

**FREE!**

# Gulf Coast *Snow* BIRDS

A Winter Visitor  
Publication  
Spring 2021

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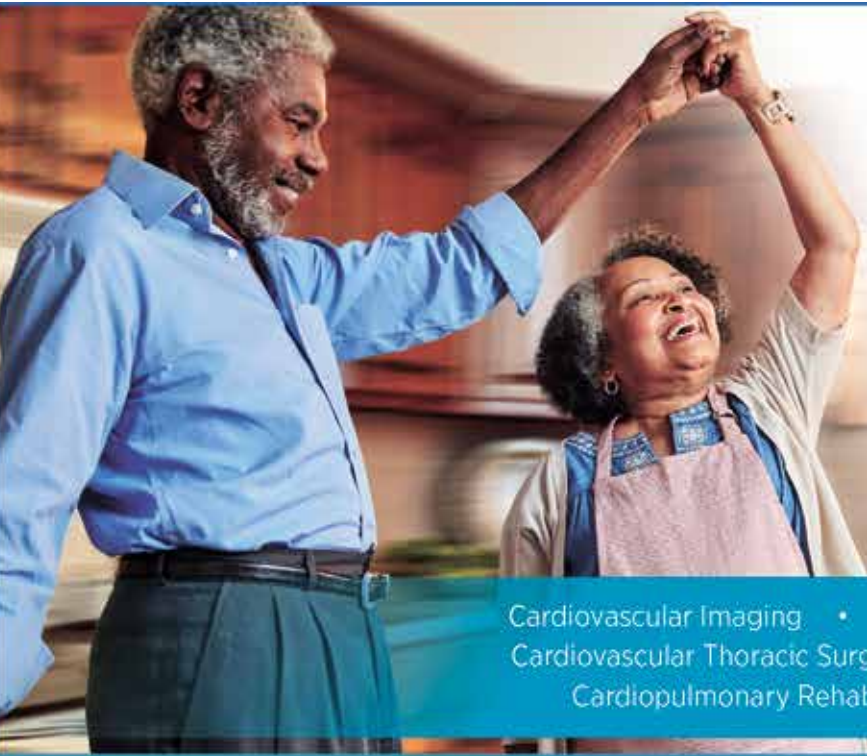
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


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### ON THE COVER

Kim and Kurt Wheat retired some three years ago and since have spent their winter season among new friends at Destin West RV Resort on Okaloosa Island, Fla. They enjoyed their stay so much they've already reserved for the 2022 season.

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**Gulf Coast**  
*Snow* **BIRDS**



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# Welcome!

This time last year my family had big plans.

My husband, adult daughter (27 at the time) and I were taking a long-planned two-week trip to Europe with stops in Germany and Austria, Paris and Normandy and finally London with a side trip to tour the Wimbledon stadium.

Sigh. Late in 2019 one of the international business cable channels mentioned a new virus in China and that it was spreading quickly. My heart sunk. Just a couple of weeks later our trip was off and soon tourism ground to a halt.

My husband and daughter were both able to telecommute (still are) and we mostly stayed home if we went anywhere we always wore a mask, dined outside or ordered pickup. I had no idea if I was going to be able to publish this magazine this season but enough businesses came forth to advertise and we pulled it off.

Soon I am scheduled to get my first shot and my husband expects his in another month or two. Our summer plans are a road trip for his 60th birthday to Tennessee and Kentucky where he can tour a half dozen or more whiskey distilleries. My plan is to retrace my mother's roots in Louisville, Kentucky, where she met my dad at 16, married and soon moved south.

I hope you all have a safe trip home. We are soon launching an Instagram page and hope you will follow us there and on Facebook. The best way to ensure you receive our latest news is to sign up for our e-newsletter "Seasons."

Safe travels to you all. Thank you for your support. It looks like we will be back for our 15th season next year and I'm excited to make plans.

Be Well.

Karen Harrell,  
publisher@snowbirdsgulfcoast.com  
850-291-1266



## Come as you are

### Pensacola Beach Community Church

New service time: 9 a.m.

Service also available on the church podcast: <https://www.thebeachchurch.com/podcast/>

Join our Facebook page for updates: The Beach Church

Via De Luna & Avenida 18  
Pensacola Beach, Fla



850-932-6628 or [thebeachchurch.com](http://thebeachchurch.com)



# Spotlight: Hugh Branyon Backcountry Trail

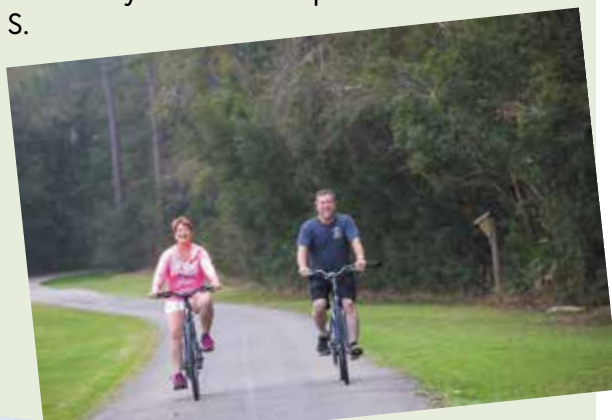
Explore the Beauty & Diversity of The Backcountry Trail!

Seven trails among six distinct ecosystems make up more than 15 miles of the Hugh S.

Branyon Backcountry Trail complex through Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, Alabama and the Gulf State Park.

Explore the timeless beauty of the Butterfly Garden, the mystical Freshwater Marshes and the Coastal Hardwood Swamps. Catch a glimpse of a Bobcat on the Twin Bridges or a White Tailed Deer on Gulf Oak Ridge. View an Alligator basking in the sun and be sure to bring your camera to capture the adventure.

The Trail was named after Mr. Hugh S. Branyon who put in 33 years as director of the Alabama Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Learn more: [www.backcountrytrail.com](http://www.backcountrytrail.com)



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# Seasons

Sign up for our new e-newsletter, Seasons, to stay up-to-date year-round!

Be the first receive Snowbirds Gulf Coast in full pdf before it hits the streets! Also, keep up to date digitally year-round on activities and events that are offered in other "Seasons." Discover area Snowbird-friendly communities. Thinking to retire on the coast? Learn more about quality of life, taxes, health care, volunteer opportunities and continuing education courses. Seasons also features side destinations, tips on planning vacation destination family reunions, beach weddings for all ages, waterfront dining options, Gulf Coast recipes and more.

Don't forget to find us on Facebook & Instagram!



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PRINT MAGAZINE



E-NEWSLETTER



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# Snow BIRDS Gulf Coast



# From Iowa to Okaloosa Island

Kim and Kurt Wheat, both 59, retired some three years ago and since have spent their winter season among new friends at Destin West RV Resort on Okaloosa Island, Fla. They enjoyed their stay so much they've already reserved for the 2022 season.

Here's their story.

**Q. Where are you from?**

Davenport, IA

**Q. Is this where you grew up?**

No, Kurt grew up in northern Ill. and Kim in a small town in Western Ill.

**Q. How did you meet?**

We met at work in our first job for the Department of the Army.

**Q. How many years have you been married?**

32 years.

**Q. Do you have any children or grandchildren?**

We have two grown sons and no grandchildren, but look forward to being grandparents one day. Our oldest son lives in Davenport, Iowa, and our youngest son lives in St. Louis, Missouri. We also have a Lab/Great Dane mix dog named Rizzo.

**Q. You said you both retired in the past three years. What kind of work did you each do?**

We both retired as civilians for the Department of the Army. Kurt and I both worked in ammunition logistics. We each worked for the Army for 33 years.

**Q. What led to your decision to choose Okaloosa Island for your stay?**

Kim has been to Eglin AFB several times on work trips through the years. I knew I liked the area and the people here are so friendly. Kurt wanted to be by a beach and wanted to travel the shortest distance possible from Iowa. The Gulf Coast fits the bill perfectly.

**Q. How long do you stay?**

We stay for nine weeks. Kim still likes to experience a white Christmas in Iowa, so we don't arrive until just before the New Year.

**Q. You are RVers; how did that come about? What kind of rig do you have?**

We started out camping in a tent when our boys were small. That didn't last too long as we decided sleeping on the ground was not ideal. Our first "RV" was a pop-up camper. It felt great sleeping off the ground. We also discovered taking your own bed with you when you traveled was a fantastic way to get away as a family for weekends or longer vacations. We're currently on our sixth RV, a fifth-wheel.

**Q. This year, with the Covid, are there any activities you aren't getting to do? What do you enjoy doing?**

We love being outdoors, so Covid hasn't really kept us from doing the activities we enjoy. The one way it has affected us in some of the friends we expected to see here from other parts of the country did not make the trip this year out of Covid caution. I hope to see everyone next year! We love to take walks on the beach, go for bike rides, play pickleball, golf and just enjoy the warmer temperatures and sunshine with our campground friends.



**Q. Any tips for new retirees?**

Nothing specific other than to find some hobbies you enjoy! Volunteering is also a great way to transition from workdays that are more structured to days where you do whatever you want.

**Q. Tips for new RVers?**

New Rvers should not be afraid to ask for advice from those of us who have been RVing for many years. By and large, RVers are a friendly group of folks who are happy to help. And learn campground etiquette such as picking up after your dog.

**Q. Are there any must-do activities for you each year? Restaurants and attractions you enjoy?**

We like the New Years' Eve fireworks on the Okaloosa Boardwalk and the Mardi Gras activities in the area, although those are limited this year due to Covid. We love to eat out at the many good seafood restaurants along the gulf. We can't possibly narrow our favorite choice down to one!





# Clubs and Activities: Staying in touch during an unusual season

Wisconsin Alabama "Snobird" club president Kenn Krouse isn't used to having so much time on his hands. Usually, this time of year, he has a full calendar of meetings, breakfasts and outings to manage for his 900+ member club. Plus, he is the point person and keeps a calendar and contacts for many of the fundraisers the 10+ Alabama Snowbird clubs collectively participate each season.

While some clubs are having informal gatherings, none are sponsoring full meetings. But, Krouse said he is optimistic the 2021-22 season will return to normal with some changes.

This year Krouse estimated that maybe 40 percent of the Snowbirds returned in January, and more have trickled in since then. Like Kenn and his wife, Lora, some own property and stay six to seven months each season.

**Hurricane Sally:** Some areas have seen a limited supply of condos and beach homes because of damage from September's Hurricane Sally.



Owners have spent the "off-season" making repairs to prepare for high season – Spring Break and Summer. The Pensacola Bay Bridge is expected to reopen in late March, giving easier access to both downtown Pensacola, Pensacola Beach and areas east.

**Book Now!** Snowbirds are encouraged to book a unit before leaving as demand increases. The pandemic has allowed many people to telecommute for work, which is expected to continue in some form or fashion. Many of those folks decided they wanted to work from the beach – who can blame them?

**Florida Clubs:** The Fort Walton Beach, Destin and South Walton County Snowbird clubs took a hiatus this year but are expected to return next season. Navarre Beach implemented smaller group activities this season sponsored by tourism officials. Perdido Key hosted its popular "Hootenanny" in February in two sessions to accommodate social distancing. Pensacola Beach is expected to resume activities next season.

**Canadians:** Panama City Beach lost the majority of its Canadian Snowbirds this winter, and to help





fill the void, they reached out to neighboring states for shorter-term stays. However, officials have maintained contact with regular visitors and plan to re-implement its winter guest program of "Real, Fun, Beach" activities next season.

For updates throughout the year, visit our website: [www.snowbirdsgulfcoast.com](http://www.snowbirdsgulfcoast.com) and sign up for our e-newsletter online. Also, follow our Instagram and Facebook pages.



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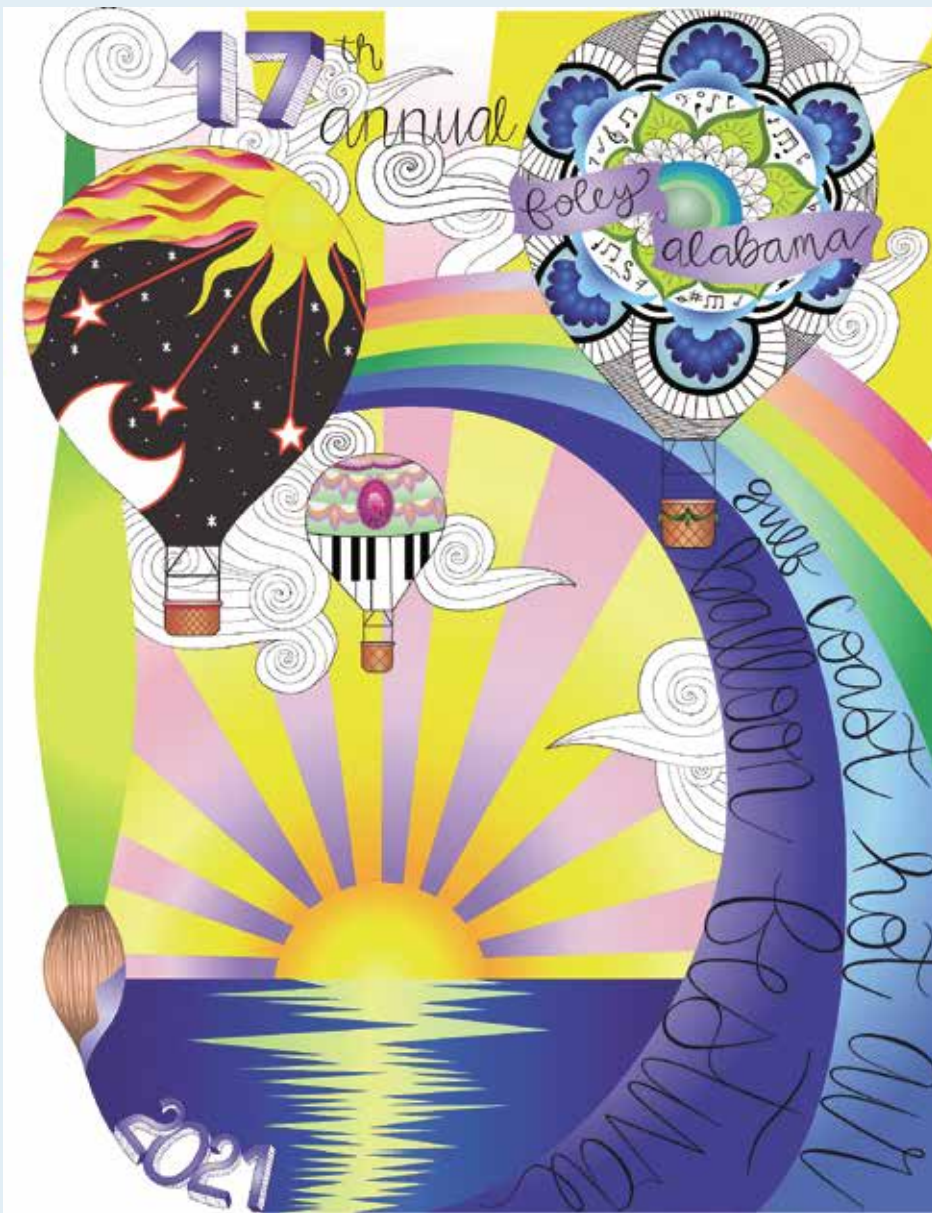
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5/7-9

**Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival** - Downtown OWA, 100 N OWA Blvd, Foley, Ala. Foley is the spot for high-flying adventure and family fun at the Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival. Enjoy the entertainment, arts and crafts displays and more at the festival site daily. Balloon flights, glows and tethered rides (weather permitting) add to the fun at dawn and dusk. Details: <https://gulfcoastballoonfestival.com/>

Please note that events can change or may be canceled because of the changing rules surrounding COVID-19 safety. Call or check websites or social media before heading out to an event.

#### WEDNESDAYS

**Boardwalk Talks at Dauphin Island Sea Lab Estuarium** - The Northern Gulf Institute presents informal talks about the Gulf of Mexico region. 101 Bienville Blvd, Dauphin Island, Ala. First and third Wednesdays, 11:15 a.m. FREE. Details: [www.disl.org/estuarium](http://www.disl.org/estuarium) or 251-861-2141

**Winter Wednesdays, Bellingrath Gardens and Home** - Sessions are held each week in the Magnolia Room from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., Jan. 6 to Feb. 24. Mobile, Ala. Register: 251-459-8864. Details: [www.bellingrath.org](http://www.bellingrath.org)

#### Thurs/Fri/Sat

**Alabama Gulf Coast Music Hall** - Dancing, BBQ, live music and more! Dance the night away to country, oldies, '50s, pop and blues. 12615-A Foley Beach Express, Foley, Ala. Details: <https://alabamagulfcoastmusicichall.com/>

**Last Saturday of each month Trash Bash with the Navarre Beach Sea Turtle Conservation Center** - Help remove marine debris to protect sea turtles! Volunteers collect trash from different areas along the 4.5 miles of Navarre Beach and record data that is forwarded to state and federal agencies. Meet in the main Navarre Beach Parking Lot near the Sand Crab Pavilion. Limited supplies of gloves, buckets and pickers are provided, or bring your own. 8 to 10 a.m. Details: <https://navarrebeachseaturtles.org/trash-bash>

thru 2/27

**Special Exhibit: Honoring African American Servicemen** - Camp Gordon Johnston WWII Museum, 1873 Hwy. 98 West, Carrabelle, Fla. The museum presents a special exhibit to honor our country's African-American Servicemen who served in segregated units in both the Army and the Army Air Corps, including the Tuskegee Airmen. Details: 850-697-8575 or [museum@campgordonjohnston.com](mailto:museum@campgordonjohnston.com)

thru 2/28

**Emerald Coast Theatre Company presents: "Popcorn Falls"** - Thursday through Sunday, Feb. 12-28. The theatre is located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Sandestin in Miramar Beach, Fla. Details: [www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org)  
Navarre Beach Visitor Information Center Snowbirds Activities - 8543 Navarre Parkway, Navarre FL 32566. All events take place at the Navarre Beach Visitor Information Center. Limited Seating. Details: 850-981-8900

thru 3/13

**Americana Music at the Lodge** - Concert series in the Lodge at Camp Helen State Park are ONLINE this year, Saturdays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Concerts are available ONLINE on their Facebook page [www.facebook.com/friendsofcamp Helen](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofcamp Helen). Dates include Feb. 27, and March 13. Details: <https://www.friendsofcamp Helen.org/america-concerts>

thru 3/28

**22nd Annual Gulf Coast Winter Classic Horse Show** - Harrison County Fairgrounds. 15321 County Farm Rd, Gulfport, Miss. Recurring weekly on Sunday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Check website for Grand Prix Field times. The event is free. Details: [gulfcoastclassiccompany.com](http://gulfcoastclassiccompany.com) or 228-832-2745

thru 5/30

**Celebrate Vegas: OWA Theater** - Wednesday through Saturday at 7 p.m, and Sundays at 3 p.m. "Celebrate Vegas" features tributes to Frank Sinatra, Elvis, Cher

and Lady Gaga. Tickets can be purchased at [VisitOWA.com/Tickets](http://VisitOWA.com/Tickets) or 251-369-6100. Details: [VisitOWA.com/CelebrateVegas](http://VisitOWA.com/CelebrateVegas)

2/27

**Multi-talented Brandon Styles presents "The Trip Down Memory Lane Dinner Show"** - Tuesdays and Saturdays in February at OWA in Foley, Ala. Seating is socially distanced and tickets are going quickly, so guests are encouraged to buy ahead of time. Tickets to the dinner show start at \$42 (with VIP upgrades available). Group pricing is available upon request by contacting Brandon Styles Theater & Magic Shop. Doors open at 5 p.m and dinner is served at 5:30 p.m. Details: [visitowa.com/events](http://visitowa.com/events)

2/26 - 28

**Vintage Market Days of Mobile** - It's the TENTH VMD™ of Mobile event - "Vintage Love"! Shop with more than 100 vendors while enjoying live music and food trucks! The Grounds at 1035 Cody Rd. N., Mobile, Ala. Details: <https://www.facebook.com/events/791168218129920>

2/26-28

**Annual Gulf Coast Orchid Show & Plant Sale** - Gautier Convention Center, 2012 Library Lane, Gautier, Miss. Beautiful exhibits constructed by the commercial dealers, Orchid Societies from Mississippi, and across the country! And a plant sale. Hosted by the Gulf Coast Orchid Society. Fri. -Sat., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sun. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free event! Details: <http://www.gcorchids.org/>

2/27

**Jumble Sale** - Lyndell Conference Center, 423 Lyndell Lane, Panama City Beach, Fla. 28th Annual Orange Beach Seafood Festival & Car Show - The Wharf, 4830 Main St., Orange Beach, Ala. Come out to spend the day with family and friends while enjoying loads of tasty food, live music on two stages, and over 125 arts & crafts vendors! Presented by The Orange Beach Sports Association. Details: <https://alwharf.com/> or 850-233-5065 or [sue@pcbssc.com](mailto:sue@pcbssc.com)

Reservations required for dinner & show.

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2/27

**Shrimp and Grits Festival -**

HarborWalk Village, 10 Harbor Blvd, Destin, Fla. 12 to 4 p.m. The inaugural Shrimp & Grits Festival will showcase shrimp & grits dishes from favorite local restaurants. Live music, craft cocktails and more. Benefitting Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast. Details: [www.shrimppandgritsfest.com](http://www.shrimppandgritsfest.com)

2/28

**Navarre Beach Bridal Expo -**

8375 Gulf Blvd. Navarre FL 32566. Save the Date! The Navarre Beach Bridal Expo takes place at the beautiful Springhill Suites Navarre Beach. Details: Springhill Suites Navarre Beach 850-939-0010

3/5

**Gulf Shores Police Association Golf Tournament 2021 -**

Peninsula Golf Club, 20 Peninsula Blvd, Gulf Shores, Ala. 10:30 a.m. registration and 1 p.m. start. Team entries due by Feb. 8. Golf, range balls, carts, lunch, hole contests, team and door prizes included. Details: Julie Netemeyer, [Julienetemeyer@yahoo.com](mailto:Julienetemeyer@yahoo.com) or Sgt. Josh Hoguet, [jhoguet@gulfshoresal.gov](mailto:jhoguet@gulfshoresal.gov)

3/5-7

**2021 Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show -**

Aaron Bessant Amphitheater, 600 S Pier Park Dr, Panama City Beach, FL. Show opens Friday at 10 a.m. More than Just a Boat Show- fishing, fitness, boating, cycling, kayaking, outdoors, paddleboarding and more. Details: [www.emeraldcoastboatshow.com](http://www.emeraldcoastboatshow.com)

3/6-7

**Gulf Coast Renaissance Faire & Pirate Festival -**

8604 Bobby Brown Rd., Milton, Fla. The Gulf Coast Renaissance Fair & Pirate Festival is a fun and education way to experience the Middle Ages. Everyone is invited to dress up as renaissance characters (not required) for a exciting weekend of history, music, food, arts, crafts, live entertainment and games. Featuring historic learning demonstrations and medieval characters. Do not miss out on a real Jousting tournament! Details: [www.gcrf.us](http://www.gcrf.us)

3/12-13

**The 2021 Festival of Flowers: All Creatures Great And Small -**

Cathedral Square, Downtown Mobile, Ala. Teams of florists go head-to-head creating amazing creatures from flowers. Benefitting the Cardiac Care Unit at Providence Hospital. Details: [festivalofflowers.com](http://festivalofflowers.com)

03/13

**2021 Foley BBQ & Blues Cook-Off!**

Foley Heritage Park, Foley, Ala. Welcome spring with the 13th Annual BBQ & Blues Cook-Off. Event benefits the South Baldwin Chamber Foundation. Details: 251.943.5590 or visit [foleybbqandblues.net](http://foleybbqandblues.net)

3/21-21

**PBR's Elite Unleash The Beast**

- Pensacola Bay Center, Pensacola, Fla. Watch the world's best bull riding athletes go up against the toughest animal athletes in an 8-second man versus beast duel. Details: <http://www.pensacolabaycenter.com>

3/21

**Spring Jam 2021 -**

1451 Navarre Beach Causeway, Navarre, Fla. Cat Country 98.7 Spring Jam 2021 starring LoCash with special guests Gabby Barrett and Gone West. Event benefits Santa Rosa Kids House and is presented by Gulf Winds Credit Union. Join us on the beach behind Juana's Pagodas and Sailors Grill for this all-ages show. Doors open at 3 p.m.; show starts at 5 p.m. Bring a small beach towel to sit on - no chairs allowed. Details: [www.juanaspagodas.com/Spring%20Jam.html](http://www.juanaspagodas.com/Spring%20Jam.html)

3/27

**Ye Olde Brothers Brewery Craft Beerfest -**

4458 Highway 87, Navarre, Fla. Join us for the annual Ye Olde Brothers Brewery Craft Beer Fest from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets include entry to event, live entertainment, beer tasting from your favorite local breweries and a souvenir glass. For the People's Choice Award and 10% of all tickets sold will be donated to the winning brewery's charity of choice. Details: 850-684-1495 or [www.yeoldebrosbrewery.com/beerfest](http://www.yeoldebrosbrewery.com/beerfest)

3/26 - 5/28

**Bands on the Blackwater Spring Series -**

5158 Willings St., Milton, Fla. 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday nights. Pull up your boat or bring a lawn chair and relax while listening to some great music! Details: [www.facebook.com/BandsOnTheBlackwater](http://www.facebook.com/BandsOnTheBlackwater) or call the City of Milton at 850-983-5400

4/17

**Navarre Beach Vintage Festival -**

8640 Blue Heron Ct., Navarre Beach, Fla. 9 a.m. There will be classic cars, motorcycles, and surfboards on display along with live music and food vendors. The Navarre Fundraiser for the Navarre Beach Lifeguards & Jr. Lifeguards. Free admission at the Navarre Beach Fire Rescue-Lifeguard Headquarters in the Navarre Beach Marine Park. Details: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1408012376196805>

5/15-16

**Pensacola JazzFest -**

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# Snaps!

Winter visitors and vendors gathered for the annual Fort Walton Beach Winter Guest Fest presented by Crystal Shores Realty.



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# Snaps!

Snowbirds learned about the reefs sunk at Navarre Beach (below) and the Perdido Key Chamber sponsored the Hootenanny Snowbird welcome at the Flora-Bama (right).



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# Maritime history subject of a 6,000-artifact online collection

By Louis Cooper

Thousands of local maritime historical artifacts in the collections of six Northwest Florida institutions have been curated into a single digital resource, just in time to enjoy from the comfort of your condo's Wi-Fi.

"The purpose of the Gulf Coast Digital History Project is to facilitate access and exploration of our region's rich history," said Dr.



Dr. Jamin Wells

Jamin Wells, an assistant professor of history at the University of West Florida.

"Whether you're a student working on a research paper, a genealogist researching a family member, or a person interested in the area's past – this project has something for you." The online resource, located at <https://uwf.edu/gulphistoryproject>, launched in December 2020, but the convergence of the virtual resource in a socially distanced world is a coincidence.

"The genesis of this project dates back to 2017, and we've been working diligently on it for several

years now," Wells said. "We're glad that the project is now available, especially for students and scholars who are facing many challenges doing historical research during the pandemic."

The project encompasses 6,388 unique items – totaling more than 20,000 individual computer scans – that tell the story of the region's maritime heritage during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The artifacts were supplied by the Destin History and Fishing Museum, the Gulf Breeze Area Historical Society, the National Aviation Museum Library, the Pensacola Lighthouse and Maritime Museum, the UWF Historic Trust, and the UWF Archives and West Florida History Center at the UWF Libraries.

Items in the project include:

- The official catch log of the Destin Fishing Rodeo from the 1950s to 1970s
- Handwritten letters from the nineteenth century
- Logbooks from the Pensacola



Lighthouse

- Promotional materials for local ports and early coastal tourism efforts

"One of the strengths of this collection of documents and photographs is how they shed light on changes and continuities in everyday life over the past 200 years," Wells said. "While at the same time they provide valuable insights into historical events, from destructive hurricanes and wartime experiences to a period of profound political and cultural upheaval."

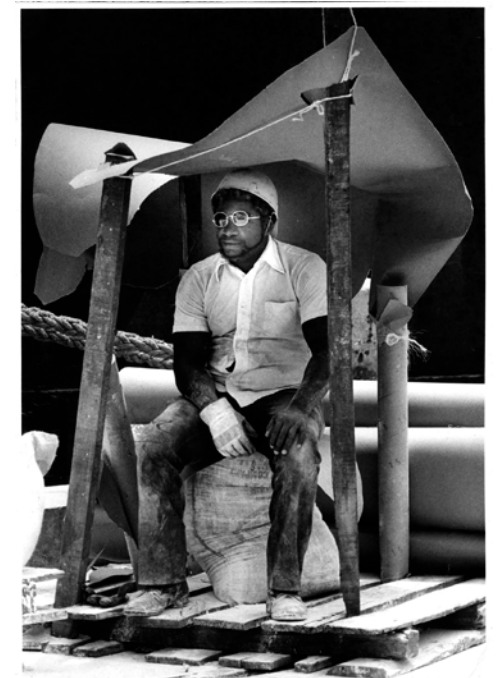
The website is organized according to the institution that owns the materials with a comprehensive search engine. For example, searching the term "hurricane" brings up 49 items. The first is a photo of damage at Warrington Beach, near Pensacola Naval Air Station, following a hurricane in 1916. The National Aviation Museum Library supplied the image.

The Gulf Coast Digital History Project was funded through a 2017 National Maritime Heritage Grant from the National Park Service and support from UWF. Those who worked on the project included UWF students and interns and the staff at each partner institution.

"We hope this project continues to grow and evolve, and we're actively

exploring funding opportunities to expand the depth and breadth of this digital resource," Wells said.

"While 6,300 documents and six collaborating institutions might sound like a lot, we've only scratched the surface of exploring the region's history."



"We have so much to learn about how the Gulf Coast (community) we live in came to be," he added.

"We hope to expand both the geographical and temporal reach of this project in the years to come."







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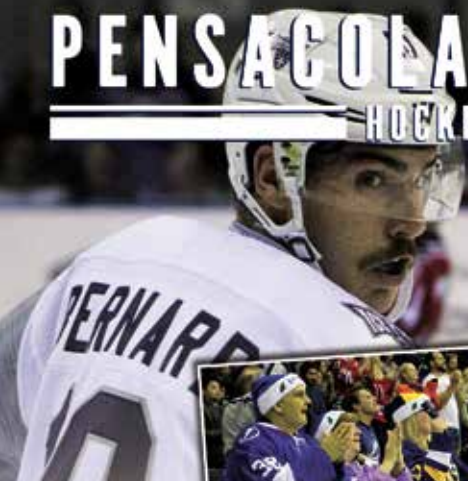



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# Baseball season swings into the Gulf Coast

Minor league baseball is returning to the Gulf Coast in 2021. After being shut down because of the pandemic, the Pensacola Blue Wahoos and the Biloxi Shuckers will begin play in May in Double-A baseball.

Teams will play 120 games this season, including 60 home games. Both the Blue Wahoos and the Shuckers will have their home openers on May 11.

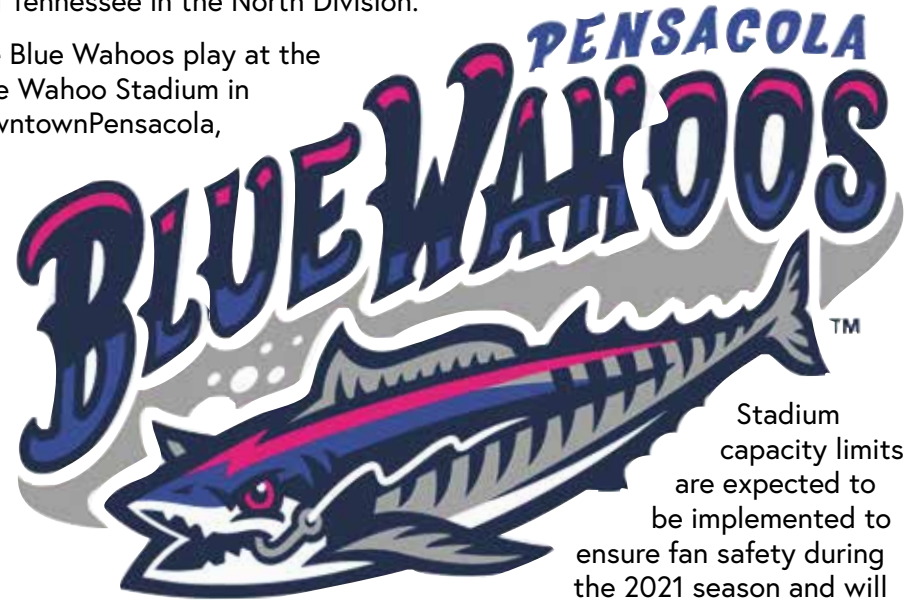
"We're just excited to be able to play baseball again and have fans here," said Blue Wahoos president Jonathan Griffith. "It feels great. To have the ownership we have with Quint and Rishy Studer who kept all of us fully employed was huge."

"I think everyone is relieved that we are going to have baseball. And for the community. I think everyone wants to be able to get out and see games and have family activity."

Under the new Professional Development License system through Major League Baseball, the Blue Wahoos will play as part of the Double-A South league, which features Pensacola, Biloxi, Mississippi, and Montgomery in the South Division and Birmingham, Chattanooga, Rocket City,

and Tennessee in the North Division.

The Blue Wahoos play at the Blue Wahoo Stadium in downtown Pensacola,



Stadium capacity limits are expected to be implemented to ensure fan safety during the 2021 season and will

be announced leading up to the season. Game times and the teams' promotional schedule will be released at a later date.

while the Shuckers play in MGM Park in Biloxi.

The Blue Wahoos are affiliated with the Florida Marlins, while the Shuckers are an affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers.

For more information, visit [www.biloxishuckers.com](http://www.biloxishuckers.com) and [www.bluewahoos.com](http://www.bluewahoos.com).



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## New Santa Rosa, Fla., park welcomes RVers

The pandemic has spawned a renewed interest in recreational vehicles and a spate of new parks are cropping up nationwide.

By this next summer, Florida's "NEXT BIG THING" is scheduled to open just off I-10 in Santa Rosa County.

The 60-acre Splash RV Resort & Waterpark will feature paved roads and full-RV hookups and concrete RV pads, 80 cabins and even a collection of Conestoga Wagons, the ultimate option for Florida "glamping" space. The park will include a variety of amenities including lazy river, three additional pools, fire pits, golf cart rentals, dog park, amphitheater and more.

The location is an easy jump-off spot to hiking the Blackwater State Forest and canoe, kayak and tube Coldwater Creek in the north and enjoy the peace and serenity at Navarre Beach to the south.

Reservations are being accepted now: [info@splashrvresort.com](mailto:info@splashrvresort.com) or (850) 626-8500. Review plans online at [www.splashrvresort.com](http://www.splashrvresort.com).



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## A Little Good

About a year ago. Before the pandemic. I saw him across the crowded restaurant with his elderly parents. They didn't look like they'd aged a bit. But he did. His face was lean, his skin was wrinkled, he was gaunt. And he still had his trademark sense of humor.

I told him I hardly recognized him.

"Yeah," he said, "it's this new diet I'm on, it's called being sick, the weight just falls off." This is not his best joke, I'm not sure whether I should laugh.

Then he gave me the real story. It's a long one, I don't have room to tell it all. He became very ill with an autoimmune disease. Doctors said he was dying. His parents were braced for the worst. His mother and father became his caregivers.

His parents tell me that for two years, they did a lot of talking to the sky, asking for help. Doctors still can't explain how he was cured. Maybe it was the treatment. Maybe it was something else. They aren't sure. All anyone knows is that one day he woke up better. No traces of illness are left.

"Now all I have to do is gain weight," he tells me. I have another friend I wanted to tell you about. I grew up with him. We once went to Mardi Gras together when we were young men—which is another long story that I don't have time for. Let's just say that I almost ended up as a permanent smear on a New Orleans sidewalk.

A few years ago my friend had the worst year of his life. His marriage sort of fell apart. His wife left him and took their son with her. Next he lost his business, then his money. He became suicidal.

One night, while asleep on his brother's sofa-sleeper he had decided that he was going to end it all on the following day. He had even worked out how he would do it.

He says he whispered to the ceiling, "You're the only one who can stop me, if you give a damn about me, you will."

The next morning, he was awoken by the sound of a car in the driveway. It was his wife and son. She had driven three hundred miles overnight on a whim. She couldn't explain why, but she wanted to patch things up. They are together today.

He's never told anyone what I just told you. So try to keep that to yourself if you don't mind. Here's another. I got an email from a gal who told me that all her life she wanted to play music. But you know how life goes. You don't always get everything you want.

She married, had two kids, there was no time for music. Instead she worked a job that she hated and found herself in charge of the soccer carpool. She was falling apart inside. Until one fateful week.

She got a call. A complete stranger offered her the lead role in a local acoustic folk band.

She was so excited that she practiced for two weeks beforehand.

On the night of the performance her husband and children were sitting in the front row eating onion rings. She sang her heart out and received a five-person standing ovation. Three people were immediate relatives. Two were cousins.

After a few gigs, a man from a nearby private school called her and told her that he had seen her perform. He said the school he worked for had just lost their music teacher. He asked if she would apply to teach music. She is happy to report that she has been a music teacher for almost two years now, and her school's pandemic-style virtual Christmas program was a glorious technological train wreck. She still sings with a folk band sometimes. Although gigs are hard to come by during the coronavirus era.

Let's see, what else?

Oh, I almost forgot. I got a letter in the mail from a 71-year-old woman in North Texas. The letter said that her dog recently died. A yellow Lab named Duke.

Duke was born in a shelter. She adopted him and loved him for six years until he got hit by a car.

A few weeks after his death, she got a call from the same shelter. The shelter said that a man had dropped off a dog because he couldn't care for it anymore due to his job. The shelter was asking her to adopt it.

"No thanks," she told them, "I just lost a dog, and I'm not ready for another."

"Well, that's why we're calling you," they told her. "This is Duke's brother, from the same litter, six years ago. He's an identical yellow Lab."

That was all she needed to hear. Even though it was evening, she drove clear across town to the shelter, still wearing her ratty pajamas. Also at the time, she says—and this was actually written in her letter—that she "wasn't even wearing a bra." Older women can be a little too forthcoming.

She burst into the shelter, "totally unbound," she points out, and many young men had to divert their eyes.

The dog was the spitting image of Duke. She took him home. His new name is Luke, in case you're curious. Though, if it had been me, I would have named him "Of Earl." But that's beside the point. Speaking of points, you were probably wondering if there was a point to this column, there is:

Don't give up. Not yet.

Help is on the way.

Sean Dietrich is a columnist, and novelist, known for his commentary on life in the American South. Learn more at [www.seandietrich.com](http://www.seandietrich.com)



Sean of the South

## Find your copy of Snowbirds Gulf Coast!

Snowbirds Gulf Coast prints four editions each winter: Holiday, January, February and Spring that are distributed regionally from Panama City Beach, Fla., west along the Florida panhandle to the Alabama Gulf Coast and Biloxi Visitor Center.

We also push out .pdf versions of the print edition through our e-newsletter (sign up online) and Facebook page: Snowbirds Gulf Coast ("Like" the page to receive information.) Find us at more than 300 condo lobbies and RV parks, plus dozens of golf courses, restaurants, medical facilities and attractions from Panama City to the Alabama Gulf Coast.

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# COVID-19 updates from Baptist Health Care

Submitted by Baptist Health Care

The first case of COVID-19 in Northwest Florida was diagnosed just over a year ago and has spread with concerning speed throughout the area ever since.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that is spread through respiratory droplets produced when people who are infected with the virus cough, sneeze, sing, talk or breathe, especially in enclosed areas. It can cause a wide range of symptoms from mild to severe.

Symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus and include cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea and/or a new loss of taste or smell. If you develop any of these symptoms, be sure to get tested for COVID-19. If you test positive, you should follow isolation guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Because COVID-19 can affect anyone and can cause serious, life-threatening illness, taking appropriate preventive measures is extremely important.

- Avoid gathering in groups, particularly indoors.
- Wear a mask any time you are with people outside your household.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home when sick, cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, avoid close contact with people who are sick, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

COVID-19 vaccination is one of the strongest tools available to fight this pandemic by providing an important layer of protection. Studies show that about a month after receiving the first dose of vaccine, immunity

is about 50%. After the second dose, immunity jumps to greater than 90%. That's why those being vaccinated are strongly urged to get both doses, which are given several weeks apart, for maximum protection.

Both may cause side effects that can include pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, body aches, chills and fever. These are signs that your body's immune system is being activated to ward off subsequent COVID-19 infection. Most side effects resolve within 24 to 48 hours.

Keep in mind that stopping a pandemic requires using all tools available. The vaccine is important, but it can't fight COVID-19 alone! That's why you should continue to wear a mask, stay at least six

feet apart from people outside your immediate household, avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and wash your hands frequently. For more information, visit [eBaptistHealthCare.org](https://www.eBaptistHealthCare.org).



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