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Merrill enters Senate race

Secretary of state becomes an immediate frontrunner

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to selecting the Republican nominee to challenge Sen. Doug Jones (D-Birmingham) in next year's general election, John Merrill believes his party needs a candidate with certain qualities necessary to win. As Merrill looked at the field of declared candidates and spoke with Republicans across Alabama, he decided the existing slate of candidates lacked those necessary qualities.

"The bottom line was a lack of candidates that excited or brought a level of enthusiasm to the position that made people want to support them," Merrill said. "I didn't have an overwhelming sense from anybody that folks were really enthusiastic about supporting any of the candidates who had announced or anyone else whose name was mentioned."

So Merrill announced Tuesday his candidacy for U.S. Senate at a press conference in Montgomery. Merrill immediately becomes a frontrunner, as a recent poll from the Moore Information Group had Alabama's secretary of state in second place, two weeks before he officially entered the race.

See 'MERRILL,' Page 8



John Merrill

Chamber, UNA partner to CREATE opportunities for arts ed students

By John Pilati

A new partnership between the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and the University of North Alabama will provide scholarship opportunities for Franklin County students interested in pursuing arts education.

CREATE (Community Reaching Every Artist Through Education) will provide annual scholarships up to \$1,500 for Russellville City Schools and Franklin County Schools students who continue their education at either Northwest-Shoals Community College or the University of North Alabama. CREATE's organizers held a reception June 21 at the Roxy Theater to introduce the program to the community.

UNA School of the Arts executive director Terrance Brown said the goal of CREATE is to award \$25,000 in

scholarship funds annually to students participating in an artistic discipline.

Students will submit funding proposals to subsidize costly items including books, room and board and other general items associated with their educations.

"We are excited to forge a partnership between the University of North Alabama School of the Arts and Franklin County, with the assistance of Cassie Medley," Brown said. "No matter what discipline you choose, creativity will always be at the forefront for that profession. These scholarships can be a tool to empower students of the arts to become graduates of the arts."

Friends of CREATE will pledge annual amounts for five years, or may make one-time contributions, to help CREATE reach its fundraising goal.

See 'CREATE,' Page 11

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Robert Dwayne Harp, Spruce Pine, age 50
Died Wednesday, June 19, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville.

Leonardo Mojica Jaramillo, Russellville, age 78
Died Monday, June 17, 2019. Funeral mass held at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Russellville. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Roger Otho Taylor, Phil Campbell, age 95
Died Wednesday, June 12, 2019. Funeral held at Akins Funeral Home Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Douglas Wayne "Pinto" Turbyfill, Phil Campbell, age 63
Died Monday, June 17, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery.



We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at franklinfreepress.net!



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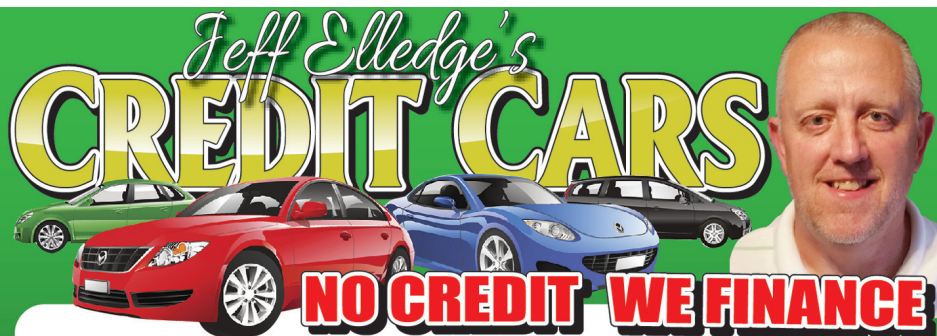
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Wrongful death suit filed in fatal ATV accident

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The mother of two children who died in an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) accident last year has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the woman with whom the children were placed in foster care.

Emily McCalpin, the mother of eight-year-old Roman Hartline and four-year-old Haven Hartline, filed the action in Franklin County Circuit Court on December 5, 2018, against Carol Davis, who was allegedly operating the ATV on August 25, 2018.

The complaint was filed by Tuscumbia attorney Grant Wright and alleges two counts against Davis, negligence wrongful death and wantonness wrongful death.

According to the complaint, Davis was operating the ATV with the two foster children aboard as

additional riders. The complaint alleges none of the riders wore helmets.

The fatal accident took place on Mill Creek Road off of Highway 19 near Vina. According to the complaint, Davis said while operating the ATV, she swerved to avoid a deer on the roadway. As a result, the ATV overturned and the occupants were thrown from the vehicle, the complaint alleges.

Both children were pronounced dead at the scene after the ATV overturned on them, according to McCalpin's complaint.

Although McCalpin did not have legal custody of her children at the time of the accident, she maintains that Davis "negligently allowed the minor children to be passengers on the single-seat ATV, an activity strictly prohibited by the manufacturer's warnings, by negligently failing to equip and fur-

nish the minor children with helmets, by negligently operating the ATV on a roadway in violation of law, and warnings of the manufacturer, and by negligently operating the ATV in such a manner as to lose control of the vehicle." (McCalpin complaint, Count One, par. 12).

Additionally, McCalpin alleges Davis's conduct was wanton, meaning it was either intentional or showed no care about bad things that might result, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary.

The lawsuit requests punitive damages against Davis in an amount to be determined by a jury.

Davis, who has denied the allegations of negligence and/or wantonness, is represented by attorney Brandy Lee of Jasper.

The case is expected to be set for trial some time in 2020, according to a source familiar with the lawsuit.

Seven local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Seven of the eight Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of June 10-14 had scores that fall into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

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

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

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation

and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage; and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

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

The highest score was 100, received by Wal-Mart #403 Deli, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville. Campbell's Texaco, 3075 Hwy. 237 in Phil Campbell, received an unsatisfactory score of 82. Violations included no backflow prevention on spray nozzle, no dates on beans or cole slaw and no proof of foodhandlers' employee reporting agreement.

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

•N&F No. 2, Inc., 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 90. (Burgers being held at 108-114 degrees).

•Elliott Branch Camp Store, 325 Elliott Branch Road, Russellville, 92. (No food probe thermometer).

•Papa John's Pizza, 14520 Hwy. 43, Ste. 1, Russellville, 92. (Date marking violations for chicken poppers and cut/diced tomatoes, no proof of foodhandlers' employee reporting agreement).

•Monchi's, 121 N. Washington Ave., Russellville, 96. (No chemical test papers available).

•Wal-Mart #403 Bakery, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.

•Wal-Mart #403 Market, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.

Of the 21 inspections done in Colbert County from June 10-14, all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory.

The high score of 100 went to Publix Dairy, 3220 Woodward Ave., Muscle Shoals.

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

Keller Festival features star-studded music lineup

Submitted to the FFP

Fletch Brown, entertainment coordinator for the Helen Keller Festival, doesn't mince words when it comes to describing this year's music lineup.

"This year's entertainment...it's pretty rocking," Brown said.

The festival is set for this Thursday-Sunday, June 27-30, in Tuscumbia.

A star-studded lineup of entertainers, including country music legend Tanya Tucker, are headed to this year's Helen Keller Festival, Brown said. The festival features daily concerts at Spring Park in Tuscumbia.

Tucker, whose hits include "Delta Dawn", "What's Your Mama's Name?", "Blood Red and Goin' Down," and "Strong Enough to Bend" will headline the entertainment on Saturday, June 29.

"She's bringing country back to the Helen Keller Festival," Brown said.

Tucker's concert at 8:30 p.m. will follow performances by Katlyn Barnes at 5 p.m., Outlaw Apostles at 6 p.m. and Joseph Baldwin at 7:15 p.m.

Admission is \$5 for the Thursday, Friday and Saturday night concerts and free on Sunday.

Brown said the Tuscumbia concert comes as Tucker is preparing to release *While I'm Living*,

her first new album in 17 years. The album is scheduled to be released August 23.

Mixtape, a nationally famous '80s tribute band, will headline the entertainment on Friday, June 28. Also performing on Friday are Electric Zen at 6 p.m. and CC Jags at 7 p.m. Mixtape's concert begins at 8:30 p.m.

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"She's bringing country back to the Helen Keller Festival," Brown said.

Christian music star Jason Crabb will close out the entertainment for this year's festival with a concert at 7 p.m. Sunday, June 30.

The festival kicks off on Thursday, June 27 with a parade down Main Street in Tuscumbia that begins at 6 p.m. Dr. Kenji Hamada of Oregon is this year's grand marshal. A concert by The Velcro

Pygmies will follow the parade at 7 p.m. in Spring Park.

"The Miracle Worker" play will be performed on Friday and Saturday nights at Ivy Green, the Home of Helen Keller. Gates open at 6:30 p.m., and the play gets underway at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 for reserved seats and \$10 for general admission. Purchase tickets at Ivy Green or by calling 256-383-4066.

In addition to the entertainment, the festival will feature several activities for children, including "Kids on Commons" from 5-7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 25 on The Commons in front of Ivy Green and "Keller Kids" from 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 27 at the Tuscumbia Multi-Purpose Center.

A marketplace featuring more than 70 vendors will be at Spring Park throughout the festival.

Tuscumbia mayor Kerry Underwood said people from around the world will make their way to the Shoals to attend the festival.

"We will have guests from all over," Underwood said.

More details about the festival are available by downloading the Helen Keller Festival app for Apple or Android devices or by calling 256-383-0783.

Honey Do List: Lawn care

The word for today is “photosynthesis.” Simply put, this is the biological process by which your grass digests its food and stays healthy and green.

Just like us, it is unhealthy for grass to over-eat or over-drink. If the lawn is fertilized or watered too much (or too little), brown spots, bare spots and unwanted weeds are bound to develop.

So, here are some thoughts on watering the lawn and achieving that healthy, lush grass we all enjoy.

Water early in the morning. This allows the grass to utilize the water before the hot sun and wind arrive to evaporate it. Lawns that are watered at night retain too much water, and insects and disease will quickly move in. Most lawns need about one inch of water per week. This can come from rain or a sprinkler. A rain gauge situated in the corner of the yard is a good way to track the volume of water.

Save money by collecting rain water. Invest in a rain barrel system and catch water that comes off the roof through the gutter. I think that natural rain water is better for gardens and lawns than city water, which is treated with chemicals.

Some folks are fortunate to have a

creek or pond close by that they can pump water from. If you use an automatic sprinkler system, be aware of weather forecasts and turn it off if rain is expected.

Aerate your lawn once a year. This allows water to get to the roots easier and keeps more water in the yard by reducing run-off. Spike aerators can be towed by a lawnmower or pushed by hand.

Water is great for your lawn, but it should eat as well as drink. Feed it with fertilizer, lime, weed killer and pest control, as needed. For best results, know your grass and soil. There is a ton of information on soil at www.aces.edu, sponsored by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama A&M University and Auburn University.

Maintain the health of your lawn by keeping it cut at the proper height. Grass cut too short can turn brown, while unattended lawns will fall prey to disease and insects.

A healthy lawn is good for the environment, animal life, your family and your home. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green



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My take Some scars tell stories on this... of survival & freedom

I had a conversation recently that got my thought process into motion. It's not even the first time this particular conversation has ever come up. I could even be a spokesperson or even a "poster woman" for this topic of discussion.

We can hear something over and over, and a certain word makes you see another side to it or places emphasis on what you already know. Well, that's exactly what happened to me!

Most of us have scars from our childhood. It could be bicycle wrecks or jumping from the barn loft or climbing trees and either a limb breaks or you tumble to the ground. [No, I'm sorry, that's the kind of childhood I had when we always played outdoors.]

The electronic years and central heat and air have resulted in fewer scars, I guess. After all, most kids don't even know about outside activities. I personally am thankful for the type of upbringing I had. We were one with nature, you could say.

Anyway, there is another type of scar: Surgery scars. That happened to be the subject being discussed that has brought about today's article.

We were talking about the hip replacement surgery that I'll be having. Two years ago, I'd had the same surgery, but on a different hip. I told her it was a good thing I only had two hips.

Then she looked at me with a concerned look and simply said, "Gail, I'm such a vain person. I'm so vain! I have no scars, and I might need a hip replacement surgery myself, and I'm so concerned about the scar it would leave."

I listened, and I could almost feel the sadness

and ache of her heart. I had never thought of her being a vain person. Needless to say, I was shocked at her words.

I don't personally think my scars have any advantages of helping me become Miss America, but I've never thought of being one anyway. Now my mother always told me that daddy would say I'd be Miss America someday, so that's close enough for me.

I do have a different perspective on scars now than when I was younger, but I never was even close to being as sad as she was.

My breast cancer scar is my "survival scar." Without it, I wouldn't be writing this article or enjoying the gift of life. My port scar allowed me to be connected to an IV to receive the poison (chemo) that killed my cancer cells and prevented me from being pricked at every treatment. I also refer to that as a "survival scar."

My hip replacement scar is the longest, deepest and ugliest, if you want to look at it that way. I prefer to call it my "freedom scar." Because of it, I can walk normally and without pain.

As silly as it might sound, I am looking forward to my next hip replacement surgery. Do I like my surgical scars? No, I don't! I do accept them, though, because they have improved my lifestyle and saved my life.

Hopefully my friend won't need a hip replacement surgery. Better yet, I hope she can live her life with no surgeries at all. As for me, I'm blessed! God continues giving me one more day!



Gail Motes



DAVE SAYS

Financial Straight-Talk

www.davesays.org

by Dave Ramsey

Helping is often more than just giving

Dear Dave,
My husband and I met a young woman through an outreach program at church. She is a single mother with a small child, and recently she asked us for money so she could buy baby food and diapers. This isn't the first time she has asked us for money. In the past, she has used money we've given her to buy alcohol for herself after telling us it was going to be used for the baby. She truly does need financial help, though. Can you give us some advice on handling this situation?

Angela

Dear Angela,
Financially speaking, her problem sounds as much like a mismanagement of money as it is a lack of money. That, and she seems to have an issue with lying. If you're determined to help this woman, you can put conditions on your help designed to improve her decision-making abilities and her life.

If someone is bold enough to ask for your money, you have every right to attach requirements to the money for their own good. One of two things will happen if you handle it this way. She'll either graciously accept your conditions and welcome

the help, or she'll get angry and say you have no right interfering in her business. I've never had a problem helping people who have good hearts and just need a break. But if someone cops an attitude with me in a situation like this, I wouldn't be breaking out my wallet anytime soon.

If you choose to do this, make the money a gift and not a loan. Concentrate on trying to get her on a path where she's a little more honest with you and thinks a little straighter. Hopefully, as a result she will start making better choices.

Teach her how to create and live off a budget, or help her enroll in a personal finance course, too. Right now, just handing her money is like giving a drunk a drink.

This whole situation is a lot bigger than helping someone with baby food and diapers. The answer to that is easy. In this case, however, I'd probably give it to her in the form of a gift card. Some of those don't allow alcohol purchases. You could avoid that possibility, too, by getting things for the baby yourself and taking them to her.

In many cases, truly helping someone is a lot more work than just throwing money at them. Sometimes, you have to get down in their mess, get real with them and walk with them.

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 16 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

City council authorizes sale of surplus vehicles

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council authorized the sale of five surplus vehicles in the Russellville Police Department inventory at the council's June 17 meeting.

The council approved the sale of the vehicles through a sealed bid process after notice of the sale and bids is made by publication.

Additionally, the council authorized advertisement to solicit job applications for the position of patrol officer in the Russellville Police Department. Chief Chris Hargett said the department is looking for candidates who are already law enforcement certified.

In other action at the short meeting, the council:

- Approved the contracts with Shenandoah, Sweet Tree Productions and other artists as part of the annual Jam on Sloss Lake July 4 Celebration.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be Monday, July 1, with work session at 6 p.m. and meeting to follow.

For news updates throughout the week, don't forget to check us out on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net!

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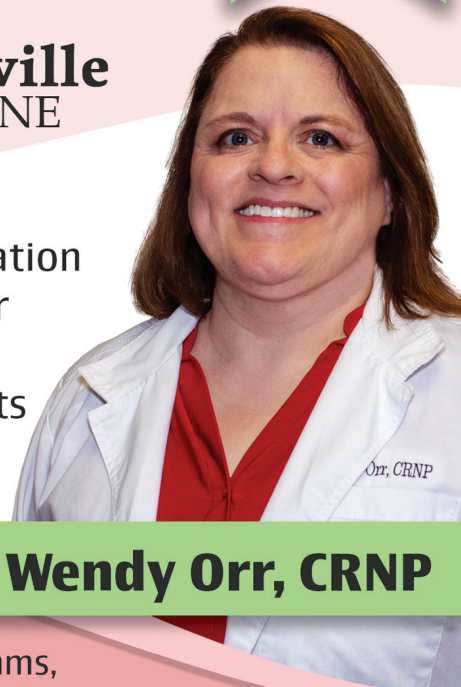
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What's Happening


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


 Mt. Moriah Baptist Church (6350 Coburn Mountain Road, Tuscumbia, AL 35674) will have Vacation Bible School for children ages three years old through sixth grade this Friday, June 28 from 6-8:30 p.m. and Saturday, June 29 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. VBS theme is "In The Wild." Come join us to have fun adventures discovering encounters with Jesus!


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


 Spruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Spruce Pine Community Center in Spruce Pine. Next meeting will be July 2. All members and friends are urged to attend.


 Dear Reedtown School Alumni and Friends: We hope you are having a blessed year so far. The time is fast approaching for our bi-annual Reedtown Round-Up fundraiser. This year's fundraiser will be held July 3-7. We are busy planning details for the event. This year's itinerary will be as follows: Wednesday, July 3 - Meet & Greet at the Back to Basics Life Skilled Center (old Reedtown School) from 4:30-6:30 p.m.; Thursday, July 4 - Free Family Day (celebrate with your family); Friday, July 5 - Talent Show at the Chucky Mullins Center from 7-9 p.m.; Saturday, July 6 - Reedtown Round-Up Banquet held at the Chucky Mullins Center from 6-9 p.m.; Sunday, July 7 - Reedtown Round-Up parade at 3 p.m. (If you are interested in putting a float or decorated vehicle in the parade, please contact the committee.) For more information on this year's event, please call Mr. Joe Graham at 256-668-2228, Mrs. Beverly Harvey at 256-332-5601 or Ms. Ella West at 256-332-7721.


 The Harris/Trapp Family Reunion will take place Saturday, July 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the East Franklin Community Center. Family and friends of Lena and Andy Harris are welcome! Bring a covered dish, desserts or drinks. For more information, call Diane Hulsey at 205-485-4616 or Cathy Harris at 205-486-4387.


 American Legion Post 64 will meet Thursday, July 11 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner served at 6:30 p.m.


 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Steve Price at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, July 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. The KGB will be the featured act at a show sponsored by the Franklin County Arts Council at the Roxy on the second Saturday of each month. Proceeds will benefit the renovation and restoration of the historic Roxy Theater.

 Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish* will be discussed at the July 17 10 a.m. meeting of the Readers of the Lost Ark Book Club. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 105 West Sixth Street, Tuscumbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com.

 The Franklin County Watermelon Pageant will be held on Saturday, July 20 at the Russellville City Schools Auditorium. For an application or more information, visit www.franklincounty-chamber.org or call 256-332-1760. The deadline for entries is June 28.

 The Russellville Golden Tiger football program will host a Youth Camp and Ladies Football Clinic on Monday, July 22 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. The youth camp is for kids in grades K-8, and ladies age 15 and up are invited to be a part of "Ladies Night Out," where they will have the opportunity to learn football facts and phrases, get an idea of the daily routines of Golden Tiger players and coaches, take part in a Q&A session with coaches and participate in light drills with the youth campers. Dinner will be provided, and prizes will be given away. Go online to goldentigers.net for more information.

 Attention all young ladies of Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale counties entering 10th, 11th and 12th grades in the Fall of 2019!!! The Distinguished Young Women Scholarship Program will be held Saturday, August 3, 2019 at Norton Auditorium on the campus of The University of North Alabama. Young ladies entering the 12th grade will have the opportunity to compete for cash scholarships as well as many other scholarships to colleges and universities. Also, each county winner will have the opportunity to represent her county at the state program in Montgomery in January of 2020. Young ladies entering the 10th and 11th grades have the opportunity to be "DYW Little Sisters." For more information, please contact Susan Hargett at 256-710-9239 or Katerina Cole-Coffey at 256-332-8880, or check information on our Facebook page at Distinguished Young Women of Northwest Alabama, or email dshargett@aol.com. Other information and sign up is available at www.DistinguishedYW.org.

 The NACOLG SenioRx Medication Assistance Program supplies free and low-cost medications for anyone in Alabama with a disability or a chronic illness, regardless of age, that requires daily medication. Medicare recipients may also be eligible. For more information, contact NACOLG SenioRx today. There is no charge for this service. Call 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463) or 256-389-0529 and ask for Paula Pardue. This program is in partnership with the state of Alabama and Alabama Department of Senior Services.

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Thursday, July 4th

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8:00 a.m.

Buford Parker

9:00 a.m.

Jacob Green

10:00 a.m.

Joseph Baldwin

11:00 a.m.

Travis Wammack

12:00 p.m.

Southbound

Evening Line Up

4:00 p.m.

Purpose

4:50 p.m.

Kerry Gilbert Band

5:50 p.m.

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'MERRILL,' from page 1

Republicans are particularly interested in regaining control of the Senate seat that saw Jones defeat Roy Moore in 2018 to gain an unlikely seat for Democrats.

While Merrill has considered other races, including Alabama governor in 2018, he waited until he felt the time was right to seek higher office.

"The bottom line was a lack of candidates that excited or brought a level of enthusiasm to the position that made people want to support them," Merrill said. "I didn't have an overwhelming sense from anybody that folks were really enthusiastic about supporting any of the candidates who had announced or anyone else whose name was mentioned."

Other declared candidates include former Auburn coach Tommy Tuberville, Moore, Rep. Bradley Byrne and Haleyville businessman Stanley Adair.

Merrill said he began receiving campaign contributions earlier this year, which he did not open. Rather, he forwarded them to his accountant and once the \$5,000 threshold was reached, Merrill created a Federal Elections Commission account pursuant to federal campaign law.

Merrill, whose wife Cindy is a Phil Campbell native, said he believes public perception of the Republican nominee will play an important role in the outcome of next year's Senate election.

"The person we nominate to take on Doug Jones has to be viewed by the general electorate and potential contributors and supporters of the Republican Party as someone who can win, is a winner, and will beat Doug Jones," Merrill said. "The candidate must also be viewed as a supporter of President Trump and be a proven conservative performer, and none of the candidates who have announced meet all those standards."

"I do meet all those. For me, there was no question about whether I need to get into the race once I realized the financial support would be there to

advance the candidacy."

Merrill will continue his full-time duties as Alabama's 53rd secretary of state, and he will not utilize his state vehicle on a regular basis going forward, because while he's traveling during the next year some of that time will be spent discussing his campaign.

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"The candidate must also be viewed as a supporter of President Trump and be a proven conservative performer, and none of the candidates who have announced meet all those standards. I do meet all those. For me, there was no question about whether I need to get into the race once I realized the financial support would be there to advance the candidacy."

"We will continue to provide excellent service from our office as we've provided the last four years and five months I've been serving as secretary of state," Merrill said.

Merrill recently received the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition's Leading Globally Matters Locally Award. Merrill was honored for his efforts to support United States diplomacy and development programs that strengthen Alabama's economy while helping to keep America safe.

"I was certainly honored to be selected by the U.S. Leadership Coalition for that designation," Merrill said. "The award recognized our service to our state because of our international investment

and our efforts to ensure all Alabamians who wish to invest internationally may do so unimpededly.

"We don't want red tape in the way when they try to expand their markets."

During his tenure as secretary of state, Merrill has removed a waiting time of seven to nine months for business filings and turned those into same-day business filings. He credited Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore and his office for holding the record in Alabama for completing paperwork in the shortest amount of time from any probate judge's office.

He believes the changes made to Alabama's election process as well as the interaction between the secretary of state's office and the people of Alabama demonstrate the sense of service he will take to Washington, D.C. as Alabama's next senator.

As senator, Merrill said he will focus on representing rural Alabamians, a group he believes too many politicians have neglected.

"The person who holds this senate seat must have a keen understanding, knowledge and desire to serve the people in rural parts of our state," Merrill said. "Alabama is a rural state. The person who is there now, Doug Jones, has no understanding of what it means to be a resident of that part of our state."

"Of all the people who have indicated an interest in this seat at this time, nobody is qualified to do that other than me. I'm from a rural part of Alabama [Heflin]. My wife is from Phil Campbell, a rural community. We raised our family in an unincorporated part of Tuscaloosa County. People in rural parts of our state don't need to feel intimidated or like second-class citizens who are not as valued as those from Birmingham, Montgomery, Huntsville or Mobile."

For more information on Merrill's United States Senate campaign, or to speak with Merrill directly, call 334-328-2787.

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Dad-deprived homes reaching crisis levels

By J. Pepper Bryars
Alabama Policy Institute

Fathers Day has come and gone, and sadly so too has the concept of fatherhood in many parts of Alabama.

Nearly half of all babies born here are to unmarried women, according to the latest information from the Alabama Department of Public Health.

This is a crisis. It is a crisis that researchers have shown significantly contributes to nearly every challenge facing our state – education, health, addiction, crime and economic mobility, to name just a few.

While dad-deprived homes cause problems for both sexes, it has a particularly damaging impact on young men.

“The boy crisis resides where dads do not reside,” said Warren Farrell, author of “The Boy Crisis” during a recent episode of the 1819 podcast.

While single mothers are making heroic efforts in Alabama, Ferrell said that young men growing up without a father in the house face enormous odds. Boys in this situation, he said, stand a greater chance than their female counterparts of doing poorly in school, being overweight, being both the bully and the bullied, of going to prison, and becoming addicted to drugs, pornography and video games.

A father’s natural way of parenting, Ferrell explained, adds something that boys critically need and do very poorly without.

“While boys who are motivated can become many of society’s most constructive forces ... boys whose energies are poorly channeled can become society’s most destructive forces,” he wrote.

The research indicates this is a slow-moving train wreck that doesn’t show any signs of stopping. In 2005, the Alabama Department of Public Health found that a little more than 35 percent of babies were born to unmarried mothers. By 2017, and despite a statewide initiative and many programs aimed at improving fatherhood across the state, that number had skyrocketed to more than 47 percent.

The research cited in Farrell’s book is alarming:

•“Children who were born poor and raised by both married parents had an 80 percent chance of moving to the middle class or above; conversely, children who were born into the middle class and raised without a married dad were almost four times as likely to end up considerably poorer.”

•“A study of boys from similar backgrounds revealed that by the third grade, the boys whose fathers were present scored higher on every achievement test and received higher grades.”

•“71 percent of high school dropouts have minimal or no father involvement. Around 90 percent of runaway/homeless youths are from fatherless homes.”

•“Every one-percent increase in fatherlessness in a neighborhood predicts a three-percent increase in adolescent violence.”

Farrell offered many partial solutions, from increasing recess time during school to recruiting more male teachers to educate people about the uniquely helpful aspects of dad-focused parenting. But to solve this problem, we must first identify and agree that it’s indeed a problem and one worth marshaling our collective resources to solve. Yet it doesn’t appear to be on anyone’s radar. It doesn’t show up on the latest survey by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama detailing what issues are most important to our state’s citizens. Not to conservatives. Not to liberals. Not to men or women. Not even to those who the report highlights as “experts” in public policy.

I don’t recall it being a noticeable talking point during any recent political campaign either.

Yet on every one of the report’s lists, and in many recent campaigns, were issues that are symptoms of fatherlessness—poor education, crime, poverty, substance abuse. The correlations go on and on.

To be fair, there are many fathers performing admirably in Alabama. I see such examples every day. We should be thankful for them and use their work to build a foundation upon.

But we must face the fact that we’re not doing too well in this regard as a state, as a society.

And not until we confront this problem as a society—liberals and conservatives, through government and private-sector efforts—will we be able to reverse this trend.

J. Pepper Bryars is a senior fellow at the Alabama Policy Institute and host of the 1819 podcast. Follow him on Twitter at @jpepperbryars. API is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to strengthening free enterprise, defending limited government, and championing strong families. If you would like to speak with the author, please e-mail communications@alabamapolicy.org or call (205) 870-9900.

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Multi-Family Yard Sale. Thurs/Fri/Sat, June 27, 28, 29. 8 a.m.-1 p.m. 411 Norton Ave, Russellville. Baby clothing, baby furniture, and MUCH more!

Close-out yard sale on Hwy. 43 North next to Calvary Baptist Church this Friday and Saturday, June 28-29 from 8 am-2 pm. Antique furniture, clothes (children and adult's), so much more. Too much to mention!

Down-sizing Yard Sale this Friday & Saturday, June 28-29 from 7:30 am-until. Antique glassware, antique

items, purses, tools, baby stroller, swing & walker, fishing items, pressure washer, clothes, jewelry, pictures, hardware items, misc. From 43 - Hwy. 24 East 3.5 miles to Hwy. 77, turn right, house on right. Behind Backwoods Bargains.

Six Family Yard Sale. Fri./Sat. June 28/29. 7 a.m.-until. 406 N. Hall St., Russellville. Lots of clothing, shoes and a little bit of EVERYTHING!

Yard Sale this Saturday, June 29 from 7 am-noon at 280 Skyline Drive, Russellville. (Hester Heights Subdivision.) Clothes, furniture, toys

and much more! Rain or shine!

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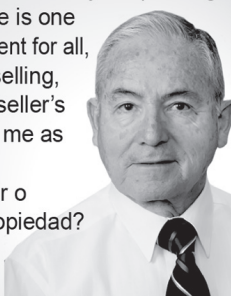
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'CREATE,' from page 1

All monies will go directly toward student learning, and there will be no funds used to pay administrative staff or other expenses, Brown said.

"We are excited to forge a partnership between the University of North Alabama School of the Arts and Franklin County, with the assistance of [Franklin County Chamber of Commerce executive director] Cassie Medley," Brown said. "No matter what discipline you choose, creativity will always be at the forefront for that profession. These scholarships can be a tool to empower students of the arts to become graduates of the arts."

All contributions to CREATE are tax-deductible gifts. The impact CREATE can have on Franklin County, Brown explained, includes benefiting low socio-economic students from a diverse background, integration of commerce into the Franklin County community, identification of crippling social issues, increased opportunity for youth who will then give back to their community, and saving lives.

Brown said more than 78 percent of Franklin County students come from economically disadvantaged homes, so there is a tremendous need for the scholarships.

Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) attended last Friday's reception and said he appreciated the willingness of UNA staff to help discover more Franklin County talent through CREATE scholarships.

"These scholarships will give students in our schools the opportunity to get an education and contribute to our community," Kiel said. "It was great to see my high school friend Charlton James here tonight. As a drama professor at UNA, Charlton is a great example of the talent we have in Franklin County and how our students can be successful through hard work and opportunity."

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Students may apply once annually to receive up to \$1,500 in scholarship funds. A student may apply up to four years but may only receive \$1,500 per year in scholarship grants, and funds must be used for educational purposes.

For more information on the CREATE scholarship program, contact Brown at tbrown5@una.edu, or contact Medley at director@franklincountychamber.org.

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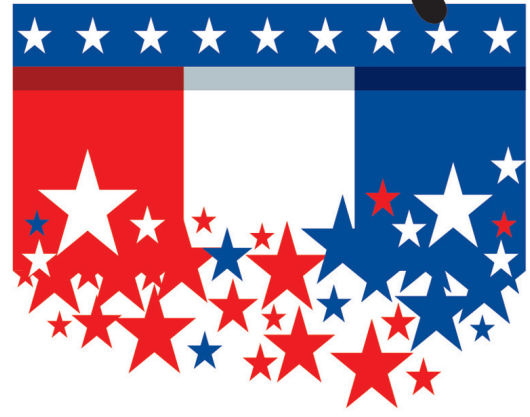
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Scott dreaming big after strong performance at first state meet

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

It goes without saying that the football field can be a very dangerous place—particularly if you're a ball carrier attempting to navigate between the numbers with Brooks Scott on the prowl.

"When I was growing up, basketball was my favorite sport because I was the biggest kid and I got to be in the post. Then people started catching up to my height," said Scott, a rising junior at Russellville High School who now packs a solidly built 205 pounds onto his broad-shouldered 6'1 frame. "Football is my favorite now. I like football because you can take your anger out on people. I'm just more comfortable on the football field."

As a hard-hitting inside linebacker who has made a total of 169 tackles for the Golden Tigers in his first two seasons at the varsity level, Scott specializes in making opposing backs and receivers feel decidedly *uncomfortable*. But as hazardous a place as the gridiron can be, it's got nothing on a track and field meet. Scott, a talented discus thrower who finished third in Class 5A at the state meet in May, knows this all too well.

"I do, now that you mention it," he said last Thursday afternoon. "At practice one day, I was working with one of the throwers, trying to teach him how to throw. I told him, 'Don't throw until I get out there and turn around.' As I'm walking out there, I hear somebody yell, 'Watch out!' The discus lands not even two feet beside me. It scared

See 'SCOTT,' Page 14



COURTESY PHOTO

POSITIVE SPIN - An emphasis on the finer points of proper technique helped Scott finish third in Class 5A at the state meet in May with a career-best throw of 144'11".

New and improved Hill stronger as a player and a person after return from injury

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

By now, Deyon Hill has grown accustomed to the raised eyebrows, the double-takes, the somewhat skeptical expressions. People find it hard to believe that, even if he could, he wouldn't go back and change anything about the events of October 21, 2017.

Hill was a red-shirt freshman at West Alabama, and that Saturday's game in Melbourne, FL against Florida Tech was his first as a starter on both the kickoff return and punt coverage units.

The former Russellville High School star was racing down the field from his gunner position on a Tiger punt when his career trajectory took an unexpected turn.

"I remember the game very well, because it was my very first game as a starter," Hill said. "It was the second play after I went in the game. I beat my guy [the Florida Tech player attempting to block him]. I beat him. I was doing really well, but then he hit me in the back and my foot got hung up in the turf."

Hill, who amassed 2,322 yards from scrimmage and 31 touchdowns in a record-setting senior season at RHS in 2015, had dealt with the usual assortment of bumps and bruises as a high school football player, but he could sense right away that this was different.

"I knew something was wrong," he said. "In my head, I knew it. It was just a different kind of feeling, one that I'd never felt before."

Hill had suffered a torn ACL and meniscus in his right knee, ending his season and casting doubt on a college career that was just beginning to take shape.

"When I come into contact with people," Hill said, "they'll say, 'I hear you're doing good after your injury. I hear you're doing pretty good.' That's when I say, 'Yeah, I'm glad it happened to me.' They're usually a little confused, and they give me this strange look. But the truth is I wouldn't go back and change it for the world."

"It was God's plan for that to happen to me. It made me a better person. It made me look at life and different things in life a little differently. It humbled me as a person and as a football player."

"It was really tough," Hill said. "I had to take a step back, and it hit me really hard. I went through a little phase where I was like, 'Is that the end of my career?' Because that's a major injury. Today, though, I wouldn't change it for the world."



FILE PHOTO

As a senior at Russellville in 2015 (above), Hill amassed 2,322 yards from scrimmage and scored 31 touchdowns.

"It was God's plan for that to happen to me. It made me a better person. It made me look at life and different things in life a little differently. It humbled me as a person and as a football player."

This is the part where Hill usually gets those disbelieving looks and surprised expressions.

"When I come into contact with people," he said, "they'll say, 'I hear you're doing good after your injury. I hear you're doing pretty good.' That's when I say, 'Yeah, I'm glad it happened to me.' They're usually a little confused, and they give me this strange look. But the truth is I wouldn't go back and change it for the world."



"It's a win-win situation. For one thing, it humbled me and gave me a testimony. But it also showed me how to work for something. Now, I've come out better than I was before I had the injury."

Better as a person, as a human being, sure. That part isn't so hard to believe. Every challenge, every battle with adversity we face in life is an opportunity for growth. Hill is by no means the first athlete to come back from an injury with a new perspective on his chosen sport and a greater appreciation for how blessed and privileged he is to play it.

See 'HILL,' Page 16

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COURTESY PHOTO

Scott hopes to return to the state meet and improve upon his third-place finish.

'SCOTT,' from page 13

the crap out of me.

"I told him before I left not to throw it until I turned around, but I wasn't no time out there when he let it go. He didn't listen."

Fortunately for everyone involved, Scott survived that close call with the four-pound disc healthy and intact. If he has his way over the next two years, however, the all-time Class 5A record for longest discus throw (182'6 3/4" by Lance Creekmore of Leeds in 1990, in case you were wondering) won't be so lucky.

"By my senior year, I would like to throw 180 to 190," said Scott, whose third-place throw of 144'11" at last month's state meet was his career-best in competition. "It's possible if I keep working at it and putting time into it, going to camps and private lessons where I can throw with people who know what they're doing and can teach me what I don't know. There's always stuff to learn."

Scott has already learned so much about discus throwing since he first took up the sport (almost by happenstance) as a seventh-grader in the spring of 2016.

"I was a big baseball player coming into the seventh grade, and I tried out for the team with all my friends," Scott said. "I was the only one who didn't make the baseball team. At first I said, 'I think I'll just take the spring off and not do anything,' since I was already playing football and basketball. But my seventh-grade coach, Coach [Michael] Phillips, called my mom and asked if I wanted to do track."

Scott decided to take Phillips up on his offer, and he convinced his good friend and classmate Grayson Eady to join him.

"We went in not really thinking about it, just looking for a way to kill time," Scott said. "I liked the disc, and Grayson liked the javelin. He started getting on up in the javelin pretty quick, but I was just there to waste

time."

It didn't take long for Scott's outlook on his new spring endeavor to change—in large part due to the success of Eady, who qualified for the state meet in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades before winning gold in the javelin last month.

"After I saw him go to state a couple times," Scott said, "I was like, 'I'm gonna start working at it and try to go to state now, too.'"

According to Scott, this past season was the first in which he really committed to tapping into his full potential as a discus thrower, and the results were startling. He progressed from typically throwing in the 115- to 120-foot range to consistently throwing in the 120s and 130s. At the sectional meet in April at James Clemens High School, Scott qualified for state with a throw of 132'7".

The best, however, was yet to come.

At the state meet in Gulf Shores in early May, each discus competitor was allotted three throws, with the top nine throwers moving into the final round. Scott's best qualifying throw was 141 feet—a career-long that he bettered just a little while later with a throw of 144'11", earning himself a spot on the podium in his first-ever trip to state.

"I wanted to get first place," he said, "but for this being my first year down there, third place was okay with me. I'm definitely gonna focus on winning state my eleventh- and twelfth-grade years."

That seems like a more than reasonable goal, given the great strides Scott has made in such a relatively short amount of time. He credits good, old-fashioned hard work and an emphasis on the finer points of throwing the discus.

"I just worked on it a lot," Scott said. "I went to a private lesson at Birmingham Southern, and I watched

'SCOTT,' from page 14

a lot of videos on YouTube. I started to get my spin down good, and I started releasing it good. One day, I got it out to 130 feet, and I knew I did it right. I knew if I kept doing that consistently and working on my technique, I could get it out there even farther.

"Throwing discus is a lot of technique, not just strength. You have to get the technique down before you can do anything."

Scott's improvement was remarkable, but it was hardly automatic. There were times early in the process when he wondered if he would ever truly get the hang of it.

"It was pretty difficult," he said. "I remember watching videos and thinking, 'I can't do this.' But I started working on it. I would just work on one part and get it down good, then go to another part and get it down good. Then I got it all together one day. You just have to keep doing it consistently until it comes together."

"I worked on it a lot."

"It was pretty difficult," Scott said of learning to throw the disc.

"I remember watching videos and thinking, 'I can't do this.' But I started working on it. I would just work on one part and get it down good, then go to another part and get it down good. Then I got it all together one day. You just have to keep doing it consistently until it comes together....Throwing discus is a lot of technique, not just strength. You have to get the technique down before you can do anything."

Listen to Scott talk discus for just a minute or two, and the knowledge and passion he's developed for the sport become plainly evident.

"The first thing I look for when I watch those videos is how they come into the ring and get set up," Scott said. "I watch their feet. Most good discus throwers, they lean left and put all their weight on their left foot. Then they swing their right leg wide with the toe up. When you do that, you sweep and gain a lot of ground. I always watch when people sweep, to see how much distance they gain. I wasn't sweeping my leg, so I wasn't gaining any ground. When I started sweeping my leg and gaining ground, I knew I was getting somewhere."

"The finish is an important part, too. You want to release it high at about a 45-degree angle, and you want your shoulder to be touching your chin when you throw it. You don't want the discus to come out too high or too low. You don't want it to come out flat. You have to get good height on it so it'll fly through the air good. A lot of people think you release it off your pinky finger, but you don't. You release it off your index finger."

Those are the finer points of discus throwing Scott hopes to sharpen even further when he and Eady head up to Idaho in July to take part in a camp for throwers where Olympians offer their instruction and expertise. The camp will be part of a busy summer for Scott, who last Thursday morning alone had already practiced football for an hour, worked out for another hour or two and then run through some plays with the Golden Tiger basketball team in preparation for a play date at Brooks High School last Friday.

On top of all that, Scott also has a summer job working on his uncle's farm. "I mend fences, check on the cows, stuff like that," he said. "I'm in the hayfield most of the summer. It's a pretty good job. I like the outdoors. I actually love the outdoors. I don't want to be inside, cramped up in a desk or anything."

"It does get hot, but we take breaks."

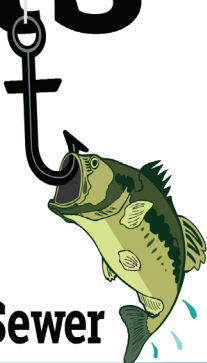
Those breaks are a good thing, too. Typically, for a three-sport athlete like Scott, there's no rest for the weary.

"I'm busy all the time," he said.

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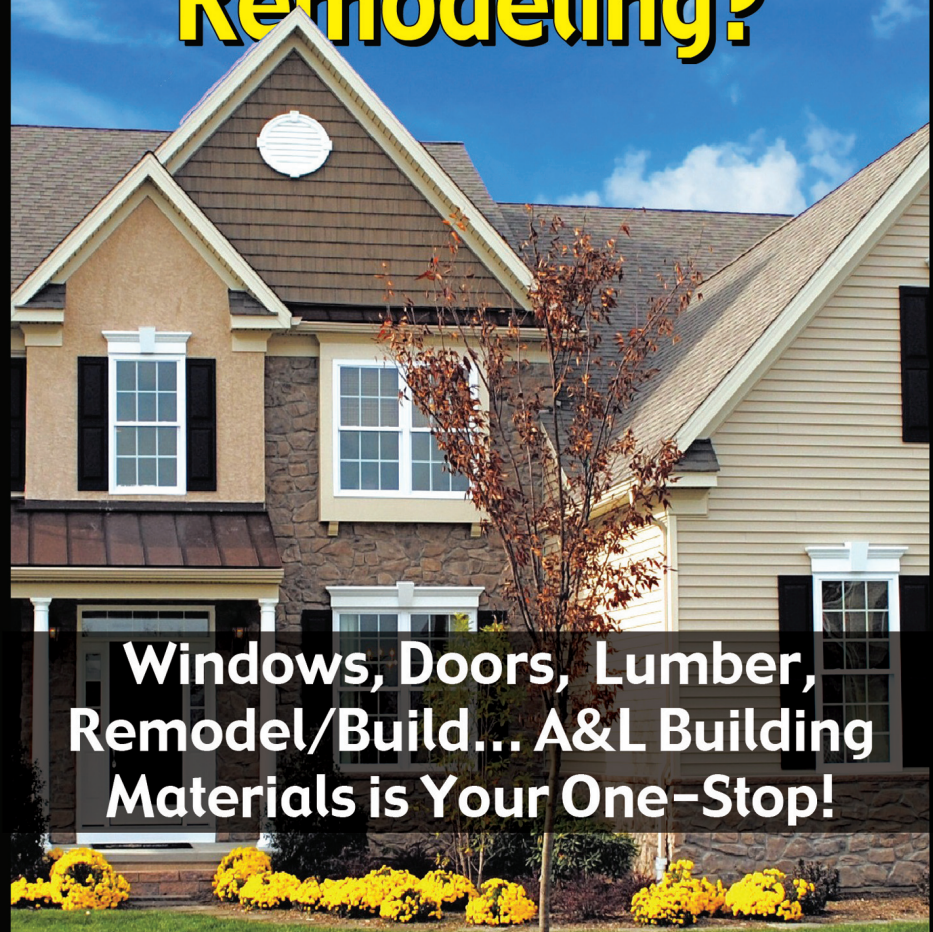
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'HILL,' from page 13

But Hill's *physical* recovery—which was both remarkably speedy and thoroughly complete—from the injury is what warrants further explanation.

"Right now, I'm stronger and faster than I've ever been—even before the injury," Hill said last Wednesday afternoon, just moments after finishing up another of his daily (and sometimes twice-daily) training sessions at Russellville High School. "That's one thing I thank God for. When I had that injury over a year ago, my mindset was totally not on being where I am right now physically. I'm bigger, faster and stronger than I've ever been in my life, and that's a testament to God."

Hill credits his speedy recovery to a couple of factors: Divine blessing, of course, but also to an aggressive, goal-oriented approach to the rehabilitation process.

"My rehab was nothing like what I thought rehab was gonna be," Hill said. "I thought I would get home and chill for a little while and then slowly make my way into it. I was in for a rude awakening. Two days later [after surgery], I got right into it—boom, boom, boom, everyday, working on something, sometimes twice a day, just going at it, going at it. It wasn't what I expected, but it was the best thing for me, because it helped me keep the right mindset."

"It took a lot of prayers and a lot of hard work. It ended up I was back running and participating at practice within a four-month span."

Hill was motivated in large part by West Alabama's long-time head athletic trainer, Brad Montgomery, whose son (a former Tiger baseball player) had once made a rapid recovery from a

similar injury.

"I was trying to beat the record," Hill said with a smile. "Brad would tell me about that everyday. I was trying to beat the record of his son, who had the fastest ACL recovery. That's one thing that kept pushing me."

"When I first got into it, we were just doing flexibility stuff, getting my range of motion back. My knee had a lot of scar tissue in there. We started out there, and by Day 11 we were doing high-knees with one leg, just walking with it, trying to get motion back and everything. That's really the first step—getting on the bike, getting that range of motion back and breaking that scar tissue down."

"Right now, I'm stronger and faster than I've ever been—even before the injury," Hill said. "That's one thing I thank God for. When I had that injury over a year ago, my mindset was totally not on being where I am right now physically. I'm bigger, faster and stronger than I've ever been in my life, and that's a testament to God."

Doctors had given Hill the standard timetable for his return to the field, but he blew those projections out of the water. He was able to take part in spring practice in 2018, running routes and catching passes from his slot receiver position as a non-contact participant.

"I didn't really understand it either," Hill said, marveling at how quickly he was able to return to action. "All the doctors had told me, 'Hey, you know, it'll be nine months to a year until you're back playing.' But then I was like, 'Okay, I'm gonna try to speed it up and get back as fast as possible.'"

"I thank God. Really, that's the only way I explain

it. That mindset I had to attack it everyday came out of nowhere. That's where I stand on it—it was a lot of prayer, a lot of hard work and God."

Hill continued to progress throughout the summer of 2018 and then made his first big splash as a college player that September 15 in Livingston, rushing six times for 55 yards and catching one pass for 11 yards in a loss to Valdosta State. Less than 11 months removed from major knee surgery but nearly three years removed from his most recent significant game action (as a senior running back at RHS), Hill was just thrilled to feel like a football player again—and to put some last, lingering doubts to rest.

"I was all the way back," Hill said. "I wasn't a hundred percent, but I was healthy enough to play. I didn't know how it was gonna be. That was my first extensive football play since the surgery, but I actually felt really good. I didn't expect that. I didn't expect for me to feel like that on the field."

"You have those thoughts like, 'Man, I'm not gonna be the same player. I'm not gonna be as good. I'm gonna get re-injured or something.' But I felt really good. After that game, my very first game back, I just thanked God. Because there was no way I should have been able to play at that level."

Hill split time between running back and the slot during that red-shirt sophomore season, finishing with 113 yards rushing on 18 carries (an average of 6.3 yards per attempt) and 24 yards on two receptions. He also returned two kickoffs for 42 yards, giving him 179 all-purpose yards for the season on 22 touches.

See 'HILL,' page 17

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'HILL', from page 16

It was a solid re-start to Hill's career at UWA, but he was by no means satisfied.

"I really didn't contribute as much as I wanted to," he said. "I felt like I couldn't really contribute to the level that they wanted me to at my position [slot receiver]. I did get to play a little bit and fill some other roles on the team. I had a special teams role, and I even went back to running back for a little while."

Hill pauses here and smiles before adding, "It felt like Russellville again."

Speaking of his old stomping grounds, odds are very good that anyone in the vicinity of Golden Tiger Stadium this summer has caught a glimpse of Hill punching the clock as part of his off-season program. He's not scheduled to report back to Livingston until July 1, but he plans on being ahead of the game when he gets there.

"This off-season...it was really different than any other off-season I've had in the past," Hill said on Wednesday. "Because I've never worked this hard in my life for something. It makes you love the game a lot more. This off-season, I've been working twice a day, everyday. If I'm not in the gym working out, I'm doing something flexibility-wise or working on something to make myself better. Sunday through Saturday, I'm trying to work out, and some Saturdays I'll work out twice."

"I've really shocked myself, actually, with how hard I've been pushing myself."

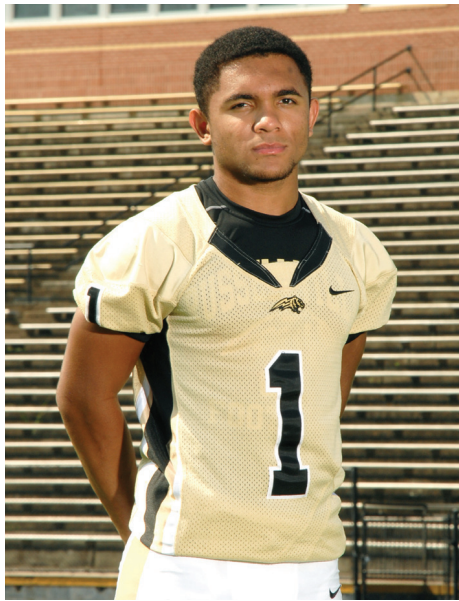
Hill, a self-described "little guy" coming out of high school four years ago, now packs a muscular 186 pounds on his 5'8 1/2 frame. [He arrived at West Alabama weighing 168 pounds and says he was around 172 pounds prior to his injury.] Hill squats in the neighborhood of 465 pounds and estimates that he's even faster now than he was as a high school senior, when he posted a forty time in the 4.4-4.5 range.

That improved speed and strength aren't the only benefits to come out of Hill's training sessions at Russellville this summer; he's also had the chance to take a trip down memory lane.

"Oh yeah. When I come up here and work out and run, I see a lot of guys and a lot of coaches," Hill said. "It makes you miss home a little bit. I always try to say a couple words and try to keep the younger guys who are still in school here on the right track."

"This coaching staff at Russellville is the most genuine coaching staff that I know of around here. They're very serious about everything they do."

So is Hill, and one of the things he can do since his injury is serve as a mentor and a source of encouragement for others who are traveling the same road.



FILE PHOTO

A junior slot receiver now at UWA, Hill helped lead the Golden Tigers to a region title in 2015.

"Oh yeah, for sure, that's the biggest thing with me," Hill said. "People want to know why I wouldn't go back and change what happened to me. It's because I have a testimony now. I can talk to people about it. I had a teammate last year who tore his ACL in practice. I had people there to talk to me when I got hurt, and I'm glad I can be one of those guys now who says, 'Hey man, keep pushing. You'll be back before you know it. Just keep pushing.'"

"I know the mindset you have to have to get through an injury like that."

Fully healthy now and in the best physical shape of his life, Hill has high expectations for 2019—not just for himself but also for the Tigers, who went 8-4 last season after going 10-3 in 2017.

"At receiver, we have a lot of depth in our room," Hill said. "I'm kind of an older guy now, and my role will be me and the number one guy, Christian Saulsberry, we'll be rotating. This receiving corps this year is gonna be something special. I'm really excited about it. I'm excited about this whole team we have."

"Something special is gonna come out of this group."

Hill, who practically lived in the end zone during his record-setting senior season at Russellville, is still looking for his first touchdown at West Alabama. Odds are good he won't have to wait much longer.

"I tell people I scored 31 touchdowns in high school, and they're like, 'No way!'" Hill said with a laugh. "It's gonna be a big moment. I'm finally getting significant playing time, and when I get in the end zone it's gonna bring back so much. I'm just gonna point up to God and thank Him."

"It's a journey. It's a process. Having that accomplishment is gonna be huge."

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Two RHS soccer players earn All-Star honors

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Having coached in the AHSAA All-Star soccer match each of the past two summers, Trey Stanford knows first-hand that only the state's highest-caliber players receive an invite to Montgomery to take part in the prestigious event.

Next month, for the first time ever, that impressive collection of soccer talent will feature players from Russellville High School.

Andres Campos, who has excelled as both a defender and a striker for the Golden Tigers, and Briana Huerta-Ramirez, a standout goalkeeper who has led the RHS girls to back-to-back playoff appearances, were both selected to play for their respective North All-Star teams during the 23rd annual AHSAA All-Star Sports Week, which will take place July 15-19 in the state capital.

"We're honored they got picked, and it's well deserved," said Stanford, who has overseen the RHS soccer program as head coach since its inception in 2017. "We've had some super soccer players here the last three years, and we finally got a couple picked this year. They were excited, and I'm excited for them. It's a big deal. I can't wait to see them play in the All-Star Game and watch them play with all the other All-Stars.

"I've coached in that game the last two years, and I know how good the talent is they're bringing in to play. It'll be interesting to watch them play with those guys and girls."

Stanford said Campos, a rising senior, has been incredibly valuable to the Golden Tigers due to his athleticism, selflessness and versatility.

"Andres played multiple spots, honestly, for our team this year," Stanford said. "We started him on defense, but when we needed some help up top because we got a few guys hurt, we moved Andres up to play striker for us. He scored fifteen goals as a striker, just because of his speed. He's one of the fastest kids I've coached. He can absolutely fly.

"We moved him back to defense when we played Guntersville [in the first round of the playoffs], and they beat us 2-0. We had two wide-open opportunities in the first half of the game that we just missed. Then we had a goal that bounced off the inside of the bar, popped up and hit the top bar and then bounced out. They didn't count it, but it was very, very close. We got beat 2-0, but we had our chances. We battled the entire game."

Campos will be back in 2020 to lead the Golden Tigers in their quest to earn a playoff berth for the



Andres Campos



COURTESY PHOTOS

Briana Ramirez is pictured above with RHS head soccer coach Trey Stanford (right) and assistant head coach Fred Ambrosio (left). Ramirez, a three-year starter in goal for the Lady Golden Tigers, was selected to play in next month's North-South All-Star Soccer Game in Montgomery. Andres Campos, a striker and defender for the RHS boys team, was also chosen to take part in All-Star Week.

fourth time in as many years.

"Andres was our anchor this past year," Stanford said. "He's such a selfless kid. He always puts his teammates ahead of himself, and he plays super-hard all the time. There's never a slow-down with him. It's 24-7 with him, all the time. He's just a great young man."

Russellville's girls have their own playoff streak working, and Ramirez's outstanding performance in goal has been the driving force behind that success. She recorded 258 saves as a freshman in the program's inaugural season in 2017, and she topped the 250-save mark again in 2018 as a sophomore to lead the Lady Golden Tigers to the postseason for the first time.

Last season, Ramirez anchored another playoff run by Russellville with more than 130 saves as a junior.

"Briana, over the last three years, has been one of the best female keepers I've ever seen in high school soccer," Stanford said. "The last two years, she's the one who kept us going to the playoffs. The year before last [2018], we finished second in the area, and that was mainly due to Briana Ramirez. She's absolutely the reason we've been to the playoffs the last two years. She's an outstanding keeper."

According to Stanford, Ramirez's leadership and other intangible qualities are just as valuable to the Lady Golden Tigers as her stellar work between the posts.

"She never complains, never says a word, never gets frustrated, never gets upset," Stanford said. "She's one of the best kids I've ever coached. She plays multiple sports. She's a volleyball player, too, just a great all-around student-athlete. Her ACT score is high, and her grades are amazing. She balances all that with athletics.

"She's just an outstanding young lady, and I really hope she gets to go play college ball. She's one of the best keepers I've seen in women's soccer."



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