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# PINES & RIVER

WINTER 2026 ISSUE

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Fusion of*

## *Chef Ethan Ammons*

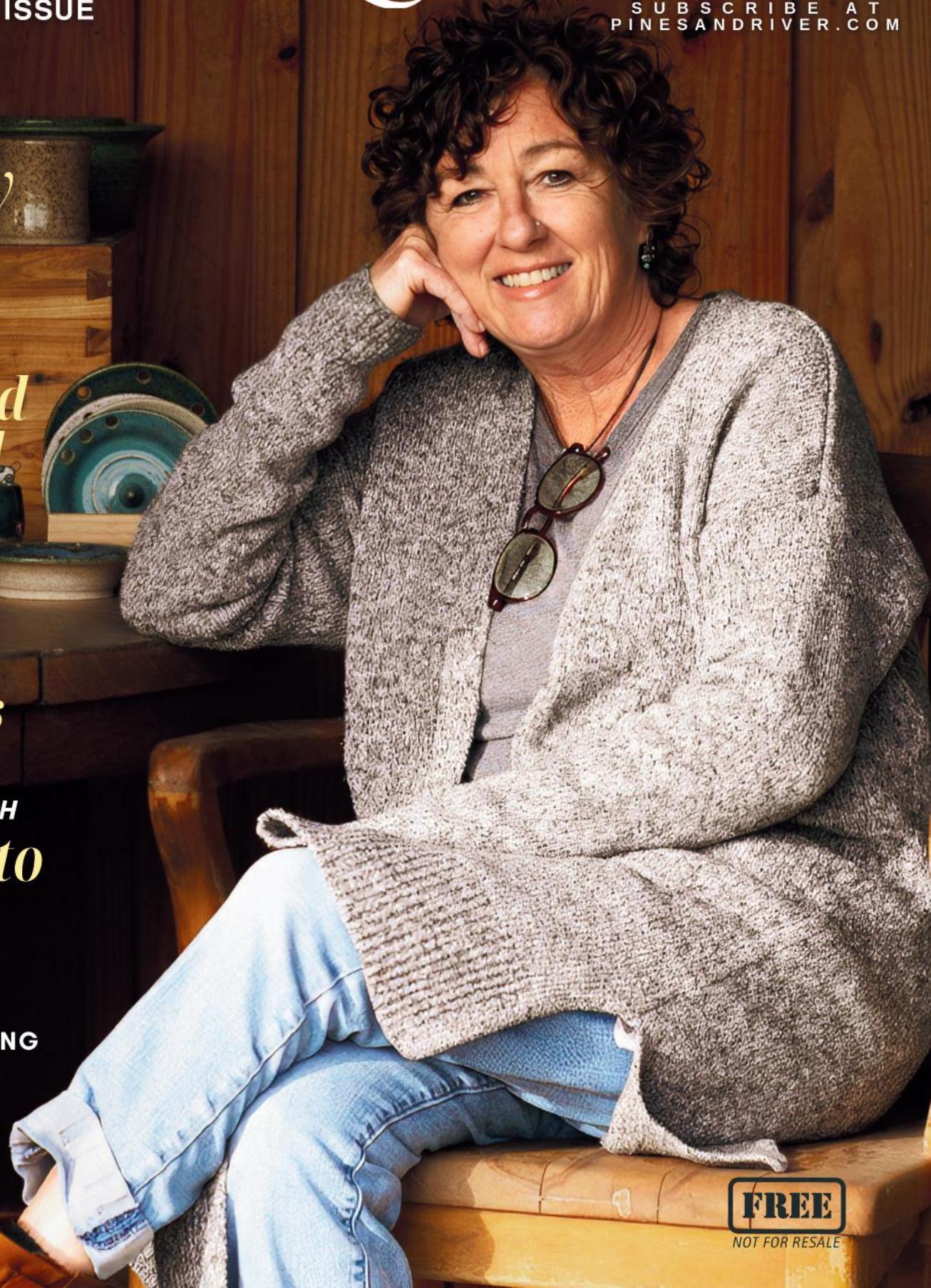
**CAVE OF THE  
GIANT CATFISH**

## *Rob Neto*

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**JENNIFER YOUNG  
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/04

PINES AND RIVER MAGAZINE WINTER  
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DEAD LAKES

# ABOUT:

## FOUNDING EDITOR

### C. Scott Stephens

For as long as I can remember, this region has held a special place in my heart. The Chipola River Valley is rich with history, natural beauty, and a vibrant sense of community that is unlike anywhere else. From the rolling pines that frame our sunsets to the winding rivers that have shaped our landscape for centuries, there's a unique charm in every corner. But beyond the land, it's the people who make this place truly extraordinary.

I've always believed that our stories, whether they come from local artisans, farmers, business owners, or community leaders, deserve to be told. Pines and River Magazine was born from that belief. My vision was to create a platform that celebrates our community's rich heritage while shining a light on the remarkable individuals whose hard work, creativity, and heart make the Chipola River Valley such a special place to live.

Every issue is a love letter to the people and places that define our region. Whether we're highlighting local crafts, sustainable farming, artistic talent, or the tireless efforts of community advocates, my goal is to ensure that these stories not only reach our neighbors but inspire pride in the valley we all call home.

## OUTDOORS EDITOR

### Rob Neto

My wife and I first visited the Chipola River Valley in 2005. It was supposed to be a half day visit to Blue Spring Recreation Area to dive the spring. That dive changed our lives. We immediately fell in love with the area. We knew we had to move here someday. We ended up moving here sooner than we expected. During our next trip 6 months later, we purchased our first house. The plan was to rent it to visitors in between our own visits. That lasted a year. We couldn't stay away. We uprooted our lives in Arizona and moved to Jackson County. We've been here since.

What attracted us most to the area were the springs. The Chipola River has sixty-three documented springs, the highest concentration in Northwest Florida. We not only like to visit and see the springs from our boat and kayaks, but we also like to dive into them and explore the hidden rivers that few get to see. There are dozens of miles of passages below the farms in the Chipola River Valley, some right below our homes. They are absolutely amazing.

## STYLE EDITOR

### Jennifer Young

Jennifer Young, owner of Sassi Frass Boutique in Bristol, Florida, is our Contributing Fashion Editor. Jennifer is known for her stylish eye, Southern charm, and love for helping women feel their best. Get ready for seasonal style tips, local fashion spotlights, and plenty of inspiration straight from one of our community's most fashionable voices.

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**FOOD EDITOR  
COMING  
SPRING 2026...  
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ISSUE!!**



## ON THE COVER:

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Pines and River Magazine is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Pine Cone Group LLC, serving as a vibrant extension of the company's mission to celebrate and uplift the rich culture, natural beauty, and hardworking communities of the Chipola River Valley. As part of The Pine Cone Group's growing portfolio of purpose-driven media and branding ventures, the magazine operates with the same dedication to storytelling, authenticity, and local pride. This relationship ensures Pines and River Magazine benefits from the strategic vision, creative resources, and entrepreneurial spirit of its parent company while maintaining its unique voice as the region's premier lifestyle publication.

Pines and River Magazine is published four times each year seasonally. Home/Office subscriptions are available for \$25.99. We offer limited complimentary copies to the public at select locations in Jackson, Calhoun and Northern Gulf Counties. Check our website, [www.PinesandRiver.com](http://www.PinesandRiver.com) for exact locations.



/06

PINES AND RIVER MAGAZINE WINTER 2025

LOWER CHIPOLA

**Restoring  
Wonder  
08**

**Southern  
Chef 18**

**Catfish Cave**

**12**

**On a**

**Tankfull 26**

**Starr Studios**

**34**

**Spring Style**

**38**

# CONTENTS



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# RESTORING WONDER

How One Grandmother  
Found Her Calling  
Writing Faith-Filled  
Children's Books



Rosalind  
Basford,  
Author



**C. Scott Stephens**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

When she first imagined writing stories for children, it wasn't with plans for a book series or a mission statement. It began simply, quietly, and sweetly—around the time she became a grandmother. With the same tenderness that fills her voice now, she remembers picturing each grandchild as a woodland creature, each with a personality that would shape little tales of adventure and moral lessons. She laughs when she recalls, "And yes—one of them was definitely going to be a skunk."

But God had a different story in mind.

One evening, she and her husband, Larry, were watching the news. Headlines about cultural confusion, shifting identity narratives, and the pressures placed on today's young hearts filled the screen. Both felt the weight of it. "We were deeply disturbed," she says. Then Larry turned to her and said something that would change everything: "Someone needs to write Bible stories in rhyming form, like Dr. Seuss—something fun, something kids will enjoy, and something that teaches them about God."

She didn't hesitate. "I can do that," she thought. And in that moment, a new calling crystallized.

"I give all the glory to God," she says. "He put the desire in my heart, and my husband encouraged me to pursue it." What began as a grandmother's pastime became a ministry—one rooted in Scripture, creativity, and the hope of planting seeds of faith in the next generation.

#### SHAPED BY FAITH. DRIVEN BY PURPOSE.

Her writing, she explains, isn't just influenced by her relationship with God—it is completely formed by it.

She points to 2 Corinthians 5:20 and the call to be ambassadors for Christ. That role, she believes, demands love first—love expressed through word, action, gentleness, and grace.

She recalls once seeing a man holding a sign that read: "If Christ comes, kill Him again." Many were furious. She was heartbroken.

"My thought was, we have misrepresented Christ. This man only knew Jesus through the people

he had encountered. He had never truly experienced the love, joy, or redemption of knowing Christ."

That moment remains a driving force behind her work. "I pray my actions—and the words I write—honor God."

#### PLANTING A LIFELONG LOVE OF READING

The "Did You Know?" series is designed to spark curiosity—about God, about Scripture, and about the beauty of learning.

And intertwined with that mission is her desire to foster a genuine love of reading.

She remembers helping her granddaughter who once struggled with reading. After school, they would sit together, sharing stacks of rhyming books—reading them, rereading them, laughing through them.

"Her confidence grew along with her love of reading," she says. Today, that once-struggling granddaughter would rather read a book than watch TV.

"Rhyming books enhance active listening, reasoning, and phonetic skills. Those moments inspired me," she adds. "I want my books to help other children feel that same joy."

#### RECLAIMING THE RAINBOW

Her newest release, *Did You Know? God Made The Rainbow*, tells the story of Noah—but more importantly, restores the meaning behind one of the world's most recognizable symbols.

"The rainbow's identity has been hijacked," she says plainly. "I want to restore it."

She remembers the childlike delight of making a rainbow sun-catcher in school, proudly hanging it in the kitchen window, where it stayed for years. "It represented hope. God's covenant. Joy."

"The rainbow has stood as a symbol of God's promise for nearly 5,000 years," she says, "but it took the world just a few decades to distort it."

#### GUIDED BY SCRIPTURE — AND GRACE

If one verse guides her writing, it's 2 Corinthians 3:6:

"For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

To her, this verse is a reminder that the Word of God is meant to reveal the Father's heart, not to be used as a weapon.

"Sometimes Christians quote scripture without understanding it. That can be reckless," she says. "Understanding the Spirit behind the Word helps us see with love."

A former pastor once taught her to judge a person not only by actions, but by character. That truth shaped her deeply.

"If we know someone's character, we understand their heart," she says. "The same is true with God."

#### A CALL TO WRITE, A CALL TO WATER THE WORLD

For aspiring authors, her encouragement is bold and clear. She turns to 1 Peter 4:10–11 and the reminder to use our gifts as faithful stewards.

"We are all called to the pulpit—'pull pit,'" she says with a smile. "Our job is to pull as many as we can out of the pit."

Children, she believes, are the most vital mission field.

"The world floods their hearts with violence and idolatry," she says. "They say fight fire with fire—but the best way to fight fire is water."

She points to John 7:38, where Jesus

# **“The only Christ some people will ever know is the one we demonstrate daily.”**

describes believers as rivers of living water.

“Our world is on fire,” she says. “Only the water of the Word can overcome it.”

Moreover, so her message to future writers is this: “If God has called you to write children’s books—WRITE THE BOOK. Flood the bookstores with His Word. Embrace the journey. Trust Him.”



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# CAVE OF THE GIANT CATFISH



## Rob Neto Outdoor Editor

[rob.neto@pinesandriver.com](mailto:rob.neto@pinesandriver.com)

On the banks of the Chipola located in Calhoun County, not far from the northern boundary, lies a spring hidden by the dark tannic waters of the river. It goes by different names depending on who you ask. Some know it as Peacock (named after the family that used to own the land above it). Others know it as Maddachalk. Its most interesting name is the Cave of the Giant Catfish.

This spring is located along the west bank about a football field north of the Willis Bridge and a little more than a mile south of Johnny Boy Landing. The opening is only 5 to 10 feet below the surface, the depth dependent on the river level. It was almost 20 years ago when my wife, Jen, and I first set out to search for this elusive spring and venture into it. I had already been in dark, murky water not knowing if an alligator was waiting for me below the surface, so the threat of giant monster catfish that could swallow me whole, wasn't a deterrence. Access to the river from the bridge isn't very easy. There's a steep hill with several steps, but no flat area to stage dive equipment and no way to easily launch a canoe. We decided to put our canoe in at Johnny Boy Landing and paddle to it. We were just scouting so we didn't have our dive equipment with us. The current assisted our travel down the river, and we arrived at the bridge fairly quickly. We hadn't seen signs of the spring along the way. We weren't sure if we missed it or if it was well hidden. We eventually learned that unless the river level was low enough to allow the water to clear, the opening couldn't be seen. The only way to find it was to descend into the tannic river water, hoping there wasn't an alligator waiting below, or a giant man-eating catfish, and feel for the temperature difference of the water flowing out of the cave. The spring water is always 69 degrees. The river water varies season to season.

We turned around and paddled back up-river looking more closely for signs of the spring opening. We spotted a cave guideline arrow nailed to a tree on the west bank of the river about ten feet above the water line. Only another cave diver would have put that there, so we knew the spring

had to be nearby. We steered the canoe toward shore to look for more signs of it. We found no other clues hinting at its location. The river water was too tannic to see anything, but it had to be there.

We paddled back to the boat launch to load our dive equipment so we could do a proper search. Along the way we passed several kids paddling canoes and kayaks downstream. Jen and I were moving at a pretty brisk pace despite moving against the current. We were anxious to get our dive equipment so we could search for the cave. One of the kids in a canoe noticed our small wake and yelled at his friend sitting in the front, "Paddle harder! Those people are moving faster than us and they're going upriver!" We returned to the line arrow tree with our equipment, ready to get into the water and find the opening to Maddachalk cave. We stepped out onto the shallow riverbank and quickly geared up. I tied a guideline to the bottom of the tree with the arrow and descended into the tannin-stained river water. I felt my way along the bank, a little concerned that there would be an alligator or catfish lurking below. The water was dark and murky, and I could barely make out the beam from my dive light. If I came upon an alligator, it wouldn't be a long encounter.

Fortunately, there were no alligators. I didn't find any giant catfish either. About five minutes after I disappeared beneath the surface, I felt a drop in temperature and the water began to clear. I sprinted forward and saw the opening. It was magnificent! The clear water pushed the tannic river water aside and created a pocket about ten feet wide and six feet out from the riverbank. The surface was only six feet above the top of the cave opening. I tied the line from my reel to a large rock in the clear water and ascended back along the line to get Jen.

With Jen close behind me, we followed the line to the reel, and I retrieved it to continue into the cave. About twenty-five feet in and to the right, I found the beginning of the permanent guideline. I secured my line to the permanent guideline, and we continued into the cave. While not small by any means, the cave was not as big as what we were accustomed to. The section near the opening was the largest area, measuring about seven or eight feet tall and ten to twelve feet wide.



The farther we went into the cave, the smaller it got.

We encountered some larger areas along the way, but most of the passage was not very big. We hadn't been in the cave for very long when we saw our first giant catfish for which the cave was famous. I was swimming through the passage following the guideline when I saw movement directly beneath me. The floor stepped down at this point and the movement came from a lower step. It must have been four feet long and close to ten inches in diameter. It wasn't quite as large as I had expected. With all of the hype, I thought I would encounter a catfish that could swallow me whole. It was still the biggest catfish I had seen in person. The catfish was hanging out perpendicular to the tunnel less than a foot below me. I jumped a little when I saw it and felt my heart rate increase. The fish didn't scare me. I just hadn't expected it to be there. The fish didn't twitch. It didn't seem bothered by my presence. I wasn't sure it knew we were there. I signaled to Jen to look below as she passed the area. Not that she could have missed seeing it, but I didn't want her to get spooked. We saw three more catfish in the next couple of hundred feet. The other three varied in size from just a few inches shorter than the first one we had seen to one that was approaching five feet in length. They were swimming in an area to the right of the tunnel and none behaved aggressively. They were just hanging out in their commune several hundred feet inside of the cave. As we continued to follow the guideline, the intensity of the current increased and slowed us down. Maddachalk isn't a first magnitude spring. However, the small size of the passage meant the water current moving through it was something to contend with. It felt almost as strong as the current in Jackson Blue, the headspring of Merritt's Mill Pond in Marianna. (Check out the article i wrote about the history of that spring in the summer 2025 issue of Pines and River Magazine.) We turned around forty-one minutes into the dive and made it back to the opening in sixteen minutes. Granted, we were moving slowly and learning the cave on the way in. We were taking it all in and enjoying the sites. We were also fighting against the current.

Maddachalk has interesting topography. The depth changes regularly, varying from fifteen feet to forty feet of depth. The sections that remain at a constant depth are short and few. It felt like we were on a roller coaster ride. We



had a great time on the dive and Maddachalk became a favorite of ours. I now look forward to finding the catfish that still inhabit the hidden river. They are usually hanging out in the same area of the cave several hundred feet from the opening to the river. If they ever venture out into the river, it must be at night because I always see them there. And they must venture out because there's nothing for them to eat in the cave. I doubt these are the same catfish I saw almost 20 years ago. The channel and flathead catfish that are known to be in the Chipola typically don't have lifespans that long. They are definitely descendants, though. And none of them has ever acted aggressively toward me or any other diver I've been with. I've even been face to face with a couple of them.

If you're interested in seeing videos of Maddachalk Spring so you can see what it looks like inside, visit my YouTube channel and click on the Panhandle River Caves playlist. I have several videos of dives I've done in Maddachalk posted there.

[YouTube.com/CaveDiverRN](https://www.youtube.com/CaveDiverRN)

\* Much of this article was taken from my most recent book, The Hidden Rivers of Florida: Discoveries. If you would like to read more about the springs in Calhoun and Jackson Counties, you can order the book at [RobNeto.com](https://RobNeto.com)

**A body discovered. Reputations tarnished. A race against time. Now, their greatest challenge confronts them.**

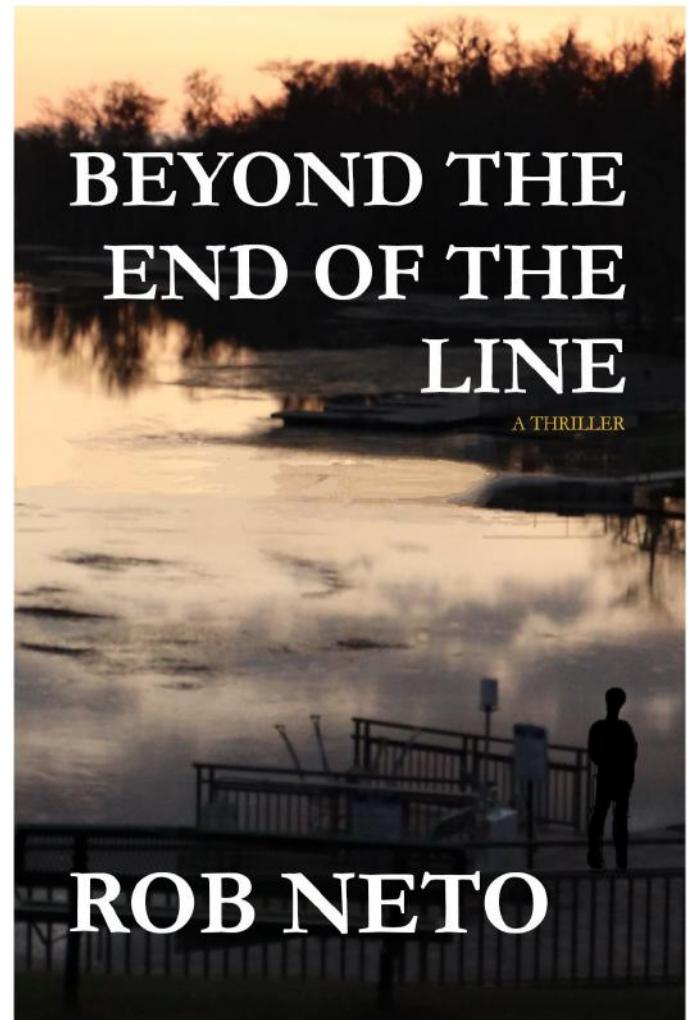
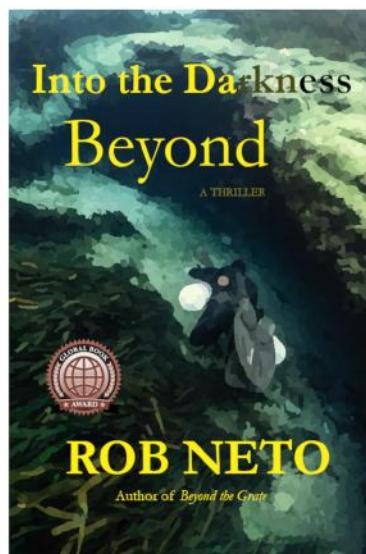
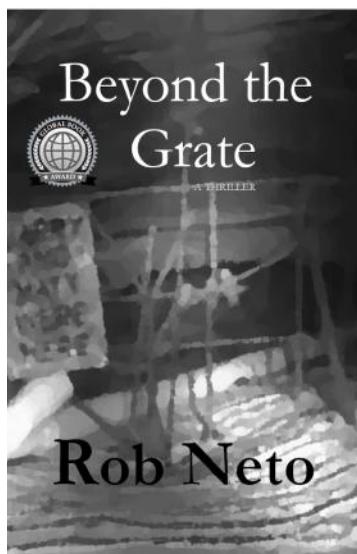
What began with a grim discovery beyond a Florida spring's grate pulled Joey and Lindsey into a world of danger and deceit lurking beneath the surface. From the shadowy depths of the Florida Panhandle to the unforgiving caves of Mexico, they've faced fear, betrayal, and the limits of survival.

Now their greatest threat has emerged.

Someone has taken over their cave exploration project right here in Jackson County, Florida. It's an act that shatters trust and sparks tension. As the mystery diver pushes boundaries and tempers flare, Joey must uncover the truth before everything spirals Beyond the End of the Line—where the point of no return could cost them everything.

The darkness is calling again... but this time, it might swallow them whole.

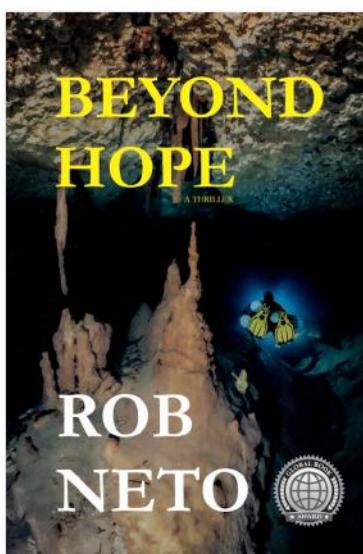
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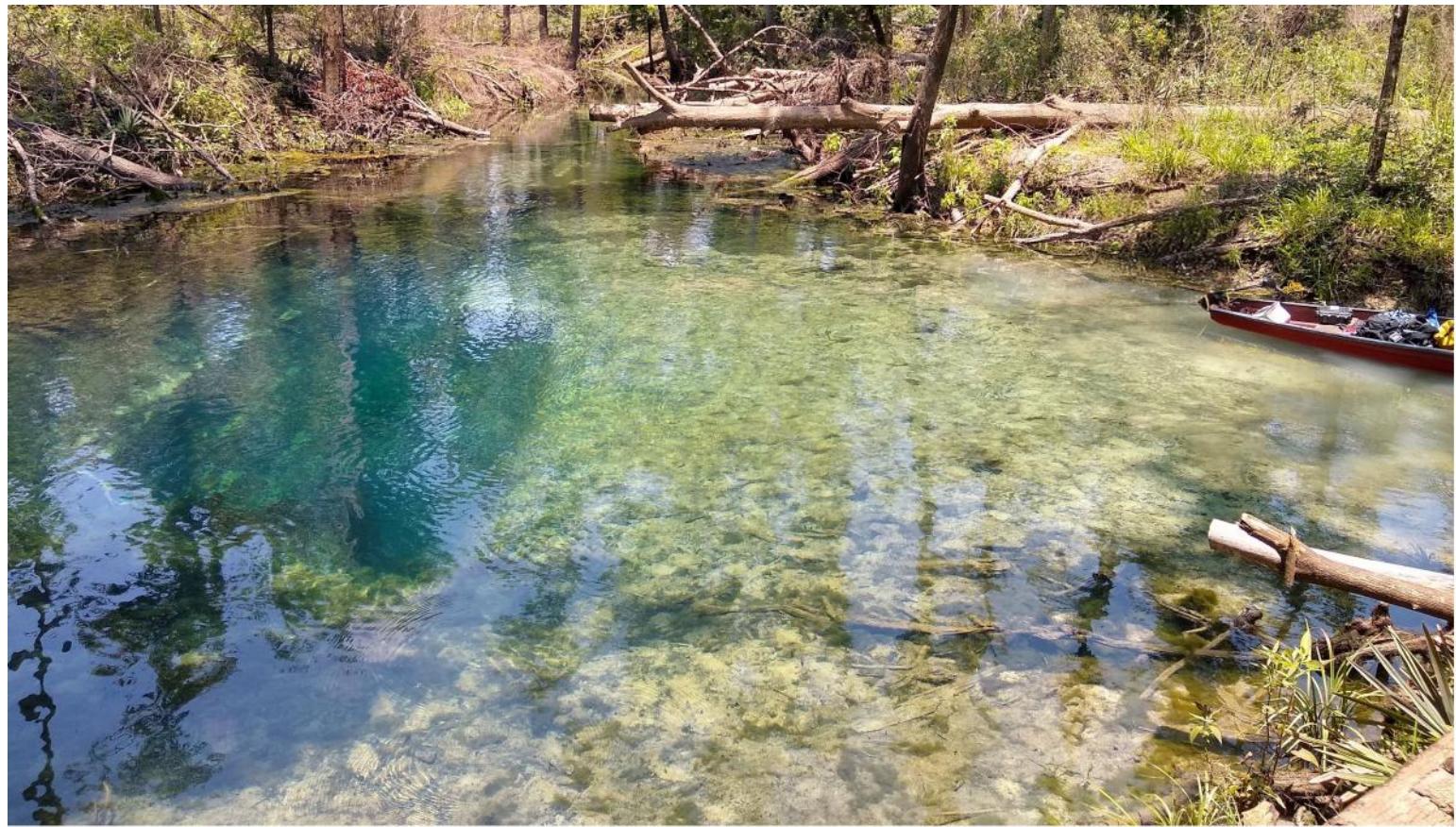
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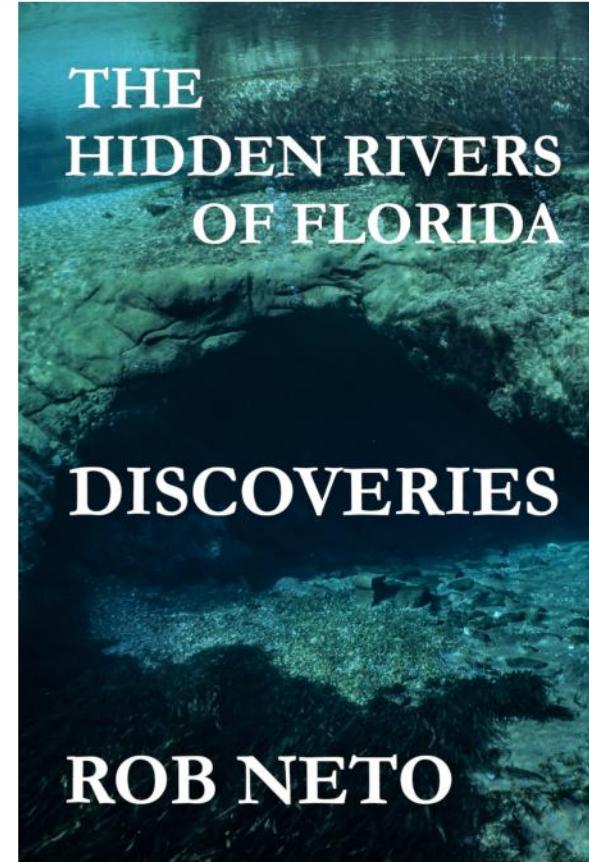


The Hidden Rivers of Florida: Discoveries is a thrilling true adventure that plunges readers into the mysterious and breathtaking world of the underwater caves of Florida. Follow Rob Neto's journey from his first awe-inspiring dive into the depths of Florida's hidden rivers to his life-changing decision to leave Arizona behind and live just minutes from some of the most stunning cave systems on Earth.

In this gripping first installment of his new series, Rob recounts the highs and lows of his first five years as a cave diver—navigating the dangers of the deep, making astonishing discoveries, and facing the heartbreak loss of friends. Through vivid storytelling, he shares the exhilaration of exploration, the challenges of teaching others to dive safely, and the personal struggles that shaped his path.

Prepare to be immersed in a world few have seen, where beauty and danger intertwine beneath the surface. The Hidden Rivers of Florida: Discoveries is more than an adventure—it's a testament to the passion, perseverance, and sheer wonder of cave diving.

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18

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# At Home in the Kitchen: The Southern Fusion of Chef Ethan Ammons

## INSIDE THE HEART AND KITCHEN OF PRIVATE CHEF ETHAN AMMONS

In the world of private dining, where every dish is crafted by hand and every gathering becomes a memory, Chef Ethan Ammons stands out—not just for his skill, but for the story behind it. His culinary journey didn't begin in a restaurant kitchen or in culinary school. It began on a small wooden stool in his great-grandmother Ethealle's kitchen, where the aromas of freshly picked vegetables and slow-simmering suppers shaped the course of his life.

He was only five when he first climbed up onto that stool, placed next to the stovetop by a woman born in 1910, who weathered the Great Depression and never once relied on a restaurant meal. "She cooked three meals a day, every day," Ethan recalls. "All from scratch. All with southern ingredients. Everything she made had a purpose."

There, among cast iron pans, garden vegetables, and the rhythm of homegrown Southern cooking, a spark was lit. Some of Ethan's most cherished memories are simple ones: sitting on the porch swing shucking corn, shelling peas, listening to the stories of a woman who had lived nearly a century.

Today, over 70 years later, he still cooks with her cast iron skillet.

By the time Ethan reached his teenage years, his childhood hobby had become a calling. Family and friends raved about his cooking, and soon enough, his phone was ringing off the hook with requests. He catered birthdays, graduations, and anniversaries—long before he could drive himself to the job. "My first paid gig happened the week after my great-grandmother passed," he says. "I was only 14, and my mom had to drive me."

Twenty years later, thousands of meals prepared, hundreds of events served, and countless memories created, Ethan still approaches his work with the same wonder he felt as a boy watching Granny stir a pot. "Being a private chef lets me continue that passion I had standing on her stool," he says. "It feels like coming full circle."

## SOUTHERN ROOTS, GLOBAL INSPIRATION

Ask Ethan to define his style and he answers without hesitation: southern fusion. He respects the structure and history of classical cuisine—French, Italian, Spanish, Asian—yet he enjoys bending those traditions just enough to bring a taste of home into every plate.

Take his Southern seafood paella, for example. Purists may raise an eyebrow, but Ethan smiles when he describes what makes it his: butter beans and andouille sausage, folded beautifully into the traditional rice base. "They're Southern staples," he says. "And they add this familiar comfort to a dish that's usually Spanish. It becomes something new."

That's the Ethan touch: honoring global flavors while making them unmistakably Southern.

## THE JOY IS IN THE FIRST BITE

For Ethan, food is far more than sustenance. It's connection. Celebration. Memory.

"What I enjoy most," he says, "is watching someone take the first bite." After hours of prep work—chopping, marinating, simmering, seasoning—that first moment becomes the reward. "Everything comes together in that one brief second. Seeing someone genuinely enjoy something you created with your hands—there's nothing like it."

He loves cooking for all types of events, but anniversary dinners hold a special place in his heart. "There's something powerful about preparing a gourmet meal right in someone's home," he says. "It creates a more intimate dining experience. Celebrating love never gets old."

## THE DISHES EVERYONE ASKS FOR

Two dishes appear again and again on Ethan's most-requested list.

### *The Appetizer*

Bacon jam crostini with honey truffle goat cheese—a symphony of savory, smoky, sweet, and tangy. It begins with a toasted baguette and layers on homemade bacon jam, goat cheese crumbles, and a drizzle of balsamic glaze. The jam is slow-cooked with brown sugar, aged sherry, thyme, and vinegar, creating a depth of flavor that guests talk about long after the last bite.

### *The Main Course*

Blackened shrimp and smoked gouda grits with a fresh corn cream sauce. Creamy, buttery grits set the stage for blackened shrimp, jumbo lump crab, caramelized onions, maple bacon, and a white wine corn sauce. "It's truly some of the best shrimp and grits you'll ever eat," he says—modestly, yet with the confidence of a man who knows the power of his craft.

## THE KITCHEN STAPLES BEHIND THE MAGIC

A multipurpose chef's knife. A reliable cutting board. Fresh herbs and garlic—always. Ethan still remembers his culinary instructor banning jarred garlic and dried herbs. It stuck with him. "Fresh ingredients just elevate everything" he says.

## A LIFE THAT FUELS CREATIVITY

While Ethan's culinary career keeps him busy, his personal journey has shaped him even more profoundly. In just two years, he lost his father, mother, and two siblings to cancer. It was a season of heartbreak, one that brought an unexpected clarity.

"It gave me a deeper appreciation for the little time we're given," he says. His son became his driving force. "I want to lead by example. I want to be someone he's proud of."

That creative determination now spills into every corner of his life. Beyond cooking, Ethan works full-time in server management for the state of Florida. He recently published a children's book, built a full arcade for his son, and is building a houseboat he plans to rent out—complete with optional private chef services. "I'm especially excited about combining my love for the Apalachicola River with my passion for food," he says.

## COOKING WITH HEART

More than anything, Ethan hopes people feel something when they sit down at one of his meals.

"I hope they feel the generations before me. I hope they feel how grateful I am to share an evening with them. I hope they taste the love I have for what I do. And most of all—I hope they feel happy."

Booking Chef Ethan Ammons  
To book a private dinner or event:  
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## CHEF ETHAN'S SOUTHERN HUMMUS

### INGREDIENTS:

- 3 CUPS SHELLLED BOILED PEANUTS
- 3 TABLESPOONS OLIVE OIL, PLUS MORE AS NEEDED
- ½ TABLESPOON COARSE BLACK PEPPER
- ½ TABLESPOON ONION POWDER
- ZEST OF 1 LEMON
- JUICE OF ½ LEMON
- 1 TABLESPOON MINCED GARLIC
- ½ TEASPOON RED PEPPER FLAKES, PLUS MORE FOR GARNISH
- 2 TABLESPOONS TAHINI

### DIRECTIONS:

1. ADD ALL INGREDIENTS TO A FOOD PROCESSOR.
2. BLEND UNTIL SMOOTH AND CREAMY, SCRAPING DOWN THE SIDES AS NEEDED.
3. FOR A THINNER CONSISTENCY, SLOWLY DRIZZLE IN ADDITIONAL OLIVE OIL UNTIL DESIRED TEXTURE IS REACHED.
4. SPOON HUMMUS INTO A SERVING BOWL.
5. FINISH WITH A DRIZZLE OF OLIVE OIL, A SPRINKLE OF RED PEPPER FLAKES, AND SLICED SCALLIONS.

### SERVING SUGGESTIONS:

Serve with your favorite chips, pita bread, crackers, or fresh vegetables.

**We're excited to officially welcome  
Ethan Ammons to the  
Pines & River Magazine family  
as our Food Editor,  
beginning Spring 2026.**

With Deep Southern Roots, A Refined Private-Chef Background,  
And A Genuine Love For Gathering People Around The Table,  
Ethan Brings

Exactly The Voice And Vision We Value.  
His Approach To Food Is Thoughtful, Seasonal, And Deeply  
Personal—Shaped By Generations Of Family Influence,  
Hands-On Experience,  
And A Belief That Meals Are Meant To Be Shared And  
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As Food Editor, Ethan Will Help Guide Our Culinary Storytelling,  
Highlighting Local Flavors, Regional Traditions, Makers,  
Farmers, And The People Who Define Food Culture Across The  
Chipola River Valley And Beyond. From Home Kitchens To Special  
Occasions,  
His Perspective Celebrates Food As Both Craft And Connection.

Please Join Us In Welcoming Ethan To The  
Editorial Team. We're Honored To Have Him At The Table And  
Look Forward To The Stories—And Flavors—Ahead.

Welcome, Ethan.

## CHEF ETHAN'S SOUTHERN SEAFOOD NAPOLEON

A bold Southern stack featuring crispy fried green tomatoes layered with rich crawfish cream sauce, sweet jumbo lump crab, and perfectly cooked shrimp—blending Cajun flavor, coastal elegance, and down-home comfort in every bite.

### Ingredients:

#### Fried Green Tomatoes:

- 1 large green tomato, sliced into 4 even rounds
- 1 package Louisiana Fish Fry seasoning
- 1 egg
- 1 cup buttermilk
- Oil or grease, for frying Crawfish Cream Sauce
- 16 oz crawfish tails
- ½ red bell pepper, finely chopped
- ½ red onion, finely chopped
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- ½ tablespoon coarse black pepper
- ½ tablespoon paprika
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter

#### Seafood Topping:

- 6–8 oz jumbo lump crab meat, gently shredded
- 6 large shrimp, peeled
- Old Bay seasoning, to taste

#### Garnish:

- Fresh parsley, chopped

### Instructions:

#### Crawfish Cream Sauce

1. Heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat.
2. Add crawfish tails, red bell pepper, and red onion. Sauté, stirring frequently.
3. Season with onion powder, garlic powder, black pepper, and paprika.
4. Cook until onions become translucent.
5. Stir in heavy cream and reduce heat to a gentle simmer.
6. Simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until thickened.
7. Remove from heat and stir in cold butter until smooth. Set aside.

#### Fried Green Tomatoes:

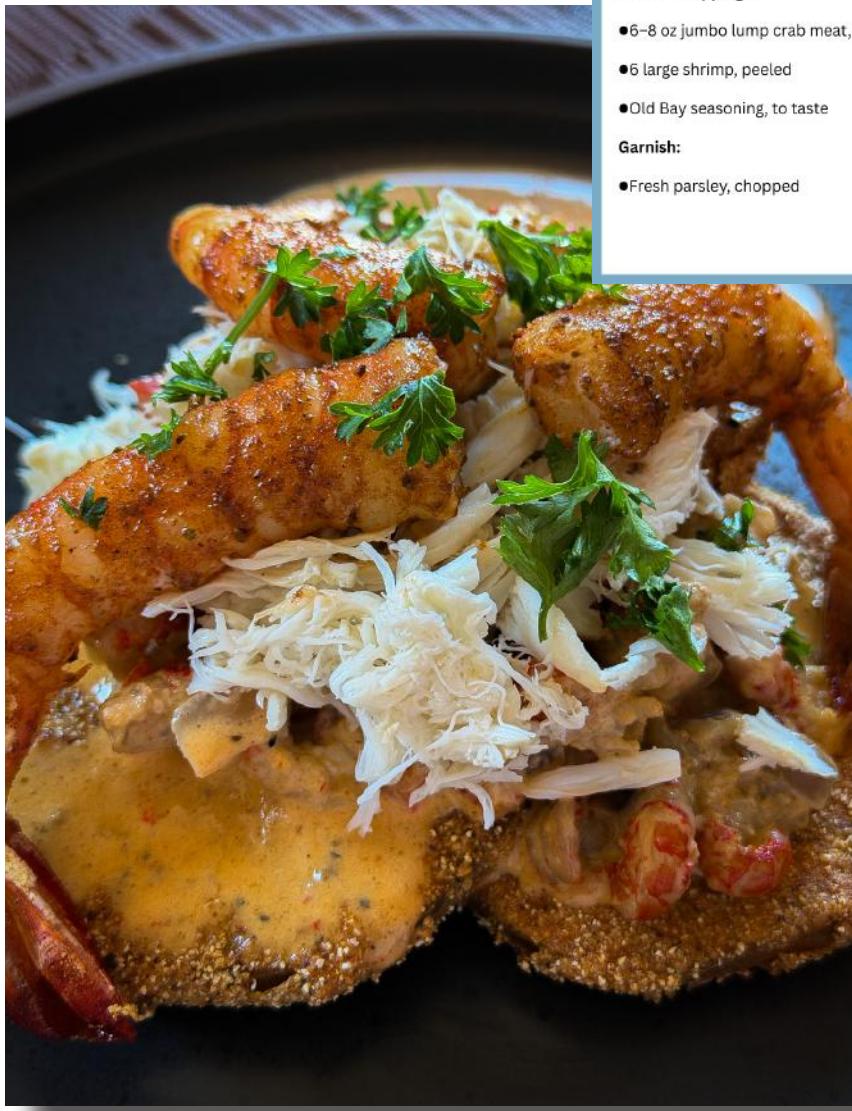
8. Whisk egg and buttermilk together in a bowl.
9. Dip tomato slices into the buttermilk mixture, then coat generously with fish fry seasoning.
10. Fry in hot oil until golden brown and crispy.
11. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

#### Shrimp:

12. Season shrimp generously with Old Bay.
13. Heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat.
14. Cook shrimp until opaque and cooked through, about 2–3 minutes per side.

### Assembly:

1. Place fried green tomato slices on serving plates.
2. Spoon warm crawfish cream sauce over each slice.
3. Top with jumbo lump crab and shrimp.
4. Garnish with fresh parsley and serve immediately.



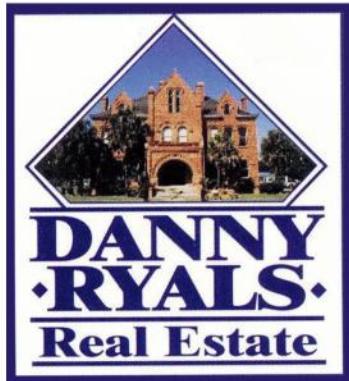
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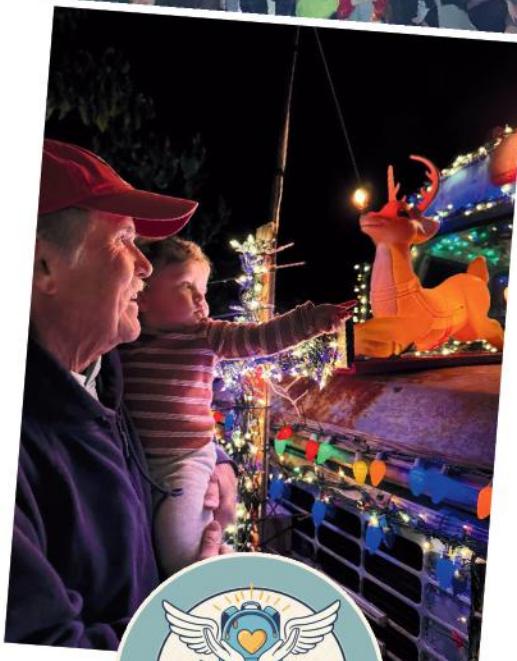
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Panhandle Weather

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Meagan Henson at Altha School is in charge of ensuring the supplies are delivered to children at Altha, Blountstown, and Carr schools.

A big shout-out to:

- John Mallory and Mallory Towing for installing a completely new brake system on the bus two years ago and only charging for the parts.
- Brandon Smith for finding a great deal on all-new speakers and getting them installed before the first parade this year.
- Mike Blackburn for making modifications to the generator bracket to accommodate the new generator that was purchased.

We truly could not do this without the support of our community.

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Hannah Howell, APRN

Brooke Sansom, APRN

On a  
Tankfull

PINEVER



# St. Augustine, Florida – the dog friendliest beaches in Florida

Museums, Spanish colonial architecture, cobblestone streets, beautiful beaches, and dogs. All of these things can be found in the oldest continuously inhabited city in the United States. That city is St. Augustine, located on the northeast coast of Florida about 3.5 hours from Calhoun and Jackson counties. Ever since moving to Florida some 20 years ago, I'd heard about the city of St. Augustine and its claim to being the oldest city in the US. The city was founded on September 8, 1565 by Spanish admiral Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, who eventually became Florida's first governor. About 50 years before Avilés founded the city, Juan Ponce de Leon was said to have made landfall at or near St. Augustine during his search for the Fountain of Youth. He supposedly remained there only a few days, but it was long enough to es-

tablish a possible connection, and in 1927, the city became home to the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park.

Since first being settled and established in 1565, St. Augustine served as the capital of Florida for almost 300 years under the control of Spain and England.

The city continued as the intermittent capital along with Pensacola, after the territory was ceded to the US in 1819 until Tallahassee became the permanent capital in 1824. Now, it is a popular tourist destination for history buffs and dog lovers.

While the historical aspects of the city were what first drew me to the area, it was the number of dog-friendly beaches that made it special. As the fur dad to 4 pups, being able to visit an area where we could spend the day with our dogs was important. A quick search revealed that St. Augustine is such a place. I won't lie to you. While St. Augustine has its own unique beauty, it's not the Emerald Coast. The sand isn't as white, and the water isn't as blue. It's still a nice place to escape for a long weekend. And did I mention that they allow dogs on their beaches?

We easily found several rental homes that were accommodating to dogs of all sizes and didn't charge an extra fee. We chose one nestled in the neighborhood of canals only two minutes from the closest beach. It was fascinating to watch the change in the water level in the canal in response to the tide in the mornings and afternoons. Each day, we packed the truck with our beach gear and the dogs and drove the short distance to the beach. We chose a different site each day, although they



were only about a mile apart from each other. On the first day, we chose the Crescent Beach park access, operated by the city parks and recreation department, and on the next, we chose Frank B. Butler Beach State Park. There wasn't much of a difference between the two. Parking was plentiful and access to the beach was made easy over the boardwalks. That said, we visited the area in December when there were less crowds. I'm sure in the summer, you would have to arrive early to secure a parking space in the lots provided by the city.

Because it was December, the water was a bit too cool for our liking, but the weather was perfect for relaxing on the beach with a good book. The sand wasn't too hot for the pups' paws, but the sun was bright enough for them to appreciate their doggles and hats. They got to watch the people walking and riding their bicycles along the water, as well as the other dogs on the beach. They did a good job of guarding our small camp when anyone got too close. Fortunately, only one person during the time we spent there did not comply with the leash law, but the small, loose dog was smart enough not to challenge the abode of 4 large dogs. Although, about all they would have done was bathe the scrappy dog with their tongues.

Each day, after spending a few hours relaxing to the sound of the surf and the feel of the breeze, we ventured around the area. One of our visits took us into the heart of St. Augustine, only 20 minutes from where we were staying. The Spanish colonial architecture is very evident when you first arrive in the city. Flagler College, a liberal arts school, sits in the middle of town. The buildings began as the Hotel Ponce de Leon in 1888, eventually becoming the college in 1968. The campus includes many historical structures showcasing Spanish Renaissance Revival architecture, including the Lightner Museum. There's plenty to keep you busy among the shops, restaurants, bakeries, and galleries surrounding the college. While you're there, hop on and off the old town trolley to see the city a little more quickly. You can also sign up for one of the ghost tours and learn about the city's haunted past. St. Augustine is also home to a distillery, where wine and beer tastings are offered to visitors.

If exploring the city isn't your cup of tea, there's plenty to do outside of downtown. Check out the Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort in the continental US. There's also the St. Augustine Lighthouse, built in the 1870s, where you can visit the maritime museum to learn more of the history of the area. I've already mentioned the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park. There's also Fort Matanzas National Monument, home of the fortified coquina (porous limestone rock made from cemented shell fragments) watchtower. You'll need to ride a ferry to get to the national monument, but the ride and fort admission are both free.

There's plenty to keep you busy for several days or multiple trips to the area. We were there for three nights and didn't even see half of it. Then again, we spent a lot of time relaxing on the beach with the dogs.



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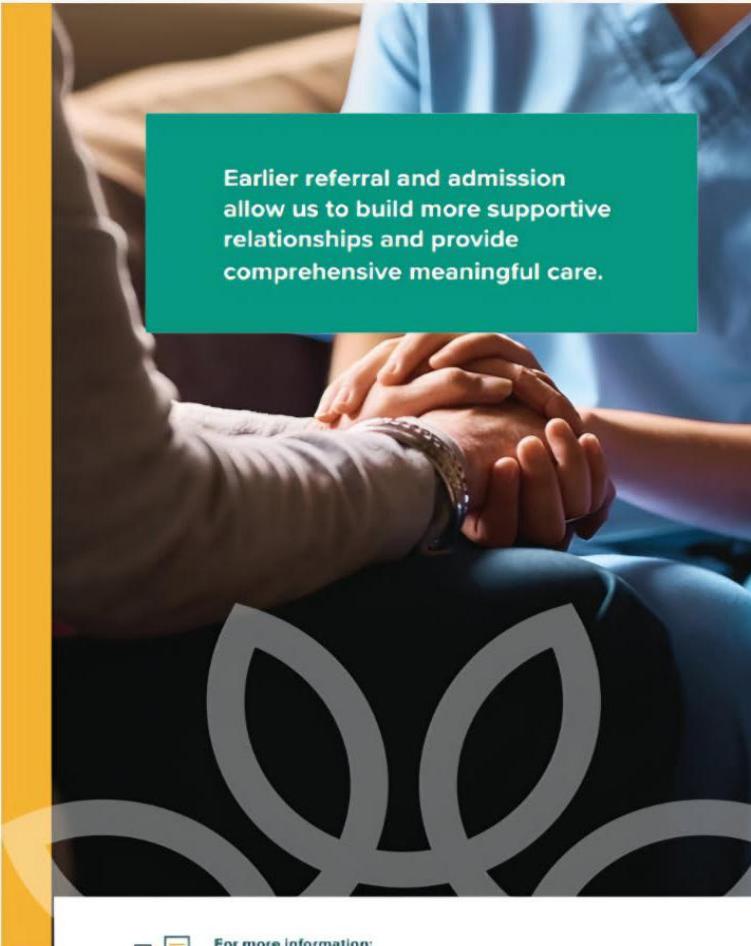


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On a quiet stretch of Northwest Florida, where days move with a gentler rhythm and creativity often sprouts from the land itself, you'll find Starr Studios—a space where earth becomes art and where a time-honored craft still feels wonderfully alive. At the center of it all is local potter and artist *Tracey Starr*, whose work has become instantly recognizable throughout the Chipola River Valley for its joyful color, functional beauty, and unmistakable personality.

But long before she ever owned a kiln or welcomed students into her home studio, Tracey's love for clay began with the simplest of beginnings: a child's imagination and a patch of sun-baked earth.

"I made sun-dried mud pots when I was little, and my mother actually put them in her china cabinet," she laughs. "That was the first spark." It was a small gesture, but one that rooted itself deeply—showing a young girl that handmade things mattered, that creativity had a place alongside treasured heirlooms. As an adult, Tracey found herself drawn again and again to pottery. She collected pieces from flea markets and antique shows long before she ever learned to make her own. Finally, about 26 years ago, she signed up for lessons—and she has been working with clay ever since. What began as curiosity matured into a lifelong passion and eventually grew into Starr Studios, the creative home that now bears her maiden name. "I've always used 'Starr' as my hallmark," she says. "When I opened the studio, I wanted it to be a place for the community to learn, explore, and create."

#### A PROCESS ROOTED IN PATIENCE

For those unfamiliar with pottery, the finished piece—a mug glowing with rich glaze, a bowl whose glossy surface pools in shifting blues and greens—can feel almost miraculous. But Tracey is quick to share just how much time and attention go into each work.

"A finished piece takes about a week," she explains. It begins with raw clay shaped by hand or thrown on the wheel. Once formed, the clay must dry



## C. Scott Stephens

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### Editor-in-Chief

slowly before the first firing, known as the bisque firing. "It goes to 1945 degrees," Tracey notes, "which prepares it for glazing." From there, the artist decides whether to dip or paint the glaze, each method creating entirely different results. Because she works primarily with durable stoneware, the final firing climbs even higher—to 2135 degrees—turning what was once pliable earth into something strong, lasting, and beautiful. Her pieces are unmistakably functional—meant to be handled, used, and loved. "Most of my work is made for everyday life," she says. "Thicker, rounded edges to resist chipping. Slightly heavier forms so they don't tip." It's a philosophy that honors pottery's ancient purpose while embracing the personal touch that makes handmade work so cherished.

But utility is only half the story. The artistry lives in her glaze work—hundreds of combinations, she says, each one offering its own surprises. "I love bright colors, mixing glazes to get movement and drips. You can plan and plan, but the kiln always has the final word."



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## INSPIRATION IN NATURE AND COMMUNITY

Much of Tracey's inspiration comes from nature—colors, textures, and elements that speak to her surroundings. But she also finds endless fuel in the broader pottery community. With social media now connecting potters around the world, techniques, successes, and even failures are shared openly. "There's always something new to try," she says. "It keeps things exciting." Yet with every new idea comes the possibility of challenges. Cracking can happen at nearly any stage, forcing an artist to start over. Kiln issues, too, can be devastating. "A malfunction can ruin thirty or forty pieces," she says. "I keep a very close eye on the kiln, even if it means getting up in the middle of the night."

Still, Tracey speaks of these challenges with the calm acceptance of someone who knows that risk is inseparable from craft. What emerges on the other side is worth every hour of tending and troubleshooting.

## THE PLACE OF HANDMADE WORK IN A FAST WORLD

In a culture where mass-produced goods dominate, Tracey sees handcrafted pottery as a quiet but important counterbalance. "I hope it encourages people to appreciate unique, lasting pieces," she says. Her younger students, especially, are often stunned to realize that the bowl they made could outlive them—becoming an object passed down rather than thrown away.

This belief in everyday connection is at the heart of her work. "I want people to use my piec-

es," she says without hesitation. "To have a favorite mug for their morning coffee, or a perfect bowl for ice cream. I want my pottery to bring joy."

## LIFE, CREATIVITY, AND HOME

Starr Studios sits right on Tracey's property, blurring the lines between home and workspace in the most charming way. "The goats peek over the gate, and the dogs come in and out checking on me," she says. Family, friends, and students in her classes often share ideas they come across, feeding her imagination and making the studio feel like the beating heart of both her creative and personal life. In the months ahead, Tracey is excited to offer group hand-building classes, inviting small groups to come together and make something uniquely theirs. It's another way for the community to experience the magic of clay—and to discover what Tracey has known since childhood: creativity thrives when it's shared.

## A SIGNATURE THAT SAYS IT ALL

When a piece finally comes out of the kiln—glowing, whole, and ready to be held—Tracey takes a quiet moment to mark it as hers. "First, I think, 'Whew!'" she admits with a laugh. But then comes a deeper hope: that the piece will carry happiness into its new home, spark appreciation for a timeless craft, and maybe even inspire someone else to create.

Because for Tracey Starr, art is more than expression. It's connection. It's heritage. It's a slow, beautiful answer to a fast world.

And in Starr Studios, tucked away on her little stretch of land, the ancient dance between earth and fire continues—one meaningful piece at a time.



**SPRING  
STYLE  
COMES  
ALIVE**

Spring fashion arrives with a renewed sense of optimism—fresh silhouettes, playful patterns, and colors that feel like sunshine after a long winter. This season is all about embracing personality through thoughtful details and easy-to-wear pieces that move effortlessly from day to night.

Stripes take a confident lead, offering clean lines and flattering structure that feel both classic and current. Designed to enhance the natural shape, these sleek patterns bring polish without sacrificing comfort. Whether woven into flowing dresses or lightweight tops, stripes remain a timeless spring staple that works in nearly any setting.

Balancing that tailored look are cheerful polka dots, adding just the right amount of whimsy. Polka dots remind us that spring style should be fun—an expression of joy, movement, and individuality. They feel nostalgic yet modern, making them a perfect way to introduce personality into an everyday wardrobe.

Color plays a starring role this season, setting the tone for lighter days ahead. Bright yellows inject energy and warmth, instantly lifting even the simplest outfit. Cool mint greens offer a refreshing contrast, delivering a crisp, clean look that pairs beautifully with denim and soft neutrals. And of course, pink remains a perennial favorite—ranging from delicate blush tones to bold, confident shades that command attention.

What defines spring fashion this year is the harmony between comfort and confidence. These are pieces designed for real life—easy to style, effortless to wear, and versatile enough to adapt to a variety of occasions. The focus is on feeling good in what you wear, while still making a statement.

As wardrobes transition out of winter, spring invites us to experiment, refresh, and rediscover our personal style. It's a season that celebrates color, pattern, and the simple joy of getting dressed again. And with fashion this vibrant, spring doesn't just look good—it feels good, too.

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