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A true standout

RHS ranked by Niche.com as No. 3 school in state

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes received the news that Russellville High School was ranked third in Niche.com's list of the 2020 Standout Schools in Alabama, he was understandably excited. But Grimes also felt a measure of frustration, though, as he reflected on the school's recent grade in the Alabama Department of Education state report cards. According to www.niche.com, standout school rankings are limited to public high schools with at least 50 percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged and an overall Niche.com grade of B or higher. While RHS received a overall grade of B-plus, the school scored even higher in the category of diversity, with a grade of A-minus.

But when it comes to the Alabama Department of Education's annual report cards, both the school and system receive a failing grade in the category of academic achievement, something Grimes attributes to the large number of non-English language proficient students in Russellville City Schools.

"Being ranked so highly on this particular list from Niche.com is an honor for us," Grimes said, "because by taking into account the challenges we face with a high percentage of ELL students, especially, it shows that we are still performing at a high level and that our system can be considered one of the best in the state."

"We scored a 66 on academic achievement. The reason for that is we had 625 kids classified as English Language Learners (ELL) who had to take a test they

See 'STANDOUT' Page 9

PCHS teacher sues school board

Lawsuit alleges administrators ignored racially motivated actions toward son, a former student


John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

A lawsuit filed by a Phil Campbell High School teacher alleges that a series of racially motivated actions against her biracial son by Phil Campbell students were ignored by administrators and, as a result, the child's parents had to remove him from the school. The lawsuit, filed January 6, 2020, in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, was filed against the Franklin County Board of Education, Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton, former Phil Campbell principal Gary Odom and current principal Darit Riddle. The alleged incidents took place during the 2017-18

and 2018-19 school years, when Riddle was the school's assistant principal and in charge of discipline at Phil Campbell, according to the lawsuit. The teacher, who is white, is married to a black man. The alleged racially motivated actions were taken against their son while he was a student at Phil Campbell. According to the lawsuit, filed by Florence attorney Hank Sherrod III, the child, referred to in the lawsuit only as "MG," attended Phil Campbell High School for his seventh- and eighth-grade years. He previously attended Phil Campbell Elementary School for grades five and six, the complaint alleges. The complaint states that, when notified of various acts

See 'SUES,' Page 10

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Sharon Ann Mashburn Barton, Russellville, age 63
Died Friday, January 17, 2020.
Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Liberty Hill Cemetery.

Barney Hugh Newell, Russellville, age 80
Died Monday, January 13, 2020.
Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Blue Springs Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

Zoey Grace Chaney, infant girl
Chapel service held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Belgreen Cemetery.

Delaine Strickland, Spruce Pine, age 76
Died Friday, January 17, 2020.
Funeral arrangements had not been announced at press time. Pinkard Funeral Home was assisting the family.

Billy N. Fuller, Russellville, age 84
Died Saturday, January 11, 2020.
Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Lela Frances Taylor, Spruce Pine (formerly of Grand Junction, MI), age 95
Died Sunday, January 12, 2020.

Freddie Clinton James, Russellville, age 71
Died Friday, January 17, 2020.
Funeral arrangements had not been announced at press time. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Graveside service held at Grand Junction Cemetery in Grand Junction, MI.

Milton Ray Laster, Russellville, age 73
Died Sunday, January 12, 2020.
Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Friendship Holiness Church Cemetery.

Faye Stewart Thorne, Russellville, age 88
Died Thursday, January 16, 2020.
Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Belgreen Cemetery.

Ricky Lynn Lovelady, Russellville, age 54
Died Thursday, January 16, 2020.
Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Carl Eugene Townsend, Decatur, age 72
Died Wednesday, January 15, 2020. A celebration of his life was held at Mars Hill Church in Phil Campbell. Interment in the adjoining church cemetery.



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County school board receives positive audit report

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The report received by the Franklin County Board of Education at its January 14 meeting regarding the system's 2018 audit report was just what they wanted—short and sweet.

Denise Olive, with the Alabama Examiners of Public Accounts, told board members that Franklin County Schools' audit for the period of October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018 was materially correct in all aspects.

Additionally, Olive stated that a financial review of the system's federal assistance funds was also in material order.

"We take great care in our fiscal responsibilities to be good stewards with our funds and maximize using them for the benefit of our students," said superintendent Greg Hamilton. "I was pleased to hear the report, but expected no less."

Board members were recognized and presented gifts from student representatives at Tharptown High School, Belgreen High School, Phil Campbell High School, Tharptown Elementary School, Phil Campbell Elementary School and Red Bay Elementary School in conjunction with

School Board Recognition Month.

In other agenda items at its January 14 meeting, the board:

- Heard a report from Hamilton that students were now in the new building at Tharptown Elementary School and the science lab/band hall at Vina High School. The issue of liquidated damages from the contractor on the Tharptown project remains open, due to the project completion being delayed after the finish date. Hamilton said he expects to have that issue finalized soon.

"We take great care in our fiscal responsibilities to be good stewards with our funds and maximize using them for the benefit of our students," said superintendent Greg Hamilton. "I was pleased to hear the report, but expected no less."

- Approved a mileage rate reimbursement of 57.5 cents per mile, down from 58 cents, effective January 1, 2020. This amount applies to personnel traveling in privately owned vehicles on official school business.

- Approved out-of-state trips for Phil Campbell High School seniors to New York City from May 4-8, 2020; Belgreen High School seniors to Orlando, FL, April 19-23, 2020; and Vina High School

cheerleaders to Orlando for competition and cheer camp from February 6-10, 2020.

- Approved compensation of \$500 to Melissa Cox, yearbook sponsor at Belgreen High School, for yearbook supplement for the 2019-20 school year, per recommendation of BHS principal Derek Ergle. The school will reimburse Franklin County Board of Education the \$500 plus applicable benefits.

- Approved the following personnel moves: Retirement of Paige Wehunt, bus driver at East Franklin Junior High, effective February 1, 2020; Employment of Jeff Clark, part-time custodian at Tharptown Elementary School, retroactive to January 8, 2020, and Jennifer Cooper as science teacher at Belgreen High School; Volunteers including Lauren Ashley Moomaw, Bryne Wayne George, Mikel Duston Mitchell as volunteer softball coaches at Vina High School and Callie Barber as volunteer assistant track coach at Belgreen; Nathan Bohannon as a substitute for 2019-20.

The next regular scheduled meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education is February 25 with work session at 5 p.m. and meeting to follow.

Seven local establishments earn satisfactory rating

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Seven of the eight Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of January 6-10 had scores that fell 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 lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range. Backwoods Grill & Fish Camp, 2937 Hwy. 43, Phil Campbell, scored a below satisfactory rating of 81. (Paper

hand towels stored with various cleaners in restroom cabinet, no date on two bags of chopped lettuce, consumer advisory not posted).

The high score was 99, received by the Russellville Senior Center, 205 Montgomery St. SW, Russellville.

Other inspection scores and violations of Franklin County businesses included:

- Yogi's Food Co., 501 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 90. (Corndogs being held at 108 degrees, no certified person on premises during cat 3 operations/inspection).

- Pupuseria y Taqueria Las 3 Fronteras, 519 St. Clair St., Russellville, 92.

- The Grind Cafe and Coffee Shop, 13760 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 92. (Cracked measuring cup).

- Doe's Eat Place, 114 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 92. (Can opener blade dirty).

- Daily Bread Bar-B-Q, 305 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 97.

- The Hangout Nutrition, 13684 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.

Of the 14 inspections done in Colbert County from January 6-10, all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory. The high score of 99 was received by The Mixer, LLC, 215 N. Nashville Ave., Sheffield.

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

RCS Board approves school calendar for 2020-21

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved the 2020-21 school calendar at its January 16 meeting.

Students will return for classes on Wednesday, August 12, 2020, with the first holiday of the school year set for Monday, September 7 in celebration of Labor Day.

Fall Break will be October 5-6, with a teacher professional day on Wednesday, October 7. Homecoming 2020 is set for Friday, October 16.

Students will dismiss for Thanksgiving Break November 25-27, but the first two days of that week will be virtual days.

Christmas Break begins Monday, December 21, 2020 and runs through Tuesday, January 5, 2021 for students. Teachers will return Monday, January

3, 2021 for work days.

Spring Break will be the week of March 29-April 2, 2021, with the last day of classes for the year May 28, 2021.

Students will dismiss for Thanksgiving Break November 25-27, but the first two days of that week will be virtual days. Christmas Break begins Monday, December 21, 2020 and runs through Tuesday, January 5, 2021 for students. Teachers return Monday, January 3, 2021 for work days.

In other agenda items, the board:

- Approved trip requests for all athletic teams during the 2020-21 academic year that may occur due to cancellations, rainouts, etc. Coaches and sponsors are authorized to take team members and cheerleaders to away games. Students will travel to away games by bus or approved vehicle. Also approved was a trip to Vestavia on February

14-15 for the Alabama State Thespian Festival.

- Approved a facility use request by Cassie Medley, executive director with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, for the RHS auditorium on February 23, 2020 to host Community Reaching Every Artist Through Education (CRE-ATE) Scholarship Benefit in conjunction with the University of North Alabama School of the Arts.

- Approved the following personnel moves: Employment in Position of Jerry Canida as bus driver, effective January 16, 2020; Volunteer approval of Cam DeArman as golf volunteer; Temporary Employment of Emili Crummie to fill LeJoy Winston's leave of absence from January 8-March 9, 2020.

- Watched a video of Russellville Middle School students with messages of appreciation for the Russellville City Board of Education as part of School Board Appreciation Month.

Honey-Do: Charge it up

If you have a lawnmower, you will eventually have battery issues. Over the winter, batteries may become weak or die from being in storage. As I mentioned last week, let's look at battery maintenance and charging procedures.

The best battery maintenance is prevention. If you don't use your mower during the winter, remove the battery and store it in a warm, dry place. Just keep it away from flammables.

Keep the connections clean and corrosion-free. They can be cleaned with a wire brush and coated with a corrosion inhibitor to keep them clean.

Make sure cables are in good shape. Look for damaged rubber coatings and deteriorated eyelets.

A trickle charger can be attached with the battery on or off the mower and will keep the battery ready to go. Follow all manufacturer's directions and safety rules.

A dead battery can possibly be charged back to life. You can try charging it or carry it to a shop and have them do a load test on it.

Charging is a pretty simple operation. For specific details, follow the manufacturer instructions for your

charger.

It's always a good idea to wear gloves and eye protection when dealing with batteries.

Set the charger to 12 volts. The battery can be in or out of the tractor when you charge it. Make sure that the battery charger is off and unplugged before connecting it to the battery.

Connect the red charger cable to the positive (+) terminal of the battery. Connect the black charger cable to the negative (-) battery terminal.

Turn on or plug in the charger.

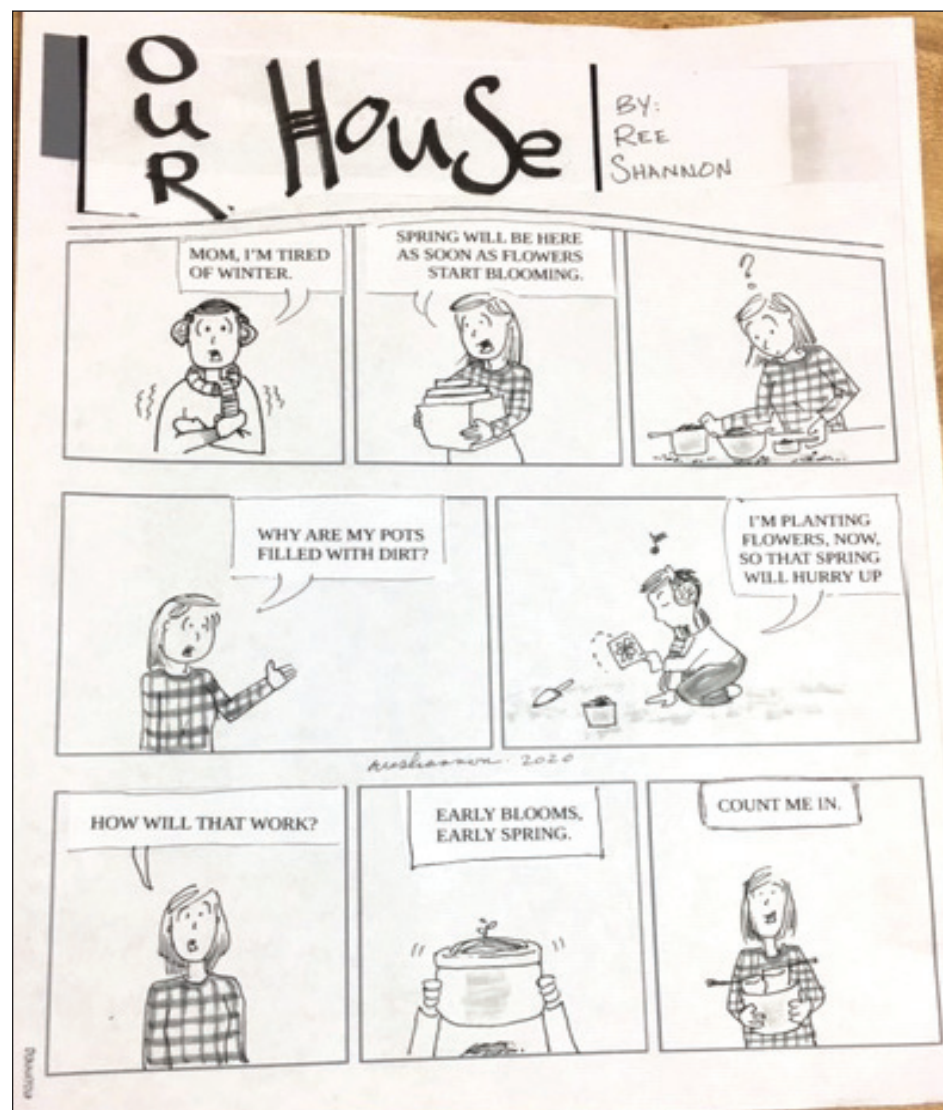
Charge the battery following the instructions specified by your battery charger manufacturer. Once the battery is fully charged, turn off the power on the charger. Then remove the charger cables.

Now is the time to be checking out these things and making sure your battery is in working order, because with a little help from the sun we'll be cutting soon.

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



Doug Green



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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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Help your teens reach their goals

I don't know about y'all, but I am ready to crush some goals this year! Maybe you don't feel so ready, and that's okay. Maybe *you're* ready, but you're worried your *high schooler* isn't.

Don't stress. No matter where you find yourself at the beginning of the year, it's never too late to get on track and set yourself (and your teen) up for success. The most important thing you and your teen need to do is: Have. A. Plan.

Here's how I break down the goal-setting process in a way that not only helps me plan for the whole year but also helps me create positive change in myself that lasts way after I've hit my goals.

The Vision

Before there can be a goal, there has to be a big-picture vision. Encourage your teen to think about what kind of person they want to become and what they want to achieve as they learn and grow in their lifetime. Thinking through these things will give your teen the *why* behind their goals. Their *why* will really keep them motivated!

The Goals

Goals are what we set in order to help us work toward the vision. All goals should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-sensitive. For example, "save money for college" is vague, but "save \$1,000 by graduation" is specific. It's driven by a deadline and makes sense for your teen.

The Habits

Help your teen build some smaller, consistent habits that help them achieve their goals. A habit for the example above could be setting aside a certain amount of money from each paycheck. That way, once they reach their goal, they've already formed a pattern that will help them stick

with their smart choices over time. Boom!

Now it's time to start putting the goal-setting process into action! If you have a student in the family, chances are that college—or at least thinking about college—is somewhere in their near future. If they're interested in going to college (without student loans), here are a few examples of goals they could set for this year that will help them get ready for that big step.

Ninth-graders should:

- Get solid grades by having healthy study habits and turning assignments in on time.
- Research three colleges that fit with the careers that interest them.
- Meet with their guidance counselor at least twice (this goes for all four years of high school).

10th-graders should:

- Consider getting a tutor or taking a prep class for the ACT or SAT tests.
- Research job shadowing or internship opportunities.
- Research scholarships every day.

11th-graders should:

- Take the ACT or SAT multiple times to boost their score.
- Make a list (resumé) of their grades, awards, organizations, volunteer time and clubs (colleges look at this stuff!).
- Spend at least an hour every day looking for scholarships.

12th-graders should:

- Apply to the top colleges on their list.



Anthony O'Neal



by Dave Ramsey

There's no magic pill

Dear Dave, My wife and I made a resolution this year to pay off \$20,000 in credit card debt we've accumulated. I want us to follow your plan and live on a really tight budget. She wants us to use a debt consolidation company, like some of her friends have done. I'm really against her idea, but how can I change her mind?

Blake

Dear Blake, I'm glad you two have made the decision to get out of debt and gain control of your finances. When it comes to this sort of thing, it's wise to remember there's no magic pill. No debt consolidation company is going to get you out of debt and help you stay out of debt. The answer is learning how to control yourself and your behavior with money.

Using a debt consolidation company seems appealing, because there's usually a lower monthly payment or lower interest rate attached. The problem in most cases, however, is the lower payment or interest rate exists only because the term is extended. You might pay a little less

each month, but you end up staying in debt longer.

There are other problems involved in using debt consolidation companies, too. For one thing, it can trash your credit for a long time when it comes to buying a car or a house. That's why I sometimes refer to it as a CON-solidation, because the whole thing is basically a con. They make you think you're really doing something about your debt problem, but the debt—and all the bad habits that caused it—are still there.

My guess is your wife's friends think using a debt consolidation company is an easy, harmless way to get out of a financial mess. But sometimes you've got to be an adult, admit the mistakes you've made and do what it takes to straighten things out. This kind of thing isn't a math issue. It's a behavior issue. Making the decision to get out of debt and never go back there again, by living on a really tight budget and making sacrifices, is the best way to fix this mess and learn a lesson in the process.

Live like no one else so that later you can live—and give—like no one else. Stay away from debt consolidation companies, Blake. Doing this the right way is worth it!

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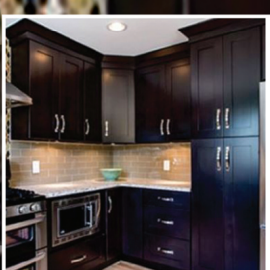
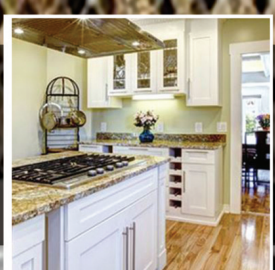
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EVENTS OF INTEREST • FAMILY REUNIONS • PLAYS • CHURCH GATHERINGS • EDUCATIONAL • CLUB MEETINGS

Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 is selling Boston butts for Super Bowl Sunday. Butts are \$30. Pre-order by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup will be Saturday, February 1 from 8-10 a.m. at the Lodge on Coffee Street.

The Russellville Parks and Recreation Department is now conducting Soccer Registration for boys and girls through Saturday, February 8. The leagues are open to boys and girls ages 3-12 of all skill levels. The fee is \$35, with a discount for sibling registration. For more information, call 256-332-8770.

Everyone is welcome to worship services at Duncan Creek Baptist Church, 3925 Duncan Creek Road, Russellville. Service times are Sunday School at 10 a.m., Worship Service at 11 a.m. and Bible Study at 5 p.m. Pastor is Bro. Joe Thorn.

Spruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Next meeting is February 4. All members and friends are urged to attend.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, February 6 at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center on Ash Avenue. For more info, call 256-324-2317. Camp #1833 meets the first Thursday of each month EXCEPT January and July. The Sons of Confederate Veterans is the direct heir of the United Confederate Veterans and the oldest hereditary organization for male descendants of Confederate soldiers. Everyone welcome!

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert at the Roxy Theatre on Saturday, February 8 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 historic Roxy Theater.

American Legion Post 64 will meet Thursday, February 13 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

The book *Scandalous Women: The Lives and Loves of History's Most Notorious Women*, by Elizabeth Kerri Mahon, will be discussed at the February 19 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 information, email nancy537481@yahoo.com.

Everyone is invited to a campaign rally for Tommy Tuberville for U.S. Senate. The rally is scheduled for Sunday, February 23 from 5-7 p.m. at the A.W. Todd Centre, 201 South Washington Avenue in Russellville.

Ronnie McDowell returns to Russellville to celebrate his 70th birthday with a special show at the Roxy Theatre on Saturday, March 21 at 7 p.m. Joseph Baldwin and Johnathan Len will open the show. Tickets are on sale now. Reserved seats are \$20-\$35, and general admission balcony seats are \$15. For ticket information, call 256-415-3270. Proceeds will benefit the Roxy Restoration Fund.

You are welcome to all services at Pleasant Ridge Missionary Baptist Church (Hwy. 48 in Russellville). Sunday service times: Sunday School at 10 a.m., worship service at 11 a.m., Sunday night service at 6 p.m. Wednesday night Bible Study is held at 6:30 p.m. Pastor is Bro. Roger Bond.

DivorceCare, 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.

TOPs 0155 Russellville is now meeting at the Russellville Hospital Education Room at 4:30 p.m. each Monday. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more info.

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Franklin County Board of Ed approves 2020-21 calendar

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved the school calendar for the 2020-21 academic year at the board's January 14 meeting.

Students will return for their first day of school on Friday, August 7, 2020. Certified and support personnel will have their annual institute day at Belgreen High School on Monday, August 3, followed by a second institute day at Red Bay on August 4.

The first school holiday will be Monday, September 7 for Labor Day. Franklin County students will enjoy a two-day fall break on Monday and Tuesday, October 12-13, with parent-teacher conferences set for the following Monday, October 19 from 1-4 p.m. Students will be dismissed from school that day at 11:30 a.m. The next fall holiday will be for Veterans Day, on Wednesday, November 11.

The Thanksgiving holiday will be an entire week from November 23-27, and Christmas break will start at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, December 18. Students will return for the spring semester on Thursday, January 7, 2021. Spring Break 2021 will be the week of March 29-April 2, 2021. The last day of school will be Thursday, May 27, 2021 with an 11:30 a.m. dismissal. Senior High graduations are scheduled for Thursday and Friday, May 27-28, 2021.

If the Alabama Legislature moves forward with a bill that would push back the start of the fall semester, students and teachers could see a dramatic change in the school calendar in future years.

According to Franklin County Schools superintendent Greg Hamilton, legislators are considering pushing back the start of the school year to no earlier than August 15.

While the specifics of any proposed legislation are not yet known, if the 180-day minimum requirement is not changed, this later start could mean the end of fall breaks, spring break and Christmas holidays could be shortened.

"It's something I'm not in favor of, because it's hard enough to get the days in now," Hamilton said. "I believe there's a time needed for breaks from the school year and that keeps students more motivated. With a later start to the school year and having to get 180 days in, that could eliminate things like fall break, Christmas holidays and spring break.

"The first of August is plenty early to start and end by Memorial Day. Reducing the days required for students to be in school would be much more of a benefit. That's what I'm for, a 165-day minimum. That would allow professional development months in May, June and July. We spend so much time now trying to get professional development in and trying to get our teachers in training during the school year."

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Byars seeking office of Revenue Commissioner

Submitted to the FFP

Stratt Byars has announced his intent to seek election to the office of Revenue Commissioner of Franklin County in the Republican Primary on March 3, 2020.

Stratt was born and raised in Franklin County. He is a 1981 graduate of Russellville High School and graduated from The University of North Alabama with a B.S. in Management in 1986.

Stratt is married to the former Connie Carr and has three children: Stratt (Carrie), Anna and Conner. Stratt and Connie are members and attend First Baptist Church in Russellville. Stratt and his family live in the Saints Crossroads Community.

Stratt worked as store manager of Rogers Department Store in Muscle Shoals until 1992. Since then he has been a self-employed businessman in agribusiness, real estate and retail sales.

Stratt served Franklin County as a County Commissioner from 2008 until 2012. As Commissioner, Stratt assisted in preparing budgets, adopting policy and managing Franklin County Business.

Byars said he has the experience and qualifications necessary to serve Franklin County as Revenue Commissioner.

"When elected," Byars said, "I will work hard to serve the people of Franklin County in a responsible manner".

Stratt said that he looks forward to visiting with the people of Franklin County before the March 3 Republican primary.



Stratt Byars

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Thanking God for the Dreamer, Dr. Martin Luther King. Thankful for the journey the late Rev. C.D. Hamilton had walking and strategizing with Dr. King. Continuing the legacy through scholarship. Appreciating the scholarship contributors. Pictured (from left) with Sheryl Hamilton, widow of C.D. Hamilton, are this year's scholarship winners: Xavier Hollingworth, Scarlett Winstead, William Rushing.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net!

'STANDOUT' from page 1

couldn't read," Grimes said, referring to the number of non-English language proficient students in Russellville City Schools. "Being ranked so highly on this particular list from Niche.com is an honor for us, because by taking into account the challenges we face with a high percentage of ELL students, especially, it shows that we are still performing at a high level and that our system can be considered one of the best in the state."

RHS was ranked third among all Alabama public high schools that meet the ranking criteria. Russellville Middle Schools placed 15th in the list of Standout Middle Schools.

The factors considered in ranking standout schools are: 30 percent for economically disadvantaged math proficiency; 30 percent for economically disadvantaged reading proficiency; 15 percent for economically disadvantaged percentage of students; 15 percent for teachers' grade, with criteria including teacher salaries, absenteeism, state test results, etc.; 10 percent for student racial diversity index. Statistics used were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, according to www.niche.com.

It's the irony of what the Niche.com ranking means and how it flies in the face of the way the state Department of Education grades academic achievement.

"This is the problem I've had with the state report card since its inception," Grimes said. "Our ELL population's scores on standardized tests, given exclusively in English, are factored into our overall standardized testing scores. This ultimately brings our scores down, and our district receives a lower grade on the State Report Card because of it."

"With the Niche Standout Schools list, it clearly shows that as a whole we are performing extremely well, especially considering our various challenges, and I strongly believe this is a more accurate measuring stick for academic achievement than that used by the state Department of Education."

The standardized tests used by the Department of Education are administered to students in grades 3-8 and 11.

This is not the first time RHS has ranked in the Niche.com Standout Schools List. In 2017, the school was ranked number one among all Alabama high schools.

Loveless Academic Magnet Program High School in Montgomery ranked number one on this year's list, followed by New Century Technology High School in Huntsville. Both schools are magnet schools, which are able to receive special funding and additional resources that may not be available to other public schools.

With more than 400 high schools in Alabama, Grimes said the overwhelming majority of those met the criteria to be included in the Standout Schools rankings.

Grimes is chairman of the Alabama Leaders Advocating for English Learners (ALA-EL), an affiliate organization of the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools, or CLAS.

This advocacy group met recently to discuss ways to improve on and strengthen the way English language learning is taught, funded and prioritized in Alabama schools.

Grimes said ALA-EL is pushing for legislation that would exclude non-English proficient students from being counted in the academic achievement category.

First Metro holding supply drive for FAME Girls Ranch

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

With 15 girls residing at FAME Girls Ranch, there's a constant need for supplies. From hygiene products to clothing, something is always needed.

With that in mind, First Metro Bank employees are holding a donation drive for supplies needed at FAME. Donations are now being accepted at First Metro Bank's Russellville location, and all other First Metro locations, now through February 29.

Kassidy Willis, CSR and Lending Assistant at First Metro Bank Russellville, said she received a list from FAME director Cindy Hall of needed supplies.

"We thought it would be a good idea to try and get some of those," Willis said. "I know it's hard when you have 15 girls there. There are a lot of items that are everyday things they need to have. It's hard to keep that up for 15 girls on a day-to-day basis."

FAME Girls Ranch is one of four Alabama Sheriffs Boys' and Girls' Ranches in the state. Located near Russellville in the former family home of Rick Hall, the ranch provides care for girls for varying lengths of time. At FAME, they

See 'DRIVE,' page 11

"We have 53 percent Hispanic students in our system. An overwhelming majority of those students score well," Grimes said. "They end up as valedictorians or salutatorians. This has nothing to do with race."

"We're simply saying that if you can't read a test, you shouldn't have to take it and it shouldn't be scored. Why are we looking at these students to see if we're doing a good job when we know they can't read the test?"

For now, though, Grimes said it's a time for students, teachers and administrators to celebrate the standout schools rankings. Efforts to change the state's testing criteria will come later.

"We want our teachers, administrators, students and citizens to know what an amazing job they're doing," Grimes said. "We're just asking for help from the state, because our teachers and administrators need to know they're doing a good job."

"But when you get the state report card and it doesn't take these factors into account, it negates the credibility of the report card altogether."

Franklin County Census 2020 Positions

- These positions are paid solely from grant funds received from ADECA.
- These positions are on a contract basis and are only for the duration of the Census.
 - Earnings from these positions are subject to 1099 reporting.

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Tasks: Help Senior Coordinator

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Number of Positions: 4

Tasks: Work events and assist in trainings.

Special Skills: Bilingual, computer skills, people skills

Bilingual Translators and Interpreters

Number of Positions: As needed according to events/need

Tasks: Translating or interpreting

Special Skills: Highly proficient in more than one language

Anyone interested in any of these positions should apply at the Franklin County Commission Office Elizabeth Lucas Annex located at 405 Jackson Avenue North, Russellville, AL 35653 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday. The deadline to apply for these positions is January 29, 2020 at Noon. Please contact County Administrator Leah Mansell at (256)332-8850 with any questions.

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'SUES,' from page 1

of racially motivate abuse toward MG, school officials, including teachers and administrators, did nothing to alleviate the situation and did not discipline the students responsible.

Franklin County Board of Education attorney Danny McDowell said he was aware of the lawsuit and he notified board members of its filing. McDowell denies any wrongdoing by school officials and believes the end result of the case will show that.

"I feel confident once all the facts come out that the people of Franklin County can be reassured that students in Franklin County are being properly educated and treated," McDowell said.

MG's lawsuit alleges two counts, race discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and a Title VI violation as a result of school officials not taking "corrective measures in response to notice of student-on-student racial harassment..."

The complaint states that while MG attended Phil Campbell, all of his teachers, administrators, staff and classmates were white, and nearly the entire student body of Phil Campbell was white (less than one percent non-white, the complaint alleges).

Although the complaint references racial incidents while MG attended Phil Campbell Elementary School, those are not the basis of the complaint as the plaintiff acknowledged "they were handled appropriately by administrators, and MG never experienced a serious racial harassment problem at the elementary school."

The pattern of racial harassment alleged in the complaint began in October of 2017, when MG and a white student got into a fight in the bathroom. Riddle allegedly gave MG 3.5 days of in-

school suspension but did not discipline the other child.

The following month, on November 13, 2017, MG's mother states she reported to Riddle incidents in MG's physical education class where students called him the N-word and told him "he belonged in the cotton field."

The plaintiff alleges she provided Riddle with specific names of students responsible for the harassment, and Riddle "assured MG and his mother...the issue would be addressed."

On November 14, 2017, the plaintiff alleges MG was subjected to racial slurs by a basketball teammate on the team bus.

Again, MG's mother says she reported the incident to Riddle and he allegedly "told MG if he was going to be a troublemaker that he needed to just turn his basketball jersey in..."

The complaint describes a December 2017 incident "of mischief" where MG and some white teammates were involved in, and that MG alone was punished.

The complaint alleges that MG's basketball teammates repeatedly played a racist song, *Alabama N-word*, through the season. When reported to Riddle, the complaint alleges he said he "would look into it and make sure the coach knew."

The next incident allegedly came in March of 2018, when MG's enrichment teacher showed her class the movie *42*, about baseball legend Jackie Robinson. When the N-word was used in the movie, students would laugh and point at MG, who looked to his teacher for help, but she just laughed, the complaint states.

The plaintiff states she reported this incident to Odom and Riddle, as well as Hamilton, but no action was taken.

An October 2018 incident is described in which MG was "disciplined more severely" than two white students for damaging school property. And later that month, MG was allegedly demoted from the ninth-grade basketball team, after Riddle took over the team.

The complaint describes the "most extreme incident" taking place on November 15, 2018, when a white student, in front of other students, threw basketballs at MG, subjected him to numerous racial slurs and showed other students a picture of a noose, claiming he was going to hang him.

School administrators are alleged to have failed to report the incident to law enforcement and taken no action against the student, according to the complaint. The complaint additionally states that administrators "refused" to file criminal charges against the student.

The complaint also alleges that student threatened to shoot up the school, but the student was allowed to return to class.

According to the complaint, MG's parents pursued criminal charges on his behalf against the student.

As a result of these incidents, the plaintiff alleges "the failure and refusal of the individual defendants to protect MG from continued harassing, intimidating and racially aggressive behavior of other students deprived MG of educational opportunities enjoyed by his white colleagues..."

The plaintiff is seeking injunctive relief, compensatory damages, punitive damages against Odom, Riddle and Hamilton, attorney's fees and court costs. As of January 18, 2020, only Odom had been served with the complaint.

The plaintiff requested a jury trial to present her case. No trial date has been set yet, as the case is in its preliminary stages.

Operation 'Direct Impact' nets 50 drug arrests

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

On January 14, numerous law enforcement agencies conducted a narcotics arrest warrant operation in Franklin County and the surrounding area.

Investigators with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and Russellville Police Department assigned to the ALEA Region E Drug Task Force conducted an extensive narcotics investigation in the region with the assistance of other area narcotics units. The investigation was conducted for approximately one year and is still ongoing.

Working with the Franklin County District Attorney's Office, the investigation was titled "Direct Impact," reflecting the direct strike this operation took to the local drug distribution community. The investigation resulted in more than 80 Grand Jury indictments/arrest warrants being issued for subjects involved or related to the investigation.

The operation, as of last week, has resulted in 50 subjects being arrested and booked into the Franklin County Jail. Six additional felony drug charges were made during the operation, as well as three individuals taken into custody that were wanted by other agencies. Numerous other arrests are expected and will follow as investigators follow up on further leads and information regarding the whereabouts of the remaining wanted subjects.

Last week's operation was a collaborative effort involving the following participating agencies:

- Franklin County Sheriff's Office
- Franklin County District Attorney's Office
- Russellville Police Department
- Red Bay Police Department
- Alabama Law Enforcement Agency – State Bureau of Investigation
- Alabama Law Enforcement Agency- Region E Drug Task Force
- Alabama Board of Pardons and Parole
- Alabama Department of Corrections – K9 Unit
- Alabama Department of Conservation- Enforcement Division
- Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office
- Marion County Sheriff's Office
- Colbert County Sheriff's Office
- Colbert County Drug Task Force
- Morgan County Sheriff's Office
- Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office
- United States Marshal Service- Gulf Coast Fugitive Task Force

Subjects arrested as of January 14, 2020, are as follows: *Booking photos posted on the departmental website inmate section.

- Alton Witt – Possession of Controlled Substance
- Jeremy Motes- Drug Trafficking, Possession of Controlled Substance
- Madison Davis- Chemical Endangerment of Child
- Dallas Terry- Conspiracy to Commit Controlled Substance Crime
- Cornelius Spangler- Drug Trafficking, Possession of Marijuana 1st
- Alysia Uzdil- Chemical Endangerment of Child, Possession of Controlled Substance
- Horace Mullins- Drug Trafficking
- Joni Baker- Promoting Prison Contraband- Drugs
- Andy Fisher- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- Thomas Hatton- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia

- Kimberly Lafine- Possession of Controlled Substance
- Frankie Vandiver- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- Jason Thomas- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Axcel Lastra- Possession of Controlled Substance with Intent to Distribute
- Jerry Mcgee- Possession of Controlled Substance
- Pamela Suggs- Drug Trafficking
- Peter Steien- Possession of Controlled Substance with Intent to Distribute
- Tamra Smith- Conspiracy to Commit Controlled Substance Crime
- Shane Riddle- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- Joshua Cameron- Possession of Controlled Substance, Burglary 3rd, Theft 1st
- Christie Ford- Distribution of Controlled Substance x 2
- Steven Pennington- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- Jessica Brackin- Probation/Parole Violation – Drug Offenses
- Robert Terry- Probation/Parole Violation- Drug Offenses
- Tevin Cross- Drug Trafficking, Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Marijuana 1st
- Jerry Green- Escape 1st – Drug Offense
- Moises Lucas- Possession of Controlled Substance x 2. Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- David Jackson- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- Silvester Tolentino-Hernandez- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Paraphernalia
- Willie Hamilton- Drug Trafficking
- Skylar Hall- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- James Coleman- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- James Fuller- Possession of Controlled Substance
- William Vandiver- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia x 2
- Raymond Perez- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Cassie Cummings- Chemical Endangerment of Child
- John Whitlock- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Jeffery Baker- Possession of Controlled Substance, Arson, Escape 1st
- Payton Fretwell- Possession of Controlled Substance x 4, Attempt to Elude, Resisting Arrest
- Sabrina Johnson- Probation / Parole Violation- Drug Offense
- Brandy Brooks- Chemical Endangerment of Child
- Angela Perrigin- Possession of Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Steven Pierce- Distribution of Controlled Substance
- David Presley- Possession of Controlled Substance x 2. Possession of Marijuana 2nd
- Erica Strickland- Drug Trafficking
- Justin Williams- Chemical Endangerment of Child
- Stacy Hester- Possession of Controlled Substance
- Brooke Michael- Chemical Endangerment of Child
- Jason Bray- Possession of Controlled Substance x 2, Carrying Brass Knuckles
- Huruy Gebrewalde- Distribution of Controlled Substance

'GOALS,' from page 4

- Plan to visit their top three colleges before making a final choice.
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on what to do during each year of high school, check out the College Prep Checklists at AnthonyONEal.com/Resources.

With some solid habits and goals, your teen will have a successful year—no matter what educational or career path they choose. Major props to you for supporting them and helping them reach

their full potential. Now, go kill it in 2020!

Since 2003, Anthony has helped hundreds of thousands of students make smart decisions. He's the national best-selling author of Debt Free Degree. Follow Anthony on YouTube and Instagram @AnthonyONEal and online at anthonyoneal.com or [facebook.com/aoneal](https://www.facebook.com/aoneal).

'DRIVE,' from page 9

receive counseling, guidance and support. Girls who are placed at FAME are there due to no fault of their own. Rather, they face family situations that don't allow them to remain at home, so the ranch becomes their home, regardless of how long they stay.

Fundraising is an integral part of FAME. The annual golf tournament is the largest event each year, but ranch directors count on the efforts of the community through drives like the one First Metro is now conducting.

The donation list includes: Socks, face wash, Dial body wash, felted hang-

ers, hair conditioner, ethnic hair products, shave cream, leave-in conditioner, mousse, hairspray, body and face lotion, laundry detergent (Tide sport preferred), fabric softener sheets, cleaning supplies, over-the-counter medications, pots and pans, cooking utensils, art supplies, silverware and duffle-sized overnight bags.

"We encourage everyone to help with this campaign to support FAME Girls Ranch, and if you want to donate, just bring your items by our Russellville branch or any First Metro location," Willis said.



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PC girls pull off threepeat

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RED BAY - After each and every practice, Kallie Allen and her Phil Campbell teammates—at least the ones who play on the perimeter—are required to make 50 three-pointers apiece before they can call it a day.

“It doesn’t take that long,” said Allen, a senior guard who signed with Wallace-Hanceville right before the season began. “Probably about twenty minutes. Maybe thirty.”

Allen was asked if she ever drifts well beyond the arc and launches any 30-footers (just for fun) during the course of these post-practice shooting sessions.

“Usually,” she confessed, “when I’m goofing around a little.”

And do any of those 30-footers ever find the

See ‘THREEPEAT,’ Page 16



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Mills led Phil Campbell’s comeback against Belgreen with 15 second-half points and then had six steals in the finals against Tharptown.

Back on top

Belgreen’s boys bring home third county crown in last four seasons

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RED BAY - If you wandered into a recent Belgreen basketball practice, you might have seen Will Bonner running with the second team.

Bonner, the team’s sophomore point guard and leading scorer this season at 18.1 points per game (through Sunday), wasn’t being punished. He hadn’t been demoted either. Rather, the move was part of first-year head coach Marty Cooper’s ongoing effort to make sure his team can continue to function at a high level even when Bonner has to come off the floor.

“You can go way back to the Deshler game [a 72-71 win by the Bulldogs on November 23], when Will had to spend some time on the bench,” Cooper said. “It worked out, and we won that game, but most of the time when he’s out it hasn’t been too good. We’ve been working on it in practice, taking him out and making the other guys do it.”

“We’ve actually been putting him on the second team and letting him press [the other starters] and put pressure on them. The other day at practice, they broke the pressure and got a score, and he turned around and started giving them a standing ovation. He was like, ‘See, you guys *can* do it without me.’”

All that practice paid off in last Saturday’s county championship game against rival Red Bay. The 5’11 Bonner was his usual scintillating self when he was on the floor, slicing up an excellent Tiger defense for 16 points in the first 13 minutes of the game on 4-for-5 shooting from the floor and 7-for-9 from the line. Then, with 2:48 left in the first half and Belgreen leading by one at 26-25, Bonner picked up his second foul and headed to the bench.

What followed was the first of two key stretches on Saturday night during which the Bulldogs were forced to play significant minutes with their floor general, top scorer, best ball-handler and defensive catalyst reduced to the role of spectator. Their poise and proficiency at those critical junctures—along with some dead-eye shooting from junior guard Scout Bragwell in the second half—pro-



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

A WILL AND A WAY - Bonner (1) scored a career-high 35 points in a semifinal rout of Phil Campbell (above), then had 24 to lead the Bulldogs past Red Bay in Saturday’s final.

pelled Belgreen’s boys to an impressive 61-41 win and a third county title in the last four seasons.

“Unbelievable,” said Bonner, who finished with a game-high 24 points. “It’s an unbelievable feeling. It feels great. We went in at halftime pretty close, and Coach told us to keep our composure, take our time and do what we do. We did it the best we could.”

After Bonner picked up his second foul late in the first half, the Bulldogs (20-5 through Sunday) actually increased their lead from one point to five points heading into the break. Cooper pointed to one chaotic sequence in particular where 6’4 senior Bryant Hubbert chased down a loose ball and banked in a runner from the right side of the lane to make it 28-25 with a little more than a minute left in the half.

“The biggest play in the first half was that long loose ball where Hubbert picked it up between two people and kind of threw it up there and banked it in,” Cooper said. “That was huge. Will was out, and we needed a bucket. That was a really big play for us.”

Collin Bonner, whose terrific performance on both ends of the floor included five blocks and two steals to go along with 14 points on 6-for-8 shooting, tossed in a floater on Belgreen’s next trip, and

See ‘TOP,’ Page 18

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Lady Tigers win ninth-grade title

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - After a thrilling one-point victory over the top-seeded Tharptown Lady Wildcats in the semifinals, expectations were sky-high for Red Bay's ninth-grade girls as they moved into the championship game against Phil Campbell at the junior high Franklin County Tournament.

Needless to say, the Lady Tigers lived up to those expectations.

While the offensive side was clicking on all cylinders for Red Bay, the defensive side was on a completely different level as the Lady Tigers routed the Lady Bobcats 37-9 in last Tuesday's final.

Once the final buzzer sounded after the first quarter, Red Bay led by a score of 7-2 thanks in part to Kaylie Lindley and four of her eleven total points for the night. It might seem as though holding an opponent to just two points in a quarter is as close to perfection as a team can get on the defensive end. Lindley and the rest of the Lady Tigers proved those thoughts to be wrong as they held Phil Campbell to just one—yes, just *one*—point in the entire second quarter. The lone point came via a free throw from Maddie Raper, who finished her day with three points for the Lady Bobcats, all from the foul line.

Red Bay coach Shauna Humphries knew that

her girls would have to play extremely well on defense based on their prior matchups with Phil Campbell this season and was pleased with how her team performed against them this time around.

"It had been fairly close the past few times we played this season, and we knew their strengths and who their primary players were," Humphries said. "We knew that if we could take their main players out of the game we had a really good shot to pull this off, and it ended up working out for us."

Humphries said that she doesn't want this to be just a one-year occurrence for the Lady Tigers, but rather something that the program can build on moving forward.

"We talked in the locker room after the game about how we didn't want this to just be enough for us. We want to look at the big picture," she said. "These girls have put in so many hours into this season from practicing with us to even practicing with our varsity coaches from time to time. I just hope they take this win tonight and feel great about it but also build on it for future seasons as well."

All seven Lady Tigers were able to register at least one point in the scoreboard, including leading scorer Lindley with 11. Others scoring for the Lady Tigers were Jaylee Vinson with 10 points, Shelby

See 'TITLE,' page 17



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Red Bay's ninth-grade girls brought home the county championship last week with a 37-9 win over Phil Campbell in the finals.

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Hyde leads PC boys to ninth-grade crown

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - In a junior high Franklin County Tournament full of fantastic defense and high-octane offenses, it was only fitting that the final game of the night last Tuesday was no different.

By the time the final second ticked off the clock, one Phil Campbell player had outscored the opposing team altogether, and four others were on the board with points of their own. Quentin Hyde did most of the heavy lifting on the offensive side of the ball with 26 points and five three-pointers as the Bobcats routed East Franklin 55-13 to take home the ninth-grade boys title.

Phil Campbell head Shane Clay was a big believer in Hyde when he took over as the head coach for the Bobcats and says that he is very impressed with how far he has progressed this year.

"When I came here in June, I knew immediately that Quentin was a very good shooter, and he's had multiple games where he's shown time and time again just how far he has matured and gotten better," Clay said. "He has so much potential. If he can just shore up some smaller things and keep improving on the defensive side of the ball, the sky



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Phil Campbell's ninth-grade boys rolled past East Franklin last week to win the county title.

is the limit for Quentin."

Hyde scored 18 of his 26 points in the first half as the Bobcats jumped out to an early 13-6 lead by the end of the first quarter. Hyde chipped in 12 more points in the second quarter to add to his total for the night but it wasn't the offense that was

the most impressive in the first half; it was the Phil Campbell defense. After allowing a miniscule six points in the first quarter, the Bobcats one-upped themselves by holding the Rebels scoreless in the second quarter.

See 'HYDE,' page 19

The Red Bay 7th/8th grade boys, Belgreen 7th/8th grade girls and Phil Campbell B-Team boys also won county championships last week. For full coverage of those games, please see next week's print edition of the *Free Press* or go online now to franklinfreepress.net.

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'THREEPEAT,' from page 13

mark?

"Sometimes," she said with a smile.

Last Thursday's Franklin County Tournament semifinal against top-seeded Belgreen was no laughing matter for the Lady Bobcats, who came in having won 20 consecutive games against county competition over the past three seasons. That stretch included a 31-point rout of the Lady Bulldogs back in mid-December, but Phil Campbell had its hands full for 32 minutes—make that 36 minutes—on Thursday night.

Trailing by 10 early in the fourth quarter after a basket by Belgreen senior Ansley Tate (who would finish with a career-high 32 points), the Lady Bobcats fought back and found themselves down by just two late in regulation. Emma Dempsey went 1-for-2 at the line with 10.8 seconds left to push the Lady Bulldogs' lead to three, leaving Phil Campbell with one final chance to pull even and keep its quest for a third straight county title alive.

The Lady Bobcats brought the ball up the floor and eventually got it in the hands of Allen, who was roughly mid-way between the top of the key and the half-court line. Out of options (not to mention timeouts), the 5'9 guard squared her shoulders to the basket, took an extra beat to gather herself and let fly from 30 feet.

It was just like those post-practice shooting sessions—only this time, Allen wasn't goofing around.

The shot was pure and true, settling into the net to tie the game 61-61 with two seconds remaining and force overtime. Tate, who had been Belgreen's anchor all night, fouled out mid-way through the extra period, and senior guard Kaci Harris made a pair of clutch free throws to put Phil Campbell in front for good with two minutes to go.

The Lady Bobcats prevailed 70-65 in an instant classic, extending their win streak over county foes to 21 and earning the right to play for a third straight county championship. [They went on to post their 22nd consecutive win against county opponents on Saturday night, beating Tharptown 62-48 in the finals to claim the tournament title for a third year in a row. For details on that game, go online to www.franklinfreepress.net.]

Phil Campbell survived the Lady Bulldogs' upset bid for several reasons, including a flurry of threes to open the game and another to start the third quarter; a huge second half from junior guard Caitlynn Mills, who scored 15 of her 21 points after the break before fouling out with 1:56 left in regulation; and 13 turnovers by Belgreen (16-6) in the fourth quarter, plus another three in overtime.

But it still came down to the best player on the floor—the best player in the county—making a 30-foot shot with time running out to save the day.

"She's a player," Belgreen coach Chad Green said of Allen, who added four points in overtime and finished the night with a team-high 22 on 8-for-15 shooting from the floor. "My girl stayed up on her. Katie Dempsey was on her, and Katie stayed up. Kallie hit a thirty-footer with a couple of seconds left. It is what it is."

Allen had only one thing going through her mind when she sized up the rim for that final shot.

Well, maybe two things.

"It was going through my head that I had to shoot it, because we were down three and there was, like, three seconds left," Allen said. "But Coach Thomas was also yelling at me not to shoot it."

Come again?

"Well, that wasn't the shot we were wanting," Thomas explained. "We were gonna run pick-and-roll and probably kick it back out to Kallie. We tried to run the play, but..."

"As it unfolded, that was probably as high-percentage a shot as we would have gotten. And we had the best kid shooting it. Kallie just stepped up and shot it. I said to myself, 'That's a good shot for us.' It was one of those where you say, 'Oh, no...atta girl!'"

"As it unfolded," Thomas said of Allen's big shot, "that was probably as high-percentage a shot as we would have gotten. And we had the best kid shooting it. Kallie just stepped up and shot it. I said to myself, 'That's a good shot for us.' It was one of those where you say, 'Oh, no...atta girl!'"

Allen, for her part, had no issue with letting fly from roughly 10 feet behind the three-point line, with her heels practically touching the edge of the logo at center court.

"I was comfortable," she said with a causal wave of her hand, dismissing the notion that she might have been a step—or three—beyond her range.

And did the shot feel good coming off her hand?

"For sure," she said.

Thomas and the rest of the Lady Bobcats went berserk after Allen's shot found its mark, rushing the floor as the final horn sounded to high-five her and envelop her. Allen allowed herself the briefest of moments to celebrate before a sobering thought popped into her head and focused her on the task at hand.

"Well...now we gotta beat 'em."

Indeed, the job was not finished, and—to their credit—the Lady Bulldogs didn't allow Allen's haymaker to put them down for the count. Allen opened the overtime period with a free throw, but senior guard Gracie Dempsey answered with a driving basket to put Belgreen back on top 63-62 with 3:10 remaining.

"I thought they did well," Green said of the way his team recovered in the immediate aftermath of Allen's big shot. "Phil Campbell came out and took the lead, and we came right back and took the lead back from them. It hurt us, of course, when Ansley and Katie fouled out. Those are two senior, veteran players."

Asked to pinpoint the deciding factor in overtime, Thomas concurred with his coaching counterpart.

"Their foul trouble," he said. "Ansley fouling out was big. Thirty-two? Is that what she had? I just told Coach Green, he had a better game plan than I did. We'll have to work harder next time to fix that. You've gotta front her and play behind her, too, and take your chances somewhere else."

Tate, averaging a team-best 14.6 points per game coming in, had 17 by halftime and finished the night 11-for-20 from the floor and 10-for-11

from the foul line. The 5'8 senior also pulled down 13 rebounds and scored all 32 of her points on either layups or free throws.

Asked to name the primary reason that last Thursday's game was so much closer than Phil Campbell's 65-34 win over Belgreen last month, Allen pointed directly to Tate's performance.

"Ansley had a bunch of their points," Allen said. "When we pressed them, they threw it over our heads and shot layups. That really hurt us, but mostly it was Ansley scoring all those points."

Thomas also gave credit to Belgreen's defensive strategy and to what he deemed an off shooting night by the Lady Bobcats (14-5 through Sunday). Truthfully, it wasn't so much an off shooting night for them as it was an odd shooting night.

Phil Campbell came out hot, hitting four threes (two by Allen and one each by Mills and Katie Thomas) in the first quarter to build a 17-12 lead by the end of one. The Lady 'Cats then went cold in the second quarter, shooting just 2-for-13 from the floor and getting out-scored 13-7 as Belgreen took a 25-24 lead into the locker room.

Mills, the team's leader in threes made with 22 entering last Thursday, drilled back-to-back triples to open the second half, and Thomas made another as part of a 10-2 run that gave the Lady Bobcats a 34-27 lead right out of the break.

The hot streak didn't last long, however, as Phil Campbell went dry again, missing nine of its next 11 shots. The Lady Bulldogs took advantage, getting back-to-back threes from Katie Dempsey and Autumn Bragwell and later a three-point play from Tate to cap off a 16-0 run that gave them a 43-34 lead with 1:31 left in the third.

The Lady Bobcats made 10 threes on the night but only shot 35 percent (22-for-63) from the floor overall. They also struggled at the foul line, finishing 16-for-32.

"We didn't shoot the ball as well tonight," Thomas said. "Yeah, we had nine or ten threes, but they took away the paint and took away the drive. They made us shoot it, and we didn't make shots. We'd make a few, and then we'd go cold."

Thomas was asked if he thought his team might have settled for a few too many three-point shots.

"No. You've gotta take what they give you," he said. "I say it all the time—if you're open, you've gotta shoot it. Forcing a shot, you don't shoot a high percentage anyway."

You'd likely have a hard time convincing Green that the Lady Bobcats had a bad shooting night on Thursday.

"Our game plan was to keep them out of the lane," he said. "You're gonna have to give up something. They're such a good team. Coach Thomas does a great job with them, and they've got great athletes like Allen and Thomas and Mills. You're gonna have to give up something. We were satisfied with keeping them out of the lane. We did a lot better job of that tonight, but they hit [ten] threes."

Five of those came from Mills, who shot 7-for-14 from the floor overall and also had four big steals

See 'THREEPEAT,' page 17

'THREEPEAT,' from page 16

to go along with her 21 points. Without her 15 second-half points, the Lady Bobcats almost certainly aren't in a position at the end for Allen's shot to even matter.

"She had a lot of steals, and she made some good shots," Allen said. "She hit a couple threes that were big for us."

Thomas raved about his junior point guard as well.

"Mills is a player," he said. "I love to see her shoot it. She never turns down a good shot, hot or cold. She hit five threes tonight, and we love to see her shoot it."

Mills made her fifth and final three of the night mid-way through the fourth quarter to cap off a 9-0 run and bring Phil Campbell within one at 49-48. She later hit two free throws at the 2:00 mark to tie the game 53-53, but Gracie Dempsey answered with a three-point play off a putback to put Belgreen back on top—and to send Mills to the bench with her fifth foul.

Tate scored off a nice inbound pass from Katie Dempsey on the next trip down the floor, extending Belgreen's lead to 58-53. The Lady Bulldogs stayed in front the rest of the way until Allen buried the shot of the night in the final seconds to rescue Phil Campbell's fading threeppeat hopes.

The Lady Bobcats shot 11 free throws in the extra period. They only made five, but that—plus a key steal and layup by Allen at the 1:35 mark that pushed Phil Campbell's lead to three—was enough to survive and advance.

"Mills is a player," Thomas said. "I love to see her shoot it. She never turns down a good shot, hot or cold. She hit five threes tonight, and we love to see her shoot it."

"It's a good experience," Allen said. "I like playing the close games instead of winning by thirty."

Her coach feels the same way.

"It makes us better," Thomas said. "We showed tonight that we have the guts to fight back. You don't have to question our character now. That's what you play games like this for. When you get to sub-regional and regional time, you've gotta have the guts to fight through some things. This will help us, a hundred percent."

A look at the stat sheet shows that Belgreen shot 68 percent (15-for-22) in the second half and overtime last Thursday. The Lady Bulldogs were done in, however, by 28 turnovers—21 of which came after the break.

"We turned up the pressure," Thomas said. "We *had* to turn up the pressure. We were playing a little loose. The first game we played them, we played them a hard man-to-man. We didn't even press a ton. We just played full-court man. This time we tried to press a little more, and in the fourth quarter we had to go back to full-court man-to-man. It worked better for us."

Tate was a consistent force in the paint all night, catching lob passes over the top and either finishing or getting to the foul line. She wore out the Lady Bobcats down low, scoring six points in the first quarter, 11 in the second, nine in the third and six in the fourth before fouling out in OT.

"She played great, but the thing about it is, it's a team effort," Green said. "My girls look for her. They look for her, and they know if she gets doubled, she'll kick it out for an open shot. Every time we go on the floor, it's a great team effort."

That effort came up just two seconds short of a monumental win last Thursday, but Green remains optimistic about what his team can accomplish moving forward.

"We had the best week of practice this week we've had in a long time," said Green, whose team was scheduled to visit Lindsay Lane on Tuesday and will get another shot at Phil Campbell this Thursday at home. "The effort was a lot better. Our girls came to work at practice, and it showed up tonight. We wanted to get the win tonight, and we fell a little short. But I hope my kids understand, they can go a long way in the 1A playoffs if we'll keep working with that same level of intensity."

Gracie Dempsey finished with 10 points for Belgreen, all of which came after halftime. Emma Dempsey added nine points and nine rebounds, and Bragwell scored eight points. Katie Dempsey had six points, six rebounds and five assists.

Allen hit three threes on the night on her way to topping the 20-point mark for the seventh time this season. She also finished with five boards, five assists and three steals. Olivia Taylor had nine points and four rebounds, and Katie Thomas chipped in with seven points and six boards. Madison Branch and Kenner Scott scored four points apiece, and Harris had three.

'TITLE,' from page 14

Nichols with five points, Amber Mason with four points, and Gretchen Davis and Brianna Markham each with three points. Ashlyn Deaton chipped in with a free throw late in the fourth quarter.

Raegan Norton led the Lady Bobcats with four points, followed by Raper with her three points and Chesney Hamby with two points.

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'TOP,' from page 13

then a fourth straight defensive stop sent the Bulldogs into the locker room with a 30-25 advantage.

Will Bonner couldn't have been more pleased with what he saw from his teammates during that stretch to close out the first half.

"They kept their composure," said Bonner, who was coming off a career-high 35-point performance in a semifinal rout of Phil Campbell last Thursday. "Nobody was worried about me being on the bench. We played how we played. Coach told them to keep their composure and play the game, and that's what we did."

Bonner returned to the floor with a bang, opening the third quarter by drilling a three-pointer from the right wing while being fouled. He made the free throw, capping off a four-point play and extending Belgreen's lead to nine. Moments later, Bragwell shook loose to bury the first of his five second-half threes, pushing the lead out to 11 at 37-26.

The Bulldogs might have run away with the game then and there, but Bonner was whistled for a charge at the 6:20 mark and headed to the bench with roughly five minutes left in the third. Red Bay (14-7 through Sunday) started to take advantage of Bonner's absence this time, getting four free throws from Braden Ray and a driving layup from Tanner Hamilton to trim the lead to seven at 39-32.

After a turnover by Belgreen, the Tigers had a chance to pull even closer, but Collin Bonner came up with a key blocked shot to turn them away. On the other end, junior forward Isac Willingham found Bragwell for his second three of the quarter, pushing the lead back into double-digits at 42-32 with less than a minute remaining in the third.

Bragwell, whose sweet left-handed stroke had produced a county-best 69 made threes coming into Saturday, is always a marked man when the Bulldogs face Red Bay. Nothing rankles Tiger coach John Torisky more than defensive miscues, and permitting Bragwell a clean look qualifies as a breakdown of epic proportions.

That made it all the more shocking, then, when Red Bay—back within six after a pull-up jumper by Ray to open the fourth quarter—lost Bragwell *two more times* on back-to-back possessions with the game hanging in the balance. It wasn't the least bit shocking, on the other hand, when Bragwell made the Tigers pay dearly, dropping in a pair of his trademark high-arching rainbows that barely stirred the net on their way through, pushing the lead back out to 12 at 48-36.

Sitting in his office after the game, Torisky didn't hesitate when asked what turned Saturday's game from a tense, two-possession affair into a runaway.

"Scout hitting threes was what did it," Torisky said. "We talked about it. He had two threes [total] in the first two games against us. We kept him under wraps. Tonight, we got into that 1-3-1 to try and mix it up, and it was doing some good, but then we didn't get to him one time. Also, I think our kids were just tired. Mistakes happen.

"The problem was, every time we left him open, he capitalized."

Torisky wasn't exaggerating. Bragwell, who nailed his final three of the night with 2:50 remaining in the game to make it 61-39, got exactly five clean looks from beyond the arc on Saturday night—and drilled every single one of them. His only miss from downtown was a 60-foot heave at the end of the third quarter—and even that one bounced off the front of the rim.

"He played a heckuva game," Will Bonner said of Bragwell, who also had a three-point play in the fourth quarter and finished with a remarkably efficient 20 points on 6-for-8 shooting from the floor and 3-for-3 from the line. "That's the best game he's played all year. I couldn't be more proud of him."

Bragwell, for his part, was happy just to finally get a handful of open looks against the Tigers.

"We knew coming into the game they were gonna guard me tight all night," said Bragwell, whose 74 threes made through Sunday were already a career-high. [He hit 66 last year as a sophomore, shooting 49.2 percent from beyond the arc.] "We drew up some plays to get me open. Then we finally learned that whenever we drove in, I was pretty much just wide open. It just kept happening."

In the midst of the post-game revelry, Cooper commented that the final score was in no way indicative of how competitive the game had truly been. Asked how his team was able to turn a six-point game into a rout so quickly, his answer was the same as Torisky's.

"Scout made shots," Cooper said. "We were trying to stall the ball [in the third quarter] with Will on the bench, just trying to run some clock. They were trying to trap us, and we were *just* good enough to get out of those traps and get it to him at the right time. And he made them. That opened it up so much.

"That's the thing—they had to change their defense, because we got a little lead on them. They were scrambling a little bit."

Bragwell and the Bonner brothers combined to score 58 of Belgreen's 61 points, shooting a combined 19-for-27 from the field, 8-for-9 from beyond the arc and 12-for-16 from the foul line. Will Bonner shot 7-for-11 from the floor

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'TOP,' from page 18

and 8-for-10 from the line on his way to topping the 20-point mark for the 10th time this season. Hubbert had five rebounds to go along with his two points, and Willingham chipped in with six boards and four assists.

The Bulldogs shot 57 percent (20-for-35) from the floor and 13-for-18 from the foul line, hitting all 11 of their free throw attempts after the first quarter. The Tigers, meanwhile, made just one three on the night and shot 39 percent (16-for-41) from the floor overall, suffering their first January loss after opening the month with five straight wins.

"It was one of those nights," said Torisky, whose team had split two previous meetings with Belgreen this season, losing 67-63 in double-overtime on December 9 and then beating the Bulldogs 50-42 in the *TimesDaily* Classic eight days later. "We didn't shoot the ball well at all, and we didn't defend very well. We didn't do a lot of good things we needed to do to win, things that we have been doing.

"It kind of all came together. They played really well. Will did his usual thing, but when Collin and Scout stepped in, that was the difference. We talked about that before the game. Will is gonna get his somehow, but we've got to find a way to stop the other guys. We just didn't do a good job."

Tanner Hamilton led Red Bay with 10 points on 4-for-7 shooting from the floor. Lane Shewbart had nine points and six rebounds, and Ray finished with nine points, three boards, two assists and two blocks. Hunter Burks and Clay Allison scored four points apiece, Jalen Vinson hit a three and Gage Bays added two points.

The Tigers were scheduled to return to action at Phil Campbell on Monday and will travel on Thursday to Sulligent, where they will have a chance to finish unbeaten in area play and earn the right to host the Class 2A, Area 13 tournament.

"Thursday is our chance to win the area," Torisky said. "That's the most important thing on our minds right now. We have to go to Sulligent, and it'll be a challenge. But we'll get our guys ready to go. The main thing is getting by Sulligent and getting to host the area. We'll see where we're at after that."

Where Belgreen is at as of Saturday night is back on top as Franklin County champions for the third time in the last four years. [The Bulldogs lost by 19 to Red Bay in last season's final.] Cooper said that beating an opponent the caliber of Red Bay made the achievement all the more rewarding.

"We have so much respect for John and their program," he said. "They do a great job. Every time you play them, they're gonna be well prepared. You're not gonna get anything easy. You're gonna have to work for it.

"This was big for our fans and our community. It's big for the coaches and players, too, but as coaches and players you want to win any game. But to be able to do this for the school and the community is really good."

To hear Bragwell tell it, the Bulldogs are far from finished.

"This feels great," he said. "Now we gotta win area. Then we gotta win the regional and win state. Then we'll be done."

'HYDE,' from page 15

Clay knew the potential that this team had in terms of defensive prowess and physicality very early on.

"We try to play the style that fits our personality the best," Clay said. "Coming in this summer, we knew that this ninth-grade group was very athletic and very fast. We knew we had the guys to play the way we wanted to play, which is up-tempo, man-to-man defense, full-court press, and our guys have done very well with that aspect."

According to Clay, his team allowed an average of 24 points per game for the entire season. This statistic seemed to hold true as the defense did not let up for the Bobcats after the break last Tuesday. They allowed only seven points the entire second half, holding the Rebels to 13 total points on the night.

Clayton DeMartin was a key contributor for the Bobcats, as he was Phil Campbell's second-leading scorer with 11 points. Canaan Clay added eight points, Cole Pace chipped in with six points and Graycen Pilkerton put up four points.

The Bobcats finished the season at 13-1. According to Clay, a majority of the players on the ninth-grade team have also played on the B-varsity team, where they went 11-1 for a cumulative record of 24-2. Clay hopes that this season's success combined with playing at a higher level of competition will be building blocks for the program's future.

"I'm really impressed by what these guys have done over the course of this season," Clay said. "As we transition from this year to next year, we hope they will want to build off of what they've accomplished this year and come back hungry for more next year."

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Will Bonner

Sophomore Guard, Belgreen

Bonner was unstoppable in two games at the Franklin County Tournament last week, piling up 59 points while shooting a remarkable 67 percent (22-for-33) from the floor and 12-for-14 from the foul line. The 5'11 point guard torched Phil Campbell last Thursday for a career-high 35 points in a 64-36 semifinal rout and then put up 24 points to lead the Bulldogs to a 61-41 win over Red Bay in Saturday's final.

Through Sunday, Bonner was averaging a career-high 18.1 points per game and had topped the 20-point mark ten times this season.



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