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The New Off-Season: When Quiet Months Aren't Quiet Anymore on the Forgotten Coast

For decades, the Forgotten Coast ran on a familiar rhythm. Summer buzzed, winter exhaled. Restaurants shortened hours, boats rested, and locals reclaimed their towns. But over the last few years, something subtle—and then unmistakable—has shifted. The off-season hasn't disappeared, but it has thinned, blurred, and in some places quietly vanished altogether across Apalachicola, East-point, Port St. Joe, Mexico Beach, and St. George Island. What used to be a seasonal pause has become a new normal—steady, unpredictable, and reshaping daily life for residents and businesses alike.

Remote work lit the fuse. Visitors who once squeezed vacations into summer weeks now arrive in October, February, even early spring, laptops in tow. Snowbirds stay longer. Short-term rentals fill gaps once considered dead months. Weekdays look more like weekends, and weekends sometimes feel like peak season without the infrastructure—or staffing—to match.



For small business owners, that can be both a gift and a grind. More consistent revenue helps keep doors open year-round, but it also means fewer chances to rest, repair, or reset. The off-season used to be when owners caught their breath. Now, many are running twelve months straight.

That shift hits workers first. Hospitality and service jobs were once seasonal by design; now they're expected to stretch across the calendar, often with-

out the pay bump that peak season used to bring. Finding reliable staff has become harder, not easier. When rent rises and housing options shrink, steady work alone isn't enough to keep people here. Teachers, restaurant workers, deckhands, and retail employees are commuting farther—or leaving altogether. A longer season doesn't automatically mean a stronger workforce if the cost of living rises faster than wages.

Infrastructure feels the strain, too. Parking fills up in months that once felt empty. Roads see wear without the funding boosts that tourism taxes once concentrated in summer. Emergency services, waste management, and utilities operate closer to capacity more often. None of this is catastrophic on its own, but together it creates a low-grade pressure locals notice daily. The coast feels busier, louder, and less predictable—especial-

ly to residents who built their lives around the old seasonal ebb and flow.

Still, the new off-season isn't just loss. It has opened doors for some businesses that once couldn't survive on summer alone. Restaurants experiment with winter menus instead of shutting down. Shops host events and workshops year-round. Artists, guides, and outfitters find audiences beyond the traditional tourist window. For families who rely on consistent income, the steadier flow can mean fewer layoffs and more stability—if housing and childcare remain within reach.

The bigger question is whether the region can adapt intentionally instead of reactively. A stretched-out season requires different planning: smarter zoning, workforce housing solutions, realistic parking and traffic strategies, and honest conversations about how much growth each town actually wants.

OFF-SEASON

continued on page 4



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Check out "Diane's Keys to the Coast - Unlocking Life at Sugar Sand in Mexico Beach" on page 6



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Why Most Local Business Websites Don't Actually Bring in Customers—and How CEB Design Studio Fixes That



BY CARA GOODMAN, OWNER OF CEB DESIGN STUDIO

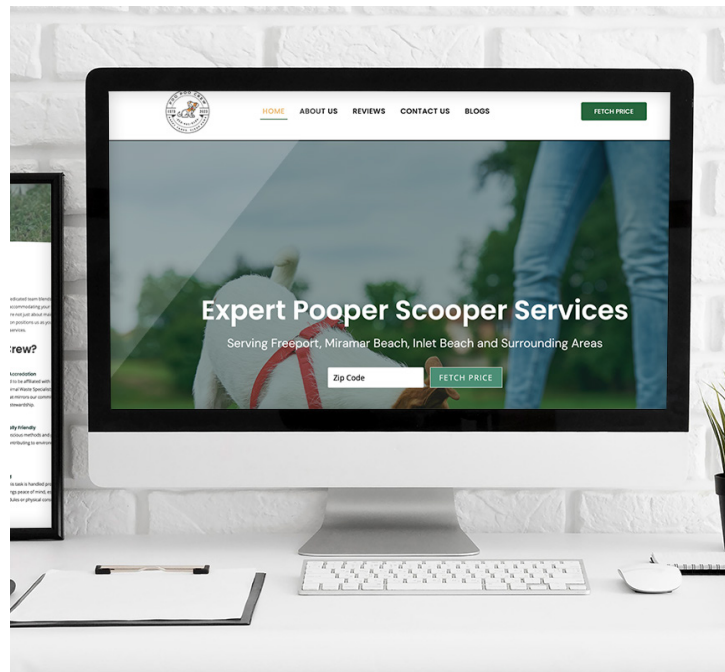
For many local businesses, a website feels like a necessary expense—not a growth tool. It exists, it checks a box, and maybe it looks “nice,” but it doesn’t actually bring in customers. The phone stays quiet, contact forms go unanswered, and owners are left wondering why their online presence isn’t pulling its weight. More often than not, the problem isn’t the business—it’s that the website isn’t built to convert visitors into customers.

One of the biggest issues we see is a lack of clear service offerings. When someone lands on your website, they should instantly understand what you do, who you serve, and how to take the next step. Too many

sites rely on vague taglines, long-winded copy, or cluttered layouts that force visitors to work too hard for answers. Clear, straightforward messaging builds trust quickly—and trust is what keeps people on your site long enough to reach out.

Equally important is making it easy to see the quality of your work or product. People want proof before they commit. Whether that’s a service portfolio, before-and-after examples, or clean, professional product photos, your best work should be front and center. If visitors can’t quickly see what sets you apart—or if they have to dig to find it—they’ll move on. Your website should make that decision easy.

And when it comes to earning confidence, nothing matters more than testimonials. Testimonials are king, especially for local businesses. Real feedback from real customers carries more weight than any headline or sales pitch. Strategic placement of testimonials—near services, contact forms, and calls-to-action—can dramatically increase conversions. They reassure potential customers that others have trusted you and had a great



experience.

At CEB Design Studio, we also understand that a new website is a big investment for a local business. That’s why we simplify the entire process from start to finish. We guide you through content, structure, and decisions without overwhelming you with technical jargon or endless back-and-forth. Our goal is to make the experience clear, efficient, and stress-free—while delivering a site that actually works for your business.

Once your website is live,

we don’t just hand it over and disappear. We provide training so you can confidently update your own content, promotions, and specials—keeping your website fresh and relevant without needing to call a developer every time. For business owners who prefer a more hands-off approach, we also offer ongoing maintenance packages after development. That means updates, security, and small changes are handled for you, so your site continues to perform without added stress.

A great website should sup-

port your business—not complicate it. When your services are clear, your quality is easy to see, your testimonials are front and center, and your site is easy to manage, your website becomes a powerful tool for growth. For local businesses, that first impression often happens online—and making it count can turn visitors into loyal customers.

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Learning on the Menu: West Bay Elementary's Recipe for Real-World Math

By REX REID

At West Bay Elementary, learning doesn't stop at the pages of a textbook; it extends into real life, guided by creativity, collaboration, and community partnerships. Fourth-grade teacher Dawn John recently brought math to life through an innovative lesson that partnered her classroom with Texas Roadhouse, giving students a hands-on way to master adding and subtracting decimals.

Transforming her classroom into a restaurant-style learning space, John used real menus and themed décor provided by Texas Roadhouse to immerse students in authentic problem-solving scenarios. Students calculated meal totals, stayed within set budgets, determined correct change, and even learned how to calculate appropriate tips, skills they will use long after they leave the classroom.

"Understanding how math applies to everyday situations helps students see its value,"



John said. "When they can connect what they're learning to real experiences, it becomes meaningful and exciting."

As a valued community partner, Texas Roadhouse went beyond providing materials. To celebrate the students' hard work, the restaurant treated them to fresh rolls and butter, adding a memorable and rewarding conclusion to the lesson.

The project reflects Bay District Schools' commitment to "Putting the 'A' Back in Bay" by fostering innovative, engaging instruction that prepares students for real-world success. By blending academic rigor with practical application, educators like John are building confidence, critical thinking, and enthusiasm for learning. District leaders say experiences like this demonstrate the pow-

er of community collaboration and creative teaching. When local businesses and schools work together, students benefit from lessons that are not only educational but also inspiring. For the students at West Bay Elementary, this math lesson was more than an assignment; it was a glimpse into how classroom learning connects to everyday life. And for Bay District Schools, it's another

example of how strong partnerships and dedicated teachers are helping elevate education across the community.

OFF-SEASON
continued from page 1

The Forgotten Coast has always prided itself on being different—quieter, slower, more rooted. Preserving that character in a world without a true off-season will take coordination across towns, not just individual fixes.

The off-season may never look the way it once did. But it doesn't have to disappear entirely, either. With thoughtful choices, it can evolve into something that supports local livelihoods without erasing the breathing room that made this coast feel livable in the first place. The challenge now isn't stopping change—it's shaping it, before the quiet months become just another memory locals talk about like an old tide that no longer comes in.

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Chili for a Cause: St. George Island's 43rd Annual Charity Chili Cook-off Heats Up March 1

The community of St. George Island is gearing up for one of its most beloved traditions as the 43rd Annual St. George Island Charity Chili Cookoff returns on Saturday, March 1, 2025. More than just a fun-filled weekend of food and festivities, the Chili Cookoff is a vital fundraiser supporting the St. George Island Volunteer Fire Department, providing a significant portion of the department's annual operating budget. Each year, locals and visitors come together to enjoy the island vibe while ensuring first responders have the resources they need to protect the community.

The weekend kicks off on Friday, February 28, with a four-person best ball scramble golf tournament at the award-winning St. James Golf Course. Golfers can look forward to a \$15,000 hole-in-one prize, awards for the top three teams, and a buffet following



play. Entry is \$100 per player and includes green fees and practice balls, with participants welcome to bring their own foursome or be placed on a team. Space is limited, making early registration essential for this popular kickoff event.

Saturday morning starts with the Red Pepper 5K Run, launching at 8:00 a.m. in front

of Paddy's Raw Bar. Runners of all ages are invited to participate, with entry fees set at \$25 for adults and \$20 for youth 18 and under. All participants receive a commemorative t-shirt, and awards will be presented to overall winners, top St. George Island residents, and age-group finishers. Local businesses can also get involved by sponsoring

the race, with logos featured on the back of the official race shirts.

The heart of the weekend is the ICS Chili Cookoff Competition, where talented chili cooks battle for a chance to qualify for the World Championship Chili Cookoff. Spectators can watch the action unfold—and sample the goods—to see who

claims bragging rights for the best chili. From 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., the lighthouse parking lot will also host the Chili Sale, offering chili, chili dogs, hotdogs, and a chance to meet local firefighters and check out the fire trucks up close.

Adding to the excitement is the Chili Cookoff Online Auction, running from February 28 through March 6. Hosted online, the auction features everything from custom t-shirts and beach baskets to local artwork, jewelry, and even week-long vacation home stays. With spirited bidding and plenty of one-of-a-kind items, the auction has become a favorite tradition in its own right.

Whether you attend in person, bid online, or make a donation, every contribution helps keep the St. George Island Volunteer Fire Department strong—making this island tradition one that truly warms hearts.

Forgotten Coast Fitness Racing to Raise Final \$120,000 to Open New Eastpoint Facility by August 2026

Forgotten Coast Fitness and Wellness Center is racing against the clock to raise \$120,000 in remaining funds needed to complete its new Eastpoint facility. Following an unexpected change to the non-profit's lease, the organization must vacate its current location by September 2, 2026, making the completion of the new facility essential to continued operations.

The organization's goal is to open the new fitness center by August 15, 2026, allowing time to transition members and equipment before the move-out deadline. Funds must be raised in the coming months for the interior construction buildout.

Private Sector Support Powers the Project

The relocation effort was made possible by an anonymous \$1 million building donation from a St. George Island resident, providing Forgotten Coast Fitness with a brand new

8,000-square-foot facility in Eastpoint. Since the donation, a coalition of local businesses has contributed more than \$200,000 in in-kind labor, materials, and equipment. This project, valued at over \$1.3 million, is being completed entirely through private philanthropy and corporate support. Notably, no government funding or taxpayer dollars have been used.

In-kind contributors include Construction & Design: Galloway Construction, CONN and Architects; Systems & Infrastructure: Cates Electric, Thompson Total Air Solutions, Keith McNeill Plumbing Contracting Inc.; and Supplies & Professional Services: Bayside Lumber and Building Supply, ACE Hardware, Sellers Beyond Title.

Cash Funding Still Needed

Local businesses, including Waters Street Seafood and St. George Island MedSpa and Wellness, are among the first



corporations to pledge financial support. Additional contributions are urgently needed to close the remaining \$120,000 gap.

"This is a true community mission," said Kara Landiss, board member of Forgotten Coast Fitness and Wellness Center and a Naumann Group Realtor. "Local businesses and corporate partners have stepped up in a huge way, and now we need the community's help to finish the facility and open on schedule. This gym supports seniors, families, and young people, and it plays a real role in keeping Franklin County active and healthy."

Lives Changed Through Fitness

For long-time member Sandra, the fitness center's future is personal. "I joined after I fell and broke my femur and ribs. Working out here helped me regain my mobility, balance, and independence. This place gave me my freedom back, and I know it's done the same for so many others."

Serving Residents and Visitors Across Franklin County

The new Eastpoint facility will serve as a regional hub for residents of Apalachicola, St. George Island, Carrabelle, and Eastpoint. The center will offer

state-of-the-art fitness equipment, locker rooms, showers, and 24-hour access, with the capacity to grow alongside the community.

Media Access and Donor Opportunities

Forgotten Coast Fitness welcomes media coverage and is prepared to provide tours of the facility currently under construction; interviews with members like Sandra, board members or other community partners; and visuals including high-resolution photos and video footage for print and television.

Donations and corporate sponsorships are needed now to complete construction and open by August. For more information, to donate, or to learn about corporate sponsorship opportunities, visit <https://www.forgottencoastfitness.org> or contact: Jim Jones | bod@forgottencoastfitness.com

Keys to the Coast:

Unlocking Life at Sugar Sand in Mexico Beach



By DIANE PEEVY

There are places along the Gulf Coast that feel discovered rather than developed. Sugar Sand, a new community set quietly along the shoreline of Mexico Beach, is one of them. Behind its gated entrance lies a community shaped by space, serenity, and an unmistakable sense of ease—where the Gulf is not a backdrop, but a constant presence.

Community / Setting

Sugar Sand unfolds across wide, sugar-white beaches and preserved dunes that soften the horizon and quiet the senses. The landscape feels intentional and untouched, offering a rare balance between privacy and openness. Streets are calm, homes are thoughtfully spaced, and the sound of the surf carries easily on the breeze. This is a place where mornings arrive gently and days feel unhurried by design.

Homes / Real Estate

Homes within Sugar Sand



are custom-crafted and coastal in spirit, designed to complement the natural setting rather than compete with it. Elevated construction and generous proportions provide sweeping Gulf views and a sense of permanence. Over the past year, home values have generally ranged from the mid-\$2 millions to just over \$4 million, with average sales prices settling in the low-to-mid \$3 million range. Inventory remains limited, reinforcing Sugar Sand's status as a discreet, high-end enclave rather than a high-turnover market.

Amenities

Luxury here is quiet and intentional. Residents enjoy private beach access that leads directly to uncrowded shoreline, golf-cart-friendly streets that encourage a slower pace, and a Gulf-front community pool positioned for effortless

afternoons under open skies. A private fitness facility and shared gathering spaces add convenience while preserving the neighborhood's sense of calm and exclusivity.

Lifestyle

Life at Sugar Sand is defined less by schedules and more by moments. Morning walks along the water as the sun rises low over the Gulf. Afternoons shaped by salt air, quiet conversations, and long stretches of time that feel entirely your own. Evenings close with sunsets that linger—soft, expansive, and deeply grounding. Mexico Beach maintains its authentic, understated charm, allowing residents to enjoy coastal living without distraction or excess.

Why Buyers Choose This Community

Buyers choose Sugar Sand

for what it offers—and what it preserves. Low density. Architectural integrity. A commitment to the natural environment. It attracts those who value discretion, beauty, and a coastal lifestyle that feels enduring rather than fleeting.

If you're drawn to the understated elegance and quiet luxury of Sugar Sand, The Peevy Team offers thoughtful guidance rooted in decades of local knowledge. Their approach is personal, informed, and centered on helping you discover where you truly belong along Florida's Forgotten Coast.

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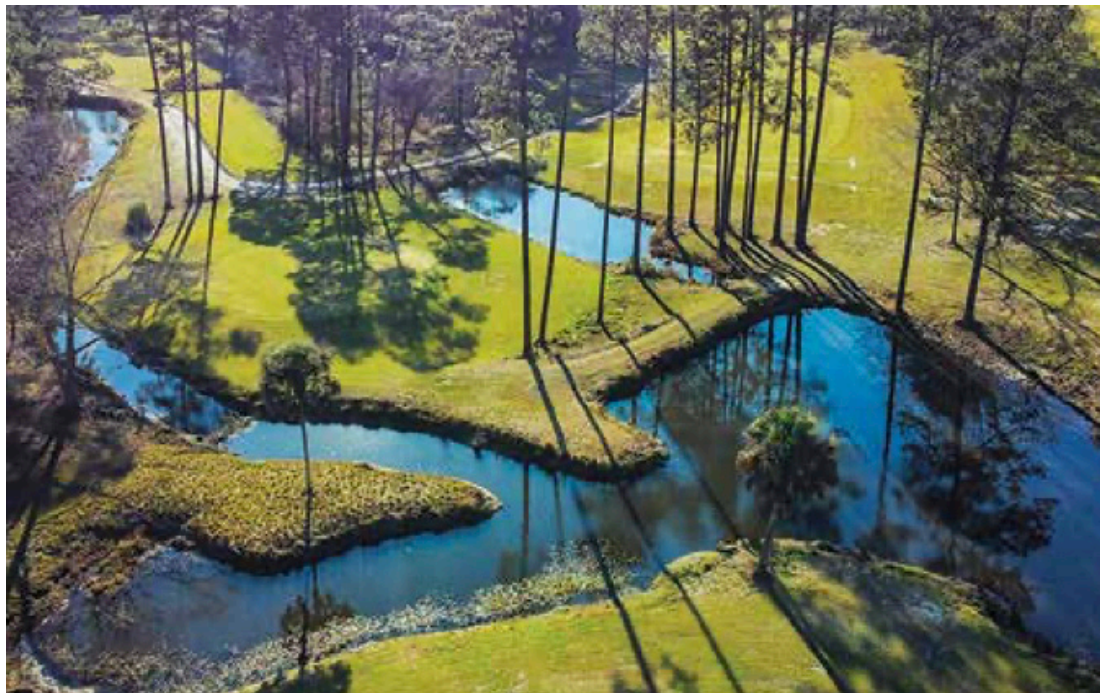


Is LIV Dead?

By Alan M. Watson, President, GOLF+ PCB

The title says it all. I've been playing golf for forty-five years, and yes, I've never made a hole-in-one. Of course, I've come close a few times—very close a couple of times. I've holed out for eagle from the fairway, chipped in around the green, and even driven the green on a par 4. But no one ever asks about those very minor accomplishments. The one metric that even non-golfers seem to know about and ask is, "How many holes-in-one have you made?"

So now that we've gotten that out of the way, let's talk about why it matters—or more appropriately, why it doesn't. Thank goodness a hole-in-one isn't a gauge of skill or the only reason we play the sport; otherwise, I would have stopped years ago. Why does a hole-in-one matter? Truthfully, it doesn't, but it is very cool. I was there a couple of years ago when a friend made one on number four at Highland Oaks (Marshwood) in



Dothan, Alabama. I still remember the shot, the way it hit and backed up into the hole. I remember the screaming and the excitement. It was electric. It was a lot of fun to be a part of and to witness. Now, I sincerely doubt that the event will be recorded on his grave marker or mentioned in his eulogy; however, as golf events go, it was great. And I

was so proud and happy for him and glad that I got to see it.

But maybe—just maybe—the mighty hole-in-one doesn't matter. I think more golfers consider handicap the ultimate measuring stick when it comes to skill. You see videos, books, and magazine articles about "How to Break 90," "How to Break 80," and the Holy Grail, "How to Break 70."

Most golfers would much rather improve their scores consistently than make a random hole-in-one. Some golfers even consider it an amazing day when they play all 18 holes with just one ball rather than losing a few sleeves like most rounds. Sure, there are hole-in-one contests at most charity golf scrambles, but how often does anyone cash in? Not often, from

what I've seen. The long drive contest and the closest to the pin are much better received and accessible to all golfers. If I could shoot around par for the rest of my life or make a hole-in-one each year, I would take the low scoring average for sure. I wonder what you would do.

Plus, the worst part of making a hole-in-one is that the reward—or rather the punishment—is that the person who did the deed must buy everyone a round of drinks. Seems silly to me. You make the shot of your life, and it costs you a bar tab. That never happens when you shoot the low score and win the match—quite the opposite, usually. So I'll just keep trying to beat my best score, or maybe my last score, and leave the magic-trick shots to someone else. After all, I've gone forty-five golfing years without one so far, so I'm pretty sure I can equal that feat for the next forty-five. Fairways and Greens!



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Sports

Back on the Water: A Promising Season Along Apalachicola and the Forgotten Coast

There's a renewed sense of optimism along Florida's Forgotten Coast this season, especially surrounding the long-awaited reopening of Apalachicola Bay to oyster harvesting. After a five-year closure aimed at restoring depleted oyster populations, limited harvesting resumed January 1. For locals whose families have worked these waters for generations, the reopening isn't just economic — it's deeply personal. While strict regulations and shorter seasons remain in place, the return of oyster boats to the bay signals a hopeful step forward for one of Florida's most historic seafood communities.

Inshore fishing has also been steady and productive across the bay systems and surrounding grass flats. Redfish are tailing in shallow water on calm mornings, and speckled trout have been active along drop-offs and deeper holes as temperatures fluctuate. Guides report solid action around oyster



bars and creek mouths, particularly on moving tides. With clearer winter water, anglers are finding success using natural bait and soft plastics worked slowly along the bottom.

Up the river, the Apalachicola River continues to provide dependable freshwater and brackish fishing opportunities. As water temperatures begin their gradual climb toward spring, striped bass and hy-

brids are becoming more active, and bass fishing is picking up in slack-water areas and near structure. The river remains a favorite for those looking to escape windier coastal conditions while still enjoying a productive day on the water.

Offshore, weather windows have been the deciding factor. When seas lay down, anglers heading into Gulf waters have reported catches of red grou-

per, vermilion snapper (bee-liners), and triggerfish in moderate depths. Though winter fronts have limited some trips, captains say the bite has been solid when conditions cooperate. As always, fishermen are encouraged to check current regulations through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission before heading out, as seasonal rules and bag limits remain closely managed.

Local bait shops and marinas say they're already seeing increased traffic as both residents and visitors take advantage of cooler temperatures and lighter seasonal crowds. From St. George Island to Eastpoint and Port St. Joe, early mornings are once again marked by the hum of boat motors and the glow of running lights heading toward the horizon. Whether casting from a skiff in the bay, wading the flats, or running offshore when the Gulf allows, one thing remains certain: along the Forgotten Coast, fishing isn't just a pastime — it's a way of life that continues to endure and adapt with each changing season.

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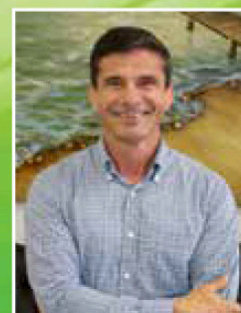
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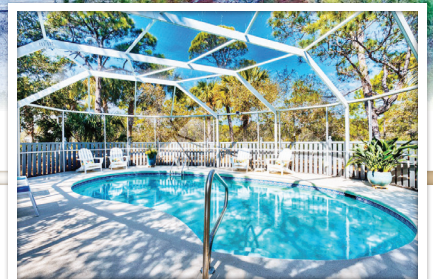
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Cold Weather Isn't Over Yet for North Florida



BY LAUREN GOLDSBY

As February settles in, cold weather can still surprise North Florida gardeners. While recent warm days may feel like an early start to spring, late-winter cold snaps are a normal part of our weather pattern in the Florida Panhandle. This time of year often brings large temperature swings as cold fronts move through the region. Plants may begin breaking dormancy during warm spells, only to be exposed to freezing temperatures when the next front arrives.

These conditions can affect landscapes differently depending on location. Areas closer to the coast or large bodies of water tend to stay warmer over-

night, while inland and northern parts of the county often experience colder temperatures. Light frosts around 32°F usually cause minimal damage to most established landscape plants. Greater concern comes when temperatures drop below about 28°F for several hours, which is considered a hard freeze. Hard freezes can damage tender growth, flowers, and shallow root systems, even on otherwise healthy plants.

If a hard freeze is forecast for your area, preparation can make a difference. UF/IFAS recommends focusing on protecting plant roots, which are more vulnerable to cold than above-ground growth. If soil is dry, watering earlier in the day can help retain heat, but avoid leaving water on leaves overnight. Cover sensitive plants before temperatures drop, making sure covers reach the ground to trap warmth from the soil. If wind or plant size limits coverage, prioritize protecting the lower portion of the plant.

It's also important to keep



perspective. Many plants in North Florida have evolved to handle short periods of cold and have been gradually acclimating throughout the winter. Temporary damage to flowers or new growth doesn't always mean a plant is lost. In many cases, leaves and stems remain healthy and will recover as temperatures warm.

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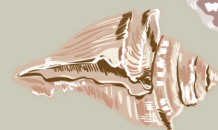
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MAR 20-29 FORGOTTEN COAST EN PLEIN AIR — PORT ST. JOE / GULF COUNTY

MAR 20 OPENING LUNCHEON (FORGOTTEN COAST EN PLEIN AIR) — JOE CENTER FOR THE ARTS,
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MAR 23 MEXICO BEACH ARTIST DEMONSTRATIONS (EN PLEIN AIR) — MEXICO BEACH WELCOME
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Tag, You're It! Let's Talk About Skin Tags



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

I often get asked about skin tags by patients in the clinic. What are they? Where do they come from? What is the cause? How can I get rid of them? This article will help address these questions and hopefully give clarity about these common growths.

The medical term for skin tags is Acrochordons. They are benign pedunculated growths on the skin that are commonly found on sites of friction. These areas can include the neck, armpits, eyelids, and groin. The causes of skin tags are multifactorial and can include genetics, hormonal



changes (pregnancy), insulin resistance, diabetes, obesity, and friction. They generally do not have any symptoms, but can become inflamed and irritated by rubbing on clothes and jewelry.

Skin tags will not cause harm, but they can be seen as cosmetically displeasing and can become irritated and inflamed. Please do not try to remove skin tags at home or buy over-the-counter products to try

and get rid of them. At home removal can lead to infections, inflammation, scarring, hyperpigmentation, and incomplete removal. In addition, the larger the skin tag, the more it will bleed during removal, so you want to make sure this is done in a medical setting. Also, there are certain skin cancers that can look similar to a skin tag, so you want to ensure that you are not mistaking a malignant growth for a benign one.

Skin tags can be removed easily by your dermatology provider with liquid nitrogen, electrocautery, or a simple snip/shave removal. I hope this article helped to answer some common questions about skin tags, and as always, please reach out to your medical provider if you have any questions or concerns regarding your skin health.



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Franklin County

Events & Activities



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HCOLA 23rd History Festival February 21-22

H'COLA's Annual African-American History Festival will be held February 21-22. This event is a celebration of African-American history, life, music, and culture. This outdoor, family-oriented event is filled with varied artists and entertainers, children's activities, arts, history, education, health & wellness, and more. There will be live entertainment throughout the two-day event.

Camp Gordon Johnston Presents African American Service Member Exhibit

Camp Gordon Johnston WWII Museum in Carrabelle is presenting a special exhibit in recognition of Black History Month honoring the service of African-American servicemembers in WWII. This exhibit will open Tuesday, February 3, 2026 and will be on display at the museum until Saturday, February 28, 2026. The museum is open every Tuesday through Saturday from 11 am to 5 pm ET and there is no charge for admission.

44th SGI Chili Charity Cookoff March 7

The St. George Island Regional Charity Chili Cook-off & Auction will be held Saturday, March 7. In addition to the main chili cooking event, this family-friendly weekend event features a Golf tournament, a Red Pepper Run the morning of March 7 and an online auction. During the chili cookoff, there will be food vendors and lots of musical entertainment. The chili cookoff is the primary fundraising event for the St. George Island Volunteer Fire Department (SGIVFD).

Eastpoint Charity Rib Cookoff March 22

The 26th Annual Eastpoint Volunteer Fire Department Charity Rib Cookoff will be held Saturday, March 22 at Vroom Park in Eastpoint. BBQ dinners will be served from 11am.

Visit
Floridasforgottencoast.com
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on all Franklin
County events
and activities

Carrabelle Culture Crawl March 28

The Carrabelle Culture Crawl, hosted by the Carrabelle History Museum, will be held on Saturday, March 28. The free celebration of art, music, history, food, and fun in the heart of downtown Carrabelle, and will take place on Saturday, March 28 from 10 am to 3 pm. The event will feature live music, food, art and the popular Fishy Fashion show.



Mardi Gras Barkus Festival February 27-28

The Mystic Krewe of Salty Barkers will celebrate Mardi Gras Apalach-style on February 27-28, 2026, at Riverfront Park in Apalachicola. The 2026 theme is "Under the Sea." This beloved coastal tradition features a lively street festival and the 15th Annual Mardi Gras

Barkus Parade, a parade of costumed dogs and their people. Guests are invited to dive into the fun in festive costumes, creative floats, wagging tails, and plenty of local flair. All sea lovers and their loyal sea pups are invited to swim by and enjoy the spectacle.



Nationally recognized Forgotten Coast Plein Air Painting Event March 20-29

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of investment quality art continues to be the trademark of this 10-day festival. The 2026 annual Forgotten Coast en Plein air painting event will be held March 20-29 throughout several venues along Florida's Forgotten Coast.

Enter to Win a Coastal Getaway

The Franklin County Tourist Development Council launched its first getaway campaign this month with the rollout of the 2026 "Come to the Coast Outdoor Getaway" which runs from February 16 through April 1. Sign up for a chance to win this curated vacation featuring a 2-night stay on St. George Island, evening meals at area restaurants, a kayak rental and tour of Franklin County's two historic lighthouses. Learn more and sign up for a chance to win at Floridasforgottencoast.com.

Franklin County Events/Activities

Feb 7 Crooked River Park Fest
Feb 1 SGI Full Moon Climb
Feb 1 Leon Anderson Concert
Feb 3-28 African American Exhibit
Feb 7, 21 Carrabelle Farmers' Market
Feb 7 History Talk
Feb 7 - SGI ShrimpFest
Feb 7 - Billy Rigsby Band Concert
Feb 12 - FSU Marine Lab Scuba Talk
Feb 14 Echo Valley Concert
Feb 14, 28 Apalachicola Market
Feb 21-22 African American Festival
Feb 22 - Anita Graef Concert
Feb 25 - Daniel Oluwabusuyi Concert
Feb 26-28 - Panhandle Players
Feb 27 - Barkus Parade & Festival
March 1 Holly Audrey Williams
March 1 Crooked River Climb
March 3 Cape St. George Climb
March 7 SGI Charity Chili Cookoff
March 14, 28 Apalachicola Market
March 7, 21 Carrabelle Market
March 8 Ilse Newell Concert
March 14 CGJ Parade
March 14 History Talk on Piracy
March 20-29 Plein Air Event
March 22 Charity Rib Cookoff
March 28 Carrabelle Culture Crawl

**Sign up to receive monthly
Franklin County event and
news at Floridasforgotten-
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Wellness

Liking Your Partner Matters More Than Loving Them



BY JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PHD

Loving relationships are essential for human well-being and happiness at all ages. In fact, the quality of our relationships determines the quality of our lives. According to Robert Waldinger, director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, “good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period”.

A variety of social connections and close relationships can produce these health and well-being benefits. It's not the number of family connections, close friends, or even whether you are in a committed romantic relationship that matters. If you cultivate a few warm, satisfying, loving relationships, you'll reap the benefits of a happy, healthier, longer life.

Loving-Liking Connection Promotes Well-Being

For the people who choose to be married or live in a committed relationship, the relationship-life happiness connection is more complicated. The quality of this primary relationship has the greatest impact on the quality of their life. And it requires both liking and loving. A satisfying love relationship where partners both love and like each other makes people happy, bolsters their ability to deal with outside stressors, and provides protection for their physical and mental health as they age. But beware. A dissatisfying, loving relationship has the opposite effect.

Dissatisfying Relationships Toxic to Well-Being

Marriages with high levels of unresolved, hostile conflict or those that lack intimacy, trust, and commitment erode the physical and psychological well-being of partners involved. Or put another way, toxic or loveless relationships

keep people unhappy and unhealthy. Period. Some (like me) say this is worse than getting divorced. Therefore, one of the most important skillsets people can learn is how to prevent negativity or indifference from eroding their intimate connection. This helps protect what was once a warm, loving bond.

Key Building Block More “Liking” Not more “Loving”

Ironically, the key ingredient for maintaining a happy relationship involves more “liking” not more “loving”. The foundation of any loving, committed relationship is the couple's friendship, or how much they like each other. This friendship forms the foundation of what Gottman calls the Sound Relationship House and allows the relationship to stand firm when inevitable conflicts and stressors arise.

Specifically, the foundational level of the Sound Relationship House model accentuates three important aspects of friendship and liking in a romantic relationship. Build Love Maps: A love map contains the intimate information you know about your partner that you use as a guide to your partner's inner world. What are your partner's likes and dislikes? Who is your partner's best friend? How do they prefer to relax after a tense day? In an ideal relationship, you and your partner know each other better than anyone else.

Share Fondness & Admiration: Sharing your fondness and admiration for your partner involves vocalizing the personal characteristics you appreciate. This can be something as simple as saying “thank you”. Or you could comment on your partner's good deeds to a neighbor, creative problem solving, intelligence, or good looks. Let your partner know you are proud of them, especially in front of others. Compliments mean the most when they come from the person most important to us.

Turn Toward Each other Instead of Away: When partners need attention, sup-



port, or comfort from each other, they say or do something to let each other know about their need. Gottman calls this gesture or request a “bid” for attention, affection, humor, or support. Turning toward your partner involves giving an affirming response to their bid.

To experience the health and well-being benefits of a romantic, committed relationship, you must keep the sentiment of your relationship positive and the foundation of liking and friendship strong. This requires that you continually improve your Love Maps: Make time to connect and truly listen to each other and respond in ways that show that you care about each other's interests and concerns.

Revisit the reasons you like and admire your partner: Think about your partner's positive characteristics. Then look for opportunities to articulate the big and little reasons you appreciate your partner. You could start by writing a love letter or Valentine that includes the top 5 reasons you admire your partner.

Respond favorably to your partner's needs:

To create a safe space where you and your partner both feel you can express yourselves and meet each other's needs, be sure to “turn toward” each other when the other makes a bid

for attention or support.

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 the Managing Partner at Amity Mediation Workshop, a mediation practice specializing

in “friendly divorce” mediation and psycho-educational couples counseling. Dr. Jamie speaks frequently on relationship topics and authors the blog “Work it Out”. You can find her online at amitymediationworkshop.com.

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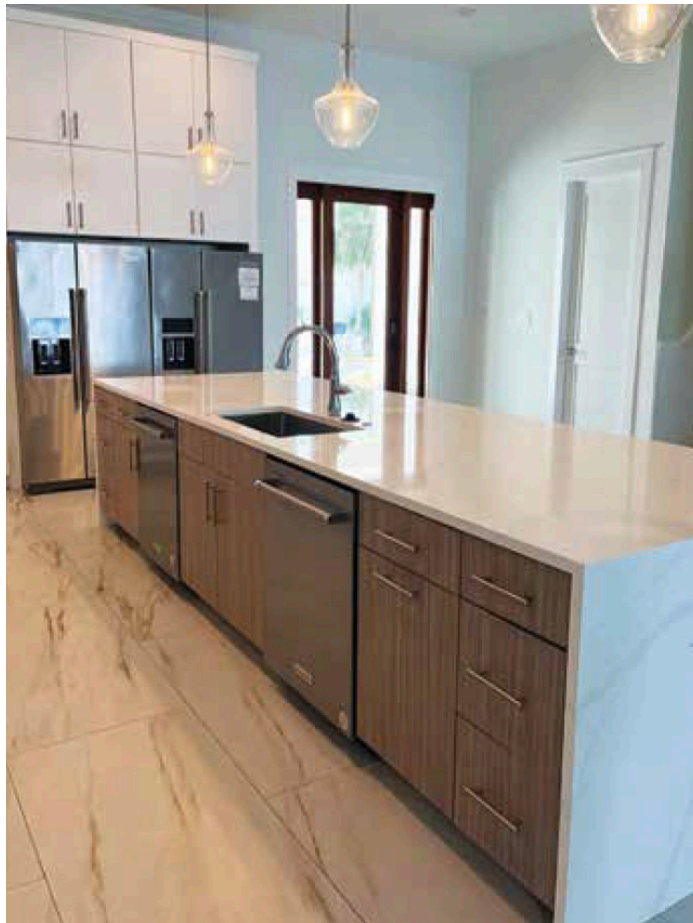
The most popular door style in cabinetry right now is a flat panel door style. It is modern, functional, chic and the variety of colors and materials this door style comes with is almost endless. The hottest trend right now is quarter sawn white oak, but it is also beautiful in Oak, Maple, Knotty Alder, Hickory and Cherry and comes in a wide range of beautiful stains. Along with a solid wood, the flat panel door style is available as a acrylic, veneer, painted HDF or MDF, laminate, textured TFL, matte foils, wired gloss foils, and laminate, all extremely durable doors. If you are looking for something light and modern for your coastal home, the alabaster stain is a beautiful light stain. It is available in all the solid woods and a veneer.

If you would like a laminate door or a textured laminate, White Barn and White Cypress are light color door style with a soft grain. For a Modern Mediterranean look a warm wood is a good choice whether you choose a veneer or a solid wood. For a strong modern look, an acrylic or an exotic veneer are good options. If you have been searching Pinterest and other resources for a modern door style you may have come across a style with a strong straight grain. To get that look with no variance in the wood grain, a laminate or a veneer is going to be the best choice.

If you are interested in any of these door styles, stop by the Granite Plus showroom and a project manager will assist with designing your new modern space. We offer a wide range of flat panel door styles for all bud-

gets and look forward to seeing you! Granite Plus is located at 17801 Ashley Drive Panama City Beach, FL 32413. You can give us a call at (850) 236-6363 or just stop by our showroom during business hours. We are open Monday - Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Right: Design by Dura Supreme Cabinetry with two custom colors, and Dura Supreme door styles Chroma and Louvered. Visit www.DuraSupreme.com for more information. Granite Plus is your local dealer for Dura Supreme Cabinetry.



Above: Design by Granite Plus. Painted flat panel door on the perimeter. Island is Dura Supreme Textured TFL.

Right: Painted door style with top knobs bit pull in honey bronze. Bath design by Sylvia Ignas.



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Motorization & Smart Window Coverings: Convenience, Comfort, and Control

BY DONNA GODWIN, OWNER OF
MADE IN THE SHADE

Motorized window coverings are no longer a luxury reserved for high-end homes—they're quickly becoming a practical, everyday upgrade that adds comfort, safety, and smart functionality to modern living. Whether you're building a new home, renovating, or simply upgrading existing window treatments, motorization offers benefits that go far beyond convenience.

What Is Motorized Window Coverings?

Motorized window coverings use a discreet internal motor to raise, lower, tilt, or draw shades, blinds, or drapery at the touch of a button. They can be operated by remote control, wall switch, smartphone app, voice assistant, or automated schedules. Motorization is available across many styles, including roller shades, cellular shades,

woven woods, Roman shades, and drapery.

Auto Wand: Simple Motorization Without Remotes

One of the most popular entry points into motorization is the auto wand. An auto wand replaces traditional cords or chains with a sleek, rechargeable wand attached directly to the shade. With a simple touch or gentle pull, the shade moves smoothly up or down.

Benefits of the auto wand include:

- No dangling cords (making it safer for homes with children and pets)
- Easy operation without remotes or apps
- Clean, modern appearance
- Rechargeable battery with long life
- Ideal for everyday windows and light-use spaces

Auto wands are a great option for homeowners who want motorization without the complexity of full smart-home integration.

Smart Hubs & Smart Home Integration

For those looking to take things further, motorized window coverings can connect to smart hubs that integrate seamlessly with today's smart homes. Using a smart hub allows your window treatments to communicate with systems like lighting, thermostats, and voice assistants.

With smart hub integration, you can:

- Control shades from your phone, even when away from home
- Use voice commands like "Open the living room shades"
- Create schedules for morning light or evening

privacy

- Automate shades based on sunlight, temperature, or time of day
- Improve energy efficiency by reducing heat gain and loss

This level of automation not only enhances daily comfort but also contributes to lower energy costs and increased home value.

Hardwiring for Motorization in New Construction

If you're building a new home or doing a major remodel, hardwiring motorized shades is one of the smartest decisions you can make. Hardwired motorization connects shades directly to the home's electrical system, eliminating the need for battery recharging.

Advantages of hardwiring include:

- No batteries to replace or

recharge

- Cleanest, most seamless installation
- Ideal for large windows, multiple shades, or high-use areas
- Long-term reliability and performance
- Increased resale appeal for future buyers

Planning for motorization during construction ensures optimal placement, hidden wiring, and maximum design flexibility.

The Bottom Line

Motorized window coverings combine style, safety, energy efficiency, and modern convenience. Whether you choose a simple auto wand, full smart-home integration, or hardwired solutions for new construction, motorization transforms the way you interact with your home—making everyday living easier, smarter, and more comfortable.



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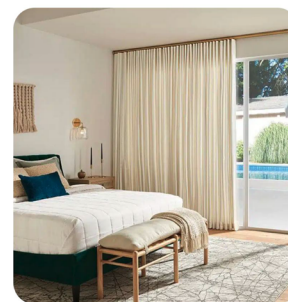
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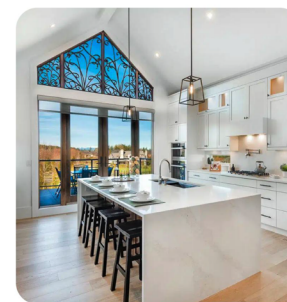
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Sean of the South: Funny Valentine



BY SEAN DIETRICH

It was a Wednesday. I know this because on Wednesdays the Baptist church had family suppers.

And although I wasn't exactly a faithful Sunday church-goer, I was a devout mid-week supper-eater.

That night, I stood in line behind a girl, holding my plate. She was funny. She had so much personality she hummed like a neon light.

Later, I sat beside her during service. That week, there was an out-of-town preacher. The kind with big hair, sweat rags, and nice shoes. He invited people to walk the aisle to get born

again.

My pal, Craig—who lost his religion every football season—recommitted for his thirtieth time. He said he felt something in the air that night. I did too.

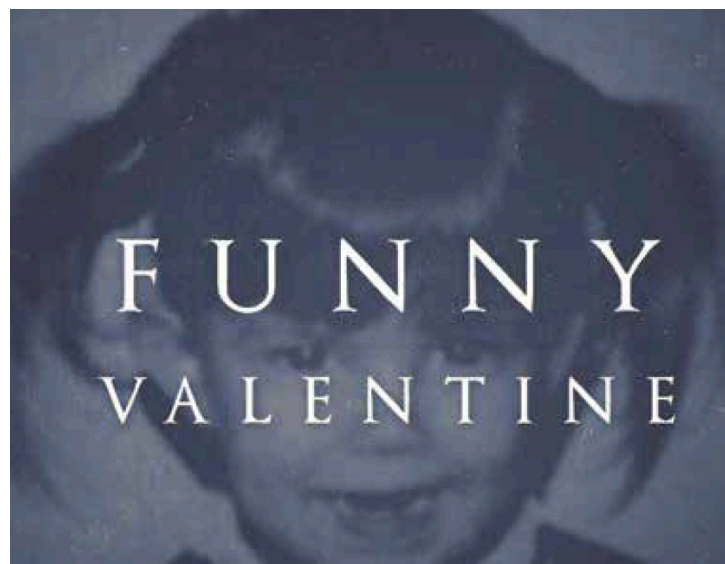
When service let out, the girl wasn't ready to go home. Neither was I. So, I suggested we drive. She liked the idea—though I'll never know why.

I pointed my vehicle east, we headed for nowhere, traveling as slow as my engine would run. The miles of pines made her more chatty. She propped her feet on my dashboard and let the words roll.

She talked about things. About how she saw the world, about her favorite kind of mustard, about religion, and the proper way to eat fried chicken.

I gave one-syllable responses because I didn't want to interrupt. She had a voice that sounded like Escambia County in June.

By the time we landed in



Port Saint Joe, her one-sided conversation had faded to a stop. I looked at her. She was sleeping.

So, I pulled into a gas station and got lukewarm coffee.

On the ride back, I thought long and hard. Not just about the sleeping girl, but about how I'd gotten a late start in life. And about how my childhood was a pitiful one.

So pathetic, in fact, it embar-

rassed me to talk about—kind of like I'm doing now.

When my father died, he left a shadow on me, one I didn't think would ever lift.

But that night, something did lift. I was someone else. I was the me I'd always known I should've been. Not the quiet young man who was too serious for baseball.

This girl. She'd done it to me without even trying. And even

if I never saw her again, I was grateful for her.

When I arrived at her house, it was three in the morning. I walked her to the door. I hugged her and whispered, "Maybe I'll see you again, sometime."

She said, "What'n the hell's maybe? 'Course we'll see each other, dummy."

Every good thing in my life can be traced back to that night—the evening I became who I am. With her I have everything. Without her I'm a blind man.

That was the Wednesday I got born again.



Personality, Party and Performance How do You Vote?

BY REX REID

It's election season again, and roughly fifty percent of the people will not even bother to show up in November. It's even worse when you consider only twenty five percent turnout in some municipal and primary elections.

Why is that? Well, IMHO, it has more to do with those that do show up. Than it does with who the candidate is. Trump and maybe a few governors like DeSantis being the exception.

Sounds crazy but it all centers around the three P's, Personality, Party and Performance.

Ask your average voter why they voted for someone in a city or county wide race and you get one of the following.

You know Jack Hammer went to the same High School I did, and his father owns the pizza place on the corner.

Well, he goes to my church. Yeah, I think he might be running around on his wife but not everybody is perfect.

Or one of my personal favorites. He knocked on my



door and said vote for me.

Then comes the party people, and they might even be the best of all.

Well, he comes to our meetings every now and again. He even listens to me when I talk to him.

Now, sadly, in Bay County that is somewhat of a rarity, but it shouldn't be the gold standard.

Now imagine any of these personality or party voters talking with a perspective/performance voter. Who thinks it is all a waste of time in whole or in part because they see these people defending the indefensible.

I assume it goes something like this.

Mr. P2: Hey bud, you really need to vote for our guy. He is

in the right party; he coaches Little League, and he is nice to old people.

Mr. Performance: Really, let's start with the last one. You mean the same guy or gal in our case who voted to cut taxes for commercial developers by as much as ninety seven percent. All but ensuring our local special assessment goes on forever.

Which causes elderly people on a fixed income to have to choose between staying in their dream home or buying their medicine?

You say he is also a member of your party, right? I thought your party believed in smaller government. Yet you are asking me to vote for someone who wants to revive a failed relic of the U.S.S.R. e.g. public transportation.

That will end up soaking the residents of PCB and Bay County for tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars. When all we really need is some outside the box thinking.

Mr. P2: Ok, you tell me how you fix the traffic problem in

season Mr. I Don't Even Vote.

Mr. Performance: Simple, instead of buying a fleet of "autonomous" vehicles. How about we either use the Bay Way buses that are being sidelined (failed system close by) or our school buses.

Mr. P2: And just how would that work.

Mr. Performance: We really only need relief between 3 pm and 9 pm in season. Run either at thirty-minute intervals from Laketown to the traffic circle on Hwy 79 and the problem is solved.

With the school buses you create some nostalgia for parents and children alike and you already have the buses and the drivers that are off during the summer. Problem solved and it didn't cost a hundred million dollars.

Mr. P2: That all sounds good, but I am sticking with my guy.

Mr. Performance: Color me surprised, and I am guessing you are still confused as to why I don't bother to vote?



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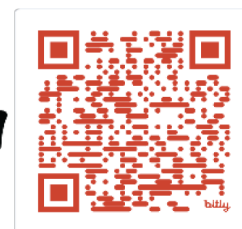
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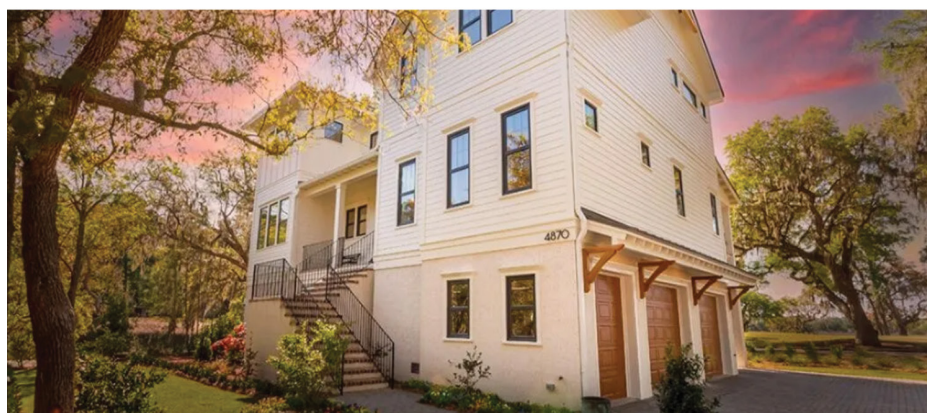


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