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SPRING 2018 MAGAZINE

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TOP SHUCKER

PAGE 42

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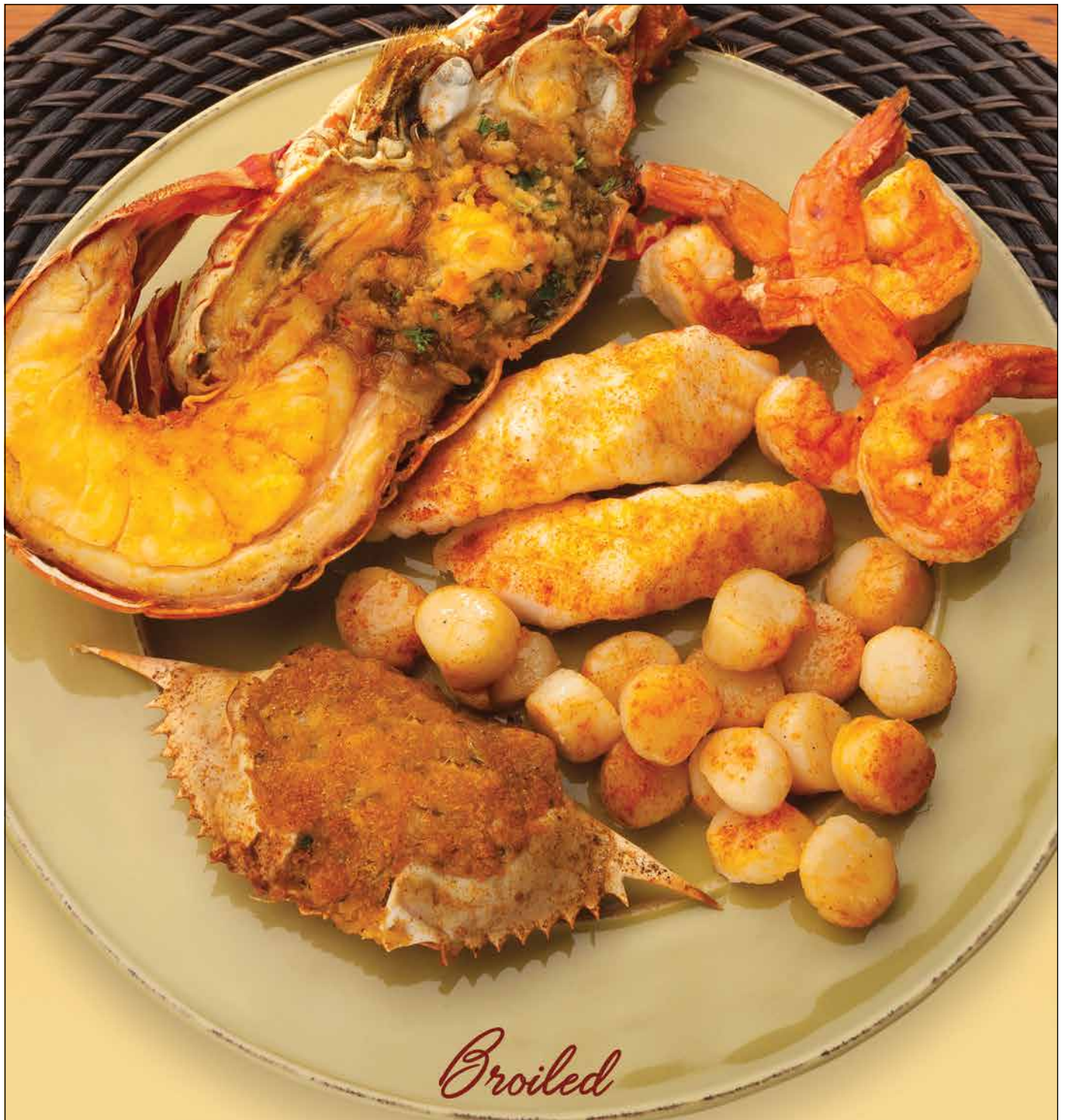
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42 AWW SHUCKS Hunt's Oyster Bar on Beck Avenue in the historic St. Andrews neighborhood of Panama City is a mecca for shellfish slurpers from down the street and across the region. Plus, it is home to shucker Honor Allen, who can move through a dozen oysters more quickly than just about anyone on the planet.

46 ALL ALONG THE SHOPPING TRAIL Reward your tireless shopping efforts by picking up a Decor By The Shore Shopping Trail online or at the Visit Panama City Beach office. Fill the card with stamps from select shops along the trail and redeem a completed card for a Panama City Beach swag bag at only one VPCB offices.

50 DINE & UNWINE The annual UNwineD Festival at Aaron Bessant Park figures to be better than ever this year. A growing list of food and drink vendors will be participating this year. Mixologists will be competing for top honors in a craft cocktail competition and headlining musical entertainers will be the soulful but brassy St. Paul and the Broken Bones.

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Capt. Travis Holeman of Key West has joined local boy Justin Leake as a host of the award-winning "Chasin' the Sun" fishing show produced by Visit Panama City Beach.

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IN FOCUS

58 TOP EVENTS

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64 FOOD For anyone with a hankering for the best in fried food, the short trip up Highway 79 from the beaches to the Boon Docks restaurant at the foot of the West Bay Bridge is surely worth it.

68 SPORTS In March, Panama City will play host to a 5-kilometer Warrior Dash, a down-and-dirty spectacle if ever there was one.

74 MUSIC A little country, a strong rock beat, even some good old rhythm and blues. The RealFunBeach station on Pandora is programmed to play the hits and b-sides that you want to hear on the beach.

80 PCB TOPS Ah, those gloriously golden creations of magnificent meatiness. Luscious lumps bound together with barely any fillers. Check out our guide to eateries whose crab cakes, well, take the cake.

86 HISTORY For 11 years, Philip Griffiths served Panama City Beach as its mayor. Today, his son, Griff, is a Bay County commissioner.

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MICHAEL BOONIN



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THE SPRING SEASON provides another opportunity for families to come enjoy the beach, bringing a wave of events, entertainment and excitement for our visitors. In addition to our 27 miles of sugar-white sand and emerald green water, our jam-packed events schedule is sure to please every member on your next vacation. Panama City Beach is built on a long-standing tradition of providing eclectic, year-round events for both visitors and locals to enjoy, and the spring is no exception!

If you are interested in spending your spring weekend tasting local cuisine and the area's finest beer, wine and spirits, be sure to check out the second annual UNwineD Food and Wine Festival (page 50). Presented by "Southern Living" magazine, this award-winning event features culinary creations by the region's leading chefs and live musical entertainment featuring St. Paul and the Broken Bones. One of our more nontraditional events starting this spring is Sand Jam, a three-day alternative rock music festival, located directly on the sandy beach. These newer events are joined by the classics, such as the Seabreeze Jazz Festival, Ironman 70.3 Gulf Coast and Thunder Beach. These events are entering a noteworthy milestone in 2018, as they celebrate two decades of entertainment in Panama City Beach.

Accompanying our widespread event schedule, visitors can embark on a "Waterfront Wonderland," (page 28) sharing the best activities and adventures for the thrill seekers in your life. One of the many adventures visitors enjoy are airboat rides, providing a diverse eco-tour of the wildlife of West Bay. Learn more about the creatures you may come across on page 38, including fish, manatees, alligators, dolphins, and even sharks! If you aren't able to see this wildlife in person, be sure to check out the third season of "Chasin' The Sun," premiering on Saturday mornings at 8 a.m. eastern/7 a.m. central on Discovery Channel (page 34). Joining native Captain Justin Leake is Travis Holeman, champion angler and guide service captain based out of Key West. Their unscripted approach to the show will give viewers a genuine glimpse into the fisheries of Northwest Florida.

The people of this destination are what build the true character and charm of our beach, bringing families back year after year. Read about Honor Allen, Bay County native and oyster shucking champion on page 42. Beginning his journey at only 18, Honor has traveled the world, competing in China and the Republic of Ireland seeking the world title of Fastest Oyster Shucker. Other



notable legacies in our community include Phillip "Griff" Griffiths Jr., local businessman, Visit Panama City Beach Chairman and Bay County Commissioner, who has followed in the footsteps of his father, Phillip Griffiths Sr. Read about their 50 years on Panama City Beach and impactful stewardship on page 86.

There is so much to discover in Panama City Beach, and we are so grateful for our visitors who come to enjoy it. As you flip through these pages, we hope you learn something new about our dynamic destination, and plan to visit us very soon.

Sunny Regards,

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



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Seas*

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- “Middle Beach Road” Hutchison Boulevard
- “City Pier” Russell-Fields Pier
- “County Pier” M.B. Miller Pier

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Bike Path



Distance Chart

Atlanta, GA	297 mi	470 km
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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

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Natural Treasures

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

BY STEVE BORNHOFT
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RUSSO

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

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

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

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



Laughing Gull



Great Blue Heron



Sandpiper

Flounder



Speckled Sea Trout



Redfish



Whiting



Fighting Conch



Callico Scallop



Coquina Shells

Osprey



Brown Pelican



Snowy Egret



Mahi Mahi



Pompano



Red Snapper



Grouper



Common Nutmeg



Florida Augers



Olive Shell



Alphabet Cone



Sand Dollar



Best 18 Golf Holes

offer scenic challenges

Linked, they add up to a dream round **BY PAT MCCANN**

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 holes that will tempt you to take your driver out of the bag. And hey, if your sand wedge is a little rusty, there's no better way to sharpen your sand play than to practice at the beach before hitting the links.

Panama City Beach's eight-course golf menu includes: **BAY POINT**, offering two layouts, the only Nicklaus Design course in the region and a more subtle Walter Byrd layout; **HOLIDAY GOLF**, home to both a regulation 18-hole layout and a lighted par-3 executive course; **HOMBRE**, with three courses, each of which provides a distinctive challenge and lots of water; **SIGNAL HILL**, which delivers a varied 18 holes, open on the front side but dicier on the back.

It doesn't take a fictional Roy McAvoy staring down his destiny to create a memorable golf hole.

Some are distinctive because they are feisty and have withstood the test of time, such as the par-4 Road Hole on the Old Course at St. Andrews.

Others, such as the tricky par-3 No. 12 at Augusta National, are devilish in the acumen and steel they demand from those seeking to wear a green jacket.

The par-5 No. 16 on "The Monster" at Firestone is legendary for its length, enough said. The panoramic ocean holes at Pebble Beach are prominent given their natural majesty.

And some golf holes, including those listed here as part of an "Elite 18" selected from courses in Panama City Beach, follow the lead of those legendary, larger-than-life holes and

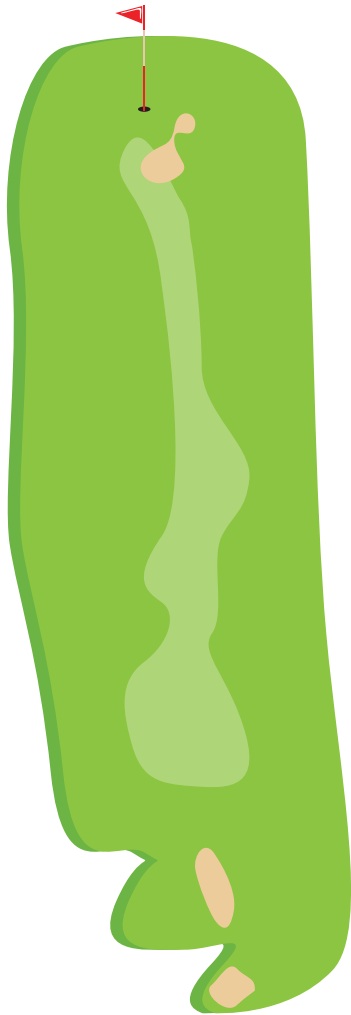
dominate conversations after the bags are put up and the beverages poured.

Our list comprises holes found at the Hombre Golf Club, Holiday Golf Club, Shark's Tooth, Signal Hill Golf Course and the Nicklaus and Club Meadows layouts at Bay Point.

Some might argue for other holes, feeling that they are especially noteworthy and memorable for the way they complement the natural beauty of the area, but in the opinion of club professionals, directors of golf and some of the regular folks who just enjoy a long walk spoiled, these holes equate to a dream round of golf in Panama City Beach. All yardages are from the tips, and the Hombre holes mentioned are on the "Bad" and "Ugly" nines. ●

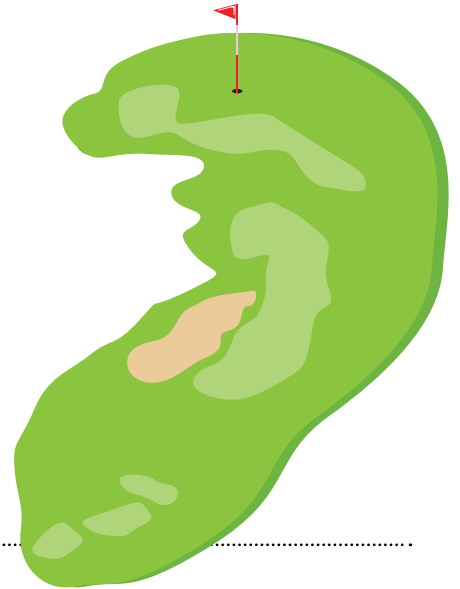


IN COMBINATION, THE ELITE 18 PLAY TO A PAR 71



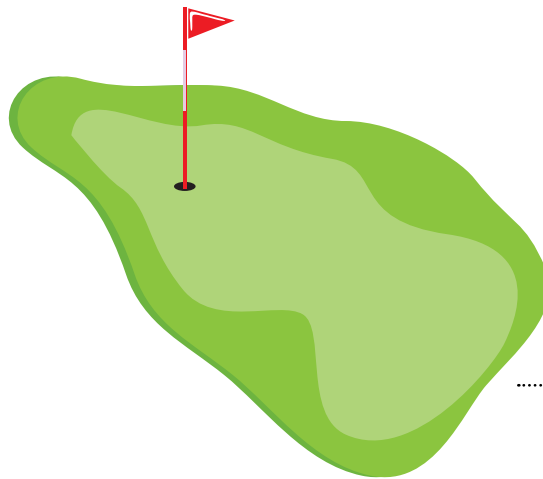
1. HOMBRE, THE BAD, 1
575-yard, par 5

The starting hole is the longest hole on the course. If you decide to lay up your second shot on this par 5, good luck. It has one of the tightest landing areas on the entire course.



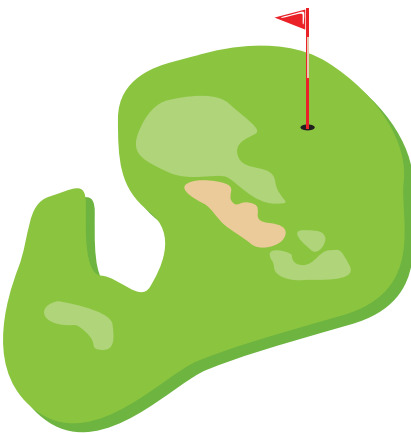
2. SHARK'S TOOTH 6
526-yard, par 5

The No. 1 handicap hole borders Lake Powell on the left and features a continuous bunker framing the left side. The drive has to carry a natural preserve for a decent approach. The entire back of the green abuts a corner of the lake and provides a spectacular setting.



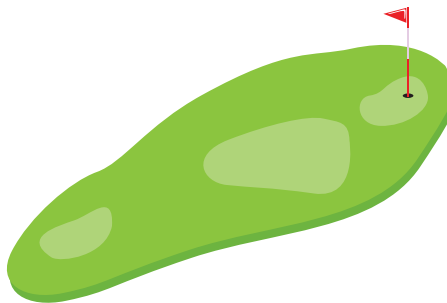
3. NICKLAUS 5
398-yard, par 4

The most scenic par 4 on the layout with a view of St. Andrew Bay. It is a target golf hole as you hit across the marsh to an island fairway, then back across the marsh to the green.



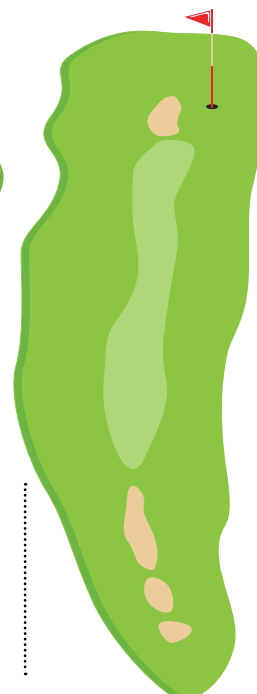
4. SHARK'S TOOTH 5
231-yard, par 3

This long par 3 plays to a two-tiered green that is more than 5,000 square feet in size. It requires a shot over a natural preserve and it borders Lake Powell, a scenic natural feature that accents their round.



5. HOLIDAY 4
195-yard, par 3

The four-section green is huge and offers a variety of pin placements. Because the green was moved during a recent course renovation, a creek now comes into play on the right.

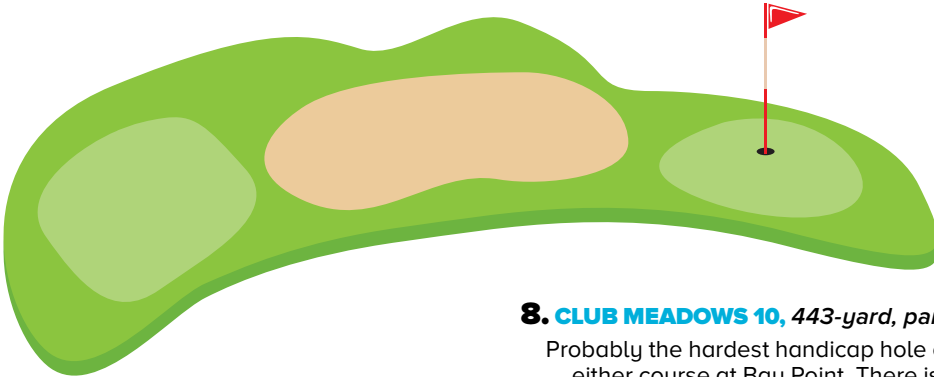


6. HOMBRE, THE BAD, 5
363-yard, par 4

One of the shorter par 4s on the course, with a narrow three-tiered green guarded by three bunkers. Try to take advantage of the short length of this hole, and it can go from the ninth hardest hole on the course in the blink of an eye.

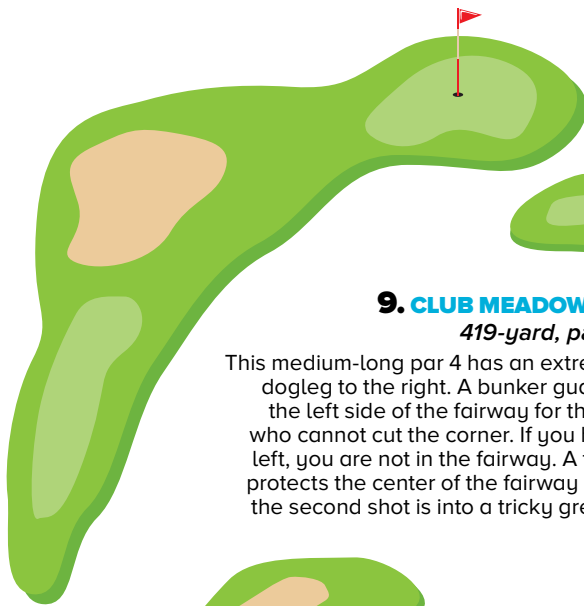
7. NICKLAUS 12, 522-yard, par 5

This hole gives the player an option whether to go to the high side of the fairway or low side. The high-side option gives you a shorter second shot, but beware — the drive to get there is a big carry and a slight miscalculation results in time spent trapped in one of the multiple fairway bunkers.



8. CLUB MEADOWS 10, 443-yard, par 4

Probably the hardest handicap hole on either course at Bay Point. There is a tight landing area off of the tee and water on the right and trees on the left. Long!



9. CLUB MEADOWS 7, 419-yard, par 4

This medium-long par 4 has an extreme dogleg to the right. A bunker guards the left side of the fairway for those who cannot cut the corner. If you hit it left, you are not in the fairway. A tree protects the center of the fairway and the second shot is into a tricky green.



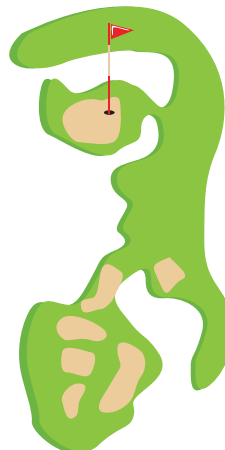
11. NICKLAUS 10, 168-yard, par 3

Beautiful from the back tee as the player hits over water to a narrow green that is guarded by bunkers. Do not let the short yardage fool you.



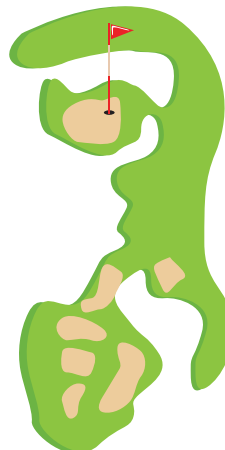
10. HOLIDAY 12, 383-yard, par 4

This hole was stretched by moving the green back 25 yards toward the water. Once simple, now not so much. The green is very undulating and guarded by a bunker on the right front.



12. HOMBRE, THE BAD, 7, 153-yard, par 3

The hole features an island green, and a lofted club usually is selected for the tee shot on this short hole. Wind always seems to come into play and can have its way with your ball.






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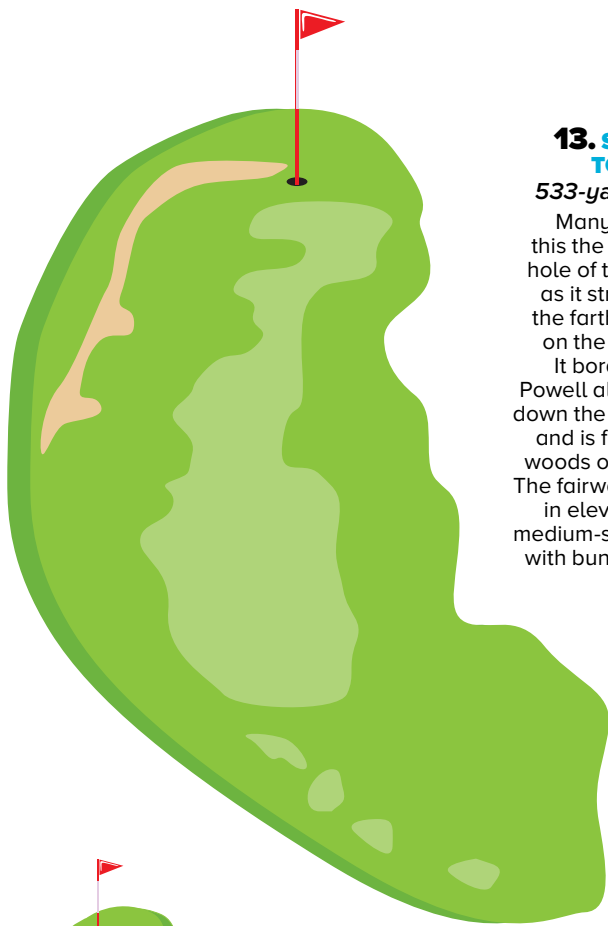
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13. SHARK'S TOOTH 13

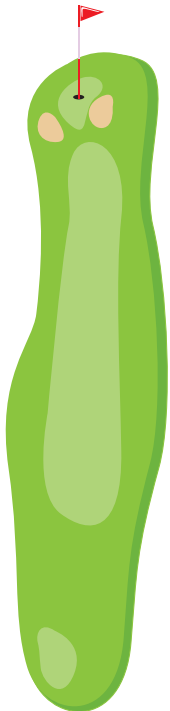
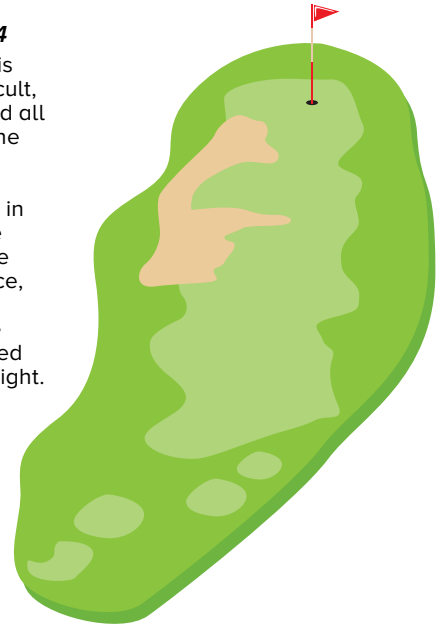
533-yard, par 5

Many consider this the signature hole of the layout as it stretches to the farthest point on the property. It borders Lake Powell all the way down the right side and is framed by woods on the left. The fairway slopes in elevation to a medium-size green with bunkering on the left.

14. SHARK'S TOOTH 18

460-yard, par 4

The home hole is not terribly difficult, though bunkered all the way down the right side. The view of the clubhouse, built in wood and stone that matches the natural ambiance, adds to the experience. The green is bunkered on the left and right.



15. HOLIDAY 14

412-yard, par 4

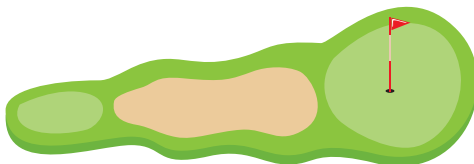
A picturesque par 4 with brand new tees offers a relatively open drive, though tighter than the previous layout. Those who favor the left side must be aware of a creek running along that stretch, and a large tree comes into play. The creek also borders the back of the green, which is multi-tiered and guarded by two new bunkers. It is for sure a second-shot hole and is the No. 2 handicap hole for men.



16. HOMBRE, THE BAD, 18

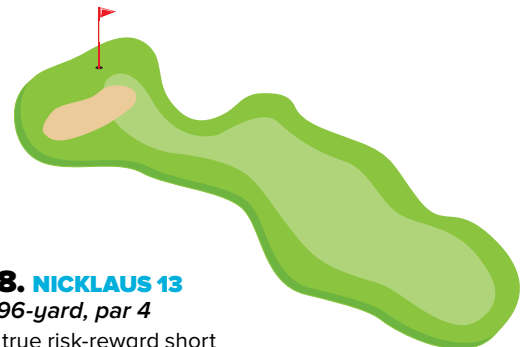
421-yard, par 4

An excellent finishing hole, though not overly long. It has a forced carry over water to a small area of the green, if the hole is cut in the "Sunday" position.



17. SIGNAL HILL 16, 161-yard, par 3

This hole provides a scenic view of both the golf course and the surrounding area. The challenge is a green framed by vegetation with danger awaiting in all directions for a shot that wanders far offline. The green rests on the highest elevation point of the golf course, with anything short and right sure to collect at the bottom of a daunting incline.



18. NICKLAUS 13

296-yard, par 4

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SIGHT

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

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


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

Adrenaline Junkies WATERFRONT **Wonderland**

Panama City Beach is a paradise for
athletes and adventurers

BY HANNAH BURKE





You've been called a thrill-seeker, a daredevil, a risk-taker and an adventurer. For you, lounging on the beach and working on your tan isn't all it's cracked up to be. Vacation means taking a walk on the wild side, and maybe crossing a few items off your bucket list. Whether you're looking for thrills on land or in the sea, Panama City Beach has a broad range of activities to scratch that itch.

DIVE SHOPS

Waters off Panama City Beach are rich in shipwrecks, artificial reefs and occasional naturally occurring rock structures known as "hard bottom." All hold magnificent populations of fish ranging from clouds of bait to apex predators like groupers. And, like all natural wonders, these environments

must be seen in person to be fully appreciated. Dive shops on Panama City Beach can outfit you with snorkeling gear ideal for inspecting life around the jetties or prepare you to make deeper dives with scuba gear. "Resort courses" that culminate in Open Water Scuba Diving Certifications require only three days to complete. Specialty courses in mixed gases diving or cave diving, for example, are also available to advanced divers. DiveLocker.net, PanamaCityDiving.com, DiversDenpcb.com, PCDiveCenter.com

ADVENTURES AT SEA

If you prefer to devour your thrills at the surface, Adventure at Sea provides both freehand and guided excursions of the Gulf aboard WaveRunners, pontoons and sailboats. The only thing that beats

the scenery of our coastline as you race through the waves? A bird's eye view from a parasail at Paradise Watersports. As you coast along the clouds, be on the lookout for pods of dolphins below. Tickets for this unparalleled experience, as well as boat rentals, are available at the numerous Adventure at Sea booths that adorn Panama City Beach's shores. WaterSportsPC.com

COBRA ADVENTURE PARK

With a name like Cobra, you know there's bound to be some excitement! Swing through Smuggler's Cove, an 18-hole putt-putt golf course that guides families through their very own pirate adventure. Crank it up a notch with one of the park's 9-horsepower go-karts and race your friends and family through a twisty, four-tiered



BEACHFRONT ADVENTURES

You'll want to set aside a day for this one. BeachFront Adventures is jam-packed with extreme recreations, including the only zip line courses you can find in PCB. Their towers stretch over 70 feet tall, propelling you across the park at high speeds. Lovers of heights will also get their kicks as they traverse the challenging rope obstacle course. Its 18 towers will test your endurance, balance and strength before you reach the top. No visit is complete without a spin around the off-road dune buggy course, a mudslinging adventure that'll have you at the edge of your seat! RABeachGetaways.com

track. If that doesn't get your heart pumping, we dare you to strap into The Vertical Accelerator, a bungee-like thrill ride that launches riders over 160 feet into the sky! "The Dragon Wagon" rollercoaster and arcade are perfect for the younger ones who need their fix of fun. VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/listings/cobra-adventure-park/169

RACE CITY

Race City supplies all the thrills of your classic amusement park, making it the ultimate attraction for the whole family. Take a spin on the Scrambler, rock the boat aboard the Sea Dragon Pirate Ship and take flight with the Hurricane steel coaster! This is also the home of PCB's legendary Skycoaster, a ride that lets you channel your inner

Superman as you free fall from a 137-foot tower at over 60 mph. To catch your breath, hop inside the 10,000-foot "Mega-Arcade" to show off your skee ball skills, hoard tickets and trade them in for awesome prizes to commemorate your visit! RaceCityPCB.com

BOGGY BAYOU AIRBOAT TOURS

Are those serene sunset dolphin cruises not really your speed? Boggy Bayou Airboat Tours redefines the aquatic tour experience, taking you to the lesser known parts of PCB. Oh, and you'll be sightseeing aboard a GTO Performance Airboat that boasts a 635-horsepower engine. While you cut through the waters of Deer Point Lake, you're sure to

see some of our famous Florida alligators, native birds and other marine life that inhabit the salt marshes. AirboatPanamaCity.com

AQUATIC ADVENTURES

Winter is over and it's finally time for some wet 'n' wild fun. Aquatic Adventures offers just about anything from guided jet-ski dolphin tours to exhilarating banana boat rides. For a more personal experience, become your own captain and navigate your way to scenic Shell Island in your choice of WaveRunners, sailboats or pontoons. Snorkeling tours near Shell Island place you right into the action, as you become immersed in the world of vibrant fish, dolphins and other exotic sea life. FunPCB.com

Bay Point Marina



Daniel Fussell, Marinas Director
(850) 235-6911
baypointmarina.net
3824 Hatteras Lane

BAY POINT MARINA

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

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

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

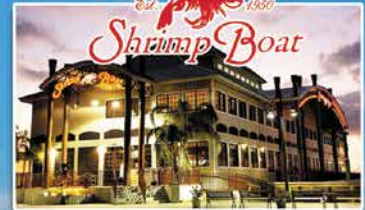
COASTAL CASUALS

A Coastal Lifestyle Boutique

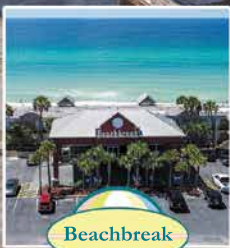
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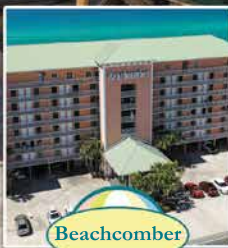
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BYTHESEARESORTS.COM

PANHANDLE HELICOPTER

Helicopter tours may sound extravagant and lavish, but Panhandle Helicopter provides an affordable, electrifying experience for all ages to enjoy. Newcomers and families with little ones mostly go for the Intro Ride — a brief but picturesque tour above PCB's piers. Those looking for an all-out expedition can soar above the city for 27 miles until reaching stunning Shell Island, passing Grand Lagoon and St. Andrews Park along the way. You've likely seen countless ads for dolphin tours, but what about a shark tour? The 16-mile "Shark Run" adventure flies above the deeper waters

to scout out the most populous shark spots!

PanhandleHelicopter.com/helicopter-tours

SHIPWRECK ISLAND WATERPARK

Starting on select days this April, Panama City Beach's beloved water park will get its flow on to celebrate the springtime. We're talking the whole shebang: a lengthy and loopy lazy river, gnarly wave pool and plummeting speed slides that'll have you lining up to go again and again. Families will especially love the White Knuckle River group raft ride. Aptly named, you'll be clutching the handles of your vessel as you plummet down a curvy, chaotic 660-foot long slide. ShipwreckIsland.com ●

SKYDIVE PANAMA CITY

Spontaneity is your nature, and what's more impulsive than jumping out of a plane? If you've never skydived before, a tandem jump is just right for you. As you leap from 14,000 feet in the air, you'll drop at a heart-pounding 120 mph. Once your highly trained companion deploys the chute, you're looking at a majestic, five-minute descent through the clouds. If you thought your view was matchless when parasailing, just imagine those emerald-green waters as you float down from the heavens.

XtremeSkyDivers.com





AN ODD COUPLE OF GUIDES

Fishing show changes channels, adds co-host

BY STEVE BORNHOFT

Go Fish!

**30.1767° N,
85.8056° W**

THAT'S THE

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

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

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

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

In the show's third season, Bay County native Captain Justin Leake has been joined as a host of the "Chasin' the Sun" fishing series by accomplished tournament angler and Florida Keys guide Travis Holeman.

The big-bearded Holeman, who describes himself as a "true fishing vagabond," presents an obvious contrast to Leake's button-down vibe. "Chasin' the Sun" viewers are enjoying an opportunity to see the relationship between the two captains evolve over season three's 13 episodes, which premiered on the Discovery Channel Jan. 6. (The program will air on Saturdays at 7 a.m. central, 8 a.m. pacific/eastern through June 2018.)

"Nothing is scripted," Captain Holeman emphasized. "Our relationship is developing organically."

Holeman, who operates a guide service out of Key West, at one time figured in ESPN's outdoor programming, which was produced by Jamie Wilkinson, whose Pinfish Media company now produces "Chasin' the Sun." Wilkinson hooked Holeman up with Leake and Visit Panama City Beach. But it's not as if Holeman was a stranger to the waters off Northwest Florida.

On the Redfish Cup tournament trail, Holeman, along with his brother Brian, fished from "Gloucester to South Padre Island," he





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**CAPTAIN** Justin Leake reels in a Amber Jack, and guide Travis Holeman stands ready to net it.  
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**REDFISH** like these keep anglers on the hunt for the right mix of boat, gear, guide and luck. Leake and Holzman make it look easy.  
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“My two favorite fish are tarpon and tuna. In South Florida, he catches primarily blackfin tuna and the occasional yellowfin. Of course, any fish that jumps is great fun. Sailfish are spectacular that way. And about 50 percent of my trips involve permit.” **TRAVIS HOLEMAN**

said. There was a time when Holeman banked so much prize money that he guided only about 90 days a year, but tournaments offering big purses have since dried up. That heyday may be gone, but the vagabond fishes on.

“For me, the perfect fishing trip is one that starts late, finishes early and has everyone smiling,” Holeman half-kidded. He does, in fact, favor running his charters from a comfortable 9 a.m. until dusk versus dawn to midafternoon. His unconventional approach means that he misses a lot of boat traffic and catches a late-afternoon bite that others don’t experience.

“My two favorite fish are tarpon and tuna,” Holeman said. In South Florida, he catches primarily blackfin tuna and the occasional yellowfin. “Of course, any fish that jumps is great fun. Sailfish are spectacular that way. And about 50 percent of my trips involve permit.”

Holeman won’t find any permit in North Florida, of course, but fishing with Leake, he has been “content to catch whatever we bump into,” from the flats to blue water.

“The talking head approach to fishing shows doesn’t have mass appeal,” Holeman said, “but the unscripted interaction between Justin and me gives our show more of a storyline that I think will keep people coming back for more.”

In its first season, “Chasin’ the Sun” aired on the Sportsman Channel; it moved a year later to Destination America and NBC Sports Network (NBCSN).

Over those two years, the show attracted approximately 2.5 million viewers, said J. Michael Brown, the vice president of tourism development for Visit Panama City Beach. Given the move to the Discovery Channel, Brown said the show is projected to attract about 6 million viewers in its third year, alone.

“Chasin’ the Sun” — which won a bronze 2017 Flagler Award for excellence in niche marketing, an honor presented at the annual Visit Florida Governor’s Conference on Tourism — had to meet the Discovery Channel’s robust production standards to qualify for its outdoor programming lineup.

The Discovery Channel, Brown said, conducted research that revealed that a high percentage of its viewers have an interest in outdoor programming and is now placing a new emphasis on that area.

“In joining the Discovery Channel, I am confident we

are getting ‘Chasin’ the Sun’ in front of the right audience,” Brown said.

As one would expect, season three has featured cast members, including bull redfish, bruising amberjacks and other marine sportfish. In addition, episodes include “destination footage,” ranging from a go-kart track to the 50th anniversary celebration of Capt. Anderson’s Restaurant to highlights of Panama City Beach’s events calendar.

The move to Discovery Channel, which is available in more than 100 million U.S. households, has enabled “Chasin’ the Sun” to attract an impressive roster of new national sponsors.

Leake and Holeman fish from a Morada 24 center-console skiff supplied by Islamorada Boatworks and powered by a 350-horsepower Mercury Marine outboard engine. (Holeman calls the Morada the “Mercedes Benz of fishing boats.”)

Brown listed other national sponsors now on board “Chasin’ the Sun”: Power-Pole Anchoring Systems, Kicker Audio; Pelican Products, Native Eyewear; Florida Fishing Products and Dulce Vida Tequila.

Those businesses have been joined by two local sponsors: Royal American Beach Getaways and Pirate’s Cove Marina.

“Our sponsors have made significant investments in ‘Chasin’ the Sun,’ and we greatly appreciate them,” Brown said. “They have contributed to making a great program even better.” ●

Fresh Gear

Z-MAN PRE-RIGGED EZ SHRIMPZ

An ultra-realistic, pre-rigged shrimp imitator that’s ready to fish straight out of the package, the new EZ



ShrimpZ is equally at home whether fished beneath a popping cork or free lined. Its durable, buoyant ElaZtech® construction outlasts other shrimp imitations and facilitates a slow, controlled fall on slack line that—in harmony with its segmented body and thin appendages—produces the look, movement and feel of the ‘real McCoy.

FFP OSPREY SPINNING REEL

Whether you like to fish for inshore game such as redfish or tarpon, or offshore group and cobia, the Osprey 5000 Spinning Reel is the perfect fishing reel for you. With a light weight, 12 ounce full aluminum body, 24 pounds of drag, and 10+1 eco-sealed ball bearings, this reel is designed to handle just about any gamefish that swims. Check out our full lineup of reels at FloridaFishingProducts.com



Airboats

Explore the backwaters at high speed

BY HANNAH BURKE





SPEED ROUND Guided airboat tours through saltwater marshes and backwoods swamps give visitors a different view of Panama City Beach.



When you think about airboats, you may envision speeding through the winding mangroves of the Florida Everglades. Others may associate the vessels with swampy Cajun bayous, skimming over their waters like a skipped stone.

But they are here, too, not far from the awe-inspiring beaches and premier shopping districts of Panama City Beach.

True to its name, Wild Thang Airboat Tours will make your heart sing with its agile airboat rides. Situated on the Intracoastal Waterway, Wild Thang has prime access to West Bay and its creeks. While customers may choose between half-hour and full-hour day tours, they mainly go for the Sunset Night Ride. Their mission? Spotting gators, of course.

“We go out about half an hour before the sunset, so it’s a really pretty ride,” says Julie Helfert, who co-owns the business with her husband, captain Russell Ackerman. “But once it gets dark, we spotlight for alligators up in the creeks. Night is the best time because this is when the gators are stirring to go feed.”

According to Helfert, gators’ eyes glow a vibrant red as they reflect the light, making them unmistakable even in darkness. As the company’s most popular trip, these 90-minute night runs book up weeks in advance.

In daylight, you may spot dolphins, birds of prey and other native species as you zip across the bay. Because you’re traversing brackish water, some species you find in the ocean also visit the bay.

If you don’t spot an alligator in the wild, you can get up close to the young alligator living at Wild Thang. Customers enjoy holding this scaly little fella and learning about him from the staff, whom Helfert considers the heart of Wild Thang.

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.



BACKWATER THRILL With day excursions and nighttime treks, airboat tours offer a glimpse into the history and wildlife of the area that's rarely seen.



BOGGY BAYOU AIRBOAT TOURS



BOGGY BAYOU AIRBOAT TOURS

"All of our captains hold Coast Guard-approved licenses, and they're extremely interactive with guests," Helfert says. "We try to make our trips very family-oriented and provide as much information about the area as we can. One of our captains, Ed, is like a walking encyclopedia of these waters. People will come off the boats shocked that there was that much to learn."

Across West Bay is Boggy Bayou Airboat Tours, a company that explores swamps and backwater salt marshes in North Bay and freshwater marshes in St. Andrews Bay. Like Wild Thang, its six-passenger airboats offer three exhilarating adventures, for day or night.

"Some of these areas are literally 'uncharted' and can only be accessed by an airboat," describes co-owner Marcia Erdman. "The salt marshes are home to an abundance of fish and wildlife that see very little to no human activity. We've seen gators, dolphins, sharks, stingrays, deer and pelicans that make each tour unique."

You won't find a large staff here, as Erdman takes care of all business while her husband, captain David Erdman, navigates all tours. As a vessel instructor, marine life and wildlife identifier, University of Florida-certified master naturalist and former marine wildlife officer

with a United States Coast Guard 100-ton Master Captain License, it's safe to say "Captain Dave" is experienced when it comes to boating and wildlife.

"He's a wealth of knowledge and quite entertaining," Erdman says of her better half. "We hit the ground running with Boggy Bayou Airboat Tours in August of 2015, and it has been non-stop from the get-go."

Boggy Bayou's airboats are custom made with dual controls. Their "You Drive" experience allows passengers to propel and steer their way through the swamps under the supervision of Captain Dave. Currently, Boggy is the only business that offers this opportunity on the Gulf Coast.

Helfert, at Wild Thang, says many visitors are surprised to discover the other side of the beaches area. "A lot of people don't realize that this is a part of Florida when they come to visit," she said. "When you get back here, it doesn't even seem that those white, sandy beaches are nearby. Seeing people's reactions and getting to interact with them on a daily basis is the best part of this business."

At Boggy Bayou, Erdman concurs: "It re-energizes the soul when you experience such beauty in a way you've never seen or felt before." ●



AARON BESSANT PARK

MARCH 23 & 24

PRESENTED BY SOUTHERN LIVING

UNwined

PANAMA CITY BEACH

CELEBRATING CRAFT BEER,
SPIRITS & WINE

Taste craft beer, spirits and wine from around the world while you mix and mingle with elite chefs, mixologists and top tastemakers of the South.

FRIDAY

BISCUITS & JAM KICKOFF PARTY

An Exclusive Event with Live Music by Cale Tyson

SATURDAY

**GRAND AFTERNOON TASTING
FEATURING ST. PAUL & THE BROKEN BONES**

Along with Live Music by Los Colognes



Panama City Beach
REAL. FUN. BEACH.

VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/Unwined

THE HONOR IS ALL HIS

Oyster-shucking champion revels in life on the half-shell

STORY BY HANNAH BURKE

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOOINI

When it came time to meet Honor Allen, he had just finished up a full day's shift at Hunt's Oyster Bar & Seafood Restaurant. As soon as he washed his hands of the hundreds of oysters he'd shucked, he took a seat at the bar to read "Oysters: A Celebration in the Raw" by Jeremy Sewall and Marion Lear Swaybill.

When I asked if I was interrupting, he responded in a charming, Southern drawl that he was "just killing time." This is just one title from his compendium of all things oyster, from which the 23-year-old absorbs detailed accounts from farmers, fellow shuckers and restaurateurs, often jotting down notes along the way.

When his hands aren't occupied with shells and knives, you can believe he's learning more about them.

It's precisely this passion that has landed the Panama City native multiple National Oyster Shucking Championship titles, and a rank among the fastest oyster shuckers in the world.

But, his fame had small beginnings. Allen grew up with four older brothers and three sisters in the St. Andrews area, where he recalls doing anything he could to pitch in.

"I was doing anything I could do get out of the house and be outside," Allen recalled. "I loved going down to the marina and getting





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**FAST AND SHARP** When he's not taking top honors for his oyster shucking skills, Panama City native Honor Allen is serving it up at Hunt's Oyster Bar & Seafood Restaurant.

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my flounder fishing in, cleaning fish for the captains or washing charter boats. Anything to make a dollar and help my parents out, you know?"

At the age of 12, Allen found himself at Hunt's Oyster Bar, where his family decided to dine one night. Enamored with the environment and with the quick work of the shuckers, he decided that the following day, he'd return and see if he could help out.

"I thought I could show up and say, 'Hey, remember me? I ate dinner here last night!'" Allen laughed. "The next day, there was a completely different crew working the bar, but I decided to talk with them anyway. I started helping out in kind of an under-the-table way, since I was legally too young to be working. Cleaning up, shucking oysters for prep ... I had a fairly good work ethic and was eager to learn."

It wasn't until Allen was 18 that he was allowed to join Hunt's as a full-time shucker. Now on the clock, the young man was shelling out thousands of oysters a week. That year, Allen's friend, co-worker and brother shucker, Max Dawson, had plans to attend the Florida Seafood Festival Oyster Shucking Contest. When Allen expressed interest, Dawson thought he was easily talented enough to compete.

For Allen, that first competition was an eye-opening experience.

"I didn't realize what it would be like on stage with dozens of other shuckers," Allen said. "When you're in the moment, you have no idea how far ahead or behind you are from everyone else. All you can hear is the sound of other people's shells breaking around you. It was unreal how fun it was because I was going from taking a stroll behind the bar to skydiving."

"When you're in the moment, you have no idea how far ahead or behind you are from everyone else. All you can hear is the sound of other people's shells breaking around you."

— HONOR ALLEN,
ON HIS FIRST
OYSTER SHUCKING
COMPETITION



QUICK STUDY Shucking since he was a teen, it didn't take Honor Allen long to start raking in the awards — at the state and national levels.



It took Allen a couple of losses to strengthen his competitive morale and properly train. When he finally took first place in 2015, he was shipped off to Maryland a year later to represent Florida in the U.S. Oyster Festival's National Oyster Shucking Contest. You can imagine the youth's surprise when he snagged first place in his very first national competition, deeming him the fastest shucker in the country.

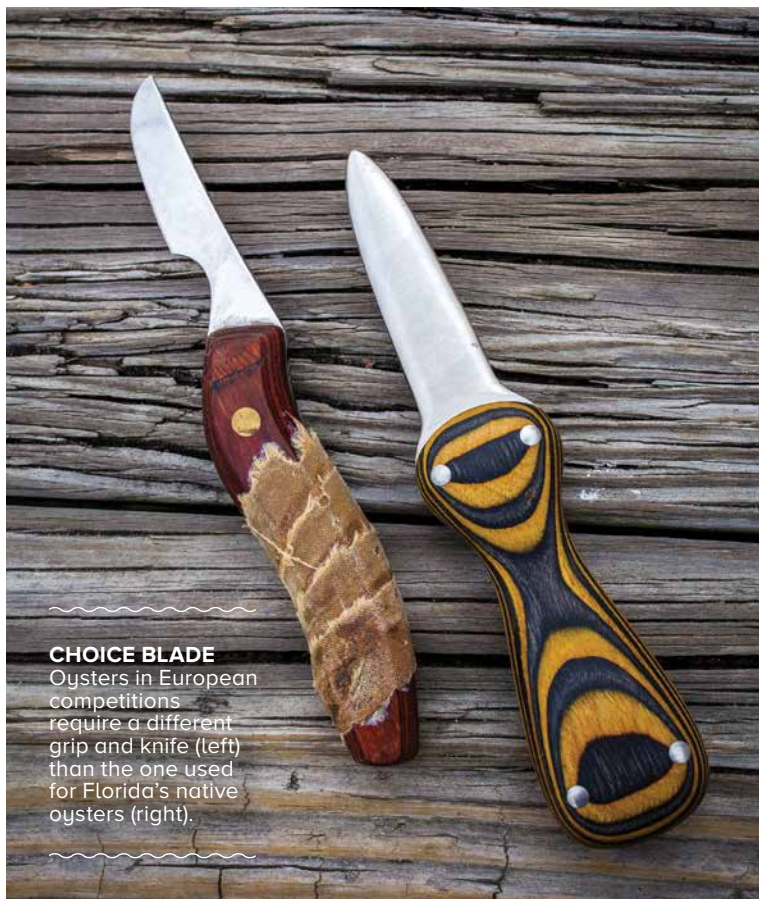
"I want to say part of it was luck, but on the other hand, I practiced, prayed and looked so forward to meeting some of the best oyster shuckers in the U.S. and representing our state," Allen gushed. "It was like I was living for it."

The national title meant Allen's next stop was 2017's Galway International Oyster Opening Competition in Ireland. Returning home from nationals, it was still sinking in that he was the quickest shucker in the states, as he contemplated having a year to train for competition on a global stage.

Research began instantly. Shucking in Ireland would be a completely different ballgame, as participants are required to work with the *Ostrea Edulis*, more commonly known as the European Flat Oyster. While the Apalachicola oysters Allen works with on a daily basis are more of a teardrop shape with a deep cup, the European Flats have a wider base and are more circular, requiring a different grip and knife to open them.

Allen partnered with Jennifer Vigil, President & CEO of Destination Panama City, to get a shipment of a similar species of oysters with which to practice. Funded by Robin Malpass, a film producer and director based in Chicago, a crate from Maine arrived to prepare Allen for the infamous *Edulis*.

Only two shuckers from America have ever won the international competition, one of which is William "Chopper" Young. Allen was lucky



CHOICE BLADE
Oysters in European competitions require a different grip and knife (left) than the one used for Florida's native oysters (right).

“I WANT TO LEARN ALL I CAN ABOUT SHUCKING AND HOW THEY’RE CULTIVATED, BECAUSE, MAYBE ONE DAY, I’LL BE FARMING MY OWN — MAYBE A RESTAURANT.”

— HONOR ALLEN, OYSTER SHUCKING NATIONAL CHAMPION

enough to meet Young, his idol, at nationals and receive a few pointers.

“Chopper took me aside and said, look man, I have this knife,” Allen imitated. “I went to Ireland in 2007 and I didn’t do so hot, but then a past champion gave me this special knife and told me to practice with it, and I’d have a lot better shot next time.”

Sure enough, Chopper took the title in 2008 with that very single-bladed, Helgess brand knife. It was an honor for Honor to be passed the blade, something for which he will be forever grateful.

Months prior to visiting Ireland, Allen flew to Shanghai for the 2nd Annual China National Shuck Off Festival competition, where he placed 4th out of 11 competitors. More important to him was the top-notch advice he received from former victors.

“I got to hang out with six world champions who came over to compete, so I have to say that was one of the biggest blessings of my journey,” Allen said. “To this day, I still think about everything they’ve told me: how to handle the oyster, shucking techniques, keeping a nice, calm demeanor, and to just go up there and do your best. It’s stuck with me and it helped calm me down for the international competition.”

Wielding his new knife and new knowledge, Allen impressively took 13th place at Galway. He’s ecstatic about his rank and even more determined to climb to the top with next year’s trip to Ireland, as he has yet again scored U.S. national champ for 2017.

“Until then, I’ve got Hunt’s and my oyster books. I want to learn all I can about shucking and how they’re cultivated, because maybe one day I’ll be farming my own — maybe a restaurant. Every day is something new, and I love feeling like I’m growing in the direction I want to be. I’m gonna take it slow, hopefully bring home a couple of world titles with me and see where life takes me.” ●

GOOD times, GREAT finds

All along the shopping trail

BY HANNAH BURKE

Embarking on the Décor' By The Shore shopping trail allows you to bottle up the scenic splendor of Panama City Beach and take it home with you. Pick up a card from Visit Panama City Beach or print one from VisitPanamaCityBeach.com and then collect stamps in it from 12 of the most distinguished coastal consignment and antique furniture shops in the area. Once your card is filled and your wallet is empty, your trek will be rewarded. Simply turn the evidence of your excursion back in to the visitors' center for your very own Panama City Beach swag bag.

"People who take on this trail will love the local twist on Panama City Beach," says Catie Feeney, Public Relations Manager for Visit Panama City Beach. "Each one of these stores has its own personality and holds a piece of our community. Although they all have the same theme, you're sure to find something different from each store!"



Take your time as you stroll down Panama City Beach's Coastal Design Emporium Trail, a choice selection of stores and shops specializing in coastal-themed antiques, furniture, gifts and accessories. These vendors are known for Northwest Florida's unique sense of style and design. 



THE SHADOW BOX

Have you ever purchased new pieces of décor, only to go home and realize you have no idea how to arrange them? Terrah Waynick, owner of The Shadow Box, completes the picture for you through her savvy staging of vignettes. With over 20 vendors that hail from all over the country, each week brings a brand-new shipment of “shabby-chic” antiques and beachy baubles to Waynick’s museum. **1711 Thomas Drive, (850) 249-1388**





ARTIST SPACE AT MR. SURF'S

You may be wondering what one of PCB's premier surf, kayak, and paddleboard renters and retailers are doing on this list, but inside Mr. Surf's gift shop lies dozens of purchasable paintings, ceramics and accessories from local artists. These one-of-a-kind pieces add PCB panache to your beach home or condo. Finn's, the adjoining barista bar and island-style grub truck, also makes this stop perfect for refueling. **7220 Thomas Drive, (850) 235-2702**

AVENUE SEA

Avenue Sea offers distinctive, timeless home furnishings with casual coastal elegance. Our unique and visually dramatic retail space reveals an array of interior merchandise from furniture, table tops and art to permanent florals, gifts and accessories including wine. Voted Panama City's "Best Place to Buy Accessories" for the past three years, our Mermaid Tales Wine Room hosts monthly wine tastings as well as the extended venue for classes and other

special events. **101 Bluefish Drive, Suite 120, (850) 708-3210, AvenueSeapc@knology.net**

BACK BEACH THRIFT

Back Beach Thrift takes on the traditional thrifting experience and makes it seamless. Rather than sifting through shelves of mismatched items, you'll find a collection of new and used furniture, appliances and recreational equipment geared specifically toward the beach lover. This stop also serves as a local trading post where you can bring your unwanted items and swap them for a new prize. With a constant influx of new stock, you never know what you might find. **19605 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 896-8373**

BEACH BUM DÉCOR

Last but not least, Beach Bum Décor will end your journey on a relaxing note with its coastal-cool and casual atmosphere. Distressed woodwork, decorative beach signs and sculptures will bring the serenity of the seashore to any room in the house. Previous owners, Beverly and John Wallischeck, recently passed the torch to new owners. They know that beach life is all about enjoying each day under the sun, and they constantly update their stock with pieces that express that philosophy. **8108 Front Beach Road, (850) 249-3047**



13 HUB LANE

The alabaster exterior of 13 Hub Lane gives way to vibrant splashes of aqua, coral and sea-glass green décor as visitors step inside. Beach meets boho at this specialty shop, where furnishings range from bold, modern statement pieces to subdued, nautical neutrals. The shop offers textured art, metallic glassware and extravagant lighting fixtures that will uniquely accent your space without disrupting a beach home vibe. Take home a sea-inspired scent from the hub's selection of Barr-Co.'s soaps, lotions and candles, and you'll experience a whole new dimension of coastal living. **17203 Panama City Beach Pkwy, (850) 532-6000**



BEACH HOUSE MARKET

This shop provides all the variety a flea market has to offer without the hassle. While browsing through the shop's 22 vendor booths, you'll find a uniquely curated combination of home décor, furnishings, glassware and jewelry. This extensive display of wares encompasses styles from shabby-chic to coastal-class, but don't be afraid to mix-n-match.

17900 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 234-8700



COASTAL COTTAGE EMPORIUM

This one's for the vintage enthusiasts. If you're looking to bring that beachside bungalow vibe to your home, the Coastal Cottage Emporium stocks its space with distressed, repurposed fittings, pastel pops of color and nautical antiques. Bedframes, bookcases, cabinets and chairs get their old-fashioned finish from chalk paint, one of the hottest interior design trends. You're encouraged to browse their selection of Annie Sloan chalk paint to take home and work some magic of your own. **17756 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 249-3782**

DINAH'S COASTAL FURNITURE & BOUTIQUE

Dinah Boatwright is known for transforming your toss-aways into treasures with her knack for painting furniture. This first stop along the trail features her charming collection of salvaged seaside-themed home goods

and gifts, as well as products from the Dixie Belle Paint Company, Dinah's go-to brand of waxes, stains and colors. To personalize your experience, you can bring Dinah that old table that's been taking up space in your garage. Whether you're looking to give it a vintage finish or a modern makeover, she'll give it a fresh, second life for your home. **22200 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 238-8999**

GREAT AMERICAN GARAGE SALE

Forget driving all over town to scout out the perfect garage sale — there's a permanent one on Thomas Drive that never runs out of priceless finds! You'll be treated to another selection of oceanic ornamentations for your home, but this is also the place to go for those looking to sharpen up their toolbox. Like a true garage sale, you never know what kind of knick-knacks and novelties await. **7030 Thomas Drive, (850) 381-8075**

PIECES ON THE BEACH

With its conglomeration of enchanting shells, alabaster driftwood and antique goods from 22 talented vendors, Pieces on the Beach is the epitome of coastal-chic. As you wander through the stylish labyrinth of this 5,500-square-foot shop, you'll eventually come across the on-site paint studio. Sign up for an art class with Pieces, and you'll learn all about furniture restoration using the serene, seaside hues of Maison Blanche paint. **2505 Thomas Drive, (850) 234-6277**

TURTLE GIRLS MARKET

A trove of local art, artisan-crafted curiosities and collectibles, Turtle Girls Market features masterpieces inspired by our emerald-green waters. Though you'll find an impressive selection of both classic and contemporary furniture for your beach home, the Turtle Girls also treat you to a gorgeous array of mermaid-worthy accessories fashioned from shells and dazzling jewels. **7930 Front Beach Road, (850) 775-4101** ●



Time To
UNwined



There's spring in the air and a festival without compare

BY HANNAH BURKE

Mark your calendars for the evening and afternoon of March 23-24, because it's time to "sip" back, relax and wine down at Panama City Beach's leading spring festival.

Set in scenic Aaron Bessant Park, UNwineD features premier spirits and wine from Florida to California. Paired with the area's finest eats and live music, this event is a highlight of the season.

Last year's event kicked off with the Southern Garden Party sponsored by *Garden & Gun* magazine. Two hundred guests enjoyed the music of Dread Clampitt, a cross-genre band from Grayton Beach. Master mixologist Ryan Johnson traveled all the way from Charleston, South Carolina, to serve up the signature cocktails he creates at his bar in the Dewberry Hotel. Light bites were provided



SIPPING SONGS Acoustic performances provide the perfect background music as participants in Panama City Beach's foremost spring festival sample premier spirits and wines and an assortment of good things to eat.



by The Seabear Oyster Bar's Patrick Stubbers, and Firefly's Derek Langford.

This year, UNwined will be sponsored by *Southern Living* magazine and gets started on Friday with a new bash, Biscuits and Jam.

"Biscuits and Jam will be a little more exclusive," says Patrick Stewart, Sports Marketing & Special Event Operations Manager at Visit Panama City Beach. "We'll have a large tent at Aaron Bessant Park that will enclose trees that will be decorated with lights. People can come and hang out with mixologists and celebrity chef Matt Moore in what will be a VIP-style event."

Cale Tyson, a burgeoning Nashville artist, will provide the jams. The singer/songwriter puts a bluesy spin on country and folk music with his soulful guitar and pitch-perfect pipes.



SPIRITS, TOO Wine may be UNwined's middle name, but spirits have become a big part of the celebration. The festival attracts top mixologists from throughout the region who bring their top craft cocktail recipes to town.

UNwined's main event, the Grand Tasting, will take place beginning at 1 p.m. on Saturday. Samplings of craft brews, spirits, wines and delectable local cuisine will be available at 36 booths.

"Our big tent will still be there, but this time it's open to everybody and we'll have great acoustic music," Stewart said. "Vendors display products from around the country, but the emphasis is on items available here on the Gulf Coast. About 58 different brands joined us last year."

Though the main attraction may be the libations, the Grand Afternoon Tasting also features fare from local restaurants. Last year, vendors from Panama City Beach included Dee's Hangout, Texas Roadhouse, Firefly, Tides, Jae's Sinful Delights, Dolce 101, Saltwater Grill and Sisters of the Sea. For 2018, there's expected to be more where that came from.



DAVID MCCLUSTER

Chef and cookbook author Moore will join in the festivities and perform two live cooking demos. Moore specializes in classic, Southern cuisine, as well as Mediterranean and Middle Eastern gastronomy.

Festival-goers will serve as judges of UNwineD's first-ever cocktail competition. Participating vendors will be shaking and stirring up their finest recipes in hopes of gaining votes and winning the festival's Best in Show award.

The Grand Tasting ends at 4:30 p.m., but more is in store for the evening. Starting at 5 p.m., Aaron Bessant Park transforms into an al fresco concert venue for Picnic in the Park. Grammy award-nominated indie folk band, The Avett Brothers, rocked 2017's event and left some big shoes to fill. This year's headliners, St. Paul and the Broken Bones, are just the fellas for the job.

This eight-member band is sweeping the South with soulful, yet symphonic tracks. Though the members of St. Paul and the Broken Bones were born in

Birmingham, Alabama, their songs are a far-cry from conventional country music. The band comprises Allan Branstetter on trumpet, Al Gamble's organ and piano solos, trombone by Chad Fisher and the unique addition of Jason Mingledorff's flute or sax melodies. Mix them with Andrew Lee's percussion, Browan Loller's guitar pickin' and powerhouse vocalist Paul Janeway, and you've got an impressive ensemble.

Indeed, the group has opened for the Rolling Stones and were featured in 2016's Glastonbury Festival.

"As befits a band of St. Paul and the Broken Bones' caliber and style, the Picnic in the Park will offer a degree of elegance and sophistication that will bring everything together," Sätewart says.

UNwineD was such a roaring success in 2017 that the Florida Festivals and Events Association (FFEA) awarded it the title of "Most Innovative Project of the Year." The festival received four other Sunsational Awards and gained national recognition for its exceptional marketing strategies.

St. Paul and The Broken Bones bring their soul-based rock to Panama City Beach.

"We were singled out by 3CMA, which is a marketing group for publicly funded organizations at the city and county levels," explains Jayna Leach, Vice President of Marketing at Visit Panama City Beach. "They gave us a Savvy Award for a recurring special event. That was huge for us! We're very proud to host an event like this in our community."

According to Stewart, only 1,000 tickets for Saturday's main event will be available for purchase.

"It's a big event, but it still provides an exclusive feel while showing guests a taste of the best that Panama City Beach has to offer." ●

» To learn more about UNwineD and claim a spot, visit VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/unwined.

@visit_pcb

Cheers

Revelers capture the fun at Panama City Beach's UNwineD event during last year's sold out celebration of wine, spirits, craft beer and spectacular local food. Good times and friendly faces were as plentiful as the pours in 2017, so make sure to grab a snapshot of yourself and your crew at this year's event.



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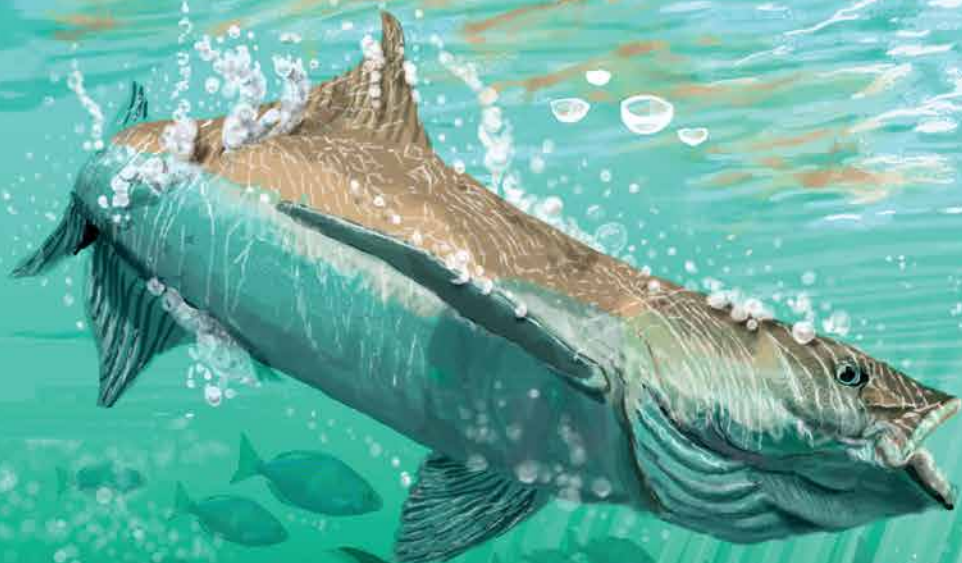


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CRAB CRUNCHERS

(Also known as cobia)



BY STEVE BORNHOFT // ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RUSSO

Pursuers of cobia are hunters as much as they are fishers. You'll see them in the spring, atop tuna towers or even step-ladders, staring from behind polarized, wraparound sunglasses at water just off the beach as they motor stealthily along at 3 to 4 knots, hoping to intercept and spot migrating fish.

Experienced cobia anglers tell the uninitiated to look for something very near the surface that resembles a drifting, brown garbage bag, but the truth is you cannot really know what the quarry looks like until a veteran points one out to you. Even then, they are hard to see. The best cobia enthusiasts seem to sense the presence of a fish moments before they blurt, "There's one!"

Until that cry is heard, nothing happens. Rods remain in holders. Fishing partners run out of conversation. The morning coolness wears off, a sea breeze freshens. And

then, could it be, yes, there it is: traveling with a large sting ray, a cobia of 50 pounds or more, making it a female.

She has grown rapidly throughout her lifetime, feeding on squid and fish and on crabs that it easily crushes with her powerful mandibles. Its flat head suggests a remora, its silhouette is remotely shark-like. Comes now the moment of truth for the angler. He is equipped with a large spinning reel and rod tipped with a live eel. The trick is to toss the bait into the cobia's line of sight without landing it so near to her that she spooks and submerges.

This time it works out. The angler drops the eel about six feet in front of the cobia's nose. The interior of the fish's mouth flashes white as the fish inhales the eel. The angler pumps his rod to bury the hook and the battle is joined, but he dare not think of cobia steaks on the grill until his hard-fighting adversary comes to net. ●

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WARRIOR DASH



March 10 This is not your conventional 5K. The Warrior Dash tests your strength, endurance and problem-solving skills by throwing 12 obstacles in your path, each more challenging than the last! Hurdle over fire, wade through mud and climb over towers of nets as you make your way to the finish line. There, you'll be rewarded with a medal and a much-needed beer. WarriorDash.com



WINTER RESIDENT APPRECIATION DAYS

Feb. 8, 22 There are just two days left in February to enjoy Appreciation Days at the PCB Senior Center! Gather with your seasonal chums at the Lyndell Building to mix and mingle over delectable donuts and coffee. Various local businesses will make an appearance to showcase places in PCB that you may have yet to visit. This is also the spot to grab your tickets for the Winter Resident Grand Finale!

VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/Events/Winter-Residents/

WINTER RESIDENT GRAND FINALE

Feb. 26 Winter residents have gathered at Homecoming, Prom and Appreciation Days, but there's still one more blow-out to wrap up the season. Held at the scenic Sheraton Bay Point, the Winter Resident Grand Finale is a thank you from Panama City Beach to winter visitors who chose to keep warm with us this winter. Get ready to groove to the music of Todd Allen and the FTD Band, including classic rock, country and golden oldies, as you enjoy refreshments with old friends and new.

VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/Event/Winter-Resident-Grand-Finale-2018/22049/

EMERALD COAST BOAT & LIFESTYLE SHOW

March 2-4 This exhibit at Aaron Bessant Park exhibition celebrates boating and other outdoor sporting activities that keep us movin'. Check out sleek watercrafts from local marinas, along with bikes and paddleboards, and load up on gear at on-site giveaways. A fashion show highlighting the latest in coastal wear will take place on March 4 so that you can stay stylish both on the water and off.

GulfBoatShow.com



EMERALD COAST CRUIZIN'


March 7-10 Aaron Bessant Park becomes a giant outdoor showroom for thousands of hot rods, classic cars and speedsters for this three-day event! While your family weaves through dozens of rows of iconic vehicles, keep your ears alert for cash and swag giveaways. Collectors and enthusiasts drive home a vintage vehicle if they prevail in the frantic bidding at a live auction.

EmeraldCoastCruizin.com

PANAMA CITY BEACH SCOTTISH FESTIVAL

March 3 Who says the month of March is just for the Irish? Frank Brown Park comes to life with bagpipes, kettle corn and Celtic merchandise at the 26th annual Panama City Beach Scottish Festival. This is the only Scottish festival in the Panhandle and is hosted by the Celtic Heritage Alliance, a nonprofit organization devoted to preserving and enlightening the community about their cultural traditions. Kilts optional but encouraged. PCBeachScotFestival.com

SEABREEZE JAZZ FESTIVAL

April 18–22 After 20 years of serenading Panama City Beach with big bands and smooth jams, the Seabreeze Jazz Festival has been officially declared as one of the top 10 jazz festivals in the country! Aaron Bessant Park is the stage for 29 of the hottest names in jazz, including Brian Culbertson, Boney James and Kool and the Gang. Once festivities end for the night, after parties continue in select Pier Park restaurants. SeabreezeJazzFestival.com 

SANDJAM

April 26–28 This inaugural adult-alternative rock music festival will be setting their stages on the beautiful sugar white sands of Panama City Beach, providing the most beautiful backdrop for this spring's biggest festival. Come for the music, stay for the beaches, and make long lasting memories. SandJamFest.com



THUNDER BEACH MOTORCYCLE RALLY 

May 2–6 The area's leading motorcycle rally is back again for its spring ride through PCB! Pier Park, Frank Brown Park, Harley-Davidson PCB and more are the sites of dozens of displays featuring biking merchandise, sharp apparel and pit-stop snacks for your pack of riders. Check the rally schedule for bike shows, demos, pageants, concerts and contests throughout the city. Plus, your contributions to various events benefit a handful of charities that assist those in need. ThunderBeachProductions.com



MISTY DOBBS

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Lighter Flair

The sunlight starts to get warmer as spring returns to Panama City Beach, and that means your wardrobe will need a light touch so you stay cool. Make sure to grab that sundress for the beach or a golf shirt before you hit the links — and don't forget to protect yourself with a new hat and a cool pair of shades. **PHOTOS BY SAIGE ROBERTS**

BB LANE, TRAVELING BOUTIQUE

Customize your footwear this year with a pair of Southern Sole sandals from BB Lane Boutique. Southern Soles is a locally owned and operated shoe brand, providing comfortable and quality leather sandals. Complete with a monogram or design, you will be able to find a style for any occasion! To track this traveling treasure truck, tune into their social media handles to find their next location! (217) 971-5147, Squareup.com/Market/bblaneboutique



COASTAL CASUALS

Floral and cut outs ... need we say more? This adorable dress is perfect for strolling the shops of Pier Park — or a relaxing dinner on the water. Or, if you want to make a statement, Ann Paige's multi-stone and gold dangle earrings are an example of their Southern-driven style. Need to stay cool this spring? Coastal Casuals' oversized derby hat goes perfectly with any garden party, outdoor concert or day on the sand.

800 S. Pier Park Drive, (850) 234-1101, Simon.com/mall/pier-park/stores/coastal-casuals



THE FLORIDA HOUSE

Diff provides quality sunglasses to their customers while giving back to their community. With each pair purchased, they donate a pair of reading glasses to a person in need. Diff sunglasses can be found in a variety of styles at The Florida House, located in Pier Park. If you need a little beach to take home with you, Lux perfumed candles make the perfect addition in any home or beach condo. They feature scents such as tweed and wood sage with sea salt. **200 Bluefish Drive, (850) 234-5544, ShoptheFloridaHouse.com**

HY'S TOGGERY

With its breathable texture and bright spring colors, this Southern Shirt Company polo is perfect for a day in Panama City Beach. Hy's Toggery, located in Pier Park, provides a variety of men's and women's apparel. They also have footwear, and Olukai provides durable sandals built for a day on the water. With their quality non-marking rubber, these sandals will remain strong in the Florida heat. For a little protection in the sun, the Patagonia LoPro Trucker style snapback is an essential while lounging on the sand. **700 S. Pier Park Drive #165, (850) 235-1177, HysToggery.com**



DINAH'S COASTAL FURNITURE AND BOUTIQUE

Embrace your inner mermaid with a charming throw pillow. Dinah's Coastal Furniture and Boutique is located on the west end of Panama City Beach, offering homemade soaps, specialty items and coastal furniture. Need a coastal twist on your morning pick-me-up? Dinah's offers an array of coffee mug designs that help when you are missing the Gulf views. **22200 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 238-8999, DinahsShop.com**



A BOON ON Flavor

Boon Docks restaurant serves up Southern comfort

STORY BY LIESEL SCHMIDT // PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOONIN



Clearly on a mission to prove that there's nothing under the sun — and nothing under the sea, for that matter — that can't be fried, Boon Docks is one Southern-inspired seafood restaurant where flavor comes fresh off the docks. It's a natural way of approaching a down-home menu in a region that breads and deep fries anything imaginable; and they're hardly bashful when it comes to exploiting the wonders of a crispy golden crust, coating everything from pickles and mushrooms to gator and scallops.

Frying isn't the only way of doing things here, however. At the end of the day, it's all about showcasing the flavor of the fresh seafood that the area is so famed for and creating a place where every guest is given a dining experience that's casual and fun without ever sacrificing quality. The cooks here are adventurous in their approach, exploring the many methods of serving those spectacular specimens of sea life. For those who prefer things a little more on the healthy side, Boon Docks baits

their hooks with a full section of grilled options that are perfectly charred and seasoned to create tasty dishes that are satisfying yet slightly less sinful than their crunchified counterparts. Regardless of preparation, though, every item on their menu is a made with the same attention to detail and focus on freshness. Their fish and seafood is caught locally, their steaks certified. Nothing is pre-breaded or mass-produced, as their concept is one that centers on home cooked, scratch



FINE CASUAL Boon Docks heaps plates with regional seafoods, including crab and shrimp, in a laid-back setting, it never relaxes its commitment to providing a quality experience.



WATERFRONT DINING

Located on the banks of the Intracoastal Waterway, the Boon Docks restaurant occupies a spot that was once home to a fish house and a bait store.



made classics — with a few unique extras, of course.

“People know that when they come to Boon Docks, they’ll be served high quality, fresh food that’s been prepared and cooked to order, and they love the atmosphere that we have here,” says owner Hilary Head, who opened Boon Docks in 1998. “We’ve created a fun place that has sort of a laid-back, Old Florida feel; and our location makes it perfect for people to come and dine with us right from their boat or by car.” It’s a special setting, to be sure, as their location on the Intracoastal Waterway is comprised of a West Bay landmark that has claimed this spot since 1941, absorbing an old fish house, a bait store, and the old home of a well-known local family into the restaurant now in operation, along



with a unique store called Pickles Gift Shop and a fun bar appropriately known as Fish Tales. The history, in and of itself, is something to pique the interest, celebrated in the ways that Boon Docks has incorporated itself into each of the property’s original structures and respecting their underlying stories.

Whether you’re docking or driving, the menu here is certainly worth the trip. To whet your appetite or fend off the munchies, take your pick of starters like corn nuggets packed with sweet and creamy kernels of golden corn, or bacon — wrapped shrimp cooked up plump and porky. Hardly something to be cast aside for the simple fact of its name, Boat Trash is a local treasure, serving up a plethora of fried fun that includes three shrimp, three oysters, grouper, and deviled crab all brought together in one devilish dish served with two home-style sides and hushpuppies. For anyone who can’t quite decide what they’re in the mood for, Boon Docks literally has the answer, with a menu listing actually called Can’t Decide? Pairing up two half-orders of your choice of bay scallops, oysters, catfish, or shrimp, this is one entrée that tops the charts of diner favorites, and you can have your selections fried or grilled. If steamed is more your style, they’re sure to please your palate, offering steamer classics like shrimp, oysters, shrimp, crab claws, grouper, and even whole flounder seasoned with the perfect blend of spices to bring just enough kick to the pot.

It’s apparent in everything that they do that Boon Docks isn’t one to stay close to the shore, as their menu hardly relies on showmanship or overly fussy presentation. Theirs is a method more direct, seeing no use for distractions or tweezified plating. Here, they use simplicity as their guide, referring back to more classic, comforting preparations that so many have grown up on. Simple ingredients whose

quality stands strongly on its own serve as the foundation. From there, the cooks who create the dishes and prepare everything from scratch bring out the vibrancy of the flavors simply by letting them shine, rather than masking them.

But the sea is not their only field of expertise. Tender steaks and juicy burgers tempt the tongue back to terra firma, and dinner salads satisfy supertime hunger with fresh lettuce and crisp veggies topped off with cooked-to-order chicken and shrimp. And who could forget dessert? If sugar is your weakness, their homemade pies are a decadence that merits the indulgence, offering selections like French Coconut, Peanut Butter, and — of course — Key Lime. “It’s hard to say which is the best,” says Head. “They’re all delicious!” Not that anyone would expect anything less from a restaurant so focused on creating comfort food.

“We serve quality here, and we enjoy what we do in getting to meet so many people and offering them great food,” Head goes on. From appetizer to dessert, they’re casting their nets wide — and the locals are lining up on the docks to come in and take a big bite. ●

.....●

Boon Docks is located at 14854 Bay View Circle, Panama City Beach, Florida 32413. Closed Monday and Tuesday. Open Wednesday from 4 p.m.–till, Thursday–Sunday 11 a.m.–till. For more information, call (850) 230-0005 or visit BoonDocksFL.com.

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A full-page photograph of two triathletes jumping over a fire pit during a triathlon obstacle course. The male triathlete in the foreground is wearing a green t-shirt with 'THE AMAZON RACE' printed on it, white sunglasses, and a race bib with the number 143880. He has mud smeared on his arms and legs and is smiling with his right arm raised. The female triathlete behind him is wearing a black tank top, a purple headband, sunglasses, and a race bib with the number 143879. She also has mud on her leg. They are both holding hands as they clear the fire pit. The background shows a blue sky with scattered clouds and a line of trees.

DOWN & DIRTY

Panama City hosts Warrior Dash where it's all about the slog

STORY BY THOMAS MONIGAN
PHOTOS BY RED FROG EVENTS/WARRIOR DASH

OBSTACLE COURSE While the Warrior Dash has something in common with the longstanding track event, the steeplechase, it is much more like Army Ranger training.



Mud, sweat and beer. What could be more fun? In March, Panama City hosts the 5K Warrior Dash, an obstacle course with fire, rope challenges and swaths of mud, followed by plenty of revelry and suds. Thousands of runners and spectators are expected to convene for the down-and-dirty spectacle, which puts runners and climbers to the test and leaves them caked in mud and smiles.

The event, on March 10, is open to all spectators. There will be a lot to see, along with an all-day festival that features a DJ, beer, food and warrior games. The course has 12 specially designed obstacles, some of them classics that appear in Warrior Dashes around the country, plus three or four new ones.

Check these out: ↓

- » **BRIDGE THE GAP** Stretch as tall as you can to reach the next plank. Summit the top of a pyramid.
- » **MAGIC CARPET RIDE** Cross a wobbling, slippery mat to get to the other side.
- » **PALLET JACKED** Traverse the swaying decks hovering above water.
- » **FISHERMAN'S CATCH** Cast your best line and make your way across without becoming bait.
- » **TRENCHES** Hit the deck and crawl 40 feet toward the light.
- » **UPSLIDE DOWN** Jump feet first into muddy waters and get ready to hoist yourself up and under the netting. From your back, use that upper body strength and leg muscles to pull yourself to freedom on the other side.
- » **WARRIOR SUMMIT** With the help of a rope, clamber up and repel back down a 30-foot pyramid.
- » **ALCATRAZ** Swim out to floating docks in the water, climb up and over, and then swim back to shore.
- » **PIPELINE** Climb up, over, and through a tube of kinked cargo nets 12 feet in the air.
- » **WARRIOR ROAST** Leap over real fire and then sprint through the final obstacles.
- » **GOLIATH** Summit two stories and take in the festival view before making a splash at the bottom of a 30-foot-high slide.
- » **MUDDY MAYHEM** Army-crawl under real barbed wire through a 100-foot-long mud pit.






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More than 3 million people around the nation consider this fun — epic fun, actually — and have completed Warrior Dash courses since 2009. The event marks its debut here on property known as SweetBay, a newly formed residential community in Panama City, Florida.

Warrior Dash participants can be as young as 10 years old, but there will also be a “kids course,” which organizers describe as more of a kids activity area with age-appropriate obstacles.

“We encourage families with children to come out and make a day of it,” said Michael Coco, Senior Director of Operations at Red Frog Events, based in Chicago, which runs Warrior Dash.

The first wave of competitors will begin at 8 a.m. The festival will close sometime between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. Coco said the setting at SweetBay is perfect.

“It’s near some big cities, and it’s a destination of its own. We settled on SweetBay because it had the right mix of varied terrain and enough open space to have a killer festival area and enough

space to park all the cars we’re expecting,” Coco said.

“It’s a gorgeous piece of property out there,” said Holly Pituch, SweetBay marketing manager. “We would love to see people come in and enjoy the area and enjoy the tourism in Panama City Beach and Panama City as well.”

The Warrior Hangout festival for competitors and spectators will feature a live DJ, photo opportunities, lawn games and a lineup of contests including tug-of-war, dancing, best beard and best costume. Shade and seating options are available.

This joint effort by the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau and Destination Panama City figures to significantly boost awareness of the area.

“It’s a big footprint for social media,” said Chris O’Brien, director of sports marketing and special events for the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. Nicole Meagher of Red Frog said Warrior Dash has nearly 1.5 million followers on Facebook.

“We’ve never had anything like it in Panama City,” said Jennifer Vigil,

WALL IN By the time they get to the finish line, most “Warriors” find that they have left it all on the course. The event comes to Panama City for the first time in March.

president and CEO of Destination Panama City. “There are some people who have their bucket list: ‘I want to do a race in every state.’ It’s healthy, it’s family friendly, it promotes tourism ... it’s an all-around win situation. It attracts visitors to stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants and explore retail and adventure attractions.”

Bay County Manager Bob Majka is one of those locals looking forward to Warrior Dash, and he’s got plenty of company. He and his wife, Jennifer, are part of Team Evolve, a group of about 50 locals headed by sports nutritionist J.T. Thompson.

“It’s an emerging sport and people travel to do it,” Majka said. “And they can come and not only participate in the race, but they can also enjoy all the other benefits the community has, from fine dining and shopping to our beaches.” ●



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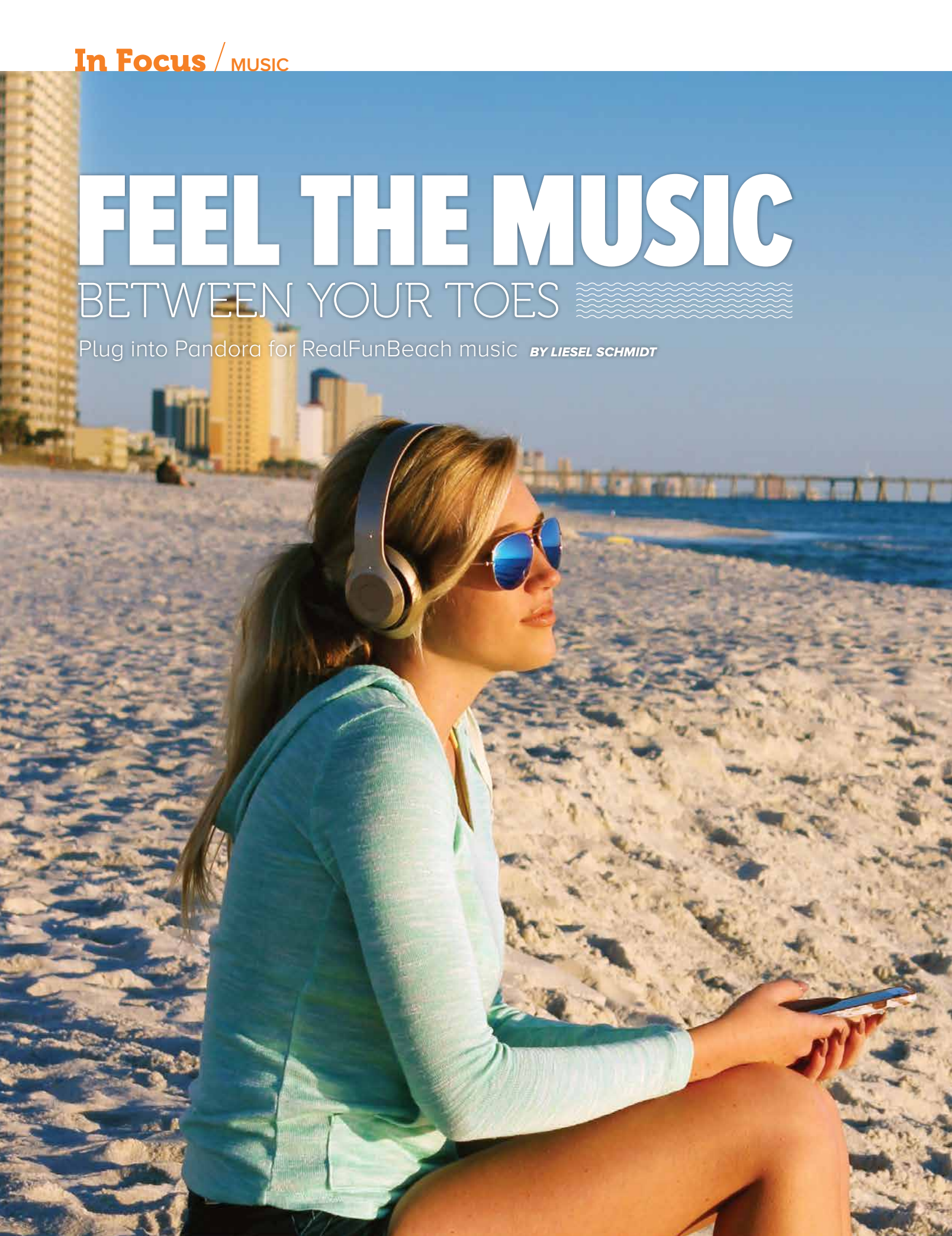
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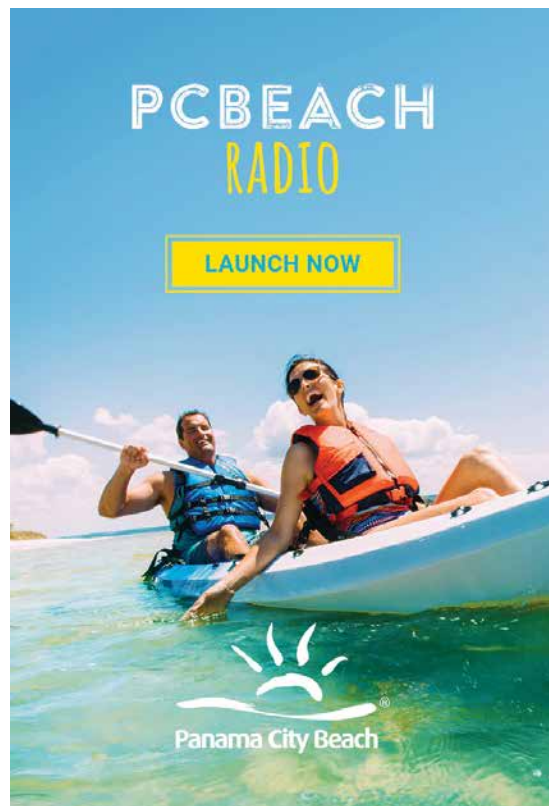
FEEL THE MUSIC

BETWEEN YOUR TOES 

Plug into Pandora for RealFunBeach music *BY LIESEL SCHMIDT*



~~~~~  
**TUNED IN** Like the sounds of the surf, the RealFunBeach Pandora radio station is the perfect auditory complement to a day on the sand. Plus, you can rate the songs as you hear them to make sure your favorites “come back around.”  
~~~~~



Sunscreen and umbrellas. Snacks and towels. A cooler full of ice and I'm all set, right?

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Everything is going to be fine. Just grab your favorite digital device and dial in the Panama City Beach Pandora radio station (pandora.com/realfunbeach).

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The RealFunBeach station is programmed to play the hits and b-sides that you want to hear on the beach. A little country, a strong rock beat, even some good old rhythm and blues. And then when you think you have it figured out, along comes a set of Beach Boys, Beatles and Buffet that might — just might — get you out of your chair and dancing.

Or maybe you just stay where you are, watching the waves and feeling the music between your toes. If this isn't paradise, I don't want to go.

With Pandora, you have the option to rate the music as it goes by. Really like that tune? Give it a thumbs up to be sure it comes around again. Don't care for a track? Click the thumbs down icon and you'll never have to hear it again. You can even click to skip a track if it is not what you are in the mood for.

It gets better. Pandora learns from your ratings. Pretty soon, RealFunBeach radio becomes your personalized gateway to the perfect beach soundtrack. Pandora uses your information to guess who you already like — and music you never heard of that you will love — and automatically adds it to your RealFunBeach playlist.

So far, around 30,000 different listeners have tuned

in for a total of more than 24,000 hours. That adds up to a thousand days on the beach.

EVERYBODY KNOWS THE WORDS

Sitting in the sand and sun, the surf at your feet and the wind on your face. That’s half the joy of being at the beach. For many, the other half is fun music. Chances are, you’re among friends, everybody knows the words and they will sing along — some louder than others, each in their own key, perhaps, but everybody having a crazy good time smelling the salt and belting out “Margaritaville.”

But the sun eventually sets and you have to pack it in. Vacations come to a close and it’s back to where you came from, the sand in your toes a fading memory.

Was I really ever there? Was it all a dream?

Here again, RealFunBeach saves the day. No matter where you are — whether you’re ankle-deep in Gulf Coast sand, shoveling snow in the frozen wastelands up north or anywhere in between — you can always dial in Northwest Florida beach music on



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Arrange a time for everyone to sit down together from afar — happy hour, perhaps! — and share the fun just like you did on the beach. It's the next best thing to actually being there. ●

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TASTY CAKES

Worth clawing after

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

New Englanders might think they have a monopoly on the market when it comes to crab cakes, but here in the South, we, too, can get downright crabby about those gloriously golden cakes of magnificent meatiness. Other than being made with the most luscious lumps bound together with barely any fillers, we have no strict rules to follow; and the creatives on Panama City Beach's culinary scene have their traps set for making crab cakes so tasty they'll give any Nor'Easter a run for their money.

~~~~~  
**CRAB ALA CRAB!** At the Saltwater Grill, cakes made up of abundant lumps of crab meat are topped with a rich crab bisque punctuated with corn and mushrooms.  
~~~~~

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DEE'S HANGOUT

Harvesting lump meat from every portion of the crab, the crab cakes at Dee's Hangout use freshly picked blue crabmeat combined with just the right amount of cracker crumbs to achieve a fluffier, lighter and less dense cake that allows the succulence of the crab come out of its shell. Served with a spicy Cajun remoulade sauce made from scratch in-house, these decadent decapods make the perfect appetizer on their own or pair deliciously well with two sides and golden-fried hush puppies as an entrée; and guests at Dee's can't grab them up fast enough. Celebrating nine years of business, owners Dee and Brenda Brown have been serving up Southern-inspired seafood specials since day one, and Dee's has become a celebrated hangout that casts a wide net.

529 N. Richard Jackson Blvd., Panama City Beach, Florida 32407. For more information, call (850) 249-4264 or visit DeesHangout.com.

FIREFLY

Served up Southern-style with house-made shishito pepper remoulade sauce and crispy, crunchy fried green tomatoes, the jumbo lump crab cakes at Firefly prove this place definitely knows how to light up your taste buds. These golden cakes are packed with premium jumbo lump blue crab meat and spiced with a signature blend of seasoning, making them a decadent delight that'll claw their way to the top of your list of appetizer favorites. Illuminating their menu with beautifully constructed dishes from sushi to steaks, owners Dave and Stacy Trepanier have created a unique concept at Firefly, and the crab cakes they serve will leave you nothing short of enchanted.

535 N. Richard Jackson Blvd., Panama City Beach, Florida 32407. For more information, call (850) 249-3359 or visit FireFlyPCB.com.

GRAND MARLIN

Made in the style of New England's finest, the crab cakes at Grand Marlin

are a stunning specimen of crabbiness at its best, bursting with fresh blue crabmeat and using the bare minimum when it comes to binders and fillers. Showcasing the crab is their top priority; and in using meticulous care to pick and clean these claw-clad crustaceans, the meat is kept large and in charge, moist and tender in a thin crust of golden crunch that seems to seal in the flavor. Served benedict-style with poached eggs, asparagus and jalapeno hollandaise at brunch or as a standalone star with roasted corn relish and a drizzle of creole mustard butter at dinner, these crab cakes are indeed a rich indulgence worthy of grand presentation. And since opening their Panama City Beach location in 2016, owners Rod Windley, Tony Strange, Doug Caddell, Philip Napier, Cindy Lumpkin and Gary Snyder have proven that Grand Marlin has set the trap for grand cuisine.

5323 N. Lagoon Drive, Panama City, Florida 32408. For more information, call (850) 249-1500 or visit TheGrandMarlin.com.

MIKE'S CAFE AND OYSTER BAR

Clawing his way out of the sweet side of the business to cast a wider net, owner Mike Thomas of Thomas' Donut & Snack Shop opened Mike's Café and Oyster bar in 2011 as the perfect accompaniment to his already successful empire of enticing eats. Amping up the menu with local seafood favorites, Mike's has crab cakes on lockdown, using fresh, quality lump meat mixed with finely diced peppers and celery to create lightly seared and baked circles of succulence that let the delicate sweetness of the crab stand on its own. Served with scratch-made lobster cream sauce, Mike's proves that some of the best cakes aren't on the dessert menu.

17554 Front Beach Road, Panama City Beach, Florida 32413. For more information, call (850) 234-1942 or visit MikesCafeAndOysterBar.com.

DECADENT DELIGHT The jumbo crab cakes at the Firefly restaurant are enhanced with a housemade remoulade sauce, crispy green tomatoes and other garnishes.



FIREFLY

RUNAWAY ISLAND

Making their Maryland-style cakes with only the minimal amount of fillers, the luscious lumps of blue crabmeat at Runaway Island are prepared a la minute and formed into patties mere seconds before they're oven baked, adding only the lightest touch of mayo and Old Bay seasoning to play up the sweetness of the meat and serving them up with a house-made lemon caper mustard sauce whose acidic bite brings out the inherent essence of the crab. Since opening in 2014, owner Neel Bennett and managing partner Robert Hammer have definitely been claws out, offering a menu at Runaway highlighting local seafood at its best; and their crab cakes are sure to trap your taste buds and leave you craving more.

14521 Front Beach Road, Panama City Beach, Florida 32413. For more information, call (850) 634-4884 or visit RunawayIslandPCB.com.



RUNAWAY ISLAND

SALTWATER GRILL

What goes great on top of succulent circles of crabmeat? More crab! At Saltwater Grill, they amplify the sweetness of the crabmeat in their crab cakes by topping them with rich, creamy crab bisque and plump kernels of sweet corn that perfectly play off the earthiness of mushrooms, adding an elegant touch to this decapod delicacy. Since taking ownership of this celebrated restaurant in 2016, father-daughter duo Rick and Christy Spell have kept Saltwater the toast of the town, offering seafood favorites that highlight the local treasure-trove of freshly caught fish on a sophisticated menu that takes high tide to a higher class.

11040 Hutchison Blvd., Panama City Beach, Florida 32407. For more information, call (850) 230-2739 or visit SaltwaterGrillpcb.com.



MIKE BOONI

BEST BITES Maryland may be especially well known for crab cakes, but Shuckums, whose offering is shown at left, and Runaway Island wouldn't shy away from a crab-cakes competition.

SHUCKUMS OYSTER PUB & SEAFOOD GRILL

They've got their traps set to bring in the flavor at Shuckums, creating golden rounds of crustacean temptation with a mixture of jumbo lump meat and backfin crab seasoned with the perfect blend of spices. Lightly coated in panko bread crumbs and seared to a light crisp on the flattop grill, it's topped off with a dollop of specially made stone ground mustard remoulade, giving their crab cakes the perfect bite of heat to play up the flavor and make them circles of crab you'll definitely want to grab. And while bivalves might be their claim to fame, at Shuckums Oyster Pub & Seafood Grill, they prove that man cannot live by oyster alone.

15614 Front Beach Road, Panama City Beach, Florida 32413. For more information, call (850) 235-3214 or visit Shuckums.com.

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A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Philip Griffitts Sr. and son Philip “Griff” Griffitts Jr.
share love of Panama City Beach

BY KARI C. BARLOW



“My dad is my work ethic.” GRIFF GRIFFITTS

Almost five decades have passed since Bay County Commissioner Philip “Griff” Griffitts Jr. first laid eyes on the sugar-white sands and emerald green waves of Panama City Beach. As a little boy he was awestruck, and today, he’s every bit as smitten.

Whenever possible, he rearranges his packed schedule to enjoy his favorite place — sometimes even hitting the waves or casting for redfish before heading in to work.

“I love Panama City Beach,” he says. “I love to fish. I love to golf. I love to surf. If I could do all three of those in one day, it’d be like Christmas Day for me!”

That love is something of a legacy for Griff, whose father, Philip Griffitts Sr., has owned and operated multiple beach hotels since the early 1970s and also served as mayor of Panama City Beach from 1989 to 2000. Philip and his wife, Jerrilyn, started with the tiny Bel-Mar Court, a beachfront property with 13 rental units, and eventually replaced it with the Sugar Sands Inn & Suites.

“The only employees were me and Jerrilyn, and she carried Griff around in a front pack or backpack,” Philip recalls. “She cleaned the rooms, and I ran the front desk and did the maintenance.”

From a young age, Griff saw his parents work as a team to build a thriving business from the ground up. He watched them invest money, time and energy into improving their local community — all with the hope of keeping the beach as beautiful as it is profitable.

Today, Griff walks a similar path, having previously run the Sugar Sands Inn until mid-January while also representing District 5, which covers all of Panama City Beach from the Hathaway Bridge to the county line and a portion of Shell Island. He and his wife, Laura, also a native of Bay County, have two daughters — Katie and Anna Claire — and make their home on Panama City Beach.

“I don’t know why anybody would want to go anywhere else,” Griff says.





~~~~~  
**THE GRIFFITTS FAMILY,**  
including Philip Sr., his wife  
Jerrilyn, and son Philip Jr.  
“Griff,” have been a part  
of the Panama City Beach  
community for decades.  
~~~~~



“He’s a smart man. I don’t really have to give him much advice. ... He always does his homework.”

PHILIP GRIFFITTS SR.

“Goodness gracious — Northwest Florida! We have everything you need here. ... And we have the greatest people in the world!”

No Sitting Back

Although Philip admits to looking over his son’s shoulder every now and then, he’s proud of Griff’s accomplishments.

“He’s a smart man,” Philip says. “I don’t really have to give him much advice. ... He always does his homework.”

Griff certainly did just that a few years ago when then-Bay County Commissioner Mike Thomas urged him to run for his soon-to-be-open District 5 seat.

“I decided to run about 14 months before the election, and I attended every commission meeting for those 14 months,” says Griff, who also served six years on the Panama City Beach Civil Service Board and nine years on the Bay County Planning Commission. “I like being prepared. I hate feeling caught off guard.”

Now almost two years into his term, he likens the role of county commissioner to being a new parent.

“I don’t know if you can ever be prepared!” laughs Griff, who also sits on the Bay County Tourist Development Council and the Bay Medical Sacred Heart Board of Trustees. “People just don’t realize how much goes on behind the scenes in county government. They don’t realize how the county employees work their butts off to make things better for Bay County.”

For Griff, who was 12 when his dad was first elected mayor, politics was never a goal.

“It was tough,” he recalls. “Everybody knew me, I didn’t know them. I had 100,000 tattle tales out there. ... Every time I walked in the door, my dad already knew what I did!”

But he’s grateful for his father’s public service because it taught him a valuable life lesson — one he hopes his daughters will learn from watching him.

AS BAY COUNTY Commissioner, Griff Griffitts, here with (left to right) wife Laura and daughters Anna Claire and Katie, is following his father into local politics.

“If you want to make your home better, you have to get involved,” Griff says. “You can’t sit back and let everyone else make the decisions.”

‘A Totally Different Time’

When father and son talk about Panama City Beach, it’s clear Philip remembers a vastly different beach town. It was the early 1970s, and he and Jerrilyn lived at the Bel-Mar with a 2-year-old Griff.

“He grew up knowing all the guests,” Philip says. “He stayed in the pool so much that his hair was almost orange from the chlorine! We had so many repeat customers who would come, and the first thing their kids wanted to know was where Griff was. He would eat with them and go to Miracle Strip with them. We were all family out there.”

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In those days, Front Beach Road had few high-rises, more sand dunes and far fewer tourists.

Philip and Jerrilyn worked hard every day of the summer, right up until the last few tourists drove away.

“Come Labor Day, we played!” Philip says. “We’d take our jeeps and trucks down on Seagrove. There was nothing out there, maybe one condo or one house. The kids would play and swim and we’d ride the sand dunes. ... It was a totally different time.”

Today Griff looks back on his parents’ early start with pride because it’s what taught him the value of hard work.

“When you lived at the hotel like we did, my mom and dad were working, and I was out swimming,” he says. “Then as I got older, I was sweeping and changing garbage cans and cleaning toilets. I’ve done every job at the hotel. There’s not one I haven’t done.”

As Panama City Beach grew, the Griffitts family expanded the Sugar Sands, bought, renovated and sold the Islander hotel and also built the La Quinta Inn & Suites at Pier Park, which is run by their younger son, Matt.

“I learned from Dad that being in

small business, when you run into a problem, if you just sit down and, you know, pout, you’re going to go out of business,” Griff says. “You better figure out how to crawl over that wall or dig under it or go through it because if you sit down, you’re broke. ... My dad is my work ethic.”

Working Together

During Philip’s 18 years in public office, Panama City Beach experienced significant growth, but what he’s most proud of is joining forces with other public officials to make residents’ lives better.

“After Hurricane Opal, we jumped right in there,” he says. “We didn’t wait. We had bulldozers and tractors on the highway the next morning cleaning the highway. We were very sensitive to the residents’ needs and to the businesses’ needs.”

Another accomplishment was the expansion of Back Beach Road.

“I went to the transportation planning group, as a member, and I told them, ‘... Let’s do this. Let’s write down what we think are the most important roads that need work on them. And let’s be serious about this!’” Philip recalls. “And we all agreed that (Highway) 231 was

No. 1 and Back Beach Road was No. 2. And within about a year, we were four-laning Back Beach Road.”

Local government always worked best, he says, when officials found common ground for the greater good.

“I tried to get everybody to work together,” Philip says. “I don’t like fighting and feuding, and I give and take.”

Griff says he tries to emulate his father’s ability to address problems quickly and build consensus.

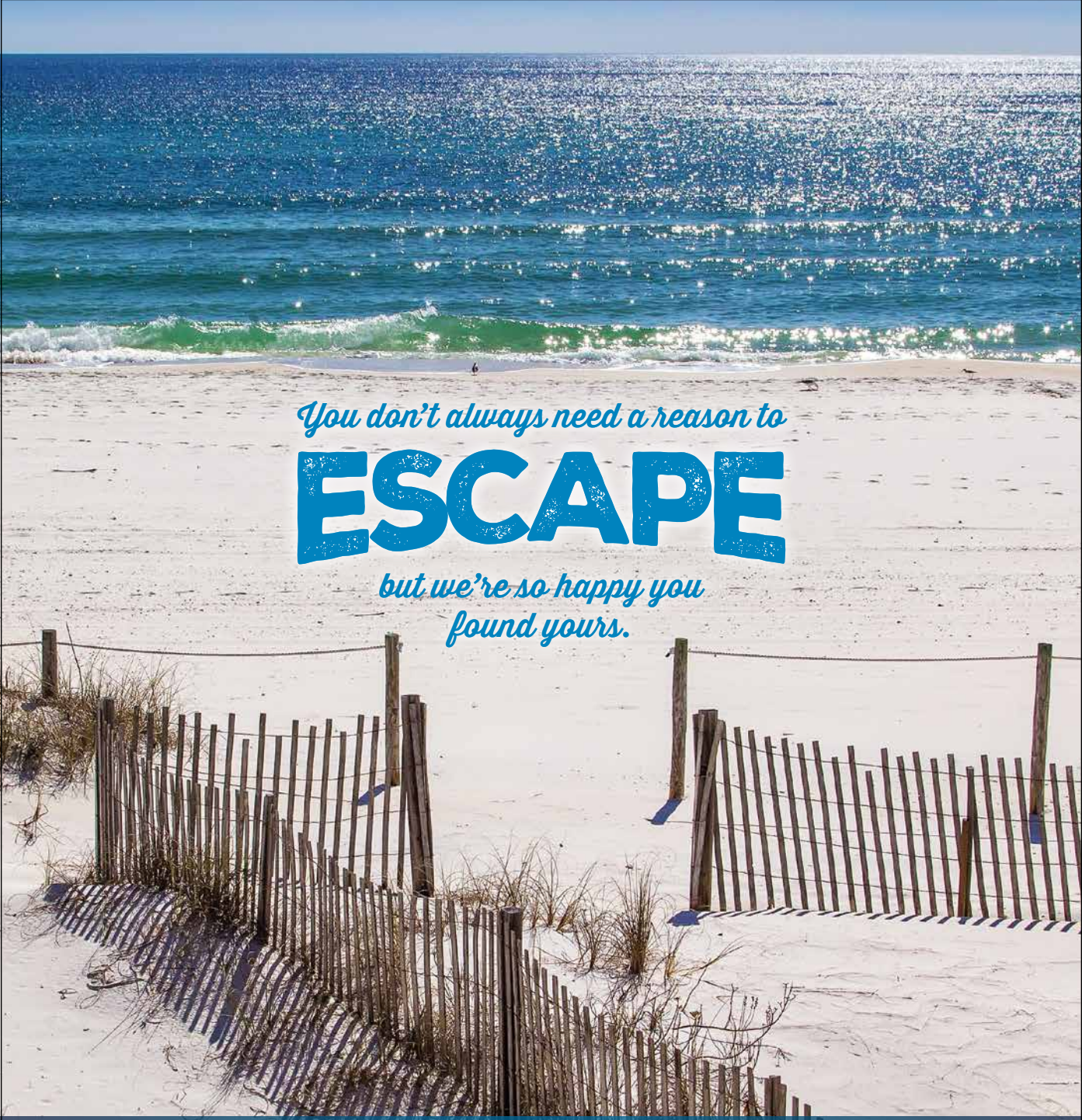
“I’m lucky with our board,” he says. “The four other commissioners and we have a huge mutual respect for each other. ... I know if I had to work with four guys who were always fighting, it wouldn’t be fun. And I have fun.”

As he helps lead Bay County into the future, Griff says he’s hopeful and determined to be a good tax steward for citizens.

“I think we’re at the tip of the spear,” he says. “We have GKN Aerospace setting their footprint here. We have our new airport that was built seven years ago. Our port is expanding rapidly. We are really in a good spot. Our infrastructure is nice, and we have room for growth. I think we are ready to just plow into the future.” ●



GRIFF GRIFFITTS says he follows his family’s hard-work ethic as he tackles the daily challenges of building and improving Panama City Beach.



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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.

“Sea Dragon” Pirate Cruise



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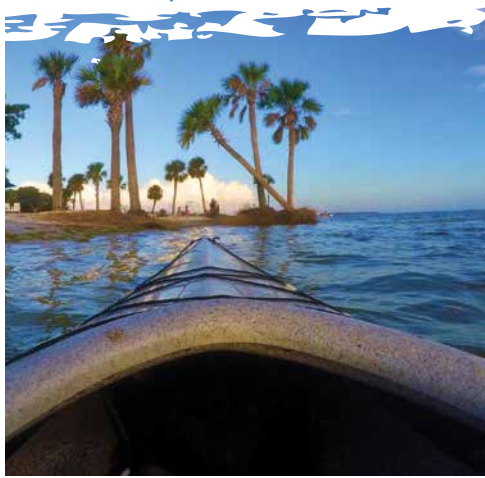


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