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Broadband partnership clears major hurdle toward countywide fiber optic internet service

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Two major hurdles have stood between rural Franklin County residents and availability of fiber optic broadband service.

The first obstacle was finding a service provider who would accept grants and take responsibility for installing and operating rural broadband. The second hurdle is securing funding to pay for the required infrastructure.

Thanks to the efforts of the Franklin County Water Service Authority, one of those hurdles has been cleared.

One down, one to go.

The Water Service Authority announced a memorandum of understanding with Tombigbee Electric Cooperative/Communications, which operates freedomFIBER, and Franklin Electric Cooperative regarding fiber optic broadband service for rural Franklin County.


Local legislation, introduced by former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, was approved by Franklin County voters in 2014 vested the authority to provide broadband internet services across the county in the Franklin County Water

See 'INTERNET,' page 8

Vote Darren Woodruff

City Council District 2

Pd. Pol. by Darren Woodruff, PO Box 1236, Russellville, AL



VOTE HILLARY MALONE HALL CITY COUNCIL DIST. 5

Pd. Pol. by Hillary Malone Hall, 302 Gaines Ave. NW, Russellville, AL 35653

Terry Bolton District City Council 1

Pd. Pol. by Terry Bolton, 70 Virginia Av., Russellville

Copperhead snakes pose problems for local residents

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The only good snake is a dead snake.

If you live in Russellville, you've probably heard this said more times than you can count.

But as one Russellville neighborhood learned recently, this saying couldn't be more wrong. And it took a rash of copperhead snake sightings, 14 night hunts with three men, and the efforts of one environmental biologist to prove it.

Joel Pounders and his family live on Allen Avenue near Russellville

See 'COPPERHEAD,' page 7



COURTESY PHOTO

One of eight copperheads found near the Russellville residence of Joel Pounders.

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Donald Joe Hester, 65, of Crooked Oak, passed away Monday, August 17th. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Clyde Burl Johnson, 71, of Russellville, passed away Tuesday, August 18th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

Henry Grady Kinard Jr., 76, of Phil Campbell, passed away Thursday, August 20th. Interment at Blue Springs Cemetery.

Bernice Beatrice Mason, 85, of Phil Campbell, passed away Thursday, August 20th. Interment at Mountain View Baptist Church Cemetery.

Jewel Dean Nagle, 82, of Russellville, passed away Friday, August 21st. Interment at Gravel Hill Cemetery.

Wallace "Corkey" Wimberley, 84, of Phil Campbell, passed away Thursday, August 20th. Interment at Oak Grove Cemetery.

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Congratulations to last week's
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Remembering William Mansell

Submitted to the FFP

William "Billy" Mansell, 86, of Russellville, AL passed away Saturday, July 18, 2020.

Brother Daniel Dulaney and Brother Thomas Thornton officiated the funeral. He was buried in Colbert Memorial Gardens.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Henry Mansell and Fannie Mitchell; brothers, "Buddy" Mansell, Charles Mansell, and Robert Mansell; sisters, Nellie Riley, Mary Strickland, and Shirley Peden.

He is survived by his wife of 34 years, Eva Mansell of Russellville; sons, Gary Mansell (Lana); nephew who he raised, Andy Riley, and Jerry Stedham; daughters, Cathy Puckett (Danny), Vickie Miller, and Evonne Freeman (Randy); grandchildren, Joey Puckett (Christy), Jay Puckett, Cort Mansell (Tiffany), Case Mansell, Andrew Mansell, and Joe Freemon, Madison Miller, and Somer Nichols (Clint), Ashley Wilson (Ben), and Amy Hellums (Jacob); great-grandchildren, Jacob, Sara, Hanna, Slaton, and Sadie Puckett, Sophie, and Roczen Mansell, Amelia Miller, Kelsey, and Katheryn Wilson, Riley Jo, and Jackson Nichols, Cooper and Tucker Hellums; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers were Joey and Jay Puckett, Cort, Case, and Andrew Mansell and Joe Freemon.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Billy's memory to Calvary Children's Home, 1430 Lost Mountain RD, Powder Springs, GA 30127. You may sign the online registry at colbertmemorial.com



William "Billy" Mansell

Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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County schools return with safety measures in place for 2020-21 year

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As he updated the Franklin County Board of Education on the start of the school year, there was a hint of fatigue in the voice of Superintendent Greg Hamilton.

"We have made every single precaution and safety measure we know to make and there are more to come," Hamilton said. "We have temperature checks in place, with readers for masks and they triple as metal detectors. There are sanitation stations set up around our schools. Anything we could think of to implement we're trying. We want to keep our kids safe."

Hamilton provided the update during the superintendent comments portion of the board's August 18th meeting. With students set to return to campus on August 20th, Hamilton credited Franklin County administrators, teachers, support staff and bus drivers for their full compliance with Alabama Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Bus routes will be limited to 20 students, which may require some drivers to make multiple trips to pick up or drop off students.

"We have standby drivers to help pick up kids. We expect to have multiple routes at Tharptown and East Franklin," Hamilton said.

Another safety protocol in place is ultraviolet germicidal lights in the HVAC systems at schools. The UV lights target and destroy bacteria, viruses and mold.

Of Franklin County Schools' 3,600 students, approximately 600 students have elected to participate in remote learning for the first nine weeks of school, representing approximately 18 percent of total enrollment.

"Our remote learning plan will allow those students to stay on pace with what is being taught in the classroom," Hamilton said. "We have 2,700 Chromebooks in all our schools and have enough additional Chromebooks on backorder to have one for every student."

"We also have some special education students who chose the remote plan and we will make sure all services are rendered to those students," he added.

Football stadiums will be marked with six-foot distancing and principals

have been encouraged to place bands (both home and visitor) in the end zones, Hamilton said.

The meeting agenda also included the following items that were approved by the board:

—awarded the bid for double-combi ovens at Phil Campbell High School to Hotel & Restaurant Supply at \$29,894.

—awarded the bid for a Hobart Dish Machine at Vina High School to the lowest responsible bidder, Hotel & Restaurant Supply at a cost of \$19,530.

—approved a supplemental grocery bid for fiscal year 2020-21 with Russellville City Schools awarded to Osborn Brothers, Inc., for the Child Nutrition Program.

—approved the mutual termination of a lease with Red Bay Rescue Squad for land and a large metal building located on Highway 19 near Vina. The land will revert to Franklin County Schools and the building will be used as an on-site bus shop and will store landscaping equipment.

—approved a physical therapy agreement with Dr. Jenny L. McCullar for the 2020-21 school year at a rate of \$50 per regular visit made to each student, \$100 per initial evaluation per student and \$.58 per mile for physical therapy services rendered.

—approved the following personnel moves:

—Leave of absence: Beverly Winchester, Pre-K teacher aide, Red Bay Elementary, Linda Castillo, bilingual registered school nurse and Angie Bolton, Vina teacher.

—Resignation: Betty Jackson, aide, Phil Campbell Elementary, Michelle Lozada, English teacher, Tharptown and Heather Darracott, prevention specialist/social worker, Community Education.

—Resignation in Supplement: Tracey Fretwell, head volleyball coach at Tharptown.

—Retirement: Kay Hargett, health science teacher, RBHS and Dana Whitten, Child Nutrition Program assistant, PC School.

—Employment in Supplement: Kamri Fleming, head volleyball coach, THS and Darby Lindsey, head girls varsity basketball coach, RBHS.

—Employment: Susan Gillentine, teacher, RBES, Carol Fretwell, teacher PCES, Sharon Stacy, teacher, TES, David Stegall, math teacher, VHS,

See 'SCHOOLS,' page 5

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My take on this... my childhood days made for some great memories!

Hello to my faithful followers!

I'd just like to remind you how much I appreciate your kindness you have shown me throughout the past years. Please know that your continued support makes my "heart happy" and is a motivator when I need that "extra push" to keep on.



Gail Motes

This past week I've thought a lot about my childhood days when out Vitamin C came from being outside in the sunshine. Most kids today will take a Vitamin C tablet while sitting indoors with an iPad or playing games that plug into the TV and get very little exercise.

I never asked for much, but I can still remember my "unspoken wish" of wanting a swing set. I was fortunate enough to live close to my friends who had one, so I was able to enjoy swinging and going down a slide. I was so glad I got to play on one sometimes. It was better than nothing.

Well, I did have a swing. My brother and I would tie a strand of twine around a cherry tree

limb. The drawbacks to that kind of swing was it would come untied a lot and sitting on that twine was very uncomfortable. Needless to say, I did a lot of readjusting to my behind trying to find a spot that didn't hurt. That wasn't really too bad though because the fun of swinging made that all bearable.

Going to homes with a porch swing was fun also! I loved them and the best part was getting to swing when it rained. I was in my late forties before I ever had one but I can say the words, "It's better late than never," hold a lot of truth to it.

Another fun thing of my childhood was something called a "jumping jack." My brother and I would use two planks of wood to lay on the ground. Another plank which needed to be longer and wider would be placed on the top but crossed over in the opposite direction. Then a person would stand on each end while one jumped making the other go in the air. That's all it was to it. The harder one would jump the higher in the air the other person would go. Staying on the board was

See 'MEMORIES,' Page 8

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[www.franklinfreepress.net!](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)

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Commission extends solid waste contract, approves other moves

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

After nearly an hour of discussion at its August 17 meeting, the Franklin County Commission agreed to extend the contract to provide solid waste pickup for the City of Russellville for six months.

The current four-year contract ends September 30, 2020.

Russellville Mayor David Grissom sent a letter to Probate Judge Barry Moore requesting a six-month extension of the contract, rather than the previous 48-month period. Grissom said in the letter that city officials are looking into the possibility of creating their own solid waste disposal system, and he requested the six month period to allow him to "research" the feasibility of doing that.

The City of Russellville pays \$11.75/month per household to the Franklin County Solid Waste Department for garbage collection. That amount, Moore said, has not increased since 2006.

Commissioner Rayburn Massey voiced concerns that if the city was eventually going to collect solid waste from Russellville households, then city officials should purchase the cans used in the city.

"If their intent is to take this business over, my belief is they need to take over the purchase of the cans in October," Massey said. "They can replace old cans as needed and there won't be any cost to the county."

Massey was referring to 100 new garbage cans that were ordered by Franklin County Solid Waste Manager Gene Ward for use by city residents. The cost of the cans is \$48 each. There are also 4,000 additional cans already in possession of city residents.

The city has agreed to purchase those cans for \$25 each in the event it takes over garbage collection.

Commissioners eventually agreed that part of the six-month extension would be that the City of Russellville reimburse the county \$4,800 for the 100 new cans. Additionally, any new cans ordered during the six month period for use in Russellville would also require reimbursement from the city.

The six-month contract also provides that the parties will meet 30 days prior to its expiration to discuss a possible extension.

The Russellville City Council approved the contract later the same day at

the regular council meeting.

The contract will expire on March 31, 2021.

In other agenda items, the commission:

—accepted the resignation of deputies Matt Weeks and Jordan Seahorn from the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, and authorized the advertisement of two positions.

—approved the hiring of Samuel Montgomery and Gerry Brian Welch as temporary deputies.

—approved the promotion of Kyle Palmer to investigator in the FCSO.

—approved the FY 2021 Franklin County Transportation Plan submitted by Franklin County Engineer David Palmer.

—approved the resignation of Highway Department temporary employee Danny Morgan, effective August 3, 2020.

—approved a 12-month contract to provide inmate medical services with Southern Health Partners for \$205,979.16.

—approved a renewal of the one-year fuel contract with Tatum Oil Company, for the same price of \$.108 above rack price for gas and \$.118 above rack price for diesel.

'SCHOOLS,' from page 4

Christi Tyra, substitute teacher full-time, PCES, Jennifer Fuller, substitute teacher, full-time, VHS, Joshua Thorn, full-time CNP substitute, temporary, VHS, Kelly Dobbs Atkins, full-time CNP substitute, temporary, Belgreen High School, Barbara Bishop, full-time CNP substitute, East Franklin Junior High, Kim Trapp, full-time CNP substitute, temporary, PCHS, Karen Nichols, full-time CNP substitute, temporary, RBS, Kaitlyn Galowitch, full-time CNP substitute, temporary, Tharptown, Charlotte Bates, full-time substitute teacher, RBHS, Tina Fisher, full-time substitute teacher, temporary, PCHS, Lori McDonnell, full-time substitute teacher, temporary, BHS, Melissa Klose, full-time substitute teacher, RBES, Robert Langley, full-time substitute teacher, temporary, Franklin County Career Technical Center and Mackenzie Roberts, English teacher, THS.

The next regular meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education is set for September 10, 2020, at 5 p.m., for a budget hearing, and September 14, 2020, with work session at 5 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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 You are invited to a Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, allowing the vote to women. The event will be held August 20, 2020, at 12 p.m., at the Colbert County Courthouse. Chief Colbert Chapter members from Colbert and Franklin Counties will portray important suffragists, including DAR members Susan B. Anthony, Julia Ward Howe, Belva Lockwood, Harriet Taylor Upton, Sue Shelton Wright, Francis Williard, and others. Participants will gather on the sidewalk on the Water Street entrance and parade around the courthouse to the front for media coverage and photos. Women were granted the right to vote by congress August 20, 1919, and it was sent to the states to be ratified. An amendment becomes part of the Constitution once it is ratified by at least three-quarters of the states. Tennessee ratified the 19th Amendment on August 20, 1920; and it became Federal law. Alabama waited 33 years after it was added to the Constitution, until Sep. 8, 1953, to finally ratify the 19th Amendment. The McLemore and Kinder Family Reunion will be held Saturday, September 5th at the Spruce Pine Community Center, beginning at 10 a.m. Please bring a covered dish. If you need additional information, call (256)-324-5288.

 Red Bay Founders Day Festival will host its annual Car, Truck, Tractor and Motorcycle Show on Saturday, Sept. 19 in downtown Red Bay. Registration is from 8 a.m.-12 p.m. Awards start at 1 p.m. Door prizes, trophies and cash prizes! Awards for best paint, best engine and more! \$20 entry fee. Second entry fee \$15 with same address. \$10 to show without entering. All proceeds go to the Red Bay Senior Center. For more information, call 256-324-0419. Entrance for the Car Show will be a West 2nd St. and 4th Ave. (Hwy. 24) by Heritage Park.

 There will be a classic car cruise fundraiser in order to raise funds for treatment for Celia Grace Hamlet on Saturday, September 19th from 7 a.m. until 12 p.m. Hamlet was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder known as Metachromatic Leukodystrophy Disease and doctors have recommended a special treatment in Italy that will take up to four months to treat. Celia's father, Gary Hamlet, is a police officer in Winfield and her mother, Kassie Hamlet, works at Citizens Bank in Winfield. The cruise will be police-escorted through 77 miles of beautiful Northwest Alabama including drives through the Appalachian Mountains and cities such as Haleyville, Bear Creek, Hackleburg, Hamilton, Guin and Winfield. Registration begins onsite at 7 a.m. with the cruise leaving at 9 a.m. and returning at 11 a.m. The cruise will begin at Grey's Landing at 7005, Highway 129, Winfield, 35594. Breakfast and lunch will be available onsite. Open to all cars manufactured before 1989 and the price is \$25 per car which will include a t-shirt and entries for door prizes as well. All proceeds from the cruise will go to cover medical, travel and living expenses for Celia and her parents. For more information call Hilda Smith at (205)-275-4432.



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'COPPERHEAD,' from page 1

City Schools. Pounders and his twin brother Jeff have been involved in environmental conservation for more than three decades, both professionally and on the farm.

About a month ago, Pounders went outside at night to feed his basset hounds, who live in a fenced-in kennel in the family's backyard. As he reached toward the dogs' bowl, Pounders was bitten by one of two copperheads inside the kennel.

Pounders was fortunate he was not seriously injured. One of the snake's fangs bit into the ulnar bone in his wrist, so only one fang penetrated. It was largely a dry bite and after receiving medical care, he recovered in a week.

Pounders noticed an increase of copperhead sightings and alerted neighbors through a Facebook page they set up for their neighborhood. He wanted to know why the numbers of *Agkistrodon contortrix*, the scientific name for copperheads, had increased in the area.

What he and his neighbors learned was a basic mathematical lesson of addition through subtraction.

In Alabama, the two primary subspecies of copperheads are the northern copperhead and the southern copperhead.

With a head significantly wider than its neck, and usually a copper color, the breed features hourglass-shaped crossbands across its body.

Copperheads, along with rattlesnakes and water moccasins, belong to the pit viper species, so named because of a tiny hole, or pit, located between the snake's eye and nostril.

As Pounders explained, these heat sensors help the snake locate warm-blooded prey. Their forked tongue then helps the snake determine the prey's location.

Pit vipers are patient hunters who sit still and wait for food to come to them. As a result, you don't always see them, even when they can see you.

The night after he was bitten, Pounders went back outside during the hours of 8-11 p.m., when the snakes are most active. It didn't take long for him to find a 36-inch giant in his yard. Two days, three copperheads.

Pounders had seen enough. "I was immediately concerned and started getting word around our neighborhood and on Facebook," Pounders said. "And I explained to people they don't need to kill all snakes they see."

What Pounders soon learned is there are many people, some of those who live near him included, whose fear of snakes leads them to kill any snake seen on their property.

While killing a venomous copperhead is one thing, some folks were actually helping the copperhead numbers increase by killing off two of its competitors in the wild, king snakes and rat snakes.

"People sent me pictures and messages saying they killed a big black snake with yellow polka dots near their swimming pool (a king snake) or a large gray snake (with brown to dark gray blotches), which is a gray rat snake," Pounders said.

"The king snake is called that because it's immune to venomous snakes and it hunts down venomous snakes," Pounders said. "The gray rat snake is a competitor to copperheads. They compete at killing baby mice, birds, rats, a lot of the food items copperheads eat. Their presence keeps the venomous snake population down," he added.

Along with two neighbors, Corey Flanagan and Justin Green (both of whom are admitted ophidiophobes), Pounders began nightly copperhead hunts in their neighborhood. Each time Pounders said 'whoa, boys,' Flanagan and Green knew there was another copperhead sighting.

And Pounders uttered eight 'whoa, boys,' in a two-block area in less than two days.

"That is a very high density of copperheads and very rare," Pounders said. "Corey and Justin really stepped up though and went with me even though they are both scared of snakes.

"Because of the large numbers of copperheads, I killed some and got rid of them. Most were found around heating and air units, near drip lines, and we found one near a child's play set. We also found a couple around ornamental landscaping," he added.

The trio made its nightly snake hunts for two weeks and found copperheads on both Flanagan's and Green's property.

Each time Pounders brought the snake out, he conducted a short biology lesson. While he generally doesn't kill any snake, particularly in Little Bear Valley, the Pounders' family farm on top of Spruce Pine Mountain, Joel stressed the importance of not killing snakes that hunt venomous snakes (king snakes) or snakes that provide competition to copperheads (rat snakes).

"Doing so creates a biological open door for copperheads. When you remove competitors for food, and remove the ones that hunt copperheads, your copperhead numbers go up," Pounders said. "This was a rare, unique situation that I'll never forget, and I don't think eight to 10 of our neighbors will forget either. It was a fun two weeks, even though it involved a snake bite, but we got the land back in balance to what it should be," he added.

According to Pounders, venomous snakes represent approximately five to 10 percent of the snake population in Alabama.

"But in a four-block area, we had inadvertently created a situation of 90 percent vipers and 10 percent non-venomous. The most important lesson to learn is that God made them for a reason, and if you keep the area in the balance the way it was meant to be, you won't have that problem," Pounders said.

Pounders stressed three points in managing snake populations around your home.

First, be aware that more than 90 percent of snakes you see are non-venomous. Second, most snakes, venomous or non-venomous, are not going to hurt you. And third, keep your home and landscaping as snake prohibitive as possible. That includes removing litter, dead logs, piles of timber, and crawl spaces under buildings should be filled or secured. Keep an organized, clean yard and remember, piles of anything are not good when it comes to controlling the snake population.

With cicadas emerging from the ground this spring as part of their 17-year life cycle, that creates a buffet for copperheads, who love cicadas as a food source. That makes it even more important to minimize snake-friendly locations around your home.

Although he had to kill some copperheads due to their proximity to homes and people in his neighborhood, Pounders lives by the adage that all creatures are beautiful creations of God, even venomous snakes, and all have their important roles in the life cycle.

And as residents in Franklin County, we are blessed to live in an area that features so much biodiversity.

"Franklin County is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, and we want to fight to keep that," Pounders said. "In the end, we're only as healthy as the environment we live in.

"That's something Franklin County can be proud of. We want and need that biodiversity. When you lose one species, that's one too many, even if it's a venomous snake," Pounders added.

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'INTERNET,' from page 1

Coordinating and Fire Prevention Authority (more commonly known as the Water Service Authority).

The August 20, 2020, memorandum outlines what the parties hope will become a final agreement to provide fiber optic broadband service to the entire 8,000-meter membership of Franklin Electric Cooperative.

FreedomFIBER offers high-speed internet through fiber optic technology to Marion and Lamar Counties, and portions of Winston and Fayette Counties. Earlier this year, freedomFIBER announced a partnership that will provide fiber optic broadband to Alabama Power customers in Franklin County.

The company has received state and national recognition for its business model and plan to provide this valuable service to rural, underserved areas of Alabama.

The next step will be securing grant funding to pay for a substantial portion of installing the fiber optic cable. The memorandum calls for freedomFIBER to have access to Franklin Electric utility poles at a standard cost to attach the cable.

Steve Foshee, president and CEO of Tombigbee Communications, said funding hinges on a federal program coming out later this year and whether his company is successful in obtaining the grant.

"I can't really discuss details of that. We hope it works well and we'll be as aggressive as we can, but we've got to be successful there with the funding to move forward," Foshee said.

Foshee said he expects to know by year's end whether the grant gets approved.

The infrastructure cost to light up Franklin Electric's service area with fiber optic technology is estimated to be almost \$20 million.

"There's not any funding out there that is 100 percent funded, so Tombigbee will have to make a substantial investment of its own capital for this project. But federal funding is a key piece of it," Foshee said.

That Franklin Electric, freedomFIBER and the Franklin County Water Service Authority would come together to forge a partnership seemed unlikely as recently as last year.

Previously, the efforts of the Franklin County Broadband Task Force and other entities were derailed either by lack of interest, or more frequently, lack of funding.

That's when Water Service Authority Chairman of the Board Randy Schultz and Secretary Scott Mugno decided they would take the lead.

"Our first choice was to build a company owned in Franklin County by the Water Service Authority," Schultz said. "We engaged a firm that does that type modeling and just couldn't come up with a financial model that would work. The overhead was just too high.

"Also, because of the poorly designed grant award system, much of our county was not eligible for federal grants. There just wasn't enough grant money to make it work," he added.

So Schultz and Mugno, with the blessing of their board, interviewed other entities doing fiber in rural Alabama and Mississippi.

"Steve Foshee and Tombigbee were the only entity we spent time with that we were comfortable would provide service to the last mile of Franklin County and cover every customer in the county," Schultz said. "They have a passion for that."

Assuming federal funding comes through, Foshee said the plan would be for all of Franklin County to have fiber optic broadband access. That includes all Alabama Power, Franklin Electric and Russellville Electric Board customers (most of whom have Spectrum high speed internet available already).

"The big factor was our board's willingness to go with us to get into Franklin County and do something," Foshee said. "This is the right thing to do. Not

that we don't have a tremendous amount of work to do already (on existing projects), but the overriding factor was this is the right to do. That's important in life, and everyone doesn't always see that."

Unlike some commercial internet providers, freedomFIBER has a willingness to reach the last home on a rural road, rather than just offering service to more densely populated areas.

And with fiber optic cable, users will have speed and capacity of one gig, up and down.

Fiber optic technology consists of a bundle of tubes, capable of transmitting messages modulated onto light waves, which allows for faster and more consistent speeds. Large files can be downloaded and sent in seconds, including the download of HD movies in minutes. This cutting-edge technology is utilized by freedomFIBER.

"If we can get this launched, folks in Franklin County will immediately have available one gig service. You don't see that other than big cities. That's important to the people of Franklin County as time moves on," Foshee said.

In addition to the three entities who signed the memorandum of understanding, Foshee and Schultz said there were others who were essential in supporting the need for fiber optic broadband service in Franklin County, including U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt and Rep. Jamie Kiel.

"Rep. Kiel has been very active. The Broadband Task Force were the original people who brought this to our attention. They have been some great leaders for Franklin County," Foshee said. "But Randy, Scott and the Water Service Authority took over as the enabling authority and it's been a total team effort in Franklin County."

Delays related to federal guidelines on COVID-19 have slowed freedomFIBER's progress on existing projects, but Foshee said if their grant is approved, he expects to see work begin in Franklin County next year.

"We're projecting getting started in 2021 to some degree, but that's fluid because a lot still has to happen," Foshee said.

In addition to providing pole access, Franklin Electric crews will complete some right-of-way work and will partner with freedomFIBER on a mapping project. Schultz commended Franklin Electric Manager Mark Stockton and his board for their vision and willingness to help Franklin County move forward.

"Mark and his board are doing a lot of good to modernize Franklin Electric and this is a giant step forward for our county and a giant step forward for Franklin Electric customers," Schultz said.

Kiel said he is working on some state grants through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs available through the state education budget. These grants would supplement any federal funding on the project.

"Today's announcement is good news," Kiel said. "But this entire project hinges on getting grant money from the Federal Communications Commission. But the progress to get this far in the process is a first for Franklin County."

Mugno said the realization of fiber optic broadband would be a 'game-changer' in the future of Franklin County.

"Broadband is not a luxury, it's a utility. This county, in order to grow, needs this utility desperately," Mugno said. "To bring fiber in rather than just broadband, that's a big step for everyone and a huge advantage for Franklin County's future.

"Fiber has substantially more capacity and speed than anything else offered out there. It's needed for business in our county, hospitals, industrial parks as well as residents in rural areas. It makes the entire county more attractive for industrial growth and expansion," he added.

'MEMORIES,' from page 4

important because falling off would usually result in skinned ankles or legs and that didn't feel good. Those things were so much fun!

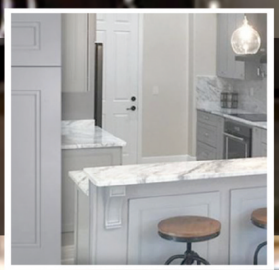
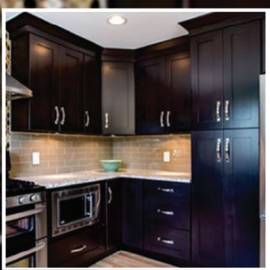
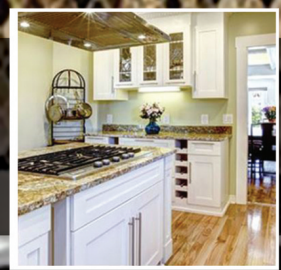
Another thing about a jumping jack is how easy it was to convert to a see-saw. Remove the top board and add one or two on the bottom ones. Place the plank back on top and you now have a see-saw.

Childhood days seemed less stressful back then. Our mother's were friends, so the kids were together playing outside and getting needed exercise without even realizing it.

Yeah, life was really good! I'm off to make more memories. So always, Until later...

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Wildcats looking to start 2-0 for first time since 2013 after week one win

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

THARPTOWN - The Alabama high school state record for rushing touchdowns is eight which is held by multiple players across the history of high school football throughout the state. While Tharptown running back Colton Simmons might not have broken the record on Friday night, he sure was on the path to do so.

The Wildcat senior finished the night with six rushing touchdowns to go along with 212 rushing yards to lead the Tharptown offense past the Shoals Christian Flame 48-14. The win against the Flame represents the third straight season-opening win for the Wildcats dating back to 2018.

Wildcat Head Coach Kevin Lacey never doubted that the talent was there from his feature back, but the numbers in the stat book at the end of the game were surprising to the fifth-year coach.

"Colton is an athlete and I expect him to play at a high level because he's such a great athlete. But also this is only his second year playing football," Lacey said. "Did I expect those kind of numbers coming out of the gate? Maybe not because those are numbers that are just unbelievable. But my brother and I sat down and got to looking at the stats and we were amazed by the numbers he put up. A lot of times Colton was seeing open field but at the same time he was running guys over and powering his way through. Just an overall great game from him."

Going into Friday night's game, Lacey and his staff had one message in particular that they wanted to drive home.

"We wanted to be physical from the get-go. Our offense is a hard-nosed style of offense. We wanted to just run the ball hard and play tough up front," Lacey said. "Offensively we were able to do what we wanted to. But our defense is what I was most impressed with. Shoals Christian has some great athletes on their team and our guys were just ball hawks and were able to fly to wherever the football went and they tackled really well and our guys just played a great, solid game of football."

As Lacey and his staff prepare the game plan for their week two matchup with Phillips High School, the Wildcats will be looking for their first 2-0 start to a season since 2013. That 2013 season was one of the best for the young Tharptown program as the Wildcats would finish just one win away from making the playoffs for the first time in program history.

The game against the Bears will be a tune-up before the Wildcats begin a string of six consecutive region games (with back-to-back byes wedged between weeks six and seven) that will ultimately define their season.

Lacey says that the Wildcats will look to improve upon a few things in practice this week before their matchup with Phillips this Friday night.

See 'WILDCATS,' page 13

Off on the right foot

After a slow start offensively, Russellville's dominant defense kept Decatur in check last Thursday night. Now the Golden Tigers look to continue that level of dominance as they prep for their home-opener against Florence this Friday night.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Conner Warhurst (right) and Caleb Mathews (left) were key parts of the run game for the Golden Tigers going for 58 combined yards and a touchdown.

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

DECATUR - Mistakes are a part of the game. Whether it's peewee football or playing in the NFL, mistakes are bound to happen. A shanked punt here, a block in the back call there, and a ton of other mistakes in between, there will be each team's fair share to go around.

And in week one in high school football, mistakes are plentiful.

How teams respond to and overcome those mistakes tends to be what makes or breaks teams chances at winning a title.

In the case of the Golden Tigers last Thursday night, after a few early mistakes cost Russellville field positioning and ultimately caused the offense

to get off to a slower start, the defense stepped up to lead the charge and right the ship while the offense found its footing.

After a fumble by Russellville on the opening drive, the defense for the Golden Tiger defense got to work and just three plays later regained possession courtesy of a Karson Hyde interception.

"We just talked about how well the defense was playing and tried not to put those guys in a bad spot with penalties and the early fumble kind of hurt us. Basically just told our guys to take a deep breath, relax and just do your job," said John Ritter, Russellville's third-year head coach.

Hyde would also lead all Golden Tiger defensive players with two sacks on the night.

After the interception by Hyde, the offense for

See 'RUSSELLVILLE,' page 12

'RUSSELLVILLE,' from page 11

the Golden Tigers began to slowly come to life. A 15 play drive capped off by a Airreon "Boots" McCulloch 2-yard scamper into the endzone to give Russellville their first points of the 2020 season.

From that point on, the defense for Ritter and company refused to take their foot off the gas as they held the Red Raiders to just 67 total yards of offense in the first half.

"It speaks volumes to what we've worked on all offseason to get to this point. I feel like we had a great defense last year and we were top five in the state in defense. But our guys took that playoff loss to Scottsboro personal last year," Ritter said. "I think that coming out and playing so physical was kind of a testament to how hard these guys have worked and how much they want to improve on what they did last year."

Just before the end of the first quarter Sophomore quarterback Conner Warhurst, who split time under center with junior Gabe Amick, would earn his first score of the season after scoring from one-yard out to put the Golden Tigers on top 14-0.

Getting the running game going was a primary focus for Ritter and his staff and despite a few early turnovers and penalties, the Golden Tigers were able to establish the run game just before the half, something that Ritter made sure to prioritize to his guys.

"We want to control the football and we want to really take shots when we want to, not because we have to. I thought we executed the game plan, with the exception of a few turnovers, we executed about as well as can be expected for that first game," Ritter said. "We've got two new guys starting at quarterback and we had some hiccups with the snaps which is to be expected with it being Dakota's (Andres) first game at center against somebody other than our defense but for the most part we did what we wanted to do. We established the run game and had over 130 yards through the air and in a game where if you take away those turnovers we are sitting right at 400 yards of offense for the game which is kind of the magic number."

Both Russellville and Decatur would remain relatively quiet throughout much of the third quarter until Amick connected with senior wideout Cole Barnett on a 17-yard touchdown pass to extend the lead for the Golden Tigers to 21-0. That would be all the help the defense would need from the Golden Tiger offense as Brooks Scott, Grayson Eady (who also had an interception on the night) and Brody Logan would lead the Russellville defense in stopping the Red Raiders offense and putting a zero on the scoreboard.

Logan would lead the Golden Tigers with ten tackles on the night followed by Eady and Scott with seven tackles apiece.

However, the biggest play of the night for Russellville came courtesy of line-backer Brooks Scott who snatched a pass out of the air from the Red Raiders and would take it to the house for a 67-yard interception touchdown return.

As the Golden Tigers begin prepping for their jamboree matchup with the Florence Falcons this Friday night at home, Ritter says the main thing he's looking for is for his guys to compete against the 7A squad.

"The beautiful part about this week is that it's a practice game. Technically speaking at the end of the night Florence is going to beat Muscle Shoals 1-0 and we're going to beat Deshler 1-0. This is a chance for our guys to go out and compete and it was important for us to find a game so that our guys can get reps in and be competitive," Ritter said. "Coach (Will) Hester is a good friend of mine and they do a phenomenal job. So some of our guys that are getting some college looks will get another opportunity to get some more looks and film against a very high-quality opponent. Anytime you play up in qualification, the speed of the game is faster and so we're really trying to give our guys the opportunity to compete and get some film against a really good opponent."

The speed of the game is something that the Golden Tigers prepared for going into their game against Decatur last Thursday night and Ritter says that leading into this Friday night against Florence, Russellville is trying to stick to that line of prep work.

"The way we practice I think showed in the game last Thursday night because we were able to play at a much faster pace than Decatur. We were used to that speed because we do so much best-on-best in practice and so we want to use this opportunity against Florence for the same thing where we want to face a fast opponent so that when we face Mae Jemison for that first region game we're used to a fast-paced speed of the game," Ritter said.

Amick finished his night going 7-12 for 83 yards and a touchdown while Warhurst would go 3-7 for 50 yards and a touchdown on the ground.

Rowe Gallagher led all Russellville receivers with five catches for 76 yards with TJ King behind him with two catches for 30 yards and Barnett finishing the night with three receptions for 27 yards and the aforementioned score.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

McCulloch (above) played a vital part in the Golden Tiger run game totaling 76 yards rushing on 17 attempts to go along with a rushing touchdown, Russellville's first score of the 2020 season.

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'WILDCATS,' from page 11

"We're very young on the offensive line so we've got to work on being more physical up front and getting after guys on the opposite side," Lacey said. "Dominic (Baker) is our new quarterback and we've got to get him a little more comfortable in our system that we run. Just focusing on cleaning up a lot of the mistakes and running a more fluent offense."

Getting off to a 2-0 start for the first time since 2013 would be a momentum-builder for the Wildcats to potentially set themselves up for a run at the school's first football playoff berth.

"Phillips hasn't played a game yet so we're kind of going off of last year which can be hard to do. But my whole outlook this offseason has been the fact that we were competitive last year and we really like this group of guys we've got," Lacey said. "Everyone knows we play in one of the toughest regions around and everyone knows that. But we're looking to build off of last year when we were competitive in the first half of games last year and say hey let's build off of that and compete deeper into games and that's what we're going to try and do Friday night."

Across the five years that Lacey has been at the helm of the program, he has seen gradual improvement over the years.

However the most resounding improvement he has seen came on the first play from scrimmage for the Wildcats on Friday night.

"Our very first offensive possession was a fumble and a turnover. When I looked at my guys on defense, they weren't down. They were fired up to go out there and get the ball back, which they inevitably did and that's something we haven't done in the past," Lacey said. "This group collectively doesn't get down, they work well with each other and they respond well to each other and I'm really excited about this group and next week against Phillips."

Of course, Simmons wasn't the only Wildcat to leave their mark on the stat book. Nathan Lucas accounted for 50 rushing yards while the aforementioned Dominic Baker recovered a fumble for a touchdown.

Jonny Jeronimo tallied 28 rushing yards while Blake Daily totaled ten rushing yards for the Wildcats as well.

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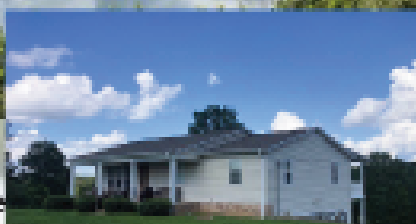
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Sharp shooting talents!



John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Young trap shooters from Franklin County's Cedar Hill Trap Range excelled at the recent Alabama State Shoot and the Grand National Youth Trapshooting Championships.

At the Grand Nationals, held August 2-4 in Linn Creek, Missouri, Cedar Hill's Smokn' Guns shot their way to both team and individual trophies.

In team competition, the Smokn' Guns Sub Jr. team earned Class B Team Champion honors. That team consists of Jon Isaac Wilson, David Lindsey, Levi Baker, Aaron Lynch, Nathan Richardson, John Daily and Chase Hickox.

Cedar Hill's Smokn' Guns Junior Team finished as Class C Runner-Up.

Team members include: Reagan Lindsey, Emily Hall, Jackson Mitchell, Jake Peden and Blake Hickox.

Luke Peden shot his first 75 straight and Levi Baker shot his first 50 straight and Abbey Hall placed third in doubles. Several other team members scored their personal bests at the competition.

The Alabama State Shoot, held last month in Montgomery, saw John Daily hit his 25 straight mark, Abbey Hall her 50 straight and Aaron Lynch hit his first 25 straight.

Cedar Hill's Smokn' Guns Pre-Sub team consists of Layne McGuire and Heidi Thomason. The Smokn' Guns Junior Gold team includes Cody Richardson, Abbey Hall and Jackson Thomas.

Team coaches are Wade Willingham and Todd Richardson.

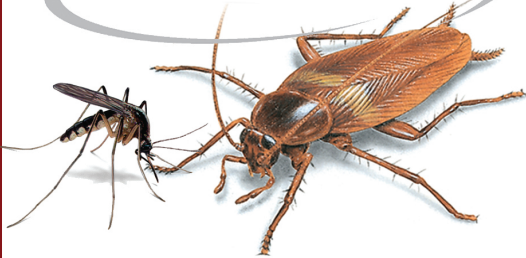
"Our kids did an excellent job this year," Willingham said recently. "I am so proud of all of them. And a special thanks to their parents and grandparents for supporting them and the range. And a big old thanks to Todd for the time and work you have put into this sport," he added.

Cedar Hill Trap Range began in 2007. Willingham is a certified ATA A.I.M. And National Rifle Association coach, and he, his wife Robbin and their two sons, Cole and Cody, manage the day-to-day operations of the range.

Team members range from beginners to skilled shooters and they include kids ages 10-19.

For more information, visit the Cedar Hill Trap Range on Facebook.

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Colton Simmons Senior running back, Tharptown

The Wildcats ran all over the Shoals Christian Flame on Friday night thanks in large part to Simmons who rushed for 221 yards and SIX touchdowns. The senior running back accounted for all but one of the Wildcats' scores in week one as Tharptown secured a victory by a final of 48-14, the schools largest week one margin of victory in program history.



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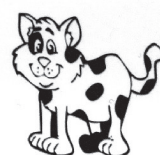
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