



SEPTEMBER 2026
VOL. 1, NO. 11

FREEPORT Life

PRSRT STD
ECRWSS - EDDM
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Santa Rosa Beach, FL
PERMIT NO. #11

Postal Customer Local

A Community Honors Its Veterans with More Than a Day of Fishing

Soldiers on the Water Returns Sept. 19

By LORI MILLER

With deep military roots and generations of veterans living and working nearby, Freeport has a special connection to the upcoming 13th Annual Soldiers on the Water. On Saturday, Sept. 19, combat-wounded veterans will board local charter boats for a day created entirely in their honor.

The Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS® (ECAR), in partnership with the ECAR Foundation, local charter boat captains, sponsors and volunteers, presents the event at no cost to participating veterans. The day combines world-class fishing with fellowship, recognition and the reassurance that their service and sacrifices have not been forgotten.

Since its beginning in 2013 with 35 military participants, Soldiers on the Water has grown to serve more than 100 combat-wounded veterans.



Organizers hope to welcome approximately 125 participants this year.

"Soldiers on the Water is one of the most meaningful traditions our Association has the privilege of hosting," said representatives of ECAR. "This event is about more than fishing—it's about showing our appreciation, building connections, and giving combat-wounded veterans an opportunity to enjoy a day

surrounded by people who are grateful for their service. We are incredibly thankful to the sponsors, charter captains, and volunteers whose generosity makes this event possible year after year."

The event will take place behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer at the Destin Fishing Fleet Marina. Veteran check-in and a light breakfast begin at 7 a.m., followed by an 8 a.m. boat



departure. Participants will spend the morning fishing the waters surrounding Destin aboard vessels provided by volunteer charter captains and boat owners.

After the excursion, everyone will return to shore for an afternoon meal, fellowship and an awards presentation recognizing accomplishments

SOLDIERS

continued on page 20



Ham Radio Connects Generations, Builds Community

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

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

HAM RADIO

continued on page 2



FREE ADMISSION

PIRATE BREW FEST

SATURDAY
Nov 7th, 2026
11am - 4pm
at Fudpucker's
www.PirateBrewFest.com

ready, tap, go!

With no annual fee, no balance transfer fee, no cash advance fee, and no international transaction fee, you're set for every beach day or weekend on the water.



Eglin Federal
CREDIT UNION

Mastercard®
rates as low as
7.9% APR



eglinfcu.org/mastercard



Community

HAM RADIO

continued from page 1

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

From there, we started working with local governments and local police. Other hams got involved, and that experience led to a love affair with electronic equipment and communications of all types.”

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

“Our clubs are where every walk of life comes together - men and women of varying occupa-

tions, veterans and civilians, seasoned operators and people who are brand new to amateur radio. What we have in common is our desire to understand this hobby. We help each other get to whatever level the individual wants to reach, whether it be in selecting or setting up equipment, figuring out the various signals, or getting ready for the next license.”

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

“Based on how much someone wants to get involved, I would encourage people to try different meetings at different clubs. This is an incredibly social hobby, and each club has unique areas of fo-



cus, whether it be more technical or community-oriented. Some people come seeking help with electrical projects, others want to get together to prepare for the next license, and others appreciate the sense of camaraderie until they decide to commit to the hobby. You’ll learn something no matter what you come for, and the club members are some of the greatest people I’ve met.”

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

Saturday, October 10 from 8 am to 12 pm

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

Saturday, November 21 from 8 am to 1 pm

Amateur radio electronics flea market: SwampFest at the roller derby hangar, Hangar



41, at 41 Wyndham Ave SE in Ft Walton Beach

In addition to these events, there are opportunities to practice picking up radio signals using personal equipment well before emergencies occur. During The Fox Hunt, a mini transmitter is hidden in a defined area, and operators work their way to it using their mobile radios. From a local to a nationwide event, Field Day, twice a year in June and January, brings together amateur radio operators throughout the nation to see how many other hams they can find using a variety of frequencies.

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

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

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

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

For those in Walton County, there is the **Walton County Amateur Radio Club**. The club meets the first Tuesday of



every month at the Life Enrichment Senior Center in DeFuniak Springs at 7:00 pm. There is also a monthly club breakfast the Saturday before their club meeting at the Eagle Springs Golf Course at 8:00 am, also in DeFuniak Springs. For additional information, go to wf4x.wordpress.com.

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

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

Writers
Dr. Karen DeVore
Heather Bennett Eye
Mimy Kincaid
Christopher Manson
Barbara Palmgren
Bobby Parker
Michelle Ruschman
“Doc” Doug Stauffer

To Advertise
850.688.9886

Freeport Life assumes no financial liability for errors or omissions in printed advertising and reserves the right to reject/edit advertising or editorial submissions.

© Copyright 2026 Freeport Life

People of Freeport: Small Town, Big Sound Country on the Coast with Emily Bass

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

While most young musicians trade small-town life for big-city lights, Emily Bass chose the opposite. She split her childhood between Destin and Magnolia, Tex., and has since returned to put down roots in Freeport, where the pace of life is a little slower.

Emily is a talented local singer/songwriter who has made multiple appearances on NBC's *The Voice*, has opened up for acts like Cole Swindell, and is working hard at making a name for herself beyond the panhandle. "I've been singing for as long as I can remember," said Emily. "I did a lot of talent shows and stuff growing up, and then started taking guitar lessons, then piano lessons and voice lessons. I just stuck with it. It's something that I just kind of had fun with when I was a kid, and then it just never went away."

Emily got an early break working with Steve Beyer Productions, now known as Beyer

Entertainment, starting when she was 16, which eventually took her to Los Angeles. Through Beyer, Emily booked events in cities like Houston, Palm Springs, New York and Las Vegas.

She met her fiancé, Eric, at one of her performances in Palm Springs, although they both lived in Los Angeles at the time. After a couple of years in the city, Emily began longing for a place that felt a little more like home. So, she and Eric moved to Freeport, where they now live with their two dogs, Alice and Penny, and where she continues to work on her music.

This past fall, she released her first album, *Pink Cadillac*, with the help of music producer Moises Zulaica, whom she had previously worked with in Los Angeles. While her shows feature a mix of rock, pop and country hits, her album reflects her own personal style. "I would definitely put it in the country-pop genre," said Emily. She



harmonized with her during her set.

Earlier this year, Emily won the People's Choice award at the "Made in Walton County" Songwriter's Showdown by the Cultural Arts Alliance. She also made a trip to Nashville to play at Ole Red and Kane Brown's on Broadway.

Most country fans know how special Nashville is, and Emily will head back to Music City this September to attend the Josie Music Awards at the Grand Ole

Opry House as a nominee for Rising Star of the Year – Country (Female). "I'm so excited," said Emily. "I've never been to the Opry, so I'm pretty ecstatic for my first time to be going there to be nominated."

If you'd like to catch one of Emily's shows, you can find a show near you at <https://www.emilybassmusic.com>. You can also listen to her music and download her album on Spotify and Apple Music.

Simon G.
FINE JEWELRY



MCCASKILL & COMPANY
— Finest Jewelry & Watches —

13390 Hwy 98 W, Destin, FL | www.McCaskillandCompany.com | (850) 650-2262

Community



Beyond Pain Relief: A Broader Approach to Acupuncture

By Dr. Karen DeVore

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

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

plication can extend.

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

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

Acupuncture Through a Contemporary Lens

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

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

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

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

More than Needles

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

Care may also extend beyond

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

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

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

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

A Specialized Approach to Neurological Care

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

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

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

Many of these patients already have neurologists, psychiatrists, therapists or rehabilitation specialists involved in their care. The goal is not to replace those relationships. A more useful question is whether adding another appropriate modality may help support function, symptom management and quality of life, particularly when recovery has

Continued on page 22



TORTOISE CLINIC

INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

**HOLISTIC HEALTH • ACUPUNCTURE
MASSAGE • APOTHECARY**

Now Offering

**PRIMARY CARE
PEPTIDE THERAPIES
SPECIALTY TESTING
IN-HOUSE LABS
IV INFUSIONS
HRT**

Scan the QR code
to learn more and
book today!



**NOW OPEN
7 DAYS A WEEK**
Including Weekends

8 AM - 5 PM

*Ask us how to get 50% off
your next IV!*



**2441 U.S. HWY 98, SANTA ROSA BEACH, FL 32459
TORTOISECLINIC.COM | 850.267.5611**



\$30 OFF

NEW PATIENT OFFER

Present this coupon and receive \$30 off any service at the Tortoise Clinic. One coupon per person.

Deer Moss Creek®

New homes in a vibrant community of Niceville, Florida



621 CHAMOMILE COURT
4 Bedroom | 3.5 Bath | 2,900 SF
\$899,000 | construction completed
Listed by Val Waters Auclair 850.855.6205



729 REINDEER ROAD
4 Bedroom | 3 Bath | 2,092 SF
\$586,000 | ready November 2026
Listed by Kelly Shephard 850.543.7353



221 FOXGLOVE RUN
4 Bedroom | 3.5/.5 Bath | 3,539 SF
\$1,219,990 | ready October 2026
Listed by Jodie Snell 850.621.6535



723 REINDEER ROAD
4 Bedroom | 3.5 Bath | 2,600 SF
\$695,000 | ready September 2026
Listed by Val Waters Auclair 850.855.6205



414 MARSH DEER RUN
4 Bedroom | 2.5 Bath | 2,026 SF
\$601,000 | ready October 2026
Listed by Crystal Tingle 850.218.4618



251 FOXGLOVE RUN
4 Bedroom | 3 Bath | 3,994 SF
\$1,425,000 | ready December 2026
Listed by Crystal Tingle 850.218.4618



Contact Ruckel Properties for a full list of available lots.

PHASE 11 LOTS

SIZE: 0.16 - 0.26 ACRE

PRICE: \$100,000 – \$149,000

PHASE 7A ESTATE LOTS

SIZE: 0.49 – 0.64

PRICE: \$209,000 - \$269,000

R*Pi*

Ruckel Properties, Inc.

REAL ESTATE & DEVELOPMENT

850.678.2223

RUCKELPROPERTIES.COM

Visit our model homes in Deer Moss Creek®

1413 CLARY SAGE LANE

Monday - Saturday 12 - 4 pm

Sunday 1 - 4 pm

301 GAZELLE COURT

Friday & Saturday 12 - 4 pm

Sunday 1 - 4 pm

 Community

NatureView: Why So Many Families Are Choosing Freeport Before Everyone Else Does

BY MIMY KINCAID, MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, THE JAY ODOM GROUP

For years, people moved to the Emerald Coast for the beaches. Today, more and more families are moving here for something else entirely. They're looking for space. They're looking for community. And they're looking for a place where life feels a little less rushed. That's one reason NatureView is quickly becoming one of the most talked-about new communities in Walton County.

Located in Freeport, NatureView offers something that has become increasingly difficult to find across Northwest Florida: a brand-new master-planned community surrounded by nature, yet still connected to everything residents need.

In a region experiencing tremendous growth, NatureView was intentionally designed to be different. Instead of being surrounded by commercial de-



velopment, NatureView is bordered by thousands of acres of permanently protected conservation land, creating a setting that feels peaceful, private, and connected to the natural beauty that first made this area so special. NatureView sits on approximately 276 acres and is surrounded by more than 50,000 acres of protected forest and conservation lands.

Residents enjoy a lifestyle centered around both commu-

nity and the outdoors. Miles of nature trails, pocket parks, gathering spaces, a resort-style pool, clubhouse, fitness center, pickleball courts, basketball courts, and playgrounds are all part of the vision for the neighborhood.

But what makes NatureView stand out isn't just the amenities. It's the feeling. Children riding bikes through the neighborhood. Neighbors gathering outside in the evenings. Families meeting friends at the pool after

work. Morning walks surrounded by towering pines instead of traffic. It's a lifestyle many people thought had disappeared from modern communities.

NatureView is also positioned in one of the fastest-growing areas in Florida. Freeport has experienced remarkable growth over the last decade, attracting families, professionals, military personnel, retirees, and first-time homebuyers who want to be near the Emerald Coast without sacrificing affordability or quality of life. NatureView's location provides convenient access to South Walton beaches, Highway 331, Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, shopping, dining, and schools while offering a quieter pace of life.

New homes from DSLD Homes and Holiday Builders are already available, giving buyers the opportunity to become part of a growing community while many of the most desirable homesites are still available. Homes are currently

starting in the low \$300,000s.

And while many developments talk about creating community, NatureView has already demonstrated its commitment through initiatives like Hero Homez, a program dedicated to providing homes for deserving local heroes and military families. Five homesites within the community have been designated for this initiative.

Perhaps that's why NatureView resonates with so many people.

It's not trying to be the biggest. It's not trying to be the busiest. It's simply offering something many people have been searching for all along.

A place to slow down. A place to connect. A place where nature, community, and everyday life come together.

A place that still feels like home.

To learn more or schedule a tour, visit NatureViewFL.com or call 850-822-5005.



BLANKEN MANAGEMENT

Financial Lifestyle Enhancement

Registered Investment Advisor offering customized guidance based on your entire financial position.

Veteran-owned Financial Advisor Firm

Your success is our obligation and privilege!



"Our goal and fiduciary responsibility is finding solutions aligned with your complex financial needs," says William Blanken.

WILLIAM EDWARD BLANKEN JR.

850-660-1164 Office | 570-236-0076 Cell

www.blankenmanagement.com

william.blanken@blankenmanagement.com



INVESTMENTS



FINANCIAL PLANNING



FINANCIAL ADVICE



850.729.6000

Biophilia Center Opens to the Public on Fridays

Discover one of Northwest Florida's premier environmental education destinations with weekly public access, animal encounters, nature trails, and hands-on experiences at Nokuse Plantation.



BY KERRI PARKER

For the first time since opening, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center in Freeport will welcome the public every Friday throughout the year.

Beginning September 4, 2026, residents and visitors will have a new weekly opportunity to experience one of Walton County's most unique environmental education destinations through self-guided exploration, animal encounters, animal chats, hikes, feedings, and other hands-on activities.

Located on the expansive 55,000-plus-acre Nokuse Plantation preserve, the Center has historically served primarily as an educational destination for school field trips and special events. The new Public Friday schedule expands access, allowing families, nature lovers and community members to visit on a regular basis.

A New Way to Experience Nokuse Plantation

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center was created to connect people with the natural world and inspire a deeper understanding of Florida's native wildlife and habitats.

The Center is home to more than 40 ambassador animals and provides environmental education programming for more than 6,500 K-12 students and community members each year.

With the launch of Public Fridays, visitors can explore



the Center's exhibits, trails, and animal habitats while learning more about the unique ecosystems found throughout Northwest Florida.

Public Friday Admission Information

Public admission beginning September 4, 2026:

- Ages 13 and up: \$15
- Ages 4-12: \$10
- Children ages 3 and under: Free

Schools are also welcome on Fridays. Field trips are available for \$10 per student and chap-

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

Membership Opportunities Available

Visitors who want to experience the Center throughout the year can take advantage of the updated Bio Membership program, which includes free weekly Friday admission along with additional benefits such as free entry to select annual events and gift shop discounts.



Connecting Northwest Florida with Nature

"We've always welcomed schools and groups to experience Nokuse Plantation, but Public Fridays lets anyone walk through our gates and connect with these animals and this landscape any week of the year," said Daniel Milana, Director of Development and Communications for the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center.

"It's a simple idea, but it's one we've wanted to do for a long time — invite our neighbors in to see what we get to see every day."

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center encourages residents and visitors from Walton, Okaloosa, Bay, Holmes, Washington, and surrounding counties to take advantage of this new weekly opportunity.

Whether you're looking for things to do in Freeport, family-friendly activities in Walton County or a unique way to explore Northwest Florida's natural environment, Public Fridays at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center offer a new reason to visit Nokuse Plantation.

For more information or to schedule a visit, contact the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center at 850-835-1824 or email information@eowilsoncenter.org.



Don't bark, beach happy!

Dogs and Cats Welcome!

Pet Bed & Biscuit Doggie Daycare

1313 Co. Hwy. 83A W, Freeport
850.865.0954 | info@sandypawsresort.net
www.sandypawsresort.net
f [sandypawsresort](#) i [sandy.pawsresort](#)

*Curated Realtor Closing Gifts,
Unique finds, Apparel,
Home decor, Jewelry*

NB
NORTH BAY
MERCANTILE
gift & clothing boutique

16400 Highway 331 South
Freeport, FL 32439

(850) 880-6491



CONNECTING WALTON COUNTY

HWY 331
Podcast

hwy331.com

OVER 14K NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS.



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Scenic Walton Celebrates Momentum on Community Initiatives Across Walton County

By BOBBY PARKER

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

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

One of the most significant milestones came when funding for an Opinion of Probable Cause, the critical first step toward developing a countywide underground utilities implementation plan, advanced into Walton County's draft 2026/2027

budget. The study will evaluate the scope and implementation of a countywide initiative to underground overhead utilities that would strengthen hurricane resilience, improve electric reliability, enhance public safety, preserve scenic beauty, and support long-term economic development. Scenic Walton also recognizes the many residents who voiced their support for underground utilities during Walton County's Strategic Planning process and commends the South Walton Community Council for helping encourage community engagement.

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

Beautiful Program, and encourage the City to pursue additional state funding. Once completed, the project will create a more welcoming northern gateway into Freeport while enhancing roadway aesthetics, improving stormwater management, and incorporating landscape features that naturally calm traffic. Scenic Walton extends its appreciation to the Freeport City Council, Planning Director Laila Hughes-Neel, AICP, Sean Daly and Ruppert Landscape, and the Florida Department of Transportation. A special word of thanks goes out to the St. Joe Community Foundation for funding the Walton Safe & Beautiful program.

Momentum is also continuing in South Walton as the 30A West Gateway Landscape Project has advanced into the proposed budget for the Walton County Tourist Development Council. Scenic Walton is pursuing the project in partnership with Friends of Scenic 30-A



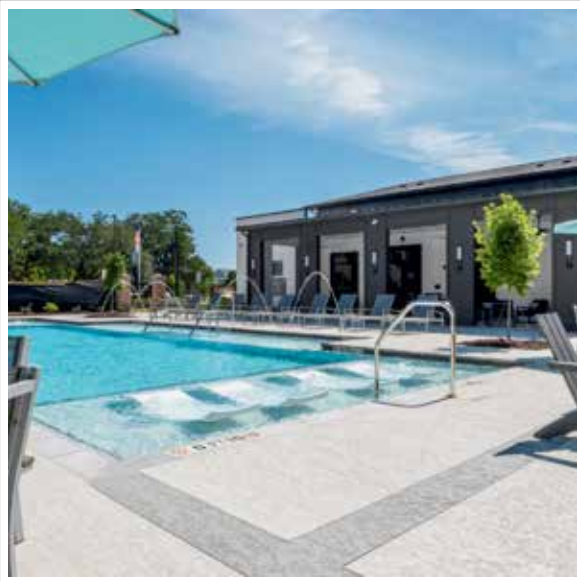
to create an attractive western gateway to Scenic Highway 30A while adding entry signage at both ends of 30A recognizing it as both a Florida Scenic Highway and a Federal Scenic Byway. Notably, the project remains the only capital improvement project included in the proposed TDC budget, reinforcing the importance of investing in beautification, placemaking, and the visitor experience.

"These projects may look different on the surface, but they all share the same purpose: protecting what makes Walton County special while investing in its future," said Leigh Moore, Executive Director of Scenic Walton.

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

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

For more information about Scenic Walton and its initiatives, visit [ScenicWalton.org](https://www.ScenicWalton.org).



LIFE FLOWS BETTER HERE

At The Waters at Freeport, thoughtful spaces and genuine service come together to create effortless living. From cozy one bedroom floor plans to spacious two and three bedroom apartments, there is a place here for everyone. Because when home feels this good, everything else just flows.



SCHEDULE YOUR TOUR!

185 Marquis Way
Freeport, FL 32439

For more details:

(850) 600-6697

@thewatersatfreeport

www.thewatersatfreeport.com



THE WATERS
AT FREEPORT



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

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

A Rare Taste of Japan

On **August 27** at 6 p.m., Old Florida Fish House will present

an exclusive **Usunaga Kobe Beef Dinner Experience** built around the importation of an entire A5 Kobe beef carcass from Japan.

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

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

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

Although "Wagyu" and "Kobe" are sometimes used interchangeably, the terms are not synonymous. Wagyu refers to four native Japanese cattle breeds. Authentic Kobe beef must come from Tajima-line Japanese Black cattle born, raised and processed in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture, and it must satisfy very strict standards for quality, marbling, weight and traceability.

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

Old Florida Fish House is an officially registered Kobe beef destination and is billed as the only Kobe-certified restaurant in the Florida Panhandle. Its whole-carass import offers

guests a rare opportunity to experience cuts and preparations that go far beyond the customary steakhouse presentation.

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

Two Evenings with The Officer Tatum

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

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

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

September 17 will feature **An Evening with The Officer Tatum**. Drawing on his experience in law enforcement, business and media, Tatum will offer his perspective on politics, culture, faith, freedom and everyday life. Known for blending direct analysis with humor and common sense, he encourages audiences to question prevailing narratives, think independently and live with courage and purpose.

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



August

27 Kobe Wagyu Presentation and Dinner

September

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

October

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

Weekly Events

Live Music Nightly, Featuring:

- Dueling Pianos Thursday through Saturday
- Alex Napier Monday - Wednesday

Brunch by the Lake with Live Music Saturday and Sunday
Sunday Funday with the Will Thompson Band Sundays Sept. 13 - Nov. 28

Visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com

OLD FLORIDA FISH HOUSE

33 Heron's Watch Way | Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459
info@oldfloridafishhouse.com | 850.534.3045



Events Around Town

Roman Street in Concert
Sunday, Aug. 23, 2026 | 3 p.m.
Christ the King Episcopal Church
480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach

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

Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Pairing and Sharing Wine Dinner
Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026 | 6 p.m.
Rosemary Beach Town Hall | Rosemary Beach

Sip, savor and support the community during an elegant evening benefiting Caring & Sharing of South Walton. Guests will enjoy a multicourse dinner prepared by Swiftly Catered, with each course paired with wines from Napa Valley's Jessup Cellars.

Proceeds support Caring & Sharing's food assistance, financial assistance, mental health counseling and case-management programs for Walton County neighbors in crisis.

Tickets are \$250 per guest or \$2,000 for a reserved table and must be purchased in advance. Visit caringandsharingsowal.org/events or email carly@caringandsharingsowal.org for tickets and sponsorship information.

Sacred Harp Musical Conversation
Saturday, Aug. 29, 2026 | 1 p.m.
Christ the King Episcopal Church
480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach

Learn about the history and development of Sacred Harp music, a traditional American art form, during a presentation by Joanna Ellis. Guests will also enjoy a practical introduction to shape-note singing led by Kristin Wendland.

Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Continued on next page

Seafood, Sounds & Harbor Views

Come hungry—the Destin Seafood Festival returns Sept. 25–27 for its 48th year, bringing three days of Gulf flavors, live music and family fun to the Destin Harbor. More than 30,000 locals and visitors are expected to attend the free waterfront celebration.

Stretching nearly a mile from HarborWalk Village to Heron Harbor, the festival will feature more than 75 food and craft vendors, along with favorite harbor restaurants serving seafood specialties and cold drinks. Browse jewelry, clothing, sculpture, glasswork, paintings and other handmade creations—and be sure to pick up this year's official festival T-shirt.

Five stages will showcase

local and regional musicians playing rock, reggae, country, tropical tunes and more. Harbor restaurants and bars will add their own entertainment throughout the weekend, so bring a chair, find a spot along the docks and enjoy the soundtrack.

Young festivalgoers can get creative in the expanded Fudpucker's Kids Zone with oyster shell painting, sand art and play areas. HarborWalk's Kids Fun Zone adds hamster balls, a climbing wall, zip line and face painting, plus shaded seating for parents.

Admission remains free, but VIP passes offer unlimited tastings from participating restaurants and chefs, exclusive entertainment, private re-

strooms, TVs and access to a cash bar.

The festival began in 1978 as a one-day gathering honoring local fishermen. Today, it with the festive kickoff to October's month-long Destin Fishing Rodeo.

Parking is available at several harbor-area lots, with free shuttles running from Morgan Sports Complex.

Hours: Friday 4–10 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sunday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

For maps, entertainment schedules, vendor details and VIP passes, visit DestinSeafoodFest.com or email info@destinseafoodfest.com.

Come hungry. Leave happy. See you on the Harbor!

MUSIC AT CHRIST THE KING FALL 2026 SERIES

Roman Street
Sunday, August 23 | 3:00PM
www.romanstreet.com



Musical Conversation:
Sacred Harp History & Practice
Saturday, August 29 | 1:00PM



 **Emerald Coast Community Singers**
Celebration of American Music
Sunday, September 13 | 3:00 PM
www.emeraldcoastcommunitysingers.com



Spotlight on Community Musicians: Spooky & Blessed Music Concert for Halloween & All Saints Day
Sunday, November 1 | 3:00PM



Studio 237 Recitals
Saturday, December 5
10:30AM & 1:00PM



 **Emerald Coast Community Singers**
Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols
Sunday, December 13 | 3:00PM



All concerts free • Donations welcomed



480 N County Hwy 393
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

For details of concerts and events, visit Christ the King Music Ministries at www.christthekingfl.org



REGISTER A COOK TEAM OR PURCHASE TASTER TICKETS VISIT EGGSONTHEBEACH.COM NOVEMBER 7 • 10AM–1PM

Presented by **BAY BREEZE PATIO** CREATING OUTDOOR DREAMS

LIVE MUSIC
GREAT PRIZES

12th ANNUAL NOV. 7, 2026
Bay Breeze Patio EGGS ON THE BEACH

SEASCAPE
GOLF, BEACH & TENNIS RESORT

MIRAMAR BEACH, FLORIDA

 Events

EVENTS

continued from page 11

Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music
Sunday, Sept. 13, 2026 | 3 p.m.
Christ the King Episcopal Church
480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach

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

Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Battle for the Buckle
Wednesday–Sunday, Sept. 23–27, 2026
Harbor Docks | Destin

The 2nd Annual Westonwood Ranch Battle for the Buckle brings together anglers, business leaders and community supporters for four days of competitive fishing, camaraderie and giving back.

Tournament highlights include a \$10,000 winner-take-all White Marlin prize and \$2,000 prizes for Catch and Release, Heaviest Tuna, Heaviest Wahoo, Heaviest Dolphin and the Junior Angler Youth Division. A \$1,500 Daily White Marlin Jackpot is also available.

Daily and Overall Calcutta

registration takes place Sept. 23, with 10% benefiting Westonwood Ranch. The boat entry fee is \$1,000. Boats should register by Sept. 23; tournament T-shirt sizes may not be guaranteed for entries received after Sept. 1.

The tournament supports Westonwood Ranch and its mission to empower teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through life-skills education, workforce development and meaningful employment opportunities.

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

14th Annual Fore Her Golf Outing
Friday, Sept. 25, 2026 | Check-in at 8 a.m.; tee time at 9 a.m.
The Links Golf Club at Sandestin

Golfers of every skill level are invited to think pink and hit the links for a great local cause. Presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care, the outing includes a Bloody Mary Bar from Ruby Slipper Cafe, breakfast from Chick-fil-A, 18 holes of golf, the popular "Dress Like a Lady Hole," food at the turn and an after-party featuring lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffle drawings.

Funds raised help Fore Her offset living expenses for local breast cancer patients undergoing treatment along the Emerald Coast.

Early BIRDIE registration is available through Sept. 1 for \$175 per golfer or \$700 per team of four. After Sept. 1, registration increases to \$200 per golfer or \$800 per team.

Register at foreher.org/golfouting. Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities are also available; contact Amy Walsh at amy@foreher.org.

Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with New York Voices
Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026 | 5:30 p.m.
Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents an intimate evening with Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble New York Voices as part of

Continued on page 14


DOGS, BANDS AND BEER FESTIVAL
OCT 10TH

SCAN ME

Mattie Kelly Amphitheatre in Niceville FL
1pm-9pm
Headliners Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall

TICKETS WWW.MATTIEKELLYTICKETS.COM

Dogs, Bands & Beer Festival!

Two legendary classic rock bands. One unforgettable night under the stars.

Join the fun Saturday, October 10, at the beautiful Mattie Kelly Amphitheater for an outdoor concert featuring Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall.

Bring your dog and enjoy a full fall day of classic hits,

cool drinks, food trucks, fresh air, and live music. And yes—dogs are welcome!

Saturday, October 10
 Gates open at 1 p.m.
 Mattie Kelly Amphitheater at NWFSC, Niceville
 Tickets and information:
www.mattiekellytickets.com

850-706-5206



THE MARKET SHOPS
 11TH ANNUAL
BLOODY MARY FESTIVAL

BENEFITING **Habitat for Humanity** of Walton County, FL

SATURDAY
OCTOBER 10, 2026
11AM - 2PM

\$65 IN ADVANCE
 \$75 AT THE DOOR

TO PURCHASE TICKETS, VISIT
THEMARKETSHOPS.COM

TICKET INCLUDES:

- UNLIMITED BLOODY MARYS
- CRAFT BEER
- BUBBLY BAR
- SPIKED SELTZERS
- LIVE MUSIC & DJ
- SEC FOOTBALL
- LOCAL EATS & SHOPPING
- PHOTO BOOTH
- CIGAR BAR
- CUSTOM TRUCKER HAT BAR

9375 EMERALD COAST PARKWAY, MIRAMAR BEACH, FLORIDA | Located on the Entrance to Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort | themarketshops.com

HAPPENINGS AROUND FREEPORT

2026 EVENTS

AUGUST

- 22**
Bubble Festival at Props Brewery
12 pm | Props Brewery Hammock Bay | Freeport
- Pickleball Tournament at the Creekside Clubhouse**
4:30 pm | The Windmills at Hammock Bay | Freeport
- 27**
Pairing & Sharing Wine Dinner Benefit
6 pm | Rosemary Beach Town Hall | Rosemary Beach
- 28**
Wine & Fries: Golden Hour for Good
6-9 pm | The Alice | Destin
- 29**
Sacred Harp Musical Conversation
1 pm | Christ the King Episcopal Church | SRB
- SOF Missions' 10th Annual Diamond Gala**
6 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB

SEPTEMBER

- 01**
Ranger-Led Hike
10 am | Eden Gardens State Park | SRB
- 04**
Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Destin FWB Rigdon Center | FWB
- Mini Makers Market & Movie Night**
5 pm | The Windmills at Hammock Bay | Freeport
- 04, 11, 18, 25**
Public Friday
9 am | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport
- 04-06**
Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest!
5 pm nightly | The Village of Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach
- 05**
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 06**
Labor Day Destin Dinner & Fireworks Cruise
6:30 pm | Baytowne Marina | Miramar Beach
- Women's Climbing Circle**
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- Blues on Black Creek**
12:30 pm | The Oar House Pub & Oyster Bar | Freeport
- 07**
End of Summer ECISS Shooting Competition
8 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 09**
Walton Chamber Power of Business Lunch
11:30 am | Hilton Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- Solaris Dinner Cruise**
5:30 pm | Baytowne Marina | Miramar Beach
- 10**
Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking with Sonny's BBQ
11:30 am | Trinity UMC | FWB
- 10-27**
Come From Away
Times vary | Emerald Coast Theatre Company | Miramar Beach
- 11-12**
Emerging Choreographers' Project: Blackbox
7:30 pm | NFB Studios at Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 12**
Rotary Sandy Bags Cornhole Tourney!
9 am | The Back Porch | Destin
- WCFR Pickleball Cadet Classic**
9 am | Freeport Sports Complex | Freeport
- Duchess - Live Music**
6 pm | Props Brewery Hammock Bay | Freeport
- Cirque Du Canines**
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 13**
Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music
3 pm | Christ the King Episcopal Church | SRB
- 17**
Walton Chamber Business After Hours
4:30 pm | Hotel Effie | Miramar Beach
- Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours**
5:30 pm | Emerald Coast Healthcare Coalition | FWB
- 18**
Rooted Together Health & Wellness Fair
5 pm | The Yoga Garden Collective | Freeport
- 19**
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 13th Annual Soldiers on the Water**
7 am check-in; 8 am boat departure | Brotula's | Destin

- 19 Continued**
Boys and Girls Club of the Emerald Coast's 6th Annual Burgers, Bourbon, and Beer Festival
1 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Cultural Village | Destin
- 
- 23-27**
Battle for the Buckle
Times vary | Harbor Docks | Destin
- 25**
Fore Her Golf Outing
8 am check-in; 8:45 am announcements; 9 am tee-off | The Links Golf Club at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 25-27**
Destin Seafood Festival
Times vary | Destin Harbor | Destin
- 26**
Build-A-Bucket Storm Preparation Event
Time TBA | Hammock Bay | Freeport

FARMERS MARKETS

- Niceville Community**
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Twin Cities Pavilion | Niceville
- Hammock Bay**
1st & 3rd Saturdays | 4 - 8 pm
The Windmills | Freeport
- Grand Boulevard**
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

MONTHLY EVENTS

- Library Lego Club**
Tuesdays | 3 pm
Freeport Public Library | Freeport
- Concert Series**
Wednesdays | 7 pm
Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach
- Chess Club**
Fridays | 3 pm
Freeport Public Library | Freeport
- Creative Craft Collective**
Saturdays | 10 am
Freeport Public Library | Freeport

Events

EVENTS

continued from page 12

the group's farewell tour, The Four and Only. Peter Eldridge, Kim Nazarian, Darmon Medader and Lauren Kinhan will celebrate 40 years of vocal jazz with inventive arrangements and seamless harmonies spanning jazz, pop and Brazilian influences.

Tickets are \$375 per person and include valet parking, a sparkling-wine reception, a multi-course dinner with wine, gratuity and the performance. Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement programs throughout Northwest Florida.

27th Annual Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show
Saturday, Oct. 10, 2026 | 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 11, 2026 | 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center
1250 Miracle Strip Pkwy. SE | Fort Walton Beach

Explore more than 51,000 square feet of exhibits featuring over 100 indoor vendors, boats, home-improvement products, healthcare services, local businesses and pet-rescue organizations. Visitors can take advantage of special home-show pricing, end-of-season boat discounts and more than \$20,000 in door prizes and giveaways.

Admission is free. Life Media is proud to sponsor this two-day community event.

Vendor and sponsor spaces are available. Contact Wes Fell at (850) 353-2832 or wesfell@cox.net. Learn more at ParadisePromotionsFL.com.

11th Annual Bloody Mary Festival

Saturday, Oct. 10, 2026 | 11 a.m.–2 p.m.

The Market Shops

Raise a glass to more than a decade of one of the Emerald Coast's favorite fall events. Guests ages 21 and older can enjoy unlimited tastes of creative Bloody Marys prepared by area restaurants, bars and caterers, along with local food samples, live music, champagne, craft beer, seltzers, a cigar bar, SEC football, a photo booth and exclusive shopping.

Attendees can vote for the People's Choice Award, while local celebrities and food critics select the overall and Best Accontrement winners. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity-Walton County and its work to provide stable, affordable housing for local families.

Purchase tickets at themarketshops.com/bloody-mary-festival.

Walton County Fair 2026
Monday-Saturday, Oct. 12-17, 2026

Walton County Fairgrounds | DeFuniak Springs

Celebrate more than a century of agriculture, youth, hard work and hometown pride at the Walton County Fair. This year's theme, "Rooted in Tradition. Built for the Future," honors the past, celebrates today and inspires tomorrow.

Enjoy livestock shows, home arts and exhibits, rides and attractions, live music, fair food and vendors for the whole family.

Join the tradition, be part of the future and make new memories with the community that grows together.

10th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival

Thursday-Sunday, Oct. 15-18, 2026

WaterColor and locations throughout South Walton

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

The festivities begin Thursday with intimate Harvest Wine Dinners at restaurants and venues throughout South Walton. Friday's Harvest After Dark brings elevated wines, unexpected pairings and culinary creations to Cerulean Park. Saturday features the signature Grand Tasting, followed by a spirited Jazz Cocktail Brunch on Sunday.

Proceeds benefit the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and its mission to help children in need throughout Northwest Florida.

Tickets are on sale now. Visit dcwaf.org/harvest-festival for the complete schedule and ticket information.

Destin Songwriter Festival
Saturday-Sunday, Oct. 24-25, 2026
Destin

Music, memories and mission come together during the Destin Songwriter Festival, which continues its partnership with Operation Song for a second consecutive year.

Operation Song pairs veterans, active-duty service members and military families with professional songwriters who transform their stories into songs. This year, the organization aims to write 250 songs with 250 veterans in celebration of America's 250th birthday.

Ticket purchases, sponsorships and other festival support help raise awareness and funds for Operation Song and its work to help service members and their families heal, preserve their legacies and share their voices through music.

Purchase tickets or learn more at DestinSongwriterFestival.com.

The Next BIG Thing 2026
Monday, Oct. 26, 2026
Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

Professionals, entrepreneurs, executives and emerging leaders from across the region will gather for one of the Emerald Coast's premier business and leadership conferences.

Attendees can hear innovative ideas, build valuable connections and explore new opportunities. Vendor booths, sponsorship packages and Early Bird tickets are available.

For vendor information, sponsorship details, tickets or additional questions, contact Gabrielle Hamilton at gabrielle@waltonareachamber.com.

BOOTH SPACE SELLING OUT FAST
for the Largest and Best TWO-DAY Business Event in NorthWest Florida

27th ANNUAL EMERALD COAST HOME & BOAT SHOW
Saturday & Sunday • October 10th & 11th, 2026
at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER OR FOR MORE INFO

SPONSORED BY **Life MEDIA** AND THE FOLLOWING AWESOME BUSINESS OWNERS

Mention You Saw This Ad in Life Media and Receive A 10% DISCOUNT on Your Booth Space

TO BECOME A VENDOR OR SPONSOR IN THIS GREAT EVENT - CONTACT Wes Fell (Event Promoter) at 850-353-2832 or WesFell@Cox.Net
More Info & Registration Form at www.ParadisePromotionsfl.com
This is Another Great Paradise Promotion

EC TC
emerald coast theatre company

FALL EDUCATION CLASSES

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

AUGUST – NOVEMBER

EMERALDCOASTTHEATRE.ORG/YOUTHCLASSES

Dance, Acting, & Voice Classes

Trolls JR.

LEGALLY BLONDE JR.

Tickets or info, call 850.684.0323 or visit EmeraldCoastTheatre.org
560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550

GRAND BOULEVARD TOWN CENTER
JERRY & ALICE ZICH
STJOE Community Foundation
IGI

CCA Florida Emerald Coast Chapter Banquet & Auction

Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026 | 6–10 p.m. | Shoreline Church | Destin

The CCA Florida Emerald Coast Chapter will host its 32nd annual Banquet & Auction, presented by The Ships Chandler. The evening will feature a catered dinner, open bar, silent auction, raffle prizes and a live auction offering exclusive items, artwork and trips.

Proceeds will support coastal habitat projects and CCA Florida's work to protect marine resources and help ensure healthy estuaries and fisheries for the future.

Tickets and sponsorships are limited.

Tickets: ticketstripe.com/CCAEmeraldCoast26.

Start Here. Engineer Your Future Here.

New NWFSC–UWF partnership will allow local students to pursue four engineering degrees without leaving Northwest Florida

For many local students, earning an engineering degree has traditionally meant moving away from home—and taking on the added costs that come with it. A newly approved partnership between Northwest Florida State College and the University of West Florida is creating another option.

Students will soon be able to begin their engineering education at NWFSC's Niceville campus and then transition to UWF to complete a bachelor's degree at the schools' joint campus in Fort Walton Beach.

That means Freeport-area students can pursue a high-quality engineering degree while remaining close to their families, jobs and community.

The Florida State Board of Education recently approved four new Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer degree programs at NWFSC:

- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering

"A student can start here, stay here and build a successful future here," said NWFSC President Mel Ponder. "Students will be able to start their engineering degree at Northwest Florida State College, continue to the University of West Florida and complete a high-quality bachelor's degree close to home."

A Smoother Path to an Engineering Degree

The new programs are designed to take some of the un-



certainty out of transferring from a two-year college to a university engineering program.

Students will complete foundational mathematics, science, engineering and general education courses at NWFSC. They can then move into upper-level engineering courses through UWF in Fort Walton Beach.

The specialized transfer degree—known as a SAAT degree—allows NWFSC to include required courses beyond those typically offered in a traditional 60-credit Associate in Arts program. This helps ensure students have completed the prerequisites they need before beginning their upper-level engineering studies at UWF.

Importantly for families, the additional required credits can qualify for financial aid. The combination of financial-aid eligibility, NWFSC's affordability and the ability to live at home could make an engineering degree more attainable for many local students.

"This partnership reflects what higher education should do—create opportunities that meet students where they are and prepare them for where

they want to go," said UWF President Manny Diaz Jr. "Students can begin their academic journey at NWFSC and then complete a UWF engineering degree without leaving the community they call home."

Preparing Students for Local Careers

The new pathways are also closely connected to Northwest Florida's workforce needs.

Engineers play important roles throughout the region's military installations and its growing aerospace, defense and technology industries. They are also needed in construction, infrastructure, manufacturing and other industries that support everyday life in our communities.

By creating a clear path from a student's first college course through completion of a bachelor's degree, NWFSC and UWF hope to prepare more local students for these high-demand careers—and encourage them to build their futures here. "Students should not have to leave Northwest Florida to pursue an engineering education or prepare for careers in industries that are vital to our re-

gion," said Rhea Goff, chair of the NWFSC District Board of Trustees. "These new pathways give local students an affordable and accessible starting point while helping employers develop the highly skilled workforce they need."

For local high school students who are beginning to consider college options—as well as working adults thinking about a new career—these programs

could open the door to an engineering education that once seemed out of reach.

Information about enrollment, advising, course schedules and anticipated program start dates will be announced as implementation plans are completed.

Students and parents can learn more by visiting NWFSC.edu/engineering.



Brandon Cervenka

Local Allstate Insurance Agent

Get in Touch:

(850) 622-0448

2441 U.S. Highway 98 W., Suite 105
Santa Rosa Beach

Auto – Home – Condo – Renters – Life
Motorcycle – Business – ATV – Boat



Allstate
You're in good hands.

 Medical Center



High-Quality Care. Right Here in North Walton.

Surgery. Imaging. Lab work. Specialists.
Emergency care when minutes matter, and everyday care for everything else.

North Walton Doctors Hospital is North Walton’s only full-service hospital,
staffed by people who live here too.



Care that’s ready
when you are.



(850) 920-2065 | NWDHospital.com



High-Quality Care. Right Here in North Walton.

You don't plan for the moment it happens. The chest pain that starts at 2 a.m. The fall on the back steps. The fever that won't break. In those moments, one question matters more than any other: *Where do we go?*

For families across Freeport, DeFuniak Springs, Paxton and the surrounding communities, the answer is closer than you might think. North Walton Doctors Hospital is the only full-service hospital in North Walton County, and that distinction matters more than most people realize. An emergency room is built for one thing: the unexpected. It's an essential service, and ours is open and staffed around the clock, ready for the moments when minutes count.

But health care rarely stops at the emergency. There's the imaging that confirms what's wrong. The yearly lab work. The surgery you've been putting off. The follow-up visit that tells you you're healing the way you should. A hospital is built to carry you through all of it: the emergency, and everything that comes after. That's the differ-



ence between a place that treats emergencies and a hospital that takes care of you. Too many families have

one team that shares patient records and history. That continuity isn't just convenient. It's better medicine. When the physician reading scans can walk down the hall to talk with the surgeon directly, decisions get made faster and nothing falls through the cracks.

Most notably, the people caring for you at North Walton Doctors Hospital are the people you see at the grocery store, at church, and on the sidelines Friday night. They're your neighbors, and hold themselves to the standard neighbors expect.

The next time a symptom won't wait, a doctor orders a test, or a procedure gets scheduled, remember you have a full-service hospital in your own county, with an emergency department ready around the clock and a full range of care for everything that follows.

*North Walton Doctors Hospital
DeFuniak Springs, Florida | nwd-hospital.com | Emergency care available 24/7*

accepted a long drive as the price of good care. North Walton Doctors Hospital is here to change that. The spine and orthopedic surgery program brings specialists from across the region, so procedures once assumed to require travel now happen close to home with recovery, follow-up and therapy close by.

Emergency, imaging, laboratory, inpatient services with 24/7 care, and surgical services all operate on one campus, with



CELEBRATING

30

YEARS

Membership keeps art FUNded

mattie kelly arts foundation

Festival of the Arts

mattie kelly arts foundation

ART, MUSIC, AND MORE FREE EVENT!

OCTOBER 25 & 26

Concerts in the Village

mattie kelly arts foundation

THURSDAY NIGHT CONCERT SERIES

ArtsReach

mattie kelly arts foundation

CHANGE A LIFE - SUPPORT THE ARTS!

160+ ARTSREACH PROGRAMS

✓ Receive one season pass to Concerts in the Village.

✓ Enjoy early admission access to Concerts in the Village.

✓ Receive discounts on Festival of the Arts merchandise.

✓ Receive membership rates on select MKAF events.

BECOME A MEMBER - JOIN TODAY!

MKAF.org



Golf Series: A New Duo in Town to Bring Bluewater Bay Golf to an Elite Level

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson! Simon and Garfunkel! Batman and Robin! Lewis and Clark! These dynamic duos solved crimes, wrote extraordinary music, saved Gotham or explored the American West.

But did they ever shank a drive into the woods or three-putt a green? Did they ever work to create and maintain acres of green space on a golf course, book tee times, give golf lessons and provide a once-in-a-lifetime golf experience for members and visitors to the Emerald Coast?

No, that responsibility is now in the hands of two gentlemen. One is Sam Newell, a marketing consultant with an English ac-

cent who views The Golf Club at Bluewater Bay as an opportunity to help the local community thrive, with a great golf course at its center.

Sam works with management on course design and development. Born outside London, England, he is now a U.S. citizen and has lived stateside for the past 16 years. His company, SGW Design, relocated from the West Coast to Niceville three years ago, and Sam has thankfully found his forever home on the Emerald Coast.

The other member of this dynamic duo is Jason Timlin. Jason is a certified PGA professional with years of golf club experience, ranging from Southern California to serving as head golf professional at the Robert Trent Jones course in Birmingham, Alabama. Jason is excited and motivated to make The Club at Bluewater Bay succeed. There was something about the enthusiasm of the Bluewater Bay community that



became the clinching point in his decision to move to what he calls “a piece of paradise.”

After he and the board of directors interviewed Jason, Sam

said he knew Jason was the perfect candidate to manage the course. Once Jason was hired, he and Sam began making significant changes. The club can now move forward with additional development to improve the course and its surroundings. Sam said he has great ideas, but Jason knows whether they will work.

One example is the new, netted, five-bay driving range, which enables golfers to warm up and allows Jason to give lessons using a portable Full Swing golf monitor. Another incentive was a one-time, substantial reduction in the cost of individual golf memberships. The roster has grown from 73

to 202 members, giving management additional capital to pay the bills. They have also created annual sponsorships for equipment, the driving range

and other course needs — all creative ways to generate income for the course.

Controlling costs in other areas is critical as well. Owning and servicing golf maintenance equipment with the help of a trusted mechanic is a key element of the club’s success, as is leasing gas-powered Yamaha golf carts with a record of durability.

Yes, bringing together Jason and Sam was an inspired move by the board of directors and investors, who all stepped up to save the golf course two years ago.

Congratulations, gentlemen, and may you “live long and prosper,” as Mr. Spock told Captain Kirk. I think that could be translated as, “Live long and hit your drive straight down the fairway.”

But do those things happen only in a galaxy far, far away? Maybe not. They happen at The Club at Bluewater Bay!

LARGEST SELECTION OF STREET LEGAL CARTS



EXCLUSIVE GIFT
Present this layout upon purchasing a cart to receive an exclusive gift.





SALES • SERVICE • PARTS AND ACCESSORIES • FINANCING • RENTALS

Join the *Neighborhood* Fun

SHOP BY BRANDS

Garia
Star EV
EVolution

GEM Car
Hunt VE
Club Car

Yamaha
Denago EV
Atlas

Epic/Icon



Off the Hook

SOLDIERS
continued from page 1

such as the day’s biggest catch and most fish caught. The full event is scheduled from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Soldiers on the Water is dedicated exclusively to combat-wounded veterans. The relaxed outdoor setting gives participants an opportunity to spend

time with fellow veterans, form new friendships and experience the camaraderie that develops naturally during a shared day on the water.

For veterans in Freeport and surrounding communities, that fellowship can be particularly meaningful since many remain in the area after military service, continuing to work, raise families and serve their neighbors here.

A past participant, Grady B., described the event’s impact this way: “After the retreat was over and back home, I realized that there are people that care about us. Second, this experience has been a great transformation not only in myself but in others.”

His words capture the heart of Soldiers on the Water: Fishing may provide the setting, but the relationships formed among

veterans, caregivers, captains, volunteers and community members carry the event’s impact far beyond the day itself.

Answering the Call

Soldiers on the Water reflects a spirit Freeport residents know well—neighbors stepping forward to support those who serve.

The event is made possible through the generosity of people and organizations across the Emerald Coast. Charter captains and boat owners provide vessels, equipment, expertise and time. Businesses and professional organizations contribute

ALTORS®, local businesses, charter captains and volunteers in honoring those who have sacrificed in service to the country.

Want to Get Involved?

Combat-wounded veterans must register in advance. There are no tickets to purchase, and eligible veterans participate at no cost. Space is limited, and applicants may be placed on a waitlist.

Local charter captains and boat owners are invited to register a vessel.

Businesses and community organizations can assist through financial sponsorships or in-

NOW OPEN!

Paved Covered Boat and RV Storage
Paved Open Lot Storage



- Power and Water at each Parking Spot
- Up to 60 ft. Long Storage Places

Call today for pricing and to reserve!



- Custom Electronics/Rigging Installation
- Yamaha, Mercury, Tohatsu, & Suzuki Outboard Service, Sales, Parts, Warranty Center
- New & Used Boat Sales

Maverick, Hewes, Cobia, Pathfinder, Jupiter, Avid, Chittum & Pair



TheShips
Chandler

17309 U.S. Hwy, 331, Freeport | (850) 880-6259

theshipschandler.com | info@theshipschandler.com



financial sponsorships and in-kind donations, while volunteers assist with registration, meals, supplies and logistics.

Community support also provides participants with bags containing water, snacks, sunscreen and other necessities. Additional in-kind needs may include lip balm, coolers, raffle prizes, gift certificates and food support.

Freeport businesses, civic organizations, professional groups and residents can all take part. Whether someone volunteers, provides supplies, registers a boat or connects an eligible veteran with the program, each contribution becomes part of a larger expression of gratitude.

ECAR represents more than 5,000 REALTOR® members across Okaloosa and Walton counties and maintains an office in Santa Rosa Beach. Soldiers on the Water allows the organization to extend its community involvement beyond the real estate profession, uniting RE-

kind donations.

Freeport-area residents interested in volunteering or providing other support should contact ECAR to learn which needs remain.

Veterans can register at form.jotform.com/ECAOR/2026-sow-attendee. Prospective sponsors and in-kind donors can visit form.jotform.com/ECAOR/2026-sow-sponsors. Boat owners, charter captains, volunteers and other supporters can find information at www.emeraldcoastrealtors.com/soldiers-on-the-water/. For additional information or to ask about remaining opportunities, contact Wendy Permenter at info@ecaor.com.

For Freeport—a home to many veterans and military families—Soldiers on the Water offers a meaningful way to honor neighbors whose courage and sacrifices continue long after their uniforms are put away.

Summer Freshwater Fishing on the Panhandle



BY HELEN PETRE

Florida is the fishing capital of the world, and the panhandle offers an incredible diversity of fishing experiences. Our emerald green, clear water, and white sand beaches provide a productive surf fishing experience, and our fresh and brackish water offer land and kayak fishing. Then, of course there is offshore redfish, which is the life experience we all dream about.

Thankfully, though, you do not need a boat to surf fish or freshwater fish. Surf fishing for pompano is fun in spring, but as beaches get crowded and hot, freshwater fishing offers an alternative that requires little more than a pole and bait and is cooler and quieter.

One of a child’s most memorable experiences is often that first fish catch. It is an experience that can lead to a lifetime of conserva-

tion and sportsmanship and teach skill, independence, achievement and respect for nature. Kids who learn to fish, and adults who learn skills, are self-confident and dependable. Now is a great time for a family fishing experience.

What Will You Catch?

Largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*)

Largemouth bass is the most popular gamefish in North America, and Florida’s freshwater fish. Bass is everyone’s favorite warm water fish. Bass are really fun to catch because they put up a good fight. Largemouth bass spawn in spring, and are easier to catch then, but summer is still a good time to catch them in lakes, rivers, and ponds. They prefer vegetated shorelines and live for ten years in the wild.

Bass are carnivores. In the wild, they eat fish, mollusks, and insects. The best live bait is a golden shiner hooked through the lips with a large hook (2 to #5). Use a medium rod with 14-to-20-pound test line. If using artificial bait, plastic worms work well.

Adult bass are apex predators, but young are prey for herons, larger bass, and catfish.

Catch bass in the Choc-tawhatchee River, accessible from Ebro, and the backwater lakes that surround the river, or fish in Holmes Creek, a spring fed tributary of the river. Bass are plentiful in the Yellow River, which flows southwest from Alabama.

Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)

Besides bass, the Panhandle is an exciting place to fish for sunfish, bluegill (or bream, or brim) are the most common summer sunfish. They are fun to catch and great to eat. These are panfish with vertical stripes. Bluegill live in rivers, streams, springs, and lakes. They spawn in summer, building nests in shallow water on sandy bottoms. Nests are in groups of about 35; a collection of shallow, scooped out areas all together in one area. The male makes the nest, invites the female to lay her eggs, and fertilizes them. Then the father to be guards the eggs until they hatch, in a week or so.

Bluegill eat mostly insects, but worms are the most successful bait. Use a small #6 hook with a split shot sinker about six inches up the line.

Another Panfish: Redear Sunfish

Redear sunfish are popular sportfish, sometimes called shell-crackers. They look like bluegill, but are slightly larger, and have a distinctive red mark on the gill cover. At home in warm water of lakes, streams, and ponds, redear sunfish live in the vegetated areas near logs, often in groups. In warm weather, they sometimes congregate around lily pads.

Redear favorite foods are snails, clams, and mussels, hence the name shellcracker. Redear crush the shell, eat the meat, and spit out the shell fragments.

Males make nests in groups, in somewhat deeper water than bluegill, lure in females, and induce them to lay eggs by making a popping sound. The female produces thousands of eggs, and then moves on to find another



Male redear sunfish guarding eggs. Wikipedia.

male, while the male fertilizes and fans the eggs to remove sediment and provide oxygen for a week until hatch. First year growth is about five inches. After that, fish grow about an inch a year.

Redear are caught most often on worms, small shrimp, or jig heads, with small hooks (6 to #10). Use small spinning rods with two-to-four-pound test. Redear are good fighting, good eating fish.

Warmouth (*L. gulosus*)

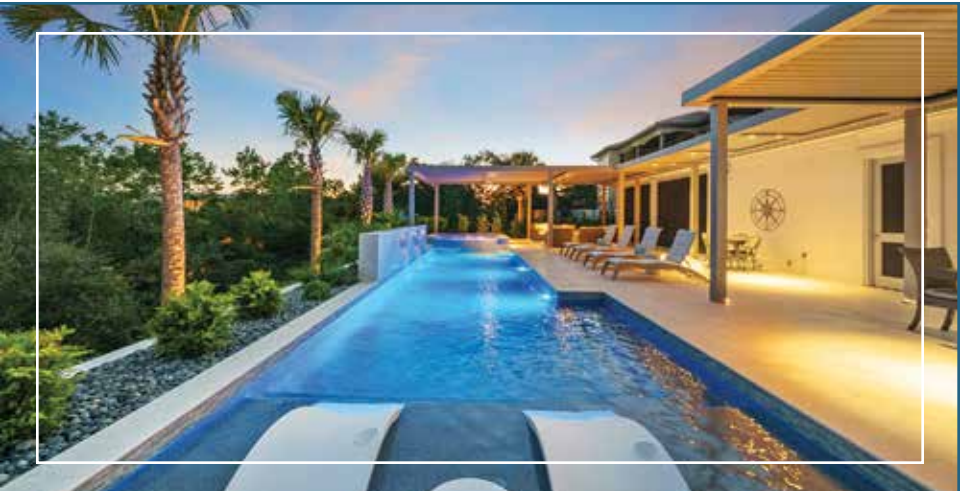
Warmouth are like other panfish, but they have a red eye and a large mouth. There are dark lines radiating from the eye that look

Continued on page 26



EMERALD COAST POOLS

Build Your Dream Pool



Elevate Your Outdoor Space

Custom Designed Pools & Spas

Emerald Coast Pools designs and builds custom pools with a commitment to craftsmanship, innovation, and personalized service.

Pool Renovation Services

Pool Resurfacing • Tile Installation • Structural Damage
Equipment Replacement • Spa and Jacuzzi Additions
Deck Repair or Replace • Paver Installation & Repair
Saltwater Conversions • Pool Heating Systems
Outdoor Kitchens • Fire Pit Installations

Call Now: 850.880.6657 | Email: daniel.emeraldcoastpools@gmail.com
Visit: 17661 U.S. Highway 331 South, Freeport | On the Web: emeraldcoastpool.com

 Wellness


By DR. RICHARD CHERN

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

Bioidentical hormones are designed to be chemically identical to the hormones naturally produced by the human body. Tiny pellets containing these hormones are inserted just beneath the skin by a healthcare provider, where they slowly release a consistent dose over several months. This steady de-

livery helps avoid the highs and lows that can occur with some other forms of hormone therapy.

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

Men with low testosterone may experience fatigue, reduced muscle strength, weight gain, low sex drive, erectile difficulties, irritability and trouble concentrating. Bioidentical testosterone pellets may help improve energy, enhance libido, support

muscle mass, sharpen focus and promote a more positive mood when low testosterone is the underlying cause of these symptoms.

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

While many people experience meaningful improvements, hormone pellet therapy is not a cure-all and is not appropriate

for everyone. Symptoms such as fatigue, weight changes or mood concerns can have many causes, so a thorough medical evaluation and laboratory testing are essential before beginning treatment. Hormone therapy should always be individualized and monitored by a qualified healthcare provider to maximize benefits and minimize potential risks.

When prescribed appropriately, bioidentical hormone pellets can be an effective option for men and women seeking relief from symptoms related to hormone deficiency. By restoring hormone levels to a healthier range, many patients report feeling more energetic, sleeping better, thinking more clearly, and enjoying a higher quality of life.

At The Hormone Restoration Center, hormone optimi-

zation is never a one-size-fits-all approach. Every patient receives a comprehensive evaluation, detailed lab work, and an individualized treatment plan designed to address the root cause of their symptoms—not simply mask them. Our experienced team works closely with each patient to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed for safe, effective care.

If you're ready to stop feeling like you're just getting by and start feeling like yourself again, schedule a consultation with The Hormone Restoration Center and call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation. Together, we'll determine whether bioidentical hormone pellet therapy is the right solution to help you look, feel and live your best.

ACUPUNCTURE

continued from page 4

plateaued or symptoms persist despite appropriate treatment.

Fertility and Women's Health

Fertility is another area where acupuncture can complement conventional care.

Some women incorporate acupuncture while trying to conceive naturally, while others use it alongside care from an OB/GYN or reproductive endocrinologist. Treatment may also address accompanying concerns such as stress, sleep or menstrual symptoms during what can be a physically and emotionally demanding process.

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

Where Could Acupuncture Fit for You?

Perhaps you're living with persistent pain. You're sleeping but rarely waking refreshed. Your headaches have become

too frequent. Stress is affecting your digestion. You're navigating fertility treatment or lingering symptoms after COVID. Or perhaps you or someone you love is managing Parkinson's, vertigo, neuropathy, stroke recovery or another complex neurological concern.

These are very different rea-

sons to consider acupuncture. And that's precisely the point.

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



**Dr. Chern, MD,
Sue Griffin, ARNP
Presley Pulse, APRN**

Look Healthy, Feel Alive!

Personalized Hormone & Wellness Care

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we help you restore balance, energy, and confidence through personalized, science-backed care—designed for your body and your life.

Bio-Identical Hormone Therapy • Thyroid Optimization • Weight Loss • Anti-Aging & Aesthetics

Miramar Beach, Florida
850-837-1271
thehormonerestorationcenter.com

BEST IN DESTIN



Get the Smile You Deserve

Smile with Confidence Again

- Are you embarrassed about smiling in front of people?
- Do you ever put your hand up to cover your smile?
- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a good candidate for A Smile Makeover.

Call today to schedule a personal FREE consultation

GULF COAST DENTAL
Steven G. Robinette, DDS
(850) 897-9600
4566 Hwy 20 East Ste 108
Niceville, FL 32578
gulfcoastdental.com

GULF COAST DENTAL
Steven G. Robinette, DDS
(850) 897-9600
4566 Hwy 20 East Ste 108
Niceville, FL 32578
gulfcoastdental.com

HONORING THOSE
Who Serve

★ ★ ★

COMPASSIONATE CARE.
PROVEN RESULTS.
A STRONGER TOMORROW.

★

POST-HOSPITAL INPATIENT CARE ★ OUTPATIENT SERVICES

Helping You Recover. Helping You Thrive.

REHABILITATION Regain strength, independence and confidence. ★	THERAPY SERVICES Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapy tailored to you. ★	RESPIRATORY CARE Specialized respiratory therapy for better breathing and recovery. ★	COMPASSIONATE CARE Experienced professionals dedicated to your well-being. ★	PROUDLY SERVING Our veterans, our community and their families. ★
---	--	--	---	--

NOW OFFERING
IN-HOUSE CONSULTATIONS
Convenient. Collaborative. Comprehensive.

 PHYSIATRIST (Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation)	 NEUROLOGY	 NEPHROLOGY	 CARDIOLOGY	 RESPIRATORY THERAPY
---	---	--	--	---

THE MANOR
at Blue Water Bay

— WHY FAMILIES CHOOSE THE MANOR —

- ✓ Skilled Nursing Care
- ✓ Comfortable, Home-Like Environment
- ✓ Personalized Rehabilitation Programs
- ✓ Coordination of Care for Faster Recovery
- ✓ Experienced Clinical Team

 1500 N. White Point Road
Niceville, FL 32578
 850-897-5592
 www.manoratbwb.com

★ ★ ★ **ASK YOUR HOSPITAL DISCHARGE PLANNER** ★ ★ ★
ABOUT THE MANOR AT BLUE WATER BAY.

 Wellness


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

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

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

Microplastics are particles smaller than 5 millimeters, and nanoplastics are smaller than 1 micrometer. Some come from

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

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

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

Researchers struggle to know

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

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

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

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

- Purchase clothes, towels, bed linens, rugs, and other items made from natural materials such as cotton, linen, silk, and wool.
- Choose stainless steel, cast iron, glass, or properly made food-safe ceramic or clay cookware.
- Replace single-use plastic water bottles with reusable stainless steel or glass bottles.
- Take a glass container with

you when you eat out so you can use it for leftovers. If you receive leftovers in a polystyrene foam container, transfer them to a different container as soon as you get home.

- When microwaving food, use glass, ceramic, or a container specifically labeled microwave-safe. Dispose of plastic items that are damaged or showing wear.

- Plastic wrap and plastic utensils can contribute to plastic waste and may release chemicals or particles, particularly when heated or damaged. Reduce the number of single-use plastic items in your kitchen. When using plastic wrap, follow the label directions and do not allow it to touch food during microwaving. Consider reusable food-grade silicone lids or Bee's Wrap. I have both, and they are great!

- Do not reuse containers designed for single use. Follow the manufacturer's directions for reusable plastic products.

- Look for products sold in glass jars rather than plastic ones, such as peanut butter.

- Once opened, store meat in a leakproof glass or food-grade silicone container.

- Consider using glass

food-storage containers.

- Pick up some inexpensive silverware to use at the beach or on picnics, and keep some in the car for those fast-food stops.

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

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

Here's to Health!

HealthyDay HealthyLife



Life is complicated.
Your insurance
doesn't have to be.

ABORA
INSURANCE GROUP

Personal & Commercial Insurance

850-424-6979
11275 U.S. Hwy. 98 #7 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550
www.GetAora.com



EMERALD ENT
Ear, Nose, Throat, Allergies
Hearing
Facial Plastic Issues
From newborns to the elderly

Stop suffering from painful sinus issues.
Services offered by Emerald ENT are comprehensive and unique to this area.

We are thrilled to announce our second location in Panama City Beach.
12909 Panama City Beach Parkway, Panama City Beach, FL 32407

Accepting New Appointments!
(850) 797-6191 | Emerald-ENT.com
141 Mack Bayou Loop, Suite 102, Santa Rosa Beach
12909 Panama City Beach Pkwy., Panama City Beach, FL 32407

News Around Freeport

Walton Officials Recognize County Namesake at Courthouse Ceremony

The Walton County Board of County Commissioners unveiled a portrait of the county's namesake, George Walton, by artist John Grice at the Walton County Courthouse recently. Commission Chairman Brad Drake presided over the event and welcomed numerous county officials, staff and members of

the public. Earlier this year, at the request of District 2 Commissioner Danny Glidewell, the Board voted to commission the artwork as part of Walton County's celebration of the 250th anniversary of America's founding. Noted artist John Grice, a retired Northwest Florida State College instructor and Walton High School teacher, was asked to create the hand-drawn portrait.



(L-R) Commissioner Danny Glidewell, Commissioner Brad Drake, Clerk of Court Crystal Sconiers, artist John Grice, Commissioner Dan Curry, Commissioner Donna Johns, and Supervisor of Elections Ryan Messer

At the ceremony, Commissioner Glidewell detailed the biographical history of George Walton, Sr., one of America's founding fathers and one of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. Glidewell

documented Walton's incredible history as a soldier, Georgia governor and statesman. Just as nearby Washington County was named for our first president, George Walton is Walton County's namesake, as he is for Walton County, Georgia.

Artist John Grice talked about his inspiration and research in creating the artwork, which depicts Walton during his military years, at a younger age than most other renderings. Grice also talked about various details in the portrait, which includes a recreation of Walton's famous signature.

The portrait will be placed in the Courthouse where it can be viewed by the public.

Local Students Named to Furman University's Spring 2026 Dean's List

Thomas House of Freeport and Hannah Rose Paulson of Niceville have been named to Furman University's dean's list for the spring 2026 semester.

The dean's list recognizes full-time undergraduate students who earn a grade point average of 3.4 or higher on a four-point scale.

House and Paulson are among approximately 2,550 students at Furman, a private liberal arts and sciences university in Greenville, South Carolina.

Learn more at www.furman.edu.

Buckets of Smiles for Kids

By RON KELLEY, WALTON COUNTY PIO

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

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

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

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

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

Placed near beach boardwalks, the Bobby Buckets have become a place where visitors could leave gently used beach toys for the next family to enjoy. For children arriving without sand toys, the buckets offer an unexpected treasure chest waiting to be discovered. For departing families, they provide an easy way to pass along toys instead of throwing them away.



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

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

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

As Tammy Lakin said, "Sometimes the best ideas are the simplest ones and thanks to Bobby Buckets, a small act of kindness is making a lasting impact, one sandcastle at a time."

Bluewater

PLASTIC SURGERY

Steven J. Clark, MD, DMD, FACS

Board Certified Plastic Surgeon

Michelle Sasala MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Nurse Practitioner/Aesthetic Injector

Maya Newell, Licensed Esthetician



UltraClear

TURN BACK THE CLOCK!

Non-Surgical Treatments

Botox Bar

Facial Fillers

Laser Hair Removal

Laser Pigmentation and Wrinkles

New - Ultra Clear Laser

Surgical Procedures

Breast Augmentation

Breast Lift or Reduction

Tummy Tuck

Mommy Makeover

Liposuction (Vaser, 360)

Facelift, Necklift, Eyelift

Gynecomastia (Male Breast Reduction)

Post Weight Loss

Labiaplasty

Skincare & Aesthetician Services

Medical Grade Skin Care

Facials

Diamond Glow

Dermaplane

Peels

Book your appointment today!

Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach

(850) 530-6064 | bluewaterplasticsurgery.com

 Business

Settling into a New School Year: Tips for Walton and Okaloosa Families

BY TED SHOOP

Students across Walton and Okaloosa counties are now a few weeks into the 2026–2027 school year after starting classes on Tuesday, August 11. For Freeport families and their neighbors in both counties, these early weeks set the rhythm for a successful year.

September brings a couple of important calendar notes.

Walton County schools have an early-release day on Friday, September 4, followed by the Labor Day holiday on Monday, September 7. Okaloosa County schools also observe Labor Day on September 7. These short breaks offer a good opportunity to catch up on rest, review routines and prepare for the remainder of the first grading period.

Simple habits make a big difference. Consistent bedtimes, a quiet place for homework and regular communication with teachers help students stay on track. Check your school's website or parent portal regularly for assignments, lunch menus and event updates. Many schools also post bus route information and activity calendars online.

Community support

strengthens our schools. Whether you volunteer at an event, join a parent organization or simply encourage a young neighbor, small actions matter. Freeport High School and other local campuses welcome family involvement. As the school year continues, remember that every student benefits from steady encouragement at home and in the community.

I wish all our Walton and Okaloosa students a productive school year filled with new academic and athletic achievements!

Ted Shoop is an experienced real estate professional with eXp Realty, serving families throughout Walton and Okaloosa counties along the Emerald Coast and Choctawhatchee Bay.

FISHING

continued from page 21

like war paint, hence the name. Warmouth swim in swampy, still, darker water than other sunfish. They spawn all summer building solitary nests next to submerged objects. Warmouth eat crayfish, insects, and fish, mostly in the morning. They are ambush predators, hiding in vegetation and then aggressively attacking prey. They appear to sleep at night.

The same baits and lures work for warmouth as for other sunfish, just in muddy waters.

Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

Catfish are hard pulling fish that live deeper in lakes and are active after sunset. Chicken and beef liver, and worms are good



Warmouth. Wikipedia.

baits because catfish smell to find food in the dark lake bottoms. Catfish have taste buds all over their bodies to help them locate food, but they do not eat decaying materials or detritus. They eat crayfish and mollusks.

Males become darker, with dark lips, and a swollen head, while females become lighter during the summer spawning season.

Adults are 20 inches long. Meat is white, crisp, tender, and tasty. Catfish are for eating. Fish



on the bottom with a sturdy #2 to #4 hook, and a heavy split shot sinker. FWC stocks catfish in Juniper Lake, Walton County.

Where to Fish?

Sunfish are in any year-round rivers, streams, backwaters, and ponds, with larger fish in larger

water bodies. The Yellow and Choctawhatchee Rivers are sure to please. Fish where tributaries enter the larger rivers, especially Holmes Creek, a spring fed tributary of the Choctawhatchee. Sunfish love cover. Anywhere around logs, stumps, vegetation, or stuff in the water is where they are.

Juniper Lake, in Walton County, is periodically stocked with catfish and bass, bream, and crappie. Bass may be a bit farther out in colder water in summer, and catfish are on the bottom.

Simon Horaist, owner of Dixie's Yards and More in DeFuniak Springs, caught a four and half pound largemouth on Juniper Lake in May (pictured left).

Florida summers are hot, but the fish still bite. Opportunities for freshwater fishing abound. This is the perfect time for family fun, but teaching children to fish is more than fun. It is an education in patience, skill, and achievement. You are making memories, but you are also developing an appreciation for nature and encouraging responsibility for protection of the environment. Family fishing produces self-confident, persistent, capable, analytical people. Go outside and enjoy the Florida Panhandle.

Helen Petre is a retired biologist. Any ideas or suggestions for articles about nature, wild things, and science, please email: petrehelen@gmail.com.



**Breaking New Ground
IN FREEPORT**

Southern Independent Bank is proud to bring
the power of independence to Freeport, Florida in 2026.

**SOUTHERN
INDEPENDENT
BANK**

The power of independence.

OPP | ANDALUSIA | FLORALA | **Coming in 2026 to FREEPORT**

www.southernindependentbank.com

MEMBER
FDIC

MyBeachAndBayHomes.com
"Bringing Paradise Lifestyles Home"

exp
REALTY

QR code: T. "TED" SHOOP, ABR, e-PRO, REALTOR®
Ted@MyBeachAndBayHomes.com
850-273-8636

**Scan this QR code to view 27+/- waterfront
acres in Freeport on State Hwy 20:**

exp
REALTY

**Call Ted Shoop for more info
or to schedule a personal tour**

Wellness in Your Home

BY MARTA ROSE-THORPE,
WWW.ASUPERIORMECHANICAL.COM

One of the fastest growing wellness trends, growing at a rate of nearly 24% per year, is a thought-provoking sector known as Wellness Real Estate. It represents a cultural and economic shift, where homes are no longer seen as just shelters but as infrastructure meant to actively enhance health span, mental wellbeing, and longevity. It is a design and development trend that integrates neuroscience and architecture. It features ergonomic spaces for movement and mindfulness: dedicated spaces for cold plunges, saunas, daily fitness and yoga, mental relaxation, and meditation.

Wellness Real Estate creates environments in the home that support brain health, reduce stress, improve mental clarity, and promote overall wellbeing. Here are eight elements:

Circadian Lighting
- Mimics the natural progress of sunlight. Think: cooler, brighter lights in the morning to boost energy, and warmer, dimmer lighting in the evening that supports better sleep.

Aromatic Design
- Approaches fragrance as environmental neuroscience to elevate mood, cognitive function, and health. This built-in diffusion system of essential oils is integrated directly into the HVAC system. Think eucalyptus in the home gym; lavender in the bedroom.

Acoustic Insulation - Reduces sensory overload and mental fatigue through sound-masking and noise-dampening architectural materials.

Biophilic Design - Incorporates aromatic plants and herbs directly into the architecture, which allows for natural, plant-based fragrances and helps with air purification.

Low VOC Paint (Volatile Organic Compound) - Emits fewer hazardous airborne chemicals and odors ~ especially important for the bedrooms of family members with allergies.

EMF Home Shielding - Electro Magnetic Fields affect our nervous system regulation, leading to bad sleep. Modify

your living environment with shielding fabrics and conductive paint to reduce EMF from outside sources like cell towers.

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)
- Indoor air is estimated to be 2x to 5x more polluted than outdoor air. Toxic microparticles include VOCs from paints, cleaning supplies and air fresheners. Biological pollutants such as mold, mildew, pet dander and pollen. Combustion pollutants like carbon monoxide (CO) and secondhand smoke. And Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can build up in homes.



Most AC companies use the standard, high-efficient Merve 13 filter that captures 98% of airborne, fine microparticles, but for truly clean air in the home, an Air Scrubber is essential. These advanced, whole-home air purification systems are installed directly into the central air ductwork and utilize activated carbon filters to capture 99.98% of airborne contaminants.

Water Purification and Water Softening - Who doesn't want to drink pure water that tastes and smells good? Reverse Osmosis uses a semi-permeable membrane to remove harmful contaminants from drinking water. Whole-home water softening treatments remove hard chemicals from the water – namely calcium and magnesium – and scale build-up in the pipes – to preserve the home's entire plumbing system and appliances like sinks, dish-



washer, and washing machine. Soft water also feels silkier on the skin, is better for your hair, and requires less soap, shampoo and laundry detergent to achieve the same lather.

What's in Our Local Water?

Our primary source of water for the entire Florida Panhandle comes from the Upper Floridan Aquifer. In Bay County, the water comes through the Aquafer into Deer Point Lake. Through environmental runoff and treatment processes, local water contains elements including Chlorine, Copper, Aluminum, Barium, Radium, Nitrate, Blue-Green Algae, and Cyanobacteria which, if ingested, can affect our liver and nervous system. When we do a Water Assessment in a home or business,

we are looking for not more than one part per million (PPM) of any of these common toxins.

"Wellness in the Home" embraces a variety of facets, including carefully designed architecture, distinct materials utilized in the home construction process, and placing special systems in the home to optimize Clean Air and Pure Water – the very essence of our bodily health and mental wellbeing. For more information on increasing wellness in your home, feel free to call me at (850) 814-3822.

Free Water Assessment

What is in your home's water?

The water you: ■ Drink ■ Bathe in ■ Wash Dishes ■ Wash Clothes

A Superior Mechanical will come do a Free Water Assessment in your home or business. Call us by July 31, 2026.

SCHEDULE YOUR FREE WATER ASSESSMENT: CALL 850-258-3225



SPECIALIZED
WATER SOLUTIONS





Stay Cool As A Cucumber
SUPERIOR MECHANICAL
Veteran-Owned Business
850.258.3225

VISIT ASuperiorMechanical.com
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR
WATER FILTRATION, REVERSE
OSMOSIS & WATER SOFTENERS.

LICENSED & INSURED: CAC1821064, CFC1431881, EC13004739



WALTON AREA CHAMBER

HOST SPONSOR: Hilton

OCTOBER 26
8AM-5PM

- LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP
- WOMEN IN BUSINESS

SCAN TO REGISTER OR VISIT WWW.WALTONAREACHAMBER.COM



TNBT

THE NEXT BIG THING CONFERENCE

PRESENTED BY:



 Musing


BY RICK MOORE

An older pastor was having a late Sunday lunch with a new pastor who had just moved to town. The older pastor asked the younger pastor how it was going. He responded, "Great! We had three people commit their life to God at church today. How about you?" The older pastor responded, "Very well. We had two and a half people commit their life to God at church today." The younger

A Pastor's Ponderings: **Wise Investment**

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

A church I was working at in New England had just built a state-of-the-art children's auditorium, and the date of their grand opening was the Sunday before VBS (Vacation Bible School). Over 500 children



signed up for a fun week of sports, crafts and bible studies. During the VBS, we accepted suggestions from adults and children to determine what the name of the auditorium should be.

The Monday morning after VBS was over, while I am helping tear down the sets and props in the children's theater, I was told there was an urgent phone call for me at the front desk. A lady I did not know asked me to come to the emergency room and pray for her son. He was run over by a car and was in

critical condition. Neither she nor her son showed up in our church data base. After praying for the boy who was in ICU, I went to the waiting room to speak with his mom and his little brother. She had never been to our church, and her son who was run over by the car had never been to our church. However, the little brother who witnessed the accident attended VBS every day. The mother said she did not know who I was, but that the little brother kept saying, "You have to call Pastor Rick to come pray." After that, we knew for sure what the name of that auditorium should be... The Lighthouse. When the storms of life come, the church stands as a lighthouse, even to those who have never walked through its doors.

There can be times it may

seem as if teaching a child doesn't pay off. Often, it is because they do not understand how much you care and want the best for them. Sometimes children do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

It might be that you have to quit focusing on what you want them to learn and try new ways to show you care. If you spend time showing a child how to make a kite or paint a canvas with a pallet and brush, suddenly that child's ears start listening to what you have to say. When you have an opportunity to invest by spending more time with your own children, or volunteering to help other children, just say yes.

Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship.

MORE CARE

continued from page 23

Care is an act of compassion.

Professional skilled nursing and rehabilitation services work alongside families to provide expert medical care, therapy,

and support while helping loved ones recover, regain independence, and live as safely as possible. Watch for these signs:

- Feeling constantly tired, even after sleeping
- Increased anxiety, stress, or depression
- Irritability or mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Feeling isolated or withdrawing from family and friends
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities once enjoyed
- Frequent headaches, body aches, or illness

- Feeling guilty, resentful, or hopeless
- Neglecting your own health appointments or medications

You are Not Alone!

Taking care of yourself is essential—not selfish.

If you're beginning to wonder whether your loved one needs more care, trust your instincts. Having a conversation early can make all the difference. Our team is here to answer your questions, discuss available options, and help you determine the level of care that's right for your family.

At The Manor at Blue Water Bay, we are committed to providing compassionate, personalized post-acute rehabilitation and skilled nursing care that helps patients recover with confidence while giving families peace of mind. Now offering professional physician consultations and oversight for Cardio, Physiatry, Nephrology, Neurology and in-house Palatine Care programs. Call us today for a tour and additional information on how our team of professionals can help.

850-897-5592 | wecare@manoratlwb.com

The Manor at Blue Water Bay | 1500 N. White Point Rd. | Niceville www.manoratlwb.com



ENTERTAIN. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

20 YEARS SINFONIA GULF COAST

DEMETRIUS FULLER
MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

YOUR SYMPHONY EXPERIENCE ... REDEFINED

SINFONIA INITIATIVES

- ♪ Paint the Music
- ♪ Link Up IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CARNEGIE HALL
- ♪ Sinfonietta Strings & Intermediate Strings
- ♪ Sinfonia Youth Orchestra
- ♪ Musicians in Schools
- ♪ Guest Artists in Schools
- ♪ Live orchestra performances for students
- ♪ Ensembles in Residence in the schools in partnership with Florida State University

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.

Donate today to help Sinfonia bring music, education, and the arts to our schools.
SinfoniaGulfCoast.org | 850.460.8800

YOUR SUPPORT IS INSTRUMENTAL TO OUR SUCCESS

Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

SEASON PRESENTING EDUCATION SPONSORS

STJOE Community Foundation

ROBERT M. FERGUSON MEMORIAL FUND FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

SILVER SANDS PREMIUM OUTLETS A HOWARD GROUP AND SIMON CENTER



Shingle - Metal - Tile Roof Replacement Experts

FREE Estimates within 24 Hrs.

ROOF PRO
Roofing Specialists

Most Awarded
Roofing Contractor

State Licensed - License # CCC133693

Scan this QR Code for a 5% Discount!

BEST IN DESTIN 2025

BBB A+

FORTIFIED CERTIFIED

(850) 332-3330 | Roofproroofting.com | [f roofproroofting](https://www.facebook.com/roofproroofting)



BY SEAN DIETRICH

It's a quiet night in Avondale. The sun is low in the western sky. The air is lit with lightning bugs. There are a few neighborhood kids, playing in front yards, trying to catch them with Tupperware.

And the memories are getting so thick you have to swat them away like gnats.

I remember the first time I ever heard a lightning bug called a "firefly." I was 11 years old. A kid from California had recently moved into our neighborhood. He got excited when the front yards were alight with summer lightning bugs.

He said, "Look, fireflies!"

All us kids looked at the new boy as though his cheese had slid off his cracker. Fireflies?

"They're not fireflies," said Margaret Ann. "They're LIGHTNING BUGS."

Truer words.

"No they're not," he answered. "They're FIREFLIES."

"What the [expletive] is a firefly?" said my cousin, Ed Lee.

"They're bugs that light up."

We howled with delight. My cousin Ed Lee almost peed himself. "Californians!" my cousin remarked.

Then the Californian went on to tell us he'd never seen lightning bugs before. He said they didn't have them in the Golden State. We were aghast. No lightning bugs? That was like not knowing Jesus. Or Dale Earnhardt.

"You've never seen lightning bugs?" we said in disbelief.

The Californian shook his head stating that, no, he'd never seen anything like these bugs with the iridescent hindparts.

Which gave us great pride. Because, you see, ever since this Californian had come to our school, he immediately became the hippest kid in our hillbilly class.

Namely, because he had wavy blonde hair, a skateboard, and he knew what tofu was. And one time, for Show and Tell, the

kid declared that he had gone surfing. The girls in the class went crazy for him and indicated that they would be interested in bearing his offspring someday.

But he'd never seen lightning bugs. And this made us very proud.

"Wanna catch lightning bugs?" suggested my cousin.

Replied the Californian, "You mean you can CATCH fireflies?"

"No," answered Cousin Ed Lee. "But you can catch lightning bugs."

So we raided my mother's kitchen cabinets. We emerged from the house with Ball mason jars—something else the Californian had never seen before.

"These are funny-looking jars," he said. "And they have funny lids."

"These are moonshine jars," said Margaret.

"What's moonshine?" said the Californian.

You have to worry about America's youth.

The next thing we knew, we were all outside, using mason jars the way the Good Lord intended—to catch lightning bugs (fireflies). Which as it happens are neither bugs nor flies. They are beetles.

To catch a lightning bug, you had to have good technique:

You must (1) take the jar in your right hand; then you must (2) hold the lid in your left hand; then (3) you fling the jar through the air haphazardly like one who hath consumed too much moonshine; whereupon you (4) slam the lid over the jar and shout, "I got one!" even if this is a lie.

It was okay to lie about catching lightning bugs because nobody paid any attention to you inasmuch as they were all busy trying to catch their own. We were all chasing the nanoscopic glowing dots.

Once we had jars full of lightning bugs, the Californian asked, "Now what do we do with 'em?"

Margaret replied, "You just look at 'em."

"Then you let them go," added Cousin Ed Lee.

"LET THEM GO?" answered the Californian. "But why go to the trouble of catching so many if you're just going to set them free?"

Sean of the South: Lightning Bugs



"Because," said Sandra. "They only live 30 days."

We were mesmerized by the bright dots in our mason jars, lit up like miracles, meandering to and fro. Their little butts glowing greenish-yellow.

"I'm going to keep my fireflies," said the Californian.

"You can't," said Margaret. "Lightning bugs have to go free so they can make babies."

"They have to make babies," said Sandra, "or else we'll never have lightning bugs again."

So we kept them for a few minutes. We observed them closely. Then, immediately after

our mothers called us inside for supper, we wandered down to the creek and let them all go. We watched the insects fill the night with millions of tiny lights.

"They're so beautiful," said the Californian. "I wish beautiful things lived longer lives."

Truer words.

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.



Local, professional photographer specializing in families, weddings, and events. My passion lies in creating lasting memories through photographs, and I cherish the opportunity to be part of such meaningful moments!




 205-567-2779
 savvyleighphotography@gmail.com
 www.savvyleighphoto.com
















Studio 237 Music Lessons

Piano • Voice • Guitar • Bass • Drums
Ukulele • Song Writing and Shofar
Call Today for your appointment 850-231-3199
237 Dawson Rd, Santa Rosa Beach
Visit www.Studio237Music.com

 Arts & Music


BY NATHANAEL FISHER

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

ECTC Announces Fall 2026 Education Classes

to expand its reach across the Emerald Coast. Payment plans and scholarships are available for families who need them, and registration is open!

This fall also marks an exciting chapter for ECTC's education program, with two new directors stepping into leadership roles: **Adam Day Howard**, MFA, as education director and **Mallory McGill** as education and outreach coordinator. Together, they bring decades of combined experience in professional theatre, music direction and arts education to a program that already reaches hundreds of students each year.

Mallory McGill was raised in Destin and is thrilled to give back to her hometown community as she shares the transformative power of theatre with the next generation. Before joining ECTC, McGill taught theatre at Destin High School, where her students consistently earned Superior ratings and Critics' Choice Awards at the Florida District and State Thespian Festivals, and where she was honored with the school's prestigious Golden Shark Teacher Award

for her dedication to students and the broader school community.

McGill's résumé extends well beyond the Panhandle. She spent more than 15 years teaching and actor coaching in Los Angeles at Lesly Kahn & Co, one of the nation's premier acting studios. She trained hundreds of actors ranging in age from 6 to 65, and many of her students have gone on to appear on HBO, ABC, NBC, Disney, Nickelodeon and in national Broadway tours. As a working actress, director, filmmaker and writer, her own credits include *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Stupid Questions*, *The Suite Life: On Deck*, *90210*, *General Hospital*, and stage productions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Misalliance*. She later discovered a passion for writing original stories, and her most recent screenplay was recognized by the Austin Film Festival and Reboot Studios. McGill holds a Bachelor of Science from Vanderbilt University, where she studied Acting/Directing, Communication Studies and Human & Organizational Development. She



believes the best rehearsal rooms are built on curiosity, kindness, collaboration and the courage to take creative risks, a philosophy that shapes everything from ECTC's youngest Mini Players classes to its competitive troupes.

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

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

Kayes, and he holds memberships in Actors Equity Association (UK), the National Alliance for Musical Theatre and the Dramatists Guild.

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

Teens have no shortage of options this fall, from Legally Blonde JR for grades 6-12, complete with an Aug. 7 audition workshop and November performances, to specialized Masterclasses in Acting for Musical Theatre, Playwriting and Acting and Improv, all taught by Howard and McGill. Dancers can pursue Broadway Dance Styles or the monthly Leaps, Turns & Tricks Skills Lab, and competitive performers have two tracks: the JTF Performance Troupe (grades 2-12), which travels to the Junior Theatre Festival in Atlanta in January, and the Junior Thespian Competition Troupe (grades 6-8), which competes regionally in October and at the state level in February. Students in grades 9-12 can also join Teen Company Fall, a semester-long training program that culminates in a One Act performance at the Florida Theatre Conference in November and includes mentorship toward collegiate auditions, scholarship opportunities and portfolio building.

ECTC's reach extends beyond its home campus through satellite classes at the Florida Chautauqua Theatre in DeFuniak Springs and the Riverwalk Community Clubhouse in Freeport, where K-12 students can participate in *Trolls JR*. The Homeschool program offers Voice

Continued on next page



JUNE 3-6, 2027
1 BEACH ★ 4 DAYS ★ 24 ARTISTS
Endless Memories.
JUST ANNOUNCED
FRIDAY 6.04 SATURDAY 6.05
LUKE BRYAN JASON ALDEAN
+ MORE ARTISTS COMING SOON!
TICKETS, HOTEL PACKAGES AND PAYMENT PLANS AVAILABLE
GULFCOASTJAM.COM

SAVE

ON YOUR
TICKETS NOW



SCAN QR CODE,
ENTER LM27
AT CHECKOUT,
& SAVE!

USE CODE **LM27** AT CHECKOUT

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

By Will Estell

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

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

For its most recent experiment in music history, the band has shifted to “Y2K Rewind: The Ultimate Early 2000s Live Experience,” featuring an impressive collection of hits spanning rock, pop, alternative and dance music from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Think Avril Lavigne, Blink-182, Concrete Blonde, Britney, Evanescence

and many more artists whose music defined an entire generation. Whether you grew up burning cheap CDs for friends or loading your first iPod with these bangers, Midnight Mixtape delivers the sounds and shows that instantly reconnect us with those unforgettable moments.

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

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

Dan Collins, whose lead vocals and guitar anchor each performance with confidence and charisma, has become well known throughout Northwest



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MURPHY

Florida as the frontman and founder of Black Eyed Blonde, as well as for producing unique live entertainment events that go beyond the typical cover band performance. He also built his reputation during his time playing with Naked Gunmen and Miss Demeanor.

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

The ensemble also includes Sarah Mangum on vocals and keys, adding rich harmonies

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

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

Midnight Mixtape will perform live at Distillery 98 in Santa Rosa Beach on Friday, Aug. 28, 2026, presenting “The Ultimate Early 2000s Live Music Experience.” This two-hour show promises to be a nonstop celebration of the music that defined the Y2K era.

At press time, a limited number of VIP and general admission tickets were available. However, given the band’s recent enthusiastic crowds, I definitely recommend purchasing tickets

soon. You can also follow the band online for more details, dates and performance videos.

Will Estell is a writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with over 750 published articles in a wide array of regional and national publications. Estell is the chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media and has been instrumental in bringing 12 new startup magazine brands to market over his 25-plus-year media career. He currently consults for publishing companies locally and nationally, as well as maintaining a career in coastal real estate and development. Originally from the backwoods of Booneville, Miss., Will is a father of three, who along with his wife, WEAR ABC 3 anchor, Laura Hussey Estell, now calls Destin and Navarre Beach home.

ECTC

continued from previous page

and Movement, Acting and Improv, and a hands-on Sewing and Costume Design course for students ages 9 to 18, while adults can join Beginner/Intermediate Tap, Intermediate/Advanced Tap or the Senior Drama Club for performers 55 and up.

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

Local Coupons

CULLIGAN WATER

\$300 OFF

WHEN YOU MENTION THIS AD/COUPON

Offer expires 9/30/26
850-664-7771

ROOFPRO

\$500 OFF

FULL ROOF REPLACEMENT

Offer expires 9/30/26
850-332-3330
Roofproroofing.com

BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY

\$100 OFF LASER PACKAGES

INCLUDES LASER HAIR REMOVAL, PHOTOFACIALS, AND PIGMENTATION TREATMENTS (EXCLUDES ULTRACLEAR). PLUS ENJOY A COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION WITH MICHELLE, NP.

Offer expires 9/30/26
Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach 850-530-6064
www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com

BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY

20% OFF ANY FACIAL

PLUS A FREE SKIN CONSULTATION WITH OUR AESTHETICIAN, MAYA. NEW PATIENTS ONLY.

Offer expires 9/30/26
Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach 850-530-6064
www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com

TED SHOOP, REALTOR

BUY OR SELL A HOME WITH TED, GET A FREE HOME WARRANTY (\$650 VALUE)

Offer expires 9/30/26
850-273-8636 • mybeachandbayhomes.com

TORTOISE CLINIC

\$30 OFF

NEW PATIENT OFFER

Present this coupon and receive \$30 off any service at the Tortoise Clinic. One coupon per person.

Offer expires 9/30/26
2441 U.S. Hwy 98, Santa Rosa Beach
TortoiseClinic.com | 850.267.5611

SHINE CHIROPRACTIC

\$99

NEW PATIENT OFFER

Includes Exam, X-rays & Adjustment

Offer expires 9/30/26
850-880-6046
www.shinechiropractic.co

LJ SCHOONERS

DOCKSIDE RESTAURANT AND OYSTER BAR

FREE APPETIZER OR DESSERT

WITH AN ENTREE PURCHASE VALUE UP TO \$11.95. LIMIT ONE COUPON PER VISIT, PER CUSTOMER. RESTRICTIONS APPLY.

Offer expires 9/30/26
290 Yacht Club Dr., Niceville • 850-897-6400
www.bluewaterbaymarina.com



NATUREVIEW

From the
Creators of 

*NatureView is Freeport's
next great neighborhood*

Brand new and move-in ready!



**HOMES STARTING IN
THE LOW \$300,000S**



- Resort-Style Clubhouse & Pool
- 24-Hour Fitness Center & Yoga Studio
- Pickleball Courts, Trails, Parks & More
- New homes by DSLD Homes & Holiday Builders

Amenities are open. Homes are available. Tours are happening now

CONTACT US TO TOUR TODAY!  850-822-5005



Beth Jones
beth@hammockbayfl.com



Gina Walker
gina@hammockbayfl.com



Anne Winjum
anne@hammockbayfl.com



Bonnie Bianca
bonnie@hammockbayfl.com

 6932 CO Highway 3280, Freeport, FL, 32439

 natureviewfl.com