



Big issues in spotlight as Congress returns

NEWS, 3A

PANAMA CITY

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Discover, read, win



A Northwest Regional Library System card is seen in this illustration photo. September is library card month.
PHOTOS BY TYLER ORSBURN/NEWS HERALD

September Library Card Month in Bay County

Panama City News Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

September is Library Card Sign-Up Month, and the Northwest Regional Library System invites everyone to discover library magic. Library cards are free to residents of Bay, Gulf and Liberty County with valid photo ID and proof of residency.

What are the benefits of being a new library card holder? Residents can borrow up to 20 items at a time, including books, e-books, audiobooks, DVDs, musical instruments, puzzles, games, and telescopes.

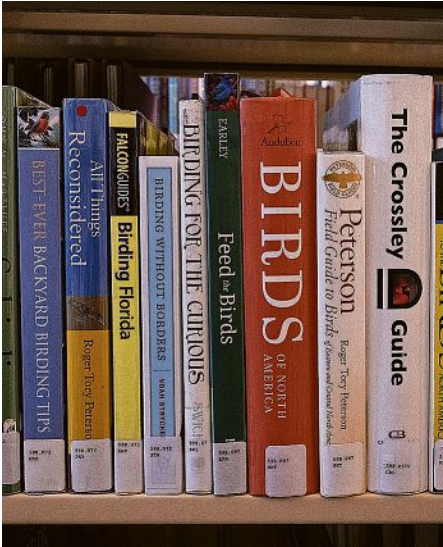
Also, while supplies last, all new library card registrations during the month will receive an "I Love To Read" bracelet.

Another reason to sign up for a new library card: a scavenger hunt raffle prize drawing!

This year, all new card members who complete the special library scavenger hunt will be entered into a raffle prize drawing. All ages can explore the shelves, solve the clues and unlock the hidden treasures throughout the library.

Key Dates
Kids Scavenger Hunt: Sept. 2 – 30
Winner selected on Oct. 1
Adult Scavenger Hunt (at select libraries): Sept. 2 – 30
Winner selected on Oct. 1

For more information about the events and library cards, contact Ashley Burlon at (850) 522-2120, or email aburlon@nwrls.com



Books about birds are seen at the Bay County Library in Panama City on Feb. 4.

BAY COUNTY

3rd person hospitalized with 'flesh-eating' bacteria

Dylan Gentile
Panama City News Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

PANAMA CITY — Another person is hospitalized in Bay County because of a "flesh-eating" bacteria.

This brings the number of cases of those infected this year up to three in Bay County, with two deaths. State-wide, there have been 23 infections and five deaths from vibrio vulnificus.

A GoFundMe circulating online to support the family identifies 38-year-old Benjamin West as the newest infected person. The fundraiser says he contracted the infection on Aug. 23 while fishing with his family underneath the intercoastal bridge in nearby Port St Joe.

He sought medical attention after symptoms broke out and received an initial misdiagnosis of cellulitis. The antibiotics he was given reportedly made the infection worse, and West had to go to the emergency room at Ascension Sacred Heart Bay.

West had to have multiple surgeries on his leg, but luckily, the infection hadn't reached his muscle tissue. The fundraiser says he has a long road toward recovery ahead.

This follows another infection earlier this month in Franklin County that led to the death of a 78-year-old man. He was reportedly fishing on the bay-side of St George Island when he was infected with vibrio. He died while at the hospital in Panama City.

So far this year in the Panhandle, there have been two cases in Escambia, one case in Okaloosa, two cases in Santa Rosa, and one case in Walton County. With Bay County's three cases, this brings the total for the region to six cases in 2025.

Across Florida, there have been 23 confirmed cases and five deaths. Last year, there were a record 82 cases and

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Big employers help drive Bay County's growth

Nathan Cobb
Panama City News Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

PANAMA CITY – For Becca Hardin, it would be "extremely difficult" to attract new businesses to the area if it weren't for a handful of key employers that help support the local economy.

As president of the Bay Economic Development Alliance, Hardin's group works to diversify the local economy away from being reliant on tourism, an industry proven to be easily influenced by natural disasters.

"After the (Deep Horizon) oil spill (in 2010), Bay County leadership began to assemble the economic development team," Hardin said. "We are solely fo-

cused on the diversification of our economy in Bay County so that we do not have all of our eggs in the tourism basket, in case there's another catastrophe.

"Tourism is always going to be very, very important for us, but we need to diversity ... so we know we have good jobs across the board."

According to a list from the EDA, the top 10 employers in Bay County based on worker size are:

1. Tyndall Air Force Base with about 6,400 employees.
2. NSA Panama City Navy Housing Service Center with about 5,200 employees.
3. Bay District Schools with about

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It might come as no surprise that Tyndall Air Force Base is Bay County's largest employer, with about 6,400 employees. MIKE FENDER/THE NEWS HERALD

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