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SOWAL Life

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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

THANKSGIVING
continued on page 2

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 treat-

THE VINE
continued on page 2



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Community

THE VINE

continued from page 1

ed. 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.

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.

THANKSGIVING

continued from page 1

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."

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!

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Community

Events Around the Beach

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-1WArASrELslzy9Shg5bUzKjEjcQ_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 @ 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.

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 @ 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 @ 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.

Continued on next page

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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 3

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 @ 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.



Still Standing Tribute to Elton John @ Old Florida Fish House Dec. 6

Experience the magic of Elton John's music with a live performance by Still Standing, an Elton John tribute band, on the main stage at Old Florida Fish House. Two performances dates with ticket options for dinner + show and show only. Enjoy an unforgettable evening celebrating the legendary music, iconic hits, and incredible energy of one of music's greatest performers! From Tiny Dancer and Rocket Man to Bennie and the Jets and Your Song, get ready to sing along to all your favorites!

Tickets at oldfloridafishhouse.ticketspice.com/a-tribute-to-elton-john.

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.

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

Continued on page 21

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Community

WCSD 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," one of only 18 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.

Mark your calendar:

• **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!

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.



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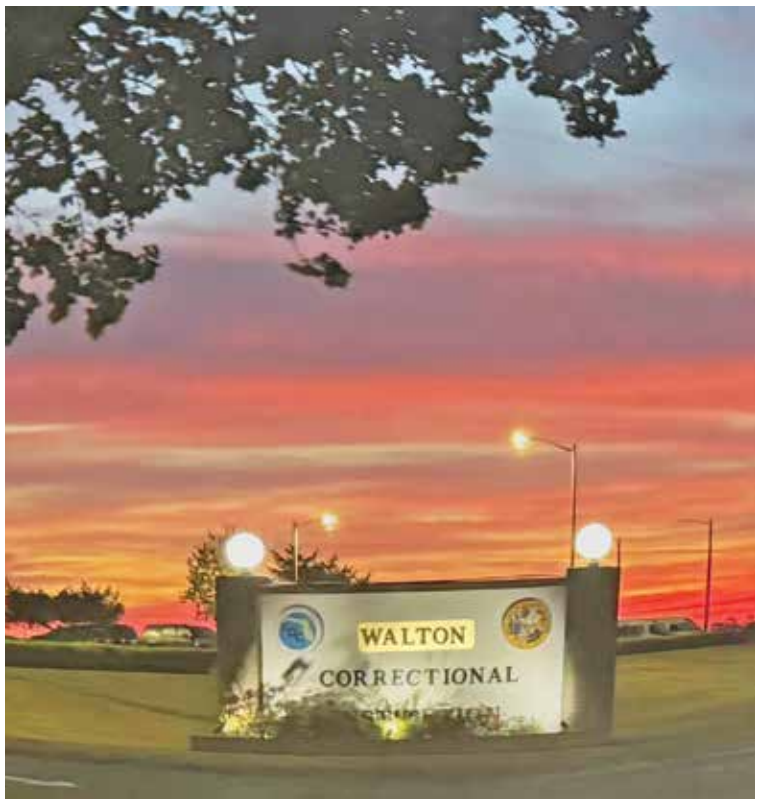
Community

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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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.



WATERSOUND FOUNTAINS
RETIREMENT LIVING

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.



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, 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. In Okaloosa County, call 850-651-7400 or visit sheriff-okaloosa.org. 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.

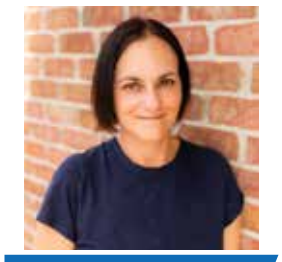
And if you see someone walking up to porches who doesn't belong there, or a car following a delivery truck through your neighborhood, call us. That isn't being nosy. That's being a good neighbor.

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.



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Community

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



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 at basinalliance.org.

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Community

Trends & Treasures!










A Little Sparkle, a Very Big Yes

Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Some holiday surprises deserve a very small box. Whether you're planning a proposal, celebrating a milestone or dropping a few well-placed hints, Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry has plenty of ways to make the moment shine.

Explore the newest engagement ring styles or have something custom designed—because a love story like yours deserves its own look. Diamonds, emeralds and other precious gemstones bring beautiful possibilities to the showroom, alongside bracelets, necklaces, earrings and rings you may find difficult to give away.

Owner Ashleigh Woolly pairs an eye for design with a passion for craftsmanship, helping customers discover pieces that feel personal, polished and made to treasure.

Perhaps your wish list includes stacked gold bands. Perhaps it's a one-of-a-kind engagement ring. Or perhaps you're simply celebrating yourself this season. There's a little-box occasion for that, too.

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

beyondmeasurejewelry.com

Your Holiday Glow-Up Is Calling

Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

The invitations are arriving, the camera rolls are waiting, and your hair would like a little holiday magic. At Pure & Couture Salon, getting celebration-ready can be half the fun.

Hand-tied extensions bring the length and volume, while fresh seasonal color gives your look a festive update. Think rich red hues, a beautiful balayage or simply a polished version of your signature style. Add a blowout or makeup appointment, and suddenly that packed social calendar looks even more inviting.

For someone who deserves a little pampering, pair a gift card with the promise of time for themselves. Styling, rejuvenating facials, lash extensions, airbrush makeup and spray tanning offer plenty of possibilities.

From weddings and photo sessions to holiday parties, there's a service for the occasion—and every reason to book ahead. Curbside pickup and online ordering make checking off your beauty gift list easy, too.

City Market Beachside| 2nd Location–Pure Collective Salon, 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

(850) 424-3935

pureandcouture.com | purecollectivesalon.com

Put Their Name on Something Fabulous

Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Anyone can grab a gift. Making it unmistakably theirs? That's where the fun begins at Frill Seekers Gifts.

Picture a stack of beautiful monogrammed notes, a necklace with a personal flourish or gift tags that make even your wrapping look wonderfully put together. From fold-over stationery to classic flat correspondence cards, these are gifts that bring a little occasion to everyday life. Thermography, letterpress and engraving add the finishing touches.

For those who prefer their initials with sparkle, explore monogrammed necklaces, bracelets and earrings, including pavé, turquoise and pearl designs. Hosting the holiday crowd? Personalized cups, napkins and favors let your party join in.

The secret to looking this thoughtful is starting early: custom creations take time. And for the delightfully hard-to-shop-for, a gift card lets them play designer. Consider it a personal touch—with the pleasure of choosing included.

City Market Bayside off Hwy. 98, Destin.

(850) 460-2700 | FrillSeekersGifts.com

Meet Your New Favorite Coffee Date

Lucky Goat Coffee Destin

Some of the best plans begin with, "Want to grab coffee?" Newly opened Lucky Goat Coffee Destin gives that invitation a delicious new destination.

Husband-and-wife team Tom and Koley Houle bring Lucky Goat's simple philosophy—make great coffee—to a welcoming community gathering spot on the Emerald Coast. Settle in with a classic espresso drink, drip coffee, single-origin roast or cold brew. Feeling adventurous? Give the fan-favorite Luckyccino a turn in your cup.

There's chai and matcha, too, plus pastries and rotating seasonal favorites for those mornings—or afternoons—that call for a little something extra.

Meet a friend, bring your work or claim a quiet moment between holiday errands. With expertly roasted coffee and warm hospitality, this café offers a tempting reason to slow down. Your to-do list can wait until after the last sip.

36150 Emerald Coast Pkwy., Ste. 107, Destin

(850) 460-9981 | luckygoatcoffee.com | Instagram: @luckygoatcitymarket

Give Your Next Chapter a Place on the Wish List

Brian K. Locicero, REALTOR® | BeOnTheCoast.com

Maybe Thanksgiving dinner has you dreaming of a bigger dining room. Perhaps decorating for Christmas reminds you that a little less house—and a little more beach—sounds lovely. Whatever your next chapter looks like, the holiday season can spark conversations about home.

Before putting those plans into motion, turn a few pages with REALTOR® Brian K. Locicero. His book shares practical selling strategies to help homeowners prepare for a successful transaction, drawing on the expertise and negotiating skills he brings to his clients.

One Destin seller shared, "Because of Brian's efforts, we quickly sold our home and purchased a 30A beachfront property below asking price."

Between family gatherings and gift wrapping, give yourself time to consider what comes next. Whether a move is on your Christmas wish list or your new-year calendar, a little preparation is a thoughtful gift to your future self.

(850) 739-3800 | BeOnTheCoast.com

Give the Pie a Little Competition

Smallcakes Destin: A Cupcakery and Creamery

Thanksgiving pie, we love you—but there's room on the dessert table for a little cupcake personality. Smallcakes Destin is bringing November plenty of sweet possibilities, from pumpkin spice to festive designs worth gathering around.

Pick up a 12-pack of assorted minis for the "just one taste" crowd, or look for limited-edition Thanksgiving-themed cupcakes and custom cakes. Tailgates, reunions, birthdays, weddings and Veterans Day gatherings all offer excellent reasons to share something delicious.

The everyday lineup is celebration-worthy, too: 13 signature cupcake flavors, four specialty flavors and 12 ice cream flavors, plus jumbo cookies, gourmet popcorn and more. Explore cookie cakes, brownies or cupcakes-in-a-jar when you feel like changing up the dessert routine.

Even your four-legged family member can join the fun with a "Pup" cake. Call ahead for pre-orders, then let someone else handle the baking. That's one holiday shortcut everyone can happily support.

Hours: Mon–Sat 11 a.m.–7 p.m., Sun 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Call ahead for pre-orders, DoorDash or curbside pickup!

(850) 842-9002 | Smallcakes-Destin.com

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VISIT **SOUTHWALTON.LIFE** TO READ THIS ISSUE ONLINE

Community

Gasworks: Bringing Comfort, Style & Craftsmanship to the Florida Panhandle





For more than 11 years, Gasworks has been proudly locally owned and operated, serving homeowners, builders, designers and businesses throughout the Florida Panhandle. What began with a commitment to quality gas services has grown into a full-service company specializing in gas lines, fireplaces, outdoor kitchens and gas lighting.

At Gasworks, we believe the right gas system is about more than function—it's about creating spaces where people gather, relax, entertain and enjoy their homes. Whether you're building a new home, renovating an existing property or adding the finishing touches to an outdoor living space, our experienced team is here to help bring your vision to life.

Our expertise covers the complete process, from gas line installation and piping to the installation of beautiful, high-quality fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, and gas lighting. By offering these services under one roof, we make it easier for our customers to create a cohesive, dependable, and beautifully finished project.

Designed for the Way You Live

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.

A fireplace can transform a room into a warm and inviting gathering place. A professionally designed outdoor kitchen can turn a patio into an extension of your home. Gas lighting can add warmth, character, and timeless appeal to outdoor spaces. Behind it all, properly installed gas piping provides the dependable foundation that makes these features possible.

We understand that every property and every customer is different. That's why we take the time to listen, understand your goals, and provide solutions tailored to your home and lifestyle. Our approach combines quality products, knowledgeable service, attention to detail and local experience.

Your Local Gas & Outdoor Living Experts

After 11 years in business, Gasworks has built its reputation one project and one customer at a time. We're proud to be part of the communities we serve and to work with the homeowners, contractors, and businesses who make the Florida Panhandle such a special place.

Visit our showroom at 3214 US Hwy 98, Suite 402 Santa Rosa Beach, to explore options, get inspired and talk with our team about your next project. Gasworksfl.com | 850-353-1316



Community

South Walton Lifeguard Selected to 2026 Lifesaving World Championship Team

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

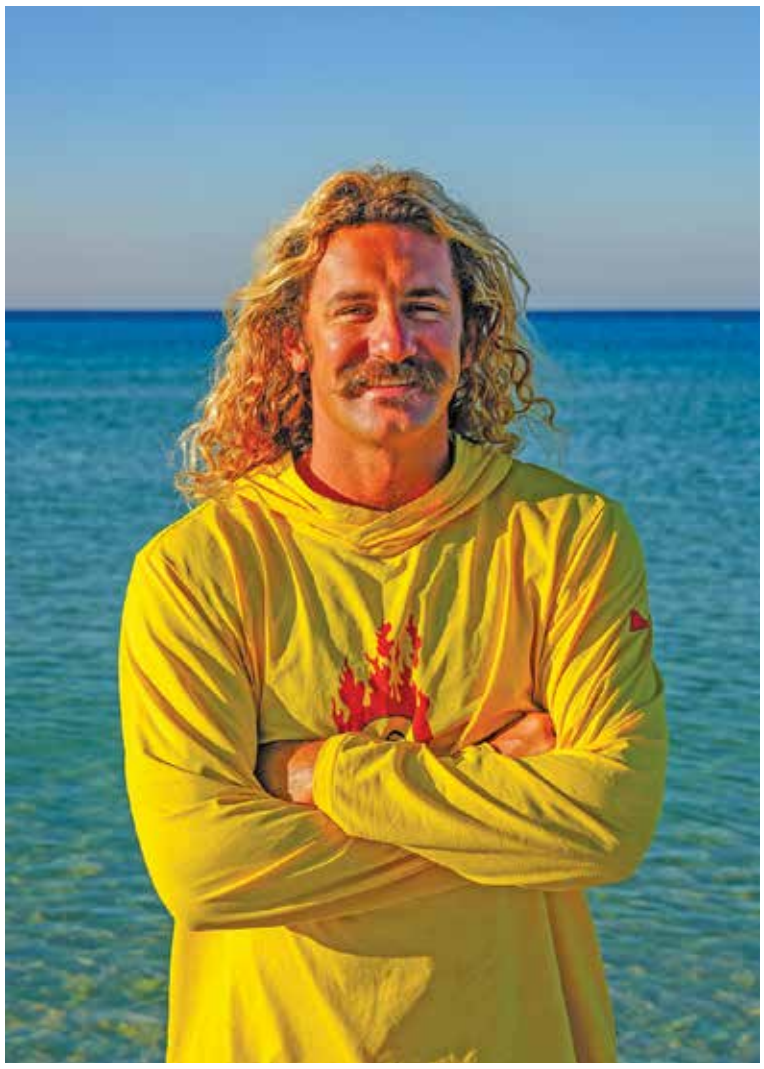
Competing on an international stage takes speed, precision, and elite athletic ability. South Walton Fire District (SWFD) lifeguard Noah Cahan has demonstrated all three, earning a selection to the 12-member US Open National Team for the 2026 Lifesaving World Championships in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

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.

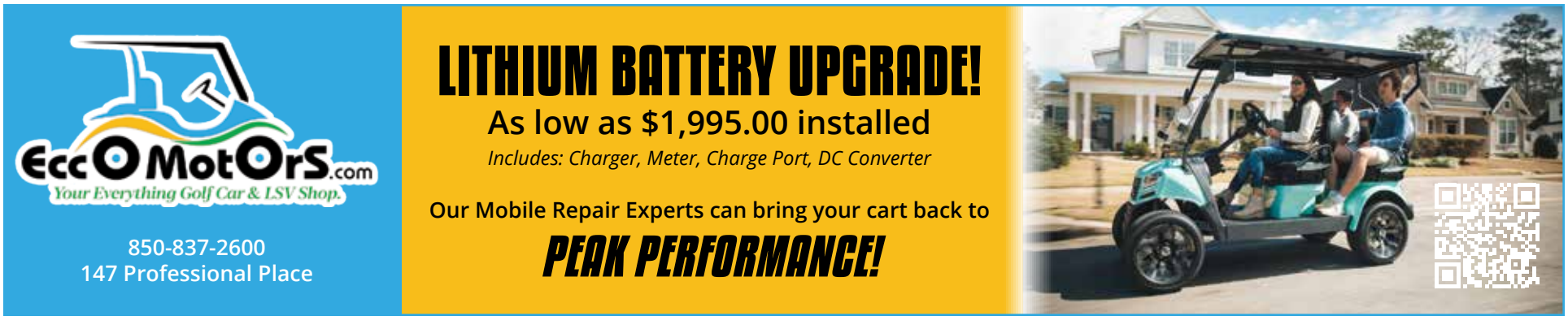


Beyond Cahan's athletic accomplishments, he is a valued member of the SWFD Beach Safety Division, having recently been promoted from Full-Time Lifeguard to the supervisory role of Beach Safety Officer. He consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to his responsibilities, exceptional athletic performance, 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.







Five Things to Review During Medicare Open Enrollment for 2027



Medicare Open Enrollment runs October 15 through December 7.

If you live in Okaloosa or Walton County, here are five things to review before deciding whether to keep your coverage for 2027.

By Max Zlobin, Founder and Licensed Insurance Agent, SwitchBlue Insurance Agency

Medicare Open Enrollment runs from October 15 through December 7, 2026. Changes made during this period generally take effect January 1, 2027. You can change Medicare Advantage plans, change prescription drug coverage, or move between Medicare Advantage and Original Medicare.

Even if your current plan worked well this year, take a few minutes to see what is changing before deciding to keep it.

1 Read your Annual Notice of Change

If you have a Medicare Advantage or Part D plan, your plan sends an Annual Notice of Change, or ANOC, each fall. It outlines changes for the following year, including premiums, deductibles, copays, drug coverage and provider networks.

Start with the things that affect you most: your doctors, hospital, pharmacy and prescriptions.

2 Check your doctors, pharmacies and prescriptions

Networks and drug formularies can change each year. Confirm that your doctors, specialists, hospitals and pharmacy will still be covered in 2027.

For each prescription, check that it remains covered, review its formulary tier, and see whether your plan uses preferred pharmacies with lower copays.

3 Look beyond the monthly premium

A $0 plan premium does not mean there will be no out-of-pocket costs.

Review what you may pay for doctor visits, hospital stays, outpatient care, prescriptions and deductibles. Also check the plan's annual maximum out-of-pocket amount for covered medical services. This shows the most you could pay for covered Part A and Part B services during the year. Prescription drug costs follow separate Part D rules.



4 Understand Medigap and TRICARE rules

If you are considering moving from Medicare Advantage to Original Medicare, you may also want a Medicare Supplement, or Medigap, policy to help pay costs Original Medicare does not cover.

Florida has certain protected enrollment situations in which you may have guaranteed-issue rights for a Medigap policy. Outside those situations, an insurer may ask health questions, use medical underwriting, and may decline an application. Florida does not have a broad annual "birthday rule" that lets people switch Medigap plans each year without underwriting.

Florida Medigap policies are issue-age rated. Your premium is based on your age when you buy the policy and does not increase simply because you get older. Premiums can still increase for other reasons, including medical costs, claims experience or rate changes affecting a group of policyholders.

If you have TRICARE For Life, you generally need Medicare Parts A and B to keep that coverage. Medicare generally pays first for covered services, and TRICARE For Life generally pays after Medicare. TFL includes prescription drug coverage, so you do not need Medicare Part D to have prescription coverage. In some cases, however, Part D may provide coverage for drugs TFL does not cover. Check with TRICARE before making a Medicare Advantage or Part D change.

5 Start early

Do not wait until December. Gather your current plan information, medication list, doctors' names, hospital preferences and pharmacy information so you have time to review what is changing.

If you are enrolled in Medicare Advantage, you also have a Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period from January 1 through March 31. During that time, you may switch to another Medicare Advantage plan or return to Original Medicare. If you return to Original Medicare, you may also be able to join a separate drug plan.

Max Zlobin is the founder of SwitchBlue Insurance Agency, an independent agency that helps beneficiaries compare coverage without charging a separate fee. The agency is compensated by the carriers it represents. This article is for educational purposes and is not a recommendation of any specific plan.

*This is a solicitation for insurance. Not affiliated with the U. S. government or federal Medicare program.

IMPORTANT: We do not offer every plan available in your area. Currently we represent eight organizations which offer 30 products in your area. Please contact Medicare.gov or 1-800-MEDICARE to get information on all of your options.

MEDICARE QUESTIONS?

We can help you navigate Medicare with confidence.

Medicare isn't one-size-fits-all. Your doctors, prescriptions, budget and priorities matter.

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Outdoors

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 who 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. 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 and confident, and they 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.



James Lapierre, with a really big largemouth



Nick Schafer



Liam Gurley

Largemouth Bass (Micropterus salmoides)

Largemouth bass are the most popular game fish 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.



Outdoors

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.

garden • pottery
blessings

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Wellness

Feelings on Bioenergetics

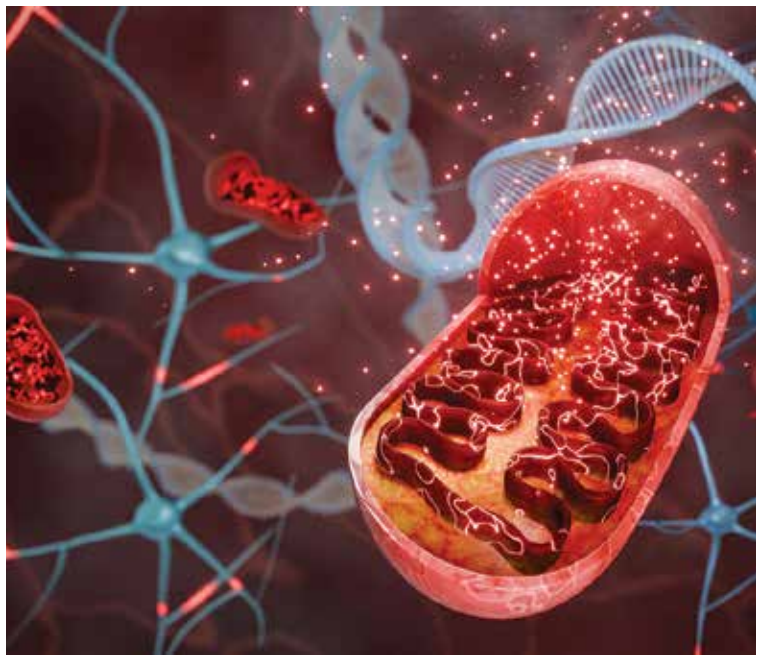


By Kay Leaman, Health Architect, Certified Nutrition & Skin Advisor

Who hasn't ever wanted more energy? We need energy to accomplish everything we do each day, from getting out of bed to spending time with family and friends and managing all the busyness of the day. We use it every day, as it makes our lives easier and brings enrichment in different ways. We can't see it, but we know when it's not there. Let's take a mini-dive into what it is and how exploring physics helps us find new ways to harness it for better health.

In some wellness and spiritual traditions, energy, described using terms such as qi, prana, spirit and ether, etc., and exploring these concepts is becoming more popular in thinking about enhancing the Body's healing processes.

Physics shows that everything is composed of energy. This energy can be observed or felt even though we are unable to see it. It is constant, occupies space and can be influenced by other energy. Matter (energy) can't be created or destroyed; it only changes form. It also has a frequency or a vibration and frequency.



Matter is made up of atoms and all atoms emit waves of energy that interact with other atoms. We recognize energy as energy waves. We use these waves daily in the form of radios, ultraviolet waves, far infrared light, microwaves, etc. These waves are identified by their frequencies. Frequency is determined by the number of waves that pass a point every second.

Human cells operate in the range of 1 to 32,000 hertz. In other words, the highest frequency to which the body was designed to respond is approximately 32,000 waves per second. In contrast, cell phones operate in the range of 3 to 4 gigahertz (3 or 4 billion waves per second). Personally, I'm concerned about possible health effects, such as DNA damage, from holding a phone against the ear regularly or carrying it in a front pocket.

Everything is energy. Energy is frequency. Frequency is vibration. We are energy.

These frequencies can be separated into different categories including Light, Sound, Smell, Emotions. Balancing the Energy Equation includes chemical energy, electrical energy, heat energy, mechanical energy and so many more. They are constantly changing from one to another.

Let's move on to the title of this article: Bioenergetics is a field in biochemistry and cell biology that concerns energy flow through living systems. This is an active area of biological research that includes the study of the transformation of energy in living organisms and the study of thousands of different cellular processes such as cellular respiration and the many other metabolic and enzymatic processes that lead to production and utilization of energy in forms such as adenosine triphosphate (Wikipedia). And, Bioenergetics bridges physics, chemistry, and biology, providing an integrated framework for understanding how life captures, stores, and channels energy to sustain itself.

Insights into energy transformation and regulation in cells continue to influence advances in science and technology.

Have you ever listened to talks on maintaining a positive attitude, both in mind and speech? What have you noticed about how you feel when you think or speak positively versus negatively? One has a higher vibration and the other a lower one. Higher vibrations heal and lower vibrations injure. If you want to see how what we speak affects us, I encourage you to watch these: https://m.youtube.com/shorts/E61HD-fG70c8?rq=m and https://m.youtube.com/shorts/QRks5iiP-2PU?ra=m.

The human body is comprised of 70% water. Water has memory as does nature and our body. So, what are we telling it?

The bioenergetic field offers various tools and therapies that can aid in restoring balance and flow to energetic systems of the body. Many of these devices can be purchased for in home use. My husband and I own a BEMER (Bio-ElectroMagnetic Regulation) mat. Certain BEMER devices can aid in improving circulation.

Today is a good day to start speaking life into yourself and others. To me, "health is frequency" is a reminder to pay attention to the thoughts, words and habits we repeat. Have a fabulous and positive Thanksgiving.

Here's to Health! HealthyDay HealthyLife

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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.





Wellness

My Resource Shelf



By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

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 difficult 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

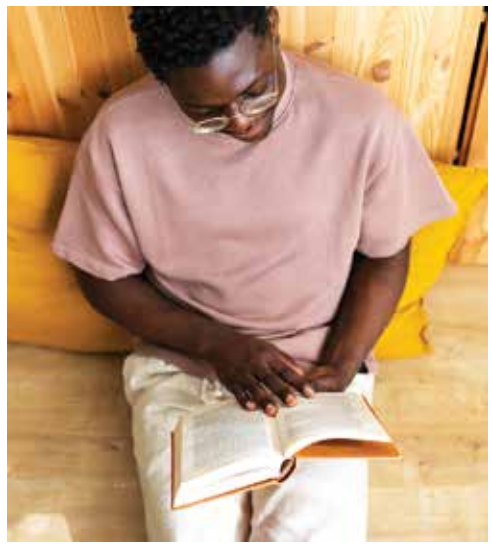
If you want to parent your children with respect for recent brain development research, connection, and healthy boundaries, I recommend the following books:

• **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

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.

HOLIDAY

continued from page 5

therapy, and movement.

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



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 unashamed, 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.

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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 back-track 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



Musing

Christian Capitalist Lori Leath Miller: Led by Purpose



By Richard 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 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!"

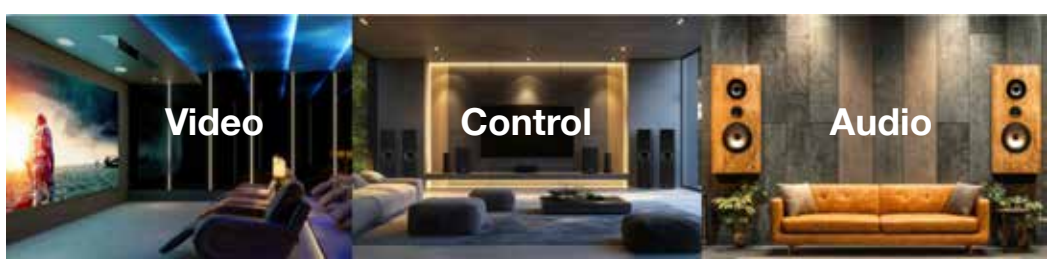
Lori recently appeared on the Christian Capitalist podcast, and you can listen to the entire episode on Sowal Life's website. We are excited to share inspirational stories of people like Lori Miller, whose hard work and generous giving help the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ!

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Neighbors

Full Circle with Naomi Alvarado

By Heather Bennett Eye

After a cancer diagnosis this past winter, local resident Naomi Alvarado found that the community she poured herself into was there to hold her up, and she learned what it meant to slow down.

In 2013, Naomi and her husband Chris, decided it was time to find somewhere quiet to live after welcoming their son Hayden into the world. They decided to move to Freeport, which was different than what they were used to south of the bay in Santa Rosa Beach. Back then, Freeport only had a co-op grocery store, a Dollar General, and two stop lights.

"Over time I just grew to love this little town," said Naomi.



"Our son has special needs, and just seeing the way that the town has embraced him, and how sweet everybody is with him, it's just obviously meant a whole lot to us," she added.

Naomi has done a lot over the years to support herself, her family and local communities. She was a freelance writer, contributing blogs to Destin 30A Moms and articles for VIE Magazine. She also spent time curating events for Southern Sound Music Alliance and booking shows for her husband Chris, a talented local musician. "Every few years, it's like, oh, let's do something else. Let's just see what else kind of speaks to me," she said. "That's the fun of it, though. You don't have to setting for one story in your life."

There was one job that holds a special place in her heart. In 2023, she became involved in the Freeport Merchants Association (FMA), which is like our chamber of commerce. It's a network of local business in Freeport, or who service Freeport residents. The FMA has networking events, like evening socials and breakfast meetings, and it's a great way to meet other business owners. "It's my favorite thing I've done," said Naomi. "Being a part of the community as it grows, has been a really special, unique experience."

Naomi has been the events chair for the FMA for the last couple of years. But, this year she's had to take a step back to focus on her health after her cancer diagnosis in February. For someone who describes herself as go, go, go, the slower pace has been an unexpected gift. "Nothing would have made me slow down other than this," she said.

Looking back, Naomi says the warning signs were easy to explain away. She was working out. That could have contributed to her weight loss or shoulder pain. It was one morning she woke up looking jaundiced, that she knew something was wrong, and Chris urged her to go to the hospital.

Within a couple of hours, an ultrasound revealed masses. Her liver was covered in tumors, and she was headed toward liver failure. "Things went from zero to 100 very quickly," she said.

One of Naomi's first worries was logistics. Would she have to travel for treatment, and what would that mean for Hayden and Chris? Instead, she found excellent care close to home. She has nothing but praise for her team at Sacred Heart Hospital in Santa Rosa Beach. "Nobody's super pumped about going to chemo," she said. "But the team there, it felt like a warm hug. This is a safe spot for me to be right now, and I can take this off my mental load for a couple of hours."

Just as Naomi supported Freeport, support for her came full circle. Hammock Bay and the FMA held a fundraising event for Naomi and her family this spring. "The response from the community was just mind-blowing," she said. "It made me feel like, okay, we're going to be fine. We're going to get through this. We got lucky that people have been so generous and supportive as they have been."

In September, she was able to ring the bell for her last chemo treatment. Throughout the year, she has spent more time at home with Chris and her son. "Things feel different. They just feel a little more like you can appreciate them in a different way."

Naomi's advice is to always keep up with yearly checkups. "It has to be a non-negotiable, which is hard for women, especially moms. If you're going to be on the phone to cancel the appointment, stay on the phone to reschedule, just so it doesn't get lost in the mix."

If anyone is going through a cancer diagnosis and needs someone to talk to, who knows what it's like, Naomi, in her true giving fashion, is here to support you. "I'm always happy to be an ear or a shoulder if I can."

If you'd like to reach out to Naomi, you can contact her at naomi.d.rogers@gmail.com.

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Arts & 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.





Arts & 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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Educational outreach remains at the forefront of Sinfonia's mission. Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has introduced music to more than 220,000 children in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties.

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Arts & Music

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

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.



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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.

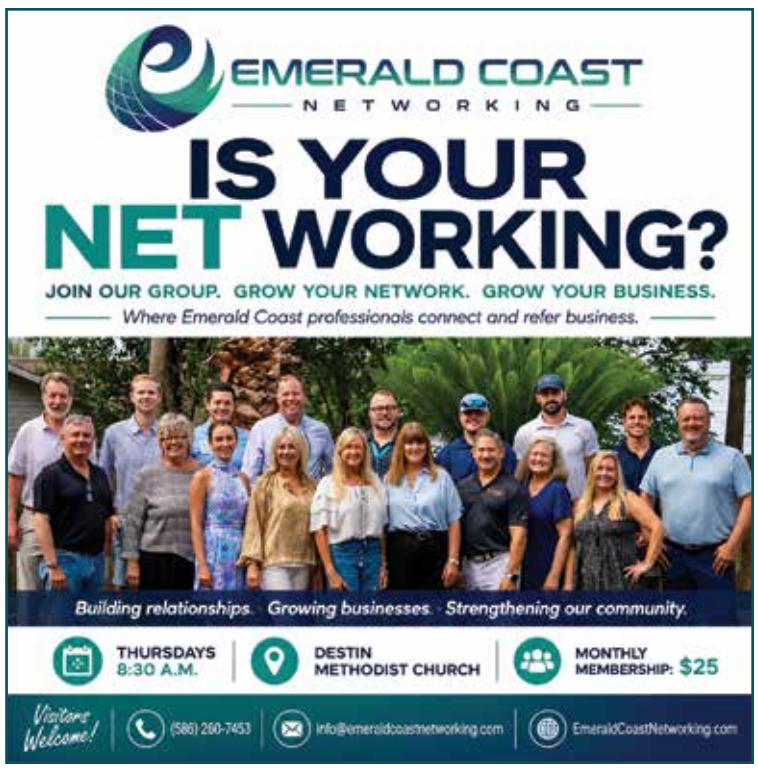
Boards should also review contracts and recurring technology costs. It is easy to continue paying for services simply because "that's what we've always had." Understanding exactly what your community is receiving can uncover opportunities for better service or smarter spending.

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.

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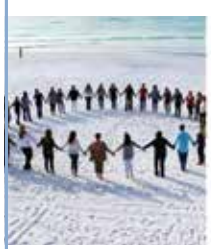
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