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LABORS OF LOVE

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1

LATE SUMMER

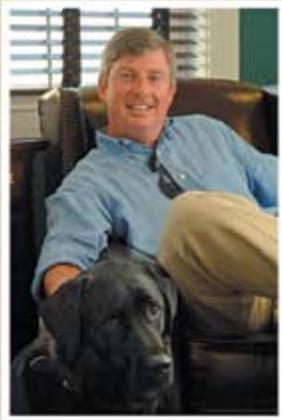
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BEACH FRONT TOWNHOMES
16 UNITS / SAINT JOE BEACH / 2021

contents

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LABORS OF LOVE BY DANIEL ANDERSON

As diverse as they may be, successful small business owners share a common trait – passion. It garners belief and innovation and focus and enthusiasm and determination and...the list goes on and on. Old Florida obviously attracts these personalities, with so many residents blazing their own trails – and their stories are almost as interesting as they are inspiring!

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ENTICING EDIBLES BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Florida's Forgotten Coast has a well-deserved reputation for beautiful beaches, world-class fishing and easy, uncrowded access to the region's natural wonders...but what about the food? Regional restaurants deliver a scrumptious fusion of international influence, local culinary tradition and superior ingredients, and the word is getting out. Better get a table while you can...

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GETTING THE GOODS BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Old Florida's retail landscape is rich in character and diversity. Local shops and boutiques are primarily owner-operated and enjoy a freedom envied by their peers in larger markets. A clear emphasis on quality over quantity makes the regional shopping experience something special, with offerings running the gamut from simple to spectacular!

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TALES OF FOUR CITIES BY DANIEL ANDERSON

More often than not, a community history is little more than a mundane litany of dates and names. For Old Florida's coastal towns – Apalachicola, St. Joseph (now Port St. Joe), Mexico Beach, and Rio Carrabella (now Carrabelle) – that is most definitely not the case. Filled with watershed moments and larger than life characters, the stories of these communities read more like an adventure novel than a history book!



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ON THE COVER



Bits & Pieces Art Class at Art of Glass on SGI.

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LABORS OF LOVE

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

DEVORAH KIRSCHENBAUM - ART OF GLASS - ST GEORGE ISLAND

Small businesses are the heart and soul of Florida's Forgotten Coast. Beautiful, uncrowded beaches and sparkling Gulf waters may be the primary draws to the region, but small businesses feed, supply and entertain residents and visitors alike. Nearly every local business is owner-operated, and the absence of chain stores and franchises is notable. While the area is not exactly an economic hotspot, local entrepreneurs are able to make ends meet and still reap further rewards – wonderful quality of life and freedom to pursue their passions among them. Diverse backgrounds and circumstances aside, their commitment to craft is inspiring.

ART OF GLASS
ST. GEORGE ISLAND

Artist Devorah Kirschenbaum, owner of Art of Glass on St. George Island, was born into a family of restaurateurs in Miami. Shortly thereafter, her parents relocated to Long Island, NY. Devorah

began creating artwork as a child after watching her mother doodle while making phone calls, and continued drawing and painting through high school, spending much of her free time in the art room. In college, she majored in art and dabbled in freelance work after completing her studies. The fine arts, though, were her passion. “Decide on a different career path. Art will never make you a living,” her mother once told her. Dev had little choice, though. The soul of an artist will not be denied.

Living on Long Island, Dev was close enough to New York City to frequent the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She visited the homes of Norman Rockwell and Jackson Pollock, and immersed herself in the NYC art & music scene. Those experiences shaped her, and cemented her future in the arts. To this day, she wears a necklace of her own creation bearing a black heart – a reminder of Joan Jett and the Blackhearts shows attended in her youth. She is still a fan today.



BITS & PIECES ART CLASS : ART OF GLASS

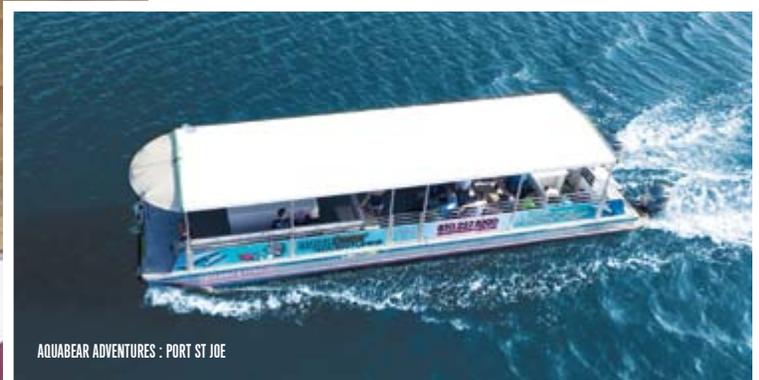
In her late 20s, Devorah married her high school sweetheart, and devoted her efforts to raising two wonderful daughters. Her return to the arts began when she accepted a job as Arts & Crafts Director for a major sleepaway camp. She was personally responsible for art programs serving 400 campers on a daily basis – an experience that would profoundly shape her career, though she did not know it at the time. She began drawing, painting and designing jewelry in a home studio. What began with beading and wire work soon evolved into copper enameling and her current medium of fused glass.

The Kirschenbaum's moved to Florida in 2014, and Dev opened her own gallery in Apalachicola. It was there that she dove head first into glass art. "The medium is limitless," she says. "I must have 10 or 15 projects in the works at a time, as well as a book of ideas." Her work includes jewelry, home décor and sculptural pieces. Dev's loyal clientele had additional plans for her, too. "You should do art classes," they advised. Eventually, Dev decided they were right. For the past 4 years, the response to her classes, by local residents and visitors alike, has been overwhelming. She has taught kiln-fired fused glass, acrylic pours and mixed media.

In 2020, Devorah moved her gallery to East Pine Avenue on St. George Island. Since relocating, her mixed media *Bits & Pieces Art Classes* have become incredibly popular, and she has expanded her studio and gallery to accommodate more guests. The classes are fun and entertaining for aspiring artists of every age and skill level, and everyone gets to take home a "masterpiece" of their own making. Dev's willingness to share and educate shows a generosity of spirit rare in any business endeavor, and her enthusiasm for the entire creative process is infectious. There can be no doubt that she loves what she does for a living.



SNORKELING SHOW & TELL : AQUABEAR ADVENTURES



AQUABEAR ADVENTURES : PORT ST JOE

Captain Bill Little has spent years making his living on local waters. As Captain of the *Fish'n Xpress*, he introduced thousands of eager fishermen to the fertile waters just off the Old Florida shore. Every day allowed by law and the vagaries of weather, he filled his party boat with anglers and plied the reefs and wrecks of the Gulf of Mexico. For trophies and table fare, Bill put



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'Seahorse' by Devorah

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happy fishermen on their quarry. In the fall of 2018, Hurricane Michael ripped away his business. Local marine facilities were utterly destroyed. The massive *Fish'n Xpress* was lifted from the Port St. Joe Marina basin by storm surge and deposited on dry land. Unprecedented stresses compromised the vessel and made any return to service on the water impossible. To Bill's dismay, his pride and joy was dismantled, cut apart and scrapped. "What now?" he wondered.

That winter, and most of the following Spring were consumed by efforts to get back in business. Dock space was cleared of debris, reinforced and secured. Bill tracked a down a boat – in Brooklyn, NY, of all places – that just might work. Slightly smaller than her predecessor, the *Captain's Lady* made the voyage south in February of 2019. The vessel was outfitted, painted, prepped and rechristened *Fish'n Xpress II* at an Apalachicola boatyard.

She made her home port debut in Port St. Joe on May 13th and Bill was fishing again before June. Unfortunately, after 2 solid seasons aboard the *Fish'n Xpress II*, ever-tightening regulations and rising costs forced Bill to rethink his business again. He conceived a new venture, but one that would still allow him to share his expertise and love of the water with his customers. **AQUABEAR ADVENTURES** was born.

According to Bill, it was "deja vu all over again." Find another boat. Secure dock space. Outfit, paint, prep. Get it to Port St. Joe. Meanwhile, Bill's wife Cindy dealt with other concerns – chief among them was making sure that, when the time came, Bill had customers. "We weren't fishing anymore," Cindy explains. "It was a brand new business model with an almost entirely new clientele. To say we were nervous is an understatement."

Never one for half-measures, Bill found a spacious 49-passenger power catamaran and went to work. The *Island Express* now cruises St. Joseph Bay and it's surrounding waterways almost every day, and provides family-friendly snorkeling adventures, sightseeing excursions and sunset cruises. These adventures are much more than just boat rides – Captain Bill's love for his work ensures that! He is a wellspring of local knowledge, and can share historic facts and interesting stories along the way. He is adept at tracking down friendly local dolphins and sea turtles, and plays an active role in *Snorkeling Show & Tell* – one of the highlights of any Aquabear Adventures snorkeling trip.



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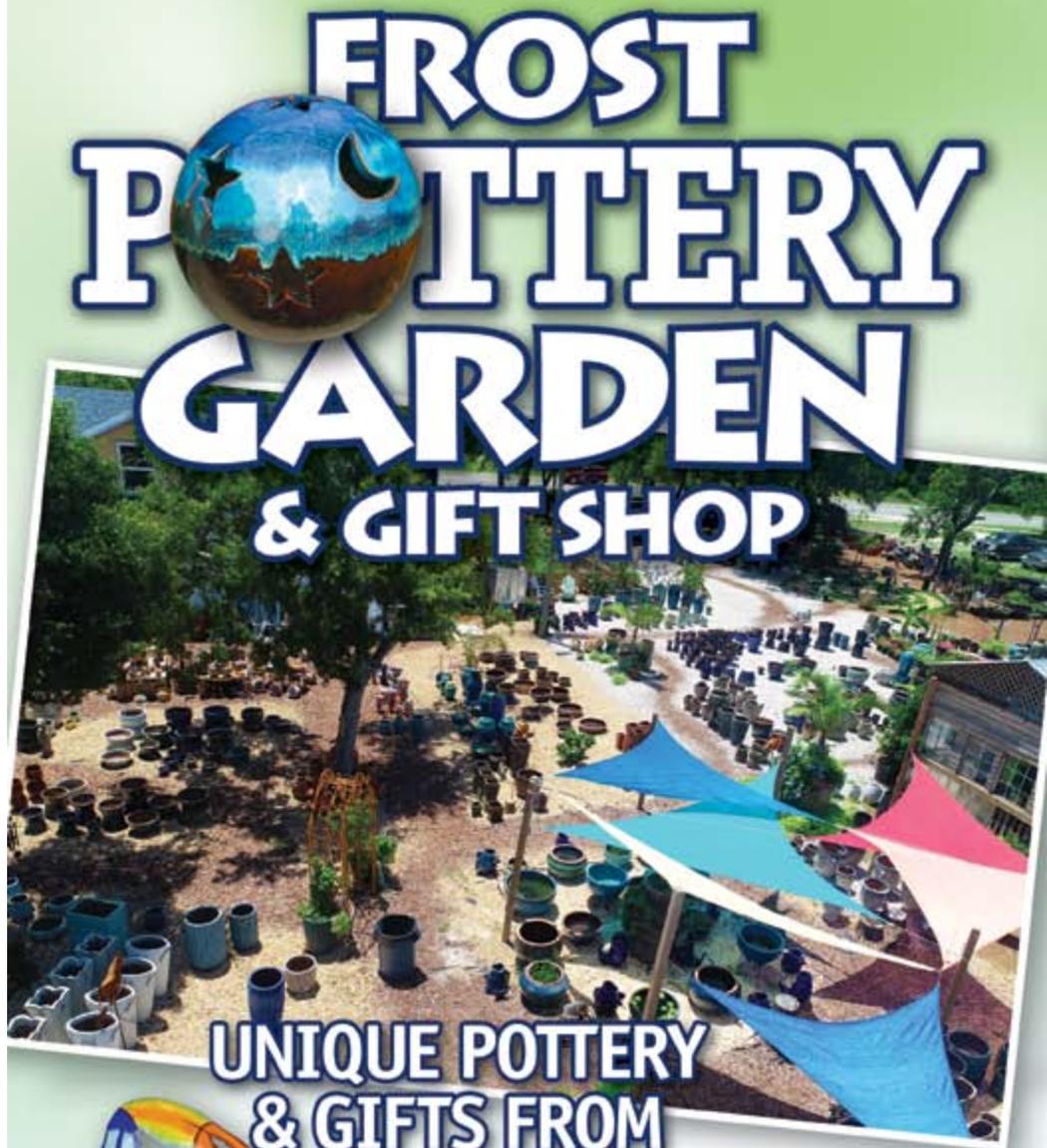
TOSSED BUFFALO OYSTERS - CAT 5 RAW BAR & GRILL

Hurricane Michael gave Old Florida it's best shot, but the region has proven itself stronger than the storm. The recovery has been rapid – new visitor's could almost forget that a Category 5 nightmare made landfall here. For those of us who lived through it, however, the memories will never fade. It was, quite literally, a life changing event – local residents uprooted from their homes and businesses, left with little choice but to start over.



When Mark Moore's seafood market, the St. Joe Shrimp Company, was wiped from it's foundations in Simmons Bayou, he was determined to build back. The market was the backbone of his entire family's life's work – commercial fishing. His enterprise had employed dozens of family members and friends for years, providing a good living for his hard-working crew. Shutting down was never an option. Instead, Mark went bigger.

He rebuilt the market to the same footprint, and added a second story with vague ideas for future use. Getting the seafood market back up and running was top priority, but as soon as that was accomplished he



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turned his attention upstairs. The incredible sunset views over St. Joseph Bay practically demanded a crowd and, after a lifetime in the seafood industry, the solution was obvious. His second story, after a lot of hard work, became **Cat 5 Raw Bar & Grill**. "It never would have happened without that storm," Mark said, explaining the name.

Scooter Acree had long dreamed of having a restaurant of his own, and couldn't resist the opportunity to launch Mark's new eatery. A trusted family friend of the Moore's, Scooter grew up on the bayou. Mark and his brother, Capt. Clint, taught him the ropes of commercial fishing, and instilled in him the same love for the water that they shared. Years in restaurant management and a titanic work ethic made Scooter the right man for the job. "Sometimes it feels like more labor than love," Scooter observes with a wry smile, "but there's plenty of both to go around."



Dena Frost-McAuliffe's life changed drastically after Hurricane Michael, as well. Both her home and business were in Mexico Beach, ground zero for the storm's worst destruction. Both were a total loss. You might think such a blow would break an artsy shopkeeper from a tiny little beach town, but you'd be wrong. Dena, and her business, **Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop**, are both back on their feet. Those



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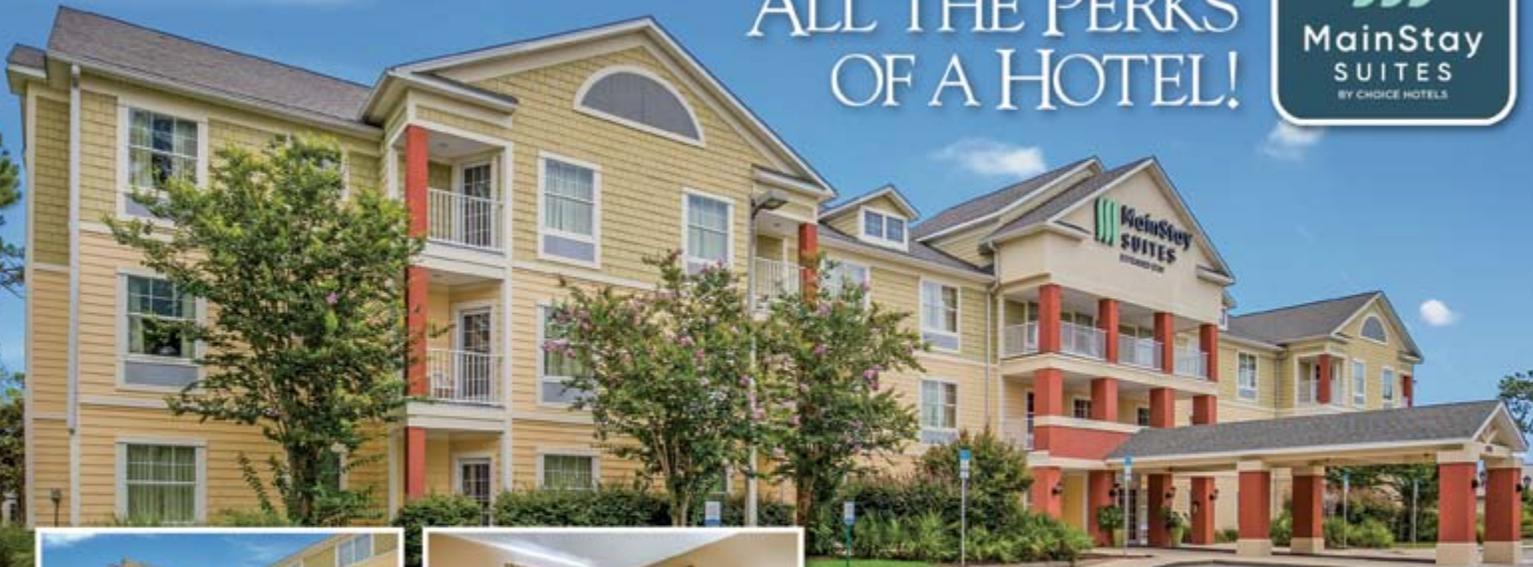
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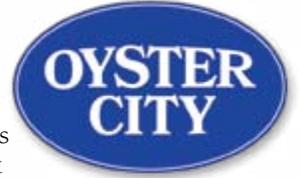
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feet are now firmly planted in Eastpoint, midway between Apalachicola and St. George Island. “At the time, conditions in Mexico Beach made it impossible to stay,” Dena recalls. “I have come to love Eastpoint, and I am here for good, but I’m going to find a way to get back to Mexico Beach, too.”

The Mexico Beach store was a town landmark, with hundreds of colorful pots, vibrant flowering plants and giant wind spinners along Highway 98. Her new Eastpoint location also flanks 98, but sprawls over two beautifully landscaped acres at the crest of Magnolia Bluff. Winding trails weave through a seemingly endless selection of imported pottery, water features, garden sculpture, greenhouses and plants by the thousands. Everywhere you look, there is something beautiful or bizarre to catch your eye – and that

is just how Dena likes it. Lush, colorful gardens of myriad design, with a touch of the whimsical to lighten things up. Her dedication to – and love for – her craft is evident at every turn.

The roots of the craft beer phenomenon are strictly local. Folks develop a bond with “the brewery around the corner.” They take pride in drinking local, and breweries and tap rooms become sources of civic identity. Rising demand for craft beer has even created a new brand of tourism. Brewery visits rank high on the to-do lists of travelers, and craft breweries often serve as catalysts for economic growth, especially in rural areas. In short, people love their beer!



This is clearly evident at the Oyster City Brewing Company in Apalachicola. Clayton Mathis, OCBC’s General Manager, has his own insightful take on the brewery’s success to date. “Since day one, every decision has been made by people who love beer and are willing to do whatever it takes to make it great,” he explains. “As long as we keep that up, everything else will fall into place.”

Keeping it up requires hard work, but it’s a labor of love that’s paying dividends. Since OCBC’s Federal Brewer’s Permit was issued in May of 2014, the brewery has consistently racked up gold medals and people’s choice awards at regional beer festivals, and even took home a Silver Medal at the U.S. Open Beer Championships in 2018. The brand’s popularity has grown far beyond the local market, and new breweries are scheduled to open soon in Tallahassee and Mobile. The original, however, is located in downtown Apalachicola, and it’s a *Must See* for any craft beer enthusiast. [📍](#)



OYSTER CITY BREWING COMPANY : APALACHICOLA

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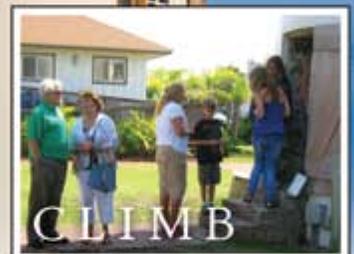
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Some folks are wise...and some otherwise.

The first sort choose The Owl. Located in the heart of historic Apalachicola, The Owl Cafe and Wine Room offers an Old Florida dining experience like no other. Freshly-caught Gulf of Mexico seafood is unloaded at docks just a stone's throw from our kitchen.

Our menu is varied and colorful with locally-harvested seafood, premium steaks, daily chef's specials, salads, soups, pasta, fowl and exotic imports. Sensational starters, delicious entrees and decadent desserts are meticulously prepared and served by our courteous, expert staff.

The wine list is comprehensive, ever-changing and full of character, and delivers the perfect complement to every meal. Intriguing views of the river and town, spacious dining areas and comfortable seating make any visit to The Owl Cafe and Wine Room a treat for all the senses.



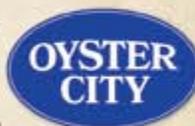
BLACK GROUPEL AT THE OWL CAFE & WINE ROOM



FISH & CHIPS AT THE TAP ROOM

Delicious pub fare, a good-time atmosphere, full bar service and 16 craft beers on draught await patrons in The Tap Room.

Located just downstairs from The Owl Cafe at 75 Commerce Street, the menu includes appetizers, entrees & rich desserts from the cafe's kitchen.



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ENTICING EDIBLES

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

I've said it before and I'm sure I will say it again. "The restaurants along Florida's Forgotten Coast are as good as you'll find anywhere." Actually, in my honest opinion, they're better.

When I travel, one of the things I look forward to most is eating out. New venues. New recipes. There's always a new twist on an old favorite, and once in a while I stumble across an entirely original experience. Lately, however, I seem to be disappointed more often than impressed, and find myself longing for the eateries of home. The "Why?" of it is no mystery. I'm spoiled rotten. Our regional restaurants are fantastic! It's an intersection of great venues, creative culinary talent, and unparalleled access to prime Gulf of Mexico seafood and farm fresh produce. Is it any wonder the local edibles are so enticing?

GATOR SAUSAGE CREOLE

The Owl Cafe & Wine Room / Apalachicola

They start with stone-ground grits mixed with salt, butter, heavy cream, herbed cream cheese, american, cheddar and parmesan. Chilled and formed, the grit cake is coated in flour and deep-fried until crispy, then smothered in a traditional sauce of onions, peppers, tomatoes, celery and a rich blend of creole spices. Split and char-grilled, spicy homemade Louisiana alligator sausage tops off the dish. It's an old-fashioned kickin' cajun delight served up in the heart of Apalachicola.

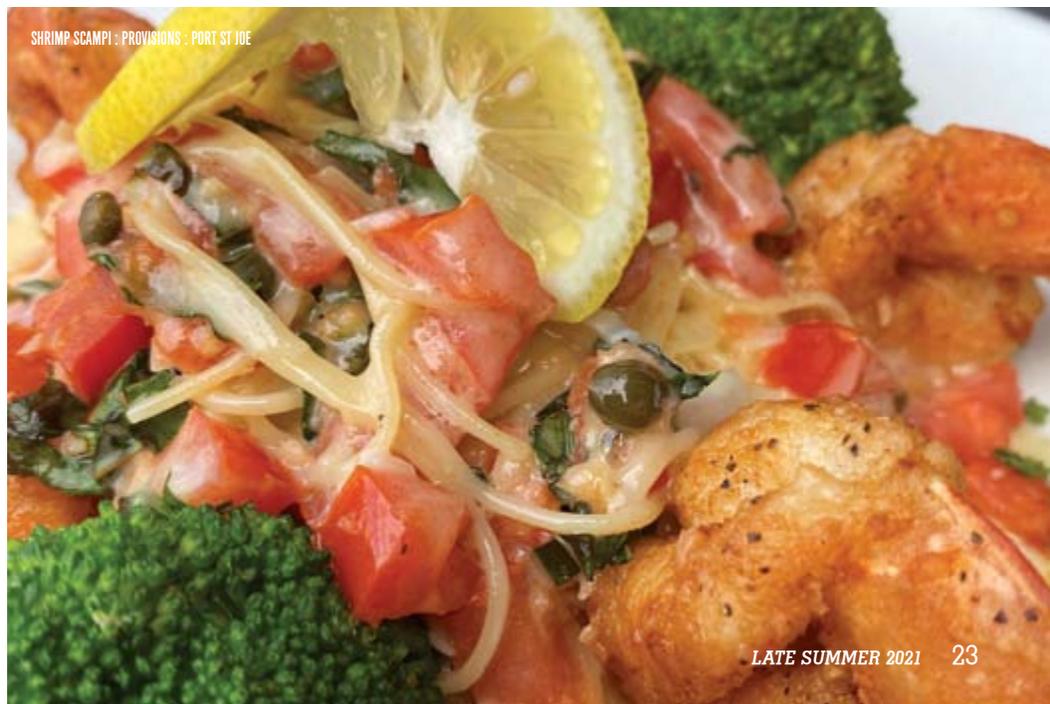
SHRIMP SCAMPI

Provisions / Port St. Joe

There may be no recipe on any menu more open to a chef's interpretation than Shrimp Scampi. Order it at ten different restaurants, and you will have ten distinctly different



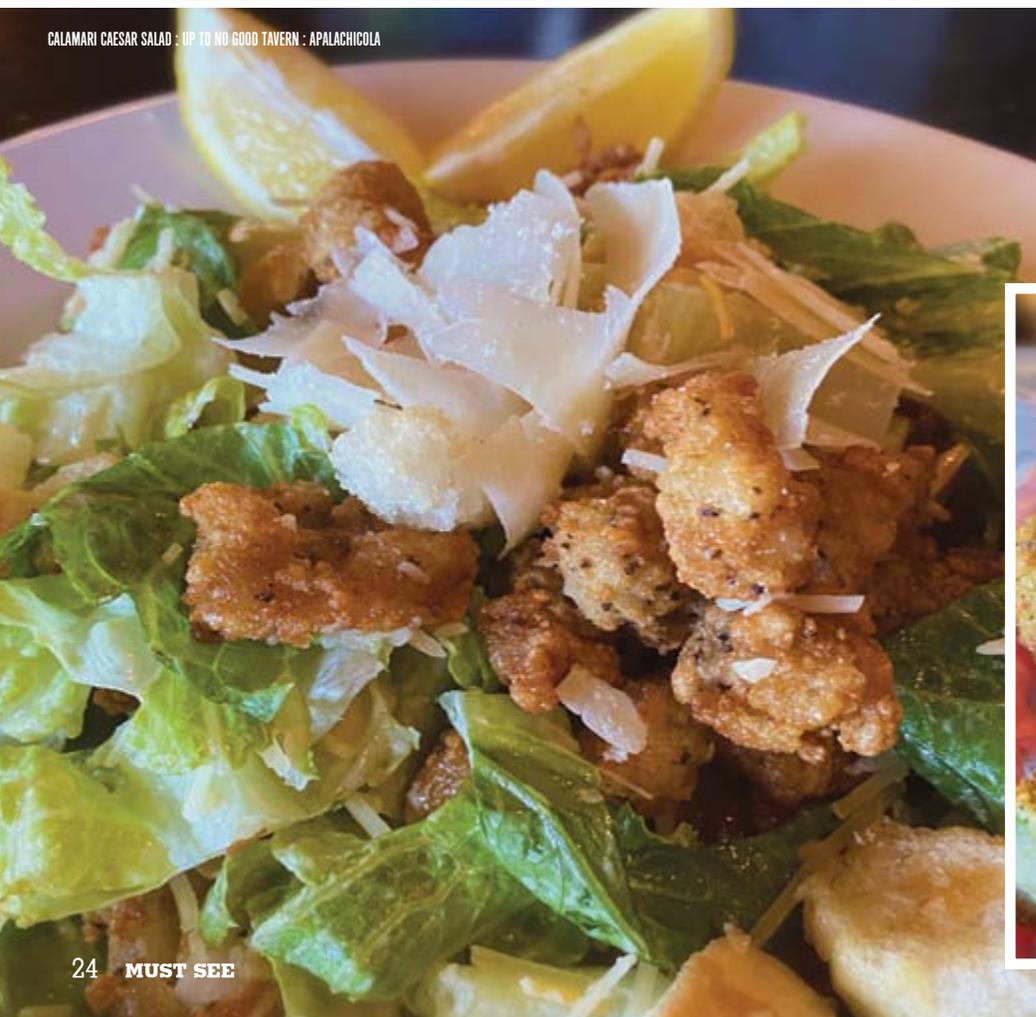
GATOR SAUSAGE CREOLE : THE OWL CAFE & WINE ROOM : APALACHICOLA



SHRIMP SCAMPI : PROVISIONS : PORT ST JOE



JONAH CRAB CLAWS : CAT 5 RAW BAR & GRILL : SIMMONS BAYOU



CALAMARI CAESAR SALAD : UP TO NO GOOD TAVERN : APALACHICOLA

meals, but Provisions' version is a standout. Fresh Gulf Shrimp are peeled, deveined, damp-rolled in flour and sauteed tail-on with tomatoes, garlic, basil and capers, then served over semolina angel hair pasta and topped with Provisions' signature creamy beurre blanc. Served with a side of steamed broccoli, it's a new twist on a classic dish.

JONAH CRAB CLAWS

Cat 5 Raw Bar & Grill / Simmons Bayou

Old Florida's newest seafood hotspot is bringing some exciting new offerings to the table. Jonah Crabs are northern relatives to our familiar Florida Stone Crabs, and for years have been considered little more than bycatch by lobstermen. Why is a bit of a mystery – their meat is flaky and sweet, and their prized claws are huge. Harvested primarily in the cold waters of the North Atlantic, New England eateries serve them steamed and cracked. Cat 5 Raw Bar & Grill may be the only place in the world you'll get them fried. Lightly battered and flash-fried in sizzling oil, they are served eight at a time with warm drawn butter.

CALAMARI CAESAR SALAD

Up To No Good Tavern / Apalachicola

Serving deep-fried calamari on a salad is not something that would occur to most of us. Luckily, it did to Keri Elliott, owner of the Up To No Good Tavern in Apalachicola. It starts with fresh calamari coated in salt, pepper and bread crumbs, deep fried until crispy, and then served over hand-chopped romaine with shaved parmesan, house made croutons and a delectable caesar dressing. The garlic, dijon, and anchovy blend complement the calamari perfectly, and make this salad something special.



FRIED AVOCADO BITES : UP TO NO GOOD TAVERN : APALACHICOLA



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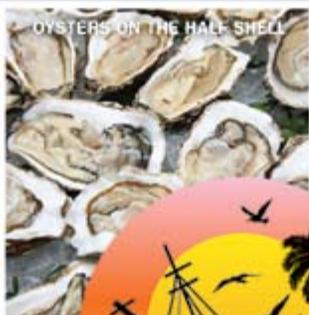


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FRIED AVOCADO BITES

Up To No Good Tavern / Apalachicola

Keri also offers a creative alternative to traditional french fries. Chunky slices of fresh avocado are coated with herbs, corn meal and bread crumbs, deep fried and served with Up To No Good's super spicy jalapeno ranch dipping sauce. Have a drink handy – this one's hot!



GRANNY'S GUMBO : LYNN'S RAW BAR : EASTPOINT

GRANNY'S GUMBO

Lynn's Raw Bar / Eastpoint

It's one of the top menu items at Lynn's, and after your first bite you'll know why. Great gumbo begins with great roux, and Granny's recipe is a closely-guarded family secret. Add fresh Gulf Shrimp, sweet bay scallops, sliced okra, corn, tomatoes, onion, celery, bell peppers, garlic and a blend of cajun seasoning - then let it simmer for 4 or 5 hours. Serve it over steamed white rice and you've got a crowd-pleasing, rich gumbo that welcomes a dollop of hot sauce for those craving a little more heat.



FRIED PORK POT STICKERS : UP TO NO GOOD TAVERN : APALACHICOLA

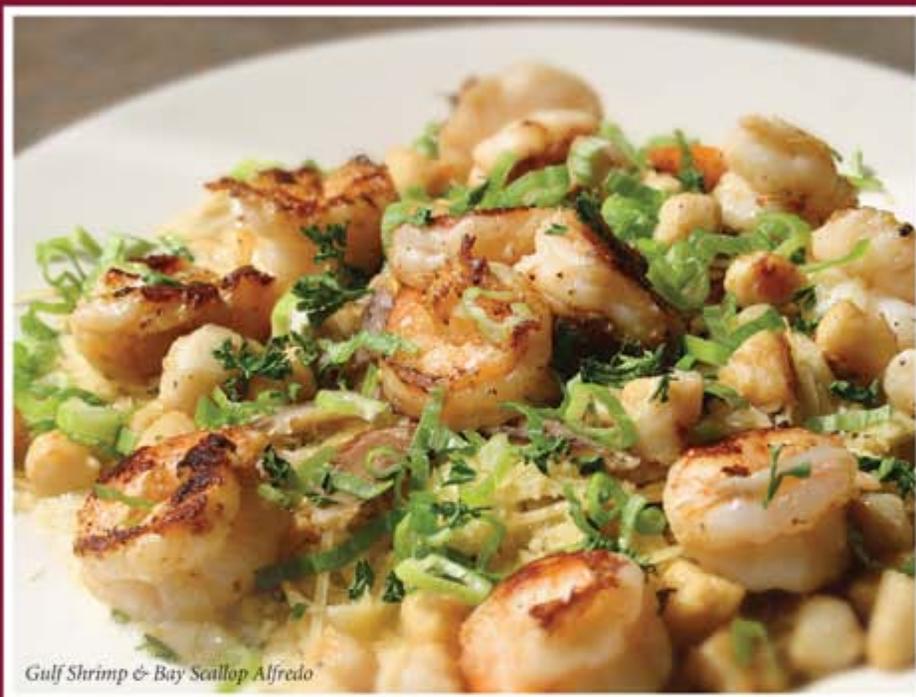
FRIED PORK POT STICKERS

Up To No Good Tavern / Apalachicola

When you're ready for something different, make your way to the Up To No Good Tavern and order the pot sticker appetizer. You haven't had them like this before! Asian-seasoned ground pork is pressed into wonton noodles and flash-fried until crispy. Served on a bed of romaine with sweet & spicy garlic ponzu, these crunchy treats will have you coming back for more.

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at St James Bay Golf Club



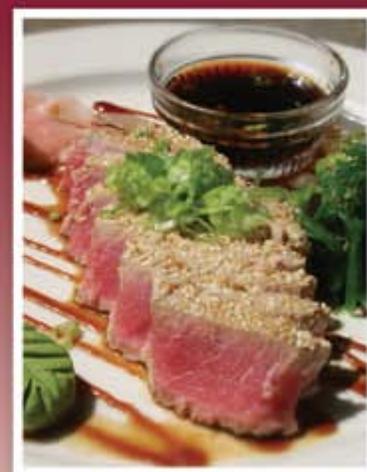
Gulf Shrimp & Bay Scallop Alfredo

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CAULIFLOWER CRUST PIZZA

98 Eats / Eastpoint

It's always exciting when a new eatery comes to the Forgotten Coast. When Jay Woolever, owner of Eastpoint's 98 Liquors, shared his idea for a new restaurant with me, I couldn't wait for the doors to open. I've known Jay for years, and he can be counted on to do things right. His concept was simple and straightforward – give the people what they want. 98 Eats does just that with quality ingredients (including Boar's Head meats), careful preparation, a spotless facility and great service. The menu covers a lot of ground, and includes a few surprises. The gluten-free pizza, with its cauliflower crust, caught me off guard. Jay insisted I sample it, and it didn't take long to figure out why. Crispy and flavorful, it's a delicious, healthy alternative that sacrifices nothing but gluten.

FORGOTTEN COAST PASTA

Longbill's Pub & Grub / Cape San Blas

Longbill's Pub & Grub is welcome addition to the north Cape, where dining options have long been limited. The eatery is off to a great start thanks to seasoned owners and staff. The menu is diverse, the service is awesome, and the food is excellent. Their flagship dish is Forgotten Coast Pasta – it deserves top billing! Blackened shrimp, bay scallops and andouille sausage are served over pasta with red peppers, green onions and parmesan. Ladled with a cajun lobster cream alfredo and served with a toasted cuban baguette, it's a meal you won't forget.



FORGOTTEN COAST PASTA : LONGBILL'S PUB & GRUB : CAPE SAN BLAS

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Either way, you can't go wrong at Lynn's Retail Market & Raw Bar. This is fresh off the boat seafood at its absolute best - packed for travel or prepped and served on-site in the State of Florida's oldest licensed packing house. Authentic Florida seafood on Apalachicola Bay in Eastpoint!



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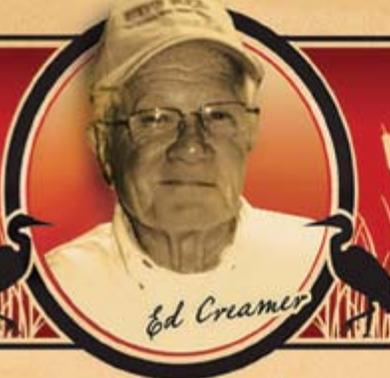
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TOMAHAWK RIBEYE

The View on Old 98 / WindMark Beach

While on the subject of memorable meals, I must include the incredible Tomahawk Ribeye at The View On Old 98. Are you kidding me? Fifty-two ounces of prime cut ribeye, soaked in a proprietary house marinade, and grilled-to-order over an open flame. This fantastic beast is topped with a slab of buttery melted brie, sautéed shitake mushrooms, caramelized red onions and micro-greens, and served with sides – house fried rice and vegetable *du jour* – for two. The presentation is nothing short of jaw-dropping, the cut of meat peerless, and the entire dining experience absolutely unforgettable. I almost forgot! The views from the dining room and open air bar aren't too bad, either. 🍷

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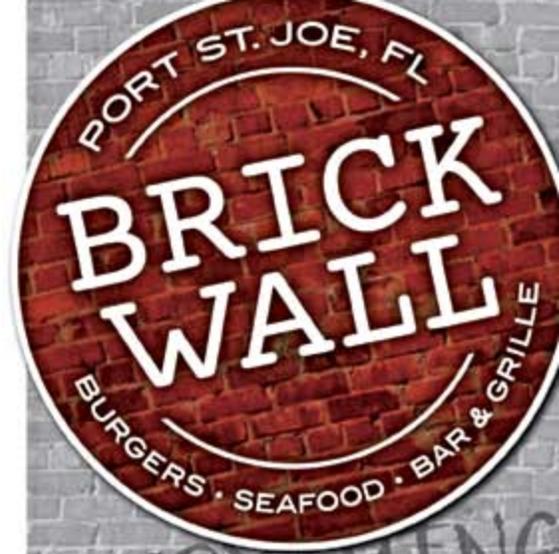
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Provisions, one of the Forgotten Coast's most popular eateries, is known for creative coastal cuisine, inspired international flavors and savory southern specialties. Established in 2005, we serve fresh, beautifully-prepared foods rich in cultural diversity with craft beer, fine wine and cocktails.

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CAPE SAN BLAS' BEACH SUPERSTORE!

Earrings by Clair Raabe: \$35.00
Cape St. George Lighthouse Museum & Gift Shop
St. George Island

GETTING THE GOODS

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Retailers along Florida's Forgotten Coast don't enjoy the notoriety (or traffic) of shopping destinations in more populous areas. Even if they did, our little towns simply cannot accommodate the volume experienced by coastal vacation meccas such as Destin or Panama City Beach.

From a shopper's perspective, this could be perceived as a drawback, but closer scrutiny tells a different tale. The local retail landscape is rich in character and diversity. Primarily owner-operated, regional retailers enjoy a freedom envied by corporate buyers, franchises and big

box stores. The emphasis is on quality over quantity, with offerings including hand-made originals, custom merchandise with local flavor, hyper-practical outdoor gear and creative accessories that "just feel like Old Florida." Prices are as competitive as you'll find anywhere, with items tailor-made for use in our little corner of the world!

Created by hand using molten glass and sterling silver, every piece of artist Clair Raabe's jewelry is as unique as it is beautiful. The self-

taught glass carver and flame worker has works included in permanent collections at the Corning Museum and the White House. The **Cape St. George Lighthouse Museum & Gift Shop** offers a wonderful selection of her jewelry. It's art-you-can-wear at a shockingly affordable price!

Winding along the water's edge from Mexico Beach to St. Marks, the Forgotten Coast Highway is a one-of-a-kind link between coastal



Straw Lifeguard Hat: \$19.99
SGI Trading Co. / St. George Island



Forgotten Coast Highway Graphic T-Shirt: \$24.99
The Cape Tradin' Post / Cape San Blas

communities. Gia Jelinek, founder of the *Forgotten Coast Highway* brand, has memorialized our favorite stretch of road, and every community it connects, on a classic graphic t-shirt. 100% cotton and garment-dyed, this must-have collectible is available in a variety of bright colors and sizes at locations all along the coast.



For decades, wide brim straw hats have been standard issue for lifeguards – their UV protection, light weight and comfort perfectly suited for long days spent in the sun. These days, lifeguard hats are fashionable as well as practical, with coordinated bands, brims and badges – defend your skin and look great doing it! **St. George Island Trading Co.** carries a great selection, many branded with SGI souvenir swag.

Huelo Sunglasses by Maui Jim: \$229.99
Beach Planet / Cape San Blas



Waterman Packable Jacket by Gillz: \$69.99
Up the Street / Apalachicola

Old Florida is filled with fantastic opportunities to enjoy the great

outdoors. Unfortunately, sun, sand and salt water can wreak havoc on your eyes. **Beach Planet** on Cape San Blas offers a great selection of *Maui Jim* performance eyewear to protect your peepers. An in-stock array of styles and lens colors are available.



ultimate waterproof protection, and it packs into its own pocket for easy storage and transport!

Hand-crafted Jewelry: from \$79.99
Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop / Eastpoint

Up the Street in Apalachicola originated as the gift shop for Up the Creek Raw Bar. While it still serves in that capacity, the store has expanded and diversified – it is now one of the region's premier retailers. There is truly something for every taste, from kids toys and wall art to skin care products and outdoor gear. The waterman packable jacket by Gillz is just one example. It offers superior comfort, quality construction, the

Since relocating to Eastpoint after Hurricane Michael, **Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop** has blossomed into one of the area's can't miss shopping destinations. Wandering the grounds, surrounded by beautiful imported pottery, lush gardens and lively water features, is a pleasure. More awaits inside, however, with a huge assortment of



Rewined Candles : \$29.99
Becasa / Apalachicola

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Forgotten Coast Highway

APPAREL AND GIFTS

The Grady Market Apalachicola	Cape Tradin' Post Cape San Blas	Shop by the Sea Carrabelle	Coastal Cabin Port St. Joe
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home décor, accessories and jewelry. Frost's offers an amazing collection of pieces in Sterling Silver & Larimar, and their new line of hand-crafted jewelry is both spectacular and affordable.

Emily Raffield's **Becasa**, located in downtown Apalachicola, is an oasis of comfort and style. Exclusive, made in the U.S.A. garments share the space with hand-selected goods created by artisans from all over the world. Clothing, accessories, beauty products and home goods all promise to enrich everyday life. *Rewined* candles, poured in re-purposed wine bottles and scented to mimic the flavors and aromas of different varietals, certainly deliver on that promise.



Snowy Egret by Marcia McAuliffe : \$62.00
Cape St. George Lighthouse Museum & Gift Shop
St. George Island



Wally Free Natural by Hey Dude: \$64.95
Beach Planet
Cape San Blas

Original works of art are an indisputably welcome addition to any home. It can be difficult, however, to find quality originals on a limited budget. Wildlife artist Marcia McAuliffe's paintings are beautifully rendered on all-natural materials in a multitude of sizes and shapes. You'll find an excellent collection of her work at the **Cape St. George Lighthouse Museum & Gift Shop** at prices usually reserved for reproductions.

Hey Dude may have designed the perfect shoe for Old Florida. It's comfortable, casual, lightweight

and breathably cool. It's available in dozens of different styles and colors, so you can stay conservative or go wild. It's the "Wally" – an ideal fit for the coastal lifestyle, and you can get yours at **Beach Planet** on Cape San Blas.



A day at the beach requires a few essential items, and the **Simply Tote** by *Simply Southern* is the perfect way to carry them. Plenty of room, a wide base and a grippy bottom keep this tote stable and upright. An inner zippered pouch keeps valuables safe and close-at-

Simply Tote by *Simply Southern*: \$70.00
SGI Trading Co. / St. George Island

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Mini Bottles by Kirby Gregory: \$10.00
The Pearl Gallery / Apalachicola

hand. Sturdy EVA construction ensures this bag will survive the trip, and makes clean-up a breeze. Find one in your favorite color or style at **St. George Island Trading Co.** on SGI.



Hand-Carved Seahorse: \$19.00
Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop
Eastpoint

Sometimes, the little things make all the difference. At **The Pearl Gallery** in Apalachicola, you can experience this first hand. The gallery is filled with unique, original works of art – from dozens of artists – in all shapes, sizes and media. Among the smallest are the Mini Bottles handmade by *Kirby Gregory*. It's hard to imagine a space that wouldn't be enhanced by one, or three, or a dozen, of these tiny treasures.

Enhancing interiors is a specialty at **Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop** in Eastpoint, too. Inside, the shop is overflowing with wall art, metallic sculpture, unique lighting and an enormous collection of accessories that nearly defies description – suncatchers, chimes and much, much more. Where else can you find an artisan-carved and painted wooden seahorse, imported from Indonesia, for less than 20 bucks? Don't stop there, though! Just outside, there's more to discover.



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EST. 2018
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The Indian Pass General Store provides a wide variety of merchandise for visitors and locals alike. Stop by to stock up on groceries, beer, wine, fishing supplies, bait & tackle, shirts, hats, sunscreen, toiletries, locally-produced soaps, candles, books, Tupelo Honey and much more!

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Meander along the winding pathways of the Pottery Garden. Detour through sheds and greenhouses. There are pots by the hundreds in every size, shape and color imaginable. There are innumerable plants in myriad variety – tropicals, succulents and indigenous species. Garden sculpture and water features abound. The entire property is a source of inspiration.

Frost Pottery Garden & Gift Shop is also, of course, an excellent source for inspired gift ideas. Among my favorites are the pre-potted succulents. Attractive arrangements of these funky, hardy plants are firmly rooted in appropriately sized, shaped and textured limestone pots. Succulents require minimal care – no green thumb necessary – and thrive both indoors and out. They're a wonderful alternative to traditional flower arrangements, and can be enjoyed for many years.

Pre-Potted Succulents: from \$9.00
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The retailers of Old Florida work hard to make every shopping experience interesting and satisfying. While local merchants may be a little short on shelf space, they compensate with quality and creativity. Great shopping is a boon to any coastal destination. Along Florida's Forgotten Coast, "getting the goods" is a rewarding pursuit. 



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With all the activity, it's easy to work up an appetite. Luckily, the Cape Tradin' Post has you covered all day long! Start out with tasty breakfast biscuits, donuts and coffee. At lunch and dinner, enjoy steakburgers, wraps, flatbreads, subs, wings and **Hunt Brothers Pizza**.

Then, finish up with hand-dipped ice cream and other frozen treats!



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TALES OF FOUR CITIES

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Community histories typically lapse into dry recitations of timelines, names and facts. For the coastal towns of Old Florida – Apalachicola, St. Joseph (now Port St. Joe), Mexico Beach, and Rio Carrabella (now Carrabelle) – that is most definitely not the case. The stories of these communities are fascinating, entertaining, and filled with watershed moments and larger than life characters. Four cities with vastly different roots, each with distinct tales of discovery, prosperity, tragedy, legend, disaster, myth and perseverance.

Apalachicola. The town of Apalachicola has weathered prosperity and decline time and time again. If the old adages “adversity builds character” and “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” have any truth to them, then Apalachicola is one of the strongest, most character-rich cities in America.

It all started in 1519 when Spanish explorer Alonzo de Pineda sailed the coastal waters of *El Golfo de Mexico* mapping the coastline of *La Florida*. Pineda’s mission was a great success, and opened up new territory to the Spaniards. It was followed closely by the largely land-based expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez in 1528. Narváez met resistance from native Apalachee Indians, and he and most of his doomed expedition were lost before exploration of coastal lands could be completed for the Spanish Crown. Narváez’s failed expedition marks the beginning of Apalachicola’s turbulent civilized history.

By the late 1600s, Spain’s claim on *La Florida* was tenuous at best, and British expansion from the Carolinas applied pressure from the north and east. When France’s La Salle laid claim to the Louisiana Territory to the west, Spain’s eventual withdrawal from *La Florida* was inevitable. Following a 20 year

stint under British rule prior to the American Revolution, control of the territory was ceded back to Spain in return for assistance during the war. Reclaimed by the U.S. in the early 1800s, Florida was, at long last, a part of something larger – the rapidly expanding United States of America. Could this be the beginning of stability and prosperity for the fledgeling state? U.S. President James Monroe thought so. He promptly set up a customs district on the Apalachicola River, and the city of Apalachicola was founded.

The town was Franklin County’s seat of government in 1832, and with the advent of steam boats powerful enough to push upstream, became a significant shipping center and Florida’s leading seaport. River trade went as far upstream as Columbus and Albany, Georgia. Apalachicola’s future seemed assured. Development plans moved forward and officials began selling tracts of land. At the time, a Tallahassee newspaper declared Apalachicola “a proud specimen of the American enterprise.”

As is often the case, such praise signaled tough times ahead. Apalachicola’s new economy was based solely on commerce. The town had very little manufacturing and almost no agriculture of any kind. As river trade dropped off following the expansion of railroads, the community’s economy was not adequately diversified. Community leaders applied for government assistance with projects that would allow the city to adapt. Nearly two thousand Apalachicola citizens watched their hopes evaporate as the funds were diverted for use in the Civil War.

Union blockades slowed trade, troops were conscripted to fight for the Confederacy, and the local military moved upriver where they could more effectively resist Union forces.

Less than 600 people scrambled to survive in a town largely abandoned and ignored for the remainder of the war.

After the North and South settled their differences, Apalachicola prospered under the Reconstruction of the South. Government programs pushed goods and people through the port, and the town’s outlook brightened. As the Reconstruction wound down, though, the city suffered again. Funding for port improvements and adequate roadways was delayed, and the town wallowed in relative isolation. By the acclaimed Centennial in 1876, Apalachicola residents had very little to celebrate.

Modest timber and seafood industries let residents eke out a living during the late 1800s, and the city saw moderate growth until 1899. That year, a powerful hurricane wrecked 13 ships off St. George Island and wreaked havoc with the city’s port facilities. The Great Apalachicola Fire of 1900 finished what the storm had begun, and completely devastated the city. The commercial district was leveled to the water’s edge, and at least 71 buildings were lost. Weary townspeople, ready for a new start, were glad to see the century turn. Resilient as always, they rolled up their sleeves and commenced rebuilding.

Booming timber business and high demand for locally harvested oysters, shrimp and sponges propelled Apalachicola into the 20th century. Once again, things were looking up. The Dixie Theatre, built in 1913, was the pride of Apalachicola and was unrivaled on the Gulf Coast. Mardi Gras was celebrated for the first time in 1914, as was Oyster Day, the precursor to the long running Florida Seafood Festival. World War I brought trepidation but little change to the city. It seemed Apalachicola had found its niche.

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Alas, riches turned to rags once again as the Florida land boom, which began after World War I, collapsed in 1925. Violent hurricanes blasted the region in 1926 and 1928. Fruit flies destroyed citrus crops statewide shortly thereafter. Florida was already in a depression when the stock market crashed in 1929, and Apalachicola was reeling. The only respite the community received during the depression era was the building of the John Gorrie bridge. Spanning the bay and connecting the city to Eastpoint, the bridge played a pivotal role in Apalachicola's recovery during and after World War II.

World War II transformed Apalachicola from a quiet coastal community trying to survive to an important cog in the U.S. war machine. Thousands of troops came into Franklin County for training as U.S. forces prepared for amphibious assault on Europe. The military presence left Franklin County after the war, but wiser post-war community leaders were prepared for the transition. The River City struggled, but residents knew it was just a matter of time. These visionaries understood that the city of Apalachicola was dependent upon the development of St. George Island for its economic success. Ferry service to the island began in 1955. Shortly thereafter, plans for a bridge were approved and construction began. The Bryant Patton Bridge, connecting St. George Island to Eastpoint, finally opened to traffic in 1965. Remnants of the original structure are still in use today – as popular fishing piers granting access to the waters of Apalachicola Bay.

St. Joseph (now Port St. Joe). From humble beginnings in the early 1700s, the little town of St. Joseph experienced burgeoning economic growth and garnered nationwide attention in the 1830s. Records from the Florida State Archives confirm that old

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St. Joseph, on the site of modern-day Port St. Joe, was the birthplace of Florida's statehood and a bustling seaport. During its heyday, St. Joseph attracted thousands of residents with the promise of inexpensive coastal property, a growing job market, and a bright future.

The port city's roots were planted in 1827 when Peter W. Gautier, Jr., the well-to-do son of a Georgia minister, settled near Apalachicola. Gautier was an energetic entrepreneur intent on making his fortune in the exotic Florida Territory. His efforts experienced an early setback when a federal court ruled against citizens of Apalachicola in a land dispute with the region's largest landowner, the Apalachicola Land Co. Irritated but unfazed, Gautier and several of Apalachicola's leading residents moved west to St. Joseph, effectively thumbing their collective nose at the greedy land company. The young community, energized by the vision and audacity of its newest residents, flourished. The boom era of Old St. Joseph began in earnest.

Gautier was the town's primary promoter. He purchased the *St. Joseph Telegraph* newspaper, renamed it the *St. Joseph Times*, and declared himself editor. This position of influence enabled Gautier to push his agenda of growth and prosperity forward at an incredible pace. By December of 1835, St. Joseph's exploding population, economic importance and busy seaport prompted the U.S. Government to open a post office. By January of 1836, just one month later, the community was chartered as a municipality.

Old St. Joseph became the hub for regional business development and a very popular tourist destination. The city was full of elegant eateries, luxury hotels, a race track, churches, schools, and hundreds of homes. The town offered plenty of entertainment, and gained a reputation as a playground for the rich. Gautier and company embraced that perception, and marketed the town as a resort getaway for wealthy plantation owners from inland Florida, Georgia and Alabama. According to several accounts, St. Joseph was the largest city in what would become the State of Florida, with as many as 10,000 residents.

As the Florida Territory joined the Union and became the State of Florida, the city of St. Joseph donned the proverbial "feather in its cap." On December 31st, 1838 it hosted the Florida State Constitution Convention. Competition with other would-be sites was fierce, but St. Joseph was chosen over Apalachicola, Tallahassee and Pensacola.

At the time, it was described as "a gem on the Florida seashore" and the type of community to which "others should aspire."

In preparation for the convention, St. Joseph residents built a dedicated convention hall with housing for delegates and the press corps – but not without controversy. Just before the convention commenced, a scene unfolded that would repeat itself nationwide as more territory was claimed by the U.S. Citizens and peace officers forcibly removed, at gunpoint, the last 269 native Seminole Indians from the convention hall vicinity. The tribe's protests were never heard.

The Constitution Convention ushered in the golden years of St. Joseph, and the town grew and prospered under Gautier's guidance and that of his like-minded peers. Of course, not everything went Gautier's way. His efforts to bring a rail line into St. Joseph eventually failed in 1840. No one knew it at the time, but that failure was the beginning of the end for old St. Joseph. As word spread about the St. Joseph Railroad's abandonment, real estate and business prospects plummeted. The city suffered and residents came upon hard times, but the economic collapse was nothing in comparison to what followed.

Life in the once-proud boomtown was about to become a living hell. The seaport was still quite active, with ships from the Caribbean Islands, Atlantic Seaboard and Gulf Coast in and out of port on a regular basis. In 1840, a pair of trade vessels entered St. Joseph harbor after visiting the Caribbean Antilles. Death, in the form of yellow fever, arrived with them.

Unwitting carriers of the deadly disease, the ships' crewmen came ashore. Yellow fever spread like wildfire and reached epidemic proportions. The disease infected an estimated 80% of the resident population of St. Joseph by the summer of 1841, and killed more often than not. By September of 1841, only 500 St. Joseph residents were left alive – Peter W. Gautier, Jr., among them.

Incredibly, that same September, a powerful hurricane swept across St. Joseph. The "gem on the Florida seashore" was decimated by destructive winds and storm surge that left few, if any, homes and businesses intact. The wharf was destroyed. Ships in port were reduced to scrap and their valuable cargo ruined. There was simply nothing left. To his credit, Gautier attempted a fresh start after the storm, but it was to no avail. He left what remained of St. Joseph in 1842, moved to Texas, and was lost to recorded history.

By 1844, the city of St. Joseph was nearly deserted. The few hearty souls remaining were driven out by a vicious tropical storm that autumn, and the town was finished. For the next 60 years, only ghosts, wild animals and the occasional intrepid trapper walked its silent avenues. Once Florida's largest city, it was as if St. Joseph had never existed. The area remained abandoned until 1905, when Terrill Higdon Stone built a log cabin near the old town site. Interest in the area slowly rekindled, and the resurrected town was renamed Port St. Joe to avoid confusion on land deeds. Life began anew as people and businesses returned.

The original Port Inn was built in 1907. A boardwalk led from the front door of the inn straight to a bathing pier at the edge of St. Joseph Bay, where Frank Pate Park is today. Tourists played on giant slides that shot them off the pier into the water, and rode in carousel swings that lofted them through the air and out over the bay.

In 1910, the Apalachicola & Northern Railroad line to Port St. Joe was finally completed. The driving forces behind the new town's economy became fishing, pulpwood, and a new pastime referred to as "autoing." From its reincarnation in 1905 through the 1920s, Port St. Joe thrived as seaside resort, lumber port and fishing village. Passenger trains and automobile caravans brought load after load of visitors into town to picnic in the park, dance in the pavillion, play on the water slides, and ride the wind-powered carousel. Then disaster struck again, this time in the form of the Great Depression. Bank failures and over-logging hit hard, reducing Port St. Joe's resident population to less than 1,000 souls.

Around this time, a wealthy industrialist named Alfred I. DuPont bought thousands of acres of timberland and beachfront property, as well as banks and railroads, at bargain prices. DuPont and his wife, Jesse (Ball), moved from Delaware to Florida, and built a house in Port St. Joe called *The Chateau*, right next door to the modern day Port Inn.

DuPont had spectacular ideas for Port St. Joe, but his plans were never realized. After his death in 1935, his successor and brother-in-law, Edward Ball, decided that Port St. Joe was the perfect site for a paper mill. DuPont's holdings, which Ball controlled, formed the basis of the St. Joe Paper Company. In 1938, the world's most modern paper mill opened in Port St. Joe. As a company town, Port St. Joe enjoyed decades of economic prosperity.

THE SCUTTling OF THE VAMAR

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Smith's Dock Company of Middleboro, England built her in 1919. Her recorded dimensions were 170 feet in length, 30 feet in beam, and 598 gross tons. She had triple expansion steam engines for propulsion, and her hull was iron. Originally christened *Kilmarnock*, she was built for the British Admiralty as part of the Kil class of patrol gun boats, but she never saw action in a military capacity. *Kilmarnock* was sold to a private firm in 1921, renamed *Chelsea*, and was later seized by British authorities for smuggling liquor.

In 1928, Rear-Admiral Richard Byrd of the U.S. Navy acquired *Chelsea* as one of two support vessels that would carry his first expedition to the Antarctic. The primary expedition ship, *City of New York*, was ideally suited for advancing through the southern ice, but her hold was too small for Byrd's cargo – the makings of a polar base and airplanes enabling the first flyover of the South Pole. *Chelsea's* hold had a larger capacity of 800 tons. She underwent repairs and upgrades at another English facility, the Todd Shipyard. Chief among the modifications was reinforcement of her bow to withstand polar ice.

Byrd renamed her *Eleanor Bolling* after his mother, Eleanor Bolling Byrd, prior to the expedition. She subsequently became the first metal-hulled vessel to navigate Antarctic waters. Very sturdy, but not particularly stable, her crew nicknamed her the "Evermore Rolling" after encountering rough seas on the voyage between Antarctica and New Zealand. Byrd completed his historic mission in 1930, and the *Eleanor Bolling* and *City of New York* returned to New York Harbor amid tremendous fanfare. She was purchased by the Vamar Shipping Company in 1933, and promptly renamed again. *Vamar* served as a freighter in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean until 1942. Several Coast Guard reports from that time indicate that she was falling into disrepair, with equipment in poor condition and no radio operator on board.

On March 19, 1942, under Panamanian registry, *Vamar* docked in Port St. Joe with a crew of 18 men. The crew was a mixed bunch, reported at the time to be from Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Spain. On March 21st, she took on a load of lumber and left port, ostensibly headed for Cuba. Harbor Pilot J. Melvin Beck was on board to see her safely through the shipping channel, and his written report regarding the events that follow raises as many questions as it provides answers. What really happened aboard the *Vamar* that day?

The official version, according to the results of a Coast Guard investigation, is that *Vamar* was overloaded and top-heavy with too much cargo stowed on the deck. While negotiating the shipping channel in calm seas, she listed to port. The weight of her cargo overbalanced her keel, and she was pulled down stern first. Air trapped in her cargo holds and bow kept *Vamar* from sinking immediately, while winds and currents pushed her out of the shipping channel. Beck and the crew abandoned ship, and returned safely to Port St. Joe. A very tidy summary of events, but hardly the whole story.

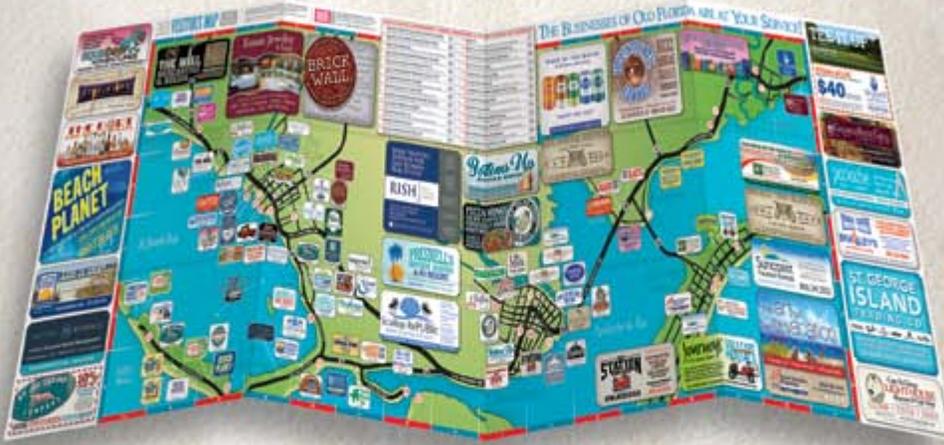
Beck's report detailed repeated warnings, even while still in port, to *Vamar's* captain about the disposition of his cargo. Every warning was disregarded. The harbor pilot's recommendation to drop the above deck cargo as the ship rolled was ignored. Port St. Joe residents and veterans of the first World War reported *Vamar's* crew members speaking German and Italian while awaiting transport after the ship went down. There were rumors of holes in her hull and talk of suspicious conduct by captain and crew while ashore.

War-time concerns for security prompted Coast Guard investigators to look closely at circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Vamar*. Salvage divers were unable to determine whether her iron hull had been compromised. A definitive cause has never been identified, and the puzzle of her demise is unlikely to be solved. Still, the spectre of war-time sabotage looms over the shipwreck. Was *Vamar* scuttled by enemy personnel in an attempt to block the shipping channel? J. Melvin Beck, along with most Port St. Joe residents of the time, thought so.

Vamar rests in 27 feet of water on flat, sandy bottom. Her cargo of lumber was salvaged, but *Vamar* was declared a total loss. Years later, the Army Corps of Engineers dynamited the wreckage as a navigational hazard. Located just 3.7 miles offshore of Mexico Beach, and north of the St. Joseph Bay shipping channel, the wreck rises as much as 9 feet off the sea floor and is often visible from the surface. In 2018, Hurricane Michael scattered hundreds of artificial reef modules in nearby waters, but *Vamar* never budged.

Dedicated as Florida's ninth Underwater Archaeological Preserve in 2004, state law protects the wreck of the *Vamar* from excavation or removal of artifacts. It is Old Florida's most visited dive and snorkel destination. 📍

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The population grew to over 6,000, and the mill ran 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During the 1950s and 1960s, the little town boasted its own bank, three jewelers, five auto dealerships, six service stations and several department stores. After 60 years of profound community impact, however, the mill was sold in 1998. Falling paper prices and overseas competition forced the mill's new owners to shut down operations in 1999. Hundreds of jobs – and a way of life – were lost.

The town, bereft of identity and income, struggled to find a new way forward. Over time, local leaders realized that sharing their coastal community was the only viable solution, and geography was on their side. Peerless access to unspoiled Gulf of Mexico beaches and the pristine waters of St. Joseph Bay were an easy sell. Spreading the word was the real challenge, but the real estate boom of the early 2000s helped. City and County officials enlisted the help of willing local businesses, and the region's reputation as a tourism destination grew steadily until the fall of 2018.

Yet again, on October 10th, 2018, the little town was decimated by a tropical cyclone. Hurricane Michael brought 150 mph winds and over 12 feet of violent storm surge to Port St. Joe. Homes and businesses were wiped out in a single afternoon. As of this writing, almost three years later, recovery efforts are still underway. The progress has been remarkable, and there is much to celebrate. Against all odds, even in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the city of Port St. Joe is making yet another comeback!

Mexico Beach. Accounts of Mexico Beach's past are a little foggy before the early 1900s. The first settlement in the area was Fort Crevecoeur, a French military installation built in 1717. The fort's life was short, however, and it was abandoned as French interests in the Americas dwindled. Sparse records indicate little activity until the 1900s when rumors of buried riches and sunken ships brought treasure hunters to the coast. One old sailing ship was found buried in local sands, but the vessel's name and any record of its cargo have been lost over time.

Businessman Felix DuPont purchased the land now occupied by the city of Mexico Beach around 1900. Native pine trees were harvested to produce turpentine, and the area gained a bit of exposure to public eyes. Fishermen were among the first to embrace the newly discovered, and newly accessible, beaches. The allure of amazing spring and

fall runs of migratory fish were as difficult to resist then as they are today. With the completion of U.S. Highway 98 in 1933, the number of visitors to the area vastly increased. Livestock and wildlife still roamed freely along the new road, however, and lodging options were limited. Growth was slow, and the community stayed quiet.

In 1946, a small group of businessmen, led by Gordon Parker, W. T. McGowan, and J. W. Wainwright, purchased 1,850 acres along the beach for \$65,000.00. Shortly thereafter, development began in earnest. Gordon Parker's partners questioned the wisdom of the purchase. They failed to see the value in four miles of windswept dunes and sandy soil. Gordon Parker remained convinced, however, and the Mexico Beach Corporation was organized. Parker's son, Charlie, eventually took over development responsibilities for his father's company. His determination, vision and efforts shaped the area into the Mexico Beach of today.

Charles M. (Charlie) Parker and wife, Inky, moved their lives – and two daughters – to the Forgotten Coast in 1949. Through dedication, hard work and sacrifice, they made Mexico Beach their home. The little community suffered numerous growing pains, with many plans for development shelved while others were realized.

Slow growth ensued, and Mexico Beach boasted several hundred residents by 1955. Always civic-minded, Charlie Parker led the town in a program of community pride and destination awareness. By 1966, the little beach town incorporated, and the City of Mexico Beach was formed. Residents immediately elected Charlie Parker as their Mayor. By 2007, over 1,000 people called Mexico Beach home.

Hurricane Michael destroyed that home on October 10th, 2018. As the storm raced northward across the Gulf, it painted a bulls-eye on Mexico Beach. Making landfall with winds over 160 mph and an incredible 22 feet of storm surge, it wiped the idyllic little beach town off the map.

The Mexico Beach of 2021 is nothing short of a miracle. The city was unrecognizable in the aftermath of the hurricane – even clean-up seemed an insurmountable task. Now, not even three years later, civilization has returned! A handful of restaurants and stores are open. Brand new homes are popping up at a breakneck pace. Beach walkovers abound, and plans for a new pier are in the works. There's even a gas station again. Dare I say it? The beach is back!

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GHOST FIRES OF THE EMPIRE MICA

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

On a clear summer evening in 1942, Master Hugh Bentley, captain of the *Empire Mica*, was faced with a difficult situation. It was June the 28th, and he had planned to shelter in St. Joseph Bay for the night. His ship, a British Ministry of War tanker carrying over 11,000 tons of aviation grade fuel destined for England, was too heavy to enter safe harbor. The only options available to him were to stop for the night in open water or press on to the east. Confirmed reports of deadly German U-boats operating in the Gulf of Mexico made his fateful decision to keep moving seem the wiser course of action. Unfortunately, it was not.

Forced to set a course in the deeper waters beyond the submarine-safe 10-fathom curve because of his cargo, Master Bentley doused every light aboard his ship and ordered “full steam ahead” through calm seas. He could never have suspected that German Captain Gunther Muller-Stockheim already stalked the tanker in his deadly U-67 submarine. The Germans anticipated the British vessel’s course, and at 1:04 am on June the 29th, a lookout aboard the *Empire Mica* noticed moonlight illuminating an ominous shape to port, just off the ship’s bow. He alerted the wheelhouse, but the tanker and its crew never had a chance.

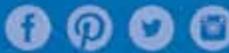
With a top speed of only 11 knots, the *Empire Mica* was a sitting duck for the faster, more agile U-boat. Mayhem erupted as the first torpedo struck the port side of the doomed ship. The impact explosion was immediately followed by a much larger explosion as flames found the tanker’s cargo of fuel. While men scrambled for the life boats, a second torpedo struck. The damage was catastrophic, and a sheen of aviation fuel covered the surface of the Gulf all around the ship. As sailors dove for safety, the fuel ignited. The surface of the Gulf was afire, and the crew was trapped. Two of the three life boats were engulfed by the flames – no one aboard them survived. While the *Empire Mica* foundered amidst the inferno, 14 survivors from its crew of 47 could only watch from the meager haven of the remaining lifeboat.

Coast Guard lookouts at Cape St. George and Cape San Blas reported an explosion at sea. Coordinates for the rescue were unnecessary – the flames were clearly visible from the mainland. *Countess* reached the burning tanker before first light, followed closely by *Scadream* and *Trouble*. Survivors were taken to Apalachicola, where news of the disaster had mobilized a concerned community, and the men of the *Empire Mica* related their horrific tales. Stories of crewmates ablaze on deck before plunging into the sea. A crew member trapped in a porthole after trying to escape and begging fellow seamen to shoot him before he was taken by the flames. Men choosing to drown because surfacing to breathe meant being burned alive.

The *Empire Mica* drifted and burned for more than 24 hours before sinking in 108 feet of water on June 30th, 1942. Strange events linked to her resting place are an integral part of Forgotten Coast lore. Unpredictable weather, fierce currents, glitchy electronics, mechanical problems and rogue waves plague visitors to the site and fishermen in nearby waters. Reports of strange lights in the water and eerie echoes across the surface of the Gulf persist to this day.

The strangest phenomenon by far, however, is the ghostly fires visible from the mainland on clear, moonless nights. Reports of the ghost fires have come from as far away as Panama City and St. Marks, and investigative expeditions have yet to yield any satisfactory explanations. When approached by sea, the fires recede to the horizon, but always on a heading leading directly to the watery grave of the sunken tanker. From shore, they appear in the same place time after time.

To see the ghost fires of the *Empire Mica* for yourself, scan the southern horizon at night under clear skies. They are most easily seen from St. George Island or Cape San Blas, and burn brightest in the wee hours of the morning on June the 29th. 



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Rio Carrabella (now Carrabelle). Native Americans and Europeans, who hunted the game abundant in the area's forests, were Carrabelle's first settlers. Originally christened "Rio Carrabella," the town is actually located on St. James Island, is surrounded by bays, rivers, swamps and marshes, and shelters behind the protective barrier of Dog Island.

In the early days of Rio Carrabella, sailing ships, mainly schooners, navigating the Gulf of Mexico, would drop anchor in a cove behind Dog Island. There, they would unload their ballast before sailing in to the shallow waters of Carrabelle to pick up cargo. Visitors still find abandoned ballast stones at that anchorage, now known as Ballast Cove.

The community of Carrabelle didn't really come into its own until after the Civil War, though. Lumber and naval stores were both in high demand, and by 1893, lumber and saw mills had sprouted up along the Carrabelle River. Downtown Carrabelle was established near the Coombs Mill, at the mouth of the river, and a railroad station serviced cargo trains at the site. The railroad also brought tourists from Tallahassee to stay at the luxurious Lanark Inn, a popular resort at the time.

Around the turn of the century, a massive hurricane devastated the town. Residents rebuilt downtown Carrabelle further inland, at its modern-day location. Greek sailors came in and began a short-lived, but very lucrative, sponge trade prior to the first World War. In the 1920s, the area suffered severe economic distress. Fishing became the town's principal industry, and Carrabelle, along with the rest of America, slid into the Great Depression.

Prohibition was the law of the land, and moonshining and smuggling became the regional careers of choice. Caribbean desperados frequented the quiet port town, as well, and Alligator Point and the forests surrounding it were believed to harbor the hideouts and liquor caches of desperate, dangerous men.

All that changed when the United States of America entered World War II. In 1942, the U.S. Army Ground Forces built Camp Gordon Johnston just outside of Carrabelle. Military operations and personnel dictated life in the community, and Carrabelle flourished. In preparation for D-Day, over 250,000 U.S. soldiers trained in amphibious assault warfare at Camp Gordon Johnston before it closed in 1946.

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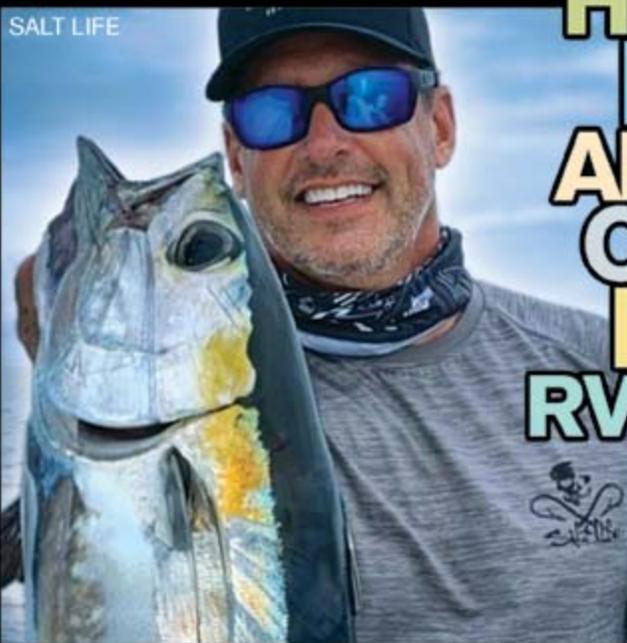
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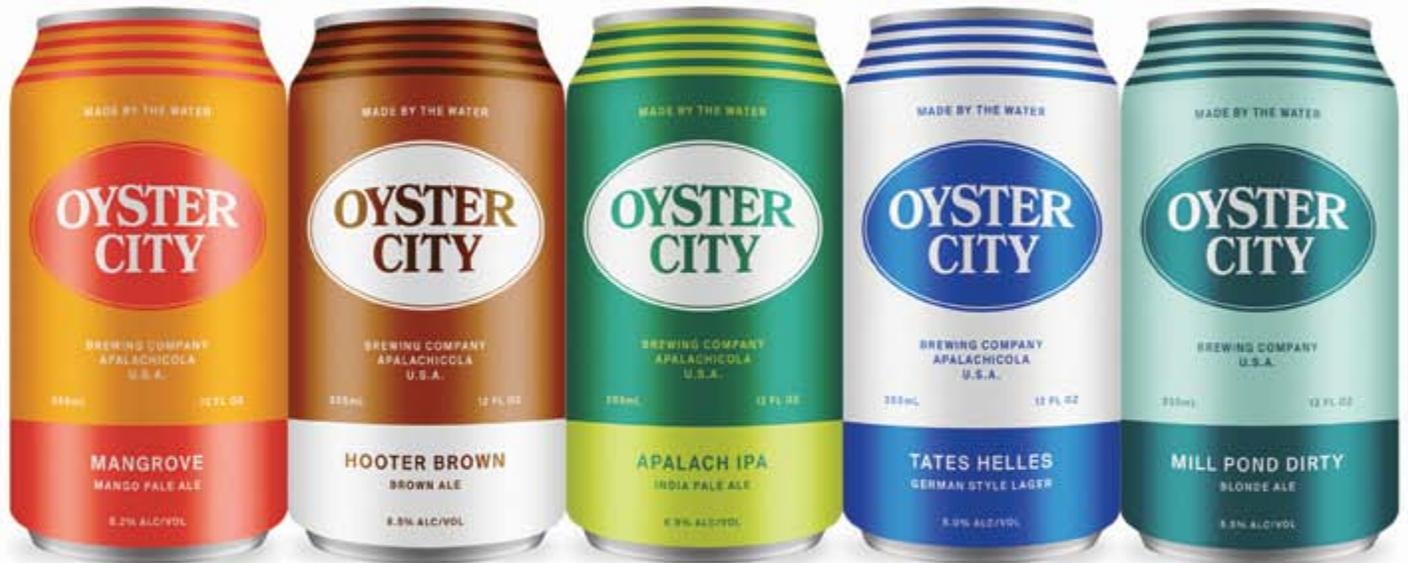
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