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# Norris retiring after four decades with State Farm

## Bradford set to take over downtown office on Feb. 1

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

With more than four decades as a State Farm insurance agent, Lanny Norris has seen his share of changes in the industry. And with another major change on the horizon, Norris decided last year it was time to retire and enjoy life with his grandchildren.

Norris's final day as a Russellville State Farm agent will be January 31, 2019. Russellville native Rhett Bradford will take over Norris's Washington Avenue location on February 1.

"The primary motivator, I guess, was that this is a constantly changing industry," Norris said. "I've been through so many changes in my career, and to go through another major change this coming year wasn't something I wanted to do again."

Norris, who will be 68 next month, had no fixed timetable for his retirement. He simply felt the time was right, and he started the process with State Farm last year.

"I want to thank everyone for all these years here," Norris said. "I've had a few second thoughts about my decision, but State Farm likes to know a year ahead of



Lanny Norris

See 'NORRIS,' Page 8



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# Robertson's assignments draw on law enforcement experience

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When Rep. Poncey Robertson (R-Mount Hope) submitted his committee preferences to Alabama Speaker of the House Mac McCutcheon, Robertson drew on his years of experience in law enforcement to make his requests.

With more than 24 years of experience with the Decatur Police Department, including duties as Homeland Security Coordinator and Public Information Officer, Robertson wanted to put his law enforcement background to use in his committee assignments.

McCutcheon appointed Robertson to the House Education Policy Committee, Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee and the Agencies, Boards

and Commissions Committee.

The Education Policy Committee is responsible for formulating education policy and laws relating to Alabama schools.

"My tie in education is in school security," Robertson said. "My background in law enforcement is in that area, and that's why I asked for this committee assignment."

Robertson, who represents House District 7, which includes eastern Franklin County, believes school security is a twofold responsibility, both from the law enforcement side and the school side.


"From the schools' side, in their budget for safety and



Poncey Robertson

See 'DRAW,' Page 8

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**Tommy Lee Allen**, Russellville, age 64  
Died Friday, January 18, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Bethlehem Cemetery in Russellville.

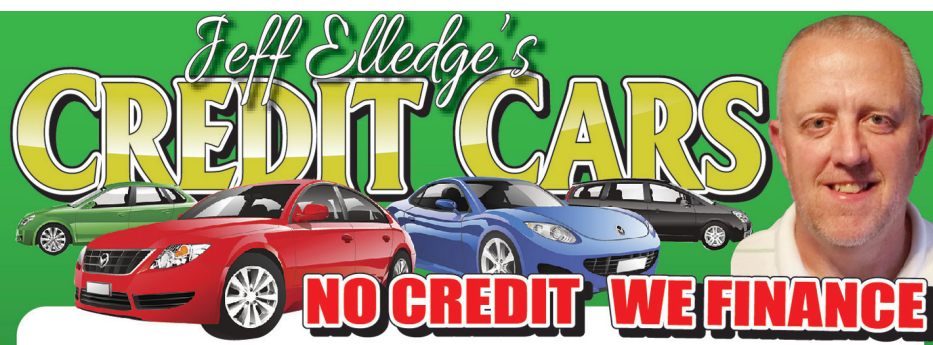
**Darold Dee Cooper**, Russellville, age 83  
Died Thursday, January 17, 2019. Funeral with military honors held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

**Peggy Louise Moore**, Russellville, age 56  
Died Sunday, January 13, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Mars Hill Cemetery.

**Myron Lyn Murray**, Spruce Pine, age 44  
Died Thursday, January 17, 2019. Funeral held at First United Methodist Church, Russellville. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

**Joyce Nell Richardson**, Russellville, age 83  
Died Wednesday, January 16, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

**Bobby Wayne Scott**, Phil Campbell, age 65  
Died Saturday, January 19, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Liberty Hill Cemetery.



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# County school board approves calendar

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education unanimously approved the calendar for the 2019-20 school year at the board's January 15 meeting.

School will begin on Tuesday, August 6 for students. Teachers will have a work day on Thursday, August 1 and bus drivers will have their annual in-service day the same date.

The first school holiday will be Labor Day, on Monday, September 2. Parent teacher conferences are set for 1-4 p.m., Wednesday, October 16. Students will be dismissed at 11:30 a.m. that day.

Fall break is set for Thursday and Friday, October 17th-18.

According to Franklin County Schools Assistant Superintendent Johnny Cleveland, the calendar is similar to this year's schedule.

"We added an additional day to fall break that was a parent-teacher conference day," Cleveland said. "Now that's a half day on Wednesday and students will be out of school Thursday and Friday."

Thanksgiving break will be a full week, with students off Monday-Friday, November 25th-29.

Students and teachers have a half day on Friday,

December 20, and then Christmas break runs through Tuesday, January 7, 2020. Spring Break will be Monday-Friday, March 30, 2019 through April 3, 2020.

"Our Spring Break coincides with Russellville City Schools because of issues with the (shared) Career Tech Center," Cleveland said.

The calendar provides for 180 student days, 187 teacher days and 183 bus driver days, including three in-service days.

In other action, the board:

- Heard a progress report from Superintendent Greg Hamilton on the Tharptown High School cafeteria project. Hamilton said the new final date is expected to be January 25. Cafeteria staff are no longer cooking in the old cafeteria, Hamilton said. And he expects students to be moved into the new facility starting on January 28.

- Heard a progress report on the Vina Band Hall/Science Lab building project. The job has been rebid and will be on the market the next couple weeks, Hamilton said.

- Received gifts from the Tharptown School Ambassadors, Belgreen School Ambassadors and East Franklin Junior High School students for School Board Member Recognition Month.

- Approved out-of-state trips for Belgreen senior class to Universal Studios in Orlands, May 5th-8,

and Red Bay seniors to ICC Fulton and Tupelo on January 30.

- Approved the Jamari Terrell Williams Student Bullying Policy, which adds off-campus and cyberbullying to the system's anti-bullying policy.

- Approved the following personnel moves: Retirement; Cindy Fleming, Belgreen science teacher; Resignation; Jason Harris, head football coach at Vina and Mandy Cummings, Secretary/Bookkeeper at East Franklin; Transfer in Position; Charlotte Thomas to Child Nutrition Program Assistant at East Franklin and Wendy Ergle to Child Nutrition Program Manager at East Franklin; Leave of Absence for Ciara Whitten, from January 7, 2019 through May 3, 2019 to complete student teaching; Employment of Tamla Whitten, part-time school nurse for Franklin County Schools, Barry Reach, science teacher at Belgreen, Christina Chambers, math teacher, Red Bay and Deedra Raper, secretary/bookkeeper at East Franklin (Board member Ralton Baker abstained from the vote on Raper); Volunteers; Dustin Welch, Stewart Blackburn and Jess Guzman, Belgreen softball; New Teacher Substitutes: John Kaleb Estes, Morgan Nicole Wooten (certified) and Allison St. Clair (certified).

The board will meet again on February 26 with work session at 5 p.m. and meeting to follow.

# Oliver begins third term as county sheriff

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Minutes before he was sworn into office for a third term as Franklin County sheriff, Shannon Oliver reflected on the accomplishments seen in his eight-year tenure as the county's chief law enforcement officer.

"I feel we've made a lot of progress, but there's still a lot to go," Oliver said. "We've made a lot of improvements and updates to equipment and have seen a good working relationship built with other departments."

Oliver was sworn into office by Franklin County district judge Paula McDowell in a short ceremony held January 14. Oliver and his wife Tange have three children, Johnna (19), Sterlyn (15) and Brannon (12).

Oliver, a graduate of Russellville High School and the Northeast Alabama Police Academy, made his first run for public office in 2010, when long-time sheriff Larry Plott retired. After winning re-election in 2014, Oliver was unopposed in 2018.

While pleased with much of the progress his department has seen, Oliver still has concerns about the frequent turnover of personnel within the department.

"The jail sees the biggest turnover, not so much on patrol," Oliver said. "A lot of our corrections officer/dispatcher positions take jobs other places. Some find working in that environment is just not for them."

Oliver was one of several local Democratic incumbents re-elected in 2018 without opposition. Republican elected officials have gained in number both in Franklin County and across northwest Alabama in recent years. While he never considered changing parties, Oliver said his job doesn't involve partisan politics on a day-to-day basis.

"The sheriff is really a non-partisan position who's charged with enforcing laws, and we don't check the credentials of D or R in order to do that," Oliver said. "My job is to enforce our laws and to treat people the way they want to be treated the best we can."

Oliver has seen a shift in some of the criminal activity his office deals with in his eight years in office.

"We're still seeing a lot of methamphetamine cases but less of the 'shake and bake' roadside/home meth labs," Oliver said. "A lot of the meth we see now comes in from other places. Prescription pills remain our primary drug problem. And that builds on the problem of thefts and burglaries."

"Another problem we're seeing more of is mental health issues inside the jail, and a lot of that goes back to drug abuse. Something needs to happen on the state level to help people with those illnesses."

Even with those problems, though, Oliver is excited about beginning a third

term as Franklin County sheriff.

"I would like to thank the people of Franklin County for allowing me the honor of serving them. Also, I'd like to thank my family for their support," Oliver said.



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Shannon Oliver (left) is sworn into office for a third term as Franklin County sheriff by district judge Paula McDowell as Oliver's wife Tange looks on.

# Honey Do: Chainsaw tips

Chainsaws are one of the best power tools you will ever own. Whether you burn firewood, clean off fence rows or trim trees, a good chainsaw can make big jobs go quickly. But they can be very dangerous, and they demand a lot of respect. Anyone who picks up a chainsaw should be physically able to handle the saw being used and be familiar with the operation of the saw.

I have written before on choosing a chain and knowing the proper pitch and gauge to fit the saw and bar you are using, but today I would like to cover some additional tips on maintaining the chain during use.

**Tension must be correct and maintained.** Never set tension on a hot chain. Chain will naturally expand and loosen as it heats up during use. Always allow the chain to cool for a few minutes before tightening.

Loosen the bar nuts, pull up on the nose of the bar and tighten the chain until the bottom of the links make contact with the bar. (HINT: Wear gloves anytime you handle saw chain.) While still holding up the nose of the bar, tighten the rear bar nut first and then tighten the front nut. Pull the chain along the

bar a few times. The chain should feel snug, but pull freely. Check tension after several cuts, more often if you have put on a new chain.

**The chain must be lubricated.** A dry chain will burn up in no time and destroy the bar in the process. Most saws have automatic oilers. Always fill the reservoir with bar and chain oil. Motor oil should never be used. Bar and chain oil is much tackier and will stay on the chain and in the groove of the bar. Always be looking for oil on the chain. Check the oil level each time you fill the saw with fuel.

**The chain must be sharp.** A dull chain is harder on you and the chain saw. You may choose to have the chain sharpened at the local saw shop or buy a kit and do it yourself. Be sure to get the right size file and kit for your chain. The kit will include a file holder that will give you the right sharpening angle.

**Depth gauges must be set.** Depth gauges are often overlooked when sharpening a chain. If improperly set, the chain will not cut well

See 'TIPS,' Page 5



Doug Green



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

113 WASHINGTON AVE. NW  
RUSSELLVILLE, AL 35653  
256-332-0255

The *Franklin Free Press* is published weekly by  
Pilati Investments, Inc.  
Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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### Correction Policy

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# Answers to your 401(k) questions

**Q: Why is it called a 401(k)?**

**A:** You can thank your federal government for creating such a non-descriptive name for a retirement savings plan. Subsection 401(k) is a part of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) that was set into law in 1978. Just in case you're wondering, a 403(b) and 457(b) are also named from their subsections in the tax laws. No wonder people get confused about retirement!

**Q: What's the difference between a traditional 401(k) and a Roth 401(k)?**

**A:** The Roth 401(k) is relatively new, and both a traditional 401(k) and a Roth 401(k) are available through employers who offer this benefit.

However, there are some clear differences:

- Traditional 401(k): employers can match your contributions, taxes are paid when money is taken out at retirement, it's beneficial if your tax bracket will be lower in retirement, you can start taking money out at age 59 and a half, and minimum withdrawals are required at age 70 and a half.

- Roth 401(k): Employers can match contributions in a separate account that will be taxed as income when you take it out in retirement, and money is taxed before you invest it, but the earnings and withdrawals are tax-free in retirement—which is beneficial if your tax bracket will be higher in retirement. You can take money out at age 59 and a half and when account has been open five years. You can also roll over money to a Roth IRA to avoid withdrawal requirement at age 70 and a half.

**Q: Where do I invest after I've maxed out my 401(k)?**

**A:** Once you've contributed the allowable amounts to your workplace investing program,

you don't have to stop there. You still have options. Here are three investing vehicles to consider:

- Invest in a traditional or ROTH IRA.
- Convert old 401(k)s to ROTH IRAs.
- Put money into taxable investments.

**Q: What can I do with my old 401(k)?**

**A:** If you have an old 401(k) from a previous employer, you have four options:

- Leave your 401(k) at your old job (not always possible or a good idea).
- Transfer the money into your new employer's plan (not always possible).
- Roll over the funds into an IRA.
- Cash out the 401(k) (don't EVER do this!).

The first two options may not be available to you, and the fourth option is not an option, so mark it off the list. You'll pay huge tax penalties and lose a chunk of that money. The best option, then, is to roll the funds into an IRA. And that's easy to do.

**Q: What do I do with my 401(k) if I lose my job?**

**A:** If you have a 401(k) and you change employers for any reason, you have three basic choices:

- Do nothing. You could leave the money in the current plan if your former employer will allow it. It's easy and convenient, but you may end up with higher fees than if you chose other options. And you can't contribute to the account anymore.

- You can roll over your money into a new employer's plan. There are limits and rules regarding this, so it's not usually your best



Chris Hogan

See 'ANSWERS,' Page 5



**You need actions, not words**

Dear Dave,  
My husband and I have about \$20,000 in credit card debt, plus payments on a new truck. We also have a camper he bought before we got married that we're still making payments on. I recently received a \$50,000 inheritance, and I'd like to use that money to help get us out of debt and open a savings account. My husband says he is on board, but he keeps buying things we don't have the money for. I don't want the inheritance to go to waste, so what can I do?

Tessa

Dear Tessa,  
I want you guys to get control of your finances and have a better life, too. But until your husband is willing to get rid of the camper and the truck, I'd hang on to the inheritance money. Right now, you need more than his words—you need his actions. At this point, the real issue isn't the debt or the idea of using the gift you

received to pay off the debt. The issue is you can't see a future where your husband isn't going to repeat the same financial stupidity. You need to have that future cleared up, and it isn't going to be cleared up until he *proves* he has changed his heart and his ways. In his case, that means *showing* he has become a grown-up and isn't buying toys he can't afford anymore.

I know where you are, and I know where he is right now. I've been there. Years ago, I was a "grown man," but I was still really a little boy buying things I couldn't afford to impress people I didn't even know. This guy likes stuff. He likes shiny trucks, shiny things to pull behind shiny trucks and that sort of thing.

But it's time for him to sell all the crap, grow up and start putting you and your family first. Keep talking to him. Explain how important it is to you that you're both on same page financially and in every other aspect of your marriage. Until he *proves* he's ready to do that, though, I'd say just hold on to the inheritance money.

Dave  
*\*Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 14 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

**'ANSWERS,' from page 4**

option.  
•You can do a direct rollover into an IRA. Direct as in don't each touch the money. If you have an existing IRA, you can roll your 401(k) balance into that. If not, you can open an IRA through a brokerage firm, a mutual fund company or your investing professional. Go to the one of your choice and ask them to contact your former employer's 401(k) plan administrator and find out what hoops to jump through. You'll fill out forms authorizing the transfer. You'll also meet with the IRA provider to choose your investments for your IRA.

*Chris Hogan is the #1 national best-selling author of Retire Inspired: It's Not an Age, It's a Financial Number and host of the Retire Inspired podcast. A popular and dynamic speaker on the topics of personal finance, retirement and leadership, Hogan helps people across the country develop successful strategies to manage their money in both their personal lives and businesses. You can follow him on Twitter and Instagram at @ChrisHogan360 and online at chrishogan360.com or facebook.com/chrishogan360.*

**'TIPS,' from page 4**

and could be prone to kickback. A good sharpening kit should include a depth gauge. As always, follow manufacturers' recommendations, and if you use a sharpening kit follow the directions there as well. If a chain is properly set up and sharp, the saw will do the cutting for you and make the job much easier.

There are many different sizes, weights and types of chainsaws available, and there is one perfect for you and your project. For small

jobs, electric saws are great, and there have been many improvements in battery-operated models. These allow you avoid some of the maintenance you have with gas-operated machines.

Maintenance, safety, knowledge and safety (did I mention safety?) are all very important when using a chainsaw. Always wear proper clothing and safety apparel, and remember that help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

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**R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston butts during Super Bowl weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, February 2 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.

**A**ARP Tax-Aide will be providing FREE income tax preparation at the Department of Human Resources in Russellville on Thursdays beginning February 7 and ending April 11. You do not have to be a member of AARP, retired or a certain age to use this service. Call Ben at 256-332-0252 for an appointment, which is required.

**F**ranklin County Schools Pre-K registration is NOW open for the 2019-20 school year. Pre-registration is open online at <https://alprek.asap-connected.com> from January 15-March 22. Random selection will be held on March 22 in the Pre-K classroom. These dates are for all six Franklin County Pre-K programs. Some classrooms still have space for THIS school year for students who will be attending kindergarten next school year. Enrollment is open to all children four years of age on or before 9/1/19 who are residents of the state of Alabama. Children who are eligible for kindergarten are ineligible for this program. Enrollees must provide copy of child's birth certificate, proof of residence (utility bill or lease or copy of mortgage). There is no registration fee for this program. Upon enrollment, child's immunization record must be provided.

**R**ussellville FUMC will host a men's and a women's Step Study on Sundays from 3-5 pm. A step study guides you through a process of discovery and recovery over your hurts, hang-ups and habits. Everyone is welcome!

**C**R 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., large group at 6:30 and small groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. Church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue. Come and join us!

**A** Book Swap hosted by the "Readers of the Lost Ark" Book Club will be held at Helen Keller Public Library on Wednesday, January 30 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Text questions to 256-412-2920.

**S**pruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Spruce Pine Community Center in Spruce Pine. Next meeting will be February 5. All members and friends are urged to attend.

**I**f you are interested in the study of the Civil War and have an ancestor who was in the Confederate Army, join the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month (except January and July) at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center. Next meeting will be February 7. The SCV is the direct heir of the United Confederate Veterans and the oldest hereditary organization for male descendants of Confederate soldiers. Organized at Richmond, VA in 1896, the SCV continues to serve as a historical, patriotic and non-political organization dedicated to ensuring that a true history of the period from 1861-1865 is preserved. Membership in the SCV is open to all male descendants of any veteran who served honorably in the Confederate Armed Forces. Membership can be obtained through either direct or collateral family lines, and kinship to a veteran must be documented genealogically. Call 1-800-MYDIXIE or 256-324-2317.

**E**ast Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will hold a chicken and beef stew fundraiser on Saturday, February 9 at the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department, 10443 Hwy. 81 in Phil Campbell. Serving begins at 11 a.m. Bring your own containers please. Please come support the fire department!

**T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Mountain Breeze at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville on Saturday, February 9 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.

**T**he next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be Thursday, February 14 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be at 6:30 p.m.

**T**he book *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story* by Onnie Lee Logan will be discussed at the February 20 10 a.m. meeting of The Readers of the Lost Ark Book Club. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 105 West Sixth Street, Tuscumbia. For more info, email [nancy537481@yahoo.com](mailto:nancy537481@yahoo.com) or visit the following link: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/174022.Motherwit>.

**R**onnie McDowell and his band will return to Russellville on Saturday, March 16 at 7 p.m. for another benefit for the historic Roxy Theater. Franklin County's own Joseph Baldwin will be the opening act. For ticket information, please call 256-415-3270 or 256-460-8988. Reservations are going fast! Floor tickets are \$20 to \$30, and general admission balcony tickets are \$15.

**T**he 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. Call 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463) or 256-389-0530. This program is in partnership with the state of Alabama and Alabama Department of Senior Services.

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## 'NORRIS' from page 1

time so they can begin the transition of the interview and hiring process. I let them know last January that I would be retiring."

Bradford, a Russellville High School graduate and the son of Jackie and Cheryl Bradford, recently completed his training with State Farm. He recently resigned from the Russellville Fire Department in anticipation of his new career.

"I'm glad to see a local person get it," Norris said. "I was from Russellville, and I came home, and I felt that really helped me get my agency started because people knew me."

Norris insures approximately 2,200 households with at least one State Farm policy. His local insureds will be divided among the three Russellville State Farm agents, Bradford, Lee Nickels and Diana Lockmiller.

Any insured with a policy through Norris's office can choose which agent they want to represent them. Otherwise, State Farm will assign an agent to them.

"The policy holder has the right to choose," Norris said. "When they get their letter sometime this month, if they want to transfer out of this office, there's a toll free number to call, or if they want to choose an agent different than the one they're assigned to, they have that right."

Norris and his wife Donna have two children and six grandchildren living in Birmingham and Atlanta, so they purchased a home in Birmingham three years ago to be closer to their family. Although he has no fixed timetable on leaving, Norris expects they will eventually make the permanent move to Birmingham.

"More than likely, that's what will happen," Norris said. "I'll still come back to Russellville often, though. I'll remain on the CB&S Board of Directors as long as they'll have me, and we have many ties to Russellville that will remain."

It was 1977 when Norris received a call from Russellville State Farm agent

B.J. Kelley that changed the course of his professional life.

Norris was on Coach Pat Dye's staff at East Carolina University. Kelley, who had kept up with Norris's career as a player at the University of Alabama and as a coach, reached out to Norris to gauge his interest in opening a Russellville State Farm office.

"I'll always appreciate B.J. Kelley for what he did. He called me out of the clear blue and gave me an opportunity," Norris said. "It was rough at the start, but it was worth what we went through then because it ended up being a great 41 years."

In addition to visiting their children and grandchildren, Lanny and Donna plan to travel and enjoy the freedom of not being tied to an office.

Earlier this month, Norris reflected on his life and how blessed he has been.

"I look around this office at all the photos and memories, and I appreciate the opportunities I've had in my life," Norris said. "If you'd have told me I'd be quarterback on a state championship football team, given a scholarship by Coach Paul 'Bear' Bryant, go and start three years in the secondary at Alabama, win a couple SEC championships and play for a national championship, then end up in my hometown for 41-and-a-half years working for a great company and actually getting to take care of a whole lot of people's problems, I'd tell you I'm truly blessed."

"There's an insurance agent with some company on every street corner. I want to thank my staff for their dedication through the years, because the only way to sell insurance and keep the business is to take care of the person better than other companies do. We treat our insureds like family and like we would want to be treated in the same circumstance."

"I hope I made a difference in the lives of my players when I was coaching and over the last 41-plus years in the lives of people who had problems and situations where they needed help. I hope anyone insured with me feels like I've gone the extra mile in every situation."

*The following poem was written by a Russellville resident (who wished to remain anonymous) for her friend. Through her words, she encourages us to open our hearts to one another to share our burdens and love that we may be encouraged and grow stronger.*

### OPEN YOUR HEART

Alone in our beds, our tears are our own,  
The sun comes up and the smile goes on;

What do we hide, when no one knows...?  
Do we think they don't have tears of their own?

We sit silent, and then speak small chatter,  
And the whole time we wish for the presence of laughter.

The joy of fellowship, the knitted strings of love,  
That makes our heart sing with strength from above.

What would happen if we just let go?  
Opened our hearts, and let the pain show,  
To a trusted acquaintance or friend we know...

(Our hearts would grow closer...  
and with love we would grow...)

## 'DRAW' from page 1

security, there must be a commitment to school security as well as from the law enforcement side," Robertson said. "You need a certified law enforcement officer to be most productive. There's a shared amount of training and cooperation that must exist to work toward this from both directions."

The Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee is a logical fit for Robertson's background. The committee approved a controversial bill last year that would allow Alabama school districts the option of arming teachers.

"This committee primarily deals with anything related to the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, and fire and police legislation," Robertson said. "ALEA is involved with training and minimum standards. It ties in to bridge the gap with school safety as well, and I look forward to finding good interaction between the two committees."

"My two committee assignments [House Education Policy and Public Safety and Homeland Security] are tailored to my professional background and were my top two requests. I'm very pleased the speaker saw fit to appoint me to these committees, and I'm ready to get to work."

To contact Robertson, call the Legislative Office in Morgan County at 256-260-2146 or email him at proncey.robertson@alhouse.gov or pronceyrobertson@gmail.com.

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# Ava's closes after 22 years

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

After more than 22 years as a Russellville fixture, Ava's China and Gifts closed its doors for the final time Monday as owners Linda and Morris "Woody" Woodruff sold the inventory of their business.

Ava's, which specialized in home interiors, gifts, bridal gifts and a massive variety of Christmas décor, was sold to Kristi James Wilbanks, effective January 16, 2019. Wilbanks will take over operations in Ava's former location under the name of her existing business, Maggie J's, which was located adjacent to Ava's at 13722 Highway 43 North.

Linda Woodruff said all existing bride credits and gift cards for Ava's would be honored as part of the business transition to Wilbanks.

The Woodruffs said they plan to enjoy their retirement and would like to travel and see the country they love.

Maggie J's former location will be available for lease, Woodruff said. Anyone interested in leasing the property may contact Woodruff at 256-627-4674.

# Sign up now for Senior Farmers Market program

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Extension Office recently announced the opening of enrollment for the 2019 Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

The program provides low-income seniors with coupons and vouchers that can be used to purchase eligible foods at the local Farmers Market.

An application must be completed for each person in the household who qualifies for the program's benefits.

Eligibility is based on income levels of the recipients' gross household income (income before taxes) and may not exceed the following limits:

- \$1,669 monthly for household of one
- \$2,263 monthly for household of two
- \$2,857 monthly for household of three
- \$3,451 monthly for household of four
- \$4,045 monthly for household of five
- \$4,639 monthly for household of six.

Applicants must be at least 60 years of age the day of the application, and all applicants must reapply each year.

Go online to enroll at <http://fma.alabama.gov/seniornutrition/> or call the Franklin County Extension Office at 256-332-8880.

Coupons will be mailed from the Farmers Market Authority in Montgomery during June or July.

**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](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com). For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at [franklinfreepress.net](http://franklinfreepress.net)!

# Sworn in



Franklin County coroner Charles Adcox was sworn into office January 12, 2019, by Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore. Adcox's wife Kasie also attended the brief ceremony held at the Franklin County Courthouse. Adcox defeated Elzie Malone in November for the position in what was his first run at public office.

# Local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Eleven of the 14 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of January 7-11 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.

Eleven of the 14 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 100, received by the Red Bay Senior Center, 115 5th Avenue SE, Red Bay.

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

- N&F No. 2, Inc., 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 71. (No soap at handsink, various cleaners/toxic items stored over food items, employee gloving without washing hands then handling food, no date on BBQ or mixed veggies, mold on two packages of hams and on package of precooked sausage. Three day notice given.)
- Legacy Chevron, 13518 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 73. (Prep cooler holding cole slaw and sliced tomatoes at 49 degrees, toxic items

stored on shelf with forks and napkins, gallon jug being stored in handsink, no chemical test papers for chlorine, smoked chicken, chicken tenders, gizzards, frozen chicken and corn poppers at 110-127 degrees. Three day notice given.)

•Jack's #148, 13640 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 75. (Dirty pans stored with clean pans, spray nozzle at sink below floodrim, no backflow prevention device on outside hose, items being held out of temperature, chicken dipping marinade at 56 degrees, coffee creamer at 46 degrees. Three day notice given.)

•Chevron Food Mart, 3515 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 85. (Mold in ice machine, no chemical test papers).

•Rhoda P's Catering Services, 2080 College Road, Phil Campbell, 85. (Walk-in cooler holding chicken tenders, cut melon, tomatoes, chopped romaine at 46 degrees. Three day notice given.)

•Willi's, 5680 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 90. (No proof of foodhandlers' employee reporting agreement).

•Stockyard Cafe, 14330 Hwy. 243, Russellville, 94.

•Pollo Lo-Quillo, 115 Franklin St., Russellville, 96. (Dented cans).

•City King Buffet, 520 4<sup>th</sup> St. SE, Red Bay, 97.

•Backwoods Bargains, 30012 Hwy. 24, Russellville, 97.

•Walmart #403 Bakery, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.

•Walmart #403 Market, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.

•Walmart #403 Deli, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.

Of the 13 inspections done in Colbert County from January 7-January 11 all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory. The high score of 98 was received by Lenny's Sub Shop, 2101 Woodward, Muscle Shoals, and Mike's Meat Market, 1012 Avalon Ave., Muscle Shoals.

Health ratings are available at [www.foodscores.state.al.us](http://www.foodscores.state.al.us) and may be viewed by city or county.



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# Tips on how to pay off the mortgage early

What's the largest debt hanging around your neck? *Your mortgage.*

Even if you saved up a huge down payment, that loan from the bank still takes up the biggest percentage of your income, doesn't it? Can you imagine how much money you could be investing if you could pay off the mortgage early? I've got great news! You *can*—if you're willing to make some sacrifices.

## How do I pay off my mortgage early?

I tell people all the time to get a 15-year fixed-rate mortgage, and there's a good reason for that. I want you to start off on the right foot. But even if you didn't, you can still get back on track and kick that mortgage debt to the curb! There are several ways to do that, depending on your financial situation.

## Refinance the mortgage

If you have a 30-year mortgage, you're paying a fortune in interest. For example, let's say you took out a \$200,000 fixed-rate loan with four percent interest in 2014. By the time you pay off that loan in 2044, the total amount you paid would be about \$343,800. That's \$143,800 in interest! If you took out a 15-year loan instead, you'd have higher monthly payments, but you'd only pay about \$66,000 in interest.

Even if you keep your 30-year mortgage because of low interest rates or to save on closing costs, you can still pay on the mortgage as if you had a 15-year loan. Just make sure the extra is going toward principal, not interest.

## Pay extra every month

If you don't have a 15-year mortgage, it doesn't mean you're dead in the water. *You can still pay more than what's required every month.* If you had that 30-year \$200,000 loan, your monthly payments would be about \$1,000. If you paid an extra \$100 a month, you'd shave more than four years off your payments and save more than \$26,000 in interest. At \$200 extra a month, you'd save over \$44,500 and more than eight years in payments. That's nothing to sneeze at!

## Pay extra when you can

I get it: Throwing a lot of extra money toward the mortgage every month might not be possible for everybody. But that's not an excuse to coast for 30 years. You can pay extra on your mortgage whenever you can. Here are a few options to consider:

- Round up your payments every month to the nearest dollar, nearest \$25, or more.
- When your salary grows, increase your mortgage payment to match the growth.

•When you get extra money, put it toward the mortgage (birthday, freelance, bonuses, yard sale, etc.).

The key here is staying focused and motivated. If you and your spouse stay on the same page and keep communicating about where you can pay extra, you can encourage each other to keep moving forward.

You may not think that extra money would matter, but it all adds up. For example, if you could only come up with an extra \$200 a year to pay on a 15-year loan, you'd still save over \$1,000. I don't know about you, but I'd rather have that \$1,000 in my pocket than give it to a mortgage company!

Keep in mind that some companies will only accept extra payments at specific times (end of a quarter, end of the year), so don't get hit with a prepayment penalty.

And again, make sure any extra money goes toward the principal, not toward the next month's payment.

## Downsize

I know, this seems like a drastic step. If you really want the freedom of a debt-free life, it might be worth the sacrifice. You can sell your home and use the profits to buy a smaller, less costly place to live. Then attack that smaller mortgage with all you've got!



Chris Hogan

One of the worst things you can do for your wealth-building future is to upsize your home and take on a more expensive mortgage in the process. Sure, you'd have a nicer house, but you'd have not-so-nice payments.

And each time you upgrade, you have to start over paying off the mortgage. I know, people do this all the time — but I don't want you to be like other people. I want you to be different. I want you to *win* with your income and your financial goals.

Paying off the mortgage early is a reachable goal. It takes hard work and determination, but the reward is worth every sacrifice you make along the way. Before you know it, you'll be sending out invitations to your mortgage-burning party!

*\*About Chris Hogan*

Chris Hogan is a #1 national best-selling author, dynamic speaker and host of *The Chris Hogan Show*. For more than a decade, Hogan has served at Ramsey Solutions, equipping and challenging people to take control of their money and reach their financial goals. His second book, *Everyday Millionaire: How Ordinary People Built Extraordinary Wealth—And How You Can Too*, releases in January 2019. You can follow Chris Hogan on Twitter and Instagram at @ChrisHogan360 and online at [chrishogan360.com](http://chrishogan360.com) or [facebook.com/chrishogan360](https://facebook.com/chrishogan360).

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One year after winning the Franklin County Tournament championship for the first time in two decades, Phil Campbell's girls brought home the crown again last week. See Page 14 for full coverage of their victory over Belgreen.

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# Golden Tigers settle score with Warriors on Bonner's buzzer-beater

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

WEST POINT - If the two regular-season meetings between Russellville and West Point are any indication, next month's first-round showdown at the Class 5A, Area 14 tournament will absolutely be worth the price of admission.

Two weeks after the Warriors stunned Russellville on the road with a last-second three to win 70-69, the Golden Tigers returned the favor last Friday night at West Point, prevailing 87-85 when freshman point guard Will Bonner tossed in an awkward-looking, double-clutch bank shot at the buzzer.

"We get to play these guys again in a couple of weeks," RHS head coach Patrick Odom said, "and it should be entertaining."

Friday's game certainly fit that bill. Trailing by four at the half, Russellville (15-6, 4-2 in area play) out-scored West Point 30-16 in a frenetic third quarter, surging to a 66-56 lead. Much as

See 'SCORE,' Page 17



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Buckhalter (5) scored 23 points in last Friday's 87-85 win at West Point, which gave Russellville a split of the season series. The two teams will meet for a third time in the first round of the Area 14 tournament.

# Long time coming

Six years since their last county title (and just two short years removed from rock bottom), Red Bay's boys reign supreme

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

PHIL CAMPBELL - When Red Bay senior Colton Corum saw teammate and friend Gath Weatherford go down with a knee injury in a January 8 game against Winston County, he could think of only one thing to do.

"I'm gonna tell you," Corum said, "the first thing I did was I got down and prayed."

While Corum was interceding on Weatherford's behalf, head coach John Torisky was having some very unpleasant flashbacks.

"I was in shock and disgust," Torisky said, "thinking, 'Where is this gonna go?' I remember when I was helping Coach [Donnie] Roberts [with Red Bay's varsity girls] one year, we were playing Belmont, I think, and Alana Hester, one of our top players, tore her ACL in like the last game of the year when we were winning by twenty. And it hurt us that year. So I was just thinking, 'Please don't let it be serious.'"

The concern expressed by Corum and Torisky and shared by all of Red Bay Nation was well founded. The Tigers pride themselves on depth and balance, on selflessness, on 'we before me,' but Weatherford—the team's top scorer and most prolific perimeter shooter—is undoubtedly their most indispensable player.

"We couldn't afford to lose him," Corum said.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Fully recovered from a recent injury scare, Weatherford (15) drilled seven threes and scored 24 points to lead the Tigers past Bragwell (23) and Belgreen in Saturday's county final.

As it turns out, they didn't. Weatherford, who has dealt with left knee trouble in the past, says he knew pretty quickly that he had dodged the proverbial bullet.

"I had this injury before," he said. "It's a re-injury is what it was. It's a sprained MCL. My first thought was, I was scared, of course, but once I got up on my feet and started walking, I knew it wasn't gonna be as bad as the first time."

Weatherford missed the next game at Addison [the Tigers were able to grind out a 54-43 win over a Bulldog team they had beaten by 53 with Weatherford healthy on December 15] and then returned

to limited action on January 14 against Hatton. The 6'3, 210-pound forward was full-go for the Franklin County Tournament, and last Saturday night he delivered a championship-game performance for the ages.

Weatherford buried a season-high seven threes and scored 24 points, helping Red Bay claim its first county title since 2013 with a 61-42 win over rival Belgreen.

After watching Weatherford top the 20-point mark for the seventh time this season and the 18th time since the start of last season, Torisky couldn't suppress a smile.

"He seems to be doing okay,"

See 'TIME,' Page 18

# Twice is nice

## One year after winning their first county crown since 1998, the Lady Bobcats went back-to-back

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

PHIL CAMPBELL - With roughly two weeks to go before Phil Campbell's girls can officially begin their postseason quest to reach the Final Four in Birmingham for a second straight year, head coach Craig Thomas was searching for ways to keep his team's competitive fire burning hot.

The Franklin County Tournament provided just the fuel Thomas was looking for.

Having won their first county crown last season in 20 years, the Lady Bobcats focused their energy this week on going back-to-back.

"I don't know that it's ever been done before at Phil Campbell, that I can ever remember," said Thomas, a PCHS alum whose father Jerry coached the Lady 'Cats to that county championship in 1998. "We put an emphasis on that this week. We told our girls we wanted to try to do something that's never been done. You've gotta motivate them somehow, and that's the only thing I had to really motivate them."

Evidently, it was enough. In last Saturday's final, the top-seeded Lady Bobcats built an early 16-3 lead and held second-seeded Belgreen to just 28 percent shooting for the game on their way to securing a second straight county championship with a 48-35 win.

**"It feels awesome," said senior forward Abby Davis, who nailed a half-court shot at the halftime buzzer to stretch Phil Campbell's lead to 13 and finished with 19 points, six rebounds and six blocks. "Winning it for the first time in 20 years last year was great, and now coming back and winning back-to-back for the first time, that's just awesome."**

"It feels awesome," said senior forward Abby Davis, who nailed a half-court shot at the halftime buzzer to stretch Phil Campbell's lead to 13 and finished with 19 points, six rebounds and six blocks. "Winning it for the first time in 20 years last year was great, and now coming back and winning back-to-back for the first time, that's just awesome."

Thomas agreed.

"We're very, very proud of that," he said. "Our girls responded well."

The second straight county title did not come easily for the Lady Bobcats (17-3 and ranked No. 5 in

See 'TWICE,' page 15



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**IN DENIAL** - Davis had six blocks (including this one on Gracie Dempsey), helping the Lady Bobcats hold Belgreen to 28 percent shooting from the field.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**REPEAT AFTER ME** - Phil Campbell's girls beat Belgreen 48-35 on Saturday night, claiming their second straight county championship. Players and coaches pictured above (L to R) are Katie Thomas (20), Caitlyn Mills, Abby Davis, Kallie Allen, Olivia Taylor, Kaci Harris, Makayla Baker, Brittany McCulloch, assistant coach Tracy Pace and head coach Craig Thomas.

## 'TWICE', from page 14

Class 3A), despite the slow start by the Lady Bulldogs (16-5 and ranked No. 9 in Class 1A). Belgreen, which dropped its previous two meetings with Phil Campbell this season by a total margin of 40 points, appeared intent at the outset of Saturday's game on freezing the basketball in an effort to keep the Lady Bobcats out of their rhythm—and out of the open floor.

It was tough to tell early on if the Lady Bulldogs' passive approach on offense was a strategic ploy or simply the result of being a little too tentative, but head coach Chad Green said it was definitely part of the plan.

"We were a little bit nervous starting out the game, no doubt about that," said Green, whose team turned the ball over on its first three possessions and fell behind 7-0 right out of the gate. "But I knew we could not come out and run the floor with them. They're one of the best teams in 3A basketball, one of the best teams in northwest Alabama, period. We played them twice before, and they beat us 18, and they beat us with a running clock last time. So I knew we had to do something.

"I felt like we couldn't run up and down the floor with them, so we've been working on slowing down the ball, working the ball and moving the ball more. Of course, that always works better when you've got the lead rather than trailing, but I was very willing to do that even down four to six points. I was good with that, as long as we slowed them down. A lot of times when you do that to a team that likes to push, push, push, it can get them out of their rhythm."

Davis scored seven early points, and the Lady Bulldogs didn't make their first field goal until a driving layup by Gracie Dempsey more than five minutes into the game. Belgreen shot just 1-for-7 in the first quarter and trailed 12-3 at the end of one.

A pair of putbacks (one by junior guard Kallie Allen and the other by Davis) pushed the lead out to 13 points early in the second quarter.

"It's hard to get behind early and beat a great team like that," Green said.

Belgreen slowly began to creep back in it, getting two threes from Gracie Dempsey and another from Autumn Bragwell to cut the lead to 19-12 with 2:30 left in the first half. Sophomore post player Katie Thomas banked in a three for Phil Campbell, and a steal and layup by Caitlynn Mills made it 24-12.

A bucket by Ansley Tate got the Lady Bulldogs back within 10. They had a chance to pull even closer, but Gabbie Moore's shot in the final seconds of the half came up empty. Olivia Taylor grabbed the rebound and got the ball to Davis, who took a couple of dribbles to the mid-court line and then launched a 45-foot runner that found the mark, sending the Lady Bobcats into the break with a 27-14 advantage.

"When it went in," Davis said, "I was like, 'Oh my goodness. I don't know how I made that.' But it felt good going off, really, and it just went in. I've never made [a half-court shot] before. That's the first one. In practice, I make them every now and then just goofing around, but that's the first one I've made in a game.

"It really got our girls pumped up in the locker room. We all came in really excited and stuff. I think it really helped."

The margin continued to grow early in the second half. Davis took a dribble hand-off from Allen and nailed her third three of the night with 3:40 left in the third quarter, stretching the lead to 33-16. Allen scored Phil Campbell's final six points of the quarter, helping the Lady Bobcats take a 39-24 lead into the fourth.

Allen was a major factor on the offensive glass all night and finished with a team-high eight rebounds to go along with her 13 points.

"Kallie rebounds the ball very well," Thomas said. "She's playing very well right now, very aggressive. She's starting to play more aggressive every day. Her aggressiveness is great right now."

Phil Campbell also forced five turnovers in the third quarter, and Thomas said the up-tick in pace was pivotal in allowing his team to create some separation on the scoreboard.

"Run, run, run. We're high-paced and high-tempo," Thomas said. "We were able to get a few easy layups in transition."

Belgreen started to chip away in the fourth quarter, getting three quick points from Katie Dempsey and a three from Tate to cut the lead to 10 at 40-30. Katie Dempsey hit 1-of-2 at the line with 4:20 left in the game and then came up with an immediate steal on the press, setting up Moore for a long jumper that brought the Lady Bulldogs within seven at 40-33 and prompted Thomas to call time out.

"We cut it to seven with about four minutes to go, and I felt like we were in a good spot," Green said. "We knew we couldn't press from beginning to end against them, but we wanted to sporadically come on and press a little bit. I have some girls who can press, whether it's a zone press or a man press or whatever. I thought our girls played with a lot of intensity in the second half."

The Lady Bobcats turned the ball over four times in the first four minutes of the fourth quarter and nine times in the second half overall, leaving the door open for Belgreen to mount a rally.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Mills totaled 23 points in two tournament outings, helping Phil Campbell run its win streak to six games.

"We weren't very aggressive in those first four minutes of the fourth quarter," said Thomas, whose team attempted only two shots (missing both) during that 9-1 run by the Lady Bulldogs to open the final period. "We took our foot off the accelerator a little bit and started trying to manage the clock, and it didn't work out for us. Their press was more of a full-court man-to-man than a typical 2-2-1 press, and we didn't have girls that wanted to take the ball down the floor. We had to call a timeout and get that adjusted."

Out of the timeout, Davis drove for Phil Campbell's first bucket of the fourth quarter, and then Mills grabbed a defensive rebound and went coast-to-coast for a layup to make it 44-33. Tate scored to get Belgreen back within nine, but then a basket by Davis made it 46-35 with 1:00 to go and essentially sealed the deal.

"Tip your hat to Davis," Green said afterwards. "She made a couple of big plays down the stretch, and that's what senior leaders do."

After seeing their 15-point lead cut in half, the Lady Bobcats made three of their last four shots from the floor and went 2-for-3 from the foul line over the final four minutes with just one turnover. In the end, they survived a shaky few minutes to improve to 5-0 in January and nail down their sixth straight win overall.

"We couldn't run our offense, and we kept turning the ball over," Davis said of her team's issues early in the fourth quarter. "We just weren't doing what we were supposed to. I was a little worried, but I knew we had it. I was like, 'We got this. We've just gotta come back and play our game like we usually play, and we'll have it.'"

Davis shot an efficient 8-for-14 from the field on the night with those three three-pointers. Allen had three assists and four steals to go along with her 13 points. Mills scored nine points on 4-for-8 shooting and also had three rebounds and three steals. Katie Thomas chipped in with seven points and five boards.

Gracie Dempsey hit three threes and led the Lady Bulldogs with 11 points. Katie Dempsey finished with eight points, seven rebounds, three assists and three steals. Tate scored seven points, and Moore, Bragwell and Emma Willingham added three apiece.

With a second straight county title now in tow, the Lady Bobcats turn their attention to a grueling finishing stretch that will include games against ranked opponents Phillips, Rogers, Wilson and Belmont (MS). If nothing else, they should be good and tested by the time postseason play rolls around—which is exactly what Thomas had in mind when he put this schedule together.

"We just want to play at a high level," said Thomas, whose team already owns wins this season over Phillips, Rogers and Wilson. "Games like that are what we really need going into the final part of the season. It'll get us playing to that high level we're gonna see in the playoffs. That's why we scheduled it this way. Those four games are gonna be....whew. But I think it's gonna help us. We've got four really good teams in that last stretch."

# B-Team Bobcats beat Red Bay for county title

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

PHIL CAMPBELL - As a graduate of Phil Campbell High School, Skeeter Benford has a healthy amount of anti-Red Bay bias ingrained in his system. When you're a former Bobcat athlete, disliking the Tigers comes with the territory.

With that in mind, Benford (now the head basketball coach for Phil Campbell's B-Team boys) had a pointed message for his players prior to last Saturday's Franklin County Tournament final against Red Bay.

"We really challenged the guys," Benford said. "We really didn't want Red Bay winning all four boys championships. We challenged them to make sure that didn't happen."

Some rivalries die hard. Others, apparently, don't die at all.

Benford's players took his challenge to heart and then took care of business on Saturday, pulling away down the stretch for a 42-32 win to avenge an overtime loss to the Tigers from earlier this season and clinch the county championship.

Ninth-grader Dylan Jeane scored a game-high 18 points for the Bobcats (10-2 through Sunday), who did indeed prevent Red Bay from sweeping all four county tournament division titles this season.

"It was very exciting when we got in the locker room," Benford said. "I may have gotten a little bit more excited than [the players] did. We felt like we let one get away here against them, and that fueled the fire. My guys stepped up and accepted the challenge we gave them, and they came out and executed fairly well and got the job done."

Jeane (4-for-5 from the foul line) and Jonah Fisher (5-for-6) helped the Bobcats finish 11-for-17 at the line, a significant improvement over their 8-for-19 performance in the overtime loss to Red Bay earlier this season.

"We've been practicing [free throws] a lot since that last game," Benford said. "That last game

against them, we went 8-for-19 in an overtime loss. We led the whole game, but the last two minutes they came back and got it into overtime. Seven out of their nine points in overtime were off free throws."

That trend reversed itself on Saturday, when the Tigers shot just 11-for-23 from the line and missed seven of their ten free throw attempts in the fourth quarter. That, combined with a tough shooting day from the field (9-for-41, or just 22 percent) and 16 turnovers, doomed Red Bay despite a double-double from Alex Kennedy and a 33-23 overall edge on the boards.

Kennedy finished with 12 points and 10 rebounds but did not make a field goal in the second half. Cam McKinney, another strapping sophomore post player for the Tigers, grabbed 11 rebounds to go along with his five points.

"We focused on [McKinney and Kennedy], the big guys, the whole game," Benford said. "We knew coming out that they had killed us on the boards and we had to box out and put butts on them. I thought we did a fairly good job. We challenged our guys at halftime. The Kennedy kid had ten points in the first half, and I challenged my guys to try and slow him down. We held him to two points in the second half."

"Nate Orrick played well for us in the post. He didn't play last year, but he came back this year. Through the season, he's progressed more than anybody on the team."

Orrick scored his only bucket of the game in the fourth quarter at the 2:15 mark, pushing Phil Campbell's lead to six at 38-32. He also finished the game with four rebounds and three blocked shots.

After Orrick's late basket, neither team scored again until Jeane made two free throws with 45 seconds remaining to stretch the lead to 40-32. Moments later, Jeane got loose for a transition layup to finish off the scoring and seal the deal. He shot 6-for-10 from the field with two threes and also had three rebounds and three steals to go

along with his 18 points.

Jeane broke a 6-6 tie with a three-pointer late in the first quarter, and the Bobcats led 9-8 at the end of one. Kennedy hit two free throws and a layup early in the second quarter as Red Bay surged to a 12-10 lead, but Mason Swinney scored to pull Phil Campbell even.

Jeane then came up with back-to-back layups off steals, and Fisher made two free throws to cap off an 8-0 run by the Bobcats and give them an 18-12 advantage.

A putback by Kennedy and a free throw by McKinney got Red Bay back within three, but Phil Campbell got a three-pointer from Julian Jimenez and two free throws from Jeane to open up its largest lead of the first half at 23-15. Red Bay's Dawson Wright hit a three in the final seconds, and the Tigers went into the locker room trailing by five.

Wright and Kyser Jackson each connected from beyond the arc for Red Bay in the third quarter, but Jeane countered with five points to help the Bobcats take a 34-29 lead into the fourth. The Tigers cut the lead to three at 34-31 on a pair of free throws by Hunter Burks with 4:31 remaining, but Phil Campbell finished the game on an 8-1 run to put it away.

"We had to call timeout at one point, because we started freaking out when they threw the press on us," Benford said. "We called timeout just to slow it down a little bit. My guards are ninth-graders, for the most part, and they handle it fairly well. As long as they slow it down and don't get out of hand, I've got confidence in my guys to handle the ball."

Swinney finished with seven points, five rebounds and two steals for Phil Campbell, and Fisher had seven points and four boards. Jimenez chipped in with five points, Orrick had three and Blaine Goodson added two.

Wright scored six points for Red Bay, and Jackson finished with five. Burks had four points and five rebounds.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Phil Campbell's B-Team boys avenged a previous loss to rival Red Bay on Saturday, beating the Tigers 42-32 in the county championship game. Team members pictured above (L to R) are John Randle Herring, Trenton McCulloch, Mason Swinney, Dylan Jeane, Hunter Saint, Jonah Fisher, Julian Jimenez, Blaine Goodson, Seth Hall, Nate Orrick, Boone Reynolds and Fransisco Casasola. The team is coached by Skeeter Benford.



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## 'SCORE,' from page 13

they had done in their one-point win at Russellville on January 4, however, the Warriors rallied in the fourth quarter and pulled even at 85-85 on a deep three by senior guard Kolton Sapp with roughly 12 seconds remaining.

Senior guard Lucas McNutt, who finished with a game-high 26 points, rushed the ball up the floor for the Golden Tigers and got all the way to the rim, but his shot was blocked out of bounds with seven seconds to go. Odom then called a timeout and drew up a final play.

Russellville got the ball in to McNutt, who drove the lane again and this time kicked the ball out to Bonner on the left wing. The freshman passed up a look from three and put the ball on the floor instead. He dribbled to within about 16 feet and then elevated, ducking under a defender and then firing a line-drive shot toward the basket.

The ball banked in just before time expired, giving the Golden Tigers their second buzzer-beating win in a two-week span. [Senior guard Devin Buckhalter hit a game-winning three to beat Central 89-86 on January 5.]

"We got the ball to Lucas," Odom said of Friday's finish, "and from that he penetrates and winds up making a kick. I still felt good about what we had. I don't know that I wanted a double-clutch [shot] like we ended up getting, but I thought we were gonna get a good look from Will right there. He found a way to make a shot."

Bonner's unorthodox game-winner negated a furious fourth-quarter rally by the Warriors (10-13, 2-4), who trailed by nine with 5:12 remaining after Russellville sophomore Brooks Scott made a pair of free throws. The Golden Tigers still appeared to be in control with barely a minute left when Bonner hit two free throws to make it 81-75.

Sophomore guard Kobe Bowers cut the lead to four with a pair of foul shots, and then West Point came up with a critical steal. Sapp attacked the rim off the turnover and converted a three-point play, bringing the Warriors within one at 81-80.

Bonner made two more free throws with 40 seconds remaining to push the lead back to three, but Sapp scored again to cut it back to one at 83-82. McNutt went 2-for-2 at the line with 27 seconds left to make it 85-82, and then Sapp buried a straight-on three (West Point's 13th of the night) to tie the game.

The Warriors got 10 fourth-quarter points from Sapp and six from Bowers (plus timely threes from Whitt Laney, Tyler Thompson and Tyler White) and had out-scored Russellville 29-19 in the final period before Bonner's game-winning bucket.

"I thought we had played some of the best basketball we've played in a while in the second half," Odom said. "Then you look at the last two-and-a-half minutes, and we didn't get stops. I think we were trying not to foul, and we continued to let them get to the rim. We got beat off the bounce. We were on our guys about getting beat off the bounce, and then they pull up and hit a three on us. Credit them. They were making some tough shots down the stretch—very similar to what they did at our place.

"But a great characteristic of a good basketball team is finding a way to win and do what you have to do. I'm proud of our guys for doing that."

Russellville got 11 first-quarter points from McNutt and nine second-quarter points from Buckhalter, but West Point countered with seven made threes (including four by Bowers) in the first half to take a 40-36 lead into the locker room. Thompson, a 6'5, 270-pound junior post player, dominated the boards on his way to scoring nine big points in the second quarter.

**"I was very proud of that third quarter," Odom said. "I really challenged our guys. I didn't feel like our defense was very good at all in the first half. The irony is, I thought we played better defense in the second half, and they may have scored just as many points. But the pace was different. I'm proud that we turned the game into what we wanted the game to be in the third quarter. I felt like we played pretty solid; we just didn't finish down the stretch. We've gotta be cleaner down the road. But our guys found a way to win, and that's what you have to do."**

Trailing 50-48 after a three by White early in the third quarter, the Golden Tigers cranked up their defensive pressure and got on a roll. Buckhalter tied the game with a basket in the paint, and then Russellville forced a 10-second violation with its press. McNutt buried a three to make it 53-50, and then Will Bonner turned a steal into a three-point play to push the lead to six.

After a bucket by West Point, McNutt nailed another three, and a three-pointer by senior Caden Parker capped off an 18-6 run and sent the Golden Tigers into the fourth quarter with a 10-point lead.

"I was very proud of that third quarter," Odom said. "I really challenged our guys. I didn't feel like our defense was very good at all in the first half. The irony is, I thought we played better defense in the second half, and they may have scored just as many points. [The Warriors actually scored *more* after the break, putting up 45.] But the pace was much different.

"I thought the officiating was decent tonight, but the way the game was called, their size was killing us in the first half. They were just mashing us under the rim, and it seemed like we couldn't get a rebound. Even when we felt like we had a stop, they were finding ways to keep the board alive. It seemed like they were scoring on every possession.

"I'm proud that we turned the game into what we wanted the game to be in the third quarter. I felt like we played pretty solid; we just didn't finish down the stretch. We gave up some possessions down the stretch. We've gotta be cleaner down the road. But our guys found a way to win, and that's what you have to do."

Friday marked the second time this season that Russellville has allowed at least 13 three-point makes and still managed to win the game. [Central hit 15 threes in that 89-86 loss two weeks ago.]

"I'm glad we won," Odom said with a weary smile, "but I'm kind of tired of having to answer, 'How do you win giving up that many [threes]?' It seemed like they didn't miss there for a while. Give them credit.

"We've gotta play better defense. We know we can score the basketball. We've gotta defend better."

Russellville won despite playing without sophomore wing Chandler Dyas, who rolled his ankle during Friday afternoon's shootaround and did not dress. With Dyas and his 11-plus points per game out of the mix, McNutt and Buckhalter stepped up.

McNutt scored 11 points in the first quarter, 11 more in the third and finished the night with four threes, topping the 20-point mark for the seventh time this season. Buckhalter hit two threes, shot 3-for-4 from the foul line and scored 23, topping the 20-point mark for the fifth time on the year.

Parker, the team's third senior, was right in the middle of the big third-quarter run and finished with 10 points.

"It's getting to that time of the year where that's what we expect from those guys," Odom said. "Both Lucas and Devin were very efficient tonight. Percentage-wise, that's probably as good as Lucas has shot it all year. Devin knocked down a couple of deep ones early, and they really tried to deny him and help on him. He did a good job of attacking and finishing. And I thought our other senior [Parker] played one of the best games he's played all year. Caden's role changes without Chandler, and he did a good job tonight, too.

"When you're missing the points and the production Chandler gives us, you want your senior leaders and scorers to step up. We've gotta have those guys playing well."

In addition to his game-winning shot, Bonner also went 5-for-6 from the foul line in the fourth quarter and finished with 15 points. Jeb Bishop added six points and four blocked shots, and Collin Bonner scored five points off the bench in the first half.

"That's probably the most minutes Jeb has played this year," Odom said. "And Collin played well in the first half. We had a lot of guys contributing."

The same was true for West Point. Sapp, who scored 21 of his 23 points in the second half in the Warriors' win at Russellville on January 4, was up to his old tricks on Friday, scoring 15 of his 22 points after the break. Bowers added 18 points (giving him 43 in two games against the Golden Tigers this year), and Thompson had 16. White knocked down three threes and finished with 15 points.

Senior point guard Rylan Jones left the game with an injury in the second quarter and did not return.

Russellville and West Point will match up in the two-three game in the Area 14 tournament at Hamilton High School, likely on Tuesday, February 5. The winner will earn a spot in the area finals and a sub-regional berth, while the loser will head home for good.

## 'TIME', from page 13

the coach said with a laugh.

Corum concurred.

"I'm glad everything worked out and he was alright," the senior guard said. "I'm glad he's back, and he's playing very well. I don't know what kind of zone he was in tonight, but he was unbelievable."

On a night when the Tigers (19-4 through Sunday and ranked No. 1 in Class 2A by the ASWA) smothered Belgreen (12-9) with their trademark brand of relentless, physical defense, Weatherford provided most of the offensive punch. [Sophomore Braden Ray, another 6'3 forward, chipped in as well, scoring 15 points on 7-for-8 shooting from the floor.]

Weatherford opened the game with a three—his 50th of the season—on Red Bay's first possession and then closed out the first quarter with another make from beyond the arc to give the Tigers an early 10-6 lead. By that time, he already had a feeling about how things were going to go.

"When that first shot went in," he said, "I was like, 'This is gonna be a good night.'"

Weatherford poured in nine second-quarter points, drilling a three from the left wing in the final seconds of the half to cap off a 14-0 run and send the Tigers into the locker room with a 25-13 advantage. He nailed two more threes in the third quarter and then knocked down number seven with a little more than three minutes left in the game. He checked out for good moments later, leaving the floor as a county champion for the first time in his four-year varsity career.

"It's been something that was a long time coming," said Torisky, now in his fourth season as head coach. "He works so hard. These guys haven't had a chance to win this. Tonight, he wanted it. In the first quarter, he came up to me and said, 'Coach, I got this tonight.' I knew he was in the zone and ready to go. He's played good for us the last three years, but tonight he really showed out. I'm really happy for him."

Red Bay improved to 5-2 this season when Weatherford scores 20-plus, but the Tigers are by no means a one-man show; thanks to a rotation that legitimately goes ten-deep, they were 10-1 through Sunday in games where Weatherford had scored in single-digits.

"We find the hot hand," said Weatherford, who averages a team-best 12.7 points per game. "We find the man who's scoring and we go for it. You can stop me, and if you leave him [here he points in Corum's direction] open, so be it. We're happy for you to leave him open and double-team me or take two of our guys out, because we have eight more. We have ten players who can score."

Their two games at the county tournament were a microcosm of the Tigers' season as a whole. In last Thursday's semifinal, all ten of Torisky's players scored, but none of them reached double-figures in a 50-26 win over Tharptown. On Saturday night, Weatherford went off for 24, and Ray and Corum—who had a pair of three-point plays in the third quarter and wound up scoring 10 of his 12 points in the second half—combined for 27 more.

The common thread in both wins, of course, was defense. After hounding the Wildcats into 26 turnovers last Thursday night, Red Bay held Belgreen to just 32 percent (12-for-38) shooting from the field on Saturday. Leading by two at 13-11 after a pair of free throws by sophomore Isac Willingham early in the second quarter, the Bulldogs went scoreless for the final six minutes of the first half.

The Tigers had won seven straight games through Sunday, holding opponents to an average of just 35.3 points during the streak.

"It starts in practice," Corum said. "We do a lot of defensive drills and shell drills. One good thing about our team, when we're guarding shells in practice, the guy we're guarding is gonna be better than the guy we're guarding in the game, more than likely."

"Since we've been back from Christmas break,



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Vinson (0) and the Tigers had won seven straight entering the week, climbing all the way to 19-4 and the No. 1 ranking in Class 2A.

we've played really good defensively. We're holding teams to like 34 or 35 points. We haven't played that well offensively, but we held Belgreen to 42. They're a team that can score 70 or 80. We're just tenacious on D."

The Bulldogs boast the highest-scoring trio in Franklin County, with senior big man Mason Bragwell (18.4 points per game), senior guard Brant Bragwell (16.2) and sophomore guard Scout Bragwell (12.2) combining to average nearly 47 points per game heading into the county final. Those three combined to shoot just 5-for-23 from the field on Saturday and totaled 20 points (half of which came from Mason Bragwell in the fourth quarter).

"Our boys came out focused and really executed the game plan," Torisky said. "We talked about taking those big three for them and trying to take them away from what they do. Mason was a handful tonight, but we slowed down Brant and Scout. Taking two of those three away really forced them to look for points elsewhere. We wanted to make someone else beat us."

With his quick feet, quicker hands and relentless energy, junior point guard Clay Allison sets the tone defensively for Red Bay. Allison attempted only four shots on Saturday, making two, but he finished with six steals and was personally responsible for forcing a large chunk of Belgreen's 17 turnovers.

"Him and Hunter [Bays, a senior guard] do a great job with their on-ball defense," Torisky said. "When they're guarding the ball and keeping it in front of them, it allows us to be aggressive and over-play the passing lanes and things like that. Those two really get after it."

"Clay has a non-stop motor. He's got another level he goes to. His engine runs so hard. He's one of the few guys who can really impact the game on the defensive end alone. He may not have had the best offensive game tonight, but he



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**TIGERS ON TOP** - Red Bay's boys are county champions for the first time since 2013. Team members pictured above are: Front row (L to R) - Manager Cooper Corum, Noah Brewer, Hunter Bays, Clay Allison, Colton Corum, Jalen Vinson, Tanner Hamilton, assistant coach Kevin Morrow; Back row (L to R) - Assistant coach David Corum, manager Devin Nichols, Braden Ray, Lane Shewbart, Gath Weatherford, Arden Hamilton, head coach John Torisky.

# 'TIME', from page 18

was getting his hands on everything and really getting them out of their rhythm. It's amazing what he can do."

Leading by 12 at the break, the Tigers opened the second half with a three-point play by Corum and a three by Weatherford, extending their run to 20-0 and opening up a 31-13 lead. Belgreen battled back to within 14 at 35-21 on a three by Willingham, but Red Bay responded with a quick 8-0 spurt (one that included back-to-back threes by Weatherford and Ray) to go up by 22 and seal the deal.

This county championship was especially sweet for the team's four seniors (Weatherford, Corum, Bays and reserve guard Noah Brewer), who were freshmen when Torisky took over and began the rebuilding job that would take the Tigers from 2-24 in his second season to where they were on Saturday night—on the verge of 20 wins, sitting atop the state rankings and reigning supreme over Franklin County for the first time in six years.

"I'm speechless," Corum said on Saturday night. "Four years ago, when Coach got here, us four seniors started the foundation, you know. Those first two years were rough, but it's paying off now. I'm very glad we showed up and played very well tonight."

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The Tigers, who made their first regional appearance last season since 1995 and are well positioned to make an even deeper postseason run this year, clearly have bigger goals in mind for next month. But, make no mistake, bringing the county championship back to Red Bay was prominent on the to-do list.

"Certainly," Weatherford said. "This is just a building block. It's one step at a time. It's been since 2013, and we're trying to lay the foundation for what's to come. We hope not to hand that title back to another school for a few more years."

Weatherford shot 8-for-14 from the floor on Saturday and also had six rebounds. Allison and Tanner Hamilton each finished with four points, and Lane Shewbart added two.

Red Bay shot 49 percent (23-for-47) from the floor and knocked down eight threes. The Tigers were stingy with the basketball, turning it over just five times.

Mason Bragwell finished with 14 points and seven rebounds to lead Belgreen. Willingham hit three threes and had 13 points and seven boards. Gaven Taylor scored five points, and Brant Bragwell had four. Scout Bragwell, Kostner Bryant and David Plott added two apiece.

The Tigers were set to go for their 20th win of the season on Monday night at home against Phil Campbell. They will host Class 4A Deshler on Thursday night.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**ON THE MARK** - Ray (32) couldn't miss in Saturday's final against the Bulldogs, scoring 15 points on 7-for-8 shooting from the field.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**LEADER OF THE PACK** - Allison (1) sets the tone for the Tigers' relentless defense. The junior guard came up with six steals in the county final and helped Red Bay hold Belgreen to just 32 percent shooting from the field.

*Legacy* **ATHLETE of the WEEK**

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## Gath Weatherford

Senior Forward, Red Bay

Weatherford was a beast on both ends of the floor in last Saturday's county final, holding Belgreen big man Mason Bragwell in check on defense and knocking down a season-high seven threes on offense to lead the Tigers to a 61-42 win and their first county title since 2013.

Weatherford finished the night with 24 points on 8-for-14 shooting and also pulled down six rebounds. Through Sunday, the 6'3 senior was leading Red Bay in scoring at 12.7 points per game and ranked second in Franklin County with 56 threes made on the year.



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