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Local schools return for spring with 'manageable' COVID-19 numbers

*John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press*

Both locally and statewide, COVID-19 numbers have taken a nasty upward turn since Christmas, but Franklin County and Russellville City Schools students either have, or will, return as scheduled from their holiday break.

In the seven-day period from January 3-10, 2022, there were 190 new COVID-19 cases in Franklin County, out of 539 total residents tested. So far in 2022, 292 Franklin residents have tested positive, and that's less than one-third of the way through the first month of the year.

The county's death total from

COVID is 113, with 60 of those coming in 2021. There have been no COVID related deaths so far this year, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Russellville City Schools students returned to class January 5th. According to RCS Superintendent of Education Heath Grimes, the system's COVID-19 numbers were in the range of what he expected.

"We came back with some definite COVID absences, but it's not really much different than other times. It's not unmanageable or high enough where you have to consider the remote learning option," Grimes said.

As of January 10th, RCS had 95

See 'SCHOOLS,' page 3

Britt visits Russellville as part of busy campaign schedule for U.S. Senate

*John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press*

*Learn to be a good listener. Your ears will never get you in trouble.
 —Frank Tyger*

When you hear Katie Britt discuss the problems facing Alabama residents, you see and hear the emotion of the 39-year-old candidate running for the Republican nomination for United States Senate.

And that emotion is genuine. It comes from her heart. It results from Britt's travels across Alabama and her unique ability to listen to *understand*, and not to *reply*, the many issues on the minds of Alabamians.

So important is that understanding that Britt spent more than six months listening to what the people of this state had on their minds, and on their hearts.

"I've had opportunities to sit across from good people across this state as they told me their stories," Britt said. "I've heard from veterans who have lost some of their brothers/sisters from combat to suicides. They've shared problems with the Veterans Administration.

"I've listened to mamas who've essentially lost their sons to opioid use and/or mental illness. Then they are no longer able to take care of their kids. These problems are very

See 'BRITT,' page 9

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Alvin Lee Prince, 77, of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, January 8th. Pinkard Funeral Home is assisted the family.

Unita Ann Baccus Thornton, 80, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Friday, January 7th. Interment at Ashridge Cemetery.

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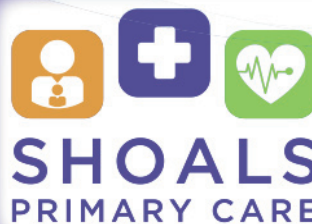
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'SCHOOLS,' from page 1

students/faculty/staff out with quarantine, Grimes said. Of those 95, 29 were confirmed positive for COVID-19.

In order to consider a return to virtual or remote learning, the system would need to meet a threshold of at least 15 percent positive, and the numbers are far from that level.

"As we have said all along, it's important to our board, our administrators and me that we want to be in school as much as possible," Grimes said. "There are times we've pushed the limit when the numbers climbed, but that generally mirrors projections of what we're seeing in this state."

Franklin County students will return to class this Friday, January 14th. This is the second consecutive year Superintendent Greg Hamilton and his board have extended the Christmas break an additional two weeks as a response to an expected spike in post-holiday COVID numbers.

"It worked effectively last year, so when we did our calendar for this year last February, we approved a COVID-19 calendar. We moved up the beginning of school, starting the first day of August," Hamilton said. "We can extend the end of the school year or lessen Fall Break. There are different ways of getting the required number of hours (1,080) in."

Faculty returned to work Monday. Hamilton said he had received one report of a faculty members absent due to COVID.

In addition to mitigating the risk of COVID, the delayed return for the spring semester also helps with the risk of flu, Hamilton explained.

"There is a flu aspect to this. Before COVID, the flu was rampant when we came back from Christmas break, and this has helped with that. But our primary focus now is COVID," Hamilton said.

RV BOE approves two resignations at January 6 meeting

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville City Board of Education approved the resignation of two employees and the employment of one new employee at a special called meeting held January 6th.

The resignations of Barry Reach, Russellville High School teacher, and Jaden Peek, an aide at Russellville Elementary, were accepted, as was the employment in position of Kaleb Hood as a science teacher at RHS.

The next regular meeting of the board will be Thursday, January 27, 2022, at 8 a.m., with the work session on Monday, January 24, at 3:30 p.m.

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Human Trafficking Awareness Day designed to share message about second-largest crime in the world

Submitted to the FFP

Human trafficking is the fastest growing and second largest criminal activity in the world. Alabama's I-20, I-85, I-10 and I-65 are major corridors for human trafficking, and specifically I-20 has been identified as the "superhighway for human trafficking in the United States."

These interstates bring significant trafficking activity into Alabama. To heighten awareness, the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force sponsored Alabama Human Trafficking Awareness Day on January 11, 2022. The eighth annual Alabama Human Trafficking Awareness Day aligns with the national observation.

In conjunction with the statewide awareness day, a media campaign will educate citizens about human trafficking; raise awareness about human trafficking; outline victim identifiers; and explain how to report potential human trafficking situations.

Human Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery where people profit from

SEE 'AWARENESS,' page 5



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'AWARENESS,' from page 4

the exploitation of others. Victims of human trafficking can be men, women or children of all races, nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

To garner support, mayors across the state have been asked to sign proclamations in observance of National Human Trafficking Awareness Month in January. Thus far, municipalities who declared January 2022 as Human Trafficking Awareness Month via proclamations were Aliceville, Brundidge, Gadsden, Grove Hill, Monroeville, Orange Beach, Tarrant, the Town of Hodges, the Town of Ohatchee, the Town of Pisgah, the Town of South Vinemont and the Town of Susan Moore. Alabaster, Athens, Huntsville and Madison will be signing proclamations later in the month.

Several municipalities have also been designated Trafficking Free Zones as defined by the U.S. Institute Against Human Trafficking. Trafficking Free Zones are an initiative focused on reducing the demand for trafficked victims via organizational training, signing a written pledge, enacting policy changes and publicly sharing the commitment to help end trafficking. Lee County as well as Alexander City/Dadeville, Birmingham, Camp Hill, Center Point, Cullman, Gardendale, Homewood, Hoover, Irondale, Mountain Brook, Northport, Opelika, Oxford, Pinson, Trussville and Vestavia Hills have been declared Trafficking Free Zones.

Alabama Human Trafficking Summit Human Trafficking Awareness Month will be capped off by the 8th Annual Human Trafficking Summit sponsored by the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force (END IT ALABAMA). The one-day event is being held on February 4, 2022, at the Renaissance Hotel Montgomery. To learn more about the Summit, visit <https://www.enditalabama.org/summit>.

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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 February 23, 2022, 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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 Florence Lauderdale Animal Services and local rescues are working with Franklin County to help save many abandoned animals to give them a chance at a new life. Save Our Strays needs donations called into Russellville Animal Clinic, to pay for veterinary services, spay/neuter and medical treatment for everything from heartworms to Parvo. There are also boarding expenses for the animals due to their medical treatment. No amount of donation is too small. This group has saved many cats and dogs, and they need the community's help. Call Russellville Animal Clinic and tell them you're donating to the Save Our Strays Account. Their phone number is 256-332-2254.

 In celebration of the 120th anniversary of Red Bay First Baptist Church, the homecoming committee is seeking 120 people who will commit to reading the Bible all the way through in 2022. Please join us in reading and asking your friends, neighbors, and co-workers to join us in this endeavor. Your life will be transformed. There are day-by-day reading calendars for January in the church office. You can also find reading plans on the internet.

 Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 is selling Boston Butts for Super Bowl weekend. Butts are \$30 each and may be pre-ordered by dialing 256-810-1970. Pickup is Saturday, February 12, between 8-10 a.m., at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.



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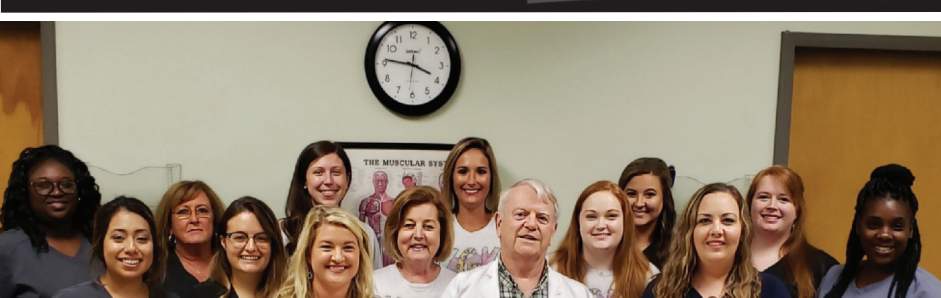
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Tim James formally kicks off third attempt to win Republican gubernatorial nomination

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

Greenville businessman Tim James officially kicked off his campaign for the Republican nomination for governor at a ceremony held on the steps of the Alabama Capitol Wednesday morning.

James, the son of former Gov. Fob James, ran unsuccessfully for the position in 2002 and 2010.

James' platform calls for Alabama to become a national leader in 'preserving America's godly heritage while also focusing on key issues to transform our state into an economic powerhouse.'

Although his formal announcement didn't come until this week, James began stumping across the state in December, and he has a familiar face working with him on his campaign, former Alabama Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead.

In an interview with the Alabama Daily News in December, James said his strategy will focus on what he believes are mistakes by the state's Republican leadership, including passing a medical marijuana bill as well as attempts to expand gambling legislation.

"This (2021 medical marijuana) law is nothing more than a vehicle to sell marijuana in Alabama," James said.

While the legislation forbids the use of recreational marijuana, James believes it will have the effect of making it easier for recreational users to get marijuana into their hands.

James said he stands ready to protect Alabama small businesses and working families against modern 'woke' efforts to "wage a culture war on the bedrock elements of America's foundation: faith, family and freedom."

The most recent Republican Primary, in 2020, saw just under 725,000 Alabamians cast ballots. James said he will conduct a grassroots effort in his campaign, which is expected to be significantly underfunded when compared to Ivey's campaign funds.

His message to voters is that the state's Republican leadership is broken, and he is the best candidate to fix it.

"The Republican leadership in large part are what we call RINOS (Republicans in Name Only) or Democrats disguised as Republicans," James said to the Alabama Daily News last month.



COURTESY PHOTO

James started his campaign for the Republican nomination for governor in a ceremony on the steps of the state capitol on Wednesday morning.

Visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net!

'BRITT,' from page 1

real. And there was no better way to spend the first six months of my campaign than listening to people affected by these issues," she added.

Britt, a Coffee County native, is married to Wesley Britt, a former University of Alabama lineman who went on to play for the New England Patriots. They live in Montgomery with their two children, Bennett and Ridgeway.

Britt served as deputy press secretary and Chief of Staff for Shelby. A graduate of the University of Alabama School of Law, she practiced law with Butler Snow, LLP, a position she left to serve as Shelby's deputy campaign manager and communications director in 2015.

Britt visited Franklin County Monday, including a campaign stop in Russellville at the Best Western Inn. Britt's grassroots campaign has seen her make several campaign stops in Franklin County so far. Red Bay City Councilman Brad Bolton introduced Britt at Monday's campaign rally.

"You will not find a more business friendly, pro-business candidate than Katie Britt," Bolton said. "My heart lies with community banking and there's no better protector of the community banking model than Katie Britt."

Britt grew up near the United States Army's Fort Rucker, where she learned to appreciate the contribution of our country's military.

"Every day I saw the sacrifice of the men and women serving our country," Britt said. "We need leaders who will never leave behind our soldiers on the battlefield."

"When they return home, we must treat our veterans like the first-class citizens they are. These men and women gave us their very best—now it's our turn to give them ours," she added.

Britt spoke to a room full of supporters for just over 20 minutes. She shared the issues she's learned are important to Alabamians and discussed ways to solve them. She discussed the border crisis, the nation's opioid crisis and the dangers of vaccine mandates.

"I never thought we'd live in a country where the President says in order to work and provide for your family, you have to have a shot in your arm," Britt said. "Is he requiring those coming across the border to get the vaccine? No. What about welfare recipients? He says there's a federal nexus with workers. Well, what about welfare recipients? There's definitely a federal tie there. Do they have to receive the vaccine? Once again, no."

"We have leaders today governing through fear and control. I choose faith and freedom," Britt added.

As she contemplated whether to enter the 2022 Republican Senate race, Britt already knew Rep. Mo Brooks would be in the mix, complete with his endorsement from President Donald Trump. Early numbers showed her trailing Brooks by a wide margin, but as her campaign built momentum, those polling disparities declined significantly.

A December 2021 poll has Brooks at 31 percent, Britt at 26 percent and Mike Durant at 15 percent. What once was a 25 percent margin between Brooks and Britt is now five percent.

"I decided, through prayer and with my family, there was too much at stake for our state just to sit on the sideline. It was clear we need someone who will fight for our values and also make sure the hard-working people of Alabama have a seat at the table," Britt said. "People are sick of do nothing, ineffective career politicians. They want someone who will actually get something done."

"As a senator's Chief of Staff, I had a front row seat to the challenges and

opportunities of this state. Together, we can see some incredible things happening from the Shoals to the Shores. We need regulations rolled back so we can create good jobs in Alabama. I've seen first-hand how the Senate works and I'll take that experience with me but most importantly I'll be the voice for Alabama's Christian, conservative values and actually move the needle," she added.

For more information on Britt, including her bio, vision for Alabama and thoughts on issues, visit www.katiebrittforsenate.com.



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

U.S. Senate candidate Katie Britt received a \$5,000 campaign contribution Monday from the Independent Community Bankers of America Political Action Committee. Britt was in Russellville for a campaign stop at Russellville's Best Western Hotel. She is seeking the Republican nomination for Sen. Richard Shelby's seat. Shelby, for whom Britt served as Chief of Staff, is retiring at the end of his term early next year.

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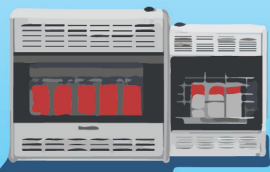
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Lady Golden Tigers secure win over Central

Staff reports

The Russellville Lady Golden Tigers varsity basketball team secured a 60-52 win over 4A Central last week thanks in part to three different Golden Tigers scoring in double digits on the night.

Jenna Whitfield led the scoring charge for Russellville with 15 points to go along with three assists, also leading in that category. Ella Copeland and Jacey Moore each scored 11 points on the night as Copeland also had two assists to her credit and Moore had seven rebounds in the win.

Jayna Poss scored nine points and brought in six rebounds against Central as Leah Rushing (three assists) and Maddy Green each finished with four points.

Avery Watts scored three points to go along with five rebounds and Anna Beth Oliver scored three points for the Lady Golden Tigers.

Picking up some key wins



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

The Bulldogs currently sit at number four in the ASWA 1A boys basketball poll. And after wins over Covenant Christian and 4A New Hope, Belgreen has their sights set on a county title.

*Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press*

Heading into the Franklin County varsity basketball county tournament, the Belgreen Bulldogs were able to notch two key wins to add to their resumé before attempting to repeat again as the champions of Franklin County boys basketball.

A win over 4A New Hope and 1A 5th-ranked Covenant Christian has the Bulldogs battle-tested before their first tipoff of the tournament on Thursday night against the winner of the aforementioned Tharptown/Vina matchup.

Belgreen 47 Covenant Christian 40
This matchup is giving off major Alabama/Clemson 2016-2019 rivalry vibes this season. Both teams continually ranked inside of the 1A top-ten polls with each team eyeing a trip to Birmingham in the not-so-distant future fighting back and forth for any advantage they can get. The first two games between Belgreen and Covenant Christian ended with a win apiece for both squads with the Bulldogs getting the first win in the series earlier in the season and Covenant

See 'WINS,' page 13

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'WINS,' from page 11

Christian notching a win in the Bracy Invitational Tournament. And in the third meeting (and potentially the final meeting before what feels like their predestined meeting down the road in the postseason), it was the Belgreen as the Bulldogs took the series lead with a 47-40 win.

However, the win didn't come easy for the Bulldogs. Covenant Christian outscored the Bulldogs in the first quarter by a 10-7 margin as Adrian Reaves led the way in scoring for Belgreen by knocking down a three-pointer. Will Bonner and Canaan Stough each scored two points in the quarter.

More of the same ensued in the second quarter as the Eagles were able to outpace Belgreen 13-9 to carry a 23-16 lead into halftime over the Bulldogs. Will Bonner did all of the scoring in the quarter for Belgreen with nine points in a preview of what was to come in the second half.

A dominant third quarter from the Bulldogs primarily hinged on a 16-point scoring effort from Will Bonner which included three three-pointers and going a perfect 5-5 from the free throw line. Collin Bonner was able to get on the board with his first points in the contest in the third quarter with five points. Belgreen outscored Covenant Christian 21-6 to give the Bulldogs their first quarter-ending lead of the game of 37-29.

Carrying an eight-point lead into the final quarter, the Bulldogs were able to stave off a comeback bid by Covenant Christian to seal off the huge win on the night despite being outscored 11-10. Will Bonner capped off a stellar night by going 6-6 from the charity stripe in the fourth quarter to lead all scorers with 33 points on the night. Collin Bonner scored four points in the quarter to give him nine points on the night.

Belgreen 48 New Hope 45

Adding to the already impressive resumé of wins that they've accumulated this season, the Bulldogs were able to add on one more win with a vic-



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA
Over the last three games, Will Bonner (above) has averaged 27.6 points per game.

See 'WINS,' page 15

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Russellville Varsity Baseball program to host winter camp

Submitted to the FFP

The Russellville High School baseball program will host a winter baseball camp on Monday, January 17th from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. The camp will be held at the Russellville High School baseball facility and the cost for the camp will be \$85 with a \$10 discount for siblings. The camp is open for any players in the surrounding area and for those interested in the camp, please contact Russellville High School.

'WINS,' from page 13

tory over 4A New Hope. Much like the Covenant Christian game, the Bulldogs found themselves behind in the early going, only to mount a comeback in the second half. New Hope outscored Belgreen 14-11 in the first quarter as the Bulldogs got six points from Will Bonner and five points from Collin Bonner who went 1-2 from the free throw line.

The Bulldogs were able to cut into the New Hope lead, making it a 24-23 lead for the Indians headed into the locker room. Collin Bonner scored six points in the quarter while Will Bonner went 3-4 from the free throw line and Cole King scored two points as he was a perfect 2-2 from the line.

The third quarter saw the margin remain the same as both Belgreen and New Hope scored 15 points in the quarter, meaning that the Indians would carry a one-point lead into the final quarter. Will Bonner scored ten points in the third quarter as Austin James knocked down a three-pointer and Collin Bonner scored two points.

Lockdown defense from the Bulldogs managed to keep the Indians at bay as Belgreen held New Hope to just six points in the fourth quarter, all while outscoring them 10-6. The Bulldogs got two points from Adrian Reaves while Will Bonner followed up his third quarter scoring outburst with an eight-point showing to lead the Bulldogs to securing the win.

Will Bonner finished the game with 27 points while Collin Bonner scored 13 points for the Bulldogs. Adrian Reaves and Austin James each knocked down a three-pointer while Cole King chipped in with two points in the win.

The Bulldogs currently sit at 16-3 while being ranked 4th in 1A according to the latest ASWA polls.

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