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Thanksgiving In America

By Tim Norris



One of my favorite times of the year is Thanksgiving. It brings families and friends together to share a meal and give thanks for their blessings. It's similar to when the pilgrims and Indians had their first meal together, and gave thanks for their bountiful year.

The Thanksgiving celebration we observe today is derived from the pilgrims' Thanksgiving celebration in 1621. They landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts in November of 1620. The first winter was harsh and more than half of the settlers died. Emerging from the grueling winter they were greeted by an Indian named Samoset; he spoke to them in their own language, explaining he had learned English from fishermen and traders. Samoset then introduced them to his friend Squanto, who then began living with them and accepted their Christian faith. Squanto taught the pilgrims how to live in the New World. He and Samoset forged a peace among the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians, which lasted many years. The pilgrim governor, William Bradford described Squanto as, " A special instrument sent of God for our good… he never left us until he died." The Pilgrims reaped a bountiful harvest that summer. So in December 1621, they declared a three-day feast to thank God and celebrate with their Indian friends. This was America's first Thanksgiving celebration. It was a festival of friends, family, and athletic events, and involved feasting, times of prayer and religious worship. This led to an annual Thanksgiving tradition in the New England colonies. But, Thanksgiving didn't start spreading southward into the other colonies until after the American Revolution. At that time, Congress issued eight separate national Thanksgiving proclamations over many years. In 1789, America's first federal Thanksgiving proclamation occurred after the adoption of the Constitution. Congress responded by requesting President George Washington proclaim a day of Thanksgiving, which he gladly did. He said, "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor."

THANKSGIVING
continued on page 2

Flight 250: To Heights Unseen

by Dr. Joshua Bledsoe
Public Information Officer

The weather may be cooling down, but things continue to heat up on Flight 250 as we Elevate EPIC to Heights Unseen in the Walton County School District! October was a month filled with celebrations that illustrate the collective success of our students and staff in the WCSD.

Our youngest passengers received extraordinary accolades as ALL of our Summer VPK sites received an "Excellent" rating from the Florida Department of Education—the highest rating possible. While FLDOE does not assign letter grades to VPK programs, earning "Excellent" across all sites is something worth celebrating! Those summer VPK students are now enjoying their first year of kindergarten. Thanks to our stellar programs, dedicated staff, and involved parents, they were able to hit the runway without losing speed on their first day.

The WCSD has once again been named an "Academically High-Performing School District," 1 of only 18

FLIGHT 250
continued on page 2



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Community

THANKSGIVING

continued from cover

The adoption of our Thanksgiving federal holiday may also be credited to Sarah Hale, a mother of five and editor of Godey's Ladies Book, a popular ladies magazine that contained poetry, artwork and articles by America's leading authors. She actively promoted the idea and said "Thanksgiving Day is the national pledge of Christian faith in God, acknowledging Him as the dispenser of blessings. This festival should be joyfully and universally observed throughout our whole country as inseparable from American life." For nearly three decades she lobbied presidents including President Abraham Lincoln, asking him to declare a federal Thanksgiving. Lincoln responded in 1863 with a proclamation printed in the New York Times, and was scheduled to be on the last Thursday of November. He reminded people that, "The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added…no human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal worked out these great things, they are the gracious gifts of the most high God."



Over the next 75 years, subsequent presidents followed President Lincoln's precedent and the celebrations varied widely and at times in different months. Then in 1933 with a Thanksgiving proclamation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, we began regularly celebrating Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of each November. By 1941, Congress permanently established that day as the national Thanksgiving holiday!

As the legendary radio host Paul Harvey would say, as he signs off the air, "And now you know the rest of the story."

Have a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving!

FLIGHT 250

continued from cover

districts across Florida to receive this recognition. To qualify, districts must earn an "A" for two consecutive years, have no district-operated schools receiving an "F," meet all state class size requirements, and have no material weaknesses or instances of material noncompliance in their annual financial audit. This distinction recognizes both student achievement and responsible district management.

These designations and accolades reflect the hard work of our staff, students, school board, and community and illustrate the intentional instructional practices taking place in our classrooms. Behind each recognition are people working together to help our students reach their potential.

November brings two major holidays, so mark your calendars:

• November 11 — Veterans Day: We will be out in observance of Veterans Day as we honor the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans.

• November 23–27 — Thanksgiving Break: All personnel will be off, and campuses will be closed throughout the week.



During this month of giving thanks, we thank our parents for their trust in us; our employees for their unwavering dedication to their students and their craft; the Walton County School Board for its support of education in Walton County; and our community for supporting all the individuals who make up the tapestry that is the Walton County School District.

Keep your eyes on the horizon, Walton County—we're headed To Heights Unseen!



Community

Seaside School Announces New Leadership Appointments

Leadership appointments build on decades of academic achievement and position SEASIDE SCHOOL™ for its next chapter of growth and impact.

The SEASIDE SCHOOL™ Board of Directors today announced the appointment of Drew Ward as Executive Director of SEASIDE SCHOOL™, formally naming the longtime school leader to the organization's top leadership position after he served as Interim Executive Director since March 2026. The school also announced Cindy Brigman as Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School, strengthening a leadership team focused on advancing academic excellence, expanding opportunities for students and guiding SEASIDE SCHOOL™ into its next chapter.

Ward's appointment comes at a pivotal moment for SEASIDE SCHOOL™ as the organization celebrates 30 years of educating students in Walton County while continuing its legacy as one of Florida's top-performing public charter schools.

"Drew has demonstrated that he understands not only what makes SEASIDE SCHOOL™ successful, but what it will take to move our organization forward," said Andrew Jordan, Chair of the SEASIDE SCHOOL™ Board of Directors. "Throughout his time with our schools and particularly during his service as Interim Executive Director, he has led with a deep commitment to our students, our educators and the community we serve. The Board has tremendous confidence in Drew's ability to build upon the legacy of SEASIDE SCHOOL™ while leading us thoughtfully and strategically into the future."

Since joining SEASIDE SCHOOL™ in 2018, Ward has held several leadership positions, including Dean of Students, Athletic Director, Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School and Interim Executive Director. During his tenure as Principal, he helped guide Seacoast through significant growth while strengthening academic programs and expanding college and career readiness opportunities. His leadership has helped advance pathways connecting students with college coursework, workforce-aligned programs and meaningful postsecondary opportunities.

Ward holds a bachelor's degree in education from Oklahoma State University, a Master of Business Administration in Athletic Administration from Southern New Hampshire University and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of West Florida. His approach to leadership is rooted in service, strong relationships and a commitment to building trust, with a focus on preparing students to become leaders who contribute meaningfully to their communities.

"SEASIDE SCHOOL™ is an extraordinary place because of the people who have believed in its mission for three decades — our students, educators, families, alumni, board members and community partners," said Drew Ward, Executive Director of SEASIDE SCHOOL™. "I am incredibly honored to have the opportunity to lead this organization. We have accomplished a great deal, but our focus is firmly on what comes next: continuing to raise the bar academically, creating even more meaningful opportunities for our students and ensuring that SEASIDE SCHOOL™ continues to be a place where students are challenged to discover what they are capable of achieving."

Building on a Record of Excellence

Ward assumes the permanent role as Executive Director during one of the strongest periods in the school's history. For 25 consecutive years, SEASIDE SCHOOL™ has earned Florida's highest school grade, reflecting a longstanding record of academic achievement and a culture of high expectations for students.

The Class of 2026 continued that record of success with a 100% graduation rate, while 83% of graduates earned an Associate in Arts degree alongside their high school diploma, 81% graduated with Honors and 80% earned industry certifications.

Those outcomes reflect an educational model designed to prepare students not simply for graduation, but for what comes after it.

Through Seaside Neighborhood School and Seacoast Collegiate High School, SEASIDE SCHOOL™ provides students with a rigorous educational experience that combines academic achievement with leadership, innovation, career preparation and opportunities to earn college credentials before graduating from high school.

Cindy Brigman Named Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School

With Ward transitioning fully into his role as Executive Director, Cindy Brigman has been named Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School, establishing dedi-

SEASIDE

continued on page 20



Community

Coastal Seniors Update for November

Exercise Classes – Angela Gibson will lead classes every Tuesday and Thursday (Except Thanksgiving Day) at 10:00 a.m. at Padgett Park. Cost is $5 per class for CSSW members and $10 for non-members. Weights and bands are used for classes. Sign up through SignUp Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

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

Watercolor Painting Class – Karen Peterson will teach beginners watercolor painting on Friday November 6 and 13 and December 4 and 11 from 8:45 a.m. - noon at Padgett Park. All supplies will be provided. Cost is $20 for members and $40 for non-members. Sign up through the SignUp Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

COASTAL SENIORS OF SOUTH WALTON

Pickleball - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex Courts on November 18 and December 16 at 6:00 p.m. This beginner class will be open to Walton County residents only. (Ages 18 and up) Registration is required. Register through Parks and Rec Website at secure.rec1.com The class is FREE and equipment will be provided or you may use your own. Email Sandy Gulak at sowalpickleball@gmail.com for more information. Open play at Boys and Girls Club every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday through December 17 (Except Nov. 11 and Nov. 24-26) from 9:30 - 12:30. Beginners welcome. Demo paddles available. Cost is $5 per day plus $35 waiver fee at initial registration. Please join the SoWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

Monthly Program - Monthly Program will be a Potluck lunch on Friday November 20, from 11 a.m.- 1 p.m. at Padgett Park. The meat will be provided so bring your favorite side, salad, or dessert. Sign up through Sign Up Genius email. To be added to SignUp Genius email, contact us at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

Mahjong - Mary Swift will host a Mahjong group every Monday at 1:00 p.m. at Padgett Park. For more information contact Mary Swift at 210-722-7939 or on Facebook join The Emerald Coast Social Club-a Mahjong Group.

Dementia Caregivers Support Group - Karen League will lead this support group for caregivers to provide a safe place to share experiences, provide practical information and mutual support. The meetings are the first Friday of each month from 12:30 -2 p.m. at the Coastal Branch Library meeting room located at 437 Greenway Trail. For more information, contact Karen League at 706-491-0812.

Northwest Florida Health Council - will provide free health screenings every other month beginning December 17th from 9 - 11:30 at Padgett Park. Screenings could identify possible health issues, answer questions, and aid with connections to specialized care.

Line Dance Classes will be back in January 2027 - Montana Sue will return to teach beginners line dances on Wednesdays at Padgett Park beginning January 6. Look for more information in December on our website at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com

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

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Community

You're Not Supposed to Need a Holiday From Your Own Body



By Dr. Karen DeVore

The turkey is not the only thing carrying tension this Thanksgiving.

Your shoulders have been somewhere near your ears since September. Your lower back has opinions about the drive to see family. And the headache you hoped would disappear has invited itself to dinner.

But there are groceries to buy, deadlines to meet, and people counting on you. So you reach for your usual remedy, say "I'm fine," and keep going.

Sound familiar?

Before you spend another holiday working around your body, consider giving it some attention. Acupuncture could be one way to begin.

When "Normal" Starts Costing You

You may have gotten very good at living with discomfort. You know which chair to avoid. How long you can stand before your back starts protesting. Which activities will leave your knees aching tomorrow.

Those adjustments can feel small until you realize how much of your day they control. Pain takes more than comfort. It takes concentration, patience, spontaneity, and sometimes the desire to participate at all.

That is why the conversation about acupuncture should begin with a question: What would you like to get back to doing?

Cooking without constantly leaning against the counter? Enjoying a walk after Thanksgiving dinner? Making the drive to see someone you love without dreading every mile?

Those are meaningful treatment goals.

Small Needles. Meaningful Possibilities.

Acupuncture involves placing very fine needles at selected points on the body. Rooted in traditional Eastern medicine, it is also the subject of modern research examining its effects on pain and the nervous system.

Some of the strongest evidence supports acupuncture for chronic lower back pain, neck pain, and knee pain associated with osteoarthritis. For someone living with those conditions, relief may make everyday movement and activities more manageable.

Acupuncture may also help reduce the frequency of migraines and tension headaches. Imagine what fewer headache days could mean: fewer canceled plans, fewer afternoons spent distracted by discomfort, and more time available for your life.

Results vary. Acupuncture does not help everyone, and improvement may take multiple visits. But you deserve to know that another option exists.

Your Treatment Should Start With Your Story

A sore back does not tell us everything we need to know about you. When did it start? What makes it worse? What have you already tried? Are you sleeping comfortably? What are you avoiding because you are afraid it will hurt?

A thoughtful consultation connects your symptoms with the way you actually live.

Acupuncture fits within an integrative approach that considers your health history, current care, and personal goals. It can complement appropriate medical treatment, physical therapy, and movement.

We also recognize when symptoms need further evaluation. The goal is a plan that makes sense for you, with prog-

TORTOISE

continued on page 13



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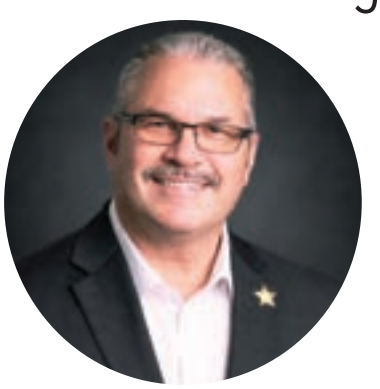


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Community

It Was Right There on the Porch

Protecting Your Deliveries During the Busiest Shipping Season of the Year



By Ted Toedte, CPD, Crime Prevention Specialist, WCSO

The notification pops up on your phone at 1:14 in the afternoon. Delivered. Front porch. You're at work, and you figure it'll be fine until you get home.

At 1:40, a car rolls slowly down your street and stops in front of your house. Someone walks up the driveway, picks up the box, and drives off. The whole thing takes less time than it took you to read this paragraph.

By the time you pull in, there's nothing on the porch but the doormat.

Package theft is one of the easiest crimes there is to commit, livery day, require a signature for higher-dollar items, or ship to a store or locker for pickup. If your employer allows it, have packages sent to work. And if you shop online a lot, a lockable package box by the front door is money well spent. and November and December are its busiest months. SafeWise's 2025 package theft report estimates that more than 104 million packages were stolen nationwide during the period studied, a loss of roughly $15 billion. The same report found that more than 30 percent of people had a package stolen in that year, with the typical stolen package worth about $143.

Here's the number that bothers me most. According to Security.org, fewer than one in four package theft victims report it to local law enforcement. That means most of these thefts never land on anyone's radar. I'll come back to that.

The good news is that porch piracy is a crime of opportunity, and opportunity is something you control.

Start with the simplest fix. Don't let packages sit. Track your deliveries and get them inside as soon as you can. If you won't be home, ask a neighbor to grab them, and return the favor. Many retailers let you pick a delivery day, require a signature for higher-dollar items, or ship to a store or locker for pickup. If your employer allows it, have packages sent to work. And if you shop online a lot, a lockable package box by the front door is money well spent.

Now look at your front door the way a thief would. That's the idea behind CPTED, (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), and it's how we look at every home during our free security assessments. Can your porch be seen from the street and from your neighbors' windows? Or is it tucked behind overgrown shrubs where nobody would notice a stranger standing there? Trim the landscaping so the entrance is visible. Make sure the porch is well lit, because in November it's dark by suppertime, and a package dropped off at 4:30 can sit in the dark for hours. If you have a side entrance out of view from the street, tell the carriers to leave packages there instead.

A doorbell camera or porch camera is a strong deterrent, especially when it's easy to see. It won't stop every theft, but it gives deputies something to work with. If your camera views the street, consider registering it with the Sheriff's Office at waltonso.org/ camera. That lets investigators know a camera is there, so they can reach out and ask for footage if something happens nearby.

Apartment and condo residents deal with this on a bigger scale, with dozens of deliveries a day landing in breezeways and at mailroom doors. If you manage a community, a secure package room or locker system pays for itself quickly. Our team can look at where packages end up on your property and how to make that area more visible and better controlled, at no cost.

Now, back to reporting. If a package is stolen, report it, even if it was only worth twenty dollars. File with the seller or carrier to get your refund, then file with us at waltonso.org/ online-reporting-system or by calling (850) 892-8111. If you have video, save it. People who steal packages rarely stop at one house, and a single report with a good camera clip can tie together a whole string of thefts across a neighborhood. If we don't hear about it, we can't connect it.

And if you see someone walking up to porches who doesn't belong there, or a car following a delivery truck through your neighborhood, call us. That isn't being nosy. That's being a good neighbor.

Those gifts are supposed to end up under your tree, not in somebody's trunk. Bring them in, light up the porch, and keep an eye on the house next door.

Ted Toedte is a crime prevention specialist with WCSO and has more than 30 years of law enforcement experience in Florida and California. He can be reached at toetheodore@waltonso.org. The Crime Prevention Division can be reached at crimeprevention@ waltonso.org or (850) 892-8111. Learn more at waltonso.org.



Community

The Vine Foundation: Removing Barriers, Restoring Hope

By Michelle Ruschman

For those who are trying to leave an abusive relationship, The Vine Foundation can be the first step to a new life. Founder Shannon Dwyer knows firsthand how difficult it can be to do it on your own. "I tried to leave my abuser five times over 10 years. So many people ask survivors, 'Why didn't you just leave?' but it's not that simple. In my situation, we were trauma-bonded. The abuse wasn't the only part of our relationship. There were good times woven in and out of the abuse. For a time, we built a home together and had children together. You hold onto those precious moments with the hope he'll finally change."

Abuse can also be more subtle and go deeper over time. "Over the years we were together, my perception became distorted. He went to work and provided for our family, so I'd wonder why I wasn't more grateful. Somehow, financial support became justification for how I was expected to tolerate being treated. I was made to feel like I did not have the right to push back, question him, be angry about how he spoke to me, or expect better because, after all, he paid for everything.

"I think that is the part of this story I most want another woman to understand. Abuse does not have to begin at its worst for it to be abuse.

"You do not have to wait until someone punches you in the face before you are allowed to call what is happening to you physical abuse.

"Someone paying your bills does not purchase the right to control, degrade, intimidate, restrain, or frighten you."

Separation from people you used to see regularly and the distance put between the victim and their loved ones are also signs that shouldn't be ignored. "Every time I wanted to go out, he'd accuse me of cheating. It just became easier to stay home until I found myself isolated and alone. As a result, his voice was the only one I heard."

What also makes it difficult for victims to "just leave" is that there are so many moving parts they have to consider:

- If the car is under my abuser's name, what will I use to leave?
- If I have no job and no access to the finances, how will I have the money to start a new life?
- If my abuser has an upstanding public persona, will anyone believe me?
- How do I leave with the least disruption to my children? What will this do to their friendships and ability to attend their school?
- How do I navigate the shame once this gets out?
- Is there a shelter I can go to that will have room for my kids and me? What will I be exposing them to once we get there?
- How will I retain a lawyer?

This is where The Vine Foundation can be a lifeline. "The goal of this foundation is to be able to ask, 'What do you need RIGHT NOW so you can leave?' and have the resources to remove any barrier. Is it rent, gas money, a job? We don't want those answers to be a hindrance from having a life that's free from abuse."

Shannon was in the process of making The Vine Foundation a 501(c)(3) nonprofit when she was in a head-on collision while visiting Ireland in May. Recovery has been long and painful, but she's finally in a place where she can focus once again on making that goal a reality. "I'm so thankful to the people who have offered to help, but for now, I'm asking that any potential donations be set aside until I can legally accept these funds directly to the foundation."

Shannon and her husband, Brendan, have been doing what they can until that day arrives. In addition to funding, volunteers are needed to provide the resources victims need to start a new life. As part of that effort, The Vine Foundation recently held a luncheon in Santa Rosa Beach. The gathering was designed to unite professionals in legal services, counseling, housing, transportation, medical care, child care, employment, financial guidance, advocacy and other community partnerships. The goal is to build a network of resources that helps survivors overcome barriers and take the next steps toward a life free from abuse.

If you are someone who is in an abusive relationship or you love someone who is, Shannon wants to pass on some advice. "When it is safe to do so, call law enforcement when an incident occurs and document everything you possibly can. Take photos and save text messages, voicemails, emails, and screenshots. Write down dates, times, witnesses, and exactly what happened. Keep copies somewhere your abuser cannot access.

"In the moment, you may want to minimize what happened, protect them, avoid embarrassment, or convince yourself that you'll never need that documentation. But there may come a day when your safety, your children, or your ability to prove a pattern of abuse depends on having a record of what actually happened.

"You are far more likely to wish you had documented and reported an incident than to wish you hadn't. Your future self may desperately need the evidence that your present self is afraid to create.

"I know how easy it is, when you are living inside of something, to move the line for what you'll tolerate. I moved that line for years. Eventually, I realized I was no longer asking myself whether the relationship could be saved. I was asking myself whether staying in it could cost me my life."

The Vine Foundation also plans to expand its services to include men, recognizing that abuse affects men as well as women.

The best way to reach Shannon and The Vine Foundation is by calling 850-684-5653 or emailing admin@thevinefoundationnwfl.com. You can also go to Facebook at The Vine Foundation or to Instagram at @thevinefoundationnwfl.

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





Community

See It Online. Experience It Here.

There are some places you need to experience before you can really picture yourself there. Watersound Fountains is one of them. Surrounded by protected forest and just two miles from the Emerald Coast, Watersound Fountains offers retirement living shaped by many of the things people already love about life along 30A: natural beauty, good food, time outdoors, connection, and the freedom to enjoy the day your way. Now, you can get a closer look without leaving home. Through Watersound Fountains' virtual tours, you can step inside residences, explore community spaces, and begin imagining what everyday life here might look like. And there is plenty to imagine. A morning might begin with a fitness class or a swim. Later, you could meet friends for a chef-prepared lunch, head out for nearby golf, or walk over to Watersound Town Center for coffee. Some days fill themselves with programs, outings, and conversation. Others leave plenty of room to simply enjoy the pool, the surrounding natural beauty, or an afternoon at home. The residences are designed to make that home time just as appealing, with bright, open spaces and an entire community just beyond your door. But what you won't see on a virtual tour may be just as important. There are no HOA fees to manage and no home maintenance waiting for the weekend. Housekeeping, transportation, concierge services, and other everyday conveniences help take care of many of the responsibilities that can consume time at home. That means more time for the parts of life you'd rather keep. It's an approach that feels a little like staying at a favorite resort — except you know your neighbors, your favorite table is waiting downstairs, and at the end of the day, you're already home. A virtual tour can show you the residence. It can take you through the community and give you a look at the pool, dining spaces, and places where people gather. But it can't quite capture a conversation over dinner, a familiar face greeting you by name, or how it feels when a beautiful place begins to feel like yours. For that, you'll have to come see us. Start with a virtual tour of Watersound Fountains. Then come experience it for yourself. [QR CODE] Explore Our Virtual Tours Call 850-601-3174 to schedule your personal visit.



WATERSOUND FOUNTAINS
RETIREMENT LIVING



Community

Give Your Home a Fresh Look Before the Holidays



By Kyle Sparks,
Ovation Painting

There's something about the holidays that makes us suddenly notice our homes. Maybe it's knowing family is coming to stay, planning a dinner with friends or simply spending more time indoors. That wall you've walked past every day without a second thought suddenly looks a little scuffed, and the color you loved years ago may be ready for an update.

November can be an ideal time for a larger interior painting project, especially if you've been thinking about refreshing several rooms or creating a more cohesive look throughout your home.

One of the biggest changes we see comes from updating older color schemes. You don't have to choose stark white or make every room the same color. Today's warmer neutrals, softer whites and subtle natural tones can brighten a home while still



giving it warmth and personality. A thoughtful palette can also help adjoining rooms flow together, which is especially noticeable in the open floor plans common in many Emerald Coast homes.

Don't overlook the details, either. Trim, baseboards, doors and crown molding take plenty of bumps and wear over the years. Fresh walls paired with tired trim can make a project feel unfinished. Painting them together gives the entire space a cleaner, more polished appearance.

Kyle's Tip: Before selecting an interior color, look at your home's permanent features—flooring, countertops, cabinetry and large furnishings. Paint should complement those undertones rather than fight them. And always view your sample in the actual room. Our abundant Florida sunlight can make the same color look very different from one space to another.

At Ovation Painting, we handle substantial interior and exterior projects where careful preparation and attention to detail matter. For larger jobs, planning ahead also helps minimize disruption, particularly during the busy holiday season.

Your home doesn't need to be perfect for the holidays. It should feel comfortable, welcoming and like you. Sometimes a fresh coat of paint is all it takes to make you appreciate your home all over again.

Call or text Kyle Sparks at Ovation Painting at 850-830-9668 to discuss your next painting project. Military and first responder discounts are available.

Visit ovationpainting.com.

Green Thumb Garden Club's Sixth Annual Holiday Bazaar

By Kathleen Edge,
Publicity & Website Chair

"Where Every Day is a Celebration" is the theme of the sixth annual Green Thumb Garden Club Holiday Bazaar that showcases unique seasonal décor and other items handmade by members and other local artists. Special thanks to Cantina Laredo for again allowing the Club to have the event at their Grand Boulevard location on November 14, 2026. Doors open at 9 a.m. Come early for the best selection! The bazaar is always a sellout.

Bazaar net proceeds will fund 2027 scholarships awarded to Walton County horticulture college students as well as youths and young adults in Timpoochee 4H Camp, E.O. Wilson Biophilia Naturalists Outdoor Program and Westonwood Ranch programs.

In October, Green Thumb members donated over $1,100 in food, gift cards and cash to Caring & Sharing of South Walton to support those in need in our community. Walton County Sheriff's Santa Patrol will receive gifts and gift cards for young children and teenagers at the GTGC holiday luncheon on December 8, 2026, at Royal Palm Grille on Scenic Gulf Drive, Miramar Beach, FL.

Also at the October meeting, Member Vicki Dickerson's Island Green home received the



October Yard of Distinction Award. GTGC Vice President, Barbara Gahagan, presented tips and ideas to extend the life of those special holiday plants.

The Club has chosen a well-deserving Walton County family as their 2026 Habitat family. The family will receive monetary donations and gifts to help ensure a great holiday season. The donations will be delivered to the family in mid-December.

Please visit the Green Thumb Garden Club website to learn about our charitable mission, how to join and details on meetings, activities, and events. The website address is greenthumbgardenclubinc.org or send an email to greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com.

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Community

South Walton Lifeguard Selected to 2026 Lifesaving World Championship Team

By: Mackenzie McClintock, South Walton Fire District Public Information Officer

Competing on an international stage takes speed, precision, and elite athletic ability. South Walton Fire District (SWFD) lifeguard Noah Cahan has demonstrated all three, earning a selection to the 12-member US Open National Team for the 2026 Lifesaving World Championships in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

He will travel to South Africa in November 2026 to compete against the top lifeguards from across the world. His selection is a tremendous milestone for his career, as this is his first time earning a spot on the national team.

Noah will represent the U.S. team in both Flags and Sprints events, bringing the speed, agility, and competitive experience needed to perform at the highest level of lifesaving sport.

"Noah represents the best of all of us," said SWFD Beach Safety Director David Vaughan. "He's a valued member of our team and the local Emerald Coast Lifesaving Association chapter not just for his athleticism but also in how he carries himself in every aspect of the job. Our community should be proud of what he's accomplishing and what this means for the profession of lifeguarding along the Emerald Coast."



Lifesaving sport combines athletic competition with skills and physical abilities that are essential to professional lifeguarding. Events such as beach flags and beach sprints challenge competitors' speed, reaction time, agility, and conditioning. These disciplines require athletes to perform under pressure while maintaining the physical readiness that supports their work in the open water.

Beyond Cahan's athletic accomplishments, he is a valued member of the SWFD Beach Safety Division, having recently been promoted from Full-Time Lifeguard to the supervisory role of Beach Safety Officer. He consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to his responsibilities, exceptional athletic performance, and a high standard of customer service for all who enjoy South Walton's beaches.

SWFD congratulates Cahan on this achievement and recognizes the hard work that helped earn him a place on the national team. As he prepares for competition in South Africa, the district wishes him continued success and good health in his training.





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Community

The Sunrise Beyond the Walls

By Shannon Kramolis

Four years ago, I walked into Walton Correctional Institution as a volunteer teacher, hoping I might have something meaningful to offer the men incarcerated there. I never imagined how much they would teach me.

Every week, I spend two and a half hours teaching Critical Thinking and Mindful Living. Together, we explore emotional intelligence, ego, communication, personal responsibility, and how our thoughts and beliefs shape our lives. We read books, challenge assumptions, examine old patterns, and ask difficult questions: What does it mean to take responsibility for our choices? How can we respond rather than react? Can we change the stories we tell ourselves?

These conversations require honesty, vulnerability, and a willingness to look inward. The men do not always agree with one another—or with me. That is part of the work. We practice listening, questioning, and considering perspectives beyond our own.

As a yoga teacher, I often remind my students that yoga is much more than physical postures. It is a practice of awareness, self-examination, compassion, and learning to live more consciously. Some of the deepest expressions of that practice I have witnessed have happened in a prison classroom, without a yoga mat in sight.

One of my favorite moments came when one of the men shared that he had watched the sunrise that morning, his cell window faces the sunrise (it also faces the city dump) When another student teased him that he looked at the dump - without hesitation, he replied, "I may have been looking at the dump, but I saw the sunrise."

I have carried those words ever since. He has no control over where his window faces, he has no control over what exists out there but he can absolutely choose what he sees.

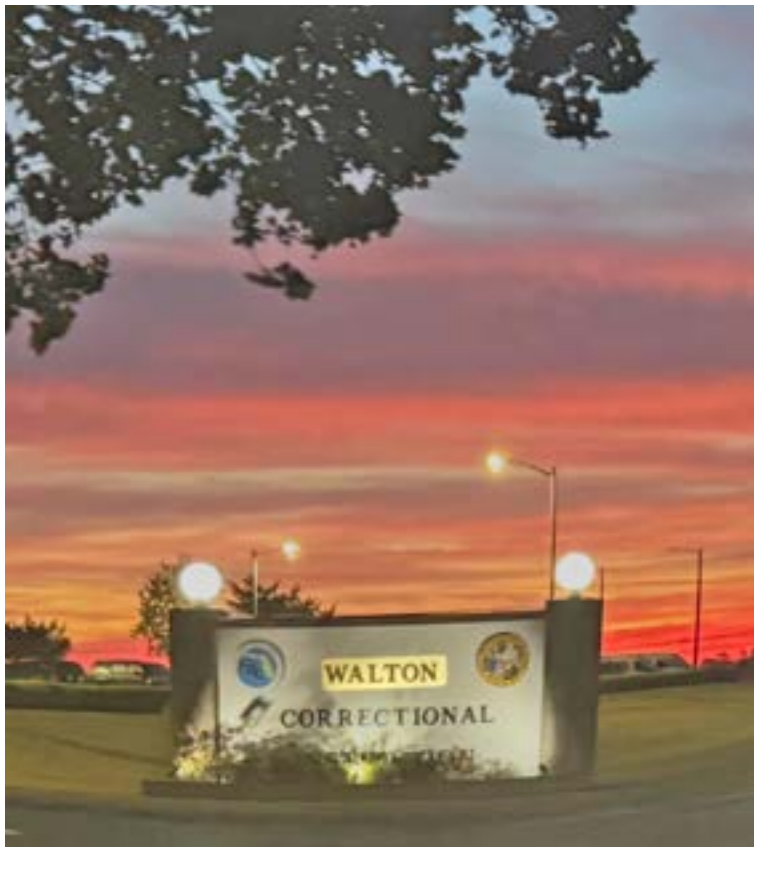
The men in my classroom are more than their convictions. Recognizing their humanity does not excuse harmful choices or erase accountability. It means believing that reflection, responsibility, redemption and growth remain possible.

Recently, our community gathered for a yoga fundraiser supporting this educational work and books for the men. Before the event, I asked my students what they wanted me to tell those who came and their answer was simple: "Thank you." Thank you for not forgetting us. For seeing us as human beings. For believing in us. Their words remind me that encouragement and human connection can reach beyond prison walls.

How can you help?

Consider volunteering at Walton Correctional Institution. Volunteers can contribute through educational, mentoring, creative, and other approved programs.

https://www.fdc.myflorida.com/volunteer-services/volunteers-and-programs?utm_source=chatgp t.com.



Even if volunteering is not possible, we can all choose to look beyond someone's circumstances and recognize their humanity.

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AJ's Has a Thanksgiving Table with Room for Everyone

Some of our most meaningful holiday traditions begin with a simple invitation: Come eat with us. AJ's Grayton Beach (Noon - 5 p.m.) and AJ's on the Bayou (11 a.m. - 4 p.m.) welcome the community for its Thanksgiving Day meals. Gather for a traditional holiday feast, fellowship and the spirit of giving. Meals are offered at no charge, with donations appreciated to benefit the Kids on the Coast Foundation. Find details at ajsgrayton.com and ajsonthebayou.com.





10-Year-Old Launches "The Post Room," A Happy-Mail Club Inspired by a Lifelong Love of Real Mail

Since she was little, local resident Hunter Grace Bakker, known as HG, has been obsessed with checking the mail. Almost every day, she would head to the mailbox hoping there might be something interesting waiting inside. Most of the time, there wasn't. Instead, there were stacks of junk mail, advertisements and bills. For HG, that was always a little disappointing. So, at age 10, she decided to do something about it.

This month, she is launching The Post Room at House of Blueprint, a monthly happy-mail club built around one simple idea: there should be something in the mailbox people are actually excited to open. "I think getting real mail is exciting," HG says. "I want people to open their mailbox and find something that makes them happy."

The idea began taking shape this summer during art camp with Santa Rosa Beach artist Liza Snyder. Snyder's colorful, joyful approach to art made an impression on HG and got her thinking about how much fun it would be to send art, notes and little surprises through the mail.

That idea became The Post Room. Each month, subscribers receive an envelope mailed from the Emerald Coast filled with art, paper goods and creative surprises. The inaugural October mailing includes a 5-by-7 art print from an artist, sticker, bookmark, postcard or recipe, along with a letter from HG. Every month will be different, and fittingly, the artist who helped inspire the idea will be the first featured.

Liza Snyder art was the featured artist for the inaugural October mailing. Information about Snyder and her work will accompany her print, giving subscribers another way to discover and connect with a local artist. HG hopes future envelopes will introduce people near and far to artists, makers and creative people from the Emerald Coast while evolving around monthly themes, local inspiration, art and activities.

The October collection drew inspiration from monarch butterflies, honoring and remembering

THE POST ROOM

continued on page 15

TORTOISE

continued from page 5

ress measured by changes you can notice in daily life.

About the Part That Makes You Nervous

Yes, acupuncture uses needles.

They are much thinner than those used for injections. You may notice a brief pinch, pressure, or a dull ache. Your practitioner should explain the process, check your comfort, and respond to your feedback.

Some people find the experience relaxing. During a season of constant demands, having time devoted entirely to your care can feel welcome.

Choose a licensed practitioner who uses sterile, single-use needles. Discuss your medications, medical conditions, and any pregnancy or bleeding concerns before treatment. You can arrive curious, skeptical, or nervous. Bring your questions.

Stop Saving Yourself for January

There is always a reason to postpone care. After the guests leave. After the shopping is finished. After the year ends.

Meanwhile, your life keeps happening. The family walk happens. The grandchildren get on the floor to play. Someone starts telling a story that makes everyone laugh until they cry.

You deserve to experience those moments with as much comfort as possible.

This November, give yourself something more useful than another promise to take care of yourself later. Start a conversation about what hurts, what you miss, and whether acupuncture could help.

Everyone else is already on your list. Put yourself on it, too.

Go Fishing in Local Lakes!

By Helen Petre

Fishing builds confidence, curiosity, and respect for nature. You do not need much gear, but you do need a positive attitude. Sometimes you catch a fish. Sometimes you do not. Sometimes it does not matter. A fisherman learns critical life skills while fishing, successful or not. Every child should discover the outdoors, and every child should have a chance to fish. It is a learned skill. Someone has to teach you. Fishing is learning about fish and fish habitats, but it is also learning important life skills, like patience, perseverance, and problem solving.

I walk down to the lake in my neighborhood often to explore the shore, the frogs and turtles, the weeds that are host plants for butterflies, and the native bees that pollinate the plants. It is rewarding, regenerating, and positive. One Saturday late afternoon, it was exceptionally rewarding. I met up with a whole bunch of middle school boys fishing. The boys rode their bicycles, under their own muscle power, down to the lake carrying their poles and bait. No phones. No parents. No fear. There are snakes in the high grass around the lake. They knew that. They showed me spiders and damselflies. They showed me fish. They had no problem talking to some weird, old lady that walks and bikes around the neighborhood looking for snakes and spiders.

While we were at the lake, they caught several largemouth bass. These fine fishermen are the next generation of anglers, and they are also the next generation of confident analysts and project managers. All fishermen start like this. Someone, probably their parents, teaches them to fish, and they learn more than how to fish. They learn independence, problem solving and critical thinking. They can do it by themselves. They can decide what to use, where to cast, and when to fish.



Liam largemouth bass.



James Lapierre, with a really big largemouth.

Sometimes they learn patience and persistence, and sometimes they just learn that it is really nice to be outside. Being out on the grassy shore with all those living things is like entering a world that is all your own. People that do not do it never know. It is freedom, and these boys have parents who gave them freedom.

The boys were nice, excited, happy, confident, and wanted to show me their catch. That is something to be proud of. I am proud of them, and their parents. The daily bag limit is five, with only one over 16 inches. Youth under 16 do not need a license and these boys fishing the lake in Owl's Head were all under 16. They could have easily caught more than five, but they were all just catching and releasing.

Largemouth bass (Micropterus salmoides)

Largemouth bass are the most popular gamefish in Florida freshwater, and these boys know all about them. Fishing along the shore, they caught one every time they cast. Their bait was soft plastic worms. They tried single tail grubs, but the Senko wacky worms worked best.

Here are some of the boys with their afternoon catches. I hope to see them out here often. Something tells me I will.



Nick largemouth bass.



Community

Money Matters: 7 Things to Check Before Year End

By Clint Gharib, AIF®, CFEd®

December has a way of sneaking up on us. One minute it's summer, then suddenly we're talking about Christmas plans, football playoffs and wondering where the year went.

Before 2026 disappears completely, here are seven financial things worth checking. None are complicated. Most take just a few minutes. A few could save money—or prevent a much bigger headache later.

1. Check your beneficiaries.

Retirement accounts and life insurance generally pass according to the beneficiary form on file. If life has changed—marriage, divorce, death, children, grandchildren—make sure those forms still reflect what you actually want.

2. Look for forgotten retirement accounts.

People change jobs and sometimes leave 401(k)s, pensions or other benefits behind. Check old employers and use the Department of Labor's Retirement Savings Lost and Found database. The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation also has a search tool for certain missing pension benefits.



3. Check your credit reports.

Identity theft often shows up there before anywhere else. Review your reports for accounts or activity you don't recognize. You can also consider freezing your credit, which can make it harder for someone to open new accounts in your name.

4. Review recurring charges.

Take one bank statement and one credit-card statement and look for subscriptions, memberships or services you no longer use. Ten dollars here and twenty dollars there can add up surprisingly fast.

Death by $9.99 a month is still death.

5. Make sure someone knows where everything is.

If you were unexpectedly unavailable tomorrow, would your spouse or family know where to find your insurance policies, estate documents, financial accounts and professional contacts?

They don't necessarily need passwords. They do need a roadmap.

6. Ask whether your estate documents still fit your life.

Have you moved? Married? Divorced? Added grandchildren? Sold property? Has your executor, trustee or power of attorney changed?

You may not need to change anything, but outdated documents are worth finding before they become a problem.

7. Take a financial snapshot.

Once a year, write down what you own, what you owe, where accounts are held and who your key contacts are. Keep it somewhere secure and update it each December.

Think of it as your financial family photo. You hope nobody needs it unexpectedly, but if they do, you'll be glad it exists.

You may not uncover $1,200 waiting for you like I did with unclaimed property (Sept issue), but spending an hour on these seven checks may be worth far more than an hour spent trying to predict next year's hottest stock.

Sometimes the best financial move isn't finding something new.

It's making sure what you already have is organized, protected and doing what you intended.

If the current market environment—or the changing policy landscape—has left you questioning whether your portfolio is positioned appropriately for what comes next, it may be worthwhile to get a second opinion. A thoughtful review can often uncover opportunities—and risks—that may otherwise go unnoticed.

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THE POST ROOM

continued from page 12

the people who came before us, zinnias and beautiful fall beach days along the Emerald Coast. November will turn toward togetherness, gratitude and family traditions, while December will focus on light, sparkle and simple ways to spread joy. HG is also getting a little help from her four-legged business partner, Barkley, the family's white Labrador and "Head of House" at House of Blueprint, who will make regular appearances in the monthly mailings.

While the concept is playful, HG has some very real goals for her business. She wants The Post Room to remind people to slow down, make things, write to one another and think about who in their life might need a little extra happy.

A Post Room subscription does not have to be for yourself. HG hopes people will send the club to grandparents, grandchildren, college students away from home, friends going through a difficult season, children who love receiving their own mail or simply someone who deserves a reason to smile when they walk to the mailbox. For $12.99 per month, subscribers can join or cancel at any time, making it an easy gift for a month, a season or longer.

HG also hopes her business can show other children that they do not have to wait until they are grown up to turn an idea into something real. The Post Room is supported by the team at House of Blueprint, the South Walton-based creative and media house founded by HG's mother, Erin Bakker. "She has always loved checking the mail, and also been consistently disappointed by the fact that most of what shows up is junk mail and bills," said Erin. "This summer, after spending time at art camp with local artist Liza Snyder, she became completely taken with the idea of 'happy mail' and decided she wanted to create something that would give people that feeling every single month."

HG is involved in the actual work of the business, from developing monthly ideas and choosing creative elements to helping prepare the envelopes that go out to members. "What I love most is that this really is HG's business," Erin said. "The House of Blueprint team is helping her with the grown-up parts, but she is involved in the ideas, themes, contents, artist collaborations and the overall direction."

For HG, it is part business, part creative project and part mission to make the mailbox a little less disappointing. There is also a give-back component built into the club from the beginning. Ten percent of The Post Room proceeds will be donated to Caring & Sharing of South Walton, allowing each subscription to send a little happiness beyond the mailbox, too.

The first Post Room envelopes are scheduled to head out this month, and because membership is ongoing, subscribers can join at any time throughout the year. HG hopes eventually those envelopes travel far beyond South Walton. But, no matter where they land, each one will carry a little piece of the Emerald Coast with it. "I want people everywhere to get happy mail from the Emerald Coast," she says.

For the little girl who spent years checking the mailbox hoping to find something special, The Post Room is her way of making sure somebody else does.

To join and for more information, visit www.houseofblueprint.com/thepostroom.





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Same Mission, Broader Role:
CBA Is Now the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Estuary Program

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After 30 years of protecting local waters, the organization now helps connect conservation work across the Choctawhatchee watershed.

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) has a new name and a larger job. The organization is now the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Estuary Program (CBAEP), a transition that adds regional coordination to the restoration, monitoring, research, and education work it has carried out since 1996.

For residents, the most important news is what stays the same. CBAEP will keep restoring oyster reefs and seagrass beds, monitoring water quality, and teaching local students through programs like Grasses in Classes. That hands-on work continues without interruption, led by the same team. "We're not replacing CBA; we're building on it," said Executive Director Alison McDowell. "The work we've been doing isn't going away. We're still the same organization, with the same people and the same commitment to the watershed. What's changing is that we have a bigger opportunity to bring people together, connect the work that's already happening, and take on some of the bigger challenges facing the Choctawhatchee watershed."

What's New

Local governments, scientists, nonprofits, businesses, and volunteer groups all work to protect the Choctawhatchee's bays, rivers, and coastal waters. As an estuary program, CBAEP now serves as the hub that connects them. The organization will:

• Coordinate projects among partners to reduce duplicated effort and stretch resources

• Pursue more funding, including estuary-wide grants, to speed up restoration

• Serve as a central point of contact for residents, partners, and funders

• The transition also supports long-term goals for the region, including raising the watershed's national profile and opening the door to additional federal and state resources for restoration.

Building on Shared Groundwork

CBAEP builds on a strong foundation. Okaloosa County and other Choctawhatchee County Estuary Coalition members laid important groundwork, developing the region's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan and bringing partners together around a shared vision for the watershed. As the program moves forward under CBA and Northwest Florida State College, it carries that foundation into its next phase, with a stable home to build on and room to grow across the entire watershed.

How to Get Involved

CBAEP still needs volunteers for restoration projects, oyster gardening, and community science, and donations still support work in local waterways and classrooms. Find volunteer opportunities and ways to give at basinalliance.org.

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Why Wine?

From the Family Table to the Wedding at Cana

The Wine Experience
by John Choquer

My journey with wine began around age five, gathered at our family table for Sunday dinner. My father would pour us children a few ounces to enjoy with our meal. In our home, wine was considered part of the food and fellowship, never something to consume in excess.



Today, my father is 97 years young. He still enjoys red wine daily, remains in excellent health, and has a remarkably sharp mind. He has always revered wine, often reminding us of Christ's first miracle and His words at the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me." Those conversations planted the seeds of my lifelong fascination with wine.

For more than 16 years, I have been a vigneron—growing wine grapes and making wine. Every vineyard, harvest, and bottle offers something new to discover. Through this column, I hope to share that excitement and invite you to explore wine's history, flavors, traditions, and place at the table.

In North America, wine is often viewed primarily as alcohol. Across much of Europe, it has traditionally been approached as a companion to food: something to savor with a meal, conversation, and family. Neither culture is uniform, of course, but the contrast invites a question: Why wine?

For Christians, that question carries a remarkable spiritual dimension. Consider Jesus' first recorded miracle, at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11). When the celebration ran short of wine, He transformed water into wine—an abundant gift that the wedding steward praised for its quality. Why begin His public signs at a wedding feast? The story suggests joy, hospitality, generosity, and transformation.

Wine appears again at one of Christianity's most sacred moments. At the Last Supper, Jesus shared the cup with His disciples and gave it profound meaning, linking it to His blood of the covenant (Matthew 26:27–29). In Luke's account, He told them to remember Him when they shared the bread and cup (Luke 22:19–20). What had long accompanied ordinary meals became a symbol of sacrifice, remembrance, and hope.

Then came a promise: Jesus said He would not drink again of the fruit of the vine until He drank it anew in His Father's Kingdom (Matthew 26:29). Revelation describes the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–9). The two passages together evoke the beauty of a glorious celebration and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wine is not an invitation to excess, nor is drinking necessary to appreciate its meaning. It is a fruit of the vine shaped by soil, seasons, patience, and human hands. My hope is that this journey opens your mind to its extraordinary story—and a new appreciation for this gift of creation. Look to future articles for in-depth discovery into the many wonders of wine and how wine is the celebration of life.



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The Florida Panhandle is known for its beautiful homes, coastal lifestyle, and incredible outdoor spaces. Gasworks helps homeowners take full advantage of that lifestyle with custom solutions designed for both indoor comfort and outdoor entertaining.

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Community

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 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.

One of Dog-Harmony's most popular fundraising events is the Annual Barktoberfest, which was just held in October at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin and features its beloved dog costume contest, music, light bites, libations and a canine-only trick-or-treat celebration.

Even though Barktoberfest matters greatly in raising monetary support, 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.

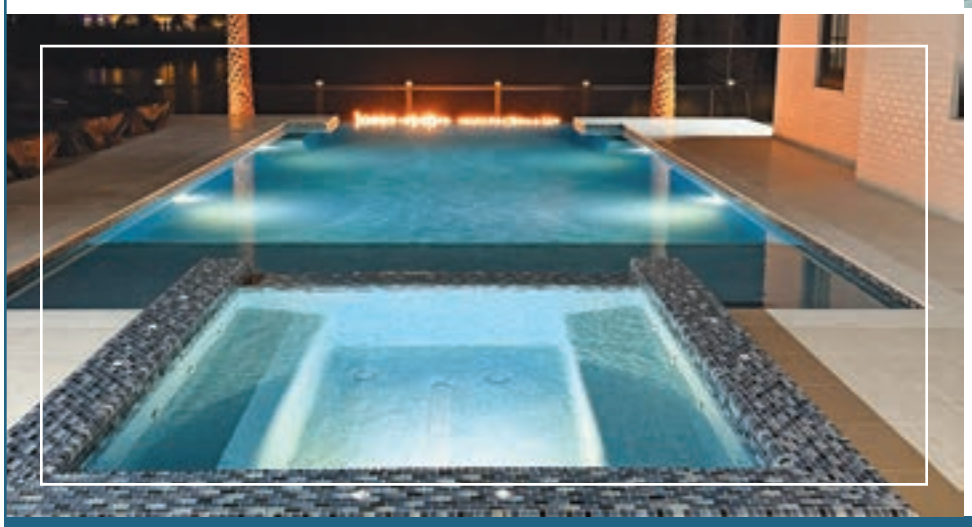
Then another word. Another page.

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.

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Community

SEASIDE

continued from page 3

cated leadership for the campus as it continues to expand its academic programs and opportunities for students.

Brigman brings more than two decades of experience in education, with a background spanning school leadership, student services, counseling, school safety and community engagement. Throughout her career, she has served students and schools at the elementary, middle, high school and district levels, developing a comprehensive understanding of student needs, educator support and the importance of strong school-community relationships.

Since joining Seacoast Collegiate High School as Assistant Principal for the 2025–2026 school year, Brigman has continued her commitment to fostering a school culture where students feel known, teachers feel supported and families feel connected. A visible, hands-on leader, she prioritizes academic achievement,



meaningful student opportunities and collaboration among educators, families and community partners. Her leadership philosophy is rooted in a simple but powerful commitment: "Every Student. Every Teacher. Every Day."

"Seacoast is a school where students are given the opportunity to see just how far their curiosity, hard work and ambition can take them," said Cindy Brigman, Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School. "I am excited to continue working alongside our exceptional faculty and staff to build an environment where students are known, challenged and supported. We have an incredible foundation, and I look forward to expanding the opportunities that prepare our students for college, careers and whatever path they choose next."

Brigman will lead Seacoast as the school continues to expand opportunities available to its students, including advanced coursework, dual enrollment, and career-focused learning experiences in areas such as artificial intelligence, engineering and rocketry. Through its partnership with Northwest Florida State College, Seacoast students can pursue college-level coursework while completing their high school education, creating pathways that can significantly accelerate their post-secondary journeys.

Leading the Next Chapter of SEASIDE SCHOOL™

The leadership appointments come as SEASIDE SCHOOL™ celebrates its 30th anniversary and



looks toward the next generation of the organization's impact.

What began in 1996 as a small public charter school created by local families has grown into an educational organization serving students through Seaside Neighborhood School and Seacoast Collegiate High School. Throughout that growth, the school's mission has remained rooted in providing students with an academically rigorous education, meaningful opportunities and a strong connection to the community around them.

Under Ward's leadership, SEASIDE SCHOOL™ will continue building upon that foundation while preparing the organization for its next era — strengthening the student experience, supporting and developing exceptional educators, expanding innovative academic and career pathways, deepening community partnerships and ensuring the school remains positioned to serve future generations of students.

"This is an exciting moment for SEASIDE SCHOOL™ because we are able to celebrate an extraordinary legacy while also looking confidently toward the future," Jordan said. "Drew and Cindy both understand the culture of these schools, they know our students and families, and they recognize that our success creates an obligation to keep pushing forward. We are excited to see where their leadership takes SEASIDE SCHOOL™ next."

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Community

The Art of Giving: A Christmas Gift Guide from Clay Garden and Gifts

The most memorable gifts are often the ones that inspire a little delight, bring beauty into everyday life, or offer something unexpected. This Christmas, Clay Garden and Gifts invites you to embrace the art of thoughtful giving with a collection of distinctive finds, beautiful details, and special treasures chosen to make the season feel a little more magical.

For a gift that captures the spirit of the season, look no further than the amaryllis. Both waxed and unwaxed amaryllis bulbs make a lovely holiday offering, combining natural beauty with the anticipation of something wonderful to come. The waxed bulbs are especially charming, requiring no soil or watering and offering an effortless way to enjoy spectacular blooms indoors. For those who appreciate the ritual of gardening, paperwhite bulbs provide the pleasure of nurturing a flower from the very beginning. Either makes a memorable gift that continues to give long after Christmas morning.





For the homebody, locally made candles from Forty-One Candle company are a thoughtful way to bring warmth and atmosphere into the home. Beautifully crafted and wonderfully personal, these candles offer more than fragrance; they evoke the comfort of a favorite room, a quiet evening, or a welcoming home filled with friends and family. Supporting our local candle maker makes the gesture even more meaningful.

Jewelry is another timeless expression of affection. Whether selecting something delicate and understated or a piece with a little more personality, it can be worn and treasured for years. It is the sort of thoughtful surprise that feels personal. We have all the right pieces from The Salty Sparrow made here in Santa Rosa Beach.

And for the person who appreciates a little everyday luxury, explore the world of fragrance. A lovely scent has a remarkable way of creating memories and setting a mood. Whether chosen for its warmth, freshness, or sophistication, fragrance is an indulgent gift that feels both intimate and timeless. Elizabeth W's Vetiver, Tocca, and our newest collection Ruth and Bo all make the perfect holiday gift.

For the garden enthusiast, there is no shortage of inspiration. Beautiful, well-made gardening tools are gifts that combine practicality with a little luxury. Think handsome hand trowels, garden pruners, snips, cultivators, weeding tools, and hand forks—those hardworking essentials that make tending the garden a pleasure. Add in attractive gardening gloves, garden aprons, plant markers, and other charming accessories, and you have gifts that are as lovely to give as they are useful to receive. We have plenty of gifts for bird lovers as well. Houses, feeders, Birdbaths and the cutest assortment of birdseed wreaths and ornaments can all be found with our tools in our garden cottage.

Of course, some of the most wonderful gifts are the unexpected discoveries you can find at Clay Garden and Gift. A charming ornament, a beautifully chosen vase, original art pieces or small treasures such as windchimes, holiday lanterns, and garden statues can immediately bring someone to mind and can often be more meaningful than the grandest gesture. At Clay Garden and Gifts, the pleasure is in discovering those special pieces that make gift giving feel personal rather than predictable.

As the holidays approach, remember the hostess, the neighbor, the teacher, and the friend who makes life a little brighter.In a world where holiday shopping has become increasingly hurried and impersonal, Clay Garden and Gifts offers an opportunity to slow down, wander, discover, and find something truly special. This Christmas, give beautifully. Choose gifts that inspire, delight, and remind the people you love just how much they mean to you.

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Arts

MKAF Awards 22 Winners at Festival of Arts

Paul Henry Devoti Earns Best In Show Honors At Destin's Annual Celebration Of Art

The 31st Annual Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) Festival of the Arts, held Oct. 24-25 at the MKAF Cultural Arts Village in Destin, showcased the talents of more than 100 artists from across the country. The two-day celebration featured a diverse array of artistic styles and mediums, drawing art enthusiasts, families and visitors for a weekend dedicated to creativity and community.









Highlights of the cultural weekend included live music, street performers, interactive art demonstrations, children's activities, food trucks, beverages and opportunities to meet artists and experience their creative processes firsthand. The festival also featured the 10th anniversary of MKAF's Warrior Arts program, which serves veterans and active-duty military members through therapeutic arts experiences.

The juried festival recognized outstanding artistic achievement with 22 awards totaling nearly $10,000 in cash prizes, including honors for Best in Show, People's Choice, Awards of Excellence, Awards of Merit, Judges Recognition and the Collaborative Tent competition.

Paul Henry Devoti earned the festival's top honor, Best in Show, and a $2,000 award for his ceramic artwork. Jordan Aucoin received the $1,000 People's Choice Award for sculpture, reflecting the appreciation of festivalgoers who cast their votes during the weekend.

The festival's 2026 featured poster artist, Jamie Babula, was also recognized with a $750 poster contest award for his work, Drawn to Paint, created in colored pencil.

The Collaborative Tent provided another opportunity to celebrate artistic expression, recognizing adult and student artists for their creativity and craftsmanship. Andrea Scurto earned Best in Show in the adult division for her oil painting, Beauty in Age, while Destin High School student Addie Kelly received Best in Show in the student division for Robin Williams.

Honored artists in the 31st Annual Festival of the Arts are as follows:

Best in Show –$2,000
Paul Henry Devoti, ceramics



People's Choice Award – $1,000
Jordan Aucoin, sculpture

Awards of Excellence – $850 each
Michael Lunsford, acrylic
Petty Shepard & Mary Otieno, fiber
Hilario Flores, wood

Awards of Merit – $450 each
Thomas Wrenn, mixed media
Molly McGuire, mixed media
Anne Schroeder, acrylic

Judges Recognition Awards – $250 each
Dorothy Starbuck, oil
Tony Cray, glass
Laurell Szczepanski, mixed media
Richard Franklin, acrylic
Ann & Henry Jalsa, jewelry

Poster Artist – $750
Jamie Babula, Drawn to Paint, colored pencil

Collaborative Tent Awards

Adult Division
Best in Show – $200
Andrea Scurto, Beauty in Age, oil

First Place — $150
John Pope, Dock Master, acrylic

Second Place — $100
Kristin Walls, Nova's Paws, oil

Third Place — $75
Ian Fagan, Taking the 'L', photography

continued on next page

Community

From Healing to Hooksets:

The Pompano Queen Finds Her Place on the Emerald Coast

When Courtney Harper first started casting lines into the Gulf in the early morning hours, she was looking for something simple: a little peace. Navigating a difficult season of personal loss, the quiet rhythm of the waves, the sunrise, and the anticipation of a bite gave her a place to breathe.

What began as a way to heal after loss, eventually became a calling, a business, and a way to share her passion with others.

Last year, SoWal Life shared Courtney's story as she began building her beach fishing guide service. Today, many locals know her as the "Pompano Queen." Her goal has always been about more than catching fish; she teaches residents and visitors the basics of surf fishing while encouraging them to understand and protect the coastal environment.

Just over a year later, as October marked National Women-Owned Small Business Month, Courtney reached another milestone: she is the ONLY female surf fishing charter guide licensed and permitted on the beaches of Walton County. Being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated industry is not something she set out to make a statement about; it simply became part of her story.

"When I started, I just wanted to share the peace and magic of sunrise fishing and protecting our natural resources," Courtney says. "I knew there weren't many women doing shore-based guiding, but I couldn't have predicted how enthusiastically people would respond to it."

That response has transformed Pompano Queen into a thriving local business. Families book sunrise sessions together, vacationers eagerly learn beach fishing, and locals return throughout the year hoping to land pompano, redfish, and other species native to the Emerald Coast.

Courtney emphasizes that she could not have built the business without her 30A community, or without her guide, Chris, and assistant, Jack, who both embrace the energy of Pompano Queen. Local tackle shops have spread the word, neighbors stop to offer encouragement, and the broader fishing community provides advice and referrals.

"The support has been overwhelmingly beautiful," Courtney says. "To go from finding solace on these beaches to being booked solid with people who want to learn from me is humbling. Walton County really does show up for its small businesses."

Her impact extends beyond the sand. When she isn't guiding clients, Courtney works with Fishing Tackle Retailer and The Fishing Wire, national trade publications owned and published by Angie Thompson, a female trailblazer in the fishing industry. The platforms connect retailers and industry professionals with product trends, market news, and business insights.



"Working with Fishing Tackle Retailer keeps me connected to the bigger picture of the industry," she says. "Between guiding on the beach and working for the magazine, I literally get to talk about fishing all day long. I'm surrounded by incredible women in business, passionate anglers, and a community that lifts each other up."

Connecting with others in the industry recently opened the door to a partnership with surf fishing leader The Sinker Guy to develop her own branded, sustainable pompano rigs. Packaged in biodegradable materials and available for wholesale purchase by the end of the year, the line reflects her ongoing commitment to conservation.

For Courtney, entrepreneurship was never about following a mapped-out plan. It was about recognizing a passion, taking a chance, and seeing where it led.

"I think sometimes you just have to start," she says. "You don't always know exactly where something is going to take you. You just know that you love it and you believe in it."

Her journey is a reminder that small businesses are often born from personal beginnings and a quiet need that evolves into a life-changing pursuit.

"If you told me a couple of years ago that I'd be running the area's only female surf charter and living out my dream on these beaches every single day, I wouldn't have believed it," she reflects. "It just goes to show that when you put your heart into something and trust your community, the tide will carry you right where you belong."

MKAF AWARDS

continued from page 22

Student Division

Best in Show – $200
Addie Kelly, Destin High School, Robin Williams, gouache/colored pencil
First Place – $150
Sophia Pawlik, Fort Walton Beach High School, Pet's Night, acrylic

Second Place – $100

Charlotte Costello, Ohana Institute, Simon, celluclay and acrylic

Third Place – $75

Wren Reddish, South Walton High School, Fragments of Me, acrylic and chalk pastels

The Festival of the Arts is one of MKAF's signature annual events, bringing artists and the community together while supporting the foundation's commitment to making the arts accessible to all.

Proceeds benefit MKAF's ArtsReach initiative, which provides educational and cultural programming for K-12 students, people with special needs and the military community throughout Northwest Florida.

To make a tax-deductible donation, explore corporate sponsorship opportunities or learn more about MKAF membership, visit www.MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.



HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BEACH NOVEMBER 2026

Alaqua Weekend Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Fest Nov. 14

Head to Alaqua Animal Refuge in Freeport for the animoré Weekend Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Fest, presented by Café Thirty-A from 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Enjoy live bluegrass, including headliner Sister Sadie, along with food trucks, local vendors, crafts, games and animal encounters. Tickets: alaqua.org.

Rosemary Beach Uncorked Nov. 14

The 15th Annual Rosemary Beach Uncorked Food and Wine Festival, presented by Audi, will take place from 1 to 4 p.m. Taste the very best of food and wine Rosemary Beach has to offer with featured restaurants, countless bottles ready for the pour, and live music to entertain and delight. Learn more and purchase tickets: rosemarybeachuncorked.com. The 2026 beneficiaries will be: Caring and Sharing of South Walton and Children's Volunteer Health Network (CVHN).



Emerald Coast Club Market Nov. 14-15

Celebrate our community and support the youth at the Boys & Girls Club in Santa Rosa Beach. Every purchase helps create brighter futures for kids, fostering educational success and healthy lifestyles.

Find unique crafts, enjoy delicious food, and engage in activities for all ages. Saturday Early Bird Entry ($5) 9-11 a.m. and free General Admission 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday free General Admission 12-5 p.m.

Tacos & Tequila Under the Trees at Biophilia Center Nov. 14

Join the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center from 12-4 p.m. for Tacos & Tequila Under the Trees! The event is a 21+ nonprofit fundraiser featuring a taco bar, tequila tasting, along with a trail scavenger hunt, live music and margaritas under the pines. Tickets and details at www.eowilsoncenter.org/events/tacosandtequila.

Gathering in the Garden Nov. 14

BeGenerous will host their 9th Annual Gathering in the Garden from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at Drive the Coast, located at 342 S County Hwy. 393, Santa Rosa Beach. Doors will open at 5 p.m. for a social hour and silent auction. BeGenerous is a Christ centered 501©3 non-profit organization created to rescue, restore and provide safe housing for women overcoming substance abuse disorder and/or sexual exploitation. Details and tickets at www.begenerousinc.org.

Kids' Night Out at Watersound Town Center Nov. 17

Kids' Night Out is back at The Pavilion at Watersound Town Center! Come out for evenings of family fun featuring activities, music and plenty of entertainment for the kids. From games and creative activities to music and more, there's something to keep little ones smiling while parents relax and enjoy the evening. Free & open to the public! Kids' Night Out is 6-8 p.m. on Nov. 17 & Dec. 15

Point Washington Medical Clinic Community Thanksgiving Nov. 18

The Point Washington Medical Clinic invites the community to join together with our neighbors and friends for a potluck celebration at their location at 2 p.m. Share a meal, connect with fellow community members, and embrace the spirit of gratitude. Register at docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScws-1WArASrELslzy9Shg5bUzK-jEjcQ_JulTxRsPfrIKY1cHw/viewform.



Grand Boulevard Hometown Holiday Parade Nov. 20

Hometown Holiday Parade returns to Grand Boulevard from 5-7 p.m. Come out to celebrate the start of the holiday season! The merchants of Grand Boulevard, along with our community partners, will bring holiday cheer, seasonal spirits, and joy to The Boulevard.

The Nutcracker at MKAC Nov. 20-22

Northwest Florida Ballet returns to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center for its 47th annual production of The Nutcracker at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. As the area's only full-length presentation of this beloved holiday classic, the production features a cast of more than 140 performers, including internationally acclaimed guest artists and more than 100 local children. The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of NFB Music Director and Conductor David Ott, will perform Tchaikovsky's celebrated score live during each public performance. Details and tickets at mattiekellyartscenter.org/events.

HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BEACH NOVEMBER 2026

Sparkling Wine & Holiday Lights @ Baytowne Nov. 21

Time to pop the cork and kick off the holidays! The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin presents the 14th Annual Sparkling Wine & Holiday Lights Festival from 4-6 p.m. Stroll the decorated streets, sip more than 30 champagnes and sparkling wines, and enjoy appetizers from Village restaurants. End the night with the first tree lighting of the season and the 12 Nights of Lights show. Tickets at www.bigtickets.com/events/sd/baytownesparkling2026.

The Nutcracker Ballet Act II at Seaside Nov. 22

Celebrate the start of the holiday season with Seaside's annual Nutcracker performance, a magical evening of dance and tradition, at 5 p.m. for a special performance of The Nutcracker Act II by Ballet Pensacola, presented on the Amphitheater Stage. This complimentary, family-friendly event is a timeless holiday classic.

30A Thanksgiving Day Run Nov. 26

The annual 30A 10K Thanksgiving Day charity race takes in Rosemary Beach. This fast & flat, out-and-back course route is designed for running enthusiasts looking for a great race to set a personal record or families that want to start a new, fun tradition on Thanksgiving Day morning. With a 10K, 5K, and 1 mile run/walk, there is a race distance for every ability. Registration and details available at www.30a10k.com.

Harbor Docks Thanksgiving Day Feast Nov. 26

Harbor Docks Charities invites visitors and tourists alike to attend the 32nd Annual Thanksgiving Day Feast from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Meals are provided at no cost, but donations are welcome. Volunteer! Dedicated volunteers are needed to make this event run smoothly - email volunteer@fftfl.org. Donations provided during the event support Food For Thought Outreach and Emerald Coast Food Rescue. More information: harbordocks.com.

Breakfast with Santa at Fish Out of Water Nov. 27

Kick off the holiday season at Fish Out of Water with a magical morning! Beginning at 8 a.m., join for a delicious breakfast buffet while visiting with Santa Claus, the perfect opportunity for little ones to share their wish list and capture a keepsake photo. Children will also enjoy festive sweet treats, making this a cherished family tradition. Reservations are not accepted; seating is offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

Alys in Winter Wonderland Nov. 27

Enjoy festive activities 4-6:30 p.m., including cookie decorating ($3 per set), letters to Santa, holiday photos by EPIC on the splash pad, face painting, and photos with Santa ($3). At 4 p.m., there will be a holiday concert, leading up to the tree lighting with Santa at 6:30 p.m. Presented by the Merchants of Alys Beach, this event is free and open to the public. Please note, lines will close promptly at 5:45 p.m. to allow vendors time to service those in line.

Seaside Holiday Parade & Turn on the Town Nov. 28

Celebrate the magic of the holiday season at Seaside's annual Holiday Parade and Turn on the Town! This beloved holiday tradition begins with a parade beginning at 3 p.m. at Seagrove Plaza and travelling west down 30A, ending at the Seaside Amphitheater and Central Square with festive floats, performers, and Santa Claus. Enjoy a special live performance by Emerald Coast Theatre Company at Krier Plaza before gathering in the Seaside Amphitheater for the spectacular Christmas tree lighting, where Santa Claus himself will officially welcome the holiday season! Following the lighting, join Santa at the Christmas Village for photos until 8 p.m. All proceeds from parade registration will benefit Point Washington Medical Clinic, making this cherished Seaside tradition even more meaningful.

Baytowne Wharf's Here Comes Santa Claus Nov. 28

Here comes Santa Claus right down Baytowne Lane! Join the fun from 6-9 p.m. to cheer Santa on as he makes his way to the Event Plaza Lawn to light up the Village Christmas Tree! Enjoy face-painting, balloon making, a brass band...and a beautiful fireworks display!



Million Dollar Quartet Christmas at ECTC Dec. 3-20

Emerald Coast Theatre Company presents Million Dollar Quarter Christmas. Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins return to the ECTC stage for an unforgettable holiday jam session filled with favorites like "Jingle Bell Rock," "Great Balls of Fire," "Blue Christmas," and more. Tickets and information can be found at emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

Grand Boulevard's Festival of Trees Dec. 4

You're invited to Grand Boulevard to celebrate Festival of Trees 4-6:30 p.m., featuring 16 local non-profits and their impact to our local community. Browse and cast your People's Choice vote from 4–6:30 p.m.; winners will be announced at 7:30 p.m. Purchase a $5 voting bell to support a favorite cause.

Rosemary Beach Holiday Tour of Homes Dec 5

The 8th annual Rosemary Beach Holiday Tour of Homes takes place from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Take a self-guided tour through six stunning, beautifully decorated homes in the Rosemary Beach community. All proceeds benefit charitable partners Alaqua Animal Refuge and Caring & Sharing of South Walton. Space is limited. Secure your spot today and kick off your holiday season with heart, style, and community spirit. Visit www.rosemarybeachfoundation.org/events for details and tickets.

Eden Gardens Christmas Candlelight Open House & Luminaries Dec. 5

Over 2000 luminaries will be lit and placed along the garden paths of the park from 5-8 p.m., and the House will be open and the decorated trees lit for the event, giving the public the opportunity to experience the magic of Eden Gardens at nightfall. The Friends of Eden will provide live music, cookies and hot beverages. Park fees are waived.

Café Thirty-A Christmas Charity Ball Dec. 5

Café Thirty-A is set to host their annual Christmas Charity Ball from 6-10 p.m. The festive evening will feature cocktails, gourmet cuisine, dessert, a DJ, dancing, Photo Booth, and so much more. One hundred percent of the ticket sales and auction proceeds benefit Caring and Sharing of South Walton. Details and tickets at cafethirtya.com/charity-ball.

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Community

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Welcomes New Staff, Announces Promotion

Expanded team strengthens development, music education, patron services and special events

Sinfonia Gulf Coast — the only fully professional orchestra in the region with a mission to entertain, educate and inspire through innovative live music — is celebrating the growth of its team with new staff appointments, a promotion and the return of two special event assistants as the area's only fully professional orchestra begins its 21st season.







Bridget Gorder, who joined Sinfonia in May 2024 as a marketing and events production intern, has been promoted to operations and patron services manager. An arts administrator, educator, conductor, performer and published researcher, Gorder earned a bachelor's degree in choral music education from Florida State University, graduating summa cum laude. Her experience spans arts administration, patron services, event coordination, music education and performance. She is pursuing a master's degree in arts administration and cultural entrepreneurship at Northeastern University, where she serves as a Creative Leader Fellow, and was recently selected to participate in the Emerging Leadership Institute at the 2027 Association of Performing Arts Professionals Conference in New York City.

SINFONIA

continued to page 28



Wellness

Be Prepared for Medical Insurance Costs in 2027



By Christian Regalado

For those who are on Medicare, November is a very important month. We're now in the middle of the Annual Enrollment Period that started October 15 and ends December 7. During this period, those enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan or Prescription Drug Plan have the opportunity to renew their plan or make a change for 2027. In years past, most people just allowed their Advantage plans to renew; the same was true for those on prescription drug plans. This year is different.

I have noticed a trend where more of my clients with Medicare Advantage plans are inquiring about switching to a Medicare Supplement aka Medigap plan. Advantage plans continue to offer a good value at low cost, but that value is not like it used to be. PPO plans, which offer a larger network of care options, are getting the biggest hit in the market. Supplement plans offer the best medical protection. You have a higher upfront cost to get lower costs when you receive care. You also have the largest network of care in the country. The higher premium may feel worth it when medical needs change and more care is needed. Just remember, these plans do not include prescriptions or Dental.

Historically, Supplement plan rate increases were fairly stable. Unfortunately, that changed with Covid. This is a major concern with recent double-digit rate increases over the last few years and projected increases in the future. Additionally, underwriting requirements will keep those in need of more medical care out of Supplement plans unless a Guaranteed Issuance (GI) is triggered.

Since a number of plans, especially PPO plans, were discontinued for 2027 there are quite



a few seniors who have to shop for a new plan. If your Advantage Plan was discontinued, a GI was triggered, and not only can you choose a new Advantage plan, if you want to switch back to original Medicare and add a Supplement plan, you can get a Guaranteed Issue (usually to a Plan G or F). This means you can enroll in a plan without needing to pass medical underwriting. This typically only applies when you first enroll in Medicare Part B. However, if your Advantage plan is cancelled, you have a new opportunity.

If you are planning on sticking with Advantage, your lowest cost options are HMOs. If you choose an HMO, be sure you are comfortable with the providers that are in the network, as you will not be covered outside of it. This includes Dental, Vision, and Urgent Care.

If you are choosing a PPO, be sure you are familiar with the in and out network and the higher costs that will be applied when you see out-of-network providers. All PPO plan costs have gone up for 2027. Many of the benefits have been reduced, and some prescription costs have gone up.

For those not yet ready for Medicare, usually under the age of 65, November 1, was the beginning of the Open Enrollment Period on Marketplace plans where folks can enroll in an ACA plan for 2027. Choosing the best plan will require balancing the importance of cost and provider network. However, there are some good strategies you can ask me about.

This is a year to speak with an insurance broker to help you decide which plan works best for you. There is no cost for our services and a little advice can go a long way to help secure your health and save money. Come see me in Santa Rosa Beach or give me a call. I meet many people in person and over the phone. I'm always happy to help.

Reach me, Christian Regalado by phone at (850) 687-7606 or email me at christian@30ahealthins.com.

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Wellness

This Lung Cancer Awareness Month:
Why a 5-minute scan may save your life
Low-dose CT screenings available at Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month, making it the perfect time to prioritize your lung health. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer in the United States, with more than 225,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Because lung cancer often develops without early symptoms, it is frequently diagnosed in advanced stages when it is harder to treat.

However, new screening technologies are changing that narrative. For high-risk individuals, a simple low-dose CT screening may result in a 20% increase in lung cancer survival rates by catching the disease early.

The Local Impact

Tobacco smoking is the most important risk factor for the disease, causing about 9 out of 10 cases of lung cancer in men and 8 out of 10 cases in women. With 29% of adults in our area identifying as current smokers1 and 28% as former smokers2, proactive screening is our most powerful tool for early intervention.

Despite these risks, less than a quarter of adults in Florida have utilized a CT lung cancer screening3. Here in Walton County, rates of lung cancer diagnosis are slightly higher than the state average4, and concerningly, more than 68% of local cases are diagnosed in advanced stages5.

What to Expect: Fast, Painless, and Non-Invasive

During a low-dose CT scan, an X-ray generating device rotates around your body to create detailed images of your lungs. The scan is completely non-invasive, takes only a few minutes to complete, and aims to help find cancer early when it is most treatable. By the time physical symptoms appear, the cancer may have already begun to spread beyond the lungs.

Who Should Be Screened?

Low-dose CT scans are recommended for adults who are at a higher risk of developing lung cancer because of their smoking history and age. Current guidelines recommend yearly lung cancer screening, when clinically appropriate, for people who meet all of the following criteria:

Are between 50 and 80 years old.

- Smoke now or have quit within the past 15 years.
- Have a 20 "pack-year" or more smoking history.
- What is a Pack-Year?



A pack-year is the number of packs of cigarettes smoked per day times the number of years smoking. Example: Someone who smoked one pack per day for 20 years or two packs a day for 10 years has a 20-pack-year smoking history.

Take the Next Step This November

Don't wait for symptoms to appear. Lung cancer screening is available locally at Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Imaging, facilitating access to care so people living in the area don't have to drive far to get the screening they need.

To learn if you qualify or to schedule your lung cancer screening, call 850-416-LUNG. Our team can help you navigate the scheduling process and connect you with a clinician for the required screening order. To find out more, visit Ascension.org/SacredHeartLung.

1. *Florida Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System telephone survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health Division of Community Health Promotion. 2022 county-level data pulled from FLHealthCharts.gov.*
2. *Florida Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System telephone survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health Division of Community Health Promotion. 2022 county-level data pulled from FLHealthCharts.gov.*
3. *Florida Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System telephone survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health Division of Community Health Promotion. 2024 state-level data pulled from FLHealthCharts.gov.*
4. *University of Miami (FL) Medical School, Florida Cancer Data System. 3-Year Discrete county-level data (2021-2023) pulled from FLHealthCharts.gov.*
5. *University of Miami (FL) Medical School, Florida Cancer Data System. 3-Year Discrete county-level data (2021-2023) pulled from FLHealthCharts.gov.*

SINFONIA

continued from page 26

Klara Mikolai, who joined Sinfonia in August 2025 as community partnership coordinator, serves in a newly created development role focused on building and strengthening relationships with the individuals and businesses that support the organization. Her responsibilities include prospecting new Treble Makers, sponsors and donors, as well as advertising supporters for the Bravo Beat program. Relationship management is also a key component of her role as Sinfonia continues to cultivate meaningful connections with supporters throughout the community.

Dr. Thomas Roggio joined Sinfonia in spring 2026 and begins his first full season as director of education and community engagement/Sinfonia Youth Orchestra programs. A conductor, violinist and educator based in Northwest Florida, Roggio has conducted for the Pas de Vie Ballet Company and Florida State University's Housewright Virtuoso Series and previously served as graduate assistant conductor for FSU Orchestras and music director for The Studio Orchestra. As a violinist, he has performed with Sinfonia Gulf Coast, the Tallahassee Symphony, Panama City Symphony and Tallahassee Bach Parley. Roggio is a graduate of Florida State University, Bowling Green State University and the State University of New York at Fredonia.

Tara Bohlen joins Sinfonia as a strings instructor. A professional violinist and educator based in Santa Rosa Beach, Bohlen brings more than 25 years of teaching experience working with students of all ages and abilities. A graduate of St. Olaf College and certified Suzuki Talent Educator, she previously served as director of Bismarck Strolling Strings and as





a secondary orchestra director in Bismarck Public Schools. Bohlen has performed as associate concertmaster of the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra and with the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra, Panama City Symphony and Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

Rafael Paredes joins Sinfonia as a strings instructor. A classically trained violinist from Ecuador, Paredes began his musical journey at age 6. He studied at the Sergei Rachmaninoff Conservatory and performed with several of Ecuador's leading youth and national orchestras. Now based in Santa Rosa Beach, Paredes performs at weddings, luxury events and private concerts throughout 30A, combining classical training with contemporary and cinematic repertoire.

"The strength of Sinfonia has always been the people behind the music," said Demetrius Fuller, Sinfonia Gulf Coast founder and music and artistic director. "Bridget, Klara, Thomas, Tara and Rafael each bring talents and perspectives that strengthen our organization in important ways — from cultivating relationships and expanding music education to enhancing the experience we provide our patrons. We are excited about what these talented team members will add and help us accomplish as we continue to entertain, educate and inspire our community."

Sinfonia also is pleased to welcome back Victoria Cetrone and Sandy Monteverde as special event assistants for Crescendo! 2027, Sinfonia's annual fundraiser. The event will be held Sunday, Feb. 21, 2027, at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Cetrone and Monteverde return to support the production of the signature fundraising event, which benefits Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

Wellness

My Resource Shelf



By Stephenie Craig

As we celebrate Thanksgiving and focus on gratitude, this can be a time of reflection about how you've lived during 2026 and how you might want to focus on growth in the coming year. I find myself grateful for the many helpful resources along my journey. This month I'm sharing some of my favorite resources that have positively impacted me, my friends, and many of my clients.

If you've struggled with feeling guilty when you say "no," overcommitting, an overfocus on the problems of those close to you, and not being able to separate your emotional experience from others, I recommend the following books:

"Boundaries" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (Christian)

"Codependent No More" by Melody Beattie

"The New Codependency" by Melody Beattie

If you struggle with feelings of shame (consistently feeling like something is wrong with or about you) or difficulty expressing vulnerability or making space for the vulnerable expression of others, I recommend the following books:

"I Thought It Was Just Me, But It Isn't" by Brene Brown

"Daring Greatly" by Brene Brown

If you often feel like the world or other people are making your life hard and victimizing you in some way or you feel powerless to change difficult situations in your life, I recommend the following books:

"The Power of TED" by David Emerald

"The Let Them Theory" by Mel Robbins

If you struggle to work through mistakes and failure without spiraling into shame, I recommend the following book:

"Rising Strong" by Brene Brown

If you you find it difficulty to choose healthy people and relationships in your life, I recommend the following book: "Safe People" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr John Townsend (Christian)

If you have a feeling you need to end some kind of relationship or circumstance in your life and want help sorting through confusing feelings, I recommend the following book:

"Necessary Endings" by Dr. Henry Cloud (Christian)

If you struggle with overperforming, perfectionism, feeling you have to get everything right all of the time, and judging yourself/others harshly for mistakes, I recommend the following book:

"The Gifts of Imperfection" by Brene Brown

If you want to parent your children with respect for recent brain development research, connection, and healthy boundaries, I recommend the following books:

"Good Inside" by Dr. Becky Kennedy

"Good Inside with Dr. Becky" podcast

"The Whole Brain Child" by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne "Bryson No Drama Discipline" by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson

"The Connected Child" by Dr. Karyn Purvis, Dr. David Cross, Wendy Lyons Sunshine (This book is specifically written regarding children who have experienced hard things in early childhood such as trauma, foster care, etc. but great reading for any parent with a child that might be struggling.)

If you want to understand your behavior, personality, motivations and those of others better to improve your insight and relationships, I recommend the following resources:

"The Road Back to You" by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile (Enneagram Book) (Christian) Your Enneagram Coach, the Podcast (Christian)

If you want to work on connection and increased understanding in your marriage or couple relationship, I recommend the following resources:

The Secure Relationship Instagram with Julie Mennano @ thesecurerelationship "Secure Love" by Julie Mennano

"Hold Me Tight" by Sue Johnson

"Safe Haven Marriage" by Dr Archibald D. Hart and Dr. Sharon May (Christian)

If you want to explore historical roots of behaviors that are causing you trouble in the present such as anger issues, avoidance, putting up walls, people pleasing, and approval seeking, I recommend the following books:

"The Internal Family Systems Therapy Workbook" by Richard Schwartz

"Boundaries for Your Soul" by Dr. Alison Cook and Kimberly June Miller (Christian)

"The Search For Significance" by Robert S. McGee (Christian)

If you are working through spiritual wounds or are working to balance spiritual and emotional health, I recommend the following book:

"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" by Peter Scazzero (Christian)

If you are a Christian person who also struggles with Anxiety or Depression, or works with others who might struggle with Anxiety or Depression, I recommend the following book: "Hope for the Anxious and Depressed" by Hope A. Blanton and Christine B. Gordon

I recommend all of these books highly and consider them to be important reading for all humans. Try picking one that seems to apply to your current space in life and read or listen to the audiobook. Give yourself some time to integrate and apply your learnings into daily life. Then, pick another and keep going. I hope you find something helpful in this list as you seek to grow and love others well. Find us at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.

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Wellness

The Effectiveness of GLP-1 Medications: A Healthier Approach to the Holiday Season



By Dr. Richard Chern

As Thanksgiving approaches, many people look forward to gathering with family, enjoying traditional holiday meals, and celebrating the season. However, for individuals working toward weight-loss goals, the holidays can also bring challenges. With larger portions, tempting desserts, and busy schedules, maintaining healthy habits may seem difficult. Fortunately, GLP-1 medications have emerged as an effective tool for weight management and improved metabolic health, helping many people make meaningful progress toward their health goals.

What Are GLP-1 Medications?

GLP-1 stands for glucagon-like peptide-1, a hormone that helps regulate blood sugar, appetite, and digestion. GLP-1 receptor agonist medications, including semaglutide, mimic the effects of this naturally occurring hormone. Tirzepatide, another widely used medication, acts on both GIP and GLP-1 receptors.

These medications help people feel full sooner, stay satisfied longer, and experience fewer food cravings. They also help regulate blood sugar levels, making certain medications useful for managing type 2 diabetes. By reducing hunger and supporting better portion control, GLP-1-based treatments can make it easier for eligible individuals to achieve and maintain weight loss.

How Effective Are GLP-1 Medications?

Clinical research has demonstrated that GLP-1-based medications can produce significant weight loss when combined with healthy lifestyle changes. In major clinical trials, adults without diabetes taking semaglutide 2.4 mg lost approximately 15% of their initial body weight on average over 68 weeks. In a separate trial, tirzepatide produced average weight reductions of approximately 15% to 21%, depending on the dose, over 72 weeks.

People with diabetes may experience different average weight-loss outcomes. Medication choice, dosage, nutrition, physical activity, and ongoing medical supervision all influence success.



Beyond weight loss, some patients experience improvements in blood sugar control, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and other measures of metabolic health. For eligible patients, certain medications may also provide additional cardiovascular benefits.

Enjoying Thanksgiving While Protecting Your Progress

Thanksgiving does not have to mean abandoning your health goals. Whether you take a GLP-1 medication or are pursuing weight management through lifestyle changes, a balanced approach can help you enjoy the holiday without unnecessary pressure.

Consider these simple strategies:

• Prioritize protein and vegetables. Include turkey, other lean proteins, and vegetables to help support fullness and balanced nutrition.

• Practice mindful portions. Enjoy your favorite holiday foods in reasonable portions rather than feeling obligated to try everything.

• Eat slowly. GLP-1 medications can increase feelings of fullness, so pay attention to your body's signals and stop when comfortably satisfied.

• Stay hydrated. Drinking enough water supports overall health and may help reduce constipation, a common side effect of these medications.

• Keep moving. A family walk after Thanksgiving dinner can be an enjoyable way to stay active.

• Skip the guilt. One holiday meal does not define your long-term progress. Consistency over time matters most.

A Sustainable Path Toward Better Health

GLP-1 medications can be powerful tools for appropriate patients, but they are not a quick fix. These medications require medical guidance, and they are not suitable for everyone. At The Hormone Restoration Center we can help determine which treatment is appropriate and establish a safe, individualized plan. Call (850)837-1721 to schedule a consultation.

As Thanksgiving approaches, remember that health is about more than the number on the scale. It is about building sustainable habits, improving well-being, and enjoying meaningful moments with loved ones. With the right medical support and realistic expectations, GLP-1 treatment may help eligible individuals move toward a healthier future—during the holidays and throughout the year.

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Wellness

Little Black Dress Party Returns in 2027 with "Velvet & Vogue" Theme

The Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation is pleased to announce its annual signature event, The Little Black Dress Party, will return on Saturday, February 20, 2027, with an elevated new theme, Velvet & Vogue.

Taking place at Hotel Effie, the premier fundraising event will bring together an evening of style, sophistication, and philanthropy in support of the foundation's mission to improve access to mental health and wellness resources throughout the community.

Serving as honorary chairs for the 2027 Little Black Dress Party, Trey Abshier, CEO of Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, and his wife, Brandy, will serve as the official event ambassadors, helping champion the Foundation's mission. As ambassadors for the Foundation's premier fundraising event, the Abshiers will welcome guests, share their connection to the cause, and help build support through community outreach, sponsorships, and fundraising initiatives.

Inspired by rich textures, bold glamour, and timeless sophistication, Velvet & Vogue will invite guests to slip into their favorite little black dress for a formal evening featuring a seated multi-course dinner, live music, cocktails, and dancing, as well as a silent and live auction showcasing art, trips, and experiences. Guests can look forward to a memorable night that pairs the glamour of a fashion-inspired affair with a meaningful purpose.

"The primary way we raise funds is through our signature event, The Little Black Dress Party," said Mark Dutram, chairman of the Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation board. "This is more than just a fundraiser; it's a celebration of community and compassion. The proceeds directly benefit health initiatives across our region, and thanks to the generosity and beautiful hearts of our community, we've been able to expand our reach year after year."

Proceeds from the event will support the Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation and its efforts to expand access to essential mental health and wellness resources, helping strengthen individuals, families, and the broader community.

Various sponsorship opportunities and tables are available for businesses or individuals looking to get involved. The Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation would like to thank the local businesses already signed up to sponsor this year's event, including BayView Private Wealth, Eglin Federal Credit Union, and Glo-

LITTLE BLACK DRESS

continued to page 40

Why I Go to Yoga



By Michael McManus, LCSW
Psychotherapist

For ten years, my wife invited me to yoga. For ten years, I had a reason not to go. I was too busy, too stiff, too set in my ways. About two years ago I finally said yes. These days I rarely miss.

As a psychotherapist, I've spent decades helping people slow down and pay attention to what is happening inside them. It took me a while to realize I could also benefit from this slowing down and getting more centered and grounded. The first thing yoga gave me was a better morning. I walk in with whatever I'm carrying: a restless night, a full calendar, a worry I can't put down. An hour later I walk out lighter, centered, and grounded with a clarity that lasts almost all day. My schedule is the same, but I'm not. Yoga doesn't just fill an hour. It sets the course of my whole day. Then there is the stretching. At my advanced age, my body has opinions, and yoga has taught me to listen to them instead of arguing. Muscles that were tight for years have loosened up. I move more easily getting out of the car, working in the yard and picking up my granddaughter.

The research backs up what I feel. Regular yoga improves flexibility, balance and strength. The breathing may be the most valuable part. We take something like 20,000 breaths a day and notice almost none of them. In yoga, every breath is on purpose. Slow, deep breathing calms the nervous system, eases stress and quiets the mind's constant chatter. I teach breathing techniques to my clients, and practicing them in a room full of people has given me even more respect for how simple and powerful they are.



What surprised me most was the community. I expected to feel like the awkward new guy in the back row. Instead, I found people of every age and ability who were welcoming, encouraging and quick to offer a kind word or a laugh. Nobody is competing. Everyone is just showing up for themselves, and somehow that makes it easier to show up for each other.

Carl Jung believed body and soul were never really separate. Yoga is where I've felt that most plainly. When the body relaxes, the mind follows, and something deeper gets room to breathe.

So why do I go? Because I leave feeling better than when I arrived, every single time. I finally listened to my wife Angela. She was right all along, and I'm happy to admit it in print. If you've been putting it off, take it from a reformed skeptic. Unroll a mat. You may be glad you did.

Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida where he lives with his wife of 42 years, Angela. He can be reached by text or phone at (850) 837-0123 to discuss setting up an appointment or through his website psychotherapy30A.com.



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Wellness

What Is Negative Sentiment Override?

Signs and Solutions for Couples



By Jamie C. Williamson, PhD

Brian and Jen should be happy together, but they aren't.

Brian and Jen both worked, raised two active boys, and still built a friendship in which they felt truly known by each other. This type of strong friendship is linked to a long-lasting relationship and helps sustain passion and romance over time.

Yet, when I asked them to create a list of 10 things they liked about each other, they couldn't do it. They couldn't even start.

So, I did a deep dive and found they are plagued with Negative Sentiment Override (NSO). They feel negative about each other and expect criticism or put-downs, no matter what the other says or does.

This NSO conceals their true positive feelings about one another. They hear or see negativity in whatever the other says or does, even when the other says something neutral or positive. NSO clouds their judgment and makes them more likely to detect negativity that isn't intended. And, more likely to react negatively as well.

How Does Negative Sentiment Override Develop?

Brian and Jen didn't develop Negative Sentiment Override overnight. They entered the empty nest phase, optimistic about their lives together and set high expectations for their marriage. They routinely displayed compassion for each other, which strengthened their friendship and created a happy home characterized by "positive sentiment override".

In contrast to how they are now, Brian and Jen once saw the other's negativity as evidence that the other was stressed or not themselves. They noticed negativity but didn't overreact or take it personally. Their positive feelings were strong enough to override the negative things the other might do.

But then both of them gradually focused more on work, taking on responsibilities that interfered with their daily routines, couple time, and social life. They became frustrated and started to blame the other for little things, then for everything.

They struggle with how to express their hurts and disappointments and often begin a conflict by blaming, criticizing, or degrading the other's character. These Harsh Start-Ups set off a spiral of negativity that they neglected to address. And now they are engulfed in Negative Sentiment Override.

To regain their happy marriage, Brian and Jen must reverse their Negative Sentiment Override by restoring their fondness and admiration for each other. Then, to prevent the recurrence of this negative state, they must learn to recognize and curtail the negative behaviors that lead to it.

Early, Subtle Signs of Negativity

Some early habits that can lead to NSO are subtle and go unnoticed until they lead to more intense negativity.

An eventual state of NSO often starts with both partners regularly turning away from the other when the other tries to connect. Then they gradually become less likely to compromise during a disagreement.

They start rejecting each other's attempts to repair negativity. If they do accept each other's repair attempts, it may only be to "keep the peace" or "make it stop." So, they do not actually resolve the issues and end up having the same arguments repeatedly.

Left unchecked, these patterns often escalate.

More Intense Negative Spirals and NSO

Negative Sentiment Override produces disagreements that routinely begin with Harsh Start Ups, including criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. These are called the Four Horsemen, and they are all indicators of relationship distress.

Criticism is blaming a relationship problem on personality flaws in your partner.

Contempt combines criticism of your partner with descriptions of your own superiority and disgust with your partner.

Defensiveness is responding to your partner's criticism or contempt by either denying any responsibility for the problem, acting like an innocent victim, or counterattacking them while ignoring their complaints.

Stonewalling involves shutting down completely and refusing to offer any verbal or non-verbal response to your partner's statements.

These harsh conflict reactions often lead to "flooding" – a high level of arousal producing a fight or flight response that can manifest as individual "blow ups," screaming matches, or a person fleeing the situation.

Bottom Line: Even happy couples occasionally have screaming arguments. But, if this happens too often, learn to recognize the subtle signs and negative spirals that lead to it. If allowed to become routine, these patterns initiate Negative Sentiment Override. For your relationship to stay healthy, these conflict patterns must change.

Let me know if I can help.

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

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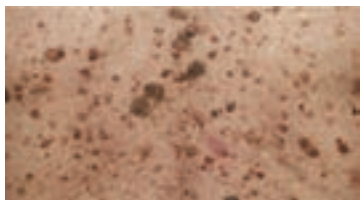
What is Growing on Me?
Common Growths Seen in Dermatology

By Bridget Sullivan, PA-C, Coastal Skin Surgery and Dermatology PCB

There are many growths on our skin with varied sizes, shapes, and colors. My hope for this article is to enlighten you on some of the common growths that many patients ask about in the clinic. I have included pictures of these growths along with a brief description and explanation as to why they appear on the skin. All lesions discussed below are benign, meaning they are non-cancerous. It is important to note that this article is not a substitute for getting a skin cancer screening. Many cancerous lesions can look like these lesions, and it is important to get a dermatology provider to examine your skin for skin cancer prevention and early detection.

1) Seborrheic Keratosis

These benign growths are often described as velvety or waxy "stuck on" growths that can appear on almost any part of the body. They come in varied sizes and shapes. They can appear black, brown, and skin colored. It is not completely understood why they appear, but aging and genetics are considered to be contributing factors.



2) Milia

These are small, firm white bumps underneath the skin that are filled with dead skin cells (keratin). You can think of milia as a tiny cyst. Some causes of milia include occlusive skin care, skin type, lack of exfoliation, and sun damage. They can appear anywhere on the body but are commonly seen on the face.



3) Solar Lentigo

A solar lentigo, or lentigines are flat, well-defined brown pigmented spots on the skin caused by an increased number of pigment-producing cells (melanocytes) and/or increased melanin production. These are also known as sunspots caused by cumulative UV exposure. These lesions are common on the face, hands, chest, and arms.



4) Skin Tags

Skin tags are small, soft flesh-colored growths. They are commonly seen in sites of friction, including the neck, armpits, groin, and skin folds. Some factors that can contribute to the development of skin tags include friction, genetics, obesity, and hormonal changes. Please do not try to remove these at home.



5) Cherry Angiomas

These are small, bright red or purple growths that are filled with many small blood vessels. They are quite common and can appear anywhere on the body. The causes of these red bumps include genetics, aging, and hormonal changes.



Many common skin growths do not require treatment. However, if you notice any bump or growth that is changing, itching, bleeding, painful, and not healing, it is important to get these lesions evaluated, as these could be signs of skin cancer. It is important to get a skin cancer screening at least once a year for prevention and early detection of skin cancer.

I hope this article gave clarity and insight into common growths seen growing on the skin. Avoid self-diagnosing any growth or lesions you may have on your skin.

As always, please reach out to your dermatology provider with any questions or concerns regarding your skin health.



Musing

When the Cheering Stops



By Kirk McCarley

At every level, the notion of amateur athletics has changed over the past several decades.

Back in the "day," as elementary age kids, weekends and free time were taken up with loosely structured and organized ballgames either in sandlots or lightly trafficked streets. Now, there are carefully planned and orchestrated activities requiring substantial investment in many cases. My daughter, for instance, has registered her two oldest kids for soccer. After investing in shin guards, socks, and jerseys the family budget has already been set back a few hundred dollars.

Soon, depending upon natural talents and personal development, opportunity may present itself for more advanced competition. With that the intensity of practices will escalate in preparation for perhaps travel to play "the best." The financial investment will only increase, maybe exponentially.

The stakes can further step to the next level once a kid lands in high school. Active recruiting has become part of the "game," offering those gifted scholarship opportunities. It is not that uncommon for the most talented to be lured to sports-focused institutions such as an IMG Academy, where annual tuition can range between $75-$100 thousand, not to mention the kid dispatched to "board" in a location that may be far from home.

The investment might pay dividends in an era of NIL: Name, Image, Likeness. An athlete becomes a commodity for colleges, advertisers, and corporations. The average price for an elite quarterback at a prominent college football program can range between $1-3 million according to ESPN. Former Duke quarterback Darian Mensah, now at Miami (FL) landed an unprecedented (deal) estimated to be in the range of $8 million.

These examples, such as Mensah, have obviously many times over paid for the investment in their athletic upbringings.

The reality of these seemingly exorbitant price tags is much different for the more "ordinary" individual athlete, less than 2% of whom will eventually play professionally. In fact, the mathematical average of NIL deals runs between $2600 and $5500 as massive, multi-million-dollar agreements skew the numbers. Further the true median value per NIL opportunity actually runs between $60 and $62, meaning many individual deals are worth the price of a nice meal out.

The majority who will not play professionally will hopefully become the benefactors of a scholarship-funded quality education, but then settle in to the pursuit of "life" like the rest of us. More difficult, compared again to most of us is the adjustment to be made when the endorsements cease to exist and the glamour, gleaming lights, and raucous crowds diminish. The labels of "former," "has been," or "the past" can be disheartening to someone quite young only still in their early 20's.

Some who never leave their playing fields will struggle with life in search of those glory days. Others, who are successful in transition, will apply the dedication, discipline, and competitive spirit to other endeavors. A team captain applies similar philosophies to the way they lead others in business realizing that there are numerous ways to motivate. A former baseball relief pitcher who toed the rubber with the bases loaded in the ninth inning is up to the pressure of making a good presentation when vast sums of money may rest on closing the deal. Likewise, a skilled surgeon has a steady hand of confidence when in the past they held the basketball with a second left on the clock and their team two points behind.

Those of us who played competitive sports embrace the lessons we learned from our sports coaches. The fact is there is not a one of us who still cannot benefit from a coach to challenge and encourage us to become a better version of ourselves. Regardless of your transition, be it from competitive to recreational athlete, from the glitz of NIL riches to needing to determine a career path or merely feeling stuck and facing roadblocks and wanting to find new direction, contracting with a life, career, or executive coach can free you from frustration and obstacles.

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Musing

Sean of the South: The Chalkboard



By Sean Dietrich

We have this place in our kitchen. It's a wall. It used to be a door, some 102 years ago, when the house was built.

There used to be stairs outside this kitchen door, leading to the backyard. But the doorway has been sealed off. Now it's just a big blank space in our kitchen.

The wall is painted with black chalkboard paint. So it's basically a big blackboard, just like the kind you once used for working out algebra problems in front of your whole class.

We write things on this board. My wife and I. The writings always change.

Usually you walk into the kitchen, and you'll just happen to notice that someone has erased the old writing, and added something new.

My wife writes messages like, "Welcome home, you've been on the road for two weeks, we missed you!"

"The dogs say 'We 'ruff' you, Daddy.'"

"Happy birthday, Sean. I cannot imagine my life without you."

Little messages. Little words. Small words. But words carry power. Words are not lightweight.

In the mornings, as I make the coffee, standing in the kitchen with a bad case of bedhead, I stare at this chalkboard. And sometimes, in my half-waking state, I get lost in the chalkboard text. Gazing into the black-and-whiteness of it all.

During the Thanksgiving season, my wife writes messages to—well—to God, I guess. She writes things she is thankful for.

And as the coffee percolates, I shuffle over to the chalkboard for deeper inspection. Then, I and add my contribution to the lot.

The dogs see me squatting, writing with a small piece of chalk. Squatting, of course, puts me closer to their eye level. So, because I am hunching low, my dogs naturally assume I must have ham.

And they attack me.

Soon, I have lost my balance. I am now on the floor. Flat on my butt. With three dogs swarming, trying to muzzle their way past the other, as if to say, "He's mine!" "No, no! He's mine!" "Get out of the way, everyone knows he's mine!"

Tails wagging. Butts wagging. Lots of panting. Lots of licking.

All three of them are pressing their surgically cold noses on my bare skin. Each dog, wholly un-

THE CHALKBOARD

continued to page 36



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Musing

Christian Capitalist Lori Miller: Led by Purpose



By Rich Sanders

As a publisher and executive editor at Life Media Group, Lori Leath Miller is in a unique position to spread the Good News to over 80,000 people every month throughout the Emerald Coast. The company's slogan, "Locals Get It," has a double meaning: it is delivered free of charge to homes and businesses from Panama City Beach to Fort Walton Beach and north of the Bay from Eglin Air Force Base to Freeport, and it includes news and notes about our communities that help bring its residents closer together.

It is also a terrific instrument, as founder Dave White likes to say, for "spreading salt." As Lori and I joked on her appearance on the Christian Capitalist podcast last month, it is one of the few newspapers in the nation that features Easter and Christmas as front-page news!

After beginning her career at Southern Living magazine and other titles at Time Inc., Lori brought an innovative spirit to her next chapter. As a young mother, she wanted to continue working while spending time with her young children. So, she started her own at-home marketing business. Talk about a self-starter: she made it work before email, cell phones and the internet!

Like so many other locals, Lori moved here 20 years ago from Alabama, because she sought the beautiful weather and beaches and a fresh start. With marketing positions for two different large organizations here on the Emerald Coast, she quickly became an integral part of the business community.

Today, Lori is a devout woman of faith and is led by purpose in her work at Life Media. While Lori thought about ordained ministry at one point in her life, she ultimately determined that God called her to work in marketing, communications and public relations, and later, coming full circle, in publishing media, to serve His purpose. She realized that a layperson can have a ministry



in business. "Personally and professionally, I feel like I'm a marketplace minister. In that respect, working hard in what you do, being excellent at what you do professionally, and then allowing God to infiltrate that, put the spiritual aspect to it, is helping people."

A key part of her role as publisher is supporting the hundreds of nonprofit organizations on the Emerald Coast. Through prayer, she seeks God's guidance on which organizations and events to highlight each month, helping readers in Life Media's eight communities discover where they can make a difference. "We feel like we're one of the best avenues for [nonprofits] to get the word out about that because we're going to do it more in depth." She is thankful for the advertisers who support each publication, praying regularly that their businesses thrive and their advertising generates a strong response, as well as seeking direction on the topics and articles to include in each issue.

Lori embraces her role as a Christian Capitalist and encourages others to look at their spiritual and business lives as integrated. "You can bring [your faith] into your business relationships, your dealings, your workplace, whether it's your employees or clients.… God can use you right where you are!"

Lori 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 people like Lori Miller, whose hard work and generous giving help the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ!

THE CHALKBOARD

continued from page 35

ashamed, devoid of ego. Fully vulnerable. Unconditionally honest with themselves, and with each other, in all regards. They are expressive, effusive, and rhapsodic with their demonstration of love. They love others like they've never been hurt.

And when I am thoroughly covered in dog saliva, which contains 98 percent water, a variation of proteins, enzymes, and other compounds, such as lysozyme and immunoglobulins, which aid digestion and have potent antimicrobial properties, I start to laugh privately.

I'm still looking at the chalkboard. I'm still holding the piece of chalk in my hands. And I'm thinking about my life. About my people. About my little family.

I'm looking at the white hairs on the snouts of my dogs, and remembering when they were mere puppies, cradled in my ams.

I'm thinking of how many generations this 102-year-old house has seen—how many Thanksgivings, Christmases, birthdays, and how many funerals.

I'm thinking about how friends become our truest family. About how nothing in this world lasts forever except memories. About how thankful I am. About how my life has been guided by an unseen hand, steering me from self-destruction, guiding me toward real love.

But mostly, I'm thinking about how it all went by so fast.

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.







Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: Thankful



By Rev. Pete Hyde

He stands in the door of the grocery store looking down at a two-column list on a piece of rumpled notebook paper. He sighs, shrugs his shoulders and moves out of the entrance door to try to figure out how he is going to tackle the task without having to back-track through the store. He has put his list, the best he can, in order of how the store is laid out from right to left. He tries to convince himself not to get impatient at those who do not have a plan and just wander aimlessly around the store oblivious to anyone else who needs to get their shopping done in an efficient manner. He picks up his head and sets his sights on the first section of the store that corresponds to the top of his list and off he goes. Dinner rolls, sandwich bread, broccoli, green beans, sweet potatoes, potatoes, lettuce, green pepper, green onions, onions. "That part was easy," he thinks to himself as his confidence builds. He turns down the canned vegetable aisle. About halfway down it is blocked by a cart and someone with no list wandering along the aisle not sure of what they want or why. He tries to be patient and waits, and waits, and waits. The owner of the cart looks at him and continues their pointless search and makes no effort to move the cart from the center of the aisle. As he reaches over to move the cart out of the way, he gets one of "THOSE" looks. "Have a nice day. I'm not anymore." he wants to say but realizes he could not say it in a way that would be courteous.

Efficiently picking items off the shelf, he smiles as his plan is coming together. The next aisle is clear, and he continues to make progress in crossing items off his list. As he turns the corner and looks down the next aisle, there it is again, the same cart in the middle of the aisle, the same joyous, confused, lost, wandering person. A quick strategy session goes on in his brain. Does he go down the aisle and wait, or does he move on to the next aisle and then have to do the dreaded "back-track?" Which would take the least amount of time? Which would cause him the least amount of frustration? Move on and backtrack was the decision. It grated on his nerves to turn around and retrace his steps, knowing he would have to come back to this aisle when he was done. The joy of marking things off his list was now clouded by the fact that he would have to return to that aisle. He was beginning to get his act back together when he turned down the soft drink aisle and there they were again!! "Just skip this aisle too if you are going to have to go back anyway."

After taking longer than he had planned, his list was all crossed off and he headed to the checkout - only the express lane and two other lanes open. Quickly, he heads to the shortest line. There it is again. The cart was blocking the lane. The owner was buried in their phone. "Inquiring minds want to know why you are not paying attention!!!" he almost thinks out loud. "The person in front of you is almost done, the conveyor belt is empty," racing through his mind. While tapping his foot impatiently, just loud enough for everyone to hear, he waits. The person finally notices that it is their turn, looks up from their phone and looks up at the impatient man and says, "Looks like you are going to have a great Thanksgiving meal. May God bless you and be thankful."

When he got home and unloaded the groceries, he discovered he had forgotten three critical items on the list. They were on the blocked aisles. He climbs back in the car and heads back to the store, short list in hand, made out in order of the store floor plan. He waits impatiently for someone to back out of the front parking spot so he can just run in. He pulls in the spot and sits for a minute. He takes a deep breath. "This can't be what Thanksgiving is all about!"

The busyness, the meals, the stress, the frustration of having to have everything "just so," the worry about who is coming and who is not, is not what Thanksgiving is all about. It's about being THANKFUL in all things NO MATTER WHAT!!

My prayer for each of you is that you stop sometime each day and offer thanks for all things, even if they are not pleasant. God is in each event, each moment, each situation, each visit, each meal, each trip the grocery store. Who cares if you forgot the turkey and had to go back to the store only to find out they didn't have the size you wanted.

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





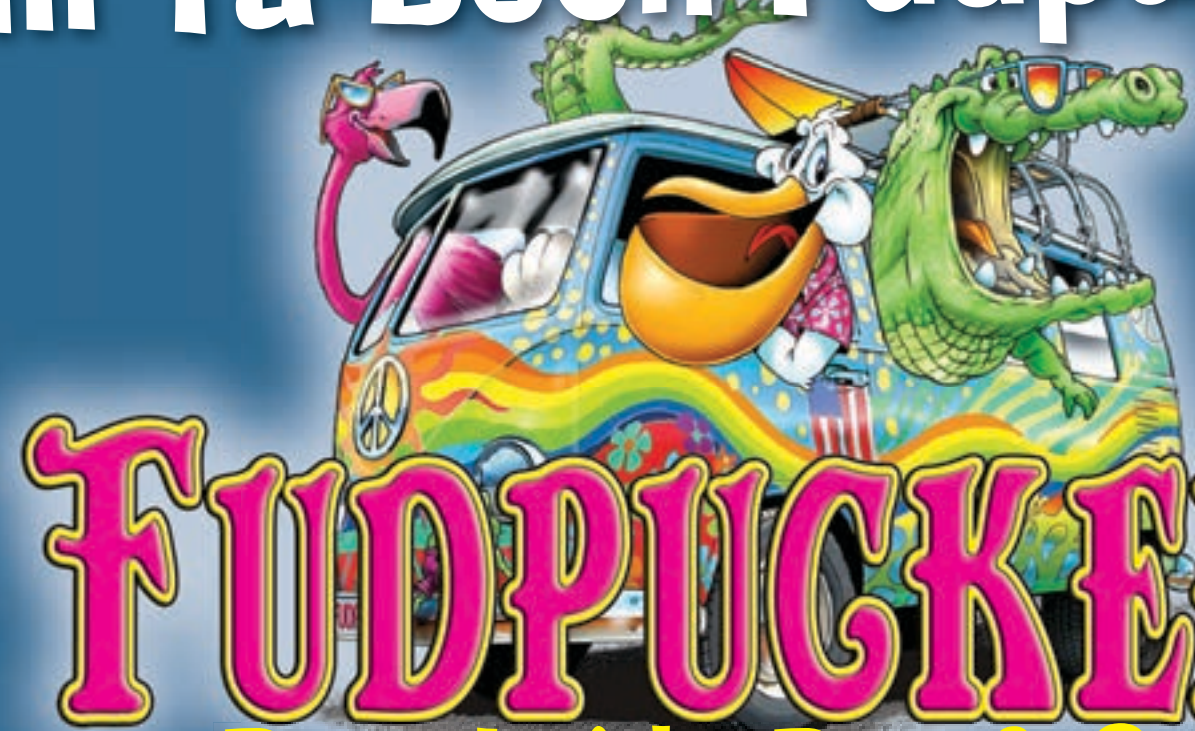




Dining

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Dining

Dinner, a Show and a Little Elton John Magic at Old Florida Fish House



By Lori Miller

I've experienced this dinner and show at Old Florida Fish House, and let me tell you—it is an awesome night out! Amazing food, the music of Elton John and an evening that makes you want to sing along…what more could you ask for?

Still Standing: A Tribute to Elton John takes the restaurant's main stage Dec. 6, and the performance runs from 6:30 to 9 p.m. If you're looking for a fun date night or an excuse to get your friends together, this is it!

My recommendation? Make it the full dinner-and-show experience. Dinner ticket holders receive preferred seating closer to the stage and should arrive at 5 p.m. Start with Gulf Coast she-crab soup or a red romaine Caesar salad, then choose from three delicious-sounding entrées: prawn risotto with roasted acorn squash, fava beans and citrus beurre blanc; herb-and-garlic-roasted tri-tip with dauphinoise potatoes and pink peppercorn cognac cream; or chicken Florentine with creamy Pernod spinach, saffron capellini and balsamic-glazed asparagus. And save room for dessert—Key lime pie and a black-and-white petit four! The menu is subject to change.

Coming for the show only? Plan to arrive between 6 and 6:30 p.m. If you'd like to enjoy dinner from the restaurant's regular menu first, reserve a table between 4:30 and 5 p.m. so you have plenty of time before the music starts. Dining reservations are available through Resy.

I had such an amazing time, and I'm excited for you to experience it, too! Tickets are limited and nonrefundable, so visit oldfloridafishhouse.com to get yours before they're gone. You'll also find schedules for other upcoming events and more information—all in one place!

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21 SEC Football Watch Party
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5 Breakfast with Santa Buffet
6 Still Standing: Elton John Tribute Show
12 Breakfast with Santa Buffet
19 Christmas Family Show
24 Christmas Eve Dinner
25 Christmas Day Dinner
31 NYE Dinner and Party

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Visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com
for schedules, tickets and more information

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Music

South Walton Live Music Scene November 2026

Sounds of Seaside Wednesday Night Concert Series

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

November 18: Roman Street
November 25: Boukou Groove
December 2: Roman Street
December 9: Max McCann

Watersound First Friday Concert Series Dec. 4

The First Friday Concert Series returns to The Pavilion at Watersound Town Center monthly through December with live music 6-8 p.m. Join for free, family-friendly evenings of music, community and fun.

Dec. 4: Michelle Malone & The Hot Toddies





Sinfonia Gulf Coast Holiday Pops Dec. 10

Celebrate the season with a festive evening of Broadway magic! The Broadway Boys join Sinfonia Gulf Coast for a high-energy Holiday Pops concert at 7:30 p.m. at Destin-FWB Convention Center. Expect soaring vocals, dazzling harmonies, heartwarming holiday classics, and behind-the-scenes stories from the Great White Way in a joyful celebration perfect for the entire family. Visit sinfoniagulfcoast.org for tickets.

Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

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

AJ's Grayton Sunday Brunch and Live Music

AJ's is the place to be to celebrate all things Sunday Funday in Grayton Beach! Come for brunch, stay for the music and dancing. AJ's brunch with bottomless Mimosas from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. is not to be missed. Or, go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar. The talented Christon Birge Duo plays live music at noon. Then enjoy The Pickled Pickers 5-8 p.m. Check ajsgrayton.com for live music throughout the week.

Karaoke Night @ AJ's Grayton Beach Thursdays

Join in the fun on Karaoke Night starting at 9 p.m. every Thursday!

Open Mic Night @ North Beach Social Mondays

Spend the afternoon or evening with friends and family on the bayside and enjoy open mic night 6-9 p.m.

LITTLE BLACK DRESS

continued from page 31

haus Aesthetics. To learn more about the event and available sponsorship opportunities visit https://www.ec-cwf.org.

About Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation (ECCWF) is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of individuals and families across Northwest Florida. Through strategic partnerships, community initiatives, education, and grantmaking, the Foundation supports programs that address critical health needs, expand access to care, and promote healthier communities. By investing in local organizations and collaborative solutions, ECCWF works to create lasting, positive change for the communities it serves. To learn more, visit www.ec-cwf.org.

Music

Growing Through Music:
The Benefits of Music for Infants and Toddlers



Music is one of the earliest and most joyful ways children experience the world. Long before babies speak their first words, they hear voices, recognize familiar melodies, and respond to rhythm. As they grow into toddlers, music becomes an exciting way to explore movement, language, emotions, and creativity. Parents do not need musical training or expensive instruments to introduce music into a child's life. With a little imagination and a few simple activities, families can make music a meaningful part of every day.

Building Brains Through Music

During the first few years of life, children's brains develop rapidly. Listening to music and participating in musical activities encourage children to pay attention to sounds, recognize patterns, and exercise their memory. Repeated melodies and rhythms help young children anticipate what comes next, building early listening and learning skills.

You can sing the same simple songs during daily routines. Try singing a good-morning song after waking up or a cleanup song before putting toys away. Repetition helps children become familiar with musical patterns and gives them something enjoyable to look forward to.

Encouraging Speech and Language

Nursery rhymes and children's songs expose little ones to new words, rhyming sounds, and repeated phrases. Babies may coo or babble in response to singing, while toddlers often begin filling in familiar words or singing short phrases.

Try singing songs such as Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, The Itsy Bitsy Spider, or Old MacDonald Had a Farm. Pause before a familiar word to give your toddler an opportunity to finish the phrase. Read nursery rhymes aloud, clap to their rhythm, and encourage your child to imitate fun animal sounds.

Supporting Emotional Development

A familiar lullaby may help a baby settle down, while an upbeat tune can encourage a toddler to smile, move, and release energy. Singing together also gives parents and children opportunities to share affection and enjoy focused time together.

Create a calming bedtime routine with soft singing and gentle rocking. During the day, play cheerful music for a spontaneous dance party. Notice how your child responds to different musical moods, try using quiet songs when your little one needs help settling.

Developing Movement and Coordination

Music encourages babies and toddler to reach, clap, sway, bounce, and dance. These activities support motor development, balance, and body awareness while making movement fun.

Give your baby a gentle opportunity to move arms and legs while you sing. With toddlers, play freeze dance, march around the room, or clap along with a steady beat. Offer safe, lightweight scarves for waving and dancing together.

Let toddlers tap a wooden spoon on a sturdy pot while supervised. Sing together, experiment with loud and soft sounds, and take turns making musical patterns. Keep music at a comfortable volume to protect sensitive young ears.

Making Music a Family Tradition

Music does not need to be formal to be meaningful. Singing while driving, dancing in the kitchen, or making up silly songs about getting dressed can turn ordinary moments into special memories.

By introducing music early at home, parents help children explore sound, develop important skills, and strengthen family bonds. The greatest gift is the joy of sharing music together.

Studio 237 Music Lessons located at 237 Dawson Rd, Santa Rosa Beach, FL teaches adults and children ages 6 and up. Our staff teaches: piano, voice, guitar (bass, electric, acoustic), ukulele, drums, shofar, and more… Call the Studio at (850) 231-3199 to schedule a visit of the studio, and check out our website www.Studio237Music.com.

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Music

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Youth Orchestras To Hold Spring 2027 Auditions Dec. 5

Young musicians in grades 8-12 invited to audition for the Emerald Coast's premier youth training orchestra

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Youth Orchestras (SYO) invites aspiring young musicians to take their talents to the next level with auditions for the spring 2027 semester. Auditions will be held Saturday, Dec. 5, at Destin High School and are open to woodwind, brass, percussion and string instrumentalists in grades eight through 12.

As part of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission focus on music education, the Sinfonia Youth Orchestras program provides young musicians throughout Northwest Florida with exceptional musical training, performance opportunities and meaningful connections with fellow students and professional artists.

Under the direction of Dr. Thomas Roggio, Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Director of Education and Community Engagement, the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra serves advanced middle and high school musicians performing at an All-State level. The program also offers Sinfonietta Strings, a beginning string orchestra for students with at least one year of playing experience.

"SYO provides students a unique opportunity to refine their musical skills, foster a love of music making, and form a strong sense of community," Roggio says. "Our goal is to develop life skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, discipline and creativity, through the art of music."

Through professional instruction, ensemble rehearsals and community performances, students gain valuable experience in a supportive environment that encourages both musical excellence and personal growth.





The repertoire ranges from classical masterworks to popular favorites, including memorable music from films such as The Lord of the Rings and How to Train Your Dragon. Students also have opportunities to work alongside Sinfonia Gulf Coast's visiting guest artists and professional musicians, gaining firsthand insight into the artistry and discipline of orchestral performance.

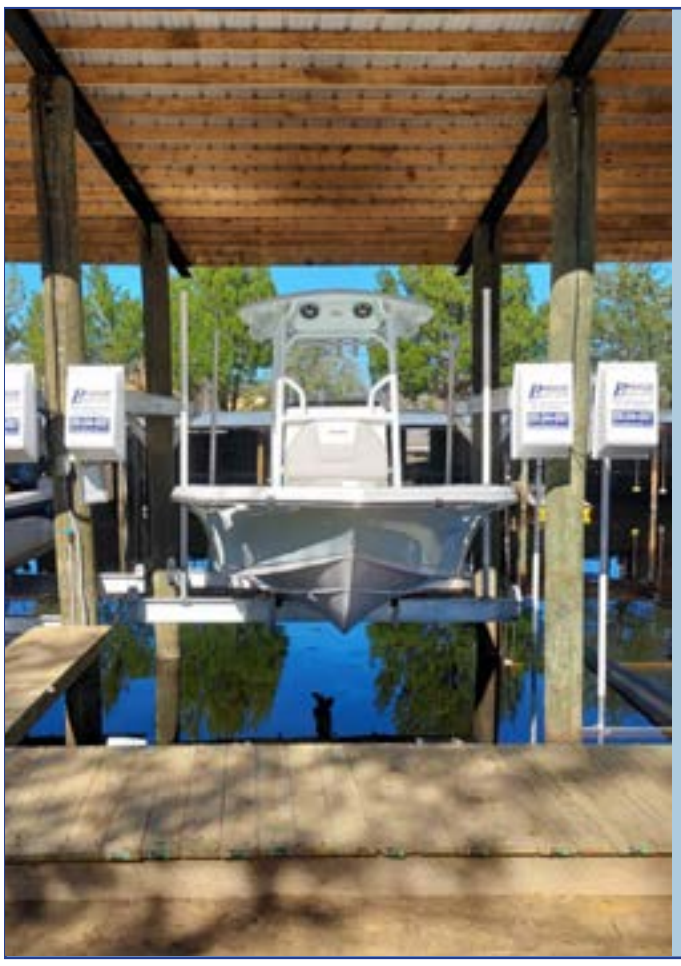
Beyond the music, SYO offers opportunities for friendship, mentorship and community engagement. High school students may earn Bright Futures volunteer hours through participation in eligible Sinfonia Gulf Coast and SYO events. Members also receive complimentary tickets to Sinfonia Gulf Coast's main season performances.

Graduating seniors are eligible to apply for the Grace Fulcher Memorial Scholarship or the Elizabeth Campbell Memorial Scholarship, further supporting their educational and musical aspirations.

SYO tuition is $210 per student per semester, with need-based scholarships available to help make participation accessible to families throughout the region.

"Music education is at the heart of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission," says Demetrius Fuller, Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director. "Through our youth orchestras, we are nurturing the next generation of musicians while helping students build confidence, creativity and skills that will serve them throughout their lives."

Students interested in auditioning for the spring 2027 semester should contact Dr. Thomas Roggio at troggio@sinfoniagulfcoast.org to schedule an audition.



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Music

Midnight Mixtape Brings the Soundtrack of a Generation to a Venue Near You



By Will Estell

If you've ever found yourself smiling from ear to ear when the opening notes of a favorite anthem blast through the speakers, you're definitely not alone. That feeling of instant nostalgia is exactly what Northwest Florida's hottest new band on the block, Midnight Mixtape, has built its reputation on — delivering energetic performances that transport audiences back to some of music's most memorable eras.

Midnight Mixtape has quickly become one of the area's most entertaining live acts, combining exceptional local musicianship, polished vocals and an electric stage presence that transforms every performance into a sing-along. Rather than simply covering familiar songs, this band recreates the feel, emotion, excitement and energy that made these tracks part of the soundtrack of our youth and young adulthood. These guys and girls aren't simply performing songs — they're playing memories.

For its most recent experiment in music history, the band has shifted to "Y2K Rewind: The Ultimate Early 2000s Live Experience," featuring an impressive collection of hits spanning rock, pop, alternative and dance music from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Think Avril Lavigne, Blink-182, Concrete Blonde, Britney, Evanescence and many more artists whose music defined an entire generation. Whether you grew up burning cheap CDs for friends or loading your first iPod with these bangers, Midnight Mixtape delivers the sounds and shows that instantly reconnect us with those unforgettable moments.

As band co-founder Dan Collins told me, "The concept behind our Midnight Mixtape shows is essentially to pick an era and build an entire show around it. A Midnight Mixtape show isn't simply an array of cover songs; it's an event." Collins added, "We play different themes and learn full new sets for each new theme. Keeping the performance more organic and unplugged, with acoustic guitars, simple hand percussion, the addition of violin playing many of the lead guitar parts, along with keys and multipart harmonies gives the shows a more intimate and up-close vibe."

Collins says he and his fellow band members believe this concept is why, to date, all of their limited-run shows have sold out at every venue where they have performed across Northwest Florida.

Dan Collins, whose lead vocals and guitar anchor each performance with confidence and charisma, has become well known throughout Northwest Florida as the frontman and founder of Black Eyed Blonde, as well as for producing unique live entertainment events that go beyond the typical cover band performance. He also built his reputation during his time playing with Naked Gunmen and Miss Demeanor.

Sharing center stage is Dan's equally talented wife, Becca (also of Black Eyed Blonde), whose dynamic lead vocals add both power and versatility to the band's sound. Her ability to move effortlessly between emotional ballads and high-energy rock anthems gives Midnight Mixtape an impressive vocal range that keeps audiences engaged from the first song to the final encore.

The ensemble also includes Sarah Mangum on vocals and keys, adding rich harmonies and melodic depth. Jess Murphy (formerly of Continuum), with her always impressive violin arrangements, gives familiar favorites an unexpected twist, adding a sound and a brand of showmanship that any band would envy. Stacy Clearman delivers strong vocals and percussion that enhance the band's layered sound and infectious rhythm. Together, Midnight Mixtape creates a polished production that feels much larger than that of just another local band.

I believe what really separates Midnight Mixtape from many other bands across our coastal communities is the way they invite the audience into the performance. A Mixtape concert becomes an interactive celebration. It's like a show that you also get to be part of — because it is your show, your memories and your music.

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Business



Is Your Community Budget Connected?

Planning Today for Tomorrow's Technology Needs

By Don Carter, Secure Vision

For many condominium and HOA boards along the Emerald Coast, November means budgets, meetings and planning for the year ahead. Landscaping, insurance, maintenance, reserves and property projects are all competing for attention—and often for the same dollars.

Internet infrastructure may not always be at the top of that list, but it deserves a seat at the table.

Residents increasingly view dependable internet as an expected community service rather than an added amenity. They use it for work, entertainment, communication, security systems and everyday tasks. Owners who rent their units also know that connectivity can influence a guest's experience just as much as other property amenities.



Budget season provides a perfect opportunity to ask a few important questions: What does our community have today? How well is it performing? And what will we need in the future?

Start by reviewing the past year. Were there repeated complaints about speed or coverage? Did the network struggle during spring break or summer when occupancy increased? Is older equipment approaching replacement? Have new common areas, security systems or smart devices been added since the network was originally designed?

Sometimes a community doesn't need an entirely new system. Strategic upgrades may address specific weaknesses and extend the useful life of existing infrastructure. The important thing is understanding what you have before deciding what you need.

Boards should also review contracts and recurring technology costs. It is easy to continue paying for services simply because "that's what we've always had." Understanding exactly what your community is receiving can uncover opportunities for better service or smarter spending.

Planning ahead gives boards choices. When connectivity becomes an emergency, decisions are often made quickly. When it is part of the annual planning process, there is time to evaluate options, ask questions and determine what makes sense for that particular property.

At Secure Vision, we work with condominium and HOA communities throughout Northwest Florida to help boards evaluate current infrastructure and plan for future connectivity needs.

As you prepare next year's budget, remember: your community's digital infrastructure is infrastructure too. A little planning today can help prevent expensive surprises tomorrow.

Our Ad & Editorial Deadline is the 20th of each month for the following month's issue.





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