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Vaccine clinic for Russellville City Schools set for July 28, 29

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It's not a mandate, but Russellville City Schools Superintendent Heath Grimes is 'strongly encouraging' all students and faculty to get their COVID-19 vaccine prior to August 11, 2021, the start of the new school year.

Grimes posted a message to parents and students on the RCS Facebook page warning about the number of COVID-19 cases being on the rise again. Franklin County is considered a 'high-risk' county and only around 28 percent of its residents have received their full vaccine regimen.

Children 12 and older are eligible for the vaccine.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alabama Department of Public Health recommend anyone ages 12 and up be vaccinated, and that is our strong recommendation as well," Grimes said.

At last week's board of education meeting, Grimes told board members administrators and faculty are preparing for much more of a 'normal' school year, but the recent spike in cases, particularly with the new Delta variant, could impact a return to a normal classroom setting.

"If we want a normal school year, including football and other extracurriculars, and to go to school without virtual days, we need our students and employees to be vaccinated,"

See 'CLINIC,' page 3

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RHS sophomore selected for prestigious cyber tech/engineering school

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Zaelyn Johnson is a young man of few words.

So when asked how he felt about being accepted into the prestigious Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering (ASCTE), Johnson needed only one word to respond.

Excited.

Johnson, who will be entering the tenth grade, was one of only 70 Alabama students who were invited to attend the ASCTE, located in Huntsville.

Founded in 2018, the tuition-free residential high school focuses on a

curriculum of cyber technology and engineering across all academic subjects.

The faculty, many of whom are professional field experts in their discipline, work with students to bridge the large gaps in the cyber workforce.

The ASCTE is the nation's only high school focused on the integration of cyber technology and engineering into all academic areas.

And Russellville will be well-represented at the ASCTE with Johnson, the son of Patricia Hill and Governor Johnson.

Johnson heard about the school from his grandmother, Florence

See 'SCHOOL,' page 8



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Jimmy Don Herring, 64, of Russellville, passed away on Sunday, July 25th. Interment at KP Cemetery.

Carl Jackson, 80, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Friday, July 23rd. Interment at Shady Grove Cemetery.

Milton Leon Pinkard, 77, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, July 22nd. Interment at East Franklin Cemetery.

Melvin Gene Pruett, 64, of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, July 24th. A memorial service will be held at a later date.




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Tune in to WGOL 100.7 FM to hear "Real Estate Tips with Willodean" weekdays at 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. Davis is the owner/broker of Davis Realty & Associates in Russellville.



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'CLINIC,' from page 1

Grimes said. "We're not making anyone get the vaccine, but we are definitely encouraging it."

Accordingly, Russellville City Schools, in conjunction with Russellville Hospital, will hold a vaccination clinic for parents and students. The Pfizer vaccine, approved for ages 12 and up, will be available at no cost. The clinic will be held on the RCS campus. Clinic dates and times are Wednesday, July 28 from 1-4 p.m., and Thursday, July 29 from 4-7 p.m.

"Again, this is simply our recommendation, which is based on recommendations from our healthcare officials," Grimes said. "We trust their guidance and believe this will be our best defense against this virus and our best chance of having the most 'normal' school year possible."

Grimes also announced the school system's policy concerning students, faculty and staff coming in contact with someone infected with COVID-19.

If the student or employee is vaccinated and comes within three feet of an infected person, this person will NOT be required to quarantine.

If the student or employee is not vaccinated and comes in contact within three feet of an infected person, there will be a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

Employees who were quarantined/infected last school year received their salary without having to use leave days. This year, however, any sick days or quarantine days will require the employee to use sick days.

"We appreciate everyone's cooperation and support as we continue to make the best decisions we can based on the information we have been given to ensure the most optimal educational atmosphere here at Russellville City Schools," Grimes said.

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

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'The Great Pretenders' concert returns to the Roxy

Submitted to the FFP

The Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, Inc. is sponsoring the 20th Annual "W. C. Handy Evening at the Roxy" on Thursday, July 29th. Entertainment will be presented by local talent featured as "The Great Pretenders".

This year marks the 40th Annual W. C. Handy Music Festival which is held during the week of July 23 through August 1st at various locations in the Shoals.

To kick off the Roxy Entertainment will be the group "Still Here" as they present the "Handy Prelude" starting at 6:30. The group consists of Larry Freeman, Byrant Bond, William Nelson, Eric Goodloe, William Buchanan, Frankie Hubbard, Johnny Smith, Harold Tisdale, and Leon Freeman.

Katerina Cole-Coffey will serve as emcee. The following are just some of the entertainers scheduled to perform as "The Great Pretenders"— Meletha Walker, Hudson Copeland, Sydney Medley, Avery Guinn, Jayne Wells, Jeff Allen, Danyelle Hillman, Alissa Young, Angela Cummings, Becky Franks, Jacob Green, Bert Fowler, Madeline Cooper, Abby Peters, Budford Parker, Dana Hill, Adam Green, Heather Carmack, Suzanne Wigginton, Debbie Nale, and others. All proceeds go to the Historic Roxy Theatre. Tickets are \$5 and children under 6 are free. Tickets will be sold at the door.

Each year the W. C. Handy Festival grows larger. It brings people from all over the state as well as from other states to northwest Alabama. The Alabama State Council on the Arts supports the performing arts through the festival. This event promotes the tourism in the area and helps our local economy. Several local businesses, industries, and individuals support this program through sponsorships. They will be acknowledged in the program, the Roxy movie screen, on the Website, and recognized throughout the evening.

The Arts Council takes pride in the restoration of the Historic Roxy Theatre. The Arts Council wants to present quality wholesome programs that the entire family can enjoy. This will be an entertaining evening that you will not want to miss.



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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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My take on this... the world of Facebook

I've been on Facebook for a few years now and I'm really surprised I ever did. I had no intentions of ever getting on it. I had heard a few good things about it but most of it seemed less interesting.

Here I am, years later with a similar opinion.

More of it is still unappealing but the *little* good has become of great importance to me. It sounds sad to say but I know when classmates, or friends in general, pass away. At one time, I'd heard about it weeks or months after.

One of my favorite reasons for enjoying Facebook is reuniting with friends, even as far back as the second grade. That happened to me a few days ago actually. I had posted a picture of my brother and I along with some friends of ours.

One of my classmates saw the picture and recognized me. Well, I probably had my name under the picture but he still remembered me.

Needless to say, I was shocked and happy to get a reply about the picture.

We had gone to Spruce Pine School together from the second grade to the fourth. He had to move in the middle of the fourth or the first of the fifth grade. We had Miss Ira Underwood and Mrs. Castle Scisson as our teachers.

Through the popularity of Facebook, we were given the opportunity to reminisce about the good ol' days. The simpler times!



Gail Motes

It was interesting to hear all of the old stories that I had forgotten. I found out he had a "big crush" on me and was so heartbroken when he had to move away. I thought that was sweet but I didn't remember it.

I looked at an old class picture that I had and then I remembered he was cute with a big smile. It was fun to look back on it, but life becomes more complicated the older that you get. Not everyone's life does, but mine has.

I am glad people kept on and on about Facebook and finally convinced me to try it. There have been times it was really worth it. This was one of those times.

Now, this might be one of the more boring articles to you that I've ever written. After all, we all have opinions don't we?

I enjoy sharing my happy moments. You all know how "odds" are. There is a 50/50 chance some of you will have enjoyed it.

I hope y'all have your own happy moments this week. You might want to consider trying Facebook if you aren't on it. It's not all bad. Of course it's not all good either.

The world of Facebook has a mind of its own. It reminds me of an old Clint Eastwood movie: The Good, The Bad & the Ugly.

Well I'm going to lay down my pen.

Hopefully I'll pick it up next week and share some more of my thoughts.

As for now... Until later...

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Craig celebrates five year anniversary of life-saving transplant

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When he was bitten by a tick in 2012, Russellville native Charles Craig had no idea how his life would change.

But change it did, and how. After going back and forth to various doctors who couldn't diagnose what was wrong, Craig finally went to a doctor who diagnosed a rare liver disease. Craig went on the transplant list in 2014 and waited to get the call that a new liver was available.

When he went to the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital in September 2016, doctors told him that, without a liver, they didn't expect him to live past three months.

His Model for End-Stage Liver Disease (MELD) score was 24 the day he underwent the seven-hour surgery. MELD scores range from 6-40, with the higher the score, the higher the three-month mortality rate.

His post-surgery therapy was difficult. With a normal shoe size of 12, Craig had to purchase size 16 slippers due to how bloated and swollen he was. He was up to 270 pounds as a result.

But he was resolved to do everything possible to recover, and that meant walking within four days.

In 2018, Craig tore muscles around his stomach. These muscles are weakened as a result of a liver transplant incision. Craig went back to Birmingham by ambulance and doctors redid the surgery and placed a hernia mesh inside him. Effective in giving support to his abdominal muscles, but very uncomfortable is how Craig describes the mesh.

It's now been five years since his transplant, and the Aliceville resident is both 'thankful and careful' about how he lives every day.

Craig will return home this weekend for a benefit fish fry to help him with medical costs and travel expenses. Fish plates will be available for \$12, and will be sold from 12-6 p.m., at 901 Mullins Street in Russellville. For to-go or large orders, you can order ahead by calling 256-460-1195.

Craig is the son of Mary Jo Beecher and Doug Craig. He has four sisters, Laretta McCulloch, Hope Craig, Latoya Beecher and Melinda Harvey. His family is putting on the benefit fish fry.

Craig expressed his appreciation to his family and his girlfriend, Val Hinton, a nurse, for their constant support and for driving him back and forth to Birmingham.

Craig left Russellville in 1986 to attend the University of Alabama. He got a good job with Sears, then Goodyear as a national sales representative, so he never finished school. He was still working for Goodyear when he got sick in 2012 and has never been able to return to work due to his medical problems.

Craig doesn't leave home much since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but he's making an exception this weekend.

"I'm excited to be coming home and seeing my family, but I'm not much on big crowds, especially with COVID-19 numbers going up. A transplant changes your life in many ways and I just have to be careful," Craig said.



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You're invited to Mountain Valley Hee Haw, every Saturday evening from 6-10 p.m. Open mic with Hee Haw Band. Travis Wammack will perform July 17 and August 14. Supper Night is held every 3rd Saturday night. Bring a covered dish. Karaoke begins each Saturday night at 10 p.m. Hee Haw is located on Highway 79, just east of Hwy. 243. For more information, call 256-810-4840.

Russellville, First Baptist Church, 213 Jackson Avenue, North will celebrate 154 years with Homecoming Service on Sunday, August 15, 2021, at 10:30 a.m. Our speaker will be Dr. Rick Lance, Executive Director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions; music by former RFBC member, Paul Lynch, Gainesville, Georgia. Bro. Chase Dowdy is Pastor, (256-332-2065).

The Association Ladies Conference will be held on Saturday, August 14, 2021, at McMurray Baptist Camp, 5315 Old Vina Road, Vina, AL., from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. This year's theme is "Bloom Where You Are Planted." Please join us for an inspirational and fun day with special speakers and music. Bring your favorite salad to share for lunch. Our mission project: Please bring diapers and wipes to be donated to Safeplace.

Registration for Phil Campbell Elementary School will begin Wednesday, July 28, with New Student Registration from 8-12 in the Counselor's office. Back to School Night will be Thursday, August 5, with Pre-K, K and 1st grade at 4 p.m., 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade at 5 p.m., and 5th and 6th grade at 6 p.m. Class lists will be posted on Friday, July 30.

Tharttown Elementary School will hold registration beginning July 28, 2021. New Student Registration (Grades 1-6) - Wednesday, July 28 - 12:00 - 3:00 (Only for students who are not currently enrolled in Tharttown Elementary). Kindergarten Registration - Thursday, August 4 - 12:00 - 3:00 (Only for incoming kindergarten students who have not previously registered. Meet the Teacher - Thursday, August 5 - 5th & 6th grade at 3:00, 2nd, 3rd, & 4th grade at 4:00, and Pre-K, K, and 1st grade at 5:00.

Evangelist Roy Midgett of Norfolk, Va., will be at God Cares For You Worship Center in Russellville on August 6-8, with day and night services. Everyone is invited and come expecting a miracle. The church is located at 207 Marion St. SW in downtown Russellville.

A free Alabama Boating License Class will take place August 10 and 12, from 6-10 p.m., each night, at the Russellville Fire Station #1, 1100 Jackson Ave. S. The class is open to the public but you must be 12 or older to attend. Upon completion of the course, participants will receive a boater certification course certificate that is required to obtain a vessel license in Alabama. For more information, email Trooper Brad Lindsey at bradley.lindsey@alea.gov.

Red Bay School will hold Pre-Registration for lockers and parking decals on July 29, 2021 in the school auditorium. Locker fee is \$15 and Parking Decal \$10. Students who drive need to bring their drivers license to the Pre-Registration. 12th grade from 8-8:45 a.m. 11th grade from 8:45-9:30 a.m. 10th grade from 9:30-10:15 a.m. 9th grade from 10:15-11 a.m. 8th grade from 11-11:45 a.m. 7th grade from 11:45-12:30 p.m.

Belgreen School will host Back to School Night on August 5, 2021. First and Third Grades at 5 p.m. Fourth and Fifth Grades at 5:30 p.m., and Kindergarten, Second and Sixth Grades at 6 p.m.

First United Methodist Church will host a Fifth Thursday Food Giveaway on Thursday, July 29, at 2 p.m., at the church. The church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue. Basic school supplies will also be given away. Please follow social distancing and staff instructions.

Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston Butts during the Watermelon Festival weekend. Butts are \$30 each and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup will be Saturday, August 21, from 8-10 a.m., at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Avenue.

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In accordance with the Alabama Abandoned Motor Vehicle Act, Alabama Code Sections 32-13-1 through 32-13-8, the following motor vehicle will be sold for cash at 10:30 a.m., on August 25, 2021, at M&N Wrecker & Service Center, 11833 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, Al, 35653. Seller reserves the right to reject any bid and the right to bid.

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120-year old water tower to be relocated as part of Red Bay Museum exhibit

Submitted to the FFP

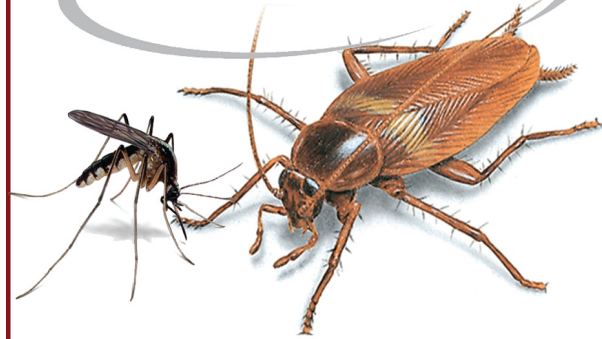
On Thursday July 29, 2021, the old wooden water tank/tower that was used to fill the old steam locomotives with water in Red Bay will be moved.

The tank, which is almost 120 years old, will be placed in a lot in downtown Red Bay that will eventually include an old Illinois Central Railroad caboose. The caboose, which was donated to the Red Bay Museum, will be moved at a later date.

Preparations have been made to prepare the tank to be moved, and the move will start very early Thursday morning, with the tank to be in place just after lunch. Electrical, phone, cable lines and two traffic signal lights will have to be moved or taken down for a short period of time. The tower will be moved about 2-3 city blocks to the lot which is on Main Street, or 4th Avenue.

The public is welcome to come and witness this piece of Franklin County history be relocated where it will become a permanent display.

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COURTESY PHOTO

The water tower, pictured above, will be moved to a downtown location where it will eventually be joined by an Illinois Central Railroad caboose.

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And don't forget to check us out online at www.franklinfreepress.net!

'SCHOOL,' from page 1

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Randolph, who encouraged him to apply.

"I'm so proud of him. I told everybody he is really smart, but they just thought that was his grandma talking," Randolph said. "He took honors classes as a freshman and did well. He's so focused and when I read about this school I immediately thought of him."

Although he hasn't decided on his career plans, Johnson said he's interested in studying engineering, so the school's curriculum is well-suited to his interests.

As part of the application process, several Russellville High School faculty and administrators wrote letters of recommendation. And Johnson took part in a telephone interview. Among those who wrote letters was Brea Colagross, RHS' computer science teacher.

"I taught him last fall. He took my class called exploring computer science," Colagross said. "Zaelyn was quiet when the year started. The class gives students a taste of general studies of computer science, design process, programming, cyber security and data entry."

"He really has a brain for that kind of thing. He's the kid in class who would finish the programming assignment first and then go help other students. If it's programming or computer science he got very talkative because it interests him," she added.

Colagross, who also teaches IT fundamentals, foundation of cyber security and AP computer science, said she hated to lose a student like Johnson, but she knows the opportunity is one he couldn't pass up.

"If this is his passion and he's ready for it, which I know he is, (ASCTE) is where he needs to be. It's a wonderful opportunity for him," Colagross said.

The school is currently located on the campus of Oakwood University. Students' daily schedules include classroom instruction until 3 p.m., followed by 2.5 hours of club activities or free time. A nightly study hour takes place from 7:45-8:45 p.m., followed by free time until the 10 p.m., curfew.

ASCTE weekend activities include student government, athletics, gardening, band and gaming/e-sports, which is of particular interest to Johnson.

"I love video games, and that's what I do with most of my free time," Johnson said.

Johnson's classes will include physics, calculus, engineering and cyber courses, and 100 percent of ASCTE students participate in internships/field experience while attending the school.

Elective offerings include personal finance, bridge building, media production, modern American music history, debate, astronomy, public speaking and many more.

The new school year will begin August 9 and runs through May 26, 2022. Although his grandmother told him about the school, Johnson gives a lot of credit to his mother, a single parent raising six kids.

"I appreciate her and she's a big part of me getting this opportunity," Johnson said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Johnson, above, was one of only 70 students across Alabama to be invited to the ASCTE.

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RHS graduate named instructor of bands at University of Alabama

Submitted to the FFP

Russellville High School alumnus Justin White will be joining the staff of The University of Alabama Bands for the 2021-22 academic year.

Justin will serve as instructor of bands at the University of Alabama.

After graduating from Russellville High School in 2007, he attended the University of Alabama where he graduated magna cum laude with a B.S.Ed. Mr. White was a Master's Conducting Associate at the University of North Texas, where he earned a M.M. in Wind Conducting with a related field in Music Education in 2014. While at UNT, he was a conducting student of Nicholas Enrico Williams, Dennis Fisher and Eugene Migliaro Corporon.

Mr. White is a published research assistant and assistant producer for two volumes of Teaching Music through Performance in Band, volume 10 and Beginner Band volume 3. In 2020, Mr. White was selected semifinalist in The American Prize conducting competition for winds and outstanding young band director by the Alabama Chapter of Phi Beta Mu.

He is a sought after conductor and adjudicator; recently judging the King's Royal Trophy International Band Competition in Bangkok, Thailand. In 2017, he was selected as the winner of the World Music Competition's Conducting Competition - North American Regional and represented the U.S. at the 2017 World Music Competition in Kerkade, Netherlands. The Alabama Music Educators Association selected Mr. White as the 2018 Outstanding Young Music Educator.

Also in 2018, he conducted the United States Coast Guard Band during a clinic with H. Robert Reynolds at the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic. Mr. White has served as the conductor of the Red Mountain Chamber Orchestra, the community orchestra of Birmingham.

Prior to the University of Alabama, Mr. White served as Director of Bands at Thompson High School in Alabaster, AL. Ensembles under his direction consistently earned superior ratings. In 2017, the Thompson Jazz Ensemble was selected finalist and competed at the Swing Central competition in Savannah, GA. The following year, the Thompson Jazz ensemble performed at the AMEA conference with Wycliffe Gordon. Under his direction the Thompson Symphonic band performed at the inaugural Crimson Festival of Winds.

In 2019, Mr. White and colleague Michael Chambless presented a session titled "From Fussing to Focused" at the AMEA conference. Currently, he is leading a consortium for a new work by Donald Grantham to be premiered in Spring 2022.

His professional memberships include Phi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society, National Association for Music Education, National Band Association, Jazz Education Network and the Alabama Music Educators Association.



COURTESY PHOTO

White, a 2007 RHS graduate, has had a long list of achievements in the music field such as judging the King's Royal Trophy International Band in Thailand while also being selected as the Alabama Music Educators Association Outstanding Young Music Educator of the year in 2018.

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Previewing the 2021 SEC East

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press



Brady Petree
 Sports Editor

Last week, we gave our predictions as to how we believe the SEC West will play out once everything is said and done.

With the recent news of Oklahoma and Texas desiring a move to the SEC, the future fate of the conference remains to be seen. But in the meantime, we'll focus on those that we know will be donning the SEC patches this season.

Georgia Bulldogs

The Bulldogs were a much better offense with J.T. Daniels under center. As for the rest of the Bulldog offense, the running back core is among the best in the conference (if not the NCAA) and the receiving core should be solid enough to get the job done.

The talent that the Bulldogs possess is by far and away better than that of their counterparts in the eastern division. Look for the Bulldogs to make the short trip to Atlanta and vie for the SEC title in December.

Florida Gators

Alabama easily lost the most talent to the draft in the SEC last year. But the Florida Gators were a close second in terms of the impact those players drafted has.

Kyle Trask, Kyle Pitts and Kadarius Toney all made their way to the NFL and the Gators will have to replace those weapons.

However the Gators shouldn't have any issue scoring.

The defense is the primary concern for Dan

See 'SEC,' page 13

Hooked on fishing



COURTESY PHOTO

The Belgreen fishing team participated in their third-straight state tournament in Prattville in mid-June.

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - For most high school students, just the thought of waking up at the crack of dawn isn't something they take lightly, let alone look forward to.

But for the Belgreen High School fishing team, waking up at 3 A.M. means they get to participate in something they're passionate about and more importantly, something they enjoy doing.

And recently, the Bulldogs were able to participate in the state fishing tournament where they performed well.

Mimi Wood, who teaches Family and Consumer Sciences at Belgreen, also serves as the sponsor for the Belgreen fishing team. Wood has only been the sponsor for the team for only one year, but she has been around the team for the past few years. And while she will be the first to admit that fishing might not be her strong point, she still makes sure that the team has everything they need to be successful.

"I've had two sons that have been a part of the fishing team so I've been affiliated with the team for quite a while," Wood said. "I can't tell anyone how to fish but I handle all the paperwork and making arrangements and things like that while the boat captains handle things in the water."

While the Bulldogs have participated in the state tournament before, and interest in the program is certainly at an all-time high within the school itself, there is a need for boat captains to accompany the

anglers on the fishing team.

And according to Wood, if the program had more boat captains, the fishing team could see its numbers grow exponentially.

"Two of our boat captains were non-parents that volunteer to take the kids out on the boat and the other three boat captains have kids on the team so we do have a decent amount of support from that area," Wood said. "Most of the kids that come out and try out for the fishing team end up loving it. The issue is finding enough boat captains because you have to find someone who has a boat and is willing to go on weekends to these tournaments fishing. I tend to have more kids interested than captains that can take the kids out on the boats."

Of course, making a push in the state tournament is likely to drum up even more interest amongst students and potential boat captains alike.

And that is something that Wood is hopeful for in the future of the program.

"I hope that we will have some step up and decide to be boat captains because it's a really big commitment to say that they'll participate and go on all of these tournaments and spend their weekends away from home," Wood said. "We've been to the state tournament the past three years including this year and we have some really good interest so hopefully we can get some more interest from the community."

One of the members of the Belgreen fishing

See 'FISHING,' page 15

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'SEC,' from page 15

Mullen and the Gators but they have enough pieces to make things work on that side of the ball. The real question is to whether or not they can string those pieces together successfully.

And if they can, Georgia and the rest of the SEC should be put on notice.

Kentucky Wildcats

This is where things get dicey. One could reasonably slide Missouri or Tennessee in this spot. But we'll give the nod to the Wildcats who have won at least four SEC games in four of the last five years and they possess one of the better consistently scoring defenses. The only question on the defense seems to be in the secondary after both starting cornerback left after the 2020 season.

Missouri Tigers

A middle-of-the-pack 2020 season was a best-case scenario under a new head coach for the Missouri Tigers and they accomplished just that.

The offense is anchored by sophomore quarterback Connor Bazalak but the rest of the offense is loaded with question marks, casting doubt as to whether the Tigers can improve on their 5-5 record from a year ago.

On the defensive side, the Tigers bring back some interesting pieces but there's plenty of work to do.

Tennessee Volunteers

It's the dawn of a new era in Knoxville as Josh Heupelc takes over. He will have his work cut out for him as there aren't a plethora of pieces for the first-year head coach to work with.

However, there is enough talent to make a bowl game, which would be a good starting point for the Vols.

Heupel has a good sense for offense and that should translate well for a team that struggled putting up points last season.

On defense, the Vols don't have that one go-to guy that one can point to and feel extremely confident in leading the unit. But there is a good amount of depth and quality talent there to carry Tennessee to a win or two they weren't supposed to be in.

South Carolina Gamecocks

It figures to be a long season for our final two schools, but there is some room for optimism.

See, 'SEC,' on page 15



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'FISHING,' from page 11

team is Samuel Darracott who has been an avid angler since he was nine-years old and the soon-to-be junior says that being able to compete in the state tournament for something he has been passionate about for years is a dream come true.

"It's the first time in two years that I've been able to go and compete and it was just awesome. It was just a mix of adrenaline and excitement being able to compete with people that fish for the same reasons that you do," Darracott said. "I was able to learn a lot from watching other people and so it was an incredible experience."

Darracott says that getting in practice before a big tournament can vary from time to time with some practices being on their own and others being alongside teammates. But regardless of how the practices go down, one thing is for sure: they'll get those practices in.

"We do a lot on our own time and we'll find anywhere we can go. If we know we've got a tournament around here, we will get up earlier than normal and get everything ready to head out and fish that entire day," Darracott said. "Since a lot of us have our own boats, we'll go out and fish separately but sometimes we'll all get together and fish whether it's once a week or the whole week."

As mentioned, Darracott has been fishing for a majority of his life. And according to him, he got his inspiration for fishing from a close member of his family and still remembers the thrill he got from catching his first bass; a feeling that ultimately has led him to being a key member of the fishing team.

"The first time I ever went fishing, I was five or six. But the first time that it really stuck with me, I was nine years old. My grandpa (Homer) went to do some work somewhere and there was a little creek nearby and I'm not sure why, but I wanted to bring a fishing pole and sure enough I caught my first bass and the second that I caught it, I remember the feeling and I was hooked," Darracott said. "But my grandpa Homer is my biggest influence and he's been my biggest supporter for sure because without him I wouldn't be doing any of this so I owe all of my thanks to him for sure."

Team members include: Will Donahoe, Brady Hovater, DJ Heyward, Miguel Willingham, Brodie Vandiver, Caige Smith, Samuel Darracott and Brason James.

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'SEC,' from page 13

In the case of the Gamecocks, new head coach Shane Beamer certainly was popular with fans when the move was announced. But walking into a program that was 2-8 last season won't be a walk in the park.

The Gamecocks possess quality talent up front on offense as well as a dynamic duo in the backfield in Kevin Harris and MarShawn Lloyd. The quality at the quarterback position remains to be seen.

The defense will be questionable as well, making for potentially another long year in South Carolina.

Vanderbilt Commodores

When you finish your season at 0-9 the only way left to go is up... right?

Clark Lea, who takes over as the head coach, is from Nashville which will instantly make him a fan favorite. How long he can maintain that "fan favorite" status will of course depend on his success which doesn't seem to be coming in the near future.

Questions at running back and the offensive line might prevent the Commodores from taking a step forward. And with a ton of questions on defense, including both players and personnel alike, it figures to be a rough go of it in 2021 for the Commodores.

But hey, at least Vandy fans have baseball to fall back on while the new coaching staff gets its feet wet.

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