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Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake set for Sunday

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It's on!
While the Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake will have a different look this year, it's a minor miracle that Russellville City Councilman Gary Cummings was able to put it together.

The annual event is in its 11th year (after a COVID-19 related cancellation in 2020). This year, July 4th falls on a Sunday, so the event will start around 5 p.m., with live music.

Cummings, who brings together the event each year for the city, said there will be four musical acts, including Purpose, the Kerry Gilbert Band, Tremayne and the New Rewind.

With the uncertainty of fireworks

availability, Cummings said it was difficult to book a headliner when the event wasn't guaranteed to take place this year.

So the decision was made to go forward with music from the talented pool of local entertainers.

The city paid half of the cost for the annual fireworks shows last year before the event was canceled as a result of COVID-19. That payment carried over to this year, and after an extensive search, Alabama Pyrotechnics was able to secure the fireworks show in Russellville.

"As crazy as everything has been this year, we have not been able to land a headliner," Cummings said. "Up until Thursday, we didn't know if we would have fireworks. We do have them now."

See 'JAM,' page 5

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Frost becoming Tik Tok, social media sensation

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

To borrow from Christopher Walken, TikTok users 'got a fever, and the only prescription is more David Frost.'

Frost, an East Franklin resident, created his TikTok account a few months ago and he's seen his number of followers soar.

TikTok is a social media app dedicated to short videos created by users. Most videos are between 15-60 seconds and are for entertainment purposes. A growing number of videos are for informational purposes, though. TikTok averages more than 689 million monthly active users, and an eye-popping number of them have liked and followed

Frost. The 49-year-old Frost has built quite a following on the popular social media platform, with almost 114,000 followers, and his videos have generated more than 2.2 million likes.

Frost plays the role of a (sometimes) foul-mouthed, loud, moonshine-from-a-mason-jar-swiggling character clad in overalls and an old leather hat. His video where he hides his moonshine stash in quicksand has more than 5.2 million views. You'll be guaranteed to laugh as you watch it. Just beware of the risqué joke at the end of the video.

He's received more than 5.1 million views on his video where he demonstrates that a snake won't bite him

See 'FROST,' page 3

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Ellis Henry "EH" Davis, 85, of Russellville, passed away on Tuesday, June 22nd. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.



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'FROST,' from page 1

since he's guzzling moonshine.

As for the real Frost, he's nothing like his TikTok character.

"I'm really nothing like him. I just do him a lot and it gets a lot of views. It's a way to have some fun," Frost said.

With 5.2 million views of his video, though, Frost has some opportunity to capitalize on his new-found fame through merchandise and/or reaching the level of followers where he can be paid for each view.

It's not all silliness and fun and games for Frost. He recently recorded a song at Wishbone Studios in Muscle Shoals. Frost's song is called *Highway 243*, and it's a personal story about how much his hometown means to Frost.

"I was working in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and was seeing this girl back home," Frost said. "It hit me how much I wanted to go home, and when I come down Highway 243, that's the last step before I see her."

Highway 243, which was recorded with an all-star cast featuring Shenandoah's Mike McGuire, songwriter Mark Narmore on bass and singer/songwriter Billy Lawson, is now playing on Russellville's WGOL-FM 100.7 and AM-920.

The song features Churntown, Frost's 'hometown,' and references the intersection of 243 and Highway 79, where Frost's nephew died in a motor vehicle accident.

It's not Frost's first songwriting venture, though. After the Columbine High School mass shooting in 1999, he penned a song called *Cassie Said Yes*, inspired by Cassie Bernall's response when her classmate asked her if she believed in God. Bernall said 'yes,' and the shooter fired a fatal shot into her head. The song was recorded by Earl 'Peanutt' Montgomery, Frost said.

Most times when you see Frost, his good friend Doug Bennett will be close by. You might not see Bennett on Frost's TikTok videos, but rest assured he's there.

You can also follow him on Facebook. To follow Frost on TikTok, search "@davidfrost2461."

It's fast and easy to add him as a follow. Just ask the other 114,000 folks who've done it...



COURTESY PHOTO

David Frost, left, and Doug Kennedy at Wishbone Studios in Muscle Shoals.

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

Miranda Decker, M.D.

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THE CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE

Murray completes 16-hour WreckMaster certification course

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When he or one of his employees responds to a request for a wrecker service, Jeff Murray knows the safety of his employees and everyone else at the scene are paramount.

And Murray's recent completion of a WreckMaster certification course will help him and the employees of M&N Towing Service achieve that goal.

Murray completed the 16-hour course in heavy truck recovery, level 6/7. Although Murray's experience in the towing industry spans more than 23 years, it's never too late to learn, he explained.

"After taking the course I found new, safer ways to hook up and rig up and ways to more safely manage the whole accident scene," Murray said. "The course provided safer ways to run our operation and keep everyone on the scene safe, from first responders to bystanders."

Murray traveled to Birmingham for the two-day, eight hours a day certification course. The Alabama Towing Association sponsors the WreckMaster training courses and the association recommends all tow operators complete them.

Murray said when the next round of courses begin, he will send all of his employees to receive the same training.

Murray purchased a 50-ton wrecker a few years ago that allows M&N to haul large, heavy-duty trucks.

Murray, who worked for Bobby Taylor for five years, purchased the business from Taylor in 2003 and changed the name to M&N Towing Service. M&N Towing is available 24 hours a day by calling 256-332-7279.



COURTESY PHOTO

Murray with his WreckMaster certificate.

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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Brady Petree

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

John Pilati

Content Contributors

John Pilati, Brady Petree, Christian Medina, Ree Shannon, Doug Green, Rebecca Thomason, Sheryl Hamilton, Ashley Cummins, Gail Motes

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

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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'JAM,' from page 1

"People count on this event every year and we really wanted to give this to the residents of our city," Cummings added.

In addition to the City of Russellville, the Jam on Sloss Lake is sponsored by the Russellville Electric Board, the Russellville Gas Board and the Russellville Water and Sewer Board.

"We appreciate all three boards and I assure you there's no way we could do this without their support each year," Cummings said.

City officials are hopeful the Russellville Splash Pad will be ready by July 4, 2021. If so, that will be the first day it will be open, Cummings said. Heavy rainfall has slowed the project but officials remain optimistic the July 4 opening will be able to take place.

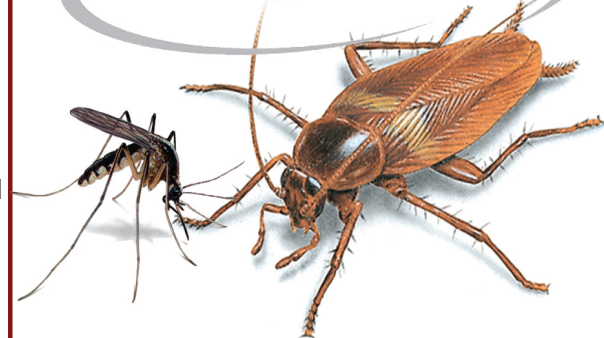
There will be food vendors at the Jam on Sloss Lake, along with great music and the big fireworks show (expected to begin around 9:45 p.m.).

Purpose will perform from 5-5:55 p.m., followed by KGB from 6:10-7:05, Tremayne from 7:20-8:15 and Rewind from 8:30-9:25.

There is no admission to the event.

One note on this year's Jam on Sloss Lake: The Cotton Flats Cruisers will not have their Car Show this year. It will return in 2022.

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The Welch reunion will be the 10th of July (second Saturday) at the Hee Haw Building. Starting at 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Mountain Valley Hee Haw, 5504 Hwy. 79, Phil Campbell, AL 35581. This is the address of Williams' mom next door to the Hee Haw. Each family will bring their favorite meat for sandwiches and bread and things you like on them. Please bring chips, tomatoes, drinks, desserts etc. for your own family. We will have lettuce, mayo, ketchup and mustard. Call Nancy at (256)-627-7635 for more information. All Welch's and Welch-related are invited to come!

Pleasant Ridge Missionary Baptist Church, 1570 Hwy. 48, Russellville, will resume full-time services on Sunday, July 11. Sunday School at 10 a.m., Worship 11 a.m., Evening Service 6 p.m., Wednesday Night Service 6:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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

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An application and job description(s) may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

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Congratulations

CLASS OF 2021!

Phil Campbell High School Valedictorian: Jonah Fisher

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*



**Jonah Fisher
PCHS Class of 2021 Valedictorian**

When you speak with Phil Campbell High School valedictorian Jonah Fisher, you quickly realize he's an articulate, respectful young man who enjoys talking about most subjects, with one exception—himself.

The humble Fisher, the son of Ben and Tina Fisher, finished at the top of the 2021 senior class of 74 Phil Campbell graduates. But you won't find him boasting about his academic accomplishments, although they are many.

He will soon start classes at Northwest-Shoals Community College, with plans to transfer to the University of Alabama to earn a degree in electrical engineering.

"My mom says I'm a man of few words," Fisher said.

In today's braggadocious world, though, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Fisher's education at NW-SCC will be paid for through a NW-SCC Valedictorian Scholarship. He also received scholarships from the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, Franklin Electric Cooperative and a Phil Campbell Alumni scholarship.

Fisher was part of the Bobcat basketball program since he started at PCHS in the seventh grade. He played baseball through his junior year and was an active member of the National Honor Society, Junior Civitan, Students Against Destructive Decisions and ACCESS Club.

Fisher said he set a goal for himself to finish as valedictorian but it never turned into a competitive situation with other students, though. And to hear from one of his teachers and coaches, it might not have been much of a competition anyway.

"Jonah is a great kid," said Phil Campbell teacher and coach Brett Thomas. "In the classroom, in sports and in his life, he's the kind of kid you want. In basketball, you could always count

on him doing the right thing, trying his hardest with no shortcuts.

"He was a leader out there who never boasted and never wanted individual accolades. He just wanted to better his team. It was the same way in the classroom. Jonah made straight 100s but you'd never know it. He just did what he was supposed to and was very successful at it," Thomas added.

Thomas was among the five faculty members Fisher said he would always remember for the positive impact they had on him during high school. Thomas was Fisher's basketball coach for four years, from seventh through tenth grade.

Fisher thanked Susan Holt, his English teacher, not only for her classroom instruction but for helping his class have a senior play and prom, PCHS Principal Darit Riddle, who remained supportive and helpful to make the Class of 2021 experience a memorable senior year, and his math teacher, LeeAnn Moore and the PCHS Librarian, Joslyn Garrison.

Fisher said another special part of high school was the unity of his class even as they navigated through a health pandemic.

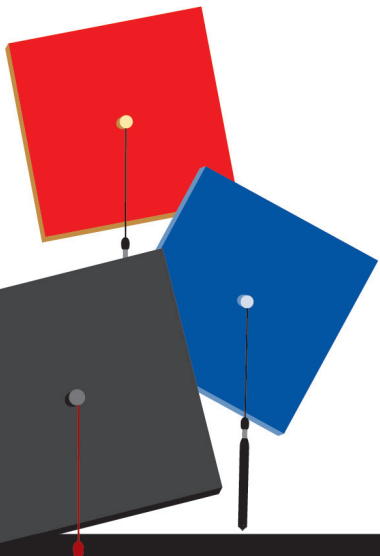
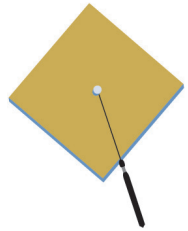
"Our senior year turned out better than expected. I wasn't sure at one time we'd even have a senior year. I thought we might go a few weeks then they'd say we have to go remote or all go home," Fisher said.

"Everyone in our class was part of a close group who cared about each other and that made it more pleasant to be in school having those bonds of friendship."

Fisher said his academic success comes "a little easier" than it does for most students, but he attributes his work ethic to why he did so well.

As for Fisher's advice to the incoming freshman class at Phil Campbell High School, it's short and sweet, just as you might expect.

"I'd tell them to enjoy it. High school goes by fast so spent time with those close friends and take every opportunity to enjoy it," Fisher said.



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Renfrow takes over as Vina head baseball coach

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

VINA - Cody Renfrow knows Vina baseball like the back of his hand.

The 2013 Vina graduate was a key contributor for the Red Devil program in the early 2010's and has kept up with the program through the years.

And following a county board meeting to confirm his hiring, he'll now have a chance to lead the very same program in which he called home during his high school days as he will officially take over as the head baseball coach for Vina High School.

According to Renfrow, following a meeting with Vina principal Brent Gillespie, it didn't take long for him to know which way his decision would go.

"I didn't know coach Hand was leaving Vina until really late in the process. And then one day I got a call asking me to meet with Mr. Gillespie," Renfrow said. "So we sat down and talked and at the end of the interview he just offered me the job and I accepted it on the spot because it's such a special opportunity for me to be able to do this."

Having made the playoffs early on in his Red Devil career, Renfrow played a vital role during a special period in Vina baseball's history which included multiple playoff berths.

Getting the program back to those peaks is something that Renfrow is hoping to make happen sooner rather than later.

"Vina baseball has always been very special to me and I've always taken a lot of pride in the program. Growing up I had so many special memories there," Renfrow said. "We won our area my freshman year and we made the playoffs three times so those are the memories that I remember from my days and I look forward to the challenge of bringing the program back to that level of competitiveness."

See 'RENFROW,' page 14

Taming the Ocoee River

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

On an early June morning in Benton, Tennessee, media members and officials from across the southeast convened at the Tennessee Valley Authority dam on the Ocoee River, for a day of fun, thrill-seeking and nature observing.

Extending an invite to media members of prominent officials alike, TVA showcased its famous whitewater rafting course by allowing those invited to attempt to tame the Ocoee River rapids.

The *Franklin Free Press* was fortunate to have been extended an invite to the media day and over nearly two and a half hours of rafting over class III rapids and ice cold water, the Ocoee River was tamed... for the most part at least.

Once you've strapped in to your helmet and life jacket and taken the instruction course from your guide, in which you're informed that you will have to be able to move quickly down inside the raft, paddle forward and backwards and other commands, you're then whisked away, carrying your raft that you will call home for the next two hours to the river put-in where your journey begins.

With four people loaded into our raft, including *Franklin Free Press* Publisher John Pilati and yours truly alongside Stacy Mandru and Hayden Zills, we were paired with Holly, our guide, who was sporting an American Flag unitard that was as bright as her personality.

Holly told us that she had once spent almost a month in the Grand Canyon rafting and hiking all on



COURTESY PHOTO

The middle part of the Ocoee River rafting experience stretches over five miles and crosses multiple class III rapids along the way.

her own - comforting words to those of us who were a tad bit unsure of what we were getting ourselves into.

Immediately you're greeted by rapid after rapid as the Ocoee twists and turns and does its best to turn the raft that you're holding onto for dear life inside out.

But with Holly at the helm knowing each nook, rock and rapid from the starting point to the finish line, those initial uneasy feelings quickly dissipate.

The Ocoee has two different courses for those looking to dip their toes into the whitewater rafting experience with the middle part of the Ocoee serving as the primary course and the one we took. The other course, which one tour guide described as "like the middle part but on steroids", served as the site of the whitewater rafting competition in the 1996 Olympic Games that were hosted by Atlanta and is not for the faint of heart.

While the upper part of the river is home to some of the higher-intense rapids that you'll find around, the middle part of the Ocoee isn't exactly a pushover.

Rapids with the names of 'Hellhole', 'Table Saw' and 'Flipper' are as intense as they sound and are

See 'OCOE,' page 12

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'OCOEE,' from page 11

an adrenaline junkies dream as the river drops nearly 260 feet over the course of your journey.

Of course the entire five-mile journey isn't just rapids and adrenaline rushes. With plenty of calm straightaways and beautiful views, you're able to take in the amazing scenery and peacefulness that makes the Ocoee and the surrounding area such a top-tier destination.

For first-timers like Mandru, whitewater rafting may certainly seem like a challenge, and don't worry, you'll get a workout in. But with an experienced and teaching tour guide and a great crew alongside you, the Ocoee is an experience that you won't soon forget.

"Being able to go out on the water and getting that adrenaline rush that you get when you go down the rapids with the cold water splashing on you made the experience so much fun," Mandru said. "I would advise people to trust their tour guide above all else. When I first got out there on the water I was afraid of falling out or something like that but just listening to Holly's commands and instructions comforted me. She was the perfect tour guide for us to have for sure."

Even for those afraid to take on the challenge, once the rapids come to an end and they begin looking back on their journey, there's often one question stuck in their minds: when can I go back and do it again?

"I would love to go back. I've already started looking at when I might be able to make it back up there and hopefully do it again sometime soon," Mandru said. "Next time, I'm hoping John won't fall on me five times."

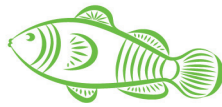


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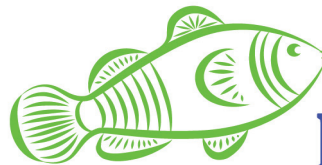
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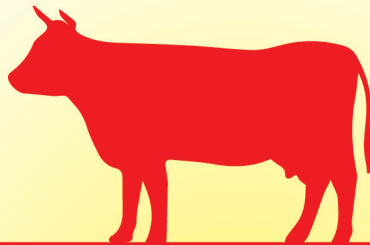
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'RENFROW,' from page 11

Taking over the program after Donovan Hand left Vina to take over the Red Bay baseball program, Renfrow will head into the job with a clear-cut idea as to what he envisions his team and program to look like once things get into full swing.

"I believe a positive work ethic and a positive attitude go a very long way. And if you do all the small things at a high level, it'll put you in the position to be competitive and win a lot of ball games," Renfrow said. "I look forward to instilling a positive work ethic in the kids to ensure that we can get back to that level that we need to be at."

Taking lessons he learned from coaches he played under during his high school days, Renfrow believes in making sure that each player knows what their role is and how they can contribute day in and day out.

And that mindset is something that Renfrow is hoping will pay dividends for years to come.

"Having a positive attitude and being coachable is huge. When I played under coach Hamilton during my time at Vina, he preached coachability and knowing what your role is as a player and how you can do anything to help your team win," Renfrow said.

Of course now his once head baseball coach Greg Hamilton is now superintendent of the Franklin County School system and things have come full circle with Hamilton, along with the board of education, approving Renfrow's hiring.

A lot of the mentality and aspects of coaching one might see from Renfrow over the next few years can be traced back to Hamilton and his coaching days at Vina. And Renfrow is hoping to follow in Hamilton's footsteps in returning Vina to what once was a prominent baseball program in Northwest Alabama.

"I'm very thankful for Mr. Hamilton and everything he's done for me. I learned a lot of valuable lessons while playing for him and many of those lessons I'm looking to instill in our program moving forward," Renfrow said.

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