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# SouthWAL 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 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."

**ENGAGE VICTORY**  
*continued on page 2*



## 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

**SOLDIER**  
*continued on page 2*



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**Community**

**ENGAGE VICTORY**

*continued from page 1*

The evening will feature Adrien 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 fam-

ily. 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 Be-Generous, Inc., please visit their website at [www.begenerousinc.org](http://www.begenerousinc.org).

**SOLDIER**

*continued from page 1*

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, es-



pecially 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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# Events Around the Beach

**Farmers Markets**

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

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

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

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

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

**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 ex-

perts 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.

**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 give-

away 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. 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

*Continued on next page*

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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 3

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.

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 the-paperbear.org.

Sandestin Wine Festival April 16-19

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, offering a

weekend full of flavor, fun and coastal charm that has become a signature of our region.

Details and tickets are available at SandestinWineFestival.com. Be sure to book early — this is one of the most anticipated events of the season.

Fudpucker’s Gatorfest May 2

Join Fudpucker’s for an unforgettable day of Gator-filled fun at GatorFest 2025! This is one event you won’t want to miss. Celebrating Gator Beach, this fun-filled GatorFest event includes: gator food cooking contest, gator shows, vendor booths, alcohol tasting, kid’s activities and more! Visit fudsgatorfest.com for details.

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. For sponsorship information, contact Callie Cox at coxc@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/runfortheroses.

FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament 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.

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.



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# 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

ing 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,



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 address-

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 acupunc-

*Continued on page 20*



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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.

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.



Cottonmouth. Wikipedia.

## 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 aggres-

sive. 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.

## Banded watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*)

Some snakes look like venomous 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),



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

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.

## 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 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.

## 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](mailto:petrehelen@gmail.com)*



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

WRITTEN 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 fer-*

*rugatus*) 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.



## Yellow Fly Kit Distribution



DATES:

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

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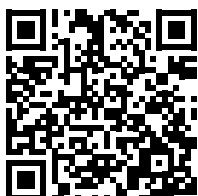
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### Why Yellow Fly Bites Hurt

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 AM–4:00 PM). Proof of South Walton residency is required, and one kit is provided 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)*

# 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 din-

ing 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

# Destin Seltzer Festival Returns May 2, 2026 at The Market Shops

## An afternoon of sips, sounds, and sunshine benefiting Opportunity Place

The highly anticipated **Seltzer Festival** is back and set to take over The Market Shops on **Saturday, May 2, 2026 from 1 to 4 p.m.** This lively, coastal event will bring together locals and visitors alike for an unforgettable afternoon featuring **seltzer samples, light bites**

**from local restaurants, live music, and more.**

Guests will have the opportunity to sip their way through a wide variety of seltzers from national and regional brands, with tasting stations offering **2 oz. samples** poured by event volunteers. The festival is expected to draw **300-400** attendees, creating a vibrant atmosphere in the heart of the Emerald Coast.

More than just a tasting event, the Seltzer Festival is proud to support a meaningful cause. The event is hosted by Opportunity Place, a local low-barrier homeless shelter dedicated to keeping families together while helping individuals transition into stable housing and self-sufficiency. **100% of proceeds from the festival will directly benefit Opportunity Place's programs and operations**, making every ticket purchased a step toward changing lives in the community.

In addition to general admission, a limited number of **VIP tickets** will be available, offering guests an elevated experience with exclusive perks and access to a private VIP tent featuring enhanced food offerings.

“The Seltzer Festival is about bringing the community together for a fun, high-energy event while supporting an incredible local organization,” said event organizers. “We’re excited to partner with The Market Shops as our venue sponsor and to showcase a wide range of seltzer brands, local restaurants,



and live entertainment—all for a great cause.”

Sponsorship opportunities are currently available for brands and businesses looking to gain exposure while giving back to the community. Interested sponsors can inquire by emailing [opportunityplacefb@gmail.com](mailto:opportunityplacefb@gmail.com).

For updates, ticket information, and event announcements, follow along on social media and stay tuned for more details.

**SELTZER Fest**  
**SATURDAY MAY 2, 2026**  
**THE MARKET SHOPS**  
**1PM-4PM**  
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 Benefiting: Opportunity Place

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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

- 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 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 in-

structional 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.

# 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 re-

freshments 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.



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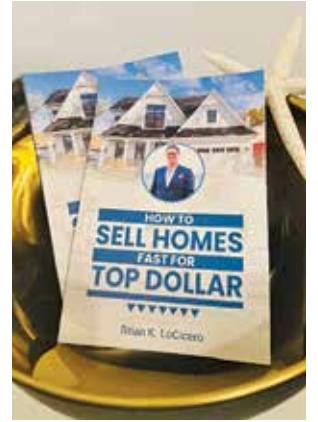
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 Community

# Trends & Treasures!



## Wellness That Works From the Inside Out

### CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center

Spring is the perfect time to reset—and at CRYO850, renewal goes deeper than the surface.

This state-of-the-art recovery center focuses on cellular wellness, helping your body recharge, restore and perform at its best. Red Light Therapy (PBM), one of their most popular offerings, works to rejuvenate damaged cells, boost energy and improve skin health through advanced light technology.

For a comprehensive approach, the Wellness Circuit combines six drug-free therapies: Infrared Sauna, Red Light, Whole Body Cryotherapy, Localized Cryo, Vibration Plates and Compression Therapy. Whether you're recovering from workouts or simply looking to feel better day to day, there's a solution for every lifestyle.

Targeted treatments like the Pagan Muscle Recovery system use alternating hot and cold to speed healing, while the Collagen Enhancement Facial delivers glowing, refreshed skin using cold therapy, oxygen and WILD ICE exfoliation.

Looking for next-level results? The Cocoon Fitness POD integrates heat, light and vibration for a full-body wellness experience.

With flexible memberships and day passes available, CRYO850 makes it easy to prioritize your health this season.

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[cryo850.com](http://cryo850.com)

## Your Spring Refresh Starts Here

### Pure & Couture Salon

A new season calls for a fresh perspective—and at Pure & Couture Salon, that transfor-

mation begins the moment you walk through the door.

From a welcoming beverage to a soothing scalp massage, every detail is designed to help you relax while expert stylists bring your spring vision to life. Whether you're craving sun-kissed blonde, rich brunette tones or dimensional color with extensions, the team tailors each service to your features, lifestyle and budget.

Enhance your experience with a blowout, makeup session, facial or therapeutic massage—because looking your best starts with feeling your best.

At Pure & Couture, the difference is personal. Stylists take the time to listen, ensuring your look reflects exactly who you are this season. You're not just a client—you're part of the family.

With curbside pickup, online ordering and the addition of a second location, Pure Collective Salon at Grand Boulevard, it's easier than ever to prioritize self-care this spring.

Feel confident. Feel refreshed. Feel purely beautiful.

(850) 424-3935 | [Facebook.com/PureandCouture](https://facebook.com/PureandCouture)  
[pureandcouture.com](http://pureandcouture.com)

## A Signature Spring Starts at the Front Door

### Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Spring is here—and it's time to make a statement before guests even step inside. At Frill Seekers Gifts, that first impression begins at the front door with a custom wooden monogram, a timeless Southern touch that feels both classic and current.

Today's trends offer something for everyone. Contemporary couples are embracing combined monograms, while traditionalists still favor the lady-of-the-house initial. Each piece can be customized in color

and style, creating a look that's uniquely yours.

Beyond door décor, Frill Seekers continues to shine as a go-to for thoughtful, personalized gifts this season. From spring-themed surprises for new parents, grandparents and teachers to party-ready essentials like cups, napkins, koozies and stir sticks, the options are endless. Planning a beach house reveal? A shatterproof monogrammed cup adds the perfect finishing touch. From weddings and showers to girls' trips, graduations and intimate dinner parties, Frill Seekers offers something for every celebration and every budget. If it's personalized, it's from Frill Seekers.

Voted "Best Gift Shop in Destin," shop online at [FrillSeekersGifts.com](http://FrillSeekersGifts.com) or visit in store.

Open Monday–Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

(850) 460-2700 | [Facebook.com/FrillSeekersGifts](https://facebook.com/FrillSeekersGifts)  
[frillseekersgifts.com](http://frillseekersgifts.com)

## Celebrate Life's Moments in Brilliant Detail

### Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Spring is a season of meaning—and at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, it's also a season of sparkle. Whether you're marking a milestone, planning a surprise engagement or simply celebrating yourself, owner Ashleigh Woolly and her team specialize in creating pieces that tell your story.

Inside the City Market Bay-side showroom, you'll find an inspiring collection of rings, bracelets, necklaces and earrings, along with the opportunity to design something completely custom. From timeless elegance to bold statement pieces, every creation reflects exceptional craftsmanship and personal detail.

Ashleigh is especially passionate about helping couples find the perfect engagement ring or wedding band, guiding them through every step of the process. "Helping people celebrate life's most meaningful moments is what we love most," says Ashleigh.

With hundreds of custom designs and a reputation for quality, Beyond Measure transforms jewelry into something far more meaningful—something unforgettable.

This Easter and beyond, celebrate love, life and new beginnings with a piece designed just for you.

(850) 424-7011 | [Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers](https://facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers)  
[beyondmeasurejewelry.com](http://beyondmeasurejewelry.com)

## Sweeten Every Spring Celebration

### Smallcakes Destin

Spring celebrations call for something sweet—and Smallcakes Destin delivers in the most delightful way.

Located in City Market, this local favorite brings color, creativity and flavor together with seasonal cupcakes, custom cakes and a full dessert lineup designed to impress. Named one of USA Today's "Top Ten Cupcake Places to Try," Smallcakes offers 13 signature cupcakes daily, plus four rotating specialty flavors and 12 ice cream options.

Planning an Easter gathering or spring event? Custom orders take center stage with edible logos, vibrant buttercream designs, gluten-free selections and even pupcakes for four-legged family members. A 12-pack of assorted mini cupcakes makes the perfect addition to brunch tables or Easter baskets.

Beyond cupcakes, guests can indulge in brownies, cookie cakes, gourmet popcorn, jumbo cookies and cupcakes-in-a-jar—

each crafted with a signature touch of fun.

From birthdays to weddings, Smallcakes turns everyday moments into sweet celebrations.

(850) 842-9002 | [SmallcakesDestin.com](http://SmallcakesDestin.com) | [@SmallCakesofDestin](https://twitter.com/SmallCakesofDestin)

## Smart Strategies for a Successful Sale

### Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Selling your home this spring? Preparation—and the right strategy—can make all the difference.

Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero is sharing his expertise in a new book designed to help homeowners maximize value while minimizing time on the market. Drawing from years of experience and thousands of successful sales, Brian outlines proven techniques once reserved for high-end sellers. "In this guide, I share what works—practical, powerful strategies for sellers who want results," says Brian.

From pricing and positioning to marketing and negotiation, the book offers clear, actionable insights for properties of all types, from cozy cottages to luxury estates.

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

Destin Life readers can request a FREE copy by emailing [Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com](mailto:Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com) or calling (850) 739-3800.

Your next move starts with the right plan.

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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



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

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

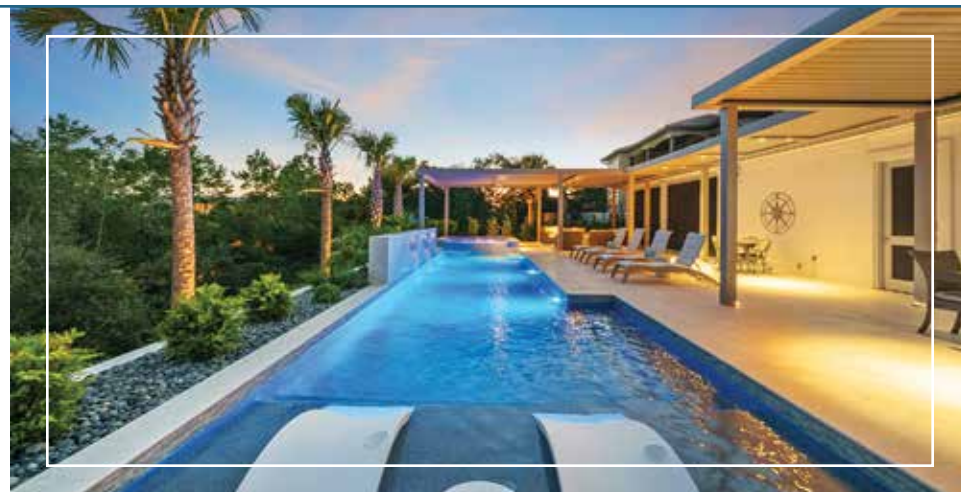
coast," said Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton. "Its commitment to architectural excellence, timeless design, and respect for place has set a

standard not only for Walton County but for coastal communities nationwide."

Moore added, "Few communities 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

*Continued on next page*



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Community

SCENIC WALTON

continued from previous page

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 en-

hances both place and people. 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 not only residents and visitors, but the entire Walton County community."

With its iconic white architecture, carefully curated street-scapes, and dedication to design consistency, Alys Beach stands as one of the most distinctive communities along Florida's Gulf Coast. Scenic Walton's rec-



CREDIT: H PAPPAS, DEFUNIAK HERALD/BEACH BREEZE 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 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.

ognition 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.

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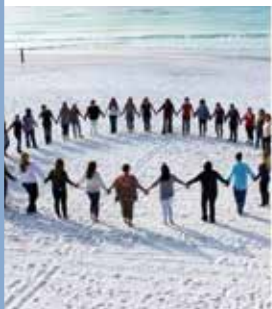
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## Peace of Mind on the Coast: Why Homeowners Trust Reside 30A

Owning a home along Florida's beautiful 30A corridor is a dream for many. With its white sand beaches, coastal charm, and relaxed lifestyle, it's a place where families gather and lasting memories are made. But for homeowners who aren't able to be there year-round, maintaining a property from afar can quickly become stressful. That's where Reside 30A, a premier home and property management company, becomes an invaluable partner.

Reside 30A was founded on a simple yet meaningful mission: to give homeowners true peace of mind. When you're away, their dedicated local team ensures your home is cared for with the same attention and respect as if it were their own.

Coastal living brings unique challenges. The combination of humidity, salt air, and seasonal storms can take a toll on a property if it isn't closely monitored. Small maintenance issues—like a minor leak or HVAC concern—can escalate

quickly when left unchecked. Reside 30A provides routine property inspections designed to catch these problems early. Their team carefully monitors key systems, exterior conditions, and overall home performance, helping to prevent costly repairs down the road.

Beyond inspections, Reside 30A offers a full-service approach to property care. They coordinate trusted local vendors, oversee maintenance and repairs, and ensure that every detail is handled efficiently and professionally. Homeowners don't have to worry about making calls from miles away or trying to find reliable help—they already have a trusted team in place.

What truly sets Reside 30A apart is their personalized service. Every home is different, and every homeowner has unique needs. Whether it's preparing a property before an owner's arrival, managing ongoing projects, or simply ensuring everything is secure during



an extended absence, their team takes a proactive and thoughtful approach.

There's also something special about arriving to a home that is completely ready for you. Instead of spending valuable time addressing maintenance issues or coordinating services, you can immediately settle in and enjoy everything 30A has to offer—whether that's relaxing on the porch, spending time

with family, or taking in a peaceful sunset.

Reside 30A's deep roots in the local community give them an added advantage. Their knowledge of the area, combined with strong relationships with trusted service providers, allows them to respond quickly and effectively when needs arise.

A home on 30A is more than just an investment—it's a place of comfort, connection, and joy.

With Reside 30A caring for it while you're away, you can feel confident knowing your home is protected and ready whenever you return.

*Reside 30A is located at 1130 North County Highway 395, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459. Reach them at 850-231-4567 or [services@reside-30a.com](mailto:services@reside-30a.com).*



At Reside 30A, we specialize in providing comprehensive property management services tailored specifically for second-home owners. We understand that your second home is not just a property—it's a place filled with memories and future plans. Whether you visit for weekends or seasonally, our personalized property management services ensure your home remains secure, well-maintained, and ready for your return.



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## Bloom, Grow, and Gather: Clay 30A



BY JASON AND ANNA-LISA DANIEL

Spring along 30A brings more than warmer days and salty breezes—Spring along 30A brings more than warmer days and salty breezes—it brings a sense of renewal that inspires homeowners to refresh their homes, gardens, and outdoor spaces. At Clay 30A, we've built a space where locals can do just that, combining beautiful plants, handcrafted furniture, artisan pottery, and now, our newest addition: Bouquet at Clay – A Flower Bar.

### Create Something Personal with Bouquet at Clay

“Even if you've never arranged flowers before, we're happy to help you put together something that will make anyone smile.”

Our flower bar is all about personal creativity and thoughtful gifting. Visitors can select from a variety of fresh, seasonal blooms and greenery to design a bouquet that's uniquely theirs. Pair with one of our unique vases we have as well.

And with Mother's Day approaching, we have many bouquets to choose from for families to celebrate moms, wives, and grandmothers with arrangements that feel heartfelt and personal.

### A Shop Designed to Inspire

One of the things customers notice first at Clay 30A is the welcoming, knowledgeable team. Whether you're selecting the right plant for your space or designing a custom arrangement, the staff is always ready



with helpful guidance and a genuine passion for what they do. Beyond plants and flowers, the boutique gift shop offers a thoughtfully curated selection of candles, jewelry, houseplants, air plants, planters, and seasonal items—perfect for finding a meaningful gift or something special for your home.

### Furniture That Brings Style and Function Together

In addition to flowers, Clay 30A features premium furniture lines such as Summer Classics, Tucci Seaside Casual, and Three Birds Teak. From elegant teak lounges to classic outdoor seating, each piece is designed for comfort, durability, and timeless appeal. Updating your



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blessings

patio, deck, or living space with the right furniture can turn your home into a welcoming gathering place that feels relaxed and distinctly coastal.

### Artisan Pottery from Around the World

We also offer a curated collection of artisan pottery

*Continued on next page*



# Home & Garden

## BLOOM, GROW

*continued from previous page*

sourced from Greece, Morocco, Italy, France, and Malaysia. Each piece carries unique character and craftsmanship, bringing a global touch to your garden, patio, or interior spaces. Pairing these pots with our plants creates vibrant, long-lasting displays that make any space come alive.

### Plants That Thrive: Monrovia and More

At Clay 30A, we carry premium plant brands such as Monrovia and Proven Winners, known for producing healthy, resilient, and beautifully bred plants. Our customers love these plants for their reliability and longevity, especially in our coastal climate. In addition to ornamental plants, we offer a wide selection of citrus trees and culinary herbs, allowing your garden to be both beautiful and functional.

### A Place to Celebrate Life and Community

“Our hope is that Clay 30A becomes a destination where

locals find inspiration for their homes, gardens, and celebrations.”

Our goal has always been to help South Walton homeowners create spaces that inspire. By combining flowers, quality plants, artisan pottery, and thoughtfully selected furniture, we provide tools for making spaces personal, joyful, and inviting.

This Mother’s Day, stop by Clay 30A to explore the flower bar, pick out seasonal blooms, or discover furniture and garden treasures that transform your home. Whether it’s an artisan pot, a citrus tree, or a custom bouquet, every piece is a way to celebrate the people and spaces you love most.

*Clay 30A is located at 4808 E County Hwy 30A, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459. Reach them at (850) 231-2150.*



## The Fabric Source: A South Walton Tradition

Creating a beautiful, inviting home goes beyond just furniture—it's about those thoughtful touches like gorgeous window treatments, rich fabrics, and striking wall coverings. For South Walton locals, The Fabric Source is more than just a store; it's a family legacy built on trust, warmth, and genuine care.

When Hank Dawson bought The Fabric Source in 2006, he devoted himself to raising the bar for quality and service, quickly becoming a local treasure. Hank's gold-standard approach and friendliness turned casual shoppers into loyal friends and repeat customers. When retirement called, he kept the business "in the family," passing the torch to his cousin, Suni Goff.

Suni brings more than two decades of whole-home remodel and renovation design experience, blending fresh ideas with the core values that make The Fabric Source special. Clients rave about Suni's intuitive eye and energetic, approachable style. She honors the past while guiding the shop into exciting new territory.

What truly sets The Fabric Source apart is not only its wide selection but also the support you receive at every step. Whether dressing windows in one room or your entire home, you'll discover a full-service design studio equipped to help bring your ideas to life with:

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Suni Goff, Cookie (the official shop pup and ADA hearing dog) and Hank.

of quality and service you've come to expect from The Fabric Source.

Service doesn't end with the sale. The team includes master installer John McCotter—an industry veteran of 40+ years—and his son Jordan, both dedicated to perfect installations that ensure every detail is just right. The Fabric Source stands by every product, offering support and repairs long after installation—because we understand life happens for busy families and vacation homes alike.

With Suni at the helm, the shop remains a heartfelt, local gem. She leads with passion, honoring Hank's legacy and inspiring a new generation of beautiful South Walton homes. Step into The Fabric Source and you'll find more than fabrics; you'll find real expertise, welcoming smiles, and people who care about your home's story as much as you do.

*The Fabric Source is located at 416 S County Hwy 393 Building 8 Unit 1, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459. Reach them at (850) 837-5252 or email: [contactus@thefabric-source.com](mailto:contactus@thefabric-source.com).*



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# 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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Dr. Chern, MD,  
Sue Griffin, ARNP  
Presley Pulse, APRN






 Wellness

# 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 a loss of a job, moving, or divorce. Other times, loss is a break up or the end of a friendship. And confusingly, sometimes loss is mixed up with celebration like a graduation or wedding. Behind 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 in spite of 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. "Everyone 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 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).

## 5 KEYS

continued from page 5

ture, 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 person-

alize 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 interven-

tions 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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# 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 prof-

itability. 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 options 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. 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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Musing

# Sean of the South: Sea Turtles



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Hello. I am a sea turtle. We turtles don't actually have names. But you can call me

Squirt. Pleased to meet you.

Maybe you've never met a talking sea turtle before. Well, I'd like to change that.

The first thing you should know about me is that I'm very old. Much older than you. I was born before automobiles. Before lightbulbs. If I wore underpants, I'd have underpants older than you.

The reason I am writing is because I have something to share with you. I'd like to talk

about water. Water is my favorite thing on earth.

You probably like water, too. But probably not as much as me.

See, water doesn't just fill the ocean. For sea turtles, water fills the entirety of all I know. To me, water isn't just a thing. To me, water is all-powerful.

Water contains the most power in my universe. I have seen water swallow islands whole. Filling every coral forest, immersing every sandbar. Water



engulfs. Water overtakes.

Imagine water behind a dam. All its weight. All its raw power. All its energy. Just begging for someone to poke a tiny hole in the dam so that tiny stress fractures can soon rupture the steel and concrete which try so feebly to restrain it.

That's the power of water.

But water is more than just power. Water is my life. You see, water is always around me. I drink by filtering saltwater through glands in my eyes. I eat by allowing the water to bring me bits of food.

Water bathes every fiber of my being, flowing inside me, and outside. Water is in my organs. Inside my muscles. In every patch of flesh. In my bones, and cartilage.

Water fills in my heart. Water is inside my skull. My brain is mostly water. So is yours, actually.

There is nowhere in my kingdom where water is not. Water is even what I breathe—sort of.

Although sea turtles are air-breathers, we also derive oxygen from water. We do this by breathing with our butts.

Yes, it's true. I am a butt-breather. The technical term for this is "cloacal respiration." I extract oxygen from the water by moving it over my body. My body is covered in blood vessels. My cloaca, which is pretty much my rear, has many blood vessels. So, scientifically speaking, I breathe with my booty-us maximus.

And I do more than breathe water. Water is all I see. Water is all there is to see.

Water above me. Water below me. Behind me. Beside me. Water cradles me like a mother, supplying me with minerals and vitamins.

The water carries me in its currents, which I slip in and out of. When I rest in the warm Gulf Stream, I can travel thousands of miles, from one side of Earth to the other, without so much as batting a flipper.

And yet, if you can believe this, sometimes I forget the water is there.

Since water is so pervasive, so immersive, so all-encompassing, sometimes I fail to remember that water is all around me.

How, I ask? How could the most vital and most plentiful element on this planetary system be overlooked? How can the essence of life itself be trivialized?

And yet this happens every day. Every hour of every day, millions of us sea turtles forget about the water that supports our life. It becomes invisible to us.

We are selfish and self-centered sometimes, and we forget that the water IS our whole life. Without it there would BE no sea turtles.

But do you know what? The water doesn't hold it against us. Its feelings are not hurt.

The water doesn't disappear when you disappoint it. The water is bigger than that. Stronger than that. The water isn't even insulted. Water is too loving to be insulted.

You can never fall out of the water. There is no such thing as falling out of the element that created you. You are held, whether you remember to be grateful or not.

The water remains in place, feeding you, holding you, carrying you, sustaining you, building you, teaching you, loving you.

We have a saying among sea turtles: "Water is love."

And so, my earthly friend, is God.

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# 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 fa-

mous – 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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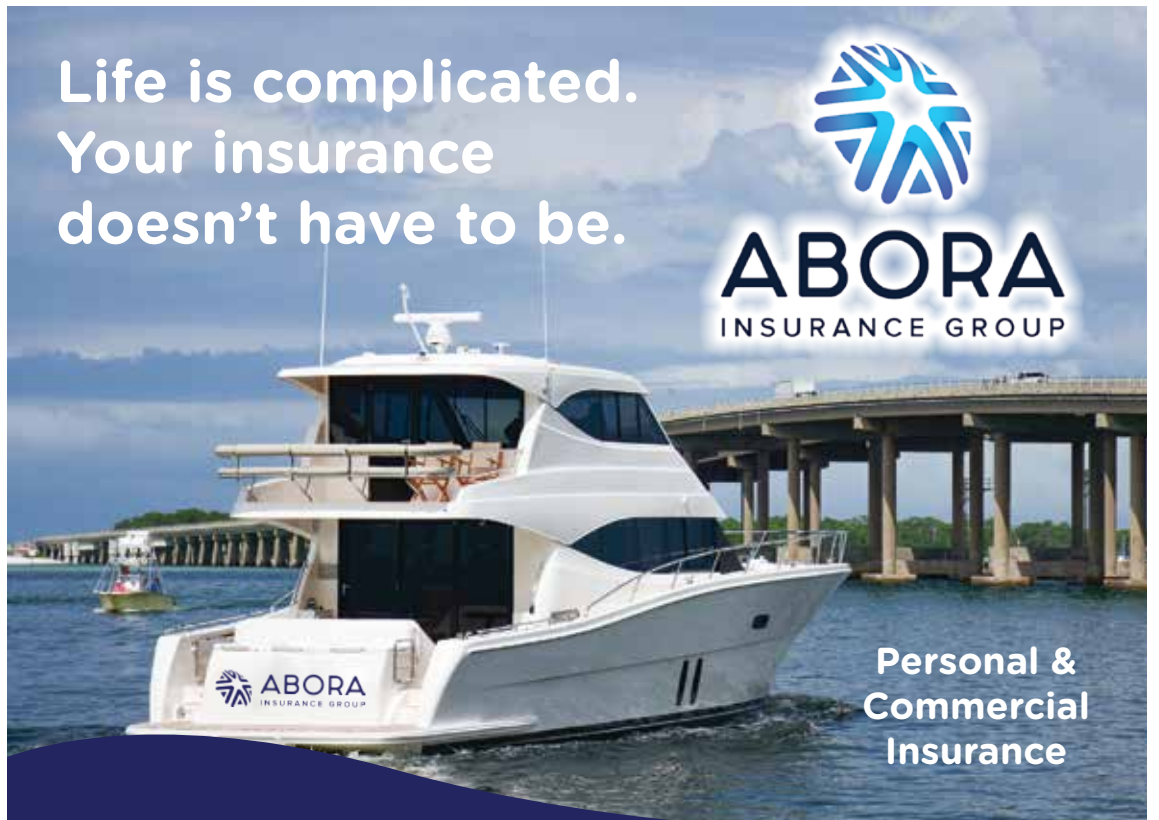
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 Musing



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

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

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 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 ap-

peared 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 health-care 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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Arts & Music

# Studio 237 Music Lessons 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



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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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# Sinfonia Gulf Coast Welcomes Nearly 2,500 Students

## Interactive Performances of Link Up: The Orchestra Sings

By ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

In March, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center 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 students 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 & Ar-



PHOTO CREDIT JIM CLARK

tistic 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 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, visit [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org), call (850) 460-8800 or e-mail [info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org](mailto:info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org).



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Arts & Music

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

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 discover 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 Hanigan in Annie and Genie Klein in Beautiful: The Carole King Musical. She is joined by ensemble members Teresa Lombardi, last seen as Brooke Wyndham 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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# Spring Maintenance Checklist: Don't Overlook Your Community Internet

BY DON CARTER, SECUREVISION

Spring along the Emerald Coast is when communities prepare for the busy season ahead. HOAs and condo associations begin their annual maintenance routines. Landscaping is refreshed, roofs are inspected, pools reopen, and common areas are prepared for residents and guests.

These efforts protect property values and keep communities looking their best.

However, one critical system is often left off the checklist: internet service.

Today, reliable connectivity is just as essential to a community as water, electricity, and security. Residents depend on it for remote work, streaming, smart home devices, and staying connected with family and friends. In larger condominium communities and master-planned developments, where full-time residents, seasonal owners, and vacation guests all rely on the same infrastructure, connectivity issues can quickly impact hundreds of people at once.

Spring is the ideal time for boards to review their internet service before peak season arrives.

Many associations remain in contracts that automatically renew year after year, even as the number of connected devices inside each home continues to

grow. A service level that worked five years ago may no longer meet the expectations of today's residents. An annual review gives boards the opportunity to confirm service levels, evaluate pricing, and ensure providers are delivering the performance the community expects.

Equipment should also be part of the conversation. Routers, switches, and wireless access points do not last forever. Older hardware can struggle during periods of high occupancy, particularly during spring break and summer when usage spikes dramatically. Reviewing equipment before the busy season helps prevent slow speeds and outages when demand is highest.

Planning ahead also reduces resident complaints. When connectivity problems appear during peak occupancy, boards often face urgent decisions and limited options. Communities that evaluate their network in advance are able to address issues strategically instead of reacting under pressure.

Network structure and security are equally important. Guest networks should remain separate from resident and ad-



ministrative systems, firmware should be current, and modern security practices should be in place. These details may not be visible to residents, but they play a significant role in performance and reliability.

For Emerald Coast communities, spring preparation sets the tone for the entire year.

Adding an internet service review to the annual maintenance checklist helps boards enter the busy season with con-

fidence, fewer disruptions, and better service for residents and guests.

SecureVision works with HOAs and large condominium communities across the Emerald Coast to evaluate contracts, network infrastructure, and managed WiFi systems. A proactive review today can prevent major connectivity issues tomorrow and help ensure residents stay connected all season long.

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