



MAY/JUNE 2026  
VOL. 9. NO. 11

# SOWAL Life

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

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

For many local residents, it's easy to drive along State Road 20 in nearby Walton County's City of Freeport 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 surrounding communities and a powerful example of how our area is helping lead the way in conservation, education and environmental stewardship.

Located on Freeport's 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 first-hand, 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.

**BIOPHILIA**  
*continued on page 2*



## Sinfonia Gulf Coast Celebrates Memorial Day Weekend 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

**SOLDIER**  
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**BIOPHILIA**

*continued from page 1*

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

counter 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 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,



PHOTOS: JEFF TALBERT

and come ready to celebrate the start of summer surrounded by nature.

**SINFONIA**

*continued from page 1*

Beach Amphitheatre.

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 celebration. 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 some-

thing 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](http://alysbeach.com/events) or [sinfoniagulfcoast.org](http://sinfoniagulfcoast.org).



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## Events Around the Beach

### Farmers Markets

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

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

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

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

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

### Village of Baytowne Wharf Family Fun

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

### 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!

### 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](http://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](http://alaqua.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.

### Paper Bear Screening at Seaside May 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 camp-

*Continued on next page*

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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 3

fire stories, local history, and the magic of the natural world along the way. Visit thepaperbear.org.

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.

Biophilia Center Summer Kickoff May 30

Enjoy live music, local food trucks, bounce houses, The Rep-tile 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.eo-wilsoncenter.org/events.

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. featuring local & regional talent from all kinds of genres. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets & your crew for some great tunes! May 20th: The Aces Band May 27th: Modern Eldorados June 3: Cadillac Willy June 10: Clinch 46

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.

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 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.

Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic June 17-21

Timed to coincide with the peak of the Gulf Coast's blue marlin season, and located at the South's number-one ranked resort destination, the 24th annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic at Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort sets the new precedent for world-class sportfishing tournaments.

This annual event offers something for everyone. Most importantly, for the angling teams, there's the deep blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, red-hot billfish action, and cool green cash. While on-shore, both the teams and their families can enjoy the wide variety of recreational activities offered at the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort and The Village of Baytowne Wharf. The spectacular night time weigh-ins are held at the Baytowne Marina at Sandestin and are open to the public.

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# 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, supporting a family, and showing up for your community. For many women, this isn't theoretical. It

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 nu-

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

*Continued on page 19*



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.

trition 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



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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 Founda-

tion 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



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KIARA WATSON PHOTOGRAPHY



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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 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 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](http://www.DCWAF.org).



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# 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](http://ascension.org/sacredheartmammogram). To support this program with your generous donations to the Sacred Heart Foundation visit [givesacredheart.org](http://givesacredheart.org).

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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 through-

out 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.

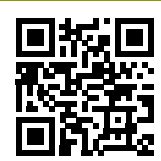
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# Advanced Veterinary Specialty Hospital with CT, MRI, Oncology and More Planned for NW Florida

Capital Veterinary Specialists celebrated the groundbreaking of its modern new specialty veterinary hospital in Santa Rosa Beach 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.

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 rep-

resents 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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# 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.

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 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 City and Beaver Creek, Colora-



do, 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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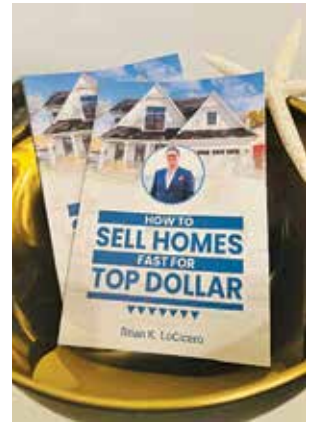
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 Community

## Trends & Treasures!



### Shine Bright This Season with Custom Sparkle Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Spring brings color, celebration and the perfect excuse to add a little sparkle—and Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry is ready to help you shine. Inspired by the season's vibrant hues, owner Ashleigh Woolly and her team create stunning designs in diamonds, gemstones and precious metals—each piece as unique as the moment it celebrates.

Whether you're searching for a meaningful Mother's Day gift, a graduate keepsake, an engagement ring or even a patriotic piece for America's 250th, Beyond Measure offers both ready-to-wear beauty and custom creations tailored just for you. Step into the City Market Bayside showroom to browse rings, bracelets, necklaces and earrings, or sit down for a one-on-one design experience. "Helping people celebrate life's most meaningful moments is what we love most," Woolly says. With hundreds of custom designs and a passion for quality craftsmanship, the team turns inspiration into unforgettable jewelry.

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### Give Mom the Gift of Wellness CRYO850 Performance and Recovery

May is all about celebrating the women who give so much—and CRYO850 Performance and Recovery is making it easy

to give back with rejuvenating, feel-good experiences designed just for her. Their popular Two-for-One Day Pass (\$99, \$175 value) offers a full afternoon of wellness, including the infrared sauna, Emerald Coast Igloo, red light therapy, vibration therapy and compression lounge—perfect for relaxing, detoxing and recharging together.

For a beauty boost, the Collagen Enhancement Treatment (\$145, \$175 value) combines hot and cold therapies with a wrinkle-reducing treatment, finishing with an oxygen mini facial and liquid collagen infusion for glowing, youthful skin.

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### Elevate Your Look with Effortless Style Pure & Couture Salon

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"Our guests often say the atmosphere feels special," Brackett says. "That's because we genuinely care about every person who walks through our doors."

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to skincare and styling, the team takes a thoughtful approach—considering your skin tone, face shape, lifestyle and budget to create a look that's uniquely yours. Planning a wedding or special event? On-location bridal and event styling ensures you look your best for every milestone.

Whether you're treating yourself or celebrating Mom, Pure & Couture invites you to step into summer with confidence, beauty and ease.

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With new flavors arriving in May and convenient ordering options including DoorDash and curbside pickup, Smallcakes makes every celebration a little sweeter.

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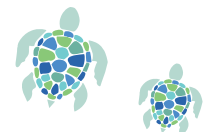
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Inside his book, you'll find battle-tested techniques once reserved for high-end sellers, now available to you. Whether you're selling a cozy cottage or a luxury estate, these insights will give you the edge you need. "In this guide, I share what works—practical, powerful strategies for sellers who want results," says Brian.

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

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# 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 longleaf 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.

The lichens in the cemetery are commonly called deer moss; large, puffy, gray-green fruti-

cose 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 Choctawhatchee 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 bur-



Lichens (*Cladonia* species)



Gopher tortoise. W. Keyes.

rows 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 tortoises 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.*



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Community

# Where Did the Golf Cart Come From?

The golf cart has come a long way from its humble beginnings as a simple tool designed to move golfers around the course. What began as a practical convenience has evolved into a lifestyle vehicle — especially in coastal communities along the Florida Panhandle, where golf carts are a familiar part of everyday life.

The story of the golf cart dates back to the early 20th century. In the 1930s, early electric carts were developed to transport equipment across golf courses. Not long after, they were adapted to carry golfers, helping players move around large courses more comfortably.

By the 1950s, golf carts began gaining popularity in recreational golf. Early models were simple, often three-wheeled and powered by basic electric batteries.

Manufacturers improved the design. Four wheels replaced three, steering wheels replaced tillers and gas-powered models appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, offering greater power and range.

Over time, people realized golf carts could be useful beyond the course. Resorts, retirement communities and large campuses adopted them for short-distance transportation. Their small size, quiet operation and ease of use made them ideal for quick trips.

Today, golf carts have entered a new era. Modern models feature lithium batteries, advanced suspension, LED lighting, Bluetooth sound systems and luxury seating. Some even include touchscreen displays and back-



up cameras, transforming them into comfortable neighborhood vehicles.

This evolution is especially visible along the Florida Panhandle. In many beach communities, residents use golf carts for quick trips to the beach, local restaurants or neighborhood events. Families often pile into multi-passenger carts to grab ice



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cream, visit friends or enjoy a sunset ride.

Golf carts offer a unique mix of convenience and fun. They encourage a slower pace, make it easier to connect with neighbors and add a sense of enjoyment to everyday travel. Once just a golf course utility, the golf cart has become a defining part of coastal community life.



Published Monthly  
Mailed FREE to the communities of Sandestin, Miramar Beach (32550), Emerald Bay (32541)

P.O. Box 1424  
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

**Editor & Publisher**  
Dave White  
[dave@southwalton.life](mailto:dave@southwalton.life)

**Art Director**  
Kim Harper

**Advertising Department**  
850-399-0228  
[sales@southwalton.life](mailto:sales@southwalton.life)

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# Parent's Guide to Summer Fun

## A Season to Grow: How Gulf South Soccer Develops Walton County Players Year-Round

Summer gives young players something they do not always have during the school year: space to grow. Without the pace of homework, school routines, and full competitive calendars, children have more freedom to stay active, sharpen skills, and enjoy the game in a lower-pressure environment. That is one reason summer can be one of the most valuable seasons for player development.

At GulfSouth Rush Soccer Club, summer is viewed as more than just offseason activity. It is an opportunity for players to build strong technical habits, improve confidence on the ball, and develop in an age-appropriate, positive setting. Founded in 2012 and recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2014, GulfSouth serves families across Walton, Okaloosa, and Bay Counties and has built its reputation around professional coaching, winning standards, and a pathway from local developmental soccer to regional and national competitive

travel teams under our parent club Coastal Rush.

For younger players, that development starts with the right foundation. GulfSouth Academy, designed for ages 5-8, focuses on helping children become confident, ball-comfortable players through purposeful play, skill-building, and engaging activities. Academy is a complement to Walton County's recreational soccer, giving young athletes a place to build confidence, creativity, and essential skills from experienced licensed coaches who have played at the professional and collegiate levels.

For older players, summer is a key time to stay sharp and keep progressing to be ready for the Fall Soccer Season. GulfSouth's coaches provide a variety of summer training clinics and we partner with non-club affiliated coaches to ensure parents and players can choose the best training paths that translate directly into better performance when the fall season begins.



Our commitment to competitive development is backed by real structure. With over a dozen youth travel teams serving 300

youth athletes ages 8-18, all supported by a mission to develop confident, character-driven players through professional coaching and a clear pathway from Academy to competitive teams and college opportunities. As part of the Rush Soccer National pathway through Coastal Rush, local players also gain access to broader resources and expanded opportunities like ECNL and college ID camps while still training in a community-centered environment at Walton Sports Complex in Santa Rosa Beach.

When children are challenged, encouraged, and excited to come back each week, they improve faster and enjoy the process more. Whether a player is just starting out or looking to prepare for the next level, GulfSouth Rush Soccer Club helps youth athletes build skills, gain confidence, and grow in the game close to home while providing opportunities to play at the regional and national level.



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# Parent's Guide to Summer Fun

## South Walton Dance Company: Where Community Meets Movement

Founded in 2018, South Walton Dance Company was built on a simple but powerful vision: to bring the community together through dance. What began as a passion project has grown into a thriving studio located in Freeport, Florida, serving dancers of all ages and skill levels.

Whether you are a local resident or visiting the area, South Walton Dance Company offers a diverse range of classes designed to meet every dancer where they are. From beginner recreational classes to advanced training, the studio provides opportunities for growth, creativity, and connection.

Owned and operated by Ashley Brooks alongside Jenni Grubbs and Mike Grubbs, the leadership team blends artistic vision with strong business structure. This collaboration ensures that every aspect of a dancer's experience—from instruction to environment—is intentional, supportive, and high quality.



A defining strength of South Walton Dance Company is its exceptional faculty. The studio is home to a diverse team of highly trained instructors whose backgrounds span professional performance, collegiate dance programs, and commercial industry experience. Many have performed at the profession-



al level, danced on university teams, or hold formal degrees

in dance. This depth of experience allows the studio to offer well-rounded, technically sound training while exposing dancers to a wide range of styles and perspectives.

For those seeking a more competitive path, the Infinity Dance Collective represents the studio's elite training program. These dancers are committed to expression, discipline, and progression, pushing boundaries while representing the studio at competitions and performances.

South Walton Dance Company is deeply rooted in community involvement. Dancers regularly participate in local parades, perform at events, and engage in unique training experiences—from football fields to basketball courts—bringing dance beyond the studio walls and into the heart of the community.

SWDC is a place where every dancer—regardless of age,

background, or experience level can feel welcomed, supported, and inspired.

If you've ever dreamed of dancing, there's no better time to begin.

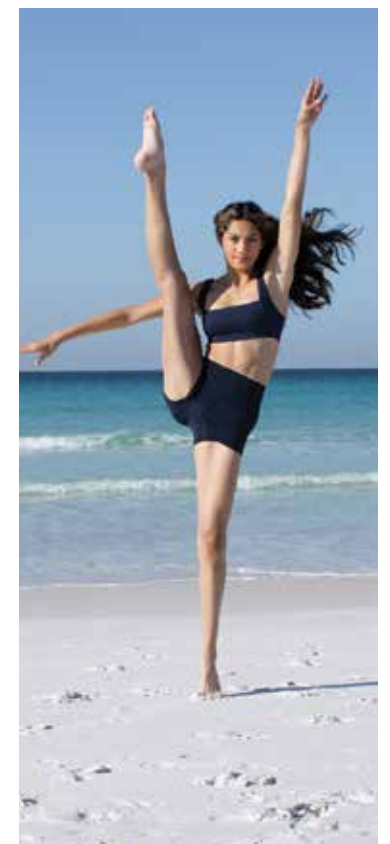
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*Phone: 859-240-5323 Email [Info@SoWalDance.com](mailto:Info@SoWalDance.com). The studio is located at: 1255 Old Jolly Bay Rd, Unit B102, Freeport.*



To learn more, visit [sowaldance.com](http://sowaldance.com) or contact the studio at [studioa@sowaldance.com](mailto:studioa@sowaldance.com)



# Parent's Guide to Summer Fun

## Step Into Their World: A Kid's Animal Adventure Awaits

Whether you're discovering Alaqua Animal Refuge for the first time, or you're a longtime supporter, get ready for a visit that's equal parts fun, heartwarming, and unforgettable, especially for kids! From the moment you arrive, the Refuge invites young animal lovers to step into a world where curiosity leads, tails wag, and every experience brings you closer to the animals who call Alaqua home.

A visit to Alaqua is anything but ordinary. Kids can enjoy hands-on moments like gentle puppy cuddles, meeting friendly cats, and spending time with barnyard animals eager for a scratch behind the ears. Beyond the familiar faces, there's always something unexpected to discover, from giant tortoises and curious emus to colorful parrots and other unique or exotic species, ensuring every visit feels new and exciting. Whether it's visiting goats, saying hello to horses, or simply exploring the peaceful grounds, each interaction is designed to spark joy while building a natural connection to animals. It's a place where learning happens without even realizing it, through laughter, discovery, and those quiet moments of wonder that stay with you long after you leave.

Parents love Alaqua just as much, knowing their children are not only having fun, but also experiencing something meaningful. Every visit helps introduce important values like kindness, respect, and compassion for

all living beings, all in a setting that feels welcoming, safe, and full of life. It's the kind of outing that feels good in every sense: a chance to unplug, explore the outdoors, and share in something truly special together.

And if you're looking for a way to make a child's big day even more memorable, Alaqua's birthday parties offer a celebration unlike any other. Imagine celebrating surrounded by furry friends, where guests can interact with animals, explore the Refuge, and enjoy a day filled with laughter and connection. It's playful, unique, and full of moments kids will be talking about long after the candles are blown out.

For those who want to take their love for animals even further, Alaqua's Humane Heroes program offers kids and teens a chance to stay involved. With hands-on learning and engaging activities, it's a fun and meaningful way to grow confidence, build empathy, and become a voice for animals in their own communities.

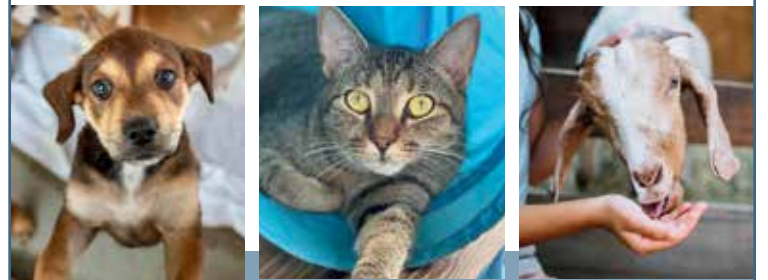
At Alaqua Animal Refuge, every visit is an opportunity to play, learn, and connect; creating joyful memories for kids and families, while helping give animals the care and second chances they deserve.



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# Parent's Guide to Summer Fun

## The Play Studio Brings Elevated Indoor Play to South Walton Families

Founded by husband-and-wife team Margaret and Corey Short, The Play Studio is a thoughtfully designed indoor play space created to support both children and their families. Built from a long-held dream, the studio reflects the Short family's passion for fostering connection, creativity, and meaningful childhood experiences. At the heart of the concept is Margaret Short, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), whose professional background in behavior analysis and parent coaching helped shape the studio's intentional, child-centered environment.

The Play Studio officially welcomed families during its soft launch opening on March 9th and is currently offering open play sessions, birthday parties, classes, and membership pre-sales. Each open play session is limited to just 15 children, ensuring a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable experience for every family. Due to this limited capacity, guests are encouraged to



book their play sessions online in advance.

In addition to open play, The Play Studio offers flexible and memorable birthday celebra-

tions. Families can choose from Basic Birthday Party packages, which include a full venue take-over for two hours along with tables and chairs, allowing hosts

to bring their own food and décor. For those seeking a more elevated experience, Fully-Styled Birthday Party add-ons are available, featuring themed balloon garlands, arch backdrops, and curated décor to create a beautifully styled event.

Designed with both children and parents in mind, The Play Studio provides a clean, modern environment where kids can ex-

plore through imaginative play while parents enjoy a welcoming, community-focused space.

Looking ahead, families can anticipate a Grand Opening celebration in early fall, when The Play Studio will unveil its final custom play structures currently being built by local contractors—further supporting the South Walton community.

*For more information, to book a play session, or to explore party options, visit [theplaystudiofl.com](http://theplaystudiofl.com). Media Contact: [hello@theplaystudiofl.com](mailto:hello@theplaystudiofl.com).*



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# 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 bi-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.

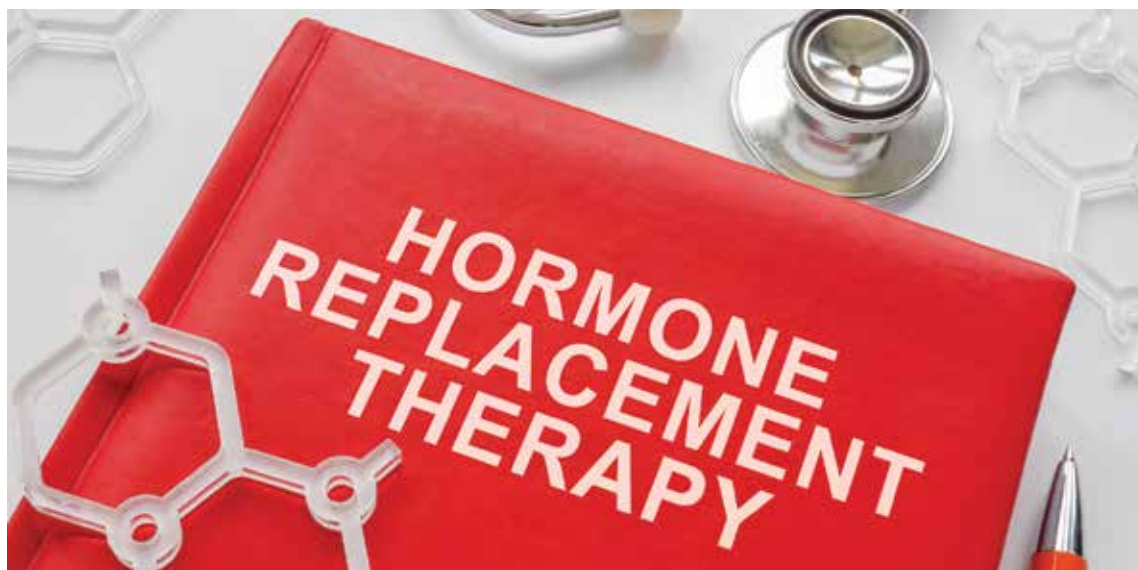
## How Pellet Therapy Helps Bones

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.

## MENOPAUSE

*continued from page 5*

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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 Wellness

# The Body, Mind, Spirit Connection



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG, JOURNEY BRAVELY

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

**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?

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 kind and curious toward yourself as you ponder and practice the body, mind, spirit connection. Connect with us at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com) along your journey for counseling and coaching support.



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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

# Medicare: 6 Quick Tips



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 various Medicare options available specific-

ly to the area. We understand the local healthcare landscape and can assist in finding a plan that aligns with your unique

needs and preferences. Whenever you have a question about your coverage, you know exactly who to call and don't have to worry about some random operator giving you biased or inaccurate information. We are not bound to any specific carrier and can therefore educate you on most/if not all of your options. Plus, being that brokers are commission based; this is a no cost service for you.

*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! Christian@evergreenhealthins.com (850) 687 7606*

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Musing

# Sean of the South: You Can Tell a Lot About a Person



BY SEAN DIETRICH

My granddaddy said you can tell a lot about a person by the way they treat a dog. Someone who treats a dog badly, is a bad person. A person who treats a dog with regard and deference is a good egg.

Right now, my wife is holding our blind coonhound, Marigold. She holds our rescue adoptee like a baby. Not like a dog.

Marigold's face was struck with a blunt object. Her optic nerve scarred over. She lost her vision. The doctor removed one eye.

"What probably happened," the vet said, "is that someone

paid a lot of money for this hunting dog, but Marigold turned out to be gun shy."

Her abuser wasn't happy about shelling out thousands of bucks for a dog who doesn't like noise. So he took his frustration out on the animal. He used a hard object. Perhaps the butt of a rifle.

My wife is softly humming to Marigold. "I love you," she is quietly singing to the animal.

We've had our dog several years now. Life with a blind dog was tricky at first. Not like having a regular dog at all. When we feed Marigold treats, for example, you have to touch her to let her know you're near. Then, Marigold simply opens her mouth widely, gyrating her head back and forth.

"I don't know where you are," she's saying, "but I'm opening my mouth to make it easier for you."

Marigold's internal schedule is all screwed up, too, because blind dogs can't sense light or darkness. So they have no idea what time it is. Some-

times Marigold wakes up at 1 a.m. and starts licking my face. And I start cussing and I say, "Please go back to bed." Whereupon Marigold barks with glee. Because there is nothing half as fun as 1 a.m.

But, we love this animal. Namely, because we don't have kids. As a result, my wife and I have a huge vacuum in our hearts. Which is why we sometimes fall deeply in love with other people's children. And it's embarrassing because they aren't ours, and people look at us funny.

Marigold is like our kid. Because this blind dog needs us for everything. She can't do anything for herself.

She needs us for simple tasks like finding her food bowl, or walking through new places. We hold her when she has nightmares—which is common for blind animals. We talk to her, from whatever room we are in, just so she knows where we are in the house.

It's been the most rewarding animal relationship I've ever had. And whenever I see Marigold crawl onto my wife's lap, when I see this woman speak softly to this wounded animal, when I see her stroke Marigold's fur and kiss her broken skull, I feel something profound.



Jamie Dietrich holds the animal like an infant. She kisses the mangled scars where Marigold's eye used to be.

"Oh, I love you so much,"

whispers my wife. She is a woman who is filled with compassion and goodwill. And she has proven to me that my grandfather was absolutely right

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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 kindling 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 wandered 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 visibility 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*



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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 government

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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# 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 green-



garden • pottery  
blessings

ery. 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.

### 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



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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.

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Arts & Music

# Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents Blockbuster Season 14 from Sept 10-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 unmis-

takable 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 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.

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](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org). Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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- 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

# Improve Your Grades with Music Lessons

Music education has long been considered an enriching extracurricular 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

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 mo-

sion 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](http://www.Studio237Music.com).*



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

tor 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 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 dimen-



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Arts & Music

# MKAF Seeks Artists for 31st Festival of the Arts

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation is now accepting artist applications for the 31st annual Festival of the Arts, set for Oct. 24–25, 2026, at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

One of the Southeast’s premier art festivals, the event features more than 100 artists from across the country, along with live music, Cuisine on the Green, a wine and beer garden, children’s art activities and more. This juried show includes a wide range of mediums, from painting and sculpture to photography, fiber, glass and digital art. Artists will compete for \$10,000 in cash awards. A \$30 nonrefundable jury fee applies, with booth fees starting at \$350. “Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation is a champion for arts and culture



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

Application deadline for artist exhibition and poster art is July 1, 2026. Learn more at [mkaf.org](http://mkaf.org).

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

*To learn more about the Artist of the Year program, contact Lisa Foster at (850) 333-2728 or [Lisa@WCTourism.com](mailto:Lisa@WCTourism.com).*



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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 infrastructure. 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 conditions, 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.

## 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](http://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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*"John Martin is hands down THE BEST realtor that I have experienced! If you are looking to buy or sell a property on 30A...he is your guy! John was able to educate my wife and I on all of the areas throughout 30A. But more importantly he possesses the rare quality that you will not find in many sales agents... HE LISTENS!" - Client*

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**john@johnmartin30a.com**

**johnmartin30a.com**