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# SOWAL Life

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## The Perfect Christmas

BY GUEARY CLENDENNING

What was the perfect gift you received as a child during Christmas? You know, the one gift that stands out in your memory even after all these years?

I remember my perfect gift was a fully loaded red chrome Schwinn bicycle! How many of you from my generation got that bike for Christmas? But of the gifts we all received, I would think being with family and friends is what we cherished the most.

Living in Illinois for many years, driving home in the snow, and listening to carols being played on the radio was a lot of fun. At Grandfather's house, some of us would sleep on the floor, so all the family could stay together. On Christmas morning, we would be awakened by the shouting of the Children, "Wake up it's Christmas!" Reading the Christmas story from St. Luke's gospel was first on the agenda. Then we would pray, giving thanks to God for sending His Son. Afterward, some would share what they were most thankful for. Next was the



madhouse, as everyone started opening their gifts. Joy and laughter filled the room as we modeled our new clothes and opened sometimes unexpected gifts. And soon the living room floor was littered with Christmas wrappings and ribbons.

Breakfast was always special on Christmas day, which always included sausage gravy and bis-

cuits with various egg casseroles. Can you tell there's a little Southern blood in us? And Christmas dinner, what a feast! A huge bowl of chicken and dumplings, garden salad, and freshly baked dinner rolls was the tradition at our house; followed by desserts we couldn't resist! The memories have lasted a lifetime.

I realize for some, Christmas

is a difficult time. Many have experienced heartaches, broken relationships, disappointments, and the passing of family members. Such is the case with me.

Is that why God sent his Son? Into an imperfect world, Jesus came, showing God's love for us

**CHRISTMAS**  
*continued on page 2*

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## Local Knights of Columbus Council Delivers Another Successful "Coats for Kids" Campaign

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Over the week of November 18–November 22, 2024, the Knights of Columbus Council 17689, affiliated with Saint Rita Catholic Church, provided over 400 area families with much-needed coats for children in Walton County. In conjunction with Caring and Sharing of South Walton, the Knights raised funds through the fall from Saint Rita parishioners and other local donors to purchase

**COATS FOR KIDS**  
*continued on page 6*



The Bobby J Team

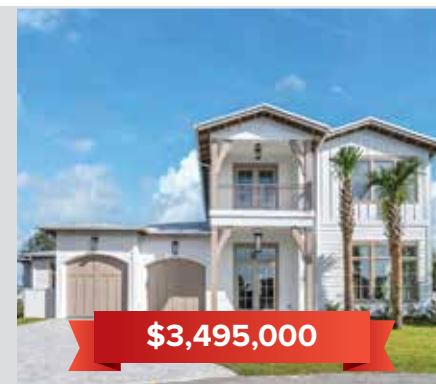
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# Best Retirement Advice for 2025

By RANDY LOCKLIER

Here's a list of things to keep an eye on if you are planning to ride off into the sunset soon.

## 1. Understand Sequence of Return Risk

Sequence of Returns Risk is a fancy term but what does

it mean? Here's the simple version: At some point during your 25-year retirement, there will be at least one bear market. Your finances will be much worse off if a market slump or crash occurs at the outset of retirement. The name of the game is to reduce risk and minimize principal

withdrawals during a market downturn.

## 2. Delay starting Social Security

Social Security is guaranteed income, indexed for inflation. That makes it extremely valuable. Mid 60's is better than 62 for a start date. Tap other sources

of retirement income before starting Social Security.

## 3. What is your Healthcare Gameplan?

Americans are eligible to enroll in Medicare at age 65. There can even be penalties for failing to enroll on time. Make a plan to sign up in the months leading up to your 65th birthday. If you retire before age 65, you'll also need to obtain health insurance on your own before Medicare kicks in. Can COBRA or the Affordable Care Act (ACA) insurance provide a bridge? Consider a Health Savings account to make your premium tax-deductible. Make a plan now before these choices are forced on you.

## 4. Consider Part-Time Work

Sometimes it's a good idea to keep some income flowing. 27% of retirees work part-time and this helps with expenses and has the added benefit of increased mental acuity and longevity.

## 5. Pivot Investments from growth to asset preservation and income:

Retirement is not the time for a lot of risk. Rather, consider it

as a time to live off the interest and income your portfolio earns while maintaining a secure principal base. Find an advisor that specializes in lower-risk income portfolios when seeking professional investment help, always work with a Fiduciary Advisory that is bound by law to act in your best interest.

## 6. Get Professional Help

Now that it's time to deal with Retirement Planning math or estate and tax planning it's time to lean on others. I'd encourage everyone to consult a fee-only financial planner or accredited Financial Counselor simply because there are so many decisions to make. After all, you've never retired before, but an experienced advisor has guided many, many people through the process.

Here's a great idea: reach out to Gulf Financial and schedule your free consultation today. It doesn't cost a thing, and you will get actionable information tailored specifically to your needs.

Until then, from the Gulf Financial Family to yours, MERRY CHRISTMAS! Randy Locklier, President Gulf Financial Group [www.gulffinancialgroup.com](http://www.gulffinancialgroup.com) (833) 403-4041



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### COATS FOR KIDS

*continued from page 1*

over 600 new coats – exceeding their goals for the second year straight.

Knights of Columbus Brother Jeff Ricketts led the months-long campaign and enlisted many fellow knights to carry out this important mission. Families who had registered to receive coats, were able to pick them in conjunction with receiving their Thanksgiving meals from Caring and Sharing’s Santa Rosa Beach headquarters. "We are so thankful to the



Knights of Columbus and their

Coats for Kids program. Each year, they commit to distributing hundreds of coats to the families we serve and despite our growing needs, they always deliver," stated Carly Barnes, Executive Director of Caring & Sharing.

The "Coats for Kids" initiative is a nationwide outreach for the national order of Knights of Columbus, a Catholic Fraternal Organization classified as



a 501©(3) benefit society. Since 2009, they have been able to distribute over 100,000 coats in 50 states and 10 Canadian Provinces.

If you are interested in providing a head-start donation to the 2025 campaign, please scan the QR code shown. The Knights wish to thank everyone who contributes to provide comfort for the needy in our

local community – the primary mission of the Knights of Columbus.

For more information on the Knights of Columbus, please visit <http://www.kofc.org> and for more information on Caring and Sharing, please visit their website at <http://www.caringandsharingsowal.org>.



### CHRISTMAS

*continued from page 1*

by dying on the cross. He paid the penalty for our sins, and through

putting our faith in Him we will become children of God.

(Read St. John 1:12 and 3:16 and Romans 10:13). The perfect gift is to spend Christmas with

God and His family forever. That's God's ultimate purpose for you!

May you receive God's perfect gift this Christmas!

Merry Christmas to all!



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 Community

# Point Washington Medical Clinic: Growing to Serve Our Community

Since its founding in April 2017, Point Washington Medical Clinic (PWMC) has been a cornerstone of healthcare in Walton County dedicated to providing high-quality primary care to those who need it most. The clinic's mission has remained steadfast: to build a stronger, healthier community by offering inclusive healthcare regardless of a patient's financial means or access to resources.

This year marks a significant milestone for PWMC, with several exciting developments expanding its ability to serve the community. In January, the clinic moved into its new permanent building, dramatically increasing its capacity to provide essential medical services. This growth has allowed PWMC to introduce several new programs that directly address community healthcare needs.

In June, the clinic launched its dental services, quickly serving nearly 100 patients and filling a critical gap in local healthcare. Complementing these dental



services, PWMC has also introduced physical therapy sessions, with a volunteer physical therapist receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from patients. Looking ahead, the clinic is preparing to launch a mental wellness program in November 2024, adding a licensed clinical social worker to provide much-needed mental health support.

Throughout its journey,

PWMC has made a remarkable impact. The clinic has served thousands of patients and generated over \$4 million in healthcare savings. Its approach goes far beyond simple medical treatment, focusing on keeping children in school, supporting workers, and reducing the burden on local emergency rooms. By providing radically inclusive healthcare, PWMC has become

a vital resource for those who are often underserved in Walton and surrounding counties.

Point Washington Medical Clinic stands as a testament to the power of compassionate, accessible healthcare. With each new service and each patient treated, the clinic moves closer to its goal of creating a healthier community for all. As the community continues to grow, so

do the clinic's needs. PWMC remains committed to meeting community members where they are, offering comprehensive care that supports the most vulnerable. The clinic invites community members to support their mission of building a healthier, stronger community through donations and continued support.



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# Coastal Seniors Update for December



## Chair Yoga Classes at the Blake in Miramar Beach

Tuesdays, December 3, 17 and January 7 at 9:45 a.m. at the Blake, 90 Ponce De Leon St. in Miramar Beach. RSVP at (850) 650-5000 to register.

**Monthly Meeting** - Friday, December 20th from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Christmas Potluck Luncheon and Cookie Swap at 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. Bring your favorite covered dish. If you would like to participate in the cookie swap please bring one dozen cookies. R.S.V.P. by calling (850) 280-5342 or email: [coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com](mailto:coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com).

**Exercise Classes** - Angela Gibson will lead classes on Tuesdays, December 3, 10, 17, 31 and January 7 at 10 a.m. and on Thursdays, December 5, 12, 19, and January 9 at 10 a.m., at 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. Cost is \$5 per session. Reservations suggested. Call (850) 280-5342 or email: [coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com](mailto:coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com).

**Art Classes - Watercolor Painting Class** - Karen Peterson will teach classes on Fridays, December 6, 13, and January 3 from 8:45 a.m. to noon. Classes are held at 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. The cost is \$15 for CSSW members and \$30 for non-members. Space is limited so call (850) 280-5342 to reserve

your spot, or email: [coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com](mailto:coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com). All supplies are included.

**Pickleball** - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex courts on Wednesday, December 18 at 6 p.m. Registration required. Register at [www.waltonrec.com](http://www.waltonrec.com). Open to Walton County residents only. Email Sandy Gulak at [sowalpickleball@gmail.com](mailto:sowalpickleball@gmail.com) for more info and with questions. Also join us at the Boys and Girls Club on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. through December 19. Will resume in late January. Cost is \$5 per day and an initial \$35 waiver fee. Please join the SoWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at [www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org](http://www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org).

Seniors 50 years of age and up residing in or visiting Walton County are invited to join CSSW. Membership is \$30 for individuals, \$40 for family, and \$75 for businesses (your business will be listed on our home webpage and our Facebook page). You can become a member via email at

[coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com](mailto:coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com), or on the website at

[www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org](http://www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org). Also, follow us on Facebook at Coastal Seniors of South Walton. Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization for active adults and we are looking for

dedicated, enthusiastic persons to join our Board of Directors. Media Contact: Jim Wilson, Director, Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. T: 404-432-6037 Email: [jim\\_wilson@bellsouth.net](mailto:jim_wilson@bellsouth.net)

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*Psalm 18:28*  
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Community

# Christmas at the Wesley House!

By MARGARET ZONIA MORRISON

Are you seeing visions of sug-arplums dancing in your head? Are you anticipating the patter of tiny hooves on the roof? Perhaps you may enhance your excitement about the holidays by taking a trip to Eden Gardens State Park. Not only will you be able to enjoy the grounds, with the early blooming Sasanqua camellias, but you will find an additional treat to add to your enjoyment.

While the holidays are often preceded by many days of anxious activity, there is an area tradition that will afford you an oasis of peace, and a chance to step back in time to the late 1800s, to contemplate Christmas traditions of families in years gone by. In keeping with the style of the Wesley House, this year's theme for decorating the rooms and exterior will be a Victorian Christmas. The house and all the rooms are ready for viewing by the public. Tours happen each hour, Thursday to Monday each week, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. You will learn the history of the house, which is



a treasure for the park and the community, and get a chance to enjoy the very creative ways in which each room has been decorated by an amazing group of dedicated volunteers.

The groups who have offered their time and talent to provide us with this glimpse into the past are:

- Point Washington Historical Association
- Green Thumb Garden Club
- Coastal Seniors of South Walton
- Seaside Style and Seaside Kids
- Impact 100
- Fort Walton Beach High

School Garden Club, and the Community Garden at Padgett Park

- Point Washington Medical Clinic
- Grace Corradino, and
- Walton County Master Gardeners.

As part of the ongoing celebration, The Christmas Candle-

light Open House is anticipated each year at Eden Gardens. On Saturday, December 7th, from 5 to 8 p.m., weather permitting, you will enjoy a ride through luminary lined pathways at Eden Gardens after sunset, and be able to tour the historic Wesley House at no charge. Live music, cookies and hot beverages will be provided by the Friends of Eden in the Pavilion.

The festive decorations will remain in place until Monday, January 6, 2025. Make plans to come and to bring along any visitors you have during this celebratory time of year. It will be a visit to remember, and an interesting way to learn about the history of Walton County before we end its Bicentennial Year (1824-2024). This effort is sponsored by the Friends of Eden, the Citizens Support Group that provides assistance to the state park staff to repair, maintain and enhance the park. Please accept this invitation to add Wesley House to your holiday schedule. The Park is opened from 8 a.m. to sunset each day, with fees of \$4 per vehicle.



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# Eagle Springs Golf and Recreation Center

Eagle Springs Golf and Recreation Center Launches "Name the Five Lakes" Contest

For its 100-year anniversary, Walton County's Eagle Springs Golf and Recreation Center (formerly Defuniak Springs Golf Course) is inviting the public to name five unnamed spring-fed lakes on the property. The winning names will be installed on commemorative plaques crediting the creative individuals behind each one.

### Contest Details

**Submission Period:** Now through December 21, 2024

**Who Can Participate:** Local residents and visitors



**Submission Methods:** Online form, Drop-off box at the club house

**Naming Themes:** Participants are encouraged to suggest names reflecting: local history, nature, community values, golf

course heritage, and past players.

### Judging Process

The judges include Walton County Commissioners, the librarian, the Visitor Direc-

tor, and selected staff. The final selection will be made with a 50/50 vote split between the public and judge selection.

### Prizes

**Grand Prize Winner:** The grand prize winner will receive

a \$100 Longhorn Steakhouse gift card, two commemorative hickory clubs, an invitation to expansion groundbreaking ceremony a commemorative plaque, and a local media feature.

### Additional Prizes:

The Runner-up will receive \$50 and \$25 Pro Shop gift cards

All participants receive branded golf items, Submissions must include a brief explanation for each proposed lake name. Full details available online and at the club house. Please visit [www.emeraldcoast.golf/eagle-springs-lake-naming-contest/](http://www.emeraldcoast.golf/eagle-springs-lake-naming-contest/)

# Dog-Harmony Seeks Sponsors for the Fifth Annual "Hops for Hounds" Set for January 18

Dog-Harmony is bringing tail-wagging fun to the community with their Fifth Annual "Hops for Hounds" dog walk and after-party on Saturday, January 18th from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Hosted in partnership with The Windmills of Hammock Bay and Props Brewery in Freeport, FL, this highly anticipated event promises a good time for both pups and their humans alike.

This local nonprofit organization is currently seeking event sponsors for Hops for Hounds, offering businesses a unique opportunity to engage with a targeted audience while supporting a worthy cause and enjoying a fun, memorable experience. For details on sponsorship levels and pricing, please contact [hello@dog-harmony.org](mailto:hello@dog-harmony.org).

This family-friendly event will feature a short stroll around the Windmills lawn with their best fur friends, followed by an after-party at Props Brewery. The after-party will include craft beer (for thirsty humans 21 and older), live music, food trucks and more. Professional photos by Rescue Animal Photography will also be available to capture the magical moments.

Tickets are \$35 per entry (includes one human and one fur



friend), an adult-sized t-shirt, and a digital photo of you and your pet. Each human walker will also receive a complimentary craft beer from Props Brewery – Must be 21 yrs old or

over to partake. Visit <https://dog-harmony.org/hops-for-hounds-2025/>. All dogs must be current on rabies vaccinations and at least 6 months old. No prong, shock, or choke collars will be permitted.

All proceeds from Hops for Hounds sponsorships and ticket sales will go to Dog-Harmony and their efforts to support the pups and programs in the community.



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Community

# Fifth Edition of 30A BBQ Festival Raises Record-Breaking \$103,228 for The Sonder Project

The fifth edition of the 30A BBQ Festival, presented by 360 Blue, raised a record-breaking \$103,228 for The Sonder Project.

The sold-out, annual event took place on Friday, November 8 at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin®, featuring 14 regional and local restaurants and catering companies, each competing for the title of “Best BBQ” chosen by the 800 guests in attendance. Participants included 3 Sons BBQ, Back Beach Barbecue, Camp Creek Inn, Cinders and Salt, Dickey’s Barbecue Pit, Evie Mae’s Barbecue, Harry

T’s, Local Smoke at The Big Chill, Marrow Private Chefs, The Perfect Pig, Sons of Amvets Post 29, Swiftly Catered, Uncle KU’s BarbeKU, and Vin’tij Food and Wine. After enjoying unlimited samples of signature barbecue, sponsored by Barker Williams and Shoreline Title, the following winners were chosen:

**1st Place People’s Choice Award: Evie Mae’s Pit BBQ**

**2nd Place People’s Choice Award: Uncle**

### KU’s BarbeKU

**3rd Place People’s Choice Award: Vin’tij Food and Wine**

A panel of judges also sampled the signature barbecue and chose their favorite overall “Judge’s Choice” winner:

**Judge’s Choice Award: 3 Sons Bar-B-Q**

Upon entry through the Carrot Top Designs Welcome Lounge, guests were greeted with a lawn filled with barbecue, live music from River Dan, a commemorative photo booth, sponsored by Esteem Wealth Partners, and complimentary seating provided by Jake’s Beach Service. In between bites of succulent barbecue, guests sipped on complimentary beer from Grayton Beer Company, who donated over 100 cases of beer, along with wine and water, courtesy of Grand Boulevard Arts and Entertainment. As each guest exited the festival, they were also gifted a complimentary grill kit, courtesy of 360 Blue.

The festival also showcased an extensive silent auction featuring a variety of items donated by community partners,



including vacation stays, gift cards, gift baskets, jewelry, and much more. All proceeds raised from the silent auction, along with ticket sales and donations, went directly to The Sonder Project to support their mission to empower impoverished communities through high-impact, sustainable development by providing access to clean water, education, and sustainable agriculture. The \$103,288 raised will make a huge impact and help The Sonder Project provide clean water for over 1,500

people, support 200 students living in extreme poverty to attend high school, provide food security and economic opportunity for 245 farmers, and much more.

“We are so grateful for the support of the South Walton community to help us empower communities and improve lives in Sub-Saharan Africa. It takes a village, and this village is strong. We can’t wait for next year,” Zibelman said.

**THEO BEACH TOWELS**  
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## Introducing 30A Studio Rental: Where Creativity and Events Come to Life

Welcome to 30A Studio Rental, the premier studio for photography, videography, and unforgettable events. Nestled in the artistic enclave of Artists Warehouses on Highway 393, just minutes from the iconic Gulf Place, this versatile studio is designed to cater to all your creative and event needs.

### A Creative Playground

At the heart of 30A Studio Rental is its stunning 16-foot-wide cyc-wall, a professional-grade feature perfect for photography and video projects. This expansive backdrop offers a seamless canvas for any vision, whether you're capturing professional headshots, shooting captivating product photography, or filming engaging interviews and video content.

### Beyond a Studio: A Space for Inspiration and Connection

The studio isn't just for creatives—it's also a versatile venue for private gatherings, special occasions, and intimate meetings. Its spacious lounge complements the cyc-wall area, creating a harmonious blend of functionality and comfort. Whether you're planning a brainstorming session, celebrating a milestone, or hosting a workshop, 30A Studio Rental is tailored to make every moment memorable.



### Why Choose 30A Studio Rental?

**Prime Location:** Conveniently located, surrounded by a thriving creative community.

**Professional Features:** A state-of-the-art cyc-wall, ample space, and customizable layouts.

**Versatility:** Ideal for photography, videography, private events, and meetings.

**Creative Comfort:** A spacious lounge area designed for relaxation or collaboration.

**Tailored Solutions:** Flexible rental packages to meet the unique needs of each project or event.

### Your Vision, Your Space

From striking visuals to unforgettable experiences, 30A Studio Rental adapts to bring your ideas to life. Whether you're creating content or hosting a one-of-a-kind event, the space offers the tools and ambiance to make it exceptional.

Discover what makes 30A Studio Rental the go-to destination for photographers, videographers, and event planners alike.

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# Seacoast Collegiate High School Senior Ava Kight Signs with the University of Southern Mississippi Golf Program

Seacoast Collegiate High School is proud to announce that senior Ava Kight has signed with the University of Southern Mississippi to play collegiate golf. Ava's signing ceremony was held at Seacoast Collegiate High School, where family, friends, coaches, and school leaders gathered to celebrate her exceptional achievements both on and off the course.

Ava has been a distinguished player and leader on the South Walton High School Golf Team for the past four years. Under her leadership, the team secured two district titles, a regional championship, and a regional runner-up title. Individually, Ava has also made her mark, finishing in the Top 10 at the state level as a freshman and qualifying for prestigious tournaments like

the Jr. PGA Championship and World Teen Championships. Additionally, she has numerous Top 10 finishes in the AJGA and EJT events.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to continue my golf journey at Southern Miss," shared Ava. "It's been a dream come true, and I wouldn't be here without the incredible support of my family, friends, and coaches. I'm excited for what lies ahead, both on the course and in my studies."

South Walton High School Golf Coach Kendall Griner spoke highly of Ava's contributions, saying, "Ava has been an outstanding leader and role



model for our team. Her hard work, dedication, and sportsmanship have left a lasting impact on our program. Southern Miss is gaining an exceptional student-athlete, and we look forward to watching her thrive at the next level."

In addition to her athletic achievements, Ava has excelled academically with a 4.043 weighted GPA and is a member of the National Honor Society. As part of Seacoast's dual enrollment program, she is on track to graduate in May with both her high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree from Northwest Florida State College. She is also ac-

tively involved in her community through Young Life, FCA, and Habitat for Humanity.

"Ava's accomplishments reflect the values we hold at Seacoast Collegiate High School," said Principal Drew Ward. "Her dedication to her studies, her sport, and her community are remarkable, and we are incredibly proud of all she's achieved. We look forward to watching her continue to succeed at Southern Miss."

Ava plans to study Business at Southern Miss, where she will join the Golden Eagles as both a scholar and athlete. The entire Seacoast community extends its warmest congratulations to Ava on this exciting next step and looks forward to seeing all she will accomplish in college and beyond.



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 Community

# Walton County Extension Office 4-H Club growing and learning

One of the programs hosted by the Walton County Extension Office on Hwy. 83 is the popular 4-H Club. The mission of 4-H is to assist young people and the adults working with them, to gain additional knowledge, life skills, and attitudes that will further their development as responsible, contributing, and productive members of society.

Nicole Crawson, Walton County 4-H Agent with the University of Florida since 2021, said that any child aged 5 - 18 “belongs in 4-H. They should really be in 4-H. I am a huge advocate of it because we teach life

skills, we teach social skills. The things that we learned when we were in school, some of the teachers are overburdened and don’t have time to teach it in the school system now – so, we teach it” she said.

“We teach a lot of leadership skills, like with this group, the teen council, they do leadership, community service – but we also teach them social skills, like how to work with each other, how to introduce themselves, shake hands correctly, how to apply for a job, what to wear at a job. It’s important that the kids in the community know that



we’re here and that we’re available. We teach everything from sewing to cooking to archery – I tell the kids, ‘If you can dream

it – and it’s within policy – we’re going to try it because we want to find their spark.”

Crawson said they try to use as many guest speakers as possible. At Wednesday’s meeting of the club, students received a lesson on the proper ways to treat, handle and fold the American Flag from Walton County Veterans Services Director Wade Wilmoth. Crawson said that, because of Veterans Day, she wondered how many of her kids knew how to fold a flag properly. “This is a perfect opportunity. We’re honoring our veterans, and we need to know how to fold

a flag, so I reached out to Wade and he agreed to come today and teach everyone.”

Crawson said joining 4-H is a simple process. Students can enroll online year-round, with parental consent. From age 5 – 7, the program is free. From age 8 – 18, there is a \$20 membership fee and scholarships are available.

There are 14 4-H Clubs in Walton County, with over 300 members and plenty of volunteers. For more information, contact Nicole Crawson at the Walton County Extension Office, (850) 892-8172.

# Tiny Libraries Become Art: A Tribute to Creativity and Memory

BY PAUL WILLMS

In a touching tribute to art and literacy, Victoria Singers’ Tiny Library Project has transformed 27 book-sharing spaces along the Emerald Coast into vibrant community landmarks. The newest addition, located at the Gulfview Heights public beach access behind Goatfeather’s Restaurant, tells an especially

poignant story.

Local artist Ridge Roberts, who moved to 30A from Memphis, created a deeply personal tiny library in memory of his younger brother Clayton. The library is a labor of love featuring a roof made of guitar picks, a guitar-shaped handle,



and a special resin floor. Adorned with stickers from the brothers’ shared memories and a heartfelt mural depicting a childhood vacation photo, this tiny library is more than just a book exchange – it’s a testament to brotherly love and remembrance.

Community members are invited to explore these artistic spaces, exchange books, and appreciate the creativity that transforms ordinary book-sharing spots into extraordinary community treasures.

Follow the project’s journey on Instagram @30ATinyLibrary and discover the art of storytelling, one tiny library at a time.

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# Spotlight On

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 Community

# Community Responds to Heirloom Donuts' Struggle with Code Compliance

As reported in the November 2024 issue, the Walton County Code Compliance has issued a "Notice of Violation" to the owners of Heirloom Donuts, Laura and Justin Gibson, for a wall mural on the east side of their building. In over 8 years of publishing SoWal Life, we have never received such an overwhelming response to an article - all in favor of keeping the mural as is.

Here is a sample of some of the responses we received:

**Nov 27, Andrew M.**

I support the wall art...hope County Building and Planning allow it to remain

**Nov 26, Michael C.**

The mural is a magnificent piece of art with artistic details, vibrancy, and personality that truly enhances the Santa Rosa Beach area of the 30A beach community. The detailed brush strokes alone are captivating and will surely make many magazines and articles. Removing or painting over the mural would be a crime to silence the artistic pas-

sions of this artist and rob the community of this treasured art.

**Nov 25, Judi, Jeff S.**

Beautiful accent

**Nov 24, Holly K.**

The mural makes me happy every time I see it.

**Nov 22, Beth B.**

Seaside has multiple murals on sides of buildings...along the "Scenic Byway" 30A! If you compare the Heirloom Donuts art-signage to many examples, it deserves an artistic award for beautification

**Nov 21, Christy B.**

A beautiful bouquet

**Nov 21, Tara B.**

I am a local resident of Santa Rosa Beach, a teacher, mother of three, and local professional violinist. As a community we must choose beauty. I was truly inspired and thrilled at the mural's appearance.

**Nov 20, Mary Beth R.**

Gorgeous painting

**Nov 19, Nan S.**

30A visitors and residents have ALWAYS been involved with and supportive of the Arts-

theatre I urge support of a new local business, like Heirloom Donuts and their magnificent business mural on the building. It's like a "turning landmark".... Tourists will love it!!

**Nov 21, Dorothea B.**

As an artist and member of the Cultural Arts Alliance who takes pride in the great diversity of artwork in Walton County, please allow this business to retain its artwork on the building and open for business as soon as possible.

**Nov 19, Ellen Z.**

This mural always inspires joy when I pass it on HWY 98. It is simply beautiful. And a true work of art!

**Nov 19, Pam P.**

What a beautiful addition.

**Nov 19, Jean C.**

Open the donut store.

**Nov 19, Shannon K.**

Murals are in large and small towns all over the US. There needs to be updating to the rules and this mural needs to stay.

**Nov 19, Angelina C.**

I absolutely adore the Heirloom Donuts mural.

**Nov 19, Nicole T.**

A 6-month opening delay over "graffiti"? You don't have to be an art expert to tell the difference between graffiti and art! In fact,

that beautiful mural brightened up the entire 98 area...something the west end of 30A needs more of.

**Nov 19, Rhea R.**

The newest addition to murals is in Inlet Beach on the walls of the underpass. Art is already present in our area and much loved! Heirloom Donut's bouquet of flowers and donuts will be a sweet addition to the aesthetics of our community.

**Nov 19, Pamela Bliss**

I am writing to communicate my support in allowing the mural to remain on the Heirloom Donuts building. I wish them well.

**Nov 19, Marasol G**

I am twelve years old. I live not too far from the Heirloom Donuts mural. The mural makes me feel happy, faithful, hopeful, and it creates a positive attitude in me. The mural gives me hope that one day as I grow into an artist I can create something just as beautiful and innovative.

**Nov 19, Blaine A.**

Let this community remain unique. It's what created the community.

**Nov 19, Monica D.**

The mural is Art. 5 reasons we need art: Art Transcends Time, Art Communicates, Art Heals, Art Tells Our Story, Art Con-

nects Us.

**Nov 18, Pete and Liz P.**

We think the mural is beautiful. It's certainly the most artistic and unique.

**Nov 18, Mandy G.**

The mural is not graffiti. It is a beautifully rendered work that offers a splash of color, a brush of happiness, and a glimpse into the mystery that art cultivates in us all. This artwork has created a hope in my daughter that she can one day aspire to create

**Nov 18, Haylee H.**

the beautiful mural perfectly captures the creativity of our community

**Nov 17, Ted B.**

The art on the Heirloom building in no way looks like any graffiti I've seen.

**Nov 17, Karl E.**

It is a beautiful work of art that enhances the area.

**Nov 17, Rebecca L.**

Cowgirl Kitchen has a beautiful mural on 30a in Blue Mountain. Why not Heirloom Donuts on 98?

**Nov 17, Phil B.**

I'm ecstatic to have them coming to our area. Their shop, and its mural, are a credit to our

*Continued on next page*

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 Community

neighborhood and adds a real touch of class.

**Nov 17, Marguerite E.**

One of the allures of the 30A area is the abundance of creative art and support of local businesses. The creativity and beauty of the mural on the Heirloom Donuts building embraces the spirit of artistic expression which is an integral part of the 30A lifestyle.

**Nov 17, JoAnn H.**

They approved the mural for the new McDonalds across from Publix in SWC and not this one for Heirloom Donuts?!!!!

Same artist!

**Nov 17, Jim K.**

We are supposed to be an "artsy" community that appreciates art forms of all types.

**Nov 17, JBJ M.**

The new donut place seems to have a plan to bring folks together-folks of all types-to enjoy fellowship, sharing of ideas, and who doesn't love donuts!!!!

**Nov 17, Janet M.**

Perhaps this could be the start of art education in our area teaching the difference between graffiti and wall art. Celebrity wall artists could be invited. Make an event of it.

**Nov 17, Victoria S.**

Lindsay's beautiful art at Heir-

loom donuts is so very special...

**Nov 16, Jeff and Joan H.**

Like so many other beautiful murals already in place for years in our community, this new and amazing work of art should be celebrated and encouraged.

**Nov 16**

I drive by every day. Quite impressive and talented artwork also!

**Nov 16, Art Lee D.**

The Heirloom work of art is just that, a "work of art"--creative, innovative, striking and enticing me to enter into their place of business.

**Nov 16, Nora V.**

So does the Planning Department prefer a white wall to a beautiful mural?

**Nov 15, Cynthia and James H**

Beautiful mural.

**Nov 15, Terry E.**

My husband and I love the beautiful mural that makes a drab building give us joy when we drive by.

**Nov 15, Misty M.**

I drive past that building at least three times a week and the mural is beautiful.

**Nov 15, David H.**

Heirloom Donuts' mural is beautiful, colorful and welcoming. It is just the opposite of



graffiti. It also reminds us of the "heirloom" moments all of us grandparents (residents and snowbirds) want to have with our families.

**Nov 15, Juliet W.**

We drive past Heirloom Donuts almost daily heading to the

beach down Thompson Rd. My first reaction to the wall art was WOW, THIS IS AMAZING!

While South Walton Life acknowledges the importance of maintaining the aesthetic standards of the US 98/331 Scenic Corridor, we argue that this par-

ticular artwork transcends the definition of commercial signage. It is a carefully crafted piece of public art that aligns with—and indeed elevates—the area's visual landscape.

We propose the following resolutions:

1. Full Approval: Recognize the mural as a unique artistic contribution and grant a permanent exemption.

2. Temporary Permit: Issue a special artistic permit allowing the mural to remain for a defined period, with potential annual review.

Heirloom Donuts represents more than a business; it symbolizes community, creativity, and the entrepreneurial spirit that makes South Walton County exceptional. The mural is not just paint on a wall—it's a testament to local talent, community values, and the vibrant culture we collectively cherish. This artwork is quintessentially "South Walton".

We respectfully request that the Design Review Board reconsider its current position and view this artwork as an asset rather than a violation.

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# Women United Empowers Local Teens with Mental Health Tools and Support

On November 16, United Way Emerald Coast's Women United hosted a transformative EmpowHER Seminar at the Boys and Girls Club of South Walton. Presented by Eglin Federal Credit Union, the event provided local teens with essential mental health resources, empowering educational tools, and a supportive community to foster self-confidence and resilience.

Designed to address the growing need for mental health support across Okaloosa and Walton counties, the seminar featured interactive workshops facilitated by dedicated partner organizations, each volunteering time and expertise to support young attendees. These workshops offered a safe space for teens to connect, share, and gain practical mental health resources.

Emerald Coast Science Center led a session where girls screen-printed their own t-shirts, encouraging creativity and self-expression. Pure & Couture Salon brought stylists to host a

braid bar, offering students the opportunity to leave with boosted confidence and a renewed sense of self. Additionally, a yoga session taught attendees relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices to help manage stress.

"Eglin Federal Credit Union is proud to partner with United Way Emerald Coast to present this sold-out event, which provides a positive environment for local teens," said SVP Membership and Community Development Neko Stubblefield. "Our goal is to uplift the communities in which we live and work. We see tremendous value in providing tools and resources to empower teens in Walton County."

Attendee surveys revealed that 76.5% of participants experienced increased confidence and self-esteem, highlighting the impact of the EmpowHER Seminar in fostering mental well-



Women United Member encourages attendee.

ness and community for teens in Walton County.

This spring, in celebration of International Women's Day, Women United will host its annual "Brunch & Bubbly" fundraiser on March 8 at Home2 Suites by Hilton, presented by Eglin Federal Credit Union.

This event, open to all community members, promises an inspiring gathering with proceeds supporting Women United's mission.

### About Women United

Women United is a philanthropic initiative within United Way Emerald Coast, dedicated to improving access to mental health resources, education, and support for women and girls in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. To learn more about their initiatives or join their efforts, visit [www.united-way.org/womenunited](http://www.united-way.org/womenunited).



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Community

# Oceans PM: Your Local Home Maintenance Specialists!

Beach home maintenance is essential and easy to ignore until it's too late. It's not your fault. Finding reliable home services can be challenging if you are new to an area or a resident. Don't worry, the experts at Oceans PM are here to help.

The same elements that make the beach so inviting—sun, sea, and sand—also bring serious challenges for homeowners. Here are a few issues you'll need to manage: Hurricane and Tropical Storm Damage, Humidity and Mold, Corrosive Salt Air, Termites, Constant Maintenance Needs, Storm Surge and Flooding Risks, and Landscape Deterioration.

At Oceans PM, they specialize in addressing home maintenance problems and upkeep, so you don't have to. Their mission is to keep your home in top condition year-round, allowing

you to enjoy your time at the beach without worry. They offer Weekly Inspections, Monthly Services, Quarterly Maintenance, and Annual Services. Why Choose Oceans PM? As a husband-and-wife team living and working right here on the Gulf Coast, they know firsthand the unique challenges of beach home ownership. Their local expertise and commitment to providing exclusive services make them the ideal partner to care for your beach home property. What Makes Oceans PM Different;

- **Local Experts:** Oceans PM is not just a local company; they're your neighbors. They understand the specific needs of your beach home because they face the same challenges every day.
- **No Long-Term Contracts:**

Flexibility matters. No long-term contracts. If you ever wish to cancel, Oceans PM asks for a courtesy 30-day notice.

- **Comprehensive Care:** From weekly maintenance to storm prep, Oceans PM

handles everything so you can relax and enjoy your home without the worries.

- **Personalized Service:** As a family-ran business, Oceans PM prides themselves in offering a personal touch. They treat your home as if it were their own, ensuring every detail is taken care of.

- **Peace of Mind:** With Oceans PM, your home is in great hands! They're here to make sure everything runs smoothly, so you can focus on what really matters—enjoying your time and stay on the beach.

Your beach home is a place of relaxation, joy, and cherished memories. Don't let the challenges of living on the Gulf take away from that. Let the experts at Oceans PM handle the details so you can enjoy all the benefits of owning a beach home stress-free.

For more information, visit <https://oceanspm.com/> or contact them directly at [service@oceanspm.com](mailto:service@oceanspm.com) or (850) 382-7475.



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# Holiday Hometown Heroes Are Easy to Find This Season

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Good news! There are plenty of opportunities to be a Hometown Hero this holiday season by donating, volunteering or simply spreading the good word about our local nonprofits. Here are just a few ways you can make the holidays a lot brighter for those in need:

**Harvest House Destin** provides for families in Destin and Miramar Beach during the holidays and year-round. If you and your family are in need or would like to donate, call 850.837.2777, stop by 300 Mountain Dr. in Destin, or visit [harvesthousedestin.org](http://harvesthousedestin.org). Volunteers are needed, too.

The **Okaloosa County School District** and **Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office** join forces for this year's **Angel Tree Program**, which assists students requiring support during the holidays. Through school guidance counselors and school resource officers, students in need are identified. Last year, more than 300 Okaloosa students received gifts from the two organizations, thanks to the generosity of staff and community members. You can help this year by contributing monetary funds or sponsoring a student and purchasing gifts from their wish list. Sponsor an "angel" or make a monetary donation at [ocsostarcharity.com](http://ocsostarcharity.com).

**Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's Christmas Toy Drive** has begun! Bring joy to area kiddos and help ECCAC stock its toy room for its families and agency partners to "shop"! Choose from ECCAC's wish list at [eccac.org](http://eccac.org).

Every contribution makes a difference in ending abuse and restoring childhood one child at a time. Contact Hailey ([Hailey@eccac.org](mailto:Hailey@eccac.org)) to schedule your drop-off.

**The Salvation Army** once again provides opportunities to give joy, by making an anonymous donation of new clothes and toys to the Angel Tree program; and time, by volunteering to distribute gifts and holiday meals to those in need. Items can be dropped off at the Salvation Army's Thrift Store, 425 Mary Esther Cutoff in Mary Esther. Call 850.243.4531 for more information.

**A Bed 4 Me**, providing beds for children in Okaloosa and Walton counties since 2016, provides a full bedding kit at no cost to local children and families in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. You can volunteer to help with bed delivery assistance, fundraising event support or to host bedding drives. To volunteer, email [diane@abed4me.org](mailto:diane@abed4me.org) or send a message at [abed4me.org](http://abed4me.org). A Bed 4 Me also accepts in-kind donations; a wish list is posted on the website and you can always donate new, standard size sleeping pillows, Amazon and Walmart gift cards.

**One Hopeful Place** provides shelter and "hope" for those in dire need—single men, women and veterans with no shelter, medical supplies, transportation or basic necessities,



850.586.7879.

**Food for Thought** ([fftfl.org](http://fftfl.org)) has geared up for the holidays and its annual food services. The nonprofit's Holiday Food List includes instant potatoes, stuffing, cornbread mix, canned vegetables, dry beans, rice, macaroni and cheese, pasta and sauce, cereal, pancake mix, boxed milk and juice. Individuals and local businesses are encouraged to drop off food items for holiday meals at Food for Thought's Destin or Santa Rosa Beach pantries. Email [support@fftfl.org](mailto:support@fftfl.org) to learn more.

This is just a small sample of the worthy charities in the DESTIN LIFE readership area. We encourage you to search online for additional opportunities to help others this holiday season! They need you and you'll be glad you did!

Community support creates a significant ripple effect on the lives of the homeless. Donations to One Hopeful Place do more than provide shelter and

meals, they instill hope and open doors to new beginnings. Even a small monthly pledge can make a significant impact. Visit [onehopefulplace.org](http://onehopefulplace.org) or call

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# Writing Off into the Sunset: Destin Word Weavers Brings Authors Together

Everyone loves a story, especially a tale they can cry about, bleed with, or laugh at. Anyone who can tell such a story will have their face carved onto the mountain of immortality. Just ask Ernest Hemingway, William Shakespeare, or Theodor Seuss Geisel (author of the Dr. Seuss books). Do you dream of writing stories that will live in people's hearts?

Literature is human. Fiction or non-fiction, humor or trag-

edy, prose or poetry: we all want to communicate. Did you know there are local friends helping each other write well?

Groups of Christian writers work together on the craft of writing called "Word Weavers." One such group is here on the Emerald Coast. Meeting monthly in Niceville, the Destin Word Weavers meet to listen to one another's works and give positive critiques and encouragement.

The members range from amateurs to published authors and publishers, all from various walks of life. The genres they represent include non-fiction, mystery, humor, memoir, devotional, biographical, fiction and poetry. With mutual respect and finely tuned skills, they edit, correct, and inspire one another.

Most of the members are Christians who attend various churches including Catholic, Protestant, Charismatic, and



Word Weavers members who recently received various writing awards at the Blue Lake Writers Conference.

non-denominational.

Alice Murray currently leads the Destin Word Weavers Chapter. She is an author of an annotated Agatha Christie book and she's had several jokes published in Reader's Digest. Numerous magazines have published her articles. The group meets on the second Saturday morning of each month at 9:30 a.m. in the Crosspoint Church, Bluewater Bay Campus, 214 Partin Drive S, Niceville, Florida, 32578. The next meeting is on December 14th.

All kinds of people participate in the Destin Word Weavers group. Freeport resident Paul Renfro has written a theological series, while Dave Holland has published a series of devotionals based on the Gospel of Luke. Susan Neal writes books fostering good health and maturity while she also leads the Christian Indie

Publishing Association (CIPA. Podia.com). Jud Stone, our chaplain, writes histories of great Christians who are little known.

You can join our hearty band of writers, poets, Bible commentators, and historians. Whether it's a legacy for your family or the next blockbuster, you are welcome in the Destin Word Weavers! We convene the second Saturday morning of each month at 9:30 in the Crosspoint Church, Bluewater Bay Campus, 214 Partin Drive S, Niceville, Florida 32578.

You can learn more about the Word Weavers at <https://wordweavers.com/>. For more information, please call Dave Holland at 970-691-9017 or email at [davidvholland54@gmail.com](mailto:davidvholland54@gmail.com).

Word Weavers members who recently received various writing awards at the Blue Lake Writers Conference.

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# Miracles Small and Grand

BY ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ECTC

Recently I traveled with our Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) Junior Thespian Troupe to the state district competition in Tallahassee. This is the qualifying event for the Florida State Thespian Festival, which is essentially like the Florida theatre Olympics. Each of our 18 students participated in solo, duet and group pieces as well as everyone performing in the one act play entitled “Box.” We were a giant roving group of students and parent supporters, cheering each other on with silent jazz hands as we also cheered on our fellow thespians who were competing alongside us. It was a day of tiny miracles, watching young middle schoolers sing their hearts out, act with conviction, and dance like everyone was watching. The highest rating one can receive is a “Superior.” This rating allows the monologue, duet or acting scene to advance to the State competition. Our students racked up 15 superiors and won Critic’s choice in the pantomime category. They also won the honor of performing their One Act at the state festival. The aforementioned miracles lie not in the fact of winning, for they worked tirelessly to achieve these rankings. The miracle lies in the motivation and determination of each student to bring their very best, the willingness to sacrifice their weekends and after school time to work on a scene, and in their understanding that this is more than just a hobby; it’s a passion.

I’ve always loved the general feeling that Christmas is a time when miracles are more prevalent and anything is possible. Just like these students experienced the miracle of working hard, believing and achieving, we continue to believe with them that “Anything Can Happen.” In keeping with ECTC’s Season 12 theme for the holidays, we chose the beautiful a cappella musical All is Calm; The Christmas Truce of 1914 to keep that spirit alive. This story is based on true events that transpired on Christmas Eve, 1914 in the Belgian territory of Ypres between the English and French soldiers, and German soldiers.

British Soldier Albert Moren of the 2nd Queen’s Regiment wrote of that night:



“There was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and then there were those lights — I don’t know what they were. And then they sang ‘Stille Nacht.’ I shall never forget it. It was one of the highlights of my life.”

In a miraculous and risky show of peace, a German soldier reached out through the darkness of the trenches and sang “Silent Night.” What followed was an incredible truce, lasting hours, and, in some places, days.

Within moments, soldiers from both sides found themselves standing in the middle of “no man’s land,” unarmed, shaking hands, laughing and doing their best to communicate in a foreign tongue. During the next several hours, they would exchange gifts, share a little rum, pause to bury fallen comrades, play a game of soccer and sing Christmas carols.

The Christmas Truce is a story that is almost too far-fetched to believe. But, the overwhelming evidence based on letters from soldiers and diaries of those who lived through it has corroborated this miraculous event. To experience the beauty of this story, as told through those words and the music that weaves seamlessly throughout the performance, is a miracle, too. This show will also feature a return to the stage of some of your favorite ECTC performers.

Bruce Collier, local actor and playwright best known for his one-man Winston Churchill show, will be joining the illustrious cast alongside many of your favorites that you know and love. Vincent Pelligrino, last seen as Bert in Mary Poppins, brings his musical direction and vivid stage presence once again. Chris Saltalamacchio, who last took a turn on our stage as buttoned up Mr. Banks with a change of heart in Mary Poppins, will once again share his velvety tenor voice with us this season. Also gracing the stage is the dynamic Logan Polson of Jersey Boys and Baskerville; A Sherlock Holmes Mystery and the multi-talented

Gavin Parmley, also of Jersey Boys and The Play That Goes Wrong.

On Christmas Eve in 1914, Allied and German troops shared a “Stille Nacht” and laid down their arms to shake hands across a muddy trench. It was

the smallest of gestures that resulted in a grand miracle that made history. Miracles small and grand are happening all around us in the everyday normalness of life, even the tiny miracles of confidence and achievement our students experienced at competi-

tion. I hope that during this holiday season, you experience a few miracles of your own. In fact, come join us at ECTC for All is Calm and walk away believing in your heart that “Anything Can Happen.”



**December 6<sup>TH</sup> – 22<sup>ND</sup>**

Christmas 1914. Out of the violence of World War I, a silence, then a song. A German soldier steps into No Man’s Land singing “Stille Nacht.” Thus begins an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music, and peace. An a cappella chorale, All is Calm is a remarkable true story in the words and songs of the men who lived it.



emerald coast theatre company

Presents




**January 9<sup>TH</sup> – 17<sup>TH</sup>**

In Every Brilliant Thing, a young boy attempts to ease his mother’s depression by creating a list of all the best things in the world worth living for. This heart wrenching and at times hilarious one-man play is based on true and untrue stories and told with the help of the audience.






Tickets or info, call 850.684.0323 or visit [EmeraldCoastTheatre.org](http://EmeraldCoastTheatre.org)  
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**DAVE HOLLAND**

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This book will fill your heart with joy and trustworthy truth. God has seven gifts for you that will prepare you for the birth of His Son. Glow in spiritual glory this Christmas as Jesus is born anew in your heart. Let this be your Happy Birthday Jesus book!


Christmas Jesus has become a classic retelling of the splendid story of the birth of Christ—updated to bring fresh insights to this ancient story.

Adding five new parables in a fiction section makes this book more fun and gives fresh insight into the wonder of God the Father sending us Jesus.

### Find the Book at [DaveHolland.org](http://DaveHolland.org)

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Holland loves Jesus and has dedicated his life to sharing God’s love. While studying at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and pastoring churches for almost forty years, he discovered Jesus is so much more than school and church—Jesus is life. Genuine faith is not about organizations, denominations, or personalities, but it is about discovering the depths of God’s love and grace. Dave and his wife Jonie live in Destin, Florida. Contact Dave on his website, [DaveHolland.Org](http://DaveHolland.Org).







# Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County Featured In Upcoming 'Empowered With Meg Ryan' Segment

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA), a non-profit organization dedicated to enriching lives through the arts, is excited to announce their upcoming feature on 'Empowered with Meg Ryan,' a nationally televised program that highlights inspiring stories of community transformation. The segment, filming on November 19th, will be distributed to stations nationwide, showcasing the CAA's impactful initiatives and their dedication to fostering a vibrant arts scene in Walton

County. It will discuss the imperative relationship between the organization and the community and will discuss events and initiatives that are fostering growth and engagement.

"We are thrilled to be featured in an upcoming episode of Empowered with Meg Ryan, which highlights the importance of the CAA's cross-sector partnerships and their impact on the community we serve," said Jennifer Steele, President & CEO. "Our organization's mission is to foster

creativity through the inclusive and collaborative advancement of the arts, making them accessible, meaningful, and inspiring for everyone. This opportunity allows us to share our story with a national audience, showcase the creativity and passion that drive us, and invite new friends and supporters to join our mission."

The CAA aims to cultivate a supportive environment where the arts can thrive. They achieve this by providing essential funding, educational programs, and



advocacy for local artists and arts organizations. Through their tireless efforts, the CAA has become a cornerstone of the Walton County community, enriching the lives of residents and visitors alike.

Empowered with Meg Ryan's segment on the CAA promises to be a heartwarming and inspiring look at the transformative power of art. Viewers will gain a deeper understanding of the CAA's vital role in nurturing creativity, self-expression, and cultural appreciation in Walton County.



## Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County Announces Artists Featured in Foster Gallery Partner Exhibition at Coastal Branch Library

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) is proud to announce The Foster Gallery's Fall/Winter rotation of artists are featured in a partner exhibition at the Coastal Branch Library located at 437 Greenway Trail in Santa Rosa Beach. Original work by fifteen regional artists will be featured in the exhibit which opened December 7 and runs through January

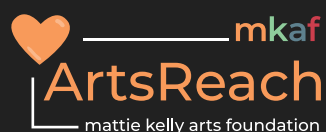
31, 2025.

The selected featured artists are Amber DeCicco, Elena Filshinska, Capri Boyle Jones, Robyn Martins, Linda Kaye Moriarity, Pam Ridler, Ridge Roberts, Kim Salesses, Blair Supplee, Sierra Swan, and Sherry Sweet Tewell. All artists are members of the Cultural Arts Alliance.

All exhibited works are for sale, and

online for viewing and purchase at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/foster-gallery.

For Coastal Branch library hours, please visit waltonlibraries.com. For more information on the CAA, including memberships, donations, class schedule, ceramics services and space rental of the Bayou Arts Center for private events, call (850) 622-5970 or visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com.



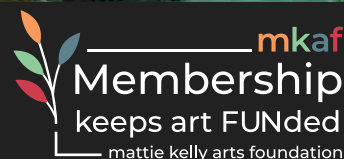
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# SEASIDE Institute™ Continues to Inspire Livable Communities

BY KIMBERLY STANLEY,  
SEASIDE INSTITUTE™

As we reflect on another remarkable year at Seaside Institute, our commitment to inspiring and fostering livable communities remains steadfast. This year was marked by a series of impactful events and initiatives that brought together thought leaders, community members, and advocates for a brighter, more connected future.

The year kicked off with the 30th Celebration of the SEASIDE Prize™, where we honored the career accomplishments of Victor Dover and Joe Kohl. Their contributions to urban design and community planning have inspired countless individuals and organizations to prioritize livability and sustainability in their work. The weekend was a celebration of innovative placemaking, showcasing how thoughtful and deliberate design can transform public spaces and enhance the well-being of a community.

Our collaboration with Southern Living for their Home Summit and with the Cultural

Arts Alliance for the Tour of Homes in February provided attendees with a unique opportunity to explore some of the most beautifully designed homes in our community. The events not only highlighted architectural excellence but also emphasized the importance of adaptability in design.

The Water Institute from Baton Rouge joined in on the sustainability conversation as we held a countywide workshop to explore current issues related to coastal resilience and adapting to climate changes. The discussion continued a few weeks later with an evening of Cocktails + Conversations at Jonah Allen's Studio in Seagrove, where participants discussed the importance of remaining committed to our community and taking steps to create positive change when it comes to factors affecting the environment.

Seaside Institute was the design hosting site for the Walton County charrette in May (PlanforWalton2040.com). The team from DPZ CoDesign brought their ideas and expertise to



Pienza tour attendees explore how design principles from Pienza were applied in the creation of Seaside, Florida. Image credit: Steve Mouzon

the area as they helped with the county's next vision plan. Multiple workshops were held throughout the county and the public provided feedback to assist the team with the project.

The 32nd gathering of the Congress for New Urbanism in May was a success as we joined urban planners, architects, and advocates from around the globe to discuss placemaking, incremental growth, and current challenges in affordable housing.

Our Seaside Institute Speaker Series returned in the fall as Ray Gindroz spoke on viewing one's space through a different lens and taking time to enjoy the surroundings, rather than getting caught up in the busyness of daily life.

We traveled to Franklin, Tennessee in October to cohost Franklin Tomorrow's Vision City Conference with a focus on "How History Impacts the Future". Through various dis-

cussions, symposia, and tours, we explored how understanding and learning from the past is an essential part of shaping resilient, inclusive communities for the future. We then journeyed to Cortona, Italy for the 61st International Making Cities Livable conference and hosted a day trip to Pienza after the conference adjourned. Many elements of Seaside were designed and integrated within the town based on principles and ideas from Pienza. This trip highlighted the beauty of a well-planned community and the importance of adaptability for future generations.

As we approach the end of 2024, we reflect on how this year has been a testament to the power of community engagement and the collective pursuits of livable, adaptable, and connected spaces. Seaside Institute remains dedicated to inspiring positive growth and nurturing environments that enhance the quality of life for everyone. Together, we can build the communities of tomorrow, grounded in sustainability and enriched by a shared vision of the future.

PLEASE VISIT [SOUTHWALTON.LIFE](http://SOUTHWALTON.LIFE) TO READ THIS ISSUE ONLINE

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 Events

# A South Walton Holiday!

**Night of Lights at Baytowne Wharf Now-Dec. 31**

Enjoy a festival light show in The Village of Baytowne Wharf. There will be three dazzling shows on the Village Christmas Tree and Event Plaza at 6, 7 and 8 p.m. [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com)

**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. Ice rink is open October 31st - February 8th. 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](http://baytownewharf.com)

**Village of Baytowne Wharf Holiday Concert Series and Visits with Santa Dec. 11 & 18**



Visit with St. Nick and share your holiday wishlist! Visit Baytowne December 11th and 18th 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. 14th! [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com)

**Grand Boulevard Horse-Drawn Carriage Rides! "Rock Around The Christmas Tree" Music Revue! Photos With Santa! Now-Dec. 28**

Enjoy complimentary carriage rides while soaking in the Coastal White Christmas Lights

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

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

Christmas 1914. All quiet on the Western Front, then a song, kicking off an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music and peace. This is the true story of soldiers laying down their weapons to celebrate Christmas together, based on firsthand accounts from the

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 for purchase online. [emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org)

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

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

**Grinchmas at The Village of Baytowne Wharf Dec. 13**

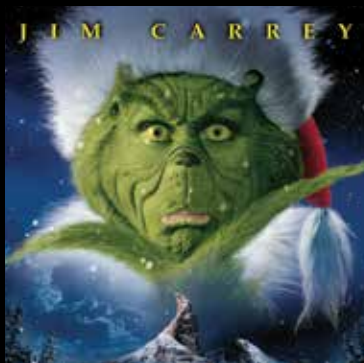
During this holiday season, put a little snark in your holiday spirit with The MEAN One on December 13th! Meet the maven of mischief himself for a photo

opportunity from 5-7p.m., then enjoy a movie showing of The Grinch starting at 7pm. FREE! [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com)

**The REP: Every Christmas Story Ever Told Dec. 13-15 and 18-23**

Back for its 14th year, The REP Theatre's holiday smash hit, Every Christmas Story Ever Told, returns with all of your favorite Beloved Holiday Classics packed into a show full of high-energy jolly and hilarity! Three REP actors, armed with a bazillion props and costumes, send up everything from Charles Dickens and Dr. Seuss to Jimmy Stewart and Chewbacca in this ever-evolving REP favorite.

Grab your chairs and pick your perfect spot in front of the Seaside Post Office on Central Square for the magical holiday tradition of Every Christmas Story Ever Told in Downtown Seaside. This special outdoor showing will take place at 11 a.m. This is a complimentary, non-ticketed event thanks to The Seaside Merchants. [lovetherep.com](http://lovetherep.com)



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.

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Celebrate the season with Morgan James' soulful holiday concert featuring Broadway hits, timeless classics, and original music. Don't miss this magical performance with her stunning vocals, guaranteed to brighten your holidays. *This event includes an elegant holiday brunch and Bloody Mary & Mimosa cash bar.*

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# A South Walton Holiday!

## Santa's Camp Christmas at Topsail Hill Preserve State Park Dec. 13-14

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park invites you to join them for Santa's Camp Christmas in the park on Friday, December 13th from 4-8 p.m. and Saturday, December 14th from 3-8 p.m. Celebrate the season with lots of activities for the kids, crafts, music, and food for all! Topsy's Polar Express will take you past Santa's Workshop to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus at the North Pole! Trams run until 7 p.m. each night.

## Brunch with Santa at Old Florida Fish House Dec. 14 & 21



Bring the kids out for Brunch with Santa at Old Florida Fish House from 11 a.m.- 2 p.m. Be sure to bring your camera to capture your magical Santa memories. Celebrate this festive time Old Florida style as you and your tiny crew enjoy an afternoon full of Christmas music and more. To make a reservation, please call (850) 534-3045. www.oldfloridafishhouse.com

## Merry Main Street DeFuniak Springs: Mistletoe Market Dec. 14 & 21

Find your unique holiday gifts or a sweet treat as you stroll along Baldwin Avenue 3-8 p.m., featuring an outdoor market with a variety of artisans lining the street paired with Santa and character visits. www.MainStreetDFS.org

## Destin Boat Parade at Destin Harbor Dec. 15

The Destin Harbor will be dancing with holiday lights and cheer during the Destin Boat Parade on Sunday, December 15. The celebration begins at 6 p.m. at Harbor Docks where boats festively decorated with holiday lights and décor line-up and begin floating past the various restaurants and docks that line the



coast, ending at Harborwalk Village. All commercial, charter, and private boats are invited to help light up the Harbor. This year's theme, in keeping with the celebration of Destin's 40th anniversary, is "Christmas in the 1980s." destinhistoryandfishing-museum.org

## Holiday Farmers Market at Grand Boulevard December 21, 24, 28 & 31

The most wonderful time of the year will soon be here, and Grand Boulevard invites you to enjoy their special Holiday Farmers' Market. This festive event is set to take place on December 21, 24, 28 & 31 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Grand Park. grandboulevard.com

## Baytowne Countdown | NYE Dec. 31

After a full season of holiday magic, ring in the New Year at Baytowne Countdown | NYE from 6 p.m. – 1 a.m.—The Village of Baytowne Wharf's end-of-the-year celebration! It's an evening to remember with two breathtaking fireworks displays at 8 p.m. and midnight. Enjoy fun for kids and kids at heart from 6-8 p.m. with face painting, kids' activities and LIVE music on the Baytowne LIVE stage. But, the fun doesn't stop there! Dance the night away with live music from 7 p.m. until 1 a.m. featuring DJ QMoney on the Baytowne Live Stage and Party Feels on the Events Plaza Stage. End the night with a spectacular,

midnight fireworks show. There is no better place to ring in 2025!

Those age 20 and under must be accompanied by a legal guardian after 10 p.m. baytownewharf.com

## Baytowne Countdown's Drone Spectacular Celebration Dec. 31

On New Year's Eve, turn your eyes to the sky at 10 p.m. and midnight during the Baytowne Countdown's Drone Spectacular celebration. You'll marvel at the eye-catching drone light show! Watch as 150 drones light up the night sky over the lagoon with swimming dolphins, shooting stars, and much more! baytownewharf.com



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# Healing in Harmony: Acupuncture's Role in Modern Medicine



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

In the story of the tortoise and the hare, there's a lesson we often overlook—the power of steady, patient progress over quick, short-lived victories. True wellness, much like the journey of the tortoise, is about a measured approach. Acupuncture, which has been practiced for thousands of years, aligns with this principle, offering a way to support the body's natural healing processes through slow, purposeful adjustments. It's a reminder that lasting health isn't achieved overnight, but cultivat-

ed over time.

Acupuncture, in its traditional form, works by targeting specific energy pathways, or meridians, within the body. These meridians are thought to carry "chi," or vital energy, and when they become blocked or disrupted, physical symptoms often arise. The careful placement of needles along these pathways reestablishes flow, reducing inflammation and pain, and promoting harmony within the body. In this way, acupuncture doesn't just address surface symptoms but fosters an inner balance that can profoundly support the body's resilience and overall health.

While traditional acupuncture is widely known, the field has evolved to include specialized techniques like Neuro-Acupuncture. Neuro-Acupuncture focuses on conditions that affect the central nervous system, such as stroke recovery, nerve pain, and various neurological disorders and diseases. By blending traditional acupunc-

ture methods with insights from neurology, Neuro-Acupuncture can help restore functionality in ways that complement conventional treatments. Having studied this technique extensively across the globe and in some of China's most prestigious hospitals, Dr. Lisa Forsythe, Tortoise Clinic's Acupuncture Physician, witnessed its transformative potential. This type of acupuncture integrates Eastern philosophy with Western medical understanding, offering patients an evidence-based approach to address complex neurological challenges.

Today, acupuncture is recognized as a valuable therapeutic modality across some of the world's top institutions, including Johns Hopkins and Sloan Kettering, where it's used alongside conventional treatment protocols. Studies have demonstrated its safety and effectiveness, particularly for pain management, stress reduction, and immune support. For patients dealing with chronic conditions

or those recovering from illness or injury, acupuncture offers a natural, non-invasive way to aid in the body's recovery process and enhance the effects of traditional medical treatments.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we take a holistic approach, recognizing that true health lies in addressing the root causes of imbalance. Alongside acupuncture, we offer an extensive dispensary with customized Chinese medicine herbal formulas and medical grade supplements to further support the body's natural defenses. These herbal therapies work in tandem with acupuncture, nourishing the body from within and offering additional support to systems under stress.

Acupuncture isn't a quick fix; it's a commitment to a path of healing. Each session builds on the previous one, gradually



promoting equilibrium and resilience in the body. Like the tortoise's journey, acupuncture's effects unfold gradually, each treatment moving us closer to a balanced, sustainable state of well-being.

I invite those who are curious to explore this path and learn more about what acupuncture has to offer. In a world often focused on fast solutions, acupuncture offers an opportunity to step back and engage with our health in a meaningful, enduring way—one that prioritizes the journey as much as the destination.



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# Safe Connections Curbs Domestic Violence

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Divorce can be vicious. Sometimes marriage can, too. Until 1997, there were few local places families could turn to in order to exorcise the hatred, violence and mistrust that are often the aftermaths of a failed marriage.

But since 1997, an organization has existed to serve children and families dealing with domestic violence and other related issues.

Safe Connections, with offices in Okaloosa and Walton counties, “specializes in supervised visitation and court-ordered custody exchanges,” according to executive director Carole Antoon. “Our staff is very well trained and our training is quite extensive. Our manual on sex abuse is almost 200 pages. The supervised visitation training manual is over 400 pages.” In addition, there is roughly 24 hours of further training annually.

Helping that goal is the passage of Florida House Bill 385, “The Safe Exchange of Minors” law, which came into effect in July, and which allows families experiencing domestic violence to use Safe Connections for their court-ordered custody exchanges. When there is a domestic violence injunction, the court can order monitored exchanges, or supervised visitation, to take place at Safe Connections’ facility. “This ensures that parents do not have any contact during the exchange, and the process is documented and conducted smoothly,” Antoon said.

One of the founders, Sharon Rogers, who recently retired as executive director, said the organization’s birth was a joint venture between volunteers and Shalimar United Methodist Church. “It was brought to the church that we needed a safe place for kids,” Rogers said. “The church formed a committee, which offered the old church building for the organization.

“We had no money, but we had space and interested people,” Rogers, who was serving as a Guardian ad Litem, providing a legal advocate for the child in difficult circumstances, at the time, said.

“Everything was free,” Rogers said. “We had donated furniture, toys. We used a model that had been started in Jacksonville and just went from there. Eventually, we got some money and decided we should hire somebody.



I applied. It was just a very small amount, just a part-time job.”

Donated space was the early prerequisite for Safe Connections. “The only way we could have done it was with that donated space,” she said. It allowed us to expand into other areas, such as Walton County, in 2001.

Then, in 2012, Safe Connections got a substantial grant from Impact 100, its first. “We bought a building in Crestview and we’ve been there since,” Rogers said.

Recently, the organization bought a building on Beal Parkway, just past Hollywood, for \$86,000. “It needs a ton of work,” Rogers said. “We have to put in the safety parameters, flooring and bathrooms need to be done and it needs an entirely new air conditioning system.”

“We’re in the process of getting handicapped accessible ADA compliance bathrooms done,” Antoon said. “We need money for a security system. We do have parents who get really angry and threaten us. Those systems cost a lot but we’re trying to get to the point where we’re self-sustainable.

“We want this to be a place where parents and children can rebuild those bonds from prior to whatever family event happened.”

“Child sex abuse, neglect, domestic violence – We have parents who have tried to kidnap their kids,” Antoon said. “We have so many different categories. It’s so hard to understand others’ experiences so we try to put ourselves in their situations.”

Safe Connections had a “giant field grant that carries us for years,” (a federal grant that supplied 200k of our budget for three years) she said. “We were competing with major entities (for grants).” But that grant wasn’t renewed. “We’re in a major funding crisis right now,” she said.

Those wanting to help can do so on the Safe Connections Website, [safe-connections.org/donate](http://safe-connections.org/donate).

Some of Safe Connections’ encounters are less than cordial. For example, said Antoon, “We had a military father. We could tell from his domestic violence injunction that he had lot of anger and he was horrible to our staff. Finally, we let him know his actions were

unacceptable, and that we understood why he was angry, but he couldn’t treat our staff poorly

anymore.

“He came in one day after that and apologized to the staff. He’s now a much more engaged parent. He asked questions like ‘what should I do here?’ We got his daughter to write him a letter and tell him what her concerns were. He got angry and said he was never coming back. We asked

him, ‘What if this was you talking to your father and you just wanted him to know what was going on and how you felt?’ We talked to him about not canceling his visits. Every so often get a text that things are going well. He got his children back. He’s been doing unsupervised visitation for over a year now.”



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Wellness

# Money Can't Buy Love, But the Right Gift Can



By JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON

Most gift givers assume that a more expensive present will be

more appreciated, yet receivers don't appreciate expensive gifts more than other less expensive gifts. And, that goes for gifts of clothes, wine, home décor, jewelry, and even the price of an engagement ring.

Research clearly shows that money can't buy you love. Instead, when it comes to gift giving, it truly is the thought (and effort) that counts.

**So, how do you select the "right" gift?**

Selecting the right gift begins with the understanding that the gift you give – no matter the cost – communicates how you feel about the receiver and the relationship you share. If you want your partner to receive a message of love, appreciation, admiration, and commitment, then you need a gift that makes that statement.

A **good gift** is tailored to the needs and desires of the receiver and communicates commitment to the relationship.

But the best gifts do all of that and more. The best gifts also reflect effort and high levels of involvement.

**It truly is the thought and effort that counts.**

For example, if your husband dreams of owning a sailboat and you can't afford it, don't buy him a toolbox or new pair of running shoes. Show him you want his dreams to come true. Buy him a sailboat (and captain) for-a-day. Arrange with his boss for a day off, schedule childcare, buy him a pair of deck shoes. Then, the two of you go for a day of sailing. If that is too much, buy him a subscription for Sailing magazine, open a special "sailing" savings account, and start saving for next year's rental or even boat ownership. Just let him know his dream is your dream, too.

Or if your wife is a busy mother who longs for the romance and excitement of your early marriage but barely has time to blow dry her hair, don't buy her a gold bracelet or the truly forbidden food processor (unless it comes with a cooking class in Italy). If she longs to feel passionate again, show her she is still the woman you married. Buy her a day of luxury and romance.

Do all the planning. Book her into a resort spa, arrange for her to have a day off, arrange childcare, schedule her a massage, mani-pedi, facial, and blow-out (or whichever services you can afford). Give her a new sexy top to wear, and end with an overnight "date night" at the resort. If that's too much, then give her the mani-pedi, send the kids to grandma's, and prepare a romantic dinner at home. Just let her know for sure that, to you, she's not just a mom, she's the love of your life.

Here's a less extravagant example. Last year around Thanksgiving, my husband broke his favorite reading glasses. I could have easily ordered him a new

pair of readers. But, I knew they wouldn't be the same. So, I found an optometrist's office willing to repair the old ones, wrapped the repaired glasses in tissue, and put them in his Christmas stocking.

Getting the glasses repaired was tailored to my husband's needs and the effort showed my commitment to him and our relationship. The effort also showed a high level of involvement (I had to do a lot of running around rather than just order something online).

Although my husband received other more expensive gifts last year, the repaired readers were his favorite because they communicated to him the lengths I would go to make him happy. In turn, he was happy with me.

**Love is, after all, an action word.**

Try sharing this article with your partner to start a discussion about what you both might want most for yourselves and your relationship this year. Acknowledge that the best gifts are tailored to the receiver's unique needs and desires, reflect effort and involvement on your part, and demonstrate your commitment to the person and the relationship you share. Then shop creatively so you have the best (and perhaps, least expensive) Christmas ever.

If you want to give your partner a private and fun marriage refresher course, contact me and I'll set it up for you.

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



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# Book Review: Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert



By MICHAEL MCMANUS LCSW

In "Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear," Elizabeth Gilbert invites readers to embark on a transformative journey that transcends traditional notions of creativity. I use Audible to listen to books and this

is an especially delightful book to listen to as Elizabeth Gilbert herself beautifully narrates it. I often refer this book to clients and use concepts in this book with clients who feel stuck or blocked or who struggle with unrealized potential. This book asserts that creativity is not the exclusive domain of artists; rather, it is a vital force that can enhance every facet of our lives. Whether you are a parent, teacher, attorney, physician or entrepreneur, Gilbert's insights will resonate deeply, empowering you to embrace your innate creativity and apply it to your everyday life.

Throughout the book, Gilbert shares personal anecdotes and reflections, creating a relatable narrative that speaks to the heart of human experience. She champions the idea that engaging with our creativity is not only fulfilling but essential for

living a rich and meaningful life.

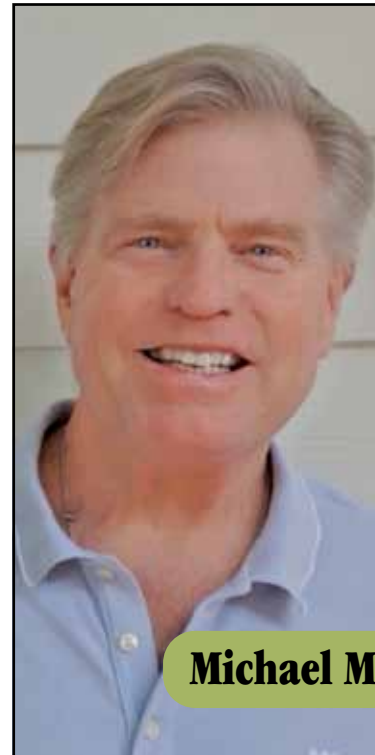
One of the most empowering aspects of "Big Magic" is its emphasis on overcoming fear—the common barrier that stifles creativity. Gilbert candidly addresses the fears that plague us all, from the fear of failure to the fear of judgment. She encourages readers to confront these fears head-on, suggesting that creativity flourishes when we allow ourselves to take risks and embrace imperfection. Gilbert reassures us that creativity is not about being flawless; it's about exploration, experimentation, and growth.

Moreover, Gilbert's exploration of the mystical nature of inspiration is a highlight of the book. She personifies ideas as entities that seek out individuals to collaborate with. This perspective encourages readers to remain open to inspiration in their daily lives.

In conclusion, "Big Magic" is a powerful reminder that creativity is not confined to the realm of artists, but is a vital force that can enrich every aspect of our lives. Elizabeth Gilbert's wisdom inspires us to reclaim our creative instincts, encouraging us to live boldly and authentically. This book is an essential read for anyone seeking to ignite their creativ-

ity and embrace the magic that lies within. I love this beautifully written book and if you embrace it with an open heart, it can bring out hidden treasures within you and change your life.

Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach and can be reached at (850) 837-0123 or psychotherapy30A.com



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Wellness

# What Version of You Will You Be?



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,  
JOURNEY BRAVELY

It's easier to be loving and

kind when you agree and have things in common with others. But, what happens when you're sitting around the table and someone shares an opinion wildly different than yours? Or, what happens when someone you don't really know expresses ideas counterintuitive to your beliefs or values? What happens when someone is rude and critical of your thoughts and beliefs? What version of yourself shows up in that moment?



Culture currently encourages polarized thought and cutting people out of your life when you

disagree. News and social media feed the narrative of each person having freedom to do and say what they want regardless of how it impacts others. And, legally, in most cases you do have that freedom. However, it might be wise to take a moment to reflect on who you want to be regarding your long-term character goals.

When you get to the end of life, how do you want to have shown up in the world? Do you want to be known for what you were against or what you were for? Do you want to be known for being right or for having healthy relationships? Do you want to be known for making people feel small or lifting people up? So, in a world with so many conflicting perspectives, how do you become a loving, mature version of yourself?

### 8 Ways to Engage Your Loving, Mature Version of Self

**Investigate value origins.** Values originate from sources including family of origin, national origin, faith background, generational influences, trauma background, racial background, ethnic background, media influences, political background, life experience, and many others. Reflect on the tapestry of your own values background. Remember the above variables have many expressions that have shaped another's values.

**Consider different does not equal less.** When surrounded by others who hold similar views to your own, you can assume people with different views/values/attitudes are less righteous, less intelligent, less moral, less patriotic, less religious, have less inherent worth, and are generally less than you. Viewing others as less leads to

self-righteous posture that repels connection and relationship.

**Consider you don't have the corner on values definitions.** Values such as integrity, kindness, decency, morality, and freedom have various expressions. While it is important that values have some commonly agreed upon definitions, it can be helpful to remember defining values incredibly specifically assumes you are right and most everyone else is wrong.

**Hold fast to your values while making space for others.** Defining and living by your values is a healthy pursuit. And, remember that others are walking through the same process with different value backgrounds. You can be clear about what you believe while respecting the humanity of those with different views.

### Disagree with curiosity rather than judgment.

Knowing what you believe and living your life in open alignment with your values is good. When interacting with someone who holds conflicting ideas, try suspending judgment and asking curious questions about how they developed their perspective. Openness to others' life experiences often results in growth for the listener and we all have room to grow.

**Focus more on your character than on the conflicting values.** Acknowledge the conflict of values while asking yourself what character you want to exhibit toward other humans. Allow your character goals to lead as you engage conflicting values rather than allowing the values conflict to lead your character.

### Engage boundaries be-

*continued on next pages*

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# Medicare and Individual Insurance Changes are Here for 2025



By CHRISTIAN REGALADO

It's been a busy year for health insurance. Some big changes happened in Medicare prescription coverage for 2025 and many people on individual plans had noticeable premium changes. If you have Medicare Advantage and take prescription drugs pay attention starting in January. Prices on next month's prescriptions may surprise you. If this happens and you have a Medicare Advantage plan you may want to give me a call. If this happens and you have a stand-alone PDP plan, you may want to contact your doctor to see if there are other drugs that are on your plan's formulary to substantially lower your costs. Feel free to contact me if you need some clarity and advice.

Baby Boomers are still turning 65 at record numbers. We are fortunate that

there are many choices of Medicare plans available in the South Walton/Destin area.

Most people end up with one of the many Medicare Advantage plans available here. More and more folks are signing up on Medicare Supplement and Prescription Drug plans, which provide excellent coverage.

Which one is best for you? It all depends on your particular needs and how you plan to use your Medicare plan. That is where a broker can be helpful by asking questions and guiding you to the plan and insurance carrier that best fits your needs. It can be a confusing process but a local broker is a great asset to help navigate the many options.

When you read this, it will be after the end of the Annual Enrollment Period on December 7. This is the annual opportunity to change your Medicare Advantage plan or Prescription Drug Plan (PDP) for a January 1 effective date. If you missed this and would still like to make a change, you can still do so for an Advantage plan between Janu-

ary 1 and March 31 but it's too late to change a PDP plan.

Medicare had many changes in 2025. This was primarily due to the Medicare prescription maximum out of pocket being reduced from \$8000 to \$2000 starting in January of 2025. Great news for those with expensive drugs but it allowed the insurance companies to spread their loss of income to other Medicare members which resulted in most PDP plans going up in cost and Advantage plans reducing some benefits. Every insurance carrier reduced or eliminated some benefits, mostly for dental. Drug formularies changed, which is the list of drugs that each carrier publishes showing which prescription drugs are included in their plans. If a drug is not included in a carrier's formulary, it is not subject to the \$2000 maximum out-of-pocket cost. So be careful since a drug covered in 2024 may not be covered in 2025. This could result in very high prescription costs not covered by insurance.

Unfortunately, some people won't realize this until they refill their prescription next year. Keep in mind that if this hap-

pens to you, there may be an opportunity to change your Advantage plan. Call for details.

If you are interested in changing plans on the Individual Market Place you have until Jan. 15 to switch plans for 2025. I wish there were insurance plans on the individual Marketplace that were anywhere close to Medicare, but there aren't. However, if you would like to discuss other options, I'd be happy to help you know what they are. Reach out anytime.

I want to say a big thank you to everyone that has reached out to me over the last two years that I have been contributing to this paper. I have very much enjoyed

the many relationships I have been fortunate to make. I also really appreciate the referrals. We have some great neighbors here around 30A. Genuinely.

Have a very merry Christmas!!

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## WHAT VERSION

continued from previous page

**fore ending relationship.** If values conversations get heated or disrespectful, try suggesting avoidance of the topic to preserve the relationship or refuse to participate in conversations that feel hostile. Ending relationships can be necessary at times when boundaries are continuously disrespected, however, working through boundaries communica-

tion first helps preserve relationship in many cases.

**View people with different values as a challenge to grow rather than as villains.** When we define others as villains, we give energy to feeling resentful and disempowered. When we define others as a challenge to grow, we give energy to expanding our emotional and behavioral capacities both in immediate interactions with those who challenge us and beyond into many

other areas of life.

Remember to give yourself and others compassion and patience as you evaluate and grow in showing up as a loving, mature version of yourself in the world. The discomfort of growth most often results in widespread positive life change over time. Connect with us as Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.



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## Conquering Limiting Beliefs



BY KIRK MCCARLEY

Have you ever been told you had a unique skill or talent and were then challenged to do something with it? Perhaps it had something to do with a business or enterprise. “You should try opening up a boutique.” Maybe it had to do with a craft. “I believe your art would really sell.” Those with a predilection towards entertaining may have heard, “You ought to get involved with community

theater.”

When I first launched my coaching business, I found myself quickly confronted with the most fundamental of operational dilemmas: how to market. Admittedly loathing self-promotion, I quickly came to the realization that any of us who own our own business have entered the world of sales.

Writing has generally come easy for me, so it was most comfortable to convey my messages in the form of blogs posted on my website and through social media. The publisher of this publication has also been generous in providing me a public forum.

Over time these blogs have accumulated to where they now well exceed a hundred. As the century mark was reached and then passed, I said to myself, “I need to do something with these.”

Unrelated to that thought, that same publisher commented, “You ought to write a book.” Hmm. That was one motivator. Business coach Diann Wingert also observed:

“Should I write a book? Well, apparently, something like 81% of people dream about writing one, but only 3% of them do.”

Sure, like the 81% I had thought about writing a book. What was further motivation, however, was the 3% part. “I have never been top 3% in anything; here’s the chance.”

“Thoughts for My Kids... and Other People’s Kids,” was released on Amazon last month.

What is your book? Or if not a book, something else? What is it that you want and maybe really need to do? Is it?

• A travel dream to a long-awaited destination?

• Setting aside the time to train and then finally run that marathon?

• Honoring and memorializing your family’s heritage through cataloging letters or pictures of your ancestors into an organized and centralized manner?

• Making amends, asking for, or offering forgiveness to a family member or good friend from the past to overcome the souring of the relationship.

• Taking the time or making the commitment to learn a new language?

What holds us back? Fundamentally, it might be fear. Fear of not being successful, depending upon how we measure success. Fear of being criticized for not being good enough. Fear of the time commitment when you’re already overcommitted. “I will get to it someday,” you say, but

then another day passes by.

What is it that you really want to do? Consider what some who know a thing about what it takes to overcome limiting beliefs say:

• “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.” Henry Ford

• “Do not be embarrassed by your failures, learn from them and start again.” Richard Branson

• “Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” William James

• “You are never too old to set another goal or to dream another dream.” C.S. Lewis

• “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” Wayne Gretzky

• Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will.” Suzy Kassem

My wife had a classmate in high school art. She still remarks about his talent even then.

Following high school they went to different colleges. He graduated with honors, married, and pursued a “traditional” career route. After a few years, his wife became ill with cancer. Before passing, she encouraged him, “follow your dream.” That jarring loss was the catalyst that caused him to evaluate his own life and pursue what he had always wanted to do: paint.

A short time later he left his “conventional” job to “make his own little dent in the universe” as an artist. He eventually remarried and moved to France.

Thomas Darnell’s paintings have been exhibited throughout the world. The wallpaper in our master bedroom reminds us daily of Tom’s talent, perseverance, and courage.

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



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# A Pastor's Ponderings: **Just a Few More**



BY REV. PETE HYDE

Just a few more days until Christmas. Just a few more days to get in the spirit of the secular celebration. Just a few more days to make those final travel plans. Just a few more days. It's on the news. It's in all the commercials. It's in all the ads that clutter social media. One almost wants to scream, "Repent for the end is near! Please let the end be near!!" Some of us want to scream, "Praise God, for the end of the season is near!" I guess I need to get out my "Bah-Humbug" sign.

Just a few more days to get in the spirit of Christmas, to get filled by the Spirit of Christ, to share the Spirit of Christmas, to be the Spirit of Christmas – now there's a challenge for you. Just a few more days to get

past the syrupy Hallmark sentimentality of Christmas always ending up "happily ever after." Just a few more days to get past the presents under the tree and find the Nativity scene and be reminded of why we celebrate. Just a few more days to get over the stress of Christmas dinner and remember the last dinner shared by Jesus and the disciples on his last night on earth before he gave his life for you and me.

Just a few more days to grasp the reality of Christmas. This little, sweet baby, who carols claimed didn't even cry, lying in a manger with mom and dad, shepherds, cows, donkeys, horses, sheep and wise men all gathered around would change the world for eternity in his short life here on earth. His earthly ministry would only span three years during which he would challenge the status quo, the hierarchy of the church, the government and even a building. He had no church board or denomination or TV or radio show or Monday morning devotional.

He would have a message, a mission and a group of dedicated followers who were willing to carry the mission and message even after he had left

them. He would have a singular vision, mission and goal – to save the world for the sake of God's kingdom. He would touch lives, hearts and souls as he journeyed through his short life that the "authorities" would end for their own purposes.

Just a few more days to realize He was and is so much more than a baby lying in a manger. He was and is the Son of God. He came as the Light of the World. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. He came to save us from our sins and bring us into a relation-

ship with God His Father. He came to gather dedicated followers who spread His message to the world in which we live. He came to be in ministry and mission as an example of what our mission and ministry should be. He was from the "beginning."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that

life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." (John 1: 1-5).

Just a few more days and we celebrate the coming of the Savior, the coming of the Promised One, the coming of a new age, the coming of a new way of "doing church", a new opportunity to commit our lives to God and dedicated followers. Are you ready? Just a few more days!

*Rev. Pete Hyde serves as chaplain with the South Walton Fire District*

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 Musing

# Road to Redemption: Holli Detweiler

BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

In June of 2004, Holli Detweiler checked into the hospital for an outpatient procedure. Her anxiety level was high because her dad had died after being put under anesthetic for an outpatient procedure years before. But she went ahead with her appointment because she needed to know if she had endometriosis, which could affect her ability to be a mother.

While under anesthesia, there was a complication, and Holli's heart stopped. The doctors worked diligently to stabilize her. She was in the ICU in Pensacola for seven days in an induced coma, and her family waited to see if she would be ok.

About four millennia ago, God miraculously brought the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, where they were more than spectators of God's miracles. They had front row seats to Egypt's progressive destruction delivered one plague at a time, while they remained safe in Goshen. The cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night was their protection and their guide as they

journeyed to the Promised Land. The Red Sea opened for their safe passage on dry ground.



Spectators? No. They were participants. But they were even more than that. Those stiff-necked Hebrews were the reason God was acting in the first place. His covenant with their forefathers and His steadfast love for them compelled His actions.

In Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, He described the short-lived wildflowers and how their

beauty surpasses even that of Solomon. He spoke about the birds and God's provision for them, and that He knows when even one falls to the ground. The Father loves His creation and, especially, His redeemed ones.

Humans experience life in three dimensions, but we're aware of more. Einstein and others believe there are actually ten dimensions. We know there's the spiritual dimension that is active even though we can't see it. Constant warfare, as explained by the Apostle Paul, is being waged in the unseen realm. As a counter-measure, he exhorts us to suit up and fight against the enemy of our souls.

While Holli was in the induced coma, she recounts an NDE (near death experience). "I remember a bright light overtaken by reds and blues and blacks. Then the light would take over again. I was temporarily out of my body, and

I heard voices and saw images. I believe the bright light showed me that God was there."

As she began to awaken from her coma, she told her mom that she was at peace with dying. "I'm ready to go home." But

God had other plans.

Holli found out later that a man had come to the hospital and had prayed over her while she was in the induced coma.

After her release from the hospital, Holli underwent therapy to help get her strength back. "I was in dark places and couldn't understand what had happened." To this day, she still struggles at times with PTSD and depression.

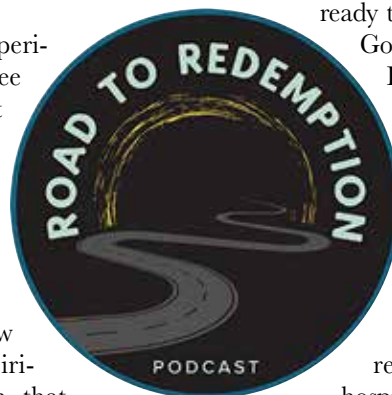
Even as believers, we sometimes become filled with anxiety and fear. Even crippling anxiety. As believers we know God doesn't want us living in defeat, so how do we fight back and overcome? Getting in the Word, staying in the Word, and prayer. The more we

ingest the living Word, the more the Spirit speaks to our hearts. The more the Spirit speaks, the more we desire to commune in prayer with our Heavenly Father. This is how we abide in Christ, just as Jesus encouraged us to do. In this scenario, spiritual growth isn't optional. It's exponential.

When Holli recounts her experience, she says "I learned a lot. I was floored at the amount of people who prayed for me and supported me financially, and how they came together." She absolutely believes in miracles.

And although she still struggles, God has blessed her with a loving husband and three children. "God's not done with me yet and I work on hearing His voice." And when it comes to anxiety – "Don't stop praying and believing. God might not answer how and when you want but He always has your back."

You can catch Holli Detweiler's entire interview and listen to many other incredible stories on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at [www.rtrdestiny.com](http://www.rtrdestiny.com).



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BY SEAN DIETRICH

The Third Day of Christmas. My three French hens must have gotten lost in the mail. The weather was a stolid 34 degrees. The water in the dog bowls was stone. The sun was out.

Waffle House was warm and

# Sean of the South: Waffle House

“It’s bacon,” said my wife. When you walk into a Waffle House, it’s the smell that gets you first. The smell of cured pork and frying tuber vegetables. It hits you in the back of the throat. If you’re lucky, the scent works its way into the fibers of your clothes. And it stays with you all day.

The child was smiling. “This place smells delicious.”

“Welcome to Waffle House,” said the server.

We told the waitress it was the kid’s first time visiting.

The employees made a big deal about it. You would have

cream smiley face on the waffle. Nobody asked her to do that.

When the meal was finished, the waitresses asked, “Has it been a good first visit to Waffle House?”

But the kid can’t answer. Her mouth is still full.

So the waitresses offered to

pose for a picture with us, to commemorate the monumental occasion. One that will not soon be forgotten.

We all pose. The photographer holds the camera and tells us all to smile. “Say cheese,” says the photographer.

“No,” says one waitress, kiss-

ing the blind girl’s head. “Don’t say cheese. On the count of three, let’s everyone say, ‘Love!’”

Whereupon every customer joined in unison, counting down with the photographer. We all counted.

“ONE...! TWO...!”

Love.



inviting. The parking lot was mostly empty except for a few muddy trucks. My wife and I had an 11-year-old with us. She is blind. This is her first time attending a Waffle House.

“Have a seat wherever,” said the server.

We found a table in the corner. A booth. Red vinyl. Faux wood table. Laminated menus. Napkin dispenser.

Going to Waffle House is one of my most cherished habits. I go a few times every week. Sometimes more often, if I’m on the road. I give the Waffle House corporation half my annual income. And I do it gladly.

But going to a Waffle House with a blind child is another matter entirely. The whole ordeal is different. For starters, the multisensory experience begins with the nose.

“That smell,” the child said, as we walked into the door.

She used her white cane to trace the perimeter of the aisle, navigating between booth and bar and jukebox.

“What is that smell?” she said. Nose to the ceiling.

thought Young Harry and Meghan Markle were entering the premises.

We sat. We talked. The waitress gave the kid a complimentary paper hat.

I’ve known people who worked at Waffle House. The industry term for this hat is the Confidence Killer. But it looked good on the girl.

The waitress gave me a paper hat too. She put it on my head. I looked like an unhappy mess-hall sergeant.

The child is thrilled to be here and she doesn’t care who knows. She is dancing in her seat. Bouncing in rhythm to the jukebox music. Which is Taylor Swift.

“Are you having a good day?” says our waitress.

“Yes, we are!!” says the kid, using not one but two exclamation points.

She ordered eggs, scrambled. Bacon, crispy. White toast, buttered within an inch of its grain. Strawberry jam. An Irish pint of chocolate milk. A giant waffle—blueberry.

The waitress drew a whipped-



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Dining

# Bringing Home the Bacon: Gatherings With Jennifer Provides Fresh Catering Options for the Emerald Coast

Jennifer Hall is a single fur baby mom who loves to cook and entertain. She traveled all over the United States before finally deciding Panama City Beach was the place to be, relocating to the area in 2014.

Jennifer has always loved to cook, teaching herself when she was young. Eventually, this love of cooking grew from a passion to a business. When she first moved to Florida, Hall opened up The Shack Pub and Grub, a food truck concept. She would go set up at bars that didn't serve food and host a Steak Night or Whole Hog Roast that eventually evolved into Mystery Murder Dinner Shows. These proved

to be a big hit. Jennifer took this concept to breweries, bars, restaurants and other local hot spots like Captain Anderson's Event Center. Then Hurricane Michael hit and business slowed to a stop. Jennifer thought outside the box and decided to start making dessert bacon, bacon caramelized in brown sugar and spices, and package it in decorative holiday tins which she sold to restaurants and bars for the holidays. This effort expanded into smoked holiday hams, which are smoked over twenty-four hours and topped with a bourbon brown sugar glaze.

Eventually, through word of mouth, Jennifer came to be



for two," she says. "I've taught myself to cook pretty much anything, and it has helped me venture out into different venues."

Though her specialty foods are equally popular at weddings and corporate functions, she also hosts holiday parties that are mystery-themed. Think Bad Santa or Ugly Sweater Office party with an assortment of great food and a "whodunnit" to solve before evening's end.

In addition to Jennifer's catering business, with the help of some great friends, she also started Emerald Coast Bonfires, and it's been a huge hit. Emerald Coast Bonfires is equipped to handle all beach bonfire needs whether it's a fun-filled family outing, a romantic night under the stars or a majestic beach wedding anywhere along the Emerald Coast.

For more information find Jennifer at [Www.emeraldcoast-bonfires.com](http://Www.emeraldcoast-bonfires.com) and [www.gatheringsbyjennifer.com](http://www.gatheringsbyjennifer.com).

known as the ham lady or the bacon lady. So in 2019, she did the next logical thing: she founded Gatherings by Jennifer.

"Everyone loved my cooking, and I have hosted big events of 250 people or more, as well as small, romantic home-cooked meals



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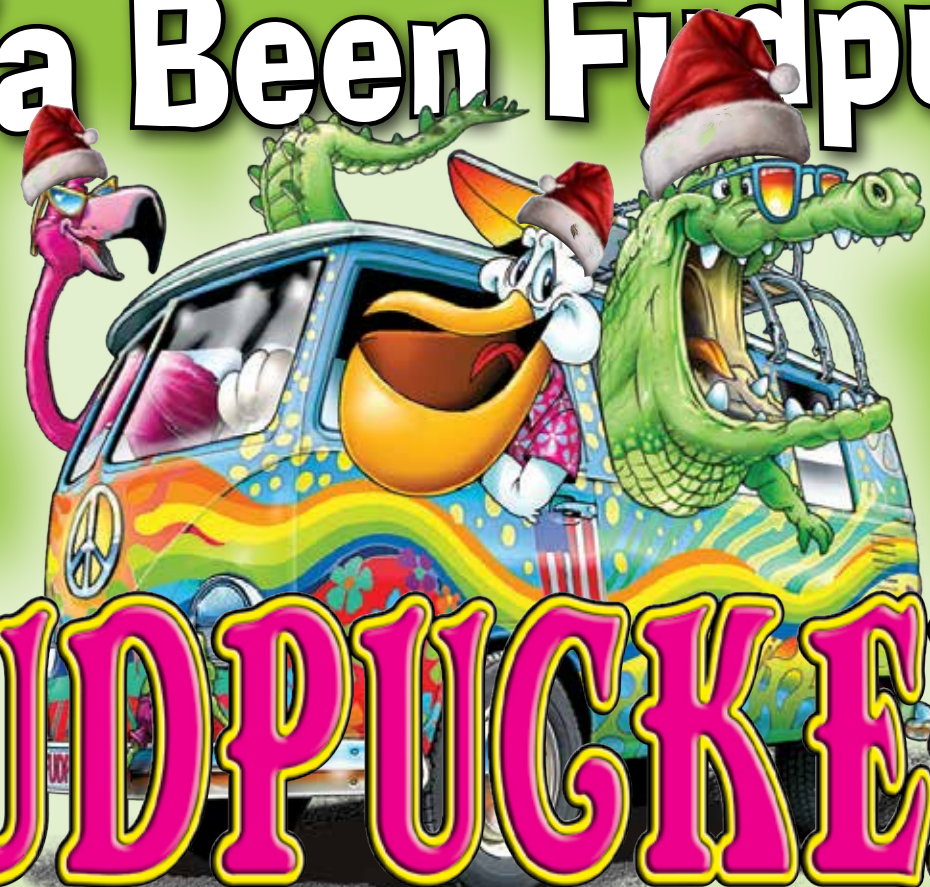
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Dining

# Pies & Provisions Brings a Taste of Hand-Made Tradition for the Holidays

BY LORI LEATH SMITH, PUBLISHER

You know that saying, “Not your mama’s [insert something here]”? It’s often used to describe things that are modern, edgy or reimagined. But at Pies & Provisions, that idea is beautifully portrayed. Here, you want exactly what your mama used to make. It’s a joyful celebration of everything comforting and nostalgic—pies, desserts, honey and more that bring back the warmest memories of home.

Pies & Provisions lovingly honors the timeless traditions, flavors and care that make you think, “Yes, this is my mama’s.” When you add a little Texas tradition to that recipe, you get an irresistible mix of love and flavor, perfect for warming any heart. Founded by a mother-son duo, Julie and Ryan Robinson from Texas, Pies & Provisions in Santa Rosa Beach brings together family, passion and a commitment to quality. Their handcrafted pies are made with natural ingredients—a throwback to simpler times when everything tasted like a hug from someone you love.

Ryan Robinson, co-founder of Pies & Provisions, put it beautifully: “Our vision for Pies & Provisions was simple - to share our love for pies with the community and create moments of joy and indulgence,” he said. “We believe that every pie should

not just taste delicious, but also evoke memories and emotions. Pie has always been more than just dessert for us—it’s a connection to our past, a way to share joy with others.”

I recently had the chance to visit Pies & Provisions and chat with the Robinsons. Let me tell you—I was blown away. The menu is a treasure trove of both sweet and savory pies, with seasonal offerings that keep things fresh and exciting.

This season, dive into rich flavors like Turtle Cheesecake and Peanut Butter pies. For the holiday season, festive treats such as Peppermint Hot Cocoa, Black Forest and Apple Pear Cranberry Spice pies become the stars, perfect for family gatherings, holiday celebrations, or even just for savoring on a cozy Christmas morning.

The Robinsons’ dedication to authenticity shines through in every hand-made bite.

They make their own vanilla extract, golden syrup, caramel and invert sugar, ensuring a perfectly balanced sweetness. Their



beloved pecan pie, a standout favorite, uses only a handful of pure, simple ingredients to let the flavors shine.

Pies & Provisions operates mostly on a pre-order basis, with pickups and deliveries available Monday through Saturday. But

if you’re in a pinch, the shop opens up for walk-in orders on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 to 5 p.m. Located at 35 Apple Ct. in Santa Rosa Beach, the shop is a welcoming spot for both locals and visitors, making it easy for you to provide a slice of homemade goodness for your holiday table.

Every pie from Pies & Provisions is crafted to bring people together, honor the past and create new, cherished memories. It’s about sharing love, tradition and the sweet coastal charm of Santa Rosa Beach with every mouthful. Whether you’re a local or just visiting, you’ll find that Pies & Provisions makes every family gathering or holiday celebration a little warmer, a little sweeter and a lot more special.

For more information and to experience the Robinsons’ delicious menu, visit [piesandprovisions.com](http://piesandprovisions.com). And don’t forget to follow @30APies for the latest updates and a peek into the magic of artisanal pie-making.

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# Register for Spring Term Now at Emerald Coast Technical College's South Campus in Watersound

Emerald Coast Technical College's new South campus located at the Magnet Innovation Center – Watersound continues to grow and expand. The Watersound campus is in the middle of its second full year, currently offering two programs, with a third program beginning the first of the year. The Spring term begins January 9 and enrollment is now open for courses at ECTC-Watersound as well as programs offered at the main campus.

One exciting part is that for a limited time, programs at the Watersound campus, the programs are offered tuition free. The tuition portion of the program is being covered by the Triumph Grant, and other grants are also being used to cover any additional costs to students. This means you could obtain an industry certification for free or at least with very little cost!!

One of the programs available is Applied Information Technology (A.I.T.), where students receive the CompTIA A+ certification. The A+ Certification is a technology industry standard and is in high demand with I.T. business owners who are looking for prospective employees. The A.I.T. program instructor, Dave Duvall, has had great success with the program

with a 100% completion rate, with all the currently enrolled students on track to be certified this spring. All students who have previously obtained the A+ certification through the program

learners ages 16 and up and are also available for dual enrollment to students from



walton.k12.fl.us

ECTC - Watersound is located at 133 S. Watersound Parkway on the campus of the Magnet Innovation Center – right across Hwy. 98 from the

Watersound Town Center. Don't miss out on the fantastic opportunity, enrollment for the Spring term, which begins Jan 9 is now open with several schedule options available.

have been employed in the local I.T. business community or are continuing their education at the E.C.T.C. main campus.

The Watersound Campus of E.C.T.C. also offers a Patient Care Technician program, and in January will be offering a Practical Nursing program, with other programs in the works to open in the future. All programs are open to adult

our district high schools. More information is available at ectc.edu or you can contact I.T. Instructor Dave Duvall directly at (850) 557-2804 or glen.duvall@



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 Music

# South Walton Live Music Scene

## Still Standing A Tribute to Elton John LIVE @ Old Florida Fish House Dec. 14

Still Standing carries on the legacy and amazing music of the iconic Sir Elton John. Close your eyes and you will swear you are listening to Elton in person, as the amazing Ben Frey looks, sounds and performs his incredible music catalog to perfection! Show starts at 7 p.m. The Dinner Package is \$69 which includes dinner starting at 5 p.m. View the dinner menu and purchase tickets at [www.oldfloridafishhouse.com](http://www.oldfloridafishhouse.com).

## Sinfonia The Grinch in Concert Dec. 14

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents The Grinch in Concert at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center at 7:30 p.m. To view seating options and purchase tickets, visit [sinfoniagulfcoast.org](http://sinfoniagulfcoast.org).

Discover the Magic of the Mean One this holiday season. Bring the entire family to remember exactly why Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas has become an enduring classic celebration of the holiday spirit.



Sinfonia Gulf Coast will perform James Horner's beloved film score from Ron Howard's award-winning film live as movie magic unfolds on the screen. Don't miss this beloved tale of the Whos, the Grinch, and his furry sidekick, Max as they rediscover the true meaning of the season. This family friendly film in concert is bound to grow your heart three whole sizes, just like the Grinch.

## A Very Grayt Christmas with Will Thompson Band at Grayton Beer Company Dec. 21

Get ready for A Very Grayt Christmas Celebration at Grayton Beer Company Taproom from 6-9 p.m. The holiday event features food trucks, drink specials, ugly sweater contest, cookies and cocoa table, raffle and the Will Thompson Band play-

ing your favorite tunes to get you out on the dance floor! Purchase tickets: <https://www.willthompsonmusic.com/event-details/a-very-grayt-christmas>.

## Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

For over a decade, Old Florida Fish House has proudly featured local live music. Catch artists playing inside the coveted bar and lounge area as well as in the large outdoor dining space situated among the palm and oak trees under the twinkling lights next to Eastern Lake. Visit [www.oldfloridafishhouse.com](http://www.oldfloridafishhouse.com).

## FOOW Live Music Fridays and Sunday Brunch

Enjoy live music on Fridays and for Sunday Brunch at FOOW - Fish Out of Water. The Gulf front restaurant invites you to delicious dining paired with live music. Visit [foow30a.com](http://foow30a.com).

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

AJ's is the place to be to celebrate all things Sunday Funday

in Grayton Beach! Come for brunch, stay for the music and dancing. Every Sunday from 11 a.m. til 3 p.m., AJ's brunch is not to be missed. Complete your meal with a mimosa or go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar. Enjoy live music with Will & Linda 12-4 p.m. and Pickled Pickers on the Main Stage at 5 p.m. Check [ajsgayton.com](http://ajsgayton.com) for other live music throughout the week.

## Shunk Gulley

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

## The Bay

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

Wednesday nights:

Dec. 11: Jared Herzog

Dec. 18: Lips Manly & the Manly Men

## Sounds of Seaside Concert Series

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

Dec. 11: Boukou Groove

Dec. 18: Fred Domulot

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# Americana Concerts Return to Camp Helen with a Music Festival Finale

Listen for Americana music floating along the shores of Lake Powell as it mingles with the salty evening breeze at Camp Helen State Park this winter. Americana Concerts in the Lodge at Camp Helen State Park are back and better than ever on Saturdays from January 11 to March 1 at 6 p.m.

Tickets are now available for purchase for a suggested donation of \$15 directly on the Friends of Camp Helen website ([www.friendsofcamp Helen.org](http://www.friendsofcamp Helen.org)). The ticket price includes park admission, food, and beverages. There will be limited seats available for each show. The doors open at 6 p.m. and the music begins at 6:30.

Little Mercies, a young trio of talented Tallahassee musicians who trade instruments around like passing a plate of biscuits to a table full of hungry children, kick off the season on January 11.

Nikki Talley, along with exquisite guitar and harmonies by hubby Jason Sharp, offers a sweet trip down the Appalachian trail with a little Florida seafaring thrown in for texture. They will perform on January 25.

On February 8, Ben Gage takes the stage. Although he comes from the rust belt of Ohio, he is anything but rusty.



Crowd favorites, Mike and Maggie Mckinney are back on February 22. Lucky Mud SwampyTonk.... Folkabilly, harmony and discord, dark and light from a Florida and beyond perspective.

The last Saturday show March 1 features Paul Kamm & Eleanore MacDonald, quintessential folk musicians with the rarest quality of combined stellar songwriting, beautiful musicianship and unreal vocals and harmonies.

For the first time ever, the grand finale of the series will be

the Roots and Wings XII Festival Sunday, March 2, from 10 a.m.- 6 p.m. Roots and Wings XII is a one day music festival that includes morning workshops and afternoon concerts by some of the finest touring Americana singer/songwriters in the country today. The festival begins at 10 am with one hour morning workshops, free with the purchase of a ticket, in guitar/mandolin/fiddle (choose your specific instrument) (workshop I) followed by vocal/harmony (workshop II) and ends with songwriting (workshop III).

These workshops follow each other so that everyone can attend all three. They are totally immersive and interactive, everyone gets involved. It's a sharing experience when we believe everyone, at any level, has something to add. Tickets are \$50 and include parking, lunch, concerts, and workshops. Tickets will be available to the public on Friday, November 29.

Scholarships will be offered to younger musicians. Concerts begin after our lunch break (1 to 1:45 p.m.), also included with the purchase of a ticket, at 2 p.m. with local favorite duo Lucky Mud, purveyors of Swampy-Tonk & Folkabilly, Florida style,

followed by David Singley, jazz-influenced guitarist, former touring backing guitar player and former Minnesota professor with poetic lyrics and soulful melodies turned solo singer/songwriter. The duo Paul Kamm & Eleanore MacDonald from Northern California are the quintessential folk singer/songwriters who are the complete package of vocal/harmony beautiful songs with meaningful, heartfelt messages for today and always. Our final performer, Wyatt Espalin hails from the heart of Appalachia, Hiawassee, Georgia. He brings big beautiful vocals, multi-instrumental talents, and powerful songwriting.

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# The Harmony of Learning and Celebration: Student Music Recitals During the Holiday Season

Studio 237 Music is excited to invite the community (free of charge) to attend our Winter Student Recital on Saturday, December 14 at Seagrove Baptist Church Sanctuary, 4915 E County Hwy 30A, Santa Rosa Beach, FL at either 10:30 a.m. or 1:30 p.m. Our

recitals last about an hour, with a variety of holiday, contemporary, and classic songs.

The holiday season is synonymous with joy, togetherness, and traditions that warm the heart. Among the festive lights and spirited gatherings, one tradition often stands out: the student music recital. These per-

formances, a blend of hard work, creativity, and holiday cheer, provide an opportunity for budding musicians to shine while spreading seasonal joy.

### A Showcase of Growth and Talent

A recital is more than just a performance; it is a milestone. After months of practice, they step onto the stage to showcase their progress. The holiday season adds an extra layer of excitement, with students performing festive classics like Jingle Bells, Silent Night, or even more challenging pieces like Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite.

Recitals provide a platform for students of all ages and skill levels to gain confidence, share their passion for music, and experience the magic of live performance. From the first notes of a young beginner to the advanced student, the event is a testament to the transformative power of music education.

### Building Community Through Music

Holiday music recitals are not just about individual achievement—they are about community. Parents, teachers, friends, and family gather to celebrate the performers, creating a supportive environment that encourages growth. In many cases, these events become community-wide celebrations, fostering

connections through shared appreciation for the arts. Familiar melodies bring memories of past holidays, evoking a sense of nostalgia and unity.

### Adding a Personal Touch to the Holidays

Holiday recitals often take on a festive flair, with venues decorated in seasonal themes and performers wearing holiday attire. The repertoire can range from

skills. Students learn discipline, perseverance, and the value of presenting their work to others. These lessons resonate far beyond the stage, influencing their personal and academic lives.

### A Lasting Memory

For many, the holiday recital becomes a cherished memory. Performers remember the applause, the glow of the stage lights, and the pride they felt in their accomplishment. Audience members leave with hearts warmed by the holiday spirit and a renewed appreciation for the talent and effort displayed.

Student music recitals are more than just performances; they are celebrations of growth,

community, and the enduring magic of music. As students take the stage, their notes are a reminder of the beauty of sharing, the power of tradition, and the joy of being together. Whether you're a performer or an audience member, attending a holiday recital is sure to make your season brighter.

Since 2011, Studio 237 Music Lessons is located in Santa Rosa Beach, FL. Our teachers are ready to teach: Piano, Voice, Guitar, Ukulele, Drums, Songwriting and more. For more info: give us a call at (850) 231-3199, or email [Studio237Music@gmail.com](mailto:Studio237Music@gmail.com), see our teachers/studio at: [www.Studio237Music.com](http://www.Studio237Music.com).




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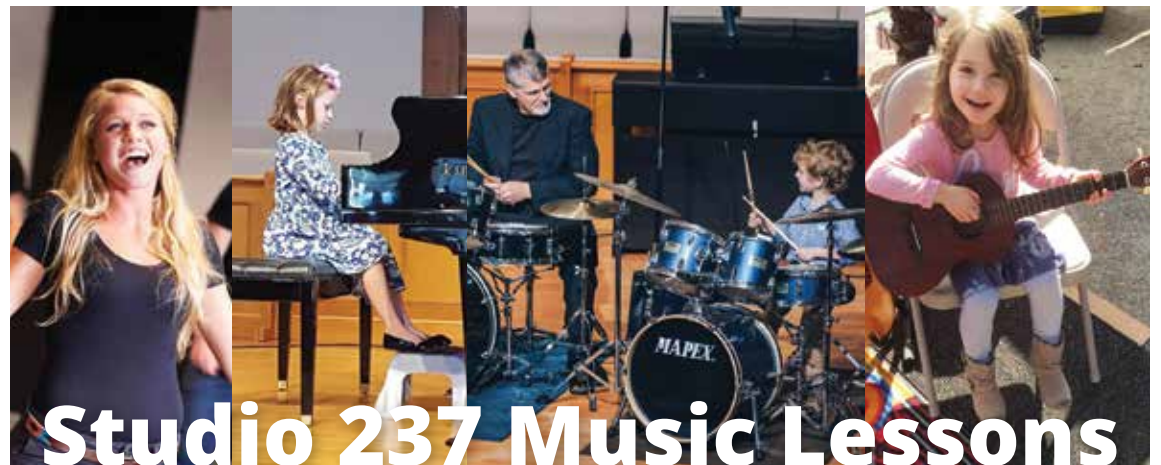
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By JULIE A. MARTIN

# 5 Tips to Lower Your Insurance Costs in a Rough Market

**Insurable Replacement Cost.** Ask your agent to update your replacement cost estimator. Most standard carriers have some form of inflation guard on their policies, which is designed to keep your dwelling coverage at or above the level required in order to fulfill the Florida Valued Policy Law. Due to the recent



ing it back, so be sure to calculate your potential out of pocket exposure before making this decision.

In this rough market, it is difficult to shop rates between carriers, but the best time to do that is after hurricane season ends, which is in December.

The guidelines are always the toughest in high summer, so that by December, many of the carriers have relaxed their rules enough for people to move from carrier to carrier with much less fuss and expense, and that, dear reader, is what we all want—peace of mind with less expense.

**1. Update your home.** In this property insurance market, most of the standard carriers are imposing strict age guidelines on Roof, Heating, Wiring, and Plumbing. If your home is 20 years old or older, keep in mind that the older your roof is, the harder it will be to move your insurance to a different carrier. The same holds true for your hot water heater, which most carriers regard as too old once it has been in your home for at least 15 years.

**2. Confirm with your agent that your insurance has all applicable discounts.** Wind Mitigation discounts weigh heavily on your premium. Roof credits such as FBC, or Florida Building Code Equivalent, Hip roof, for roofs that slope on all four sides like a pyramid, and single wraps, may vastly decrease your premium from what it is now. If you have recently replaced your roof, it is best to order a new mitigation inspection directly afterwards, and submit it to your agent. Carriers acknowledge new inspections as of the date they are received by the underwriting department, rather than the date they are performed.

**3. Check your Total In-**



burst of inflation in materials and the costs of hiring a licensed contractor, some policies may experience a bigger jump in dwelling coverage from policy term to policy term. It is best to check with your agent to be sure your home is not over-insured.

**4. Smart Water Protection System.** Some newer homes have a Smart Water Protection system which automatically shuts off the water in the event of accidental leakage, and many carriers offer a good discount to policyholders for having this device

installed in their homes.

**5. Increase Deductibles.** This is a valid way to reduce your overall property insurance premium. However, there is a downside. For one thing, if raising your deductible significantly increases your potential out of pocket expenses in the event of a claim, you have to decide if you are prepared for that risk. Secondly, some deductibles can only be changed at renewal. If you change your wind deductible from 2% to 5%, you will have to wait another year before chang-

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# Energy Saving Tips for the Holidays



By CHRIS BALZER

The holiday season is a time for joy, celebration, and togetherness. However, it can also be a time of increased energy consumption, leading to higher utility bills. With a few simple adjustments, you can enjoy the festivities while keeping your en-

## ENERGY TIPS

by Emerald Coast Energy Solutions

ergy usage and costs in check. This article provides practical tips for saving energy during the holidays, allowing you to celebrate sustainably and responsibly.

### Lighting Up the Season Efficiently

**Embrace LED Lights:** Traditional incandescent lights consume significantly more energy than LED lights. Switching

to LED lights for your holiday decorations can reduce energy consumption by up to 80%. LED lights also last longer, reducing the need for frequent replacements.

**Light Timers and Smart Plugs:** Utilize light timers or smart plugs to control when your holiday lights turn on and off. This prevents unnecessary energy usage when you're away or asleep.

**Candlelight and Natural Light:** Consider using candles for a warm and festive ambiance, and take advantage of natural daylight whenever possible. Open curtains and blinds during the day to reduce the need for artificial lighting.

### Cooking and Entertaining with Energy Efficiency

**Optimize Oven Usage:** When cooking multiple dishes, plan to cook them simultaneously to maximize oven efficiency. Avoid opening the oven door frequently, as this allows heat to escape and increases cooking time.

**Utilize Smaller Appliances:** Consider using smaller appliances like slow cookers, microwaves, and toaster ovens for smaller meals or side dishes. These appliances typically use

less energy than a full-sized oven.

**Cooktop Efficiency:** When using the cooktop, match the size of the pot or pan to the burner to prevent heat loss. Keep lids on pots and pans to retain heat and reduce cooking time.

**Energy-Efficient Appliances:** If you're in the market for new appliances, look for models with high energy efficiency ratings. These appliances may have a higher upfront cost, but they will save you money on energy bills in the long run.

### Heating and Cooling Wisely

**Lower the Thermostat:** Consider lowering the thermostat by a few degrees when you have guests over. The additional body heat from people in your home can help keep the space warm.

**Seal Air Leaks:** Check for air leaks around windows and doors, and seal them with weatherstripping or caulk. This prevents warm air from escaping and cold air from entering, reducing the need for excessive heating.

**Zone Heating:** If you have a programmable thermostat, consider using zone heating to heat only the areas of your home that are being used. This can significantly reduce energy consumption.

**Smart Thermostats:** Consider investing in a smart thermostat that allows you to control the temperature re-

motely and program temperature settings based on your schedule. This can help you avoid heating or cooling an empty home.

### Additional Energy-Saving Tips

**Unplug Electronics:** Unplug electronics and appliances when not in use, as they can continue to draw power even when turned off. Consider using a power strip to easily turn off multiple devices at once.

**Energy-Saving Mode:** Utilize the energy-saving mode on your electronics and appliances whenever possible. This mode can reduce energy consumption without significantly impacting performance.

**Wash Clothes in Cold Water:** Washing clothes in cold water instead of hot water can significantly reduce energy consumption. Most modern detergents are designed to work effectively in cold water.

**Air Dry Dishes:** If possible, air dry dishes instead of using the heated dry cycle on your dishwasher. This can save energy and reduce wear and tear on your dishes.

**Gift-Giving:** Consider giving experiences or homemade gifts instead of material possessions. This reduces the environmental impact of manufacturing and shipping gifts.

**Holiday Travel:** If you're traveling for the holidays, consider carpooling, taking public transportation, or choosing a fuel-efficient vehicle to reduce your carbon footprint.

By implementing these energy-saving tips, you can enjoy a festive and sustainable holiday season. Remember, small changes can make a big difference in reducing energy consumption and protecting the environment. By celebrating responsibly, you can ensure a brighter future for generations to come.

*Chris Balzer is Founder and President of Emerald Coast Energy Solutions (ECES) 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 more energy efficient, schedule an inspection by calling (850) 588-2870, visit [www.trusteces.com](http://www.trusteces.com) or email [wecare@trusteces.com](mailto:wecare@trusteces.com) and Beat the Heat.*

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**10% LOCALS DISCOUNT**  
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 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 4324 W County Hwy 30A, (Gulf Place)  
 Santa Rosa Beach, (850) 278-6440

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**MARBLE SLAB & COOKIE COMPANY**  
**\$2 OFF ANY 16-INCH COOKIE CAKE OR LARGER, OR 10% OFF PURCHASE**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 12805 US Hwy. 98 # R102, Inlet Beach  
 850-909-0405

**HYDRATE 30A / 850 MIDLIFE**  
**FREE B12 INJECTION FOR BOOKING A SERVICE WITH US!**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 3754 W County Hwy 30A Unit #1  
 Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459 (850) 987-8968

**THAI ELEPHANT RESTAURANT**  
**BRING IN THIS COUPON FOR 10% OFF!**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 3906 U.S. 98 #5-6, Santa Rosa Beach  
 850-660-6711

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**FREE SMOOTHIE**  
 WITH PURCHASE OF REGULAR PRICED SMOOTHIE EQUAL VALUE OR LESS  
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 Hwy 30A in Watercolor

**MIMMO'S RISTORANTE ITALIANO**  
**COMPLIMENTARY GARLIC ROLLS W/ LUNCH - M-F 11AM-3P**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 2700 W. County Hwy 30A, Mountain Beach  
 850-660-6970 • www.mimmos.com

**VKI JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE**  
**10% OFF W/ANY PURCHASE OVER \$55**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 4552 US Hwy. 98W, Santa Rosa Beach  
 850-267-2555

**PANHANDLE ASSISTANT CARE**  
**FREE CONSULTATION FOR IN-HOME ASSISTANCE**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
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 850-517-5745 | www.panhandleassistantcare.com

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 THE ULTIMATE WASH PACKAGE \$54.98/MONTH  
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 Offer expires 11/30/24  
 34709 Emerald Coast Pkwy., Destin  
 850-974-9994

**OVERHEAD DOOR**  
**\$100 OFF A NEW WI-FI DOOR OPERATOR AND FREE DECORATIVE DOOR HARDWARE**  
 WITH EACH DOOR PURCHASE. (NO OTHER DISCOUNTS APPLY.) FINANCING AS LOW AS \$79/MO. W.A.C.  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
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**FREE SMOKED TUNA DIP WITH THE PURCHASE OF TWO ADULT ENTREES.**  
 (No other discounts given.)  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 On Eastern Lake and 30A, 33 Heron's Watch Way  
 Santa Rosa Beach 850-865-2550

**SS GRANITE & TILE**  
**\$100 OFF\***  
 \*Coupon must be presented at the time of first deposit.  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
 21 Shannon Lane, Santa Rosa Beach  
 850-267-0599

**EAGLE SPRINGS GOLF & RECREATION**  
**FREE BUCKET OF RANGE BALLS OR 1 OZ. TUBE OF SUNSCREEN**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
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**15% OFF YOUR WHOLE SINGLE HAT PURCHASE**  
 Offer expires 12/31/24  
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