



KATHY HARRISON | The Destin Log

**HAVE A BALL:** Legendary vice president Howard Long said that they chose to bring the "Time Ball" tradition to Destin harbor because of the maritime beginnings.

# Emerald Coast now on the ball

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An iconic New Year's Eve tradition is coming to the Emerald Coast.

This year, a "Time Ball" is going to drop for the first-time ever in Destin at HarborWalk Village.

And they aren't the only ones ringing in the new year with a ball drop. Pier Park in Panama City is planning what sounds like a similar event, complete with fireworks, food, children's activities and a "Beach Ball Drop".

"When we found out there was a maritime tradition of the ball drop, we realized that this was a fantastic opportunity to follow that tradition on the harbor," Legendary vice president Howard Long said.

The Time Ball concept got its beginnings long before the century old celebration in Times Square caught on. The tradition dates back to 1833 at England's Royal Observatory at Greenwich, when a ball would drop at 1 p.m. every afternoon so that the captains of surrounding ships could synchronize their clocks.

Today, a ball drops in other locations around the United States to welcome a

new year, with Destin soon to be added to the roster of where to be when the clock strikes midnight on Jan. 1.

"We borrowed the design for the ball that was used in Time Square up until the 80s," Long said.

The Destin Harbor New Year's Eve ball carries a simple design and a route that is truly unique to Destin harbor. It is a 4-foot in diameter, aluminum sphere with 12 segments that was assembled by a fabricator in Freeport. The ball merely weighs in under 100 pounds, compared to the ever evolving 11,875 pound Times Square version that will drop this year.

Long said that the Ball will begin its descent from atop HarborWalk at 11 p.m., with fireworks going off every 15 minutes to illuminate the Ball's progress across the harbor to Norriego Point.

The ball will travel down the line as a Legendary maintenance employee cranks a wench for the hour it will take the ball to cross the harbor, triggering a pyrotechnics show as the grand finale.

"Our hope and dream is that this becomes an annual event and that the harbor becomes a tradition for people all over the region," Long said.