

FREE!

Gulf Coast *Snow* **BIRDS**

A Winter Visitor
Publication
Holidays 2021

Holiday Calendar

page 10-11

Shopping Local

page 18

Clubs

page 15

Farmers Markets

page 9

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Gulf Coast *Snow* **BIRDS**

ON THE COVER

Shirley and Craig Chamberlain aren't your typical Snowbirds. Both grew up in New Orleans, but since relocating to the North Carolina mountains they like to spend part of each winter at a familiar destination - Pensacola Beach, Florida.

INDEX

Publisher's Welcome	6
Cover Couple	8
Farmers Markets	9
Calendar	10-11
Welcome events	12
Clubs	15
Sports	16
Beau Rivage Christmas	17
Local Holiday Shopping	18
Sean of the South	19

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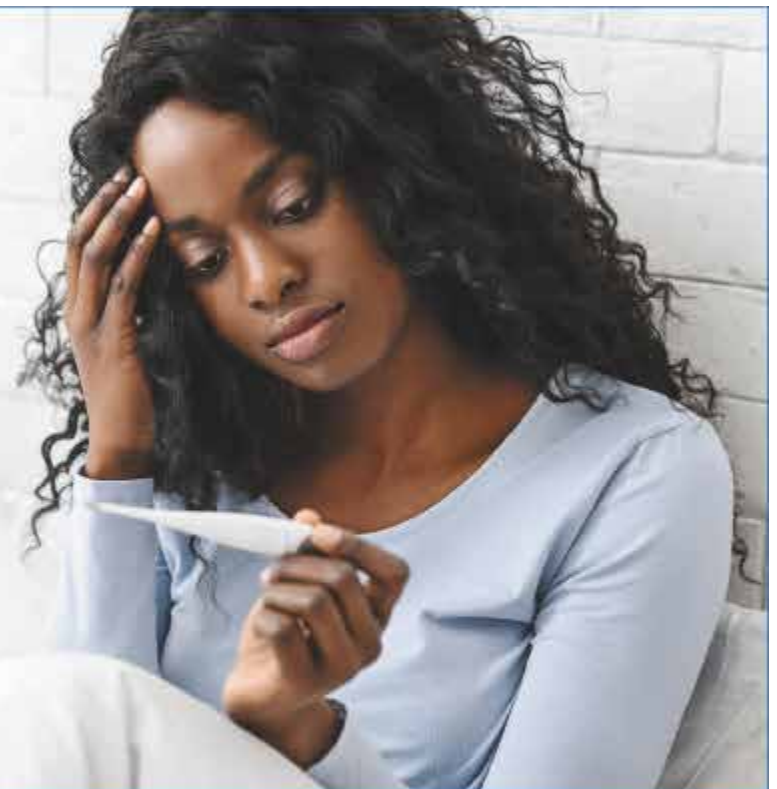
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Welcome!

First – welcome back to our Canadian and European Snowbirds! It's been a long two years since many of you have been back to your "happy place."

We also have many new Snowbirds so be sure to make them feel welcome.

This time last year many areas of the country and world were in lockdown. Some managed to venture south to enjoy an isolated beach, long walks outdoors and patio or take-out dining.

Many stores, pharmacies, and public areas such as libraries still request you wear a mask. For me – it's something I will do for a long time to come.

In this edition, cover couple Shirley and Robert Chamberlain are unlikely Snowbirds. Lifelong New Orleans natives, the duo was displaced by Hurricane Katrina and relocated to the North Carolina mountains. They spend part of each winter at one of their favorite haunts: Pensacola Beach.

Be sure to peruse our calendars and activities. There still is plenty to do. Yes, we occasionally get colder weather here but you know what to do – layer up!

Enjoy the Holiday season. Give thanks for all we have.

Best,

Karen Harrell, publisher@snowbirdsgulfcoast.com

850-291-1266



Randy Hamilton goes the extra mile to get the best angle of his subjects. Randy stays busy year-round photographing beach couples and family portraits.

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
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From NOLA to NC to Pensacola Beach

Shirley, 59, and Craig, 69, Chamberlain aren't your typical Snowbirds. Both grew up in New Orleans, but since relocating to the North Carolina mountains (where they do see snow) they like to spend part of each winter at a familiar destination - Pensacola Beach, Florida.

Q. How did you meet?

We met at an Uptown Eatery in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1983.

Q. Where are you from, and where have you lived?

We were both born and raised in New Orleans. We relocated to Cary, North Carolina, after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. We moved to the Mountains of North Carolina, a little bitty town of Saluda.

Q. Do you still work? If so, what is your current occupation, and what other careers have you had?

Craig is a retired New Orleans Police Sergeant. Shirley has had a variety of careers - she's a former restaurateur, marketing manager, and within the last year five years, the co-owner of a food truck. She is now in the process of starting a cleaning and organizing business.

Q. Do you have children, grandchildren?

We have two children, Nick, age 32 and Cody, age 28. Both are engaged.



Cody will wed Stephanie at Margaritaville in Pensacola Beach in 2022; Nick will wed Haley in the mountains of North Carolina in 2023.

Q. How did you choose Pensacola Beach?

Pensacola Beach has been our family vacation spot for many decades. Craig has been vacationing in Pensacola since he was 7 years old; Shirley has spent many spring breaks on Pensacola Beach. Shirley's sister, Nancy, and brother-in-law, Andrew, own a beautiful Pensacola Beach home, which has been in their family for many years, surviving many hurricanes.

Q. Are you planning to relocate or to just spend winters here?

We come every January for the month (but this year planning to also stay through February.)

Q. What are some of your favorite restaurants?

We love NOLA, Flounders, and Joe Patti's.

Q. What activities do you enjoy? Fitness, sports, cards, reading, etc.?

Rob likes to fish, Shirley likes to collect seashells.

Q. Any tips for those looking to become Snowbirds?

Visit the Visitor Centers, especially the one by the Beach Ball, there are a ton of resources, and they are super helpful. Pick up local magazines at the nearby restaurants/bars. Attend or connect to a nearby church. Visit Facebook for local events posted. Visit a nearby library.



Safer, seasonal shopping at the Gulf Coast's open-air farmers markets

Take a leisurely stroll this winter through an area Farmers Market. Numerous markets are staged on different days.

Palafox Market in Pensacola - The iconic farmers market features locally grown food, farm produce and products. The Palafox Market is staged under a canopy of crepe myrtle trees that align Martin Luther King, Jr. Plaza in downtown Pensacola, Fla. Seasonal vegetables and fruit, home baked good, arts, crafts and live music make this market a festive place. From the market you can walk the length of Palafox Street (sidewalks) to the waterfront and explore the Historic Pensacola Village nearby. A vendor and locator map are available at palafoxmarket.com.



The Farmers Market - Historic Downtown Panama City and Historic Millville Watson Bayou Park. Weekly Market with local produce, meats, arts and crafts. Saturdays they are in Historic Downtown Panama City and Thursday in Millville, Fla. Check out their featured vendors at: <https://panamacityfarmersmarket.com/> and questions 850-481-9969 850Market@gmail.com

Downtown FWB Farmers' The Market - 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays at Fort Walton Beach Landing Park, 139 SE Brooks Street, Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Farmers, artisan food vendors, and crafters offers an array of locally grown and handmade items. Stroll down the streets of Downtown Fort Walton Beach after the Farmers Market and check out local shops and restaurants. Details: downtownfwb.com or downtownfwbartwalk@gmail.com

Highway 87 Outdoor Market at Pik-itz - 1922 Hwy. 87, Navarre, Fla. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. This outdoor market takes place on the first and third Saturday of each month. Farm to Table vendors are available along with arts & crafts and inside shopping at Pik-itz! Art & Antiques. 850-710-7128 or visit www.pikitz.com

Grand Boulevard Farmer's Market - Saturdays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. inside Grand Boulevard, Sandestin, Fla. Features fresh produce, fruit, vegetables, grass-fed beef, whole chickens, eggs, honey and more. Saturdays year round. Details: Diane Kolopanas 850-499-4697.

30A Farmer Market - Rosemary Beach Inlet, 28 S. Barrett Square, Rosemary Square, Rosemary Beach, Fla. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sundays year-round. Walk through the beautiful park like setting with shade trees, a pretty fountain, cobblestone walkways and visit with our friendly farmers, makers and bakers. Details: Diane Kolopanas, 850-499-4697.

Coastal Alabama Farmers and Fisherman's Market - 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. Located at 20733 Mifflin Rd., Foley, Ala. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Located 30 acres near Wolf Bay Lodge restaurant on County Rd. 20 in Foley between Hwy. 59 and The Foley Beach Expressway. The market has strict Covid-19 rules following CDC guidelines. The covered facility is open year-round rain or shine. Details: www.coastalalabamamarket.com/

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Stars shine onstage during the holidays at OWA

Through Jan. 1, 2022, you can spend the holiday season with the stars at **Classic Christmas at Legends In Concert at OWA** - The all-new Classic Christmas at OWA Theater will pay tribute to music royalty including Celine Dion, Karen Carpenter, Young Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley! Recurring weekly on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 7 to 9 p.m., at the OWA Theater - 205-A N. OWA Blvd., Foley, Ala.

Enjoy the **OWA Holiday Tree Show** every night, beginning with the **OWA Tree Lighting Ceremony** on Nov. 20. OWA's 36-foot-tall Christmas tree will put on a mesmerizing light show to holiday music nightly at 7 p.m. in downtown OWA, 1501 South OWA Blvd., Foley, Ala.

Through Dec. 28, you can catch some real magic at the **Brandon Styles VARIETY SHOW!** Styles combines comedy, magic and impressions at the Brandon Styles Theater, downtown OWA, Tuesdays and Saturdays at 7 p.m.

For more information about any of OWA's exciting holiday events, visit <https://visitowa.com/christmas/> or call 251- 369-6100.

Events may change or may be canceled because of the changing rules surrounding COVID-19 safety. Call or check websites before going 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 or 251-861-2141

Through 2/6/22

Baytowne On Ice - Apex Skating Pavilion, 9300 Emerald Coast Parkway, West Miramar Beach, Fla. The perfect place to find the winter spirit! Details: 850-714-7614 or www.baytownewharf.com

Through 11/30

Fall Outdoor Cascading Chrysanthemums at Bellingrath Gardens and Home - 12401 Bellingrath Gardens Rd., Theodore, Ala. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Details: 251- 973-2217 or bellingrath.org

Through January 2022

STEM Wonderland at the Exploreum - 65 Government St., Mobile, Ala. Enjoy STEM-based fun for all ages! Visitors will learn about the North and South poles, penguins, polar bears, and more. See the iconic model railroad from the Mobile Society of Model Engineers. Details: 251- 208-6893 or www.exploreum.com

11/19

Lighting of the Tree - Mardi Gras Park, 104-148 S. Royal St., Mobile, Ala. The traditional lighting of a Christmas tree marks the official start of the holiday season in Mobile. 6 p.m. Join Santa for this free event.

11/19-12/11

Forgotten Coast Festival of Trees - Explore a winter wonderland filled with decorated trees, wreaths and holiday collections. The Joe Center for the Arts, 201 Reid Ave., Port St. Joe, Fla. Details: www.thejoecenter.org

11/20 - 12/23

Fish River Christmas Tree Farm - Cut your own tree or pick one off the lot! Enjoy a manger scene with live animals, free tours on the tree train and more! 3982 Woodhaven Dairy Road, Summerdale, Ala. Closed on Thanksgiving. Details: 251- 988-8144 or www.fishrivertrees.com

11/21, 26, 27, and 28; 12/3, 4, 10, 17—19, 21—24

Winterfest - Downtown Pensacola. Ride aboard the Winterfest trolley or the mini-train through the lights, snow, and magical scenery of Winterfest! Details: <https://pensacolawinterfest.org>

11/26

The Polar Express - 6 p.m., Events Plaza Lawn, Village of Baytowne Wharf, 9300 Baytowne Wharf Blvd., Miramar Beach, Fla. Experience The Polar Express on a LED HD Video Wall plus more holiday fun! Details: <https://www.baytownewharf.com>

Apalachicola Downtown Christmas Celebration

- 4 to 8 p.m. Early Christmas shopping along streets filled with holiday spirit. Santa will arrive via shrimp boat at 4 p.m. EST at Riverfront Park on Water Street, Apalachicola, Fla. Tour the decorated Historic Orman & Raney House Museum. Details: 850-653-9419 or www.apalachicolabay.org

11/26 - 12/31

Experience the Magic of Christmas and Trains - Mississippi Coast Model Railroad Museum, 522 Pass Road, Gulfport, Miss. See more than 1 million lights surrounding the museum. Christmas Light Show nightly from 5 to 9 p.m. Details: www.mcmrcm.org

11/27

Here Comes Santa Claus - Village of Baytowne Wharf, 9300 Baytowne Wharf Blvd., Miramar Beach, Fla. 6 -9 p.m. Cheer for Santa as he lights the Village tree! Details: www.baytownewharf.com

Hike and Florida Trail Stamp Unveiling, Pensacola Beach - Noon. Hike from Park West (Fort Pickens gate entrance) along the Florida National Scenic Trail to the Pensacola Beach Visitors Information Center. Florida Stamp unveiling is at 2 p.m. Registration required. Details: [www. PensacolaBeachChamber.com](http://www.PensacolaBeachChamber.com)

Trash Bash with the Navarre Beach Sea Turtle Conservation Center

- 8 to 10 a.m., 8739 Gulf Blvd., Navarre Beach, Fla. Help clean up our beaches! Navarre Beach Parking lot near the Sand Crab Pavilion. A limited supply of gloves, buckets and pickers are provided, or bring your own. Details: www.navarrebeachseaturtles.org

Saltwater License-free Fishing - The license requirement is waived for all recreational anglers. All other rules apply. Details: myfwc.com/license/recreational/do-i-need-one/free-fishing/

11/27 - 12/17

Merry Main Street - Baldwin Ave., Downtown DeFuniak Springs, Fla.. "Merry Main Street" boasts live music and theatrical performances, outdoor market, food trucks, the Choctaw Express Train and more. Details: https://bit.ly/MSD_MerryMain

11/29 - 12/6

Festival of Trees 2020 - Beautifully decorated Christmas trees at the historic Chautauqua Hall of Brotherhood, 95 Circle Drive in DeFuniak Springs, Fla. Details: www.defuniaksprings.net

12/1 - 12/17

Decorated for the Christmas Season: Bragg-Mitchell Mansion - 906 Springhill Ave., Mobile, Ala. The Mansion will be decorated in traditional natural décor. Hour-long tours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tues. - Fri. Details: braggmitchellmansion.com

Reservations required for dinner & show.

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12/4

Christmas in the Garden - 216 8th Street in Port St. Joe, Fla. The Port St. Joe Garden Club's annual celebration, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Vendors are on hand with handcrafted gifts, decor items and baked goods. See Florida wildlife presentations and cooking demonstrations. Details: www.visitgulf.com/event/2021-christmas-in-the-garden/292/

The 8th Annual Pensacola International Airport

Runway Run 5k - 10 a.m. at Pensacola International Airport. Run the runway! Proceeds go to USO Northwest Florida. Pensacola, Fla. Details: www.runway5k.com

First City Art Center's WINTER

ART MARKET - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 1060 N. Guillemard St., Pensacola, Fla. Over 20 local vendors will be selling handmade goods including holiday ornaments, glass items, pottery, paintings, jewelry, sweets, and more. Food trucks onsite and a sidewalk book sale. Details: www.FirstCityArt.org

12/5

Dauphin Island Heritage and Arts Council Presents the Fifth Annual Gulf Seafood Gala - 100 Orleans Dr., Dauphin Island, Ala. This year's Gala showcases the best of Alabama Gulf seafood traditions. Proceeds benefit DIHAC. Details: info@dauphinislandarts.org

12/9 - 19

Emerald Coast Theatre Company - Miracle on 34th

Street: a Live Musical Radio Play - Adapted from the 1947 Lux Radio Broadcast with Original Songs plus live Foley effects and a score of holiday carols! 560 Grand Blvd., Miramar Beach, Fla. Details and showtimes: www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org

12/10

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents Holiday Pops featuring Nicholas Rodriguez - Village Church - Destin, 101 Matthew Blvd, Destin, Fla. Join Sinfonia for a festive holiday concert featuring singer/actor of the stage and screen Nicholas Rodriguez. Details: SinfoniaGulfCoast.org



12/11

Caroling on Pensacola Beach - 3 p.m., Pensacola Beach Boardwalk, 400 Quietwater Beach Rd., Pensacola Beach, Fla. Boardwalk shops will be open for holiday shopping and the public is invited to enjoy the lights on Pensacola Beach!

12/11, 12, 18, 20

3rd Annual Christmas Zoobilee - Live music and entertainment and a Candy Cane Market with unique gifts from local artists and holiday treats. Gulf Breeze Zoo, 5701 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze, Fla. Details: www.gbzoo.com

Light shows brighten the holidays

Through 1/7/22

Christmas Nights of Lights - Hank Aaron Stadium, 755 Bolling Brothers Blvd., Mobile, Ala. Alabama's largest synchronized light show! Enjoy over one million lights synchronized to Christmas music played through your car stereo. Details: 251-572-2327



11/26 - 12/31

Gulfport Harbor Lights Winter Festival - Highway 49 & Highway 90, Gulfport, Miss. See Mississippi's Largest Christmas Light Show with over 1.5 million lights throughout 40 acres in Jones Park! Enjoy self-guided walking tour, carnival rides and train rides. Details: <https://gulfpotharborlights.com>

11/26 - 12/31

Christmas Reflections - DeFuniak Springs, Fla. More than 10 million lights sparkle in Chipley Park! Thousands of decorations including Victorian, animal and toy soldier cutouts, Santa's workshop and more. Details: <https://www.defuniaksprings.net/1097/Christmas-Reflections>

11/26/21 - 01/05/22

Magic Christmas in Lights at Bellingsrath Gardens and Home

- 12401 Bellingsrath Gardens Rd., Theodore, Ala. Magic Christmas in Lights is an hour-long walking tour of the gardens. Details: 251.973.2217 or bellingsrath.org

11/26 - 1/1/22

Snowflakes in the Bay and Sugarplum Festival - Illuminated snowflakes ilight up the historic live oaks in Bay St. Louis and Waveland. Bay St. Louis, Miss. Details: www.gulfcoast.org

11/26 - 12/26

Sowell's North Pole

Christmas Lights - 7650

Sowell Rd., Milton, Fla. Sowell's North Pole Christmas Light Display is open every night including Christmas Eve and Christmas night. Details: <https://www.sowellfarms.com>

11/26 - 1/13/22

First City Lights

Festival - 226 S.

Palafox Place, Downtown Pensacola, Fla. Experience music, shopping, food, art and nightlife under a canopy of half a million white lights. Details: downtownpensacola.com

12/1-22

12 Nights of Lights - Shows at 6, 7 and 8 p.m., Events Plaza Lawn, The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Miramar Beach, Fla. Enjoy a festive light show every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday leading up to Christmas! This event is featured during the holiday Wednesday Night Concert Series. Shows at 6, 7, and 8 p.m. Details: www.baytownewharf.com

12/17 - 12/31

2021 Holiday Lights Extravaganza - Throughout Gulf County, Fla. Take a tour of Gulf County homes and businesses and see the sparkle of a coastal Christmas. The Holiday Lights Extravaganza Map will guide you to all the locations throughout the county. Details: <https://www.visitgulf.com>



Holiday parades return to the gulf coast

12/4

Pensacola Beach Lighted Boat Parade

- The Lighted Boat Parade sets sail at 6:30 p.m. from Sabine Marina and makes its way around the Santa Rosa Sound to the Pensacola Beach Boardwalk. A dazzling firework display will take place over the Santa Rosa Sound at 8 p.m. Details: www.pensacolabeachchamber.com

Panama City Jaycees "A Candyland

Christmas" Parade - Downtown Panama City, FL. 6 p.m. Details: www.pcfjaycees.com/christmas_parade/

"City Light Celebration" in Gulf Breeze

- The Gulf Breeze Community Center's "reverse parade" returns with dozens of floats themed after classic holiday movies, handing out goodies to your car. 10 a.m. Details: www.gulfbreezechamber.com

12/05

Pensacola Beach Surfing Santa Beach

Parade - Starting at 2 p.m. from Avenida 10, the parade will make its way down Via De Luna and ends at the Gulfside Pavilion. Details: www.pensacolabeachchamber.com

Daphne Christmas Parade - Daphne's Main

Street Parade Route. Parade begins at 11 Details: www.daphneal.com

26th Annual Christmas Parade &

Christmas in the Park - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 8513 Navarre Pkwy. in Navarre, Fla. A full day of fun: Jingle Bell 5K Run/Walk, reindeer games, Merry Market, tree lighting and the Navarre Annual Christmas Parade at 1 p.m. Details: www.navarrechamber.com

Discover Christmas Parade & Toy Drive -

2 p.m. in Ocean Springs, Miss. Unwrapped toys brought by parade goers will be collected before and during the parade. Details: www.facebook.com/discoverchristmasparade

12/6

Fort Walton Beach "Christmas

Characters" Parade - Gather along Eglin Parkway to watch about 100 entries including military, bands, area schools, organizations and area businesses. Parade begins at 6:30 p.m. Details: www.fwb.org

12/11

LuLu's Lighted Boat Parade in Gulf Shores

- Enjoy a magical night on the Waterway Village with brightly decorated boats to light the night! Parade begins at 5 p.m. at LuLu's, 200 East 25th Ave., Gulf Shore, Ala. Details: <https://lulubuffett.com/>



Christmas on the Coast Parade - 6 p.m.

EST. 305 Cecil G. Costin Sr. Blvd., Port St. Joe. Sleigh Bells ring on Historic Downtown Reid Avenue for this traditional family fun event! Details: 850-229-8261.

Cox Pensacola Christmas Parade -

Downtown Pensacola. 5:15 p.m. This annual parade includes more than 100 entries, and eight bands from Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, and New Orleans. The parade also features dozens of floats with throws and the nationally renowned Blue Angels flight team. Details: www.coxpensacolachristmasparade.org

Welcome events, cruises return

The pandemic put on hold many regular events but a few are still "on go."

Here's what we have so far. An ongoing list is being compiled at: www.snowbirdgulfcoast.com.

WINTER GUEST FEST:

Billed as the area's largest seasonal expo, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce's Winter Guest Fest will be staged 8 a.m. – Noon Jan. 20 at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, 1250 Miracle Pkwy, Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

The lively event features 50+ booths representing an array of restaurant, hospitality, health-related and other business located throughout the region. There is a nominal \$2 entrance fee. Booths typically have giveaways and some draw for prizes. There also are ongoing drawings for prizes as well. Details: 850-244-8191 or fwbchamber.org/calendar

ANNUAL PENSACOLA BEACH BASH - 10 a.m., Jan. 20, at Our Lady of Assumption Church, 920 Via de Luna, Pensacola Beach. Details: 850-932-2257

SNOWBIRD HOOTENANY: The Perdido Key Chamber will present three "Snowbird Hootenanny" events at the world-famous roadhouse Flora-Bama Lounge on the Florida and Alabama line.

Theme for the first event Jan. 13 is "New Boots;" Feb. 10 is Valentine's theme "Sweetheart Saloon" and the finale Feb. 24, The Original Hootenanny. Events are staged under an outdoor tent and includes live band, buffet lunch and prizes.



Tickets are available at the Perdido Key Chamber, 15500 Perdido Key Dr., Pensacola, FL. Details: 850-492-4660

NAVARRE: The Navarre Visitor Center plans are underway for a series of lectures and events. Details will be announced in the January edition.

CARNIVAL CRUISES:

Carnival Cruise Lines announced in mid-November that cruises will resume on 22 of its ships this March, including out of the Port of Mobile (Ala.)

The Carnival Sensation will sail March 5, just four days after the big Fat Tuesday celebration. There will be four and five-day options to the Western Caribbean. Rates start at \$258. Ports of call can include Cozumel, Progreso and Costa Maya, Mexico depending on cruise length.

The Port of New Orleans will feature four-, five- and seven-day sailings with Mexican ports of call for the shorter cruises and Montego Bay, Mahogany Bay; Grand Cayman or Belize on select longer cruises. Rates start at \$259 for the five-day and \$479 seven-day cruise.

Passengers over age 12 must be fully vaccinated, which follows CDC guidelines. Details: www.carnival.com or contact a travel agent.



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Snowbird Clubs

As we head into 2022, many Snowbird clubs are cautiously moving forward.

Panama

City Beach:

Activities at the Panama City Senior Center are ever-expanding and include wood shop, exercise and dance,

luncheons and more. Check out activities on their Facebook page: Panama City Beach Senior Center.

The Destin Snowbird club has a full slate of activities. The first weekly Tuesday meeting was staged Nov. 16 at "The Roost" Destin Community Center. The club will participate in the annual Destin Christmas parade Dec. 11. Check the website: destinsnowbirds.com for schedules and activities.



Fort Walton Beach:

Club meetings resume Jan. 11. Registration opens Jan. 7. Meetings are held at the Fort Walton Beach Recreation Center, 132 Jet

Dr. NW, Fort Walton Beach. Check activities and details: fwbsbc.com.

Perdido Key: The Perdido Key Chamber will host three "Hootenanny's" at popular roadhouse bar Flora-Bama on the Fla./Ala. line. Details: visitperdido.com

Walton County: The Walton County Snowbirds return this season but urge members to wear masks and social distance for safety. Registrations begin Dec. 6 at Faith Assembly Church, 306 S. Geronimo St., Destin. The first regular meeting is 10 a.m., Dec. 9, at St. Andrews by the Sea Episcopal Church,



307 Harbor Blvd., Destin. Regular winter 2022 meetings will be 10 a.m. Thursdays Jan. 13, 20 and 27 and Feb. 10. at Destin United Methodist Church, 200 Beach Drive, Destin. Check out website for fees and further details: www.waltoncountysnowbirds.com

In Alabama, Snowbird clubs developed organically more than 25 years ago. Today, there are about a dozen (mostly midwestern) clubs.

What we know: Annual fundraisers such as the multi-club Bratfest are tentative. We will have more in our January edition.

Iowa: Iowa Club meets for breakfast at 8:30 a.m., Wednesdays at Perdido Beach Resort, 27200 Perdido Beach Blvd., Orange Beach, Ala. The cost is \$15. Dates include: Jan. 12, 25, Feb. 9, 22 and March 8. Registration and other details: iowa-alabamagulfcoastsnowbirds.org

Minnesota: Members are encouraged to monitor the club

website: <http://www.mnal.org/> for breakfast and activity dates. You must pre-register for breakfast meetings held at GT's on the Bay, 26189 Canal Dr., Orange Beach. There is a 75-person Covid-safe limit. Weekly Tuesday breakfast meetings start Jan. 11 and continue through March 8 (except Fat Tuesday). Pre-register by the Tuesday prior. A breakfast buffet is available for \$10 which includes beverage, tax and tips. Masks are optional but encouraged. Activities include golf, pickleball, dancing and card games. **Michigan and Wisconsin:** The two largest Alabama clubs have tentatively suspended activities for the season.

Please check our website: www.snowbirdsgulfcoast.com and sign up for our e-newsletter for updates. Do you have club updates for our January edition? Submit by Dec. 5 to publisher@snowbirdsgulfcoast.com. Questions? 850-291-1266

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Snowball Derby brings the heat to Pensacola

The famed Snowball Derby, the short-track extravaganza at Five Flags Speedway, is set for its 54th running from Dec. 1-5 in Pensacola.

Drivers from across the country and Canada will come to try and win the prestigious race. And this year, the winner's purse has been raised to \$30,000 from \$25,000.

But the prestige of the race is more to the drivers than the paycheck.

"It's more about the trophy than it is about the check," said track owner Tim Bryant. "We're raising the purses for all divisions to reward all the local drivers as well.

Among the returning drivers is defending champion Ty Majewski, who had led the Derby with less than 30 laps to go twice in the previous four races but hadn't been able to hang on for the lead. Last year, he held off Derek Thorn over the last five laps to secure the

prestigious Tom Dawson trophy.

Two current NASCAR Cup drivers are set to try and make the 38-car field – Erik Jones, the 2012 and 2013 Snowball Derby champion, and Ryan Preece. Also, among the early



entries are Rich Bickle Jr., the only five-time Snowball Derby champion, Stephen Nasse, Bubba Pollard, Chandler Smith and Casey Smith. Also returning is Thorn, who lead a race-record 250 laps in last year's race before finishing runner-up.

"It's a who's who of short-track drivers," Bryant said.

Since the pandemic has left a shortage of tires, the track is limiting the number of tires they can use during practices.

"One of the things we've battled through this year is a shortage of racing tires," Bryant said. "We're hoping all it will do is save them some money."

With Hooters signing on as the presenting sponsor of the race, the Tuesday, Nov. 30 Kickoff Party will move from downtown Pensacola to Pensacola Beach at the Boardwalk where Hooters is located.



Races start Thursday, Dec. 2 and continue until Sunday, Dec. 5, with the green flag waving for the start of the Snowball Derby at 2 p.m.

The race will be its traditional 300 laps and will use the same format last year, which includes controlled pit stops. Fans can check out the updated driver entry list, purchase tickets and other race information at www.snowballderby.com.

Pensacola hockey defending league title this season

The Pensacola Ice Flyers' championship year last season doesn't come with an asterisk.

They clinched their fourth title as the Southern Professional Hockey League played the 2020-21 season with only five teams and a reduced schedule because of the pandemic.

This season, the league is back as whole, including the new expansion team, the Vermilion County Bobcats, located in Danville, Ill. It gives the SPHL an 11-team league playing 56 games (28 home and away).

Summer recruiting was challenged by the fact that a vast majority of collegiate players were staying in school, following the NCAA decision to grant an extra year of eligibility. With the higher-level ECHL not playing last year, those teams tapped into SPHL teams, including the Ice Flyers, to sign their returning players.



Season tickets and single game tickets are on sale. Fans can download the Ice Flyers app and follow the team's social media accounts for news and information. Details: www.pensacolaiceflyers.com.

Home games: Pensacola Bay Center

Nov. 24 – vs. Macon, 7:05 p.m.
Dec. 3 – vs. Macon, 7:05 p.m.
Dec. 16 – vs. Huntsville, 7:05 p.m.
Dec. 26 – vs. Birmingham, 5:05 p.m.
Dec. 30 – vs. Birmingham, 7:05 p.m.
Jan. 7 – vs. Huntsville, 7:05 p.m.
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Beau Rivage brings holiday joy!

The Mississippi gulf coast is counting down to Santa's arrival with a full slate of holiday events.

Christmas magic is in the air at MGM Resorts' Biloxi beachfront resort with a winter wonderland featuring glittering displays, live entertainment, shopping and Santa.

Beau Rivage Resort & Casino celebrates the season through New Year's with special events including a spectacular holiday show.

The resort is adorned with larger-than-life nutcrackers, oversized Christmas ornaments, hundreds of frost-covered trees, thousands of brilliant poinsettias, and Santa's sleigh and reindeer soaring high



above the atrium. A stunning 20-foot Christmas tree and classic winter scenes throughout the resort's public spaces invoke the spirit of the season.

This year's holiday show, Christmas in the Air, is a Broadway-style holiday spectacular performed by an award-winning cast of high-kicking Rockette-style dancers, world-class singers, and veteran TV and film actors. The 75-minute show depicts a 'snow globe come to life' through music, exquisite costuming, festive

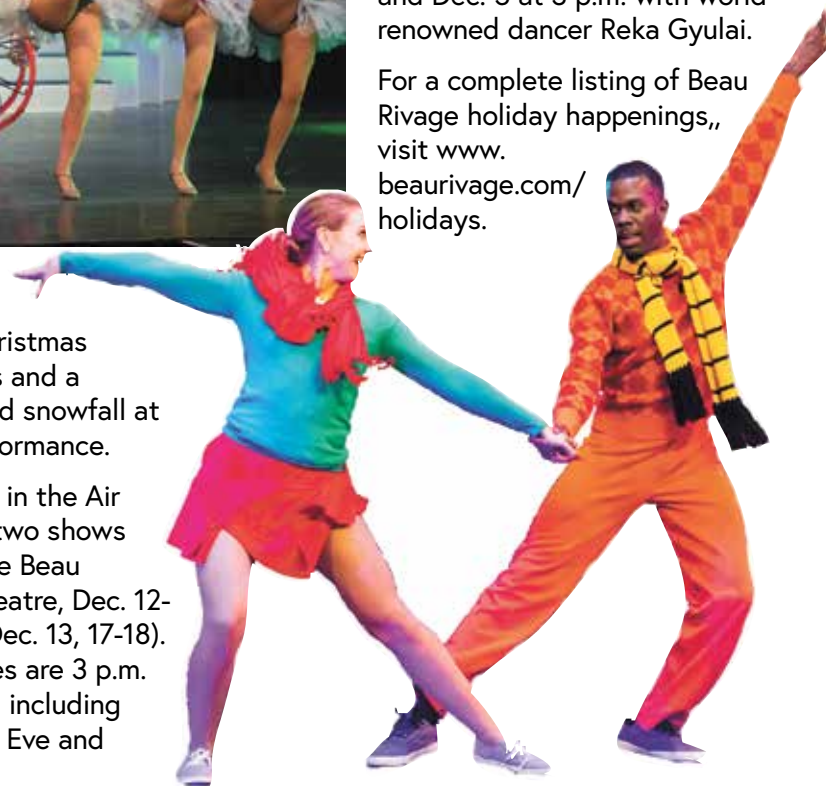
sets, well-known Christmas characters and a guaranteed snowfall at every performance.

Christmas in the Air performs two shows daily in the Beau Rivage Theatre, Dec. 12-26 (dark Dec. 13, 17-18). Show times are 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. including Christmas Eve and

Christmas Day performances.

The Beau Rivage is also home to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Ballet Theatre's 11th annual presentation of The Nutcracker at the Beau Rivage Theatre stage on Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. and Dec. 5 at 3 p.m. with world-renowned dancer Reka Gyulai.

For a complete listing of Beau Rivage holiday happenings,, visit www.beaurivage.com/holidays.



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Local small businesses beckon holiday shoppers with special events

By Louis Cooper

At Christmastime, the historic downtown hearts of some small Southern cities are transformed into special, local shopping events.

"You support the small business owner when you shop small, you support local artists when you shop small, but most of all, you support your local economy when you shop small," said Laurie Rosetti, who works with Biloxi's "Christmas In The City."

Here are some great opportunities to find that perfect Christmas gift while helping make the holidays brighter for local small business owners:



DeFuniak Springs, Florida

In downtown DeFuniak Springs, an extravaganza called Merry Main Street joins local, small-business shopping with live entertainment, visits with Santa and food trucks, starting on Nov. 27, Small Business Saturday, the day after Black Friday.

"This is a great event for snowbirds visiting the area," said Chelsea A. Blaich, the executive director of Main Street DeFuniak Springs. "It's completely free to attend, guests can come and go as they please, strolling and shopping our streets."

The festival site is just a short walk to and from Lake DeFuniak, home of the city's annual Christmas Reflections light show.

Festivities run every Friday and



Saturday leading up to Christmas. On Saturdays from 2 to 8 p.m., the Mistletoe Markets feature about 60 vendors with homemade items.

Visitors can also enjoy live entertainment, train rides and food trucks on Fridays and Saturdays.

The Men's Lounge at the Florida Chautauqua Theatre will stream live sports and have refreshments available noon to 6 p.m. on Nov. 27.

"Main Street DeFuniak Springs continues to work hard to reinvigorate the downtown experience," Blaich said. "We are blessed with a business district set in the heart of the city and we want to host events that showcase that." Details: mainstreetdfs.org/merry-main-street/

Biloxi, Mississippi

For the 17th year, businesses in downtown Biloxi will welcome shoppers for "Christmas In The City" on Nov. 20, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the downtown Rue Magnolia district.

The charming holiday festival showcases the Biloxi Art District, local retailers and nearly 100 vendors from the region.

"This festival also honors many long-held Biloxi Christmas traditions with music from local church choirs," said Laurie Rosetti, assistant executive director of Biloxi Main Street, which coordinates the event.

Festivities include live music, food from local vendors and a local favorite spiced fritters called pusharatas, a Slovenian treat brought to Biloxi a century and a half ago. Every hour, there will be a drawing for \$100.00 cash.

"We know our snowbirds come to "Christmas In The City." Some of them happen upon it while visiting

(downtown), but many have returned through the years also," Rosetti said. "What visitors love is that they get a flavor of Biloxi's culture and our melting pot heritage."

In addition to many downtown businesses, festival vendors include jewelers, potters, toymakers, home décor creators and more. Details: mainstreetbiloxi.com

Pensacola, Florida

One lucky shopper will win \$1,000 through the "All I Want" giveaway, sponsored by Pensacola's Downtown Improvement Board.

The giveaway runs through Dec. 24. Shoppers upload their receipts from participating downtown businesses for a chance to win the gift card.

On Small Business Saturday, qualified receipts earn two entries. Sidewalk decals in front shops, bars, restaurants and other businesses denote their participation. Details: www.downtownpensacola.com

Panama City, Florida

The weekly St. Andrew's Market is putting on its tinsel for Small Business Saturday, Nov. 27, starting at 8 a.m.

Shops in the historic neighborhood, are planning live entertainment, giveaways and more. Details: www.historicstandrews.com

Orange Beach, Alabama

Small businesses in South Alabama are coming together for Nov. 27, Small Business Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at The Wharf.

The Wharf is the premier stop along your shopping route to purchase regional goods, products and services for the holidays. Details: <https://alwharf.com/>

Navarre, Florida

Navarre is hosting the Shop Small Christmas Crawl! Celebrate the season with a small business passport from Nov. 27 to Dec. 15. Explore and save! Details: www.navarrechamber.com

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Holy Joe

He sat alone in a breakfast joint. He was old, wearing wrinkled clothes, with white stubble on his chin, like he forgot to shave. He was doing a crossword puzzle.

When I am old, I will forget to shave and do crosswords.

He wore a Navy ball cap with scrambled-egg embellishments on the bill, his reading glasses on his nose.

Buck Owens was overhead singing "Together Again."

I pulled up a stool beside him. Socially distanced, of course. We micro-smiled at each other. The waitress handed me a menu, I gave it back and replied, "Three eggs, sunny, and bacon, please."

The old guy and I exchanged another formal grin. Minutes went by. He broke the ice first. "Where's home, fella?"

When I am old, I will call strangers fella.

I jerked a thumb behind me. "About three hours that way. You?"

He laughed. "Nineteen hours in the other direction. On vacation with my kids in Crawfordville this week." He looked at me over his readers. "Had to get outta the condo, my granddaughters were driving me insane."

The waitress refilled his mug. The man used six packets of sugar in his coffee.

I will someday use six packets of sugar.

The inscription on his ballcap caught my eyes, it read: "Navy Chaplain Corps."

I pointed to his hat. "Bet I can guess what you did for a living."

The man smiled. "Yep. I'm an inactive chaplain—there's no such thing as a retired chaplain."

"So, how'd you get into the business of saving Navy souls?"

He laughed again. "Well, I didn't save'em. I just listened to a lot of'em talk."

Silence.

He added, "My daddy was a preacher. But that ain't what made me wanna be a Holy Joe."

"What did?"

"Oh, lotta things." He looked at me with eyes of slate blue, the color of dungarees. "You ever hear of the SS Dorchester?"

I shook my head. "Was that your ship?"

"No way. The Dorchester was back during the War Against Hitler, in '43. I was busy filling diapers in '43. You weren't even a glint in your grandfather's eye."

I will also tell youngsters they weren't glints in their grandfathers' eyes.

"The Dorchester was a troop transporter, carrying 904 passengers. They were in a three-ship convoy in the North Atlantic when they sank."

"Sank?"

"Sank." He nudged his cap backward and acknowledged a young waitress who had joined our little conversational soirée. I got the feeling the old preacher didn't get captive audiences like this anymore.

"How'd it sink?" asked the waitress.

"Torpedoed." He clapped once. "The Dorchester got attacked by a German sub, middle of the night, just off Newfoundland. Enemy fire knocked out the electrical system, left 904 folks in the pitch dark."

He leaned forward and lowered his voice for effect. The waitress leaned in too.

"You wanna talk fear, fella? Try being stuck in the North Atlantic in the dark."

He let the melodrama breathe for a few moments, then pretended to work on his puzzle again. He was probably waiting for us to beg him to keep talking.

Preachers.

"So what happened?"

The Holy Joe shrugged. "Panic. Suddenly, the crew was going ape, screaming. The ship was going down. Crewmen were trapped below deck. Game over. No hope."

By now, another young waitress had joined storytime circle.

"So," the old man went on, "guess who helps organize an orderly evacuation, guess who calms everyone down and keeps 900 people from losing it?" He thumped his hat. "Chaplains. There were four of'em on the Dorchester."

He placed four fingers on the bartop. "George Fox, Alex Goode, John Washington, and Clark Poling—a Catholic priest, a rabbi, and two old-school preachers."

The waitress interjected. "I'm Methodist."

Everyone paused to look at the young woman with confused but polite smiles.

"Well, I am," she said quietly.

I attempted to bring us back on track. "So they sank?"

"I'm getting to that part. See, these four chaplains were in charge of getting the panicked and wounded to safety, but first they had to pass out life jackets to everyone—in the dark, mind you—and that's when it all hit the fan."

He froze to add more tension. This guy was a showman.

"So what happened?" said the professed Methodist. "What happened is they ran outta life jackets, and without those, you're dead. Lotta men died."

"Survivors said the only thing you could hear that night were prayers in Hebrew, English, and Latin, filling the air—it was the voices of the chaplains. The chaplains never quit praying. There were 674 lives lost at sea."

"Wow," muttered the waitress.

I looked downward at my coffee and thought about brave men I never knew.

The old man's voice hushed. "Survivors were swimming away from the wreckage, dog paddling through 34-degree water. Some said they looked at the ship behind them, in the glow of the emergency flares, and you know what they saw?"

"What?"

"The four chaplains were removing their own life jackets and giving their jackets away to save others, while the ship was going down."

The old man had glazed eyes now. "Last thing anyone remembers seeing was one priest, one rabbi, and two preachers, holding hands, linking arms with crewmen, and singing hymns. The waves crashed in, swallowed everyone whole, killed'em. And those four chaplains went down singing."

He turned back to his crossword. "That's what made me wanna be a chaplain."

Sean Dietrich is a columnist and novelist known for his commentary on life in the American South. Learn more at www.seandietrich.com



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