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SUMMER 2017 MAGAZINE

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PCB ENTERTAINMENT, LLC

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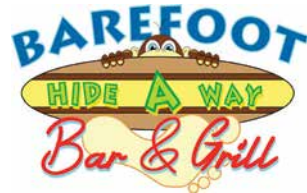


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CALL FOR SUMMER SPECIALS!



IN DAYS GONE BY, many Panama City Beach businesses were open only for summer — locals often say that you could just about “roll up the sidewalks” after Labor Day weekend, the unofficial end of summer. While Panama City Beach has grown into a year-round destination and that same Labor Day weekend is known more for the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam marking the beginning of a fun-filled fall season, it’s still true that the summertime tradition of bringing the family to Panama City Beach is a strong one. Businesses across the beach are excited to welcome first-time visitors along with families who have been frequenting the beach for generations.



It’s in that spirit of summertime fun that this issue of Visit Panama City Beach magazine is offering a close look at time-honored favorites like snorkeling at the jetties in St. Andrews State Park (“Life on the Rocks,” p. 48) and taste-testing favorite local stops for ice cream (p. 76), along with new ways to explore the beach ... like seeking out new and “undiscovered” shops (p. 90) or taking flight to see Panama City Beach from a whole new perspective (“Flying High,” p. 50).

You’ll find this season’s top picks for shopping, along with a new line of Panama City Beach apparel that will let you take a little bit of that fun vacation vibe home with you. As always, we’re delving deep to provide insights into golf, fishing and diving — did you know that the waters off Panama City Beach are a great place to scuba dive with the endangered species known as the goliath grouper (p. 32)?

Our summer issue is a fun read that will unlock many secrets of our Real. Fun. Beach. In every season, we’re proud to have you with us, and thank you for making Panama City Beach your own.

Sunny Regards,

Dan Rowe, President and CEO

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FISHING, DIVING AND THE COASTAL LIFESTYLE

Chasin' The Sun explores the diverse fisheries found in the emerald waters off the coast of Panama City Beach. Host and professional fishing guide Justin Leake provides an in-depth look at the irresistible coastal lifestyle, highlighting the region's rich culture and revealing why Panama City Beach is a fishing and diving hotspot and family vacation destination.

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- "City Pier" Russell-Fields Pier
- "County Pier" M.B. Miller Pier

**NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

Major Road

Bike Path



Distance Chart

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Birmingham, AL	280 mi	440 km
Dallas, TX	751 mi	1,310 km
Houston, TX	639 mi	1,034 km
Montgomery, AL	186 mi	206 km
Nashville, TN	476 mi	744 km
New Orleans, LA	305 mi	513 km
Orlando, FL	340 mi	617 km
St. Louis, MO	745 mi	1,243 km
Tallahassee, FL	98 mi	171 km
Tampa, FL	339 mi	546 km

Natural Treasures

By land and by sea, animals enrich the Gulf of Mexico experience

BY STEVE BORNHOFT
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RUSSO

DESERTS CAN BE made to bloom. Just add water. Doubt that? Consider, then, the sands of Panama City Beach, its surf line and the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico extending to the horizon.

Those environments attract and host myriad life forms, a mere small sample of which is represented in the drawing before you. Some, at the bottom of food chains, are so small as to go unseen; others are too big to be reeled in.

To be sure, all add to the experience of visiting the beach. It is possible to enjoy each on a surface level, but you may also be inclined to go granular — see what we did there? — and seek answers to the questions they invite: How do sand dollars eat? Of what advantage to snowy egrets are yellow feet? All groupers mature first as females! What's that all about?

And, hey, we haven't even gotten around to marine mammals, including that bottlenose leaper who elicits oohs and aahs whenever it takes to the air.



Laughing Gull



Great Blue Heron



Sandpiper

Flounder



Speckled Sea Trout



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Golfers' Paradise

FOR THE SERIOUS GOLFER — or the lucky beginner — there could be no Panama City Beach souvenir more precious than a hole-in-one. Courses here offer easy-to-reach par 3s that make such an achievement possible. There are plenty of driving holes, too, that will tempt you to take the big stick out of the bag. And hey, if your sand wedge is a little rusty, there's no better way to sharpen your sand play than to practice at the beach before hitting the links.

Panama City Beach's eight-course golf menu includes:

BAY POINT, offering two layouts, the only Nicklaus Design course in the region and a more subtle Walter Byrd layout;

HOLIDAY GOLF, home to both a regulation 18-hole layout and a lighted par-3 executive course;

HOMBRE, with three courses, each of which provides a distinctive challenge and lots of water;

SIGNAL HILL, which delivers a varied 18 holes, open on the front side but dicier on the back.



RAISED ON GOLF

A local's tips and tricks for golfing in Panama City Beach

BY MATT ALGARIN

PHOTOS BY CHASE ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY



CAMERON FISH,
a junior at Arnold
High School, calls
the Hombre in
Panama City Beach
her home course.

FOR 17-YEAR-OLD CAMERON FISH, a junior at Arnold High School, golf is more than just a hobby or a way to spend her free time; it's a way of life. Fish has been golfing for more than 10 years and is a junior member at Hombre, which serves as her home course in Panama City Beach. Fish, who recently accepted a scholarship to play golf at Belmont College in Nashville, Tennessee, is a talented golfer who was named a Top 5 Individual Medalist at the Florida 2A State Championships in 2016 and crowned champion of the 2016 Daily News Classic. So, how does Fish stay focused on her game, schoolwork and normal teenage life? Here's a Q&A with the young golfer in which she shares some of her favorite tips and tricks.

What are the best times to play/practice?

Fish: My favorite time to play and practice golf is between 8–10 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to sunset. The fall is always so nice to play because it's not too hot and there is always a nice breeze. What's great about Florida is that golf can be played year-round without the worry of snow days. However, we may have to worry about the heat index in the summer months.

What is your favorite course?

Fish: My home course, Hombre, is essentially my ideal place to play. I love the course, practice facilities and the people who work there. I have been playing golf at Hombre for over 10 years. If I'm not at Hombre, my other favorite course is Bay Point. A lot of my matches are played there during our season. And the views on the Nicklaus course at Bay Point are beautiful.

What are the best ways to improve your game?

Fish: The best way to improve your game is to practice. My dad always tells me to practice with a purpose! Having a positive attitude going into practice is important. Figure out how to make practice fun and not a chore. Having a golfer friend to play and practice with makes it challenging.

What are the biggest challenges?

Fish: The biggest challenges, for me, are staying focused and removing outside distractions — allowing golf to be an escape.





What tips do you have to make practice fun/unique?

Fish: Creating situations for each shot. Sometimes I say, “This putt in to win the U.S. Open.” Always making the target the most important part and taking time with each shot.

How much time should be spent practicing the game?

Fish: During my season, I usually spend an hour or two practicing every day, working on my short game, drives and irons. I also try to get out on the course and play holes, too. Some days I only practice chipping and putting. Practice really depends on the person. A serious golfer will most likely practice every day.

How do you balance school, practice, tournaments and normal teenage life?

Fish: Time management and scheduling are very important. A usual week for me: school until 3 p.m., golf after school until about 5 p.m. On weekends I try to practice or play in the morning. During the school week, I have homework/studying that gets done after golf practice. About once or twice a month we are out of town for a tournament. When I am home and have extra time, I enjoy spending time with my friends. Lucky for me, I also have a lot of friends who golf, too!

What are some good training tips?

Fish: Create a practice schedule. Work hard and have fun. I like to use drills and games.

What are some of your tips/suggestions for staying comfortable on the course?

Fish: I drink lots of water and carry healthy snacks (no sports drinks). Wear dry-fit clothing. I also use cooling towels when it’s extra hot to stay cool. I use a push cart for my clubs and sometimes even put my umbrella up for shade when I’m on the course. ●



SNORKELING AT
ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK

THE FUN NEVER STOPS

Activities are abundant, day and night!

BY HANNAH BURKE

FAMILIES. THEY VARY IN SIZE, shape, composition and quirks. Like animals in the wild, some families play all day, while others look for excitement as the sun sets.

Whether your family falls into the diurnal or nocturnal camp, Panama City Beach will keep everyone busy and having fun!

DAY

Beaches and Trails at State and City Parks

Panama City Beach is the home of several nature and conservation parks, which allow families to see Florida in

its most natural, untouched state. One such area is St. Andrews State Park, a gorgeous slice of land that offers camping, hiking and water activities. St. Andrews stretches along 1.5 miles of pristine beach and is perfect for fishing, snorkeling, SCUBA diving and boating. Opened as a state park in 1951, this landscape is rich with history and filled with trails that wind through pine forests, begging to be explored.

FloridaStateParks.org/Park/St-Andrews

Camp Helen State Park is home to 180 acres of land surrounded by the Gulf and Lake Powell. This allows for kayaking, swimming and casting your

line to catch freshwater or saltwater fish. Many visitors to this park come to hike and to see the old cottages that were constructed here in the 1940s or the log cabin lodge that dates to 1931. Birdwatching is highly popular among visitors to the park; hawks, osprey and even bald eagles are frequently seen along one of the park's two hiking trails. A half-mile trail leads to a secluded beach, home of the so-called "hidden pier." FloridaStateParks.org/Park/Camp-Helen

Families that just want a beach day are invited to flock to Rick Seltzer Park. Encompassing 4.75 acres of >>



Instant Attractions

FOR THOSE LOOKING FOR ATTRACTIVE GALORE, PANAMA CITY BEACH IS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

“FUN IN THE SUN” may be one of Panama City Beach’s unofficial mantras, but this booming beach town has a lot more to offer than simply world-class natural amenities. Sure, the 27 miles of pristine coastline are what draw people in. But once visitors arrive in this vacationers’ wonderland, there are a million reasons to stay.

Sightseers in need of a reprieve from the sunshine will have an array of adventures to choose from in Panama City Beach.

On the agenda? Well, for starters, how about partaking in a round of mini-golf, getting into a laser tag shootout with loved ones or making friends with a stingray? As a true, All-American seaside retreat, this beach is chock-full of fun attractions.

coastline, this park is free to enter and allows easy access to the beach. This locally renowned spot features natural dunes, which means that although the amenities of the city are just around the corner, park guests experience the feeling of a secluded beach, undisturbed by civilization. You can find Rick Seltzer Park at 7419 Thomas Drive. VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/Listings/Rick-Seltzer-Park/545

For families that are serious about hitting the trails, the Panama City Beach Conservation Park provides a premier hiking venue. Visitors can choose from 12 different paths, ranging from a half-mile to 11 miles in length. These trails twist through the park's 2,900 acres of land, which is home to multiple ecosystems. An elaborate system of boardwalks stretches over cypress ponds and make for amazing photo opportunities. The park welcomes families to bring their furry friends on leashes, and pups will love taking in all the sights and smells of the land. Bikers will also enjoy the mix of paved and

off-road pathways through the park. PanamaCityBeachParksAndRecreation.com/Conservation-Park.html

Day Cruises and Tours

Families who want to venture beyond the shore have plenty of daytime cruising options to choose from. Paradise Adventures is owned by Tracey and Donnie Coker, a seafaring couple who are living out their dream every day aboard their boat, the Privateer. This 52-foot-long catamaran takes families along a 3.5-hour adventure cruise to Shell Island. There, Mom and Dad can enjoy a cool beverage while the kids play on water trampolines, take banana-boat rides and even descend the Privateer's waterslide into the water! For a tamer experience, Paradise Adventures also provides an exclusive dolphin-spotting tour, in which guides share fun facts about the area and its wildlife while guests enjoy a relaxing sunset cruise. ParadiseAdventuresPCB.com

Looking to blend a little education with your entertainment? The Captain



Anderson III is a double-decker boat that takes up to 250 passengers at a time for a sightseeing eco-tour. Feed the seagulls, look for dolphins and travel by the jetties of St. Andrews Bay while guides talk about the habitat and the life it supports. Upon reaching Shell Island, guides use a net to haul up sea creatures and shells from the water. Before they are safely released back to the bay, guests are invited to get a hands-on encounter with sea urchins, crabs and puffer fish! Guests are

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A photograph showing a man and a woman on a boat, both smiling and holding fishing rods. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a blue shirt and white shorts, and the man is behind her, wearing a pink shirt and dark shorts. They are on a boat with a white railing, and the background shows a vast ocean under a sunset sky with soft, colorful clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The water is a deep blue-green color. The overall mood is peaceful and enjoyable.

Whether you choose to fish offshore or in the shallows, in Panama City Beach you're all but guaranteed to "hook a big one!"

GARY JOHN NORMAN

encouraged to snorkel, swim or explore the island while the boat is docked. CaptAndersonsMarina.com

Ready to trade in your landlubber status to be a pirate of the high seas? The Sea Dragon Pirate Cruise is led by Captain "Fearless" Phil and his daring deck hands. Each guest is an honorary crewmember of the Sea Dragon, which sets sail from the Grand Lagoon. Kids are led in "sword" fights, look for treasure and receive their very own pirate "tattoo." Drinks and snacks are served aboard, and the mood is set along the way with some swashbuckling dance tunes. PirateCruise.net

For some high-speed, hands-on action, multiple vendors around Panama City Beach provide both guided and unguided Jet Ski tours. At Flippers Boat Rentals and Dolphin Tours, located on North Lagoon Drive, a two-hour guided Jet Ski tour provides a wet-and-wild ride to Shell Island, where each rider has the opportunity to see dolphins up close! You must be at least 16 to operate a Jet Ski, but children 5 and up are able to ride as passengers, promising a great time for the whole family. goflippersgo.com

Sports

The usually placid Gulf of Mexico occasionally offers up emerald green waves, welcoming experienced surfers and newcomers. If you and your family are pros at riding the rollers, the beach is chock-full of surf shops that offer board rentals. If you're just visiting the area, Mr. Surf's on Thomas Drive is home to experienced surfers who delight in providing lessons for first-timers. Each instructor has years of experience and can turn novices into conquerors of the waves. Lessons and rentals are also available for stand-up paddleboarding, if that's more your speed. MrSurfs.com

Ahoy, anglers! Panama City Beach is a fisherman's utopia, with the sea, lakes, ponds and piers at every turn. For a unique experience that you can't get from your waters back home, embark on a daytime deep-sea fishing adventure. At Capt. Anderson's Marina, fishing charters take groups on five- to 12-hour excursions into the Gulf of Mexico. There, fishermen drop their lines to catch snapper, mackerel and grouper! Back at the marina, Anderson's Seafood Market is more than happy to

clean and store your fish so you can take it home with you, or they will deliver it to a local restaurant to cook up your catch! If you prefer to stay grounded, the M.B. Miller County Pier and Russel Fields Pier on Front Beach Road extend 1,500 feet from the beach. Both include a Florida fishing license for the day as part of a \$6 fishing fee. CaptAndersonsMarina.com/deep-sea-fishing and VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/things-to-do/piers

Athletic families can stay on top of their game while on vacation, thanks to the facilities at Frank Brown Park. This recreational center recently received a \$4 million makeover and covers over 200 acres filled with basketball and tennis courts; baseball, soccer and football fields; an Olympic pool and Aquatic Center; and an enclosed dog park! Frank Brown Park frequently hosts a variety of sports tournaments, and it is not uncommon for families to plan a vacation around sporting events. This summer, the park will hold the Grand Slam World Series of Baseball and Fast Pitch tournament. Be sure to check out the park's website for events that may pique your interest! FrankBrownPark.com >>

NIGHT

Amusement Parks

The sun is down, replaced by stars and the tantalizing neon lights of classic amusements.

Thrill seekers can find plenty of excitement at Race City. With multiple race tracks to choose from — including one designed with little riders in mind — Race City Go Karts is unlike any go-kart venue in the area. Visitors especially love the Golden Gate track, which is the highest, speediest track in all of Panama City Beach. Extra-adventurous families are invited to try the park's Sky Coaster, a 137-foot tower that plunges its harnessed riders from the clouds and lets them soar like Superman. The park also caters to the less extreme members of the family, providing a unique indoor mini-golf experience, an arcade and bumper boats. RaceCityPCB.com

Even after the sun has set, heat lingers in the air. To cool off, Funland Arcade provides an enclosed, air-conditioned retro space for entertainment. Having a night out at Funland is like taking a step back in time, as this arcade has been around since 1953 and retains its classic charm. With more than 100 games to choose from, families can experience contemporary arcade games as well as the classics. After you're done playing, reap your rewards by turning in your hard-earned tickets and selecting from hundreds of individual prizes. Guests are also able to enjoy breakfast, lunch or dinner from the Funland restaurant. Funland-Arcade.com

While mini-golf can certainly be enjoyed during the day, nighttime play takes the top prize when the course and its obstacles are embellished with brilliant light. Coconut Creek Family Fun Park stays open until 11:30 p.m., allowing plenty of time to make the rounds through two 18-hole courses that journey along winding waterways and across suspension bridges. For an additional challenge, Coconut Creek lets you explore its fenced-in labyrinth, the Gran Maze. CoconutCreekFun.com

Concerts

There's something about summertime that causes Panama City Beach to come to life with music. It's become a local



COCONUT CREEK FAMILY FUN PARK



MICHAEL BOONIN

tradition to head out to Aaron Bessant Park every Thursday for the Summer Concert Series. Live shows start June 15 and carry on each Thursday until August 10. The best part? It's completely free! Bring a blanket or beach chairs, drinks and snacks, then sit back and enjoy rockin' performances by artists of all different genres. VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

At nearby Carillon Beach, you can enjoy a more intimate musical experience with Groovin' on the Green. This series kicks off and wraps up on Sundays, but

all dates between are held on Mondays. Bring snacks, drinks and chairs, or take a seat on the lush green field, which is also where each two-hour show is held. Local bands like Reasonable Doubt, The Rowdies and The Mighty Hurricanes are scheduled to jam the night away. This series begins at the end of May and ends in September, with one show per week. Facebook.com/GroovinontheGreen

Take a trip to Pier Park on any given night, and you'll hear music emanating from the area's restaurants. For coastal

melodies that set the perfect ambience for paradise, Margaritaville is the place to be. Parents out for a night without the kids may take interest in the neighboring Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, a place where boots stomp to country music and the beer is always served cold. For some international flair, the Hoffbräu Beer Garden serves up German beer and cuisine with traditional tunes. Families who seek live entertainment and a beachside view can venture beyond Pier Park to restaurants like Pineapple Willy's, Sharky's Beach Club, Harpoon Harry's or the world-famous Schooners, still known as "The Last Local Beach Club." Keeping the spirit of the al fresco beach bar and grill alive, Schooners is a great venue for outdoor concerts near the sand and surf. The bands of Schooners play everything from rock, country and oldies to dance music. Schooners.com

Across the Hathaway Bridge, check out the historic downtown or St. Andrews

sections of Panama City. These areas of town have been undergoing a revival of late and are quickly becoming hot spots for nighttime entertainment. Restaurants along the main streets of Harrison Avenue and Beck Avenue are opening their doors at night and letting the music pour out; the hard part is choosing where to stop!

Sunset Cruises

Before the night begins, twilight casts Panama City Beach in shades of rose-gold and tangerine. Sunset cruises take passengers into another world, where the breeze is warm and reality seems to drip away. Island Time Sailing's catamaran embarks on a two-hour cruise through the Gulf to view dolphins, which are incredibly active at this time. While parents may prefer to sail off alone on a romantic getaway, it is certainly an event the whole family can enjoy. The impressive vessel can transport up to 78 passengers

and is stocked with refreshments for the voyage. IslandTimeSailing.com/dolphin-sunset-cruise

Families seeking a true Floridian experience can venture out on a sunset cruise by Wild Thang Airboat Tours. These exceptional boats are designed to easily navigate through the marshes and backwaters of the area, which are home to wading birds and those famous Florida gators. In fact, taking this sunset cruise is the best opportunity to spot a gator, as they are more active by night. As the sky grows dim, your captain will shine his light onto the water to give passengers the chance to spot some of these amazing creatures. In the dark, a gator's eyes shine a bright, ruby red, making the reptiles hard to miss! Wild Thang boats are spacious, allowing room for the whole family to pile in and embark on a memorable and unique adventure. PanamaCityAirBoat.com/tour-info ●

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Diving Panama City Beach

THE NO. 1

destination for scuba diving in the Southeast is right here, or to be more precise, offshore in the calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

There are six dive shops in the area and a number of independent dive charters — a testament to the world-class diving that can be found in Panama City Beach.

Artificial reefs, made from decommissioned ships, old bridge spans and other structures, give divers from all over the world a chance to see a wide variety of undersea wildlife.

An artificial reef off Panama City Beach is like an oasis in a desert, because this part of the Gulf sea floor is 98 percent sand and the wrecks help attract and support sea life. The wrecks themselves can be found at depths starting at 60 feet and as far down as 110 feet, providing opportunities for novice divers and experts alike.



An underwater photograph showing a vibrant coral reef. In the foreground, there are large, branching corals with a yellowish-orange hue. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from above. A large, dark fish, likely a goliath grouper, is visible near the bottom of the frame, partially obscured by the coral.

Diving with Endangered Species

Goliath grouper are a common site on nearshore reefs **BY STEVE BORNHOFT**

CONSULT YOUTUBE, and you can find a brief video of an angler reeling in a 4-foot shark, when suddenly a goliath grouper engulfs the hooked fish.

So, let there be no doubt as to which species swims atop the marine food chain in Florida waters.

All of this has been known to Capt. Chris Powell for years. Powell grew up in Fort Lauderdale and did a lot of diving in the Keys where his parents had a weekend place. An avid spear

“We frequently find goliath grouper near the jetties at the pass to (St. Andrew) bay. I am very familiar with one that has been hanging around the tip of one of the jetties for about six months.”

— Capt. Chris Powell

fisherman, he is today the manager at Panama City Diving on Thomas Drive.

“When I’m spearfishing, sharks are less common a sight than goliaths,”

Powell has found. The giant groupers, he says, “will follow you around a wreck and they may back off just a little bit if you turn and look at them, but as soon as you resume swimming, they will fall right back in behind you.”

Powell says that once he corrals a fish and places it on a stringer, goliaths tend not to be a problem; “but when I shoot a fish and it’s going crazy on the end of a spear, that’s when the goliaths will come in,” seeking an easy meal.

Waters off Panama City Beach do not feature coral reefs, meaning that fish are concentrated instead on limestone outcroppings, often called “hard bottom,” or shipwrecks and other artificial reefs. Goliath grouper, said Powell, prefer structures with relief that afford them hiding places.

One need not travel far from the dock to find goliaths hanging out in the waters of Panama City Beach.

“We frequently find goliath grouper near the jetties at the pass to (St. Andrew) bay,” Powell observes. “I am very familiar with one that has been hanging around the tip of one of the jetties for about six months.”

Powell says divers who visit wrecks and reefs off Panama City Beach can



"We don't have any Volkswagens, but we've got some big ones." — Capt. Chris Powell



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reliably expect to see goliath grouper ranging between 100 and 400 pounds.

“We don’t have any Volkswagens, but we’ve got some big ones,” he says.

Among the bridge spans that became artificial reefs when the old Hathaway Bridge was dismantled, No. 14, located just 5.7 miles outside the pass, is a goliath hot spot. Powell says that especially during the summer

months, the span can attract four or five goliaths at a time.

Local waters host another outlandishly large apex predator called the Warsaw grouper, but it tends to inhabit greater depths than those favored by goliaths. Like goliaths, Warsaw grouper take up residence on a particular structure and stay there. So it is that one popular area dive site is known as the Warsaw Hole.

Any number of spots might legitimately be named Goliath Hole, says Powell, who notes that goliaths, whose populations have grown given their long-running status as a protected endangered species, seem sometimes to be on “absolutely every wreck.”

Goliath populations were decimated by overfishing in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to a harvest prohibition in 1990. Since then, there have been dramatic increases in abundance as goliaths have reclaimed much of their former range off the Big Bend and Panhandle regions of Florida.

Still, Powell is wary about consideration being given to proposals that would allow for a limited harvest of goliaths.

“I’ve heard about a possible lottery approach, like gator hunting, where the winners would qualify to purchase a goliath tag,” Powell says. “But, whatever the proposal, we would need to be careful. In a week, you could totally get all the ones we see.”

Indeed, at a meeting on Feb. 8, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) discussed how the state might conduct a drawing to select fishermen who would be allowed to keep one goliath grouper in a year. Drawing winners would pay a fee of \$300 or so for the privilege with the money going to goliath research.

Anglers would be limited to fishing outside key goliath grouper spawning areas, and would not be allowed to fish during spawning months (July through September). Only hook-and-line gear would be allowed, and there would be no commercial harvest or sale of the fish.

FWC will hold a series of public meetings to get public feedback before moving forward with a goliath harvest. Commission staff is projected to submit a draft rule to FWC commissioners for their review later this year.

Any regulatory changes affecting goliath grouper likely wouldn’t go into effect until 2018, at the earliest.

Until then, and we can hope, beyond, Powell will know right where to find them. ●



Real Deal ‘Ol Time Candy Store

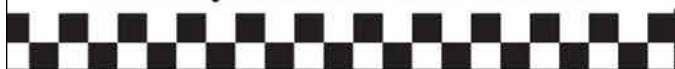
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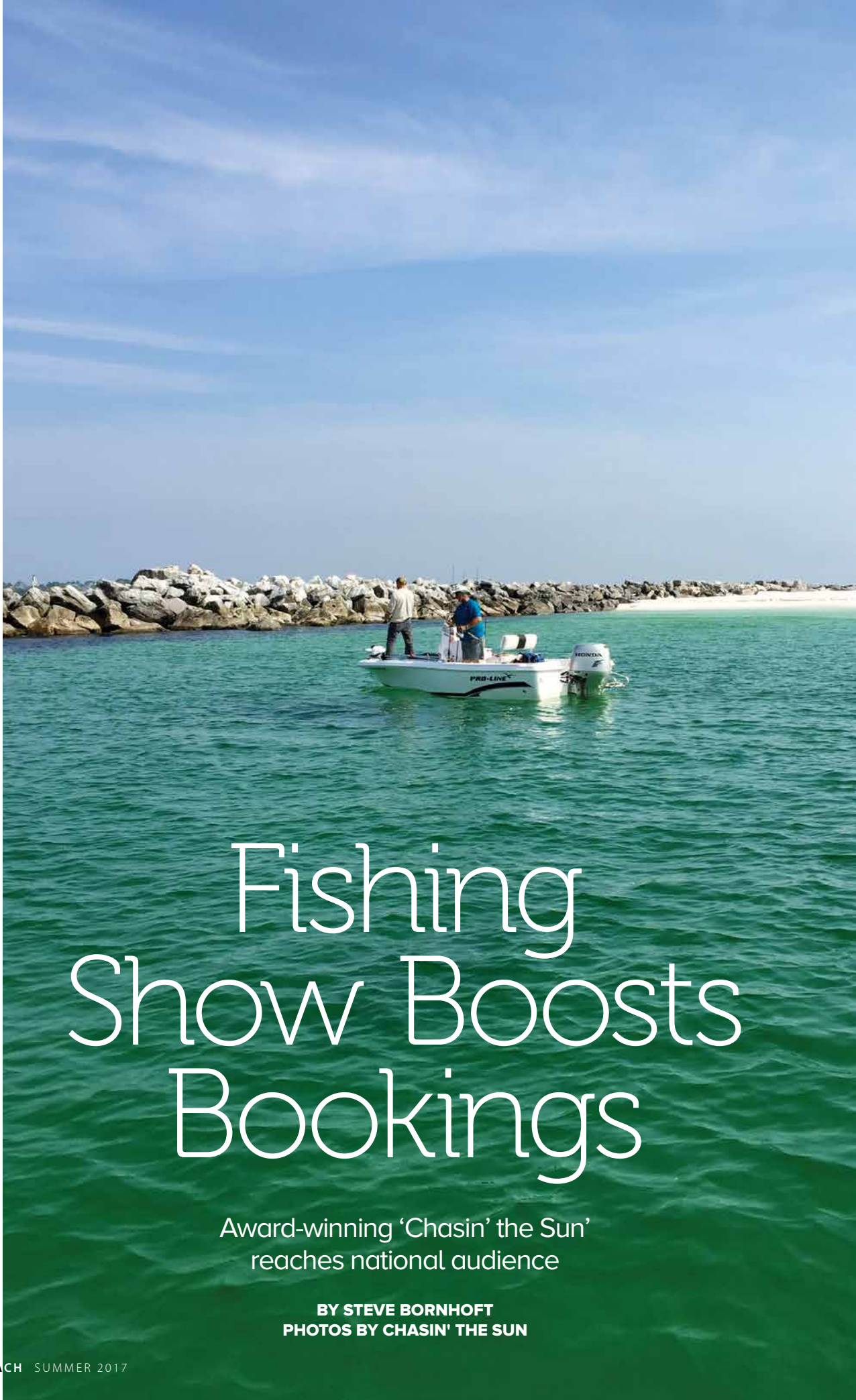
THAT'S THE

latitude and longitude for Panama City Beach, Florida, a world-class fishing destination with easy access to year-round angling opportunities.

What do you dream of reeling in? Do you see yourself chasing a big cobia or pulling a large grouper or snapper up off a shipwreck on the Gulf floor?

In Panama City Beach, you can troll for mackerel, target redfish and tarpon on fly tackle or just take the kids out for a day on the water to have a good time.

With three public piers on the Gulf of Mexico, lucky spots to fish from shore and countless charters available, Panama City Beach has something to offer every angler. Remember, in Panama City Beach, fishing season lasts all year long.



Fishing Show Boosts Bookings

Award-winning 'Chasin' the Sun' reaches national audience

**BY STEVE BORNHOFT
PHOTOS BY CHASIN' THE SUN**

Justin Leake fishing from the "Chasin' the Sun" show boat.



TOURNAMENTS TARGET REDFISH, OFFSHORE SPECIES

For anglers with a competitive bent, Panama City Beach is the headquarters for both inshore and offshore fishing tournaments.

GRAND LAGOON GRAND SLAM Aug. 4–6, 2017; Lighthouse Marina

The Grand Slam enters its second year after attracting 23 boats in 2016. While the inaugural competition was limited to outboard-driven vessels in pursuit of wahoo, tuna and dorado (mahi-mahi) in a total points format, an open division will be added this year and billfish will be eligible as a tournament species. The Grand Slam answered a pent-up demand for an offshore tournament in Panama City Beach and is projected to be bigger and better this August. Fred Marshall and Team Lil' Trader won the 2016 championship and \$17,000 in prize money. *More information is available from tournament chairman Jim Hamilton at (850) 525-2728.*

EMERALD COAST REDFISH CIRCUIT CHAMPIONSHIP Nov. 11; West Bay

The culminating event in the 2017 Emerald Coast Redfish Circuit series of tournaments will determine the team of the year. Entries are limited to teams that have participated in at least two regular season events. They compete on the basis of the combined weight of two redfish falling within the state's 18-27 inch slot limit. Fishing is limited to the use of artificial lures. Prize money is made up of 80 percent of entry fees. The Emerald Coast Redfish Circuit welcomes anglers of all skill levels. *Contact Bill Burke at (850) 826-1203 for more information.*

CAPT. JUSTIN LEAKE doesn't spend many daylight hours on what watermen call "the hill," but a blustery day in March had him shorebound. From his office at Sun Harbor Marina, just across the bridge from Panama City Beach, Leake gauged the wind, detected dropping temperatures and conceded that fishing was likely to suffer for a couple of days.

"But that's spring fishing," Leake says. "A cold front comes through and puts a damper on things for a bit, and then the weather improves and we're right back at it, wide open."

February had been extraordinarily warm and generally calm, and migratory baitfish, along with predators including Spanish mackerel, showed up much earlier than usual. Those developments were more than enough to whet Leake's appetite for all that summer fishing has to offer, both inside and outside of the pass to St. Andrews Bay.

Leake is a fly- and light-tackle-fishing guide, and while the popularity and year-round catchability of redfish helps,

summer, for him, represents the bulk of his business. In addition to working as a guide, Leake hosts "Chasin' the Sun," a fishing and coastal lifestyle television program that focuses on Panama City Beach as a fishing and vacation destination.

Chasin' the Sun was named a winner of a 2017 Silver Telly award in the Travel/Tourism category. This prestigious award recognizes the best work of the most respected advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators and corporate video departments in the world.

In 2016, the show, which is produced by Visit Panama City Beach, aired on the Sportsman Channel. This year the show has been picked up by two heftier networks, Destination America and NBC Sports. Episodes ran first on Destination America until May, when "Chasin' the Sun" premiered on NBC Sports.

Leake has been pleased with the feedback and results the show has generated.

"Many times, it's hard to know whether or how an investment in advertising is

Jason Giles and Justin Leake show off a beautiful amberjack. Known as a strong fighter with great endurance, the amberjack is commonly found near reefs and underwater wrecks.



paying off,” Leake says. “But, in the case of our show, all of the guides who have been featured have received calls for bookings from viewers, and from all over the country — the West Coast, the Midwest and the East Coast. Sometimes viewers have placed calls to guides while episodes were actually airing.”

Of course, visitors lured to Panama City Beach by “Chasin’ the Sun” do more than just fish.

“They stay in condos, dine out, shop and participate in other activities that benefit the local economy,” Leake points out. “It’s all about promoting the destination.”

Panama City Beach Mayor Mike Thomas, who describes himself as a fan of outdoors programming, sees the Convention and Visitors Bureau’s investment in “Chasin’ the Sun” paying off.

“The program is doing very well,” he says. “It has new sponsors, it’s on new networks and it does a nice job in presenting our area as one that offers lots of outdoor activities.”

Thomas says outdoors shows originating in other markets help him and his wife decide where to travel, and “people are

going to want to visit Panama City Beach” after watching “Chasin’ the Sun.”

In season one, the program was devoted primarily to showcasing the variety of fishing adventures that Panama City Beach has to offer in inshore and nearshore waters — Leake’s wheelhouse.

In year two, the show ventured farther offshore and dug a little deeper into fishing techniques and tackle.

Two episodes featured offshore grouper trips and the tackle used to target large fish in 500 feet of water without having to resort to electric reels.

“That was beyond my comfort zone,” Leake says, “but it was a chance for me, along with the viewers, to learn about the latest specialized tackle — we used big, conventional Shimano reels loaded with braided line — that has been developed for that type of fishing.”

Another current-year episode explored fly fishing for tarpon.

Let this be said about Leake: For anyone who was under the impression that “silver kings” do not range north of Boca Grande, he has proved otherwise. This year’s tarpon adventure included a

duck-hunting enthusiast from Minnesota who uses feathers from the birds he harvests to tie saltwater fishing flies.

“We live in an area where you catch a bull redfish in 18 inches of water, a tarpon right off the beach and a yellow-edge grouper in hundreds of feet of water offshore, all in the course of a week’s vacation,” Leake says.

“If you are into fishing, who wouldn’t want to come here?” ●



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Grass flats are great places to find flounder and redfish. (Left) Capt. Steve Bachman and Steve Hare with a redfish.

Summer Fishing Report

What to expect from a summer's day on the water

BY CAPT. NATHAN CHENNAUX



CAPT. NATHAN CHENNAUX

The author is a USCG licensed captain, fishing guide and outdoor writer at Bay County Outdoors. He fishes out of Panama City Beach, Florida. Captain Nathan can be reached at (850) 258-7235 or CaptainNate@BayCountyOutdoors.com.

PANAMA CITY BEACH offers fantastic fishing opportunities inshore as well as out in the Gulf of Mexico. During the warm summer months, our waters are home to many different species of fish — some coveted for their excellent food quality and others for the incredible fight that occurs after hookup.

Great places to start most mornings are the shallow, clear water grass flats, where you can often find exciting topwater action for the tasty speckled sea trout. These fish are very aggressive predators and love to explode on surface baits — making them one of the more popular fish on the flats.

Once the sun comes up and visibility improves, it's time to pull out the jigs and start stalking the flats, ready to sight cast to cruising redfish. Many anglers consider the redfish to be the “bulldog” of the flats because of its penchant for fun, rod-bending action. They usually swim in large schools, so the action can be very fast-paced if you get into a good school.

Many of our grass flats have small areas of sand (“potholes”), and these are favorite spots for fish to hide in between ambushes for food. If you see a pothole, it's a good idea to throw a bait that way just in case a fish is hiding in it. Even if you don't see a redfish, there might be a flounder lying on the bottom — perfectly camouflaged by the sand and ready to strike.

Away from the flats, the bays also hold other species of fish to

challenge anglers of all skill levels. These include Spanish mackerel, sheepshead, black drum, bluefish, ladyfish, mangrove snapper and many others.

Along the beaches, we have schools of tarpon cruising the shoreline along with the tides. They are one of the most sought-after gamefish, valued strictly for their drag-peeling runs and high-flying acrobatics. In season, experienced anglers and guides can be seen working the sandbars with artificial lures on heavy spinning gear and fly tackle, hoping for a shot at an elusive “silver king.” Patience is the name of the game, because tarpon can be very picky and scrutinize nearly every offering; but battling one will be the memory of a lifetime for most anglers.

Offshore fishing techniques vary greatly and depend on the species being targeted, but there are three basic techniques from which to choose. When targeting pelagic species such as tuna, mahi-mahi, wahoo, king mackerel and various billfish, the preferred method is trolling natural or artificial baits behind the boat. Around structures, near floating debris or around bait balls, you can also catch them by free-lining live baits. Bottom fishing is exactly as it sounds: You drop live baits or lures down to the bottom in hopes of hooking snapper, grouper, triggerfish, amberjack or other species that hang around artificial structures and natural reefs.

Good luck! ●

Bay Point Marina



Daniel Fussell, Marinas Director
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Housing the area's finest motor yachts, sport fishing yachts and cruisers up to 120 feet, Bay Point Marina is no slouch when it comes to world-class boating.

Panama City has some of the best bottom fishing and sport fishing. Cruise local bays, visiting area restaurants and local hangouts like Shell Island. Bay Point Marina is teamed up with only the best vendors for marine services, so at any time you can have your boat properly repaired by the area's best.

This fully staffed, clean marina located next to St. Andrew Pass is open 7 days a week. Radio dispatched dock attendants are fully trained to handle your docking experience with ease. From a well-marked channel to an easy approach fuel dock with customer discounts, Bay Point Marina is a place you and your boat should call home.




MORE CHOICES FOR **VACATIONERS**

LISTS OF ACCOMMODATIONS, DIRECT FLIGHTS GROW

BY HANNAH BURKE



A new flag is flying at the Bay Point Resort, overlooking Grand Lagoon, Panama City Beach's gateway to the Gulf of Mexico. Sheraton Hotels and Resorts acquired the property in 2015 and invested \$30 million in renovations.



UMMERTIME IN Panama City Beach offers vacationers an escape to a paradise, with a growing list of accommodation options to suit all tastes and travel styles. The following hotels and resorts are the newest additions to the area, providing guests with contemporary getaways that won't be soon forgotten.

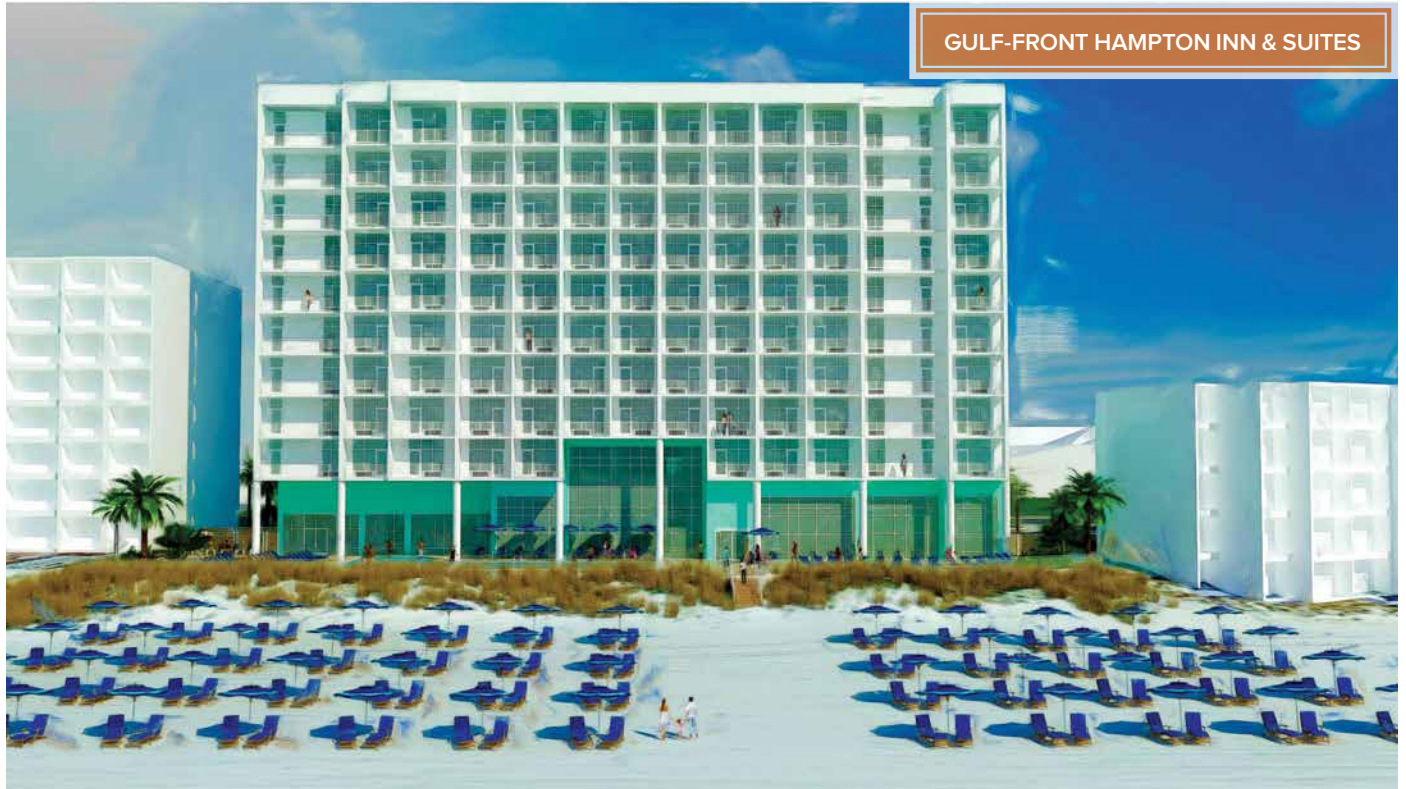
GULF-FRONT HAMPTON INN & SUITES

Making its debut this summer is the Panama City Beach Hampton Inn & Suites, located right on the beach. A beloved international hotel, the Hampton Inn & Suites promises to bring luxury to its premier location on Front Beach Road. "Guests can look forward to a completely custom design that will capture the eye and heart, a place for making memories in a beloved Florida destination," says Ashley Salley of Innisfree Hotels. "The 182-room Gulf-front hotel will feature a dune walkover to the beach, beachfront pool and hot tub, fitness center, bar and hospitality room, fast and free Wi-Fi, and Gulf-front breakfast seating and boardroom." Guests will also find themselves within walking distance of Pier Park and all of its dining, shopping and entertainment venues. Salley describes the hotel's mission as providing quality, comfort and value to the area. "Innisfree has longed for the opportunity to bring such a fine guest experience to the Panama City Beach market," he says. "We are thrilled that day has come and expect it will attract new visitors to the destination. Most importantly, we're happy to help guests make Panama City Beach memories." *15505 Front Beach Road, (850) 235-4650, HamptonInnAndSuitesPanamaCityBeach.com*

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS & SUITES

Another new beachside hotel popped up this spring in the form of a Holiday Inn Express & Suites. Also finding its home on Front Beach Road, this 147-unit property offers an intimate travel experience for those who seek ultimate relaxation. The beach is just outside the back door, and guests will also have plenty to do on the hotel grounds. Children and adults alike will love soaking up some sun while floating down an outdoor lazy river, all while enjoying live music and entertainment. Serious swimmers can choose between an indoor or outdoor pool, then grab a meal at the hotel's bar and grill. For those traveling for work, the Holiday Inn Express & Suites has you covered, too. Take advantage of the Business Center, complete with computers, printers and on-site assistance for all faxing and copying needs. After a long day of exploring nearby amusements like WonderWorks or Gulf World Marine Park, the Holiday Inn Express & Suites provides a comfy and cozy respite, so you can wake up and do it all over again! *(850) 238-8848, HiExpressPCBeach.com*

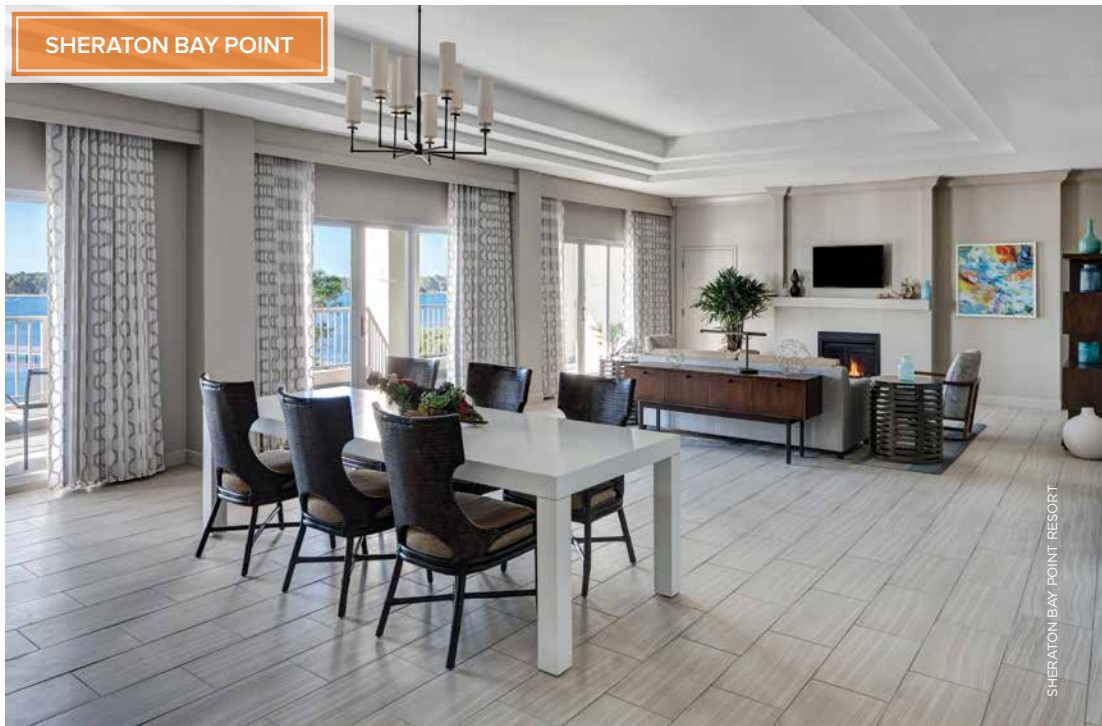
GULF-FRONT HAMPTON INN & SUITES



HAMPTON INN & SUITES, PANAMA CITY BEACH

SHERATON BAY POINT RESORT

In 2015, the Bay Point Resort was purchased by Sheraton Hotels and Resorts. Prior to its launch as the Sheraton Bay Point Resort, the hotel underwent \$30 million in renovations, making it the pinnacle of luxury in Panama City Beach. Reopened in the fall of 2016, the resort now features new, contemporary rooms and suites, updated dining facilities and 60,000 square feet of space devoted to meeting spaces for businesses and private parties. Privacy is something the Sheraton Bay Point Resort prides itself in; it features its own Bayside Beach, Golf and Tennis Club, and Serenity Spa. (866) 912-1042, SheratonBayPoint.com



FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES



FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES

The Fairfield Inn & Suites is located a bit more inland in Panama City Beach, convenient for business travelers and those attending events at the new \$30 million sports park being constructed on the east end of the beach. Opened in the summer of 2016, it includes 82 rooms and 27 suites with a modern, sleek design. This Marriott-owned property features an outdoor pool, fitness center, an on-site restaurant and convenience store, and a premier location just two miles from the beach. (850) 234-7422, Marriott.com/hotels/travel/pfnfi-fairfield-inn-and-suites-panama-city-beach/ ●

GETTING HERE

Along with the growing list of places to stay, the number of direct flights to Panama City Beach has increased, too. Three airlines offer non-stop or direct flights to the Northwest Florida Beaches Airport of Panama City Beach from the following locations:

- ATLANTA:** Delta Airlines
- AUSTIN:** Southwest Airlines
- BALTIMORE:** Southwest Airlines
- CHICAGO:** Southwest Airlines
- DALLAS:** Southwest Airlines
- HOUSTON:** Southwest Airlines, United Airlines
- NASHVILLE:** Southwest Airlines
- ST. LOUIS:** Southwest Airlines

Be sure to check flight schedules at Southwest.com, Delta.com and United.com, as non-stop flights may be seasonal and there are a limited number of flights scheduled per day. The Northwest Florida Beaches Airport is just minutes away from Panama City Beach. More information and directions can be found at IFlyBeaches.com.





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Life On the Rocks

Jetties lure a menagerie of marine creatures

By Steve Bornhoft • Illustrations by John Russo



LONG BEFORE there were artificial reefs deliberately built to attract fish and delight scuba divers, the U.S. Congress authorized the dredging and stabilization of a 29-foot-deep channel uniting St. Andrew Bay with the Gulf of Mexico. Jetties, one measuring 800 feet in length and the other, 850, were built using steel sheet pile and quarried rock in 1933-34 at a cost of \$268,000. That was a lot of money to have spent back then on a project that immediately began to deteriorate and sustained severe damage during a July 1, 1936 hurricane. The jetties have been repaired and rebuilt throughout their history, but the rocks never have ceased luring all manner of fish and other life forms, including snorkelers and divers. Thousands of student divers have completed their mandatory checkout dives at the jetties en route to becoming scuba-certified. It is hard not to be anthropomorphic about the jetties' inhabitants: cheerful blennies that with their elongated shape and the antennae that erupt from their

foreheads look like creatures that Jim Henson or Theodore Geisel may have dreamed up — surely they metamorphose into underwater butterflies; depressed lookdowns that appear as if irascible wrasses may have stolen their lunch money; envious batfish reduced to life on the bottom; and bodacious damselfish that just might turn to peacocks and say, "Not bad." For all, the jetties are their condo, their place at the beach. They claim crevices and crannies as their units, enjoy the commons areas and find that the people-watching is pretty darn good.



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FLYING



HIGH

Panhandle Helicopter treats visitors to a bird's-eye view of the beach

BY KARI C. BARLOW





**“THE SUNSET
FLIGHTS ARE THE
PRETTIEST FLIGHTS.”**

— JR Hott, owner of
Panhandle Helicopter

When it comes to having fun in Panama City Beach, it's hard to beat splashing through the emerald green waters or sinking your toes into that sugar-white sand. But why not change things up a bit? With the help of Panhandle Helicopter, you can — quite literally — take your vacation to new heights.

“We fly up and down the beach, and it gives people a new perspective on the area,” says JR Hott, who purchased the company with his siblings in 2008. “It’s a combination of sightseeing and the thrill of taking a helicopter ride.”

With a wide variety of customizable flights, this family-run business offers one of the most unique ways to experience the beauty of the Emerald Coast. Open year-round, its tours are an increasingly popular attraction, with the summer season being the busiest.

“A lot of people have never even had the chance to fly,” Hott says. “There’s no age limit. We’ve had ladies take their

month-old babies in their laps, and we’ve had people well into their 90s take a ride.”

The best-selling tour is the Miracle Strip, which lasts for eight to nine minutes, covers about 10 miles and treats passengers to sweeping views of Panama City Beach. On this tour, “Dolphins are the big thing people love to see,” Hott says. “And there’s sea turtles and manta rays, stingrays, cow-nosed rays.”

Another favorite route is Shell Island/Breakfast Point, a longer ride at 25 to 26 minutes. “We go down to Shell Island and come back to the jetties,” Hott says. “Then we turn north and go all the way up to Breakfast Point. ... If we’re lucky, we see osprey and occasionally some eagles. We also see alligators and some wild pigs!”

Sunset is an especially popular time to be up in the air, according to Hott. “The sunset flights are the prettiest flights,” he says. “(The sunset) often affects people — like a religious experience.” It’s also the time of day when Hott and his pilots are most often called upon to help pull off marriage proposals. “It can be kind of romantic,” Hott says. “The guys will call

up ahead of time, and they’ll write out on the sand, ‘Marry me!’ And we have to go out and make sure they’ve written it big enough to see.”

While Panhandle Helicopters offers other services, such as frost protection for local crops, aerial photography flights, aerial patrols and environmental and land surveys, its beach tours are paramount. But whatever the activity, safety is always front and center. Each helicopter carries a maximum load of 550 pounds, with no more than three passengers plus the pilot.

“We don’t do any extreme maneuvers. We do our best not to scare anybody,” Hott says. “We fly like we’ve got an FAA inspector on board!”

The entire goal, he says, is to have fun. “It’s not just a scenic tour, and it’s something that is entirely different from an airplane. People are fascinated by it. They get really excited!”

Panhandle Helicopter is located at 15726 Front Beach Road in Panama City Beach. For more information, call (850) 230-2080, or visit panhandlehelicopter.com. ●

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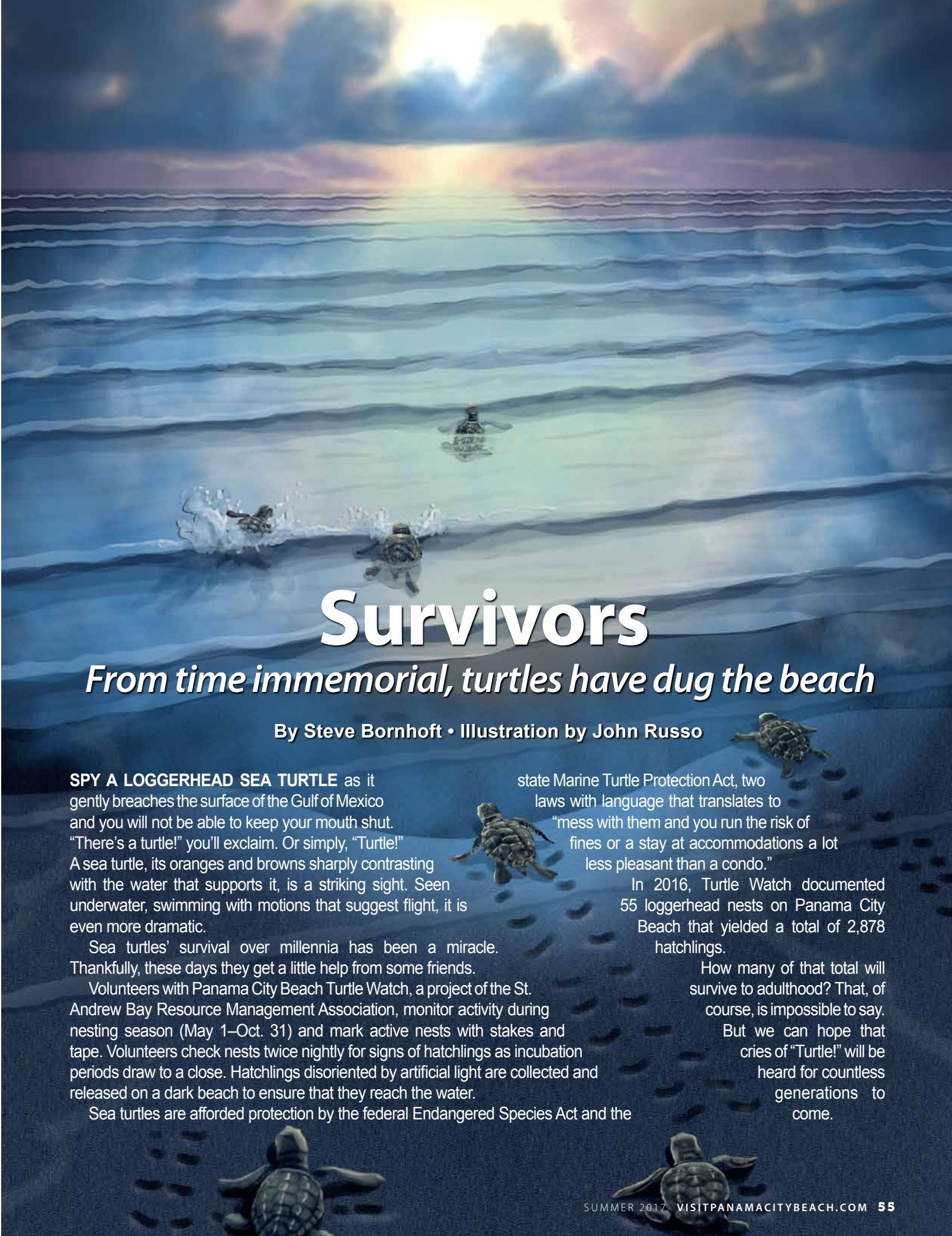
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Survivors

From time immemorial, turtles have dug the beach

By Steve Bornhoft • Illustration by John Russo

SPY A LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE as it gently breaches the surface of the Gulf of Mexico and you will not be able to keep your mouth shut. “There’s a turtle!” you’ll exclaim. Or simply, “Turtle!” A sea turtle, its oranges and browns sharply contrasting with the water that supports it, is a striking sight. Seen underwater, swimming with motions that suggest flight, it is even more dramatic.

Sea turtles’ survival over millennia has been a miracle. Thankfully, these days they get a little help from some friends.

Volunteers with Panama City Beach Turtle Watch, a project of the St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association, monitor activity during nesting season (May 1–Oct. 31) and mark active nests with stakes and tape. Volunteers check nests twice nightly for signs of hatchlings as incubation periods draw to a close. Hatchlings disoriented by artificial light are collected and released on a dark beach to ensure that they reach the water.

Sea turtles are afforded protection by the federal Endangered Species Act and the

state Marine Turtle Protection Act, two laws with language that translates to “mess with them and you run the risk of fines or a stay at accommodations a lot less pleasant than a condo.”

In 2016, Turtle Watch documented 55 loggerhead nests on Panama City Beach that yielded a total of 2,878 hatchlings.

How many of that total will survive to adulthood? That, of course, is impossible to say.

But we can hope that cries of “Turtle!” will be heard for countless generations to come.

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Summer Concert Series June 8–Aug. 10 (Thursdays) Hot summer nights are made for music, and the Summer Concert Series has become a beloved summertime tradition in PCB. Enjoy a FREE concert in the park every Thursday at Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater — bring your lawn chairs and blankets and enjoy the sounds of summer music; coolers, food and pets are welcome. The 2017 lineup can be found at VisitPanamaCityBeach.com.

Camp Helen's Movies and More June 14–July 26 (Wednesdays) Camp Helen State Park offers a summer full of movies, food and fun with a series of family-oriented movies, environmental interpretive programs and old-fashioned campfire cookouts. FriendsOfCampHelen.org

Groovin' on the Green May 28–Sept. 3 (Mondays and a couple of Sundays) This free weekly summer concert series takes place in Carillon Beach (west end of PCB) and features a myriad of musical stylings including bluegrass, Top 40, beach, reggae, country, blues and jazz. Bring your chairs or blankets, a cooler and snacks or purchase refreshments from one of the local vendors. Sit back and enjoy! VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

Grand Lagoon Grand Slam Aug. 10–12 This offshore fishing tournament is limited to outboard powered fishing boats (including center consoles, walkarounds, cuddly cabin boats, catamarans, etc.). Teams will target three species: tuna, wahoo and dolphin, with a special optional billfish category added for 2017. GrandLagoonGrandSlam.com

Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam Sept. 1–3 More a start to an event-packed fall than an end to summer, Labor Day weekend in PCB means Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam. This highly anticipated concert has been bringing the hottest country music stars to the beach since 2013, ratcheting up the bar year after year. This year is no exception.

Headlining acts for 2017 include Luke Bryan, Little Big Town and Jason Aldean. Book a concert package from a participating lodging property for special seating and free shuttle rides to Frank Brown Park. GulfCoastJam.com

28th Annual Lobster Festival Sept. 11–17 The biggest seven-day lobster festival in Florida takes place at Schooners during the middle of September. Lobster tournament divers hunt for local lobsters and vie for prizes, while spectators devour delicious lobster dishes and participate in a sand sculpting contest. Schooners.com

Bloody Mary & Music Festival Sept. 30 Enjoy all-you-can-drink bloody mary samples from 25 vendors before casting your vote for the best bloody mary. The winner (the "Big Tomato") will be awarded a trophy and some serious bragging rights. A full bar and local eats will also be available. Admission is \$20 per person (\$15 for military/first responders with ID). The spectacular Grand Lagoon provides the backdrop for this event held at Treasure Island Marina. GrandLagoon.org

Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally Oct. 25–29 & May 2–6 Known as "The Most Biker Friendly FREE Rally in the United States," Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally is held twice yearly in Panama City Beach during the first weekend in May and mid-October. Bikers from around the country enjoy scenic rides along the Emerald Coast, live entertainment and local cuisine. ThunderBeachProductions.com

Emerald Coast Cruizin' Nov. 8–11 & March 7–10 Twice a year, Panama City Beach pays homage to the classics ... cars that is. Activities include cruise-ins, concerts, parties, vendors, food, parades and celebrity appearances. Car enthusiasts of all ages are welcome to check out the thousands of hot rods, customs, muscle cars, trucks and classics on display. EmeraldCoastCruizin.com



Pirates of the High Seas Fest

Oct. 6–8

Columbus Day weekend brings waves of fun-filled adventure to Panama City Beach each year with the annual Pirates of the High Seas Fest. The whole family can play together, and weekend activities include a scavenger hunt, pirate invasions, water battle, kids parade and main parade, live music, fireworks and so much more! VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

Beach Home for the Holidays Nov. 24–25 Kicking off Thanksgiving weekend, Beach Home for the Holidays includes a fun-filled lineup of activities and events to entice families from far and wide to build new traditions and celebrate the season together in Panama City Beach. Highlights include the lighting of a 100-foot Christmas tree, magical Santa's Village and holiday music concerts (past acts include Wynonna Judd, John Berry and Panama City POPS Orchestra). VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

Panama City Beach Marathon Dec. 2 Runners can choose from a marathon, half-marathon, 5K or kid's fun run in this popular annual event — regardless of the division, all win with a view of the Gulf of Mexico to guide them along. PCBMarathon.com

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No Independence Day is complete without sparkling, vibrant fireworks displays.

Panama City Beach celebrates all weekend long, so whether you watch from the water's edge, a private balcony (no one offers more rooms with a view than PCB) or any number of places that offer both a view and table service, it's easy to claim a front row seat for any one of these spectacular fireworks shows.

VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

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Ninth Annual Beach Ball Drop

Dec. 31 Celebrate New Year's Eve on the beach! A family-friendly countdown at 8 p.m. culminates with fireworks and 10,000 beach balls being dropped over the crowd. As the seconds tick down to midnight, thousands of revelers watch the Celebration Tower as a glowing beach ball descends to signify the start of a New Year and kicks off a second round of fireworks. Live music sets a festive tone all night long! VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

2018 EVENTS

Panama City Beach Mardi Gras & Music Festival Feb. 9-10

The most family-friendly Mardi Gras celebration on the Gulf Coast, this two-day festival takes place in Pier Park and is one of the most fun Mardi Gras events anywhere. Enjoy a weekend filled with parades, float tours, street fair, kids zone and live music (and lots and lots of beads). VisitPanamaCityBeach.com



Ironman Florida

Nov. 4, 2017

What began as a challenge between groups of Navy SEALs has become one of the most recognized endurance events in the world. The Ironman consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run, with the Florida edition of the challenge serving as one of the most popular races on the circuit. Too much to take on? Check out the new Ironman 70.3 Gulf Coast in May ... half the course with all the fun! Ironman.com

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EVENTS



UNwined March 23–24 Guests can raise a glass while mixing and mingling with elite chefs, mixologists and top tastemakers at this hip signature spring event. UNwined features superb craft beer, spirits and wine from around the world, along with culinary creations by Northwest Florida's leading chefs, accompanied by outstanding musical talent (2016 featured Grammy-nominated and acclaimed American folk-rock band The Avett Brothers). VisitPanamaCityBeach.com

Seabreeze Jazz Festival April 18–22 Named a "Top 10 Jazz Festival in the USA" by JazzIZ Magazine and recently nominated as "Best Jazz Festival" at the Oasis Smooth Jazz Awards, the Seabreeze Jazz Festival combines top national smooth jazz artists with a full weekend of fun, sun, great beaches and good times — all on the west end of Panama City Beach. The event attracts thousands of fans from the U.S., Canada and Europe for the ultimate performance-packed weekend of jazz. SeabreezeJazzFestival.com

Pepsi SpringJam April 27–28 Get ready to join a few thousand of your closest friends as the Pepsi SpringJam returns to Panama City Beach and Aaron Bessant Park, April 27–28. Past talent for this star-studded event includes Darius Rucker, Sheryl Crow, Thomas Rhett, Rascal Flatts and more. For more information, visit SpringJamPCB.com.

Ironman 70.3 Gulf Coast May 12 This newly rebranded endurance event, previously known as the Gulf Coast Triathlon, begins with a 1.2-mile, open water swim in the Gulf of Mexico. Competitors then bike 56 miles on an out-and-back course through rural Bay County and Panama City Beach. The final leg, a 13.1-mile run, concludes with a spectacular finish at the Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort. Because the on-land courses are fast and flat, the race provides a great opportunity for athletes seeking personal best times. IRONMAN 70.3 Gulf Coast will offer 50 slots to the 2018 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship.

Jeep Beach Jam May 16–20 Jeep enthusiasts from throughout the United States travel to Frank Brown Park for this five-day event dedicated to all things Jeep. Industry-leading companies will be present with information, seminars and merchandise. This family-friendly event includes obstacle courses, bonfires, jeep parade, bounce houses, live music and so much more! JeepBeachJam.com

Visit VisitPanamaCityBeach.com for more details.

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CHASE ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY

Simple and Fresh

The Grand Marlin aims to deliver the region's most authentic dining experience

BY KARI C. BARLOW

FOLKS WHO PREFER THEIR seafood fresh, their breezes gentle and their cocktails robust and refreshing are sure to feel right at home at The Grand Marlin. The popular Pensacola eatery expanded to Panama City Beach in the fall of 2016, opening in a beautiful two-story building overlooking Grand Lagoon.

"We're excited to be a part of the Panama City Beach community," says president and founding partner Bryan Housley. "Our focus has always been about people."

Inside the bright and airy space, it's virtually impossible to hold on to your worries. Everything from the fresh Gulf oysters — shucked to order — to the Caribbean-inspired North Drop Bar beckons patrons to kick back, breathe deep and relax.

"Our concept, we feel, works best on the water," Corporate Chef Gregg McCarthy says. "As soon as I saw the building, I got so excited by the look, the atmosphere, the colors. This one just really has that beachy, light, uplifting feel to it!"

Corporate Chef
Gregg McCarthy,
of The Grand
Marlin, serves
only fresh,
locally sourced
foods. Here he
displays a platter
of locally caught
fish that have
been cooked to
perfection.





CHASE ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY

As the days grow longer and warmer along the Emerald Coast, McCarthy is excited about a new season of culinary adventures. “Spring is such a fun time of the year for chefs,” he says. “So much is coming out. Asparagus is an obvious choice — like a grilled asparagus appetizer. ... I’ve also done a straight-up asparagus salad with some slow-cooked eggs and a light lemon vinaigrette and some tomatoes.”

McCarthy also plans to put some Florida strawberries to good use. “I just love a strawberry shortcake,” he says. “I do a traditional recipe, with a sweet biscuit with a tinge of orange. We macerate the strawberries and top it with a whipped cream with just a touch of Grand Marnier.”

“I’m passionate about freshness.”

— Chef Gregg McCarthy

The talented chef has also developed a recipe for a multigrain pilaf to serve with entrees. “Everybody loves mashed potatoes, but you can’t put them on everything!” he says.

Other dishes that are sure to be well-represented on the menu are pan-seared snapper with a crispy skin, oysters Rockefeller, fried soft-shell crab and sautéed swordfish.

With a career spanning more than 30 years and including stints at the Buckhead Diner in Atlanta, the Old Ebbitt Grill in Washington, D.C. and The Hotel Crescent Court in Dallas, McCarthy is more than willing to bend or even break some culinary rules; but he always stands firm on working with quality ingredients. That’s why The Grand Marlin’s menu, which is printed daily, reflects the bounty of the Gulf

The Grand Marlin Grouper Piccata

FOR THE PARMESAN CRUST

2/3 cup Panko breadcrumbs
1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
1 tsp. Italian parsley, chopped
1/2 tsp. granulated garlic
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1/4 tsp. ground black pepper

FOR THE GROUPEr

In a bowl, combine all ingredients.
4 (6–8 ounce) grouper fillets
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 cups Parmesan Crust (see Parmesan Crust recipe)
4 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped
4 tbsp. fresh butter
2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
2 tbsp. brined capers, drained and minced
Lemon slices, for garnish

Season both sides of the grouper with salt and black pepper. Place flour in a stainless-steel bowl. Place eggs in another stainless steel bowl. Place the Parmesan crust in a third stainless steel bowl. Dip the grouper filets first into the flour, then into the egg and lastly into the Parmesan crust mixture. At medium temperature, heat about 1/3 cup of oil in a nonstick skillet. Add the breaded grouper fillets to the pan and cook about 3 minutes on the first side (until golden brown) then carefully turn to the other side and cook for another 3 minutes. If the grouper fillets are very thick, you can have them butterflied to flatten them out for more even cooking or place them in a 350-degree oven to finish. Cook until the fish reaches about 135 degrees. It should have a moist, translucent texture. Do not overcook, as it will be dry and tasteless. Remove the grouper from the pan and add the butter. Heat until the butter begins to brown. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice, chopped parsley and capers. Pour sauce over fish and garnish with lemon slices. Serves 4.

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GRAND MARLIN, PANAMA CITY BEACH



CHASE ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY

of Mexico and the freshest produce from farms across the Southeast.

“I’m passionate about freshness,” McCarthy says. “Frozen fish is not even in our inventory. I wouldn’t even consider it.” Instead, he draws from oystermen, crabbers and farms within 200 to 250 miles whenever possible. A favorite source is Covey Rise Farms. “They drive up with a truck once a week, and I just go shopping in the truck,” McCarthy says. “They have these gorgeous baby, tri-color carrots, this cauliflower that’s green, yellow and white — everything is so fresh. It’s so much fun.”

McCarthy believes The Grand Marlin’s overall commitment to excellence is one reason the restaurant is already packed with regulars. “Consistency is key,” he says. “Our bar scene in the afternoon, at happy hour — you can look down the bar and see the same people.”

Although the restaurant currently opens only for dinner, McCarthy and his partners say they might add lunch if demand grows. “It’s going very well,” McCarthy says. “We are above where we thought we’d be, so that’s a positive indicator. The feedback we’re getting is overwhelmingly promising.”

The Grand Marlin of Panama City Beach is located at 5323 N. Lagoon Drive, in Panama City Beach. The restaurant, Ship Store and The North Drop Bar are open Sunday–Thursday from 4–9 p.m., and on Friday and Saturday from 4–10 p.m. ●

HAVE YOUR SEAFOOD AND EAT IT, TOO!

The Grand Marlin Crab Cakes

Ingredients

2 pounds jumbo lump crab meat
1 pound crab claw meat
2 eggs, fresh, whole
1 ½ cups mayonnaise
2 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped
4 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 tsp. yellow mustard
1 tbsp. Old Bay seasoning
1 cup bread crumbs, Japanese-style

Pick through all the crab meat for shell pieces and place in a stainless-steel bowl. Be very careful not to break up any of the lump crab. In another bowl, mix together the eggs, mayonnaise, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, mustard and spices. Mix well. Pour the wet mixture over the clean crab meat, add just enough breadcrumbs to hold the mixture together, and very gently mix to incorporate the sauce without breaking the lumps of crab. Portion two 2-ounce cakes for appetizer size and two 4-ounce cakes for dinner size.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees, place the cakes on a greased sheet

pan and bake in the oven until golden brown and hot inside. Serve with the mustard butter sauce.

GRAINY MUSTARD BUTTER SAUCE

Ingredients

1 ½ cups white wine (chardonnay)
¼ cup rice wine vinegar
¼ cup lemon juice, freshly squeezed
1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
3 shallots, sliced
2 sprigs thyme
2 bay leaves

2 ½ cups cream
½ pound of butter, cut into 1-inch pieces, softened
3 tablespoons grainy-style mustard
Salt and pepper, to taste

Method:

Reduce first seven ingredients to ½ cup total. Add cream and reduce to sauce consistency. Remove from heat and slowly whisk in butter, one piece at a time, until it is all melted into the sauce. Strain the sauce through a fine mesh sieve. Add the mustard. Season with salt and pepper.

(Courtesy of The Grand Marlin Restaurant and Oyster Bar)

Basking in the Sports Spotlight

New sports park, renovations at Frank Brown Park are bringing Panama City Beach to ‘another level’

BY MATT ALGARIN

WHO WOULDN'T WANT to step into the batter's box with the cool Gulf breeze blowing in across the baseball diamond? Panama City Beach is a prime destination, given its idyllic setting, weather and good old Southern hospitality. But it's also a destination for athletes from around the country.

Sports are a big deal in Panama City Beach, whether it's fast-pitch softball, World Series baseball, soccer or lacrosse. Thousands of athletes come to the city annually for tournaments and training camps. Sporting events and Frank Brown Park are essential to the Panama City Beach tourism industry, as they account

for more than 100,000 visitor room nights a year and \$75 million in direct visitor spending, annually.

In fact, sports are so pivotal that Frank Brown Park, a 200-acre recreation facility, recently underwent a \$4 million renovation project, which included new backstops, rust-proof fencing, new



The artist's renderings of Panama City Beach's newest park reveal several state-of-the-art playing fields and boardwalks that will pass through the park's scenic wetland areas.



THE SPORTS FORCE



Frank Brown Park

dugouts, shaded spectator areas, an improved layout (to help with crowd flow), a new concessions building and new restrooms.

This was the first major renovation project at Frank Brown Park since it was opened in 1979. Funding was provided by the Bay County Tourist Development Council. The park has nine baseball/softball fields, one T-ball field, one Miracle League field, three soccer fields, four multi-purpose football fields, four tennis courts, two outdoor basketball courts, two shuffleboard courts, as well as a playground, a gymnasium, picnic pavilions, trails, a dog park, an aquatic center and a 22-acre festival site.

On a daily basis, Frank Brown Park is bustling with activity, whether it's youngsters and their parents or area seniors and snowbirds.

"It was important for us to reinvest in Frank Brown Park. That facility has become a high-profile stop for teams from across the region; across the country, even," says Dan Rowe, president and CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. "Literally thousands of teams and families spend time in Frank Brown Park every year as they combine

a sporting event with a beach vacation, so we're making sure that they have the best possible experience and that the fields and the facility deliver that 'wow' experience to the players and their families."

In addition to the renovations at Frank Brown Park, ground has been broken on a new sports park, which will occupy 210 acres of land on the east end of Panama City Beach.

Partners in the project are the St. Joe Company, which donated the land for the project; the Bay County School District, which will construct a K-8 school on the property; and the Bay County Tourist



Two-time Olympic medalist Jennie Finch (softball) addresses a rapt crowd in Aaron Bessant Park. (right) San Antonio's "Fearless Fastpitch" team is revved up as they participate in a parade through Pier Park.

Development Council, which purchased 10 acres of land for an access road to the site.

In the first phase of the approximately \$30 million project, a total of nine rectangular, multi-purpose fields will be constructed using synthetic turf. These fields can accommodate sports such as lacrosse, soccer and flag football, and will have multipurpose capabilities, which will allow them to also accommodate

Continued on p. 74 >>

BY THE NUMBERS

NUMBER OF TEAMS:

- >> Close to 1,000 at Frank Brown Park during the summer
- >> 1,800 annually at Frank Brown Park
- >> 3,000 annually at all Panama City Beach parks

PARADES/EVENTS PER YEAR HELD AT PANAMA CITY BEACH PARKS:

- >> 2 USFA Fast Pitch World Series
- >> 4 Grand Slam Sports Baseball World Series
- >> 17 special events, which represent everything from the Mardi Gras parade and Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally to car and boat shows, concerts and foodie events



SPORTSCATION

Panama City Beach is more than sun and sand

With close to 320 days of sunshine each year and an average temperature of 74 degrees, Panama City Beach is a magnet for beach lovers — but it's also the perfect destination for sports teams.

"Panama City Beach gives teams the opportunity to make a 'sportscation' out of (a sporting) event," says Richard Sanders, vice president of sports marketing and special events at Visit Panama City Beach.

Sanders and his team saw the potential in sports tourism about 10 years ago, when the economic recession was taking its toll on American travelers. At that time, more and more families were forced to choose between traveling for sporting events and traveling for vacations. Sanders says that combining both into one trip was a "win-win" situation. Thus, sports tourism in Panama City Beach was born.

According to the Sports Facility Advisory, research shows that sports tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry. A 2015 study by the National Association of Sports Commissions revealed that visitor

spending in the sports-tourism segment totaled more than \$8 billion in 2014 — an increase of three percent from 2013. The study also showed that, nationwide, more than 25 million people traveled for sporting purposes in 2014.

"Sports is now in the DNA of (Panama City Beach), with a huge annual impact of over \$75 million," Sanders says. "What was once a destination for vacation and spring is now a destination that includes sports and (other) events."

So what does that look like, locally? Whether they're of the bat-toting or soccer ball-dribbling kind, numerous sport teams come to Panama City Beach to participate in a variety of tournaments and parades. During the summer season alone, close to 1,000 teams will participate in tournaments at Frank Brown Park, which is a major destination for sport teams. In fact, this year marks the 13th year in a row in which the park will host the Grand Slam World Series of Baseball, which showcases top-notch baseball from 8U to 13U. Young ladies from the USSSA Fast Pitch Softball League also put bat to ball at Frank Brown Park.



"Our girls' fast-pitch program, which is a two-week event we started back in the early 2000s, saw 29 teams in its first week; then the second week, we had 39 teams," Sanders says. "Fifteen years later, we are at almost 300 teams each week. That's almost 600 teams and 30,000 (hotel) room nights."

In addition to the events held at Frank Brown Park, which recently underwent a \$4 million renovation, Panama City Beach will soon break ground on a new \$30 million state-of-the-art sports complex that will feature rectangular fields (for soccer, lacrosse, football and ultimate Frisbee) that can also be used for baseball and softball. There's also a plan on the drawing board for a 200,000-square-foot indoor special events venue.

"We're definitely making a huge investment," Sanders says.

When Sanders and his team spend time talking to the families that come to Panama City Beach for tournaments, the general consensus is that there's something special about the Emerald Coast. "They tell us that they love it here," Sanders says. "Over 90 percent of these teams are not from our area. The industry standard might be 70/30 or 60/40. Who doesn't want to come to the beach?"

And the honors have come rolling in, which is humbling to Sanders. In 2015, the USFA Fast Pitch event was named the "Mid-Market Sports Event of the Year" in the state of Florida. In 2016, Sports Destination Magazine recognized the event as one of the "Top Economic Impact Events."

"It really can't be successful without the destination," Sanders says. "Panama City Beach has become a 12-month destination for sports and events. My team, including Director of Sports Marketing Chris O'Brien and my Sports Marketing and Special Events Coordinator, Patrick Stewart, works incredibly hard, year-round. ... Our parks and recreation folks understand our destination and the number of jobs this business generates. It's beyond significant ... it's an absolute game changer."



This artist's rendering depicts Vendor Row, which will be located in the center of Panama City Beach's new sports park.

THE SPORTS FORCE

five full-size baseball and softball diamonds.

As part of the sports park design, guests will see a concession area and tournament headquarters facility. The sports park will also include a variety of nature trails and fitness trails. The northern area of the park will eventually feature an additional four rectangular grass fields.

Panama City Beach City Manager Mario Gisbert says the renovations at Frank Brown Park and the proposed sports park are tremendous assets to the community.

"The renovations at Frank Brown Park are wonderful for us, because they allow us to take an already very successful park and make it better," he said. "The new sports park will see football, soccer, lacrosse and rugby, all on rectangular fields. They are typically more of a fall timeframe sport, which is our shoulder season. These will be a welcome addition to the beach, as we already have a robust summer season and schedule with the sports parks."

Gisbert said not only will the new park augment what the city is already doing, but it "brings us to another level."

Teams are expected to begin play at the new sports park, which has yet to be named, by the spring of 2018. From baseball and softball to soccer and lacrosse, the future of sports and sports visitation is bright in Panama City Beach, and the new sports park will only brighten the sports spotlight already shining on the city.

"Developing the new sports park on the east end of Panama City Beach not only is bringing a state-of-the-art facility to the region, but also opens up huge possibilities for large-scale soccer and lacrosse tournaments, and will allow our already successful baseball and softball tournaments more room to play ball," Rowe says. "Those teams, and those sports, will boost visitation in the spring, fall and winter, and especially keep the east end of the beach involved in — and benefitting from — sports visitation." ●

UPCOMING EVENTS FRANK BROWN PARK

- June 2–4 USFA Fast Pitch
- June 9–11 USSSA Fast Pitch and Baseball
- June 16–18 Grand Slam Baseball
- June 18–24 Grand Slam Baseball World Series 1
- June 25–July 1 Grand Slam Baseball World Series 2
- July 2–8 Grand Slam Baseball World Series 3
- July 9–15 USFA World Series 1
- July 16–22 USFA World Series 2
- July 23–29 Grand Slam Baseball World Series 4
- Aug. 11–13 USSSA Slow Pitch
- Aug. 18–20 Travel Ball USA
- Aug. 25–27 Youth Baseball
- Sept. 7–10 World Softball League World Series 1
- Sept. 14–17 World Softball League World Series 2
- Sept. 22–14 World Softball League World Series 3
- Sept. 29–Oct. 1 GSL World Series 1
- Oct. 6–9 GSL World Series 2
- Oct. 13–16 GSL Military World
- Oct. 20–22 USSSA Fast Pitch
- Oct. 27–29 Thunder Beach
- Nov. 3–5 Youth Baseball
- Nov. 10–12 USSSA Softball Fall World Series
- Nov. 18–20 NSA Fall World Series
- Dec. 1–3 USSSA Fast Pitch

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BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

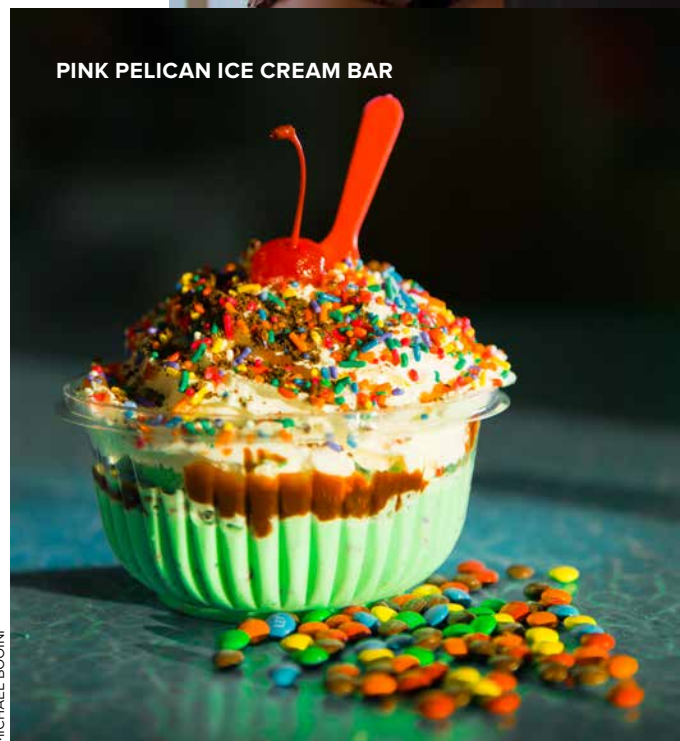
COFFEE ... BACON ... CINNAMON SWIRL AND MAPLE SYRUP ... they're standard favorites on the menu at breakfast; but in recent years, they've been showing up in ice creams all over the country, claiming their place in the mix along with everything else imaginable, from sea salt and candy bar bits to sweet corn, roasted beets, tea and even curry. Plainly put, we've come a long way from plain-Jane chocolate and vanilla. Even the days of 31 flavors can seem like they were part of the ice age. Once so seemingly simple, ice cream has become a canvas of creativity, and whether you stand by your standards or are down with dipping into the most confounding concoctions to come out of the churn, one thing's for sure: Young

or old, traditionalist or rebel, we all still scream for ice cream.

Here's a look at some Panama City Beach favorites:

Pink Pelican Ice Cream Bar

Pink Pelican Ice Cream Bar has the scoop on fantastic flavors, sourcing each of their 40-plus ice creams, sherbets and frozen yogurts from the crème de la crème of the nation's creameries. Perhaps that's what helped earn them the distinction of being named the No. 2 Ice Cream Shop in America by TripAdvisor. Pink Pelican's menu of sweet treats is so wacky, it might make your head spin. Topping the list is the Pink Pelican Special, a mix of peanut butter cups, Oreo cookie pieces, brownie pieces and



MICHAEL BOONIN



THOMAS DONUT & SNACK SHOP

Heath Bar bits swirled together with a silky ribbon of butterscotch. Other licks to love are Cookie Monster, Chocolate Hurricane, Tennessee Whiskey, Mexican Hot Chocolate and Almond Joy. Owners Stuart and Deana Spencer tempt customers with a range of indulgences that include sundaes, shakes, ice cream floats and buzz-worthy coffee drinks. *543 Richard Jackson Blvd., (850) 249-5576, Facebook.com/PinkPelicanIceCream*

Thomas Donut & Snack Shop

Rounding up the first of their loyal following when they opened as a donut and snack shop in 1971, Thomas Donut & Snack Shop put the cherry on top of their

already successful family-owned business when they built an ice cream shop in 2015. The menu, which offers a daily rotating list of 36 flavors of ice creams, frozen yogurt, sorbets and sherbets, boggles the mind (and freezes the brain). Best-sellers include “C” is for Cookie, Butterscotch Bomb, Garbage Can, Key Lime Pie, Dulce de Leche, and Special Praline. Loading on the love with sundaes and other delights like floats, milkshakes and New Orleans-style Sno-Balls, Thomas doubles down the fun with The Original Freezer Donut Ice Cream Sandwich, which sandwiches ice cream between two halves of a freshly baked Thomas Donut. Life is sweet, and Thomas Donut & Snack Shop gives you plenty of excuses to eat dessert first. *19208 Front Beach Road, (850) 234-8039, ThomasDonutAndSnackShop.com*

Chuy's Gourmet Pops & More

With more than 35 flavors on their menu, Chuy's Gourmet Pops & More first opened in late spring of 2016. Since then owners Jazmina and Silvino Barragan have been using fresh fruits and ice creams to create combinations that are truly unique and worth getting downright sticky for. Classic pops like Cookies & Cream, Raspberry Lemonade, Strawberry and Mango are available, but don't worry — Chuy's doesn't get stuck in convention. Their fruit-based pops are made using fresh juices and 12 flavors of hand-dipped ice creams. Chuy's ups the cool factor even further with milkshakes, aguas frescas and fresh-baked treats. One visit to Chuy's, and you'll never want to blow this

popsicle stand. 292 B Powell Adams Road, (850) 249-5102, Facebook.com/ChuysPops

David's New Orleans Style Café & Sno-Balls

A one-stop shop for New Orleans's most iconic bites, David's New Orleans Style Café & Sno-Balls offers everything from massive muffalettas and po'boys to jazzy jambalaya. And if all that spice leaves your tongue feeling fiery, David's has a truly sweet way to cool it right down. Since they opened the NOLA-style eatery in 2007, owners David Bulger and David Ellingson have made it their mission to bring the Big Easy to the beach, and their famous Sno-Balls have really put this place on parade. A cup of finely shaved ice with soft-serve ice cream at its center is drizzled in one of many flavored syrups and is then capped off with a dome of even more shaved ice and syrup. Sno-Balls are customizable and

CHASE ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY



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Funland Arcade and Snack Bar

With its multitude of high-energy arcade games in constant play, Funland Arcade and Snack Bar has been a gamer's dream-come-true for more than 65 years; but whether your name is topping the leader board or you've been mourning your digital demise, the game's not over until you've scooped up a treat from the Dairy Bar, where they're serving up everything from ice cream cones and classic sundaes to floats and milkshakes. Make tracks for a cone piled high with Moosetracks, or lick your way to the next level of happiness with Butter Pecan, Birthday Cake, Strawberry Cheesecake or Cookies and Cream. Win or lose, Funland's 14 flavors of cool, creamy deliciousness will make you feel like a champ. **14510 Front Beach Road, (850) 234-3693, Funland-Arcade.com.**

Kilwin's

Offering handcrafted sweets since 1947, Kilwin's has become a name famous for their heavenly fudges, premium gourmet chocolates, caramels, toffees, brittles, candied apples and caramel corns. But surely heaven would seem incomplete without ice cream; so they've scooped up flavors like Old Fashioned Vanilla, Salted Caramel, Toasted Coconut, Georgia Peach, New Orleans Praline Pecan, Superman and Cookies & Cream. Since opening the Pier Park location in 2008, franchise owners Marc and Yvonne Berkowitz have offered more than 30 flavors of ice cream, perfect for topping off their made-from-scratch waffle cones. And if the smell of warming waffle batter wafting through the air doesn't tantalize your taste buds, the scent of fresh fudge or caramel corn being cooked in their open kitchen will surely do the trick — and they'll gladly serve you samples of whatever your

kaleidoscopic, and with more than 60 flavored syrups and 12 ice cream flavors available at David's, the combinations are endless. Winning the Sno-Ball fight are favorites like Key Lime Pie (topped with graham cracker crumbs) and Piña Colada. **13913 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 236-1998, DavidsSnoBalls.com**

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Bruster's Real Ice Cream

Bruster's Real Ice Cream churns out all of their creamy dreaminess on location each and every day. Favorite flavors include Cookie Dough, Mint Chocolate Chip, Butter Pecan, Birthday Cake and Chocolate Raspberry Truffle; but with 55 ice creams available, this drive-thru and walk-up shop has the perfect scoop for your craving. Shakes, smoothies, floats, freezes and ice cream sodas add to the fun, while Bruster's freshly baked turnovers and brownies are perfect for going a la mode. For special occasions, slice up one of their custom ice cream cakes or a cookie-crumb-crusteds pies. While the cherry-red awning of this little shop might front a franchise, there's nothing corporate behind the service here; owner Tam Thompson and her staff are so friendly and warm it could melt your ice cream cone! **7101 Coastal Palms Blvd., (850) 249-2544, Brusters.com. ●**

heart desires. **821 Pier Park Drive #100, (850) 230-4177, Kilwins.com**

Nitrofreeze Ice Cream Company

Chilling is a way of life for Nitrofreeze Ice Cream Company owner Kevin Stringer, an island boy at heart whose love of the madcap is clearly apparent in everything he serves his guests. Clearly apparent, that is, once the smoke has dissipated. But the smoke is part of the show, spilling in thick billows from the rapidly forming ice cream concoctions that Kevin whips up with the help of his trusty tank of liquid nitrogen. It's frozen fun in a flash, taking a base made of coconut milk, local honey and cinnamon and combining it with any of the 50-plus ingredients on their menu, which includes everything from fresh fruit and nuts to Nutella and candy bar bits. Mixed to order before your very eyes with a blast of liquid nitrogen, it's an interactive experience indeed. And while Nitrofreeze might specialize in ice cream, their menu also features fresh and healthy smoothies, gourmet shakes and frozen sweet tea. **202 Blue Fish Drive, (850) 381-8903**

Southern Craft Creamery

Having actually attended ice cream school to learn their art, Southern Craft Creamery owners Dale and Cindy Eade took their family's passion for ice cream and turned it into a family business, using their dairy in Marianna, Florida to supply the milk for their creamy creations. Since opening in 2013, Southern Craft has become known for the purity and richness of their handcrafted ice creams and sorbets. Southern Craft partners with local farmers and producers to source the highest quality ingredients, achieving



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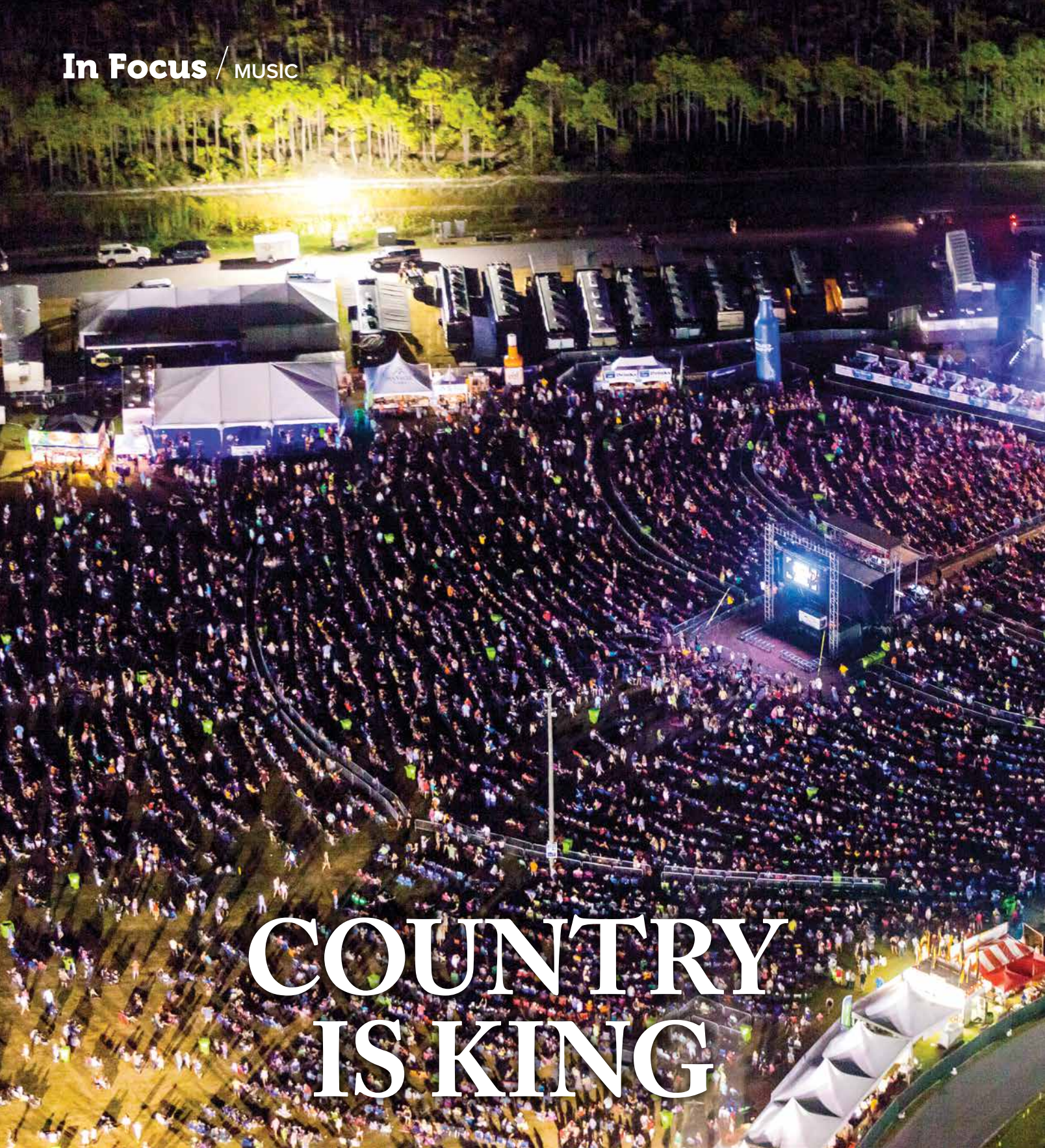
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COUNTRY IS KING

2017 Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam brings star-studded
lineup to Panama City Beach

BY GAYLE THOMPSON



The 2017 Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, scheduled for Labor Day weekend, will bring an all-star lineup including Jason Aldean, upper right, to Frank Brown Park. At nearby Aaron Bessant Park, the City of Panama City Beach will hold free weekly concerts beginning June 15.



LUKE BRYAN

PANAMA CITY BEACH'S annual Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam will celebrate its fourth year with an all-star lineup: Jason Aldean, Little Big Town and Luke Bryan will headline the three-day event, held Sept. 1 to Sept. 3 at Frank Brown Park, in the heart of Panama City Beach.

Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady is thrilled with this year's list of artists and the headliners — especially Bryan.

"I can't tell you how excited I am," Lovelady says. "It's the biggest lineup we've ever had. Luke Bryan has been the No.1 most requested artist in Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam history, since the first year we did it in 2013. So to be able to give attendees the No.1 artist requested five years in a row, that's exciting. Little Big Town is about as hot as it gets right now with their new record. Jason's got a home around here. He comes here all the time. It's three strong artists that are going to be amazing for the Gulf Coast and amazing for the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam. I actually expect 25,000 to 30,000 people a day."

This year's event is particularly meaningful for Lovelady, since last year's Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam was canceled due to the impending Hurricane Hermine.

"We sold 21,000+ tickets a day and canceled the day before the event," Lovelady recalls. "At the time

"It is an honor to be a part of such a great American music festival. We are stoked about the opportunity to take our history and our music to the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam over Labor Day weekend. This year we are on our Celebration Tour, and we plan to celebrate in Panama City Beach!"

— Joe Bonsall, Oak Ridge Boys



we canceled, it was headed right at us. Of course, God has a sense of humor, and it turned right and landed 30 miles away, so we got very little from it, but the day that we canceled it, we were looking at 130 mph winds right in the middle. By the next morning when we woke up on the bus, the sun was shining and it was beautiful outside. But you have to react to what can happen and not necessarily what is happening."

Citing a compassionate heart from the artists, who all readily agreed to participate in this year's festival, especially after last year's unfortunate loss, the 2017 Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam lineup also

includes performances by the Oak Ridge Boys, Brett Eldredge, Dan + Shay, Kip Moore and several others.

"It is an honor to be a part of such a great American music festival," Joe Bonsall of the Oak Ridge Boys says. "We are stoked about the opportunity to take our history and our music to the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam over Labor Day weekend. This year we are on our Celebration Tour, and we plan to celebrate in Panama City Beach!"

In addition, this year's three-day festival will feature a VIP experience with drink tickets, T-shirt giveaways and discounts, and an improved military tent, where Lovelady promises both active and retired members of the armed forces will have exclusive access to specially priced hotel stays, travel packages, dinners and other rewards.

The Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam concerts will start at 2 p.m., which is an intentional decision to allow plenty of time for visitors to enjoy the beach and

other attractions in Panama City Beach. It's one of the many ways the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam promises an experience unlike any other festival in America.

"One, it's purely country," says Lovelady. "Two, our biggest headliner is the beach. That's what makes it unique. You can come, you can play golf, go fishing. You can eat at all these great restaurants. You can spend your day on the beach — get your sun and have all the freshness of the beach. And then, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. is our happy hour. You can move over and have the biggest and the best — I mean the biggest in country music names."



The Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, which is a family-friendly event, offers something for everyone, from the young child to the senior citizens.

“When I program a festival, I sincerely try to give an experience for everybody, where everybody gets a little piece of love,” explains Lovelady. “There is no other country festival that’s on the beach. There is no other country festival that you can come and stay in a resort, and you stay in a condo that sits on a beach. You’re not locked up in a tent. You’re not having to camp. You can actually come and pamper yourself.”

Luckily for residents and guests of Panama City Beach, no one needs to wait until Labor Day weekend to hear live music. Once again, Panama City Beach is hosting their weekly Summer Concert Series every Thursday at Aaron Bessant Park, home to the annual Pepsi Spring Jam. Held from June 15 to August 10, the concerts are free and open to the public. Coolers, children and pets are welcome.

Tickets for the 2017 Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam are available at GulfCoastJam.com. ●

GAYLE THOMPSON

The author is a Nashville-based music journalist who has written for Rolling Stone, Country Weekly, The Boot and CBS Radio, among other outlets.

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Buzzed About Beans

A great way to start to your day ...

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOINI

IF YOU'RE LIKE 99 PERCENT of working adults or college students, you probably hold firm to the theory that coffee is necessary for life. It keeps the energy flowing and the brain sharp. It wakes you up and helps you start your day on the right foot.

More than just a beverage, however, coffee is also a culture. There's an art to its processes — the growing, harvesting, roasting and brewing. Every step along the way affects its taste and its potency, making the difference between a cup that is bitter and one that's silky smooth, rich and robust to the last drop.

Fortunately, there are some Panama City Beach businesses that take their coffee-making art very seriously. To learn more about the craft, we talked to a couple of newcomers to the coffee scene who are offering a warm (or iced!) welcome to coffee aficionados living in or visiting the area.

Wild. Root.

For Wild. Root. owners Eric Marcus and Chandra Hartman, coffee is a beautiful thing — a curiosity of sorts that captured their passion. When they decided to add on to their successful little shop of sundries by opening a coffee bar in April of 2016, they took their affinity for all things natural, organic and sustainable and dove deep into the world of coffee making. They began to source fair-trade, organic beans and learned how to handcraft cups of beautifully brewed bliss.

Marcus' professional experience with coffee began when he was working for an independent coffee roaster in Maine during his 20s. Since then, Marcus has honed his craft, using his hard-won knowledge to build an extensive menu of more than 26 handcrafted coffee drinks. These range from roasts



At Wild. Root., pictured here and on the opposite page, owners Eric Marcus and Chandra Hartman serve up something a lot like serenity, adorned or unadorned.



in their purest form to creative cups that are boldly unique and deliciously eye-opening. Among the most innovative is the S'mores Latte, an espresso drink made with organic cacao, organic agave, cinnamon, organic vanilla extract and organic steamed milk topped in marshmallows and a sprinkling of crushed graham crackers and brown sugar, all cupped and campified with a marshmallow-singeing turn under a torch flame.

"Every drink we serve is made from scratch, using organic ingredients," Marcus says. "That's one of the things that sets us apart. There are no bottled syrups or chocolate pumps here, and that's an important part of creating the best products."

For the purists, the menu at the coffee bar offers a daily roast in addition to French press coffees, cold brews and espresso shots. Familiar favorites like lattes, cappuccinos and macchiatos make the list, but so do a few irregular joes. Reflective of Marcus and Hartman's own observance of the Paleo life, Wild. Root.'s "Kevlar" combines organic coffee with a double-shot of espresso and grass-fed butter, organic coconut oil and organic cream to boost energy and work in some healthy fats.

Java-lover though he might be, Marcus knows that man cannot live by coffee alone; he and Hartman have also curated loose-leaf and sachet teas from Rishi and The Art of Tea, which has allowed them to fortify their menu with freshly made superfood-herbal elixirs.

At the end of the day, however — or, perhaps more accurately, at its beginning — coffee is what keeps Marcus' blood flowing. "I love the taste of good coffee. I just feel good when I have a really good cup of coffee," he says. "But it's my morning ritual that I love as much as anything, too: a cup of coffee, sitting outside in the sun, contemplating life and all its vicissitudes. It's a great way to start my day."

The coffee and tea bar at Wild. Root. is located as part of the Zen Garden community of shops at 707 R. Jackson Blvd., in Panama City Beach. Hours are Monday–Saturday from 7 a.m.–5 p.m. and on Sunday from 9 a.m.–3 p.m. For more information, call (850) 249-0614 or visit wildrootlife.com.

Finns Barista Bar & Snack Shack

The idea to open a coffee shop and diversify the already booming business at Finns Island Style Grub happened organically for Justin and Krista Buxton. Already coffee fanatics, the Buxtons grew an even deeper love of the bold little bean as they learned the fascinating facts and time-honored techniques for achieving a truly fine cup of coffee.

"I thought I loved coffee before we opened the Barista Bar, but when I was taught where really good coffee comes from around the world and learned more about all of the regions, the elevations and the climates, and gained an understanding of the care with which it's handled before it ever makes it to us, it went to a whole new level for me," Justin says. "It really opened my eyes about what to look



Finns Barista Bar & Snack Shack serves treats you don't have to feel guilty about and coffee enhanced with organic flavorings and other special ingredients.





“We really try to focus on simplicity and quality, and we’re proud of the fact that we offer our customers some of the most original and healthiest choices in the area. When you taste quality and freshness, that’s when you can truly begin to love it and appreciate it. It’s simple: The better the coffee, the better it is for you — and the more your love for it will grow.”

— Justin Buxton

for and reinforced how much there is to love and appreciate about coffee.”

Bringing that appreciation and knowledge to every handcrafted cup, Finns Barista Bar & Snack Shack has created a menu of signature cold brews that have gained quite the following since the café opened late in the summer of 2016. Offering everything from straight, traditional classics like espresso and drip coffee, Finns also makes a variety of hot and iced lattes that use organic flavorings and a few special ingredients that make Finns so much more than the average java joint.

“We saw the potential a barista bar would provide us for becoming a place to focus on things that the restaurants can’t — somewhere that would serve delicious, healthy smoothies and Acai bowls, along with craft coffees, beer and wine,” Justin explains. “It’s also become a kitchen for Steve and Summer Kole, the owners of Noli South, to make their wonderful Kombucha (sweetened, fermented tea), and we love having the opportunity to serve that here, as well.”

Although coffee could certainly be considered the main focus, the Snack Shack side of Finns Barista Bar & Snack Shack isn’t merely an afterthought; rather, it is the cream in their coffee — the

perfect accompaniment to round out a menu of beautifully created drinks. Their smoothies and smoothie bowls have also claimed a bit of fame as well — and rightfully so, as each one is packed with flavors from fresh, healthy, high-quality ingredients. A smoothie bowl is a combination of a thick smoothie and granola, and it is topped with fruit. If toast is more your jam, Finns has everything from Peanut Butter Toast, made using peanut butter, flax seed and bananas drizzled with local honey, to a Sausage Egg Cheese Toast.

They’ve learned their craft at Finns, and the attention to detail is apparent in everything they serve. “We really try to focus on simplicity and quality,” Justin says, “and we’re proud of the fact that we offer our customers some of the most original and healthiest choices in the area. When you taste quality and freshness, that’s when you can truly begin to love it and appreciate it. It’s simple: The better the coffee, the better it is for you — and the more your love for it will grow.”

Finns Barista Bar & Snack Shack is located at 7220 Thomas Drive in Panama City Beach. The business is open daily from 7 a.m.–3 p.m. For more information, visit Finns on Facebook at facebook.com/finnsbaristabar. ●

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**GREEN –
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Calm conditions,
exercise caution



**YELLOW –
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**RED – HIGH
HAZARD**
High surf and/or
strong currents



**RED OVER
RED**
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PANAMA CITY BEACH is known for having the “World’s Most Beautiful Beaches,” and we would like to keep it that way for the enjoyment of locals and tourists alike! For this reason, the “Leave No Trace” ordinance was adopted in 2012. Anything you bring to the beach should also leave the beach with you. Anything left on the beach overnight could be cleared off the beach by the time you return in the morning. Our goal is to protect our pristine beaches and the natural wildlife, such as nesting sea turtles, by leaving no trace of personal items on the beaches overnight. Please do your part in maintaining our beautiful beaches!

The Leave No Trace ordinance states that all personal items will be removed

and disposed of if left on the beach between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. These items include, but are not limited to, tents, chairs, toys, umbrellas and coolers. On public beaches or with the upland landowner’s permission, beachgoers may store personal belongings overnight at the toe of the dune. The toe of the dune is the area of the beach immediately seaward of the dune and beach vegetation. To be specific, it is the area of the beach that is furthest from the water that is not in a sand dune or beach access point.

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GAYE PATTON

Gaye Patton and her sister, 1956



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