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

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

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

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

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



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

Later, after learning her son was on the autism spec-

trum and would likely need specialized educational support, she encountered the DCWAF name once more while touring Westonwood Ranch and Emerald Coast Autism Center.

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

Years passed. Her business grew. And when she found



herself in a position to give back, she knew exactly which organization she wanted to support. "Her story captures the heart of our mission: supporting a network of trusted nonprofit partners that can care for children through different needs and stages of life," Kate said. "It also demonstrates how generosi-

HARVEST WINE
continued on page 2



Freeport Mayor's Ball 2026 to Support Local Families and Organizations

BY KERRI PARKER, HWY331.COM

An evening of casino games, music and dancing will carry a purpose close to home when the Freeport Mayor's Ball brings its Casino Royale theme to Freeport Shipyard Marina on October 10. Behind the evening's glamour is a community tradition of helping local families through difficult times.

Long before the casino tables are

MAYOR'S BALL
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 Community
HARVEST WINE*continued from page 1*

ty comes full circle—helping a family during a critical time and inspiring that family to create the same opportunity for others.”

That story explains the heart of Harvest better than I—or any event schedule—ever could: a family receiving support during a frightening time, then one day extending that same support to

someone else.

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

Harvest returns **Oct. 15-18 in WaterColor**. Over the past decade, the festival alone has raised more than \$1 million for programs addressing



healthcare, education, housing, food security, mental health and other essential needs of children throughout Northwest Florida.



“As we celebrate this milestone, we are especially proud that every ticket purchased, every bottle poured and every partnership formed has helped create meaningful, lasting impact right here at home,” Kate said.

That is certainly worth celebrating!

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

I’ve even had the delightful surprise of running into friends from Birmingham—my hometown. Those unexpected reunions, warm hugs and opportunities to catch up over a glass of wine help make Harvest so special. It’s fun to look across the crowd and spot a familiar face.

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

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

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

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

That is why DCWAF’s network of 16 partner charities is so important. “Their collective strength lies in working together

Continued on next page

From the Publisher: One Wonderful Year, and We’re Just Getting Started!



Happy first anniversary, Freeport Life! And thank you, Freeport, for giving us so much to celebrate.

A year ago, we launched these pages with a simple purpose: to share your stories, celebrate your successes and give our growing community a place to see itself reflected. You welcomed us into your homes, your businesses and your lives. Because of you, Freeport Life has become something we’re proud to share each month—a paper that belongs to this community.

We knew Freeport had stories worth telling. What a joy it has been to discover just how many! Everyday heroes quietly making a difference. Business owners pouring their hearts into a dream. Students making us proud, leaders serving their neighbors and organizations

finding new ways to help. Add in local sports, delicious dining and events that bring us together, and we’ve had a year full of reasons to smile.

Some of you call Freeport Life the “feel-good” or “happy” paper. We’ve taken that to heart. There is something special about opening your community paper and recognizing a neighbor, discovering a local business or learning about someone whose kindness deserves a little recognition. Those moments remind us how much good is happening right here at home.

Freeport Life is the newest of Life Media’s eight publications serving our region. Throughout our growth, our mission has remained the same: to deliver meaningful, informative and positive community stories directly to your mailbox. We’re also passionate about helping local businesses connect with the people who live here. When you tell us you visited a shop, tried a restaurant or called a business after seeing it in our pages, we’re reminded why those connections matter.

To our advertisers and editorial contributors—including

so many who have been with us since the first issue—thank you for believing in Freeport Life. Your support makes these pages possible. To our readers, thank you for picking us up, passing us along and sharing your ideas. You give this paper its personality, its purpose and its heart.

As we begin our second year, we’re excited to keep building relationships, celebrating your accomplishments and introducing you to the people and places that make Freeport special. Through direct mail and local distribution, we’ll continue sharing 10,000 copies each month and offering local businesses affordable ways to reach their neighbors.

Visit MyFreeportLife.com for our online edition, feature stories, coupons and past issues. And keep those story ideas coming! If we haven’t met you yet, we look forward to it.

Thank you for a wonderful first year. We can’t wait to see what fills these pages next—and we’re so glad you’re part of the story.

*With gratitude,
Lori Leath Miller, Publisher*



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HARVEST WINE

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er to support the whole child,” Kate said. “By sharing resources, identifying gaps in services and connecting families with additional support, our partners create a coordinated network of care that extends far beyond what any one organization could provide alone.”

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

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

I witnessed tears of joy. Excited joy. Thankful, grateful joy. You could hear it in the voices of those who stepped to the mi-

crophone, and you could feel it throughout the room.

Every person who donates, volunteers, serves on a board, bids in an auction, hosts a wine dinner or simply purchases a ticket to an event such as Harvest plays a part in changing real lives right here in our own backyard.

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

That deeper purpose does not diminish the fun of Harvest. If anything, it adds to it. “Wine and food have a remarkable ability to bring people together and create a shared sense of community,” Kate said. “Our events begin with an exceptional experience, but the connection to our mission gives that experience greater meaning.”

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

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

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

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

Saturday brings the signature **Grand Tasting**, where guests can explore hundreds of wines from around the world

while enjoying seafood, barbecue and other creations from talented chefs and makers.

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

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

It promises to be a spectacular four days. Yet the most meaningful result will not be found on a menu, in a wineglass or beneath the lights of a beautifully decorated tent. Through stories like the young mother’s, we know that impact extends far beyond the festival weekend. It is found months—and even years—later in a NICU, a classroom, a counseling room, a safe home or a mother’s arms.

I have long believed the compassion and generosity of our relatively small Northwest Florida communities rival those of much larger cities and regions. We may be small in size, but when it comes to giving, serving and taking care of our own, our



hearts are huge. Harvest is one more beautiful expression of that heart.

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

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

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

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Community



Needles, Fire and Herbs: The Not-So-Scary Side of Acupuncture

By Dr. Karen DeVore

October is the season for haunted houses, bubbling cauldrons and things designed to make us shiver. Yet for many people, nothing sounds quite as intimidating as voluntarily lying down while someone places needles in their body. Add herbs, glass cups and perhaps even a flame, and I can understand the hesitation.

Fortunately, acupuncture is usually far gentler than the



anticipation. The needles are remarkably thin, and most patients are surprised by how comfortable—and often deeply relaxing—the experience can be.

But the needle is only the beginning of the story.

Acupuncture exists within a much broader Eastern medicine tradition that considers patterns, relationships and the interplay between structure, function, energy and environment. Traditional acupuncture, neuroacupuncture and facial rejuvenation acupuncture can use the same tiny needle in very different ways. Herbal medicine, cupping and other complementary techniques expand the possibilities even further.

So, in the spirit of October, let's make the needles, herbs and fire a little less mysterious.

menopause or staying active as the body changes with age.

Eastern medicine has also long valued prevention—paying attention to changes in sleep, digestion, energy, tension and recovery before they become impossible to ignore.

Acupuncture is about more than placing a needle where something hurts. Research continues to explore its relationship with pain modulation, sensory signaling and nervous system activity, while the traditional framework considers the individual's larger pattern of function and balance. That versatility allows it to be restorative or proactive, highly focused or whole-person, and able to stand alone or complement other care.

Neuroacupuncture: When the Nervous System is Part of the Story

Neuroacupuncture takes acupuncture into remarkably complex territory. This specialized approach incorporates carefully selected scalp and body acupuncture around neurological and functional goals involving the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves, movement, sensation, balance and coordination.

This is where neuroplasticity becomes particularly interesting. The brain and nervous system retain an ability to adapt and reorganize in response to

Traditional Acupuncture: Much Bigger Than You Think

If your idea of acupuncture begins and ends with back pain, you are seeing only a small part of the picture.

People explore traditional acupuncture for headaches, sleep, stress, digestive concerns, fertility, hormonal transitions, musculoskeletal complaints, neuropathy and chronic or complex pain. For one person, it may complement physical therapy or medical treatment. For another, it may be part of preparing for pregnancy, navigating peri-



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 Community

NatureView: See What New Home Living Can Look Like in Freeport

New construction from the upper \$200s. Resort-style amenities. Miles of trails. A remarkable natural setting. And the Emerald Coast just a short drive away.

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

For homebuyers searching Northwest Florida, it might be time to look a little north of the beach. In Freeport, a new master-planned community is giving buyers something increasingly compelling: the opportunity to own a brand-new home while gaining an entire lifestyle outside their front door.

Welcome to NatureView.

Developed by The Jay Odom Group, the developers behind Hammock Bay, NatureView brings together new homes from two established builders, resort-style amenities and an extraordinary natural setting to create a community designed around how people actually want to live. And for buyers who assume that kind of lifestyle must come with a luxury price tag, NatureView may be especially worth a closer look.



What Can New Construction Get You in Freeport?

Quite a lot, actually. At NatureView, DSLD Homes currently offers new homes starting from \$289,990, with options ranging from approximately 1,293 to more than 3,000 square feet and floor plans offering three to five bedrooms.

Holiday Builders adds even more choices, with homes currently starting from the \$360s and floor plans extending beyond 3,000 square feet. That means NatureView isn't built around just one kind of homeowner. There are options for someone buying their first home, families looking for another bedroom, buyers who want a larger garage or home office, and those simply ready to trade the projects and maintenance of an older home for something brand new.

And that is one of the advantages of buying new. Modern floor plans are designed around the way families live today. New systems, appliances and materials can mean fewer immediate



maintenance projects. Energy-efficient construction can help make a home more comfortable and efficient. Builder warranties can also provide an added layer of peace of mind.

Instead of asking, "What will I need to replace first?" You get to ask a much more exciting question: "Which floor plan feels like home?"

But You're Buying More Than the House

That may be NatureView's biggest differentiator. Your home doesn't end at your property line. Step outside and the community itself becomes part of the lifestyle. NatureView features a resort-style zero-entry swimming pool, clubhouse, 24-hour fitness center, yoga space, pickleball and basketball courts, playgrounds, dog parks, pocket parks and miles of nature and fitness trails.

There are places to exercise. Places for the kids to play. Places for the dog to run. Places to meet neighbors. And plenty of places to simply slow down and enjoy being outside. These aren't amenities you have to drive across town to use. They're part of the neighborhood you call home.

Imagine an Ordinary Saturday Here

Wake up and take the dog for a walk along the trails. Grab your coffee and enjoy a quiet morning surrounded by Northwest Florida's natural landscape. Take the kids to the pool after lunch. Meet friends for pickleball in the afternoon. Head south for dinner, shopping or an evening near the Gulf. Then come home to somewhere that feels removed from the crowds. That balance is what makes NatureView different.

The community is located approximately nine miles north of South Walton's beaches, yet NatureView is surrounded by tens of thousands of acres of protected conservation land. You can stay connected to the Emerald Coast without having to live in the middle of its busiest areas.

From the Developers Who Created Hammock Bay

For people who know Freeport, The Jay Odom Group is already closely connected to the city's growth. More than two decades ago, the company began developing Hammock Bay with a vision of creating something much larger than a subdivision: a master-planned community built around amenities, recreation, nature and a genuine sense of place. Today, Hammock Bay has become one of the area's most recognizable communities.

NatureView represents the next chapter. It isn't a copy of Hammock Bay. It has its own identity, its own natural setting and a lifestyle designed specifically around the land surrounding it. But behind it is the same local development experience and attention to community planning.

NatureView encompasses approximately 276 acres and is planned for 792 single-family homesites, with homes by DSLD Homes and Holiday Builders. That gives buyers something else increasingly valuable: choice. Two builders. Multiple home designs. Different sizes and price points. One thoughtfully planned community.

Surrounded by Something That Can't Be Recreated

Homes can be built. Pools can be built.

Clubhouses can be built. But thousands of acres of protected natural land surrounding your community? That is much harder to duplicate.

NatureView is surrounded by more than 50,000 acres of



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Continued on page 15



MAYOR'S BALL

continued from page 1

arranged and guests step onto the dance floor; that purpose can be found in a much quieter scene: a child opening a gift and a family sitting down to a meal. For more than a decade, the Mayor's Ball has raised money to help ensure that children in the Freeport area do not go without. Funds raised have helped hundreds of local families facing difficult circumstances.

That tradition will continue Saturday, October 10, when the 2026 Freeport Mayor's Ball brings its Casino Royale theme to Freeport Shipyard Marina for the first time. The new venue gives the longtime fundraiser a fresh setting, but its purpose remains rooted in neighbors helping neighbors. Proceeds will support families in need as well as deserving organizations serving the Freeport area.

The event is organized by the Town Planters Society of Freeport, a local nonprofit involved



throughout the year in community traditions, beautification projects and holiday assistance. Its work reflects the largely volunteer network behind many of the events and programs that help give Freeport its sense of place.

As the city grows, the Mayor's Ball offers residents and businesses an opportunity to ensure

that growth is accompanied by generosity. It turns an elegant evening into Christmas gifts, family meals and support that remains close to home.

Casino Royale will include casino-style games, a silent auction, raffles, live entertainment, food and beverages and dancing. Elegant evening attire is encouraged.

Eglin Federal Credit Union returns as presenting sponsor. Additional sponsors include Natureview by the Jay Odom Group, Emerald Coast Title, Kingdom Developers, Blue Haven Pools, Lennar Homes, Dewberry, Fountain & Bridgeford Law Firm, Home Biz Properties, Ali Vei Salon and Southern Independent Bank.

The Freeport Mayor's Ball will be held from 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, October 10, at Freeport Shipyard Marina.

Tickets and sponsorship information are available through the event's official registration page.

Town Planters Society: Growing Community Pride

Community pride takes willing hands, and the Town Planters Society of Freeport puts volunteers at the heart of its work. The organization supports local beautification, education and neighbors in need, offering residents a way to give back while connecting with their community.

Its projects have included the Miss Freeport Pageant, Bayfest, the Mayor's Charity Ball and Festival of Trees, along with efforts to help maintain Freeport's appearance and support community celebrations.

The society also has a con-

nection to local history. Its home, the Blount House, was offered to the organization in 2002. After the building was damaged during its move to city property, it was rebuilt in cooperation with the city.

New members and volunteers are welcome. The society's website lists meetings for the first Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Blount House, 541 Kylea Laird Drive.

Get involved: Visit townplanterssociety.com or email tpsfreeport@yahoo.com for membership information and volunteer opportunities.

Celebrating 15 Years!

Gulf Coast Jam Announces Star-Packed 2027 Lineup
June 3–6, 2027 | Frank Brown Park | Panama City Beach

Bailey Zimmerman is the opening-night headliner (Thursday) for the 15th Annual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam. He joins country superstars Jason Aldean (Friday), Luke Bryan (Saturday) and Zach Top (Sunday) for four days of live music and beachside fun. A fourth and final headliner will be announced in the coming weeks.

Four-day passes are currently available for General Admission, College, First Responder and Military levels. Elevated experiences include Caymus Premium Standing, Caymus VIP, Overlook Club and Side Stage. Ticket-and-hotel packages and payment plans are

also available.

Billboard Magazine called Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," drawing over 25,000 fans nightly to the four-day event in May. Ticketmaster listed Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam as one of the Best Country Music Festivals to See in 2026. Music Festival Wizard named it the number one festival in their Top 50 Most Popular Fests in the World 2024 – Voter's Choice poll and their Best Beach Music Festivals This Summer in 2025.

Jammers are encouraged to follow Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam at www.gulfcoastjam.com

and on Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat for special announcements about the Festival.

To purchase discounted tickets through Life Media, scan the QR code and enter LM27!

Stay tuned to Life Media papers for lineup announcements and festival updates leading up to the event. GulfCoastJam.com



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 Community

Countywide 911 Coordination Expands Walton County's Simultaneous 911 System

FROM PIO COREY DOBRIDNIA,
WALTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S
OFFICE

Emergency response in Walton County is now faster, smarter, and more connected. The Walton County Sheriff's Office is thrilled to announce the formal integration of the South Walton Fire District and the DeFuniak Springs Police Department into the county's Simultaneous 911 Ringing System. The expansion aims to strengthen countywide emergency response coordination and enhance service for residents and visitors in Walton County.

So, how does this technology work? The Simultaneous 911 Ringing System routes emergency calls to multiple agencies at the same time based on where the call originates from. This allows for faster information sharing and streamlined dispatching, so emergency response is unified. The Walton County Sheriff's Office serves as the county's primary Public



Safety Answering Point (PSAP), meaning all 911 calls first enter through our agency. Under the simultaneous ringing model, calls will now ring to multiple agencies at once when appropriate, depending on the caller's location. This collaborative approach improves situational awareness for responding agencies and reduces delays caused by transferring calls between dispatch centers.

"The project represents a significant step in modernizing emergency communications in Walton County," said Walton County Sheriff Michael Adkinson. "By bringing SWFD and DFSPD fully into the simultaneous 911 environment, we're ensuring that every second counts



and that first responders have the information they need as quickly as possible."

But this couldn't have been accomplished without the help of multiple partners. Walton County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) supported this initiative by developing new mapping layers essential for determining which calls should ring to which agencies simultaneously. Over three months, extensive testing was done with dispatchers from all three agencies, along with technical partners such as Motorola and C1, formerly ConvergeOne. Although the system went live in July, officials from all involved agencies continue to refine processes to maximize efficiency

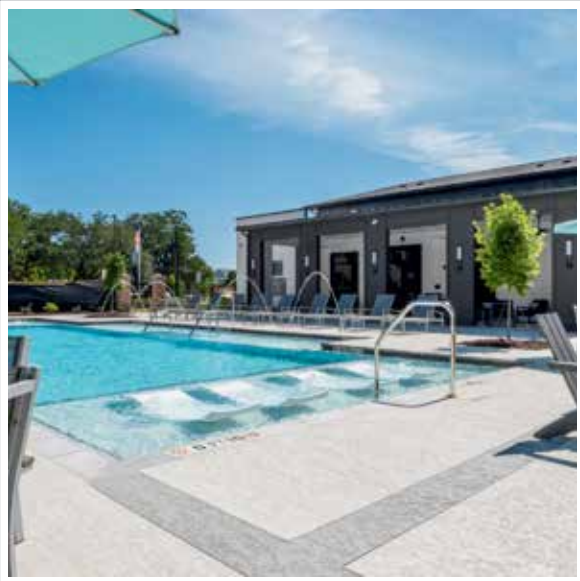
and coordination.

South Walton Fire District and DeFuniak Springs Police Department officials echoed the importance of the integration and emphasized the benefits of enhanced coordination and reduced response times. "Developing this system included careful planning and forecasting to bolster Emergency Communications staffing levels specifically in South Walton Fire District's jurisdiction," said SWFD Fire Chief Ryan Crawford. "We prepared for the increase in our inbound 911 call volume while fostering collaborative operating procedures to reflect 'Walton County 911' as a team.

Ultimately, the agencies involved did the work to make this possible, but the true beneficiaries are the taxpayers who receive critical redundancy in their local 911 system." "We're a small community, and when someone calls 911, they deserve quick help from folks who know this area and care about

the people in it," said DeFuniak Springs Police Chief James Hurley. "Joining this system means we're working shoulder to shoulder with our partners across the county to make sure no call gets delayed. It's another way we're looking out for our neighbors and doing everything we can to keep them safe."

This unified system reflects ongoing efforts across Walton County to leverage technology and interagency partnerships to deliver the highest standard of emergency service. The implementation of simultaneous ringing aligns with broader countywide initiatives to strengthen public safety infrastructure and provide first responders with reliable, efficient communication tools. The Walton County Sheriff's Office extends its appreciation to the dispatchers from all three agencies whose patience, dedication, and countless hours of hard work made this launch possible.



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

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

Our expertise covers the

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

Designed for the Way You Live

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

A fireplace can transform a room into a warm and inviting



gathering place. A professionally designed outdoor kitchen can turn a patio into an extension of your home. Gas lighting can add warmth, character, and timeless appeal to outdoor spaces. Behind it all, properly installed gas

piping provides the dependable foundation that makes these features possible.

We understand that every property and every customer is different. That's why we take the time to listen, understand your

goals, and provide solutions tailored to your home and lifestyle. Our approach combines quality products, knowledgeable service, attention to detail and local experience.

Your Local Gas & Outdoor Living Experts

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

Visit our showroom at 3214 US Hwy 98, Suite 402 Santa Rosa Beach, to explore options, get inspired and talk with our team about your next project. Gasworksfl.com | 850.603.2550



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 Out & About

Celebrate the Songs at the Second Annual Destin Songwriter Festival!

BY WILL ESTELL

This Oct. 24 and 25, the white sands and emerald waters of the World's Luckiest Fishing Village will serve as the picturesque backdrop for five stages of music and fun at the second annual Destin Songwriter Festival. If you're a fan of great songs, beautiful backdrops and all the fun that fall along our coastal paradise offers, you're going to want to grab your tickets fast and join in on the celebration.

This year's festival features intimate acoustic, songwriter-round-style performances and unforgettable headliner sets across five stages over two days, offering music lovers a firsthand glimpse into the stories behind the songs.

In my two decades covering festivals and writing interview features on numerous songwriters — from Kenny Chesney, Alan Jackson and Sara Evans to Darius Rucker, Lyle Lovett and even the late, great Jimmy Buffett — I've often said that to sing is one thing, but to write and breathe lyrical and musical life into a song is another entirely. This is what the Destin Songwriter Festival is all about.

I asked festival CEO and

co-founder Matthew Pennings for a little insight into some of the second-year changes to the festival, and this is what he had to share: "Throughout the festival, music lovers can enjoy free performances at multiple popular venues along Destin Harbor, coupled with paid ticket holders being able to access the main stage and featured acts. The Destin Harbor stages include Boathouse Oyster Bar, Sky Bar and Edge Seafood Restaurant. All of the shows at those venues will be free to attend, while the main stage events will be available to ticketed patrons only."

As for the talent on hand for this second rendition of the growing music fest, fans are sure to be impressed. The most notable headliner, Jeffrey Steele, is a personal favorite of mine, having seen him perform numerous times at various festivals I have covered. Steele is a six-time Grammy nominee with more than 65 million airplays for hits penned for artists such as Keith Urban, Eric Church, Zac Brown Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Cher, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Rascal Flatts and numerous others.

His accolades include induc-



tion into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Country Music Hall of Fame's Poet and Prophet Honor and multiple BMI and NSAI Songwriter of the Year awards. Steele's chart-toppers include "Raise 'Em Up," "What Hurts the Most" and "My Wish," along with so many other hits you will know and sing along to. Steele has received more than 35 BMI Country and Pop awards, a Golden Globe nomination for "I Thought I Lost You" from Dis-

ney's "Bolt" and recognition as one of Billboard's top five writers for eight consecutive years.

Other artists on hand to share their songwriting and performance talents include: Terri Jo Box has an impressive catalog that includes Lainey Wilson's "Hillbilly Hippie," Ashley McBryde and Trisha Yearwood's "Bible and a .44," Cody Johnson's "God Bless the Boy" and Miranda Lambert's "Dear Old Sun."

Carolyn Dawn Johnson is a



well-versed hit songwriter and recording artist. Johnson penned Chely Wright's No. 1 hit "Single White Female" and Jo Dee Messina's "Downtime," in addition to Johnson's own 2001 hit, "Complicated."

Bridgette Tatum, best known for writing Jason Aldean's "She's Country," Randy Houser's "Back" and Gretchen Wilson's "Big Wood Deck," has helped shape the sound of modern country music.

Saturday's main stage will be located directly in front of The Edge Seafood restaurant. Pennings says the main stage shows are bring-your-own-chair events and run from 4 to 8 p.m. Saturday main stage tickets are only \$30, with a very limited number of eight-person tables also available for purchase.

Saturday Main Stage

4-4:50 p.m. — Destin Songwriter Competition finalists

5-5:50 p.m. — "Next of Nashville" with Bryce Leatherwood, Jessie G and Reed Foley

6-6:50 p.m. — "Female Power Round" with Terri Jo Box, Bridgette Tatum and Carolyn Dawn Johnson

7-7:50 p.m. — Headliner Jeffrey Steele, solo

For Sunday, the festival moves to the remarkable grounds of The Alice, where lucky ticket holders will relish an intimate VIP experience with reserved high-top seating. Sunday tickets are remarkably priced at only \$60, with on-site food and beverages available for purchase. Pennings tells me that a very limited quantity of only 10 tables, with eight seats each, are also available for purchase and will include special VIP swag.

Sunday at The Alice

Doors open: 3 p.m.

4-4:30 p.m. — Surprise artist



Building relationships one cup at a time.

 Saturday, October 10th
  10:00 am-12:00 pm
  Abide Coffee in Hammock Bay

Coffee with a Hero is about breaking down barriers between first responders and the community. Police officers, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, military, and neighbors come together in a welcoming space to connect, ask questions, and build relationships. Children are welcome to explore fire engines, police cars, U.S. Army advanced robots, and much more!





Have Coffee With a Local Hero!

Saturday, Oct. 10 | 10 a.m.–Noon | Abide Coffee, 1799 Great Hammock Bend, Hammock Bay | Freeport

Connect with the men and women who serve and protect our community during Abide Coffee's second annual Coffee With a Hero. Local law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel and a large military presence will give families opportunities to ask questions, hear their stories and build relationships in a relaxed setting over coffee.

Kids can explore police cars, a fire truck and military robots, try on a bomb suit, and enjoy coloring activities and giveaways. Beyond the hands-on fun, the gathering encourages neighbors to spend time getting to know

their local heroes.

Abide will provide complimentary drip coffee and baked goods for participating first responders and military personnel. The coffee shop also offers community heroes 10% off specialty drinks every day.

"We're excited to bring this event back for a second year and hopefully introduce even more of our Freeport community to the people who serve and protect us," said Stephanie Brown of Abide Coffee Co. "We hope to see you there!"

drinkabide.com

Continued on next page

DESTIN SONGWRITER

continued from previous page

4:45-6:15 p.m. — Operation Song presents Jamie Floyd, Matt Wynn and Kelli Johnson

6:15-6:30 p.m. — Official premiere of the music video “Something Blue,” the story of Kristin Sullivan, written by Jessie G and Matt Wynn

6:30-7:30 p.m. — “Female Power Round” featuring headliners Terri Jo Box, Bridgette Tatum and Carolyn Dawn Johnson

7:45-8:45 p.m. — Headliner Jeffrey Steele, solo

I asked my friend and fellow music lover Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner what having Destin Songwriter Festival back for its second year means to him. “As someone who loves music, I see this festival as more than entertainment. It’s a chance for our locals to revel in the talent and for our visitors and vacationers to experience the spirit of Destin through both song and the beautiful backdrops of our harbor area and The Alice.”

Organizer and CEO Pennings also reminded me that while the festival is about music, it’s also about giving back. As such, a portion of the proceeds will benefit Operation Song, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to helping veterans, active-duty service members and their families tell their stories through songwriting — a mission that reminds us of the powerful connection between music and healing. Being a veteran-owned festival is something Pennings says he is especially proud of.

When I asked Pennings what he was most excited about in coming back for a second year of Destin Songwriter Festival, he enthusiastically said, “I couldn’t be prouder of how much this festival has grown in just one year. A huge part of that momentum comes from the incredible support of our presenting sponsor, Patriot Vodka, and North American Spirits Inc. Their belief in this festival and commitment to helping us bring it to life has been instrumental in taking us to the next level.

We’re incredibly grateful to have Patriot Vodka in our corner as we build something truly special that we believe can become a signature event for Destin. I want to encourage everyone to come out, experience it for yourself and help us continue building.”

Visit destinsongwriterfestival.com for the latest updates, ticket information, artist announce-

ments and insider travel tips for making the most of your festival fun.

Will Estell is a writer, editor and entrepreneur whose 25-plus-year media career includes more than 750 regional and national articles and the launch of 12 magazines. Chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media and CEO of 399 Ventures, he has written one-on-one features on Kenny Chesney, Darius Rucker,

Alan Jackson, Florida Georgia Line, Sara Evans, the iconic Jimmy Buffett and dozens of other artists. He also consults for media entities nationwide and works in coastal real estate and development. A father of three from the backwoods of Booneville, Miss., Estell and his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey Estell, call Destin and Navarre home. He is a longtime regular contributor to Life Media’s family of publications.

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

By PUBLISHER LORI MILLER

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

Still Standing: A Tribute to Elton John takes the restaurant’s main stage Nov. 8 and Dec. 6, with each performance running from 6:30 to 9 p.m. If you’re looking for a fun date night or an excuse to get your friends together, this is it!

My recommendation? Make it the full dinner-and-show experience. Dinner ticket holders receive preferred seating closer to the stage and should arrive at 5 p.m. Start with Gulf Coast she-crab soup or a red romaine Caesar salad, then choose from three delicious-sounding entrées: prawn risotto with roasted acorn squash, fava beans and citrus beurre blanc;

herb-and-garlic-roasted tri-tip with dauphinoise potatoes and pink peppercorn cognac cream; or chicken Florentine with creamy Pernod spinach, saffron capellini and balsamic-glazed asparagus. And save room for dessert—Key lime pie and a black-and-white petit four! The menu is subject to change.

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

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



Fall Events



Sept. 26



Nov. 8 & Dec. 6



Watch Parties!



September

- 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



November

- 8 Still Standing: A Tribute to Elton John



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 Now - Nov. 28

Visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com for schedules, tickets and more information

OLD FLORIDA FISH HOUSE

33 Heron's Watch Way | Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

info@oldfloridafishhouse.com | 850.534.3045

Events Around Freeport

Comedy on the Boulevard
Thursday, Oct. 1 | 7 p.m.
| Emerald Coast The-
atre Company, 560 Grand
Blvd., Suite 200 | Miramar
Beach

Enjoy a one-night stand-up comedy showcase featuring comedians from across the Southeast. Tickets: emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

Cars of 30A Grand Tour
Saturday, Oct. 3 | 1–4 p.m.
| Alys Beach

Explore a curated collection of rare and high-performance automobiles along the streets of Alys Beach and around Lake Marilyn. Enjoy specialty displays, live music, art, food trucks and beverages, followed by an afternoon gathering at Central Park with lounge seating, food and games on the big screen. Tickets are \$60 for adults and \$20 for children. Tickets and details: carsof30a.com/cars-of-30a.

**"Nighttime Neighbors"
Night Hike**
Saturday, Oct. 3 | 4–8 p.m.
**| E.O. Wilson Biophilia
Center | Freeport**

Explore nocturnal wildlife, enjoy activity stations along the trail and hike to the bat house to



watch the evening bat flight just after sunset. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children. A \$5 Camp Longleaf add-on includes s'mores, cocoa, coffee and a bounce house. Bring a flashlight. Proceeds benefit the nonprofit E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. eowilsoncenter.org/events

Night at the Museum
Saturday, Oct. 3 | 6–8
p.m. | Heritage Museum
of Northwest Florida, 115
Westview Ave. | Valparaiso

Celebrate America's 250th anniversary with costumed portrayals of historical figures, drinks, appetizers, photo opportunities and a silent auction. Admission is \$60 per person

and \$50 for museum members. For information, call 850-678-2615 or email assistant@heritage-museum.org or manager@heritage-museum.org. heritage-museum.org

Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with New York Voices

**Thursday, Oct. 8 | 5:30
p.m. | Seagar's Prime
Steaks & Seafood | Mira-
mar Beach**

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble New York Voices during its farewell tour, *The Four and Only*. Celebrate 40 years of vocal jazz with arrangements spanning jazz, pop and Brazilian influences. Tickets are

\$375 per person and include valet parking, a sparkling-wine reception, a multicourse dinner with wine, gratuity and the performance. Proceeds benefit Sinfonia's music education and community engagement programs. sinfoniagulfcoast.org

**Rockin' in Paradise with
Styx and Friends**
**Thursday–Saturday, Oct.
8–10 | 3–10 p.m. daily**
**| Seascape Resort, 100
Seascape Dr. | Miramar
Beach**

Rock legends Styx return for a three-night beachfront concert experience featuring two Styx performances and an all-star lineup of classic rock artists. Enjoy local food vendors, premium hospitality and resort accommodations steps from the Gulf. For info: styxparadise.com

**Special 250th History
Sandwiched In Lunch**
Friday, Oct. 9 | Noon
**| Heritage Museum of
Northwest Florida, 115
Westview Ave. | Valparaiso**

Bring a sack lunch for a free presentation by Dr. Marie Hal-

lion, curator of America 250! The Revolution. “The Road to Independence: Siege of Boston (1775–1776) and Colonial Resistance” explores events leading to American independence as part of the nation’s 250th anniversary celebration. heritage-museum.org

**Dogs, Bands & Beer
Festival**
**Saturday, Oct. 10 | Gates
open at 1 p.m. | Mattie
Kelly Amphitheater at
NWFSC | Niceville**

Bring your dog for a fall day of classic hits, cool drinks, food trucks and live music, followed by an evening under the stars featuring Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall. Dogs are welcome at this outdoor concert. Tickets: www.mattiekellytickets.com or 850-706-5206.

**27th Annual Emerald
Coast Home & Boat Show**
**Saturday–Sunday, Oct. 10–
11 | Saturday, 10 a.m.–5
p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–3
p.m. | Destin–Fort Walton**

Continued on page 14




 emerald coast
 theatre company
Presents

THE 39 STEPS

OCTOBER 15-25

HOLD ONTO YOUR HAT IN THIS FAST-PACED, LAUGH-OUT-LOUD FARCE INSPIRED
 BY ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S LEGENDARY THRILLER! MISTAKEN FOR A MURDERER,
 RICHARD HANNAY RACES ACROSS BRITAIN IN A WHIRLWIND OF SPIES, ROMANCE,
 AND ESCAPADES THAT WILL KEEP YOU ON THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT.


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

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A Weekend Benefit for the Love of Animals

HAPPENINGS AROUND FREEPORT

2026 EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

Now–Sept. 27

Come From Away

Times vary | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. | Miramar Beach

23–27

Battle for the Buckle (Westonwood Ranch)

Times vary | Harbor Docks | Destin

25

14th Annual 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

26

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Estuary Program Mattie Kelly Bay Day

10 am | Rocky Bayou State Park | Niceville

Emerald Coast Science Center’s Day of Play with ACM and Nickelodeon

10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Biophilia Center Creature Feature

5 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

OCTOBER

01

Bands on the BLVD Fall Series Concert

6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents Comedy on the Boulevard

7 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

02

Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee

7 am | First Baptist Church | FWB

First Friday Fall Concert

6 pm | Grand Boulevard Town Center lawn | Miramar Beach

03

Dog Daze

10 am | The Landing | FWB

Concealed Carry Weapons Class

10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

6th Annual ECAR Foundation Barbecue Cook-Off

11 am | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Night at the Museum Fundraiser

6 pm | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida | Valparaiso

Cars of 30A Grand Tour

Alys Beach

Rock the Dock for Alaquia

2 pm | 4576 Co Hwy 3280 | Freeport

04

Women’s Climbing Circle

5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

08

Cabaret at Seagar’s: An Evening with New York Voices

5:30 pm | Seagar’s Prime Steaks & Seafood | Sandestin

08–10

Rockin’ in Paradise with Styx and Friends

3 pm | 100 Seascape Drive | Miramar Beach

10

Coffee with a Hero

10 am | Abide Coffee, 1799 Great Hammock Bend, Hammock Bay | Freeport

11th Annual Bloody Mary Festival

11 am | The Market Shops | Miramar Beach

Dogs, Bands & Beer Festival – Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall

Bands start at 1:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Freeport Mayor’s Ball Presents “Casino Royale”

7 pm | Freeport Shipyard Marina | Freeport

12

Knights of Columbus Charity Golf Tourney

The Links at Sandestin | SRB

12–17

Walton County Fair

5–9 pm Monday–Thursday; 5–10 pm Friday; noon–9 pm Saturday

15–25

Emerald Coast Theatre Co.’s The 39 Steps

Times vary | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

16

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Harvest After Dark

7 pm | Cerulean Park | WaterColor

16–17

Baytowne Wharf Beer Festival

Village of Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin

17

Concealed Carry Weapons Class

10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Harvest Grand Tasting

1 pm | Cerulean Park | WaterColor

Sip and Science: Wizarding World

6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Film in Concert: The Wizard of Oz

7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Dugas Pavilion | Destin

20

First Responders Appreciation Lunch

11:30 am–1 pm | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

22

Walton Area Chamber Business After Hours

4 pm | Pirates Voyage | Panama City Beach

22–24

South Walton Celebrity Golf Classic Benefiting Children’s Advocacy Center

5:30 pm Thursday; 8:30 am–6 pm Friday; 8 am–4 pm Saturday | Sandestin Baytowne and Raven golf courses | Miramar Beach

23

Grand Boulevard Barktober Fest

5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Sandestin

23–25

Shinedown’s Lunatic Ball Beach Weekend

3 pm daily | Seascape Resort | Miramar Beach

24–25

31st Annual Festival of the Arts

9 am–5 pm Saturday; 10 am–4 pm Sunday | Dugas Pavilion green, Cultural Arts Village | Destin

Destin Songwriter Festival

Times vary | Multiple locations at Destin Harbor & The Alice

25

Boys and Girls Club of the Emerald Coast Brunchfest

11 am | Seville Quarter | Pensacola

26

The Next BIG Thing 2026 Leadership Conference – Walton Area Chamber

8 am | Hilton Sandestin | Miramar Beach

30

Dog-Harmony’s 11th Annual Barktoberfest

4:30 pm | Grand Park, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

31

Halloween on the BOOlevard

4 pm | Grand Boulevard | Sandestin

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

continued from page 12

Celebrate more than a century of agriculture and hometown pride with livestock shows, home arts and exhibits, rides, live music, fair food and vendors for the whole family. This year's theme, "Rooted in Tradition. Built for the Future," honors the

Join sports and entertainment celebrities for three days of golf, entertainment and charitable giving. Festivities include a welcome reception, Casino Night and Pairings Party, two rounds of golf, a Celebrity Gala & Auc-

Connect with professionals, entrepreneurs, executives and emerging leaders during this regional business and leadership

available. For details, contact Gabrielle Hamilton at gabrielle@waltonareachamber.com. waltonareachamber.com/the-next-big-thing/

Guests can also enjoy bites from restaurants at The Market Shops, along with craft beer, spiked seltzers, rosé, sparkling wine and a mocktail option. Live music by Catalyst, courtyard entertainment from DJ Dad, a photo booth and SEC football games on a

For tickets and information, visit themarketshops.com/bloody-mary-festival.





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Endless Memories.
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MARY
FESTIVAL**

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SATURDAY
OCTOBER 10, 2026

11AM - 2PM

\$65 IN ADVANCE
\$75 AT THE DOOR

TO PURCHASE TICKETS, VISIT
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- SPIKED SELTZERS
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- SEC FOOTBALL
- LOCAL EATS & SHOPPING
- PHOTO BOOTH
- CIGAR BAR
- CUSTOM TRUCKER HAT BAR

9375 EMERALD COAST PARKWAY, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA | Located at the Entrance to Sandcastle Golf and Beach Resort | themarketshops.com  

A Superior Mechanical Hosts Second Veterans & First Responders Event

Walton and Okaloosa communities are coming together again to give recognition and thanks to our first responders, veterans, and active military. A Superior Mechanical will hold its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive North, Niceville 32578 on Tuesday, Oc-

tober 20, 2026, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Please save the date! During the event, A Superior Mechanical will donate a new Hot Water Heater complete with installation to one First Responder or Veteran in need. This giveaway is open to all who have served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and all first responders



including EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Fire Fighters. Register to win at ASuperiorMechanical.com and go to About Us > HVAC Giveaway. The event includes a delicious hot lunch catered by Swiftly Catered, a brief welcome from the sponsors and supporters, and the Hot Water Heater. This event is supported and sponsored by the

City of Niceville and Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School (who will present the colors), Rocky Bayou Christian School (who will sing the National Anthem), Walton and Okaloosa County businesses are encouraged to sponsor; for more information contact Martha Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

NATUREVIEW

continued from page 6

conservation land associated with Nokuse Plantation and the Northwest Florida Water Management District. It gives the community a sense of separation and natural beauty that was part of NatureView's vision from the very beginning. Nature isn't an amenity that was added later. It helped shape the community itself.

A Community With Heart

There is another part of NatureView's story that can't be measured in bedrooms or square footage. Five homesites within the community were reserved for Hero Homez, an initiative created to provide homes for deserving local heroes. The program reflects a larger philosophy behind NatureView: a neighborhood should contribute to the community around it, not simply occupy land within it.

It's another reminder that the vision for NatureView goes beyond building houses. It's about building a place people are proud to call home.

Maybe the Question Isn't "Why Freeport?"

Maybe the better question is: Why not? If you can own a brand-new home starting in the upper \$200s... Live in a master-planned community with resort-style amenities... Walk trails surrounded by protected natural land... Choose between multiple builders and dozens of home designs... And still have the beaches, dining and recreation of the Emerald Coast within easy reach... Freeport starts looking a little different. And NatureView may be exactly what some Northwest Florida homebuyers didn't real-

ize they were looking for.

Come see it for yourself.

Tour NatureView, explore the amenities and walk through the model homes from DSLD Homes and Holiday Builders. Because sometimes you don't understand what a community can offer until you actually experience it.

NatureView | Freeport

Visit NatureViewFL.com to learn more and plan your visit. Home pricing, availability, floor plans and builder incentives are subject to change. Contact DSLD Homes or Holiday Builders directly for current home availability, pricing and purchasing information.

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850.897.0045 | LYP@LYP-LAW.COM

The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience.



Don't bark, beach happy!

Dogs and Cats Welcome!

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SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Sept 5	Sept 12	Sept 19	Sept 26	Oct 3	Oct 10	Oct 17	Oct 24	Oct 31	Nov 7	Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 28
Alabama	E CAR	@UK	FSU	S. CAR	@MISS ST	UGA	@TENN	A&M	OPEN	@LSU	@VANDY	UTC	AUBURN
Arkansas	NALA	@UTAH	UGA	TULSA	@A&M	TENN	@VANDY	OPEN	MIZZOU	@AUB	S CAR	@TEX	LSU
Auburn	BAYLOR (ATL)	S. MISS	FLA	VANDY	@TENN	OPEN	@UGA	LSU	@OLE MISS	ARK	@MISS ST	SAMFORD	@BAMA
Florida	FLA ATL	CAMPBELL	@AUB	OLE MISS	@MIZZOU	S CAR	@TEX	OPEN	UGA (ATL)	OKLA	@UK	VANDY	@FSU
Georgia	TENN ST	WKU	@ARK	OKLA	VANDY	@BAMA	AUB	OPEN	FLA (ATL)	@OLE MISS	MIZZOU	@S CAR	GA TECH
Kentucky	YSU	BAMA	@A&M	S ALA	@S CAR	LSU	@OKLA	VANDY	OPEN	@TENN	FLA	@MIZZOU	LOUISVILLE
LSU	CLEMSON	LA TECH	@OLE MISS	A&M	MCNEESE ST	@KU	MISS ST	@AUB	OPEN	BAMA	TEXAS	@TENN	@ARK
Ole Miss	LOUISVILLE	CHARLOTTE	LSU	@FLA	OPEN	@VANDY	MIZZOU	@TEXAS	AUB	UGA	@OKLA	WOFFORD	MISS ST
Miss St	ULM	@MINN	@S CAR	MIZZOU	BAMA	OPEN	@LSU	OKLA	@TEX	VANDY	AUB	TENN TECH	@OLE MISS
Missouri	UAPB	@KANSAS	TROY	@MISS ST	FLA	A&M	@OLE MISS	OPEN	@ARK	TEX	@UGA	KU	OKLA
Oklahoma	UTEP	@MICH	N MEX	@UGA	OPEN	TEX (DAL)	KU	@MISS ST	S CAR	FLA	OLE MISS	A&M	MIZZOU
S Carolina	KENT ST	TOWSON	MISS ST	@BAMA	KU	@FLA	OPEN	TENN	@OKLA	A&M	@ARK	UGA	@CLEMSON
Tennessee	FURMAN	@GA TECH	KENNESAW ST	TEX	AUB	@ARK	BAMA	@S CAR	OPEN	UK	@A&M	LSU	@VANDY
Tex A&M	MIZZ ST	ARIZ ST	UK	@LSU	ARK	@MIZZOU	CITADEL	@BAMA	OPEN	@S. CAR	TENN	@OKLA	TEX (11/27)
Texas	TEXAS ST	OHIO ST	UTSA	@TENN	OPEN	OKLA (DAL)	FLA	OLE MISS	MISS ST	@MIZZOU	@LSU	ARK	A&M (11/27)
Vanderbilt	AUSTIN PEAY	DELAWARE	NC ST	@AUB	@UGA	OLE MISS	ARK	@KU	OPEN	@MISS ST	BAMA	@FLA	TENN

Best Places to Watch Your Favorite Team

By SCOTT MILLER

Ah, October. Football season is in full swing, rivalries are heating up and fall weekends are looking pretty good.

Why, you ask? Because, like so many others living in this paradise we call Freeport, we love God, we love our families, we love the beach, we love our friends—and we sure do love ourselves some football!

In my humble opinion, no other sport delivers the passion, excitement and camaraderie of good ol’ American football. So, break out your favorite team’s jersey, rally your friends and head to one of the area’s best sports bars to watch the action.

Whether you’re a die-hard SEC fan who shouts “War Eagle!” whenever you spot someone in Auburn gear or a transplant like me who still loves cheering on Penn State, one thing holds true: There’s nothing quite like fall Saturdays spent cheering on your team.

Let’s keep the excitement rolling all October long. I hope to see you out there!



AJ's Grayton Beach

Gather your game-day crew and bring your team spirit to AJ's Grayton Beach, located just off Scenic 30A on DeFuniak Street. With three bars, a spacious dining area and an inviting outdoor patio, this laid-back local favorite pairs football-season fun with seafood, oysters, burgers and sushi. Make Sunday a celebration with brunch and bottomless mimosas from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., plus live music to keep the weekend going. Getting an early start on the weekend? Happy hour

runs Wednesday through Friday from 3 to 6 p.m., featuring \$5 house wines, \$5 Crown & Down drinks and \$5.50 24-ounce draft beers. From gathering for the game to enjoying a night out with friends, AJ's brings plenty of food, music and fun to the lineup.

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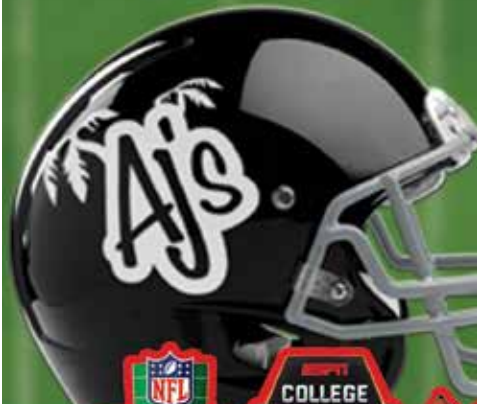
AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Go big on game day at AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar, home to the one and only Jumbotron

Continued on next page

AJ's

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- Aug. 21 Arnold Away 7 p.m.
- Aug. 28 North Bay Haven Academy Away 7 p.m.
- Sept. 4 Gulf Breeze Away 7 p.m.
- Sept. 11 North Florida Christian Home 7 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Walton* Away 7 p.m.
- Oct. 1 Rutherford Away 7 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Pensacola Catholic* Away 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 15 Marianna Away 7 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Destin* Home 7 p.m.
- Oct. 29 Pensacola Home 7 p.m. District game.

Times are local Central Time. Note the Thursday games on October 1, 15, and 29.

Inshore Redfish in Choctawhatchee Bay



By HELEN PETRE

Choctawhatchee Bay is open to fishing for redfish all year, but the best season is fall, and the best time is early morning. The bay is probably the best place in Florida to catch them, and once you have caught one, you will more than likely be hooked.

As the water cools in autumn, the bay fills with redfish. You can even see them in the shallows. The bay offers 130,000 acres of prime habitat, stretching more than 30 miles from east to west — prime fishing for our favorite inshore fish.

Inshore fishing has several advantages over offshore fishing. The water is calmer, boats are smaller and the experience is quieter and more technical, especially if you are sight fishing. You are not battling the open gulf with 20 other people on a charter boat.

Redfish are hard-fighting fish that like structure and edges, especially grass flats. They are not picky. The most reliable baits are pinfish, mullet, crab or shrimp, fished on the bottom or under a popping cork. Artificial baits, like gold spoons and plastic worms, work as well. Or try flies.

Eating

Although this fish was released because of its large size, redfish in the 18- to 22-inch range are excellent eating fish. The flesh is firm, white and mild, similar to snapper but sweeter. While the slot limit is 18 to 27 inches, any fish over 22 inches is probably better released. Larger,



Bailey Lee with his homemade fly used to catch redfish in the Choctawhatchee Bay.



Bailey Lee, of Lee Boatworks, caught this redfish with his own homemade fly on a fly rod. Most redfish have one characteristic tail spot, but some have two, like this one. Some even have three or more spots. Bailey's redfish is about 30 inches and ten pounds. While not quite a trophy, which would be larger than 35 inches, this one is over the slot limit and should be released. It is certainly possible to catch more than one redfish, but the bag limit is one.

older redfish have coarser flesh, and releasing larger fish protects the breeding population.

Now is the best time for redfish fishing in Choctawhatchee Bay. Go out and enjoy a day, or a few, in the sun and on the water. Whether you eat them or release them, the experience is sure to be a memory worth keeping. Get hooked! I will see you out there!

Helen Petre is a retired biologist enjoying the wild things of the Florida Panhandle. If you have science questions or suggestions for articles, email

petrehelen@gmail.com.

Fishing News is brought to you by The Ships Chandler, a trusted name in Gulf Coast boating since 1980, serving Walton County in its Freeport location (17309 Highway 331 (32439). The 14-acre marine and service center provides top-quality fishing and pontoon boats, outboard motors and complete marine support

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BEST PLACES

continued from previous page

on the Destin Harbor. Watch your favorite football teams on the big, big screen while taking in the energy and beauty of the harbor, enjoying fabulous food and sipping a game-day drink.

For 40 years, AJ's has been serving fresh Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hangout for fresh oysters and cold beer—shucked from the deck behind a

small trailer on the harbor—has grown into one of Destin's most iconic hot spots with four locations along the Emerald Coast. Add daily specials, mouthwatering drinks, live music throughout the month and exciting water activities in the Destin area, and AJ's has everything you need for a winning football season.

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Little Angler, Big Catch: A Walton County Fish Tale

BY HELEN PETRE

Pond Fishing in Walton County

We all know South Walton is a fishing paradise, but for those of us not going out on a charter or fishing the emerald-green surf, there is another option that is exciting, rewarding and good eating. North of the Choctawhatchee Bay are the lakes, big and small, filled with opportunity.

Almost every fisherman got their start on a pond somewhere, catching bream. It is a great way to start a lifelong habit. The weather is getting cooler, and youth under 16 do not need a license, so now is the perfect time to take your kids fishing or just let them go by themselves.

Sometimes small opportunities lead to large opportunities.

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



Sally Petre with a bluegill (bream).

cause they like to eat them.

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

Garrion Gay, age 8, fished a Second Street lake one day, and it worked well for him. People think they need lots of fancy stuff to catch big fish, but Garrion went to the pond with a pole



Garrion Gay and his bream-caught bass.

and bread. No worms or lures? No problem. He scrunched up a ball of bread, put it on his hook and threw it out there. He caught a bream.

Bream are Panfish

Bream are popular panfish, and bread is a good bait for them. In the wild, they eat crickets, smaller fish, insect larvae like dragonfly larvae and water

bugs, but they like bread. They breed during summer, and the males defend the nests, so males tend to bite at anything, which is good for catching them.

Limits

The statewide daily bag limit for black bass, which includes largemouth, Florida and Choctaw bass, is five in total, and only one can be 16 inches or longer. The daily limit for panfish, including bluegill, bream and sunfish, is 50 in total.

Garrion could have taken that bream home and fried it up with cornmeal or onions and hot sauce, but he figured he could do better. Bream are kind of small, and being a knowledgeable fisherman, Garrion knew that bream are prey for bass. He must have had a pretty good teacher if he knew all that by age 8, but he also was very resourceful, as fishermen usually are. No need for fancy boats and a suitcase full of lures; Garrion had a plan.

Bream is Bait for Bass

Bass are big and aggressive,

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

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

I am grateful that here in the Panhandle of Florida we can teach our children skills they can be proud of. The next catch may not be this big, but it will still be a catch. Good job, Garrion, and your family as well.



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What Happens During a Security Inspection?

Walk Through a Free Home or Business Assessment with the WCSO Crime Prevention Division



BY TED TOEDTE, CPD, CRIME PREVENTION SPECIALIST, WALTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Most people never call us until something's already gone wrong. The ones who do call before something happens are the ones we remember. They're the ones who understand that security isn't reactive, it's proactive. That it happens before a break-in, not after. We live in a generally safe area, and that creates a quiet assumption: nothing will happen to us. Freeport is a good place. Walton County maintains strong public safety. So we may leave our doors unlocked not

thinking anything of it, telling ourselves we're just going down the street for a few minutes, we'll be right back. We leave windows open and announce our vacations on social media. Then something happens. A break-in. A theft. Suddenly, that safe assumption feels naive.

Three days later, there's a Crime Prevention Specialist at your door. What happens next? We show up, we look, and we tell you what we see. October is National Crime Prevention Month, and it's a good time to think about this. Not because crime is waiting for October, but because prevention is something you do before something happens, not after.

"An inspection takes maybe an hour for a house, longer for a commercial property. We're not here to critique you. We're here to read the security language your property is speaking."

For a homeowner, we walk the perimeter and check sightlines, landscaping, and lighting. Are shrubs blocking views? Are

entry doors solid with proper deadbolts, strike plates, and hinges? Are windows pinned and locked? Are there dark corners or tools left out that could help someone gain access? We look at alarm systems and cameras. We ask questions about your habits: Do you lock doors? Leave windows open? Announce vacations on social media? Sometimes the biggest vulnerability isn't a broken lock, it's predictable behavior. We talk about what you can control right now, without spending money.

For a business or property manager, we assess parking lots, warehouse doors, lighting, access control, and landscaping. We check door systems for reinforced frames, strike plates, and auxiliary locks. We review camera placement and coverage. We look at sight lines from registers and storage areas. We assess badge access, visitor procedures, and key control policies.

By the end, we've usually identified three to five actionable recommendations. Some cost

nothing: trim that hedge, fix the light, lock the gate. Others might involve a contractor. The whole thing is free and voluntary.

Research backs up what we see in the field. Studies show that implementing CPTED principles can reduce crime by up to 84%. For homeowners, repeat burglary victimization drops by approximately 60% when proper environmental design is applied. For businesses, a

U.S. Department of Justice review found that 57% of successful crime reduction projects were based on CPTED strategies. In Flint, Mich., neighborhoods using CPTED-based initiatives saw violent crime decline by 40% over five years. The design of a space matters. It sends a message. Criminals see it. Legitimate users feel it.

Most people act on our recommendations because once you understand how a criminal reads a space, you can't unsee it. You notice the dark corner. You fix the light. You trim the hedge. That's the goal. Not to scare

you. Just to give you the eyes to see what a criminal sees.

If you want to schedule an inspection of your home or business, call the Walton County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit at (850) 892-8111 or email crimeprevention@waltonso.org.

Walton County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Division:

(850) 892-8111

crimeprevention@waltonso.org
Free home and business security inspections.

Ted Toedte, CPD, is a certified Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design practitioner and Crime Prevention Specialist with the Walton County Sheriff's Office. He brings over 30 years of law enforcement experience in Florida and California to the Community and works with residential, commercial, and municipal partners throughout Walton County.



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Pets

One Child, One Book, One Patient Dog: How Dog-Harmony Builds Confident Readers

BY BREANNA BECKER

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

For Nancy Bown, founder of Dog-Harmony, that simple relationship between a child and a dog has been part of a calling decades in the making. "I've always loved to read," Bown said, recalling that nearly 20 years ago she and her therapy dog were already visiting libraries and working with children. "It's so funny in life how things just all come together of what you're meant to do."

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

The need remains real. According to the Florida Department of Education, 61%

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

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

Bown believes dogs can help change that story. "I know the good we're doing," she said. "I know we're reducing anxiety. I know that we increased our literacy rate by using those reading education assistance dogs."

In the first six months of 2026, Dog-Harmony's therapy teams provided 994 hours of service across three pillars: Youth Mental Health and Crisis Intervention, Literacy Advancement and Educational Enrichment, and Adult Wellness and Healthcare Support. Of those



hours, 279 were devoted to literacy and educational enrichment in local schools and libraries. Together, those 994 hours represent nearly \$100,000 in community investment.

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

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

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

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

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

On Oct. 30, Dog-Harmony's 11th Annual Barktoberfest returns to Grand Park at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The organization's primary fundraiser will feature its beloved dog costume contest, music, light bites, libations and a canine-only trick-or-treat celebration.

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

The work continues. So must the support.

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

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

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

Then another word. Another page.

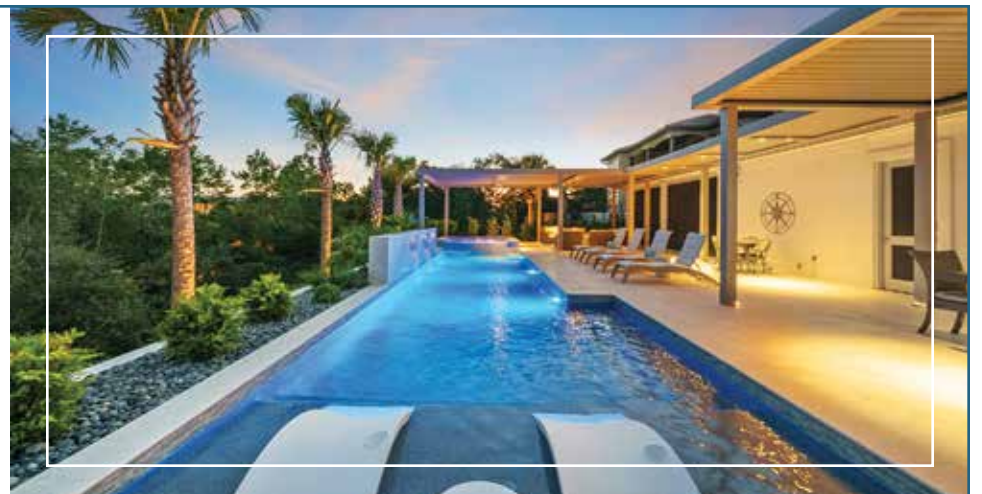
And, little by little, a child who begins to believe, I can do this.

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



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ACUPUNCTURE

continued from page 4

stimulation, learning, injury and rehabilitation—even in adulthood.

Neuroacupuncture may be incorporated as supportive care during stroke recovery or for people living with Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, neuropathy, neuralgia, tremors, weakness or certain forms of paralysis. It may also be explored around specific symptoms or functional goals for people with PTSD, anxiety or autism, as well as neurological symptoms associated with complex chronic illnesses.

Treatment is individualized around the person, their neurological presentation and their goals. Neuroacupuncture does not replace appropriate neurological, medical, psychological or rehabilitative care. Instead, it offers another potential tool within a thoughtful, coordinated plan.

Facial Rejuvenation Acupuncture: A Different Approach to Aging Well

Needles in the face may sound particularly appropriate for October, but these needles are tiny, remarkably fine and meticulously placed.

Facial rejuvenation acupuncture is considerably more so-

phisticated than placing a few needles around a wrinkle. Precise needling creates controlled stimulation within the tissues, supporting local circulation and the body's normal tissue-repair response. Research continues to explore its potential influence on skin elasticity and other features associated with facial aging.

This is typically a progressive approach, with sessions building upon one another as the practitioner monitors the response over time. It may appeal to someone noticing that stress, hormonal changes and time are showing differently in the mirror—or someone interested in complementing an established aesthetic or skin-health routine.

Eastern medicine brings an interesting perspective to aesthetics: the face does not exist independently from the person attached to it. Sleep, chronic stress, hormonal transitions, nutrition and overall health eventually show up in how we look and feel. The goal is not to make someone look like a different person, but to support the face while still paying attention to the whole person.

Herbal Medicine: More Than "Natural"

No October discussion of Eastern medicine would be complete without a few herbs.

Botanical medicine has deep



roots across Eastern traditions, where plants may be used individually or combined into carefully constructed formulas. Plants contain biologically active compounds, which is precisely why species, preparation, sourcing, formulation and dose matter.

Herbal medicine may provide additional support alongside conventional care or offer another avenue when certain options are limited or poorly tolerated. That does not mean ignoring pathology. Good integrative care respects diagnosis, appropriate testing and conventional treatment while continuing to ask what else may reasonably support the individual.

At Tortoise Clinic, our in-house dispensary includes raw Chinese herbs, carefully selected formulas, professional-grade

supplements and targeted nutrients. It supports individualized patient protocols and is also open to the public.

Cupping: An Old Practice with Modern Appeal

Cupping has been used for centuries and has found a modern audience in sports, physical recovery and wellness settings.

Traditional fire cupping may be dramatic to watch, but the flame is removed before the glass cup is placed on the body and never touches the skin. Contemporary methods create a similar lifting effect without fire.

Unlike the downward pressure of massage, cupping lifts the tissues and may be incorporated for muscular tension, mobility, restriction, discomfort or recovery after physical activity. Whether it is a golfer

maintaining shoulder mobility, a runner recovering from training or someone carrying years of tension through the neck and back, cupping offers another tool within a broader approach to movement and recovery.

Eastern medicine can appear mysterious from the outside. There are needles, unfamiliar herbs, glass cups and occasionally even fire. Behind them is a long history of observation, individualized care and an evolving body of research.

For me, the interesting part is not choosing between Eastern and Western medicine. It is understanding where each has something meaningful to offer and when they can complement one another.

So, this October, save the fear for the haunted houses and scary movies. The needles are tiny. Fire is optional. And the herbs are far more sophisticated than a bubbling cauldron might suggest.

Dr. Karen DeVore is the owner of Tortoise Clinic in Santa Rosa Beach, a multidisciplinary clinic bridging Eastern and Western perspectives and providing the North Florida community with thoughtful, individualized, whole-person care.

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BY TERESA HALVERSON,
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY
RELATIONS, THE MANOR AT
BLUE WATER BAY

Healing Goes Beyond Physical Recovery

When seniors begin rehabilitation after an illness, injury, or hospitalization, the focus is often placed on rebuilding strength, improving mobility, and restoring independence. While these physical improvements are important, rehabilitation also plays a significant role in supporting emotional health.

For many older adults, health challenges can lead to feelings



of frustration, anxiety, loneliness, and a loss of confidence. Rehabilitation provides more than therapeutic exercises and treatment plans. It offers encouragement, structure, social interaction, and renewed hope.

Improving Quality of Life Through Rehabilitation

The goal of rehabilitation is not simply to treat symptoms. It is to help seniors remain active, independent, and engaged in the activities they enjoy.

With the right combination of therapy, education, and support, older adults can successfully manage chronic health conditions while maintaining their independence and improving their overall quality of life.

At **The Manor at Blue Water Bay**, our rehabilitation team is committed to providing

The Emotional Benefits of Rehabilitation and Social Engagement

compassionate, personalized care that helps seniors overcome challenges, achieve their goals, and continue living life to the fullest. At the Manor at Blue Water Bay, our comprehensive inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation programs are designed to help patients regain strength, restore independence, and improve their quality of life through personalized therapy and compassionate care.

Rebuilding Confidence Through Rehabilitation

Physical, occupational, speech therapy and skilled nursing services help seniors regain abilities that may have been lost following surgery, illness, or injury. Each small achievement, whether walking farther, preparing a meal independently, or improving communication skills, helps restore confidence.

As progress is made, many seniors begin to feel more optimistic about their recovery and more comfortable participating in everyday activities. The goal is to return home stronger and healthier.

The Importance of Social Engagement

Rehabilitation programs provide valuable opportunities for social engagement. Through therapy sessions, group activities, educational programs, and interactions with healthcare professionals, seniors can develop meaningful relationships and strengthen their sense of connection and community. Isolation and loneliness can negatively affect both physical and emotional well-being.

- Regular social engagement can help:
- Reduce feelings of loneliness
- Improve mood and emotional well-being
- Increase motivation during recovery
- Strengthen cognitive function
- Encourage participation in healthy activities
- A Sense of Purpose Promotes Healing

Remaining active and involved helps seniors maintain a sense of purpose. Participating in therapy, setting personal goals, and celebrating milestones can provide motivation and a renewed sense of accomplishment.

Simple interactions, such as sharing a meal, participating in an activity, or attending a support group, can have a powerful impact on emotional health.

Recovery Is Stronger Together

Successful rehabilitation involves more than physical healing. Emotional support, social connections, and compassionate care all contribute to a healthier and more fulfilling recovery.

When seniors feel supported, encouraged, and connected to others, they are often more engaged in their rehabilitation journey and better equipped to

maintain their independence
and quality of life.

At The Manor at Blue Water Bay, we understand that healing involves caring for the whole person. Through rehabilitation services and meaningful social engagement, we strive to help every patient achieve both physical recovery and emotional well-being. Call us today for a tour and information on how we can help you and/or your loved one on the road to recovery.

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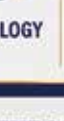
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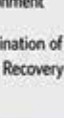
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ABOUT THE MANOR AT BLUE WATER BAY.



By KAY LEAMAN HEALTH
ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED
NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Electro Magnetic Field

If you would like to reduce your everyday exposure as a precaution, consider some practical measures:

- Don't stand in front of the microwave. Inspect it regularly. Do not use it if the door, hinges, latch, or seals are damaged.
- Stop putting your cell phone to your ear when talking. Use the speaker.
- Don't keep your bluetooth ear buds in constantly. Give your head an EMF break.
- Don't wear your cell phone. Put it in your purse or choose

the side pocket of cargo pants so that it does not come in direct contact with your organs. Note: My friend who was diagnosed with breast cancer was told two things: stop storing your phone in your bra and stop using deodorant containing aluminum. You can also purchase a case that has a lining in it which blocks the EMF's (this is the side that would be against your body.)

- Reduce the EMFs in the bedrooms. Take the TV out, put your phone in the drawer, etc. Your TV may be off but it continues to emit EMFs

as does any appliance that is plugged in, including lamps.

- Don't work with your computer on your lap. You can purchase a protective case or place it on a pillow or box or book to separate it from your body.
- Turn off or unplug electronic devices when they are not needed. This may reduce energy use as well as unnecessary exposure.

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A Pastor’s Ponderings: The Big Break

By RICK MOORE

“I’m exhausted. We can’t go on like this. Something has to give.” These are the words Mr. Avila and his wife were saying right before they got their big break. The year was 2003. They asked us to bring a missionary team of a dozen or so folks to the small town of Carpegna, Italy, where they had moved to

start a church. After working for three years, they only had seven members who met weekly at their home. They were Protestants starting a church in a town that claimed to be 98% Catholic. That’s why they asked for our help. Because the second Iraq War had just begun, there were mass protests in Italy against America, so we wanted to make sure they knew we came in peace. A week before we left for Italy, while walking past a kiosk in a mall, I noticed a blue ball cap with different colored doves embroidered on it. Since doves represent peace, I bought a dozen of them for our team. It is nice when everyone in a group wears the same shirt or hat when traveling through airports because it helps us to keep up with each other. We had two objectives for the trip. Every day the girls would have a gymnastics class, and the boys would have a baseball clinic. Our goal was to have a dozen children at each. It appears the good Lord had other plans.

Mr. Avila was on the youth committee for the town of Carpegna. Our first day visiting happened to be the last day of school before summer break. Hundreds of students gathered in a tent for the closing program. When the mayor and priest saw our group wearing blue ball caps with the doves, they asked me if I wanted to speak to the students. The interpreter stood on the stage with me as I shared stories of God’s love. Then, af-



ter the event was over, the mayor asked if we wanted them to leave the tent, chairs, and soundstage up while we were in town to hold meetings every night. We thought the interpreter was confused at first. None of us had any idea why they were being so generous to us. We held programs every evening. All who attended, including adults, received a glow-in-the-dark necklace with a cross. As we headed to our hotel room each night, we drove by the restaurants and laughed at just how many people were still wearing their glow-in-the-dark cross. The third day there, the priest said he heard we had access to clothes for the refugees from the war. We affirmed we did. He said he would give us a church to make into a clothing pantry. It wasn’t just any church. It was a beautiful stone building constructed in the 1200s.

What made the city leaders go from not giving Mr. Avila the time of day to giving us an entire church? By this time the baseball and gymnastic classes

had grown from a dozen to hundreds of children. We contacted Operation Missions who sent us helpers because the crowds were just too big. On our last day at Carpegna, right before we left town, we stopped at what had become our favorite restaurant. While enjoying some gelato, a man pointed at my wife’s hat and said something in Italian. Mrs. Avila’s eyes got big. It finally made sense. She and my wife pulled me aside to explain what the man said, which was, “We are so glad the Pope sent you to our town.” What!? The doves on our hats were the exact same doves used by the Vatican a couple of years earlier for the year of Jubilee. The whole town thought the Pope had sent us. Who knew that Protestants and Catholics could work together? The truth is someone with even more influence than the Pope was at work. Thank you Lord for big breaks.

Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship Center.



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Sean of the South: Pikes Peak

By SEAN DIETRICH

Morning in Manitou Springs, Colorado. My sister and I have a rental cabin located near the base of Pikes Peak. I am sitting on a picnic table outside our cabin, drinking crappy instant coffee, finishing my third chocolate bar.

My sister brought the chocolate. It's artisan chocolate. She is asleep in the cabin right now. She's not going to be happy when she awakes and finds out I've eaten all her fancy chocolate. I will undergo one of her famous improvised gender reassignment operations.

I can see Pikes Peak in the distance. The mountain looks significantly bigger than I remember. About 14,115 feet bigger to be exact.

We scattered my father's ashes up there when I was 11. It was a bad day for me. There were a lot of emotions that fateful afternoon.

The predominant emotion was, of course, altitude sickness. Thanks to the thin air, I could not feel my face, my hands were numb, I was spacey, and I was pretty sure I'd seen Abraham Lincoln and Alexander the Great in the gift shop.

Also, there was anger. I was mad. At everyone. At everything. At circumstances. At life. And, most importantly, at Major League Baseball players, who were currently on strike that year. I was just mad all over. And I stayed like that for about 21 years.

In my defense, I had a lot to be mad about. My dad was in his prime when he shot himself by inserting the barrel into his mouth. He was healthy. He was smart. He was a marathon runner. He ran this mountain every year.

And then. One day. Bang. Over.

On the day of his scattering, I was supposed to recite the 23rd Psalm atop the mountain as we upended his ashes. But I never finished reading the Psalm. I couldn't. I was feeling too poorly. Besides, I didn't want to read Psalms. "Screw the Psalms," I think were my exact words.

Actually, I think I said something even worse.

So anyway, I've sort of been a runner ever since that pubescent period of my life. I think I was looking for a way to connect

with my late dad, and running was a way to do that without actually being vulnerable. I didn't know how to connect with a dead man. And, truthfully, I didn't know why I even wanted to.

His family sort of disowned us. They didn't intentionally do this. It just happened. All his pictures were taken down in our house. We quit talking about him. I forgot him. So all I had left was running.

Running was the most important thing he'd ever done. He took the sport so seriously. When I was a boy, in the mornings, the old man would suit up for his pre-dawn runs and I'd ask dumb kid-questions while I silently idolized him.

"Is running difficult?" I once asked.

"You bet," he said.

"Why do you do it?" I'd say.

He laughed. "Sometimes, honestly, I don't know why. Guess it makes me feel good?"

"Good? It looks miserable."

"It makes me feel like I'm alive."

"Have you ever felt like you couldn't finish a race?"

"Yes. But I always keep trying."

"Why?"

He finished tying his shoe. "Because, what do I always tell you? What's even more important than finishing?"

"Trying?"

"Damn right."

He died in September. I began running one blustery October. Running gradually took over my life. It became an obsession. Granted, I am a terrible athlete and a dreadfully slow runner. How slow am I? During marathons I carry pocketfuls of bird food for the buzzards.

Still, I have been training to run up my father's mountain for months now. I've been running hill-repeats, running during the heat of the day, doing endurance workouts to prepare. I've been jogging bleachers, hotel stairwells, and trying to wrap my head around the enormity of this summit.

With each step, on each run, during each moment of pain, I have tried to cultivate forgiveness. I've almost given up a few times with my forgiveness practice. But someone once told me the most important thing was to keep trying.



"I release you," I often tell my dad through sweat and tears, as I trot forward. "You owe me nothing."

I realize this doesn't seem like a big deal. But I try to reiterate this as I run. Not only to him. But to myself.

"I cancel your debt to me!" I'll sometimes shout while running a desolate country road. "Do you hear me?! Your debt is paid in full! So go and be happy, wherever you are!" The buzzards get very excited when I shout.

But as I look at Pikes Peak this morning, I'm not sure whether I'll make it to the summit. What the heck am I doing out here? Am I being stupid? I am from the lowlands of Alabama, not Colorado.

Pikes Peak sits a mile and a half above Earth's surface. At high altitude, your body starts shutting down. First, there is hyperventilation. Arterial hypoxia signals your brain to breathe faster and deeper. This expels more carbon dioxide which raises blood pH. Which causes a runner to feel like he is undergoing seeriuss drain bamage.

Then you have an elevated heart rate. Your heart tries to compensate for low oxygen. You get dizzy. Your hands swell. Sometimes your lungs fill with fluid. Brain fog can make you lose consciousness. Sometimes people puke. Other times they get nuclear diarrhea.

All the while, the air keeps getting colder and drier the higher you climb. Your heavy breathing causes high-altitude diuresis, which causes your kidneys to dump fluid. You dehydrate in mere hours.

That's not to mention the risk of hypothermia. Or injury. Or the wild animals like territorial mule deer, wolves, dangerous cougars, and prairie rattlesnakes. Lions and tigers and bears.

I am interrupted from my thoughts.

My sister wakes up. She staggers out to the cabin porch and sits at the picnic table to watch the sunrise with me. Her hair is a mess. Her eyes, boogery. Breath that could kill small woodland creatures.

She looks so young. Although she is 38 years old, I do not see a grown woman before me. I see a kid. The little girl who was too young to understand how Daddy was now made of ashes. Too young to know how to hold back the tears during funerals. Too innocent to be mad at the world like her big brother used to be.

A girl who used to be too scared to sleep alone after my father's funeral—I slept at the foot of her bed, on the floor, for six years. I see the girl I taught to drive. The girl I gave away at her wedding. I see the most beautiful thing my father ever made before he left this world. And I actively forgive him for abandoning her.

"Do you think we should be doing this?" she says.

"Probably not."

"We have today to acclimate to the altitude, but is that enough time?"

"Doubt it."

"Is this stupid?" she asks, glancing upward at the mountain.

"Yes," I say. "But we're going to do it anyway."

She nods.

"Damn right," she says.

Then we put our arms around each other. We touch our foreheads together. We close our eyes. Then, she speaks in a low, confident, empowered voice. The kind of voice that takes years of heartbreak to develop.

"What have you done with my chocolate?" she says.

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

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 Business

The Register Family Runs a Honey of a Business

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Business is buzzing for the Register family of Freeport, which has produced some of the cleanest honey available anywhere for 13 years.

After serving in combat roles with the Army, Joseph, Jeremiah, James, Melissa and Alex Register saw a need for the kind of honey that's not available in grocery stores.

"Our family has the entrepreneurial spirit," Joseph said. "We always had owning our own business in mind. Dad always had businesses."

Today, the Register patriarch, Gerry, builds the frames and boxes necessary to maintain a

thriving bee business, while matriarch Shelley works behind the scenes, doing a variety of jobs, from extracting honey to sewing bee suits.

"We're a family of U.S. Army veterans," Joseph said. "We love to work together. We want the best-tasting, cleanest honey for our customers."

Jeremiah lit the spark. "He had an orchard and was talking about getting some bees," Joseph said.

Creating honey isn't simply a matter of harvesting it from beehives. The task begins with bees collecting nectar from various flowers. According to Joseph, nectar sources bloom for only

two to three weeks, although the seasons for the various nectars tend to overlap.

Then comes the necessity of keeping the bees healthy so they can use the nectar to make honey. One significant threat is pests, such as varroa mites and small hive beetles, which can decimate entire colonies if left unchecked. Regular monitoring and integrated pest management strategies are crucial to maintaining healthy hives. Bees live only about six weeks, so it's imperative to have thriving hives that maintain a relatively stable population.

Jeremiah and Alex tend the hives to keep the bees healthy.



Joseph Register looks over the non-honey beeswax products his family produces.



Candles, skin care products and a variety of beeswax items are part of the Register family line.

Register honey is unusual in that it is completely pure. Many honeys contain corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup or rice syrup, and some contain glyphosate residue. Glyphosate is an herbicide. All of the family's honey is tested and certified as pure.

The Registers have about 1,500 bees right now. And do the owners ever get stung? "All the time," Joseph said, chuckling.



Joseph Register with some of the hives that yield his family's honey.



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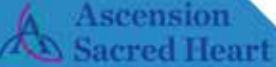
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The family also goes out of its way to maintain good relations with neighbors, who might be skittish about having more than a thousand bees next door.

The family produces a wide variety of honey, including creamed, wildflower, tupelo, chocolate creamed and a slightly hot, spicy version.

The honey is available online at registerfamilyfarm.com, as well as at the Staff of Life health food store and the Niceville farmers market on the Twin Cities Pavilion property, both in Niceville. The Registers also have their own farm market in Freeport, which sells the honey, beeswax candles, homemade ice cream and beeswax skin care products.

Flight 250: A September WCSD Brief

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

By DR. JOSHUA BLEDSOE

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

new possibilities. In the Walton County School District, we are focused on preparing the Whole Child, and that includes access to robust art, music, and theatre programs. FLIGHT 250 begins this school year at an impressive altitude. Walton County School District has already received several honors in 2026, includ-

ing Florida's No. 2 ranking for school grades, a No. 3 statewide ranking based on academic assessment results and the state's No. 2 graduation rate at 97.5%. National recognition has followed. Magnet Innovation Center, South Walton High School, Freeport High School and Walton High School—all of our traditional high schools—rank among the nation's top 20% in the 2026–2027 U.S. News & World Report “Best High



students on course. Chronic absenteeism can significantly affect achievement. One study found that only 17% of students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade were proficient readers by third grade, compared with 64% of students who maintained good attendance.

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

Our next checkpoint is National Literacy Month. Reading provides the lift for learning in every subject and opens pathways throughout life. Whether families share a favorite book, news article, recipe or bedtime story, a few minutes of reading each day can strengthen vocabulary, build comprehension and inspire curiosity. Reading turns the key to doors in the mind to which television, tablets, or phones simply have no access.

September 13–19, we also observe National Arts in Education Week. Across Walton County, visual art, music, theater and other creative experiences help students find their voices, build confidence, collaborate and see

ing Florida's No. 2 ranking for school grades, a No. 3 statewide ranking based on academic assessment results and the state's No. 2 graduation rate at 97.5%.

National recognition has followed. Magnet Innovation Center, South Walton High School, Freeport High School and Walton High School—all of our traditional high schools—rank among the nation's top 20% in the 2026–2027 U.S. News & World Report “Best High

A. Russell Hughes, remarked, “Our schools may serve different communities, and our students may choose different paths, but we share one vision and one responsibility: to prepare not just the whole child, but every child, for a life of success. When an entire District is moving together with that purpose, the heights we can reach are Heights Unseen.”

With students present, reading, creating and striving for

excellence, our course is clear. FLIGHT 250 is climbing together **To Heights Unseen!**

Freeport's Real Estate Boom: Finding Balance Near the Coast

As commercial and residential space along South Walton's famous Scenic Highway 30A gets gobbled up, attention has shifted north of Choctawhatchee Bay. Freeport has quickly transformed into one of the region's fastest-growing communities, offering a calmer hometown lifestyle with more affordable prices and room to stretch out.

The local housing market is moving into healthy, balanced territory. The frantic bidding wars of the past have cooled down, giving homebuyers more negotiating leverage. The typical sales price for a home in Freeport ranges between \$360,000 and \$415,000, which sits roughly 29% below the Walton County average, where prices frequently exceed \$650,000.

New construction is booming all along Highways 20 and 331, featuring highly sought-after communities like Hammock Bay, Windswept

Estates, Owl's Head and NatureView. Buyers are flocking here for larger homesites, functional garages and neighborhood amenities that vacation-crowded beach towns simply cannot offer. Essential infrastructure upgrades are also bringing new restaurants, retail centers, public parks and school expansions.

For full-time residents and retirees, Freeport offers the ultimate regional compromise. It is only a 20-minute drive away from the world-class white sand beaches of the Emerald Coast, yet everyday living remains largely insulated from intense tourism traffic and higher coastal insurance costs. Freeport is proving that you don't have to live right on the sand to enjoy the very best of Emerald Coast living.

Ted Shoop is a Realtor with eXp Realty with a passion and focus on serving homebuyers and sellers in Freeport and across Walton County.



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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents The Wizard of Oz: Film in Concert Oct. 17 to Open 2026-2027 Season

Beloved cinematic classic comes to life on the big screen with Sinfonia Gulf Coast performing live under the stars

Follow the Yellow Brick Road as Sinfonia Gulf Coast launches the Main Event concert series of its 21st annual season with The Wizard of Oz: Film in Concert

on Saturday, Oct. 17, at 7 p.m. at the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Dugas Pavilion in Destin.

One of the most beloved films of all time comes to life in

a magical new way as the full Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra performs live with the brilliantly restored classic on the big screen. The production features

new orchestral transcriptions of Harold Arlen's score, accompanying Judy Garland's original 1939 studio recordings and transporting audiences of all ages to Oz.

Presented outdoors on the Dugas Pavilion green, the eve-

ducer John Goberman, producer of Live From Lincoln Center and creator of the acclaimed A Symphonic Night at the Movies. It premiered in summer 2005 to sold-out crowds at Wolf Trap and the Ravinia Festival.

From Over the Rainbow and





THE WIZARD OF OZ

SAT. OCTOBER 17 | 7:30 PM

DUGAS PAVILION AT MATTIE KELLY ARTS FOUNDATION

Follow the Yellow Brick Road as one of cinema's most beloved classics comes to life in an unforgettable concert experience. Watch *The Wizard of Oz* on the big screen while Sinfonia Gulf Coast performs Herbert Stothart's iconic Academy Award-winning score live, perfectly synchronized with every magical moment. From Over the Rainbow to the Emerald City and beyond, this spectacular evening celebrates the timeless film that has enchanted generations of audiences.

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ning offers a distinctly different way to experience both a symphony concert and a timeless movie — exactly the kind of unexpected programming that has become a hallmark of Sinfonia Gulf Coast and Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller.

As the area's only fully professional orchestra, Sinfonia continues to push beyond the traditional concert hall, and The Wizard of Oz: Film in Concert is a fitting example of how Fuller brings the organization's mantra, "Your symphony ... redefined," to life.

"Film in concert is such an exciting way to experience a symphony orchestra because it brings together two art forms audiences already love and allows them to hear and see them in an entirely new way," Fuller says. "And presenting The Wizard of Oz outdoors makes the experience even more special. You have this extraordinary film on the big screen, our full orchestra performing live and an audience gathered under the stars. It really embodies what we mean by 'Your symphony ... redefined.'"

The production was created by Emmy Award-winning pro-

Dorothy's first steps along the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City and beyond, audiences can rediscover the music, characters and unforgettable moments that have enchanted generations.

Released in 1939, The Wizard of Oz earned six Academy Award nominations, including best picture. Over the Rainbow, composed by Harold Arlen with lyrics by E.Y. Harburg, won the Academy Award for best original song.

The concert marks the first Main Event of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's 2026-2027 season and continues the orchestra's tradition of pairing world-class musicianship with innovative programming designed to make symphonic music accessible, relevant and engaging.

Lawn seating is \$25 per person, \$15 for students and \$20 for military. Table seating is \$45 per person.

Tickets are available at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or by calling (850) 460-8800.

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

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The Sound of the Shofar:

A Call to Remember, Reflect and Return

As October arrives, many people think of the changing season. But for the Jewish people, this time of year brings a much deeper spiritual meaning. It is a season of reflection, repentance and renewal—marked by the feast of trumpets celebrated in September with the ancient sound of the **Shofar**, a trumpet traditionally made from a ram’s horn or a triple twist Yemenite horn from an African antelope known as a Kudu.

The shofar is one of the oldest musical instruments known to humanity. Unlike a modern trumpet, it has no valves, keys or complicated mechanisms. A person sounds into the hollowed-out horn, producing a powerful, unmistakable tone that can be heard from a great distance.

Ray Cyr at Studio 237 Music Lessons has nine years’ experience teaching the sounding of the Shofar playing on one or two at the same time using the same breath to reach 5 to 7 notes depending on the quality of the horn or the experience of the sounder. He also provides the horn for purchase.

The use of the shofar reaches back to biblical times, when it served both practical and spiritual purposes. It was used to:

- call people together for a gathering or sacred assembly;
- signal an important moment in the life of the community;
- proclaim a warning or call for attention; and
- celebrate victory, deliverance or other significant events.

One of the most famous biblical associations with the shofar occurs in the story of Abraham and Isaac, where a ram becomes the substitute sacrifice. Because the ram’s horn comes from this animal, the shofar eventually became strongly associated with remembrance, sacrifice and God’s provision. 1Corinthians 15, Exodus 19, Isaiah 27, Leviticus 25,

The shofar has a particularly important role in the **Feast of Trumpets**, known in Hebrew as Yom Teruah. The biblical book of Leviticus describes this day as a memorial marked by the blowing of trumpets. In Jewish tradition, it became asso-



ciated with **Rosh Hashanah**, the beginning of the Jewish civil year.

The sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is much more than a musical performance. It is considered a spiritual wake-up call: a reminder to stop, listen and examine one’s life. Its piercing sound calls people to remember God, turn away from wrongdoing and begin the new year with a renewed heart.

The shofar’s message continues into the **Ten Days of Repentance**, which culminate in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. While the Feast of Trumpets begins the season, **Yom Kippur** brings it to its solemn conclusion.

Yom Kippur is traditionally observed as a day of fasting, prayer, repentance and seeking forgiveness. It is a time to consider relationships with God and with other people, to acknowledge mistakes and to seek reconciliation.

At the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the shofar is traditionally sounded one final time. That single, long blast represents the end of the sacred day and the closing of this period of repentance.

For Christians, these biblical traditions can also provide an opportunity for reflection. The

themes of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and spiritual renewal are found throughout Scripture. The shofar’s ancient call can serve as a reminder that every person has moments when it is necessary to pause, listen and consider the direction of his or her life.

Perhaps that is one reason the sound of the shofar remains so powerful after thousands of years. It is not merely the sound of an ancient instrument, it is a call.

- A call to wake up.
- A call to remember.

• A call to examine our hearts.

• A call to make peace where peace is needed.

• And ultimately, a call to return.

As October brings the Jewish season of the Feast of Trumpets and Yom Kippur into our awareness, the ancient sound of the shofar offers a timeless message: sometimes the most important thing we can do is stop, amid the noise of everyday life, listen carefully, and allow ourselves to be called toward renewal.



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 Arts & Music


By CAMERON HUGHES

October is the perfect time for a murder mystery, and Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is bringing plenty of in-

A Comedically Fun Murder Mystery Hits the ECTC Stage This October

trigue to the stage with *The 39 Steps*, running October 15–25 at Grand Boulevard.

Based on Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller, *The 39 Steps* combines murder, espionage and romance in an adventure filled with rapid-fire comedy. Four actors take on more than 150 characters as one ordinary man finds himself caught in an extraordinary chase filled with

twists, turns and laughs, making for a fun night out this fall.

Lovers of last season's *Murder on the Orient Express* will find plenty to enjoy in this fast-paced thriller, including the return of audience favorite Hayes Mercure. After keeping audiences guessing as American businessman Samuel Ratchett, Hayes returns to the ECTC stage in *The 39 Steps* for an-

other suspenseful adventure, this time on a deadly pursuit through the Northern European countryside.

Following *The 39 Steps*, ECTC heads into the holidays with its third production of *Season 14, Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*, running December 3–20. Featuring the music of Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Elvis Presley,

this high-energy holiday celebration combines rock 'n' roll classics with Christmas favorites for a festive night of live music, nostalgia and holiday spirit.

Performances of *The 39 Steps* run October 15–25 at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, located at Grand Boulevard in Miramar Beach. Tickets and more information are available at emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

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

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

This fiscal year's round of funding includes 35 arts education grants, formerly known as teacher mini grants, to ed-

ucators representing 13 area schools including: Bay School, Dune Lakes Elementary School, Freeport Elementary School, Freeport High School, Freeport Learning Center, Paxton School, Seacoast Collegiate High School, Seaside Neighborhood School, South Walton Academy, The Nature School, The WISE Magnet School, Van R. Butler Elementary School, and West DeFuniak Elementary School. These grants are designed to enhance visual, literary, and performing arts experiences for K-12 students in

public, private (501c3), and homeschool environments. Funding supports materials, guest artists, field trips, and other arts-focused enrichment opportunities initiated by educators.

In addition to the arts education grants, professional education grants were awarded to local musician Sammi Accola and visual artist Stacy Martin for continuing education to advance their work, and three non-profit organizations, Friend of Eden State Garden, Point Washington Medical Clinic and Westonwood Ranch, were

awarded grants to support youth arts programming and outreach.

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

"These grants reflect the heart of our mission: supporting the creative development of our



Westwood Ranch students created pieces for an exhibition hosted at the Freeport Library throughout the summer.

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community," said CAA President & CEO Jennifer Steele. "When we invest in arts education, we invest in a future that values imagination, empathy, and innovation. We're proud to help empower educators, students, and local creatives to shape a vibrant, art-rich Walton County."

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

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

30A Songwriters Festival Announces Headliners

The 30A Songwriters Festival attracts thousands of dedicated live music fans from around the world to hear original songwriters spanning multiple genres perform their songs. Returning Jan. 15-18, 2027, the festival will transform beach communities along Scenic Highway 30A into a music haven, with 30 venues hosting more than 160 songwriters and more than 300 solo, band and in-the-round performances.

The festival will celebrate its 18th year of “Hooks, Lines and Singers” with Saturday and Sunday afternoon headliners Gillian Welch & David Rawlings, St. Paul & The Broken Bones, Larkin Poe, Booker T. Jones and Tommy Emmanuel on the main stage at presenting partner Grand Boulevard’s Town Center in Miramar Beach. Friday’s kickoff performances at the Seaside Amphitheater will feature Dawes, S.G. Goodman and Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves.

Artists initially confirmed for evening performances include Robyn Hitchcock with his band, Rainbow Girls, Shawn Mullins, Gary Louris of the Jayhawks, Raye Zaragoza, Steve Poltz, Kim Richey, Rhett Miller of the Old 97’s, Mary Gauthier, Jaimee Harris, Jeffrey Steele, Murray Attaway of Guadalcanal Diary, Don Dixon, Bob Schneider, The Mammals, Danny Schmidt, Cat Ridgeway, Eliot Bronson, Jennifer Lynn Simpson, Erin McKe-

own and Gurufish.

The full lineup of more than 160 songwriters will be announced this fall.

“Depending on your age, you have Booker T’s music somehow at your fingertips — from your 45s collection, your parents’ LPs, your CDs, the Spotify southern soul playlist. For six decades his music has been spun, burned and streamed with undiminished excitement and energy. What a thrill to bring it our way in January!” said Russell Carter, president of Russell Carter Artist Management and festival co-producer.

“Larkin Poe needs no introduction to folks in South Walton. They played 30A in their and our early days and impressed everyone. We have both grown considerably. Very proud to have Larkin Poe back, this time on the headline stage where they belong. Talk about momentum — they have played Telluride, Jazzfest, Montreal and BottleRock recently! Gillian and David are royalty in the kingdom of 30A Songwriters — they do not tour as frequently as many artists and we are honored to introduce them for the first time to our headline stage.”

“The 30A Songwriters Festival is unlike any other music event in the region. It spans more than 20 miles, brings together 30 unique venues, and features more than 160 acclaimed songwriters from across the country,” said Jennifer Steele, festival

co-producer and president and CEO of the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County.

“We’re thrilled to announce this year’s headliners, who will join that lineup in bringing the art of songwriting to unexpected places — from a town hall or converted restaurant to two iconic main stages at Seaside and Grand Boulevard. But the festival is about more than what happens in January. It is the Cultural Arts Alliance’s largest fundraiser, with net proceeds reinvested in programs and services that help ensure Walton County remains a creative community year-round. To date, those funds have helped the CAA award more than \$923,000 in Art For All grants and scholarships to artists, students, teachers and arts organizations. They also support Beyond Bars, which brings songwriting into Walton Correctional Institution and has engaged more than 300 participants in producing over 100 original songs — along with many other programs that expand access to the arts throughout our community.”

Festival weekend passes are available at 30asongwritersfestival.com, including VIP Mainstage tickets offering premium seating and complimentary gourmet food and drinks in the VIP tent on Saturday and Sunday afternoons at Grand Boulevard.

For descriptions of all ticket packages, including VIP Main-

stage and full-weekend transportation packages for groups of two to 12, visit the festival website.

The 30A Songwriters Festival is presented by Grand Boulevard, with additional support from Visit South Walton, Wa-

terColor Inn and Resort and ASCAP.

Purchase tickets at 30aswf.freshstix.com/events/2027-30a-songwriters-festival.

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