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Russellville Water and Sewer Board takes top prize in state drinking water taste test

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When you fill a glass with tap water supplied by the Russellville Water and Sewer Board, you'll enjoy a refreshing drink with a taste unsurpassed in Alabama.

And the recent 2021 Water Taste Test, sponsored by the Alabama Rural Water Association, proves it.

The Russellville Water and Sewer Board was the winner of the 2021 Alabama State Drinking Water Taste Test, held last week at the annual Alabama Rural Water Association conference in Mobile.

The Russellville Water and Sewer Board will now compete in the Great American Drinking Water Taste Test

to be held in February 2022.

The contest was open to all 600 water systems in Alabama. A panel of judges graded each entry on taste, clarity and odor. Each water system that entered was required to meet Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) approval having no violations of bacteriological or chemical monitoring prior to the taste test.

The Russellville Water and Sewer Board entered a one gallon glass container of water per contest rules. Water and Sewer Board General Manager Eric Hill said it was the first time for Russellville to win the annual contest.

A representative of the Russellville
See 'WATER,' page 7

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Baggett hired on as assistant county engineer

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Through the many projects he's been involved in with the Civil Group, Franklin County Engineer David Palmer has developed a respect and trust with the company's engineers, so it's no surprise Palmer's recommendation for the county's new assistant engineer position came from that very company.

At its March 15 meeting, the Franklin County Commission approved the hiring of Jason Baggett as the new Franklin County Assistant Engineer. Baggett, a senior engineer with the Shoals-based Civil Group, will begin his new job April 19.



COURTESY PHOTO

Baggett is set to begin his new job on April 19th.

Although he will have to apply for the county engineer job when it comes open in two years after Palmer's retirement, Baggett's hiring

See 'BAGGETT,' page 5

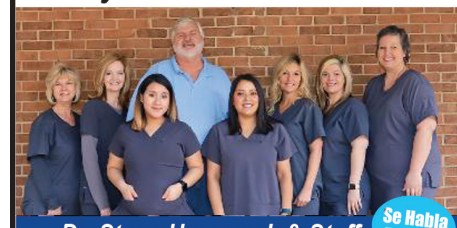
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McDowell concert to highlight June reopening of Roxy Theatre

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

While it won't be in his traditional month of March, country legend Ronnie McDowell will return to Russellville's Roxy Theatre for the 27th time on Saturday, June 26th.

The Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council announced Saturday that the historic Roxy Theatre will reopen in June with McDowell's show highlighting the month's schedule. The concert begins at 7 p.m., with Joseph Baldwin as the opening act.

Kerry Gilbert and the KGB will kick off the reopening with the return of their monthly show on Saturday, June 12th at 7 p.m.

McDowell's show in his 'adopted' hometown of Russellville is a fan favorite as he performs a mix of his 13 top 10 hits, along with some tributes to other artists as well as some of his newer releases.

Wanda Myrick, past president of McDowell's fan club and a member of the Arts and Humanities Council, will once again coordinate this year's show.

Tickets may be ordered by calling 256-415-3270, with floor and balcony seating available. Ticket prices range from \$35 down to \$15 for balcony seats.

Myrick said tickets purchased for McDowell's canceled 2020 show will be honored. For those who purchased tickets last year but cannot attend this year's show, they may obtain a refund by calling the number above.

With a successful songwriting career on top of his own musical success, McDowell has penned hits for Porter Wagoner, Eddy Arnold, Tanya Tucker, George Jones and others.

A native of Portland, Tenn., McDowell makes his home in Hendersonville, Tenn. He's also a talented painter and his latest project finds McDowell paying tribute to Walt Disney through his Disney artwork.

McDowell splashed into the music scene with his 1977 hit song, *The King is Gone*, a tribute to the late Elvis Presley.



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COURTESY PHOTO

McDowell will headline the reopening of the Roxy with a concert on Saturday, June 26th.

Russellville council approves Pilgrim's splash pad project

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the City of Russellville's new splash pad is completed later this year, it will "easily be the nicest in the state" and one of the top splash pads in the Southeast, according to a representative of Great Southern Recreation, the contractor hired to construct the pad.

The Russellville City Council voted March 15 to approve the \$444,729.50 project. \$309,000 of those funds will come from Pilgrim's 'Hometown Strong' program and the remaining balance from the city's 2019 Capital Improvement Fund.

Pilgrim's made the donation last year as part of its national 'Hometown Strong' initiative that will see the company inject more than \$20 million into the cities and communities that have Pilgrim's facilities.

"This is something we've talked about for some time now," said Russellville Mayor David Grissom. "And now we're ready to move forward, thanks to Pilgrim's."

Jonas Bailey, a sales representative for Great Southern Recreation, told the council the baseball-themed splash pad will be a 'marquis project' for his company.

The design will include ample space for seating and shading, Bailey said. The splash pad will be constructed with a flow-through system that doesn't recirculate water.

"All water used will be fresh water that will be drained off to waste," Bailey said.

He said construction of the project will begin later this spring, with a goal of opening the splash pad before the annual Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake hosted by the City of Russellville.

The splash pad will be constructed between the ball fields at the John Blackwell Sports Complex and the west side of Sloss Lake.

See 'PROJECT,' page 7

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Commission approves retirement upgrade for 45 county employees at March meeting

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

During its March 15 meeting, the Franklin County Commission approved funding that will allow 45 county employees to receive Tier One benefits in the State of Alabama's retirement system.

The county will pay \$132,854 to 'catch up' Tier Two employees and allow them to receive the better Tier One benefits. Those funds may be paid to the State of Alabama over a 15-year period. Franklin County joined 42 other Alabama counties in approving the Tier One conversion plan.

The employees will also be responsible for paying the difference in their retirement amounts in order to qualify for Tier One benefits.

Under the Tier One retirement, the employee percentage paid toward retirement is lower, and the employer percentage is higher, than Tier Two.

Tier One benefits also allow employees' retirement to be based on their average salary the last five years of employment, while Tier Two is capped at 80 percent of the employee's final salary. Sick leave may also be converted under Tier One benefits.

In other agenda items, the commission:

—approved the Franklin County Revenue Commissioner Office to contract with GovEase to conduct delinquent tax sales online at www.gov-ease.com.

ease.com.

—authorized the purchase of a paver, bush hogs, a grapple bucket for a gradeall and new shop doors by the Franklin County Highway Department, and authorized the solicitation of interest quotes for the financing of said purchases.

—authorized the purchase of four dump trucks by the Franklin County Highway Department as well as a contract with JM Wood guaranteeing a buy back of the trucks on a rotating basis. The commission also authorized the solicitation of bids for the financing of the dump trucks.

—reappointed Franklin County Archivist Chris Ozbirn to her director's position.

—appointed Probate Judge Barry Moore as the commission's representative on the Bear Creek Development Authority Board of Directors.

—approved a grant resolution for a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant to purchase a trailer that will be used to administer COVID-19 vaccines across Franklin County.

—approved the hiring of Robert Wolfe as a temporary employee with the Franklin County Highway Department.

—approved the advertising of job openings including roadway maintenance technician and property appraiser.

—appointed Tim Horton to replace Beth Forsythe as the Franklin County appointee on the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Bureau.

For updates on news and sports, visit us online at
www.franklinfreepress.net!

'BAGGETT,' from page 1

Engineer. Baggett, a senior engineer with the Shoals-based Civil Group, will begin his new job April 19.

Although he will have to apply for the county engineer job when it comes open in two years after Palmer's retirement, Baggett's hiring came with the plan that he will be a front runner for the position if the next two years work out.

Baggett is a 2002 Rogers High School graduate. He earned his Associates Degree in Business Administration from Northwest-Shoals Community College before attending the University of Alabama, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, with a minor in Construction Engineering.

Baggett went to work for Bhate Geosciences after graduation. Bhate is a geotechnical and materials engineering firm that tests concrete and soil at construction sites.

Baggett left that company to return to the Shoals with the Civil Group in 2012.

Recognized as a company with integrity and expertise, the Civil Group works with clients, including many municipalities and county governments, to conduct Construction Engineering and Inspection (CE&I) on a variety of projects.

The Civil Group's work in Franklin County includes the Hal Kirby, Jr., ballpark renovation and the Transportation Alternatives Program sidewalk project in Russellville.

Of the four candidates interviewed by Palmer and Franklin County Administrator Leah Mansell, Baggett had the most experience and familiarity with the application of engineering services to government projects, Palmer said.

"He has considerably more experience as it applies to government application than the other candidates," Palmer said. "He has a familiarity with Franklin County as well. He's done work for several years in all the counties

around the region."

Baggett's starting salary will be approximately \$85,000.

Baggett said his experience with the Civil Group helped familiarize him with the challenge of helping people solve problems and issues in their communities.

"I wanted the opportunity to help people and thought this position would give me a good opportunity to get out and interact as much as possible with people," Baggett said.

"I do that a lot on the consulting side, but we generally work through municipalities without that direct interaction with people."

Baggett and his wife Allie live in Killen. Allie is the Assistant Human Resources Officer with TNT Fireworks.

If he is later hired as Franklin County Engineer, Baggett said he and his wife would plan to move to Franklin County to start their family.

While it may take some time to get used to the direct interaction the county engineer has with the people of Franklin County, Baggett said that's something he's looking forward to.

"I've always been honest with people. Sometimes they don't like the answer they get, but as long as you're straightforward and honest with them, that's the code I live by," Baggett said.

"I will be professional and very responsive to people. If they call me and I don't answer, I'll call back in a reasonable amount of time because it's important to the person calling," he added.

Palmer's contract doesn't expire until January 31, 2023, so Baggett will be working and training with Palmer the next two years.

"David has been great for Franklin County. He's built relationships with people in Montgomery and been able to get funding for projects that greatly benefit Franklin County," Baggett said. "I look forward to working with David and my time working with him will definitely benefit me going forward should I get the engineer position."

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The Franklin County Commission will accept applications for the following position(s):

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What's Happening


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


 Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling hams Easter weekend. Hams are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup will be Saturday, April 3rd from 8-10 a.m., at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Avenue.


 American Legion Post 64 will have a meeting on April 8th at 6 p.m. Will meet at the fellowship hall of North Highland Church of Christ. Meal will be provided.

 Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church will host its Spring Revival April 18-21, 2021. Sunday night services begin at 5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday services begin at 7 p.m. The church is located at 305 Bethlehem Road in Russellville. Pastor Bro. Jeff Fleming and congregation invite everyone to Revival. Evangelist will be Bro. Terry Pace from Scottsboro.

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

 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.

 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.

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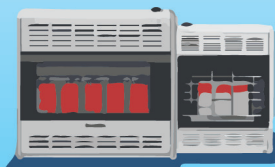
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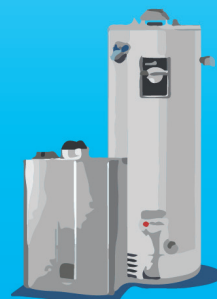
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'WATER,' from page 1

W&SB will travel to Washington D.C., with local water in hand, to compete in the National Drinking Water Taste Test next year. As part of winning the state contest, one round-trip airline ticket to Washington D.C., will be provided by the Alabama Rural Water Association.

Hill said providing good tasting, quality drinking water is the result of a team effort of the W&SB's employees and the support of the W&SB board.

"We are proud of our employees and the job they do every day to bring a quality product to the families and businesses who rely on safe, good-tasting water," Hill said.

The Alabama Rural Water Association is a non-profit organization representing water and wastewater systems serving rural communities and towns and those commercial firms which support these systems.

The association provides assistance to these systems to comply with federal and state regulations, to help them with management and operational problems and to provide training initiatives which will promote personnel development and efficiency.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Russellville Water and Sewer Board won state recognition for best tasting drinking water. From left: Trevor Hallmark, Todd Carter, Manager Eric Hill, Darren Ponders, William Hamilton and Board member Tim Smith.

'PROJECT,' from page 4

Grissom said plans call for the facility to be open from Memorial Day through Labor Day, on a similar schedule as the city pool located behind Russellville High School stadium.

The pad will be approximately 6,000 square feet with a Tuffcoat surface made of a rubber non-skid coating.

The city will also pay for a four-inch water line and power lines to the splash pad as well as a fence around it with a main entrance.

In other agenda items, the council:

—approved the hiring of Kyle Knight as a patrol officer with the Russellville Police Department.

—approved the promotion of Jake Tompkins to Captain in the Russellville Police Department.

—accepted a letter of resignation from patrol officer Krista McLennon and authorized advertising for a vacancy for patrol officer.

—approved an ordinance to amend the job descriptions in the Russellville Street Department and to adopt the Heavy Equipment Operator/Driver, Solid Waste and Municipal Court Magistrate positions. The laborer position in the Street Department no longer requires a CDL, and equipment operators no longer must have a high school degree of GED equivalent.

—authorized Grissom to sign a grant application for federal assistance of \$9,000 for the Russellville Municipal Airport. The funds will be used for costs related to operations, personnel, cleaning, sanitization and janitorial services to combat the spread of pathogens at the airport.

—approved waiver of the Payment in Lieu of Taxes from the Russellville Housing Authority.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be April 5, 2021, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Russellville City Council approved the splash pad project at a March 15th meeting. Officials are hopeful the project will be completed by the annual Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake.

Letters to the Editor

We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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In the Beginning: A Life Transitioning Through Two Careers

Russellville native Gerald Borden tells his story of a life of achievements mixed with its share of tragedy. With a foreword from Russellville attorney Danny McDowell

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Bolton begins term as chairman of national banking association

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Community Spirit Bank CEO Brad Bolton was recently elected chairman-elect of the Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA) for the 2021-22 year.

Bolton's term as chairman-elect began March 11. He will take over as chairman in March 2022.

Bolton served as vice-chairman last year for the organization that represents the nation's community banks. ICBA works to promote the interests of locally-operated community banks and savings institutions.

99 percent of all banks in the United States are community banks. For more than one in three counties across the country, community banks are the only physical banking presence available to residents.

Bolton, a second-generation community banker, serves on the Legislative Committee of the Mississippi Bankers Association and he's served as past chairman of the Alabama Young Bankers. Bolton serves on the Red Bay City Council and the Franklin County Community Development Commission.

Bolton is a zealous advocate for community banks. Last year, Bolton represented the nation's community banks in a teleconference with President Donald Trump to discuss the status of the Paycheck Protection Program.

"It is an honor and a privilege to be elected to represent our nation's community banks as ICBA chairman-elect," Bolton said. "I am grateful for the opportunity to give back to an industry that has meant so much to me and my community and I am eager to get to work supporting ICBA's mission for the benefit of rural, urban and suburban communities nationwide."

Bolton holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of West Alabama. He is a graduate of the Barrett Graduate School of Banking in Memphis, Tenn.

"Brad is an incredible leader and a passionate advocate for our industry. He has earned the trust and respect of his customers and community and has proven to be a positive force for change—helping to move our industry forward," said ICBA Chairman Robert M. Fisher.

"I look forward to leveraging his considerable talents and expertise as we work towards ICBA's mission to create and promote an environment where community banks flourish," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO

Bolton will begin his term as chairman of the national banking association in March 2022.

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If you have any questions or need any additional infor-
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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Victory over Hamilton gives Bobcats second seven-game win streak of season

Staff reports

PHIL CAMPBELL - Phil Campbell got six strong innings from Levi Crittenden and a home run from Mason Swinney on Saturday, stretching its win streak to seven with a 4-3 victory over Hamilton.

Swinney and Luke Barnwell each had two hits and two runs for the Bobcats (14-1), who have now sandwiched a pair of seven-game win streaks around their only loss of the season (7-6 to North Jackson on March 6).

Crittenden pitched around a leadoff hit in the top of the first on Saturday, and Phil Campbell grabbed an early lead in the bottom half when Barnwell singled, stole second and scored on a base hit by Austen Baker.

Crittenden retired Hamilton in order in the top of the second, but the Aggies tied the game 1-1 with an unearned run in the top of the third. The Bobcats went back in front for good with two runs in the bottom of the inning. Barnwell and Swinney both singled, and both scored when Baker reached on an error to make it 3-1.

Crittenden pitched his way out of trouble in the top of the fourth before yielding an RBI single to Bryant Loving in the top of the fifth. Phil Campbell got that run right back in the bottom half when Swinney drove a 2-2 pitch deep to right for his second home run of the season to make it 4-2.

The Aggies put together a single, a passed ball

See 'BOBCATS,' page 13

Franklin Free Press 2020-21 All-County Girls Basketball

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

The 2020-21 season saw another successful year for girls basketball in Franklin County. Programs like Phil Campbell and Belgreen brought home area titles yet again while Vina's girls clinched the Lady Red Devils first playoff berth in over two decades after finishing as the 1A area 14 runner-up behind the Lady Bulldogs.

And now that all of the nets have been cut down and student-athletes have begun making the transition to baseball, softball or track and field, it's time to unveil our annual *Franklin Free Press* All-County selections, beginning with the girls team this week and revealing the boys team in next week's issue of the *FFP*.

Let's kick things off with our top player from this year's season.

Player of the Year
Emma Dempsey, Senior Post Player, Belgreen

When you average a double-double over the course of an entire season at the high school level, things are going to bode well for you when it comes to end of the year honors.

Dempsey has long been a force to be reckoned with on the hardwood for the Lady Bulldogs. The 6'1 senior had a phenomenal season in her junior campaign as she finished behind last year's *FFP* player of the year Ansley Tate in scoring for Belgreen with 13.9 points per game.

Dempsey took her game to an entirely different level in her final season with the Bulldogs.

Leading the charge for the Lady Bulldogs first area championship since 2016, Dempsey led the way for Belgreen averaging just under 20 points per game (19.9) while dominating the glass by pulling in 10.3 rebounds per game to go along with 2.0 assists per game.

Not only was Dempsey the primary factor on the offensive side of things for the Lady Bulldogs, but she more than held her own on the defensive end as well. While her former teammate Tate was a defensive stalwart in her own right, Dempsey more than doubled Tate's defensive output in her player of the year campaign in the shot-blocking category as she accumulated 70 blocks (to Tate's 30) while swiping 42 steals this season.

For her final season, Dempsey knocked down an astounding 538 points while pulling in 280 rebounds and dishing out 55 assists. For her stellar career with the Lady Bulldogs, Dempsey finishes with 1,925 points for her career.

What makes Dempsey's performance on the basketball even more remarkable, is that basketball is considered as her secondary sport as she is currently signed on to play softball at Northeast Mississippi Community College. So it's safe to



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Dempsey managed an impressive 19.9 points per game while pulling in an average of 10.3 rebounds per game in her senior season for the Lady Bulldogs.

say that this won't be the final time we see Dempsey's name associated with a *Franklin Free Press* All-County team.

First-Team All-County
Abbie Mitchell, Senior Guard, Vina

The Vina Lady Red Devils made the playoffs for the first time since 1998 and it's safe to say that without Mitchell leading the way, that drought

See 'TEAM,' page 14

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Early blasts by McCollister, Blackburn power Red Bay past Belgreen

Staff reports

Red Bay got early home runs from Emma McCollister and Lila Blackburn on Friday, and Chloe Knoblock overcame a rough start in the circle to shut down Belgreen as the Lady Tigers rolled to a 7-2 win.

The Lady Bulldogs jumped out to a quick lead with two runs in the top of the first. Emma Dempsey led off with a double, and Noelle Willingham reached on a bunt hit. Dempsey scored on a sac fly by Madison Vandiver, and Willingham came home on a squeeze bunt by Lily Blackburn to make it 2-0.

Knoblock got Kelsey Wilson to ground out to end the top of the first and did not allow a base runner the rest of the way, retiring the final 13 batters she faced. Red Bay took the lead for good with four runs in the bottom of the first, getting a game-tying RBI single from Georgia Inman and then a two-run homer from McCollister.

Blackburn smacked her third home run of the season in the bottom of the second, a three-run shot to center that extended the lead to 7-2.

Knoblock allowed just two hits and two earned runs in a five-inning complete game. She struck out five and did not issue a walk, throwing 41 of her 58 pitches for strikes. She worked ahead in the count all game, throwing first-pitch strikes to 15 of the 17 batters she faced.

Blackburn and McCollister each went 1-for-2, and Sarah Eaton was 1-for-2 with a double and an RBI. Inman was 1-for-2 with an RBI and a run. Knoblock and Annaliese Rogers each went 1-for-3 and scored a run.

Hannah Borden pitched the first two innings for Belgreen and took the loss. Dempsey pitched two scoreless innings in relief, allowing one hit and striking out two.

In other recent action:
Itawamba (MS) 4 Red Bay 0

See 'RED BAY,' page 13

GENERAL NOTICE ANNOUNCEMENT CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE

PATROL OFFICER - POLICE DEPARTMENT

DEFINITION OF JOB: Patrols a designated sector of the city of Russellville and responds to complaints. Serves warrants and subpoenas and testifies in court. Provides traffic control assistance. Performs surveillance equipment and legal procedures involved with illegal drug cases. Performs dispatching duties. Performs other police related duties as required.

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

Knowledge of: the city buildings and street system of Russellville; city, state and federal laws; court procedures; department rules, regulations and procedures; maintenance and use of weapons; radio codes, surveillance equipment and legal procedures involved with illegal drug cases.

Ability to: operate a motor vehicle; read; safely fire a weapon; communicate on telephone and radio; generate written documents such as reports and tickets; bend, crouch; stretch; stretch; walk; run; respond to emergency situations on short notice when off-duty; and do the essential functions of the job as directed in this description.

Willingness to: work overtime, irregular hours, weekends and holidays; travel and attend seminars and workshops.

QUALIFICATIONS and SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Possession of a high school diploma or GED

Minimum of 21 years of age

Must meet or exceed the minimum requirements established by the State of Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission

Possession of a valid Alabama Drivers License

Possess the ability to obtain an Alabama Police Academy diploma or its equivalent

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Applications and copies of the Job Descriptions may be obtained at the Russellville City Hall, Office of the Mayor, 304 North Jackson Avenue. Applications submitted to the Russellville Civil Service Board less than one year ago remain active. Those individuals need not reapply in order to receive consideration for this appointment. Applications must be returned no later than April 11, 2021 by U.S. Mail to:

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'RED BAY,' from page 12

Chloe Knoblock had the only hit for the Lady Tigers in the first of their two games on Saturday.

Lila Blackburn (3-2) took the loss for Red Bay, allowing four runs (two earned) in a four-inning complete game. Blackburn only gave up one hit (a two-run homer by Riley Sheffield in the top of the fourth that made it 4-0), but she walked six. She also finished with six strikeouts.

Salttillo (MS) 11 Red Bay 1

In their second game on Saturday, the Lady Tigers (9-6) got a first-inning home run from Blackburn but couldn't muster any more offense against Salttillo (MS).

Blackburn's homer was her fourth of the season. She finished 2-for-2, and Chloe Knoblock and Sarah Eaton had Red Bay's only other two hits of the game.

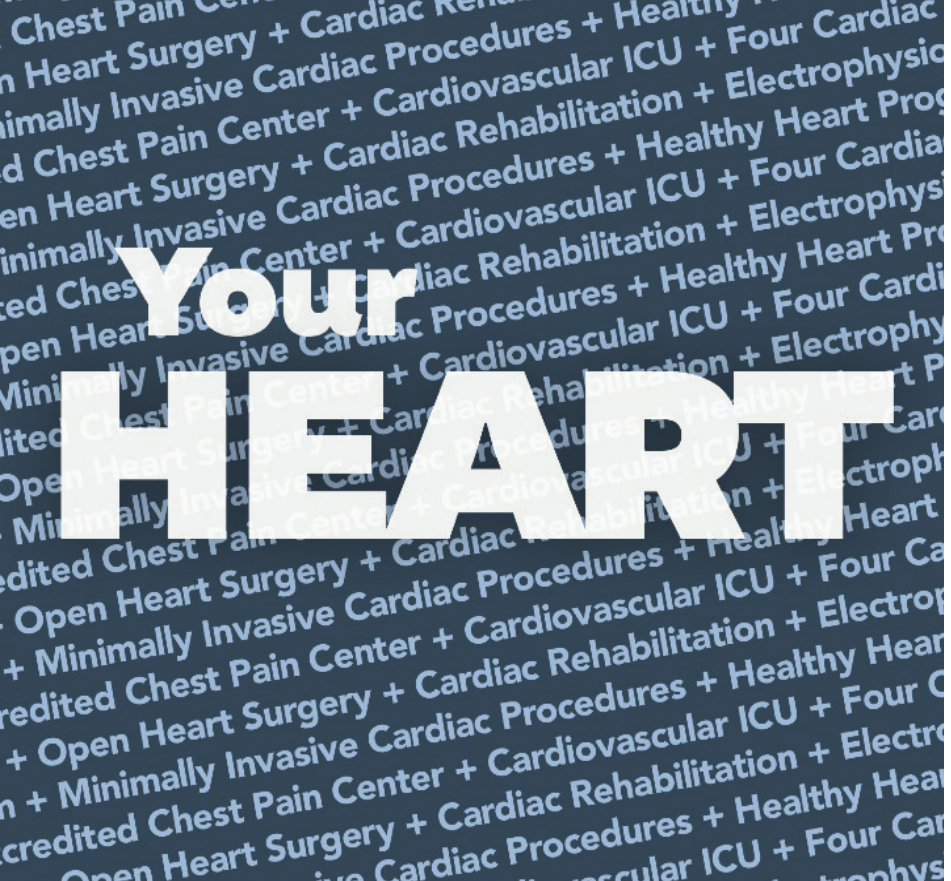
Knoblock took the loss in the circle.

'BOBCATS,' from page 11

and two groundouts to manufacture a run in the top of the sixth, trimming the lead to 4-3. Baker relieved in the seventh and worked around a leadoff hit to seal the deal and earn his first save of the season.

Crittenden (1-0) allowed three runs (just one earned) on six hits in six innings. He struck out five and walked one, throwing 55 of his 81 pitches for strikes. Baker filled up the zone in his lone inning, throwing 10 of his 13 pitches for strikes and striking out one.

Swinney's home run was the third of his varsity career. He and Barnwell each went 2-for-3 and scored twice. Baker had Phil Campbell's only other hit.



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'TEAM,' from page 11

might not have ended.

On the heels of a 20-win season from a year ago, the Lady Red Devils were in search of a player to step up and lead the charge after former leading scorer Rayleigh Guin transferred out. Mitchell took over and the Lady Red Devils hardly skipped a beat.

Finishing behind Dempsey and Gracie Montgomery in leading Franklin County in scoring with 16.4 points per game, Mitchell was a scoring machine for the Lady Red Devils. Knocking down 40 three-pointers over the course of the season, Mitchell finished her basketball career with 1,083 points.

Mitchell was no slouch in other aspects of her game. The senior Red Devil pulled in 104 rebounds (5.0 RPG) and was a prime offensive facilitator for the Lady Red Devils with 75 assists (3.6 APG). On the defensive end, Mitchell was just as impressive. The 5'6 guard accumulated 50 steals to go along with 26 blocks to lead Vina in both statistics.

Gracie Montgomery, Senior Guard, Tharptown

Montgomery has been a rising performer on the Franklin County girls basketball scene for a few seasons now. After her junior season saw her lead the Lady Wildcats to an 18-win season with 13.4 points per game, Montgomery was able to improve upon that impressive performance in her final season for Tharptown.

Averaging 16.9 points per game in her senior season, Montgomery was a catalyst for the Wildcats offense that was in dire-need of scoring this season. Adding to her scoring performance, the senior Wildcat shot 66% from the free throw line while knocking down 47 three-pointers to lead the Wildcats from beyond the arc.

While her presence was primarily felt on the scoring front, Montgomery was able to affect games in a multitude of different ways for the Lady Wildcats. Montgomery averaged 3.1 rebounds per game while showing her defensive prowess night-in and night-out averaging 2.0 steals per



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

After making the *FFP* All-County second-team a year ago, Montgomery improved on her performance from a year ago with a 16.9 points per game season.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Mitchell, above, and her 16.4 points per game enabled the Lady Red Devils to make the post-season for the first time since 1998.

game to lead the defensive charge for the Wildcats.

Katie Thomas, Senior Forward, Phil Campbell

Part of the reason that the Lady Bobcats managed to win 27 games this season was due in large part to their relentless defense. And right in the middle of that tenacious defense was Phil Campbell senior Katie Thomas.

Thomas managed to swipe 95 steals (3.0 SPG) while locking down the paint with 62 blocks (1.8 BPG). The senior forward was able to pull down 264 rebounds over the course of the season, giving her an average of 8.0 per game.

In terms of offense, Thomas was able to do a little bit of everything that her team needed, whether it be with scoring or facilitating the offense and getting open shots for her teammates. Averaging



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Thomas (20) finished her stellar career at Phil Campbell with 95 steals and 62 blocks in her senior season.

just 8.0 points per game as a junior, Thomas was able to improve on that mark by putting up an average of 10.3 in her senior season, good for 341 points across 33 games played. The 5'10 Thomas also accounted for 132 assists for an average of 4.0 assists per game as part of a trio of senior stars for Phil Campbell.

Destiny McCollister, Senior Post Player

McCollister led the Lady Tigers in scoring under first-year head coach (and former basketball standout) Darby Madden, scoring 271 points on the season, good for 12.3 points per game. While McCollister was able to do a ton of damage on the boards, as she would accumulate 148 rebounds to the tune of 6.7 per game, McCollister's hardest work came on the defensive aspect.

While Emma Dempsey might have put up eye-popping numbers when it comes to blocking shots, McCollister managed to sneak by Dempsey for the shot-blocking crown for the season. McCollister managed to reject 73 shots for the Lady Tigers (3.3 BPG) to lead all eligible players in Franklin County in blocks.

Second Team All-County

Sara Scott, Junior Post Player, Vina

Much like her counterpart just minutes up the road in Dempsey, Scott was able to manage a double-double stat line for her impressive junior campaign.

The 5'10 post player averaged 11.0 points per game (241 total) while grabbing 11.7 rebounds per game (257 total) for the Lady Red Devils to lead all Franklin County girls in rebounds per game. Through her junior campaign, Scott has accounted for 822 points in her career and will enter her senior season just one rebound shy of 1,000 for her career.

Caitlynn Mills, Senior Guard, Phil Campbell

Last season, Mills managed to get the nod to our all-county first-team and while she gets the slot

See 'TEAM,' page 15



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

McCollister pulled down 148 rebounds while dominating in the shot-blocking game with 73.

'TEAM,' from page 14

here on our second-team, Mills' numbers were still impressive nonetheless. Playing across 32 games, the senior guard accounted for 247 points (8.0 PPG) while knocking down an impressive 56 three-pointers. Mills also put in work in terms of rebounding and assists, crashing the boards for 95 rebounds (3.0 RPG) and running the Lady Bobcat offense to the tune of 136 assists per game (4.2 APG).

The most impressive statistic that Mills was able to produce this year comes on the defensive end, to no surprise as Mills was a formidable part of one of the best defensive girls squads in Northwest Alabama alongside teammates Katie Thomas and Olivia Taylor. Mills swiped 116 steals for the Lady Bobcats, good for 3.6 steals per game.

Olivia Taylor, Senior Forward, Phil Campbell

The third member of the aforementioned senior trio that led the Lady Bobcats to their 27-win season, Taylor broke out last season with a stellar junior campaign. And as the Lady Bobcats gained more weapons to use this season, Taylor's overall numbers declined slightly but were still impressive.

Taylor averaged a solid 6.0 points per game while pulling in 9.0 rebounds per game as a do-it-all forward for Phil Campbell.

Last year, as she earned a nod as a member of the FFP second-team, Taylor's defensive numbers stood out above all else. This season was no different as Taylor averaged a whopping 3.0 steals per game to lead the Lady Bobcats in that regard.

Kaitlyn Athey, Sophomore Forward, Vina

The Lady Red Devils got off to a hot start with a 5-2 record thanks in part to good play early on from Athey who had a 24-point outing in a key area win over Phillips which would prove to be a critical win for the Lady Red Devils making the playoffs for the first time in over two decades.

In her sophomore season, Athey accumulated 178 points while averaging 8.5 points per game and 108 rebounds averaging 5.1 rebounds per game, good for second on the team. Athey was also able to put up a respectable 2.1 assists per game (54 total) and 26 steals on the defensive end. Athey will enter her junior season with 401 career points with the Lady Red Devils.

Jenna Whitfield, Junior Guard, Russellville

In a sort of rebuilding year for the Lady Golden Tigers, Whitfield was one of the bright spots for head coach Jermaine Groce. The junior guard led Russellville in scoring while also putting up respectable numbers in both rebounding and on defense.

Whitfield eclipsed the 200 point mark for the season while playing in 22 games across the season and averaging 9.1 points per game in addition to tallying 60 rebounds which was good for 2.7 rebounds per game.

On defense, Whitfield was able to snag 60 steals in her 22 games played, averaging 1.7 steals per game for the Lady Golden Tigers.

Coach of the Year

Craig Thomas, Phil Campbell

This accolade had its fair share of suitors this season as Chad Green led the Lady Bulldogs to their first area title in four seasons while Richie Hester led the Lady Red Devils to the program's first playoff berth since 1998.

But we'll give the edge to Thomas who led the Lady Bobcats to a 27-6 record (an astounding number of victories given the fluidity of schedules due to the pandemic) and the program's fourth straight 20-win season which culminated in a sub-regional loss to the second-ranked team in 3A, Susan Moore High School.

En route to clinching their third-straight county championship and yet another area title, the Lady Bobcats pulled off victories over teams like Marion County, Colbert County and Danville to name a few.

Thomas had incredible amounts of depth and talent to work with as the Lady Bobcats saw one of the most formidable senior trio's to ever come through the program lead the way this year in Caitlynn Mills, Olivia Taylor and Katie Thomas while younger players like Kenner Scott were able to provide quality shots and minutes for Phil Campbell as well.

Thomas is now 153-57 in his seven seasons at the helm of the Lady Bobcat program.

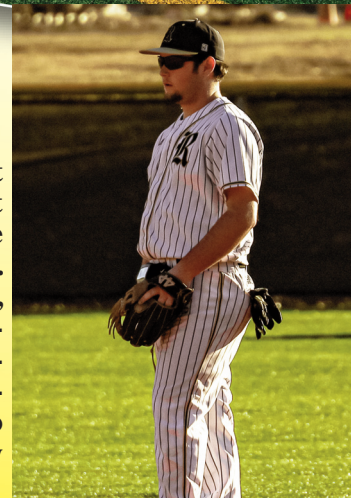


PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA
After a 27-win season, Thomas record with the Lady Bobcats now sits at 153-57.



Gordon White Senior, Pitcher Russellville

Russellville have been one of the hottest teams around and before their loss against 7A James Clemens, the Golden Tigers were staring down a nine-game winning streak. And White was a key part of that win streak, which included a starting pitching performance that saw the senior pitcher start a combined no-hitter against Tennessee powerhouse Loretto High School. White would go five innings while striking out four and only allowing three hits.



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