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# SOWAL Life

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## A Place to Belong

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

In the heart of South Walton, a new kind of living community is taking shape, one built not just with brick and mortar, but with love, determination, and a belief that everyone deserves the chance to live a full and independent life. Established as a 501(c)(3), Harlan's Place is a nonprofit housing community designed for adults with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities, created by parents who dared to imagine a brighter future for their son and for countless families who share the same hopes.

Harlan Carey, who's now eight, is at the heart of this vision. Like all parents, his family dreamed of a life where he could make his own choices, form friendships, and experience the everyday joys of independence. Yet, they also faced a reality familiar to many families of individuals with disabilities, "What will happen when we can no longer provide care?" From that question, Harlan's Place was born. "I was looking at what his future looked like, and how



I wanted him to live his adult life," said Harlan's father and Harlan's Place founder, Michael Carey. "I started doing a bunch of research. Everything was either institutional or a group home. That's just not what I had envisioned."

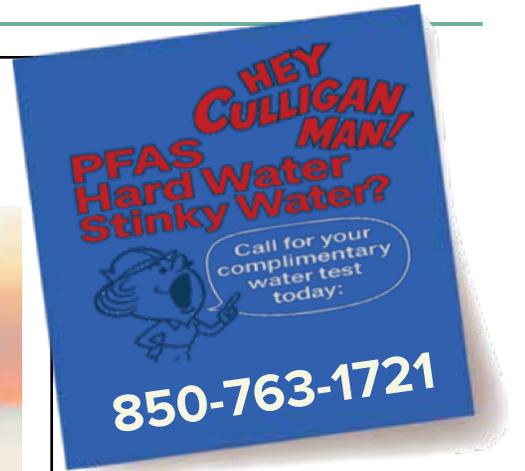
Out of that concern, Harlan's Place was born. Michael is committed to building a living environment that goes beyond traditional models of disability care. The goal is

simple but powerful: to create a place where people with Down syndrome can thrive, grow, and belong while maintaining dignity, purpose, and independence, and giving families peace of mind when thinking about their child's future. "Every other parent is having the same challenge. Hopefully, we can resolve that for many," said Michael.

Located next to Stock & Trade Design, Co., the

community will feature 60 thoughtfully designed apartment homes for adults who do not require licensed medical care. Each residence will offer a safe, welcoming environment that encourages self-reliance while providing the support needed to succeed. But Harlan's Place is much more than housing. It's a pur-

**A PLACE**  
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## Walton County Tourism Launch New Beach Tram Routes

Walton County Tourism (WCT) has expanded its free Beach Tram service as of March 1, connecting municipal parking facilities to regional beach accesses in an effort to ease parking demand and improve beach access. Route details are available at [WaltonTransportation.com](http://WaltonTransportation.com), which will act as an informational hub for the transportation program.

"This program has been years in the making," said Tabatha Bolen, transportation manager for WCT. "The entire team has put so much

**BEACH TRAM**  
continued on page 2



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 **Community**

**A PLACE**

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posefully designed apartment community where residents can enjoy shared amenities such as a swimming pool, a walking trail, and a clubhouse for social gatherings. There's also a communal dining space where residents can enjoy a meal together. For residents who want to cook, they will be able to grab ingredients and directions to prepare meals at home.

There will also be recreational activities to promote physical health, creativity, and connection. There will be sporting classes, basketball, and pickleball, along with the outdoor walking trail. "Something will be happening all the time in the gymnasium," said Michael. "There are going to be so many activities. We just want people that had their day packed to feel accomplished."

Harlan's Place also believes that true independence comes from being part of the greater community. Residents will have opportunities for job training, volunteering, and community integration, ensuring they become active, valued members of South Walton and the surround-



ing areas. "We want people that are outgoing, and they want to have responsibility, they want to have interactions with people. They want to show what they can do," stated Michael. "I've been reaching out to people to put together a culinary program," he adds. "Not only for individuals that live there, but for any intellectually disabled people that want to come to just do the program, and for even



those without disabilities to do the program." Michael also sees potential for the culinary program to lead to a business that provides pastries for local shops and cafes.

"I want this to be a part of the community where we can offer services. If there needs to be speech therapy for a young child, we're not going to be worried about how someone's going to pay for it. We'll work with the resources we have and not be focused on the bottom line that so many businesses are focused on," said Michael.

At its core, Harlan's Place represents a promise to families, to individuals with Down syndrome, and to the commu-



nity at large, that a future filled with purpose and possibility is not only achievable but worth building together. This is not just a residence. It is a community of hope, where independence is nurtured, uniqueness is celebrated, and everyone has the chance

to belong. "We're a nonprofit. Everything is going back into serving these individuals and helping them find everything they need," said Michael.

While they haven't broken ground yet, they are hopeful this is the year of great things to come. They secured their development order at the end of last year and are about 40% through with the construction design while they wait on financing. "We've had great feedback, and community involvement. We've had two galas now with tremendous support," stated Michael. "I feel like this is going to be the year that we really make some good ground coverage."

Michael hopes that the model of Harlan's Place can be adopted and put into place all around the country. "We're going to prove how this is successful. It'll be something easily replicable, something every community would want because it brings positivity to a community and brings a necessity," stated Michael. "We can grow it from here, and we can show what an asset these individuals can be to businesses in life. I can see it taking off and multiplying once we get off the ground."

**BEACH TRAM**

*continued from page 1*

work into making it what it has become. It is exciting to be part of a program that provides a needed service that truly benefits our guests, both visitors and

the local community."

The 393 Municipal Parking Facility (MPF), at 1668 S County Hwy 393, and the Grayton Beach Municipal Parking Facility, at 1505 S County Hwy 283, are the first two lots that are on the transportation program.



At 393 MPF, service runs daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The A-to-B Route runs directly from 393 MPF to Ed Walline Regional Beach Access (RBA), departing every 10 minutes. The West Route includes stops at Dune Allen Regional Beach Access and Fort Panic RBA, departing every 15 minutes.

At Grayton Beach MPF, also known as Grayton Central, the A-to-B Route operates from 6 a.m. to 9:45 p.m. daily, with direct service to the corner of Hotz Avenue and Garfield Street every 10 minutes.

As of March 1, Grayton Central added a West Route

running from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. with stops at Blue Mountain RBA, Gulfview Heights RBA and 393 MPF. This route will depart every 15 minutes.

A third location, Driftwood Road MPF, will be added to the transportation program after construction is completed. Planned service includes a direct route to Miramar RBA and additional stops along Scenic Gulf Drive. Final route details are pending. For more information, please contact Beach Operations at (850) 267-4578, or visit [www.waltoncountylftourism.com/transportation](http://www.waltoncountylftourism.com/transportation).



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## Events Around the Beach

### 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.

### Huck & Lilly @ Rosemary Beach Mondays

Sing and dance with Huck & Lilly, a beloved children's music duo, in Rosemary Beach this spring. Beginning at 5:30 p.m. in North Barrett Square every Monday thru April 6th, enjoy pure fun for the whole family.

### ECTC Children's Theater at Seaside Mondays

Step into a world of magic, mischief, and moonlit romance as Emerald Coast Theatre Company presents A Midsummer Night's Dream in a family-friendly adaptation at the SEASIDE



Amphitheater. Beginning at 6 p.m. Mondays thru August 3rd, bring a blanket and enjoy dinner from any of Seaside's delicious eateries. This joyful retelling of Shakespeare's beloved comedy brings love, laughter, and live theatre to Central Square. It's an enchanting experience for audiences of all ages.

### Huck & Lilly @ Seaside Amphitheatre Tuesdays and Thursdays

Huck & Lilly will perform LIVE in the Seaside Amphitheater Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 - 5:45 p.m. Bring a chair or blanket, snacks and drinks, and enjoy the show. Free and open to all ages. Singer/song-

writers Ken Johnson and Andi Zack-Johnson as Huck and Lilly specialize in music for kids AND the grown ups who love them!

### Bark for Books at Coastal Branch Library Wednesdays

Join Dog-Harmony and the Walton County Coastal Library for Bark for Books—a tail-waggingly fun way for kids to build confidence by reading aloud to a friendly therapy dog! Held every Wednesday from 3:30-4:30 p.m. through May 20, this unique literacy program gives children the chance to practice their reading skills in a calm, pressure-free environment.

### St. Patrick's Day Party at AJ's Grayton Beach March 17

AJ's St. Patrick's Day Party kicks off at 11 a.m, with drink and food specials. Celebrate ALL day with green drinks, great vibes, and a stacked live music lineup. Wear your green, grab your crew, and make it a shamrockin' good time!

### Baytowne St. Paddy's Day Delight March 17

Celebrate the luck of the Irish at the Village of Baytowne Wharf's St. Paddy's Day Delight from 6-9 p.m. Sandestin is painting The Village GREEN from the lagoon to the lights! A free to attend event featuring Carpenter Academy of Irish Dance and live music from Shenanigans, this is one St. Patrick's Day party you don't want to miss.

### CAA Creative Kids Night March 27

Take the night off while your kids enjoy a cozy, holiday-inspired Parents' Night Out at the CAA! Creative Kids Night returns to the Bayou Arts Center from 5-8 p.m. This month's feature project: Enchanted Forest Canvas Paintings. Kids are encouraged to come in their pajamas and bring a sleeping bag to snuggle up with during the film! Aprons will be provided. Kids will kick off the evening with an exciting hands-on painting, then, refuel with a pizza dinner before winding down for a cozy movie

screening of Fern Gully with an accompanying themed snack. Learn more & purchase tickets: <https://www.culturalartsalliance.com/upcoming-events>.

### Under the Moonlit Pines Gala at Biophilia Center March 28

Join the Biophilia Center for Under the Moonlit Pines Gala, its signature gala celebrating environmental education, biodiversity, and the natural beauty of Northwest Florida at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center from 4-9 p.m. Guests will enjoy live music from the Panama City Youth Orchestra, delicious catering, an exciting auction featuring unique items, and opportunities to connect in support of the Center's mission. For tickets and more information, visit [eowilsoncenter.org](http://eowilsoncenter.org). All proceeds benefit the Center's hands-on environmental education programs.

### Caring & Sharing Spring Fashion Show March 29

Join Caring and Sharing for

*Continued on next page*



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 Community

**EVENTS**

*continued from page 3*

their Spring Fashion Show beginning at 11 a.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. During the event, guests will enjoy a fashion show, lunch, a complimentary welcome drink, a silent auction, music, a photo booth, and more. Items will be for sale after the Fashion Show at the popular pop-up boutique curated specifically for this event. Purchase tickets at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/caring-sharing-spring-fashion-show-tickets-1981237758469>.

**Doggie Eggstravaganza at Grand Boulevard April 3**

Dog Harmony presents the 11th annual Doggie EGGstravaganza, the annual canine social where dogs hunt for eggs filled with yummy treats from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin. Guests will enjoy delicious food, family-friendly games, great prizes, and music. For a \$20 donation in advance (or \$25 on the day of the event), humans and their leashed canine companions will receive a souvenir bag to sniff out 1,000 colorful eggs filled with delicious dog



treats. With two designated hunting areas for dogs over and under 35 pounds, every furry friend has a chance to join in on the fun. Visit [dog-harmony.org](https://dog-harmony.org) to learn more, volunteer, donate, adopt.

**UNwineD April 3-4**

UNwineD returns to Panama City Beach at Aaron Bessant Park. Spend the weekend tasting craft beer, wine, and spirits while sampling cuisine from renowned area chefs and local eateries. For details and to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.visitpanamacitybeach.com/unwined>.

**Seaside Easter Celebration April 5**

Celebrate Easter Sunday in Seaside! Bring the whole family for a day filled with complimentary photos with the Easter Bunny, live music, face painting, and exciting activities for kids. Kicking off at 1 p.m., the Easter

Egg Hunt has over 25,000 eggs and promises an egg-citing adventure for children of all ages.

**Gulf Coast Salute Air Show April 11-12**

The Gulf Coast Salute Air Show, a premier aviation event held in Panama City Beach showcasing a spectacular lineup of military and civilian aerial performances, is scheduled at the Russell-Fields City Pier from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. This is a free family-friendly experience. The Thunderbirds will perform at 3 p.m. daily. The other entertainers will proceed them. Food & beverage vendors will be lined up along the beach accesses near Russell-Fields City Pier.

**South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival April 23-26**

Tickets are on sale now for the South Walton Beaches Wine &

Food Festival, returning to Grand Boulevard with more than 600 wines, beers and spirits to sample across four days of tastings, live entertainment and culinary experiences. Guests can purchase featured wines on site, with proceeds benefiting Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and children in need across Northwest Florida. Get full details and tickets at [sowalwine.com](https://sowalwine.com).

**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. Held in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, the auction also takes place at Grand Boulevard the same weekend. The festival showcases hun-

dreds of premium wines, spirits and culinary offerings, with proceeds benefiting DCWAF. Full details are available at [dcwaf.org](https://dcwaf.org).

**FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament Returns to Sandestin May 9**

Tee up for a great cause at Alaqua Animal Refuge's 5th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament, presented by Sandestin Investments, on Saturday, May 9, at The Links Golf Club at Sandestin (165 Sandestin Blvd. N., Miramar Beach). This signature fundraiser brings golfers and animal advocates together for 18 holes of scramble-format play with a shotgun start, on-course contests, raffles, awards and a "Pups & Pours" after party. Registration includes a cart, boxed lunch and two drink tickets. Proceeds support Alaqua Animal Refuge's rescue, veterinary care, rehabilitation and adoption programs across the Southeast. Registration deadline is May 4. Details and sign-up: [app.eventcaddy.com/events/2026-fore-the-love-of-animals](https://app.eventcaddy.com/events/2026-fore-the-love-of-animals).




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# Magic + Comedy for Another Year!

After a well-received, successful first season at The Palms Resort in Destin, the Magic & Comedy Destin show has signed on for a second season — along with several new enhancements for guests.

The showroom now features all table seating, with bar wait-staff taking drink orders prior to the performance. Guests can enjoy alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages delivered directly to their tables so they don't miss a moment of the live show.

The action-packed production features world-class magic, comedy and ventriloquism, with interactive illusions performed just inches from the audience. While the sophisticated magic and smart comedy are geared toward adults, the show remains family-friendly and appropriate for all ages.

The residency is headlined

by Bart Rockett, who hosted his own nationally syndicated television show for three seasons, had a co-starring role on the former NBC drama "Parenthood," and headlined his own 1,000-seat theater in Branson, Missouri, for nine seasons. He has performed in more than 90 countries and headlined for most major cruise lines worldwide.

Rockett, who began performing at age 10, trained under Jeff Dunham and is recognized for his ventriloquism, which is featured prominently in the show. After growing up in the South, Rockett moved to Hollywood, California, where his management team is based. He also coached his children to the finals of NBC's "America's Got Talent," and they have since appeared in major Hollywood projects.

His son, Kadan, starred in the film "Dark Skies" with Keri Russell and appeared on CBS's "Rush Hour." He joins his sister, Brooklyn, for guest appearances in the Destin show.

Brooklyn gained national attention for her viral Super Bowl commercial, which has nearly 800 million views on YouTube. Most recently, she portrayed the daughter of Bradley Cooper in a project involving Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese.

The Rockett family has vacationed in Destin for many years. Now that his children are nearly grown, Rockett says he is excited to return for a long-term residency in the place his grandparents first introduced him to as a child. "I am excited to be back for another season here on the Emerald Coast and to continue creating magical memories for our guests," Rockett said.

A new restaurant, The Blue Lagoon, is now open before and after each show where guests can enjoy an extensive menu. Known for its Italian fare, the restaurant is located next to the showroom, and beverages may be brought into the theater.

For a full schedule and reser-

vations, visit MagicDestin.com. This season includes 7 p.m. evening performances and 4 p.m. matinees on select Sundays. Advance reservations are required. Parking is free and plentiful.



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## Veterans Appreciation Lunch April 21

The Walton and Okaloosa communities are coming together to give recognition and thanks to our first responders, veterans, and active military. **A Superior Mechanical** will hold its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive North, Niceville, FL 32578 on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, from 11:30 AM to 1:00 pm. Please save the date!

During the event, A Superior Mechanical will donate a new AC system complete with installation to one First Responder or Veteran in need. This giveaway is open to all who have served in the Army,

Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and all first responders including EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Fire Fighters. Register to win at [ASuperiorMechanical.com](http://ASuperiorMechanical.com) and go to ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY.

Local businesses are invited and encouraged to donate door prizes and giveaways. Thorpe says he hopes this giveaway serves as an example of how others can give back. "We wanted to somehow give back to others and simply decided to give back what we have: AC systems."

The event includes a delicious hot lunch catered by Swiftly Catered, a brief wel-

come from the sponsors and supporters, and the AC Giveaway. This event is supported and sponsored by the City of Niceville and Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School (who will present the colors), Rocky Bayou Christian School (who will sing the National Anthem), United Community Bank, NHance Cabinet Makeovers, Blanken Management, and Beachworx CoWorking Spaces. Damien from Coastal Wildlife is our event's MC-Host. Walton and Okaloosa County businesses are encouraged to sponsor; for more information contact Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

## South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival

### April 23-26 | Grand Boulevard



[www.SoWalWine.com](http://www.SoWalWine.com)



SCAN FOR TICKETS



Community

# Top 5 Supplements to Spring into Health



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE, TORTOISE CLINIC

Here along the Gulf Coast, the arrival of spring means longer days and a return to the outdoor living that defines our beach communities. For many, it feels like a natural inflection point of renewed momentum and a reminder to re-prioritize

energy, strength, and overall well-being. It's often during this season that people begin reaching for supplements and vitamins in hopes of supporting this shift.

At the Tortoise Clinic, I remind people that supplements are never a substitute for the fundamentals including bal-



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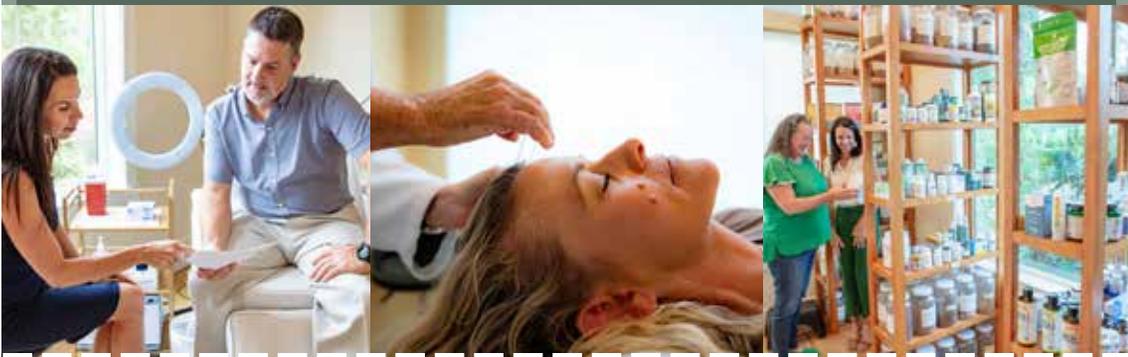
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Not every supplement is appropriate for every person. When selected strategically, with attention to quality, bioavailability, and individual physiology, they can support the systems that drive sustainable energy and resilience.

Here are five I commonly evaluate this time of year, and how I think about applying them.

### Vitamin D - A Hormone with Broad Impact

Despite its name, Vitamin D functions as a hormone in the body. It plays a role in immune balance, bone strength, muscle function, and mood regulation. Vitamin D receptors are found throughout the body, which helps explain its wide-reaching influence.

Deficiency remains common, even living in Florida. Indoor work, sunscreen use, skin tone variability, and seasonal shifts all contribute. When levels are sub-optimal, people may notice fatigue, slower recovery, decreased muscle strength, or a subtle dip in mood.

**When I look closer:** recurrent illness, low energy that doesn't improve with rest, mood changes, bone or muscle concerns, and limited sun exposure

**Practical Tip:** Vitamin D absorbs best when taken with food that contains healthy fats. Testing provides clarity — op-

timal levels are individualized, not guessed.

### Magnesium - Calm Energy & Recovery

Magnesium supports muscle relaxation, sleep quality, blood sugar balance, and healthy stress response. It participates in hundreds of biochemical processes and is one of the most common nutrients I see run low.

Despite the beauty of coastal living, daily demands such as work, activity, travel, and stress still accumulate, and magnesium depletion is common.

**Two forms I often consider:**

**Magnesium Glycinate:** Supports relaxation and restorative sleep.

**Magnesium Threonate:** May support focus, cognitive clarity, and emotional steadiness.

**When I look closer:** muscle tension, poor sleep, stress reactivity, headaches, and difficulty focusing

**Practical Tip:** Magnesium glycinate is often best tolerated in the evening. Magnesium threonate can be used in the morning when focus support is desired. Some individuals divide doses based on response. Because magnesium influences muscle relaxation, higher amounts may also influence digestive rhythm. Gradual adjustments help the body adapt comfortably.

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids - Inflammation & Heart Support

Omega-3 fats help regulate inflammation and support heart health, joint comfort, brain function, and mood stability.

Continued on page 28

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Community

# Walton County Public Schools March Update

By JOSHUA BLEDSOE,  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

February provided an opportunity to celebrate what makes public education strong. During National Public Schools Week, Walton County School District joined communities across the nation in recognizing the essential role public schools play in preparing future leaders and sustaining vibrant local communities. Florida's Future: Powered by Public Schools.

Public schools are accountable to the families they serve. They are governed locally, open to every child, and built on responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars. That stewardship is evident in our continued partnership with Schneider Electric, which is helping transition district facilities to energy-efficient LED lighting.

This districtwide LED conversion is projected to generate approximately \$4 million in long-term savings and produce a 14% reduction in utility costs. LED systems consume significantly less energy than tradi-



tional lighting and have a much longer lifespan, reducing both power usage and maintenance expenses.

March is an exciting month of celebrations as we recognize several important observances:

**Music in Our Schools Month** celebrates the impact of music education on student creativity and achievement. Walton County has a strong commitment to developing the Whole Child, and that means

strong music programs.

**National Nutrition Month** highlights the connection between healthy choices and academic performance. We ensure students receive food that they like to eat while also taking care to provide food that is thoughtfully prepared and nutritious.

**Women's History Month** honors the achievements and contributions of women throughout history and in our

own community. We are also proud to recognize the finalists for this year's No Ordinary Joe School Award, which honors outstanding students across Walton County:

**Walton High School**  
Edward O' Daniels, Nevaeh

Messer, Julie Laviolette  
**The WISE Center**  
Aaliyah McCullough  
**Freeport High School**  
Larae Smith, Helena "Lainey" Pitts, Davis Goodwin  
**Magnet Innovation Center**  
Michael (Gabe) Griffin, Brent (Beau) Melancon, Grace Petty  
**Paxton School**  
Grace Tyner, Teghan Araneo, Forrest Geoghagan  
**South Walton High School**  
Joseph Gilmore, William Justiss, Sophia Mijatovic  
These students exemplify what it means to be EPIC!

**Dates to Remember**  
**March 16-20** – SPRING BREAK!  
**March 23** – Teacher Workday (No School for Students)



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both time and mental space.

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That flexibility is intentional. "I like that I don't have to commit to anything," a member shares. "Some days I'm busy. Some days I'm not. Either way feels right."

Afternoons stretch into easy hours. Guests gather in the W

Lounge, spend time poolside, or explore nearby favorites along 30A. On Fridays, many discover one of the community's most loved traditions: dinner at The Mark, where reservations, conversation, and chef-prepared meals turn an ordinary evening into something to look forward to.

For some, a short-term stay is about proximity — spending more time near children or grandchildren and being close enough for everyday moments, not just holidays. For others, it's about location: enjoying coastal living, escaping colder climates,

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 Community

# 32nd Annual SEASIDE Prize™ Celebration

## The SEASIDE Institute™ Celebrated 32nd Annual SEASIDE Prize™ Recipients, Marianne Khoury-Vogt and Erik Vogt, February 6-8, 2026

By CHRISTY MILLIKEN

The 32nd Annual Seaside Prize, held from February 6-8, 2026, brought together leaders, visionaries, and community members to celebrate excellence in architecture, urban design, and community development. This year's event featured a series of engaging presentations, insightful panel discussions, and networking opportunities, all set against the picturesque backdrop of the coastal communities of SEASIDE®, Rosemary Beach®, and Alys Beach®, Florida. Attendees enjoyed learning from esteemed speakers, attending town tours, and honoring this year's SEASIDE Prize recipients, Marianne Khoury-Vogt and Erik Vogt for their outstanding contributions to architecture and to the built environment through new urbanist principles.

Beyond the formal programming, the weekend included social gatherings, walking tours, and awards dinners that fostered meaningful connections among participants. The event once again underscored Seaside's role as a model for innovative, people-focused community planning and design. The weekend also highlighted the neighboring New Urbanism communities of Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach.

### Private Reception at the Palmer House

Khoury-Vogt Architects welcomed clients, sponsors, friends, and the Seaside Institute Board of Governors on Thursday evening to the Palmer House for a sunset reception. The Palmer House, designed by KVA, served as a welcoming venue where the homeowners graciously hosted attendees for the evening gathering on Camp Creek Lake overlooking both the lake and



the Gulf. The home was meticulously designed in the style that Khoury-Vogt Architects are known for, creating a memorable experience for all who attended.

### Town Tour, Welcome Reception, & Keynote Conversation at Alys Beach

Alys Beach offered attendees a guided town tour led by Marianne Khoury-Vogt, providing insight into the community's architectural features and urban design. Following the tour, participants gathered at Caliza for a welcoming reception, setting the stage for an engaging keynote conversation. The keynote featured Andrés Duany and Scott Merrill, who discussed the origins and development of the new urbanism movement, and the beginnings of the Seaside Institute as an instrument that has been fostering education surrounding this movement for forty-three years and helped inspire the founda-

tion of CNU (The Congress for the New Urbanism). CNU works to implement and activate the principles in their mission.

During the keynote conversation, participants delved into the development and ongoing impact of new urbanism, focusing on the distinctive qualities that define Seaside, Rosemary Beach, and Alys Beach. Seaside, recognized as a pioneering community in this movement, served as a central case study. The discussion also examined how Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach have contributed their own unique features to the new urbanism landscape.

A highlight of the conversation was Andrés Duany's remarks, which underscored the significant achievements of Khoury-Vogt Architects. He emphasized the influential role of Marianne Khoury-Vogt and Erik Vogt in shaping the built environment, particularly through their work as the town architects of Alys Beach. Their contributions were recognized

as instrumental in advancing the principles.

### Signature SEASIDE® Saturday - Symposium, Town Tour, and Awards

On Saturday, the Seaside Institute and the town of Seaside warmly welcomed both attendees and former Seaside Prize recipients for a day filled with signature events. The day's program featured a symposium with notable speakers, guided town tours, a closing panel discussion, and celebratory awards ceremonies.

The symposium brought together a group of esteemed speakers, including Scott Merrill, Michael Imber, Richard John, Maria Fernanda Sanchez, Pedro Pablo Godoy, Marianne Khoury-Vogt, and Erik Vogt. Their presentations offered valuable insights into architecture, urban planning, and the ongoing impact of new urbanist principles in shaping the community. The closing panel discussion, skillfully moderated by Marina Khoury, featured perspectives from Mike Watkins, Geoffrey Mouen, Ty Nunn, and the year's prize recipients, providing a platform for thoughtful dialogue and reflection on the event's themes. The town tours were led by Robert Davis, Andrés Duany, and Dhiru Thadani.

Attendees also had the opportunity to view artwork by local artist Allison Wickey. Wickey's creation, inspired by the archi-

*Continued on next page*

### Event Highlights and Community Engagement



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### SEASIDE PRIZE

*continued from previous page*

texts, town planners, and the mission of the Seaside Institute, was on display and available for purchase. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this work will benefit the ongoing initiatives of the Seaside Institute, reinforcing the event's commitment to fostering creativity and community engagement.

The awards celebrations were held at The Chapel at Seaside, where Robert and Daryl Davis presented honors to the recipients. The evening culminated in an awards dinner at Bud & Alley's Waterfront Dining, offering a fitting conclusion to a memorable day dedicated to recognition, fellowship, and the advancement of community ideals.

#### Rosemary Beach Breakfast and Tour

On Sunday, The Rosemary Beach Homeowner's Association graciously hosted a breakfast for attendees at Edward's, creating a welcoming atmosphere to begin the morning. Following the meal, participants embarked on a guided town



PHOTO CREDIT BRANDAN BABINEAUX

tour led by master planner Andrés Duany, DPZ CoDesign and Rosemary Beach Town Architect, Bret Azzarelli. This tour provided an in-depth look at the design principles and planning strategies that have shaped the distinctive character of Rosemary Beach, offering attendees valuable insights into the community's architectural vision and development.

#### Community Gatherings and Cultural Events

Following the insightful town tours, attendees reconvened in Seaside to immerse themselves in the local culture and connect

with the broader community. The afternoon began with a Matcha Tasting at Amavida, where participants enjoyed a unique and flavorful experience that fostered conversation and camaraderie. Afterwards, guests attended an art opening at Anne Hunter Galleries, featuring the work of artist Melissa Davis. This event provided an opportunity for attendees to engage with local art and creativity, further enriching the weekend's celebration of community and innovative design.

Each year, Anne Hunter



generously donates a portion of sales from her gallery opening following Prize festivities to the Seaside Institute. This ongoing commitment exemplifies the concept of Civic Art, which plays a vital role in nurturing a holistic community. By supporting the Institute through her artistic endeavors, Hunter helps reinforce the values of creativity, collaboration, and communi-

ty engagement that are central to the mission and spirit of the Seaside Institute.

#### Weekend Overview

The Seaside Institute Executive Director, Christy Milliken, with the support of the Seaside Institute Board of Fellows and Board of Governors, Sponsors, and dedicated volunteers, curated an inspiring weekend that underscored Seaside's ongoing leadership in innovative community planning. The event featured a thoughtfully designed sequence of activities; each aimed at celebrating people-centered urban design and fostering community among participants.

Throughout the weekend, the program fostered meaningful connections among attendees, encouraging collaboration and the exchange of ideas. The recognition of influential individuals further emphasized the importance of Seaside and its neighboring communities as exemplary models for people-focused urban planning and design.



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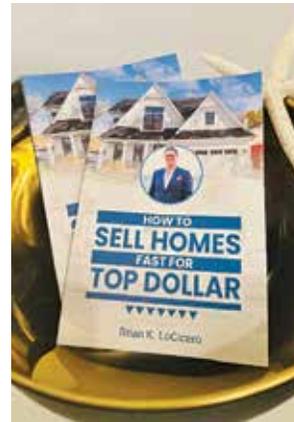
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 Community

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Ashleigh specializes in diamond, gemstone and precious metal pieces, with a passion for custom design. Engagement rings and wedding bands hold a special place in her heart. "It is truly special to help people celebrate one of the biggest moments of their lives," she says.

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## Easter Magic Starts Here Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Spring celebrations begin with the sweetest traditions — and Easter arrives Sunday, April 5! At Frill Seekers Gifts, it's time to think beyond the basket and

add those meaningful, personalized touches that make the holiday unforgettable. From custom Easter baskets and bags to spring-themed treasures for parents, grandparents and teachers, the creative team at Frill Seekers specializes in details that delight. Choose festive basket name tags shaped like bunnies or chicks, elegant monograms or personalized names to make little ones (and grown-ups!) smile.

Entertaining this Easter? Consider a timeless charcuterie board engraved with your family name or monogram, or a set of custom wine glasses perfect for spring gatherings all year long. And if you're celebrating at someone else's home, don't forget the Southern tradition of a thoughtful hostess gift. A monogrammed tote, blessing beads, stationery or a beautiful tea towel makes a gracious statement.

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## Step Into Spring Beautiful Pure & Couture Salon

A new season is the perfect excuse for a refresh — and Pure & Couture Salon is ready to pamper you from the moment you walk in the door. From a welcoming beverage to a relaxing scalp massage during your shampoo, the experience is designed to help you unwind while elevating your look. Whether you're brightening up with

blond sparkle, embracing rich brunette curls or blending in gorgeous extensions for added texture, Pure & Couture's experienced and creative team listens carefully to what you want and works with your skin tone, face shape, lifestyle and budget.

Spring is about lightness and glow — warm up your color, add fresh styling or complete your makeover with makeup, a facial, kinesiology or a therapeutic massage. When you leave, your hair says it all. Have your wedding coming up? No problem. Let the team help you with hair, makeup and more!

Pure & Couture also offers curbside pickup and online ordering, making it easy to stay connected. And for even more reason to celebrate — the second location, Pure Collective Salon, is open at 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

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Spring calls for color — and cupcakes deliver!

USA TODAY named Smallcakes one of the "Top Ten Cupcake Places to Try" in the country, and the City Market location continues to wow guests with award-winning creations that have even found their way to celebrities.

March brings a fresh lineup of seasonal flavors and frostings in bright spring hues, along with the daily favorites guests love. Each day features 13 signature flavors, four specialty flavors and 12 house-made ice cream flavors. From gourmet cupcakes and jumbo cookies to brownies, cookie cakes, cupcakes-in-a-jar and gourmet popcorn, there's something for every sweet tooth.

Planning a celebration such as St. Patrick's Day? Custom orders are welcome — from birthday and wedding cakes to custom edible logos and images on cupcakes. Gluten-free options are available, and yes, even "pup" cakes for furry friends.

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Beyond the Circuit, Pagani Muscle Recovery Therapy alternates hot and cold application to mimic hours of traditional heat and cold therapy. For

next-level recovery, the Cocoon Fitness POD combines heat, light and full-body vibration.

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## Love Where You Live — and Profit from It Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Spring often sparks fresh starts — and for many homeowners, that means thinking seriously about selling. If love is in the air, let it extend to your bottom line. Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero is sharing insider strategies designed to help sellers get top dollar in any market.

Brian's popular book reveals proven tactics used by the most successful home sellers — strategies that shorten time on market while maximizing value. These are the same methods Brian has used to help sell thousands of homes across Northwest Florida.

"In this book, I've provided an effective guide for you to have the most successful real estate transaction possible," Brian said. "We hired Brian to help us navigate 30A's tough real estate market," said client A. Albright. "Because of his efforts and strategies that he details in his book, we quickly sold our Destin home and bought a 30A beachfront home, below asking price."

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# Saddle Up for a Cause: **Westonwood Ranch Rodeo**

By LORI SMITH

Our area's hometown rodeo is back — and it's more than just a night of bulls, broncs and barrel racing. The 7th Annual Westonwood Ranch Pro Rodeo returns March 27–28 at the Freeport Regional Sports Complex, bringing high-energy entertainment to the community while raising vital support for one of Walton County's most meaningful nonprofit missions.

Presented in partnership with the Walton County Sheriff's Office and the City of Freeport, the two-night event invites families from across the Emerald Coast to gather for live rodeo action, music, food vendors and kid-friendly fun — all while helping teens and young adults with developmental differences build brighter futures.

Doors open at 6 p.m. each evening, with Professional Cowboy Association performances kicking off at 7:30 p.m. Fans can expect classic rodeo events including bareback bronc riding, steer wrestling, breakaway roping, ladies barrel racing, team roping and bull riding. Chil-



dren's activities, bounce houses and local vendors will add to the festive, family-focused atmosphere.

Tickets are sold at the gate only, with proceeds directly supporting Westonwood Ranch programs that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our area and throughout Northwest Florida.

### More Than a Rodeo: The Heart Behind Westonwood Ranch

While the rodeo has become a beloved local tradition, its true purpose goes far beyond the arena lights. Westonwood Ranch is a Freeport-based nonprofit dedicated to helping teens and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities gain life skills, job training and independence through hands-

on, real-world experiences.

Located on a holistic ranch campus along U.S. Highway 20, Westonwood provides vocational training, functional learning opportunities and social enterprises that build confidence and prepare participants for meaningful employment. Programs focus on recognizing “ability over disability,” giving individuals the tools they need to thrive and live productive, independent lives.

Through farm-based activities, animal care, vocational training and structured life-skills programs, participants experience daily victories — mastering new tasks, developing friendships and discovering their unique potential.

### A Growing Impact

Westonwood Ranch has become a vital resource for families across Walton and Okaloosa counties, filling a critical transition gap between high school and adulthood for individuals with developmental differences.

The organization's impact continues to expand. Recent in-

vestments and community support are helping fund new training spaces and future supportive housing initiatives designed to create inclusive living environments where young adults can work, learn and build lasting friendships.

Events like the annual rodeo play a key role in making that growth possible, bringing neighbors together while raising funds that sustain programs year-round.

Whether you're a longtime rodeo fan or simply looking for a unique way to spend a spring evening, the Westonwood Ranch Rodeo offers something for everyone — from thrilling cowboy competition to community connection.

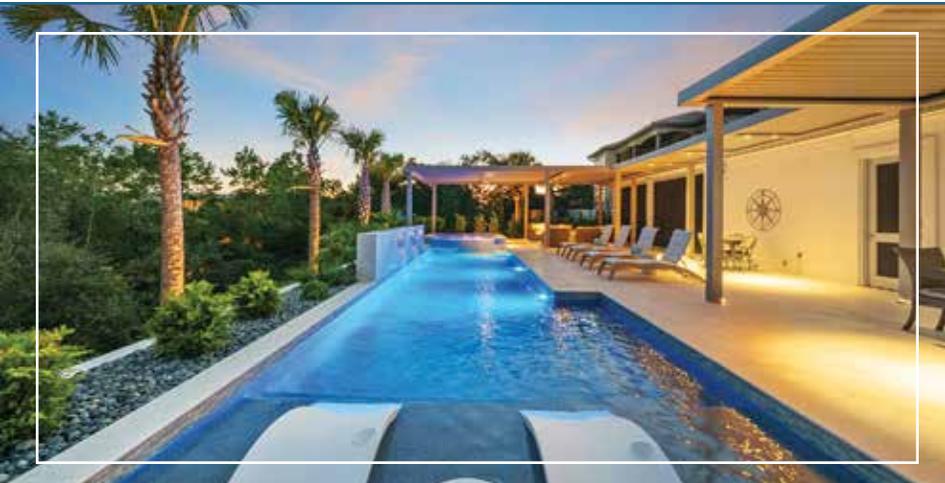
But at its core, the event is about celebrating inclusion and creating opportunities for individuals who often face barriers to independence.

For more information about Westonwood Ranch or its upcoming rodeo, visit [westonwood.org](http://westonwood.org).



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Community

# Inspiring Stewardship. Protecting Our Future. Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance 2025 Impact

By ALLISON MCDOWELL, CBA  
For three decades, the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) has worked at the intersection of science, education, and restoration to protect one of Northwest Florida's most vital natural resources. Guided by data and powered by sustainable partnerships, CBA continues to advance meaningful, measurable conservation across the watershed.

### Restoration

CBA's restoration work in 2025 focused on strengthening natural systems that protect water quality and coastal resilience.

- 140 vertical oyster gardens cultivated throughout the watershed
- 200+ tons of recycled oyster shells collected and returned to local waters for habitat creation
- 3.35 acres of salt marsh and oyster habitat restored
- 600+ tons of limestone placed at higher-energy shoreline sites to reduce erosion and

support • living shoreline development

- Seagrass restoration lab initiated, with pilot plantings launched to expand submerged aquatic vegetation recovery efforts

### Monitoring & Research

As a leader in environmental monitoring, CBA places science-based conservation at the forefront of protecting the Choctawhatchee Basin.

In 2025, CBA added 8 new sites for a total of 145 active water quality monitoring sites across the watershed, continuing to provide essential field expertise and data support for environmental monitoring and research throughout the region.

Working alongside university, county, state, and federal partners, CBA helped expand monitoring coverage, improve public access to data, and strengthen the scientific foundation for both coastal and freshwater protection. These collaborative



efforts ensure that restoration and management decisions are guided by sound science and a long-term understanding of our waterways.

### Education & Outreach

Environmental stewardship begins in the classroom.

In 2025, CBA reached 3,000+ students across 20 public schools and five homeschool groups, delivering monthly

hands-on lessons aligned with STEM skills and Florida science standards. Programs like Grasses in Classes and oyster gardening give students real-world environmental experience, connecting classroom learning to tangible restoration outcomes. Through immersive, standards-based curriculum, CBA is cultivating the next generation of scientists, conservationists, and informed citizens.

### Sustainable Partnerships

CBA's impact is amplified through collaboration.

Key partnerships in 2025 included:

- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Oyster shell recycling restaurants
- Islanders Coastal Outfitter
- JW Couch Foundation

Together, these partners help fund, expand, and sustain restoration and education initiatives throughout the Basin.

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# *A New Era of Elegance:* **McCaskill & Company's Expansion Culminates in a New Rolex Environment**

BY CAITLYN BURRUS

In Miramar Beach, McCaskill & Company Fine Jewelry & Watches has completed a carefully curated expansion that redefines the in-store experience while honoring the values that have guided the family-owned jeweler for generations. Long known for its elevated selection of fine jewelry and luxury timepieces, the gallery's multi-year transformation culminates in the completion of a new Rolex space, set to debut in early March 2026.

The expansion began with a practical need—more parking—but quickly evolved into a broader vision with a total showroom renovation and expansion. As McCaskill & Company's designer offerings and customer base grew, so did the desire to create a space that reflected the caliber of the brands represented, particularly Rolex.

For the late Elizabeth Campbell and her daughter, Carolyn Brigman, who together led the gallery alongside husband and father Bill Campbell, the opportunity was about more than square footage.

"We were laser-focused on interesting architectural accents, stonework, and materials that tell a story," they share. "As a family-owned gallery, we wanted the space to feel warm, residential, and elegant—somewhere guests could truly enjoy the experience."

Architect Cherri Pitts of Studio C Architecture in Birmingham, Ala., led the design, while Grand Bay Construction brought the vision to life. While executing one



of the largest commercial renovations in the Miramar Beach area, the team faced the added challenge of keeping the gallery operational throughout the process, which required careful coordination.

The expanded west showroom was the first phase of the transformation, introducing a refined, guest-focused layout with comfortable seating areas, custom artwork, sculptural objects, and lighting designed to enhance the natural brilliance of each piece of jewelry. The Bridal Gallery quickly became a standout, with crystal snowflake-inspired lighting creating a sense of intimacy and celebration.

As work continued, attention shifted to the east showroom, where the most immersive elements of the expansion unfold. Guests will enter through a foyer featuring handblown-glass maple leaves hanging from the ceiling, created by artist Brit Deslonde. "To reflect the store's commitment to exceptional craftsmanship, each glass maple leaf was hand-blown at the furnace without molds and embedded with 24-karat



gold and pure silver, ensuring that every piece is entirely unique," Deslonde says. "I sculpted the leaves to create a light, floating canopy suspended overhead that interacts with light and space, echoing the refinement, individuality, and material beauty found in fine jewelry."



Steps to the right, the Rolex environment represents the grand finale of McCaskill & Company's expansion. Designed to align with Rolex's world-renowned standards of craftsmanship, fit, and finish, the space offers a focused, elevated experience for guests.

Additional brand-focused spaces include a dedicated David Yurman area, reinforcing McCaskill's commitment to full-service, design-driven luxury. The second phase also introduces an enhanced Service Department, including an authorized Rolex Service Center staffed by two highly credentialed watchmakers.

Large viewing windows allow guests to observe the intricate work of watch and jewelry repair and custom design firsthand. "Our goal has always been to offer an elevated shopping experience that still feels personal," Carolyn reflects. "Luxury, to us, means warmth, connection, and artistry."

With the debut of its new Rolex environment, McCaskill & Company completes a transformation defined by intention, craftsmanship, and collaboration, setting a new benchmark for fine jewelry and timepieces on the Emerald Coast.

Visit [McCaskillandCompany.com](http://McCaskillandCompany.com) or follow them on Instagram @mccaskillandcompany to learn more.

**Publisher's Note:**

*The Life Media family extends our heartfelt prayers and deepest condolences to the Campbell family and the entire McCaskill & Company team on the recent passing of Elizabeth Campbell. Elizabeth's warmth, vision and dedication helped shape an experience cherished by so many across our community. She will be remembered with admiration, gratitude and great respect.*

# Inside the Therapy Room: What Really Happens in a Session



By MICHAEL McMANUS, LCSW, PSYCHOTHERAPIST

For many people, starting therapy can feel like stepping into unfamiliar territory. What does a therapist actually do? What happens in a session? And how does talking to a professional lead to lasting change?

At its core, psychotherapy—also called counseling or talk therapy—is a process that

helps people explore their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a safe, private, and supportive environment. Therapists are trained to help clients gain insight into their patterns, manage anxiety or depression, recover from trauma, improve relationships, and cultivate personal growth.

### The First Session

The first meeting is often about building comfort and gathering background information. Your therapist may ask what brings you in, what's been troubling you, and what goals you'd like to reach. It's also a time for you to ask questions—about the therapist's style, confidentiality, or what therapy might look like. Many clients feel relief simply from being heard without judgment.

### What Therapists Actually Do

Good therapists don't just listen; they guide conversations in ways that promote awareness and change. They may highlight recurring themes, reflect emotions, or help connect past experiences with current challenges. Depending on their approach,



a therapist might use specific techniques like:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): Challenging unhelpful thinking patterns and replacing them with realistic, balanced thoughts.
- Psychodynamic therapy: Exploring how early experiences shape present behavior and relationships.
- Humanistic or person-centered therapy: Emphasizing self-acceptance and aligning behavior with one's true values.
- Mindfulness-based therapy: Developing awareness and presence to reduce reactivity and stress.

Most therapists blend several methods to fit each client's needs rather than adhering rigidly to one model.

### Common Themes in Therapy

People come to therapy for countless reasons—relationship conflicts, grief, anxiety, stress, or a search for meaning. Over time, certain themes often surface: setting boundaries, improving self-esteem, healing wounds from the past, identifying personal values, or reclaiming a sense of agency in life.

### The Path Toward Growth and Healing

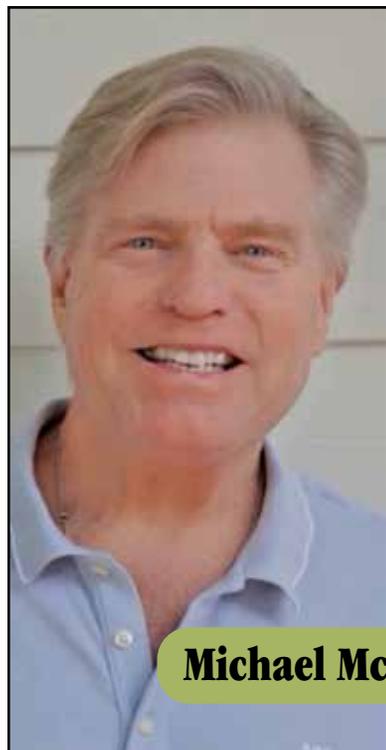
Therapists help clients grow by doing more than offering advice—they create conditions where insight, self-compassion, and change can occur naturally. They model empathy, curiosity, and acceptance, helping clients internalize these attitudes toward themselves. Progress often unfolds gradually as clients learn to tolerate difficult feelings, challenge limiting beliefs, and practice new ways of thinking and relating.

### Beyond Symptom Relief

The ultimate goal of therapy isn't only to reduce distress but to foster self-actualization—the process of becoming one's fullest, most authentic self. Clients begin to see their challenges not just as problems to fix, but as opportunities for growth. A successful therapeutic relationship helps people rediscover their own resilience, wisdom, and capacity for joy.

In the end, therapy is less about being told what to do and more about learning how to listen deeply—to one's own mind, body, and spirit—and using that understanding to live with greater freedom and purpose.

*Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach. He can be reached by text or phone at 1-850-837-0123 or visit psychotherapy30A.com*



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# Special Enrollment Periods for Health Insurance



By CHRISTIAN REGALADO

It's March. Do you have health insurance?

If you're under 65 and need to buy your own health insurance, finding an affordable, quality health plan for yourself and your family became more challenging for the self-employed and others in the individual marketplace this year. Open Enrollment for 2026 ended January 15, and I saw many families choosing to downgrade their health plans due to increased premium costs. If there's an upside, one of the most crucial benefits secured by the ACA that remains is guaranteed issue. That means you can't be denied

health coverage because of a pre-existing health condition.

Rumor has it Congress is working on bipartisan solutions to address the drivers of high healthcare expenses here in the U.S.; we'll see how it goes. In the meantime, we're working with what we've got!

If you are under 65 and uninsured, you'll need to qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) in order to enroll in a new health plan for 2026.

There are several events that can trigger a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). The first is if you've lost employer sponsored health coverage for any reason. Second, a SEP is triggered if you move to an area outside your existing coverage area. Other qualifying life events such as getting married or having a baby can open a SEP for you. If you have a life event that triggers a SEP, don't wait to find a new plan. Generally, you only have 60 days from the reported "event" to apply.

For folks turning 65 this year, the important timeline you'll



want to keep in mind concerns your initial enrollment period. You have to take the initiative to enroll in Medicare through ssa.gov unless you're already collecting Social Security. You can apply as soon as 3 months prior to your birth month or you can delay up to 3 months past your birth month, but unless you have

other creditable coverage, you really shouldn't. Understanding all of Medicare's moving parts is a bit of a learning curve, and sorting through it with the free services of a local independent broker can be game-changing. If you're navigating Medicare for the first time this year, I'd be happy to help you through it.

If you're over 65, there are three common circumstances that may find you enrolling for coverage outside the annual enrollment period. The first would be if you retained insurance through your employer past 65, but are ending that coverage now. In this case, you're likely already enrolled in Part A. You have 60 days to report your

creditable coverage loss and enroll for Part B without penalty. Then you can choose an Advantage Plan or a Supplement and PDP plan to complete your coverage. The second common circumstance is a SEP triggered by a move outside your service area. The third is a Medicare Disaster-related SEP. These are triggered when a natural disaster or storm event happens in your area during a standard election enrollment period.

*As usual, broker services are offered at no cost to you, and I will be happy to discuss your options in my office or over the phone. Reach out anytime! Email Christian@evergreenhealthins.com or call (850) 687 7606.*

## First Ever Urgent Care In Walton County and New Primary Care Office Expand Healthcare Options for Residents and Visitors

This is the first Ascension Sacred Heart Urgent Care in Walton County with 7 day a week walk-in urgent care

Ascension Sacred Heart Medical Group is celebrating the opening of its first Urgent Care in Walton County, expanding access to convenient care for residents and visitors near 30A.

Sacred Heart Primary Care and Urgent Care - South Walton is located at 5551 US Hwy 98 in Santa Rosa Beach. The clinic is open seven days a week for walk-ins. Hours are Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"We are excited to provide urgent care for patients who need to be seen for illnesses and injuries that can be treated outside of the emergency room with convenient access to 30A", said Trey Abshier, President and CEO of Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. "This

will allow people to get the care they need close to home sooner and help to lessen waits at the ER."

High temperatures, intense humidity and an influx of visitors drive a surge in emergency medical calls across Destin and South Walton County each summer. The need for convenient, accessible care extends year-round and the new urgent care helps meet that demand.

Ascension Sacred Heart Medical Group also expanded primary care in February with the opening of a new clinic in Santa Rosa Beach. Ascension Sacred Heart Primary Care - Mack Bayou is located in the Medical Office Building on Mack Bayou Loop. Laura Bruck-Hillas, APRN, is accepting new patients. Appointments can be made by calling 850-278-3932.

Walk-in care is available in

*Continued on next page*



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Wellness



# When Spring Comes Back to Life

BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

We don't notice it happening at first. Winter rarely announces itself all at once—it settles in quietly. Shorter days. Colder mornings. Longer evenings spent on the couch. Same house, same routine, but something feels different. There's less energy, less motivation, less desire to care.

Where we once enjoyed moving our bodies, getting outside, and feeling strong and capable, now the alarm rings and staying in bed feels easier. Joints ache. Muscles feel weaker. Even sim-

ple routines—exercise, cooking well, making time for ourselves—feel like work instead of something life-giving. It's easy to dismiss it as stress, age, or just “the time of year.”

As spring approaches, the light begins to change. A familiar spark returns—the desire to feel better, to take care of ourselves again, to re-engage with life. But the energy we expect doesn't necessarily follow the season. Motivation fades as quickly as it appeared, leaving frustration and the quiet question: Why don't I feel like I should?

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we hear this story every year.

Winter blues aren't just about the weather. They're also about hormones. As daylight decreases, hormonal signaling in the body shifts. Testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, thyroid



hormones, cortisol—and even Vitamin D—all influence how we feel, how we move, how we sleep, and how we recover. What many people don't realize is Vitamin D isn't just a vitamin; it functions as a hormone, affecting mood, immune health, muscle strength, and bone density. During the winter months, when sunlight exposure drops, Vitamin D levels often fall right along with energy and motivation.

When hormones decline or fall out of balance, energy drops, mood flattens, sleep suf-

fers, and winter feels longer and heavier than it should.

Hormones also do far more than influence mood or libido. They are foundational to the body itself. Testosterone and estrogen are essential for maintaining muscle mass in both men and women. When levels are low, the body loses lean muscle—even with consistent exercise. As muscle declines, metabolism slows, joints lose support, and fatigue becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Hormones play a critical role in bone health as well. Estrogen, testosterone, and Vitamin D work together to protect bone density. When any of them are deficient, bone loss accelerates, increasing the risk of osteopo-

rosis and fractures in both men and women. This loss happens quietly, often for years, before it ever makes itself known.

This is why so many people feel tired, frustrated, and fragile. Why workouts stop working. Why motivation disappears. Why winter feels like survival instead of rest—and why spring can feel like a letdown.

### Hormone optimization helps.

When hormones are restored to healthy levels the body responds. Energy improves. Muscle becomes easier to build and maintain. Bones are protected. Sleep deepens. Mood stabilizes. That natural desire to care for yourself returns.

Hormone Replacement Therapy isn't about pushing the body beyond normal. It's about restoring what time, stress, and life have gradually taken away.

*At The Hormone Restoration Center, we take a comprehensive, personalized approach. You're not broken, and you're not alone. You don't have to wait for another season to feel like yourself again. Just call us: (850) 837-1271. It might just change your life.*





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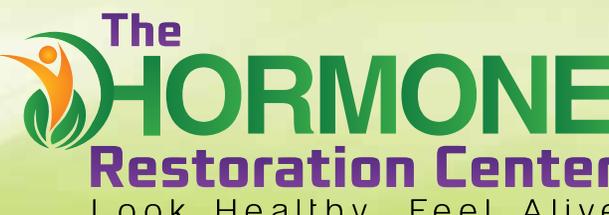
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### URGENT CARE

*continued from previous page*

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Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast has more than

20 primary care providers for adults and children with 9 clinic locations in Walton and Okaloosa Counties. Ascension Sacred Heart Primary Care and Urgent Care - South Walton will be adding primary care later this year. To find medical care near you visit [GetSacredHeart-Care.com](http://GetSacredHeart-Care.com).

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# The Art of Healthy Unproductivity



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,  
JOURNEY BRAVELY

Healthy unproductivity is an art and a practice worth learning. Are you a person who has fun and rests without any guilt or internal drive to return quickly to productivity? If so, well done and others can learn from you. Or, are you a person who feels pressure to be productive, to work, to tend to your to-do list all of your waking hours? Maybe you're a person who says work must come first and be complete before you can enjoy yourself and relax. Perhaps you believe that unproductivity is useless and lazy. Life gives you all sorts of messages about productivity vs. unproductivity that can be very hard to sort.

American culture transmits clear values about productivity. Get up earlier, fit more into a day, work harder, earn more, save more, buy more, buy bigger...all in the name of achieving success and the American Dream. The family you come from may also have transmitted some values regarding productivity. Work before play, the early bird gets the worm, only lazy people rest, always moving, never sitting, slowing down will get you left behind. Your personal goals can also be strong drivers that do not permit unproductivity.

While having a good work ethic is admirable and important, it can be overdone. Personal growth matters, and at the same time, your brain and body need breaks from the stimulation of productivity. Living in over-productivity can result in hypervigilance in your physical body that often leads to anxiety, depression, excessive tension, chronic pain, other health issues, and relationship problems. Balance between productivity and unproductivity is actually a worthy goal. You don't always need another growth-oriented book, Instagram account, or podcast.

Sometimes what you need is consistent time to intentionally put away productivity and embrace fun and rest. Your body

was made to need both productive work and unproductive activities meant to spark enjoyment.

So, how do you slow down and pursue some healthy unproductive time?

## 7 Ways to Practice Healthy Unproductivity

**1. Evaluate your current balance of productivity vs. unproductivity.** Do you have trouble resting or being still? Do you turn fun activities into something productive? Are you ruled by a to-do list? How often do you engage in intentional unproductive fun or rest?

**2. Go deeper.** Reflect on what is driving your over-productivity. What current or historical messages make you feel behind or guilty when you rest or are unproductive? What did your parents and other family members teach you about productivity and rest/fun? What are you afraid will happen if you stop producing? How might your sense of value as a person be connected with your productivity? What spiritual messages might be influencing your views of rest/fun?

**3. Give yourself permission to engage in healthy unproductivity.** Remind yourself that life is best lived with a balance of productivity and fun/rest. Your mental and physical health need some unproduc-

tivity. Rest/fun are not lazy but healthy and kind for yourself. You will be more productive in your work time when you take unproductive rest time.

**4. Explore unproductive activities.** Remember the whole point is that it is not productive. Remember what has been fun or restful to you before. Read an unproductive book, use creativity for the sake of fun, play with your pet, lay in a hammock, take a nap, dance to music you love, bake for the joy of it, color, do puzzles, watch a funny show, take a long bath, sit in nature, take a stroll, soak up some sun. Find your version of unproductive fun and rest.

**5. Plan.** Create intentional and consistent space in your schedule for healthy unproductivity. Mark your calendar. Keep things you need for your fun pursuits handy so participating in activities is accessible. Create restful space where you can enjoy rest and fun regularly.

**6. Practice.** Pick an unproductive activity and spend an hour engaging in it. It's okay if it is uncomfortable at first. Gently remind yourself that some unproductivity is good for your mind, body, and soul. Let yourself get immersed. Your tasks will still be there later.

**7. Repeat.** Mark time off in your calendar once a week when you will not schedule other things. Use that time for healthy



unproductivity and through repetition, your brain will begin to embrace your new habit.

Taking time for restorative unproductivity is very likely to bring energy and enthusiasm

back into your productive life pursuits. Be gracious and consistent with yourself as you explore healthy unproductivity as a life practice. Connect with us along your journey for counseling and coaching at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com).



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# Sean of the South: Enough



BY SEAN DIETRICH

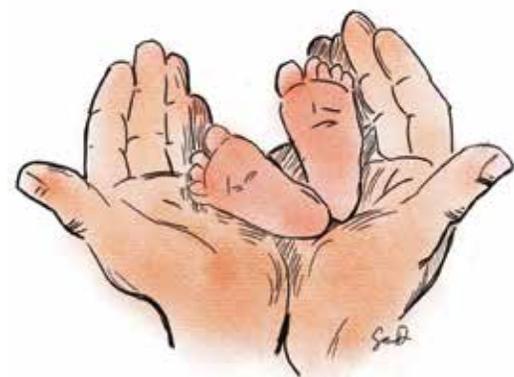
What if I told you that you are enough?

Moreover, what if you woke up this morning and, for the first time ever, you actually felt like enough. What if you loved yourself? And I mean really loved yourself.

Do you love yourself? Let's find out.

Are you a perfectionist? No? Yes? Have you ever asked WHY you're a perfectionist? Have you ever wondered why you strive to be flawless so that nobody will find a reason to judge you?

Or are you a people pleas-



er? Ever wonder why? How did you become a doormat? Why do you fall all over yourself to ensure everyone will like you? Would showing them the real you be that bad?

Or maybe you're critical. Maybe you nitpick those you love. Heck, maybe you nitpick yourself. Maybe you look in the mirror and think, "I'm so fat and ugly."

Perhaps you see photos of

yourself and react with true disgust, thinking, "I'm so old and wrinkled. Look at all this flab underneath my neck, jiggling like Jello salad."

Maybe you don't like your nose. Or your teeth. Or the shape of your bootymus maximus.

Then again, maybe you dislike yourself in much simpler ways. Maybe you're embarrassed about your bank account. "Omigod. Is this ALL you have in savings? What a loser."

Maybe you don't like where you are in your career. What a freaking disappointment you are. You should've been MUCH further along in your field by now. Instead, you're just a supporting actor in someone else's made-for-TV drama.

Maybe you don't feel smart enough. Maybe you are socially anxious. Maybe you think you're too much of an introvert. You're a classic procrastinator.

You feel invisible. You hate your hair. You wish you were prettier. Skinnier. Funnier. Happier.

Either way, your inner critic is always screaming, "You're not enough!" You've tried to shut up this blowhard for years. But it doesn't work. The inner critic just keeps talking smack.

"You're simply not enough," the critic keeps saying.

This is shame you feel. You might not be aware that it's shame, but it is. You don't feel shame because of something you've done. You feel shame over who you are.

You dislike the real you. And thus, you've formed a persona to hide the real you. And hopefully, everyone will like this persona

because, God knows, you work really hard building it. You built this persona because the real you is not worthy. The real you just isn't enough.

But... What if I told you that you don't have to feel this way anymore? What if I told you that you ARE enough? What if I said that you are so insanely beautiful as a human being, just the way you are in this moment. Moreover, what if I am not pro-

digiously and majestically full of bovine ordure?

There is a way to never feel ashamed again. You will not find the answer through rituals and creeds, nor through the oppression of pious dogmas. You will not find answers in internet videos or poorly written articles on the internet—such as the one you are currently reading.

I have been ashamed of myself for my entire life. Because of childhood trauma, I became

the essence of shame itself. But if I have learned one truth in my short life—if you get nothing out of what I've written you today—I hope you understand one thing, because the entirety of reality rests upon it:

The only way to love yourself is to first love your neighbor. And the only way to love your neighbor is to love the One who made them.

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Musing

# A Pastor's Ponderings: God Sightings



BY REV. PETE HYDE

Just a mile or two east of the small (population 200) rural town situated in the vast, open, windy, "big sky" plains of western Oklahoma is the Lochman ranch. It is a modest spread in terms of size but has features not found on many of the larger arid wheat farms and cattle ranches of the western high plains. Just east of the farmhouse, barns and outbuildings is a small butte (a flattop hill) known as Lochman's Hill. It rises abruptly out of the flat plains a hundred feet or so. The flat stony top is probably 50 feet in diameter. From the top (not too bad of a climb), you can see "forever" in all directions - especially on a clear day. The lonely

whistle and rumble of one of the 10 or 15 Santa Fe/Burlington Northern freight trains on the mainline from Chicago to LA can be heard and felt well before the multi-engine and up to 60 or 70 freight cars can be seen coming over the horizon to pass by the butte and come through the town of Fargo, slowing to 40 or 50 miles per hour.

In the middle of the flat top of Lochman's Hill, an old, rugged, weathered cross, probably 10 to 15 feet high, has been erected. The church I pastored there gathers on Lochman's Hill for a sunrise service each Easter morning. The sun breaks across a treeless horizon with a dazzling beauty and glory that will rival any beach sunrise. A close and concentrated look to the west and a little north at sunrise from the top of the butte on a clear morning will reveal what looks like a little white fence post standing right at the edge of the horizon. As the sun gets higher, the image disappears. I asked Oliver Lochman about the image one Easter Sunday.



He said it was the white CO-OP grain elevator from a small town across the Texas border,

some 25 miles away. When the sun is just right, and the sky is just clear enough, there it stands almost like a lighthouse on the horizon - a beacon - shining in the distance for just a few short minutes when all the conditions

are right.

For some reason, this memory from Lochman's Hill has been floating around in my mind. The vast expanse of God's creation from Lochman's Hill is a God sighting, as is a sunrise or sunset on the beach, a walk through a forest, or up a mountain trail. The little, white, fence-post-sized grain elevator reflecting the morning sunlight on the horizon on a perfect morning; the crying, lonely wail of the train whistle in the distance on a dark and lonely night; the dedication and quiet, Christian spirit of Oliver Lochman are all God sightings for me. God has blessed me through them and blesses me again in the memory of them.

Stop for a moment, close your eyes, and reflect on where you have seen God. Where have you had a "God Sighting?" Let those images and "God-touches" comfort you and give you peace. Open your eyes and resolve today to see and recognize where God touches you today and every day.

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

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# Lauren Ewashko: Airman, Model and Christian Capitalist

BY RICHARD SANDERS

Like so many members of our community, Lauren Ewashko moved to the Emerald Coast courtesy of the U.S. Air Force. When her service concluded, Lauren stayed because her “soul loves it here” (Locals Get It)!

Lauren traveled the world extensively, mostly with just a backpack. Like most Christian Capitalists, Lauren benefited from hard work. “Every time I put everything in storage, I’d go for six months, come back, and work really hard. It was just easy to pick up gigs and get enough funds to support myself to go out for months at a time. I loved it!”

Her simplified life brought her closer to God: “Every time I’d come back, I would clear more out of the storage unit. I started feeling more clarity. My clarity with God started.”

Lauren then landed on a core principle of the Christian Capitalist: “I am so grateful to give, because I receive... there’s something that I just trust and have faith that more will come. There is trust in a gift. So, I choose to give. Therefore, I choose to allow and to trust and to receive and live and just let God move through me.”

A few months after her young daughter passed away, Lauren decided to go to a restaurant for the first time. Her server was in a desperate situation. When she was ready to leave, God called Lauren to give the server \$100. That was half of all the money Lauren had left! Lauren explains: “So I go in and I take her \$100 and I give it in love. I’ve got tears pouring down my face. I was like: ‘I’m so grateful.’ This is the first time I’ve been out. You blessed my life.”

As many folks have mentioned on the podcast, Lauren received a benefit from her gift very quickly after that. A few months later, she received a



surprise invitation to attend a coaching course complimentary called Immersion on a Friday, and the course started the following Monday. “Guess how much the course costs? \$10,000! A hundredfold for that \$100 just a few months later after I gave

it... it is one of the reasons why I’m here right now. It’s a blessing to be a blessing to others. It just comes back if you’re open to receiving.”

Lauren decided that the best way for her to recover from her grief was to give back to the community. As the Chief Engagement Officer of the Advanced Sacred Heart Academy, a school for children with developmental differences in Fort

Walton, Lauren gets to advocate for those kids every day, and she helped raise funds for its new building.

Lauren 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 Lauren Ewashko!



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# Gators + Food + Booze = Fun At Fudpucker's GatorFest 2026

## GatorFest 2026

Get ready for GatorFest 2026, returning on May 2, 2026 from

11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for four action-packed hours of food, fun, and Florida wildlife. Hosted at Des-

tin's favorite family hotspot, this annual celebration brings locals and visitors together to honor

one of the Gulf Coast's most iconic creatures, the alligator.

And here's the best part: General Admission is FREE.

tasting access (no alcohol).

VIP is your ticket to tasting the best gator tail on the Emerald Coast in cool, shaded comfort.

## GatorFest Activities

GatorFest 2026 delivers an immersive Florida festival experience with something for every age group.

- Thrilling Gator Shows featuring up-close demonstrations and educational insights

- The fan-favorite Gator Tail Cook-Off Competition, where local chefs compete for bragging rights

- Live entertainment and music throughout the event

## Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill continues to lead the way in family-friendly entertainment along the Emerald Coast. Home to Gator Beach, known as "The World's Greatest Alligator Park," guests can experience safe, educational interactions with live alligators all year long.

From Pirate Brew Fest to Kid's Day to the Noon Year's Eve Balloon Drop and other sig-



**MAY 2ND, 2026**  
**11AM - 3PM**



**GATORS + FOOD + BOOZE = FUN  
AT FUDPUCKER'S**



**WWW.FUDSGATORFEST.COM**



The Kid Zone is packed with family-friendly fun, including face painting and gator-themed games designed to keep young adventurers engaged and smiling all afternoon.

Adults can explore specialty vendors, sample bold flavors, and soak in the coastal festival energy that makes this event a local favorite year after year.

## Admission Options

General Admission is FREE. Enjoy full access to the vendor marketplace, Kid Zone, live music, gator shows, and all general festival entertainment.

Bring the whole crew, no ticket needed.

## VIP Experience

Upgrade your day with exclusive access to the VIP tent and Gator Tail Cook-Off tasting.

\$30 (21+) – Includes alcoholic samples.

\$15 (Under 21) – Includes

nature events, Fudpucker's has built a reputation for unforgettable experiences, and GatorFest is no exception.

## Food, Fun & Gators

Whether you're coming for the free family fun, the VIP tastings, the live shows, or just an excuse to spend a Saturday surrounded by great food and great people, GatorFest 2026 is the place to be.

Mark your calendar, invite your friends, and join us at Fudpucker's, where the wild is welcomed and the memories are legendary.

**So, stop by and have some fun at Fud's Gatorfest – see you later, alligator!**

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www.FudsGatorFest.com

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# South Walton Live Music Scene

## Alaqua Sunday Sessions Sundays March 15-May 31

Sunday Session, a weekly gathering in the Alaqua Arena filled with live music, delicious food, and the peaceful charm of the Refuge, returns every Sunday through May 31st from 1-4 p.m. Free to attend, bring your friends, your family, and your love for animals.

## Made in Walton County Songwriter Showdown March 26

Made in Walton County Songwriters Showdown returns to The Pavilion at Watersound Town Center from 6 - 8 p.m. Join in for an evening of live music and friendly competition as local songwriters take the stage to perform original, homegrown songs and compete for cash and prizes. Grab your chair and meet under the shade for this free, family-friendly event. A food truck on site will offer food and drink for purchase.

## Forrest Williams Band @ Local Catch Bar & Grill March 28



Forrest Williams Band returns to Local Catch Bar & Grill! Beginning at 6 p.m., gather your crew and bring your dancing shoes to boogie with Forrest Williams Band with special guests, Jason Campbell & Robby Deal.

## Spring It On! Concert Series at Rosemary Beach Wednesdays

Wednesdays in Rosemary Beach mean music, family and fun. The Spring It On! Concert Series takes over the St. Augustine Green on Wednesdays, March 4th through April 8th, from 5:30-8 p.m. Bring your blankets and chairs to enjoy a free night of music under the stars.

March 18: Still Standing - Elton John Tribute

March 25: Gage Coward Band

April 1: Will Thompson Band

April 8: Sons of Saints

## Baytowne Wednesday Night Concert Series

Join The Village of Baytowne Wharf as they host the Wednesday Night Concert Series, a free weekly tradition on the Events Plaza Stage from 7-9 p.m. featuring local & regional talent from all kinds of genres. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets & your crew for some great tunes! March 18th: Funky Lamphshades March 25th: Forrest Williams

## Bands on the Boulevard Spring Music Series Thursdays

Introducing Bands on the Boulevard, a brand new live music series coming to Grand Boulevard in Miramar Beach through April 16 from 6-8 p.m. Join in for laid back evenings filled with great music, fresh air, and the unmistakable energy of the Boulevard.

March 19: 12Eleven

March 26: Boukou Groove

April 4: River Dan

April 9: Will Thompson Band

April 11: Josh Drake Band

## Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

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

## 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](http://foow30a.com).

## AJ's Grayton Brunch, Crawfish 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](http://ajsgrayton.com) for live music throughout the week.

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Arts & Music

# A Blooming Music Community

Music has a quiet way of weaving itself into the fabric of a community. It plays at local events, fills school auditoriums, drifts from open windows, and brings people together in moments both ordinary and unforgettable. Beyond simple enjoyment, music offers deep social, emotional, and cultural benefits and when music education is accessible, those benefits don't just exist; they grow, multiply, and bloom.

One of music's greatest gifts to a community is connection. Concerts, recitals, festivals, and jam sessions create shared experiences where people of dif-

ferent ages, backgrounds, and stories gather with a common purpose. Music becomes a universal language that tells a story, allowing individuals to communicate and relate even when words fall short. These shared moments build stronger bonds between neighbors and foster a sense of belonging that is essential for a healthy, vibrant community.

Music also supports emotional well-being. Listening to or creating music can instantly change the atmosphere, reduce stress, lift spirits,



and provide comfort during difficult times. Music is everywhere

if you actively listen for it. In communities where people face busy schedules, economic pressure, or social isolation, music offers a powerful outlet for expression and healing. Local music programs, choirs, bands, and ensembles give individuals a safe and supportive space to process emotions and feel seen and heard.

Culturally, music helps preserve identity and celebrate diversity. Communities are shaped by their histories, traditions, evolving influences, and music reflects all of it. Whether it's classical, jazz, country, pop, or music rooted in cultural heritage, local music scenes honor the past while inspiring creativity for the future. When communities value music, they affirm that creativity and culture matter.

Music lessons play a vital role in nurturing and expanding these benefits. Education transforms passive appreciation into active participation. When individuals learn to play an instrument or use their voice, they gain confidence, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment. It is one of the greatest forms of expression and communication. These personal skills ripple outward, strengthening the community as students perform at events, collaborate with others, and eventually mentor the next generation of musicians. Music speaks when words cannot be spoken.

For children, music lessons

build foundational life skills. They enhance focus, listening, teamwork, and perseverance skills that extend far beyond the music room. For adults, lessons offer lifelong learning, goal development, stress relief, and renewed creativity. In both cases, education keeps music alive and evolving within the community rather than letting it fade into the background.

Perhaps most importantly, music lessons create sustainability. They ensure that community music programs, ensembles, and traditions continue to thrive. Each new student represents a future performer, teacher, audience member, or advocate for the arts. With guidance and encouragement, a single lesson can spark a lifelong relationship with music that enriches not only the individual but everyone around them.

When a community invests in music education, it invests in connection, well-being, and cultural vitality. Music benefits us all but music lessons give those benefits roots, allowing them to grow deeper, stronger, and more beautifully with each passing year.

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# Gulf Coast Jam 2026 Brings Star Power, Theme Nights and High-Energy

One of the Gulf Coast's most anticipated music events is gearing up for another unforgettable year as the 14th Annual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam returns May 28-31, 2026, at Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Recently named by Billboard as one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," the four-day celebration promises chart-topping performances, themed nights and a high-energy coastal vibe that continues to draw fans from across the country.

Headliners **Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green** will lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing across the Country On The Coast™ experience. The festival has seen tremendous momentum in recent years, selling out with crowds of 30,000 the past two years and earning recognition as the No. 1 festival in Music Festival Wizard's Top 50 Most Popular Fests In The World 2024 - Voter's Choice poll, along with top

honors among beach music festivals in 2025.

### A Star-Studded Lineup

The festival kicks off Thursday, May 28, with Keith Urban headlining alongside Treaty Oak Revival, Wyatt Flores, Cooper Alan, Walker Montgomery and Gannon Fremin. Friday night brings powerhouse vocals from Chris Stapleton, joined by Marcus King, Jackson Dean, Brent Cobb, Cole Goodwin and Hueston.

Saturday's high-energy lineup features Riley Green, Koe Wetzell, Ole 60, Josh Ross, Ashland Craft and Hannah McFarland. The weekend wraps Sunday, May 31, with genre-blending superstar Post Malone, plus Muscadine Bloodline, 49 Winchester, Elizabeth Nichols, Them Dirty Roses and Skeez.

### Theme Nights Add Extra Fun

Beyond the music, Gulf Coast Jam's fan-favorite Theme

Nights are returning bigger than ever, giving attendees a chance to dress up and lean into the festive spirit each evening.

Thursday's Neon Night invites bright colors and glowing outfits as Keith Urban launches the weekend. Friday's 'Merica Night celebrates country pride with red, white and blue flair during Chris Stapleton's headlining set. Saturday turns to Camo Night for Riley Green's high-octane performance, while Sunday's Rhinestone Cowboy Night encourages fans to shine alongside Post Malone for a sparkling finale.

Whether guests go all out in themed attire or add a simple nod to the night's vibe, organizers say the goal is to create shared memories and a fun, welcoming atmosphere.

### Passes and Packages Available

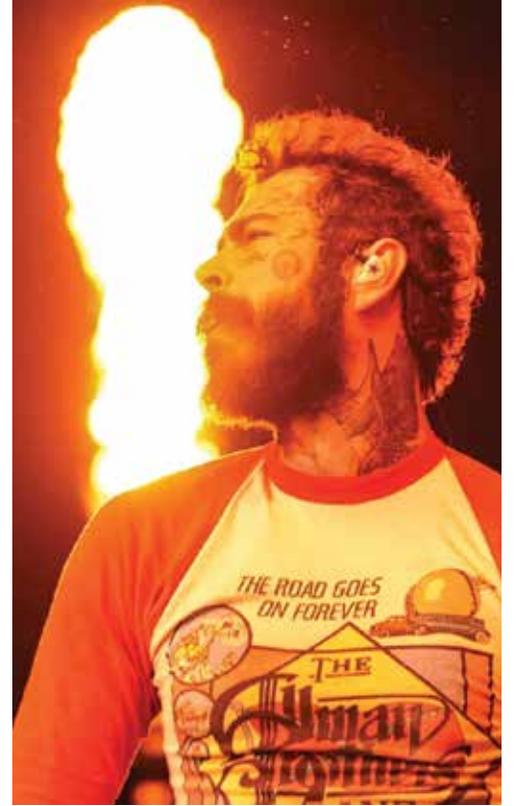
A variety of pass options are currently on sale, including General Admission, Military, College and First Responder passes,

Caymus Vineyards VIP Pit experiences and hotel or lodging packages. Premium offerings such as Skyboxes, Luxury Suites, Super VIP, Side Stage access, The Overlook Club and the new Eagles Nest have already sold out — a testament to the festival's continued popularity.

Payment plans are available for all pass levels, making it easier for fans to secure their spot early.

Jammers are encouraged to follow Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam online and on social media

for lineup updates, special announcements and festival news as the countdown to Memorial Day weekend begins.



For tickets and details, visit [www.GulfCoastJam.com](http://www.GulfCoastJam.com).



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# Spring Maintenance Checklist: Don't Forget Your Internet Services

BY DON CARTER, SECUREVISION

Spring on the Emerald Coast is a time for fresh starts. HOAs and condo associations across Panama City Beach, Santa Rosa Beach, Miramar Beach, and Destin begin seasonal projects like landscaping, roof checks, pool prep, and cleaning common areas. These efforts help protect property values and keep residents happy. One important system often left off the list, though, is community internet service.

Reliable internet is now as essential as water, power, and security. Residents depend on it for remote work, school,



streaming, smart home devices, and staying connected. In larger communities with full-time residents, seasonal owners, and vacation guests, even small connectivity issues can lead to frustration.

Spring is the right time for boards to review internet con-

tracts before the busy season begins. Many agreements renew automatically each year, even as the number of devices in each home continues to grow. What worked a few years ago may not meet today's needs. A yearly review

helps confirm service levels, spot gaps, and ensure providers are delivering as promised.

Equipment should also be checked. Routers, switches, and access points wear out over time. Older or basic hardware may struggle when usage rises, especially during spring break

and summer when occupancy is higher. Addressing equipment now can help prevent slow speeds and outages later.

Planning ahead can reduce complaints. Waiting until residents report buffering or dropped connections often leads to rushed decisions. Communities that plan early can make improvements in a thoughtful way. Residents notice when boards stay ahead of problems, and that builds trust.

Security and network setup matter too. Spring is a good time to make sure guest networks are separate from resident and office systems, updates are

current, and best practices are in place. These steps help improve performance and reliability, especially in large communities with shared Wi-Fi.

For Emerald Coast communities, spring sets the tone for the year. Adding an internet service review to the maintenance checklist can help ensure a smoother season, fewer disruptions, and a better experience for residents and guests. Secure Vision works with HOAs and large developments across the region to review contracts, equipment, and network design, helping communities stay connected year-round.

## TOP 5

continued from page 6

Even with access to fresh seafood, consistent intake of meaningful amounts of omega-3s is less common than many assume. Modern dietary patterns tend to favor inflammatory fats over anti-inflammatory ones. As activity increases and seasonal allergens rise, balanced inflammatory support becomes increasingly important.

**When I look closer:** joint stiffness, cardiovascular risk factors, brain fog, mood variability,

and seasonal inflammatory symptoms

**Practical Tip:** If fish oil results in occasional upper digestive discomfort or burping freezing capsules may help. Those taking blood thinners should consult their provider. Wild-caught fatty fish remains an excellent whole-food option.

### Probiotics + Prebiotic Fiber - Digestive Precision

The gut influences immune function, hormone balance, inflammation, and mood. Probiotics introduce beneficial bacteria,

the "seeds," while prebiotic fibers provide the nourishment that allows them to flourish. Together, they help shape digestive terrain.

Not all probiotics are the same. Strains and potencies vary, and prebiotic fibers can aggravate some digestive systems if introduced too quickly. Because not every gut responds the same way, they should be introduced thoughtfully and increased gradually.

It's also important to recognize that not every digestive system benefits from supplemental probiotics or prebiotic fibers.

Certain digestive patterns or underlying gut conditions may require a more targeted approach rather than broad supplementation.

**When I look closer:** bloating or irregular digestion, recent antibiotic use, immune imbalance, and skin or hormone concerns

**Practical Tip:** Start low. Increase gradually. Monitor response carefully. Individuals using GLP-1 medications may benefit from additional digestive support due to slowed gastric emptying, but adjustments

should always be gradual and individualized.

### B-Complex Vitamins - Cellular Energy & Stress Support

B vitamins are essential for energy production, nervous system signaling, red blood cell formation, and stress adaptation. They are not stimulants. They support the body's ability to generate steady, efficient energy. Stress, hormonal transitions, digestive variability, dietary restriction, or genetic factors can increase demand.

**When I look closer:** persistent fatigue, brain fog, elevated stress, hormonal shifts, and limited dietary variety

**Practical Tip:** Form matters. If B12 has not been helpful in the past, the issue may be the form rather than the dose.

Supplements are tools, not shortcuts. Quality matters. Formulation matters. Dosage matters. Context matters most. The goal is not to take more. The goal is to take what is appropriate for your body, your current demands, and your season of life.

Spring is about renewal, not rushing. Sustainable health is built through steady habits, thoughtful evaluation, and informed decisions, not trends or impulse purchases. When the foundation is strong and support is chosen strategically, small adjustments create meaningful momentum.



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# Pine Pollen and Smilax: Ready for Spring?



BY HELEN PETRE

Yes, we are! Winter has been cold and dreary, even though there was no snow this year. While wishing for warm weather, I read a book about Theodore Roosevelt and J.P. Morgan and their solution to the coal strike. I empathize with the cold, wet, mine workers. I am grateful that I am not a coal miner and I do not live in 1902.

In 1902, in the middle of the coal strike, Roosevelt had a state dinner for the King of Prussia to celebrate his new yacht. None of them had any idea things



Smilax species. Edith's decorative display for the state dinner.

were not going to end well for Prussia or Germany, so they all had a great time being rich and spending money. World War I dissolved Prussia and the poor king was not a king anymore, however the state dinner was a fabulous success. They ate terrapin and ice cream, and Edith Roosevelt decorated the dining room with Smilax species vines (those briar kind of vines that grow up trees and everywhere). Smilax is the reason they make those jeans with the extra layer



The Roosevelt dining room is minus Edith's Smilax, but complete with Theodore's moose and elk. Library of Congress. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/whitehouse-tour/state-dining-room>.

of jean on the front legs so foresters, and other people who crash through the brambles, don't tear their jeans to shreds. Edith strung the vines from the chandeliers and light fixtures, and everywhere she could around her husband's stuffed bears, elk, bison, and moose heads.

The state dinner was in February, so there was probably nothing else green in DC, however I think Edith is quite the genius, encouraging native plants in an environment of yachts and expensive cigars.

### What's Blooming?

**Southern wax myrtle** is just starting to produce flowering parts. This evergreen shrub smells like bayberry. It is dioecious, with separate male and

female plants. Fruit forms on female plants and is food for turkeys and other birds. Wax myrtle fixes nitrogen more efficiently than legumes.

Another dioecious, evergreen shrub that grows well in our sandy forests, **American olive** is just about ready to produce white, fragrant flowers, which will mature into blue black fruit in the fall.

It is the time of yellow pine pollen from all our pine trees, but especially from our native **Choctawhatchee sand pine**, which grows on marine, acid, sandy Entisol soils deposited during the Pleistocene.

Choctawhatchee sand pines grow only on the Panhandle between Pensacola and Panama City and nowhere else. All Choctawhatchee sand pines grow within one degree of latitude, on about 100,000 acres.

As with all pine trees, pollen forms on the male structures, which grow on the bottom half of the tree. Pollen is wind-blown up to the female pinecones at the top of the tree. Each scale of the female cone contains a winged seed. The female cones open when mature, without fire, but stay on the tree for what seems like forever.

Sand pines provide food and cover for birds and small mam-

mals and make great Christmas trees.

Pine pollen, like goldenrod pollen, is way too big and heavy to cause allergies. It is advertised on Amazon for men, and you are welcome to buy it, but I am quite sure it does nothing.

### Embrace our Natives!

There are many other native trees, shrubs, and flowers getting ready to bloom as the weather warms. Here in the Panhandle, we are blessed with native plants and pleasant weather, dune lakes, and the Gulf of America, along with Smilax vines and pine pollen. Embrace nature and the natives. If Smilax is good enough for a White House state dinner for presidents and royalty, it is certainly good enough for us. Enjoy.

If readers have questions or suggestions for articles that concern science, nature, or wild things around the Panhandle, please email [petrehelen@gmail.com](mailto:petrehelen@gmail.com).

*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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