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Bring Hope Now: Local Nonprofit Aims to Solve Youth Mental Health Crisis

BY PEGGY BROCKMAN

Imagine receiving a call from your child's school: your middle-schooler, diagnosed with ADD, lost his temper and screamed, "I wish I were dead." Because the staff knows you, they give you the option to take him to the emergency room yourself, instead of calling law enforcement.

You arrive at the ER, but there's no child psychologist. The ER doctor decides to send your child—seven hours away—to a facility in Orlando for evaluation. You object. Emotions rise. The doctor blames you and asks you to leave. Your child is transported anyway, placed in a holding area with wooden slab beds and other children in crisis, screaming. He's terrified.

Three days later, a tele-psychiatrist finds your child isn't a threat and should be released. But when you return from a brief trip home, you discover your child was already transferred to an inpatient facility in



Pensacola—without your consent. He must now remain for another three days, all while you watch helplessly.

This is the true story a mother shared with me after a recent Bring Hope Now presentation. Though a few years have passed and improvements have been made—such as the addition of Mobile Response Teams that now evaluate stu-

dents on campus—children in crisis in our area still face long waits in local ERs and may be transported hours away due to a lack of local facilities.

This is exactly why we founded Bring Hope Now.

A Growing Crisis

In 2019, two community leaders—David Triana, founder of United for a Good

Cause, and myself, Peggy Brockman—joined forces to address a terrifying trend: Northwest Florida, particularly Okaloosa County, had one of the fastest-growing youth suicide rates in the state.

We set out to bring hope through a national peer-to-

BRING HOPE NOW

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South Walton County Tax-Aide Program

Free Federal Income Tax Preparation Available in South Walton County

Free Federal income tax preparation is being offered in South Walton County for low to middle-income families and individuals, with special attention to senior citizens. Tax Preparation service will be available from Feb. 3 through April 14, 2026, at A Simple Faith Church in Santa Rosa Beach, 360 WRM Circle Blvd in the Blue Mountain Beach Industrial Park, north of Hwy 98.

TAX-AIDE
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 **Community**

BRING HOPE NOW

continued from page 1

peer suicide prevention program in local schools. Eglin Federal Credit Union kickstarted our mission with a \$50,000 donation. With support from Superintendent Marcus Chambers and the Okaloosa County School Board, the program launched in 2020. By the end of 2022, every school in the district had the program in

place. It became a model of success.

In 2024, Bring Hope Now officially separated from United for a Good Cause to pursue broader goals. We expanded into the military community with “Hope on the Line,” a peer-led suicide prevention initiative for active-duty personnel. But another pressing need was calling us: a lack of local youth mental health facilities.

**By the Numbers:
Why Local Help Matters**

The data is staggering. In the 2022–2023 school year, 376 children under 18 in Okaloosa and Walton Counties were involuntarily Baker Acted. Of those, 76% were first-time cases, and 92 were repeat cases.

Statewide, 87% of youth Baker Acts are due to suicidality: 46% had suicidal thoughts, 28%



NATIONAL
SUICIDE
PREVENTION

had a plan, and 10% had made an attempt.

Children are typically taken to a local ER, where they wait for an inpatient bed to open in Pensacola or Panama City. Some wait days. If extended treatment is needed, they’re sent even farther—to Jacksonville or Orlando—hours from family and support systems. Many families can’t even afford to retrieve their children afterward.

What if that child were yours?

According to Florida Health Charts, 168 people in Okaloosa and Walton Counties went to an emergency room for self-harm injuries in 2023. Shockingly, 121 of them—72%—were children ages 5 to 19. Yes, even as young as five.

From the 2023 Florida Youth Survey:

- 22% of students said they almost always felt symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression.
- 46% said these emotions stopped them from doing daily activities.
- 19% had seriously considered self-harm.
- Encouragingly, 31% sought help.

But we need more resources. And we need them here.

The Mission Ahead

With strong leadership from Board Chair Kathy Houchins and a growing board of community advocates, Bring Hope Now’s next mission is clear: establish a youth mental health treatment facility for Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

We’re currently seeking a facility or land to build a welcoming, home-like inpatient center. Until that becomes a reality, we continue to train community members through QPR Gatekeeper Training—equipping ev-

eryday citizens with the tools to recognize suicide warning signs and how to respond.

We also aim to launch a local loss survivor program to support families who’ve lost loved ones to suicide.



A Community That Cares

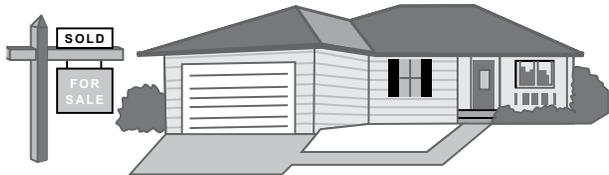
We believe in this mission because we’ve lived it. I’ve personally experienced the pain of a suicide attempt and subsequent residential treatment with a grandson. I know what families are facing.

Bring Hope Now is not just one organization—it’s a movement of people, volunteers, educators, parents, and advocates committed to changing the story for our youth.

We’re looking for sponsors, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who’s lost a loved one to suicide? To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

Mark your Calendar Now. The 2026 Annual Bring Hope Dragon Boat Race & Festival Will Be April 25th. It’s not only a fundraiser—it’s a celebration of resilience and community. We’re looking for sponsors, racing teams, raffle and auction items, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who’s lost a loved one to suicide? We’d be honored to include a sign in their memory at the event. To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

It may take a village to raise a child—but it takes a whole community to save one.



DID YOU BUILD OR PURCHASE A HOME LAST YEAR?

**PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION
FILING DEADLINE MARCH 1, 2026**

Gary J. Gregor, Walton County Property Appraiser, reminds property owners who intend to make application for Homestead Exemption, Deployed Military Exemption, Combat Disabled Veteran’s Discount, Veteran’s Exemption, Disability Exemption, Agricultural Classification, Additional Senior Exemption, or Widow’s and Widower’s Exemption, the absolute filing deadline is **MARCH 1, 2026**.

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

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

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

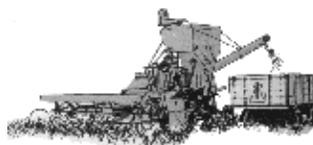
You may file for exemptions at the following office locations of the Property Appraiser Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

DeFuniak Springs - Courthouse
571 Hwy. 90 East
Defuniak Springs, FL 32433

Santa Rosa Beach - Courthouse Annex
31 Coastal Centre Blvd., Suite 600
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

THE ABSOLUTE FILING DEADLINE FOR 2026 EXEMPTIONS IS MARCH 1, 2026.

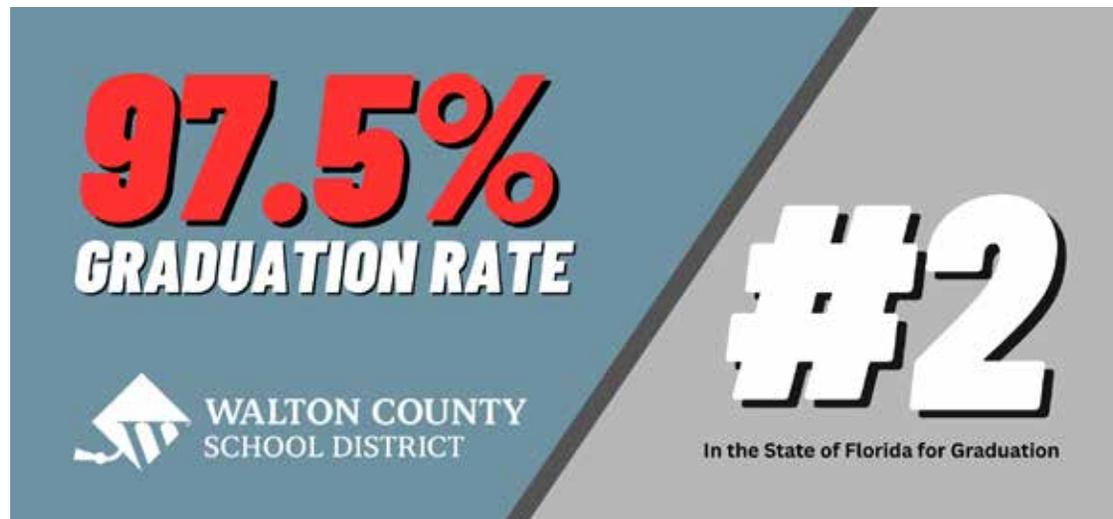
Have You Applied For Ag Classification of Newly Acquired Agricultural Lands For 2026?



97.5%: WCSD Closes Gap to No. 1

Walton County School District ranks No. 2 in the state of Florida for graduation rate, posting a 97.5% graduation rate - just 0.1 percentage points behind the No. 1 district statewide. The district also saw a 0.1% increase over last year's graduation data.

While the numbers are impressive, they matter most because of what they represent: students completing high school prepared for what comes next. Walton County graduates are stepping confidently into college, technical programs, military service and the workforce with the skills, certifications and experiences needed to succeed. This success is the result of intentional planning, strong instruction and a districtwide commitment to student outcomes. The district



also celebrates school counselors this month and their pivotal role in guiding students' paths toward a diploma.

Though February is the shortest month on the calendar, it is

busy with celebrations and recognitions:

- Black History Month
- Career and Technical Education Month
- National School Counseling

Week (Feb. 2-7)

- National FBLA Week (Future Business Leaders of America) (Feb. 2-7)
- School Resource Officer Appreciation Day

- National FFA Week (Future Farmers of America) (Feb. 15-22)

Walton County School District is committed to Preparing the Whole Child for a Life of Success, ensuring that no matter the goal, students are ready to take the next step after receiving their diploma. During the 2023-24 school year, WCSD students earned more than 2,500 industry certifications.

Student safety remains the district's top priority. Walton County School District is grateful for its partnership with the Walton County Sheriff's Office and we celebrate the committed deputies who walk our campuses daily with the mission of keeping students safe on the path to EPIC.

TAX-AIDE

continued from cover

Taxpayers must make appointments online at tinyurl.com/yryzb5mt or by calling (850) 275-9104.

The site will be open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to

4 p.m., with last appointments at 3 p.m. Tax-Aide is also available in DeFuniak Springs. Call (850) 892-8746 for an appointment.

AARP Tax-Aide is a nationwide service, with information available at other nearby locations at <https://www.aarp.org/money/>

[taxes/aarp_taxaide/locations.html](https://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_taxaide/locations.html).

This service is sponsored by the AARP Foundation and the IRS. There are no age restrictions and AARP membership is not required.

Taxpayers need to bring their

2024 tax return, Social Security cards for taxpayer(s) and all dependents, picture IDs, and all tax documents received. Bring checking or savings account information if direct deposit of refunds or direct debit of amounts due is desired. If applicable, bring Identity

Protection PIN (IP PIN) for each individual. Taxpayers who wish to itemize deductions must bring appropriate information. Note that complicated tax returns involving rental properties, cryptocurrencies, inventories, depreciation, etc. cannot be prepared.



 Community

Coastal Seniors February Updates

COASTAL SENIORS OF SOUTH WALTON

Exercise Classes – Angela Gibson will lead classes every Tuesday and Thursday at 10 a.m. at 70 Logan Lane, Grayton Beach. Cost is \$5 per class for CSSW members and \$10 for non-members. Sign up on the email list. If you are not already on the email list, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Core Class - Angela Gibson will lead a 30-minute core class every Tuesday at 9:15 a.m. Participants will be screened to meet the safety and health requirements of this class. A yoga mat and Pilates ring are used for this class. Cost is \$5 per class for CSSW members and \$10 for non-members. For information or screening, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Chair Yoga - Amy Lindsey with Santa Rosa Physical Therapy will lead a one-hour Therapeutic Chair Yoga class on

Thursdays, February 12, 19 and March 5, 12 at 8:45 a.m. and One Time Only Tuesday, February 3 at 11 a.m. at 70 Logan Lane, Grayton Beach. Cost is \$5 per class for CSSW members and \$10 for non-members. Sign up on the email list. To be added to the email sign-up list, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Watercolor Painting Class – Karen Peterson will teach classes on Fridays, February 6, 13, 27 and March 6 and 13 from 8:45 a.m. to 12 noon at 70 Logan Lane, Grayton Beach. Cost is \$20 for CSSW members and \$40 for non-members. Sign Up Required Due To Limited Space. No Walk-Ins. Sign up on the email list. If you need to be

added to the email list, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Northwest Florida Health Council - will provide FREE health screenings on February 11 from 1:30-3:30 p.m. at 70 Logan Lane, Grayton Beach.

Pickleball - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts on February 11 at 6 p.m. Please Check The Sites Listed Below For Updates. This beginner class is open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) Registration is required. Register through the Parks and Rec Website at secure.rec1.com. Email Sandy.Gulak@atsowal-pickleball@gmail.com for more information. Class is FREE and equipment is provided or use

your own. Open play at Boys and Girls Club play every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 9:30-12:30 from January 13 - April 30. Beginners welcome. Come learn how to play. Demo paddles available. 6 indoor courts. Cost is \$5 per day plus \$35 waiver fee at initial registration. Please join the SolWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

Monthly Meeting - Friday, February 20, from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Garrett Horn, a local author and builder, will be the guest speaker. Mr. Horn will speak on the history of the Walton County area. A light lunch will be served.

Sign up on the email list or email CSSW at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Line Dancing Is Back with Sue Westphal every Wednesday through March 18 from 3-4 p.m. at 70 Logan Lane, Grayton Beach. Registration required as space is limited. Call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Seniors 50 years of age and up residing in or visiting Walton County are invited to join CSSW. Membership is \$30 for individuals, \$50 for family, and \$100 for businesses (your business will be listed on our home webpage and our Facebook page). You can become a member via email at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com, or on the website at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org. Also, follow us on Facebook at Coastal Seniors of South Walton. Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization for active adults.



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Training for the Long Run: A Smarter Way to Think About Your Health



The Body Responds to Patience

I've watched patients experience profound change not because they did more, but because they did less—less forcing, less

self-criticism, less urgency. They learned to listen instead of override. To adjust instead of quit. To trust that small improvements compound over time.

And they do.
A little better sleep leads to

better energy. Better energy leads to gentler movement. Gentler movement supports hormone balance. Hormone balance im-

TRAINING
continued on page 10

By DR. KAREN DEVORE,
TORTOISE CLINIC

If you've ever laced up your shoes for a long walk, a run, or even just committed to showing up for yourself day after day, you already understand something fundamental about health: real progress takes time.

In my work, I see it constantly—people who are frustrated, exhausted, and overwhelmed because they've tried everything. The detox teas. The extreme cleanses. The 30-day challenges promising a brand-new body and life by next month. And when those promises inevitably fall short, they blame themselves.

Here's the truth I want you to hear clearly: your body is not the problem. The problem is the belief that wellness should be fast, dramatic, and immediate.

Health doesn't work that way. It never has.

The Myth of the Quick Fix

We live in a culture that celebrates instant results. Faster internet. Overnight shipping. Before-and-after photos that suggest transformation can, and should, happen in weeks. It's no wonder people feel discouraged when their own bodies don't keep up with those expectations.

But your body is not a machine you can reboot. It is a living, adaptive system shaped by years of stress, habits, hormones, sleep patterns, relationships, injuries, and emotions. Expecting it to "snap back" after a few weeks of effort is not just unrealistic, it's unfair.

Fads and trends often work briefly because they shock the system. They rely on restrictions, extremes, or novelty. And while they may produce short-term

changes, they rarely create lasting health. Once the trend ends, as it always does, the symptoms return, sometimes louder than before.

Why Slow and Steady Actually Works

When I say wellness is a marathon, I don't mean it has to be miserable or exhausting. Quite the opposite. Sustainable health is built through consistent, manageable choices that your body can integrate over time.

Think about how trust is built in a relationship. It's not created by grand gestures alone. It's built through reliability. Showing up. Listening. Responding with care. Your body works the same way.

When you nourish yourself regularly, move in ways that feel supportive, address stress gently, and prioritize sleep, your nervous system begins to relax. Hormones rebalance. Digestion improves. Pain softens. Energy returns, not all at once, but gradually, reliably.

This is not flashy progress. It's quiet. And it's powerful.

Real Life Doesn't Happen in Perfect Conditions

One of the biggest reasons people abandon their wellness efforts is because they believe they've "fallen off the wagon." Life happens—a busy week, a sick child, a stressful deadline, a holiday meal—and suddenly it feels like everything is ruined.

But a marathon isn't lost because you slow down for water. Or because you stumble. Or because one mile feels harder than the last. You keep going.

Health is not about perfection. It's about resilience and return—coming back to yourself again and again without punishment or shame.



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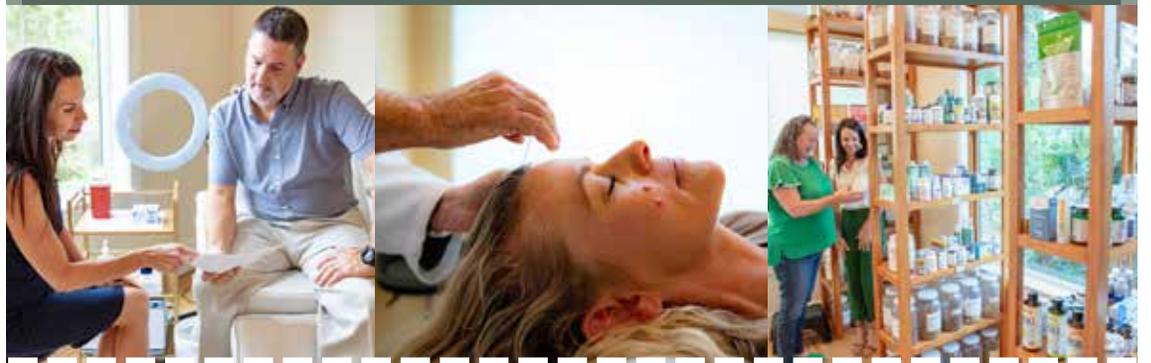
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Community

Did Ponce de Leon Really Find the Springs in North Walton?

By HELEN PETRE

No, probably not, but the springs named after him are well worth protecting. I usually write about wild places and organisms in Freeport and South Walton, some even in south Bay County. But now that it is winter, the 68-degree Fahrenheit water in the North Walton springs calls to me. Well, sort of. It is still cold, but kind of exciting to get in, just to say I did.

from the Floridan Aquifer, and the water that comes out of the springs is this water. Springs flow because the pressure in the aquifer is high. As we continue to develop land and use water, that pressure goes down and the amount of water released by the springs decreases. Both Morrison and Ponce de Leon springs are second-magnitude springs based on outflow.

The water in the Floridan Aquifer is a constant 68 degrees Fahrenheit. The aquifer is composed of porous limestone and dolomite that is hundreds of feet thick and was formed 35 million years ago. The Florida Aquifer is fed by rainwater that seeps into

Floridan Aquifer. USGS.

the ground north of Florida and flows south by gravity through the porous limestone. The water in this aquifer is our groundwater, and as such, is susceptible to contamination.

Many places are named for the Spanish explorer, Ponce de Leon, but he probably never went to most of them. He explored Florida in 1513, notably before air conditioning or mosquito control. If he was trying to find the famed Fountain of Youth, he failed miserably, but in reality, he never even thought of that. Still, we have some great springs, regardless of the myths.

Ponce de Leon Springs produces 14 million gallons of water a day. The spring head is 20 feet deep and a clear stream flows from it to the tannin-stained Sandy Creek, which flows into the Choctawhatchee. Ponce de Leon and Morrison Springs are two of the 13 springs that drain into the Choctawhatchee River.

Plants and animals

Although everyone comes for the spring, there are notable plants at Ponce de Leon Springs, including pitcher plants, flame azaleas, and mountain laurel. There are longleaf pines that were used in the turpentine industry in the higher, drier areas, and some trees still show the "catface scars" made to extract the resin. Among the pines are rhododendron, hickory, huckleberry, milkweed, blazing stars, oaks, magnolia, saw palmetto, and blueberry.

The habitat is suitable for alligators, turtles, gopher tortoise, turkey, fox, deer, and bobcat. Catfish, bass, bluegill, sunfish, warmouth, crappie, and pickerel are common in the springs and in Sandy Creek. Northern wrens, kinglets and brown creepers spend the winter here.

There are two short nature trails. The sign says it takes 45 minutes, but it really takes ten.

Morrison Springs

Producing 48 million gallons

SPRINGS

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Swimming in Ponce de Leon Spring on New Year's Day, 2026.

The source

Florida has more springs than any other state, and perhaps any place on Earth, with over 1,000 in the state. The springs are our water source. In fact, 92% of our drinking water comes



Ponce de Leon Springs State Park. Wikipedia.

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A New Way to Live in Retirement

Before the first streaks of sunrise settle over Inlet Beach, one member is already at the gym — stretching, lifting, moving with a quiet determination. “I wake up at 4:30,” he says with a shrug, as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. “I work out, head back for breakfast, and then I decide: golf simulator... or swimming?”

He smiles. “I feel better than I have in years.”

Across the community, the day opens at its own gentle tempo. A woman clips a leash on her dog and walks toward one of the community’s dog-friendly outdoor areas, grateful for the easy routine they’ve settled into. Not long ago, she was living with her daughter in Alys Beach, watching Watersound Fountains being built across the highway. She never imagined it would one day be home.

“I thought, Those places aren’t for me,” she admits.

But when her daughter insisted she come take a look, everything shifted — the bright, thoughtfully designed apartments, the welcoming outdoor spaces for her dog, the light, the

openness, the surprising sense of possibility.

“After the first week,” she says, “there was no going back.”

The beauty of a morning here is that everyone’s version looks a little different. Some head to the balance studio for physical therapy. Others meet friends on the walking trails that curl through Watersound and 30A. Some hop on a bike. Some linger over coffee. Each person finds their own pace.

By mid-morning, the community hums with activity. One member laughs as she lists her schedule: “Today I had, back-to-back: physical therapy, a fitness class, book club, then happy hour.” She shakes her head, still amused. “It’s just kind of non-stop here.”

And yet, it’s never rushed. Life simply unfolds — with options around every corner.

For many, the choice to move to Watersound Fountains was about proximity. After years in Georgia, far from children and grandchildren, one couple realized they wanted the holidays, the milestones, and the simple

weekends back. Now their son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter live minutes away. “We do more now,” they say. “Especially with family so close.”

Afternoons often stretch into easy hours. Neighbors meet in the W Lounge. Others gather



around the open hearth pizza oven, where flatbreads are rolled out right in front of them. On Fridays, The Mark dining room becomes the community’s favorite tradition — a dressed-up, res-

ervations-only dinner with filet, snapper, grouper, and the kind of conversations people look forward to all week.

There’s always movement, always laughter, always someone

waving from a walkway or calling out a hello — the kind of natural, everyday community that makes a place feel alive.

What surprises many is not how much there is to do, but how effortless daily life feels here. The physical therapist is downstairs. The gym is steps away. The trails are safe and beautifully maintained. The beaches and local favorites are just a short drive. Every day can unfold at its own pace.

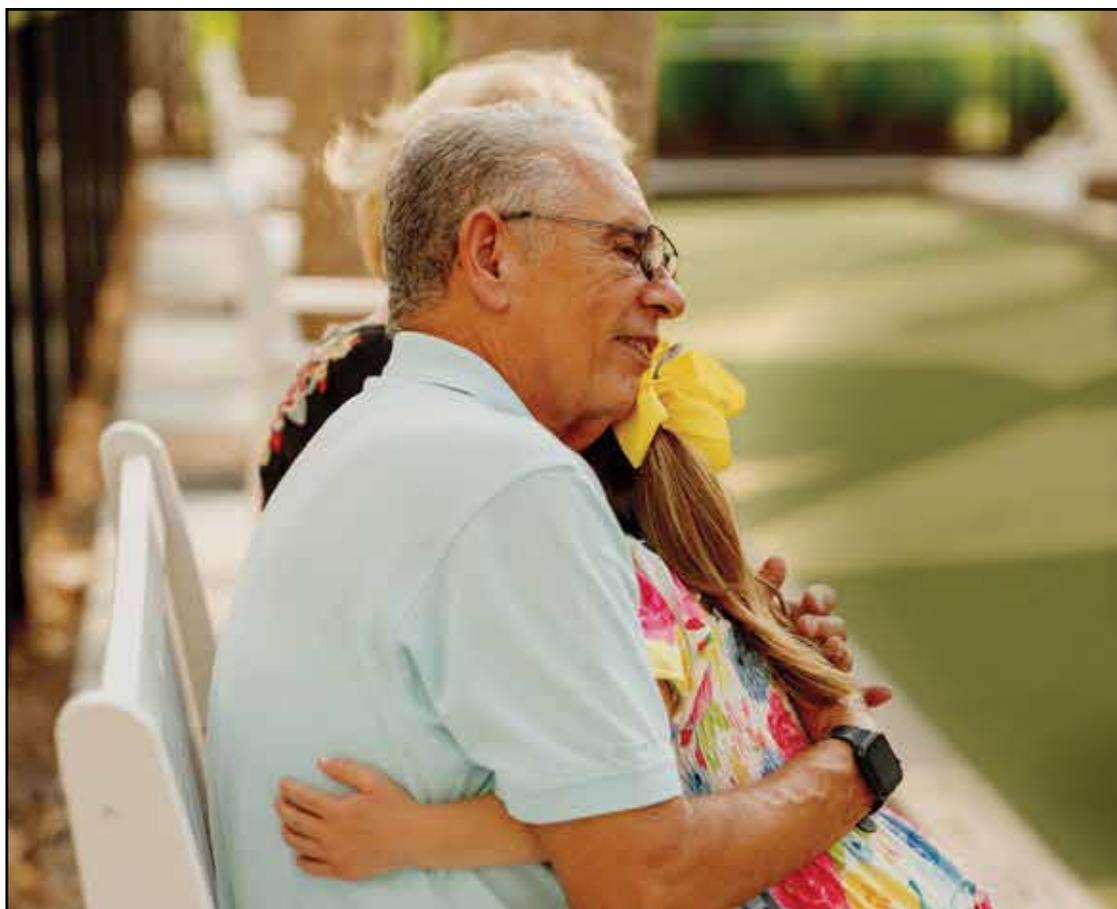
“You can do as much or as little as you want,” a member says as she waves to a neighbor. “It’s like living in a resort — but it feels like home.”

And maybe that’s the truest throughline here.

Occasionally, one member’s daughter will call and say, “Come home — come stay some.” And she’ll laugh and reply, “But I am home. This is my home.”

Watersound Fountains Independent Living — where independence, wellness, and coastal living come together.

To schedule a visit, call (850) 904-3835 or visit watersoundfountains.com.



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Community

Captured After Hours

Two creative brands rooted in Grayton Beach will mark milestones this February with an after-hours gathering focused on art, place, and community.

Captured Clothing 30A will celebrate **three years** at its Grayton Beach storefront, while Modus Photography Gallery marks **thirteen years** of documenting the Gulf Coast. The two will host *Captured After Hours — Valentine's Eve on Friday, February 13*, at their shared location.

The evening is intended as a relaxed, open gathering rather than a traditional Valentine's event. The space will remain open after hours, inviting visitors to browse, connect, and spend time with work shaped by the surrounding landscape.

Modus Photography Gallery is known for a quiet, observational approach to coastal imagery — dune systems, waterways, and early morning light — creating work meant to function as statements rather than souvenirs.

Captured Clothing 30A, which opened in 2023, operates alongside the gallery as a lifestyle-focused retail space built around the same idea: objects

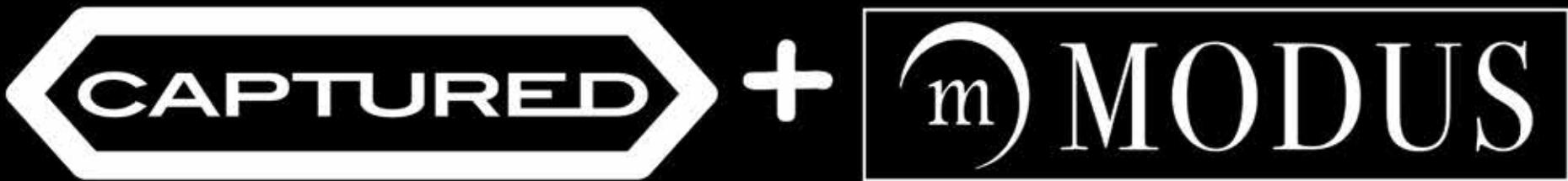


designed for everyday use, longevity, and connection to place. Captured After Hours — Val-

entine's Eve takes place **Friday, February 13, from 5 to 9 p.m.**, inside Captured Cloth-

ing 30A in Grayton Beach. The event is open to the public, and no RSVP is required.

Captured Clothing 30A is located at 37 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach.



From Rental to Residence: Full-Home Painting Projects That Add Value



By KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

Across the Emerald Coast, many properties serve multiple purposes. Some are investment rentals, some are second homes, and others eventually become primary residences. No matter how a property is used today, one thing is certain: a full-home painting project adds both beauty and value.

For families moving into a former rental, fresh paint is often the first step in making a house feel like home. Rentals are typically painted in basic, neutral shades to appeal to a wide variety of guests. A whole-home refresh brings consistency, warmth, and personality, transforming “a place to stay” into “a place to live.”

But even for owners not making that move yet, painting is a smart investment. Updated interiors brighten rooms for visiting

guests, improve rental appeal, and protect surfaces from years of wear and tear. A well-maintained property also increases resale value — something every owner or investor can appreciate.

This is especially true for property management companies and rental agencies. With dozens or even hundreds of homes under your care, keeping them updated isn’t just about aesthetics; it’s about protecting the asset. Guests notice when a property feels fresh and clean, and owners notice when you help preserve their investment. A proactive painting schedule can set your agency apart, ensuring properties are market-ready and reducing the headaches of deferred maintenance.

Large-scale painting projects are about more than color. They extend the life of walls and trim, seal out moisture, and set a higher standard for both



residents and guests. February is an ideal month to plan these projects, before spring break and peak season bring fuller calendars and heavier use.

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 Community

Where Thread Meets Tide: The Handwoven World of Kathy Schwietz

By ANDREA ALLEN

Tucked away in Inlet Beach, just minutes from the Gulf’s white sand and rolling surf, a quiet kind of magic is happening inside the home of local weaver Kathy Schwietz.

What looks like an ordinary home from the outside opens into a workshop alive with color, texture, and rhythm—home to three looms and nearly five decades of craftsmanship.

Kathy has been weaving for 49 years, mastering the art of turning raw fiber into functional beauty. Her process begins long before a loom is ever dressed. She hand-dyes much of her own thread, carefully blending colors inspired by the coastal world around her—sea glass blues, sandy neutrals, and the warm tones of sunset over the water.

Once at the loom, time seems to disappear. With old-time rock and roll playing in the background, Kathy often gets lost in the steady rhythm of weaving, the repetitive motion becoming

both focus and meditation. Hours can pass before she realizes it, as fabric slowly takes shape beneath her hands.

From these looms emerge a collection of handwoven textiles, including cozy blankets, absorbent towels, and elegant table runners, all designed to be both aesthetically pleasing and practical. Each piece is uniquely crafted, showcasing subtle variations that highlight the human touch—an element that mass production cannot replicate.

Kathy particularly enjoys weaving blankets. She sources her cotton

from the southern United States, which is spun into yarn in Asheville, NC. This cotton is specially processed for handweavers, in contrast to commercial standards, resulting in a fabric that

boasts remarkable softness and luster. Kathy purchases it in bulk, dyeing it in various colors to suit her creative vision. The blankets she weaves from this exquisite cotton are not only incredibly soft and machine washable but



also crafted to become cherished heirlooms. Generously sized, these blankets provide the perfect comfort for cuddling up and make beautiful accent pieces for any room in the house.

In an age of mass production, Kathy’s work represents a return to slow craft and enduring quality. Her textiles fit seamlessly into modern coastal homes while honoring weaving traditions that span centuries.

Members of the community can find Kathy’s work locally at Retail Therapy of

Santa Rosa Beach, where her handwoven pieces are proudly displayed alongside other thoughtfully curated goods. She also sells online through her Etsy shop, HandwovenbyKathy.com, making her work accessible beyond the beach.

Those interested in seeing behind-the-scenes glimpses of her process can follow her on Facebook at Handwoven by Kathy.

Supporting Kathy’s work means supporting a local artist who has dedicated nearly half a century to her craft. As she continues weaving away in her Inlet Beach workshop, her textiles remain a reminder that some of the most meaningful pieces in our homes—and our community—are still made by hand, one thread at a time.

TRAINING

continued from page 5

proves mood and focus. Suddenly, the person who felt stuck begins to feel capable again.

That’s how marathons are won. Not by sprinting at the start, but by pacing wisely.

Redefining Success

What if success wasn’t measured by how fast you change, but by how well you sustain? What if progress meant fewer crashes, quicker recovery, and a deeper sense of connection to

your body?

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So, if you’re feeling discouraged, tired of trends, or tempted by the next “miracle” solution, pause. Take a breath. Ask yourself not what will fix you fastest, but what will support you longest.

Your body is in this for the long haul. And when you meet it with patience, consistency, and care, it will carry you farther than any shortcut ever could.

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KOLTERHOMES®

 Community

Money Matters: Doodie! Doodie!

By CLINT GHARIB, AIF®, CFED®

Wow, what a new year can ring in. If you've been reading my updates then you know I have been saying for many months to pre-

pare for a real sell-off: "So when the next big sell-off comes (a sale), remember this idea of so many proposed data-center projects to shop during the sale. I don't know the future, but I can see "miles

and miles and miles" of proposed spending ahead." Also, you may recall from the "Deepseek" moment in early 2025 that I've not been a fan of OpenAI, believing Sam Altman is more 'sizzle than



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steak'. This by no means tempers my enthusiasm for the upside potential from the massive buildout of technology and electrification. Rather, it continues to reinforce to me the importance of stock selection. Remember, I have believed we are in a new Bull market (started March 2023 imo) and like past Bull Trends, there can be serious sell-offs while in the Bull Trend. The long-term possibility of this massive buildout reminds me of the scale of rebuilding Japan and Europe after WWII.

Dunnn dunn... duuuunnn duunn... ('Jaws' theme music)

At the end of 2025, we saw folks begin to worry about debt and circular AI deals, especially with Oracle and OpenAI. Reactions by many remind me of the hilarious scene in "Caddyshack" when the candy bar is floating in the pool and panic ensues when a child yells, "Doodie! Doodie!" After they have the entire pool drained and sanitized by Bill Murray's character in a hazmat suit (while we know it was a Baby Ruth candy bar), he deadpans, "It's no big deal" as he takes a bite. Like the caddies in the pool, Wall Street is known to overreact on the up as well as the down. Yes, I do think OpenAI and Oracle's debt are doodie, warranting sell off, but the notion that the upside potential is over like a dot.com burst seems to me like the reaction of the pool cleaning

scene: way over the top. Scary declines within a Bull trend can offer potential springboards to a portfolio after the panic subsides. Remember, amidst the fear, what seems like doodie can end up being just a Baby Ruth candy bar.

We invite you to contact us with your questions about the markets and your portfolio.

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Camellias Take Center Stage as Seagrove Garden Club Members Gather

Camellias, the showy bush with large, colorful winter blooms, were the focus of the most recent meeting of the Seagrove Garden Club as the organization continues its 62nd year.

Margaret Morrison, a Walton County master gardener and a board member of Friends of Eden Gardens, shared details about proper growing conditions, pruning and propagation of camellias at the group's January meeting at Pazzo Italiano in Santa Rosa Beach to prepare members for the annual Camellia Festival and plant sale held Feb. 7 at Eden Gardens State Park.

"We have had such a fantastic first half to the year," said Seagrove Garden Club president Marie Spafford. "I'm really excited about what 2026 holds, especially as we continue to make a difference in our community."

In mid-February, Seagrove Garden club members will tour Coastal Blue Farms/Nursery in Freeport and enjoy a "winter picnic" in the event center, catered by Emerald Coast Catering.

The 62nd Seagrove Garden Club season began in September with a presentation about 30A Tiny Library, a passion project spearheaded by club member Victoria Sellers, followed in October by a fabulous holiday floral demonstration by Kirby Holt, owner of Blossom, a floral and gift shop in downtown Chipley.

The garden club closed 2025 with its annual Gifting & Giving fundraiser. The November

lunch, along with an additional club donation, raised \$11,000, which was distributed to local charities to benefit children and families in need of food, clothing, housing and other needs during the holiday season.

Organizations receiving donations included St. Vincent de Paul Society, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Chapel at Crosspoint, Simple Faith, Point Washington Medical Clinic and the Muscogee Nation.

Spafford is completing the second year of her club presidency. New officers joining the leadership team in September were Judy Clark and Carolyn Dzelzkahns as co-treasurers. Eileen O'Grady continues as vice president and Carolyn Lohmiller handles club secretary duties. Patsy Powell is the club parliamentarian and Kathy Martin handles financial reporting.

Long-time member Cora Brettel revived the club's Charity of the Month effort last year by encouraging members to donate diapers, pet food and supplies, toothbrushes, women's personal care items and healthy snacks to local non-profits. Brettel made sure all donations were delivered each month to Caring & Sharing, Alaqua Animal Rescue, Shelter House, Food for Thought and Path of Grace.

"Our monthly meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at different venues," Spafford said. Community involvement includes the weekly Flower Shuttle program and monthly charity donations.



Seagrove Garden Club officers for the 2025-26 season are left to right, Carolyn Dzelzkahns, Marie Spafford, president; Eileen O'Grady, Carolyn Lohmiller, Patsy Powell, Judy Cox and Kathy Martin.

Looking forward, Michael Smith of Artistic Designs Unlimited in Mariana will talk about floral design in March. In April, members will learn about using native plants to attract birds from Ron Houser of the Bay County Audubon Society and participate in the club's annual plant exchange. May's meeting is being planned.

Visitors to Ascension Hospital Emerald Coast in Santa Rosa Beach, the nearby Ascension

Cancer Center, Genesis Care and residents of three assisted-living facilities enjoy the weekly handiwork of Seagrove Garden Club members who create dozens of personal flower arrangements created with donated flowers.

Organized in 1963 in South Walton County, Fla., Seagrove Garden Club is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit. The club's early focus on sharing the culture of coastal flowers and ex-

periences has evolved into a mission of giving back to the community through flowers and monetary support. Since becoming a tax-exempt organization in 2019, the club has raised more than \$86,000 to support charities in Walton, Bay and Okaloosa counties. For more information on Seagrove Garden Club activities and membership, please visit the group's Facebook page.



Winter blooming camellias are showcased at Eden Gardens State Park in February

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Lee Campbell

 Community

Green Thumb Garden Club is Offering Scholarships to Students from Walton County

By KATHLEEN EDGE, PUBLICITY & WEBSITE CHAIR

For over four decades, Green Thumb Garden Club has awarded Mercer Scholarships to college students from Walton County. Students must be currently enrolled or must have been accepted by a college, university, or technical school with a major in agriculture, biology, botany, ecology, environmental studies, forestry, horticulture, landscape design or an acceptable related course.

Through the generous donations from GTGC members, fundraising events and the Wal-

ton County community, a total of \$4,000 is available for award. The amount of each scholarship will be based on applicants' qualifications. Detailed application requirements and forms are available on the GTGC website, www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org.

GTGC Board member, Debbie Michel, is Scholarship Committee Chair. Her contact information is on the application form which must be submitted no later than April 30, 2026. Please contact Debbie Michel with any questions or email greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com.

The scholarship is for tuition

only and is paid directly to the college, university, or technical school. The winner(s) will be requested to make a presentation at the member meeting award ceremony for the scholarship in May 2025.

This month's member meeting will be held on February 18, 2026, at Westwinds Conference Center, 4700 Westwinds Drive, Miramar Beach, FL. The guest speaker will be Walton County Extension Agent Evan Anderson, presenting the timely subject of Panhandle Spring gardening. The meeting cost is \$30 and includes lunch. Donations will be accepted for



Caring & Sharing's diaper drive.

The Green Thumb Garden Club, Inc., located in Walton County, Florida, is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its mission is to stimulate interest in the beautification of Walton County, furthering the education of its

members and the public in botany, community beautification, conservation of natural resources, environmental awareness, floral design, gardening, horticulture, and nature studies and instill in our youth the love of gardening and respect for the environment.

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SPRINGS

continued from page 6

a day, Morrison Springs is south of Ponce de Leon State Park. There are three cavities into the Floridan Aquifer here, the deepest of which is 300 feet deep. Cyprus knees stand out of the water, but there are no nature trails.

Because of the limestone rock of the aquifer, there are many caves. Caves are dangerous for inexperienced underwater explorers.

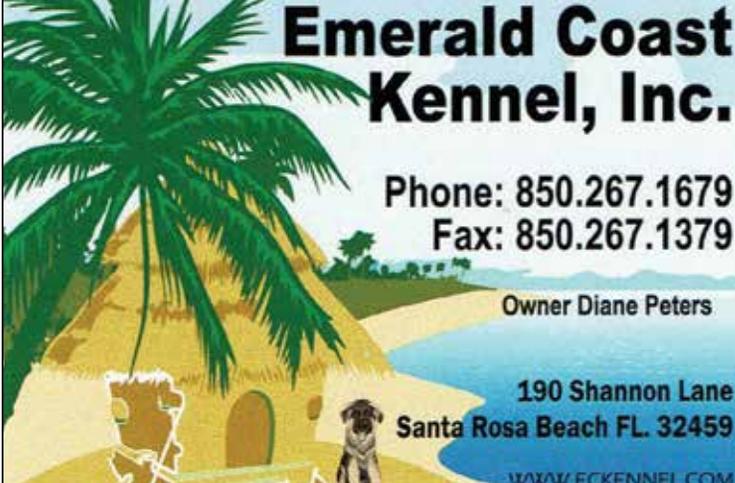
Springs of Walton County

The springs are unique ecosystems with unique histories

that are more than fun places to go on hot summer days or even cold winter days. They represent a window into our water supply and a chance to understand how water moves through the aquifer to supply our needs and the needs of the plants and animals that depend on the water. The springs are one more reason to be grateful for our resources. Enjoy the plants and animals and jump in. Getting out is the hard part!

Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology professor. She spends her time volunteering, teaching, and writing science articles to share her interests with future generations.

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Walton County Launches Geocaching Program

Walton County has decided to launch a Geocaching program. What, you might ask, is Geocaching? It is a kind of real-life treasure hunt and adventure is the key! Geocaching is an outdoor activity where people use a GPS device or smartphone to find hidden containers, called geocaches or simply caches, at specific coordinates. There are more than three million active cache sites worldwide and now Walton County has decided to join in the adventure. <https://youtu.be/jr2WsUm5GSc>

Most caches are small, waterproof containers that hold a logbook and sometimes a pen or pencil. Some larger caches, like big plastic containers or ammo



boxes, may also include small items or trinkets you can trade. These objects are usually more sentimental than valuable, but they add a fun element to the adventure.

Many caches are on trails or in areas not normally explored. ADA accessible caches are also available.

Geocaching Rules & Etiquette:

- Sign the logbook with your username and date
- Be respectful of others using the park
- Trade items responsibly—no food, and family-friendly items only
- Log and move trackable items according to their mission
- Return caches exactly as found
- Log your find online without spoilers
- Stay on marked trails and protect natural areas
- Cache In, Trash Out—help keep our parks clean
- Geocache at your own risk; Walton County is not responsible for interactions with nature



or wildlife

How to Get Started:

- Sign up at Geocaching.com (free accounts can access all county-maintained caches)
- Most county parks now have caches, including ADA-accessible options
- Visit username [WaltonCountyParks](https://www.geocaching.com/profile/username/WaltonCountyParks) on Geocaching.

com to see our caches • Visit MyWaltonFL.gov for more information on caches and events

Get outside, explore Walton County Parks, and start your geocaching adventure!

Visit this link to learn more: <https://youtu.be/jr2WsUm5GSc>

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 Community

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Fundraising Events in 2026 for Emerald Coast Autism Center

There are many great opportunities to connect with Emerald Coast Autism Center this year and play a part in providing necessary services to individuals with autism in our community.

The national incidence rate of children diagnosed with autism increased in 2025, going from 1 in 36 children to 1 in 31 children. Emerald Coast Autism Center (ECAC) is one of this area's major resources for children with autism. As a non-profit, ECAC puts on several fundraising events each year to raise money to continue providing these necessary resources for their clients, students, and their families.

ECAC provides Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy, education, and vocational training to children and young adults with autism and other related unique abilities across Northwest Florida. The center was founded in 2009 by Heidi Blalock and Staci Berryman to fill a need in the community and initially served five clients while sharing their space with another business. Now, ECAC has expanded to two buildings of their own on the Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) campus and provides services to over 100 children and young adults between the clinic and the newly built school, Emerald Coast Learning Center (ECLC).

The expansions are made possible through special events and donations from the community. Each year, ECAC hosts the ONE Campaign to benefit their scholarship fund and raise awareness by encouraging ev-

eryone to run or golf for the one in their lives affected by autism. The campaign is comprised of the ONE Run 5k on Saturday, May 2 and the Hole in ONE Golf Tournament on Friday, September 18.

In addition to the ONE Campaign, ECAC will be hosting two other special events in 2026 to raise funds to provide the best care and education possible for their clients, students, and families.

Girls Just Wanna Have Lunch will be a women-focused event at The Wine Bar – Grand Boulevard on Saturday, February 21, from 2- 4 p.m. This is an exclusive event with limited seating, so tickets will sell quickly. Tickets are \$50 and include food, two glasses of wine, and a raffle ticket and are available on Eventbrite and on ECAC's website – www.ecautismcenter.org.

Fleets & Eats, a bar hop by boat on the Destin Harbor, will take place on Saturday, October 24. This year, The Edge Seafood Restaurant & Skybar is generously providing the boat and afterparty location. The other locations will be announced later this year, and will each have heavy appetizers and a signature cocktail. Tickets for Fleets & Eats will be available closer to the event.

For more information about events and day-to-day happenings at Emerald Coast Autism Center, please visit their website or Facebook page. To sponsor, donate a raffle prize, or volunteer, contact Jordan Eberle at ECACoutreach@ecautismcenter.org.

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Innovation Takes Flight: South Walton Mosquito District Wins Prestigious Award and Donates 30K to Friends of Topsail

South Walton Mosquito District (SWMD) proudly announces its recent recognition at T-Mobile's 2025 4th Annual Innovate Awards in Orlando, where industry leaders were honored for groundbreaking achievements in innovation and community impact. SWMD received the event's highest distinction—the Malcolm Gladwell Tipping Point Award—along with a \$30,000 charitable donation.

SWMD earned this honor for introducing the Panhandle's first-ever drone-powered mosquito control program, powered by T-Mobile 5G technology. This innovative initiative has reduced treatment times by 75%, optimized resource allocation through advanced mapping systems, and set a new benchmark for sustainable public health practices. By integrating drones, data, and reliable connectivity, SWMD has redefined mosquito control—protecting communities more efficiently while demonstrating how small government

agencies can leverage innovation to serve the public and preserve the environment.

"We are honored to receive the 2025 T-Mobile Malcolm Gladwell Tipping Point Award. Competing alongside nationally recognized organizations such as Cisco, Tractor Supply, and UNLV made this recognition especially meaningful, and being selected by Malcolm Gladwell himself is a true honor," said Darrin Dunwald, Director of SWMD. Following discussions with staff and Board of Commissioners, SWMD voted to donate the award to Friends of Topsail Hill Preserve State Park. Darrin added, "In keeping with our commitment to community and environmental stewardship, we chose to donate the \$30,000 award to Friends of Topsail Hill Preserve State Park to help preserve one of the limited conservation areas in our region."

To learn more about SWMD, its drone program or other services, follow SWMD on social media and visit <https://www.southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org>.



[southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org](https://www.southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org). About South Walton Mosquito District: In 1964, SWMD was established to control disease-bearing mosquitoes and other insects. Services include advanced methods of Surveillance, Drone technology, Truck Spraying, Aerial Treatments, Larvaciding, Adulticiding, Integrated Pest Management, Source Reduction/Ditch Operations, Distribution of Yellow Fly

Kits, Sentinel Chicken Surveillance, and Public Outreach. For more info, please follow SWMD on Facebook or Instagram or visit <https://www.southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org>.

About Friends of Topsail Hill Preserve State Park: The Friends of Topsail is a Citizens Support Organization committed to protecting, enhancing, and celebrating this beautiful natural space. Through volunteer projects, ed-

ucational programs, community gatherings, and fundraising efforts (Tapas & Tunes and Camp Christmas), they work hand in hand with park staff to preserve the park's unique environment and history. As the community grows, so does the importance of safeguarding this local treasure for future generations. To learn more or volunteer, please visit <https://www.topsailparkfriends.org>.

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 Community

Eroded: 30A's Battle for Florida's Beaches

A locally produced documentary podcast

By JARED SCHNADER

“Since the Walton County [Customary Use] ordinance was adopted mid-year 2016, can’t we just say, ‘this section shall not apply to an ordinance adopted and effective on or before Jan. 2, 2016’? That would protect Volusia and St. Johns counties...”

That sentence, taken from a 2017 email written by lobbyist Gary Hunter to then-State Representative Katie Edwards-Walpole, would quietly reshape the future of Walton County’s beaches. The very next day, that language appeared in House Bill 631. With it, a long-simmering dispute over who owns—and who can use—Florida’s beaches erupted into one of the most con-

sequential local battles.

Eroded: 30A’s Battle for Florida’s Beaches chronicles the creation, passage, and fall out from this bill through 7 audio episodes.

Over the past two years, I have interviewed key figures on all sides of this conflict and spent countless hours researching how Walton County arrived at this point. What I found was not a single villain or an easy fix, but a complicated convergence of politics, property rights, lobbying influence, and public misunderstanding.

My own journey into this issue began a few years earlier, when I overheard a candidate for county commission confidently tell a voter, “If you vote for me, I will

fix the problem with our beaches. The commissioners can do this—they just aren’t.” Even without fully grasping the details at the time, I knew that statement was inaccurate. But if that wasn’t true, what was?

Eroded is a documentary-style podcast designed to answer those questions. Through interviews with local business owners, longtime residents, tourists, legal experts, and the lawmaker who originally wrote the law that would become HB 631, we uncover how all of this came about and what could be done next.

The podcast begins by laying essential groundwork, explaining concepts like Customary Use and Beach Nourishment—terms that

are often misunderstood but central to the dispute. Listeners learn how, in 2014, beachfront homeowners and local business leaders stood together against a proposed beach nourishment project. This alliance unraveled as HB 631 passed and public beach use collided with private property rights.

From there, the story broadens. Senator Passidomo recounts how her initial attempt to address Customary Use was derailed, ultimately forcing her to kill the bill. I also speak with local business owners and tourists about how they have been impacted, and advocate for fighting to restore public beach access. The series explores why the 2025 repeal of HB 631 failed to return the pub-

lic’s rights to the sand, leaving many questions—and frustrations—unresolved.

Eroded was created to give the community a clearer picture of how we got here—and to encourage informed, constructive involvement in what comes next. My hope is that listeners come away better educated, more engaged, and ready to take part in shaping the future of our community and our beaches.

You can find all 7 episodes on the major podcast platforms, or visit the website for links: www.erodedpodcast.com

Jared Schnader is the creator of the locally produced Eroded: 30A’s Battle for Florida’s Beaches. He lives in Santa Rosa Beach with his wife and children.

Fore Her Organization Ushers in Spring with Twelfth Annual “Tea Fore Her” Fundraiser

Set for March 1st at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa, Benefiting Breast Cancer Patients on the Emerald Coast

Tickets are now on sale for “Tea Fore Her,” a fundraiser to benefit Fore Her and presented by Emerald Coast Hospice, set for Sunday, March 1st at 12 p.m.

at the Hilton Sandestin. This annual fundraiser, in its 12th year, provides support and financial assistance to breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast who are undergoing treatment.

Tickets are \$70 per person and tables (for 8 guests) are also available for purchase at www.foreher.org.

A \$65 discounted ticket will be available for breast cancer survivors.

“Emerald Coast Hospice Care recognizes how essential it is for breast cancer patients in our community and surrounding communities to receive financial support and services while navigating one

of the most taxing times in their lives as they undergo treatment,” says Melody Joy, Hospice and Palliative Care Consultant with Emerald Coast Hospice Care. “We are honored to support this most esteemable charitable cause Fore Her provides to our local residents by sponsoring Tea Fore Her.”

The day’s festivities will include a seated luncheon with a special guest appearance from Opera singer Toccara Scott, a silent auction, photo booth...and of course, tea! Guests are also encouraged to wear their most festive hats for a chance to win the coveted “Best Hat” prize!

Fore Her is honored to welcome Dr. Alison M. Moody as the guest speaker for the Twelfth Annual Tea for Her. Dr. Moody is a breast surgeon and board-certified general surgeon at Ascension Sacred Heart in Panama City, Florida. She is dedicated to caring for women and men

facing breast cancer and other breast conditions. Her commitment to both medical excellence and compassionate connection makes her a meaningful voice for the gathering. Tea Fore Her offers the perfect setting to gather with friends and enjoy an uplifting afternoon focused on inspiration, connection, and supporting a great cause.

Tea Fore Her 2026 sponsors to date include Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa (Venue Sponsor), Emerald Coast Hospice (Platinum), Clay Garden and Gifts (Photo Booth and Centerpiece Sponsor), Silver Sands Premium Outlets (Beverage Sponsor), and Eglin Federal Credit Union (Registration Table Sponsor). To become a Tea Fore Her sponsor, donate to the silent auction, or for more information, contact amy@foreher.org or visit www.foreher.org/tea-fore-her.



March 7 & 8
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eccac gala golf &

presented by Peggy & Jerry Swanson

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eccac.org/gala-golf

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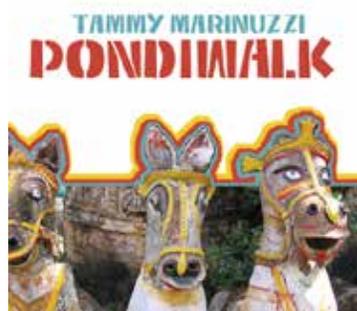
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 Arts

9,514 Miles: Local Artist's Long Walks Help Raise Awareness

On a bright, brisk Florida day at the Conservation Park in Panama City Beach, Tammy Marinuzzi's stride is purposeful as she makes her way along uneven pine-lined trails, a chilly breeze lightly teasing tree-tops. Daily walks like this—in many different places—have become an important part of her life over the past ten years. Marinuzzi, an artist and educator, is well known for her widely exhibited ceramic work, in turn both whimsical and evocative. She's also been a beloved art professor at Gulf Coast State College for nearly two decades, with further educational experience that includes time teaching at the University of Florida, the Skopart Foundation in Greece and the Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry, India. These facets of her practice—pottery and education—along with a particularly formative period spent in India, led her to begin a project of great personal significance in 2015: Pondi Walk. Pondi Walk has been a journey of nearly 10,000 miles over the past ten years, and it's very near completion. In addition to a symbolic finish at 9,514 miles, the project will culminate with a solo exhibition at The Light Room in Panama City, Florida, opening February 21 2026.

Marinuzzi's journey began, as they say, with a single step over 20 years ago when she temporarily relocated to Pondicherry, India, to teach at Golden Bridge Pottery. Her interactions with local and village potters led her



to a better understanding of the challenges disadvantaged young women face in the region, including child marriage. As Marinuzzi dug deeper, she discovered that impoverished women were further hindered in their efforts to build better futures due to their daily water-carrying obligations. "I started researching, and I came to find out a girl might walk some three to eight miles a day to get water," she explains. "Because of these responsibilities, they may not be able to go to school or finish their education," Marinuzzi recalls a story she's heard of an



Tammy Marinuzzi

organisation that, to overcome these very real limitations, sent teachers to the wells to educate the girls while they waited for water. Her research, and stories like this one, as well as her personal experience in Pondicherry, got Marinuzzi thinking about ways she could call attention to these circumstances.

"Here I am, an educator, a potter, a woman—I'm all these things, but my destiny has been different," she says. "This is how it started. The walking is a metaphor for thinking about women globally, it's an opportunity to take an hour to pause during my day, and reflect on the women globally who must walk daily—

often without access to the things I take for granted—basic needs such as water, food, and education."

As she was developing the concept of Pondi Walk, Marinuzzi resolved to walk the equivalent of the distance between her home in Northwest Florida and Pondicherry, in Southern India. "Pondi Walk began as a personal journey—both literal and reflective—but it has since evolved into something larger," says Marinuzzi. In the last ten years, she's covered over 9,000 miles, averaging 951 a year, with only a few hundred left to go before she reaches her goal. Along the way, she's taken photographs, creating a visual walking journal, a body of work that both documents physical locations but also serves as a reflection of her contemplative mindset. It's work from this documentary approach that will be on show at The Light Room in 2026. Over the years, Pondi Walk has also created numerous opportunities for social engagement, from community-oriented projects to workshops, public lectures, and exhibits, all "designed to inspire awareness and action," explains Marinuzzi.

Additionally, the artist is using her walking as a way to raise funds for a nonprofit in Southern India, Shanti Bhavan Children's Project, a school in Tamil Nadu that provides an education for one child per family from villages experiencing extreme poverty. "Initially, I had hoped to return to India to reconnect with the children of Thuvara-

dimanai, a small pottery caste village in Southern India, and explore how I might support their futures," says Marinuzzi. However, though her commitments as an artist, educator, and mother prevented her physical return, her continued research led her to Shanti Bhavan as an alternate avenue in need of support; she found their mission closely aligned with her own goals for this project. Since its founding in 1997, this organization has provided possibilities for children who would otherwise be most vulnerable—in the case of girls, their efforts have reduced child marriage rates, but for both boys and girls, they've helped drive a small-scale shift away from generational poverty. Shanti Bhavan's support offers a rare opportunity to break the cycles that prevent upward mobility.

Currently, Marinuzzi is seeking sponsors for every 100 miles of the walk in an effort to raise one dollar per mile, with donations to go to further Shanti Bhavan's efforts in Southern India. Her goal is to raise \$9,514, which can cover all costs associated with sending a girl to school at Shanti Bhavan for five years.

For more on Marinuzzi's project, including a selection of images from her walking journal and details on her upcoming show at The Light Room, follow her on Instagram @pondiwalk. Those interested in sponsoring Marinuzzi's project or donating to Shanti Bhavan should contact Tammy Marinuzzi at tmarinuzzi@gmail.com.

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents "Everlasting Love" – A Valentine's Day Musical Revue Fundraiser



Love takes center stage this Valentine's season as Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) presents Everlasting Love, a special Valentine's Day musical revue fundraiser celebrating romance, connection, and timeless love songs on February 14 at 7 p.m. This intimate evening of music and storytelling will feature beloved performers Teresa Lombardi, Taylor Walker, Skylar Smith, and Jackie Rose.

Everlasting Love invites audiences to experience an unforgettable night filled with iconic love songs from stage and screen that span generations. Designed as both a celebration of love and a fundraiser supporting ECTC's mission, the revue offers a perfect Valentine's date night with a meaningful cause at its heart.

"Everlasting Love celebrates shared dreams and the meaningful relationships that grow when people come together," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director of Emerald Coast Theatre Company. "This evening is about connection,

possibility, and supporting the future of theatre here on our Emerald Coast."

Everlasting Love will be held at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200, Miramar Beach, FL. Tickets are \$150 each and are sold in pairs. Each pair of tickets includes a bottle of wine along with a sweet or savory charcuterie. Proceeds from the event directly support ECTC's youth educational programming and community outreach initiatives.

ECTC's 2025–2026 season is made possible with generous support from Grand Boulevard Town Center, St. Joe Community Foundation, Visit South Walton, Howard Group, and Jerry and Alice Zich. To make a tax-deductible donation, become a VIP or sponsor, or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoast-theatre.org. Follow ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for the latest updates.

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Events

FEBRUARY HAPPENINGS IN SOUTH WALTON

Farmers Markets

Grand Blvd. Saturdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Grayton Locals Market Thursdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at Hibiscus Guest House

Seaside Amphitheater Saturdays and Tuesdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Peddlers Pavilion Sundays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Rosemary Beach at North Barrett Square Sundays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

SOWAL Comedy Festival Feb. 12-14

SOWAL Comedy Fest (formerly Sand Up Comedy Fest) returns, bringing three days of sharp, big-city stand-up to South Walton over Valentine's weekend. Venues include: SOWAL House, Wild Olives, and Distillery 98. Shows run nightly with two showtimes, 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. at each venue. 2026 Headliners: Peter Wong, Anjelica Scanura, & Carter Deems. Purchase tickets, view the full lineup, and learn more at sowalcomedyfest.com. Support and sponsorships benefit the SOWAL Foundation (SOFO), a nonprofit dedicated to empowering and uplifting local creatives.

Hard Hats & High Heels Feb. 13

Habitat Walton County invites you to join them at the annual Hard Hats & High Heels,



a women's empowerment luncheon bringing together a cross-section of the Emerald Coast's professional, social, and philanthropic leaders. The Hard Hats & High Heels Luncheon takes place at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa from 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

My Furry Valentine at AJ's Grayton Beach Feb. 14

Join AJ's Grayton Beach from 1-3 p.m. for a special Valentine's Day event! My Furry Valentine invites you to celebrate Valentine's Day in a fun, loving atmosphere with your loved ones, both human and canine. Groove to live music by Sean Williams from 12-4 p.m. Road Dogg Rescue will be on-site with adorable pups available for adoption or looking for foster families. Enjoy Tito's

Swag for you and your furry friend, plus Tito's Specialty Drinks. Refresh with a Wicked Weed Beer and get a FREE pint glass with the beer special.

Be Mine Dinner & Live Music at Fish Out of Water Feb. 14

Celebrate Valentine's Day with FOOW as they host a special Be Mine three-course dinner from 4-9 p.m., perfectly paired with their exclusive WaterColor private label wine. Throughout dinner, enjoy live music by husband-and-wife duo Gillerans Island from 6-9 p.m. Reservations are not accepted; seating is offered on a first-come, first-served basis. View the menu at dinefish30a.com/events.

Anti-Valentine's Day at North Beach Social Feb. 14

Join NB Social for ANTI-VALENTINE'S DAY, a night to embrace the joy of being unattached and celebrate with great bay views, heartbreaking desserts, spicy drinks, and DJ Grateful Dan spinning live. The celebrations begin at 6 p.m. If the upcoming couples' holiday has you down, North Beach Social is here

to put some pep in your step and a drink in your hand!

IDIDAHIKE 2026 Feb. 14

Spend Valentine's Day outdoors during IDIDAHIKE, hosted by the Choctawhatchee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association. The annual event features guided hikes of varying lengths through the scenic Nokuse Land Conservancy, part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor and home to sections of the Florida National Scenic Trail.

Designed for families, casual walkers and experienced hikers alike, IDIDAHIKE combines outdoor adventure, conservation education and community connection in one of Northwest Florida's most treasured natural settings. Info & registration: ididahike.org.

Toast 'n Jam: Sincerely, Sondheim Feb. 15

Sinfonia Gulf Coast welcomes back Broadway favorite Nicholas Rodriguez for a special Valentine's weekend brunch concert celebrating the life and legacy of legendary composer Stephen Sondheim at 10:30 a.m. at Hotel Effie, Miramar Beach. Toast 'n Jam: Sincerely, Sondheim blends live music, storytelling and excerpts from Sondheim's handwritten letters for an intimate, heartfelt experience.

A beloved Sinfonia audience

favorite, Rodriguez is joined on piano by Grammy- and Emmy Award-winning music director John McDaniel. Together, they bring to life selections from Company, Sunday in the Park with George, Into the Woods and other Sondheim classics, while sharing stories of the composer's friendships with icons such as Oscar Hammerstein II, Jonathan Larson and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Tickets are \$125 per person and include brunch, performance and gratuities; limited front-row seating is available for \$195. Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community programs. Seating is limited. Tickets and information are available at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or by calling (850) 460-8800.

Russell Brad at Old Florida Fish House Feb. 16 & 17 and March 2 & 3

Russell Brand returns to Old Florida Fish House. Tickets are live now — catch the energy and the laughs beginning at 5:30 p.m. Purchase tickets at oldfloridafishhouse.com.

AJ's Grayton Beach Mardi Gras Celebration Feb. 17

The annual AJ's Grayton Beach Mardi Gras Celebration begins at 3 p.m. on Fat Tuesday. The party kicks off with a delicious Crawfish Boil followed by live music with Dikki Du & Zydeco Krewe at 4 p.m., bringing the vibrant sounds of Louisiana right to AJ's! Enjoy Cajun favorites including Crawfish, Gumbo, Étouffée, Jambalaya, and Red Beans. Sip on Hurricane drink specials to keep the celebration going and \$5 Big Draft Beers to quench your thirst. Come eat, drink, and dance with AJ's this Fat Tuesday!

The 30A Wine Festival Feb. 18-22

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

continued on next page

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FEBRUARY HAPPENINGS IN SOUTH WALTON

surroundings. The festival showcases renowned distillers, vintners, and culinary favorites over four days of celebration – a series of events and workshops where wine enthusiasts and bourbon lovers alike relish in the festivities within the captivating town of Alys Beach. Visit 30awinefestival.com for more details on the festival events, tickets, participants and more.

Sandestin Gumbo Festival Feb. 20-21

The event is a beloved local winter tradition in South Walton. Featuring gumbo tasting throughout The Village, as well as a bloody mary competition and live music. This year's event is promising to serve up fun for everyone. The event begins with a kick-off party the 20th at 5 O'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grille, with the main event from 1-4 p.m. at The Village the 21st. Visit sandestingumbofestival.com for tickets and details. Event will happen rain or shine.

Shrimp & Grits Festival Feb. 28

The festival will showcase shrimp & grits dishes from some of your favorite local restaurants on the Emerald Coast. Proceeds from the festival benefit over 5,000 local club kids at the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. This spirited and fun competition features local area restaurants, showcasing their culinary expertise and innovative variations of the Shrimp & Grits dish. Enjoy "tasting stations," live entertainment, craft beer and cocktail samples of choice. Guest celebrities will judge the competition for winners in several categories, with of course, the coveted "People's Choice" title voted by all the guests. Learn more and get tickets at www.shrimppandgritsfest.com.

Tea Fore Her March 1

Gather your friends and join Fore Her at noon for Tea Fore Her at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. Enjoy lunch and tea with great company while raising funds for breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast. During the event there will be a photo booth, silent auction, lunch, wine pull and

more. Big hats encouraged for a chance to win "Best Hat" prize. Tickets can be purchased online at www.foreher.org/event-details/tea-fore-her-2.

Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 6-8

This land-based show at Aaron Bessant Park will feature boat displays from all major manufacturers and the top dealers representing the latest in boats, high-tech engines, electronics and marine accessories. Buyers will find everything in between. REAL. FUN. BOATS. Making it much more than a boat show, this event features everything for the kind of active, outdoor beach living so popular along the Emerald Coast. From stand-up paddleboards and fishing kayaks, to outdoor kitchens, diving, active wear and beach cruising bicycles. Visit emerald-coastboatshow.com to purchase tickets, check out the venue and registered exhibitors.

Book Carnival | Festival del Libro at Grand Boulevard March 7

Join fellow book-lovers in Grand Boulevard in Grand Park from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. for Book Carnival / Festival del Libro, a vibrant celebration of books, community, and creativity! Free and open to all ages. Bring a book to swap. Bring a friend to brag. Wear your best carnival costume! There will be free books, costume parade, arts & crafts, yummy treats and tons of other literary adventures!

ECCAC Gala & Golf Weekend March 7-8

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center will host its 28th annual signature Gala & Golf Weekend on March 7-8, bringing the community together to support children in need. The Gala takes place Saturday, March 7, at 5:30 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa and includes dinner, music, a wine pull and live auction led by DawnMarie Kotsonis, "The Gavel Girl," with former ECCAC client Isabella Rose as the featured speaker. The weekend continues Sunday, March 8, with a noon shotgun-start Golf Tournament



at Kelly Plantation Golf Club. Proceeds benefit ECCAC's mission to provide free services to child victims of abuse. Gala and golf reservations are available at eccac.org. For details, contact Kate McDougall at 530-341-0802 or kate@eccac.org.

CVHN Soirée on the Bay March 13

Enjoy a lavish gathering with fine wine, food and spirits at Soiree On The Bay: Act V, an elevated weekend benefiting Children's Volunteer Health Network honoring 20 incredible years of care, compassion, and community impact. This weekend is presented by the Dugas family and will take place on their stunning family estate overlooking the Choctawhatchee Bay in Santa Rosa Beach. Details and tickets at givebutter.com/c/SoireeontheBayACTV.

Destin Charity Wine Auction Turns 21 and Goes Wild for Kids April 24-25

The 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family benefits children in need across Northwest Florida through Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's (DCWAF) 16 partner children's charities. In 2025, the foundation donated \$3.1 million

following one of its most successful auctions to date.

The 2026 auction will feature an impressive lineup of celebrity chefs and internationally renowned vintners. Confirmed vintners include owners and winemakers from Allegrini, Cardinale and Lokoya, Domaine de la Clos Chapelle, Dossier, Doubleback, Forman, Jarvis Estate, Phifer Pavitt, Aaron Pott Wines, Revana Wine Portfolio, Thompson 31 Fifty, VGS Chateau Potelle and more.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction is held in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, also taking place at Grand Boulevard the same weekend. The festival showcases hundreds of premium wines, spirits and culinary offerings, with proceeds benefiting DCWAF.

More participating chefs and vintners will be announced in the coming months. Full details are available at dcwaf.org.





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- PLATINUM: WaterColor Inn & Resort
- GOLD: Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

BEST RENTAL MANAGEMENT COMPANY >50 UNITS

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- PLATINUM: 30A Beach Girls
- GOLD: Royal Destinations

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- PLATINUM: Ria Leigh Gallery
- GOLD: Jonah Allen Gallery

BEST EVENT

- DIAMOND: 30A Songwriters Festival
- PLATINUM: Seeing Red Wine Festival
- GOLD: 30A BBQ Festival

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- DIAMOND: Camp Creek Golf Course
- PLATINUM: Eagle Springs Golf Course and Recreation Center
- GOLD: Santa Rosa Golf & Beach Club

BEST KIDS ATTRACTION

- DIAMOND: Camp WaterColor
- PLATINUM: The Village of Baytowne Wharf/Adventure Zone
- GOLD: Wild Sea Turtle Wednesdays/South Walton Turtle Watch

BEST NATURE LOCALE

- DIAMOND: Grayton Beach State Park
- PLATINUM: Eden Gardens State Park
- GOLD: Topsail Hill Preserve State Park

BEST RETAILER

- DIAMOND: Lola's on 30A
- PLATINUM: The Seaside Style
- GOLD: WaterColor Store

BEST SHOPPING AREA

- DIAMOND: Grand Boulevard
- PLATINUM: Seaside
- GOLD: Silver Sands Premium Outlets

BEST TENNIS FACILITY

- DIAMOND: Watersound Club Tennis
- PLATINUM: Seaside Tennis
- GOLD: Rosemary Beach Racquet Club

FOOD & DRINKS

BEST BREAKFAST

- DIAMOND: Donut Hole
- PLATINUM: Crackings
- GOLD: Cowgirl Kitchen

BEST CASUAL DINING

- DIAMOND: Shunk
- PLATINUM: L
- GOLD: Fish C

BEST COFFEE

- DIAMOND: Black
- PLATINUM: Be
- GOLD: Amavida

BEST CRAFT BEER/S

- DIAMOND: T
- PLATINUM:
- GOLD: Growle

BEST FINE DINING

- DIAMOND: C
- PLATINUM: Georg
- GOLD: Seagar's Prim

BEST HAPP HOUR

- DIAMOND: The Gr
- PLATINUM: Hurr
- GOLD: Fish C

BEST LOCAL RESTAURANT

- DIAMOND: Co
- PLATINUM: Sou
- GOLD: Chant

BEST PERSONAL CHEF

- DIAMOND: Tow
- PLATINUM: Blue N
- GOLD: Grayton Beach

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RESTAURANT DINING

DIAMOND: Gulley Oyster Bar
PLATINUM: Los Rancheros
GOLD: Out of Water

CAFE HOUSE

DIAMOND: Black Bear Bread Co.
PLATINUM: Signets & Brew
GOLD: Coffee Roasters

BEVERAGE SPIRITS SELECTION

DIAMOND: The Craft Bar
PLATINUM: Distillery 98
GOLD: Beer Garage 30A

BAR DINING

DIAMOND: Café Thirty-A
PLATINUM: George's at Alys Beach
GOLD: The Steaks & Seafood

BAR/CLUB HOURS

DIAMOND: Great Southern Café
PLATINUM: Hurricane Oyster Bar
GOLD: Out of Water

BRUNCH

DIAMOND: Cowgirl Kitchen
PLATINUM: South of Philly 30A
GOLD: Bicycle Eatory

EVENTS/CAFETERIA/CATERING SERVICE

DIAMOND: Grand Send Catering
PLATINUM: Magnolia Catering
GOLD: The Catering and Events

BEST SWEET TREATS

DIAMOND: Pecan Jack's Ice Creamery & Candy Kitchen
PLATINUM: Caramel Cow
GOLD: Blue Mountain Beach Creamery

BEST WINE SELECTION

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VENUES

BEST LIVE MUSIC VENUE

DIAMOND: North Beach Social
PLATINUM: Red Bar
GOLD: Seaside Amphitheater

BEST MEETING/CONFERENCE SPACE

DIAMOND: Camp Creek Inn
PLATINUM: WaterColor LakeHouse
GOLD: Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

BEST WEDDING VENUE

DIAMOND: The Chapel at Seaside
PLATINUM: WaterColor LakeHouse
GOLD: Vue on 30A

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Arts

MKAF 30th Anniversary of Concerts in the Village

Celebrate three decades of music under the stars as the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) marks the 30th anniversary of its beloved Concerts in the Village series. The area's first live outdoor concert series returns

Thursday evenings from April 9 through June 11, 2026, at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin.

This 10-concert, family-friendly series features premier regional and national artists and top tribute bands performing every-

thing from classic rock, rhythm and blues, and disco to yacht rock and modern pop favorites.

The season opens April 9 with Smash Mouth, followed by Black Jacket Symphony recreating Van Halen's 1984. Other highlights



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include Yacht Rock Schooner, Rumours ATL (Fleetwood Mac tribute), Brass Transit: The Music of Chicago, The Turnstiles: A Tribute to Billy Joel, Boogie Wonder Band, The Molly Ringwalds, The Return: A Beatles Tribute performing Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and a season finale with A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band.

"We are thrilled to celebrate 30 years of Concerts in the Village with one of our most dynamic and diverse lineups yet," said MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "When you purchase a concert ticket, you are supporting our mission to bring arts education and engagement programs to thousands across Northwest Florida. We invite everyone to join us this season for unforgettable nights of music and community."

Gates open at 6 p.m., with concerts beginning at 7 p.m. Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and picnics, or enjoy food and beverages available for purchase from featured restaurants and food trucks.

General admission is \$40 per adult (including processing fees), with discounts available for active-duty military with ID. Children 12 and under are free. Tickets are available at MKAF.org/events.

A limited number of VIP tables, seating eight guests for the entire season, are available. For availability or sponsorship information, call (850) 650-2226 or

email info@mkaf.org.

MKAF members receive early entry, free admission to every concert, and discounts to other MKAF events. Learn more at MKAF.org.

Concert lineup is subject to change. All sales are final. Pets, drones, and tables larger than two feet are not permitted. Children 17 and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

The 2026 Concerts in the Village schedule:

- Thursday, April 9 | Smash Mouth
- Thursday, April 16 | Black Jacket Symphony: The Music of Van Halen
- Thursday, April 23 | Yacht Rock Schooner
- Thursday, April 30 | Rumours ATL
- Thursday, May 7 | Brass Transit: The Musical Legacy of Chicago
- Thursday, May 14 | Turnstile: The Music of Billy Joel
- Thursday, May 21 | Boogie Wonder Band
- Thursday, May 28 | The Molly Ringwalds
- Thursday, June 4 | The Return: A Beatles Tribute
- Thursday, June 11 | A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band

New To Medicare?



BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

I dedicate this month's article to those of you who will be newly eligible for Medicare in 2026. I hope you find it helpful!

If you've been anticipating your own transition to the Medicare program, you may have already noticed that there are a lot of moving parts, and figuring out what to do can be confusing. So let's break it down.

First of all, you want to know about your initial enrollment period. Assuming you are not intending to remain on your employer's group plan and you're not already collecting Social Security benefits, begin-

ning three months before your birth month when you turn 65, you can enroll for Medicare Parts A and B through the Social Security Administration. These days, this is best accomplished online at ssa.gov. Technically, you can wait as long as three months past your 65th birthday to enroll without penalty, but get it done early.

If you've worked at least 40 quarters in your lifetime, you're automatically provided Medicare. This includes two parts (Medicare Parts A and B). Medicare Part A has no premium and covers hospital-related fees with various deductibles. Medicare Part B covers 80% of physicians and other outpatient fees, and it is offered with a monthly premium. For most people, in 2026, the Part B premium is \$202.90, which will be automatically deducted from SSA benefits if you collect them, or paid directly by you if you are not. For those with higher incomes based on a two-year look back, the Part B premium will vary and can be as high as \$689.90 (and

\$91.00 for Part D prescription coverage) per month. This is known as the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount, or IRMAA.

Step two, you're going to decide whether you'd prefer to stick with Traditional Medicare (Parts A and B) and then add a Medicare Supplement Plan and a Prescription Drug Plan (Part D) to help offset the rest, or switch to a Medicare Advantage Plan, which is a commercial health plan designed specifically for Medicare beneficiaries.

Original Medicare with an added Supplement Plan (Medigap) will be your strongest insurance option. During your initial enrollment into Medicare, you have guaranteed issuance into a Supplement Plan within the first six months of enrolling in Part B. This means that you do not need to pass underwriting before purchasing a Supplement Plan. If you decide after those six months to purchase a Supplement Plan, you will need to pass medical underwriting to be accepted. A

Supplement Plan will allow you to see any provider in the country that accepts Medicare, and most of the costs that Original Medicare does not cover will be covered by your Supplement Plan. The reason many choose a Supplement Plan over an Ad-

vantage Plan is the flexibility to see more providers, without the concern of needing prior authorization or having an insurance company deny a claim. However, Supplement Plans

MEDICARE
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 Wellness

Three-Day Event in Panama City Beach Focuses on Harmonic Living and Sound Immersion

What if the modern health system isn't built around wellness at all, but around long-term dependency? That question sits at the center of EXPHARMACON 2026, a three-day health and wellness experience coming to Panama City Beach from April 24-26 that challenges conventional thinking and invites attendees into a different conversation about how we live, heal, and thrive.

Unlike traditional wellness expos focused on products and protocols, EXPHARMACON 2026 is designed as an experiential event, blending education,

immersive Sound Bath sessions, and practical discussions around what organizers call Harmonic Living — an approach centered on alignment, balance, and intentional lifestyle choices.

Set against the calming backdrop of the Gulf Coast, the event will bring together speakers, facilitators, and attendees who share a curiosity about alternatives to one-size-fits-all health narratives. Through guided sessions and immersive experiences, participants will explore how sound, environment, and intention can influence clarity, stress reduction, and overall well-being.

“EXPHARMACON isn't about rejecting modern medicine,” organizers say. “It's about expanding the conversation. Many people feel there must be more to wellness than prescriptions alone, and this event creates space to explore that — responsibly, experientially, and without pressure.”

Cornerstones of the event include a Sound Bath, Quantum Meditation and brainwave entrainment practices, where attendees experience carefully designed sound environments intended to encourage relaxation, focus, and nervous-system reset.



exploration of wellness concepts.

Organizers emphasize that EXPHARMACON 2026 is educational and experiential, not medical in nature. The event does not provide diagnoses or treatments, but instead focuses on lifestyle awareness, personal exploration, and community dialogue.

Attendance for EXPHARMACON 2026 is limited, reinforcing its emphasis on quality experience over scale. Tickets and accommodation information are available now, and early booking is encouraged due to anticipated demand.

These sessions are paired with discussions around conscious living, personal responsibility, and how small, intentional changes can have a meaningful impact on daily life.

The timing and location of EXPHARMACON 2026 are intentional. Panama City Beach offers a rare quartz sand beach to ground and reconnect to the energy of this natural setting that complements the event's themes, giving attendees the opportunity to step away from noise and routine while engaging in a deeper

For those who have ever questioned whether health can be approached differently — more intentionally, more holistically, and more personally — EXPHARMACON 2026 offers an invitation to explore what that might look like.

Tickets for this event are available at www.EXPHARMACON.com.

This is an educational and experiential event, not medical advice.

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MEDICARE

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have an extra premium between \$100 and \$225 per month, depending on which plan and carrier you choose, and they do not include a Prescription Drug Plan. You will need to add a PDP along with it. If you don't, you will be charged a lifetime penalty when you later decide to add an Advantage Plan or PDP. This penalty is 1% for every month you did not have a PDP after starting your Medicare Part B.

If you choose an Advantage Plan, the government essentially pays your Medicare benefits to the insurance company to manage your health care, and in turn, the Advantage Plan is required to offer benefits that meet a minimum standard. Historically, many have offered extra perks as well, including a Prescription Drug Plan. Advantage Plans work very much like an employer's group insurance. You will need to decide if you want an HMO or a PPO

and will need to stay within your plan's network. This is the most affordable option as they usually have \$0 premiums, and many even include a Part B Giveback, which will actually pay back a portion of your Medicare Part B premium. Different carriers will have different provider networks and PDP drug formularies, so it is important to choose the right plan according to your needs.

What most influences people when it comes to choosing which Supplement and PDP plan or Advantage plan will work best is typically a combination of one's anticipated health care needs, doctor network flexibility or preferences, and budget. Talk to your local broker to get more details and see which plan may work best for you.

Everyone is different and has individualized needs, so getting a free consultation from a certified Medicare broker is valuable. Reach out anytime! Email Christian@evergreenhealthins.com or call (850) 687 7606.

An Inner Voice Makeover



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

Do you ever look back at the way you used to be with judgement? Maybe you are embarrassed about the way you used to look or act in childhood. Perhaps you shame yourself for previous relationships. Maybe you feel angry at yourself about how you handled your work life. Perhaps you are hard on yourself for past mistakes.

It's easy to be unkind and judgemental toward yourself from your present place of knowledge and understanding. However, what would it be like to consider what those earlier versions of yourself knew when they were making decisions? What did your 8 year old self know when you were deciding how to manage growing up in your family of origin? What did your 15 year old self know when you chose who to date? What did your 20 year old version of self know when you were choosing a career? In most cases, these earlier versions of yourself were making decisions that made sense at the time with the current developmental information and understanding.

Rather than being unkind to yourself, consider that every version of you that came before the current version was an important part of your journey to the present. Each of these parts

of yourself made decisions and have been working hard for years trying to protect you and to get you to today. While the life strategies of these parts of you may not have always panned out positively, they were trying to help you to cope and to survive. What might it look and feel like to shift from being mean to yourself to talking to yourself like someone you love deeply like a child or a dear friend? How would your words and approach be different?

Your words and tone create cycles with lasting impact. Often, the negative voice in your head originated from a critical parent or other authority figure who did not know how to be kind to themselves. When you learn to honor and speak kindly to yourself, it creates a natural result of you speaking more kindly to others. Similarly, when you are critical and shaming of yourself, you are more likely in times of stress and hurt to speak unkindly to others resulting in you becoming the unkind voice in someone else's head. And beyond human relationship, the unkind voice in your head often unhelpfully gets attributed to God, creating an impatient and angry idea about how God sees you when in reality, you are deeply loved and valued.

So, how do you shift your inner voice from judgement to kindness?

7 Ways to Talk to Yourself with Kindness

1. Notice when you are being harsh with yourself. "I'm not being very kind to myself in this moment."

2. Seek the source of the voice. "Where is this judgement coming from? Am I talking to myself the way someone talked to me when I was younger? When do I first

remember talking to myself in this way?"

3. Acknowledge earlier parts of self. "I see you, 8 year old me. What can you show me about your concerns and your strategies for getting my needs met?"

4. Validate earlier versions of yourself with grace. "I can see

that you started trying to be perfect at a young age in order to get approval and I can understand why you needed to do that at the time. I can also see why you sometimes still want to do that now."

5. Show appreciation to earlier versions of self. "I really

appreciate that you have been trying to help me along in life by trying to be perfect."

6. Talk to earlier versions of self like you would talk to some-

JOURNEY BRAVELY

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Wellness

Where Has The Love Gone?



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

Sitting on opposite ends of the couch, wondering if they were still in love. Same house, same couch, same bed, same routine, but where is the love, the fun, the passion? It seems like years since they've been intimate.

She doesn't seem interested anymore. He's tried so many times, he just doesn't ask any-

more. She always seems angry about this or that. Complaining about things that shouldn't even matter; but apparently they matter a lot. Complaining about not sleeping or waking up all night and always being tired. Is she just tired of him? It's like there's no way to make her happy anymore.

He doesn't seem interested anymore. When was the last time he came on to me? I can't even remember the last date we went on. We never spend time together. He's always asleep on the couch and we never talk anymore. If I still love him, why don't I have any desire? I thought marriage was supposed to get easier.

Does this sound familiar? It should. It's the story we hear from patients all the time. No libido, never feeling rested, just surviving each day so you can

get home and crash, the weight gain, the irritability. And why is everyone getting so annoying?

It's amazing what hormones are responsible for. Everyone seems to think testosterone = mean and muscles and estrogen = emotional overload. That's so far from the truth. It's hard to describe, but I might say, testosterone = fearless desire to engage in life, and estrogen = the emotional awareness to enjoy every moment.

Forget the health benefits of hormones today, and there are tons. Let's talk about how it changes your life.

Imagine peacefully drifting off to sleep and waking after eight hours feeling fresh and rested. Not even an ounce of tired. None. I'm talking ready to hop out of bed with a list of tasks to accomplish and looking forward to accomplishing every

single one. You can't wait to get out of bed excited for the day. Sounds impossible.

Imagine actually taking the steps toward a goal instead of just having some hazy snippets of a daydream where you don't really know what you want, where you would go or what you would do, because it seems like you will never get there anyway.

Imagine your spouse approaching you with that look in his eye and you smile, because you've been waiting for him all day.

That's just a taste of what hormones do. I used to feel like you. I got treated 12 years ago. It changed my life. I felt alive. I slept. I was happy. I wasn't afraid of life. So, I quit my job and left over 20 years of traditional medicine. Why? So, I could help you feel better, too.

We take a comprehensive approach. We listen. We review. We create. We design. And we personalize it all to you. You're not broken—and you're not alone. I can't wait to see you feeling better. You really have no clue what you're missing. It's so exciting. Just call us. It's really not expensive to completely change your life. Call The Hormone Restoration Center at (850) 837-1271.



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Book Review: Good Morning, Monster: A Psychotherapist's Delight in Raw Recovery Stories



REVIEWED BY MICHAEL
McMANUS, MSW, LCSW

As a licensed therapist with over four decades in psychotherapy, Catherine Gildiner's "Good Morning, Monster" feels like a professional homecoming. This collection of five extended case studies—framed as "heroic stories of emotional recovery"—captures the gritty beauty of long-term therapy in ways few books do. Gild-

iner, a seasoned clinician herself, turns clinical encounters into compelling narratives that resonate deeply with therapists craving transparent, relational accounts.

Each chapter traces a client's multi-year arc, from devastating intake to transformative follow-up.

- One grapples with a tyrannical mother's verbal venom ("Good morning, monster!"), internalized as self-loathing.
- Another navigates cult deprogramming after decades of indoctrination.
- Stories span physical paralysis from psychosomatic roots, Munchausen-by-proxy survival, and more.

These aren't tidy vignettes; they're messy, real journeys mirroring the nonlinear paths

we see daily.

Themes That Hit Home

Gildiner spotlights core psychotherapy truths:

- Attachment wounds: Childhood neglect and abuse echo in adult bodies and bonds.
- Intergenerational cycles: Trauma's ripple effects demand generational reckoning.
- Therapist humanity: She owns countertransference stumbles and strategic pivots, demystifying our role.

For me, this validates the slow repetition of relational repair—rewiring neural pathways through lived safety.

What elevates this for fellow clinicians is Gildiner's candor on process. She dissects intake decisions, technique shifts (from psychodynamic probing to so-

matic attunement), and ethical anonymization. No jargon barriers obscure the work; instead, scenes reveal how theory lives in the room. Her admission of blind spots—moments when her own filters clouded empathy—spurs reflection on our use-of-self. It's a masterclass in endurance: therapy as marathon, not sprint, yielding hope amid entrenched pain.

Gildiner's prose sings—cinematic dialogue, wry humor amid horror, literary flair without artifice. Harrowing details (a client's ritualistic self-harm; another's hallucinatory gurus) balance with triumphs, like reclaimed autonomy. At 350 pages, it's brisk yet profound, accessible for trainees or veterans.

Extreme cases dominate, potentially sidelining "everyday"

therapy's quiet wins. Subtle Canadian context adds flavor but limits universal transfer. Still, strengths overwhelm: ethical storytelling empowers clients' legacies without exploitation.

If you've ever ached for realistic portrayals of depth work—beyond pop-psych soundbites—this delivers.

Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. Michael and his wife Angela, who is also a therapist, have raised four children. They enjoy exploring, cooking, reading, yoga, hiking, biking trying out the restaurants around town and traveling to visit their kids scattered around the country. Michael can be reached by phone or text at (850) 837-0123
obsite:psychotherapy30A.com

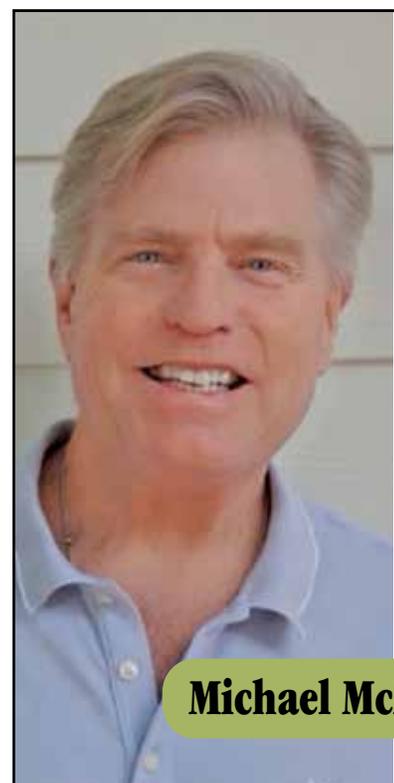
JOURNEY BRAVELY

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one you love. "I understand that you started trying to be perfect as a way to survive. I am here now and I see you and I care for you and I will help you figure out some different ways to feel okay."

7. Develop an ongoing friendship with earlier versions of self. "I am here and will be here for you every day to talk you through the hard moments."

While this approach may seem a bit unusual, incorporating loving, kindness into your inner voice creates a positive impact on how you feel about yourself, how you treat others, and how you understand your spiritual life. You love others better when you know how loved and valued you are. Connect with us along your journey for counseling and coaching support at Journeybravely.com.



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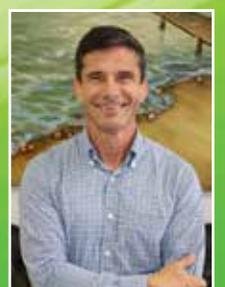


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Wellness

Tag, You're It! Let's Talk About Skin Tags

BY BRIDGET SULLIVAN, PA-C, COASTAL SKIN CANCER SURGERY AND DERMATOLOGY

I often get asked about skin tags by patients in the clinic. What are they? Where do they come from? What is the cause? How can I get rid of them? This article will help address these questions and hopefully give clarity about these common growths.

The medical term for skin tags is Acrochordons. They are benign pedunculated growths on the skin that are commonly found on sites of friction. These areas can include the neck, armpits, eyelids, and groin. The causes of skin tags are multifactorial and can include genetics, hormonal changes (pregnancy), insulin resistance, diabetes, obesity, and friction. They generally do not have any symptoms, but can become inflamed and irritated by rubbing on clothes and jewelry.

Skin tags will not cause harm, but they can be seen as cosmetically displeasing and can become irritated and inflamed. Please do not try to remove skin tags at home or buy over-the-counter

products to try and get rid of them. At home removal can lead to infections, inflammation, scarring, hyperpigmentation, and incomplete removal. In addition, the larger the skin



tag, the more it will bleed during removal, so you want to make sure this is done in a medical setting. Also, there are certain skin cancers that can look similar to a skin tag, so you want to ensure that you are not mistaking a malignant growth for a benign one.

Skin tags can be removed easily by your dermatology provider with liquid nitrogen, electrocautery, or a simple snip/shave removal. I hope this article helped to answer some common questions about skin tags, and as always, please reach out to your medical provider if you have any questions or concerns regarding your skin health.

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Brings Endocrinology Care Close to Home

A critical gap in health care is being filled. Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast welcomes board-certified endocrinologist Jeremy Harmson, DO, to the team. Dr. Harmson arrives at a crucial time to serve the needs of Bay and Walton counties.

"I've seen firsthand the difference specialized care can make in a person's life, especially when managing chronic conditions like diabetes," says Dr. Harmson. "I'm thrilled to join the Emerald Coast community and look forward to building meaningful relationships with my patients."

Community need

Dr. Harmson's recruitment directly addresses a significant local need. The health statistics locally are clear: rates of diabetes, heart disease, and stroke are higher than the state average. Nearly 18% of adults living in Wa county have been diagnosed with diabetes. If left untreated, both diabetes and thyroid conditions (including hypo- and hyperthyroidism) can significantly increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

"Having a board-certified endocrinologist that can help people manage their diabetes and thyroid conditions is crucial to the health of our community," said Trey Abshier, President of Sacred Heart Emerald Coast.

"Through data and your feedback we were able to recruit Dr. Harmson to help fill this gap in care."

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- Thyroid disorders and Graves Disease
- Thyroid Nodules and Thyroid cancer
- Male Hypogonadism

Education

Dr. Harmson is board certified in Endocrinology. He completed his fellowship at Ochsner Health in New Orleans and his

Internal Medicine residency with the University of Florida. He went to medical school at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Personal interests

A perfect fit for the Emerald Coast lifestyle, Dr. Harmson is an avid outdoorsman. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his family, traveling abroad, cooking, scuba diving, baseball, running, fishing, hunting and even car mechanics.

How to make an appointment

Dr. Harmson's office is conveniently located in the Medical Office Building on the campus of the hospital at 7720 U.S. 98 in Suite 230. He is accepting new patients and appointments can be made by calling 850-278-3742. A referral from your primary care provider may be needed depending on your insurance.

MyGULFCare for diabetes self management

Another way Sacred Heart Emerald Coast is supporting people living with diabetes is through the MyGULFCare program which offers personalized education and assistance for chronic disease self-management. This program is available to residents of Walton and surrounding counties. For more information call 850-278-3546.



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How Do Love Relationships Make You Happy & Healthy?

Liking Your Partner Matters More Than Loving Them



BY JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PhD

Loving relationships are essential for human well-being and happiness at all ages. In fact, the quality of our relationships determines the quality of our lives.

According to Robert Waldinger, director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, “good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period”.

A variety of social connections and close relationships can produce these health and well-being benefits. It's not the number of family connections, close friends, or even whether you are in a committed romantic relationship that matters.

If you cultivate a few warm, satisfying, loving relationships, you'll reap the benefits of a happy, healthier, longer life.

Loving-Liking Connection Promotes Well-Being

For the people who choose to be married or live in a committed relationship, the relationship-life happiness connection is more complicated. The quality of this primary relationship has the greatest impact on the quality of their life. And it requires both liking and loving.

A satisfying love relationship where partners both love and like each other makes people happy, bolsters their ability to deal with outside stressors, and provides protection for their physical and mental health as they age.

But beware. A dissatisfying, loving relationship has the opposite effect.

Dissatisfying Relationships Toxic to Well-Being

Marriages with high levels of unresolved, hostile conflict or those that lack intimacy, trust, and commitment erode the physical and psychological well-being of partners involved.

Or put another way, toxic or loveless relationships keep people unhappy and unhealthy. Period.

Some (like me) say this is worse than getting divorced.

Therefore, one of the most important skillsets people can learn is how to prevent negativity or indifference from eroding their intimate connection. This helps protect what was once a warm, loving bond.

Key Building Block More “Liking” Not more “Loving”

Ironically, the key ingredient for maintaining a happy relationship involves more “liking” not more “loving”.

The foundation of any loving, committed relationship is the couple's friendship, or how much they like each other. This friendship forms the foundation of what Gottman calls the Sound Relationship House and allows the relationship to stand firm when inevitable conflicts and stressors arise.

Specifically, the foundational level of the Sound Relationship House model accentuates three important aspects of friendship and liking in a romantic relationship:

1. Build Love Maps: A love map contains the intimate information you know about your partner that you use as a guide to your partner's inner world. What are your partner's likes and dislikes? Who is your partner's best friend? How do they prefer to relax after a tense day? In an ideal relationship, you and your partner know each other better than anyone else.

2. Share Fondness & Admiration: Sharing your fondness and admiration for your partner involves vocalizing the personal characteristics you appreciate. This can be something

as simple as saying “thank you”. Or you could comment on your partner's good deeds to a neighbor, creative problem solving, intelligence, or good looks. Let your partner know you are proud of them, especially in front of others. Compliments mean the most when they come from the person most important to us.

3. Turn Toward Each other Instead of Away: When partners need attention, support, or comfort from each other, they say or do something to let each other know about their need. Gottman calls this gesture or request a “bid” for attention, affection, humor, or support. Turning toward your partner involves giving an affirming response to their bid.

To experience the health and well-being benefits of a romantic, committed relationship, you must keep the sentiment of your relationship positive and the foundation of liking and friendship strong. This requires that you:

1. Continually improve your Love Maps: Make time to connect and truly listen to each other and respond in ways that show that you care about each other's interests and concerns.

2. Revisit the reasons you like and admire your partner: Think about your partner's positive characteristics. Then look for opportunities to articulate the big and little reasons you appreciate your partner. You could start by writing a love letter or Valentine that includes the top 5 reasons you admire your partner.

3. Respond favorably to your partner's needs: To create a safe space where you and your partner both feel you can express yourselves and meet each

other's needs, be sure to “turn toward” each other when the other makes a bid for attention or support.

Let me know if I can help.

Jamie C. Williamson, PhD is a FL Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and Member of the Gottman Referral Network, with a Certificate in the Science of Wellbeing and Hap-

piness from the Harvard School of Medicine. She is the Managing Partner at Amity Mediation Workshop, a mediation practice specializing in “friendly divorce” mediation and psycho-educational couples counseling. Dr. Jamie speaks frequently on relationship topics and authors the blog “Work it Out”. You can find her online at amitymediationworkshop.com.

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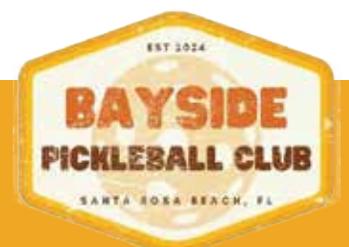
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 Musing

Lee Curtis: Banker, Real Estate Agent & Christian Capitalist



By RICH SANDERS

Lee Curtis always knew she wanted to work with people and money. After graduating from the University of Alabama (like our daughter Caroline, Lee was in the Kappa Delta sorority), she began work in banking and is now an entrepreneur and real estate agent in Destin.

As a banker, Lee had the opportunity to work with all kinds of people, including Christian Capitalists who owned their own businesses. “We love our small business owners. And you can tell those that work faith into their business. They tend to have people that stay around longer,

people who were great leaders. It just kind of trickles down from the top.”

Lee also got to see stories of giving when she worked in banking. She could see the faith of her customers through their bank accounts. “They would bless others when they had a tax

cut, or an extra amount, or a lump sum fell out of the sky for whatever reason, a lot of people would take the initiative to pass that on to their employees or put it back into the business to help grow the business.”

As a mother, Lee has tried to instill the spiritual discipline of giving in her son James, who is now fourteen. “It's just keeping the envelopes of spend, give and save. Then you can decide what proportions every month you want to put into those. I give him some ideas or percentages, but whenever he gets money for his birthday or for Christmas... we look at that. It's now evolved to an electronic envelope.”

One of the principles of the Christian Capitalist movement is that we are blessed when we bless others, and Lee gets it. “My book club does the book called One Word every year. One year my word was ‘give’, and that was the year that Hurricane Michael hit Panama City. Everybody in this community rallied around Panama City. I struggled, and I prayed [about how much to give], and I finally decided on this amount... and it was a lot more than I planned on, but I thought ‘I can do this right now—this is the max, and I'm not going to think anymore or be afraid’. And I'm not kidding, the day I decided to give that money, my credit card company called and said: ‘We've made a mistake on your payments, and you're getting a refund.’ And do you know it was almost the exact same amount that I had donated? And I was just in awe and was like, ‘That is the Lord at work!’”

Lee reflects on that story, and she concludes: “I firmly believe that Jesus is the voice of love.”

Lee recently appeared on the Christian Capitalist podcast, and you can listen to the entire episode on SOWAL Life's website. We are excited to share inspirational stories of hard work and generous giving to the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ, like Lee Curtis!

Rich Sanders is a pastor, small business owner, retired healthcare attorney and adjunct professor at Emory University, and former intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy. He and his wife, Rebekah, met at church in 1996, have been blessed with three children (James, William and Caroline) and live in Destin with their large golden retriever, Cowboy.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: This is the Day



BY REV. PETE HYDE

He stands before a large, empty, stark white canvas with paints and brushes at the ready. It is time to create. With the skill of a master artist, he begins to paint. He starts with a pure blue and brushes the top of the canvas. He smiles as if gaining strength and inspiration from the first few brush strokes. With a sense of mission, he changes brushes and colors and is now fully immersed in His task. Hues of reds, yellows, oranges, browns and greens begin to fill the canvas with so much color it would take away the breath of all who would see. Grays and browns and whites break the rainbow of colors and add contrast and

a depth of beauty that only a master could portray. Across the azure blue, he sweeps strands of grey and white. He steps back for a moment to look upon his creation. It seems the painting goes on forever and flows off the edges of the canvas and fills his entire field of vision. But something was missing. Even though it was brilliant, it was just a lifeless canvas. Yes, it was pretty and inspiring, but it was a flat picture. Something else was needed.

He raises His hand and speaks life into the canvas. The grey strands of clouds streak across the pure, blue sky driven by a crisp north wind. The reds, yellows, oranges, greens and browns come to life as the wind rustles through the leaves. The sun, breaking through the blotchy clouds, makes the colors in the valley contrast between subdued shadows and brilliant exclamation points of color. The grey, black and white cliffs towering hundreds of feet above the valley floor frame each section of color. A lull in the wind allows the sounds of the river below to echo through valley. The rain

of the day before brings forth the smells of fallen leaves. The smell of smoke from a fireplace somewhere lingers in the air and adds to the magic of the scene.

The couple stood on the overlook. Little was said. Pictures were taken. The moments and company of each other and presence of the Master Artist were all that was needed. As they drove the winding roads,

the leaves of infinite color swirled around them. With each break in the tree line the beauty of the living canvas brought new images and inspiration. "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Psalm 104:31-34 says: "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth and it trembles, who

touches the mountains and they smoke! I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him for I rejoice in the Lord."

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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



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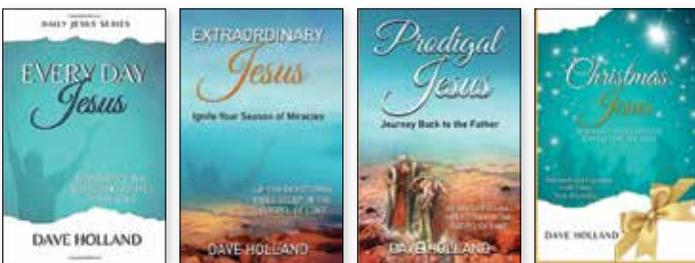
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Holland loves Jesus and has dedicated his life to sharing God's love. While studying at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and pastoring churches for almost forty years, he discovered Jesus is so much more than school and church—Jesus is life. Genuine faith is not about organizations, denominations, or personalities, but it is about discovering the depths of God's love and grace. Dave and his wife Jonie live in Destin, Florida. Contact Dave by email at davidvholland54@gmail.com.



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 Musing


BY KIRK MCCARLEY

A coaching colleague recently posted about time, making a distinction between the time on our watches, clocks, and calendars (chronos) vs. a more spiritual dimension of the concept (Kairos). His piece struck me as it paralleled a message I heard at a worship service where the pastor correlated the two.

Clock time, chronos, is measurable, where the barometer can be evaluated through timekeeping devices such as an hourglass or calendars. Comparatively, the latter time, Kairos, is a more abstract notion that goes outside the elements of time movement. It can include those “time standing still” moments like falling in love, delivering a game-winning hit, or offering valuable wisdom to

others going through difficult seasons.

Providing Kairos time suggests stepping out of the rush of everyday life to offer focused, spirit-led attention that creates space for divine encounters, deep relational bonding, and impactful divine work, even if it's just for a sacred moment. Mary Kay Ash offered that “No matter how busy you are, you must take time to make the other person feel important.”

What do you see as your availability for Kairos? Consider our rapid-paced world where we are commonly overscheduled. There is appointment after appointment, commitment after commitment, with little reserve built in. Only so much time exists, and if you have the fortune of being in demand, many people want a piece of yours. The problem with existing fully on a schedule, a chronos, is that it has limits. There are only 168 hours in a week, 24 hours in a day. That will not change. What can be altered is your approach to time.

Some ideas:

1. Put limits on meeting times. It is surprising how meetings scheduled for 60 minutes, for example, extend beyond that time parameter, often creating lateness to the next meeting. Better “return” time. That is to say, if the business for that one-hour meeting appears to be winding down after 45 minutes, leader, wrap it up then, seizing whatever energy and momentum has been captured to that point. People will appreciate the “extra” time, and who knows, maybe a Kairos opportunity might emerge.
2. Set aside a period of availability daily. College professors provide office hours when they are available to students, for example.
3. I find that many people take pride and comfort in the notion of being busy, no matter the actual degree of busyness or not. When asked by someone, “How are you?” they often respond, “busy.” Is that really true or merely more of a rationale or justification? It might also send a subliminal lesson of “leave me

alone, I don't have time”.

I resolved a few years back to delete the concept of “busy” from my lexicon. Rather than describing my state as busy, I try to refer to myself as either “engaged” or “occupied.” With that, I hope that my degree of approachability has been enhanced.

4. Besides the desire to be heard and understood, one of the most sacred aspirations from my coaching clients is the need to have impact. Impact connotes the longing to live a life that positively influences others. Often it occurs not through a monumental achievement or elucidating profound words of wisdom, but rather in a kind handwritten note, a prayerful text, an invitation to lunch, or simply being present and available.

As we are in the early days of this still fresh new year, how will you allow a pace that will leave an opening for Kairos? Who is someone you need to have time for this year? How do you decide what you will make time for? What might it look like to make a deliberate effort at least four

or five days a week to reach out to an obscure someone: a past co-worker or customer, a former coach or teacher, a neighbor from some place you lived ten years ago? What opportunities might be created from that flight delay, canceled engagement, or the grim weather that postponed the golf match?

Former first lady Barbara Bush shared these words. “At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, or a parent.”

Who needs your time?

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

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Sean of the South: Funny Valentine



BY SEAN DIETRICH

It was a Wednesday. I know this because on Wednesdays the Baptist church had family suppers.

And although I wasn't exactly a faithful Sunday churchgoer, I was a devout mid-week suppeater.

That night, I stood in line behind a girl, holding my plate. She was funny. She had so much personality she hummed like a neon light.

Later, I sat beside her during service. That week, there was an out-of-town preacher. The kind

with big hair, sweat rags, and nice shoes. He invited people to walk the aisle to get born again.

My pal, Craig,—who lost his religion every football season—recommitted for his thirtieth time. He said he felt something in the air that night.

I did too.

When service let out, the girl wasn't ready to go home. Neither was I. So, I suggested we drive. She liked the idea—though I'll never know why.

I pointed my vehicle east, we headed for nowhere, traveling as slow as my engine would run. The miles of pines made her more chatty. She propped her feet on my dashboard and let the words roll.

She talked about things. About how she saw the world, about her favorite kind of mustard, about religion, and the proper way to eat fried chicken.

I gave one-syllable responses because I didn't want to interrupt. She had a voice that

sounded like Escambia County in June.

By the time we landed in Port Saint Joe, her one-sided conversation had faded to a stop. I looked at her. She was sleeping.

So, I pulled into a gas station and got lukewarm coffee.

On the ride back, I thought long and hard. Not just about the sleeping girl, but about how I'd gotten a late start in life. And about how my childhood was a pitiful one.

So pathetic, in fact, it embarrassed me to talk about—kind of like I'm doing now.

When my father died, he left a shadow on me, one I didn't think would ever lift.

But that night, something did lift. I was someone else. I was the me I'd always known I should've been. Not the quiet young man who was too serious for baseball.

This girl. She'd done it to me without even trying. And even if I never saw her again, I was grateful for her.



When I arrived at her house, it was three in the morning. I walked her to the door. I hugged her and whispered, "Maybe I'll see you again, sometime."

She said, "What'n the hell's maybe? 'Course we'll see each other, dummy."

Every good thing in my life can be traced back to that night—the evening I became who I am. With her I have everything. Without her I'm a blind man.

That was the Wednesday I got born again.

Forty Years at the Table

How Bud & Alley's grew from a surf-town dream into Seaside's enduring gathering place

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

At Bud & Alley's Waterfront Restaurant, the ritual is familiar. The sun lowers toward the Gulf, glasses are raised and a bell rings from above, marking another day shared. For 40 years, that simple moment has defined Bud & Alley's — not just as a restaurant, but as a place where Seaside gathers.

Founded by Dave Rauschkolb and Scott Witcoski, two 24-year-old surfing buddies with more enthusiasm than experience, Bud & Alley's opened at a time when Seaside itself was just beginning to take shape. Few could have predicted that a casual beachfront restaurant in a town with barely a dozen houses would become one of Northwest Florida's most enduring culinary landmarks.



The name itself reflected the founders' lighthearted approach.

Witcoski named the restaurant after his cat, Alley, and Seaside founder Robert Davis' dachshund, Bud — a playful beginning that hinted at the welcoming spirit to come. From the outset, Bud & Alley's was designed to feel approachable, unpretentious and deeply rooted in its surroundings.

As Seaside grew, Bud & Alley's grew with it. What began as a simple Gulf-front restaurant evolved thoughtfully over time, helping pioneer the farm- and sea-to-table movement along Scenic Highway 30A while main-

BUD & ALLEY'S
continued on page 38

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Dave Rauschkolb

BUD & ALLEY'S

continued from page 37

taining its relaxed, come-as-you-are feel. Fresh regional seafood, carefully sourced ingredients and consistent quality earned the restaurant a loyal following that now spans generations.

“For me, this milestone is really about gratitude,” Rauschkolb said. “I’m thankful for our dedicated staff, past and present, whose talent and commitment define this place every day. I’m grateful to my founding partner, Scott, to my wife, Carol, and our daughters for their constant support, and especially to the generations of loyal patrons who have gathered here with their families — and now their grandchildren. Bud & Alley’s has always been about good food, good people and times.”

Today, Bud & Alley’s continues to serve as a central gathering place. The Taco Bar and The Pizza Bar now oper-

ate under the same roof as the original Bud & Alley’s, allowing guests to move easily between concepts while remaining connected to the same sense of place. Whether stopping in for tacos, wood-fired pizza or a sunset toast, visitors experience a seamless extension of the Bud & Alley’s ethos.

Beyond daily dining, Bud & Alley’s has become known for its role in community traditions. Signature events — from wine dinners and New Year’s Eve celebrations to music-filled evenings tied to the 30A Songwriters Festival — help define the social rhythm of Seaside, many while supporting local nonprofits and causes.

Over the years, Bud & Alley’s has been recognized with numerous awards and accolades, including Florida Trend magazine’s Golden Spoon Hall of Fame Award; designation as one of the Top 20 Restaurants in Florida; Coastal Living maga-



Bud & Alley's by Michael Booini






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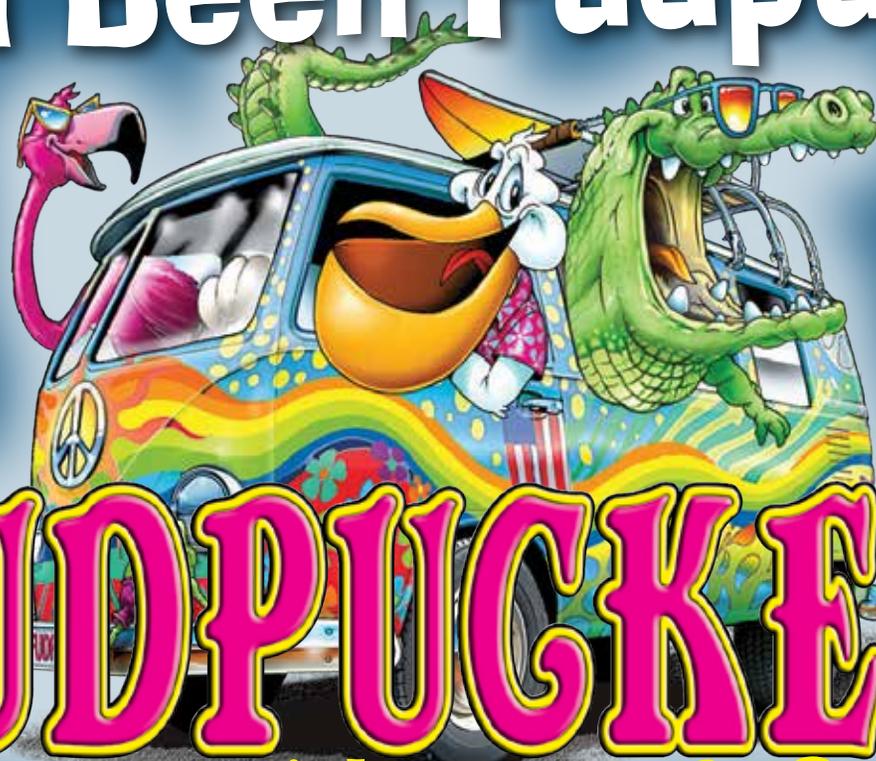

zine’s Best Rooftop Bars; Emerald Coast Magazine’s Best Place to See the Sunset; and Visit South Walton’s Perfect in South Walton Awards for Best Seafood Menu and Best Sunset View, among others. In 2024, Bud & Alley’s was named to Southern Living’s “17 Most Legendary Restaurants in Florida” list.

As part of its 40th anniversary, Bud & Alley’s is marking the milestone with a redesigned website and a special anniversary logo featuring a golden banner. A public celebration is planned for the spring.

Four decades on, as the sun dips low and the bell rings once more, Bud & Alley’s remains what it has always been — a place to gather, to celebrate and to return to, again and again.

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FOOW Live Music Fridays and Sunday Brunch

Enjoy live music on Friday nights, as well as Sundays for Brunch featuring bottomless mimosas at FOOW - Fish Out of Water. The Gulf front restaurant invites you to delicious dining paired with live music. Visit foow30a.com.

AJ's Grayton Brunch and Live Music

AJ's is the place to be to celebrate all things Sunday Funday in Grayton Beach! Recharge your weekend at our live music brunch with the talented duo, Christon Birge Duo every Sunday at 12 p.m. for a delightful morning filled with delicious food, refreshing drinks, and engaging tunes. Have a mimosa or go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar, then enjoy live music from The Pickled Pickers 5-8 p.m. Join in the fun on Karaoke Night starting at 8 p.m. every Thursday night (also Prime Rib Night). Check ajsgrayton.com for live music throughout the week.

Shunk Gulley

Shunk Gulley is a premier location on 30A for live music, bringing in artists from around



the Gulf coast and beyond. Whether you just want to relax to indie guitar players or upbeat party songs, the talented musicians know the vibe of the area. Visit www.shunkgulley.com.

Red Fish Taco

Live music is a central component of Red Fish Taco's festive atmosphere. Rock out to local and visiting musicians in their outdoor covered Garden Room. Check redfishtaco.com

for featured musicians every day of the week.

The Bay

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

Friends on stage from 4-8 p.m. Mike brings in new musicians to play every week. Check The Bay's Facebook or Instagram pages for details.

Americana Concerts in the Lodge at Camp Helen

Americana Concerts in the Lodge at Camp Helen State Park are back! The concert series will take place every other Saturday from January 10 - February 28. There will be limited seats available for each show. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the music begins at 6:30 p.m. Pick up your tickets at the Camp Helen park office Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. \$20 cash for each concert! Ticket price includes park admission, drinks, and an assortment of snacks.

Feb. 21: The Honey Badgers
Feb. 28: Wyatt Espalin



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Café Thirty-A Christmas Charity Ball Raises Record-Breaking \$90,905 for Caring and Sharing of South Walton



an Epic Photo Co. photo booth, courtesy of A BOHEME Design, along with music from DJ Casey, sponsored by Maranta Copy Co., who kept the Barlovento Dance Floor going all

night long. Santa also made a surprise appearance at this year's event, courtesy of Barnes Capital Group, and captured photos with guests, sponsored by Corcoran Reverie. New this

year, an upstairs lounge, sponsored by Engel & Volkers 30A Beaches, offered guests extra space to relax and mingle.

CHARITY BALL

continue on page 46

Café Thirty-A's Annual Christmas Charity Ball raised a record-breaking \$90,905 for Caring and Sharing of South Walton. The holiday event held on Saturday, December 6, 2025, simultaneously celebrated the restaurant's 30-year anniversary.



Presented by honorary sponsors Coastal Luxury Real Estate, Earl Bacon Agency, Thomas Howell Ferguson P.A., and the Ellis Family, the sold-out event welcomed over 250 guests to the festively decorated restaurant, courtesy of Palms 30A. Attendees were greeted with complimentary valet parking, sponsored by All Access Coach and Leasing, and a glass of champagne, courtesy of Clear Title and Escrow. Inside, event goers enjoyed heavy hors d'oeuvres, a gourmet dinner

buffet, cash bar sponsored by All Access Coaching and Leasing, and a variety of desserts courtesy of Haney Holloway, LLC. Sponsors and VIP attendees also received exclusive access to a pre-party event provided by The Watson Group.

Throughout the night, guests had the opportunity to view and bid on various pieces of art, jewelry, gift baskets, and luxurious items featured in the extensive silent auction. There was also



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 Music

Top 10 Valentine's Day Songs

Valentine's Day is a celebration of love in all its forms: romantic, passionate, tender, and timeless. Few things capture those emotions quite like music. Over the years, certain songs have become synonymous with Valentine's Day because of their heartfelt lyrics, unforgettable melodies, and emotional depth. Here are the top 10 Valentine's Day songs and what makes each one truly special.

1. "All of Me" – John Legend

This modern classic is a raw and honest declaration of unconditional love. With simple piano accompaniment and deeply personal lyrics, "All of Me" resonates because it embraces imperfections and vulnerability, making it a favorite for weddings and Valentine's playlists alike.

2. "At Last" – Etta James

Few songs capture the feeling of love finally fulfilled like "At Last." Etta James's powerful, soulful vocals paired with lush orchestration make this song a timeless anthem for enduring romance.

3. "Can't Help Falling in Love" – Elvis Presley

This gentle ballad remains one of the most iconic love songs ever written. Its simple message—that love is inevitable,

combined with Elvis's warm delivery, gives it an innocence that continues to charm listeners across generations.

4. "Thinking Out Loud" – Ed Sheeran

Ed Sheeran's promise of lifelong devotion has made this song a modern Valentine's staple. Its lyrics imagine love that grows stronger with time, which resonates deeply with couples dreaming of a shared future.

5. "My Heart Will Go On" – Celine Dion

Forever linked to the film Titanic, this song is about love that transcends time and loss. Celine Dion's soaring

vocals convey deep emotion, making it a powerful reminder that true love never fades.

6. "I Will Always Love You" – Whitney Houston

This song is often associated with heartbreak, but at its core, it is a profound expression of selfless love. Whitney Houston's unmatched vocal performance elevates the song into an emotional masterpiece that still moves listeners decades later.

7. "Let's Stay Together" – Al Green

Smooth, soulful, and optimistic, this song celebrates commitment and sticking together through life's ups and downs. Al Green's warm vocals and groovy rhythm make it a perfect Valentine's Day choice for couples who value lasting love.

8. "Something" – The Beatles

Written by George Harrison, "Something" stands out

for its sincerity and understated beauty. Frank Sinatra once called it one of the greatest love songs ever written, and its gentle melody continues to prove why.

9. "Endless Love" – Diana Ross & Lionel Richie

A duet that defines romance, "Endless Love" captures the magic of two voices blending into one emotional message. Its lyrics express devotion, unity, and a love without limits which are perfect themes for Valentine's Day.

10. "Make You Feel My Love" – Adele

Adele's soulful interpretation of this song adds depth and vulnerability to its lyrics. It's about unwavering support and standing by someone no matter what, making it a powerful expression of true, enduring love.

Why These Songs Endure

What makes these Valentine's Day songs special is their ability to express universal emotions. They speak of devotion, longing, commitment, and hope feelings that never go out of style. Whether classic or contemporary, each song offers a soundtrack for love, making Valentine's Day a little more meaningful through music.

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How a Move to the Sunshine State Could Impact Your Estate Plan



By JON CARROLL

My mother, who was born and raised in Florida, used to quip that no one lived here until air conditioning and mosquito control became prevalent. Today, climate and pest control, along with beautiful beaches, a temperate climate and no state income tax, among other things, continue to draw new residents to Florida. Perhaps you have just moved to the area from out of state, or maybe you are a visitor contemplating turning your vacation destination into your permanent home. If you already have a trust or will from another state, or own property elsewhere, you should know how Florida law may affect your existing arrangements.

A common question is whether your documents, created in another state, are still valid after you move. The simple answer is yes. Relocation from one state to another does not invalidate your will, trust, or power of attorney, but some issues could arise.

For example, your trust likely contains a “governing law” clause that determines which state’s law controls the trust’s validity, interpretation, and administration. However, if there is no longer any real connection to the original state, a court could decide that Florida is now the primary place of administration and apply Florida law to administrative issues despite an out-of-state governing law clause.

One area where an out-of-state trust or will is often affected by Florida’s laws is with regard to homestead property. Florida has very strong homestead protections, and our laws reflect a strong public policy in favor of a surviving spouse or minor child inheriting your homestead property. If your old trust was drafted in another state, it may not account for these homestead rules, which can cause provisions about who inherits the house, or when it can be sold, to fail or operate very differently than you intended.

While some states recognize “holographic wills”, Florida does not. A “holographic will” is a will that is handwritten, dated and signed by an individual. Unless the will has been witnessed by two witnesses and is therefore no longer considered a “holographic will”, it will not be recognized by a Florida court.

Additionally, with regard to wills, Florida imposes rules on who can serve as a personal

representative/executor of an estate. Generally, a nonresident may serve only if they are related to the decedent by blood, marriage, or adoption. For trustees, Florida allows out-of-state individuals or institutions to serve,

but the practicality of managing assets in Florida should be considered, and it may be wise to appoint a co-trustee or successor trustee who is physically closer.

If you still own property in another state after your move

to Florida, your estate may face what is called “ancillary probate” in that other state when you pass. Ancillary probate is a second,

ESTATE PLAN

continue on page 46



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This year's special guest is internationally renowned and iconic big band **Pink Martini**, the “little orchestra” that's wowed audiences around the globe with a dazzling blend of jazz, classical, and old-school pop sung in more than 25 languages. Founded by pianist Thomas Lauderdale, Pink Martini is known for its playful, cosmopolitan style and vibrant, genre-bending performances. As part of Sinfonia's 20th anniversary celebration, Pink Martini will be accompanied by the full **Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra**. This marks the first time the orchestra has performed at Crescendo!

Guests will enjoy reserved table seating, hors d'oeuvres, an elegant, seated late lunch, and an all-inclusive afternoon of music, wine, food, and fabulous fun — all in support of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

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 Business


By DANICA LAFAIRE,
FISH WINDOW CLEANING

How a favorite color, a family-first decision, and a belief in oppor-

Why Red? It's a Love Story.

tunity built Fish Window Cleaning.

If you've lived here long enough, you've probably seen it.

A red bucket on the sidewalk.

A red truck parked just off the curb.

A team quietly at work, making something clearer.

What you may not have wondered is why red.

At Fish Window Cleaning, the color isn't a marketing decision or

a branding exercise. It's something far simpler — and far more meaningful.

Red is Linda's favorite color — Linda Merrick, Mike's wife and partner in the earliest days of the business.

In 1978, after being unexpectedly laid off from his job in banking, Mike Merrick found himself at a crossroads familiar to many families: start over, or stand still.

With a future suddenly uncertain, Mike chose to buy a small window-cleaning route from a local cleaner — about 100 accounts, no fanfare, and no guarantees.

What he did have was work ethic, faith, and the quiet confidence of someone who believed he could build something better.

Linda believed it too.

She has spoken openly about knowing Mike was a hard worker — someone with initiative, discipline, and the willingness to grow a business through effort and persistence. That shared belief became the foundation on which Fish was built.

When it came time to name the business and decide how it would show up in the world, Mike and Linda made that decision together. They chose the name Fish Window Cleaning, believing the opportunity before them was guided by something larger than themselves. And the color red — Linda's favorite — became the symbol of the business. Not flashy. Not loud. Just visible. Dependable. Hard to miss.

In the early days, Mike did the work himself. He carried the buckets. Cleaned the glass. Built trust account by account. What began as a way to provide and persevere gradually grew into something larger — a realization that this kind of business could create opportunity for others too.

Behind the scenes, Linda's attention to detail and systematic thinking helped transform a hands-on service business into something that could be taught, shared, and eventually franchised. Over time, processes moved from being stored in Mike's head to becoming repeatable systems — developed through trial, error, and a commitment to doing things the right way.

As Fish grew, so did the vision behind it.

Mike and Linda recognized something important about blue-collar work and small business ownership: many capable, hardworking people never see a clear path to leadership or ownership. Fish became their way of changing that — by turning a simple, honest service into a scalable system where everyday people could build something of their own, not by cutting corners, but by showing up consistently and following a proven process.

That belief is what ultimately drew me to invest in Fish Window Cleaning.

At first, it was the simplicity and focus of the service. At its core, this business is about helping others look

great. But what truly stopped me in my tracks was a message I saw on the wall:

Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.

That philosophy has guided my life and leadership for a long time. I knew Fish would help me live out my purpose of helping other business owners, while empowering those who never thought they could level up their lives through leadership or gain more control over their earnings. All of which is woven into our company mission.

Interestingly, red was never a color I was naturally drawn to — except for my heels and my lipstick. In a previous chapter of my life, when I wore those, it meant I meant business. It meant what I was about to do had purpose and would make a difference. It meant I was a force. Red was my color of confidence.

That feeling hasn't changed.

Today, I'm proud to wear red almost daily. The confidence is still there, but the mission has grown. My focus is helping others shine — through developing our team, serving our community, and fostering connections that help people grow. Fish is one of the ways I get to do that.

And yes, we also make windows shine — because first impressions matter. Whether it's a commercial storefront, a home being listed for sale, or a place where a family lives and gathers, clean windows quietly tell a story. They say someone cared enough to pay attention to the details.

For me, Fish is about opportunity — created through care, belief, and a genuine love for helping others grow.

When you see a red bucket outside a business or home, you're not just seeing a brand. You're seeing a story that began with a favorite color, an unexpected turning point, and two people who believed in each other — and continues every time someone is given the chance to grow, to lead, and to build something meaningful.

Sometimes, the clearest things tell the truest stories.

At Fish, we believe clear windows tell a story of care. If you are ready to brighten your home or business, contact us for a free estimate at (850) 842-2162 or FishWindowCleaning.Com/3249. Or, if you're looking for an opportunity to grow within a team that values leadership and ownership, we'd love to hear from you. Let's shine together.





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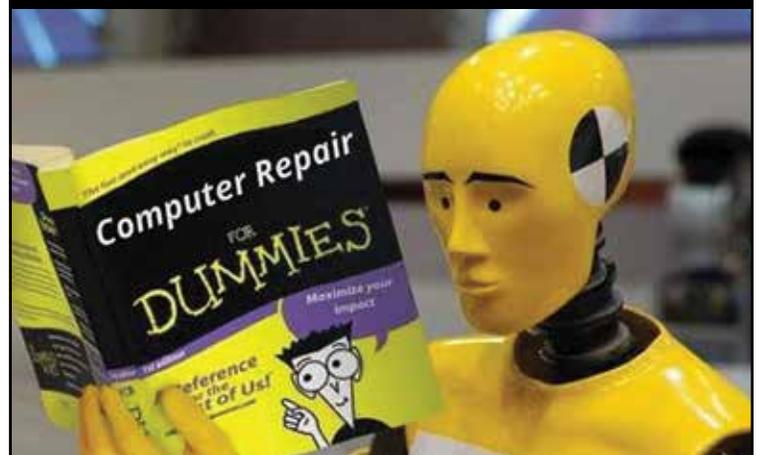
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CHARITY BALL

continue from page 41

In honor of the restaurant's 30-year anniversary, special guests donned handmade pearl jewelry from Mignot & Co. for event goers to purchase. Twenty five percent of the sales made from those pieces was donated to Caring and Sharing of South Walton.

"Because the pearl is the traditional symbol for 30 years, we wanted to offer something special for our guests this year," said Café Thirty-A co-owner Jackie Maliszewski. "This milestone is only possible because of our incredi-

ble community who has gathered around our table and supported Café Thirty-A for three decades."

Through ticket sales, sponsorship, donations, and funds raised from the silent auction, the annual event raised a record-breaking grand total of \$90,905 for Caring and Sharing of South Walton. The money raised will be used to provide local families with access to food, financial assistance, case management, and connection to other resources.

"We are so thankful to Café Thirty-A, our generous sponsors, and everyone who joined us for this special evening," said

Carly Barnes, executive director of Caring and Sharing of South Walton. "The continued success of the Charity Ball makes a direct impact on our ability to serve local families facing crisis. Because of this community, we can keep saying 'yes' when our neighbors need help most."

Café Thirty-A would also like to thank all of those who donated to the silent auction. For area businesses interested in sponsorship for the 2025 Café Thirty-A Christmas Charity Ball slated for the first week of December, please contact Jessica Bracken at jessica@proffittpr.com.

ESTATE PLAN

continue from page 43

additional court proceeding, on top of any Florida probate, to transfer title in the out-of-state property. Titling that property in a properly structured trust, business entity, or other planning

vehicle can often reduce or avoid the need for ancillary probate.

As you are settling into your new life in Florida, take a moment to ensure your estate plan is still properly settled.

Jon Carroll is a licensed attorney. The information in this column is provided for educational

and informational purposes only, and does not constitute legal advice, nor establish an attorney client relationship. Consult a qualified attorney in your jurisdiction for legal advice specific to your situation.

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