



APRIL 2026  
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# Forgotten Coast Living!

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## Building the Future: Forgotten Coast Unveils Career Pathways for Students and Workers

The Forgotten Coast is taking a major step toward securing its economic future. A newly unveiled program called the Gulf County Workforce Pathways Initiative — developed under the Triumph Gulf Coast banner — is poised to transform how local students and adults prepare for careers in two of the region's most vital industries: public safety and maritime trades.

The program's vision is clear: "To build a sustainable workforce pipeline that prepares Forgotten Coast students and adults for high-demand, well-paying careers — strengthening public safety, growing our maritime economy, and investing in our community's future." Its two anchors are a Fire Academy and a Maritime Academy, each designed to address workforce shortages that local employers and fire departments have struggled with for years.

### A True Community Effort

Gulf District Schools serves as the lead applicant, overseeing program administration and CTE integration across



approximately 1,800 students at four public schools — over 60% of whom are economically disadvantaged. Tom P. Haney Technical College contributes curriculum development and instructional support. Eastern Shipyard rounds out the partnership as the primary workforce partner, currently projecting 337 new jobs — jobs the initiative is directly designed to fill.

### The Fire Academy

The Forgotten Coast has long relied on volunteer fire service. The Fire Academy directly addresses the need to transition volunteers into career profes-

sionals and train the next generation from scratch. Located on county-donated land in White City — a midpoint between Port St. Joe Jr/Sr High School and Wewahitchka Jr/Sr High School — the academy will deliver hands-on, certification-aligned instruction to 25 or more students per year, with close ties to Gulf County fire departments for on-site training partnerships.

### The Maritime Academy & Mobile Welding Lab

The Maritime Academy will offer training in marine engine repair, vessel operations, welding, shipfitting, and skilled

trades including Electrical, HVAC, and Plumbing. It will be based at the former Arizona Chemical Plant site in Port St. Joe — a 33-acre property adjacent to the bay and Intracoastal Waterway, walking distance from Eastern Shipyard.

The most innovative piece of the initiative is the Mobile Welding Lab — a 102' x 53' DOT-certified trailer supplied by The Pioneer Group featuring 6 Lincoln Electric welding booths, 2 VR simulation stations, MIG/TIG/Stick welding capability, a plasma cutter, and full climate control with its own Generac generator. The lab can travel to any site in the

region, bringing professional training directly to students in Wewahitchka and beyond — eliminating the geographic barrier that has long limited rural workforce development.

### The Timeline

The initiative launches in Summer 2026 with grant applications and partnership finalization, followed by facility renovations and first-cohort enrollment in 2026–2027. Full implementation and expanded enrollment follow in 2027–2029, with the program reaching full sustainability — approximately 25 students annually and a strengthened paid fire service capacity — by 2033.

### Learn More

For enrollment details, partnership opportunities, or more information, contact:

Melissa Hancock — 850-340-6194 or 229-8256 | mhancock@gulf.k12.fl.us

Karen Shiver, CTE Director — 850-229-8256 | kshiver@gulf.k12.fl.us



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# What Your Logo Says About Your Business Before Anyone Reads a Word



BY CARA GOODMAN, OWNER OF CEB DESIGN STUDIO

You've got about three seconds.

That's roughly how long it takes a potential customer to form a first impression of your business — and most of that judgment happens before they read your name, your tagline, or anything else you've carefully written. It happens the moment they see your logo.

We don't often think about it that way. Most business owners think of a logo as a formality — something you need before you can print business cards or launch a website. But the truth is, your logo is doing active work every single day, either building trust or quietly eroding it.

## The silent conversation your logo is already Having

When someone sees your logo for the first time, their brain immediately starts answering questions they didn't consciously ask:

Is this business legitimate? Is it worth my time? Does it feel like "my kind of place"?

A polished, well-crafted logo signals that you take your business seriously — and

by extension, that you'll take your customers seriously. It communicates stability, professionalism, and attention to detail before a single word is exchanged.

A dated, cluttered, or inconsistent logo sends the opposite message. It doesn't matter how good your product is or how excellent your service is. If the first visual impression doesn't hold up, many customers won't stick around long enough to find out.

This isn't shallow — it's human psychology. We are wired to use visual cues as shortcuts for trust.

## What "bad" actually looks like

Bad logos rarely look obviously terrible. More often, they just look forgettable — or worse, they look like a business that's trying to save money in the wrong places.

Here are the most common problems local businesses run into:

- Too much going on. A logo that tries to show everything — the product, the location, the founder's name, three different fonts — ends up communicating nothing clearly. Simplicity isn't laziness. It's discipline.
- Clip art and stock icons. If your competitor in the next town over uses the same wrench graphic or coffee cup silhouette, your logo isn't doing any work to differentiate you. Generic imagery is forgettable by design.
- Fonts that don't match the brand. A family law firm using a bubbly script font.

A children's boutique using a heavy industrial typeface. Fonts carry mood and meaning — a mismatch creates subconscious friction that customers can't always name, but they feel it.

- Poor scalability. A logo that looks fine on a website banner but turns into an unreadable blob on a business card — or worse, on a vehicle wrap or storefront sign — is a logo that wasn't designed for real-world use.

## What the right logo actually does for you

A professionally designed logo works harder than most business owners realize.

It creates instant recognition. Think about the businesses in our community that have been around for decades. Part of what makes them feel like institutions is that you've seen their mark over and over, in consistent contexts. That familiarity is built, not accidental.

It gives you visual consistency across every touchpoint — your website, your social profiles, your signage, your packaging, your invoices. When all of those things look cohesive, customers feel like they're dealing with an organized, trustworthy operation. When they don't match, something feels off even if the customer can't articulate why.

It attracts the right customers. Design speaks to specific audiences. A rustic, hand-lettered mark draws a different crowd than a clean, modern geometric mark — even if both businesses offer similar services. The right logo acts

as a filter, attracting the people most likely to connect with what you offer.

And it holds its value over time. A well-designed logo doesn't need to be replaced every few years. Done right, it grows more recognizable and more trusted the longer it's in use.

## When it's time to take a hard look

If any of these sound familiar, it may be worth a conversation about your visual identity:

- Your logo was made by a friend as a favor, or put together quickly using a free online tool
  - You've rebranded your services or your target market has shifted, but your logo hasn't changed with it
  - You feel embarrassed handing out business cards or hesitant to put your logo on a vehicle or storefront
  - Customers sometimes confuse you with a competitor
  - Your logo looks different across your website, social media, and printed materials
- None of these mean your business is failing. They just mean your visual identity hasn't caught up with where your business actually is — and where it's trying to go.

## Design is an investment, not an expense

Here on Florida's Forgotten Coast, local businesses are the backbone of this community. The ones that grow and endure aren't always the ones with the biggest budgets — they're the ones that understand the value of showing up professionally at

every touchpoint.

Your logo is the face of everything you do. It's on your signage when someone drives past. It's in their email inbox. It's what their friend sees when they tag you in a post. It's working for you — or against you — around the clock.

## Getting it right isn't vanity. It's strategy.

CEB Design Studio is a graphic design firm serving businesses in the Florida area and beyond. We specialize in brand identity, marketing design, and web presence. If you'd like a free, no-pressure review of your current logo and branding, reach out at carab1203@gmail.com.

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## What the Surge in Cape San Blas and St. George Island Property Values Means for Your Net Worth

There is a moment that catches a lot of Forgotten Coast homeowners off guard. They bought their place years ago — maybe a beach cottage on Cape San Blas, maybe a family getaway on St. George Island — and they have been quietly enjoying it ever since. Then one day a neighbor sells, or a real estate mailer lands on the kitchen table, and the number stops them cold. Their property is worth how much?

Over the past several years, property values in Gulf and Franklin counties have climbed at a pace that has outpaced many larger and more well-known Florida markets. What was once one of the most affordable stretches of pristine coastline in the country has quietly become one of its most sought-after. For homeowners who have been here all along, that is genuinely good news — but it also comes with a set of financial decisions that deserve careful and deliberate thought.

### ***You Have Built Real Wealth. Now What?***

Equity is wonderful, but it sits in your property doing nothing unless you make a deliberate choice about what to do with it. For many Forgotten Coast homeowners, the surge in property values has created a level of wealth they may not have anticipated — and that wealth creates both opportunity and responsibility in equal measure.

The question becomes strategic: are you holding, selling, borrowing against, or passing this property on? Each path has meaningfully different financial and tax implications, and each deserves a different kind of planning. Understanding your options before making a move is essential.

### ***If You Are Thinking About Selling***

If you sell a property that has appreciated substantially, you may face capital gains taxes that catch you off guard. For

a primary residence, the IRS allows an exclusion of up to \$250,000 for single filers and \$500,000 for married couples — but vacation and investment properties do not receive that same exclusion.

If you purchased a St. George Island rental home ten years ago for \$350,000 and it is now worth \$900,000, you could be looking at a significant taxable gain. A 1031 exchange allows you to defer capital gains by rolling proceeds into another investment property — but that strategy requires careful planning well before the closing date. Waiting until after you have signed a contract is almost always too late.

### ***If You Are Holding and Want to Leverage the Equity***

Many families along the Forgotten Coast have deep roots here, and the property is not just a financial asset — it is a piece of family history. That

is completely understandable, and there is no obligation to sell simply because values have risen. But there are still smart ways to put that equity to work without ever putting a for-sale sign in the yard.

A home equity line of credit or cash-out refinance can unlock capital for other investments, diversifying your overall financial picture rather than leaving the bulk of your net worth concentrated in a single piece of coastal real estate. Of course, borrowing against your home carries its own risks and should be approached with guidance.

### ***If You Want to Pass It to Your Children or Grandchildren***

Waterfront property is not the kind of asset that fits neatly into a simple will. High values, multiple heirs, carrying costs, and estate tax thresholds all combine to make coastal property one of the more complex assets a family can transfer. A

trust can minimize estate taxes, avoid probate, and set clear expectations among heirs. The step-up in basis rules that currently apply at death can also significantly reduce capital gains exposure for your children — but these rules have been subject to legislative discussion in Washington, making sooner rather than later a reasonable approach.

### ***The Bottom Line***

The rise in property values along Cape San Blas and St. George Island is a genuine wealth-building event for the families who have been part of this community. But wealth that is not managed is wealth that is easily lost — to taxes, poor timing, or simply the absence of a plan. A conversation with a qualified financial advisor who understands the local market is one of the most valuable investments you can make right now — and the best time to have that conversation is before you need it.



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# Franklin County

## Events & Activities



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### Carrabelle Riverfront Fest April 25

The Carrabelle Chamber of Commerce invites you to experience a fun-filled day along the beautiful historic Carrabelle Florida Riverfront!

The 2026 Carrabelle Riverfront Festival, scheduled for April 25, is a full day of family-friendly activities, live music, unique entertainment, colorful arts & craft vendors, and delicious food vendors. There will be plenty of activities for the young and old along the beautiful historic harbor. Visitors can browse tons of festival vendors and booths with unique arts and craft items, delicious food, yummy treats and interesting products. Food vendors will be offering shrimp, conch fritters, BBQ, kettle corn, funnel cakes, shaved ice, cotton candy, pork skins, and more. Plus, there will be family-friendly exhibitors with engaging local displays.



### Apalachicola Boat & Car Show April 18

The Apalachicola Bay Chamber of Commerce will present the 27th Annual Boat & Car Show on April 18 from 10am to 3pm at Riverfront Park in Apalachicola. Come see Boats, Cars and Golf Carts of all makes and models while enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of Apalachicola. If you would like to register your Car, Boat or Golf Cart for the show, you can visit Apalachicolabay.org to download a form or stop by the Chamber office in Apalachicola.

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### 9th Annual SGI Brewfest April 18

The 2026 SGI Brewfest will be held on Saturday, April 18, 2026 from 1-4 pm (Eastern) in the public parking area adjacent to SGI Lighthouse Park. The SGI Brewfest is a one-day beer tasting festival to promote the

#### Historic Home Tour

May 2 in Apalachicola The Historic Apalachicola Home and Garden Tour returns Saturday, May 2. Come explore some of the community's most distinctive homes. A featured highlight this year is a residence redesigned by noted Modernist architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen. The weekend begins Friday, May 1, with a 6 p.m. Even-song service and reception. On Saturday, a public silent auction opens at 9 a.m. on the church grounds.

Want more history? The Apalachicola Area Historical Society (AAHS) announces the return of its popular self-guided history tour, "If This House Could Talk," May 2 -17 throughout historic Apalachicola. This free event transforms the town into an open-air museum where visitors can explore local history through engaging visual storyboards.

appreciation of craft beer. All proceeds benefit the Franklin County Humane Society. This year's event features an even broader selection of amazing craft beers, friendly faces and furry friends. This is a very limited engagement and tickets must be purchased in advance. Tickets will NOT be sold at the door so buy your tickets early!

#### Celebrate Estuaries Day at ANERR May 1

The Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve will celebrate Estuaries Day on Friday, May 1st, from 1:30-5:30 pm E.T. in Eastpoint. The event is free and will include fun educational activities for kids and adults, and estuary-themed games. Please note that all children must be accompanied by an adult. New activities will be debuting this year such as ink block art printing, Be Bay Aware, the junior water quality lab, and living shoreline demonstrations. Old favorites will be returning, including the cast net game, the wacky waterfront race, aquatic animal touch tanks, live oyster microscope viewing, glass grinding and sand art, Be-A-Bear, and more!

### FSU Marine Lab Open House April 25

FSUCML's Open House will take place on April 25, 2026! Join us for a day of hands-on educational displays, food trucks, a silent auction, and a celebration of scientific knowledge. The FSU Open House highlights the work of FSU's scientists and their graduate students, providing a unique opportunity to explore research focused on coastal and marine ecosystems.

### Mid April through May Franklin County Events

April weekly - Yoga  
April weekly- Apalach Ghost Tours  
April 11, 25 - Apalachicola Farmers' Market  
April 11 - FCA Wrestling Golf Scramble  
April 18 - Apalachicola Boat and Car Show  
April 18 - SGI Brewfest  
April 22 - Celebrate Earth Day, Apalachicola  
April 25 - FSU Coastal Marine Lab Open house  
April 25 - Carrabelle Riverfront Festival  
May 1 - Cape St. George Lighthouse Full Moon Climb  
May 2 - Trinity Home & Garden Tour  
May 2-17 - If This House Could Talk  
May 2, 16 - Carrabelle Country Farmers' Market  
May 9, 23 - Apalachicola Farmers' Market  
May 30 - Drone Light Show Apalachicola  
May 31 - Cape St. George Full Moon Climb

**Sign up to receive monthly Franklin County event and news at**  
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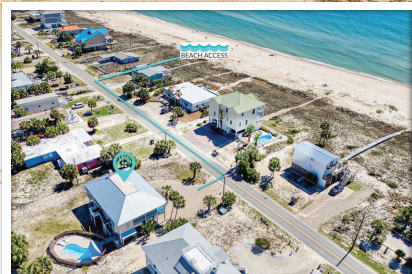
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Community

# Sheriff's Second Chance Inspires Organ Donation Awareness Across Franklin County

At the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, you can find the Donate Life flag waving proudly from the flagpole. April is dedicated to Donate Life Month, which is a nationwide effort dedicated to raising awareness about organ, eye, and tissue donation and the lifesaving impact it has on thousands of individuals each year. The message carries special meaning as Sheriff A.J. "Tony" Smith continues to share his personal life-saving story, turning it into national advocacy.

About seven months ago, Sheriff Smith underwent a kidney transplant. The donor happened to be his loving wife—the odds of a match being a miracle in itself. The life-saving procedure restored his health and allowed him to continue serving the citizens of Franklin County. From extensive medical testing and appointments to being placed on the transplant waitlist—the experience shaped Sheriff Smith's perspective on how precious life can really be and the extraordinary generosity behind organ donation.

Throughout Sheriff Smith's experience, he learned how delicate time can really be while on the transplant waiting list. For some, being on the wait-



list means pausing their life, being away from loved ones, putting their careers on hold, making financial sacrifices, and so much more. Some could be on the list for months; however, most are looking at years. Years of pausing, years of prayers waiting to be answered, years of hoping that the next phone call is a transplant team telling them it's their time. Behind every transplant is a family, a future, and a renewed opportunity to live life to the fullest.

Since his recovery, Sheriff Smith has worked to raise

awareness about the importance of becoming an organ donor. With newfound energy and determination, he set out to establish Donate Life badges and challenge coins.

Throughout the month of April, deputies with FCSO are wearing special Donate Life badges to bring attention to the importance of organ donation. This initiative aims to encourage others to register as organ donors when obtaining or renewing their driver's licenses or to consider living donations for a friend or loved one.

The Donate Life badges also reflect strong community support. Local businesses stepped forward to sponsor the badges, helping turn awareness into action. The Franklin County Sheriff's Office extends sincere appreciation to the following community partners for their generosity and shared commitment to this cause:

- Blue Line Innovations
- Galloway Construction
- Water Street Seafood
- Jason White Construction
- Ace Hardware Apalachicola

- Coastline RV Resort
- Coastline Clearing
- Forgotten Coast Automotive
- Tallahassee Ford

Sheriff Smith's story serves as a powerful example of how one selfless decision can provide someone else with a second chance at life.

Residents interested in learning more or registering as organ donors can visit Donate Life Florida or speak with their local driver's license office.



27th Annual 2026

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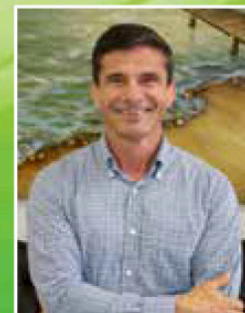
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# Understanding Everyday Toxins: What to Know and What to Do

Toxins are substances that can harm the body when they build up over time. Many are common in modern environments—found in food, water, air, and household products. While small exposures may go unnoticed, chronic exposure can contribute to fatigue, illness, and increased long-term disease risk.

## Common Toxins and Their Effects

We frequently see five major categories of toxins in clinical testing:

**1. Mold (Mycotoxins):** Mold toxins such as aflatoxin in M1 and ochratoxin A are produced by fungi in damp environments or contaminated foods, including dairy, cereal, spices, peanuts, grapes/wine, and coffee. Symptoms may include fatigue, headaches, sinus issues, breathing problems, digestive distress, and mood changes. Long-term exposure can damage the liver, kidneys, immune system, and may increase cancer risk.

**2. Heavy Metals:** Toxic metals like arsenic, lead, and mercury are well known, but antimony, nickel, gadolinium, and palladium are increasingly common. These are linked to neurological issues, fatigue, hormone disruption, cardiovascular disease, and cancer risk. Common sources include unfiltered drinking water (many metals, including lead), contaminated ayurvedic herbs (arsenic), certain seafood like mackerel and tuna (mercury), black plastic from take-out containers, and air fryer use (antimony), MRIs (gadolinium), and cheap jewelry (nickel and palladium).

**3. Glyphosate:** This widely used herbicide is commonly found on fruits and vegetables, as well as oat, soy, wheat, and corn products - even wine and beer. It is also present on treated grasses like lawns and golf courses. Glyphosate has been associated with inflammation, gut microbiome disruption, DNA damage, and is classified as “probably carcinogenic.” Exposure occurs mainly through ingestion and skin contact.

**4. Gut Overgrowth (Candida):** Candida is a yeast that can overgrow when the microbiome is imbalanced. This can lead to bloating, sugar cravings, fatigue, digestive issues, and immune dysfunction. It is often linked to antibiotic use, high sugar intake (which “feeds” the yeast), or a weakened immune system.

**5. Hormone Disruptors:** Chemicals such as phosphates and parabens - commonly found in plastics and personal care products - can interfere with hormone function. They are linked to reproductive issues, metabolic disorders, developmental problems, and increased cancer risk.

**How to Know if You're Affected**

Symptoms of toxin exposure are often nonspecific and may include fatigue, headaches, brain fog, digestive issues, skin problems, and hormonal im-

balances. Because these overlap with many conditions, testing is key. At Nutrition Connection Balance, we offer convenient at-home test kits using urine samples to assess mold, heavy metals, environmental chemicals, glyphosate, and candida/gut imbalances.

## What You Can Do

Reducing toxin burden involves limiting exposure and supporting the body's natural detox systems:

- **Remove the source:** Address mold, filter water, and avoid contaminated foods (e.g., follow the EWG Dirty Dozen for produce, choose organic grains, and consider mold-free coffee).

- **Choose cleaner products:** Opt for non-toxic personal care items; apps like Yuka can help evaluate products such as lipstick, soaps, lotions, fragrances, deodorants, and toothpaste.

- **Support detoxification:** Eat a high-fiber diet (aiming for 25–35g per day) and stay well hydrated.

- **Lifestyle strategies:** Maintaining a healthy weight can help eliminate stored toxins, which are often held in fat tissue.

- **Supplementation, detoxing, and retesting:** Regular testing helps us guide personalized protocols and track progress. Make sure your supplements are third-party tested, such as with the NSF Standard, as supplements are often unregulated and may be contaminated.

## The Bottom Line

Toxins are an unavoidable part of modern life - but their impact can be managed. With awareness, proper testing and supplementation, and consistent lifestyle changes, you can reduce exposure and support long-term health. Nutrition Connection Balance helps clients nationwide. Visit [nutritionconnectionbalance.com](https://nutritionconnectionbalance.com) or call 850-227-7931.

If you missed our live webinar on April 21, head over to our YouTube @nutritionconnectionbalance to watch the free recording!



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## Twice as Nice for Rory

BY ALAN M. WATSON, PRESIDENT, GOLF+ PCB

To win one green jacket would be a career milestone for any professional golfer. Winning at Augusta – The Masters – the first major of the year – the one everyone dreams of is and always will be a career defining achievement. Now Rory McIlroy has done it twice, and in back to back years no less, joining only Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, and Sir Nick Faldo in this illustrious club.

Sure he will have to pick up the tab for a second year in a row at the Champions Dinner. Sure he couldn't put the green jacket on himself. Sure he overcame one of the worst driving performances in major history. And on and on and on. We all feel sorry for Rory.

No we don't. I jest. Rory is a great champion with many worldwide wins to his name. When he donned the green jacket in 2025 it was the final piece in his career grand slam. But two in a row—well that's just special. Rory is living in rarified air in this era of two

tours (LIV and PGA). He's beaten world number 1 Scottie Scheffler two years in a row at Augusta along with a host of other recent winners like Justin Rose, Cam Young, and J.J. Spaun. Rory is doing what Rory does: winning.

We celebrate this accomplishment not only because it's a known figure in the world of professional golf but also because the pressure was on. He clearly put a pile of it on himself to repeat, as is evidenced by the fact that he admitted he had spent quite a bit of time in Georgia playing the course weeks before the tournament. Was this an unfair advantage over the other players? Maybe. But come tournament time everyone has to play the same course under the same conditions. And the 2026 Masters was pretty benign as weather goes—no rain and no heavy winds. The greens were a little firm and maybe even crispy due to the lack of rain, but again, everyone plays the same course. And while many great players had their chances to



take it to the course, Rory was just one shot better in the end, and that's all it takes.

So how did he do it? Putting for the most part. His putter was deadly on many holes, and even when he missed, he missed close for the most part. His wedge game was solid as well, with lots of chips and full wedges that came into the correct spot of the green. Long iron play was another place where Rory had a slight edge over the field. With his

amazing height, his shots don't move as much as some people's when they land. Rory could have lost it with the driver, as in some stretches he was not hitting fairways; however, when it counted, his driver was solid enough, and he found ways to escape trouble when he did go wayward.

Now the talk is three-peat, and for me I say let's put a pin in that. Maybe it's just too early to be talking about next year. What I will wonder about,

though, is if Rory can win another major tournament this year in the 2026 season. Can he win enough to overtake the world number 1 spot? Can he win the FedEx Cup? Those are more pressing issues for 2026, but if this Rory keeps showing up to play, then the other pros are in for a long year.

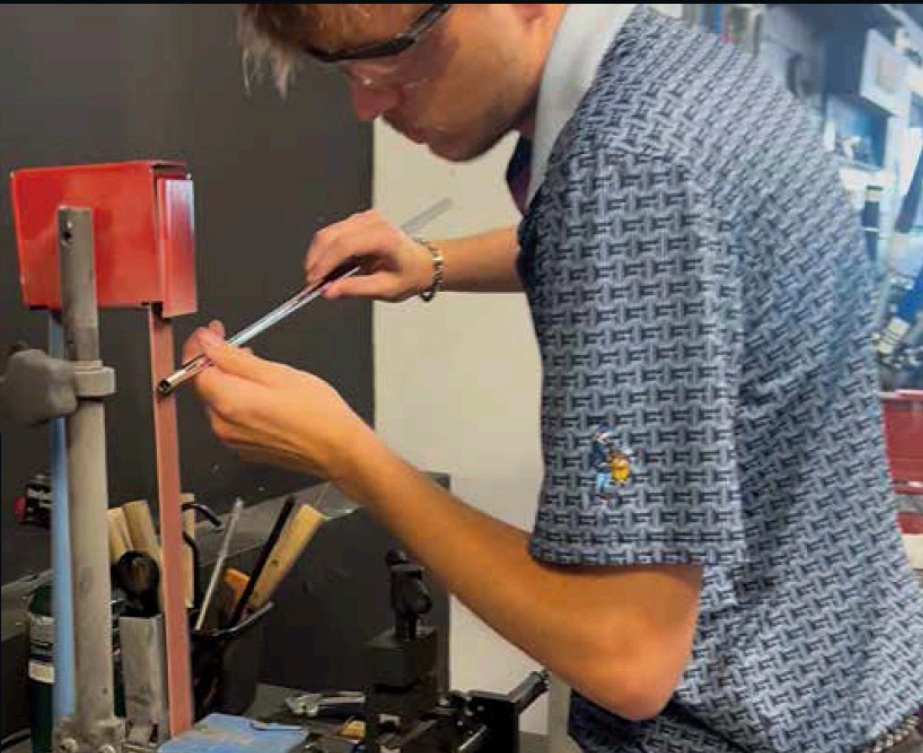
Congratulations Rory McIlroy for your second Masters win! You deserve it.



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## Sports

# A Gulf in Crisis: What the Mass Dolphin Deaths Along the Florida Panhandle Mean for Our Coast

Something is wrong in the Gulf.

Since the start of 2026, at least 44 bottlenose dolphins have washed up dead along the Florida Panhandle coastline — and the numbers have been accelerating at an alarming rate. In March alone, at least 24 dead dolphins were found on Panhandle shores, with strandings recorded in Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, and Gulf counties.

For communities along the Forgotten Coast — where the Gulf of Mexico is not just a backdrop but a way of life — the sight of these animals washing ashore has stirred deep concern, grief, and urgent questions that scientists are still racing to answer.

The Florida Panhandle Marine Institute typically responds to 30 dolphin or whale strandings in an entire year, with fewer than 10 happening on average by March. What has unfolded in 2026 has far exceeded those historical norms,

with more than half of this year's strandings occurring in March alone.

Most of the strandings were reported in Bay and Gulf counties, around St. Joseph's Bay. All but two of the stranded dolphins were already dead upon arrival, and those two died shortly after rescue efforts began. All of the dead dolphins found so far have been bottlenose dolphins, with the majority being adults. Notably, there did not appear to be any physical injuries or visible causes of death on the animals found. That absence of obvious trauma makes the situation both more puzzling and more unsettling.

## What is Causing This?

That is the question on everyone's mind — and the honest answer, for now, is that no one knows for certain. The Florida Panhandle Marine Institute is working alongside the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Marine Fisheries

Service, and other community partners in the ongoing investigation. After transporting each animal, a necropsy is performed if the condition allows, and samples are sent to a laboratory.

Some locals believe red tide may be to blame, but officials say nothing is confirmed until lab results come back. Red tide — caused by blooms of the toxic algae *Karenia brevis* — has a well-documented history of killing dolphins along Florida's Gulf Coast. The Florida Panhandle has seen multiple dolphin die-offs linked to red tide. In 2003, almost 100 bottlenose dolphins died in a Panhandle event coinciding with dense algal blooms, and brevetoxins were found in all dolphins tested, traced to contaminated baitfish in their stomach contents.

Florida Panhandle Marine Institute Board President Pamela George has been direct about the severity. "We have seen patterns like this. When

we had the oil spill, there was an unusual mortality event. This is a high number of dolphins that we were waiting for. It's really unusual to have that many at one time," George said.

## What the Community Can Do

If you come across a live or dead stranded dolphin or whale, never push it back out to sea or remove it. Moving the animal can destroy critical forensic evidence and may cause further harm. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Alert Hotline can be reached at 1-888-404-3922, and the National Marine Fisheries Service hotline is available at 1-877-942-5343. When reporting, have a description of the animal's size, condition, and precise location ready.

Beyond reporting, support the organizations doing the work on the ground. The Florida Panhandle Marine Institute is still building its new facility

while responding to stranding calls around the clock. Donations can be made at [floridapanhandlemarineinstitute.com](http://floridapanhandlemarineinstitute.com).

## Why This Matters Beyond the Headlines

Dolphins are not simply beloved animals — they are indicator species. The health of dolphin populations reflects the health of the broader marine ecosystem. When dolphins die in numbers like this, it is the Gulf itself sending a signal.

For a region whose identity, economy, and spirit are woven together with the Gulf of Mexico, what is happening to these animals is not a distant environmental story. It is happening in our backyards. The most important thing our community can do is stay informed, report what we see, and support the people working tirelessly to find out why our Gulf is losing its dolphins.

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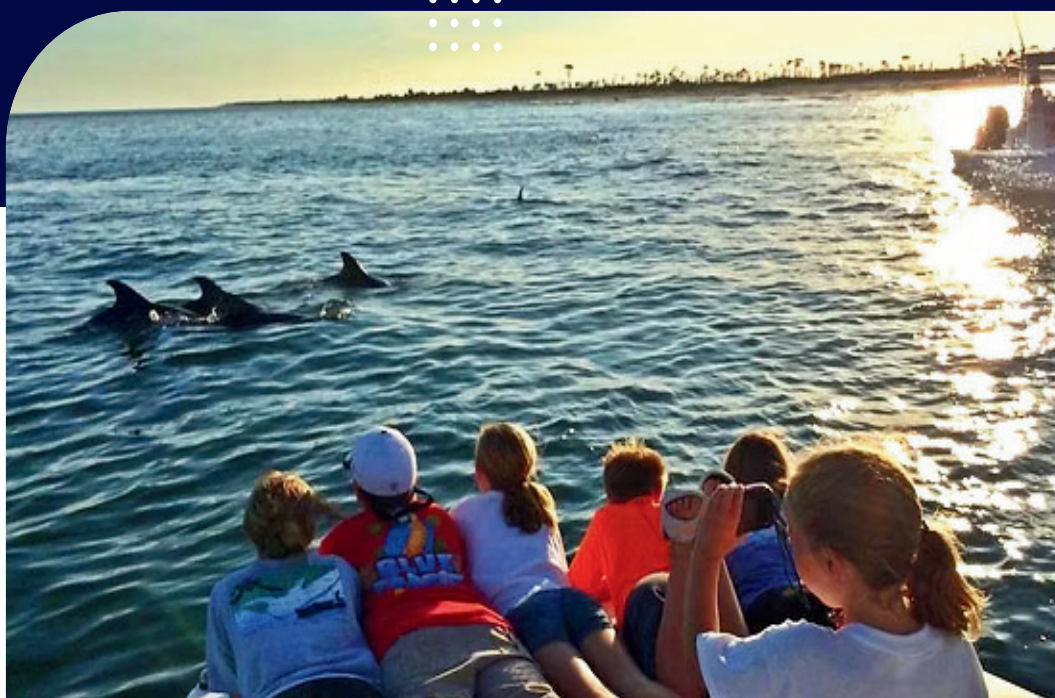
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# Ten Tips to Know About Sunscreen



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

As we are approaching the summer months, it is important to use sunscreen daily, but to make sure we use it correctly. Sunscreen is the most important step in our daily routine to prevent premature aging and skin cancer. This article will go over some tips on using sunscreen properly.

- 1.) Apply Sunscreen SPF 30 or higher and make sure it is broad spectrum ( protects against UVA and UVB )
- 2.) Reapply every 90 minutes
- 3.) Wear water-resistant and sweat-resistant sunscreen if you will be outdoors, on the



beach, or swimming.

- 4.) Don't forget your ears, lips, tops of feet, and hands. These are common areas people miss during application and are common areas for skin cancers.
- 5.) Apply 15 minutes before going outside to ensure the sunscreen has absorbed into your skin.
- 6.) Make sure your sunscreen is not expired. Expired sunscreen is not as effective in pro-

tecting your skin.

- 7.) Avoid leaving sunscreen outside in high temperatures for prolonged periods. The heat can slowly break down some of the active ingredients that protect your skin.
- 8.) If you have sensitive skin, rosacea, or acne-prone skin, consider purchasing mineral sunscreen over chemical sunscreen.
- 9.) Use enough sunscreen. For full protection, adults typ-

- ically need one ounce ( a shot glass full) to cover the entire body.
  - 10.) Cloudy skies do not mean there are no UV rays. Up to 80% of UV rays can pass through clouds. Sunscreen should still be applied even on overcast beach days.
- Sunscreen is one of the simplest ways to protect your skin—but small mistakes can significantly reduce its effectiveness. By applying enough,

reapplying regularly, and covering often-missed areas, you can greatly reduce sun damage. Apply your sunscreen this summer to prevent skin cancer and keep your skin healthy and beautiful!



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## Wellness Fair at Carrabelle Senior Center April 23, 2026

A new community health fair is bringing something simple, meaningful, and often hard to access in one place: free care, real conversations, and practical support for everyday health needs. Organized through a partnership between the local Food Pantry and the Health Department, this event grew out of something deeper than planning—it came from listening.

Throughout 2025, pantry volunteers found themselves doing more than handing out food. Week after week, they stood alongside families navigating health challenges—unmanaged conditions, lack of transportation, limited access to screenings, and uncertainty about where to turn next. Over time, those conversations made one thing clear: the need wasn't just for food, it was for accessible, preventative healthcare. This health fair is a direct response to that need.

At the heart of the event are

completely free health screenings, offering attendees an easy and approachable way to check in on their well-being. Services will include blood pressure checks, oxygen level (O2) testing, heart rate monitoring, breast cancer information, blood glucose testing, and colorectal cancer screening. These are the kinds of basic but critical screenings that can catch early warning signs and, in many cases, prevent more serious health issues down the line.

Beyond the screenings, the fair will feature a wide range of booths and mobile units, bringing together providers and organizations from across the region. The Department of Health will be onsite offering vital checks, breast cancer information, and tobacco and vape cessation counseling. North Florida Medical Center East Point will provide blood glucose testing, while Guardant Health will offer colorec-

tal cancer resources. Second Harvest of the Big Bend will be available with WIC nutrition services, and the Franklin County Senior Center will share information on senior activities and support.

Attendees can also connect with a strong network of behavioral health providers, including CORE Network, Disc Village, the Northwest Florida Health Network, Apalachee Center, the Department of Health, and the Sheriff's Office. Additional resources include the Carrabelle Food Pantry and United Way of the Big Bend for community support, the FSU REACH Program for geriatric services, and the Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Memory Disorder Clinic for memory-related care. The Veterans Affairs team will be present with suicide prevention outreach, while Healthy Families/Healthy Start and the Department of Children Welfare will provide family and early

learning resources. Practical services like transportation assistance from Big Bend Transit and stress relief through massage services from Happy Body Peaceful Mind round out the offerings.

The event will also feature several mobile units expanding access even further. The PanCare Bus will offer a wide range of mental health and recovery services, including counseling, telehealth appointments, substance use treatment, peer support, case management, Narcan distribution, rapid HIV and Hepatitis C screenings, and assistance with insurance navigation and patient onboarding. Emergency preparedness and safety services will be represented by the Fire Department, Franklin County Emergency Management, and Franklin County EMS, covering CPR, AED use, hurricane safety, fire safety, and summer health. Additional mobile providers

include Big Bend Hospice for palliative and hospice care, the Blood One Bus for blood donations, and Clinical Home Medical offering home health products and support.

What makes this event stand out isn't just the number of services—it's the intention behind it. This isn't a one-size-fits-all health initiative. It's a community-driven effort built from real relationships, real stories, and a genuine desire to meet people where they are.

For many in the Forgotten Coast area, this fair represents an opportunity to take a first step—whether that's getting a screening they've been putting off, asking a question they haven't had the chance to ask, or simply learning what resources are available. It's healthcare made more human, more accessible, and more connected to the people it serves.



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## Community

# America's Greatest Author: James Lee Burke

REVIEW BY JACK SMITH

It turns out that one of America's greatest writers lives next store in New Iberia, Louisiana. He is also known to spend time at his second home in Missoula, Montana. He was born in Houston, Texas, in 1936, and spent his first twenty years doing almost anything but writing. James Lee was a pipeliner in Texas, a landman for Sinclair Oil in Louisiana, a surveyor in Colorado, and a long distance truck driver. One of his first novels, "The Lost Get-Back Boogie," stayed under submission for nine years and was rejected more than 111

times. When finally published, it was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Times compared him to Faulkner and Sartre. His most popular mystery series featuring 'fictional character' Dave Robicheaux has been translated into almost every language in the world. Dave Robicheaux, a recovering alcoholic, and current alcoholic, Clete Purcel, are former disgraced New Orleans homicide detectives nicknamed the 'Bobbsey Twins.' Dave is currently a detective with the New Iberia Police department and Clete is a sometimes employed Private Detective who never

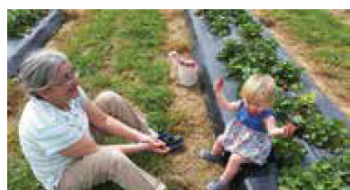


met a hooker or pole dancer with whom he didn't fall in love. Together, they know every character in the underbelly of crime from New Orleans to New Iberia. They served together during the Vietnam War

and that is the catalyst of their wet and dry alcoholic binges. Operating on just this side of law and order, they manage to solve horrific crimes while invoking the ire of the police and criminals alike. His newest

book, the 40th in the series, pits Dave and Clete against two of Louisiana's oldest and bloodiest crime families. In a plot that reeks of Romeo and Juliet, star crossed lovers Johnny Shondell and Isolde Balangie run away after she is promised as a sex slave to Johnny's uncle. Burke flirts with belief in a parallel world, and Dave has many visits with Confederate General John Bell Hood from Texas. I do compare Burke with William Faulkner, but I can pronounce more of his words. James Lee Burke is by far my favorite author and I hope he will become one of yours.

## We Love Snakes!



BY HELEN PETRE

I volunteer at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, helping Turtle Bob teach fourth and seventh-graders about snakes and turtles. When the students enter the Turtle Bob room, some are terrified. By the time the class is over, Turtle Bob has convinced even the most uneducated that snakes are our friends. All the snakes the students hold are non-venomous and accustomed to being held. We teach the students that they will encounter snakes in the wild if they go outside.

Most of our snakes in the Panhandle are non-venomous, but a few, like our common cottonmouth, are venomous. Even so, if you wear shoes and keep your hands where you can see them, you will be fine. Venomous snakes do not chase you down or attack you unless you try to kill them, step on them in bare feet, or pick them up. Like bears and bobcats, give them room, do not threaten them, and you will be fine. Any snake will bite if threatened. Any human probably will, too.

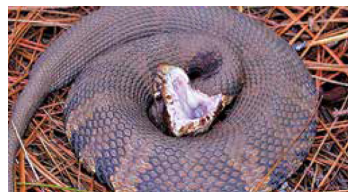
**Eastern cottonmouth**  
(*Agkistrodon piscivorus piscivorus*)

The cottonmouth is our most common venomous snake. It swims well, lives near water, and opens its mouth when threatened. Cottonmouths sometimes shake their tails when threatened, sort of like rattlesnakes. They are just trying to let you know they are there, and they hope you will go away. When cottonmouths are swimming, you can see their entire body on the surface of the water, unlike other water snakes.

Cottonmouths have big heads and skinny necks. They are very thick snakes with very thick tails. They look scary, but unless you step on them in bare feet or try to kill them, they will not bite. Venomous snakes use venom to subdue prey. You are not prey. You are way too big to swallow. Bites are last resorts to make you go away.

Contrary to public opinion, cottonmouths are not aggressive. I almost stepped on one wearing flip flops (which is not a good idea), and the snake just sat there with its mouth open. Yes, I was terrified, but it did not bite. Bites are very uncommon, and although they are not fun, they are very rarely fatal.

Cottonmouths are food for eagles, owls, herons, alligators, kingsnakes, and snapping turtles. They eat fish and frogs. They are important members of an ecosystem that we want



to preserve.

**Banded watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*)**

Some snakes look like venomous snakes, and they do that on purpose. The banded watersnake is a common snake that lives near water like the cottonmouth, but it is not venomous. The banded water snake hopes you will think it is a cottonmouth and leave it alone. Sometimes that works. The difference is that banded watersnakes have long, pointed heads (not triangular), round eyes, they do not open their mouths when threatened, and you cannot see their entire body when they swim, only their heads. They, and especially their tails, are much thinner than those of a cottonmouth. They also have dark, vertical lines on their heads that are visible in the photo below and can be seen from a safe distance.

When a banded watersnake is threatened, it flattens out its head, but don't be fooled. The head looks flat, not blocky like a cottonmouth.

**Red rat snake (corn snake, oak snake) (*Pantherophis guttatus*)**

Red and gray rat snakes are also called oak snakes and corn snakes. They look alike except some are red and some are gray, or brownish. Red corn snakes are expert climbers. Some people think they look like copperheads, but copperheads are rare in the Panhandle.

Red and gray rat snakes are constrictors, but have no fear, they are way too small to strangle you. They constrict around a mouse, or other rodent when it exhales, and then it cannot inhale. It sounds terrible, but death is quick. Rat snakes are useful to control rodent populations and are beneficial to humans because rodents carry ticks and disease and spoil human food. Rat snakes live about 15 years in the wild in palmetto flatwoods and forests.

**Black racers (*Coluber constrictor*)**

Black racers, or black snakes, are probably the most common urban snake. They are active during the day, so they are often seen. Black snakes live around freshwater and under shrubs. They eat insects, frogs, and toads. They are also slightly hyperactive and large, so they tend to move quickly and scare people. They do not do well in captivity because they cannot tolerate life in a small box.

**What to do if you see a snake**

Nothing. Move away. Give the animal room and take a deep breath. The snake does not want to chase you, bite you, or eat you. It wants you to go away. So go away.

There is no good reason to kill a snake, and if you try, it might not end well for you. If you have snakes in your yard, it is probably because there is food: rodents, bird seed, or pet food. Remove the rodent food and the rodents and the snakes will leave.

Snakes are assets to our environments. They eat mice, rats, and other things that we do not want around our yards. Snakes are food for owls, herons, snapping turtles, and alligators. Like all wild animals, they were here first, and despite the Adam and Eve story, they do not tell us to do bad things. They just want to be left alone to enjoy the sun and rodents. We love snakes at the Turtle Bob room, and we hope you love them in your yards and in the wild.

*Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology instructor. Turtle Bob is the turtle guy at E. O. Wilson. We both hope to share our passion for the longleaf ecosystem with all the wonderful people who live here. If you have any questions about science, nature, or the wild world of Florida's Panhandle, email petrehelen@gmail.com*



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| <b>Mexico Beach</b><br>HOMES/CONDOS FOR SALE<br>125<br>LAND FOR SALE<br>66<br>AVERAGE SALE PRICE<br>\$644K<br>PROPERTIES SOLD IN '26<br>36 | <b>Cape San Blas</b><br>HOMES/CONDOS FOR SALE<br>93<br>LAND FOR SALE<br>95<br>AVERAGE SALE PRICE<br>\$1,041,000<br>PROPERTIES SOLD IN '26<br>27 | <b>Port St. Joe</b><br>HOMES/CONDOS FOR SALE<br>85<br>LAND FOR SALE<br>20<br>AVERAGE SALE PRICE<br>\$384K<br>PROPERTIES SOLD IN '26<br>38 | <b>St. George Island</b><br>HOMES/CONDOS FOR SALE<br>126<br>LAND FOR SALE<br>69<br>AVERAGE SALE PRICE<br>\$1,000,700<br>PROPERTIES SOLD IN '26<br>15 |
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## Curing the Roommate Syndrome: How the AMITY Code Reconnects Couples



By Jamie C. Williamson, PhD

Working professional couples and couples with children in their busiest seasons of life are susceptible to a common marriage pitfall called the Roommate Syndrome. That's why I created the AMITY Code.

Couples afflicted by the Roommate Syndrome seem happy on the surface but have drifted apart emotionally. They are adept at the logistics of running their home, like paying bills, meal planning, chores, and parenting. Although their daily interactions may be civil, they focus on "to do" lists, rather than meaningful conversations.

**Roommate Syndrome Causes and Effects:** Couples don't drift apart because of a single explosion or a lack of love. They start living parallel lives because they've allowed work priorities, parenting re-

sponsibilities, or hobbies to take priority over their time for romantic connections, difficult conversations, or maintaining their intimate friendship.

To remain functional, time stressed couples fall into predictable habits and routines. And they avoid discussing issues that might lead to conflict. For these couples, it is easier to "keep the peace" than it is to work things out.

A temporary bout of Roommate Syndrome is common for working professionals and exhausted parents. But couples should not let the symptoms go unaddressed. Extended periods of living like "married roommates" can cause partners to feel alone in their own home. They stop sharing intimate thoughts, ideas, or concerns with each other, and often seek emotional support from friends or colleagues instead. If not addressed, this can lead to affairs, permanent emotional disengagement, and divorce.

**AMITY Cures the Roommate Syndrome:** Couples trapped in the Roommate Syndrome should take deliberate steps to rebuild the amity between them.

In marriage, "amity" is an intentional, intimate friend-

ship grounded in genuine goodwill for each other. As they rebuild amity, couples will replace indifference with interest, emotional detachment with empathy and warmth, transactional exchanges with meaningful conversations, and routine touch with physical intimacy.

My AMITY Code guides couples as they transition from married roommates back to romantic partners and it all begins with the Daily Connections Framework.

The Framework: AMITY for Connection

**A — Attention:** Show attention to your partner through your daily conduct and by setting aside time for fun and intentional reconnection. Do small things often. Include consistent, small actions in your daily life that make your partner feel noticed, valued, and supported. Institute a Date Night that suits your interests and your budget.

**M — Mutual Respect:** Mutual respect fosters trust and a secure connection, two integral parts of amity in marriage. To display respect, be reliable. Be fully present during conversations (get off your phone). Listen carefully to what your partner says without interrup-

tion or formulating a rebuttal. Be curious about what matters to your partner and validate their feelings. Openly express your admiration for your partner. Support their independent dreams and goals. Speak kindly. Instead of avoiding conflict, use a "soft start-up" and be honest about your feelings.

**I — Intentional Touch:** Reintroduce small, non-sexual touch to signal affection and lead you back to physical intimacy. Start with holding hands and long hugs. Then replace the perfunctory peck on the lips with a 6-second kiss. Just six seconds is long enough to release oxytocin, the "bonding hormone," which strengthens emotional connection and deepens intimacy. A 20-second hug has the same effect.

**T — Transition Talks:** Create rituals of connection. In the morning, connect for at least two minutes in undistracted, face-to-face conversation. And save time for that six-second goodbye kiss. When you reunite at the end of the day, find and greet each other positively before getting tasky. Include a long hug and a six-second kiss, whenever you can. Identify a routine time to set aside 15-20 undistracted minutes for a daily debriefing conversation.

**Y — Yielding to Gratitude:** Adopt an attitude of gratitude. Train yourself to focus on what your partner did right rather than what they did wrong. Explicitly thank your partner for the small things they do to break the feeling of being "unseen".

Whether you are looking to cure the Roommate Syndrome or simply want to deepen your relationship connection, you can use the AMITY Code - Daily Connections Framework to build a marriage grounded in lasting amity. I hope it works for you. Let me know if I can help.

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

## Historic Apalachicola Home and Garden Tour Returns May 2

The Historic Apalachicola Home and Garden Tour returns Saturday, May 2, offering a rare opportunity to step inside some of the community's most distinctive homes. Among this year's highlights is the former residence of a prominent Black family that was relocated and later redesigned by noted Modernist architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, known for his sophisticated residential designs, including a home for Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis on Martha's Vineyard.

The tour was founded in 1992 by the women of Trinity Episcopal Church to celebrate Apalachicola's rich architectural heritage and to raise funds for preservation of the church's historic buildings. In addition to touring distinguished private



homes and visiting the City Square Community Garden, guests are invited to explore Trinity's 1838 sanctuary, where costumed docents will share stories of the church's history. A special art exhibit featuring

Trinity will also be on display at Live Oak Gallery, one of this year's tour stops.

The weekend begins Friday, May 1, with an Evensong service at 6 p.m. featuring Trinity choir members and friends

from the Bay Area Choral Society, followed by a reception in Gorrie Square. On tour day, a curated silent auction—open to the public—begins at 9 a.m. on the grounds in front of Trinity Church.

Advance tickets are \$30 and may be purchased at [apalachicolahometour.org](http://apalachicolahometour.org). Day-of-tour tickets will be available for \$35 on the church grounds beginning at 9 a.m. Proceeds from the tour support the preservation and maintenance of Trinity's historic campus, with a portion also directed to outreach efforts serving individuals and families throughout Franklin County.

Apalachicola's historic district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With many structures dating to the

pre-Civil War era and continued prominence into the twentieth century, the city is considered one of the best-preserved communities on Florida's Forgotten Coast. Visitors are encouraged to make a weekend of the event by exploring Apalachicola's historic sites, shops, galleries, restaurants, and scenic waterfront.

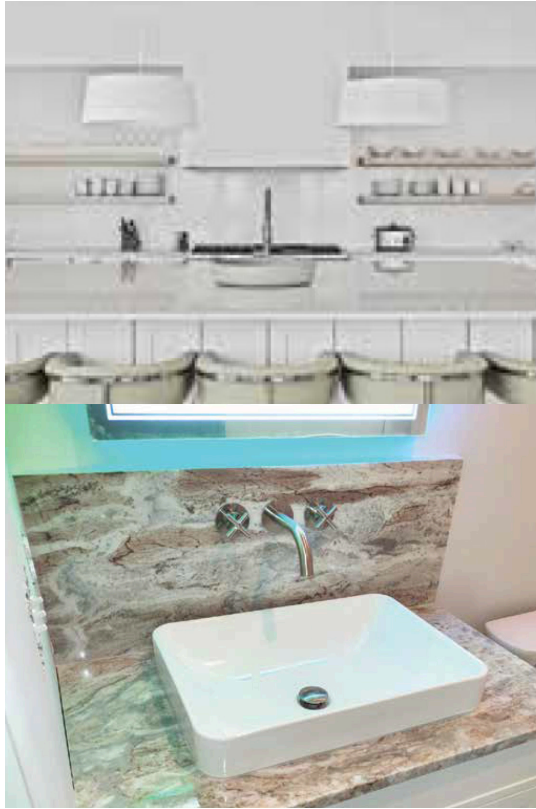
Contact: Kay Carson, (617) 388-8589, [kaycars@icloud.com](mailto:kaycars@icloud.com) or Trinity Episcopal Church, (850) 653-9550, [tour@trinityapalachicola.org](mailto:tour@trinityapalachicola.org)



## Design and Culture: Countertops, The Details

Countertops are a fabulous investment for any space, and surprisingly, may be one of the few products that are not inflated right now in terms of price. If you are interested in renovating or are building a new home, we are here to help and discuss all the current trends going on in the most beautiful beaches in the country with countertops.

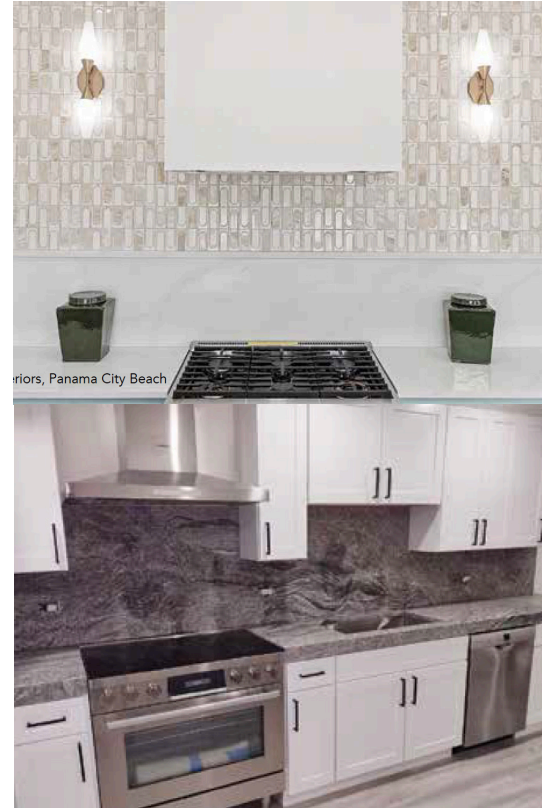
As color and pattern are the most important when selecting a countertop that works best with your space, there are a few small details you can consider when it comes to edges and backsplash to give your space, whether small or big, that extra special touch. The standard edge profile, also referred to as a flat eased edge profile, is by far the most common countertop edge, but we have seen a small revival of the ogee edge in baths. The mitered edge has become increasingly popular for kitchens, kitchen islands, baths, and outdoor kitchens. A mitered edge is a lovely detail and creates a bold statement in



any space. If you are interested in a mitered edge, 2 inches to 2½ inches is a good range to consider.

When it comes to stone backsplash, 4" is the standard

height, but different heights are becoming increasingly popular as designers push the boundaries of stone applications. Full-height backsplash, backsplash to the ceiling with



floating shelves mounted on the stone, and 6-inch to 8-inch backsplash with a stone cap shelf, are increasingly in demand. As these details have always existed, they are becoming

more and more desirable as clients veer away from grout lines or hard-to-clean surfaces in their homes. The final product is stunning. When considering this application, there may be coordination and planning required to achieve some of these options. A fabricator will be able to assist you with any questions you might have. If you would like more information, you can visit Granite Plus located at 17801 Ashley Drive or give us a call at (850) 890-0307 and a project manager would love to assist you.



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Historic American Buildings Survey, 1923

### FRIDAY, MAY 1

Evensong Service 6 pm  
Trinity Episcopal Church  
Reception to follow in Gorrie Square

### SATURDAY, MAY 2

Tickets / Check-in 9 am  
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Home & Garden Tour 10 am - 4 pm



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APRIL 23

CARRABELLE HEALTH FAIR AT THE SENIOR CENTER 9-1 PM

APRIL 25

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## Sean of the South: Dispatches Del Camino



BY SEAN DIETRICH

"We have no rooms," the innkeeper says over the phone.

"None?" I say.

"We are full."

My wife and I are sitting on the ancient steps of la Iglesia de Santiago. The Church of Saint James. We are dusty and sweaty, and one of us smells like a giant armpit. (Moi.)

The stone doorway arch above us features carvings of angels and demons which date back to Roman times. Eight angels surround Christ, who is looking straight at me as though He is saying, "No room' at the inn?—Now where have I heard THAT before?"

"Please," I say to the innkeeper. "My wife and I are

exhausted, there are no rooms anywhere."

"I said no room." And the woman hangs up.

It is late siesta in Spain. No traffic on the highways. No pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Streets are vacant. Most pilgrims have already found lodging for the evening and are already getting their complimentary massages.

At least that's what I imagine. Because we have been hunting for a room all day, and there are no vacancies for another 20 miles. It is Holy Week, and the Camino is packed with hikers. Finding a room is like trying to locate a porta john at a bluegrass festival.

All day we have been seeing pilgrims turned away from hostels. Some, we learn, have been forced to sleep outside on doorsteps.

I am still staring at the call-ended screen. "She hung up on me," I say in mock disbelief. So, I take a moment. I need to get my head together. I need to figure out what we should do. Otherwise we're

sleeping on church steps tonight.

I wander into the church while Jamie sits on the steps watching our backpacks. I cross myself. I take a pew.

Tomorrow is Good Friday. And I am looking at a sculpture of Christ on a cross.

My entire evangelical childhood featured imagery of the crucifixion. We sang cute little Sunday school songs about it. We wore tiny crucifixes around our necks. We had paintings portraying the crucifixion. Jesus always had great abs.

But right now, in light of Good Friday, I'm thinking about what it truly means to truly die by crucifixion.

First, you're stripped nude. You are not a fitness model. You are a 30-something male who eats a lot of bread and drinks wine with every meal. And it shows in your midsection.

Then, a crowd watches as a group of 18-year-old soldiers with egos to prove kick the proverbial excrement out of you. Next, they place you on tim-

bers. They mutilate your hands with nails. Romans didn't always use just one nail per hand.

Then, you just hang there.

It's gross. It's raw. There are no orchestras playing an overture. No cinematic key lighting. Your cross stands erected on Main Street. Your basic human reflex is to shield your nudity. But you can't.

The boy-soldiers beneath your cross are screwing around, engaging in locker room banter, shooting craps, seeing which one will win your shoes.

You can't breathe. Your lips are turning blue. Your arms are numb, devoid of circulation. Your serratus muscles and shoulders are torn from struggling against your own body weight.

The worst part is, almost none of your friends are here. Few are brave enough to attend your last hours. Doesn't anyone care? Isn't anyone going to say goodbye? Aren't you important in anyone's life?

Meantime, there are four other guys crucified alongside you. Hollywood films, and var-

ious evangelical bumper stickers will depict only three crosses on this fateful Friday. But in reality, there are five crosses, and you're just one of them.

In other words, you are not given special treatment. No sacred ceremony. Charleston Heston does not attend your death scene. You are just another state inmate on the roadside. No big deal.

Most people who are crucified will hang for entire days before finally dying. Crucified persons do not receive burial, either. Usually, Romans let birds pick their skeletons clean. In simple terms, you are trash. And you know what hurts most? It's that people did this to you. Not wild animals. Not an act of nature. Fellow human beings.

Because the harsh truth is, people are not always nice. People hate. People start wars. People hurt each other, and

**SEAN OF THE SOUTH**

*cont'd on page 29*

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# 10 Stylish Ways to Cover a Large Opening (Like a Sliding Glass Door)

BY DONNA GODWIN, OWNER OF MADE IN THE SHADE

Large openings, like sliding glass doors or wide patio windows, bring in beautiful natural light, but they can be challenging when it comes to privacy, light control, and style. The right window covering enhances both function and design while allowing easy access. Here are 10 great options to consider.

Vertical honeycomb (cellular) shades are ideal for energy efficiency — their air-trapping design helps regulate indoor temperatures, making them perfect for large glass areas, offering an insulating, soft appearance with smooth operation. Roller shades can be installed in multiple panels across wide openings for a clean, modern look, and are sleek, available in light filtering or blackout options, and motorization-friendly.

Bypass shutters slide along a track, making them great for wide openings where access is

needed. They're durable and timeless, making them a great fit for coastal or traditional homes. Bi-fold shutters fold neatly to the side for maximum opening space, offering compact stacking, full access, and an upscale appearance.

SmartDrape combines the softness of drapery with the function of vertical shades — and you can walk right through it. It features a walk-through design with no cords or wands for a truly modern feel. Sliding panel track shades feature large fabric panels that glide smoothly across a track for a bold, contemporary look, ideal for large spans with clean, modern lines.

Drapery panels add softness and elegance with endless fabric and design options. They're fully customizable, great for layering, and add warmth and height to any room. Vertical natural shades, also known as woven woods, bring organic texture and warmth using nat-



ural materials that softly filter light — perfect for coastal or relaxed interiors. Traversing sheer shades combine sheer fabric with adjustable vanes for both light control and daytime privacy, creating an airy, diffused feel. And finally, vertical blinds remain a classic, budget-friendly solution that now comes in updated fabrics and finishes for easy maintenance and durability.

The best option really depends on your style and how

you use your space. For energy efficiency, vertical honeycombs are the top choice. If you prefer something soft and elegant, drapery or SmartDrape fits beautifully. For a modern look, roller shades or panel tracks deliver clean lines, and for timeless structure, shutters are hard to beat.

At Made in the Shade Bay Walton, we help you choose the right solution for your home, then handle measuring and installation for a perfect

fit. Schedule your free in-home consultation and let's design something beautiful together.

**SEAN OF THE SOUTH**  
*cont'd from page 28*

often for no reason. They posture, they compete, they gossip. They invent rules and dogmas so they might force others unto their will.

And in this moment of nude agony, you see all these failings of human nature beneath you. You watch it all, with human eyes. And you forgive them. For we are fools who know not what we do.

I cross myself and exit the chapel.

My wife is sitting on the steps with our bags. We still have no rooms. We are low on food. We are in a foreign country, and we have a long way left to walk. But I think, perhaps, I've just remembered why I'm walking.





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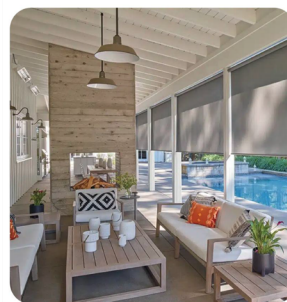
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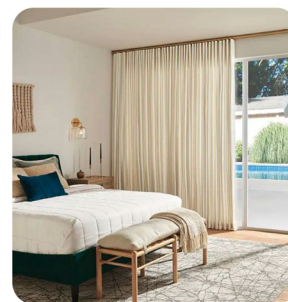
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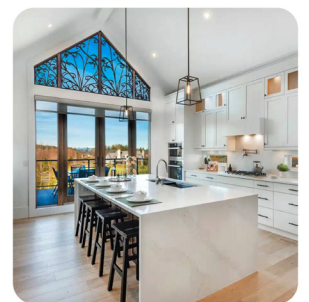
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