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Touchstone leaving Russellville for Pilgrim's position in Texas

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

After three years as Pilgrim's Russellville Complex Manager, Kevin Touchstone will be leaving Franklin County to take a similar position at a Pilgrim's facility in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Touchstone said he and his family will remain in Russellville through the end of the current school year. Touchstone will work with Jamie Young, his successor, to introduce Young to the community, he said. Touchstone expects to remain at Pilgrim's Russellville through May.

When he took over as Pilgrim's Complex Manager in February 2018, Touchstone took over a facility that faced a sharp divide between labor and management. Touchstone worked immediately to improve employee-management relations, and he worked equally hard to increase Pilgrim's footprint in the community.

The company's *Hometown Strong* initiative began after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. That program is a commitment from the company to inject \$50 million into the communities it serves. Russellville will benefit.

See 'TOUCHSTONE,' page 5

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Merrill will not seek political office in 2022

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Less than two years until his second term ends, Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill announced Wednesday he will not seek any public office in 2022.

The announcement ends speculation about Merrill entering the 2022 United States Senate race for retiring Sen. Richard Shelby's seat.

Merrill made the announcement through a written press release Wednesday, one day after a right-wing website, the National File, released an article detailing an interview with a woman who allege she and Merrill had an extended year-and-a-half extramarital affair through

last November. Merrill initially denied the allegations, but admitted the veracity of the woman's claims after she released audio taped conversations between herself and the Secretary of State.

Merrill received national recognition for Alabama's election process in the COVID-19 impacted 2020 election year. Voter registration in Alabama has reached unprecedented levels under Merrill's tenure and Alabama's election laws have served as a model for national election reform.

Merrill briefly entered the 2020 Senate Republican Primary for Sen. Doug Jones' seat, but he withdrew after former Sen. Jeff Sessions

See 'MERRILL,' page 8

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Hugh Don Cochran, 76, of Phil Campbell passed away
on Monday, April 5th. Interment at Winston Memorial
Cemetery.

Cora Alice Daniel, 89, of Russellville, passed away on
Monday, April 5th. Interment at Franklin Memory
Gardens.

Joe Thomas Hamilton, 70, of Russellville, passed away
on Tuesday, April 6th. Interment at Franklin Memory
Gardens.

Calvin Lee Hurley, 64, of Russellville, passed away on
Sunday, April 4th. Interment at Fairview Cemetery.



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PUBLIC NOTICE

REOPENING OF RUSSELLVILLE UTILITIES OFFICE LOBBY



Beginning Monday, April 12, 2021, the
Russellville Utilities lobby, located at 721 South
Jackson Avenue, will reopen to the public.

The lobby has been closed due to the
COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that you continue
to practice social distancing guidelines upon
entry to pay your utility bill and/or to apply for
new service.

Also, as the lobby reopens, Russellville Utilities
will be reinstating credit card fees beginning
May 1, 2021, for those who wish to pay by card.
ACH Debit is also available free of charge.

Thank You!

Beautiful P opens doors in Urgent Care Shopping Center

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When Tasha and Bernard Phinizee decided to open a business in their hometown, their first thought was a restaurant. But the COVID-19 pandemic, along with difficulty finding a suitable building, led the Russellville couple in a different direction.

The result: Beautiful P Boutique, a clothing and fashion boutique that opened last month on Highway 43 in Dr. Kevin Kelly's Urgent Care Shopping Center.

Beautiful P offers men's, women's, women's plus size and children's clothing, with a newborn clothing line to be offered soon. They also carry a full line of purses, wallets, hair extensions and lashes.

The store is open Tuesday through Friday from 10-6, and Saturday 10-3.

Phinizee puts her experience in the fashion industry to good use as she is responsible for ordering all the boutique's merchandise. Phinizee previously served as manager of Citi Trends department store in Muscle Shoals. You'll find her most days at the business, while Bernard is the more 'silent' business partner.

Beautiful P is named after the Phinizee's daughter, Taishenna, who died tragically five years ago at the age of 15. Their nickname for her was *Beautiful*, so they decided the name of their business would serve as a tribute to their daughter.

As Russellville continues to see a decline in its Black population, the Phinizees' investment into a local business speaks volumes as to their commitment to the city.

"We wanted to have our business right here in the city we live in, so that's

See 'BEAUTIFUL,' page 8



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Beautiful P Boutique owner Tasha Phinizee looks forward to helping you find affordable fashions for you and your family.

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College Road paving project to cause short-term traffic delays

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As improvements continue on College Road in Phil Campbell, the next phase will be a paving project scheduled to begin April 19.

Franklin County Engineer David Palmer said the paving is expected to be completed in two days, weather permitting, but there will be minor traffic interruptions while the project is ongoing.

The portion of College Road to be micro-paved is from Highway 43 south to Dan Street. The Dan Street to Highway 237 portion was previously paved by the Town of Phil Campbell.

Palmer described the work as micro-surfacing, a polymer modified cold-mix paving system that can remedy a range of problems on roadways without causing extensive delays.

"The project won't stop traffic, but it will slow it down through the operation," Palmer said. "Unlike traditional paving jobs, traffic has to stay off this pavement for an hour or so, so the contractor will be paving one lane at a time and will have traffic controlled with a pilot car."

Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore encouraged motorists using College Road on those dates to leave earlier and allow extra time to get to Northwest-Shoals Community College or to work.

College Road has seen extensive modifications in the last year, including installation of guardrails, safety groove pavement on the shoulder as well as restriping and resurfacing.

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

FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

113 WASHINGTON AVE. NW
RUSSELLVILLE, AL 35653
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The *Franklin Free Press* is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc. Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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Correction Policy

The *Franklin Free Press* strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

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

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Senior Sprint job fairs set to take place at Russellville and Franklin County Schools

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Local businesses are encouraged to participate in the inaugural *Senior Sprint*, a series of job fairs for area high school seniors looking to enter the workforce immediately upon graduation.

Franklin County Schools and Russellville City Schools Career Coach Lori Hardin said the events will be held at Phil Campbell, Red Bay, Russellville and Tharptown High Schools.

Seniors at Belgreen and Vina High Schools will be transported to one of these events so they may be included.

The first *Senior Sprint* was set for last spring until the COVID-19 pandemic forced its cancellation.

Hardin said the job fairs will link senior students ready to enter the work force with employers in the area looking for new employees. Any business or industry wanting to participate in the job fairs is welcome to be included by calling Hardin at 256-460-7738 or emailing her at Lorihardin@franklin.k12.al.us.

Several larger employers, including Pilgrim's, Sunshine Homes, Clayton Homes, G&G Steel, etc., will attend the job fairs. Hardin encourages smaller employers to participate even if they just have a few openings for employment.

The scheduled events and locations are as follows: Phil Campbell High School April 27, Red Bay High School April 28, Russellville High School April 29 and Tharptown High School May 4. The *Senior Sprints* will take place from 9-11 a.m., each day.

Students will receive and complete job applications in that two-hour period and space will be provided for job interviews to take place that after-

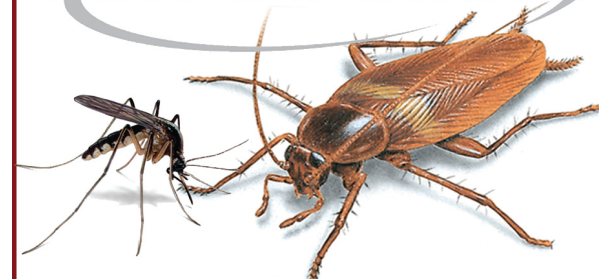
noon.

While the *Senior Sprints* are primarily for full-time positions, Hardin said students looking for part-time employment will also be allowed to participate.

"There's a lot of opportunity here. Some students make the choice not to go on to college or they're just not ready to go," Hardin said. "So why go and waste your money if you're not ready? They may need a few years before making that transition back to school. This is a way to help our students and local businesses come together."

Hardin said there will be school staff on hand at each event to assist students with job applications.

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'TOUCHSTONE,' from page 1

fit from approximately \$600,000 of *Hometown Strong* funds. "We appreciate Pilgrim's investment in our local community and their involvement in programs and projects that will benefit all our citizens," Russellville Mayor David Grissom said. "Kevin Touchstone has been a supporter of Russellville from the day he arrived. His dedication has definitely made a positive impact in our city."

Touchstone said he and his family were not looking to leave Russellville, but the move results strictly from a need created by a promotion.

"My boss ran that complex and he got promoted from that position, so this just kind of happened. It's been in the works for a few months and everything finally was worked out," Touchstone said.

Pilgrim's impact on Russellville and Franklin County is massive. In addition to employing approximately 1,350 people, Pilgrim's Russellville contracts with 236 local poultry farms with annual payments of more than \$41 million, along with \$40 million in payroll for the Russellville facility.

The company also contributes more than \$3 million to the local tax base and another \$3 million in utility payments.

Touchstone's tenure at Pilgrim's Russellville will be remembered as an era when Pilgrim's embraced its community, and its employees, at a level never seen before 2018.

Previous management came and went, with many choosing not to live in Franklin County. That changed with Touchstone, a man who didn't take long to learn and understand his community, and the company has developed a true partnership with Franklin County in the last three years.

Last year, right in the middle of the pandemic, Pilgrim's gave 10-pound bags of chicken to every Russellville Hospital employee as a thank you for their service on the front lines. As the chicken bags were unloaded from the truck, there was Touchstone, sleeves rolled up, stacking boxes.

Touchstone also made sure Pilgrim's financial support of its community and local schools didn't stop with the 'big' sports like football (although the company financially supports that program as well). It was the donations to the Russellville High School cross-country team, the Franklin County SPAN program, and other groups that made significant impacts on those organizations.

And Pilgrim's involvement in the community has only just begun, Touchstone said.

"What I have been part of is just laying the groundwork. Pilgrim's will be *the* employer of choice in Northwest Alabama," Touchstone said. "I am leaving Russellville but two leaders will move in as I leave and they will make sure of that. It's not that we want to be, but we *will be* Northwest Alabama's employer of choice."

Touchstone said Young and his family will live in Russellville. With new plant manager Walter James already living here, the two top positions at Pilgrim's will be local residents.

Young comes to Pilgrim's Russellville from the company's Live Oak, Florida, facility.

Although he won't be a part of it after May, Touchstone is optimistic about the future of Pilgrim's Russellville and believes it will do well under Young's leadership.

"I will always appreciate my time in Russellville. We've made a lot of strides with the plant itself and I feel like it's a better place than it was when I got here," Touchstone said. "There are brighter days ahead for Russellville and Pilgrim's once we clear through this COVID-19 situation."

"I'm proud of the work done here, especially within the facility and the complex itself," he added.

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

 You are invited to a Gospel Singing Saturday, April 17, at 7 p.m., at Lawlers Chapel, 1712 Gravel Hill Road in Phil Campbell. The singing will feature Family Tradition. Everyone is welcome.

 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.

 Osborn Hill Cemetery -Decoration Day will be on May 1, 2021. The first Saturday of May has been observed as Decoration Day for well over 100 years. All old flowers will need to be removed off the graves. Please make plans for that special day to come to the cemetery. Also its time again for annual donations. If you would like to donate to the Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, please send your donations to: Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, c/o Mrs. Lana Duncan 2330 Colburn Mtn. Road, Tuscumbia, AL 35674.

 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.

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.

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'MERRILL,' from page 1

entered the race.

Although Merrill did not close the door to a future political comeback, that door will definitely not open until after 2022.

"I will absolutely not run for any office in 2022," Merrill said. "I don't know about after that time period. The next election cycles will be 2024 or 2026, and that's a long time from now, so I don't know what will happen."

Alabama's two-term limit would prevent Merrill from running for reelection as Secretary of State in 2022, so the Senate race would seem particularly attractive to the political veteran.

"After much prayer, reflection and conversations with my wife, Cindy, I have decided that I will not be a candidate for any office in 2022," Merrill said. "Life presents us with a series of chapters, some more challenging than others, in our book of life, and when one finishes, another one begins. While I remain fully committed to continuing my service as your Secretary of State through the end of my term, I do not know what the next chapter will present for me and my family," he added.

Merrill, who travels to every county in his official capacity multiple times each year, has been particularly active in Franklin County. His wife, the former Cindy Benford, is a Franklin County native. Merrill is known as Alabama's most accessible elected official.

Last month, Merrill spoke to Russellville Middle School's Aspiring Minds Academy students at a special ceremony held at the A.W. Todd Centre.

'BEAUTIFUL,' from page 3

what we did," Tasha said. "We believe in Russellville and we believe in what we are doing here."

Phinizee works daily to equip Beautiful P Boutique with affordable, fashionable clothing.

"What satisfies me the most is when we can provide a customer with what they want right here in Russellville so they don't have to go out of town to find the fashions they want," Tasha said.

For more information on Beautiful P Boutique, follow their Facebook page or call 256-398-8935.

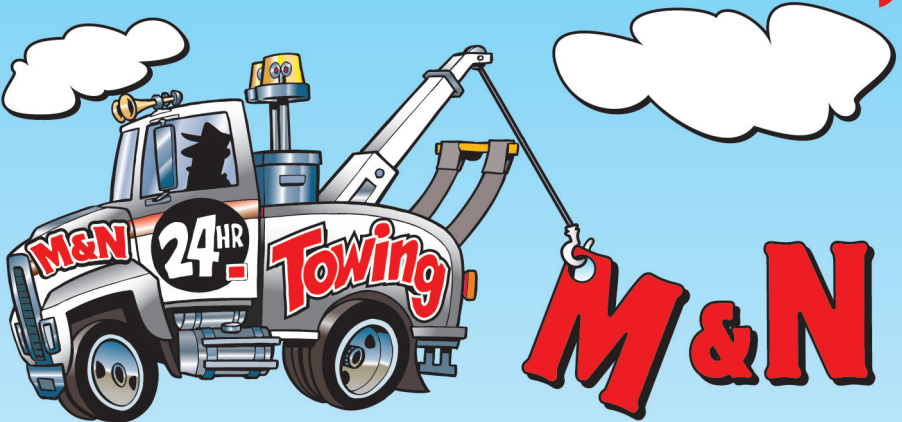


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PROJECT REQUIREMENTS:

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2021 PROJECT SCHEDULE:

Friday, April 30th	Registration Deadline. This project requires a \$25 program fee and registration form. The fee covers the cost of a single rabbit, a Record Book, and a Project Manual. You will receive your Project Manual to start learning about your new pet.
Tuesday, May 4 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm	Mandatory Parent and Participant Meeting. Each 4-H participant and a parent <u>must</u> attend this project training. The meeting will be virtual and virtual Zoom meeting info will be given out closer to time.
May 7th 4:00 pm — 6:00 pm	Rabbit Pickup at the North Alabama Fairgrounds in Muscle Shoals! Pick up your new rabbit! Participants will be randomly given 1 rabbit that will be one of the following breeds: Polish, Dutch, Himalayan, California, or Mini Satin.
July-August	Schedule a project "check in" with the 4-H Agent. We can setup an in-person home visit or virtual home visit. Your 4-H Agent will contact you to set date and time.
Saturday, August 14 10:00	Showmanship Clinic. Participants will learn everything they need to know about showing their rabbit and what to expect on the day of the show. The location of the clinic will be announced closer to the date.
September 2021	2021 NW AL 4-H Rabbit Show. The show will be held during the North Alabama State Fair at the Fairgrounds in Muscle Shoals. The exact date and time will be announced at the Virtual Mandatory Meeting.

For questions about the 4-H Rabbit Project, please contact
Vanessa Roberts, Franklin County 4-H Regional Extension Agent, (256) 309-9576



The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. An Equal Opportunity Educator and Employer. Everyone is welcome! Please let us know if you have accessibility needs.

Obituary for Sharon Marie Elkins Williams

Submitted to the FFP

Sharon Marie Elkins Williams (March 05, 1942 - April 02, 2021)
Sharon Marie Elkins Williams, of Northport, FL (formerly of Russellville) went home Friday, April 02, 2021 at the age of 79.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Malcom and Glenice Elkins; and mother and father-in-law, Buck and Louise Williams.

She is survived by her husband of 60 years, Billy Williams, North Port, FL; three children, Denise Gray (Buddy) of Russellville, AL, Charles Rainey of Sheffield, AL, Chrissy Cooper (Niles) of North Port, FL; two grandchildren, Gregg Gray (Erin), Christopher Cooper (Kaity); three great-grandchildren, Murphy Shea Cooper, and Bryant & Tyson Gray.

She loved scary movies and her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her real babies were her three cherished dogs. She was a spirit in her younger days who wanted to try it all: motorcycles, makeup consultant, karate, real estate, yoga instructor / personal trainer, and one memorable day of substitute teaching. You just never knew. She loved living in the Florida sunshine but always missed the southern cooking back home.

A graveside service was held on Tuesday, April 06, 2021 at KP Cemetery. Bro. Bo Lloyd officiated. A family viewing was held before the service at Spry Memorial Chapel.

Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family. To have us sign the book for you, please free to call or to leave private condolences, please visit our website at www.sprymemorialchapel.com.



Sharon Marie Elkins Williams

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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Bobcats score 33 runs in two games to win county title

*Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press*

RED BAY - Coming into the 2021 high school baseball season, it was assumed that the pitching staff for the Phil Campbell Bobcats baseball team would be the crown jewel for head coach Jonathan Raper and his staff. And while the pitching staff certainly hasn't been too shabby (sporting a 3.23 ERA coming into this week along with 12 shutouts for the staff), it's the offense that has garnered a large amount of attention as of recently.

That offense was on full display over the weekend as the Bobcats rolled over Belgreen (by a 17-1 final) and Tharptown (by a 16-0 final) to take home the Franklin County championship.

In eight of their last nine games, the Bobcats have reached double digit run totals, good for an average of 11.8 runs per game, just north of their 11.4 runs per game for the season.

While the offensive output might catch the casual fan off guard, it's certainly not surprising to Raper.

"Coming into this season we expected to hit the ball pretty well because we have a lot of older kids that we've had in this program for a few years. And of course you never know what is going to happen from one year to the next but overall we expected to be a good offensive team," Raper said. "We've got six seniors on this team, a junior and two sophomores in our lineup and when you have those older guys you kinda know what you're going to get out of them."

While the offense has certainly been dynamic for the Bobcats, the aforementioned pitching staff has certainly lived up to the hype. Junior righthander Mason Swinney, who has been clocked hitting the low-90's with his fastball, carries a 2.07 ERA across 39.2 innings pitched on the season while Ridge Raper (a Wallace State commit) has improved his varsity career ERA to 1.68 ERA after notching his 10th career complete game in the Bobcats' 10-2 win over Danville recently.

"Mason and Ridge have been great this year for us and they've constantly found a way to battle through things and I think they have just about found a way to finish everything that they start," Raper said. "We've got the luxury of saying 'if you're not filling it up this day, we've got a ton of other arms we can go to'. But Mason and Ridge are both great kids that have worked hard to get to this point and they've earned it."

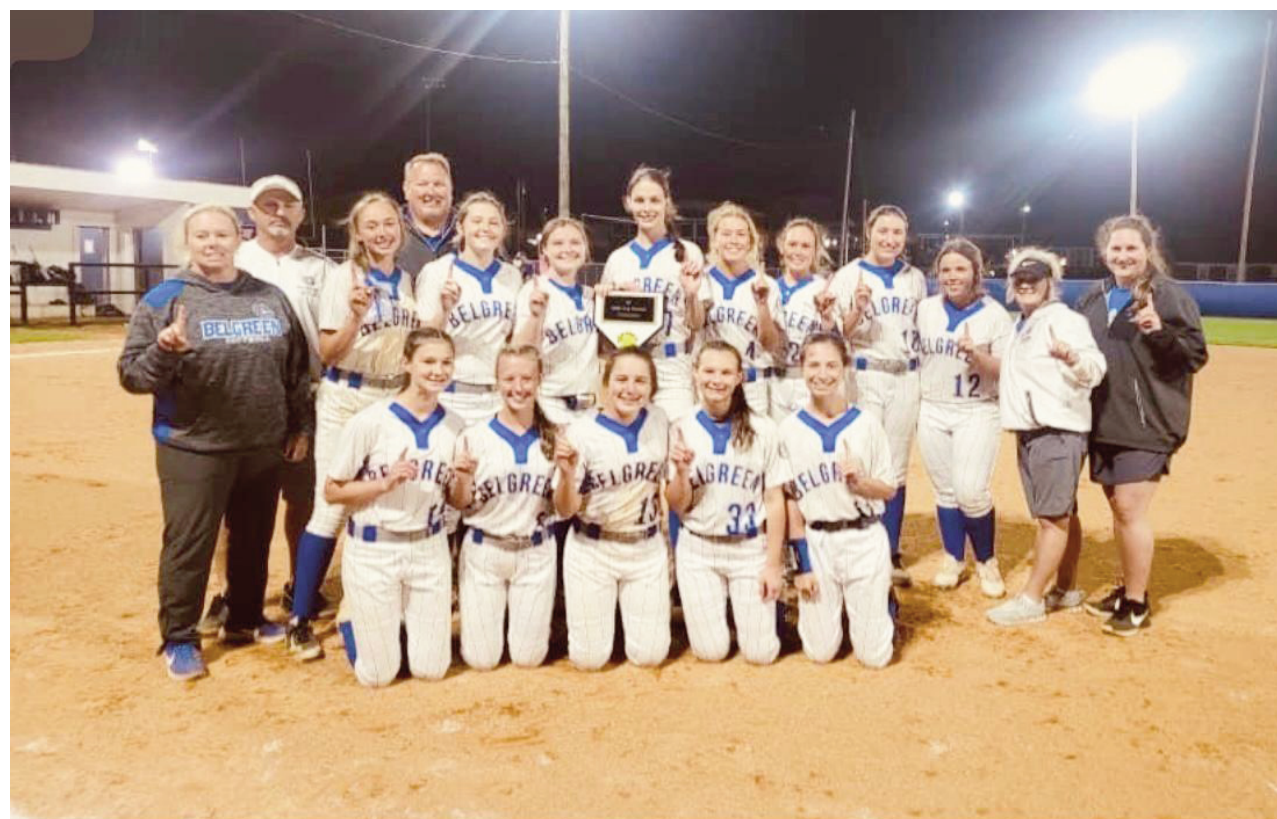
And as if facing Swinney and Raper wasn't enough of a threat to give you nightmares if you're an opposing coach, the rest of the arms for the Bobcats are just as capable of dominating on any given night.

Senior righty Luke Barnwell carries a 10-2 record along with a 1.48 ERA across 80.2 innings pitched for his varsity career and fellow arms in Austen

See 'BOBCATS,' page 14

Bringing home a title

After being swept in a tournament on spring break, the Belgreen Lady Bulldogs needed something to get them back on track. Now with a county title in hand after their 5-2 win over Red Bay along with meaningful developments from their ace and a great strength of schedule on their side, the Lady Bulldogs are looking to go on a run with the playoffs right down the road.



The Lady Bulldogs won the county title after beating Vina 12-0, Tharptown 2-1 and winning game two against Red Bay 5-2.

*Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press*

RED BAY - As the Belgreen Lady Bulldogs cruised to a Franklin County Championship on Saturday, head coach Susie Tverberg began to see the beginning of the culmination of the hard work and tough schedule that her squad has been up against.

Coming off of a first round win over Vina by a final of 12-0, the Lady Bulldogs found themselves matched up against Tharptown for a chance to play in the county title game. In what was a low-scoring affair, Belgreen came out on top by a final of 2-1 in a pitchers duel between Emma Dempsey and Taylor Cameron.

For Tverberg, winning over a Tharptown squad (where she led the Wildcat program for an extended period of time) that had been trending in the right direction en route to her fifth county championship as a head coach was something to hang her hat on.

"I was pleased with the way our girls played in the tournament. We jumped out against Vina and then we played Tharptown and we were going at it against them. We couldn't hit Taylor and they couldn't hit Emma. All three of the runs scored in that game came off of walks or a hit by pitch," Tverberg said. "Coach Whitfield has those girls at Tharptown on the right track and they were playing very well and so I was glad we were able to get the win over them."

With the tournament being double-elimination, and Red Bay already losing earlier in the tournament, the Lady Bulldogs needed just one more victory to take home the title. And after dropping the first game to the Lady Tigers by a 2-1 final, a lightning delay forced the Lady Bulldogs to postpone their championship game against Red Bay midgame to the next day.

The delay to the next day certainly didn't have any sort of negative effect on Dempsey and the rest of the Lady Bulldogs as they were able to bat

See 'TITLE,' page 13

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

JOB FAIR

To be held at

Muscle Shoals Church of God,
1700 Firestone Ave
Muscle Shoals, Alabama 35661
Tuesday, April 13th, 2021
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.



JOB FAIR

To be held at

Wilson Park, 223 E, Tuscaloosa St.
Florence, Alabama 35630
Wednesday, April 14th, 2021
9 a.m. - 2 p.m.



'TITLE,' from page 11

tle back from an early 2-0 deficit after the Lady Tigers plated two runs in the bottom of the first inning. Madison Vandiver and Noelle Willingham both knocked in a run in the top half of the second inning to tie things up as Vandiver would repeat her heroics in the very next inning, knocking in two more runs to give the Lady Bulldogs a 4-2 lead in the top of the third.

Belgreen would get an insurance run after a runner scored on an error and Dempsey would shut down the Lady Tigers offense the rest of the way, securing the county title.

Dempsey, who got off to a slow start on the season with her velocity down from a season ago, has been ramping up at the perfect time for Belgreen and in the Franklin County tournament showed just why she is a college commit on the diamond. "At the beginning of the season she struggled. She played basketball and her velocity and spin just wasn't fully there. I think in our first game against Addison she allowed two home runs in the first inning and she was kind of taken back by it," Tverberg said. "But she was able to reel herself in, regain her focus and buckle down and she has progressed and gotten better and better as the season has gone on."

The biggest key in Dempsey's development from her junior to senior campaigns, according to Tverberg, has been learning how to be a better pitcher with working counts instead of looking to strike every batter out.

And it is because of that development that Dempsey has begun to see an improvement in multiple aspects of her game in the circle.

"Emma has been hittable this season because she's not coming in trying to strike everyone out but we've been working on her development because once she gets to that next level of play or deep into the playoffs, you're not going to blow the ball by everybody you face," Tverberg said. "When you've got disciplined hitters that are trained to hit the fastball, that fastball is probably going to be the last thing you throw in college. So you have to make a lot of pitches and go after hitters' weaknesses and Emma knows she has to get better and she has progressed extremely well and we're pleased with her developments this year."

After playing in a tournament over spring break the last week of March in which the Lady Bulldogs went 0-5 against teams in classes 3A or higher, Belgreen found their stride just one week later and rode their newfound momentum to a county title.

And while their 12-13 record might not turn any heads on face value, Tverberg isn't concerned. In fact, with the quality of opponents that the Lady Bulldogs have lost to combined with the fact that her squad routinely takes care of business when it comes to teams within their own classification, their recent string of success has Tverberg optimistic with the area tournament and playoffs right around the corner.

"My biggest fear was playing those bigger schools, getting beat and that kind of draining their spirits out of them to make them feel like they weren't good enough. But the coaches, parents and everyone else did a good job in keeping up their spirits and encouraging our girls," Tverberg said. "It was tough competition but I honestly don't know that there's another team in 1A that will be better than we faced that week. Those teams were great and we just made sure to keep our girls heads up and not worry about those losses because they made us better in the long run."

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'BOBCATS,' from page 11

Baker (who is 3-0 this season including a complete game in the county title game), Bryant Hyde (who closed out the win over Belgreen while striking out two in a scoreless inning) and Brett Saint who is coming off an injury give the Bobcats one of the more impressive amounts of pitching depth in north Alabama.

The only problem is, with the way the Bobcats are dominating on the offensive side of things and winning most games by the fifth inning, it can be tough to make sure everyone is able to get innings on the mound.

Not a bad problem to have if you're Raper and the Bobcats. "We felt good this year because we knew we were going to have several arms we can go to whenever we need to. We lost (Brett) Saint for the biggest part of the year with injury and he's working back into form and we feel really good about the arms we've got," Raper said. "This is one of those years where we needed to play 60 games because we've got so many guys that can pitch for us. We've got a lot of younger guys that throw pretty well for us but we just can't get them into games because we don't have enough innings and games to go around and get them some work in."

With the Bobcats clinching another county title and an area title in the same week (including their eighth-straight postseason berth), don't think for a second that this season has been taken for granted by both Raper and his squad.

Going into last season, the Bobcats had a good reason to believe they were well-suited to make a play for the state title. After all, they had lost in the 3A state semifinals just a year prior and had a large chunk of that same core returning. But after the 2020 season was cut short due to COVID-19, the Bobcats were forced to put their title hopes on hold for another season.

Now, with the 2021 regular season nearing a close in the coming weeks, the Bobcats are making sure to not waste a single pitch and appreciate every inning.

See 'BOBCATS,' page 15

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

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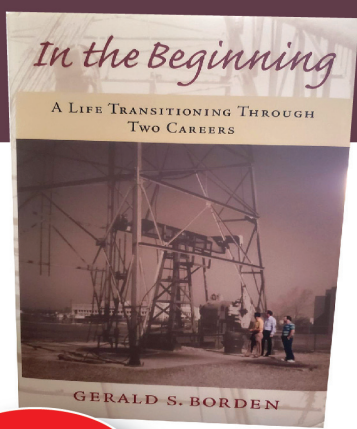
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Russellville native Gerald Borden tells his story of a life of achievements mixed with its share of tragedy. With a foreword from Russellville attorney Danny McDowell



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'BOBCATS,' from page 14

"We felt like we had a really good team and a really good chance to do something special last year and we had that chance taken from us. And I really think our guys have taken this year and enjoyed it more than they normally would have and are thankful for every chance they get to play," Raper said. "Everything can be gone in a day and they finally realized that. We talk about it all the time how everyone's career has an hourglass and everyone's time runs out at a different time and when it's over it's over, and no one expected it to end when it did last year. That's why when our guys are out here they give it 110 percent and take every play to heart because it can be over in the blink of an eye."



COURTESY PHOTO

Phil Campbell (23-4) beat Belgreen 17-1 before routing Tharptown 16-0 to capture the Franklin County title.

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Across six games last week, one could make the case that Whitfield was the hottest hitter around. Going 14-26, good for a .538 average, Whitfield managed to knock in ten runs with a walkoff grand slam to seal a win over Red Bay. Whitfield, a junior shortstop for the Lady Golden Tiers, also scored nine runs while adding three doubles and two triples to her impressive tear on the week as well.



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