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Beauty for Ashes

Publisher's Note: Having been raised in a part of the country that doesn't experience forest fires like the one which erupted in South Walton recently, I was at a complete loss to write anything meaningful other than the basic facts. And then I read a Facebook post from a woman that just experienced the most incredible loss. Her words will have much more meaning than mine...

"God answered my prayers. I know that might seem odd to some people, but let me explain: When our Wednesday afternoon, suddenly and without notice, went from prepping for a family movie night to a Sheriff Deputy telling us we had to evacuate our home immediately because a fire was out of control and already coming into our neighborhood, my immediate prayer was not for my house or our things, but for my family and my neighbors—the people, not the things! When we were driving through the smoke and flames, I prayed for my babies, all four of them by name, for my husband, and I asked God to keep us all safe and deliver us out of this fire



that came out of nowhere... and He did! All six of us are fine; not a single singe on any of us! When we ran out to get in the car, the smoke was so thick and wind was blowing embers everywhere—they looked almost like leaves, but not a single one touched us, not one! That, my friends, is God answering my prayers!

Beauty for Ashes. Fire is destructive and consumes all it comes in contact with. Trust me, it is way more powerful when you see it up close and personal! Yes, the fire consumed our belongings, it stole my most beloved treasures—the gown I brought my babies home from the hospital in, my wedding dress and veil

I was saving for my daughters, little love notes Grayton used to leave under my pillow when he was little, Riley Kate's books she herself has spent hours writing and illustrating with her precious little hands, Brantley's Mother's Day Card he made me when

BEAUTY
continued on page 2

Kids in Crisis Can't Wait

ECCAC Continues to Work with the Community

BY KAY PHELAN



"When children are isolated, they can't tell anyone until the end of the crisis, but it is still happening. Child abuse was an epidemic before the pandemic."

—Julie Porterfield, CEO ECCAC

According to the non-profit information and networking resource that deals with all aspects of criminal justice, The Crime Report, with school closures lasting through this school year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a worrisome trend has been reported in numerous states — dramatic decreases by one-third to one-half in child abuse hotline reporting.

KIDS
continued on page 2



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 Community
BEAUTY*continued from page 1*

he was age 3 that said I was the best Mom because I liked football, and Sophia's precious artwork from this past school year her teachers just brought to us a couple of days ago. These are the things I treasured most, but not more than the people who were the reason those items were so precious to me! Yes, the fire totally consumed them all, but God didn't let it so much as singe a single spot on any one of us! Beauty for Ashes.

Yesterday when we went to see the house or what was left of it, I frantically tried to salvage something, just one thing, anything, to take with us, something symbolic at least. But I found nothing! I was covered in ashes

from head to toe—the ashes that were left over from our home and belongings burning. Empty handed, sobbing and feeling defeated, I just wanted something for my kids, something tangible that would trigger that normalcy, that comfort of your own home feeling for them. But I couldn't find anything. I felt like a failure! As I was slowly walking down the street, away from the place we had called home feeling emptiness in both my hands and my heart, I saw something out of the corner of my eye! I thought I saw a picture of my babies! I looked down and it was a picture of my babies, laying on the edge of the retention pond covered in ashes, but still, it was them! I immediately dropped to my knees, grabbed it and began wiping off the glass!

There they were...it took me a minute to process it, but it really was them...pictures of them... pictures of us...our pictures!

I want you all to know that those pictures were purposely and lovingly removed, all from different rooms in our house by firefighters—some were from the hallway, the den, the guest bathroom and the wall by our bedroom door. They ran into our burning home into different rooms to grab what they knew meant the most—family pictures! Take a minute to let that sink in. I don't know their names, but I am on a mission to find them, because in my moment of despair, they gave me HOPE! I must hug their neck and thank them for what they did! I cannot even mention these pictures without sobbing

uncontrollably, and I can never put into words what seeing those pictures did for my soul!

Please understand that when the fires started on our street, the firemen were not even near our house yet as they were battling the blaze trying to stop it at so many different points, and about five minutes after we evacuated, our house caught fire! Some amazingly brave, kind-hearted firefighters ran into our burning home, knowing it would not survive the fire, to save something...something they knew was precious...pictures! Beauty for Ashes...those firefighters are our beauty!

So many of you have said fire destroys. But what comes after the fire and the ashes? The beauty! We have already seen so much beauty for our ashes!

Thank you for being that beauty for us!

Beauty for Ashes...Isaiah 61:3

“To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory.”

Note: According to Walton County Emergency Management, on May 6, 2020, a wildfire occurred in the vicinity of Mussett Bayou Rd. in Santa Rosa Beach. The final estimated acreage indicates the fire burned approximately 343 acres of wildlands and damaged or destroyed approximately 59 homes in the area.

KIDS*continued from page 1*

It isn't that there's less abuse — these declines are similar to the decline in normal summer months, when mandated reporters such as classroom teachers, guidance counselors, school nurses and others required by law to report suspected abuse, see less of the children they care for or teach. Those are all opportunities to notice behavioral signs of abuse, like diminished school performance or social relationships, or in limited cases, physical evidence such as bruises. As both layoffs and alcohol usage climb in the U.S. and families are confined together to comply with stay-at-home orders, the risk of physical, emotional, and sexual violence climbs. The more stress an offender is under, the less able they are to control and manage their behavior. When this is over, a major increase in child abuse reports are expected.

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Centers (ECCAC) are anticipating the same increase to happen with this crisis. In these unprecedented

pandemic times, the centers in Niceville and the Pierce Family Center in DeFuniak Springs are dealing directly with these issues. They have already adapted and stepped up with the community to help children. This has been a time to acknowledge the importance of the community working together to help prevent child abuse and neglect, and also to promote the social and emotional well-being of impacted children and their families.

For the safety of the children ECCAC serves, their centers' lobbies have closed until it is deemed safe to re-open. Although the lobbies are closed, the centers and its agency partners are still responding to and investigating child abuse cases.

Their therapists are conducting virtual “tele-therapy” sessions with children and staff is hard at work from home. Many members of ECCAC's team partners are considered essential workers, such as law enforcement, prosecutors, child protection teams and the Department of Children and Families. Even ECCAC's therapy dogs have been on the tele-therapy sessions which has been a



big hit with the children and a big help for them to open up to their therapist.

Distillery 98, located in Santa Rosa Beach, was kind enough to donate five gallons of sanitizer. Velia Lala, an ECCAC board member and owner of Velia Lala Designs in Ft. Walton Beach, along with her team, have been making face masks. They have donated more than 70 face masks in the past several weeks. Then there is long-time volunteer at the Niceville Center, Bernadette Williams. For the past five years, she has been an admin volunteer helping the staff. Now that she is adhering to Florida's stay-at-home directive, she got busy and has made over 50 face masks for ECCAC and their partners.

In addition, because schools have been closed, many, if not most, students in Okaloosa and Walton Counties either had, or have received Internet devices so they can continue the

learning process on-line.

So, ECCAC has created child abuse prevention information videos that include internet safety that are designed just for students and hopes to have them available in the near future. Please visit the website at www.ECCAC.org and Facebook page for updates.

ECCAC is in its 20th year of operation. It has provided more than 150,000 services at no cost to include mental health therapy, crisis intervention, referrals to other community providers, interviews and medical services to more than 14,000 children and their families. They will be hosting a 20th year celebration at the Niceville Center on October 27. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



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Hometown Heroes, Big and Small

BY RITA L. SHERWOOD

What a different time we have all lived in the past few weeks! Schools, restaurants, gyms, movie theaters, hair and nail salons, and others (too many to name), and even our beautiful beaches were temporarily closed. What was our reality in the beginning of March is no longer, and as we take the time to reflect upon our past few weeks, many heroes big and small emerge.

At *Bay Life*, we have read and appreciate all of your comments and nominations for local heroes during this unprecedented crisis. Some might stand out and come to mind more quickly, while others are “unsung” heroes, the everyday kind, and might even go unnoticed by some.

The most obvious heroes are the brave men and women from our healthcare system. They’re on the front line of this pandemic countless hours every day for not only days, but also weeks on end, tirelessly caring for those affected by the virus. How can we ever express

our gratitude for these special people? They’re all a gift from Heaven, that’s for sure. **Hannah Gord, a COVID-19 nurse at Sacred Heart hospital** says, “Our hospital has prepared us so well for this. We feel safe and have plenty of personal protection equipment (PPE). It’s sometimes hard, because you don’t know what you’re going to walk into each day. But the support that our community has shown by donating lunches and dinners every day, not only for our ER, but the entire hospital, has really helped keep our spirits up. We live in such a great community!”

Local Nonprofit, **Food For Thought**, continues to fight food insecurity for families affected by COVID-19. Founder and Executive Director, Tiffanie Nelson says, “We’re seeing families that have never required our services before.



Food insecurity can often result in one missed paycheck.” Food For Thought operates year-round, providing their services to children and families.

Because of COVID-19, they have had to shift to larger, more involved summer-style services three months earlier than anticipated. This shift in programming means that 60,000 additional food items are needed per month and \$120,000 in donation losses must be replaced. It’s only \$30 per month to sponsor a family, which provides one full week of food. You can sponsor a family by texting FFTSUMMER TO 44321, or by donating online at fftfl.org. You or your business can also sponsor a pickup location for \$1500 per month. Locations to serve locals in need are in Freeport, Santa Rosa Beach, Defuniak Springs, Mary Esther and Destin. Families receive curbside

bags of food ranging from 30-50 full size food items to make family meals, and each location hosts two pickups per month which serves 500-600 families.

If you or someone you know is in need of support from Food For Thought, text@FFTST to 81010 to use the Remind App, email support@fftfl, or call 850.714.1960.

Our **local schools** are stepping up to the “plate” also. Both of our school systems in **Okaloosa and Walton** counties have continuously been providing food to their students and families, as many of the children get most of their meals from school, as their parents can’t afford to feed them. Walton County School District’s Superintendent A. Russell Hughes says, “We have fed more than 23,604 students throughout Walton County, through our many distribution sites as well as from our bus drivers. I have real heroes preparing food and packages, I have real heroes driving busses and disseminating food. We have provided more than 105,000 meals to our community members, our

HEROES
continued on page 31

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-  The commercial area and town center plans include spaces for shops, restaurants, and professional services of all kinds.
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Thursday Throwdowns 2020

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar and Bluewater Bay Marina has resumed its Thursday Night Throw Downs! These races continue until October 29 every Thursday evening! This is a fun Stand-Up Paddle Board race with a unique race format. All Stand-Up Paddlers are welcome, all ages and all levels of expertise. Points will be



awarded during the season and overall winner will be recognized on October 29 at awards ceremony. "We want everyone to be able to enjoy the beautiful waters of Rocky Bayou," says Jimmie Boisjolie, Marketing Director. For more information visit bluewaterbaymarina.com or call 850-897-2821.



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- Sugar 50 g (2 oz.)
- Vanilla Sugar 1 pk.
- Salt 1 pinch
- Egg 1 pc - Milk 250 ml (8.5 fl. oz.)
- Butter, soft 100 g (3.5 oz.)
- Flour for working surface

For the Topping:

- Butter 200g (7 oz.)
- Sugar 125g (4.4 oz.)
- Vanilla Sugar 1 pk.
- Almonds, sliced 150 g (5.3 oz.)



Take Out Menu



Take Out Menu



APPETIZERS

- German Pretzels \$3.10
- German Potato Pancakes \$5.40
- Lodge Salad \$9.20

SCHNITZEL

- Schnitzel Wiener Art \$9.90 - \$17.80
- Jäger Schnitzel \$12.50 - \$20.40
- Herren Schnitzel \$11.40 - \$19.30
- Schnitzel "Schweizer Art" \$12.10 - \$20.00

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- German Potato Salad \$3.10
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- Käs' Spätzle \$4.60
- German Potato Pancake \$3.10
- Red Cabbage \$3.10
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- Spätzle \$3.10
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- Black Forest Cake \$6.90
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- Beer to go!

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Heat the milk hand warm for the dough. Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk and stir in. Dissolve the flour in it. Process with sugar, butter, vanilla sugar, salt and egg with the kneading hooks of the hand mixer and later with your hands to a smooth dough. Then let the dough rise for an hour.

Knead the dough again briefly on a lightly floured work surface, shape it into a roll and roll it out on the baking sheet.

Spread the butter in flakes evenly over the dough. Mix sugar and vanilla sugar, sprinkle over it and spread the almonds evenly over it.

Let the cake rest for 15 minutes. Put the tray in the oven and bake for 20 minutes at 390 °F top / bottom heat.

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Hello Frances.

Hello Frances is a podcast for curious creatives and nano entrepreneurs who seek knowledge, purpose, and community brought to you by Niceville creative firm and solutionist agency, Frances Roy.

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- Luc Speisser

 Community


BY MAURICE STOUSE,
BRANCH MANAGER AND
FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Many investors today worry about identity theft, which can mean the loss of some or

all of their assets. Identity theft is often reported to the work of a known attacker, making defense that much more difficult. It is more difficult because the known attacker might be a friend, associate or relative or family member.

What about cyber security? While you hear the term often, there does not seem to be a lot of substance provided. Just what is it and what does it mean? Should investors look to just be

aware or look to cybersecurity as another area for investment?

Many people today are growing in their concern over the security for the very devices they rely so heavily upon in their everyday lives. Every time someone turns on his or her phone or logs in to a computer, the person is potentially exposed, we are told. Malware is the general term used for all sorts of malicious software that can attach to your computer or phone. There

is a variety of types which include those with names like ransomware, adware, crypto ware, scareware and logic bomb.

It seems to be a repeat of an age-old pursuit: to hold something up and in this case the efforts and treasure of the user of a computer device. Ransomware has grown, and it is quite simply a program that encrypts or locks up your files until a ransom can be collected. Businesses and governments are increasingly at risk as they are bombarded daily with threats to their systems.

This is not only a national and international threat, but one that investors, for protection as well as opportunity, might take note of. The Department of Homeland Security is hard at work protecting the internet and preventing cybercrime. In 2018, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency Act was signed into law. According to a DHS release: "CISA builds the national capacity to defend against cyberattacks and works with the federal government to provide cybersecurity tools, incident response services and assessment capabilities to safeguard the 'gov' networks that support the essential operations of partner departments and agencies."

Many colleges and universities today offer courses in cyber security and some offer a degree in the discipline. It is also considered a fast-growing career opportunity. The U.S. Department of Defense has also given cybersecurity much attention, not only in education, but also in training as well.

Extra caution is usually suggested for most folks in that they should consistently back up their files and, as an added measure, periodically print out copies of needed files.

Investors today can find opportunities to invest in cybersecurity in a variety of ways. There are companies that specialize in it and there are also exchange traded funds that focus on companies that specialize in cyber security. This is what is known as a growth opportunity and of course comes with commensurate risk.

Find out more about cyber security by visiting with an ad-

visor or conducting your own research and see if this can play a part in your investment portfolio.

Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager of The First Wealth Management and Raymond James and he resides in Grayton Beach. He has been in financial services for over 32 years. His main office is located at First Florida Bank, a division of The First Bank, ANBA, 2000 98 Palms Blvd, Destin, FL 32451. Branch offices in Niceville, Mary Esther, Miramar Beach, Freeport and Panama City. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com.

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144 Spires Lane # 315, Gulf Place Caribbean 2 Bedroom, 2 Baths, Gulf View! \$480,000

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Hammock Bay, 145 Symphony Way, 5 Bedroom, 3.5 Baths, 3781 SF, 3 Car Garage, \$422,500!

SOLD



109 Flamingo Drive, 3 Bedroom, 2 Baths, Emerald Walk on 30A, \$ 360,000!

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SOLD



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 Community

Is Your Insurance Ready for Hurricane Season?



BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

Our local retail shops and restaurants are cautiously re-opening, with limitations. Our beaches are once again being enjoyed by residents and vaca-

tioners while (hopefully) adhering to social distancing. We are moving forward, closely monitoring the ongoing pandemic threat and hoping to slowly put it behind us.

Andrea caught the headline in her Facebook feed. "Great!" she exclaimed to no one in particular. "Now hurricane season is beginning again." Yes, June 1st marks the beginning of hurricane season. So, it is time to make sure you're ready for the next round of tropical depressions, storms and hurricanes that visit the Gulf Coast every year.

Andrea called her agent for some insight. "Good morning, Andrea!" said Jack. "Have you

been staying healthy during this pandemic?"

"Thankfully, yes," she replied. "Hey, I just saw a reminder that hurricane season starts on June 1st. Do I have what I need, you know, just in case?" This was Jack's third call already that day, so he was prepared for her questions.

"When it comes to homeowner's and flood insurance and hurricanes," he told her, "there are a few things that should be on your radar. If you have these coverages in place, you'll be better equipped to ride out whatever storm blows through." Then he went on to explain a few things to her.

First on the list is hurricane/wind coverage. Most home policies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) in Florida include either hurricane, named storm, or wind/hail under a separate deductible. This is preferred since coordination and consistency of coverages is important. Some carriers don't write wind coverage close to the water. So, a stand-alone wind-only policy would be needed. If this is the case, extra care must be taken to avoid any coverage inconsistencies. In a previous article last year, we addressed the differences in hurricane, named storm, and wind/hail coverage. But suffice it to say, when it comes to wind coverage, the best option is hurricane. Under this coverage scenario, the larger deductible in the policy, usually a percentage of the Dwelling Limit, applies to declared hurricane activity, while the smaller deductible in the policy would apply to other wind losses and all other perils in the policy. There are several deductible options available that can have a large impact on what would be your out-of-pocket responsibility if you file a claim.

Make sure you know you have sufficient Dwelling Limit (Coverage A) coverage to rebuild your home in the event of a loss. Local and national data indicates that nearly 2 out of 3 homes and structures are underinsured.

Another important coverage is Loss of Use that pays for you to live somewhere else while repairs are being done to your temporarily unlivable home. This goes for rental properties with Loss of Rents coverage as well. Remember, there needs to be direct physical damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Another often misunderstood coverage not offered with each carrier, but always recommended, is Law or Ordinance coverage. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25%, or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to



your protection, since your policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play.

Another vital policy to have, especially during hurricane season, is flood insurance. Flood and water damage from a wind event are not necessarily the same thing. This coverage is so vital that we will again devote our next month's article to this topic. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent. For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30-day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective. Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

"I hope this helped ease your concerns a little, Andrea," said Jack.

"Thanks! This does make me feel better. I think I understand it more now. Whew, what a year!" she said.

"You got that right!"

Insurance Zone, owned by Joe and Lea Capers, is a full service commercial and personal lines insurance agency serving Destin, Miramar Beach, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach. Visit their Video Library on www.ins-zone.com and watch several informative videos on 'Homeowners, Condo Unit Owners and Flood', or call 850.424.6979. Victoria Ostrosky, author of this article is an Agent/CSR with IZ.

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Exceptional Students Choose Northwest Florida State College to Begin Their New Chapters

By STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, NWFSC

Many people will tell you that the only time for resolutions is in January. But we are here to tell you that at Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC), one can RESOLVE to make positive changes at any time! NWFSC is resolved to improve lives across the panhandle region by providing a premiere higher education experience.

On May 2, we convened virtually with 1,569 Raider graduates and their families to celebrate with them as they received diplomas, degrees and certificates – their ticket to a new chapter, a brighter future.

Many students attend NWFSC and leave with a job that provides a family-sustaining wage or a springboard to transfer into the university system without the debt acquired by attending all four years. We would like to share two unique stories of NWFSC Raider Grads who chose to attend Northwest Flor-

ida State College and are using their education as a foundation for success.

Looking to make a career change around 2012, Jany Youngs completed NWFSC's EMT program. After becoming an RN in 2018, she is now nearing completion as a member of NWFSC's online Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program while working full-time at a medical clinic in town. In early April, she accepted a short-term contract position in New York City to care for patients with COVID-19, while continuing her online studies. Jany told her professor, "Dr. Norton, I'm going because the nurses in New York need help—they are completely worn out and I can help them, but, I am no hero. I feel fortunate to have re-



ceived an education that allows me to serve with confidence under these circumstances." Jany was assigned to Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center – Bronx,

where he placed 6th best pipe welder in the nation and graduated in December 2019. In late April, Allan passed a rigorous certification test and was hired by SpaceX in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on a contract where he will be welding on platforms that are used to send rockets into space.

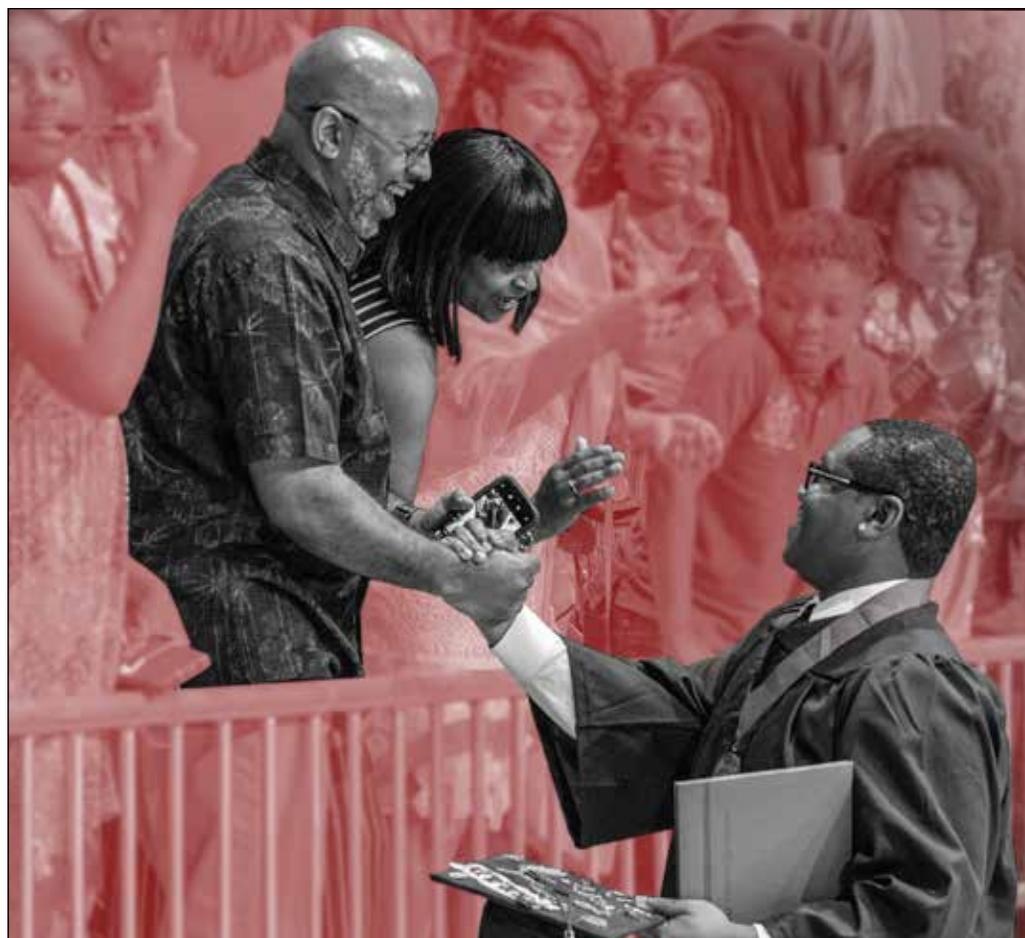
Jany and Allan are not the exception, but rather the norm when you look around NWFSC's classrooms, which are filled with students committed to bettering their lives, and who leave with the knowledge, skills and credentials resolved to make a greater difference in our world.

Your new chapter begins here at Northwest Florida State College. Enrollment for the Summer/Fall 2020 terms is underway! Summer classes begin May 18 online. Fall term begins August 19. We encourage you to visit www.nwfsc.edu to learn more about our programs, or call 850-502-2895 to speak to one of our Student Success Navigators.

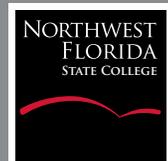


a 347-bed hospital, now a COVID-19 (only) hospital.

Allan Castillo heard about NWFSC's nationally accredited welding program from a friend and decided to check it out. Fast forward, he competed in the 2019 Associated Builders and Contractors National Craft Championship,



NEW CHAPTERS



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 Community

Alaqua Hosts a Virtual Online Show

As COVID-19 creates a new normal throughout the United States, a Florida animal shelter puts a new spin on fundraising to keep their doors open, operations alive, and save animals' lives in the process.

Alaqua Animal Refuge is a local, private, non-profit (501c3) animal shelter and sanctuary committed to serving the Southeast as the premier no-kill refuge providing protection, shelter, and care to animals in need. It's a full-service animal adoption center and a peaceful, proactive animal welfare advocate. In fact, Alaqua has become the "go-to" organization to help animals, and grown to be a nationally recognized leader in animal rescue, welfare, cruelty prevention, and advocacy throughout the country.

Alaqua not only rescues dogs and cats, but all domestic animals in need—including horses, farm animals, and birds. The animals come from mostly cruelty and neglect cases, but also from overloaded shelters in the Southeast. From purebreds to special needs, these animals have all found shelter, safety, and second chances at Alaqua until they find a permanent home or sanctuary.

Alaqua operates solely on funds that are raised through private donations, fundraising, and

grants. These endeavors provide crucial funding for their entire yearly operation and most of them have come to a complete halt with the country's shutdown from the spread of the coronavirus. Two major fundraisers were canceled this past Spring which was a devastating blow to Alaqua's bottom-line to be able to meet the needs of animals in their care and keep the Refuge functional—including its day-to-operations and provision of services and programs to continue its mission.

"As animal shelters and veterinary offices are operating on limited intake, the need for our services are even greater today than they were prior to the shutdown. It is honestly unbelievable the need we are seeing from our surrounding communities and state," said Alaqua Founder Laurie Hood. "Cruelty and abuse cases are at an all-time high and we had to figure out a way to help. It's just what we do."

To supplement the loss of funds from fundraising events and to provide a bridge gap until things could get back to semi-normal state, Alaqua created "Rescue Me," a very unique type of virtual event that included an Online Live Webcast that ran simultaneously with



an Online Auction containing curated items donated before Alaqua's events were canceled. The event also saluted Alaqua's supporters, sponsors, volunteers and friends.

Premiering May 16, the show was jam-packed full of special guest appearances including:

Chef Emeril Lagasse and his wife Alden, of AldenAlli wine, cooking live in their home

kitchen; Brian Kelley of Florida Georgia Line and his wife Britney, a fashion designer for their Tribe Kelley boutiques; Kenan Thompson, an actor and comedian, and the longest-tenured cast member in Saturday Night Live's history; Eric Lindell, an American singer songwriter described by USA Today as "pumping soul into funk, blues an roots-rock;" Dr. Will, featured on Love and

Vets, a Nat Geo WILD series on his vet practice in Atlanta; Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and former CEO of The Humane Society of the United States; John O'Hurley, an actor, author, game show host, and TV personality known for his role as J. Peterman on the NBC sitcom Seinfeld and host of NBC's National Dog Show; Billy Dawson, Nashville Industry Awards "Artist of the Year"; Cathy Bissell, founder of the Bissell Pet Foundation

Kate McFall, the Florida Director for The Humane Society of the United States; Jon Nite, a CMA and ACM award winning singer/songwriter who has written top ten hits for Luke Bryan, Blake Shelton, Kenny Chesney, Dierks Bentley; Carole Baskin, CEO of Big Cat Rescue and the most talked about reality TV personality today; and a lot of other surprises.

The show was also filled with supporters and incredible stories of animal rescues from the Refuge with appearances by favorite Alaqua alums and friends.

Miss it? Alaqua will be releasing a video of the online webcast soon. Visit the Alaqua Animal Refuge Facebook page for updates and release date.



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Makin' Waves

Non-profit's 'Water Warriors' Swimming In Success

In a time when we are all starved for “good news,” Safe Water for Walton has plenty to share, and is inviting the community to help make more.

Just weeks ago, a state permit application sitting in Tallahassee was withdrawn by a Fortune 500 company. Concerns about that permit are what galvanized Safe Water for Walton into existence a few short years ago.

That's right – for nearly three years, the group did not let up, spurred into action by citizens in Jackson County sitting at the top of our public water supply.

Safe Water for Walton – comprised of retirees, parents, former state agency leaders, attorneys, community leaders, and a slew of small business owners – week after week continued to unearth facts and use experts to interpret complicated data and engineering.

The federal-state permit would have allowed Waste Management to inject “leachate” (or “garbage juice”) about 4,000 feet

underground near the very top of the Central Panhandle's regional water supply.

With about 100 freshwater springs within or near our six-county watershed, it serves as the only source of water for both utility customers and anyone on a private well. The watershed is recharged daily by the Floridan Aquifer underground, in terms of both water quality and quantity. The utilities and private wells tap into and depend on that water supply as it moves south.

The permit applicant has more than 21 million customers nationwide, and billions in assets. It runs a regional landfill in Jackson County, and said it needed a different disposal system than trucking the hazardous liquid to treatment facilities in the region, as it had for years.

With the permit application for a “deep injection well” to be drilled now withdrawn for final review by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the company has new



regulatory air permits that allow it to, among other things, use an evaporator and burning system on-site. The leftover “slurry” is put back into the landfill liner on-site.

The landfill accepts municipal waste (household trash) from Walton, Okaloosa, Jackson and other counties in Northwest Florida where it has contracts, and from other states.

“It was a long but powerful testament to the power of positive thinking, and to being factual

and civil. We have to take action to protect major resources and assets of this region as we continue to grow,” said the group's founder Kelly Layman. “We pulled in the right people to be all over this, and others stepped up. Every single one of them knew what was at stake. We've had other successes in the meantime, but this was our No. 1 priority and it's a big deal to now have it resolved.”

Lee Perry, a 35-year Walton resident, has a unique perspective. He owns Azland C&D Recycling Facility in DeFuniak Springs, which helps keep construction waste out of landfills across the Florida Panhandle. He was one of Safe Water for Walton's first Business Members, and is now a Board member. “There was absolutely no reason to unnecessarily risk the public water supply in a region that isn't an

urban area and wouldn't have the resources for any future contamination crisis,” Perry said.

The group's most recent event prior to COVID-19 quarantine was a membership “thank you” event, hosted by Hyatt Place at Grand Boulevard. YOLO Board® and Gulf Power Company were honored. A special tribute video was premiered, featuring their work with Safe Water for Walton after Hurricane Michael.

“Our entire business philosophy is centered on building community, encouraging outdoors discovery, and fostering well-being, so we have been excited about what Safe Water for Walton has accomplished in that same spirit,” Jeff Archer, YOLO Board® owner said. The group is still doing post-hurricane recovery assistance: www.safewaterforwalton.org/hurricane-relief

You can find many other beneficial and protective activities spurred by the group at safewaterforwalton.org.



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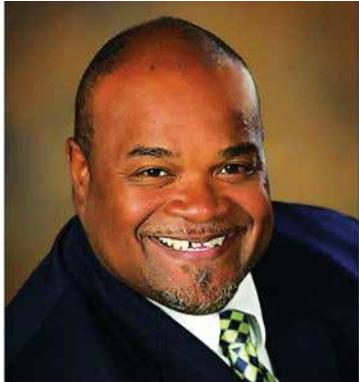
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 Community



May 2020 WCSD Superintendent's Update

County School District website and submit a written question via email and/or call our district office at 850-892-1100.

When we speak of heroes, we must recognize our behind the scenes heroes who are preparing and packaging food, driving buses to distribute both food and educational materials, our school principals and office personnel who are answering parent phone calls and providing Wi-Fi in our parking lots for those without connectivity at home, all the tiers of leadership at the district level, our community and all the stakeholders of Walton County School District. This is a massive collaborative effort.

The safety, health and well-being of our students and staff continues to be our top priority. A major focus for us currently is the feeding of our children. With the help of our state agencies and local partners in education we have provided over 105,000 meals to the children of Walton County. We will continue our once-a-week food and paper learning packet distribution each *Wednesday*, beginning on May 6, through the end of the month. Please note the change in day of the week from Tuesday (April) to Wednesday (May). Specific dates

are May 6, 13, 20 and 27, from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. Our 5 primary distribution sites will remain the same: Paxton School; Mossy Head School; West DeFuniak Elementary; Walton Middle School; and Freeport High School. We will continue delivering meals and paper instructional packets via our 70 bus stops on the same Wednesday dates in May, with no changes in bus routes.

As we move forward toward the close of the 2019-2020 academic school year, our At-Home-Learning Instructional Continuity Plan continues in full EPIC fashion. Due to technical issues that may occur during the At-Home-Learning process, our two district Digital Learning Specialists have been tasked with responding to inquiries from our stakeholders. Since the first day of At-Home-Learning, our Digital Learning Specialists have assisted teachers, parents, students, administrators, district personnel, and vendors with software and hardware items related to digital curriculum. This effort has resulted in over **985** (as of 4/22) support related responses to stakeholders. ClassLink (our single sign on platform) has been launched over **50,000 times**

per week by users! Top 5 Apps are Edgenuity Compass (K-5), Edmentum Study Island (3-8), Edgenuity Courses (9-12), Khan Academy (3-12) and Google Classroom.

Schools and Curriculum & Instruction staff (Math and Literacy Coaches) continue to update and distribute paper packet materials. 22% of our students in grades Prek-12 are utilizing At-Home-Learning paper-based curriculum.

Over 1200 devices have been distributed to families, and 100 iPads have been provided to students for continued ESE services. We are working to provide options for students in grades 6-12 to take their CTE industry certifications and Advanced Placement exams at home. Students may contact their teachers for more information.

Grading Period ends Thursday, May 28, 2020.

There is no question that our nation is experiencing one of the most difficult challenges of our time. Our school administrations, teachers and staff are working diligently and tirelessly to ensure that our students are continuing to move forward, with no breaks, setbacks or loss of learning. We are so proud of our Heroes at Home, our parents and caregivers, who have accepted the challenge of monitoring their students during the At-Home Learning process with grace and tenacity.

To keep the lines of communication open for questions that develop as we move forward, parents and students can text a question to 850-204-9667. Our staff will receive the text immediately and be able to get back with our stakeholder's questions and/or concerns. You can always visit the Walton

Congratulations 2020 Seniors!



This has been an unprecedented time for us all, especially the graduation class of 2020. But they have endured and overcome!

Since Senior year was cut short and our children and students are missing out on so many memorable senior events, some ways you can show them some love and care is to "Adopt A Senior" or a few if you'd like. You can decorate their yard, send a gift card, flowers or a graduation card—anything to put a smile on their face and let them know you're incredibly proud of them.

There's also a cool, new Facebook page that allows you to "Adopt" a senior. Simply visit "Adopt" A Senior Okaloosa County and type "Adopt" in the comments. Then send a private message to the person who posted the picture to work out the details with them. There can be more than one person to adopt a senior. To place your senior up for adoption, they must be a senior at an Okaloosa County high school. Visit "Adopt" A Senior Okaloosa County. Then post a picture of them with their name and high

school. Type "UP FOR ADOPTION" at the top, and list a few of their likes. Then share this page with as many as you wish.

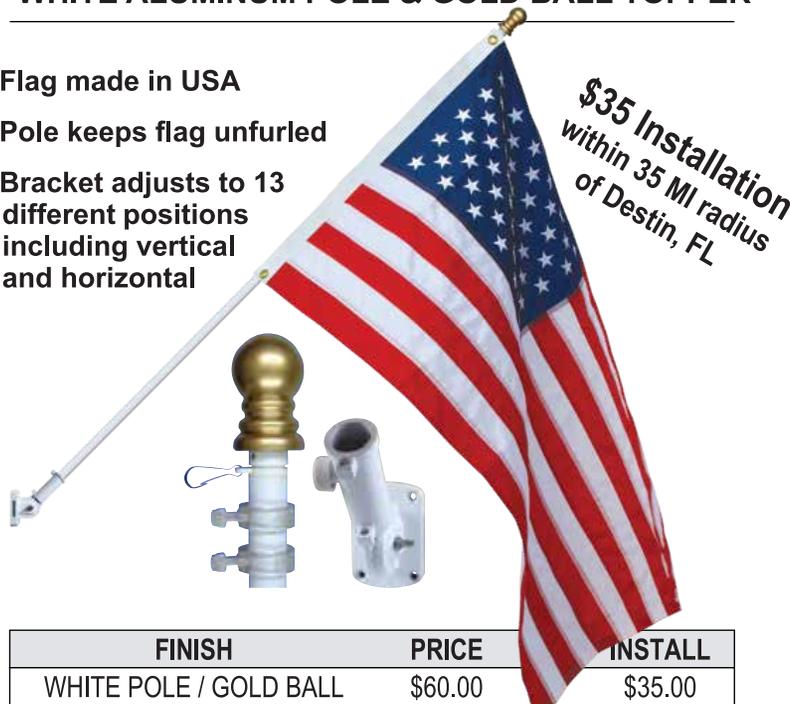
Freeport High School has tentatively set its graduation ceremony date for July 21st! In the meantime, Freeport HS is highlighting its individual 2020 Seniors daily on the Freeport High School Facebook page. You can also check out the Class of 2020 Senior memories on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/nxUR10TZ0B4> and the FHS Awards Ceremony at <https://youtu.be/9kjVhiDSTi0>.

Partnering with the Lamar Sign Company, NHS is proud to show off and congratulate its seniors with the names and pictures of the graduating class displayed on digital billboards in the city of Niceville. The signs will be running throughout the entire month of May and are located on John Sims Parkway east of Davis Drive, John Sims Parkway west of State Road 20 (facing west, and east of Turkey Creek Park) and at Hwy 20 and Range Road in Bluewater Bay, facing east.

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Interested in Selling? Wanna Wait till this Health Event Passes? DON'T WAIT!

BY GAIL PELTO, REALTOR

As a professional real estate agent, I study the real estate stats in our market on a daily basis and there's a few things

I've noticed over the last month and a half: Many properties that had been on the market for sale cancelled their listings, or they let their listing agreement expire and didn't go back on the market for sale. I've also spoken to clients who I know want to sell, but want to wait. In both scenarios, many have said that they're going to wait until this health event passes, when things get more "normal," whatever

that's going to look like. However, something to consider: If you wait and brace for cover (like the rest of your competition) until you and they gain a little confidence, and then come back on and flood the market with new inventory, what's that going to do to the value of your home? Think supply and demand.

There are many ways to sell safely during this time. There

are buyers out there and available inventory is a little slim. Think about it...Ok, now that you've thought about it, you've figured out that if you want to sell, it makes WAY MORE SENSE to be on the market now.

So, call your realtor or call this realtor, Gail Pelto, 850-374-0454. Let's talk about if this is the right time to sell for you and how to get it done. Don't wait!

Gail Pelto is a Rotary Club and Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation board member—and yes, a powerful, full-time real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty Emerald Coast. Call her direct at 850-374-0454 or email to Gail.Pelto@kw.com with any real estate questions you have, and she'll guide you in the right direction. Do you want to know the value of your property today? Visit www.Bayside-Agent.com.

Leadership Okaloosa Taking Applications

Leadership Okaloosa is an esteemed leadership training and development program with a 30-year history of being a vital part of Okaloosa County's growth and development of its leaders. This nine-month experience is designed to enhance the participant's leadership skills and provide community awareness. Hosted from September to May, participants receive classroom training by certified instructors and are given opportunities to

interact with various key community leaders throughout the process. Tours of key areas such as Destin, Crestview, Niceville, Valparaiso, Fort Walton Beach, Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field and Legislative Days in Tallahassee provide participants with a better understanding of the community. Additionally, each participant takes part in a group project to benefit the community while focusing on project management, time management

and team building skills. Another important aspect of Leadership Okaloosa is the networking relationships forged that lead to long lasting personal and professional relationships. Hosted by Northwest Florida State College with the support of the Crestview Area Chamber of Commerce, Destin Chamber of Commerce, Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce and Niceville Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce, benefits include

leadership training and development, community networking, becoming equipped and motivated to assume leadership roles in the community, interacting with community leaders, developing an awareness of the region and its needs, and earning aspects of the Legislative process (Tallahassee Legislative Days).

Applications will be accepted through August 24 and class size ranges from 25-40 participants.

Tuition Fee is \$975 and in-

cludes access to online training and materials, coffee and lunch during training days, chamber breakfast or lunch during tours, hotel and transportation during Tallahassee Legislative days, and graduation celebration.

Download the enrollment form at nwfsc.edu. Application can be submitted by email at leadershipswfsc.edu.

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 Community


Tips to Reduce Household Energy Use

ENERGY TIPS

by Emerald Coast Energy Solutions

By CHRIS BALZAR, ECES

In my household, energy consumption has increased with the stay-at-home order and e-learning with my children. We are streaming more, using devices more. We are using and occupying living spaces more, cooking more, washing hands more, using major appliances more. We can't avoid more, so below are some tips to save more:

Living & Family Room

Lower the brightness on all TV screens. This saves energy and is good for your eyes.

If your electronic devices have energy-saving features use them. Remember, just because devices are not plugged in, they still need to be charged. Using energy-saving features allows the battery to last longer.

When streaming content,

choose the smallest device that makes sense for the number of people watching. Avoid streaming on game consoles, which use 10 times more power than streaming through a tablet or laptop.

Always be sure to turn off lights, fans and electronics when you leave the room.

Bathroom

Check the temperature on your water heater and set it to 120 degrees. The DOE estimates that a heater set at 140 degrees, which is typically the manufacturer setting, can waste up to \$60 annually.

Use the exhaust fan when showering and leave on for 10 minutes to remove hot humid air.

Check faucets for leaks.

Laundry Room

Use cold water in your clothes washer. Most newer washers are designed for cold water.

Throw a few dryer balls into the dryer with your load to reduce drying time.



If your dryer has an auto dry option (moisture sensing), use that option instead of timed dry.

Clean the lint trap between loads—this improves air circulation and increases the efficiency of the dryer.

Kitchen

Dust off the top of your refrigerator and coils to keep it running efficiently and cool.

Cover liquids and wrap foods stored in the refrigerator. Uncovered foods release moisture and make the compressor work harder.

Don't open the oven door while food is cooking. You can lose up to 50 degrees in temperature and waste energy.

Run the dishwasher only when you have enough dirty dishes accumulated for a full load.

Use small appliances such as toaster ovens, electric pressure cookers, microwave ovens or convection ovens for small meals rather than your large stove or oven. They will save energy and can save on cooling costs, because they generate less heat.

General Household

Set the air conditioning thermostat on the highest comfortable setting. (We recommend 78-80 degrees, and no higher than 84.) Raising the temperature just two degrees can reduce cooling costs by as much as five percent.

If your home has two units (upstairs and downstairs), raise the temperature on the thermostat to 84 degrees in the area not occupied.

Upgrade your lighting to ENERGY STAR certified LED bulbs, which use 70-90% less energy than standard bulbs.

Change or clean air conditioner filters monthly. Dirty filters can increase operating costs by 20 percent.

Chris Balzar is founder and president of Emerald Coast Energy Solutions which is a Smile Provider Company. We provide smiles to our customers after installing our high energy efficient products, increasing comfort and lowering energy bills. For more information on how to save this summer and become energy efficient, schedule an inspection by calling (850) 588-2870, visit www.trusteces.com or email wecare@trusteces.com and Beat the Heat.

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Matrix COC's Ongoing Recovery Efforts

Since 2011, the Matrix COC (Community Outreach Center) a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, has been dedicated to improving the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the men, women and children within Walton County. The Matrix has been able to provide individuals and families throughout this community with resources such as bill and utility assistance, employment resources, and food services, including the more recent mass feedings. They customize efforts to meet the needs of those being serviced through a "Hand Up not a Handout" approach. Matrix works with community partners, such as Florida Department of Children and Families, to identify and assist clients in creating more productive lives.

The impact from COVID-19 has reached every corner of our community. This virus has crippled individuals from all backgrounds and sees no boundaries. Since the onset of the crisis, the Matrix has seen huge rise in demand. The organization is remaining true to its mission, while expanding their resources and

reach to help those affected. In the last month, they have served over 2,900 families and have distributed over 120,000 pounds of food within Walton County. With the help of their dedicated volunteers and community partners, they have successfully conducted drive-through mass feeding distribution sites and replenished food banks to ensure stability in these uncertain times. In addition to COVID-19, Matrix is also actively responding to the Santa Rosa Beach fire by playing a main role in feeding and resourcing displaced families.

Walton County Emergency Management Director, Jeff Goldberg, is an avid supporter of Matrix COC. Matrix serves as the Human Services Branch of Walton County Emergency Management during times of disaster. In this function, they oversee the Mass Care Unit, Business and Industry Unit, and Volunteers and Donations Unit. Mr. Goldberg states, "The reason for providing financial support for the Matrix is simple, it is a much-needed expansion of what this organization currently does and



an invaluable partner to my organization."

In addition to the residents they have been able to serve, the Matrix COC is blessed to help serve and support other charities and agencies within the area including Destin Harvest, Walton County School District, Catholic Charities, the Homeless Housing Alliance, Caring and Sharing of South Walton, and the City of DeFuniak Springs, just to name a few. These partnerships were created to ensure all demographics would be served and donated funds could be distributed throughout the community.

Recently, the devastation of the fire in Santa Rosa Beach compounded the needs of an already afflicted Walton County reeling from the impacts of COVID-19. These crises may have shaken our world, but they have not broken the bond of Walton County. Like the indi-

viduals they serve, Matrix COC has felt the impact of COVID-19. Their main source of revenue, their thrift store called The Redemption Boutique, has temporarily closed and they are left depending on donations to continue their efforts through this pandemic and beyond.

Howard Group, Scenic Walton and others have chosen to support the Matrix COC in an effort to help our neighbors during the COVID-19 crisis. To donate, please visit the Matrix COC website www.matrixcoc.org/donate.html.

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Bay Buzz

Jay Mathews, author, education columnist and blogger with the Washington Post, has ranked **Niceville High School** #280 out of the Top 300 schools across the United States. Mathews created the annual Challenge Index rankings of high schools which were released on April 30.

The Washington Post Challenge Index score is the number of college-level tests given at a school in 2019 divided by the number of graduates that year. Niceville High School is the only school in the district to reach the top 300 schools (top 2 percent) out of America's 22,000 high schools.

Here is the link to the entire list of the 2020 Top 300 Schools Index: <https://jaymathewschallengeindex.com/>. For more information about programs, visit www.nicevillehighschool.org.

In a show of national unity, the **U.S. Navy's Blue Angels** and the **U.S. Air Force's Thunderbirds** have been



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO

honoring front line workers in the COVID-19 pandemic with joint flyovers in locations such as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. and Atlanta as a tribute to health care workers, first responders, military and other essential workers there. "Our nation's healthcare workers and first responders who are on the frontlines combatting COVID-19 are a representation of American resolve and the American spirit. They are an inspiration for the entire country during these challenging times.

We were filled with joy when we saw the outpouring of love and excitement from these heroes and the many other Americans as they watched the flyover. We can't thank them enough for their hard work and dedication during this difficult time in our nation. We're in this together. America Strong!"

Toms Bayou Bridge construction crews are working to build the new northbound (Eglin AFB to Niceville) bridge in Valparaiso. This work is part of the \$8.5 million project that includes

replacing the aging northbound bridge across Toms Bayou with a new structure that will accommodate two travel lanes, an eight-foot outside shoulder and a five-foot sidewalk. The southbound bridge has been widened to include an eight-foot outside shoulder and a five-foot sidewalk in its final configuration.

All travel lanes continue to be shifted to the southbound bridge to allow for demolition and reconstruction of the northbound structure. The traffic shift means that John Sims Parkway over Toms Bayou has been reduced from four to three travel lanes. While traffic volumes are low on John Sims Parkway, two southbound (Niceville to Eglin AFB) lanes and one northbound (Eglin AFB to Niceville) lane will remain in place. The "reversible" lane will not be implemented until further notice.

Eglin Federal Credit Union presented \$25,000 from their C.A.R.E.S (COVID-19 Attack Relief Efforts) fund to assist

United Way Emerald Coast with their COVID-19 relief efforts in our local communities. United Way's COVID-19 Relief Fund has totaled over \$276,000; eight local non-profit organizations have received grants to help residents meet immediate needs for food, shelter, and healthcare.



Designed for kids and teens with Autism and related developmental differences, **Westonwood Ranch** is offering Ranch Round Up Camp again this year June 15-18 and day camp from 9-12 p.m. or 2-5 p.m. Space is limited to 8 individuals per time slot.

Westonwood Ranch is also offering two weeks of Horse Camp in July, one week for younger-aged

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Bay Buzz

kiddos (2-5 p.m.) and the other week for teens (9-12 p.m.). Space is limited to nine riders per camp. Each week is \$150. For questions or to reserve a spot, email info@westonwood.org or call 850-880-2220.



Freeport Area Youth Sports is offering 2020 FAYSA Annual Football/Cheer and Activities Camp. Email faysabulldogs@gmail.com for the registration form. Camp is open to ages 4 to 14. Guests this year include Vernon HS Football, NWF Cheer, Sowal Elite wrestling, Atwells MMA, Bend The Bar Cross Fit and so on. Registration is FREE for 12U Middle school aged (ages 10, 11 and 12)

Football along with FREE Registration Sideline cheer and competition cheer (ages 10 thru 14).

At **Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA)**, this time of year is normally filled with Grasses in Classes field trips. Excited students would be jumping off the bus ready to explore the Bay and plant their smooth cordgrass that they took care of all year long. But their hard work was not in vain. CBA staff picked up all of their grasses and are taking care of them so they can still become part of a salt marsh! CBA staff and our AmeriCorps members are working hard to plant these grasses at restoration sites around the Bay. It takes a community to maintain fishable, swimmable waterways. To learn more about what you can do for the Bay, visit basinalliance.org.

Our local **United Way Emerald Coast** and its community partners have provided COVID19 relief funds for those

in need: 183,000 lbs. of food, 3,920 adults served, 55 children served, 139 prescriptions filled, 9 families remained in stable housing, five families avoided utility disconnection, 1,360 volunteer hours coordinated.

Donors include: Gulf Power, Beach Community Bank, Beast Code, Florida Blue, Truist Foundation, Wind Creek Hospitality, Wells Fargo and more than 30 individual donors.

Community Partners Impacted: Bridgeway Center, Catholic Charities, Feeding the Gulf Coast, Mental Health Association, and Sharing & Caring.

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) donated \$21,600 to children in need through its COVID-19 Relief Fund launched to assist its network of Northwest Florida children's charities who were experiencing additional strain on their resources due to the pandemic. The relief fund, which launched April 6, raised over

\$20,000 and will be distributed to three organizations in the form of grants to assist in their sustainability:

Opportunity Place: \$1,800, Food for Thought: \$9,900, Youth Village: \$9,900

Note: Grants from the COVID-19 Relief Community Children's Fund are separate from the annual funding that each charity receives from DCWAF.

DCWAF is one of the nation's premier fundraising organizations, donating more than \$21 million to children in need in Northwest Florida since its inception in 2005. Its largest annual fundraiser, the Destin Charity Wine Auction has been rescheduled for Aug. 21-22. DCWAF is currently ranked #5 on the list of "Top Charity Wine Auctions in the U.S." by Wine Spectator Magazine.

Selected among numerous outstanding youth, Jacinda Rassa has been named the **Youth**



of the Year by the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. Jacinda will go on to contend for the Florida Youth of the Year title and a \$2,500 college scholarship from Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Jacinda's involvement over the last four years with the Keystone Club, including serving as president, has been instrumental in her leadership development. In the wake of Hurricane Michael, she worked with other Club members to make and distribute hygiene kits to families affected by the storm. After graduation, Jacinda plans to attend Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Fla., and then transfer to the University of Florida.

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 Community

Sean Dietrich Shares His Own Story for the First Time

Publishes "Will the Circle be Unbroken?"

Longtime local and fan favorite Sean Dietrich (sometimes better known as "Sean of the South") is a traveling storyteller, podcaster, and *Southern Living* writer known for his daily column filled with stories of steel workers, church potlucks, and trusty bloodhounds, which always give his readers a reason to believe there is good in the world—despite what they may have experienced to the contrary.

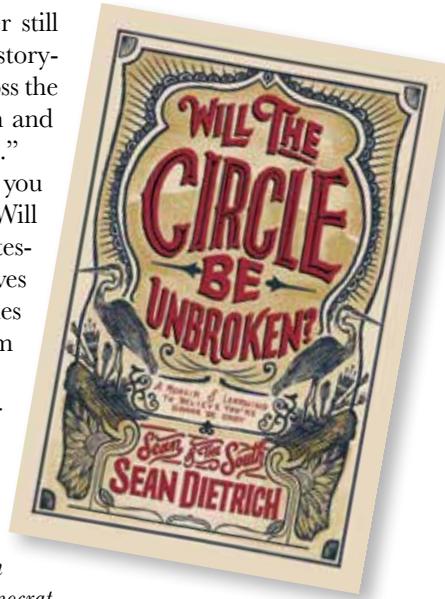
In his new book, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?: A Memoir of Learning to Believe You're Gonna Be Okay*, Sean is telling his own story—for the very first time. It is one that has been marked by both loss and love and has taken him on an unlikely path. Sean was only age 12 when he scattered his father's ashes from a moun-

tain range. His father had been a man who lived for baseball. He was a steel worker with a ready wink, who once scaled a 50-foot tree just to hang a tire swing for his son. But he also had been the stranger who tried to kidnap and kill Sean's mother before pulling the trigger on himself. He was a childhood hero who was now reduced to a man in a box. After his father's death, Sean dropped out of seventh grade and became a dishwasher, a newspaper deliverer, and then a construction worker to help his mother and sister scrape by. As a self-described "nobody with a sad story behind him," Sean still could not deny the glimmers of life's goodness. Such goodness became even harder to deny when Sean met the love of his life, Jamie, at a fried chicken

church potluck, and harder still when his lifelong love of storytelling led him to stages across the country, where he is known and loved as "Sean of the South."

A story that will stay with you long after the final page, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* testifies to the strength that lives within us all to stop the cycles of the past from laying claim to our future.

Sean is a columnist, podcaster, speaker, and novelist, known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Southern Living*, *The Tallahassee Democrat*, *Good Grit*, *South Magazine*, *The Bitter Southerner*, *Thom Magazine*, *The Mobile Press Register SoWal Life*, *Destin Life* and *Bay Life*. He



"A self-declared simple storyteller who champions finding a way to shine the light of positivity, Dietrich shifts the lens a bit as he unpacks his own tragedy. What could easily have been a heavy read is uplifted with Dietrich's quirky one-liners told with a big-hearted, Southern voice."

—Library Journal

cleBook.com. Web Site: www.SeanDietrich.com, Facebook: @seanofthesouth, Instagram: @seanofthesouth, Twitter: @seanofthesouth1, Show/Podcast: www.SeanoftheSouthShow.com.

Long-time readers are well familiar with Sean's monthly column in Bay Life.

has authored 11 books, including the novel *Stars of Alabama*. Learn more at www.WillTheCircle.com.



My name is Matthew Vanderford. I am a public adjuster. If you don't know what that is, you

My Name is Matthew Vanderford

can call me to find out or read more of my columns. Because this article isn't about public adjusting.

My name is Matthew Vanderford. I am a father of four children. But this article isn't about me being a dad either. Nor is it about being anything that anyone might think they know me as.

If you've read my columns here in *Destin Life*, you'd know that I work in the insurance in-

dustry. I write articles about insurance; stories of people affected by property damage and the ups and downs of filing insurance claims. You'd know the reason I pursued my insurance adjusting license was because I saw too many being taken advantage of; people with licenses saying things weren't covered when they really were. But that's not what this article is about.

My name is Matthew Vanderford. I am a victim of childhood sexual abuse. That's what this article is about.

I don't even know where to begin. I'm not even sure why this has to come out. But, it does.

I used to work in the cemetery business, dealing with the dead... although I was living, I felt so dead. Maybe that's why I worked there. Perhaps I wanted to see if there was life beyond the grave, because inside, I was dead. Dead to myself; dead to the world around me; dead to those who I knew – or thought I knew ... and empty. Dead because life was sucked out of me at such an early age. Dead because those I trusted turned their backs on me. Dead because I became a victim of those who were able to take advantage of a small child, who were able to use fear and aggression to make the quiet voice of this small boy even smaller...

even quieter...even smaller and quieter still. Silenced.

My name is Matthew Vanderford. I am a victim of childhood sexual abuse. But that's not what this article is about.

I was sexually abused as a child. I attempted suicide three times by age 13. I checked myself into rehab at age 16. I held a gun to my head at age 21, but was too afraid of ending up as a vegetable, sitting in a wheelchair, drool hanging from my chin—left in the care of those who already abused me and tossed me to the streets. I'm married. I have four children. I adjust insurance claims for policyholders. I've been hospitalized in my 40's for suicide, because life got way too big. Way too big, way too fast for a small boy of three years old.

"Daddy, can you come and measure me?" my daughter playfully laughs as she hops across the dining room chairs. She stops me writing. It's the second time this week she's wanted to check.

"Three feet, four inches – you're getting soo big!"

She dances in a circle. Hair and arms spinning in the air.

That's what this article is about.

***Author's Note:** Trauma in life comes to all. Sometimes as children, sometimes as adults, and takes many

different forms. But we all experience our own pain in life. My mom used to talk about *Jonah of the Bible* – how it was such a good story. When I asked her why, she replied, "Because he made it to the end – he got to write the story." Well, in this way, I, too, like *Jonah*, get to tell my story – that I didn't come this far only to come this far. That there is healing and that there is joy in this world. Joy that makes life worth living. Like the joy of watching my three-year old who is full of laughter and dance.

Editor's note: More than 1 million children are victims of child abuse and neglect each year, according to state child protective service agencies. Many victims don't receive help because they are not reported to the system. These abused and neglected children span all ages, races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Child maltreatment includes actions that result in imminent risk of serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation of a child under age 18 by a parent or caretaker. Reporter information is confidential.

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center is the best way to get abused kids all the services they need. **If you know or suspect child abuse, please call the Florida Child Abuse Hotline at 1.800.962.2873.**

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For over a decade, Matthew Vanderford has worked in the Construction, Restoration and Insurance Industries as an Insurance Company Preferred Vendor, Insurance Industry Continuing Education Instructor, Public Adjuster/ Policy Holder Advocate and Licensed Contractor. He's proud to call Destin his home, with his wife Candice and four children: Matthew, Blake, Jordan and Scarlett.

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You could have it answered in one our columns.

Off the Hook

63rd Annual Blessing of the Fleet



As one of the area's long-standing traditions, the Blessing of the Fleet brings out locals and tourists each year for a ceremony unlike any other on the Destin Harbor. However, amidst all the uncertainty surrounding our reopening agenda, this year's tradition looked a bit different.

On Ascension Day every year, local pastors gather behind Brotula's on the Harbor to bless charter fishing boats, boat cap-

tains, crews and passengers for a safe and bountiful busy season. Many captains attribute the success of their season not to luck, but to these blessings. This tradition has held for many years, even as Destin evolved from a

small fishing community to the World's Luckiest Little Fishing Village it is today.

From only a handful of small boats, the fleet has grown and prospered into the largest fishing fleet in North America.

The Blessing of the Fleet was begun by St. Andrews Episcopal Church in 1958 with around 12 boats and has since grown to over 150 boats in 2019. Numbers like this make it the largest Blessing of the Fleet in the country, with families making it tradition and participating every year. Boats line up in a parade like fashion, being called up by name to be blessed. Any vessel

and its crew who make their living on the sea are encouraged to participate, and are welcomed on the water. The impact has been far reaching.

This year, the usual church service and fish fry had to be cancelled due to the large groups. But the Blessing of the Fleet was open to the public to watch on the docks behind Brotula's Restaurant.

Fishing Recovery

The Secretary of Commerce announced the allocation of \$300 million in fisheries assistance funding provided by Sec. 12005 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also called the CARES Act, to states, Tribes, and territories with coastal and marine fishery participants who have been negatively affected by COVID-19. In Florida, \$23,636,600 has been allocated.

"This relief package will support America's fishermen and our seafood sector's recovery," said U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. "Thank you President Trump, Secretary Mnuchin, and our Congressional leaders of both parties for your work to pass the historic legislation that is bringing much needed relief to America's fishermen. This Administration stands with the men and women working to provide healthy and safe seafood during this uniquely challenging time, while our U.S. fisheries work to continue to support 1.7 million jobs and to generate \$200 billion in annual sales. The nation is grateful to our fishermen for their commitment."

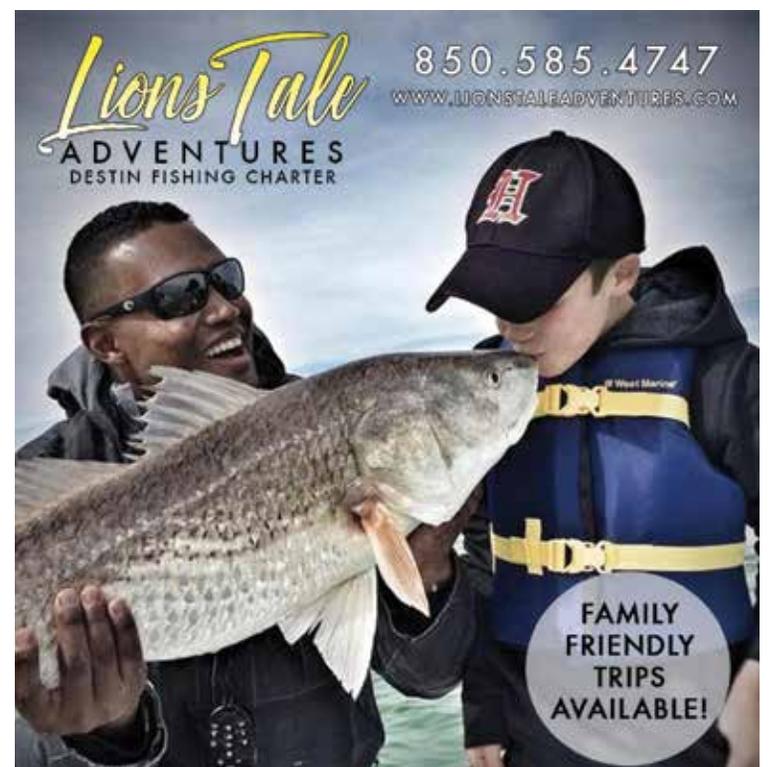
As a next step, NOAA Fisheries will use these allocations to make awards to its partners, including the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. They will disburse the funds to address direct or indirect fishery-related losses as well as subsistence, cultural, or ceremonial impacts related to COVID-19.

The commissions then will work with each state, Tribe, and territory to develop spend plans consistent with the CARES Act and NOAA's guidance. Puerto

Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands will submit award applications and spend plans to the agency directly. All spend plans must describe the main categories for funding, including direct payments, fishery-related infrastructure, and fishery-related education that address direct and indirect COVID-19 impacts to commercial fishermen, charter businesses, qualified aquaculture operations, subsistence/cultural/ceremonial users, processors, and other fishery-related businesses. Once a spend plan has been approved by NOAA, the agency anticipates that the three Com-

missions will review applications and process payments to eligible fishery participants on behalf of the states and territories. The states will have the option to process payments themselves.

Fishery participants eligible for funding include Tribes, commercial fishing businesses, charter/for-hire fishing businesses, qualified aquaculture operations, processors, and other fishery-related businesses. They should work with their state marine fisheries management agencies, territories, or Tribe to understand the process for applying for these funds.





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Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19

Dr. Richard Chern, M.D., communicated with several experts and wrote the following statements to let the community know the latest information on ways to combat COVID-19:

- Highest risk individuals are those who have diabetes, high blood pressure (especially on ACE inhibitors), COPD, cardiovascular disease, age over 65 and males. Each adds significant risk. If you have any of these risk factors or have regular contact with someone who does, be extremely cautious. In the United States as of March 26, the death rate in diabetics with COVID-19 is over 10%.

- COVID-19 can stay aerosolized (airborne) for three hours and alive on surfaces for 10 days. It is found in blood, stool, tears and of course respiratory secretions. It can be shed 10 days before a person displays symptoms

and 20 days after recovery from infection, although 6 to 10 days is typical. People under age 20 can display symptoms as mild as a headache, sore throat, mild cough or just diarrhea. It's best to consider every stranger infected.

- Step one is avoidance. This infection is in our community. Stay at home if possible and use social distancing if not. Be aware of people around you and give them space. Kids want to touch everything. Be aware of any surface kids can reach. Wearing masks, gloves and glasses does not eliminate your risk. They can give a false sense of security and often encourage you to touch your face. Be careful when wearing these and avoid touching your face. When wearing gloves, it is easy to contaminate clean surfaces. Be aware of what surfaces you want to keep clean and do not touch them with gloved hands.

- Doorknobs, doorknobs, doorknobs... They may be a primary transfer method of COVID-19. Be careful where you place your hands after touching a doorknob.

- COVID-19 is an enveloped virus which means it is easily destroyed with soap and water. Soap and water can be used on countertops, food containers and many other surfaces, not just your hands. Alcohol is also effective but the killing action occurs during evaporation. Let alcohol dry and avoid wiping it up before it's job is done. In Italy, non perishable groceries are quarantined outside for at least a day and perishables are sanitized with either soap and water or alcohol before being put away.

What can you do to reduce the severity of infection?

T cells, B cells and Natural Killer cells are white blood cells

that help prevent and fight infection.

Vitamin A is critical for T cell and B cell function and reduces mortality in infection.

Vitamin C directs white blood cells to the infection site for a quick response.

Vitamin D increases Natural Killer cell function and reduces risk of infection.

Zinc increases Natural Killer cell function and optimizes T cell function.

Iodine enhances immunity by increasing B cell and Natural Killer cell function.

In addition, these prescriptions are available from our office. Thymosin Alpha greatly inhibits viral replication and stimulates B cell, T cell and Natural Killer cells. It is used in Influenza, Hepatitis, HIV and other viral infections and is safe to use at every age.

Thymosin Beta stimulates T cell production and improves B cell antibody formation.

Selank kills viruses and bacteria by increasing superoxides and white blood cell function.

Optimizing hormones and thyroid can boost immunity by inhibiting the ability of viruses to enter our cells and decreasing the severity of respiratory infections.

Avoid ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin and possibly naprosyn or Aleve. This is based on preliminary findings but is becoming a common recommendation.

Lastly, the combination of chloroquine and azithromycin works well. Chloroquine inhibits the virus's ability to enter the cell while azithromycin inhibits its ability to replicate. Unfortunately, these drugs have multiple drug to drug interactions and possible severe adverse effects. Chloroquine can cause retinal damage, hearing loss and in those with particular heart abnormalities, sudden death. It is not for everyone.

All these preventative measures need proper dosing and patient selection. They should be discussed with your doctor or myself during an appointment. Something as simple as zinc lozenges can cause loss of smell, kidney and liver damage, or death. Speak with a doctor before using these.

We are still seeing patients and can also do telemedicine appointments if desired. We are adhering to all CDC guidelines. Please call Dr. Richard Chern at 850-837-1271 for an appointment.



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Ask Dr. Marty: Immune System Strength

to boost their immune systems. The following is a list of my favorites to protect us from respiratory viruses in particular, in order of importance, including the typical daily amount used:

CITRUS BIOFLAVONOIDS /VITAMIN C/ ROSE HIPS COMBINATION (1000 mg) Bioflavonoids are antioxidant compounds found in the leaves, flowers and stems of many plants.

QUERCETIN is a broad-spectrum antiviral bioflavonoid that has been shown to increase zinc uptake. Quercetin is especially important in the prevention of a COVID-19 infection because it inhibits cytokines and raises our resistance to upper respiratory infections. Excess cytokines are responsible in part for some of the severe and sometimes fatal damage caused by COVID-19. If you bruise easily, you might need more vitamin C. Gradually increase the

amount you are taking until you have loose bowels, then return to the prior dose. This is called bowel tolerance.

ZINC (30-50 mg) An in vitro study showed that zinc coupled with quercetin blocks the replication of SARS coronavirus. Green tea has an antioxidant compound called EGCG that also increases zinc uptake.

SELENIUM (50-100 mcg) is a trace mineral that acts as an antioxidant in the body and is especially healing for the respiratory system.

VITAMIN D3 (100 mcg) is the sunshine vitamin. It is especially helpful for fighting infection and lowering the risk of catching the flu and getting an upper respiratory infection. Studies indicate that having a vitamin D deficiency, which is very common, can double your risk of having an upper respiratory infection. Having dark skin, winter months, and living in north-

ern climates are all risk factors for vitamin D deficiency. Aren't you glad you live in the South?

SPIRULINA (15 grams) is a blue-green algae and other greens, like chlorella (a fresh water green algae) are powerful antioxidants that have been shown to stimulate immune function. They are especially rich in minerals and vitamins that boost the immune system. In clinical trials, spirulina reduced the severity of the flu and lowered mortality.

PROBIOTICS (18 billion beneficial bacteria) A broad spectrum probiotic with at least 11 different strains of probiotics will really build the immune system by improving the absorption of nutrients and increasing resistance to infection.

ELDERBERRY (600-1500 mg) can be used for prevention but should not be used if you have COVID-19 because of the stimulation of cytokines.

Regardless of what bacteria, virus or fungus is among us, building your immune system will provide protection and more peace of mind. Heaven knows we all need an extra dose of that right now.

Hot Tip: The amounts listed are for pharmaceutical grade supplements. Otherwise higher amounts would be needed. Stay well.

Marty Kernion, Ph.D. is not a medical doctor. She has a doctorate in naturopathy. Naturopathy uses natural, gentle ways to bring our bodies back into balance so that they have the God-given ability to heal themselves. She is a retired professor of herbal medicine and nutrition and has written 39 college level courses in natural approaches to health. She has published two books on natural health. She can be reached on askdoctormarty@cox.net for scheduling a class or consultation, or for sending in your questions for this column.

QUESTION:

I am really trying to take better care of myself during this covid-19 pandemic. I have been eating well, getting plenty of rest, minimizing stress and drinking a lot of water. What supplements do you recommend to strengthen my immune system?

ANSWER:

There are dozens of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbs and miscellaneous nutraceuticals (a catch-all category for the other nutrients we need) that I use with my clients

CVHN Receives \$35,000 Grant

Children's Volunteer Health Network (CVHN) recently ac-

cepted a grant totaling \$35,000 from the Helping Hands Foun-

dation of the All In Credit Union. These funds will go towards a second mobile dental unit to focus on restorative dental care in Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

The restorative mobile unit will consist of a dentist, dental assistant and registered dental hygienist and offer services such as fillings, extractions and root canals as compared to the pre-

ventative program that provides free dental exams, x-rays, assessments, cleanings, sealants and oral health education.



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 Wellness



By E. JENNIFER ESSES, M.D., FACOG

I have to admit before this year, I really didn't give "Earth Day" too much thought. Sure, I love the beach, the outdoors and nature as much as anyone who lives in our area. And I want to continue to enjoy all the beauty our Emerald Coast has to offer for generations to come. However, true introspection of how all of creation is intimately connected has taken on new meaning in the past few months.

This year is very different. All would agree 2020 has seen unprecedented events worldwide. Corona virus has changed our daily lives in ways that most of us have never experienced. What is interesting, however, is not only how this pandemic is affecting human behaviors, but also the effect it has had globally on the environment. It isn't uncommon at all for natural disasters to affect human behavior. After Hurricane Michael, our entire community experienced significant ripple effects to the economy and livelihood. Lives were uprooted in a moment, and neighboring communities responded with compassion. The difference between what we are seeing with Corona virus and other natural disasters, is that all the changes we are making now are voluntary. Rather than humans changing their behavior because of nature, it has

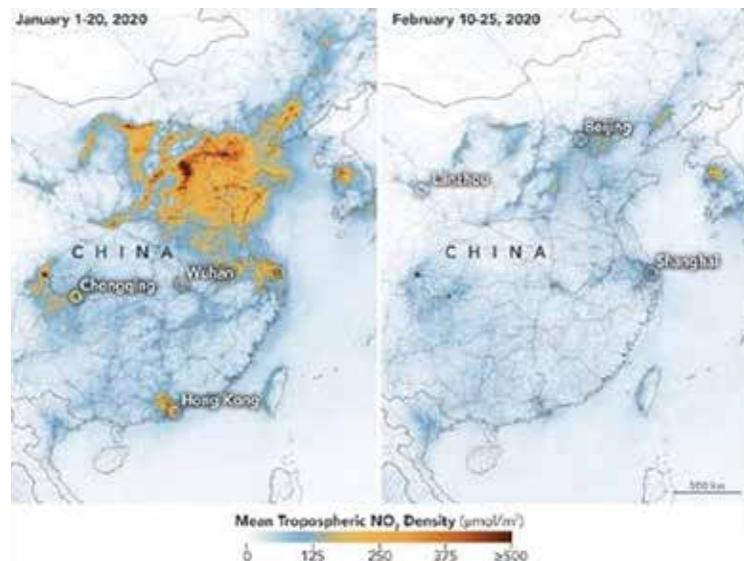
been reversed. Humans changing their behavior has directly impacted the Earth. And guess what? That is truly what Earth day is all about. Let me provide some specific examples.

The nitrogen dioxide emissions and production of greenhouse gasses over China have dropped over 25% since the Corona virus pandemic began significantly reducing air pollution. This can also be seen in the smog over Los Angeles and all of Northern California. Historical data from the EPA suggests that this may be the longest stretch of clean air there since 1980. Beirut Lebanon, a city known for high levels of pollution, has also shown much clearer skies and improved air quality. Similarly, it is said that inhabitants in India can see Mt. Everest and the peaks of the Himalayan mountains which haven't been visible for thirty years due to pollution.

The same improved air quality has also been demonstrated in Italy. With decreased commuting and transportation, the canals of Venice are crystal clear again and fish are seen swimming there. Residents cannot remember a time when this was true.

In India, the lack of human pollution and intrusion has allowed Olive Ridley Turtles to nest undisturbed. Last year in 2019,

Earth Day



they did not come to this beach at all. But now in 2020, over 70,000 turtles came en masse to lay their eggs. Experts predict the same might be true here in the southern United states this year. The first Leatherback turtle has already nested on Hutchinson Island which is the earliest nesting recorded in Florida to date.

Out west in our National Parks, rangers report more visible wildlife than they can remember. Some estimate the visible bear population has quadrupled in Yosemite; without people, they are coming out of the shadows along with other wildlife enjoying the new freedom to roam.

Observing these phenomenon, how should we interpret what we see? The Earth and the pace of our lives are intricately connected. Families are spending more quality time together. Churches and individuals have stretched themselves to think outside the traditional confines of four walls to help others. In essence, the Earth has been given a Sabbath.

Prioritizing rest is important; in fact, God commanded it. Exodus 20:6, "Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is Sabbath to the Lord your God."

And truthfully, humans and the land are far more productive when allowed periods of rest.

Farmers know this; you must allow your fields a fallow year to be more productive. The Bible assures us you will accomplish more in six days, with one day devoted to your family, others and the Lord, than you can accomplish in seven days working at full steam.

Perhaps we should choose to take notice during our confinement what God is trying to teach us by drawing us closer to Himself and allowing the Earth to heal. And when life returns to a more "normal" pace, I pray as a nation we choose to remember the value of obedience to the Lord and His Sabbath. The health of the Earth and our own lives are directly connected both physically and spiritually. Corona virus has revealed that to us.

Dr. E. Jennifer Esses, OB/GYN, has been in private practice in Okaloosa/Walton Counties since 2001. She has delivered well over 3,000 babies in her career. Prior to private practice, she served active duty in the U.S. Air Force stationed at Eglin AFB as the Eglin OB/GYN Flight Commander. She is currently affiliated with Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast and delivers at 'The Family Birth Place.' She loves to run and meditate on God's word. Dr. Esses says her faith keeps her running and she keeps running because of her faith. You can read her blog, "Running on Faith," at runningonfaith-beachstork.blogspot.com.

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BY LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH AND WELLNESS COACH

As I sat down to compose something profound after what we have been through and are still contending with, I felt I must share something important.

Due to the quarantine, we've been unable to do the things

or the work we have been doing routinely all our lives. This caused me to go from denial to elevated concern to slight fear to confusion and uncertainty, then topped off with anger about the situation. All of a sudden, it took pure self-discipline to do mediocre tasks and chores. Even exercise—my job that brings so much joy—turned to apathy, because stimulation has been at its lowest.

My lack of motivation has been a daunting revelation. As a fitness professional, I have always had tons of energy and drive! I can still turn it on, but it's not natural for me to have to TRY at it. Are you feeling the same way? Have you be-

come less motivated? That's NOT GOOD for our bodies or well-being.

I started wondering if there was something wrong; I had slightly retreated, which is SO not like me! I'm sharing, because, I thought, if it can happen to me, someone who's profession is to motivate others and cheer people on, it's probably happening to many! I simply want to be transparent in hopes it will help someone.

Through research, I found a really cool article in Entrepreneur Magazine called, "Science Discovers Why Some People Are Motivated to Succeed While Others Aren't" written by John Rampton. Please Goo-

Mindful Motivation



gle it and read it as I am unable to relay everything here. The gist of the article is, when it comes specifically to motivation, one of the most important neurotransmitters in the brain is dopamine. Neurotransmitters spark messages to keep us alert and on task. "Dopamine is what enables you to make the decision to be active," explains John Salamone, Ph.D. How you handle your thinking and your personal reward system either positively or negatively affects your dopamine level. Dopamine rises when you feel accomplished and praise-worthy. The article goes on to explain more facts about dopamine and how you can increase it. But a couple of them jumped out that pinpoint why, during quarantine, we might be feeling unmotivated.

Professional Development Manager, Ken Trass wrote in New England Law Society publication, "Positive...environments, where colleagues regularly praise each other as they work together, will have higher levels of dopamine, and therefore motivation, than people working in isolation. Dopamine, along with another neurotransmitter, serotonin, play a large part in the occurrence of depressive episodes." He goes on to say that when people feel they

have purpose, they will have increased dopamine. AH-HA! No wonder we all lack motivation right now. We have an innate need to help others, but also receive praise, however your mind perceives praise, because it's an individual thing. For me, being around friends, clients, participants and social environments motivates me to keep on. It's the very reason I chose fitness and wellness as my career! And I realized, there's nothing wrong with me, only the way I'm allowing my brain to think. So, if you feel any type of lack of motivation and drive, perhaps you're not broken, just dopamine imbalanced! What we have gone through has been uncontrollable, because laws were enforced. Mindful, purposeful meditation is key!

Philippians 4 speaks on steadfastness. It warns us to be mindful of our thoughts, especially in verses 4:8-9. Meditate on everything you're thankful for; keep your mind on these things only. That's it! I have been thinking negatively, because I was focused on the negative situation and how it was affecting me.

There are some things we can all do to raise and keep dopamine levels balanced. Think of your brain as a piggy bank—

Continued next page

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 Musing


BY RICK MOORE

Years ago, in downtown Mobile, Alabama, the City Council debated whether or not to allow people to continue feeding the squirrels in parks such as Bienville Square. This had been a tradition for old and young alike

for over a half a century. But concerns over human safety, overpopulation of squirrels, and the fact the city could never get the grass to grow in the park became an issue. The proposal before the city leaders was to fine anyone feeding the squirrels \$500.00. Fortunately for the squirrels and those who adored them, the city came up with a Plan B. They decided to use signs and other means of education to inform the public of their concerns. It was a compromise that stopped many people and the squirrels from “going nuts.”

Plan B is a compromise that we are all faced with at one time or another. With the recent

A Pastor's Ponderings: Plan B



shake up of the U.S. economy, many people find themselves having to go to a Plan B just to survive. Even though a person's formal education and their passion may be in a specific field, market changes can force one to choose a different occupation. It may just be for a season, and then again, it may be a change that leads you to your greatest achievements.

Of course, there are some things we should never compromise such as our faith and our family. For some priorities in life there should be no Plan B. According to historians, Hernan Cortez, on his way to conquer the Aztec Empire in the year 1519, landed his ships in Veracruz, Mexico. Concerned that many of his men wanted to return to the safety and security of their home instead of risk possible failure, he ordered the destruction of the ships, making it impossible to go back. This is where the expression “burn the ships” comes from. It means to get rid of any Plan B. For those of us who have come from a past

full of vices, additions, and a long list of failures, we should never consider going back. We have to “burn the ships” that may lead us back to a life of destruction.

Everyone should plan their work and then work their plan. But plans don't always work out. I ministered with a pastor years ago who had to make a major change in the middle of a building program. I'll never forget his words to the congregation. He said, “I reserve the right to know more today than I did yesterday.” We all learn as we journey through life's ups and downs.

While in high school I had a wonderful Youth Pastor, but he did change his mind often, and he would cancel events frequently. If we had a car wash planned to raise money for missions, most of us would call in the morning just to make sure it was still going to take place. Often it didn't. Later, when I became the Youth Leader, I decided whether it was raining or not, we were still going to have the car wash. But one morning there was such an enormous storm with severe lightning that I had no choice but to cancel the car wash. Knowing we had not met our pledge for the missions fund, we came up with a Plan B. The next morning, as members drove into the church parking lot, there was a large container with the words “Give to Missions” and a series of signs which read: “If God washed your car with the heavy rain yesterday, be sure to pay up today.” We met our goal.

None of us should spend the rest of life worrying about what could have been. There's no need in crying over spilled milk. Times are tough. We all have to be willing to adapt. The quicker we move to our next phase in life, the quicker the sting of the last phase dissipates. Who knows, soon we may all find ourselves blessed with an overflow of abundance far beyond what we've ever had. When that happens, remember to share with others, and be sure to save a little something for the squirrels.

Rick Moore is Communications Pastor at Destiny Worship Center.

MINDFUL

continued from previous page

with each token, it gets fuller. In this case, the more dopamine in the right area of the brain, the easier it is to do the things that were difficult in the first place. So, count your blessings—it'll bring a smile to your face. Accomplish getting small things done. Find out what drives your personality. (A great read on personality types is *The Four Tendencies* by Gretchen Rubin.)

As we slowly come out of quarantine, help yourself by helping others. And remember, people have an innate need for affirmation; don't be fake, but give compliments when deserved.

I welcome you to join me on the journey of getting back to living; I'd love to become your own personal trainer—exercise and eating right is necessary. Try some workouts, more ideas and recipes on my Facebook page: Lisa Turpin-Be Active Health & Fitness (@LisaTurpinFitness).

Lisa Turpin is a degreed and certified health and fitness lifestyle coach who has devoted her life to motivating and strengthening the body and minds of others. With over 20 years' experience as a group exercise leader, currently at Destin Health & Fitness and an independent personal trainer in the Niceville/Bluewater Bay and Destin areas, she is diverse and extensively trained in classical and modern Pilates, lifestyle management, personal training, group exercise and post-rehabilitation. She is currently taking on new clients/participants; text only to 850-974-2005 or message from her Facebook Page.



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Walton County



By SEAN DIETRICH

There is a faint smell of smoke in Walton County this morning. It's a little hazy, but not too bad. I can see charred pine trees and an ocean of black soot.

Walton County is my home. My first kiss was on the shore of the Choctawhatchee Bay. My first beer was in a camper outside DeFuniak. I met my wife here.

Ours is a diverse county. You've got your ultra-elite, who live on the beach, drive Land Rover Autobiographies, and have New England accents. And you have guys like me, with two rusted fishing boats in his front yard, and a fence that has needed replacing since the Carter administration.

A few nights ago, a Walton County Sheriff's Department cruiser sped down our street, past my rusty boats and old fence, and into my driveway. Blue lights blaring. Kicking up gravel. A deputy in a county uniform beat on our door.

"Fire," was the deputy's first word. The officer pointed into the distance. "It's coming this way."

I looked at the horizon. Just above the treeline was a cloud of brown smoke rising into the sky like something from a bad horror movie.

"Hurry," the deputy said. My wife and I spent the next 10 minutes running through our house, shouting things to each other.

"WHAT ABOUT OUR WEDDING PHOTOS?!"

"WHERE'S MY COMPUTER?!"

"DID YOU SHUT THE GARAGE?!"

"Hurry," the deputy pointed out.

I've never been given 10 minutes to choose my most essential possessions. It was a bizarre scenario. I mean, what DO you choose?

Here's what we chose: Wedding photos, four homegrown tomatoes, my favorite hat, one change of clothes, two books, a mounted fish, vitamins, a block of cheese, a white-noise machine, my mother's handmade quilt, beer.

We crammed our dogs and belongings into our vehicles. I was barefoot. My wife wore pajamas.

Walton County uniforms were barricading our streets. No cars were coming in. Traffic was at a standstill. The cloud behind us was getting bigger.

Sirens were whining. People were standing along the sides of the highway. Rubberneckers had pulled vehicles over to gawk. Emergency vehicles sped past us. A chopper pulsed overhead. There was the sound of a baby crying in the distance. It was a nightmare.

But the worst was yet to come. That was just the dress rehearsal. That fire barely made the local news. A few days later, a different fire broke out, and this one made national news.

I will never forget it. One

minute the sky was blue and birds were singing. The next minute, the air was filled with the smell of burnt pines and a smoke-cloud the size of Cincinnati.

There were flames taller than skyscrapers. Sounds of trees cracking. I saw Walton County firefighters uniforms sprinting directly into this Armageddon.

Sprinting.

The longleafs were lit up like birthday candles, and they made the air smell sour. It was the same scenario as a few nights before. The whole world was filled with sirens again. Speeding vehicles. Loud engines. Screaming.

Then came more heavy equipment, bulldozers, electrical trucks, tractors, diesels revving, people shouting.

It was getting close to dusk; the fire was only getting bigger. Later that evening, I stood with my wife at the end of our street, watching a billow of smoke cover the moon.

People in the neighborhood had gathered, biting fingernails, calling loved ones on cellphones.

We are the same people who have been social-distancing and quarantining for 50-some-odd days. The same people who wear surgical masks just to check the mail. And now this.

"What do we do?" one neighbor shouted to another.

"I don't know," said another.

"It's getting closer."

"I heard it's spread to Thompson Road."

"Oh my God, my mother lives near Thompson."

You never know when the world is going to fall apart, I guess. Sometimes you wander through life feeling protected from bad fortune, but the truth is ugly things happen every day. This was one of those things.

Even so, somehow, even though the whole world was on fire, the worst didn't happen. There were too many brave people standing in its way.

The South Walton County Fire District, the Florida Forestry Service, the Walton County Sheriff's Office, the electrical crews from CHELCO cooperative, they all participated in one of the largest choreo-

graphed wildfire operations our little county has ever seen. They saved our homes and our lives.

The forestry service deployed 40 of its best men, 15 tractor plow units, and two dozer strike teams. The Sheriff's deputies worked around the clock, living on nothing but adrenaline and coffee. Emergency workers sheltered refugees in the local high school. Electrical linemen pulled all-nighters. And the firefighters were nothing short of heroic.

The wildfire consumed 575 acres. There were 33 houses burned to the ground. It consumed cars, telephone poles, woodland animals, and birds. But nobody died.

Last night, I heard a journalist on the national news say it was a miracle the fire was contained and that no lives were lost. But he was wrong. This was more than just a miracle. This was the handiwork of brave men and women who wear Walton County uniforms.

And I just wanted to thank them.

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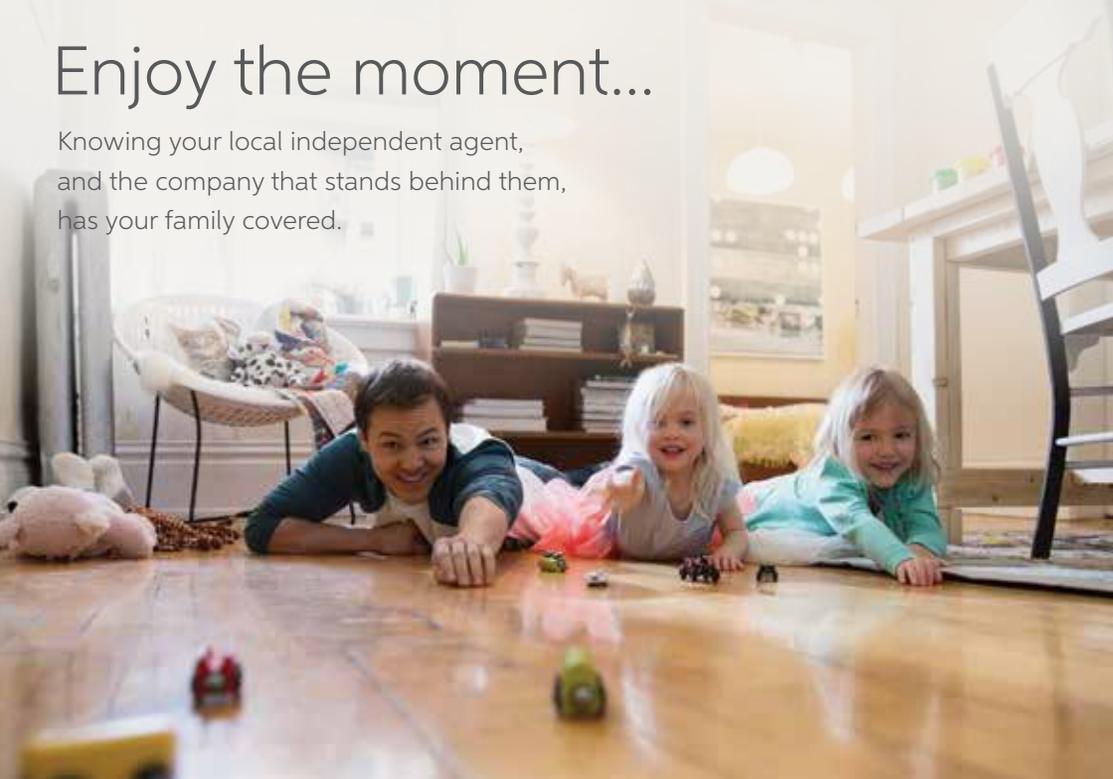


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 Music


BY LISA CYR

Here I am again, on the back porch enjoying my hedge of clumping bamboo. The ongoing joke for the last three years has been, “I’m watching the bamboo forest grow today.” It started out with a vision to create a unique privacy hedge. The plants were small with just a few stems, now they are eight feet tall, bushy, and give me that “Chi” feeling. I looked forward in anticipation to

the moment I am now experiencing. Ahhh.

As a piano music teacher, one of the skills I teach my students is to look ahead in the music. A form of prepared anticipation. Like riding a bike, looking back at a missed note causes a distraction from the notes you are currently playing, and will certainly affect your performance.

It’s not easy to look ahead. If we focus on small chunks of notes at a time, the music will not flow properly. We must aspire to move forward, to look ahead, and not get stuck in the same six note muddy rut. It reminds me of the first four words of Jingle Bells played over, and over, again.

Each practice day, you add several new bars of music.

Within a week, the song is complete. You see the “big picture” and your mind is free to be several steps ahead of where you are currently playing, enjoying each and every moment in anticipation of a beautiful ending. Then suddenly, you are there. Are you there?

Aspire 4 Music Summer Programs at Studio 237 Music Lessons are continuing throughout the extended summer with private one-on-one instruction. Many are taking the opportunity to master their musical instrument or learning another at a weekly discounted rate—daily, one-hour lessons, five days in a row, each day building ability for the next. Some students will continue with their one-on-one private instruction throughout the summer. Call 850-231-3199. The following are the programs we are offering:

Creative Song Building for Kids (ages 7 and up): Learn the fundamentals of composing an original song. Plan, build and perform a song with others as a team. (5 consecutive days)

Drum Set or Marching Drumline Lesson (ages 7

and up): Students learn tempo, count-ability, accent-ability, playing different beats, to ride the rhythm of the music on a drum set or single drum. Marching band students will learn how to drum and march in step, playing snare drum, quads, or rudimental bass drum.

Piano/Keyboard Basics (ages 5 and up): Students get the feel of a typical piano lesson process while learning piano basics. Includes lesson book.

Private Instruction 5 days in a row (ages 7 and up): On the instrument of your choice in-

cluding piano, guitar, bass, violin, drums, ukulele and shofar. Beginner to advanced students.

Private Instruction Once Per Week: Study an instrument for the summer months at our normal monthly rates on piano, guitar, drums, ukulele, and violin.

Studio 237 Music teaches music lessons to students of all ages. Call 850-231-3199 for more information or to schedule a studio visit. Read about our teachers at our website: www.Studio237Music.com or send us an email at Studio237Dawson@gmail.com

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ECTC Summer Camp



Creative online programming offers performing art sessions and professional lessons designed for Thespians of all abilities from tots to teens ... and beyond.

Whether your thespian craves the glow of a center stage spotlight or prefers to make the magic happen backstage behind-the-scenes, Emerald Coast Theatre Company’s (ECTC) 2020 Summer Camp series has something to offer you.

Following CDC guidelines, this selection of “socially distanced” Summer 2020 classes are offered online. These sessions begin June 2 and run through June 18. The classes, workshops and lessons are designed for various age groups that range from preschool aged children through 12th grade high schoolers.

Tuition ranges from \$95 to \$295 per student depending on the program. Sibling, military and multiple camp discounts are provided; payment plans and scholarships available for group camps/classes.

In accordance with CDC safety protocols and state guidelines, ECTC’s doors remain closed. But once it is safe to do

so, ECTC will re-open and hold on-site performing arts programs throughout Northwest Florida. To review and pre-register for the full roster of Summer Camp 2020 program offerings, visit www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

“This will be our eighth year of offering summer camps to the children of the Emerald Coast,” said Nathanael Fisher, producing artistic director of ECTC. “The pandemic has not stopped us; it has just inspired us to be that much more innovative. 2,212 local children have participated in our educational programs thus far, and 18,500 students and families have experience ECTC’s Theatre for Young Audiences productions. It is near and dear to our mission to provide these opportunities to our community.”

For more information and to register, call (850) 684-0323 or visit www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org. You can also find information and pre-register reservations for the second phase in-person classes on our website.

Be social with the ECTC tribe. Follow ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.



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Local Business Highlight: SimpleHR Offers Solutions

Managing an organization is a full-time commitment and a business owner's top priority. The day to day can become easily consumed by administrative responsibilities, vast amounts of paperwork, government compliance and detailed accounting. Unless your business specializes in these areas, that does not leave much time for the heart of your business model.

For the past 18 years, locally owned and operated, SimpleHR has made it their mission to relieve these complicated burdens. They focus on human resource needs so their clients can focus on building their businesses. As a Professional Employer Organization (PEO), SimpleHR provides employee management solutions and administrative relief for small to mid-sized business owners.

What is the secret to their success, particularly during such unprecedented times? If you ask SimpleHR President, Bill Lindley, putting people first and



establishing a strong corporate culture has built a strong and lasting foundation, "SimpleHR is blessed with an outstanding team of professionals. We are thankful for their remarkable efforts during such an unparalleled time in our history. We are equally thankful for the loyalty of our clients that entrust our expertise to help navigate life's celebrations, as well as difficulties. And for the last 18 years, we have been grateful to call this amazing community home. Working collectively, our team, clients, and community have overcome past adversity, will successfully manage today's challenges, and look forward to facing the future together."

What can a client expect

from a relationship with this community partner? A dedicated account representative who is based locally and a team of certified experts available day or night, providing quality services that meet the initial and ongoing needs and expectations of their clients. The team at SimpleHR breaks it down in three manageable categories.

Simple Payroll

SimpleHR provides accurate, reliable payroll services. A team of experts has the knowledge of all applicable laws that govern compensation. They effectively

administer your payroll, report payroll taxes, and deliver timely paychecks to your employees.

Simple Benefits

SimpleHR meets the specific needs of a small to medium-sized business. A team of benefits experts provide comprehensive, low-cost benefit packages tailored to an organization. By offering a broad range of choices, SimpleHR ensures employees receive the best benefits at the most cost-effective prices.

Simple Protection

SimpleHR helps protect your business. Staying compliant with federal and state regulations can be daunting. Human resource and risk management specialists ensure that you and your employees are protected.

While COVID-19 has pre-

sented many businesses with a number of challenges, SimpleHR has responded with critical resources and information including hosting free webinars to local chambers of commerce and launching a dedicated website where business owners can find a plethora of tools and resources via quick links.

SimpleHR is not only considered an essential business, it is vital to all businesses, essential or otherwise. For more information and for access to a list of resources and to sign up for the newsletter, please visit SimpleHR.com/Newsletter. You can also follow SimpleHR on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. SimpleHR is a licensed Florida Professional Employer Organization (PEO), license number #EL374.

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 Business

Meet Balenda Hetzel – our Local Pro

Seasoned mortgage extraordinaire and lifelong resident of the Florida panhandle

As Regional Production Manager for Inlanta Mortgage, Inc., Balenda brings over 18 years of experience in the mortgage industry and title field to those she works with and is pleased to find herself still just as passionate about her clients and her career as she was when she first entered the industry.

Balenda assures that even after 18 years, closing day for her clients is not only a celebration for them, but for her as well as she still feels excitement every time she watches her borrowers receive the keys to their brand new home for the very first time.

While Balenda has spent nearly two decades successfully helping many home buyers in the community navigate the ins and outs of the mortgage process, she finds that her most proud and cherished title is that of “Mom” to her amazing children.

Balenda comes from a military family and is an avid supporter of our military members, their families and all of our com-



munity heroes. She considers herself as an esteemed member of the local community and finds herself very involved, serving on a number of boards as a representative both at the local and state level.

Balenda currently leads a group of mortgage professionals – the Emerald Coast Mortgage Team of Inlanta Mortgage – that work hard to make the mortgage process as smooth as possible for their clients. Providing their cus-

tomers with high-quality service and an unforgettable mortgage experience is her team’s top priority and they are fully dedicated to ensuring their clients receive the level of service they expect and deserve, no matter their financial situation.

In fact, Balenda and her team strive to be considered as their clients’ “lender for life” as they combine their local experience along with their mortgage expertise, to offer outstanding ser-

vice and genuine customer care consistently treating their clients as family long after the loan has closed.

The Inlanta Mortgage team offers a diverse range of mortgage loan products that serves to find the right loan for you and your unique financial situation. Inlanta also offers VA and FHA loan programs, and has down payment assistance programs, all designed to help buyers afford

homeownership in the Emerald Coast area. The team’s ability to understand and work with each customer’s specific financial situation has helped them successfully serve customers in the Florida panhandle area for more than 20 years.

If you’re looking to take the leap and invest in homeownership in 2020, give Balenda a call at 850-499-4759 or email her at balendahetzel@inlanta.com.

One Small Act of Kindness

BY SUE GAMBLA

When a Massachusetts photographer decided she wanted to capture this unsettling time of quarantine and social distancing, she and a few other local photographers came up with a grand idea called The Front Steps Project (FSP) or #thefrontstepsproject.

FSP is a volunteer photo session that allows families to give back to their favorite local charity with a love donation while spending just a few minutes being as creative as they like on their front porch or steps with their loved ones, and of course, their furry friends.

Generating smiles and laughter in the midst of a troubling time is the goal of The Front Steps Project. 200 plus photog-

raphers from all over the nation have raised in excess of \$225,000 for local non profit organization, bringing big smiles to local organizations, This is indeed #some-goodnews!

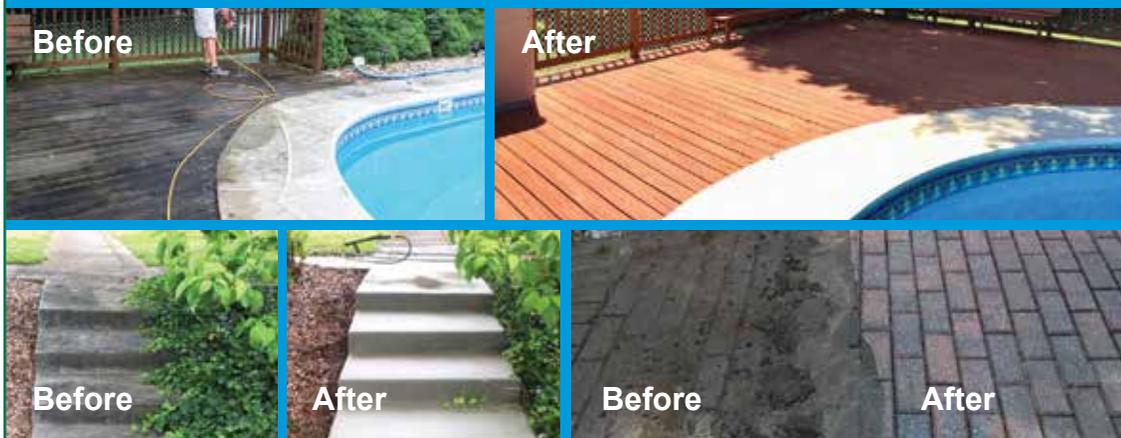
Locally, participating families have donated to Destiny Worship Center, Alaqua Animal Rescue, Food For Thought and many other wonderful charities, helping many in their time of need.

If you or your family would like to participate in the Front Steps Project, you can contact Sue Gambla of Ciao Bella ArTe to capture your incredible smiles and to have a memory that’s truly beautiful. There is beauty everywhere, just depends on what you are looking at. Find Sue on Facebook @CiaoBellaArTe.

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HEROES

continued from page 3

students and families. I'm proud of everyone for this massive undertaking that was done flawlessly." He also says thank you to the many volunteers, parents, employees and to everyone in the community who come together to make this possible.

Northwest Florida's own **Costa Enterprises**, which owns 24 McDonald's restaurants, has gotten into the swing of things also. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they served 9,056 free combo meals to medical workers as part of their "Free Meals for Heroes" initiative—a "thank you" to all of the brave men and women who have been dedicating their

time and putting themselves at risk to work in the medical profession. Hospice nurses, pharmacists, nursing home employees, and various other healthcare workers were able to get one free combo meal of their choice every day for a period of two weeks, spanning McDonald's locations including Bluewater Bay, Niceville and Defuniak Springs. To learn more, visit costamed.com, follow Costa Enterprises on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

And what about the extracurricular activities for our children that were cancelled? One local **dance instructor, Shaye Smith**, also a full-time Marketing Manager, has hopped on the virtual train by teaching her students online

dance classes from her home every week. Shaye says, "When Verve Dance Company first took our dance program online, I was worried that students wouldn't connect, show up or try. But just the opposite has happened. Class numbers have stayed consistent and students are working harder than ever. They're learning and growing and seizing opportunities they might not have had if classes weren't virtual." Shaye laments that she can't wait to hug her kids and give them high fives when classes resume in person. But for now, she will keep challenging them online. I'm sure as parents we can agree Shaye is a hero!

Even **mom**s are getting into the act. Just when you thought being mom is the hardest but

most rewarding job, now we're educators as well by teaching and helping our children online through virtual home schooling. If you've never had an appreciation for our teachers before, I'm sure you do now!

Adrienne Brackett, owner of Pure & Couture Hair Salon, says it's definitely a challenge teaching her advanced 12-year-old middle schooler and her 7-year-old on a daily basis. She says, "I really appreciate our teachers and all they do. I'm impressed by how the schools got the online platform up and running so quickly, and how students retrieve and turn in their assignments. I'm amazed at the pure scope of what my son is learning in advanced math and how challenging it is. Middle School teachers

have created more of a high school type course." Adrienne says it's been interesting to still have projects going on at the salon, whether it's been cleaning or organizing, while still conducting online school with her two children.

There's too little time, and too many local heroes to mention in this space. So, come back for next month's *Bay Life* and the many more local heroes who make our communities here north of the Bay the absolute BEST!!

Bay Life's "Hometown Heroes" are sponsored by Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Emerald Coast. To find out if you qualify for cash back rewards, call 850.837.8880 or visit www.BeALocalDestin.com.

CareerSource Office Open

CareerSource Okaloosa Walton systematically began reopening its Fort Walton Beach Career Center on May 18th to serve those most impacted by COVID-19. Virtual services will continue to be provided online, by phone and email.

Initially, the career center will be open by appointment only, weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4

p.m. More extensive career services will become available in accordance with the safety of the general public and staff.

Appointments will be for those needing help with Reemployment Assistance, Welfare Transition and/or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is more commonly known as Food Stamps.

Appointments will be limited and must be scheduled by calling 850-833-7587 weekdays between the hours of 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Michele Burns, Executive Director of CareerSource Okaloosa Walton said that all CareerSource Okaloosa Walton staff will wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). All incoming customers will be required to wear face coverings

such as a medical mask, scarf, bandana or improvised cloth face mask. Staff will also thoroughly clean and sanitize work areas between each scheduled appointment in addition to the periodic sanitizing that will occur throughout the business day.

Customers arriving more than 10 minutes late for their scheduled appointment will be asked to

wait for the next available opening or be rescheduled.

Important updates and additional information will continue to be posted at www.careersourceokaloosawalton.com and on social media platforms.

CareerSource Okaloosa Walton's Fort Walton Beach Career Center is located at 409 Race-track Road NE.

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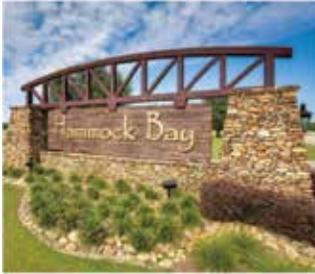
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FREEPORT		KEY METRICS APRIL 2019		APRIL 2020
	New Listings	118	78	
	Pending Sales	73	81	
	Closed Sales	50	54	
	Days on Market	133	90	
	Avg. Sales Price	\$229,381	\$229,617	
NICEVILLE		KEY METRICS APRIL 2019		APRIL 2020
	New Listings	133	94	
	Pending Sales	97	83	
	Closed Sales	89	84	
	Days on Market	48	40	
	Avg. Sales Price	\$322,056	\$362,595	

Current as of May 18, 2020. All data from Emerald Coast Association of Realtors Multiple Listing Service. Report © 2020.

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