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In "Paradise," a Promise: Harvest Wine Festival Turns 10 with NWF's Children at Heart

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

The wine is exceptional. The food is unforgettable. But the true beauty of **Harvest Wine & Food Festival** is found in the lives being changed long after the final glass is poured.

As Harvest Wine & Food Festival prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Kate MacMillan is marking a milestone of her own: 10 years with Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF). I recently caught up with Kate, now DCWAF's senior director of strategic partnerships, about what the festival's first decade has meant beyond the festivities. She has had a front-row seat to Harvest's growth—and the deeply personal ways its mission touches local families.

A few years ago, a young mother and local business owner called Kate out of the blue about sponsoring



the festival. Her connection to DCWAF had begun long before that call. Years earlier, her youngest son had spent time in the NICU at Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast. She first noticed the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation name at the NICU entrance. Then she saw it again on equipment throughout the room where she sat rocking her baby.

Later, after learning her son was on the autism spectrum and would likely need specialized educational support, she encountered the DCWAF name once more while touring Westonwood Ranch and Emerald Coast Autism Center.

DCWAF had quietly been there throughout her family's journey, supporting trusted local organizations when help



was needed most.

Years passed. Her business grew. And when she found herself in a position to give back, she knew exactly which organization she wanted to support. "Her story captures the heart of our mission: supporting a network of trusted nonprofit partners that can

HARVEST WINE
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One Child, One Book, One Patient Dog:

How Dog-Harmony Builds Confident Readers

BY BREANNA BECKER

There is a particular kind of courage required of a child who struggles to read. But what if the one listening never judged you? What if your reading partner simply rested a furry head nearby and listened?

For Nancy Bown, founder of Dog-Harmony, that simple relationship between a child and a dog has been part of a calling decades in the making. "I've always loved to read," Bown said, recalling that nearly 20 years ago she and her therapy dog

DOG HARMONY
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 Community
DOG HARMONY*continued from page 1*

were already visiting libraries and working with children. “It’s so funny in life how things just all come together of what you’re meant to do.”

Today, Dog-Harmony carries that work into schools and libraries across Northwest Florida through evaluated therapy dog teams, literacy programming and humane education.

The need remains real. According to the Florida Department of Education, 61% of Florida students in grades 3 through 10 scored Level 3 or above in ELA/Reading at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Okaloosa County reached 65%, Walton County 70% and Bay County 61%. Encouraging numbers, but ones that still leave thousands of local children with ground to gain.

Nationally, only 31% of American fourth graders performed at or above NAEP Proficient in reading in 2024.

Bown believes dogs can help change that story. “I know the

good we’re doing,” she said. “I know we’re reducing anxiety. I know that we increased our literacy rate by using those reading education assistance dogs.”

In the first six months of 2026, Dog-Harmony’s therapy teams provided 994 hours of service across three pillars: Youth Mental Health and Crisis Intervention, Literacy Advancement and Educational Enrichment, and Adult Wellness and Healthcare Support. Of those hours, 279 were devoted to literacy and educational enrichment in local schools and libraries. Together, those 994 hours represent nearly \$100,000 in community investment.

That breadth matters because Dog-Harmony can be easy to misunderstand.

Yes, there are wagging tails, wet noses and photographs that make people smile. But behind those moments is serious community work.

Evaluated therapy teams walk into schools where children are struggling to find confidence in their own voices. They support youth experiencing



anxiety and crisis. They enter healthcare facilities where patients and frontline workers are carrying difficult days. Through literacy and humane education programs, children are also learning compassion, empathy and respect.

The dogs may make the work look effortless. It is anything but.

On Oct. 30, Dog-Harmony’s 11th Annual Barktoberfest returns to Grand Park at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin from 4:30 to

6:30 p.m. The organization’s primary fundraiser will feature its beloved dog costume contest, music, light bites, libations and a canine-only trick-or-treat celebration.

Barktoberfest matters, but Dog-Harmony’s mission cannot be sustained by one night alone. When the costumes come off, another child still needs encouragement. Another therapy team still walks through the doors of a school, youth program or healthcare facility.

The work continues. So must the support.

Recurring gifts, sponsorships, volunteers and community advocates allow Dog-Harmony to keep showing up where the human-canine bond can do the most good. “When you support our mission, your generosity does not just stay within our walls, it ripples out across our entire community,” Bown said.

Perhaps nowhere is that ripple easier to imagine than beside a child with a book.

One child. One difficult word. And one patient dog who does not care how long it takes.

Then another word. Another page.

And, little by little, a child who begins to believe, I can do this.

To learn more about Dog-Harmony’s literacy and library programs, Barktoberfest, volunteer opportunities and ways to provide year-round support, visit Dog-Harmony’s website. www.dog-harmony.org.

**HARVEST WINE***continued from page 1*

care for children through different needs and stages of life,” Kate said. “It also demonstrates how generosity comes full circle—helping a family during a critical time and inspiring that family to create the same opportunity for others.”

That story explains the heart of Harvest better than I—or any

event schedule—ever could: a family receiving support during a frightening time, then one day extending that same support to someone else.

It’s also a reminder that behind every ticket purchased, every bottle poured, every auction bid, every wine dinner hosted and every sponsorship is a child whose life may be changed in ways most festival guests will never see.

Harvest returns **Oct. 15-18 in WaterColor**. Over the past decade, the festival alone has raised more than \$1 million for programs addressing healthcare, education, housing, food security, mental health and other essential needs of children throughout Northwest Florida. “As we celebrate this milestone, we are especially proud that every ticket purchased, every bottle poured and every partnership formed has helped create meaningful, lasting impact right here at home,” Kate said.

That is certainly worth celebrating!

What began as an elevated wine and culinary experience has grown into one of our area’s most anticipated fall events. I know—I’ve attended for several years, and it’s truly one of the best I’ve experienced. It is beautiful and sophisticated, but also warm, lively and fun. There’s something special about strolling beneath the trees in WaterColor, discovering a remarkable wine, tasting food prepared by gifted local chefs and sharing it with friends.

I’ve even had the delightful surprise of running into friends from Birmingham—my hometown. Those unexpected reunions, warm hugs and oppor-



tunities to catch up over a glass of wine help make Harvest so special. It’s fun to look across the crowd and spot a familiar face.

Harvest gives guests every reason to enjoy themselves. But it also gives that joy a greater purpose.

In Northwest Florida, we live in a place so beautiful we often describe it simply as paradise. Visitors see white-sand beaches, emerald water, lovely homes, thriving businesses and bustling restaurants. But what they might not see are the families sustaining that tourism economy while struggling with rising housing and living costs. “Our area is known for its beauty and hospitality, but that image can obscure the realities facing many families who sustain our tourism economy,” Kate said. “As housing and other living costs continue to rise, even those working full time can struggle to meet basic needs, leaving their

children vulnerable to housing and food insecurity, limited healthcare access and educational disruption.”

They may not see the child living with housing instability or hunger. The child whose education is repeatedly disrupted. The child recovering from abuse. The child who needs medical treatment, therapy or specialized instruction that a family cannot afford alone. Those hardships rarely exist in isolation. “The challenges facing children in Northwest Florida are deeply interconnected, making it difficult to identify any single need as the most urgent,” Kate explained. “A child experiencing housing instability may also face food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, disruptions in education or trauma.”

That is why DCWAF’s network of 16 partner charities is so important. “Their collective strength lies in working together to support the whole child,” Kate said. “By sharing resources, identifying gaps in services and connecting families with additional support, our partners create a coordinated network of care that extends far beyond what any one organization

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Farmers Markets

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Grayton Locals Market Thursdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at Hibiscus Guest House
Seaside Amphitheater Saturdays and Tuesdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Come From Away at ECTC Sept. 10-27

Don't miss the most produced musical of this year and winner of over thirteen international awards, including a Tony Award! This inspiring true story follows a tiny Canadian town that welcomed thousands of travelers who were grounded on 9/11. Tickets and information can be found at www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

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

The Point Washington Medical 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.

13th Annual Soldiers on the WaterSept. 19

For 13 years, Soldiers on the Water has brought together the local community to honor combat-wounded veterans through a day of fishing, fellowship and appreciation. The event is made possible through the generosity of volunteer charter captains, community sponsors and countless volunteers who donate their time and resources each year.

The event is offered at no cost to participating combat-wounded veterans. Organizers expect more than 100 veterans to participate this year.

Veteran check-in begins at



7 a.m. behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer. Charter boats will depart at 8 a.m. for a morning of world-class fishing.

Following the fishing excursion, return for an afternoon of fellowship, dinner and an awards presentation recognizing accomplishments such as the day's biggest catch and most fish caught.

For more information: Brandon Schwartz, Brandon@ecaor.com or 850-243-6145.

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

The 2nd Annual Westonwood Ranch Battle for the Buckle brings together anglers, business leaders and community supporters for four days of competitive fishing, camaraderie and giving back. Tournament highlights include a \$10,000 winner-take-all White Marlin prize and more. The tournament supports Westonwood Ranch and its mission to empower teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through life-skills education, workforce development and meaningful employment opportunities. Register at westonwood.org/battle-for-the-bucklefishingtournament. 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 Hos-

pice Care, the outing includes a Bloody Mary Bar from Ruby Slipper Café, breakfast from Chick-fil-A, 18 holes of golf, the popular "Dress Like a Lady Hole," food at the turn and an after-party featuring lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffle drawings. Funds raised help Fore Her offset living expenses for local breast cancer patients undergoing treatment along the Emerald Coast.

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,

Continued on next page

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Community

EVENTS

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waterfront boardwalk and docks become a feast for the senses as more than 75 local food and craft vendors, plus the area'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 ewilsoncenter.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 Meader 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-festival.

Dogs, Bands & Beer Festival Oct. 10

Two legendary classic rock bands. One unforgettable night

under the stars. Join the fun at the beautiful Mattie Kelly Amphitheater for an outdoor concert featuring Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall. Bring your dog and enjoy a full fall day of classic hits, cool drinks, food trucks, fresh air, and live music. And yes—dogs are welcome! Tickets and information: www.mattiekellytickets.com.

Saint Rita Catholic Church Knights of Columbus Charity Golf Event Oct. 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.

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!

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

Walton County Fair Oct. 12-17

The fair prides itself on continuing to update the areas for ex-

hibits and entertainment. Exhibits at the fair still include animal, art, agriculture, handicrafts, potted plants, photography, and canned foods divisions. Children also have the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents with animals, speeches and educational posters.

Entertainment is a big deal at the fair. Each year the building is filled with music - from gospel to country and western performers. The gospel sing on Saturday night has become a great hit and much-anticipated event.

Visit waltoncountyfair.com for more details.

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.

Destin Songwriter Festival Oct. 24-25



This year's festival features intimate acoustic, songwriter-round-style performances and unforgettable headliner sets across five stages over two days, offering music lovers a firsthand glimpse into the stories behind the songs. Saturday's venue is directly in front of SkyBar at The Edge. For Sunday, the festival moves to the remarkable grounds of The Alice, where lucky ticket holders will relish an intimate VIP experience.

The most notable headliner, Jeffrey Steele, is a six-time Grammy nominee with more than 65 million airplays for hits penned for many famous

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Kelley's Beach Liquors Opens Sixth Location at The Market Shops!

Kelley's Beach Liquors has opened its sixth location in The Market Shops at Sandestin. Spanning 4,800 square feet, the new store is situated on the far west side of the shopping center at 9375 Emerald Coast Pkwy., Miramar Beach. The Market Shops location is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., with delivery service from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. The store can be reached by phone at 850-460-9997.

Here's the story:

"We are excited to be part of The Market Shops family of businesses and look forward to serving all the residents of Sandestin and other nearby communities," said Beach Liquors co-owners Mike and Chuck Kelley. This store features retail as well as an exclusive self-serve wine and whiskey bar showcasing over 35 fine wines and premium whiskeys by the individual pour. Guests can also shop with the guidance of an in-house

wine steward, explore THC-infused beverages and gummies, and enjoy a large walk-in craft beer cooler. The store will host weekly Friday night wine tastings from 5 to 7 p.m., along with a variety of special tastings and educational events throughout the year. Online ordering and delivery are available through the company's website, mobile app, or Uber Eats. Beach Liquors is a family-owned chain of liquor, wine, and craft beer stores serving Northwest Florida's Emerald Coast and surrounding areas. It was founded in 2000 by siblings Chuck, Mike, and Pat Kelley, who opened their first location in Panama City Beach. The Kelley family's business roots run deeper. Their father, Charles Kelley, and uncle Roy previously owned and operated Kelley's IGA supermarkets in the region. Growing up in that environment instilled a strong work ethic that the siblings carried into their own venture. Mike Kelley has summarized



the family philosophy simply: hard work produces results, and nothing comes easy. They have long emphasized a "hometown advantage"—local ownership that resonates with permanent residents, military personnel stationed nearby, and the many visitors who flock to the Gulf Coast. From the original Panama City Beach store, the business expanded steadily. Additional

locations followed in Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, and Destin. A Pensacola Beach store has also been added, giving the chain broader coverage across the region. The stores operate seven days a week, typically from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., and offer delivery, curbside pickup, online ordering, and a rewards program. Beach Liquors specializes in a broad selection of wines,

spirits, and beers, with particular strength in craft products. The wine departments feature high-quality bottles from around the world, with an emphasis on handcrafted domestic American wines. Wines are organized for easy browsing by color, country, style, and other attributes. The craft beer selection is one of the largest in the area.

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Community



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 ap-





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plication 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.

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Community

HARVEST WINE

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could provide alone.”

Since its founding in 2005, DCWAF has donated more than \$38 million to Northwest Florida children’s charities, impacting more than 100,000 young lives. Those are extraordinary numbers. But numbers alone cannot fully express what that help means.

I was reminded of that at a recent DCWAF check presentation where \$3 million in funding was awarded in a single year. Pure joy—that is what I felt walking into the ballroom and seeing the people behind these local charities: founders, directors, board members, volunteers and donors who serve children day in and day out.

I witnessed tears of joy. Excited joy. Thankful, grateful joy. You could hear it in the voices of those who stepped to the microphone, and you could feel it throughout the room.

Every person who donates, volunteers, serves on a board, bids in an auction, hosts a wine dinner or simply purchases a ticket to an event such as Harvest plays a part in changing



real lives right here in our own backyard.

You may never know how many children you helped grow up and graduate. How many you helped escape a terrible situation. How many you gave hope, healing, a safe place to sleep or even a beautiful new smile. You might never meet them or hear their stories. But the difference is real.

That deeper purpose does not diminish the fun of Harvest. If anything, it adds to it. “Wine and food have a remarkable ability to bring people together and create a shared sense of

community,” Kate said. “Our events begin with an exceptional experience, but the connection to our mission gives that experience greater meaning.”

“This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate how far Harvest has come, but it is also the beginning of its next chapter,” Kate said.

That next chapter begins Thursday with six intimate wine dinners at acclaimed locations throughout South Walton, featuring Alpha Omega Wine Collective, Bordeaux wines, Innumero Wines, Lerner Project, Pahlmeyer and Sign of the Dove.

On **Friday, Harvest After Dark** returns to Cerulean Park with elevated wines and culinary creations from celebrated chefs across the Southeast. “This year’s festival will honor the experiences guests have come to love while adding a little extra sparkle in celebration of our 10th anniversary,” Kate said.

That reimaged evening will blend glamorous after-hours energy, unexpected pairings and a

touch of Studio 54 flair. “It will feel distinctly celebratory while remaining true to what has made Harvest so special for the past decade: exceptional wine and food, meaningful connections and a shared commitment to supporting children in need across Northwest Florida,” she said.

Saturday brings the signature **Grand Tasting**, where guests can explore hundreds of wines from around the world while enjoying seafood, barbecue and other creations from talented chefs and makers.

The weekend concludes **Sunday** with a **jazz cocktail brunch** featuring ingredient-driven cocktails and a New Orleans-inspired menu by award-winning chef Tory McPhail.

A virtual silent auction featuring rare wines, luxury travel and staycations will add another way to participate—even for those unable to attend in person.

It promises to be a spectacular four days. Yet the most meaningful result will not be found on a menu, in a wineglass or beneath the lights of a beautifully decorated tent. Through stories like the young mother’s, we know

that impact extends far beyond the festival weekend. It is found months—and even years—later in a NICU, a classroom, a counseling room, a safe home or a mother’s arms.

I have long believed the compassion and generosity of our relatively small Northwest Florida communities rival those of much larger cities and regions. We may be small in size, but when it comes to giving, serving and taking care of our own, our hearts are huge. Harvest is one more beautiful expression of that heart.

In a place known as paradise, it is easy to celebrate what is visible. Harvest asks us to look deeper—to notice the needs that are often hidden, to pull up another chair and to make room at the table for children who deserve every opportunity to thrive.

Ten years in, that is something truly worth raising a glass to!

The **10th annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival** will be held **Oct. 15-18 in WaterColor**. **Tickets** for available events, the complete schedule and virtual-auction information are available at **HarvestWineandFood.com**.

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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.



65 Origins Parkway, Inlet Beach, FL 32461
WatersoundFountains.com | 850-601-3174

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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 Community

Ham Radio Connects Generations, Builds Community

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Ham Radio is a hobby that is not only intergenerational for men and women, but can be started with varying ability and interest in amateur radio. DJ Stewart (call sign KI4ZER) is the president of Playground Amateur Radio Club (PARC) and North Okaloosa Amateur Radio Club (NOARC). He has great memories from starting with Ham radio from early childhood.

"My father and grandfather were both hams in Wisconsin. When we moved to St. Peters, my dad started the St. Peter's Emergency Operations Center. They had no emergency resources at the time and were dependent on St. Louis, Missouri, which was 35 miles east. Since few resources were allocated to people outside the city, the response times were slow. The center became a very robust program as they helped people during times our community faced tornadoes, fires, floods, and even tremors. Watching my dad help our town through those efforts taught me a lot.

From there, we started working

with local governments and local police. Other hams got involved, and that experience led to a love affair with electronic equipment and communications of all types."

In the early 19th century, the term "Ham" radio distinguished amateurs from professional operators. It stemmed from "ham-fisted," an old wired-telegraph slang term describing clumsy Morse code operators. It has evolved into a term signifying the fellowship of those interested in a communication style that endures through the digital age.

"Our clubs are where every walk of life comes together - men and women of varying occupations, veterans and civilians, seasoned operators and people who are brand new to amateur radio. What we have in common is our desire to understand this hobby. We help each other get to whatever level the individual wants to reach, whether it be in selecting or setting up equipment, figuring out the various signals, or getting ready for the next license."

To fully experience amateur radio, operators can use a vari-



ety of handheld gear or desktop transceivers communicating by voice, Morse code, or digital data. However, acquiring a license is required. Individuals do this by passing a test for a fee, which legally earns the operator privileges to broadcast on the specific frequencies for that class. There are three issued licenses: Technician Class, General Class, and Amateur Extra Class. Each license dictates what frequencies a ham radio operator can legally transmit, and the range of frequencies that can be used. Each test to obtain these licenses becomes more difficult as you learn radio theory and regulations. In the United States, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) manages and enforces these rules.

"Based on how much some-

one wants to get involved, I would encourage people to try different meetings at different clubs. This is an incredibly social hobby, and each club has unique areas of focus, whether it be more technical or community-oriented. Some people come seeking help with electrical projects, others want to get together to prepare for the next license, and others appreciate the sense of camaraderie until they decide to commit to the hobby. You'll learn something no matter what you come for, and the club members are some of the greatest people I've met."

Not only will you find a new hobby and friends through amateur radio, but you'll also have an opportunity to serve the community and take part in community events. Club members have served as points of contact at 5K events and other races, escorted parades, and helped supplement communication. Members will also be at these upcoming events:

Saturday, October 10 from 8 am to 12 pm

Trade show: Amateur Radio Club Hamfest at the Crestview Community Center at 1446 Commerce Dr in Crestview

Saturday, November 21 from 8 am to 1 pm

Amateur radio electronics flea market: SwampFest at the roller derby hangar, Hangar 41, at 41 Wyndham Ave SE in Ft Walton Beach

In addition to these events, there are opportunities to practice picking up radio signals using personal equipment well before emergencies occur. During The

Fox Hunt, a mini transmitter is hidden in a defined area, and operators work their way to it using their mobile radios. From a local to a nationwide event, Field Day, twice a year in June and January, brings together amateur radio operators throughout the nation to see how many other hams they can find using a variety of frequencies.

To learn more about what Ham radio operators can do, visitors are welcome to club meetings to meet area experts.

PARC meets the 1st and 3rd Thursdays at 17 1st St. in Ft. Walton Beach at 7:30 pm. W4ZBB.Org

NOARC meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 4565 Live Oak Church Rd. in Crestview at 7:00 pm. W4AAZ.Org

You can also email parcfwb@gmail.com with any questions.

For those in Walton County, there is the **Walton County Amateur Radio Club**. The club meets the first Tuesday of every month at the Life Enrichment Senior Center in DeFuniak Springs at 7:00 pm. There is also a monthly club breakfast the Saturday before their club meeting at the Eagle Springs Golf Course at 8:00 am, also in DeFuniak Springs. For additional information, go to wf4x.wordpress.com.

Additional clubs in the area include the Panama City Amateur Radio Club and the Milton Amateur Radio Club.

Michelle Ruschman is a local artist, speaker, and writer. She can be reached at michelleruschman@gmail.com or michelleruschman.com.



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Flight 250: A September WCSD Brief

Flight: 250 | Airline: WCSD Airways | Destination: To Heights Unseen | September Checkpoints: Attendance, Literacy and the Arts

By DR. JOSHUA BLEDSOE

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 attendance.

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 pres-

ent 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 Education 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 programs.



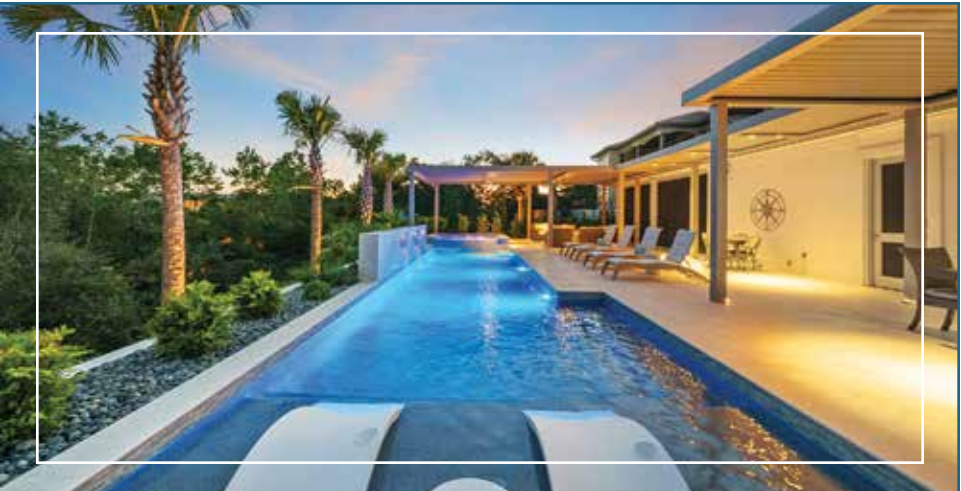
FLIGHT 250 begins this school year at an impressive altitude. Walton County School District has already received several honors in 2026, including Florida’s No. 2 ranking for school grades, a No. 3 statewide ranking based on academic assessment results and the state’s No. 2 graduation rate at 97.5%.

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 success. 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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Trends & Treasures!



Good Fortune Is Brewing in the Area Lucky Goat Coffee

The local coffee scene is getting a fresh jolt this September as husband-and-wife owners Tom and Koley Houle open Lucky Goat Coffee at City Market Beachside. After years of moving, the couple returned to their Florida roots to create something special in their new community.

Founded in Tallahassee in 2010, Lucky Goat grew from a wholesale roaster serving cafés across the Southeast into a growing family of coffee shops, with quality still at the heart of every cup. Coffee is roasted fresh throughout the week at its Tallahassee roastery.

The Destin café will pour classic espresso drinks, drip coffee, single-origin roasts and nitro cold brew. Try a creamy Luckycino, the espresso-powered Goat Bomb, signature lattes, chai, hand-whisked matcha or a rotating seasonal sip. Pastries from local favorite Blue Mountain Bakery complete the menu. The Houles envision a welcoming spot where friends meet, families linger and neighbors become familiar faces. Stop in for a morning pick-me-up or beach-day iced latte.

Opening Sept. 10 | City Market Beachside

36150 Emerald Coast Parkway, Suite 107, Destin
(850) 460-9981
luckygoatcoffee.com
Instagram: @luckygoatcitymarket

Sweeten the Season Smallcakes: A Cupcakery

Fall celebrations deserve a sweet game plan, and Smallcakes is ready for every kickoff, watch party and milestone. The 12-pack of assorted mini cup-

cakes lets guests sample different flavors, while team-colored treats bring extra spirit to the dessert table. Add edible logos, images or personal messages for a custom creation made for the occasion.

The fun extends beyond football. Smallcakes welcomes the school year with cakes, cupcakes or cookies for faculty gatherings, team celebrations, kickoff parties and teacher gifts. Birthdays, showers, weddings and corporate events get a memorable—and delicious—finishing touch, too.

With up to 18 flavors available daily, there is always something new to cheer. The bakery lineup includes cupcakes, cookie cakes, brownies, cupcakes in a jar, wedding cakes, gourmet creations, gluten-free treats, housemade ice cream, jumbo cookies, gourmet popcorn and pupcakes. No matter the occasion, Smallcakes has the perfect recipe for smiles. Call ahead to preorder, stop by for curbside pickup or order through DoorDash.

Mon.–Sat., 11 a.m.–7 p.m.;
Sun., 11 a.m.–4 p.m.
(850) 460-7487
smallcakes.net

Sparkle With a Story Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

The season's richest colors shine at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, where owner Ashleigh Woolly pairs timeless elegance with fresh, personal style. Explore coastal-inspired pieces, vivid gemstones and distinctive cuts for everyday wear, meaningful milestones and unforgettable proposals. Custom design is Ashleigh's specialty—and her one-on-one approach makes the experience as personal as the

finished piece. Whether the vision is a sparkling engagement ring, a timeless wedding band or an heirloom-worthy creation, she helps each client shape the details into jewelry that tells a story. Find elegant earrings, bracelets, necklaces and rings, from refined classics to bold statements.

Shopping for a loved one or ready to celebrate your next chapter? Visit the store for a curated experience, or browse online to discover the piece that feels just right. If the perfect design is not in the case, Ashleigh can help create it. Because love is in the details—and life's most meaningful moments deserve to shine beyond measure.

(850) 424-7011
beyondmeasurejewelry.com
Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers

Fall Hair, Fresh Flair Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

A new school year, special event or walk down the aisle can inspire a fall beauty refresh. At Pure & Couture Salon and Pure Collective Salon, talented hair and makeup artists create looks that complement each client's features, style and vision.

This season's inspiration ranges from caramel swirls, bronzed curls and bold reds to chocolate melts and beachy blonde bobs. Clients seeking extra volume or length can explore Invisible Beaded Extensions, seamlessly applied and styled by certified IBE specialists. For weddings and events, soft waves, polished ponytails, intricate braids and flowing styles offer fresh ways to frame the face and complete the moment.

Makeup artists assess facial structure to highlight each cli-

ent's best features. The salon menu includes cuts, color, blow-outs, lashes, airbrush makeup, spray tans and extensions, while gift cards, professional products, curbside pickup and online ordering add convenience. Step into the new season with a look that feels polished, personal and unmistakably you.

Pure Collective Salon: 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102
(850) 424-3935
pureandcouture.com

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Whether you are selling, downsizing or searching for a property closer to family, the right strategy can make every step more manageable. Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero helps clients navigate moves across town and along the Emerald Coast, matching properties and neighborhoods to the lifestyle they want.

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Cheer-Worthy Style for Every Fan Frill Seekers Gifts & Personalized Fabulous Finds

Football season is here, and Frill Seekers has everything fans need to give sideline style a spirited upgrade. Whether wearing a favorite jersey or dressing from the clear bag to the shoes, beaded purse straps, stadium-approved handbags and statement earrings add a cheer-worthy finish. Officially licensed designs for SEC schools and NFL teams make it easy to represent colors, slogans and mascots in fabulous fashion. Frill Seekers also creates custom team pieces. The football lineup includes clear stadium bags, hand-beaded straps, themed entertaining accessories and game-day coin purses personalized with a name and school colors.

Because customized and hand-beaded creations take time, ordering early is the winning play. Personalized game-day coin purses typically require three to four weeks, so now is the time to plan for rivalry weekends, tailgates and gift giving. Shop in-store or online, and enjoy complimentary gift wrapping on in-store purchases. With the right accessories, every fan can show team pride from kickoff to overtime.

Mon.–Fri., 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m.–2 p.m.
City Market Bayside, 4495 Furling Lane, Suite 130, Destin
(850) 460-2700
FrillSeekersGifts.com



EVENTS

continued from page 4

artists. Other artists on hand to share their songwriting and performance talents include: Terri Jo Box, Carolyn Dawn Johnson, Bridgette Tatum and more.

Visit destinsongwriterfestival.com for the latest updates, ticket information and artist announcements.

The Next BIG Thing 2026
Oct. 26

Registration is open for the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce’s The Next BIG Thing 2026 at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Presented by Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast and Eglin Federal Credit Union, the premier one-day conference will feature three professional development tracks: Leadership Development, Entrepreneurship and Women in Business.

Attendees can expect inspir-

ing keynote speakers, TED-style breakout sessions and valuable networking opportunities designed to provide practical insights, fresh perspectives and meaningful connections to help elevate careers and businesses.

Questions: Gabrielle@waltonareachamber.com

For registration information, visit WaltonAreaChamber.com.

Eggs on the Beach Cooking Competition Nov. 7

Bay Breeze Patio will host the 12th annual Eggs on the Beach Big Green Egg Cooking Competition at Seascape Resort. Nonprofit teams will compete for cash donations determined by taster votes, with every participating nonprofit receiving a donation. A limited number of nonprofit team spots remain, and registration fees are waived.

Backyard and restaurant teams may register for \$50, with up to six cooks per team. Advance taster tickets are \$60 for



adults and \$21 for ages 11–17. Children 10 and younger attend free. Discounted demo Big Green Eggs will also be available.

Visit EggsOnTheBeach.com or call 850-269-4666.

Alaqua’s Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Fest Nov. 14

Music, fall fun and Alaqua’s lifesaving mission come together during this family-friendly celebration presented by Café Thirty-A.

Angel’s Arena will feature more than six hours of live

bluegrass headlined by Grammy-nominated Grand Ole Opry favorite Sister Sadie, along with Firetown Bluegrass and Black Creek Strings Band. The back acreage will offer jam sessions, vendors, food trucks, a full bar, fall crafts, games, photo oppor-

tunities and encounters with rescued animals. General admission and VIP options are available.

Proceeds support Alaqua’s mission to provide shelter, safety and second chances to animals in need. Visit alaqua.org/events for tickets and info. For sponsorship information, email ssalatich@alaqua.org.



Hard Hat Happy Hour



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 information, visit WaltonCountyHabitat.org

KELLEY’S

continued from page 5

Shoppers can find domestic and imported beers, including IPAs, stouts, porters, pilsners, lagers, Belgian-style ales, and low-alcohol or nonalcoholic options. Local and regional craft beers—often in cans preferred for beach, boat, and pool use—are highlighted so visitors can sample local flavors. Hard seltzers have also become a major category, appealing across genders for their lower calorie and carb profiles and convenience.

Spirits cover leading national brands as well as harder-to-find specialty items. Categories include whiskey and bourbon (with notable depth), tequila (described by the owners as the “new bourbon,” especially aged expressions), vodka, Scotch, moonshine, and more. Accessories, mixers, wine glasses, gifts, and related items round out the inventory.

In recent years, the stores have also added popular new lines of hemp-derived THC beverages and gummies. These legal products (compliant with Florida’s hemp rules) include flavored THC seltzers and other ready-to-drink options, along with THC gummies, offering customers nonalcoholic alternatives that have grown quickly in demand alongside traditional beer, wine, and spirits.

Over the years, the Kelleys have adapted to changing shopping habits. The company upgraded its website and launched a smartphone app many years ago, positioning itself for online ordering and delivery through partners. Tastings and community events further strengthen customer relationships.

Today, Kelley’s Beach Li-

quors remains a locally owned fixture along the Northwest Florida coast, combining family management, wide product variety, and a focus on service for both everyday shoppers and seasonal visitors.

To learn more about Beach Liquors, visit beachliquors.net.



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MIRAMAR BEACH, FLORIDA

A Superior Mechanical Hosts Second 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 32578 on Tuesday, October 20, 2026, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. 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 Ca-

tered, 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.

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Buckets of Smiles for Kids

By RON KELLEY, WALTON COUNTY PIO

Move over Beach Blanket Bingo and get ready for Beach Bobby Buckets!

If you spend much time at Inlet Beach, you've probably seen Bobby Watkins, the friendly Beach Steward who works the B Shift with Walton County Code Compliance. As a Beach Steward, Bobby Watkins interacts with beachgoers constantly.

Over time, he noticed something. Visitors would bring beach toys for their kids to play with, but when the vacation ended, most of the toys were discarded because they were impractical to pack for the trip home. That's when he conceived of the idea for 'Bobby Buckets.'

According to Lead Beach Steward Tammy Lakin, Bobby took some discarded landscaping containers designated for the landfill and gave them a second life. After drilling holes in the bottoms so sand and water could drain through, Watkins transformed the containers into community toy stations, she said.

The concept is delightfully simple: Take a toy, leave a toy. Enjoy the beach but leave no trace behind.

Placed near beach boardwalks, the Bobby Buckets have become a place where visitors could leave gently used beach toys for the next family to enjoy. For children arriving without sand toys, the buckets offer an unexpected treasure chest waiting to



be discovered. For departing families, they provide an easy way to pass along toys instead of throwing them away.

Even better, the buckets help reduce waste and keep plastic out of the environment. The buckets can easily be removed at the end of the busy season or relocated any time storm conditions make it necessary.

Code Compliance Director Tony Cornman praised the initiative and its results. "Bobby, and all of our Beach Stewards, are deeply passionate about our beach and work very hard every day to help keep it beautiful. Bobby Buckets is just one example of how every day our beach stewards welcome visitors and do their part by helping to ensure everyone has an awesome time while they're here," said Cornman.

Bobby Watkins has lived up to the name and proven himself to be a good steward of the beach, but the reward isn't recognition. For Bobby, the reward is seeing cleaner beaches, protecting marine life, and watching families create memories together on Walton County beaches.

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Pirate Brew Fest 2026

Brew Fest Returns to Our Area

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 a.m. to 4 p.m., 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-

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 music with friends, there will be plenty to explore between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

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 atmosphere.

Make Plans to Join the Crew

Pirate Brew Fest 2026 takes place Saturday, November 7, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. 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!



of-a-kind finds, grab something delicious to eat, and enjoy a lively afternoon at one of the area'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 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 the area's playful pirate spirit. Whether you come to discover a rare piece, support a local artist, sample the food-truck fare, or simply enjoy



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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



Garrison Gay and his bream-caught bass.

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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 Defuniak 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.

Garrison 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 Garrison went to the pond with a pole and bread. No worms or lures? No problem. He scrunched 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.

Garrison 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, Garrison 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, Garrison had a plan.

Bream as bait for bass

Bass are big and aggressive, and Garrison 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 Garrison, 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 still be a catch. Good job Garrison, 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.



BY KAY LEAMAN HEALTH
ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED
NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

Also known as EMFs, these unseen waves have been extensively debated as far back as Thomas Edison. They exist in everything from power lines to cell phones, appliances to batteries. The electromagnetic fields are typically classified as low-frequency, 0-300 Hz, such as power lines and appliances up to high-frequency, 10 MHz-300 GHz, such as mobile phones and microwave ovens.

Radiation does not accumulate in the body in the same way that some substances do. However, it can cause damage to cells and DNA when absorbed. The body can repair some of this damage.

Repeated exposure to radiation can increase the risk of long-term health effects, such as cancer.

Low-frequency fields may induce weak currents in tissues, affecting neural and muscular systems. High-frequency fields on the other hand are linked to both thermal and non-thermal effects, including oxidative stress, calcium overload, and cellular dysfunction.

Below is a list of affected areas based on low to high frequencies:

- (Earth's EMFs) Brain orientation, plant growth direction and circadian system
- Nervous, muscular and cardiovascular systems
- Cellular stress
- Organ level functions
- Endocrine disruptions
- Reproductive system
- Oxidative systems
- Circadian regulation
- Neuronal oscillation

Documented impacts from a study (2017-2024) include effects on humans, animals, and plants, targeting various cell types (e.g., blood, cancer, thyroid, cochlea), genotoxicity, cardiovascular parameters (e.g., heart rate, blood

pressure), male fertility (e.g., testes, sperm), neuronal brain activity, and photosynthesis in plants. The findings demonstrated that EMFs negatively affect a wide array of biological systems of living organisms, including mechanisms of oxidative stress, inflammatory responses, and disruptions in cellular, physiological, and ecological processes.

While radiation does not accumulate in the body, some forms of radiation can damage cells and DNA after sufficient energy is absorbed. Ionizing radiation, including X-rays and gamma rays, can break DNA directly or through the production of reactive molecules. Ultraviolet radiation can also create DNA lesions. Radiofrequency EMFs from cell phones, Wi-Fi, and household appliances are non-ionizing and do not have enough photon energy to break DNA directly. Although some laboratory and animal studies have reported DNA damage under particular exposure conditions, the results are inconsistent and do not establish that ordinary, low-level radiofrequency exposure causes DNA damage or cancer in humans.

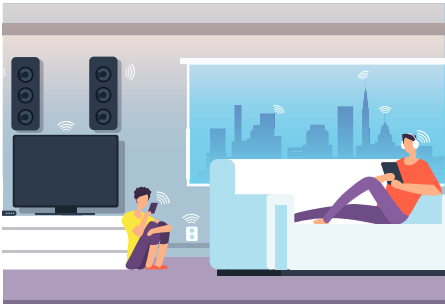
So, basically, radiation itself does not accumulate in the body, but unrepaired or incorrectly repaired DNA damage can persist. The body is able to repair some of this damage. However, repeated exposure to some of these types of radiation can increase the risk of long-term health effects, such as cancer and inflammation. Many believe inflammation is a root cause of all disease.

Did you know? In electric and hybrid vehicles, the highest concentration of EMFs is sometimes found in the back seat (where your kids sit). Though available research has generally found in-vehicle exposure levels to be within established safety guidelines, cars today, in general, have more EMF emissions in part due to the increase of electronic systems that produce electromagnetic fields.

So, what can we do? Being mindful and informed is the first step. As it goes with health, every step we take makes a difference and these accumulating steps can make a big impact on our health.

If you would like to re-

The Electro Magnetic Field



duce your everyday exposure as a precaution, consider some practical measures:

- Don't stand in front of the microwave. Inspect it regularly. Do not use it if the door, hinges, latch, or seals are damaged.
- Stop putting your cell phone to your ear when talking

Use the speaker.

- Don't keep your bluetooth ear buds in constantly. Give your head an EMF break.
- Don't wear your cell phone. Put it in your purse or choose the side pocket of cargo pants so that it does not come in direct contact with your organs. Note: My friend who was diagnosed with breast cancer was told two things: stop storing your phone in your bra and stop using deodorant containing aluminum. You can also purchase a case that has a lining in it which blocks the EMF's (this is the side that would be against your body.)

- Reduce the EMFs in the bedrooms. Take the TV out, put your phone in the drawer, etc. Your TV may be off but it continues to emit EMFs as does any appliance that is plugged in, including lamps.
- Don't work with your computer on your lap. You can purchase a protective case or place it on a pillow or box or book to separate it from your body.
- Turn off or unplug electronic devices when they are not needed. This may reduce energy use as well as unnecessary exposure.

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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 Con-

don, 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 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 ex-

pertise, 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 be-





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fore completing multiple medical training programs. These included a surgical internship through the University of North Dakota, a general surgery residency at Saint Louis University, and a cardiothoracic surgery fellowship 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.

A New Chapter in Feeling Your Best



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

Life can feel different when your energy, motivation, sleep, mood, or sense of vitality changes. For some men and women, those changes may be connected to shifting hormone levels. That's why more people are ex-

ploring options such as bioidentical hormone therapy (BHT) pellets as part of a personalized approach to feeling better.

BHT pellets are small implants placed under the skin by a qualified healthcare professional. They can provide a steady release of hormones over time, rather than requiring daily applications or frequent dosing. For appropriate patients, hormone therapy may help address certain symptoms associated with hormone deficiency or menopause and may support improvements in overall well-being.

But feeling better isn't simply about taking a pellet—it's about finding the right treatment for

you. At the Hormone Restoration center we can review your symptoms, medical history, laboratory results, and individual goals to determine whether hormone therapy is appropriate.

Imagine approaching each day with renewed confidence: having the energy to stay active, the focus to pursue your goals, and the motivation to make the most of the life you've built. The right treatment plan can be one piece of a broader commitment to wellness.

If you've been feeling unlike yourself, don't assume you simply have to accept it as part of getting older. Schedule a consultation by calling (850)837-



1271. Together, we'll determine whether BHT pellets—or another treatment option—may be right for you.

Your best chapter may still be ahead.

ACUPUNCTURE

continued from page 6

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 symptoms during what can be a physically and emotionally de-



manding process.

It illustrates an important point: patients don't necessarily

have to choose between two worlds of healthcare.

Where Could Acupuncture Fit for You?

Perhaps you're living with persistent pain. You're sleeping but rarely waking refreshed. Your headaches have become too frequent. Stress is affecting your digestion. You're navigating fertility treatment or lingering

symptoms after COVID. Or perhaps you or someone you love is managing Parkinson's, vertigo, neuropathy, stroke recovery or another complex neurological concern.

These are very different reasons to consider acupuncture. And that's precisely the point.

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



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

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 navigating 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 compro-



mised 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, stomach-aches, 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.

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 hang over or a hit to my bank account." If you determine the behavior may be unhealthy, consider trying another option.

6. Create a list of 5 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.



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Beware of Medicare Fraud!



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 of-

fering "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.

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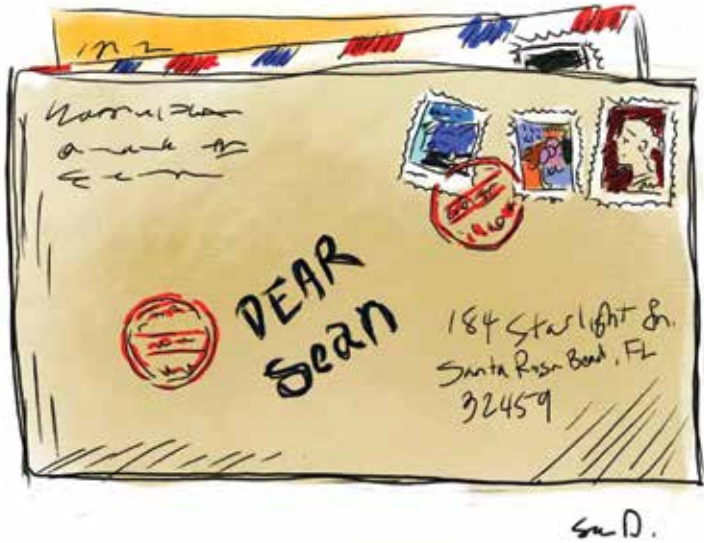
Sean of the South: Dear Sean



BY SEAN DIETRICH

“Dear Sean, your column yesterday about embracing my inner child and childhood was inaccurate. I’m 67 with more life experience than you... And my childhood wasn’t idyllic like yours obviously was... “I choose NOT to remember childhood. I was abused and don’t want anything to do with my inner child. From reading comments on yesterday’s post

many others feel like I do and prefer not to approach childhood memories which I think is best. “...No offense, but you’re not a psychologist. How about leaving therapy to professionals?” Good idea. You’re absolutely right. Please allow me to apologize. I’m no professional. In fact, I have a longstanding habit of talking out of my rearmost orifice. I will, however, point out that your email contains a few misconceptions about me. My childhood was anything but happy. I won’t go into detail, I’ve written entire books on this subject. But I grew up beneath the weight of abuse. My “idyllic” youth was peppered with abuse, fear, depression, panic attacks, eating disorders, attempted murder, gun violence, suicide, and all manner of other



“idyllic” things you regularly see featured in Lifetime Channel movies. To make matters worse, during those years, the University of Alabama football team was undergoing a major “suck” era. So, I began therapy as an adult. I still undergo therapy. I believe in therapy. Speaking of therapy, friend. If you’ve ever been to therapy, you know that the first thing you’ll end up talking about ain’t the weather. It’s childhood. Nevertheless, I’ll stop here, since I am, I think we can all agree, a blowhard. Instead, I’d

like to finish this column by telling you about a friend. I’ll call her Lori. She was midforties. She had the quintessential American suburban life. Successful husband. Nice house. Two-point-five children. Luxury SUV with crappy gas mileage. One day, Lori developed a hardcore case of asthma. Soon, she was seeing several doctors. She started taking meds, undergoing treatments, and trying everything. Nothing worked. So she tried therapy. It took six years of talking to a therapist before she finally admitted that she had been raped. The incident happened when she was a child. By a family member. And it happened many times.

As a therapeutic exercise, she wrote a letter to her abuser. She never intended on actually sending the letter. This was simply for healing. But one afternoon, for no explainable reason, Lori took things one step further and visited her abuser’s home to deliver the letter by hand. When her tormentor opened

the door, he found a beautiful, middle-aged mother on his stoop, with a letter in her hand, suffering from a full-blown asthma attack. Lori hurriedly presented this man with the letter. Then, she used three words. “I forgive you.” Lori then sprinted away, in tears. Gasping for air. But wait. There’s more. A few years later, her abuser became very ill. He was dying. He had no health insurance, so hospice was not an option. Thus, Lori began caring for him. She stayed at his house, organized sitters, and personally nursed him. She bathed him, clutching his limp body in her arms, scrubbing him, as she stood clothed in the shower. She emptied his bedpan. She addressed his bedsores. In fact, Lori remained at his bedside during his final hours. After he died, it was Lori who read the eulogy at his funeral. And it was also Lori who placed a letter of forgiveness she wrote, squarely into his casket. And since, as stated earlier, I am not a professional, I think it is only best to give Lori the last word of this column: “I have been asthma free for 22 years.”

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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A 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 approached 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 unpack,

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 impact 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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Christian Capitalist Whitney Lee: The Unstoppable American Tourist



BY RICH SANDERS

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal featured 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 hospitality 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 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 to make money and to be successful 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 believe it comes with a responsibility 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 podcast, and you can listen to the entire episode on SOWAL Life's website! We are excited to share inspirational stories of hard work and generous giving to the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ, like 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 intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy. He and his wife, Rebekah, met at church in 1996, have been blessed with three children (James, William and Caroline) and live in Destin with their large golden retriever, Cowboy.

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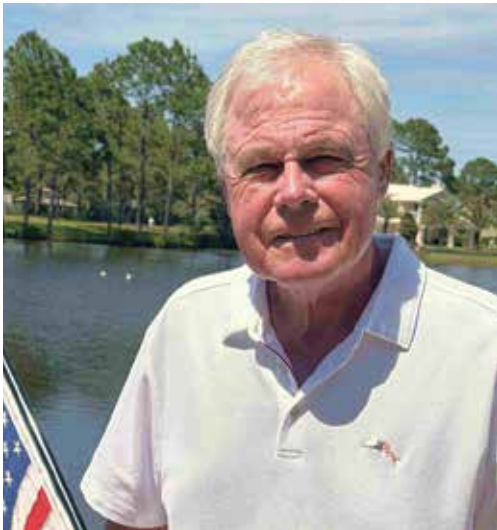
Jim Jaquess and his family have been residents of South Walton for more than twenty years. They are members of the Chapel at Crosspoint Church in Santa Rosa Beach and have been involved in various South Walton volunteer activities for many years.

Jim has served the community in a number of capacities, including as a member of the Walton County Sheriff's Posse and has served on numerous boards over a span of forty+ years. Several years ago, Jim was appointed by the BCC to the Walton County Zoning Board of Adjustment and is currently a member of the Planning Commission which makes recommendations to the Board

of County Commissioners on major development applications as well as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code.

He states that he is not running to be an EMT or a fire-fighter, SWFD has many well qualified experts in that arena. However, he would bring his management and board experiences to the table in order to strengthen the organization by conservative budgeting, increasing compensation for district employees while lowering SWFD taxes through innovative revenue generation and providing direction in regard to overall management of the district.

As a member of the Northwest Florida State College Insti-



of fire protection programs to minimize risk and assure regulatory compliance at local, state, and federal levels. He has conducted root cause evaluations of oil and natural gas pipeline failures on an international basis.

Jim's youngest daughter graduated from Freeport High (prior to the existence of South Walton High School).

father served in the Philippine Islands during WW2 where he was awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and three Bronze Stars. Jim's grandfather retired as a USAF colonel who served during WW1, WW2 and the Korean war. He was awarded the Air Force Legion of Merit for his service in Europe. Jim is a member of the Emerald Coast Chapter of Sons of the American Revolution.

Jim has been a Board Member of the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, NW Florida State College - Institute of Senior Professionals, Walton County Taxpayers Association, University of Southern Indiana Alumni Association and USA Water Ski (USOC). He is recognized as a Kentucky Colonel and Notable Alumnus of the University of Southern Indiana.

He holds a Juris Doctorate from Georgia State University, MBA from Indiana State University, and BS from University of Southern Indiana.

tute of Senior Professionals, Jim was instrumental in conducting a review of the Destin Fire Department, publishing a report providing recommendations for improvement. SWFD was used as a model for the report, which included reviews of similar size fire districts.

During his professional career in electric power generation, he was tasked with the development and implementation

His wife retired from full time teaching, but has served as a substitute teacher at South Walton High. Both daughters (Regina and Renee) are elite level athletes who serve on various boards within the United States Olympic Committee while owning/operating Emerald Coast Compounding Pharmacy in Santa Rosa Beach.

The Jaquess family has a long history of military service. Jim's



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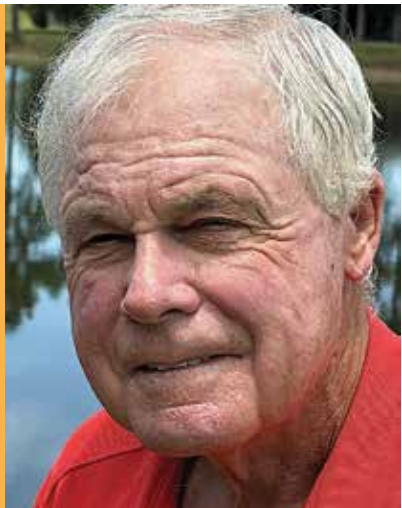


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Jim has served the community in a number of capacities, including as a member of the Walton County Sheriff's Posse and has served on numerous boards over a span of forty+ years. Jim was appointed by the BCC to the Walton County Zoning Board of Adjustment and is currently a member of the Planning Commission.

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 Arts & Music

ECTC Kicks Off Season 14 with the Tony Award Winning Musical, "Come From Away," Sept. 10–27

By CAMERON HUGHES

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) opens its landmark 14th 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 Sept. 10 – Sept. 27, at ECTC's theater in Grand Boulevard. Performances are held Thursday through Saturday at 7 p.m., 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 af-



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-



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ter 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

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.

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



lessons. From 2019–2021, she taught piano and voice at Play-ground Music Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, before returning to part-time private teaching. Shari is excited to continue sharing her passion

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.



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

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 85 years old. She believes every student is unique and creates customized lesson plans based on each student’s skill level, learning style, and individual piano or singing goals.

Her lessons incorporate the fundamentals of music, including technique, music theory, exercises, and a variety of song selections. She provides detailed



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MKAF Names PCB Artist Jamie Babula 2026 Featured Festival of Arts Poster Artist

BY ZANDRA WOLFGAM

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 also can 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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Back-to-School Season Highlights the Importance of Reliable Connectivity



BY DON CARTER, SECURE VISION

As families transition from summer schedules to the school year, internet usage patterns across many communities change almost overnight. Students return to online

learning platforms, parents continue working remotely, and households increasingly depend on connected technology throughout the day. What was once considered a convenience has become an essential part of everyday life.

For HOA boards and property managers, this seasonal shift serves as an important reminder that reliable connectivity plays a critical role in resident satisfaction.

Today's households often support multiple simultaneous activities, including:

- Video conferencing
- Online homework and research

- Streaming educational content
- Remote work applications
- Smart home devices and security systems

When hundreds of households within a community are doing these activities at the same time, network performance becomes increasingly important.

Residents may never notice a network that works perfectly. They will immediately notice one that doesn't.

This is why successful communities focus on proactive planning rather than reactive troubleshooting. Regular infrastructure reviews, ongoing

monitoring, and network optimization help ensure residents receive the performance they expect throughout the year.

Strong connectivity also contributes to a stronger sense of community. Residents feel more confident when they know the services they depend on every day are reliable, responsive, and professionally managed.

As technology continues to play a larger role in education, work, communication, and entertainment, dependable internet service has become as important to many residents as any other core utility.

Communities that recognize this shift and plan according-

ly position themselves to better serve both current residents and future homeowners.

As another school year begins, now is an excellent opportunity for boards to evaluate whether their network infrastructure is prepared to meet the evolving needs of today's connected households.

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



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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.



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.

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.

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



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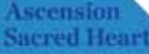
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