



**PR Contact:**

Proffitt PR

Jessica Bracken

[Jessica@proffittpr.com](mailto:Jessica@proffittpr.com)

(850) 460-7777

**Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation Raises over \$74,000 at Inaugural Fundraising Event**  
***Sip and Splash: An Aquatic Affair presented by Tim Smith Acura***

**DESTIN, Fla. (June 1, 2022)** – The Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation (ECFF) is pleased to announce that over \$74,000 was raised at the Inaugural Sip and Splash: An Aquatic Affair presented by Tim Smith Acura.

The first-of-its-kind event took place under the stars on Saturday, May 14 at the Aquatic Center of Destin located at 4345 Commons Drive West. The pool facility was transformed into an elegant event space with whimsical balloon décor, bistro twinkle lights, and coastal place settings, seating, and decor.

The sold-out fundraising dinner welcomed over 250 guests who kicked off the evening with a cocktail hour featuring hand rolled sushi by Camille's at Crystal Beach's Yoshie Eddings. Entertainment included live music by Reed Waddle, a photo booth, a cigar bar, live painting by Maxine Orange, and an extensive silent auction featuring two week-long vacations in Colorado, jewelry, gift cards, gift baskets, artwork and much more. All funds raised through ticket sales, sponsorship, and the silent auction go directly back to the foundation to help fund operation costs and equipment upgrades. Funds raised will also be utilized for the numerous aquatic programs at the three community pools the ECFF manages, including the Aquatic Center of Destin, the Bernie R. Lefebvre Aquatic Center of Fort Walton Beach, and the ROC Pool of Crestview.

Later in the evening, patrons delighted in an intimate five-course dinner prepared and served by local chefs and restaurants. The lineup of culinary talent this year included:

- Chef Orion Cordoves of Jackacudas Seafood + Sushi
- Chef Al Massa of Brotula's Seafood House and Steamer
- Chef Jim Shirah of Dewey Destin's Harborside
- Chef Chad Donelson of Bitterroot
- Chef Daniel Soto of Café Rico

Each of the chef's unique courses were perfectly paired with craft cocktails served by Better Together Beverage from the official 26-foot Bitterroot Bar including spirits from Distillery 98, Campesino Rum, Good Clean Wine, Hey Mama Wines, and Odd Pelican Brewing Company.

In between courses, the Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation honored some of their own members by inducting them into the Okaloosa County Swim and Dive Hall of Fame, an organization formed to recognize excellence by local coaches, athletes, and volunteers. The 2022 inductees included James Lefebvre, Betty Ballasch, Mary Edith Malin, Dave Smith, and Monty Landingham.

Before the night ended, the foundation also unveiled the new, official name of the Aquatic Center during a heart-felt tribute to a close friend.

"We wanted to name the pool after someone we knew personally and who exemplified characteristics that could be a representation of all of those who have worked with us," said Kathi Heapy, co-founder of ECFF. "A person came to mind who was smart, generous, thoughtful, hardworking, faithful, willing to serve, anxious to work, and supportive of swimming and water safety for everyone."

Taj Renee Oliver was one of Heapy's close friends and swim teammate in 1980. They formed a special friendship and bond throughout the years until Taj succumbed to pancreatic cancer in 2008. Taj Renee means "Love Reborn," so when the Heapys were looking for a permanent name for the Aquatic Center, the answer to them was obvious.

"The facility will now be known as the Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center, fondly known as 'The Taj', in honor of Taj Renee Oliver Brown, who represented the many people who helped revive the facility because of their shared love of swimming," Heapy said.

A new sign was also unveiled during the event, which will be displayed outside the Aquatic Center, showcasing the new name and logo that includes a heart written in Taj's own handwriting.

ECFF would also like to thank the additional local community businesses who sponsored the inaugural event, including HomeFi Digital Mortgage, Splash RV Resort and Waterpark, 654 Limo, Adrift Adventures, Alpha Lit Emerald Coast, As You Like It Salon and Spa, Big Day Rentals, Bitterroot, Brotula's Seafood House and Steamer, Bryan Jones for Congress, Cardinal Financial, Classic Vikings, Coldwell Banker and the Jen Purdy Group, Cory Fosdyck and Merrill Lynch, Costa Enterprises McDonald's, CrossFit Destin, Destin Floral Design, Dr. Bawa & Associates, Eglin Federal Credit Union, First Choice Appraisals, Greenday Cleaners, Hand Arendall Harrison Sale, The Harris Family, La Dolce Vita, MidSouth Bank, Mingle, Powell & Swanick Attorneys at Law, Saltmarsh CPA, Sea Dragon Swim Shop, The Ships Chandler, Showtime Events, Simple HR, Studio 6Twenty5, Taylor Allen Properties, Trees on the Coast, UPS Store, Valparaiso Coca-Cola Bottling Co. and White Wilson Medical Clinic.