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PAID Franklin Free Press
113 Washington Ave. NW
Russellville, AL 35663

FranklinFreePress.net

07.11.18

Civil unrest forces FBC mission team to extend its stay in Haiti

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When he left with 13 fellow church members June 30 for a mission trip to Haiti, First Baptist Church Russellville pastor Patrick Martin would have never expected to receive a phone call from U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt to check on Martin and his group Monday morning.

But Martin didn't plan on being in Haiti Monday morning. That's where the mission team remained, though, as political unrest and violent protests in the country broke out as a result of government-imposed fuel price increases.

The First Baptist mission team
See 'HAITI,' Page 7



COURTESY PHOTO

A mission team from First Baptist Church Russellville left the airport in Atlanta for Haiti on June 30. The group was scheduled to return home on Saturday, July 7, but demonstrations in the capital city of Port-au-Prince made travel impossible. Pastor Patrick Martin said Monday that arrangements had been made for the team to return home Tuesday.

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Resolution passes to honor Vietnam hero

Submitted to the FFP
By Johnny Mack Morrow

A group of Cherokee High School graduates meet once a month at the Two Fat Sisters Restaurant in Tuscumbia. Jack Cochran and Buddy Willis invited me to attend one month in late 2017.

Jack and Buddy introduced me to Curtis Wallace, who immediately began telling me about his cousin Frankie Lee Wallace, a true hero of the Vietnam War.

I researched Frankie Lee and was amazed by his act of bravery in the battle with the Viet Cong, where he was killed. My initial response was to ask myself, 'Why was he not awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor?'

Curtis Wallace asked me if I would name a portion of Highway 72 the Frankie Lee Wallace Highway, and that is exactly what HJR 13 does. I passed this resolution during the 2018 Regular Session through the House

See 'HERO,' Page 3



COURTESY PHOTO

State Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (center) stands on a portion of Hwy. 72 recently named in honor of Frankie Lee Wallace.

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Donald Thomas Brewer, Jr., Russellville, age 39
Died Sunday, July 1, 2018. Memorial service held at Spry Memorial Chapel.

Ricky Edward Corbell, Russellville, age 60
Died Monday, July 2, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in East Franklin Cemetery.

Byron Dwight Smith, Coosada, AL (formerly of Russellville), age 54
Died Friday, July 6, 2018. Visitation will be from 10-11 a.m. on Saturday, July 14, 2018 at Crooked Oak Baptist Church in Russellville. Memorial service with military honors will follow at 11 a.m. Interment will be in Crooked Oak Cemetery. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Keith Thomas, Russellville, age 59
Died Sunday, July 1, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Roy Lee Varney, Phil Campbell, age 37
Died Monday, July 2, 2018. Memorial service held at Witness Outreach Ministries in Spruce Pine.

Letters to the Editor

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Bank Independent holding fifth annual School Share drive

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Bank Independent will kick off its fifth annual School Share drive on July 9 to collect supplies for local children. From July 9-20, school supplies can be dropped off at any of the Bank's 27 north Alabama locations. On July 20, Bank Independent team members will be at Walmart locations on Hough Road in Florence and Spring Avenue in Decatur collecting school supplies to "Stuff the Bus" and raise awareness of the needs of local families.

The bank aims to build on the success of last year's drive, which collected more than 9,400 items. Supplies are distributed through local organizations in each market, including Committee on Church Cooperation in Decatur; Sidney's Safe! Foundation and New Beginnings Church in the Shoals; and the Department of Human Resources in Madison, Limestone, Franklin and Lawrence counties. Items needed include backpacks, headphones, notebooks, paper, pencils, glue, folders, crayons, markers and rulers.

"School supply lists have grown so much that it can be hard for families to afford everything required at back-to-school time—especially families with multiple children," said Penny Camp, executive vice president of customer experience at Bank Independent. **"We want to make a positive difference for these families and take away some of the stress of going back to school."**

"School supply lists have grown so much that it can be hard for families to afford everything required at back-to-school time—especially families with multiple children," said Penny Camp, executive vice president of customer experience at Bank Independent. "We want to make a positive difference for these families and take away some of the stress of going back to school."

School Share is part of Bank Independent's Helping Hands program, which also includes employee volunteer efforts, donations and sponsorships. Other Share drives include Toy Share, to collect toys for children during the holiday season; Shelter Share, to benefit animal shelters; and Food Share, to collect non-perishable food items.

Helping Hands was inspired by employee requests for organized volunteer opportunities after the April 27, 2011 tornadoes. In response to those requests, Bank Independent implemented a program that allows each employee eight hours of paid time off per year to volunteer for a non-profit cause. Since then, Bank Independent employees have donated more than 5,800 hours in paid volunteer time to community efforts.

About Bank Independent

Since 1947, Bank Independent has taken pride in serving the customers who count on us to be there for them when they need us most. With 27 branches across north Alabama, we're committed to providing the best service, designing the most desired products and creating an overall excellent experience for each and every customer. As a local community bank, we believe in building relationships that run deep and last. All of our employees reside in our local communities, and believe in giving back through volunteering. To become part of a bank that is Radically Original in all that it does, visit us at bibank.com.

'HERO,' from page 1

and Senate, and it was signed by Governor Kay Ivey.

Malcomb Wallace, Frankie Lee's brother, has a son, Pete Wallace, who is currently deployed in Africa. Pete is named for his Uncle Frankie Lee. When Pete returns home, a ceremony will be held to officially name the highway after his uncle.

Thomas McKnight, American Legion Tuscumbia, is in charge and is currently making plans for the ceremony to honor 1st Lt. Frankie Lee Wallace's bravery. Details for the ceremony will be announced later.

A sign at the Mississippi/Alabama line and one at milepost 18 have already been erected by the Alabama Department of Transportation. I want to thank everyone who helped me with this extremely important project!

Lieutenant Wallace gave his life for our freedom, and he is an American hero. He is deserving of this special recognition.

Perhaps we have other war heroes from our area that need to be recognized in some manner. If you have someone in mind, please contact me.

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Honey Do: Here, spot!

Here, spot !! That's what I felt like yelling as I watched it rain just a few feet from my house. Isn't it amazing how those spotty showers can come through and leave you dry as a bone or almost washed away. I remember once driving into town in the rain and the railroad track being the wet/dry line.

So you may have some decisions to make as to what projects you may tackle when possible rain is expected or a quick shower has occurred. These activities include cutting the grass, fertilizing or broadcasting insect or weed control.

As a general rule, you should never cut grass when it's wet. First of all, it's not good for your lawnmower.

Belts, blades, engines and transmissions are all put under way more stress in wet conditions.

As a general rule, you should never cut grass when it's wet. First of all, it's not good for your lawnmower. Belts, blades, engines and transmissions are all put under way more stress in wet conditions. The grass will suffer as well. Tires will cut ruts and tear out patches of grass; blades will rip and tear instead of cutting through the wet grass; and the clippings will clump

and make a pile instead of spreading over the lawn.

Fertilizer and insecticides may not be as risky to put out before rain as you might think. These products generally fall into two groups, granular and liquid.

Granular products do not work until they begin to dissolve. A little unexpected rain shower may even help them on their way. Even a heavy rain will probably not hurt too much, as the granules will probably sink down into the soil and be held in place by grass and roots.

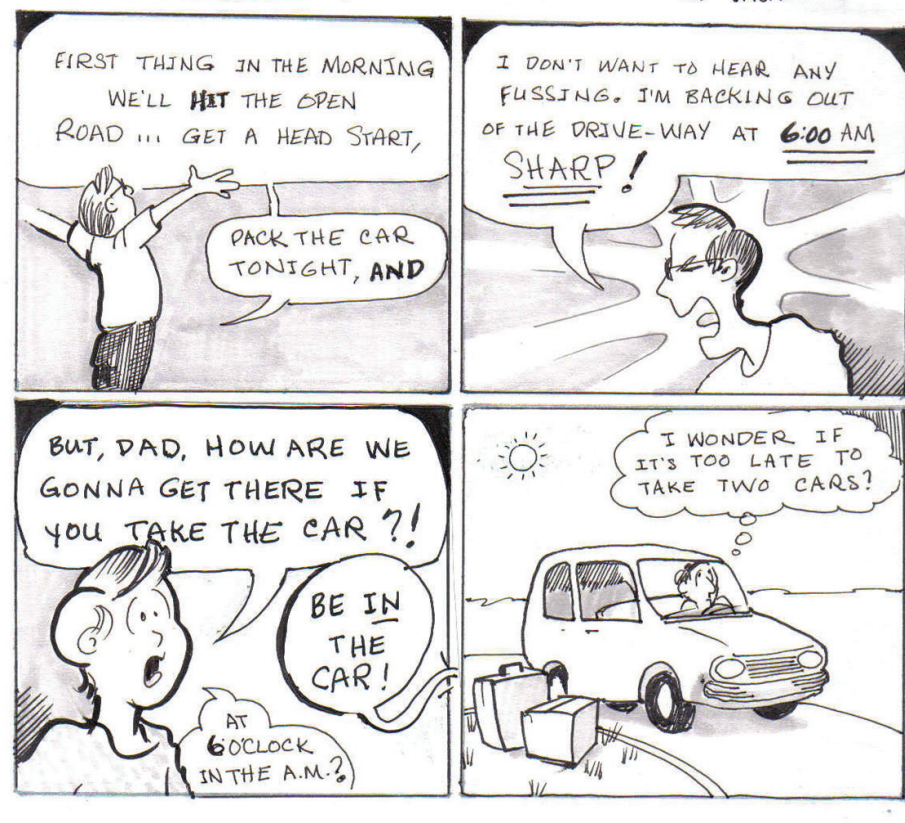
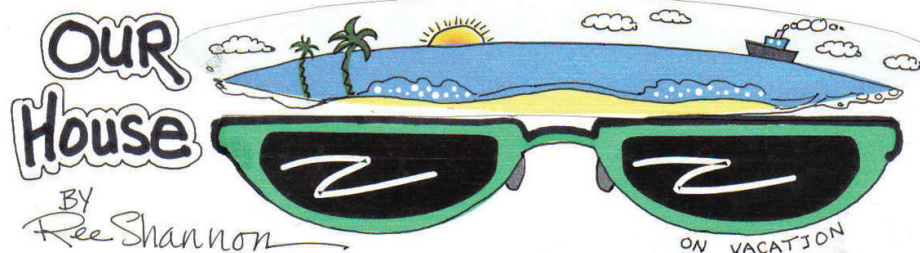
Liquid product will usually have a built-in provision for sticking to plants. If these products have the opportunity to dry on the plants before a rain comes, they may still be very effective.

I'm really glad to see these recent spotty showers, and I hope they keep coming--even if they do miss my house. Right now the grass is flourishing in most places, and I know the farmers would like to see that hay grow into a late-season cutting.

Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green



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Letters to the editor

The *Franklin Free Press* is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The *Franklin Free Press* reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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My take Life lessons are on this.... easy to swallow

The swallows have returned, but I can't help remembering them several times a year. I always enjoy watching the swallows as they prepare for their babies to be born.

Both parents work non-stop in building the twig-and-mud nest (their home). It seems location is chosen with the comfort and safety for the family they will bring into the world. They build their home on a ledge under the porch ceiling. They are literally putting a roof over their heads.

No sooner than the nest is completed, it seems like the babies have been born. The sounds of babies, whether animals or humans, are like sweet music to my ears. Since I have been watching these birds, there have been five babies born each time.

It seems only a few days have passed before I can see the tiny, dark-feathered heads. Soon afterwards, those little mouths are open wide as the tedious job of providing their favorite food (worms) is carried out by both parents. It takes several flights to feed five hungry mouths.

As with all babies, there will be messes. Since birds don't wear diapers, it's a good idea to place a rubber mat underneath the nest and wash it from time to time.

I am amazed at the pattern of the feeding. The babies were in a row and were fed in order. No one bird got more than the other. That could be a good example for parents to follow. Sadly, there are babies born that starve for proper nourishment and the comfort of love.

Birds sacrifice their time and show patience,

dedication and love. If it only teaches us to do right by our kids, then this article on the swallow is well worth it.

Then comes the time to teach the babies to fly. They sit on the nest's edge and rock to and fro with very little balance. The male and female take time to fly to the nest and back to a ledge nearby or just fly around. The bravest one will lean off the nest and fly inches back and forth to the nest. It will continue flying like that, and before long it is flying farther. It's then that the others do the same, except for one, who seems to be scared and timid.

The mother doesn't give up. The baby bird doesn't either. After extra coaxing, that bird, too, is flying. It's then that they disappear and I begin anxiously waiting for the following year to come around.

That bird has shown what "tough love" is all about. We sometimes can't give that to our own children. It's needed for growth and development for a young person to turn into a responsible adult. It teaches independence and so much more. A mother seems to be more guilty. We've been the "life-giver," and that bond begins with the first flutter during pregnancy. It's as though our role of mothering begins with that first small movement; it's hard to turn loose.

The swallow is an example on how to turn loose. If we love someone, we should let them go when the times comes. A swallow knows!



Gail Motes



DAVE SAYS
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by Dave Ramsey

Artistic endeavors

Dear Dave,
I'm retired, and in the past few years I've taken up painting. This hobby has begun bringing in more money than I expected. At what point should I start thinking about separating my art money from my personal finances, and look at officially starting a little business.

Pat

Dear Pat,
I'd do it now. A hobby that makes money is called a business. Hearing this is scary to some people, but starting a small business doesn't have to be complicated. You can go to your bank and, using your Social Security number, open a sole proprietor checking account. Title the account with your full name, then DBA—doing business as—and the name of your business.

All your art income goes into that account, and any expenses paid where your painting is concerned comes out of that account. After the income goes in and the expenses come out, what's left is profit. That's what you'll end up paying taxes on. Also, you'll be required to do quarterly estimates and send them to the IRS if you make more than \$640 in a quarter. Remember to always hold back 25 percent for taxes, too, in a separate savings account just for this purpose.

This is really cool, Pat. I think you're on the verge of being very successful!

Dave

Follow up for peace of mind

Dear Dave,
I've been following your teachings for a while, and I've noticed you advise people to get things in writing when dealing with creditors. Usually, it seems like you're talking about credit cards and things like that when this is mentioned. I finally made my last student loan payment the other day. Do you think it would be a good idea to request a formal statement saying my student loan debt has been completely paid off?

Andrea

Dear Andrea,
Following up on paid-off debts is *always* a good idea. It wouldn't hurt to write and request formal, written confirmation that everything is paid in full. You can do this through email, so you'll have a record of

contact, or you can send a certified letter—return receipt requested—through the postal system. That way, you'll have a record they received the letter and signed for it.

It sounds like you spent a lot of time paying off your student loans. After an experience like that, you don't want to have to deal with greedy or dishonest collectors hounding you years later, and no way to prove you're free and clear.

Congratulations on finally kicking your student loan debt to the curb, Andrea! It feels great, doesn't it?

Dave

Keep it simple and safe

Dear Dave,
My husband and I finally have our full emergency fund in place. Like you recommend, we've kept it in a money market account with check-writing privileges for easy accessibility. Recently, we heard about short-term bond funds with a higher interest rate than our current money market account. Our money would be available for withdrawal if needed, and we would only lose the interest. Is it okay to move half of our emergency fund into one of these bond funds to take advantage of the higher interest rate?

Ferisa

Dear Ferisa,
Absolutely not! Under no circumstances should you do something like that. An emergency fund is not an investment. You'll never build wealth and get rich off your emergency fund. That's not what it's there for.

I understand this might be the first time in your lives you've had a nice chunk of cash in the bank. I also get that it's hard to let it just sit there and make no money. But an emergency fund is insurance, not an investment. It's a rainy-day fund, and its whole purpose is to sit there safe and wait until life throws unexpected expenses in your face.

Think about it this way. Insurance costs you money to protect things that make you money—like your home. It's also there to cover things you otherwise would not be able to afford. When you have an emergency fund in place, you don't have to dip into your 401(k), your IRA or go into debt. Why? Because your emergency fund provides insurance against those kinds of things.

Let your emergency fund sit right where it is, Ferisa. Besides, it's a really bad idea to buy bonds in an environment where interest rates are increasing. Bonds have an inverse relationship to interest rates. So as interest rates climb you'll lose out if you're playing around with bonds!

Dave

Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at [@DaveRamsey](https://twitter.com/DaveRamsey).

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What's Happening

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EVENTS OF INTEREST • FAMILY REUNIONS • PLAYS • CHURCH GATHERINGS • EDUCATIONAL • CLUB MEETINGS

Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston butts during the Watermelon Festival weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, August 18 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.

The Russellville Farmers Market is now open! Weekly schedule from now through October is Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 6 a.m.-noon. Manager is Greg Stanford. Located behind the A.W. Todd Centre. Produce: Tomatoes, onions, squash, peppers, cucumbers, rattlesnake beans. The Franklin County Extension Office will present a special program, "Caring For A Loved One With Dementia," at the Franklin County Farmers Market this Saturday, July 14.

Attention all young ladies of Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale counties entering 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in the Fall of 2018!!! The Distinguished Young Women Scholarship Program will be held Saturday, August 4 at Norton Auditorium on the campus of The University of North Alabama. Young ladies entering the 12th grade will have the opportunity to compete for cash scholarships as well as many other scholarships to colleges and universities. Also, each county winner will have the opportunity to represent her county at the state program in Montgomery in January of 2019. Young ladies entering the 10th and 11th grades have the opportunity to be "DYW Little Sisters." For more information, contact Susan Hargett at 256-710-9239 or Katerina Cole-Coffey at 256-332-8880, or check information on our Facebook page at Distinguished Young Women of Northwest Alabama, or email dshargett@aol.com. Other information and sign-up is available at www.DistinguishedYW.org.

The Belgreen High School volleyball team will host a play date (varsity and jayvee) this Thursday, July 12. Roughly 15 schools are set to participate, including Belgreen, Tharptown, Russellville, Phillips, Covenant Christian, Sheffield, Marion County, Tishomingo County (MS) and Belmont (MS). Kona Shaved Ice will be selling outside the gym all day as part of a fundraiser for Belgreen volleyball. Belgreen also has play dates scheduled for July 23 and July 26.

The next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be Thursday, July 12 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

The Welch Reunion will be held this Saturday, July 14 at the Mountain Valley Hee Haw building starting at 10 a.m. Anyone related in any way to the Welch family, please come on out! Each family should bring what they like for sandwiches (meat, cheese, lettuce, tomato, chips, drink, etc.) A donation will be collected to help pay for use of the building. No alcohol or drugs, please. For more information, call 256-627-7635 or 256-810-4840.

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Coby Greer at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville this Saturday, July 14 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Call 256-335-4356. The KGB will be the featured act at a show sponsored by the Franklin County Arts Council at the Roxy on the second Saturday of each month.

Rockin' Eco Hero Steve Trash will perform two educational and entertaining shows at the Belgreen High School Auditorium (14220 AL-187, Russellville, AL 35653) on Tuesday, July 17 at 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Admission is free! Kids will have fun, be totally amazed and learn why trash is a valuable natural resource; which things are recyclable; the magic of reduce, reuse and recycle; how to "Close the Loop"; and that everything in nature is connected. To register, call the Franklin County Extension Office at 256-332-8880.

Registration for the 2018-19 school year at Russellville Middle School will be held according to the following schedule: Eighth grade from 8-11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 24; Seventh grade from 1-4 p.m. on Tuesday, July 24; and sixth grade from 8-11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 25. Students must come during their designated time frame only. For more info, call RMS at 256-331-2120.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, August 2 at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center on Ash Avenue. Camp #1833 meets the first Thursday of each month EXCEPT January and July. For info, call 256-324-2317. Everyone is welcome!

Mountain Valley Hee Haw features live music every Friday and Saturday night. Show time is 6 p.m. Karaoke at 7 p.m. on Thursday nights. Free admission. No alcohol or drugs. From Russellville, take 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on left. For more information, please call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

New Life Ministries invites you to join them for Sunday School at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings and for worship services on Sundays at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Wednesdays at 7 p.m. On the first Sunday of each month, there will be a fellowship lunch after morning services. You and your family are invited to come worship and fellowship with the Lord of Hosts and his children. New Life Ministries is located on Hwy. 24 west toward Red Bay, right behind Tompkins Feed.

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) weight loss support group meets each Monday evening at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center. Weigh-ins begin at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more information.

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'HAITI,' from page 1

planned to return to Alabama Saturday, July 7, but demonstrations in the capital of Port-au-Prince made travel impossible.

A Facebook post from Martin on the FBC Russellville page Monday said the group was set to return home Tuesday afternoon and would likely be flown into the Port-au-Prince airport on a small plane before boarding a Delta flight back to Atlanta.

"We are working to be flown on a smaller aircraft directly into PAP International Airport, so we can avoid the protests going on outside the airport," Martin said. "We believe this option presents the fewest question marks in regard to safety."

When news arrived in Russellville that the group wouldn't be returning home Saturday, church staff organized a prayer vigil at First Baptist Saturday afternoon. With extensive media coverage of the mission team's dilemma, staff member Lynn Suddith said the prayer chain for the group has grown exponentially.

"People are asking what they can do," Suddith said. "I keep encouraging everyone to do the same thing—like the First Baptist Church Russellville Facebook page, and they can follow what's happening there. There's information in those posts I didn't even know. Social media has been a big asset with this situation."

The mission team traveled to Haiti as part of ESPWA Ministries. The word espwa means 'hope' in the Haitian Creole language. According to the group's web site, www.espwaministries.org, its mission is "to share the hope that is found in Jesus, and help meet the physical and spiritual needs of the people of Haiti."

The FBC team helped host vacation Bible schools, distributed food and visited children's hospitals in Haiti as part of its mission.

The impoverished nation saw protests break out last week after the government announced fuel price increases of 40 percent and up. Diesel prices were to increase 47 percent and kerosene more than 50 percent.

On Saturday, Haiti's prime minister announced a reversal of the fuel increases, at least temporarily.

Several airlines announced the cancellation of flights to and from Haiti last weekend. The U. S. Embassy in Haiti warned citizens to "stay inside amid continued demonstrations in the capital city of Port-au-Prince and a northern

city amid a fuel price hike."

The FBC team remained at a guest house inside a secure compound. Martin shared Monday how much the prayers for his group are helping.

"I can not imagine how it feels to be home and not be able to do anything physically to help," Martin said. "Please know that by praying and keeping the faith, you are being a great help to us. The team is in great spirits, playing card games, laughing and joking around. The mood is very positive around here, despite being warm. We have plenty of food and water to keep us squared away, too."

Another FBC Russellville mission team was set to travel to Houston on Tuesday, led by David Balding. Church staff asked not only for continued prayers for the Haiti mission team, but also the group going to Texas.

A mission team from Russellville's Calvary Baptist Church was scheduled to travel to Haiti Sunday, but that trip was cancelled due to civil unrest. A post on the church's Facebook asked for continued prayers for mission teams that remained in Haiti.



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Franklin County Schools get \$110,000 grant

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Appalachian Regional Commission awards grants and contracts from funds appropriated to the commission annually by Congress.

Program grants are awarded to state and local agencies, governmental entities and non-profit organizations. The \$110,000 grant to Franklin County Schools was administered through the State of Alabama. Gov. Kay Ivey's office notified Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) on July 9 that the grant had been awarded.

"I am happy to have helped in securing these badly needed funds for the school children of the Franklin County School System," Morrow said.

Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton said the ARC funds were a reimbursement grant that will reimburse his system for

the purchase of 360 Chrome books. Chrome books are laptop computers that operate with Chrome OS, rather than Windows10 or macOS. The machines are designed to work while connected to the Internet, as many applications and programs are located in the cloud.

Hamilton said the ARC grant is another way for the system to incorporate technology into the classroom.

"That is so important in a variety of ways," Hamilton said. "We want to thank Susan Hargett for working to write this grant. We will see the benefits of this for years to come."

Dr. Susan Hargett wrote the technology grant for Franklin County Schools, and Jessica Hamilton (technology instructional teacher for the system) will be in charge of purchasing the Chrome books.

Each of the system's eight schools will receive 30 Chrome books, and the remaining 120 will be used to fill in where needed. The cost of the Chrome books includes charging carts and the necessary licensing and software, Greg Hamilton said.

"This is an ongoing project. We already have Chrome books in our schools thanks to a \$25,000 middle school grant from the Alabama Department of Education," Hamilton said. "Franklin County and Muscle Shoals City Schools were the only two local systems to receive that grant last year."

Hamilton said the ARC grant is another way for the system to incorporate technology into the classroom.

"That is so important in a variety of ways," Hamilton said. "We want to thank Susan Hargett for working to write this grant. We will see the benefits of this for years to come."



COURTESY PHOTO

Joshua Pinkard and Brooklyn Bolton were voted Mr. and Ms. Northwest-Shoals Community College 2017-18 for the Phil Campbell campus. Pinkard, of Russellville, was completing his Associates Degree at Northwest with plans to transfer to the University of Alabama at Huntsville to pursue a degree in computer engineering. Bolton, of Red Bay, was also completing her Associates Degree with plans to transfer to Mississippi State University to pursue a degree in marketing.

Russellville's Pinkard, Red Bay's Bolton win Mr. and Ms. NW-SCC

Submitted to the FFP

PHIL CAMPBELL – Joshua Pinkard and Brooklyn Bolton were voted Mr. and Ms. Northwest-Shoals Community College 2017-2018 for the Phil Campbell Campus.

Students, faculty, and staff cast a vote for the students who best represent NW-SCC and the College mission. All students nominated must be enrolled full-time, take classes on the Phil Campbell Campus, be a second-year student, have a 2.0 GPA or higher, and display leadership in extracurricular activities and community service.

Pinkard, of Russellville, was completing his associates in science degree at NW-SCC and will transfer to the University of Alabama in Huntsville to pursue a degree in computer engineering. He was Student Government Vice President, an officer in Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, a College Ambassador, a member of the College Bowl Team, an All-Alabama Academic team member, and a math tutor.

Bolton, of Red Bay, was completing her associates degree in science and will transfer to Mississippi State University to pursue a degree in marketing. She was Student Government President, a Student Ambassador, member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and winner of the President's Award, the highest honor at NW-SCC.

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I'm younger than I look...

Bo Lemay, left, and Noah Wyatt examine a cow at the recent Franklin County Junior Cattlemen's Association Day held at Mike Madden's Brangus Farms in Spruce Pine. Wyatt and Joe Hester held a demonstration showing how a cow's age could be determined by looking inside its mouth.

Commission approves bid on Oak Hill project

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At a special-called meeting Monday afternoon, the Franklin County Commission voted to approve a bid from Franklin County-based Eady Contracting, Inc., to complete the drainage and roadway improvement project in Oak Hill subdivision.

Eady Contracting submitted the lowest competitive bid, at \$604,419.40, among the five received. Commissioners authorized chairman Barry Moore to sign the contract with the company once the paperwork is complete.

The project, which is already underway, is designed to alleviate drainage problems in the subdivision. Work to be performed by Eady Contracting includes the replacement of all undersized driveway pipes with the correct sized pipes, installation of concrete flumes to help combat erosion and the final step of repaving Oak Hills Drive.

Franklin County is contributing \$137,448.90 in matching funds on the project, most of which will be in the form of in-kind work. A representative of Civil Group, which is administering the project, said the work is expected to be completed within five months. Eady Contracting also performed work at the MarJac facility in Spruce Pine last year after receiving that contract.



We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com. For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at franklinfreepress.net!

Northwest-Shoals PTK chapters receive awards

Submitted to the FFP

Northwest-Shoals Community College's (NW-SCC) Phil Campbell Campus (Alpha Zeta Iota chapter) and Shoals Campus (Alpha Sigma Beta chapter) received 17 awards at the 2018 Phi Theta Kappa Alabama Regional Convention at Enterprise State Community College in Enterprise, AL.

The Phil Campbell and Shoals Campus Chapter was recognized with the following awards at the convention:

Shoals Campus

- Competitive Edge Award
- Distinguished Administrator Award - Crystal Reed
- Distinguished Chapter Advisor(s) Award Jacque Jefferys and Desiree South
- Distinguished Chapter Advisor Team Award - Jacque Jefferys and Desiree South
- Distinguished Chapter Member Award - Cyntonia Carroll
- Distinguished Chapter Officer - Tuesday Richey
- Five-Star Chapter Award
- Reach Award (for increasing membership)

Phil Campbell Campus

- Continued Excellence Award
- Distinguished Chapter Officer Team Award
- Distinguished Honors in Action Project Award

- Distinguished Honors in Action Theme Award
 - Distinguished Chapter Member Award - Leah Gunderman
 - First Alternate, Most Distinguished Chapter Award
 - Five-Star Competitive Edge Chapter Officer Awards
 - Five-Star Chapter Award
 - Reach Award (for increasing membership)
- Phil Campbell Campus officers are: Shirley Acosta of Haleyville, Lauren Belcher of Lynn, Josh Pinkard of Russellville and Luke Stanford of Vina. Advisors for the Phil Campbell (Alpha Zeta Iota) chapter are Pam Peters and Rachel Trapp. Melissa Harris, a Phil Campbell chapter mem-

ber, was selected as the new Alabama Regional Officer for District 1.

Shoals Campus Officers are: David Lugo-Barrera of Russellville, Emma Bratton of Tuscumbia, Diane Peebles of Muscle Shoals and Tuesday Richey of Sheffield. Advisors for the Shoals chapter are Desiree South and Jacque Jefferys.

Both chapters attended the Phi Theta Kappa International Convention April 19-21 in Kansas City, MO.

Phi Theta Kappa, the International Honor Society of the Two-Year College, has recognized academic excellence in the two-year college since 1918.



COURTESY PHOTOS
Northwest-Shoals Phil Campbell Campus chapter officers (pictured at right, top) received nine awards at the Alabama Regional Phi Theta Kappa Convention. Left to right are Lauren Belcher of Lynn; Josh Pinkard of Russellville; Luke Stanford of Vina; Dr. Glenda Colagross, NW-SCC Interim President; Shirley Acosta of Haleyville; Layne Boyd, 2018-19 Phil Campbell Campus chapter officer; and Rachel Trapp, Advisor.

NW-SCC Shoals Campus chapter officers (pictured at right, bottom) received eight awards at the Alabama Regional Phi Theta Kappa Convention. Left to right are Desiree South, Shoals Campus Advisor; Cyntonia Carroll of Tuscumbia; Tuesday Richey of Sheffield; Diane Peebles of Muscle Shoals; Dr. Glenda Colagross, NW-SCC Interim President; David Lugo-Barrera of Russellville; Emma Bratton of Tuscumbia; Crystal Reed, NW-SCC Assistant Dean of Student Success (Distinguished Administrator Award recipient); and Jacque Jefferys, Shoals Campus Advisor.





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Low rates!

Two more local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Two of the three Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of June 25-29 had scores that fall into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage; and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

Two of the three Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range. One business scored a 79.

The highest score was 97, received by Red Bay Hospital, 211 Hospital Road, Red Bay.

Inspections of Franklin County businesses, with critical item violations noted, resulted in the following scores:

•Swamp John's Country Store, 5181 Hwy. 24, 79. (Large canister of sanitizer not labeled in commissary, employee washing utensil in kitchen

handsink, no toilet paper in men's restroom, no hot water available at handsink, mold in commissary ice machine).

•Yogi's Food Co, 501 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 85. (Hot dogs and smoked sausage being held at 44-46 degrees, gizzards and cole slaw exceeding date limit).

Of the eight inspections done in Colbert County from June 25-29, one restaurant scored below the satisfactory range. Coldwater Mill Restaurant, 814 Hwy. 72 West, Tuscumbia, scored an 84. (No soap or paper towels at all hand washing stations, dented cans).

The high score for the week in Colbert County was 98, received by George's 217, 217 N. Montgomery Ave., Sheffield.

Updated ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

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Quote from Larry Stutts/Decatur Daily 5/20/18

“The Legislature is a part-time job and that’s what it’s intended to be,” he said. “When we’re in session, I take three days a week off and travel to Montgomery. The rest of the year, I work my regular job.”

Former Golden Tiger eager to get started on college career

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

To truly appreciate the cool-factor that accompanied Rudy Fernandez's last home run, you have to understand the confusion that came with his first.

Back in the fall of 2016, Fernandez—then a junior at Russellville High School—was playing for a travel team out of Montgomery called the Triton Rays when he cracked a pitch over the fence for the first time in his baseball-playing life.

"I had never done that before," he said. "Never in my life—not even in Little League. I'd never had the feeling of hitting one and watching the ball go over the fence."

In retrospect, perhaps he should have been watching a little more closely.

"As soon as I hit it, I took off running,"

See 'COLLEGE,' Page 18



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW
RUDY'S READY - After an All-State senior season at Russellville, Fernandez hopes to make an immediate impact at Motlow.

Turn the page



Braden McCaig (24) is one of only a handful of starters who return from last year's 11-win team.

Colbert Heights is coming off the most successful season in program history, but 18 seniors who helped make it happen left big shoes to fill. It's time to reload on The Mountain.

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Last week we kicked off our summer football preview series with an in-depth look at Russellville, where the Golden Tigers are aiming to bounce back from their first three-win season in 20 years. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find a Colbert Heights team coming off the most successful season in the program's 52-year history.

The Wildcats set a school record with 11 wins last year and reached the state quarterfinals for the first time ever before losing to Piedmont. Now, third-year head man Taylor Leathers (the 2017 ASWA Coach of the Year in Class 3A) and his staff must find a way to replace 18 departed seniors, including two 1,000-yard rushers on offense and the top five tacklers from a defense that allowed only 13.5 points per game.

"The word 'inexperience' comes to mind right off the bat," said Leathers, whose team will open the 2018 season on August 24 at rival Red Bay. "This spring and summer have been an eye-opening experience for our kids, with the amount of players we lost from last year's team. It's no secret. We pretty much lost half our roster. It's eye-opening

for our guys to look around and notice that the Kevin Shaws, the Dylan Chandlers, the Cain Phifers, all those players are not with our team any more.

"You've gotta be able to turn the page," Leathers said. "2017 is in the past; 2018 is here. There's a big difference between standing on the sidelines in an eleven-win season and going to Red Bay and those lights pop on and it's your year. These players have to understand that all the success we had last year, we can't rely on that to propel us into any form of success this year."

"You've gotta be able to turn the page. 2017 is in the past; 2018 is here. There's a big difference between standing on the sidelines in an eleven-win season and going to Red Bay and those lights pop on and it's your year. These players have to understand that all the success we had last year, we can't rely on that to propel us into any form of success this year."

What the Wildcats can rely on is the same system and philosophical approach that propelled them into the history books a year ago: A simplified yet fundamentally sound 4-4 scheme on

See 'TURN,' Page 18

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'TURN' from page 13

defense that stresses selflessness and consistency over creativity; and a methodical, run-heavy offense predicated on physicality at the point of attack, moving the chains and controlling the clock.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it—even with no more than two or three starters returning on either side of the ball.

"Each team has its own identity, its own personality," said Leathers, who is 15-8 in his two seasons on The Mountain. "This is high school football. We can't go out and recruit our players like the college level does. We play with the Colbert Heights kids we have, the kids in our community who have been in our school system and have come through our program. Each year there are gonna be ups and downs in terms of what talent you have, but it's our job as coaches to make the most out of that talent and to improve our players. That's our goal. That's our end game—to get our players to be the best players they can be when they leave our program.

"And the most important goal I have hasn't changed. My goal is to develop young men of character and integrity who will leave this program having learned life lessons of hard work and commitment. They can leave this program ready to contribute to the community—being good people, maintaining jobs, getting married, being a great husband and a great father to their kids. That's what it's all about. That's what I'm all about, and that's why I feel like God has blessed me in this position.

"We try to do things the right way. I make my share of mistakes, no doubt about it, but we want our kids to develop those character traits they can't always get somewhere else. That's what makes football special."

Leathers says he is "not a big fan" of 7-on-7, but you wouldn't know it by looking at the Wildcats' schedule for July. They're slated to take part in 7-on-7 camps at Waterloo, Florence, Decatur, Russellville and in their own backyard. Leathers' goal is not to implement any shift in offensive philosophy [Colbert Heights averaged barely half a dozen pass attempts per game last season, and that number doesn't figure to climb in 2018], but instead to give his players as many opportunities as possible to test themselves against actual opponents with something tangible on the line.

Yes, they're called 'passing competitions,' but Leathers is putting the emphasis squarely on the latter and not the former.

"One thing we're doing this summer, we're playing a lot of competition days—more than we've played since I've been here," he said. "I'm not a big 7-on-7 fan in terms of how it relates to the game of football, but what it does do is create and foster a competitive environment and give our kids a chance to build a competitive spirit. We're not gonna come out on Friday nights and throw the ball every down, but we are gonna come out and compete on every down.

"We're gonna get involved in doing as many of those [competition days] as we can. We want these guys to gain as much experience in a competitive way as they can before we go to Red Bay."

Here's a position-by-position breakdown of how the Wildcats look with the start of fall camp less than four weeks away.

Quarterbacks

Position coach: Taylor Leathers

Kevin Shaw, who rushed for 1,110 yards and nine touchdowns on 198 carries last season, graduated in May. The Wildcats will now turn to Kevin's younger brother, Carson Shaw, to take over as the triggerman for their option-based attack. Only a sophomore, the younger Shaw is a dynamic athlete who rushed for 168 yards and two scores on 30 carries in limited duty on offense in 2017. [He started on defense all season and was the team's top corner, making 35 solo tackles and picking off two passes.]

"Carson is a phenomenal athlete," said Leathers, who serves as the Wildcats' offensive coordinator and play caller. "He's got great potential to be a very, very special football player for us here at Colbert Heights. He's a very intense competitor. He wants to win, and he's very eager to do that."

"Carson is a phenomenal athlete," said Leathers, who serves as the Wildcats' offensive coordinator and play caller. "He's got great potential to be a very, very special football player for us here at Colbert Heights. He's a very intense competitor. He wants to win, and he's very eager to do that."

Kevin Shaw made major strides as an on-field leader for the Wildcats toward the end of his career, and Leathers is hoping to mold Carson into the kind of player who can assume those same responsibilities.

"We're progressing him as a leader, toward being the commander in chief of the offense," Leathers said. "That's a little difficult for a sophomore going into his first year as the starter, but he did play a lot of running back last year and he has had Friday-night game experience. Now it's about being the signal man, the triggerman, and making sure the offense is in the right formation, running the right play, getting everybody aligned correctly and managing the clock—doing the critical things it takes to run the offense.

"We're progressing that with him, but there's no question on his athletic

'TURN,' from page 14

ability and the capacity he'll have to make plays for us. Carson is an extremely hard worker. As a sophomore coming in, I've been very impressed with the leadership role he's taken on in the weight room, going that extra mile to become the best athlete he can be."

Running Backs

Position coach: Isaac Fuller

The Wildcats typically deploy a fullback and two slot-backs in their base offense, with the fullback serving as the featured ball carrier. Dylan Chandler flourished in that role last season, rushing for 1,212 yards and 22 touchdowns on 202 attempts. Chandler was part of that 18-man senior class, so Leathers is looking for a new bell cow to step in and carry the load. Enter Riley Fuller, a senior who started at linebacker last season.

"Riley was one of the few non-seniors who played a lot on last year's team," Leathers said. "He did a tremendous job for us on defense. He didn't run the football on offense, but we're transitioning him into being our running back. Riley is physical. He's athletic and fast, of course, but he's gonna be a physical type of runner. That's what we're looking for out of him, and that's why he's in that position."

Colbert Heights looks to be in good shape at the slot-back position, where senior Braden McCaig is coming off a productive season and athletic newcomer Cayne Balta—another senior—is poised to make an immediate impact. The speedy McCaig rushed for 236 yards and two touchdowns on 42 carries last season while also catching eight passes for 77 yards and another score.

"Braden is one of our few returners on the offensive side," Leathers said. "He did a tremendous job in thirteen games as a starting slot-back. We expect him to be a big playmaker for us and a go-to guy in the offense. He's got great quickness, and he sees the hole well. He'll line up in the slot and at the running back position also."

Leathers believes that last year's unprecedented success can have a ripple effect on the program, increasing interest and participation by players who either haven't played football before or haven't been out in several years. One such player is Balta, who last suited up for the Wildcats as a freshman—prior to Leathers' arrival from Lexington.

"Cayne wanted to come out and play football, and he's met all the expectations in order to do that," Leathers said. "He's a tremendous athlete. Cayne is very athletic with great quickness. I look for him to not only be an impact

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PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

OH, BROTHER - Carson Shaw (5), who rushed for 168 yards and two touchdowns on just 30 carries as a freshman in 2017, is taking over for his older brother Kevin as the Wildcats' starting quarterback.

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'TURN,' from page 15

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Receivers

Position coach: Scott Hunter

Another newcomer from within Colbert Heights' own halls is senior Skyler Gault, who projects as a starting receiver alongside fellow senior J.J. Michael, a converted safety who didn't catch a pass last year but did make 13 tackles.

"J.J. played ten games at safety for us last year, so he has game experience," Leathers said. "He just doesn't have any offensive experience. But he's got good hands. He's not a very tall receiver, but he's athletic. He's a shorter guy with good hands, and he's gonna do what we ask him to do and start for us at receiver.

"Skyler is another player [like Balta] who has come out this year. We've got two new guys on the offensive side who have been in school here but did not play last year. We're excited about getting those guys out. Skyler can help us on both sides of the ball as well."

Offensive Line

Position coach: Justin Helms

The O-line was as responsible as any other group for the Wildcats' deep run last year, and now four starters—including All-State left tackle Cain Phifer—must be replaced up front. The lone returner is senior Tyler Tubbs, who started at right tackle in 2017 but may slide over to guard this season depending on how the rest of the line shakes out. Fellow senior Ryan Sanderson will start at tackle and is also an option to fill Phifer's shoes on the left side.

"Tyler Tubbs is gonna be our anchor on the offensive line," Leathers said. "Last year, Cain Phifer was our man, our vocal leader. Tyler is gonna take on that role for us this year. He and Ryan Sanderson have done a good job, being seniors on the line, showing leadership throughout the summer months.

"In order for our offense to be successful, it all starts with the offensive line becoming a physically dominating presence up front. That's the mentality those guys are gonna have to portray and take on as we get into fall camp. That group has really progressed lately as we've gone through the spring and summer."

Joining Tubbs and Sanderson up front will be Logan Simpson, a junior guard. Leathers also said there's "a good possibility" that Patrick Holt, who played significant snaps on the defensive line last year as a junior, will factor into the O-line mix as a senior this year. Sophomores Ethan Seal and Mason Lee are both working at the center spot.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Leathers (above) earned Class 3A Coach of the Year honors from the ASWA after leading Colbert Heights to an 11-2 record and the first quarterfinal berth in program history.

"We're gonna create our best five out of those six," Leathers said.

Senior Evan Norton, who had 115 yards and two touchdowns on just five catches as a junior in 2017, will provide another target in the passing game and an extra blocker when the Wildcats use their tight end formation.

Norton, who is also slated to start at inside linebacker, is one of many players Leathers expects to see significant snaps on both sides of the ball in 2018.

"There are a couple of things that make us much different as a team than we were last year," Leathers said. "Number one is the inexperience we talked about, and number two is gonna be the number of two-way players we have. We just don't have the depth this year compared to last year. The number one factor, without a doubt in my mind, behind our success last year was the ability we had to play guys one way. In a typical game, we played 25 or 26 players valuable snaps. That's

very rare for a 3A school.

"Numbers fluctuate from year to year, and we're in a situation right now where we have as many freshmen coming in as we had seniors graduating, but we do not have many sophomores or juniors on this football team. There's a gap there in back-to-back classes, and that's why we have as many two-way players as we do.

"The depth is coming, though, and we'll have some of those freshmen play for us this year. Hopefully some of those guys will work their way into starting roles. As things progress, we hope to bring along some of those freshmen so we can have them taking valuable snaps on either side of the ball."

Defensive Line

Position coach: Justin Helms

As is the case on the offensive line, the Wildcats will lean heavily on Tyler Tubbs to anchor their four-man defensive front as well. Tubbs had a very productive season at defensive end in 2017, recording 9.5 tackles for loss and 33 total stops. Ryan Sanderson is projected to hold down the end spot opposite Tubbs, replacing an All-State performer in departed senior Bud Pratt.

Leathers said that Patrick Holt, who played a lot of valuable snaps at shade (nose guard) for Colbert Heights last season, is expected to start in that spot this year. Logan Simpson will play the three-technique defensive tackle position, and seniors Andrew Richardson and Cody Richardson are in line to contribute along the defensive front. There could also be a role in the D-line rotation for freshman Cory Martinez.

"Any time you're talking about freshmen, they've gotta be physically mature enough to handle playing on Friday nights," Leathers said. "For a freshman, Cory is definitely strong enough and capable of plugging in and playing for us on the defensive line."

Given that all four projected starters on the defensive line are also expected to start on the offensive line, building depth along the defensive front is essential for Colbert Heights going into the season. That's true across the board, according to Leathers.

"I can't emphasize enough the importance of creating depth, due to the large number of two-way players we have," he said. "We knew this situation was coming. It's just one of those cycles you go through at our level of school. What we're trying to do is really create a mentality in our players where they're ready to play iron man football."

"We made sure our guys know what iron man

See 'TURN,' page 17

'TURN', from page 16

football is. We told them, 'A lot of you guys aren't gonna be able to come off the field. You're gonna have to play both sides of the ball. You're gonna have to be iron men. You're not gonna be able to wear down or fatigue.'

Linebackers

Position coach: Lonnie Robinson (Defensive Coordinator)

Evan Norton will line up at inside linebacker alongside returning starter Riley Fuller, who made 43 tackles last season as a junior. Senior Tyler Taylor is slated to take over at one of the outside linebacker spots, with Skyler Gault in the mix to start on the other side. Leathers said he expects two young players, sophomore Blane Holt and freshman Andrew Tedford, to come in and make an impact at linebacker this season as well.

Defensive Backs

Position coaches: Isaac Fuller (corners), Scott Hunter (safeties)

On a typical snap, the Wildcats will line up with two corners and one safety in their Cover Three scheme, though Leathers did say they plan to work in some two-safety looks this year. Carson Shaw, the team's leading returning tackler with 47 total stops last year as a freshman, is back at one corner spot, with Braden McCaig—who saw plenty of snaps at corner late in 2017—returning to start on the opposite side. Leathers said that Shaw's athleticism and versatility make him an immensely valuable piece on defense.

"Carson started 13 games at corner for us last year and did a great job, but he's the type of athlete who can play anywhere," Leathers said. "If we need him at safety, at outside linebacker, even at inside linebacker, he'll be able to play those spots. The number one thing we're focusing on as a coaching staff is realizing the small number of names that we're penciling in. We're gonna have to create our own depth."

Kevin Shaw played safety in key situations for the Wildcats last season and made several big plays, picking off a team-best five passes and amassing 170 yards in interception returns. Shaw has moved on, but Leathers loved what he saw this spring from newcomer Cayne Balta.

"Cayne had a tremendous spring at safety, an incredible spring," Leathers said. "If we had a game to play right now, he would be our starting safety."

Senior J.J. Michael also has a lot of game experience at safety, and Leathers said junior Jacob Millender—who suffered a broken leg on the first day of spring drills—should be back in time to be a contributor this season at either outside linebacker or in the secondary.

With 40 players, at most, on the roster and precious little Friday-night experience to go around, Leathers and his staff have spent the summer stressing the importance of conditioning.

"We're very inexperienced," Leathers said. "But our goal and what we preach and instill in these young men who play football at Colbert Heights is to reach the postseason and to be competitive in every game we play. That has not changed, and it's not gonna change."

"We've really been preaching that mentality to our players," said Leathers, who played defensive line at UNA after graduating from Winfield High School in 2003. "My goal is to field the team that's in the best shape since I've been here. As soon as we got back [this summer], we started running 110-yard sprints on a timer. We started with two, and we're working our way up to sixteen. Just before we broke for the Fourth, we ran ten of them. Our linemen are making it in twenty seconds, our tight ends and linebackers in eighteen seconds, and our skill players are making it in sixteen."

"Those 110's are something I got from UNA, when Mark Hudspeth was there [as head coach]. I had to run those myself. It's a true test of conditioning. Our goal is to go into the Red Bay game in the best possible shape. We have to be, because we can't afford to have anybody tapping out."

Colbert Heights finished tied for first in Class 3A, Region 8 last season, but the region looks very different following realignment and reclassification. Gone are co-region champion West Morgan (the only team to defeat the Wildcats in region play last year), long-time rival Colbert County (now in Class 2A) and Elkmont. Westminster Christian (dropping down from 4A) and Phil Campbell (moving up from 2A) have arrived, joining Colbert Heights and fellow holdovers Clements, East Lawrence, Lauderdale County and Lexington to form what should be a very competitive seven-team region.

The Wildcats snapped a five-year playoff drought with last season's historic run, but returning to the postseason while breaking in as many as 15 new starters in 2018 will be a challenge. Still, Leathers isn't backing down one bit.

"My goal here at Colbert Heights is to have a consistently competitive postseason team," he said. "That's been my goal since day one. The first year, we didn't do that. [The Wildcats finished 4-6 in 2016 and narrowly missed the playoffs.] Last year we were blessed with a tremendous year, a history-making year. This team is gonna look a lot different."

"We're very inexperienced. But our goal and what we preach and instill in these young men who play football at Colbert Heights is to reach the postseason and to be competitive in every game we play. That has not changed, and it's not gonna change."



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'COLLEGE,' from page 13

Fernandez recalled last Thursday. "I got to second base and I stopped. I was just standing there on the bag, thinking it was a ground-rule double. Then I saw the umpire waving his finger around in a circular motion, and I knew it was a home run."

As Fernandez resumed his first-ever home run trot, his predominant feeling was one of disbelief.

"I remember thinking, 'I just did that? I've never done *that* before,'" he said. "All my friends, they knew I'd never hit a home run, so they were really happy for me."

Fast-forward to the spring of 2018, a late-April Friday night in front of a packed house at Russellville Baseball Stadium. Already a game up on Etowah in a best-of-three first-round playoff series, the Golden Tigers were leading 4-2 in the seventh inning of Game 2 when Fernandez stepped to the plate with two on and two out. Facing Blue Devil reliever Jarren Wright, Fernandez worked the count to 1-1 and then fouled off two straight pitches before smacking a long, high drive to left for a three-run bomb that effectively put the game out of reach and the series on ice.

When his first-ever home run for the Rays nearly two years earlier cleared the fence, Fernandez had been the last to know. This time, he was the first. Immediately after making contact, he flipped his bat toward the first-base dugout in a spontaneous—not to mention stylistically pleasing—expression of joy. So rhythmic and fluid was Fernandez's flamboyant finish that it appeared to be merely a natural extension of the swing itself.

"This is like a dream to me, playing at the next level," said Fernandez, who chose Motlow State over offers from Lawson State and a junior college program in Illinois. "I'm super-happy about it. My high school career ended, but now I get to start a new chapter in my life. I'm ready for college baseball. I'm super-excited."

Admittedly, the cool-factor would have been reduced drastically had the ball not cleared the fence, which it did by only a few feet. [Fernandez would have been stopping at second for an entirely different reason.] But the home run that buried the Blue Devils was number six on the season for Fernandez, who by that time had learned to recognize when he got hold of one.

"My senior season, I was hitting some home runs at practice, so I was getting used to hitting them and being able to tell if they're going out or not," he said. "I'm glad that one went over, or it would have been pretty embarrassing."

The very idea of Rudy Fernandez, Home Run Hitter, seemed pretty far-fetched not too long ago. That long ball he hit while playing for the Rays in the fall of 2016 proved to be something of an aberration—at least for a while. As a Golden Tiger junior in 2017, Fernandez had a fine season on the mound (going 8-0 with two saves and a 1.75 ERA in 19 appearances) but largely scuffled at the plate, collecting just 14 hits—and no homers—in 74 at bats.

Looking back on it now, Fernandez attributes his struggles not to a lack of effort but rather to a mechanical issue that he says took time to correct.

"I always worked at hitting, but I had a flaw in my swing until my senior year," Fernandez said. "Something didn't feel right, and one of my coaches noticed I was coming up and coming off my back leg when I would swing. I wasn't staying on plane to hit the ball hard. I knew I had to fix it, but it was the middle of my junior year, and sometimes it's hard to fix something like that in the middle of the season."

"You're just trying to go out there and compete every day, and I was focused on doing that."

Fernandez began to hit the ball with more authority late in the year, smacking three doubles in 17 playoff at bats after recording just one extra-base hit in the 2017 regular season. In Game 3 of the Class 5A finals against Faith Academy, Fernandez took the mound in relief to record the final two outs and preserve a 7-4 win that clinched Russellville's third consecutive state championship. As soon as the Blue Map was back in the trophy case at the Golden Tigers' baseball facility, Fernandez was back in the cages just down the hall, dead-set on fixing his swing and reaching his full potential as a hitter.

"I knew I wanted to play baseball at the next level," Fernandez said. "A lot of kids who play high school baseball want that opportunity to play at the next level, but sadly they don't get one. Playing college baseball has always been my dream."

Determined to see that dream become a reality (and to do his part in making sure Russellville remained a championship contender on the state level), Fernandez analyzed video of his swing and put in extra hitting sessions with close friend and Golden Tiger teammate Brock Malone.

The work paid immediate dividends. Fernandez took part in a showcase at Faulkner University in the summer of 2017 and turned a few heads, including those belonging to the coaches at Motlow State Community College in Tullahoma, TN.

"They told me to come on a visit," Fernandez said, "and I really liked their

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'COLLEGE' from page 18

program. They have a lot of good things going for them. A lot of my coaches [at Russellville] had told me that JUCO baseball would be really good for me, and I decided that's what I wanted to do."

The interest was mutual. Motlow State, in the market for a couple of middle infielders, offered scholarships to both Fernandez (a second baseman) and his Triton Rays teammate, shortstop Xavier Torres. The two plan on rooming together in Tullahoma.

"This is like a dream to me, playing at the next level," said Fernandez, who chose Motlow State over offers from Lawson State and a junior college program in Illinois. "I'm super-happy about it. My high school career ended, but now I get to start a new chapter in my life. I'm ready for college baseball. I'm super-excited."

Fernandez signed with Motlow State prior to the start of his senior season at RHS and then proceeded to torment one Russellville opponent after another with his re-tooled swing. He hit his first home run as a Golden Tiger on March 3 of this year at Gunter'sville, finishing 3-for-4 with five RBIs in a 16-8 win. He had three more hits and another home run in an 11-4 rout of Austin on March 8, and he homered twice and drove in a career-high seven runs on March 28 in a wild 20-15 win over Fairhope.

Fernandez went deep again in the Class 5A, Area 16 finale at East Limestone and then blasted that three-run shot to help put away Etowah in round one of the playoffs. Two weeks later, he delivered what might have been Russellville's biggest hit of the postseason in the sixth inning of Game 3 of a quarterfinal series against Springville, ripping a game-tying RBI double into the left-field corner and then scoring the go-ahead run in what proved to be a 6-4 win.

The Golden Tigers' bid for a fourth straight title ultimately fell one series short, but Fernandez earned second-team All-State honors from the ASWA at shortstop after leading the team with 52 hits and a .344 batting average. He pounded out nine doubles to go along with those six homers, driving in 35 runs, scoring 37 and walking more often (25 times) than he struck out (20 times).

Fernandez reached base at a .441 clip and recorded 14 multi-hit games, but it's those half a dozen long balls that still surprise him.

"It amazes me that I got six," he said last week. "That's shocking to me. I'm not a power hitter."

Then again, he didn't used to be a middle infielder either—not until Russellville coach Chris Heaps, perceiving a need at second base, approached Fernandez before his junior season and asked the lifelong outfielder what he'd think about playing on the dirt for a change.

"I actually came into class one day, and Coach pulled me off to the side and said they were planning on working me as an infielder," Fernandez said. "I said, 'That wouldn't bother me a bit. I'll play wherever you want me to play. That's perfectly fine.' I've been an infielder ever since."

Fernandez played primarily at second base as a junior, then shifted over to shortstop as a senior. He soaked up as much knowledge and expertise as he could from Heaps, a former middle infielder who played one year of JUCO baseball before spending three years in the New York Yankees minor league system.

"Good footwork is definitely a key," Fernandez said of manning a middle infield spot. "Coach Heaps always said an infielder, even an infielder with good hands, is nothing without footwork. You're not gonna get anywhere without that. It helps to have a plus arm, too, and I'm working on that a lot, getting my arm strength up. Having good range is important, too."

Motlow State's coaches evidently saw enough of those traits in Fernandez to envision him as the solution to their second base dilemma. For his part, Fernandez has taken to the middle infield quite nicely, so much so that he names Francisco Lindor (a shortstop for the Cleveland Indians) and Javier Baez (a second baseman for the Chicago Cubs) as his two favorite big leaguers. Both, incidentally, are slick fielders with big-time power who play the game with more than a little flair.

Sound familiar?

"Those are two guys you can look at and say you want to play the game like they do," Fernandez said. "They both play with a lot of confidence."

Odds are very good that both of them would have *loved* the bat flip.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

IN OR OUT - Fernandez came up through the ranks as an outfielder before switching to second base as a Russellville junior (above). Motlow State's coaches plan to keep him in the middle of the infield.

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