

Pd. Pol. Adv. By: Eddie Britton, 4771 Hwy 524, Russellville, AL 36663

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

The right call



Nick Schmittou calls six games a week in the Gulf Coast League.

Former Vina standout now a pro umpire

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

During his standout career at Vina High School, then Tougaloo College in Mississippi and Lemoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Nic Schmittou lined up behind the plate as a catcher.

While his playing days may be over, Schmittou is still staring down

See 'CALL,' Page 9

Johnny Mack MORROW STATE SENATE



Pd. Pol. by Morrow for Senate, 1895 Hwy. 28, Red Bay, 35892

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Five & Dime store will take visitors down memory lane

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to his hometown, Mark "Yogi" Welborn admits he's a bit nostalgic.

While his business ventures are obviously set up to make money, Welborn also invests in Russellville because of his passion for the community. And that's what drove Welborn's latest venture, Five & Dime Antiques & Collectibles.

Located on North Jackson Avenue in the downtown building that once housed White's Five & Dime, Welborn's new business was inspired by his childhood memories of playing at Five Oaks Park and the Moody

See 'STORE,' Page 8



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Mark Welborn's new business is located on North Jackson Avenue in the building that once housed White's Five & Dime.

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**At a Meeting Held July 16, 2018:
The Russellville Gas Board adopt-
ed new industrial/interruptible
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and regulations. Copies of the
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'Great strides' made on THS cafeteria job

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton told his board last Tuesday that "great strides" had been made on the cafeteria project at Tharptown High School.

After delays from the contractor forced the project completion date to be pushed back, Hamilton said that (although there was no timetable on completion) workers were making progress, new block had been laid and brick work was underway.

"There were some roofing issues, though, and that subcontractor has been terminated," Hamilton said.

The project includes a new cafeteria, six new classrooms and a safe room for students. The old cafeteria will be converted into four classrooms.

At Vina High School, Hamilton said the demolition was complete of the old science lab/band hall building. He expects the project to rebuild to be bid out and approved by October 1, 2018.

Hamilton also said surveyors were looking at Belgreen High School to determine a possible location for additional parking.

"There's an issue with parking at Belgreen, and we're looking at some ways to alleviate that," Hamilton said.

In other action at its July 31st meeting, the Franklin BOE:

- Heard a report that the system's one-month emergency fund had grown to \$680,000. While that is still short of the required \$2.2 million one-month expenses, Hamilton said when he took office in January 2017 the fund was in the red \$425,000, so progress is being made.

- Approved the resignation in supplement of Richie Hester as Vina head softball coach, Johnny Cleveland as head coach for boys and girls golf at Red Bay High School, and Sonya Marks as Red Bay varsity girls basketball coach.

- Approved the resignation of Bethany Tracy, speech pathologist, effective July 18, 2018; Molly Martin, math teacher at Red Bay; and Sonya Marks, physical education and math teacher at Red Bay.

- Approved the retirement of Joy Berry, teacher aide at Red Bay, effective September 1, 2018.

- Approved leave of absence for Kristina Allen, aide at Phil Campbell School, for 2018-19 school year for medical reasons; Lisa Franklin, elementary teacher at Vina, for 2018-19 school year; and Holley Lewey, kindergarten teacher at Red Bay, for 2018-19 school year.

- Approved the transfer of Hannah Vincent from elementary teacher at Belgreen to elementary teacher at Tharptown; Luanne Vickery from guidance counselor at Franklin County Career Tech Center to guidance counselor at Phil Campbell; and Ashley Grimes, from multi-sensory interventionist aide at East Franklin to multi-sensory interventionist for Franklin County Schools.

- Approved employment in supplement of: Tommy Bruton, assistant softball coach at Belgreen; Jonathan Jones, head softball coach at Vina; Michael Jackson, head varsity football coach and ½ paid assistant, field maintenance at Red Bay; Richard Maggerise, football coach assistant at Red Bay; Anthony Pounds, football coach assistant at Red Bay; Jamie Purser, football coach assistant at Red Bay; and Kelby Hallmark, football coach assistant (½) at Red Bay.

- Approved employment of: Jody Humphres, special education aide at Belgreen; Caitlin Maijala, instructional aide at Phil Campbell Elementary; Donovan Hand, instructional aide at Vina; Traci Montgomery, special education aide at Belgreen; Ashley Easterling, special education aide at Vina; Chassidy Winsted, special education aide at Phil Campbell Elementary; and Amanda Gurley, special education teacher.

- Approved the following principal contracts: Lance Mitchell, Red Bay High School for three years; Kelby Daniel, Tharptown Elementary School, three years; Brent Gillespie, Vina High School, one year probationary contract; Jennifer Warhurst, Phil Campbell Elementary, two year probationary contract; and Jonathan King, principal, East Franklin Junior High, 19 months probationary contract, retroactive to January 24, 2018.

- Approved Lynsi Bragwell, Jessica Holland and Brooke Williams as substitute teachers.

- Approved Adam Hester, Jason Vinson, Heath Isom and Dale Saint as football volunteer assistants at Red Bay; Lance Mitchell as Red Bay Athletic Director; and Michael Jackson as Red Bay Athletic Director.

- Awarded the Child Nutrition Program bid for bread to Flowers Baking Company as lowest responsible bidder, with roll-over extension for three

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additional 12-month periods through July 31, 2022.

- Approved extracurricular activities/field trips bus driver rates increasing from \$65 to \$75. Field trips requiring the bus driver to miss regular routes and not exceeding 120 miles of travel will be billed an additional \$25 driver pay. This additional \$25 does not apply to sports-related trips.

The next regular meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education will be August 14, 2018, with work session at 4 p.m. and meeting to follow.

Honey Do: Moving out?

If you or someone else in the house are making plans to head off to college, career or other commitments, here are just a few things you must have to settle into your new place.

•A BASIC TOOL KIT consisting of a hammer, screwdriver set (or a multi-bit screwdriver), adjustable wrench, pliers and a retractable utility knife.

•A PLASTIC TOOL BOX to keep all that stuff in.

Here's to success, adventure and fun in new experiences!

•DUCT TAPE and a small can of WD-40. (Just in case something moves, or doesn't move, or squeaks when it does.)

•BATTERIES - An ample supply.

•STORAGE TOTES and a LAUNDRY HAMPER. I suggest clear storage totes, because it is easy to see

the contents at a glance and they let light shine through into the dark corners of closets to discourage spiders and pests.

•BROOM, MOP, FLOOR CLEANER, TRASH BAGS AND BUG SPRAY. [Yes, you'd be surprised.]

•A POWER STRIP with multiple outlets and with a BUILT-IN SURGE PROTECTOR. Maybe two.

•A GOOD FLASHLIGHT. Many times they are quicker and more dependable in an emergency situation than the one on your phone.

These are just a few things that no person should be without.

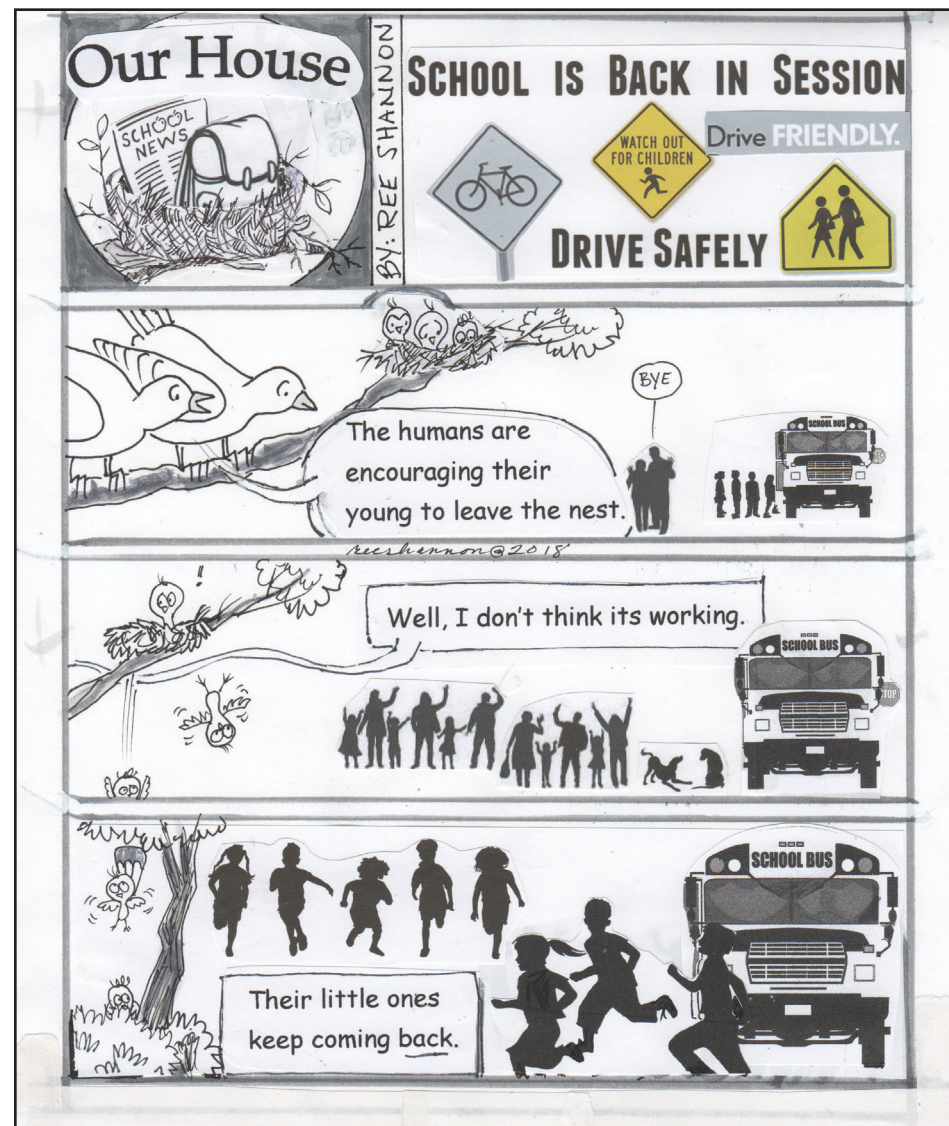
Here's to success, adventure and fun in new experiences! Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green

Letters to the Editor

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!



FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Mike Self

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

John Pilati

Content Contributors

Mike Self, John Pilati, Ree Shannon, Doug Green, Rebecca Thomason, Sheryl Hamilton, Ashley Cummins, Gail Motes

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

Correction Policy

The *Franklin Free Press* strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

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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DAVE SAYS
Financial Straight-Talk
www.davesays.org
by Dave Ramsey

Finding responsible renters

Dear Dave,
I'm a landlord, and I own a few houses and duplexes around town. Recently, I made the mistake of renting to some tenants who were not respectful of my property. Do you have any tips for selecting good renters?

Joe

Dear Joe,
In my experience, most landlords simply aren't thorough enough with the screening process when it comes to potential tenants. It's difficult to get to know someone—especially in this kind of situation—without spending some face-to-face time with them *and* digging into their backgrounds a little.

I have several rental properties, so here are a few tips that have served me well over the years. Always require a big deposit up front. In addition, pull a credit bureau report on prospective renters. I also drive by the place they're currently living to see how they take care of things. To me, this is a great indication of how responsible they are, and how they might treat *my* property. Finally, get

proof they've regularly made past rental payments on time.

It's a leap of faith, to an extent, any time you sign an agreement with a new tenant. But there are things you can do to make a more informed decision as to whom you're doing business with!

Dave

Don't allow them to break the rules

Dear Dave,
A debt collector has been calling members of my family for the last two weeks to get information on me. He identified himself as a collector, and I want to pay what I owe, but is it legal for him to do this?

Kerry

Dear Kerry,
No, it isn't legal. If he identified himself in any way as a debt collector and spoke with anyone but you about your debt, he broke the law. This is a violation of the Federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. You need to file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) against this collector and his company.

Record the conversation the next time they call. Tell them at the beginning you'll be taping any interaction you have with them from that point forward, and ask your relatives to do the same. That way, you'll have proof to hand over to the FTC or the attorney general.

There's nothing wrong with collecting a debt. If you're a collector or creditor, it's money that is legally owed to you. Still, you must do it within the confines of the law.

Dave

*Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.

Toyland tix to go on sale at Watermelon Festival

Submitted to the FFP

Tickets for The Roxy's Legend of Toyland will officially go on sale Friday, August 17 at 5:30 p.m. at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville.

This initial ticket sale will coincide with the Franklin County Watermelon Festival, which will take place Friday evening and all day on Saturday, August 18. Ticket sales on Saturday will begin at 10 a.m.

Assistant director Hillary Hall said tickets for the wildly popular holiday production, which is the creation of Russellville resident and longtime Northwest-Shoals Community College music instructor Lanny McAlister, will be on sale throughout the festival, and those who purchase tickets that weekend will be entered into a special drawing to receive reserved seating.

"All of the tickets for The Roxy's Legend of Toyland are general admission, but a select few people will have the chance to have their seats upgraded to reserved seating for the performance they purchased tickets for," Hall said. "Only those who purchase tickets during the Watermelon Festival will be entered into this drawing, so we encourage everyone to come out that weekend and get your tickets."

After the Watermelon Festival is over, Hall said tickets will be available to purchase online the following Monday at Eventbrite.com. Tickets will also be available to purchase each Sunday in November from 1-3 p.m. at the Roxy Theatre box office and before each performance if any tickets are still available.

"We had such a tremendous response to the production last year," Hall said. "I have no doubt tickets for this year's production will go fast, so purchasing early is the best way to ensure you'll get to experience this fun and magical event that has earned a reputation for being one of the most beloved holiday traditions in our area."

The Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council will present The Roxy's Legend of Toyland on November 28-December 2 at the Historic Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville, with 14 shows planned for this year.

School board approves several personnel moves

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A brief meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education included several personnel moves in advance of the start of the new school year.

Included in the items approved at the August 3, 2018, meeting were:

- Resignation in supplement for Eli Fuller for all coaching duties for 2018-19 school year.

- Resignation in position for Kayla Thorn, teacher at Russellville Elementary School.

- Employment in position for Katelyn Allen, science teacher at Russellville High School; Jane Wade, counselor at RES; Ashley Almon, teacher at RES; and Kayle Moor, social science teacher at Russellville Middle School.

- Temporary employment in position for Sarah Wilson, to fill a leave of absence for Kendra Howard from August 16-September 7, 2018.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the board will be Thursday, August 23 at 3:30 p.m., with work session Monday, August 20 at 3:30 p.m.

Correction

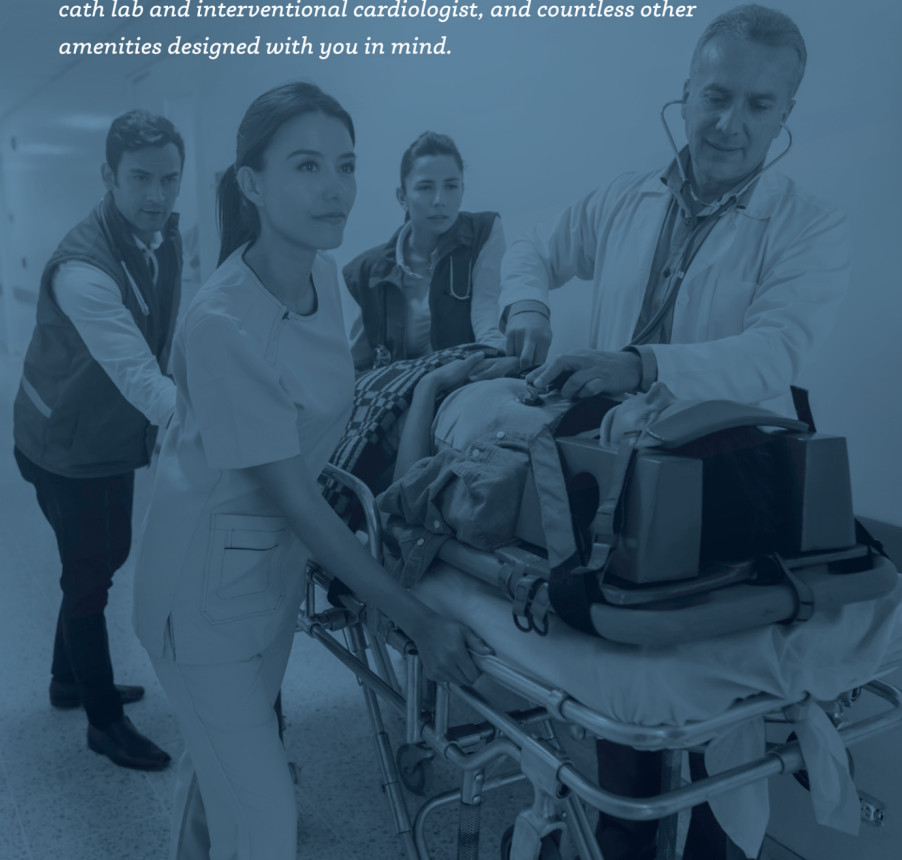
An article in the August 1, 2018 edition on smoke-free policies in public housing agency facilities incorrectly stated that officials with Village Square Apartments said their privately owned facility was not subject to the new HUD smoke-free policy. In fact, the article should have stated that an official with Village Square said she was unsure since they were privately owned whether the new smoke-free policy applied to her facility. The *Free Press* apologizes for the error and is happy to set the record straight.

Please send your letters to the editor, guest columns, cartoon panels and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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What's Happening


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 The NACOLG SenioRx Medication Assistance Program supplies free and low-cost medications for anyone in Alabama with a disability or a chronic illness regardless of age that requires daily medication. Medicare recipients may also be eligible. For more information, contact NACOLG SenioRx today. There is no charge for this service. 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463). For more information, call 256-389-0530. This program is in partnership with the State of Alabama and Alabama Department of Senior Services.


 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.


 Come worship with us! An old-fashioned tent and prayer revival will be held August 5-12 at the old Mars Hill Church grounds in Phil Campbell. Services will start at 6 p.m. each night. There will be singing and a prayer call every night. Everyone is welcome to join us! For more information, please call Rev. Kenneth Hawkins at 256-460-0420 or Rev. Vic Hawkins at 803-804-9406.


 Since the Chamber of Commerce is preparing for the Watermelon Festival, the August meeting of American Legion Post 64 will not be held at the Chamber office. Instead, Post 64 will meet this Thursday, August 9 at 6:30 p.m. at City Lake Park for their annual picnic/BBQ. The Post will supply hamburgers and hot dogs with the fixings. Anyone who would like to bring a side or a dessert is encouraged to do so. All veterans and families are invited to attend. If you plan to attend, please call Grant Atkins at 256-627-2866 or Harry Upton at 256-331-4924 to notify them as to the number of guests attending.


 Russellville High School will host a "Meet the Tigers" Community Night this Friday, August 10. This event will be a great opportunity to meet members of the current Golden Tiger football team, volleyball team and cheer squad. The night will be highlighted by an Alumni Flag Football Game. RHS football coach John Ritter is inviting all former players and students of Russellville High School to participate in the game. Cost is \$10, and each participant will receive a T-shirt. The number of games and teams will be determined by participation. Contact Coach Ritter at John.ritter@rcs.k12.al.us for more information.


 Restoration Church will hold its first annual Golf Tournament at Twin Pines Country Club this Friday, August 10 at 12 p.m. Format is a two-man scramble. Registration fee is \$130 per team. First and second place plus Worst of the Pack will receive prizes. For more information, call Coach Boutwell at the Pro Shop at 256-331-0270 or John Quillen at 256-277-8197.


 The Pebble Bluegrass Festival is set for this Friday and Saturday, August 10-11 at the Pebble Community Center (100 County Road 3423 in Haleyville). All proceeds go to the community center. Good clean family entertainment. Music includes the Saltillo Circuit Riders. Weekend pass costs \$10. Friday only (7 p.m.) costs \$5. Saturday only (2 p.m.) costs \$7. Children ages 6-12 get in for \$2, and children under 6 get in free with an adult. All bands and pickers welcome. Concessions on grounds. Bring lawn chairs. Free camping in rough. Camper hookups 30 amp \$12/day, 50 amp \$12/day. For info, call 205-269-2221.

 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guests Danika and the JEB at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville this Saturday, August 11 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.

 You're invited to hear Carroll Roberson at Mountain Home Baptist Church (3600 Colburn Mountain Road, Tuscumbia) this Sunday, August 12 at 11 a.m. (preaching) and 6 p.m. (in concert). Roberson can be seen nationwide on the Church Channel, Dish Network and DirecTV. His television presence is growing and is reaching millions with the gospel. Carroll has recorded more than 60 albums. He has written over 300 songs and authored several books. Visit his website at www.carrollroberson.com.

 Jonesboro Baptist Church (5061 Waterloo Road, Russellville) will celebrate Homecoming this Sunday, August 12. Morning worship service will start at 11 a.m., and the gospel group Purpose will sing at 1:30 p.m. Pastor Kent Walker and congregation invite everyone to attend! For more information, please call 256-331-0995.

 First Baptist Church College Avenue will host revival services at 7 p.m. nightly from Monday, August 13 through Wednesday, August 15. The church is located at 521 College Avenue, Russellville. Evangelist will be Rev. Otis C. Neloms, pastor of First Baptist Church in Courtland. Pastor B.J. Bonner extends an invitation for your attendance.

 The Cowboy Church of Franklin County (25100 Hwy. 24, Russellville) will hold a Youth Rally for students age 12 to 18 on Saturday, September 1 at 6 p.m. Chuck Wagon will serve the meal. Contests, door prizes and music, plus line dancing and arena games. Dress for weather. Arena events will take place rain or shine. Speaker will be Brian Welch. Best church sign wins a prize!

What's Happening

256.332.0255

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

The American Cancer Society Relay for Life of the Shoals invites you to their 2019 Kick-Off, as they Turn the Page on Cancer! The event will be Thursday, September 13, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. at the Listerhill Credit Union Auditorium (4790 East Second Street, Muscle Shoals, AL 35661). A light meal will be provided. There will be special guest speakers, an awards presentation for outstanding volunteers and door prizes for attendees. Please RSVP to melmax34@yahoo.com. Funds raised help the American Cancer Society attack cancer in dozens of ways, each of them critical to achieving a world without cancer—from developing breakthrough therapies to building supportive communities, to providing empowering resources to deploying activists to raise awareness.

The American Cancer Society Relay for Life will hold a support group meeting for survivors and caregivers on Sunday, September 16 at 6 p.m. in the Community Room at ECM East (2111 Cloyd Blvd., Florence, AL 35630). Everyone is invited to come and share their journey. Light refreshments will be served.

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.

For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, First United Methodist Church of Russellville will host *Celebrate Recovery!* on Tuesday nights with supper at 6 p.m., worship at 6:30 and groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. The church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue in downtown Russellville. Come and join us!



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NAMC partners with doulas on new birthing suites

Submitted to the FFP

The Labor and Delivery unit at North Alabama Medical Center (NAMC) will feature two natural birthing suites, designed in collaboration with doulas, to offer mothers in Florence a better place to give birth naturally in a hospital setting.

North Alabama Medical Center will replace Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital (ECM) in order to improve access to quality healthcare in the North Alabama Region. Upon its completion, the \$250 million technologically advanced medical center will centralize medical care in the region, eliminating the need for patients to travel to Huntsville to receive care. The 450,000-square-foot structure will house \$32,000,000 in new equipment to further the hospital's mission toward patient-centered care.

Part of this investment is the improved Labor and Delivery unit. NAMC will be improving on the two existing private natural birthing suites at ECM. Each suite at NAMC will feature a custom labor tub and labor swing to facilitate natural birth. Designed under the guidance of doulas, the labor tubs will help to ease labor pains.

"We do not do water births, but we are providing tubs for water labor," said Mike Howard, Chief

Operating Officer at NAMC. "This way, mothers in labor can soak in a hot tub. These tubs are specially designed \$25,000 labor tubs, with walls that insert so the tubs can fill with water and be removed so the mother can exit the tub without having to climb out. The tubs drain rapidly so the mother can exit quickly."

During labor, mothers at NAMC can deliver from a stabilizing labor swing in each suite, which will support the mother's body during the birth. It will support her in a natural squatting position, prevent her from falling, and keep her comfortable during labor and birth.

The HOPE suites are just one of the many improvements to the Labor and Delivery unit of the new hospital. North Alabama Medical Center will feature an expanded, six-bed special care unit to continue to prevent families with babies who need special care from traveling to Birmingham or Huntsville to receive care. NAMC will be able to care for premature babies close to home, preventing families from having to leave town for weeks or months on end while their baby receives care.

In addition, each suite in the Labor and Delivery unit is designed to be comfortable and private for families. Suites boast panoramic views and contain sinks specially designed for parents to give

their babies their first bath. Each suite has a bathroom with a full-size shower, custom, directed lighting to assist during procedures, and a storage closet for carts and supplies to clear the room quickly and safely after a delivery.

About Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital

The existing Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital has served the Florence, Alabama, community since 1919. In that time, it has grown into the largest, most comprehensive medical facility in northwest Alabama, south-central Tennessee and northeast Mississippi, according to their website. ECM's 24-hour emergency department serves as the primary referral center for major trauma cases in Northeast Alabama.

The 200-plus physicians on staff represent more than 42 specialty areas of medicine, alongside a facility that offers the community's only open heart surgery sites and recovery facilities, a complete line of women's and children's services, and a complete line of medical, oncology, pulmonary, ambulatory, endoscopy, laboratory, and imaging services.

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For more information on this topic, please contact Samantha Bamaca at s.bamaca@nice-branding.com.

'STORE' from page 1

Lot downtown, then walking to Elmore's or White's for a drink or snack.

"That was a big part of our childhood," Welborn said. "And when I saw the revitalization efforts here in downtown Russellville, it sparked an interest to do something myself. I saw Willodean [Davis] one day and asked her about this building, and it worked out."

Welborn purchased the building, along with its contents, from Ellis and Willodean Davis. And it was full of antiques and other items Ellis collected through the years.

As Welborn has prepared the business for its opening this Friday, August 10, he's worked to create an atmosphere that is duly respectful to Davis,

as the building contains so many memories of his life.

"I want this to be in honor of Ellis. So many of the antiques and things here were personal to him," Welborn said. "I want to honor him and make him proud with what we've done. I feel like he's handing over the responsibility to me to carry on, and I want to make him proud of what we've turned this into."

Five & Dime Antiques will also keep a few pieces of history from White's, including an original White's horoscope machine that sat in front of the store.

Welborn will host a ribbon cutting Friday morning, and that will be his first day of business. For now, Welborn plans to personally run the business, and his hours will be 12-5 Thursday through Sunday.

In addition to a great variety of antiques, the store will offer collectible items including racing signs, beer mirrors, Alabama prints, baseball cards and more.

Several items will carry a local Russellville flavor. For example, there are physician's examination tables dating back to the early 1900s when the building was used as a medical office.

"There's a pretty diverse and eclectic mixture of period-correct pieces of Russellville back to the 1800's," Welborn said. "I hope to make it an interesting store to walk through. We want to have a broad diversity of local antiques and items designed for people to look at and purchase."

Although he admits to not having a trained eye for antiques, Welborn said he's enjoying learning

on the job.

"I'm more into collectible sports-related items. I've never had an eye for antiques, but I've always had an interest," Welborn said.

Several items in the new Five & Dime store will carry a local Russellville flavor.

"There's a pretty diverse and eclectic mixture of period-correct pieces of Russellville back to the 1800's," Welborn said. "I hope to make it an interesting store to walk through. We want to have a broad diversity of local antiques and items designed for people to look at and purchase."

Five & Dime Antiques & Collectibles will also offer consignment sales where sellers can either rent space or leave their items to be sold, with Welborn receiving a percentage of the sale.

And his vision isn't stopping with just an antique store. Welborn hopes to expand in the next five years to include at the location a coffee shop, ice cream shop (along the lines of The Palace) and a banquet/meeting room available upstairs.

"With the historical tax credits available, I want to renovate the upstairs ballroom and maybe build an apartment suite. I also hope to offer arts and crafts and painting classes," Welborn said.

Welborn will also be busy in the next year overseeing the construction of his new convenience store/truck stop at the intersection of Alabama 24 and Lawrence Street.

"I hope to have that business open by the end of next year," Welborn said.

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Russellville's Pierce named Franklin County DYW

Submitted to the FFP

The annual Northwest Alabama Distinguished Young Women Scholarship Program was held on Saturday, August 4 at Norton Auditorium on the campus of The University of North Alabama.

Twenty-four young women from Colbert, Franklin, and Lauderdale counties competed in scholastics, interview, fitness, talent and self expression categories.

Elizabeth Ann Pierce of Russellville High School was selected as Franklin County's 2019 Distinguished Young Woman and will represent Franklin County in the state program in January. Elizabeth was also selected as the winner of the fitness, scholastics and self expression categories.

Abbey Jones of Red Bay High School was selected as the winner of the talent category and was awarded 1st Alternate. Emma Claire Bragwell of Russellville High School was awarded 2nd Alternate.

Kelly Moore of Muscle Shoals High School was selected as Colbert County's 2019 Distinguished Young Woman and will represent Colbert County in the state program in January. Kelly was also the winner of the scholastics category and the "Be Your Best Self" essay winner.

Hannah Jenkins of Muscle Shoals High School was selected as the winner of the fitness, self expression and talent categories, and was awarded 1st Alternate. Maddie Grace Bailey of Deshler High School was awarded 2nd Alternate.

Erin Key of Florence High School was selected

as Lauderdale County's 2019 Distinguished Young Woman and will represent Lauderdale County in the state program in January. Erin was also the winner of the self expression category.

Calee Copley of Lauderdale County High School was selected as the scholastics winner and was awarded 2nd Alternate. Ally Shelton of Rogers High School was selected as the 1st Alternate.

Alyssa Ledlow of Rogers High School was the winner of the talent category. And Kaitlyn McBride of Rogers High School was the winner of the fitness category. Anna West of Hatton High School won the Spirit Award.

For more information on Scholarship opportunities for young ladies in this area, please contact Susan Hargett at 256-710-9239 or Katernia Cole-Coffey at 256-541-5674.

'Hydrate the Homeless' event set for August 23rd

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

While it may not be visible to all residents, homelessness is an issue in northwest Alabama, and an event set for August 23 will help 'hydrate the homeless' in and around Franklin County.

Sponsored by the Homeless Care Council of Northwest Alabama, *Hydrate the Homeless* is designed to help those in need during the hot summer days. The drive will take place in the First Baptist Church parking lot in downtown Russellville at 213 North Jackson Avenue.

Donations are needed and include: Reusable water bottles, new socks, lip balm, cooling towels, ice packs, sunscreen, handheld fans, rain ponchos, flip flops, bags, tissues, hats, baby wipes, T-shirts, sunglasses and umbrellas.

The Homeless Care Council of Northwest Alabama is a coalition of agencies, shelters, governments, businesses, institutions of higher learning, private citizens and other interested parties who want to increase the ability to solve the problems of homelessness throughout Northwest Alabama. The service area includes Franklin, Lauderdale, Colbert, Lawrence, Marion and

Winston counties.

Volunteers with the coalition will distribute bottled water and other summer necessities to the local homeless population on August 23. The event is scheduled from 10-11:30 a.m.

To donate, or sign up to volunteer, contact Christa Martin at 256-398-0192 or email hccnwal@gmail.com.

The mission of the council is to equip and empower the community to end homelessness through advocacy, education and coordination of services.

For more information, log onto www.homeless-

'CALL,' from page 1

balls and strikes as a professional umpire in the Gulf Coast League.

Schmittou, a 2012 Vina graduate, is spending his summer in Florida working his first season as a professional umpire. After completing the Minor League Umpire Training Academy in Florida last winter, Schmittou caught the eye of school officials and was hired to work the June-August season for the Gulf Coast League, a rookie-level minor league baseball league comprised of 16 teams based in Florida.

Schmittou's schedule finds him and his umpiring partner spending two weeks in Clearwater, followed by one week in Fort Myers and a week in Juno Beach; then the three-city rotation starts over once again. He typically works six days a week, with Sundays allotted for travel.

Schmittou began umpiring while in high school, as members of the Vina baseball team did the umpiring for the Vina youth league. After his college career ended, he started umpiring tournaments for the United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA), and he started calling high school baseball games two years ago as part of the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

Schmittou said he never considered umpiring as a possible career, but after he received some good reviews and positive feedback from several veteran umpires, he decided to take the next step and sign up for the umpiring academy.

"At first, it was just a way to make some extra money," he said. "But I got encouragement from some of the older guys who have called a long time, and I gave it some thought. I also got some good feedback at a junior college umpiring camp that was led by a couple umpires from the AAA level. So I went there and got a taste of what professional umpiring school would be like.

"But when I decided to go to the academy in Florida, I definitely went down there to try and get a job. It wasn't just for the experience."

Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton was Schmittou's high school baseball coach at Vina. Hamilton said he wasn't surprised to hear Schmittou had taken the next step in his umpiring career.

"Nic loves the game of baseball. He worked hard the entire time he played for me," Hamilton said. "His hard work led him to being able to play college baseball. It has now led to him being able to stay in the game he loves and make a living doing it. I am proud for him."

Minor league umpires work in two-man crews until they reach the AA level. The Gulf Coast League consists largely of players recently drafted out of high school as well as rookie players from Latin America.

"At this level the players are young, and most of the umpires are young. They try and get the youngest umpires they can," Schmittou said. "We have to work through the same system as the players, so if you move up a level every season, that's six or seven years away from when you enter, so they try to get the younger group to the pros the fastest."

Each Gulf Coast League umpire is evaluated twice during the season. Those evaluations play a large role in whether the umpire is invited to move up to the next professional level.

"It's all about how you're evaluated and what happens in the leagues above you," Schmittou said on Monday. "I had my first evaluation early this season, and it came back really well. I had a few things to work on, but nothing major.

"My second evaluation is likely this week, so I hope it goes well and I can start next year in the

short season and travel like minor league players [at the next level]."

The Gulf Coast League season runs through August 25, but Schmittou will miss the final week in order to be here for his wife Chelsea, who is expected to deliver their first child later this month. With a wife and a young family, Schmittou said it's not easy being away from home, but it's part of the process to become a successful professional umpire.

"Being away from my family is strange, especially with my wife being pregnant," Schmittou said. "We found out she was pregnant right before I went to professional school. That made it challenging to leave home to start the season. She's like any expectant mom in that she wants me to be home, but she understands this is just part of it."

Occasionally, veteran players working rehab assignments after injury will make an appearance in the GCL, and that happened during a game Schmittou umpired on July 18 when New York Mets left fielder Yoenis Cespedes played a game with the Gulf Coast League Mets at first base.

As far as ejections, Schmittou and his umpiring partner have had a clean summer with no early exits for players or coaches.

Umpires are taught to stand in the slot between the batter and catcher, rather than directly behind the catcher, so Schmittou has even more respect for the position he played for many years.

"You never want to be right behind the catcher, because you take more direct shots on your face-mask, and with increased attention on concussions they try to keep us out of that area," Schmittou said. "It's a big trust issue with the catcher, especially with how hard some of these guys are throwing. You hope and pray the catcher knows what's coming."



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Eleven local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Each of the 11 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of July 23-27 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.

All of the 11 Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 99, received by Russellville Senior Center, 205 Montgomery St. SW, Russellville, Tienda Latina Mi Refugio, 412 Madison St.,

Russellville and MeMe's Cakery, 15480 Hwy. 43, Russellville. Inspections of Franklin County businesses, with critical item violations noted, resulted in the following scores:

- The Grind Cafe/Coffee Shop, 13760 Hwy. 43, Ste. 1, Russellville, 91. (Dented cans).
- El Quetzal Buena Vista Bakery/Restaurant, 118 E. Franklin St., Russellville, 93.
- Panda Buffet, 14633 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93. (Cracked flour container).
- Flying Beetle Destination, 104 Montgomery St. SE, Russellville, 93. (Windex stored above fountain drinks).
- Pupuseria y Taqueria Las 3 Frontera, 519 St. Clair St., Russellville, 94. (Cleaner stored above utensils).
- Captain D's #3737, 15434 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
- Taylor's Restaurant, 808 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville, 98.
- Monchi's, 121 N. Washington Ave., Russellville, 98.

Of the 16 inspections done in Colbert County from July 23-27, one restaurant scored below the satisfactory range. Quick Stop Tuscumbia, 1021 Hwy. 72 East, Tuscumbia, scored a 79. (Mop water poured outside, now in mop sink, mold in fountain heads, food in warmers out of temperature).

The high score for the week in Colbert County was 99, scored by Subway, 4116 Jackson Hwy. Sheffield.

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

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, I want to thank all the performers, sponsors and supporters of the W.C. Handy "Evening at the Roxy with the Great Pretenders." It was a huge success!

Each year The Great Pretenders Show seems to grow. It's wonderful how the Roxy provides a venue that our local talent can use to perform. We have a lot of outstanding local talents, and we are so pleased to have this program for them. Also, the Arts Council is so appreciative of how the community comes together to support the W.C. Handy Evening at The Roxy.

As always, Katerina Cole-Coffey did an outstanding job as emcee. The entertainment was professional. Franklin County is blessed with so much talent.

We appreciate the following people for their participation in this year's program: Sydney Medley, Avery Guinn, Gary Cummings, Jayne Wells, Angela Townsel, Jeff Allen, Hudson Copeland, Alissa Young, Leah Nix, Layla Rush, Dana Hill, Meletha Walker, Ella West, Mike Byrd, Tammy West, Destiny Cooper, Sydney Burcham, John Pilati, Jacob Green, Anna Beth Oliver, Ally Oliver, Suzanne Pitt, Robin Wigginton, Gene Grubbs, P.J. Winston, Buford Parker, Bruce Hamilton, and the group "Still Here," consisting of Rev. William Freeman, Wash Bates, Bryant Bonds, William Nelson, George West, Eric Goodloe, William Buchanan, Ryan Freeman and Larry Freeman.

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The following board members of the Franklin County Arts & Humanities are to be commended for their volunteer work and dedication to supporting the continued upkeep and coordination of events at the Historic Roxy: Debbie Nale, Judy Horton, Wanda Myrick, Cheri McCain, Brenda Oliver, Danny Joe Stowe, Chase Sparks, Tom Senter, Ann McDermitt and Fletcher Scott.

The Arts Council takes pride in the restoration of the Historic Roxy Theatre. We want to present quality, wholesome programs that the entire family can enjoy.

The community's support was evident as almost 200 people attended and enjoyed the outstanding entertainment at this year's "Evening at the Roxy with the Great Pretenders." Thank you for your continued support of the Roxy.

Susie Hovater Malone,
President
Franklin County Arts & Humanities Council

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Coaching gives former Bobcat a new outlook

Benford grateful for chance to pay it forward at Phil Campbell

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

If you're one of Jordan Benford's former coaches, be on the lookout. He has something he'd like to say to you.

Benford, who played three sports at Phil Campbell High School before graduating in 2011, says he has a greater sense of appreciation for coaches and everything they do, now that he's a full-fledged member of their ranks.

"I do. I don't care what level it is," said Benford, who was hired last month to take over the varsity softball program at his alma mater and also serves as the Bobcat football team's strength and conditioning coach, among other duties. "I don't care if it's tee-ball, Little League, high school, college or pro; any coach has my utmost respect. There's a lot of time that goes into it, a lot of dedication. You have to be passionate about it, or you're not gonna be any good at it.

"All those men and women who coached me over the years, I tell them thanks all the time when I see them. I see now the hours they had to put in and how much it took to make me who I am today. It took a lot from them."

As Benford is no doubt learning, coaches wear a lot of different hats; they serve as mentors, friends, parental figures, confidants, encouragers, accountability partners—and, in the case of former Phil Campbell baseball coach Michael Beck, chauffeurs.

"We would be up there at five o'clock in the morning hitting in the cages," recalled Benford, who was still attending East Franklin Junior High School when he played for Beck's varsity baseball team as a ninth-grader. "Everybody would leave to go home and get showers, and Coach Beck would drive me all the way to East Franklin and drop me off at school. He did a lot for me."

As a high school athlete, Benford's two favorite sports were football [he played quarterback for the Bobcat varsity as a sophomore in 2008 and again as a senior in 2010] and basketball [his career was highlighted by a pair of memorable game-winning shots, one against Tharptown in the county finals in 2009 and another to beat rival Red Bay in a big area game in 2011]. But his best sport—the one that earned him a full ride to Alabama A&M University after a year at Northwest-Shoals Community College—was baseball.

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Big league hire

Fresh off a twelve-year career in professional baseball, former major league pitcher Donovan Hand is ready to run the Vina baseball program

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Donovan Hand is well acquainted with the odds—even if he did manage to defy them.

"I forget the exact figures, but I've seen the funnel charts that show the number of kids who play baseball in high school, college and then professionally," Hand said. "When you talk about how many kids make it from high school to playing in the big leagues, it's a very, very small percentage. So where does that large percentage go? They go out into the world. They get jobs.

"That's where I want to make an impact—teaching these kids life skills that will help them succeed. I haven't seen it all, don't know it all, but I want to help them any way I can."

Hand, a 2004 graduate of Hatton High School and the new varsity baseball coach at Vina, is part of that very, very small percentage of high school players who actually make it to The Show. His 12-year journey through the ranks of professional baseball exemplifies the exceedingly difficult task of reaching the game's highest level.

Hand, a right-handed pitcher, signed with Jacksonville State University out of high school and won 26 games for the Gamecocks from 2005-07, earning All-OVC honors in each of his three seasons. Roughly half a dozen major league teams had come to see him pitch at JSU, and Hand says the Washington Nationals had discussed the possibility of selecting him in the eighth round of the 2007 draft.

"When you talk about how many kids make it from high school to playing in the big leagues, it's a very, very small percentage," Hand said. "So where does that large percentage go? They go out into the world. They get jobs. That's where I want to make an impact—teaching these kids life skills that will help them succeed. I haven't seen it all, don't know it all, but I want to help them any way I can."

The Nats' turn in round eight came and went, and Hand remained on the board. He was still available on the draft's second day when he received a phone call from veteran scout Joe Mason, then with the Milwaukee Brewers. Mason had scouted Hand for the Red Sox when Hand was pitching at Hatton, so the two knew one



COURTESY PHOTO

YOU GOTTA HAND IT TO HIM - Hand, a three-time All-Star in the minors, made his major league debut with the Brewers in May of 2013. The former Hatton High and Jacksonville State star also pitched briefly for the Reds.

another well. [Mason had hoped to see the Sox take Hand right out of high school in 2004, but the organization wasn't too keen at the time on selecting prep pitchers.]

Mason followed Hand closely at Jacksonville State, and the Brewers picked him in the 14th round of that 2007 draft. Watching the draft on his computer as it progressed, Hand was elated to see his name come off the board.

"It was something I had dreamed about doing for a long time," said Hand, who shared that once-in-a-lifetime draft-day moment with his parents, Don and Betty, and his younger brother Darren, who played basketball at Northwest-Shoals after graduating from Hatton, among others. "It was special for me—not just for me, but also for my dad and my whole family. They had invested a lot of time into me getting where I was. It was a special time for a lot of people."

Being drafted, however, is merely the first step in a long and arduous journey that only in the rarest of cases actually leads to the major leagues. It's a sobering fact of which Hand was well aware.

"At that time...honestly, I don't know," he said

See 'HIRE,' Page 16



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Smith bound for Troy after strong summer



Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Even after an All-Conference season at Dyersburg State Community College in 2018, Reed Smith still wasn't satisfied.

Smith, a 2016 graduate of Russellville High School who signed with Troy University this spring, spent the summer in south Florida playing for the Winter Garden Squeeze in the Florida Collegiate Summer League, an affiliate of the National Alliance of College Summer Baseball.

Despite putting up gaudy numbers at Dyersburg this past season, Smith swung and missed a little too often for his liking. He headed down to Winter Garden with the express goal of cutting down on those strikeouts.

Mission accomplished.

Smith struck out only a dozen times all summer in 102 at bats for the Squeeze; only four players in the league with at least 100 at bats whiffed fewer times. Overall, Smith tied for the league lead with two triples and finished fourth with 15 stolen bases in 17 tries. He ranked second on the team with 22 runs scored, third with a .275 batting average and fourth with 28 hits, finishing Top 20 in the league in all three categories. He also drove in 13 runs and drew eight walks.

Smith will now head down to Troy, where he will

join a Trojan program coming off a 42-21 season in 2018 that ended with a runner-up finish in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament and an NCAA Regional Appearance.

In his only year at Dyersburg State, Smith earned first-team All-Conference honors as an outfielder from the Tennessee Community College Athletic Association. He closed out the season with a strong showing at the conference tournament, going 9-for-19 with a home run, a triple, a double, four RBIs and seven runs scored in six games as the Eagles (37-15) bounced back from a first-round loss to finish as runners-up.

For the season, Smith batted .376 (65-for-173) for Dyersburg with eight homers, two triples and nine doubles. He hit safely in 39 of the 49 games he played in, collecting multiple hits in 19 of them. Smith drove in 45 runs, scored 55 and stole 14 bases in 15 tries.

He also drew 15 walks and got hit by a pitch 21 times, boosting his on-base percentage all the way up to .472.

At Russellville, Smith was a two-time first-team All-State selection as a shortstop, leading the Golden Tigers to Class 5A state titles in 2015 and 2016. He was MVP of the 2015 state finals series against Helena and finished his varsity career at RHS with 179 hits, 68 extra-base hits (including nine home runs) and 172 runs scored.

COURTESY PHOTOS
SQUEEZE PLAY - Suiting up this summer for the Winter Garden Squeeze, Smith led the Florida Collegiate Summer League with two triples while ranking fourth with 15 stolen bases. He batted .275 with 22 runs scored in 28 games.



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PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Russellville High School will host a "Meet the Tigers" Community Night this Friday, August 10. This event will be a great opportunity to meet members of the current Golden Tiger football team (including first-year head coach John Ritter, above), volleyball team and cheer squad. The night will be highlighted by an Alumni Flag Football Game.

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'BENFORD,' from page 13

Benford overcame two serious injuries in high school (a torn ACL as a freshman and a torn rotator cuff as a sophomore), and his rehab experiences motivated him to major in Exercise Science at A&M with an eye toward attending Physical Therapy school. Riding back from a game at Mississippi Valley State in the midst of his junior season, Benford had something of an epiphany. He still had a strong desire to help young athletes, but suddenly he saw himself fulfilling that mission in a different capacity.

"One night on the bus, coming back from Mississippi from one of our region games, I just felt a change of heart," Benford said. "I felt like [teaching and coaching] was what God was wanting me to do. I wanted to help young people. I finished my internship, and the very next day I enrolled in the master's program in education."

After completing his undergrad degree in Exercise Science in 2015, Benford earned his Master's in General Science and Education from A&M two years later. He landed his first job last year at Phil Campbell, where he served as head junior high football coach, head jayvee softball coach and an assistant varsity softball coach.

"I don't care what level it is," Benford said. "I don't care if it's tee-ball, Little League, high school, college or pro; any coach has my utmost respect. There's a lot of time that goes into it, a lot of dedication. You have to be passionate about it, or you're not gonna be any good at it. All those men and women who coached me over the years, I tell them thanks all the time when I see them. I see now the hours they had to put in and how much it took to make me who I am today. It took a lot from them."

Almost immediately, he knew he'd made the right decision.

"It was everything that I thought it would be," Benford said. "I've always been around it, and it wasn't anything different—except that it was a different point of view. As a coach, you're seeing it from a different angle, having to worry about everything. As a player, you don't really have to do that. You just show up and get your work in. But as a coach you're worried about player development, you're definitely worried about the academic side of it, and really trying to be a positive influence more than anything.

"That's why I'm doing this. Yeah, I'm a head coach, and you're trying to win ball games, but I'm also trying to be a positive influence. Helping these young people grow up to be good men and women, just trying to help them strive for and achieve the dreams they've set for themselves—that's my goal."

Kevin Barnwell, the Bobcats' first-year head football coach, has raved about the job Benford is doing as the team's strength and conditioning coach. [Suffice it to say his degree in Exercise Science has come in handy.] Benford says his experience as a college athlete opened his eyes to the impact weight training and conditioning can have on a program.

"Well, I'll tell you, when I was in high school that's something that a lot of programs lacked," Benford said. "For me, personally, when I got to college and saw the importance of weight training, strength and conditioning, and the nutritional side of it, too, that helped me become the athlete I became in college."

When he walked across the stage at his high school graduation in 2011, Benford weighed 155 pounds. By the time he graduated from Alabama A&M in 2015, he checked in at 185 pounds.

"It wasn't thirty pounds of fat, either," he said. "I went up almost a hundred pounds and even two hundred pounds in some lifts. [Strength and conditioning] really is the core base, the foundation of your program. If you don't have one, it's hard to be successful.

"With the kids we have, it really is a necessity. It's a priority. This year, especially, we're putting one hundred percent effort into it."

In addition to his strength and conditioning duties, Benford is also coaching linebackers and quarterbacks on Barnwell's varsity staff, and he's preparing for his second season as head football coach at the junior high level. Next spring, he'll get his first taste of what it's like to be a varsity head coach when he takes the field with a Lady Bobcat softball program coming off back-to-back appearances in the North Regional Tournament.

Benford said the transition from baseball to softball has been a relatively smooth one.

"Coming into it, I thought there wouldn't be that much difference, and from an instruction standpoint there really isn't," he said. "Swinging, throwing, fielding—all those things are really the same. The ball plane is a little different, but at the point of contact it's not that much different.

"The scheme of the game and the speed of the game are different, and just dealing with girls in general, you have to take different approaches, things like that."

Benford got his feet wet this past season, leading Phil Campbell's jayvee softball team to an impressive 14-2 record. He's as familiar as anyone with the talented players poised to begin working their way up to the program's highest level.

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'BENFORD', from page 16

"We have some young talent," said Benford (right). Our girls... I don't think we have anybody who stands out as a young phenom, I guess you would say, but we have a lot of girls who really enjoy it. They're passionate about it. They'll put in the work. There are days when I go up there and cut the grass, and there will be three girls in the cages hitting. As a coach, you love to see that. It's nice when you don't have to beg them.

"We have some young girls who are talented, and they're willing to work. They have a lot of experience, too. A lot of them play travel ball."

The Lady Bobcats, who went 23-14 a year ago, will undoubtedly miss the contributions of Snead State-bound shortstop Leeah Jackson and her fellow departed seniors, but several key players will be back in 2019. Catcher Katie Thomas earned All-County honors from the *Free Press* as a freshman last season after batting .382 with 11 doubles, a .442 OBP and only four strikeouts in 129 plate appearances. Infielder Kenner Scott was a varsity starter as an eighth-grader, batting .299 with eight doubles and 28 runs scored. Emma Ergle, another rising freshman, was the team's top pitcher in 2018 despite missing several weeks with a broken leg; she finished the season 9-4 with a 2.82 ERA and 52 strikeouts in 57 innings.

Ergle continued to pitch for two weeks after sustaining her injury, earning the respect and admiration of her new head coach.

"That's the kind of passion some of these girls have," Benford said. "You're not gonna find too many athletes who go out and pitch on a broken leg, and really drive through it and be effective."

Abby Davis had a strong junior season for the Lady Bobcats in 2018, batting .333 with four triples, 31 runs scored and 15 stolen bases. Kallie Allen hit .312 as a sophomore with seven doubles, 25 runs scored and 16 stolen bases. Then there's rising junior Cypress Quinn, who moved up from Benford's jayvee team late in the 2018 season and immediately became a difference-maker for the varsity squad.

"She came up and had a big impact offensively for us," Benford said of Quinn, who went 10-for-12 with two home runs and six doubles during one particularly hot stretch after her promotion. "She made an impact very quickly. We had another young girl, Chesney Hamby, who came all the way up from the junior high team. She got a win against Florence, and she threw a lot of quality innings. She'll be an eighth-grader this year."

The Lady Bobcats are making the jump this year to Class 3A, where they'll compete in a three-team area with Colbert Heights and East Lawrence. Benford believes the pieces are in place for Phil Campbell softball to remain a factor at the regional and perhaps even the state level.

"We're not gonna have many seniors, probably a couple of seniors max," he said. "We're gonna be young—but we've been young. I don't expect the results to be any different. We expect to win games and to be competitive in every game. I would have expected us to make it back to the regional whether we moved up or not. The girls we've got coming back are perfectly capable of doing that. It just comes down to whether or not the ball falls our way and whether or not we can catch a few breaks."

Beyond mere wins and losses, Benford's primary goal is to help provide aspiring student-athletes with the resources and opportunities to succeed—both now and in the future. He's thrilled to have the chance to make that kind of impact in his hometown and at his own school.

"It's good to be back," Benford said. "One of the biggest influences on me wanting to be an educator was that when I got out of Phil Campbell and got to the college level and saw the kids who made it and were on my team, in my mind I was saying to myself, 'I know two or three guys back home who are just as talented as these guys.' But they didn't get the chance because they didn't have the resources to make it here and get that free ride to college and those kinds of things."

"I wanted to go back and help the kids where I'm from and give them opportunities. I want to help them, whether that means calling the right people or just giving them good advice on what to take in high school that will transfer over in college—just help prepare them and give them some real-world advice that will help them reach the goals they've set."

Based on his time at PCHS, Benford believes strongly that the hometown fans will remain firmly behind the hometown team—win, lose or draw.

"The one thing I remember about Phil Campbell that still to this day mesmerizes me is the support that Phil Campbell gives," he said. "You go around to a lot of high schools, and they don't have near the same level—the community, the fans, the people who come and support you, year in and year out. Even when you lose, the community still supports you and backs you."

"The support you get week in and week out is much appreciated. From a player's standpoint, you know you're gonna have a crowd full of people supporting you, and that's a great thing."



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'HIRE,' from page 13

last week. "You're always looking up. I was playing professional baseball, getting paid to play a game. My goal was the big leagues, of course, but I was trying to make it through that year. I've always been very good at setting attainable goals for myself. I didn't sell myself short, but I've always known what my limits were. It's better to set attainable goals and work through them all than to not attain anything."

With that in mind, Hand reported to advanced rookie ball in Helena, Montana to begin his pro baseball career. It wasn't long before he moved up to Low-A ball in Charleston, West Virginia, joining the West Virginia Power for the second half of their season. Success, as it so rarely does in baseball, came quickly.

"I had thrown so many innings in college that season that they had me on an innings limit," Hand said. "I got to close a little bit and do some different things there. We made the playoffs my first year in the minor leagues, and I had a very solid first year. I kind of got myself on the right track. I was just trying to keep my head down, work hard and listen."

Hand opened the 2008 season playing high-A ball in Brevard County, Florida, well ahead of most of the guys he was drafted with the year before. After earning a berth in the Florida State League's mid-season All-Star Game, Hand was promoted to the Brewer's Double-A affiliate in Huntsville. The journey from 14th-round pick to Double-A starter in basically a year's time represented nothing short of a remarkably fast rise through the system.

"I was thinking, 'I'm getting close—really close,'" Hand recalls. "It was still my first full season, and I was still kind of getting my feet wet, getting used to playing 142 games in 155 days. To get that move [to Huntsville] that quick was huge. [The Brewers] had made some trades, and I was the next guy in line to go [to Double-A]. I was fortunate enough to pitch really well the first half of that year, so I got the call to Huntsville, even though I wasn't quite ready for the Double-A level."

Hand spent the second half of 2008 and all of the next season pitching in Huntsville, where in '09 he earned his second All-Star nod in two full pro seasons. He remained in Huntsville for the first half of the 2010 season before receiving a promotion to Triple-A, where he pitched the next two-and-a-half seasons for the Nashville Sounds.

What had once appeared to be a fast track to the big leagues had slowed down a bit, but Hand appreciates the opportunity he got to pitch professionally in two locales that were so close to where he grew up.

"For those four or five years, I basically got to play at home, either in Huntsville or Nashville," Hand said. "All the people who had supported me all those years got a chance to see what was going on. My parents and my brother got to come watch me play. If I had been somewhere else farther away, they couldn't have."

Hand refers to minor league baseball as "the ultimate grind," and he knows whereof he speaks. Cracking through to the big leagues seems virtually impossible at times, every bit as dependent upon on timing and support as it is on skill and performance. Toward the end of his time in Nashville, Hand definitely started to feel the grind.

"I had put up two good years, two solid years in Double-A, and then I got my first taste of AAA in '10," he said. "Things were going good, and then I rolled into Vegas and gave up seven runs in one-third of an inning, and it blew my numbers up. But the second half of that season in Triple-A, I set myself up for the next year, and in 2011 I dominat-

ed in Triple-A. I was looking for an invite [to Milwaukee's big league camp], but it just never happened. I was thinking to myself, 'What have I gotta do?'

"The next spring training, they had me working on different things, trying to add movement, trying to add velocity, and it just didn't work out. I went back to what I'd done in the past, and 2012 ended up being the best year of my career."

Hand spent all of 2012 in Nashville, going 3-3 with a 3.84 ERA across 44 appearances (41 of which came in relief). In 79.2 innings, he struck out 54 batters and walked only 18. Still, no call-up was forthcoming.

"I was like, 'What in the world? What's going on?'" Hand said. "When 2013 rolled around, I was getting close to being a free agent. I'm thinking, 'Okay, new start.' Then stuff started turning in my favor. I'm a big believer that if you'll endure the storm for a while, you'll finally come out the other side."

In 2013, six years after he was drafted and five years after his rapid rise to Double-A, Hand got an invite to the Brewers' big league camp.

"I finally got a chance to prove myself," he said last week. "That's what I had always said—'I just want a chance. If I can't pitch in the big leagues, I'll retire. I'm man enough to admit that. I'll come home.'"

In 2013, six years after he was drafted and five years after his rapid rise to Double-A, Hand received an invite to the Brewers' big league camp.

"I finally got a chance to prove myself," he said last week. "That's what I had always said—'I just want a chance. If I can't pitch in the big leagues, I'll retire. I'm man enough to admit that. I'll come home.'"

Hand certainly made the most of his opportunity, tossing 14 consecutive scoreless innings to open spring training. A spot on the Brewers' Opening Day roster seemed well within reach.

"Six months earlier," Hand said, "I was sitting there wondering, 'Why am I not in the big leagues?' Now all of a sudden I'm in a position to make the Opening Day roster."

As it turned out, the Brewers elected to keep another reliever who threw 97 miles an hour. They sent Hand (a sinker/slider pitcher whose modest fastball topped out at 92) back to Triple-A, where he resumed grinding away in Nashville. He performed even better than he had in his breakthrough 2012 season, going 3-1 to open 2013 with a 3.28 ERA and 38 strikeouts in 35.2 innings.

"I just kept my head down and went back to work," he said. "You've gotta keep working. The more you look up and start looking around at all this other stuff, the more you start thinking—and that's usually not a good thing."

Within two months, Hand got the call he'd been waiting for. The Brewers called him up to the major leagues on May 27, 2013; the first batter he faced in his big-league debut was Pirates All-Star Andrew McCutchen, who was on his way to batting .317 with 21 home runs and winning National League MVP honors that season.

"He hit a single up the middle," Hand recalled. "I threw him a four-seam fastball. I was mainly a sinker-slider guy, but I threw a four-seamer just because I was nervous and I knew I could throw a four-seamer over the plate. [McCutchen] missed it by a gnat's hind end and hit a single up the middle. I said, 'Let's not throw those four-seamers any

more.'"

Hand threw roughly 45 pitches in that debut appearance and allowed one run, a "solid first outing," as he termed it. Soon thereafter, his steady performance out of the pen—combined with fortuitous circumstances—earned him a more meaningful role on Milwaukee's staff.

"Starting out, I was in the bullpen, and I did really well," Hand said. "Then around the end of June or the first of July, we had a starter go down. They were gonna call somebody up [to fill the rotation spot]. I was in the bullpen before a game, just throwing off the mound to stay sharp, because our starters had been going deeper into games and our middle [relief] guys weren't getting a lot of work."

"Our pitching coach came over to me and said, 'What do you think about starting?' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said we had a spot coming up and they wanted me to fill it."

Hand pointed out that he hadn't carried a starter's workload on a regular basis since 2009, but he nonetheless answered the call.

"I told him, 'I can do it. I just don't last as long as I used to.'"

Two days later, Hand was making his first major league start at Miller Park against the team he grew up rooting for as a kid in Hatton, the Atlanta Braves. The opposing pitcher that day was four-time All-Star Tim Hudson, who was in the latter stages of a major league career that would see him win more than 200 games and strike out more than 2,000 batters. Hand rose to the occasion, holding the Braves to one hit and striking out six in 4.2 innings of scoreless work.

"It was just one of those games," Hand said. "It catapulted me into the rotation. I had gone from being the long guy in the bullpen in Triple-A to finding myself in the big league rotation, facing Tim Lincecum and Francisco Liriano and Tim Hudson, guys I've tried to mimic my whole career."

Hand's pitching line from his starting debut begs one question: Given that he was so effective, why didn't the Brewers at least let him finish the fifth inning, which would have made him eligible to earn the win?

"People ask me that all the time," he said last week. "That was the most pitches I had thrown in a couple of months. I was at about sixty pitches through 4 2/3, and I was straight-up out of juice. The adrenaline from the first inning wore off. There was a lot of unneeded energy being taken. If they had left me out there to get that next out, it might have got really ugly."

Hand made six more starts that season before eventually transitioning back to his former role as a reliever. The increased workload began to take its toll, he says, and he closed out the season with a couple of rough outings, giving up a late run in an extra-inning loss in Atlanta and then blowing a two-inning save opportunity in New York against the Mets.

"That was kind of the nail in the coffin," said Hand, who finished the 2013 season 1-5 with a solid 3.69 ERA in 31 appearances, striking out 37 batters and walking 21 in 68.1 innings. "I didn't leave them with a good taste. I was just flat worn out. I didn't have the same stuff I had earlier in the year."

Comparatively speaking, Hand's stuff didn't leave him with much room for error to begin with.

"I saw a stat the other day," Hand said last week. "The average velocity coming out of the bullpen now is like 96.2 miles an hour. Ninety-two is not that hard any more."

The Brewers were grooming Hand for a late-

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inning role in 2014, but they acquired veteran reliever Francisco Rodriguez, and Hand was sent down to Triple-A two days before the end of spring training. Back in Nashville again, he took over as the Sounds' closer and earned the third All-Star Game berth of his pro career, finishing the 2014 season with 13 saves in 17 chances and 71 strikeouts in 79.2 innings.

He never returned to the major leagues in a Milwaukee uniform. "I raised my head up," Hand said, "and my mind started racing." Hand joined the Cincinnati Reds organization in 2015 (pictured at right) and pitched in 33 games in Triple-A before making a single, solitary appearance at the major league level. He tossed three scoreless innings, allowing two hits and striking out three. It was, by all accounts, a good outing. It would also prove to be his last at the big-league level.

Hand pitched professionally in Asia in 2016 before returning to the U.S. in 2017. He signed with the Mets and made 24 starts between Double-A and Triple-A, his heaviest workload in eight years. Hand and his wife Haley (a graduate of Red Bay High School) had a young daughter, Sophie, and Haley was pregnant during that 2017 season with twin boys. [Hudson and Harper were born 11 months ago.] Hand began to feel the burden of having to spend so much time away from his family.

"It was clear as day," Hand said of his decision to retire this past spring. "The Good Lord blessed me all those years, and He made it very clear to me that it was time to come home. When I look back over all the things that happened and how fortunate I was to have twelve years of playing...that's a pretty nice career. It was time to move on."

"My numbers suffered. My family wasn't with me for the first time," Hand said. "My wife and daughter were not able to travel with me, because of the pregnancy. It was tough."

When the 2017 season ended, Hand wasn't sure what to do. More than two years removed from his last major league appearance, he seriously contemplated hanging up his cleats for good.

"My support group—my parents, my wife, my brother, my family—encouraged me to give it another shot," Hand said, "and see what happens."

Hand headed down to Florida this spring to join a group of other unsigned free agents ["Camp Jobless," he called it] hoping to latch on with a team. The Detroit Tigers called and invited him to come throw for them.

"I did, and they said they wanted to sign me," Hand said. "I was like, 'Sweet, another year. Here we go.'"

The Tigers reversed course, however; citing vague injury concerns that Hand believes were unfounded [he had thrown 120 injury-free innings the year before], the organization decided not to sign him. With Opening Day rapidly approaching, Hand told himself he would give it one more week and headed back to Florida.

"By the fourth day, I'm dying. It was clear as day," he said. "The Good Lord blessed me all those years, and He made it very clear to me that it was time to come home. When I look back over all the things that happened and how fortunate I was to have twelve years of playing...that's a pretty nice career. It was time to move on. We had the twins at home, and I was needed there."

Hand returned home to be a husband and a father and to work the farm he had bought on Cedar Creek Reservoir, building chicken houses and raising cattle. After 12 years of playing baseball in places like Montana, West Virginia, Huntsville, Nashville, Milwaukee, Louisville, Cincinnati and Binghamton (not to mention Asia and Venezuela), he was more than ready to put down roots.

"I had always said, 'When I come home, I want to be at home.'"

It didn't take long, though, for baseball to come calling again—albeit in a slightly different form. Huntsville native Hunter Morris (an acquaintance of Hand's from their days together in Triple-A) was hired as the new head baseball coach at Muscle Shoals High School, and he wanted Hand to serve as his pitching coach. Hand was all set to fill that role, but Morris stepped down at Muscle Shoals to take a job on staff at Tennessee Tech University.

Hand continued in talks with Muscle Shoals but ultimately declined an offer to join the Trojan staff. About an hour later, he says, he got a call from Greg Hamilton, who coached baseball at Vina for 20 years before being elected as superintendent of Franklin County Schools in 2016. Hamilton wanted Hand to take over the baseball program at Vina, where Brent Gillespie—Hand's former head coach at Hatton—had recently been hired as principal.

"Greg called about the opportunity at Vina," Hand said. "It worked out for the things I was needing and the things he needed. It fit very well. Brent was my high school baseball coach. I haven't coached a lot, so this is all very new to me. Having those familiar faces around and somebody to lean on helps."

"I wanted to do something in the school system and be around kids and have the chance to help kids. I thought this would be a good opportunity for me and my family."

Hand was hired last week to fill the position left vacant when former Vina baseball coach Jake Ward took a job earlier this summer on staff at his alma

mater, Russellville. Hand played against Hamilton's Vina teams when he was at Hatton, and he has the utmost respect for the job Hamilton did in building the Red Devil program into a perennial winner.

"Outstanding. He left it in good shape," Hand said. "Jake [Ward] took over a program in good shape. Greg built it. He was passionate about it. He gave those kids something to look forward to. They knew what he expected of them—be professional, be on time, dress right, play the game the right way. If you take care of those things first, winning will take care of itself. Greg is very passionate about it, and he wants the job done correctly. Hopefully I can live up to that."

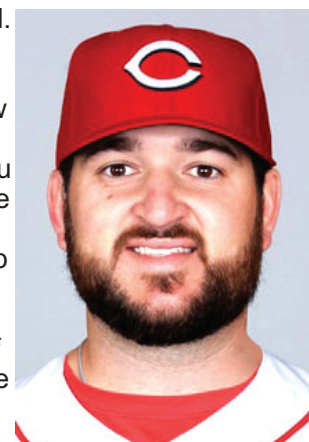
Vina made the playoffs in 2017, Ward's first season, before slipping last year. Hand's philosophy of setting attainable goals should serve him well as he begins his tenure with the Red Devils.

"I know they want to win," he said. "They're passionate about it. The biggest thing I'm gonna try to do is be there for the kids and show them that I care. As far as goals and winning games, I'd love to win every game we play, and we'll get there. Right now, I have no idea about the kind of talent we have or the number of kids or anything. I've been told some stuff, but as far as seeing it with my own eyes, I haven't seen it yet. My goals right now are to get everybody on the same page."

As for what comes after that, Hand already has some ideas about how he wants to do things.

"The biggest thing for me is, I've seen so many coaches who want to be friends [with their players]," he said. "Sure, I want to be there for the kids to be able to talk to me, but at the same time I want them to respect me. I'm not gonna tell the kids to do something I wouldn't do myself. I've done all this. I know what works. I've been around outfield coaches, infield coaches, catching coaches, hitting coaches—for what reason, I didn't know at the time, but the Good Lord had a good plan. He prepared me for this."

"I want to be a players' coach. I want these guys to learn from me—not just to be good at the game, but to be good in life. I'm looking forward to it."



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