



APRIL 2026  
VOL. 11, NO. 10

# SOWAL Life

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## EnGage Victory: A Night of Surrender, Worship & Redemption

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Some moments call us to come together, not just as neighbors, but as family. In the face of addiction, overdose, and the painful loss that has touched so many we love, our community is choosing to take a victorious stand for life. Now is the time to EnGage.

BeGenerous is honored to announce the 6th Annual EnGage outreach will take place Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Lakeyard Amphitheater, 1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs. It's an evening centered around Jesus and a community declaring hope over heartbreak, life over death, and freedom over addiction. This night is dedicated to honoring those we have lost, loving those who are still struggling, and supporting and educating the generations to come.

Founded by Stephanie McMinn, the heart behind BeGenerous, Inc., EnGage was born from both personal experience



and a growing crisis in our community. In February 2021, Stephanie's 22-year-old son, Gage, lost his life to a fentanyl overdose. That same week, five others in the community were also lost. Amid unimaginable loss, Stephanie made a choice to channel the pain of the loss of loved ones into that of victory. Through her grief, Stephanie believed that God never left her. "He has just revealed Himself to me. He has proven Himself as my everything," stated Stephanie.

EnGage became both a tribute to her son and a bold platform for opioid awareness, prevention, and healing. Today, it is known as EnGage Victory, a declaration that death will not have the final word. "Victory was accomplished by the blood of Jesus and so we don't fight for it, but stand in it, and move from that place declaring freedom

**ENGAGE VICTORY**  
*continued on page 3*



## The Hope of Easter

BY GUEARY CLENDENING

I have spoken at many funerals, offering hope and comfort to grieving relatives and friends. Yet the reality cannot be denied—there will be an empty place at the table tomorrow and in the days ahead. The absence of a loved one leaves a hole in our hearts that words often cannot fill, and sometimes the pain feels unbearable.

Years ago, just a few days after my wife passed away, I visited her grave. I found myself in tears, my emotions completely frayed. No one was around, and I began to pray aloud, pouring out my heart and my sorrow to God.

**HOPE OF EASTER**  
*continued on page 4*



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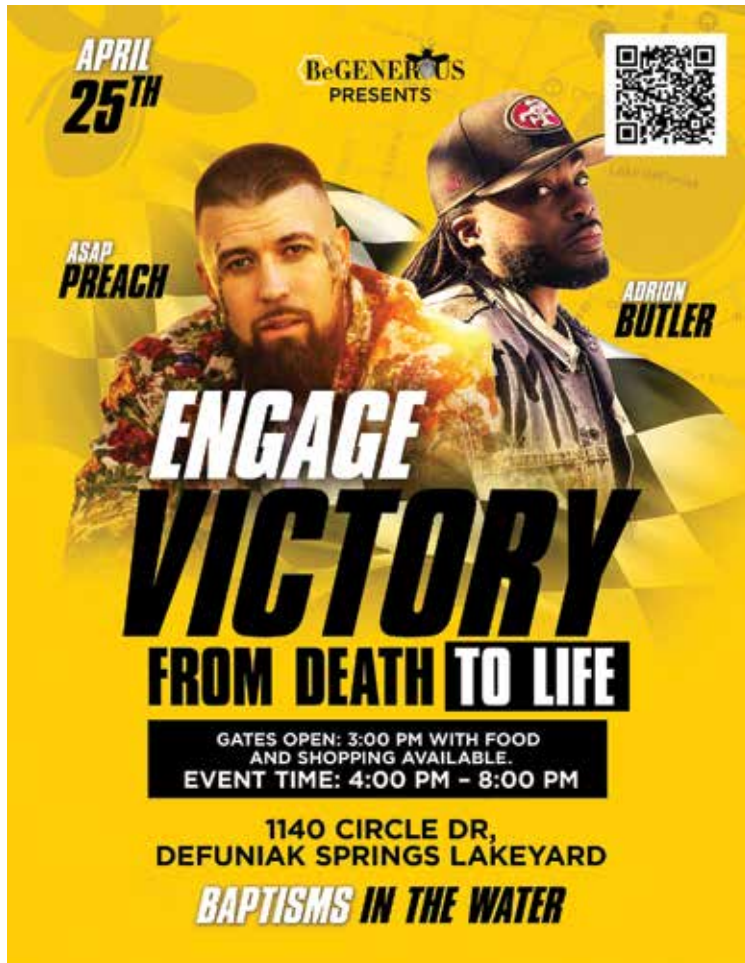
### ENGAGE VICTORY

*continued from cover*

for those who have yet to find themselves in it," said Stephanie.

EnGage is a time of worship, prayer, and connection, creating space for healing in the midst of the opioid and fentanyl crisis. Through awareness and compassion, BeGenerous and its partners are bringing light into places that have felt dark for far too long. Stephanie says she hopes people feel "The Presence of the Holy Spirit."

The evening will feature Adrion Butler, ASAP Preach, local worship artists, powerful testimonies, water baptisms, and spontaneous moments led by the Spirit. It is a night designed not just to attend, but to experience. "Seeing hundreds of youth, mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers standing together in worship, asking for support and prayer for those they are believing for, one after another surrendering at the altar, youth lined up with a deep desire to be baptized, and testimonies that shake a city," said Stephanie, when asked about moments from previous EnGage events that remind her of why the fight against this crisis matters.



Gates open at 3 p.m., giving families time to connect with local community resources, shop with area vendors, enjoy local food trucks, and build relationships with other attendees. This

is a free, smoke-free, and alcohol-free event for the entire family. Bring a towel, your family and friends, and come with an open, expectant heart. Stephanie hopes people leave with a hope



and fire in their heart that "fuels a passion to play a part to bring awareness and awaken those in their circles to what community and Kingdom Family surrounds them and their loved ones." If you are interested in this free event, you can register for free tickets at <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/engage>.

In a world marked by loss, EnGage stands as a testimony

that light still shines and hope still lives. Stephanie hopes that the future of EnGage grows in attendance and spreads to other communities and surrounding states, expanding opioid crisis awareness and the gift of God's love and redemption.

If you would like to learn more information about BeGenerous, Inc., please visit their website at [www.begenerousinc.org](http://www.begenerousinc.org).

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**Community**

**HOPE OF EASTER**

*continued from cover*

Suddenly, as I prayed, a bird in a nearby tree began to sing. Whether others might believe this or not, I felt deeply that this moment was sent by God, a quiet reminder that He is always near, even in our darkest hours.

When I stopped praying and looked up into the tree, the bird

fell silent, and moments later, it flew away. I left the cemetery uplifted in spirit, feeling a sense of peace that I had not experienced in days.

In the Bible, First Thessalonians 4:13-14 speaks of hope. It acknowledges our sorrow when someone close passes, but it reminds us that we should not grieve as people without hope. If we believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son,

died for our sins and rose again to intercede for us before His Father in heaven, then we have hope in God's promise: Christ is coming again, bringing with Him all who have trusted in Him.

Verses 16 and 17 continue:

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trumpet of God, and the dead shall rise first. Then we who are alive at that time shall be caught up together with them

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall ever be with the Lord."

This is the hope of Easter, promised by God—a hope that comforts our hearts, strengthens our faith, and reminds us that life does not end with death.

As John 3:16 reminds us:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life."

This is God's Word for anyone willing to open their heart and receive Christ. Through Him, we experience forgiveness for the past, healing for our pain, and the beginning of a new, eternal life filled with joy and purpose.

Embrace the hope of Easter that God has for you, and let it transform your heart and your life.

Happy Easter!



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## Walton County School District: Keeping the Charge Through April

By DR. JOSHUA BLEDSOE, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

The Walton County School District has entered the final nine weeks of the semester, and with only one remaining holiday on the calendar, schools across the district are focused on finishing strong. April is about maintaining momentum, supporting students, and continuing to Keep the Charge through the end of the school year.

Teachers are reinforcing key standards, students are preparing for end-of-year assessments, and campuses are emphasizing attendance, engagement, and consistency. Every instructional day matters as Walton County students push toward a successful close to the year.

**April Recognitions**

April also brings several important recognitions across the district:

- Month of the Military Child — Students and staff will Purple Up on April 15 to recognize and support military-connected families

student learning

- Child Abuse Prevention Month — Promoting safe, supportive environments for all students

**Join the EPIC Team**

Walton County School District will host a Job Fair on May 11 at the CHAT Center in DeFuniak Springs (555 Walton Rd.). Community members interested in joining the district are encouraged to attend and learn more about available instructional and support positions.

Walton County Schools continues to build its EPIC team with strong leadership, excellent starting pay, competitive

benefits, and a supportive work environment focused on student success.

With the final nine weeks underway, Walton County students and staff are working to Keep the Charge and finish the school year strong.



- National Assistant Principals Week — April 6-10

- Administrative Professionals Day — April 22

- School Bus Driver Appreciation Day — April 28

- School Library Month — Celebrating the impact of school libraries and media specialists on



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Community

# Coastal Seniors April Updates

## COASTAL SENIORS

OF SOUTH WALTON

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

**Core Class** - Angela Gibson will lead a 30 minute core class every Tuesday at 9:15 a.m. at Padgett Park. A yoga mat and Pilates ring are used for this class. Cost is \$5 per class for CSSW members and \$10 for non-members. For information or screening, call (850) 280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

**Watercolor Painting Class** – Karen Peterson will teach classes on Fridays, April 10 and 24, and May 1 and 8, from 8:45 a.m. to 12 noon at Padgett Park. Cost is \$20 for

CSSW members and \$40 for non-members. Sign Up Required Due To Limited Space. Sign up by the email list. If you need to be added to the email list, call (850) 280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

**Northwest Florida Health Council** - will provide FREE health screenings on April 16 from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Padgett Park.

**Pickleball** - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts on April 8 and April 29 at 6 p.m. This beginner class is open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) Registration is required. Register through the Parks and Rec Website at secure.rec1.com. Email Sandy Gulak at

sowalpickleball@gmail.com for more information. Class is FREE, and equipment is provided or use your own. Open play at Boys and Girls Club play every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 9:30-12:30 through April 30. Beginners welcome. Demo paddles available. Cost is \$5 per day plus a \$35 waiver fee at initial registration. Please join the SolWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates, and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

**Pickleball Social And End Of Boys And Girls Club Spring Session** - lunch at North Beach Social on April 30 at 1 p.m.

**Monthly Meeting** - Friday, April 17, from 11 a.m. -1 p.m at Padgett Park. Evan Anderson, Walton County Master Gardener, will be the guest speaker with information on Florida plantings and gardening. Lunch will be a Pot Luck. Bring your favorite side or dessert for the Pot Luck. Sign up on the email list or email CSSW at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

**Mahjong** - Mary Swift will host a Mahjong group every Monday from 12:30-2:30 at Padgett Park. For more information, contact Mary Swift at (210) 722-7939 or on Facebook, join The Emerald Coast Social Club, a Mahjong Group.

**Water Aerobics** - Classes will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays beginning April 13

at 9 a.m. and at 10:15 a.m. at Watersound Fountains pool located at 65 Origins Pkwy, Inlet Beach. A pool noodle and a set of water bells are used for class. Sign up for the email list. To be added to the email list, call (850) 280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

*Seniors 50 years of age and up residing in or visiting Walton County are invited to join CSSW. Membership is \$30 for individuals, \$50 for family, and \$100 for businesses (your business will be listed on our home webpage and our Facebook page). You can become a member via email at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com, or on the website at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org*

*Also, follow us on Facebook at Coastal Seniors of South Walton. Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. is a non-profit 501© (3) organization for active adults.*

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# Calling All Snowbirds: A New Way to Enjoy the 30A Lifestyle

Along Florida's Panhandle coast, the seasons feel a little different. Winter mornings arrive with soft sunlight and cool breezes off the Gulf. Afternoons stretch into easy walks, long lunches, and time outdoors. It's the kind of place people return to year after year — especially those who know the magic of 30A.

For many seasonal residents, the question has never been whether to return, but how to make those months feel more refreshing and restorative.

At Watersound Fountains, a retirement community in Inlet Beach, more returning residents are discovering a new way to enjoy the coast. Instead of managing a second home or coordinating short-term rentals, they're choosing seasonal retirement living — a simpler, more flexible way to spend the months they love most along the Panhandle.

Here, the focus is on enjoying the lifestyle without the usual responsibilities that come with homeownership. No insurance policies to track. No property taxes to manage. No upkeep waiting after a storm or a long

stretch away.

Instead, days open up naturally.

Mornings might begin with coffee as sunlight fills the windows. Some residents start the day in the fitness center or by the pool. Others prefer a walk through the surrounding protected forest or a quiet breakfast with neighbors before deciding what the day will hold.

Wellness classes, social gatherings, and chef-prepared dining offer easy ways to stay active and connected. And with the beaches, shops, and restaurants of 30A just a short drive away, there's always something to explore.

But what many people appreciate most is the sense of ease.

Life here is designed to remove the background worries that can follow a second home. Maintenance is handled. Daily details are taken care of. Support is available if needed. Residents are free to focus on the things that drew them to the coast in the first place — fresh air, time with friends, and the simple pleasure of being near the water.



Watersound Fountains recently introduced a Seasonal Commitment Plan, created specifically with snowbirds in mind. The program allows residents to enjoy the community during the months they love most while maintaining flexibility throughout the year.

For some, it's a chance to escape colder climates without the burden of managing another property. For others, it's a way to stay close to family or return to a place they've loved visiting for years.

Whatever the reason, the appeal is simple: more time enjoying the Panhandle lifestyle, with fewer responsibilities behind the scenes.

And once people experience it, many find themselves wondering why they waited so long.

Watersound Fountains Retirement Living is located at 65 Origins Parkway in Inlet Beach.

To learn more about seasonal retirement living near 30A or ask about the Seasonal Commitment Plan, call (850) 904-3835 or visit [WatersoundFountains.com](http://WatersoundFountains.com).

## Calling All Snowbirds

A flexible way to enjoy seasonal retirement living in the Panhandle. Comfort, connection, and ease are all part of life at Watersound Fountains.



See what seasonal living near 30A looks like.

Call **850-904-3835** to ask about our Seasonal Commitment Plan.



Community

# If We Want Authenticity, We Have to Initiate It

Walk into almost any major retailer right now and you'll see the same pattern: racks packed tight, new collections already replacing last month's inventory, markdown signs quietly preparing for the next cycle. The system depends on constant turnover. More product. Faster releases. Shorter relevance.

That model works in cities built on trend velocity. It doesn't feel right on 30A.

This coastline moves differently. The light changes daily, but the landscape remains. The dunes don't reinvent themselves every month, and Western Lake doesn't rebrand each season. There's a steadiness here — a quiet consistency — and it makes you question why everything else has to move so quickly.

Fast fashion has conditioned us to expect constant novelty. Weekly drops. Micro-trends. Clothing produced in such large quantities that disposal is factored into the business model. When something fades, stretches, or falls out of style, replacing it feels easier than keeping it.

But speed carries a cost.

Not only environmentally, but culturally. It shifts how we value what we wear. When garments

are built to be temporary, our attachment to them becomes temporary too.

There's a difference between buying something because it's inexpensive and buying something because it feels right. One fills space. The other earns it.

Along 30A, where lifestyle is deeply tied to place, that distinction matters.

At Captured Clothing 30A, we've tried to avoid the fast-fashion, mass-produced approach as much as we can. Not because it sounds good in marketing language, but because it doesn't align with how we want to operate. Producing in limited runs forces discipline. When quantities are smaller, decisions carry more weight. Fabric selection matters. Construction matters. Fit matters. You consider whether a piece will still feel relevant next season — not just next week.

It also requires accepting that when something sells out, it may stay sold out.

That isn't about scarcity as a tactic. It's about restraint as a principle. It keeps creativity honest and prevents excess from quietly stacking up in back rooms and landfills. It allows space for



evolution instead of overproduction.

Spring on the coast reinforces that philosophy. The season isn't about excess — it's about refinement. A well-constructed layer for cool mornings. A sweatshirt that holds its shape after exposure to salt air and sun. Colors that feel drawn from the shoreline rather than pulled from a corporate forecast.

Quality reveals itself over time. Stitching that doesn't twist. Fabric that softens instead of thinning. Structure that endures beyond a single season.

Well-made clothing doesn't demand attention. It earns loyalty.

Sustainability is often presented through bold claims and certifications, but sometimes it's simpler than that. Sometimes it's choosing to produce less. Resisting the urge to overstock. Being comfortable selling through instead of marking down. Designing pieces meant to be worn repeatedly, not photographed once and forgotten.

In a community that depends

on the health of its environment, restraint isn't abstract. Our dunes, our rare coastal lakes, and our shoreline exist because someone chose preservation over expansion. Because someone understood that more isn't always better.

Clothing can follow the same philosophy.

As both a retailer and a photographer, I'm drawn to what endures. The same stretch of water looks different every day, but it never loses its identity. That thinking shapes our Modus Made pieces — smaller releases, thoughtful construction, and designs intended to outlive a single season.

Authenticity doesn't happen by accident. It requires intention. It requires the willingness to produce differently, even when speed would be easier.

If we want authenticity — in our communities, in our businesses, in what we wear — we have to initiate it.

We have to choose better over more. Quality over quantity. Longevity over immediacy.

The Gulf doesn't compete. It endures.

What we create, and what we choose to wear, can do the same.



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# Planning Ahead: The Smart Way to Prepare Your Home for Summer



By KYLE SPARKS,  
OVATION PAINTING

April along the Emerald Coast brings warmer weather, blooming landscapes, and a steady flow of visitors returning to our

beaches. While most people are thinking about outdoor fun, it's also a smart time to start looking at the condition of your home.

Along the coast, paint does far more than improve appearance. Salt air, strong sunlight, humidity, and storms all work together to wear down exterior surfaces over time. A solid paint system acts as one of the first layers of protection for siding, trim, and outdoor structures.

Spring is a great time to walk around your home and take a closer look. Fading color, small cracks, peeling edges, or chalky residue on your hand when you

touch the wall are often the first signs that paint is beginning to break down.

For property managers and rental agencies around Destin and Santa Rosa Beach, this is also the time when homes begin seeing more activity. Guests start arriving for spring travel, and first impressions matter more than ever. A fresh exterior can make a property feel clean, welcoming, and well cared for before guests even step inside.

**Kyle's Tip:**

"One of the first places paint starts to fail on coastal homes is

the trim around windows and doors. Those areas take the most sun and moisture, so they're often the best place to check first."

Taking time in April to plan projects can make scheduling much easier before the busy summer season arrives.

Ready to give your home the loving protection it deserves? Reach out to Ovation Painting and let's start planning your refresh. Call or text (850) 830-9668 to get started. And as a thank you to those who serve, we proudly offer a military and first responder discount by mentioning this article! Ovation Painting



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## South Walton Fire District Lifeguard Named Soldier of the Year

By MACKENZIE MCCLINTOCK,  
SWFD PUBLIC INFORMATION  
OFFICER

South Walton Fire District Beach Safety Lieutenant Brandon Brown has been named the Florida National Guard's Soldier of the Year, earning the honor at the 2026 Best Warrior Competition and bringing statewide recognition to the South Walton community.

His recent accomplishment at the 2026 Best Warrior Competition included rising to the top of a stout field of candidates, proving to have the best overall score in events such as land navigation, warrior tasks and battle drills, physical fitness tests, rucking, and water survival. The contest also

required several days of advanced training and studying to prepare.

"We couldn't be prouder of Brandon and what he has accomplished not just here at home, but through his military service," said SWFD Fire Chief Ryan Crawford. "He continuously seeks out opportunities to improve himself and exemplifies the kind of dedication we strive to commend in our agency, especially in his role as an instructor for future lifeguards."

Lieutenant Brown is a familiar face for many around South Walton thanks to his role as the SWFD Junior Lifeguard Program Coordinator. His role with this program involves coaching



more than 200 children each summer to master skills like rip current safety and open water swimming, as well as learn what it takes to work professionally as

a beach lifeguard.

Brandon also manages SWFD Beach Safety's Drone Program and serves as a key contributor to additional public education and recruiting events throughout the year.

In his military career, Specialist (Spc.) Brown is assigned to 2nd Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade, 83rd Troop Command. He first enlisted in the Florida National Guard in 2021 and has since balanced his role in Beach Safety leadership with his army career,

citing his lifelong desire to be a soldier and serve others.

In April 2026, Brandon will represent Florida on the regional stage for the National Guard Best Warrior events, which include a new group of competitors from the Southeastern United States.

South Walton Fire District wishes him continued success in the additional rounds of competition, knowing he is making the South Walton community proud through his consistent examples of selfless service to others.



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 Community

# We Love Snakes!

By HELEN PETRE

I volunteer at the E.O.Wilson Biophilia Center, helping Turtle Bob teach fourth and seventh-graders about snakes and turtles. When the students enter the Turtle Bob room, some are terrified. By the time the class is over, Turtle Bob has convinced even the most uneducated that snakes are our friends. All the snakes the students hold are non-venomous and accustomed to being held. We teach the students that they will encounter snakes in the wild if they go outside.



**Turtle Bob and a gray rat snake, or oak snake (*Pantherophis spiloides*)**

Most of our snakes in the Panhandle are non-venomous, but

a few, like our common cottonmouth, are venomous. Even so, if you wear shoes and keep your hands where you can see them, you will be fine. Venomous snakes do not chase you down or attack you unless you try to kill them, step on them in bare feet, or pick them up. Like bears and bobcats, give them room, do not threaten them, and you will be fine. Any snake will bite if threatened. Any human probably will, too.

**Eastern cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus piscivorus*)**

The cottonmouth is our most common venomous snake. It swims well, lives near water, and opens its mouth when threatened. Cottonmouths sometimes shake their tails when threatened, sort of like rattlesnakes. They are just trying to let you know they are there, and they hope you will go away. When cottonmouths are swimming, you can see their entire body on the surface of the water, unlike other water snakes.

Cottonmouths have big heads and skinny necks. They are very thick snakes with very thick tails. They look scary, but, unless you step on them in bare feet or try to

kill them, they will not bite. Venomous snakes use venom to subdue prey. You are not prey. You are way too big to swallow. Bites are last resorts to make you go away.

Contrary to public opinion, cottonmouths are not aggressive. I almost stepped on one wearing flip flops (which is not a good idea), and the snake just sat there with its mouth open. Yes, I was terrified, but it did not bite. Bites are very uncommon, and although they are not fun, they are very rarely fatal.

Cottonmouths are food for eagles, owls, herons, alligators, kingsnakes, and snapping turtles. They eat fish and frogs. They are important members of an ecosystem that we want to preserve.



**Cottonmouth. Wikipedia.**

**Banded watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*)**

Some snakes look like venom-

ous snakes, and they do that on purpose. The banded watersnake is a common snake that lives near water like the cottonmouth, but it is not venomous. The banded water snake hopes you will think it is a cottonmouth and leave it alone. Sometimes that works. The difference is that banded watersnakes have long, pointed heads (not triangular), round eyes, they do not open their mouths when threatened, and you cannot see their entire body when they swim, only their heads. They, and especially their tails, are much thinner than those of a cottonmouth. They also have dark, vertical lines on their heads that are visible in the photo below and can be seen from a safe distance.

When a banded watersnake is threatened, it flattens out its head, but don't be fooled. The head looks flat, not blocky like a cottonmouth.



**Banded watersnake. Dr. Steve A. Johnson, UF/IFAS**

**Red rat snake (corn snake, oak snake) (*Pantherophis guttatus*)**

Red and gray rat snakes are also called oak snakes and corn snakes. They look alike except some are red and some are gray,

or brownish. Red corn snakes are expert climbers. Some people think they look like copperheads, but copperheads are rare in the Panhandle.



**Red rat snake. FWC.**

Red and gray rat snakes are constrictors, but have no fear, they are way too small to strangle you. They constrict around a mouse, or other rodent when it exhales, and then it cannot inhale. It sounds terrible, but death is quick. Rat snakes are useful to control rodent populations and are beneficial to humans because rodents carry ticks and disease and spoil human food. Rat snakes live about 15 years in the wild in palmetto flatwoods and forests.

**Black racers (*Coluber constrictor*)**

Black racers, or black snakes, are probably the most common urban snake. They are active during the day, so they are often seen. Black snakes live around freshwater and under shrubs. They eat insects, frogs, and toads. They are also slightly hyperactive and large, so they tend to move quickly and scare people. They do not do well in captivity because they cannot tolerate life in a small box.

**SNAKES**

*continued on page 32*



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# More Than Students Tested This May

By CLINT GHARIB

While May brings the “joy” of final exams and the SAT for those poor souls required to take it, the financial markets may

soon face a test of their own: a new Chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Historically, whenever a new Fed Chair steps into office, markets rarely remain calm.

Investors know that leadership changes can signal shifts in monetary policy. I’ve often heard it said that markets “test the new chairman”—in other words, they push asset prices around to



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see where the new leader stands on inflation, economic growth, and financial stability.

Research compiled by Barclays strategist Alexander Altmann shows that since 1930, the S&P 500 has experienced average peak-to-trough declines of roughly 5% in the first month, about 12% within three months, and approximately 16% within six months after a new Fed chair takes office, according to data reported by Bloomberg. Interestingly, volatility often begins even earlier, sometimes as much as 20 days before the new chair officially assumes the role.

Yet those early swings rarely define the full story. Over longer periods, markets have historically recovered, with returns over the following year tending to move back toward the S&P 500’s long-term average annual gain of roughly 10%.

Once investors begin to understand the new chair’s policy framework, market focus typically shifts back to corporate earnings and economic growth. History reminds us that short-term policy uncertainty does not necessarily change long-term market outcomes.

For investors, periods like this highlight an important distinction: reacting emotionally to short-term volatility versus having a plan in place before turbulence arrives. Preparing for these moments might include maintaining some cash to deploy during market declines, reviewing what you own and why, and making sure the risk in your portfolio still matches your long-term goals.

If the current market environment—or the changing policy landscape—has left you questioning whether your portfolio is positioned appropriately

for what comes next, it may be worthwhile to get a second opinion. A thoughtful review can often uncover opportunities—and risks—that may otherwise go unnoticed.

The S&P 500 Index is a widely recognized index including a representative sample of 500 leading companies in leading sectors of the U.S. economy. Indexes are unmanaged. Investors cannot invest directly into indexes. Past performance does not guarantee future results. All historical market data referenced above was obtained from S&P Global ([www.spglobal.com](http://www.spglobal.com))

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# Scenic Walton Honors Alys Beach with Design Excellence Award

Scenic Walton proudly presented its Design Excellence Award to Alys Beach during a special ceremony on February 26, 2026, recognizing the community's extraordinary commitment to architectural integrity, thoughtful planning, and enduring scenic beauty along Walton County's Scenic Highway 30A corridor.

The award was accepted by Robert Stenhammer, Vice President and General Manager of Alys Beach, on behalf of Alys Beach and its owner, EBSCO Gulf Coast Development, Inc. The award was presented by Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton, with Tony Vallee, President of the Scenic Walton Board of Directors, in attendance representing the organization's board.

Scenic Walton's Design Excellence Award celebrates businesses and organizations that demonstrate exceptional commitment to excellent architecture, landscaping, signage, and overall scenic quality in the built environment. Since its launch in 2017, the award has recognized projects that enhance the visual character and environmental appeal of Walton County.

"Alys Beach represents one of the most thoughtfully designed and carefully executed communities anywhere along our coast," said Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton. "Its commitment to architectural excellence, timeless design, and respect for place has set a standard not only for Walton County but for coastal communities nationwide."

Moore added, "Few commu-



**Scenic Walton Executive Director Leigh Moore presents the Scenic Walton Design Excellence Award to Robert Stenhammer, Vice President and General Manager of Alys Beach, on February 26, 2026. Stenhammer accepted the award on behalf of Alys Beach, EBSCO Industries, and the Stephens family. Credit: H Pappas, DeFuniak Herald/Beach Breeze**

nities along the Gulf Coast demonstrate the level of architectural discipline and continuity found at Alys Beach. The development's dedication to maintaining a clear architectural vision over time has helped create a place that is both visually distinctive and deeply connected to its coastal environment."

During the ceremony, Stenhammer and Moore also recognized Marianne Khoury-Vogt and Erik Vogt of Khoury Vogt Architects, recipients of this year's Seaside Prize for their body of work in architecture. The pair have served as the Town Architects at Alys Beach for more than fifteen years, helping steward the creators' original vision while guiding the community's thoughtful growth and development. "They have been stewards

of the founders' original vision and shepherds of the community's growth and development," Moore said. "Alys Beach flourishes today in no small part because they helped establish and maintain the architectural course that defines it."

"We are honored to accept Scenic Walton's Design Excellence Award on behalf of Alys Beach and our Town Architects," said Robert Stenhammer, Vice President and General Manager of Alys Beach. "This recognition affirms the vision of the Stephens

family and a shared commitment to life defined through thoughtful architecture, enduring landscapes, and an environment that enhances both place and people.

**AWARD**  
*continued on page 14*

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Community

AWARD

continued from page 13

From the beginning, Alys Beach was envisioned to enhance the natural beauty of Walton County while setting a timeless standard for design, stewardship, and community. We are grateful to Scenic Walton for reviving this important initiative and for celebrating projects that elevate the visual and environmental character of our region."

"The vision behind Alys Beach and the discipline required to maintain that vision over time is truly remarkable," said Tony Vallee, President of Scenic Walton's Board of Directors. "It reflects a level of commitment to quality and design that benefits



Marianne Khoury-Vogt and Erik Vogt of Khoury Vogt Architects were recognized during the Scenic Walton Design Excellence Award ceremony. The architects were recently named recipients of the Seaside Prize and have served as Town Architects at Alys Beach for more than fifteen years. Robert Stenhammer, Vice President and General Manager of Alys Beach with Marianne Khoury-Vogt of Khoury Vogt Architects. Credit: H Pappas, DeFuniak Herald/Beach Breeze

not only residents and visitors, but the entire Walton County community."

With its iconic white architecture, carefully curated streetscapes, and dedication to design consistency, Alys Beach stands as one of the most distinctive communities along Florida's Gulf Coast. Scenic Walton's recognition highlights the development's continued role as a model of thoughtful planning and architectural excellence.

For more information about Scenic Walton and its initiatives, visit www.scenicwalton.org.



Alys Beach is known for its iconic white architecture, carefully designed streetscapes, and commitment to architectural integrity along Walton County's Scenic Highway 30A corridor. Credit: Kurt Lischka, Moon Creek Studios

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## Explore Local History with Video Docu-Series at the Coastal Branch Library

"Unknown History of Walton County," a video docu-series, can be watched in the Library's new Video Reference Area, funded by a grant from St. Joe Community Foundation. Videographer Paul

Vizard produced the series.

Each of the seven episodes, narrated by local "historians" tells an amazing story of heroics, bravery and vision.....U Boats in the Gulf and Old Town Santa Rosa (Chick Huettel), Coffeen Nature Preserve (Susan Paladini), Saving the State Parks (Celeste Cobina), The Muscogee Museum (Ann Tucker), Friends of the Coastal Branch Library (Kramer, et al), Rise of the Arts Community (Steele, et al).

A reception honoring St. Joe and the series authors is planned for May 6 at 3 p.m. at the Coastal Branch Library. We will also be celebrating the new Art in Public Places Exhibit. Light refreshments will be served. The Public is welcome!

Friends of the Coastal Branch Library is a 501c3 charity established in 1987 to promote and support library services. To become a member or for more information, go to their website: focbl.com. "Unknown History of Walton County" can be seen there, too.



Published Monthly  
Mailed FREE to the Communities of 32459, 32461 and 32413  
Circulation: 12,500 households  
P.O. Box 1424  
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

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# Watersound Fountains Veterans Honored at Warrior Beach Retreat Salute

Three members of Watersound Fountains, an independent living community in Inlet Beach, were honored at the Warrior Beach Retreat Salute at Boardwalk Beach Convention Center last month.

Colonel (US Army ret.) Joe Feliciano, Lt. Colonel (US Air Force ret.) Jerry Santens and Colonel (US Air Force ret.) Frances “Frank” Sabo were recognized as honorary guests at the event, held on Thursday, February 26.

The recognition was made possible by the senior living community, which connected Warrior Beach Retreat with its veterans.

“I’ve been involved with Warrior Beach Retreat in the past, but never had the opportunity to bring forth veterans to benefit from the organization,” said Paula Zeller, sales director at Watersound Fountains. “When I found out we had 16 veterans living at the community, I knew we had to make this connection.”

Warrior Beach Retreat, Inc, is a nonprofit organization that makes it possible for combat wounded veterans and their spouses/care-

givers to spend a week away at a relaxing beach retreat in Panama City Beach, FL. The organization was founded by Linda and Phillip Cope and their son Jonathan Cope.

Twice a year, Warrior Beach Retreat hosts a parade and Beach Retreat Salute to honor veterans. This year, the event featured guest speaker Sergeant First Class John Wayne Walding, U.S. Army, Ret, who spoke of how far we’ve come as a country in terms of taking care of and honoring our veterans. The speech was emotional for the Watersound Fountains’ seniors honored at the event, all of whom served in Vietnam.

“Our residents were in tears during the ceremony, particularly when John Wayne Walding talked about the reception they received coming home from Vietnam,” said Estella Bowers, regional operations specialist for Watermark Retirement Communities. “It was really special to be able to honor them and give them the recognition and honor they deserve for serving our country.”



**Pictured from left to right: (front row) Colonel (US Army ret.) Joe Feliciano and his wife Carol, Lt. Colonel (US Air Force ret.) Jerry Santens and his wife Carol, Colonel (US Air Force ret.) Frances “Frank” Sabo, (back row) Tom McElroy, Paula Zeller, Estella Bowers, and Eric Stromski of Watersound Fountains.**

The moving tribute left a lasting impression on the residents. In a letter written to community leadership following the event, Lt. Colonel (US Air Force ret.) Jerry Santens had this to say:

“We were humbled to have been mentioned at the meet and greet, enjoyed riding in the Watersound Fountains bus with our name and rank signs along the

parade route, then sitting down to the delicious dinner, and being saluted along with other honored Watersound Fountains’ guests during the speech and ceremony.

We will never forget the encouraging words of Guest Speaker, John Wayne Walding, introduced by U.S. Army LTC Allen West, a man we have greatly admired over the years. You have enriched our

lives through your kind professionalism, and we agree that moving to Watersound Fountains was one of the best decisions we’ve ever made.”

The community says it plans to get even more veterans involved in next year’s event, until each of the 16 veterans living at the community has been honored.



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 Community

## Green Thumb Garden Club Springs Into the Season

BY KATHLEEN EDGE, PUBLICITY & WEBSITE CHAIR

The last two meetings of the 2025/2026 GTGC year will wrap up an unprecedented year of member patronage, community involvement, educational presentations and significant donations to Walton County students and organizations.

April's member meeting is on Wednesday, April 15, 2026, at Westwinds Conference Center, 4700 Westwinds Drive in Miramar Beach. The program will focus on the Farm-to-Table social movement, emphasizing sourcing food directly from local farms and producers to ensure freshness, sustainability, and support for local communities. There will be a Bake Sale with proceeds benefitting scholarships and other GTGC charities. Members are asked

to bring their favorite sweets to support the effort. The Meeting cost is \$30, and includes lunch. Check-in time is 9:30 a.m.

The not-to-be-missed May 20 member meeting is in the Pavilion at Eden Gardens State Park. Members and guests will experience a live butterfly exhibit and presentation plus receive an update on Eden's Butterfly Garden restoration supported by Friends of Eden Garden, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and Green Thumb Garden Club. A tour will be offered to anyone interested. Scholarships will be awarded to very deserving Walton County college students, 4-H Camp Timpoochee, E.O. Wilson Naturalist Outdoor Camp and Westonwood Ranch. 2026/2027 Green Thumb Officers will be inducted. Meeting cost is \$30, and includes lunch.

Check-in time is 9:30 a.m.

Please note that the Mercer college scholarships deadline is April 30, 2026. Details about the scholarships, events, how to join and more can be found on the website at [www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org](http://www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org) or email [greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com](mailto:greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com).

*The Green Thumb Garden Club, Inc., located in Walton County, Florida, is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its mission is to stimulate interest in the beautification of Walton County, furthering the education of its members and the public in botany, community beautification, conservation of natural resources, environmental awareness, floral design, gardening, horticulture, and nature studies and instill in our youth the love of gardening and respect for the environment. Please note: Programs are subject to change.*

## SOFO Raises the Bar on Fashion and Philanthropy with The Nicole Paloma Fashion Show

SOWAL House proudly presents: The Nicole Paloma Fashion Show, a stylish celebration of design excellence and community impact benefiting the SOWAL Foundation. The runway event takes place Thursday, April 9, 2026, from 6:30–10 p.m. at SOWAL House, located at 82 S. Barrett Square in Inlet Beach, Florida.

This evening of fashion, philanthropy, and cultural connection will highlight the acclaimed work of designer Nicole Paloma — an artist known for her hand-sewn couture and community-driven creative vision. Guests will enjoy a dynamic runway presentation, live auction, and curated entertainment, all while supporting the foundation's mission to expand arts funding, creative programming, and cultural initiatives across the South Walton region.

The doors open at 6 p.m. for VIP early access with a champagne reception. The live auction begins at 7:30 p.m. Exclusive items and experiences benefiting the SOWAL Foundation. The runway show kicks off at 7:45 p.m. A showcase of Nicole Paloma's latest couture pieces.

DJ and Celebration After Party at 8:15 p.m. Music, networking, and celebration of creative community.

"All proceeds from the evening directly support the SOWAL Foundation's artist grants and cultural initiatives," said a spokesperson for SOWAL House. "This show is more than a fashion event — it's a gathering that amplifies the creative economy and artistic vibrancy of our region."

Nicole Paloma's designs are widely celebrated for their thoughtful craftsmanship and



distinct aesthetic, cultivating a loyal following among fashion enthusiasts and creative communities alike. Her work embodies both local craftsmanship and bold artistic expression.

About SOWAL House:

SOWAL House is a cultural hub located in the heart of South Walton, dedicated to elevating creative experiences and community engagement. Through live performances, fashion, visual arts, and philanthropic events, SOWAL House fosters an environment where art and community thrive together.

About the SOWAL Foundation (SOFO):

The SOWAL Foundation supports regional artistic and cultural growth by funding grants, programs, and initiatives that strengthen the creative ecosystem of South Walton and beyond.



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# Fight The Bite Week: Stop Mosquitoes Before They Start

## FLORIDA MOSQUITO CONTROL AWARENESS WEEK

It is SKEETER WEEK! Florida mosquito control professionals fight a daily battle against the world's deadliest animal: the mosquito. It takes as little as a bottle cap of water for a female mosquito to lay her eggs, and in Florida's warm, humid climate, even the smallest amount of standing water can quickly become a breeding ground for disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Each year, mosquito control districts across the state participate in Florida Mosquito Control Awareness Week (April 20–23, 2026) to educate the public on prevention, mosquito-borne illnesses, and the work being done to protect communities. In recognition of this week, the South Walton Mosquito Control District (SWMD) will host a series of daily public events at its district office located at 774 N. County Hwy 393, Santa Rosa Beach. Community members are invited to:

- Meet your local mosquito control team

- Pick up FREE Yellow Fly Kits
- Learn practical prevention tips
- Experience a live drone demonstration
- Participate in a Q&A with staff
- Possible appearance(s) by the Board of Commissioners

Mosquito control is a year-round effort. Across Florida, professionals work 365 days a year to monitor and reduce mosquito populations that pose serious public health risks.

Much of this work happens behind the scenes, where we study mosquito behavior, track populations, and identify new species. Florida is home to more than 80 mosquito species, and as a global hub for travel and trade, the state remains vulnerable to invasive species that can spread diseases such as Zika, West Nile virus, Chikungunya, and Dengue.

To enhance these efforts, SWMD uses drone technology to safely and precisely treat hard-to-reach breeding areas like marshes and wetlands—improving efficiency and effectiveness in



mosquito control operations.

With more than 20 million residents and millions of visitors each year, Florida relies on a strong network of mosquito control professionals working together to safeguard public health. Residents play a vital role by eliminating standing water around their homes and staying informed.


South Walton County resi-

dents are encouraged to stop by during Florida Mosquito Control Awareness Week to pick up a free Yellow Fly Kit; check out a drone demonstration; take a selfie with Coolio our Mosquito Mascot; see how to eliminate mosquito breeding at your home; pick up some swag; and learn about how SWMD protects the community! For more information on daily events, visit our website or Face-

book page.

About South Walton Mosquito District: In 1964, SWMD was established to control disease-bearing mosquitoes and other insects. Services include advanced methods of Surveillance, Drone technology, Truck Spraying, Aerial Treatments, Larvaciding, Adulticiding, Integrated Pest Management, Source Reduction/Ditch Operations, Distribution of Yellow Fly Kits, Sentinel Chicken Surveillance, and Public Outreach. For more info, please follow SWMD on Facebook or Instagram or visit <https://www.southwalton-mosquitocontrol.org>






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 Community

# The 5 Keys to Longevity

BY DR. KAREN DEVORE,  
TORTOISE CLINIC

We live in a culture that glorifies speed — fast food, fast results, fast fixes. But true longevity doesn't come from rushing. It comes from consistency, balance, and tending to the body with intention over time.

Longevity isn't simply about

adding years to your life. It's about adding life to your years. Through an integrative and holistic approach to medicine, we focus on optimizing how you feel today while protecting your health for decades to come. Here are the five keys I believe are foundational to living longer and living well.

## 1. Reduce Inflammation at the Root

Chronic inflammation is one of the most significant drivers of aging and disease. It's linked to heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, cognitive decline, and chronic pain.

In integrative health, we don't just suppress symptoms. We ask

why inflammation is present. Is it driven by diet? Stress? Gut imbalance? Environmental toxins? Hormonal shifts?

By identifying and addressing root causes through anti-inflammatory nutrition, targeted supplementation, acupuncture, stress management, and lifestyle modifications, we can reduce the internal "fire" that accelerates aging and instead create an environment where the body can repair and regenerate.

## 2. Support Metabolic Health

Your metabolism is far more than calorie-burning. It's the foundation of energy, hormone balance, blood sugar stability, and long-term vitality.

Insulin resistance, blood sugar spikes, poor sleep, and chronic stress all impair metabolic function and accelerate aging. Supporting metabolic health through whole-food nutrition, strength training, adequate protein intake, sleep optimization, and strategic supplementation helps maintain muscle mass, protect brain function, and reduce risk for chronic disease.

Longevity isn't about restrictive dieting. It's about nourishing your body in a way that supports resilience and strength at every stage of life.

## 3. Balance Hormones Thoughtfully

Hormones regulate nearly every system in the body from mood and metabolism to bone density and cardiovascular health. As we age, shifts in estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, thyroid hormones, and cortisol can significantly impact how we feel.

An integrative approach to hormone health looks at the full picture. We assess lifestyle, stress patterns, nutrient status, gut health, and detoxification pathways before determining whether bioidentical hormone therapy or targeted nutritional support is appropriate.

Balanced hormones can improve sleep, mental clarity, libido, energy, and muscle preservation, which are all essential components of aging well.

## 4. Prioritize Nervous System Regulation

You cannot out-supplement chronic stress. The nervous system plays a powerful role in

longevity. Persistent sympathetic ("fight or flight") activation increases inflammation, impairs digestion, disrupts hormones, and accelerates cellular aging.

Practices that activate the parasympathetic ("rest and repair") system such as acupuncture, breathwork, meditation, time in nature, meaningful social connection, and restorative sleep, allow the body to heal.

Neuro-acupuncture and integrative therapies are especially powerful for supporting neurological resilience, reducing chronic pain, and optimizing brain health as we age. A regulated nervous system is one of the most underestimated keys to long-term vitality.

## 5. Invest in Preventative, Personalized Care

Longevity is proactive, not reactive. Rather than waiting for lab values to reach "abnormal," integrative medicine focuses on optimal ranges and early intervention. Advanced lab testing, nutrient analysis, gut health assessments, and comprehensive evaluations allow us to personalize care based on your unique biochemistry.

No two patients age the same way and they shouldn't be treated the same way. Preventative care might include optimizing vitamin D levels, improving gut microbiome diversity, supporting detoxification pathways, addressing subtle thyroid dysfunction, or implementing strength and mobility strategies before decline begins.

Small, consistent interventions compound over time, much like investing in your retirement account. The earlier you begin, the greater the return.

## Longevity is a Lifestyle

True longevity isn't found in a single supplement, procedure, or bio hack. It's built through daily choices that support inflammation control, metabolic resilience, hormonal balance, nervous system regulation, and personalized prevention.

## Aging is inevitable. Decline is not.

When we work with the body, honoring its signals, supporting its systems, and addressing root causes, we create the conditions not just to live longer, but to live stronger. Because wellness, like life itself, is not a sprint. It's a marathon and it's worth pacing yourself well.



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# Spring In South Walton: Flowers, Sunshine, and Yellow Flies

By KELLYANNE BARTLESON,  
PUBLIC OUTREACH COORDINATOR

As warm weather returns to South Walton, so do one of spring's less welcome visitors—yellow flies. Known for their persistence and painful bites, these insects typically appear in early spring and remain active for about six weeks, with peak season running from April through June.

Yellow flies (*Diachlorus ferrugatus*) are quiet, fast daytime biters that often go unnoticed until it's too late. They are most commonly found near shaded tree lines, wetlands, and wooded areas, especially on calm or cloudy days.

### Why Yellow Fly Bites Hurt

Unlike mosquitoes, yellow flies do not simply pierce the skin. Female yellow flies use scissor-like mouthparts to cut the skin, creating a small wound while releasing anticoagulants to keep blood flowing. This process results in a sharp, painful bite and often leaves behind a raised welt. Some individuals may even experience allergic reactions. Only female yellow flies bite, as they require a blood meal to produce eggs. Males, on the other hand, feed on nectar and pollen and play a role in pollination.

### Life Cycle & Habitat

Yellow flies lay their eggs on vegetation over water or damp soil. Once hatched, larvae drop into moist environments, where they develop over the course of about a year. They thrive in shaded, organic-rich areas such



as root systems of cypress trees. Because they develop in natural wetlands and forested environments, controlling them at the larval stage is not currently possible. Adults may appear as early as March and can persist into late summer.

### Prevention Tips

While yellow flies cannot be eliminated entirely, a few simple steps can help reduce bites:

- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing
- Avoid dark clothing, hats, and sunglasses, which attract flies
- Use insect repellents containing DEET
- Cover exposed skin when possible
- Limit time near shaded tree lines during peak activity
- Yellow flies can also bite pets. If you're concerned, consult your veterinarian for guidance.

### Yellow Fly Kits

Because spraying is not effective—and can harm beneficial pollinators—the South Walton Mosquito Control District does not spray for yellow flies. Instead, they offer free Yellow Fly Kits designed to reduce activity

around individual homes. These traps attract and capture biting females, helping lessen their presence in small areas.

Kits will be available April 1 through June 30, 2026 (Monday–Thursday, 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.). Proof of South Walton residency is required, and one kit is pro-

vided per primary residence.

While yellow fly season can be uncomfortable, it's temporary. With a little preparation, you can still enjoy the beauty of spring along the coast

For more info, please call (850) 267-2112 or visit: [www.southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org](http://www.southwaltonmosquitocontrol.org)



## Yellow Fly Kit Distribution

DATES:

**Wednesday, April 1  
to Tuesday, June 30, 2026  
7:30am - 4:00pm**

ADDRESS:

**774 N. Co. Hwy 393**

**MUST BE A SOUTH WALTON RESIDENT**

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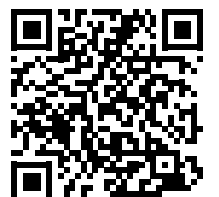
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## MKAF Call for Artist Applications

31st Annual Festival of the Arts is set for October 24-25, 2026



Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Festival of the Arts is one of the Southeast's premier festivals and showcases more than 100 artists from across the U.S. The Festival is a celebration of art, music, food, and family fun and features a live music lineup, Cuisine on the Green, a wine and beer garden, art activities for kids, merchandise, and more.

The 31st annual Festival will be held on Saturday, Oct. 24, and Sunday, Oct. 25 in the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin, Florida.

This is a juried show that includes artists in the categories of Acrylic, Clay, Pen & Ink, Mosaic, Watercolor, Metal, Jewelry, Sculpture, Photography, Collage, Printmaking, Fiber, Glass, Wood, Mixed Media, Pottery, Resin, Pastels, Ceramics, Pencil, Oil and Original Digital Art.

Artists display their pieces and compete for \$10,000 in cash award prizes.

Participating artists must pay a \$30 non-refundable jury fee. Booth fees are from \$350.

"Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation is a champion for arts and culture and the Festival of the Arts helps to build that creative community. This festival attracts artists from across the country and has become a popular annual fall event with locals and visitors alike," said Deb Nissley, director of operations for Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation.

The application deadline for both Artist Exhibition and Poster Art is July 1, 2026.

Visit [www.mkaf.org](http://www.mkaf.org) for Artist Application, Rules of Participation, and Poster Art entry forms. Call (850) 650-2226 or email [mkaf.org](mailto:mkaf.org) for more information.



# Sinfonia Gulf Coast Welcomes Nearly 2,500 Students for Interactive Performances of Link Up: The Orchestra Sings

These music education performances continue Sinfonia's 20th anniversary season celebration

On Wednesday, March 11, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, transformed into a vibrant concert hall as Sinfonia Gulf Coast presented two performances of its annual Link Up concert program, The Orchestra Sings, in partnership with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute.

As the only fully professional orchestra in the region, Sinfonia Gulf Coast continues its commitment to expanding music education across the community. The 2026 Link Up performances are also part of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's 20th anniversary celebration, marking two decades of innovative programming and impactful arts education initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

This interactive musical experience welcomed nearly 2,500 third through fifth-grade stu-

dents from Okaloosa and Walton counties, who performed on recorders and sang alongside the professional musicians of Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

Through months of classroom preparation, students learn to read music, play the recorder, and explore the fundamental elements of melody, harmony, rhythm and expression before joining the orchestra for this culminating performance.

The Link Up: The Orchestra Sings program explores how melodies are created and how different musical lines work together to form harmony and texture. Students discover how composers use melody and lyrics to tell stories, how voices and instruments blend within an orchestra and how musical ideas evolve through collaboration. During the performance, students actively participate by singing, moving to the music and performing recorder parts alongside the orchestra, transforming the concert into a powerful shared musical experience.



Reflecting on the event, Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller shared, "Link Up is my favorite

concert of the year. While it may be the loudest concert we present all year, it's also one of the most joyful. Often it's the only music education many of these children receive, so it's incredibly important that we continue to support special programs like this."

The annual Link Up concert is also a live example of Sinfonia Gulf Coast realizing its mission to champion music education in the local community. By bringing students, educators and professional musicians together in a shared performance experience, the program demonstrates how music education can inspire creativity, confidence and collaboration among young learners.

Proceeds from Sinfonia Gulf Coast events and donor support benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida, including musicians and guest artists

**SINFONIA**  
*continued on page 22*

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# Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents 1980'S Iconic "Mystic Pizza" from April 30 – May 17, 2026

Friendship, love, and small-town dreams take center stage as Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) closes its thirteenth season with Mystic Pizza. This iconic coming-of-age story runs April 30 through May 17, with

performances Thursday through Saturday at 7 p.m. and matinees on Wednesdays and Sundays at 2 p.m., at ECTC's theater in Grand Boulevard at Miramar Beach.

Based on the beloved classic

film, Mystic Pizza follows three young women navigating life, love, and the uncertainty of what comes next, all while working less than glamorous jobs at a local pizza shop in a coastal town. As they chase their dreams and dis-

cover who they are, their bond with one another is tested and strengthened in ways that are both heartfelt and relatable.

With humor, nostalgia, and a vibrant soundtrack of 1980s and 1990s hits like "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," "Addicted to Love," and "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now," Mystic Pizza captures the magic of growing up and finding your place in the world.

"Mystic Pizza is a story about friendship, growing up, and the moments you look back on years later and realize changed everything," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director. "It's nostalgic, heartfelt, and full of music that audiences will instantly connect with."

The leading trio features Tennessee natives Shea Grande as Josephina "Jo/Jojo" Barboza and Presley Ann Calonge as Daisy Araujo, alongside Olivia Evans as Katherine "Kat" Araujo, coming to the ECTC stage from Lawrence, Kansas.

Returning to the ECTC stage are several familiar faces, including Darla Briganti as Leona Silva, previously seen as Miss Hannigan in Annie and Genie Klein in Beautiful: The Carole King Musical. She is joined by ensemble members Teresa Lombardi, last seen as Brooke Wynd-



ham in Legally Blonde; Mikayla House Pilstrom, who portrayed Cynthia Weil in Beautiful; and Martha Wingfield, who appeared as Lily St. Regis in Annie.

Performances will be held at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200, Miramar Beach, FL.

ECTC's 2025-2026 season is made possible with generous support from Grand Boulevard Town Center, St. Joe Community Foundation, Visit South Walton, Howard Group, and Jerry and Alice Zich.

To purchase tickets, make a tax-deductible donation, join as a VIP or sponsor, or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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## SINFONIA

*continued from page 21*

in schools, free orchestra concerts, student transportation, the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra, Link Up concerts in partnership with Carnegie Hall, Paint the Music (with Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation), Arts in Medicine with Sacred Heart Hospital and more.

Sinfonia's Link Up program is made possible through generous support from the St. Joe Community Foundation, the Dugas Family Foundation

and the Emeril Lagasse Family Foundation. Additional funding from Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! annual fundraiser, Treble Makers (an honorary membership committee of Crescendo!) and community donors has allowed Link Up to grow into Sinfonia's largest education initiative.

For more information on Sinfonia Gulf Coast, visit [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org), call (850) 460-8800 or e-mail [info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org](mailto:info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org).





# Cultural Arts Alliance Announces Renee Broxson as 2026 ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival Featured Artist

The Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) of Walton County proudly announces Renee Broxson as the Featured Artist for the 38th Annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival. Her custom artwork—Crowned in Courage—will be showcased on all ArtsQuest marketing materials. The festival, a beloved May tradition, will take place May 2 & 3, 2026, at Grand Boulevard Town Center’s North Park. A second work—Big Ears, Clear Vision—will be the cover image for this spring’s #ArtMatters publication available at all official Art Month events.

Renee Broxson began painting part-time in 2014, guided by a belief that growth comes through curiosity, persistence, and hard work. A lifelong learner, she took up tennis later in life and, through dedication and determination, earned an athletic scholarship to the University of West Florida at age 32 — an experience that continues to shape her disciplined approach to both life and art.

Her artistic practice is rooted in continual skill-building and the pursuit of improvement. Broxson

creates whimsical, abstracted figures and animals inspired by individuality and personal expression. She is drawn to the visual language of style — bold clothing, distinctive shoes, expressive accessories, and meaningful tattoos — the details people choose to show the world that quietly tells their stories.

Through playful imagery and simplified forms, her work celebrates character, humor, and the beauty of uniqueness. A portion of her sales supports local charities benefiting people and animals, reflecting her commitment to connection, community, and giving back through art.

“Being chosen as the featured artist is an incredible honor,” said Broxson. “It means I need to focus deeply on my art — someone believes in me, and I will believe in myself. It’s a push to work hard, develop my skills, and become the best artist I can be. I’m truly over the moon excited for this opportunity!”

“Renee’s work captures joy, curiosity, and the little details that make each of us unique. Her whimsical figures and play-



ful approach to storytelling reflect the creative spirit we celebrate at ArtsQuest,” said CAA Vice-President Marketing & Strategy Melissa Wheeler. “We are thrilled to showcase Renee as our Featured Artist for 2026 and to share her incredible talent with our community and visitors.”

ArtsQuest will feature over 125 artists from across the U.S., exhibiting in a variety of mediums, including ceramics, sculpture, glass, oils, acrylics, mixed media, photography, metal and

wood, jewelry, and works on paper. Artists will compete for awards and cash prizes totaling \$10,000, judged by a panel of distinguished experts.

Additionally, original work by over 40 CAA member artists will be featured in a collaborative tent, with one winning a Member Best In Show Award.

Attendees will enjoy continuous live music and entertainment, a Walton County student exhibit, a special showcase from the CAA’s Prison Art program, an interactive public art installation, a silent auction, live visual art demonstrations, and “Imagination: Where Kids Rule.” A full cash bar will be open throughout the weekend in Grand Park, and food options will be available throughout Grand Boulevard’s Town Center.

ArtsQuest is the kick-off event for Art Month Walton County, a collaboration of visual, performing and literary arts events presented in diverse formats and venues throughout Walton County in May. Art Month Walton also includes Digital Graffiti at Alys Beach, the Longleaf Writ-

ers Conference, an Open Mic Night with Emerald Coast Storytellers, JAWS in concert with Sinfonia, Mystic Pizza - a production from Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Gallery events, concerts, and more.

Presented by Grand Boulevard Town Center, with additional support from Visit South Walton, Hwy331.com, Emerald Coast Magazine, Capital City Bank, and Ohana Day School. Volunteers are needed throughout ArtsQuest weekend to work on all aspects of the festival. Those willing to help can sign up at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/volunteer. Sponsorships are still available, and interested businesses can contact Gabby@culturalartsalliance.com for more information.

ArtsQuest is a rain or shine event. The festival is open to the public, and a \$5 - \$10 admission donation per person is requested to support the Arts. Visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com for more information about ArtsQuest as well as other Art Month events, which are supported in part by Visit South Walton.



## JAWS IN CONCERT

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# APRIL HAPPENINGS IN SOUTH WALTON



### Farmers Markets

Windmills in Freeport Every Other Saturday 4-8 p.m.

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.

### 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 through 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.

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### Huck & Lilly @ Seaside Amphitheater 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/songwriters 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.

### CAA Creative Kids Night April 10

Take the night off while your kids enjoy a cozy Parents' Night Out at the CAA! Creative Kids Night for ages 5-11 yrs, returns to the Bayou Arts Center from 5-8 p.m. This month's feature project: Colorful 3D Birds. Kids are encouraged to come in their pajamas and bring a sleeping bag to snuggle up with during the film! Aprons will be provided. Kick off the evening with an exciting hands-on painting activity inspired by Pixar's Rio. Then refuel with a pizza dinner before winding down for a cozy movie screening of Rio with an accompanying themed snack. Learn more & purchase tickets at [www.culturalartsalliance.com/upcoming-events](http://www.culturalartsalliance.com/upcoming-events).

### Gulf Coast Salute Air Show April 10-12

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. For more information, visit [visitpanamacitybeach.com/events/special-interest/gulf-coast-air-show](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com/events/special-interest/gulf-coast-air-show).

### Earth Day Beach Cleanup April 11

To help keep our beaches and parks beautiful, join the annual Earth Day Cleanup event from 8-10 a.m. This free family-friendly event includes: clean-up contests with prizes, a post-clean-up participant breakfast at select locations, and an event t-shirt (limited quantity). Participants are encouraged to bring: your own bucket, mesh bag, gloves, and trash grabber; water bottle and sun protectant. Register at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeDw>

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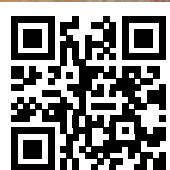
Clean up locations:  
The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island  
The Crab Trap/James Lee Park  
The Surf Hut  
June White Decker Park  
Henderson Beach State Park

### CAA Cocktails & Clay April 15

Tap into your inner artist at Cocktails & Clay, a hands-on creative workshop hosted by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County from 5-7:30 p.m. at Grayton Corner Cafe & Wine Shop. Sip while you sculpt with a complimentary glass on wine, along with light bites. Join local artist Sarah Bumanglag for a hands-on workshop where you'll sculpt your own functional ceramic bird feeder — the perfect handmade touch for your spring garden. No experience needed — just come ready to relax, connect, and make something uniquely yours. Learn more and register at [www.culturalartsalliance.com/event-details/cocktails-clay-at-grayton-corner-cafe](http://www.culturalartsalliance.com/event-details/cocktails-clay-at-grayton-corner-cafe).



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# APRIL HAPPENINGS IN SOUTH WALTON

## Reeling in the Emerald Coast at Topsail State Park April 18

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park and Walton County 4-H will host a fun day of hands-on activities, local conservation experts and a Kids Fishing Tournament 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Register at 9 a.m. for the tournament, with lines in the water 9:30-11:30 a.m. Prizes for the biggest, smallest and most caught. Join in for an unforgettable morning on the coast.



Get full details and tickets at [sowalwine.com](http://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 hundreds of premium wines, spirits and culinary offerings, with proceeds benefiting DCWAF. Full details are available at [dcwaf.org](http://dcwaf.org).

## Earth Day at Biophilia Center April 25

Explore interactive booths, environmental education exhibits, and native plant vendors while connecting with wildlife experts and conservation organizations. The event is from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. and food trucks will be on site throughout the day. Enjoy hourly theater talks, a Career Hour featuring professionals from forestry, fish and wildlife, and other environmental fields, and an "Essence of Florida Flora" tasting room highlighting the unique flavors of Florida's native edible plants. Learn more at [eowilsoncenter.org](http://eowilsoncenter.org).

## Paper Bear Screening at Seaside April 19 and 26

The Paper Bear invites the community on a heartfelt journey into the forests and coastal wilds of Northwest Florida at 7:30 p.m. Blending live-action storytelling with hand-drawn animation, the film follows a father and son as they venture into the woods to document real Florida black

bears, sharing campfire stories, local history, and the magic of the natural world along the way. Visit [thepaperbear.org](http://thepaperbear.org).

## Dancing with the Emerald Coast Stars May 2

Seaside School will debut its newest signature fundraiser, "Dancing with the Emerald Coast Stars," presented in partnership with Fred Astaire Dance Studios Fort Walton Beach at 6 p.m. at Hotel Effie Sandestin. Inspired by the hit TV show Dancing with the Stars, the ballroom-style competition pairs local leaders with professional dancers for an evening of glamour, entertainment and friendly rivalry—all supporting the Seacoast Collegiate High School Expansion Project. The 2026 Emerald Coast Stars include Dr. Lindsey Hoppe of 30A Smiles, Whitney Cooley of Scenic Sotheby's International Realty and Southern Sand, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, and Drew Ward, principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School. The evening begins with a cocktail hour and champagne toast, followed by a plated dinner, dance competition, awards ceremony and VIP after-party. Guests—and supporters watching from home—can vote for their favorite dancer for \$10 per vote. Sponsorships and tickets are available at [SeasideSchools.net](http://SeasideSchools.net). For sponsorship information, contact Callie Cox at [coxco@seasideschools.net](mailto:coxco@seasideschools.net).

## Derby Day Run for the Roses at Baytowne May 2

Join The Village of Baytowne Wharf as they host the 1st Annual Run for the Roses Kentucky Derby celebration from 4-7 p.m. in the Events Plaza. Dress to impress and embrace the spirit of the day. High hats, glasses full, and eyes on the race—all for a meaningful cause. Proceeds from the evening will benefit Dog Harmony. Your ticket grants you unlimited access to classic mint juleps, signature cocktails, and curated bourbon tastings, paired perfectly with delicious bites from Baytowne merchants. Tickets: [www.bigtickets.com/e/baytownederby/runforthorses](http://www.bigtickets.com/e/baytownederby/runforthorses).

## 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](http://app.eventcaddy.com/events/2026-fore-the-love-of-animals).

## Tequila & Taco Fest May 16

Tequila & Taco Fest returns to the scenic waterfront at The Village of Baytowne Wharf from 1-4 p.m.! One of the Southeast's favorite family-friendly festivals, this fun-filled day features mouthwatering tacos, premium tequilas & margaritas, live music, kid-friendly activities, and lively contests. Vote for the People's Choice Best Taco, cheer on local favorites, and enjoy an unforgettable day on the Emerald Coast! Tickets and details at [www.efestevents.com](http://www.efestevents.com).


## Veterans & First Responders Appreciation Lunch April 21

A Superior Mechanical will host its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Niceville Community Center (204 Partin Drive N., Niceville). The community-focused event honors local veterans, active military and first responders with a catered hot lunch from Swiftly Catered, special presentations and an AC system giveaway to one deserving service member or first responder in need. Eligible participants include members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Firefighters. Register for the HVAC giveaway at [ASuperiorMechanical.com](http://ASuperiorMechanical.com) under ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY. The event welcomes business partners to contribute door prizes. For sponsorship details, call Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

## 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.





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 Community

# Raise a Glass: Sandestin Wine Festival Returns for Year 39 at Baytowne Wharf

The 39th year of being THE BEST! It's time to raise your glasses and celebrate spring right in our own backyard. The 39th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival returns to the Village of Baytowne Wharf from Thursday, April 16, to Sunday, April 19, 2026, offering a weekend full of flavor, fun and coastal charm that has become a signature of our region.

A pioneer among Emerald Coast festivals, the Sandestin Wine Festival has drawn locals and visitors alike for more than three decades, all eager to experience the culture and vibe of the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast in a fun-filled, come-as-you-are atmosphere. Whether you're a wine aficionado or a curious newcomer, there's something for everyone with hundreds of featured wines.

Consistently topping area polls as a must-experience event, this beloved festival offers four full days of unique experiences including wine dinners with celebrity chefs, yoga, live music, interactive experiences, culinary tents and, of course, wine tastings.

The festival's Grand Wine Tastings, Friday from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday from 1-4 p.m.,

will feature more than 500 wines from domestic and international vineyards. It's your chance to meet the makers, explore new varieties and discover wines to suit every taste and budget.

Pair your pours with gourmet bites during the Savor South Walton experience, featuring creative, coastal-inspired, bite-sized dishes from some of the area's top chefs, expertly paired with wine selections.

A returning favorite, the Bubbly & Boozy Tent on Sandestin's Grand Lawn offers a playful tasting experience featuring sparkling wines and artisan liquors alongside lively local music.

### Weekend Event Highlights Include:

- Prisoner Wine Company Dinner (April 16, 6 p.m., Poppy's Crazy Lobster at Baytowne Wharf)
- Beachside yoga and mimosas during "Seas the Day" (April 18, 9-11 a.m., Hilton Sandestin) wellness event
- Farewell Brunch (April 19, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Ovide) Whether you're a wine rookie or a seasoned sipper, everyone is welcome.
- Tickets are available at SandestinWineFestival.com. Be sure



to book early — this is one of the most anticipated events of the season.

### Easter Explosion

Saturday, April 4th, 12-3p.m.

Bounce on over to the Village of Baytowne Wharf for an Easter Explosion!

Enjoy a day filled with face-painting, balloons, and more! Also, don't forget to get your picture taken with the Easter Bunny!

### Springtime Fun Continues All April at Baytowne Wharf

Wednesday Night Concert Series – Tribute Edition  
Wednesdays | 7-9 p.m.

The Wednesday Night Concert Series – Tribute Edition brings music and nostalgia to

the Events Plaza Stage every Wednesday, April 2-30, from 7-9 p.m. Enjoy tributes to some of the biggest legends in music:

- 8: Departure
  - 15: 7 Bridges Band
  - 22: Ron Adams - Shadow of the King
  - 29: Emerald Coast Blues Brothers
- These concerts are free and a great midweek treat for the whole family.

### Bubbly Baytowne

April 23 | 5-7 p.m.  
Don't miss Bubbly Baytowne

on Thursday, April 23, from 5-7 p.m. Sip free champagne as you stroll through the shops and boutiques of Baytowne. This 21+ event is a fun way to support local retailers while enjoying a relaxed evening out.

### Movie Monday

April 6 | 7 p.m.  
Zootopia 2

Grab a lawn chair or blanket and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film on our new BIG Screen!!

### Boomin' Tuesday

Tuesdays, March 18 - April 1 | 6:30-8:30 p.m. FREE

Enjoy singing and dancing with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza. Then watch as Baytowne Wharf lights up the night sky with a breathtaking fireworks show over the Lagoon at 8:30 p.m.!

### Thursdaze Lights Show

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# Medicare Update



BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

Now that we've finished the first quarter of 2026, I've seen some changes and trends that affect those on or going on Medicare. If that's you, perk up. I'm here to help you get sorted.

In the past, most seniors aging into Medicare chose to enroll in an Advantage plan. The premiums were usually \$0, and the extra benefits commonly offered for vision, dental, and hearing that aren't provided by original Medicare were attractive to many enrollees.

Today, those perks aren't so perky. Some plans that once offered generous dental benefits have been reduced to as few as a couple of checkups a year. At one time, Over-the-Counter benefits were \$75 per quarter or higher on some plans. Some carriers cut their OTC benefits completely, while all others reduced them.

Why all the reduction in benefits? Federal funding cuts, along with rising medical costs and lower than expected reimbursement rates have cut into carriers' profit margins. Carriers choose to lighten extra benefits in order to help their profitability. After the out-of-pocket max for prescription drugs went down in 2025, beneficiaries' costs went from \$8000 to \$2100 in 2026, and carriers replaced that lost revenue by cutting other benefits.

Most Advantage carriers have eliminated or reduced their offering of PPO plans that don't require referrals and allow out-of-network benefits. I expect next year that there will be even fewer PPO plans offered. You may have noticed talk in the media about HMO Advantage plans denying pre-authorizations. When this happens, it can be anywhere from a hassle to a nightmare for some folks. In our area, it does happen, but it appears that incidents are low.

In the past, most of the clients that I enrolled in a Medicare plan chose an Advantage plan; they were primarily motivated by the \$0 premiums and the extra benefits not offered by original Medicare. This has changed. These days, more folks are choosing to enroll in Medicare Supplement plans.

The mean income for someone over 65 in Walton County is around \$70k. This allows many seniors to afford the monthly Supplement premium costs which can start around \$100/month. However, most plans people want are closer to \$200/month, but there are many options. PDP premium costs run from \$0 to over \$100/month, depending on their formularies. Which plan suits you best will depend on the prescriptions you take. If you do not take any prescriptions, remember to still at least enroll in a \$0 premium PDP to save yourself costly penalties for a future PDP plan. Too many Medicare beneficiaries make this

mistake because they simply did not know about this penalty.

Many of our area's seniors have above average incomes and are subject to IRMAA (Income Related Monthly Adjustable Amounts). If your adjusted gross income two years ago was over \$109,000 for a single, or \$218,000 for those filing a joint return, you are subject to an additional tax on your Medicare. This surprises most folks when they get a bill from Social Security. It is a tax and not a payment to an Advantage plan. This is one of many things to discuss with your broker.

The job of a broker is to help you sift through the many op-

tions available to you and help you decide which available plans and carriers will work best for your situation. Whether you are looking for a low-cost Advantage plan or your best option for a Supplement plan, I am here to help. Everyone's needs really are different! Call me for a free consultation at my office in Santa Rosa Beach at (850) 687 7606 or reach me by email [Christian@evergreenhealthins.com](mailto:Christian@evergreenhealthins.com). It doesn't cost you anything but a moment of your time. However, it can save you a lot of money and unwanted frustrations. I look forward to visiting with you!

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Wellness

# Borland Groover to Break Ground March 23 on Emerald Coast Endoscopy Center in Santa Rosa Beach

New outpatient clinic and ambulatory surgery center will expand access to gastroenterology care in Walton County

Borland Groover, North Florida's leading gastroenterology provider, broke ground last month on Emerald Coast Endoscopy Center, a new outpatient clinic and ambulatory surgery center in Santa Rosa Beach. The facility is expected to open and begin seeing patients in summer 2027.

Located at 200 Mack Bayou Road, the new 16,000-square-foot facility will expand Borland Groover's presence in Walton County, building on the practice's existing local presence. The

project reflects Borland Groover's continued investment in the area, where the practice already has a nearby location and is expanding with a larger office and its own ambulatory surgery center. The expansion responds to growing demand for gastroenterology services from both patients and providers in the region.

Borland Groover's Emerald Coast Endoscopy Center will include dedicated clinical and surgical space designed to support outpatient gastroenterology services. The outpatient clinic will include six provider offices, one infusion room and 11 exam rooms.

The ambulatory surgery center, owned and operated by Borland Groover gastrointestinal specialists and United Surgical Partners International, will feature three procedure rooms equipped with state-of-the-art

endoscopy technology, providing patients access to minimally invasive procedures, including colonoscopies. The center will be the sixth surgery center jointly operated by the two organizations.

"This project reflects our con-

tinued commitment to expanding access to specialized gastroenterology care," said Jackie Kennedy, COO of Ancillary Services at Borland Groover. "The new center enhances regional capacity for outpatient procedures and clinical services in Walton County and the surrounding area."

The groundbreaking ceremony took place March 23. Borland Groover hosted the event in partnership with project architect Bhide & Hall and contractor Lord & Son. Bhide & Hall previously collaborated with Borland Groover on Orange Park Endoscopy Center and Durbin Crossing Endoscopy Center.

Leadership attendees include Dinesh Madhok, M.D., CEO of Borland Groover; Jackie Kennedy, COO of Ancillary Services; Cloyd Thomas, COO of Clinics; and Vince Vitali, CIO, along with ASC Director Ginny Foreman, Mikelah Lugg, Ancillary Operations Manager, and Director of Facilities Melanie Wood.

Providers expected to practice at the new location include Dr. Snehal Desai, M.D., Dr. Kane Edwards, M.D., Dr. Jacob Feagans, M.D. and Jordan Miles, P.A.-C.



## Emerald Coast Endoscopy Center



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# Leaning Into Loss and Grief



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

When did you last lose something or someone important to you? When did you last face an expected or unexpected ending? Loss is incredibly uncomfortable and also inevitable. Throughout life, you will face many kinds of loss. Sometimes loss is obvious, like the death of a pet, a family member, or a friend. Sometimes loss is related to major life transitions, such as losing a job, moving, or getting divorced. Other times, loss is a breakup or the end of a friendship. And confusingly, sometimes loss is mixed up with celebration, like a graduation or wedding. Be-

hind every new and different change in your life is the loss of the way things used to be.

Because loss has so many different faces, it is hard to understand your feelings as you navigate it. Grief is how your brain and body make sense of loss and figure out how to move forward despite the loss life brings. Grief gets a bad wrap because no one wants to feel uncomfortable feelings. Most people attempt to avoid grief by any means possible because they fear the discomfort will last indefinitely. You might try avoiding grief by pretending it doesn't exist, by pushing it down, by numbing with things like alcohol, drugs, shopping, scrolling, or staying busy.

The uncomfortable truth about life is that loss and grief will be part of your journey. There is no preventing it. So instead of avoiding, what if you learn to embrace loss and grief as part of being human

and an experience you can develop tools to walk through with health and wisdom?

## 10 Ways to Embrace Loss and Grief with Health and Wisdom

1. Let go of avoiding/numbing. Face the reality that uncomfortable experiences and feelings are part of your humanity. Avoiding discomfort hijacks your growth, learning, and emotional maturing. Loss is a normal, hard part of life. Notice and list activities you engage in to avoid uncomfortable feelings from loss.

2. Notice grief feelings in your body. Grief and loss bring feelings of overwhelm, exhaustion, sadness, despair, anger, confusion, and depression. Notice how these show up in your body. "I am feeling tearful and extra tired."

3. Connect your grief feelings to a specific loss and validate your experience. "I am feeling sad, tired, and overwhelmed. I just moved to a new city and I am starting everything over from scratch. It's normal to feel overwhelmed in this situation."

4. Normalize grief. "Every-

one goes through loss and has hard grief feelings. I am normal. It is normal for me to be feeling like this right now."

5. Remind yourself that the feelings won't last forever. "My grief feelings are really intense right now, and I will find a way through. It won't always feel like this, even though it's hard to imagine how I will feel better at this time."

6. Create space for grief. Give yourself time each day to process. Journal about your loss, talk to a friend, cry, punch a punching bag, scream into your pillow. Give grief a way out of your body rather than pushing it down. Try setting a timer for 30 minutes and sit in your hard emotions. Allow yourself to grieve spontaneously when possible.

7. Accept grief as unpredictable and largely outside your control. It's okay to grieve without judgement. Remember, everyone will experience grief.

8. Continue living normally as you are able. Though it will feel strange to do normal things during times of loss and grief, it is healthy to do so. Moving forward in your life day to day is

not a sign of indifference about your loss; rather, it's part of continuing to live with loss.

9. Lean into the growth grief and loss promote. No one wants to experience loss in order to grow. However, growth is often a byproduct of loss and grieving. Lean into your spiritual life knowing that your feelings are not unmanageable to God. Deep learning about yourself, God, and life often occurs in difficult times.

10. Release victimhood. Remember, loss happens to us all. Your current loss is not directed at you; rather, it is part of the human journey you are walking through. Despite the difficulty, you can find a way through and will find meaning in life again.

As grief emerges in your personal story, remember that our shared human experience is tied together by grief. As you navigate your own loss and grief, watch for the spaces where you can connect with others in their loss and grief. You aren't alone in grief even when it feels like you are. Connect with us for support along your journey for counseling and coaching at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com).

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 Wellness

# Stop Counting Sheep



By DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You turn over for the third time, looking over at the clock. 2:13 a.m. Your heartbeat matches second hand as a thin layer of sweat cools on your skin. You turn to the window, pulling the covers back, then lie awake for an hour replaying the day—emails, errands, the list that never ends and the sleep won't come. Nights like this are the new norm

— a few hours of rest followed by morning fog, and the slow erosion of patience and energy. It feels like stress, but lately it's been more—hot flashes, night sweats, and a restlessness that started when the seasons and hormones shifted.

Sound familiar? Bioidentical hormone pellets are the straightforward and lasting solution you need. At The Hormone Restoration Center we use bioidentical hormone pellets to optimize hormone levels—so nights stop sabotaging your days.

For thousands of patients, when estrogen and testosterone are where they should be, sleep is just better. These hormones help your body make melatonin - the hormone that tells your brain it's time for bed. They support GABA - the calming brain chemical that relaxes you at night.

They also keep serotonin

steady, improving mood and sleep quality. They help lower cortisol so you're not wide awake at 3 a.m. Finally, they stabilize body temperature so night sweats don't keep kicking the covers off. When hormones are low, people often describe their sleep as "fragile"—light, restless, and easy to interrupt, with lots of tossing, turning, and clock-watching.

**How hormone therapy helps:**

Hormone therapy in the form of pellets helps, because it delivers hormones in a slow, steady way. No daily creams. No spikes and crashes. Just consistent support that eliminates hot flashes and night sweats, helps you stay asleep and wake up rested and excited to start your day. Progesterone has a naturally calming effect that helps quiet a racing mind at bedtime. As hormones rebalance, everything else just works. Melatonin and serotonin can do their jobs again, and cortisol settles down. The result? Better nights—and better days. When you're sleeping well, your mood, focus, and energy improve, which makes it easier to wind down the next night.

**What people usually notice:**

Most patients feel the benefits within the first few weeks and reliable improvement by week



six as hormone levels stabilize. Hormone pellet therapy eliminates hot flashes, night sweats, and hormonal swings. If sleep still isn't right after treatment, then other issues like sleep apnea, restless legs, iron deficiency and other concerns often reveal themselves.

**What a hormone consultation and follow up looks like:**

Patients can expect a thorough baseline evaluation before starting therapy, including blood testing of sex hormones and key metabolic markers along with a comprehensive symptom review. The insertion procedure itself is brief, performed in the office and involves minimal downtime.

We don't set it and forget it—follow-up is integral to safe, effective care. After insertion we check

labs to make sure your levels are optimal. Dosing is adjusted based on lab results and symptom relief. Our team stays in touch between visits for any questions you may have, or needed tweaks in treatment. Routine reviews ensure your plan evolves with your needs so you get steady relief without surprises.

**A simple, practical plan:**

We combine hormone therapy with lifestyle guidance, including supplements, so changes stick. So, if you're tired of counting sheep, call The Hormone Restoration Center. We listen, run the right tests, and build a personalized plan aimed at getting you sleeping through the night again – and so much more! Call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation.

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# You Don't Have to Feel This Way Forever

## What your sadness, loneliness, and heaviness are trying to tell you – and what to do about it



BY MICHAEL MCMANUS, LCSW  
LICENSED PSYCHOTHERAPIST

Most of us were never taught how to handle our own emotional pain. We were told to push through it, stay busy, or wait for it to pass. But what if those quiet moments of sadness, loneliness, or emotional heaviness are not signs of weakness — but messages worth listening to? You are not broken. You are not alone. And you do not have to keep carrying this by yourself.

### Ask Yourself These Honest Questions

Before anything can change, it helps to simply get honest with yourself. Take a quiet moment and consider:

- How long have I been feeling sad, low, or emotionally flat?
- Am I withdrawing from people or activities I used to enjoy?

- Do I feel like a burden to others — or like no one truly understands me?
- Am I sleeping too much, too little, or using food, screens, or substances to cope?
- When did I last feel genuinely at peace or joyful?

If these questions hit close to home, that is not a reason to feel worse — it is a reason to pay attention. Awareness is the very first step toward change.

### What Depression and Loneliness Are Actually Saying

Depression is not a character flaw or a permanent state. It is often the mind and body's signal that something important is out of balance — unprocessed grief, unmet needs, disconnection from purpose, or old wounds that never properly healed.

Loneliness, too, is more than missing people. It is often a deep ache for being truly seen and understood — sometimes even in a room full of others.

These feelings are not your enemy. They are invitations.

### Practical Things You Can Do Right Now

You do not have to wait until things are unbearable to take action. Here are steps that genuinely help:

- Name what you feel. Simply saying 'I am sad' or 'I feel alone' begins to release the grip those feelings have on you.
- Move your body. Even a 20-minute walk changes brain chemistry. It is not a cure, but it is real.
- Reach out to one safe person. You do not have to explain everything — just make contact.
- Limit isolation. The pull to withdraw feels protective but deepens depression. Resist it gently.
- Write it down. Journaling even a few sentences a day

creates clarity and emotional release.

- Be compassionate with yourself. You would not shame a friend for struggling. Extend that same grace inward.

### When It's Time to Talk to Someone

Self-help strategies are valuable — but there are times when the weight you are carrying is simply too much to shift alone. That is not failure. That is wisdom.

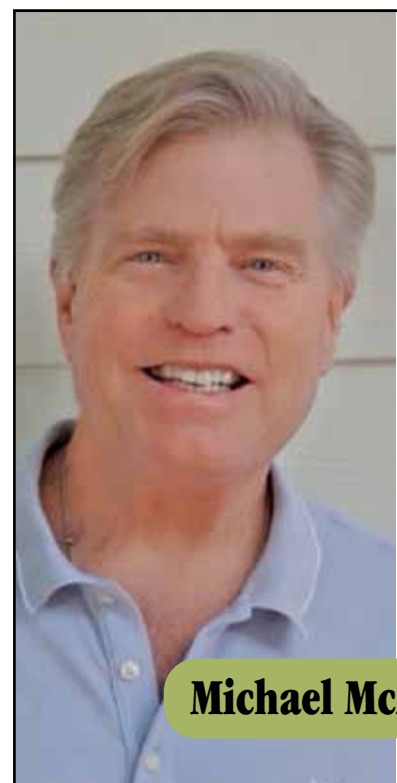
Therapy gives you a private, judgment-free space to finally say the things you have been holding inside. It helps you understand why you feel the way you feel, break old patterns that

no longer serve you, and build a life that genuinely feels like yours again.

People often say they wish they had come sooner.

If any part of this article resonated with you, I invite you to take that first step.

*I am Michael McManus, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and psychotherapist with 40 years of experience helping people find their way through exactly what you may be feeling right now. My practice is a warm, confidential space where real healing happens. For more, find me on Instagram @Michaelmcmanustherapy, online at [www.psychotherapy30A.com](http://www.psychotherapy30A.com), or you can call/text (850) 837-0123. You deserve to feel better. Let's talk.*



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Wellness

# Ten Tips to Know About Sunscreen

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

As we are approaching the summer months, it is important to use sunscreen daily, but to make sure we use it correctly. Sunscreen is the most important step in our daily routine to prevent premature aging and skin cancer. This article will go over some tips on using sunscreen properly.

**1.)** Apply Sunscreen SPF 30 or higher and make sure it is broad spectrum (protects against UVA and UVB)

**2.)** Reapply every 90 minutes

**3.)** Wear water-resistant and sweat-resistant sunscreen if you will be outdoors, on the beach, or swimming.

**4.)** Don't forget your ears, lips, tops of feet, and hands. These are common areas people miss during application and are common areas for skin cancers.

**5.)** Apply 15 minutes before going outside to ensure the sunscreen has absorbed into your skin.

**6.)** Make sure your sunscreen is not expired. Expired sunscreen is not as effective in protecting your skin.

**7.)** Avoid leaving sunscreen outside in high temperatures for prolonged periods. The heat can



slowly break down some of the active ingredients that protect your skin.

**8.)** If you have sensitive skin, rosacea, or acne-prone skin, consider purchasing mineral sunscreen over chemical sunscreen.

**9.)** Use enough sunscreen. For full protection, adults typically need one ounce (a shot glass full) to cover the entire body.

**10.)** Cloudy skies do not mean there are no UV rays. Up to 80% of UV rays can pass through clouds. Sunscreen should still be applied even on overcast beach days.

Sunscreen is one of the simplest ways to protect your skin—but small mistakes can significantly reduce its effectiveness. By applying enough, reapplying regularly, and covering often-missed areas, you can greatly reduce sun damage. Apply your sunscreen this summer to prevent skin cancer and keep your skin healthy and beautiful!



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## SNAKES

continued from page 10



**Black racer (black snake). Dr. Steve A. Johnson, UF/IFAS.**

### What to do if you see a snake

Nothing. Move away. Give the animal room and take a deep

breath. The snake does not want to chase you, bite you, or eat you. It wants you to go away. So go away.

There is no good reason to kill a snake, and if you try, it might not end well for you. If you have snakes in your yard, it is probably because there is food: rodents, bird seed, or pet food. Remove the rodent food and the rodents and the snakes will leave.

Snakes are assets to our environments. They eat mice, rats, and other things that we do not want around our yards. Snakes are food for owls, herons, snapping turtles, and alligators. Like

all wild animals, they were here first, and despite the Adam and Eve story, they do not tell us to do bad things. They just want to be left alone to enjoy the sun and rodents. We love snakes at the Turtle Bob room, and we hope you love them in your yards and in the wild.

*Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology instructor. Turtle Bob is the turtle guy at E. O. Wilson. We both hope to share our passion for the longleaf ecosystem with all the wonderful people who live here. If you have any questions about science, nature, or the wild world of Florida's Panhandle, email petrehelen@gmail.com*



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# Three Envelopes



BY RICK MOORE

sources For Your Current Mess.” He did it, and it worked. The following year he experienced his worst crisis yet. He opened the third envelope and read these words: “Here Are Three Envelopes For You To Give To The Next Manager Who Will Take Your Place.” He did it, and he was out of work. No matter if you are the new person coming in or the old person going out, there are always challenges.

The new employee, the new doctor, the new teacher, the new coach, the new pastor, etc., will usually have gifts and talents allowing them to do certain things better than their predecessor. But almost always, there will be things the “old person” did better than the “new person.” When those topics come up, we can choose to extinguish the fire or add fuel to it.

Young people moving their way up the ladder of success often complain they are not given opportunities. Older people who secure the best jobs with the best pay often say young people do not want to listen to experience. Compared to generations before us, the most successful type of mentorship has shifted from



rigid apprenticeship, hierarchy, and lifelong paternalistic guidance to a model defined by flexibility, a willingness to accept new technology, and reverse mentoring. Reverse mentoring is where junior or younger employees mentor senior leaders, reversing the traditional hierarchical, top-down mentoring model. It fosters cross-generational knowledge sharing, helps leaders understand new technologies and perspec-

tives, and promotes inclusion. In other words, sometimes I have to ask a teenager how to work certain features on my iPhone. True mentoring is a two-way street. You get out of it what you put into it. The choice is yours. You can change with the times, or you can go buy three envelopes.

*Rick Moore is Communication Pastor with Destiny Worship Center in Miramar Beach*

At the time of his resignation, the outgoing manager gave the new manager a unique gift. He handed the new manager three envelopes. Each envelope had something written on it, and each contained something inside to help in the event of a crisis. The first envelope had the words “Open During Any Crisis Your First Six Months.” The next envelope had the words “Open During Any Crisis After Your First Year.” The third envelope had the words “Open During Any Crisis After Your Second Year.” The new manager thanked him and stuck the three envelopes in his desk drawer. During the new manager’s first six months, a major crisis arose. He figured this would be a good time to see what is in the first envelope. He opened it up and read these words: “Blame Your Predecessor In Order To Get Out of Your Current Mess.” He did it, and it worked. Shortly after the new manager’s first year, another major crisis arose. He opened up the second envelope and read these words: “Blame The Lack Of Budget And Human Re-



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 Musing

# Carly Barnes and Dani Aylsworth: Caring and Sharing for Our Community



By RICH SANDERS

As the leaders of Caring and Sharing of South Walton County, Carly Barnes and Dani Aylsworth take care of the poor and needy in our community every single day!

Dani was kind enough to take me on a tour of the building

across the street from Caring & Sharing's main facility in Santa Rosa to scout a location for us to record our podcast the week before Christmas. We found a room upstairs away from the busy distribution activities downstairs. At that time, early on a Tuesday morning, the quiet upstairs room

was full of cloth bags to be distributed to more than 700 children as part of the Angel Tree program: literally hundreds of bags covered the floor. Dani and I agreed that it would make a terrific backdrop for our podcast.

When I returned 48 hours later to set up our equipment, I



was stunned to find that the room was completely empty!

That single instance demonstrates the strong demand for assistance, as well as the capacity to meet that need that its staff and volunteers provide to people from all over Walton County. Carly painted a broad picture of those services: "We provide crisis relief through food, financial assistance (which is past due rent or past due utilities), counseling, case management, and connection to area resources."

As a social worker, Dani works directly with families in need to connect them to those resources and provide encouragement to them. She literally shines the light of Christ to people in some of their darkest hours! As she meets with families, "So you build a relationship, but it's not only connecting them to resources, it's helping people empower themselves to start taking control of their own lives."

Caring and Sharing tracks the number of families that it serves every month, and Carly delivered some surprising and disheartening news in our discussion that day: "We are ending the year serving 1,100 families, and that's the most we have ever served."

Support comes from all over the community: locals get it! Carly echoes the sentiment of so many other non-profit leaders on the Emerald Coast: "We live in the most generous community that I've ever experienced. I

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**CARING & SHARING**

*continued to page 35*



# A Pastor's Ponderings: Casting Shadows

BY REV. PETE HYDE

The mid-morning crowd at the Café Du Monde was lined up outside the door. We took our beignets, buried in powdered sugar, to a park bench overlooking the Mississippi River. It was a beautiful, crisp morning. I turned away from the view of the river to look into the French Quarter. In the middle of Jackson Square stood St. Louis Cathedral. With the morning sun reflecting off the white church, it looked almost heavenly against the darkness (literally and figuratively) of the city. Surrounded

by manicured landscaping, it was an oasis in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the French Quarter, buzzing with tourists and those who made their living in the heart of New Orleans. In the shadow of the cathedral's magnificent spires was all that makes the French Quarter famous – voodoo, bars, strip clubs, the homeless by choice and by circumstance, street vendors, aspiring street musicians, throngs of tourists and all the businesses that cater to them, high-rise office buildings and hotels all melded together in just a few city blocks.

We drove into the town of Donalsonville. On the main street, just a block or so from the main business district that had seen its glory days pass away and now only housed one or two stores and a restaurant, stood a small Methodist Church on a

corner lot. The building, set on concrete blocks, leaned a little to one side and probably on a good day held no more than about sixty folks. My first impression - "Isn't it great they preserved the old church for historical purposes."

We stopped at an antique shop a little further down the street. I asked about the old church, where it was located, and how wonderful it was that they had preserved the old building. To my surprise, the owner of the store said it was still the Methodist Church. There were only eight folks worshipping there in this town of about 1500. They gathered each Sunday, but not for much else. Its small steeple didn't seem to cast much of a shadow.

Another back road brought us to a crossroads in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by

sugar cane fields. On one corner of the intersection was a small, red brick building that, on first glance, looked like a telephone company building that holds the relays for the rural area. The small gravel-covered, corner lot was empty of vegetation and cluttered with highway litter. It looked pretty lonely there all by itself on this out-of-the-way intersection. The sign listed its services on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays. In its shadow (there was no steeple) was nothing but gravel and sugar cane fields.

I can tell you nothing about the ministries of these churches, from the magnificent cathedral in Jackson Square, to the small downtown church that had seen its better days, to the rural church on a barren crossroads. Each had a ministry, no matter how large or small, as determined by human standards of

success. The shadows of their steeples (or buildings) must still be touching lives.

Take some time and consider what is in the shadow of the steeple or building of your church or ministry. Regardless of the label on the sign, each church casts a shadow in the community where God has planted it. Some have cast their shadow in many and vast directions. Some have only cast their shadows very close to home. What lies in the shadow of the steeple?

Let's make it personal today. As those who have received God's light in Jesus Christ, how is the shadow cast by the light in our own lives impacting the community in which we live? How big is the shadow of the Christian witness being cast by each of us?

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

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## CARING & SHARING

continued from page 34

cannot imagine doing this work anywhere else. When I say the majority of churches give to us monthly, that is not an exaggeration. They are just as invested in this work as anybody else, which is really special."

With grand plans to renovate the building where we met and

increase the services that it provides, we can all donate our time, talent and treasure to Caring and Sharing to help those in need!

Carly and Dani 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 Carly Barnes and Dani Aylsworth!

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



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# An Active Imagination...More Than Just Child's Play



BY KIRK MCCARLEY

Regardless of whether you're a fan of Harry Potter, you need to acknowledge the active imagination of author J.K. Rowling. Who would have envisioned the concept of an academy for prospectively talented magicians? Or for that matter, a sport called Quidditch that is centered on a large oval pitch amidst three ring-shaped goals of different heights as witches and wizards compete on broomsticks? The idea of "vaporized" transportation from an ordinary train station to Hogwarts continues to delight readers.

Besides, Ms. Rowling, consider other creative inventors. Cycle shop entrepreneurs Orville and Wilbur Wright retro-

fitted a bicycle with "wings" to provide lift for early-stage development of an airplane. Musician Neil Diamond crafted a hit song describing an imaginary friend who was always there for him when other kids wouldn't play with him or his father couldn't devote time. "Shilo" achieved top 20 status in 1970.

I believe that within many of us lies a craving to invent and innovate. Somewhere along the way, however, those dreams get short-circuited. Why? The lack of time is likely a culprit. Another one is fear—will my idea be accepted or worse, criticized? How much will it cost? What if the attempted innovation is an abject failure? Our own limiting beliefs also contribute, convincing us of our incapacities.

An article by Farley Ledgerwood (an innovative name in and of itself) listed characteristics of those with an active imagination. He predicated his findings first with an overriding warning: do not fall prey to the skeptics critical of your daydreams and fantasies. Those outward behaviors are really

the engines that drive creativity, problem-solving, and genuine happiness.

See how many of these conditions relate to you:

You can entertain yourself for hours without any external stimulation. Imaginative people don't need constant entertainment. Give them a quiet room with their own thoughts, and they're set for hours.

You see connections that others miss. You know a friend who always says "that reminds me of..." and then shares something that seems completely unrelated until they explain it? Might that be you?

You have vivid, memorable dreams. Our dreams are not just random firings. They're elaborate productions with plots and characters. You might even find yourself solving real problems or waking up with creative ideas that later will actually work.

Stories affect you deeply. When you read a book or watch a movie, you don't just observe the story. You live it!

Boredom is a foreign concept. Even in the most mun-

dane situations, your mind finds something interesting. Waiting in line at the DMV or TSA flight check-in becomes an opportunity to people-watch and create backstories.

You ask "what if" constantly. What if gravity worked backwards for just one second? What if people were born old and aged in reverse? What if my parents had never met? How would time travel work?

Aside from Mr. Ledgerwood's list, I included some conditions that might further stimulate imagination.

Movement. For me, physical movement seems to be critical to spark creativity. More arcane thoughts come to me while either out cycling or mowing grass. The creative juices of others may be just as well accomplished through mental movement such as reading a book, preparing a recipe, or reviewing family photographs.

Though budgetary constraints may prohibit you and your family from enjoying an extravagant vacation, where else might you enjoy a beautiful

beach, a high mountain peak, or a cool stream, all within just a few hours from home?

Imagine not what you see or hear, but what is not evident. Empty train tracks suddenly become filled with a mélange of colors; an otherwise obscure roadway transforms into a bustling freeway, teeming with traffic.

Granted, most of us are not gifted like Michelangelo, Taylor Swift, or Meryl Streep, yet we each likely possess a certain indefinable something unique to us, our own secret sauce. What is yours? What's something that you dream of doing? What's holding you back? When are you going to start?

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

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# Sean of the South: Dispatches Del Camino



BY SEAN DIETRICH

“We have no rooms,” the innkeeper says over the phone.

“None?” I say.

“We are full.”

My wife and I are sitting on the ancient steps of la Iglesia de Santiago. The Church of Saint James. We are dusty and sweaty, and one of us smells like a giant armpit. (Moi.)

The stone doorway arch above us features carvings of angels and demons which date back to Roman times. Eight angels surround Christ, who is looking straight at me as though He is saying, “No room’ at the inn?—Now where have I heard THAT before?”

“Please,” I say to the innkeeper. “My wife and I are exhausted, there are no rooms anywhere.”

“I said no room.” And the woman hangs up.

It is late siesta in Spain. No traffic on the highways. No pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Streets are vacant. Most pilgrims have already found lodging for the evening and are already getting their complimentary massages.

At least that’s what I imagine. Because we have been hunting for a room all day, and there are no vacancies for another 20 miles. It is Holy Week, and the Camino is packed with hikers. Finding a room is like trying to locate a porta john at a bluegrass festival.

All day we have been seeing

pilgrims turned away from hostels. Some, we learn, have been forced to sleep outside on doorsteps.

I am still staring at the call-ended screen. “She hung up on me,” I say in mock disbelief.

So, I take a moment. I need to get my head together. I need to figure out what we should do. Otherwise we’re sleeping on church steps tonight.

I wander into the church while Jamie sits on the steps watching our backpacks. I cross myself. I take a pew.

Tomorrow is Good Friday. And I am looking at a sculpture of Christ on a cross.

My entire evangelical childhood featured imagery of the crucifixion. We sang cute little Sunday school songs about it. We wore tiny crucifixes around our necks. We had paintings portraying the crucifixion. Jesus always had great abs.

But right now, in light of Good Friday, I’m thinking about what it truly means to truly die by crucifixion.

First, you’re stripped nude. You are not a fitness model. You are a 30-something male who eats a lot of bread and drinks wine with every meal. And it shows in your midsection.

Then, a crowd watches as a group of 18-year-old soldiers with egos to prove kick the proverbial excrement out of you. Next, they place you on timbers. They mutilate your hands with nails. Romans didn’t always use just one nail per hand.

Then, you just hang there.

It’s gross. It’s raw. There are no orchestras playing an overture. No cinematic key lighting. Your cross stands erected on Main Street. Your basic human reflex is to shield your nudity. But you can’t.

The boy-soldiers beneath your cross are screwing around, engaging in locker room banter, shooting craps, seeing which one



you. Hollywood films, and various evangelical bumper stickers will depict only three crosses on this fateful Friday. But in reality, there are five crosses, and you’re just one of them.

In other words, you are not given special treatment. No sacred ceremony. Charleston Heston does not attend your death scene. You are just another state inmate on the roadside. No big

deal.

Most people who are crucified will hang for entire days before finally dying. Crucified persons do not receive burial, either. Usually, Romans let birds pick their skeletons clean. In simple terms, you are trash.

And you know what hurts most? It’s that people did this to you. Not wild animals. Not an act of nature. Fellow human beings.

Because the harsh truth is, people are not always nice. People hate. People start wars. People hurt each other, and often for no reason. They posture, they compete, they gossip. They invent rules and dogmas so they might force others into their will.

And in this moment of nude agony, you see all these failings of human nature beneath you. You watch it all, with human eyes. And you forgive them. For we are fools who know not what we do.

I cross myself and exit the chapel.

My wife is sitting on the steps with our bags. We still have no rooms. We are low on food. We are in a foreign country, and we have a long way left to walk. But I think, perhaps, I’ve just remembered why I’m walking.

will win your shoes.

You can’t breathe. Your lips are turning blue. Your arms are numb, devoid of circulation. Your serratus muscles and shoulders are torn from struggling against your own body weight.

The worst part is, almost none of your friends are here. Few are brave enough to attend your last hours. Doesn’t anyone care? Isn’t anyone going to say goodbye? Aren’t you important in anyone’s life?

Meantime, there are four other guys crucified alongside

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# WFLDAR Honors Student Essayists and Good Citizens

Founded in 2014, the West Florida Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (WFLDAR, NSDAR) recently celebrated local students during its annual American History Essay Contest and Good Citizens Awards Ceremony.

WFLDAR Regent Robbie Carroll welcomed special guests, students, teachers, principals and parents to the event, which recognizes academic excellence and civic character.

The American History Essay

Contest invites students in grades 5–8 to explore the nation’s past through creative writing. This year’s theme, “Lunch with a Signer,” coincides with America’s 250th birthday on July 4, 2026. Students were asked to imagine returning to 1776 to meet a signer of the Declaration of Independence and reflect on how that individual’s service contributed to the nation’s independence.

First place was awarded to sixth grader Connelly Grelle, who selected John Hancock and

titled her essay “Put Your John Hancock on That.” In her winning entry, she wrote that Hancock “was passionate about our country becoming independent from Britain” and noted that his famously bold signature was “a statement to King George III.” She referenced the well-known quote attributed to Hancock: “There, I guess King George will be able to read that without his spectacles!” His signature, she explained, symbolized patriotism, courage and unity, inspiring the phrase still used today.

Second place was awarded to Freeport Middle School student Sheilia Bouldridge.

The WFLDAR Good Citizen Program honors outstanding senior high school students who demonstrate dependability, service, leadership and patriotism in their homes, schools and communities. Each recipient receives a Good Citizen pin featuring 13 stars for the original colonies, a blue enamel band representing the DAR and symbols of honor and understanding.

This year’s focus question,

“Our American Heritage and Our Responsibility for Preserving It,” asked students to reflect on how the characteristics of a good citizen can strengthen the democracy secured by the Patriots of the American Revolution.

The 2026 Good Citizen Award recognized first-place winner Anaya Patel of Seacoast Collegiate High School, with runners-up Elijah Brooks Ordis of Destin High School and Austin Hays Hostetler of South Walton High School.

## Sea Shul Announces 2nd Annual Charity Golf Tournament Benefit Caring & Sharing of South Walton

Sea Shul will host the 2nd Annual Sea Shul Scramble Golf Tournament on Sunday, April 19, 2026, at Legacy Golf Course in Panama City Beach, with proceeds benefiting both Sea Shul and Caring & Sharing of South Walton.

The tournament is organized by Sea Shul’s Mensch Club, the organization’s men’s group, and is designed to bring the community together for a day of golf in support of local charitable efforts.

“One of Sea Shul’s goals is to be part of, and give back to our community,” said Louise Short, MD, MSc, President of Sea Shul. “The golf tournament provides a great opportunity for everyone involved to help Caring and Sharing, an organization that is so dedicated to assisting those in need.”

Registration begins at 8 a.m., followed by a 9 a.m. shotgun start. The event includes a bagel breakfast sponsored by Breezy’s, driving range access, green fees, cart, on-course refreshments, and a post-tournament lunch. Participants will also receive tournament goodie bags.

Tournament features include team awards, longest drive and closest-to-the-pin contests, raffle prizes, and a silent auction. Additional on-course opportunities, including mulligans and red tee

options, will be available for purchase.

This marks the second year of the tournament. The inaugural event raised more than \$8,000 to support local initiatives.

Caring & Sharing of South Walton, a nonprofit serving more than 850 families each month, provides food assistance, financial support, and crisis services throughout Walton County.

“Support from events like this directly helps us serve families across Walton County,” said Carly Barnes, Executive Director of Caring & Sharing of South Walton. “These funds allow us to continue providing essential services to those who need them most.”

“We are very excited to once again support Caring & Sharing of South Walton, one of the strongest charitable organizations in Walton County,” said Lon Goodman, Tournament Director and Chairman through Sea Shul’s Mensch Club. “They do so much good for so many people, and this event gives our community a way to be part of that impact.”

Sponsorship opportunities, player registration, and donation options remain open through April 12. Additional information and registration are available at [www.30amenschclub.com](http://www.30amenschclub.com).



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Music

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## Meet the Voice Teacher: Natalie Rachkov

Natalie Rachkov was born in Ukraine and moved with her family to the United States in the early 2000s. Music has been part of her life since the age of five, when she first began singing on stage. At seven, her parents enrolled her in a music academy, where she studied vocal performance, solfeggio, and piano. There she earned her first diploma.

After moving to the United States, Natalie continued pursuing her passion in voice by enrolling in Willow International College in California to further study music. During that time, she had the privilege of participating in several opera performances, which deeply enriched her vocal training and stage experience. That strong classical foundation continues

to shape both her musicianship and teaching today.

Natalie says, "My greatest desire has always been to worship the Lord with the musical gifts He has graciously given me." She has faithfully served in choir and led worship in church, using music to glorify God and encourage others.

As she grew older, Natalie felt called to invest in children. She began teaching small groups of young singers, and by God's grace, that group grew into a choir of 80 children. Watching them grow in confidence, discipline, and joy has been one of the greatest blessings of her life. Today, she continues to coach children in vocal lessons, and also teaches beginner piano, helping students build strong foundations while nurturing

their love for music.

Natalie says, "I truly love music and I love children. It is a beautiful privilege to see young hearts discover their voices and expand their God-given gifts. I give all glory to God for every opportunity and remain committed to inspiring the next generation to grow, shine, and use their talents for His glory."

Studio 237 Music Lessons is excited to have Natalie Rachkov join our staff of music teachers. She is ready to help both young and old discover, develop and demonstrate their God given musical gifts. To schedule a visit or lessons with Natalie, call Studio 237 Music Lessons at (850) 231-3199. To learn more about the Studio and its teachers, visit our website at [www.Studio237Music.com](http://www.Studio237Music.com).



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 Music

# South Walton Live Music Scene April 2026

**Joe Bonamassa's Sound Wave Beach Weekend April 10-12**

Topeka presents Joe Bonamassa's Sound Wave Beach Weekend at Seascape Resort. Joe Bonamassa, Gov't Mile, Grace Potter, Little Feat, JJ Grey & Mofro, and more are among the acts on the lineup for the 2026 event. Artists perform from 5-10 p.m. each evening. Learn more, check the lineup, safety tips, and the experience here: [topeka.live](http://topeka.live).

food, and the peaceful charm of the Refuge, returns every Sunday through May 31 from 1-4 p.m. Free to attend, bring your friends, your family, and your love for animals.

**Seabreeze Jazz Festival April 22-26**

Smooth jazz, white sands, and fun set for The Ultimate Weekend of Smooth Jazz. Tickets and lineup at [seabreezejazzfestival.com](http://seabreezejazzfestival.com).

**Alaqua Sunday Sessions - Sundays through May 31**

Sunday Session, a weekly gathering in the Alaqua Arena filled with live music, delicious

**Emerald Coast Community Singers Spring Concert: Choral Classics Through Time April 26**

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ral music across the centuries as the Emerald Coast Community Singers present their Spring Concert, Choral Classics Through Time, at Christ the King Episcopal Church, SRB, 3 p.m. This vibrant local ensemble will take audiences on a musical journey spanning from the 12th to the 21st century, showcasing the timeless power of song to connect and inspire. Admission is free, and donations are gratefully accepted. More info: [emeraldcoastcommunitysingers.com](http://emeraldcoastcommunitysingers.com).

**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!

- April 15: 7 Bridges Band
- April 22: Ron Adams - Shadow of the King
- April 29: Emerald Coast Blues Brothers
- May 6th: Duchess

**MKAF Concerts in the Village**

Celebrate three decades of music under the stars as Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation presents the 30th Anniversary season of Concerts in the Village, April 9 to June 11. Held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin, from chart-topping legends to the nation's best tribute acts, this year's concert series stages a lineup that

offers something for every music lover.

- April 16: Black Jacket Symphony: The Music of Van Halen
- April 23: Yacht Rock Schooler
- April 30: Rumours ATL
- May 7: Brass Transit: The Musical Legacy of Chicago

**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. Have a mimosa or go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar. Crawfish Boil at 12 p.m., along with live

music from the talented Christon Birge Duo. 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.

**Shunk Gulley**

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

**Red Fish Taco**

Live music is a central component of Red Fish Taco's festive atmosphere. Rock out to local and visiting musicians in their outdoor covered Garden Room. Check [redfishtaco.com](http://redfishtaco.com) for featured musicians every day of the week.

**The Bay**

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



# Musical Echoes Returns: A Festival Where Ancient Sounds Meet the Emerald Coast

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

Each spring, something remarkable happens along the shores of the Santa Rosa Sound. The gentle notes of the Native American flute drift through the air; dancers move in colorful regalia and locals and visitors gather to celebrate one of the Emerald Coast's most unique cultural traditions.

From April 24-26, 2026, the Musical Echoes Native American Flute Festival will celebrate its 25th anniversary, inviting the community to experience three unforgettable days of music, art and heritage at 139 Miracle Strip Parkway SE in Fort Walton Beach. Set against the stunning backdrop of the Santa Rosa Sound, the festival is free and open to the public.

Since becoming part of the fabric of Fort Walton Beach in 2001, Musical Echoes has grown into one of the premier Native American flute and art festivals in the nation, honoring the rich traditions, storytelling and artistry of Native American culture.

You can expect a vibrant weekend filled with live performances, flute concerts, cultural dancing, art displays, storytelling and interactive exhibits. The hauntingly beautiful sound of the Native flute—an instrument long used for storytelling, ceremony and reflection—cre-



ates a peaceful atmosphere that perfectly complements our Fort Walton Beach environment.

This year's festival features several acclaimed performers:

Shelley Morningsong, a Northern Cheyenne singer-songwriter and 2019 Native American Music Awards Artist

of the Year, brings her powerful alto voice and heartfelt songwriting to the stage. With seven albums and multiple Native American Music Awards to her name, Morningsong blends con-

temporary Native music with blues influences reminiscent of artists like Buffy Sainte-Marie and Bonnie Raitt.

Joining her is Fabian Fontenelle, a Zuni/Omaha per-

former and descendant of the famed Omaha Chief Big Elk. Fontenelle captivates audiences with powerful dance perfor-

## MUSIC ECHOES

continue on page 46



*Old Florida Soul in the Heart of 30A*



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# Florida Friendly Landscaping and the Law



BY JON CARROLL

There are many signs of spring in the air; crowded beaches, the sound of lawnmowers starting up after their winter hiatus, new blooms and accompanying allergies. As you begin your spring plantings, did you know that Florida Statute (F.S.) protects Florida-friendly landscaping in Homeowners Association neighborhoods?

Under F.S. § 373.185, Homeowners Associations may not enforce covenants which prohibit property owners “from implementing Florida-friendly landscaping on his or her land.”

The statute defines “Florida-friendly landscaping” as “quality landscapes that conserve water, protect the environment, are adaptable to local conditions, and are drought tolerant. The principles of such landscaping include planting the right plant

in the right place, efficient watering, appropriate fertilization, mulching, attraction of wildlife, responsible management of yard pests, recycling yard waste, reduction of stormwater runoff, and waterfront protection.”

The governing documents of my own neighborhood’s HOA even contain a provision on Florida Friendly Landscaping. According to the community’s charter, the HOA “shall encourage best management practices cited by the University of Florida in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences’ “A Guide to Florida-Friendly Landscaping” for landscape installation, irrigation, and fertilizer and pesticide applications as to the Units...”

However, as with anything, the devil is in the details, and F.S. § 373.185 is not a carte blanche pass allowing homeowners to completely ignore an HOA’s rules regarding landscaping.

HOAs may still place restrictions on the manner and appearance of Florida-friendly landscaping, so long as those restrictions do not effectively prohibit it altogether. For example, associations may adopt reasonable guidelines regarding design, placement, and maintenance, including requirements

for neatness, defined borders, or approval of a landscaping plan before installation. HOAs may also regulate issues such as visibility at intersections and drainage concerns. In practice, this means that while a homeowner may have the right to incorporate native plants or reduce turf grass, they are not free to create an unmaintained or aesthetically inconsistent yard that conflicts with legitimate community standards. The balance struck by the statute allows for environmentally conscious landscaping while preserving an association’s ability to maintain a cohesive and orderly neighborhood appearance.

In situations where an HOA wrongfully denies a homeowner’s landscaping application, the unfortunate reality is that potential litigation costs may dissuade homeowners from exercising their rights to Florida-friendly landscaping. Even when a homeowner is legally in the right, the prospect of hiring counsel, responding to enforcement actions, or pursuing declaratory relief against an HOA can be both time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, under Florida Statutes § 720.305, the prevailing party in an HOA dispute is entitled

to recover reasonable attorney’s fees and costs. While this allows a successful homeowner litigant to recover litigation costs, the prospect of having to pay the association’s costs, if the homeowner were to lose, could serve as a deterrent to pressing one’s rights.

If you are interested in learning more about Florida-friendly landscaping, there are many excellent resources available. Organizations such as the Florida Native Plant Society provide education, plant guides, and local chapter support focused on using native species. For those looking for inspiration and practical guidance, Backyard National Park promotes the idea of turning residential landscapes into thriving habitats for wildlife. Locally, nurseries like Sandhills Native Nursery specialize in

plants that are well-suited to Bay County’s soil and climate conditions. Homeowners can also consult the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, which offers research-based publications and often hosts workshops through its county extension offices. Together, these resources can help ensure that your landscaping choices are not only compliant with Florida law, but also sustainable, attractive, and beneficial to the local environment.

*Jon Carroll is a licensed attorney. The information in this column is provided for educational and informational purposes only, and does not constitute legal advice, nor establish an attorney client relationship. Consult a qualified attorney in your jurisdiction for legal advice specific to your situation.*



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 Business



BY DANICA LAFAIRE

# What Your Windows Say About Your Home (Before Anyone Walks In)

You clean your floors.  
 You wipe your counters.  
 You dust the shelves.  
 You even fluff the pillows before guests arrive.  
 But when was the last time you really looked through your windows? Not at them... through

them.  
 Because over time, something subtle happens. Dust settles. Salt in the air leaves behind a slick film. Rain dries in soft patterns you don't quite notice anymore. And this time of year—a layer of pollen seems to settle on everything



overnight. And slowly, barely noticeable, the light in your home begins to change.

It's a gradual change. You don't wake up one day and realize the house is dark; you just slowly get used to the rooms feeling a bit flatter. The views of the coast start to look more like a faded photograph than the real thing. And that's the tricky part—you stop seeing it.

And whether we realize it or not... our windows are always saying something. Not in a loud or critical way. Not in a way that asks for perfection.

Because every home is lived in. Full schedules, growing families, busy seasons—it's all part of it.

When the glass is clear, it changes the whole vibe. It makes the house feel like a place that actually welcomes the sun, rather than just blocking the wind. It says that the family that lives here is creating a home that feels open and inviting. This home believes in fresh starts, and that a space can shift your energy. Our family believes small intentional care, over time, strengthens each of us. We believe the little things matter.

There's something about clean windows that goes beyond appearance. It's not about perfection or impressing the neighbors; it's about the experience of living there. It's

the way the morning light pours into your kitchen—warmer, clearer, more alive—and shifts your energy without you even realizing it.

Clean windows don't just change how your home looks; they change how it feels to wake up in it. You pause, just for a second, and finally notice the view you fell in love with in the first place.

This time of year, we talk a lot about spring cleaning. About fresh starts. About opening things up again.

And sometimes, the simplest change makes the biggest difference. What if, instead, you chose to reset the way your home feels—intentionally?

- Letting the light back in and seeing your home clearly.
- Experiencing your space the way it was meant to be.

If it's been a while since you've really looked through your windows, this might be your moment. And if you see something you can't unsee, we're here to help.

At Fish Window Cleaning, we believe it's often the smallest details that make the biggest difference in how a home feels. Because at the end of the day, it's not just about clean glass. It's about coming home to a space that feels as good as it looks. Visit [www.fishwindowcleaning.com/3249](http://www.fishwindowcleaning.com/3249).





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*continued on next page*

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## MUSIC ECHOS

*continue from page 42*

mances, traditional storytelling and sacred songs performed in the Native Zuni language. His vibrant regalia and rhythmic drumming bring ancient traditions to life in a mesmerizing cultural experience.

Also performing is Gareth Laffely, an award-winning Mi'kmaq/Cree composer whose Native flute compositions have been featured on NPR's Hearts of Space and networks including Discovery Channel, PBS and A&E. Laffely is the youngest composer ever to reach No. 2 on the Billboard New Age chart and has collaborated with George Lucas' Skywalker Symphony.

Beyond the stage, the festival also highlights Native-inspired artistry and craftsmanship. Visitors can explore arts and crafts vendors, cultural exhibits and

artist demonstrations, while artisans compete in both the Arts Competition and the Flute Makers Competition, showcasing handcrafted pieces that blend music, tradition and visual art.

The event is supported by the local community and volunteers. Those interested in helping can assist with activities such as the information booth, raffle sales, silent auction support or festival photography. Volunteers who contribute at least four hours receive a free festival T-shirt, and high school students can earn community service hours.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Musical Echoes relies on sponsorships and donations to continue offering this unique cultural event to the public each year. Contributions of any size—including memorial or honorarium gifts—help sustain the festival's mission of celebrating Native American music, art and heritage.

Many locals will tell you Musical Echoes is more than a festival—it's an immersive cultural experience that leaves a lasting impression long after the final flute note fades.

Whether you come for the music, the art or simply the peaceful atmosphere by the water, one thing is certain: once you hear the echoes, you'll want to return year after year.

### Musical Echoes Native American Flute Festival

April 24-26, 2026  
The Landing | 139 Brooks St. FWB

Info: [info@musicalechoes.org](mailto:info@musicalechoes.org)  
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