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A Natural Treasure in Our Backyard: The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

For many local residents, it's easy to drive along State Road 20 and not fully realize that just beyond the trees lies one of the most extraordinary environmental education centers in the country.

I had the special opportunity recently to visit the amazing E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. And, believe me, it isn't just a place to visit — it's a point of pride for our local communities and a powerful example of how our area is helping lead the way in conservation, education and environmental stewardship.

Located in Freeport on the Nokuse Plantation, the center opened in 2009 thanks to the vision of the late M.C. Davis, a Walton County conservationist who believed deeply that people protect what they love. His mission was simple, but profound: give children and families the opportunity to experience nature firsthand, and they will grow up wanting



to protect it.

That philosophy is rooted in the concept of "biophilia," a term coined by famed biologist Dr. E.O. Wilson, meaning a natural love for living things. It's a fitting name for a place that has quietly been changing lives in our own backyard for more than 15 years.

Today, the center operates as a nonprofit environmental education facility serving thousands of students each year, many from Walton and Okaloosa counties. Fourth- and seventh-grade students regularly visit for immersive field experiences that go far beyond a typical field trip. Here, learning happens outside — in the woods, along trails, and through hands-on discovery.

"The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center lets children and adults explore a unique ecosystem that inspires curiosity and play with the benefit

BIOPHILIA CENTER
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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Celebrates Memorial Day Weekend With Sinfonia Salutes at Alys Beach

This free outdoor concert features patriotic favorites and a mesmerizing drone show at the Alys Beach Amphitheatre on Sunday, May 24.

Sinfonia Gulf Coast invites the community to kick off Memorial Day weekend with Sinfonia Salutes, the orchestra's annual free pops concert and drone show, on Sunday, May 24 at 7:30 p.m. in the Alys Beach Amphitheatre.

SINFONIA
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BIOPHILIA CENTER

continued from cover

of having a knowledgeable staff available to answer the questions that naturally arise when engaging with nature. Sharing our passion for nature and conservation is our foundation,” says Executive Director Nicole Schafer.

For local families, it’s especially meaningful knowing that children in our own community have access to this kind of experience. Many students leave with not only new knowledge, but a genuine appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds us every day.

And that beauty is something special.

The Biophilia Center sits within the longleaf pine ecosystem, one of the most diverse and endangered habitats in North America. Thanks to restoration efforts on the Nokuse Plantation, millions of longleaf pines have been replanted, bringing this critical ecosystem back to life. It’s a quiet but powerful success story happening right here at home.

Visitors to the center

can encounter native wildlife, including birds, reptiles, pollinators and the beloved gopher tortoise — a keystone species that plays an important role in the health of the ecosystem. Inside, interactive exhibits and “animal ambassadors” help bring these lessons to life in a way that resonates with all ages.

Beyond its educational programs, the center also supports broader environmental initiatives, hosting researchers, educators and conservation leaders who are working to protect Florida’s natural resources. Its sustainable practices — from conservation efforts to environmental programming — reflect the same values it teaches every day.

For those who haven’t visited yet, the center is open to



Photos: Jeff Talbert

the public on select days and through special events and seasonal programs. It’s a perfect outing for your family, grandparents (like me) with visiting grandchildren, or anyone looking to reconnect with nature just minutes from home.

Did you know? The Nokuse Plantation surrounding the center spans more than 50,000 acres, making it one of the largest private conservation efforts in the Southeast — and it’s

right here in Freeport.

In a fast-growing area where so much is changing, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center stands as something steady and lasting — a reminder of what makes this community so special.

It’s not just a destination. It’s part of who we are.

Summer Kickoff

Mark your calendar for the public’s first “non-event” opportunity to come in for the season—

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center’s Summer Kickoff on May

30 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. This family-friendly fundraiser will feature live music by Jennifer Alvarado, food trucks, bounce houses, animal chats, raffles, and access to the Reptile Room. Admission is \$15 for ages 13 and up, \$10 for ages 4–12, and free for Bio-members. Guests are encouraged to bring a towel and spare clothes for water activities, and come ready to celebrate the start of summer surrounded by nature.

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SINFONIA

continued from page 1

Now a beloved holiday tradition on the Emerald Coast, Sinfonia Salutes brings the full orchestral sound of Sinfonia Gulf Coast under the palm trees for an evening of patriotic and popular tunes that appeals to all ages. The concert will be capped by a mesmerizing drone show lighting up the night sky over Alys Beach.

This year also marks Sinfonia Gulf Coast's 20th anniversary and maestro Demetrius Fuller will be conducting.

The festive outdoor performance is free and open to the public. Guests are encouraged to bring low-back chairs or blankets and arrive early to find the perfect spot on the green. The amphitheatre is located on Scenic Highway 30A directly across from the Gulf of Mexico, making it an idyllic backdrop for a family-friendly holiday celebra-

tion. Doors open at 6 p.m., and music begins at 7:30 p.m.

"Sinfonia Salutes has become one of the most anticipated events of the season," said Demetrius Fuller, Sinfonia Gulf Coast founder and music & artistic director. "There's something special about gathering under the stars with the whole community to celebrate the holiday through great music. We look forward to another memorable evening at Alys Beach."

Sinfonia Salutes continues Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission to entertain, educate and inspire the community through innovative programming and high-caliber performances. This event is one of the symphony's signature traditions that blends professional musicianship with a laid-back beach town vibe.

The concert is presented by the Merchants of Alys Beach. For more information, visit alysbeach.com/events or sinfoniagulfcoast.org.

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Community

Coastal Seniors May Updates

COASTAL SENIORS

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

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

Watercolor Painting Class – Due to unforeseen circumstances, dates and locations are not available at this time. For updates, please visit our

website at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org or follow us on Facebook at Coastal Seniors of South Walton or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Northwest Florida Health Council - will provide FREE health screenings on May 21 from 9-11:30 a.m. at Padgett Park.

Pickleball - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts on May 13 at 6 p.m. This beginner class is open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) Registration is required. Register through Parks and Rec Website at secure.rec1.com Email Sandy Gulak at sowalpickleball@gmail.com for more information. Class is

FREE and equipment is provided or you may use your own. Open play at Boys and Girls Club has ended for the summer but will resume after Labor Day. Please join the SoWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

Monthly Meeting - Monthly meeting will be Friday May 15 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at LOGAN LANE. Guest speaker will be announced at a later time. A light lunch will be served. Sign up on the email list. To be added to email list, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Mahjong - Mary Swift will host a Mahjong group every Monday at 1 p.m. at Padgett Park. For more information contact Mary Swift at 210-722-7939 or on Facebook join The Emerald Coast Social Club-a Mahjong Group.

Water Aerobics - Two Classes will be held on Mondays May 4, 11, 18 and Wednesdays May 6, 13, 20, and 27 at 9 a.m. and at 10:15 a.m. at Watersound Fountains pool located at 65 Origins Pkwy, Inlet Beach. A pool noodle and set of water bells are used for class. Sign up on the email list. To be added to the email list, call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Dementia Caregiver Support Group - Karen League will lead this caregiver support group on the first Wednesday of each month beginning May 6 from 10:00 am to 11:30 am. at Padgett Park. For more information call 850-280-5342 or email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

stretch away.

Instead, days open up naturally.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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Community

If We Want Authenticity, We Have to Initiate It

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

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

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

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

But speed carries a cost.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



evolution instead of overproduction.

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

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

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

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

In a community that depends

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

Clothing can follow the same philosophy.

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

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

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

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

The Gulf doesn't compete. It endures.

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



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Taking Advantage of the Emerald Coast's Short "Shoulder Season"



BY KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

May is a unique month along the Emerald Coast. The spring break crowds have mostly

headed home, and the summer travel season hasn't quite begun. For homeowners and property managers, that creates a valuable window to tackle larger home improvement projects.

Painting projects in particular can benefit from this quieter stretch of time. Homes may have fewer guests, property managers often have a little more flexibility in their schedules, and the weather is usually cooperative for both interior and exterior work.

For homeowners, May is a great time to refresh spaces that see the most daily activity—hall-

ways, kitchens, and family rooms. A full repaint can bring new life to those areas and give the entire home a clean, updated feel.

Property management companies and rental agencies across our beautiful Emerald Coast also use this short pause to prepare properties for the busy summer season. Guests notice the details when they arrive, and a well-maintained home makes a strong first impression.

Kyle's Tip:

"Many homeowners try to tackle painting one room at a

time, but doing the whole interior together often gives the best results. It creates better flow throughout the home and usually saves time in the long run."

Using May wisely allows homes and vacation properties to be ready when the summer crowds arrive.

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



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School is (Almost) Out! WCSD Eyes the End of Another EPIC Year!

BY DR. JOSHUA BLEDSOE,
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

The final days of the 2025-2026 school year are finally upon us, and across Walton County, that means one thing—graduation season is here. It's a time filled with celebration, reflection, and excitement as the Class of 2026 prepares to take its next steps.

Ceremonies will kick off on May 16, with In10sity School of Excellence graduating at 4 p.m., followed by Freeport High School at 7 p.m. The celebration continues on May 19 with the Magnet Innovation Center at 7 p.m., and on May 21 with South

Walton High School at 7 p.m. Walton High School seniors will walk the stage on May 22 at 7 p.m., and Paxton High School will close out the season on May 23 with a 2 p.m. ceremony.

Each ceremony marks more than just the end of high school—it represents years of dedication, perseverance, and growth. This year's graduates have truly lived out what it means to "Keep the Charge," demonstrating resilience and commitment every step of the way.

As families make plans for the end of the school year, a few key dates are worth noting. There will be no school on May

25 in observance of Memorial Day, and the last day for students is May 29.

With summer just around the corner, families are encouraged to stay engaged. Be sure to check with your child's school for Summer Bridge opportunities designed to help students maintain academic progress and avoid the "summer slide." These programs offer a valuable way to keep learning going even after



the final bell rings.

Also, keep an eye on district social media channels for up-

dates on when the EPIC Van will be visiting neighborhoods throughout the summer, bringing fun and educational experiences directly into the community.

As another school year comes to a close, Walton County celebrates the achievements of its students and looks ahead with pride.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026—and best wishes for a safe, restful, and rewarding summer.

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Community

Scenic Walton Strengthens Leadership with New Board Appointment and Officer Elections

Shannon Richmond joins the Board of Directors as current board members Bruce Naylor and Matt Milliron are elected to key leadership roles.

Scenic Walton is pleased to announce the appointment of Shannon Richmond, Vice President and Director of Membership Services for the Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce, to its Board of Directors. The organization also announces the election of Bruce Naylor as Vice President and Matt Milliron as Treasurer, further strengthening its leadership during a time of continued growth and opportunity across Walton County.



Richmond brings nearly a decade of experience connecting businesses and fostering community engagement through her work with one of the most active chambers in the region. A long-time Panama City Beach resident, her passion for supporting local communities is both professional and deeply personal. Known for her energy, relationship-driven approach, and com-

mitment to championing local businesses, Richmond adds a valuable regional perspective to Scenic Walton's mission.

"Joining Scenic Walton is an incredible opportunity to be part of something that truly shapes the future of our communities," said Richmond. "This region is so special, and I'm passionate about

preserving what makes it unique while supporting thoughtful, responsible growth. I'm excited to work alongside this dedicated group to continue making a positive impact."

In addition to welcoming Richmond, Scenic Walton has elected Bruce Naylor as Vice President. A long-time DeFuniak

Forest Service, ecosystem restoration, and municipal arboriculture, providing Scenic Walton with valuable expertise in preserving and enhancing natural landscapes.

"As Walton County continues to grow, it is more important than ever to have strong, thoughtful leadership guiding our efforts," said Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton. "Shannon, Bruce, and Matt each bring a unique perspective and a deep commitment to this community. Together, they strengthen our ability to advocate for projects and initiatives that protect our scenic beauty, enhance safety, and ensure a high quality of life for residents and visitors alike."

These leadership additions reflect Scenic Walton's ongoing commitment to collaboration, regional engagement, and proactive planning. By bringing together expertise in business development, real estate, and environmental stewardship, the organization is well-positioned to continue advancing initiatives that support both economic vitality and the preservation of Walton County's distinctive character.

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

Springs resident and owner and broker of Naylor Realty & Associates, Naylor brings more than three decades of experience in real estate, marketing, and community leadership throughout Walton County. His deep understanding of the region, combined with his longstanding commitment to preserving its character, makes him a natural fit for this leadership role.

Also elected to a leadership position, Matt Milliron will serve as Treasurer. An ISA Certified Arborist and Branch Manager for SavATree in Santa Rosa Beach, Milliron brings a strong background in environmental stewardship, urban forestry, and sustainable land management. His experience spans wildfire management with the Florida

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Investing: At a Crossroads

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Financial markets have a habit of panicking about new technology before they understand it.

It has happened many times before.

Railroads were once feared as dangerous speculation. Electricity was expected to wipe out en-

tire industries. The internet was supposed to destroy traditional business models overnight. Instead, each of those innovations ultimately expanded economic opportunity far more than it eliminated.

Artificial intelligence may be following the same pattern today.

Over the past several weeks, markets have reacted sharply to news coming from AI frontier model companies. One of the most notable developments came on April 10 when Anthropic revealed new capabilities in its AI systems through a cybersecurity initiative known as Project Glass-

wing.

The technology demonstrated an ability to identify vulnerabilities in software and hardware systems at an unprecedented level. In theory, this type of AI could detect weaknesses across industries ranging from finance to healthcare to infrastructure.

Former Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Jen Easterly recently wrote about the potential significance of this moment. For decades, she noted, the technology industry has built an enormous ecosystem focused on defending against vulnerabilities in software that should never have existed in the first place. AI, she suggests, may eventually help shift the focus toward building systems that are secure from the start.

That possibility has made some investors nervous.

Software and cybersecurity stocks sold off as markets tried to process what these developments might mean.

Technology seems to be developing faster and faster, but markets often move even faster than understanding.

Something similar happened about 15 months ago when investors were surprised by the emergence of the low-cost AI chatbot from DeepSeek. At the time many investors questioned whether companies like Nvidia would still be needed in an AI world where software appeared to be doing more with less computing power.

Nvidia's stock dropped sharply. But the underlying data told a different story. AI development ultimately required more computing power, not less. What initially looked like a threat turned into a powerful tailwind.

Today we may be seeing another example of the same pattern. When investors grow nervous, they often sell first and ask questions later. In the process, strong companies can fall alongside weaker ones.

For long-term investors that environment can create opportunity. Technological revolutions rarely eliminate industries. Much more often they reshape them. Artificial intelligence will almost certainly change how software and cybersecurity are built and deployed. But the more likely outcome is not the disappearance of those industries — it is their evolution.

The key during periods like



this is not predicting every headline. It is understanding what you own and why you own it. Because when markets react emotionally, disciplined investors who rely on data and fundamentals often find the best opportunities.

If you would like to discuss these developments or learn more about how we are positioning portfolios in response to changing market conditions, please feel free to contact our office.

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Green Thumb Garden Club Wraps Up the Year in May With a Beautiful Program at a Special Venue

BY KATHLEEN EDGE,
PUBLICITY & WEBSITE CHAIR

Since 1990 - for 36 years - Green Thumb Garden Club has maintained the Eden Gardens State Park Butterfly Garden and is proud to support the much-needed 2026 renovation. The centerpiece of the Garden, the beautiful fountain, has been removed, repaired, repainted and reinstalled along with the hardscape and mulch around the fountain. Next, the butterfly-attracting flowers and bushes will be planted, and a dedication celebration will be held at the member meeting on May 20, 2026 with the unveiling of a granite marker. Eden's Butterfly Garden restoration is supported by



Friends of Eden Garden, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and Green Thumb Garden Club. A Park tour will be offered to any-

one interested. Generous donations and multiple fund-raising projects supported by members and the

Walton County community have allowed GTGC to increase scholarship awards from \$7,000. in 2025 to \$8,500. in 2026. We are very excited to present awards to Mercer college scholarship winners, Westonwood Ranch, 4H Camp Timpoochee and E.O. Wilson Biophilia Naturalist Camp. The awards will be presented over the next several months.

May's meeting on the 20th will be held at the Eden Gardens State Park Pavilion, 181 Eden Gardens Road, Santa Rosa Beach, FL. Check-in time

is 9:30 am; cost is \$30 cash, \$32 credit card with lunch included. Attendees will also see a live Butterfly exhibit and presentation. 2026/2027 Club Officers will be inducted. Casual clothing, comfortable walking shoes, a hat and sunscreen are highly recommended.

Details about how to join Green Thumb Garden Club, programs, projects and more can be found on the website at www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org or email greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com

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Community

From Spontaneity to Sacred Rhythm: My First Encounter With Anglican Worship

By KIMBERLY HOOD, MD

Coming from a lifelong charismatic church background, my first visit to Apostles by the Sea, an Anglican congregation, was both unfamiliar and deeply refreshing. I expected something rigid or distant, but instead I encountered a reverence that felt both ancient and alive—something that immediately drew me in.

The most noticeable difference was the liturgical structure. Unlike the spontaneous, free-flowing and at times, chaotic worship I had always known, every part of the service carried intention and meaning. Prayers, Scripture readings, and congregational responses were shared together, creating a powerful sense that worship was not about any one individual, but about the body of believers collectively honoring God. I found myself shifting from a mindset of “what can I receive?” to “what can I offer?”—a posture that felt both humbling and deeply grounding.

What surprised me most was that, despite the structured nature of the service, this was not a cessationist church. There remained an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, but it was expressed in a way that felt ordered, thoughtful, and deeply rooted in tradition. Rather than diminishing the spiritual experience, it seemed to anchor it in something more enduring.

The beauty of the liturgy itself was striking. The words carried a sense of weight and history, shaped by generations of believers. Participating in those prayers and responses made me feel connected not just to the people in the room, but to the broader, historic Church and to Jesus. It was a form of worship that invited reflection, reverence, and unity.

Equally impactful were the people. From the very first day, they were warm, welcoming, and genuinely kind. There was no pressure to perform or conform—only a sincere joy that we were there, worshipping Jesus



alongside them. That authenticity made a lasting impression.

Father John Wallace and his wife, Ashley Wallace, also stood out as gracious and sincere leaders. Their heart for loving Jesus was evident, not only in what was said, but in the tone and spirit of the entire service. It set the foundation for a church culture that felt both peaceful and genuine.

This is the kind of church I would gladly join and attend regularly. Unfortunately, discovering it just a few months before moving away makes the experience



bittersweet. Even so, I do not see this as a goodbye. These are relationships I intend to keep, people I hope to stay connected with despite the distance. I look forward to visiting whenever I am back in the area, and I already plan to make a special trip to see their new church on Highway 98 in

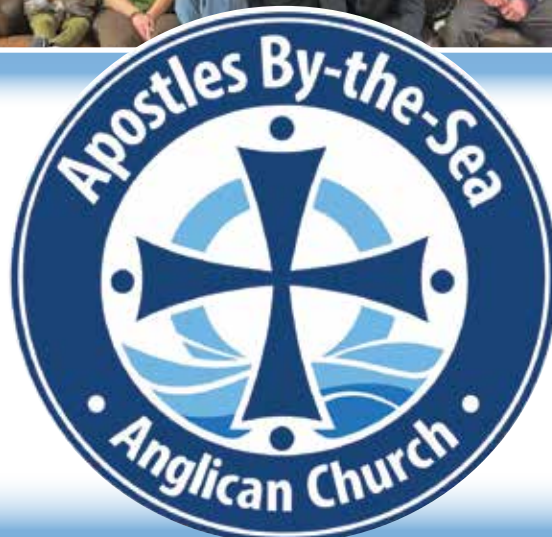
Santa Rosa Beach once it is completed.

In the end, my experience at Apostles by the Sea did not feel like a departure from my faith background, but rather an expansion of it—a deeper expression of loving Jesus, together.



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~ Events ~



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ApostlesByTheSea.com/Live

Website:

www.ApostlesByTheSea.com

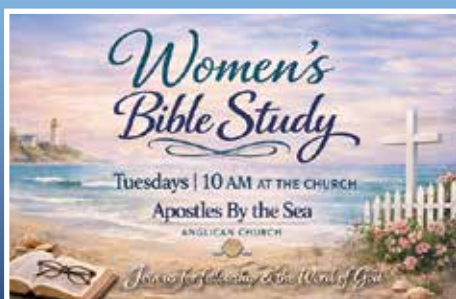
Staff:

The Very Rev. John G. Wallace, Rector

Chad Watson, Minister of Music

Ashley Wallace, Children's Minister

Emily Cason, Guest Services Coordinator



Bloom, Grow, and Gather: Clay 30A

By JASON & ANNA-LISA DANIEL

Spring along 30A brings more than warmer weather and coastal breezes—it inspires a sense of renewal that encourages homeowners to refresh their indoor and outdoor spaces. At Clay 30A, that spirit comes to life through a thoughtfully curated blend of plants, handcrafted furniture, artisan pottery, and their newest addition: Bouquet at Clay – A Flower Bar.

Create Something Personal with Bouquet at Clay

The flower bar invites guests to explore their creativity by designing custom bouquets using fresh, seasonal blooms and greenery. Whether experienced or new to arranging flowers, visitors receive guidance from a welcoming team eager to help create something meaningful. Customers can also pair their arrangements with unique vases available in-store. With Mother’s Day approaching, the shop offers a variety of ready-made and customizable bouquets, giving families a personal way to celebrate the important women in their lives.



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A Shop Designed to Inspire

Clay 30A is known for its friendly, knowledgeable staff who are always ready to assist, whether helping customers select the right plant or design a floral arrangement. Beyond flowers, the boutique gift shop features a carefully chosen selection of candles, jewelry, houseplants, air plants, planters, and seasonal décor. Each item is selected with intention, making it easy to find something meaningful for the home or as a gift.



Furniture That Combines Style and Function

The store also offers premium outdoor furniture lines, including Summer Classics, Tuuci, Seaside Casual, and Three Birds Teak. From elegant teak lounges to comfortable outdoor seating, each piece is designed with durability and timeless coastal style in mind. Updating a patio or living space with quality furniture can transform a home into a welcoming place for gathering and relaxation.

Artisan Pottery with Global Character

Clay 30A features a curated collection of artisan pottery sourced from around the world, including Greece, Morocco, Italy, France, and Malaysia. Each piece reflects unique craftsmanship and adds character to gardens, patios, and interiors. When paired with the store’s plants, these pots create vibrant displays that elevate any space.

Plants That Thrive

The shop carries premium plant brands such as Monrovia and Proven Winners, known for their quality and resilience—especially suited for the coastal climate. In addition to ornamental plants, customers can find citrus trees and culinary herbs, offering both beauty and function for their gardens.

A Place to Gather and Celebrate

At its heart, Clay 30A aims to be a destination where locals find inspiration for their homes and celebrations. By bringing together flowers, plants, pottery, and furniture, the store helps customers create spaces that feel personal, inviting, and joyful.

Visit Clay 30A to explore the flower bar, discover seasonal blooms, or find unique pieces that enhance your home.

Located at 4808 E County Hwy 30A in Santa Rosa Beach, the shop offers a welcoming space to celebrate the people and places you love most. Reach them at (850) 231-2150



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A FLOWER BAR



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Community

Destin-South Walton Toastmasters 2025-2026

The Destin-South Walton Toastmasters Club invites the public to attend and participate in its Finishing Strong Together final club meeting for 2025-26 on Tuesday, June 16. The meeting celebrates the club's successes and the members' individual achievements during the year.

The club is a member of Toastmasters International, an organization dedicated to providing a friendly environment for men and women to become

better leaders with a special focus on improving public speaking skills. The Toastmasters educational program offers six distinct pathways for members to choose from that best aligns with their desired educational goals. Each pathway combine speaking and leadership projects, as well as elec-

tives. Meetings features



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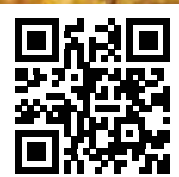
three main components: prepared speeches by members, Table Topics (speaking off the cuff) for both members and guests, and evaluations of the prepared speeches. Prepared speeches help fulfill each member's educational pathway requirements. Table Topics help develop the ability to think and speak effectively without prior preparation. Speech evaluators give immediate feedback on the prepared speeches.

The Destin-South Walton club meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month (excluding July) at the South Walton Utility Company at 369 Miramar Beach Drive, next door to the U.S. Post Office. Each meeting starts at 6 p.m. and concludes by 7:30 p.m. For more information, please visit the club website: <https://dsw.toastmastersclubs.org/>. The public is invited to attend meetings.

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A Superior Mechanical to Host Its Second Appreciation Lunch in October

The Walton and Okaloosa communities are coming together again to give recognition and thanks to our first responders, veterans, and active military. A Superior Mechanical will hold its next Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive North, Niceville, FL 32578 on Tuesday, October 20, 2026. Doors open at 11 a.m.; Lunch and the program will begin promptly at 11:30 a.m.

During the event, A Superior Mechanical will donate a new AC system complete with instal-

lation to one First Responder or Veteran in need. This giveaway is open to all who have served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and all first responders including EMT/ Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Fire Fighters. Register to win at ASuperiorMechanical.com and go to ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY.

Local businesses are invited and encouraged to donate door prizes and giveaways. A Superior founder Jimmy Thorpe says he hopes this giveaway serves as an example of how others can give

back. "We wanted to somehow give back to others, and decided to give back what we have: AC systems."

The event includes a delicious hot lunch catered by Swiftly Catered, a brief welcome from the sponsors and supporters, and the AC Giveaway. This

event is supported and sponsored by the City of Niceville and Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School (who will present the colors), Rocky Bayou Christian School (who will sing the National Anthem), Chelco, United Community Bank, NHance Cabinet Makeovers,

One Beach Real Estate, and Beachworx CoWorking Spaces. Walton and Okaloosa County businesses are encouraged to sponsor; for more information contact Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.




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Community

Ascension Sacred Heart Launches Free Mammogram Program for Uninsured Women

Initiative provides potentially life-saving breast cancer screenings to uninsured women 40 and older across Northwest Florida

Ascension Sacred Heart has launched a new free mammogram program to provide critical breast cancer screenings to uninsured women across Northwest Florida. Uninsured residents over 40 years old are eligible for the screenings. Funding for the program comes from generous donors to the Sacred Heart Foundation.

“Sacred Heart Foundation is committed to ensuring no woman goes without an essential breast health screening,” said Adrienne Maygarden, President of the Sacred Heart Foundation. “Too often, women, especially mothers and caregivers, put their own health on hold. With more than one-third of women behind on critical appointments like mammograms, the need is real. Thanks to the support of our community, we are helping remove barriers and provide access to potentially life-saving care.”

According to the American Cancer Society, when breast cancer is detected early and remains localized, the five-year relative survival rate is 99 percent. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in Florida, with more than 17,000 new cases diagnosed each year. But only about half of the women over 40 living in Bay, Walton, Okaloosa and Gulf Counties get an annual screening as recommended.

The free mammogram program is available to women who:

- Are 40 years of age or older
- Are uninsured



- Are seeking a preventive screening and have no current breast health symptoms
- Have seen a primary care provider within the last 2 years

The screenings are conducted at four locations in the area:

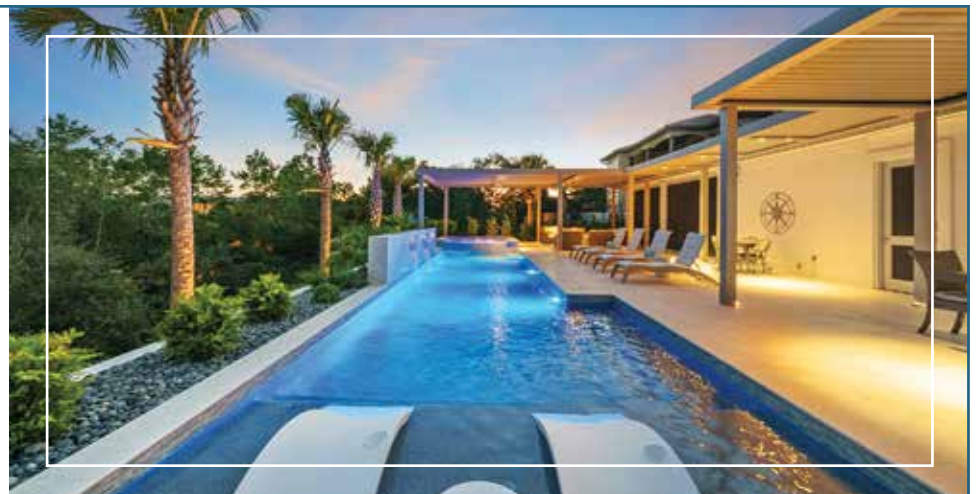
Walton and Okaloosa County residents - Ascension Sacred Heart Women’s Diagnostic Center - Emerald Coast in

Santa Rosa Beach 850-278-3980
Ascension Sacred Heart Women’s Diagnostic Center - Watersound Origins 850-278-3441

Bay County residents - Ascension Sacred Heart Women’s Diagnostic Center - Bay in Panama City 850-804-3909

Gulf and Franklin County residents - Ascension Sacred Heart Women’s Diagnostic Center - Gulf in Port St. Joe 850-229-5680

Women seeking a free mammogram can call their nearest location above to schedule an appointment. To find the location near you, visit ascension.org/sacredheartmammogram. To support this program with your generous donations to the Sacred Heart Foundation visit givesacredheart.org.



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Chapel at the Beach Celebrates 20 Years

By COLE FLOYD, PASTOR

In the early months of 2006, five couples living in Rosemary Beach began meeting for a Bible study with the vision of launching a local church for their community. They recruited Pastor Mike Young to help guide them as they explored this possibility. That Easter, with very little promotion, they hosted a worship service on Rosemary Beach's Eastern Green and 300 people showed up. Encouraged by this response, they began holding Sunday morning worship services the following week at Town Hall, where the church has continued to gather for 20 years.

Founded on a commitment to clear biblical teaching, meaningful community, and generous support of gospel ministry both locally and globally, Chapel at the Beach has become a cornerstone of the 30A community. Mike Young served as the founding pastor for 14 years before passing the baton to Cole Floyd in February 2020.

Throughout its history, the Chapel has been a steady and stabilizing presence during challenging times. In 2018, when Hurricane Michael devastated Panama City and surrounding areas, the church responded with significant financial support and thousands of volunteer hours. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chapel met outdoors for a full year at the Rosemary Beach Amphitheater, providing a much-needed space for worship and connection.

The church's impact extends far beyond its local community. Through its commitment to international missions, the Chapel has helped raise up and send out missionaries, support those already established in gospel ministry and has unleashed millions of dollars to support these mission partners.

Now, 20 years later, the Chapel is a thriving congregation preparing to open a second location in the Dune Lakes area, in addition to its ongoing presence in Rosemary Beach. As the community has grown and diversified across generations, so has the church. Today, Chapel at the Beach offers vibrant and expanding ministries for children and teens, while also welcoming thousands of visitors each year who join locals in worship—reflecting the unique opportunity this area provides to bring together people from so many different places and backgrounds.

From its earliest days, the Chapel's mission has been clear: "Love Jesus. Love People. Transform the World." By God's grace, that mission continues to shape its story.

In celebration of 20 years, the Chapel welcomed back Mike and Kathy Young for the morning. Pastor Mike and Pastor Cole shared the stage for an interview about how the church was started and how far it has come. Several key leaders from the past and present were in attendance, and the celebration was capped off with a brunch



Photo credit: Brandan Babineaux



and baptisms. It was a sweet morning of celebrating what God has done and what He continues to do.

As the Chapel celebrates its 20th anniversary, it indeed looks

back with gratitude for all that God has done and forward with great anticipation for all that He will accomplish.

You can join Chapel at the Beach for worship at Town Hall

in Rosemary Beach every Sunday at 8:30 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. Details about the new location will be announced soon. To learn more, visit chapelatthebeach.org.

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents Blockbuster Season 14 from Sept 10, 2026 - May 23, 2027

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is proud to unveil its highly anticipated Season 14, a lineup that promises to be bigger, bolder, and more unforgettable than ever before. With a dynamic mix of Tony Award-winning productions, gripping thrillers, a holiday favorite, and a magical regional premiere, this season invites audiences to take a front seat to something truly special on the Emerald Coast.

At the heart of Season 14 is a commitment to storytelling that moves, inspires, and entertains. The season features the Tony Award-winning phenomenon *Come From Away*, the remarkable true story of 7,000 stranded passengers and the small Canadian town that welcomed them during the events of September 11th that redefined humanity

and hope. Audiences will then buckle up for Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*, a fast-paced adventure blending suspense and comedy in a way that keeps viewers on the edge of their seats.

As the holidays approach, ECTC brings the electrifying energy of *Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*, a returning favorite, wrapped up in a new way, where legendary rock 'n' roll icons reunite in a festive, high-octane jam session filled with seasonal spirit. The new year kicks off with *9 to 5: The Musical*, the smash-hit production that celebrates ambition, resilience, and the unmistakable influence of Dolly Parton in a story that remains as relevant as ever.

Continuing the season's dynamic offerings, *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* offers a heartfelt and

continued on next page



ECTC emerald coast theatre company
Presents
SEASON 14

COME FROM AWAY SEPTEMBER 10-27	THE 39 STEPS OCTOBER 15-25
MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET CHRISTMAS DECEMBER 3-20	DOLLY PARTON PRESENTS 9 to 5 THE MUSICAL JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 7
KEN LUDWIG'S Dear Jack DEAR LOUISE FEBRUARY 18-28	FROZEN THE MUSICAL MAY 6-23



Accepting Applications for 2026 Walton County Artist of the Year

Walton County Tourism began accepting applications for the 2026 Artist of the Year Award on May 1. Currently in its 24th year, this accolade aims to honor a local artist of Walton County whose unique artistic expression captures the essence of the destination's renowned creativity and beauty.

The deadline for submissions for the Artist of the Year program is Sunday, May 31, at 5 p.m. CDT. The winner will be announced during the Walton County Tourism Annual Meeting in October 2026. Artists can find instructions and apply online at waltoncountyaoy.com.

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

work to be showcased in Walton County.

"Walton County is home to incredibly talented individuals who express their craft through creative mediums," said Matt Algarin, tourism director for Walton County Tourism. "Through our Artist of the Year program, we are not only able to showcase and highlight a truly deserving individual, but we are able to promote and share their work with a larger audience."

Artwork submissions will be evaluated based on criteria such as originality, authenticity and

overall appeal. Finalists will participate in in-person interviews where they will be required to present three examples of artwork during a panel discussion.

Recent Artist of the Year winners include: Mindy Moore, Sarah Page, Bradley Copeland, Joseph Messer and Chandler Williams. For a complete list of winners, visit waltoncountyaoy.com.

To learn more about the Artist of the Year program, contact Lisa Foster at (850) 333-2728 or Lisa@WCFLTourism.com.



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intimate look at a love story that blossomed through letters sent across the Atlantic Ocean during the height of World War II. Closing out the season is a moment audiences have been waiting for as the regional premiere of Disney's iconic Frozen takes the stage, bringing the modern classic to life, designed to captivate audiences of all ages.

Season 14 is thoughtfully curated to offer something for everyone, from families experiencing theatre for the first time to longtime patrons seeking unforgettable nights out, to date nights, and much more. Enhancing the experience even further, ECTC's Season 14 VIP program provides early access to the best seats, exclusive invitations to special events, opportunities to meet the cast, and behind-the-scenes experiences that bring audiences closer to the art. It is through the support of this community that ECTC continues to raise the bar, delivering professional productions that enrich, educate, and inspire.

"This is one of the most exciting seasons we've ever put on our stage," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director of Emerald Coast Theatre Company. "From the scale of these productions to the stories we're telling, everything about Season 14 is designed to raise the bar for what audiences experience at ECTC."

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

ECTC's 2026-2027 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.



SOWAL House Hosts SOFO Fashion Show Benefiting SOWAL Foundation

SOWAL House welcomed a sold out crowd on April 9 for the SOFO Fashion Show featuring Nicole Paloma, an evening of couture, community, and philanthropy benefiting the SOWAL Foundation.

Salon, and photographer Jim Clark, with DJ Vladi providing the music for both the fashion show and the wrap party that followed.

Beyond the runway, guests participated in a live auction featuring luxury trips to New York

The event showcased 11 models wearing 22 unique couture looks by Nicole Paloma, bringing a runway-style fashion experience to the intimate setting of SOWAL House. The presentation paired Paloma's distinct coastal-meets-couture aesthetic with the creative direction and community energy that have become central to SOFO's cultural programming.

The evening was produced in collaboration with Nicole Paloma, Maria Heckscher



City and Beaver Creek, Colorado, along with select memorabilia and experience-based items. Proceeds from the evening benefited the SOWAL Foundation, a local nonprofit dedicated to building cultural infrastructure for artists, filmmakers, musicians, and creatives across the region.

"The SOFO Fashion Show was exactly the kind of cultural moment we want to keep creating," said Dave King of SOWAL House and the SOWAL Foundation. "It brought together fashion, music, photography,

beauty, and philanthropy in one room, while directly supporting SOFO's mission to invest in the creative life of our community."

The April 9 event marked another step in SOWAL House's growing role as a home for elevated cultural programming in South Walton, combining intimate live experiences with support for the arts through the SOWAL Foundation.

Photography credit: Jim Clark



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Art Month Walton County 2026 Showcases a Month of Creativity and Community

Art Month Walton County returns this month with a dynamic, month-long celebration of creativity, culture and community. Presented by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County with support from Visit South Walton, the initiative features more than 40 arts experiences spanning visual, literary and performing arts across the region.

Signature events include the 38th Annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival, Digital Graffiti, the Longleaf Writers Conference and Mystic Pizza at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, alongside performances by Sinfonia Gulf Coast, storytelling events, art walks, gallery shows and more.

At its April 14 meeting, the Walton County Board of County Commissioners officially proclaimed May as Art Month Walton County, recognizing the arts as a vital driver of economic development, tourism, education and quality of life.

Led by the Cultural Arts Alliance, the initiative brings together artists, organizations and businesses to showcase the depth and diversity of Walton County's creative landscape. "This proclamation is more

than a designation—it's a reflection of how deeply the arts are woven into the fabric of our community," said Jennifer Steele, president and CEO of the Cultural Arts Alliance. "Art Month Walton County is an open invitation to experience the creativity that thrives here year-round."

The celebration serves as both an invitation and a call to action—encouraging residents and visitors alike to explore, participate in and support the arts while fostering connection and inspiration throughout the community.

Below are additional upcoming Art Month events:

Mystic Pizza, presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company, runs through May 17. Based on the beloved 1988 film, the musical follows three young women navigating life, love and family in a small-town pizza shop. Tickets and showtimes are available at EmeraldCoastTheatre.org.

Curate 30A hosts a live artist show featuring Plaid Columns May 7–9, showcasing nostalgic



mixed-media works inspired by Americana and vintage iconography.

The Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Concerts in the Village series continues May 7, 14, 21 and 28, offering family-friendly live music each Thursday evening. Visit MKAF.org for details.

Art Walks take place throughout the month, including the Artist Warehouses on County Road 393 on May 21 and the Seaside Art Walk on May 27.

The 15th Annual Longleaf Writers Conference returns to Grayton Beach May 9–16,

featuring acclaimed authors Jennifer Haigh and Beth Ann Fennelly, along with literary agents and special events. Registration is available at LongleafWritersConference.com.

The Petite Picasso Art Showcase takes place May 13 from 6–8 p.m. at Art Basha Gallery, featuring live painting by young artists and collaborative works available for auction.

Justin Gaffrey Gallery hosts "Neither Here Nor There" May 14 from 5–8 p.m., an immersive evening marking a new creative direction inspired by the artist's Liminal collection. Details at

JustinGaffrey.com. Digital Graffiti returns to Alys Beach May 15–16, transforming the town's iconic white architecture into a canvas for projection art by international creatives. Tickets at DigitalGraffiti.com.

Jaws in Concert takes place May 15, as Sinfonia Gulf Coast performs John Williams' iconic score live alongside the film.

Emerald Coast Storytellers hosts a Writers Meetup May 21 at Distillery 98, offering a collaborative space for writers of all levels beginning at 6 p.m.

Celebrate Memorial Day weekend with Sinfonia Salutes, a free outdoor concert and drone show May 24 at 7:30 p.m. at Alys Beach.

Through performances, exhibitions and interactive experiences, Art Month Walton County highlights the power of the arts to connect people, inspire creativity and enrich the community—inviting all to be part of the celebration.

30A Cats and Local Veterinarians Launch Pilot Spay and Neuter Program

Are you a Walton County resident with a cat that needs to be spayed or neutered? 30A Cats, in conjunction with local veterinarians, is proud to announce a new pilot program offering residents up to two (2) vouchers to fix

their cats for free at participating veterinarians. This initiative has been approved by the county to help reduce cat overpopulation by spaying and neutering your pet cats.

How does it work? To learn

more about this voucher program and to sign up, residents simply go to 30Acats.com/voucher.

On the website residents can learn more about this program and easily sign up for a voucher.

Each approved voucher covers the full cost spay/neuter surgery, including a rabies vaccine, FVRCP vaccine, and a microchip. As part of the program, cats receive a left ear notch, a standard and humane way to in-

dicate they have been spayed or neutered. If you have additional questions about this initiative, click "contact" on the website and a volunteer from 30A Cats will be in touch.

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MAY HAPPENINGS IN SOUTH WALTON

SoWal Upcoming Events May 2026

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.

Village of Baytowne Wharf Family Fun

Scallywag Sundays: Watch as featured pirate Captain Davy



takes you on an adventure with two magic shows on stage at 7 and 8 p.m. Movie Mondays: A free to attend event, grab a lawn chair or blanket and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film on the big screen at 8 p.m. Boomin' Tuesdays: Baytowne lights up the night with fireworks over the

lagoon at 9:15 p.m. Before the show, enjoy a dance party starting at 7:15 p.m. with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza. Thursdaze Lights Show: Experience a unique aerial display that blends technology and coastal charm at Thursdays 9 p.m.

ECTC Children's Theater at Seaside Mondays

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

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

Huck & Lilly @ Seaside Amphitheatre Tuesdays and Thursdays

Huck & Lilly will perform LIVE in the Seaside Amphitheater Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5-5:45 p.m. Bring a chair or blanket, snacks and drinks, and enjoy the show. Free and open to all ages. Singer/songwriters Ken Johnson and Andi Zack-Johnson, as Huck and Lilly, specialize in music for kids AND the grown-ups who love them!

Bark for Books at Coastal Branch Library Wednesdays

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

Paper Bear Screening at Seaside May 15 & 24, June 7

The Paper Bear invites the community on a heartfelt journey into the forests and coastal wilds of Northwest Florida at 7:30 p.m. Blending live-action storytelling with hand-drawn animation, the film follows a father and son as they venture into the woods to document real Florida black bears, sharing campfire stories, local history, and the magic of the natural world along the way. Visit thepaperbear.org.

Defuniak Springs LakeFest May 15-16

This annual event is loaded with activities the whole family will love on the water and banks of beautiful Lake DeFuniak, one of the world's rare, naturally round spring-fed lakes. Enjoy a fish fry, kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, toy duck hunts, hilarious Cardboard Boat Races, and the thrill of watching hydro-flight ath-

letes performing for the crowds! There will be live entertainment, waterslides, a dunking booth, and many other activities in the Kids Zone, a variety of food and merchandise vendors, educational vendors, and exhibits, and the 2026 LakeFest Car Show "Under the Oaks" sponsored by Krewe de Yak. More details at www.defuniaksprings.net/1101/LakeFest.

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.

Guided Plant Tour at Topsail State Park May 18

Join Topsail Hill Preserve State Park and Master Gardener Bill Kuenstler on the third Monday of each month from 9-11 a.m. for a Guided Plant Stroll. The stroll begins at Tram Stop #2. This program is free with regular park admission.

continued on next page

ECTC Comedy on the Boulevard May 22

Emerald Coast Theatre Company invites you to Comedy on the Boulevard on the Cabaret Stage at 7 p.m. Come for an uproarious night of laughs. This hysterical event will be hosted by Jason Hedden. Purchase tickets: www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events.

Comedy Night at Alaqua May 23

Alaqua Animal Refuge invites you to join them for an evening of music, comedy, and community at Angel's Arena at Alaqua Animal Refuge! Gates open at 4:30 p.m. Kick off the night with live music from the Black Creek String Band, then get ready to laugh with nationally touring comedian Darren Knight, aka Southern Momma, and enjoy the fun, food trucks, and drinks—all while supporting animals in need. More details at alaqua.org/events.

continued on next page

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21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction Raises \$4 million for Children in Need

The Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) is pleased to announce that the 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family raised a record-breaking \$4 million for children in need in Northwest Florida. The amount raised is a \$550,000 increase over the previous year and the most ever raised at an auction in DCWAF history.

Hosted April 24 and 25 to a sold-out crowd of more than 600 guests, proceeds from the auction benefit DCWAF's 16 partner children's charities in Northwest Florida. This year's auction marks 21 years of giving to children in need in Northwest Florida.

"This historic year for Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation is a powerful reflection of what happens when generosity and purpose come together. Surpassing \$4 million is more than a record—it represents real, life-changing impact for children across Northwest Florida," said DCWAF President, Karah Young. "The energy in the room was undeniable, highlighted by our highest-ever single lot sale at an unprecedented \$400,000—an extraordinary moment that speaks to the passion, generosity, and unwavering commitment of our supporters. We are incredibly grateful to our patrons, vintners,

sponsors, and partners who continue to make this mission possible year after year."

The auction weekend began Friday, April 25 with 11 patron dinners hosted in private homes and restaurants spanning from Pensacola to Alys Beach that collectively raised an astounding \$860,000. The live auction kicked off on Saturday, April 25 with DCWAF's flagship Magnum Force lot featuring 50 magnums from vintners past and present that raised \$55,000. The highest single-selling lot of the night



Photo credit:
Kiara Watson Photography

Honorary Vintner. Fourmeaux generously donated two live lots, an immersive stay in Napa Valley guided by Napa's most famous French wine families and the only full piano of 2019 Piece de Resistance Cabernet Sauvignon in existence, that sold for a total of \$98,000.

The funds raised at the 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine

Auction presented by the Jumonville Family will be distributed to 16 local non-profit organizations for specific projects and programs that benefit children. DCWAF's charity partners for 2026 are Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children's Home Society of Florida, Children in Crisis Inc., Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison McCraney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, Mental Health Association of Okaloosa and Walton Counties, Northwest Florida Guardian ad Litem, Opportunity Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Westonwood Ranch, and Youth Village.

The date for next year's 22nd Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction weekend is April 23-24, 2027. For more information on the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation, visit www.DCWAF.org.



was a nine-night, fully guided trip to Italy, generously donated by Marilisa Allegrini, that sold for an unprecedented \$400,000.

Two other auction lots sold for over \$100,000, marking the first time in DCWAF history that three, single-selling lots sold for

six figures. An all-inclusive, four-night, chartered yacht excursion in the BVIs with private air passage sold for \$150,000, and a seven-night stay in Virgin Gorda sold for \$100,000.

DCWAF celebrated longtime friend and supporter Jean-Noël Fourmeaux of VGS Chateau Potelle as the 21st Annual Auction's

trucks, bounce houses, The Reptile Room, animal chats with wildlife ambassadors, raffles and more from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. It's the perfect way to celebrate the start of summer while connecting with nature and wildlife. Bring the whole family and spend the day exploring, learning, and having fun. More details at www.eowilsoncenter.org/events.

Baytowne Memorial Day Celebration May 23-24

Kick off your summer during Sandestin's Memorial Day Celebration at The Village of Baytowne Wharf. Enjoy LIVE music all weekend. On Sunday, enjoy activities for the kids and a fireworks show at 9 p.m.

Biophilia Center Summer Kickoff May 30

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the following month's issue.

 Community

The Menopause Conversation Every Woman Needs (But Rarely Gets)

BY DR. KAREN DEVORE,
TORTOISE CLINIC

What if I told you there would be a period in your life, one that could last up to 10 years, that would fundamentally shift how your body feels and functions?

Imagine a season marked by persistent fatigue, disrupted sleep, weight gain that no longer responds the way it once did, and emotional shifts that feel unfamiliar. And that you would be expected to carry all of this while maintaining a career, sup-

porting a family, and showing up for your community. For many women, this isn't theoretical. It is the reality of perimenopause and menopause.

For years, this transition was rarely discussed openly. That is changing, as it should. Many

women are still navigating this blindly without understanding what is happening, what to expect, or what options they have to support themselves.

This is a natural progression, but it is not always easy, and most women are never taught how to navigate it. With the right understanding and guidance, this phase can shift from something reactive and uncertain to something far more stable and intentional.

Here's what I would share with every woman, regardless of where she is in her transition:

Build Your Team

You do not have to navigate this phase alone. When you understand what is happening in your body, your decisions, and your outcomes, improve. Your health deserves the same level of support as every other area of your life.

Build a team that will explore this transition with you—one that listens, collaborates, and individualizes your care. The right support shifts this experience from reactive to intentional.

Explore Your Options

Menopause is not a uniform experience, and your care should not be either.

Support may include nutrition and lifestyle changes, targeted supplementation, hormone therapy when appropriate, and restorative therapies. The goal is not to push through symptoms. It is to understand them and respond appropriately. If something feels off, it is worth addressing.

Rethink How You Fuel Your Body

Hormonal shifts increase sensitivity to blood sugar fluctuations, driving energy instability, cravings, weight gain, and brain fog.

Focus on stability: prioritize protein and hydration, include healthy fats and limit highly processed carbohydrates. When blood sugar is stable, energy, mood, and metabolic function follow.



Build Strength—Not Just Endurance

Muscle becomes increasingly important during this phase of life. Hormonal changes contribute to muscle loss, reduced bone density, and slower metabolic function. Resistance training

is one of the most effective ways to counter this.

Build up to strength training 2–4 times per week. This not only preserves muscle, but it places necessary stress on long bones, helping maintain bone density and reduce the risk and progression of osteoporosis.

Address Sleep Directly

Sleep disruption is common and often one of the most impactful symptoms. Difficulty falling asleep, waking during the night, and non-restorative sleep affect everything from mood to metabolism. Support sleep with a consistent routine, a cool, dark environment, and mindful use of caffeine and alcohol.

For some women, declining progesterone may contribute to sleep disruption. In those cases, targeted support, including progesterone when clinically appropriate, can help restore more consistent, restful sleep. Quality sleep is a cornerstone of hormonal and cognitive health.

Support Your Nervous System

This transition affects both hormones and the brain. Increased anxiety, irritability, and emotional variability reflect real neurological shifts. Daily regulation, through movement, time outdoors, breathwork, or meaningful connection, supports resilience and emotional stability.

These are not luxuries. They are essential tools for navigating this phase well.

Menopause is not the end of your vitality. It is a significant physiological transition that deserves attention and support, not dismissal. These changes are not random. They are signals.

When you understand what your body is doing and respond accordingly, you move through this phase with greater stability, clarity, and long-term health in mind.



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Medicare: 6 Quick Tips



BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

If this title got your attention, I highly recommend you read each of these tips below. Your medical care coverage is extremely important to understand in order to both save you money and take care of your health. Here are 6 important tips:

Know Your Coverage:

This sounds basic but it can be tricky. This is because Medicare is divided into several parts: Part A covers hospital stays, Part B covers medical services, Part C combines Parts A and B (known as Medicare Advantage), and Part D provides prescription drug coverage. Supplement plans are an alternative to part C for a higher premium. They are widely accepted and will cover many or most of the out of pocket costs when using Parts A and B. If you choose an Advantage Plan, be sure to keep track of the services and treatments covered under your plan to ensure you make the most of your benefits. This is easy to do, you just may need to learn how. We are here to help.

Know Your Costs:

Medicare part A has no premium. The part B premium just increased to \$202.90 for 2026. If you buy a supplement plan, you pay an extra premium to know that when you need coverage you will have many options for care and low out of pocket expenses. However, you are paying a guaranteed \$500-\$3.5K extra each year in premiums for this peace of mind. You will also need to add a Prescription Drug Plan, which can be an additional premium. However, another major advantage is that you don't have to worry about an insurance carrier denying a claim. You are still on Original Medicare with the government, and they are not known to deny claims from your doctor.

Those that choose an Advantage plan may have \$0 or low premiums, but need to understand their deductibles, copayments, coinsurance, and of course max out of pocket expenses. Many HMO plans have become available that will give back a portion of the Part B premium. These are known as "Giveback Plans" This can result in some significant savings..

Know Your Network:

I honestly can't emphasize this part enough. When it comes to Advantage plans, don't be fooled into switching plans without first reviewing the network of care providers. Knowing which doctors, specialists, hospitals, and pharmacies are in-network can significantly impact your out-of-

pocket expenses, as well as how often you will use their services. If you decide to change Medicare Advantage plans, be sure you are comfortable with the network of providers and prescription drugs that will be covered under your new plan. Most providers accept Original Medicare. If you decide on a Supplement Plan you just need to make sure the provider accepts Medicare.

Know the Benefits:

Each Medicare plan offers different benefits beyond basic coverage. Some plans (Medicare Advantage) include additional perks like dental, vision, hearing, fitness programs, and even transportation services. Understanding these extra benefits can

significantly enhance your overall healthcare experience. For instance: Part B Giveback, OTC Allowance, and access to specific wellness programs or health services tailored to the community are all extra perks worth knowing about. Take advantage of these offerings to optimize your Medicare plan.

Know Your Enrollment Dates and Your Local Independent Broker:

Your Initial Enrollment Period begins three months prior the month you turn 65. You have up to three months after you turn 65 to enroll without any penalties. Annual Enrollment Period for changing PDPs

and Medicare Advantage plans is October 15 to December 7 each year. The Open Enrollment Period for Medicare Advantage to do a one time change is January 1 through March 31 each year. However, there are also many other opportunities to change plans with a Special Enrollment Period(SEP). It's always good to check with your broker to see if you qualify for an SEP if you need to change plans for any reason.

A knowledgeable independent broker can provide personalized guidance, answer your questions, and help you explore

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How to Stop Cheating Before it Starts

By JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PhD

You may have heard the adage “cheating is a symptom of relationship problems, not the cause of it”. With notable exceptions for certain pathologies, this statement is generally accurate.

So, the time to protect your relationship from an affair is long before your partner feels the need to seek attention or support outside your relationship.

Current research shows that between 20 and 26 percent of married men cheat and between 10 and 19 percent of married women cheat. These numbers have remained consistent over the last twenty years.

The difference now is that relationship partners have a lower tolerance for cheating because attitudes about marriage have changed. As more women earned higher education and entered the workforce, married couples began looking for their spouse to be their best friend, confidante, parenting partner, homemaking partner, wage-earning partner, AND an amazing lover.

This is a lot to ask of one person. Even strong marriage partnerships can cascade down-

ward to a betrayal if the couple is not vigilant about turning toward each other in response to daily bids for connection and, especially, when repairing their relationship after regrettable incidents.

Couples who successfully protect their relationship from an affair understand how to bolster trust to prevent a betrayal. Trust is built on a solid, reciprocal foundation of predictability, dependability, and faith – the three building blocks of trust. When trust is fully present in a relationship, partners perceive that they will behave in a consistently positive manner toward each other, that they will be reliable when it counts, and that they will continue to be responsive and caring to each other, which includes “turning toward” each other’s bids for attention AND not doing things that they know will hurt the other’s feelings.

Happily married couples expect each other to work on maintaining relationship trust. However, they also accept that they will let each other down from time to time. When these regrettable incidents happen, happily

married couples “turn toward” each other and work together to repair the damage. This repair work involves fully processing the negative event and the feelings around it. As such, it lets the couple move past the incident, close their discussion about it, rebuild trust, and remain close.

Couples who “turn away” from each other after a regrettable incident don’t fare as well. Instead of showing empathy, regret, and forgiveness, couples who turn away from each other place blame, become defensive, and hold a grudge. As a result, the regrettable incident becomes an open sore between them and festers. This creates negative feelings that infect the couple’s reactions to other issues, and leads to flooded arguments, contempt, and “turning against”.

Sometimes the “turning away” is less obvious and involves simply avoiding any discussion of the incident. Avoiding discussion of important negative incidents may initially seem to keep the peace, but soon the unprocessed negative feelings coalesce into either (a) surprisingly negative reactions to other unrelated issues

or (b) avoidance of other issues, and eventually avoidance of the other partner, intimacy decay, and loneliness.

Both types of “turning away” lead to relationship decline, create emotional distance within the relationship, and serve to justify the conclusion by one or both people that the other is “not there for me”. This often prompts people to begin comparing their partner to real or imagined alternatives and asking, “Would I be happier with someone else?”

And here is where the cascade from unrepaired broken trust to outright betrayal often begins.

It’s a long path from “turning away” from your partner when regrettable incidents occur to actively “turning toward” others to have your needs met or to find what is now missing from your relationship. Nonetheless, the tumble to real betrayal begins when couples fail to “turn toward” each other, especially in the aftermath of a regrettable incident, large or small.

Turning toward each other to meet each other’s daily attempts to connect and especially after a regrettable incident, establishes

trust and allows couples to remain close. So, then, they either never ask the question, “Would I be happier with someone else?” Or if they do, the answer is a resounding “no way”.

If you and your partner have let each other down and need to repair the trust in your relationship, summon the courage to turn toward each other and process your negative feelings with all the honesty, empathy, regret, and forgiveness required to truly put the incident behind you. Take action to stop cheating before it starts.

Let me know if I can help.

Jamie C. Williamson, PhD is a FL Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and member of the Gottman Referral Network, with a Certificate in the Science of Wellbeing and Happiness from the Harvard School of Medicine. She is an owner and partner at Amity Mediation Workshop, a mediation practice specializing in “friendly divorce” mediation and psycho-educational couples counseling. Dr. Jamie speaks frequently on relationship topics and authors the blog “Work it Out.” You can find her online at amitymediationworkshop.com.

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MEDICARE

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I hope you learned something here, but I’m sure you still have plenty of questions. Not to worry, we are just a phone call or email away to help. Reach out anytime!

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Editor & Publisher

Dave White
dave@southwalton.life
editor@southwalton.life

Production & Layout

Dawna Shackley
graphics@southwalton.life

Advertising Department

850-399-0228

Advertising Manager

850 797-3546
sales@southwalton.life

Contributing Writers

Heather Bennett
850-399-0228

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The Body, Mind, Spirit Connection



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

Do you ever find yourself feeling a bit off and you can't figure out why? Maybe you've had seasons of trying to heal and feel better using different means. You might feel anxious and go to the doctor only to be told you check out fine and they recommend going to counseling. Other times, you may have gone to counseling trying to resolve feeling low energy to be told you should try going to the doctor and get your blood work checked. Maybe you've prayed and gone to speak to a pastor about emotional pain and while that was helpful, they recommended you get some additional counseling.

It can become confusing trying to sort out the origin of issues you are having and where exactly to go for help. For a long time, humans were encouraged to view their bodies, minds, and spirits as separate without much overlap. If medical professionals didn't find a medical explanation, people were sometimes told "it's all in your head." As more research emerged, doctors started encouraging people to get mental health support to

supplement medical help. For years, people went to counselors talking about problems believing that their mind and their physical experience were two completely separate things. As more research emerged, counselors began understanding the connection between emotions and how feelings are stored and experienced physically in the body. More therapists are now incorporating physical body exercises along with talk therapy with improved results. For many years, some churches discouraged people from trusting mental health support outside the church. Now, many churches encourage church members toward counseling alongside spiritual discipleship.

While it is complicated to sort and determine the next steps in pursuit of healing, what we are all learning is that the body, mind and spirit are deeply connected. You don't have to choose only one pathway of growing and healing. You can choose to address all three areas with a greater chance of feeling more healed and whole. So, what does it look like to embrace the body, mind, spirit connection in day to day life?

6 Ways to Embrace the Body, Mind, Spirit Connection

1. Evaluate historical messages. Notice messages you may be carrying from childhood or other times in life that make it hard for you to give credibility to your experiences in your body, mind, or spirit. Were you told that you shouldn't believe

in counseling? Was faith modeled for you in harmful ways that create current confusion? Were you encouraged to ignore or skip what your physical body is trying to signal to you?

2. Get support to decide what you believe now. While historical messages can be powerful, you have the option to decide what you want to believe in the here and now. Try doing your own research to develop beliefs about how you want to seek mental or medical support. Try talking to a spiritual mentor about spiritual struggles. Do the work to unblock what might be blocked related to how you grew up.

3. Notice. Start intentionally noticing the connection between what you think, how you feel, what sensations you are having in your body, and how your faith experience is shaping you. All of these work best when you are open to noticing how they work together.

4. Try using body, mind, and spirit together to process life experiences. For example, notice that you are feeling angry and stressed. Notice the physical signs such as tension in your body and exhaustion. Notice the irritable thoughts and feelings. Notice how your anger and stress are related to your relationship with

God and how you are living out your faith.

5. Try engaging spirit, mind and body to address feeling better. Try talking openly with God and people in your spiritual community about your struggles. Engage spiritual disciplines to support yourself. Ask for help surrendering spiritually. Seek counseling to understand how historical messages, boundaries, and your internal thoughts might be impacting your stress and anger. Try a stretching class, breathing exercises or other physical activities to engage your body in releasing anger and stress. Each of these can be helpful, however, all of them together work most effectively.

tively.

6. Practice and repeat. Use reminders in your phone and post it notes to notice how mind, spirit, and body are deeply connected and all important parts of how you were created to be a person. Your brain rewires through repetition. The more you connect all three areas in your daily awareness, the more you will notice naturally how they are each at play every day.

Be curious and kind toward yourself as you ponder and practice the body, mind, spirit connection. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com along your journey for counseling and coaching support.





Stephenie Craig, LCSW
Therapist
918-221-9987 | stepheniecraig@journeybravely.com

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Wellness

Hormone Therapy for Stronger Bones



DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You're taking care of all of it — work, home, children or grandchildren, spouses, parents, your boss/clients/students/patients. Mother's Day is for the flowers, but every day you show

up — lifting groceries, carrying kids, steadying loved ones — you're asking a lot from your bones. This Women's Health Week (May 10-16), let's celebrate all women (the nurturers, the bosses, and everyone in between) by protecting those quiet workhorses. At The Hormone Restoration Center, we use bio-identical pellets as our method of hormone therapy — here's how pellets can help keep your bones strong.

Why Pellets — And Why Hormones — Matter

Estrogen slows the breakdown of old bone and supports new bone formation. When estrogen drops around perimenopause



and menopause, bone loss can speed up, making fractures more likely over time. Testosterone and progesterone help too, by supporting muscle and balance so you're less likely to fall. Pellet therapy delivers bio-identical hormones under the skin in a slow, steady stream — avoiding daily highs and lows — and gives consistent support that helps preserve bone.

How Pellet Therapy Helps Bones

By keeping hormone levels steady, pellets can slow or

even reverse bone loss for many women, especially when started near the time of menopause. Over time, the benefits of pellet therapy reveal themselves as improved bone density and, importantly, a lower risk of fractures. Pellets often also ease hot flashes and improve sleep and energy — benefits that help with strength and fall prevention.

What The Pellet Process Looks Like

Consultation: We review your health, family fracture history, lifestyle, and order baseline labs.

Placement: A brief in-office procedure places small, sterile pellets under the skin. Minimal downtime and a small dressing afterward.

Steady delivery: Pellets release hormones continuously for about 3–6 months, depending on dose and metabolism. No daily dosing to remember.

Follow-up: We monitor symptoms and labs, adjust dosing as needed.

What To Expect

You won't "feel" bones strengthening day-to-day, but many patients notice fewer menopausal symptoms, better sleep, and steadier energy within weeks.

Pellets are one tool in a practical plan: individualized HRT when appropriate, adequate calcium and vitamin D, resistance and balance exercise, fall-proofing your home, and regular bone checks.

You carry everyone else — let's help your skeleton keep up. If bone health is on your mind, call The Hormone Restoration Center. We'll review your history, run the right tests, and build a personalized pellet plan so you can keep lifting, hugging, and showing up for the people who matter most. Call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation.

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Still in This Together: What Marriage Counseling Really Looks Like and Why It Works

Every relationship goes through hard seasons. The couples who come out stronger are usually the ones willing to ask for help.



BY MICHAEL McMANUS, LCSW | PSYCHOTHERAPY 30A | SANTA ROSA BEACH, FLORIDA

In nearly four decades of sitting with couples in my office, I have yet to meet two people who stopped caring about each other overnight. What I do see, again and again, is two people who have been hurt, who have grown tired, and who have quietly stopped reaching for one another because they are not sure the reach will be met. That is usually

what brings a couple through my door. Not hatred. Exhaustion.

People come to marriage counseling for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes there has been a betrayal of trust and they are trying to figure out whether the relationship can survive it. Sometimes the arguing has become so predictable and so painful that they have just stopped talking altogether. Sometimes life has simply gotten in the way. A new baby, a career change, aging parents, financial pressure. The intimacy fades gradually and one day they look at each other across the dinner table and realize they feel like strangers. Whatever brings a couple in, I have rarely met one that could not benefit from the work.

A lot of people are nervous about starting. They worry that therapy will become a place where old wounds get reopened,

or that the therapist will take sides, or that talking about their problems will only make things worse. In my experience, the opposite tends to be true. What happens in a good couples session is that two people begin to actually hear each other, often for the first time in years. Not just the words, but what is underneath them. The hurt, the longing, the fear of being left or unloved. When that kind of understanding starts to happen, something shifts.

The practical side of the work matters too. Couples learn concrete ways to communicate that do not escalate into fights. They learn how to recognize when

a conversation is starting to go sideways and how to slow it down before real damage is done. They work on rebuilding trust, on rekindling physical and emotional closeness, and on getting back on the same team when it comes to parenting, finances, and everything else that life throws at a marriage.

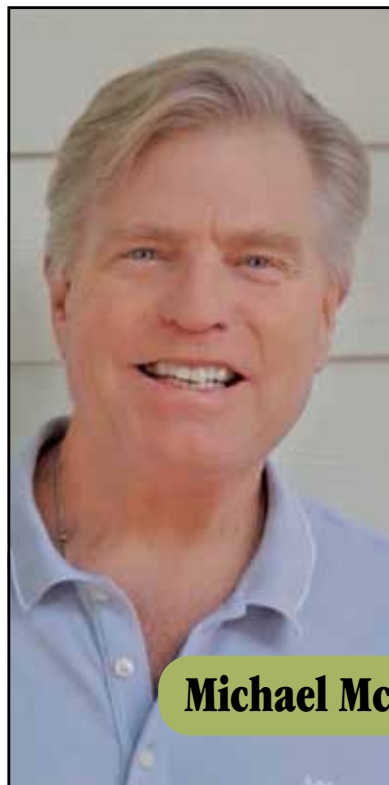
Research tells us that more than seventy percent of couples who commit to the process see real improvement. In my own practice, I would say that number feels about right, and I would add that the couples who do the best are almost always the ones who came in before things got

truly desperate. Most people wait far too long. If something feels off in your relationship right now, that feeling is worth paying attention to. You do not have to wait until you are standing at the edge before asking for help. The door to my office is open.

To learn more, contact Psychotherapy 30A by phone at (850) 837-0123 or visit their website, psychotherapy30a.com.

Michael McManus, LCSW is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice along the 30A/South Walton corridor with nearly 40 years of clinical experience. He works with individuals, couples, and offers concierge in-home therapy.

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Wellness

May is Melanoma Awareness Month

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











Every year, the month of May is recognized as Melanoma Awareness Month, a time dedicated to educating the public about melanoma, a serious form of skin cancer. Melanoma develops from melanocytes, the pigment-producing cells in the skin, and although it accounts for a smaller percentage of skin cancer cases, it causes the majority of skin cancer-related deaths. Increased awareness, early detection, and preventive measures can significantly reduce the impact of this disease.

Annual skin cancer screenings are essential for prevention and early detection. When detected and treated early (Stage 0-I), the five-year survival rate is very high, often around 99%.

There are also pre-cancerous moles that can be detected and treated before evolving into a melanoma skin cancer. During a skin cancer screening and when doing self-exams at home, you should be looking out for the ABCDEs of melanoma.

- A – Asymmetry: one half of the mole does not match the other
- B – Border: edges are irregular, scalloped, or poorly defined
- C – Color: uneven colors such as shades of brown, black, red, or white.
- D – Diameter: greater than about 6 mm, which is about the size of a pencil eraser
- E – Evolving: any change in size, shape, color, or symptoms

Other signs and symptoms include moles or growths that itch, bleed, or hurt. A mole that stands out from the rest of your moles

	Benign		Malignant	
Symmetrical		A Asymmetry		Assymetrical (the two sides do no match)
Borders are even		B Border		Borders are uneven
One color		C Color		Two or more colors
Smaller than 6 mm (1/4 inch)		D Diameter		Larger than 6 mm (1/4 inch)
Ordinary mole		E Evolution		Changing in size, shape, color, or another trait

and a mole that changes quickly.

Prevention and protection against melanoma also include sun protection and decreased UV exposure. This includes wearing an SPF 30 or higher sunscreen, avoiding peak hours of sunlight, and wearing sun protective cloth-

ing.

Melanoma Awareness Month serves as a reminder that protecting our skin is an important part of overall health. By practicing sun safety, checking our skin for changes, and seeking medical evaluation when concerns arise,

we can help reduce the burden of melanoma and improve outcomes for those affected. Awareness and prevention remain powerful tools in the fight against skin cancer.



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Bridget Sullivan, PA-C

Advanced Veterinary Specialty Hospital with CT, MRI, Oncology, and More Planned for West Florida

Capital Veterinary Specialists celebrated the groundbreaking of its modern new specialty veterinary hospital in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, on March 6, marking a major expansion of advanced specialty and emergency animal care in Northwest Florida.

The future 20,000-square-foot facility will anchor a 7-acre medical campus, with a possible additional 7 acres reserved for future expansion. This project is expected to create approximately 100 jobs and serve pet owners across the Florida panhandle and neighboring regions who previously traveled long distances for specialty care.

Once complete, the hospital will be the only specialty veterinary facility of its kind within nearly 300 miles, dramatically improving access to advanced treatment for companion animals and supporting a rapidly growing regional population.

“For too long, families in this region have had to travel hours during medical emergencies to access advanced care for their pets. What Capital Veterinary Specialists are doing with this new facility changes that reality and brings life-saving treatment closer to home,” says Stephen Favaloro, DVM, of Forest Park Animal Hospital, in Panama City, Florida.

Designed to deliver academic-level veterinary medicine in a community setting, the hospital will feature advanced diagnostic capabilities, including CT and MRI, comprehensive specialty services, and emergency response capabilities supported by a helipad, making it one of the most advanced animal healthcare facilities in the region.



“This groundbreaking represents our long-term commitment to expanding access to life-saving specialty care in an underserved region of Florida,” said Kevin Drygas, DVM, DACVS, owner and lead surgeon. “For years, pet owners in this area have traveled hours for advanced treatment. This facility will bring world-class veterinary medicine closer to home and transform how emergency and specialty care is delivered across Florida’s panhandle.”

A Decade of Regional Investment

While the new hospital marks a major milestone, Capital Veterinary Specialists has served the Santa Rosa Beach area for nearly a decade to meet growing community needs.

2016: The practice began seeing referred cases from the Santa Rosa Beach area and launched a dedicated transport service to its Tallahassee hospital due to increasing demand.

2019: Capital Veterinary Specialists established a satellite clinic, providing specialty services in the Santa Rosa Beach corridor.

2023: The practice expanded to offer full-time dermatology services locally while continuing its regional transport program through its referral network.

2026: Capital Veterinary Specialists also opened an urgent care hospital in Santa Rosa Beach to support immediate and emergency needs for pets in the community.

Leadership says the new campus represents the natural evolution of years of growing demand for advanced veterinary medicine and rapid regional growth.

“This investment reflects both the rapid growth of the Florida panhandle and its increasing expectations for advanced animal healthcare,” said Dr. Drygas. “We are building a destination for specialty veterinary medicine that supports local families,

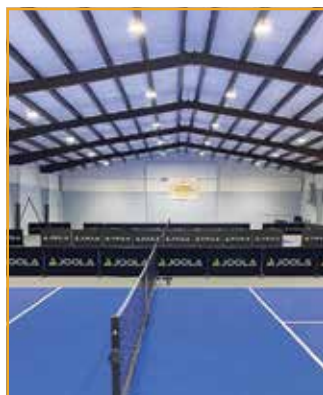
referring veterinarians, and the regional economy while positioning Santa Rosa Beach as a hub for advanced university-level veterinary care.”

This facility will enhance emergency response capabilities, strengthen the regional veterinary referral network, and provide expanded specialty services for companion animals across multiple counties in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.

Construction is expected to begin immediately following the groundbreaking ceremony, and the hospital is set to open in early 2027.

About Capital Veterinary Specialists

Capital Veterinary Specialists is a leading provider of specialty and emergency veterinary care serving North Florida and surrounding regions. Through advanced diagnostics, specialty treatment services, and a collaborative referral network, CVS delivers comprehensive medical care for companion animals while supporting veterinarians and pet owners with innovative treatment solutions.



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 Musing

Changing Course



By KIRK MCCARLEY

We've heard the saying, "The epitome of idiocy is repeating the same pattern over and over and expecting a different result."

Probably most of us have faced a harsh personal or professional junction to a greater or lesser degree. The medical doctor who

comes to the realization that they really disdain medicine. The well compensated, yet frustrated accountant with a suppressed and creative talent in art. The family attending a church that just "doesn't work for them," yet who continue attending because their departure would "upset others."

How do you know when you've reached a crossroads? We've heard it expressed in a variety of ways:

"If I can just make it in this miserable job eight more years I can retire." *Eight years is almost 3,000 days of misery.*

"I can't keep good staff and the

ones who stay don't know how to work." *Might you be the problem, boss?*

"I'm constantly being interrupted to the point I can't get anything done." *What kind of boundaries have you established?*

What is the pain point for you? How do you make the decision to alter course? How are you able to change your way of thinking? Where do you muster up the courage? There's got to be something better: how do you get off the hamster wheel?

Canadian born and raised, as a young man he accepted an acting scholarship and moved to New York City. During the first 30 years of his career, he had roles not only in Broadway Theatre, but in television and several successful big screen ventures including "Forbidden Planet" and later "The Poseidon Adventure".

It was not until 1980 when he was 54 years old that his performing career shifted course. A new comedy movie "Airplane!" a spoof following the 70's craze of "disaster" productions, cast Leslie Nielsen in the role of Dr. Rumack. His deadpan delivery was the perfect complement to the movie's chaotic absurdity rebranding the veteran player as a comedy actor. What was a reasonably successful career rocketed to an entirely new level.

Following the success of "Airplane!," Nielsen went on to star in the TV series, "Police Squad," which spawned "The Naked Gun" movie franchise for which he found greatest acclaim.

The St. Louis Cardinals are a storied major league baseball franchise. Following a dearth of down seasons between 1988 and 1999, the Cardinals posted their best record in 13 years by going 95-67 in 2000 and winning their division in the National League. A key ingredient to their success was 21-year-old rookie pitcher, Rick Ankiel, who started 30 games for the Redbirds and was arguably their most consistent starter in the regular season.

Heading into the post season, St. Louis was optimistic about playoff prospects.

What happened to Ankiel in those playoffs was tragic. Suddenly unable to locate the strike zone with wildly erratic pitches, the southpaw was mercifully re-

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CHANGING COURSE

continued to page 35

Sean of the South: Enough



BY SEAN DIETRICH

What if I told you that you are enough?

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

Do you love yourself? Let's find out.

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

find a reason to judge you?

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

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

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

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

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

Maybe you don't like where



you are in your career. What a freaking disappointment you are. You should've been MUCH further along in your field by now. Instead, you're just a supporting actor in someone else's made-for-TV drama.

Maybe you don't feel smart enough. Maybe you are socially anxious. Maybe you think you're too much of an introvert. You're a classic procrastinator. You feel invisible. You hate your hair. You wish you were prettier. Skinnier. Funnier. Happier.

Either way, your inner critic is always screaming, "You're not

enough!" You've tried to shut up this blowhard for years. But it doesn't work. The inner critic just keeps talking smack.

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

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

You dislike the real you. And thus, you've formed a persona to hide the real you. And hopefully, everyone will like this persona because, God knows, you work really hard building it. You built this persona because the real you is not worthy. The real you just isn't enough.

But...

What if I told you that you don't have to feel this way anymore? What if I told you that you ARE enough? What if I said that you are so insanely beautiful as a human being, just the way you are in this moment. Moreover, what if I am not prodigiously and majestically full of bovine ordure?

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

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

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

CHANGING COURSE

continued from page 34

lived from several post season contests.

The following year and for several seasons after that, Ankiel sought to recover his mound prowess and for the most part staggered through upsets, injuries, and general mediocrity.

Frustrated and disappointed, yet resolute, Ankiel made the decision to transition from pitching into becoming an everyday player.

Such a move in baseball is unprecedented: the most renowned ballplayer to that time who executed that type of conversion was Babe Ruth and he was well...Babe Ruth!

What Rick Ankiel accomplished the next few seasons as a Cardinal and later with several other franchises is considered legendary. He was a superb outfielder, fielding well and throwing out baserunners foolish enough to challenge his pitching strengthened left arm. He banded out 76 home runs, becoming the only

ballplayer besides Ruth to have won ten games pitching and hit at least 70 homers. That duo's achievements are now shared with likely future hall of famer Shohei Ohtani.

Both Leslie Nielsen and Rick Ankiel seized different paths.

Near the end of our days on earth, a common regret is of choices not made. Why didn't I take that opportunity?

Do you need to change course? What is holding you back? Conquer regret. Unbury your passion. What's your epilogue?



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Musing

Zoran Subotich: Entertaining People with Music and Serving the Lord



BY RICH SANDERS

Zoran Subotich, a popular entrepreneur in the wedding and event scene on the Emerald Coast, came here for the first time nearly forty years ago like so many other folks: on vacation!

Before he could come to Destin from the Midwest in his twenties, however, Zoran had to get to America. He was raised by his grandparents in the former nation of Yugoslavia, which was behind the “Iron Curtain” of the Soviet Union at that time and very much a Communist country. Zoran recalls: “All of these things were government funded, and it was mostly gov-

ernment operated. So most businesses were factories and things like that. There were very few independent business owners. In order to succeed, in order to have your dream become a reality, you would have to move to another country that offered more of a different structure... to have your own business and to be a capitalist... you have to move. And that's exactly what my father did!”

Once his father, who worked with his brother in Chicago, made enough to get everyone to America, Zoran and his grandparents moved to the Windy City and joined a thriving community of people from Yugoslavia.

Although Zoran loved his time in Chicago, everything changed when he got to the Emerald Coast: Locals get it! He began working manual day jobs but got his big break when an AM radio station manager offered him the graveyard shift.

Once Zoran started to deejay, he was hooked and eventually landed at 102.1 The Wave.

It wasn't long before Zoran started hosting beach wedding events, and now he owns a company called Celebrations by the Sea that hosts dozens of weddings each year! Zoran describes his business as a “one-stop shop” for couples who want to get married on the Emerald Coast, and he serves as the coordinator, planner, director and emcee. Some couples even check his availability before they book a date for the wedding!

Through the Hope and Restoration Tour, which Zoran founded in 2022, he offers free concerts featuring Christian praise music (including reggae, blues, rap and hip hop). Zoran's focus through the Tour is spreading messages of inspiration, aspiration, and optimism to the disheartened. He describes himself as an “Undercover Agent for the Most High God!”



Zoran brings his faith into the workplace everyday: “The light of God, that's always my wish, is that they will see the light of the Father through me, through my words, through my actions, through my demeanor, to the works of these hands.” That includes support for various charities like the Tim Tebow

Foundation and the Hope Squad to help him find “treasure in Heaven.”

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

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Fog



BY REV. PETE HYDE

The night was crystal clear when they crawled into the tent and slipped into sleeping bags for the night. The campfire had burned down to a mound of glowing red embers. The last of a marshmallow sizzled on a rock next to the fire. Graham cracker and chocolate bar wrappers were now ghostly, ashen

forms in the fire pit. They took one last look at the night sky to see the lights of the heavens beyond number. The milky way stretched from one corner of the sky to another. A shooting star scooted across the sky as a "good night" salutation.

They awoke to an eerily quiet, cold morning. They dressed and opened the tent. The area was cloaked in thick, gray fog. Visibility was only a few yards. Moisture had covered the landscape with an even coating of silvery dew. The fire now lay in a heap of ashes, but warmth of live coals underneath could be felt on the palm of a hand set close to the fire. The marshmallow had dried to a hard pile of baked sugar on the rock next to the fire. A few sticks of kin-

dling had the fire blazing while the smoke added its fragrant statement to the foggy morning. Bacon and eggs were on the menu for breakfast. (There is nothing like the smell of bacon cooking on an open fire.) Dishes were left in a pile next to the fire that had again turned to a bed of red, shimmering coals.

Now it was time for a hike to get the blood circulating. They started off down a familiar path. They had camped here many times. After a good walk, they decided it was time to turn back. In the shroud of fog they missed an important landmark on the trail and had become disoriented. They knew the general direction they'd gone, but the specific location of the camp now eluded them. They wan-

dered for the better part of an hour and were getting a little worried. Nothing was familiar. They sat on a fallen tree trunk beside the trail for what seemed like a long time. A streak of sunlight finally broke through the thick, gray blanket. Within half an hour, the fog retreated to the advance of warm, spring sunshine. The area began to look familiar again. As they stood and looked around surveying their situation, they looked down the hill and not more than 50 yards away was the campsite. They were so close, yet so far away.

On this journey called life, we can get caught up in the thick blanket of fog - everyday routines and the busyness of life. These things can reduce our vis-

ibility of what is really important and we can truly lose our way. It is not until we stop and let the light of the Lord break through that we find we were really not that far off track, but have just lost our sense of direction.

Like the disciples on their way to Emmaus after the resurrection, Jesus dropped in on the two lost souls and pointed them in a new direction. We are given the assurance that God is with us over and over in God's Word. Let us lift our heads from the fog of life and look to the light of His Word to light our paths and keep us and guide us on His path. Hope you are on a great journey.

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

Did the Founders Really Want Religion Out of Public Life?



BY CHRIS HOWSE

Most history classes teach something like this: America's Founders wanted religion separated from government, kept safely out of public life. It is a tidy story. It is also largely false.

The First Amendment wasn't written to kick religion out of public life. It was written to make sure the government couldn't force everyone to follow one specific denomination. That's a huge difference from what we practice today.

Consider the evidence in plain sight. In 1789, Congress passed the Free Exercise

Clause, and twenty-four hours later, it proclaimed a national day of prayer. Thomas Jefferson - the man whose letter to the Danbury Baptists gave us the famous "separation of church and state"

phrase closed that letter with a prayer, in his official capacity as President. Our founders were not confused or hypocritical. They understood that promoting religion generally, while establishing no sect specifically, is not a contradiction. It's brilliant.

Why did they care about religion? Because they understood something we've forgotten: free government cannot survive without moral citizens, so good values must be taught and prioritized. John Adams said it plainly - our Constitution "was made only for a moral and religious people." That's likely



why the American Revolution succeeded where the French Revolution failed. Americans emphasized religion.

Self-government is hard. It asks politicians to put the people first instead of their own power. It asks citizens to serve on juries, stay informed to vote wisely, and sacrifice their time for the community. It asks businesses to deal honestly and parents to raise responsible kids. Our country didn't prosper because of the Constitution alone; it did because of a million daily acts of integrity, responsibility, and self-restraint.

The government can use

laws to punish bad behavior and incentivize good - but it can't see what you do in the dark or affect your soul in eternity. That is the genius of religion in a free society. God's love, laws and omnipresence do what the govern-

ment can't create good citizens without force. The founders knew this, even though we have grown timid of saying it: A nation can be tolerant while still affirming that the Christian laws which built the freest country in history deserve our gratitude, our respect — and our defense.

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Dining

Popular Destin Café Lady Ray's Announces Expansion and Founders Club as It Celebrates Four Years

By TIM VONDELL

This month, Lady Ray's celebrates its fourth anniversary, marking a significant milestone for the beloved Destin-based brand known for its whimsical tea parties, refined café offerings, and immersive lifestyle experiences. What began as a charming concept has grown into a thriving, multi-faceted business—and now, it's preparing for its next chapter.

To commemorate the occasion, Lady Ray's has announced plans to begin renovations in May, introducing a highly anticipated addition: a private tea room designed to function as both an elegant lounge and a banquet space. The new area will be available for birthdays, baby showers, and private events, further enhancing the brand's signature tea party experience while expanding its hospitality footprint.

The space will also serve a

practical purpose. During peak café hours, when regulars know seating can be at a premium, the tea room will act as overflow—ensuring that more guests can enjoy the Lady Ray's experience without compromising comfort or ambiance.

Alongside the physical expansion, the organization also plans to introduce a highly curated "Founders Club," an invitation-forward membership experience designed for those who value priority, access, and distinction. Members will receive first-right booking privileges, preferred access to limited seatings, bespoke brand offerings and preferred pricing, as well as invitations—with guest privileges—to private, members-only gatherings and preview events.

Positioned as an elevated extension of the Lady Ray's experience, the Founders Club is intended to deliver a more intimate, refined way to engage with the brand as it continues to grow.



A Brand Built for Experience

Lady Ray's is a Destin-based, multi-concept culinary, beauty, and lifestyle brand operating a diversified portfolio of consumer experiences and product lines. The company integrates food service, wellness, retail, and branded distribution under a scalable platform designed for measured growth, strong community engagement, and long-term brand equity.

Over the past four years, Lady Ray's has distinguished itself not only through its offerings but through its atmosphere—where curated tea parties, delicate pastries, and intentional design converge to create a memorable escape from the everyday.

As renovations begin and the brand continues to evolve, one thing remains constant: a commitment to experience, detail, and community.

"We're just getting started," Vondell said. "And we're excited to bring our guests along for what comes next."

With its expansion underway and its reputation firmly established, Lady Ray's appears poised to turn four years of success into a foundation for even greater growth—one tea party at a time.

"If you've ever stopped in during our busiest hours, you know we're often at capacity," said Rachel Ploegmakers. "We've thoughtfully utilized just about every inch of our café space over the years. This expansion allows us to grow while preserving the charm and intimacy our guests love."

Ploegmakers, the creative force behind the culinary direction at Lady Ray's, has become known for her artful approach to tea service and seasonal menus. Her work blends classic tea traditions with modern, inspired flavors, earning her recognition among both locals and visitors seeking a unique, elevated experience.

"Our goal has always been to create something transportive,"

she added. "Tea parties are more than a meal—they're a moment. This new space lets us lean even further into that magic."

Owner Tim Vondell emphasized that the expansion reflects both customer demand and a long-term vision for the brand.

"Lady Ray's has always been about thoughtful growth," Vondell said. "We're building something that goes beyond a café—a brand that brings together food, wellness, retail, and community. This renovation is a natural next step in delivering more of what our guests already love."



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South Walton Live Music Scene May 2026

Locals Last Stand May 17

Locals Last Stand returns to the The Pavilion at Watersound Town Center May 17 from 2-6 p.m. Enjoy live music, great company, and the laid-back atmosphere that makes this time of year so special. Live Music Lineup: Sammi Accola, Mike Whitty Band and Dion Jones & the Neon Tears. This event is FREE and open to the public. Celebrate one last afternoon of community fun before the summer season kicks into full swing. Bring a lawn chair or blanket and settle in for an afternoon of live music and good vibes. For more information, visit localslaststand.com.

Sinfonia Salutes at Alys Beach May 24

At this celebratory Memorial Day Concert and Drone Show, enjoy the orchestral sounds of Sinfonia Gulf Coast under the palm trees in the Alys Beach Amphitheatre. Bring blankets and low-back chairs. Presented by the Merchants of Alys, this beloved event is free and open to the public. Doors open at 6 p.m., and music begins at 7:30 p.m.

Gulf Coast Jam May 28-31

One of the country's most popular beach music festivals returns May 28-31 as Gulf Coast Jam brings four days of live country music to Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing throughout the high-energy Country On The Coast™ weekend.

Fans can enjoy multiple stages, food vendors, bars and interactive fan experiences while soaking in the coastal festival atmosphere that has drawn sellout crowds of more than 30,000 in recent years. Pass options currently available include General Admission, Military, College and First Responder tickets, VIP experiences and lodging packages. Several premium viewing areas have already sold out.

Payment plans are available. Follow festival updates online. Visit GulfCoastJam.com.

Baytowne Wednesday Night Concert Series

Join The Village of Baytowne Wharf as they host the Wednesday Night Concert Series, a free weekly tradition on the Events Plaza Stage from 7-9 p.m. featur-

ing local & regional talent from all kinds of genres. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets & your crew for some great tunes!

May 13th: Coming Soon

May 20th: The Aces Band

May 27th: Modern Eldorados

MKAF Concerts in the Village

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

May 14: Turnstile: The Music of Billy Joel

May 21: Boogie Wonder Band

May 28: The Molly Ringwalds

June 4: The Return: A Beatles Tribute

June 11: A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band

Alaqua Sunday Sessions

Sunday Session, a weekly gathering in the Alaqua Arena filled with live music, delicious food, and the peaceful charm of the Refuge returns every Sunday through May 31st from 1-4 p.m. Music by Rescue Me: Tim Jackson, Holly Winter, and John Link and rotating food trucks. Free to attend, bring your friends, your family, and your love for animals.

Bands on the Boulevard Summer Music Series Thursdays

Live music series returns to Grand Boulevard May 21-July 2nd from 6-8 p.m. Throughout the summer music series, experience Grand Park transform into an open-air concert setting where friends, families, and neighbors can gather to enjoy live performances from talented musicians in a relaxed coastal atmosphere. Bring a lawn chair or blanket, grab dinner or drinks from your favorite Town Center spots, and settle in for a new weekly tradition designed for easy nights and good company.

Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

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

FOOW Live Music Fridays and Sunday Brunch

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

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brate all things Sunday Funday in Grayton Beach! Recharge your weekend at our live music brunch. Have a mimosa or go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar. Crawfish Boil at 12 p.m. along with live music from the talented Christon Birge Duo. Then enjoy live music from The Pickled Pickers 5-8 p.m. Join in the fun on Karaoke Night starting at 8 p.m. every Thursday night (also Prime Rib Night). Check ajsgrayton.com for live music throughout the week.

Shunk Gulley

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

Red Fish Taco

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

The Bay

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



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Music

Improve Your Grades with Music Lessons

Music education has long been considered an enriching extra-curricular activity, but growing evidence shows that it can play a powerful role in improving student learning and academic performance. Far from being just a

creative outlet, music lessons engage multiple areas of the brain, strengthen cognitive skills, and foster habits that directly translate into better grades in school.

One of the key ways music lessons enhance learning is through

improved brain function. When students learn to read music, they are simultaneously decoding symbols, recognizing patterns, and coordinating physical movement. This activates both the left and right hemispheres of the brain,

strengthening neural connections. Studies have shown that students who participate in music education often demonstrate better memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. These cognitive benefits can carry over into subjects like math, science, and reading comprehension.

In addition to cognitive development, music lessons promote discipline and time management. Learning an instrument requires consistent practice, goal-setting, and perseverance. Students quickly learn that improvement comes from effort over time, a mindset that can positively influence their approach to homework and studying. As they experience progress in music, they build confidence, which can reduce anxiety and improve performance in academic settings.

Music education also enhances language and literacy skills such as in voice lessons. Rhythm and melody help students recognize patterns in speech and improve phonological awareness, which is essential for reading. Singing or playing music can strengthen vocabulary and comprehension, particularly in younger learners. This connection between music and language development often leads

to stronger reading abilities and overall academic success.

When it comes to choosing the best instruments for students, the ideal option often depends on age, interest, and learning style. However, some instruments are particularly effective for beginners and offer strong educational benefits.

The piano is widely considered one of the best instruments for improving academic skills. It provides a clear visual layout of notes, making it easier for students to understand musical structure. Playing the piano also requires coordination between both hands, which enhances motor skills and brain development. Because it allows students to play both melody and harmony simultaneously, it offers a comprehensive introduction to music theory.

String instruments such as the guitar or ukulele are also excellent choices. These instruments develop fine motor skills and require careful listening, which strengthens auditory processing. Students who learn string instruments often show improvements in concentration and patience, as mastering pitch and tone takes time and precision.

Wind instruments like the flute

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or clarinet are particularly beneficial for developing breath control and focus. These instruments encourage proper posture and lung capacity while also requiring attention to timing and rhythm. They can be a great option for students interested in joining school bands, which adds a social and collaborative dimension to learning.

Percussion instruments, such as

drums, are ideal for students who thrive on rhythm and physical activity. They help improve timing, coordination, and pattern recognition. While they may seem less melodic, percussion instruments play a crucial role in understanding musical structure and teamwork.

Ultimately, music lessons provide far more than artistic skills. They nurture cognitive development, discipline, and emotional growth, all of which contribute to

improved academic performance. By choosing an instrument that aligns with a student's interests and strengths, parents and educators can help unlock both musical potential and scholastic success.

Studio 237 Music Lessons in Santa Rosa Beach, FL has teachers ready to help you improve your learning capabilities. To get started, call or text us at (850) 231-3199 and/or visit our website at www.Studio237Music.com.

Flora and Fauna of the Historic Gulf Cemetery

By HELEN PETRE

South of 98, on 293, almost to the beach, is a cemetery on 40 acres of pristine wild land. The cemetery offers burial sites, but it is also a unique ecosystem that is rare among the housing developments that surround it. Established in 1914 by Woodrow Wilson, the Choctawhatchee sand pines and gopher tortoises have been relatively untouched by human development or fire for an exceptionally long time.

The Historic Gulf Cemetery covers 40 acres of low hills and mature trees that make up a unique ecosystem dominated by Choctawhatchee sand pine (*Pinus clausa immuginata*). Sand pines grow on entisol soils which are about 90% sand, and strongly acidic (pH 5). The soil is low in nutrients, lacking ammonium, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium, and contains only about 1% organic matter, making it perfect for sand pines, but not for most other plants. Sand is excessively drained, making the soil very dry, even when it rains.

Choctawhatchee sand pines grow only on the coast of the Gulf of America, mostly in Walton and Okaloosa counties. In fact, they only grow within one degree of latitude. Most of their preferred habitat has been lost to development making the cemetery habitat unique.

The sand in the cemetery, and along the Gulf coast, is of marine origin and was deposited in the Pleistocene as a series of ancient shorelines, forming long,

gentle hills and flat ridge tops. This is a distinct community that is strikingly different than long-leaf pine communities, which are higher in elevation and have more organic matter.

Since the cemetery is relatively protected from fire, Choctawhatchee sand pines thrive. The natural ecosystem, without fire, has an open canopy with sparse understory. Turkey oak, prickly pear cactus, wildflowers, and broadleaf grasses are the predominant plant species. Lichens are present in dense clusters on the infertile soil surface.



Lichens (*Cladonia* species)

The lichens in the cemetery are commonly called deer moss; large, puffy, gray-green fruticose lichens. They are a mutualistic relationship between a blue-green algae and a fungus, and look like pale green, round sponges. There are no roots, so the lichens just sit on top of the ground.

Deer moss and Choc-

FLORA & FAUNA

continued on page 44



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Internet as Essential Utility. Treat It Like Water and Power



BY DON CARTER,
SECURE VISION

Internet service is no longer an amenity. In today's communities, it functions the same way as water and electricity. It is expected, relied upon, and immediately noticed when it fails. For associations in Gulf Shores, this shift requires a different approach to how connectivity is planned, managed, and delivered.

Residents depend on internet access for daily life. Remote

work, streaming, security systems, smart home devices, and communication platforms all require consistent, reliable connectivity. In larger communities, a single service issue can impact hundreds of residents at once, creating immediate volume for management teams and frustration across the property.

Treating internet as a utility starts with prioritizing it at the same level as other core in-

frastructure. Boards should be evaluating service performance, reviewing agreements regularly, and ensuring providers are meeting defined standards. Allowing contracts to roll over without review often leads to outdated solutions that no longer match current demand.

Infrastructure plays a critical role. Bandwidth alone does not solve performance issues. Communities relying on aging systems or residential-grade equipment will continue to experience inconsistency, especially during peak usage. High-density environments require properly designed networks, including enterprise-grade equipment and property-wide coverage that can support real-world demand.

This is particularly important in Gulf Shores, where seasonal occupancy and short-term rentals can significantly increase network load. Systems must be built to perform under peak con-

ditions, not average usage.

Communication also matters. When boards clearly explain how internet service is managed and why upgrades are necessary, it builds alignment with residents. Like any shared utility, reliable connectivity requires ongoing investment and planning.

The impact of getting this right is measurable. Communities with strong connectivity experience fewer complaints, improved resident satisfaction, and stronger positioning in both rental and resale markets. Internet performance is often one of the first questions prospective buyers and renters ask.

Internet service is no longer optional. It is a core part of how communities operate and how residents live.

Secure Vision works with associations throughout Gulf Shores to design, implement, and support connectivity solutions built for modern demand.



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Land Trusts and Conservation Easements – Tools to Preserve Florida’s Past for the Future



By JON CARROLL

Growing up in Southwest Florida, one of the most memorable trips I ever took was a canoe and camping trip through the Ten Thousand Islands. Not only has the challenge of paddling against the current in the open gulf stuck with me, but so has the pristine beauty of the preserve. Florida

is filled with many such areas of natural beauty. According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in the 13 counties (including Bay) that border Florida’s “forgotten coast”, there are 10 aquatic preserves, 36 state parks, the Gulf Islands National Seashore and the 234,000-acre Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.

In addition to these large-scale preservation efforts, the Bay County Conservancy – The Land Conservancy of Northwest Florida, manages and owns approximately 409 acres across eight counties. The Bay County Conservancy is a land trust “dedicated to the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands in Northwest Florida.”

But what is a “land trust?”

Florida Statute § 689.071 recognizes this distinct legal structure known as a land trust. This statute allows real property to be held by a trustee, while the beneficiaries retain control over how the property is used and managed. A land trust can be used for conservation purposes when voluntary restrictions on use are included within the trust agreement itself. For example, the trustee can be directed to prohibit subdivision, limit development, preserve timber resources, or maintain the land in its natural state.

Traditionally, an arcane legal principle called the Rule of Perpetuities (the bane of every law student’s real property class existence) limited the length of time a trust could exist to a “life in being plus 21 years.” Without getting into too many weeds, a basic land trust is not impacted by the time limits on a trust. However, even if a more complex land trust does trigger such a time constraint, the Florida legislature has significantly expanded the amount of time property can be tied up in a trust.

Land preservation efforts may involve combining a land trust for control and management with a conservation easement. Conservation easements are authorized under Florida Statutes § 704.06, and allow landowners to permanently limit development while retaining ownership and traditional uses of their property. Because these easements “run with the land,” they bind future owners and ensure long-term protection of the property.

A conservation easement does not mean land is forever locked away from all human use. Such an easement is designed to preserve the land’s natural or agricultural character while allowing continued traditional uses that are consistent with that goal. The statute expressly allows easements to be tailored. This means landowners can reserve rights such as hunting, fishing, timber harvesting, farming, ranching, and recreational use. In many cases, these activities are not only permitted but encouraged, so long as they are conducted in a way that does not impair the conservation values being protected. For ex-

ample, a family may continue managing timber or using the land for seasonal hunting while restricting subdivision or commercial development. The key is that the easement defines what is allowed and what is limited, striking a balance between preservation and practical, ongoing use of the property.

Land trusts and conservation easements offer Florida landowners a way to preserve the character, beauty, and function of their land while still maintaining meaningful use and control. Whether protecting a family homestead, working timberland, or sensitive coastal habitat, these tools allow individuals to ensure that the landscapes we value most remain part of Florida’s story for generations to come.

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



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 Community

FLORA & FAUNA

continued from page 41

tawhatchee sand pines in the Historic Gulf Cemetery. W. Keyes.

Fauna

The sand pine ecosystem provides abundant food and cover for wildlife. Wild turkey, gray squirrel, and mourning dove eat the seeds of Choctawhatchee sand pine. The open canopy provides habitat for woodpeckers, squirrels, and birds of prey. When I was there in March 2026, I saw an eagle, along with many songbirds and squirrels. There are bluebird boxes throughout the cemetery, and most are occupied.

Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)

The gopher tortoise is an important resident of the Historic Gulf Cemetery. I saw three burrows in March 2026. Gopher tortoises are threatened by habitat destruction and need a very sandy substrate to dig burrows. They also need an open canopy in order for their preferred food, grass, to grow. About 75% of their diet is grasses. Gopher tor-



Gopher tortoise. W. Keyes.

toises also eat wiregrass, gopher apple, blackberries, and palmetto berries, all present close to the burrows.

Gopher tortoises are seldom seen, as they spend 80% of their time in their burrows. Burrows average 15 feet long and six feet deep, and protect the tortoises from heat, cold, fire, and predators. The burrow provides homes for commensural species, including Florida mice, gopher frogs, and eastern indigo snakes. Gopher tortoises live for about 40 years.

The sand pine ecosystem in the cemetery is a uniquely wild environment that provides habitat and food for many species. A

walk through the cemetery is peaceful and reflective, but it also allows visitors to experience a rare ecosystem in contrast to the surrounding housing and commercial developments. It is a special, protected home for some of my favorite native plants and animals. I am grateful there is a peaceful place for them to live quietly and respectfully, among a place for humans to rest in peace.

Helen Petre is a retired biologist enjoying her time in nature along the Gulf of America. If you have any nature questions, or suggestions for articles about our bio paradise, email petrehelen@gmail.com. William Keyes is the President of the Board of Directors of the Historic Gulf Cemetery.

Seacoast Collegiate High School Senior Calvin Chilton Signs with Liberty University Track and Field

Seacoast Collegiate High School, the high school under SEASIDE SCHOOL™, proudly celebrated senior Calvin Chilton today as he officially signed with Liberty University to continue his academic and athletic career in Track and Field. Surrounded by family, coaches, classmates, and school leadership, Calvin marked this exciting milestone during a special signing ceremony held on campus.

A standout student-athlete, Calvin has built an impressive track and field career competing at some of the nation's top meets. In 2023, he placed in the top eight at Nike Outdoor Nationals, followed by a fourth-place finish at the AAU Junior Olympics in 2024. Although injury prevented him from competing, Calvin also qualified for both Nike and New Balance Indoor Nationals last year and again this year, further solidifying his place among the country's top young athletes.

This summer, Calvin plans to compete at Under Armour Outdoor Nationals in May, with hopes of qualifying for the USA Under-20 Nationals in Eugene, Oregon, in June. In addition to his success on the track, Calvin also represented Seacoast Collegiate High School this year as a member of the school's golf team.

Beyond athletics, Calvin has excelled in the classroom as a dedicated dual enrollment student through Northwest Florida State College. In May, he will graduate with both his Associate of Arts degree and his high school diploma from Seacoast Collegiate High School. He currently holds a 4.0 college GPA and an impressive 4.426 weighted high school GPA.

"Signing with Liberty University is a dream come true for

me," said Chilton. "I'm incredibly grateful for my family, my coaches, my teammates, and everyone at Seacoast who has supported me along the way. This next chapter is exciting, and I'm ready to continue pushing myself



both academically and athletically at the next level."

Seacoast Collegiate High School Principal and Interim Executive Director Drew Ward said Calvin represents the very best of what the school strives to cultivate in its students.

"Calvin is an exceptional example of discipline, determination, and leadership," said Ward. "His commitment to excellence both in the classroom and in competition has been inspiring to our entire school community. We are incredibly proud of all he has accomplished and look forward to seeing him continue to thrive at Liberty University."

As Seacoast Collegiate High School continues to prepare students for success in college, career, and life, Calvin's achievements serve as a powerful example of what is possible through hard work, perseverance, and opportunity. His signing reflects not only his personal dedication, but also the impact of the school's rigorous academics and supportive athletic programs.

To learn more about Seacoast Collegiate High School's academic and athletic programs, visit SeasideSchools.net.

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