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# Scott honored as Franklin Citizen of the Year

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The 2020 Franklin County Farm-City Banquet had a very different look to it due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the day was special nonetheless for Russellville businesswoman Ila Scott, who was honored as the 2020 Franklin County Citizen of the Year.

The annual banquet is sponsored by the Franklin County Extension System and the Franklin County Farm-City Planning Committee, and is typically held the Monday of Thanksgiving week.

Sponsors of this year's event included the Franklin County Commission, Community Spirit Bank, the Franklin County Farmers Federation and Pilgrim's Russellville.

With a restriction of 50 people gathered together, though, this year's banquet was not possible, so Extension System Coordinator Katernia Cole-Coffey and her committee held an awards ceremony for the recipients Monday morning at the A.W. Todd Centre.

The highlight of each year's event is the presentation of the Citizen of the Year. Nominees come from the

See 'SCOTT,' page 8



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# Sidewalk improvements lead to important keepsake for local family

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When the City of Russellville received federal grant funding through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), it allowed for major sidewalk improvements throughout the downtown area.

That came at the expense, though, of several large trees whose roots had grown through the existing sidewalks. Those trees would have to be removed in order to make the sidewalk improvements.

One of those trees, located on Lauderdale Street, had a very special meaning to the Billy Norris family. So when Russellville Mayor David

Grissom called Jackie Richardson, whose wife Bunny is Billy's daughter, he wasn't sure how the family would react to the news that a 100-year-old water oak tree planted by Billy was going to be cut down to allow a new sidewalk to be constructed.

"The family was so nice when I contacted them. The tree was very large and located between the curb and the sidewalk and it just had to be removed," Grissom said. "So we asked the family if they wanted some of the wood from the tree as a keepsake, and they did."

The massive water oak measured 61 inches across the stump, so it did not come down easily. But when it did, the family considered options to


See 'KEEPSAKE,' page 7

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**Douglas Arlie Bohannon**, 77, of Florence, passed away on Thursday, November 26th. A memorial service will be held at Akins Funeral Home in Russellville.

**Mae Jean Johnson**, 88, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Friday, November 27th. Interment at Corinth Heights Cemetery.

**Douglas Wayne Lewey**, 57, of Russellville, passed away on Sunday, November 2nd. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

**Dorothy Murphy**, 92, formerly of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, November 21st. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

**Michael Wade Myrick**, 56, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, November 26th. Interment at Bethsaida Cemetery.

**Daryl Louis Rice**, 54, of Spruce Pine, passed away on Friday, November 27th. Interment at Liberty Hill Cemetery.

**Charles Kenneth Rickard**, 87, of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, November 28th. Interment at Belgreen Cemetery.

We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

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## Rowland: a lifetime of bringing out the best in others

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Richard Rowland, "Dick" to those who knew him, probably wasn't too well known in Franklin County.

After all, the retired U.S. Army colonel moved to Russellville just three years ago.

But to those involved with county and local government, Rowland was a familiar face. He regularly attended meetings of the Russellville City Council and the Franklin County Commission. And Rowland co-chaired the Franklin County Census Committee, a group whose hard work led to a significant increase in the county's 2020 Census response.

Rowland died November 27<sup>th</sup> at the age of 90.

With nine decades of life experiences to share, Rowland was definitely a 'talker.' It wasn't that he enjoyed hearing himself speak. Instead, Rowland had something to contribute to most any conversation. Chances were he'd been through it, fought it, or knew about it, regardless of the topic.

And Rowland was an equally adept listener. He loved listening to stories

See 'ROWLAND,' page 5

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# Russellville City Council reappoints Bedford as municipal judge

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council reappointed Roger Bedford, Jr., to serve as the city's municipal judge for the next four years at the council's November 16<sup>th</sup> meeting.

In other agenda items, the council:

—authorized the purchase of two Gravelly Pro-Turn 148 lawnmowers from Kiel Equipment in the amount of \$14,990, for the Russellville Street Department. The purchase includes two trade-in mowers to be credited against the purchase price, for a total purchase amount of \$7,490.

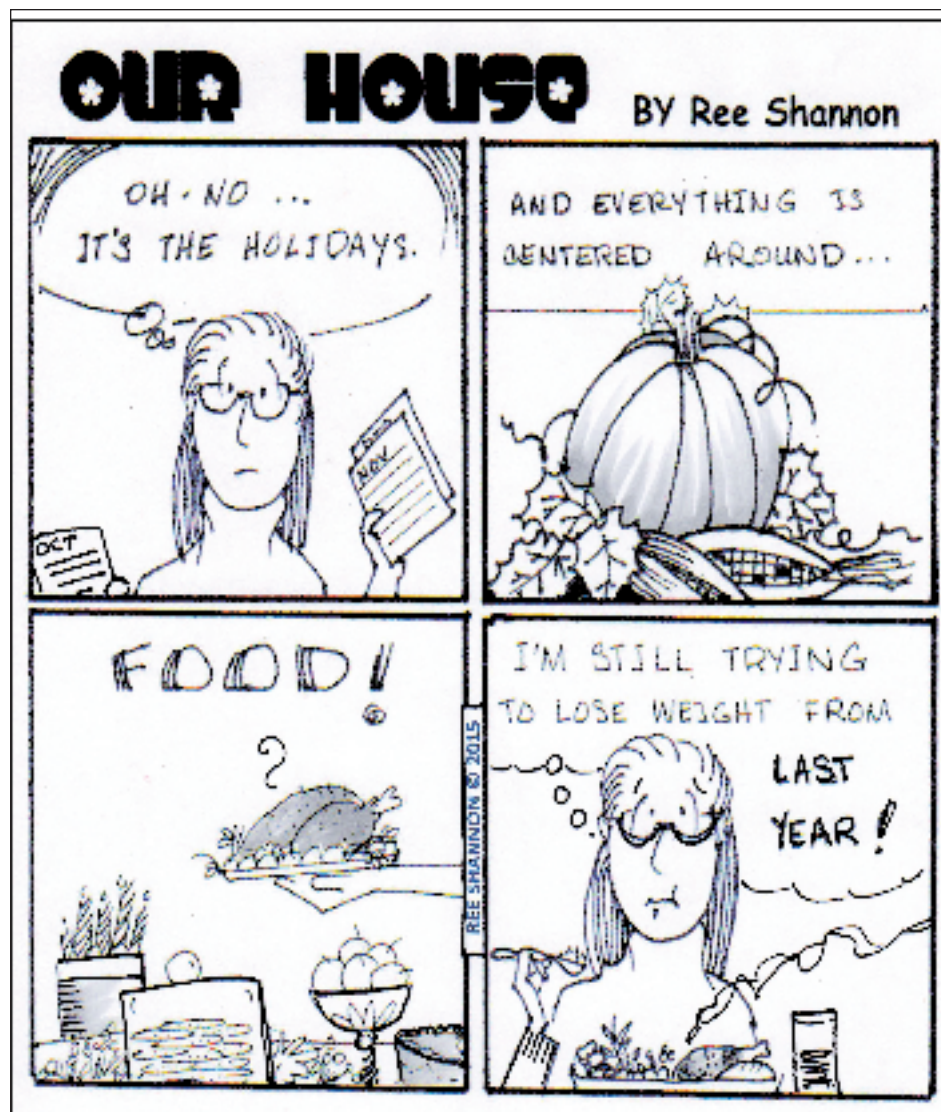
—authorized advertisement to solicit sealed bids for the purchase of a 2021 Chevrolet 1500 Silverado for the Russellville Police Department. Funds for this vehicle will come from a grant from the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency Drug Task Force, according to RPD Chief Chris Hargett.

—authorized Mayor David Grissom to sign the Pre-Application SF-424 for a federal assistance grant for runway lighting at the Russellville Airport, contingent upon Federal Aviation Administration funding. The grant is funded 90 percent through federal funds, five percent state funds and five percent local match. The estimated cost to replace the lighting with LED lights is approximately \$300,000.

—approved the submission of the Foster Grandparent Program grant application for the period of April 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022, and the appropriation of a local match in the amount of \$4,142.

—approved the submission of a Rebuild Alabama grant application for separate projects to improve Clay Avenue (from Adams St. to Summit Drive) and Madison (from Jackson Avenue to Waterloo Road). Funds for this grant come from Alabama's gas tax revenue.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council is set for December 7, 2020, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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## Cultura Garden Club to host Christmas tree lighting ceremony

Submitted to the FFP

Cultura Garden Club members have been working at the Russellville old firehouse separating garland and wreaths, removing old ribbons and checking lights, replacing damaged ornaments, and fluffing wreaths and garland to prepare them for the city street department to hang.

The garden club purchased new ribbon for bows and also purchased a "Letters to Santa Post Office Box" which will be displayed in the Gazebo.

The Garden Club works year round holding fund raisers and applying for grants to beautify downtown for the different seasons. But Christmas is their favorite season.

This year the club's big project and long-awaited one is the Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Cecil Batchelor and his family made this event possible by granting the Cultura Garden Club permission to plant the Christmas tree on Batchelor's Property at the Byars Building on North Jackson Avenue. The 12 foot Norway Spruce tree will grow to 40-50 feet tall.

Pilgrims donated \$2,000 to the Cultura Garden Club to use for the purchase of the tree, planting, lights, etc.

The tree lighting ceremony will be part of the

annual Every Light a Prayer for Peace which begins at 4:30 p.m. at the Franklin County Courthouse. At the ceremony the veterans, front-line workers, first responders, and EMA will be honored and recognized.

Guest speaker will be Chase Dowdy, Minister of First Baptist Church. Entertainment will be presented by the RHS chorus. Emmanuel Cooper and Abigail Ashton will be soloists for "This is My Wish" with Zachary Pinkard playing percussion and backup from the RHS chorus. Morgan Jenkins will lead "Let There Be Peace on Earth."

Candles will be distributed by the garden club members.

The reading of the "Light a Candle" Poem will be led by RHS drama student, Iris Salgado Valenzo.

There will be additional entertainment and the lighting of the tree will be presented by Mr. Batchelor.

The Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony along with the Every Light a Prayer for Peace will become a traditional gathering of family, friends and visitors to the community.

Thanks to the community for their continued support of Cultura Garden Club.

The public is invited for this festive event which will kick off the Christmas season in Russellville.

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## 'ROWLAND,' from page 3

and opinions from other people. And that's a trait of an effective leader—someone willing to *listen* to others and not just wait on his turn to talk.

Rowland, a frequent visitor to the *Franklin Free Press* office, believed that everyone had something to contribute. Whether the contribution was to their family, community, church or school, Rowland motivated people to shine and forge their life's path using their best efforts and potential.

Franklin County Commissioner Jason Miller was on the Census Committee with Rowland. From the time Miller met him, he knew Rowland was someone special.

"Mr. Rowland was one of those people you meet once in a lifetime. I'm so thankful that our lives crossed paths," Miller said. "I will always remember our many conversations and the guidance he gave me for the rest of my life. He was a special person."

A Texas native, Rowland moved to Hawaii 50 years ago while still serving in the Army. After 26 years in the insurance industry, Rowland retired from Northwestern Mutual, but his impact on his community was just beginning.

Rowland founded and chaired the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, where he worked to educate and inform island residents on the importance of individual liberty, economic freedom and accountability in government.

Rowland was 71 when he founded the Institute.

Some of Rowland's accolades include receiving the 1997 Small Business Hawaii (SBH) Small Business Person of the Year. Rowland served on the SBH Board of Directors. His insurance sales career was highlighted by Rowland being named a life member of the Million Dollar Round Table, the standard of excellence in the industry. And Rowland thrice ran for public office, once for the Honolulu City Council, and twice for United States Senate.

Russellville Mayor David Grissom learned of Rowland's passing and had this to say about his friend: "Mr. Rowland went out of his way to try and make Russellville and Franklin County a better place.

"Whether it was the Census or any project he took on, he amazed me, especially at his age, how energetic he was and how adamant he was in his beliefs. He gave 110 percent. Mr. Rowland was a unique person I enjoyed getting to know and be around. He had a different kind of energy you rarely see."

Rowland is survived by his three daughters, Connie Cole, Linda Zimmerhanel and Michelle Sanoske, nine grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, one great-great grandchild and a city and county who will miss him dearly.

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 Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus will be set up in front of the Byars Building in downtown Russellville this Sunday, December 6th, from 1-4 p.m., in front of the Christmas tree. There will be donations collected for pictures with Santa and Mrs. Claus so that everyone in Franklin County has an opportunity for a picture with the North Pole's first couple. Social distancing will be in place. Please bring your own cameras for photos. Hot cocoa will be available for \$1 a cup.


 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.


 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.

 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.

 TOPS 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.

 The 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. Burselon 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.

 Russellville Al-Anon is meeting at Russellville First Baptist Church at 6 p.m., each Thursday. We are wearing masks and social distancing.

 The Franklin County Women's Leadership Committee, a division of Alabama Farmers Federation is seeking donations for our annual "Cottons for Christmas". Donations requested are for new socks that will be distributed to residents in one of the county's nursing homes. Each year our committee picks a different nursing home in the county and we strive to provide all residents in that particular nursing home a gift of socks & lotion. Unfortunately, this may be the only gift some of our local residents receive and we want to let them know we care about them! Traditionally we have a donation/collection box at the annual Farm-City Banquet, however; due to COVID the banquet will not be held this year and donation boxes will be placed at 4 local businesses in Franklin County: Franklin County Extension Office (please leave your donations with one of the Courthouse security guards) ALFA Insurance Office-Russellville, ALFA Insurance Office-Red Bay & Kiel Equipment, Hwy. 43, Russellville Cottons for Christmas is one of the many community efforts the Franklin County Women's Leadership Committee works on each year to "give back" to the community. Please take your sock donations to one of the above locations by Friday, December 11, 2020. If you have any questions please call Carol Glass @ 256-810-5446 or Shannon Murray @ 256-668-3893.

We love to hear from you! Please send your guest columns, cartoon panels, letters to the editor, recipes and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).



## 'KEEPSAKE,' from page 1

create a lasting keepsake from the tree planted more than a century earlier by the family patriarch.

"Lei-anne (Jackie and Bunny's daughter) said we've got to do something special with Papaw's tree," Richardson said. "We had the limbs sawed into lumber. My brother Johnny (who died in 2019) made some bowls for the family and we gave one to the mayor."

But there was much more wood remaining and Billy's tree still offered much more to give his family.

"Jack Hester (the Richardson's son-in-law) and Milton Timmons hauled the cuts to the sawmill. Josh (Timmons) cut the main trunk into slabs, one of which was used to make the table here at the Rustic Youth Camp," Richardson said.

That table was constructed of a large water oak slab fitted on top of a metal base built by Greg Hovater. There were 12 tables made and they were distributed among the Norris family.

The story doesn't end there, though, thanks to the hard work of Richardson's family and friends who put in countless hours constructing a scale map of the Cedar Creek Reservoir on the table top.

That body of water is adjacent to the family's Rustic Youth Camp, an all-volunteer operated youth camp now in its 40<sup>th</sup> year. The camp hosts summer and winter sessions and has hosted campers from 43 states and more than 15 countries.

Jackie did the sanding and prep work on the slab that would become the Cedar Creek Reservoir map, and Isaac and April Hester, along with Camron Jarnigan, did the extensive final prep work.

Then the Richardson's son Scott created a template of the Cedar Creek Reservoir so it could be traced onto the table. Isaac, April and Camron put carbon paper under the template and did the tedious job of tracing the design, routing it and wood burning the design onto the wooden slab.

Family friends and camp volunteers Dr. Bobby Murphy and his wife Patty filled in the lake with blue epoxy and coated the entire table in a clear epoxy. This was done in stages over several days.

Scott also researched the history of the area and made and printed an overlay map that shows roadways prior to the construction of Cedar Creek Reservoir. The overlay map also shows locations of the many schools, churches and other landmarks in the area. Some of those include Mint Springs School, Dunkin Creek School, Massey Cemetery, Blue Lick Post Office, Turner Bonds' store, Oak Grove School, Cedar Creek School and others.

The map includes gravel roads from 1908 and 1960 and paved roads from 1960.

The end result is a thing of beauty that will be a permanent part of the Rustic Youth Camp.

Who would have thought a slab of wood could hold historical and educational value, as well as being a symbol of a family working together to preserve a tribute to one of their own?

"Everyone in the family shared in some way in this piece of history. That's another reason it's so special to me," Richardson said.

The end result was even more special than anything the family envisioned when pieces of the old tree were hauled away from downtown Russellville.

And the Rustic Youth Camp, which began in Franklin County 40 years ago with 65 campers that first summer, has grown into a national treasure hosting hundreds of campers each year, and a registration that is full within minutes of going online each year.

There could be no better place to permanently house the map, a piece of family history, than the camp that was created by that same family.



Courtesy Photo

The map, which includes an overlay of key locations in the area, will be a part of the Rustic Youth Camp permanently for generations to enjoy.

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## 'SCOTT,' from page 1

various civic clubs in Franklin County.

Scott, who has called Russellville her home for more than six decades, was nominated by the Russellville Civitan Club, an organization she holds dear to her heart.

"Mrs. Scott has served the Civitan Club faithfully for almost 20 years," said Civitan Club President Eric Fike. "She actively recruits new members, especially women, to bring a diversity of membership to our group.

"She is a loyal support of everything we do and she helps in meeting our objectives as a civic organization," he added.

Scott serves as secretary on the Russellville Civitan Club Board of Directors. She and the club are active in community service, awarding scholarships to local students and raising funds for local charities.

Scott, who was invited to Monday's event to 'represent' Civitan, was shocked to learn she was the recipient of the day's top honor.

"I can't believe they sprung this one on me," Scott said. "I thought this was just a Civitan event. I've been in this town 60 years and never missed a day of work. This is the first award I've ever received. Thank you so much."

Farm-City Week, traditionally celebrated during Thanksgiving week, began in 1955 with the goal of improving relations between farm and city dwellers across the United States.

By educating youth and adults about the interdependence of agriculture and industry, a better understanding between the two entities is forged.

Other honorees at the 2020 Farm-City Awards Banquet included:

—*Agricultural Lifetime Achievement Award, Ralph Winchester:* Winchester, a retired 36-year employee of Franklin County Schools, also served as a Franklin County Commissioner and member of the Franklin County Board of Education. He has been in the cattle business more than 40 years and is active in the Franklin County Cattleman's Association, where he has also served on the board of directors.

—*Agricultural Lifetime Achievement Award, Calvin Channell:* Channell began row cropping and managing four layer houses in 1980. A decade later, he built a broiler farm where he still grows broilers for Pilgrim's Russellville. Channell is a top poultry producer for three different companies.

—*Agricultural Lifetime Achievement Award, Jimmy Dale Seay:* Seay has 31 years' experience in the poultry industry. He is ranked in Pilgrim's top 25 percent growers. Seay owns 30 head of cattle and is in the hay business with his father.

—*Farm Family of the Year, Lemay Family:* The family's farming operation includes 30 cattle, 25 bee hives and pigs and chickens. T.J. Lemay serves on the Franklin County Cattleman's Association Board of Directors. The family prepares meals for hospital staff. Sons Bo and Kade and daughter Madalyn have each started farming themselves, with cattle ownership and duties on the farm.

—*Franklin County Extension Agricultural Community Based Business of the Year, Premier Angus Genetics:* With 45 years in the cattle business, this company combines the very best genetics available with the very best nutrition and health programs to produce healthy, high-quality beef. They use DNA testing to enhance EPDs to help select the right bulls, donor cows and replacement females. Premier Angus Genetics holds several professional certifications and membership in several professional associations. The business is located in Phil Campbell.

—*Franklin County Farmer of the Year, Tommy Murray:* Murray is an active member of the Franklin County Young Farmers. He's participated in several variety trials, including cotton, corn and peanuts. Murray plans to promote the importance of agriculture to students and the community. He grows crops using the no-till method to prevent erosion and maintain soil nutrients. He operates 324 acres of cotton, 141 acres of corn, 135 acres of peanuts and 34 acres of soybeans.

—*Agricultural Lifetime Achievement Award (Posthumous), Tim Reed:* The long-time Franklin County Extension Coordinator, who died in 2019, also held the same position in Covington County. Reed was a true friend to the farmer who worked countless hours helping farmers with their operations and saving them money while not compromising their crops.

Reed conducted many variety trials across Franklin County and the state to help farmers make the best decisions on seeds and pest management.

Reed's wife Joy accepted the award on Tim's behalf.

Cole-Coffey expressed her appreciation to Pilgrim's Russellville for sponsoring the Farm-City Week billboards in Franklin County. Franklin County is ranked as the 10<sup>th</sup> top county in Alabama poultry production.

As part of Farm-City Week, an essay contest, coloring contest and poster contest were held for local children. The winners are listed below:

—*Essay Contest 7th-9<sup>th</sup> Grade, First Place, Lindsay Everett, Belgreen High School, Ryan Champion, teacher.*

—*Essay Contest 10th-12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Third Place, Oscar Molina, Phil Campbell High School, Caleb Beason, teacher. Second Place, Bailey Oliver, Belgreen, Ryan Champion, teacher. First Place, Colt Thomas, Phil Campbell, Caleb Beason, teacher.*

—*Poster Contest, 4th-6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Third Place, Alejandro Gonzalez, Belgreen, Tara Oliver, teacher. Second Place, Sara Beth Fuller, Red Bay Elementary School, Lori Shook, teacher. First Place, Ethan Colagross, Russellville Elementary School, Caitlin Swinney Smith, teacher.*

—*Poster Contest, K-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade: Third Place, Saxton Oliver, Phil Campbell, Jill Harris, teacher. Second Place, Logan Everett, Belgreen, Carlee Robbins, teacher. First Place, Cristian Galindo, Tharptown Elementary School, Suzanne Borden, teacher.*

—*Coloring, Pre-K: Honorable Mentions, Kylee Frederick, Tharptown, Charla Lewis, teacher, and Stetson Sparks, West Elementary School, Lauren Taylor, teacher. Third Place, Saylor Mathhues, Tharptown, Charla Lucas, teacher. Second Place, Audree Snow, Tharptown, Charla Lucas, teacher. First Place, Glendy Ramos, West Elementary, Dana Massey and Libby Scuggs, teachers.*



**PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI**  
Ila Scott, left, with Katernia Cole-Coffey at Monday's Farm-City Week Awards Ceremony.

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# Presenting: the 2021 Franklin County Distinguished Young Women

Submitted to the FFP

The annual Northwest Alabama Distinguished Young Women Scholarship Program was recently held on November 7, 2020 at The Clarion Inn, Muscle Shoals, AL. 13 young women from Colbert, Franklin, and Lauderdale counties competed in scholastics, interview, fitness, talent and self expression categories. One participant from each county was selected to represent her county at the state program which will be held in January 2021.

Franklin County's 2021 Distinguished Young Woman is Lily Pounders, a senior at Russellville High School. Lily also won the fitness, talent, and self expression, and scholastics categories, as well as being named the Be Your Best Self Essay Award winner. Alexis Tabbs, a senior at Red Bay High School, was awarded 1st Alternate. Lauren Mae Sturdivant, a senior at Russellville High School, was named 2nd Alternate.

\*For more information on scholarship opportunities for young women in this area, please contact Susan Hargett @ 256-710-9239.



Courtesy Photo

Lily Pounders, a senior at Russellville High School, was named Franklin County's 2021 Distinguished Young Woman. From left to right: Alexis Tabbs- Red Bay High School, Lily Pounders- Russellville High School, Lauren Mae Sturdivant- Russellville High School



Courtesy Photo

Lily Pounders (pictured on left), also won the fitness, talent, self-expression and scholastics categories and was also named the "Be Your Best Self" essay award winner.

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## Ritter hopeful that 2020 season is building block for bright future

With a host of seniors laying the foundation and a group of younger players ready to take the next step, the future looks to be something the Golden Tigers can look forward to.

Brady Petree  
 Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - The 2020 football season ended sooner than many had hoped for the Russellville Golden Tigers after a defeat in the quarterfinals against Ramsay. However, there are bright spots to point out for both the present and the future of the program.

In a year like no other, the simple fact that the Golden Tigers were able to make it through their schedule with only a few weeks being affected by COVID-19 might have counted as a win in its own right. But the fact that the Golden Tigers were able to put together a winning season coupled with the program's deepest playoff run in five years is just one of the many reasons that head coach John Ritter has optimism about where the program is headed for years to come.

"It makes things that much sweeter when you look at everything that was going on. All the hard work and dedication that those guys put in, I think it solidifies what they did and hopes that it can propel us to another level," Ritter said. "It was a difficult year because not only did we have injuries but we also had COVID and contact tracing and things like that on top of everything else that would cause

See 'FUTURE,' page 12

# Making his own lane

For Tharptown's Winston Nolen, sports have been a major part of his life with basketball leading the way. Now taking on the task of leading a relatively new cross country program, the Wildcat senior is blazing his own path to stardom on two different fronts.



PHOTO BY CHRISITAN MEDINA/COURTESY PHOTO

Nolen has eclipsed the 20-point mark multiple times already this season for the Wildcats basketball program in addition to finishing in 8th place in the 1A-2A cross country state competition.

Brady Petree  
 Franklin Free Press

THARPTOWN - Winston Nolen has only been in high school for four years, but he's been a part of the Tharptown varsity athletic program in some capacity dating all the way back to his elementary school days. Starting out as a manager for the boys basketball program, Nolen worked his way up the ladder over the years to become the leader of the very same program he was a manager for all those years ago.

Now Nolen is the star of the Tharptown men's basketball program and having spent all of those years as a manager and working his way up through junior high ball and b-varsity games, he says that sports played a crucial role in getting him to where he is today.

"Being a part of sports for so long taught me to

be a hard worker in everything that I do, regardless of what sport it is. It also taught me that if I want to be successful at what I do, it's going to take work and I'm going to have to work for what I want to achieve," Nolen said. "I got to see firsthand how everyone played and I just grew to love basketball and that's stuck with me ever since."

While Tharptown varsity athletics have only been around since the mid-2000's, during that time there haven't been too many years that someone with the last name 'Nolen' wasn't a major part of the Wildcat athletic program.

Within Winston's own family sits a treasure trove of talent that passed through the very same halls that he himself walks today.

Riley Nolen was a part of the first ever boys basketball team from Tharptown to make the regional tournament in Hanceville in 2011, along with hav-

See 'NOLEN,' page 13

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## 'FUTURE,' from page 11

players to miss games and teams to shut down. To be able to navigate through all of that and finish the season speaks volumes to the type of kids that we have here."

Ritter is also hopeful that this season will be a building block and somewhat of a new foundation for the Golden Tiger football program to build off of in hopes of pursuing the ultimate prize: a state title.

"I think this season further hammers home the expectations and the drive to improve and the drive to win it all. Every year we talk about our goal to win a state championship and that should be your goal because if you're not working to win a state championship, why are you putting in all that work and effort? Winning a state title in football is difficult and there's a reason there are only seven trophies handed out every year," Ritter said. "This year further solidifies that what we do is play at a high level and to put a good product on the field which has been our goal since day one whether it be at the high school or middle school level. That's why we work to put a high-quality product on the field and it just enhances that drive to be the best."

One of the reasons for the Golden Tigers success this season has been due in part to the work of the group of seniors that Ritter and his staff had suiting up for them night in and night out. That group of seniors led by Edgar Amaya, Ashaad Williams, Caleb Matthews and Caden Watts just to name a few, have improved every year since Ritter took over the program back in 2018.

"Those guys had a great career. Their freshman year they went 3-7 and went through a coaching change and went through a drastic change where a head coach and four assistants came in and they handled it all very well," Ritter said. "They did what we asked them to do and to be the second team in ten years to make it to the quarterfinals is a huge deal."

Taking a look at some of the end-of-season statistics for the Golden Tigers...

Gabe Amick was the leading passer for Russellville, throwing for 782 yards while going for 58 completions in 106 attempts which is good for a 54.72 completion percentage. Amick also totaled seven touchdowns and two interceptions on the year. Conner Warhurst accounted for 157 yards through the air this season to go along with one touchdown and four interceptions.

Where Warhurst really excelled was on the ground as he led the Golden Tigers with 15 rushing touchdowns. Warhurst also accumulated 557 rushing yards on 83 carries. Caleb Mathews led Russellville in total rushing with 904 yards on 137 carries and 12 touchdowns on the year. Airreon "Boots" McCulloch carried the ball 73 times for a total of 489 yards and seven touchdowns on the year. Malachi Duncan eclipsed the triple-digit mark for total rushing on the year with 141 yards on 28 carries and two touchdowns.

On the receiving front, sophomore TJ King led the way with 32 receptions for 533 yards and four touchdowns. Rowe Gallagher accounted for 11 receptions and 125 yards. Tight end Nathan Brockway hauled in seven passes for 102 yards and two touchdowns. Banks Langston brought in four passes for 69 yards and a touchdown while Cole Barnett had six receptions for 50 yards and a touchdown of his own.

## Russellville basketball getting into full swing in 'uncertain' season

Brady Petree  
Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - For last year's Russellville boys basketball team, area play left something to be desired for the Golden Tigers. With a highly competitive area, the Golden Tigers managed to sneak in their only area win when it counted the most as they knocked off Hamilton to clinch a sub-region berth.

Fast-forward to this season and those area wins are going to be much more crucial now that Russellville is situated in 5A area 15 with only two other schools vying for an area championship: Lawrence County and West Point.

With the three-team area, Russellville head coach Patrick Odom believes that this could be a positive for his squad once the area tournament rolls around in a few months.

"I think it simplifies things because we've always taken the approach of everything we do is built around trying to advance through the area tournament. There's only two other opponents and so it limits the amount of games you have to win so I think it just mainstreams things and in a year like this it probably makes things easier," Odom said. "We're always pretty stubborn and we know we're always going to do the things we need to do to be successful in February."

One of the key storylines for every high school basketball program this season will be how schools navigate the ongoing pandemic and the effects it will have on basketball and Odom understands the challenges that coaches face are different from any that they have faced before.

"Obviously you've got the general things going on that everyone understands and knows about but I think there's another issue with uncertainty."

See 'RUSSELLVILLE,' page 15



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# Bulldogs sweep Sheffield in doubleheader after tournament altered due to COVID-19

Brady Petree  
Franklin Free Press

SHEFFIELD - The Belgreen Lady Bulldogs came away with two victories last Friday after a quick alteration in their original schedule.

What was intended to be a round robin tournament last Friday was quickly whittled down to simply a doubleheader between Belgreen and Sheffield due to COVID-19 forcing other teams to drop out of the Thanksgiving tournament.

Winning by a landslide in both matchups, the Bulldogs move to 3-3 early on in the 2020 season.

## Game one

Belgreen wasted no time in jumping out to a lead against Sheffield, outscoring Sheffield 29-13 in the first half en route to a 56-32 victory.

Emma Dempsey paced the offense for Belgreen as she led the way with 27 points in game one of the doubleheader. The senior post player would put up 12 points through two quarters while also going 7-9 from the free throw line in game one.

Kaley Chandler would knock down three three-pointers (the only ones of the game for Belgreen)

to add to her 11 point total for the game. Noelle Willingham also got in on the offensive attack for Belgreen accumulating eight points while going 2-4 from the charity stripe. Dakota Green chipped in with four points of her own while Katie Cooper, Madison Vandiver, and Felica Campos all added two points apiece.

## Game two

Putting up 27 points in a high school game is quite a feat. So it stands to reason that if you don't eclipse that total in game two of a doubleheader, it's completely understandable.

But Emma Dempsey did just that.

Dempsey led all Belgreen scorers once again, this time putting up 29 points (9-12 FT) as the Lady Bulldogs cruised to a 61-35 victory. Outscoring the entire Sheffield team in the first half as Dempsey put up 16 points on her own compared to Sheffield's 13 points for the first half.

Kaley Chandler would once again knock down three shots from beyond the arc to total 15 points of her own in game two while Noelle Willingham would add six points of her own and Dakota Green contributed five points in game two.

Katie Cooper, Madison Vandiver and Hanna Borden added two points apiece to contribute to Belgreen's second victory of the day.



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# 'Nolen,' from page 11

ing a stellar career on the baseball diamond as well. His brother Max led the Wildcats to their second ever basketball area title in 2015 en route to a 27-3 record on the season to go along with his own elite baseball career with the Wildcats. Meanwhile Kirsten Nolen, who was a part of a girls basketball program that had their fair share of dominance at Tharptown, was also the salutatorian of her class.

So it's safe to say that the Nolen's have left their mark on Tharptown.

But now it's time for Winston Nolen to get his moment in the spotlight, and he's doing everything he can to help propel the Wildcats to new heights in multiple aspects.

The senior Wildcat not only excels on the hardwood (where he has already eclipsed the 20-point mark multiple times in this early 2020 campaign), but he has also become a trailblazer for the Tharptown cross country program.

When he was approached with the idea of taking part in the Wildcats cross country team, it didn't take long for Nolen to realize that he may have a knack for it.

"Cross country was new at Tharptown and the coaches thought I'd be good at it because I'm pretty athletic according to them," Nolen said. "So I tried it and I could run pretty well and people from other schools that had been running cross country for a while said I was doing pretty good at it so I decided to keep working at it. I really liked it and enjoyed it so I stuck with it."

After finishing in third place at the Falcon Derby with a time of 18:44 and

See 'NOLEN,' page 14



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

While he might excel at cross country, Nolen's passion for basketball comes first. And it shows as he leads the Wildcats in scoring early in the 2020 season,

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# Blackburn signs letter of intent with Copiah-Lincoln Community College

Brady Petree  
Franklin Free Press

RED BAY - Lila Blackburn understood the significance of the moment when she signed her letter of intent last week to continue her athletic and academic career at Copiah-Lincoln Community College in Wesson, Mississippi.

For Blackburn, the opportunity to sign on to continue playing the game she loves at the next level (while playing on both sides of the ball) is something she realizes that most people aren't able to do. And she doesn't take that for granted for one second.

"It was kind of magical. Not a lot of people from around Red Bay get this kind of opportunity to do something like this so it's a very cool and awesome feeling," Blackburn said. "The coaches there were wanting me to pitch but in the end they said I can play whatever position I wanted to so I'm looking forward to that."

Red Bay head softball coach Shane Nichols believes that Blackburn has not only the ability to be an immediate impact player at Copiah-Lincoln, but also be a potential building block for the program at the next level.

"She's an extremely hardworking kid and she's the type of player that you want to build your program around. She loves softball and she works at it all the time," Nichols said. "She's the kind of kid that when she walks into the room, everyone's mood changes because she's just full of energy and she leads by example and she's just a really great player to have on your team. She's always wanted to play college softball and the fact that she's getting to live out her dream is awesome"

Blackburn has had quite the career as a softball player for Red Bay. In her sophomore and junior seasons, Blackburn accumulated a 7-4 record on the mound to go along with two saves, a 3.29 ERA and 85 strikeouts. And keep in mind that her junior season was cut drastically short due to COVID-19.

On the offensive side of things, Blackburn sports a .529 batting average with 45 hits, 12 doubles, two triples, seven home runs and 46 RBI.

senior year."

Due to her junior season being cut short, the Tigers will never get to know if the team they had would have made a deep push into the playoffs. However, that hasn't stopped Blackburn from wanting to run things back and try one more time before her time in the orange and navy comes to an end. And thanks to the push from her parents and her coaches, there's a high chance that she'll potentially lead the Tigers to an area title and perhaps further.

"I thought last year we had a really good shot of making it to state and going pretty far and I really hope to push harder this year and be a strong leader to push us to state this year and hopefully win a championship," Blackburn said. "My parents and coaches always push me to be the best I can be and take the positives out of situations and that's really helped me along the way."



COURTESY PHOTO

Blackburn officially signed on last week to continue her athletic career at Copiah-Lincoln Community College once her career at Red Bay comes to a close.

## 'NOLEN,' from page 13

then coming in first place in the 2A section three race, Nolen would then compete in the 1A-2A cross country state tournament where he would finish in eighth place.

Make no mistake about it, Nolen is talented when it comes to cross country. But where the 6'2 senior shines brightest is on the basketball court.

After averaging 16.8 points per game (including 49 made threes), 5.0 rebounds per game and 3.0 assists per game as a junior last season, Nolen is already improving on some of those numbers early on this season, putting up a career-high 34 points against county rival Phil Campbell and then 25 points against 4A Deshler just a few nights later.

As those numbers will undoubtedly continue to improve as the season goes on, Nolen has high hopes not only for himself this season, but for his team as well. "First I want us to make it through the whole season with everything that's going on so that's number one. And I think we've got a shot to win our area or at the very least finish runner-up and get a chance to go to sub-region and hopefully make it to regionals and have a pretty good run," Nolen said.

Of course what really matters at the end of the day, is who takes the crown within the Nolen household in terms of athletic ability. And while there is no shortage of right answers, and Winston certainly believes he's in the conversation, that title might belong to someone who never even donned the blue and white jerseys.

"I would say I'm definitely up there. But we always ask my mom and mess around with her about it and she says that my dad is the best one out of everyone but I think I'm up there," Nolen said.

**"It was kind of magical. Not a lot of people from around Red Bay get this kind of opportunity to do something like this so it's a very cool and awesome feeling," Blackburn said. "The coaches there were wanting me to pitch but in the end they said I can play whatever position I wanted to so I'm looking forward to that."**

Add to the fact that Blackburn was also named to the 2020 north roster for the AHSAA all-star squad as well and it's no wonder why Blackburn had her fair share of offers for her softball services.

"I had a lot of offers including a few bigger colleges interested in me too. But once I met Copiah-Lincoln's coach, I fell in love with the program and I just knew that it was the right college for me and the place I felt like I needed to be," Blackburn said.

Nichols believes that due to the shortened season and an extra layer of motivation, Blackburn will come out full speed ahead for her senior season.

"She's been working hard all summer. She even shuffles multiple sports and she's motivated and always loved softball. I want her to keep doing what she's been doing which is working hard and being a leader," Nichols said. "She's the type of player that can affect the game in multiple ways and if she continues to work hard and lead by example, then I think she's in for a big

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# 'RUSSELLVILLE,' from page 12

We've already seen games get cancelled in basketball and football and so it's going to take getting people to understand that there's going to be more change, more uncertainty, and a realization that you're more than likely going to be playing with some guys out from time to time through the course of the season," Odom said. "As a coach we're used to the X's and O's challenges but these things are just so out of everyone's control."

As for the talent on the court, Odom is optimistic about the experience and talent within the Golden Tigers team despite having only three seniors for the upcoming season.

Russellville returns the trio of aforementioned seniors that led the Golden Tigers in scoring just a season ago. Forward Chandler Dyas, who recently committed to Millsaps College to play basketball, averaged a career-high 17.3 points per game last season and will team up with fellow seniors Brooks Scott (13.9 PPG last season) and Jeb Bishop (9.1 PPG, 2.5 blocks per game and 6.8 rebounds last season).

"We only have three seniors but they're all very very experienced. They've played in games that matter and that goes a long way in accomplishing what we're trying to do," Odom said. "We've got a lot of things that we can count on and in a year where you can't count on a whole lot, that's comforting to have that. We're playing an unbelievably tough schedule and we're going to be challenged but I feel like we've got a group of guys that can weather the uncertainty to where we know what we're getting each day in the gym."

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)!

Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

Congrats to Week 12 winner ERIC MCCARLEY, who correctly picked 6 out of the 8 games that were played!

**BEAT BAILEY** finished all of her picks and still had time to take a nap. Don't sleep on your chance to BEAT BAILEY!!

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**BEAT BAILEY IS BACK!** Submit your picks to us each week in one of two ways: Fill out the entry form on this page and mail it to us at 113 Washington Ave. NW, Russellville, AL 35653, or email your picks to us along with your name and number at [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com). **Picks sent in by mail for Week 13 must be postmarked by Friday, December 4th, and picks submitted by email for Week 13 must be received by Saturday, December 5th at 10 a.m.** Each week, the contestant who correctly picks the most games will win a free T-shirt and the chance to pick in the grand-prize final-week contest. If multiple contestants correctly pick the same number of games in a given week, the tiebreaker score will be used to determine a winner. Contestants are only eligible to win the weekly contest once. No multiple winners allowed. ONE entry per telephone number. Thanks for playing, and good luck!

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## Emma Dempsey Senior, Belgreen Center

Dempsey had quite the Thanksgiving break on the basketball court. The Bulldog senior accounted for 56 total points in Belgreen's two victories over Sheffield in last Friday's doubleheader. Dempsey put up 27 points in game one while going 7-9 from the free throw line. In game two, Dempsey would improve on her performance in game two, accounting for 29 of Belgreen's 61 total points in the second matchup.



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## Franklin Free Press Football Picks Contest

Week 13: December 5th	Bailey's Pick	Your Pick
Texas A&M vs. Auburn	Texas A&M	_____
Florida vs. Tennessee	Florida	_____
Northwestern vs. Minnesota	Northwestern	_____
Texas vs. Kansas State	Texas	_____
West Virginia vs. Iowa State	Iowa State	_____
Indiana vs. Wisconsin	Indiana	_____
Alabama vs. LSU	Alabama	_____
Arkansas vs. Missouri	Arkansas	_____
South Carolina vs. Kentucky	Kentucky	_____
Liberty vs. Coastal Carolina	Coastal Carolina	_____
Tiebreaker Score:	Baylor _____	Oklahoma _____
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