

# **VISIT PANAMA CITY BEACH**

WINTER 2016 MAGAZINE

## ***LIFE ON THE BEACH***

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BEER AFICIONADOS**

**HIDDEN EATERIES OFFER  
TASTY SURPRISES**

**AMERICANA CONCERTS  
RETURN TO CAMP HELEN**

**SEA OATS STABILIZE  
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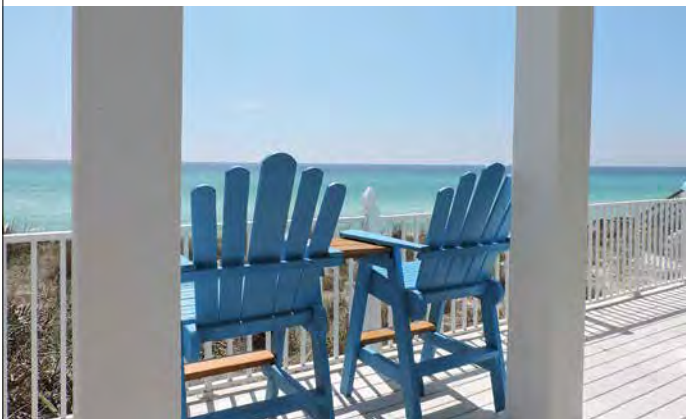


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**CALL FOR WINTER SPECIALS!**

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MICHAEL BOGINI

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LAWRENCE DAVIDSON

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CHASE YAKABOSKI



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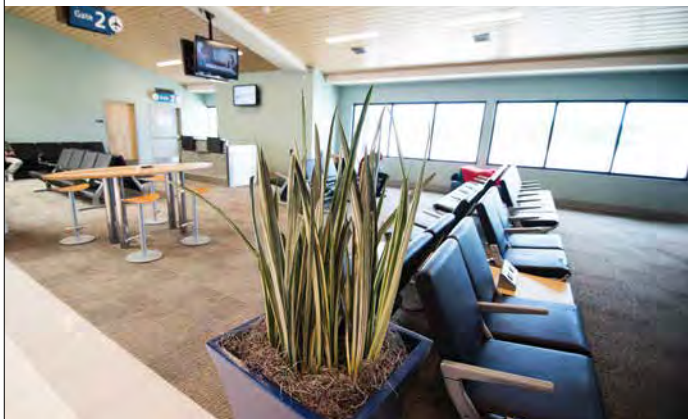


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## **WINTER IN PANAMA CITY BEACH**

is a homecoming for many of our visitors, and a chance to celebrate special occasions for many others. We warmly welcome both those who stay with us for extended trips, and those who come down for a week or a weekend to take part in the family fun we're proud to offer.

Appropriately, in this winter issue of Visit Panama City Beach Magazine you'll get to see Panama City Beach from a Canadian's perspective ("Flying South for the Winter," p. 36), and get the ultimate local's guide to "Under the Radar" food stops that are off the beaten path but worth the effort to find (p. 66). We'll also take a look at the burgeoning local craft beer scene ("Going Froth," p. 52), and point you to free concerts that you won't want to miss.

These days, there are a lot of activities to enjoy during the winter season, from our Beach Home for the Holidays celebration, to the Panama City Beach Marathon or the world-famous New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop, and that's just for starters! Once we ring in 2017 we'll be looking forward to celebrating Mardi Gras as the beach and a whole host of Winter Resident activities.

You'll find guides to all this and more in the pages of Visit Panama City Beach Magazine, along with some great pictures submitted by visitors just like you. Thank you for being part of the fun here in Panama City Beach, and we hope we will see you here again real soon!

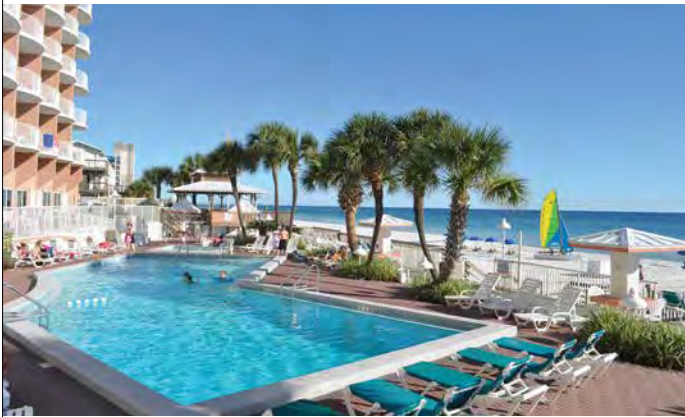
Sunny Regards,

**Dan Rowe, President and CEO**

*Visit Panama City Beach*



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Gulf-front kids playground**



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## >> LIVE WEBCAM

When you can't be in Panama City Beach, you can still keep an eye on the world's most beautiful beaches thanks to a new high definition webcam mounted on the M.B. Miller Pier. Just go to **VisitPanamaCityBeach.com** to access the webcam, and even take control of the camera for up to 40 seconds at a time!

You can choose from 10 pre-set views to check on the waves and the water, or take a look down our white sandy beaches in either direction.

As an extra treat, you'll be able to save and share images from the webcam, or see a time-lapse replay of the previous day's sunset. Check it out! It's the next best thing to actually getting the sand between your toes.



LIVE VIEWS OF PCB

Even if you can't be here in person, you can catch a glimpse of Panama City Beach from anywhere in the world! Check out the white sand, emerald green water or last night's sunset!

[WATCH LIVE](#)



**Visit our website to find out about current beach conditions!**

**VisitPanamaCityBeach.com**

## >> SOCIAL CABANA

Check out what's happening in Panama City Beach through our range of social media: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube and our Blog.



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## >> Get Inspired

While you're planning, check out the photos that other visitors have already posted. **#RealFunBeach**



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# Panama City Beach

## Talk Like a Local

- "Back Beach Road" ..... Panama City Beach Parkway
- "Middle Beach Road" ..... Hutchison Boulevard
- "City Pier" ..... Russell-Fields Pier
- "County Pier" ..... M.B. Miller Pier

\*\*NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

Major Road

Bike Path





## Distance Chart

Atlanta, GA	297 mi	470 km
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 are 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



Speckled Sea Trout



Flounder



Redfish



Whiting



Callico Scallop



Fighting Conch



Coquina Shells

**Osprey**



**Brown Pelican**



**Snowy Egret**



**Mahi Mahi**



**Pompano**



**Red Snapper**



**Grouper**



**Common Nutmeg**



**Florida Augers**



**Olive Shell**



**Alphabet Cone**



**Sand Dollar**



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# THE SWING OF THINGS

The game of golf continues to enthrall and evolve

BY MATT ALGARIN

## 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**, three courses each provide a distinctive challenge and lots of water.

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

## A New Way to Ride

**SOME GOLFERS** prefer to walk their rounds, while others enjoy the comforts and convenience of a golf cart. Golfers at the Bay Point Resort Golf Club have an additional alternative; they can surf the course with their new GolfBoards. Designed specifically for golf courses, the GolfBoard looks like a surfboard on wheels and includes a platform on which a bag of clubs can be secured. The GolfBoard can transport a single golfer and his gear at speeds of 7 to 12.5 miles per hour. Bay Point currently has eight GolfBoards that can be rented for \$15. See [GolfBoard.com](http://GolfBoard.com) for more information.

**THE GULF COAST** is known as a golfer's paradise, and nowhere is that more evident than along Panama City Beach.

Whether you are a beginner, an amateur or a seasoned professional, there's a course to fit your skill level. Many golfers come to Florida to hit the links when the summer heat gives way to cooler winter air. Here's a look at what's happening and what's in store on the local golf scene.



### BAY POINT GOLF RESORT & SPA

Change is indeed on the horizon at Bay Point. The resort has officially reopened as the new Sheraton Bay Point Resort, which includes the completion of more than \$30 million in renovations. The golf club has added 144 new carts to its fleet and has unveiled a remodeled clubhouse. Golf Villa renovations began in the fall. The golf club has put into play more than \$1 million in new maintenance equipment.

“This is just the beginning to the improvements we are making and the great new events we will be able to bring to the area and our community,” says Ryan Mulvey, general manager of Bay Point Club.

As for the resort itself, guests will enjoy three new restaurants and bars, one of

which includes an open-air pool bar.

“This is not just a renovation. It is a reimagining of the next most sought-after destination golf resort in Northwest Florida, and we can’t wait to share all the amazing changes with our loyal community of supporters and the new Sheraton Bay Point golf enthusiast,” said director of sales and marketing Jess Johnson. “It is truly the beginning of the next amazing chapter at the Bay Point Golf Club at the Sheraton Bay Point Resort.”

At Bay Point, golfers can choose between two courses — the Meadows and the Nicklaus. Both offer unique challenges. The Meadows course is 6,913 yards in length and features tight fairways and multiple bunkers and lakes.

The Nicklaus layout — the only Nicklaus Design course in Northwest Florida — exceeds 7,000 yards in length and includes a surprising number of elevation changes.

Bay Point Golf Club is located at 4701 Bay Point Road in Panama City Beach. For more information or to book tee times, call 850-235-6950 or visit [BayPointGolf.com](http://BayPointGolf.com).

### HOMBRE GOLF CLUB

As they say at the Hombre Golf Club, come “Play Where the Pros Play.” Hombre, a course developed by Wes Burnham, has served as a host of the PGA Tour Qualifying School, so you know the golf has to be serious. The club is currently undergoing a redesign but will remain open for play throughout the redevelopment.



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Hombre is home to a full-service pro shop, as well as the Siesta Bar & Grill and a well thought-out practice facility, which features a driving range, putting green and chipping green with a sand bunker. Lessons are also available whether you are looking for a half-day class or multi-day school. The golf academy associated with the Hombre is equipped with an indoor learning center complete with state-of-the-art video analysis.

Hombre Golf Club is located at 120 Coyote Pass in Panama City Beach. For more information, call 850-234-3673 or visit [HombreGolfClub.com](http://HombreGolfClub.com).

**HOLIDAY GOLF CLUB**

The 6,859-yard championship course at the Holiday Golf Club features forgiving fairways and TifEagle Turf. The Jim Dunkerley course dates back to 1964, which gives it a rich tradition for both locals and visitors, and a recent million-dollar makeover provided upgrades to its greens and tee boxes that keeps its elite status secure. An added bonus at Holiday is the lighted par-3 course. At an average play rate of 60 minutes, the 1,003-yard

par-3 course is perfect for junior golfers or beginners and is open from 7 a.m.–9p.m. daily; rental clubs are available.

If you're looking to work on your game, the practice facilities at Holiday Golf Club are just what the doctor ordered. Take advantage of the chipping and putting greens or practice your long game on the lighted driving range. Holiday has PGA pros available for private lessons.

Holiday Golf Club is located at 100 Fairway Boulevard in Panama City. For more information or to book tee times, call (850) 234-1800 or visit [HolidayGolfClub.com](http://HolidayGolfClub.com).

**SIGNAL HILL GOLF COURSE**

Developed by John Sherman, the 5,617-yard course at Signal Hill has been challenging golfers since 1962.

Panama City's Beach closest golf course to the beach, Signal Hill is relatively flat, but masterfully blends holes that are both challenging and laid back. The course is ideal for the beginning golfer or an old pro who wants to enjoy a relaxing round.

With a pro shop and snack bar on property, Signal Hill has all the amenities you need for an afternoon on the course.

Signal Hill Golf Course is located at 9615 Thomas Drive in Panama City. For more information about the facility, or to book a tee time, call 850-234-5051 or visit [SignalHillGolfCourse.com](http://SignalHillGolfCourse.com). ●



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**Holiday Golf Club**

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[HolidayGolfClub.com](http://HolidayGolfClub.com)

**Signal Hill Golf Course**

(850) 234-3218  
[SignalHillGolfCourse.com](http://SignalHillGolfCourse.com)

# Times Square Meets The Beach

BY MATT ALGARIN

The New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop is a Panama City Beach tradition

*As part of the annual New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop, 10,000 beach balls are released during the family friendly kid's celebration.*

VISIT PANAMA CITY BEACH



## 2016 NEW YEAR'S EVE RUN OF SHOW

**Family Celebration begins**  
5:30 p.m.

**Band on Main Stage**  
5:35 p.m.—7:30 p.m.

**Kids' Countdown to 8 p.m.**  
7:30 p.m.—8 p.m.

**10,000 Beach Balls drop down on Pier Park Drive as fireworks are shot from rooftops**  
8 p.m.

**Band on Main Stage**  
8:15 p.m.—9:45 p.m.

**The RiverTown Band performs**  
10 p.m.—11:55 p.m.

**Final countdown to midnight begins**  
11:55 p.m.

**Fireworks ring in the New Year from the City Pier**  
12 a.m.

**THE ANTICIPATION** builds and builds as anxious young faces gaze towards the sky, awaiting the big moment.

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one ... "Happy New Year!" As the countdown reaches its crescendo and revelers celebrate New Year's Eve, they are engulfed by a sea of beach balls — 10,000 beach balls to be exact. The best part? It's only 8 p.m.

Mom, dad, children and grandparents alike can have

a ball, literally, during the family-friendly New Year's Eve celebration at Pier Park. And it wouldn't be New Year's without fireworks, so be sure to turn your attention back to the sky as fireworks illuminate the air above you.

You can't really fathom what the Panama City Beach New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop is like without experiencing it. But for those living along the Gulf Coast or visiting Panama City Beach and the surrounding

area, this New Year's Eve celebration doesn't have to remain an exotic concept. They can experience it live and in living color on Dec. 31 when the family celebration begins at 5:30 p.m.

"The New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop is arguably the most family-friendly New Year's Eve celebration of them all," says Dan Rowe, president and CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. "The kids have a blast. Balls just come raining down from on



high and they are able to have their New Year's Eve tradition without keeping the kids up until midnight."

But that's not the end of the festivities. As families who don't care to stay up until midnight head home, other revelers stay and continue the celebration and dancing with a lineup of crowd-pleasing music performed by energetic bands right up until the official countdown to midnight, when an 800-pound, illuminated beach ball drop — Panama City Beach's answer to Times Square's Ball Drop — takes place. Crowds thrill to this official countdown to the New Year, and celebrate with even more fireworks. This finale shooting off from the end of the City Pier is visible not only from Pier Park, but for miles up and down the beach.

This year's celebration is going to have a new twist. Going into 2017, a new beach ball will be unveiled for the midnight countdown, so don't miss out on something special.

Panama City Beach's New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop dates back to 2008, which coincided with the opening of Pier Park. Attendance at the annual event has increased tremendously since the early days. Rowe says there were about 7,500 people at the first Beach Ball Drop in 2008. By comparison, Rowe says last year's festivities saw more than 40,000 people take to the streets of Pier Park.

For those who may not be able to make it to Pier Park for the party, or just want to experience how New Year's Eve is celebrated at the beach, WJHG-TV in Panama City Beach will be broadcasting live on their website and on local TV on NewsChannel 7.

"Watching the ball drop live is one of the most exciting events of the year," WJHG news director Donna Bell says. "It caps off the past year and rings in the new one with all the fun and celebration that you can imagine."

The New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop at Pier Park has something for everyone. Not only does the event bring visitors to the destination for one of the best celebrations in the country, it also unites the local community.

"Events like this are vital for our community," Bell says. "The people of Northwest Florida work hard and deserve to have a place to come celebrate. It gives us at WJHG enormous pride to be a part of something that brings everyone together, locals and visitors, and allows people of all ages to enjoy a fun, safe and festive atmosphere."

For more information about the annual Beach Ball Drop, go to [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com).

"It's really a wonderful event; it's completely transformed how Panama City Beach celebrates the New Year," Rowe says. "This really does reflect on Panama City Beach as a really fun beach." ●



# SO MUCH TO EXPLORE

Panama City Beach  
Conservation Park and Gayle's Trails

BY KIM THACKER // PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOINI

## **THE PANAMA CITY BEACH CONSERVATION PARK** 100 Conservation Drive

Located on 2,912 acres, the Panama City Beach Conservation Park was developed to protect the area's natural resources and to encourage Panama City Beach residents and visitors to head outdoors and enjoy the incredible scenery found in this unique part of the country. And what better way to see Gulf Coast cypress domes than to walk the Panama City Beach Conservation Park's more than 24 miles of trails and boardwalks?

The 12 designated trails that are found in the Panama City Beach Conservation Park range in length from less than a mile to 11 miles long. An additional mile of boardwalks through the park's wetlands allows birders unparalleled opportunities to view migrating and resident birds.

According to Dale Colby, Panama City Beach Park Resources Supervisor, other wildlife that are frequently seen by park visitors include alligators, whitetail deer, gopher tortoises and a very special, brightly colored creature that makes a pit-stop in the park on its way from Canada to Mexico: the Monarch butterfly.

"Every October, we hold our Monarch Festival at the Panama City Beach Conservation Park," Colby says. "We talk about Monarch butterfly migration, and then we pass out nets so everyone who comes can catch their own Monarch. Then we tag the monarchs and release them again. The event is free to the public, and the kids really love it."

Other events in the park include free, early morning bird-watching tours hosted throughout the year by Bay County Audubon, and, for a reasonable fee, a private covered wagon ride through longleaf pines.

## **Natural Diversions**

**SET OUT TO EXPLORE** local state parks and beaches and find out firsthand how diverse and rare animal species and plant life make Panama City Beach a nature lover's wonderland. With 27 miles of beach, a multitude of parks and forests and a 700-acre natural barrier island, ecotourists have their choice of wonderful adventures, from hiking and biking to kayaking and canoeing. You don't have to go far to enjoy a swim, look for shells or just log some great bird-watching time.



School groups that visit the park are allowed access to the on-site classroom, which is near the visitor parking lot on Conservation Drive. Also located near the parking lot are a covered pavilion, picnic tables, restroom facilities and fresh drinking water. There is no drinking water available on the trails, so visitors should be sure to bring a bottle or two to the park and fill up before they head out!

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

- » **Monarch Butterfly Festival** Oct. 22, 11 a.m.–2 p.m. *(free to public)*
- » **Bay County Audubon Birding Tours**  
Nov. 12, Feb. 22 and Apr. 1, 7 a.m. *(free to public)*
- » **Planned Trail Improvements**  
Jan.–Feb. 2017 *NW Side (mostly Bear Track Trail)*

#### **GAYLE'S TRAILS** 600 Pier Park Drive (Aaron Bessant Park) and 16200 Panama City Beach Parkway (Frank Brown Park)

For the explorer who wants a smoother, less challenging path to follow than those found in Conservation Park, Gayle's Trails are a great option. These paved pathways were named after former Mayor Gayle F. Oberst, who played a major role in securing the grants that allowed for the trails' development. As part of the proposed statewide trail system that is to run from Pensacola to Miami, Gayle's Trails will eventually connect trails across Panama City Beach, from the Panama City Beach Conservation Park to the Hathaway Bridge and Bay County 388.

The Gayle's Trails trailheads are found in Aaron Bessant Park and Frank Brown Park. Visitors to Gayle's Trails can choose to walk or bike the trails found within the parks' boundaries, or they can follow them from park to park. They can also explore the many paths that lead away from the parks, such as the trail that runs from the Frank Brown Park trailhead to the Panama City Beach Conservation Park (2.8 miles), or the stretch that parallels Highway 79 north to the Intracoastal Waterway.

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

- » **Buddies not Bullies (5K)** Oct. 15, 8 a.m. *(Frank Brown Park)*
- » **Making Strides against Breast Cancer (5K)**  
Oct. 29, 8 a.m. *(Aaron Bessant Park)*
- » **Pilot Club 5K** Mar. 18, 8 a.m. *(Frank Brown Park)*
- » **Furry Friend 5K** Apr. 1, 8 a.m. *(Frank Brown Park)*
- » **Glow Run (5K)** Apr. 15, 7:30 p.m. *(Frank Brown Park)*

## BIKE PC BEACH!

Panama City Beach is the perfect city for two-wheeled exploration! Bicycle rental shops, such as Barley's Bike Rentals (which has direct access to Conservation Park), Bike the Beach (which is close to Aaron Bessant Park), and Peddle Paddle Surf Shop are great options for serious cyclists and for casual coasters, alike.

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#### **PEDDLE PADDLE SURF SHOP**

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# ***FLYING***

*SOUTH FOR THE WINTER*



## A Canadian Travel Writer Takes a Look at What Makes Panama City Beach Special

BY JIM BYERS



It might be the beaches; a whiter more dazzling shade than I've seen anyplace else.

It might be the down-home people, who make me feel like I'm more in the American South than the typical tourist spots of Florida.

It might be the value, which is as solid as anything you'll find in the Sunshine State.

More than likely it's a combination of all three of those things and others that spark my admiration and fondness for the Panama City Beach area. And that slow down my heart rate.

The beaches are second to none; soft, powdery mounds of sand that blow across boardwalks in a way that reminds a Canadian of drifting snow (but with flip-flops and shorts and Hawaiian shirts instead of thick boots and Michelin Man, puffy jackets).

Taking a long walk in the morning or at sunset on these beaches is about as good as it gets.

The area has a gorgeous barrier island and protected bay, making it great for kayaking or stand-up paddleboarding (not as hard as it looks, folks). I had a fantastic visit at St. Andrews State Park when I was last in town. The beaches go on approximately forever, and the sand is as soft as a baby's bottom. The waterways are filled with porpoises and sometimes manatees, and there are quiet bays that are perfect for dipping a kayak or canoe paddle while you watch brilliant white egrets wade along the shore hunting for their lunch.

They also have playgrounds for kids and camping facilities, not to mention places for surfing, campfires, scuba diving, fishing and geocaching.

If you prefer to let someone else do the work, and there's nothing wrong with that, there are more than two dozen boat tours you can try, including snorkel/scuba trips, a Sea Dragon Pirate cruise, charter fishing expeditions and a Wave Runner dolphin excursion, where you can possibly see beautiful bottlenose dolphins up close and get the kind of thrill that only comes with racing across a stretch of open water on a personal watercraft. Not enough? There's also airboat rides and a pontoon boat outfitted with water slides.



The activities are great, but some of the best times I remember from visiting the area are simple chats with locals on the Russell-Field Pier, which juts out into the Gulf of Mexico; talks about fishing or sports or the weather. Not that it always works like this (I mean, lots of women fish and lots of guys shop) but last time I was there my wife took some extra time to shop across the street at the Pier Park center while I strolled along the water's edge.

It's a great shopping area, with dozens of top shops and restaurants, including American Eagle, Chico's, Dave & Buster's and MAC Cosmetics, as well as an IMAX Theatre. They have several rides for the kids (the drop tower is great for older kids, while everyone will enjoy

the merry-go-round) and a small train that goes about. They also have a play area in the middle of the center so everyone can rest up for that final retail assault.

If you want something a little more substantial in terms of entertainment, you can try Gulf World Marine Park. They have educational programs and you also can swim with dolphins or watch a magic show. On a warm day, cooling off at the Shipwreck Island Waterpark is tough to beat.

One of the great things about Panama City Beach is you get Florida beaches and Florida sunshine at a fair price. It might look like Miami Beach, but you won't pay \$20 for a cocktail or a fortune for a meal out. And then there's the American-style happy hours,





which make the Canadian versions pale in comparison. You can practically fill up on the appetizers some of these places offer. And the deals on beer and drinks are astounding.

Dusty's Oyster Bar has a happy hour that starts at 2 p.m. and one of those ceilings where folks plaster dollar bills everywhere (maybe because of the money they saved at dinner, I don't know). The Craft Bar will put on meals that pair everything from crab-stuffed mushrooms or grilled pork with local, craft beer.

Weather is always a huge lure for folks heading to Florida. I didn't know it was this warm in January, but USClimateData.com states the average high temperature in the first month of the year is 17.3° Celsius (or 63° Fahrenheit). It's perfect for golf or tennis or walks on the beach. Heck, if you're a Canadian that's swimming weather.

They know Canadians have a choice of where to spend their winters, so the local tourism folks make sure they embrace their neighbors from the north. Every December and January they do Winter Resident Appreciation Days (often known as "doughnut days"), where winter residents can enjoy free doughnuts and coffee. Local hotels and restaurants have also been known to do special discounts for Canadians, too; a big deal with the Canadian dollar currently down against the American greenback.

I went online recently and found a number of three-to-four hotels on the

"Local tourism folks know that Canadians have a choice of where to spend their winters, so they make sure that they embrace their neighbors from the north. ... Local hotels and restaurants have been known to give special discounts to Canadians." — **JIM BYERS**

water for less than \$140 Canadian dollars (roughly \$110 U.S.) a night. Staying at a condo also is a great way to save, as you can make your own meals. I stayed at a lovely waterfront spot called En Soleil a few years back, with a massive deck looking out on the Gulf of Mexico, a full kitchen and all the amenities you could ask for. They also are offering extended-stay special rates.

I could talk all day about the attractions and the palm trees and the quiet bays and dazzling white sand. But a lot of what I like about the area still harkens back to the people and the relaxed, easy charm.

When I was last in town, my wife and I had breakfast at Andy's Flour Power. I went in expecting some kind of 1960's flashback. Instead, I found a place that serves up the best breakfast I've had anywhere, served with Southern style by an Italian-American refugee from New York. His grits are tastier and smoother than anything you'd expect from a New Yorker, and his sausage gravy is rich and thick enough to make grown men swoon.

Manager/owner John Certo said it wasn't hard to give up New York traffic and snow for the pastoral beauty of Panama City Beach.

"This place is charming, and it's the real deal," he told me when I stopped in. "I have a young son at home. I come home from work and say, 'Go play with your friends. When I whistle for you it's dinner time.'"

I can't imagine a parent who doesn't like the sound of that. Even if you don't have kids, that's the kind of neighborhood you want to live in.

Spending a few minutes with Certo is like meeting your new best friend. The restaurant is bright and cheery, and there is that sausage gravy I can't seem to get out of my head. But I think it's Certo's warmth and the care that goes into his place that left a bigger imprint. ●

*Jim Byers was travel editor of the Toronto Star for five years, and now writes for media outlets across Canada and the U.S. You can follow him on his travel blog, [JimByersTravel.com](http://JimByersTravel.com).*

# Winter Wonderland

## Panama City Beach gives seasonal residents a warm embrace

Panama City Beach attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year including, importantly, winter visitors — many of whom are seniors escaping colder climes and seeking warmth beneath the Florida sun. Along with the sunshine, these winter residents discover a host of activities planned just for them.

### WINTER RESIDENT HOMECOMING

Held last year at one of Panama City Beach's premier resorts, the Boardwalk Beach Resort, the Winter Resident Homecoming Dance and Social is an occasion that winter guests eagerly look forward to. The event celebrates the return of visitors to their winter home, uniting them in a spirited good time that sets the tone for the season. Guests mix, mingle and dance — and scope out the competition likely to figure in contests and tournaments held for winter residents throughout the season.

### WINTER RESIDENT SENIOR PROM

Winter residents agree that the most magical event of the season is the Winter Resident Senior Prom. Each year a theme for the event is announced. The 2016 prom featured a Hollywood theme that invited participants to add a touch of celebrity style to their ensemble. Beginning 10 days before the dance, participants

voted on the Visit Panama City Beach website to determine who would represent the winter resident community as Senior Prom King and Queen at events including the Mardi Gras Parade. The elected king and queen also receive official recognition from the mayor. King Jack and Queen Joyce Davis of Missouri were elected in 2016.

### WINTER RESIDENT GRAND FINALE

The Winter Resident Grand Finale in February concludes the season with a night of memorable revelry. Participants enjoy a fine meal, sing their hearts out in karaoke and show off their best moves in a dance contest. The event gives winter residents one more chance to socialize with the new friends they've made in Panama City Beach — perhaps at one of the many "State Days" held at local restaurants or at sporting events at the Senior Center. And, the occasion gives Panama City Beach a chance to thank winter guests for all they do

to support their home away from home.

### WINTER RESIDENT APPRECIATION DAYS

Panama City Beach loves its winter visitors for all the joy and warmth they bring to the area. Visit Panama City Beach's Winter Resident Appreciation Days bring together winter residents for coffee, donuts, information about the area and conversation. It's a reminder that even when you're spending winter on the World's Most Beautiful Beaches, something as simple as coffee and conversation can still help make amazing memories. Winter Resident Appreciation Days are held throughout the winter season and include prize drawings.

*To find out about more Winter Resident events, or for information on the location, time and date of events listed here, go to [visitpanamacitybeach.com/events/winter-residents/](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com/events/winter-residents/) or call Visit Panama City Beach at (850) 233-5070.*





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# TUNA TIPS

Markets, restaurants offer smoky treat

BY MICHALEAN STEWART



## WHERE CAN I FIND AMAZING SEAFOOD?

That's one of the top questions visitors ask when planning trips to Panama City Beach, and a staple dish that almost every seafood joint around here has is smoked tuna dip.

Now I'm not talking about some canned tuna, cream cheese and mayo concoction. I'm talking fresh yellowfin tuna, a mix of yummy spices and — wait for it — liquid smoke. Liquid smoke gives it that extra amazing flavor that makes your taste buds come alive! So who has the best smoked tuna dip? Recipes differ, and each restaurant's offering has its own unique style, but here are some of my favorite places to go:





## Local Seafood Markets

Want to just pick up some smoked tuna dip, bring it back to your condo and snack on it with a bottle of wine on the balcony watching the sunset? **Buddy's Seafood Market** is one of those joints that will have you taking back home loads of tuna dip. Buddy's own disclaimer on his website: Buddy's is not responsible for "tuna dip addiction." It is prepared daily with fresh Yellow Fin tuna and less mayonnaise for a thicker, tastier dip. If you happen to be on the East End of the beach, **Cardenas Seafood Market** is another spot where you can get amazing smoked tuna dip (I recently bought two containers of it). Cardenas tuna dip is served in many local restaurants — so you know it's tasty! Pick up tortilla chips, and you'll have the perfect evening hors d'oeuvres while watching the sunset. For more information, visit [BuddysSeafoodMarket.com](http://BuddysSeafoodMarket.com).

## ☉ Schooners

If you are in the mood to sit by the beach and enjoy a casual lunch, Schooners is the place for you. Get your smoked tuna dip here topped with spices and paired with tortilla chips and jalapeños. Their tuna dip is rich and full of smoky flavor. For more information, visit [Schooners.com](http://Schooners.com). Shirts and shoes are not required!

## ☉ Dee's Hang Out

Chef Dee is credited for spreading tuna dip love to customers for over 20 years. You can now order Dee's tuna online, and it is smoked to perfection, vacuumed sealed and cold shipped to your door! Now you can use this popular smoked tuna dip for sandwiches, snacks and salads at home. To order online, visit [SmokedTunaDip.com](http://SmokedTunaDip.com) or to view full menu go to [DeesHangout.com](http://DeesHangout.com).

CHASE YAKABOSKI



## ☉ Patches Pub and Grill

Looking for pub-style food to fulfill your hunger? Patches Pub and Grill is a fun place to grab your favorite beer, listen to live bands and feast on smoked tuna dip. This appetizer is smoked on the patio bar with hickory chips for that extra earthy flavor. Served with flash fried tortilla chips, jalapeños and pico, it's guaranteed to not make it to the to-go box. For more information, visit [PatchesPub.com](http://PatchesPub.com).

CHASE YAKABOSKI



DEE'S HANG OUT



## SCHOONERS



CHASE YAKABOSKI



HOLLY GARDNER

### ◎ Salty Sue's

If you're bringing the family out for dinner and want more than seafood options, Salty Sue's offers steak, burgers and barbecue as well. Start your family off with their "crowd pleasing favorite" smoked tuna dip. This appetizer is enough for the whole family to share and is joined by crispy corn tortilla chips and jalapeños on the side. For more information, visit [SaltySues.com](http://SaltySues.com).

### ◎ Hook'd Pier Bar

One of the best locations on the beach to indulge in smoked tuna dip is Hook'd Pier Bar. Hook'd is adjacent to the City Pier and overlooks the Gulf of Mexico. Served with tortilla chips, celery and carrots (jalapeños optional, although I recommend), it is the perfect complement to a beautiful sunset and a fruity cocktail. For more information, visit [HookedPierBar.com](http://HookedPierBar.com).

These are just a few of my favorite places to satisfy my smoked tuna dip craving! Explore, and create your own list of top picks. ●

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# LOOKING FOR A WARM UP?

HOP IN THE POOL AT FRANK BROWN PARK

BY MATT ALGARIN



**W**hen the Florida sun is blazing overhead and you need to beat the heat, there's nothing better than making a splash and diving into a pool or the Gulf waters.

Thankfully, along the Gulf Coast there's plenty of time and sunshine to swim laps or splash around, given that average temperatures for most of the year range from the 70s to the high 80s.

But when the temperature starts to drop, the thought of taking a chilly dip in the Gulf of Mexico doesn't sound quite as appealing, unless you want to zip up your wetsuit. But there is another great option: Whether you are a local or a visitor, the Aquatic Center at Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach is the perfect place to get in a few laps or participate in a water aerobics classes. The Olympic-sized, 50-meter heated swimming pool is a warm 82 degrees during the winter season.

"It seems counter-intuitive to come to the pool and go swimming in the winter," says Will Spivey, beach and aquatic superintendent for the city of Panama City Beach. "But, if you think about it, there's not much you can do on those cold days, so why not come jump in the pool and be surrounded by 82 degrees of warmth."

Lynda Yates has been a water aerobics instructor for more than 25 years and has been leading classes at the aquatic center in Panama City Beach for the last eight years.







“There are many different types of water exercise classes, but they all provide an opportunity to increase strength, endurance, flexibility, cardiovascular capacity and weight loss.”

— LYNDA YATES, WATER AEROBICS INSTRUCTOR AT THE AQUATIC CENTER

“Water exercise provides an environment for people of all ages and abilities to exercise with low or no impact,” she says. “This minimizes stress on joints, while providing a way to exercise at any level.”

As for her water aerobics classes, it’s not uncommon to hear music pumping through the speakers and Yates offering words of encouragement and direction to a pool full of participants.

Yates says all principles of exercise can be incorporated into a water aerobics program, including strength, high intensity interval training, cardiovascular conditioning, yoga, Pilates and dance. Given that water provides resistance in all directions, movements as simple as walking can become resistance training.

“Athletes frequently use water exercise as a cross-training option or an alternative way to continue training while recovering from injuries,” Yates says. “It provides a fun, social environment for seniors, as well as any age.”

One can enjoy all of the benefits of an exercise routine while minimizing the impact on joints and eliminating the fear of falling, Yates adds.

“There are many different types of water exercise classes, but they all provide an opportunity to increase strength, endurance, flexibility, cardiovascular capacity and weight loss,” she says.

Water aerobics are held Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.

The Aquatic Center at Frank Brown Park opened in 2006, giving the community a



place where it could hold swim meets, offer swimming lessons and extend training opportunities to lifeguards, triathletes and other groups.

“We want to make this the hub for swim lessons,” says Jim Ponek, parks and recreation director for the city of Panama City Beach. “Over the next year or so, if someone asks where to go for swim lessons in the area, we want it to be here.”

The winter season at the aquatic center is split into two parts. The short schedule runs Nov. 7–Dec. 31 and the long schedule is Jan. 2–March 5. Both schedules offer a mix of modified open swim, lap swimming (both the short course and long course) and water aerobics.

Most of the people who visit the pool during the winter season come for training purposes and the water aerobics classes, Spivey says.

“We see a lot of competitive swimmers and athletes,” he says. “We are a big hub for triathletes, because they come here and take a swim, then they can hop on their bike and hit the trails, and then go for a run.”

Spivey says the pool lanes are packed on an almost daily basis, especially given the boost the facility sees from winter visitors.

For more information about the Aquatic Center at Frank Brown Park, visit [PanamaCityBeachParksAndRecreation.com](http://PanamaCityBeachParksAndRecreation.com) or follow the aquatic center’s Facebook page.

Frank Brown Park is located at 16200 Panama City Beach Parkway, just west of Pier Park. The aquatic center can be reached by phone at (850) 236-2205.

With the pool facility open on a daily basis, there is something for everyone at the aquatic center. When the winter weather outside is frightful, the 82-degree pool water is quite delightful. ●



## PCB AQUATIC CENTER FACTS AND FEATURES

- » Facility opened in 2006
- » Heated and cooled 50-meter Olympic pool with two one-meter springboards
- » Olympic pool is 25 yards wide, 50 meters long and contains almost 700,000 gallons of water
- » Locker rooms with showers
- » Large community classroom
- » Gift shop and concession stand
- » Classes offered: lifeguard, swim lessons, SCUBA certification, springboard diving and water aerobics

# GOING FROTH

Craft beer movement hits PCB

BY THOMAS J. MONIGAN

PHOTOS BY CHASE YAKABOSKI

Not long ago, if someone said the words “beach” and “beer” in the same sentence, the only adjective that mattered in describing the beer was “cold.”

Temperature is still important, but in recent years a whole new wave of beers and beer aficionados has arrived in Panama City Beach. Craft beer is here, and its appeal is growing steadily.

So if you're a “beer geek” and you want to know where to find all sorts of amazing brews when you're visiting the world's most beautiful beaches, read on.



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AND FISHALE  
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*Owned and operated by Selma and Leo Hill, who started Fishale in 2011 and created NIVOL (“lovin” spelled backward) early in 2016.*

Leo Hill didn’t mind sharing some advice for those just becoming acquainted with craft beer.

“Go with pale ales and ambers,” Hill said. “You don’t want to jump right into an IPA. It would blow your taste buds away.”

Fishale sports 67 taps and features a “mug club” and customer rewards program. There are also regular “theme events” such as “Tasty Tuesday” and “Pint Night.”

Hill is working on certification as a “cicerone” or beer tasting expert.

“I just love making beer, taking a product of water and turning it into a good flavor beer,” he says with a smile. “Just the whole process of it. Brewing a batch — seven to 12 barrels — I’ll be there knee deep in it.”

Hill recruited brewmasters Doug Whitt and Mike Delf to start NIVOL, which is located in the Edgewater Shopping Center.

NIVOL encompasses 12,000 square feet with a 3,000-square-foot tap room that features 20 taps. Five of those are “guest taps” that offer products by regional craft brewers such as Grayton Beer Company and Idyll Hounds Brewing Company from Walton County, Pensacola Bay Brewery from Escambia County and Props Brewery from Fort Walton Beach in Okaloosa County.

But the big deal at NIVOL is its own beer, which Hill hopes to be distributing from Apalachicola to Pensacola in the future.

They include the Scuba IPA, Route 98 Roadside Blonde and Nivol Amber. There’s also a Vanilla Porter, a Pale Ale, a Bitter Blonde, a Cream Ale and a Stolen Orange Wheat.

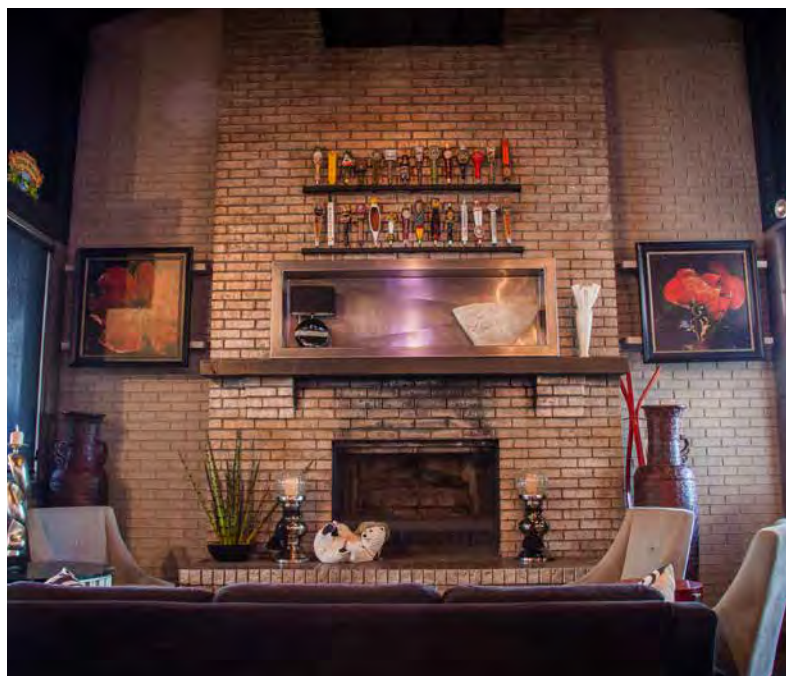
“Craft beer is all about sharing,” Hill summarizes with a smile. ●

**NIVOL  
BREWERY AND  
TASTING ROOM**

483 Richard  
Jackson Blvd.  
(850) 249-1150  
20 taps

**FISHALE  
TAPHOUSE  
AND GRILLE**

7715 Front  
Beach Road  
(850) 640-1410  
67 taps



## THE CRAFT BAR

*Located in Pier Park North adjacent to its cousin, Chan's Wine World, this bar and restaurant bills itself as a "Florida Gastropub." It is managed by Fontella Hardman and Brittney Osborne.*

**T**he Craft Bar features 30 taps and sells about a dozen craft beers in bottles. Worth noting is that Wine World, the beer, wine and spirits specialty store next door to the Craft Bar, lists "between 700 and 800" craft and import beer selections.

Hardman's résumé includes a stint at Old Mecklenburg Brewery in Charlotte.



"Doing the purest form of brewing and showing people the art in it is what it's all about," Hardman says. "It's adventuresome for people to be able see how it's made and what goes into it."

As part of the Wine World family, The Craft Bar offers something unique in the form of 32-ounce "crowlers." These are 32-ounce cans available along the Gulf Coast since early 2016.

Crowlers are cans filled and sealed on-site and there is no deposit required, as in the case of glass growlers.

"I think a big part of the motivation on that is that they are beach friendly," Hardman says. "That's very big in this area. Whether it's tourists or locals, they like to hang out on our beautiful beaches and drink beer, and you can't do that with glass here."

The Craft Bar sells an average of 50 crowlers a week, and Hardman recalls one customer who bought 12 of them filled with Oyster City's Hooter Brown, made with Tupelo honey.

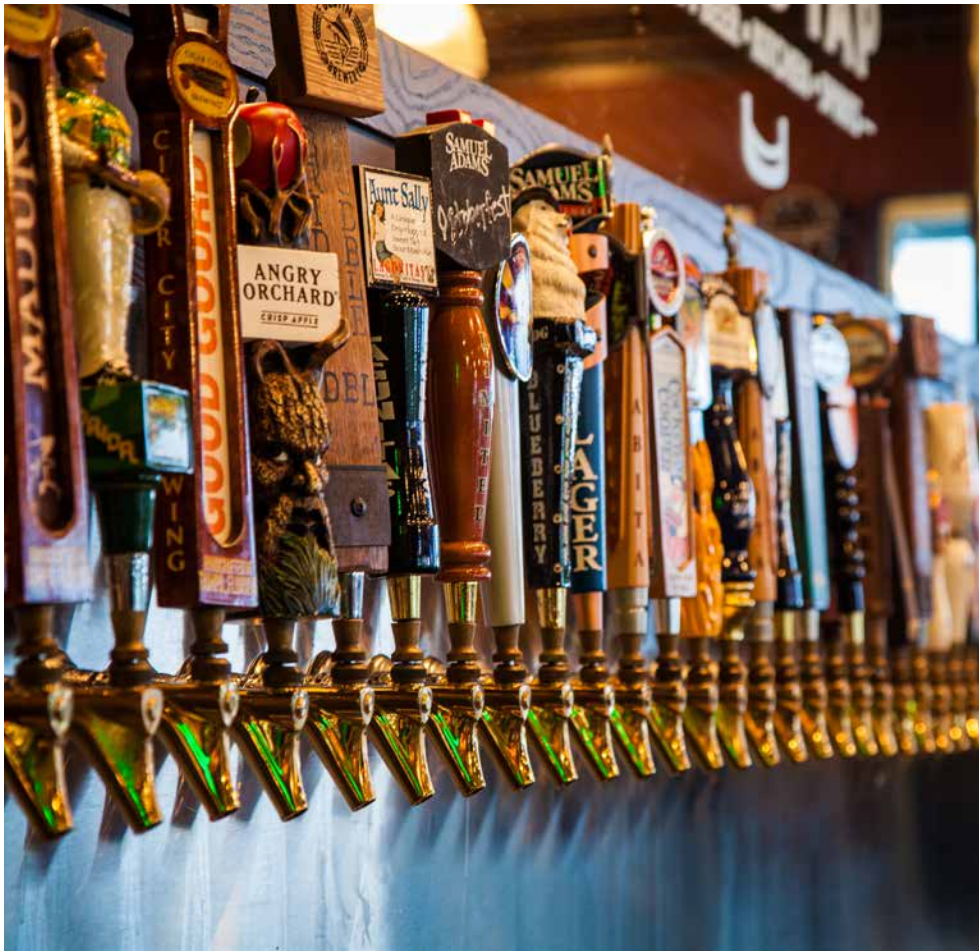
The Craft Bar's gastropub aspect means that regular events involve special pairings of food and craft beer. For instance, there's even been a Movie Monday event that combined "Jaws" with Lost Coast Sharkinator White IPA.

"It's a cool way to educate the public and get them excited about craft beer" Hardman said. "It's not just about drinking brews — it's the whole experience." ●

### **THE CRAFT BAR, A FLORIDA GASTROPUB**

15600 Panama City Beach Parkway, Suite 180  
@ Pier Park North  
(850) 588-7309  
30 taps





## THE BRASS TAP

*Located in Pier Park West since August 2015, Brass Tap offers 60 taps and about 100 more varieties of craft beer in bottles and cans.*

General manager Rachel Burke, who at one time was a Michelob Ultra drinker, is not surprised at the building wave of craft beer popularity.

“It’s so good and there’s so many different varieties of it that no matter what you like — wine, liquor, bourbon — no matter what your preferred taste is, you can find a beer to match it,” Burke said.

Burke looks forward to the seasonal beers of winter.

“There’s Puming from Southern Tier, Sweet Potato Casserole from Funky Buddha and there are a lot more chocolate stouts around,” Burke says. “Around Christmas time, there’s St. Bernardus Christmas Ale and it literally tastes like a Christmas Tree in a glass.”

In addition to a Brew Crew rewards program and regularly scheduled events,

Brass Tap also works craft beer into its food menu. There are offerings such as Guinness Bacon Waffles and Seadog Blueberry Ale Waffles, and the menu includes recommendations on how to pair certain dishes with specific beers.

Bartender Jack Nichols can claim 464 Brew Crew points, meaning he’s tasted that many different craft beers, but he says he prefers to drink local brews.

“You might as well drink something that’s going to help the community and your neighbors,” Nichols said.

“If you like pilsners you can find a pilsner that’s local,” he added. “‘Craft’ means that it’s made by hand and not by a machine. That’s my favorite part about craft beer — it’s the guys down the street that I can go talk to and my business helps them support their families.” ●

### WHERE TO BUY GROWLERS IN PCB?

#### ABC FINE WINE & SPIRITS

11699 Panama City Beach Parkway  
(850) 235-6399  
12 taps

#### FISHALE TAPHOUSE AND GRILLE

7715 Front Beach Road  
(850) 640-1410  
67 taps

#### BEACH LIQUORS

2423 Thomas Drive  
(850) 235-1135  
14 taps

#### KWIKER LIQUOR

23028 Panama City Beach Parkway  
(850) 234-1434  
18 taps

#### NIVOL BREWERY AND TASTING ROOM

483 Richard Jackson Boulevard  
(850) 249-1150  
20 taps

#### THE CRAFT BAR, A FLORIDA GASTROPUB

15600 Panama City Beach Parkway, Suite 180  
@ Pier Park North  
(850) 588-7309  
30 taps

**WINDBLOWN SAND** is slowed by the sea oats and settles on the lee side of the plants.  
SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

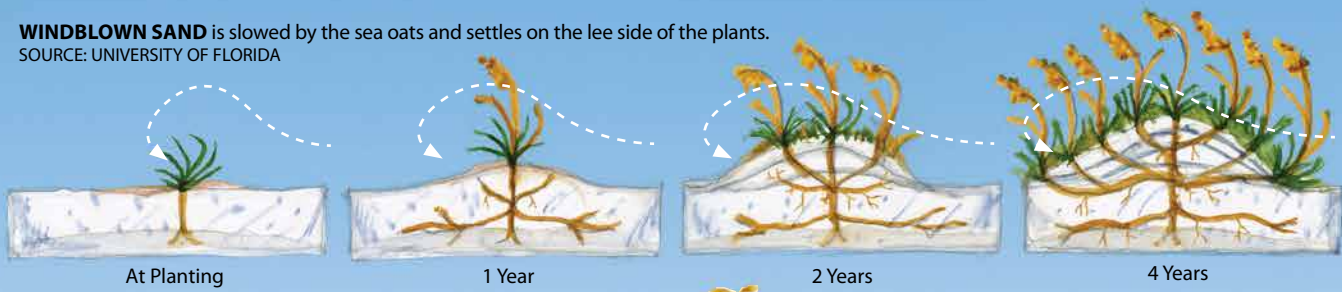


PHOTO COURTESY OF WINSTON CHESTER.



Mosley High School students plant sea oat seedlings in an effort to re-establish sand dunes lost to storms, time and tides.

# Sea Oats: Nature's Dune Stabilizers

**WINSTON CHESTER** surprised himself when he thought about the total number of sea oat seedlings that students in his outdoor education classes at Mosley High School have planted on Panama City Beach.

"Ten or 12 years at 4,000 to 5,000 plants each year, I guess it's gotta be around 50,000," Chester said and smiled.

In the fall, students strip seeds from established sea oats. They are sent to an operation in St. Petersburg where they are planted in flats that are shipped to Panama City Beach in the spring when the seedlings are a few inches high.

Sea oats planted by Mosley students have taken root at Rick Seltzer Park and the County Pier on Panama City Beach and also in Mexico Beach. Chester, who retired from teaching last spring after 44 years, plans to stay involved in the planting program.

"It is a way for both me and the students to give back to the community," he said.

"Sea oats or *Uniola paniculata*," said Dr. Mike Kane of the Environmental Horticulture Department at the University of Florida, "have extensive root systems that consolidate sand and stabilize dunes — and they are dune builders, too. The plants slow the velocity of the wind as it moves through them and windblown sand falls to the ground around them.

"Look at the downwind side of sea oats that have been planted in dunes created by nourishment projects and you will see the sand piling up there."

Kane is impressed by the adaptability of sea oats to a harsh, salty environment.

"You would be surprised how rapidly their roots grow to reach the moist sand well below the surface," he said.

— **STEVE BORNHOFT**

**TOPPLED SEA OATS** may begin to sprout new root systems at the nodes along the plant's stem.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RUSSO





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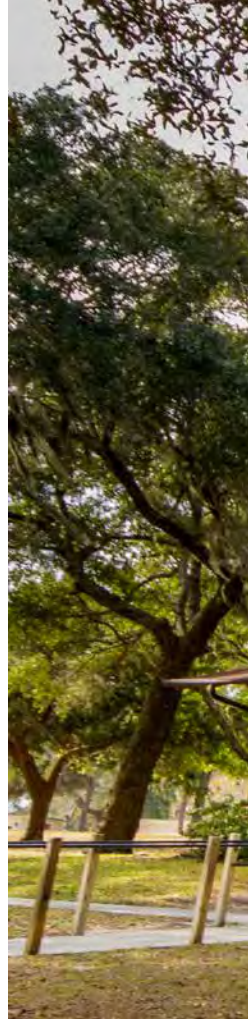
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(850) 249-7000  
wonderworkspcb.com

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# AMERICANA

Camp Helen State Park dances to a traditional beat

BY REBECCA PADGETT // PHOTOS BY CAMP HELEN STATE PARK

**T**he timeless sound of banjos and soulful crooners drifting from the front porch of Camp Helen State Park's log cabin can either take you back to your roots or make you want to plant them. In either case, enjoyment is easy. Sit, listen and absorb your surroundings.

Camp Helen State Park is a natural escape providing peace of mind in a world where serenity is increasingly difficult to find. The park is rich in natural beauty and removed from the machines of man, except perhaps for the park ranger's four-wheeler.

Its bucolic log cabin lodge serves as a venue for events hosted by the Friends of Camp Helen, whose mission it is to preserve, maintain and improve the park.

Three years ago, the board of Friends of Camp Helen had a brainstorming meeting to identify events that are both consistent with the nature of the park and capable of attracting new visitors. Board members and musicians Maggie and Mike McKinney proposed an Americana concert series.

It was a good match, right from the start. The McKinney's have connections

to musicians from around the country that they have made during years of touring. The lodge has the acoustics and space to provide a perfect setting. And the park presented the ideal backdrop for music that emphasizes the beauty of nature. The premier concert was held on Jan. 11, 2014. At every concert since, the lodge's 125-person capacity has been exceeded, but that's what front porches are for.

"I think the concert series has become a success because nowhere else in Bay County can you experience Americana concerts for free," said Lynn Cherry,



## 2017 SCHEDULE

» On **Jan. 7**, **The Curry's** will take the stage. This trio was brought together by love of folk, rock and the Curry family's roots.

» **Paul Kamm and Eleanore MacDonald**, who have been performing modern folk music for over 33 years together, are next up on **Jan. 21**.

» Friends of Camp Helen members and event conceptualizers, **Maggie and Mike McKinney of Lucky Mud**, will do what they do best on **Feb. 4**.

» Singer, songwriter and poet **Tom Kimmel** will appear on **Feb. 18** and the **Sarah Mac Band** will provide a healthy dose of soul on **March 4**.



The Americana concert series at Camp Helen State Park has featured performers including The Currys (opposite page) and Lucky Mud, left. Audiences tend to spill out onto the porch at the lodge.

president of Friends of Camp Helen. "It's a way for guests and locals to experience high caliber music while showcasing Camp Helen as a wonderful facility. The lodge is a registered historic site and one of the most beautiful venues in Bay County."

Maggie McKinney, an event producer who plays in a band called Lucky Mud, agrees: "The lodge is beautiful and the view is spectacular. It's a piece of Florida history and the music really fits here."

This year's lineup includes performers from Port St. Joe to Tallahassee to Mississippi and California, all specializing

in Americana, which blends country, rock, bluegrass and blues.

While the concerts are free, donations are accepted and go directly toward resource management and interpretive programs. Food and drinks provided by local restaurants are available during the concerts.

"I love watching the reactions of the audience to the music," said Maggie McKinney. "I always say, this is music that you will never hear on the radio, but you should. This is a way to appreciate live and original music. I think the audience takes away a certain amount of respect for Americana music." ●

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rvinfo@rvresort.com | rvresort.com

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## Ironman Florida

**Nov. 5** 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.

## 2016 Events

# Music, Food and Fun for Everyone

### Beach Home for the Holidays

**Nov. 25–26** Thanksgiving weekend brings the lighting of Panama City Beach's Christmas tree and holiday music from the Panama City POPS Orchestra to kick off the holiday season. The weekend wraps up with special performance: "A Wynonna & The Big Noise Christmas."

### Panama City Beach Marathon

**Dec. 3** A 5K, half marathon and full

marathon all run along the beautiful Gulf of Mexico and the world's most beautiful beaches.

### New Year's Eve 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

an 800-pound glowing beach ball descend to signify the start of a New Year with a second round of fireworks.

## 2017 EVENTS

### Winter Resident Senior Prom **Feb. 7**

Now in its fourth installment, the Senior Prom is a fun opportunity for winter residents to get out their dancing shoes. Held at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, the 2017 theme is Mardi Gras.

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castoinfo.com

  
pierparknorth

**Panama City Beach Mardi Gras & Music Festival Feb. 24–25** The two-day festival and parade takes place in and around Pier Park and is one of the most fun Mardi Gras events anywhere. The event is perfect for the whole family and includes a Mardi Gras Kids Zone, float tours, street fair and live music.

**Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 3–5** Aaron Bessant Park in Panama City Beach will host the inaugural Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 3–5. The event is more than a boat show, as it will feature fishing, boat exhibits, cycling, kayaking, paddle boarding, personal watercrafts and seminars. Adults: \$10, kids (12 and under): free, military: (active and retired) \$5. For more information about the event, visit [gulfboatshow.com](http://gulfboatshow.com).

**UNwined March 31–April 1** The Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce presents a spectacular weekend celebration of vines, steins and palate-pleasing food. Enjoy perfectly

paired wine, craft beer and appetizers at Aaron Bessant Park.

**Seabreeze Jazz Festival April 19–23** 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.

**Pepsi SpringJam April 28–29** 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 28-29, featuring Grammy-award winning singers Sheryl Crow and Darius Rucker. VIP Pit tickets: \$199 (plus taxes and fees), General Admission: \$69 (plus taxes and fees).

For more information about the event, visit [springjampcb.com](http://springjampcb.com).

**Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally May 3–7 & Oct. 25–29** 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.

**Jeep Beach Jam May 17–21** Jeep enthusiasts from throughout the United States travel to Aaron Bessant Park & Amphitheater 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 bounce houses, obstacle courses, live music, bonfires, a parade and much more!

*Check [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com) for more details.*



**Emerald Coast Cruizin'**

**Nov. 7–12** The annual event at Aaron Bessant Park is perfect for families and attracts thousands of classic cars, hot rods, custom cars and trucks. Live music will also be featured at the event.

# Gear Up For Winter

**WINTER IS WELCOMED** in Panama City Beach for the changes it introduces to our environment. Winter winds from the north usher in a season of holiday happenings, bonfires, hot toddies and sweaters. And, given the many retailers in the area, you are sure to find cozy clothing to suit you and gifts that warm your soul.

**PHOTOS BY LAWRENCE DAVIDSON**



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15801 L.C. Hilton Jr. Drive, Suite 115  
[ThatCuteLittleSoapShop.net](http://ThatCuteLittleSoapShop.net)





### HALF-HITCH

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2206 Thomas Drive  
(850) 234-2621  
HalfHitch.com



### HY'S TOGGERY

Just because it's a tad chilly doesn't mean you can't stroll the beach or while away the day fishing on a pier. Pull on a one-of-a-kind Guy Harvey fishing shirt, shade your eyes from the sun with a visor and pack everything you need in a nautical tote bag.

700 S. Pier Park Drive  
(850) 235-1177  
HysTogger.com



### THE CANDYMAKER

Satisfy your sweet tooth or treat friends and family (even your pup) to a confection from The CandyMaker. This locally owned sweet shop is famous for its handmade saltwater taffy in mouthwatering flavors.

600 S. Pier Park Drive  
(850) 236-6575, TheCandyMaker.com





CHASE YAKABOSKI

# Under the Radar

Out of the way eateries worth exploring

BY DAVID DEMAREST

**EVERYONE KNOWS THAT** you should never judge a book by its cover, and any foodie worth their salt knows that you can't judge a restaurant before you've tried the food. Ask locals and long-time visitors about their favorite restaurant, and you're just as likely as not to be met with intricate directions for finding the spot in the first place, or an admonishment along the lines of, "Now, it may not look like much from the outside, but they have the absolute best \_\_\_\_ that you've ever had in your life!"

That's the way it is in today's food scene — many of the most exciting chefs, cooks or grill masters are focusing their passion on the food, rather than their advertising or curb appeal. They're rewarded with loyal followings and the enthusiasm of customers who promise to come back ... often!

So what are some of these under-the-radar restaurants that you need to know about? There are many — so never stop exploring — but the following list is a great way to get started.



**BFE BBQ** Here, purveyors of the “Best Food Ever” offer a prime rib cheesesteak sandwich that lives up to the restaurant’s name.

### **BFE BBQ**

6511 Laird Park Road  
(850) 708-1458  
Facebook.com/BFE.PCB  
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
(closed Wednesday)

“BFE” stands for “Best Food Ever,” which is a pretty tall order. However, once you’ve sunk your teeth into the brisket served up here, or perhaps their prime rib cheesesteak sandwich, you’ll either agree immediately with the claim, or at least have to admit that it’s right up there.

A small and picturesque structure overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway on the northern border of Panama

City Beach, BFE BBQ is hard to find but worth the effort. (Turn off of Hwy. 79 and make your way to the water’s edge. You’ll find it on the southwest side of the bridge heading to or from the airport.) There are a few tables inside, but most customers call ahead with to-go orders.

### **CHILLIN’ GELATO BEACH BAR AND GRILL**

13500 Front Beach Road  
(850) 588-5949  
ChillinPCB.com

Open every day, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
Most first timers who wander in probably aren’t expecting much beyond a cold and

delicious gelato, but what they’re met with is high quality and inexpensive food with the high-end touches that betray the chef’s extensive culinary experience.

Don’t believe us? Try the tuna wonton nachos or the avocado fries (lightly fried slices of avocado). The burgers will please just about any palate, and neither the jumbo Gulf shrimp skewers or the BLT skimp on the ingredients. You’re guaranteed to leave happy with a full belly. Plus, it’s a great price for a quality meal. Just don’t forget about the gelato!

### **DAVID’S SNO-BALLS**

13913 Panama City  
Beach Parkway  
(850) 236-1998  
DavidsSnoBalls.com

9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, Noon to 9 p.m. Sunday; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Monday

Two Davids put their name on the Panama City Beach map after moving here from New Orleans and bringing this taste of the Big Easy to the beach. If you’ve never tried Sno-Balls, there’s no better place to start. Here you might meet displaced Louisianans



  
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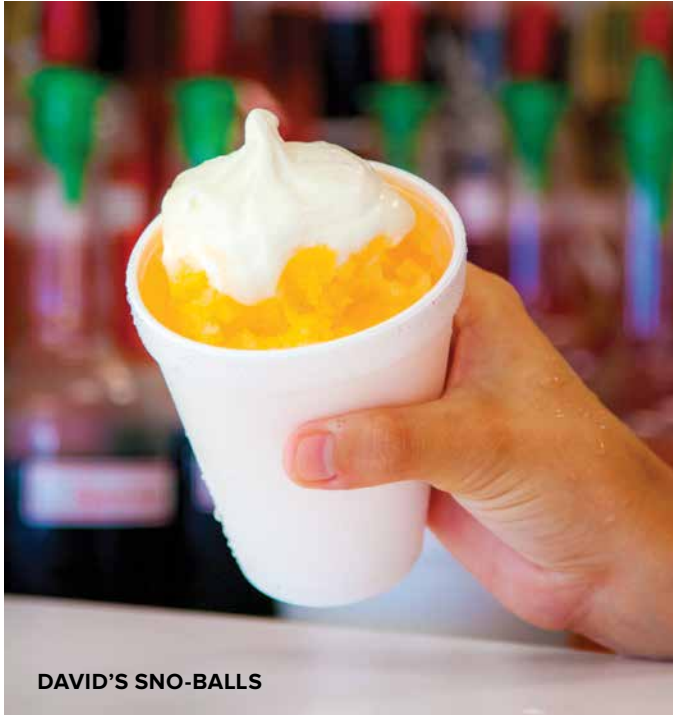
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CHASE YAKABOSKI



DAVID'S SNO-BALLS

who drive miles (or hours!) for this taste of home, or locals who tried it once and are hooked.

The secret to the sno-ball is the super-fine shaved ice. From there you can choose from 60 flavors. Insider's tip? Get yours "stuffed" with soft-serve ice cream and/or topped with condensed milk. Their taste tributes to the Crescent City don't end there, though. A 4-pound muffaletta is as authentic as you'll find, and their oyster po'boy is rumored to be one of the best anywhere.

**DEE'S HANG OUT**

10440 Front Beach Road  
(850) 249-4264  
DeesHangOut.com

11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Thursday; 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday, Saturday; Closed Sunday

Owner Chef Dee Brown studied the art of haute cuisine at the Culinary Institute of America, but when the Panama City Beach native opened his namesake restaurant he was aiming for something decidedly more welcoming and relaxed. Mission accomplished, but it's the food and not the atmosphere that packs his Front Beach Road location with locals and in-the-know visitors.

The food embodies a Southern/coastal/Creole/Cajun style and includes oysters, gumbos, etouffee, po'boys and much more. Not bad for a restaurant that originally set its sights on being "just a little sandwich bar" by the beach. To avoid lines, be sure to arrive early!

**EAT MY PASTY**

280 S. Arnold Road  
(850) 235-7981  
EatMyPasty.com

Open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; closed Monday

Located at the Y where Highway 79 meets Front Beach Road, Eat My Pasty is an owner-operated purveyor of English Fish and Chips and Cornish Pasties that is taking Panama City



DEE'S HANG OUT

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Dolphin Encounter • Swim Adventure • Royal Swim  
Swim Journey – New!

Open daily, rain or shine!

Beach by storm! It has quickly earned a high ranking on social media sites thanks to the enthusiastic commentary of its customers and the adherence to authentic British flavors by its owners, natives of Essex in England. Even their Malt vinegar is made in-house!

If you've never tried a traditional English pasty, then you're in for a treat. A pasty is a baked pastry folded around your choice of fillings — usually meat and/or veggies and cheese. The traditional Cornish pasties at Eat My Pasty are made from scratch, with top-quality meats, veggies and cheeses.

**JESSE'S PLACE**

7008 Thomas Drive

(850) 708-1356

Facebook.com/JessesPlacePCB

7 a.m. to 2 p.m.; closed Sunday and Monday

With fresh ingredients, homemade sides and friendly service, Jesse's Place is quickly becoming a favorite "hole in the wall" for many looking for a great breakfast or lunch option in the Thomas Drive area.

Jesse's Place has not been in place for long in Panama City Beach, but it quickly attracted a following of locals and visitors looking for a healthy, hearty meal. Specials are posted daily online (or just "come on in" and read it on the chalkboard), and

while the selections change, you'll always have a wide range of entrees and sides to choose from. For a very reasonable lunch price, you'll get an entrée and three sides, making Jesse's Place a great place for a well-rounded lunch.

**PATCHES PUB**

4723 Thomas Drive

(850) 233-8879

PatchesPub.com

Open every day, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m.

Patches Pub takes its name from military patches patrons sometimes leave here as mementos, and while the connection to the armed forces is strong, what brings in locals and their families time and again is the good food and frequent live music.

And yes, Patches Pub is family friendly — it's also a good place to watch sports, and fosters a warm and welcoming environment. The pizzas are good, the burgers are even better (if you're only going to eat once, try the "Old McDonald Burger," which is a burger topped with pulled pork, bacon, a fried egg and melted pepper jack cheese). Sample a few and find out why Garden & Gun Magazine included Patches in their guide to the South's Best Burgers.

**RED RAE'S RESTAURANT**

12011 Panama City Beach

Parkway

(850) 249-7858

RedRaesPCB.Weebly.com

Open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.;

closed Tuesday

The two trickiest parts about enjoying a meal at Red Rae's Restaurant are 1) Finding it; 2) Trying to decide between menu items and specials that are all amazing. As far as finding it, it's located on the inside of a curve in Back Beach Road, one of the shops tucked away in the Lyndell Shopping Center. Keep an eye out for the big red Florida Linen sign — Red Rae's is next door.

Red Rae's serves breakfast until noon, which gives you ample time to order their Bayou Breakfast (homemade jalapeño cheddar cornbread topped with Boudin cakes and fried eggs, topped with Cajun

Andouille gravy) or the sweet potato Waffle (both are excellent). Lunch might include the roast beef and debris po'boy, or the pecan crusted chicken salad. Whatever you order, you can't go wrong!

**SISTERS OF THE**

**SEA GRILL & GROG**

9952 Hutchinson Blvd #200

(850) 708-1890

SistersofTheSea.net

Open every day, hours vary

Sisters of the Sea Grill & Grog is making its name on local word of mouth, not location. From the outside you'll see a non-descript storefront in a shopping area located (according to their Facebook Page) "across from Walmart and near Kwiker Liquor." Inside you'll find a cozy space that its owners have clearly put love into creating, and food that reflects that same quality.

The food's presentation is impressive, though it smells so good you won't sit back admiring it for long before diving in. The seafood dishes are of course delicious (try the Florida Cracker Crab Cakes appetizer), and those who prefer red meat won't be disappointed by "The Starliner," their house specialty brisket sandwich named after Florida's first rollercoaster, built right here in Panama City Beach. No wonder locals love it!

**SUNNYSIDE GRILL**

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What do I need to say about Sunnyside Grill besides this: They fry up the best bacon in three states (at least). The décor here trends more toward shabby than chic, but that doesn't stop customers in search of straightforward and delicious diner food from filling the tables and lining the counter.

How good is the food at Sunnyside Grill? Sunnyside is cash only, and it's definitely worth a trip to the ATM. Keep coming back and you'll find the waitresses and cooks are part of the experience, and they recognize and appreciate their regulars ... just like those regulars appreciate that bacon. Recommended: the daily specials are great; get the full size burger; and the cheese grits are excellent, even to go. ●

CHASE YAKABOSKI



JESSE'S PLACE

# Giving Back to a Special Place

Volunteers enhance park visitors' experience

BY HANNAH BURKE







**ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK** is a little slice of unspoiled Florida that has been giving campers something special since 1951. And, in exchange for all the memories of late-night campfires, fishing off the jetties, and hikes through Florida pine forests, there's a way for you to give back.

"Volunteers assist with everything from beach cleanups, special events and construction projects, to bath house cleaning, mowing or working the Ranger Station," says park manager Melissa Shoemaker. The backbone of the park, volunteers are responsible for keeping the beauty of St. Andrews preserved and accommodating guests in any way that they can.

There are many different volunteer programs you can participate in to help keep St. Andrews State Park one of Florida's premier parks. One such volunteer program schedules long-term campers in advance, and in return for a minimum of 20 hours of



ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK

**"Volunteers assist with everything from beach cleanups, special events and construction projects, to bath house cleaning, mowing, or working the Ranger Station."**

— Melissa Shoemaker,  
Park Manager



ST ANDREWS STATE PARK

**“My husband and I do most of the mowing and weed-eating and keep the bathrooms clean. This is our favorite camp because we’ve been bringing our kids here since they were little. Our whole family usually comes down one week in the summer and stays with us and we have a family reunion while we’re here working.” — Jean Hendrix**

community service per week, the camping fee for those scheduled volunteers is waived.

Bill and Jean Hendrix have been volunteering at the park for four years. The couple, who just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, travels from Tennessee to spend their summers helping out at the park.

“My husband and I do most of the mowing and weed-eating and keep the bathrooms clean,” Jean Hendrix explains. “This is our favorite camp because we’ve been bringing our kids here since they were little. Our whole family usually comes down one week in the summer and stays with us, and we have a family reunion while we’re here working.”

The most rewarding thing about their work? “We get to meet people from all over the United States, hear their stories and share ours. It’s just a really good relationship here with everybody in the park.”

One of the most sought-after positions a volunteer can obtain is that of a camp host. These leaders are champions of hospitality and are available to assist and educate campers at all times. In exchange for their services, camp hosts receive a

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Staff members and volunteers at St. Andrews State Park combine to maintain the park's assets ranging from a great blue heron to buildings at the 1,200-acre recreation area.

free stay at their own campsite and additionally gain volunteer hours that can accumulate toward future free admission to the park.

Ann Gager, the director of group sales at Visit Panama City Beach, is a former camp host and looks back on that experience with great fondness.

"It was wonderful. I basically raised my kids there, and that park was really our playground," Gager says. Back then, she would travel from Georgia with her family and camp all summer long. Time spent at the park led her to fall in love with Panama City Beach.

"You had to love camping, and you had to love helping people," Gager says of her duty. "A lot of people there have never camped before. We would help show people how to pitch a tent, identify and clean a fish, and more or less run interference for the state park personnel. It's just such a healthy, wholesome atmosphere, and there's such an opportunity to not only teach but learn."

To volunteer with the park, as a camp host or a daily volunteer, pick up an application at St. Andrews, or fill one out online at [Volunteers.FloridaStateParks.org](http://Volunteers.FloridaStateParks.org). ●



ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK

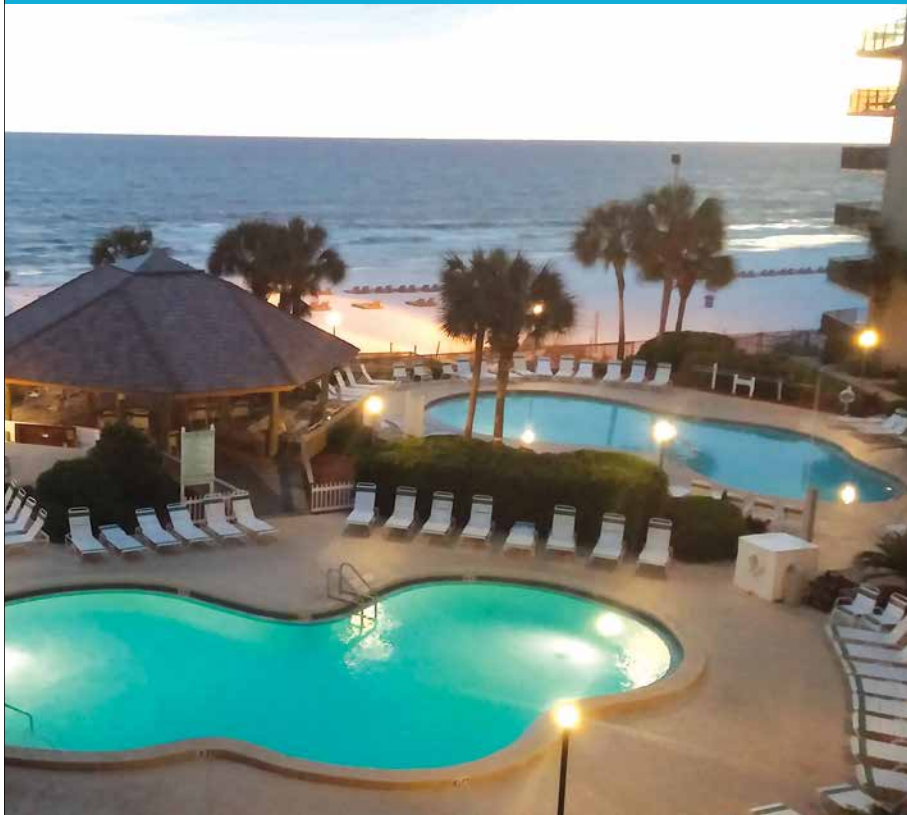


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# An Eatery Founded on Love

Someone's in the Kitchen with Liza

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT // PHOTOS BY CHASE YAKABOSKI



**GULF COAST NATIVES** Mike and Cat Meek took a circuitous route to the intersection of their paths — they met not on a white sand beach, but in the kitchen of a restaurant hundreds of miles away from Panama City Beach in Charleston, South Carolina, where Mike was attending culinary school at Johnson & Wales University.

The Mike and Cat pairing happened at a restaurant called Magnolias, where the two worked, fell in love and decided to marry in 2002, before moving to Colorado to begin their married life.

Cat, a trained sommelier, advanced her career in the wine world, while Mike further honed his culinary skills at a highly regarded restaurant in Denver. It was their shared passion for the restaurant industry that led them to make the decision to return to their roots in 2005, ultimately choosing to settle in Panama City Beach, where they could raise their new baby girl near family and friends. On Valentine's Day in 2006 they opened a

**“We make an effort to create fun and inventive combinations, and we make everything from scratch.”** — Cat, who runs the front of the house while Mike mans the kitchen.



restaurant of their own that reflected their personalities and brought the area something delicious, unique and created with love.

Naming their new lunch spot in Panama City Beach for Liza, their daughter, Mike and Cat packed the menu at Liza’s Kitchen with a wide variety of sandwiches, soups and salads, focusing more on the high-quality of the ingredients they used than the elegance of the cuisine. They decided to offer casual fare, creating plates of food that speak through their flavor rather than pretention.

“We make an effort to create fun and inventive combinations, and we make everything from scratch,” says Cat, who



Sandwiches including the Hippy Chick are built on a foundation of “love-infused” focaccia bread made from scratch every morning.

runs the front of the house while Mike mans the kitchen.

In fact, scratch-made focaccia bread fragrant with oregano is one of the very things for which Liza’s is most well known. “It’s made fresh every single morning, starting with bowls of flour, yeast, water, salt and oregano. Every piece of focaccia that we make is hand-shaped, and you can see and taste the love,” Cat continues.

Built on the very foundation of that love-infused bread is the Hippy Chick, which piles on juicy roasted chicken breast, topping off the tender meat with tangy goat cheese, fresh spinach leaves, roasted red peppers and a slather of spicy mayo to liven things up. The colorfully named Hair of the Dog brings bacon into the mix, topping chicken breast with strips of crispy, porky goodness and nestling it all in focaccia bread layered with house-made pimento cheese, fiery Sriracha sauce, and creamy cool Ranch dressing. For something bright and tart, the Big Apple Turkey is a palate pleaser, serving up sliced

turkey and bringing on the crunchy appeal of fresh apple, spinach and sliced provolone cheese on focaccia, spread with the sweetly golden acidity of honey mustard.

Vegetarians can rejoice in their wide array of veggie-laden options, which claim an impressive portion of the menu and showcase flavors that could make even the most ravenous of carnivores forgetful of the absence of meat. Stacking up grilled Portobello mushroom caps with roasted eggplant on focaccia, Liza’s adds sharp red onion, creamy avocado, cool cucumber and goat cheese to achieve a sandwich that packs on the protein.

For a sweet twist on a beloved classic, the Gourmet Grilled Cheese is a layering of sliced apples with soft and gooey brie; while the Haight Ashbury offers its own variation, bringing on the funk of blue cheese and blending it with melty mozzarella before topping it all off with slices of tomato, briny olive tapenade and roasted red peppers served on their famous focaccia bread.

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Diners flock to Liza's Kitchen, especially on the weekends, and enjoy dishes both familiar and newly minted.

## TOMATO-BASIL SOUP

(serves 4-6 people)

### Ingredients:

- 1 large onion, diced
- 8 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 oz. extra virgin olive oil
- 6 lbs. tomatoes, chopped w/ juice (2 large cans can be substituted for fresh tomatoes)
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 cup chopped basil
- Salt
- Pepper

### Directions:

In a medium-sized pot over medium-high heat, add olive oil, onions and garlic and cook until onions are translucent (3-5 minutes). Add tomatoes and bring to a simmer for 30 minutes. Add basil and cream to the mixture and season to taste with salt and pepper, then purée with immersion blender until smooth or carefully pour into a traditional blender to blend until the soup reaches a smooth and creamy consistency.

*Recipe adapted and printed with permission from Liza's Kitchen.*

If you're feeling the desire to craft a culinary masterpiece of your own, Liza's offers a seemingly endless list of breads, meats, cheeses, spreads, and fresh veggies and fruits to custom design your dream Dagwood. It's part of Mike and Cat's desire to give their guests an experience they'll love and provide them with food that truly satisfies.

"We want all of our guests to be happy when they come here — but that extends beyond just the food we serve them," Cat says. "When we opened Liza's, we tried to create an atmosphere that makes people smile. There are funny stickers and signs plastered all over the place, and people are constantly taking pictures of them. We want to be different, and really we want people to feel that energy in everything that we do, from the food that we make to the way that we interact. Singing along with the music that's playing on the speakers is not an infrequent occurrence — both from the kitchen staff as well as from our guests!"

For the perfect way to warm up those vocal chords, order a bowl of one of their

scratch-made soups. The Tomato Basil pairs beautifully with any of Liza's grilled cheese sandwiches, and their regularly rotating menu of soups helps keep things fresh every day.

On the lighter side, Liza's has more than just the garden variety of salads, conquering expectations with options like the Warm Napoleon Salad, tossing fresh mixed greens with Balsamic vinaigrette and topping it with fried eggplant, diced tomato, crumbled goat cheese, sliced avocado and chopped red onion.

Naturally, weekends are a time worth savoring at Liza's, and what better way to enjoy the chance to slow the pace of life than with brunch? Bringing every bit of their stellar culinary skills to the breakfast scene, Mike and Cat have compiled a menu of dishes that bring hungry diners flocking to Liza's on the weekend, offering up familiar classics as well as a few new items that will quickly become favorites.

The Eggs Liza puts their special touch on the more commonly known Benedict, layering poached eggs and



meaty roast beef on focaccia with pimento cheese and getting saucy with rich Hollandaise. To get the day rolling, order their ever-popular Breakfast Burrito, a generously packed flour tortilla filled with scrambled eggs, cheese, chopped bacon, crumbled sausage, fried potatoes, and sautéed peppers and onions drizzled with a spicy green chili sauce.

Regardless of what's on order from the menu, one ingredient at Liza's Kitchen remains the same: love. It sauces every plate and seasons every dish.

*Liza's Kitchen is located at 7328 Thomas Drive, Suite L, Panama City Beach. Open Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.; weekends, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. For more information on the menu, catering services and cooking classes with Mike, call (850) 233-9000 or visit [LoveLizas.com](http://LoveLizas.com).* ●



# THE MARTIN TURNS 80

And, still, it's puttin' on the Ritz

BY STEVE BORNHOFT  
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOINI

**FOR 26 YEARS, BARBARA MCMINIS** has been synonymous with the Martin Theater, as inseparable as Rodgers from Hammerstein or Porgy from Bess.

She loved theater and productions and performance from an early age and was a thespian at Rutherford High School in Bay County. With a partner, she established an event-planning business called Thematrix and made occasions special at the old Bay Point Clubhouse and elsewhere. She coordinated a performance series for the then-Gulf Coast Community College Foundation. And she served as

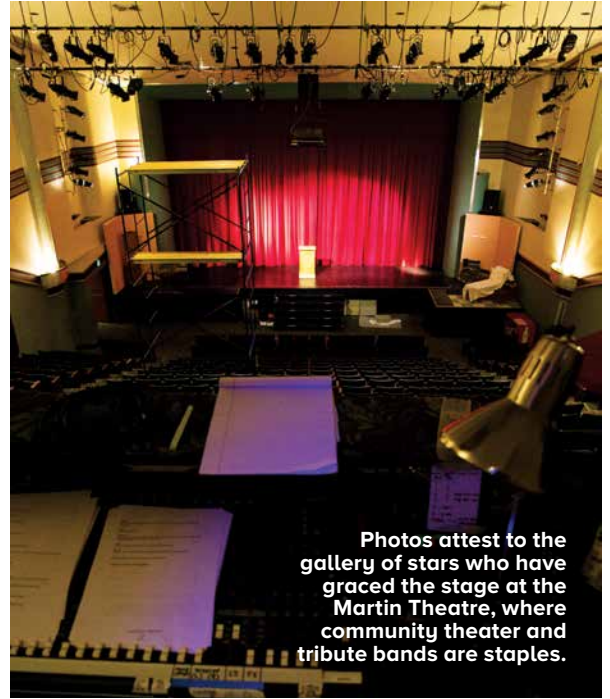
president of the Kaleidoscope Theatre in Lynn Haven.

As McMinis was advancing her career, the Martin Theater, a downtown Panama City fixture long moribund, was coming back to life, thanks due to the efforts of the Downtown Improvement Board and its chairman, H. Mack Lewis.

What is today the Martin Theatre opened first as a cinema in 1936 as the Ritz Theatre. A few years later during that incarnation, the theater was visited by notables including Clark Gable, Constance Bennett, Michael O'Shea and William Boyd, whose role was to promote not

Originally a movie house, the Martin Theatre changed hands and briefly served as a shooting gallery before it was acquired by the Panama City Downtown Improvement Board and made a home for the performing arts.





Photos attest to the gallery of stars who have graced the stage at the Martin Theatre, where community theater and tribute bands are staples.

so much movies, but the sale of war bonds. Military aircraft were from time to time positioned on Harrison Avenue in front of the theater where they were inspected by an enthusiastically supportive public. Lewis would recall years later, McMinis says, that war bonds sold as briskly in Panama City as they did anywhere.

The Martin family of Columbus, Georgia, acquired and renovated the Ritz chain of movie houses in the early 1950s. The Ritz marquee was replaced with the one which graces the façade of the Martin Theatre to this day. The Martins operated the cinema until 1976.

Thereafter, the theater was operated for a short time as a shooting gallery and then left vacant and deteriorating until 1987 when the Downtown Improvement Board bought the building.

The DIB and Lewis, with the assistance of the City of Panama City and the State of Florida, revived the Martin, turning it into the wonderful performing arts facility that Panama City boasts today.

The Martin's grand reopening took place in November 1990. As a new home for live performances, the Martin first hosted a Kaleidoscope production of "Godspell" coordinated by McMinis, who was Kaleidoscope president at the time. Lewis was so impressed by McMinis's work that he offered her the job of Martin Theatre director on the spot.

"When someone offers you your dream job, you take it and ask questions later," McMinis said. "Basically, Mr. Lewis told

me that the facility was mine to manage and he would let me know if he found that things were going wrong."

McMinis said she was grateful to have been afforded the freedom to make mistakes — and there would be flops along the way.

In 1991, McMinis sold series subscriptions along the lines of a "Chinese menu." Patrons picked two shows from list "A," two from list "B" and two from list "C." As it happens, only two people chose Amahl and the Night Visitors, which was among the operas offered. The touring company had been booked, however, and the show had to go on.

In an effort to pony up an audience, "we were ushering people into the theater off the streets," McMinis recalled.

McMinis recalls painfully well, too, a nearly disastrous performance by a Bill Haley and the Comets tribute group that included that Comets' original bass player, Al Rappa.

The aging Rappa's dentures rattled when he rocked around the clock and the group's guitarist fell ill and was hospitalized at Bay Medical Center, leaving the Martin Theatre's technical director, Rex Knight, to take his place.

The years have brought surprising successes, too.

McMinis had her doubts when she booked a Bee Gees tribute band, fearing that disco might bomb, but the show was a sellout.

**"When someone offers you your dream job, you take it and ask questions later."**

— Barbara McMinis

She was flabbergasted, too, at the success of Dave Bennett, a Benny Goodman-style clarinet player. Bennett, whose appeal has proved to be cross-generational, will be back in 2017.

"When I started, I was booking shows with my parents' tastes in mind," McMinis said. "Now I'm looking for shows that appeal to my generation."

Throughout, McMinis has adhered to the adage, "Give the people what they want." In so doing, she has discovered the Martin's enduring niche: tribute bands, one-person shows and community theater.

But there's more.

Now celebrating its 80th year, the Martin boasts a series of nationally touring road shows; is home to the Martin Ensemble Theatre, a critically acclaimed community theatre; screens classic and novelty films; presents several special events a year; and hosts a variety of community shows, parties and fundraisers. In 1994, the theater was expanded to include a reception and meeting room known as the Greenroom at the Martin.

Today, the building is owned by the city of Panama City and managed by Martin Theatre, Inc. a 501(c) nonprofit corporation.

"I'm approached all the time by people who want to get involved in the theater as volunteers, but what they are really saying is that they want to be on stage," McMinis said. "We all harbor that desire." ●

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# CREATE A NEW TRADITION

Make the beach your home for the holidays

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Bottom, the stage at Aaron Bessant Park, appropriately decked out, comes alive with songs of the holiday season. At right, Santa prepares to strut his stuff aboard a stand-up paddleboard.



**WITH THE LEVEL OF PLANNING** and attention to detail that goes into such a small window of time, the Thanksgiving holiday weekend can sometimes seem like an Olympic event. We judge ourselves on our level of execution and whether we can fully deliver on expectations — our own, as well as those of everyone around us. We spend hours compiling prep lists for meals, arranging seating plans, setting up accommodations, checking and rechecking every last detail.

It's an odd way to welcome a season that's supposed to be centered on friends and family and remembering what we truly have to be thankful for in life. We don't have time to relax and breathe

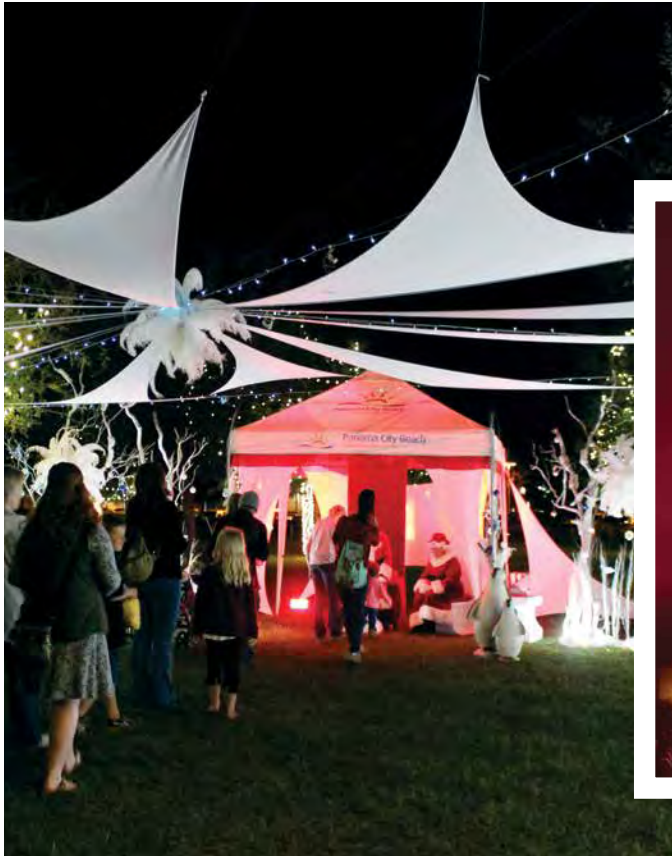
anymore, to just look around and enjoy the beauty of the season and savor the chance to be with our loved ones.

But why get caught up in all the stress? Instead of piling into cramped quarters at a relative's place, why not invite the family to the meet you on the Gulf Coast and make Panama City Beach your very own Beach Home for the Holidays? Meet on the white sandy beaches — the ultimate neutral ground — and begin a new tradition. Not simply to enjoy the beautiful beach views, but also for everything that this Real. Fun. Beach. has to offer — great dining, fantastic shopping, fun, and seasonally themed events — everything you might need to make Thanksgiving weekend run

a little more smoothly, freeing you up to simply relax and enjoy time with the family.

Unless, of course you love a good challenge. If you thrill to the feel of crisp fall morning air in your face and long to get your blood flow going, dash out the door on Thanksgiving morning to hit the streets for the second annual Bay Point Turkey Trot and Family Fun Run. The race begins at 8 a.m. at Sheraton Bay Point, which means you'll have plenty of time to finish your run before the turkey needs basting. It's a great way to show your own spirit of giving and thankfulness, as the proceeds benefit the Wesley Burnham Foundation and its dedication to early childhood education and musical development.





Magic moments occur on stage and off at Aaron Bessant Park as the Christmas holiday approaches, making it easy for visitors to Panama City Beach to enjoy traditional seasonal activities and establish new traditions.



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Even if you're not planning to lace up your running shoes, the idea of all the meal prep can still leave you feeling as breathless as if you've just run a race. So leave the ovens off! Have one of Panama City Beach's great restaurants cater your meal, or take the whole crew out to dinner instead. You'll feast without the heartburn that comes with having to time everything just so. (Also, three cheers for not having to do the dishes!)

**HERE ARE A FEW OF THE GREAT RESTAURANTS THAT'LL BE AT YOUR SERVICE ON THANKSGIVING DAY:**

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- » The Grand Marlin
- » Harpoon Harry's
- » Margaritaville
- » Runaway Island
- » Saltwater Grill

To really get into the spirit of the season, Panama City Beach is presenting a lineup of fun-filled festivities Thanksgiving weekend activities that are sure to boost your holiday spirit and make you feel like a kid again.

"With the Beach Home for the Holidays celebration, our aim is to create a new family tradition for visitors, encouraging them to spend their holiday season in Panama City Beach and enjoy seasonally themed events that will help them create a memory," says David Demarest of Visit Panama City Beach. "The most important thing is having the opportunity to be with family, so why not do it

at the beach? For locals, it's another fun, family-friendly event that they get to take part in. It's free to attend, there's entertainment and music, and it really helps kick off the holiday season."

Holiday festivities will be in full swing on Saturday evening, Nov. 26, as Wynonna Judd is spreading holiday cheer with a stop in Panama City Beach on her Simpler Christmas Tour. Her full band, Wynonna & The Big Noise, will take the stage at Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater. The night before on Friday, Nov. 25, the Panama City POPS kick things off with a free concert featuring lots of fun Christmas music, along with the lighting of the Christmas tree.

On both nights prior to the free concerts Santa and Mrs. Claus will meet children at the Winter Wonderland set up in Aaron Bessant Park. Carolers will also regale the gathering crowds while campfires glow bright and toasty, making the night feel even more special and offering up the perfect setting for snuggling up and enjoying ooey-gooney s'mores and steamy hot cocoa (all provided for free).

Naturally, the weekend would hardly be complete without some serious shopping, and unique boutiques scattered along the beach from the Grand Lagoon to the West End of Panama City Beach, as well as hundreds of famous retail stores and local shops at Pier Park, are offering up countless deals for the shopaholic in your family.

Ready to make some holiday memories you'll cherish for years to come? Set your sights on Panama City Beach, where you'll get to view the city with the wonder of child at Christmas and remember everything you have to be thankful for, right here at the beach. ●

## Making Memories



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# YOU MAY BE SURPRISED TO LEARN ...

Little-known facts about Panama City Beach

BY STEVE BORNHOFT



**HAVE SOME** Panama City Beach trivia on hand for your next trip to the world's most beautiful beaches! We gathered up 10 lesser-known facts about Panama City Beach that might just surprise you.

## **MOLLUSKS AND FISHES AND BIRDS, OH MY**

St. Andrew Bay is one of the most ecologically diverse estuarine systems in the world. A 2002 study identified 2,913 species present there, including 309 species of fish, 340 mollusks and 225 birds.

## **TANGLED UP IN BLUE**

Conrad Hawkins, fishing in the 2001 Bay Point Billfish Tournament, set a Florida record when he brought to the scales a blue marlin weighing 1,046 pounds. The fish was lifted from water more than 600 feet deep. The record remains unbroken.

## **A SCHOOL OF WHITETAIL DEER?**

While not often thought of as swimmers, whitetail deer are adept enough in the water to make the seemingly perilous crossing from mainland St. Andrews State Park to Shell Island, often surprising boaters. Deer, singly and in groups, make the trip to discover whether the grass is greener on the other side of the pass.

## **WHAT WAS ONCE WDTB**

The television station known familiarly as Channel 13 commenced broadcast operations in October 1973 as WDTB-TV. It was a property of the Panhandle Broadcasting Corporation, run

## / FUN FACTS

by attorney Denver T. Brannen and financed by Chevy dealer Tommy Thomas and attorneys Julian Bennett and Dick Arnold. In 1977, WDTB was sold to Octagon Broadcasting in Atlanta. With D.T. Brannen no longer in charge, the new owner changed the station's call sign to WMBB, which stands for the "World's Most Beautiful Beaches."

### A PRISTINE BEAUTY

Lake Powell, at the west end of Panama City Beach, is the largest dune lake in Florida. Dune lakes are rare ecosystems found only in the Florida Panhandle, Madagascar, Australia and New Zealand. They are freshwater systems that intermittently exchange water with bodies of salt water such as the Gulf of Mexico through a meandering outlet. Lake Powell has been designated a "Pristine Florida Waterway." Camp Helen State Park is located along its western shore.

### TALK ABOUT YOUR SNOWBIRDS

The Bay County Audubon Society, like Audubon chapters around the country, conducts a bird count each December; between 120 and 140 species are documented each year. In 2014, Bay County Audubon Society president Ron Houser readily recalls, the count included a snow bunting, a species that typically inhabits the Arctic tundra. Houser also notes that a snowy owl, another Arctic denizen, has been spotted at St. George Island State Park.

### CRYSTALLINE BEACH

The world famous sugary white sand of the world's most beautiful beaches resulted from quartz crystals that were washed

down from the Appalachian Mountains centuries ago. Along the way, the crystals were bleached, ground, smoothed and polished.

### EASY ACCESS

Panama City Beach is home to 98 public beach access points, not including those in St. Andrews State Park or Camp Helen State Park. Some provide parking, each has a unique personality and all guarantee the public free access to the sand.

### A DIFFERENT KIND OF PODCAST

Panama City Beach and St. Andrew Bay are home to one of the highest concentrations of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins anywhere, a reflection of the area's excellent water quality. Pods of dolphins are resident along Panama City Beach year-round and are made curious by human activity. Bear in mind, though, that feeding or otherwise interfering with dolphins is prohibited by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act.

### DISCOVERING THE OCEAN'S SECRETS

The U.S. Navy's SeaLab program was to undersea exploration as Mercury astronauts were to space exploration. The prototype submersible sea base was developed at the then-Navy Mine Defense Lab in Panama City Beach and paved the way for SeaLab I, which was tested three miles off PCB before it was shipped to a site south of Bermuda 52 years ago. There, with a crew onboard, it was lowered to a depth of 193 feet for 11 days, proving for the first time that men could live and work underwater for extended periods. ●



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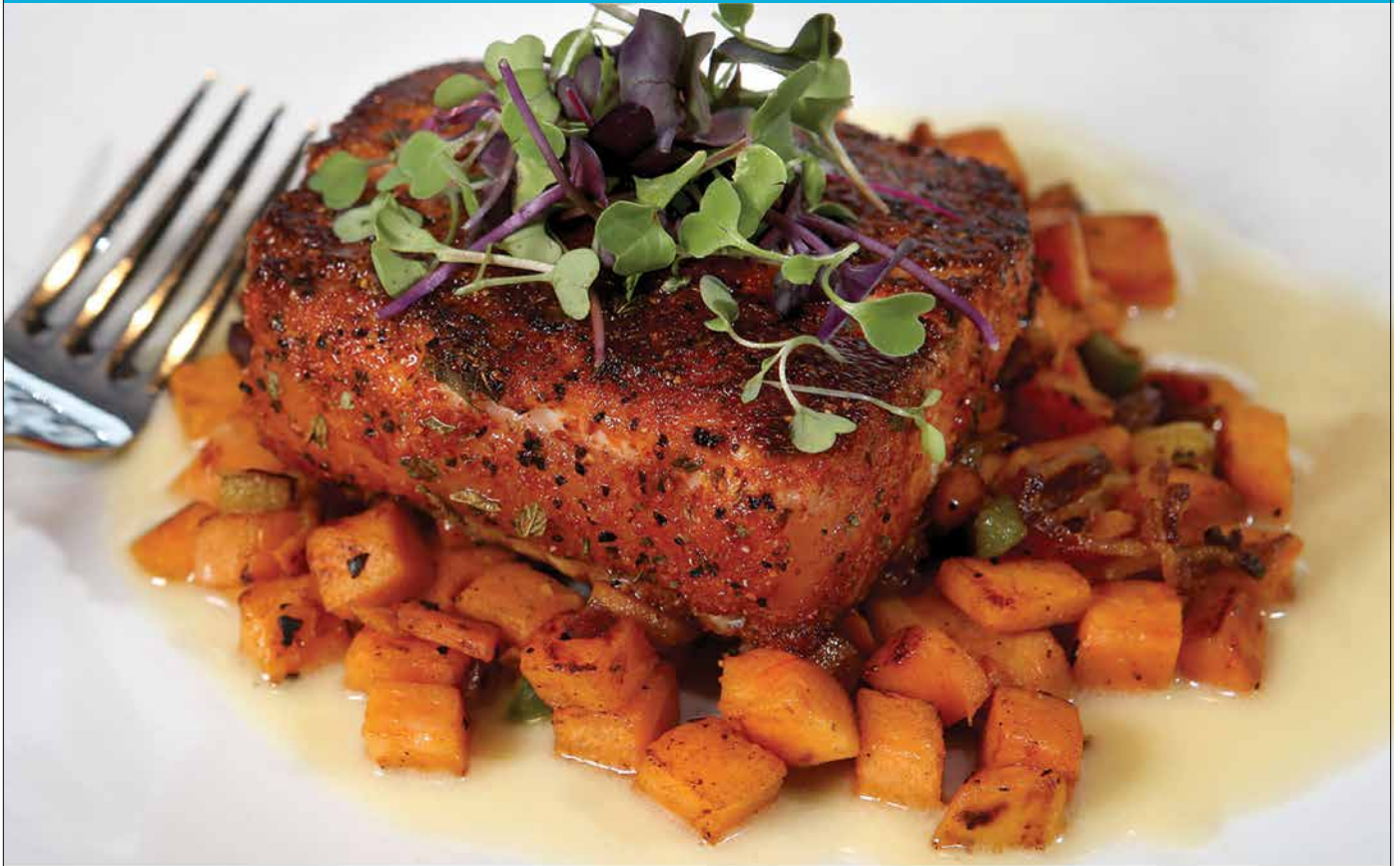


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Hy's Toggery is the oldest family-owned clothing store in Bay County — founded by Hy Wakstein in 1969 and still providing the best customer service. Hy's Toggery is now 9,000 sq. ft. of the best brands for all your work, play, social or sporting requirements. Select from a huge assortment: Columbia · Guy Harvey · AFTCO · Toms Costa Del Mar · OluKai · Southern Tide · Vineyard Vines · Patagonia · Kühl · North Face · Southern Marsh · Tilley · Under Armour · UGGS · Tommy Bahama · Lauren James · Southern Shirt Co. · Sanuk · Born Sperry Top-sider · Cole Haan · Rainbow · Chacos · Hunter · YETI

# The Grand Marlin



5323 N. Lagoon Drive  
(850) 249-1500  
thegrandmarlin.com

## AN EXPERIENCE BETWEEN TIME & TIDE

Fresh local seafood, island cocktails and a relaxed atmosphere ... welcome to The Grand Marlin! Pull up a seat at our fantastic oyster bar or join us upstairs at The North Drop Bar for a more casual, laid-back waterfront setting! Enjoy a succulent meal of fresh seafood, perfectly grilled steaks, decadent desserts and, of course, the view. Come by land, come by sea, but definitely come as you are.

# Safety First

**FLORIDA'S BEACH WARNING FLAG** program uses flags in four colors accompanied by interpretive signs along the beach to explain the meaning of each color. Flags are located approximately one mile apart along the beach. Absence of flags does not assure safe waters. Current beach flag conditions can be found on [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com). Sign up to receive text alerts for flag changes.



-  **GREEN – LOW HAZARD**  
Calm conditions, exercise caution
-  **YELLOW – MEDIUM HAZARD**  
Moderate surf and/or currents
-  **RED – HIGH HAZARD**  
High surf and/or strong currents
-  **RED OVER RED**  
Water closed to public
-  **PURPLE**  
Dangerous marine life

# Leave Only Footprints

Together, we can keep our beaches pristine

**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 brought to the beach with you 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.

Those who store their personal items overnight do so at their own risk. The county, the city, the Tourist Development Council and the beach maintenance contractor do not assume any liability for any items left on the beach.





# Your Adventure at Sea Starts Here



5709 N. Lagoon Drive  
(Across from Capt. Anderson's)  
(850) 235-0099 | watersportspc.com

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With the largest fleet of pontoon boats and WaveRunners® in PCB, as well as the closest access to Shell Island, we will get you out on the water quickly and easily. Clean, reliable, fully equipped pontoon boats available for full or half-day rental, fuel included! Experience the thrill and freedom of riding new WaveRunners®, two-hour tours and hourly rentals at more than 12 locations.

**Ask about our Dolphin Tours and \$30 off special!**

# Sand & Surf

## PANAMA CITY BEACH

sets the stage for great memories and spectacular photos as well. Visitors often share their breathtaking “you had to be there”-types of photos with us on social media, so we thought we might pick a few and show them off here in the non-digital space of our magazine. We think you'll agree, they look great in any format!

*Post your Panama City Beach photos on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook with the hashtag #RealFunBeach, and they might just end up featured here in the next issue! (We'll contact you to ask permission first, of course!)*



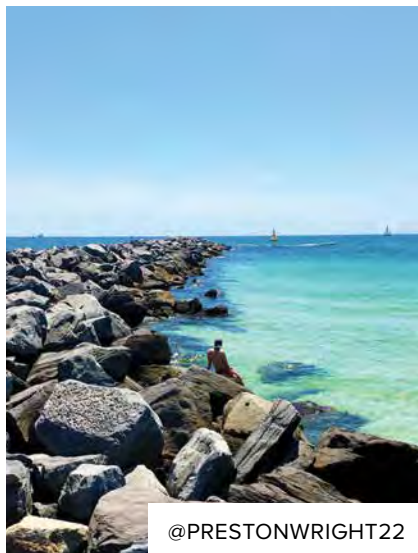
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