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The Sky is Not the Limit

Astronaut Winston Scott talks Space Exploration, Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex Summer Events, and why Space Tourism is coming faster than we think.

BY PAUL BONNETTE

Fifty years ago, as Americans celebrated their bicentennial with fireworks, parades, traveling museums and community festivals, they were also celebrating a major leap in space exploration. On July 20, 1976, the space probe Viking 1 touched down on Mars and sent back the first photos of the Red Planet. Shortly after, NASA publicly unveiled its first space shuttle, the Enterprise, paving the way for reusable spacecraft. So it's no coincidence that as America now celebrates its 250th anniversary, space exploration has kicked into a new gear — a fact not lost on former NASA astronaut and retired Navy captain Winston Scott.

Captain Scott has flown two space missions, logged over 24 days in orbit, completed three spacewalks, and played a key role in the manual capture and retrieval of a malfunctioning satellite. He served as mission special-



ist on STS-72 Endeavour in 1996 and STS-87 Columbia in 1997, and he's watched the rise of private spaceflight companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin with real enthusiasm. Scott sat down with Life

Media on a recent visit to the Emerald Coast.

"I love it," Scott says. "I like the fact that we're going back to the moon, that we've developed new rockets, Artemis, the Orion capsule, and

the crew. There's always a part of you that says, 'I'd like to go do that,' but I'm proud and happy for the astronauts who are doing those things."

He's also encouraged by the growing role of commercial companies. For three years, Scott directed the Florida Space Authority (now Space Florida), where he pushed to open up facilities to private spaceflight companies. Two decades later, he can see that work pay off: "What you see happening now, many of us began pushing for twenty years ago," he says.

Scott is especially excited about the early days of space tourism. He points to high-profile flights, like William Shatner's brief trip to space, as a sign of what's ahead: longer flights, more access, and eventually the kinds of experiences once reserved for science fiction — hotels in space, amusement parks in

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Life Media Turns Ten

How a Dream, a Turtle and Local Support Started It All

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Ten years ago, many South Walton residents could still remember when Highway 30A felt more like a scenic backroad than a nationally recognized brand. Growth was already underway, but the area still carried the slower rhythm and small-town familiarity locals cherished. Summers were busy, but the quieter months still belonged to the teachers, fishermen, artists, restaurant owners and entrepreneurs who formed the backbone of the

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Community

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orbit, even destination weddings on the moon. For Scott, affordability is the key that unlocks all of it. “The more people that can go, the more affordable it becomes,” he says. “It’s a cycle. I love the expansion of access to space.”

Access is something Scott thinks about often. He’s currently a resident astronaut at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, where he encourages aspiring astronauts to “take the leap from make-believe to make it happen.” The visitor complex plays a critical role in human spaceflight — past, present and future — but it’s also a major cultural and educational resource open to the public.

Under its theme “Discover Something Real,” Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex offers guests a simulated shuttle launch, no training required. Guests can stand beneath the massive, 6.2-million-pound Saturn V rocket, get up close with the retired space shuttle Atlantis, and even touch a moon rock. On a clear day, there’s a chance of catching an actual rocket



launch. KSCVC posts an events calendar with launch tickets, so it’s worth checking the website ahead of a visit.

Even if a launch gets scrubbed, visitors can still meet former astronauts, take a photo, and get an autograph. “It re-



ally is an experience where we think it’s the closest thing you can come to experiencing space without leaving the earth,” Scott says.

This summer, Kennedy

Space Center Visitor Complex is marking America’s 250th anniversary with new interactive exhibits, astronaut meet-and-greets, block parties, and “250 Space Dreams” giveaways featuring NASA gear and astronaut souvenirs. For hours and event details, visit kennedyspacecenter.com. The Kennedy Space Center is located just over six hours by car from Panama City Beach.



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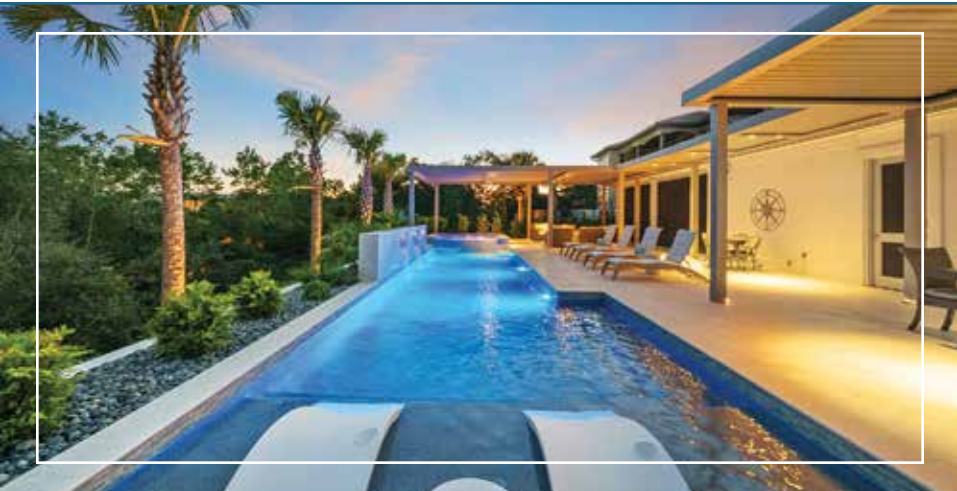
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PCB Chamber Spotlight



Puddle Pool Services: Raising the Standard for Pool Care in Panama City Beach

In a community built around sunshine, swimming pools, and outdoor living, pool care is more than a service—it's an essential part of protecting homes, vacation rentals, and the experiences families create together.

At Puddle Pool Services, our journey began when we experienced many of the same pool maintenance and service challenges that homeowners face every day.

As pool owners ourselves, we know the feeling of wondering whether a service company will show up as scheduled, communicate clearly, and complete the work as promised. Too often, visits were missed, communication of services was limited, and there was little accountability.

The more we spoke with neighbors, homeowners, vacation rental owners, property managers, and HOA communities throughout Panama City Beach, the more we realized we weren't alone. Many people were facing the same chal-

lenges. Instead of accepting the status quo, we decided to build the kind of pool company we wished we had found ourselves—one focused on reliability, transparency, and genuine customer care.

Today, Puddle Pool Services proudly serves residential and commercial customers throughout Bay County, providing professional pool, spa, and water feature maintenance. Our team is CPO certified. Every service is designed to give customers peace of mind through clear communication, detailed reporting, and dependable service. We believe pool service should be simple: show up when promised, communicate clearly, and treat every pool with care.

Our services include weekly pool cleaning, water chemistry management, equipment inspections, filter cleanings, specialty cleanings, repairs, leak detection, hot tub maintenance, and pool inspections. We also work closely with vaca-



tion rental owners and property managers to help ensure guests arrive to a clean, safe, and inviting swimming environment. Whether it's a family backyard pool, a community amenity, or a vacation rental that welcomes



guests from around the country, we understand how important it is to keep the water clean, safe, and ready to enjoy.

While pool care is what we do, serving our community is why we do it. As a locally owned business, we're proud to support Panama City Beach through our involvement with the Chamber of Commerce, partnerships with property managers and HOAs, local networking events, and relationships with fellow business owners. We're committed to helping our community grow and thrive.

What truly sets us apart is our commitment to communication and quality service for our customers. After every visit, customers receive detailed service reports documenting the work

performed, water chemistry readings, and photos. Whether a customer lives locally or owns a property from hundreds of miles away, they can have confidence knowing exactly how their pool is being cared for.

As Panama City Beach continues to grow, we are honored to help keep our community's pools clean, healthy, and ready to enjoy. Our mission is simple: show up, do the job right, communicate clearly, and treat every pool as if it were our own.

Because your only job should be to swim.

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PCB Prestige Private Dolphin & Snorkel Tours

My name is Captain Justin, and I am the owner and operator of PCB Prestige Private Dolphin & Snorkel Tours, a locally owned charter business based in Panama City Beach, Florida. Our mission is simple: provide families, couples, and visitors with a private, unforgettable ex-

perience on the beautiful waters surrounding Shell Island while showcasing the incredible marine life that makes our area so special.

Unlike large commercial tour boats, PCB Prestige focuses exclusively on private charters. This allows our guests to enjoy a

personalized adventure tailored to their interests. Whether guests want to search for wild dolphins, snorkel crystal-clear waters, explore Shell Island, hunt for sea-shells, or simply relax on the water, every trip is customized to create lasting memories.

As a lifelong lover of the Gulf



Coast and marine environment, I enjoy sharing my knowledge of local wildlife with guests of all ages. It is common for our tours to encounter bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles, rays, starfish, sand dollars, hermit crabs, and a variety of colorful fish. For many families, the highlight of the trip is seeing these animals up close in their natural habitat while learning about the ecosystem that supports them.

Serving our community means more than just operating a charter business. We believe in promoting responsible tourism, educating visitors about marine conservation, and helping people develop a greater appreciation for the natural beauty of Panama City Beach. By introducing guests to the waters of St. Andrews Bay and Shell Island, we hope to inspire stewardship of these unique coastal resources for future generations.

Our business also contributes to the local economy by encouraging visitors to explore

and support other Panama City Beach businesses during their stay. Tourism plays a vital role in our community, and we are proud to help create positive experiences that bring visitors back year after year.

What truly sets PCB Prestige apart is our commitment to customer service. We strive to treat every guest like family, ensuring they feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed from the moment they step aboard. Whether it is helping a child snorkel for the first time, photographing a family's dolphin encounter, or simply sharing stories about the local waters, we take pride in creating experiences that guests will remember long after their vacation ends.

At PCB Prestige Private Dolphin & Snorkel Tours, we are honored to share the beauty of Panama City Beach with visitors from around the country and look forward to continuing to serve our community one memorable adventure at a time.



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TEN YEARS

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community before much of the country fully discovered it.

Then came 2016.

That was the year newspaper man Dave White arrived from New England carrying a simple, but ambitious, dream: to create a publication devoted entirely to the people, stories and spirit of South Walton.

Like so many who now call this area home, Dave's connection to the Emerald Coast actually began years earlier during visits with friends Ray and Lisa Cyr, owners of Studio 237 Music School in Santa Rosa Beach. They introduced him to the charm, beauty and strong sense of community found throughout South Walton. What started as admiration soon became something more — a desire to move here permanently and become part of the community itself. And he did.

Ray helped introduce Dave to local business owners and community leaders while Dave shared the vision for an all-positive publication centered on storytelling, connection and, most importantly for local business owners, direct-mail distribution.

But a brand was still needed that truly reflected the local lifestyle. That inspiration came through South Walton resident and the paper's first-year editor Sarah Stewart. She suggested the now-iconic sea-glass blues and greens, a turtle "mascot" and logo, and a tagline that instantly separated locals from tourists: "Locals get it," which, to be clear, they did. And still do.

And just like that, SoWal Life was born.

The concept was simple — deliver the publication directly to mailboxes and fill it with stories locals actually cared about: community happenings, events, arts, local personalities, hometown heroes and positive news. Nationally known author Sean Dietrich came aboard alongside monthly columns such as the now longtime faith-based column, A Pastor's Ponderings. With no established playbook, the small team juggled ad sales, last-minute content submissions, production challenges and tight deadlines while working to prove the concept month after month. The vibe was less "breaking news" and more "Hey, did you hear about this?" As SoWal Life continued

gaining momentum and reader support, a second SoWal Life edition was launched to expand the publication's reach to Miramar Beach. The strong response confirmed what Dave White and the team had believed from the beginning: people were hungry for positive, community-focused local media that celebrated the place they called home.

The Next Chapter

What started as one community newspaper soon became something much bigger.

In 2018, publisher Lori Leath Smith became a partner in launching Destin Life, bringing the same all-positive, community-centered concept into the Destin market. The response was immediate and enthusiastic.

The momentum continued with the launch of Bay Life in 2019. Through another business partnership, Lori and Scott Miller introduced the publication to the Bluewater Bay community, followed shortly thereafter by a second Bay Life edition serving Niceville and Valparaiso. Growth continued across the Emerald Coast with the addition of PCB Life in Panama City Beach, FWB Life in Fort Walton Beach and the newest publication, Freeport Life.

As the family of publications expanded, Scott recognized the need for a stronger umbrella brand to unite the growing network. Together, they established Life Media Group, creating a cohesive identity for what had become a thriving collection of community-focused media outlets.

Today, Life Media Group encompasses eight all-positive community newspapers, digital platforms and specialty publications serving readers across the Emerald Coast. The organization is supported by a dedicated team of 13 staff members, along with a talented network of writers, photographers, designers, contributors and community partners who help bring each publication to life every month.

While each publication maintains its own unique hometown personality, the mission has remained the same from the beginning: celebrate local people, support local businesses, strengthen community connection and shine a light on the positive stories happening all around us every day.

"Readers have embraced the publications as their own,"



PHOTO CREDIT: SAWY LEIGH PHOTO

(Left to Right) Paul Willms, Sales; Sarah Stewart; Scott Miller; Lori Leath Miller; Dave White; Lisa and Ray Cyr; Grace Ann Russell, Sales; and Denise David, Sales. Not pictured: Jamie Zimchek, Editor Sowel Life and PCB Life; John Tower, Accounting; Dawna Shackley, Sowel Life Graphic Designer; Kim Harper, Life Media Art Director.

says Dave. "Many say they read the papers cover-to-cover each month for local events, uplifting stories and hometown happenings often difficult to find elsewhere. Others intentionally support businesses they discover inside the pages."

Life Media direct-mails and distributes more than 87,000 hyper-local copies monthly throughout the Emerald Coast while also reaching thousands more readers digitally through websites, e-newsletters and social media platforms.

More than newspapers, Life Media has always been about connection — and interaction. We love hearing from our readers, receiving story ideas, celebrating accomplishments, spot-

lighting businesses and learning about the people and organizations making a difference throughout our communities. Some of our readers and advertising partners have been with us since the very beginning, and for that loyalty and support, we are deeply grateful.

The Next Decade

As Life Media moves into its next decade, the mission remains unchanged: sharing positive stories and celebrating the faith, family, businesses and community spirit that make our area so special.

WE'LL CONTINUE providing a trusted community voice while offering affordable, effective promotion through the

powerful combination of direct-mail print and digital marketing.

WE'LL CONTINUE connecting readers through engaging editorial, websites, e-newsletters, social media, events and community involvement throughout the region.

Most importantly, WE'LL CONTINUE believing positive news still matters.

What began with one dream, one turtle and one small newspaper in South Walton has grown into something far greater than anyone imagined 10 years ago.

And we're just getting started.

Cheers to 10 Years!

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St. Joe Foundation to Donate More than \$90k to FSU Panama City Programs

Funds support scholarships, physical needs of Autism Program and Collegiate School

The St. Joe Community Foundation will present checks totaling \$90,500 to the Florida State University Foundation to support two FSU Panama City initiatives: the Early Childhood Autism Program and The Collegiate School.

ECAP will receive \$75,000 for scholarships that cover services for clients with autism and related disorders, as well as updated lobby furnishings.

TCS will receive \$15,500 to aid in support materials and

emergency needs for first-generation, underserved students. That includes funds for activity fees and instructional materials, test prep support, professional attire, hygiene products and other needs.

“St. Joe continues to allow us, as a school, to make access to educational opportunities equitable for all students, so that each student can participate in and learn from high school activities and experiences at the same level as their peers,” said

Debbi Whitaker, TCS director. “These funds help make those hands-on learning experiences an instrumental part of their high school journey.”

ECAP provides Applied Behavior Analysis services to children in Bay County diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, developmental delays and other conditions. Learn more at PC.FSU.edu/ecap.

The Collegiate School at FSU Panama City is a tuition-free developmental labo-

ratory charter school offering a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and career preparation. TCS opened in 2023 with 100 ninth-graders and will include grades 9-12 when the fall semester begins in August. For details, visit TCS.FSU.edu.

The St. Joe Community Foundation was established in 1999 as a separate entity from the St. Joe Co. The Foundation provides grants to 501(c)3 nonprofits in the areas of education, environmental stewardship,

building healthier communities and programs that honor the cultural arts. Learn more at Joe.com/community-foundation.

Established in 1960, the FSU Foundation now manages an endowment of more than \$964 million and assets of about \$1.3 billion, with a mission to enhance the academic vision and priorities of FSU through fund-raising activities and funds management. Learn more at Foundation.FSU.edu.

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport Introduces New “Flybrary” for Travelers

Take a book, leave a book, and enjoy reading while traveling

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) is partnering with the Northwest Regional Library System to give travelers a new way to enjoy

their journey with the launch of the ECP FlyBrary, a free, community-driven library located inside the Terminal.

Designed to make travel even

more enjoyable and engaging, the FlyBrary invites passengers to “Take a Book. Leave a Book. Enjoy the Journey.” Travelers can pick up a book for their flight, leave one behind for others, or simply relax and read while waiting at the gate.

“We are always looking for ways to enhance the passenger experience at ECP,” said Parker W. McClellan, Executive Director of ECP. “The FlyBrary is intended to promote literacy, reduce flight anxiety, and help create a positive and unique travel experience for travelers.

The FlyBrary operates on an easy, honor-based system:

- Guests can choose a book to take along on their travels
- Share a book for another passenger to discover
- Or enjoy reading in the terminal and return the book when finished

“We are thrilled to partner with ECP to share the joy of reading with travelers from across the world,” said Robin Shader, Library Director, Northwest Regional Library System. “We hope travelers of all ages will find their new favorite book and engage with the FlyBrary to help others take part in the excitement of reading.”



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In addition to physical books, travelers with a Northwest Regional Library System card can access thousands of e-books, audiobooks, and magazines through the Libby app.

For more information on ECP's FlyBrary, please visit <https://www.iflybeaches.com/airport-info/facilities-services>.

The Top 5 Things Your Doctor Wishes They Could Tell You (Without Hurting Your Feelings)



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

If you’ve ever sat across from a healthcare provider and wondered what they were really thinking, I can assure you it’s not judgment. Most of us chose this profession because we genuinely want to help people live healthier, happier lives.

That said, there are a few things many doctors wish we could say more directly. Not because we’re frustrated, but because these truths have the power to change your health more than any prescription, supplement, or procedure ever could.

Here are five things your doctor would probably tell you if they knew it wouldn’t hurt your feelings.

1. Your body is talking to you. Stop waiting until it’s screaming.

Many people ignore symptoms for months or even years. Fatigue becomes “normal.” Weight gain is blamed on age. Brain fog gets brushed aside. Digestive issues become part of daily life.

The problem is that most chronic health issues don’t appear overnight. They often start as whispers before they become alarms.

When your energy changes, your sleep deteriorates, your mood shifts, or your body starts functioning differently, pay attention. These are not inconveniences to ignore. They are valuable pieces of information. The earlier you investigate a problem, the easier it often is to address.

2. You can’t out-supplement a lifestyle that isn’t working.

I say this as someone who believes supplements can be incredibly helpful when used appropriately. But no supplement can consistently overcome poor sleep, chronic stress, a sedentary lifestyle, excessive alcohol consumption, or a diet built primarily around convenience foods.

Many people are searching for the one thing that will fix everything. The reality is that health is usually built through hundreds of small decisions repeated over time. The basics are not exciting, but they work. Sleep. Movement. Nutrition.



Stress management. Meaningful relationships. Consistency. Those habits may not come in a bottle, but they are often the most powerful medicine available.

3. Stress is affecting your health more than you realize.

When patients come to me with fatigue, digestive issues, weight struggles, hormone imbalances, headaches, anxiety, or chronic pain, stress is often somewhere in the picture.

We’ve become so accustomed to being busy, overwhelmed, and constantly connected that many people no longer recognize what chronic stress feels like. They simply assume it’s normal. Your body, however, keeps score.

Stress influences inflammation, blood sugar regulation, hormone production, immune function, sleep quality, and even how quickly you age. Managing stress is not selfish. It is a fundamental part of maintaining your health.

4. Aging is inevitable. Feeling terrible is not.

One of the most common statements I hear is, “I guess I’m just getting older.”

While aging does bring changes, we often blame age for things that deserve a closer look. Low energy, poor sleep, decreased strength, brain fog, loss of motivation, weight gain, and declining vitality are not things

you simply have to accept.

Many of these concerns may be related to nutrition, hormones, inflammation, stress, metabolic health, or other factors that can often be improved. The goal isn’t to look 25 forever.

The goal is to feel your best at every age.

5. Nobody cares more about your health than you do.

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Celebrating Freedom, Family & Fishing!

BY PAM ANDERSON

Celebrating our Nation's 250th anniversary is quite a blessing for all of us who love America. The celebrations will be exceptional at Capt. Anderson's Marina and all along Grand Lagoon with the annual Grand Lagoon Freedom Rocks Fireworks Display on July 3.

Come early to enjoy the festivities and live entertainment at Capt. Max's Bar & Grill. You will have a front row seat from any of the waterfront venues along Grand Lagoon, including, of course, top deck views from Capt. Max's and all along the marina. On the ground level are play areas for children and Capt. Max's Grill and Hershey's Ice Cream shop, as well as That Ship's Store. Be sure to check out their patriotic shirts and blouses.

On July 3, Capt. Anderson III will cruise down the Lagoon to get a different fireworks view, up close and personal. The cruise will be from 8-9:30 p.m. with fireworks at 8:45. Reserve early for the cruise!

On the Fourth of July, sev-



eral of our boats, including, of course, Capt. Anderson III, will cruise over to the downtown marina for the City of Panama City's fabulous fireworks display. They sell out quickly, so be sure to reserve early!

The fishing fleet is experiencing plenty of fine catches of Red Snapper and so many other

great species. There are plenty of opportunities to get out cruising and fishing all along the Lagoon. We offer 5-hr., 6-hr., & 10-hr. day fishing trips, as well as the 8-hr. night fishing. In addition, 12 hr. trips are available Saturday & Sunday from 6 a.m. -6 p.m.

Grand Lagoon also has a

variety of locally owned restaurants serving some mighty fine seafood, burgers and steaks. And lots of family fun in the neighborhood!

The Bay County Artificial Reef Association update: BCARA has kicked off its Summer Raffle Series with an exciting opportunity for anglers to win a self-contained Daiwa Tanacom electric reel paired with a Proteus saltwater

rod. This limited raffle is helping raise funds for future artificial reef deployments that enhance fishing and diving opportunities throughout Bay County. We are also excited to announce that BCARA and the PCB Fishing Rodeo have officially merged, creating an even stronger fundraising platform to support reef

construction, habitat enhancement, and youth outdoor education programs. In addition, BCARA continues to grow its volunteer program through monthly volunteer meetups held on the first Tuesday of each month, providing community members with a chance to get involved, learn about upcoming projects, and help shape the future of our local fisheries and reefs. Together, these efforts are building a stronger organization dedicated to preserving and improving our marine resources for generations to come.

Capt. Anderson Marina's Event Center continues to be a great place for parties great and small, whether weddings, business meetings or church conferences. It's beautiful and you can't beat the view!

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Patriots Point Aims to Create a Lasting Tribute for America 250

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

As communities across the nation celebrate America's 250th anniversary throughout the year, a project taking shape in West Bay is inviting local families, veterans, businesses and community supporters to become part of a permanent tribute to our nation's history.

Known as Patriots Point, the initiative is the nonprofit arm of The Corner PCB, a community-focused development in Panama City Beach that seeks to create a gathering place centered on faith, patriotism, history and civic engagement. At the heart of the project will stand a towering American flag surrounded by a commemorative plaza designed to honor the nation's founding, military service and enduring ideals.

What began as a local passion project led by Steven Franco, owner of Rodos Realty, and his daughter, Bebe Franco, is quickly evolving into something much larger. Franco and a team of longtime Beachworx members, Rodos Realty colleagues and respected community leaders—including decorated military veterans Gary Redden and Bill Blanken, real estate partner Greg Ganske, and service providers Jeff Margaretten, Aerial Payne and Dillon Turner—have collaborated on community-focused initiatives for years. Together, they believe Patriots Point has the potential to become a regional destination and a meaningful part of the nation's America 250 celebration. "Patriots Point started as a local project, but the more we developed the vision, the more we realized it represents something much larger," Franco said. "Northwest Florida has one of the strongest military connections anywhere in the country. We want this to be a place where residents and visitors alike can reflect on the freedoms we enjoy and the people who have helped protect them."

That military connection is one reason Franco, Redden and the others believe the project is uniquely positioned to resonate with residents throughout Northwest Florida. In close proximities to West Bay are military installations including



Tyndall Air Force Base, Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, Naval Air Station Pensacola, Duke Field, Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Naval Support Activity Panama City and additionally Corry Station (Center for Information Warfare Training), the U.S. Coast Guard Station Panama City and Fort Novosel (formerly known as Fort Rucker) nearby in Alabama. Generations of Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel have trained and served throughout the region, making the area one of the nation's most significant military corridors.

As America approaches its semiquincentennial, Patriots Point seeks to create a place where local families, veterans, business owners and community leaders can leave their mark and ensure their stories become part of a larger American story.

One of the most distinctive features of the project is a 1,776-square-foot commemorative walkway that will surround the flag plaza, symbolically honoring the year America declared its independence. The walkway will be constructed using custom engraved brick pavers purchased by supporters.

Each engraved paver can feature a family name, business, veteran tribute, memorial dedication or personal message. The pavers will become a permanent part of Patriots Point, creating a lasting connection between community members and the landmark itself. Project plans call for up to 5,000 engraved

pavers, allowing individuals to honor loved ones, celebrate family legacies, recognize military service or showcase local businesses that support the effort. Supporters can also purchase duplicate engraved pavers as keepsakes.

The vision extends well beyond the paver program, however. Design plans reveal a thoughtfully crafted public space featuring elements that symbolize key aspects of American history and government. Monument columns will represent significant eras of Amer-

ican history, while additional features will honor the nation's military branches, the 50 states and the three branches of government.

For Redden, the project is ultimately about creating something that future generations can experience and appreciate. "As America approaches its 250th anniversary, we have a unique opportunity to create something lasting," Redden said. "Every brick tells a story. It might honor a veteran, recognize a family or celebrate a local business, but together they become part of a

larger story about our community and our country."

At a time when communities throughout the country are reflecting on what it means to be American, Patriots Point seeks to create a place where the stories of local residents can be shared and remembered for generations to come. Whether through a family name engraved in brick, a tribute to a veteran or support from local businesses, Franco's team hopes Northwest Florida residents will come together to build a lasting legacy that reflects the patriotism, service and community spirit that have long defined the region. More than a monument, Patriots Point is envisioned as a place where future generations can gather, reflect and remember the people whose service, sacrifice and love of country helped shape the community they call home.

For more information or to purchase an engraved paver, visit thecorneratpatriotspoint.org or scan the QR code.



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Know Your Neighbor: Taylor Williams, Cool to be Kind

By PAUL BONNETTE

Many know Taylor Williams as the Marketing Manager for Dolly Parton's Panama City Beach attraction, Pirate's Voyage Dinner and Show. However, much like the show itself, there is much more to Taylor than meets the eye. Motivational Speaker, Marketer, Influencer, and Mental Health Advocate, Taylor uses her voice to share messages of positivity and hope everywhere she goes.

Taylor knows Bay County well. She's not only a lifelong Bay County resident, but she also has family roots here going back four generations. Although Taylor has a skill set that seems tailor-made for her work with Pirates Voyage, she started on a very different career path.

"I am a 4th-generation Bay Countian, born and raised; my whole family still lives here," Williams tells Life Media. "I have had a very interesting career path, because I went to Gulf Coast State College for Dental Assisting. I was working at a local movie theater all through college. I love Oral

Health, but I realized I loved Real Estate. So, I went to work for a husband-and-wife realtor team as their transaction coordinator and did that for three years. I learned so much about real estate."

It wouldn't be long before Williams started feeling the pull to be in the family business, where she would first discover her love of marketing while working as an agent with her mother in home insurance.

"It's still in the Real Estate world, and it was more of a career," explains Williams. "When you are in insurance, you have to sell yourself and I got really into that. I liked the marketing side of things, so I started deep diving, learning and taking online courses, and really fell in love with that." During this time, she was actively putting together a business plan of how she wanted to start marketing herself differently, and saw that Setco Title & Insurance Company had a job listing. Williams applied and got the job, a position she stayed in for five years. She also did business develop-



ment and marketing for 3 separate offices (and loved it). This experience helped her learn the ins and outs of marketing.

During this time, Taylor's love of marketing would soon collide headlong with another love, the Queen of Country Music, Dolly Parton.

"I came and saw Dolly Parton's Pirates Voyage on June 1, and I am a life-long Dolly Parton fan. My lullaby every night for my entire life was my mom reading "Coat of Many Colors." I have a VHS copy of Dolly Parton's Live in London and these concerts. Dolly was a big

deal. I wasn't looking for another job... fast forward to the job of Marketing Manager becoming open. I've been here since August, and we are now hitting the one-year anniversary for Pirates. It's been a dream job. It's exactly what I wanted it to be and more."

For many people, that dream job won't always live up to the hype. However, Williams discovered it was better than she imagined, all because of the people.

"My favorite part of this place, as much as I love the actual production, is the people I work with. It's so extraordinarily rare to have 100+ employees like we have and the management team we have. You can see the genuine kindness and the smile on people's faces. You can tell it by the greeters, face painters, servers, bartenders, because when you have positivity like that...I feel like I'm with my people here."

For Williams, these opportunities give her a voice for her other passion, spreading positivity and mental health awareness. Last year, she started a

non-profit based around mental health called the Cool to be Kind Foundation.

"I was in a really low place around COVID, a lot of people were," remembers Williams. "I am in a wonderful, beautiful place now because I took the time to care for myself then, and I still do every day. It's a choice to choose to keep going and to choose to see the positive in life. It's something anyone can do, choosing that mindset."

Williams has been hard at work getting her message of positivity out into the community, including an event in 2023 called the Positivity Symposium, where she was a keynote speaker. The event raised \$3000 for Suicide Prevention, Awareness Response & Education (SPARE). For Taylor Williams, her goal is to share her message of joy, positivity and hope. Whether that is helping guests make lifelong memories at Pirates Voyage or through her non-profit work, it goes to show there is more to her than meets the eye.



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Don't Be a Hurdle, Save a Turtle

Keep the Beaches Clean, Dark and Flat

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Long before the beaches were our escape and playground, before we built homes near the dunes, before we built sandcastles, dug holes and left beach chairs and umbrellas behind overnight, beaches were, and still are, nesting grounds for sea turtles. Not for decades. Not for hundreds of years. Not for thousands of years. Scientists have proven that turtles have been

al development and pollution. Of all these hurdles she had to overcome, her life was ended by a beach chair, which was something that could have been prevented. This tragic event followed a false crawl made by a disoriented loggerhead earlier in the month. While false crawls happen, South Walton Turtle Watch's observation of the tracks led the group to believe

our beaches are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The Kemp's ridley is the rarest and most endangered sea turtle species in the world, with only around 2,000 to 3,000 nest-

ing females remaining today.

While we choose to use the beaches for our own recreation and enjoyment, we need to remember that we are guests. We are stewards of a land they've

chosen to lay their eggs on, and the sea they call home. It's our duty to protect these vulnerable creatures and ensure their species continues and thrives.



nesting along the Gulf beaches for millions of years.

Sea turtle nesting season on the Emerald Coast is May 1 through October 31. During this time, local wildlife authorities and conservation organizations, like South Walton Turtle Watch and Friends of South Walton Sea Turtles, urge beachgoers to keep the beaches clean, dark and flat. When we fail to do this, there can be detrimental consequences for nesting sea turtles.

In June, a Kemp's ridley, the rarest sea turtle, washed ashore on Blue Mountain Beach, entangled in a beach chair. Deceased. Sea turtles face a gauntlet of survival challenges: predators, storms, climate change, boats, poaching, fishing gear, coast-

this was due to artificial lighting and obstacles on the beach. She had been stuck in a hole for some time before returning to the Gulf.

Please remember that it's critical to all marine life that we pick up our trash and any other trash we find, and remove it from the beach. At the end of the day, we need to remove all beach furniture and toys. We also need to remove obstacles by knocking down sandcastles and filling in holes. If you have a property near the beach, please turn off your lights at night or use amber or red lights. If your property is a rental, please educate your renters on these best practices. It's up to us to keep the beach clean, dark, and flat.

The sea turtles that nest on



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• **Star Spangled Spectacular** - July 4, City & County Piers 9 p.m.

Community



Let’s Get Growing: Flowers That Thrive in the Heat (and Drought!)

BY LAUREN GOLDSBY

As summer rains have officially begun, I have delighted in not having to pull out the hose and water my outdoor plants. The extreme drought conditions that we had this spring have been tough on lawns, outdoor plants, and the people that take care of them! There is one section of plants, my native wildflowers, that did not get any additional water throughout the drought. These plants came back from last year’s garden, either by seeds or underground storage tissues, depending on the species.

I did not expect the plants to survive the drought without irrigation and was pleasantly surprised to find them healthy and flowering throughout the

drought period. Now that they have been getting some supplemental rain, they are even happier. This is a great example of the Florida Friendly Landscaping principle number one, Right Plant Right Place. By utilizing this landscaping principle, I have reduced my labor requirement by not having to replant a garden every year. I have also reduced my water use as these deep-rooted native plants do not require extra irrigation to survive. Rather than fight the harsh conditions that Florida summers provide, we lean into them with plants that belong. Here are a few species that are growing well despite the drought conditions.

Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta)

Salt and drought-tolerant, black-eyed Susan is a great choice for coastal landscapes. You can seed directly in the garden or purchase plants to transplant. These flowers do great as



a cut flower for bringing inside.

Blanket Flower (Gaillardia pulchella)

Native to the southwestern US, blanket flower does well in our environment. Pollinators



love the flowers and it readily reseeds the following season.

Sunshine Mimosa (Mimosa strigillosa)

Also known as ‘sensitive plant’, this low-growing ground-

cover folds up when it is disturbed. It can be used alone as a groundcover or grown with turfgrass to help fill in the gaps. It can be mowed along with turfgrass and is a host species for the Little Sulphur butterfly.

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On June 17, 2026, Florida Power & Light Company volunteers handed out hurricane preparedness meal kits to Bay County seniors to help them prepare for the 2026 hurricane season. It’s part of FPL’s commitment to powering strong communities, making Florida an even better place to live, work and raise a family. Each of the meal kits, courtesy of FPL, in partnership with Florida Council on Aging and Bay County Council on Aging, contained water and a three-day supply of shelf-stable foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

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By JON CARROLL

Immigration law is often discussed in headlines and political debates, but for attorney Liza Galindo, the work is much more personal. During a recent conversation, Liza reflected on her journey into immigration law, the misconceptions she encounters most often, and the ways immigration issues affect families in Bay County. The following Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.

Jon Carroll: Tell us a little about yourself and what brought you to Bay County?

Liza Galindo: I grew up in the Miami area. I earned my undergraduate degree from the University of Florida before attending law school at Regent University in Virginia Beach.

Bay County entered my life because of my brother. He interned with the Navy base as an electrical engineer and was eventually offered a job. Over the years, our family visited frequently, and about three years ago we purchased a home in Bay County.

Carroll: What led you to become an immigration attorney?

Galindo: I grew up attending a small Hispanic church. At that church, the women would always say, "Pray for my papers and pray for my husband." Those experiences stayed with me.

I briefly practiced family law, but it wasn't the right fit. Immigration law allowed me to combine my interest in helping families with a practice area that offers a great deal of variety. One day I may be conducting consultations in the office, another day attending immigration court, visiting a detained client, or representing someone in an interview with immigration authorities.

Carroll: How do you explain what an immigration attorney does?

Galindo: I like to say I'm in the business of keeping families together.

Keeping Families Together: A Conversation with Immigration Attorney Liza Galindo

My role is helping people find legal pathways to remain with their loved ones. Sometimes that means helping someone already in the United States legalize their status. Other times it means helping a U.S. citizen bring a relative from abroad through the proper legal process. I also assist employers who need guidance on lawful immigration options for workers.

Carroll: What types of cases make up most of your practice?

Galindo: A large portion involves helping individuals determine whether they qualify for legal status through family relationships or other immigration programs.

More recently, especially in the Panama City area, I've also handled cases involving individuals who are detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after routine traffic stops. In immigration court, unlike criminal court, a bond hearing is not automatic. We often must file a motion requesting a bond hearing before a judge can decide whether someone can be released while their case proceeds.

Carroll: What has been one of the most rewarding parts of your career?

Galindo: Working with immigrant children.

Years ago, there was a significant influx of unaccompanied minors entering the United States. Many arrived without parents or legal guardians. I became involved in a specialized area of law called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, which can provide a path to lawful permanent residence for children who have experienced abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

The process requires both state court and immigration court involvement, making it highly specialized. At first, many attorneys avoided these cases because they were complicated and relatively uncommon. I decided to learn the area thoroughly and eventually became someone other attorneys referred these cases to. Looking back, helping vulnerable children obtain stability and legal status is one of the accomplishments I'm most proud of.



Carroll: What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about immigration law?

Galindo: The biggest one is probably the idea that there is a simple "line" people can get into.

People often ask, "Why didn't they just come the legal way?" The reality is that immigration law is much more complicated. For many individuals, there is no available pathway. Even when there is one, the wait can be extraordinarily long.

For example, if a U.S. citizen petitions for a sibling living abroad, the process can easily take more than ten years. For some countries, including Mexico and the Philippines, wait times can exceed twenty years because of visa limitations and demand.

Another misconception is that simply living in the United States for a long period automatically creates eligibility for legal status. Unfortunately, that's not how the law works. Length of residence alone generally does not create a path to a green card. People must qualify under a specific category established by immigration law.

Carroll: How does immigration affect Bay County specifically?

Galindo: Bay County has seen significant growth and rebuilding activity, particularly since Hurricane Michael. Many immigrants have been part of that workforce, especially in construction and related industries.

I've also seen situations involving workers who possess valid work authorization and have passed security requirements for employment, yet still encounter immigration enforcement issues. These situations

can create uncertainty not only for the workers involved but also for families, employers, and the broader community.

One thing I've learned through bond hearings is that immigration cases rarely affect just one person. Family members, friends, employers, and neighbors often step forward to support someone facing detention. It reminds us that immigration issues have a direct impact on local communities.

Carroll: If there's one thing you want readers to take away, what would it be?

Galindo: Learn the facts. Immigration law is complex, and many assumptions people make simply aren't accurate. Understanding how the system actually works helps create more informed conversations and better solutions.

For Liza, immigration law is about the people and families. While the legal system may be complex, her mission remains straightforward: helping families stay together whenever the law allows.

Jon Carroll and Liza Galindo are licensed attorneys. The information in this column is provided for educational and informational purposes only, and does not constitute legal advice, nor establish an attorney client relationship. Consult a qualified attorney in your jurisdiction for legal advice specific to your situation.



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A Short Memory is Key

BY ALAN M. WATSON,
PRESIDENT, GOLF+ PCB

In every round of golf that I've ever played, I've hit a bad shot. Sometimes I've even hit more than one bad shot. Shocking I know! But the good rounds versus the bad rounds - what was the difference? A short memory.

When you dwell on your mistakes, your poor choices, your chili dips and your chunks, your short putts and your sliced drives that went OB, then you can't focus on the next good shot you intend to hit. Simple advice I'm quite aware. Easy to say but much harder to do. Yes, we all know what to do, yet it's the execution that is much more difficult.

I haven't taken much time for golf this year. Work, travel, and a little bit of rest have taken priority but in my last three rounds, I've scored surprisingly well compared to what I expected when I arrived at the course. The key for my better than aver-

age scores has been in my memory not in my shotmaking. Sure I have made some putts and I have hit a bunch of fairways but the best club in my bag lately has been forgetfulness. Hit a bad wedge shot - ok then - let's hit the next one close. Misread a green and leave myself four feet for par - no problem. Drive a tee shot into the water - that's okay - I can still score from here. My attitude and my ability to shake things off has led to three great rounds and I know why. By accepting the fact that the bad shot or shots are inevitable I have removed the anger fit that comes after hitting that shot. In other words, I already made up my mind that I was going to flub one here or there so when it happened I wasn't surprised. Sure I wasn't happy, but I wasn't shocked that it happened. And because I wasn't shocked I was able to keep my composure and play on. Would I like to hit each shot exactly as I had hoped?



Sure. But having made peace with imperfection I can play and have a good time and keep reasonable expectations and have fun.

I'm certainly not advocating for a negative mindset that is ready to make mistakes. I'm sim-

ply saying that no one has ever played the perfect round of golf and so having a more balanced approach gives us a chance to enjoy ourselves without getting too upset when things don't go right. And the best part is that with a short memory we can get

back to hitting good shots rather than stewing on the negative shots.

Try it sometime. I think you'll be a lot happier. And more realistic.

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Summer Freshwater Fishing in the Panhandle



BY HELEN PETRE

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

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

One of a child's most memorable experiences is often that

first fish catch. It is an experience that can lead to a lifetime of conservation and sportsmanship and teach skill, independence, achievement and respect for nature. Kids who learn to fish, and adults who learn skills, are self-confident and dependable. Now is a great time for a family fishing experience.

What will you catch?

Largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*)

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

Bass are carnivores. In the wild, they eat fish, mollusks, and insects. The best live bait is a golden shiner hooked through

the lips with a large hook (2 to #5). Use a medium rod with 14-to-20-pound test line. If using artificial bait, plastic worms work well.

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

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

Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)



Male bluegill, Wikipedia.

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

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

Another panfish: Redear sunfish

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

Redear favorite foods are



Channel catfish, Wikipedia.

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

Males make nests in groups, in somewhat deeper water than bluegill, lure in females, and induce them to lay eggs by making a popping sound. The female produces thousands of eggs and then moves on to find another male, while the male fertilizes and fans the eggs to remove sediment and provide oxygen for a week until hatching. First year growth is about five inches. After that, fish grow about an inch a year.

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

Warmouth (*L. gulosus*)

Warmouth are like other panfish, but they have a red eye and a large mouth. There are dark lines radiating from the eye that look like war paint, hence the name. Warmouth swim in swampy, still, darker water than other sunfish. They spawn all summer, building solitary nests next to submerged objects. Warmouth eat crayfish, insects, and fish, mostly in the morning. They are ambush predators, hiding in vegetation and then aggressively attacking prey. They appear to sleep at night.

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

Channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

Catfish are hard pulling fish that live deeper in lakes and are active after sunset. Chicken and beef liver, and worms are good baits because catfish smell to find food in the dark lake bottoms. Catfish have taste buds all over their bodies to help them locate food but they do not eat decaying materials or detritus. They eat crayfish and mollusks.

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

Adults are 20 inches long. Meat is white, crisp, tender, and tasty. Catfish are for eating. Fish on the bottom with a sturdy #2 to #4 hook and a heavy split shot sinker. FWC stocks catfish in Juniper Lake, Walton County.

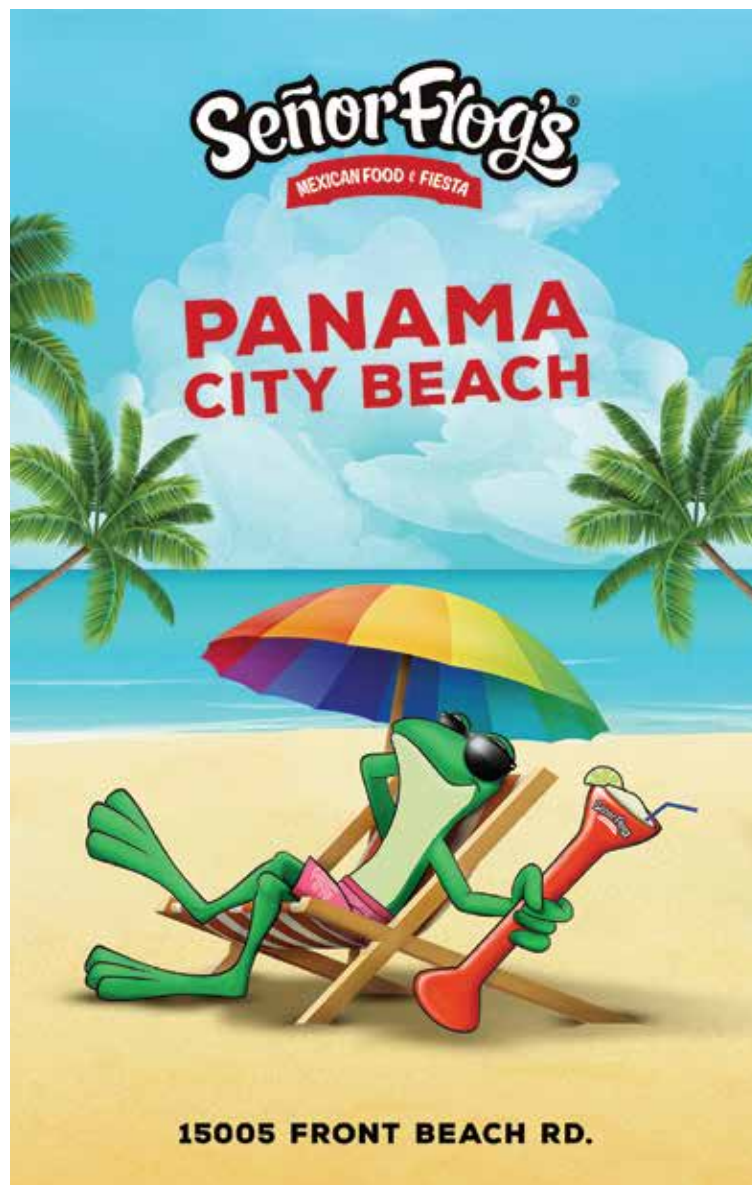
Where to fish?

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

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

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

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



Warrior Memorial Reefs Foundation Ignites the Gulf with Second Annual Reels & Spears Gulf Classic

Get ready for an adrenaline-fueled showdown on the water like no other! Warrior Memorial Reefs Foundation proudly announces the 2026 Reels & Spears Gulf Classic, a thrilling competitive fishing tournament where pole-and-reel anglers and spearfishers clash head-to-head in pursuit of bragging rights, big prizes, and a cause that runs deeper than the Gulf itself.

Hosted, once again, by South Point Marina at Bay Point in beautiful Panama City Beach, FL, this year's event promises to be bigger, bolder, and more unforgettable than the standout 2025 debut. Every dollar raised, after payouts to winning teams, will fuel the rapid expansion of dedicated memorial artificial reefs that are living tributes to fallen veterans and first responders.

This tournament is more than just fishing; it's a powerful chapter in the Foundation's ambitious #250for250 Campaign. Warrior Memorial Reefs Foundation is charging toward a \$250,000 goal in honor of America's 250th Anniversary, aiming to deploy 25 dedicated reefs for 25 Fallen Warriors. Two of these majestic structures will stand as grand celebrations of the founding of the United States, creating permanent underwater legacies that blend patriotism, conservation, and remembrance.

You need to be a part of this! Imagine the thrill of battling massive Gulf fish while knowing your entry directly helps build these living memorials. Whether you're a seasoned angler, a passionate spearfisher, or a team ready to dominate, this is your chance to compete, celebrate, and contribute to something truly historic.

The tournament format offers participants pure excitement across fishing disciplines. Compete in Snapper, Grouper, Amberjack, and Lionfish categories. Separate prizes for Reels (pole & reel) and Spears divisions mean everyone gets a fair shot at glory. The biggest fish wins in each category, plus a "Most Lionfish" award that shines a spotlight on the invasive species devastating our reef systems.



2025 proved that it can get wild out in the Gulf. Last year's anglers delivered jaw-dropping performances that set the bar high:

Spears Division

- Biggest Snapper: 29.2 lbs – Team Silver Slinger (Capt. Pat Green)
- Biggest Amberjack: 54.8 lbs – Team Snapper Slapper (Capt. Chad LaFrenz)
- Biggest Grouper: 35.2 lbs – Team Wet Bandits (Capt. Jaime Kosier)
- Most Lionfish: 72 – Team Wet Bandits (Capt. Jaime Kosier)



Reels Division Sweep

Team Critical Care, led by Capt. Charles Drumm, crushed it with:

- Biggest Snapper: 19 lbs
- Biggest Grouper: 27 lbs
- Biggest Amberjack: 51.6 lbs

And don't forget Team Free-diver's impressive 10 lb lobster!

Reels & Spears Gulf Classic 2026 Event Schedule:

- Thursday, September 10, 2026 — Captain's Meeting (essential planning, rules and good times)
- Friday, September 11, 2026 — Day 1 Fishing + powerful



9/11 Tribute, family movie night, and high-energy entertainment

- Saturday, September 12, 2026 — Day 2 Fishing + explosive Family Festival with College Football viewing tent, delicious food, local vendors, nonstop raffles, silent auction treasures, and non-stop fun for the whole crew.

Early Bird Registration is now open. Don't miss your shot! Secure your spot and save! Regular registration begins on August 1, 2026. Sign up today at: www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/2026-reels-and-spears-gulf-classic

Local businesses can join the movement by stepping up with impactful sponsorship packages and be part of this noble, patriotic celebration. Vendors, make sure to grab your booth at the Family Festival. Volunteers and community members, it takes your energy to make the magic happen. This is more than a tournament; it's a weekend where fishing legends are born, families bond, and every participant helps turn grief into growth beneath the waves while racing toward America's 250th Anniversary milestone.

The Warrior Memorial Reefs Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to honoring fallen veterans and first responders through the construction of dedicated artificial reef memorials. These vibrant underwater tributes restore marine ecosystems, create world-class diving and fishing opportunities, and provide sacred spaces for remembrance and healing.

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+ Family Festival with delicious food, local vendors, raffles, raffles, silent auction treasures, and fun for the whole crew.

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WarriorMemorialReefs.org

 Arts & Music

Coastal Creatives: Katie Hughes

BY LEE ANN LEONARD

Katie Hughes prefers a world that isn't so black and white. The local artist escapes societal constraints—and even her darker thoughts—when her brush, dipped in vibrant colors, hits the canvas.

“My work, over the years, has been inspired by my difficulty to sort my own feelings out...difficulty to have a true awareness of what I'm feeling other than the insight that I'm crawling out of my skin,” Hughes confesses. “So, distracting myself with beautiful colors and a challenge has been very helpful.” Hughes encourages others to broaden their palette and to embrace art for its mental health benefits. “When you're being creative, it feels like you're able to access a

gentler form of thinking,” she elaborates. “It's more about being curious than it is about being perfect. Maybe art is just a reminder that we're happier when we stay curious.”

Helping others stay curious plus connecting with fellow creatives drove her recent move from Enterprise, Alabama, to Panama City Beach, Florida. “I moved here for the art community,” Hughes explains. “Where I lived, I was the only artist I knew other than my mother and a couple of others.” She admits that the area's talent level is intimidating. “Because there are a lot of artists that I'm very inspired by and admire, you can feel small against such large, admirable creatures. It's helped me feel challenged and helps me



want to push through and improve.”

The self-taught artist says her main medium is acrylic. She sometimes textures the paint with flexible modeling paste or heavy body molding paste so she can manipulate it with palette knives. Her favorite subjects are feminine faces, beautiful blooms

and whimsical wildlife, which she frequently drenches in colors, textures and patterns. Like their maker, her works are often layered, revealing new facets with each glance.

One tool she has mixed feelings about is Artificial Intelligence. “AI art feels a bit like being served already chewed-up food,” Hughes shares. “It just sort of took the fun out of it. I've used it in different ways and found it to be enjoyable and useful. But I don't look at it in a competitive nature anymore. There's a nostalgia that AI will never really offer.”

Because art is the beach resident's sole income source, she balances creating projects for others with completing pieces for herself. She cautions that

maintaining that balance is critical. “As soon as your entire portfolio is for someone else's consumption rather than for yourself, the joy will slip away like a mushy soap bar in the shower.” She adds that the pressure to meet a client's expectations can be motivating and inspiring or crippling. “It just changes when someone else's expectations become a collar around your neck, and then you're basically in what will feel like a 9-to-5. It takes something you love and cages it.”

To discover this colorful, uncaged creator's work and explore learning opportunities, visit her Eye Catchers Artworks pages on Facebook and Instagram. You'll see proof that this Hughes likes her hues varied and bright.

Think Blacksmiths Disappeared? Think Again.

Local craftsmen are keeping a centuries-old tradition alive through fire, steel and fellowship

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Blacksmithing may have been popularized in recent years by television shows such as Forged

in Fire and Men at Arms, but in our state, the tradition has been thriving for more than four decades thanks to the Florida

Artist Blacksmith Association (FABA).

Founded in 1984, FABA has spent the last 41 years teaching the craft, preserving its history and helping establish historical blacksmith shops throughout the state. Its mission is simple: To teach – To preserve. “Blacksmithing has experienced a renaissance in recent years, but this isn't new to us,” said David Sandlin of the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths chapter. “FABA has been teaching the craft and preserving the traditions of blacksmithing in Florida for more than four decades.”

Today, FABA includes eight chapters across the state, each hosting monthly meetings where blacksmiths of all skill levels gather to share techniques, ideas and stories while working hot iron at the forge.

For local residents, that opportunity is available through the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths chapter, headquartered at Traditions Workshop, 418 Green Acres Road in Fort Walton Beach. Meetings regularly feature demonstrations, hands-on projects and open forge time, allowing participants to learn new skills or work on personal projects alongside experienced smiths. “Our mission is to teach and preserve the noble art of blacksmithing,” Sandlin said.



“We enjoy the open exchange of ideas as we smite hot iron on the anvil.”

First-time visitors are always welcome at no charge. After that, annual family memberships are just \$30 and provide access to FABA events across Florida, discounts on the organization's annual conference and a digital subscription to The Clunker Breaker, FABA's monthly newsletter featuring blacksmithing news, projects and events from around the state.

One of the highlights of each year is the statewide convention in Gainesville, where blacksmiths gather for three days of demonstrations, classes and fellowship. This year's event, FABA CON 41, is scheduled for Oct. 16-18 at the Best Western Gateway Grand in Gainesville.

Beyond teaching traditional skills, FABA members actively seek opportunities to introduce



the public to blacksmithing through demonstrations at museums, libraries, festivals and community events. “FABA is always looking for opportunities to put the noble craft of the blacksmith before the public eye,” Sandlin said. “Museums, libraries and community venues have proven to be great places to meet people and generate interest in our craft.” The organization also welcomes recommendations from groups interested in hosting a demonstration or “hammer-in” event.

Upcoming Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths Events

June 27 Traditions Workshop, Fort Walton Beach | 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Members will focus on drawing out heavy steel while work-

Continued on page 25



Top 5 Reasons You Should Learn to Play an Instrument at Austin Music Co. in Panama City Beach



BY MICHAEL AUSTIN

If you have ever watched someone casually pick up a guitar at a beach bonfire and thought, “Wow, that person has their life together,” you are not alone. Learning an instrument is one of those things people dream about while staring dramatically into the Gulf breeze. Fortunately, you do not have to become a mysterious wandering musician overnight. You can simply start at Austin Music Co. in Panama City Beach, Florida, a family-owned local music store and school that offers lessons, instruments, rentals, repairs, and enough musical possibilities to make your inner rock star sit up straighter.

1. You Can Finally Stop Air-Guitaring in Public

Air guitar has its place. That place is usually the living room, the car, or aisle seven of the grocery store when a classic rock song sneaks onto the speakers. But sooner or later, your hands deserve strings, keys, sticks, or valves. Austin Music Co. offers lessons for all ages and skill levels, which means you can trade imaginary solos for actual ones. Even if your first chord sounds like a pelican arguing with a lawn chair, that is called progress.

2. It Is Never Too Early, Too Late, or Too “I Only Know Three Notes”

One of the best things about Austin Music Co. is the attitude: it is never too early or too late to start playing. Kids can begin their musical adventures before they learn that practice is not technically a punishment, and adults can finally prove that “I have always wanted to learn piano” was not just something they said at dinner parties.

Whether you are eight, eighty, or somewhere in the “I bought a ukulele during a very ambitious vacation” range, there is room for you.

3. You Get Local Help Instead of Arguing with the Internet

Online tutorials are great until the instructor says, “Now simply move your fingers into this impossible crab formation.” At that point, you need a real human being who can look at your hand, your instrument, and your expression of mild panic. Austin Music Co. provides music instruction in a welcoming local setting, which is far better than pausing a video seventeen times while your dog judges your rhythm. Plus, if something breaks, buzzes, squeaks, or mysteriously refuses to behave, the shop also offers instrument repair.

4. The Gear Is Right There, Calling Your Name

Learning an instrument is easier when you are surrounded by actual instruments instead of guessing from an online photo whether a guitar is “sunburst” or “slightly toasted sandwich.” Austin Music Co. carries guitars, band instruments, pro audio gear, accessories, rentals, and more. That means you can ask questions, compare options, and avoid buying something that arrives in a box the size of a kayak. Rentals are especially helpful if you want to try a band instrument before making a commitment serious enough to require its own corner of the house.

5. Music Makes You More Fun at Parties, Family Gatherings, and Possibly Tuesdays

Learning music gives you a portable superpower. You can entertain friends, join jam sessions, play at church, write songs, impress relatives, or at least make “Happy Birthday” sound less like a smoke alarm test. In a beach town like Panama City Beach, where sunsets already come with a built-in soundtrack, knowing how to play gives you a way to be part of the moment instead of just

filming it on your phone.

Austin Music Co. is located on Panama City Beach Parkway, just west of Pier Park and Highway 79, making it a convenient stop for anyone ready to begin, restart, or rescue their musical journey. The store’s mix of lessons, retail gear, rentals, and repair services makes it less like a music shop and more like a headquarters for future guitar heroes, piano legends, drum warriors, clarinet champions, and ukulele enthusiasts who insist they are “just doing this for fun” right before forming a band.

So if you have been waiting for a sign, this is it. Pick an instrument. Take a lesson. Ask questions. Make noise. Make better noise. Then make music. At Austin Music Co. in Panama



City Beach, the hardest part may be deciding whether your future self is holding a guitar, sitting at a keyboard, keeping time on drums, or dramatically lifting a saxophone toward the

Florida sky. Either way, your air-guitar days are numbered.

Austin Music Co. is open Mon-Fri, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Sat., 11 a.m.-4 p.m., and closed Sunday.

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When Life Changes, Marital Core Values Help Couples Thrive



BY JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PhD

Summertime often is a season of transition, change, and shifting priorities for couples. Many couples must adapt to their kids' next phase of school, prepare for an empty nest, or adjust to retirement. They start new jobs, relocate, or downsize.

We call these kinds of transitions Inflection Points: critical turning points where the current relationship direction or nature of the connection shifts significantly. During these moments, marital core values can help guide how partners respond to change.

Inflection Points affect a couple's momentum and signal a need for new behaviors, clearer communication, renewed commitment, or a realignment of values. The extent to which

couples prepare for and adapt during the Inflection Point determines if they move toward deeper trust, commitment, and growth—or toward distance, conflict, and possible separation.

Fortunately, couples can learn to identify approaching inflection points and use their core values to prepare for and address underlying issues before they become destructive or terminal.

Types of Inflection Points

Inflection Points may be categorized as resulting from a couple's own decisions, natural life changes, or external forces.

Decision-Driven: Decide to combine finance, have children, change careers, relocate.

Life Transitions: Children aging, parents aging, retirement, growing old together, death.

Externally Related: Job loss, job promotions, market shifts, hurricane damage.

Response Determines Relational Impact

An Inflection Point's impact may be positive or negative. When couples manage the inflection point by adapting well,



focusing on solutions, becoming resourceful, and overcoming the major hurdle together, the relational impact is positive. They can boost their intimacy and trust in each other, and their excitement about their future together.

However, when couples manage the inflection point by adapting poorly, focusing on blame rather than solutions, and becoming undependable, disrespectful, or contemptuous, the relational impact is negative. Their intimacy and trust de-

cline, and they lose faith in each other and their future together.

Anticipation and Advance Preparation Matter

Decision-Driven and Life Transition Inflection Points are easier to anticipate than those caused by external forces. Yet couples often focus on the "what" of a decision without considering the "why," creating unintended consequences that become unanticipated Inflection Points.

Consider a common example: A happy couple combines finances to affirm their marital partnership, but never agrees on core values for spending, saving, and building financial stability. Each continues spending according to individual priorities. Soon they face unsustainable debt, and must sacrifice vacations, new cars, and future savings—and begin fighting about money.

Suddenly, they have an unanticipated Inflection Point for which they are not prepared. And there is no one to blame but themselves (or each other). This new disappointing reality can be either a positive catalyst for growth or the beginning of a decline.

It also could have been prevented.

Marital Core Values Guide Preparation

Had this couple done the foundational work to outline their core financial values, they could have anticipated the prob-

lems that come with combining finances, established spending guidelines and savings goals, and enjoyed the boost in intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction that comes from working toward a common goal.

But it is not too late for them... or any other couple anticipating an Inflection Point.

To effectively prepare for inevitable changes, couples should establish Core Values for their relationships, focusing especially on the areas where they need to anticipate and prepare for change. Establishing Core Values moves the couple past discussions of "what" they want to do in their marriage into the "why" they want to do it.

There are common values categories you and your partner can use to identify your Core Values: (1) Stability and Security (financial and personal health); (2) Connection and Legacy (family and community); (3) Growth and Experience (intellectual curiosity, spiritual devotion, adventure); and (4) Relationship Style (intimate best friends, playfulness, autonomy).

Each of you can write down what is most important to you in these categories. Then you can compare your lists, identify your shared values, and discuss how you can support each other's individual values.

Once you commit to your Marital Core Values, you will be well prepared to anticipate and respond to Decision-Driven and Life Transition Inflection Points. And, you will have the foundation you need to guide your response to the externally imposed changes that will come your way.

Let me know if I can help.

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

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Tick Bites: Prevention, Removal, and Seeking Treatment



BY BRIDGET SULLIVAN, PA-C,
COASTAL SKIN SURGERY AND
DERMATOLOGY

Have you seen a tick recently? Now that the summer is here, people are spending more time outdoors and as a result, it is not uncommon to have a tick encounter. Understanding how to reduce your chances of getting a tick bite and what to do if one occurs can help reduce the risk of tick-borne illnesses.

What Are Ticks?

There are many different types of ticks. Ticks are small, blood-feeding parasites related to spiders and mites. They are commonly found in wooded areas, tall grass, and weeds. Ticks attach to humans and animals to feed on blood and may transmit disease-causing bacteria, viruses, or parasites during the process.

Several tick species are found throughout the United States, including the Lone Star tick, American dog tick, Gulf Coast tick, and Blacklegged (deer) tick. While not every tick carries disease, some can transmit infections such as ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease, and other tick-borne illnesses.

According to the CDC, tick bites are on the rise in 2026. Therefore, I want to share the following information recommended by the Cleveland Clinic, the Center for Disease Control, and Science Insights on preventing tick bites, what to do after a tick has bitten you, and when to seek treatment.

Preventing Tick Bites

The best defense against tick-borne disease is preventing tick bites before they occur. Below are some things you can do to

avoid ticks while outdoors in tick-prone areas:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts tucked into long pants.
- Tuck pant legs into socks when walking through tall grass or wooded areas.
- Use insect repellents containing Deet.
- Walk on established paths to avoid wooded areas and tall vegetation.
- Following outdoor activity, perform a full-body tick check, including your scalp.
- It also helps to shower, which can remove ticks that are not yet firmly attached.

Cleveland Clinic (2026, March). <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-you-can-protect-yourself-against-ticks-and-lyme-disease>

What to Do After a Tick Bite

According to the CDC, if a tick is attached to your skin, remove it as soon as possible, using fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick close to the skin's surface. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don't twist the tweezers as this may result in the body of the tick breaking from the attached head, mouth part of the tick. If this occurs, you can use the tweezers to remove the head/mouth part. Do not use petroleum jelly, heat, or nail polish to attempt to remove or kill the tick.

After removal:

- Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- Clean the area with alcohol if available.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or hand

sanitizer.

- Monitor for symptoms over the following days and weeks.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2026, June). <https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/index/html>

When to Seek Medical Attention

Medical evaluation is recommended if the tick was attached for more than twenty-four hours. Medical attention is also necessary if symptoms develop after a tick bite. A small red bump is common at the site of the bite. However, symptoms to watch out for include:

- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle or joint aches
- Enlarging rash
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Flu-like symptoms

Lyme disease is an infection associated with certain forms of ticks. The risk of transmission increases with the length of time

the tick is attached. Therefore, removing the tick early is very important. When caught early, Lyme disease is easily curable with a round of antibiotics. If treatment is delayed, Lyme disease can be serious and affect multiple parts of your body. If you have any questions about a rash or tick bites that won't go away, do not delay treatment.

Continue to watch for any of the above symptoms for several weeks after being bitten. <https://scienceinsights.org/what-to-watch-for-after-a-tick-bite-a-timeline> (2026, March)

Enjoy the Outdoors Safely

Ticks are a natural part of the environment, but simple preventive measures can significantly reduce the risk of bites and tick-borne disease. By taking precautions while in areas where ticks are prone to live, using repellents, performing regular tick checks, and seeking prompt medical attention when symptoms occur, individuals and families can safely enjoy outdoor activities throughout the year.



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BY MICHAEL MCMANUS,
LCSW, PSYCHOTHERAPIST

The Blueprint We Never Asked For

One of the most striking patterns I see in my work as a therapist is this: people who genuinely want love, peace, and stability often find themselves recreating the opposite. They end up in relationships defined by conflict, emotional volatility, or chronic distance, and many of them cannot explain why. The answer, more often than not, leads straight back to childhood.

Long before we can put words to what we feel or need, our nervous systems are quietly recording everything around us. The emotional climate of our early home, whether it was warm and predictable, cold and

withdrawn, or charged with conflict, becomes the template our brains use to define what feels normal. Neurologically speaking, familiarity registers as safety. Even when the familiar is painful.

This is not weakness. It is wiring. The developing brain calibrates itself to survive whatever environment it is born into. A child raised in a home where love was unpredictable learns to stay hypervigilant, always scanning for signs of danger or approval. A child raised amid constant conflict learns to associate intensity with connection. When that child grows into an adult and encounters calm, consistent love, it can feel unsettling or even hollow. The quiet does not register as love because quiet was never what love looked like.

The Drive to Replay

Psychologists have long observed what is known as repetition compulsion, the unconscious tendency to reenact unresolved emotional experi-



ences, often in hopes of finally achieving a different outcome. There are also parts of ourselves we have never fully examined that drive our behavior from beneath conscious awareness. The clinical reality is consistent: we are drawn toward what echoes our earliest experiences of love, even when those experiences were painful.

I've sat with clients who married the emotional equivalent of a dismissive parent, and with partners who chose chaos repeatedly because stillness felt like abandonment. These were not careless or self-destructive people. They were following an internal GPS that had been programmed in childhood, one that needed to be updated through awareness, patience, and new relational experiences.

The Attachment Connection

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth, gives us further language for this pattern. Our early experiences with caregivers create internal working models, unconscious beliefs about whether we are worthy of love and whether others can be trusted to provide it. Someone with an anxious attachment style may find themselves chasing the unavailable partner. An avoidant style may push closeness away once it arrives. A disorganized attachment, often rooted in early trauma, can produce the push-pull dynamic so many people recognize but cannot seem to escape.

Breaking the Pattern

The first step is awareness without shame. Recognizing that you have been following an unconscious script is not a character flaw. It is the beginning of real change. In therapy, we look at the origins of these patterns with curiosity rather than judg-

ment, tracing present-day struggles back to where they began.

From there, the work involves building what I think of as a tolerance for the unfamiliar good. Learning to sit with healthy love, consistent safety, or simple peace long enough for the nervous system to accept it as real. This takes time and repetition. It also takes a therapeutic relationship built on genuine warmth, honest reflection, and the belief that change is possible.

The patterns formed in childhood do not have to define the rest of your life. Awareness opens the door. Courage walks you through it. And on the other side is something that may feel strange at first, but that a part of you has been reaching toward all along.

Michael McManus, LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. He can be reached for an appointment through his website at psychotherapy30a.com or by phone or text at (850) 837-0123.

TOP 5

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This may be the hardest truth on the list. Your doctor can guide you. We can educate you. We can order tests, recommend treatments, and help cre-

ate a plan. But we cannot make choices for you.

The patients who experience the greatest transformations are not necessarily the ones with the most resources or the perfect genetics. They are the ones who become active participants

in their own health. They ask questions. They stay curious. They follow through. They view their health as an investment rather than an expense.

Your healthcare team can walk beside you, but ultimately, you are the most important

member of the team.

At the end of the day, these truths are not meant to make anyone feel guilty. They're meant to be empowering. Your body is remarkably resilient. It is constantly adapting, healing, and responding to the choices you make each day. Small im-

provements, practiced consistently, can create extraordinary changes over time.

And if there's one thing I hope every patient understands, it's this: it's never too late to start listening to your body and giving it the care it deserves.

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By KERRY KNIGHT, MINISTER,
EMERALD BEACH CHURCH OF
CHRIST

A Minister's Message: God's Faithfulness

We all must navigate through the doubts that arise in our spiritual journey, but we can seek the strength that comes from God's faithfulness. His constancy serves as a balm for our weary hearts. Our emotions are a roller coaster, yet God remains the same. His love is unwavering and His desire to help and guide is amazingly consistent. He is a steadfast support who will bolster our faith when we

encounter doubt. He will never abandon us, though many forsake Him. So we ask, "Why does He show such resolve and care in dealing with man?" "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morn-

ing; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) God has a plan for your life. Find hope in what Jeremiah wrote: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

These verses of scripture give us clarity despite our occasional doubts. We can find hope and even resolution for our problems. Let us lean upon the Lord, drawing strength from His promises.

BLACKSMITHS

continued from page 20

ing on the chapter's competition piece for display at the October conference. This year's project incorporates the themes of motion, balance and inspiration from the cosmos. Open forges will follow the demonstration. Lunch provided; donations appreciated.

July 25 John Butler Family Farm, 4112 Bell Lane, Pace | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

The focus shifts to the annual gift-exchange project, "Something That Twists or Turns." Demonstrations will include forging a corkscrew under the shade of the pecan trees. Lunch provided; donations appreciated.

Aug. 22 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Members pursuing Journeyman certification will work toward completing required standards in preparation for recognition at the October state conference.

Sept. 12 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

This special out-of-cycle meeting will focus on completing both the chapter competition project and individual gift-exchange projects before the conference season begins.

Oct. 10 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Members will prepare equipment and pack the trailer in advance of FABA CON 41 in Gainesville.

Oct. 16-18 FABA CON 41 | Best Western Gateway Grand, Gainesville

The statewide convention features three days of demonstrations, classes and educational opportunities for blacksmiths of all experience levels.

Oct. 31 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.



Members will share techniques, ideas and discoveries gathered at the conference while resetting equipment for upcoming competitions.

Nov. 7 Timber Creek Distillery, 6451 Lake Ella Road, Crestview | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

The annual chapter competition returns with a mystery challenge announced closer to the event. Participants will have five hours to create a forged project using either their own steel or material from the chapter's scrap supply. The day traditionally includes pizza from Timber Creek's stone oven, fellowship and plenty of friendly competition.

Winter Schedule: No December meeting is planned due to holiday activities and Renaissance fair commitments.

For safety, all participants and visitors under the forge tent are required to wear safety glasses and sturdy closed-toe shoes or boots. Long pants and long-sleeve shirts made from cotton or other natural fibers are strongly recommended.

For more information about membership, events or hosting a demonstration, visit www.blacksmithing.org or contact David Sandlin at david@traditionsworkshop.com or 850-974-1548.

WHY I BELIEVE



Join Us for July Sermons

- July 5:** More Than Conquerors
- July 12:** Let Christ Help You With Stress in Your Life
- July 19:** Conquering Doubt
- July 26:** Nothing to Fear

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Bible Class 9 am	Lesson 1 pm	Bible Study 7 pm
Worship 10 am		

Sean of the South: 4th of July



BY SEAN DIETRICH

March, 1783. The Revolutionary War was not over. The throng of Continental soldiers encamped at headquarters was pissed. And with good reason. The soldiers were bloody. Battered. They were sick. And worst of all, they were unpaid. Namely, because Congress would not get off its fat aspirations and pay its own army. Just who did Congress think it was? These wealthy jerks, sitting in ornate boardrooms, wearing tight pants and powder wigs, making up new laws, refusing to fund their own army. The soldiers were angry. Angry at the negligence. Angry at bloated government fatcats whose daughters mail-ordered clothes from Italy, whose sons

studied Latin and ceramic pottery, while soldiers couldn't even feed their families. This was NOT the America the soldiers signed up for. This was B.S. General Washington's officers began whispering behind his back. They wrote seething letters in secret. The soldiers had been circulating petitions suggesting large-scale mutiny. An anonymous letter was read aloud in the bunkhouses, barracks, and tents: "Any further experiments on our patience may have fatal effects... If this then be [our] treatment, while the swords [we] wear are necessary for the defence of America, what have [we] to expect from peace...?" So the men's minds were made up. They decided on mutiny. Screw this. They were going to abandon the war, let the American people fend for themselves against the British. Then, the army would march on Congress and demand paychecks, with muskets drawn. Washintgon caught wind that his officers had planned a secret meeting. This was serious. These were HIS officers. HIS trusted guys. And they were plotting against him.



A meeting was called in New Windsor Cantonment, New York. March 15. A nation's entire future hung in the balance. This is what happened at that meeting: It was a large hall, entirely made of wood. Voices reverberated off the walls. Lots of grumbling. Fraternal laughter. Meeting was about to begin. Everyone in the crowd had two things in common. They were angry at Congress. And angry with George Washington.

The gavel banged. "Meeting will commence," someone shouted. The crowd fell to a hush. That's when everyone heard a horse come charging up outside. Someone looked out the window. "It's General Washington!" someone shouted. Washington climbed off his horse. In moments he was hobbling down the aisle, winded and out of breath. His hair was gray. His skin, wrinkled.

Wait a second. THIS was Washington? This looked like an old man. The great General took the podium and read a nine-page letter in an aged voice. He pleaded with his men, begging for patience. But it was doing no good. His men were snickering bitterly. Arms crossed. Shaking heads. If anyone would've had rotten tomatoes, they would've hurled them at the General. General Washington's mood was falling. It was over for the Great American Experiment. He folded up his speech and prepared to read another speech to his crowd.

"What a JOKE!" the men were muttering. "Get this guy off the stage." And that's when it happened. As the General was unfolding leaflets, he patted his chest pockets. Then he removed a pair of wire spectacles. The room collectively gasped. It was the first time anyone had seen the great and fearless General wearing eyeglasses. They had always viewed this man as a giant. A myth. A man's man. But this was no legend in their midst. This was a man humbled. Washington was visibly embarrassed. He apologized to his crowd. "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for, I have grown not only gray, but almost blind in the service of my country." Nobody spoke for whole minutes. Many soldiers began to weep. And, well, anyway we won the war.

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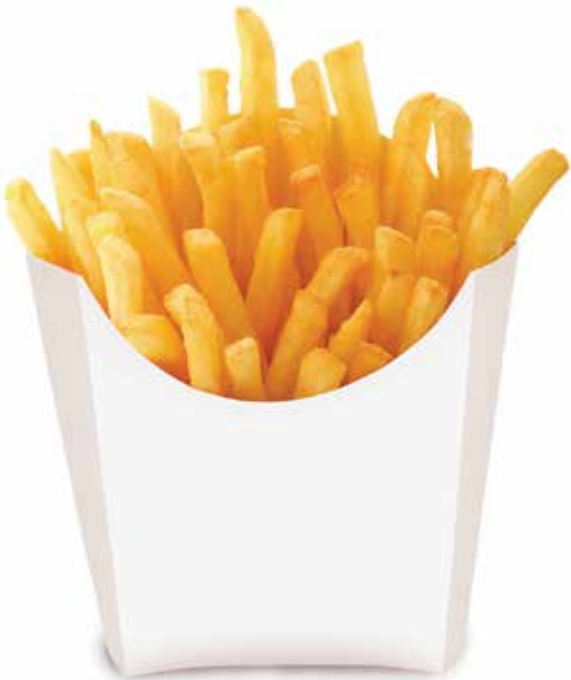


By Rick Moore

It wasn't really a diet. We weren't trying to lose weight. It was more or less a plan to stop gaining weight. Because we were on the road for hours each day, both my wife and I would purchase several of our meals from fast-food chains. Our plan was to stop eating french fries for a month to see if it would make a difference. A week into the self-imposed plan, my wife called and asked me to pick up dinner from a drive-thru on the way home. Driving past one of my favorite hamburger joints, I couldn't help but notice a huge banner which read, "Buy 1 Combo And Get The 2nd Free!" I did a u-turn and

pulled into the drive-thru. Suddenly remembering we weren't supposed to be eating fries, I did the math and realized we would still be better off to order the combos and throw away the fries. After receiving the meals, I pulled over to the dumpster behind the restaurant and ditched the french fries.

As we are sitting at the kitchen table eating, my wife looks at the receipt taped to the side of the bag from the restaurant and saw where I had received two orders of fries. She became irate. "I can't believe you ate two orders of fries in the car on the way home!" I promised I didn't and began explaining how the cost of the two combos was cheaper, and that I had thrown away the fries in the dumpster. She wasn't buying it. She said she knew me too well and there was no way in the world I would throw away two orders of fries. Then, out of no where, she came up with a new label she tried to put on me, a label I'd never heard before. She said, "I knew you would go fast-fooding on me." I didn't even know "fast-fooding" was a thing. Now I'm upset. I



jump in the car and do the only reasonable thing left to do. I drive back to the restaurant dumpster. No, this isn't a Seinfeld sketch.

I leaned over the dumpster, stretching as far as possible, but the french fries were still inches away out of reach. I grabbed a long stick and tried to pull

them towards me, but that didn't work either. Taking a picture of them as proof would have been a reasonable thing to do, but that could never be as good as securing the evidence. So, I jumped into the dumpster and picked up the two containers of french fries. After gently setting them on the ledge of the dumpster making sure they would not tip over, I began realizing getting into the dumpster was

easier than getting out. It is at that moment a bunch of young people pulled into the drive through. With their windows down and cell phones out taking pictures and videos, I heard one of the teenagers say, "I've never seen someone dumpster diving at a restaurant before."

To this day, I'm still not sure my wife believes I didn't eat the fries. In her defense, I was known to sneak around and eat candy bars when I shouldn't. We want to be trusted, and we want to trust others. My father used to say trust isn't given, it is earned. No matter if you agree with that or not, that was the rule in the home I grew up in. If I snuck out in the middle of the night and was caught, I would be grounded and not allowed to drive the car for a week. The punishment of being grounded was bad, but what really hurt the most was to hear my father say, "I can't trust you." One of the highest honors a person can receive is to be told they are trustworthy. Trust is the fragile cornerstone of all human connection. Go earn it.

Rick Moore is Communication Pastor at Destiny Worship Center



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The Process of Choosing Your Floors: A Step-by-Step Guide for Homeowners

BY AUBRIE BAILEY, MARKETING COORDINATOR, FLOORING DEPOT OF PANAMA CITY

Choosing new flooring can feel overwhelming—but it doesn't have to be. With so many styles, materials, and options available, the key is breaking the process down into simple, manageable steps. At Flooring Depot of Panama City, we're here to guide you every step of the way and make the experience as smooth and stress-free as possible.

Here's how to confidently choose the perfect floors for your home:

Step 1: Start with Your Lifestyle

Before you even look at colors or styles, think about how your space is used. Do you have pets, kids, or high foot traffic? Do you live near the beach where sand and moisture are a factor?

Your lifestyle plays a huge role in determining what flooring will hold up best. For busy households and coastal living,

waterproof and scratch-resistant options like luxury vinyl plank (LVP) are often the most practical and long-lasting choice.

Step 2: Consider Each Room Individually

Not all flooring works in every space. Kitchens, bathrooms, and entryways require moisture-resistant materials, while bedrooms and living areas allow for more design flexibility.

By choosing flooring based on how each room functions, you ensure your home is both beautiful and durable.

Step 3: Choose Your Style & Color Palette

Now comes the fun part—design. Think about your overall home aesthetic. Do you prefer light and airy, warm and cozy, or modern and bold?

Lighter tones can make a space feel larger and brighter, while darker floors add depth and contrast. Bringing inspiration photos, cabinet samples, or paint colors into the show-



room can help guide your decision and create a cohesive look throughout your home.

Step 4: Explore Your Material Options

From tile and hardwood to laminate and LVP, each flooring material offers unique benefits.

Tile: Extremely durable and water-resistant

LVP: Waterproof, low-maintenance, and budget-friendly

Hardwood: Timeless, natural beauty and long-term value

Laminate: Stylish look at

an affordable price point

Not sure which option is right for your home? Come into Flooring Depot of Panama City and let our professional sales staff guide you. We'll walk you through the differences, answer your questions, and help you find flooring that fits your lifestyle, design goals, and budget.

Step 5: Preview Your Options Before You Decide

Lighting, room size, and surrounding finishes can all affect how flooring looks in your

home. What you see in the showroom may look different in your actual space.

To help with this, we offer a room visualizer tool at flooringdepotofpanama.com, allowing you to preview different flooring styles in your own room. This gives you a helpful starting point before visiting our showroom and seeing samples in person.

Step 6: Make It Work for Your Budget

New flooring is an investment, but it should also be attainable. That's why Flooring Depot of Panama City offers 24-month financing options to help make your project more manageable.

This allows you to move forward with the flooring you love now while spreading out payments over time—without sacrificing quality or design.

Step 7: Understand the Installation Process

Once you've made your se-

Continued on page 31

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Design and Culture: **Decorative Arts**

We just finished up this lovely project of cabinets and countertops and while working, I met the artist Krista Vind. Her innovative creativity and her artistic inclusion of textures throughout the home made the spaces on this project stand out. The cabinetry in this kitchen already had a lovely texture of oyster-painted oak selected by our client, but the textures Krista used to accent the cabinetry really made for a stunning look. Krista painted the beautiful knee wall using metallic paints and transformed the wall in the dining room using plaster and metallic waxes. Both works of art are unique and bring energy and a modern touch to the spaces. I love what Krista did with the light switches too, hiding them so they wouldn't take away from the beautiful marble backsplash tile. Krista also refurbished the vanity using plaster, silver leaf, and lightly tinted waxes, just stunning.

Krista Vind has been a resident of the Gulf Coast for over 30 years. She is an accomplished artist that has traveled the country working as a field decorative artisan and also an instructor of decorative arts, teaching everything from fine art to custom finishes for furniture. Passing her gifts along, she has taught hundreds of art



students over the years, many of whom have successfully gone on to be art instructors themselves. You can follow her work on Facebook, Artists Warehouse of South Walton, and Instagram, [@kristavindstudiogallery.com](https://www.instagram.com/kristavindstudiogallery.com). If you are interested in a custom piece for your home, contact Krista at kkvind@gmail.com or visit the Artists Warehouse of South Walton located at HWY 393 in Santa Rosa Beach where her studio and gallery are located.

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 Business


BY TIPP SPRADLIN

At 16, in the thick of the Florida heat, I grumbled my way through the decidedly-not-fun task of taking a tire off over and over again until my dad was satisfied I wouldn't need anyone's help if I ever got a flat. Then, after a short break for sweet tea in a mason jar, he walked me through changing the oil. It was a Saturday. I could have been at the beach with my friends.

He explained what happens to a car over time if the oil isn't changed — how dirty oil can infect the engine, how the whole thing can eventually seize. Then he told me how expensive that repair would be, and that I'd be walking to work or begging for rides. The entire exercise felt performative and dramatic and I didn't have the best attitude.

That was more than 30 years ago, and I have never changed my own oil since.

But my dad's lesson was never really about the oil. It was about understanding what it takes to keep a complicated machine moving safely and efficiently. I wasn't destined to be a mechanic like him, and I don't geek out about cars. But I have never once forgotten to get my oil changed. I take it to a local quick-change shop that handles all the things I don't want to do and the machine keeps running.

I think about that lesson a lot now, because I spend my days looking at a different kind of complicated machine: businesses. And I've noticed something. The owners who built them are almost always the ones changing their own oil. Every single time.

They're the engine, the mechanic, the dispatcher, and the person under the hood at 11 p.m. all at once. The business runs on their back, their phone, their memory. And for a while, that works beautifully because nobody knows the machine like the person who built it.

But here's what I've learned watching this play out across the Panhandle: a business that depends entirely on its owner is a machine running on increasingly dirty oil. It still moves. It still makes money. But the owner is



exhausted, maintenance keeps getting deferred, and one day the thing that felt solid starts making a sound nobody likes.

Owners ask me about timing all the time. Usually, some version of: If I stay in business a few more years, will I get more when I sell? And my answer is that it depends on how much gas you have left in the tank — and whether the drive is worth the mileage.

Sometimes it absolutely is. A few more strong years, the right improvements, a little less dependence on you personally, and the business can be worth meaningfully more. That's a great drive, and I'll help you

map it.

But sometimes the tank is closer to empty than the owner wants to admit and gas is getting expensive. The miles are adding up, something is leaking, and pushing for two more years means risking the engine to chase a payoff that may not come. That's not a drive worth taking.

The only way to know which one you're looking at is to check the gauges before you decide — to get the financials clean, understand how much the operation leans on you, and find out what the business is actually worth today. The best moment to look under the hood is while

it's still running well. While you're not desperate. While you can still say "not yet" to a buyer and mean it.

I've watched people who held on one year too long leave serious money on the table — not because the business wasn't valuable, but because by the time they were ready to sell, they were running on fumes and no longer had the stamina to wait for the right deal. A business that has to sell never commands what a business that's ready to sell does.

You don't have to become a mechanic. That was never the point of my dad's lesson, and it isn't the point here. You don't have to geek out about market multiples or seller's discretionary earnings or add-backs. That's my job. That's what I do for the things you don't want to do.

But you do have to get the oil changed. For a business owner, that starts with a Market Price Analysis. A clear, confidential look under the hood that tells you what your business is actually worth today, how much it leans on you, and what the drive ahead really looks like. It's the gauge check that turns "I think I might sell someday" into a decision you can actually make.

So consider this your reminder, 30+ years in the making: don't wait for the seizing sound. Let's get your oil changed and see how much gas is really left in the tank.

Tipp Spradlin is a Business Sales Advisor with First Choice Business Brokers, NW Florida, helping owners find out what their business is worth before they're ready to sell. Reach her at tipp.spradlin@fcbb.com or 850-532-8882.

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BY DON CARTER,
SECURE VISION

Summer is here, and across the Emerald Coast, communities are seeing what they wait all year for: full parking lots, packed pools, busy amenity spaces, and high occupancy.

For HOA boards and property managers, however, peak season brings a different challenge. Every arriving resident and vacation guest brings multiple connected devices, creating a dramatic increase in demand on a community's internet infrastructure.

A typical vacationing family may arrive with smartphones, tablets, laptops, streaming devices, gaming systems, smart watches, and connected home technology. Multiply that across hundreds of units, and a network that performed well in February

can quickly be tested in July. When connectivity issues occur, residents rarely see them as technical problems. They see interrupted streaming, dropped video calls, buffering televisions, and unreliable Wi-Fi around the pool or clubhouse. The result is frustration, complaints, and in some cases, negative reviews that impact the overall perception of the community.

The strongest-performing communities don't wait for complaints to identify issues. They take a proactive approach by evaluating network performance before occupancy reaches its peak.

Key areas boards should consider include:

- Available bandwidth during peak occupancy periods
- Wi-Fi coverage in amenity areas such as pools, fitness centers, clubhouses, and outdoor gathering spaces
- Aging equipment that may no longer support modern device demands
- Network design that separates resident, guest, and opera-

- tional traffic
- Visibility into performance issues before residents experience them

Internet service has evolved from a convenience into a critical utility. Residents and guests expect the same reliable connectivity they experience at home, regardless of whether they are visiting for a week or living in the community year-round.

Communities that invest in reliable connectivity create a better resident experience, reduce support issues, and position themselves for long-term success.

As occupancy reaches its highest levels of the year, now is the ideal time to evaluate whether your community's network is performing as expected and identify opportunities for improvement before small issues become larger problems.

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

FLOORS

continued from page 28

lection, our team takes care of the rest. From scheduling to installation, we ensure the process is handled professionally and efficiently so you can enjoy your new floors with minimal disruption.

We also provide free in-home measurements to ensure your project is accurately planned and quoted. This step helps eliminate surprises and ensures everything is prepared correctly before installation begins.

Step 8: Enjoy Your Finished Space

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new flooring. It enhances comfort, improves style, and adds long-term value to your space—all while reflecting your personal taste.

Let's Get Started

Choosing your floors should feel exciting, not overwhelming. And you don't have to do it alone.

Come into Flooring Depot of Panama City and let our professional sales staff guide you or schedule your visit today. With expert guidance, a wide selection of flooring options, and flexible financing available, we make it easy to bring your vision to life from start to finish and feel confident every step of the

way in your project.

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