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Fore Her Opens Registration For 14th Annual Golf Outing

As Fore Her prepares for its 14th Annual Golf Outing, the organization is calling on the community to rally around local breast cancer patients and their families. Far more than a day on the golf course, the event represents hope, compassion and support for those facing the financial burden of treatment. Every swing, sponsorship and volunteer effort helps provide critical assistance with living expenses, allowing local patients to focus on what matters most: healing.

Founded in 2013 by Amy Walsh after losing both her mother and aunt to breast cancer, Fore Her began as a single charitable golf tournament dedicated to helping local women facing the financial challenges of treatment. Today, the nonprofit serves Northwest Florida through three signature fundraising events: the Golf Outing, Tea Fore Her and Pink Run. Beyond fundraising, Fore Her also provides education, hope and connection through ini-



tatives including the Grand Pink Out, Men Fore Her, and monthly peer support groups in Walton and Bay counties for individuals navigating a breast cancer diagnosis. What began as one golf tournament has

evolved into a lifeline of hope, compassion and assistance for local breast cancer patients and their families.

Fore Her invites golfers of all levels seeking a fun-filled day to dust off their clubs and

swing for a cause at the 14th annual Golf Outing on Friday, September 25, 2026, at the Links Golf Club in Sandes-

FORE HER GOLF
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E.O. Wilson
Biophilia Center to
Open to the Public
Every Friday, Year
Round, Starting
September 4th

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, operated by Nokuse Education Inc. on the 55,000+-acre Nokuse Plantation, announced today that for the first time in its history, it will welcome the public every Friday, year-round, beginning September 4, 2026. Previously accessible primarily through scheduled school field trips and spe-

BIOPHILIA CENTER
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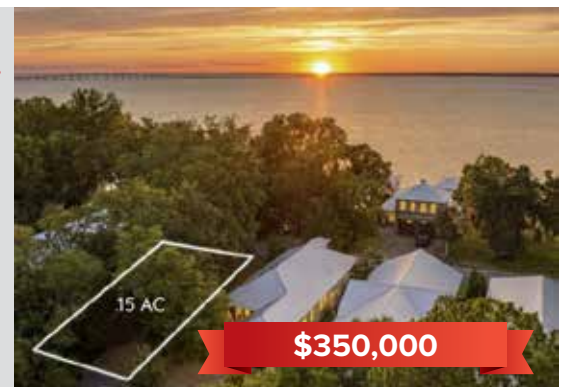


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Community

BIOPHILIA CENTER

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cial events, the Center will now offer standing weekly public admission, giving visitors of all ages the chance to explore its trails, exhibits, and ambassador animal habitats through self-guided exploration, animal chats, animal encounters, hikes, feedings, and other hands-on activities.

The expanded access reflects the Center’s ongoing mission to connect the community with the natural world and build on its work as one of Northwest Florida’s leading environmental education resources. Home to more than 40 ambassador animals and serving more than 6,500 K-12 students and community members each year, the Biophilia Center has long offered educational programming for schools and groups; the move to permanent, year-round Friday public hours makes that experience accessible to individual visitors and families on a regular, ongoing basis for the first time.

General admission for Public Fridays is \$15 for ages 13 and up, \$10 for ages 4–12, and free for children 3 and under. School field trips are also welcome on Fridays at a rate of \$10



per student and chaperone, with teachers and bus drivers admitted free. All ages and grade levels are welcome, and schools are encouraged to schedule visits in advance.

For visitors who plan to attend

regularly, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center also offers an updated Bio Membership program, which includes free weekly Friday admission along with additional benefits such as free entry to select annual events, gift shop dis-

counts, and more. “We’ve always welcomed schools and groups to experience Nokuse Plantation, but Public Fridays lets anyone walk through our gates and connect with these animals and this landscape any

week of the year. It’s a simple idea, but it’s one we’ve wanted to do for a long time, invite our neighbors in to see what we get to see every day.” –Daniel Milana, Director of Development and Communications

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center encourages residents and visitors throughout Walton, Okaloosa, Bay, Holmes, Washington, and surrounding counties to take advantage of the new weekly public access. Individuals and schools interested in scheduling a visit can call (850) 835-1824 or email information@eowilson-center.org.

About the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, operated by Nokuse Education Inc., is an environmental education facility located on the 55,000-plus-acre Nokuse Plantation preserve in Freeport, Florida. Founded in 2009, the Center is home to more than 40 ambassador animals and serves more than 6,500 K-12 students and community members annually through hands-on educational programming focused on Florida’s native wildlife and habitats.



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FORE HER GOLF

continued from cover

tin, presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care. Golfers will hit the links at 8 a.m. for check-in, announcements at 8:45 a.m. and tee off at 9 a.m. for a very “pink” cause, supporting local breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast.

This year, Fore Her’s Golf Outing will bring together seasoned golfers and novices alike plus those simply looking for a festive day, while making a difference in the lives of breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast. Now is the time to register a team, secure a sponsorship or step up to volunteer with over 200 locals and businesses. All funds raised from the Golf Outing will go to specifically offset local breast cancer patients’ living expenses, while they undergo costly treatments.

Registration is available now through September 1 for Early BIRDIE pricing where participants may sign up for a discounted price of \$175 per golfer or \$700 for a team of four. After September 1st, the price increases to \$200 per golfer and \$800 for a team of four. To register, visit <https://www.foreher.org>.



org/golfouting.

The day will kick off with a Bloody Mary Bar by Ruby Slipper Cafe and breakfast from Chick-fil-A. Golfers will then embark on an 18-hole golf outing featuring the ever-popular “Dress Like a Lady Hole” and burgers and hot dogs on the turn courtesy of Centennial Bank. An After Party will complete the day with a catered lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffle winners will be announced.

“The community’s contributions through this event give

these families a great deal of relief when they need it most,” says Amy Walsh, Founder of Fore Her. Last year Fore Her raised nearly \$30,000 at our Golf Outing, and as a result we were able to help offset these women’s living expenses while continuing to provide educational resources through our support groups. None of this would be possible without the generous and passionate support of individuals and businesses along the Emerald Coast.”

“At Emerald Coast Hospice,



Her Golf Outing 2026 Sponsors (to date): Emerald Coast Hospice Care: Presenting Sponsor; Chelco Operation Round Up and Combined Insurance: Golf Cart Sponsors, Terri and Bob Hensley: 19th Hole After Party Sponsor; Burns Estate Planning and Wealth Advisors: Lunch Sponsor; Emerald Bay Plumbing: 19th Hole Bar Sponsor; Emerald Coast Title Services: Dress Like a Lady Hole Sponsor; David Scott Lee Crestview Buick and GMC: Hole in One Sponsor; Emerald Bay Plumbing: Women’s Longest Drive Sponsor; Dr. James Moody: Men’s Closest to the Pin Sponsor; Renasant Bank: Women’s Closest to the Pin Sponsor; and Hole Sponsors Eglin Federal Credit Union, Bob Carver, Big Wave Dave and Jo Menary. Also thanks to Fore Her Donors: The Links Golf Club at Sandestin, Centennial Bank, LEGS: Ladies Executive Golf Society, IAMJIMCLARK Photographer, Stretch Zone, The Back Nine, Ruby Slipper and Chick-fil-A.

Golf Outing sponsorships and volunteer opportunities are still available. For more information, contact Amy Walsh at amy@foreher.org.

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Coastal Seniors Update for August

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Exercise Classes – Angela Gibson will lead classes every Tuesday and Thursday at 10 a.m. at Padgett Park. Cost is \$5 per class for CSSW members and \$10 for non-members. Weights and bands are used for classes. Sign up on Sign Up Genius email. To be added to the sign-up list, email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

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

Watercolor Painting Class – Karen Peterson will teach beginners watercolor painting on Friday, August 7, 14, and 28 from 8:45 - 12 p.m. at Padgett Park. All supplies will be

provided. Cost is \$20 for members and \$40 for non-members. Sign up on Sign Up Genius email. To be added to the sign-up email, email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com.

Pickleball - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts will resume in September. The dates are to be determined. This beginner class will be open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) The class will be FREE, and equipment will be provided or you may use your own. Email Sandy Gulak at sowalpickleball@gmail.com for more information. Open play at Boys and Girls Club has ended for the summer but will resume after Labor Day. Please join the SoWal

30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

Monthly Meeting - Monthly Meeting Social will be Friday, August 21, from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Padgett Park. We will be celebrating National Senior Citizens Day. Join us for lunch and social time. Sign up on Sign Up Genius email. To be added to Sign Up Genius, email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com to be added.

Mahjong - Mary Swift will host a Mahjong group every Monday at 1:00 p.m. at Padgett Park. For more information, contact Mary Swift at (210) 722-

7939 or on Facebook join The Emerald Coast Social Club-a Mahjong Group.

Water Aerobics - 2 Classes will be held each Monday and Wednesday in August at 9 a.m. and at 10:15 a.m. at Water-sound Fountains pool located at 65 Origins Pkwy, Inlet Beach. Cost is \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members. A pool noodle and set of water bells are used for class. Sign up on Sign Up Genius email. To be added to Sign Up Genius, email coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Dementia Caregivers Support Group - Karen League will lead this support group for caregivers to provide a safe place to share experiences, provide practical information

and mutual support. The meetings are the first Friday of each month from 12:30 - 2 p.m. at the Coastal Branch Library meeting room located at 437 Greenway Trail. For more information, contact Karen League at (706) 491-0812.

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



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FLIGHT: To Heights Unseen

By DR. JOSHUA BLEDSOE

The beginning of a new school year always brings excitement, anticipation, and a renewed sense of purpose across Walton County. On August 11, our students will return to classrooms filled with educators and administrators who are ready to help them learn, grow, and reach new heights.

Although students have been enjoying their summer break, our educators have remained hard at work. Professional development opportunities throughout the summer have allowed our teachers and leaders to strengthen their skills, exchange ideas, and prepare for a successful 2026–2027 school year.

During our two-day Admin Institute in Pensacola, administrators from across the District came together for focused, intensive planning. Every discussion centered on identifying opportunities for improvement and finding new ways to help each student thrive. Our ad-

ministrators also attended the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium Conference in South Walton, where collaboration with fellow educational leaders allowed iron to sharpen iron. These experiences help ensure that our schools continue learning, evolving, and implementing the most effective educational strategies.

On August 3, EPIC Day brought every educator in Walton County together to celebrate our shared mission and establish the theme for the year: FLIGHT: To Heights Unseen. This theme reflects our commitment to helping every student rise beyond expectations, discover possibilities they may not yet see, and develop the knowledge, confidence, and character needed to soar. Just as flight requires preparation, courage, and a clear sense of direction, reaching new heights requires students, families, educators, and our community to move forward together.

In the week leading up to the first day of school, teach-



ers worked tirelessly to prepare their classrooms, finalize lessons, and create welcoming environments for our students. From arranging desks and organizing materials to planning meaningful learning experiences, they carefully prepared for the moment our children walk through the doors.

We are grateful for the dedication of our teachers, administrators, support professionals, families, and community partners. Together, we are ready to make the 2026–2027 school year one filled with discovery, achievement, and opportunities for every student.

As August 11 approaches, families are encouraged to follow their school’s social media accounts and visit the District website for important back-to-school announcements, schedules, and other information.

The runway is ready, and the destination is filled with possibility. Let’s take FLIGHT—To Heights Unseen!

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When the Gut Speaks First: The Back-to-School Stomachache



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

The first week of school has arrived. The backpacks are packed, the lunches are made, and after one last search for a missing shoe, everyone heads out the door. Then, just as you're reaching for the car keys, your child quietly says, "My stomach hurts."

For many parents and caregivers, this scene is as much a part of the back-to-school season as shopping for school supplies and navigating busy car lines.

The child who seemed perfectly healthy all summer suddenly doesn't want breakfast, complains of a stomachache before school, or makes repeated trips to the bathroom. Naturally, families wonder: Are they getting sick?

Sometimes they are. But sometimes, the stomach is simply the first place the body speaks.

The brain and digestive system are in constant communication through what scientists call the gut-brain axis. When children experience change, whether it's a new teacher, new classmates, academic expectations, a disrupted routine, or the excitement and uncertainty that naturally come with a new school year, the digestive system may respond before children have the words to describe what they're feeling.

Sometimes, the gut speaks first. That can look like stomachaches, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, changes in appetite, or even changes in bowel habits. The question isn't whether these symptoms are real; it's why they're happening.

One of the most helpful things parents and caregivers can do is look for patterns rather than focusing on a single episode.

Does the stomachache happen only before school? Does it improve later in the day? Does it appear before a test, after a difficult interaction with friends, or on Sunday evenings before the

week begins?

Patterns like these may suggest the nervous system is playing a role, but they don't rule out an underlying medical condition. Pain that wakes a child from sleep, is accompanied by fever, persistent vomiting, blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss, poor growth, or continues regardless of the situation deserves prompt medical evaluation.

Rather than asking only, "Where does it hurt?" it can also be helpful to ask: "When does it happen?" "What was happening just beforehand?" "Has anything changed recently?"

Sometimes those questions provide clues that the symptom alone cannot.

Today's children navigate full schedules, academic expectations, extracurricular activities, changing friendships, and a constant stream of information. While these experiences are a normal part of growing up, they can place greater demands on a developing nervous system. For some children, those demands may show up in the digestive tract long before they have the words to explain what they're experiencing.

What Can Parents and Caregivers Do?

If a child says, "My stomach hurts," and otherwise appears well, the first response doesn't always have to be finding the medicine cabinet. Instead, create a few minutes of calm.

Turn off the television or music. Set aside phones and other screens. Sit together quietly. Offer a reassuring hug, hold their hand, or simply be present. Children often take emotional cues from the adults around them, and a calm presence can be incredibly grounding.

Encourage slow breathing. A simple technique such as box breathing can help calm the nervous system: inhale through the nose for four seconds, hold for four, exhale gently for four, and pause for four before repeating. Younger children may enjoy imagining they're smelling a flower on the inhale and slowly blowing out birthday candles on the exhale.

Offer a few small sips of water and allow the moment to slow down.

These simple steps aren't

meant to replace medical care. They create an opportunity to observe whether symptoms begin to settle while helping children reconnect with their bodies.

If stomachaches have happened around previous school

years, don't wait until the first difficult morning to talk about them. A relaxed conversation a few days before school starts can go a long way.

Ask open-ended questions: "What are you most excited

about this year?" "Is there anything you're a little nervous about?" "I remember your tummy bothering you before school last year. How are you

TORTOISE

continued on page 13



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Eventually, that search led them to Watersound Fountains in Inlet Beach.

"It was just a good situation for us," Gerald says.

For Gerald, the day often starts outside.

Some mornings begin with golf at a nearby course before returning home for a fitness class or a swim. Other days start with a walk to Watersound Town



Center for coffee before the day unfolds from there.

One of the things that surprised him most wasn't just the beauty of the area—it was how easily everyday life came together.

"You really don't need a car here at all," Gerald says.

Within walking distance are restaurants, coffee, Publix, community events, and everyday conveniences that make the neighborhood feel connected rather than isolated. Just beyond the community, protected forest and nature paths offer another



kind of access — quiet, beauty, and room to breathe.

That ease continues inside the community, where dining, wellness, learning, and social connection are designed to feel just as natural as the neighborhood around it.

Gerald enjoys an active schedule.

Sheree prefers a quieter pace.

Both found exactly what they were hoping for.

"You can be as active as you want to be here," Gerald says.

That flexibility is one of the things Members talk about most. Some mornings begin with movement. Others with coffee and conversation. Some days include beach outings, lectures, live music, or time with friends. Others are intentionally slower.

There isn't one right way to spend retirement here.

After careers that took them across the country—and years spent searching for the right place to settle down—the McKenzies discovered something they weren't expecting.

The destination mattered.

But the shape of everyday life mattered even more.

Today, that shape includes nearby golf, walkable mornings, chef-prepared meals, new friendships, and being close enough to family that seeing one another no longer requires weeks of planning.

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Planning Ahead for Fall Home Improvements



By KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

As summer begins to wind down along the Emerald Coast, many homeowners start thinking about projects they would like to complete before the end of the year.

August is an excellent time to evaluate the condition of your home and begin planning ahead. Coastal weather throughout the

year—sun, humidity, and occasional storms—can gradually wear down surfaces.

Exterior paint often shows the effects first. Small cracks, fading, or chalky residue can indicate that the protective layer is beginning to break down.

Interior spaces may also benefit from updates after months of summer activity. Fresh paint can restore brightness and create a clean, refreshed feel throughout the home.

Property management companies and rental agencies also begin planning offseason maintenance around this time. Scheduling projects ahead of the slower months helps ensure homes remain in excellent condition without interrupting guest bookings.

Kyle's Tip:
"If you're thinking about re-



painting your home, planning a few months ahead usually gives

the best scheduling flexibility—especially along the coast."

Planning ahead now helps ensure projects move smoothly later in the year.

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Community

Frogs of the Panhandle

By HELEN PETRE

Throughout the summer, here in the Panhandle, we have frogs. Most of us will probably hear more frogs than see them, but here are a few of our common frogs, just in case you see them. If you want to learn their calls, the Florida Museum at the University of Florida has a great website with calls. Frogs usually call when they are mating and they are usually mating in spring.

Terrestrial frogs live under logs, plants, and other cover, and have dry, bumpy skin. Terrestrial frogs include toads. All toads are frogs. Not all frogs are toads.

The most common toad in Florida is the Southern toad (*Anaxyrus terrestris*). They eat bugs and snails, and burrow into soil. They are common near either permanent or temporary freshwater and can be found on well-watered lawns in evening.

Most call in spring.
Eastern narrow mouthed toads (*Gastrophryne carolinensis*) are only about one inch long, but they have a really big call. They eat insects, including termites, and live burrowed



Southern toad. Wikipedia.

in soil in sandhills, pine, oak and scrub forests, or roadside ditches. These toads are often found floating in swimming pools in the morning.



Eastern narrow mouthed toad. Wikipedia.

Arboreal frogs live in trees and have large, sticky, toepads for climbing.

Cope's gray tree frog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) is a quite common frog that is only about an inch long and can be gray, green, or brown, but all have

bright orange inner thighs. They eat roaches and other insects, and live in hardwood forests near marshes, bogs and swamps, and in wet backyards.



Cope's gray tree frog. Wikipedia.

Green tree frogs (*Hyla cinarea*), although only about an inch long, eat stinkbugs and other invertebrates. They live in trees near permanent water bodies, even those with fish, including marshes, bogs, swamps, ponds, lakes, and ditches, and in urban areas. They are sometimes found on the side of houses, or at night, around porch lights, eating bugs. They have a white stripe down the side of the body.



Green tree frog. Wikipedia.

Barking tree frogs (*Dryophytes gratiosus*) can be gray, green, or brown. They live high in treetops or burrowed in sand. They breed in fish-free wetlands, such as bogs and ditches.

Barking tree frogs are large and colorful.

When barking tree frogs feel threatened, they inflate themselves, so they appear too large to swallow. Individuals live ten years.



Barking tree frog. Wikipedia.

Aquatic frogs spend most of their time in the water and have webbed toes.

Southern cricket frogs (*Acris gryllus*) can be green, gray, brown, or tan, with warty skin. They have a Y-shaped line on the back and a dark triangle on the head. Cricket frogs have tiny toepads and a pointed snout. They eat leafhoppers and other invertebrates.

Southern cricket frogs live in bogs, ponds, roadside ditches, lakes, and potholes. The call sounds like marbles hitting against each other. Even though they are aquatic frogs, they stay

on shore. If they get scared, they will go in the water, but they do not put their heads in, and when the coast is clear, they come back ashore.

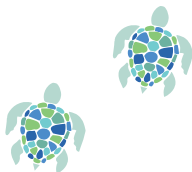
This is the call most often heard around ponds in the evening.



Southern cricket frog. Wikipedia.

There are many more frogs here in the Panhandle. These are just a few of my favorites. The volunteer coordinator at FFWCC, Adam Lache, is coordinating a Frog Watch program which includes frog call workshops and field herp walks. Come join us! Enjoy the warm evenings and the calls.

Helen Petre is a retired biologist out there enjoying nature in the Panhandle. If you have any nature questions or suggestions for articles, email: petrehelen@gmail.com.





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Investing: The Forest from the Trees

By CLINT GHARIB, AIF®, CFED®

The Sale We Have Been Preparing For

This past week I received calls from three clients—not panicking, but close—because of the sharp decline in technology stocks. I understood their concern. Watching investments fall is never comfortable. What surprised me

was how quickly they seemed to forget what I had been writing and discussing for months: a real technology correction was coming, it could be swift and steep, and we needed to prepare before it arrived. To me, this July plunge is that selloff. I do not know the exact bottom, and stocks may decline further

before this runs its course. But a sharp correction does not end the long-term opportunity. During my 37 years managing stocks, I have seen this pattern repeatedly. A powerful advance is interrupted by a sudden decline, fear makes the drop feel permanent, and the recovery begins before investors feel comfortable believing it.



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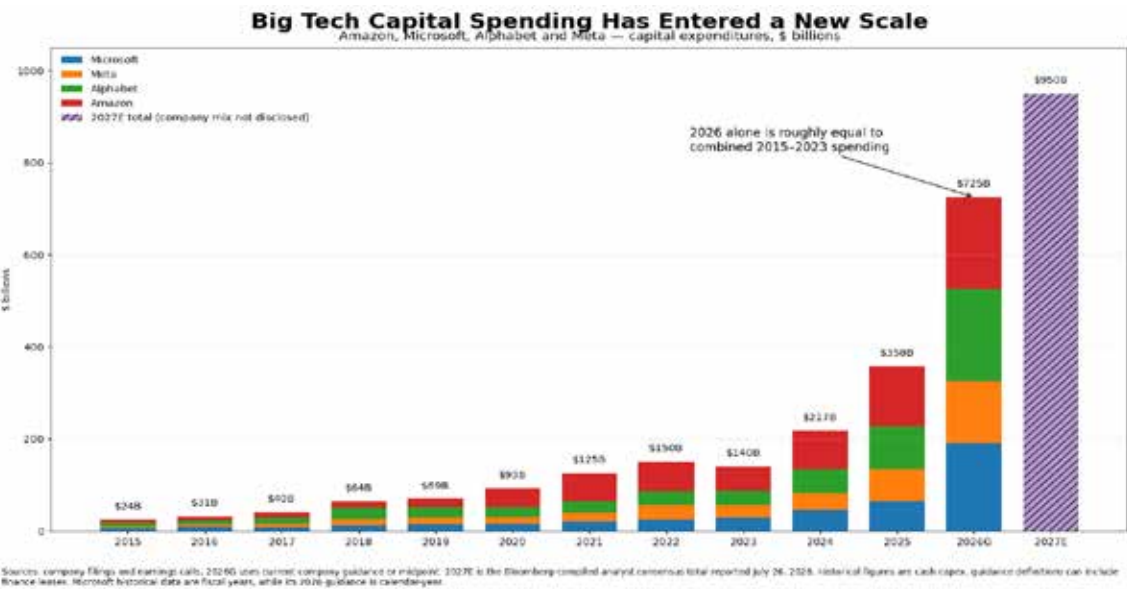
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Most recently, technology stocks fell sharply over roughly seven weeks between February and April 2025. Many of the hardest-hit technology leaders then rebounded quickly. History does not provide an exact timetable, but it does provide perspective: markets can fall much faster than seems reasonable and recover before the headlines become reassuring again. This is why I have advocated trimming gains, pruning weaker investments and allowing cash to accumulate. Cash may feel frustrating while stocks are rising, but it gives investors choices when others are frightened into selling. The latest source of fear is Kimi K3, a new Chinese artificial-intelligence model that has revived memories of the DeepSeek panic in early 2025. Investors quickly moved from “a formidable competitor has arrived” to “the entire AI investment cycle may be over.” Those are not the same conclusions. Better and less expensive AI models may actually accelerate adoption by making artificial intelligence available to more businesses and people. That will create different winners and losers, but it does not eliminate the need for computing, memory, networking, electricity, cooling, cybersecurity and data infrastructure. Artificial intelligence is also moving into a new phase. Phase One focused largely on building and training models such as ChatGPT. Phase Two is about putting that intelligence to work through reasoning, inference and AI agents. Instead of simply answering a question, an AI system may review multiple sources, operate software, solve a complicated problem and complete an entire project. That requires far more computing than producing a simple chatbot response. One model may advertise a lower price per AI “token” but

require many more tokens to produce the correct result. It is like a car using cheaper fuel but burning twice as much to travel the same distance. What matters is not simply the price of each token, but the total cost of completing useful work. As intelligence becomes less expensive, businesses will likely discover many more ways to use it. Lower costs could therefore increase infrastructure demand rather than reduce it. The spending plans support that view. Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet and Meta spent approximately \$217 billion on capital expenditures in 2024 and roughly \$358 billion in 2025. Their current plans call for about \$725 billion in 2026 alone—roughly equal to everything those companies spent during the entire nine years from 2015 through 2023. Current analyst estimates place their combined 2027 spending near \$950 billion. Not every dollar will produce an adequate return, and not every company will benefit equally. That is why stock selection matters. The trees are today’s falling prices, frightening headlines and worries about Chinese competition. The forest is the much larger transformation taking place. Some trees may become damaged. Some may even fall. That does not mean the forest has disappeared. This is the moment to remember the forest—and why we prepared before the trees began shaking. We’re here to help answer your financial life and investing questions. *Image created using AI-assisted digital artwork directed by Clint Gharib. Opinions expressed are that of the author and are not endorsed by the named broker/dealer or its affiliates. All information herein has been prepared solely for*

INVESTING
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TORTOISE

continued from page 7

feeling about going back?”

Sometimes children don’t know exactly what’s bothering them until they’re given a safe space to think about it. If this has been a recurring pattern, consider letting your child’s teacher or school staff know ahead of time. A little extra reassurance or simply having another trusted adult aware of the situation can make the transition easier.

Supporting the whole child also means supporting healthy daily habits. Consistent sleep, balanced meals with protein and fiber, regular movement, outdoor play, hydration, and opportunities for meaningful conversation all help children adapt more effectively to change.

Not every stomachache is related to the nervous system, and it’s important not to assume it is. If stomachaches become frequent, interfere with school or daily life, or are accompanied by concerning symptoms, reach out to your child’s pediatrician. They know your child’s medical history

and can help determine whether additional evaluation or treatment is needed.

Perhaps the most important takeaway is this: Symptoms are information.

Rather than asking only, “How do we make this go away?” it can be equally valuable to ask, “What might this symptom be trying to tell us?”

Sometimes the answer lies in the digestive system. Sometimes it’s the nervous system adapting to change. Often, it’s a combination of several factors.

As another school year begins, remember that children don’t always have the words to explain what’s happening inside. Sometimes the gut speaks first.

When families respond with curiosity instead of assumptions, they become better equipped to recognize when a child simply needs reassurance, when they may need a little extra support, and when it’s time to partner with their pediatrician. Because every symptom has a story, and sometimes, listening is the first step toward understanding it.

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Lee Campbell



Scenic Walton Celebrates Momentum on Community Initiatives Across Walton County

Recent milestones highlight collaborative efforts to advance resilient infrastructure, community beautification, and scenic preservation across Walton County.

Meaningful change happens through collaboration, persistence, and a shared vision for the future. Scenic Walton is celebrating significant progress on several initiatives that will help shape Walton County for generations to come, including advancing countywide underground utilities planning, securing additional funding for the Freeport Gateway Landscape Project, and moving the 30A West Gateway Landscape Project closer to reality.

One of the most significant milestones came when funding for an Opinion of Probable Cause, the critical first step toward developing a countywide underground utilities implementation plan, advanced into Walton County's draft 2026/2027 budget. The study will evaluate the scope and implementation of a countywide initiative to un-

derground overhead utilities that would strengthen hurricane resilience, improve electric reliability, enhance public safety, preserve scenic beauty, and support long-term economic development.

Scenic Walton also recognizes the many residents who voiced their support for underground utilities during Walton County's Strategic Planning process and commends the South Walton Community Council for helping encourage community engagement.

Scenic Walton is also celebrating the City of Freeport's recent \$100,000 Florida Department of Transportation Highway Beautification Grant, which doubles the funding available for the city's U.S. 331 Gateway Landscape Project. Scenic Walton worked alongside City planning staff to help identify the project, develop the initial design through its Walton Safe & Beautiful Program, and encourage the City to pursue additional state funding. Once completed, the project



will create a more welcoming northern gateway into Freeport while enhancing roadway aesthetics, improving stormwater management, and incorporating landscape features that naturally calm traffic. Scenic Walton extends its appreciation to the Freeport City Council, Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel, AICP, Sean Daly and Ruppert Landscape, and the Florida Department of Transportation. A special word of thanks goes out

to the St. Joe Community Foundation for funding the Walton Safe & Beautiful program.

Momentum is also continuing in South Walton as the 30A West Gateway Landscape Project has advanced into the proposed budget for the Walton County Tourist Development Council. Scenic Walton is pursuing the project in partnership with Friends of Scenic 30-A to create an attractive western gateway to Scenic Highway 30A while adding entry signage at both ends of 30A recognizing it

as both a Florida Scenic Highway and a Federal Scenic Byway. Notably, the project remains the only capital improvement project included in the proposed TDC budget, reinforcing the importance of investing in beautification, placemaking, and the visitor experience.

"These projects may look different on the surface, but they all share the same purpose: protecting what makes Walton County special while investing in its fu-

ture," said Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton. "Whether we're advocating for underground utilities, helping communities secure beautification funding, or enhancing our scenic corridors, each of these initiatives improves quality of life while preserving the character that makes Walton County such a remarkable place. We're grateful to our community partners, local governments, and residents who continue working alongside us to move these important projects forward."

Together, these milestones demonstrate growing momentum for resilient infrastructure, scenic preservation, and thoughtful community development throughout Walton County. Scenic Walton remains committed to working with public and private partners to ensure future growth protects the natural beauty and unique character that define our communities.

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



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~ Events ~



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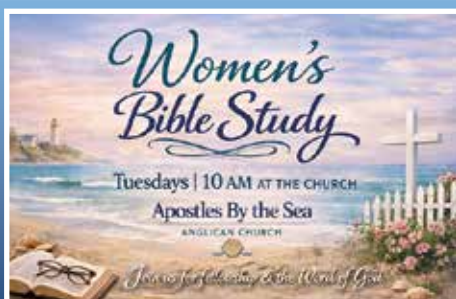
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Summer & Fall Happenings With Green Thumb Garden Club

By KATHLEEN EDGE, PUBLICITY & WEBSITE CHAIR

The end of summer is rapidly approaching as we look forward to the beautiful, cooler Fall season in our area. Green Thumb Garden Club is excited to announce details for member meetings and events in the next several months.

GTGC is growing its Club with a special gathering, "Hawaii on the Emerald Coast" Membership Recruitment Event is on Wednesday, August 19, 2026, at Westwinds Conference Center. There is no charge for the event; however, registration is required and limited to residents at least 21 years old. Walk-ins are not permitted. Details are on the website Events Calendar at www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org.

The first 2026/2027 member meeting is on Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at Westwinds Conference Center. Master Gardener Barbara Young will present "Landscaping with Ferns and Shade Gardening". Barbara is a long-time member of GTGC and is always willing to share her horticultural expertise and guidance.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, District 1 Fall meeting is being hosted by Destin Garden Club on Tuesday, October 13, 2026, at First Baptist Church in Fort Walton Beach. The meeting theme is America 250. Additional details will be on the Green Thumb Garden Club website in late August.

Gifts of beautiful plants are gratefully received during the holiday season. October's member meeting will educate attendees on holiday plant survival to extend the life of these precious gifts. The members-only pre-sale leading up to the annual Holiday Bazaar will also take place at the October 21, 2026 meeting at Westwinds Conference Center.

GTGC's largest scholarship fundraiser, the annual Holiday Bazaar, is on November 14, 2025, at Cantina Laredo Grand Boulevard. The sixth annual Bazaar hours are 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Past year's events sold out -- save



the date and come early for the best selection.

Green Thumb will have a golf cart (or two) in the Hometown Holiday Parade in Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach, FL, on Friday, November 20, 2026, at 5 p.m.

For the first time, GTGC will have a tree in the Festival of Trees, Grand Park in Grand Boulevard, November 27 through December 25, 2026. More details to follow.

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

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

Walton County Welcomes Senate Candidate



Walton County voters welcome Ms. Angie Nixon, a candidate for the U.S. Senate. She assured the crowd that she, a Florida native, was for all of Florida and that her top priority was insurance and Medicare for all in need of these service

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An Unexpected Stage

How Christ the King Episcopal Church is becoming one of the Emerald Coast's newest homes for live music

By ARLON JAY STAGGS

When most people think of a concert venue, they likely don't picture a quiet church tucked away beneath the pines of Santa Rosa Beach.

Yet, that's exactly what Christ the King Episcopal Church is becoming.

This fall, the church launches Music at Christ the King, a new concert and educational series that's bringing internationally acclaimed musicians, local performers, student artists, and music lovers together in one of the area's most intimate listening spaces. The church itself makes an ideal setting. With its soaring wood ceilings, the sanctuary of-

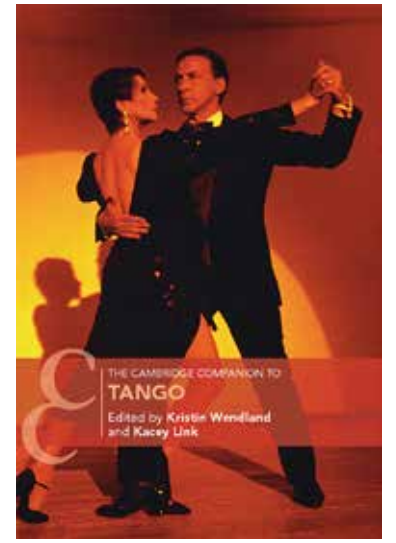
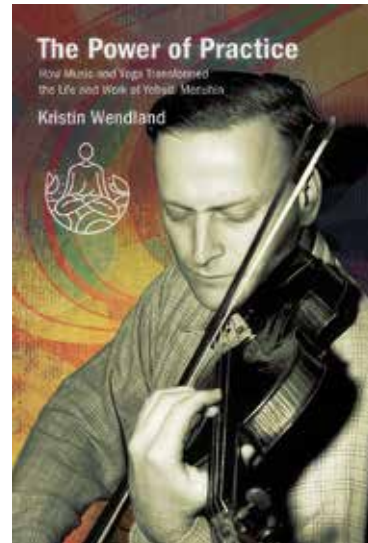
fers warm, resonant acoustics that reward both performers and audiences alike. Still, the series is an ambitious vision rooted in a simple idea: music has the power to build community.

The inaugural season begins Sunday, August 23, with Roman Street, the guitar duo of brothers, Noah and Joshua Thompson. Blending contemporary jazz, Latin, Nuevo Flamenco, classical, and gypsy influences, Roman Street has earned multiple Billboard Top 25 singles, toured internationally, and shared the stage with artists including George Benson, The Gipsy Kings, Dave Koz, Bela Fleck, Ziggy Marley, and Maroon 5.

The music series is the vision of Dr. Kristin Wendland, who joined Christ the King as Director of Music Ministries in February 2025.

For Wendland, this is something of a homecoming.

A Panhandle native, she served as organist at St. Jude's Episcopal Church in Niceville while in high school before earning degrees from Florida State University, the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She then spent twenty-five years on the music faculty at Emory University in Atlanta and is the author of three books, including



two on Argentine tango and a recent work exploring how yoga shaped the life and artistry of violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

After returning home to Northwest Florida, Wendland saw an opportunity to help restore Christ the King's role as a musical and cultural resource for the community. "Music has an extraordinary ability to bring people together," she says. "Whether someone comes to hear a concert, joins a community chorus, or simply learns something new, those experiences create connections and moments that last far beyond a performance."

Since arriving, Wendland has strengthened the parish choir, revived the Emerald Coast Community Singers, and begun establishing Christ the King as a place where professional artists, student musicians, and the wider community can share the joy of live music.

Roman Street is only the beginning. While the world-class artists will launch the season, the Emerald Coast Community Singers serve as the heart of the Music at Christ the King series. Recently reinvigorated under Wendland's leadership, the chorus brings together singers from across the community and will present two cornerstone performances this fall: A Celebration of American Music in September and a Christmas concert in December.

Rounding out the season are interactive musical conversa-

tions, concerts featuring local artists, and student recitals that reflect Wendland's vision of a music ministry extending well beyond Sunday mornings.

The variety is intentional. Rather than simply presenting concerts, Music at Christ the King invites audiences to experience music from many perspectives—as listeners, learners, participants, and neighbors.

In a region celebrated for its beaches and outdoor recreation, Christ the King is carving out a unique place within the Emerald Coast's growing arts community by offering a space where people can discover exceptional music together.

Admission for all events is by donation, making the series accessible to everyone. For a complete schedule of concerts and events, visit Christ the King's Music Ministries page at christthekingfl.org.

Arlon Jay Staggs is an award-winning author and Southern storyteller. His debut novel, *Leta Pearl's Love Biscuits* was published in 2025 and was named Best New Voice in Fiction by the Independent Book Publishers Association. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times* and *December Magazine*. He teaches English at Northwest Florida State College and lives in Inlet Beach.



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For details of concerts and events,
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More Than a Crossing: How the Inlet Beach Underpass is Reconnecting a Community



By BOBBY PARKER

As the sun begins to set in Inlet Beach, a different kind of traffic now moves beneath Highway 98. Families stroll toward dinner with sandy feet and beach towels draped over their shoulders. Cyclists coast through the underpass on their way to evening reservations at 30Avenue. Students laugh as they walk together toward the beach during the school day. What was once a stressful crossing dominated by speeding traffic has quietly transformed into something far more meaningful. A connection point for everyday life in South Walton.

For years, Highway 98 served as both a gateway and a barrier for Inlet Beach.

On the south side of the highway sat the beaches, Scenic Highway 30A, and the coastal lifestyle that has long defined the area. North of the highway, neighborhoods, restaurants, and gathering spaces continued to grow as Inlet Beach evolved into one of the fastest-growing communities in Walton County. Despite being separated by only a few lanes of traffic, the two sides often felt disconnected from one another.

Crossing Highway 98 on foot or by bike was possible, but it rarely felt comfortable or inviting. Families loaded bicycles onto cars for short trips. Visitors staying north of the highway often drove to the beach rather than walking. Those staying south of the highway rarely ventured north without getting behind the wheel.

The completion of the Inlet Beach Underpass has begun changing that dynamic in ways that are both visible and deeply personal to the community.

What was once simply a transportation challenge has become an example of how thoughtful infrastructure can reshape the

way people experience a place. The underpass is no longer just a route beneath a highway. It has become part of the daily rhythm of Inlet Beach itself.

Few people have had a clearer view of that shift than Bryan Corr, developer of 30Avenue.

“Traffic into 30Avenue was not limited by the highway,” Corr said. “But more people chose to drive instead of bike or walk.”

That distinction gets to the heart of why the underpass matters. The challenge was never simply access. It was the experience of moving through the community safely and comfortably outside of a vehicle.

Today, Corr says visitors and residents alike are beginning to embrace a different pace and a different way of experiencing Inlet Beach.

“We are seeing more pedestrian and bike traffic since the underpass opened,” he said. “The visitors to the area are beginning to discover the safer option of crossing the highway.”

The impact is showing up in ways both large and small.

Students from Ohana Institute now regularly walk through the underpass to access nearby beach areas during school hours for recreation. Families staying north of the highway are biking south for beach days without loading everyone into a car. Visitors staying south of Highway 98 are now crossing north to shop, dine, and explore places they may never have previously considered visiting on foot.

What once felt like two separate parts of Inlet Beach is beginning to feel connected again.

That transformation is also being felt by businesses throughout 30Avenue. Corr says one of the clearest signs of the underpass’ success has come directly from tenants themselves.

“Tenants have requested more bike parking areas to reduce the number of bikes parked by their front door,” he said.

It is a small detail, but one that says a great deal about how daily behavior is changing. Rows of bicycles outside restaurants on a warm evening tell a more meaningful story than traffic counts ever could. They represent people choosing to slow down, spend more time outdoors, and experience South Walton in a more connected and active way.

For Corr, that shift aligns naturally with the vision behind 30Avenue and the larger culture of the

INLET BEACH
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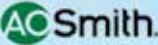
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A New Heart, A New Beginning: Community Celebrates Miracle for 8-Year-Old Sadie Long

By TRISH LeCLERE

Less than 3 months ago, eight-year-old Sadie was enjoying a normal sunny Spring day at Van R. Butler Elementary School when she fainted. Life changed in an instant.

Sadie was rushed for emergency medical care. What began with a trip to Panama City quickly escalated to Sacred Heart Pensacola before she was airlifted to a pediatric cardiac center in Orlando.

There, doctors delivered devastating news. Sadie had been diagnosed with a rare genetic heart condition that can cause dangerous heart rhythm disturbances and progressive heart failure. To protect her from sudden cardiac arrest, surgeons implanted an internal defibrillator. While the device could save her life in an emergency, it was not a permanent solution.

Eventually, it became clear that Sadie's only hope was a heart transplant. Arrangements were made for Sadie to meet with the transplant team at UF

Shands in Gainesville. What followed were many tests and monitoring to determine if she was a candidate for the transplant list. She was. Due to the seriousness of her heart failure, she was placed on the list as a priority transplant, Status 1A.

No one knows when the perfect heart will arrive. So, Sadie was confined to the hospital to wait. Her environment had to be sterile so that she would be healthy when the day came.

Sadie's mother, Rose, never left her daughter's bedside. While she lived in hospital rooms hundreds of miles from home, Sadie's sister remained in Walton County surrounded by family, friends, classmates, and a community eager to help shoulder the burden.

Those who know Rose describe her as one of the kindest



people they've ever met—a devoted mother whose deep faith and quiet strength have carried her family through unimaginable circumstances.

Then came the morning that changed everything. It was sister Harper's 10th birthday. While

she was celebrating here in Santa Rosa Beach, Rose was sitting beside Sadie's hospital bed, still dressed in sweatpants and a T-shirt, gently waking her daughter for morning medication when there was a knock at the hospital room door.

Expecting a nurse, she instead found three of Sadie's cardiologists. One of them looked at her and asked, "Have you heard the news?" Then came the words every transplant family longs to hear. "We've accepted a heart on her behalf."

After the doctors left, mother and daughter sat together absorbing what they had just heard. "I looked at her and said, 'They found your heart,'" Rose wrote. The two cried tears of joy before calling the people they loved most to share the life-changing news.

Yet even in one of the happiest moments of her life, Rose's

thoughts turned to another mother. "My heart soared for the possibility that tomorrow Sadie will go through surgery and have her angel heart," she wrote. "But I won't lie—the mother in me grieves with the mother on the other side of this. I'm very aware that in order for this miracle to come to us, someone else had to make the choice to have their child be an organ donor. My heart stays with that family."

Her words are a poignant reminder that every transplant carries two stories—one of heartbreaking loss and another of extraordinary hope. Though understandably nervous, Sadie faced surgery with remarkable courage. "I'm nervous because it's surgery," she told her mother. "But I'm also very excited and ready to have my new heart."

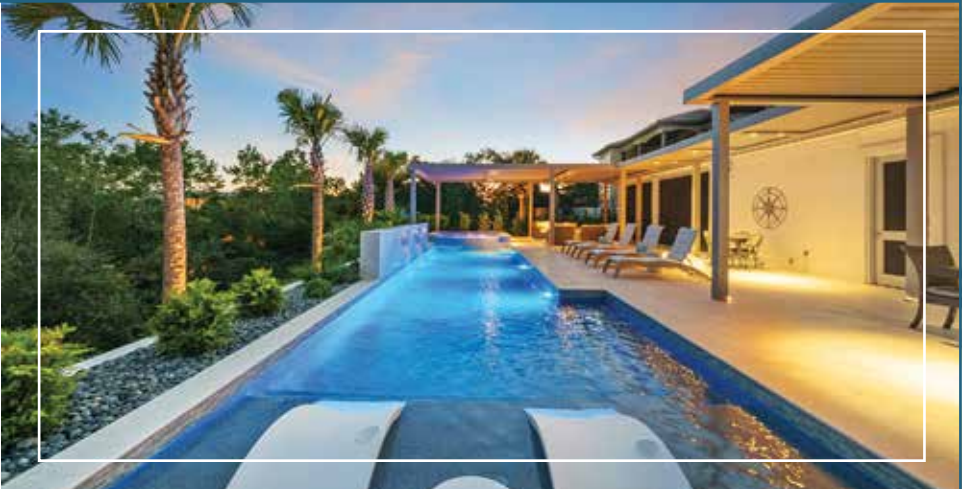
On July 13, surgeons successfully transplanted Sadie's new heart. While the surgery marked

SADIE LONG
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SADIE LONG

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a life-changing milestone, it was also the beginning of a long road to recovery. The months ahead will include rehabilitation, medications to prevent rejection, countless follow-up appointments, and ongoing medical care.

Throughout every step of this journey, Sadie’s family has been embraced by an outpouring of love from neighbors, classmates, teachers, Community Church of Santa Rosa Beach, and peo-

ple across Walton and Okaloosa Counties. Prayer chains have stretched throughout the community, reminding them they are not walking this road alone.

For many, Sadie’s story has become a powerful testament to faith, perseverance, modern medicine, and the extraordinary gift of organ donation.

Today, because one family made the courageous decision to give the gift of life during their darkest hour, another little girl has been given the chance to grow up.

As Sadie begins this new chap-



ter with a new heart, her family asks for continued prayers—not only for her healing, but also for the anonymous donor family whose unimaginable loss made this miracle possible.

Some stories remind us how fragile life can be. Others remind us how precious it is. Sadie’s story is both.

To receive updates on Sadie’s recovery or make a donation to support her family during this journey, visit: SupportNow: <https://www.supportnow.org/long-family>.

INLET BEACH

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area itself.

“A healthy lifestyle is part of the overall vitality of 30A,” he said. “People love to get out and walk and bike.”

One of the biggest changes he has noticed is the rise in what he calls “bike to dinner” traffic at night as visitors and locals move between the beach communities south of the highway and the restaurants and businesses north of it.

The underpass itself also reflects a larger vision for how infrastructure can enhance community character rather than detract from it. Organizations like Scenic Walton have long advocated for thoughtful and context-sensitive solutions that improve safety and connectivity while preserving the pedestrian-friendly nature and scenic beauty of South Walton. Rather than

viewing the project as simply a transportation improvement, the focus remained on how it could strengthen quality of life and help maintain a sense of community as growth continues across the area.

That vision was further elevated through the involvement of the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County, whose contribution helped transform the underpass into something far more inviting than a standard pedestrian tunnel. Public art and placemaking elements create a space that feels welcoming, creative, and reflective of the coastal community surrounding it. Instead of rushing through a dark concrete corridor, pedestrians and cyclists now move through a space that feels intentionally designed for people.

For Corr, the larger impact of the project ultimately comes down to unity.

“Inlet Beach 10 years ago was a tale of two towns, the North and the South,” he said.

That divide is beginning to fade as safer and more convenient access changes the way people move throughout the community.

“Now that safer and convenient access across the highway is available, we are starting to see more vacationers staying on the North side, and those staying on the South side are biking and walking north to shop and dine.”

The true success of the Inlet Beach Underpass may not be measured only in safety improvements or traffic patterns. Its greatest impact may be found in the ordinary moments now unfolding every day beneath Highway 98. Children walking to the beach. Couples biking to dinner at sunset. Families exploring more of the community together without needing to load

into a car.

For a place that once felt divided by the highway running through its center, those moments are helping Inlet Beach feel connected again.



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Community

Hide It, Lock It, Take It: Doing Your Part for National Vehicle Theft Prevention Month



By TED TOEDTE, CPS, CRIME PREVENTION SPECIALIST, WCSO

It only takes a minute. You run into the store for a gallon of milk, leaving the car running with the AC on to fight off the Florida summer heat, doors unlocked “just this once.” You walk back out to an empty parking spot. By the time you realize what happened, the car, and whatever was inside it, is already gone.

August is the final peak month of summer travel, and with it comes heightened national attention on property and vehicle crime. The National Crime Prevention Coun-

cil and NHTSA use this month to spotlight a simple, seasonal problem: with more people traveling, more cars sitting in driveways and parking lots, and more valuables left in plain sight, vehicle theft and break-ins tend to climb. The good news is that most of it is preventable.

Vehicle thefts nationally have actually fallen for two straight years, largely thanks to better anti-theft technology and closer cooperation between automakers and law enforcement. But the crime hasn’t disappeared, and one part of it is creeping back up: catalytic converter theft, which had dropped sharply, is rebounding in some cities as precious metal prices climb again. A converter can be cut out from underneath a parked car in under two minutes.

Here at home, WCSO’s message hasn’t changed in years, and it still works: hide it, lock it, take it. Deputies say the overwhelming majority of the car burglaries they respond to

involve a vehicle that was left unlocked, with something valuable sitting on the seat. It’s an easy crime to prevent and an easy one to become a victim of if you skip the basics.

What Our Local Data Shows

A five-year look at our own case data backs up the national trend: reported auto thefts in Walton County fell from 67 in 2021 to 27 in 2025, a decline of roughly 60 percent. That’s real progress, and it lines up with what NICB is seeing nationwide.

The more useful finding is where these crimes are happening. Over the last five years, 56 percent of all reported auto thefts in Walton County occurred at a residence or apartment, and another 10 percent happened in a parking lot or garage, together accounting for two out of every three incidents. Roadway thefts were a distant third at 12 percent. In other words, this isn’t primarily a retail-lot or highway prob-



lem; it’s a driveway, carport and apartment-complex problem.

CPTED
Because residential and multifamily properties account for most of the thefts we see, this is exactly where Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) makes the biggest difference.

WCSO’s Crime Prevention Division offers free CPTED assessments for apartment complexes, HOAs and parking lots. A walkthrough looks at lighting levels, sightlines between units and parking areas, landscaping that may be hiding vehicles from view, and where cameras would do the most good.

Property managers and HOA boards can request an assessment at no cost, and many of the fixes we recommend are low-cost changes that make a real difference in reducing crimes of opportunity.

One more way to help: register your home or business security cameras with WCSO at

HIDE, LOCK, TAKE
continued on page 21



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South Walton Beach Safety Lieutenant Earns "Soldier of the Year" Title

By MACKENZIE MCCLINTOCK,
SWFD PUBLIC INFORMATION
OFFICER

When the Army National Guard set out to find its best soldier, they found one of South Walton's own. Brandon Brown, a Beach Safety Lieutenant for the South Walton Fire District, has been named the 2026 Army National Guard Soldier of the Year.

Brown earned the title during the 2026 Best Warrior Competition, held at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center. The prestigious competition brought together high-performing Soldiers from across the United States to determine the National Guard's top service members.

Through four demanding days, competitors completed more than 25 physically and mentally challenging events designed to evaluate every aspect

of military readiness. The competition tested physical fitness, marksmanship, land navigation, tactical proficiency, leadership, and decision-making under pressure, all while soldiers were enduring Florida's triple-digit heat index.

"This recognition speaks to Brandon's character more than anything else," said South Walton Fire District Fire Chief Ryan Crawford. "No matter which uniform he's wearing, he leads by example and represents this District with professionalism and integrity. We're incredibly proud of him and all he's accomplished. This sort of service and performance is simply exceptional."

Brown advanced to the national competition after winning company, state, and regional-level Best Warrior competitions, earning the opportunity to represent



Florida on the national stage.

Within South Walton Fire District, Brown serves as a Beach Safety Lieutenant and Director of the Junior Lifeguard Program, where he leads efforts to educate local youth in open water safety, surf lifesaving skills, and leadership. He is also a certified drone pilot and serves as a mentor to

the lifeguards under his supervision.

"Whether he's mentoring and coaching others, protecting visitors on our beaches, or performing in his military role, Brandon approaches every responsibility with humility, discipline, and a genuine desire to serve," Crawford added. "We strive to hire and retain this level of leadership within our Beach Safety Division, and this speaks volumes to what our lifeguards are capable of achieving."

South Walton Fire District congratulates Lieutenant Brown on this remarkable achievement and extends its support to all the Soldiers who competed in the 2026 Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

Photos courtesy of the Army National Guard and the Brown family.

HIDE, LOCK, TAKE

continued from page 20

waltonso.org/camera. It doesn't give deputies live access to your feed; it simply lets us know a camera is nearby so investigators can reach out if footage might help solve a case. Walton County also partners with Flock Safety's license plate reader network, which has made it dramatically harder for someone to steal a car here and simply drive away. In one stretch in September 2024, Flock alerts led deputies to three separate stolen vehicles in just over 24 hours, resulting in five arrests. If you already have a compatible camera, you can add it through the Flock Safety Community portal to help extend that coverage even further.

Businesses, HOAs and community groups can also help spread the word. WCSO's Crime Prevention Unit has "Hide It, Lock It, Take It" rack cards and metal yard signs available at no cost for any business, apartment complex or neighborhood that wants to help reinforce this message locally. Reach out to us to request a supply for your lobby, clubhouse or parking area. You can call 850-892-8111 or email crimeprevention@waltonso.org.

None of these steps take more than a few minutes, but together they make Freeport a harder target for the crimes of opportunity that drive most vehicle theft. Do your part this month: hide it, lock it, take it.

Ted Toedte is a Crime Prevention Specialist and certified CPTED practitioner with the Walton County Sheriff's Office, with more than 30 years of law enforcement experience in Florida and California.

Vehicle Theft Prevention Checklist

- Hide it: Never leave purses, electronics, or packages visible on a seat, put them in the trunk before you arrive, not after you park.
- Lock it: Lock every door, every time, even in your own driveway. Most car burglaries in Walton County involve an unlocked vehicle.
- Take it: Never leave keys or a fob in the car, even "just for a minute."
- Park in well-lit areas and, where possible, off the street or behind a fence.
- Consider a steering wheel lock, kill switch, or GPS tracker for added protection.
- If you drive a hybrid or truck, ask a local shop about a catalytic converter shield, theft of these is rising again.

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company Announces Fall Classes

By NATHANAEL FISHER

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is gearing up for another season of exceptional educational theatre programming with its Fall 2026 Youth and Adult Education Classes, running Aug. 8 through Nov. 22. This semester's lineup spans nearly every age and interest, from five-year-olds taking their first bow in Mini Players to seasoned performers refining their craft in Teen Company and adults finding (or rediscovering) their love of the stage in Senior Drama Club. With classes at ECTC's Grand Boulevard campus, its second space on Grand Boulevard (formerly Orvis), the Florida Chautauqua Theatre in DeFuniak Springs, and the Riverwalk Community Clubhouse in Freeport, ECTC continues to expand its reach across the Emerald Coast. Payment plans and scholarships are available for families who need them, and registration is open!

This fall also marks an exciting chapter for ECTC's education program, with two new directors stepping into leader-



Anna and Nathanael Fisher.

ship roles: Adam Day Howard, MFA, as education director and Mallory McGill as education and outreach coordinator. Together, they bring decades of combined experience in professional theatre, music direction and arts education to a program that already reaches hundreds of students each year.

Mallory McGill was raised in Destin and is thrilled to give back to her hometown community as she shares the transformative power of theatre with the next generation. Before joining ECTC, McGill taught theatre



at Destin High School, where her students consistently earned Superior ratings and Critics' Choice Awards at the Florida District and State Thespian Festivals, and where she was honored with the school's prestigious Golden Shark Teacher Award for her dedication to students and the broader school community.

McGill's résumé extends well beyond the Panhandle. She spent more than 15 years teaching and actor coaching in Los Angeles at Lesly Kahn & Co, one of the nation's premier acting studios. She trained hun-

dreds of actors ranging in age from 6 to 65, and many of her students have gone on to appear on HBO, ABC, NBC, Disney, Nickelodeon and in national Broadway tours. As a working actress, director, filmmaker and writer, her own credits include The Lincoln Lawyer, Stupid Questions, The Suite Life: On Deck, 90210, General Hospital, and stage productions of The Importance of Being Earnest, Biloxi Blues and Misalliance. She later discovered a passion for writing original stories, and her most recent screenplay was recognized by the Austin Film

Festival and Reboot Studios. McGill holds a Bachelor of Science from Vanderbilt University, where she studied Acting/Directing, Communication Studies and Human & Organizational Development. She believes the best rehearsal rooms are built on curiosity, kindness, collaboration and the courage to take creative risks, a philosophy that shapes everything from ECTC's youngest Mini Players classes to its competitive troupes.

Adam Day Howard steps into the role of education director following a distinguished career in higher education and professional musical theatre. Most recently, he served as Lecturer of Musical Theatre at Youngstown State University's Dana School of Music and University Theatre, where he taught vocal pedagogy, acting for musical theatre, music direction and playwriting, and directed all mainstage musicals. He also directed the university's Voices of YSU University Chorus from 2022 to 2024 and created YSU's minor in Musical Theatre Music Direction in 2024. Before Youngstown State, Howard held faculty positions



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at Texas Tech University, Centre College, the Institute of the Arts Barcelona and Kent State University, teaching musical theatre performance, vocal studio, acting and the history and literature of musical theatre.

Howard’s creative work spans regional theatre, Off-Broadway and international festivals. He produced and music directed Here There Be Dragons at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2024, having previously music directed its Off-Broadway run at Players Theatre in Manhattan in 2022. As a composer and writer, he created several original Texas pantomimes for Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, including “Hansel and Gretel -or- Out of the Woods and Into the Fire.” His original music for Tennessee Williams’ Kirche, Kuche, Kinder was reviewed in The New York Times. Howard holds a Doctor of Education from Ohio University (expected 2026), a Master of Performance with Honors from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and a BA in Theatre Studies from Kent State University. He is the only American certified in the Vocal Process Methodology developed by Gillyanne Kayes, and he holds memberships in

Actors Equity Association (UK), the National Alliance for Musical Theatre and the Dramatists Guild.

The ECTC Education fall lineup begins with Mini Players for kindergarten through first grade, where students explore songs, dance and basic theatrical vocabulary through a Trolls-themed class, culminating in a showcase on Nov. 4. Young dancers can also join First Steps Ballet/Tap, taught by Emily Bainbridge, or the Ballet/Jazz Combo, taught by Chelsea Rager. Little Players (grades 2-3) step up to a full production class experience with Trolls JR, while Big Players in grades 4-5 take on more complex choreography in their own Trolls JR production with technique class options like Group Vocal Techniques and Broadway Dance Styles.

Teens have no shortage of options this fall, from Legally Blonde JR for grades 6-12, complete with an Aug. 7 audition workshop and November performances, to specialized Masterclasses in Acting for Musical Theatre, Playwriting and Acting and Improv, all taught by Howard and McGill. Dancers can pursue Broadway Dance Styles or the monthly Leaps, Turns &



ECTC Opens Registration For Fall Education Programs



Tricks Skills Lab, and competitive performers have two tracks: the JTF Performance Troupe (grades 2-12), which travels to the Junior Theatre Festival in Atlanta in January, and the Ju-

nior Thespian Competition Troupe (grades 6-8), which competes regionally in October and at the state level in February. Students in grades 9-12 can also join Teen Company Fall, a

semester-long training program that culminates in a One Act performance at the Florida Theatre Conference in November and includes mentorship toward collegiate auditions, scholarship opportunities and portfolio building.

ECTC’s reach extends beyond its home campus through satellite classes at the Florida Chautauqua Theatre in DeFuniak Springs and the Riverwalk Community Clubhouse in Freeport, where K-12 students can participate in Trolls JR. The Homeschool program offers Voice and Movement, Acting and Improv, and a hands-on Sewing and Costume Design course for students ages 9 to 18, while adults can join Beginner/Intermediate Tap, Intermediate/Advanced Tap or the Senior Drama Club for performers 55 and up.

Registration details, scholarships and payment plans are available through ECTC’s website, and families with questions about specific classes are encouraged to reach out to education@emeraldcoasttheatre.org or call 850-684-0323. See you at the theatre!

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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.

Greenway Station 30A
Wednesdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
The Big Chill 30A Thursdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Village of Baytowne Wharf Family Fun
Thursdaze Lights Show Aug. 13: Experience a unique aerial display that blends technology and coastal charm at Thursdays 9 p.m. For the adults, join Bubble Baytowne Aug. 20 to enjoy an

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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

Queens of the Tiles: Mahjong at Ovide Aug. 17 & 31
Brunch, bubbles, and a little friendly competition! Join Ovide for Queens of the Tiles, a lively Mahjong social where guests can sip, shuffle, and socialize over brunch favorites and wine. Get in the game from 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

Guided Plant Tour at Topsail State Park Aug. 17
Join Topsail Hill Preserve State Park and Master Gardener Bill Kuenstler on the third Monday of each month from 9-11 a.m. for a Guided Plant Stroll. The stroll begins at Tram Stop #2. This program is free with regular park admission.

Emerald Coast Foundation's Children's Charity Poker Run Aug. 21-22
The Emerald Coast Foundation's Children's Charity Poker Run returns with a fresh new look and a new home at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, raising vital funds for children's charities across Northwest Florida that support local youth and families in need. Formerly known as the Emerald Coast Poker Run, the weekend will bring together boating enthusiasts, sponsors and supporters for one of the nation's largest boat poker runs, featuring

on-resort accommodations, overnight slip rentals, boat and trailer storage, and a lineup of social events. Learn more and register today: emeraldcoastpokerrun.com.

Biophilia Center Back to Nature Aug. 22
The forest is calling — and so are some very special intergalactic guests! Join the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. for Back to Nature, a day packed with wildlife, fun, and adventure for the whole family. Meet ambassador animals, explore the Reptile Room, bounce, play, raffle, and grab a bite from the food trucks — and keep your eyes open for some mysterious visitors who love photos. May the forest be with you. Bring a towel and spare change of clothes for water activities! Visit eowilson-center.org.

Pairing & Sharing Wine Dinner Benefit Aug. 27
This memorable evening brings together community members and supporters who share a passion for giving back. Proceeds from the event directly benefit Caring & Sharing of South Walton, helping provide food, financial assistance, counseling, and case management to neighbors in need throughout Walton County. The evening begins with a cocktail hour featuring passed hors d'oeuvres. Guests will then be seated for an intimate four-course dining experience by Swiftly Catered, with each course thoughtfully paired with exceptional wines from Jessup Cellars. Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/pairing-sharing-wine-dinner-with-jessup-cellars-tickets-1988335629392>.

Wine & Fries: Golden Hour for Good at The Alice Aug. 28
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida's signature fundraiser returns with waterfront views, wine, local brews, McDonald's famous French fries, live entertainment and auctions from 6-9 p.m. Proceeds help families remain close to children receiving medical treatment.
Tickets are \$115. Purchase tickets at givebutter.com/c/wine-and-fries.

HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BEACH AUGUST 2026

Ranger Led Hike at Eden Gardens State Park Sept. 1

Meet up on the paver block pad at 10 a.m., adjacent to the screened-in pavilion. The hike will meander through two distinct natural communities, Xeric Hammock and Floodplain Swamp. A ranger will share information about the flora and fauna found throughout the park and specific to the natural communities being hiked through. The event is free with paid park entry fee.



Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest Sept. 4-6

This Labor Day Weekend, join us for Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest. Each evening from 5-9 p.m., stroll The Village streets as you browse a variety of artwork from local and regional artists. Enjoy LIVE music throughout the festival 7-9 p.m. nightly, and a spectacular fireworks show over the lagoon on Sunday at 9 p.m.

Labor Day Block Party at WaterColor Package Store Sept. 5

Kick off Labor Day weekend from 5-7 p.m. and enjoy live music from Christon Birge, complimentary wine tastings inside the store, and street bites served curbside. The fun continues outdoors with family games, local vendors, and festive activities for the whole family to enjoy. Feeling lucky? Try your hand at the “fishing for discounts” game and reel in savings of up to 50% off any bottle of wine. Classic and signature cocktails will also be available for purchase to keep the celebration going.

Come From Away at ECTC Sept. 10-27

Don’t miss the most produced musical of this year and winner of over thirteen international awards, including a Tony Award! This inspiring true story follows a tiny Canadian town that welcomed thousands of travelers

who were grounded on 9/11. Tickets and information can be found at www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

9/11 Day of Honor & Live Music @ Fish Out of Water Sept. 11

FOOW invites you to a Day of Honor in remembrance of 9/11 from 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Enjoy special Chef and beverage features, as well as patriotic live music by Jamah Terry from 6-9 p.m. Reservations are not accepted; seating is offered on a first-come, first-served basis. All active and retired military personnel, veterans, law enforcement officers and emergency service professionals (with proper ID) will receive 50% OFF all day!

Battle for the Buckle at Harbor Docks Sept. 23-27

The 2nd Annual Westonwood Ranch Battle for the Buckle brings together anglers, business leaders and community supporters for four days of competitive fishing, camaraderie and giving back. Tournament highlights include a \$10,000 winner-take-all White Marlin prize and \$2,000 prizes for Catch and Release, Heaviest Tuna, Heaviest Wahoo, Heaviest Dolphin and the Junior Angler Youth Division. A \$1,500 Daily White Marlin Jackpot is also available. The tournament supports Westonwood Ranch and its mission to empower teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through life-skills education, workforce development and



meaningful employment opportunities. Register at westonwood.org/battleforthebucklefishing-tournament. For additional information, contact tournament director Joe Donovan at (850) 572-3695.

14th Annual Fore Her Golf Outing Sept. 25

Golfers of every skill level are invited to think pink and hit the Links Golf Club at Sandestin for a great local cause. Presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care, the outing includes a Bloody Mary Bar from Ruby Slipper Cafe, breakfast from Chick-fil-A, 18 holes of golf, the popular “Dress Like a Lady Hole,” food at the turn and an after-party featuring lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffle drawings. Funds raised help Fore Her offset living expenses for local breast cancer patients undergoing treatment along the Emerald Coast.

Early BIRDIE registration through Sept. 1. Register at foreher.org/golfouting. Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities

are also available; contact Amy Walsh at amy@foreher.org.

Destin Seafood Festival Sept. 25-27

The Destin Seafood Festival returns for its 48th year, transforming the Destin Harbor into a mile-long celebration of fresh Gulf seafood, live music and coastal culture. The festival features five stages of live music with local and regional artists. The pedestrian-friendly, waterfront boardwalk and docks become a feast for the senses as more than 75 local food and craft vendors, plus Destin’s favorite restaurants,

serve up seafood specialties, cold drinks and handmade art. For more information and tickets, visit DestinSeafoodFestival.com.

10th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival Oct. 15-18

Sip, savor and celebrate during four unforgettable days of exceptional wine and cuisine at the Harvest Wine & Food Festival, produced by the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation.

The festivities begin Thursday with intimate Harvest Wine Dinners at restaurants and venues throughout South Walton. Friday’s Harvest After Dark brings elevated wines, unexpected pairings and culinary creations to Cerulean Park. Saturday features the signature Grand Tasting, followed by a spirited Jazz Cocktail Brunch on Sunday. Proceeds benefit the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and its mission to help children in need throughout Northwest Florida. Visit dcwaf.org/harvest-festival for the complete schedule and ticket information.



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Wellness

Ascension Sacred Heart Welcomes New Cardiologist

We are pleased to welcome Darin Busby, MD, to Ascension Sacred Heart Cardiology - Miramar Beach. His office is located in the Medical Office Building on the campus of Sacred Heart Emerald Coast at 7720 U.S. 98, Suite 110. He joins the largest heart care team in Walton County with four doctors, including a cardiac electrophysiologist and two interventional cardiologists, and four mid-level providers specializing in cardiology.



chronic conditions to reduce their risks and improve their quality of life.”

Dr. Busby is board-certified in cardiology and completed a fellowship in Cardiovascular Diseases and his residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, where he also earned his Medical Degree.

He specializes in cardiovascular disease and internal medicine, providing comprehensive care for patients with heart and vascular conditions, as well as general adult medical needs.

Appointments are available with Dr. Busby. To schedule an appointment or get a second opinion, call (850) 267-1603.

“12% of adults in Walton County have been told they have heart disease, heart attack or stroke,” said Claudia Emami, MD, MPH, MBA, FACS, Chief Medical Officer for Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. “Increasing access to cardiology care will help more people manage

Family Medicine Residency Program Reaches Full Capacity; Expands Community Healthcare Access

The Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Family Medicine Residency program has hit a major goal. As of July 1, the program is officially at full capacity with 18 resident doctors. This means the program has reached its plan to have six residents per class for each of its three training years.

“We are ecstatic to work together to create more access to healthcare,” said Holly Holt, Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health in Walton County. “We are grateful for these partnerships that have made it a reality.”

A big part of this success comes from a special partnership. The resident doctors get their hands-on training at the Walton Community Health Center. This facility is owned and run by the Florida Department of Health in Walton County. This partnership is the foundation of the residents' training. From their very first day, the residents are responsible for their own patients. This allows them to build long-term relationships and provide the kind of consistent care that local families rely on.

To keep up with the growing number of doctors and the high demand for healthcare, the residency program has gotten creative with the space. They moved office space into shared office spaces, converted the residents workspace into a place for

nurses to chart and moved residents to a conference room with workstations. This will allow for the addition of four brand-new clinic rooms, including an integrative health room that will focus on mental health and osteopathic adjustments. Once the renovations are complete, the total number of exam rooms will be 12. This change allows the clinic to run more smoothly and see more patients.

“Our goal is to blend service with education,” said Joshua A. Hodge, MD, Program Director, Florida State University Family Medicine Residency at Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. “By expanding our space and our resident team, we are doing more than just training doctors. We are filling a real gap in healthcare for the people of Walton County.”

The impact will be significant. With 18 residents working and the new clinic spaces, the program will be able to handle 400 more appointments every month. That brings the clinic's total capacity to about 900 appointments each month. This is a huge help for the local area, especially since nearly 70% of the patients at the clinic do not have insurance. Without these extra appointments, many people might not get the preventative care they need, which would force them to rely on emergency rooms for help.



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Not 65 Yet? Here's Your Bridge to Health Coverage



BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

I hear a version of the same story every year from some of my clients. A spouse retires, enrolls in Medicare, and the other spouse loses coverage they'd relied on for years. They look at the ACA Marketplace, see the sticker price, and decide to go without insurance rather than pay it. Then open enrollment closes, and they feel stuck. If that's you, take a breath. You have more options than you probably realize, and a few things have changed for the better this year.

The first thing worth knowing is that you may still have a path back to an ACA plan. Losing coverage because your spouse aged into Medicare counts as a qualifying life event, opening a sixty-day Special Enrollment Period to sign up for a Marketplace plan outside the regular fall window. If that window has closed, the next option is the standard Open Enrollment Period, which runs November 1 through January 15 in most states, Florida included. Before you assume you've missed your chance, it's worth having me check your specific timeline.

The bigger piece of news is that short-term health insurance has become more useful again. For the past couple of years, federal rules limited these plans to four months total, a poor fit for anyone facing a longer gap. In August of 2025, federal regulators stopped enforcing those limits while they reconsider the

rule, and insurers in many states, Florida included, can once again offer plans with longer terms, some stretching up to twelve months with the ability to renew for up to three years depending on the carrier. Unlike ACA plans, short-term medical can be purchased any time of year, so there's no enrollment window to miss in the first place.

I want to be upfront about what these plans are and what they are not. Short-term medical is available to people ages 18 to 64, so it fits squarely in that window between losing employer coverage and reaching Medicare eligibility yourself. Short-term plans are medically underwritten, meaning your health history factors into whether you qualify and what you pay, and they don't have to follow ACA rules, which is part of why they cost less. There's no guarantee of coverage for pre-existing conditions, benefits like maternity care

aren't required, and insurers can cap what they'll pay out over a year or a lifetime. One real advantage is how quickly coverage can begin, often within 24 hours after an injury or 7 days after the onset of an illness, which matters if you're closing a gap in a hurry. Many short-term medical plans are also offered as affordable PPO options, giving you more flexibility in which doctors and providers you can see. Still, I don't recommend them as a permanent replacement for comprehensive coverage, since comprehensive plans are guaranteed to renew regardless of your health, cover pre-existing conditions, and include essential benefits short-term plans aren't required to offer.

There's one other bridge option worth mentioning. Fixed indemnity plans pay a set cash benefit for a covered service or hospital day, rather than a percentage of your actual costs, and

pair well with Short Term Medical for stronger coverage.

I don't see myself as just an insurance broker. I see myself as an educator first, and my job is to make sure you understand your options and to help guide you toward a plan tailored to your needs.

My advice to anyone without health insurance is simple. Don't assume the door is closed just because open enrollment has passed. Give me a call, let's get your real numbers and compare what a subsidized Marketplace plan might actually cost. The math often looks different once someone runs it properly. I'd be happy to be that person for you.

Call me, Christian Regalado, at (850) 687-7606, or email christian@30ahealthins.com. You can find more on our website at www.30AHealthins.com.

FWC Recognizes Several Landowners Across The Panhandle For Wildlife Conservation Efforts

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is recognizing several individuals for their outstanding wildlife habitat management in northwest Florida.

To show appreciation for the work done by landowners to conserve our state's wildlife habitat, the FWC's Landowner Assistance Program (LAP) created the Wildlife Habitat Recognition Program to formally honor landowners by awarding them with a sign to display on their property and a certificate recognizing their conservation efforts.

The FWC is recognizing the following landowners for implementing a variety of conservation practices to restore and enhance wildlife habitat on their property for both game and non-game wildlife species:

- Charles Livingston of Gadsden County with Crossbow Land Company LLC
- Steve and Susan Roeser of Holmes County with The Woodland Springs Farm
- Gary Breilmayer and Family of Okaloosa County with Good-Mayer LLC

- Calvin Robinson of Okaloosa County with The Fleming Creek Farm
- Edwin Henry of Okaloosa County with the Welannee Plantation
- Brett Wilson and Family of Walton County with Limestone Creek Farms
- Gary Johnson and Family of Walton County with Square-J Farm

"We're recognizing these landowners for their enduring commitment to the ecosystem and its wildlife, plants and animals," said Ed O'Daniels, FWC Private Lands Regional Coordinator. "Through their stewardship and dedication, they have helped preserve these natural resources not only for themselves, but for future generations to enjoy and benefit from them. Recognizing and supporting responsible landowners is essential, as their commitment to stewardship helps protect biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem health, and preserve the natural heritage we

FWC

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The World of Microplastics



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

I had heard of microplastics but had not paid much attention to them until recently. However, I think the subject is quite interesting.

A little history: Leo Baeke-

land, a Belgian immigrant to the United States, developed Bakelite, considered the first fully synthetic plastic, in 1907. Early uses included electrical components; Bakelite was later used in radios, automobiles, and appliances. In the 1930s and '40s, new synthetic materials included polyester, nylon, polystyrene foam, and plexiglass. In 1955, Life magazine published an article titled "Throwaway Living," focusing on how plastics were helping overburdened housewives. Fast-forward to now, and you will find plastics in modern medicine, food packaging, construction, cosmetics, apparel, paint, cleansers, toothpaste, and the list goes on.

Microplastics are particles smaller than 5 millimeters, and nanoplastics are smaller than 1 micrometer. Some come from larger plastics breaking down, while others are manufactured for use in certain products. Most conventional plastics do not readily biodegrade; instead, they can persist and break into increasingly smaller particles. We find them in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the clothes we wear, and the food we eat. They've been found from the summit of Mount Everest to the ocean depths. To date, microplastics have been found in more than 1,300 aquatic and terrestrial species and detected in various human

tissues and fluids.

Stanford physician Desiree LaBeaud has described this as being "born polluted," after studies reported microplastics in meconium (a newborn's first stool). Researchers have also reported microplastics in breast milk. During preliminary research, Teflon specks were visible under a microscope in one child's tonsil tissue.

Micro- and nanoplastics have been detected in brain and reproductive tissues, among other areas. Researchers are investigating whether smaller particles can cross cell membranes, disrupt signaling processes, or affect other cellular functions. What these findings mean for human health is still being studied.

Researcher struggle to know which substances to study, as more than 10,000 chemicals have been identified as being used in plastics. More than two-thirds have not been fully assessed for safety, and over 2,400 have been identified as potentially hazardous. Heat and sunlight can increase the migration of some substances from plastic bottles, so avoid storing bottled water in hot cars or direct sunlight. Notice how many cases of water are left in the sun at gas stations and other stores.

So, what can we do about it? Ready, set . . .

Children: When practical, choose well-made, age-appropriate metal or wooden toys that meet current safety standards. How many kids put toys in their mouths?!

Here are some more options for reducing plastic use and potential exposure:

- Purchase clothes, towels, bed linens, rugs, and other items made from natural materials such as cotton, linen, silk, and wool.
- Choose stainless steel, cast iron, glass, or properly made food-safe ceramic or clay cookware.
- Replace single-use plastic water bottles with reusable stainless steel or glass bottles.
- Take a glass container with you when you eat out so you can use it for leftovers. If you receive leftovers in a polystyrene foam container, transfer them to a different container as soon as you get home.
- When microwaving food, use glass, ceramic, or a con-

tainer specifically labeled microwave-safe. Dispose of plastic items that are damaged or showing wear.

- Plastic wrap and plastic utensils can contribute to plastic waste and may release chemicals or particles, particularly when heated or damaged. Reduce the number of single-use plastic items in your kitchen. When using plastic wrap, follow the label directions and do not allow it to touch food during microwaving. Consider reusable food-grade silicone lids or Bee's Wrap. I have both, and they are great!
- Do not reuse containers designed for single use. Follow the manufacturer's directions for reusable plastic products.
- Look for products sold in glass jars rather than plastic ones, such as peanut butter.
- Once opened, store meat in a leakproof glass or food-grade silicone container.
- Consider using glass food-storage containers.
- Pick up some inexpensive silverware to use at the beach or on picnics, and keep some in the car for those fast-food stops.

As always, don't overwhelm yourself. Start with what you use most often. The next time you're shopping for clothes, check the material label inside the garment and ask yourself whether the choice supports your health and environmental goals. I recently needed to pick up a few new items and found that some international brands didn't have material labels, so I chose not to buy them.

Look for flatware at thrift stores. Another good place to start is with bed linens and jammies. We spend up to eight hours in them every day of our lives. IKEA has some good stainless steel cookware at a reasonable price. Lastly, if you're at the farmers market and there is a pottery booth, stop in and look for a new pie pan or other items to replace the not-so-healthy ones at home. Just confirm that the pottery is intended for food use, was made by a reputable potter, and has a food-safe glaze.

As more of us change our buying habits, the market will begin to change as well. This is how we can fight back.

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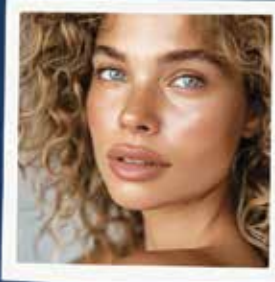
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Create and Highlight the Good



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

I was enjoying some sunshine and air show aviation when two adult drunk guys proceeded to fist-fight and roll their tent onto our chairs and umbrella. Later, I noticed a mom struggling to both carry beach bags and her crying toddler. Then, a kind stranger walked her bags to her car so she could carry her child. Then, I saw three people get out of their cars to check on a woman who fell on a bike. Shortly after, a kind couple helped my son carry a cooler. When I recounted these events to my husband, it struck me that what I emphasized most was the unpleasant and irritating fist fight.

Why is it so much easier to focus on bad behavior than good?

Negativity is often louder and more attention-grabbing than goodness. We like to feel in control, and when others are engaging in behavior outside of our values, it makes us feel out of control and our brain alerts us. Additionally, focusing on the negative behavior in others can let us off the hook because our

behavior isn't as bad.

Generally, when things are going well, it is easy to overlook the good. We get up, get in our cars, go to work, interact with others, come home, all the while forgetting to notice the good warm sun, the good of having money for gas, the good of having meaningful work, the good of relationships that make us smile, and the good of a nice home at the end of the day. And while we are overlooking the good, our brains are scanning for danger and alerting us to bad drivers, a person who looks dangerous, the person yelling out the window in the parking lot, the mean person in the checkout line, the humidity, and people leaving trash on the beach.

Focusing on bad behavior over the good in life can leave us feeling we need to protect ourselves, become cynical, isolated, and embrace a negative mindset. The great news is our brains are trained through patterns of repetition, so while brains naturally scan for danger, we can retrain our brains to recognize the patterns of good in the world. And,

when you begin to seek the good, you will find good happening all around. People are creating good by donating time to pick up trash, sweep boardwalks, and fill in holes on the beach for sea turtles. People are creating good by starting meal trains and GoFundMe pages for those who need support. Neighbors are creating good by mowing each other's lawns and buying baked goods from one another's children. Volunteers are creating good by serving in food pantries and clothing closets for those who could use some community support.

We cannot control the drunk brawlers on the beach, but we can control how we show up in the world. We get to decide if we will create and highlight the good. We get to decide if we will go out of our way and inconvenience ourselves to create more good in the world. So, how do you shift more focus to the good?

5 Ways to Create and Highlight the Good

1. Pay attention. Notice when you are annoyed and why. Notice when you are inspired by others doing good and how that feels. Notice your responses in both scenarios. Which are you giving more energy and attention?
2. Shift energy. When you notice yourself giving more at-

tention to bad than good, say to yourself, "I want to give more energy to noticing and creating goodness." Seek justice in helpful ways when appropriate and when it's not, let go of your righteous indignation and put your energy where it counts.

3. Watch. Look for opportunities to create good even when it inconveniences you. Do something kind and unexpected for someone in your home. Find a way to be a good and kind neighbor. Seek ways to create goodness in the larger world. Be creative and have fun with creating goodness.

4. Name goodness. When you see goodness, talk about it with others. Tell someone their good-

ness inspired you. Practice naming good things in your life daily.

5. Repeat until it's a habit. Choose a day each week to create good. Fold a goodness creating practice into something you do each week like going to the grocery store or grabbing coffee. Connect creating goodness with specific times like holidays. Put reminders in your phone until it becomes second nature.

The world can feel dark and frustrating at times. And regular people doing simple good things really do make a transformational difference. Enjoy creating some good and invite others to join you. To connect with us along your growth journey, find us at Journeybravely.com.



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Wellness

Beat the Heat – How to Cool Down Your Conflicts



By JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PhD

Couples tend to have more heated conflict when it's hot outside. Hot temperatures interfere with mindful, sensible thinking because when we are overheated, our bodies automatically spend energy to cool down. Much of that energy comes from the pre-frontal cortex, which is the front part of our brain that helps us self-regulate. When this happens,

we are less able to keep our aggressive impulses in check. Couples impacted by work or parenting stress and those who are exhausted also have more heated conflict. Like being physically overheated, psychological stress and physical exhaustion create heightened physiological arousal that interferes with mindful, constructive responses and leads to the more automatic “fight or flight” response. During heated relationship conflict we default to either (a) an attack and defend response or (b) shutdown and withdraw response. So, when it's hot out (like it is now), or when you and/or your partner are stressed or exhausted, you are more likely to feel overwhelmed and have a difficult time expressing your own negative emotions constructively or dealing with your partner's negative emotions rationally.

Rest assured, these types of emotional and physiological responses during arguments are completely normal and predictable. Thankfully, if you pay attention to your own body, you can learn to recognize the first signs of this negative arousal and take self-corrective action BEFORE you become overwhelmed and “flooded” with hard-to-control emotions.

How to Cool Down Conflicts and Stop Flooding

- 1. Learn to identify the early warning signs of being emotionally overwhelmed or “flooded”. The first signs that your negative arousal is too high will be unique to you but will likely include the common classic symptoms like: sweating, racing or pounding heartbeat, gritted teeth, shortness of breath, queasy stomach, or your mind is spinning.
- 2 The instant you sense the presence of one of your early warning signs, STOP the discus-

sion and ask to take a break. All your flooding signals will interfere with your ability to mindfully process information or pay attention. Instead, you will respond reflexively and either lash out with harsh words or shut down. Either of these reactions will likely invite equally negative, matching responses from your partner. To prevent this negative spiral and its aftermath, you must notice your early signs of flooding, put a stop to the conversation, and take a break. 3. Take a Break for at least 20 minutes. The purpose of the break is to give you an opportunity to calm down. During this time, do something that occupies your attention and is self-soothing. You might listen to music or a podcast, walk the dog, take a bath, read, meditate, or complete a mindless task. Whatever you choose to do, be sure to do it alone, and avoid thoughts of righteous indignation and innocent victimhood. Avoid playing out the rest of your conflict through “imaginary interac-

tion” with your partner. Just chill. Don't start your break by storming out of the room and slamming the door! Or try to get the last word in before you take a cool-down break. That will add fuel to an already heated argument. Instead, respectfully communicate your need to calm down. Explain that you are feeling overwhelmed and need a break. Be sure to say where you are going and when you will be back. Say something like: I'm starting to feel too upset to be rational about this and I am afraid I'll say something that I will regret. So, I'm going to walk the dog around our usual path. When I get back, I'll be ready to pick this up again. 4. If your partner is flooding, suggest that “we” take a break. You likely recognize your partner's early warning signs of flooding. The minute you sense one of those signals, stop the discussion

BEAT THE HEAT continued on page 31

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Finding Your Way Back to Calm Through the Breath



By MICHAEL McMANUS,
LCSW, PSYCHOTHERAPIST

In nearly four decades of clinical practice, I've watched people spend years searching for relief from anxiety and depression before discovering that one of the most powerful tools was

something they'd been doing, unconsciously, their entire lives: breathing.

Breath is unique among our bodily functions because it operates both automatically and voluntarily. We don't have to think about breathing, but we can also choose to change it, and in that choice lies real therapeutic power. When we're anxious, our breath tends to become shallow and rapid, living high in the chest. This isn't just a symptom. It's a feedback loop. Shallow breathing signals to the nervous system that danger is present, which produces more anxiety, which shallows the breath fur-

ther. Depression often shows the opposite pattern: breath that's constricted, sighing, or barely present at all, as though the body has quietly given up asking for more air than it needs to survive.

This is why breathwork isn't just relaxation. It's a somatic intervention. The body holds what the mind sometimes cannot yet name or process. Working with breath allows us to reach nervous system states that talk therapy alone often can't touch directly. When we slow and deepen the breath, we activate the vagus nerve and shift the body out of sympathetic "fight or flight" activation and into the parasympathetic state, where healing, digestion, and clear thinking become possible again.

One of the most accessible techniques is box breathing, the method used by Navy SEALs to stay focused and steady under extreme pressure. It's simple. Inhale for a count of four, hold for four, exhale for four, hold for four, and repeat. The symmetry itself is grounding. There's something in the equal, structured rhythm that gives an anxious mind a place to rest. I recommend it often to clients before difficult conversations, during panic, or simply as a daily practice to build resilience



over time.

There are other approaches worth knowing. Diaphragmatic, or "belly," breathing retrains the body to breathe from the base of the lungs rather than the chest, and this alone can lower baseline anxiety. 4-7-8 breathing, which means inhaling for four counts, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight, uses an extended exhale to trigger the body's relaxation response, and I often suggest it for sleep difficulties. More activating practices, like certain rhythmic or cyclic breathing patterns, can help move stuck grief or numbness when depression has flattened a person's emotional range.

What I find most meaningful, both as a clinician and simply as a person who has practiced this myself for years, is that breathwork asks nothing of you that you don't already have. It requires no equipment, no appointment, and no permission. It meets you exactly where you are and offers a doorway back into your own body.

Anxiety and depression can make us feel exiled from ourselves. Breath is often the shortest way home. I'd encourage you to try one of these techniques this week, even for just a few minutes, and notice for yourself what shifts. Sometimes the most meaningful change starts with a single breath.

Michael McManus, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. Reach out for a free 10-minute consultation at (850) 837-0123 or contact by text or website: psychotherapy30A.com.

BEAT THE HEAT

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and say that "we" need to take a break.

Avoid calling attention to your partner's negative behavior. And avoid saying "I think you're getting too emotional. You should take a break."

Instead, say Sweetheart, we're getting more heated up than we should over this. Let's take a break and come back to this in about an hour; then we can figure it all out."

There are many ways for you and your partner to calm down and sooth each other. Find something meaningful, enriching, and enjoyable that really helps center you.

Of course, on an ideal, cool weather, low stress day, you would

plan an enjoyable, calming activity together BEFORE you have a serious discussion.

But, in the heat of the summer, when life's stressors get the best of one or both of you, the most that you can expect of yourselves is to stop the flooding before it gets out of hand.

Let me know if I can help.

Jamie C. Williamson, PhD is a FL Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and Couples Counselor who is part of the Gottman Referral Network. She is an owner and partner at Amity Mediation Workshop, a mediation practice specializing in "friendly divorce" mediation and psycho-educational counseling for couples. Dr. Jamie speaks frequently on relationship topics and authors the blog "Work it Out". You can find her online at amitymediation-workshop.com.



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Integrative Dermatology: Dermatology Beyond Prescriptions

BY BRIDGET SULLIVAN, PA-C
COASTAL SKIN SURGERY AND
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Integrative dermatology is an approach to skin care that combines standard dermatology treatments with evidence-based lifestyle, nutrition, and complementary therapies. Integrative dermatology is intended to complement, not replace, proven medical treatments. Clinicians and patients will experience better outcomes when thinking about and treating “the whole patient” and not the specific medical condition alone. Including factors such as diet, lifestyle modifications, and daily routines can lead to a healthier lifestyle and a healthier patient. This article will review a few recommendations that I believe can benefit a person’s skin health and reduce inflammation.

1.) Wash your pillowcases - Wash your pillowcases every 1-2 weeks, particularly if you have acne-prone skin. Pillowcases can accumulate skin oils and debris that can cause skin irritation and contribute to acne. Also, don’t forget to wash your face every night before going to bed.

2.) Avoid extreme temperatures when taking a

shower or bath - most people enjoy a very hot bath or shower, but lukewarm water is best. Extremes of temperature can impair the skin barrier and can lead to dryness, itching, and increased inflammation.

3.) Smoking Cessation - Smoking cessation not only improves our lung health and life longevity, but it also improves the reduction of inflammatory skin conditions like psoriasis and hidradenitis suppurativa (HS). Stopping smoking also helps with surgical wound healing and scar outcomes and improves our skin quality and cosmetic concerns.

4.) Mediterranean Lifestyle Diet - This diet includes high fruits and vegetables, fish (omega-3 fatty acids), nuts (almonds and walnuts), and fermented foods (yogurt). This diet helps with reducing inflammation and improving metabolic health. This can help with conditions like acne, psoriasis, and rosacea.

5.) Daily Skin Moisturizers - Moisturizers containing the ingredients of: ceramides, glycerin, colloidal oatmeal, hyaluronic acid and petroleum can improve skin barrier function, hydration, and symptoms

of itching and dryness. Examples include Aveeno, Cerave, Vaseline, and Vanicream. It is best to apply moisturizers right after getting out of the bath or shower. Daily moisturizer use can improve chronic inflammatory skin condition outcomes.

cleared masks include Omnilux, Currentbody, and Therabody. Consult with your dermatology medical provider before purchasing and treatment to make sure you are the right candidate and that you do not have any contraindications for its use.

ommended. Getting enough sleep has been shown to help aid in decreasing inflammation, increase our skin barrier repair, accelerate wound healing, and improve immune function. Beauty sleep is more than just a saying!

INTEGRATED DERMATOLOGY

6.) Silicone gel and sheets for scars - best for raised scars and keloids. May reduce redness, itching and scar thickness. Best outcomes if used and applied for several months.

7.) Red light therapy face mask - this is an “at home” anti-aging device that can be used in conjunction with other important skin care products and treatments. Look for the red wavelength of 630-660 nm and near-infrared wavelength of 810-850 nm. Examples of FDA-

8.) Salicylic Acid for warts - requires daily application for several weeks.

9.) Toenail Fungus - some at-home tips that can help reduce the risk and help in the treatment of toenail fungus include white vinegar soaks, keeping nails trimmed short/thin, change socks regularly, and avoid walking barefoot in the gym or sauna.

10.) Sleep Optimization - 7 or more hours of sleep per night on a regular basis are rec-

Lifestyle modifications in our diet, daily routines, skin care products, and sleep can help improve our skin health and overall well-being and immune system. The skin is not separate from the person—it is a reflection of the internal health, lifestyle, environment, and experiences that shape us. As always, please reach out to your medical provider if you have any questions or concerns regarding your skin health and wellness.

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BY RICK MOORE

An older pastor was having a late Sunday lunch with a new pastor who had just moved to town. The older pastor asked the younger pastor how it was going. He responded, “Great! We had three people commit their lives to God at church today. How about you?” The older pastor re-

sponded, “Very well. We had two and a half people commit their lives to God at church today.” The younger pastor scratched his head for a moment. What is half of a person? As soon as he felt he had figured out the riddle, he yelled out, “I know; you had two adults and one child. That makes it two and a half.” The older pastor said, “No, it was two children and one adult.” You see, many adults only have half of their life before them once they see the light. But a child has his entire life before him. The greatest potential for a great return will always be investing in people when they are young. Remember, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

A church I was working at in New England had just built

a state-of-the-art children’s auditorium, and the date of their grand opening was the Sunday before VBS (Vacation Bible School). Over five hundred children signed up for a fun week of sports, crafts and bible studies. During the VBS, we accepted suggestions from adults and children to determine what the name of the auditorium should be. The Monday morning after VBS was over, while I was helping tear down the sets and props in the children’s theater, I was told there was an urgent phone call for me at the front desk. A lady I did not know asked me to come to the emergency room and pray for her son. He was run over by a car and was in critical condition. Neither she nor her son showed up in our church database. After

praying for the boy who was in the ICU, I went to the waiting room to speak with his mom and his little brother. She had never been to our church, and her son, who was run over by the car, had never been to our church. However, the little brother who witnessed the accident attended VBS every day. The mother said she did not know who I was, but that the little brother kept saying, “You have to call Pastor Rick to come pray.” After that, we knew for sure what the name of that auditorium should be... The Lighthouse. When the storms of life come, the church stands as a lighthouse, even to those who have never walked through its doors.

There can be times it may seem as if teaching a child doesn’t

pay off. Often it is because they do not understand how much you care and want the best for them. Sometimes children do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. It may be you have to quit focusing on what you want them to learn and try new ways to show you care. If you spend time showing a child how to make a kite or paint a canvas with a palette and brush, suddenly that child’s ears start listening to what you have to say. When you have an opportunity to invest by spending more time with your own children, or volunteering to help other children, just say yes.

Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship

FWC

continued from page 27

leave to future generations.” The aforementioned landowners range in their experience, as some have a few years of land stewardship and others, several decades. The commendable practices of this group are many, and include longleaf pine replanting, prescribed burning, hardwood tree management, the establishment of a family tree farm, the introduction of pollinator-friendly plants, and the development of wildlife openings. The combined efforts of these varied land management initiatives have significantly benefited a wide range of local species, including bobwhite quail, turkeys, gopher tortoises, white-tailed deer and fox squirrels. Additionally, members of this group have accolades that extend beyond the FWC, as it



Gary Johnson, Square J Farm FWC Photo by Faith Flawn

includes recipients of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Stewardship Forest Certification and the National Wild Turkey Federation Wild Turkey Woodlands Recognition Program.

The FWC’s Landowner Assistance Program offers a written management plan to guide landowners interested in work-

ing toward meeting the requirements for the Wildlife Habitat Recognition Program. Interested landowners of 20 acres or more can apply online. For more information, visit MyFWC.com/LAP and click on “Landowner Recognition Programs.”

FWC Landowner Assistance Program biologists provide technical assistance to private land-

owners, helping them develop property management plans that maximize benefits to wildlife and people. These biologists can also assist with finding financial assistance to complete important habitat restoration projects on private lands. To learn more

about this program or to find help and resources for managing wildlife on your property, check out our “Wildlife and Habitat Assistance” section online at MyFWC.com/LAP or call your FWC Regional Office and ask to speak to a LAP biologist.

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Wisdom, Intelligence, and a Blue Pillow Parable



By Kirk McCarley

“If I claim to be a wise man, it surely means that I don’t know.”
Kansas

If you had to make a choice, would you rather be smart or wise?

Earlier this year I had the chance to spend a week pedaling nearly 400 miles across Georgia with a contingent of other souls. Given that each day’s ride began around 7 a.m., many were typically done around noon. After pitching a tent, showering, and grabbing a bite, not necessarily in that order, there was idle time to debrief with fellow cycling mates, enjoy a beverage or two, and share stories, most of little import.

During one of our late afternoons, the subject drifted towards that of “smart” people.

By smart, names of some of the modern-day titans of innovation and technology were bandied about: Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk among them. Admiration for their inventiveness and ingenuity, along with contributions to societal gains were affirmed.

As I listened, I couldn’t help but contemplate that term, smart. Intelligence is an attribute which we all aspire to, yet might there really be a different quest? I blurted out, “Is it preferable to be smart or wise?” which altered the direction of the discourse, subjecting me to some gentle, good-natured scorn for the balance of the ride.

I still reflect on that conversation.

AI research defines “smartness as the ability to acquire and process information quickly, while wisdom is the judgment to apply that knowledge effectively. In other words, smart gives you the facts; wise gives you the orientation.”

Smart goes on to be characterized as:

The “What:” Raw cognitive ability, high IQ, rapid learning, and analytical problem solving

Focus: Often optimizes for short- to medium-term efficiency, innovation, and finding the correct answer.

Nature: Generally viewed as an inherent trait or capacity that can be sharpened through formal education.

Example: Knowing a tomato is technically a botanical fruit.

Wisdom:
The “How & Why:” Represents sound judgment, emotional intelligence, and long-term foresight.

Focus: Prioritizes ethics, human flourishing, and the consequences of actions on oneself and others.

Nature: Acquired over time primarily through lived experiences, failures, and deep reflection.

Example: Knowing not to put that tomato in the fruit salad.

Practical Distinctions:
Knowledge vs. Application: Smart knows how to build an atomic bomb. Wise knows whether it should be used.

Impulse vs. Restraint: Smart individuals have the technical capacity to solve a problem

quickly, whereas wise people demonstrate the restraint to wait for the appropriate context to act.

Speaking vs. Timing: A smart person knows what to say, while a wise person understands when and how to say it.

I have a friend with a property management company. He shares a story which I call “the parable of the blue pillow.”

A homeowner who entrusted his agency with both the maintenance and leasing of their property insisted that a blue pillow be prominently positioned on a couch welcoming guests to their home. My friend found this request both out of typical scope and a possible indication that the client may have demanding expectations. “If they are sensitive to such an extraordinary matter, might there be other challenging demands forthcoming as well?” he wondered.

Upon further examination, he arrived at a realization. The homeowner wished to convey a specific and unique brand to their guests. The blue pillow was part of that brand. My friend came to understand that what his prospective client was ultimately trying to

determine was if the property management company grasped what was most critical to this customer. In other words, could they be trusted to take care of the details?

His company ultimately passed that test and has loyally and amiably established a long-term relationship with this property owner.

Smart move to carefully hear the client’s specific requirements and align them with the company’s service capabilities. Wise response as well to take a moment to first evaluate the request and then reach an understanding of the meta message of what that petition really represented.

If you had to make a choice, would you choose smart or wise?

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

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Sean of the South: Ball Games



BY SEAN DIETRICH

I remember going to a ball game with my old man. I remember the smells. Stale beer, human sweat, and the odor of unnaturally pink hotdogs that turned your bowels into stone.

I remember before the game, things got very quiet. All 30-odd thousand people rose. The throngs of stadium chairs creaking sounded like the world was splitting.

Everyone’s dad put down

his non-evangelical beverage, SLOWLY, careful not to spill. Thousands of American grandpas removed lit cigars and balanced them, with surgical-like care, onto armrests.

The anthem was played.

Back in those days, the anthem was handled differently than it is today. Back then, guest artists did not take the mound, wearing asymmetric haircuts and crotch-revealing trousers. Neither did singers demonstrate 10 minutes of vocal gymnastics until their anthem performance resembled a febrile seizure.

No. Back then the organ played. And everybody sang.

We used to be a nation of singers. Remember that? Singing was just normal for us. Our childhood classrooms had upright console pianos, and our teachers knew how to play them. Mrs. Moore would bang out “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” before



each class. Mrs. Smith played “This Land is Your Land” every Friday after the Pledge.

Well, that was a long time ago.

Recently, I attended a modern baseball game. It was a very different experience. My wife and I ordered \$34 nachos from a kiosk, and the cashier asked whether I wanted to leave a 25-percent tip. Beers were \$18 apiece.

During the game, a huge LED timer runs between pitches so TV producers can fit in more commercials on broadcasts. The bases are now bigger, the

distance between bases is now shorter. They’re changing our game.

But none of that bothered me. Not really. A Major League park is what it is. Get over it. At a ball game, you get what you get, and you don’t pitch a fit.

What I was most interested in, truthfully, was the anthem. I was curious about it. I wondered: Do people still sing together the way they did 40 years ago?

After all, our world is nothing like it was. Our current world, for example, is almost devoid of classroom pianos. In 1938 the New York Times reported that 5.8 million pianos were sold in America each year. Whereas last year we barely sold 30,000.

So anyway, the moment of truth arrived. The announcer asked everyone to rise for the anthem.

People stood. Chairs creaked. Dads placed beers beneath seats. People who were vaping expelled a final blast and hid their devices from security.

Everyone looked at the flag. The music began.

And...

Everyone knew the words. Everyone sang. The stadium sounded like it was going to crumble beneath the volume of mass singing.

The boy next to me held his hat over his heart, singing so loudly the vein in his head showed. The old man beside the boy was singing even louder.

But when the song finished, the people were not. In fact, the crowd was only just getting warmed up. They kept cheering. For whole minutes, they cheered.

Fists pumped into the air. People were hugging. A flag waved on the mega-tron screen. The sound of unified voices was engulfing. Fighter jets flew overhead. Fireworks. People were amazingly, wholeheartedly, demonstratively together. Even if only for a few seconds in time.

And in that beautiful moment of oneness, that moment of palpable joy, do you know something?

Nobody seemed to care about Cracker Barrel’s sign.

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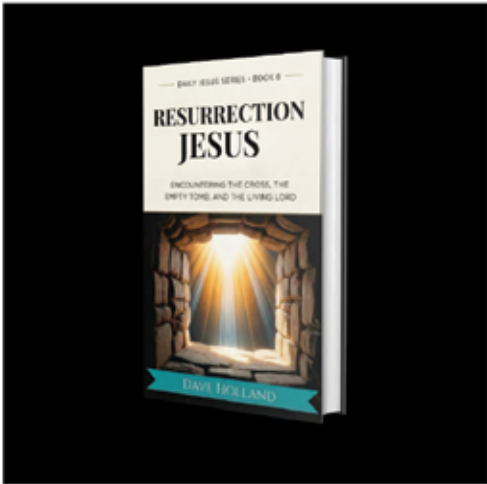
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The Christian Capitalist: Chris Cumby—Networking with a Cause



BY RICH SANDERS

As a “super-connector of people”, Chris Cumby loves hosting the Level Up Emerald Coast conference every Fall, inspiring business leaders to deepen their

faith and improve their businesses. After last year’s conference, however, Chris felt like something more was needed... something more than just an annual meeting.

The answer he developed is a weekly get-together at Stock & Brew in Santa Rosa Beach called Networking with a Cause! Chris describes this new gathering as “more than a networking event. It’s an opportunity to invest in yourself.”

After just a few short months, the event is really gaining traction and developing a community of entrepreneurs on the Emerald Coast, just as Chris envisioned.



Speaking of life-changing developments, Chris also recently launched a new non-profit, 501(c)(3) corporation focused on helping children realize their goals: Level Up Emerald Coast. With a focus on education and business training for young people, this is exactly the kind of charity that will help change lives. It is also a great example of a Christian Capitalist: Chris employs his business activities to help others and bring real impact to the Emerald Coast.

Chris is once again hosting the Level Up Emerald Coast conference for business leaders later this Fall. He aims for it to be the biggest one yet, with an anticipated attendance of 500 people! You can find out more information about the conference at <https://levelupemeraldcoast.com>.

Chris 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 Chris Cumby and the Level Up Conference!

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

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Every Tuesday from 4-6:30 p.m., Chris utilizes hot coffee, warm cookies and an inviting space to create valuable insights and meaningful relationships. It is free of charge, and everyone is welcome. Chris gives special thanks to Michael Carey, owner of Stock & Brew, for his gracious hospitality.

At a recent meeting of Networking with a Cause, Chris invited me to speak about my new book, “Tools of the Bible”. After attending this gathering, it is clear to me that the community he is developing on Tuesdays is full of energy and entrepreneurial spirit, and the chocolate chip cookies are outstanding!

As Chris likes to say: “Come for the coffee. Stay for the conversations. Leave with new relationships that could change your business—and maybe even your life!” Especially with the development of artificial intelligence, Chris notes that this event is much different because it is analog (the opposite of digital).

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A Pastor's Ponderings: All the Ways You Can



By REV. PETE HYDE

It was a long, hot, humid day. We spent the day wandering the streets of Savannah, Georgia, taking in the sights and the history. We were the typical tourists. With a map in hand, we made our way from square to square, shop to shop, trolley stop to trolley stop, restaurant to restaurant. The moments we spent resting or eating were infused with the joy of people watching (I believe there is no better sport). We made our way back to an old downtown hotel for a late afternoon break. After a couple of hours, we headed out to grab a

bite to eat and enjoy one final walk along the riverfront. On our way back to the hotel for the night, the sound of a saxophone could be heard in the distance. Kay asked where the music was coming from. The music got louder as we approached the small square in front of our hotel.

The old, live oak trees formed a canopy blocking out most of the evening sky. The Spanish moss moved gently in the light breeze of the evening. The mid-day heat had broken, and it was comfortable here in the shade. The street musician played some favorites as well as some original tunes. He even took requests and played them if he knew them. People from all sorts of backgrounds strolled through the square. Some stopped to listen, and some just moved on barely noticing an evening blessing. Kay and I took a place on a park bench to enjoy music and the atmosphere.

A look to the center of the square brings your eyes to a bronze statue of John Wes-

ley, founder of the Methodist Church. The hotel where we were staying was built on the site of Wesley's first parsonage in the New World when he made his first church planting trip to the Americas in the 1730s. He stood there, Bible in hand, as if teaching to anyone who would listen to his message of salvation and right living. He and his brother Charles (a prolific hymn writer) co-pastored a church in Savannah for a time.

Wesley, an Anglican priest, failed in the first attempt to bring his church to America due the mistrust of anything British during this time in American history. He would return after the Revolutionary War and successfully bring a message of grace and Good News to this new land. He would struggle against the institution of his church. He could not understand why they would put so many restrictions on him when he was trying to accomplish the mission of spreading Christ's message to all those who would hear it. He finally had to

leave the Anglican church and start a new church called the Methodists. If Wesley were alive today, he would lament the fact that his new church has become the very church he broke away from long ago. But alas that is the evolution of institutions unless they are intentional about their mission.

There he stood, memorialized in bronze, in the middle of a public square still beckoning people to hear his message, no, God's message. Here he stood, still calling people to give their lives to the Lord and to spend their lives serving the Lord. With Bible in hand, hands outstretched to any person or crowd that would gather, he was still stating his case and asking those who wandered by to hear and listen, much like the saxophone player in the background. Wesley's message and impact continue, even though he lived more than 200 years ago.

I found myself doing a little reflecting on my journey of faith and ministry that carried me

through many years as a Methodist pastor with some of the same frustrations as Wesley had with his home church, the Anglican church. The age-old ministry and church mission question came to mind. How do we as Christians make a lasting impact on individual lives and the community and world in which we live? It is not about whether we are remembered with a statue, a plaque, or a building with our name on it or our picture in the hallway. It is about whether or not someone saw Jesus in us. Wow! What a burden! What a mission for each of us and our churches! But how, O Lord?

Here is one of my favorite Wesley sayings. I have it on a plaque in my office: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you ever can."

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

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Hosts 10th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF), one of the nation's premier fundraising organizations, is pleased to announce the return of Harvest Wine & Food Festival to South Walton on October 15-18.

Tickets to all 2026 festival events are on sale now at HarvestWineandFood.com. Proceeds from the festival benefit DCWAF's mission of helping children in need in Northwest Florida. DCWAF supports 16 children's charities working to tackle homelessness, abuse, medical care, and more in the local community.

Ranked as one of Southern Living's "15 Southern Festival's Worth Planning Your Trip Around," this year's festival will

feature an expanded line-up of events beginning with six wine dinners hosted in upscale locations throughout South Walton and beyond. The line-up of wine dinners for the 2026 festival is as follows:

Alpha Omega Wine Collective at Indaco Alys Beach presented by Ben & Tiffany Edwards with Jeanne Dailey & Jay Nettles
Bordeaux Wines at Wine World WaterColor
Innumero Wines at Surfing Deer

Lerner Project at Vue 30a
Pahlmeyer at Pandora's presented by Stephen & Joan Carter
Sign of the Dove in a private WaterColor residence presented by Dahler & Co. and Setco Services



Friday features the return of Harvest After Dark, an upscale evening event that invites an intimate crowd to experience elevated wine selections paired with culinary delights from celebrity chefs from across the Southeast.

Saturday brings the main Grand Tasting event where guests sample hundreds of wines from around the world while enjoying bites from stations ranging from seafood to barbecue.

The weekend concludes with a Jazz-themed cocktail brunch hosted in a private WaterColor residence by Barker Williams and Shoreline Title featuring cuisine by award-winning chef Tory McPhail.

A silent auction boasting rare wines, luxury trips, and staycations will be available virtually Thursday, October 15 at 9 a.m. CST through Sunday, October 18 at noon CST. A full list of this year's headliners and schedule of events can be found at www.harvestwineandfood.com.

Tickets to all festival events are on sale now at HarvestWineandFood.com

About Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's (DCWAF) mission is to connect wine enthusiasts to raise money to benefit children in need in Northwest Florida. Founded in 2005, DCWAF has donated more than \$38 million to 16 Northwest Florida children's charities by hosting world class wine and culinary events. These funds have impacted the lives of over 100,000 youth, including those afflicted by health issues and abuse. Learn more at DCWAF.org or facebook.com/DCWAF.

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Dining

The Pearl Hotel Welcomes Executive Chef Jordan Economy to Lead Havana Beach Bar & Grill

Chef Economy Brings Global Culinary Influences and a Fresh Perspective to Rosemary Beach

The Pearl Hotel, the luxury boutique hotel and crown jewel of the Rosemary Beach® community, announces the appointment of Executive Chef Jordan Economy to lead the culinary program at its signature restaurant, Havana Beach Bar & Grill. Bringing more than two decades of culinary experience and a passion for global cuisine, Chef Economy will oversee the restaurant's evolving food and beverage offerings while honoring the flavors that have made the eatery a favorite along 30A.

Inspired by the abundance of fresh Gulf ingredients and cuisines from around the world, Chef Economy's approach balances familiar favorites with thoughtfully selected bites for patrons. Since joining the team, he has introduced a new rooftop lounge menu and rotating Chef's Table specials, offering guests inspired dishes that push culinary boundaries and highlight

seasonal elements and internationally inspired flavors. Guests can also expect additions including charred octopus with tahini mousse and preserved lemon, curated oyster selections, seafood towers and butcher boards, all designed to complement Havana Beach Bar & Grill's elevated coastal dining experience.

"What excites me most about this opportunity at Havana Beach is the chance to contribute not only to the culture of the restaurant, but to the culinary identity of 30A as a whole," said Chef Jordan Economy, Executive Chef at Havana Beach Bar & Grill. "I want to bring bold flavors, new culinary perspectives, and meaningful cultural experiences to 30A, and I can think of no better place to do that than with the innovative team at Havana Beach."

A New Orleans native, Chef Economy began his culinary journey as a teenager and has



acclaimed restaurants across the South, served as a culinary consultant for restaurant concepts nationwide and made three appearances on Food Network. Some of his roles have included Executive Chef at The Day-trader, Executive Chef & Culinary Director at Salt & Time and Chef de Cuisine and Opening Chef at Doris Metropolitan.

"Chef Jordan brings an incredible depth of experience, modern techniques and creativity to Havana Beach Bar & Grill, and we're thrilled to welcome him to The Pearl," said Kyle Davis, General Manager at The Pearl Hotel. "His collaborative leadership style, passion for hospitality and thoughtful approach to cuisine make him a wonderful fit for our team, and we're excited for guests to experience his vision."

Located within The Pearl Hotel, Havana Beach Bar & Grill offers a distinctive dining experience inspired by the Gulf Coast, Caribbean and the spirit of old Havana. From its signature dining room and lively bar to its rooftop overlooking Rosemary Beach, the restaurant pairs exceptional cuisine with one of the most memorable settings along Scenic Highway 30A.

Havana Beach Bar & Grill is open daily for brunch from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and for dinner from 4 - 9 p.m. The bar and rooftop (weather permitting) are open daily from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., with happy hour offered Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Seasonal hours apply.

For more information, please visit <https://www.thepearlrb.com/> and <https://www.havana-beachbar.com/>.

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From Kobe to 30A: Extraordinary Evenings Ahead at Old Florida Fish House

This August and September, Old Florida Fish House is bringing a remarkable collection of culinary and cultural experiences to the shores of 30a’s Eastern Lake. The season’s highlights include an exceedingly rare Kobe beef presentation featuring a visiting Japanese cattle farmer, followed in September by two distinctive evenings with former police officer and nationally recognized media personality Brandon Tatum.

A Rare Taste of Japan

On August 27 at 6 p.m., Old Florida Fish House will present an exclusive Usunaga Kobe Beef Dinner Experience built around the importation of an entire A5 Kobe beef carcass from Japan.

The whole-animal presentation is believed by the restaurant to be unique in the Southeast and possibly throughout the U.S. Rather than showcasing only a familiar premium cut, the dinner will give chefs the opportunity to explore the animal through a thoughtfully composed, 10-course menu.

The evening will also introduce diners to the people and traditions behind the beef. Special guest Yoshiki Usunaga, owner and farmer of Usunaga Ranch in Japan’s Hyogo Prefecture, will travel to Florida to present the beef and tell the story of his farm. Throughout the dinner, he will share insights into the care, lineage and exacting standards involved in producing authentic Kobe beef.

“Having the farmer travel from Japan makes this much more than a dinner,” the Old Florida Fish House team says. “It is an opportunity to connect our guests with the origin of the product, the traditions behind it and the person who raised it.”

Although “Wagyu” and “Kobe” are sometimes used interchangeably, the terms are not synonymous. Wagyu refers

to four native Japanese cattle breeds. Authentic Kobe beef must come from Tajima-line Japanese Black cattle born, raised and processed in Japan’s Hyogo Prefecture, and it must satisfy very strict standards for quality, marbling, weight and traceability.

A5 is Japan’s highest combined yield and quality designation. The “A” refers to the amount of usable meat produced by the carcass, while the “5” represents the highest quality score. Its intricate marbling creates the tenderness, richness and distinctive texture that have made Japanese Wagyu one of the world’s most celebrated culinary treasures.

Old Florida Fish House is an officially registered Kobe beef destination and is billed as the only Kobe-certified restaurant in the Florida Panhandle. Its whole-carass import offers guests a rare opportunity to experience cuts and preparations that go far beyond the customary steakhouse presentation.

The August 27 dinner will feature 10 chef-curated courses accompanied by selected sake, wine and cocktails. Tickets are \$299 per person, excluding tax and gratuity.

Two Evenings with The Officer Tatum

The momentum continues September 16 and 17 when Brandon Tatum brings two special events to Old Florida Fish House.

Tatum is a nationally recognized digital media personality, former police officer and SWAT operator, author, speaker and entrepreneur. He has developed one of the country’s most prominent independent conservative media brands, attracting more than 8.6 million followers and subscribers and generating billions of views across YouTube and social media.

On September 16, The Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Dinner Experience will combine conversation, cuisine and a curated bourbon tasting. In addition to his work in media, Tatum is the founder or owner of several businesses, including Verdict Bourbon, Blackline Security

Operations, Shinerby Life and Pure Choice Apparel.

September 17 will feature An Evening with The Officer Tatum. Drawing on his experience in law enforcement, business and media, Tatum will offer his perspective on politics, culture,

faith, freedom and everyday life. Known for blending direct analysis with humor and common sense, he encourages audiences to question prevailing narratives, think independently and live with courage and purpose.

Reservations for the August

27 Usunaga Kobe Beef Dinner Experience may be made at floridafishhouse.com. Visit the website for tickets, times and additional details for September’s Officer Tatum events and the complete seasonal calendar.



Fall Events



Aug. 27



Sept. 16 & 17



Sept. 26

August

27 Kobe Wagyu Presentation and Dinner

September

9 SEC Football Watch Party
12 SEC Football Watch Party
16 The Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Dinner Experience
17 An Evening with The Officer Tatum
26 SEC Football Watch Party
26 Japanese Bluefin Tuna Cutting Show
26 Japanese Bluefin Tuna Dinner

October

1 The Will Thompson Band Motown Tribute
31 SEC Football Watch Party
31 Halloween Costume Contest Party

Weekly Events

Live Music Nightly, Featuring:
• Dueling Pianos Thursday through Saturday
• Alex Napier Monday - Wednesday
Brunch by the Lake with Live Music Saturday and Sunday
Sunday Funday with the Will Thompson Band Sundays Sept. 13 - Nov. 28

Visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com

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South Walton Live Music Scene August 2026

Roman Street in Concert at Christ the King Episcopal Church Aug. 23

Acclaimed guitarists and brothers Noah and Josh Thompson blend classical, gypsy jazz, Latin, contemporary jazz and nuevo flamenco influences in a captivating performance at 3 p.m. that kicks off the church's

fall concert series. Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Sacred Harp Musical Conversation at Christ the King Episcopal Church Aug. 29

Learn about the history and development of Sacred Harp music, a traditional American art

form, during a presentation by Joanna Ellis at 1 p.m. Guests will also enjoy a practical introduction to shape-note singing led by Kristin Wendland. Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music at



Christ the King Episcopal Church Sept. 13

Celebrate America's musical heritage while commemorating the 25th anniversary of 9/11 and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The 3 p.m. concert will feature works by Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, William Dawson and Duke Ellington, along with traditional American and patriotic songs. Audience participation is encouraged.

Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

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!

August 19th: One False Move

August 26th: Almost Famous

September 2nd: The Typos

September 9th: Six Piece Suits

Sounds of Seaside Wednesday Night Concert Series

Sounds of Seaside returns to the Seaside Amphitheatre Wednesdays from 5-7 p.m. A free-to-attend and open to all ages event, bring blankets and chairs and enjoy an evening of live music from local musicians.

August 19: Flow Tribe

August 26: Fred Domulot

September 2: Roman Street

September 9: TBD

September 16: Max McCann

30Avenue Summer Concert Series Every Evening

Come out to 30Avenue for the

Summer Concert Series from 6-9 p.m. on the green. LIVE MUSIC every night in June. Gather your people for dinner, sips, shopping and live music under the stars. Guests are encouraged to bring a blanket or low-back lawn chairs. See the full lineup at www.thirtyavenue.com/calendar.

Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

For over a decade, Old Florida Fish House has proudly featured local live music. Throughout the week, catch artists playing inside the coveted bar and lounge as well as in the large outdoor dining space situated among the palm and oak trees under the twinkling lights next to Eastern Lake. Saturday and Sunday Brunch with live music 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Dueling pianos Thursday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. Visit www.oldfloridafishhouse.com for more info.

FOOW Live Music Fridays and Sunday Brunch

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

AJ's Grayton Brunch, Crawfish and Live Music

AJ's is the place to be to celebrate all things Sunday Funday in Grayton Beach! Recharge your weekend at Brunch with Bottomless Mimosas 11 a.m.-3 p.m. The talented Christon Birge Duo plays live music at noon. Then enjoy The Pickled Pickers 5-8 p.m. Check ajsgreyton.com for live music throughout the week.



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Trading Screen Time for Stage Time: How Music Lessons Re-Wire the Digital Brain

As another school year begins, families focus on schedules, homework, sports, and after-school activities. One of the greatest challenges facing parents today extends far beyond academics which is “helping children stay engaged in a world dominated by screens”. Smartphones, tablets, social media, streaming entertainment, and online gaming have become constant companions for many young people. While technology certainly offers valuable educational tools, excessive screen time can gradually replace face-to-face interaction, creative thinking, patience, and meaningful human connection.

Private music lessons offer a refreshing alternative.

Unlike the fast-paced rewards of digital entertainment, learning an instrument or developing one’s voice requires focus, perseverance, and consistent practice. These experiences strengthen attention spans, improve memory, and encourage problem-solving skills that extend well beyond the music studio. Every lesson becomes an opportunity for a student to build confidence one accomplishment at a time.

One of the biggest differences between online gaming and music education is the “quality of human interaction”. Many children spend hours connecting with friends and strangers via headsets. Although online games can involve teamwork,



the relationships often remain anonymous and temporary. In contrast, private lessons create genuine mentorship between teacher and student. A teacher celebrates successes, provides encouragement through challenges, and guides each student according to their individual learning style and goals.

This personal connection helps children develop trust, communication skills, accountability, and self-confidence, which are qualities that cannot be downloaded through an app.

Music also provides opportunities to step into the real world through recitals, performances, and community events. Standing before an audience teaches courage, preparation, and resilience. They experience the satisfaction of sharing something beautiful with family, friends, and neighbors while becoming part of a

supportive musical community.

These experiences replace isolation with belonging.

Scientific research continues to reveal that learning music simultaneously stimulates multiple regions of the brain. Reading music, listening carefully, coordinating hand movements, maintaining rhythm, and expressing emotion all work together to strengthen the brain’s pathways. Rather than providing the instant gratification common with digital entertainment, music develops the brain through sustained concentration and repetition. In many ways, private lessons help “rewire” the digital

brain by restoring the ability to: focus deeply, think creatively, and remain engaged with challenging tasks. A student learns to complete projects by becoming a “Finisher”.

Back-to-school season is the perfect time for parents to establish routines that encourage life-long success. Just as homework, sports practices, and healthy meals become regular habits, weekly private music lessons can become a consistent part of family life. The structure of scheduled lessons teaches responsibility while giving students a creative outlet that balances out the demands of school and technology.

The goal is not to eliminate screens entirely but to create healthy balance. Every hour spent preparing for a recital, mastering a favorite song, or working alongside a dedicated teacher is an investment in skills that will last a lifetime.

This school year, consider trading a little screen time for stage time. The confidence, friendship, discipline, creativity, and joy that grow through private music lessons will remain and continue to enrich a child’s life, long after the latest game or device has been forgotten. These are sometimes called “Life Lessons” by music teachers.

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Multi-County Collaboration to Add 224-Foot Vessel to Artificial Reef System

By NICK TOMECEK,
OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners recently approved an agreement between the county and the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) on June 16, 2026, to expand the Gulf's artificial reef system with the deployment of the 224-foot Henry Alex vessel to create the Sposit Reef, the newest addition to a growing network of large-vessel artificial reefs in the region.

The partnership builds on a successful history of collaboration between Okaloosa County's tourism department, Destin-Fort Walton Beach, and the Panama City Beach CVB, including the deployment of the 239-foot Deep Stim III in 2023.

"The marine life that benefits from these artificial reefs does not see borders," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "We are pleased to be working again with our neighbors in Panama City Beach on

this effort as a showing of how the power of partnerships can create something worthy for our residents, visitors and the environment."

The \$450,000 cost to purchase, prepare and transport the vessel will be shared equally between Okaloosa County and the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, with each organization contributing \$225,000.

"This project is another example of how strong partnerships can create lasting benefits for our Gulf," said Erin Graham, coastal resources manager for the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau. "By working alongside Okaloosa County and CCA Florida, we are expanding critical habitat for marine life while creating new opportunities for anglers and divers to experience the incredible resources our waters have to offer."

The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Florida, a longtime partner in marine



conservation and artificial reef development, will provide an additional \$60,000 to cover towing and deployment expenses. Beyond supporting numerous artificial reef deployments, CCA has partnered with the county on invasive lionfish removal efforts, habitat restoration projects, redfish release initiatives and the ongoing SS United States artificial reef project.

All funding for this project is provided through tourism development tax revenue and partner contributions. The Sposit Reef was named by CCA in memory of the late Rebecca Sposit, human resources director at the

CCA national office.

"Rebecca Sposit did so much for marine conservation through her role at CCA, in ways the public could never see," said Pat Murray, CCA's national president and CEO. "She was a beloved part of CCA, and this reef is a lasting testament to her impact on the organization and the marine environment."

"The Sposit Reef deployment serves as a lasting tribute to Rebecca's life and legacy while reflecting our ongoing commitment to the conservation and enhancement of Florida's marine resources and coastal ecosystems. We are grateful for the

opportunity to work alongside our partners on initiatives that strengthen marine biodiversity, expand critical habitat for fish and other marine species, and support economically important local industries, including recreational fishing and diving," said Brian Gorski, executive director of CCA Florida.

The proposed deployment site is located at 30° 05.831'N, 86° 17.749'W, in approximately 120 feet of water, 22 nautical miles from the Destin East Pass and 28 nautical miles from the Panama City Pass. The official reef name will be the Sposit Reef. Deployment is expected in fall 2026.

Okaloosa County has deployed 48 large vessels in the Gulf since the 1970s. Those vessels are part of nearly 600 existing artificial reefs in Gulf waters. Explore 3D imaging of the county's large-vessel reefs at <https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/3d-models>.

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The Ripple Effect of a Great Teacher

Bree O'Donnell inspires students through discovery, mentors fellow educators and now stands among Florida's top five teachers.

By Lori Leath Miller

Every once in a while, a story comes along that's really bigger than the headline. This is one of those stories.

Yes, Walton County educator Bree O'Donnell has been named one of five finalists for Florida's 2027 Teacher of the Year—an exceptional accomplishment all on its own. Chosen from more than 180,000 public school teachers and 74 District Teachers of the Year across Florida, O'Donnell now stands among the state's top five educators.

But what struck me most wasn't the award. It's what the award represents. As someone who spends a great deal of time highlighting the people, businesses and organizations that make a difference in our area communities, I find myself asking a simple question: What is Walton County doing right?

The answer, I believe, can be found in educators such as Bree O'Donnell. A fourth-grade math and science teacher at Dune Lakes Elementary School, O'Donnell is well-known for creating classrooms where students don't simply sit and listen. They move. They explore. They experiment. They inquire. They learn by doing.

Her students have tracked data with sidewalk chalk, tested gravity through hands-on experiments and participated in interactive

scavenger hunts that transform learning into discovery. Instead of relying solely on textbooks, she creates opportunities for students to experience concepts firsthand. That's not only the kind of teaching that sparks curiosity, but also the kind that students remember.

What I love most about Bree's story is that her success isn't built around awards or titles. It's built around helping students see learning as



something exciting rather than something they have to do. She creates opportunities for children to be curious, engaged and confident in their abilities—qualities that often last far beyond a single school year.

What makes O'Donnell's recognition even more impressive is that her impact extends far beyond her own classroom. She recently helped develop Walton County's districtwide fourth-grade science and mathematics



pace guides, helping ensure consistency and excellence for students across the county. She also leads her Professional Learning Community, where teachers collaborate, analyze student data and share best practices. Under her leadership, that team has been recognized as a model for the entire district. In other words, she's not just helping students succeed—she's helping teachers succeed, too.

Florida Education Commissioner Anastasios Kamoutsas praised O'Donnell for demonstrating “an unwavering commit-

ment to student achievement and a relentless focus on continuous improvement.”

Walton County Superintendent Russell Hughes, also Florida's 2024 Superintendent of the Year, described her as an educator who motivates students, uplifts colleagues and plays a vital role in her school community.

Those are impressive words; but perhaps the greatest measure of a teacher isn't found in awards, accolades or rankings. It's found years later when a former student remembers a lesson and gains confidence, because someone believed in them, or chooses a path because a teacher helped

them discover what was possible or where their hidden talent lies. That's the true ripple effect of great teaching.

One proud parent shared that their child advanced three levels in math under O'Donnell's instruction at Dune Lakes Elementary, describing her as the kind of teacher who helps students believe in themselves while achieving remarkable academic growth.

While O'Donnell's recognition places her among Florida's elite educators, it also shines a spotlight on the quality of education taking place throughout Walton County. And perhaps that's what makes this story so special.

Yes, it is about one exceptional teacher. But it is also about the students she inspires, the colleagues she mentors and the community that supports educational excellence. It is about a school district that has now produced two Florida Teacher of the Year finalists in the past three years. In 2025, Paxton School science and aerospace teacher Heather Stewart was named one of Florida's Teacher of the Year finalists. Now, in 2027, Dune Lakes El-

THE RIPPLE EFFECT
continued on page 46





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The Biggest Shift in Filmmaking Since Digital Cameras

By PAUL VIZARD,
CEO of 30A.TV

For more than a century, making a movie required one thing above everything else: access. Access to funding, actors, cameras, studios, editors, special effects, and large production crews. Great stories often went untold simply because talented storytellers never had the opportunity to bring them to life.

That is changing. Artificial intelligence is rapidly removing many of the barriers that once prevented independent creators from producing cinematic-quality content.

In the traditional filmmaking process, creators spent months or even years writing screenplays, casting actors through auditions, scouting locations, hiring crews, creating storyboards, recording dia-

logue, composing music, editing scenes, and producing visual effects. Every stage required specialists, budgets, and countless hours of coordination.

Today, many of those same creative tasks can begin with a simple prompt.

AI tools now assist with screenplay development, character creation, casting concepts, dialogue generation, shot planning, storyboarding, voice acting, music composition, visual effects, animation, editing, color grading, and even complete scene generation. While human creativity remains the driving force, AI has become a powerful production partner that allows creators to focus more on storytelling and less on logistics.

Perhaps the most exciting change is that access is no longer reserved for major studios.

A writer with a great idea can now visualize scenes that



once would have required millions of dollars in production costs. Independent filmmakers can experiment with concepts before investing in traditional production. Educators, historians, marketers, and entrepreneurs can produce compelling

visual stories that were previously beyond their reach.

This does not eliminate the importance of creativity—it increases it.

The best AI-generated films still depend on strong ideas, compelling characters, emotional storytelling, and creative direction. Prompts are becoming a new creative language, but they are only as effective as the imagination behind them.

The AI Creator Channel on 30ATV is dedicated to showcasing this new generation of filmmaking. Viewers can expect original AI-assisted films, creator spotlights, behind-the-scenes production techniques, prompt engineering demonstrations, industry discussions, tutorials, interviews, and examples of how artificial intelligence is reshaping every stage of content creation.

Whether you're an experienced filmmaker or someone

who has always dreamed of bringing a story to life, there has never been a better time to create. The tools that were once available only to Hollywood studios are becoming accessible to anyone with vision, determination, and a willingness to learn. Tools such as MovieFlow and Imaginart are gaining in popularity.

The next generation of filmmakers may not begin in Los Angeles or New York. They may begin in a home office, a classroom, a coffee shop—or anywhere inspiration strikes.

Watch the future of storytelling unfold on AI Creator Channel, now broadcasting on 30ATV and streaming on Roku and 30Alive.com. The barriers to movie creation have never been lower, and the opportunities for storytellers have never been greater. The question remains -- will you be watching?

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THE RIPPLE EFFECT

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ementary’s Bree O’Donnell has earned the same distinction. They say lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place. Walton County just proved otherwise. At first glance, some might call it coincidence. But at some point, success like this stops looking like coincidence and starts looking like culture. Two Florida Teacher of the Year finalists in three years. A superintendent who was named Florida’s 2024 Superintendent of the Year. Exceptional educators, engaged school leaders and a community that values education. Together, they tell the story

of a district committed to helping students succeed. This year, O’Donnell stands as the only educator from Florida’s Panhandle among the five statewide finalists. That’s a remarkable achievement for her, for Dune Lakes Elementary and for Walton County. Behind every successful student is a teacher who cared enough to make a difference. And behind every great teacher is a community that values the work they do. Congratulations, Bree O’Donnell. Thank you for representing Walton County so well and for reminding us that some of the most important work happening in our community takes place every day inside a classroom.



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