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Improving Lives: Tonya Taylor, a Russellville Coalition success story

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When Tonya Taylor climbed into a dumpster behind a Russellville grocery store three years ago, she knew her life had hit rock bottom.

Taylor was starving, though, so she put away what was left of her pride and began rummaging through

the refuse, looking for something safe to eat.

That moment, beyond all others during her three years of living homeless in Russellville, sticks with her the most.

From 2017-20, Taylor lived on the streets with the daily goal of scroung-

See 'SUCCESS,' page 7



COURTESY PHOTOS

Tonya Taylor booking photo, left, and Taylor in 2022, right, now clean and self-sufficient.

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Investigation of four-month-old's death underway in Red Bay

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Red Bay Police Department is investigating the death of a four-month old child who was found 'unresponsive' by a worker at Tiny Tigers Day Care Wednesday afternoon.

Red Bay Police Chief Janna Jackson said her department was called to Red Bay Hospital at 2:17 p.m., March 9. When officers arrived, the child was already deceased, Jackson said.

According to a press release issued by Franklin County Coroner Charles Adcox, the child was taken by a Tiny Tigers employee and the owner in a private vehicle to Red Bay Hospital after being found unresponsive by the worker.

Adcox said the child was pronounced dead at the hospital shortly after arrival to the emergency room. The child was transported to the custody of the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences for an autopsy.

See 'DEATH,' page 3

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Patricia "Tuffy" Quillen Smith, 63, of Phil Campbell, passed away on
 Wednesday, March 9th. Interment at Oak Grove Cemetery.

Anthony "Blu" Spurgeon, 62, of Phil Campbell, passed away on
 Monday, March 7th. Interment at East Franklin Cemetery.

Johnny Durward "Trey" Taylor III, 35, of Russellville, passed away
 on Monday, March 7th. Interment at Dempsey Cemetery.



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

RC&D grant funds used for football practice field at Phil Campbell

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Phil Campbell High School's football team now has a turf practice field that will allow practices come rain or shine, thanks to a \$15,000 grant funded by the Northwest Resource, Conservation and Development Council.

The grant was used for the installation of artificial turf, drainage and base on the school's practice field.

Phil Campbell varsity football coach Kevin Barnwell said the funds were a blessing to his program that resolved a long-standing need.

"We literally had nowhere to practice so I called Rep. (Jamie) Kiel and (Proncey) Robertson and they got the ball rolling on this project. We are so appreciative of all the people who helped get this done," Barnwell said.

Northwest RC&D Executive Director Lauranne James also praised the teamwork that went into securing the grant.

"We are happy to be able to help with this completed project, and we thank Reps. Robertson and Kiel for their support," James said.

A check presentation was held Monday afternoon on the practice field. Northwest RC&D board members Barry Moore, Katernia Cole-Coffey and Don Barnwell attended the presentation, along with Kiel, Robertson, Franklin County Commissioner Jason Miller, Coach Barnwell and PCHS Principal Darit Riddle.

"We appreciate y'all working together as a team to get these projects done," Robertson said. "Jamie and I are proud to support the program, but you find the specific needs and projects and that's a very important part of the process," Robertson said.

The Northwest RC&D is a non-profit organization that supports educational and community development projects across Northwest Alabama in Franklin, Colbert, Lauderdale, Marion and Winston counties.



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Northwest RC&D's \$15,000 grant will provide Phil Campbell with a turf football field suitable for any weather.

'DEATH,' from page 1

Jackson said the investigation, which remains ongoing, indicated the child had been sick the previous week, but whether that factored into the child's death would not be indicated until the autopsy was completed.

Red Bay Investigator Kyle Gober took statements from day care workers Wednesday evening.

Since the investigation involves the death of an infant, Jackson said her department conducts a reenactment of events leading up to the child's death.

As a result of information obtained from that reenactment, Jackson said one Tiny Tigers employee, Payton Gann of Vina, was arrested and charged with the misdemeanor offense of Giving False Information to Law Enforcement.

Gann was booked and released Friday afternoon after posting bond on that charge.

Jackson said the investigation will continue and Gann's arrest does not mean she was involved in the child's death in any manner.

"It's one charge and that arrest does not incriminate (her) for any other misconduct," Jackson said. "When the investigation is complete, we will turn the case over to the Franklin County District Attorney's Office. There have been no charges as of this time related to the child's death."

Police have requested any video footage available from Tiny Tigers, but they had not received any video as of Sunday afternoon.

The Franklin County Department of Human Resources is assisting with the investigation. The child's family lives in Mississippi, according to law enforcement.

Jackson said death investigations involving children are always difficult, and her department wants to make sure it's handled in a thorough manner.

"It's extremely difficult for our department to work cases like this and it's difficult to see the family grieving," Jackson said. "We want to cover every aspect of it and make sure we provide justice for our victims and determine the truth about what happened."

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TVA asking for public's help in locating artifact looters

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Excavating archaeological sites and/or removing artifacts on federal land is a serious crime, and Tennessee Valley Authority officials are turning to the public for assistance in bringing violators to justice.

TVA's Thousand Eyes program works with local groups and communities to protect archaeological sites and preserve them for future generations. Staff members conduct presentations and field trips that help educate others about protecting these sites and encouraging the public to take action when they see suspicious activity.

TVA officials held a two-day public education program Friday and Saturday at Florence's McFarland Park to promote awareness about the Thousand Eyes program and the importance of reporting violators to TVA Police.

Tim Dilbeck, an investigator who works in the TVA Police's Resource Protection Division, took part in the two-day event along with other TVA police, archaeologists and a representative from the Florence Indian Mound Museum.

Friday's event was for the media, with Saturday reserved to interact with boaters and park users to help them learn about the Thousand Eyes program.

TVA manages more than 12,500 archaeological sites across the Tennessee River Valley. The sites are protected through the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, which provides stiff penalties for those convicted of looting artifacts or disturbing sites.

Those convicted under the ARPA face a fine up to \$20,000 and up to two years in prison for a first offense. Repeat violators face a \$100,000 fine and a five year prison term as well as forfeiture of any vehicles or equipment used to commit the crime.

While most of the sites and artifacts relate to Native American burial grounds, the law applies to any resource over 100 years old, which would also include Civil War relics. Additionally, arrowhead collection is also prohibited under federal law.

As Dilbeck explained, theft of artifacts and other cultural resources is a serious problem.

"It's very significant and I wish we had a lot more manpower to help enforce ARPA laws," Dilbeck said.

"The (Resource Protection Division) has other land management duties but ARPA is a priority for us."

Dilbeck encourages those who enjoy using TVA properties to look for anyone who appears to be digging on TVA property. Most artifact looters also use tools including shovels, pick axes, probes, rakes and/or sticks.

If you see someone digging on TVA managed land, you are encouraged not to confront them. Instead, notify TVA Police immediately by calling 1-855-476-2489. Be prepared to describe the persons involved and write down any license plate numbers.

One reason for the strict enforcement of artifact looters is because their actions can destroy the irreplaceable value of a site and make it difficult for archaeologists to interpret the activities that occurred in these locations.

Erin Dunsmore, TVA archaeologist, said there is a tremendous range of people who are violating ARPA, both intentionally and unintentionally.

"Some people really don't know they're doing something wrong. Some are serious collectors who know their actions are illegal and they frequent sites often, especially after rain," Dunsmore said. "And there are the hard-core looters. The counter measures these folks do does the most damage to TVA lands and burial sites. Some of them do this because they're fascinated with Native American culture and some do it because they make money selling artifacts on the black market," she added.

For updates on news and sports, visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net!

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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Brady Petree

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

John Pilati

Content Contributors

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

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

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Applications may be obtained at the Russellville City Hall, Office of the Mayor, 304 North Jackson Avenue. Applications must be returned no later than March 28, 2022 by U.S. Mail to:

The Russellville Civil Service Board, P. O. Box 308 Russellville, AL 35653

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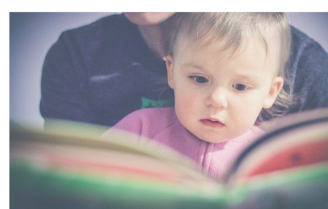
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Parents with children birth to 4 years old...Join us for a night of learning and fun!



Who's Invited: Children 0 to 4 years (thru Pre-K) and their parents/guardians
Where: West Elementary School Cafeteria
When: Thursday, March 24th 6:00pm
 ■ Meal Served
 ■ Take Homes- A book and craft

- The Program will include:
1. A popular award-winning children's book that is age appropriate for young children.
 2. How to read the book to your child, engage them in a story, and how to follow-up including fun activities for your child.
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This partnership is funded in part with a grant by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education.

Please cut and return the below information sheet if you plan on attending. Please return to RES or WES office.

Number of adults attending _____

Number of children attending _____ Name & age of child _____

Name & age of child _____

Parent Signature _____

What's Happening
 256.332.0255

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

East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be serving William Earl Bishop's Smoked Chicken and Pulled Barbecue Pork Plates from 4-7 p.m., on Friday, March 25. Plates are carryout only and are \$10 each. Pickup at East Franklin VFD, 10433 Highway 81, Phil Campbell. Dessert donations appreciated.

Belgreen School will host Kindergarten Registration on Friday, March 18, from 8:30-2:30 in the Belgreen High School Library. Parents or guardians of children who are 5 on or before 9-1-2022. Bring child's birth certificate, Social Security Card, proof of residency and up-to-date immunization records. For more information, call 256-332-1376.

LifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on Thursday, March 17, from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. LifeSouth is the primary supplier of blood products to Russellville Hospital. Please contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or by email at deborah.lindsey@russellvillehospital.org. Please bring a photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive a free t-shirt, an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a free cookie dough card from Papa Murphy's and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. All donors will receive a free cholesterol screening and we will be giving away door prizes! Please call with any questions and thank you for giving the gift of life!

Parents with children birth to 4 years old are invited to a night of learning and fun with their children! Children 0-4 years (thru Pre-K) and their parents/guardians are invited to West Elementary School cafeteria on Thursday, March 24, at 6 p.m., for a dinner and a program that includes a take home book and craft for each child. Topics will include how to read the book to your child, engage them in a story and how to follow-up including fun activities for your child. Dinner will be served to all in attendance. This event is funded in part by a grant from the Alabama Department of Early Education. Please contact the Russellville Elementary School or West Elementary School office for more information and to sign up, complete the form in this week's Franklin Free Press.

Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, 305 Bethlehem Road, Russellville, has changed its Decoration Day to the first Sunday in May, 2022. This year that date will be Sunday, May 1st.

The 13th annual Coats Farm Benefit Trail Ride and Auction will be held on Friday, April 8th and Saturday, April 9th at Coats Farm at 1458 Co. Road 298 in Florence. Yard sale begins Friday at 8 a.m. in the barn with the trail ride beginning on Saturday at 9 a.m. There will be no silent auction. However, there will be restaurant, hotels and business gift cards sold at a discount. Chicken and goat stew, hamburgers, hot dogs, BBQ, and ham and beans will be served beginning at 11 a.m. Homemade peach and apple fried pies will be sold as well. There will be a big auction held outside beginning at 12:15. New & used furniture, sports merobillia, antiques, tools, appliances, horse and horse tack, grass seed and much more will be auctioned off. For more information, call NACCH Director Don Williams at (256)-366-3327. All proceeds go to North Alabama Christian Children's Home.



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'SUCCESS,' from page 1

ing up enough money to score her daily fix of methamphetamine. For a young woman in her early 40s, it doesn't sound like much of a life, and it wasn't.

"What stuck out at me the most during my addiction was the very first time I had to go climb into a dumpster for food," Taylor said. "I was literally starving and didn't have anything to eat. I remember that day and thinking, 'Really? I've resorted to this?'"

Through what both women call a *God* encounter (not a *chance* encounter), Taylor met Betsy Green on a rainy day in February 2020, and that meeting changed both women's lives.

Green and her husband created the Russellville Coalition, a branch of their Free to Praise ministry, to provide tools to the city's growing homeless population and help them improve their life situations.

Green first heard about Taylor from a worker at the Russellville Public Library in 2019, and she was impressed by the Lord to find Taylor. She looked for Taylor more than a year with no success.

The homeless have a way of staying invisible in a community, particularly if they don't want to be found.

"When we met, I learned she had been looking for me for a year-and-a-half," Taylor said. "If Betsy had found me when she started looking, I wasn't ready for help at that time. And if an addict isn't ready for help, no treatment or assistance will succeed."

After the few possessions she had were stolen the previous night, Taylor was walking that February morning to a friend's house. That friend had loaned Taylor a tablet, so she wanted to tell him in person what had happened.

He wasn't home, so Taylor noticed a gravel road and decided to follow it. She reached the end of that road as it connected into Underwood Road and saw a vehicle leaving a driveway headed toward town.

As Green pulled out of her driveway, she noticed someone walking in the heavy rain.

"Normally, I don't pick up strangers, but I did not hesitate that morning to do just that," Green said. "It was Tonya! I was amazed that God had literally delivered her right to my door step."

This time, Taylor was ready to turn her life around.

"God's timing is always perfect! So we paid for, and transported her to, a recovery facility out of town and we've continued to stand by her in any way we can to this day," Green said.

Taylor, the mother of two (25 and 21), is a 1994 graduate of Phillips High School. She worked for her first husband's business, TC Tires in Russellville, for several years.

Taylor's methamphetamine use started in 2017 after she and her second husband split up. Taylor said she was encouraged to try meth and started doing it 'every now and then for energy.'

Before long though, an addict's control over the drug flip-flops, and the drug begins to control the addict. That's what happened with Taylor.

"I started using it every day and then snorting it wasn't good enough. So I started putting a needle in my arm from there," Taylor said. "I lost my vehicle and a month later lost my apartment at East Side Apartments. That's when I started living on the street.

"I was shoplifting to pay for the habit. I had a cell phone but could only use it on WiFi because I couldn't afford any minutes. Drugs took over my whole life. I was using meth every day and got very underweight, only eating every

two or three days. I'm 5'6" and I got down to less than 120 pounds. The last time I went to jail, the leggings they gave me were a girls' large," she added.

When she met Green, Taylor had no home, no job, no vehicle, a broken relationship with her family and she was on probation.

Two years later, Taylor lives in her own apartment in Florence, has a car and she's rebuilt her relationships with her children. Taylor will soon be a grandmother. She's done with the court system, other than paying off some fines.

She is training for a mentorship program where she will work as a peer specialist. Taylor will be assigned a client and work as the client's advocate, helping to provide assistance to help that person recover from addiction. Once she completes the online training, she will be certified through the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Taylor continues to talk with her sponsor three times each week and she regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. The road to recovery from addiction never ends, and Taylor realizes that.

"You have to stay around people in recovery who want the same goals in life that you want. Whatever you surround yourself with is what you'll eventually become," Taylor said.

Taylor remains active with the Russellville Coalition, helping Green to reach out to and help those still homeless and in addiction.

"Being a part of Tonya's story has been such an inspiration for us, and witnessing first hand God's ability to restore what the enemy has stolen is nothing short of miraculous," Green said. "Recovery for Tonya wasn't always easy. But, I'm sure she would agree that it was worth it!"

Taylor isn't the Russellville Coalition's only success story, and Green says she won't be the last. Coalition members continue to work to prevent homelessness in Russellville, and have successfully helped many get off the streets and out of the woods the past two years.

As with any outreach, there are successes and failures. And that doesn't discourage Green.

"As much as we wish every story could end as well as Tonya's, we realize most will not. But that does not discourage us or make us feel our efforts are unsuccessful. We may never see the true results of what we do in someone's life, but it is what God has told us to do until He comes," Green said.

Taylor will always appreciate what Green and the Russellville Coalition did for her after that rainy morning the two women finally met.

"She really helped me, and went above and beyond for me. From finding me dry clothes that first day to giving me food to eat," Taylor said. "When I got my first job, there was no way for me to get work shoes. She bought those for me. Whenever she has questions about where to find people to help, I let her know when I hear about a new place. She buys groceries for folks. She's filled my tank with gas when I had to go to rehab in Birmingham. If I ever really and truly need anything, she's there for me.

"When you're homeless, people look at you like you're not worthy or equal to them and it hurts. I had to go dumpster diving for food. That's hard and people judge you. Before I was in my addiction, I was probably one of those people who looked the other way. If I hadn't gone through my addiction, I wouldn't be equipped to help people going through that now," Taylor said.

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

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Council authorizes historical study on structures to be demolished

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved a \$4,000 expense with a Decatur consulting firm to conduct a historical study on the 11 properties set to be demolished as part of a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant.

The council approved the measure at its March 7, 2022 meeting. Because the grant includes federal funding, the study must be done to make sure there are no historical landmarks or designations on the structures (or land) before they are demolished.

The study will be submitted to the Alabama Historical Commission. The 11 sites include College Avenue Elementary School and all the structures on that property. The remaining 10 properties are: 501, 503

Montgomery St. SE, 401
Montgomery St. SE, 902
S. Washington Ave., 726
S. Jackson Ave., 801,
807 Franklin St. NE, 108
Lauderdale St. NE and
550 Fourth St.

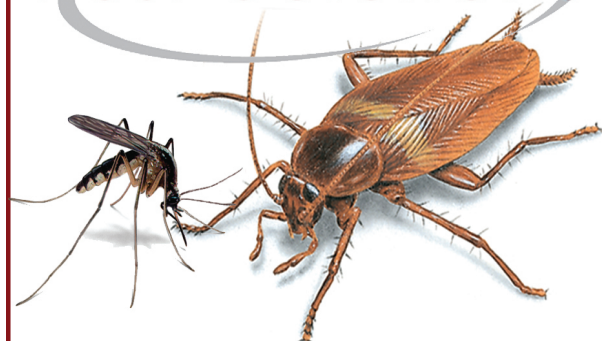
In other agenda items, the council: —accepted letters of resignation from Sgt. Chris Hill in the Russellville Police Department and declared a vacancy for sergeant with promotion from within the Classified Service, and declared a vacancy for patrol officer in the RPD.

—accepted a letter of resignation from Landon Hill in the Street Department and declared a vacancy for Laborer and authorized advertisement to solicit job applications.

—extended the deadline to accept patrol officer applications until March 14, 2022.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be March 21, 2022, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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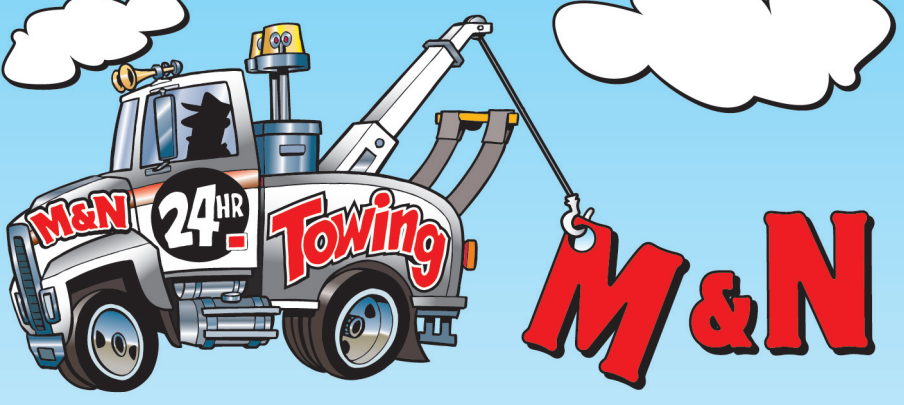
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Two Phil Campbell pitchers one-hit Deshler as Bobcats cruise to fourth straight win

Staff reports

Cam Habada and Noah Raper combined to throw a one-hitter for Phil Campbell on Thursday at Deshler as the Bobcats extended their early-season win streak to four with a 9-2 rout.

The Tigers took advantage of two walks and two errors to score two unearned runs off Habada in the bottom of the first, but the senior lefty locked in thereafter. Habada (4-0) cruised through the next three innings, retiring nine of ten batters and striking out six.

Habada worked around a pair of walks in the fifth, recording three more punch-outs, and then turned things over to Raper, who retired all six batters he faced in the final two innings.

Phil Campbell (7-2) put up all the offense it would need with a four-run top of the first. Sage Raper was hit by a pitch with one out, and Mason Swinney followed with a single to center. Habada drove in a run with a base hit, and Kyle Pace followed with a two-run double. Pace later scored on a passed ball to make it 4-0.

Leading 4-2, the Bobcats added three more runs in the top of the fourth. Jacob Barnwell drew a one-out walk, and Cole Pace followed with a single. Bryant Anthony chased home Barnwell with an RBI single, and Phil Campbell scored twice more in the inning thanks to two Deshler errors.

The Bobcats added another run in the top of the fifth when Habada led off with a triple and later came home on a groundball by Barnwell. The Bobcats finished off the scoring in the top of the

See 'BOBCATS,' page 13

Dawn of a new era



Langston, second from left, and Brown, second from right, were named as the head coaches of the NW-SCC baseball and softball programs last week after the college announced the return of athletics after over a decade absence.

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

In 2011, when Northwest-Shoals Community College announced the cancellation of all athletic programs within the college, there was a deep sense of loss within the Muscle Shoals and Phil Campbell communities as well as the surrounding areas.

And with the return of the program rumored for years feeling more and more like a distant dream with each passing season, that dream took one step towards realization last week.

David Langston and Angel Brown were hired as the new head coaches of the baseball and softball programs, respectively, and were introduced to the public at a press conference at the Northwest-Shoal Community College Muscle Shoals campus last Tuesday.

While Brown is somewhat familiar with the program as she played for Bevil State Community College and often squared off against NW-SCC during her playing days, no one is quite as familiar with their *new* program as Langston is.

A member of the first baseball team at NW-SCC in 1993, Langston is all too familiar with the program in which he is taking over.

Part of the departing coaching staff in 2011 was

Langston, who served as the head coach of the Patriots for over a decade.

During his time as the head coach, Langston amassed a 327-160 record during his stint with NW-SCC.

In addition, Langston also won five Alabama Community College Conference (ACCC) championships as head coach of the Patriots as well as two regional coach of the year awards.

Having the opportunity to come back to a program he was so familiar with was something that Langston jumped on immediately. However, when the hiring process occurred, Langston was unsure about his status for a brief period of time.

But once he got the call that he had been selected as the head coach, Langston was jubilant for a moment, then immediately went to work on recruiting and restoring the program to where it once was.

"I think the waiting and the uncertainty was the worst part. A lot of people were telling me that I probably got the job but of course you never know," Langston said. "It's very exciting. I've been very fortunate with the places I've been to be surrounded by great people that helped me get here. Having been here for ten years, this is home for me. I love college baseball, specifically junior col-

See 'ERA,' page 14

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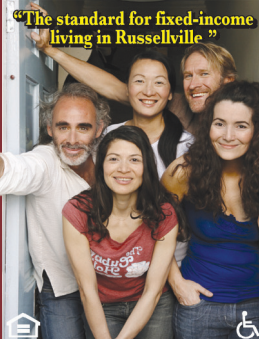
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By virtue of an execution issued out of the Alabama Department of Revenue of Franklin County, Alabama, and to me directed whereby I am commanded to make the amount of a certain judgment recently obtained against Amada Torres Mena in favor of Alabama Department of Revenue out of the goods, chattels, land and tenements of the said Amada Torres Mena. I have levied on the following property, to wit:

Lots Numbered 185, 186, and 187 according to the original plat and survey of the City of Russellville, Alabama, said lots being bounded on the North by Lawrence Street, on the East by Lot No. 188, on the South by an alley, and on the West by Washington Street, in the City of Russellville, Franklin County, Alabama, and being a part of the property conveyed to Earl D. Stevenson on November 3, 1915, by Katie Canterbury and husband, W.J. Canterbury, by deed recorded in the Office of the Judge of Probate of said County in Deed Book 25, at Page 69. (Legal description provided by the parties)

Together with the appurtenances thereunto belonging.

Therefore, according to said command, I shall expose for sale at public auction, all the right, title and interest of the above named Amada Torres Mena on the 28th day of March 2022, at 10:00 A.M. on the Franklin County Courthouse steps.

This property will be sold on the above date unless this civil case has been settled. For information regarding this sale you may call 256-332-8811.

Dated this February 15, 2022.

Shannon Oliver
Sheriff of Franklin County

'BOBCATS,' from page 11

sixth when Sage Raper singled, moved to second on a walk to Swinney, stole third and came home on a wild pitch.

Habada, who improved to 7-0 in his varsity career, struck out 11 and walked five in five innings, allowing just one hit. He now has 40 strikeouts on the season in 17.1 innings.

Habada also led the way at the plate, going 2-for-4 with an RBI and two runs scored. He is batting .462 (12-for-26) on the season with 10 RBIs. Raper was 1-for-3 on Thursday with a stolen base and two runs scored. He's hitting .394 (13-for-33) on the year and is tied with Swinney for the team lead in runs scored with 13.

Swinney went 1-for-3 with a walk and a run on Thursday. The University of Alabama signee is now batting .500 (13-for-26) through the season's first nine games.

Kyle Pace was 1-for-4 on Thursday with a two-run double, and Cole Pace went 1-for-4 with a run. Anthony was 1-for-4 with an RBI and a run, and Eli Taylor walked and stole a base.



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'ERA,' from page 11

lege, and so I'm just really excited about getting on the phone tonight and getting the recruitment process going and getting the best players for our program that we can."

Langston, who has made coaching stops at Muscle Shoals, Bob Jones, Florence, and is currently the pitching coach at Russellville High School, has been heavily involved with summer baseball programs over the years as well.

So in order to find a more qualified coach who has a better eye for local talent, you could search far and wide and would most likely come up empty in your search.

And as he begins to embark on the recruitment trail, Langston is hopeful that the connections he has made during his previous stops will yield dividends once recruits start putting pen to paper.

"Being here local, I've been involved in a lot of stuff outside of high school ball. So the connections and everything that I have, including relationships locally and throughout the state, remain," Langston said. "We want to make sure that we get the best players from this area. And I already have a list. Several guys that I haven't been able to contact yet that we will definitely be interested in. We don't want to go out and sign 24 freshmen because we'll just be right back in the same boat two years later. So we're going to look at about half freshmen and half transfers. And finding that balance is key for us."

As for Brown, she's no stranger to building a program from the ground up. Returning to her alma mater, Brown, a Reform, Alabama native, was

named the head coach of Bevil State Community College, where she played softball while earning her associate degree, when the administration reinstated the athletic program in 2016.

Spending time as an assistant coach at the University of West Alabama and University of Alabama in Huntsville, Brown has an extensive coaching resume.

And bringing that experience to a reborn program is a challenge that she knew she couldn't pass up — even if it meant coaching her former rival school.

"I was nervous coming in just because I knew how big of a deal this was for this community. But after speaking to the public and officials and just seeing that genuine excitement that they had for the program, it just gives you goosebumps," Brown said. "Obviously I've heard about this and just how big of a deal it is for the community but to be here and to see it in person, it's just pretty awesome."

While she has coached at larger programs in the past, Brown says that one of her main areas of focus is to instill a 'family-like' culture within the program.

And for a program that will rely heavily - at the start - on recruits from the surrounding area, that idea is one that will most likely bode well for Brown and the program.

"My philosophy is that this is going to be a very family-oriented program. Finding the right kids that are going to buy in to what we're trying to do and what we stand for," Brown said. "I coach very much like a mother figure. I'm going to make sure that they do what they're supposed to do on and off the field. I'm also going to make sure that they keep those grades up and at the end of the day, make them better people as well."

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Russellville rallies past Etowah with six-run sixth, falls to Hartselle, Bray in nightcap

Staff reports

Russellville split a pair of games with Etowah and Hartselle on Thursday, rallying for six runs in the bottom of the sixth inning to beat the Blue Devils 7-3 in game one before falling 6-1 to the Tigers and Auburn signee Elliott Bray in the nightcap.

The Golden Tigers (5-7) had their chances early on in game two against Bray, one of three Hartselle pitchers who signed with Auburn in November. They stranded two runners in the bottom of the first and two more in the second after getting a double from Shayden Romans and a bunt hit from Casen Heaps.

Trailing 2-0, Russellville got on the board in the bottom of the third when Canyon Pace singled and scored on a double by Ethan Oliver. Nathan Brockway drew a walk, but the Golden Tigers stranded two runners for the third inning in a row.

Heaps doubled in the bottom of the fourth, but he would prove to be Russellville's final base runner of the night. Bray settled into a groove from that point on and retired the final 11 batters he faced. The 6'2, 210-pound senior right-hander closed out the game in dominant fashion, striking out six consecutive hitters in the sixth and seven innings. He finished with 16 strike-outs, the most by any pitcher at Russellville Baseball Stadium since former Golden Tiger Landon Ezzell struck out 16 East Limestone batters on April 10, 2018.

Bray pounded the zone all night, throwing 82 of his 107 pitches for strikes. He allowed one earned run on six hits and walked just one in the complete game win.

Junior lefty Logan White pitched well but took the loss for Russellville, allowing four runs (just one earned) on five hits in 5.1 innings. He struck out four and walked one. Reed Hill worked the final 1.2 innings in relief, allowing two runs (both unearned) on one hit and two walks.

Leading 2-1 after four innings, Hartselle (10-2) scored two runs in the top of the fifth and two more in the seventh to put the game away.

Heaps finished 2-for-3 and is now tied with Pace for the team lead in multi-hit games this season with five. Heaps is 10-for-13 over his last five games and is now batting a team-best .444 (16-for-36) on the year.

Pace, Oliver, Romans and Eli Gipson had one hit apiece against Hartselle.

Earlier on Thursday, Russellville rallied from a late 3-1 deficit to beat Etowah 7-3. The Golden Tigers put together four hits, two walks and three hit batters to score six runs in the bottom of the sixth inning. Heaps drove in a run with a bunt hit, and Gipson had a game-tying RBI single. Pace, who finished 2-for-3, drove in the go-ahead run with another RBI single.

Russellville added three more runs in the inning when Oliver and Romans were each hit by a pitch with the bases full and Brockway drew a bases-loaded walk.

Reliever Brayden Spurgeon was the beneficiary of the late rally, tossing two scoreless innings to pick up his third relief win of the season. Spurgeon (3-0) allowed one hit and struck out two, throwing 21 of his 32 pitches for strikes.

Junior right-hander Banks Langston overcame a rough start to the game to put together five solid innings for Russellville. He issued a leadoff walk in the top of the first and then allowed a two-run homer to Caleb Freeman that put the Golden Tigers in an early 2-0 hole.

Langston allowed two more singles in the first but settled in thereafter, holding Etowah hitless over the next four frames. The Blue Devils took advantage of an error, a stolen base and two wild pitches to score an unearned run in the top of the fourth, stretching their lead to 3-0. Russellville got on the board in the bottom of the fifth when Gipson was hit by a pitch and later scored on a two-out double by Hill to make it 3-1.

Spurgeon worked a scoreless top of the sixth, and then the Golden Tigers rallied for the win in the bottom half.

Langston allowed three runs (two earned) on three hits in five innings. He struck out four and walked five. Pace was 2-for-3 with an RBI and a run, and Andrew Hatton went 2-for-4 with a run. Gipson was 1-for-3 with an RBI and two runs scored, and Hill was 1-for-3 with an RBI double and a run.

Heaps went 1-for-3 with an RBI and a run, and Romans was 1-for-3 with an RBI. Brockway reached base three times, walking once and getting hit by a pitch twice. He drove in a run and scored another.

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