



Still feeling the love, 70 years later

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Life hasn't always been easy for JB and Betty Mills. Through their 70 years of marriage (yes, 70 years), the couple has seen its share of life's ups and downs. But there's always been one constant—the love they feel for each other.

The Mills celebrated their 70th anniversary March 1st with friends and family at B&J Cafe in Phil Campbell.

With four children, 13 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren and eight great-great-grandchildren, JB and Betty's legacy will live on for decades. But they're not through enjoying their own lives yet.

"We still love each other. We're still together and take care of each other after 70 years," JB said. "I'm six years older than her but it doesn't matter much at our age."

While that age difference doesn't seem significant today, it was a different story in 1950.

"I was living in Spruce Pine with my relatives. Her grandparents were neighbors," Mills said. "That's how we

See 'LOVE' page 8



COURTESY PHOTO
 JB and Betty Mills, pictured above with grandson Shane Baker, celebrated their 70th anniversary with family and friends on March 1st.

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Lawsuits, foreclosure call MS Industries' future into question

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Alabama Department of Revenue has filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction that would cease operations of MS Industries II, LLC, based on allegations the company failed to pay withholding tax to the State of Alabama as required by the Code of Alabama.

The lawsuit, originally filed erroneously in Russell County, was properly filed in Franklin County on February 5, 2020, by Assistant Attorney General Keith Maddox on behalf of the Alabama Department of Revenue.

Chuck Kelley, MS Industries II general counsel, said his company is aware of the suit concerning overdue payroll taxes and he expects the matter to be resolved by MS Industries II satisfying the payroll tax debt.

"We are communicating with the attorney and representatives of the Alabama Department of Revenue concerning payment of the payroll tax bill," Kelley said. "We fully intend to pay the taxes and do not believe that any formal proceedings in the suit will be necessary."

The Department of Revenue case is one of four civil actions pending against MS Industries II, which has its principal place of business at 430 Walnut Gate Road in Russellville.

Steven D. Smith, MS Industries II CEO, acknowledged his company has "experienced financial difficulties" over the last year, but he attributes them to "engineering mis-cues" during the construction of the company's Walnut Gate Road tract.

The 58-acre tract was conditionally transferred to MS Industries II from the Industrial Development Board of the City of Russellville pursuant to a lease-purchase agreement originally executed on April 14, 2016.

In a statement to the *Franklin Free Press*, Smith said: "It's no big secret around Russellville that MS Industries has experienced financial difficulties over the last year or so," Smith said. "Like so many new, start-up companies, our company has encountered numerous hurdles in reaching our revenue projections for 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. We are firmly committed, however, to reaching our goal of being the largest producer and ship-

See 'MS INDUSTRIES' Page 5

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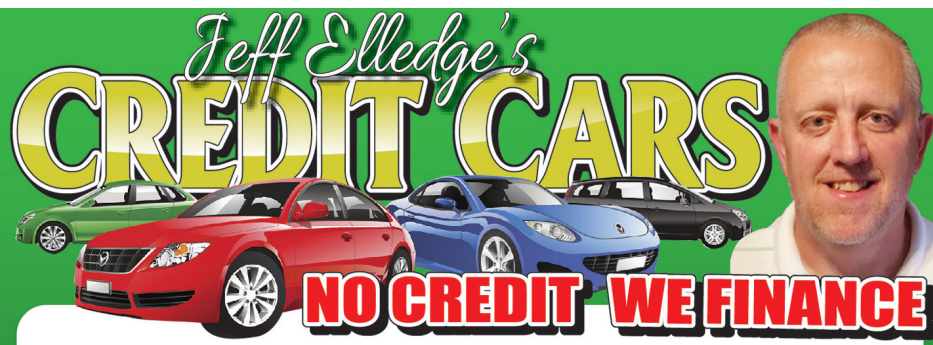
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Geneva Bradford, Phil Campbell, 80, died on Sunday, March 15th. Funeral service held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Internment to follow in Union Hill Cemetery.

Laddie Hamilton, Russellville, 75, died on Sunday, March 15th. Funeral service held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Internment at Fairview Cemetery.

Jimmie Lou Reynolds, Hoover (formerly of Russellville), 91, died on Thursday, March 19th. Funeral service for immediate family only held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



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Grissom declares state of local emergency, creates task force

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Following the lead of President Donald Trump and Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, Russellville Mayor David Grissom declared a State of Local Emergency at the March 16th meeting of the Russellville City Council.

Grissom made the declaration as a result of the ongoing threat of COVID-19, known as the Coronavirus.

According to Russellville City Attorney Danny McDowell, the Code of Alabama provides that a local government may declare a State of Emergency based on the fact that the governor has done the same at the state level.

The move authorizes the mayor to perform certain duties that ordinarily would require approval of the city council, including entering into contracts dealing with the emergency situation and making certain personnel moves that may be necessary in response to the emergency.

The State of Local Emergency will expire on April 6, 2020, the same date set for the state emergency declaration to expire.

Grissom formed a COVID-19 Task Force for the City of Russellville and announced the task force members at Monday's meeting.

"We want to be proactive with this situation. We are in uncharted territory and this task force contains experts in their fields who can offer valuable insight as we move forward," Grissom said.

Task force members include: McDowell, Dr. Keith Morrow, Dr. Joel Bridgewater, Pam Welborn, Alisia Welborn, Kevin Touchstone, Chris Hargett, Joe Mansell, Heath Grimes, Ike Rogers, Justin Copeland, Bo Lloyd, Matt Cooper, Jerry Groce and Dr. Jeremy Campbell.

In other action, the council:

—approved the transfer of an Class II—Lounge Retail Liquor (Off-Premise Consumption) license to Shivam 07, LLC, d/b/a Mike's Beverages, 13501 Highway 43, Russellville.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be April 6, 2020, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

Ozbirn, Bicentennial committee earn special recognition

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The leadership of Chris Ozbirn and the work of the Franklin County Bicentennial Committee recently received statewide recognition as the Franklin County/City of Russellville Bicentennial Committee received recognition as a "Alabama Bicentennial Legacy Project."

The honor was bestowed to a limited number of organizations across Alabama whose Bicentennial activities had "significant impact and/or ongoing benefit beyond the end of the Bicentennial."

A bronze plaque and letter of acknowledgement will be sent to Ozbirn, who serves as Director of the Franklin County Archives. Ozbirn was the chairperson of the county and city's Bicentennial committees. Ozbirn said the plaque will be displayed at the Franklin County Courthouse for six months, followed by display at Russellville City Hall for six months.

The Franklin County/City of Russellville Bicentennial efforts will also be included in an official report of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission that will be delivered to Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Legislature.

"We very much appreciate your efforts and the efforts of your committee. Your work was outstanding and this statewide recognition affirms that," Russellville Mayor David Grissom told Ozbirn at the March 16th meeting of the Russellville City Council.

After display at the courthouse and Russellville City Hall, the plaque will be permanently displayed at the Franklin County Archives.

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

Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

To say the last several days have been a whirlwind of emotions is an understatement. Covid-19 and phrases such as social distancing are quickly becoming the norm.

National and statewide restrictions are being placed on everything imaginable and more and more daily. All of these things are understandable measures to prevent further spread of the virus.

Most of us probably have spent a lot of time on social media as of late in an effort to reduce anxiety (An activity which probably has increased it).

Every day you read of something else being cancelled; all measures that are probably necessary.

For instance the cancellation or at the very least postponing of spring sports. Most rational human beings understand this although it is very difficult for those effected.

The other morning I was reading Twitter and I came across a tweet from a young lady that said in reference to the cancellation of the sports "I know it's disappointing but it's just a game".

I disagree wholeheartedly.

To my daughter and thousands of

other young teenagers these sports are not "just a game". To many of them it has been an integral part of their lives.

My daughter for instance has played the game of softball since she was nine years old and has played at a very competitive level for most of that time. As have many, many other young teenagers across the country. It's not just a game.

These kids have invested countless hours training, sweating, competing, winning, losing and growing for the last several years.

They have made lifetime bonds, many have broken bones, achieved the pinnacle of success and known the lows of defeat. They have grown as a result of what some call "just a game".

Now let's think about the seniors. They have looked forward to this season and of no fault to anyone especially them it's possible now that it could all be taken away.

All of that time invested physically, emotionally, and yes even financially could seemingly be lost. Not just the seniors involved in athletics either but I think my point is clear.

I've heard others make the remark as well. Yes this scourge we are fac-

See 'LETTER,' Page 8



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Letters to the editor

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My take on this... a two for one special!

Hi friends!

Have I told you lately how much you inspire me by your compliments? It is nice to be appreciated by doing something I love doing. I enjoy sharing the daily actions of people who influence my stories. You know how people can do the strangest and funniest things without realizing it. Of course what we think is altogether put in a different perspective than what they are doing.



Gail Motes

To them it's a normal thing. To us our thought goes to thinking, "well I've never seen anything like this before!"

That is exactly how this story originated. I'd never seen anything like it but I knew immediately it was the beginning of my next article.

A few days ago, I turned into the old Fred's parking lot and I immediately noticed someone washing a car. I know you are excited already.

The reason I noticed was the handheld high pressure sprayer. I didn't know there was one in Russellville anymore. I thought it was a thing of the past and all the automatic car washes had replaced them.

For some reason, I can never make the sign happy. My last experience just did me in. I knew I was through with 'em. The first light is easy to do. Slowly move forward until the sign reads "STOP". The wash area though is my problem. I think I'm there but it will let me know I need to move forward. Then I roll past it and it tells me I need to back up.

I would have just left but I hated not to get my money's worth and my car was extremely dirty. So I just kept going back and forth until the "STOP" showed up.

Sometimes, I would go into the rinse area correctly on my first try... notice I said "sometimes".

I've been told I can make a mountain out of a mole hill. You know that doesn't sound right. Well you know what I mean.

The bottom line is that automatic car washes are not programmed for people like me. If it's like the "stop" and "go" would rather flash "go home" or "get out".

If you don't believe me, I'll try to take a video for you. If I know you, you can just come ride with me. It's insane!

Anyway, I saw the car wash and the overspray and then something else caught my eye. At first glance it looked normal but my mind wasn't quite satisfied. So, I looked a little closer.

I saw two cars in one bay parked as close together as possible and both were being washed at the same time. Now y'all might have seen something like this before but not me.

I just called it a "two-for-one discount".

When I pulled my car in the bay, I had to use the brush because my car was so dirty. To top that off, I had to wash it twice. So I washed one car to their two.

Maybe they had something there. I should have asked if they would wash my car.

The main thing is now I know my life will be less stressful. But I did drive away thinking that I had to have seen that before.

Well my memory is not what it used to be. With that thought comes one more; I sure hope I can remember Russellville still has them and that I remember where it is!

Wow, sounds to me like another story in the making!

Please take care; I appreciate each of you so much. And as always, until later...

'MS INDUSTRIES,' from page 1

per of industrial silica and related products in the Southeast. We are working hard with lenders and other resources to overcome the financial hurdles we have faced, and are extremely confident that better days are ahead for MS Industries.

"The problems we have experienced can be traced back to early 2018, when we learned for the first time that engineering miscues created a \$14 million shortfall on the construction budget for our silica processing and distribution plant on Walnut Gate Road. That shortfall created an immediate and unexpected cash shortage, and left our company facing significant construction invoices while we began the process of re-capitalizing the company," Smith said.

The company's agreement with the board included several conditions, including minimum employment levels, that had to be satisfied in order for the property to be transferred to MS Industries. Those conditions included a minimum of \$10,000,000 in capital improvements to the site and at least 50 full-time jobs paying a minimum of \$20/hour by the end of the third year of the agreement.

While the capital investment in the property exceeds the \$10,000,000 requirement, MS Industries II failed to reach the 50-employee threshold at any time since the agreement was signed.

According to Industrial Development Board Chairman Greg Trapp, MS Industries II officials asked for and received an extension on the time allowed to meet the 50-employee minimum. A second request for a time extension has not been acted on by the Industrial Development Board as of March 18, 2020. Trapp said the employment condition was the lone benchmark that has not been met by MS Industries II.

The lease purchase agreement also provides that MS Industries II, in the event it does not comply with the conditions, may purchase the property outright for \$360,000.

Kelley said his company is working closely with the board to extend the lease agreement one year beyond its April 14, 2020, ending date.

"MS Industries has invested over \$40 million in constructing its silica plant on Walnut Gate Road. The extension has been requested to give MS Industries the opportunity to financially rebound, and either add the 50 jobs specified in the lease, or raise the land purchase price of \$360,000 which was determined by appraisal arranged by the Russellville Industrial Development Board," Kelley said.

Regardless of the result, Trapp said the Industrial Development Board will be on solid footing when it comes to the MS Industries property. With the construction of a railroad spur to the property, if the land reverts back to the board, it would make an attractive location for new industry. If MS Industries officials end up purchasing the land for \$360,000, the board will come out whole, and if MS Industries moves forward with its business operations and employs at least 50 good-paying jobs, that's also a win-win for the community.

A foreclosure sale on the company's downtown building, located at 101 North Jackson Avenue, was set for March 18th based on the company's default on a mortgage filed on the property. According to Russellville attorney Jeff Bowling, who represents TBS Factoring Service, the foreclosure sale was postponed until April 22, 2020, due to legal questions regarding whether foreclosure sales may go forward during the government shutdowns resulting from the COVID-19 virus.

The *Franklin Free Press* also confirmed that numerous MS Industries II employees were laid off effective March 13, 2020. A source familiar with the layoffs said some of those employees had not received paychecks for a month. According to the source, company officials told the laid off employees they could be hired back in approximately 30-45 days.

Smith said the layoffs were temporary and resulted from issues with two of the company's largest customers.

"MS Industries values the men and women who work for our company, making these layoffs a difficult thing to do," Smith said. "Our employees were advised that the layoffs should be considered temporary in nature, as we are hopeful to be in a position to recall them within the next 30-45 days."

Smith also said that, as of March 20th, the company's employees have been paid in full through the layoff date.

Smith said the layoffs resulted from "delays because of equipment issues" at one of MS Industries' customer plants.

"These problems were worsened during 2019 when we faced lengthy delays beyond our control in bringing two new, very sizable silica supply contracts online in a timely manner," Smith said. "With one customer, the delays were caused by prolonged flooding that interrupted its production. The other contract was delayed because of equipment issues at the customer's plant. Unfortunately, these delays put an additional strain on our monthly cash flow, and we were forced to make the difficult decision on Thursday, March 12, 2020, to temporarily suspend shipments of silica to our largest customer, and to also temporarily lay off the majority of our work force," Smith added.

According to the company's website, www.msind.com, "MS Industries is a mining research and development company centrally located in Russellville... who offers a range of high-grade silica products, including whole grain silica, silica flour, metakaolin, and clay."

On October 30, 2019, Contractor Service & Fabrication, Inc., obtained a consent judgment against MS Industries II, LLC., in the amount of \$1,900,705.70. Essentially, MS Industries II entered into an agreement to satisfy the amount owed by a date certain and that was filed with the court in the form of a judgment. That lawsuit also named the Industrial Development Board of the City of Russellville as a defendant, although the judgment was against MS Industries only.

In that civil action, Contractor Service maintained it provided materials, service, labor, equipment and supplies to MS Industries II, and was not paid for its work. The Industrial Development Board was named in the lawsuit as "the holder and owner of title of record" to the Walnut Gate Road property.

As to the Industrial Development Board, that lawsuit remains pending.

Earlier this month, another civil action was filed against MS Industries II, LLC, by Kice Industries, Inc., alleging MS owes a balance of \$135,541.80 for certain industrial equipment and merchandise, and that the company failed to pay the remaining balance by September 28, 2018, the deadline for payment according to the complaint.

A lawsuit recently filed in Lawrence County Circuit Court by Caterpillar Financial Services Corporation against MS Industries II seeks \$781,250.13 in damages for the company's alleged failure to pay for certain equipment.

When MS Industries announced its plans to locate its silica plant and corporate headquarters in Franklin County, it was hailed by many, including the *Franklin Free Press*, as a 'renaissance' for Russellville.

With an 'all-in' mentality for Russellville, including the purchase of the downtown building that houses its corporate headquarters and construction of the Walnut Gate Road plant, MS Industries II CEO Steve Smith said his company's total investment in Russellville would approach \$100 million.

The question now becomes whether the company will be able to raise the additional capital necessary to satisfy its creditors and complete the construction of the plant necessary to operate at full potential.

Smith, though, remains confident that will happen.

"The City of Russellville and its leaders have been very supportive of MS Industries, and we are very proud to be located here," Smith said. "Our company has invested heavily downtown and in the community, and we plan to be here for a long, long time."

"We appreciate the kind words of encouragement that we have received from our friends in the community, and look forward continuing on with our mission of adding to the local economy," Smith added.

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In accordance with Chapter 1, Title 39, Code of Alabama, 1975, notice is hereby given that Hovater's Metal Works, Inc., Contractor, has completed the Contract for Renovation of Building Renovation for Phil Campbell Splashpad, Phil Campbell, AL, Project # 21712, for the State of Alabama and the Town of Phil Campbell, Owners, and have made request for final settlement of said Contract. All persons having any claim for labor, materials, or otherwise in connection with this project should immediately notify CREATE Architects, Inc., 218A North Court Street, Florence, AL 35630.


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What's Happening


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


 **R**onnie McDowell returns to Russellville to celebrate his 70th birthday with a special show at the Roxy Theatre on Saturday, May 16 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.


 **T**he Belgreen Alumni Banquet, set for April 4, 2020, has been postponed as a result of COVID-19 health concerns. There is not a date set for the rescheduling yet. Once a decision is made, we will let everyone know when we will have it.


 **T**he 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.


 **S**t. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal Church invites you to be a part of their spring revival Wednesday March 25 through Friday March 27 at 7 PM nightly. Guest evangelist will be Rev. Bruce Williams from Enon United Methodist Church in Birmingham. For more information call 256-332-6177.


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


 **Y**ou are invited to attend an old fashioned dinner on the grounds with all day singing and preaching at My Fathers House in downtown Russellville on March 29. Festivities will begin at 10:30 AM with lunch beginning at 12:30 PM and praise and worship at 2 PM. Heart's Desire will perform a singing special and Bradley Bowen will be preaching. Come be our guest & receive your miracle! Everyone is special and always welcome! For more information call 256-460-1376.


 **T**he Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts has announced that its next production, Cheating Cheaters, that was to be performed April 23-26, 2020, will be postponed until June. They apologize for any inconvenience, but hope everyone stays well and they look forward to seeing everyone in June.


 **A**s of Wednesday, March 18 the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art will be closed to the public due to concerns related to COVID-19. We will remain closed until further notice. Our offices are still open and able to receive your call. We will continue to respond to developments as they arise. Please check for updates on our Facebook pages. Thank you for your understanding.


 **T**he 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!


 **V**illage Square Apartments in Russellville host George's Country Boys each Monday from 6-8 p.m. for some Gospel and Country singing!

 **M**ountain Valley Hee Haw features live music every Saturday night. Show time is 6 p.m. Free admission. No alcohol or drugs. From Russellville, take 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on left. For more information, please call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840 for any more information.

 **N**ew Life Ministries invites you to join them for Sunday School at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings and for worship services on Sundays at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. On the first Sunday of each month, there will be a fellowship lunch after morning services. You and your family are invited to come worship and fellowship with the Lord of Hosts and his children. New Life Ministries is located on Hwy. 24 west toward Red Bay, behind Tompkins Feed.

 **T**he Newburg Masonic Lodge #388 meets the first Thursday of every month. The Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 meets the first and third Tuesday of every month. The Franklin County Shrine Club meets the second Tuesday of each month. The Order of the Eastern Star Chapter 256 meets every second and fourth Tuesday of each month at the Russellville Masonic Lodge. Spruce Pine Masonic Lodge #608 meets the second and fourth Thursday of each month. Phil Campbell Masonic Lodge #880 meets the first and third Thursday of each month. Burleson Lodge #143 meets the second and fourth Monday of each month. Belgreen Lodge #428 meets the first and third Monday of each month. All meetings start at 7 p.m.

 **Y**ou are invited to attend an old fashioned dinner on the grounds with all day singing and preaching at My Fathers House in downtown Russellville on March 29. Festivities will begin at 10:30 AM with lunch beginning at 12:30 PM and praise and worship at 2 PM. Heart's Desire will perform a singing special and Bradley Bowen will be preaching. Come be our guest & receive your miracle! Everyone is special and always welcome! For more information call 256-460-1376.

 **T**he American Legion Post 64 in Russellville will postpone its April and May meetings. If you have any questions, please contact Grant Atkins.

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Russellville Utilities announces changes to curb virus spread

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Officials at Russellville Utilities said Friday they are implementing changes designed to limit personal interaction and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The lobby area at Russellville Utilities, 721 South Jackson Avenue, has been closed effective Friday, March 20, until April 6, 2020.

Officials will reevaluate the situation on that date and announce their plans. But customers needing to establish or cutoff service, or make payments, still have several options as to how to proceed.

There is a drive-thru window and a drop-off box for payments on the north side of the utility office at the address above.

Additionally, payments may be made over the phone by calling *Nexbillpay* at 1-877-256-4714.

While there usually is a \$3.95 convenience fee for payment through *Nexbillpay*, Russellville Utilities will absorb that payments now through April 6, 2020.

Payments may also be made online through *Nexbillpay* by following the link on Russellville Utilities' website, www.russellvilleutilities.com.

When you go to the website, click the "Pay Your Bill online" link.

For customers needing to establish new service or disconnect service, call 256-332-3850 and you will be instructed how to proceed.

On Thursday, Russellville Electric Board (REB) General Manager Charles Canida said his department has not disconnected any customers other than those set for normal cutoff due to lack of payment.

With shutdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic affecting Alabama beginning Friday, March 13, 2020, Canida said any disconnections since that date were

"strictly the result of implementation of our normal cutoff policy."

That said, the REB has not yet suspended its normal practice of disconnecting utility services for nonpayment.

"We are monitoring this fluid situation on a day-to-day basis and as circumstances change, we will make necessary adjustments as needed or required," Canida said.

In the event the REB does implement temporary suspension of its normal disconnection policy, customers will still be responsible for payment of their full bill amount accrued until payment is made.

If customers have any questions, they are encouraged to call Russellville Utilities at 256-332-3850.

And for after-hours emergencies, to contact the Russellville Police Department at 256-332-2230.

Courthouse, annex now closed to public

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission voted to close the Franklin County Courthouse and Annex effective Monday, March 23, 2020, at an emergency meeting held Friday afternoon.

Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore presented a resolution to commissioners that declared a State of Local Emergency for Franklin County. After the unanimous approval of that resolution, commissioners voted to close the courthouse and "all Franklin County facilities" to the public through April 3, 2020.

Moore said county officials would reevaluate the situation at that time.

The resolution read as follows:

"Whereas, the Franklin County Commission has joined the State and Federal Government in declaring an emergency due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus epidemic; and

Whereas, public health agencies have recommended the practice of social distancing to slow the spread of the pandemic to assist healthcare providers in keeping the number of those experiencing severe symptoms at a manageable level; and

Whereas, operations of local schools have been suspended, creating childcare issues for many employees; and

Whereas, it is anticipated that additional orders and recommendations from the State and Federal level will make it increasingly difficult to maintain routine operations;

Now therefore be it resolved by the Franklin County Commission, that Franklin County Facilities shall be closed to the public starting March 23, 2020 through April 3, 2020."

Moore described the move as "a difficult, but necessary, decision" to protect the citizens of Franklin County.

"This decision was not taken lightly. There was a great deal of serious thought put into it by commissioners and department heads," Moore said. "Courthouse employees will still come into work. We left it to each department head how they will work that within their department..."

"We ask the citizens and employees of this county to be patient with us as we have to make the decisions we believe best for the citizens of our county. We will get through this difficult time," Moore added.

With the State of Local Emergency declaration, Moore, as Chairman of the Franklin County Commission, will have authority to take action, including entering into contracts, incurring obligations, employing temporary workers, renting equipment, acquiring supplies and appropriating public funds, for matters related to the State of Local Emergency.

A meeting and subsequent approval of the commission would ordinarily be required for such action, but the declaration waives the procedures and formalities otherwise required.

Moore stressed that these measures were taken as part of county officials being proactive in protecting the health, safety and welfare of Franklin County residents.

"We want the citizens of Franklin County to remain calm. We have no virus cases detected in Franklin County or surrounding counties. This is our commission being proactive in taking steps to take care of this situation before it affects us," Moore said.

Franklin County Emergency Management Agency Director Mary Hallman-Glass told commissioners that, as of 12 p.m., March 20th, there were 78 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Alabama, in 14 counties.

There were no cases as of that time in Franklin, Colbert, Lauderdale, Marion or Winston Counties, she said. Hallman-Glass said she receives updates at 9 a.m., and 4 p.m., each day from the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Hallman-Glass said she has activated Franklin County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as of March 20th, on an as-needed basis.

Franklin County joins 27 other counties whose EOCs have been activated.

While normally activated in preparation for, or in the aftermath of, severe weather incidents, Hallman-Glass said the Franklin County EOC needed to be in place to properly respond to the public health threat.

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'LETTER,' from page 4

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Clint Sikes

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'ANNIVERSARY,' from page 1

met. Back then, there wasn't much dating to it. She was young and going to school I stole her away and married her. We ran off to luka, Mississippi, to get married."

The couple lost their first two children early in their marriage. A baby girl lived 67 days and their first boy almost one year.

Donna, the oldest of their surviving children, was born 10 days before JB left for the United States Army.

"They sent me straight overseas in the Army to Germany," Mills recalled. "Later, my wife and daughter came to Germany to stay with me until my rotation date."

The family relocated to Chicago, where they lived for 25 years. Three more children followed, including Eddie, Glenda and Sherry. In 1970, JB and Betty decided to return to their native Franklin County.

"Our kids were getting grown and we did not want them to marry (in Chicago) so we figured it was time to come back here," Mills said.

The couple's bond has withstood the test of time. A sign at their anniversary dinner read, "840 months of happiness. 25,568 days of understanding. 3,652 weeks of laughter. 613,632 hours of love. 4 wonderful children. 13 grandchildren. 17 great-grandchildren. 8 great-great-grandchildren. 1 blessed family."

For Heather Lashay Aldridge, one of the couple's 13 grandchildren, JB and Betty are sources of strength in her life.

"They helped raise me. They are like the rock of our family," Aldridge said. Laughter and love remain at the core of the couple's marriage, even after 70 years.

"Dr. (Keith) Morrow says we fascinate him. Most people who live together as long as we have don't even speak to each other, but we love each other even though I'm always picking at her," Mills said.

"And I accuse her of using a ball bat on me. Dr. Morrow said he doesn't believe it or I'd look even worse than I do now."

As for regrets, or thoughts about whether they made the right decision on March 1, 1950, JB said that's never been an issue.

"I'll be 91 years old in July. She will be 85 in November. 70 years we've been together, so evidently I found the right one," Mills said.

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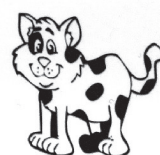
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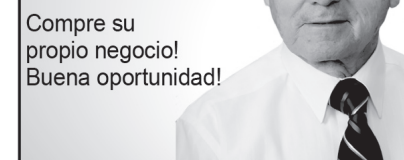
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Local players named to Alabama all-star game

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

After the nets were cut down in Birmingham and trophies were handed out, there was one little bit of business that needed to be taken care of.

The all-star teams for the annual Alabama North-South boys and girls all-star games were announced last week and Franklin County was well represented on both teams.

After three teams made it past their area tournaments with at least a sub-regional game on the girls side, (Belgreen, Red Bay, and Phil Campbell), having players and coaches named to the North squad was inevitable.

How many would actually get the nod was the only question.

One of the coaches named for the girls North team was Phil Campbell Lady Bobcats coach Craig Thomas.

After an 0-3 start to the season, Thomas led the Lady Bobcats to a 23-7 record on the season while winning their area tournament and were able to reach the 3A girls regional final game.

Along the way, Phil Campbell was able to continue their streak of beating in-county opponents to 25 straight while also beating top-notch teams like Belgreen, Mars Hill, Belmont (MS), and Phillips.

Part of the reason for Thomas and the Lady Bobcats success was the stellar play of senior guard Kallie Allen who was one of two players from Franklin County to get the nod to play in the all-star game for the girls squad.

Allen, a Wallace State signee, was arguably the most versatile player in Franklin County over the course of the season.

Allen averaged 12.0 points, 5.2 rebounds, 3.4 assists, and 3.3 steals per game while also shooting 57.6 percent from inside the 3-point arc while shooting 48.6 percent from the floor altogether.

In addition, Allen was also extremely efficient on the defensive side of the ball as she compiled 73 steals and 22 blocks to add to her stat sheet on the year.

While Allen was the only senior from Franklin County to be named to a team, the future bodes well for basketball in the county as three juniors were selected.

Emma Dempsey, a junior center from Belgreen, was the only other player from Franklin County to be selected to the girls team.

Ranking third in the county in terms of points scored per game (13.9), the 6'1 Dempsey utilized her mid-range jumper to be dominant out of the high post for the Lady Bulldogs.

Dempsey played a crucial part on the offensive and defensive side of the court in the Lady Bulldogs making it to the sub-regional round of the state playoffs.

Averaging 6.5 rebounds per game, Dempsey also had a huge impact with her defense as well

See 'ALL-STAR,' Page 12

Experience is key

With a roster loaded with senior talent, Golden Tigers hoping experience pays off with a deep playoff run



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

The Golden Tigers return more than 30 seniors to this year's squad, something that Ritter and his staff hope can help push them deeper into the playoffs.

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

The last time John Ritter had a team as senior-laden as his Russellville squad will be in 2020 was 2017, his third and final year at West Morgan.

With roughly 20 seniors on a 50-man roster, the '17 Rebels went 10-2 and won a share of a region championship. Following that season, Ritter left Trinity for Russellville, where he now has the Golden Tigers in position to enjoy a similar level of Year Three success behind a roster teeming with experience and veteran playmakers on both sides of the ball.

Russellville figures to have 30-plus seniors out of roughly 100 varsity players in 2020—eye-popping numbers for a Class 5A program. With guys like linebacker Brooks Scott, offensive lineman Edgar Amaya, corner Ashaad Williams, and receivers Rowe Gallagher and Cole Barnett setting the tone for that massive senior class, Ritter believes his team will be well equipped to take on any challenge this coming season.

"Those guys have experienced just about everything you can experience. There's not a lot that's gonna catch them off guard," said Ritter, who has guided the Golden Tigers to a 17-5 record in his

first two seasons. "You go back to our first year, and we were playing a bunch of kids that had never played varsity football or had played very little. Everything was a new experience. The first road trip was a new experience. A turnover late in a game was a new experience. Giving up a score late was a new experience. Now, we're very seasoned. We've got a bunch of guys on both sides of the ball who have gone through all the peaks and valleys you can go through.

"When you have a team with this kind of experience, it means a couple of things. Number one, you should play with a lot of confidence. Number two, there's not a lot that should get that group rattled."

Another advantage with such a veteran team is the benefit of having a lot of players who have worked their way through the strength and conditioning program for multiple years now. According to Ritter, the team-wide gains in strength and physicality are evident heading into his third season.

"We've had a great offseason," Ritter said earlier this month. "We've got sixty-five guys who work out with us on a daily basis, and eighty percent of them are in the 700-pound club or higher. [Players

See 'EXPERIENCE,' Page 14

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'ALL-STAR,' from page 11

rejecting 75 shots over the course of the season, good enough for 2.6 per game.

For the first time in her four-year career as a varsity player, Dempsey reached the 400 point plateau finishing the season with 404 points on the year.

She will head into her senior year with an outside chance of eclipsing the 2,000 point marker as she reached 1,396 career points to end her junior season.

Transitioning to the boys side of the rosters, one player from a Franklin County school and one from Russellville High School were chosen to represent the north team.

The lone representative from Russellville High School was Junior Forward Chandler Dyas.

Coming into this season, expectations were high for Chandler Dyas as he was the only returning member of the 20-win Golden Tiger team from a year ago.

Needless to say that Dyas not only met those expectations, but exceeded them.

Averaging 17.3 points per game, good for the second highest mark in the county, Dyas put up 20 points or more in ten times across the season.

Not only was Dyas the most efficient scorer on the Golden Tiger team that was able to claim the runner-up spot in their area title (including a victory over Hamilton to advance to the area title game), but he also had a major influence in other aspects of the game.

See 'ALL-STAR,' Page 13

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'ALL-STAR,' from page 12

Dyas was active on the boards and in the passing game as he averaged 4.6 rebounds per game to go along with 2.9 assists per game.

Next season will be a special season personally for Dyas as he is only 104 points away from 1,000 for his varsity career.

If you were looking for a member of the Red Bay boys team to choose for a spot on the state all-star team, you could take your pick from a handful of players on the team and be very happy with your selection.

While you could make the case for multiple members of this years RBHS boys team to make the all-star team, Braden Ray was the only member to garner a selection.

Ray, a Junior forward for Red Bay, was a solid role player for coach John Torisky last season averaging just under ten points per game across his freshman and sophomore seasons.

In his junior year however, Ray took a huge step forward.

An all-around threat for the Tigers, Ray was a key piece in a historic year for the program as they were able to reach the final four for the first time in program history.

Ranking in the top five within the county in points per game (16.5), three-pointers made (55), and free throws made (110), Ray was an offensive juggernaut.

Crossing the 1,000 point mark in his varsity career, Ray scored 20 or more points in eight contests including 31 points in an area win over Sulligent and a career-high of 35 against Mars Hill.

The 2020-2021 high school basketball season figures to be an exciting one in Franklin County as there is a plethora of young talent across the county.

If some of the younger players take the next step in progressing their game, don't be surprised if you look at this same list next year and see an all-star roster loaded with local players.



Olivia Ergle Senior Pitcher, Tharptown

In a week where most teams were only able to get one game in, it might have been hard to find a way to stand out. That wasn't the case for Tharptown senior Olivia Ergle. In their only game of the week, Ergle put on a clinic in the circle. Last Monday against county rival Red Bay, Ergle went seven strong innings pitching scattering seven hits and allowing only one earned run. Nearly 70% of Ergle's pitches would be called for a strike as she tallied up seven strikeouts along the way and allowed only one walk. Ergle also had one RBI on the day as well.



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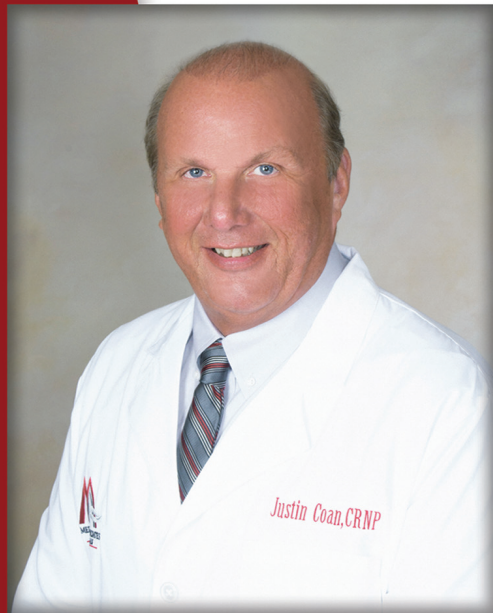


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'EXPERIENCE,' from page 11

whose max lifts in the bench press, squad and power clean total at least 700 pounds.] We've got fourteen guys in the 700-pound club, fourteen guys in the 800-pound club, thirteen guys in the 900-pound club and thirteen guys in the 1,000-pound club. That's fifty-four guys in all. I think we're getting a lot closer to where we wanna be strength-wise.

"This is our second full offseason, and I think we've made a ton of gains in terms of physicality. That goes back to the experience factor. Our guys should know how to practice by now. We've got about thirty eighth-graders moving up this time, and those guys have played in our middle school program for two years. It's not gonna be as big a jump as it was the first spring after we got here. These guys have gotten a taste of our brand of football for two seasons now."

Included among that group of rising freshmen is stud tailback Malachi Duncan, who helped head coach Larry Gilmer's eighth-grade team go undefeated in 2019. Ritter said that Duncan is one of a handful of players who could have the opportunity to make an impact at the varsity level in 2020 as ninth-graders—just like defensive back Conner Warhurst and receiver T.J. King did late in the 2019 season.

"Obviously, Malachi Duncan had a phenomenal seventh- and eighth-grade year," Ritter said. "Physically, he's close to being able to play [on Friday nights]. It'll be a lot like we did with T.J. last year. We didn't rush T.J., but when he was ready, you can see the impact he made."

King emerged as Russellville's top big-play receiver down the stretch in 2019, finishing his freshman season with eight catches for 240 yards and three touchdowns—one of which came in a first-round playoff loss at Scottsboro. Another player who contributed as a freshman last season was Warhurst, who made his first career start in the secondary in Week 8 against top-ranked Jasper and promptly recorded 14 tackles.

Warhurst will be part of a two-man competition, along with rising junior Gabe Amick, to take over as the team's starting quarterback in 2020.

"Gabe was our jayvee guy the last couple of years, and Conner Warhurst worked at quarterback some early," Ritter said. "We had some depth issues at safety last season, so we put him over there, and everybody knows what happened. He goes out there and makes fourteen tackles against the No. 1 ranked team in the state. He played in a lot of spots from that game on."

"We'll let those two guys battle it out. I think we've showed here that we're gonna put the best people on the field. If that's a tenth-grader, it's a tenth-grader. If it's a senior, it's a senior. We don't care about age. If you'll do what we ask you to do, we'll get you on the field."

Whoever wins the QB job will have an abundance of experienced playmakers to work with at the skill positions. Gallagher (six touchdown catches through Week 5 last season) and Barnett are both entering their third season as starting receivers, and King could be ready to explode after his late-season surge in 2019.

Rising junior tailback Boots McCulloch should be in line for a larger workload in 2020 after rushing for more than 800 yards as a sophomore while splitting carries. Rising senior Caleb Matthews is dangerous with the ball in his hands, and Duncan could make an immediate impact in the backfield—or wherever Ritter decides to put him.

The Golden Tigers are loaded at tight end/H-back as well, with rising sen-

See 'EXPERIENCE,' page 15

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'EXPERIENCE,' from page 14

ior (and blocker extraordinaire) Peyton Ray and rising junior Nathan Brockway (a more gifted receiver) both returning after productive seasons in 2019. The 6'4, 290-pound Amaya leads an experienced offensive line group that also includes returners Will Calhoun, Luis Domingo and Dakota Andres, along with reserves Grayson Murray and Trevor Franklin.

Russellville should be even more experienced on the defensive side of the ball, where as many as 11 players with starting experience are back in the fold. Linemen Angel Moreno and Angel Martinez both had extremely productive junior seasons, and Scott leads a hard-hitting linebacking crew that also includes Gavin Slay, Cody Logan and Brody Logan, among others. Williams sets the tone on the back end as a shut-down corner.

"Defensively, we return thirteen of our top seventeen guys," Ritter said. "We played so many people last year and started so many different rotations because of sickness and injury and other things, we basically return eleven starters. We lost Jamal [Hubbard, an outside linebacker], but with guys like Gavin Slay and Cody Logan we can replace him with a guy who started three or four football games for us last year. Up front, we lose [Jose Gaspar], but we played as many as six D-lineman on any given Friday night.

"We've got a ton of older guys and experience on defense. If you look at the progression we made from year one to year two on that side of the ball...if we can make half that jump this year, we ought to be dang good on defense."

Given how much tougher their schedule looks in 2020, the Golden Tigers had better be dang good. Ritter was asked if he knew of any 5A team with a non-region schedule as daunting as Russellville's, which includes traditional rival Deshler, perennial powerhouse Madison Academy and Class 6A programs Hartselle and Decatur.

"Nope. It's kind of a blessing and a curse," Ritter said. "It's a testament to where we are as a program. By no means are we satisfied with where we are, but we need to be tested early. We need to play those games. It'll get us ready for a playoff-type environment. We're taking baby steps forward.

"Deshler is a game we're gonna play every year. Haleyville was a game we would like to have kept on the schedule, but they decided to go in a different direction. Lucky for us, coach [Jere] Adcock [at Decatur] and Coach [Bob] Godsey [at Madison Academy] are good friends of mine, and we were able to get them lined up. We wanted to play Hartselle, too. That's a great game for us. Russellville-Hartselle has always been a good game. I really like the strength of our schedule."

After two years in Region 7, Russellville was realigned back into Region 8 for the next two seasons. Mae Jemison, Lee-Huntsville, East Limestone, Ardmore and Brewer will join holdovers Russellville and Lawrence County in the new-look Region 8.

"The region got more athletic," Ritter said. "Jemison and Lee...when you play those Huntsville city schools, they're always gonna be very athletic. Jemison is a team who was a pretty decent 6A team last year. I think they went 6-5. The year before that they were 9-3. Lee is a team that's been up and down a little, but they've always got athletes. Ardmore is much-improved. P.J. Wright is doing a great job with them. Geoff Walters does a good job at Brewer, and Coach [Rich] Dutton does a great job at Lawrence County. They're always tough to play, no matter their record, no matter the situation. That game is gonna be a war. There are some really good coaches in the league we're playing in.

"It's very similar to the region we had last year, only without the glaring front-runner in Jasper."

The Golden Tigers will chase their first region title since 2015, after finishing second and third in Ritter's first two seasons, respectively.

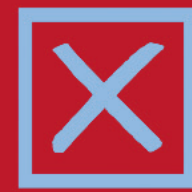
"A region championship is something we've talked about," Ritter said. "We've been close. The year before last, we played for it. Last year we fell to third, because we had a game [a 17-0 loss at Hamilton] where we played with a lack of focus. We talked about making sure that doesn't happen again.

"We want to beat everybody we're supposed to beat and beat somebody we're not supposed to beat. The third goal is to make sure we put a good product on the field every Friday night. If we do that, the first two will take care of themselves, and the wins will take care of themselves. We've talked about working harder than everybody else. Everybody talks about it, but our kids have really bought into that."

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