

COMING *of* AGE

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR SENIORS

WINTER 2025

A man and a woman are standing in front of a theater with red-lit seats. The man is wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a yellow bow tie. The woman is wearing a black dress and a pearl necklace. They are both smiling at the camera.

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
MARY HOXENG

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[FROM THE EDITOR]



Emily Echevarria

Marketing
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The winter doldrums can leave us feeling drained and wanting nothing more than to curl up under a blanket and shut out the world. This year, though, I've resolved to shake off the glum moods that creep in during the colder, darker days. I want to go into 2025 with grace and a more grateful and positive outlook. To that end I've been making the extra effort to slow down, take a breath, and focus on the good stuff, both in my own life and at Council on Aging.

At the first sign of a cold snap, our agency starts getting calls from seniors in need of heaters. We usually receive heater donations intermittently throughout the season, with no official donation drive event. This season, just as the weather turned, a longtime regular donor called unprompted to let us know 200 space heaters would be delivered to our office the following week.

Around the same time, I received a call from the coordinator of a quilting bee, the Sunbonnet Sisters, because the group had devoted their quilting efforts to Council on Aging for the entirety of 2024. They donated 32 lovingly crafted quilts which were distributed with heaters, given to clients, and a few now live at The Retreat for use by participants. Their passion for quilting inspired an article about the group and local quilting resources in this issue.

Additionally in this issue, we've got a piece on recognizing artificial intelligence and its use in fraud and scams. We've also got articles about our region's Mardi Gras events and the newly opened Bruce Beach Park. Finally, we hope you enjoy our interview with local media mogul Mary Hoxeng. She and her husband Dave started a radio station from the ground up and have since expanded their offerings and reach, received major national awards, and have had a massive impact giving back to their community—to Council on Aging and many others.

The stories shared here are just a snippet of the generosity and consideration I've seen for our area's older adults in recent months, and it's these stories I think of when winter gloom rears its head. I feel lucky to be able to witness these big-hearted helpers, and it's their warmth that will get me through to spring, which luckily is never too far off.

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Advocacy

The Words We Use

by Josh Newby

MY 5-YEAR-OLD SON'S VOCABULARY IS RAPIDLY EXPANDING. Since he has been in school, I've noticed him using words I'm unfamiliar with, and it is especially humorous when he can't even pronounce them properly. I won't give you an example, but the dichotomy is an interesting one to me: the situations he finds himself in and the words his brain uses to describe them are increasing faster than his articulatory muscles' ability to say them. Sometimes, he uses the wrong word, but I can see how he arrived at it nonetheless. "I'll love you for a hundred years" means that he'll love me forever, but he doesn't grasp the latter concept yet, so he uses the biggest number with the longest stretch of time he can conceptualize.

"Is language the adequate expression of all realities?" asked Friedrich Nietzsche. Is our primary method of communication both expansive and specific enough to collaborate on our quest for truth? Like democracy, it's not perfect, but it's the best we've got. The reason we have supercomputers that power rockets to Mars and animals don't is because we humans can use language to pass forward and build upon the totality of all previous knowledge. And that generally does work fine for technical and precise information. But what about everyday conversation? When I say "senior," can you determine if I'm talking about a high school senior or an elderly adult, sans context?

"I can write it better than you ever felt it," declared Patrick Stump. (And gosh darn it, he does get me). Using the above example, generally adding something like "...citizen" sufficiently delineates "senior" from its grade school homophone. Some words are far more important, however, and specific word choice can communicate so much beyond its simple definition. Let's take a far more contentious word, like "racist." In everyday parlance, someone is a racist if they hold prejudice against a particular ethnic group and use that prejudice to actively harm or neglect them. In academic literature, though, the word generally involves the stipulative component of either institutional or social power. If someone is conversing using the former definition with a person using the latter, the dialogue can quickly devolve into an argument. But that hypothetical is still not the worst possible outcome...

Media and politicians will purposely employ vague yet inflammatory language to stoke engagement and resentment. A headline with a dramatic

word such as "so-and-so DESTROYS so-and-so" drives 49 percent more clicks than the far more truthful "so-and-so disagrees with so-and-so."

Words can motivate, deflate, antagonize and quicken. For that reason, some in the aging industry shy away from words like "elderly" or "poor," opting instead for the more neutral-sounding "older adult" or "disadvantaged." You see this in other nonprofit sectors as well. Frankly, I think that does a disservice to who we're serving and is just a way for some to both social-signal and not think about the grim reality they could change with just a relatively small amount of real sacrifice. But I digress. Words matter, and we should think carefully about them, but we also shouldn't filter for our audience the negative connotations that may very well apply.

So reader, what words describe you? "Senior," "frail," "poor," "malnourished?" If you're one of our clients, honestly, they probably do. But what words also apply? "Resilient," "capable," "wise," "resourceful?" Similarly, the words this agency uses to describe itself: "helpful," "caring," "impactful," "necessary." I hope you would use those words to describe Council on Aging. Our supporters? "Generous," "selfless," "incredible," "indispensable."

If someone calls you a senior, own it. You've earned it! Think, too, about the words you use to describe your fellow man, your situation, and your community. I can't tell you the number of times an elder has been turned down for help because they sugar-coat their experience to the person doing an assessment. Our words are among the greatest tools we have. Deploy them effectively and don't hold back, but also be mindful that the person you're speaking to might have a completely different understanding of that vocabulary based on their upbringing, culture, or education.

I think words are inadequate to describe what you have given to your family and your community. The selflessness and generosity, the wisdom, long nights, low pay, and sometimes literally blood, sweat and tears. But I hope that this agency expresses gratitude to you in ways that are similarly ineffable. Words may fail, but we will never stop striving for the superlatives that describe our mission and our seniors.



Let the Good Times Roll!

2025 Pensacola Mardi Gras Events

by Nicole Willis

Grab your beads, put on your masks and bake your king cakes because Mardi Gras is here! That's right, folks, the 2025 Pensacola Mardi Gras season has officially begun. The local Mardi Gras season brings so many opportunities for celebration, socialization and fun. Whether you're looking for a family-friendly parade to attend with your crew, or you're looking for more of a party where the spirits are flowing, we've brought you details on some of Pensacola's upcoming Mardi Gras events to help you make the most of Carnival season. For complete details on the 2025 lineup of Pensacola Mardi Gras events, visit pensacolamardigras.com. Laissez les bons temps rouler!

Milton Mardi Gras Parade

February 15

The Krewe of Airship Pirates will present something different for this year's Milton Mardi Gras Parade, with an inaugural themed parade of "Rock the 80s." The annual Milton Mardi Gras Parade will roll down the streets of historic downtown Milton at 2:30 pm and conclude at Jernigan's Landing located behind the former Santa Rosa County Courthouse. A free concert and after-party will be held after the parade with a live concert by L.A. Roxx at 4 pm. The after-party will also include a free kids zone, food trucks, local vendors and a ticketed VIP area. For event details and VIP ticket purchases, visit kreweofairshipirates.com.

4th Annual Pensacola Pawdi-Gras

February 16

WolfGang LLC, will host the fourth annual Pensacola Pawdi Gras event for families and their pups. Filled with vendors, music, paw-rade, a costume contest and more, this event is one the entire family can enjoy. This annual street parade also helps raise funds and awareness for local animals in need. This year's Pawdi-Gras benefactor is the Escambia County Department of Animal Welfare. The Pawdi-Gras event is free and open to the public. The parade begins at 2:30 pm and will travel down Garden Street in downtown Pensacola. For event details and contest registration, visit wolfgangparkandbrews.com.

Navarre Krewe of Jesters Mardi Gras Parade

February 22

The Krewe of Jesters will host the annual Navarre Mardi Gras Parade on February 22 at 1 pm. This year's theme, "Celebrating 100 Years of Navarre," will celebrate the local community and all that has helped to shape it over the last 100 years. This annual Mardi Gras parade attracts around 30,000 spectators each year and features participants from krewes from cities across the Gulf Coast. This family-friendly parade also includes an award ceremony after the parade, in which participants will be awarded prizes in various categories. The parade route runs along Gulf Boulevard in Navarre Beach. For complete event details, visit nkoj.org.

Photo courtesy of Visit Pensacola



Krewe of Lafitte Illuminated Mardi Gras Parade

February 28

Enjoy the only illuminated nighttime Mardi Gras parade in Pensacola, hosted by the Krewe of Lafitte on February 28 in downtown Pensacola. Crowds can expect to be entertained with local marching bands, lighted floats, amazing throws and more! The theme of the parade is "Seven Seas" and features lighted floats manned by majestically dressed krewe members tossing beads and other throws to parade goers along the downtown parade route. The parade will start at 7:30 pm and make its way down Garden Street, concluding at the end

of Palafox Street. For event details and to view a map of the parade route, visit pensacolamardigras.com.

Pensacola Grand Mardi Gras Parade

March 1

Get ready for the Pensacola Grand Mardi Gras Parade, the city's largest and most anticipated event of the year! Drawing over 6,000 participants and 100,000 spectators, this massive celebration fills downtown Pensacola with dazzling floats, marching bands, colorful Krewe displays and spirited performances. Held on the historic Palafox and Garden Streets, the parade kicks off at 2 pm, offering hours of vibrant entertainment. Families can enjoy the parade from a designated children's viewing area, which is alcohol-free and features a variety of family-friendly activities. To view the complete parade route, visit pensacolamardigras.com/parade.

Krewe of Wrecks Pensacola Beach Mardi Gras Parade

March 2

The Krewe of Wrecks presents the annual Pensacola Beach Mardi Gras Parade, a vibrant parade on the beach. Attendees will enjoy the beautiful coastal scenery of Pensacola Beach and the spirit of

Mardi Gras. The parade kicks off at 2 pm, and the route runs along Via de Luna, from Avenida 10 to the Gulfside Pavilion and Casino Beach Parking Lot. After the parade, attendees are invited to join the post-parade party and awards ceremony at the Gulfside Pavilion. Early arrival is recommended as parking fills quickly. This event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit pensacolamardigras.com.

Fat Tuesday Celebration

March 4

Pensacola Mardi Gras and Seville Quarter are teaming up with Mardi Gras Krewes for a French Quarter Fat Tuesday Celebration on March 4 at Seville Quarter in downtown Pensacola. This Big Easy-style Mardi Gras party will include a low country boil, food trucks, dancing and partying. The Priscus Celebration will kick off at 11 am with a Mardi Gras-themed brunch. Krewes will take over every room inside the historic Seville Quarter, transforming the historic complex into the French Quarter for the day. The coronation of a new King and Queen Priscus will take place at 7 pm, with the end of the 2025 Mardi Gras season commemorated at midnight. For tickets and more details, visit pensacolamardigras.com.



Photo courtesy of Visit Pensacola



How to Spot Artificial Intelligence

Protect Yourself from Misinformation and Scams

By Lauren Watkins

It's official: artificial intelligence (AI) isn't going anywhere. With every company revealing their new AI-driven tools, headlines constantly creating hype around the topic and workplaces implementing AI into daily workflows, it's clear that everyone is invested in these technological advancements. While AI can be useful, it's also new. The capabilities of these programs may prove beneficial, but it also opens a brand-new world of scams, phishing attempts and the spread of misinformation. Seniors, in particular, are often targeted by these AI scams because they might not be as familiar with these emerging technologies. It's necessary to learn how to detect these deceptions to improve your personal security.

Why Should Seniors be Concerned About AI Deception?

AI can create written content, images, videos and even audio recordings that are difficult to discern from content created by a human being, making it hard to tell what's real and what's not. And, unfortunately, scammers often use AI to trick people into giving away personal information or money.

Recent studies show that older adults are disproportionately impacted by scams. According to the FBI's 2023 Internet Crime Report, the total losses linked to complaints of elder fraud totaled over \$3.4 billion in 2023, up from \$2.9 billion in 2022. Scams relying on AI develop as the capabilities grow, meaning it's not always easy to detect.

AI in Photos and Videos:

It's easier than ever for scammers to manipulate images and videos with AI. It's possible for programs such as OpenAI's Dall-E to alter images of anyone from celebrities to your own family. These manipulations are referred to as "deepfakes."

What to Look Out For:

- Pay attention to highly detailed areas like hands, feet, and facial features. It's common for AI generated images to have extra fingers, misaligned noses, or odd appearances.
- The lighting of an image says a lot. When you look at an image, ask yourself if the scenario in the photo calls for artificial, high-definition lighting.

AI in Audio:

You may have heard about AI tools that can mimic someone's voice. Scammers can now use these tools to make a phone call that sounds exactly like a friend or family member. It's a trick known as "voice phishing." In 2022 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) received 726,000 reports of imposter scams, a category that includes grandparent scams.

What to Look Out For:

- Vague, non-expressive sentences or a tone that doesn't match the person's normal voice or language. Sometimes, the structure of the sentences doesn't make sense and sounds mumbled.
- Repetition of the same phrases or questions that are overtly requesting personal information, like a social security number or credit card.

AI in Writing:

Another way AI is used in scams is through fake emails. AI can write emails that look like they're from a trusted source, such as a bank or a relative. These emails often ask you to click on a link, verify your personal information, or make a payment. Pay attention to unsolicited text messages and social media posts, as well.

What to Look Out For:

- Overly formal language. Does the tone of this message match the person sending it or the situation at hand?
- Extremely fast response times could indicate the use of AI. Consider how long it may take for a person to type a message.

How Can You Protect Yourself?

If you feel a phone call begins to seem "off," look at the phone number or caller-ID. Be wary of unknown numbers, even if they appear to be local. If the communication is coming from someone close to you, like a friend, coworker, or family member, ask a question that only said person would know about you. Don't ask about any identifying information such as your birthday, rather, something such as the date of your anniversary or the name of your childhood pet. In the event a scam affects you or someone you know, call the National Elder Fraud Helpline, run by the U.S. Department of Justice, at 833-372-8311.



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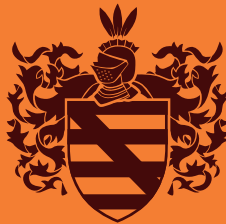


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The New Bruce Beach

A New Waterfront Destination

Photos courtesy of City of Pensacola

by Morgan Cole

After six years of planning, designing and construction, the revitalization of Bruce Beach is now complete and the park is open as Pensacola's newest public waterfront space.

The project to rehabilitate Bruce Beach Park has been in the works for most of this decade. This catalytic project is part of the Pensacola Waterfront Framework Plan supporting the city's goal of creating a more connected public waterfront for residents and visitors alike.

Key project goals include:

- Connect people to the waterfront
- Restore and enhance local ecology
- Mark and commemorate African American history and heritage at the site
- Design for educational activities, both indoors and outdoors
- Create a cultural and educational destination at the Bay's edge

The project was designed by the planning and engineering firm HDR, with consistency review from SCAPE and input from the public. The city awarded a contract to Biggs Construction Inc. for the construction of the Bruce Beach Revitalization Project in 2022.

The city unveiled the completed phase one portion of the 13-acre park during a public ribbon cutting ceremony

in April of last year, as construction continued on the nearly \$4.9 million section of phase two.

"This has been years and years—about six years in fact—in the making. From the genesis of this project to robust community feedback about what the vision could be here, and access to the waterfront, all of these things have now been talked about for years," Pensacola Mayor D.C. Reeves said.





The park features an array of amenities, as well as signage that tells the history of the property and surrounding neighborhood, from its days a dry dock to becoming a recreation area for the Black community during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras.

Phase one of the revitalization project brought about major upgrades to the property. Constructed for \$6.9 million, improvements include a central plaza with walkway, shade structures, two public lawn areas with seat walls, a learning garden and a children's playground.

Another important feature constructed as part of phase one, is a new pedestrian bridge that runs over Washerwoman Creek, allowing for a direct connection to the neighboring Community Maritime Park.

For decades, Bruce Beach has been a key site for coastal recreation in Pensacola, with a rich history of use by the city's Black community. As part of the park's redesign, SCAPE also developed a series of double-sided signs that invite visitors to explore the history of Bruce Beach. The interpretive signage details the site's marshy beginnings, sharing the stories of the park's industrial history, its evolution as a recreational center and its reopening today.

The signs also explore the origin and lasting significance of Bruce Beach for Black, Indigenous and Creole members of the Pensacola community. The content and design of the interpretive signage was a collaborative effort between SCAPE, HDR and a group of local historians from the University of West Florida Historic Trust.

Local history is sprinkled throughout the park, highlighting the history of the area, from its days as a

shipyard in the 19th century to the location of a public pool for Black people used during the segregation era up until the early 1970s. Open from 1957 to 1975, Bruce Pool was "the place to be" during the summer. The outline of the original Bruce Pool is marked with concrete at the foot of the Washerwoman Creek bridge.

The park also highlights the area's connection to Pensacola Bay, with the children's playground framed by a large map on the ground that shows the outline of Pensacola Bay and other surrounding waterways.





With native plantings, improved stormwater management areas and a specific focus on protecting specific native trees and wetland areas, the revitalized park helps restore and enhance the local ecology and the community's connection to the water.

The city initially did not open the first phase of the park because of ongoing site construction and the lack of a public restroom facility. However, in April of last year, the city announced that the completed phase one section of the park would open early due to the installation of a new modular public restroom known as a Portland Loo.

"To have the park open as an amenity for kids, for parents and grandparents who put a lot of value and memories into this area, to have this open for six or seven months before phase two is completed, will be a big asset for us," Reeves said.



The most recent project milestone was the completion of the phase two section of the park in October. Phase two improvements gave the park a fresh look and updated amenities, including planting 194 new trees, building wall terraces and creating a bluff overlook with panoramic views of Pensacola Bay and the city.

Other additions include a rock scramble, terrace sitting areas, a permanent kayak launch, a sand volleyball court and designated picnic areas.

"Much like the Community Maritime Park before it, the new park will serve as a catalyst for the city's economic growth," Reeves said.

Swimming is not permitted at the park, but the park does serve as an access point for kayakers and other paddle craft to launch into the bay.

The city initially postponed the grand opening of the park in October due to a spike in the water bacteria levels surrounding the park. In November, bacteria levels were confirmed to have returned to normal and the city hosted the official grand opening on November 8. Members of the community and project partners were invited to celebrate the project and view the completed phase two portion of the park.

Bruce Beach Park is located at 601 W. Main Street in downtown Pensacola and is open seven days a week. To learn more about the Bruce Beach Revitalization Project, visit cityofpensacola.com.

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The Comfort of Quilting

By Emily Echevarria

Nothing quite represents comfort and coziness like being curled up under the soft warmth of a handmade quilt.

From colorful geometric patterns to monochromatic stitched masterpieces, quilts can come in all forms, and they're very often passed down from generation to generation as family heirlooms. The effort and talent that goes into making them may be mysterious to many, but this craft has dedicated practitioners that span generations as the skill is taught and passed down—often in helpful groups like local quilting bee, The Sunbonnet Sisters.

With about 20 women ranging in age from their 40s to 80s, The Sunbonnet Sisters are a warm and welcoming bunch with a shared enjoyment of quilting, facilitated by Linda Kimble. The group was initially started as an offshoot of another quilting bee, The Sunbonnet Sues, which was started by members of the Pensacola Quilters Guild.

The Pensacola Quilters Guild is a nonprofit organization that offers many benefits to local quilters and beginners who want to learn the skill. The group holds monthly meetings, workshops and skill shares, and also holds an annual quilt show to showcase masterpieces made by local artisans. This year's showcase theme is "Stars Above, Quilts Below" and the event will take place March 28 and 29 at the Pensacola Interstate Fairgrounds.



Patti Struck serves as the first vice president and educational coordinator of the Pensacola Quilter's Guild, and said the show is great for quilters and non-quilters alike.

"It's an opportunity to get together with other quilters and talk with them, to meet people from other guilds and learn from each other," she said. "For the general public it's kind of an art show, with all the colors and textures and different techniques that go into the quilts."

Patti said many people are introduced to the Guild when they see the booth at the Great Gulf Coast Arts Festival, or through outreach quilting classes like those Patti teaches at the library. She suggested those interested attend one of the group's two monthly meetings. Membership is only \$25 for the year and offers access to educational workshops, presentations and the wealth of knowledge of the nearly 200 members.



While the Guild offers a plethora of resources and activities for quilting aficionados, the bee offers a smaller group for more one-on-one sharing and learning. At their regular meetups, the Sunbonnet Sisters address club business, discuss their in-progress projects and show off their latest work.

"One of the most beautiful things is that there is a difference in the ages and we get together, we're from all different situations," Linda said. "We come together and there's such a closeness. We try to be there for one another if one is sick, and we stay connected."

The social aspect of the group has provided support and flourishing friendships among the members. When Linda underwent surgery a few months ago, members of the Sunbonnet Sisters checked in and stopped by with meals during her recovery. One brought her a handmade prayer shawl, giving Linda the very experience she had often offered to others with the quilts she and other members of the bee have created to gift and donate to others. Wrapped in the lovingly crafted shawl, Linda said she felt humbled by the offering.

"I just thought, oh, I hope this is what the people that we make these quilts for feel," she said. "This is what I want them to feel, that they matter, that they're loved."

The group often makes quilts with an organization in mind where they'll donate the finished quilts. In early 2024, Linda saw a local news piece about Council on Aging's collection of heaters and blankets for seniors in need. She discussed this need with the group and



members contributed quilts they created throughout the year to be donated, resulting in a donation of 32 beautiful and intricate quilts that were distributed to older adults along with heaters during the colder temperatures in December.

Kathy Israel is a member who first became interested in quilting as a child while watching her mother craft quilts along with a group that was donating them to an orphanage in Mexico. She carried that interest through a teaching career.

"It's been fun watching the excitement of younger people getting involved," Kathy said.

Linda's daughter, Dawn, has been a member of the bee for around a year, and initially she resisted her mother's interest in quilting. Then, for Christmas 2023, she was looking for a practical handmade gift she could give to her roughly 50 employees and settled on a simple quilted soup cozy like a set Linda had made for her family.

"By the end of it, I had 230 soup cozies and carpal tunnel," she joked. "And I said I'd never make another soup cozy. But when it was all done, I'd had so much fun with the fabrics and that was it. I've totally caught the bug."

The basic structure of a quilt involves picking fabric and pattern, cutting the fabric pieces, and sewing them together to form the quilt top, or front. Depending on the pattern, one might add a border around the pattern. Next comes the basting, which means connecting the quilt top to a thin filling called batting, and connecting that to the backing fabric.

Last is sewing on the binding to finish the quilt. There are popular kits with pre-cut fabric pieces that streamline the process and help beginners find their groove. While quilting might seem like a very traditional craft, there are endless styles that suit any niche, and a variety of styles are represented among the group.

In the last year, Dawn has made 30 quilted projects and said she quilts any time she possibly can. When she's not quilting, she's watching videos about quilting, usually from her favorite YouTube quilter Kimberly Jolly. The resources for beginning quilters online are endless, and all the Sunbonnet Sisters utilize videos and online stores to hone their craft. They also frequent several local stores where many quilters flock for patterns, fabrics and other supplies. Those include A&E, Martelli's and other typical craft stores.

For the Sunbonnet Sisters, the skill and art of quilting is definitely a shared passion, as is spreading love through their cozy creations, but the camaraderie and connection that comes through the bee is just as important, stitching them not only to each other but to their greater communities.

"We've had some members who've passed away and their family members have come back with their mothers' unfinished projects and it's been a blessing for us to finish them for that person because we knew them too," Kathy said. "It was like one more thing you could do for a friend to finish that quilt."

"It does make you feel like it ties you to the ages," Linda said. "It really does tie you to the generations that came before you."

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An Exclusive Interview with Mary Hoxeng

by Kelly Oden

Local media moguls **Mary and Dave Hoxeng** are hardworking entrepreneurs with a deep commitment to community. The Hoxeng's journey from startup to success was neither fast nor easy. In 1984, the couple took the first step in realizing Dave's lifelong dream of owning a radio station when they applied for a radio frequency license in Pensacola. Little did they know that it would take 15 years and a trip to the Supreme Court to fulfill their dreams. The couple officially moved to Pensacola in 2002, and they flipped the switch on Cat Country 98.7 in 2003.

Since then, the Hoxengs have established multiple successful radio stations including Cat Country 98.7, News Radio 92.3 FM/AM 1620 and ESPN Pensacola 99.1 FM/1330 AM—all while leaving a lasting impact on the Pensacola community through their entrepreneurial and philanthropic work.

Coming of Age had the pleasure of speaking with Mary about her and Dave's journey together, the challenges and triumphs of building a business and the deep friendships and connections they have developed along the way.



Young Mary with family

COA: Where did you and Dave each grow up, and how did you meet in New York City?

MH: Dave grew up in Pittsburgh and I grew up in New York City. We met in 1979. I was a media buyer in New York, and he was selling advertising, so he called on me. I was his client, and that was how we originally met. We just became good friends. I was at an agency called Benton and Bowles in Manhattan. We were in cubicles, and the girl on the other side of the cubicle kept coming to me saying, 'He's got a crush on you.' I was like, 'No, you're out of your mind. You don't know what you're talking about.' Well, sure enough, one day, he asked me to go to the Philharmonic concert. They used to do free concerts in Central Park. We went after work, and we stopped and got some sandwiches, and as soon as it got dark, he pounced on me, pretty much. That was when I first figured

out that he actually liked me more than just as a client. I was 24 and he was 29 when we met.

COA: What was your first impression of Dave?

MH: I knew he was really smart. He was also very shy in everything except sales. I was Miss Media in New York City, so I dragged him everywhere. Now it's kind of like we've reversed roles. Now, he's become this person who wants to be out and about all the time, and I kind of want to be home sometimes. He's no longer shy. He's very outspoken. He has no filter, and he has no fear of saying anything. He'll say what he thinks. He'll tell you you're great, or he'll tell you that you didn't do a good job on that. He's very honest.

COA: What do you think his first impression of you was?

MH: I know he liked calling on me because he would come and

sit for an hour and a half just chatting with me. I think he also thought I was smart, which was attractive to him. I mean, that was important to both of us. We're not into looks and all of that. We're really into being kind and good and smart. He is an amazingly kind person—I mean, almost to a fault sometimes.

COA: What part of New York did you grow up in?

MH: I grew up in Queens, in Whitestone. I moved into the city when I was 20. I did a year of college, and then a year of fashion design school. I said, 'Enough of this school stuff. I need to make some money,' because I came from a poor background. Ultimately, I did go back to school. I graduated from Hunter College in New York City when I was 32. I got my degree in communications, which was great. I went to school at night and on the weekends and I

worked during the day. Dave graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a degree in radio, television and motion pictures. He knew since he was a kid that he wanted to own a radio station. I remember his mom telling me once that when he was 4-years-old, he took apart a transistor radio and put it back together again. I mean, he loves radio—specifically news talk radio. He's all about news talk.

COA: When did you decide to get married?

MH: We dated for nine years before we got married. He was scared to death of getting married. And today, if you ask him, it's as if it were all his idea. I said to him, 'You know, after nine years, if you don't know you want to marry me, then we need to move on.' That lasted a few months until he came back begging. So, we got married in 1988. I moved to San Antonio in 1986, but we came back to New York to get married. He had moved to San Antonio to run a group of radio stations. When I moved there, I got a job as a national sales manager at a television station. So, he was working in radio and I was working in TV at that point.

COA: What brought you to Pensacola?

MH: In 1986, we applied for the license for a brand-new frequency in Pensacola, Florida at 98.7 on the dial. It was not an existing radio station at the time. We didn't buy a radio station. We won a license to the frequency in 2003. It took 15 years to get the actual license.



Young Dave with family

COA: Why did it take so long to get the license?

MH: Because you have to be able to prove to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that you have the money to build and run the station. Originally, there were 17 applicants for the frequency, and it got down to four people. The four of us met and basically auctioned it off between us. We paid to have two other applicants withdraw their applications—one of which was Papa Don Schroeder, and the other was Marty McGreevey, who owned a liquor store across the street from the Flora-Bama at the time. The last holdout was an African American pastor from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who really wanted the license. It turned out he had been somewhat dishonest in that he

was going through a divorce with his wife, and he hid a lot of money in different places. So, it went all the way to the Supreme Court, and we wound up winning the license, but it took 15 years. Once we got the license, I remained in San Antonio for another year to continue working so that we had income. Dave came here and lived at the Red Roof Inn. That's when we built the tower, which cost over a million dollars back in 2003. It took about a year to build it. I would come over on the weekends. Dave's room at the Red Roof Inn was all paper and printers and equipment—all that kind of stuff. So, when I would come and visit, we would have to get another room so that we could sleep because he literally had a king-sized bed and only a tiny space for his body. The rest was all equipment.



Dave and Mary launch Cat Country

COA: When did the station finally open?

MH: Dave left San Antonio about a year and a half before I did. I stayed and sold the house and continued to earn some income. I moved here on July 3, 2003 and we turned the station on at 5:09 pm on November 29, 2003. The first song we played was Dark Side of the Moon by Pink Floyd, which was something I always said I wanted to do. I was sitting outside where the tower is, in my car listening, and Dave and his dad were inside flipping the button. All of a sudden, I ran out and said, 'I hear it! I hear it!' We weren't ready to be a country station yet, so we went with all Christmas music. We were Christmas Radio 98.7 until Christmas night. On Christmas night, we debuted Cat Country

98.7 and we debuted with the George Strait song about coming from San Antonio. That was our official opening.

COA: How does obtaining a frequency work?

MH: You don't buy it. You're awarded the frequency, but you have to pay the legal fees and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) fees to get there. We are governed by the FCC. We don't have a traditional business license. We have a license from the FCC to operate the frequency of 98.7.

COA: And that frequency is designated to this specific place?

MH: Yes. It's a 100,000-watt signal, and we go pretty much from the west side of Mobile over to Destin and pretty far north. I

picked it up in Hattiesburg, so it's a strong signal. We've been blessed with just having an amazing group of people who work with us too. I mean, you have to be a little crazy to work in radio, quite honestly. We work hard and we work all the time. It's not like we go home at night and our job is done.

COA: Tell me about each of the stations that you have now.

MH: We have Cat Country, which we refer to as the Queen. It's a very successful country music radio station. We've now won three CMA Awards and four ACM Awards. We've won Personality of the Year as well as Station of the Year. We've been very, very successful. When we came into the market, WXBM was huge. They had been here at the time for around 44 years, and we were brand new, so it was quite the struggle to take them on. We did it the old-fashioned way. We do radio the old-fashioned way. We have actual people who are on our staff. We live here, we work here, we pray here, we play here. Whereas all our competition's corporate offices are out of town, and all the money they make here in Pensacola goes out of town. With us, all the money that's made here stays in our town. We're very, very proud of that. It took us a while, but we did take WXBM down to where now, Cat Country is the number one country station in the market, which is great. News Radio started as a classic country music station with Larry Butler, the producer. He was on the air. We did news, and then we played classic country music. After about three years, we transitioned into live news talk. We

are now live in the morning and in the afternoon, and then we run syndication from 11 am until three pm. We're a Fox Network affiliate, so we won the Fox syndication. Then we purchased WEBY from Mike Bates, which, at the time, was a talk station. We transitioned that over to ESPN. We have the ESPN affiliation. That's still a growing brand for us. It's a very strong signal. You can get ESPN on 99.1 or 1330 AM all the way to New Orleans. Then, when the FCC started to allow FM translators, which were things that would boost your signal to areas out in the country and stuff, we started on our HD2 channel, Pensacola Playlist, which is at 94.5. That's mostly female musician-based music from the 90s and the 2000s—all the big hits pretty much. Except for every year on November 1 through Christmas Day, we play all Christmas music, which some people love, and some people hate. We also started a digital division where we now can provide clients with digital services like buying ads on Facebook and things like that. Dave originally told me that it was going to be just this one little station. We'd probably have maybe ten employees, and I could be at the beach all the time, because I'm a beach girl. In reality, I work all the time, and we now have about 50 employees. It has really grown.

COA: Well, you mentioned working all the time. You are the general manager, and Dave is the CFO, correct?

MH: Yes. His official title on our website is Catalyst. So, he comes up with things that we all need to do. He is responsible for forward thinking. Where are

we going? How are we getting there? He's very engineer-driven. He's got an engineer's mind. He always pushes us to do more, to do better. But he works primarily from home. He only comes to the station maybe twice a month. I come in every day.

COA: How do you work together and maintain a good personal relationship?

MH: You know, it's funny. It works because the things that I'm responsible for and interested in, he has no interest in, and vice versa. I don't care about how the radio works. I just want to know that when I push that button, I'm going to hear it. I don't need to know about this and that and the transmitter. He doesn't want to know that I have to hire a new sales manager or whatever it might be. He's great in emergencies. I mean, if

anything happens, he is calm and collected. I tend to get stressed, and he really doesn't. So, we balance each other well there. He is very optimistic. I mean, he believes he can do anything he sets his mind to, and he pretty much does. I'm always the one who says, 'Well, do you really think we can do this?' Because I try to be practical, right? He's always like, 'Yeah, we can do it!' So, I give it the old college try and we typically do succeed. The one downside of it is that we'll be home having dinner, and inevitably we wind up talking about business. So, we force ourselves to take some time and go places and do things that are not radio-related or business-related, but it is hard; this is our baby. We don't have children. God did not want us to have children, and we tried. Now I know why—because we never could have



Dave and Mary at their wedding reception



Dave and Mary on the beach

done this if we'd had children. There's no way. I mean, this is really my family. I spend more time with them than I do with my own family.

COA: What is the secret to a long and happy marriage?

MH: Respect and like. I respect Dave so much, and he does me as well. Besides being in love with each other, we really like each other. We like to be together. We like to do things together. And that's different. I think part of that is because we didn't have children, so we really had to depend on each other and remain focused on each other and on the business. Although now we have a cat. She's our baby.

COA: What was your first big award and what is it like to receive these big, national awards now?

MH: It's very exciting and very rewarding. I'm just so happy for our staff because they work so hard. I mean, to get the local recognition is amazing, but to be able to get Pensacola some national recognition is just wonderful. I think our Academy of Country Music Station of the Year Award was the first award that we got.

COA: What do you guys like to do in your off time?

MH: I love going to the beach. Dave's not a beach person at all. He loves to sail. He's very involved in computer stuff. He loves to read. I mean, he is an avid reader. We also like to travel. I love going to Europe. For a few years, we couldn't take any trips because we were so busy getting everything going here. But this past spring, we went on a river barge cruise in Budapest, which was amazing.

We travel at Christmas to be with family and then typically, our family comes down here in the summer, and we rent a big house. This summer we had 29 people in one house together, and we all got along. It was great.

COA: How do you approach getting older? Do you have any tricks or advice for aging?

MH: My number one advice is to keep moving. You can't stop. You have to keep pushing yourself to go, go, go. Because it's easy to just sit down and watch TV, and that's not good. I also think that staying involved in business has been very good for both of us. I mean, I don't feel like we're outdated or whatever. Dave's much better at the technology end of it than I am. I can do the basic stuff, but he can figure out all that hard stuff. We just keep going, going, going. We do try to take very good care of our health as best we can. We try to do what we're supposed to do. We both need to exercise more, which we've both said we're going to do next year, but I'm pretty sure we said that last year.

COA: What do you love most about Pensacola?

MH: I love the weather. I love the beach, and I love the community. I love that we live in a community where people are so willing to help each other. I've never seen anything like this in my life. People come out time and time again to help others. It's unbelievable. When I tell people about all the things that Pensacola people do for each other, I think they think I'm lying. It's a very philanthropic place



Dave and Mary with extended family

and lots of entrepreneurs live here and are willing to give back. It's small enough that we can be involved in all of that. I really like being involved in making our community better. Dave's passion is economic development. He's very involved in economic development. My passion is really in nonprofits. I've been on the board of IMPACT 100, Arc, Council on Aging, the Escambia County Sheriff's Foundation and others. My passion is trying to help nonprofits. We have a great community for doing and a great group of people who are willing to work to make it happen. When we first started the radio station, we had no advertising. So, we met with most of the nonprofits in town and said, 'Let us help you with your cause. Tell us what your cause is and how we can help you.' Our first advertisers on the radio station were all nonprofits for a long, long time, until finally,

our very first paying client was Beré Jewelers, and they have been with us every month since. I am forever thankful to Barry and Laura Cole for recognizing that something was happening here at Cat Country.

COA: What other charities are close to your heart?

MH: Dave and I did an endowment at Pensacola State College last year for journalism students. That's very important to us because we need some journalists. We helped the new Baptist Hospital. We did an endowment with them as well. I think good medical care is so important—especially as we get older. We do the radiothon for the Children's Hospital every year. We've raised close to half a million dollars for them. We've also helped to raise a lot of money for Gulf Coast Kid's House and the Arc Gateway as well.

COA: What's next? Are you going to add more stations? Do you have any big adventures on the horizon? The big "R"?

MH: Dave's exact quote is, 'I want to die with my boots on.' I'm not quite convinced that's what I want to do. I don't want to stop working. I would love to work three days a week with the radio station and two days a week with nonprofits. That would be ideal for me. But right now, I'm needed here five days a week. So here I am. Dave would love to own WXBM, but I don't see how we could possibly do anything more than we're already doing.

What's The News?



Gulf Winds Credit Union Kites on the Coast Presented by Council on Aging

March 14-16 | Pensacola Beach Gulfside Pavilion

Presented by Council on Aging, the fourth annual Gulf Winds Credit Union Kites on the Coast festival will bring three days of intergenerational, high-flying fun on beautiful Casino Beach in Pensacola Friday, March 14 to Sunday, March 16. Chicago Kite will bring massive show kits and SkyFX will be showing off high-speed stunt kites. Food trucks, kid's activities, and music will round out the celebration at the Gulfside Pavilion on Casino Beach. Hours are Friday 4 pm – 7 pm with night fly into the evening if weather permits; Saturday 10 am to 4 pm, with another night fly after sunset if weather permits; Sunday, 10 am to 2 pm.

The community is invited to celebrate this classic pastime with kite flying, local vendors, food trucks, and showstopping displays from Chicago Kite and SkyFX. Proceeds from event donations and sponsorships support the seniors and programs served by Council on Aging. The weekend will include:

- Professional Kite Flying Demonstrations
- Lighted Night Fly (weather permitting)
- Kids' Activities
- Food Trucks
- Kites for sale on site OR bring your own to fly!

For more information visit kitesonthecoast.org.



Granny Get-Down: The Ole School Food Fest

May 3 | Sanders Beach-Corinne Jones Resource Center

Join us for this year's Granny Get-Down, hosted by Council on Aging of West Florida. We're bringing back that ole school food fest feeling this year, so grab a plate, and let's get down! The Granny Get Down "Ole School Food Fest" is a cook-off featuring the culinary stylings of Council on Aging's AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteers. For just \$10, attendees can sample an array of homestyle dishes while enjoying music and cooking demonstrations in a festive atmosphere that harkens back to traditional community food festivals. This vibrant and nostalgic celebration of classic culinary delights brings together the community to support the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent volunteer programs. Beyond the delicious offerings, the event aims to educate the community about food insecurity among seniors and raise funds to support local aging services programs that help combat this growing challenge.

For more information or for sponsorship opportunities visit grannygetdown.org.



Council on Aging Receives Santa Rosa Chamber Community Impact Award

Council on Aging of West Florida was awarded the Community Impact Award at Santa Rosa County's Annual Community Leadership Awards Luncheon on January 17. This award celebrates the positive results and dedication that Council on Aging has shown in Santa Rosa County. Through programs like Meals on Wheels, senior dining sites, and respite services, Council on Aging has impacted the lives of thousands of seniors and their caregivers in Northwest Florida, as Santa Rosa County's Chamber of Commerce recognized through this award.

FPL Makes \$10,000 Donation for Heaters for Seniors

Florida Power and Light Company generously donated \$10,000 to Council on Aging to fund the purchase of electronic heaters for seniors in need. This past winter season has had uncharacteristically low temperatures for Northwest Florida, so these heaters were needed more than ever before. Having a reliable and safe heating source can drastically increase comfort on a cold winter day and even save lives, helping local seniors stay happy and warm. Thank you, FPL!



Senior Volunteers Participate in MLK Day of Service

In Recognition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, participants in our Senior Volunteer Programs collected donations for Ministry Village at Olive and visited the site on January 31 for a day of service. The Ministry Village at Olive, Inc. is a charitable group that provides support to members of the community, particularly those struggling with addiction, people without stable housing and those with small children. During their time with Ministry Village, Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent volunteers gave donations of personal care items for young women working towards securing a more positive and sustainable future through Ministry Village's program.

Thank You.

Many thanks to our donors. We appreciate your generous support. Gifts received from November 24th 2024 -February 25, 2025

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Council on Aging of West Florida is a local independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that has served seniors and their families since 1972. Council on Aging of West Florida helps seniors in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties live healthy, safe and independent lives in their own familiar surroundings by providing community-based, in-home programs and services such as Meals on Wheels and Alzheimer's respite care. For more information, call 850-432-1475 or visit www.coawfla.org.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the division of consumer services by calling 1-800-435-7532 toll free within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state. The registration number assigned to Council on Aging of West Florida, inc by the florida department of agricultural and cosumer services is ch201. Council on Aging of West Florida does not use a professional solicitor or professional fund raising consultant for the purposes of soliciting funds. 100% of donations go to Council on Aging of West Florida, Inc.

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