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FLIGHT 250: A September Brief

Flight: 250

Airline: WCSD Airways

Destination:

To Heights Unseen

September check-
points: Attendance,
Literacy and the Arts

By DR. JOSHUA BLEDSON

Walton County School District's FLIGHT 250 is in the air and already climbing to altitudes not previously reached. September's leg of flight calls awareness to attendance, the arts, and the power of reading.

Our first checkpoint is Attendance Awareness Month. Consistent attendance keeps students on course. Chronic absenteeism can significantly affect achievement. One study found that only 17% of students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade were proficient readers by third grade, compared with 64% of students who maintained good atten-



dance.

Our families are essential members of the flight crew. Dependable routines, appointments scheduled outside school hours when possible, and early communication with schools can help students remain present and ready to learn.

Our next checkpoint is National Literacy Month. Reading provides the lift for learning in every subject and

opens pathways throughout life. Whether families share a favorite book, news article, recipe or bedtime story, a few minutes of reading each day can strengthen vocabulary, build comprehension and inspire curiosity. Reading turns the key to doors in the mind to which television, tablets, or phones simply have no access.

September 13-19, we also observe National Arts in Edu-

cation Week. Across Walton County, visual art, music, theater and other creative experiences help students find their voices, build confidence, collaborate and see new possibilities. In the Walton County School District, we are focused on preparing the Whole Child, and that includes access to robust art, music, and theatre

FLIGHT 250
continued on page 3



Point Washington Medical Clinic Announces Tenth Annual Harvest Moon Celebration Sept. 18 and 19

This year's Harvest Moon Celebration is not to be missed! The 10th annual event celebrates the local nonprofit and will bring back a series of local favorites, including Harvest Moon Yoga, Harvest Moon Dinner, and Harvest Moon Social Club.

Point Washington Medical Clinic (PWMC) is a donation-based health-

HARVEST MOON
continued on page 2



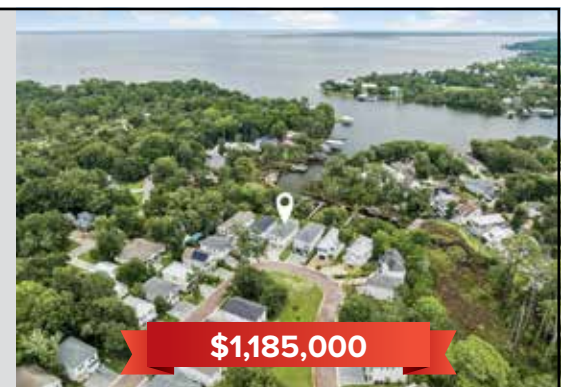
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 Community

HARVEST MOON

continued from cover

care clinic serving patients regardless of their financial limitations. The staff and volunteers are dedicated to building a stronger, healthier community by providing high-quality healthcare, and the Harvest Moon Celebration will help advance their mission.

“For ten years, Harvest Moon has been the heartbeat of our fundraising each fall, and this milestone anniversary means so much to our entire team and me,” said Hillary Glenn, DNP, APRN, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Point Washington Medical Clinic.

“Support from this event has helped make it possible for us to provide over \$8.7 million in healthcare services to our community since PWMC opened its doors. Every ticket sold and every dollar raised goes straight back into keeping our doors open for the patients who depend on us, and we’re beyond grateful to celebrate this milestone with the community that has stood behind us since day one.”

The two-day celebration kicks off Friday, September 18th, with complimentary Harvest Moon Yoga set in the

peaceful and picturesque Ruskin Park in Seaside, Florida, led by local instructor Shannon Kramolis from Studio Thirty-A and accompanied by musician and sound healer Dustin Borlack. Participation is free, and all skill levels are welcome!

The celebration continues on Friday evening at 5:30 p.m. with the signature Harvest Moon Dinner Under the Stars at Bud and Alley’s in Seaside and presented by The Jabbour Luxury Group,

Global Real Estate Advisors | Scenic Sotheby’s International Realty.

The evening will include a cocktail hour on the beach, a four-course dinner as the sun sets, and dancing and live music by The Steenos and will feature Fly By Radio. Tickets for this event are \$275 each or \$2,500 for a table of 10. Guests will also get a first look at items available for bid in the Silent Auction!

On Saturday, September 19th

from 6-10 p.m., guests may “join” the Harvest Moon Social Club for \$125 per person, which includes all food and beverage.

The evening kicks off from 6-7 p.m. with a behind-the-scenes tour of Point Washington Medical Clinic. Immediately following the tour, guests will follow a lantern-lit walk to a vintage-style carnival setting in the forest, hosted by Michael and Laura Granberry, owners of The Art of Simple and Art of Fact(s). This magical evening

“Under the Big Top” will include access to a “Speakeasy” featuring craft cocktails by Better Together Beverage and food by Havana Beach Bar and Grill, Raw + Juicy, Pazzo Italiano, Seaside Pop!, and Beignets & Brews, live painting and caricatures, a Tent of Curiosities, carnival games, football lounge, and dance floor with live music from Rowan Saunders and The Tanner Gray Band.

Additional sponsors include Mercantile & Duckie’s, A Boheme, Central Square Records, Electric Cart Company, Fishers Flowers, Shelly Swanger Photography, and Detailed Creative Company.

Purchasing a ticket to one or all of the Harvest Moon Celebration events offers much more than amazing cuisine, cocktails, and entertainment, but also the chance to make meaningful connections with fellow community members who share a commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. Tickets are available at <https://www.thepwmc.org/upcoming-events>.

For more information on purchasing tickets or a table, getting involved, inquiring about sponsorships, or donating a silent auction item, contact Jackie Ward at jackie@thepwmc.org.



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Lunch and Learn About Ferns with Green Thumb Garden Club

BY KATHLEEN EDGE, PUBLICITY & WEBSITE CHAIR

Learn about Landscaping with Ferns and Shade Gardening at the first 2026/2027 Green Thumb Garden Club meeting on Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at Westwinds Conference Center. Master Gardener volunteer Barbara Young will share her advice and horticulture expertise. Barbara is a long-time, valued member of GTGC.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, District 1 Fall meeting, hosted by Destin Garden Club, is on Tuesday, October 13, 2026, at First Baptist Church in

Fort Walton Beach. The meeting theme is Celebrating America 250. Additional details, including the meeting registration form, are at www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org. Non-members: please email greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com for registration instructions.

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 happen at the October 21, 2026 meeting

Westwinds Conference Center is located at 4700 Westwinds Drive, Miramar Beach, FL 32550. Meeting check-in time is 9:30 am. Lunch is included in the meeting fee of \$30.

GTGC's largest scholarship fundraiser, the annual Holiday Bazaar, is on November 14, 2026, at Cantina Laredo in 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. More details are available on the GTGC website.

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 12, 2026. More information 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 by emailing greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com.

FLIGHT 250

continued from cover

programs.

FLIGHT 250 begins this school year at an impressive altitude. Walton County School District has already received several honors in 2026, including Florida's No. 2 ranking for school grades, a No. 3 statewide

ranking based on academic assessment results and the state's No. 2 graduation rate at 97.5%.

National recognition has followed. Magnet Innovation Center, South Walton High School, Freeport High School and Walton High School—all of our traditional high schools—rank among the nation's top 20%

in the 2026–2027 U.S. News & World Report “Best High Schools” rankings.

U.S. News evaluates the high school grades of eligible public schools but does not distinguish the unique learning structure of K–12 schools. Therefore, we must also recognize our northern county gem: Paxton School,

ranked the No. 2 K–12 school in the entire state of Florida. Superintendent of Schools, A. Russell Hughes, remarked, “Our schools may serve different communities, and our students may choose different paths, but we share one vision and one responsibility: to prepare not just the whole child, but every child, for a life of suc-

cess. When an entire District is moving together with that purpose, the heights we can reach are Heights Unseen.”

With students present, reading, creating and striving for excellence, our course is clear. FLIGHT 250 is climbing together To Heights Unseen.

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Coastal Seniors Update for September



Exercise Classes – Angela Gibson will lead classes every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00 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 through SignUp Genius email. To be added to the SignUp Genius email list, contact us at 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, September 4, 11, and 25 from 8:45 - 12 noon at Padgett Park. All supplies will be provided. Cost is \$20 for members

and \$40 for non members. Sign up through SignUp Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Pickleball - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts on September 16 at 6:00 p.m. This beginner class will be open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) Registration is required. Register through the Parks and Rec Website at secure.rec1.com. The class is FREE, and equipment will be provided, or you may use your own. Email Sandy Gulak at sowlpickleball@gmail.com for more information. Open play at Boys and Girls Club every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday starting September 15 through December 17 from 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Beginners welcome.

Demo paddles available. Cost is \$5 per day plus a \$35 waiver fee at initial registration. 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 Program - Monthly Program with light lunch will be Friday, September 18, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Padgett Park. Guest speaker will be announced at a later date. Sign up through SignUp Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

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 - Two Classes will be held each Monday and Wednesday in September (except Labor Day, Sept. 7) at 9 a.m. and at 10:15 a.m. at Watersound 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 through SignUp Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at 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.

Northwest Florida Health Council - Two free health screenings provided on September 17 from 9 - 11:30 a.m. at Padgett Park. Screenings could identify possible health issues, answer questions, and aid with connections to specialized care.

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© (3) organization for active adults.

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 Community

Pond Fishing in Walton County

BY HELEN PETRE

We all know South Walton is a fishing paradise, but for those of us not going out on a charter, or fishing the emerald green surf, there is another option that is exciting, rewarding, and good eating. North of the Choctawhatchee Bay are the lakes, big and small, filled with opportunity. Almost every fisherman got their start on a pond somewhere, catching bream. It is a great way to start a life long habit. The weather is getting cooler and youth under 16 do not need a license, so now is the perfect time to take your kids fishing, or just let them go by themselves. Sometimes small opportunities lead to large opportunities.

Large opportunity is usually largemouth bass, *Micropterus nigricans*, Florida's favorite freshwater fish. Bass eat fish, insects, and crustaceans and are fun to catch. They are aggressive and put up a fight. They also hang around bream because they like to eat them.

Juniper Lake and Lake De-funiak are great places to fish, but so are the small lakes spread throughout the area, like the ponds on the south east side of Second Street.

Garrion Gay, age eight, fished a 2nd Street lake one day and it worked well for him. People think they need lots of fancy stuff to catch big fish, but Garrion went to the pond with a pole and bread. No worms or lures? No problem. He crunched up a ball of bread, put it on his hook and threw it out there. He caught a bream.

Bream are panfish

Bream are popular panfish and bread is a good bait for them. In the wild they eat crickets, smaller fish, insect larva like dragonfly larva, and water bugs, but they like bread. They breed during summer and the males defend the nests, so males tend to bite at anything, which is good for catching them.

Limits

The bag limit for any black

bass, which includes largemouth, Florida, and Choctaw, is five and only one can be more than 16 inches. The limit for panfish, including blue gill, bream, and sunfish is 50.



Bluegill, a type of bream.
Wikipedia.

Garrion could have taken that bream home and fried it up with cornmeal, or onions and hot sauce, but he figured he could do better. Bream are kind of small, and being a knowledgeable fisherman, Garrion knew that bream are prey for bass. He must have had a pretty good teacher if he knew all that by eight years old, but he also was very resourceful, as fishermen usually are. No need for fancy boats and a suitcase full of lures, Garrion had a plan.

Bream as bait for bass

Bass are big and aggressive, and Garrion knew he could get one. He hooked his bream so it could swim sort of naturally and cast. Bass are opportunistic feeders, and they hang around with bream in the ponds doing the predator prey thing. The bream keeps enough distance to not get eaten until the bass sees an opportunity and the bream is lunch. This works a bit better for bass when the bream is hooked.

Smart thinking, patience, and a lot of practice resulted in a memorable achievement for Garrion, and his family as well. Fishing is more than catching a fish. It is an experience in self reliance, problem solving, and planning. Learning how to fish is one of those things that stays with you for a lifetime, like riding a bike, or playing a musical instrument.

I am grateful that here in the Panhandle of Florida we can teach our children skills they can be proud of. The next catch may not be this big, but it will



Garrion Gay and his bream caught bass.

still be a catch. Good job Garrion, and your family as well.

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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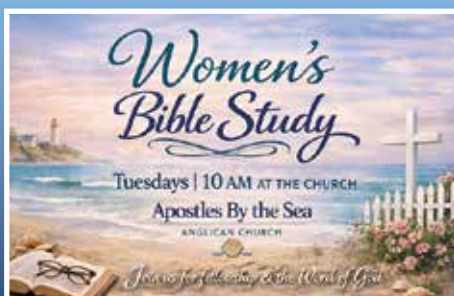
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Beyond Pain Relief: A Broader Approach to Acupuncture



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

Mention acupuncture and most people still think of one thing: pain. Back pain. A stubborn shoulder. Sciatica. Headaches. An injury that just doesn't seem to completely resolve.

And for good reason. Acupuncture can be an extraordinarily useful tool for managing pain, muscle tension and many musculoskeletal complaints. But what often surprises patients is how much further its clinical application can extend.

Acupuncture may support patients navigating stress, insomnia, headaches and migraines, digestive issues, fertility, inflammatory conditions and long COVID. With specialized training in neuroacupuncture, its applications can extend to neuropathy, vertigo, Parkinson's disease, stroke rehabilitation, PTSD, autism, ADHD, anxiety and other neurological and neuropsychiatric concerns.

For some patients, acupuncture addresses a specific problem. For others, it becomes part of how they support their health, function and quality of life over time.

Acupuncture Through a Contemporary Lens

Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine have remarkably long histories of clinical use. What I find particularly interesting today is the convergence of that accumulated clinical tradition with our evolving scientific understanding of the nervous system, pain signaling, physiology and botanical medicine.

Modern research continues to investigate how acupuncture influences nervous-system signaling and pain processing, while pharmacological research examines the bioactive compounds found within medicinal plants.

We don't have to position traditional medicine in opposition to modern healthcare. Instead, we can ask thoughtful questions: What works? How does it work? For whom might it be useful? And where can it fit within a

comprehensive health plan? Acupuncture also doesn't have to be something you try only after everything else has failed. Nor does choosing acupuncture mean stepping away from conventional medicine. It can complement care from a primary care physician, neurologist, physical therapist, OB/GYN, psychiatrist or other specialist.

More than Needles

Acupuncture treatment is highly individualized. Two people with the same complaint may receive different treatment based on their health histories, symptoms and goals.

Care may also extend beyond needles. Depending on the individual, traditional Chinese medicine can incorporate cupping, fire cupping, gua sha, food-based recommendations or customized Chinese herbal medicine.

Like many therapies, acupuncture is rarely best understood as a "one-and-done" treatment. Some people notice changes quickly, while others experience therapeutic benefit over a series of treatments. Frequency and duration depend on the individual, the complexity and chronicity of the concern, and how that person responds.

That individualized approach matters because the body doesn't organize itself into separate compartments. Sleep affects pain. Stress can affect digestion. Pain influences mood and sleep. Our nervous, hormonal, immune and musculoskeletal systems are deeply interconnected.

That interconnectedness is one reason acupuncture can fit naturally within a broader health plan.

A Specialized Approach to Neurological Care

One of the most fascinating developments within the field is neuroacupuncture.

Neuroacupuncture is not simply traditional acupuncture applied to someone with a neurological diagnosis. It requires advanced specialized education integrating acupuncture techniques with detailed study of neurological anatomy, function and rehabilitation.

This specialized approach may be incorporated into care for people navigating Parkinson's disease, neuropathy, vertigo, stroke recovery and other neurological conditions, as well as PTSD, autism, ADHD, anxiety

and complex neuropsychiatric concerns.

Many of these patients already have neurologists, psychiatrists, therapists or rehabilitation specialists involved in their care. The goal is not to replace those relationships. A more useful question is whether adding another appropriate modality may

help support function, symptom management and quality of life, particularly when recovery has plateaued or symptoms persist despite appropriate treatment.

Fertility and Women's Health

Fertility is another area where acupuncture can complement conventional care.

Some women incorporate

acupuncture while trying to conceive naturally, while others use it alongside care from an OB/GYN or reproductive endocrinologist. Treatment may also address accompanying concerns such as stress, sleep or menstrual

TORTOISE
continued on page 13



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They Searched Everywhere. Then They Found Watersound Fountains.

Gerald and Sheree McKenzie searched farther than most before deciding where retirement would begin.

When they started thinking about retirement, they didn't limit themselves to one city — or even one country.

Over the years, they explored retirement destinations across Florida's Gulf Coast and considered places as far away as South Africa. They weren't simply looking for a beautiful home. They wanted a place that fit the life they had imagined for themselves: active, connected, close to nature, and close to family.

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.

For Gerald and Sheree, Watersound Fountains didn't simply end their search.

It gave them the kind of life they had been searching for all along.

Discover retirement living near 30A. Call 850-601-3174 or visit WatersoundFountains.com to schedule your visit.



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They searched everywhere.
Then they found Watersound Fountains.

After exploring communities near and far, Gerald and Sheree chose Watersound Fountains for the lifestyle: chef-prepared dining, wellness programs, nearby golf, surrounding nature, and a welcoming community close to the 30A life they love.

Call **850-601-3174** to schedule your visit.



READ THEIR STORY

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Getting Homes Ready for the Fall Season



By KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

September often brings a welcome change of pace along the Emerald Coast. With the busy summer season winding down, homeowners and property managers finally have an opportunity to focus on maintenance and improvement projects. Fall is widely considered one of the best seasons for painting. Temperatures are more moder-

ate, humidity begins to ease, and weather conditions are often more predictable. For homeowners, this makes it an ideal time to refresh both interior and exterior spaces before the holiday season arrives. A well-maintained home not only looks great but also stays protected against the elements. Rental property owners and management companies frequently use this time to schedule updates that may have been difficult during the peak summer months.

Kyle's Tip: "One of the easiest ways to keep a home looking sharp year-round is staying ahead of maintenance. Small updates done at the right time can prevent much bigger repairs later."

Taking advantage of the quieter fall months helps keep homes across the Emerald Coast looking their best. Ready to give your home the loving protection it deserves? Reach out to Ovation Painting and let's start planning your refresh. Call or text (850) 830-9668 to get started. And as a thank you to those who serve, we proudly offer a military and first responder discount by mentioning this article! Big projects. Beautiful results. Done right. Visit ovationpainting.com.





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Community

Santa Rosa Beach Author and Local Coach Releases Book On Friendship, Belonging, and Pickleball



Pickleball may be one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, but according to Santa Rosa Beach author and coach Colleen Riddle, the real story isn't the score. It's everything that happens around it.

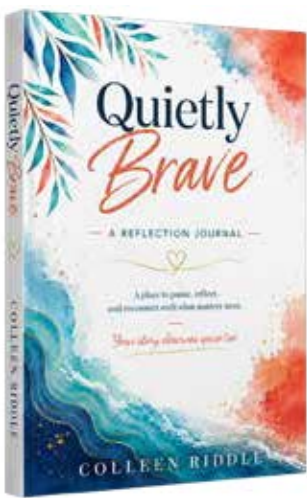
In "Came for the Game, Stayed for the People: True Stories of Pickleball, Friendship & Belonging," released last month, Riddle shares eighteen true stories from members of her own local coaching community — people who walked onto a pickleball court looking for exercise, a new hobby, or simply something to do and found something they didn't expect: friendship, confi-

dence, connection, and a sense of belonging.

The stories follow everyday people navigating grief, divorce, retirement, relocation, empty nesting, new beginnings, and other major life transitions. Their experiences are woven together with fifty-four short life lessons on resilience, reinvention, courage, and what it means to truly belong.

Riddle has also released "Quietly Brave: A Reflection Journal," a companion to the book that invites readers to turn those same fifty-four life lessons inward. Through guided reflection prompts, simple action invitations, and space to write, the journal encourages readers to explore their own experiences with courage, change, joy, connection, and belonging. While designed to complement "Came for the Game, Stayed for the People," "Quietly Brave" also stands on its own as a personal reflection journal.

"Pickleball gets people in the door," Riddle says. "But it's the people who keep them coming



back. I've watched this sport hand people their community back to them — sometimes exactly when they needed it most. That's the part nobody talks about, and it's the whole reason I wrote this book."

Riddle has called the Emerald Coast home for more than two decades and has spent much of that time helping others improve their health and confidence. An ACE-Certified Personal Trainer and founder of Fit Pickleballer, she began her pickleball coach-

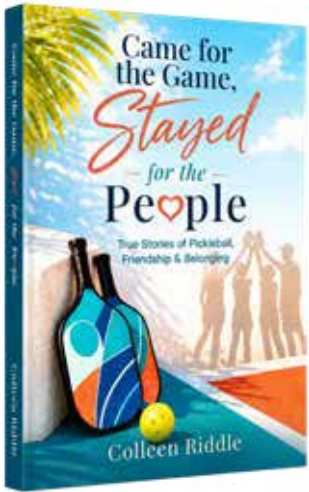
ing community with a single free beginner class. What she didn't expect was how quickly lessons would become friendships, friend groups would become support systems, and a sport would become the beginning of entirely new chapters in people's lives.

Although pickleball provides the backdrop, Riddle says the message of "Came for the Game, Stayed for the People" reaches well beyond the court. At its heart, the book is about the cour-

when people make room for one another. "Quietly Brave" extends that message by giving readers a place to pause, reflect, and consider how those same themes are showing up in their own lives.

Riddle celebrated the release of both books with an invitation-only community launch event in Destin, bringing together many of the local people whose stories and friendships inspired the project.

"Came for the Game, Stayed for the People" is available in paperback and Kindle editions, and "Quietly Brave: A Reflection Journal" is available in paperback. Both are available on Amazon and through Colleen-Riddle.com.



ABOUT COLLEEN RIDDLE

Colleen Riddle is an ACE-Certified Personal Trainer, pickleball instructor, author, and founder of Fit Pickleballer. For more than 20 years, she has coached and encouraged people to become stronger, healthier, and more confident. Her work today brings together fitness, pickleball, wellness, and community, with a focus on helping people find connection and belonging through shared experiences.

age to show up, the friendships that can change the direction of a life, and the ripple effect created



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Money Matters: Could You Have Money Waiting for You?

By CLINT GHARIB, AIF®, CFED®

Months ago, I came across an article about unclaimed property. Out of curiosity, I searched Ohio, where I lived briefly after college. To my surprise, the state was holding more than \$1,200 from an old insurance settlement I didn't even know

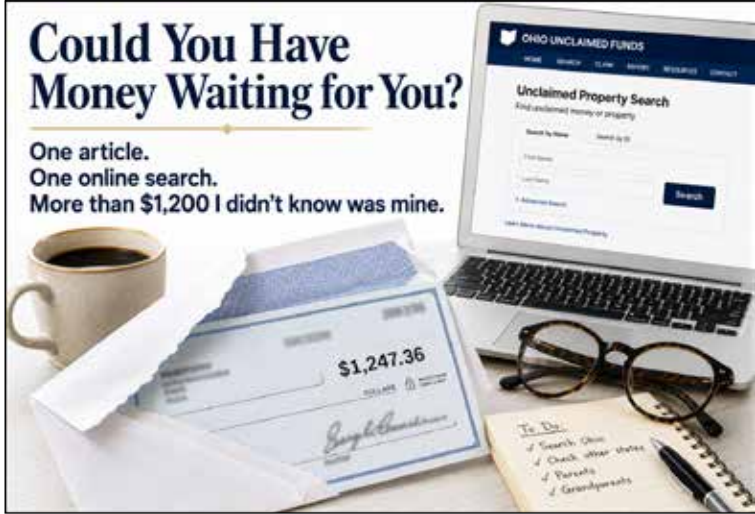
existed. The claim process took about an hour of my time, the cost of certified mail, and about two weeks later a check arrived in my mailbox.

What surprised me most wasn't the huge amount of unclaimed money nationwide, but that, according to the National Association of Unclaimed Prop-

erty Administrators (NAUPA), about 1 in 7 people has unclaimed property. That means there's a good chance you—or someone in your family—may have money waiting for you.

So where does this money come from?

Sometimes it's an uncashed payroll check. Other times it's



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an insurance payment, utility deposit, stock dividend, bank account, escrow refund, or another financial asset that couldn't be delivered to its rightful owner. After a period of inactivity, those assets are generally transferred to the state's unclaimed property program, where they remain until someone claims them.

Don't stop with your own name. Think about every state where you've lived, worked, attended college, or owned property. Then consider searching for your parents, grandparents, or other family members. In some cases, heirs may be entitled to claim property belonging to a deceased relative.

While every state has its own process, the basic steps are similar. Search the official state database, submit a claim if you find a match, and provide documentation verifying your identity and, when necessary, your connection to the property. Some claims are processed in a matter of weeks, while others take longer depending on the circumstances.

One important tip: never pay someone just to search for unclaimed property. Official state searches are free, and NAUPA provides links to every state's official unclaimed property program.

Maybe you'll find nothing.

Then again, I never expected to find more than \$1,200 waiting for me.

Sometimes the best financial discovery isn't a new investment. It's finding money that was yours all along. For additional perspective, see: <https://Oxfordra.com/blog>

Where to Start

Visit www.unclaimed.org, the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators' official website, for free links to every state's unclaimed property program.

Source: National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA): Approximately 1 in 7 people have unclaimed property waiting to be claimed.

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 informational purposes and should not be considered legal or tax advice. It is not an offer to buy, sell, or a solicitation of an offer to buy or sell any security or instrument to participate in any particular trading strategy and is not intended to provide, & should not be relied on for, tax, legal or accounting advice. You should consult your own tax professional regarding your specific situation. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Certain statements contained within are forward-looking statements including, but not limited to, statements that are predictions of future events, trends, plans or objectives. Undue reliance should not be placed on such statements because, by their nature, they are subject to known and unknown risks and uncertainties. Oxford Retirement Advisors is an independent firm with Securities and Advisory services offered through Madison Avenue Securities, LLC ("MAS"), member FINRA/SIPC and a Registered Investment Advisor. Oxford Retirement Advisors and MAS are not affiliated entities.



Registration Open for Saint Rita Catholic Church Knights of Columbus Charity Golf Event

On Columbus Day, Monday, October 12, the Knights of Columbus Council 17689 out of Saint Rita Catholic Church in Santa Rosa Beach will host their Third Annual Charity Golf Tournament at The Links at Sandestin. Once again, this fun-filled event will generate funds for its three Emerald Coast-based Mission Partners: Healing Paws for Warriors, Point Washington Medical Clinic and Caring & Sharing of South Walton.

The tournament is accepting both Foursomes (\$600) and Single Players (\$150) and has sold out each of the first two years. Sponsorships are available and many include playing spots. The Silent Auction is virtual and is live for seven days around the golf tournament date. All those who sponsor or offer auction items are featured on the event's official website for an entire year!

Over \$80,000 in net proceeds have been presented to our three charities from our first two years. And the event offers comp beverages, food stations on-course, post-event Happy Hour and snacks, on-course contests on all par 3s, including



a \$10,000 Hole-in-One prize FOR ANY player who makes an ace on Number 12.

To register to play, become a sponsor, contribute to the Virtual Silent Auctions or to learn more, visit <http://www.golflkoc.com>.



TORTOISE

continued from page 7

symptoms during what can be a physically and emotionally demanding process.

It illustrates an important point: patients don't necessarily have to choose between two worlds of healthcare.

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The best healthcare doesn't always require choosing one approach over another. Sometimes it means understanding how much more we may be able to accomplish when we thoughtfully bring different disciplines together.

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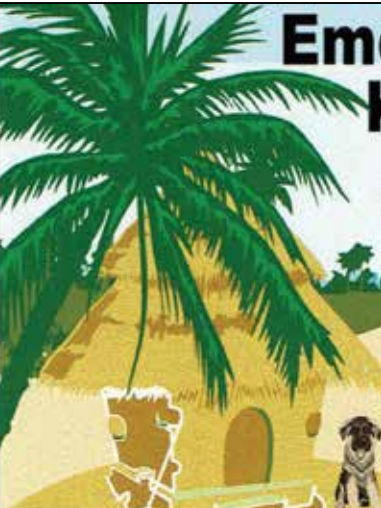




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Community

Watersound Fountains Associate Shares Passion for Sea Turtles With Residents

Resident Experience Director Brooke Leestma, a Wildlife Observer with Panama City Beach Turtle Watch, will help residents experience the sea turtle nesting process up close

By day, Brooke Leestma is the resident experience director at Watersound Fountains – where she plans programs and events for the seniors who live at the resort-style senior living community. But by night, you can find her maneuvering an all-terrain utility vehicle on the beach as a Wildlife Observer for the Panama City Beach Turtle Watch.

The latter is something that she is deeply passionate about and excited to share with residents of Watersound Fountains later this month.

The community is sponsoring a green sea turtle nest located on the west end of Panama City

Beach near Inlet Beach, where the community is located. As part of this sponsorship, Panama City Beach Turtle Watch visited the community on August 20 to speak with residents about the work they do. Residents will also visit the nest with Brooke during excavation.

For Leestma, it's a way to connect with residents on a deeper level and share a part of her life outside of the community with them.

“Working with this organization has allowed me to experience things I never thought I would. I have been blessed to witness sea turtles at every stage

of life – from mothers coming ashore at night to nest to watching a nest hatch,” said Leetsma. “Now, I get to share that with our residents.”

This is Leestma’s third year working with Panama City Turtle Watch and her first as a Wildlife Observer.

As a Wildlife Observer, she drives the local beaches at night to look for nests and check for hatching once they are laid. She and her team work alongside the Leave No Trace group, who clear the beach every day after sunset to ensure that no chairs, tents or debris are left behind that may interfere with the nesting sea



turtles and their journey to and from the water.

Panama City Beach is one of a handful of beaches in Florida where volunteers and staff of these organizations can go out on the beach at night, but the vehicles must be outfitted with red lights so the artificial light does not confuse the baby sea turtles who follow the light of the moon to find the water.

“Sea turtles are fascinating animals,” said Leetsma. “But there are obstacles to their survival each year. One of the most important things we do as an organization is educating people about conservation efforts and how to respect sea turtle nests during this pivotal time.”

As part of the seminar being held at Watersound Fountains, members of the Panama City Beach Turtle Watch will educate residents about the sea turtle nesting and hatching process. They’ll also bring in artifacts such as a preserved sea turtle nest and shell. Residents of the community will have the opportunity to visit the nest during excava-

tion, which happens a couple of days after the sea turtles hatch.

During the excavation, the trained staff with Panama City Beach Turtle Watch carefully dig up the sea turtle nest to see how many eggs were laid, how many hatchlings successfully emerged and how many unhatched eggs remain. Occasionally, a hatchling may still be found in the nest during the excavation.

“Every nest tells its own story, and it is fascinating to discover what each contains,” said Leestma. “What excites me most about sponsoring a nest this year is the opportunity to share a nest excavation with our residents.”

For resident Gaynell Lisenbe, the experience will be particularly special. Lisenbe previously volunteered for a local sea turtle conservation organization. In her role, she would walk more than two miles of beach each day searching for sea turtle nests. It’s a similar position to the one that Leestma holds – and a shared connection for the two women as they embark on this unique experience.

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A Superior Mechanical Hosts Second Event

Veterans & First Responders Event This October

The Walton and Okaloosa communities are coming together again to give recognition and thanks to our first responders, veterans, and active military. A Superior Mechanical will hold its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive North, Niceville, FL 32578 on Tuesday, October 20, 2026, from 11:30 AM to 1:00 pm. Please save the date!

During the event, A Superior Mechanical will donate a new Hot Water Heater complete with installation to one First Responder or Veteran in need. This giveaway is open to all who have served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast



Guard, and all first responders including EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Fire Fighters. Register to win at ASuperiorMechanical.com and go to ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY.

The event includes a delicious hot lunch catered by Swiftly Catered, a brief welcome from the sponsors and supporters, and the Hot Water Heater. This event is supported and sponsored by the City of Niceville and Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School (who will present the colors), Rocky Bayou Christian School (who will sing the National Anthem), Walton and Okaloosa County businesses are encouraged to sponsor; for more information contact Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

Save the Date!

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Tuesday, October 20, 2026
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MKAF Names Panama City Beach Artist Jamie Babula 2026 Featured Poster Artist for 31st Annual Festival

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) has named Jamie Babula of Panama City Beach as the Featured Poster Artist for the 31st Annual Festival of the Arts, set for Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 24-25, 2026, at the Mattie Kelly Dugas Pavilion Green in Destin.

Recognized as one of Northwest Florida's premier juried fine arts festivals, the two-day celebration brings together more than 100 acclaimed artists from across the country, along with live music, local cuisine, interactive children's activities and family-friendly entertainment.

Admission and parking are free.

For Babula, the honor represents the realization of a dream nearly three decades in the making.

"I first attended the Festival when I was 16 years old and remember dreaming about exhibiting here someday," Babula says. "To now be selected as the Featured Poster Artist is both an incredible honor and a little surreal."

At 44, Babula has spent nearly three decades inspired by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Festival of the Arts. Known for her hyperrealistic colored-pencil drawings, the Panama City Beach artist creates remarkably lifelike works that often leave viewers questioning whether they're looking at a drawing or a photograph. A self-taught artist who later studied art at Gulf Coast State College, she has exhibited at the Festival numerous times and earned six MKAF Festival awards, including Best of Show, First Place, two Judges Recognition Awards and two Awards of Excellence.

Her featured artwork, *Drawn to Paint* (20 x 30 inches, colored pencil on paper), offers a fresh interpretation of the Festival's creative spirit. Rather than depicting a finished painting, Babula chose to draw an artist's palette featuring paint mixed



to match the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's signature colors, capturing the quiet moment before creation begins.

"I thought, 'If I'm going to create the Festival poster, it still has to be me,'" Babula says. "I draw, so I drew the paint that would be used to create it."

Completed in approximately 60 to 70 hours using nearly 40 colored-pencil hues, the artwork reflects Babula's fascination with

hyperrealism and her desire to spark curiosity.

"I hope people stop, ask questions and wonder whether they're looking at a drawing or a photograph," she says. "If it makes them curious, then I've done my job."

As the annual Featured Poster Artist, Babula will receive a \$750 cash award, and the winning artwork will

serve as the visual centerpiece of the Festival, appearing on the official Festival poster, Festival Guide, commemorative T-shirt, marketing campaign, website, social media and promotional materials throughout the year.

Festival attendees will have the opportunity to meet Babula, view *Drawn to Paint* on display and shop her collection of original artwork throughout the weekend. The original art-

work will be included in a Silent Auction to benefit MKAF. The auction will be live during the Festival for those who would like to bid on it.

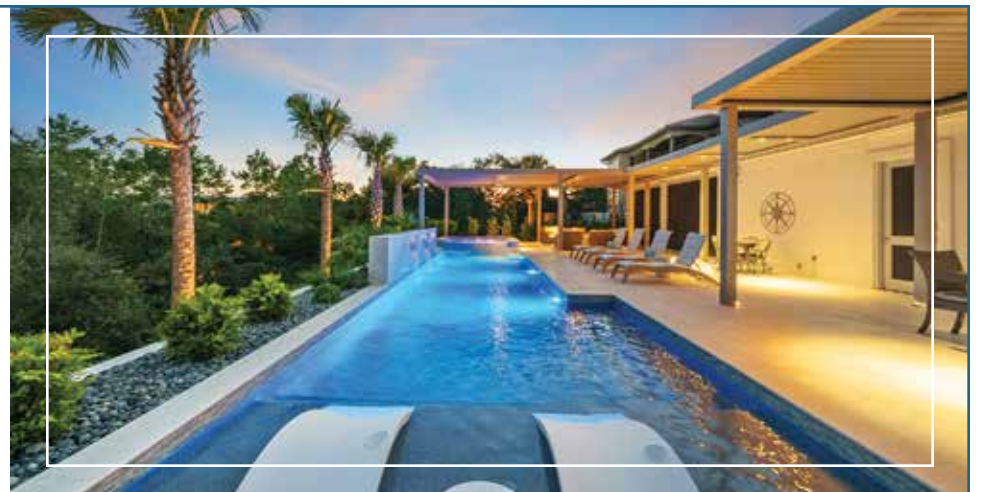
More than 100 artists from across the United States will compete for more than \$10,000 in cash awards in 18 categories, including Best in Show and the People's Choice Award. Guests can also enjoy live entertainment, artist demonstrations, hands-on children's activities, an art raffle, local food vendors, a beer and wine garden, and more.

Proceeds from the Festival benefit MKAF's ArtsReach education initiatives, which provide arts programming for K-12 students, individuals with special needs and members of the military community along the Emerald Coast.

For more information, sponsorship opportunities or to become a Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation member, visit MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.



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Cultural Arts Alliance Awards More Than \$38,000 in Art For All Grants To Support Walton County Arts Education

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) is proud to announce that over \$38,500 in Art For All grant funding has been awarded to support arts education and creative projects benefiting more than 800 K-12 students across Walton County. In its ongoing mission to foster creativity, the CAA has granted more than \$923,500 to teachers, students, artists and arts organizations over the years.

This fiscal year's round of funding includes 35 arts education grants, formerly known as teacher mini grants, to educators representing 13 area schools including: Bay School, Dune Lakes Elementary School, Freeport Elementary School, Freeport High School, Freeport Learning Center, Paxton School, Seacoast Collegiate High School, Seaside Neighborhood School, South Walton Academy, The Nature School, The WISE Magnet School, Van R. Butler Elementary School, and West DeFuniak Elementary School. These grants are designed to enhance visual, literary, and performing arts experiences for K-12 students in public, private (501c3), and home-school environments. Funding supports materials, guest artists, field trips, and other arts-focused enrichment opportunities initiated by educators.

In addition to the arts education grants, professional education grants were awarded to local musician Sammi Accola and visual artist Stacy Martin for continuing education to advance their work,

and three non-profit organizations, Friend of Eden State Garden, Point Washington Medical Clinic and Westonwood Ranch, were awarded grants to support youth arts programming and outreach.

During the 38th Annual Arts-Quest Fine Arts Festival, nine award winners were named in the Student Art Exhibit. Winners represented five different Walton County schools including Freeport High School, South Walton High School, Freeport Middle School, Freeport Elementary and Dune Lakes Elementary.

"These grants reflect the heart of our mission: supporting the creative development of our community," said CAA President & CEO Jennifer Steele. "When we invest in arts education, we invest in a future that values imagination, empathy, and innovation. We're proud to help empower educators, students, and local creatives to shape a vibrant, art-rich Walton County."

The next application deadline for Art for All grant submissions is November 16, 2026. Eligible applicants include teachers, students, individual artists, and arts organizations. Applications and guidelines can be found at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/artist-resources.

For more information about the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County and the Art for All program, visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com or call (850) 622-5970.



BIA OW (Building Industry Association Okaloosa and Walton) hosted Hard Hat Happy Hour at Habitat for Humanity of Walton County ReStore. Sponsored by Community Bank, this was a well attended event. We are building home 76 in our 30TH year. For more, visit WaltonCountyHabitat.org

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 Community

HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BEACH SEPTEMBER 2026

Farmers Markets

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

Grayton Locals Market Thursdays 9 a.m.-a 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.

Come From Away @ 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.

Stargazing @ Eden Gardens State Park Sept. 11

The Northwest Florida Astronomy Association hosts Stargazing on the Lawn from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Meet between the historic Wesley House and fountain. The event is free and open to the public with a park entry fee of \$4 per vehicle. Normal celestial gazing includes bright galaxies, star clusters and planets. Event is weather permitting. Guests are encouraged to bring their own telescopes, wear weather-appropriate clothing and bring bug repellent. If you bring a flashlight, use a red filter to minimize the effect on night vision.

Children's Home Society of Florida's Seaside Soirée @ Rosemary Beach Sept. 11

Join Children's Home Society of Florida for the inaugural Seaside Soirée from 6 to 9 p.m. at St. Augustine Green. Enjoy an unforgettable evening of fine food, fine wine, coastal elegance, and philanthropy, all while helping Children's Home Society of Florida. Debuting on Florida's Emerald Coast, the Seaside Soirée invites guests to indulge in an upscale coastal experience that blends la dolce vita—the sweet life—with Gulf Coast charm. Savor fine wines, inspired coastal cuisine, and artisanal cocktails as live music drifts through Rosemary. Reserve your tickets or explore partnership opportunities today at secure.qgiv.com/event/seasidesoiree2026.

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!

Caring & Sharing The Glow of Giving Sept. 14

Join Caring and Sharing at The Glow of Giving, an afternoon of self-care, community & giving back from 3-6 p.m. at Drive the Coast in Santa Rosa Beach. At the heart of the afternoon is a one-hour panel featuring an inspiring group of local experts who will share their insights on the importance of self-care, confidence, wellness, and taking time for yourself while continuing to give to others.

The event will also feature a Diaper Drive, providing an opportunity for guests to make an immediate and tangible contribution to local families in need. Guests are encouraged to bring diapers and wipes to help support this important community effort. Caring & Sharing of South Walton provides food and financial support to our neighbors in need in Walton County. Visit caringandsharingsowal.org.

Queens of the Tiles: Mahjong @ Ovide Sept. 14 & 28

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. every other Monday, September 14 - December 21.

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HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BEACH SEPTEMBER 2026

Third Thursday Art Walk at The Warehouses of SRB Sept. 17

Browse paintings, drawings, custom jewelry, clothing, photography, pottery, glassblowing and more. Shopping begins at 6 p.m. Enjoy light bites, drinks, music and ART! Artists you'll find at the Art Party include: Allison Wickey, Andy Saczynski, Chandler Williams, Doug Foltz, Glass Deer 30A, Ginger Leigh, The Gypsy Garage, JA Beauty/Wellness, Justin Lyons, Krista Vind, Lisa McGee, Mary Ellen DiMauro and Merry Beth Myrick.

International Talk Like a Pirate Day @ Village of Baytowne Wharf Sept. 17

Ahoy Matey! Join in for an evening full of adventure with our Special Guest Captain Davy starting at 5 p.m. Come dressed in your best pirate costume and get ready for a scavenger hunt, magic show, costume contest, and loads more of mayhem!

ECAC Hole-in-One Golf Tournament at Sandestin Sept. 18

Benefiting the Emerald Coast Autism Center Scholarship Fund, the annual tournament brings golfers together to support ECAC students and families through a day on one of Sandestin's signature golf courses.

Tea off for a meaningful cause! Boxed lunches are included in the registration fee and beverages will be available for purchase. Players will also have the opportunity to bid on some great silent auction items and participate in a 50/50 raffle! Register at www.eventbrite.com/e/13th-annual-hole-in-one-golf-tournament-registration-1989414882467.

Point Washington Medical Clinic Harvest Moon @ Ruskin Place Sept. 18 & 19

The Point Washington Medi-

cal Clinic invites you to join them as they celebrate another year serving the community – and the TENTH annual Harvest Moon Celebration fundraiser. Events include a Morning Meditative Yoga, Harvest Moon Dinner on the 18th, and a Harvest Moon Social Club on the 19th. Support the mission of the clinic: to build a stronger and healthier community by providing high-quality primary health care regardless of the patient's means or access. Find details and registration at www.thepwmc.org/upcoming-events.

Paddle 4 Peace @ Grayton Beach Sept. 19

Join local charity Gulf Therapy for the Annual Paddle For Peace, welcoming all community members with the focus on love and peace for paddling, live music and lunch on the beach. Pre-registration is encouraged as boards sell out fast. Gulf Therapy's goal is to provide a platform to help people both on and off the water. Get details and register at www.gulftherapy.org/paddleforpeace.

Guided Plant Tour @ Topsail State Park Sept. 21

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.

CAA Cocktails & Clay Sept. 23

Tap into your inner artist at Cocktails & Clay, a hands-on creative workshop hosted by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County from 5-7:30 p.m. at Distillery 98. While you work, you'll enjoy a complimentary craft cocktail or mocktail and some light bites. Learn more and

get tickets at www.culturalartsalliance.com/upcoming-events.

Battle for the Buckle @ 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. The tournament supports Westonwood Ranch and its mission to empower teens and

adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Register at westonwood.org/battleforthebucklefishingtournament. 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

EVENTS
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Events

EVENTS

continued from page 19

cancer patients undergoing treatment along the Emerald Coast.

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.

Biophilia Center Creature
Feature Sept. 26

Join the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center at 5 p.m. for a Creature Feature, a screening of *The Forgotten Coast: Return to Wild Florida*, presented by the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. This event is free to attend and donations are always appreciated. Bring blankets, pillows, and wear comfy clothes for a showing in the indoor theater. Concessions such as pizza and popcorn will be available for purchase. Learn more at eowilsoncenter.org.

Cars of 30A Grand Tour @

Alys Beach Oct. 3

Cars of 30A presents a highly curated collection of rare and high-performance automobiles along the streets of Alys Beach and around Lake Marilyn. Specialty displays, live music, art activations, food trucks and beverages will be featured throughout the all-ages event. The afternoon concludes at Central Park with lounge seating, live music, food and games on the big screen. Visit www.carsof30a.com for details and tickets.

Cabaret at Seagar’s: An
Evening With New York
Voices Oct. 8

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents an intimate evening with Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble New York Voices as part of the group’s farewell tour, “The Four and Only.” Peter Eldridge, Kim Nazarian, Darmon

Meador and Lauren Kinhan will celebrate 40 years of vocal jazz with inventive arrangements and seamless harmonies spanning jazz, pop and Brazilian influences. Tickets are \$375 per person and include valet parking, a sparkling-wine reception, a multi-course dinner with wine, gratuity and the performance. Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast’s music education and community engagement programs. Visit sinfoniagulfcoast.org for ticket info.

11th Annual Bloody Mary
Festival Oct. 10

Guests ages 21 and older can enjoy unlimited tastes of creative Bloody Marys prepared by area restaurants, bars and caterers, along with local food samples, live music, champagne, craft beer, seltzers, a cigar bar, SEC football, a photo booth and shopping. Attendees can vote for the People’s Choice Award, while local celebrities and food critics select the overall and Best Accoutrement winners. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity–Walton County and its work to provide stable, affordable housing for local families. Purchase tickets at themarketshops.com/bloody-mary-festi

val.

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.

18th Annual Baytowne
Wharf Beer Festival Oct.
16-17

Join in for samplings of local brews and merchants, and live music on the lawn! Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort presents the 18th Annual Baytowne Wharf Beer Fest. Sample and savor American specialty brews from around the nation. The event will feature over 150 domestic and international craft beers, offering an opportunity to learn about the different types of lagers and ales from a variety of styles. It’s the best Beer Fest on the coast! Visit www.baytownebeerfestival.com.



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Editor & Publisher

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

Production & Layout

Dawna Shackley
graphics@southwalton.life

Advertising Department

850-399-0228

Advertising Manager

850 797-3546
sales@southwalton.life

Contributing Writers

Heather Bennett
850-399-0228

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company Kicks Off Season 14

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) opens its landmark fourteenth season with the critically acclaimed musical *Come From Away*. Celebrating compassion, community, and the triumph of the human spirit, this inspiring true story runs from September 10 through September 27, 2026, at ECTC's theater in Grand Boulevard. Performances are held Thursday through Saturday at 7:00 PM, with matinees on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 1 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m.

Based on the events following the September 11 attacks, *Come From Away* shares the remarkable story of 7,000 air passengers stranded in a small Canadian town, Gander, after US airspace was shut down. The local residents open their homes and hearts to strangers from all over the globe, known as "come from aways," turning a tragedy into a display of kindness and unity.

"Opening our 14th season with *Come From Away* sets a powerful tone for what ECTC is all about: storytelling that unites, uplifts, and connects our community," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director. "It's a high-energy show with a foot-tapping score that reminds us of the profound impact that hospitality and human kindness can make."

The talented cast features several returning favorites, including Darla Briganti, who returns as

Beulah, previously seen as Leona Silva in *Mystic Pizza*, Princess Dragomiroff in *Murder on the Orient Express*, Genie Klein (Carole King's mother) in *Beautiful:*



The Carole King Musical and Miss Hannigan in *Annie*. Joining her is Teresa Lombardi, who takes on the roles of Hannah/Margie after cracking audiences up with her Portuguese accent as Mrs. Araujo in *Mystic Pizza*. Rebeca Lake returns to the ECTC stage as Diane/Crystal, most recently seen on stage as Greta Ohlsson in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Adam Silorey returns as Kevin, following his standout performances as Phileas Fogg in *Around the World in 80 Days*, Zeus in *Xanadu*, as well as Aaron in *First Date*, and Zachary Ryan returns to the stage as Claude, having previously played Barry Mann in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*.

Produced right here on the Emerald Coast, the creative team includes Nathanael Fisher as Director, Emily Bainbridge as Choreographer, Rebeca Lake as Scenic Designer, and Taylor Walker as Costume Designer. Tom Baroco returns as Music Director, joined

by New York City-based Lighting Designer Matt Morris. Baroco and Morris most recently collaborated on Season 13's hit finale, *Mystic Pizza*. Morris also designed the lighting for *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Performances will be held at Emerald Coast Theatre Com-

pany, located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200, Miramar Beach, FL. ECTC's 2026–2027 season is made possible with generous support from Grand Boulevard Town Center, St. Joe Community Foundation, Visit South Walton, Howard Group, and Jerry and Alice Zich.

To purchase tickets, make a tax-deductible donation, join as a VIP or sponsor to get the best of what Season 14 has to offer, or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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 Wellness


BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

Over the years I've watched many things change in the healthcare industry; some of them are good and some not so good. The internet and advances in technology have brought with them mixed changes. On the upside, how we choose and enroll in health insurance plans is much easier for both brokers and clients. I use helpful online quoting tools every day. One of the downsides is the volume of information that's available out there can feel inundating

to consumers, and you don't know what kind of rabbit hole you'll find yourself in just trying to figure out what to do when you turn 65. And unfortunately, worst of all is the abundance of online predatory behavior.

Seniors are particular targets online, especially those seeking Medicare. It's important to know that if someone calls you about Medicare, unless you requested the call, it's fraudulent. Medicare will never call you, and brokers are not allowed to contact you unless they have written permission to do so. If you get a call that offers "free stuff", it is fraudulent. While it's true there are Medicare Advantage plans with extra benefits such as free groceries and other perks, these are generally Special Needs Plans for those who are on Medicare and Medicaid. It's also true that many carriers

will call after you enroll to go over plan information and ensure you are aware of the plan's benefits. However, avoid enrolling in a new plan without speaking with your broker. Never give out your Medicare number to anyone over the phone unless you are enrolling with a trusted broker or called a carrier directly. If ever in doubt, call your broker. They'll help you with any questions or concerns. I help my clients with these concerns quite often. I'm always happy when they call.

When first navigating the Medicare landscape, it can be quite confusing. Is a Supplement Plan or Advantage Plan best? Should an Advantage plan be an HMO or a PPO plan? An experienced broker can help you sort it out. Luckily, our assistance comes at no cost to you since brokers are paid through

the insurance companies whose plans we are certified to sell. You want an independent, local broker who is able to sell you plans from the different carriers in your area. Agents that work directly for one carrier will only inform you on that carrier's plans.

Crooks have always been around, and in the flesh, most of us generally know how to avoid them. With the internet, they can disguise themselves as anything. At worst, a friendly "agent" with a stolen logo attempts to solicit your information or hack into your computer to steal your personal information. While I am able to process enrollments online, I enjoy meeting most of my clients in my office in Santa Rosa Beach. I get to know my clients and they know me.

We can start talking about

next year's plans beginning October 1 and the Annual Enrollment Period (AEP) starts on October 15. AEP is the opportunity to sign up for a 2027 Advantage Plan. It's also open season for telemarketers who will lure you with advertisements offering "free" stuff or other enticing benefits. Beware! If you call that 800 number, they will try to collect your information and the unsolicited calls will really start! I've learned there are tricksters out there that prey on all of us, but especially seniors who generally are trusting. So, beware and be careful.

If I can help you, please give me a call at (850) 687-7606 or email me at christian@30ahealthins.com. You can also find more on the website at www.30AHealthins.com.

Ascension Sacred Heart awarded more than \$2.8 million to expand rural health care

\$2.4M will go toward a new mobile stroke unit, and \$450K will support new diagnostic and imaging equipment for the Family Medicine Residency program

Ascension Sacred Heart Health System has been awarded more than \$2.8 million in funding to expand access to health care in rural communities, part of Gov. Ron DeSantis' announcement of nearly \$188 million through Florida's Rural Health Transformation Program.

The largest portion of the funding, \$2.4 million, will support a new mobile stroke unit for Ascension Sacred Heart Health System. The unit will service rural counties on the I-10 corridor, including Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, and Jackson counties. These counties have higher rates of strokes than the state average, with many residents living long distances from hospitals with stroke accreditation.

"When a stroke happens, time is brain," said Will Condon, President and CEO of Ascension Sacred Heart Health

System. "Providing rural communities with a CT scan to begin treatment while a patient is being transported helps support stroke care to help prevent disability and death."

Because of the uniqueness of the mobile stroke unit, it will be custom-built. The unit will be equipped with a CT scanner and a CT technologist to assess strokes in the field through imaging and a secure telehealth connection to the care team at Ascension Sacred Heart in Pensacola. It will also be fully stocked with treatments for stroke, including clot-busting medications, when clinically appropriate. It is expected to be complete and in use by summer 2027.

In addition, the Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Family Medicine Residency program received \$450,000 for diagnostic and imaging equipment. This equipment will be used at a variety of sites of care where physician residents see patients in rural Walton County, including through home visits and mobile health options. The goal of this

ASCENSION

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Tell Me You're Stressed Without Telling Me You're Stressed



By STEPHENIE CRAIG

I was sitting at the kitchen counter putting together the fall family calendar when I realized summer is over and life is about to get very busy. I got up to get a snack, and before I knew it, I had cleaned out the entire pantry and then moved on to the refrigerator. The deep cleaning went on the rest of the night and the following morning, when the stress energy subsided. When I start deep cleaning, my family starts asking, “What’s wrong? Are you upset about something?” It’s a known family fact that one of

my stress behaviors is passionate cleaning. While stress is a year-round struggle, fall is a high-stress season when school, activities, and commitments pick up pace after having a break during summer. It can be difficult to get your brain and body back on board with the alarm clock, the car-pools, the games, the homework, and all of the other fall things that need to be done. Sometimes it’s obvious when you’re stressed and other times you can carry stress under the radar, not realizing you’re stressed until you become irritable with others, feel pain in your body, or you get physically sick. When is the last time you were stressed? Do you tend to know when you are stressed, or do others in your life tend to point it out to you? Awareness of your stress level and skills to regulate stress are valuable tools for navigat-

ing daily life. Lacking awareness of stress can lead to poor relationship behavior, forgetting to care for yourself physically, emotional distress, stalled motivation, and lack of regular enjoyment. Sometimes you can predict stress, like in the case of Back to School season and other times stress surprises you out of nowhere on an otherwise sunny day. Commonly, the first life structures to become compromised during stress are what you eat, whether you move your body, and your quality of sleep. Letting these foundational structures go often feeds stress and creates a cycle that can be hard to stop. All people have stress behaviors. Some common stress signs are grumpiness, irritability, anxiety, exhaustion, driving angry, rushing, slamming things, sighing, carrying excessive body tension, headaches, stomachaches, and avoidance. When stress sets in, most people have go-to strategies, both healthy and unhealthy, for managing stress. Some common strategies include drinking alcohol, shopping/spending, gambling, sleeping, scrolling, controlling, eating excessively, and restricting food. Other strategies include cleaning, music,

journaling, dancing, creating art, walking, running, gym workouts, sitting at the water, talking to a friend, and spiritual practices. Knowing your personal signs of stress and understanding how to be more intentional in managing stress can be life-changing. So how do you do it? **7 Ways to Identify and Manage Stress** **1.** Notice your stress cues. Where do you experience stress in your body? Check in with your stomach, chest, breathing, neck, shoulders. Notice the intensity of body movements, tone of voice, and words you are using. Try making a list of your top 3-5 signs of stress, like “jaw grinding, cussing in my head or out loud, audible sighing.” **2.** Rate your stress on a scale of 1-10. Notice if you are mildly, moderately, or intensely stressed and try to assign a number. **3.** Reflect on what is causing the stress, and whether there is meaningful action you can take to reduce stress, like having a conversation, using stress management tools, or setting a boundary. **4.** Notice stress management behaviors you gravitate toward. Do you want to drink, clean,

sleep, scroll, or something else? **5.** Evaluate the health of your stress management behaviors. Ask yourself, “Is drinking, cleaning, shopping, or scrolling going to help reduce my stress? Is this behavior going to cause me secondary problems later, like a hangover or a hit to my bank account?” If you determine the behavior may be unhealthy, consider trying another option. **6.** Create a list of five healthy stress management tools that help alleviate stress and don’t cause you secondary problems later. Examples include: deep breathing, saying no, exercising, talking to a trusted friend, or sitting in nature. **7.** Use your healthy stress management tools until your stress level is down to a reasonable level on your rating scale. Many people find 4 or below manageable on a scale of 1-10. Repeating consistent, healthy stress identification and management can change the overall quality of your life for the better. Repetition creates new patterns in your brain so be patient and consistent. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.

ASCENSION

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program is to train these doctors to provide care for many conditions that affect individuals living in rural communities. Having this equipment aims to help patients, regardless of their ability to pay, receive a timely diagnosis and treatment to support their quality of life. “With this new equipment, we are expanding access to healthcare for individuals in Walton County while providing training for our physician residents to help equip them with additional

skills as they complete their program and continue to serve rural communities,” said Joshua A. Hodge, MD, Program Director, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Family Medicine Residency. Administered by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, the Rural Health Transformation Program is designed to strengthen healthcare access and delivery in rural communities across Florida. To learn more about Ascension Sacred Heart Health System or to find care, visit GetSacredHeartCare.com.



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

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Wellness

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast increases Access to Advanced Lung Cancer Treatment

Christopher Ellington, MD, a thoracic surgeon board-certified in thoracic surgery and fellowship-trained in oncology, is bringing advanced lung cancer treatment to Ascension Sacred Heart Cancer Center - Mack Bayou, located at 27 Mack Bayou Loop in Santa Rosa Beach. Dr. Ellington will work closely with oncologists Dr. Thomas Johnson, Dr. Mark DeLeon and Dr. Heather Hilty.

In Walton and Okaloosa Counties, over 700 people were diagnosed with lung cancer in

the past three years, and 156 people died from the disease. Thoracic surgeons are key to the treatment process of lung cancer, one of the country's deadliest forms of cancer. Dr. Ellington will bring advanced treatment for lung cancer closer to home for patients living in the Walton and Okaloosa County area.

"When diagnosed early, lung cancer is more treatable," said Trey Abshier, Sacred Heart Emerald Coast President and CEO. "With our low-dose CT screening and Dr. Ellington's expertise,

we are improving access to care for patients in the area, including minimally invasive treatments."

Dr. Ellington utilizes modern robotic equipment for minimally invasive procedures, including the DiVinci Surgical Robot and Ion robotic-assisted bronchoscopy tools used to treat lung cancer. He earned his medical degree at Flinders University of South Australia before completing multiple medical training programs. These included a surgical internship through

ship at the Texas Heart Institute, Baylor College of Medicine, and MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Sacred Heart Emerald Coast provides low-dose CT screenings for lung cancer as well as personalized treatment plans through the Cancer Center. This includes a multispecialty care team with medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, surgeons, and other cancer specialists who diagnose and treat many types of cancer, including lung cancer.

Appointments are now available with Dr. Ellington. To schedule an appointment or get a second opinion, call (850) 416-6933.



the University of North Dakota, a general surgery residency at Saint Louis University, and a cardiothoracic surgery fellow-

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How Bioidentical Hormone Pellets Can Help Men and Women Feel Better



By DR. RICHARD CHERN

As we age, our hormone levels naturally decline, often leading to symptoms that affect energy, mood, sleep, and overall quality of life. For many men and women, bioidentical hormone pellet therapy offers a long-lasting option to help restore hormone balance and reduce these symptoms.

Bioidentical hormones are designed to be chemically identical

to the hormones naturally produced by the human body. Tiny pellets containing these hormones are inserted just beneath the skin by a healthcare provider, where they slowly release a consistent dose over several months. This steady delivery helps avoid the highs and lows that can occur with some other forms of hormone therapy.

Women experiencing menopause or perimenopause may notice improvements in common symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, vaginal dryness, decreased libido, fatigue, and difficulty sleeping. Some women also report improved mental clarity, increased motivation, and better overall well-being when hormone levels are restored.

Men with low testosterone may experience fatigue, reduced muscle strength, weight gain,

low sex drive, erectile difficulties, irritability, and trouble concentrating. Bioidentical testosterone pellets may help improve energy, enhance libido, support muscle mass, sharpen focus, and promote a more positive mood when low testosterone is the underlying cause of these symptoms.

For example, a woman who has been waking several times each night because of hot flashes may begin sleeping through the night after appropriate hormone treatment, leading to more energy and a better mood during the day. A man who has struggled with low energy and decreased motivation due to low testosterone may notice improved stamina, increased interest in exercise, and enhanced productivity after his hormone levels are optimized.

While many people experience meaningful improvements, hormone pellet therapy is not a

cure-all and is not appropriate for everyone. Symptoms such as fatigue, weight changes, or mood concerns can have many causes, so a thorough medical evaluation and laboratory testing are essential before beginning treatment. Hormone therapy should always be individualized and monitored by a qualified healthcare provider to maximize benefits and minimize potential risks.

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Wellness

When Everyone's a "Narcissist": The Rise of Therapy-Speak



By MICHAEL McMANUS, LCSW, PSYCHOTHERAPIST

Scroll through social media long enough and you'll notice something odd. Strangers calling their ex a narcissist. Friends describing an awkward conversation as gaslighting. Someone announcing a "boundary" because a coworker asked them to switch shifts. Clinical language that used to live inside therapy offices has

spilled into everyday conversation, and it's changing the way people talk about relationships, conflict, and themselves.

Part of this makes sense. For a long time, people lacked words for certain kinds of pain. Someone who spent years in a confusing, manipulative relationship might not have had language for what was happening to them until they heard the term gaslighting and thought, that's it, that's exactly it. A person who never learned how to say no might find real freedom in the idea of boundaries. Naming something is often the first step toward changing it, and in that sense, therapy-speak has done real good.

But something gets lost when these words leave the clinical setting. Narcissist was never meant to describe every selfish or diffi-

cult person. It refers to a specific, fairly rare personality disorder, not a catchall for someone who annoyed you. Gaslighting was coined to describe a deliberate, sustained pattern of making someone doubt their own reality, not a single disagreement about what was said last Tuesday. And boundaries, as therapists use the term, means stating your own limits. It was never supposed to be a tool for controlling what other people do.

That flattening has consequences. When every difficult person becomes a narcissist, it gets harder to tell the difference between someone who is genuinely exploitative and someone who is just tired, or grieving, or simply not like you. When "setting a boundary" starts meaning "I don't want to deal with this," the phrase loses the thing that made it useful

in the first place, which is personal accountability rather than control over someone else.

There's a quieter cost too. Sometimes therapy language becomes a way to avoid the harder work it was meant to support. Calling someone a narcissist can feel like closing a case file, when actually repairing a relationship usually means sitting with uncertainty a lot longer than that. Declaring a boundary can stand in for the more vulnerable act of saying, plainly, what you need and why.

None of this means people should stop using psychological language. Words move around. They always have. The real question isn't whether people borrow from therapy, it's whether they're using these terms to understand something more clearly or simply to end a conversation faster.

For therapists, this shift creates a strange kind of opening. Clients now show up already fluent in psychological vocabulary, which can speed certain conversations along. But it also means more time spent gently unpacking the labels people bring with them, asking not just "was that gaslighting?" but "what actually happened, and how did it make you feel?"

That return to specifics, to the texture of an experience rather than its shorthand, might be exactly what the moment needs. The words themselves aren't the issue. They're just easier to reach for than to use carefully.

Michael McManus is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. He can be reached by text or phone at (850) 837-0123 or through psychotherapy30A.com.

Acne: More than Skin Deep

By BRIDGET SULLIVAN, PA-C
COASTAL SKIN SURGERY AND DERMATOLOGY, PCB

Acne is a common skin condition affecting both adolescents and adults. The causes of acne are multifactorial and include an increase in sebum or oil production, hormonal changes, clogged pores, bacteria, and inflammation. Understanding these factors is essential for effective treatment and management.

Fluctuations in hormone levels can lead to an increase in sebum or oil production, making people more prone to acne. People experiencing puberty, menstruation, and

pregnancy experience hormone level fluctuations, making these populations particularly susceptible to acne flares. Increases in oil production lead to a cascade of clogged hair follicles, bacterial formation and inflammation which can then lead to inflammatory pimples and cyst.

Clogged pores or comedones can also lead to acne development. Causes for clogged pores include heavy makeup, certain skincare products, pollution, sweat, and humidity. These clogged pores will cause blackheads and whiteheads. Also, pores clogged with dead skin cells can often lead to inflamma-

tory acne and pimples.

There are many different treatment options for acne. When buying skin care products look for ingredients containing benzoyl peroxide, salicylic or glycolic acid, and alpha or beta hydroxy acids. These ingredients can combat bacteria and unclog pores.

Acne treatment should be tailored to each individual for their type of acne and skin type. If you have inflammatory pimples and cysts, you might need a prescription strength oral or topical antibiotic.

To treat hormonal acne in women you might need a pre-

scription of spironolactone or a topical anti-hormonal cream. By regulating hormone levels, we can decrease sebum or oil production. There is also a treatment option of an oral retinoid, commonly known as accutane, that can be prescribed for severe or stubborn inflammatory and cystic acne.

Lifestyle changes also play an important role in managing acne. A consistent skincare routine that includes gentle cleansing and non-comedogenic products can help prevent breakouts. Additionally, maintaining a balanced diet, staying hydrated, and managing stress levels can contribute to healthier

skin.

The goal of acne treatment is to clear the acne and prevent scarring. When treating acne with a tailored treatment approach and getting the patient on a proper skin care regimen we can accomplish this goal. Acne is often more than skin deep and can affect people's self image and self esteem. It's a great feeling to have a patient leave the office after their acne is cleared with a new complexion and new air of confidence! If you are struggling with acne, I encourage you to make an appointment with a dermatology provider to get your treatment plan started.

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Michael McManus LCSW

The Big Break



BY RICK MOORE

“I’m exhausted. We can’t go on like this. Something has to give.” These are the words Mr. Avila and his wife were saying right before they got their big break. The year was 2003. They asked us to bring a missionary team of a dozen or so folks to the small town of Carpegna, Italy, where they had moved to start a church. After working for three years, they only had seven members who met weekly at their home. They were Protestants starting a church in a town that claimed to be 98% Catholic. That’s why they asked for our help. Because the second Iraq War had just begun, there were mass protests in Italy against America, so we wanted to make sure they knew we came in peace. A week before we left for Italy, while walking past a kiosk in a mall, I noticed a blue ball cap with different colored doves embroidered on it. Since doves rep-

resent peace, I bought a dozen of them for our team. It is nice when everyone in a group wears the same shirt or hat when traveling through airports because it helps us to keep up with each other. We had two objectives for the trip. Every day the girls would have a gymnastics class, and the boys would have a baseball clinic. Our goal was to have a dozen children at each. It appears the good Lord had other plans.

Mr. Avila was on the youth committee for the town of Carpegna. Our first day visiting happened to be the last day of school before summer break. Hundreds of students gathered in a tent for the closing program. When the mayor and priest saw our group wearing blue ball caps with the doves, they asked me if I wanted to speak to the students. The interpreter stood on the stage with me as I shared stories of God’s love. Then, after the event was over, the mayor asked if we wanted them to leave the tent, chairs, and soundstage up while we were in town to hold meetings every night. We thought the interpreter was confused at first. None of us had any idea why they were being so generous to us. We held programs every evening. All who attended, including adults, received a glow-in-the-dark necklace with a cross.



As we headed to our hotel room each night, we drove by the restaurants and laughed at just how many people were still wearing their glow-in-the-dark cross. The third day there, the priest said he heard we had access to clothes for the refugees from the war. We affirmed we did. He said he would give us a church to make into a clothing pantry. It wasn’t just any church. It was a beautiful stone building constructed in the 1200s.

What made the city leaders go from not giving Mr. Avila the time of day to giving us an

entire church? By this time the baseball and gymnastic classes had grown from a dozen to hundreds of children. We contacted Operation Missions who sent us helpers because the crowds were just too big. On our last day at Carpegna, right before we left town, we stopped at what had become our favorite restaurant. While enjoying some gelato, a man pointed at my wife’s hat and said something in Italian. Mrs. Avila’s eyes got big. It finally made sense. She and my wife pulled me aside to explain what the man said, which was,

“We are so glad the Pope sent you to our town.” What!? The doves on our hats were the exact same doves used by the Vatican a couple of years earlier for the year of Jubilee. The whole town thought the Pope had sent us. Who knew that Protestants and Catholics could work together? The truth is someone with even more influence than the Pope was at work. Thank you Lord for big breaks.

Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship Center.



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Friends



By Kirk McCarley

Who among us does not crave a good life?

A good life can be defined by a variety of measures. A safe and secure environment is fundamental. We want our output to matter, doing what is interesting, rewarding, and delivers positive impact to others.

We are hopeful that when our time on earth is complete, we will have built a legacy. I've heard it said an ideal is to "live our lives such that at the end our memory will be celebrated at a memorial service that is standing room only."

It was a remote meeting with a prospective coaching client.

She was in a rough spot. Well educated, yet unemployed. Broken, she confessed that she didn't deserve the affection of others. Worse, she went on to tell me the number of relationships she had wrecked, admitting the void of not having even one friend at present. It was then that I realized I was being summoned to a different role than coach, a more important calling. Regardless of whether she engaged with me professionally, I then told her, "I was going to be her friend."

When we next communicated, she was better. Moreover, she helped me better appreciate my own friendships.

One of the earliest was Kenneth Ray Blakey in first grade. Kenneth Ray had the distinction of being the first African American student to set foot in the recently integrated Fort Worth Public School System in 1963. On occasion that year, he came to my house after school to play. I recall Kenneth Ray was a fan of the Minnesota Twins.

Kenneth Ray switched schools after that first year. I wonder what happened to him and if he



having the opportunity to produce broadcasts with not only work colleagues, but people I cherish as friends.

In mid-career for those in executive positions, the development of friendships can be a difficult proposition. From a professional standpoint, fraternization with subordinate employees can lead to inherent risks of inappropriate relationships. In addition, demands frequently lessen the opportunities to develop relationships outside the work environment. I often found that our friends were the parents of those that our kids attended school with. When conflicts occurred in those relationships and the kids moved on, so did our adult friends.

I'm glad to have now reached a stage of life that in some ways resembles being in school again and having the chance to formulate new memories with more groups of buddies with common interests and experiences.

It is good to be at a place of having meaningful friendships. If you are in that position, treasure that gift and your memories with those people. Nurture your relationships: text, write, call, plan get-togethers. Who needs to hear from you?

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ever considers his unique place in history. I do.

In high school I played sports with a guy I had known since 6th grade. Still to this day, we exchange a phone call annually on our respective birthdays. I carpooled to school with my good buddy down the street. We maintain contact and he's enjoyed a successful career on the East Coast. Another friend recently retired after a long career as a physician. He texted me the other day about another mutual friend who continues an illustrious career as frontman for an avant-garde rock band.

In college I met the person

who would become my very best friend. She and I recently celebrated our 46th wedding anniversary.

It was also while at university that I connected with a group of fraternity brothers who were similarly sports-minded. It was through these relationships that I was eventually linked to a larger sports world and ultimately a part-time role with ESPN.

I have now been affiliated with that company for more than 30 years. Through those years, I have had the fortune of working with a profuse array of crews. I can fairly say that the richest days have perhaps been most recently,

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Sean of the South: Nah, I'm Good



By SEAN DIETRICH

Marriages are down 60 percent since the '70s. Divorce rates are soaring. And the New York Times reported that more 40-year-olds are choosing to live alone than ever before.

Another recent survey of U.S. high-schoolers showed that the percentage of 12th graders who have ever dated has fallen 85 percent since the '80s. It has fallen another 50 percent within just the LAST FIVE YEARS.

What the heck is going on? Why aren't people dating, or getting married? What's to blame? I can't answer that, I'm too busy scrolling my phone right now.

Nevertheless, one marital expert chimes in.

"The problem is risk. People want guarantees these days. We are a nation of consumers, and consumers require return policies. We need guarantees."

Another psychologist has a different assessment. "It's helicopter parenting that's killing marriage. How can a 20-year-old decide to get married when they haven't ever built a fort in the woods or ever played House?"

Well, I decided to approach the marriage crisis by asking random people to give their opinions and advice on the institution of matrimony.

Gary and Delores have been married for 54 years. Gary says: "My 38-year-old son has never been married. Recently he asked what it's like to be married, so I told him to 'LEAVE ME ALONE!' When he did, I asked why he was ignoring me."

Simon and Anne have been married 62 years. They were married the same year Kennedy was shot. "Marriage is simple.

You can either be happy or you can be right. But you can't be both. Too many people want to be both."

Lydia and Eddie, 48 years: "Nobody tells you that you don't fall in love before you're married. It takes years and years to fall in love. A little more every day."

Pearl and Jacob say: "People don't realize that you actually can survive on love. They've been told otherwise."

Dan and Kristie say: "In marriage, don't use 'absolutes' such as, 'You never,' or 'You always.' They never work, and you always end up sounding like an absolute idiot."

Karen and Dale, 41 years: "I once gave my wife the silent treatment for a week, and at the end of the week she said, 'Hey, we're getting along pretty good, lately, aren't we?'"

Kevin and Rachel: "Don't ever point out your husband's weaknesses during an argument. Wait until the next morning."

Ron and Tiffany, 32 years. "I

told my nephew that I haven't spoken to my wife in 20 years, and that's why our marriage worked. My nephew said, 'Why haven't you spoken to her?' I told him 'Because she hasn't stopped talking.'"

Ella and Charles, 59 years: Ella says, "I always tell my married daughters, 'Remember that the grass is always greener over the septic tank.'"

Peter and Catherine, 56 years. "I told my husband that I had a dream he'd given me a diamond bracelet for our 30th anniversary. He smiled and said, 'Wait until tonight, and you'll see.' That night, he gave me a book called 'Interpreting Your Dreams.'"

Sylvia and Tyler. "If your mom is laughing at your dad's jokes, it means there are guests in your house."

Sarah and Greg, 49 years: "When we got married it was for better or worse. I couldn't have done better, and she couldn't have done worse."

Gina and Todd, 55 years: "If you ever think that women are

the weaker sex, try pulling the blankets back to your side."

Sandra and Thomas, 62 years. "If you're not laughing together, you're not really married."

Rhonda and Brian, 55 years: "If you ever start to think you've got marriage figured out, just ask your wife if that's true."

Dori and Andrew, 58 years: "A good husband is someone who, after taking out the trash, acts like he cleaned the whole house."

After all my research, I have come to this conclusion. Marriage has no guarantees, if it's guarantees you're looking for, marry a set of Craftsman socket wrenches.

Sean Dietrich is a columnist, and novelist, known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in Southern Living, The Tallahassee Democrat, Good Grit, South Magazine, Alabama Living, the Birmingham News, Thom Magazine, The Mobile Press Register and Life Media publications, and he has authored seven books.

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Musing

Pastor's Ponderings: Cruise Ships and Battleships



By Rev. Pete Hyde

Two ships lay rigged and ready in the harbor. The passengers were beginning to gather. They came from all walks of life, young, old, and in between; rich, poor, and in between. There was no confusion about which ship they would board. As they ap-

proached the ramps to the ships, they split up into two groups without any guidance. They were confident about which cruise they had booked.

One group was dressed in shorts, Hawaiian shirts, designer sneakers, sunglasses, hats and so much baggage that porters had to follow them in lines that looked like a mountain trek in the Himalayas. They exchanged pleasantries and smiles as everyone was caught up in the excitement and expectation. As they boarded the sleek, shiny, beautiful white vessel, they were greeted by smartly dressed hosts at the top of the ramp and quickly whisked off to their accommodations.

After some time to un-

pack, they made their way to the dining room where food would be available 24 hours a day. In fact, they wouldn't even have to go to the dining room because whatever they needed would be brought to their room or on the deck. They would be fed abundantly, waited on hand and foot, whatever they thought they needed would be taken care of by the friendly staff, with no expectation of lifting a finger for any purpose except getting all they could out of the experience. If their needs weren't met, they would demand that something be done, for they were important and this cruise was all about them – if they didn't say so themselves. (And they did say so themselves.) It would all be over in a short time, and they would return home with no lasting impact except for a few memories and a hundred new photos on their phones.

The other group was all dressed alike in clothes given to them from a warehouse. Each looked exactly the same except for the weight, height, color and gender. They carried all they had for the cruise in their backpacks and duffel bags – no porters to help. There were not many smiles or idle conversation, only focused expressions mirroring their determination to get underway.

As they boarded the drab, gray ship, orders were barked with dorm assignments and meal schedules. They would eat what was served, when it was served, no questions asked. They would

do all the duties required with little time to lie out on the deck to relax and be waited on. You see, they had a job to do. They were on a mission. They came to serve. The cruise would last more than six months and would have an everlasting impact on each passenger, their families and everyone with whom they came into contact. They would make a difference.

I believe churches today can generally be divided into two groups – cruise ships and battleships. Some exist for the benefit of themselves. Their mission is ensuring their own needs are met. When they are not, explanations are demanded even though no effort is made to be involved in any way. The ship (building) is pretty and “it better stay that way.” The staff jumps at every command – “They better because we pay them.” The mission is to impress the community and themselves without having to lift a finger. These are cruise ship churches.

The others are battleship churches. The mission is to im-

pact the community instead of impressing it. A majority are involved and dedicated to the mission and work for the good of the church rather than their own perceived wants and needs. The building is adequate for their needs and the future. The staff and leaders are supported in prayer and service as everyone pitches in to carry out the mission.

What kind of church do you attend – a cruise ship or a battleship or one that is a good balance between the two? Which do you prefer? Do you wish your church was more of a cruise ship or a battleship? What are you doing to make your church one way or the other? Simple questions? Not if you are really honest with yourself and your church.

Ships will be boarding next Sunday. Which one will you be on?

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



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BY RICH SANDERS

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal featured the unstoppable American tourist.

Christian Capitalist Whitney Lee: The Unstoppable American Tourist

When I forwarded it to Whitney Lee, she exclaimed: “That’s me!”

What makes Whitney fit this description so perfectly? To celebrate her 40th birthday and escape the scorching heat of Scottsdale, Arizona this time of year, she decided to spend the summer in Europe!

As the owner of True Story

Public Relations Agency, Whitney runs a dynamic team of PR professionals here on the Emerald Coast. After graduating from Florida State, she started her firm in Destin with the goal of offering outstanding service and quality work to businesses of all sizes and in all industries. As she gained more experience, she eventually determined that her niche was in the hospital-

ity industry. As for the name, Whitney simply says: “People are starving for real!”

With the growth of her firm and development of a national client base, Whitney determined that it might be fun to try a new place to live. She relocated to Scottsdale and has lived there for a couple of years, still managing her team in Florida and clients all over the world.



Whitney Lee

Whitney attributes part of the growth and success of her business to her strategic thinking on behalf of her clients: “I always say that PR is not an overnight thing. We’re not playing checkers. We’re playing chess... like it is our job to shape what people think and feel about your business until the end of time.”

Once she realized that she could run things from Arizona, it didn’t take long for Whitney to also conclude that she could do the same thing from a more exotic location: Europe! In 2026, Whitney spent the month of June in Milan, then July in Spain. After celebrating her 40th birthday on the exclusive island of Ibiza, she visited both countries again in August. Her social media posts this summer make these locations come alive!

Her faith has been a significant source of inspiration in starting and growing her business, especially her views on success and serving others as a Christian Capitalist. “Nowhere in the Bible does it say it’s wrong

WHITNEY LEE
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Two Distinctive Nights with Officer Tatum at Old Florida Fish House

A five-course bourbon dinner and a live edition of The Officer Tatum Show headline a September calendar filled with food, music and lakeside entertainment.

Old Florida Fish House is bringing two distinctive evenings with Brandon Tatum to the shores of Eastern Lake on September 16 and 17. The nationally recognized media personality, former police officer and SWAT operator, author, speaker and entrepreneur will meet guests in two very different settings—first over a carefully paired dinner, then during a live presentation centered on the issues shaping American life.

Set beneath moss-draped oaks overlooking the water, Old Florida Fish House has long combined dining with live entertainment. These back-to-back events take that approach further, offering one evening built around the kitchen and bar and another focused on conversation and commentary.

The series begins at 6 p.m. September 16 with the Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Five-Course Dinner Experience. The intimate evening will pair five courses from the Old Florida Fish House culinary team with cocktails featuring Tatum’s Verdict Bourbon. Between courses, guests will hear about the inspiration behind the brand and how he brought it to life.

The restaurant’s beverage team has created a lineup of pairings with names inspired by the courtroom. “The Indictment” combines Verdict Bourbon and Amaro Nonino with fresh-pressed apple juice. “Voor Dire” takes a savory turn with roasted beet juice, fresh lemon and orange juices and basil, while “The Objection” reimagines an old fashioned with brown butter fat-washed Not Guilty Bourbon, maple syrup and bitters.

“Sustained” offers a Manhattan-style blend with espresso liqueur and Amaro Averna. Dessert brings bread pudding and ice cream alongside Not Guilty Bourbon, served neat or poured over the top for an affogato-style finish. A curated wine pairing will also be available for guests who prefer an alternative to bourbon. Although the complete five-course menu is still to be announced, the cocktails offer a preview of the bright, savory,



rich and sweet flavors planned throughout the meal.

At 6 p.m. September 17, the focus shifts from the table to the stage for An Evening with The Officer Tatum, featuring a live edition of his show. Drawing on his background in law enforcement, business and independent media, Tatum will share his perspective on politics, culture, faith, freedom, law enforcement and everyday life. His presentations are known for direct analysis delivered with humor and an emphasis on questioning conventional narratives, thinking independently and living with purpose.

Tatum has built a digital audience of more than 8.6 million followers and subscribers, with billions of views across YouTube and other social platforms. His business ventures include Verdict Bourbon, Blackline Security Operations, Shinerger Life and Pure Choice Apparel. A VIP option for the September 17 show includes a welcome cocktail, meet-and-greet and preferred seating. Guests may attend either evening or experience both.

The September calendar continues beyond these two special nights. Coastside 30A wine tastings are offered on select Fridays, while singer-songwriter Alex Napier brings his mix of bluegrass, country, blues and audience requests to the restaurant on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Dueling Pianos delivers interactive performances, sing-alongs and mu-

sical surprises Thursdays through Saturdays. Brunch on the Lake is served Saturdays and Sundays, offering another way to enjoy the restaurant’s Eastern Lake setting. For tickets, reservations, event times and the latest schedule, visit oldfloridafishhouse.com/special-events.



Fall Events



Watch Parties!



Sept. 16 & 17



Sept. 26

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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Pirates + Food + Booze = Fun, Pirate Brew Fest 2026

Brew Fest Returns to Destin

Ahoy, mateys! Pirate Brew Fest is returning to Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin on Saturday, November 7, 2026, for five hours of pirate-themed fun, live entertainment, local shopping, food, and cold drinks. The festival runs from 11 AM to 4 PM, and admission is completely free.

This year's event brings together everything needed for a proper coastal celebration: live music, food trucks, artists, vendors, beer memorabilia, drinks, and games for kids. Families can explore the festival, browse one-of-a-kind finds, grab something delicious to eat, and enjoy a lively afternoon at one of Destin's best-known family attractions. Guests are strongly encouraged to arrive in pirate attire - whether that means a full captain's coat and tricorne hat or simply an eye patch and a convincing 'Arrr!'

Dress Like a Pirate and Claim Some Booty

The first 100 guests who arrive dressed like pirates will receive a free gift. Pirate attire is encouraged throughout the event, giving visitors of every age a chance to become part of the spectacle. Break out the bandanas, striped shirts, boots, hats, sashes, and other seaworthy accessories. The goal is simple: help turn Fudpucker's into the most colorfully crewed pirate port on the Emerald Coast.

Families can also look forward to games for kids and plenty of room to enjoy the atmosphere. With free admission, Pirate Brew Fest makes it easy to bring the whole crew, spend the afternoon together, and choose the food, shopping, and ticketed experiences that suit your group.

Brews, Bites, Music, and More

For adults ready to raise a glass, VIP drink tickets start at just \$10. Admission to the festival remains free, so guests can enjoy the entertainment and explore the event without purchasing a ticket. Those who want to take part in the featured drink experience can select the VIP ticket option that works for them.

A lineup of food trucks will be serving festival favorites throughout the day, giving guests plenty of choices when hunger strikes. Live music will provide the soundtrack, while artists and vendors offer hand-crafted goods, local creations, collectibles, and other treasures worth taking home.

Beer fans can browse displays of beer memorabilia and collectibles - a fitting addition to a festival that celebrates brewing culture alongside Destin's playful pirate spirit. Whether you come to discover a rare piece, support a local artist, sample the food-truck fare, or simply enjoy the music with friends, there will be plenty to explore between 11 AM and 4 PM.

A Pirate Festival at a Destin Landmark

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill has been a Destin landmark since 1982, known for family dining, colorful coastal character, and memorable experiences. The restaurant is also home to Gator Beach, where visitors can see live alligators and learn more about the animals that have become part of the Fudpucker's story.

That mix of family fun, local flavor, and larger-than-life personality makes Fudpucker's a natural home port for Pirate Brew Fest. The festival adds vendors, artists, music, games, food trucks, drinks, and pirate pageantry to the venue's already unmistakable Destin atmosphere.

Make Plans to Join the Crew

Pirate Brew Fest 2026 takes place Saturday, November 7, from 11 AM to 4 PM at Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill, located at 20001 Emerald Coast Parkway in Destin, Florida. Admission is free, and VIP drink tickets start at \$10.

SO, STOP BY AND HAVE A SOME FUN AT PIRATE BREW FEST - YA SCALAWAGS!

More information at: www.PirateBrewFest.com.



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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Announces 21st Season, Kicking Off With Cabaret At Seagar's Featuring New York Voices

Sinfonia Gulf Coast launches its 21st season in spectacular style with Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with New York Voices on Thursday, Oct. 8, at 5:30 p.m. at Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort &

Spa in Miramar Beach.

Celebrating 40 years of vocal jazz excellence, Grammy Award-winning New York Voices brings its farewell tour, The Four and Only, to this intimate evening of dining and performance. Featuring Peter Eldridge, Kim

Nazarian, Darmon Meader and Lauren Kinhan, the acclaimed ensemble has captivated audiences worldwide with breathtaking harmonies, inventive arrangements and a seamless blend of jazz, pop and Brazilian influences. This rare perfor-

mance offers a final opportunity to experience one of the world's most celebrated vocal groups together on its farewell tour.

The evening includes valet parking, a sparkling wine reception, multi-course dinner, wine, gratuity and the performance. Tickets are from \$375 per person, with proceeds benefiting Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida. Seating is limited, and this event is expected to sell out.

Sinfonia's 2026-2027 Main Event concert season unfolds with an ambitious mix of cinematic favorites, Broadway talent, classical masterworks and gravity-defying spectacle, all performed by the area's only fully professional orchestra. The 21st season also delivers even more classical music with two Classical Connections concerts featuring extraordinary guest artists alongside orchestral masterworks.

"After 21 seasons, we continue to look for new ways to surprise, connect with and inspire our audiences while staying grounded in the extraordinary power of great music," said Demetrius Fuller, founder and Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast. "This season moves from the intimacy and artistry of New York Voices to Beethoven and Haydn, from the cinematic magic of The Wizard of Oz to Broadway and the breathtaking artistry of Troupe Vertigo. That range is at the heart of what we do. It's adventurous, accessible and unexpected — your symphony ... redefined. And underlying everything we present is our deep commitment to music education and ensuring young people throughout our community have meaningful opportunities to experience great music."

The main concert season opens Saturday, Oct. 17, at 7:30 p.m. with Film in Concert: The Wizard of Oz at the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Dugas Pavilion in Destin. Audiences can follow the Yellow Brick Road as one of cinema's most beloved classics comes to life on the big screen while Sinfonia Gulf Coast performs Herbert Stothart's Academy Award-winning score live and perfectly synchronized with the film. From Over the Rain-



bow to the Emerald City and beyond, the outdoor concert experience celebrates a timeless film that has enchanted generations. Lawn seating is \$25 per person, \$15 for students and \$20 for military. Reserved table seating is \$45 per person. Bring a picnic supper or purchase fare from local food trucks.

Sinfonia turns the spotlight to the classics Saturday, Nov. 14, at 7:30 p.m. at Destin High School with Classical Connections featuring Howard Levy, harmonica and piano. The two-time Grammy Award winner is a virtuoso pianist, pioneering diatonic harmonica player, composer and educator whose groundbreaking techniques transformed the harmonica into a concert soloist capable of crossing classical, jazz, folk and world music. Levy will give the world-premiere performance of his Eastern European Harmonica and Piano Concerto for Single Soloist, a vibrant four-movement work inspired by the musical traditions of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Turkey and the Balkans. Beethoven's spirited Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93 completes the program. Tickets are \$35 per person, \$15 for students and \$20 for military.

The season shifts into holiday mode Thursday, Dec. 10, at 7:30 p.m. when The Broadway Boys join Sinfonia Gulf Coast for Holiday Pops at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center in Fort Walton Beach. Featuring acclaimed performers from Broadway productions including Hamilton, Wicked, The Lion King, Jersey Boys,

SINFONIA
continue on page 35



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Studio 237 Music Lessons Welcomes Shari Harper to Its Teaching Team

Shari Harper has joined the staff of music teachers at Studio 237 Music Lessons. She has many years of experience performing and teaching voice and piano.

Shari Harper grew up in Northern Virginia in a family of musicians, where her love for music began at an early age. She started piano lessons at just six years old and has been playing

piano and singing throughout her life.

Her musical experience spans church choirs and worship teams, high school and college choirs, church talent competitions, and numerous solo performances. One of her most memorable singing engagements was performing the “Star-Spangled Banner” a cappella at the retirement ceremony of a five-star Surgeon

General of the U.S. Army in Arlington, Virginia.

Shari studied voice for approximately five years throughout high school and then in college. Over the years, she has directed children’s choirs and variety shows, as well as accompanying soloists and choirs on piano.

In 2006, she began teaching group piano lessons, and in 2018, she expanded her teaching to include private voice lessons. From 2019–2021, she taught piano and voice at Playground Music Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, before returning to part-time private teaching. Shari is excited to continue sharing her passion for music through her recent opportunity to teach piano and voice at Studio 237 Music Lessons, Santa Rosa Beach, FL.

Shari has experience teaching students ranging from 6 to



feedback on practice methods and progress while helping students develop confidence and a genuine enjoyment of music.

Above all, Shari strives to create a positive, inspiring, and encouraging environment where students feel comfortable learning, growing, and discovering their own musical abilities.

To schedule lessons with Shari or our other teachers, contact Studio 237 Music Lessons at (850) 231-3199. Since 2011, our staff of teachers has offered private lessons on a variety of instruments, including guitar (acoustic, bass, classical), ukulele, drums, piano, voice and shofar. To learn more about us, visit the website at www.Studio237Music.com. Studio 237 is located at 237 Dawson Rd, Santa Rosa Beach, FL.

SINFONIA

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The Book of Mormon and Haddestown, the ensemble brings fresh, electrifying arrangements that blend Broadway favorites with pop, rock, funk and gospel influences. Audiences can expect soaring vocals, dazzling harmonies, heartwarming holiday classics and behind-the-scenes stories from the Great White Way. Tickets are \$45-\$69.50 per person and \$25 for students and military.

Classical Connections returns Saturday, March 13, 2027, at 7:30 p.m. at Destin High School with acclaimed cellist Coleman Itzkoff. Known for his dazzling technique, expressive warmth and adventurous musical spirit, Itzkoff has performed at Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall and on stages around the world. He joins Sinfonia to perform Haydn’s radiant Cello Concerto No. 1 in C Major. Haydn’s spirited Symphony No. 82, “The Bear,” and majestic Symphony No. 104, “London,” bookend the program. Tickets are \$35 per person, \$15 for students and \$20 for military.

Sinfonia brings the season to a spectacular close Saturday, May 15, 2027, at 7:30 p.m. with Cirque Cinema at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. Troupe Vertigo’s

gravity-defying aerial artists join Sinfonia Gulf Coast for a breathtaking fusion of acrobatics, dance and unforgettable movie music, creating a cinematic season finale that takes the symphony experience to exhilarating new heights. Tickets are \$45-\$69.50 per person and \$25 for students and military.

Beyond the concert stage, Sinfonia Gulf Coast maintains a deep commitment to music education and community engagement. Since its founding in 2005, the organization has worked to entertain, educate and inspire Northwest Florida through imaginative musical programming while expanding access to music for the next generation. Sinfonia’s education initiatives, guest artists in schools and outreach programs have impacted more than 220,000 children, making education an integral part of its mission and its work throughout the community.

Save the dates and experience Sinfonia Gulf Coast’s 21st season of world-class artistry, musical discovery and unexpected collaborations. Tickets for the 2026–2027 season are available for purchase online at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org. For more information, call (850) 460-8800 or email info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.



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Protect Yourself from Scams

Scam phone calls are becoming more common, and people are losing thousands of dollars to them. Scammers may sound polite, helpful, and professional. Others may yell, threaten, or try to frighten you into acting quickly.

They may claim to be calling from your bank, Medicare, Social Security, the IRS, the police department, a utility company, or a computer company. Some scammers pretend to be a family member who has been arrested, injured, or stranded and needs money immediately.

Do not trust a caller simply because the person knows your name, address, or information about your family. This information may have been found online or stolen from a company.

What to Do During a Suspicious Call

If something does not feel right, stop talking and hang up.



You do not have to be polite. Do not argue with the caller or try to prove that the call is a scam.

Never give an unexpected caller your Social Security number, Medicare number, bank information, credit card number, passwords, or a security code sent to your phone.

Do not press any buttons or follow the caller's instructions. Never allow a stranger to control your computer or phone.

A scammer may say that your computer has a virus or that your bank account is in danger. The caller may actually be trying to steal your information or money.

After hanging up, speak with a trusted family member or friend. You can also call your bank, government agency, or other company directly. Use the official number printed on your bank card, bill, or statement. Do

not use a telephone number provided by the suspicious caller.

Scammers often demand quick payment through gift cards, cash, wire transfers, payment apps, or cryptocurrency. A real government agency, police department, bank, or utility company will not demand gift cards or threaten to arrest you unless you pay immediately.

Caller ID cannot always be trusted. Scammers can make a false number appear on your phone, including a local number or the number of a real business.

If you already gave the caller personal information or money, contact your bank immediately. Ask the bank to protect or freeze

your account. Change your passwords and report the incident to local law enforcement.

Remember this simple rule: Stop, hang up, and check with someone you trust. Taking a few minutes to verify a call could protect your savings.

For additional help with suspicious calls, computer warnings, possible viruses, or online scams, contact Minh's PC Services at (850) 376-3412 or email minhpcservices@gmail.com. Minh's PC Services can help determine whether a call, message, or computer warning is real before you provide information or send money.

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WHITNEY LEE

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to make money and to be suc-
cessful and to be aspirational. I
think it's always knowing that it
is not ours, that it is a gift from
God, and that when you are
given success, whether that be
business or financial, when you
are given that success, I truly be-
lieve it comes with a responsibil-
ity to pay it forward, to take care
of other people, and to bless
other people with what you've
been given.”

Whitney recently appeared
on the Christian Capitalist pod-
cast, 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 Whitney Lee
and True Story PR.

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



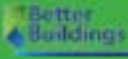
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