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Citing 'declining revenue,' Russellville Electric Board votes 3.1% rate increase

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

All customers of the Russellville Electric Board may soon pay more for their electricity after the board approved a rate increase expected to generate more than \$500,000 in additional revenue each year.

The increase of 3.1 percent for all REB customers will now be submitted to the Tennessee Valley Authority for regulatory approval.

Electric Board General Manager Charles Canida said residential electricity usage has decreased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in less revenue for the REB.

"Usage has been down for some

time due to COVID. No one can explain that but it's been down," Canida said.

The rate increase was approved unanimously by the five-member board, consisting of James McDuffa, Bill Jackson, Nick Willis, Chad Wells and Leamon Mosley. The action was taken at the board's January 27th meeting.

The rate increase, supposedly based on declining revenue, comes following a year when the board approved the purchase of two new vehicles for Canida, totaling more than \$130,000, a private invitation-only Christmas party held out of county at the Shoals Marriott, and

See 'INCREASE,' page 9

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Qualifying ends for local, state candidates

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Qualifying for local and state elected offices ended Friday afternoon with the majority of local candidates signing up to run in the May 24, 2022, Republican Primary.

Local offices up for election this year include Franklin County Sheriff, Franklin County Board of Education District Two and Four and Franklin County Coroner.

District Attorney for the 34th Judicial Circuit (Franklin County) is also on the ballot this year, along with Alabama House of Representatives District 18 and Senate District Six, both of which

include Franklin County. State Executive Committee members for both parties will also be elected on May 24.

The lone Democratic candidate to qualify for office was BOE District Four incumbent Shannon Oliver, whose district includes Belgreen School.

On the Republican side, the following candidates will be seeking their party nomination for these positions:

—Franklin County District Attorney: Jeff Barksdale.

—Franklin County Sheriff: Shannon Oliver (incumbent), Joe Fike.

—Franklin County Board of Education District Two: Terry

See 'QUALIFYING,' page 5

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Alfred Lee Gann, 72, of Russellville, passed away on Sunday, January 30th. Interment at Belgreen Cemetery.

Sonya Kay Green, 78, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, January 28th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

Thomas Anthoy Young, 66, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, January 28th. Interment at Fairview Cemetery.

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Grammy award winner Shawn Colvin to perform at Decatur theatre

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Shawn Colvin's successful career as a three-time Grammy winning singer-songwriter has as its foundation songs that draw upon her life experiences in ways that allow her fans to relate to what she's experienced.

So there's a measure of irony that the biggest hit of her career, *Sunny Came Home*, was one of the few songs she wrote not about herself, but about a character.

Colvin's inspiration for *Sunny* came from the cover of her 1996 album *A Few Small Repairs*. Colvin's friend, Julie Speed, painted the album cover, which showed a woman holding a lit match.

Colvin needed one more song to complete the album, and she found it after deciding to write a story about the woman on her album cover. *Sunny Came Home*, based on that woman, soared to #7 on Billboard's Hot 100 in 1997, and Colvin received two Grammy awards, for Song of the Year and Record of the Year.

Colvin will perform an acoustic show Tuesday, February 8th, 7 p.m., at Decatur's Princess Theatre. Tickets are \$25-\$55 and are available online at www.princesstheatre.org.

Although *Sunny* wasn't autobiographical, Colvin said she did have different emotions going through her mind as she wrote it.

"There's a woman with a match and a big fire in the background. So I just played with it. She sets a fire. She's angry," Colvin said. "She may have experienced domestic abuse, or a mental health situation. She was wronged in some way but I didn't have that specific situation in mind and there is no person the song was based on other than the woman in the painting."

Colvin enjoys having her fans theorize as to what *Sunny Came Home* is about, because truth be told, there's no right or wrong answer.

"In a way it's a personal story. But it's also a made up story about a woman who is understandably angry. There are personal and emotional elements to the song but it just happens to be about a character. I couldn't be happier when people share their feelings about it. I love that song," Colvin said.

Colvin, who lives in Austin, Texas, stands out as an artist whose music career spans parts of six decades. She first came to Austin in 1976 as part of the Dixie Diesels, a country swing band.

Two years later, her career took her to New York City after the band broke up. Music executives really took notice of Colvin when she sang backup vocals on Suzanne Vega's hit song *Luka*.

"A year later I got signed to Columbia Records and I started making albums and traveling the world," Colvin said.

Her first album, 1990's *Steady On*, won a Grammy award for Best Contemporary Folk Recording. Colvin went on to release 12 albums, including a special, newly-recorded all acoustic release of *Steady On* in 2019, to celebrate the album's 30th anniversary.

Colvin will perform *Steady On* in its entirety at her February 8th Decatur concert.

The acoustic release exemplified Colvin's the type of artist she is, even though it took her years to make that realization.

"The consensus I came to was that I was at heart a solo acoustic artist. The heroes I had were the proverbial singer/songwriters like Paul Simon, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell and Jackson Browne," Colvin said. "I could do that well — just me and a guitar."

"I tried a country swing band, rockabilly, pop bands. I dabbled in all kinds of genres and could sing about anything, but I had to get to know myself better before I was able to say who I was. I wanted to write but just didn't know what to write about and was scared to," she added.

One of those heroes, Jackson Browne, presented the induction speech when Colvin was inducted into the *Austin City Limits* Hall of Fame in 2019, along with Lyle Lovett and Buddy Guy.

Browne praised Colvin's songs that "get in your head and influence your way of looking at the world," one of the best compliments a singer-songwriter who writes based on personal experiences could receive.

"Being inducted into the *ACL* Hall of Fame meant a great deal to me. I'm good friends with Lyle Lovett and have always admired Buddy Guy. And having Jackson Browne induct me was beyond my wildest dreams. It really surprised me. I wasn't expecting anything like that," Colvin said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Tickets for Colvin's show at Decatur's Princess Theatre are on sale now and are available online at www.princesstheatre.org ranging from \$25-\$55.

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Two Space Camp scholarships available to local students

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) has announced the opening of applications for the 2022 Space Academy for Leading Students in Alabama, or SALSA.

Two middle school students from Franklin and/or Colbert Counties will receive scholarships to attend this year's Space Camp free of charge.

Applications are now open for students ages 12-14. One male and one female student will receive scholarships to attend SALSA, which promotes Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. The camp will take place May 29-June 3, 2022, at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville. The scholarships include tuition, room and board. Travel to and from Huntsville is not included.

"The importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math cannot be emphasized enough," Kiel said. "I want to be sure that our students in rural Alabama have the same opportunity to attend Space Camp as other kids in the state."

To be eligible for SALSA, students must apply for the scholarship at <https://spacecamp.smapply.io/> or through their school counselor. Kiel has notified all school systems in House District 18 and they have the information needed to apply.

"I would suggest parents encourage students who are either interested in STEM now, or students who might become interested in STEM due to this camp, to apply immediately," Kiel said. "This experience might open the eyes of a future scientist, astronaut, doctor or engineer."

To learn more, visit www.spacecamp.com/salsa.

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

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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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'QUALIFYING,' from page 1

Welborn (incumbent), Curtis Baker.
—Franklin County Board of Education District Four: Carol Murphree, Heath McKee.

—Franklin County Coroner: Charles Adcox (incumbent).
Alabama State Senate and House of Representatives qualifiers for Franklin County's legislative districts include:

—Alabama State Senate District Six: Larry Stutts (incumbent), Republican Party. No Democratic candidate.

—Alabama House of Representatives District 18: Jamie Kiel (incumbent), Republican Party. No Democratic candidate.

—Alabama House of Representatives District 7: Proncey Robertson (incumbent), Ernie Yarbrough, Republican Party. Mose Jones, Jr., Democratic Party. (Note to readers: House District 7 currently includes eastern Franklin County but the Legislative redistricting for the next four years now includes all of Franklin County in House District 18).

Stutts will be unopposed for the first time, as he prepares for a third term in the Alabama Senate.

Kiel is unopposed as he prepares for a second term representing House District 18. Robertson is also seeking a second term, though he has Republican and Democratic challengers.

There will also be contested races for Franklin County's seat on both the Alabama Democratic Party and Alabama Republican Party State Executive Committees.

On the Republican side, Lowell Moore (incumbent) will be challenged by Jason Miller. The race for the men's seat on the Alabama Democratic Party State Executive Committee will see Charles Dale face Rick Neighbors. Heather Crowder Cade was the lone qualifier for the women's seat for Franklin County on the Democratic State Executive Committee.

Voters on May 24, 2022, will select a ballot for the Republican or Democratic Primary. If there is a runoff, voters may not cross over from one party to the other's runoff election.

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Rising COVID numbers stretch FC Schools nursing staff thin

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As Lead School Nurse Diane Baker gave an update on COVID-19 numbers for Franklin County Schools, members of the Franklin County Board of Education realized they continue to have a serious situation on their hands.

Baker addressed the board at its January 25th meeting.

Franklin County students returned to classes Friday, January 14, almost two weeks after Russellville City Schools students began their spring semester. While the first week's COVID-19 numbers were manageable, they changed for the worse beginning last week.

On Tuesday, January 18th, 104 students were absent. One week later, on January 25th, that number increased to 844 students, including 272 students and 62 employees positive for COVID.

That number of student absences represents 23% of the system's enrollment of 3,674.

On Tuesday, East Franklin Junior High School had 125 students absent.

The school's enrollment is around 230 students.

After that number increased Wednesday, Superintendent Greg Hamilton told school officials to go to remote learning Thursday and Friday. The school was scheduled to return to regular on-campus classes Monday.

Baker said her staff along with school officials are challenged by the ever-changing Centers for Disease Control and Alabama Department of Public Health guidelines.

"This is a massive problem, so much worse than last year," Baker said.

With a county-wide nursing staff of eight,

Baker said that increase has helped from previous years, but nurses and school staff are spending much of their days taking calls where positive cases are being reported or parents have questions about the system's COVID-19 policy.

"From last Tuesday to (January 25), the number of positives has doubled. That's a significant change in seven days and we continue to send a lot of students home sick.

The ADPH guidelines allow asymptomatic student who was positive to return to school on day six. But the student must wear a mask days 6-10.

And students in close contact to a student who tests positive are not all sent home as was the case last year. Instead, letters are sent home to every parent of a child in a self-contained classroom that there has been a confirmed case in their child's classroom and directing them to watch their child for symptoms.

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

☀️ 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.

☀️ The NACOLG SENIORx-Medicine Program is a program for free and low-cost medications for the uninsured, underinsured, Medicare coverage gap or disability waiting period. For more information, contact NACOLG SENIORx today. There is no charge for this service. 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463). Paula Pardue. 256-389-0529. This program is in partnership with the Alabama Department of Senior Services and NACOLG Department of Aging Services.

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Board approves new athletic facility at Belgreen

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education authorized moving forward with a new athletic facility to be built at Belgreen High School, after an agreement to accept a \$1.5 million private donation was approved at the board's January 25th meeting.

The board approved a charitable pledge agreement from an anonymous donor that will provide \$1.5 million to construct a football field, track and related components and stands with a press box at Belgreen.

Although Belgreen does not have a football program, that may soon change, according to school officials.

District Four Board Member Shannon Oliver said the athletic facility will bring to reality a long-standing vision and dream for the Belgreen community.

Oliver, who supports the addition of football at Belgreen, spoke about the school's legacy of outstanding track and field athletes. Oliver said the track will be of regulation size and construction and will be used by all county schools for competitions.

Franklin County Schools Assistant Superintendent Johnny Cleveland updated the board on a number of ongoing capital projects, including installation of a roof on the Tharptown concession stand, the Phil Campbell practice field, the Ag Shop at Red Bay High School, which passed final inspection last week, redoing of the track at Tharptown, resurfacing of the Phil Campbell baseball field and the softball field at Red Bay.

An artist's rendering of the gym and new classroom addition at East Franklin Junior High School is expected this week, Cleveland said.

In other agenda items, the board:

—approved out-of-state trips for Belgreen softball to Tishomingo County, Miss., on March 1 and RBHS students to Belmont, Miss., on Feb. 26, and New Site, Miss., on February 19.

—approved compensation of \$1,500 to Emily Taylor for Yearbook Sponsor at Red Bay Schools. Red Bay Schools will reimburse the Franklin County BOE the \$1,500 plus applicable benefits.

—approved an increase in mileage rate per mile for employees in privately owned vehicles from .56 cents to .585 cents per mile.

—approved coaching and staff member supplements for Phil Campbell including \$4,900 for Trevor Allison (football), \$2,450 for Jonathan Grimes (football), \$2,450 to Derrek Fikes (football) and \$500 to LeeAnn Moore for yearbook. Phil Campbell High School will reimburse the board for the supplements and benefits.

—approved 10 relief days for employees who test positive for COVID-19, retroactive to August 2, 2021, through May 27, 2022.

—approved an agreement with the Franklin County Commission and Franklin County Sheriff's Office to employ Sammy Washington as School Resource Officer at Tharptown High School/Tharptown Elementary School, beginning January 14, 2022, through September 30, 2022.

THS Principal Bart Moss, who attended Tuesday's board meeting, said he was excited to have an officer assigned to his school.

"We are very thankful to have Officer Washington with us full-time. Officer (Brent) Wells did a great job, but he was really stretched thin covering several schools," Moss said. "Officer Washington has a lot of experience as an SRO. He will build relationships with our students and staff so they know they can confide in him if they know about something going on at school that is a potential problem.

"Having someone there full-time will give our students and their parents confidence we are doing everything in our power to keep our school safe and secure," Moss added.

—approved a number of personnel moves, including:

—Resignation: Rachel Doss, Child Nutrition Program Assistant, PCHS, Jeffery Clark, custodian, TES and Derinda Chaney, Child Nutrition Program Assistant, BHS.

—Employment: Andrea Harrison, bookkeeper, BHS, Sander Tverberg, special education teacher, BHS, Dustin King, temporary special needs bus driver, Franklin County Schools, Tracy Pace, bus driver, Franklin County Schools, Addison Nelson, EL aide, PCHS/PCES, Baylee King, elementary teacher, TES, Mattie Puckett, elementary teacher (5-6 grade math) PCES, Jakelin Gonzalez, special education aide, BHS, David Tyler Berryman, assistant principal, TES and Keylee Allison, business education teacher, Franklin County Career Tech Center.

—Leave of Absence: Rebecca Susan Ezzell, teacher, TES, from January 10, 2022 through the remainder of the school year.

—Contract Extension: Matthew Wilemon, Computer Tech, from 11-month contract to 12-month contract.

—Child Nutrition Program Substitute: Kelsie Schmittou.

—Substitute Bus Driver: Jeremy Hancock.

The next regular board meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education will be February 15, 2022, with work session at 5 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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County employees to receive COVID premium pay in five installments

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County employees received notice last week as to how they will receive the premium payments approved last month by the Franklin County Commission.

Full-time county employees will receive \$3,000 and the 11 part-time employees will receive \$2,175, an increase over the initial amount that was announced at \$1,500.

Employees will receive their COVID-19 pandemic premium payments over five pay periods, with \$7.50/hour added for 80 hours for each of the five pay periods beginning on February 11, 2022. If an employees works overtime hours, they will receive premium payments for the matching amount of total hours they worked for that pay period.

County employees are paid every two weeks.

The premium pay is included in the employees' regular rate of pay for the purposes of calculating overtime.

County employees making more than \$70,250 will not receive the premium pay. Elected officials will also not receive the additional funds.

Franklin County Administrator Leah Mansell said the payment over the next five pay periods came at the direction of the Investing in Alabama Counties (IAC) program, which is affiliated with the Alabama County Commission Association.

The IAC is providing legal advice and procedure for counties as to how the American Rescue Act Plan funds may be spent. Franklin County has paid the IAC \$74,000, with a second installment due at a later time. The total amount paid by counties will be less than \$148,000.

The total amount of the premium payments, for 111 full-time employees and 11 part-time employees, including retirement and FICA, is approximately \$425,000, Mansell said.

"According to the information we received (from the ICA), we can't pay employees this premium pay in an amount more than \$13/hour," Mansell said. "And the Alabama Constitution prohibits paying our employees bonuses.

"It will be in a separate check from their regular check and will include deductions for taxes and retirement," she added.

For employees who do not work overtime, they will receive \$800/gross per pay period for the next five pay periods. Employees working overtime will receive their \$3,000 amount earlier than the fifth pay period, based on the number of overtime hours they work.

Part-time employees will receive \$7.50/hour for 29 hours/week, the amount most part-time employees work, so that will cap out at \$2,175.

Franklin County is expected to receive just under \$6 million in American Rescue Plan funds, with approximately \$3 million already in the county's coffers.

After employee pay through the temporary premium pay program, and the county's proportionate share of the IAC fee, the remaining balance of the funds will be spent for broadband build-out across rural areas of the county. The Franklin County Commission approved the broadband payment at its January meeting. That amount is expected to be more than \$5 million.

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'INCREASE,' from page 1

multiple conferences and out-of-state meetings for Canida and board members, all paid by ratepayers.

REB Accountant Tiffany Holt told the board the best practice would be to 'kind of inch up' rates every year, but said the board had not imposed a rate increase since 2015, when rates went up by more than seven percent.

Canida said the rate increase was based on guidelines provided by TVA.

As the regulatory agency for the Russellville Electric Board and other electrical providers who receive power from it, TVA will review the board's rate increase to insure the changes are fair and reasonable for all customers, according to Scott Fiedler, with TVA Media Relations.

Fiedler said TVA prepares guidelines for local power companies that are unique for each LPC. These guidelines are confidential and are only a "guidepost to insure regulation for electric utilities within our service territory," Fiedler said.

TVA does not make recommendations to local power companies regarding rate increases.

There are ways for the public to have input prior to TVA's review of the proposed rate increase by the Russellville Electric Board.

Fiedler said the primary avenue would be for ratepayers to address their concerns directly to the Russellville Electric Board. The board approved Thursday's rate increase with no advance public notice that an increase was being considered.

Fiedler said customers may also contact TVA as the regulator. The website tvainfo@tva.gov sets out a complaint resolution process and how a consumer may initiate a complaint. There is a complaint form on the website that consumers may complete.

Additionally, complaints may be filed by email at complaintresolution@tva.gov, or by calling the TVA Regulatory Hotline at 1-888-289-8409.

The board also approved a \$500 non-refundable installation fee for any residential user who wants a security light installed on their property. There is currently no installation fee, but that will change effective immediately for new security light installations. In addition to the \$500 fee, the monthly cost for pole rental increased from \$1 to \$2. This fee is in addition to the monthly cost of the light.

Customers wanting a security light will now be required to sign a three-year contract obligating them to pay for three years of lighting even if they move from their residence. The board approved the \$500 fee, pole increase and three-year contract rental unanimously.

The Russellville Electric Board's website states the board is pleased to

offer dusk to dawn lighting for homes and businesses at a low cost that provides light for safety and security.

Holt said they were "pretty far behind in what we charge," based on her contacting multiple local utility companies served by TVA to inquire about security lighting installation fees and costs.

After McDuffa asked Holt and Canida to 'put something together to bring to the board' regarding recommended increases in security lighting costs, the board voted anyway to approve the new installation fee and contract requirement.

"Most utilities are around the \$450 range," Holt told the board. "\$600 will not recover our cost but certainly is more than we're getting now."

Canida referenced other utilities' charges for security lighting and told the board "they all realize they're not charging what they need to be."

Prior to approving the rate increase and \$500 security light pole installation, the board unanimously approved the purchase of two new service trucks that will replace two existing trucks that will be traded in when the new vehicles are purchased.

The trucks will be purchased through the State of Alabama bid list. Additional equipment will be installed on the trucks once they are purchased.

For the second consecutive month, the board held its business meeting Thursday morning at 8 a.m., a change from previous meeting times, at the Russellville Electric Board Warehouse.

Moments after board chairman McDuffa called the meeting to order, the board voted to go into executive session for 'up to two hours,' McDuffa said.

Outside of board members, Canida, other REB employees and board attorney Jeff Bowling, the only members of the public in attendance were *Franklin Free Press* Publisher John Pilati and Russellville City Councilman Darren Woodruff.

After the 40-minute executive session concluded, McDuffa said no motions, actions or votes were taken.

In other agenda items, the board:

—followed Canida's recommendation to change the accounting firm that handles the annual audit for the Russellville Electric Board to Fricke, Sweatmon & Co, out of Cullman.

Canida told board members it is recommended they engage a different auditor firm every five to six years.

—authorized Canida to enter into annual wage negotiations with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, or IBEW, the union that represents REB employees.

—appointed board member Chad Wells as Secretary-Treasurer.

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Lady Red Devils split two game slate against Lynn, Tremont

Staff reports

The Vina Lady Red Devils went 1-1 last week against Lynn and Tremont (MS) in a tuneup just before the 1A area 14 tournament next week.

With the win, Vina improves to 8-14 on the season as they will take on Belgreen next Monday at Hackleburg who is hosting the area tournament after winning a coin flip against Belgreen.

Vina 64 Lynn 47

Vina wasted no time in getting off to a 19-5 lead over Lynn in the first quarter. A huge quarter from Sara Scott in which she scored eight points led the Lady Red Devils to carrying a sizable lead into the second quarter. Sara Harper scored four points in the quarter while Kaitlyn Athey knocked down a three-pointer. Kaley Attaway and KK Mitchell each scored two points in the quarter as well.

After scoring a resounding 19 points in the first quarter, the Lady Red Devils one-upped themselves by scoring 20 points, giving Vina a 39-17 lead after outsourcing Lynn 20-12 in the second quarter.

Kaitlyn Athey led all scorers in the quarter with 11 points as Sara Scott scored five points and KK Mitchell scored four points.

Carrying a 22 point lead into the half, Lynn was able to cut into the Vina lead after outsourcing the Lady Red Devils 17-9 to make it a 48-26 lead for Vina after three quarters. Hailey Cantrell and Kaitlyn Athey each scored three points in the quarter as KK Mitchell scored two points and Sara Scott scored one point.

See 'RED DEVILS,' page 14

Looking for a repeat



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

The Lady Bulldogs will travel to Hackleburg next Monday where they will take on Vina in the first round of the area tournament. Belgreen is looking for their second straight 1A area 14 tournament title.

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

The fourth time was the charm. At least that was the case of the Belgreen Lady Bulldogs last season as they appeared in their fourth-straight area title game. However, despite having appeared in the game the three years prior, they had always came away as the runner-up.

Now, after capping off last season with an area tournament title, the Lady Bulldogs are looking to repeat as area champions and host a critical sub-region game with visions of the regional tourna-

ment in their eyes.

The biggest difference between last year's Belgreen girls team and this year's team, is the loss of star Emma Dempsey who graduated at the conclusion of last season.

Typically, when a smaller program loses such a key component on both ends of the floor, the program tends to take a step backwards for a year or so until an underclassman makes the step up.

Add on top of losing Dempsey, the fact that the Lady Bulldogs are starting three eighth-graders at the varsity level and it leaves one to wonder just

See 'REPEAT,' page 13

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'REPEAT,' from page 11

how Belgreen has managed to contend for another area title. The answer lies within the massive steps in progress from the start of the season to this point according to head coach Chad Green.

"Last year we lost a really good player in Emma Dempsey. But we've got a young group this year with five eighth-graders. We may be a younger team but from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, we've made a lot of progress," Green said. "We were young and timid at the start of the year but here lately, especially on the defensive end, we've got some kids that have really stepped up big for us."

One of the biggest helps in terms of attempting to replace the production from Dempsey, has been the emergence of Carson Hovater. Hovater, an eight grade post player for the Lady Bulldogs who stands at 5'11, has given the Lady Bulldogs a much-needed presence inside.

Combine that size on the interior with the developments along the perimeter, and it's quickly becoming known that the Lady Bulldogs are a program to keep a close watch on with the postseason around the corner.

"Carson started off the year struggling. It's just one of those situations where I stayed on her and pushed her to get better. But being 5'11, you can't coach that. She has the potential to be a shot blocked and a shot alterer," Green said. "We knew that if she could give us six or eight points with six or eight rebounds down the stretch, that would be absolutely huge for us and she's made a lot of strides. But for this team right here and the success that they've had, it's not just one player. Noelle Willingham is our leader and you can just go down our roster and point out the significant development that each player on the roster has made."

With three-fifths of the starting rotation coming back this season, Green and his staff had a general idea as to how things *might* look this season. But with the youth and need for players to step up, Green acknowledged that some players would have to adjust their roles. And the response has been a positive one to this point.

"At the end of last year, we knew we had three starters coming back for us. Noelle Willingham, Dakota Green, and BB Scott were all coming back but we also knew that their roles were going to be a little different this year," Green said. "Isabella and Alayna Tate have done a great job stepping up for us and Makenna Fisher comes off the bench and does a really nice job for us as well. This team may be young but there's a lot of talent and a lot of potential here with this group over the next several years."

A lot of times, especially with smaller schools, program success tends to

See 'REPEAT,' page 15

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'RED DEVILS,' from page 11

A double digit scoring quarter from Sara Harper in which she scored ten points, led Vina to outscoring Lynn 16-14 to secure a 64-47 win for the Lady Red Devils. Kaley Attaway scored five points in the quarter while Sara Scott scored one point.

Athey led all scorers with 17 points while Sara Scott (15 points) and Sara Harper (14 points) also scored in double digits in the win. KK Mitchell scored eight points while Attaway scored seven points.

Vina 40 Tremont (MS) 50

Sara Scott had a massive game for the Lady Red Devils with 23 points despite the loss to Tremont.

Scoring nine points in the first quarter, Vina was outscored by Tremont 15-9 in the first quarter. Sara Scott scored five points while Kaitlyn Athey and Kaley Attaway scored two points each.

Vina wasn't able to cut into the Tremont lead in the second quarter after Tremont outscored the Lady Red Devils 11-5 to make it a 26-14 game going into halftime. Sara Scott scored all five points in the quarter for Vina.

Trying to mount a comeback, the Lady Red Devils outscored Tremont 12-10 in the third quarter as Sara Scott scored ten points while going 4-6 from the free throw line. Kaitlyn Athey scored the other two points in the quarter.

Matching the scoring total in the fourth quarter, Vina was able to score 14 points but it was too little too late as Tremont would close out the ten point victory over Vina. Athey scored five points in the fourth quarter as Hailey Cantrell and Sara Scott scored three points each. Khylee Brooks scored two points going perfect from the free throw line while Sara Harper scored one point.

Scott's 23 points led all scorers on the night as she went 7-12 from the charity stripe. Athey scored nine points while Cantrell (three points), Attaway (two points), Brooks (two points), and Harper (one point) contributed.

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'REPEAT,' from page 13

come in alternating waves. But that's not how Belgreen operates. As a school with a rich history on the hardwood, both the Bulldogs and Lady Bulldogs have seen their fair share of success in recent years.

And now, with the area tournament's next week, both programs are vying to make the trip to the regional tournament and perhaps beyond.

The tradition and history of success that Belgreen has plays a vital role in both program's ability to contend year-in and year-out. And according to Green, the varsity mentality is something that is picked up on from early-on.

"It's one of those things where basketball is just huge down here. Kids grow up coming to the games and *wanting* to play basketball. They just step in here and they show that they want to be a varsity basketball player that makes those runs into the playoffs, regional and state tournaments," Green said.

Behind the scenes, a stout coaching staff which includes a former player under Green's tenure as the head coach at Belgreen. Green accredits his coaching staff playing a large role in the progress that a lot of the younger players have made this season, as well as a fan favorite providing an emotional boost as well.

"These kids have bought into our system here and they've gotten a lot better as the season has gone on. But I've got a great coaching staff here. Marty Guidry does an outstanding job with the weight room and conditioning. Brooke Williams is an assistant for me and she does a great job and then I've got Ansley Tate who played for me a few years ago that has also really helped out my young post players," Green said. "And of course I can't forget about my head coach Jason Bolton. He's where things chart out with us. He sits there on the front row of every game and he gives us a big boost."

Belgreen 44 Hackleburg 24

The Lady Bulldogs got a significant win over the Lady Panthers which resulted in a two-way tie at the top of 1A area 15 just before the area tournament is slated to kick off.

With both teams boasting a 5-1 record in area play, a coin flip was used on Monday to determine which school would host the 1A area 15 tournament. The Lady Panthers won the coin toss and therefore won the right to host the tournament.

Belgreen jumped out to an early 11-4 lead in the first quarter behind four points from eighth-grader Carson Hovater, three points from Alayna Tate and two points each from Noelle Willingham and BB Scott.

Adding onto their lead, Belgreen outscored Hackleburg 7-5 in the second quarter to give the Lady Bulldogs an 18-9 lead headed into halftime. Carson Hovater added to her scoring table on the night with three points in the quarter while Alayna Tate and Noelle Willingham each scored two points.

The third quarter is where the Lady Bulldogs were able to extend their lead and put the game out of reach as they outscored the Lady Panthers 20-10 to carry a 38-19 lead into the final quarter. Nine points in the third quarter from Carson Hovater and Dacota Green led all scorers for the quarter while BB Scott scored two points.

Keeping with a trend throughout the game, the Lady Bulldogs outscored for the fourth straight quarter, this time by a margin of 6-5 to seal off the 44-24 win for Belgreen.

Green scored three points in the quarter while Noelle Willingham (two points) and Laura Seal (one point) each chipped in.

Hovater led all scorers with 16 points as Green scored 12 points in the win. Willingham (six points), Tate (five points), Scott (four points), and Laura Seal (one point) each etched their name into the scoring book.

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