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Coalition helping to address Russellville's hidden reality — homelessness

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

There's some palpable irony when it comes to the Russellville Coalition, an outreach of Doug and Betsy Green's Free to Praise ministry. The Russellville Coalition is an effort of the local community, from churches to businesses to local governments, coming together to provide tools for Russellville's homeless community to improve their life situations.

That's right—Russellville's homeless community. And therein lies the irony. Most Russellville residents don't realize there are homeless liv-

ing among us. They remain hidden, scattered around in makeshift campsites or living in trap houses around town.

Make no mistake, Betsy says, Russellville's homeless community is a reality, and it's likely much larger than you think.

"My faith in mankind was restored when we started this about 18 months ago," Betsy said. "Every person I've come in contact with since we've started this outreach has bent over backwards wanting to help.

"But most people don't realize we have homeless people in Russellville and Franklin County. And most

See 'HOMELESSNESS,' page 8

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County commission approves second amendment resolution

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved a resolution that emphasized its support of the Second Amendment and its opposition to any state or federal law that may "dilute or violate the important Second Amendment rights of the citizens of Franklin County."

Commissioner Joseph Baldwin introduced the motion after he learned of a similar resolution approved by the Chilton County Commission. The resolution was approved at the commission's April 19 meeting.

Baldwin asked the commission to show its support of the Second

Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, specifically that the right of "a well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of the free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

Baldwin received a copy of the Chilton County resolution and a similar Second Amendment Support Resolution was drafted for Franklin County.

"I wanted to see us propose a resolution that states we prohibit, or drastically oppose, any new government regulation that violates our Second Amendment rights," Baldwin said.

Baldwin said he expected more

See 'RESOLUTION,' page 9

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Lonnie Ray Bassham, 71, of Russellville, passed away on Tuesday, April 13th. Interment at Florence Cemetery.

April Marie Green, 26, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, April 9th. Interment at King Cemetery.

Richard Wayne "Rick" Karhoff, 65, of Vina, passed away on Thursday, April 15th. A private memorial service will be held at a later date.

Otis Leon Pruett, 86, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, April 16th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

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Governor signs Kiel-sponsored business opening bill into law

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A bill that allows businesses and churches to continue operations during a state of emergency as long as they comply with all required safety precautions became law after signature from Gov. Kay Ivey last week.

HB103, introduced by Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville), was approved 26-6 by the Alabama Senate and 95-1 by the Alabama House.

Kiel, a small business owner himself, said he and other small business owners were outraged last year with Alabama State of Emergency mandates that favored mega-retailers remaining open while smaller businesses were forced to close their doors.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama residents saw businesses categorized as *essential* or *non-essential*, and that label determined whether these businesses could remain open or be forced to close pursuant to emergency orders.

The result saw *essential* businesses like Walmart, Lowe's and CVS Pharmacy remain open, while sporting goods, furniture and book stores were forced to close, even though the so-called *essential* big box stores sold the same items on their shelves.

Additionally, churches were not allowed to hold services unless their members sat in cars and listened to the radio or watched online.

Kiel's legislation makes sure that during a State of Emergency any business or church may remain open as long as it "complies with all of the safety precautions issued by the Governor, a state department or agency, or a county or municipal governing body or agency thereof under the authority of the Alabama Emergency Management Act of 1955."

HB103 met opposition from some Democratic senators who said it favored business interests over public safety concerns. Kiel dismissed those concerns and said if a business complies with the state of emergency rules, it should have the same right to remain open.

"We had ABC package stores open because they were classified as essential, but people could not attend church services because they were deemed non-essential," Kiel said. "That was the height of ridiculousness."

Kiel's legislation received support from the Business Council of Alabama, and Kiel said he received no opposition to HB103 from any constituent organization.

"The foundation of this legislation was fairness. Whatever the governor or state health officer says the limit on number of people inside a building is, any business should be able to open up subject to those guidelines," Kiel said.

One interesting addition to Kiel's bill provides that the Alabama State House may not be closed to the public while the Legislature is in session, even in a state of emergency.

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

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Free COVID-19 vaccination clinic set for Friday, April 23

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A COVID-19 vaccination clinic set for April 23, 2021, will allow advance appointments as well as walk-ins to receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

New Freedom Christian Fellowship is partnering with Russellville Hospital, Helen Keller Hospital and Red Bay Hospital to sponsor the clinic on Friday, April 23, from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., at the A.W. Todd Centre in downtown Russellville.

Appointments may be made by visiting www.helenkeller.com. A link will direct you to the Helen Keller Hospital Facebook page where a second link will allow you to schedule a time to receive the vaccine.

Those attending the clinic will receive their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on April 23, with the second dose scheduled for the same time on May 14, 2021. Facial covering and social distancing will be required at the clinic.

New Freedom Pastor Mario McCulloch said there will be 500 vaccine doses available for each of the two days of the free clinic.

"A team of Helen Keller, Russellville and Red Bay Hospital employees will be there to administer the vaccines on an appointment or walk-in basis," McCulloch said. "We scheduled the clinic at the Todd Centre and encourage anyone wanting a COVID-19 vaccine to come. We're just trying to do our little part in our community."

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

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Letters to the editor

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Tai Chi Day celebration to take place on April 24

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

You may not know that Saturday, April 24, is World Tai Chi and Qigong Day, but there will be a local event organized by Anna Carol Porter to celebrate the occasion.

Porter, a holistic health practitioner at Holistic Harmony, will host the event outside the A.W. Todd Centre in downtown Russellville. Porter will lead an introduction to Qigong from 10-11 a.m. The event is free and local restaurant El Buen Sabor will offer 10% off coupons to everyone who attends the event.

According to Porter, Tai Chi and Qigong are health technologies evolved over several thousand years of research in China and now growing in popularity worldwide. They are used in hospitals, business, prisons, schools, and other institutions.

Tai Chi and Qigong are said to reduce anxiety, depression, chronic pain conditions. They boost the immune system, improve respiratory function, burn calories, dramatically improve balance, provide cardiovascular benefit, provide powerful stress management tools, and slow aspects of the

aging process, Porter said.

World Tai Chi and Qigong Day is celebrated globally in more than 80 nations. The event introduces people to Tai Chi and Qigong and helps people find local classes and how to maximize benefits from those classes.

Qigong is a system of coordinated body-posture and movement, breathing and meditation used for the purposes of health, spirituality and martial-arts training, according to Wikipedia.

For more information, visit Porter's Holistic Harmony Facebook page.

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Pilgrim's donation benefits SPAN students with Chromebook purchase

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A \$4,500 donation from Pilgrim's Russellville will allow students in the Franklin County Special Programming for Achievement Network (SPAN) to have Chromebooks they can take home to continue learning after hours.

Pilgrim's Complex Manager Kevin Touchstone presented the check to the Franklin County SPAN Advisory Board as part of the company's *Hometown Strong* program.

The *Hometown Strong* program is a commitment from the company to inject \$50 million into the communities it serves. That includes an investment of almost \$600,000 into the City of Russellville, with \$309,000 having been donated to construct a splash pad by Sloss Lake.

According to SPAN teacher Mindy Harris, the advisory board will purchase 15 Chromebooks for students. The SPAN program, which serves 12-15 students at any given time, works with at-risk youth who would benefit from additional support through education and counseling. The program has a lower student-teacher ratio and allows more individualized attention for these students.

The Chromebooks will enable students to work online away from SPAN to help accelerate the process of the students working up to their appropriate grade level.

Touchstone said Pilgrim's works to assist all students in their community, and programs like Franklin County SPAN are exactly what the *Hometown Strong* initiative was created for.

"Those kids need assistance more than anybody and we serve our community, not just one group or one school," Touchstone said. "And we want to be a good community partner to everybody.

"Technology is more essential in learning today than maybe anything else. It's becoming a key part of every school system," Touchstone added.

Harris expressed her appreciation to Pilgrim's and said the donation will have long-term benefits.

"We appreciate Pilgrim's and their support of our community, as well as the Franklin County SPAN program. These (Chromebooks) will be invaluable in helping our students to be successful by providing them with another way to learn and grow," Harris said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Pilgrim's Complex Manager Kevin Touchstone, center, presents a \$4,500 donation to the Franklin County SPAN Advisory Board. Pictured with Touchstone are SPAN teacher Mindy Harris and Advisory Board Treasurer Justin Green.

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

Fifth Thursday Food Giveaway - 2 p.m. April 29, 2021 - Russellville First United Methodist Church – downtown corner of Madison and Washington Ave. Groceries will given out while supplies last. All social distancing measures will be followed. Bring your ID and follow instructions given by staff.

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.

In preparation for mowing season and before June 1, 2021, please remove all old flowers from the graves in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery on Highway 724. Donations for upkeep are needed and may be mailed to: Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, 941 Highway 87, Russellville, Al., 35654.

Whether permitting, there will be "Preaching from the Porch" on Sunday, May 2, 2021, at 11 a.m., Homecoming Day at Cherry Hill Baptist Church, Hwy. 244, Russellville. There will be NO meal. In case of rain, there will be no services.

You are invited to Revival Services at Charity Chapel, 2955 Frankfort Road in Tuscumbia, from April 29-May 1. Services begin at 7 p.m., nightly. Revival will feature Bro. Rayburn Haynie as Speaker. Everyone is welcome.

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Stutts' bill would create Alabama Teacher Initiative scholarships

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

With Alabama facing a teacher shortage, especially in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and special education, Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) has introduced legislation to provide scholarships for students who pursue those teacher preparation programs and agree to teach in rural areas after graduation.

SB225 would establish the Alabama Teacher Initiative and would provide scholarships for education majors who are enrolled in and attending a public two-year or four-year college in Alabama.

To be eligible for the scholarship, the student would contract with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) to teach for at least five years after certification in rural areas of Alabama with the greatest need for STEM and special education teachers.

The bill was referred last week to the Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee and would be part of the education budget if passed. Stutts said there are still details to be worked out with the legislature and it may not advance to a vote of the legislature until the 2022 session.

Since 2010, enrollment in collegiate teacher education programs has declined more than 40 percent. In Franklin County, Superintendent Greg Hamilton has expressed concerns about fewer applicants for teaching jobs the last several years.

"I believe this legislation would be a good way to encourage students to pursue a career in education by helping them afford their education and see that earning that degree is possible," Hamilton said. "We have significant

shortages in the STEM and special education areas, so I support this plan to help increase those numbers."

SB225 would provide 200 scholarships per year that would be phased in with 50 scholarships available the first year. Scholarship recipients would be selected by ACHE and the chief academic officer of each participating college, with no more than 200 active scholarships at one time.

The scholarships would be available for up to four years per student and would not apply to a fifth year of college.

Stutts said he wants students to be eligible for the scholarships their freshman year so that they can attend a junior college if they choose, but he said ACHE officials want to delay the scholarships until students' junior years.

"My vision is I want something in place where a high school guidance counselor in any rural area of Alabama can tell a kid who thinks he or she can't afford to go to college, there is scholarship money available through the state if you major in math, science or special education and commit to teaching at least five years in a rural school system," Stutts said.

"They could apply for the scholarships their senior year of high school. Hopefully, they get the vision they can go to college, come back home and impact students right in their own school district," he added.

SB225 would be funded by a portion of gaming revenue that will be used for educational purposes if gaming legislation is approved in Alabama, Stutts said.

"That bill refers to monies to be used for educational purposes in high need areas of Alabama, which would include rural areas," Stutts said. "There are still details to be worked out in this bill as to how the scholarship program would be managed, but I'm hopeful it can be approved by next year."

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



Sherye Price,
*Executive Director,
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'HOMELESSNESS,' from page 1

Franklin County residents are willing to help their homeless but they're just not sure where to go. They have no idea how to help, where to help, what to give or where to donate money," she added.

That's where the Russellville Coalition comes in—to provide an outlet to help the homeless.

"We're more like a hub to facilitate where these people need to go, and provide them assistance and support to start the process of coming out of the situation where they currently are," Green said.

Russellville Mayor David Grissom was among those who didn't realize the extent of the homeless problem in his community.

"It's a hidden reality. The (Russellville Coalition) works with them as far as food, clothing, housing, just to mention a few, all with the goal of helping them become self-sufficient," Grissom said.

"It was pretty eye-opening to me to see not only the number of folks we have who face homelessness, but also to see the work Betsy and her group is doing to help these people. It's a work in progress, but I'm impressed with what they have done to help other people," he added.

The Russellville Coalition does not give money directly to anyone. Instead, its mission is to help transition people from being homeless to becoming a responsible, self-sufficient member of their community, regardless of where that may be. Green estimates there are between 25-30 homeless living in Russellville.

But not all of them are ready or willing to begin that transition.

With those cases, Green said she prayed extensively asking God how to reach them. Sometimes, they aren't ready to commit to that transition. But Green doesn't give up on them even if they don't want to start that journey.

"The Lord said you just need to keep them alive another day. Tomorrow might be the day they make up their mind to change their lives," Green said. "That's when we started giving out survival packs. We give out 25-30 of them each year."

Those backpacks contain supplies and grocery items that will help them get through another day. And they're filled with items from local businesses who care about these people. It's a joint effort of the Russellville community that cares about the fact that people are living in the woods and they want to help," she added.

In a year and a half, the Russellville Coalition has laid the groundwork for several success stories. Lives are being turned around. People who were at the low points of their lives are once again becoming self-sufficient. But it's not a fast-track process. It takes time, support, both moral support and support through donations, and most of all, it takes patience and a refusal to judge another.

The hurdles many homeless must clear are the

same obstacles that contributed to their current plight. Substance or alcohol addiction. Family domestic situations. Mental health issues. Criminal activity. Many of the people helped by the Russellville Coalition have no family to turn to as a support base. Those bridges were burned long ago.

"That's our whole purpose—to provide the tools and resources to come out of the woods, but they've got to do the work," Green said. "The community comes together to provide what's needed to help them, but ultimately, it's their choice," Green said.

Today, the Russellville Coalition is at a crossroads. To continue meeting their mission, the outreach must grow. Monetary donations are needed for that to happen.

A building is needed to store donated items. And Green has a vision of that building providing much more than storage.

"They have nowhere to bathe. I see a layout of what we are going to have as far as a building, with a free bath house, several cubicles with beds, dressers and closets to house those we are transitioning," Green said. "This will not be a shelter. It will be transitional housing to temporarily provide the life tools they need.

"We want a community room that will be open for any local group to use, whether that be Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, church services or counseling. And we'll have a small kitchen and our offices there, with a security booth and one large storage area on one end of the building," she added.

And Green has no shortage of confidence this vision will become a reality.

"It's going to happen in our community, and it won't cost us a dime. The Lord will provide. 100 percent of our donations go back into the ministry," Green said. "The Lord has laid this upon my heart and the response from our community has been phenomenal.

"We want to help those who are ready to help themselves. We're not supposed to do what we do as Christians because of the results. We're just supposed to be obedient to God, whatever He called you to do. One smile or one pat on the back could change somebody's life. It might take days or years. You don't do it because of what you see happening right in front of you or you'd never do it. There is a need in this community and we're trying to meet it as best we can," she added.

To become involved in the Russellville Coalition, call 256-815-5249. Donations, payable to the Russellville Coalition, may be mailed to P.O. Box 415, Russellville, Al., 35653. For more information about the Russellville Coalition, email free2praiseministries@yahoo.com.

Once the Russellville Coalition has a building to call its own, the outreach will need donations of

beds, furniture, and travel size toiletries and hygiene items. Green hopes that will happen in the near future.

Since 2019, the Russellville Coalition has helped at least six people get off the street into group or independent housing. There are certainly more success stories, but as Green explains, you don't always see those.

"We met a man from Florida who was driving through Russellville when his car broke down. He had no family to help him financially and he didn't have the money for repairs," Green said.

"He was pretty much stranded. He had only one family member in Florida and there was nothing or no one for him there. There were no drugs involved in his life, no warrants, no mental or physical health issues. I saw him walking one day, asked him if he needed some help and gave him some free meal tickets. That's how we started our progression with him. With the support of several agencies and people working together, we got him a job at Pilgrim's, a fully-furnished apartment and through the CHANCE program he received up to \$300 of groceries each month. And all I did is make some phone calls," she added.

On rare occasions, Green gets to see a success story unfold all the way.

"I heard about a drug-addicted young woman living in the woods in Russellville. The Lord put her on my heart. I looked for her but couldn't find her," Green said. "These people move constantly. I knew He was calling me to help her get off the street and sponsor her if she was willing to do the work.

"I looked for her over a year. Then one rainy day I backed out of my driveway and saw someone walking down the road. I offered this woman a ride. She was drenched to the bone. I never pick people up but I did this time. As we talked, I came to find out this was the exact woman we'd been praying about for a year, and here she was at my doorstep," Green added.

With the Russellville Coalition's support, the woman completed her legal obligations, graduated from a substance abuse facility where she now serves as a counselor and she's working toward earning her degree.

"She's been drug-free more than a year and is now in the process of working with Community Action Agency to find housing in the Shoals area. So sometimes we do get to see the fruit," she added.

Green and her coalition hold themselves accountable to a lot of people in and around Franklin County, including pastors, mentors, businesses and community agencies. They have also partnered with the Homeless Care Council of Northwest Alabama.

"We can't do this by ourselves. It takes a village," Green said.

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'RESOLUTION,' from page 1

counties to approve similar resolutions and wanted Franklin County to be one of the first to do so.

"The right to keep or bear arms is a fundamental right that we support. But this resolution is not to offer support to bear arms to persons who have been convicted of felony crimes or who are prohibited from possessing firearms under federal law," Baldwin said.

The resolution also states that is not intended to prohibit or affect the prosecution of any crime for which the use of, or possession of, a firearm is an aggravating factor or enhancement to an otherwise independent crime.

Second Amendment rights are protected by the Constitution and not subject to infringement by state or local governments, so the resolution is somewhat symbolic in nature. But Baldwin hopes as more counties approve similar resolutions, the Alabama Legislature will take notice and enact legislation at the state level similar to the language of the county resolutions.

In other agenda items at its April 19 meeting, the commission:

—approved Edgar Bahena as a Property Appraiser in the Franklin County Revenue Commissioner's Office, effective March 29, 2021, and then approved Bahena's resignation effective April 23, 2021.

—accepted the resignation of Hunter Godsey as a Corrections Officer/Dispatcher in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and the resignation of Jonathan Copeland as a Deputy. Commissioners approved advertising for vacancies for both positions.

—approved letting out bids for a new control system and camera system in the Franklin County Jail. The current systems were rendered inoperative after lightning damage last month.

—approved Trey Willingham and Mickey Montgomery as permanent employees for the Franklin County Highway Department.

—accepted the low quote of 2.15 percent from Community Spirit Bank on a \$315,000 loan for a new paver, John Deere tractor and two bushhogs.

—opened an account at First Metro Bank for federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds expected to be received next month.

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Golden Tigers shut out Loretto for 17th straight win

Staff reports

The last time Russellville won as many as 17 games in a row, the season ended in historic fashion.

This Golden Tiger squad is hoping to see history repeat itself.

Senior ace Rowe Gallagher and two relievers combined on a four-hitter Thursday night as Russellville blanked Loretto (TN) 5-0 for its 17th straight win. The streak, which would end the following night with a 5-2 loss at Helena, was the longest by any Golden Tiger team since the 2015 squad won its final 21 games en route to claiming the first state championship in program history.

Thursday's victory over Loretto was Russellville's fifth shutout among those 17 consecutive wins. The Golden Tigers (31-5) held nine other opponents to just one run during the streak and gave up a total of only 20 runs in the 17 games.

Gallagher (8-0) matched junior Emitt Green for the team lead with his eighth win on Thursday, holding Loretto to just two hits in four innings. He struck out three and walked one, giving him 48 K's and only four walks on the season to go along with a 0.90 ERA in 39 innings.

Russellville broke up a scoreless tie in the bottom of the third when Banks Langston doubled to left, moved to third on a sac bunt by Eli Gipson and then came home on an RBI single by Jackson Lindsey. Loretto mounted its only serious threat against Gallagher in the top of the fourth, getting a two-out double followed by a walk, but the hard-throwing righthander struck out Jackson Traglia to keep it a 1-0 game.

Reliever Reed Hill worked a scoreless top of the fifth, stranding a pair of runners, and the Golden Tigers gave themselves some breathing room with four runs in the bottom half. Gipson led off with a double to left and scored on an RBI single by Nick Smith. A walk to Canyon Pace and an infield hit by Ethan Oliver loaded the bases, and Cole Barnett delivered a two-run single to right to make it 4-0. One out later, Casen Heaps capped off the inning with another RBI single.

Oliver pitched two hitless innings to close out the win, striking out three and walking two. He now has 33 strikeouts in 29.1 innings on the season, making him one of nine Russellville pitchers with more strikeouts than innings pitched on the year. The others are Green (55 K's in 48.1 innings), Gallagher (48 K's in 39 innings), Gordon White (37 K's in 33.2 innings), Hill (39 K's in 26 innings), Samuel Pace (36 K's in 27.1 innings), Langston (25 K's in 24 innings), Casen Heaps (10 K's in 7.2 innings) and Brayden Heaps (7 K's in 4.2 innings).

Lindsey finished Thursday's game 2-for-4 with an RBI, recording his team-leading 11th multi-hit game of the season. The senior first baseman and UAH signee also leads the team in hits (40), home

See 'GOLDEN TIGERS,' page 14

A little first year magic

In their first full season of eligibility, the Tharptown boys soccer team scored a win on the road against J.B. Pennington High School and with that win, they secured the runner-up spot in the class 1A-3A in region 7.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Wildcats will take on Mars Hill in the first round of the 1A-3A AHSAA soccer playoffs on April 26th.

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

THARPTOWN - For most programs going into their inaugural season, whether it be basketball, football, soccer or any other sport, the expectations within the coaching staff is almost always low. Just get to the end of the season and hopefully begin the development process and build for a playoff berth five years down the line.

That certainly wasn't the mindset within the Tharptown boys soccer program going into their first full season.

If you ask head coach Scott Vance, he'll tell you just what the program was intending to do from day one. And his answer boils down to a rather simple one.

Win and develop along the way.

"Before the season we had extremely high expectations because we knew that our guys were good and that we had some really talented players. We just needed to work with them," Vance

said. "Seeing what we saw last year in those three games we played, we knew the talent we had, they just needed to play as a team and get some games under their belt and we knew we would have something special."

But before the Wildcats could begin to attempt to chase down any kind of playoff berth, they were forced to encounter some untimely setbacks thanks to COVID-19 and mother nature.

Just two days before their first match of the season, both Vance and assistant coach Carlos Perez were forced to go into quarantine for two weeks due to exposure to the virus, leaving the team without two of its three coaches outside of Dixie Chavez.

To make matters worse for the Wildcats during those two weeks, rain forced more matches to be cancelled or postponed, leaving the team without any opportunity to get some much-needed in-game development after playing only three official matches last year.

See 'MAGIC,' page 13

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Bobcats run win streak to nine with doubleheader sweep

Staff reports

Phil Campbell has its second nine-game win streak of the season after piling up 30 runs and 26 hits in a doubleheader sweep of Dora on Saturday.

The Bobcats (28-3) got home runs from Bryant Anthony and Austen Baker in a 10-run seventh inning in game one, cruising to a 19-2 win behind a complete-game effort from Luke Barnwell. Mason Swinney homered to spark a seven-run outburst in the third inning of game two, helping senior pitcher Brett Saint earn his 10th career win in an 11-1 rout.

Dating back to last season, Phil Campbell has now won 38 of its last 41 games overall. Of the Bobcats' 28 wins on the year, 19 have come by a margin of at least 10 runs. They have out-scored their opponents this season 364 runs to 60.

Phil Campbell wasted no time in taking control of Saturday's opener, scoring five runs in the top of the first. Barnwell and Swinney walked, and both came home on Baker's 15th double of the season to make it 2-0. Baker scored when John Miller Lawson reached on an error, and Bryant Hyde had an RBI single. Trey Leindecker walked and scored on a double by Anthony to cap the inning and make it 5-0.

The Bobcats added a run in the second when Swinney walked, stole second, took third on a fly-out by Baker and then scored on a passed ball.

Elijah Pruitt homered off Barnwell in the bottom of the second to get Dora on the board, but Phil Campbell answered with a three-run fourth highlighted by RBI singles from Baker and Hyde.

Leading 9-2 in the top of the seventh, the Bobcats poured on 10 more runs. Anthony got things started with a two-run homer, his second of the season, and Barnwell followed with a double. Swinney drove him in with a single, and Baker blasted a 2-2 pitch over the fence in left for his seventh home run of the season and 10th of his varsity career.

Phil Campbell tacked on five more runs before the inning was done, getting a two-run double from Kyle Pace to cap it off and open up a 19-2 lead.

That was more than enough support for Barnwell, who needed just 87

See 'BOBCATS,' page 15



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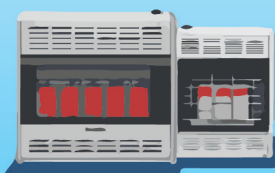
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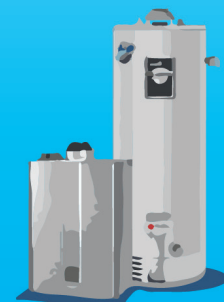
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'MAGIC,' from page 11

"We didn't really get into a full swing where we were able to play games consistently until the end of February and beginning of March. And even then we had some games cancelled due to weather. So early on it was certainly a struggle," Vance said. "But we finally were able to get into a stride and get some games played. And as we were able to play more and more games, our guys started to develop really well and realized what it was going to take to compete and win."

With wins over larger schools on their resumé such as Lawrence County (5A) and Muscle Shoals (6A), Tharptown currently sits at 9-9 on the season with a 7-2 record in class 1A-3A region 7. And with a win over J.B. Pennington last Friday by a 3-1 final, the Wildcats punched their first-ever ticket to the AHSAA soccer playoffs as the region runner-up.

"Last year we weren't able to compete for titles or anything so we've never been in an area before or anything like that. It was a learning experience for everybody," Vance said. "Learning the competitive nature that comes with playing soccer and learning what we needed to learn to get to where we needed to go."

Defense has been one of the go-to keys for the Wildcats this season as they have done a great job of keeping their opponents off the scoreboard. In five of their wins this season, the Wildcats have held their opponents to one goal or less, including three shutouts with a resounding 10-0 victory over region opponent East Lawrence.

That defense, which is anchored by the team's two seniors, Winston Nolen and Jonny Jeronimo along with Angel Ortiz, combined with an offensive threat in Ismael Perez, is what the Wildcats are hoping will lead to a deep playoff push in the coming weeks.

"Our guys work hard, they do what we ask of them and they're not afraid to go up against a challenge. We've played Russellville, Mars Hill, and Muscle Shoals, which are some really good teams, and we've been toe-to-toe with them," Vance said. "And we told our guys that playing these bigger schools with that kind of talent, it's only going to make us better and help us develop. We're a first year program going up against these elite programs that have been around and the competition that we've seen on the field this year has done a ton of good for our development."

One thing that this season has brought along with it that stands out to Vance most of all, is the fact that the head coach is seeing more and more students getting involved and along with it, taking some pride in their school.

"With the soccer program, I've got kids on my team that have never before done anything like clubs or anything else in this school but they come out and play soccer. They're out there taking pride in their school and participating and that's one of the reasons that I'm so thankful that we took that leap and started this program," Vance said. "Because it opens the door for a lot of kids that otherwise wouldn't have taken part in something. Now I feel like they feel like they're a part of this school and integral part of Tharptown High School. And I think that's really important."



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'GOLDEN TIGERS,' from page 11

runs (four), extra-base hits (16), RBIs (31) and runs scored (32). Heaps went 2-for-3 with an RBI, recording his second straight multi-hit game. Barnett was 1-for-2 with two RBIs, and Langston and Oliver each went 1-for-3 with a run. Gipson was 1-for-2 with a run, and Smith's RBI single in the fifth extended his hit streak to nine games.

Green, who had allowed only three earned runs all season in 46.1 innings, started Friday's game at Helena and suffered his first loss of the year. The Huskies (23-7) used a leadoff double, two singles and a double-steal to score twice off Green (8-1) in the bottom of the first. He worked around a one-out double in the second but left the game after the first four batters in the bottom of the third all reached base.

Green allowed five earned runs on seven hits in two innings, striking out one and walking one. His season ERA rose from an otherworldly 0.45 to a merely stellar 1.16.

Trailing 5-0, Russellville got on the board in the top of the fourth when Hill doubled and scored on an RBI single by Canyon Pace. Smith added a solo home run (his third of the season) in the top of the sixth, extending his hit streak to 10 games. Lindsey went 1-for-3 with a double, his team-leading ninth of the season.

Samuel Pace pitched three scoreless innings in relief, holding Helena to just one hit. He struck out two and walked one. Hill pitched the sixth inning and did not allow a hit, striking out one and walking one.

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'BOBCATS,' from page 12

itches (58 of which were strikes) to toss his third complete game of the season. The senior righthander allowed two earned runs on five hits, striking out six and walking two.

Barnwell improved to 6-1 on the season with a 1.39 ERA and an impressive strike rate of 68 percent. He is now 11-2 with five complete games in his varsity career.

Swinney extended his hit streak to 10 games with his seventh-inning single, finishing 1-for-2 with three walks and four runs scored. Baker went 4-for-5 with five RBIs and three runs scored. His double and home run gave him a team-high 22 extra-base hits on the season, one more than Swinney.

Anthony recorded his 10th multi-hit game of the year, going 2-for-5 with three RBIs and two runs scored. Levi Crittenden was 3-for-4 with a double and two runs, and Hyde went 3-for-5 with two RBIs and two runs scored. Barnwell was 1-for-4 with a double and two runs, and Lawson and Ridge Raper each had a hit and a run scored.

Saint (2-0) struggled with his command a bit in game two but overcame four walks and a hit batter to earn the win, improving to 10-3 in his varsity career. He held Dora to three hits and one earned run in four innings before turning things over to Baker, who struck out four of the six batters he faced in two perfect innings of relief.


The Bobcats trailed 1-0 until Swinney tied the game with his fifth home run of the year in the top of the third. Phil Campbell then loaded the bases on a hit batter, a single by Raper and a walk to Hyde. Two runs scored when Leindecker reached on an error, and another came home on a wild pitch. Barnwell delivered a two-run single, and courtesy runner Sage Raper scored the final run of the inning on a passed ball to make it 7-1.

The Bobcats padded their lead in the top of the fifth, getting a double from Anthony, a hit batter, two errors and an RBI single from Raper to score three times and make it 10-1. Leindecker walked in the top of the sixth and eventually came home on a sac fly by Barnwell to finish off the scoring.

Raper was 3-for-4 in game two with a double, an RBI and a run, recording multiple hits for the sixth time in his last eight games. Crittenden went 2-for-3 with a run and finished the doubleheader with five hits in seven at bats.

Barnwell was 1-for-2 in game two with three RBIs, and Swinney's home run extended his hit streak to 11 straight games. Anthony was 1-for-2 with a double, his ninth of the season, and Lawson was 1-for-4. Leindecker and Sage Raper each scored two runs.

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As the Bobcats were rolling right along to their ninth-straight win, Swinney made key contributions to that win streak both on the mound and at the plate for the Bobcats. Across four games, Swinney would go 6-12 (.500) at the plate with ten runs, seven RBI, three home runs and a double to go along with seven walks. On the mound, Swinney was just as dominant. Against Vinemont, the junior right-hander threw six innings of one-run ball with 11 strikeouts and two walks.





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