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Toasting Hope with Bailey Brigade

By Heather Bennett Eye

We've all been affected by cancer. Cancer has touched us whether it's a dear friend, a loved one, or a personal diagnosis. Michele Bailey, founder of Bailey Brigade, and her family were affected in a big way when her husband Scott, a father of three, passed away in December 2021 from a rare salivary gland cancer. He was only 54 years old.

Bailey Brigade was started to honor Scott and support locals battling all types of cancer. All money donated goes to help patients from The Emerald Coast. "Every dollar raised here is helping your neighbor," stated Michele. They work closely with the oncology team at Ascension Sacred Heart Cancer Care at Santa Rosa Beach. "They have the most incredible spirits and are so loving to the patients," said Michele.

In the two years since they started, Bailey Brigade has provided four scholarships for those wanting to go into the medical field, hundreds of chemo care backpacks for cancer patients that contain self-care and hydration items along with letters of encouragement from local school kids and community members, held multiple fundraisers, and raised thousands of dollars in co-pay assistance, and now transportation assistance.

For their latest fundraiser in November 2024, Toasting Hope, Bailey Brigade teamed up with the 30A Distilling Co. to produce a charitable spirit. The bourbon, originally a single barrel from Indiana, had been resting at Sugarfield Spirits in Gonzales, Louisiana before making its way to 30A. The seven-year-old bourbon was transferred to an Orange Flavored Rum barrel to finish for two weeks. The final product is a unique 118 proof, limited-edition bourbon. The Bailey Brigade Board members hand-labeled and numbered the 195 bottles produced. Each bottle comes in a handcrafted wooden box to protect and display the bourbon. One hundred dollars of

TOASTING HOPE

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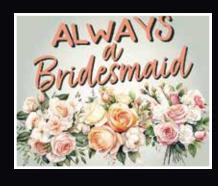
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Sowal Health Urgent Care

in Walton County Award Winners Announced

The Walton County Tourism Department unveiled the winners of the 2025 Perfect in Walton County Awards during a celebration at the Hotel Effie Sandestin on Thursday, Jan. 30. Now in its 11th year, this annual tradition invites residents and visitors to nominate and vote for their favorite tourism-related businesses, services and organizations.

PERFECT continued on page 2



Always A Bridesmaid Feb. 20-March 2



Go, Dog. Go! March 11-16



emerald coast theatre company

More Info and Tickets: www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org





PERFECT

continued from page 1

"We are incredibly proud to celebrate our local business, activities and events as part of the Perfect in Walton County awards," said Matt Algarin, tourism director for Walton County. "These awards allow us to celebrate and shine a spotlight on our well-deserving businesses

that work hard to provide unforgettable experiences throughout the year."

This year, more than 6,000 votes were cast across 30 categories to determine the best in dining, entertainment, shopping and more throughout Walton County. The 2025 Perfect in Walton County guide features the 90 winners, including first, second and third place, or Di-

amond, Platinum and Gold, in each category.

"What it means to win is that you're a leader in the community, you're giving back to the community and you're supporting the community – those three valuables," said Kevin Rosa, director of Sales and Marketing at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, winner of three awards. "It validates everything

you do in your job day to day, that you're setting the standard in the community and being recognized by [Walton County Tourism], the entity that brings us all together."

Jared Herzog, Diamond Award winner for Best Local Musician/Band, has won in the past and says he feels fortunate to attend the awards again this year. "Music has been a big part of my life, ever since I was very young," said Herzog. "There are so many incredibly talented musicians in this area, and I'm honored to stand aside them and get to attend this amazing event every year."

The full list of winners and detailed category results can be viewed online at perfectinwal-toncounty.com.

TOASTING HOPE

continued from page 1

the \$175 retail price goes directly to Bailey Brigade to support their mission.

You can purchase a bottle at the 30A Distillery Co. (605 N County Hwy 393, Bldg 15-B, Santa Rosa Beach) during their tasting room hours, or contact Michele directly. "This is an exceptional bourbon. One of a kind, there's only one like it, and when it's gone, it's gone," stated

Michele. "It makes a perfect old fashioned." You can learn more about the bourbon on the Bailey Brigade website or by visiting the 30A Distillery Co. website at www.30adistillingco.com under About Our Spirits.

Bailey Brigade also partnered with South Walton High School for several fundraiser nights at local sporting events, where they sold Bailey Brigade merchandise, and all ticket sales went to the non-profit as well. This fall Bailey Brigade was invited to the Flutterby Festival by the Cultural Arts Alliance where kids painted rocks with messages of encouragement to add to their chemo care backpacks.

The goal for Bailey Brigade is to be able to continue funding the assistance they have in place, and eventually expand. To reach this goal, Michele would love to have consistent donations and fundraising, ongoing signature events in the community and to partner with local businesses who support the mission behind



Bailey Brigade. "If you are a local business that believes no one should go through cancer alone, and want to partner with us, please call. We're determined to find a way to continue to be able to help local cancer patients," said Michele. "Everybody is just one diagnosis away from being the person in the chair."

Another way to help is to volunteer your time and skills. If you are interested in social media, website content or grant writing, Bailey Brigade is also looking for volunteers to assist with social posts, maintaining their website and writing blogs, and grant writing to help secure additional funding. These volunteer positions could be great for either someone with years of experience looking to get involved in the community, or students looking to gain community service hours for Bright

For more information about Bailey Brigade and their army of hope and love, please visit their website at www.baileybrigade.com and follow them on Instagram @baileybrigadefl. To reach Michele, please call (850) 586-1382.

Remember to get your bottle of bourbon before they are all gone!



THEOBEACH TOWELS NOW ON SALE!



Check out the new beach towels at Pecan Jacks in Santa Rosa Beach. All Theo-inspired products benefit the educational mission of the Friends South Walton Sea Turtles nonprofit organization.

S WAL/ife

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Upcoming Events

SeaLight Festival Now-April 13

The SeaLight Festival has returned to Seascape Resort, open Thursday through Sunday from 5:30-9:30 p.m. The whimsical outdoor walk-through experience showcases over a thousand intricately designed Chinese lanterns and invites visitors of all ages to explore a luminous landscape inspired by Chinese legends and lore, while others celebrate the beauty of nature. Enjoy live entertainment by the Zigong Acrobatic Troupe, an award-winning Chinese acrobatic collective. Each festival also features a variety of vendors, games, food & drink, and cultural booths boasting incredible artisanal gifts for purchase.

Tickets are now available for purchase: sealightfestival.com.

CAA Cocktails & Canvases at Farm & Fire Feb. 19

Unleash your creative side with the Cultural Arts Alliance! Grab your friends and secure your spot for their Cocktails & Canvases experience with artist



Pam Ridler at Farm & Fire on Wednesday, February 19, from 5 to 7 p.m.

Cocktails & Canvases is a program of the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County that offers guests the opportunity to be guided by an experienced artist in creating a piece of artwork they will take home at the end of the session. This event is open to all levels of learners ages 21 and older. Cost is \$75 which includes supplies, 2 cocktails and light bites. Visit Cul-

turalArtsAlliance.com/upcoming-events to reserve your spot!

30A Wine Festival Feb. 20-23

The 30A Wine Festival, underwritten by The Alys Foundation, returns to the beautiful community of Alys Beach for its 13th year. Cleanse your palate and prepare for five days of exquisite wines, delectable dishes, and beautiful surroundings.

The festival showcases renowned distillers, vintners, and culinary favorites over four days of celebration – a series of events and workshops where wine enthusiasts and bourbon lovers alike relish in the festivities within the captivating town of Alys Beach.

All proceeds from the festival benefit the Children's Volunteer Health Network, a local charity which provides health services to uninsured or underinsured school children in Walton and Okaloosa Counties.

Tickets and more info at 30awinefestival.com.

Emerald Coast Theatre Company: Always a Bridesmaid Feb. 20 -March 2

Emerald Coast Theatre Company presents Always a Bridesmaid at 7 p.m., Sundays and Wednesdays at 2 p.m. at ECTC's space in Grand Boulevard Town Center. In this hilarious comedic romp a la "Golden Girls," four friends have sworn to keep the promise they made on the night of their Senior Prom: to be in each other's wed-

dings...no matter what. More than thirty years later, these Southern friends-for-life are still making "the long walk" for each other, determined to honor that vow. If you've ever elbowed a stranger out of the way to catch a bride's bouquet, seriously questioned the mental stability of the duo saying "I do" or been forced to wear the world's ugliest bridesmaid dress, this deliriously funny Jones Hope Wooten comedy is definitely for you... and your dearly beloved!

Tickets and information can be found at www.emeraldcoast-theatre.org.

Sandestin Gumbo Festival Feb. 21 & 22

The event is a beloved local winter tradition in South Walton, featuring gumbo tasting throughout The Village as well as a bloody mary competition and live music. This year's event promises to serve as fun for everyone. Gulf Coast restaurants will be featured along with live

Continued on next page



Community

Upcoming Events

music and children's activities.

Visit SandestinGumboFestival.com for tickets and details, including a daily schedule of events and entertainment. Event will happen rain or shine.

Escape to Create: A Performance by Seyko Groves Feb .21

Escape To Create makes its highly-anticipated return! Accompanied by local musicians, Soulful singer and songwriter Seyko Groves will perform a selection of jazz, soul and R&B standards and introduce new works at The REP Theatre. Tickets will be available through The REP Theatre at http://lovetherep.com.

Escape to Create performances continue throughout February at The REP and other various locations in Seaside. Ticket purchases support Escape to Create Residencies and Educational Outreach throughout Walton County. To learn more and view the full schedule, visit www.escape2create.org.



6th Annual Shrimp & Grits Festival Feb. 22

Don't miss out on the 6th Annual Shrimp & Grits Festival Feb. 22 from 12-4 p.m. behind Brotula's Seafood House and Steamer, benefiting the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. Delight your taste buds with creative twists on this classic southern dish from local chefs, sip on refreshing drinks, groove to a live DJ and cast your vote for the best Shrimp and Grits on the Emerald Coast. To purchase tickets, visit www. eventbrite.com/e/5th-annual-shrimp-grits-festival-tickets-741754897867.

Dog-Harmony Hops for Hounds Feb. 23

Dog Harmony's 5th Annual "Hops for Hounds" dog walk and after party, will be held February 23rd, 1-3 p.m.

at Props Brewery in Hammock Bay, Freeport. The day will start with a picturesque, short stroll followed by a lively after-party at Props Brewery, complete with craft beer (for thirsty humans 21 and older), live music, vendors, food trucks and more. To register, visit https://dog-harmony.org/hops-forhounds-2025.

DeFuniak Springs Home and Garden Show March 1

The DeFuniak Springs Home and Garden Show takes place Saturday, March 1st from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Fair Grounds in DeFuniak Springs. Entry is free, but donations are greatly appreciated.

The show is a local marketplace where you can shop for home-related products and services, purchase unique decor and gifts from arts and crafts vendors, get products from local hobby farms, support small business owners, view displays to help inspire your next home project, connect with home improvement and real estate professionals, and enjoy informative presentations from local home and garden experts. Enjoy plant and food vendors as well as pet adoptions on-site. Visit waltoncountyfair.com/events for more information

La Vie En Rouge Friday, March 7

Immerse yourself in the glamour of 19th-century Parisian cabaret at La Vie En Rouge, presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company on Friday, March 7th 6-9 p.m. This exclusive signature event will feature exhilarating live performances, dazzling costumes, and a vibrant atmosphere for guests 21+. Get ready to indulge yourself in an evening of elegance, as we transport you to the iconic Moulin Rouge for a night of dinner, dancing, entertainment, silent auction, and many more unforgettable moments.

Purchase tickets at emerald-coasttheatre.org/special-events.

ECCAC's Signature Gala & Golf Events March 8-9

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-

CAC) is putting on its annual signature Gala & Golf event this year, presented by Peggy and Jerry Swanson. The Gala features a cocktail hour starting at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 8, at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Guests will enjoy dinner and live entertainment; an exciting live auction, as well as a featured guest speaker. The Gala is an energetic, yet important ECCAC fundraiser to benefit children by providing services at no cost to help identify, treat and support child victims in abusive situations. The Golf Tournament, also to benefit ECCAC, will take place on Sunday, March 9, at Kelly Plantation Golf Club with registration and a cookout meal from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. to be ready for a tournament shotgun start at noon. An Awards Ceremony will follow the tournament. Please make reservations online at eccac.org. Sponsorships are still available.







The Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show Returns February 28-March 2nd

\$40 Million Dollars of Marine Inventory Coming to Aaron Bessant Park More Than 400 Boats to be Displayed in Panama City Beach Curated Premier Line-Up of Exhibitors for Those Who Love the Coastal Lifestyle

It only happens one weekend a year. From the Panhandle to Tallahassee, boating, fishing and outdoor lifestyle enthusiasts gather in Panama City Beach for the Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show at Aaron Bessant Park, which returns February 28th-March 2nd.

Whether buying their first boat or upgrading their cur-

Bob Price of Panama City Beach, who never misses the show, purchased a 17-foot center console in 2019 and upgraded to a 24-foot center console last year. "Boat show pricing is a real thing," he said. "I know for a fact I got my best deal on both boats I purchased at this show."

In addition to boats, this show also highlights the best of

honor military members and first responders on Sunday. For

on the show, including dealers, brands, exhibitors, and vendors, the most up-to-date information or to purchase tickets in ad-

vance allowing you to 'skip the line,' visit EmeraldCoastBoat-Show.com





rent model, boat buyers enjoy a shopping experience featuring the top dealers in the Southeast displaying more than 400 boats, valued at more than 40 million dollars. Bay boats, pontoons, cruisers, personal watercraft, and center consoles, from 17' to those well over 40', will be on display, along with the latest marine electronics and innovations.

This onsite collection of dealers and manufacturers allows buyers to compare boats side by side while taking advantage of the best discounts and incentives available exclusively at the show.



the Coastal Lifestyle. Attendees who love the sugar-white sand, glistening Gulf waters, sunrises and sunsets, salty breezes, and making family memories along the coast celebrate together at The Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show!

The curated line-up of exhibitors and vendors showcases boating, fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking, biking, electric carts, product demonstrations, seminars, beach furniture, coastal artists, condo and beach house furnishing, kids' activities, live music, food trucks, beer, and cocktails inspire thoughts of outdoor activities and glorious weather all along the Emerald

Parking for the show is always free at the adjacent Pier Park. The show will once again



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Beyond the Bicentennial:

Reflections of Walton County History

By Christopher Manson

Last year marked the 200th anniversary of Walton County, which at one time was much larger than its current 1,028 square miles. In 1846, portions of the original territory were given away to help form Washington County. Two years later, part of the northeast section was given to Holmes County. And in 1915, a western chunk—along with an eastern portion of Santa Rosa County—was untitled and released to form what is now Okaloosa County.

To celebrate Walton County's bicentennial, numerous projects were undertaken in 2024, including the website walton 200. com, which focuses on the county's history through the written word, photographs and videos.

The YouTube series "Reflections of Walton County" launched last year on the Walton County BCC channel and features interviews with residents who, according to Public Information Officer for Walton County Commission Ron Kelley, "either helped create some of that history or had relatives and ancestors who did."

In late 2023, Kelley and Commissioner Danny Glidewell kicked around ideas about how to celebrate the bicentennial, and Glidewell suggested a series of interviews. "The idea caught on quickly," says Kelley. "We compiled names to see if they would participate, and most of them have."

At first, Kelley and videographer Billy Goodwin handled the interviews. Then Goodwin

was called away for other county tasks, and Kelley took the interviewing and editing reins. The videos generally run 20 minutes or less, though "some of the people have shared such rich detail about our history that we were able to make them into two parts," says Kelley.

"The feedback has been extremely positive," he adds. "And with people moving here from other places, it's a chance for them to find out about the history of their new home. I've learned many things, even though I've been in Walton County most of my life. It's fascinating for residents, too.

"We're losing members of the greatest generation all the time. So, it is important that we preserve as much of their amazing life experiences as we can. In the future, our children and grandchildren will be able to get a sense of what life was like in the early days of Walton County and hear from some of the people that made an impact."

The website, too, is a work in progress. "We're adding to it all the time," says Kelley. "We would like for it to become a one-stop historical resource. Obviously, no single book, film or website will contain everything, but we want this to be a growing repository for as much of our historical data as we can gather."

Commissioner Glidewell initiated a series of public meetings that doubled as "history fairs" and were held at locations throughout the county in 2024. For last fall's Walton County Fair, an exhibit with newly designed stickers featuring the bicentennial logo were on display. The county planned a street event in DeFuniak Springs with music, food vendors, videos playing at the Chautauqua Theater and fireworks over Lake DeFuniak for December 28—to tie in with the actual bicentennial date of December 29—but inclement weather postponed the celebration until January 4, 2025.

No commemorative events are scheduled for the rest of 2025, though Kelley and his team will continue to film interviews with local citizens and historians. "We've really just scratched the surface," says Kelley. "So, I will continue to interview as many people as possible that have a significant depth of knowledge about our fascinating history.

"The 'Reflections' series is just as important today as it was in the bicentennial year, and there are many stories we haven't yet heard. We sometimes forget that history continues to be



made even as we speak. It may be a disconcerting thought, but our current era will eventually be 'The Good Old Days' for a whole new generation, and we need to make sure that we have something valuable and memorable to share with them."

An early episode with Reverend Kenneth Harrison generated a lot of favorable comments. "He told me that he'd been approached by a lot of people who enjoyed that segment, and it's one of my favorites," says Kelley. "Reverend Harrison passed away recently, making his appearance in the series somewhat bittersweet.

"Donnie Richardson, a lifelong Walton County farmer, shared incredible stories about farm life then and now. South Walton folks will recognize the name Ed Walline; his daughter Adrianne talked to us about his impact. Ann Robinson, who helped launched Grit & Grace (Walton County's annual theatrical production) and a second Chautaugua Assembly, did a great interview with us-she, too, has recently passed on, which illustrates how important it is to gather and preserve these incredible histories.

"We also did interviews with local historians like Brenda Rees and Bruce Cosson. There's something for everybody, and we're planning more. I think people may not realize how rich Walton County history is, and hopefully, we're going to change that."



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Eleventh Annual "Tea Fore Her" Fundraiser March 9th Supports and Celebrates Breast Cancer Patients Along the Emerald Coast

Fore Her announces ticket sales for their annual "Tea Fore Her" fundraiser on Sunday, March 9, at 12 p.m. at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. This tea and luncheon is a beloved tradition among locals who are ready to dress for Spring, gather with friends and support breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast. Fore Her local nonprofit organization offers financial assistance, resources, hope, and compassion for all who are affected by breast cancer, with fundraisers like Tea Fore Her.

This year's tea, presented by Emerald Coast Hospice, will include a seated luncheon with a special appearance from opera singer Toccara Scott, a silent auction, photo booth... and of course tea! Guests are encouraged to wear their most gorgeous hats for a chance to win the coveted "Best Hat" prize!

Guests will get a very spe-

cial treat with Tea For Her's Keynote Speaker, a local treasure and breast cancer survivor Donna Bell, News Director and Anchor at WJHG in Panama City. Bell is a "new" survivor as she was diagnosed with breast cancer only in July of 2024. Tea Fore Her will be Bell's first public appearance after going through breast reconstruction in February of this year.

"In 2013 I lost my mom to breast cancer," says Bell. "In 2024, I was diagnosed at stage one. What I learned through my experience with breast cancer is no two journeys are the same. Early detection is so important, but so is listening to your body, following your instincts, and advocating for yourself and your loved ones. I hope my story encourages others to do just that."

"This event is near and dear to my heart, not only as a Fore Her board member but most importantly as a breast cancer



survivor," says Ginny Richerson, Fore Her Patient Liaison and Board Member. "It is truly remarkable to see our local community come together to raise funds for these breast cancer patients at this beautiful event. I look around the room every year and see how much good we are doing in caring for and supporting patients who need financial assistance during the most trying time in their lives.."

Tickets are \$70 per person and tables (8 guests each) are



also available for purchase at www.foreher.org. A discounted ticket price of \$65 per person will be available for breast cancer survivors.

Tea Fore Her 2025 sponsors include Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa (Venue Sponsor), Emerald Coast Hospice (Platinum), Clay Garden and Gifts (Photo Booth and Centerpiece Sponsor), Silver Sands Premium Outlets (Beverage Sponsor), Eglin Federal Credit Union (Registration Table Sponsor), Shelley Albarado and Brenda Whitwell of Edward Jones (Dessert Table Sponsor), Veronica Trout and Family (Tea Table Sponsor), Community Bank (Pink Ribbon Sponsor), RHoward Photography and AlphaLit.

To become a Tea Fore Her sponsor, donate to the silent auction, or for more information, contact amy@foreher.org or visit www.foreher.org/teafore-her.



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Tickets On Sale Now for the 2025 Caring & Sharing Spring Fashion Show & Luncheon

Join Caring & Sharing of South Walton for the Spring Fashion Show, presented by Bluewater Plastic Surgery and Emerald Coast Hospice, on Sunday, March 23, 2025, at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. The much-anticipated event promises an afternoon of fun, fashion, and community support, featuring a fashion show, lunch, music, a silent auction, a photo booth, and much more.

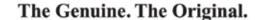
will be available for purchase at the on-site pop-up boutique, specially curated for this event.

"In my five years as a volunteer and board member with Caring & Sharing," said Miller. "I've witnessed this event grow year after year. It's been exciting to see its continued success and to watch our guests enjoy themselves while supporting such a meaningful cause."

Tickets are available for purchase online only. Caring &

management. Founded in 1994, the organization serves over 800 local families each month. Caring & Sharing of South Walton also operates a Thrift Store. Sales in the Thrift Store help cover operating expenses and generate funds to help those they serve. Items for sale in the Thrift Store include clothing, housewares,

bedding, furniture, electronics and books. For more information about Caring & Sharing of South Walton visit www.caringandsharingsowal.org





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The doors will open at 12 p.m., and guests will be greeted with a complimentary welcome drink. Attendees will have the opportunity to mingle, browse the boutique, and place bids on silent auction items before the ballroom opens at 12:30 p.m. for lunch and the fashion show.

"The Caring & Sharing Fashion Show is not only an exciting and unique event (the only fashion show on 30A), but it also raises awareness in the community about our neighbors in need," said Mary Catharine Miller, Board President of Caring & Sharing. "I'm proud, not only as the Board President, but also as an active volunteer."

Volunteers and supporters of Caring & Sharing will walk the runway, modeling outfits made entirely of items donated to the Caring & Sharing Thrift Store. These featured pieces, along with additional thrift store items, Sharing offers individual tickets for \$65, as well as the ability to reserve a table for eight guests for \$600. Visit https://springfashionshow2025.eventbrite.com or www.caringandsharingsowal.org to purchase tickets.

Special Thanks to Our Sponsors

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our generous event sponsors, including Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Emerald Coast Hospice, Bluewater Plastic Surgery, Cogent Bank, Blush Beauty Lounge, Eglin Federal Credit Union, Palms 30A, Sweet Henrietta's, Mingle, GTS Entertainment, Shunk Gulley, Emerald Coast Florals & Event Design, and Epic Photo Booth Co.

Caring & Sharing of South Walton provides crisis relief to our neighbors in need in Walton County through financial assistance, food, counseling and case



100 Years of Golf!

Eagle Springs Golf Course and Recreational Center is a 190 acre site located in DeFuniak Springs. The Club currently offers an 18-hole Golf Course, Public Swimming Pool and Clubhouse. Future expansion will include fishing docks, walking trails, basketball courts, tennis courts and much more. Eagle Springs Golf Course is available to host your tournaments and the Clubhouse is available for rent for parties, birthdays and weddings.

All Junior Golfers (15 and Under) play golf FREE.

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"We hired Brian to help us navigate 30A's tough real estate market. He has serious negotiating skills and expertise. Because of his efforts and strategies that he details in his book, we quickly sold our Destin home and bought a 30A beach front home, below asking price," said client A. Albright. To get your copy, email Brian@BeOnTheCoast. com or call.

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Wellness

Medicare Advantage Plans: Prior Authorization Problems?



By Christian Regalado

Health insurance has been a hot topic recently and as a Medicare Specialist, I hear a lot of commentary and concern about insurance company practices, like prior authorization denials. Understandably, many seniors enrolled in one are now questioning if they should be worried about their Medicare Advantage Plan. Here are the facts:

Across the nation, on average, the percentage of seniors who choose a Medicare Advantage plan versus those who stick with original Medicare and add a Supplement plan are about evenly split. Our area is a little similar as only a small majority of seniors, here, get their coverage through an

Advantage plan. Why is this? We are fortunate to have many different insurance companies competing for your business. This allows for more competition, and we tend to have fewer problems with Advantage plans here. Most Advantage plans in our market have \$0 premiums and offer some benefits that Supplement Plans don't.

Why do Advantage Plans even exist? The federal government spends about 12% of its annual budget on Medicare (roughly \$840 billion in 2024).

A doctor billing traditional Medicare who follows Medicare guidelines doesn't need approval before providing a procedure they deem appropriate. While this is great for patients, concerns arose over medical fraud, waste, and abuse. To combat costs and promote efficiency, Medicare Advantage plans were established by partnering with private insurance companies to provide a managed care ap-

proach to senior healthcare delivery. Managed care agencies save the government money by requiring pre-approval (or pre-authorization) before costly medical procedures are billable. The downside is insurance carriers can reject or delay care just to save money. Many people believe a high percentage of pre-authorizations are denied by insurers. In truth, most authorization denials happen because of clerical, documentation errors or omissions, and billing code mistakes.

Only about 10% of patients appeal denials and of those, 83.2% have the denial overturned. So, if you get a denial, appeal it! Reports suggest only 7.4% of prior authorizations are denied after missing documentation is provided. Even though a small percentage of authorizations are ultimately denied, patients can still suffer from having their treatment delayed.

Generally, carriers are allowed 10 business days to respond to appeals, expedited to 2 business days in emergency cases. Legislation scheduled

to go into effect in 2026 should reduce all requests to 72 hours. In some cases, even this is too long for a patient to wait for treatment.

One study reports that insurance carriers using artificial intelligence to review requests increased denials from 10% in 2022 to 12% in 2023.

Because more errors than expected were reported from AI reviews, most carriers have gone back to physician reviews, at least for now.

Prior authorization for Advantage Plans can be a problem, but it is not as bad as the media reports. Concerns have been noted and corrective action is anticipated.

So when my clients who sign up for an Advantage plan that they are quite happy with ask why their friends and family always recommend choosing a Supplement plan instead, the Prior Authorizations problems is the reason. However, the facts are that most seniors will not have to deal with those issues, but if they do, I hope they know to appeal it.

In conclusion, Medicare Advantage Plans are still overall a great value for the level of care. The important part is choosing

the right plan that best fits your needs. We have many great options in South Walton for Advantage plans. If you are soon aging into Medicare and going the Supplement plan route, I still recommend exploring multiple different companies as the rate on premiums can vary

quite substantially. Of course, there are a few other things to consider as well.

If you would like any assistance, I will be happy to help you explore any of these options further or just answer any questions. My services are no cost to you and I am always happy

to help a neighbor. Reach out anytime! Email Christian@ evergreenhealthins.com or call (850) 687 7606.





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Wellness



By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

Have you ever done something kind for someone you value to then feel like it went largely unnoticed? Do you feel frustrated when you spend time and energy investing in a relationship to feel like the other person doesn't really see or appreciate your investment? Doing thoughtful things for your loved ones matters. However, the human instinct, most often, is to

Investing Relationship Energy Strategically

do for others what you would like someone to do for you. And, while that approach works sometimes, often the other person in the relationship feels most loved and seen in ways that might be different than what helps you feel loved and seen.

Maybe you are spending energy cleaning your child's room and packing time consuming lunches when what really makes your child feel seen and loved is playing a game with you. Maybe you are spending energy buying something for your partner when what really makes them feel seen or loved is time and meaningful conversation. Maybe you are spending energy planning a party for a friend when what makes them feel most loved is spontaneous lunch with you.



Investing energy in relationships unintentionally can create frustration, confusion and disconnection over time as both parties can end up feeling unseen. So, how do you figure out how to invest energy in your relationships strategically so your effort is landing in a way that feels meaningful to the other person? And, how do you learn to communicate your needs clearly to others, so they can invest energy strategically in their relationship with you?

Seven Ways to Invest Relationship Energy Strategically

1-Let go of mind reading. Mind reading is a myth. Culture has sold you a false

idea that mind reading equals love. No one can read your mind and you can't read theirs. And, that's perfectly okay. Let go of expecting yourself or others to read minds when it comes to what makes you or them feel seen and loved.

2 - Reflect on what makes you feel seen and loved. Notice what makes you feel valued, connected, deeply seen and known. Do you feel most seen with side by side time together, meaningful conversation, acts of service, physical touch, encouraging words, gifts, surprises? Notice that what makes you feel seen works for you but is not necessarily the same for others.

- 3 Ask the other person what makes them feel seen and loved. Be curious and take notes. Remember, your way of feeling seen is not the right way, it's just your way. Let the other person have space to need and want what feels best and most connecting to them in the relationship.
- 4 Make adjustments in your approach. Make consistent and meaningful efforts to spend more energy on what helps the other person feel seen and loved and less energy on things that do not matter as much to them.
- 5 Tell people what you need. Communicate clearly what helps you feel seen and connected in your relationships. Remember that communicating what you want and need does not take away from the value when the other person gives you what you're asking for. Being clear about your needs makes you more likely to get what you need and to feel connected in your relationships. Instead of hoping someone reads your mind about wanting a nice dinner for your birthday, tell them a nice dinner would make you feel loved.
- 6 Give and notice positive feedback. When your friend does something that felt meaningful, tell them directly what it meant to you. When your family member tells you the focused time you spent with them was meaningful, take mental note and prioritize spending focused time with them.
- 7 Initiate check in conversations periodically. Try directly discussing connection in your relationships. Ask the other person how it's going for them? Don't judge their response. Share your connection needs.

Spending your relationship energy strategically feels better and much less frustrating. Be patient with yourself and others as you learn. Connect with us along your journey for coaching and counseling at Journeybravely.com.







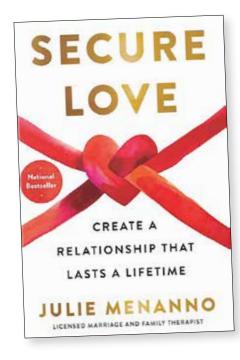


Book Review: Secure Love by Julie Menanno



REVIEWED BY MICHAEL MCMA-NUS LCSW

Reading "Secure Love" by Julie Menanno is like having a heart-to-heart chat with your best friend about what makes relationships tick. One of the main things I love about this book is that it gives specific examples and strategies of how to interrupt toxic communication patterns that couples have been unconsciously repeating for years. Many couples that come in to see me report that they start out discussing a seemingly simple topic and then it escalates into an argument and they don't even know how they got there. Julie breaks down the often confusing world of love and attachment styles in a way that's super easy to understand.



You don't need a psychology degree to get it!

Imagine this book as your personal guidebook to love, where each chapter feels like a cozy conversation over coffee. The author shares relatable stories that make you nod your head in agreement, thinking, "Wow, that's so me!" It's all about figuring out why we act the way we do in relationships and how our past experienc-

One of the best parts is the emphasis on communication. The book teaches you that being open and honest is like the secret sauce for a healthy relationship. It gives you tips on how to express your feelings without sounding like a robot or starting a fight.

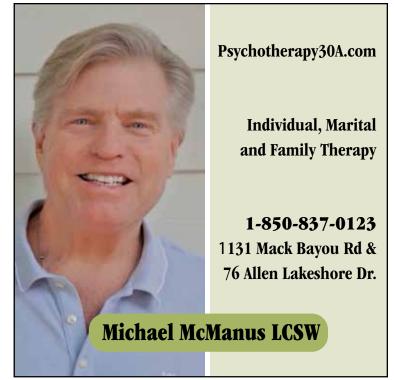
Whether you're single, dating, or in a long-term relationship, this book something for everyone. It's

packed with wisdom that can help you build stronger connections and maybe even find a little more happiness in your love

If you're looking for a fun, insightful read that helps you navigate the wild world of love, "Secure Love" is a fantastic choice! Grab a copy, settle in, and get ready to rethink love in the best way possible.

Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida and can

es shape our love be reached by phone or text at 1-850- 837-0123 or Psychotherapy 30A.com







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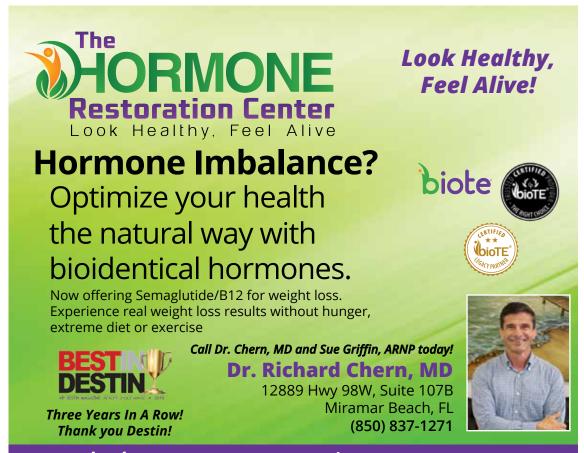


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Staying Healthy This Cold & Flu Season:

A Q&A with Dr. Karen DeVore

By Bobby Parker

As the seasons change and the air gets crisp, so does the likelihood of sniffles, sore throats and seasonal viruses. The Tortoise Clinic, located in Santa Rosa Beach, believes in blending Eastern and Western medicine to support the immune system naturally. Their medical-grade dispensary, open to the public, offers third-party tested supplements, vitamins, and herbs to ensure quality, safety, and therapeutic effectiveness.

We sat down with Dr. Karen DeVore, Naturopathic Doctor at the Tortoise Clinic, to discuss immune support, stress management and how natural supplements can play a key role in overall wellness this time of year.

Dr. Karen, what are your favorite formulas during cold and flu season?

Dr. Karen: Prevention is key when it comes to cold and flu season, and supporting the immune system proactively is the best way to keep illness at

bay. For my family, I rely on a few key supplements to give our immune defenses a strong foundation.

One of my favorites is Pure Defense, a powerful all-in-one formula that includes vitamin C. NAC, elderberry, quercetin, vitamin D, zinc, and a probioticall crucial for upper respiratory health and immune support. I also use Viracid, which has broad-spectrum antiviral properties with lysine and vitamin A, echinacea, astragalus, and andrographis. Either formula is great for both prevention and early intervention if you start feeling under the weather.

Beyond supplements, lifestyle factors play a huge role in immune health. Adequate sleep, stress management, proper hydration and a nutrient-dense diet all help the body fight off infections more effectively. If you're not prioritizing these areas, even the best supplements won't be as effective.

Stress can take a huge



toll on the immune system. What are your go-to recommendations for managing stress naturally?

Dr. Karen: Absolutely! Chronic stress weakens the immune system and can make us more susceptible to illness. When someone comes to us struggling with stress, the first step is to assess how stress is affecting their biochemistry—including hormones, sleep, and metabolism.

favorite of my stress-support supplements is

Cortisol Manager, an ashwagandha-based formula that's particularly effective for people dealing with prolonged stress, sleep disturbances, and difficulty managing weight. For those who need more adrenal support, HPA Adapt is a combination of adaptogenic herbs to help the body adapt to stress more efficiently. Chelated Magnesium L-Threonate is a favorite of mine to support the brain with anxiety due mental stress, and is a great option for those needing support with focus, memory, and mood.

In addition to supplements, I encourage everyone to prioritize stress-relief techniques including meditation, breathwork, acupuncture, exercise, and mindfulness practices—all of which can help manage stress and the toll it takes on the body, and support the nervous system.

What is your favorite way to naturally support kids and teens?

Dr. Karen: Although noth-

ing takes the place of sunshine, a balanced and low sugar diet, exercise, and limited screen use, a great liquid multivitamin with methylated B vitamins and minerals is a great way to get good nutrients into sensitive pallets. My favorite is by Eddie Bee, called Liquid Multivitamin + Mineral Support. This can be paired with a high quality probiotic like a refrigerated formula by Klaire or Metagenics.

How can people access high-quality supplements, and why does it matter?

Dr. Karen: Not all supplements are created equal, and quality matters immensely when it comes to effectiveness and safety. We stock medical-grade brands at the Tortoise Clinic that undergo third-party testing to ensure purity, potency, and proper formulation. Each product is vetted for therapeutic dosages and clinically-backed ingredients, so our patients can

Continued on page 18







By Kathryn Porter, APRN, ACNP-BC

February is American Heart Month, first celebrated by the American Heart Association in 1963 and later officially recognized by President Johnson in 1964. We recognize National Wear Red Day on the first Friday of the month, in honor of the Go Red for Women campaign which aims to raise awareness about heart disease in women.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States. In fact, about 1 in 3 women die from cardiovascular disease (CVD) each year. This includes conditions like coronary artery disease, heart attacks, and stroke. Despite these high rates, many women are unaware of their risk and may not recognize heart disease as a major threat to their health. In fact, cardiovascular disease kills more women than all forms of cancer combined.

Several factors can increase the risk of heart disease in both women and men. Some are controllable, while others are not. Controllable risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, obesity, physical inactivity, and an unhealthy diet. These factors contribute to increased strain on the heart and arteries, raising the risk of heart disease. Uncontrollable factors include age, family history, gender, and genetics, with women's risk rising after menopause. Chronic stress and untreated sleep

Go Red in February: Raise Awareness and Reduce Heart Disease Risk

apnea can also contribute to heart disease. Managing controllable risks through lifestyle changes like diet and exercise, along with regular health check-ups, can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and promote overall heart health.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) affects men and women differently in terms of age, symptoms, and contributing factors. Men typically develop CVD in their 40s or 50s, while women's risk increases after menopause. Women often experience more subtle symptoms, like fatigue or shortness of breath, which can lead to delays in seeking treatment, delayed care, and even misdiagnosis. Risk factors such as diabetes and high blood pressure impact women more strongly, especially after menopause. This is partly due to a decrease in estrogen, which has a protective effect on the heart and blood vessels. As estrogen levels drop, women are more likely to experience changes in cholesterol levels, increased abdominal fat, and higher blood pressure, all of which significantly increase heart disease risk. Social and emotional factors can further complicate heart disease in wom-

To reduce cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk in women and men, focus on these key interventions: Adopt a heart-healthy diet with plenty of fiber and proteins, while limiting ultra processed foods. Increase physical activity by incorporating weight training and moderate cardio into your routine. Quit smoking to prevent blood vessel damage and plaque buildup; Manage stress with relaxation techniques like meditation and yoga. Regular health screenings to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar, and manage chronic conditions like diabetes. These changes, along with maintaining a healthy weight, can significantly lower heart disease risk and improve overall health. When risk factors extend beyond the control of diet and lifestyle, seek a knowledgeable health practitioner to guide you in your health journey, be that medication, screening, or referral to a cardiovascular specialist.

Take the next step in prioritizing your heart health! If you have any questions or would like personalized guidance on managing your cardiovascular risk, or are interested in discussing risk factor modification or assessing your personal risk, don't hesitate to reach out. Katherine Porter at Hydrate30A (hydreight30a@gmail. com) and Margaret Russell at 850 Midlife (margaret@850midlife. com) are happy to discuss your concerns and help you chart a path to a healthier future!

Katherine Porter, APRN, ACNP-BC is the owner of Hvdrate30A. She received a BSN from Auburn University and an MSN from UAB and has practiced locally as an acute care nurse practitioner since 2013. She can be contacted at hydreight30a@ gmail.com

Russell, APRN, Margaret AGACNP-BC is the owner of 850 Midlife and has been in practice locally for more than a decade. If you are interested in discussing risk factor modification or assessing your personal risk, She may be reached at Margaret@850Midlife.com





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BEST CRAFT BEER/S DIAMOND: Idyll Hour PLATINUM: Grov GOLD: The

BEST FIN DIAMOND: (PLATINUM: Ambrosia F GOLD: Th

> BEST HAP DIAMOND: Amici ; PLATINUM: Hurr GOLD: The

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BEST PERSONAL CHE
DIAMOND: So
PLATINUM: Blue I
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PLATINUM: Blue Mountain Bakery
GOLD: Pecan Jack's Ice Creamery & Candy Kitchen

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PLATINUM: The Pickled Pickers
GOLD: Dion Jones & The Neon Tears

BEST OUTDOOR ACTIVITY COMPANY DIAMOND: 3OA Blaze Beach Bonfires PLATINUM: YOLO Board + Bike GOLD: South Walton Beach Chair Guys

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DIAMOND: Jonah Allen Gallery
PLATINUM: Jacqueline Ward Images
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GOLD: Spa Lilliana

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WALTON COUNTY TOURISM





By Sean Dietrich

Wake up. Start coffeemaker. Turn on TV. A panicky news journalist is saying America is doomed and only minutes away from exploding. And if not America, at least my house.

Turn off TV.

Coffee is ready. Pour said coffee. Check my phone. Look at emails. The first subject line attracts my attention. "YOU ARE NOT A TRUE AMERICAN IF YOU DON'T READ THIS!!!"

Sean of the South: Wake Up

I want to be a true American, but for the next few minutes I'll have to settle for being a fallacious one. Namely, because it's a little early to be reading anything in all caps.

Sip coffee. Massage eyeballs. Leash up dogs. Take them outside for morning walks. It's still dark.

My dog doesn't want to pee. So we walk in tight, concentric circles through the neighborhood as I whisper-shout, "Go pee!" As though these two words have ever helped a canine successfully urinate within the long and noble history of dogdom.

I check my phone. To give my dog privacy. Hop on social media. My newsfeed is nothing but politics. What ever happened to cute kitty videos?

The first post I see shows the picture of an American flag covered in mud, or perhaps it's a more organic substance. The first words are: "PREPARE TO HAVE YOUR MIND TO-TALLY FREAKING BLOWN AMERICA!"

The user who shared the brain blasting patriotic item is my childhood Sunday school teacher. A woman whose wardrobe once consisted entirely of polyester. Her profile picture is a bald eagle wearing a bikini.

Soon, I am walking through a dark neighborhood near my house. My dog is sniffing the millions of locations where other dogs peed. I'm encouraging my dog to leave her mark on this world so we can go back home.

Surrounding me are yard signs galore. There must be hundreds, perched in everyone's yards. Each sign has some urgent message. Some political aphorism or watchword, printed in bold letters. A few of them have cusswords.

Signs are all around me. Like I'm walking through a redwhite-and-blue Times Square. I actually find one sign I agree with. The sign is huge, adorned in stars and stripes, and it reads:

"I'M NOT RUNNING FOR ANYTHING, I JUST WANT-ED A SIGN IN MY YARD."

Dog finally pees. We go back home. I'm checking my phone again because it notified me that I had an urgent private message. The direct message comes from a coworker I haven't seen in decades. We aren't friends in real life, but he insists on sending me important American videos. Usually these are political ads which require a bottle of Maalox after watching.

Today, however, the video was entitled, "CUTE KITTY ON TRAMPOLINE."

There is a God.



because it notified me that videos. Usually these are political ads which require a bottle of **DESTIN SMOKE SHOP**

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STAYING HEALTHY

continued from page 14

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Musing



By Rev. Pete Hyde

The Oklahoma winter morning broke grey, cold, windy and dreary. The Monday crowd at the hotel was small as we gathered for breakfast. Afternoon flights for the trip home were already being delayed and connections were going to be missed. An hour on the phone with "customer service" finally got a new schedule in place only to have it changed again as those flights were in turn shuffled.

These delays at the hotel put us behind the Tulsa rush hour traffic as we headed out of town for the funeral of a close friend. The rush of traffic and the concrete landscape gave way to less congested roads and more Oklahoma countryside as

A Pastor's Ponderings: The Tree

we headed north to Bartlesville. Billboards and neon signs disappeared leaving a lonely brown and grey landscape framed by a cloudy, cold, Oklahoma winter day. Someone in the car commented on how brown the scenery was in comparison to the Florida evergreens.

I began to take note of the rolling open hills of pasture.

into the low grey clouds. They stretched for yards horizontally and then reached up to the bleak winter sky. The smaller branches reached out their spindly, leafless fingers in an effort to provide the spring and summer leaves every square inch of opportunity to catch the life-giving sun that sustained it through probably more than a centu-

and asks us to make a difference and have an impact with His witness and message. We try to live our lives in the way spelled out in Scripture. But we wonder if anyone notices or even hears the message. Are we the lone oak making God's statement in the best way we can? Have we stretched out our faith branches to give every opportunity for God to use us to bring His message and light to the world?

The old magnificent oak

probably doesn't worry about such things. It just is and does what God has intended it to be and do. Maybe that's the secret we all miss in our quest for meaning. We need to just be and do what God has intended us to be and do in the field where He has planted us. And never forget that we will be noticed!

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



Black Angus and white face cattle added a stark contrast to the drab winter palate. As I glanced off to the side, standing alone in an empty field was a stately, towering, perfectly shaped, yet lonely oak tree. It stood starkly naked in the emptiness of the sprawling tan pasture. Its grey branches almost blended

ry. I wondered about all it had witnessed during its years and wished it could tell its story.

For all its beauty, the old naked oak stood alone. There was not another tree or bush for at least a hundred yards. But yet it stood proclaiming to all who would care to notice the magnificence of our great creator God. No one with an ounce of spirituality could miss its message and witness.

Many times we feel alone in the field where God planted us



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Lee Campbell



Road to Redemption: Zach Kiley - Deliverance

By Victoria Ostrosky

Walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, God called out – "Adam, where are you?" Enoch's legacy is that he walked with God every day. Then there's Moses of whom it is said that God talked with him face to face as one speaks with a friend. And we can't forget David – a man after God's own heart. God the Father, through the prophet Isaiah entreated Israel to "come now and let us reason together..."

Throughout the Bible, God reveals that He is all about reach-



ing out to us because He desires connection with us. Jesus, in the fullness of time, arrived on the scene and spoke the invitation – "follow me". "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Jesus instructed His disciples and us today about the importance of abiding in Him. This is not a New Testament only theme. God has always desired a relationship with us. We wonder, in our modern day, what exactly Jesus meant. There's a cute saying from years ago — "home is where, when you go there, they have to let you in."

Zach Kiley grew up in Spring, Texas, and was raised in the Catholic faith. "I knew God existed, but I didn't want Him in my life, so I stepped away." His world came crashing down in 2020, when he experienced a complete mental breakdown, partially brought on by abusing his body with alcohol, excessive energy drink consumption, and virtually no sleep for many days. His

sleep-deprived hallucinations caused disruptions at work. He soon found himself in a mental hospital.

The Christian mental hospital staff had placed Bibles throughout the facility, and he was encouraged to read. After years of ignoring God, he prayed, and God touched his heart. "I started writing in a journal. It blew me away the love God had for me. I encountered Jesus when I read the Bible." Jesus, the living Word, used the written Word to call out to Zach – "come to me...".

After his discharge from the hospital, Zach moved back with his parents and they relocated to the Destin area. He came out of isolation and discovered something amazing-connection with other believers. "I met Darryl who brought me to a small group. Those men have become brothers to me and have blessed me with mentorship." Zach is now an active member in his church and participates in a small group of men encouraging each other to walk with God and abide in Jesus, daily.

Zach knows that in order to live a fruitful life and walk in freedom, getting in the Word, staying in the Word, and praying



the Word is essential. He understands depression and anxiety are crippling. "I still struggle with depression at times, but I know I'll come out of it." Memorizing scripture is paramount to combating anxiety.

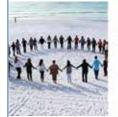
Thinking of the Psalmist, David, what did he do when he was depressed or anxious, afraid or uncertain? He cried out to the One he knew would hear him. That's how David walked with God. His heart was fixed and his feet never wandered far from the path.

Zach's advice for anyone experiencing incapacitating depression or anxiety – "know that it's not going to kill you. You'll get through it. Depression feels like forever, but it will pass. Lean into connection." Staying close to Jesus with prayer and reading the scripture and connecting with other believers is God's way of protecting and growing His children. Abiding in Jesus takes time and effort. The payoff is a closeness with Him that is indescribable.

You can listen to Zach Kiley's entire interview and many other incredible stories on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at www.rtrdestiny.com.

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Scratch Biscuit Kitchen Reopens with a Southern-Style Celebration

Exciting news for food lovers in South Walton — Scratch Biscuit Kitchen has expanded its hours and launched a brandnew dinner menu! After a brief pause, the beloved biscuit spot reopened on February 15 with expanded hours from 7 a.m.- 8 p.m. daily, serving a new all-day menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

New menu items include:

Made-from-scratch with



our secret 24-hour brine, never frozen, lightly dusted, and

fried to a crispy Southern golden brown: Buttermilk Chicken Tenders, Crispy Wings and Honey Ale-Basted Chicken Thighs

- Blackened Bayou Bird Sandwich (Spicy Blackened Chicken Breast, White Cheddar, Jalapeno, Lettuce, Tomato, Avocado on Brioche Bun)
- New Sides including Mac N' Cheese, Coleslaw and Boston Beans
- Beers, Wines, Bloody Marys, Screwdrivers and Popsicle Mimosas

• \$12 Lunchbox Special (available from 11 a.m.-2 p.m.) includes special of the day, as well as choice of side, dessert and beverage

This marks an exciting new chapter for Scratch Biscuit Kitchen, with extended hours and an all-new dinner menu. We'd love for you to consider covering the event or stopping by to experience it firsthand

Better Than Panera Bread Broccoli Cheese Soup

By Susan Benton, 30AEats.com With all of the runny nos-

es, nothing beats the warming comfort of a big bowl of soul-satisfying soup, and this wonderful homemade Broccoli Cheese Soup (a favorite of my UA daughter who adores Panera Bread) is always a hit, and easy to make!

The family opted out of hollowing out a boule creating a bread bowl, and served it on the side instead.

Ingredients: 6 tablespoons butter or extra virgin olive oil 2 cloves garlic 1 small onion, chopped 1 stalk celery, chopped 1/4 cup all-purpose flour 2 cups half-and-half

3 cups chicken broth

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg Kosher salt and freshly ground

- 4 cups broccoli florets (about 1
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 2 1/2 cups (about 8 ounces) grated sharp cheddar cheese

Preparation:

Melt the butter in a large

Dutch oven or pot over medium heat. Add the onion, celery and garlic, and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the flour and cook until golden, 3 to 4 minutes, then gradually whisk in the halfand-half until smooth. Add the chicken broth, bay leaves and nutmeg, then season with salt and pepper and bring to a simmer. Reduce

the heat to medium-low and cook, uncovered, until thickened, about 20 minutes.

Add the broccoli and carrot to the broth mixture and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaves. Puree the soup in batches in a blender until smooth; you'll still have flecks of carrot and broc-



coli. Return to the pot.

Add the cheese to the soup and whisk over medium heat until melted. Add up to 3/4 cup water a little at a time if the soup is too thick.

Note: Garnish with grated cheese and broccoli floret. I also like fresh ground pepper.







The Love Language of Music

Music is often described as the universal language, transcending barriers of culture, language, and geography. Yet, its role extends far beyond communication—it serves as an expression of love and connection that resonates deeply within the human soul. The love language of music is a powerful medium through which emotions are conveyed, relationships are nurtured, and hearts are united.

The Emotional Resonance: At its core, music is a form of emotional expression. From a lullaby soothing a restless infant to a romantic ballad expressing profound affection, music has an unparalleled ability to evoke and share feelings. Its melodies, harmonies, and rhythms can articulate emotions that words often fail to capture. This emotional resonance is why certain songs become deeply personal; they remind us of loved ones, significant moments, or shared experiences that carry a profound sense of meaning.

A Tool for Connection: Music bridges gaps in relationships, serving as a shared experience that fosters connection. Families bond over traditions of singing together, couples find their "song" that symbolizes their love, and friends create memories at concerts and festivals. In these moments, music becomes more than just soundit becomes a shared language of affection and togetherness.

Even in moments of solitude, music connects us to others. A song written hundreds of years ago can make us feel understood in the present, as though the composer knew our heartache, joy, or longing. This timeless quality underscores music's ability to transcend time and space, reinforcing the idea that we are never truly alone. For example, the well-known "Happy Birthday to You" song which was written by Patty Hill and her sister Mildred in 1893 is probably sung many times every day of the year.

An Act of Love: Creating music for someone is one of the most personal and profound acts of love. Whether it's a custom playlist curated for a friend, a serenade for a partner, or a heartfelt composition for a family member, these gestures carry deep meaning. They say, "I see you, I understand you, and I care for you," in a way that words alone cannot.

Likewise, sharing music is a way of sharing oneself. Recommending a favorite song or attending a concert together is an act of vulnerability and trust. These exchanges foster intimacy and understanding, enriching relationships in ways that feel both subtle and significant.

Music's Role in Healing

and Reconciliation: Music also plays a pivotal role in healing and reconciliation, embodying forgiveness, empathy, and love. For instance, lullabies comfort distressed children, and music therapy is used to mend emotional wounds. On a larger scale, anthems and peace songs unite communities, fostering understanding and collective healing in times of discord.

The love language of music is a profound and versatile form of expression, weaving together emotions, relationships, and shared human experiences. It transcends the limitations of spoken language, offering a unique and powerful way to connect and communicate. Whether it's through listening, creating, or sharing, music allows us to express love in ways that touch the heart and soul.

Music reminds us of our shared humanity and universal longing to feel understood and loved. It is, in every sense, the sound of connection.

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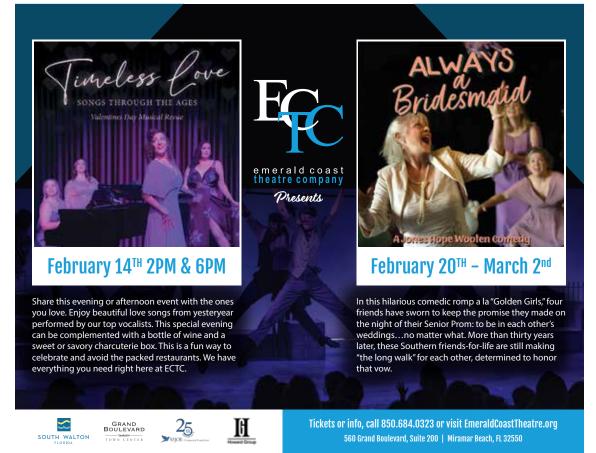
Emerald Coast Theatre Company Opens Registration for 2025 Summer Theatre Camps

Emerald Coast Theatre 560 Grand BLVD. Suite 200 Company's (ECTC) 2025 Summer Theatre Camps are going to be a blast! These camps provide experience and training in theatre that can improve students' communication, critical thinking, and team-based skills! ECTC offers classes for Mini Players (5yrs.-1st), Little Players (2nd-3rd grade), Big Players (4th-5th grade), and teens.

Summer Theatre Camps are held from June - August 2025, with varying dates based on camp. Payment plans and scholarships are available. Class locations include ECTC's main space at

in Miramar Beach, FL as well as Florida Chautauqua Theatre (FCT) at 848 Baldwin Avenue in Defuniak Springs, FL, Gulf Coast State College at 5230 US-98 in Panama City, FL, and Seaside Neighborhood School at 10 Smolian Cir in Santa Rosa Beach, FL. Please have your child bring a snack and water for half-day camps and a snack, water, and lunch for full-day camps.

The full schedule of class dates and times along with tuition and registration rates can be found at emeraldcoasttheatre.org/summer-camps.





Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents Crescendo! 2025:

A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza, Feb. 28 & March 2

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! 2025, its highly anticipated annual fundraiser will be held February 28 to March 2, 2025. This multi-day cultural and culinary extravaganza will bring together world-class entertainment, exceptional cuisine and fine wine in support of Sinfonia's music education and community outreach programs.

Crescendo! 2025 Lineup

Crescendo! Kick-Off Lunch: Thursday, Jan. 30 at Bijoux Restaurant + Spirits in Miramar Beach. This chic luncheon will feature award-winning cuisine, elegant wines, and exclusive shopping opportunities. Tickets are \$175 per person.

Vintner Dinners: Friday, Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. Carefully curated dinners hosted in elegant homes and venues across the Emerald Coast, featuring "celebrity" chefs paired with renowned vintners. Tickets are \$500 per person.

Crescendo! Main Event: Sunday, March 2 at 11:30 a.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Enjoy an all-inclusive afternoon of culinary delights, live and silent auctions, and exceptional entertainment. This year's theme is "Paint the Town Red." Tickets are \$225 per person.

Featured Entertainment for the Main Event

Crescendo! 2025 will highlight extraordinary talent, including the acclaimed string rock band Violectric. Proclaimed "House Band for the City of Orlando" by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Violectric captivates audiences with cutting-edge technology and live performances that span rock history, from The Beatles to The Weeknd. Led by artist and producer Michelle Jones, known for Grammy-nominated projects, Violectric's interactive performances promise an unforgettable experience.

Also featured is Bradley Copeland, a rising 25-year-old visual artist based in Santa Rosa Beach. Copeland, named Walton County Artist of the Year



(2023), will be showcasing her award-winning talent with a live painting demonstration and a pop-up art gallery. With over 600 pieces in her collection, Copeland's work reflects her passion and creativity, shaped by her experiences and surroundings. Her vibrant career includes solo exhibitions, public art projects, and a mural at Linda Miller Real Estate on 30A. Copeland's dedication to art as a transformative medium extends to her teaching at the Walton Correctional Institution, where she leads an art program aimed at inspiring creativity and healing.

Supporting Music Education

Proceeds from Crescendo! 2025 benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission to redefine the symphony experience and provide exceptional music education. Programs include support of

supported include support of Sinfonia's signature music education program, musicians in schools, free orchestra concerts, transportation for students, and partnerships with Carnegie Hall's Link Up initiative and Ascension Sacred Heart's Arts in Medicine program and more.

Sinfonia Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller states, "Crescendo! is more than a fundraiser; it's a celebration of our community's commitment to the arts. The funds raised allow us to continue bringing mu-

sic and education to thousands across Northwest Florida."

Are you a "treble" maker? If so, Sinfonia Gulf Coast invites you to join this honorary committee. For a \$650 contribution, Treble Makers will receive one ticket to the Crescendo! Kick Off Lunch and Main Event, recognition in the event program, a reserved seat at the closed-to-the-public student Link Up performances on March 12, 2025, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, a special Treble Maker gift, and more.

Tickets, Sponsorship & Volunteering

Tickets are available at www. SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or by calling (850) 460-8800. Sponsorship opportunities are also available. For inquiries, contact Daniel Milana at dmilana@sinfoniagulfcoast.org. For more information on how you can join Sinfonia's team of volunteers, contact Beth Clavier at (850) 460-8800 and bclavier@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.





MKAF Announces 2025 Concerts in the Village!

The 10-concert Thursdays, live-music series, April 10 - June 12, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and yacht rock to soulful tributes and high-energy hits. From iconic blues rock to soulful Amy Winehouse tributes, danceable yacht rock and Def Leppard classics—plus a special performance of Journey's album Escape from start to finish by Black Jacket Symphony-the 2025 Concerts in the Village presented by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation offers a dynamic lineup for every music

The area's longest-running live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year's family-friendly series will run from April 10 to June 12, featuring premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and rhythm & blues to modern pop and nostalgic tributes.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 10, 2025, with an electrifying performance by The Fabulous Thunderbirds, setting the stage for an unforgettable season.

"This is an exceptional lineup of live music in a beautiful outdoor venue at an affordable price for a great cause," says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "When you purchase a concert ticket, you're helping us provide high-quality arts education and community engagement across Northwest Florida. Whether you're a regular or joining us for the first time, we promise an unforgettable experience."

Gates open at 6 p.m., and concerts begin at 7 p.m. This come-as-you-are outdoor concert series encourages attendees to bring a lawn chair, picnic, or wine. Food and beverages also will be available for purchase from local food trucks on-site.

2025 Concerts in the Village Schedule:

April 10 – The Fabulous Thunderbirds Kick off the season with blues rock legends known for hits like Tuff Enuff and Wrap It Up.

April 17 – Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute Celebrate



Clapton's timeless hits like Layla and Wonderful Tonight with stunning authenticity.

April 24 - Yacht Rock Revue Dance to soft rock classics from the '70s and '80s by artists like Christopher Cross and Hall

May 1 – Black Jacket Symphony: Journey's Escape Relive Journey's iconic album Escape, featuring Don't Stop Believin' and Open Arms.

May 8 – Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute The official estate-approved band, pays tribute to Winehouse's soulful legacy with hits like Rehab and Back to Black.

May 15 – Kickstand Jenny Experience a high-energy night with this dynamic rock 'n' roll

May 22 - The Molly Ringwalds Journey through the '80s with this ultimate tribute to the decade's greatest hits.

May 29 - Petty Hearts Celebrate Tom Petty classics like Free Fallin' and American Girl.

June 5 – AlA: Jimmy Buffett Tribute Escape to Margaritaville with the original, Jimmy Buffett estate-approved tribute

June 12 - Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard Rock out to Def Leppard's biggest hits like Pour Some Sugar on Me and Love Bites.

General admission tickets are \$35 per person, plus a ticketing fee. Save \$5 by purchasing tickets in advance online at MKAF.org. Children under 12 attend for free. MKAF members enjoy early entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing for other MKAF events. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$3,000. To reserve a VIP table, call Deb Nissley at (850) 650-2226.

To purchase tickets, become an MKAF member, make a tax-deductible donation or provide a corporate sponsorship, visit www.MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226. Follow MKAF on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates.





















THURSDAY NIGHT CONCERTS **APRIL 10 - JUNE 12**

Annual Thursday evening concert live music series featuring family-friendly premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, reggae and disco to modern pop.

April 10 | The Fabulous Thunderbirds

April 17 | Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute

April 24 | Yacht Rock Revue

May 1 | Black Jacket Symphony: Journey's Escape

May 8 | Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute

May 15 | Kickstand Jenny

May 22 | Molly Ringwalds

May 29 | Petty Hearts

June 5 | A1A: Jimmy Buffet Tribute

June 12 | Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard

Purchase Tickets at MKAF.org/Events











Proceeds from all events benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach education and community engagement initiatives.





DID YOU BUILD OR PURCHASE A HOME LAST YEAR?

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FILING DEADLINE MARCH 1, 2025

Gary J. Gregor, Walton County Property Appraiser, reminds property owners who intend to make application for Homestead Exemption, Deployed Military Exemption, Combat Disabled Veteran's Discount, Veteran's Exemption, Disability Exemption, Agricultural Classification, Additional Senior Exemption, or Widow's and Widower's Exemption, the absolute filing deadline is **MARCH 1, 2025**.

If you plan to file your exemption for the first time, please bring with you a copy of your recorded deed or tax receipt, the social security number(s) of all owners of property, Florida driver's license number, Florida auto tag number, and voter's registration number. If you are entitled to disability exemption, please bring proof of disability (two doctors' statements). If you are filing Homestead Exemption on a

mobile home, please bring the title or registration certificate.

If you are filing for the "Additional Exemption for Persons 65 and Older" there is a total household income limitation (adjusted annually for cost-of-living; proof will be required).

If you would like information to determine your eligibility for exemptions, please call **850-892-8123** or **850-267-4500**, Monday thru Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

You may file for exemptions at the following office locations of the Property Appraiser Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

DeFuniak Springs - Courthouse 571 Hwy. 90 East

Santa Rosa Beach - Courthouse Annex 31 Coastal Centre Blvd., Suite 600

THE ABSOLUTE FILING DEADLINE FOR 2025 EXEMPTIONS IS MARCH 1, 2025.

Have You Applied For Ag Classification of Newly Acquired Agricultural Lands For 2025?





Insights for Investors: Some Things to Watch for 2025



By Maurice Stouse, Financial Advisor & Branch Manager

Leading off our list would be interest rates. We watch, daily, the yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury Note (USTN). That is a leading indicator for the stock and bond markets. It also is a leading indicator for mortgage rates as well. It is important to be aware of how changes in the rate can impact stocks. A rising vield means a declining price for bonds (and investors are selling bonds and buying stocks). A declining yield might mean Treasury prices are going up and there is more demand for those, and investors are moving assets from stocks to bonds.

When we refer to investors, we are pointing more toward professional investors vs. individual investors. By some indicators, professional investors account for almost 80% of the daily volume in the stock market What or who are professional investors? Those could be hedge funds, mutual funds, private equity funds, trading firms, pension funds as well as others. Professional investors are less likely to be buy and hold vs. individual investors, because they rely on shorter term profits or returns for performance (in our opinion).

The question on everyone's mind is will rates on the 10 year remain the same, head higher or go lower? A few things impact that, the first of which is inflation. While inflation has come down, it remains to be seen if it will continue to decline, head back up or remain the same.

Next would be the **borrow**ing demand of the U.S. **Treasury.** That is from the issuance of new debt as well as the refinancing of maturing debt.

Lastly is the **strength of the U.S. dollar.** At this writing, it is up in value almost 4% over the past 12 months. Many would think the dollar is too high citing the fact that a too strong dollars makes U.S. exports costlier over-

Next, we look at **valuations**. In other words, the prices for stocks and bonds and if they are becoming over-valued, undervalued or fairly valued. We would agree the overall stock market (after two straight years of 20% returns) has grown rapidly and is overvalued. What follows would mean earnings would have to up or prices would have to come down. We do also share the concern that a majority of the returns have been from just 10-20 stocks.

Bonds, on the other hand, might be seen as cheap. The risk with bonds is if they move down from where you bought them and you feel like it is a losing proposition. A few things about bonds: 1) You know what you will have and when you will have it. 2) You can sell them at any time (subject to market movement) and they help reduce risk in your overall portfolio. We have heard and read that Warren Buffet, the famous U.S. investor, prefers stocks over bonds, because of the greater potential over time. But we have also learned that he does include short-term bonds in his holdings, but also that he currently has built a lot into cash or money markets. Money markets continue to offer a compelling vield and do not come with the same risk as bonds-after having said we believe bonds can be

used to diversify portfolios. The same can be said for tax-free bonds which have experienced lower prices and hence higher

Gold, silver and other precious U.S. metals, we feel, should play a part in a longterm, diversified portfolio. We also believe that a small percentage of commodities in a portfolio can be beneficial. Also take note that precious U.S. metals, gold and silver and others have seen significant rises in price over the past 12 months. Many wonder what might be driving that, particularly with the U.S. dollar so high. We think it is a lot of foreign buying that has driven those prices. By the way, foreign investment in the U.S. stock market has grown significantly over the past decade. The strong dollar has helped to fuel that. We do take note that if the dollar were to eventually begin to decline that investments in foreign markets might see stronger returns.

And then there is **crypto.** That is a difficult one to address as many investors do not want to overlook what might be an emerging choice for them to allocate their assets. Raymond James has continued to decline to offer trading in these types of assets and we take note of that with a cautionary tone. We agree that it has added elements of risks, among them, as Raymond James points out, lack of regulation. There are some known and some unknown risks

and we do not encourage investors to consider investing in crypto assets at this time.

There is much more for savers and investors to consider when it comes to investing and saving. Investment objective, time frame and risk tolerance cannot be overstated in their importance when making investment decisions.

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

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What You Should Do Right After An Accident

By Julie A. Martin

It can be scary to be driving along one minute, and the next, either you've been run off the road, or spun out into the intersection, or even into a ditch. You or your passenger might even be injured, and need medical attention. Here is the short version of how to handle auto accidents so that you know you handled everything correctly and your stress level can come down.

Pull over safely to the side of

the road and call 911. Calling for help is the first essential step in making sure that any injuries are treated in a timely fashion, as well as making sure the police arrive to do a full accident report.

Take photos of the other vehicle(s) involved including the drivers, as the position of the vehicles, for your insurance company, so that there is photo evidence of all damage as well as an accurate representation of who was in which car, as well who was driving.

Make sure you have your license, registration and insurance information on hand. I recommend keeping a copy of your declarations page, your auto id cards and your registration in your glove box.

If your vehicle is not drive able after the accident, you have two choices. If you have AAA, you can have them pick up your vehicle and drop it off at your preferred auto repair shop. If you have towing on your auto policy, and the site of your accident is less than five miles away from your repair shop, you can potentially use the towing coverage on your policy for this accident.

If you are injured, go to the hospital to get checked out or your primary care physician, if your injuries are not serious. Personal Injury Protection in the state of Florida pays 80% of your \$10,000 coverage, minus

the deductible. This includes hospital bills, medical bills relating to your accident injuries, physical therapy, casts, crutches, etc. If you have medical payments on your policy as well, they will start where the Personal Injury Protection ends. If the at fault driver is not you, and they either have no bodily injury liability coverage, or not enough to cover your injuries, this is where uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage comes in. You insure for those times that you get hit, you're hurt, but the person who causes the accident does not have enough coverage to cover your medical expenses.

If you have not already called your insurance company to put in the claim, do so now, calling your agent and explaining to them what happened. Answer their questions and do not guess if you do not know the answer. Let them know that the police have been on the scene. Give them the case number the police give you and they will get the accident report when it becomes available. Write down the claim number and any other instructions the claims representative, and your agent give you for the accident.

Dear reader, we all get into a scrape from time to time, and hopefully this list is helpful when you need to know what to do. Call 850-424-6979.





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Elizabeth Beeson February 13, 2025



The Housing Revolution Starts Now Meet Visionary Bekah Manley

By Christopher Manson

Bekah Manley is a holistic realtor, meaning that she looks well beyond the structure of a house. "I take the physical, spiritual and emotional into consideration," she explains. "I go a little deeper than most realtors when it comes to finding an environment in which a person will best thrive. To me, a house is more than a structure. It's a sanctuary for your soul."

Bekah has called the Emerald Coast her home since 2017. After graduating from Auburn University (Manley majored in psychology, which she says she uses every day in her work), she visited her mother who had recently moved to the area. "And me being a broke, confused college student, it was either go back to my hometown or go to the beach," she says. "I decided to go to the beach."

The Northwest Alabama native has been engaged to Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner for more than a year now, and I jokingly ask if she has any influence over the city government. "No," she laughs. "But we have been able



to use both our jobs to create a positive impact on the community."

Bekah and Mayor Wagner worked together shooting videos in Gulf County after Hurricane Michael, letting the rest of the world know that the area was rebuilding. She obtained her real estate license in 2021, and one of the first things Bekah did was ask her brokers:

"Why do we keep building

the same thing over and over again and expecting different results?"

Bekah sought out contractors and architects with a passion for revolutionizing the building environment "from the ground up" as well as utilizing political connections to "challenge and change the building standards for the state of Florida."

For the past three years, Bekah and business partner Joseph Beeman have been building THEIA Development to create sustainable, resil-

ient and affordable houses using advanced technology like 3D printing. "Due to recent hurricanes, people's eyes have been opened" to new things, she says. "You don't have to be an expert to know if something isn't working. I believe we can change the standards. The 'Oh, we've always done it this way' isn't working anymore."

Bekah says traditional building methods are outdated. "In-

surance rates are not going to budge until we have better products for them to cover."

She is also working to connect with industry people interested in green initiatives. "I know they exist," says Bekah. "I'm just trying to bring different experts – appraisers, lenders, builders, engineers – out of the woodwork who care about sustainable futuristic building practices."

Bekah and her team are looking to launch the new housing initiatives here in the Panhandle, with a focus on areas affected by hurricanes. And then, spreading throughout the state and beyond.

"The next step for me is to build a physical product for people to touch and feel," she says, "so they can see the whole process and open their minds about how to build in the future.

"It's not that scary. The big obstacle is that a lot of people fear change and things they don't understand. Sometimes people tend to be a little closed-minded when it comes to (housing)." Bekah is working to create a dialogue and educate the community.

"It should be clear, in light of recent events, why I'm looking to change things. And have been."

Serendipity Wellness and Therapeutic Telepsychiatry Services LLC, the office of Michelle Norris APRN, MSN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, will be closing as of April 5, 2025.

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