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02.05.20

Inquiry leads to fuel billing change

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

An inquiry from Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore to the company with the contract to provide fuel for the county has led to a change in the way the county is now billed.

In a letter dated September 27, 2019 from Moore to Tatum Oil Company of Sheffield, Moore said county officials had been "made aware of some discrepancies on rack pricing," and he asked for clarifications as to why the rack price indicated by Tatum was different on certain dates than the rack price on invoices from another fuel supplier.

To bid on gasoline and diesel fuel contracts with governmental entities like the Franklin County Commission, bidders submit a mark up per gallon for both unleaded 87 Octane E10 gasoline and #2 diesel fuel—low sulfur.

Tatum's bid for fiscal year 2019-20, for example, was \$.1080/gallon mark up for unleaded and \$.1180/gallon for diesel.

That means the company bills Franklin County 10.8 cents on top of the rack price per gallon it pays for

unleaded fuel from its supplier and 11.80 cents on top of the rack price paid for diesel fuel.

Last fall, local businessman Jim Sibley reported to Moore and Franklin County administrator Leah Mansell discrepancies between the rack price his company, Sibley Oil Company, was paying Murphy Oil Company in Sheffield and the rack price that Tatum was billing the county for fuel purchased on the same dates from Murphy.

"We have been made aware of the situation and got our records together before contacting Tatum Oil, Inc.," Moore said. "The rack price on our invoices had one number, and another supplier showed us a different rack price for the same dates."

"We have been made aware of the situation and got our records together before contacting Tatum Oil, Inc.," Moore said. "The rack price on our invoices had one number, and another supplier showed us a different rack price for the same dates."

Moore included copies of invoices received from Tatum along with invoices generated for Sibley Oil Company for

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PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Land next to Akins Funeral home on Hwy. 43 has been cleared in preparation for the construction of the new El Patron restaurant building.

El Patron owners planning to open larger restaurant

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As a co-owner of El Patron Mexican Restaurant in Russellville, Armando Torres doesn't hear many complaints.

After all, El Patron offers delicious Mexican cuisine with fast, friendly service, so there's not much to complain about.

Since the restaurant opened its doors in 2009, though, there has been one recurring concern raised by El Patron customers—parking.


"The big issue here is parking. It's been a problem

See 'RESTAURANT,' Page 5

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Carolyn D. Moore, Russellville, age 69
 Died Wednesday, January 29, 2020. Funeral held at Bethsaida Baptist Church. Interment in Bethsaida Cemetery. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Johnny Lee Nance, Jr., Russellville, age 46
 Died Saturday, January 25, 2020. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Fairview Cemetery.

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

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Cordle to headline Bluegrass concert

Submitted to the FFP

Renowned country-bluegrass singer-songwriter Larry Cordle and his band, Lonesome Standard Time, will headline the annual Jake Landers Bluegrass Concert at the Ritz Theatre in Sheffield this Saturday, February 8 at 7 p.m.

The concert includes bluegrass artists Iron Horse and the Red Bay FFA String Band.

Cordle is most famous for his song "Murder on Music Row," recorded by George Strait and Alan Jackson. Cordle's songs have received Country Music Award nominations. He has also written songs for music legends Ricky Skaggs, Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Diamond Rio and more. His band Lonesome Standard Time received a Grammy Award nomination for their debut album in 1992.

Iron Horse creates much of its own music, with an innate ability for cross-genre arrangements.

Iron Horse has recorded tribute projects with CMH Records for bands like Metallica, Led Zeppelin, Ozzy Osborne, Modest Mouse, The Shins, Guns and Roses, The Goo Goo Dolls, Hank Williams and Black Label Society in their unique acoustical stylings.

The Bluegrass Concert was created in 2010 to honor Shoals bluegrass artist Jake Landers. Landers performed at the Grand Ole Opry and was one of Bill Monroe's "Blue Grass Boys." He is an award-winning songwriter and Grammy nominee. Landers is an Alabama Music Hall of Fame Music Achiever and was inducted with the first class into the Alabama Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

The Ritz Theatre is located at 111 W. Third Street, Sheffield, Alabama. Tickets are \$25 each and can be purchased at the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art (511 N. Water Street in Tusculumbia), at 256-383-0533, www.tvaa.net or ritztheatre.ticketleap.com. All seats are reserved.

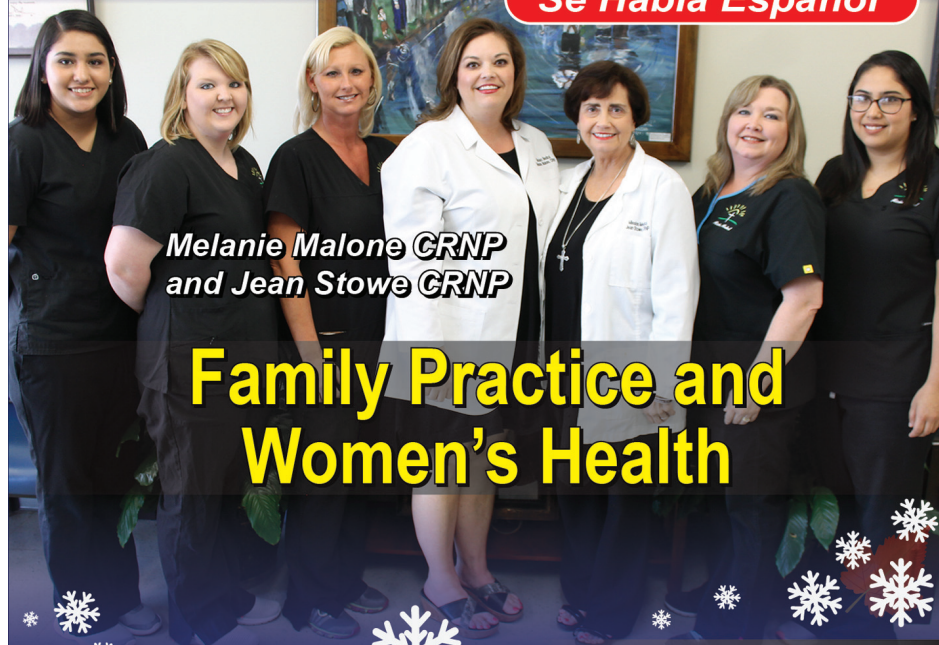
This program is sponsored by Pettus Plumbing and Piping and the Alabama State Council on the Arts.



Bluegrass group Iron Horse (above) will also perform Saturday in Sheffield.

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We must unite, not hate

Recent comments made by Bradley Byrne, a Republican running for the Alabama Senate, and others made by a regular columnist to the Red Bay News, are very disturbing. As reported by Yellowhammer News, Byrne says that Democrats "do not believe in God" and "they want to take God out of our lives. They are coming for you. And your little dog." The columnist called Democrats "Evil Doers" and tried to twist history to accuse Democrats ("evil people") of standing in the way of freedom and justice. Wow! Citizens and Christians, pay attention to these remarks teeming with hypocrisy.

I am a born again, God-fearing, Christian who chooses to be a Democrat. My parents raised me to help others, whether it was my dad helping neighbors fix their appliances, cars, etc. when we were supposed to be fishing, or my mom bringing numerous youth to church or helping others in need, such as the aged, children or those suffering a loss.

I am pro-life, as are all members of my family. Obviously, I do not agree with the National Democratic Party on everything. I am now a

senior citizen, and I do not know of any person in my personal life that has had an abortion. Yet I know of many people in need who can not afford their medications necessary to continue their way of life or insurance for their family. I do not believe that any person who is vulgar, lies continuously, gropes women, calls people S.O.B.'s, makes fun of handicapped people, puts down Gold Star parents, prefers heroes "who were not captured" and treats children in ways that would put any parent in jail for such actions, is worthy of our respect.

Also, I choose to worship at a Methodist Church, follow Alabama football, drive Ford Trucks, hunt deer (preferably with dogs) and cherish my guns, a lot. But I do believe in background checks and not allowing mentally challenged persons to own guns, because I love all of the students and staff for which I have felt responsible in my 38 years in education. Nor do I want

See 'UNITE,' Page 5



Eddie Britton

OUR House by Ree Shannon



FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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RUSSELLVILLE, AL 35653
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The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc. Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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Correction Policy

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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My take My new addiction is one on this... you probably know well

Well, hello again, my friends! I have something I'd like to share with y'all today. It might be rather surprising, but here it goes.

I am an addict. I have been for a few years now, and instead of getting better, it seems to be getting worse. Sharing things have been known to help in healing, so I figured it wouldn't hurt to give it a try. My life is close to an open book, so I doubt there will be any harm in opening one more chapter. I can almost visualize you trying to figure out what my addiction could be. It would be interesting to know some of your guesses.

We already know I'm addicted to laughter, talking and picking on people. Of course, there are good addictions and not-so-good addictions. I prefer the good ones, but we don't always have the opportunity to choose our addictions, do we?

As for this one, I didn't even have an interest in it, but so many people kept on and on about how much I would enjoy it. They kept saying it would widen my horizons; I would be better informed for it. Of course, we've all heard the one where, "you'll wish you would have started it years ago."

As all addictions go...I was finally talked into it. What they didn't tell me is it would become so addictive that I would lose much-needed sleep. I'd lose my ability to spell correctly, and language would be gradually removed from my senses, as if I'd never had an education whatsoever.

I was never informed of the different types of people that would surround me or even follow me. I began hearing such vulgar profanity. I learned how to shut most of that out, but my life was so full of such shady characters and sym-

bols without meanings. At times, everything around me was so confusing. My life is so different now.

All I can honestly say is, Facebook will do that to a person, won't it? Oh yeah! I'm addicted, but I'm not alone in this.

Did I throw anybody off, or did you figure this out a while back? Facebook is a good way of keeping up with the daily news. The journeys people are taking in their daily lives. Some good. Some bad.

Anniversaries, birthdays, births, jokes, beautiful scenic pictures, plus all the beautiful pictures of family friends, both near and far. I enjoy all the different groups that are available, whether it be the variety of things that are Victorian, which I love, or the pretty flower gardens and the mouth-watering recipes. Facebook has a variety of everything, and its popularity has no end. There are so many sales groups. You can post anything to sell, and the buyer will even come to your door to pick it up. You can't ask for more, right?

There have been children and pets found by posts that are so graciously shared. Facebook is an amazing technology, but with all good comes some downsides, too. At least, there are choices to "delete" or "block," and I am very thankful for that. In closing, I must say, I hope y'all had as much fun with my little prank as I did.

On a more serious note, please keep our first responders in your prayers. Our "men-in-blue," need extra ones at this time.

Wishing all of you a great week.



Gail Motes

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to strengthen the contents of America's character. Dr. King challenged our nation to live up to its founding principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for "ALL."

The Franklin County Branch of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Committee, along with the Northwest Alabama Branch of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Committee, celebrated MLK Day with a Commemorative March and an event to honor the legacy of Dr. King.

Franklin County's elected officials were invited to participate in this event. However, it appears they did not deem or feel it necessary, as no one attended nor offered to support the 2017 "Resolution" which made the City of Russellville an honorary Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

We are committed to "Keeping the Dream Alive" and would like to thank

Franklin, Colbert and Lauderdale counties for attending and supporting MLK Day and events. In addition, we would like to thank the Russellville Police Department, the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and the Russellville Fire Department.

We would furthermore like to thank each individual and business for their donations, support and participation in making this event a success. We are forever grateful for your acts of kindness and support, which empowers us to influence and aid students in continuing their education.

"INTELLIGENCE PLUS CHARACTER—THAT IS THE GOAL OF TRUE EDUCATION." —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sincerely,

William Nelson, Chairman, Franklin County Branch Committee

'RESTAURANT,' from page 1

since we opened, and we also need a larger, more comfortable seating area," Torres said.

That will soon change, though, as the restaurant's owners have purchased a large tract of land adjacent to Akins Funeral Home on Highway 43. The tract, just south of Akins, has been cleared, and workers are in the process of leveling the site for future construction.

El Patron is owned by Armando, Juan, Cuco and Rafael Torres along with Juan Leon. The family also owns and operates restaurants in Tupelo and Mantachee, MS. El Patron is located in the strip shopping center just south of Walmart. Parking is limited for customers of the restaurant and several other businesses located in the center.

The new location will be larger, Torres said, and its purchase was driven by the owners' desire to meet the needs of their guests.

"It will be a bigger location with better accessibility for our customers, with a larger, more comfortable seating area and plenty of parking," Torres said.

Torres said they have a five-year lease on the current El Patron location, so once the new restaurant opens, they are considering another business, or another restaurant, in that location.

"There is no definite timetable for building," Torres said. "We have not worked with an architect or the city building inspector yet, so it's early in the process."

The new location will also see the addition of new menu items along with the current favorites.

"We plan to bring more authentic dishes. With a bigger kitchen, we can prepare authentic dishes from Mexico, along with our current menu items, to our customers," Torres said.

As with most land purchases, Torres said the decision to purchase next to Akins came down to location.

"That was the most attractive element to us," Torres said. "It's near the four-lane with a good view and good access. We really believe it's a good spot for a restaurant. With a larger restaurant, we'll be able to hire more people and bring more economic growth to our city and county."

'FUEL,' from page 1

the same dates with his letter to Tatum.

Sibley said this was not the first time he made county officials aware of billing discrepancies, but to his knowledge no action had been taken to look into the situation until now. Sibley said this has been an issue since Moore first took office and the fuel contract was held by Petroleum Traders.

"I've shown it to them again and again, and they've done nothing. It's clearly wrong," Sibley said.

The 2018-19 contract with Tatum Oil called for a \$.0689/gallon mark-up over rack price.

After Mansell conferred with other county administrators to see how they bid out fuel contracts, she contacted the Oil Price Information Service (OPIS) to receive additional information on how to properly bid fuel contracts.

The bid specifications for FY 2019-20 from Franklin County stated: "The Mark Up bid shall include all profit, transportation costs, drop charges, freight, pump off charges and applicable taxes, inspection and any other fees. Franklin County will only pay the successful bidder the amount of mark up (including applicable taxes and fees) plus the rack price for the day delivered."

After receiving Moore's letter, Tatum Oil sent Franklin County officials the the following response: "As stated in the past, we had a contract on conventional gas and diesel so that we could always get product for Franklin County. Sometimes the contract is cheaper and sometimes it's higher. The last bid stated cost, not rack price for us to provide, so we got a contract.

"That way, supply would not be an issue for Franklin County in case of an emergency. We thought that a guarantee for product was crucial to your operation. As we see now, price is the most important factor, so we have canceled your contract. You are now being pulled rack price for all your future purchases, so we won't have any more issues. Attached is a copy of the invoice for June as a courtesy. I don't have back to April. We have always appreciated Franklin County and have tried to the best of our ability to take care of this great county for many years without any conflict in the past." The letter was signed 'Tatum Oil Inc.'

When contacted by the *Free Press*, a representative for Tatum Oil who did not want to be named said the previous charges for Franklin County were sometimes more and sometimes less than

rack price, depending on the supply at Murphy Oil in Sheffield, where Tatum purchased the fuel. In the event of a shortage, the representative explained, the cost would increase.

A Murphy Oil Company representative told the *Free Press* that all customers are charged the same rack price for that day, unless a special contract has been arranged through the company's headquarters.

"The rack price is a set price for all wholesale customers. It's the same for all customers unless the customer has a specific contract through El Dorado, Arkansas. Rack price is rack price," said Brian Murphy.

Moore disputes Sibley's contention that he has "repeatedly" made county officials aware of billing discrepancies by Tatum Oil.

"Jim came to us to make us aware of a potential problem. Previously, we had nothing to go on so there was no reason to look into it," Moore said. "Once we were aware of the situation and got documentation to review and compare, we went ahead and contacted Tatum Oil.

"I'm not saying there was any wrongdoing. We just were trying to get some answers."

'UNITE,' from page 4

my grandchildren scared to go to school or church because of fear they might be shot. And I do not need a 30-round clip to hunt deer or protect my home. My .30-06 rifle or my double-barreled shotgun or my 'Judge' pistol will do just fine for that.

So, don't judge me and call me ugly names because I believe in mostly Democratic principles or because I go to a Methodist Church or support Alabama Football or drive Ford Trucks or love to hunt deer or want to help others in need. These are my rights, just as you have the right to believe otherwise. Calling me an "evil doer" or saying that I do not believe in God is just wrong and downright hateful!

It is imperative that we find a way to unite our country. We need to do this individually, one by one, by reducing our hate and dislike for those who

believe differently from us. Patience, Virtue, Faith, Hope and Charity are needed.

So, for this Southern 'born and bred' country boy, let me enjoy standing around my 1976 Ford 4x4 pickup eating Vienna sausages, sardines, beanee weenees and honey buns while drinking a Mt. Dew, holding my .30-06, listening to my beagles on the trail of a buck, while catching the Tide roll on the radio. If you must criticize me, maybe just question my choice of deer rifle or truck, because I do have a few friends that worship their .308's and drive a Chevy. Can you imagine that?

1 John 4:1 – BELOVED, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. KJV



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What's Happening


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


 **W**est Elementary School is currently holding registration for Alabama's First Class Pre-K program at WES, a nationally recognized Pre-K program that sets school-ready children up for success as they continue through their educational career. Online applications can be filled out at <https://alprek.asapconnected.com>. Applications will be accepted through March 12. Enrollment is open to all children who will be four years old on or before September 1, 2020 and are residents of Alabama. Enrollees must provide a copy of the child's birth certificate and proof of residency (either a current utility bill or a copy of a loan or mortgage). Upon enrollment, the child's immunization form must be provided. Acceptance to the program is strictly through a random drawing that will be held Friday, March 13 at 9 a.m. at the RCS Board of Education. Parent/Guardian does not have to be present for drawing. For those interested in registering for Kindergarten at WES, registration will take place Monday-Friday, February 3-21, from 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m. at the Russellville Board of Education located at 1945 Waterloo Road in Russellville. Documents required to register include: Birth certificate; Alabama shot record (not expired); lease, rental agreement, or deed; and a corresponding utility bill. Children who will be five years old on or before September 1, 2020 are eligible. For more info, visit <https://www.rcs.k12.al.us> and go to the West Elementary page.


 **T**he 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.


 **A**ARP Tax-Aide is offering FREE income tax preparation at the Department of Human Resources in Russellville on Thursdays from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. through April 9. You do NOT have to be a member of AARP, a certain age or retired to use this service. Call Ben at 256-332-0252 for an appointment.


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


 **T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Kami Collier at the Roxy Theatre this 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.


 **S**t. Paul Missionary Baptist Church Relay for Life Team invites you to an all-you-can-eat soup supper this Saturday, February 8 from 4-6 p.m. in the church Fellowship Hall. Singing following with the group Southern Image at 6 p.m. The church is located at 5107 Hwy. 79 in Phil Campbell. Eat-in or carry out available. Donations support the church's Relay for Life Team.


 **T**he Sheffield Public Library will host a Book Talk and Book Signing with Peggy Allen Towns this Saturday, February 8 at 3 p.m. Towns will discuss her book, *Scottsboro Unmasked: Decatur's Story*. This powerful narrative examines the legal saga of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black youth who were falsely accused of assaulting two white women in 1931. The case produced two landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings that continue to influence the judicial system. Towns will present new aspects of this well known story by exploring events in Decatur, the site of the infamous re-trials, and how they affected the local community. This program is free to the public and is sponsored by Friends of Sheffield Public Library. For more information, kindly contact Beth Ridgeway at (256) 740-1674.

 **Y**ou are invited to a gospel singing featuring the Southern Image Quartet this Sunday, February 9 at 5 p.m. at Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, 305 Bethlehem Road, Russellville. Everyone is welcome!

 **T**here will be a Black History program at St. Paul C.M.E. Church this Sunday, February 9 at 11 a.m. Guest speaker will be Katerina Cole-Coffey of the Franklin County Extension Service. Everyone is invited to attend.

 **A**merican Legion Post 64 will meet Thursday, February 13 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. with meeting to follow.

 **T**he Shoals Chapter of the Order of St. Luke will meet in the Media Room at Park Place (500 N. Montgomery Avenue, Sheffield) on Thursday, February 13 at 2:30 p.m. Ellen Bryson will lead the study "Healing the Human Spirit" from the book *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 Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts in Red Bay announces its second production of the 2019-20 season, *Til Beth Do Us Part*, written by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten and directed by Mark Richardson. The performance dates are February 13-15 at 7 p.m. and February 16 at 2 p.m. at the Weatherford Centre in Red Bay. Tickets are on sale at the Weatherford Centre. You may call between the hours of 2-4 p.m. weekdays to reserve tickets at 256-356-9829 or go by during those hours to purchase them. A dinner is offered for this production but must be purchased in advance, with the play ticket at \$8.00 and the meal at \$17.00. Total cost \$25.00 for both.

What's Happening

256.332.0255

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

Spruce Pine Community Center will be the site of a Candidate Supper on Saturday, February 15 at 6 p.m. Plates will be available for \$5, and candidates for local office will speak. Everyone is invited.

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.

There will be a Candidate Supper at the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department on Friday, February 21 from 4 p.m.-7 p.m. William Earl Bishop's smoked chicken and pulled barbecue pork plates will be sold for \$10 each. Proceeds will go to the repair of the pump on Fire Engine #3. The East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department is located at 10443 Hwy. 81, Phil Campbell.

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.

Spruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Next meeting is March 3. All members and friends are urged to attend.

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.

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

Baldwin running for County Commission

Submitted to the FFP

Joseph Baldwin has announced his candidacy for Franklin County Commission, District Three.

Baldwin is seeking the nomination in the March 3, 2020 Republican Primary.

Baldwin and his wife Misty reside in the Atwood community. He is a self-employed farrier and musician.

Baldwin, who is entering his first political race, said he hopes to bring a fresh perspective to the Franklin County Commission.

"When making decisions on behalf of our county, I will always consider what's best for the citizens of Franklin County," Baldwin said. "I'm just like most Franklin County residents. We have looked at politics from the outside, from a common-sense viewpoint, and that's what I will carry into the position of Franklin County commissioner."

As he's campaigned across the county in recent months, Baldwin said it's been rewarding to meet so many people and hear what's important to them when it comes to Franklin County.

"To be an effective leader, you need to be a good listener. The people you represent need to have open lines of communication with the men and women they choose to represent them," Baldwin said.

He will continue to be active on the campaign trail as the days until March 3 wind down.

"When you campaign across the county, you realize Franklin County is a big place," Baldwin said. "I apologize in advance if we don't have the opportunity to meet you before election day, but we're trying."

Baldwin invites all citizens to follow his Facebook page for more information on his campaign and upcoming political events.



Joseph Baldwin

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Carson, Ivey visit Southern Homes

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As former Presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson spoke to a room full of Southern Homes employees last Thursday morning in Russellville, he told them how important their jobs were to America.

"Manufactured housing is helping make the American dream a reality for so many people," Carson said. "From the beginning of my time as secretary, I have believed in the benefit of manufactured housing to help communities and change lives."

Carson is the 17th Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. He was appointed by President Donald Trump in 2017.

Carson and Alabama governor Kay Ivey toured the Russellville facility, owned and operated by Clayton Homes, as part of Carson's *Driving Affordable Housing Across America* tour.

The six-month tour, which began in Louisville earlier this week, is designed for Carson and other HUD officials to meet with local governments and builders to receive their input on reducing regulatory barriers that drive up the cost of affordable housing.

Carson and Ivey received a golf cart tour through Southern Homes' facility before each addressed the employees and invited guests.

Clayton's Russellville facility began production in July of 2014, producing homes under the Southern Homes brand. Southern Homes has produced more than 77,000 homes since its inception in 1989.

Clayton Russellville produces 14 floors per day, which translates to nine to ten homes each day. Figures for 2020, according to Southern Homes General Manager David Brewer, call for more than 3,300 floors (2,250 homes) to be produced in Russellville. Production revenues for the local facility are expected to top \$92 million in 2020.

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, Carson said, as he described them as playing "a vital role in meeting American housing needs."

Carson announced a new proposed update to federal manufacturing standards with several key components geared to ease expensive regulations while still keeping safety a priority.

Southern Homes CEO Kevin Clayton said the climate for manufactured housing has improved significantly under Carson's tenure as HUD Secretary.

Clayton also lauded the job performance of his employees in Russellville.

"You rank at the top in the nation for our customer efficiency scores," Clayton said. "Never forget that every home that goes out of here ends up with a family who might have thought they would never have a shot at owning a home."

PHOTO/JP
Dr. Ben Carson toured Southern Homes in Russellville along with Gov. Kay Ivey.



More than 55,000 families purchased homes manufactured by Clayton last year, he said. Clayton Homes' footprint in the industry is massive, with 40 manufacturing facilities, more than 20 supply facilities, 325 retail locations and nine on-site home builders.

In Alabama, Clayton operates eight home building facilities, nine supply facilities, 16 retail locations and two site-built home builders. That adds up to more than 3,000 team members in Alabama.

Carson and Ivey inspected Clayton's new Cross-Mod home, which was constructed in the two weeks prior to their visit. The Cross-Mod models are built at the company's Addison plant.

Former Russellville and Tennessee Tech football standout Caleb Mitchell serves as Sales Manager for Clayton's Addison location.

Carson said Southern Homes in Russellville was the first housing manufacturing facility he's visited, and he was impressed with what he saw.

"What stood out was how coordinated everything is in this facility," Carson said. "That leads to a tremendous amount of efficiency. It's something that can be duplicated and really grow."

Ivey said Clayton's footprint in Alabama is threefold.

"Clayton is not only a company that hires a lot of people in our state," Ivey said, "but you pay good wages and realize the importance of giving back to the community."

Ivey's comment about Southern Homes paying good wages wasn't just political speak. The 324 team members working at the Russellville facility have an average hourly pay rate, including bonuses, of more than \$20/hour.

Towns to discuss new Scottsboro Boys book

Submitted to the FFP

Author Peggy Allen Towns will discuss her book, *Scottsboro Unmasked: Decatur's Story*, at the Sheffield Public Library this Saturday, February 8 at 3 p.m.

The program is free to the public and is sponsored by the Friends of the Sheffield Public Library.

This powerful narrative examines the legal saga of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black youth who were falsely accused of assaulting two white women in 1931. The case produced two landmark U. S. Supreme Court rulings that continue to influence our judicial system.

Towns will present new aspects of this well known story by exploring events in Decatur, the site of the infamous retrials, and how they affected the local community.

Towns is a local historian of African-American history. She is a native of Decatur who graduated from Alabama A&M University with a degree in religious studies. She was employed by the U.S. House of Representatives for 20 years. Her passion is preserving the voices and legacy of African Americans in her home town.

For more information on the event, call Beth Ridgeway at 256-740-1674.

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Bolton nominated for ICBA Board of Directors

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Red Bay banker Brad Bolton has been nominated for the 2020-21 Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA) Board of Directors.

Bolton, who serves as president, CEO and senior lender of Community Spirit Bank, was nominated for ICBA's Vice Chairman position. ICBA members will vote on the nominations at the 2020 ICBA National Convention, set for March 8-12 in Orlando. ICBA works to promote an environment where community banks flourish across the country. With more than 50,000 locations nationwide, community banks constitute 99 percent of all banks and hold more than \$5 trillion in assets.

Community Spirit Bank Chairman of the Board Billy Bolton said his son's nomination was not only an honor for him, but also a prestigious moment for the bank as well.

"This nomination is a high honor, not only for Brad personally, but for Community Spirit Bank, our communities, our state and certainly our family as well," Bolton said. "Brad's focus has always been real community banking—services in an expedient manner to our customers and satisfying their needs. And he does an outstanding job at it.

"On behalf of our entire Board of Directors, it is with pleasure to wish Brad the best in serving the community banking industry in this capacity of vice chairman of Independent Community Bankers of America, our national trade association."

ICBA works to keep community banks strong, something the association believes is vital to keep local economies vibrant.

According to icba.org, "Community banks are an integral part of Main Street; they reinvest local dollars back into the community and help create local jobs. Their relationship banking philosophy is ingrained in the way they conduct business, one loan—one customer—at a time. Local reinvestment helps small businesses grow and helps families finance major purchases and build financial security."

Bolton expressed his appreciation for the nomination on Twitter last week.

"I'm very excited and thankful for the opportunity to serve with all these fine bankers and industry leaders, and I'm looking forward to the year ahead," Bolton said.



Brad Bolton

New civic club's Mardi Gras parade set for this Saturday

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A new civic club in Russellville will hold its first community event Saturday, February 8 when the Krewe de Guard holds a Mardi Gras Parade in downtown Russellville. The parade will begin at 4:30 p.m. this Saturday afternoon.

Lineup will begin at the Canteen and A.W. Todd Centre. Everyone wanting to participate in the parade must line up by 4 p.m.. Krewe de Guard members will be checking in participants and putting them in their place for lineup.

The parade rules for participants include no motorized vehicles, as this is a zero-emission parade. No animals may participate, and no floats with plastic, as it's a zero-plastic waste parade. All participants must sign a waiver, and there will be no handling or tossing of beads, although they may be worn.

Entry costs are \$10/person for ages 16 and up, \$5/person for ages 15 and below and \$50 for groups with more than 10 members.

The parade fee will be waived for the RHS Marching Hundred, drama department, choral department, Robotics team and art department, and for Tharptown High School marching band, drama department, choral department, Robotics team and art department.

All Franklin County high school marching bands, artistic clubs and Robotics teams are welcome free of charge.

Parade participants may use golf carts, bicycles, scooters, hover boards, skateboards, electric wheelchairs, roller skates, etc. And small trailers for

See 'PARADE,' page 10

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THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION WILL ACCEPT APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITION: DEPUTY SHERIFF IN THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE UNTIL 5:00 PM ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2020. AN APPLICATION AND JOB DESCRIPTION MAY BE PICKED UP, FAXED OR EMAILED UPON REQUEST FROM THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE, LOCATED AT 405 N. JACKSON AVE., MONDAY – FRIDAY, 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM.

FRANKLIN COUNTY IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX, RELIGION, AGE OR DISABILITY IN THE EMPLOYMENT OR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

'PARADE,' from page 9

floats are allowed, but they must be pulled by a non-motorized vehicle.

The ONLY item allowed for participants to hand out during the parade are Moon Pies, a New Orleans tradition.

Children may be involved in the parade on the Krewe de Guard float, which will feature an Australian scene with a koala. Children may dress as rain drops or tear drops and will be escorted by Krewe members and parents alongside the float. All parade participants must wear purple, gold or green, including parent escorts.

A float sponsored by the Russellville Public Library will allow children to be involved theatrically. The float will feature a story-telling scene with a book about the Rainforest Children.

Cast members of the Roxy Christmas Spectacular may wear their costumes with the permission of Hillary Hall and the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, Porter said.

At 6:45 p.m., the plans are to have a jazz band start a Second Line in front of Doe's Eat Place on North Jackson Avenue and lead the crowd to the Roxy Theater and down into the aisles to watch the Kerry Gilbert Band concert that begins at 7 p.m.

Krewe de Guard was the original idea of Anna Carol Porter, a former member of the Russellville High School Color Guard. Porter's idea was to have a club comprised of former RHS Color Guard members. Her next call was to her friend Laura McKinney, an RHS graduate who now lives in New Orleans. They discussed the idea of getting together and developing routines for parades and other events.

Eventually, that idea grew into a club for men and women to encourage people to get involved like when they were in school.

The club's membership is 21 and continues to grow.

JOB OPPORTUNITY

THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION WILL ACCEPT APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITION: CORRECTIONS OFFICER/DISPATCHER IN THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE UNTIL 5:00 PM ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2020. AN APPLICATION AND JOB DESCRIPTION MAY BE PICKED UP, FAXED OR EMAILED UPON REQUEST FROM THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE, LOCATED AT 405 N. JACKSON AVE., MONDAY – FRIDAY, 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM.

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JOB OPPORTUNITY

THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION WILL ACCEPT APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITION: ACCOUNTANT/PAYABLE CLERK IN THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE UNTIL 5:00 PM ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2020. AN APPLICATION AND JOB DESCRIPTION MAY BE PICKED UP, FAXED OR EMAILED UPON REQUEST FROM THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE, LOCATED AT 405 N. JACKSON AVE., MONDAY – FRIDAY, 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM.

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Who's headed to Hanceville?

Sizing up the top five regional contenders in Franklin County

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Area tournaments are already underway, and the Northwest Regional tips off next week at Tom Drake Coliseum. A little further down the road (both literally and figuratively), the bright lights of Birmingham are beckoning.

That means it's time for our annual look at which local teams might be headed for Hanceville—and perhaps beyond. By our count, five teams from Franklin County have at least a 50-50 shot of reaching the regional. Others are capable of making a run as well, but—with apologies to those longer shots—we'll focus today on what we deem to be the top five contenders.

Here they are, starting with the team we think has the best odds of making it to Hanceville and then moving down the list in descending order.

Phil Campbell girls
Head coach: Craig Thomas
Record through Sunday: 20-6
ASWA ranking: No. 9 in Class 3A
Best wins: Belgreen (3), Mars Hill, Belmont (MS), Phillips

The skinny: Phil Campbell has dropped just one game in 2020, and Thomas believes that loss served as a much-needed "wakeup call." After watching their 11-game win streak end at Mars Hill last Thursday, the Lady Bobcats bounced back and promptly posted their two most impressive wins of the season—52-45 at Belmont on Friday and 56-51 at Bear Creek on Saturday. Now they



appear primed for a playoff run.

Thomas said before the season that this would likely be the best shooting team he's had at Phil Campbell, and it's hard to argue with him. Senior guard Kallie Allen (12.7 points per game), junior guard Caitlynn Mills (11.2) and junior forward Katie Thomas (8.0) have combined to make 84 threes on the season, and sophomore forward Faith Cook is also a perimeter threat. With four shooters on the floor at any given point, the Lady Bobcats shouldn't be as vulnerable against zone defenses as they've been in the past.

Mills (36 made threes) is the best shooter of the bunch and also a catalyst for Phil Campbell's trademark pressure defense; when she missed two games in late January with an injury, the Lady Bobcats struggled to break 40 points against lesser competition. Thomas is also a key piece to the puzzle and played her best basketball of the season down the stretch. After taking the night off at Fayette County on January 21 to rest her ailing hip, Thomas averaged 14.6 points and made 11 total threes in Phil Campbell's final five games of the regular season.

Junior forward Olivia Taylor has stepped up in the season's second half, averaging 9.2 points in 13 games since January 1 while leading the Lady Bobcats in scoring four times. Taylor's ability to finish in the paint and rebound will be key moving forward, but Phil Campbell's postseason hopes hinge largely on the play of Allen. The Wallace-Hanceville signee is without question the straw that stirs the drink for the Lady Bobcats.

With her defensive prowess, her natural play-making skills and her tireless work on the boards, the 5'9 Allen can make a major impact on a game without scoring a lot. She seems more comfortable in the role of facilitator, but there will almost certainly come a time in the next couple of weeks when Phil Campbell will need Allen to set aside her preference to get others involved and instead just take over a game.

With seven games of 20-plus points this season (tied with Vina sophomore Rayleigh Guin for the most in Franklin County), Allen is more than capable of doing exactly that. Whether or not she rises to the occasion when the time comes [like she did two years ago as a sophomore, scoring 20 points in a regional final win over Cold Springs] may well determine how deep the Lady Bobcats go.

They're an absolute lock to win the area title on Thursday night, and a sub-regional game with Lexington would likely follow. Eighth-ranked Lauderdale County (24-5) looms as the biggest obstacle between Phil Campbell and a second Final Four trip in three years.



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW
HERE WE GO AGAIN - Allen (24) has helped Phil Campbell reach the regional tournament each of the past two seasons under Thomas (below, left). She'll have to come through in the clutch once more if the Lady Bobcats are to make another run to Hanceville--and maybe beyond.

Belgreen boys
Head coach: Marty Cooper
Record through Sunday: 24-6
ASWA ranking: No. 7 in Class 1A
Best wins: Lindsay Lane (2), Winfield, Deshler, Red Bay (3), R.A. Hubbard, South Lamar

The skinny: Much like Phil Campbell's girls, Belgreen's boys are a stone-cold lock to win their area tournament this week and host a sub-regional game. That's where the road gets exponentially tougher.

The Bulldogs will likely have to get by Mars Hill (16-10), which demonstrated its ceiling last week by beating Deshler 76-73 in double-overtime. [That same Deshler team ended Belgreen's nine-game win streak three days later with a 65-42 win.] If Mars Hill manages to get over the hump after two close losses to Covenant Christian in the



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

DOG FIGHT - To reach the regional final (let alone Birmingham), Bonner (1), Willingham (far left) and the Bulldogs must survive a loaded field of Class 1A contenders in northwest Alabama.

'HANCEVILLE,' from page 11

regular season and pull a mild upset in the Area 16 finals, it will instead be third-ranked Covenant (21-2) coming to Belgreen for a colossal sub-regional showdown that would send one very, very good team home early.

Speaking of very, very good teams...if the Bulldogs do make it to Hanceville, they'll find Decatur Heritage waiting on them in the regional semi-finals. That would be top-ranked and reigning state champion Decatur Heritage. The Eagles may not be quite as savvy or ruthlessly efficient in the late stages of close games as last year's title team was, but a source familiar with the program says this group is perhaps the most athletic team Heritage has had in years.

Don't expect Belgreen to back down from a challenge, though. The Bulldogs are a resilient, tough-minded bunch, and they don't come any tougher than sophomore point guard Will Bonner. The 5'10 Bonner takes a licking [he leads Franklin County by a wide margin with 189 free throw attempts and 140 makes] and keeps on ticking, averaging a county-best 19.0 points per game this season. He gets into the lane whenever he wants and finishes around the rim with the strength and efficiency of a much larger player.

Working in perfect tandem with Bonner is junior sharpshooter Scout Bragwell, the county's most prolific and accurate three-point threat. Bragwell made a county-best 83 threes in the regular season [only Russellville's Chandler Dyas, with 70, was even close] and averaged 11.8 points per game. He topped the 20-point mark six times, and Belgreen won all six of those games. Simply put, Bonner is almost always going to get his; if Bragwell starts hitting threes on top of that, the Bulldogs are extremely tough to beat.

But can they make a run? That depends largely on how well their post players perform in the coming weeks. Mars Hill, Covenant and Decatur Heritage all have more size than Belgreen, so 6'4 senior Bryant Hubbert (6.0 points per game) and rugged junior Isac Willingham (5.3 points per game) will have to provide timely buckets in the paint and solid work on the glass.

The X-factor is sophomore wing Collin Bonner. He's technically a guard, but the 6'3 Bonner has tremendous length and is often Belgreen's best rebounder and shot-blocker. He's also a natural scorer who averages 10.7 points per game with mid-range skills that fit nicely in between Will Bonner's drives to the rim and Bragwell's bombs from the beyond the arc.

The Bonner brothers and Bragwell average a combined 41.5 points per game, making them the highest-scoring trio in Franklin County [just barely ahead of Russellville juniors Dyas, Brooks Scott and Jeb Bishop, who combine to put up 41.3 points per game]. Given the daunting path in front of them, Belgreen's Killer B's will have to be at their very best if the Bulldogs are to reach the regional final.

Red Bay boys

Head coach: John Torisky

Record through Sunday: 18-9

ASWA ranking: No. 8 in Class 2A

Best wins: Hamilton, Belgreen, Lauderdale County, Haleyville, Mars Hill

The skinny: After setting a new school record with 27 wins a year ago, this season has been more of a grind for Red Bay. Things got a bit rocky around mid-season, but the Tigers survived and now find themselves well positioned to reach the regional for a third straight year—though the road certainly won't be easy.

Red Bay, which won all six of its regular-season area games by double-digits, is the odds-on favorite to repeat as Area 13 tournament champions this week. Should the Tigers cut down the nets again, they'll be hosting a sub-regional game next week against a tough opponent—likely either Sheffield (17-9), Hatton (14-12) or fourth-ranked Tanner (16-7)—out of Area 16. Sheffield and Tanner, in particular, possess the length, athleticism and defensive chops to make things tough on a Red Bay team that can struggle to score at times.

That's what makes junior Braden Ray as important to the Tigers this post-season as just about any player on any team with legitimate Hanceville hopes. Ray, a 6'5 forward with the versatility to score inside and out, finished the regular season fifth in Franklin County in scoring (16.7 points per game), fourth in threes made (44) and second in free throws made (87, at a 74-percent clip). He's the one Red Bay player who has the potential to put up 20-plus points on any given night. [He had done it seven times through Sunday—six more than the rest of the team combined.]

The most impressive thing about Ray's big scoring nights is that they tend to come against the best competition. He put up 29 points in a double-OT loss to Belgreen, 31 in an area win over Sulligent, 25 in a victory over Lauderdale County, 21 in a loss to Deshler and a career-high 35 last Friday in a 74-56 whipping of Mars Hill.

The Tigers have a lot going for them. They're athletic. They're long. They

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'HANCEVILLE,' from page 12

rebound. They defend at an extremely high level. [They're 15-0 this season when holding an opponent to less than 50 points.] They make free throws. [Ray and fellow starters Clay Allison (8.6 points per game), Jalen Vinson (7.0) and Lane Shewbart (6.9) all shoot better than 70 percent from the line.] They play hard for 32 minutes, night in and night out. But Ray's knack for rising to the occasion against high-caliber opponents might be the most critical piece to the puzzle in the coming weeks if Red Bay is to successfully navigate a treacherous postseason road.

Tharptown girls
Head coach: Tanna Benford
Record through Sunday: 18-10
ASWA ranking: N/R
Best wins: Tanner, Vina (3), Falkville
The skinny: The Lady Wildcats sat at 7-7 when the New Year arrived, but they've been a different team in 2020. Tharptown went 11-3 in January, losing twice to Phil Campbell and once—on a buzzer-beater—to Area 16 champion Hatton. Those 11 wins were largely against lesser competition, but they came by an average margin of 29.1 points per game.

Sophomore guard Gracie Montgomery led the charge in January, averaging 14.6 points per game. She's enjoyed a breakout season overall, ranking fourth in Franklin County in scoring (13.4 points per game), fourth in threes made (39), first in free throw percentage (.732) and tying for third with six games of 20-plus points.

Senior guard Shaylee Wieting, whose contributions on the defensive end have always been solid, has developed into a consistent second scorer and perimeter shooter, ranking ninth in the county with 10.2 points per game and eighth with 27 threes made. Post player Brooke Daily, also a senior, provides a nightly double-double threat in the paint. She scored a season-high 26 points last Tuesday in a rout of Cherokee and averages 8.8 points per game on the year.

The Lady Wildcats came into the year with plenty of veteran experience and a solid mix of guards and post players. Now they have two other key elements that should serve them well in the postseason—a big-time scorer in Montgomery and the confidence that comes from a sustained stretch of winning games. Factor in a favorable road to the regional, and it's not hard to imagine Tharptown doing what Red Bay did last season and making a run all the way to the Elite Eight.

The Lady Wildcats will open the postseason Wednesday night in the Class 2A, Area 16 tournament against a Tanner team that struggled down the stretch, going just 3-6 in January. Win that game, and a matchup with Hatton (24-5) awaits in the area final. Even if the Lady Wildcats fail to pull the upset there, there's nothing particularly daunting about a sub-regional trip to Addison. Addison's girls are 20-2, but one of those two losses came to a Falkville team that Tharptown thumped 63-39 last Monday night.

If Tharptown's girls have indeed put their struggles with inconsistency behind them, that red-hot January could be followed by an unforgettable February.

Belgreen girls
Head coach: Chad Green
Record through Sunday: 19-8
ASWA ranking: No. 8 in Class 1A
Best wins: Tharptown (2), Winfield (2), Phillips, Hamilton, Russellville (2), Vina

The skinny: Whereas Tharptown's road to the regional tournament appears to be wide open, Belgreen's girls face a stiff challenge in trying to reach Hanceville for a third straight season. The Lady Bulldogs must first survive Wednesday's Area 12 semifinal showdown with a Vina team whose 20 wins during the regular season included a 54-53 upset of Belgreen in mid-December. [The Lady Bulldogs won the rematch 75-47 at home on January 9.]

Should they get by the Lady Red Devils, Belgreen's girls will then face reigning state champion Phillips in Friday's area final in Bear Creek. The two teams split a pair of regular-season meetings, each winning 57-45 on their home floor. If the Lady Bulldogs were to take down the champs a second time, they would all but punch their ticket to the regional.

A loss to Phillips, however, means a sub-regional road trip to take on fourth-ranked Mars Hill (23-7). The Lady Panthers went 13-2 in January, beating the likes of Central, Wilson, Deshler and Phil Campbell. Mars Hill would undoubtedly be hungry for revenge, too, after losing to Belgreen in overtime last season in the sub-regional round.

That's a tough road to hoe, but Green likes his team's chances to make a run—and it's easy to see why. The Lady Bulldogs are as committed as any team in northwest Alabama to pounding the ball inside, and they have a dynamic post duo in

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'HANCEVILLE,' from page 13

5'8 senior Ansley Tate (who ranks second in Franklin County in scoring at 14.9 points per game) and 6'1 junior Emma Dempsey (third in the county at 13.8 points per game). Dempsey's ability to face up and either drive or shoot from the high post is a perfect complement to Tate's low-block dominance.

Dempsey has six games this season with 20-plus points, and Tate has five, so both are more than capable of putting up a big number on any given night. Both also excel at getting to the foul line, where Dempsey shoots 72 percent (86-for-119) and Tate shoots 65 percent (85-for-130). Factor in versatile senior forward Katie Dempsey (5.3 points per game), and Belgreen can go toe-to-toe down low with just about anybody.

The key to a potential postseason run for the Lady Bulldogs may be the ability of their veteran guards to knock down perimeter shots and handle the ball against pressure. Senior Autumn Bragwell puts the "shooting" in shooting guard, ranking second in Franklin County with 53 threes made this season and third in free-throw percentage at .711 (54-for-76). She also ranks sixth in the county in scoring at 12.4 points per game and tied for third with six games of 20-plus points, giving Belgreen a third big-time scorer with the ability to take over a game.

The starting five of junior Emma Dempsey plus seniors Tate, Bragwell, Gracie Dempsey and Katie Dempsey has combined to score more than 4,400 career points. A run to the regional final—and perhaps beyond—would be the crowning achievement of their collective careers.

The vast majority of the ball-handling duties fall to senior point guard Gracie Dempsey, who also happens to be the team's top perimeter defender and its second-best shooter. Dempsey (7.8 points per game) ranks seventh in Franklin County with 28 threes made and seventh in free-throw percentage at .658 (52-for-79). If she and Bragwell can consistently make opponents pay for double-teaming the post or packing in a zone defense, the Lady Bulldogs might finally break through and earn that elusive Elite Eight bid.

Green's team certainly doesn't lack for experience and production. The starting five of junior Emma Dempsey plus seniors Tate, Bragwell, Gracie Dempsey and Katie Dempsey has combined to score more than 4,400 career points. A run to the regional final—and perhaps beyond—would be the crowning achievement of their collective careers.

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Katie Thomas

Junior Forward, Phil Campbell

Thomas capped off a strong week for Phil Campbell by scoring a career-high 19 points on Saturday in a 56-51 win at rival Phillips. She also led the Lady Bobcats with 15 points last Thursday in a loss at Mars Hill and scored 10 points on Friday in a 52-45 win at Belmont.

After sitting out to rest a troublesome hip on January 21 at Fayette, Thomas averaged 14.6 points and hit 11 threes in Phil Campbell's final five games of the regular season. For the year, she's averaging 8.0 points per game and ranks second on the team with 29 threes made.



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