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Byars, Stancil make final pitch to voters

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It's shaping up to be a crowded field in the August 25 Russellville municipal elections, but before city leaders are selected, Franklin County voters have another election on July 14.

Franklin County voters who either voted in the March 3, 2020, Republican Primary or those who didn't vote at all may cast ballots in the Republican Primary runoff on July 14.

There will be three races to decide, including the United States Senate runoff between Tommy Tuberville and Jeff Sessions, the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, Place Two, between Beth Kellum and Will Smith, and the Franklin County Revenue Commissioner runoff

between Veronica Copeland Stancil and Stratt Byars.

Polls will be open from 7 a.m.-7 p.m., next Tuesday, July 14. The runoff was rescheduled from March 31 due to the COVID-19 outbreak and Alabama's stay at home order.

The *Franklin Free Press* interviewed both Revenue Commissioner candidates in advance of the primary and asked both to submit a final statement to voters to consider on July 14. The following is a compilation of that information:

STRATT BYARS: For Byars, seeking public office is nothing new. He served on the Franklin County Commission from 2008-2012. His father Jimmy served as Franklin County Probate Judge, so political roots run deep in the Byars family.

Byars' plan as Revenue

See 'PITCH,' page 9

On Tuesday, July 14th

Elect

Stratt Byars
Revenue Commissioner

FD political advertisement by Stratt Byars, 8275 Highway 45, Russellville, AL 35654

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Morrow's Cypress Cove Farm to close August 1st

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Johnny Mack Morrow and his wife Martha spent a recent June day canoeing a portion of Bear Creek adjacent to their Cypress Cove Farm in Red Bay.

Thousands of people have enjoyed Cypress Cove since Morrow opened it to the public 20 years ago. But this was one of the few times the couple enjoyed its natural beauty and serenity without serving as hosts to hikers, bird watchers, friends or school children.

When asked how often he was able to do that, Morrow shrugged off

the question.

"My parents (Grover and Hazel Morrow) were always teaching me there are two kinds of people in the world—givers and takers," Morrow said. "They taught us from day one to be givers, not takers, and that's how I try to live my life.

"My memories of this place include the thousands of children learning from local veterans, the enjoyment bird watchers from across the country have as they hike the birding trails and the important historical lessons learned from the archeological digs here at Cypress Cove Farm. Those are what helped make this place

See 'CYPRESS COVE,' page 5

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Earl Leroy Coan, 87, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, June 25th. Interment at Tharptown Cemetery.

Sue King, 82, of Spruce Pine, passed away on Thursday, July 2nd.

Della Mae Posey, 77, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Friday, June 26th. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Betty Senkbeil Prince, 87, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Tuesday, June 30th. Interment at Shady Grove Cemetery.

Dorothy Scott, 90, formerly of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, June 27th. Interment at Shady Grove Cemetery.

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**On Tuesday,
July 14th**

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**Stratt
Byars**
Revenue Commissioner

Pd political advertisement by Stratt Byars, 8275 Highway 48, Russellville, AL 35654

Giving back: Phil Campbell Lodge makes donation to PCHS baseball team

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the members of Phil Campbell Masonic Lodge 880 decide the recipient of their annual donation each year, they try to keep those dollars in their community.

And with their recent donation of \$1,000 to Coach Jonathan Raper's Phil Campbell High School varsity baseball team, the Lodge did just that.

Lodge 880 Worshipful Master Rodney Ertle presented a check to Raper at a June 30 meeting. Lodge members Jackie Fowler, Cody Williams (Worshipful Master Ensuing Year) and Randy Bracken also attended the presentation.

The opportunity to learn about the Lodge was a first for PCHS baseball athletes Luke Barnwell, Austen Baker and Mason Swinney, who accompanied their coach to the meeting.

The donation included \$500 from Lodge 880 and a matching \$500 donation from the Grand Lodge of Alabama F&AM.

"We always want to keep the money here in our community," Ertle said. "Our funds are limited as we are a non-profit organization. Our funds come from dues paid. We try as best we can to donate, especially to youth programs and causes."

Raper said funds for his program were low after the cancellation of the 2020 season and the donation from the Lodge was a welcome blessing.

"We appreciate this and are very thankful. It takes a lot for us to operate a program and we appreciate the support of the Phil Campbell Lodge," Raper said.

After the presentation, Lodge members visited with Raper and his players and shared some of the history about the Masons.

Phil Campbell Lodge 880 meets the first and third Thursdays of each month at 7 p.m. Meetings are held in the lodge building located just off Broad Street in downtown Phil Campbell.



COURTESY PHOTO

Members of Phil Campbell Lodge 880 presented Phil Campbell High School Baseball Coach Jonathan Raper and his team with a \$1,000 donation at a June 30 meeting.

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

FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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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.

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

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Russellville Board of Education approves RMS assistant principal hire, other personnel moves

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education held a special meeting July 1 to approve 14 personnel moves, including the promotion of Alicia Stanford to assistant principal at Russellville Middle School.

Superintendent Heath Grimes recommended the following personnel moves, all of which were approved by the board. Board members Greg Batchelor and Brett Gist were absent from the special meeting.

—Temporary Employment in Position for 21st CCLC Summer Program: Rhonda Pounders and Heather Boyd as teachers.

—Temporary Employment in Position for 2020

Summer Learning Program: Laura Pruitt, Jessica Amick and Gina Kiel as nurses, Leticia Miguel, interpreter and Carly Hellums, Lauren Hellums and Jermaine Groce as teachers.

—Transfers: Sandra Kennedy from maid at RMS to maid at RCS Early Learning Center, effective July 20, 2020, Jason Walker, from At-Risk teacher at West Elementary to At-Risk teacher at RMS and Alicia Stanford, from RES teacher to RMS assistant principal.

—Employment in Position for 2020-21 School Year:
Kelly Dowdy,
Nurse/Bookkeeper/Receptionist at RCS Early Learning Center.

—Resignation in Position: Melissa Espinoza, EL Aide at RES.

Russellville City Library moving to PHASE 2 of reopening plans – will allow appointments

Submitted to the FFP

The library will be moving in to PHASE 2 of the gradual reopening plan on Monday July 6, 2020. We will continue to offer curbside pickup of library materials and print documents. However, we will also have computers and copy machines available to the public by appointment. In the interest of safety, appointments are for one person only. If you require assistance on the computer,

please notify the staff when you call to schedule your appointment.

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'CYPRESS COVE,' from page 1

special to us," Morrow added.

So it was with deep regret Morrow recently announced the permanent closing of Cypress Cove Farm effective August 1, 2020. Morrow, who serves as Special Projects Coordinator for the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development at Mississippi State University, and Martha, an optometrist, will soon move to Starkville, Miss., once construction of their new home is completed. Martha will continue her Russellville optometry practice even after they relocate to Mississippi. The Morrrows have listed their home and most of Cypress Cove Farm (244 of approximately 271 acres) for sale.

"As an absentee land owner, I cannot accept the liability from the public using my property as has been the case for the last 20 years," Morrow said. "I sincerely regret that this action is necessary, but my attorneys are telling me I have no choice but to close all activities at Cypress Cove Farm."

Morrow will only allow use of the property with his prior written permission. "I have enjoyed beyond words having all of you as my special guests at Cypress Cove Farm for these activities and I want to invite each of you to visit me at Mississippi State University," Morrow said.

The activities and events held at Cypress Cove Farm since 2000 are too numerous to list. From archeological digs to hosting a Smithsonian Institute "Farm Works" display of a working whiskey still, blacksmith shop, gristmill and sawmill, Cypress Cove Farm has played an important role in teaching people of all ages to appreciate the history and natural beauty of the area.

Whether it was taking photos in its beautiful sunflower fields or fishing along the banks of its ponds, it's estimated more than 100,000 people have visited Cypress Cove Farm.

Red Bay resident and National Hot Rod Association driver Jeff Strickland describes Cypress Cove Farm as a 'special place' for him and his family.

"We used to go out there two or three times a week. I've been there fishing with the kids many times," Strickland said. "It will always be a special place to my family. Johnny Mack was always gracious to let us come out there and fish or ride the trails."

Vina High School alumnus Jessica Pickle remembers visiting Cypress Cove Farm on school field trips. And even though the drive to Cypress Cove Farm wasn't far from her school, it seemed like a world away once she arrived.

"I remember going to the Veterans Day program, and riding the trails in military vehicles," Pickle said. "It seemed like we were in this far away place that was so beautiful but it was really so close to home."

Through the years, news of Franklin County's hidden secret made its way through Alabama and beyond. In 2019, the Alabama Forestry Commission awarded Morrow and Cypress Cove Farm with the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award, which annually recognizes Alabama's most outstanding treasured forests, with an emphasis on their educational value and use. Morrow planted 44 acres of natural hardwoods, with 10 species of oak

trees, 20 years ago. But he had no plans to harvest any timber.

"I consider education as my number one crop here," Morrow said.

And that crop cultivated with each family walking the trails or fishing the lake, or when 1,200 kids visited Cypress Cove Farm each year for a special Veterans Day program.

Morrow inherited the first 46 acres of Cypress Cove Farm from his parents, and he later purchased four additional contiguous tracts. Unsure what to do with the land, it was a *Times Daily* article that gave him the inspiration to use the land for educational purposes.

"Tom Smith (A *Times Daily* writer) wrote an article about Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District officials looking for land to use as an outdoor classroom," Morrow said. "So I submitted a proposal and it was accepted. That's how Cypress Cove Farm had its beginning."

The ways people have enjoyed Cypress Cove Farm vary almost as much as the visitors who came. Morrow constructed a gun range for law enforcement to use for training. The Morrow hosted kids from the "Helen Keller Experience: Camp Courage" for many years, and a special few duck hunters had the hunt of a lifetime at Cypress Cove Farm's 12-acre and two five-acre ponds formed from reclaimed wetlands. In 2016, Diane Doyle, the birding department editor for the American Birding Association's *Tools of the Trade*, spent five days on Cypress Cove's bird trails. She spotted 51 species of birds and described Cypress Cove as a 'bit of paradise.'

From clearing brush along the seven miles of bird trails to bush hogging, Morrow has done it all at Cypress Cove. And he still does today. But with the move to Starkville, he realizes that's no longer possible. The farm's future lies in the hands of its future buyer.

Though his name won't be on the deed, Morrow and his family will always remain connected to Cypress Cove Farm.

"This property has been all about the children—educating them on what a wonderful world we have and to enjoy and protect it," Morrow said. "We can't expect them to do that unless we teach and show them how to protect it. And I'm proud to have been a part of that here at Cypress Cove Farm."



COURTESY PHOTO

Johnny Mack and Martha Morrow at the confluence of Mud Creek and Bear Creek at Cypress Cove Farm.

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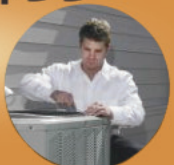
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 You are invited to join summer revival services at Alva Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Located at 4395 Highway 77, Russellville, AL 35654 in the Mountain Star community. Services begin Sunday, July 12 at 2 p.m. with services each night Monday July 13 thru Friday July 17. Morning services during the week begin at 10:30 a.m. with evening services beginning at 7 p.m. Moderator is Brother Ronald Oliver with evangelist Brother Keith Prince. Everyone is welcome to attend!

 Revival at Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, Highway 195, two miles south of Double Springs. July 5-10, Sunday night 5 p.m., Monday-Friday 7 p.m. each night. Evangelist Elder Greg Thorne. Pastor Elder Buford Parker. We invite you to our services!

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

 You are cordially invited to new service time at Pleasant Ridge Missionary Baptist Church on Highway 48 in Russellville, at 11 a.m., Sunday mornings. Social distancing practiced, mask optional. Pastor Roger Bond.

 New 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.

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Harris announces re-election bid for City Council District Five seat

Submitted to the FFP

Jamie Harris has announced his intention to run for re-election as Russellville City Councilman for District Five in the August 25, 2020, municipal election.

Harris was first elected in 2012 to represent the people of District Five. Harris said he hopes to continue working for job opportunities and growth in Russellville. He attributes the council's accomplishments to the 'team' approach taken not only by city leaders, but county leaders as well.

"We have built some strong working relationships with local, county and state-level officials in the last eight years," Harris said. "Working together, I'm excited about projects we have in the works and we are all working for a future that is beneficial to all ages in our city."

With eight years experience on the council, Harris has been an important part of managing more than \$70 million in taxpayer monies and an additional \$9 million in state and federal grant funding. Russellville has added more than 1,200 new jobs the last eight years.

Work continues on Russellville's downtown revitalization, which includes a \$1.2 million grant through the Transportation Alternatives Program used for sidewalk projects in the city's downtown.

Harris and his wife Mindy have been married eight years. They have three sons, Bryson (6), Anthony (4) and AJ (4).

Harris has worked with the Franklin County S.P.A.N. Program as a counselor since 1999. The co-educational program works with at-risk youth to meet their educational and social needs. Harris is also a cattle farmer.

A member of the Franklin County Cattleman's Association, Russellville Masonic Lodge, Newburg Masonic Lodge, Cahaba Shrine and Franklin County Shrine, Harris works actively to improve his city.

"Russellville is like one big family, and I hope to continue to improve our city and make it a place where other people want to live and raise their families," Harris said.

He is a third-generation Russellville High School graduate who attended Northwest-Shoals Community College and Auburn University. Harris earned a Management degree from the University of North Alabama in 1998.



Jamie Harris and family



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Palmer seeking re-election to City Council District One position

Submitted to the FFP

Russellville City Councilman David Palmer announced his plans to run for another term representing the citizens of District One in the August 25, 2020, municipal election.

Palmer, a 1989 graduate from the University of Alabama, has served on the Russellville City Council since 2012. Palmer has 37 years combined experience dealing with multiple public agencies at all levels of government. He started with the Franklin County Highway Department in 1991. He continues to work as Franklin County Engineer in that department.

Through Palmer's tenure on the city council, the City of Russellville has seen tremendous growth including 1,200 new jobs, and more than \$9 million in public works projects, including a road and bridge program (ATRIP) that is unprecedented in the history of Russellville.

The City's investment in its local school system the last eight years totals almost \$9 million. City and school officials worked together to approve a bond issue that will fund the construction of a much needed state of the art Vocational/Technical school along with other additions to Russellville High School. Palmer said he sees the Russellville City Schools as a vital part of city government and he appreciates the current working relationship between city and school officials.

Palmer believes that strong partnerships between city, county and state agencies are vital to the success of our whole community and that cooperation and collaboration between all levels of government increase efficiency and produce the highest levels of service at the lowest possible costs for all our citizens. He said the current working relationship between the many agencies across the city and county are as good as he has seen in his tenure.

"To continue moving our city, county and state forward, it takes the support and trust of the mayor and city council, the county commission, city and county school boards, and the people of Russellville and Franklin County," Palmer said.

Palmer and his wife Kim, a first grade teacher at West Elementary School, have three children, John David, Callie and Kinsley. They are members of First Baptist Church in Russellville.

"It has been a privilege to serve the past eight years on the Russellville City Council and to be part of the tremendous growth and progress," Palmer said. "With the vote and support of District One residents, I would be honored to continue working to move our city forward," he added.



David Palmer

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

Being a good neighbor: Local State Farm agents give back

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

State Farm's marketing has been based around being a 'good neighbor' for decades.

And Franklin County's four State Farm agents recently did their part to be good neighbors in their community by donating \$2,000 to the Franklin County Schools technology fund.

Russellville agents Rhett Bradford, Lee Nickels, Diana Lockmiller and Red Bay agent Ronald Thorn presented the check to Franklin County Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton on July 2.

The funds will be distributed equally among county schools and will be used for technology in Franklin County Schools' classrooms.

"We are very thankful to State Farm for their donation and their commitment to helping the students of Franklin County," Hamilton said.

State Farm's Good Neighbor Citizenship Grant Program helps to build safer, stronger and better educated communities across the country.

The grants are focused on three areas: safety, education and community development.

Each agent was allocated \$500 to donate, so the four of them decided to pool their donations to help the county school system.

"We made the donation collectively so we could give more to the school system," Nickels said. "We wanted to help meet some of the technology needs for kids who otherwise might not have access to it.

"There are so many organizations out there you can choose from. This is the one we thought would be best for this year. And Mr. Hamilton said they would use the funds in all schools, so they money can help across the county," Nickels added.

For updates on news throughout the week, visit www.franklinfreepress.net!



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

From left: State Farm Agents Ronald Thorn, Diana Lockmiller, Franklin County Schools Superintendent Greg Hamilton and State Farm Agents Rhett Bradford and Lee Nickels

'PITCH,' from page 1

Commissioner is to draw on his professional experience as an employer and small business owner, former county commissioner and realtor as he handles the day-to-day duties of the office.

Byars has supervisory responsibilities through his business ownership, and as a commissioner he was involved in annual budget planning and monthly budget maintenance.

His realty experience allowed Byars to work with independent appraisals and tax appraisals, along with the Franklin County Mapping Department. He also received training about homestead exemptions and tax sales, all of which he believes have prepared him for the office of Franklin County Revenue Commissioner.

A Franklin County native, Byars is married to the former Connie Carr and he has three children, Stratt, Anna and Conner. Byars and his family are members of First Baptist Church in Russellville. They live in the Saints Crossroads community.

Byars graduated from the University of North Alabama in 1986 with a degree in Business Management. He worked as store manager at Rogers Department Store in Muscle Shoals until 1992. Since then, he's been a self-employed businessman in agribusiness, real estate and retail sales.

BYARS' STATEMENT TO VOTERS: "I am Qualified and have the Experience to serve as your Revenue Commissioner. I am a Graduate of the University of North Alabama with a degree in Business Management.

After graduation, I worked as the Manager of Rogers Department Store. I have held positions where I have supervised groups of people, handled money and made daily deposits.

I have been a Local Businessman for many years.

I am a Former County Commissioner. As your Commissioner, I worked on yearly budgets and monthly budget maintenance. I am familiar with the budgets that the revenue Commissioner oversees.

I have a real estate license and worked in real estate for several years. I have worked with independent property appraisers and tax appraisals, the mapping department, homestead exemptions etc.

I have always conducted business in a professional and responsible manner and will continue to do so as your Revenue Commissioner.

Thank you! "

VERONICA COPELAND STANCIL: Stancil has made continuing education a mainstay of her term as Revenue Commissioner. She believes that's



Stratt Byars

important to stay abreast of ever-changing laws and policies in licensing and property tax administration.

In 2019, Stancil became one of two Alabama Revenue Commissioners to receive accreditation from Auburn University in Licensing Administration.

During her term, Stancil has earned nine certificates from Auburn University in Licensing and Property Tax Administration.

First elected in 2014, Stancil is the daughter of the late Lowell Copeland and Bobbie Copeland. She has two sons, Justus and Jonah. Stancil is from the East Franklin community. She's a graduate of Phil Campbell High School and Northwest-Shoals Community College.

Her work at the Franklin County Courthouse began in 1989.

Stancil said she has always been accessible to the public, in person at her office, on the phone or through Facebook. While she doesn't always have the answer the citizen may want to hear, Stancil said she explains the reasons why she can or can't resolve their issue.

STANCIL'S STATEMENT TO VOTERS: "I would like to ask each one of you for your vote. The Revenue Commissioner is responsible for assessment, mapping, appraisal, and collection of property taxes. Titles and tags are also done in this office. The office does over 57000 financial transactions and collects over \$15 Million yearly.

As you can see the responsibility of this position is astronomical. Does Franklin County need someone with knowledge and experience?? I believe so.

I have worked at the courthouse for 31 years. 5 years as the Revenue Commissioner and 26 years as an employee. Being an employee for so many years, makes me truly value my staff. I help them any way I can. I am very "hands on", working the counters as well as behind the scenes.

As many of you know, I am always available. I have assisted many customers at nights and weekends. This doesn't bother me at all, because I work for you. I am 1 of 2 Revenue Commissioners in the State of Alabama to receive the Certified License Administration Certificate.

I am also thankful to say in March, I became Franklin County's first Certified Tax Administrator. I do not list these achievements to be boastful, but rather to show my interest in my job. When a person NEEDS a job they have a tendency to perform better.

Please vote for me and keep a good thing going!! Thank you and God Bless each of you!"



Veronica Stancil



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Safety taking top priority at Tharptown

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

THARPTOWN - Keeping your players focused during practice as a high school coach can be difficult. With all kinds of distractions pulling players every which way, it can be challenging to get a game plan across or simply run an efficient practice.

Adding masks, sanitizing everything players touch and having to stay away from teammates to the equation, and coaches are undoubtedly exhausted at the end of the day.

However, Tharptown Head Basketball Coach Tanna Benford is doing everything she can to keep the Lady Wildcats involved while staying apart from each other during this challenging time.

"It's hard because if you're wanting to do any kind of scrimmaging or anything that involves closer contact with one another, there are challenges there. It's difficult to try and practice and get better with everything that's going on but we're doing everything by the book and following the AHSAA guidelines every step of the way," Benford said.

Benford says that during practice they have utilized all six goals available in their gym as well as maintaining a six-foot distance as much as possible. In addition to those precautions, making sure her players are wearing masks is something she has stressed to her players as well.

Despite all of the struggles that come with practicing and working out during these times, Benford says that her players have picked up where they left off before school was suspended.

"Our girls haven't been skittish about things at all. They've been really fired up to go and get back to preparing for the season," Benford said. "We've had great numbers this summer and they've been working extremely hard and given a

See 'SAFETY,' page 14

Climbing the ladder

Isaiah Jackson has taken the amateur golfing world by storm. Now with a championship under his belt, he's ready to take on the PGA Tour

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

MISSISSIPPI - Isaiah Jackson is really good at golf. Like *really* good at golf.

Of course the definition of how "good" someone is at something is almost always subjective. However, Jackson's resume speaks for itself, and he's just getting started.

As the dust settled at the Annandale Golf Club in Madison, Mississippi on June 28th, the Red Bay High School graduate added quite the accomplishment to an already impressive resume. At the end of four rounds, Jackson was holding the championship trophy after winning the Mississippi Men's State Amateur Championship.

Although he pulled off the impressive win in the state tournament, this moment almost didn't happen for Jackson after he transferred to Memphis from Meridian Community College.

"I remember the first week of school at Memphis I had my major picked out and everything and after that first week I called my dad four or five times just upset and thinking that I wanted to quit school and get a job," Jackson said. "The school and the transition was tough but I changed my major and it all ended up working out because I had a really good fall that year playing and things started changing. It was a bit of a rough transition period but it all worked out for me in the end."

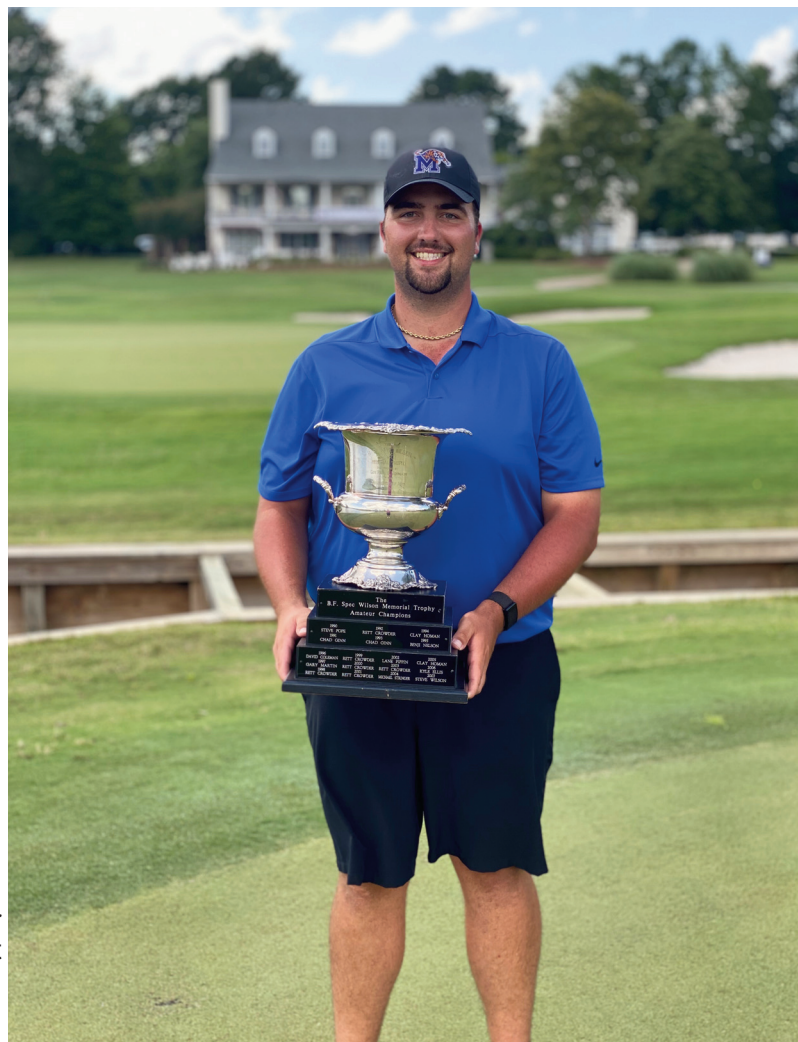
Sticking with Memphis might have been the best choice Jackson has made as he has dominated during his two years as a Tiger.

After working his way up the ladder at Meridian Community College as the number one golfer in the NJCAA Division II circuit, Jackson made the jump to division one, joining the Memphis Tigers golf team in 2018.

For Jackson, winning the Mississippi Amateur Championship was something that holds more meaning than just hoisting a trophy.

"It's pretty special. Anyone who has won their state's amateur tournament, their names get placed in the history books and mine will be in Mississippi's history book and that's really something special to me," Jackson said.

Going into the weekend, Jackson was primarily focused on simply competing in the tournament



COURTESY PHOTO

Jackson beat out two previous winners of the tournament by four strokes to capture the title.

and trying to make a bigger name for himself.

"Coming into that week it had been close to three months since I had played any kind of competitive golf and I kept telling myself I just wanted to put up four competitive rounds. It had been so long since anyone had played and so I knew it was going to be a challenge," Jackson said. "I was going up to Memphis and putting in a lot of good work and coming home on the weekends and playing some and getting more practice. I really just wanted to compete and that's exactly what I tried to do."

Normally, by winning a tournament, Jackson might have just received a trophy and some recognition for his great work. The prize for winning the Mississippi Men's State Amateur Championship? How about a start on the PGA Tour for starters.

As the winner of the tournament Jackson will be able to live out a lifelong dream and will be given

See 'LADDER,' page 13

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'LADDER,' from page 11

a start in the Sanderson Farms Championship on the PGA Tour on October 1st thru the 4th at the Jackson Country Club.

Ironically enough, when the tournament was finished, it took Jackson close to an hour to realize that he would be playing in a PGA Tour event due to his win.

"It was crazy. I remember coming off of the 18th green and thinking to myself that I couldn't believe I just won the state amateur tournament. It wasn't until about 45 minutes later when I heard the announcement that I had earned myself a spot on the PGA Tour," Jackson said. "Like I knew in the back of my mind that it was a possibility but it didn't set in right away. I was really just excited and thrilled."

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, Jackson didn't get the chance to compete this season as it was cut short. Luckily, the NCAA granted him an extra year of eligibility so he will be suiting up and hitting the course one more year as a Memphis Tiger next spring.

Of course the PGA Tour is quite the leap from collegiate golf and while Jackson would love to continue his winning streak, he is focused on remaining competitive at the games highest level first and foremost.

"I just want to put up another four competitive rounds. Because last year I got a chance to play in an event in Kansas and I missed the cut and it was a big disappointment to me because I felt like my game, at that point, was good enough to compete at that level," Jackson said. "Of course I want to win the tournament, of course I do. But every level that I've played at, my mindset has been to always compete. I want to make the cut, play through the weekend, and just compete. That's my whole mindset for the tournament."

Regardless of the outcome in his first PGA Tour start in October, Jackson hopes that it will become a regular thing for him to spend his weekends on some of the most prestigious golf courses around the world when he looks ahead to where his career might be in a few years.

See 'LADDER,' page 14

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



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'LADDER,' from page 13

"Five to ten years from now, I want to be on the PGA Tour. I can see myself competing all the time in the PGA. I've told my family that I envisioned my first career PGA Tour start being two years from now. Well now it's in October and I wholeheartedly believe that God has a way of surprising people and so I'm just trying to put him first and let him guide me on the best path for me. It has all been a heck of a ride and I've enjoyed every minute of it."

'SAFETY,' from page 11

lot of effort. They want to get better and they're showing that by their willingness to work hard during all of this."

Some of the things that Benford and her team have been doing each day before practice involves filling out questionnaires from the AHSAA in regards to having any symptoms tied to COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with anyone known to have the virus.

One thing that Benford tried to focus on when practicing was allowed to resume earlier this summer, is prioritizing increasing their offensive output while navigating the safety guidelines.

"We struggled scoring last year and that was going to be one of the main things we stressed this summer. We've been able to do that with not a lot of adjustments having to be made," Benford said. "They've been able to have their own ball a majority of the time and if we have had to partner up for drills then we have worn masks and disinfected everything before someone else uses them."

As she looks ahead to the upcoming season just months away, Benford realizes that she lost some key veteran players but is hopeful that some of the younger role players from last season can step up and take over.

"I lost four seniors last year but I do have girls like Gracie Montgomery who was our leading scorer last year who will be back. Then we have girls like Jaiden Gaston who will be key for us this year as well. I don't have any seniors and only two juniors and a few freshmen who will play on varsity so I'm really counting on those younger players to take over and be leaders for us this season," Benford said.

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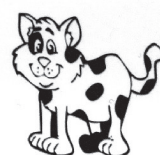
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