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## Local Photographer Chandler Williams Heads to Kenya to Support Education and Conservation Efforts

Chandler Williams, a renowned local photographer and the 2021 South Walton Artist of the Year, has recently returned from a transformative journey to Kenya, where he dedicated his talents to support two impactful non-profit organizations: Holding Hands Africa and Tsavo Trust.

For photographer Chandler Williams, travel has always been more than a vacation—it's been a bridge to deeper connections and new opportunities. With each journey, he not only captures the world through his lens but builds lasting relationships, finds purpose in unexpected places, and discovers stories that continue to shape both his art and his life.

In 2024, Williams spent a month in Tanzania summing Mt. Kilimanjaro and traveling the country to create content for a new kids' ed-



ucation program. This year, Williams found himself with the opportunity to create content in Kenya. When meeting Santa Rosa beach local Sonya O'Brien, director of HoldingHands Africa, he knew he had made another lifetime connection—one rooted in shared purpose and a deep commitment to nonprofit work and a love for Africa.



### Capturing Hope in Watamu

In the coastal town of Watamu, Williams collaborated with O'Brien and Holding Hands Africa, a nonprofit committed to partnering with the local community to educate and feed children. The organization operates schools, provides daily meals, and ensures access to safe water, working hand-in-hand

with local leaders and families to foster economic development (hhafrica.org). O'Brien launched a pen pal program that connects students in Watamu, Kenya, with children at Seaside Charter School in South Walton, Florida. Her vision was to foster cross-cultural understanding and em-

**PHOTOGRAPHER**  
*continued on page 3*

## Saddling Up for Success with Westonwood Ranch

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Whether you're navigating a new diagnosis or have recently moved to the Emerald Coast, finding the right resources for a child or family member with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) can feel overwhelming. Knowing where to turn for therapy, education, social support and recreational opportunities can make all the difference. Our community offers several resources to help you connect, advocate and thrive.

Lindy Wood, founder of Westonwood Ranch in Freeport, was once in your shoes. Her 15-year-old son Weston was diagnosed with autism when he was two. "It's overwhelming. You do not get a lot of guidance from the diagnostic physician. They tell you that you need to start therapy, but you walk away, and you don't know where to turn to," said Lindy.

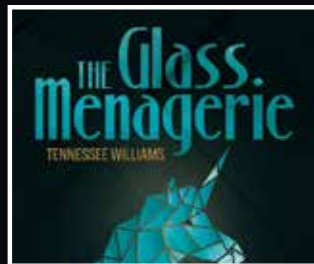
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**WESTONWOOD**  
*continued on page 2*

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 **Community**

**WESTONWOOD**  
*continued from page 1*

lived, extensive therapy was limited. After visiting several schools, they decided the Emerald Coast Autism Center in Niceville was the best choice for Weston, and they moved to Freeport to give Weston better opportunities. Here, they navigated a new community and new opportunities.

Now Lindy and her family work to help others. “The most important, or critical thing, when they’re young, is that you’re more aggressive with therapy. It’s shown to have the best outcomes as they continue to age,” stated Lindy. “Take advantage of that time ahead of the game. Be proactive. You have to advocate for alternate learning opportunities. Because those are critical.” Westonwood Ranch started as a vision of a place where individuals with disabilities could learn, grow and thrive, and since opening in 2019, they’ve worked hard to help teens and young adults with IDD realize their potential and develop life skills to foster independent and productive lives.

While there are numerous therapy and skill-building op-

portunities available for young children with autism and other developmental disabilities, resources tend to become more limited as children grow older. For adolescents and young adults, access to developmentally appropriate services, such as life skills training, social development programs, or transition support, can be significantly harder to find. Additionally, insurance coverage for these types of services may be restricted, leaving families to navigate financial barriers during a critical period of growth and independence.

Westonwood Ranch works hard to raise money and find community support to help offset costs for participants through financial aid. “We never want finances to be a barrier to obtaining this higher level of programs,” said Lindy. They also have an aquaponic farm where they grow and sell produce. They currently have seven local restaurants sourcing lettuce from them regularly. They also have a bakery where they produce their own Brew Chews Gourmet Dog Treats. Proceeds from those businesses are reinvested back into the ranch.



There are several programs to assist children and young adults with IDD offered at Westonwood Ranch. The Transitional Services Day Program is full-time, year-round for those 12 and up, providing opportunities to gain critical skills to be more independent. The LIFT OFF Program for those 18 and older is designed to help those exiting the school system and focuses on developing soft skills with real hands-on learning at the aquaponics farm and pet treat bakery. The program culminates in an internship and an opportunity to be employed. The ranch also provides an Afterschool Equine Therapy on Mondays and Wednesdays for ages four to adult.

“No matter where you are on your walk with autism or other developmental disabilities, don’t let their age be a limit on their ability to learn. No matter what age you are, you’re still capable

of learning whether you have a disability or not,” added Lindy. “They are still able and capable of learning and capable of doing amazing things if given the right opportunities and pathways.”

Many cities and counties face the challenge of affordable housing for people with IDD, and the Emerald Coast is no different. Westonwood Ranch is looking to change that. They are currently working on securing funding for a supportive living community for 44 young adults that will include apartments, townhomes and tiny homes with a pool and a clubhouse. This community will be 180 degrees from the traditional group homes.

In addition to Westonwood Ranch, there are a variety of resources available along the Emerald Coast to support individuals with IDD, as well as their families and caregivers. These resources span early intervention

services, educational supports, therapy providers, community programs, and advocacy organizations. Notable organizations include the Emerald Coast Autism Center; Great Gains Behavioral, Project 10, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities, Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities, Autism Society of Florida, Walton County Arc, Grace Rides, and the Special Olympics of Walton County.

If you would like to learn more about Westonwood Ranch, visit [www.westonwood.org](http://www.westonwood.org) or contact them at [info@westonwood.org](mailto:info@westonwood.org) or (850) 880-2220.



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PHOTOGRAPHER  
*continued from page 2*

pathy through shared stories, letters, and experiences. The program has become a meaningful bridge between communities, inspiring students on both sides of the globe.

Williams documented the vibrant life at Bluebells Primary School and Gede Middle School, capturing moments of learning, play, and community engagement. His photographs aim to bring awareness to the organization’s mission and the children’s aspirations. But for Williams, the reward is not just in the images captured—each time he donates his work, he experiences a deeper sense of connection, humility, and personal growth.

“Every project with HH Africa reminds me why I picked up a camera in the first place. It’s about being present, listening, and sharing the beauty of lives that might otherwise go unseen,” Williams shared.

Protecting the  
Giants of Tsavo

Venturing inland, Williams joined forces with Tsavo Trust,

a Kenyan nonprofit focused on wildlife conservation in the Tsavo Conservation Area. The organization is renowned for its efforts to protect the world’s last big tuskers—elephants with tusks weighing over 100 pounds on each side. (tsavotrust.org)

Through his lens, Williams captured the majesty of these iconic creatures and the dedicated work of conservationists striving to safeguard biodiversity and empower local communities. His images highlight the delicate balance between wildlife preservation and human development.

“Spending time alongside the rangers and the elephants is an experience that changes you,” Williams said. “Unlike a typical safari, you are spending time tracking and trying to find certain tuskers. We spent over 4 hours searching for one trek and came up empty handed. I guess that’s kind of the beauty of it all, you just never know what you will find on the next trek.”

A Journey of Purpose and  
Reflection

Reflecting on his experience, Williams explained, “This journey was more than a pho-



tographic expedition; it was a personal pilgrimage. The resilience of the communities and the grandeur of the wildlife in Kenya are truly inspiring. Each time I donate my work to these nonprofits, I get back something priceless in return: clarity, purpose, and the reminder that cre-

ativity can serve a greater good. I have always felt that creating with a camera has been the right fit for me. These travels really allow me to really live in the moment and appreciate the now.

His work serves as a bridge, connecting audiences in Santa Rosa Beach and beyond to the vital efforts of these organizations. By showcasing the realities and triumphs of communities and conservationists in Kenya, Williams hopes to foster greater support and understanding.

Chandler Williams’ photographic journey underscores the power of visual storytelling in driving awareness and change.

But more than that, it illustrates how giving through art can enrich not only communities around the world—but also the artist’s own life in return.

With funding being pulled from nonprofits and emergency meetings taking priority, Williams suddenly found himself with a few unexpected days on his hands. So, in true spontaneous spirit, he decided to go to Egypt. What followed was a journey through ancient wonders, quiet reflection, and unexpected inspiration. Chandler Williams set off on a new path that didn’t disappoint—but that... is a story for another time.

Supporting the Cause

For those interested in learning more or contributing to these causes:

**Holding Hands Africa:** Visit [hhafrica.org](http://hhafrica.org) to explore their educational initiatives and community programs.

**Tsavo Trust:** Learn about their conservation efforts at [tsavotrust.org](http://tsavotrust.org), including the Big Tusker Project and community conservancies.

# Jude Frances



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## Upcoming Events

### Forrest Williams Band Returns to the Red Bar May 18, 20

Catch Forrest Williams Band at the Red Bar May 18 from 12-3 p.m. Previously South Walton locals, Forrest Williams Band is an award-winning favorite on stage among locals and visitors to the area. The band performs a variety of music from southern rock to country and blues. A guaranteed good time.

### The Velvet Jazz Collective Series at SOWAL House

SOWAL House continues its tradition of celebrating jazz with a rotating cast of nationally recognized musicians and Velvet Jazz Collective members throughout May. Doors open at 6 p.m. for all performances. More information at: [sowal-house.com/performers](http://sowal-house.com/performers). SOWAL House is where art comes to life.

May 23-24: Stephen Cospar, Luke Pinegar & Steve Gilmore

May 30: Sheila Ford & Cam Ray

May 31: Sheila Ford & Luke Pinegar

### Memorial Day Service at Gulf Cemetery May 26

Gulf Cemetery will host the annual Memorial Day Ceremony on Monday, May 26 at 10 a.m. in Santa Rosa Beach. The approximately 150 veterans interred in the cemetery will be honored in a service. Folks are encouraged to bring umbrellas and/or personal lawn chairs. A limited number of folding chairs will be provided. The speaker for the 2025 Memorial Day Ceremony will be Colonel Ed Hubbard ([edhubbardpow.com/biography/](http://edhubbardpow.com/biography/)). Gulf Cemetery is located at 1466 S County Highway 393, Santa Rosa Beach.

### Grand Boulevard Lawn Games

Bring the entire family out to Grand Boulevard to enjoy some fun! Summer Lawn Games will take over Grand Park from 5-8:30 p.m. nightly, May 23 thru August 9. Grab some food and drinks from one of the many restaurants in Grand Boulevard before you settle in to a fun round of corn hole, giant lawn chess, checkers and more



### SEASIDE Memorial Day Concert May 25

Celebrate Memorial Day with a performance by Ken & Andi on Sunday, May 25 in the Seaside Amphitheater from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Bring a chair or blanket, snacks and drinks, and enjoy the show. Free and open to all ages.

### Sinfonia Salutes at Alys Beach May 25

Alys Beach presents Sinfonia Salutes on Sunday, May 25 at 7:30 p.m. Enjoy the orchestral sounds of Sinfonia Gulf Coast under the palm trees in the Alys Beach Amphitheatre, accompanied by a mesmerizing drone show lighting up the night sky. Bring blankets and low-back chairs. This event is free and open to the public.

### Frog's Leap Wine Dinner at Burnt Pine Sandestin June 7

Get ready for a show to die for—join in the fun at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort's Burnt Pine for an unforgettable Murder Mystery Wine Dinner on Saturday, June 7th from 6-9 p.m. featuring the renowned wines of Frog's Leap Winery. RSVP to [Julie.Lewis@sandestin.com](mailto:Julie.Lewis@sandestin.com) to secure your seat—space is limited, and this is one dinner you don't want to miss.

Kick off the evening with a lavender champagne toast before diving into a multi-course menu paired with wines from one of Napa Valley's most iconic and sustainably driven estates. From scallops on a rice paper flower to lamb lollipops and chocolate-dipped strawberries, each course is as dramatic and delightful as the mystery that will unfold around you.

### Rosemary Beach Memorial Day Concert May 26

Come out to the St. Augustine Green for an evening of music by Rubiks Groove. The free and open to the public show starts at 7 p.m. Bring your chairs, blankets, picnics, friends and family. Rubiks Groove is the premier "Outside of the Box" 80s, 90s & 00s Tribute Band with a complete 360-degree interactive experience.

### Sounds of the Summer! LIVE! at Grand Boulevard

Mix, mingle, and enjoy live musical selections performed by talented company actors at Emerald Coast Theatre Company's Sounds of the Summer! LIVE! every Thursday night, May 29th-July 3rd, at 7:30 p.m. Meet the local and regional actors that grace the ECTC stage outdoors by the fountain in Grand Park. Don't miss this unforgettable limited engagement performance.

This event is free and open to the public. First come, first serve seating is available, however, we recommend you bring a chair to enjoy the event.

### ECTC: Comedy on the Boulevard June 13

Emerald Coast Theatre Company invites you to Comedy on the Boulevard on Friday, June 13 at 7 p.m. Come for an uproarious night of laughs. This hysterical event will be hosted by Jason Hedden. Purchase tickets: Comedy on the Boulevard

Comedy at the Boulevard will be staged on the Cabaret Stage in ECTC's main space located on the second floor of 560 Grand Boulevard in Grand Boulevard Town Center in Miramar Beach

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# Summer Camps 2025: A Local Guide for Families

## General Enrichment & Academic Camps

• **Abadie Academy (Santa Rosa Beach):** For ages 5–12, week-long camps run June 3–July 12, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m., at \$350/week. Themes include “Under the Sea” and “Happy Campers.” [abadieacademy.com](http://abadieacademy.com).

## Arts & Performing Arts Camps

• **Emerald Coast Theatre Company (Miramar Beach):** Offers various theater camps for ages 5–14, including Mini Player Camps (ages 5–7) and Camp Broadway sessions (grades 2–5). Dates and tuition vary. Register: [emeraldcoasttheatre.org/summer-camps](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org/summer-camps).

• **studio6twenty5 (Destin):** This boutique classical ballet studio offers summer camps for children ages 2–9, following the American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum. Programs include Pre-Primary and Primary levels, focusing on foundational movement, musicality, and imaginative exploration. Camps are held at 625 Harbor Blvd., Destin. Register: [studio6twenty5.com](http://studio6twenty5.com).

• **Compass Rose Academy Summer Enrichment (Santa Rosa Beach):** Offering programs for ages 3–12, this camp includes activities in art, music and dance. Half-day and full-day options available June 2–August 1; weekly rates range from \$180 to \$440. Register: [compassroseacademy.org](http://compassroseacademy.org) or call (850) 660-1110.

## Sports & Recreation Camps

• **Challenger International Soccer Camp (Freeport):** A soccer camp for boys and girls, offering skill development and fun games. Dates and specific details for 2025 are to be announced. [challengersports.com](http://challengersports.com).

• **Uniquely Clever Mobile Art & The Yoga Garden – Art & Yoga Camp (Freeport)**

This camp offers a blend of art and yoga activities for children aged 5 and up. Sessions are on Tuesdays: June 3, 10, 17, 24 and July 8, 15, 22, 29, from 10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. The cost is \$50 per day or \$160 for the month. 48 Commerce Lane #6, Freeport. Register: (850) 307-8907.

## STEM, Science & Innovation Camps

• **Ohana Day School (Miramar Beach & Inlet Beach):** Themed camps for ages 3–5 run weekly from June 10–July 19, featuring themes like “Under the Sea” and “At the Carnival.” (850) 608-2081. [ohanadayschool.org](http://ohanadayschool.org).

• **Barrett School RoboQuest STEM Workshops (Destin):** Targeting ages 10–15, this program offers robotics and coding workshops from June 10 to July 26. Weekly fee is \$350. Register: [barrettschool.com](http://barrettschool.com).



## Outdoors, Wildlife and Environment Camps

• **Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park (Okaloosa Island):** Sunset Camps for ages 6–14 include dolphin encounters, beach exploration and dinner. Select dates in June–August, 4–9 p.m., at \$89 for the first child, with discounts for additional siblings. [gulfarium.com](http://gulfarium.com)

• **E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center – Wednesday Summer Day Camps (Freeport):** Designed for children aged 5–12, these camps focus on nature exploration, animal encounters and environmental education. Sessions are held on Wednesdays from June 4 to July 30, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. \$55 per camper. Register: (850) 835-1824.

• **Camp Longleaf at E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center (Freeport):** Camp Longleaf provides week-long overnight camps for children aged 9–14. Campers engage in traditional outdoor activities combined with hands-on nature education, including animal encounters, nature hikes and team-building exercises. Cabins are air-conditioned. Dates TBD. [eowilson-center.org](http://eowilson-center.org).

• **Childcare Network WonderQuest Summer Camp:** Held at multiple lo-

cations, this themed adventure camp is open to children ages 5–12. Register: [childcarenetwork.com](http://childcarenetwork.com).

## Variety & Specialty Camps

• **Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast:** From June 2 to August 6, the program

serves children K–12 with educational, recreational and leadership-building activities. Register: [emeraldcoastbgc.org](http://emeraldcoastbgc.org).

• **HERricane Florida: Landfall – Walton County (Freeport)**

A free leadership camp for girls focusing on emergency

management and community leadership. Open to girls entering grades 8–12. The camp runs from June 11 to 14, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Walton County Emergency Operations Center. Register: [mywaltonfl.gov/1348/HERricane-Florida-Landfall-Walton-County](http://mywaltonfl.gov/1348/HERricane-Florida-Landfall-Walton-County).



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 Community

# Faith, Community and the Sea

## Destin's Week of Blessings Returns May 26–29

By LORI LEATH SMITH

We all have our reasons for calling this area home. Some come for the beauty, others for the lifestyle—but many of us feel we were drawn here for something greater. Yes, to the outside world the little fishing village next door is a beach destination. But long before the tourists and high-rises, it was a humble fishing town—a place where hard work met the sea, and faith anchored the community.

Known proudly as the “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village,” I believe Destin’s blessings go far beyond its natural beauty. Every year, we gather to bless our boats, our Harbor, our children, our leaders and our people. Could it be that this annual act of faith and unity brings favor to our city? That beneath the sparkle of our shoreline lies something even more powerful: a shared purpose and a spirit that keeps our little paradise thriving? Many area fisherman, locals and professionals alike

will tell you they believe their success rides on blessings.

Destin’s beloved Week of Blessings returns May 26–29, 2025. Organized by the Church of Destin, Inc., this cherished tradition brings together neighbors, businesses, fishermen and faith leaders for a heartfelt week of prayer, unity and gratitude that includes a series of faith-focused, family-oriented activities leading up to Ascension Day, 40 days after Easter, with the Blessing of the Fleet.

On Thursday, May 29, is the highlight of Destin’s Week of Blessings—the 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet, Destin’s second oldest, annual tradition that pays homage to our city’s deep-rooted maritime heritage and is held behind Brotula’s Seafood House & Steamer. (The oldest is our annual Fishing Rodeo first held in 1948.)

This time-honored tradition got started when more than a half century ago, Destin’s Immanuel Anglican Church began blessing a tiny fleet of perhaps

four to five boats. From this handful of small boats, the fleet has grown and prospered into the largest fishing fleet in North America, with more than 125 charter-fishing boats. Captains fly the small blue cross-and-dove Blessing of the Fleet flag to indicate they and their vessels have been blessed.

The festivities commence at 4 p.m. with a Captain’s Testimony and Worship Service under the tent, open to all. At 5:15 p.m., the Blessing of the Vessels begins, where clergy from various local churches will bless each commercial boat one-by-one that makes its living on the sea, praying for safety and prosperity in the upcoming season. In 2024, over 158 vessels participated in this important procession.

Following the blessings, attendees are invited to a community fish feast provided by Brotula’s, with donations appreciated. Free parking is available at Brotula’s and the City of Destin’s harbor district lots.

For those not in a vessel, the

event can be viewed from various vantage points around the harbor. Additionally, SkyBar at Edge Seafood is hosting a Blessing of the Fleet Watch Party starting at 4 p.m., featuring live music by The Six Piece Suits at 6 p.m. and a firework display at 9 p.m.

Captains wishing to have their vessels blessed can register by emailing [immanuel@iacdestin.org](mailto:immanuel@iacdestin.org) with their vessel’s name, captain’s name, business contact information and mailing address.

Though the Blessing of the Fleet is the focal component of the extended week of events, the Week of Blessings is now a 20-year tradition that brings together faith, family and the workplace alongside the fishing community.

For example, at the Blessing of the Marketplace, local pastors gather to pray over business owners, first responders and industry leaders seeking guidance and prosperity for their businesses and the community.

Organized by the Church of Destin, Inc., the Week of Blessings reflects our city’s deep-rooted connection to the sea and its enduring faith through all facets of life. Several pastors make up the ‘Church of Destin’ formed 20 years ago as a symbol of unity, crossing denominational barriers. As the Blessing of the Fleet grew, so did the hundreds of people, families and businesses in the area who also wanted to be blessed. And before you knew it, the vision expanded into a full “Week of Blessings.” That’s how the Blessing of the Marketplace was born, enabling the “blessing” to impact further to other locals, professionals and visitors, too.

“This week is a reminder of what makes Destin truly special,” said one of the event organizers. “We’re a fishing village, yes—but we’re also a faith-filled community that supports one another through every season.”

God continues to richly bless our “Little Fishing Village” and we shall continue to call upon Him to bless, preserve and protect those who make their living from our bountiful seas.

For more information, contact Immanuel Anglican Church [www.iacdestin.org](http://www.iacdestin.org), 850-837-



6324 or the Church of Destin at [info@iacdestin.org](mailto:info@iacdestin.org).

### Schedule of Events

#### **Blessing of the Marketplace – Monday, May 26, 11:30 a.m.**

The week begins with the Blessing of the Marketplace luncheon at Brotula’s Seafood House & Steamer. Local clergy will offer prayers over business owners, first responders, civic leaders, and workers across all industries. The luncheon is free and open to the public, with food provided and a spirit of encouragement offered to all who attend.

#### **Blessing of the Youth – Tuesday, May 27, 6 p.m.**

Held at Destin United Methodist Church, this service lifts up local students, educators and youth ministries. The evening includes worship music, student testimonies and words of encouragement for the next generation.

#### **Blessing of the Land – Wednesday, May 28, 6 p.m.**

This outdoor event, hosted at Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation’s Dugas Pavilion, honors farmers, builders and stewards of the land. Guests can enjoy live music and a message focused on restoration and growth.

#### **Blessing of the Fleet – Thursday, May 29, beginning at 4 p.m.**

Festivities begin at 4 p.m. with a Captain’s Testimony and Worship Service under the tent behind Brotula’s. At 5:15 p.m., boats of all sizes will line the harbor to receive blessings from local pastors as prayers are lifted for safety, abundance and calm seas in the season ahead. Immediately following the fleet blessing, all are invited to a community fish fry—an evening of fellowship, food, and music on the waterfront. Donations are welcome.



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 Community

# Cheers to 20 Years: Destin Charity Wine Auction Raises \$3.55M for Children in Need

The 20th Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family, raised a record-breaking \$3.55 million—a \$350,000 increase over last year—to support 17 children's charities across Northwest Florida. Held April 25–26, the sold-out event welcomed more than 600 guests to celebrate two decades of giving back through exceptional wine, food and generosity.

“This year's Destin Charity Wine Auction was unforgettable. Together, we raised \$3.55 million to change lives—a milestone made even more meaningful as we celebrated 20 years of impact and honored the founders who made it all possible,” DCWAF President Karah Fridley-Young said. “I am overwhelmed with gratitude and pride for this community, and for the visionaries whose hearts started it all.”

The weekend kicked off with 12 exclusive patron dinners from Destin to Rosemary Beach, raising \$978,600 in a single evening.

Each dinner featured expertly paired wines with gourmet menus from acclaimed chefs.

Saturday's live auction was equally impressive. The Magnum Force lot raised \$60,500 alone, while a 7-night trip to Barbados sold for \$120,000. Additional standout lots included:

- A trip to the South of France – \$105,000
- A custom Paul Sutton Bourbon barrel + distillery experience – \$100,000 (sold twice)
- Champagne and Alsace tour – \$105,000 (sold three times)
- Record-breaking \$260,000 Paddle Raise

Local favorite restaurants added to the celebration of flavor with exquisite tastings perfectly matched to the vintners' selections. World-class wines were thoughtfully paired with gourmet tastings by top regional chefs:

- Bijoux Restaurant & Spirits Wine: Red Blend
- Pairing: Bold, savory bites designed to enhance the richness of the blend



“We've participated for 20 years—this pairing is a guest favorite.”

- Marrow Private Chefs Wine: Sauvignon Blanc

Pairing: Light, elegant dishes to complement the wine's crisp acidity

- Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood

Wine: Cabernet Sauvignon

Pairing: Aged steak cuts and hearty flavors

- O-Ku

Wine: High-acid whites & sake

Pairing: Sushi and Asian fusion with fresh, bright notes

- Wild Olives

Wine: Chardonnay

Pairing: Creamy cheeses, seafood and savory pastries

- Browne Trading Co.

Wine: Assorted varietals

Pairing: Premium smoked seafood and caviar

- Wine Chips

Wine: Versatile reds and whites

Pairing: Gourmet snack chips crafted to balance tannins and sweetness

These carefully crafted pairings elevated the auction's culinary experience and honored the vintners who make DCWAF's mission possible.

Featured Chefs and Restaurants included Chef Nikhil Abudala of Roux 30a, Chef Matthew Basford of Canoe, Chef Ignacio Bernal of Vin'tij Food + Wine, Chef Fleetwood Covington, III of Seagar's Prime Steaks and Seafood, Tim Creehan of Cuvee 30A, Chef Mark

Eichin of Restaurant Paradis, Chef Will Farrington of M&P Farrington Foods, Chef Jason Goodenough of The New Culinarian, Chef Emeril Lagasse of Emeril's, Chef Francisco Lopez, Jr. of Ambrosia 30A Prime Seafood and Steaks, Chef Jack McGuckin of Bijoux Restaurant and Spirits, Chef Tom Stafford of Roy Estate, and Chef Dan Vargo of Fine Coastal Cuisine.

In total, 48 Live Lots, 33 Cellar Lots, 18 Super Silent Lots, and 143 Silent Lots were auctioned, featuring rare wines, luxury travel and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Proceeds from the 2025 Destin Charity Wine Auction benefit 17 local nonprofits serving children in Northwest Florida:

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children's Home Society of Florida, Children in Crisis, Inc., Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison McCraney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, Mental Health Association of Okaloosa & Walton Counties, Opportunity, Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Shelter House Domestic Violence Center, The Arc of the Emerald Coast, Westonwood Ranch and Youth Village.

Together, these organizations serve thousands of children in our area providing hope, healing and opportunity—made possible by DCWAF supporters. Funds will be distributed in August to 17 local nonprofit partners during a private check presentation at the Hilton Sandestin.

DCWAF's Impact? Since its founding in 2005, DCWAF has donated more than \$35 million, impacting over 100,000 children affected by health challenges, abuse, poverty, and more.

Save the date: The 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction is scheduled for April 24–25, 2026. Learn more at DCWAF.org or follow @DCWAF on Facebook.



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# New FM Station



By Rick Moore

We are excited to share some wonderful news with you. A new radio station, WODR, FM 90.3, Destiny Radio, has just been launched in our area. This new station reaches from Panama City Beach to Saint George Island. With special programming tailored specifically for this region, the Forgotten Coast is forgotten no more! Our mission statement is “Encouraging Connection With God And Our Community,” and we are indeed proud to be a part of this great community.

The core message of Destiny Radio is: “There is great potential locked up in each and every one of us; a destiny in heaven and a destiny on earth.” These are the words of our founder, Steve Vaggalis. He was part of the team that launched what is now Destiny Radio decades ago. Our agenda is in no way a secret agenda. Our values are crystal clear. We desire to help transform communities by exercising goodness, generosity, and love.

Destiny Radio is family focused. There are few things these days that families can enjoy together. Even going to church, you will find the family splits up as soon as they arrive. Children go to children’s church, teenagers go to youth groups, adults go to their classes, and senior citizens hang out with each other. However, when everyone is in the car driving down the street,

they can all enjoy the upbeat, positive music on Destiny Radio. It truly bridges generations.

90.3 FM is commercial free. No one ever asks for money over the air. We proudly play uplifting music twenty-four hours a day. Though we do not air sermons, some airtime is dedicated to short inspirational nuggets. A great example of this would be the segments we call Mile Markers. These are short messages that pack a punch. They consist of multiple guest speakers, multiple styles, multiple topics and multiple lengths ranging from thirty seconds to two minutes. Topics and locations will change, but each message will help direct you to your destination.

Destiny Radio is made up of several media outlets: 90.3 FM, 91.1 FM in Fort Walton Beach, a website at [DestinyRadio.live](http://DestinyRadio.live),



and Destiny Visual Radio (DVR) which is our multi-platform app. The Destiny Visual Radio app is available from the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, Apple TV, Roku TV and Fire TV. This new app features your favorite Christian music videos. It allows pausing and rewinding in ways FM Radio cannot. The app also lists the name of the song playing, the name of the artist, and shows the album cover. The app features several one-minute inspirational messages, quizzes, a blog, and upcoming events highlighting concerts that are coming to our area. To download the app visit: <https://subsplash.com/destinyworshipcenter-fl/app>

A recent survey showed a vast majority of those who listen to music on FM Radio do not want AI technology deciding the songs they hear. They want more than just the top twenty songs from a countdown generated by a computer. They prefer a curated list from someone they trust. We feel

like we’re someone the region can trust and we take our song selection seriously. One of our goals is for FM 90.3 to become a primary source in the region for discovering new music and new artists. Listeners can request certain songs to be played on air by emailing [contact@destinyradio](mailto:contact@destinyradio).

live or using the “Call In” feature on our app.

Though there are many ways we can listen to our favorite music, FM radio remains a staple for listening in vehicles. It’s a medium people look to. People find a sense of comfort from their local radio station because they know

they have the heartbeat of their community. We want FM 90.3 to have the heartbeat of this community, to inform the community, to encourage the community, and to inspire the community.

*Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship Center*

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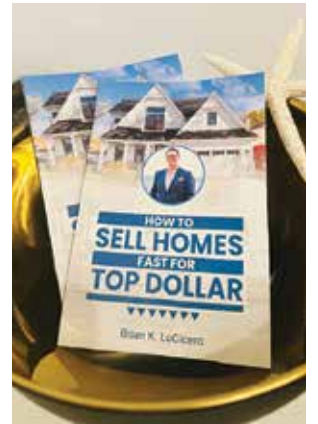


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# Trends & Treasures!



## Celebrate Spring with Sparkle at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

At Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, the season's colors inspire dazzling designs in diamonds, gemstones and precious metals. Owner Ashleigh Woolly and her team are ready to craft your next showstopper. Let's design something for you for Mother's Day, Memorial Day or summer! With so much colorful variety, your only challenge is choosing. Whether you're shopping for a special gift to honor your Mom for Mother's Day, a graduate gift, an engagement ring or a patriotic piece, Beyond Measure is here for you.

Step into the City Market Bayside showroom and explore stunning rings, bracelets, necklaces, and earrings—or sit down for a one-on-one custom design experience. From classic to bold, Ashleigh's passion for jewelry shines, especially when helping couples choose the perfect engagement ring or wedding band. "Helping people celebrate life's most meaningful moments is what we love most," says Ashleigh. With hundreds of custom creations and an eye for exceptional quality, Beyond Measure makes every piece personal and unforgettable.

Visit [BeyondMeasureJewelers.com](http://BeyondMeasureJewelers.com) or stop by the shop to begin your custom journey.

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## Mothers' Day May Madness CRYO850 Performance and Recovery

It's our favorite time of year at CRYO850 when we get to honor the women in our lives! Most moms spend their days focused on everyone except themselves. What better way to celebrate her than spoiling her

with a gift of self care and time with loved ones! In appreciation for all moms (and a push to kids and spouses), we're offering a DAY PASS FOR TWO for only \$125 (\$175 value). Spend an afternoon with mom experiencing all the latest technology in health and wellness. Detox in the Infrared Sauna. Refresh and rejuvenate your body and your mind in the Emerald Coast Igloo and Red Light Therapy Room. Shake it out with Vibration and move your lymphatic system and increase circulation in our Compression Lounge. Want to go next level with mom? Give her a COLLAGEN ENHANCEMENT TREATMENT \$125 (\$145 Value). Want to go all out? Give her a full body MOMMY MAKE-OVER with Radio Frequency Skin Tightening for only \$399.

Give mom the gift of youth and self-care! CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center accepts Health Saving Accounts and Flexible Spending Accounts, which provide tax free dollars for spending on your health.

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## Polished, Classy, Edgy, Inviting—For You or Mom! Pure & Couture Salon

At Pure & Couture Salon, beauty isn't just a service—it's a passion woven into every appointment. "It's a beautiful thing when a career and passion come together," says owner Adrienne Brackett. "For me, it's not just about making clients look and feel amazing—it's about sharing knowledge, uplifting our team, and creating real connection with our community." From the moment you walk in, you'll notice something different. "Our guests often say the

atmosphere just feels special," Adrienne adds. "That's because we genuinely love our stylists, therapists, and guests like family. Your relationship with us means everything." Whether you're shopping for salon products or booking a service, the Pure & Couture experience is centered around you—your look, your lifestyle and your confidence. Expert stylists carefully consider your skin tone, face shape, personality and budget, crafting styles that take you from "fine" to fabulous. Planning a wedding or special event? The salon offers on-location bridal and event styling to make your big day even more beautiful. This season, treat yourself—or Mom—to the gift of timeless beauty. Let the Pure & Couture team take you into summer with pure confidence, expert care and effortless style. Be beautifully you. Be "Purely" beautiful.

Second location: Pure Collective Salon, 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

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[pureandcouture.com](http://pureandcouture.com)

## Flavors That Wow—From Mom's Day to "Just Because"

### Smallcakes Destin: A Cupcakery

From custom cakes to gourmet cupcakes, Smallcakes at City Market in Destin is your go-to for sweet celebrations this Mother's Day, Memorial Day—and every day! Whether you're planning a wedding, surprising Mom or just craving something delicious, Smallcakes serves up handcrafted treats baked fresh daily with flavor, flair, and fun. Choose from 13 signature cupcakes, 4 rotating specialties, 12 ice cream flavors, plus gourmet popcorn, cookie cakes, brownies, jumbo cookies and cupcakes-in-a-jar. Looking

for a lighter option? Ask about gluten-free treats. Even furry friends get in on the fun with adorable pupcakes.

Celebrate in style with custom edible images or logos on cupcakes, cakes and minis—perfect for weddings, birthdays, office events or just because. Can't choose? Grab a 12-pack of assorted minis to sample the season's best. New cupcake and frosting flavors are dropping in May—colorful, creative and made to impress—with flavor and fun baked in.

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## Cheers to Fun, Unique Gifts! Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Looking for a unique gift for Mom, Grandma, Graduate or your BFF? Frill Seekers Gifts in City Market Bayside has you covered with meaningful treasures and stylish surprises.

Start with a Champagne Nite Shirt—super soft 100% cotton sateen with pink trim and French cuffs. Add her monogram for a chic, personalized touch. Or gift a custom porcelain ring box—monogrammed on the lid with a sweet note tucked inside. Sentimental and stylish!

For the note-writing mom, engraved stationery, notecards or calling cards make thoughtful keepsakes. And no one can resist the cult-favorite Volcano candle by Capri Blue—citrusy, sweet, and absolutely addicting. Don't forget graduation invitations and thank you notes, customized with your personality and style.

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## Unlock the Secrets to Selling Your Home for Top Dollar!

### Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Thinking of selling your home? Discover the insider strategies used by top sellers with the new book from luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero. With years of experience and thousands of successful sales, Brian reveals the proven methods that can help you get maximum value in minimum time—in any market.

Inside his book, you'll find battle-tested techniques once reserved for high-end sellers, now available to you. Whether you're selling a cozy cottage or a luxury estate, these insights will give you the edge you need. "In this guide, I share what works—practical, powerful strategies for sellers who want results," says Brian.

Clients agree. "Brian helped us navigate 30A's competitive market with ease. Thanks to his strategies, we sold our Destin home quickly and bought a beachfront home on 30A—below asking price!" shares happy client A. Albright.

Destin Life readers can claim a FREE copy of Brian's book for a limited time by emailing [Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com](mailto:Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com) or calling (850) 739-3800.

Your successful sale starts here!



# How 850 Midlife Health & Wellness is Redefining Aging in the Local Community

Did you know the average life expectancy in the U.S. is 78.6 years? Here in sunny Florida, we edge just a little higher at 79.6 years. Not bad—but what good is living longer if we aren't feeling our best along the way?

Here's the truth: no one plans to develop a chronic illness, but how many of us are actively thinking about aging well? Some, sure. But probably not enough. At 850 Midlife Health & Wellness, the focus is clear: prevention, independence, and helping people in midlife stay well, feel strong, and thrive through the years.

### Healthcare that is Individualized

850 Midlife was founded by local nurse practitioner Margaret Turk Russell, APRN, AGACNP-BC, who brings not just years of experience in acute and chronic care, but also a deep personal connection to the local community, with her upbringing along the Emerald Coast. As both a provider and a patient, Margaret knows firsthand how overwhelming the healthcare system can be, and how easy it is for prevention to take a backseat in the rush of everyday life.

That's why she created a practice centered around what really matters: personal connection, thoughtful care, and helping people stay healthy before issues become chronic. Perhaps you are already experiencing some chronic issues. Margaret will assist in the management and modification of risk to prevent exacerbation. Margaret is truly invested in this communi-

ty—and in your health and well-being.

### A Different Kind of Healthcare Experience

At 850 Midlife, bigger isn't better. It's the details that count—time spent listening, educating, and creating a personalized care plan that works for your lifestyle and your goals.

This isn't rushed, insurance-driven care. You'll have a full hour for your first visit, so Margaret can understand your concerns, your health history, and where you want to go from here.

### What Does 850 Midlife Offer?

A hybrid concierge-style, Direct Primary Care (DPC) model designed specifically for adults 18+, including:

- Primary & preventive care
- Sick visits & telehealth
- Weight loss support with GLP-1 medications (like semaglutide)
- Bioidentical hormone therapy for women (HRT) and men (TRT)
- Cash-pay lab work with 24-48 hour results (with itemized receipts if requested for self-submitting insurance reimbursement)
- Local referrals when needed

### Why Midlife Is the Perfect Time to Invest in Your Health

Noticing shifts in energy, mood,

weight, or just a nagging "something's off"? Margaret is here to help you decode the questions we all have but don't always get answers to:

- Could it be my thyroid or cortisol?
- Am I dealing with insulin resistance—is this diabetes?
- Is this perimenopause—or menopause?
- Are GLP-1 medications right for me? Is there another option?
- Is low testosterone affecting my energy and drive?
- How much protein do I really need?
- Am I at risk for heart disease?



Margaret Turk Russell, APRN, AGACNP-BC  
Owner & Practitioner of 850 Midlife Health & Wellness

- What can I do now to avoid chronic illness later?
- Am I hydrating appropriately?

The truth is, midlife is the time to fine-tune—before little problems become big ones. Prevention now pays off in strength, vitality, and independence later.

### Bioidentical Hormones: Tailored to the Individual

Interested in hormone therapy but unsure where to start? Unlike synthetic birth control hormones, bioidentical HRT/TRT uses natural compounds and comes in many forms—creams, patches, sprays, injections, even pellets (850 Midlife is not inserting pellets at this time).

Margaret's approach is step-by-step and individualized—starting conservatively, monitoring closely, and adjusting when needed.

### You Deserve More Than 10 Minutes and a Prescription

In Walton County, 59% of the population is aged 18–64, and this is the group 850 Midlife is made for. If you're ready to take charge of your health and feel empowered in your body again, Margaret and 850 Midlife are here to support you.

### Book Today & Start Feeling Like You Again

Ready for care that sees the full picture—and actually takes the time to understand yours? 850 Midlife is by appointment only, offering flexible later afternoon and evening appointments, plus select Saturday availability—because your health shouldn't have to compete with your calendar: your work schedule, your children's team practice, date night. You can book directly online anytime at: [www.850MidlifeJane-app.com](http://www.850MidlifeJane-app.com)

Because midlife isn't a crisis—it's a comeback! And Margaret Turk Russell APRN, is here to help you live it well. Find Margaret on Instagram @850midlife. 850 Midlife Health & Wellness is located at 3754 Hwy 30a, Unit A in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. Margaret shares a space with local nurse practitioner Katherine Porter APRN, ACNP-BC who is the owner/operator of Hydrate 30A & Intrepid Health. Katie offers IV therapy, Botox, Medical/Wellness, Sick care and can be reached at [www.Hydrate30A.com](http://www.Hydrate30A.com).

Mention this article and receive a complimentary B12 injection.

*Margaret Turk Russell, APRN, AGACNP-BC Owner & Practitioner of 850 Midlife Health & Wellness*



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# Important Conversations



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

You know that feeling when it’s time to have a conversation about something important but you aren’t sure how to approach it? You feel the urgency to speak but your hands get sweaty, your chest gets tight, and you tell yourself it’s not really a big enough issue to discuss resulting

in avoidance. Or, you feel anger bubbling up and you speak up with aggression, anger and intensity that turn the conversation in an unintended direction. Avoiding important conversations may keep the peace in the short term, however, in the long-term avoidance creates unresolved tension, lack of change, feeling unseen, resentment and bitterness. Approaching important conversations with anger and aggression most often results in defensiveness, not being heard, escalation, alienation and seeing the other person as a villain. What if there was another way to talk about things that are important to you? What if there was a way to be calm, clear, direct, and curious, while also being heard?

- 7 Healthy Ways to Have Important Conversations**
1. Notice your emotional activation. When are you feeling upset, bothered or emotionally reactive? Notice big feelings, body tension, irritability, headaches, stomachaches, exhaustion, anxiety, depression.
  2. Regulate yourself. Use intentional calming skills to move your brain from emergency, overwhelmed mode to rational mode. Breathe slowly for 2 minutes, take a brief walk, journal, yell into your pillow, punch a punching bag, etc. Use coping skills that don’t hurt yourself, others, or property.
  3. Engage internal sorting. Notice if past emotion about previous situations/relationships is intermingled with the present. Determine the real issue in the present moment separate from other emotional situations.
  4. Own your part. Remember that while you may feel upset with someone, you are not a victim. You have power and self-control. You have a voice and it is healthy to use it. Notice when you are being defensive or making up negative stories in your head (we all make up negative stories that aren’t accurate). Determine and clarify what negative contribution you might be making to the situation at hand. Determine how you can communicate your willingness



- to take responsibility for your part.
5. Reach for vulnerability instead of blame and finger pointing. Notice if you are feeling hurt, misunderstood, invalidated, rejected, afraid, unsupported, insecure, unappreciated, or unseen. Look underneath anger as vulnerable feelings often hide beneath.
  6. Outline your approach to the conversation. Start by asking the other person if they would be willing to take a few undistracted minutes to talk about something important to

you. Then use “I” statements and feeling words to describe what is feeling difficult for you. Follow up by communicating a clear alternative that would feel better to you. “I feel hurt and dismissed when I tell you I am overwhelmed in parenting and you respond by telling me I just need to get more organized. What I’m really needing in those moments is some validation that parenting can be hard. I’m also needing to know you understand my feelings and can be curious about support I might be needing.”

7. Practice your outline, then gather your courage or calm and initiate the conversation.

Remember to regulate yourself before and during the conversation with calm breathing. Your approach will influence the tone of the discussion. Also, try to listen to the other person with curiosity rather than defensiveness when they respond to your thoughts. The other person may or may not respond the way you are hoping. However, it feels empowering to know you handled your side of the conversation well. Practice is needed much more than perfection when it comes to learning new communication skills. Keep working at it consistently and it will become more natural. Connect with us along your journey for counseling at coaching at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com).





**Stephenie Craig, LCSW**  
Therapist  
918-221-9987 | [stepheniecraig@journeybravely.com](mailto:stepheniecraig@journeybravely.com)

**Todd Craig**  
Life & Leadership Coach  
918-740-1232 | [todd@journeybravely.com](mailto:todd@journeybravely.com)

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# Beyond Routine: Innovative Testing for Proactive Health



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

Healthcare should be proactive, not just reactive. You shouldn't have to wait until something is "wrong" to start paying attention to your body. This is the foundation of our integrative approach—focusing on prevention, understanding the root cause of symptoms and delivering care that's personalized to you.

Although often a great first step, conventional lab work often doesn't tell the full story. Maybe you've been told your results are "normal," but you still don't feel like yourself. Fatigue, brain fog, bloating, mood swings or trouble sleeping—these aren't just in your head. They're signals from

your body that deserve to be explored, not dismissed.

That's why we offer a deeper level of testing at the Tortoise Clinic. Our specialty diagnostics are designed to find answers, target care more effectively, and give you the insights you need to feel empowered on your wellness journey.

**Precision Testing for Personalized Care**

Specialty testing goes beyond the basics. It helps us detect hidden imbalances, identify early warning signs, and tailor a treatment plan specifically for you. This isn't about chasing symptoms—it's about uncovering what's really going on beneath the surface so we can support your health in a meaningful, lasting way.

Here are a few of the impactful tests we use to support your whole-body wellness:

• **Galleri® Multi-Cancer Early Detection Test**

This groundbreaking blood test screens for over 50 types of aggressive cancer—many of which don't have routine screen-

ing options. It detects tiny fragments of tumor DNA in your blood before symptoms ever appear. It's a great option for those with a family history of cancer, unexplained symptoms, or anyone who wants to take a proactive approach.

• **Genova GI Effects® Comprehensive Stool Analysis**

Your gut tells a bigger story than you might think. This test looks at digestion, inflammation, your microbiome (the bacteria living in your gut), and even signs of infection. Because your gut health is connected to your immune system, mood, energy levels, and more, this test can be a game-changer if you're struggling with things like bloating, fatigue, skin issues, or autoimmune concerns.

• **Hormone Testing (Se-**



**rum & DUTCH)**

We offer both traditional blood work and the more advanced DUTCH test, to give us a fuller picture of your hormone patterns. DUTCH helps us see how your body makes, uses, and clears hormones like cortisol, estrogen, and testosterone. It's especially useful for symptoms

like low energy, irregular cycles, sleep issues, and mood swings.

• **Food Sensitivity Testing**

Unlike allergy tests, which check for immediate reactions, this test looks at delayed immune responses that can cause

*Continued on page 15*



## WELLNESS IS A MARATHON, not a sprint.

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# Book Review: Max Strom’s A Life Worth Breathing

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL McMANUS, LCSW

Max Strom’s “A Life Worth Breathing” is an inspiring and thought-provoking exploration of personal transformation through mindfulness and conscious living. Drawing on his extensive background as a yoga teacher and speaker, Strom presents a comprehensive guide

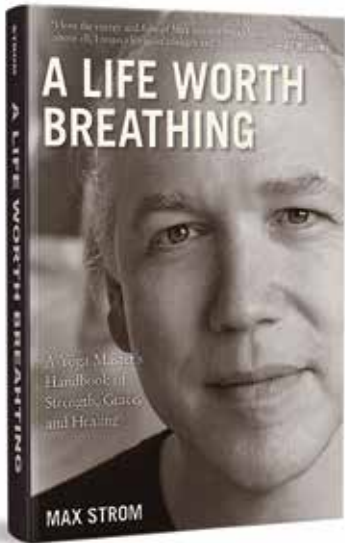
that encourages readers to reflect on their lives and embrace their true selves.

The central theme of the book revolves around the significance of breath—not merely as a biological function but as a powerful tool for emotional and spiritual well-being. Strom eloquently explains how conscious breathing can foster

self-awareness, reduce anxiety, and facilitate personal growth. He provides practical exercises and insights that empower readers to harness the power of their breath to navigate challenges and cultivate a more fulfilling life.


Throughout the book, Strom shares personal anecdotes and relatable stories that illustrate his points, making the concepts accessible to a wide audience. I love his warm and engaging writing style, which invites readers to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery, urging them to confront fears, embrace vulnerability, and seek deeper connections with others. This emphasis on community and relationships adds a rich layer to his message, underscoring the idea that personal growth is often intertwined with our connections to those around us.

In summary, “A Life Worth Breathing” is a beautifully crafted book that offers valuable insights for anyone seeking to lead a more intentional and meaningful life. Max Strom’s blend of practical wisdom and philo-



10 years, and I finally started going about a year ago. I love going and especially enjoy the positive physical, emotional and community benefits – it’s also a wonderful time to pray silently.

*Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice for over 30 years. He and his wife Angela live in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. He can be reached for an appointment by text or phone at (850) 837-0123 or visit his website: Psychotherapy30A.com.*



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## Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Family Birth Place Earns National Recognition

For the fifth year in a row, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast has earned the honor of being on Newsweek’s list of America’s Best Maternity Care Hospitals at the highest five ribbon level.

“The doctors, nurses, and associates that work in the Family Birth Place consider their jobs as a calling to serve our community,” said Trey Abshier, CEO and President of Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. “We thank them for their commitment to quality, personalized care that earns these awards.”

The Best Maternity Care distinction recognizes facilities that have provided exceptional care to mothers, newborns, and their families based on three data sources. These include nationwide online surveys of hospital managers and maternity healthcare professionals, medical key performance indicators relevant to maternity care and patient satisfaction data.

The hospital also earned the distinction of being a U.S. News & World Report 2025 High Performing hospital for Maternity Care. This is the highest recognition a

hospital can earn in the Best Hospitals for Maternity Care annual ratings. Additionally, U.S. News recognized Sacred Heart Emerald Coast as a Maternity Care Access Hospital, for its essential role in serving underserved communities at risk of becoming maternity care deserts. Only 118 hospitals – representing just 14% of all evaluated hospitals – earned this distinction for their critical contributions to maternity care access.

“One of the cornerstones of our mission is the care of moms and babies,” said Erica Bottom, MSN, RN-C, OB, Family Birth Place Manager for Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. “Our Family Birth Place team actively participates in initiatives to improve maternal health outcomes.”

Sacred Heart Emerald Coast’s Family Birth Place recently became a Maternal Levels of Care verified hospital by The Joint Commission through its collaboration with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and support from the Florida Perinatal Quality Collaborative. The hospi-

tal is Baby-Friendly designated for its commitment to the highest level of breastfeeding support and education. It is the only hospital in the area to hold this accreditation.

One year ago, Sacred Heart’s facilities in Pensacola and Miramar Beach began participating in the state’s first postpartum wristband initiative. The new program involves giving a silver rubber wristband to mothers to voluntarily wear for up to a year postpartum. This has helped prioritize them as patients and spotlight their medical history when they seek care through EMS, ERs or other medical sites.

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Family Birth Place is the home to the only neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) serving families from Walton and Okaloosa counties close to home. The NICU celebrated five years of serving the community last week with more than 1,000 families served. Neonatal specialists are available 24/7 for neonates needing routine and specialty care.



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# Spring Cleaning and Medicare



By CHRISTIAN REGALADO

So you're turning 65 this year. You've been anticipating life transitions that start happening around this time, and you know you'll be eligible for Medicare Parts A and B soon. Like many of the 10,000 Baby Boomers who turn 65 each day,

you're wondering, "What do I do next?"

One thing you want to make sure to do is enroll in Medicare Parts A and B. If you're already receiving Social Security benefits, you will automatically get your Medicare card about 3 months before your birth month. But if you're like most folks and don't plan to collect social security benefits until a later date, you have to request your card from [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov) or in person and, ideally, you'll apply about 3 months before you turn 65. For many, this process is easy but for some, it's quite challenging.

If you don't already have an online Social Security account set up, you'll need to get that done at [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov) and go through their multi-step authentication process. I have noticed recently when helping clients request their card for Medicare Parts A & B that the site seems easier to

use. Just be prepared to receive many texts verifying your identity. Social Security guards your information carefully and wants to make sure they are dealing with the right person.

Once you get into your SS account, there are two options, and this is where things can start to get complicated. The first option simply says, "Sign up for Medicare." There is a little blue box with an (APPLY ONLINE) option. Most people should select this and start their application. The second option says, "Sign up for Part B Only," and that blue box will say, "Get Started." This is for folks who already have Part A or who delayed enrolling in Medicare because they stayed on their employer group plan. After this selection, verify your identity and complete your application. If you need assistance, give me a call. I would be glad to help you.

Keep in mind that once you complete your application, it will take 2-4 weeks before you receive your Medicare card. When you receive a letter showing that your application is being processed, it means you may already be in the system and your Medicare number is accessible.

Once you get your card and even before, you will want to know about the many options you have so you can consider which will be best for you. Call me, I can help.

I am available any day that's best for you to schedule a consultation in person at my office, your home or office, or via Zoom to get many of your Medicare

questions answered in person.

Don't be fooled by advertising that may enroll you in the wrong plan.

Folks living in the Panhandle area actually have many excellent Medicare plans to choose from. Which is best will depend on your personal situation. Let me help you select the one that is right for you. Should you have any questions or need help, please contact me. My services are no cost to you and I am always happy to help a neighbor. Reach out anytime! Email [Christian@evergreenhealthins.com](mailto:Christian@evergreenhealthins.com) or call (850) 687-7606.

## BEYOND

*continued from page 13*

chronic inflammation. That includes symptoms like brain fog, joint pain, headaches, or breakouts—often tied to foods you'd never suspect. Knowing your sensitivities helps us craft a dietary strategy that truly supports your body.

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### • Functional Lab Panels

We also look at standard labs—like vitamins, minerals, cholesterol and inflammatory markers—through a functional lens. That means we're not just checking if you're in a "normal" range; we're asking, is this optimal for you? These panels help us assess your metabolic health, nutrient levels, and inflammation in more meaningful ways.

collecting more data—it's about getting the right insights. By understanding your body's unique rhythms and needs, we can create a plan that's truly tailored to you. Whether you're managing symptoms or staying ahead of potential issues, we're here to guide you with clarity and care.

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not rushed. Our approach helps you slow down, look deeper and make informed decisions without pressure or guesswork.

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# Relax: Bringing Health and Wellness to the Community with Viking Spas

Did you know that when it comes to relaxation, recovery, and overall well-being, few things compare to the soothing experience of a high-quality hot tub! Rob Abel is your dedicated local hot tub dealer for Viking Spas and has witnessed the health benefits of high quality relaxation firsthand. With a passion for fitness and health, Rob isn't just selling hot tubs—he's promoting a lifestyle of wellness that benefits both the body and mind.



### The Health Benefits of Hot Tubs

As someone who values fitness, Rob understands how crucial recovery is after workouts. Hot tubs offer a natural way to relax muscles, reduce stress, and improve circulation. Whether you're an athlete looking for muscle recovery or someone who simply wants to unwind after a long day, soaking in a hot tub can provide numerous benefits, including:

- **Muscle Relaxation & Pain Relief** –Viking hot tubs also offer significant advantages

for muscle recovery and pain management. The strategically placed jets target key muscle groups, enhancing circulation and helping flush out lactic acid buildup. This makes the tubs especially beneficial for athletes or individuals with chronic pain conditions like arthritis or fibromyalgia. The heat soothes aches, while the massaging action stimulates blood flow, promoting faster healing.

- **Improved Circulation** –The heat from a hot tub promotes better blood flow, which can help with muscle recovery



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ery and overall cardiovascular health. Soaking in hot water can mimic the effects of light exercise by increasing heart rate and lowering blood pressure. Regular use may contribute to better heart health over time.

- **Stress Reduction** – One of the primary health benefits of Viking Series hot tubs is stress relief. The combination of warm water and hydrotherapy jets helps relax tense muscles, lowers cortisol levels and reduces anxiety. The buoyancy of the water supports the body, easing pressure on joints and allowing the mind to unwind. This stress reduction can lead to improved sleep quality and overall mental health.

- **Better Sleep** – A nighttime soak can improve sleep quality by relaxing the body and mind before bed.

the hot tub is designed to last for years to come.


### More Than Just a Hot Tub Dealer

Viking Series hot tubs offer a blend of luxury, durability, and wellness, making them a popular choice for those seeking both relaxation and health benefits. These hot tubs are designed with therapeutic features that promote physical and mental well-being, turning a simple soak into a holistic health experience. And for Rob, selling hot tubs isn't just about making a sale—it's about helping improve the health and quality of life of every customer!. Whether you're looking for relief from sore muscles, a way to enhance your fitness routine, or simply a place to relax with family and friends, Rob is here to help you find the perfect hot tub to fit your needs.

If you're interested in experiencing the therapeutic benefits of a Viking Spa, reach out to Rob today. Your journey to relaxation and wellness starts here! For more information, visit [www.30ahottubs.com](http://www.30ahottubs.com), email [Rob@30ahottubs.com](mailto:Rob@30ahottubs.com) or call (850) 830-0003

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# Sean of the South: Memorial Day Weekend



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Memorial Day is the unofficial start to summer, and summer was in full bloom in America. The nation experienced mostly beautiful weather.

The Midwest had highs in the 80s, The Southeast experienced temps even higher. Temperatures in the Florida panhandle exceeded approximately 173 degrees.

But it's important to remember that it wasn't a great Memorial Day weekend for everyone.

Yesterday in Saint Louis, for example, a man named Phillip was playing baseball with his kids while his wife, Lindsey, was making potato salad inside. The day was going swimmingly.

"Guys in my family have always played baseball on Memorial Day weekend," Philip wrote to me this morning in an email. "It's a longstanding tradition for us."

Phillip was pitching. His 11-year-old son, Austin, was at the plate. Phillip delivered an easy pitch underhand. His son swung the bat like the baseball had personally insulted his mother. The bat connected.

PING!

The good news is that Phillip's son hit a line drive. The bad news is: it was a line drive which struck a part of Phillip's anatomy most often associated with procreation.

The ball nailed Phillip. He howled in pain. He went down under the power. His kids all gathered around him and asked if he was okay. All Phillip could utter was, "Go get your mom, please."

It bears mentioning, Phillip's son was using an aluminum bat not a wooden bat. Which might not sound like an important detail to this story except that the exit velocity of a ball hit by an aluminum bat is a LOT higher than that of one hit by a wooden bat.

A ball hit by a wooden bat has an average velocity of 60 to 80 mph. Whereas a ball hit by an aluminum bat is capable of breaking the sonic barrier.

Phillip's wife approached her husband and asked her children what had happened.

Her 4-year-old son remarked, "Austin hit daddy in the Twinkie."

His wife had to excuse herself for a moment. When she returned, her face was red and she looked like she'd been laughing.

"I wasn't laughing," said Phillip's wife. "It's allergies."

Then, his wife single-handedly loaded Phillip into their SUV. She placed him in the cargo hold because Phillip was incapable of sitting. Phillip laid on on his side throughout the long ride to the hospital and tried to remind himself to breathe.

Occasionally, he heard a cackling sound coming from the front seat, but his wife swears that her allergies get so bad this time of year.

"My wife doesn't even have allergies," Phillip writes.

At the hospital, a doctor checked him out. The nurse removed Phillip's trousers and the medical professionals inspected the bruising. The doctor asked how it happened.

Phillip's 4-year-old spoke



again. "My brother hit my daddy in the Twinkie."

The doctor nodded, covered his mouth, then excused himself briefly. The medical man left the exam room and Phillip swears he heard the sound of the doctor's allergies acting up.

When the doctor returned, he was out of breath and he had four other male medical colleagues with him who were available to offer their expertise. Also, the janitor said he wanted to see, too.

One of the veteran ER doctors, male, inspected the bruising and wore a grave face. Whereupon he looked Phillip square in the eye and said, "Son, I'm afraid we're going to have to remove it."

At which point, all medi-

cal staffers excused themselves again and Phillip heard more allergies in the hallway.

"What kind of world is this we live in," Phillip wrote to me, "when doctors and nurses can't even act professionally?"

Thankfully, as it turns out, Phillip will make a full recovery. The main advice the doctor gave Phillip was to use frozen

vegetables—either corn or peas work best—to de-inflate the affected netherregions. Once the bruising goes away, the doctor recommends that Phillip retire his jersey and quit baseball altogether.

Phillip spent most of today in the supine position, lying on his sofa. All day, Philip's friends have been stopping by to wish him well.

"They've been bringing me a lot of Hostess products," said Phillip.

He hopes that by sharing his story he can warn fathers out there to take the proper protective measures when playing backyard sports.

"I just don't wanna see this happen to someone else," he added. "I think it's time we talked openly about this painfully sensitive subject."

Now if you'll excuse me, my allergies are acting up.

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# A Pastor's Ponderings: A Time for Everything



BY REVEREND PETE HYDE

*"There is time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

Even though the hospital room is dark, it is filled with excitement, anticipation, anxiety, discomfort, joy, worry, and happiness. Though the air conditioning has made the room cool, it is filled with warmth. The new mom and dad dote over the newborn child. Dad does his best to

take care of his wife and the new baby. His face is lined with worry and the bags under his eyes reveal his lack of sleep. Emotions are on edge. Grandma holds the child as she squeaks and coos. Grandpa takes a turn when it's offered. Other family and friends filter in and out. The new parents try to rest when they can, knowing that their schedule is no longer their own. Surrounding all of it is JOY—not happiness, but JOY. Goodbyes were hard. Tears were choked back.

The nursing home hallway is filled with lonely souls in wheelchairs. Some faces are blank while others offer a smile and wave as people walk by. The uncomfortable fragrances come and go as they make their way down the hallway to Mom's room. Her face lights up as she recognizes her visitors, even if it is just for a moment. The conversation drifts in and out as memories come and go like surfing the channels on the TV. Long ago memories are shared while keeping track of recent events (even today's) is hard. The visit was long enough, but wasn't long enough. Goodbyes were hard. Tears were choked back.

He makes his way around the house with his new friend—the walker. Though struggling with his health and independence, he



dutifully does the exercises the physical therapist has prescribed, hoping and praying to regain his independence. He likes having the kids around, but probably feels like he is causing an imposition. If truth be spoken, he would rather have the house to himself again. Yet, he is enduring this time without complaint, still trying to be the rock of the family. He is a proud man of deep faith who sits in the front room in the sun each morning reading his daily devotion. Goodbyes were hard. Tears were choked back.

I marvel at the way God is working in each situation. Wishing circumstances might be different, I am still thankful for God's hand in all of this, even though I don't understand His timing. But yet, the passage from Ecclesiastes jumps from the page.

"There is time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens: A time to be

born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and time and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace." (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8)

Whatever your time in life or whatever your experience of where others are in the times of their lives, be assured that it is all God's timing, even though we may not understand it. May you be filled with God's timing and blessing.

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



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# The Road to Redemption: Billy Milan – Learning to Abide

BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

In the Gospel of John, the Beloved Disciple records Jesus' invitation to 'abide in Him.' Jesus masterfully used descriptive imagery to drive His point home. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:4-5a) Many years later, the Apostle John penned his first letter to young churches in Asia Minor. He encouraged them to walk as Jesus walked, "...the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." (1 John 2:6) John also inspired them to "not love the world nor the things in the world," (1 John 2:15) and heartened them with these words: "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." (1 John 2:28)

In Kenneth Wuest's expanded translation of the New Testament from the Greek, John 15:4 reads like this: "Maintain a living communion with me, and I with you." To Jesus, abiding means living with, making your home with, and being in constant communion with Him. When it comes to Jesus, abiding

in Him is where our power, effectiveness and ministry flow from.

Billy Milan grew up in New York City in a single parent Catholic household. His mother worked hard to care for her children, and when he was 22, Billy



joined the New York Police Department. Some years later, he and his wife ended up living in Texas for her job, and in 2014, while vacationing in Destin and celebrating his retirement from the police force, Billy and his wife ended up purchasing a home and now live in Florida full time.

Before coming to the Lord in 2003, Billy's difficult job in the homicide division of the police force led him to drink excessively, which led to other bad behav-



ior. "My household was broken on the inside. The exterior was beautiful, but the interior was broken. When the Lord got ahold of me in 2003, it was a radical change."

After his conversion, Billy, along with his wife, got plugged in and participated in a strong ministry in Long Island where they served faithfully for years.

But when they came to Destin and attended Destiny Worship, he felt an automatic peace. "I feel like we're home."

Billy explains how his life changed after meeting Jesus, and his fellow officers saw it too. "Police culture is not healthy and needs balance. Jesus culture is so much better." Billy has learned over the years of walking with

God, the importance of staying in the Word. "I stand on my faith and stay in the Word. Stay covered and find good Biblical counsel. We have to step outside of ourselves and let God do what He does. Remain faithful in prayer and in the Word. Bad things will continue to happen, but God is true."

Complacency is the opposite of abiding. As Billy says, "In the spiritual world, complacency can cause spiritual death. Stay consistent in the Word and prayer and in the church and fellowship. Do not allow complacency to set in."

Believers are called to maintain a living communion with Jesus. When we walk in His footsteps, breathe in the Word, bathe our days in prayer, and actively search for opportunities to serve, that's when we become what God designed us to be. Salt and light; useful and effective for the Kingdom.

You can listen to Billy Milan's entire interview and 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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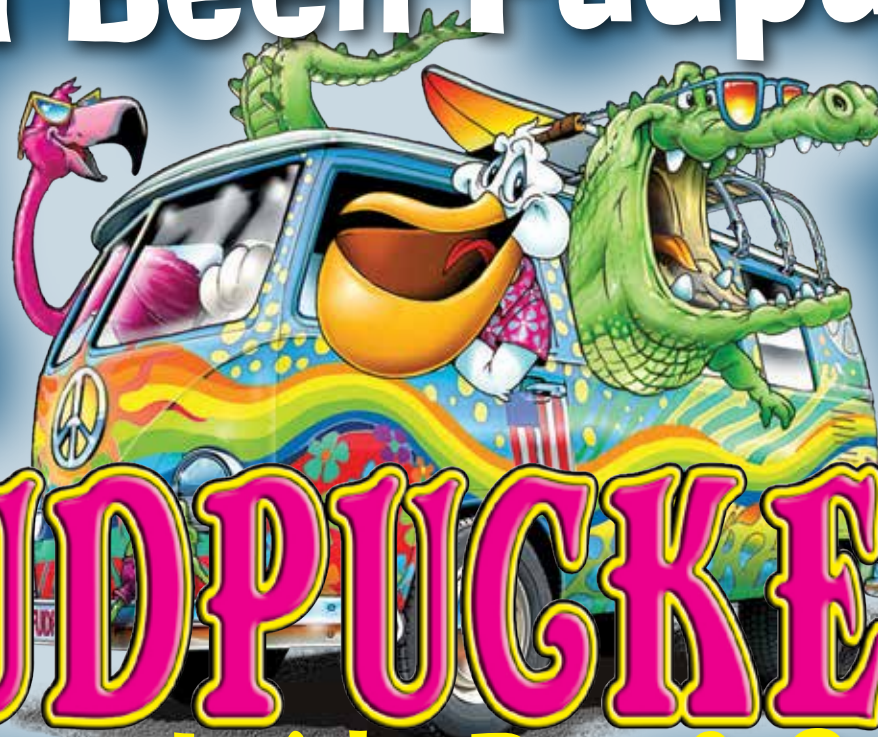
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# Walton County Board of County Commissioners Officially Designates May as 'Art Month'

At the April 22 Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meeting, the Walton County Board of County Commissioners officially proclaimed May as Art Month Walton County, highlighting the county's ongoing commitment to fostering the arts, supporting local artists, and enriching the cultural landscape of the community.

Commissioner Donna Johns shared her thoughts on the importance of the Arts in Walton County, stating, "The Arts are central to Walton County's identity, enriching our community culturally, socially, and economically. Art Month celebrates the creativity that brings us together and enhances the quality of life for all who live in and visit our county. We are proud to support the Cultural Arts Alliance and all who contribute to the vibrant artistic spirit of our county."

Art Month Walton County is a collaborative initiative led by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA), bringing together a variety of art-focused events

throughout the month of May. The celebration includes the Dine + Dive fundraiser for the Underwater Museum of Art, the 37th Annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival, Longleaf Writers Conference, Digital Graffiti at Alys Beach, Legally Blonde at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, special gatherings from Emerald Coast Storytellers, Sinfonia Salutes, and much more. Art Month unites artists, organizations, businesses, and audiences in a shared mission to showcase high-quality, diverse arts experiences across the region.

Commissioners unanimously approved the designation during Tuesday's meeting, recognizing the important role the arts play in economic development, tourism, education, and overall quality of life in Walton County.

"We are honored and excited that the Walton County Board of County Commissioners continues to support Art Month Walton County," said Jennifer Steele, President and CEO of the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton




County. "This official designation amplifies the value of the Arts in our community and helps us spotlight the many talented artists, cultural experiences, and creative opportunities available to both residents and visitors throughout the month of May and beyond."

The proclamation serves as an invitation for all to engage in and support the diverse artistic offerings happening countywide.

For more information about Art Month Walton County and a full schedule of events, visit [CulturalArtsAlliance.com](http://CulturalArtsAlliance.com).



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Since 2011, Studio 237 Music Lessons has become a beacon of musical growth, creativity and home to a passionate group of instructors with decades of experience and dedication to their craft. Each teacher contributes a unique background and skill set, creating a well-rounded learning environment for students of all ages and levels. Our teachers, from left to right in picture,

are: Max McCann, Scott Gilmore, Helmut Dimmel, Ray Cyr, Kimberly Burke, Lisa Cyr, and MaryKate Cary-Dooly. Studio 237 Music provides a place for teachers to teach and for students to learn.

Max McCann is a graduate of the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT) in California. As an accomplished guitarist with over 30 years of experience, he

offers students quality technical instruction and insight for live performance. His teaching style and personality is favored by students of guitar and bass. Max seeks to get one's musical gifting flowing in a simple and fun way via knowledge, technique, and feel. He believes all students have potential.

Scott Gilmore has been with Studio 237 since 2016, and has



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over 16 years of teaching students of all ages and levels on guitar (acoustic and classical), ukulele, songwriting, and theory. Known for his patient, kind, and detailed instruction, Scott emphasizes technique, music theory, and developing sight-reading skills. He teaches a variety of styles such as classical, Latin, jazz, and pop, each lesson is personally designed.

Helmut Dimmel is an accomplished pianist, keyboardist, and church worship leader for 29+ years. He earned his bachelor's degree of education in Germany, which brings his European classical training and appreciation for musical expression to the student. Along with reading music, Helmut teaches playing piano by ear, identifying chords, and tabs. Keyboard improvisation encourages learning, flexibility, and musicianship.

Ray Cyr is the co-owner, administrator, and teacher of drums/percussion. Ray has 60+ years of experience in the music industry, in live concerts, recording, and owning a talent agency. Ray is known for his technical precision, fun, and supportive teaching style. He has trained over 100 drummers to play marching band, rock, blues, boogie, gospel, swing and big band music.

Kimberly Burke, with 30+ years of experience as a singer/songwriter and Nashville recording artist, is a classically trained musician with a degree in voice performance. Kimberly performs as a solo artist and with bands covering country, classic rock, beach town favorites and old R&B. Her original music is published online, including her new single titled "The Girl I Was

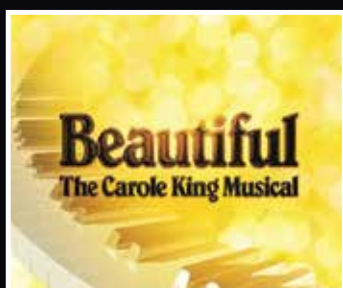
Before." Kimberly emphasizes technique, breath support, developing skills, range, and confidence.

Lisa Cyr, the co-owner, administrator, and teacher, brings a wealth of 35 years of teaching experience in piano, music theory, chord method, and general music education. Her gentle demeanor and creative teaching methods make her an excellent fit for beginners through advanced learners of all ages 6 and up. Lisa uses fun, time-proven techniques to keep students motivated and progressing. As a member of the National Federation of Music Clubs, she encourages and prepares her students to perform at music events, auditions, and competitions.

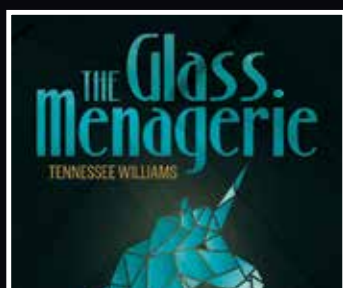
MaryKate Cary-Dooly is a classically trained vocalist with studies in gospel, jazz, and pop who teaches voice and piano. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Music and Entrepreneurship degree from Florida State University. With her experience and vocal performance, she helps students unlock their potential and develop stage presence using classical and contemporary techniques. As a versatile and dynamic teacher, MaryKate is thrilled to share the joyful experience of music with others.

Together, the teachers at Studio 237 form a passionate and supportive music community. Whether a student dreams of performing on stage, composing original music, or music appreciation, our talented group of instructors can help make one's dreams a reality. To find out more about Studio 237 Music, visit our website at [www.Studio237Music.com](http://www.Studio237Music.com). Or call (850) 231-3199.

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# The Blessings of Theatre Education

By HEATH CARROLL, EDUCATION AND OUTREACH DIRECTOR, EMERALD COAST THEATRE COMPANY

I've been blessed enough to work in theatre education for 13 years. I've seen children learn and grow. They've learned about themselves, learned to work as a team, learned to build skills that aren't only beneficial to the stage, but truly follow them into their adult lives. These are skills of confidence, communication, and empathy. Surely, learning the process of theatre is fun, but that hidden by-product--the thing they don't yet clock in their young eyes--is that it makes them better people. It's transformative.

One of the biggest transformations I see in my students is confidence. Whether my students are 5 or 75, and I've got both, that first step on stage can be daunting. But as I tell all my students: those butterflies in the tummy? That stage fright? That's a good thing! It means that you care! But, for my kids, there is no need to fear. Because our audiences want



to see them succeed! And no matter who is in that audience they can know, without doubt, that they have someone behind them--cheering them on. That's me. It's more than my job. It is my true passion. Because I know what comes next. I see it time and time again; every time that student speaks up, tries--tries again, and feels supported by the group, they start to realize something important: that their voice matters. They're seen. They're heard. That kind of self-assurance? It sticks with them, way beyond the curtain

call. And, parents have repeatedly testified to that fact over the years.

And speaking of parenthood... In a few short weeks, my wife and I will be blessed to welcome our first child into our family. And I want this for my daughter. I want her to have a sense of community. I want her to see the different perspectives that theatre offers. I want her to be wise, and above all, empathetic to those around her. I know that studying theatre and being involved in the art can make this happen. I've lived it

myself. I fell in love with theatre in high school. It allowed me a scholarship for college, the ability to travel and meet and work with new people, chiefly among them was the woman who would become her mother. Our shared love of the art brought us together, brought us to this place. It's life altering and life affirming.

And it's so much fun in the summertime. There is magic in the summer for kids. It's two short months that can feel like a year for a child. There's no school. Kids are looking

for a way to connect with their friends. Camps of any kind kindle that flame of socialization. I'd want my daughter in a theatre camp. Dancing wildly--even if off beat. Singing loudly--even if off key. Playing. Learning. Pretending. Finding a place to belong.

This summer at Emerald Coast Theatre Company we have a wonderful selection of titles to choose from. Snow White and Seussical the Musical for grades 2nd to 5th. Too Many Detectives, Chicago (audition only) and Beetlejuice for our Teens 6th-12th grade. And our Mini Players, K-1st, have titles like Moana, Encanto, Trolls, and more! There are also several Show Choir Camps available for multiple age groups.

If your kid's looking for a place to belong, I'd love to welcome them to our stage. Maybe they, too, will grow, connect, and fall in love with the arts. There is no way of knowing just where it could take them. It could very well be a blessing.



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# Accepting Applications for 2025 Walton County Artist of the Year

The Walton County Tourism Department will accept applications for the 2025 Artist of the Year Award beginning Thursday, May 1. Currently in its 23rd year, this accolade aims to honor

a local artist of Walton County whose unique artistic expression captures the essence of the region’s renowned creativity and beauty.

The deadline for submissions for the Artist of the Year program is Saturday, May 31, at 5 p.m. CDT. The winner will be announced during the Walton County Tourism Annual Meeting in October 2025. Artists can find instructions and apply online at [waltoncountyaoy.com](http://waltoncountyaoy.com). Download the rules and application for more details on submission.

The Artist of the Year Award is a community initiative highlighting local artists, spotlighting their work through diverse publicity channels and events throughout the year. The recipient will be granted \$4,000 for creating a commissioned artwork to be showcased in Walton County.

“Walton County is home to incredibly talented individuals who showcase their craft through creative mediums,” said Matt Algarin, tourism director for the

Walton County Tourism Department. “Through our Artist of the Year program, we are not only able to showcase and highlight a truly deserving individual, but we are able to promote and share their work with a larger audience.”

Artwork submissions will be evaluated based on criteria such as originality, authenticity, and overall appeal. Finalists will participate in in-person interviews where they will be required to present three examples of artwork during a panel discussion.

Past Artist of the Year winners include Sarah Page, Bradley Copeland, Joseph Messer, Chandler Williams, Doug Foltz, Jenna Varney, Kathleen Broaderick, Mari-sol Gullo, Melody Bogle and Juan Adaro. For a complete list of winners, visit [waltoncountyaoy.com](http://waltoncountyaoy.com).

To learn more about the Artist of the Year program, download the informational flyer or contact Lisa Foster at (850) 333-2728 or [Lisa@WCFLTourism.com](mailto:Lisa@WCFLTourism.com).

## Sinfonia Gulf Coast’s Demetrius Fuller Accepted into Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy; Takes Leadership Role in Music Education

Demetrius Fuller, Founder and Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast, has been named a Professional Member of the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy—currently the ONLY professional member from Northwest Florida. He has also been appointed to the chapter’s Education Committee, helping guide statewide music education and scholarship initiatives supported by MusiCares.

Fuller founded Sinfonia in 2004 at just 24 and joined the Academy in 2024. His appointment comes as Sinfonia prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary season in 2025–2026.

“Joining the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy is an honor that places Sinfonia



Gulf Coast within an influential global network of music industry professionals,” said Fuller. “This affiliation aligns perfectly with our mission to redefine the symphony experience while supporting music education and professional growth in our community and beyond.”


Demetrius also mentors through GRAMMY U, connecting music professionals with college students pursuing

careers in the music industry. He has commissioned and premiered numerous works, helping shape both regional and international music culture.

“We are beyond proud of this stellar accomplishment,” added Elizabeth Boswell, board president. “Demetrius is not only a distinguished music professional, but a relevant and engaged industry leader.”

The Recording Academy’s Florida Chapter, founded in 1995, represents artists and professionals throughout Florida and Puerto Rico and includes icons like Gloria Estefan, DJ Khaled and Bad Bunny, reflecting Florida’s rich musical heritage and dynamic contemporary scene.

Visit [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org).



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Educational outreach remains at the forefront of Sinfonia’s mission. Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has introduced music to more than 200,000 children in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties.

Your support is instrumental to our success. Donate today to help Sinfonia bring music, education, and the arts to our schools. [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) | 850.460.8800



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## Business Profile: Spotlight on Phoenix Restoration

Travis Kring has come a long way on his inspiring 4-year journey marked by faith, dedication, and an unshakable commitment to serving God and others. Just one year ago, he was recruited from the real estate world and joined Phoenix Restoration and Catastrophe. In that short time, by the grace of God, Travis and his team, led by Bobby Cates, have generated \$1.2 million in revenue. But beyond the numbers, this season has been about

building meaningful, spiritual, and professional relationships that continue to grow and bear fruit. Travis, Bobby, and the Phoenix team bring a passion for people and excellence into every home and project.

From his days on the court as a basketball player to his time coaching and mentoring players, Travis has always carried a strong sense of leadership and heart. That same spirit now fuels his work with Phoenix Restoration, where he's become known across



the Florida Panhandle for reliability, integrity, and genuine care for the community. His journey has been nothing short of incredible, transforming lives through service, bringing comfort in crisis, and building a reputation that speaks louder than words.

We truly believe that the Phoenix Restoration team is just scratching the surface of what's to come. The growth, the connections, and the opportunities to serve are only beginning. Our Kingdom-focused team at Phoe-

nix is excited to continue impacting our community with care, skill, and faith at the center of it all. Whether you're in need of a free HVAC ductwork mold inspection or help with restoration after a storm or fire, we are ready to show up and help, just like we would for our own family.

Everyone on our team lives here in the Santa Rosa Beach, Destin, and Freeport area. You'll see us around—at Destiny Worship Center, in Grand Fitness, or grabbing groceries at Publix. We're your neighbors, your friends, and your trusted professionals. Honest, caring, and King-

dom-driven, we're here to serve you with excellence. Thank you for letting us be a part of your community. We'd love the opportunity to earn your trust and do business with you.

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## ECP and Delta Air Lines Expand Service to New York City with Daily Nonstop Flights Starting in November

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) announces that Delta Air Lines will be expanding its service to include new daily flights between New York-LaGuardia Airport (LGA) and ECP starting November 6, 2025. This announcement follows the news that Delta will offer seasonal Saturday service between LGA and ECP for Summer 2025. The new year-round route will be operated with an Embraer 175 aircraft, providing passengers with a comfortable and efficient travel experience.

"This expanded nonstop service announcement is a testament to the growing demand for travel to our Region," said Parker W. McClellan Jr., A.A.E., Executive Director of ECP. "Partnering with Delta Air Lines to offer this year-round service

will provide our passengers with more convenient travel options and enhance connectivity between New York City and the beautiful beaches of Northwest Florida. We are proud to bring this exciting opportunity to our Region and look forward to welcoming travelers from the Big Apple."

Delta is America's most-awarded airline leading the way to deliver a world-class customer experience on up to 5,000 daily flights to more than 290 destinations on six continents, connecting people to places and to each other.

Passengers can book their flights directly through Delta or by using the new FlyMyAirport booking tool available on the ECP website.



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# Capital City Bank Celebrates New Office Opening in Watersound

In March, Capital City Bank hosted a ribbon cutting to commemorate the opening of its new banking office located at 8403 West Bay Parkway at the entrance of the Latitude Margaritaville Watersound community. Attendees included leadership from Capital City Bank and The St. Joe Company, as well as several members of the Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Bay County Chamber of Commerce.

“With the opening of our new office in Panama City Beach, we are strengthening our commitment to Bay County,” said Stephen Stabler, Capital City Bank regional executive for the Emerald Coast of Florida. “The addition of our West Bay Office compliments our existing locations in the area, enhancing access to comprehensive banking services and ensuring we are well positioned to support clients across the region.”

“We are very pleased to welcome a financial institution to Watersound West Bay Center,” said William Brock, Vice President of Commercial Real Estate for The St. Joe Company. “We have had the opportunity to work with Capital City Bank on other offices near our residential communities. This new location gives them an additional opportunity to serve customers as development continues along Highway 79.”

With the addition of West Bay, Capital City Bank now operates five service locations across Bay



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and Walton counties, providing a full range of consumer and business banking, lending, trust and wealth management solutions to the local community. The Bank’s expansion in the region began with the opening of its first loan production office in Panama City Beach in March 2018. Since then, Capital City has steadily grown its presence. In 2020, the Company added a loan production office in Santa Rosa Beach and constructed its first full-service banking office at Panama City Beach’s Breakfast Point community to replace the original Panama City Beach loan production office. In 2023, the Bank continued its expansion with a second new-construction full-service banking office at the Watersound Town Center in Inlet Beach and a loan production office in Lynn Haven. With the addition of the West Bay Office, Capital City Bank remains committed to serving the financial needs of Bay and Walton counties with convenient locations and comprehensive financial solutions.

The West Bay Office is equipped with virtual teller technology, which enables live assistance from a banker via video chat with or without a debit card from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m., Monday

through Friday, and from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Saturday. The machine has a Smart ATM option for self-service banking with a debit card 24 hours a day. The Smart ATM has all the standard features of a traditional ATM but includes several key enhancements that make it easier, faster and more convenient than ever before. It accepts cash and check deposits of up to 30 items in a single transaction, and checks post the same day when deposited by 8 p.m. on business days.

Founded in 1895 and headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, Capital City Bank provides a full range of consumer, wealth management, business and commercial banking services. The Bank has repeatedly been selected as the best bank or financial institution in multiple communities across its footprint, including Tallahassee, Crawfordville, the Emerald Coast and Palatka, Florida, and Cairo, Georgia. Additionally, the Company has been chosen for Florida Trend magazine’s “Best Companies to Work For in Florida” thirteen years in a row and the American Banker magazine’s “Best Banks to Work For” every year since the list’s inception in 201



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# Is Your Storefront Silently Sending Customers Away This Season?



BY DANICA LAFAIRE

In the heart of Northwest Florida, from the streets of Destin to the shops in Fort Walton Beach and the growing businesses of Walton County, local pride runs deep—and so does the importance of first impressions. While quality products and top-tier service are the backbone of any successful business, many owners overlook a simple but powerful factor: how your business looks from the outside. A clean, well-maintained exterior—clear windows, swept walkways and fresh signage—is key to turning foot traffic into revenue.

And why does this focus on a pristine exterior hold such significance here in the heart of Northwest Florida? It's because we understand the fabric of our community. Our businesses aren't just storefronts, but integral parts of the local landscape, reflecting the pride we collectively

hold for our beautiful surroundings.

Think about it: visitors flock to our stunning beaches and charming towns seeking an escape, a breath of fresh air. When they encounter businesses that mirror this beauty and care through their clean and welcoming exteriors, they reinforce their positive impression of our entire region. It signals that we, as local business owners, are custodians of this beauty, extending the same level of care to our establishments as we do to our natural treasures.

Customers often decide where to shop, dine or do business in a matter of seconds. And in that brief moment, appearances matter. Multiple studies show that people are more likely to trust and spend money with businesses that look clean, organized and professional. This sends a quiet but powerful message: "We care about the details."

On the flip side, a cluttered or dirty storefront can turn people away—sometimes for good. In fact, many consumers admit to avoiding businesses with poorly maintained exteriors or negative cleanliness reviews. In today's connected world, word travels fast, and a single bad impression can impact your reputation more than you might expect.

But here's the good news:

making your business stand out doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Often, it's the simple things—like sparkling windows or a tidy entrance—that create the most welcoming atmosphere. These small touches not only draw people in, but also show that you're ready and eager to serve.

Let's not forget, in a close-knit community like ours, word-of-mouth also travels quickly. A business that presents itself with pride and attention to detail earns the trust and loyalty of locals who are the lifeblood of our economy year-round. A clean exterior isn't just about attracting tourists; it's about fostering a sense of community pride and mutual respect among neighbors. It says, "We care about our business, and we care about our community."

Interestingly, customers tend to be more forgiving of small service hiccups when they feel like they're in a clean, cared-for space. It builds trust, which is at the heart of every lasting customer relationship.

Investing in a clean exterior is more than just good business sense; it's an investment in the very essence of what makes



Northwest Florida, and especially our corner, so special. It's about contributing to the overall appeal of our region, strengthening our local economy, and showcasing the pride we all share in calling this beautiful place home. And that, ultimately, is why a clear view from the outside can lead to a clearer path to success on the inside.

Whether you're looking to attract foot traffic, earn repeat business, or simply reflect the

pride you take in your work, keeping your exterior clean is a smart and lasting investment.

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# What You Should Do Right After An Auto 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 drivable 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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By CHRIS BALZER

I have been in the home improvement industry for over 17 years and have heard just about all the sales gimmicks and cheeky techniques used by salespeople to wow customers. One slightly stretched story I heard about radiant barrier is that it was developed by NASA from alien technology! If only radiant barrier were so glamorous. Actually, in 1925, two German businessmen filed patents on reflective surfaces for use as building insulation. This became the launching pad for reflective insulation. NASA did help to improve this technology and adopted it for the Apollo program, but its origins were perfectly human.. This metalized film was used to protect spacecraft, equipment and astronauts

from the extreme heat of space. Even the student housing at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Princeton, and Frank Sinatra's residence in Palm Springs have used radiant barriers to become more energy efficient. In 1996, Radiant barrier was even inducted into the Space Technology Hall of Fame, now that's pretty cool.

So why use a radiant barrier? When the Sun's rays strike a roof, heating the roofing material (shingles, tiles or roofing sheets), it causes the underside of the roof surface and the roof framing to heat up, causing radiant heat to flow downwards through the roof space towards the attic floor, heating up the entire attic. When a radiant barrier is installed on the rafters in the attic, much of the heat radiated from the hot roof is reflected back toward the roof, allowing for a cooler attic.

Why is that important? Many of our attics will reach into the 140° F to 150° F range this summer, lately in fall too, heating up insulation, ductwork, and many times, our stored belongings. Anyone who has stored candles in the attic knows what I mean. This extreme heat makes our

# Radiant Barrier, Alien Technology?

## ENERGY TIPS

by Emerald Coast Energy Solutions



perform better, saving you money and increasing your comfort.

One common misconception regarding radiant barriers is that the heat reflecting off the radiant barrier back to the roof has the potential to increase the roof temperature and possibly damage the roofing material, voiding warranties. Performance testing by Florida Solar Energy Center showed that the increase in roof materials temperature, at the hottest time of day, was no more than 2° to 5° degrees. RIMA (Reflective Insulation Manufacturer Association) wrote a technical paper on the subject, which included statements collected from large roofing manufacturers, and none said that radiant barrier would in any way affect the warranty or lessen the life of the roof.

current insulation and air conditioners work harder to keep our homes cool, costing us money, comfort and lessening the life of our HVAC systems. Properly installed radiant barrier on the roof rafters will reflect 97% of the radiant heat, reducing the attic temperature during this extreme heat by 40° to 50° degrees, allowing your insulation, ductwork and HVAC systems to

To improve on this technology, we sandwiched high-density insulation between two pieces of radiant barrier, allowing our radiant barrier to help fight against not only radiant heat, but conduction and convection heat as well. My son recently did a science fair project on the performance of different types of radiant barrier. The results? Our multilayer radiant barrier outperformed both silver and copper single-layer radiant barriers. If you would like to learn more or see a demonstration on how radiant barriers work, contact us at (850) 588-2870 or visit us at [www.trusteces.com](http://www.trusteces.com).

*Chris Balzer is Founder and President of Emerald Coast Energy Solutions, which is a Smile Provider Company. We provide smiles to our customers after installing our high energy efficient products, increasing comfort and lowering energy bills. For more information on how to save this summer and become 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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