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**04.03.19**

# Foshee: Tombigbee 'willing to help anybody' bring broadband internet to rural Franklin County

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Whether the future of high-speed broadband internet in rural Franklin County is at a crossroads or a dead end depends on who you ask.

Either way, a service most everyone agrees is vital to economic growth and continued sustainability for rural Franklin County continues to have no direct path to becoming a reality.

Former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, who organized the Franklin County Broadband Task Force several years ago after a series of community meetings showed strong interest in rural broadband service, is now calling on officials at Franklin Electric Cooperative to follow the lead of Tombigbee Electric Cooperative in Hamilton in moving

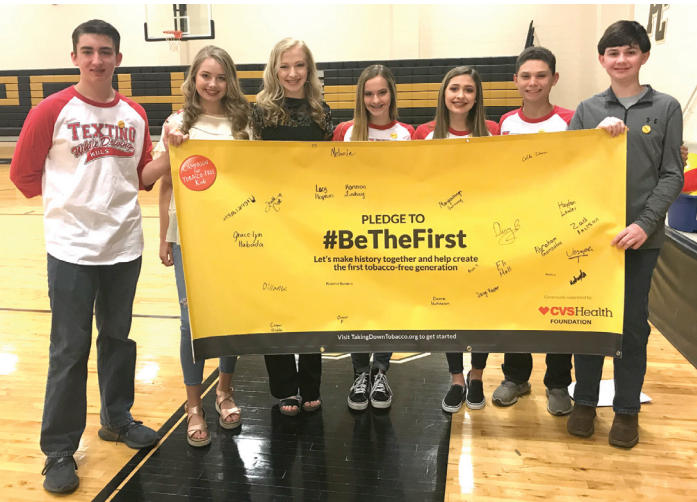
forward to set up the infrastructure needed to bring broadband internet to its approximately 8,000 residential and business customers.

**"We are willing to help anybody," Foshee said. "We will go wherever we are asked to go to show how to do it or to physically do it in that area if we can work out the business arrangement."**

And Morrow has a new feather in his cap when it comes to making affordable, high-speed broadband available to rural Franklin Countians, as Steve Foshee, CEO of Tombigbee, told the *Free Press* last week that his cooperative is willing to work with Franklin Electric, or any Franklin County entity, to bring broadband internet here.

See 'INTERNET,' Page 11

# PCHS students aim to 'Kick Butts'



Brady Petree  
Franklin Free Press

One of the primary concerns surrounding today's youth is the ongoing fight to get teens to abandon tobacco and other smoking habits such as vaping.

Recently, during a nationwide initiative held every year called "Kick Butts Day," students from Phil Campbell High School participated in different events as part of the effort to curb tobacco use among teens. Some of the events held at the school involved guest speakers, information about the harms of smoking, games for the students to play and skits prepared and performed by students in the schools S.A.D.D. club.

S.A.D.D. (Students Against Destructive Decisions) is a nationwide group of high school students representing thousands of high schools. The group's primary objective is to educate students on the harmful effects of drugs, tobacco and other substances.

The "Kick Butts Day" campaign for this year was

See 'KICK,' Page 9

During a nationwide initiative held every year called "Kick Butts Day," students from Phil Campbell High School participated in different events as part of an effort to curb tobacco use among teens.

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Sue Bradford Strickland, Phil Campbell, age 78  
Died Tuesday, March 26, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Shady Grove Cemetery at Liberty Hill.



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)!

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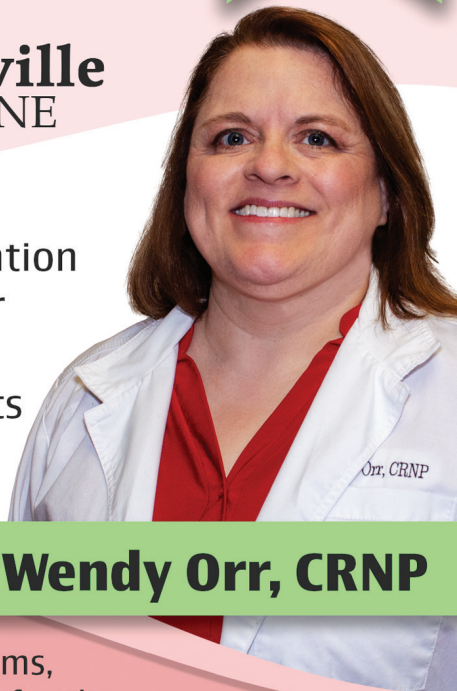


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# Lodge honors Hulsey for 50 years of service

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

It was December 5, 1968, when Jerry Don Hulsey was initiated as an Entered Apprentice into Russellville Masonic Lodge #371. A half-century later, Hulsey was honored by the Grand Lodge of Alabama for 50 years of faithful service at a ceremony held March 19 at the Russellville Lodge.

Hulsey received a certificate from the Grand Lodge and a 50 Year Mason Award from Lodge #371 signed by Worshipful Master Scotty Hovater.

After joining the Lodge late in 1968, Hulsey passed to Fellowcraft on February 13, 1969, and was Raised to Master Mason two weeks later, on February 27, 1969. He would go on to serve Lodge #371 as Worshipful Master in the early 1970s, and he had aspirations to advance to leadership at the state level until his work duties changed those plans.

"When I got into the Lodge, I went through the process to become Master of Lodge," Hulsey said. "I got all the work in to become District Lecturer, and I envisioned Grand Master at the state level, but my work changed and I wasn't able to stay at home like I previously did. I was on the road traveling, and that's why I was unable to attend the Lodge and proceed with what I envisioned serving."

Hulsey and his wife Nancy live in Russellville. They have two sons, Jeff (and wife Kelley) and Jason (and wife Julie) and four grandchildren.

As Hulsey reflected on 50 years of membership in Lodge #371, he found it hard to believe so much time has passed.

"I doesn't seem like it's been that long. I got in in 1968 and was raised in 1969," Hulsey said. "It doesn't feel like 50 years. Unless you've been involved with the Masonic organization, you don't know what it does. The big thing is it teaches you about brotherhood, friendship and looking out for your brothers in the Lodge and your family."

Hulsey looks back on his decision to join the Masonic Lodge as one of the most important he's made in his lifetime.

"We've had a lot of fun through the years, but it's serious when we get down to Lodge work," Hulsey said.

Hovater said the 50-year award requires a man to join the Lodge at a rela-



COURTESY PHOTO

Jerry Don Hulsey (front row, second from right) received a certificate from the Grand Lodge and a 50 Year Mason Award from Lodge #371 signed by Worshipful Master Scotty Hovater at a March 19 ceremony.

tively young age and to be blessed with health and longevity.

"It's both an honor and a privilege to have had a small part of this 50-year presentation for Brother Hulsey," Hovater said. "Brother Hulsey has now joined a very select group that has achieved this high honor. Russellville Lodge is very privileged to have several members who have achieved this high honor along with Brother Hulsey."

# Radio spot on WGOL show wins ABBY Award

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When Mark White recorded a commercial for McClary Tire in Athens to air on White's radio show, he wanted his daughter Cora to record the tagline 'Where the rubber meets the road' at the end of the spot.

Five-year-old Cora got a little tongue-tied, though, and 'rubber' kept coming out 'ruther.' Several tries later, Cora finally got it right, but White decided to include the outtakes in the final spot for his advertiser. Good decision, as Cora took the stage at the Club in Birmingham March 23 to receive an ABBY Award from the Alabama Broadcasters Association for the best large market radio commercial.

*Where the Rubber Meets the Road* earned one of the prestigious ABBYs as the association hosted the 13th annual awards banquet to honor Alabama's best in broadcasting for 2018.

White is the host of the *Mark White Show*, which airs Friday at 2 p.m. on WGOL-FM 100.7 and AM-920 in Russellville. The show also airs on superstation WXJC-FM 101.1 in Birmingham and WKAC-AM 1080 in Athens.

Cora is the daughter of Mark and April White. April is the daughter of Doug Green, owner of Green's Dependable Hardware in Russellville, and Charlotte Green. Mark served as a Russellville police officer from 2001-2002.

In addition to Cora, the family includes White's 17-year-old nephew, Nicholas.

White recalled the day he and Cora were in the studio recording the spot and how he totally changed what he had planned for the spot.

"It was so funny," White said. "I've been getting her to do some taglines, and she's getting better and better, but on this particular commercial I wanted her to say 'rubber' and she kept saying 'ruther.'"

"We did a commercial finally where she said it right, but I started listening to the outtakes and thought, 'This is pretty funny.' I put them into the commercial and thought that would get people's attention."

In radio advertising, with the repetitive nature of commercials, the goal is to get the listener engaged with the product and to remember the name or the jingle contained in the spot. With McClary Tire's commercial, that's exactly what happened.

White did not attend the ABA Banquet because he was visiting Barcelona, Spain, where he recorded the March 22 episode of the *Mark White Show*.

The one-hour show recognizes people, groups and organizations in Alabama who are making a positive difference in our communities.

"We want to encourage anyone in the audience or in the community who has a vehicle for good to use it as a positive and good tool to try and bring people together," White said. "That is my encouragement, for people to use their vehicle for good and be careful about creating division among people."

White's special Barcelona show featured the inspiring story of a man addicted to drugs and alcohol who has overcome that addiction and his childhood affliction with polio; a woman who has overcome multiple tragedies in her own family and is raising her children alone; and two interviews



Cora and Mark White of the *Mark White Show* on WGOL.

with Barcelona street musicians.

While the ABBY Awards are usually presented to adults, White said ABA officials told him Cora was the third five-year-old to be recognized by the ABA.

While he was proud for his daughter and glad he was able to promote his advertiser with an effective commercial, for White, it's all about the message of his show. It's something he believes in and a passion he shares with everyone who will listen.

"I want people to know what this show is about. It's not the normal talk you get on the radio," White said. "It's just about normal people with extraordinary challenges finding ways to overcome those challenges and help others in the process."

For more information on the *Mark White Show*, log onto [www.themarkwhiteshow.com](http://www.themarkwhiteshow.com).



# Honey Do: It won't idle

Finally...surely....maybe...Spring weather is here. I know many of you are digging out the mowers, trimmers and tillers. If your equipment doesn't start, run or idle properly, consider the following.

Many times equipment may start, but it runs rough or quickly dies. Air filters, spark plugs and bad fuel can all cause these types of problems, but this week let's consider engine idling a little closer.

Remember, machines are a lot like our bodies. They need air, food and blood flow in order to function. Air is taken in through the air filter, and a dirty air filter is like you trying to breathe in a sand storm. Be sure the airways are clear, but filtered.

Food comes to the engine in the form of fuel. The food we eat should be fresh, free from contaminants and prepared properly. Fuel should be fresh (less than 30 days old), free from water contamination and foreign material (such as rust) and prepared properly, with proper oil mixes (2 cycle machines) and fuel additives. There are many fuel additives on the market. Just be sure that the one you use specifies protection from ethanol.

In a machine, blood flow is akin to oil circulation. Proper fill levels and

clean oil filters assure that internal parts are lubricated to give you the longest life possible out of the machine. Check your owner's manual for the correct weight and type of oil to use.



Doug Green

We are definitely seeing a lot of carburetor problems these days due to the quality of available fuel and the introduction of ethanol.

Carburetor diaphragms and needle seats are all prone to damage, and this can cause the engine to either flood out or be starved for gas. It's not a huge job to change these components or, in some cases, replace the carburetor.

Sometimes the carburetor may need to have the idle jets adjusted. Most new carbs must be adjusted by a licensed mechanic, due to new EPA regulations. If you attempt this job, you will probably find that you don't have the proper tools to turn the screws that adjust the fuel flow.

If your equipment cranks and runs at all, it's probably worth fixing. Consult a mechanic, and he'll steer you in the right direction.

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

## OUR HOUSE by Ree Shannon

by Ree Shannon



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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## My take on this... Technology makes less time for hugs

As I was driving home yesterday from visiting an elderly lady, my mind traveled back to yesterday.

I might not do a lot of traveling, but I can sure tell you my mind does a lot of it. I thought back to 40 and 50 years ago and the drastic changes in our youth and even our middle-aged folks.

Times are different, and I still believe in the so-called "good ole days." Having all the technology available is an advantage today. I do agree it reduces time, but it also reduces communication.

The days of conversation are less, and I'd not be surprised if the days of poor eyesight have increased. Wouldn't you think looking at a computer or cell phone while texting requires more up-close visual concentration for hours at a time?

I might be out in left field, as the expression goes, but I can't help thinking I'm right on target.

Have you considered the youth of today are limited in their spelling ability? There's no need, because most of our electronics have automatic spelling correction. Not only that, the parts of a clock and knowing the functions are a thing of the past. There's no reason for such a thing

If you were to ask the time of someone in a waiting room of any kind with a clock hanging on the wall, it would never cross their mind to even look. Instead, they would get out their cell phone or look at their digital watch.

The days of asking for directions are close to being non-existent. Our minds are only geared toward that GPS. If we are directed what seems to be miles out of the way, we rely on that GPS

to get us back on track. Of course, it doesn't matter how many miles out of the way, because stopping at a convenience store hardly ever has crossed your mind anyway.

Have you ever wondered why our older folks are visited less and less? Well, I have my own theory about that also. Our communication is by texting or talking on the cell phone. Most older folks to not have a cell phone or even want one, for that matter. So, odds are against talking to them. The lucky ones are those who are blessed to be on speed-dial. Computers have replaced those big hugs and seeing the smiles of those beautiful faces. Five to ten minutes face-to-face is better than hours spent at a funeral home.

**Our communication is by texting or talking on the cell phone. Most older folks to not have a cell phone or even want one, for that matter. So, odds are against talking to them....For the younger folks that know how to spell correctly or tell time the old-fashioned way or visit their older relatives without a cell phone, I'd like to commend you.**

For the younger folks that know how to spell correctly or tell time the old-fashioned way or visit their older relatives without a cell phone, I'd like to greatly commend you.

I'm sure my mind will take me to another thought or idea that I will share later, but for now you'll just have to wait.

Until next time!



Gail Motes





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**Preparing for the real world**

Dear Dave,  
I'm getting married this summer and about to become a stepfather, but my fiancé's daughter from a previous marriage seems very irresponsible. She's 20 and lives at home, has trouble holding a job, and she doesn't really want to work. When she doesn't have money to make her car payment, she seems to expect her mom to pay it for her. My fiancé and I both agree that she's been too lenient with her in the past, but she doesn't want to suddenly pull the rug out from under her. How do you think we should approach this situation?

Kendall

Dear Kendall,  
Marriage counselors say you have a good chance of having a successful marriage if you're in agreement on four things—religion, money, children and in-laws. So, first things first. I'd strongly suggest you and your fiancé go through pre-marital counseling to make sure you're on the same page when it comes to handling this and other issues.

If you and her mom really want to show her you love her, you'll make sure she starts learning some character and discipline. And it's very important that both of you are on the same page and in agreement every step of the way. You might also want to read a book together by Dr. Henry Cloud called *Boundaries*. This is a great book, and it will give you both several

ideas for creating a reasonable timeline aimed at teaching her more responsibility.

I would advise letting her mom present any changes to her initially. Neither of you wants to create a scenario where *you're* viewed as the bad guy. Let her mom start the process by explaining that she made a few mistakes in terms of teaching her more about personal responsibility and self-reliance when she was younger. Then, she can begin to lay out the first few rules and expectations.

In my mind, there's nothing wrong with requiring her to get a job within 30 days if she doesn't already have one. If she needs to go job hunting, make sure she's out of bed and on the road no later than 8 a.m. every morning. During this first phase, looking for work every day should be her job. It wouldn't be a bad idea to start teaching her about budgeting, saving and everything else that goes into handling money responsibly during this time, too.

Next, phase two might consist of requiring her to help around the house doing chores on her days off, or whenever mom needs a hand. Then, after a month or two of this, phase three might consist of her paying a small amount in rent.

Do you see what I'm doing? By stepping up the expectations gradually you're building a foundation so she'll have the tools and knowledge to where, in the sixth or seventh month, she's moving out and taking care of her own responsibilities. Like an adult!

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 15 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at [daveramsey.com](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.

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# What's Happening


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 **R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 is selling Easter hams. Hams are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup will be Saturday, April 20 from 8-10 a.m. at the Lodge on Coffee Street.


 **W**e are searching for descendants of people buried in Russellville's Old Town Cemetery and Sadler Cemetery to give personal info and stories about their ancestors for a cemetery tour as part of Russellville's Bicentennial Celebration. Contact Doris Hutcheson (256-332-4085 or dorishutcheson@msn.com) or Chris Ozbirn (256-332-8827 or archive@hiwaay.net) for more info.


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


 **T**he dates for West Elementary School Kindergarten registration and verification have been set for April 1-12, 2019. Registration packets may be picked up at the Russellville City Schools Board of Education and returned with the required documents. A kindergarten screening will be administered to all registered students. Please refer to the following information to determine the appropriate time for you and your child to be present for the screening. All screening will be conducted at the RCS Board of Education building located at 1945 Waterloo Road, Russellville. Hours are 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-2 p.m. Students whose last names begin with the letters A-M will be screened on Wednesday, April 17, 2019. Students whose last names begin with the letters N-Z will be screened on Thursday, April 18, 2019.


 **N**orthwest Alabama MS Warriors, a support group for those dealing with Multiple Sclerosis and their families, will meet at 5:30 p.m. this Thursday, April 4 at the Muscle Shoals Public Library, 1918 Avalon Avenue, Muscle Shoals. For more information, call 256-356-8548.


 **T**he Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833, will meet this Thursday, April 4 at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center on Ash Avenue. Camp #1833 meets the first Thursday of each month EXCEPT January and July. For more info, call 256-324-2317. Everyone welcome!


 **T**harttown High School presents Pro Wrestling "Wrestle Slam 2019" this Friday, April 5 at 7:30 p.m. at the THS gymnasium. Main Event: \$1,000 "King of the Ring" Battle Royal. Second Main Event: United States Tag-Team title Match - WWE/TNA superstar Johnny Swinger & Action Mike Jackson vs. the #1 Tag Team in the South, The American Brawlers. United States Junior Title Match: Hispanic superstar Antonio Garzia vs. The Ultimate Dragon. Special Opening Event: The Thundercat vs. The Wrestling Superstar. Advance tickets may be purchased from the THS office now. Tickets will be also available the day of the show. General admission. No reserved seats. Ringside seats available. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Autograph party at Quinn's Grocery from 3:30-5:30 p.m. For more info, call 256-332-6485.


 **B**eef Quality Assurance Training (opportunity to become BQA certified) will be held Tuesday, April 9 from 6-8 p.m. at Northwest Alabama Livestock Auction (14330 Alabama Hwy. 243, Russellville, AL 35653). Instructor: Dr. Soren Rodning, Association Professor at Auburn University & Veterinarian with Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Topics: Herd Health Management; Animal Care and Handling; Injection Sites, Needle Size and selection; De-horning; Vaccination Protocol and Vaccine Handling A FREE meal will be provided! Pre-register at Franklin County Extension Office: (256) 332-8880.


 **A**merican Legion Post 64 will meet Thursday, April 11 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

 **T**he Shoals Chapter of the Order of St. Luke will meet in the Sheffield Room at Park Place (501 N. Montgomery Avenue in Sheffield) on Thursday, April 11 at 2:30 p.m. Dr. James Anderson will teach on healing. We believe that God heals spiritually, physically and emotionally. Prayer for healing will be offered. All are welcome.

 **P**astor Lindell Cooley, former worship leader of the Brownsville Revival, will be in concert at Gateway Church (Russellville Church of God), 15988 Hwy. 43 in Russellville, on Friday, April 12 at 7 p.m. Admission is free. Come and be touched by God! For more info, call 256-627-7935 or 256-332-7176.

 **T**he Belgreen Alumni Banquet will be held Saturday, April 13 with a social hour beginning at 4 p.m., a meal (\$12 per person) at 5 p.m. and a business meeting at 6 p.m. The class of 1969 will be honored for their 50th Anniversary. Graduating classes of 1944, 1954, 1964, 1974, 1984, 1994, 2004 and 2014 will also be honored. Everyone is welcome! If you plan on attending, please RSVP by calling 256-277-1211 or 256-740-9501.

 **T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guests the RHS A Cappella Ensemble at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville on Saturday, April 13 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.

 **K**athryn Tucker Windham's book *Alabama: One Big Front Porch* will be discussed at the April 17 meeting of the Readers of the Lost Ark Book Club at 10 a.m. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 105 West Sixth Street, Tuscumbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com.



# BCDA Board taking steps to end Sunset review

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When the Alabama Legislature's Sunset Committee convenes later this year, an extensive review of the Bear Creek Development Authority is scheduled to be on the committee's agenda.

Members of the Bear Creek Development Authority, though, are taking proactive measures to remove the agency from Sunset Committee review.

When it reviews a state agency, Sunset Committee members have the option to recommend one of three alternatives: Continue without modification, continue with modification, or termination.

In order to terminate a state agency, there must be a bill that passes through the legislature.

At its February 15 meeting, the BCDA Board of Directors approved a resolution that formally asks the Sunset Committee to remove BCDA from its 2019 agenda. The specific language in the resolution reads as follows:

"The members of the BCDA Board do hereby resolve that BCDA as an entity, its Board members individually and the Board members on behalf of the citizens in the area served by the BCDA lakes that a request be made to the Sunset Committee for the State of Alabama that any and all issues regarding BCDA be removed from the Sunset Committee's docket and/or agenda and/or schedule for review."

The resolution was drafted by BCDA board attorney Jeff Bowling.

Former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow submitted BCDA to the Sunset Committee last year after Morrow described BCDA as "a dysfunctional entity." Morrow also cited a pattern of lack of proper development of BCDA lands and assets in the Bear Creek Watershed area.

Morrow was defeated last November in his run for Alabama Senate District Six by incumbent Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia). As of last Friday, Stutts said he had not received a copy of the resolution nor has he been contacted by anyone about it.

**Board member Brad Whitehead believes the Sunset Committee process for BCDA has its roots in politics and should not go forward.**

**"We know this was politically driven, and it needs to be stopped," he said. "Eighty percent of the people in this room know this was politically motivated and that it should be stopped."**

Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville), who now represents House District 18, said he had not received a copy of the resolution and has not been contacted by any individual about it.

The resolution was approved by a 5-2 vote of the board. Board member Mark McNatt, one of the two to vote against the resolution, said his reason for opposition was that the BCDA board should welcome state oversight and not fight it.

"I expect that oversight and accountability from my city, county and state government. We, as a state agency, should welcome the state checking us out," McNatt said. "I'm not saying anything is

wrong. But it puts out the wrong message when we are pushing back. Let's embrace it and say what we're doing is the right thing."

Board member Brad Whitehead believes the Sunset Committee process for BCDA has its roots in politics and should not go forward.

"We know this was politically driven, and it needs to be stopped," Whitehead said. "Eighty percent of the people in this room know this was politically motivated and that it should be stopped."

Board member Peggy Fowler supported the resolution and believes the board must fight to maintain the reputation of the Bear Creek Development Authority.

"This was gone about the wrong way. Someone says we have a dysfunctional board and BCDA isn't doing what it's supposed to, and that's my concern," Fowler said. "It puts our board and BCDA as a whole in a bad light in the public's view."

The Sunset Committee is comprised of six members of the Alabama House and six members of the Alabama Senate. The committee has the assistance of the Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts at its disposal to help compile and/or evaluate information and produce a report on each agency.

The BCDA board's resolution also calls for a copy to be forwarded to all current legislators and members of the governing branches of the State of Alabama.

BCDA was established in 1965 with its purpose stated in Alabama Code Section 33-15-6(2)(b) as

See 'SUNSET,' page 8

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COURTESY PHOTOS

Phil Campbell High School senior Anna Benford (above, left, in red) was chosen as the Senior High Division winner at the school's 2018-19 Dream Girl Pageant last month at the Bevill Center on the campus of Northwest-Shoals Community College. Pictured with Benford (and above, right) is PCHS freshman Grace-lyn Habada, who won Poise and Appearance, Evening Gown and First Alternate.

**'SUNSET,' from page 7**

follows: "Develop and carry out a unified, comprehensive program of resource development designed to encourage and assist the economic growth of the area, which program shall not be inconsistent with official programs for statewide economic development."

BCDA manager Shannon McKinney told board members he welcomes and expects oversight of his agency, but McKinney challenged the reasons Morrow cited for submitting the agency to the committee.

"I have no fear of the sunset process. What I take issue with is the way it was brought about. It suggests improper notification of our meetings," McKinney said. "What was said was manipulated to try and put us in a bad light."

McKinney believes the current method of selecting board members allows for fair cross-the-board representation from all of the counties served by the Bear Creek Watershed.

"When you start hand-picking a board, you can be beat by political influence. As the board is selected now, it's fairly representative of each county represented," McKinney said. "Board participation has really picked up, and attendance at meetings has not been an issue for some time."

The Code of Alabama provides the 14-member board shall consist of one appointee each from the Franklin, Marion, Winston and Colbert County Commissions; one at-large appointee selected by the governor; and the mayor or other chief executive officer of the municipalities of Red Bay, Vina, Hodges, Hackleburg, Bear Creek, Haleyville, Phil Campbell, Russellville and Cherokee.



# Red Bay Museum honors Morrow with new Native American exhibit

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Regular visitors to the Red Bay Museum notice new exhibits and updates to existing exhibits upon each visit to the building in downtown Red Bay.

The latest exhibit, the Johnny Mack Morrow Native American Display, was unveiled and dedicated March 24 in a special ceremony that saw Morrow, along with museum curator Scotty Kennedy, pull down the curtain to officially introduce the display.

The Native American Display includes fossils that were found during archaeological digs done on Cypress Cove Farms, a 21-acre reclaimed wetlands preserve owned by Morrow and his wife Martha. A large diorama shows the locations where the Chickasaw Indians resided 10,000 years ago on the land now called Cypress Cove Farms.

Additionally, there are numerous fossils and Native American tools unearthed from digs in Moundville, AL that resemble items found in local burial sites that can not be displayed. The display includes Native American clothing from the early 1800s Trail of Tears period, and Kennedy said there will be additional items added to the collection.

Morrow donated the diorama, which was made by Red Bay resident Dennis Raper, to the museum.

As a member of the Alabama House of Representatives for 28 years, Morrow chaired the House Tourism Committee and was responsible for several grants received by the museum. He also worked to schedule the Smithsonian Institute's "The Way We Worked" traveling exhibit that saw more than 7,000 visitors come to Red Bay to view it.

Morrow authorized two archaeological digs on Cypress Cove Farms that were coordinated by Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research under the supervision of its president Hunter Johnson. Local high school students participated in the digs along with the TVAR.

Morrow said he was humbled by the display and he's constantly amazed at the growing number of exhibits at the museum, which is managed by Kennedy and is a project of the Red Bay Civitan Club.

"It is indeed an honor to be here today," Morrow said. "I want to thank Scotty and the Red Bay Civitan Club, as well as my wife Martha for standing by me. What they have done with this museum is incredible."

Morrow recalled the first dig when Johnson uncovered a perfect point from a six-foot pit. He handed the point to a Russellville High School student for her to hold.

"You are the first human in 10,000 years to hold this," Johnson told the student. "When you consider that, it's pretty overwhelming."

Cypress Cove Farms is also a state-recognized bird sanctuary, with more than 50 species of birds on site. Thousands of local students have visited the farm for archaeological digs, bird watching, Veterans programs and other outdoor events.

Morrow said the land created a perfect setting for Native Americans to live as it provided all their needs in a consolidated area.

"They had fresh water in Brush Creek, fresh fish in Bear Creek and plenty of rocks for tools," Morrow said.

The Johnny Mack Morrow Native American Display is located next to the Carl Elliott Display in the Red Bay Museum. Elliott represented northwest



COURTESY PHOTO

The Johnny Mack Morrow Native American Display includes fossils that were found during archaeological digs done on Cypress Cove Farms, a 21-acre reclaimed wetlands preserve owned by Morrow and his wife Martha. A large diorama shows the locations where the Chickasaw Indians resided 10,000 years ago on the land now called Cypress Cove Farms.

Alabama in Congress from 1949-1965. Kennedy told the crowd at the dedication about the impact these two men have had on the area.

"Who would think these two Franklin Countians would contribute so much to our county," Kennedy said. "They were civil servants with servants' hearts, and we want to remember Carl Elliott for all he did for this area."

The 7,000-square-foot Red Bay Museum has two stories full of local history, including a second-floor growing display honoring country legend Tammy Wynette. Kennedy said museum officials are always looking for new donations or items to be loaned to the museum. Particularly, they are asking for Tammy Wynette items as well as other items depicting Red Bay's history.

Franklin County Archives director Chris Ozborn said she recently donated to the museum a stockholders agreement for the construction of the old Brick Red Bay Hotel dated March 24, 1924. The document shows the original stockholders and how much each invested in the project.

The Red Bay Museum is located at 110 4th Ave. SE in downtown Red Bay. It's open Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 1:30-4 p.m., with a \$5 admission for adults and \$2 for kids.

Guided group tours are available by contacting Kennedy at 256-356-8758 or by email at scottydk@att.net.

## 'KICK,' from page 1

focused on "kicking" Juul's and other electronic cigarettes that are popular among teens and young adults. Libby DeVaney is the sponsor of the S.A.D.D. club at Phil Campbell High School and said they wanted to take part in the campaign due to the threat that smoking poses to today's generation.

"We've all had people deal with emphysema in the older generations," DeVaney said, "and now we see the younger people starting with the vaping and stuff like that, and they genuinely do not believe that there is anything wrong with what they're doing. I said when we started this club that we were going to actually do something with it. Then they started the initiative of being the first

'tobacco-free' generation, and we decided to take that and run with it and educate our students, families and friends as much as we could."

**"Making sure that people quit or preventing them from using tobacco or other things that contain nicotine, drugs and other substances is our goal," DeVaney said, "and we will continue to fight to make that change."**

According to recent studies, in Alabama 24.5 percent of high school students use e-cigarettes, while 14 percent smoke cigarettes. Tobacco use claims 8,600 lives in Alabama and costs the state \$1.9 billion in health care bills each year. It is because of these alarming numbers and the

risk of more students and young adults being lured in to using tobacco or vaping products that DeVaney hopes the message will get out and will be effective.

"The main thing I want everyone, not just our students, to take from this is that we not only have a drug epidemic but that nicotine is an epidemic as well, and it is even harder to quit," DeVaney said. "We have to start somewhere, so we're starting with this, and this is just the beginning. We are not going to stop here."

"Making sure that people quit or preventing them from using tobacco or other things that contain nicotine, drugs and other substances is our goal, and we will continue to fight to make that change."





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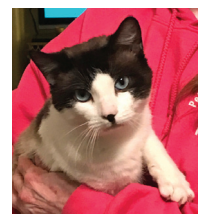
Yard Sale this Saturday, April 6 down from Frosty Inn on the corner of Hwy. 43 and 1st Street. (If raining, sale will be the following Saturday.) Dresser, office chairs, snare drum, trombone, boys clothes (size 7), girls clothes (sizes 4-5T and size 16), women's clothes and men's clothes (medium up to 3XL), household items, toys and much more!

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# No change in BCDA camping, user fees

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

A review of the annual Bear Creek Development Authority budget for fiscal year 2018-19 shows numbers similar to the previous year's budget. The Bear Creek Development Authority Board of Directors approved an annual budget of \$700,475 during a meeting last summer. That anticipated revenue is down approximately \$19,000 from the FY 2017-18 budget. The largest individual expense is in the category of recreation expenses, with \$221,375 allotted for salaries and benefits. This year's budget included a five-percent step raise for BCDA employees Mike Stephens and Colton Hovater. An additional \$6,200 is budgeted for workers compensation insurance, a decrease of \$1,200 from the previous year. There is \$25,000 budgeted for vehicle expenses, \$7,500 for vehicle insurance and \$75,000 for utility expenses. The budget provides for \$39,000 to be spent on

operation and maintenance of public use areas and \$19,000 for cabin utilities and \$6,000 for cabin cleaning and maintenance supplies. Under the heading of general administration and office expenses, \$206,000 is allotted for salaries and benefits. The next largest cost is for shoreline liability insurance, in the amount of \$25,000. Under the heading of capital investments, \$14,000 is allotted for operating equipment and machinery and an additional \$20,000 for Little Bear Subdivision development. BCDA anticipated revenues for this year include a carryover of \$25,000 beginning balance operation fund. The largest revenue source is expected to be recreation permits at \$227,000 and an additional \$180,000 in revenue from cabin rentals and \$7,500 from cabin cleaning fees. Camping fees are expected to be: \$95,000 from Slickrock; \$44,000 from Elliott Branch; \$28,000 from Williams Hollow; \$19,500 from Horseshoe Bend and \$7,500 from Piney Point camping. Water supply programs are expected to bring in

a total of \$59,000 this year, with \$41,000 from Upper Bear water grid and \$18,000 from Franklin County Water Service Authority. Tanglewood Sewer revenue is anticipated to be \$4,500, and \$975 is expected from agricultural licenses. The board continues to move forward with plans for timber sales from a tract of land near Elliott Branch, although the FY 18-19 budget does not reflect anticipated revenue from timber sales. The BCDA Board of Directors decided not to raise camping fees for 2019 but did increase the cabin cleaning fee to \$20 for one bedroom cabins and \$25 for two bedrooms. Other fees remaining constant include monthly camping rates of \$20, \$200, \$250, \$300 and \$450 for waterfront sites, \$25 annual permit fee for individuals, \$4 for daily use fee, \$10 for a three-day permit and \$250 for a lifetime permit. For more information on camping sites and activity on the Bear Creek Lakes, log onto www.bearcreeklakes.com.



# 'INTERNET,' from page 1

"We are willing to help anybody," Foshee said. "We will go wherever we are asked to go to show how to do it or to physically do it in that area if we can work out the business arrangement."

This, Morrow believes, is a major step forward from a few years ago when Tombigbee officials were in the process of launching FreedomFiber and did not have the time or resources to take on the project in another utility's service area.

FreedomFiber, a subsidiary of Tombigbee Electric Cooperative, provides high-performance fiber optic internet services across northwest Alabama, including affordable broadband internet at a monthly residential cost of \$49.95 for 100 Mbps.

FreedomFiber is in the process of lighting up the cities of Hamilton, Winfield, Guin, Brilliant and Beaverton with plans to expand into the rest of Marion and Lamar counties, the City of Haleyville and portions of Fayette County over the next few years. FreedomFiber services are available beyond the service area of Tombigbee thanks to a collaborative agreement with Alabama Power that allows their customers to subscribe to FreedomFiber.

Tombigbee officials already have a collaborative agreement with Franklin Electric for use of its poles in order to route the fiber-optic cable north. This arrangement provides for Tombigbee to pay Franklin Electric a usage fee per pole.

Morrow, whose frustration with Franklin Electric officials has been publicly voiced, issued a challenge to the task force he formed if those members are really serious about moving forward in Franklin County.

"My challenge to the task force is, if you really want to succeed in bringing high-speed internet to rural Franklin County residents, control of the Franklin Electric Board has got to be in the hands of individuals who share this same interest, which means at its next annual meeting if members of Franklin Electric really have an interest in pursuing this, they need to organize and get a slate of nominees and elect that slate who will begin a pursuit of this goal," Morrow said.

While Morrow believes high-speed rural broadband must begin with Franklin Electric, in order to financially survive it would have to be offered to subscribers beyond the Franklin Electric Cooperative membership, Foshee said.

"In my judgment, it can not be done in Franklin County without a significant investment of utilities," Foshee said. "Yes, we are willing to sit down with them and say what can be done here and how it can be done. Our role could be anywhere from an advisory role to possibly being physically involved with the project."

"Distributing electricity is complex, and distributing high-speed broadband is complex. It's also capital-intensive. It takes a lot of money. So how do you reduce the cost and do this in a rural area in a cost-effective manner? If you own the poles, you have a significant advantage. The most important aspect is electrical cooperatives are non-profit. If you do rural Franklin County, there's no money in this. The only reason to move forward is to help the community. But you can build it and make it affordable because of that non-profit status."

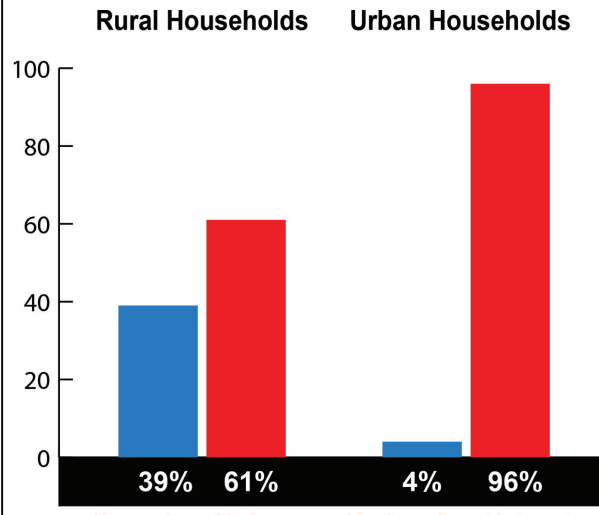
Foshee was careful to state that Tombigbee is not pressing Franklin Electric to move forward with high-speed broadband internet. Rather, he says if and when any Franklin County utility is ready to take the next step, Tombigbee officials will be there to work with them if requested.

While the City of Red Bay is serviced by Franklin

Electric, Russellville and the towns of Phil Campbell, Vina and Hodges are not. Russellville has the Russellville Electric Board, and the other three communities are lit up by Alabama Power.

As a member of Franklin Electric Cooperative, though, Morrow wants answers, and he's not willing to be ignored.

**RURAL ROADBLOCK:** The percentage of urban residents with access to high-speed internet of at least 25Mbps download with 3 Mbps upload is almost 100 percent compared to less than two-thirds of rural American communities, according to information from the Federal Communications Commission.



Homes in red being served by broadband internet.

The rural digital divide in the U.S. Nearly all urban residents have access to true high-speed internet (25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload), while less than two-thirds of rural America have the chance to use the internet at speeds like that.

"As an owner of Franklin Electric Cooperative, I'm not willing to sit back and accept this," Morrow said. "I can step across the Franklin/Marion County line, and here's a company leading the nation, and in Franklin County we're doing nothing. I'm asking the task force to take the lead and change the governing body of Franklin Electric Cooperative so this can be realized."

"When the economic welfare of the entire county is at stake, it's something worth fighting for."

**"Shouldn't rural Alabamians have the same quality of life? How can you have economic development if you don't have a big enough communications system? E-medicine is critical to our future," Foshee said. "How do rural schools compete with big city schools who have all these resources?"**

**"Fiber communication to the home can be a tremendous resource to change that," Foshee continued. "Otherwise, how do we get our young people to stay in rural communities if they can't offer the same quality of life? Our greatest export in Alabama has been our children, and that needs to stop. Once you have broadband, it's up to the community to decide how to use it. But without it, there's zero chance."**

Mark Stockton took over as Franklin Electric General Manager earlier this year. Although Franklin Electric's board of directors was not previously inclined to move forward with broadband internet, Stockton said there was no reason someone or some entity couldn't approach the board and ask it to revisit the issue.

"Any entity that would like to discuss broadband

should provide a request to [me] as General Manager," Stockton said. "The request should include the substance of the presentation, any written materials the requesting party would like the board to review and who will be in attendance."

"Time is limited to ten minutes unless additional time is granted. If the agenda has space, the requesting party will be placed on the next agenda. If there is not space, the requesting party will be placed on the following agenda."

Stockton also said he's willing to discuss broadband internet with anyone who contacts him, and, if requested, he will go to the board with any proposal.

Regardless of which rural areas it serves, high-speed internet allows communities to improve quality-of-life issues like education, to gain access to better health care and to expand economic development, Foshee explained.

"What is the cost for not doing it? What happens to rural Alabama? We are diminishing in rural areas, and these rural counties are dying," Foshee said. "If you can fix it, why not do it? And if we can fix it, what's the plan?"

"If rural Alabama still matters, the 26 dying rural counties, we need it. Does broadband in of itself fix that? No, but it's a big tool in the toolbox."

Katernia Cole-Coffey, chairwoman of the Franklin County Broadband Task Force, shares Foshee's thoughts, and she believes the key to seeing her dream become a reality is to educate and inform those in positions to move forward why it is so important.

"We have to educate them concerning the need for broadband, and that's the major thing," Cole-Coffey said. "If you don't understand the need, this issue doesn't bother you. But if children in our schools need high-speed internet to do homework and these officials know that, it gives you a different perspective."

"So it's our role to inform our officials about the genuine need for this service in Franklin County."

Cole-Coffey addressed the growing need for high-speed internet when completing job applications, receiving virtual health care and applying for grants or governmental services.

"We're losing young people here in Franklin County. When they have to go to a parking lot of a business to get internet service, that's a problem," Cole-Coffey said. "As young people move away, your towns and community essentially die off."

"Our electric cooperatives have to take charge on providing high-speed internet in the county. As the task force, we can't do it by ourselves. It's going to take everybody to be on board. And businesses who can help with broadband, we need them to invest in it. Each entity is needed more so than what they think. As long as we remain divided, we will never get anything done."

Foshee said rural Alabamians, on the average, earn 30-40 percent less than people in cities, yet their cost for groceries are the same.

"Shouldn't rural Alabamians have the same quality of life? How can you have economic development if you don't have a big enough communications system? E-medicine is critical to our future," Foshee said. "How do rural schools compete with big city schools who have all these resources?"

"Fiber communication to the home can be a tremendous resource to change that. Otherwise, how do we get our young people to stay in rural communities if they can't offer the same quality of life? Our greatest export in Alabama has been our children, and that needs to stop. Once you have broadband, it's up to the community to decide how to use it. But without it, there's zero chance."



# REQUESTS FOR BIDS: FRANKLIN COUNTY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY AND RUSSELLVILLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The FRANKLIN COUNTY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (FCIDA) invites sealed bids for the lease of property from any person, business or entity of any nature for the production of HAY ONLY. The property to be leased is identified as approximately 69.25 acres, in two tracts of approximately 10.5 and 58.75 acres, bordering Highway 243. Bidders are cautioned that this is a request for offers, not an offer or request to contract and the FCIDA reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all bids at any time if such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of the FCIDA. ALL BIDS ARE SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- BIDDING:** The bidder shall submit a bid reflecting the proposed total lease amount for the three year term. The individual, business or entity awarded the lease shall pay the lease on an annual basis equal to 1/3 of the total bid. A BID PACKAGE MAY BE OBTAINED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF THE PROBATE JUDGE, FRANKLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Russellville, AL, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. FURTHER, THE PROPOSAL SHALL BE SUBMITTED IN A SEALED ENVELOPE TO EITHER THE OFFICE OF THE PROBATE JUDGE OR THE OFFICE OF THE FRANKLIN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, 16109 Highway 43, Suite C, Russellville, AL, 35653, ON OR BEFORE 12 P.M. ON THE 8TH DAY OF APRIL, 2019. NO BIDS SHALL BE ACCEPTED AFTER 12 P.M. Bids shall be opened at 4:00 p.m. on April 8, 2019, at the Office of the Franklin County Development Authority, the name of the bidder and the total amount of the bid shall be publicly announced. All bids shall be evaluated and awarded based on the qualified bid offering the highest price meeting the requirements set out herein. The FCIDA reserves the right to reject all offers or bids and request one or more of those bidding to submit bids within a competitive range to submit a best and final offer.
- LEASE TERM:** The duration of the lease term shall be three (3) years and a lease agreement shall be executed between the FCIDA and the party whose bid is accepted within five (5) days of the opening and approval of the bid.
- INSURANCE:** The bid shall contain proof in the nature of a copy of the policy or a binder therefor of general public liability equal to or exceeding \$1,000,000.
- INDEMNIFICATION:** The individual, business or entity of any nature awarded the lease based on the bid understands and agrees to indemnify, defend and hold FCIDA, its officers, directors, agents and employees harmless from any and all demands, claims, damages, liabilities or losses of any nature, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or caused by their negligence or willful misconduct.
- CANCELLATION OF LEASE:** THE INDIVIDUAL, BUSINESS OR ENTITY AWARDED THE LEASE UNDER THIS REQUEST FOR BIDS UNDERSTANDS AND AGREES THAT UPON NOTIFICATION BY FCIDA, OR APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATIVE THEREOF, THAT ALL OR A PORTION OF THE PROPERTY HEREIN IDENTIFIED IS NEEDED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BUILDING OR ANY OTHER INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT PURPOSE, THE AGREEMENT WILL BE TERMINATED AND POSSESSION OF THE PROPERTY, WHETHER ALL OR A PORTION THEREOF, SHALL BE IMMEDIATELY RELINQUISHED TO THE FCIDA, GROWING CROPS OR ANY OTHER USE OF THE PROPERTY BY THE BIDDER NOT WITHSTANDING.
- ASSIGNMENT OR SUBLEASE:** The individual, business or other entity awarded the bid shall not be permitted to assign or sublease the property without written consent of the FCIDA.

FRANKLIN COUNTY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The RUSSELLVILLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD (RIDB) invites sealed bids for the lease of property from any person, business or entity of any nature for the production of agricultural products, including hay or grain products. The property to be leased is identified as approximately 49.2 acres, in two tracts of 43.36 acres and 5.84 acres. The property is located between Highway 44 and John Blackwell Drive in Russellville. Bidders are cautioned that this is a request for offers, not an offer or request to contract and the RIDB reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all bids at any time if such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of the RIDB. ALL BIDS ARE SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- BIDDING:** The bidder shall submit a bid reflecting the proposed total lease amount for the three year term. The individual, business or entity awarded the lease shall pay the lease on an annual basis equal to 1/3 of the total bid. A BID PACKAGE MAY BE OBTAINED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF THE PROBATE JUDGE, FRANKLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Russellville, AL, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. FURTHER, THE PROPOSAL SHALL BE SUBMITTED IN A SEALED ENVELOPE TO EITHER THE OFFICE OF THE PROBATE JUDGE OR THE OFFICE OF THE FRANKLIN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, 16109 Highway 43, Suite C, Russellville, AL, 35653, ON OR BEFORE 12 P.M. ON THE 8TH DAY OF APRIL, 2019. NO BIDS SHALL BE ACCEPTED AFTER 12 P.M. Bids shall be opened at 4:00 p.m. on April 8, 2019, at the Office of the Franklin County Development Authority, the name of the bidder and the total amount of the bid shall be publicly announced. All bids shall be evaluated and awarded based on the qualified bid offering the highest price meeting the requirements set out herein. The RIDB reserves the right to reject all offers or bids and request one or more of those bidding to submit bids within a competitive range to submit a best and final offer.
- LEASE TERM:** The duration of the lease term shall be three (3) years and a lease agreement shall be executed between the RIDB and the party whose bid is accepted within five (5) days of the opening and approval of the bid.
- INSURANCE:** The bid shall contain proof in the nature of a copy of the policy or a binder therefor of general public liability equal to or exceeding \$1,000,000.
- INDEMNIFICATION:** The individual, business or entity of any nature awarded the lease based on the bid understands and agrees to indemnify, defend and hold RIDB, its officers, directors, agents and employees harmless from any and all demands, claims, damages, liabilities or losses of any nature, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or caused by their negligence or willful misconduct.
- CANCELLATION OF LEASE:** THE INDIVIDUAL, BUSINESS OR ENTITY AWARDED THE LEASE UNDER THIS REQUEST FOR BIDS UNDERSTANDS AND AGREES THAT UPON NOTIFICATION BY RIDB, OR APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATIVE THEREOF, THAT ALL OR A PORTION OF THE PROPERTY HEREIN IDENTIFIED IS NEEDED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BUILDING OR ANY OTHER INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT PURPOSE, THE AGREEMENT WILL BE TERMINATED AND POSSESSION OF THE PROPERTY, WHETHER ALL OR A PORTION THEREOF, SHALL BE IMMEDIATELY RELINQUISHED TO THE RIDB, GROWING CROPS OR ANY OTHER USE OF THE PROPERTY BY THE BIDDER NOT WITHSTANDING.
- ASSIGNMENT OR SUBLEASE:** The individual, business or other entity awarded the bid shall not be permitted to assign or sublease the property without written consent of the RIDB.

RUSSELLVILLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD





## Groce says selflessness, pride will be key qualities for RHS girls

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Everyone has heard the expression. Nearly everyone has used it at one point or another.

Jermaine Groce lives it. "People use the phrase, 'Bleed Black and Gold,' but I honestly feel that way," said Groce, a 2003 graduate of Russellville High School who was recently named the new head coach for the Lady Golden Tiger varsity basketball team. "I couldn't envision myself working anywhere else at the current time. I don't know what the future holds, of course, but I'm extremely proud to be a Golden Tiger, and I relish the opportunity to try and push on the legacy and the tradition of excellence and to try and turn this program around."

"Being able to come home to the same place that helped raise you and then getting the chance to help mold the minds and hearts of kids for the future...I count it a tremendous obligation, a tremendous blessing to be able to do so. I look forward to the challenge."

See 'GROCE,' Page 18



COURTESY PHOTO

Jermaine Groce, a 2003 graduate of RHS, has been named the school's new head coach for varsity girls basketball.

## Return to Riverwalk



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Former Russellville High School stars and current Auburn University teammates Judd Ward (left) and Cody Greenhill returned to Riverwalk Stadium in Montgomery last week to play for the Tigers in the 11th annual Capital City Classic. At RHS, Ward and Greenhill played in five games apiece at Riverwalk Stadium while helping lead the Golden Tigers to three straight Class 5A state championships. Greenhill, Auburn's closer, didn't pitch in last week's Classic, but Ward started in left field and went 1-for-3 with a walk and a run in a 6-3 loss.

Auburn (22-6 overall, 6-3 in the SEC) bounced back from the loss to Alabama by taking two of three from South Carolina over the weekend. In a 4-2 win by the Tigers in last Friday's series opener, Ward went 2-for-4 with an RBI, and Greenhill struck out one in a scoreless ninth inning to earn the save. Ward had another hit in Game 2, a 4-0 win by South Carolina, and then Greenhill got the final four outs of Game 3 on Sunday to notch his sixth save of the season and close out a series-clinching 7-5 win by Auburn.

Through Sunday, Ward had started all but one of the Tigers' 28 games and was batting .268 with 26 hits (including three doubles, two triples and two home runs), 16 RBIs, 17 runs scored and a .390 OBP. In addition to his six saves, Greenhill had posted a 3.63 ERA and a 1.13 WHIP in 12 appearances, striking out 15 batters and walking only four in 22.1 innings.

## Jackson leads UNA to historic win

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Through the first few tournaments of the spring semester, North Alabama senior golfer Aaron Jackson was fighting his short game a little bit.

And he wasn't winning the fight.

Then, in the days leading up to last week's North Alabama Spring Classic at Turtle Point Yacht and Country Club, Jackson finally began to feel like he was landing a few punches.

"It had been kind of frustrating, because I hadn't

been getting the results I wanted," said Jackson, a 2014 graduate of Russellville High School. "A few days before [the Spring Classic], I definitely figured out my putting and my short game. I was pretty confident in my swing, but I had to make some mechanical adjustments with my putting. After I did that, I was more confident in my short game."

As Jackson played his practice round on Sunday, March 24, the difference—particularly in his putting stroke—was readily apparent.

See 'JACKSON,' Page 15



# Bobcats close in on 20 wins with sweep of Central

Staff reports

Brett Saint pitched six strong innings for Phil Campbell on Saturday, and the Bobcats overcame a slow start at the plate to beat Central-Florence 6-1 for their 14th win in the last 15 games.

Phil Campbell (19-5 through Sunday) had been nine up and nine down through the first three innings and trailed 1-0 before leadoff man Luke Barnwell was hit by a pitch to start the bottom of the fourth. After Central booted Mason Swinney's sacrifice bunt, Nate Owens delivered a two-run single to put the Bobcats on top. Owens later scored on Ty Leindecker's sac fly to make it 3-1.

Phil Campbell took control with a three-run fifth inning highlighted by Rilan Garrison's two-run single. That was more than enough breathing room for Saint (3-2), who held the Wildcats to one earned run on four hits in six innings. He struck out five and did not issue a walk, throwing 51 of his 72 pitches for strikes. Luke Barnwell relieved in the seventh and retired Central in order to finish off the win.

Owens went 2-for-3 with two RBIs and two runs scored, and Garrison was 2-for-3 with two RBIs. Trey Leindecker went 1-for-3 with a run, and Swinney scored twice and drove in a run.

In previous action:

### Phil Campbell 14 Central 3

Mason Swinney struck out seven batters in four innings of work, and the Bobcats broke open a tight game with nine runs in the bottom of the fourth on their way to routing Central in the first game of Saturday's doubleheader.

Trailing 2-0 early, Phil Campbell got an RBI double from Swinney and an RBI single from Motes to pull even in the bottom of the second. Central scored a run in the top of the third, but Rilan Garrison's two-run single in the bottom of the inning gave the Bobcats their first lead. Austen Baker added an RBI single later in the inning to make it 5-3.

Phil Campbell then put the game out of reach with a nine-run fourth inning that started with a double from Trey Leindecker and also included six bases-loaded walks and a sac fly from Nate Owens.

Swinney (1-0) got the win, allowing three runs (none earned) on two hits in four innings. He struck out seven and walked two before giving way to reliever Levi Crittenden, who threw one scoreless inning.

Motes went 2-for-3 with two RBIs, and Garrison was 1-for-3 with three RBIs. Baker went 1-for-1 with two walks, two RBIs and two runs scored. Swinney was 1-for-2 with two RBIs and two runs, and Trey Leindecker went 1-for-3 with two runs.

Luke Barnwell walked twice and scored twice, and Ridge Raper had two walks, an RBI and a run. Owens drove in a run and scored two, and Ty Leindecker added an RBI and a run.

### Phil Campbell 14 Lexington 0

Phil Campbell got three hits apiece from Luke Barnwell, Rilan Garrison and Mason Swinney and another good outing from Ridge Raper last Wednesday morning at the Gulf Coast Classic, cruising to a five-inning rout of Lexington.

The Bobcats took control early with an eight-run first inning highlighted by RBI singles from Swinney and Ty Leindecker and two-run doubles from Trey Leindecker and Barnwell.

That was more than enough offensive support for Raper (4-0 through Sunday). The sophomore right-hander walked the first two batters in the bottom of the first but escaped the jam with the help of a 3-6-1 double play. He settled in thereafter and finished with four strikeouts in three innings of one-hit ball, throwing 26 of his 43 pitches for strikes.

Swinney was dominant in two perfect innings of relief, striking out five of the six batters he faced. He also added another RBI single in the top of the second and later scored on a passed ball, stretching the lead to 10-0. Phil Campbell put up four more runs in the top of the fifth, getting an RBI single from Barnwell and a two-run double from Garrison.

Barnwell finished 3-for-4 with three RBIs and three runs scored. Swinney was 3-for-3 with two RBIs and two runs scored, and Garrison went 3-for-3 with two RBIs. Ty Leindecker was 2-for-3 with an RBI and two runs, and Trey Leindecker was 2-for-3 with two RBIs and a run. Brett Saint went 1-for-2 and scored twice.

### Phil Campbell out-hit Lexington 14-1.

### Hewitt-Trussville 9 Phil Campbell 1

Michael Fowler struck out 14 Phil Campbell batters in 6.1 innings last Tuesday, helping Hewitt-Trussville snap the Bobcats' win streak at 11.

Trussville broke up a scoreless game with three runs in the bottom of the third, and Fowler took care of the rest. He held Phil Campbell to one earned run on three hits, walking just one batter and throwing 66 of his 107 pitches for strikes.

Grant Waid relieved in the seventh and got the final two outs.

Brett Saint took the loss but pitched well for the Bobcats, allowing just three runs (two earned) on six hits in five innings. He struck out five and walked two, throwing 61 of his 94 pitches for strikes. Saint left with his team trailing just 3-1, but Trussville scored six runs in the bottom of the sixth to put the game out of reach.

Mason Swinney went 1-for-2 and drove in Phil Campbell's lone run. Austen Baker was also 1-for-2, and Rilan Garrison went 1-for-3.

### Phil Campbell 9 Morristown West 8

Phil Campbell rallied from a three-run deficit in the bottom of the seventh to force extra innings last Tuesday morning and then scored twice in the bottom of the eighth to walk off with a win over Morristown West in the Gulf Coast Classic.

The late comeback by the Bobcats extended their win streak to 11 games. That streak looked to be in serious jeopardy heading into the bottom of the seventh, with Morristown leading 7-4, but Phil Campbell quickly loaded the bases on a single by Luke Barnwell, a hit batter and a walk to Nate Owens. Rilan Garrison drove in a run with a groundout to short, and then Austen Baker followed with a game-tying two-run single to center.

The Trojans scored a run in the top of the eighth to grab an 8-7 lead, but they left the bases loaded. Brett Saint drew a leadoff walk to start the bottom of the eighth and then moved to second on a passed ball. Barnwell tied the game with an RBI double to left and then scored the winning run on an error.

Levi Crittenden (1-0) picked up the win in relief, allowing one unearned run on one hit in 2.1 innings. Barnwell also pitched in relief, allowing two earned runs on two hits in three innings. Cole Motes started for Phil Campbell and gave up five runs (all unearned) on four hits in 2.2 innings. He struck out three and walked one.

Barnwell went 2-for-4 with an RBI and three runs scored. Raper was 1-for-3 with two runs scored, and Baker was 1-for-2 with two RBIs. Mason Swinney went 1-for-3 with an RBI, and Owens scored twice. Garrison walked twice, drove in a run and scored another.

### Phil Campbell 11 Childersburg 5

Senior Nate Owens homered twice and drove in six runs for the Bobcats in their opening game of the Gulf Coast Classic last Monday.

Phil Campbell jumped all over Childersburg in the top of the first inning, getting a triple from Luke Barnwell, an RBI double from Ridge Raper, an RBI single from Owens and a sac fly from Austen Baker to grab a 3-0 lead. Childersburg answered with two runs in the bottom of the inning, but then Owens smacked his third home run of the season, a three-run shot to center, in the top of the second to make it 6-2.

The Bobcats got RBI singles from Mason Swinney and Cole Motes in the top of the fourth, and then Owens hit a two-run homer in a three-run fifth that stretched the lead to 11-2.

Owens finished 3-for-4 with a walk and also got the job done on the mound, striking out nine batters and walking just two in a complete game. Owens (2-1 through Sunday) gave up five runs (four earned) on eight hits in seven innings, throwing 63 of his 95 pitches for strikes.

Raper went 2-for-4 with two RBIs and three runs scored. Rilan Garrison was 2-for-3, and Baker was 1-for-3 with an RBI and a run. Swinney went 3-for-5 with an RBI, and Trey Leindecker and Brett Saint each scored two runs.

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# 'JACKSON', from page 13

"I played really well on Sunday, especially on that front nine," he said. "My putter was working well. I was making pretty much everything, and that gave me confidence that I could make putts out there."

Jackson rode that restored confidence on and around the green right into history, shooting 69-67-72 to finish with an eight-under par total of 208 and win the tournament's individual medalist honor by six strokes. Jackson became the first UNA golfer to win a tournament at the Division-I level and also helped the Lions capture their first-ever team tournament championship as a D-I program. [They finished the 54-hole event at two-under par 862, eight strokes better than second-place Belmont and 14 ahead of third-place Jacksonville State.]

**"It was kind of shocking to win by as many as I did," said Jackson, who entered last Tuesday's final round with a two-shot lead and then closed with an even-par 72. "I thought it would take another round in the 60's to really close the deal. I figured even par would have me losing by one or in a playoff...The last couple of days, it's been a cool feeling, just to be on the first team [at UNA] to win at the D-One level and the first guy to win a D-One tournament. It's pretty awesome."**

"It was kind of shocking to win by as many as I did," said Jackson, who entered last Tuesday's final round with a two-shot lead and then closed with an even-par 72. "I thought it would take another round in the 60's to really close the deal. I figured even par would have me losing by one or in a playoff."

"The last couple of days, it's been a cool feeling, just to be on the first team [at UNA] to win at the D-One level and the first guy to win a D-One tournament. It's pretty awesome."

For his performance at Turtle Point, Jackson was named the Atlantic Sun Conference Golfer of the Week.

"It didn't even cross my mind that they gave out [the award] weekly," he said. "One of my friends told me, and I was pretty excited about it."

Turtle Point serves as one of the Lions' two home courses [along with Robert Trent Jones], and Jackson plays there twice a week.

"It's one of my favorites," he said. "I'm a big fan of the greens, and the par fives are reachable. We don't play many of those. I've always played it pretty well."

The first two rounds of the Spring Classic were played last Monday, with no break in between, but Jackson said he had no issues with playing 36 holes in one day.

"I've kind of gotten used to [playing 36 holes]," he said. "The good thing on Monday was we got to ride, so it wasn't as bad."

Jackson churned out 10 consecutive pars to open his first round last Monday before starting to make his move on the par-five 11th, which he describes as "gettable." Jackson followed up a strong drive with a second shot to about 20 feet, then sank the eagle putt to go two-under for the round. He added a birdie down the stretch and finished the first 18 with a bogey-free 69.

"I didn't have a bogey that round, which gave me a lot of confidence," Jackson said. "Then that eagle on eleven just got me going for the rest of the day. [The weather] was calm on the first 18. The last nine holes of the second 18, it got kind of windy. But otherwise it was sunny and perfect."

Jackson took advantage of the good conditions in his second round on Monday, firing a five-under par 67 to go eight-under for the tournament and open up a two-shot lead. His second 18 on Monday included seven birdies and two bogeys.

"I wasn't hitting the ball great, but I played it pretty smart," he said. "I didn't try to force anything. I attacked when I had the chance, and I made the putts I hadn't been making. It was just a solid round of golf."

The one shot from his second round that stuck out to Jackson came on his 36th and final hole of the day. His tee shot on the par-four 18th left him 144 yards from the pin—somewhere between a nine-iron and a pitching wedge. Factoring in the wind, Jackson went with the nine and stuck it, knocking it to within three feet and then making the birdie putt to get to eight-under for the day.

The weather for last Tuesday's final round was colder, windier and not ideal for scoring, but Jackson was able to grind out an even-par 72, which turned out to be plenty good enough for him to secure a historic win—one that came largely on the strength of a short game that had been giving him fits through the early stages of the season.

"I hit it pretty bad, honestly," said Jackson, who struggled to find consistency off the tee last week. "My short game saved me on the front nine. I ended up in some weird spots, but I was still able to get up and down a lot. I struggled finding fairways, but it was a little easier to swallow knowing I was putting so well."

In fact, Jackson finished the 54-hole tournament without a single three-putt. "That's probably a first for me," he said with a laugh.

Jackson, who also pitched for the Golden Tiger baseball team during his final golf season at RHS in 2014, is now only a few weeks away from graduating from North Alabama with a degree in marketing. With only three tournaments remaining (including next week's Lipscomb Tournament in Nashville and the ASUN Conference Tournament at Chateau Elan Golf Club outside Atlanta on April 21-23), the end of Jackson's collegiate golfing career is becoming clearer on the horizon.

"It's hard to believe I've only got three more tournaments left," he said, "It's gone by fast."

Even after he graduates and finishes his career at UNA, however, Jackson hopes to have a few rounds left in him.

"It's always been a dream of mine to play professional golf," he said. "If I keep improving, I feel like I'll have a chance. That would be the ultimate goal, to do that."



## Aaron Jackson Senior Golfer, North Alabama

Jackson, a 2014 graduate of Russellville High School, became the first UNA golfer to win an individual tournament title at the Division-I level last week, carding an eight-under par 208 to win the North Alabama Spring Classic by six shots at Turtle Point Yacht and Country Club.

Jackson, now in his fourth and final season at UNA, played 36 holes last Monday, shooting three-under par 69 in the first round and five-under par 67 in the second round. He closed with an even-par 72 on Tuesday, helping UNA wrap up its first-ever D-I tournament title.



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# Allen's one-hitter keeps Tigers unbeaten in area

Staff reports

Chase Allen threw a complete game one-hitter and also drove in four runs for Red Bay on Monday, helping the Tigers remain unbeaten in area play with a 9-0 win at Tharptown.

Cade McKinney had three hits and three RBIs for Red Bay (11-7, 3-0 in Class 2A, Area 14), and Kolby Bragwell went 2-for-2 with two walks and three runs scored. Allen took care of the rest on the mound, striking out six and working around four walks and two hit batters. The only hit the Wildcats (11-6, 1-2) managed off Allen was an infield single in the bottom of the fourth.

The Tigers jumped in front in the top of the first when Bragwell walked with two outs, moved to second on a passed ball, stole third and scored on an infield hit by Allen. After Allen pitched around a couple of walks in the bottom of the inning, Red Bay added another run in the top of the second. McKinney doubled, moved to third on a passed ball and scored on a groundout by Landon Glover to make it 2-0.

The Tigers tacked on another run in the third when Bragwell tripled and scored on a groundout by Allen. Still leading 3-0, they put the game out of reach with a six-run sixth inning highlighted by Allen's two-run single and McKinney's three-run double.

McKinney finished 3-for-3 with two doubles, three RBIs and two runs scored. Allen was 2-for-3 with four RBIs. Peyton Green went 1-for-3 with a run, and Kaleb Sims also had a hit. Kaleb Bragwell and Colbie King both walked and scored a run.

Red Bay was set to go for the series sweep on Tuesday at home.

# Fleming's walk-off single lifts Belgreen to first win

Staff reports

Jacob Fleming's walk-off two-run single in the bottom of the seventh on Monday capped off a late-inning comeback by Belgreen and gave the Bulldogs their first win of the season, 11-10 over Phillips.

Belgreen (1-8, 1-4 in Class 1A, Area 13) trailed 10-5 before taking advantage of two errors, two walks, a single by Kostner Bryant and an RBI groundout by Luke Henson to score three runs in the bottom of the sixth. After Henson finished off his complete-game effort on the mound with a scoreless top of the seventh, the Bulldogs rallied for three more runs in the bottom half.

Jackson Galliano led off with a walk and scored on an RBI double by Koby Collins. After Bryant walked, both runners moved up on a sac bunt by Will King. Fleming followed with a base hit to right, bringing home Collins and Bryant to give Belgreen the win.

Henson pounded the strike zone all game, throwing 74 of his 94 pitches for strikes. He struck out nine and walked just one, allowing 10 runs (only three of which were earned) on nine hits in seven innings.

The Bulldogs finished with just five hits but made the most of six walks and 10 Phillips errors. Fleming was 2-for-5 with two RBIs and two runs scored, and Bryant went 1-for-3 with a walk and three runs scored. Collins also scored three times and went 1-for-4. Canaan Stough was 1-for-4 with a run, and Galliano walked twice and scored.

The two teams were set to conclude the series on Tuesday in Bear Creek.

# James tosses four innings of no-hit ball in rout of Sheffield

Staff reports

Tanner James struck out eight batters in four innings of no-hit ball for Russellville last Wednesday at the Gulf Coast Classic, and the Golden Tigers rode a pair of six-run rallies to an 18-1 rout of Sheffield.

Sheffield's leadoff man reached on an error in the bottom of the first, but that was the only base runner the Bulldogs managed to get against James. The senior right-hander retired the next 12 men he faced, striking out five in a row at one point, before turning things over to reliever Nathan Brockway in the bottom of the fifth.

Cole Barnett finished 2-for-4 with four RBIs. Caden Parker was 2-for-3 with two RBIs and two runs, and Cam Bonn went 2-for-2 with two runs.



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# Homers help RHS girls snap streak with 11-1 rout of Colbert Heights

Staff reports

Autumn Logan, Karlie Moore and Alivia Clemmons all homered for Russellville on Monday, helping the Lady Golden Tigers snap a five-game skid with an 11-1 win at Colbert Heights.

Russellville (10-12) pounded out 12 hits on the day and had three doubles to go along with the three home runs. The onslaught began in the top of the first when Madison Murray singled with two outs and Logan followed with her second homer of the season, a two-run shot to center field to make it 2-0.

Makala O'Neal led off the top of the second with a single, and then Moore smacked her team-leading fourth home run of the year over the fence in left to make it 4-0. Clemmons and A.J. Taylor followed with back-to-back doubles, and then Taylor stole third and scored on a groundout by Tori Tiffin. Logan later added an RBI single to cap off a five-run inning and make it 7-0.

Clemmons added to the lead with a solo homer, her second of the season, in the top of the third. Russellville tacked on two more runs in the fourth and another in the fifth.

That was more than enough offensive support for senior pitcher Megan Warhurst (8-5) who struck out five batters in three perfect innings to earn the win. Warhurst was razor-sharp, throwing 24 of her 30 pitches for strikes. Krista Sikes pitched the final two innings in relief, allowing one unearned run on two hits.

Logan finished 3-for-3 with three RBIs and two runs scored. Clemmons was 2-for-3 with two runs, and Taylor went 2-for-2 with a pair of doubles, an RBI and a run. Moore was 1-for-2 with two RBIs, and O'Neal went 1-for-4 with a run. Katie Skidmore had one hit, and Murray went 1-for-2 with three runs scored. Warhurst was 1-for-2 with a walk.

In previous action:

## Hillcrest-Tuscaloosa 5 Russellville 4

A late rally by Russellville fell short on Saturday in a tournament at Sparkman as the Lady Golden Tigers dropped their fifth straight game.

Russellville led 2-0 before Hillcrest took advantage of three hits and three errors to score five runs in the top of the fourth. The Lady Golden Tigers cut the lead to 5-4 on a two-run single by A.J. Taylor in the bottom of the sixth, but Taylor was stranded at second. Russellville got a two-out hit from Makala O'Neal in the bottom of the seventh but failed to score.

Krista Sikes (2-3) took the loss, allowing five runs (all unearned) on six hits in 3.1 innings. She struck out three and walked one. Megan Warhurst pitched 3.2 innings of scoreless relief, allowing just one hit. She struck out two and walked one.

Taylor was 1-for-3 with two RBIs, and Warhurst went 1-for-4 with a run scored. O'Neal and Karlie Moore also had one hit apiece. Jenna Whitfield and Autumn Logan each walked twice and scored, and Lauren Rogers also scored a run.

In previous action:

## Sparkman 19 Russellville 10

Alivia Clemmons and Karlie Moore both homered for the Lady Golden Tigers on Saturday, but Sparkman scored seven runs in the top of the seventh inning to break open a tight game and win going away.

Russellville trailed 3-0 going into the bottom of the third when Moore walked and Clemmons followed with her first home run of the season, a two-run shot to left to make it 3-2. Sparkman answered with four runs in the top of the fourth, but Clemmons came through with a two-run double in the bottom of the inning to cut the lead to 7-4.

Trailing 9-4 in the bottom of the fifth, the Lady Golden Tigers got an RBI single from Makala O'Neal and then a two-run homer for Moore (her third of the season) to cut the lead to 9-7. Sparkman put up three runs in the top of the sixth and then seven in the seventh to open up a 19-7 lead.

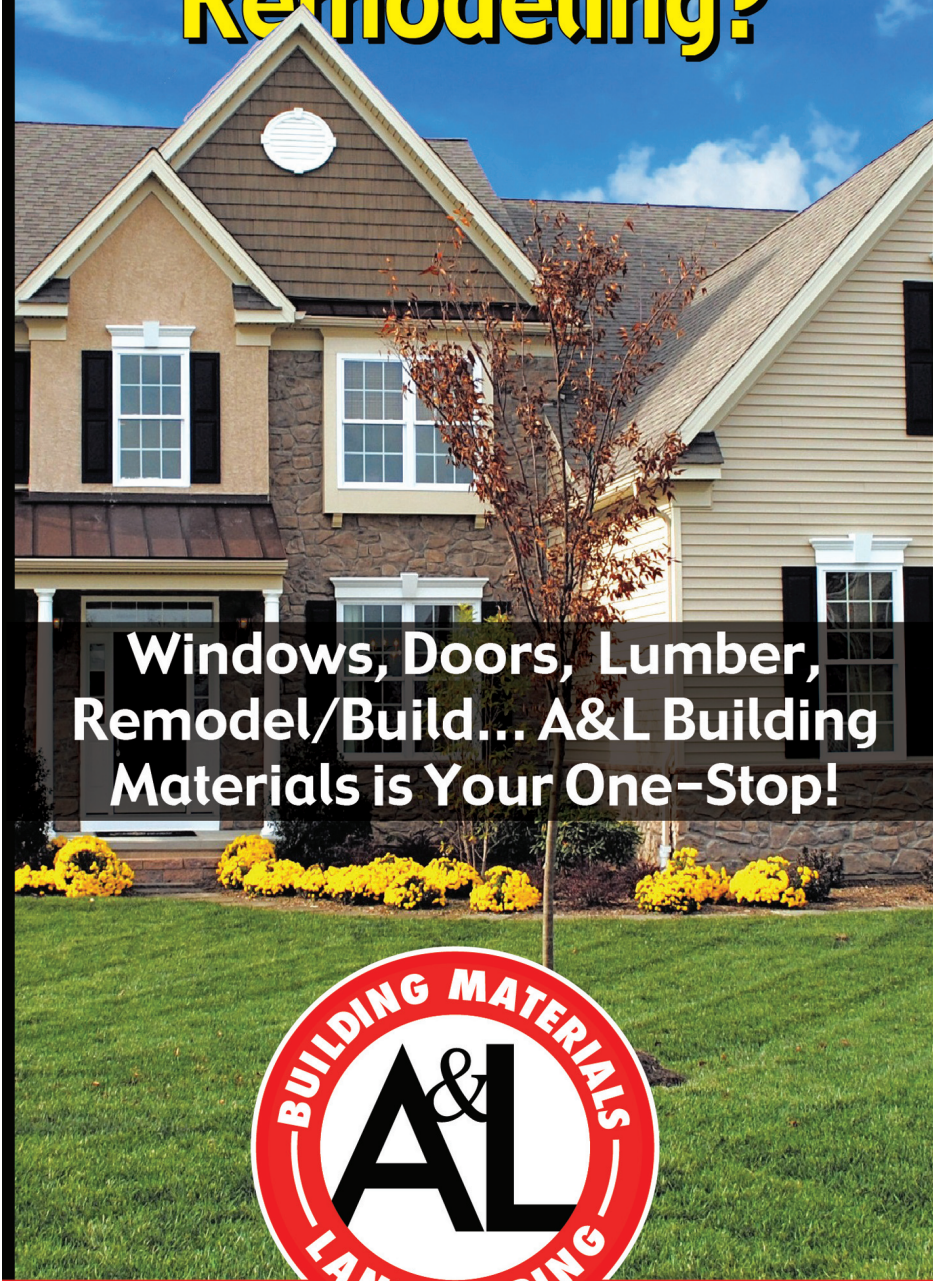
Megan Warhurst took the loss despite striking out seven batters and walking none in four innings. She gave up five earned runs on eight hits.

Clemmons finished 3-for-4 with four RBIs and two runs scored. Moore was 1-for-1 with three walks, three runs and two RBIs. Madison Murray went 2-for-4 and drove in a run, and O'Neal was 1-for-4 with two runs scored. Tori Tiffin was 1-for-3 with a double and an RBI, and Jenna Whitfield went 1-for-5 with an RBI. Warhurst went 1-for-2.

## Danville 11 Russellville 1

Blayne Godfrey went 3-for-4 with two RBIs and also struck out six batters in a complete game, leading Danville to a six-inning rout of Russellville last

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Danville led 3-0 after the first and scored at least once in every inning. Alivia Clemmons went 1-for-2 and drove in Russellville's only run. Tori Tiffin, Jenna Whitfield, Megan Warhurst and Makala O'Neal also had one hit each.

## Ardmore 7 Russellville 1

Brittany Jones struck out 11 batters in a complete game two-hitter last Friday, leading Ardmore past Russellville.

Ardmore scored two runs in the top of the first and two more in the second, opening up an early 4-1 lead. That was plenty for Jones, who walked only one batter and threw 73 of her 104 pitches for strikes.

Autumn Logan went 1-for-2 with an RBI for Russellville, and Jenna Whitfield was 1-for-3 with a run. Chalea Clemmons started in the circle and took the loss. Megan Warhurst pitched six innings in relief, allowing three earned runs on nine hits. She struck out five and walked two.

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# 'GROCE', from page 13

Groce served as an assistant under former girls head coach Corey Thomaston for the past three seasons and has coached several different sports at RHS since first hiring on at his alma mater in 2011. A running back/cornerback in his playing days as a Golden Tiger, Groce coached corners on the varsity football staff this past season, and he also coaches the RMS track and field program while splitting those duties with Tony Buckhalter at the high school level.

Factor in his basketball duties (not to mention the fact that he and his wife Cassy have two sons, 12-year-old Malaki and three-year-old Austin, with a third due in late September), and it goes without saying that Groce is a busy man. He understands, however, that his first head coaching job at the varsity level will necessitate a reshuffling and refocusing of coaching responsibilities. And he welcomes it.

"That's definitely something they brought up in the interview—having to reduce my responsibilities a little bit," said Groce, who will likely transition into a less demanding role within the Golden Tiger football program as a middle school assistant. "But I wouldn't have it any other way. I want to give my all to basketball. I want to make basketball my main priority."

This isn't the first time Groce has had to prioritize with regard to his sporting endeavors. His father, Clifton Groce, served in the U.S. Army, and his mother, Dolly, passed away from a lung disorder when Jermaine was six years old. He and his three siblings lived with their aunt, Rita King, who had two children of her own and—due to the inevitable constraints of time and money—instituted a hard and fast rule for each member of her athletically inclined brood.

"We had to pick two sports, and that was it," Groce said. "I never got into basketball, just because of family rules. All of us brothers and sisters were close in age, and with all of us trying to do multiple sports, it could have put my aunt in a financial bind, I think. I picked football, and track was the other one, because it helped with football."

Groce arrived as a varsity football player right around the time Russellville began its ascension to perennial powerhouse status under then-head coach Perry Swindall. Groce was a senior on the 2002 Golden Tiger team that set a school record for points scored and went 14-1, narrowly losing to Homewood in the Class 5A state championship game.

"I wasn't a great player, but there was so much talent on those teams," Groce said. "I wasn't a standout prospect or anything, but just being a part of that culture of winning and that tradition of excellence in the early 2000's was just awesome."

After graduating from RHS in the spring of 2003, Groce enlisted in the Army and spent 14 months in 2004-05 overseas as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"It was a life-changing experience," Groce said of his military service. "It taught me a lot of discipline and what it takes to work as a team, the sacri-

fices you've gotta make to be successful. Just seeing the selflessness those soldiers displayed on a day-in, day-out basis...

"One character trait I definitely try to overemphasize with our players is being selfless. What can I do for the girl next to me? What can I do for the program?"

At the time, though, Groce didn't exactly envision putting those lessons on discipline, service and sacrifice into practice as a teacher and coach in the world of high school athletics. He enrolled at the University of Alabama in 2005 and began pursuing a degree in finance. Those plans changed, however, during his sophomore year, when he took a job at Riverbend Mental Health Center working in a summer program helping kids who had been diagnosed with ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder).

"Working that summer, I was really able to build a bond with those kids, who had been labeled as 'misunderstood' because of their behavioral problems," Groce said. "It just kind of changed my heart and my soul, and it really developed my passion for wanting to be able to help with the development of kids. I went back to Alabama the following fall and changed my major to education."

"Once I got involved in education, I realized you can make a greater impact on kids by coaching them as well. That's how it kind of came about. It wasn't planned, but I wouldn't take it any other way. Some people have told me that I gave up a sizable amount of money when I made that shift [from finance] to education, but I'm always looking for opportunities to mentor kids and be a role model to them and inspire them to be great."

Groce has been doing that at Russellville for the better part of nine years now—whether on the football field, at the track or in the gym, where he started out back in 2011 as a varsity boys assistant under then-head coach Michael Smith. Groce has undoubtedly paid his dues, and he's ready to tackle the responsibilities that come along with running his own program.

"I'm very excited and happy about the opportunity," he said last week. "I just appreciate Russellville City Schools giving me the opportunity to attack my first coaching gig. I'm extremely blessed."

Having served as head coach of the jayvee girls the past three seasons, Groce is more familiar than anyone with the young players coming up through the program. That, along with the rapport he already has with the current crop of varsity players, puts him in a position to succeed—from a relationship-building standpoint, if nothing else.

"Having an opportunity to work with these girls and watch them grow and build relationships with them while they're young, hopefully we can capitalize on that relationship," Groce said. "We do have a large number of seniors coming back next year, but after that we'll go pretty young. It's definitely an advantage to have worked with them at the junior varsity level, and hopefully that will help with the transition."

Part of that transition, as Groce knows, will be the inevitable change in dynamic that comes along with going from assistant coach to head honcho.

"The majority of my coaching career," he said, "I've been labeled as a 'player's coach.' As an assistant coach, I've kind of been the good cop, and the head coach played the part of the bad cop. Having to lead these ladies now as their head coach, I still want to be myself and have an open-door policy, but I'd be naïve to think that our relationship won't change a little now that things like punishment and enforcement are coming directly through me and I'm not in the role of assistant anymore."

"It'll be a challenging endeavor for some of the girls to get used to as the season starts, but it's nothing we can't work through."

There are, of course, more daunting challenges confronting Groce as he inherits a program that has lost 63 games over a three-year period and went just 4-22 this past season. The Lady Golden Tigers' recent fortunes have undoubtedly been impacted by the decision of some key players to transfer and others to simply not participate in basketball. Groce sees solving that issue as the first—and most critical—step toward getting the program back on track.

Simply put, he wants to restore a pipeline of student-athletes who bleed Black and Gold—just like he does.

"The main priority is to win the hearts and minds of these girls in Russellville and to keep our kids in-house," he said. "I hate to say it like that, but if we can keep our kids here and get these girls to buy in to being a Golden Tiger and what it means to be a Golden Tiger, if we can get them to buy into working hard and putting in the time and the sweat and the hours in the gym that it's gonna take, then success will take care of itself."

"My primary focus is developing relationships with the community and with parents, getting people to buy in to wanting to stay here and develop this program from within. If we can do that, with just our girls, we can be successful. So that's what I'm trying to do—recruit the community, recruit parents and recruit our kids to buy into being Russellville Golden Tigers. That starts all the way down in the youth leagues. We're gonna put more focus on travel

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## 'GROCE,' from page 18

leagues and rec leagues and making sure these kids buy into basketball at an early age."

As for the on-court style of play he prefers, Groce has some very clear ideas about that, too.

"Defensively, we want to bring relentless pressure and make people have to think about what we're doing," he said. "I use the term, 'Exhausting them mentally and physically,' with the amount of pressure and aggressiveness we put on the ball and by the different sets and defensive formations we throw at people.

"The goal is to let our defense translate into offense and easy buckets in transition. Offensively, we'll try to run a smooth, high-paced offense that focuses on motion, movement, cutting and trying to keep the ball moving. We want to wear the defense out."

Groce has a unique task in front of him. On the one hand, based strictly on recent win-loss record, the program needs a rebuild; on the other hand, the top five scorers on last year's team—including guard Madison Murray, who led the way with 11.1 points per game—were all juniors. That should make Groce's first season as head coach an interesting one.

"Next year is extremely important," he said. "These girls, this group of seniors, they have played for us for a long time, and we would like to send them out on a winning note, just because of the time, energy and effort they've put in to Russellville basketball. As far as goals, I wouldn't go so far as to say I have any particular goals in mind when it comes to the win-loss column. My goal is to convince these girls to give everything they've got every game, and for us to do all the work we can possibly put in before fall camp starts in October. Hopefully that will translate into wins. That's enough to do it.

**"Our goal is to work and commit ourselves to being selfless. That's gonna make up our whole team identity—what are you willing to do for the sake of the team? What are you willing to give up? How much time are you willing to put in for this team to be successful?"**

"Every time we approach the season, a championship is always the ultimate goal. But if we don't win the area, if we don't make it to Wallace, I wouldn't necessarily count it as a failure. Our goal is to work and commit ourselves to being selfless.

That's gonna make up our whole team identity—what are you willing to do for the sake of the team? What are you willing to give up? How much time are you willing to put in for this team to be successful?"

Technically speaking, Groce's debut as a head coach is already behind him. With Thomaston home sick for an area game against Lawrence County two seasons ago on January 11, 2018, Groce ran the show on the bench and guided Russellville to a 65-32 rout of the Lady Red Devils.

For now, as a varsity head coach, he's undefeated.

"It was kind of a last-second thing," Groce said. "Coach called and said, 'I can't make it.' He had been fighting all day to try and get well, and then at the last second he told me, 'You've got the keys to the truck.' It was exciting—your first opportunity to get out there, and everything goes through you. I had fun with it. We played relaxed, because in the moment, knowing your head coach isn't there, you just take on the mindset of, 'We're gonna give everything we've got for Coach.'

"I appreciated the opportunity. Hopefully we can replicate that over and over and over."



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