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08.07.19

2012 legislation key factor in current teacher shortage

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the Alabama Legislature changed the teacher retirement benefit package seven years ago, it resulted in a 20-percent cut in benefits to teachers hired after January 1, 2013.

As a result, the number of applicants has steadily declined over the last seven years and has created a shortage of new teachers as Alabama graduates are choosing more lucrative careers after college. Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton said his system is dealing with that now, with the number of applicants at all-time lows in some areas that were previously loaded with candidates.

"It's a sign of the times when you have a low number of applicants in elementary education and low numbers in history," Hamilton said. "And we we experienced that this year. Math and science, you see that because the private

sector pays twice as much, but 20 years ago, if there was an elementary teaching job posted, there would be 40 or more applicants.

"Now, we post one and probably receive five to eight applications at most."

"It's a sign of the times when you have a low number of applicants in elementary education and low numbers in history," Hamilton said. **"And we we experienced that this year. Math and science, you see that because the private sector pays twice as much, but 20 years ago, if there was an elementary teaching job posted, there would be 40 or more applicants. Now, we post one and probably receive five to eight applications at most."**

The changes came in 2012 when the legislature changed teacher retirement benefits and placed new teachers in a category called Tier 2, which requires them to work until age 62 to retire with full benefits. Existing

See 'TEACHER,' Page 10

'Grandparent scam' hits Russellville

Local resident receives three calls over two-week period

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

So you get a call from your grandchild who's in an urgent situation, like having been in an accident or having been arrested, and he or she needs money fast.

Most grandparents would want to help out their grandchild, often with no questions asked.

Unfortunately, it's this love and willingness to help that helped create the 'grandparent scam,' which has hit Russellville in recent days.

The scam works something like this: You get a call from someone either pretending to be your grandchild or who is calling on the grandchild's behalf. They have a dramatic story to share, usually saying they've been in an accident, they are in jail, they are in the hospital or they're stuck in a foreign country and need cash fast!

The scam works something like this: You get a call from someone either pretending to be your grandchild or who is calling on the grandchild's behalf. They have a dramatic story to share, usually saying they've been in an accident, they are in jail, they are in the hospital or they're stuck in a foreign country and need cash fast!

One local resident has received three of these calls in the last two weeks. The resident, whose name is being withheld, was told by her pretend grandson that he had been in an accident. The next call he claimed he was in jail and needed her to send him money.

Fortunately, this lady smelled a scam before it was too late. But others are not so fortunate. And the scammers can be quite convincing.

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the grandparent scam often includes the caller telling the victim that a third person, like a

See 'SCAM,' Page 11

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Michael S. Morrow, Czech Republic (formerly of Russellville), age 73
Died June 30, 2019. Visitation will be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, August 24, 2019 at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville, with memorial service at 1 p.m.

Norman Eugene Small, Tuscumbia, age 52
Died Wednesday, July 31, 2019. Graveside service held at New Bethel Cemetery in Tuscumbia. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family.

Martha Jean Willingham Taylor, age 87
Died Thursday, August 1, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

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FALL/WINTER SALE

Board hires Berryman as East Franklin principal

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved the hiring of Megean Berryman as the next principal at East Franklin Junior High School at the board's July 30 meeting.

Berryman leaves her position as assistant principal/counselor at Hazlewood Elementary School in Lawrence County to take the position at East Franklin.

Other personnel moves approved by the board included:

- Retirement: Rhonette Bailey, counselor at Tharptown High School, effective October 1, 2019.

- Resignation: Jonathan Odom, math teacher at Tharptown High School; Melisa Askew, Child Nutrition Program bookkeeper; Richard Maggerise, history teacher/coach at Red Bay High School.

- Leave of Absence: Beverly Winchester, pre-K teacher at Red Bay School from August 1, 2019 through August, 2020.

- Transfer: Chassidy Winsted, transfer from Special Education Aide at Phil Campbell Elementary School to Special Education Aide at PCHS; Nichole Ergle, from elementary teacher at Tharptown to guidance counselor at

Tharptown High School.

- Employment: Sheena Johnson, elementary teacher at Tharptown; Ryan Champion, 7-12 Comprehensive Social Science with coaching duties at Tharptown High School; Jimmy Johnson, Remedial Interventionist with Band Director/Music Duties, Vina High School; Sherry Parker, half-time science teacher at Tharptown; Hulon Heath, bus driver Tharptown School; Savannah Latham, Speech Language Pathologist; Misty Henderson, Special Education Aide for Franklin County Schools; Patricia Nix, Special Education Aide, Phil Campbell Elementary; Jason Evans, part-time Aviation Teacher (contract amount \$17,500); Brooke Williams, temporary elementary teacher at Tharptown; Kelsey Pruitt, English teacher at Phil Campbell High School; Taylor Hamilton, English Learners Aide with coaching duties, Red Bay High.

In other action, the board:

- Approved an updated Student Policy Handbook for the 2019-20 school year.

- Rescinded the hiring of Armondo Jimenez from May 28, 2019, and Judith Waldecker from June 11, 2019. There was an error in Jimenez's name, and Waldecker will be paid through accounts payable instead of payroll.

The board will meet again August 20, 2019, at 5:15 p.m., with work session at 5 p.m.

Six eateries in Franklin County receive ratings of satisfactory

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Six of the seven Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of July 22-26 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.

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

Snack Shack, 3066 Hwy. 43, Phil Campbell, received a below satisfactory score of 75 and will be inspected again within 60 days. Violations included: Several chemical bottles stored with single service and not labeled, reach in cooler holding food at 47 degrees, including chili, cheese dip, handsink not accessible due to dishes and equipment and no proof of food service employee reporting agreement, no cooling on return unit, food discarded-available.

The highest score was 99, received by MeMe's

See 'RATINGS,' page 9

FRANKLIN COUNTY SCHOOLS CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM MENU				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
CYCLE ONE Choice of: <u>Nutri-Grain Bar</u> Apple/Blueberry/Strawberry or <u>Cereal Bar</u> Trix/Cinnamon Toast Crunch/Cocoa Puffs Graham Cracker Snacks Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	Choice of: <u>Maple Syrup Mini Pancakes</u> Or <u>Mini French Toast</u> Sausage Link Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	<u>Biscuit and Sausage</u> Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	<u>Muffin:</u> Chocolate Chip/ Blueberry/ Apple Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	<u>Chicken Biscuit</u> Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk
CYCLE TWO Choice of: <u>Pop Tart</u> Frosted Blueberry/frosted Strawberry/Fudge/Brown Sugar Cinnamon or <u>Graham Cracker Snacks</u> Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	Choice of: <u>Cereal:</u> Cocoa Puffs/Lucky Charms/Frosted Corn Flakes/Honey Nut Cheerios Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	<u>Ham and Biscuit</u> Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	Baked Cinnamon Bun Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk	Sausage and Biscuit Choice of Fruit Choice of Juice Choice of Milk

- A choice of 1% white, fat free chocolate and fat free strawberry milk is offered daily.
- Choice of apple juice, fruit juice blend, grape juice, and orange juice is offered daily day.
- MENU is subject to change according to availability of product(s)
- Cycle 1: Aug.6-9, Aug.19-23, Sept. 3-6, Sept. 16-20, Sept. 30-Oct. 4, Oct. 14-16, Oct. 28-Nov.1, Nov. 11-15, Dec. 2-6, Dec. 16-19, Jan. 13-17, Jan. 27-31, Feb 10-14, Feb 24-28, Mar. 9-13, Mar. 23-27, Apr. 13-17, Apr. 27-May 1, May 11-15
- Cycle 2: Aug. 12-16, Aug. 26-30; Sept. 9-13, Sept. 23-27; Oct. 7-11, Oct. 21-25, Nov.4-8, Nov. 18-22, Dec. 9-13, Jan. 8-10, Jan.21-24, Feb. 3-7, Feb. 18-21, Mar. 2-6, Mar. 16-20, Apr. 6-10, Apr. 20-24, May 4-8, May 18-21

LUNCH MENU				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
CYCLE ONE Spicy or Regular Chicken Sandwich Lettuce/Tomato Baked Fries or Potato Wedges Baked Beans	Beefy Taco Salad Whole Kernel corn Lettuce/Tomatoes Shredded Cheddar Cheese	Soup and Sandwich Manager's Choice: Veggie Soup w/ Ham Cheese Hoagie Taco Soup w/ Jalapeno Cornbread Chicken Stew with Cheese Toast Veggie Beef Soup w/ PB & J	Pizza Tossed Salad Carrots/Broccoli/Tomatoes Ranch Dressing	Chicken Nuggets or Salisbury Steak Gravy/Cream Potatoes Green Beans or Peas
CYCLE TWO Cheeseburger or Fish Sandwich Lettuce/Tomato/Pickles Baked Beans Baked Fries or Potato Wedges	Chicken Fingers Steamed Broccoli Cheese Sauce Cream Potatoes Bread Stick	Crispos/Cheese Sauce/Salsa Tortilla Chips Pinto Beans Tossed Salad	Pizza Tossed Salad Carrots/Broccoli/Tomatoes Ranch Dressing	Spaghetti or Alfredo Garlic Toast or Breadstick Tossed Salad/Dressing
CYCLE THREE Grilled Hot Dog or Corn Dog Baked Fries or Potato Wedges Baked Beans Sauerkraut	Sausage Link Scrambled Eggs Biscuit Hash Browns	Hot Wings or Chicken Bites Cream Potatoes Broccoli w/Cheese Roll	Pizza Tossed Salad Carrots/Broccoli/Tomatoes Ranch Dressing	Grilled Chicken Fajita Nachos Cheese/Salsa Lettuce/Tomato Tortilla Chips

- OFFER vs. SERVE: Students have a choice daily of 1% white, fat free chocolate and fat free strawberry milk; Regular Cycle Menu, Chef Salad or Grab n' Go Meal. (Grab n' Go meal choices are PB&J or Ham n' Cheese Sandwich with chips, fruit, fresh vegetables, ranch dip, and string cheese)
- Students may also choose from fresh/dried/canned fruit or variety of fruit juice with all meals.
- ** On Mondays, a Baked Potato is offered with Chef Salad and Baked Beans are offered with Grab n' Go Meals.
- MENU is subject to change according to availability of product(s).
- Cycle 1: August 6-9, Aug. 26-30, Sept. 16-20, Oct. 7-11, Oct. 28-Nov.1, Nov. 18-22, Dec. 16-19, Jan.21-24, Feb 10-14, Mar. 2-6, Mar. 23-27, Apr. 20-24, May 11-15
- Cycle 2: Aug. 12-16, Sept. 3-6, Sept. 23-27, Oct. 14-16, Nov.4-8, Dec. 2-6, Jan. 8-10, Jan. 27-31, Feb. 18-21, Mar. 9-13, Apr. 6-10, Apr. 27-May 1, May 18-21
- Cycle 3: Aug.19-23, Sept. 9-13, Sept. 30-Oct. 4, Oct. 21-25, Nov. 11-15, Dec. 9-13, Jan. 13-17, Feb. 3-7, Feb 24-28, Mar. 16-20, Apr. 13-17, May 4-8,

Honey Do: Dog days

The dog days of summer are upon us. The Alabama heat makes us want to lie in the shade like an old hound dog and save our outdoor activities for early morning or late evening, or this fall, or next year, or....

But the dog days are not an Alabama thing and really have nothing to do with "Ol Blue" or "Rover." The ancient Romans actually recognized this time as the dog days based on the heavenly activity of Sirius, the dog star. This event was associated with heat, drought, sudden thunderstorms and very uncomfortable conditions. Sound familiar?

But there are some things on the honey-do list that we should pay attention to, even in this heat.

All living things need some water. Keep yourself and the kids hydrated when working or playing outside.

•CHANGE YOUR AIR FILTER. Your air conditioner, whether it's a window unit or central unit, is working overtime trying to cool your home. Make sure air flow is unrestricted by replacing or cleaning the filter every 30 days. (I mention this a lot, I know, but it's a task that I seem to forget.)

•OPEN AND CLEAR FOUNDATION VENTS. Foundation vents allow outside air to circulate under your house to prevent moisture, mold and mildew in the crawl space. Keep grass and shrubs trimmed to keep them from blocking air flow. Close them this winter to prevent frozen pipes.

Another reason to keep the grass, weeds and shrubs trimmed is to deter animal visitors such as armadillos, rats and snakes that can dig around foundations, chew wiring and insulation or just scare you to death.

•WATER EVERYTHING. All living things need some water. Dogs, cats, plants, shrubs and people. Keep yourself and the kids hydrated when working or playing outside.

•ENJOY THE SUMMER. We are given these days to either enjoy or suffer through. By taking the right precautions, these days can be productive and fun. Soon the temps will fall and the days will shorten, and it will be too cold to be out.

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



Doug Green



FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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

Letters to the editor

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

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Not too early for a Christmas budget

Can you believe Christmas is right around the corner? It seems like we were just celebrating the Fourth of July, and now it's time for another Christmas season. Okay, don't get mad and protest that I'm bringing up Christmas too early. Even though the actual holiday is still five months away, it's not too early to budget for it.

One of the most frequent stressors I hear about during the holiday season is overspending. So many people have the best intentions—and they want to give to as many people as possible—but those good intentions often come with a lot of bills in January. If you're worried about overspending this Christmas, the fix is to do a Christmas budget. Here's how you make a very simple zero-based Christmas budget:

•Step 1: Decide how much you can spend on Christmas gifts. I'm not talking about throwing Christmas parties or decorating your house. This is just about gifts.

Last year, 33 percent of Americans planned to spend \$1,000 on Christmas gifts. Now, depending on your family and money situation, that might be a lot or not nearly enough. But chances are you don't have that kind of cash just lying around in your bank account, which is why you'll want to start putting a little bit aside each month starting now.

For example, let's take that number and reduce it a little. Let's say you budget \$600 for Christmas gifts. That's the total amount of money you plan on spending on your family and friends this holiday season. If you start saving for that this month, you'll need to set aside \$120 per month. That's if you do all your shopping in December.

•Step 2: List the people you want to buy for and how much you plan to spend on each.

Your Christmas budget might look like this: Kid One - \$135; Kid Two - \$135; Spouse - \$50; Mom - \$50; Dad - \$50; In-Laws - \$100; Sister - \$30; Friend - \$30; Office Secret Santa - \$20.

•Step 3: Subtract all those numbers from the total amount you've budgeted for gifts. If you end up with zero, then you've perfected a zero-based Christmas budget!

Every dollar you'll spend is attached to someone's name, just like categories in a normal budget. It's that simple, and all you really need is a sheet of paper. If you prefer a digital budget, check out EveryDollar, the budgeting app I use.

Don't get too caught up in the specifics of this example. Your situation might be totally different. The main thing is being intentional, proactive, and precise with your spending. And when December comes around, your Christmas shopping experience will be much more merry and bright. You'll be checking everyone off your budget list, instead of spending first and worrying about the consequences later.

Merry Christmas in August! Happy budgeting!
As a #1 *New York Times* best-selling author, host of *The Rachel Cruze Show*, and *The Rachel Cruze Show* podcast, Rachel helps people learn the proper ways to handle money and stay out of debt. She's authored three best-selling books, including *Love Your Life, Not Theirs* and *Smart Money Smart Kids*, which she co-wrote with her father, Dave Ramsey. You can follow Cruze on Twitter and Instagram at @RachelCruze and online at rachelcruze.com, youtube.com/rachelcruze or facebook.com/rachelramseycruze.



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Adjust our emergency fund?

Dear Dave,
My husband and I have been married five years, and we've decided we want to have children. We've both been working full-time since our wedding, and we were wondering if we should adjust our emergency fund and retirement investing to accommodate all the upcoming life changes that go along with having a bigger family.

Rachel

Dear Rachel,
When it comes to an emergency fund, I'd stick with what I recommend in the Baby Steps. A good emergency fund of three to six months of expenses should be fine. If you feel safer leaning toward the six-month side, that's fine. As far as investing is concerned, that's Baby Step 4. This means 15 percent of your household income going toward retirement. None of that really changes.

Now, with another person in the house, your day-to-day expenses are going to increase. That'll make it even more important to make sure you're living on a written monthly budget. What you *don't* want to do is quit your job to come home and be a full-time mom, then find yourselves dipping into the emergency fund. Being a stay-at-home mom is fine. It's a wonderful thing if you can afford it. But if that's the plan, you need to budget accordingly and practice living on just your husband's income before you quit your job.

God bless you two, Rachel!

Dave

Micro investing apps?

Dear Dave,
What is your opinion on micro investing apps like Acorns and Betterment? Are these good vehicles for building wealth in the long term, and are there any major drawbacks to these types of services?

Alex

Dear Alex,
I'm not saying there's anything really wrong with Acorns or Betterment, but they do different things. Acorns is more of an invest pennies, round-up kind of program, where Betterment is kind of a robo-investing deal.

Here's the thing. Micro investing is going to create micro wealth. And the big downside is you're going to feel like you did something important. The way you end up with *money* is by investing *money*. The way you end up with *more money* is by investing *more money*. You can argue all you want that using things like these create extra money. Yeah, but not really. The returns are still micro. An app doesn't make two dollars turn into twenty dollars.

It's okay to use apps like that. I'm not mad at them, and I don't think they're a rip-off or anything like that. What worries me about these kinds of things, in an investing sense, is they give the *illusion* that you've done something significant with your money.

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 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.*

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


 **A**merican Legion Post 64 will meet this Thursday, August 8 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) this Thursday, August 8 at 2:30 p.m. Grace Anderson will lead a study called "Anointed to Heal" by Larry and Audrey Eddings. We believe that God heals spiritually, physically and emotionally. Prayer for healing will be offered. All are welcome.


 **T**he Pebble Bluegrass Festival will be held this Friday and Saturday, August 9-10, at the Pebble Community Center, 100 County Road 3423, Haleyville. The event will be held rain or shine. Enjoy some good clean family entertainment with all proceeds going to the Pebble Community Center. Featured artists include Crossing Grass, Lisa Lambert Band and Solid Blue. Weekend pass is \$10. Concessions will be available. Supper served Saturday from 4-7 p.m. Free camping in the rough, and camper hookups will be available. For more information, call 205-269-2221.


 **T**he Franklin County Baptist Association Ladies Conference will be held this Saturday, August 10 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at McMurray Baptist Camp, 5315 Old Vina Road, Vina. Bring your favorite salad to share for lunch. Everything else will be provided. Conference theme is "Love Me, Love Me Not."


 **T**his Saturday, August 10 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m., the Russellville Bicentennial Committee will present the fourth in the Saturday history series called "The Way We Were: Historical Demonstrations, Exhibits, and Portrayals." Schedule: 10 a.m.-Bob Perry portraying George Colbert and speaking on the Mary Crawley incident; 11 a.m.-Tony Turnbow, author of *Hardened to Hickory*, speaking about Andrew Jackson and the Chickasaw Indians; 12 p.m.-Rickey Butch Walker, author of *Doublehead: Last Chickamauga Cherokee Chief*, talking about Doublehead; 1 p.m.-Tim Kent, author of *The Reckoning*, discussing other aspects of Chief Doublehead; 2 p.m.-Randy Brown portraying Sam Dale, known as the Daniel Boone of Alabama. Authors will have their books for sale. The last event in this series will be September 14. All events are free and will be at the Russellville Canteen at 217 Washington Avenue. For more information, call Doris Hutcheson at 256-332-4085 or Chris Ozbirn at 256-332-8827.


 **T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Bryan Muse at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville this Saturday, August 10 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.


 **T**here will be a benefit for Jagger Mills this Saturday, August 10 at Liberty Hill Auction in Phil Campbell. A singing with gospel groups Family Tradition and The Believers will begin at 3:30 p.m., with an auction to follow at 6 p.m. Jagger, age 16, has been diagnosed with a severe blood disease and is undergoing treatment at Children's Hospital in Birmingham. He has been there 120 days and will have to be there until April. Come out this Saturday to enjoy some gospel music, take part in an auction and help Jagger's family!


 **J**onesboro Baptist Church will host Homecoming this Sunday, August 11 with preaching service at 11 a.m. and a meal to follow. At 1:30 p.m. there will be a singing with the group Reassurance. Pastor Kent Walker and congregation invite you. Church is located on Waterloo Road north of Russellville.

 **T**here will be a gospel singing with Distinction Trio this Sunday, August 11 at 5 p.m. at Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church (305 Bethlehem Road, Russellville, AL 35654). Everyone is welcome!

 **T**he Believers will be in concert at The Church of God on Hwy. 5 South in Phil Campbell this Sunday, August 11 at 5 p.m. Fellowship supper after the singing. For more information, call 256-324-5288.

 **F**irst Baptist Church Russellville will host its 152nd Homecoming this Sunday, August 11. Worship service will be at 10:30 a.m., with message from previous interim pastor Bro. Danny Knight, Guin. Music by Denise Davis Arnold, singer/songwriter from Nashville. Covered dish luncheon immediately following worship service in Fellowship Building. Our interim pastor is Dr. Gene Balding. Minister of music/senior adults is Bert Fowler. Children's ministry coordinator is Jennifer Willis, and interim student pastor is Bro. Kyler Childers. Church is located at 213 Jackson Ave. North in downtown Russellville.

 **A**uditions for the Roxy's Christmas Spectacular will be held this Sunday, August 11 with make-up day Monday, August 12. Children auditions for ages 6-12 will be at 1:30 p.m., females ages 13 and up at 3:30 p.m. and males ages 13 and up at 5:30 p.m. Make-up day auditions will be at 5:30 p.m. on Monday the 12th. Doors open 30 minutes prior to audition time.

 **D**ivorceCare, a special help seminar and support group for people experiencing divorce and separation, will be held on Sunday evenings at 5 p.m. at First Baptist Church Colbert Heights. DivorceCare features nationally recognized experts on divorce and recovery topics. Seminar sessions include "Facing My Anger," "Facing My Loneliness," "New Relationships," "KidCare" and "Forgiveness." Meetings will be held at 6000 Woodmont Drive, Tuscumbia, AL. For more information, call First Colbert Heights at 256-383-8016.

What's Happening

256.332.0255

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

Revival services will be held at First Baptist Church (521 College Avenue, Russellville) on Monday, August 12 through Wednesday, August 14 at 7 p.m. each night. Evangelist will be Rev. Otis C. Neloms, pastor of First Baptist Church in Courtland. Pastor B.J. Bonner and the congregation of First Baptist Church College Avenue invite everyone to attend!

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!

Russellville Masonic Lodge #371, located at 416 Coffee Avenue, will be selling fish plates during the Franklin County Watermelon Festival on Friday, August 16 from 5-7 p.m. and Saturday, August 17 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Eat in air conditioned comfort or take out! Plates cost \$12. Pre-order: 256-810-1970.

Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 will be selling Boston butts during Watermelon Festival weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, August 17 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.

The book *Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud and the Last Trial of Harper Lee* will be discussed at the August 21 10 a.m. meeting of the Readers of the Lost Ark Book Club. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 101 West Sixth Street, Tuscumbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com.

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 September 3. All members and friends are urged to attend.

Fourth part of *The Way We Were* series to shine spotlight on local history

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The spotlight will shine on local history at the latest in a series of historical presentations set for this Saturday in downtown Russellville.

The Russellville Bicentennial Committee will present the fourth in a five-part series called *The Way We Were: Historical Demonstrations, Exhibits and Portrayals*, this Saturday, August 10, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Russellville Canteen, 217 North Washington Avenue, next to the A.W. Todd Centre. The events coincide with the 200th anniversary of the City of Russellville, which was founded on November 27, 1819.

The event will include a number of historical demonstrations and will feature several local authors of history books. In addition to presenting historical programs, the authors will have their books for sale.

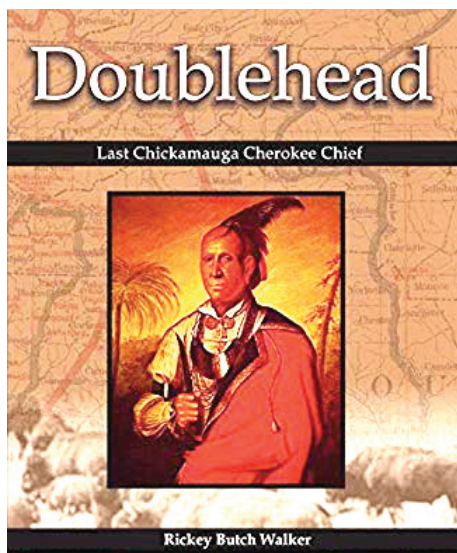
Scheduled presenters include:

10 a.m.—Robert Perry, who will portray George Colbert and speak on the Mary Crawley incident.

11 a.m.—Tony Turnbow, author of *Hardened to Hickory*, will speak about Andrew Jackson and the Chickasaw Indians.

12 p.m.—Rickey Butch Walker, author of *Doublehead: Last Chickamauga Cherokee Chief*, who will speak about Doublehead.

Walker is a noted Indian historian who is a member of the Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama and a former science teacher at Speake



High School. In 1987, Walker became director of Lawrence County Schools' Indian Education Program and later served as Chickasaw Chief George Colbert, for whom Colbert County is named.

1 p.m.—Tim Kent, author of *The Reckoning*, will discuss other aspects of Chief Doublehead.

2 p.m.—Randy Brown will portray Sam Dale, known as the Daniel Boone of Alabama.

All events at *The Way We Were* are free. The final program is scheduled for Saturday, September 14, and each event features different exhibits, presenters and portrayals.

For more information about this special program, contact Chris Ozbirn at 256-332-8827 or Doris Hutcheson at 256-332-4085.

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An Evening at the Roxy with... *The Great Pretenders*



The annual Evening at the Roxy: The Great Pretenders, featured 26 local performers singing hits from Elvis Presley to Chris Stapleton. The event is part of the W.C. Handy Festival and is the only Russellville event that's part of the Festival calendar. Pictured on this page (clockwise, from top left): Sydney Medley performs Olivia Newton-John's "Hopelessly Devoted"; Jeff Allen performs the Drifters' hit "Up on a Roof"; Dana Hill sings the Judds' hit "Girls Night Out"; Jacob Green performs "That Ain't the Way To Go" by Brooks and Dunn; Kassidy Willis and Jacob McCarley perform Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner's "If Teardrops Were Pennies"; Heather Carmack sings Sara Evans' "Suds in a Bucket"; Blaze Bishop sings Patsy Cline's "Walking After Midnight"; Meletha Walker performs "Let It Be Me" by Ray LaMontagne; Gene Grubbs croons Elvis Presley's hit "Way Down."



Red Bay man to serve 25 years after pleading guilty

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Red Bay man pled guilty last Monday to two felony charges, and he will serve a 25-year prison sentence according to the plea agreement filed in Franklin County Circuit Court.

Scott Brady Pugh, 36, 610 Second St. SE, Red Bay, pled to first-degree rape and first-degree sodomy according to Franklin County District Attorney Joey Rushing.

Pugh was indicted in May 2018 on 11 counts, all related to accusations that he raped, sodomized and molested a young girl who was a family acquaintance.

The case was investigated by the Red Bay Police Department after the girl reported the ongoing abuse to a family member. According to police reports, the abuse had been going on for an extended period of time, and Pugh allegedly threatened to harm the girl and a friend of hers if she reported it.

With a 25-year sentence on forcible rape and sodomy of a child, Pugh will serve the time day-for-day without chance of parole. He must also comply with sex offender registration upon his release.

"This was a tragic situation for the victim and her family," Rushing said. "With this plea, the defendant will serve a lengthy prison sentence with no opportunity for parole."

Rushing credited the investigation done by the Red Bay Police Department that allowed Pugh to be brought to justice.

"They did a great job handling this difficult case and making sure the victim received justice for Pugh's crimes," Rushing said.

In an unrelated case, James Lamar Horton, 72, of Red Bay, was sentenced this week to seven years on his plea of sexual abuse of a child under the age of 12.

Horton, a former kindergarten class worker in the Foster Grandparent Program of Northwest Alabama, pled in June to the charge after he was accused of inappropriately touching and exposing himself to kindergarten students, as well as watching students while they were in the bathroom.

Horton was arrested in January 2018 after an investigation headed by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's State Bureau of Investigation.

After his June plea, Horton requested to have time to address a medical situation before he was sentenced.

He was taken into custody last Monday by the Franklin County Sheriff's Office to begin serving his sentence immediately.

As a result of his plea to a crime involving a young child, Horton will serve his time day-for-day and will not be eligible for parole.

'RATINGS,' from page 3

Cakery, 15480 Hwy. 43 in Russellville.

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

•B&J Cafe, 1327 Shelnut Loop, Phil Campbell, 92. (Slaw in reach in cooler at 57 degrees).

•Gas Mart North, 17060 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93. (Spray bottle not labeled, improper insecticide).

•Homestead Cafe, 6631 Hwy. 43, Spruce Pine, 93. (Sliced tomatoes sitting out at 70 degrees, potatoes at 63 degrees and chicken tenders at 50 degrees).

•Willi's, 5680 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 97.

•Sonic Drive In #6295, 15376 Hwy. 43 North, Russellville, 97.

Of the nine inspections done in Colbert County from July 22-26, all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory.

In Colbert County, the high score of 99 went to Logan Court, 206 Main St., Tusculmbia.

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



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Neighborhood Yard Sale this Friday & Saturday, August 9-10, from 7 am-until at 315 Montgomery Street in Russellville. Household items, clothes, lots of misc. Too much to mention!

Yard Sale this Saturday, August 10 from 7 a.m.-noon at 125 Tony Avenue across from Summit Pool in Russellville. Baby clothes, toys, glassware, clothes, lots of misc.

Huge 5-Family Yard

Sale this Saturday, August 10 at 7 a.m. at the corner of Jackson and Cherry Street. Furniture, chairs, dining table, armoire, desks, vanity, toys, clothes (men's, women's, boys', girls'), shoes, jewelry & jewelry boxes, dishes, household items, bicycle, scooters, Christmas decor & tree, glassware, bedspreads, sheets, window curtains, flower arrangements, American Girl doll clothes, dollhouse, girls dance clothes.

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'TEACHER,' from page 1

employees, in a category called Tier 1, may retire with full benefits after 25 years of service, regardless of age.

Additionally, Tier 2 employees must use their sick leave each year or lose it, another change created by the legislature in 2012. Tier 1 employees may accrue sick leave and apply it toward

their years of service. The effect of this has been more Tier 2 teachers missing work in order not to lose sick leave.

A survey done by the Alabama Department of Education showed that, before 2013, 12 percent of Alabama high school students stated a preference to pursue a career in education. That figure has dropped to four percent.

A survey done by the Alabama Department of Education showed that, before 2013, 12 percent of Alabama high school students stated a preference to pursue a career in education. That figure has dropped to four percent. While it's a difficult situation for school systems to deal with, Hamilton hopes the legislature will take steps in 2020 to remedy the problem and make education more attractive for college graduates.

"I've talked with almost every superintendent in surrounding counties," Hamilton said, "and they're all facing the same difficulty we are, feeling the effects of a teacher shortage."

Legislation was introduced in this year's session to create a Tier 3 category that would allow employees to serve for 30 years then retire. All Tier 2 teachers could opt into the Tier 3 category. While it's an improvement, it's still a five-year difference from Tier 1 employees.

The bill passed the Alabama House but died in the Senate.

"Tier 3 would be better, but not great," Hamilton said. "If you rewind all the way back to 2014, they

also increased the amount you have to contribute for retirement from five percent to 7.5 percent. So 2.5 percent of your take-home pay was now going toward retirement. It took a pay raise to offset what had to be contributed to retirement."

Teachers, Hamilton said, went eight years with no pay raise, although they have received a raise the past two years.

"That long run contributed to the shortage as well," Hamilton said. "In reality, the benefit package that lured people into the teaching field, when that went away, we started to see the effects of 25 years until retirement versus 40 years."

The Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) released numbers that show 26 percent of members are Tier 2 employees while 74 percent are Tier 1.

"We had Dr. Chris James [from the University of North Alabama] speak at our certified in-service day," Hamilton said. "He talked about the low number of students at UNA in different fields like math, science and counseling."

While it's a difficult situation for school systems to deal with, Hamilton hopes the legislature will take steps in 2020 to remedy the problem and make education more attractive for college graduates.

"I anticipate they will pass Tier 3 next year, and that will help some. This year was obviously worse than past years on the numbers of applicants," Hamilton said. "I've talked with almost every superintendent in surrounding counties, and they're all facing the same difficulty we are, feeling the effects of a teacher shortage."

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'SCAM,' from page 1

lawyer, police officer or doctor, can explain and verify the situation. Then the caller asks the victim to send or wire money immediately, usually with the request that the victim not tell anyone about their predicament.

According to Russellville Police Department investigator Jake Tompkins, his department has not fielded any calls recently about such scams, but the grandparent scam is nothing new.

According to AARP, in 2017 nearly one in five people reported losing money in an impostor scheme like the grandparent scam, totaling a loss of more than \$328 million. And those age 70 and older have incurred the highest percentage of losses.

And the scammers often target their victims after researching personal information from social networking sites like Facebook, or by hacking into email accounts to obtain names of relatives.

The best defense, according to Federal Trade Commission attorney Kati Daffan, is to not act quickly. You can attempt to verify the caller's identity by asking personal questions that someone else couldn't answer, like a pet's name and species. Additionally, when you get off the phone, but before sending any money, call the person who supposedly called you. They may answer and be just fine.

Additionally, if the money request is for a wire transfer through Western Union or MoneyGram, for example, or is in the form of a prepaid or gift card, don't do it, Daffan explains.

"That's just like turning over cash to somebody. Remember, court systems and hospitals don't accept gift cards as payment," Daffan said.

If you fall victim to the grandparent scam or any form of fraud, you can report it to local law enforcement and to the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint or call 1-877-FTC-HELP.

Another scam working its way through Russellville involved the hacking of a former resident's email last week. Dozens of the person's contacts (including the *Franklin Free Press*) received an email asking them to "do her a favor."

When they responded to the email, the request was to help her purchase an iTunes gift card for her niece because the resident was supposedly out of town. The email claims it is her niece's birthday and asks the victim to buy the gift card and the money will be paid back when the resident returns home.

If the scammer keeps contact with the victim and the victim agrees to help, the next email requests the purchase of a \$300 iTunes card, in \$100 denominations, and for the victim to scratch off the label on the back of the card, take a picture of the back of the card showing the code, and email that back to the resident who supposedly needs the victim's help.

Once the scammer has the code from the back of the iTunes card, it's just like having the possession and they can quickly transfer or use the funds off the card.

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SEC preview: Higher/lower

The preseason Coaches Poll was released last week. The poll is meaningless as to determining anything of significance in college football in the playoff era, but it does provide us with an opportunity to play one of our favorite preseason games: Higher or Lower.



Mike Self
Sports Editor

Six SEC teams were ranked in the Top 25, including four in the top eight and five in the top 11. Given the way the league tends to beat up on itself, it's unlikely that all those highly ranked teams will finish where they start. On the other hand, the abundance of marquee games against quality opponents presents ample opportunity for SEC teams to climb the polls.

We'll take a look at the six ranked teams today and tell you whether we think they'll finish higher or lower in the final regular-season poll (the one that will be released *after* conference championship weekend). Let's dive in.

Alabama

Preseason rank: No. 2

The Skinny: This boils down to a simple question. Will the Tide be ranked No. 1 in the country after the SEC Championship Game on December 7? That's at least partially dependent on what Clemson does. If the reigning national champs, who the coaches have ranked No. 1 to start the season, run the table and go 13-0, will they go wire-to-wire in the top spot? The guess here is no, not necessarily, given that Alabama has more marquee games toward the end of the schedule: Home to LSU on November 9, at Auburn on November 30 and—presumably—versus Georgia in the conference title game.

If Alabama wins all three of those games—and particularly if Nick Saban's team does so in impressive fashion—on its way to finishing 13-0, there's a very good chance the Tide will leapfrog Clemson (even an undefeated Clemson) and claim the top spot.

Furthermore, in a straight-up comparison of the consensus top two programs in the country, both Clemson and Alabama are unstoppable juggernauts on offense, but Clemson has more work to do to rebuild things on the other side of the ball. With that in mind, if one of the two teams is going to stub its toe along the way, it seems more likely that it would be the Tigers. [ESPN's Football Power Index, for the record, disagrees, giving Clemson a 49 percent chance to run the table, compared to less than 15 percent for Alabama.]

Bottom line, we expect Alabama to go undefeated, and an undefeated Tide team will be No. 1 on the morning of December 8.

Prediction: Higher

Georgia

Preseason rank: No. 3

Back on the bump



PHOTO/KYLE GLASGOW
As a Russellville senior in 2016, Kitterman went 10-1 and earned a complete game win over Faith Academy in the decisive Game 3 of the Class 5A state finals.

Austin Kitterman is no stranger to overcoming the odds. Healthy again, the former Golden Tiger is ready to resume his career at West Alabama.

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

One minute, Austin Kitterman was sitting in the bullpen at Reese Smith, Jr. Field on the campus of Middle Tennessee, holding a walkie-talkie and communicating with a Blue Raider coach in the home dugout during a mid-April game against Conference-USA rival UAB.

Kitterman doesn't really remember what happened next.

"I was the walkie-talkie guy in the bullpen that night, and our coach had just called down there to tell me who to get hot," he said. "Then I blacked out. Forty-five minutes later, I woke up in the hospital."

Kitterman had suffered a seizure, approximately



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New softball coach: 'Every single thing about Russellville was appealing to me'

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

Josh Graham is no stranger to the Russellville softball program. Before he was recently hired as the new head softball coach at RHS, Graham had spent the previous five years coaching a team in the Lady Golden Tigers' own area at Lawrence County. Having coached from across the field for five years, Graham could see just how supportive the fans, coaches and Russellville administrators were of their softball program.



COURTESY PHOTO

New Russellville softball coach Josh Graham is pictured above with his wife Amanda, their daughter Abigail, RCS superintendent Heath Grimes (far left) and RHS principal Jason Goodwin (far right).

That support was one of the primary reasons Graham decided to make the trip one county over to become the Lady Golden Tigers' head coach.

"Every single thing about Russellville was appealing to me," Graham said. "The area, the people, the traditions—it's all just a very supportive area, and that's what really drove me to come here. You can tell that the administration really cares about taking care of their athletic and academic programs, and to know I have that kind of support really pulled me in."

"Every single thing about Russellville was appealing to me," Graham said. "The area, the people, the traditions—it's all just a very supportive area, and that's what really drove me to come here. You can tell that the administration really cares about taking care of their athletic and academic programs, and to know I have that kind of support really pulled me in."

Graham has always had a passion for baseball and softball and has been around the game in some form for a majority of his life. After graduating from Pontotoc High School in Pontotoc, Mississippi, Graham went on to play collegiate baseball at Itawamba Community College before transferring to the University of North Alabama where he would continue his baseball career and also earn his degree.

From UNA, where he was also a graduate assistant coach, he went to Lawrence County for a few years for his first stint as a coach with the Red Devils. Graham then had a brief coaching stint with the Bob Jones baseball program before coming back to Lawrence County, where he would coach football and softball.

Graham has already gotten a chance to meet and interact with some of the players on the RHS softball team and is extremely encouraged from what he has seen so far.

"I got hired on a Thursday, and every day from then on out that I have been at the school or the field, I've seen players hitting, working on their fielding and things like that," Graham said. "I've been able to meet with some of the senior players, and I've also gotten a chance to have a meet-and-greet with some of the younger players as well. I'm very excited, and I have loved what I have seen so far."

When a coach comes into his or her first year with a certain school or team, there are personal expectations that each coach has. While the first goal with

See 'SOFTBALL,' page 15

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'SOFTBALL,' from page 14

any program is to win, Graham wants to make sure that he builds a program that will be able to compete not only this year but for years to come.

"I want to develop a deep program here at Russellville—not only at the high school level, but from middle school to even the youth leagues," Graham said. "There is a ton of potential here in Russellville, and I want to get kids excited to play softball so that we have the ability to be a long-time powerhouse."

One thing that Graham will have no problem finding within this Russellville Golden Tiger softball team is veteran leadership. The Lady Golden Tigers return numerous seniors from last year's regional tournament team, including shortstop Madison Murray, second baseman Alivia Clemmons and third baseman Autumn Logan, who will all undoubtedly play a key role as the anchors of the infield for Graham.

Murray led the team last season with a .362 average, 42 hits, eight doubles and 21 stolen bases. Clemmons batted .342 with four home runs, 36 runs scored, 14 stolen bases and a .409 OBP. Logan hit .327 with three home runs and seven doubles, driving in a team-high 34 runs and reaching base at a .405 clip.

First baseman Makala O'Neal (.284 average in 2019 with one home run and 14 RBIs), pitcher Krista Sikes (14 wins and 130 strikeouts in 158.2 innings pitched over the past two seasons combined) and outfielder A.J. Taylor (who earned All-State honors as a sophomore in 2018 after batting .406 with five home runs and then hit .301 with 21 runs scored and 16 stolen bases last season) are also part of a deep and talented senior class.

Graham said he is familiar with his senior core of players and is very eager to coach them.

"Having watched them from a different dugout for the past five years, I've kind of gotten to know how they play, where they play and things like that, so I'm excited to get to work with them," Graham said. "I have talked with them, and as I'm getting to know them the one thing I need them to do is buy in. Buy in to our process here and what we're trying to do. If we do that we're going to have something pretty special."

With a roster full of senior leadership comes a lot of potential college talent for the Lady Golden Tigers as well. Ace pitcher Megan Warhurst signed with West Florida last year, and the current roster has multiple players who could follow Warhurst's lead in extending their playing career to the collegiate level. The amount of talent that Graham has to work with on his roster is yet another reason for him to get excited, and he believes this is the perfect team to begin his process for the future of Russellville softball.

"These girls have been playing softball since they were young kids, so they know how to play the game and play it at a high level," Graham said. "It's extremely comforting and exciting to know that we have six seniors who have a legitimate chance of playing college ball. While having all that talent takes a lot of pressure off, everyone has to make sure that they are on the same page as well."

Overall, Graham expects that his first season with the Golden Tigers will be a very exciting, well played one.

"We're going to play some tougher teams, and we're going to play in more tournaments as well. I believe that if you play hard and you play to the best of your ability, you can beat anyone," Graham said. "This team is extremely talented in all areas, and I'm excited to get to coach them and begin building a deep softball program."



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW

Alivia Clemmons (above) and Madison Murray (at right) are two members of a deep and talented senior class for RHS in 2020.



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'BACK,' from page 13

his 10th in the span of less than six months. The first seizure had occurred on October 28, 2018—four years and one month to the day since Kitterman had sustained a brain injury in a near-fatal ATV accident early in his junior year at Russellville High School.

Scar tissue—often the cause of epileptic seizures—had built up on Kitterman's left frontal lobe, and doctors determined that each of his seizures had originated in that same lobe. Their eventual diagnosis was that Kitterman's seizures were most likely triggered by sleep deprivation and stress, stemming from a combination of factors that included the pressures of playing Division I baseball and the anxiety that accompanied his mother Vicki's battle with cancer. [She is now cancer-free.]

"Health-wise, I was feeling great," Kitterman said on Monday. "[The seizures] came out of nowhere, out of left field. It was definitely very scary."

Scary, but not unprecedented. This wasn't the first time Kitterman's baseball career had been placed in serious jeopardy by medical issues. Doctors initially—and understandably—deemed his playing days done nearly five years ago when the ATV accident left him in a medically induced coma. Kitterman miraculously recovered and returned to the baseball field in mid-March of 2015, helping Russellville win the first state championship in program history.

The following year, as a senior, Kitterman was medically cleared to pitch again and went 10-1 with a 1.13 ERA and a strikeout/walk ratio of 70/8 in 68 innings, capping off his amazing comeback story with a complete game 5-3 win over Faith Academy in the decisive Game 3 of the 2016 Class 5A state finals.

Kitterman earned first-team All-State honors from the ASWA as a utility player that season, batting .321 with five home runs and a .492 OBP. His baseball future, however, lay not at the plate but

60 feet, six inches from it. He signed as a pitcher with Union University, an NAIA school in Jackson, TN, and proceeded to post a team-best 2.89 ERA in 62.1 innings as a freshman in 2017.

Eager to put himself on a path to the Division I level, Kitterman transferred from Union to Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa, where he went 4-1 with two saves and 53 strikeouts in 48.2 innings in 2018. He parlayed that performance into the Division I opportunity he had been working toward, signing with Middle Tennessee.



Kitterman, a right-hander whose arsenal features an upper-80s fastball along with a slider and a changeup, started eight games last fall for the Blue Raiders and was in line for a spot in the rotation this spring when the seizures put his career on hold—and threatened to end it prematurely.

Kitterman started eight games last fall for MTSU and was in line for a spot in the rotation this spring when the seizures put his career on hold—and threatened to end it prematurely.

"Oh yeah, it crossed my mind a lot," he said on Monday. "I think that's one of the things that was causing so much stress on me. It kept me up at night. The game that I love so much was almost taken away from me for good on September 28, 2014, but God decided to spare my life and gave me a second chance to play this game. I felt like it was being ripped from me again."

For the second time in less than five years, Kitterman could sense his baseball future slipping through his fingers.

"Oh yeah, it crossed my mind a lot," he said on Monday. "Honestly, I think that's one of the things that was causing so much stress on me. It kept me

up at night. The game that I love so much was almost taken away from me for good on September 28, 2014, but God decided to spare my life and gave me a second chance to play this game. I felt like it was being ripped from me again.

"I thought I might never play this game again. I had doctors tell me I wouldn't. It kind of put me down in the dumps. I was very anti-social. I didn't really communicate with anybody. It was very frustrating. Then I just came back home, and I asked myself, 'What am I really here for? Am I here to pick up this five-ounce ball and play a game, or am I here for a bigger purpose?' I talked to my mom and to a few other people who have mentored me, and that helped me get my focus on the bigger scheme of life."

Coincidentally (or perhaps not), just as Kitterman was gaining a new perspective and starting to come to terms with what life might look like after baseball, he got good news on the medical front. The seizures stopped [he hasn't had one since the UAB game in Murfreesboro roughly four months ago], and his primary doctor at Vanderbilt Hospital essentially told him late in the spring, "I don't see why you couldn't play baseball."

Kitterman's natural instinct was to return to action immediately, but it made little sense to burn a year of eligibility with the Blue Raiders going nowhere fast at the tail end of a frustrating season. When that trying season was over, Middle Tennessee's coaches set about overhauling the majority of the team's roster, and Kitterman and the Blue Raiders came to a mutual parting of the ways.

"They wanted me there, and I wanted to be there," he said, "but it didn't work out. It was just bad timing."

Kitterman, healthy again and able to play but suddenly without a team to play for, entered the transfer portal and waited. And fretted.

"I started thinking again that I was never gonna play again," he confessed. "I was thinking, 'People are gonna see that I've been to three schools in three years. They're gonna see the medical problems and the fact that I haven't thrown in a live game in over a year.' All these thoughts start popping into your head again, and mentally it's a very dark place to be."

"I've put so much time and hard work and effort into this game since I was three or four years old. It's all I've ever known."

After the requisite 48-hour waiting period for prospective transfers elapsed, Kitterman not so casually checked his inbox to see if any teams had reached out to him.

"I had fifteen different schools trying to get in touch with me," he said. "Most of them I had never heard of—some D-I schools in the Northeast and down in the deep South. I was like, 'I want to finish my degree and play baseball, but I'm not trying to go that far away from home.' I still can't drive [due to the seizures], and even though my mom is cancer-free, I wanted to be close to home just in case something happens."

Kitterman largely didn't follow up with the emails, but he started getting phone calls from schools like Arkansas-Monticello, UAH, the University of Tampa and West Florida. At the recommendation of Shelton State coach Bobby Sprowl, Kitterman also talked to UNA (which had offered him back in 2016 when he graduated from Russellville). None of those schools, however, seemed to be the right fit.

Meanwhile, Kitterman's younger brother, Houston, a 2018 graduate of RHS and a red-shirt



COURTESY PHOTO

As a freshman in 2017, Kitterman led the Union staff with a 2.89 ERA across 62.1 innings pitched. He transferred to Shelton State (inset) in 2018 and then red-shirted last season at Middle Tennessee. He signed with West Alabama last week.

'BACK', from page 16

freshman at West Alabama, talked to his Tiger coaches about the possibility of extending an offer to his big bro. Big bro, however, was skeptical.

"I was like, 'If they wanted me, they probably would have called me by now,'" Austin said. "It had been three weeks."

Better late than never, though. Kitterman's phone rang one day, and West Alabama assistant coach David Steed was on the other end of the line.

"He said, 'Hey man, we have three scholarship spots, and we need a pitcher, a shortstop and an outfielder,'" Kitterman recalled. "We want you to be the pitcher we get."

Just a couple of days later, West Alabama made the offer official, and Kitterman signed with the Tigers last week. For the first time in 12 years, he and his younger brother will be suiting up for the same team. [Houston didn't break into the varsity ranks at Russellville until 2017, the year after Austin graduated.]

"Me and Houston have played on the same team one time in my entire life, when I was nine and he was seven," Kitterman said. "I was talking to Coach Steed and Coach Rundles the other day, and like I told them, it's always been a dream of mine to play at the next level. It's always been a dream of mine for my younger brother to play at the next level, too. We never got the opportunity to play together in high school. It just didn't work out. But it's great now for us to get the chance to play together and compete together. Looking over while I'm pitching and seeing him at third base is gonna be pretty cool."

"It tickles me that God has opened the door and given us the opportunity to play together."

So...what happens the first time Austin induces a groundball and Little Bro boots it?

"I'll look at him and tell him to keep his head up and get the next one," Kitterman said before adding with a smile, "and he better make the play."

Asked if he plans to room with Houston at West Alabama, Kitterman answers emphatically.

"Lord, no," he said. "I lived with him for 18 years. I'm getting a house with another guy, and Houston will be in a house about a mile away. That's close enough."

With the seizures hopefully behind him for good now thanks to medication, Kitterman has been focusing this summer on getting his body and his arm back in game shape. He runs seven days a week, lifts weights four days a week, and throws bullpen sessions every Thursday and Sunday. He's happy to be a baseball player again.

"Oh yeah, it feels so great," he said. "People ask me all the time how I'm feeling, and I feel great. I'm healthy, and I feel good. For a few months there, I was worrying all the time, 'Am I gonna have a seizure today?' But I feel like I'm past that point. If it happens, it happens, but it's not something that's constantly on my mind."

"I was talking to somebody yesterday, and they asked me if I was gonna try to play pro ball," Kitterman said. "I feel like that should be everybody's goal if they're playing college ball. I'm gonna play until somebody looks me in the eye and tells me I'm not good enough to play anymore—whether that's in two years or in 22 years. If it's in two years, I'll get my degree and come back and coach and try to mentor and help kids like I had coaches help me my entire life. I want to do for kids what those coaches did for me."

Kitterman, who has two years of eligibility remaining and is working toward a degree in special education, aspires to coach baseball and football when his playing career is finished. But he's not prepared yet to concede exactly when that might be. He's laid hold once again of the game he loves, and he doesn't plan on letting go any time soon.

"I was talking to somebody yesterday, and they asked me if I was gonna try to play pro ball," Kitterman said. "I feel like that should be everybody's goal if they're playing college ball. I'm gonna play until somebody looks me in the eye and tells me I'm not good enough to play anymore—whether that's in two years or in 22 years. If it's in two years, I'll get my degree and come back and coach and try to mentor and help kids like I had coaches help me my entire life. I want to do for kids what those coaches did for me."

Taking a lunch break from his summer job on Monday afternoon, Kitterman paused for a moment to reflect on what he had learned from this most recent ordeal.

"You have to control what you can control," he said. "Control the controllables, and realize that some things are out of your hands. It's easy to get frustrated and act out of anger, but it takes character and focus to remain calm when something happens that you can't control. When life deals you a bad hand, play it the best you can. That's kind of what I've learned. It's not the bad hand you're dealt that matters most. It's how you react to those bad hands."

"This past season helped me grow as a person and as an individual. You can't take the game for granted, because you never know when you're gonna play your last game. I just finished reading a book about not taking life for



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'SEC,' from page 13

The Skinny: The Bulldogs are going to be really good again, but Kirby Smart's last two teams were also really good, and both of those teams lost a game in the regular season to an SEC West opponent—Auburn in 2017 and LSU in 2018. Should that happen again this season [Georgia travels to Auburn on November 16 and hosts Texas A&M the following week], the Bulldogs—assuming they win the East—would need to beat Alabama (again, presumably) in Atlanta to finish in the top two of the final preseason poll.

Georgia has had Alabama on the ropes two years in a row but has been unable to finish the job. Will this be the season the Bulldogs finally topple the Tide? We're not ready to go quite that far. Furthermore, Georgia's extremely tough November schedule (which includes games against Florida and Missouri in addition to the two crossover games mentioned above) makes a late loss in the regular season a distinct possibility, especially for a team with legitimate questions to answer at receiver and on defense.

Prediction: Lower
LSU

Preseason rank: No. 6

The Skinny: Preseason expectations were shockingly low for LSU last year, but a 10-win season ensured that wouldn't be the case again this year. How many games can LSU lose and still finish in the Top 5 in the final regular-season poll? One? Two? As good as the Tigers should be, they've lost at least three games in each of the last seven seasons.

This year's schedule features trips to Texas (early) and Alabama (late), plus home games with Florida, Auburn and Texas A&M. If the Tigers win three of those five games and finish 10-2, they might finish in the top five. But they might not. And more than two losses is certainly possible.

Prediction: Lower

Florida

Preseason rank: No. 8

The Skinny: Florida has a ton of momentum after closing last season with four straight wins and thrashing Michigan in a bowl game to get to 10-3. The Gators are definitely on the upswing, but replacing virtually the entire offensive line will be a challenge, and Feleipe Franks still has to prove he can play well against top-flight opponents.

He'll certainly get the chance, given the difficulty of Florida's schedule: Regular season bookends against Miami and FSU, a back-to-back with Auburn (at home) and LSU (on the road) in October, and the annual showdown with Georgia on November 9.

If Florida rises up to take the East from the Bulldogs, then we like the Gators to finish in the top seven. But we don't think they're quite there yet.

Prediction: Lower

Texas A&M

Preseason rank: No. 11

The Skinny: As we stated last week in this space, A&M may still be a year away from making legitimate noise as a playoff contender. Plus, the Aggies seem to have a schedule more challenging than any of the ten teams ranked ahead of them. Road games at Clemson, Georgia and LSU, plus a home date with Alabama? Yikes.

Lots of opportunities for season-defining wins. Also a great opportunity to finish 8-4 and well outside the Top 10.

Prediction: Lower

Auburn

Preseason rank: No. 16

The Skinny: We said last week in this space that Auburn might be better than people think, and we're sticking to it. If the young skill talent pops, if the offensive line takes a big step forward, if a quarterback emerges, if the loaded defensive line plays to its dominant potential....the Tigers could finish 9-3, and that would be enough—against a brutal schedule—to land them well inside the Top 15 at season's end.

On the other hand, if some of those ifs remain iffy, then 7-5 or 6-6 is a distinct possibility.

Prediction: Higher

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99¢ LB.

J.J.'s
Fried Pies
CHERRY

2/\$1 EACH

Whole Select
Beef Tenderloins
Sliced Free

\$7.99 LB.

Whole
Boneless Pork Loin Sliced Free

\$14.99 LB.

Smithfield Frozen **Back Rib Portions** 10 Lb. Box ... **\$9.99**

Roger Wood Lumber Jack Brand **Smoked Sausage** 24 Oz. **2/\$6.99**

Eckrich **Jumbo Franks** 14 Oz. **99¢**

Zeigler **Bologna** Regular Or Thick 16 Oz. **2/\$3**

Wright's **Bacon** Regular Only! 24 Oz. **\$6.99**

Fresh Frozen
Boneless Chicken Breast

\$1.59 LB.