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FALL 2015 MAGAZINE

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- » Capture memories using your smartphone
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The weather!
Warm days and
cool nights. — **Marcia**



The water is still
warm and there's
a fresh feeling to
the air. — **Tracy**

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The sunsets — they're
even more beautiful
in the fall. — **Michaellean**



You can't beat the
fishing in the fall.
— **Lorraine**



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MANY LOCALS AND VISITORS consider fall their favorite time of the year, and in the pages of our fall edition you'll discover many of the reasons why. For some of us, it's a toss-up between the weather and all the great events going on.

As far as the weather goes, when I think of fall I always remember how the air cools down just the right amount, and the water of the Gulf of Mexico stays clear, calm and perfect for swimming for most of the season. That's been true since time immemorial.

What's relatively new for Panama City Beach's fall is all the events that are moving what used to be the best-kept-secret in travel to the forefront of people's minds when they think of a can't-miss vacation season. In the pages to follow, you'll read about the great events heading our way, including the 2nd annual Chasin' the Sun Music Festival, with Alan Jackson coming to Panama City Beach as a headliner; the Pirates of the High Seas Fest; Emerald Coast Cruizin'; and find out what it takes to compete in the Ironman Triathlon.

You'll also hear from some local experts and many of our Panama City Beach fans about why they think of fall as a favorite season, learn about how to get out on the water and bring home dinner by kayak fishing, and in the Insider Tips section you'll find out what's going on in one of our favorite new "secret" spots in Panama City Beach.

There's all that and more, as we'll also look ahead to some of the great fun we have going on in the winter, so no matter when you decide to plan your vacation to Panama City Beach, you'll be making the most of your time here and getting the most out of your hard-earned vacation days.

Sunny regards,

Dan Rowe, President and CEO

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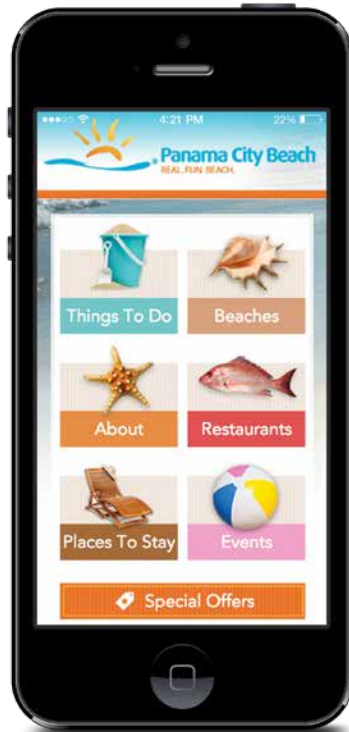


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Panama City Beach

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

**NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

Major Road

Bike Path



Distance Chart

Atlanta, GA	297 mi	470 km
Birmingham, AL	280 mi	440 km
Dallas, TX	751 mi	1,310 km
Houston, TX	639 mi	1,034 km
Montgomery, AL	186 mi	206 km
Nashville, TN	476 mi	744 km
New Orleans, LA	305 mi	513 km
Orlando, FL	340 mi	617 km
St. Louis, MO	745 mi	1,243 km
Tallahassee, FL	98 mi	171 km
Tampa, FL	339 mi	546 km



Exciting Fishing Adventures Await!

EXPERIENCED ANGLERS, families ready for the “next big adventure” and fathers passing on their love of the sport to the next generation all know that fishing in Panama City Beach does not disappoint. From the sandy marshes and tidal flats of St. Andrew Bay to the depths of the Gulf of Mexico, our waters abound with a variety of marine life sure to entice the adventurer in anyone!

In Panama City Beach, pros and amateurs alike catch an array of species, including amberjack, bluefish, cobia, flounder, grouper, king and Spanish mackerel, mahi mahi, marlin, pompano, redfish (or red drum), red snapper, trout, wahoo, sailfish and yellowfin tuna. Two of our premier locations to fish are the Russell-Fields Pier (or City Pier) and the M.B. Miller Pier (County Pier). An admission fee will include a license to fish from that pier for the whole day.

Fall is the time to take advantage of the Fall Fishing Challenge, when each weekend in October anglers fishing at the city pier and county pier are automatically eligible to weigh in their catch and win prizes in certain categories and age groups. Targeted fish species typically include king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, flounder and pompano. Winners at each pier are generally awarded in each fish category every weekend, with a children’s division open to those 12 years of age and younger.

For those who want to get farther offshore, trolling, bottom-fishing and deep-sea excursions range from private crew charters

on luxury yachts to large group experiences on party boats. Small boat rentals are also available. In either case, you’ll benefit from the expertise of a knowledgeable captain and crew when zeroing in on some great fishing.

In the fall, cooler temperatures stimulate fish to feed. That’s when redfish and trout most aggressively go after bait near the top of the water. With pompano and others schooling along the beach, fishing near the shore also improves.

As winter arrives, trout and redfish occupy the deep holes in the bay or seek refuge in creeks and rivers. Flounder, pompano and cobia, however, swim toward the shoreline for food. The warmer shores, in fact, lure larger fish throughout the cold weather.

At the onset of spring, Spanish mackerel, bluefish and cobia can be caught off the piers and in the bay, while trout and redfish populate the grass flats to feed.

Information and resources for fishing expeditions are available from the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau website at VisitPanamaCityBeach.com under Ecotourism. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission publishes fishing regulations and license applications online at MyFWC.com, and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council posts federal and state regulations on its website at gulfcouncil.org. Find additional information on fishing and charters at VisitPanamaCityBeach.com/things-to-do/fishing-charters.



Pompano



Redfish



Flounder



Mahi Mahi



Grouper



Sea Trout



Cobia



Red Snapper



King Mackerel

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The Best Birding, Naturally

NATURE ENTHUSIASTS have much to explore in and around Panama City Beach. Birding is a hobby that is growing in popularity on the Gulf Coast, and with our diverse ecosystems of coastal dunes, salt marshes and freshwater wetlands, a wide variety of birds can be viewed in their natural habitat.

The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT) is a program of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission designed to conserve and enhance Florida's wildlife habitats by promoting birding and wildlife-viewing activities and conservation education. At its core is a network of nearly 500 sites throughout Florida selected for their excellent bird-watching, wildlife-viewing or educational opportunities. Miles of this self-guided trail run right through the Panama City Beach area.

St. Andrews State Park is featured on the GFBWT. Lush nature trails wind through the park, providing an excellent opportunity for birding. Or, take a kayak out and explore the coast for a more unique vantage point. Also, from

St. Andrews State Park you can take a boat tour to Shell Island, a 700-acre island populated with a variety of wild birds, including pelicans, sandpipers, gulls, egrets and snowy plovers.

Camp Helen State Park, another site on the Trail, boasts a wide array of bird-watching opportunities. There is no end to what the attentive bird-watcher will see at Camp Helen since it is bordered by water on three sides. By the Gulf of Mexico to the south and Lake Powell — one of the largest coastal dune lakes in the world — to the east and north.

The Panama City Beach Conservation Park was born from a desire to protect and balance our natural resources while providing outdoor recreational opportunities. Twelve trails, ranging from just over half a mile to 11 miles, provide endless opportunities, so bring your binoculars and camera and enjoy a day in nature!

For more information on birding in the Panama City Beach area please visit: BayCountyAudubon.org and FloridaBirdingTrail.com.



Bald Eagle



Brown Pelican



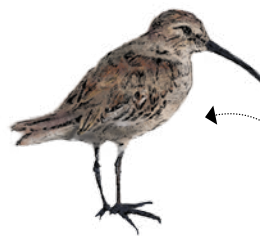
Osprey



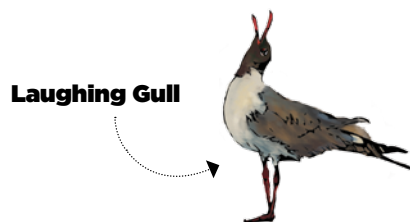
Red-Shouldered Hawk



Sandpiper



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Great Blue Heron

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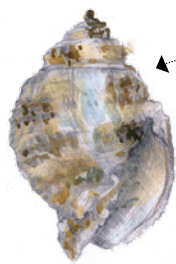
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Stop for Nothing? Sure About That?

DISPLAYED ON WINDOW SILLS, end tables and bathroom shelves all over the world are samples of Nature's handiwork plucked from the sugar sands of Panama City Beach and the bay bottoms and nearshore waters of Bay County's Gulf Coast. Anyone who says they will stop for nothing surely hasn't walked anywhere between St. Andrews State Park and Camp Helen the day after a heavy surf deposits sand dollars and the latest raft of seashells on the

sand. Shells can be found along the entire 27-mile length of Panama City Beach — make sure you pack a mesh bag along with your towels and sunscreen whenever you hit the sand — and especially on the uninhabited and aptly named Shell Island, accessible by shuttle boat from the state park. Serious collectors gather their most spectacular shells while snorkeling or diving. The species below represent a sampling of those that are indigenous to our area.



**Common
Nutmeg**



Angel Wing



Alphabet Cone



True Tulip



Lion's Paw



**Atlantic
Giant
Cockle**

Calico Scallop



**Lightning
Whelk**



**Florida
Fighting
Conch**





BEACH SPOTLIGHT

27 Miles of Beautiful Beach Awaits

WHEN YOU'RE

ready to feel the soft touch of the sparkling white sands of Panama City Beach beneath the soles of your bare feet, there are 27 miles of beautiful beach where you can choose to take your first step. One hundred public beach access points bring you to places where you can see and be seen, watch beach volleyball, grab a drink or a snack, go shelling or watch for dolphins frolicking in the waves. Or you can choose to lose yourself on an undeveloped island where you may be lucky enough to see the tracks of a sea turtle. Just wait until you catch that first glorious beach sunset. And the beach sunrises? They're pretty spectacular, too.



Capturing spontaneous Panama City Beach moments like this one is easier than ever before given the convenience and capabilities of smartphones. Become familiar with your phone's features before beginning your vacation.



DIALING UP GREAT PHOTOS

Use your phone to record vacation memories

BY KIYO KAWAGUCHI

VISITING PANAMA CITY BEACH is an unforgettable experience and one that you can relive and share with others if you capture your vacation memories in photos. For those of us with smartphones constantly at our fingertips, lively, spontaneous shots are easier to take than ever before.

Camera phone technology has become much more sophisticated in recent years, and an added bonus is that you can share those images with your friends instantly on social media. Armed with a smartphone and a few tips, your vacation pics from Panama City Beach are sure to make your memories of the World's Most Beautiful Beaches something you'll cherish forever.

First, check the settings on your phone to make sure you've chosen the best resolution for high-quality photos. High resolution photos take up more memory on your phone, but if you plan to print the photos — especially in a larger format — that may be the way to go.

Another tip is to get to know your camera so you can anticipate possible shutter lag — that's the time between when you press the button and the moment that the frame is captured. If you know you'll need to anticipate the action, you can nail your shots at precisely the right moment. Many phones also offer a "burst" capability — the option of automatically taking 3 to 10 shots in rapid

fire, so you can choose your favorite from the bunch. This is especially helpful if you're trying to capture an action shot, or a baby making just the right expression.

When taking photos, it's very important to stabilize the camera. In low light, phones slow the shutter speed, so any movement of your hands can make your photos blurry. Hold the camera steady with both hands and brace your arms against your body to prevent blurry photos. Avoid using the digital zoom function, which will degrade the quality of your photo. Instead, crop after you've taken the picture. Another feature to avoid is the flash: A smartphone LED flash isn't state-of-the-art, so try to find a different light source.



Just because you're using a camera phone doesn't mean the principles of traditional photography don't apply. Use the rule of thirds, which states that points of interest should occur at 1/3 or 2/3 of the way up (or across) the frame, rather than in the center. Most camera phones have a "show grid" option that divides the screen into thirds. Panama City Beach professional photographer Holly Gardner says, "Try to place points of interest along the intersections of the lines for more visual interest."

Get creative with your shots – You might try changing your perspective by kneeling down and shooting at an angle. Gardner suggests playing with reflections: "Look for them along the water's edge, in a glass or your sunglasses."

Posed group shots and portraits are a given when on vacation, but don't forget to take candid photos as well. Be sure to ask another member of your party to take pictures, too, or hand over your phone every now and then so you're included in the photos you take home.

Panama City Beach sunrises and sunsets are can't-miss photo opportunities. Another local photography professional, Teresa Tuno, says, "Your reward for waking up early is empty beaches, less haze and soft light." That same beautiful light also occurs at dusk. When the sun is low in the sky, try shooting silhouettes. On most camera phones you can tap to focus on bright sky in the distance, making the subjects in the foreground darker and the colors of the sunset more vibrant.

Finally, if you want to make your smartphone photos look extra impressive, consider using an app. Many shooting and editing apps, including VSCO Cam (free on iPhone and Android), allow you to fine-tune exposure, focus, ISO and shutter speed. Camera+ (\$2.99 on iPhone) is known for its Clarity feature, which automatically brings out details in dull photos — even shots that you might have thought unsalvageable. Another all-in-one app, ProCamera 8 (\$4.99 on iPhone), was named one of National Geographic's top eight must-have travel apps. Its full screen

trigger feature lets you capture candid moments without looking at the screen.

Editing apps also work wonders for smartphone photos. Snapseed (free on iPhone and Android) has a multitude of tools and filters that you can manipulate using a unique stacking feature. Once you've applied filters to an image, your edits are shown in a chronological list so you can alter the settings or even paint them in or out with the Stacks Brush. Afterlight (\$0.99 on iPhone and Android) offers a selection of 74 filters, plus adjustment tools and frames, so the options are almost endless. Enlight (\$5.99 on iPhone) is an editing app that provides photo correction, artistic touches and the ability to add text and drawings to photos.

After you've finished editing, smartphones make it easy to post to your favorite social media sites. Many apps have built-in sharing features, so posting to Facebook, Instagram or Twitter is a breeze. The photos you take will not only be priceless memories, but also the best way to say, "Wish you were here!" ●



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A Mecca for Golfers

FOR THE SERIOUS

GOLFER — or the lucky beginner — there could be no Panama City Beach souvenir more precious than a golf ball retrieved after it rattles the flag stick and drops into the cup for a hole-in-one. Courses here offer easy-to-reach par 3s that make just such an achievement possible. And there are plenty of driving holes, too, that will tempt you to take the big stick out of the bag. And, hey, if your sand wedge is a little rusty, there's no better way to sharpen your sand play than to practice at the beach before hitting the links. Panama City Beach's eight-course golf menu includes:

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

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

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

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

Bay Point's Nicklaus Design Golf Course

A Diamond in the Rough and on the Fairway

BY STEVE BORNHOFT AND JOHN MOOSHIE PHOTOS BY BAY POINT RESORT



Meadows Hole 2

KEMPER GOLF, managers of more Top 100 golf courses in the United States than any other firm, recently assumed custody of a Gulf Coast jewel, the Nicklaus Design course at Bay Point.

Kemper is committed to seeing to it that the jewel is highly burnished at all times.

"We'll be adhering to a daily maintenance schedule that will make for excellent course

conditions," says Jody Graham, a regional operations executive with Kemper.

No course modifications are planned at this time. Instead, Graham says, Kemper will place a premium on playability and consistency in quality from hole to hole.

Too, the Nicklaus course has been added to the Kemper Collection, meaning that Bay Point members will enjoy access and





privileges at other Kemper-managed courses. They include Chambers Bay in Washington state, site of the 2015 U.S. Open.

The Nicklaus name became synonymous with Bay Point 11 years ago. It was then that the Nicklaus Design firm was brought in to renovate and redesign an existing course at Bay Point with the aim of making it manageable for all, but challenging enough for the discriminate golfer.

It opened a year later under its new name, the Nicklaus Course at Bay Point, and remains the only Nicklaus-designed course in Northwest Florida. The layout offers plenty of opportunities for birdies and bogeys and a chance to interact with water — on 12 of the 18 holes.

Golfing fees, which include required golf carts, are extremely reasonable and well below all comparable courses in the Florida Panhandle. Well-maintained putting greens provide an introduction to what you can expect to experience on the course.

Four sets of tees dot every hole, allowing the course to play from 4,974 yards to 7,152 yards. The Nicklaus team produced a masterpiece. The course presents a true test of golf in a natural lagoon-front setting that excels. While the back tees command a difficult slope rating of 143 and a course rating of 74.3, the layout provides a truly memorable round regardless of skill level. Strategically placed bunkers tempt golfers through a “risk/reward” scenario. And the natural terrain offers a composite of stunning oaks, looming Florida pines and salt water marshes.



Bay Point Golf Resort and Spa

The Nicklaus Course &
The Meadows Course
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BayPointGolf.com

Hombre Golf Club

(850) 234-3673
HombreGolfClub.com

Holiday Golf Club

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HolidayGolfClub.com

Signal Hill Golf Course

(850) 234-3218
SignalHillGolfCourse.com



Nicklaus Hole 5



Nicklaus Hole 1



Nicklaus Hole 4



Nicklaus Hole 6

HOLES 1-3

Hole No. 1 has water down the entire right side, but a wide landing area offers a clear pathway to the green. No. 2 is a challenging mid-length par 3, with most of the green protected by water and a strategically placed bunker. No. 3's huge green features a massive false front. If the pin is back, be sure you hit enough club to avoid the ball rolling off the front of the green.

HOLES 4-6

Hole No. 4, offers a wide landing area off the tee. The long but narrow green is protected by water on the left, but a huge mound right of the green offers respite and a means to avoid potential disaster. Hole No. 5 requires a demanding tee shot over the saltwater marsh in order to position yourself for a second shot to the green that also requires a carry over the marshland. Compensating for the prior two holes, No. 6 is an easy par 5 designed to help golfers regain their confidence and can render a lot of birdies.

HOLES 7-9

The 7th hole is a not-so-easy long par 3 that is deceiving because of the mounds that protect the green. You'll need enough club to

negotiate both the mounds and a likely headwind. No. 8 features untamed rough along the entire right side of the fairway, but a good tee shot between two well-placed bunkers will put you in position to fire downhill to a green protected by water on the left. The longest hole on the course is No. 9. This par 5 is a straightaway, but be wary of the large bunker that hugs the left side. The green is well protected by bunkers and very much contoured, making par a good score.

HOLES 10-12

Depending on which tee box you choose, the par-3 10th hole can be easy or somewhat difficult. Water lurks to the left of the green, but a well-struck shot should yield an easy par. Hole No. 11, the longest par 4, is one of the hardest holes on the course. It requires two well-struck shots to reach the green. But once you're there, the green offers a reasonable opportunity for a two-putt. The 12th hole is a relatively easy par 5 and sets up well to the eye. But don't be fooled by the downhill and narrow green, or it just might jump up and bite your score.

HOLES 13-15

Hole No. 13 is a short par 4 with a small green, so it's best to plan a well-positioned tee shot to set up a short pitch to the green.



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No. 14, easily the most challenging hole on the course, will rarely yield a birdie and is stingy with par. Make par here, and you'll pick up a stroke on your playing partners. To play the long par-5 15th hole, you'll want to favor the left side on your second shot to approach the difficult green by avoiding the water on the right.

HOLES 16-18

No. 16 is a good driving hole, but you have to avoid hitting into the fairway's center-located pot bunker. The elevated green may require extra club. The par-3 No. 17 is deceiving because the saucer-like green is partially hidden by the mound in front of the course's largest green. No. 18 is a wonderful finishing hole with a tee shot over water. Once you're in the fairway, be careful of the small lake and bunkers that protect the right side of the green. ●

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IF YOU DON'T know where it is, it's the latitude and longitude for Panama City Beach, Florida: a world-class fishing destination with easy access to year-round fishing opportunities.

What do you dream of reeling in? Perhaps you see yourself chasing a big billfish, or reeling a large grouper or snapper up off a shipwreck resting 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.



JERRY MCBRIDE

Beach or Backwaters?

Panama City Beach kayak anglers find opportunities in all directions **BY JERRY MCBRIDE**

MAYBE IT'S THE SELF-RELIANCE or simply the release of endorphins that accompany the physical demands of self-propulsion. Whatever the reason, fish caught from a kayak come with a heightened sense of accomplishment.

This is not to imply that fishing from a kayak puts one at a competitive disadvantage; what it lacks in speed, it makes up for in stealth and accessibility. The

slower pace of kayaking allows anglers to better study details of topography and tide and fish an area more precisely than boaters zipping through at 40 knots.

Panama City Beach offers an exceptionally rare venue featuring three very distinct kayak fisheries, each against stunning scenic backdrops.

For anglers content with fishing traditional kayak-style grassflats, the Panama City Beach area features



JERRY MCBRIDE

Back-country fishing from a kayak enables anglers to approach shallow water bull redfish like this one.

shallow shorelines and bayous teeming with speckled trout, redfish, flounder and numerous other possibilities. Whether it's the crystal-clear waters and pristine seagrass meadows of St. Andrew Bay, or West Bay's spartina-lined backwaters, anglers can explore miles of stunning shorelines while encountering few other fishermen.

This is not complicated fishing; any spinning reel in the 2000 to 4000 class clamped on a light 7-foot rod covers virtually all shallow kayak fishing needs. Spool the reel with 8- to 15-pound braided line. Braid packs several advantages over traditional monofilament. Because it is much thinner than equivalent-strength mono — 15-pound braid has the diameter of 4-pound mono — it casts much farther, allowing the angler to cover more water and reach fish beyond the range of monofilament. It is also far more sensitive due to its lack of stretch, so anglers feel and react more quickly to even subtle bites.

Rigging is simple. Leave the hardware at home — no snaps or swivels to spook fish. Tie two or three feet of 15- to 20-pound mono or fluorocarbon leader directly to the braid, and connect the leader to the lure with a loop knot to maximize its freedom of movement.

The beauty of kayak fishing lies in its simplicity. Everything I carry fits in one small box beneath my seat. Fish what you have

confidence in — the presentation is more important than the lure. I generally rig one rod with a shallow, suspending twitchbait such as a Rapala Twitchin Rap, LiveTarget Sardine or Egret Kick-A-Mullet. If the water is very shallow or if I get on the water at dawn — I generally venture out at the crack of noon or so — I might start with a Heddon Spook Jr. topwater; there's nothing better than watching fish blow up surface lures. My second rod typically holds a soft-plastic bait rigged weedless on a weighted Owner hook, especially in the summer when seagrass grows tall and thick. Weedless spoons are also popular.

The universal rules of flats fishing apply here. Look for areas of mixed sand and seagrass. Fish gravitate to edges where grass and sand merge. Against conventional wisdom that maintains they prefer grass, larger trout in reality spend most of their time over sand, utilizing adjacent seagrass mostly as an avenue of escape should danger threaten. Approach quietly, and if possible, position the kayak to take advantage of the wind to make longer casts. If there is tidal current, cast lures uptide or perpendicular to the flow; predators mistake them as vulnerable baitfish struggling in the current. This area experiences just one high and one low tide most days. Typically, predators follow rising water to hunt shorelines or

Panama City Beach's often gentle surf and relaxed seas make pursuing offshore species from a kayak a possibility. King mackerel frequently fall for lures and baits trolled from a kayak.



JERRY MCBRIDE

THE FOUR BASIC RULES WHEN ANGLING FROM A KAYAK

- 1 Dress to swim
- 2 Rig to flip
- 3 Your body follows where your head goes
- 4 Always give yourself a rod's length of line to work with

grassflats they can't access at low tide. As the water falls, fish drop back into channel edges and deeper potholes.

As good as the grassflats fishing is, it's the big-game kayak fishery that sets Panama City Beach apart. There is no easier place on the planet for kayakers to catch a bragging-size trophy. Anglers have two options that can occupy them day or night.

Nocturnal kayakers can hunt giant redfish year-round beneath the blue lights adorning the Hathaway Bridge. Crabs and baitfish sweeping seaward on outgoing tides create tasty silhouettes for the golden predators lurking below. When they're feeding, schools aren't hard to locate; a 40-pound redfish smacking a big blue crab at the surface leaves behind an explosion and hole in the water that's hard to miss.

A pedal-driven kayak leaves hands free to fight fish and provides a huge maneuvering advantage in dealing with current, wind and powerful fish among the concrete pilings. Headlamps are necessary for rigging, and a stern-mounted safety light and life vest are required. Bridge redfish rarely fall within the 18- to 27-inch harvest range, so bring a camera rather than a fish cooler. Heavier spinning tackle with 20- to 40-pound line gives anglers a fighting chance to pull powerful reds away from concrete cutoffs.

Finally, the world-famous white sand beaches and typically docile surf conditions of Panama City Beach offer an introduction to offshore kayak fishing that rivals the easiest on the planet.

Natural reefs hold red snapper, grouper, flounder, black seabass and dozens of other species enticingly close to shore. King and Spanish mackerel, cobia, blackfin tuna and even sailfish begin cruising just off the sand around the beginning of April, when water temperatures approach the 70-degree mark.

Medium to heavy spinning tackle is adequate for any of these species. One- to 3-ounce speed jigs, or feathered jigs tipped with a soft-plastic tail or frozen cigar minnow are all that's needed for reef species. Before throwing reef species in the dinner box, check the latest updates on ever-changing harvest regulations at a local tackle or kayak shop, or dial them up at MyFWC.com.

The easiest big-game catch is the king mackerel. Simply steer a zigzag pattern parallel to the beach just beyond the color change a couple hundred yards offshore. Drag a diving plug, spoon, live bait or frozen cigar minnow — kings are equal-opportunity eaters. Tackle in the 10- to 20-pound class is best, as kingfish can run 10 to 60 pounds. A short wire leader prevents razor-jawed mackerel from slicing the line.

Check weather and wave forecasts before launching, and wear a PFD. Do not venture offshore alone. Compared to most coastlines, the Gulf of Mexico features relatively tranquil surf, especially when launching early. However, keep in mind that a surf-generating seabreeze kicks up midday, which can cap a great day on the water with an exhilarating finale. The sand is soft and the water warm, so if you roll in the waves, it just adds to the adventure. ●

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“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 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, exploring an imitation-shipwreck, getting into a laser tag shoot-out with loved ones or making friends with a stingray? As a true, All-American seaside retreat, this beach is chock-full of fun attractions.

GULF WORLD MARINE PARK



Get in Touch with Fun at **Gulf World Marine Park**

Swim with a dolphin, cradle a stingray, feel a seal

BY SAM TUNO/GULF WORLD MARINE PARK



Cownose rays and southern stingrays, their barbs removed, inhabit a petting pool at Gulf World Marine Park. A trainer hops a ride aboard a bottlenose dolphin.



GULF WORLD MARINE PARK

GULF WORLD MARINE PARK has been a staple family destination in Panama City Beach since 1970. Guests come to see the dolphins, but leave with a new found love and appreciation for dozens of animals, and new knowledge about marine preservation. Daily shows and exhibits excite and educate children and adults alike. Indoor and outdoor tropical gardens allow guests to see penguins, tropical birds, alligators, California sea lions, harbor seals and much more. With multiple interactive programs to choose from, guests can personalize their experience for a fun and excitement-filled day!

The Swim with a Dolphin program is a favorite for many visitors. After all, there are few places across the country that can guarantee a dolphin encounter. Guests learn about dolphin senses, conservation and take part in a dolphin handshake, hug and dorsal pull around the habitat.

Those interested in an all-day event can sign up for Dolphin Day Camp or the Trainer for a Day program. Dolphin Day Camp is

perfect for children ages 7–12. The campers visit the various animal departments and participate in interactive activities and games. The Trainer for a Day program provides a behind the scenes experience at Gulf World. It is a perfect choice for the ultimate animal lover, who will love spending the day shadowing trainers. Meet N Greets are available with sea lions, bottlenose dolphins and rough toothed dolphins (a rarely seen species that is smaller and thinner than the Atlantic Bottlenose dolphins.)

Whatever you do, don't miss out on the entertaining and informative shows at the Sea Lion Stadium, Tropical Garden Theatre and Dolphin Stadium.

What's New at Gulf World Marine Park

Recently, Gulf World also opened a new habitat, Stingray Bay. This 20,000-gallon indoor habitat housing de-barbed cownose and southern stingrays has quickly become a favorite. Visitors



discover that these rays are beautiful, graceful creatures that each have unique personalities.

Guests are permitted to touch the rays in the petting pool all day. During hourly feeding times, a diet-controlled selection of food is available for purchase and hand-feeding. There is also an in-water interactive program within Stingray Bay called the Stingray Encounter. Trainers teach guests the stingray shuffle, how to cradle a stingray and allow participants to get up close and personal with the rays in their habitat.

Many of Gulf World's stars are previously stranded animals that have been rehabilitated and deemed non-releasable by the federal government. Others were born in the park. Gulf World Marine Park is dedicated to the rehabilitation and release of marine mammals and is the largest contributor to the Gulf World Marine Institute 501c3 non-profit. While they are separate entities, they work hand in hand to take care of injured sea turtles and dolphins.

GWMI is the only Mammal Stranding rehabilitation facility in the Florida Panhandle. The stranding team consists of Gulf World



The Gulf World Marine Institute, in a single winter, has treated as many as 1,800 sea turtles stunned by cold water. Release days are happy occasions.

staff members and volunteers who deeply care for these animals. Secret Holmes, zoological director of Gulf World Marine Park, acts as director of the institute and truly eats, sleeps and breathes her work. While the number of animals in rehab varies on a weekly basis, the numbers are typically larger during the winter months. For example, GWMI has rehabilitated 1,800 cold-stunned sea turtles during a single winter! The cold blooded animals are affected when temperatures drop faster than they can escape the shallow bays of northern Florida for the more temperate waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Many would not survive the cold without the help and dedication of GWMI volunteers and staff. Release days are truly days of celebration

for all involved. Gulf World Marine Institute is striving to have a state-of-the-art stranding rehabilitation and research center. (Visit gulfworldmarineinstitute.org for more information.)

To purchase admission tickets to Gulf World Marine Park and reserve interactive programs, book online at GulfWorldMarinePark.com or call 850-234-5271. ●

**Gulf World is closed Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. The animal section of the facility is closed on the Monday after Thanksgiving and re-opens the day after Christmas. (The gift shop is open during this time to purchase gift items and concert tickets for the theatre.) Reservations are required for interactive programs. Age and height restrictions vary based on program.*

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Fun on the Water

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at sunset, a chance to observe dolphins or a fishing trip? Or are you enticed by SCUBA diving and snorkeling adventures?

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In Panama City Beach, watersports are a way of life and you'll find the equipment, guides and lessons here to experience them to the fullest.

And the fun doesn't stop at the beautiful white sand beaches. The area is loaded with bays, lakes, rivers, bayous, swamps, creeks and lagoons — all waiting for you to explore and enjoy.

Dolphin Encounters

See dolphins in their natural habitat with Capt. Lorraine **BY WENDY O. DIXON**

FOR MARINE LIFE LOVERS, there is no sight more thrilling than a pod of dolphins slicing through the water and leaping into the air. Panama City Beach is home to a large population of bottlenose dolphins, and no vacation here is complete without booking a dolphin tour to witness the beautiful creatures playing in the emerald waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Dolphin advocate Lorraine Frasier, known as Capt. Lorraine, is owner and operator of Dolphin and Snorkel Tours Panama City Beach, a guided tour that offers close encounters with dolphins and other marine wildlife in their natural habitat.

Originally from Germany, Capt. Lorraine moved to Florida from Colorado at age 18. While she didn't have much of a plan, she knew she wanted to work with marine animals.

"It has been my lifelong dream and passion to work with marine life," she says. "I have been obsessed with whales and dolphins since the age of 3. Growing up, I had dreams of becoming a marine biologist. I also wanted to spend my free time doing watersports and enjoying the Florida outdoors."

Capt. Lorraine began her career as an intern, helping with training and rehabilitating marine animals. "I quickly learned that this industry was very hard to get into, and also a tough way to make a living," she explains. "The dolphin research center says it is statistically easier to become a Hollywood movie star."

She later earned her captain's license, and now enjoys spending time working on the water. "After landing my first full-time job as a charter boat captain, all I wanted to do was explore the area, underwater and on land," she says. "Every night, I would research animals of the area I had seen that day. I would wonder about all of the fun

"I quickly learned that this industry was very hard to get into, and also a tough way to make a living. The dolphin research center says it is statistically easier to become a Hollywood movie star." — Dolphin advocate Capt. Lorraine Frasier

CAPT. LORRAINE



The waters off
Panama City
Beach are home to
one of the greatest
concentrations
of bottlenose
dolphins anywhere.



facts about them. Who knew that this water bird I see every day can dive to 200 feet?"

Capt. Lorraine says her dolphin and snorkel tours are different from others in the area. "I wanted to make my tours meaningful and educational," she says. "I wanted to give people an experience they will remember for years to come."

With Capt. Lorraine's dolphin tour, your adventure begins at the beautiful Bay Point Marina, the marina closest to Shell Island and to the areas where dolphins are known to hang out.

"This area is famous across the country for having one of the highest and most consistent concentrations of bottlenose dolphins," says Capt. Lorraine. "We can virtually guarantee dolphin sightings in no time, and we do not waste time having to travel across the bay getting to the snorkeling, free diving, dolphin, wildlife and Shell Island areas."

Capt. Lorraine is so confident you'll encounter dolphins that on the off chance you do not see them, she will invite you to come back on a complimentary tour.

Capt. Lorraine will transport you to Shell Island, where she'll anchor and give you plenty of time to explore the area. A favorite spot for locals and visitors alike, Shell Island is a 7-mile-long undeveloped peninsula with pristine sand dunes, coastal scrub forest, pine hammocks and an inland lake. It is home to deer, ospreys, bald eagles, pelicans, cormorants and other shorebirds, as well as ghost crabs, endangered Choctawhatchee beach mice and loggerhead and green sea turtles.

Capt. Lorraine encourages her guests to have an appreciation for wildlife, and hopes to inspire them to protect the environment and animals that inhabit it.

"Every day I think about how lucky I am to be able to do this job," she says. "It's a good life when you absolutely love what you are doing, and when you love what you're doing, you tend to be good at it."

"Half-day tours" are three hours, but Capt. Lorraine is open to customized tours of longer lengths. Guests may pack a picnic to enjoy on Shell Island. A light meal is included as part of tours five hours or longer.

The boat carries a maximum of six people. Masks, snorkels, wetsuits, fins and life vests are provided. Bring sunscreen, towels, snacks, drinking water and perhaps binoculars. Reservations are required by email at snorkelpcb@gmail.com or (850) 866-8815. ●



Capt. Lorraine Frasier's dolphin and snorkel tours afford people an opportunity to examine the myriad life forms that find food and shelter in the grass beds off Shell Island.

CAPT. LORRAINE

**Dolphin and Snorkel Tours
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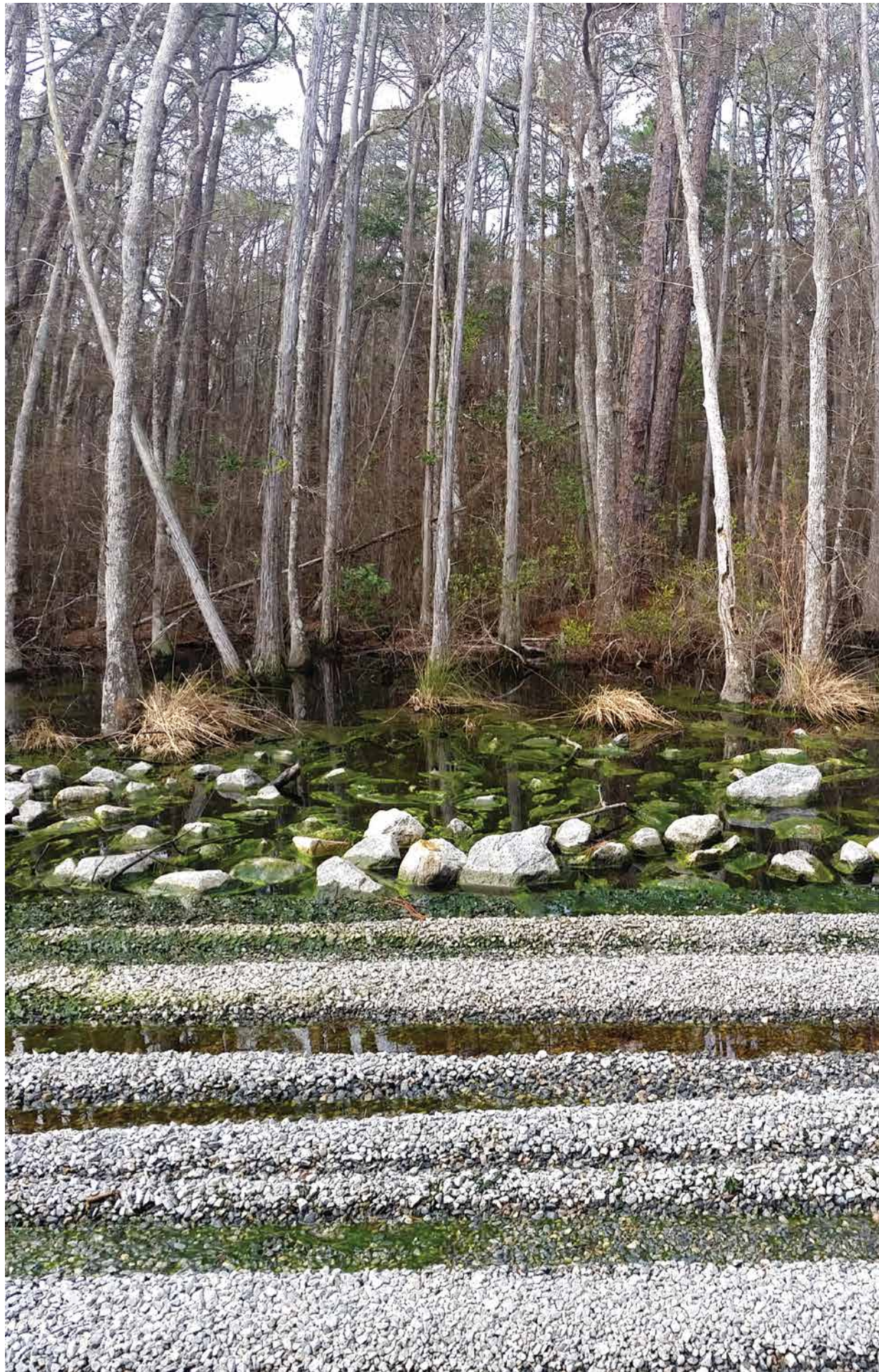


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The Conservation Park located off Highway 79 in Panama City Beach hosts a variety of colorful flora and fauna.

BLAKE CORLEY



BLAKE CORLEY

My Panama City Beach

For hikers, paths lead to self-discoveries

BY BLAKE CORLEY

MY FAVORITE MEMORIES from growing up are when my father would take me camping, hiking and exploring. My parents taught me to appreciate nature and I always wanted it to be a part of my life.

After my father's passing 15 years ago, though, I somehow drifted away from this love of nature and adventure-seeking. Life got busy. I went to college, graduated and started working. But there was always something missing in my life and I knew I had to get back to my roots.

A few years ago, I was tired of sitting on the sidelines and was ready for a new path. So I quit playing video games and wasting my weekends on the couch and started spending my free time exploring, hiking and searching for adventure. I learned so much about who I am, what I want out of life and who I want to become. I learned I love photography. There is nothing like the feeling of capturing a beautiful moment in time and being able to share it with your friends and family.

I learned that a long hike is the perfect way to collect your thoughts and unwind after a long work week. I learned that there is so much undiscovered beauty and adventures to undertake right in my backyard of Panama City Beach.

In 2011, the Panama City Beach Conservation Park opened. This is possibly my favorite place on earth. I have hiked all 24 miles of trails that wind through the park's 2,912 acres. The land the park sits on was once used for tree farming for the paper industry, but the City of Panama City Beach purchased it and has begun the process of transforming the land from a planted pine plantation to a natural long-leaf pine and wetland ecosystem. The transformation of the park has been amazing to witness. Wetlands are being restored, controlled burns are taking place and native long-leaf pines are being planted.

You shouldn't be intimidated by the size and scope of the park. It is perfect for adventurers of any skill level. Just footsteps from the entrance there are boardwalks over beautiful cypress swamps. Over a mile of boardwalks in the park cross some of the prettiest wetlands I have ever seen. For beginners, my personal favorite is the Cypress Trail.

When I first started, I only hiked a couple miles at a time. The more I did this, the more I enjoyed it. I would see beautiful things: fields of

wildflowers, deer, wild boar, alligators and so much more. In each season I found something new and exciting. The further I pushed myself, the more I wanted to see what was around the next bend. I can honestly say it has changed who I am.

I now often hike the 10-mile trek around the perimeter of the park. Ten miles is something I never thought I would do when I first started, but I am so glad I worked up to it. One of my favorite places is the furthest point from the entrance. There is a beautiful bridge over West Laird Creek on the Bear Track Trail. This is my happy place. The peacefulness and solitude of this place is something that is hard to describe.

My adventures at the PCB Conservation Park only made me want more. I was officially addicted to this natural high. I began seeking out other places to go. Once again, I didn't need to go far. I started exploring the two state parks in Panama City Beach, St. Andrews State Park and Camp Helen State Park.

Many visitors to St. Andrews State Park don't stray far from the protected beach and swimming area known as the "Kiddie Pool," but they are really missing out. On the north side of the park, not only are there camping areas but also wonderful nature trails that meander along the bay and through the sand dunes. There are sand cliffs, and one of the best fishing spots in the area

PLACES TO EXPLORE (AND FIND YOURSELF)

St. Andrews State Park: Two nature trails wind through a rich diversity of coastal plant communities and marsh ecosystems -- a splendid opportunity for bird watching.

Conservation Park: A total of 24 miles of trails range in size from 0.6 miles to 11 miles; 12 trails to choose from. Lots of birds and other wildlife are drawn to rehydrated wetlands.

Camp Helen: Oak canopy trails wind through a dense growth of maritime hammock overlooking a salt marsh, home to white egrets and blue herons and red-winged blackbirds.





Blake Corley took all of the photographs accompanying this story with his Samsung Galaxy S5 phone, proof positive that you can capture Panama City Beach's natural beauty and precious vacation memories with a device you carry around in your pocket.

on the bay side. The fall is one of the best times of year to see the wildflowers, when the sand dunes are filled with an abundance of beautiful yellow flowers that contrast with the stark white sand.

If it's wildlife you're looking for, walk the nature trail in the early evening. I guarantee you will see a deer just feet away from you.

As my adventures continued, I discovered scenic Camp Helen State Park. The history of this place alone is worth the trek. I recommend taking one of the monthly Saturday guided tours to learn more about the park. Camp Helen State Park sits on the shore of Lake Powell, which is the second largest coastal dune lake in the northern hemisphere (the largest is in Africa). Coastal dune lakes are quite rare and the North Florida coast is one of the few places in the world you'll find them.

When you get to the park, you have two equally great choices. You can go south toward the Gulf of Mexico, or take the trails along Lake Powell. The southern trek takes you from marshlands to sand dunes, ending at what was once a fishing pier. The beach is about a half-mile walk from the parking lot, but the effort is well worth it because you never know what you will find. I've seen pieces of Native American pottery on the beach along the outflow of Lake Powell. Just last fall there was a sailboat shipwrecked on the shore right in front of the pier.

The north part of the park is not as well known or traveled and that is why I love it. Take the trail near the parking lot under the US 98 bridge and follow it along Lake Powell. In just a short visit to Camp Helen State Park, you will see an ecosystem that exists only a few places on earth.

My adventures in Panama City Beach have changed me for the better. I have learned so much about who I am: I am a nature lover, a photographer, sunset addict and seeker of adventure. I am lucky enough to live in one of the most beautiful places on earth. If you see me out on a hike, stop and say hi and I will tell you about my latest finds.

I hope to see you out there on my next adventure. Happy trails! ●

BLAKE CORLEY



Diving Panama City Beach

THE NUMBER

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

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

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

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

U.S. NAVY



FINAL DESCENT

Submerged jets attract fish and divers

BY DAVID DEMAREST



When construction projects forced two retired Air Force jets from their pedestals, a coalition of organizations saw to it that they were moved to a new, watery home.



The jets deployed for service as an artificial reef had been displayed for decades at Panama City's Marina Civic Center and Gulf Coast State College.



U.S. NAVY

ON JUNE 27, 2014, two supersonic Air Force fighter jets that had been fixtures in Panama City for decades touched down for the last time, coming to rest 75 feet below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico.

This was no aeronautical tragedy, however. Both retired F101 Voodoo jets had been scheduled to be scrapped due to construction projects that forced them to be moved from their display mounts in front of the Marina Civic Center and Gulf Coast State College. Fortunately, the Bay County Commission was able to steer the jets into a new life as artificial reefs, thanks to help from Visit Panama City Beach, the Tyndall Dive Club, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Bay County Artificial Reef Association.

Almost immediately, fish were attracted to the new reef, and the jets (one of which came to rest upside down) are now home to a

variety of marine life. The “Voodoo Reef,” located about three miles from the M.B. Miller Pier, has quickly become a popular dive site and serves as a nice reminder of Panama City Beach’s connection between the military and the dive community. (Did you know that all U.S. military divers go through training at the Navy Diving and Salvage Training Center in Panama City Beach?)

Before beginning their new life as artificial reefs resting about three miles from the M.B. Miller pier, these F101 Voodoo fighter jets were designed by Boeing to escort bombers, attack ground targets and provide support for ground troops. The jets that now form Voodoo Reef were very much at home in the skies over Panama City Beach, having been flown by Carleton “Sonny” Vail and Rick Seltzer, men who were then stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base and who would become mainstays of the local community after their retirement from military service.

Completing the site where the F101 Voodoo Jets now rest are 18 concrete reef modules, sometimes referred to as “Grouper Grottos” for their ability to attract fish and form habitat for marine life.

Want to see for yourself? Local dive shops offer certification classes, equipment rental and chartered trips to dozens of artificial reefs not far from the shores of Panama City Beach! Find GPS coordinates for many local dive sites at VisitPanamaCityBeach.com. ●

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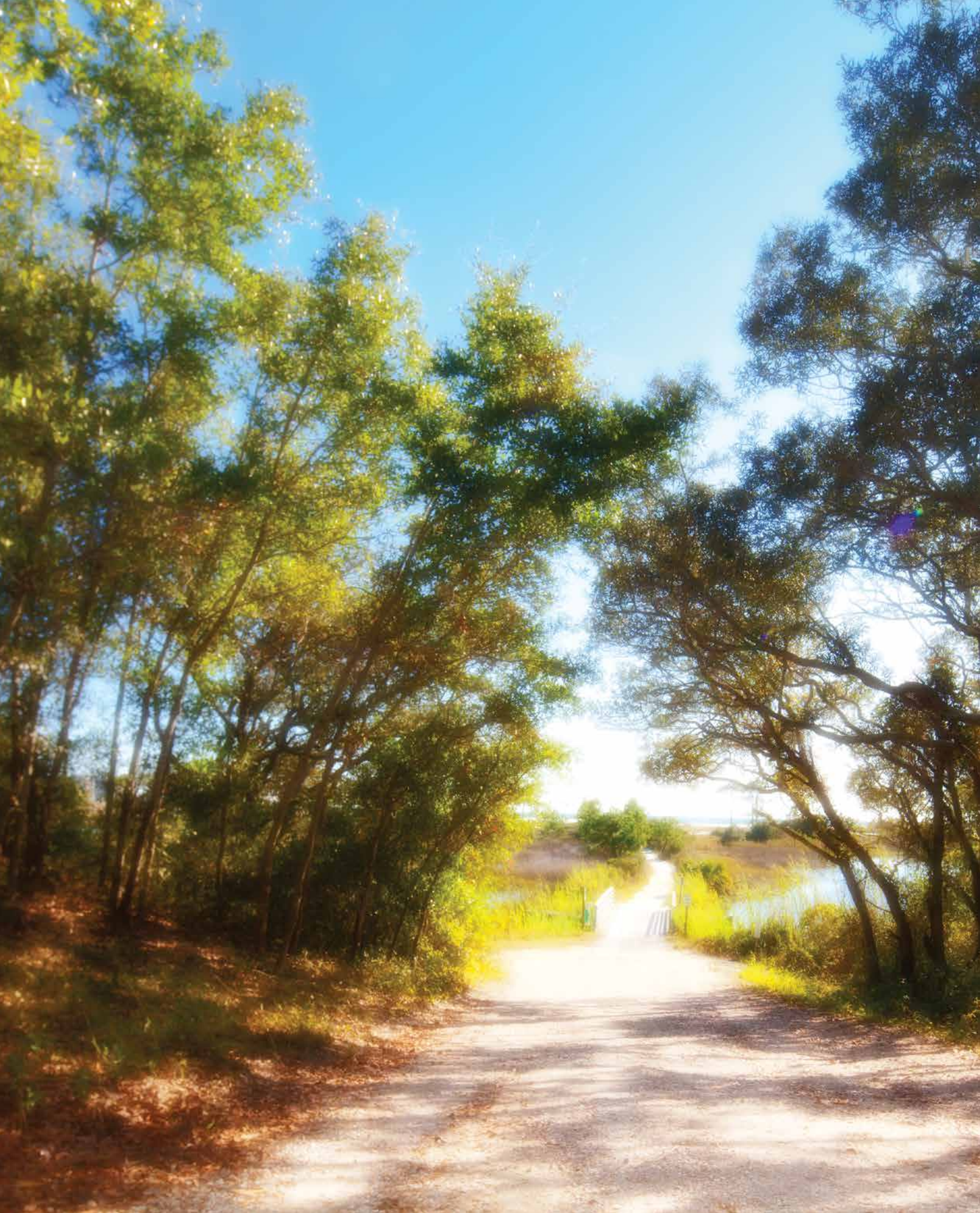


HAUNTED BY
SPIRITS
THREE

GHOSTS, SOME SAY, FREQUENT CAMP HELEN

BY JASON DEHART







Camp Helen State Park is a peaceful little wayside just off U.S. Highway 98 at the west end of Panama City Beach. It's a good place to pull off the road, park and stretch your legs. There's a small Visitor Center that tells the history of the 183-acre property and, when the weather is fine, you can change into flip-flops and hike down to the beach.

People have been coming here since the earliest Native Americans arrived thousands of years ago. There's evidence of prehistoric Indian mounds and middens, and like much of the coast, it's rich in fish and game. The area was so attractive that around 1910 a hotel and a small general store were built; the hotel subsequently burned down, but the store building survived to become a kitchen space.

In 1928, Robert Hicks and his family bought the property and built a grand log home on a ridge overlooking Lake Powell. Known as Loch Lomond, the property was originally intended to be a private retreat. But upon the death of her husband, and the onset of the Great Depression, Margaret Hicks was forced to open it to paying guests who stayed at the small "Rainbow Cottages" she built.

Avondale Textile Mills of Sylacauga, Alabama, bought the property in 1945 and used it as a summer vacation spot for its employees until 1987. During that time, 12 duplex cottages and a recreation hall were built. Some of those buildings still exist today. The Nature Conservancy bought the property in 1996 and on March 1, 1997, Camp Helen was opened as a state park thanks to grassroots efforts to save the property from development.

It's hard to believe that such a peaceful place could be haunted, but park volunteer and local historian Emily Smith enjoys regaling the curious with tales of not one, but three, specters said to inhabit the grounds. She says that for seven years, between 2006 and 2013, the Friends of Camp Helen State Park held popular "ghost walks" at the park. The tours came to an end when costs became prohibitive. But that doesn't stop Smith from telling ghost stories to anyone eager to listen.

The first ghost in the park is the spirit of Rose, a young slave girl killed by Native Americans in 1843. Smith says Rose was a

At Camp Helen State Park, a pathway leads from the Visitor's Center over a dune line to a broad white-sand beach fronting the Gulf of Mexico. There, it is said, the "ghost of Rose" sometimes walks at night.

passenger on a ship that had run aground nearby during a New Year's Eve storm.

"While repairs to the ship were being made, they made contact with Indians who they thought were going to be friendly, but they weren't," Smith said. "First, they made friends, but one day when the captain was out trying to secure food, the Indians attacked and Rose was killed. They buried her in a shallow grave, and it's said that on moonlit nights she sometimes walks the beaches."

The second ghost is said to be Margaret Hicks' only grandson, who ventured away from his nanny and drowned in Lake Powell. Smith says the little boy was left in the care of the cook and a nursemaid while Hicks was on a grocery run to Panama City when the accident happened. Tragically, he managed to wander down to the boat dock in front of the family lodge and fall into the water.

"He goes out playing in the courtyard garden and the cook and maid go to prepare his lunch and when his lunch is ready, they call for him and can't find him. Now, where do you think a little boy would go with all this water around him? He went down to the lake and didn't know how to swim. He went to the end of the boat dock, fell in and drowned," Smith said.

When the nurse and cook realized he was nowhere in sight they raced down to the water and found him lying on the bottom of the lake. They hailed a passing fisherman who helped get him up and out of the water but couldn't revive him.

"So they had to go into Panama City and tell his mother and grandmother that he had drowned, and what a horrible thing it was for the family," Smith said. "If he had only known how to swim."


The ghost of "Gigi," as the child was called in life, was first seen in 1996 when a passing fisherman saw a little boy playing on the beach. That seemed unremarkable, but the caretaker assured him that nobody lived on the property anymore. Sightings continue to this day, Smith said.

Buildings at Camp Helen, on Lake Powell, date to their ownership by Margaret Hicks. Hicks' grandson drowned in the lake, which is skirted today by a footbridge that leads to an old pier where the ghost of Gigi, some say, hangs out.





“This Hugh Comer was so scared, he went down and would not stay in the house anymore. Instead he stayed in the little apartment over the garage. It was that real to him. The caretaker’s children remember they would turn lights off and the lights would come back on, things would move around the house and they would say the ghost of Captain Phillips lived in the house. But he never did hurt anybody, he was just really territorial. That was his house, and we had great fun telling about that (during the ghost walks).” — **Emily Smith, Park Volunteer and Local Historian**



“Sometimes, fishermen on the lake still see a little boy sitting on the old pier,” Smith said. “I have told this story for seven years, and on two occasions I have had people tell me they had fished and seen what looked like a child on the pier down from the house.”

The third and final ghost is known to have actually talked to a guest of the former Hicks family lodge. Smith said that right after the property was sold to Donald Comer of Avondale Mills, Hugh Comer — a prim and proper Sunday school teacher from Birmingham — was invited down for a visit to check the place out. He stayed in the Hicks’ log home.

“He had dinner and went to bed early and slept in Margaret Hicks’ old room, and when he went to sleep during the night, this ghost appeared beside him,” Smith said.

Legend holds that this was the ghost of Captain Phillips, the namesake of nearby Phillips Inlet. Captain Phillips loomed large in the darkness and intoned in a grave voice, “This is my house, get out of my house!”

Seriously spooked by the spirit, Comer quickly sought another room to stay in, Smith said.

“This Hugh Comer was so scared, he went down and would not stay in the house anymore. Instead he stayed in the little apartment over the garage,” she said. “It was that real to him. The caretaker’s children remember they would turn lights off and the lights would come back on, things would move around the house and they would say the ghost of Captain Phillips lived in the house. But he never did hurt anybody, he was just really territorial. That was his house, and we had great fun telling about that (during the ghost walks).”

Quite apart from the paranormal, there’s much to see and do at Camp Helen State Park, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors can take a walking tour of the historic grounds, enjoy birdwatching, swimming, beach combing, canoeing, kayaking, hiking and picnicking along the dunes and scrub forests. The Hicks House and recreation hall are available for weddings, meetings and other functions. ●

For more information, call the park office at (850) 233-5059.

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Fun, Food and Music for Everyone

Fall Fishing Challenge, Oct. 1-31

To showcase the world-class fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, Panama City Beach is luring avid anglers with weekend-long pier fishing tournaments this fall. Through the month of October, the City Pier vs. County Pier Challenge guarantees fun and prizes for participants. Extending more than 1,500 feet into the Gulf of Mexico, the M.B. Miller Pier (County Pier) and the Russell-Fields Pier (City Pier) are two of the longest on the Gulf Coast and are prime fishing spots for anglers of all ages. There is no fee to enter the contest — anyone fishing from the pier is automatically entered into the tournament.

Chili Vibrations World Music Festival, Oct. 3-4 Soul-soothing music serves as the backdrop for an International Chili Society (ICS) Cook-off. Because, why not? It all comes together at Aaron Bessant Park and Amphitheater.

UNwineD, Oct. 16-17 The Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce presents a spectacular weekend celebration of vines, steins and palate-pleasing food. Enjoy perfectly paired wine, craft beer and appetizers at Aaron Bessant Park.

Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally, Oct. 21-25 Known as “The Most Biker Friendly FREE Rally in the United States,” the Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally is held twice yearly in Panama City Beach during the first weekend in May and mid-October. Bikers from around the country enjoy scenic rides along the Emerald Coast, live entertainment and local cuisine.



Pirates of the High Seas Fest, Oct. 9–10

Columbus Day weekend will bring a wave of fun-filled adventures to Panama City Beach with the Pirates of the High Seas Fest. Taking place throughout the coastal community, the festival will include an ensemble of parades and sword-swinging showdowns, culminating with a dueling fireworks display reenacting The Battle of the Seven Seas.



PANAMA CITY BEACH
MARDI GRAS & MUSIC FESTIVAL

Ironman Florida, Nov. 7 What began as a challenge between groups of Navy Seals has become one of the most recognized endurance events in the world. The Ironman consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run, with the Florida edition of the challenge serving as one of the most popular races on the circuit.

Emerald Coast Cruizin', Nov. 9–14 The annual event at Aaron Bessant Park is perfect for families and attracts thousands of classic cars, hot rods, custom cars and trucks. Live music will also be featured at the event.

Beach Home for the Holidays, Nov. 27–28 The lighting of a 100-foot Christmas tree and holiday music from John Berry and the Panama City POPS Orchestra kick off the holiday season. Visit VisitPanamaCityBeach.com for more details.

Panama City Beach Marathon, Dec. 5 A 5K, half marathon and full marathon all run along the beautiful Gulf of Mexico and the world's most beautiful beaches.

2016 EVENTS

Winter Resident Senior Prom, Feb. 10 Now in its fourth installment, the Senior Prom is a fun opportunity for winter residents to get out their dancing shoes. Held at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, the 2015 theme was "Under the Starry Skies."

Panama City Beach Mardi Gras & Music Festival, Feb. 12–13 The two-day festival and parade takes place in and around Pier Park and is one of the most fun Mardi Gras events anywhere. The event is perfect for the whole family and includes a Mardi Gras Kidz Zone, float tours, street fair and live music.



EMERALD COAST CRUIZIN'



Eighth Annual Beach Ball Drop, Dec. 31

Celebrate New Year's Eve on the beach! A family-friendly countdown at 8 p.m. culminates with fireworks and 10,000 beach balls being dropped over the crowd. As the seconds tick down to midnight, thousands of revelers watch an 800-pound glowing beach ball descend to signify the start of a New Year with a second round of fireworks.

Seabreeze Jazz Festival, April 20–24

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

There’s Music in the Air in Panama City Beach Summer

Throughout the summer, visitors and locals gather for the free summer concert series at Aaron Bessant Park amphitheater, where live performances in the open-air amphitheater set the tone. The PCB Summer Concert Series takes place every Thursday night, and Groovin’ on the Green offers a scaled down version of the open-air concert series on Monday nights at the Carillon Beach neighborhood.

Star Spangled Spectacular, July 4 Panama City Beach celebrates the 4th of July with the largest fireworks display on the Gulf Coast at Pier Park. Families can enjoy a day filled with live entertainment, children’s activities, tasty food and drinks, as well as breathtaking firework displays at multiple locations.

Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, Sept. 2–4 This Labor Day weekend, the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam will bring the best of today’s country music to the beach. When the sun begins to set, patrons can ride free shuttles to the headline stage at Frank Brown Park from participating lodging properties.

Lobster Festival and Tournament, Sept. 14–20 Schooners sets the stage for the largest lobster festival in Florida, as the 26th Annual Lobster Festival & Tournament gives divers a chance to compete and attendees a chance to eat amazing lobster dishes. Tournament participants compete in a variety of categories, including spiny lobster, shovelnose lobster and big 6. Weigh-ins begin Saturday and end Sunday with grand prizes and a Lobster Feast. The popular Sand Sculpting Contest is now in its 18th year and takes place on the beach behind Schooners.

3rd Annual Chasin’ the Sun Music Festival, Sept. 23–24 Enjoy a few bonus days of summer at a festival created to celebrate artists who wrote and continue to play classic beach songs.

For more event information, visit VisitPanamaCityBeach.com.



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Florida Ironman

Race tests triathletes, one stage at a time

BY SANDI POREDA

Triathletes plunge into the Gulf of Mexico at the start of the Florida Ironman. The swim leg is 2.4 miles.



TOM SLOTT, TJS PHOTOGRAPHY

BEAUTIFUL BEACHES. Frequent stops for a cool beverage. Miles of picturesque sightseeing.

More than 100 miles, to be exact. But it's not exactly what you would call a Sunday drive; it's the Florida Ironman in Panama City Beach, the only full distance Ironman race in the Sunshine State.

It's no picnic. A 2.4-mile swim is followed by 112 miles on a bike and marathon-length run of 26.2 miles. It's not something most people can just decide to do and then successfully complete — it usually takes months of a very structured training regimen.

So what drives someone to participate in an Ironman race? For Tallahassee resident Michael Stiles, it was a gradual process, starting with 5K races about six years ago and then working his way up to competing in triathlons. A friend challenged him to keep competing, and once he fell in with the crowd, it was the company that kept him coming back for more.

"I really enjoy the group experience," Stiles said. "You meet people like you and there is a strong sense of camaraderie."

For Stiles, the Florida Ironman in November 2015 will be his first Ironman competition. He started training for this year's race the day after the 2014 race.

Karl Trucks, on the other hand, had a very different beginning. Before his first Ironman in Panama City Beach in 2013, he had been competing in triathlons for only two years.

"I woke up one day and decided I wanted to compete in the Florida Ironman," said Trucks, of Panama City. "I only had about 10 months to train."

How to Train

When he began training for his first Ironman, Trucks decided not to use a coach. Instead, he looked for online training resources that would fit the length of time he had to train, as well as his daily schedule. As a small business owner and the father of young



TOM SLOTT, TJS PHOTOGRAPHY



TOM SLOTT, TJS PHOTOGRAPHY

“You’ve got to swim before you bike. You’ve got to bike before you run. You’ve got to finish, but take it one stage at a time.” — Ben Rausa, Race Director since 2008

children, he didn’t have a lot of free time to train, so he looked for programs that matched his availability.

“I started by training on the run, because I was most comfortable with the running portion,” said Trucks. “I wanted to train within my comfort zone.”

Now, after completing two Ironmans and in the process of training for his third, Trucks said his race splits — his individual times on the swim, the bike ride and the run — help him identify the areas he needs to focus on in his training process so he can improve any weaknesses.

Jim Phillips of Tallahassee recommends starting training by focusing on whatever portion of the race is your weakest, and then preparing accordingly. The exception to this rule, he said, is the swim.

“The race doesn’t start until you start running, so get to the run in the best shape and as quickly as you can,” Phillips said. “You can afford to lose an hour on the swim, but not several hours on the run.”

Race Director Ben Rausa had a similar perspective. He said athletes should take the race one stage at a time — not just physically, but mentally as well.

“You’ve got to swim before you bike,” said Rausa, who has been the race director since 2008. “You’ve got to bike before you run. You’ve got to finish, but take it one stage at a time.”

Training Priorities

Most athletes will agree that coach or no coach, it’s essential to have a structured training plan with direction.

Stiles works with a coach who has developed a customized training plan that factors in his work schedule, available training time and personal strengths and weaknesses. He said this has been hugely beneficial in his training process.

Tallahassee resident Jamie Fortune plans to run in 2016, but the first thing she’ll do is hire a coach to start training. Her priority, she said, is figuring out what to do and how not to hurt herself in the process.

Trucks still has no coach, and he’s still going strong.

In addition to a training plan, every athlete emphasized nutrition as a huge part of race preparation.

Stiles was blunt.

“You need to know exactly how many calories to consume every hour or you’ll run out of gas,” he said. “You also need to know what kind of nutrition you can intake without irritation. I’m lucky. I have an iron stomach.”

Phillips agreed.

“Fluid and food intake is the most important part of your race day,” he said. “You also have to practice it in training to know what works for you.”

Words of Training Wisdom

So what personal words of wisdom would these athletes offer? Turns out, they had a lot of advice. And that, according to Stiles, is one of the unique aspects of the Ironman community.

“There are so many people with information and advice, and everyone is so generous with sharing what they know,” Stiles said. “There are also plenty of groups on social media, especially Facebook, that can serve as a resource.”

Stiles’ top tip? Consistency.

“Consistency is key,” he said. “I have to have the mindset that I’m going to do each workout without making any excuses.”

Excuses would be easy — Stiles trains five days a week, sometimes putting in two workouts a day. Weekends are for the longer workouts.

Phillips said his most important race day tip is not to wear, eat or change anything that you haven’t used, worn or eaten for at least five long workouts. Rausa agreed; he said not to change anything at all the week of the race.

Trucks said a lot of athletes often overlook getting the proper amount of rest while training, which can lead to injury.

“As race day approaches, training hours will increase,” he said. “Your body has to get enough rest.”

Have Fun

If you’re going to train for an Ironman, make the Florida Ironman a top priority. Rausa said the pristine beaches, the open water swim and the moderate weather makes the race an excellent experience — one that often sells out within days. The best way to get a spot is to volunteer at the race the year before.

“Every year, we need roughly 4,000 volunteers for 2,800 racers,” he said. “If you volunteer, you get a good spot in line for the next year’s race.”

Stiles volunteered last year so he could race this year. He said his No.1 goal is to finish comfortably.

Trucks said his favorite landmark along the course is the finish line.

And Phillips did have one more tip: Have fun.

“Have fun in the training and the race, and remember why you are out there,” he said. “Your time is not as important as fun, and the longer your time the more fun you are having!”

FLORIDA IRONMAN RACE

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Zen and the Art of Organic Cuisine

Lotus Cafe reveals itself to growing number of customers

BY STEVE BORNHOFT

TWENTY YEARS AGO, Joe McKenna declared that he will live to age 117, and he has never stopped saying so.

Get to know him and you'll find yourself giving him at least an outside chance. He survived 2007, after all.

In that year, McKenna lost his mother to colon cancer. He learned that he had the same disease. An electrical fire that originated in an air conditioning system gutted his business, Zen Garden, which already had been hit hard by the recession.

Under those circumstances, a less resilient man might have shriveled. McKenna got stronger.

"When I received my cancer diagnosis, my partner, Sandy (Pearson), shed a tear, but I didn't cry," McKenna says matter-of-factly. "I told myself that it was just another challenge that I needed to overcome."

McKenna would do so in unconventional fashion. No chemo. No doctors. His chief support was instead an airbrush artist named Kenny who had worked at one time for Ann Wigmore, celebrated by some as the godmother of health foods. It was she who made wheatgrass shots a staple at juice bars.

"It's hard to find people to back you up when you eschew medical doctors, but you need someone to encourage you," McKenna found. "For me, that was Kenny."

McKenna took steps to give his digestive tract a vacation, consuming only raw foods for six months — that is, apart from the bentonite clay he ate believing that it would pull toxins from internal organs. Kenny served to keep McKenna on program and prepared many of his meals.

Meanwhile, Zen Garden, which had been home to a plant nursery, landscaping operation, and spaces for yoga and massage therapy, also was at rest. McKenna and Pearson had a fundamental decision to make: They could walk away from the property located on Richard Jackson Boulevard between Back Beach and Middle Beach roads, or they could try to resuscitate it. They chose the latter course. The garden wouldn't let them go.

McKenna and Pearson had acquired the heavily wooded property and residence in 1996 from the Churchwell family, which had made a fortune in the amusement park

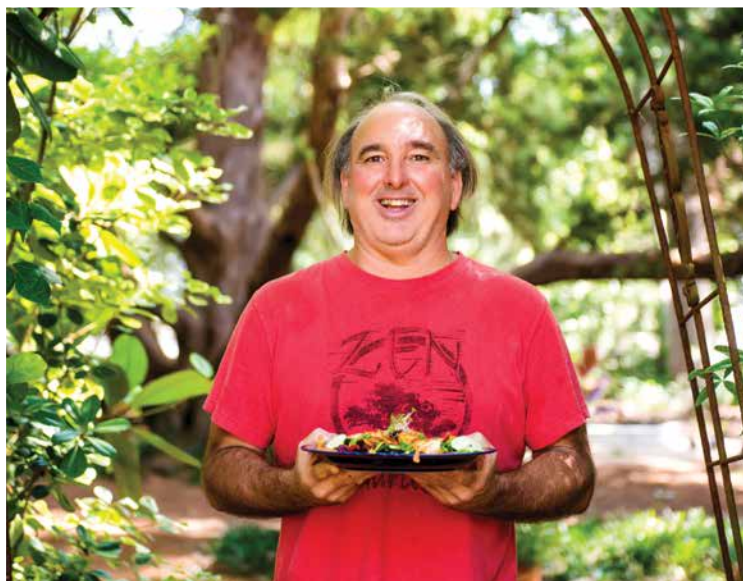


The Lotus Cafe affords diners a serene setting in which to enjoy healthy eats. Says owner Joe McKenna, "Here, you will never run into someone you don't want to see." Don't look for processed foods in the store that adjoins the kitchen.





Joe McKenna says he chased colon cancer by adhering to a raw foods diet that gave his digestive tract a vacation. Yoga classes have long been held at his oasis on the beach.



“When Sandy relented and we opened things up, that made the place a lot less daunting. We’ve rarely had a customer who didn’t want to come back again — I mean, why wouldn’t you? Here, you never run into anyone that you don’t want to see. Our problem was getting people back here in the first place.”

— Joe McKenna

business. Just months earlier, Hurricane Opal had battered the Florida Panhandle. Over time, they would replace blowdowns with saplings, gently nurse Pearson’s dream of running a plant business and develop a close attachment to an oasis of green in a town built on sand.

When McKenna recovered sufficiently from his bout with cancer, he went to work waiting tables at George’s restaurant in Alys Beach. There he worked with a dreamer and a vegan, Adam, who sold him on the idea of establishing an organic cuisine restaurant and juice bar at Zen Garden. It would come to be known as the Lotus Cafe, a nod to the hundreds of lotus flowers that bloom in a pond located just steps from the cafe’s outdoor dining area.

The menu is a reflection of a man who saved himself by eating carefully and naturally. Here you can throw back a wheatgrass shot for \$4 or choose from smoothies including the Peanut Butter Buddha, Morning Meditation and Antioxidant. A Jerk Chicken Plate with black rice and zen slaw runs \$12. Serenity comes at no extra charge, and wading birds keep their distance.

Today, Fred, the cook, removed pulp — carrots, apple, beets, lemon and ginger — from a juicer and shaped it into a patty that he placed on the grill. He had McKenna sample it.

“It wasn’t bad,” McKenna brightens. “Add some spices and it could really be good. I’m not sure what I’d call it, though. Veggie Trashburger?”

That name is not likely to appeal to the cafe’s core customer, a professional woman with time for a leisurely lunch.

“And they may get around to bringing their husbands or boyfriends and their children,” McKenna says. “Once in a while, a cool dude will wander in by himself, and it didn’t hurt when the new gym (Sequence) went in right down the street.”

It’s helped, too, that Zen Garden, which always had been obscured by trees that Pearson would not allow to be trimmed, finally has been unshrouded.

“When Sandy relented and we opened things up, that made the place a lot less daunting,” McKenna says. “We’ve rarely had a customer who didn’t want to come back again — I mean, why wouldn’t you? Here, you never run into anyone that you don’t want to see. Our problem was getting people back here in the first place.”

In addition to the cafe, “back here” includes a yoga studio built two years ago and a market where shoppers can stock up on spirulina and other superfoods. A tenant business, Wild Root, sells seeds, herbs, air plants and fruit trees.

But the overall effect of the place is that of a giant terrarium in which diners and artists and, occasionally, mourners and wedding

parties take the place of newts and frogs. The work of maintaining the Zen Garden greenscape is never done.

“A lot of businesses can manicure their grounds with a leaf blower in a minute and a half,” McKenna offers. “But there is always a million things we could be doing. We’re slaves to this place.”

Not that McKenna would have it any other way.

“I want this property to continue to be what it wants to be,” McKenna stresses. “I would hate for it to be developed as a hotel. When I leave this place, I’d like to see it become a city park.

“This is a good place for people and for the community. People can meet here and think here and paint here removed from distractions. And they can offload stuff. We accumulate way too much bad baggage. When I had cancer, I learned that I hadn’t let go of my mother. I was literally carrying her illness around. You’ve got to lighten your load for the long haul.”

Don’t look for McKenna to be motivated by the trappings of wealth.

“Money is not what makes me spin,” McKenna says. “In the end, what does it really do? Life is what makes me spin.”

And, at 52, McKenna, the way he figures it, has another 65 years of living to go. ●



Wild Root, a store at the Lotus Cafe sells all the ingredients needed to assemble a terrarium. The cafe's verdant surroundings themselves resemble a terrarium, a respite for people seeking quiet on a bustling beach.

Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center

CHOOSE QUALITY AND SAFETY

Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is a 218-bed acute-care hospital located in Panama City. The hospital was named a Top 100 Hospital by Truven Health Analytic and recently unveiled a 42-bed critical care wing, which includes a 20-bed adult-level Intensive Care Unit and the region's only four-bed Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and an 18-bed (six Level III) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.



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Pier Pleasure

The shopping is supreme, fish meet their fate and the bands play on

BY STEVE BORNHOFT AND GINA DAVIDSON

BEYOND HERE LIES nothing save for a seemingly limitless expanse of salt water and the horizon. Here, at the end of the Russell-Fields Pier on Panama City Beach, anglers geared up with heavy spinning rods and outsized reels heave Spanish sardines as far as they can toward Mexico.

They attract onlookers who are unfamiliar with their sport and can only imagine what they may be trying to catch.

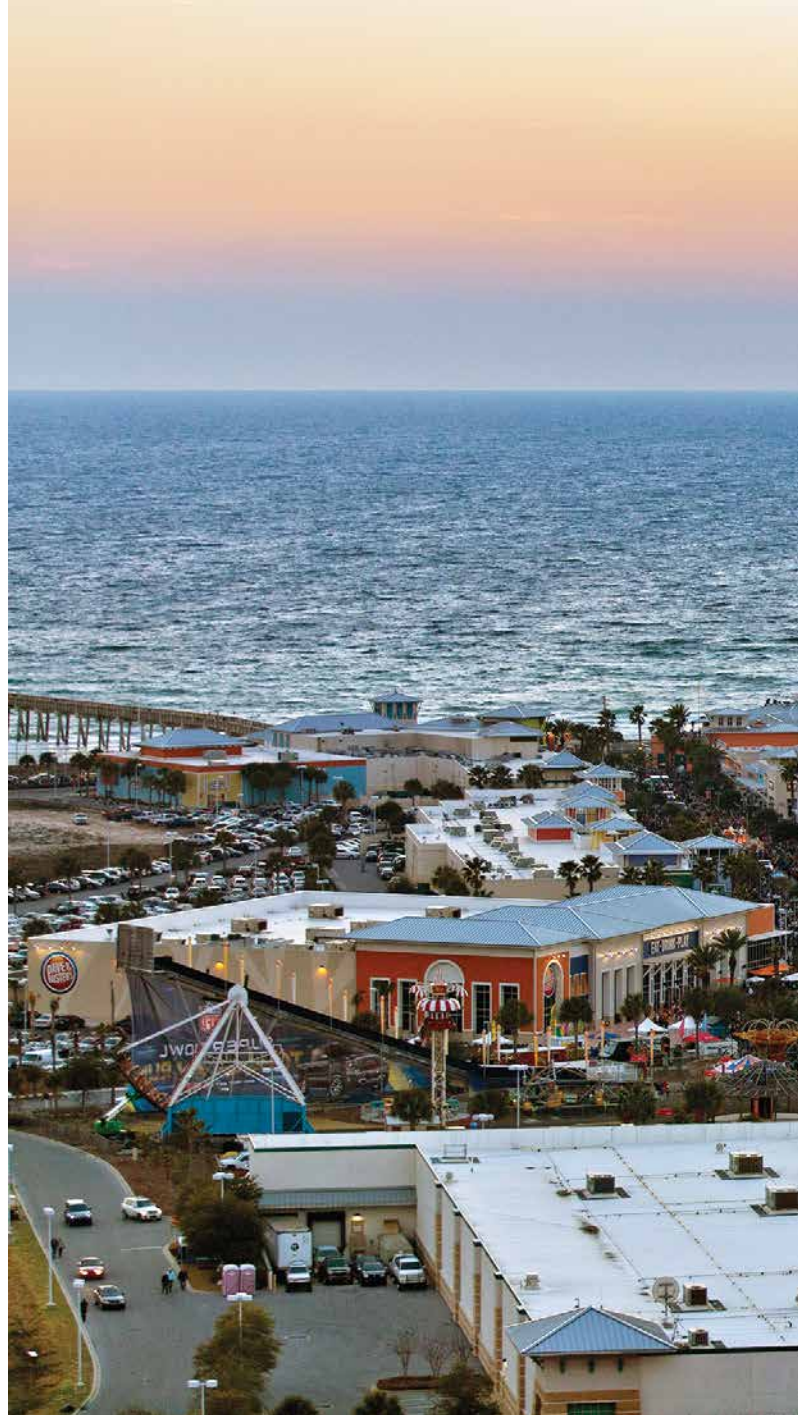
Two anglers exchange opinions about how best to retrieve the sardines, along the bottom or near the surface. They agree that they are fishing in the tideline, a good thing.

Moments later, the quiet is disturbed when a helicopter out of Eglin Air Force Base buzzes the pier. Its cargo doors are open and personnel on board sit with their feet dangling from the aircraft. The chopper banks sharply toward shore and then cruises along the beach at no more than 150 feet above the sand. In such a way, two critically important sectors of the Northwest Florida economy, tourism and the military, all but shake hands.

Then it happens. A slashing king mackerel hits what will prove to be his last supper — a sardine impaled on a treble hook — and a lucky angler rears back on his rod in response. With considerable skill, the angler avoids others' lines and pier pilings, playing the fish until it exhausts itself. An acquaintance deploys a gaff hook on a stout rope and soon the mackerel, about an 8-pounder, is on the deck of the pier. It's more than enough to intrigue a suddenly gathered audience and infuse other anglers with renewed optimism.

The 1,500-foot Russell-Fields Pier, known less formally as the City Pier or the concrete pier, was for decades a somewhat isolated attraction. All that has changed. Today, the pier is

Anglers, as they have for decades, try their luck at the Russell-Fields Pier while visitors and residents from throughout the region are lured to the namesake Pier Park area's shops, eateries and entertainment venues.



an appendage jutting from Pier Park, a collection of retail businesses, attractions, restaurants, watering holes and an amphitheater whose advent was enough to change shopping patterns in Bay and surrounding counties.

The successful angler, as he heads to the hill with his prize, pauses to watch beach volleyball games underway on several of the 10 courts located just east of the pier. Skill levels vary among the players. Generally, the deeper the tan, the better the digger. The angler looks to his left and is amused by the antics of a labrador puppy at a dog-friendly stretch of sand. The pup's owners intend that it retrieve a tennis ball, but unnerved by the surf, it bolts for terra firma instead.

As he exits the gate to the pier, the angler looks up and is greeted by an archway that welcomes people to Pier Park. Beyond it lies most everything that the hungry, the thirsty, the clothes horse and the souvenir shopper might desire.

The sun sets at Pier Park, an open-air mall and event center that has given rise to additional development both west and north of its original footprint.



Pier Park is Panama City Beach's newest family-friendly destination, offering more than 125 retail and dining choices, as well as special events almost every month of the year. The one-of-a-kind epicenter extending from Front Beach Road to Back Beach Road features resort style, island-inspired architecture and, what's more, it has spawned additional development to the west and north of Pier Park's original footprint. The area's evolution has been analogous to a hospital rapidly adding new buildings housing new specialties.

At the main campus, shoppers find the latest fashions in local boutiques **Deja Vu**, **Hy's Toggery** and **Pink Narcissus** — a **Lilly Pulitzer Signature Store**, and at popular favorites **Dillard's**, **Ron Jon Surf Shop**, **Forever 21**, **Victoria's Secret**, **Old Navy** and **LOFT**.

Diners can head over to **Tootsie's Orchid Lounge** for Southern dishes such as a Low Country Shrimp Boil accompanied by live country music every night of the week, or pop over to the **Hofbrau Beer Garden** for traditional German food and drinks. Beachfront

restaurants **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville** and **Pompano Joe's** offer local seafood and a beautiful view of the Gulf of Mexico.

Entertainment options include **Dave & Buster's** and **The Grand IMAX Theatre**.

Immediately east of the main Pier Park shopping district off Powell Adams Road lies the **Miracle Strip Amusement Park**. The attraction represents a reincarnation of the old Miracle Strip Amusement Park, which was located along Alf Coleman Road. Today's park invites a sense of nostalgia for anyone old enough to recall Panama City Beach's Top of the Strip Observation Tower or giant King Neptune statue — as surely as it provokes a sense of wonder among the young.

The park offers thrill rides and kiddie rides, almost all of them enduring favorites. There is a towering Ferris wheel, the spinsational Tilt-a-Whirl and a vintage carousel with horses gray, chocolate, palomino and appaloosa. (Kids gravitate first to the latter; they always have.)



There's even a butterfly garden and a duck pond, complete with mallards.

Adjoining Pier Park to the west is the **Aaron Bessant Park and Amphitheater**, an immaculately manicured, dog-friendly green space. A flag park on the property includes a veteran's memorial. Small, freshwater lakes nearby the 70-acre park are said to hold bass and bream.

The park is home to three paved hiking trails that provide more contour than you might expect to find so close to the Gulf. The park each year serves as the start-finish line for a number of fundraising running races — 5K events and some longer courses.

The **Frank Brown Recreational Complex** is another great place to stretch your legs, run the bases, swim some laps or introduce your pooch to fellow canines. The park, located north of Back Beach Road and just west of Pier Park, rates a homerun with the organizers of softball and youth baseball tournaments that draw competitors from throughout the Southeast and beyond. Multiple purpose fields accommodate youth soccer leagues and, increasingly, lacrosse at the high school level.

The aquatic facility at Frank Brown features an Olympic-size pool and was the site in 2014 of the U.S. Masters Synchronized Swimming National Championship.

The park's festival grounds are the site of the Pepsi "Country on the Coast" Gulf Coast Jam featuring the biggest names in country music. In addition, they play host to events as varied as the Gulf Coast Charity Horse Show or the spring and fall Thunder Beach motorcycle rallies.

Too, Frank Brown is the trailhead for a network of paved paths named for Panama City Beach Mayor Gayle Oberst. Popular with walkers, runners, bicyclists and Roller Bladers, Gayle's Trails extend from the city's Conservation Park (and more trails) on the west to the Colony Club subdivision and golf courses on the east, with a connected section running north as far as the intracoastal waterway.

The fenced-in dog park features multiple water stations and a large exercise yard and attracts a different menagerie each day.

Hang a right as you exit Frank Brown and a short ways later, at the intersection of Back Beach Road and Pearl Street, you'll encounter Pier Market, a bazaar that features coastal and country themes. Local vendors

When it comes to a tremendous variety of things to do in close proximity, the Pier Park area may be peerless. And, in addition to its year-round attractions, parks, recreational venues and retail and dining options, the neighborhood is also the location for a robust roster of exciting events including:

Pirates of the High Seas Fest, Oct. 9–10, 2015

More than 25,000 people visit Pier Park for this highly anticipated, family-friendly event that features fireworks, parades, pirate battle reenactments and live music.

Boo 'n Brew, Oct. 31, 2015

New this fall is a Halloween-themed beer festival sure to become an annual must-do.

Christmas Tree Lighting and Santa's Arrival, Nov. 27, 2015

New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop, Dec. 31, 2015

Topping the list of Pier Park's premier events is the annual Beach Ball Drop, which draws more than 40,000 people to the region. It's the area's most family-friendly New Year's Eve party and unlike any other in the nation. The free event kicks off at 5:30 p.m. and includes activities specifically designed for children. Little ones can enjoy bounce houses, a snow zone complete with snow machines, a special kid's zone, seven-foot-tall inflated beach balls, giveaways and more. The highlight of the night is an 8 p.m. Beach Ball Drop, where more than 10,000 inflatable beach balls are released from nets high above Pier Park's boardwalk to parties below while fireworks light up the sky. For late-night revelers, there are more giveaways and live music that provides a rockin' countdown to midnight when an 800-pound lighted beach ball descends nearly 100 feet to the delight of the crowd below. Another round of fireworks draws the celebration to a close. This year's headlining act is The Celebrity AllStars, a versatile band comprising former members of Earth, Wind & Fire, The Eagles, Billy Joel, Stevie Wonder, Janet Jackson, Kenny Loggins, Bette Midler, Mariah Carey and Garth Brooks. Having made their Panama City Beach debut at last year's New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop, the high-energy group will be returning to amp up the crowd with a mix of current Top 40 hits and classic rock favorites to get them dancing into 2016.

Mardi Gras and Music Festival, February

Bead-craving festival-goers take over the streets of Pier Park for this family-friendly annual tradition recently named a Top 10 Mardi Gras celebration outside of New Orleans.

Taste of the Beach Food and Art Festival, May

This event celebrates the chefs from Pier Park and from some of Northwest Florida's leading restaurants as they battle for the top spot and bragging rights. The beachfront culinary tasting event entices attendees with a variety of eats from many of Pier Park and Northwest Florida's leading restaurants, and provides attendees with a day of live entertainment, children's activities and more.

Visitors who are looking for a place to shop, dine or party will no doubt find just the right fit in the greater Pier Park neighborhood — any time of the year.

offer an eclectic mix of items that includes tupelo honey, driftwood, organic foods and antiques.

Just east of Frank Brown lies Pier Park North, anchored by **Dick's Sporting Goods** and **World Market**, where you can find polka-dot straws, ceramic starfish, Mississippi Mud Black and Tan Beer and faux fur pillows under one roof. Coming soon at this writing is a **Fresh Market** grocery store sure to appeal to sophisticated foodies. For now, they can sample the upscale pub fare and craft drinks at the gastropub known as **The Craft Bar**. For the Neanderthal that survives in some of us, there is **Jake's Wayback Burgers** where, if you can down a regular size soft drink and order of fries along with a Triple Triple — that's a burger nine patties high — in eight minutes, the meal is free.

New businesses also have sprouted to the west of the main campus across Pier Park Drive. They include four first-in-the-market eateries.

The Brass Tap offers full-service dining and more than 300 varieties of craft beers, including stouts, lagers, IPAs and more, plus a diverse selection of wines. Diners also can choose from classic and unique bar fare items.

For barbecue lovers, **Dickey's Barbecue Pit** serves up a variety of meats, including brisket, pulled pork, ham, polish sausage, turkey, and chicken, all smoked daily on-site. In addition, Dickey's will serve an array of homestyle side dishes and dill pickles. Bonuses include complimentary ice cream and free meals for kids on Sundays.

Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches features a selection of freshly baked bread topped with meat and veggies that are sliced fresh in-house every day. The restaurant is known for counter service that is freakishly fast and also offers delivery service.

Beyond Pier Park's gateway arch lies most everything that the hungry, the thirsty, the clothes horse and the souvenir shopper might desire. Too, Pier Park is home to events throughout the year including a New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop that attracts huge throngs of revelers.

With a focus on high-quality fresh ingredients, **Chipotle Mexican Grill** offers delicious salads, burritos, burrito bowls and tacos filled with environmentally conscious sourced meats and ingredients at reasonable prices.

For both visitors from out of town and local area residents with a desire to go "parking" for the weekend, the Pier Park area offers a variety of accommodations ranging from the vintage Osprey Motel and Driftwood Lodge to the contemporary Calypso Resort to the quaint Summer-Towne Cottages. Consult VisitPanamaCityBeach.com for complete "Places to Stay" listings. Click on the "Browse Locations" filter and then select Pier Park from the dropdown menu.

Some may be inspired to make the Pier Park neighborhood a permanent home. Several subdivisions are located in the immediate area including Palmetto Trace, Summerwood and Open Sands. Whether for a shopping excursion, a night on the town, a week on the sand, or a permanent place to hang your hat, the Pier Park neighborhood has much to offer. ●

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Prime Rib and Primo Fish

Boar's Head offers balanced menu **BY STEVE BORNHOFT**

BARRY ROSS ISN'T CONTENT just to make dinner for people. He strives to make their night, and he's been making nights since first opening his restaurant 37 years ago.

Consistently for 34.

Ross and his wife, Robin, own the Boar's Head Restaurant near the west end of Panama City Beach, a fine-dining establishment loved by locals and visitors alike. Most don't know, however, that this longtime favorite for special occasions was at least partially inspired by a submarine sandwich shop.

Nor is there a universal favorite dish ... or even category! Tourists, Ross finds, favor the Boar's Head as a first-rate seafood restaurant, despite its decidedly turfy name. Locals come for the beef.

The Rosses were living in Miami and working their first jobs out of college when they developed a relationship with a sub shop where they loved to eat.

"Robin was a schoolteacher and I was working as a bank examiner for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency," Ross recalls. "Because we were both working for the government, we had a lot of free time and wondered if we couldn't start a sandwich place of our own on the side."

Barry's parents convinced him to aim higher. They owned the Gulf-front Rendezvous Motel at the site today of the luxury Palazzo Condominiums development. Ross' father convinced his son that if he were serious about getting into the restaurant business, he should do so right across Front Beach Road from the Rendezvous — and the motel would benefit.

"My father told me that whenever a guest would ask him for a restaurant recommendation, he'd wind up sending them past every other motel and hotel on the beach," Ross says. "My father agreed to finance our restaurant and, along with my brother, Kenny, we took the plunge."

They knew the hospitality business from the standpoint of the motel, but none possessed any restaurant experience. They were about to embark, says Ross, on a "very expensive education."

Consistency proved elusive for those first three years.

"I know a local doctor who is still here who told folks that he had had both the best and the worst meals of his life at the Boar's Head Restaurant," Ross says. "I felt like that was a fairly honest appraisal of where we were. On any given day, you just never knew. But after



three years, we achieved consistency. And that was the beginning of a nice long upward climb."

Over time, the menu at the Boar's Head has mirrored the growth of the west end of the beach. Today, Ross says, it is the most balanced menu — red meat, pork and seafood — anywhere from Apalachicola to Pensacola.

The Boar's Head's aim from the beginning was to excel at prime rib, and it always has been a specialty of the house. But Ross is equally proud of his approach to fresh Gulf fish. He buys whole fish daily from Water Street Seafood in Franklin County. The skin of the fish is a reliable indicator of its freshness and a natural wrapper that preserves its flavor.

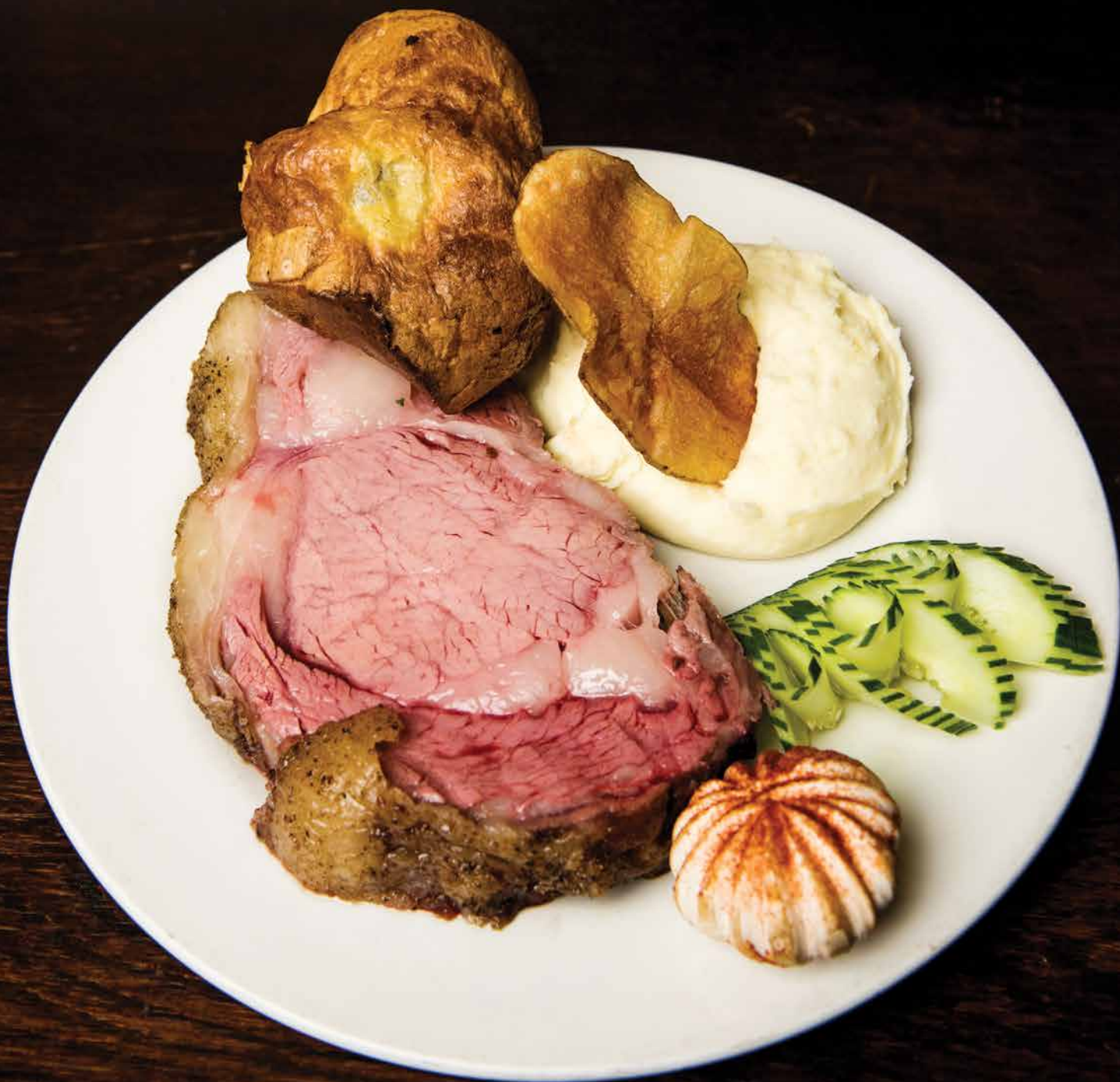
"We're not dockside, but you're going to have a hard time finding fish fresher than ours," Ross offers.

Ross is as particular as his spoiled customers. He purchases black and deepwater yellowedge grouper only. Red grouper is more plentiful and less expensive, but Ross won't have grouper on his menu if red is the only grouper available. He learned long ago that customers can detect the difference.

Fish at the Boar's Head are chargrilled, a concept that necessitates using the best, freshest fish possible.

"It's a simple, straightforward process that displays the innate quality and freshness of the fish," Ross says. "You're not masking it with a lot of flavors."

When Robin and Barry Ross established the Boar's Head Restaurant, they resolved to serve the best prime rib in the area. Thirty-seven years later, it remains a signature dish at the restaurant.



"I deal with happy people, people who are treating themselves well on a special occasion. Lots of customers come here because they have developed an attachment to a particular dish. They may look forward to it for months." — Barry Ross

The Boar's Head pioneered fried lobster as both an entrée and an appetizer. Ross insists upon slipper-tail lobster, a warm-water species from Australia.

"And we've got a great baby-back pork rib," Ross adds. "Pork is in our name, if you please."

Here, too, Ross insists upon the best product available. Ross buys ribs imported from Denmark, where they are harvested from smaller animals than is the case domestically. The result is a rib with a higher proportion of rib to bone and a smaller amount of fat.

Thirty-seven years ago, one of the first things Ross learned was that the restaurant business wasn't going to be what he envisioned.

"We saw ourselves reading *Gourmet* magazine and testing recipes in our kitchen and putting our favorites on the menu, but we found that the business is far too intense for that kind of leisurely approach," Ross says. "Besides, it's not about our taste buds."

Robin Ross, however, developed a recipe, "Special Fillet," that has withstood the test of time.

Tenderloin medallions are sautéed in a "garlic brown sauce beef gravy that is totally unique and absolutely, delectably delicious," Ross says lovingly. "It's the sort of thing that someone who is trying to work on his cholesterol doesn't need to run into too often but, boy, is it good."

Robin remains an important part of the business, serving as its webmaster, and a son, Barry Jr., began work as a manager about a year ago. It's his second tour of duty at the restaurant. Starting at age 12, he worked as a busboy and server.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed that he will stay with the business," Ross says. "He's enabled Robin and me to devote more of our time and energy to doting on our first grandchild," born to daughter Amy, a Panama City attorney.

Not that Ross, 67, is entertaining thoughts of retiring. The restaurant is his livelihood and his social life.



Barry Ross, center, his wife, Robin and son Barry Jr., combine to manage the family business.



"I don't see my neighbors at Bay Point when I'm home," Ross says. "I see them when they come to the Boar's Head to eat."

Ross confesses that every 10 years or so he may think about doing something else.

"But I've never come across anything that would be as fun or as interesting as what I'm doing," he says. "What I do doesn't feel like work."

"I deal with happy people, people who are treating themselves well on a special occasion. Lots of customers come here because they have developed an attachment to a particular dish. They may look forward to it for months."

Ross pauses and then recognizes that he has served customers from three generations of some families.

"Anyone who goes into the restaurant business and survives 10 years deserves a tip of the hat," Ross calculates and then adds, "We've been very fortunate." ●

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Honoring Courage

The Navy Diving and Salvage Training Center salutes military diving's proud history **BY JASON DEHART**

IT TAKES A SPECIAL BREED of human being to brave the crushing depths of the deep. But whether it's saving lives or advancing scientific knowledge, you'll find military divers ready to jump in to make a difference. Navy officials are celebrating that commitment by designating 2015 the "Year of the Military Diver."

Cmdr. Hung Cao, commanding officer of the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center (NDSTC) in Panama City Beach, notes that 2015 marks important milestones in the history of military

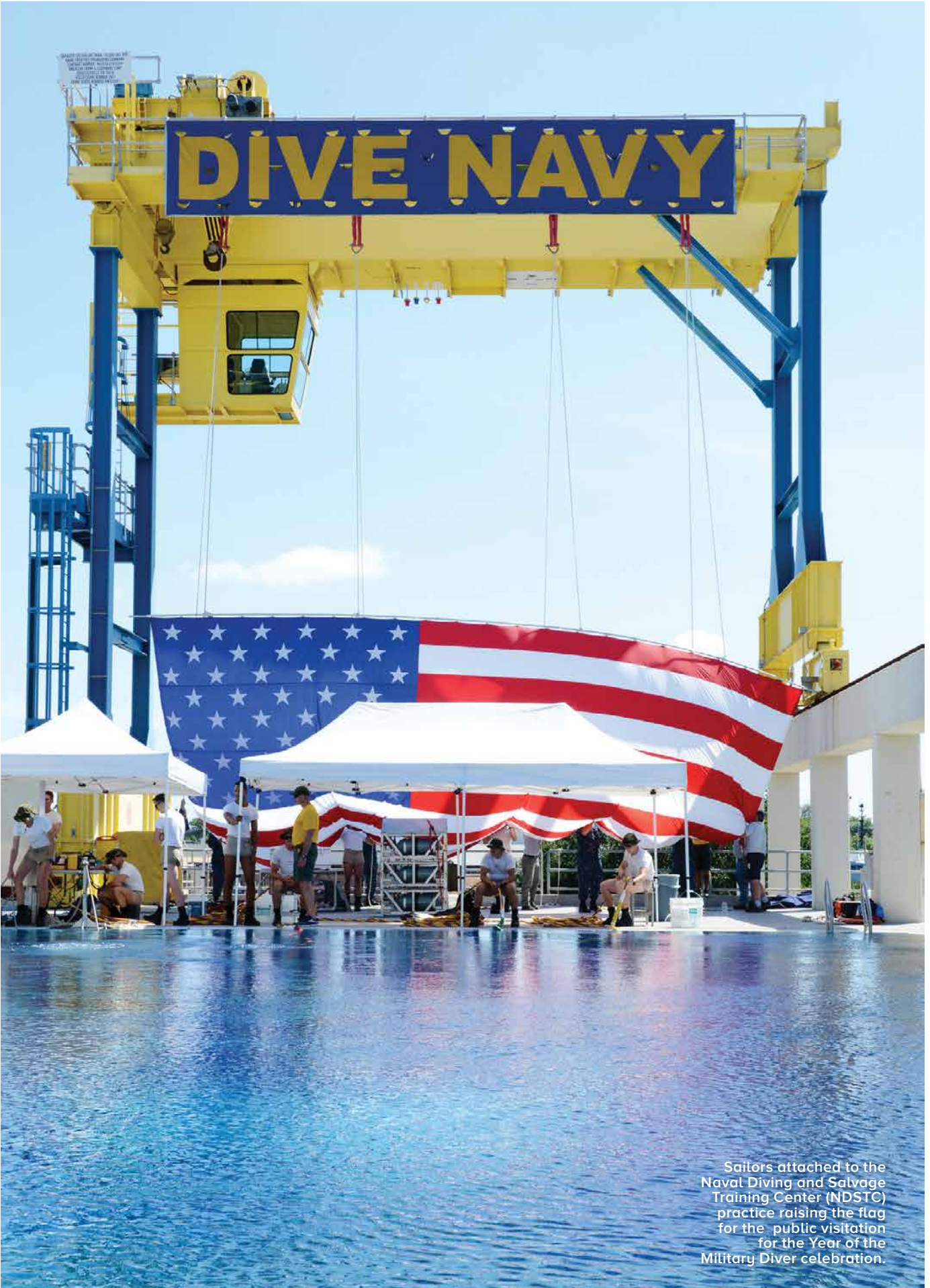
diving, starting with the iconic Mark V helmet — the symbol of military diving.

"This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Mark V dive helmet, the workhorse of Navy deep sea divers for 65 years and the trademark of courage, perseverance and professionalism," Cao says. "Although the Dive Manual lists 1916 for the year when the U.S. Navy adopted the Mark V, research and development actually occurred the previous year, according to the Diving Historical Society."

U.S. NAVY



Students at Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center conduct training operations in the center's 40-foot-deep Aquatic Training Facility.



Sailors attached to the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center (NDSTC) practice raising the flag for the public visitation for the Year of the Military Diver celebration.

Cao says the goal of the Year of the Military Diver observance is to commemorate this historical milestone, which paved the way for men and women to conquer the treacherous ocean depths.

“This year-long commemoration may serve as a reminder to our country of everything military divers have done for this great nation,” he says.

The centennial is being celebrated along with the 35th anniversary of the NDSTC, which is the largest diving facility in the world. All branches of the U.S. armed forces, including the U.S. Coast Guard, are trained at the center.

More than 1,200 students train each year at NDSTC. It features 23 certified diver life support systems (including six hyperbaric chambers), two diving simulators, an aquatics training facility (which includes the second largest pool in the U.S.), a submarine lockout trunk and two diving tenders for open-ocean diving support. The school also offers an international course for officers and enlisted divers from allied and coalition nations. The year 2015 also marks the 70th anniversary of the U.S. Navy’s presence in Panama City Beach and the 40th year of female divers.

“The Year of the Military Diver will not only highlight great achievements, but also the great servicemen and women who made these achievements,”

Cao says. “These success stories include divers such as Carl Brashear, who shattered barriers to become the first African-American master diver, and Donna Tobias, the first female Navy diver.”

Military divers have gone above and beyond the call of duty for generations. For example, in 1939, four brave divers risked their lives to rescue 33 survivors of an accident that sunk the submarine USS Squalus. Their work proved the concept of submarine rescue and earned the four the Medal of Honor. But there was soon to be much more work for military divers.

“After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, it was Navy divers who raised every ship sunk (with the exception of the USS Arizona and the USS Utah) back to the surface and sent them back to chase the Japanese fleet, demonstrating to the world that the indomitable American spirit can never be subdued,” Cao says.

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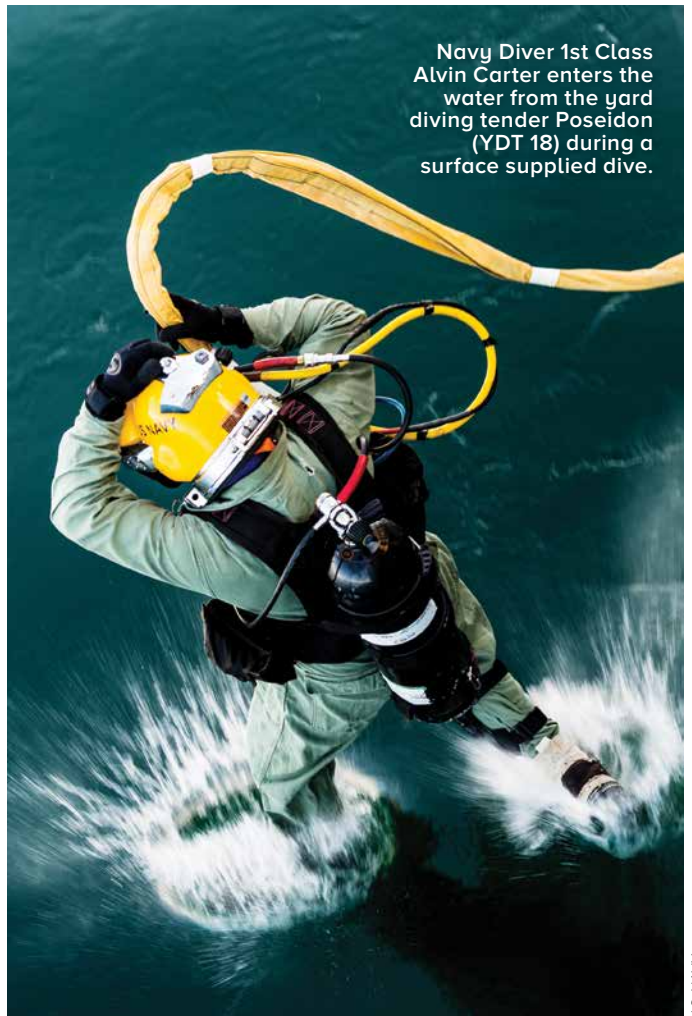
— Cmdr. Hung Cao, commanding officer of the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center

“Since that time, whether it was TWA Flight 800 and other airline disasters, the space shuttle Challenger, the Minnesota I-35 bridge collapse, mineshaft collapses, the Fukushima power plant meltdown or the Korean ferry boat capsized, military divers have been there for every tragedy to help heal the wounds of the world.”

Too, the underwater research conducted by the Navy has greatly benefited commercial and recreational divers.

“Whether they received their certification from the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) or Scuba Schools International (SSI), all of the tables and charts used were created from the sweat and sometimes blood of divers of the Navy Experimental Dive Unit,” Cao says.

“When divers are hurt, they are treated by recompression tables also created by NEDU. The benefits of hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) therapy are not limited to just diving casualties, but the super-oxygenation of cells has been successful in treating gangrene and carbon monoxide poisoning. Recently, HBO therapy has had reported successes in cases of treating traumatic brain injuries. Wherever HBO research may one day lead, it all began with a Navy diver willing to give everything for God and country.” ●



Navy Diver 1st Class Alvin Carter enters the water from the yard diving tender Poseidon (YDT 18) during a surface supplied dive.

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Autumnal Bliss

For some beach-goers,
fall beats all **BY SANDI POREDA**

AH, FALL. IT'S THE PERFECT SEASON for apples and pumpkin spice, Halloween costumes, cooler temperatures and ... the beach?

Yes, you read that correctly. Here in Panama City Beach, many locals and guests agree that fall is the best season to enjoy all that the area has to offer. But what makes it so special?

Something for everyone

By autumn, summer crowds have subsided, making Panama City Beach a laid-back destination for families, foodies and friends looking to reconnect with their toes in the sand. Fortunately, when fall rolls around in Panama City Beach, there are still months of sun and comfortable temperatures to enjoy this coastal community.

Take the Emerald Coast Cruizin Classic Car Show, for example. One of the largest classic car shows in the area, this year's show will feature more than 3,000 cars and a wide range of entertainment, from appearances by popular car celebrities to the Bellamy Brothers' Friday night musical performance at Aaron Bessant Park.

Robert Parrish, the man behind the annual event, says the main appeal is that there really is something for everyone, but adds that the beautiful beaches and the comfortable weather are also big draws for participants.

"You don't have to be a car person to participate in this event and enjoy yourself," Parrish says. "Just watching the parades of cars at Pier Park, seeing everyone create themselves in their cars — it's a must-do event."

EMERALD COAST CRUIZIN

Nov. 9-14, 2015

Aaron Bessant Park

500 W. Park Drive, Panama City Beach

EmeraldCoastCruizin.com



Spend a leisurely morning at the market

What could be better than spending a clear, sunny autumn day strolling through a farmer's market, looking for fresh produce and local arts and crafts? The Grand Lagoon Waterfront Farmers' Market has a specific mission: to raise agricultural awareness while enhancing economic opportunities in the community. This market is hopping on weekends at Capt. Anderson's Marina and features produce and local products from numerous vendors. After you've picked up your fresh fruit and veggies for the week, take advantage of the location with a stroll along the waterfront and visits to the various retail and restaurant options.

GRAND LAGOON WATERFRONT FARMERS' MARKET

Recurring weekly on Saturday and Sunday,

8 a.m.—2 p.m.

Capt. Anderson's Marina

5550 N. Lagoon Drive

Panama City Beach

Try a new athletic activity

Cooler and calm, fall in Panama City Beach and environs is the perfect time of year for a feat of physical fitness. We recommend beach walking — the sunrises and sunsets are SPECTACULAR. Or you may be looking for something a little more challenging. How about 140.6 miles more challenging? Panama City Beach is home to the only full distance Ironman race in Florida. Athletes often use the event to qualify for the World Championship Ironman in Kona, Hawaii. “Our open water swim is a big draw for our athletes because it’s very similar to Kona,” said race director Ben Rausa. “The beauty of the beach is also remarkable, and the lower temperatures on race day are huge selling points for us.”

If you’re going to compete in an Ironman competition, it’s best to pick out a pretty destination and good weather.

FLORIDA IRONMAN RACE

Nov. 7, 2015
Panama City Beach
IronmanFlorida.com

Catch a concert, or 10

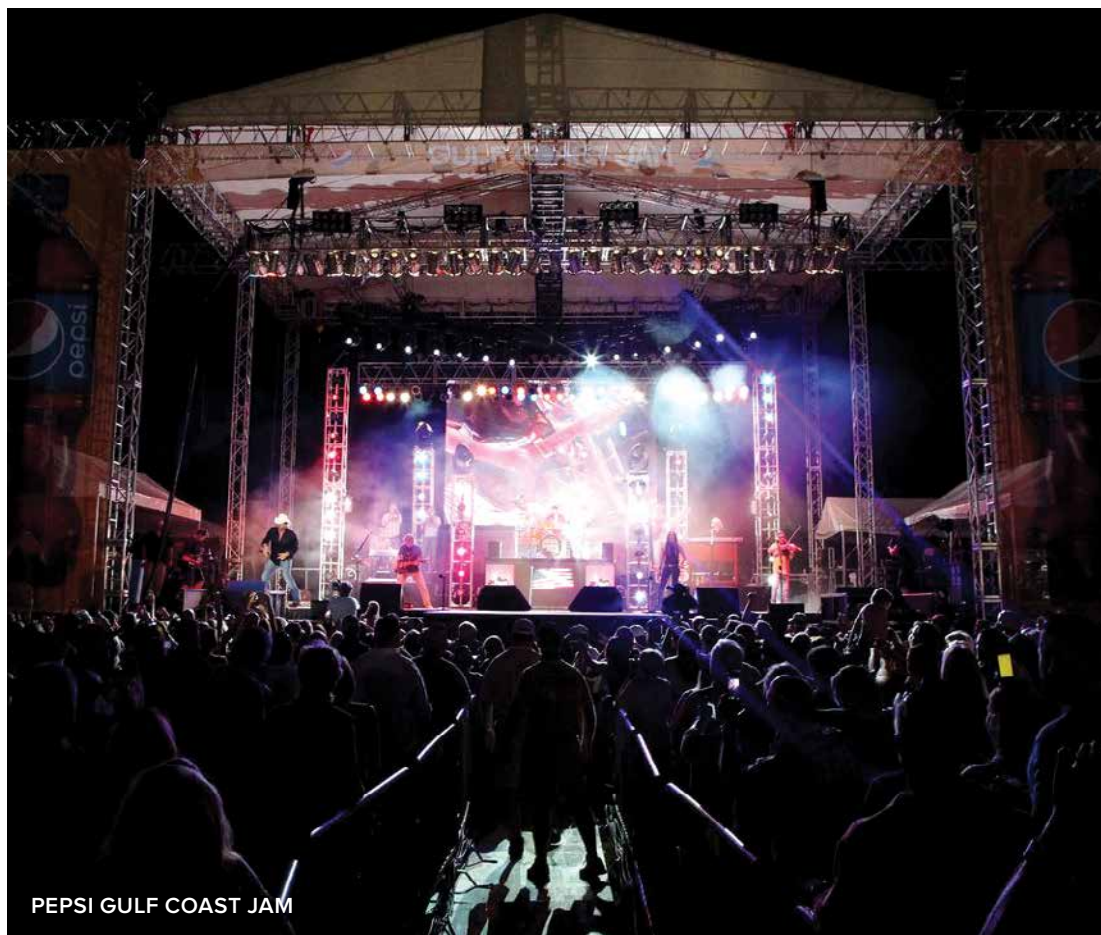
In the fall, Panama City Beach’s calendar is jam packed with entertainment options, including numerous concerts and music festivals. Pier Park and adjacent Aaron Bessant Amphitheater are the ideal locations for a rockin’ afternoon or evening.

Speaking of jams, the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam is one of the biggest musical events Panama City Beach has to offer each year. With at least 20 artists, including big names like Miranda Lambert, Keith Urban, Lady Antebellum and Martina McBride, this three-day extravaganza is one residents and guests shouldn’t miss.

PEPSI GULF COAST JAM

Sept. 4–6, 2015
Frank Brown Park
16200 Panama City Beach Parkway
Panama City Beach
GulfCoastJam.com

If you can’t make the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, don’t worry. Just a few weeks later, Alan Jackson will be in town with his Chasin’ the Sun Music Festival. Known for sing-along favorites like “Chattahoochee” and “It’s Five O’Clock





KEVIN WHITE

Somewhere” and ballads like “Remember When” and the 9/11 tribute “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning),” Mr. Jackson is a true country music legend. Mr. Jackson is a true country music legend. Also appearing at the festival will be The Landsharks, The Tams and Pablo Cruise (Friday) and Chris Stapleton and Maddie & Tae (Saturday).

CHASIN' THE SUN MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sept. 25–26, 2015
Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater
600 Pier Park Drive, Panama City Beach

On the funkier side, Panama City Beach also hosts the Chili Vibrations World Music Festival in October. The Chili Vibrations Chili Cook-Off is sanctioned by the International Chili Society, and competition is red hot.

CHILI VIBRATIONS WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

Oct. 2–4, 2015
Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater
600 Pier Park Drive, Panama City Beach

Come savor the flavors of craft beers and award-winning wines along with delectable advertisers at a tasteful tasting event sponsored by the Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce.

PANAMA CITY BEACH UNWINED VINES TO STEINS

Oct. 16–17, 2015
Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater
600 Pier Park Drive, Panama City Beach

Lie back and soak up the sun — with proper protection, of course!

Still not convinced you should head this way in the fall? Ask anyone who has been here! A recent informal Facebook survey about favorite seasons in Panama City Beach showed fall was by far the favorite. Warm temperatures, beautiful sunsets, fewer tourists and many other reasons were given, but the consensus was as clear as the water in the Gulf of Mexico.

Speaking of the Gulf of Mexico, there couldn't be a better reason to visit Panama City Beach any time of the year, but fall is especially serene. With temperatures in the mid-80s most days, conditions are perfect for a beach day. Trust us, your friends up north will be jealous. We hope to see you soon! ●

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Safety First

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



RED OVER RED
Water closed to public



YELLOW – MEDIUM HAZARD
Moderate surf and/or currents



PURPLE
Dangerous marine life



RED – HIGH HAZARD
High surf and/or strong currents



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Leave No Trace

Take only pictures, leave only footprints

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

The Leave No Trace ordinance states that all personal items will be removed and disposed of if left on the beach between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. These items include, but are not limited to, tents, chairs, toys, umbrellas and coolers. On public beaches or with the upland landowner’s permission, beachgoers may store personal belongings overnight at the toe of the dune. The toe of the dune is the area of the beach immediately seaward of the dune and beach vegetation. To be specific, it is the area of the beach that is furthest from the water that is not in a sand dune or beach access point.

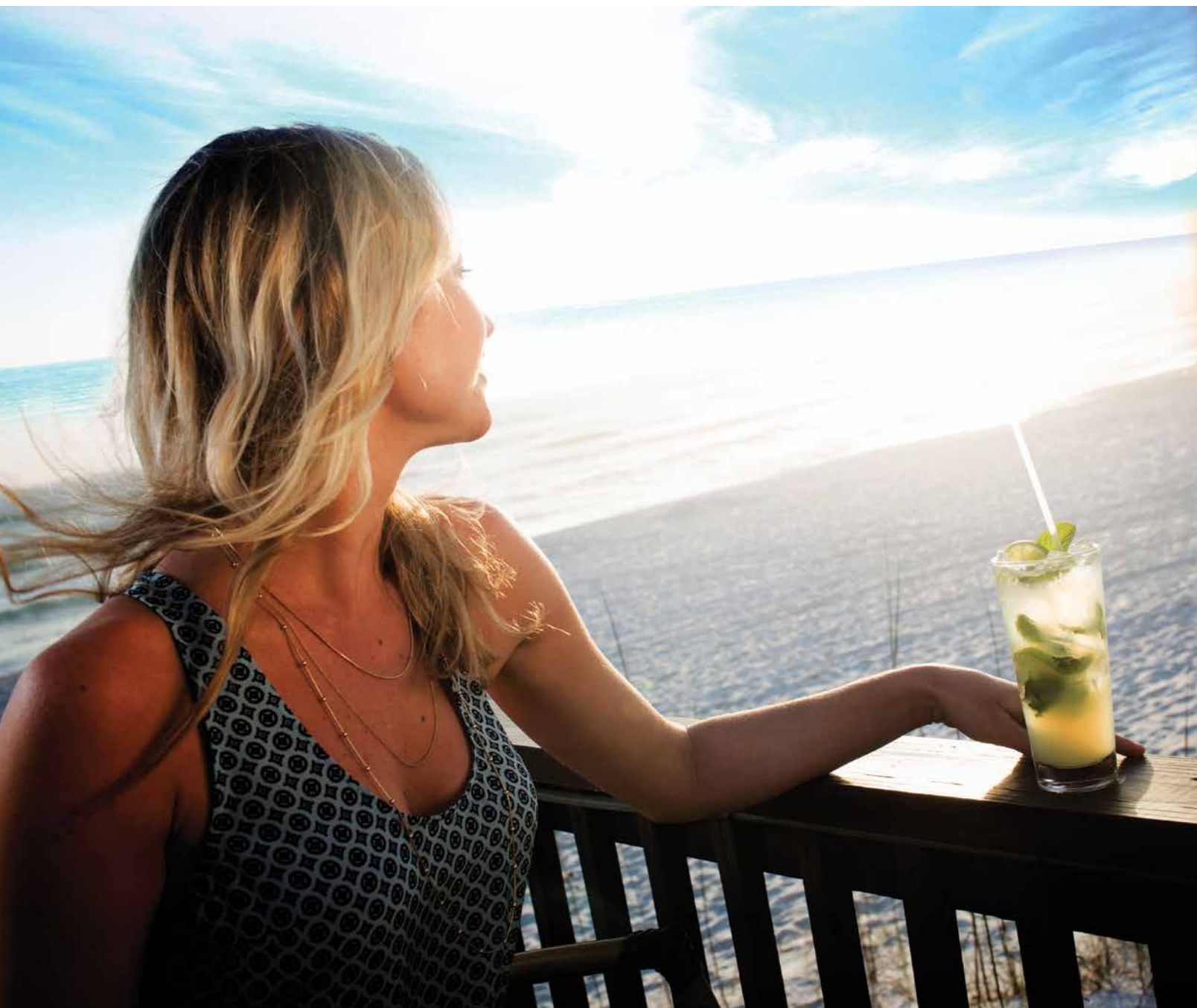
Those who store their personal items overnight do so at their own risk. The county, the city, the Tourist Development Council and the beach maintenance contractor do not assume any liability for any items left on the beach.



Share your POV! Share your Panama City Beach experience with us on Instagram using the **#PCBPOV** hashtag. Just follow **@Visit_PCB** on your Instagram account and share your pics or videos from your point of view. It's that easy. So have fun. We'll be looking for your POV. If it's cool enough, we might even feature your POV photo in an upcoming issue of this quarterly magazine.



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