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CAROL MURPHREE
 Board of Education District 4
 Republican Primary Tuesday, May 24

Russellville Elementary School named best in 'CLAS' for 2022

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The honors keep coming for Russellville City Schools, as Russellville Elementary School was named last week as the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools Banner School for District Seven.

The announcement follows Russellville High School being named one of Alabama's top 25 high schools by U.S. News and World Report in its 2022 rankings.

30 Alabama schools received CLAS distinction among Alabama's eight state school board districts. The CLAS Banner School Program recognizes schools that "showcase outstanding programs and service to

students."

Among the four schools honored in District Seven, RES was named the overall 2022 CLAS Banner School.

RES earned this honor because of its innovative its Bilingual Team-Taught Science Program, implemented during the 2020-21 school year to meet educational needs of students with limited and interrupted formal education. The success of the program was demonstrated by increased testing scores at the school.

"This is a great honor for RES and shows the value of the work they are doing to provide each and every student at their school with the best educational possible," RCS

See 'CLAS,' page 3

Calderon, Malone eager to represent RHS at Boys, Girls State

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Although neither of Russellville High School's Boys and Girls State representatives plan on a career in politics, they will see first-hand how government operates when they travel to Troy University this summer.

RHS rising seniors Madilyn Calderon and Brayden Malone were recently selected by faculty and staff to represent their school at the 2022 Girls and Boys State. Both sessions will be held on the campus of Troy University, with Boys State May 29-June 4 and Girls State June 5-10.

Boys and Girls State were created by the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary to give young men and women the opportu-

nity to learn the ideals and objectives of American government. This is done not through lectures and textbooks. Rather, students take part in a model state government that includes a two-party system where they develop their own party platforms while campaigning and seeking various elected offices.

Boys and Girls State is for students who will be entering their senior year of high school. Both Calderon and Malone were somewhat familiar with the program before they were selected, and they're excited to be part of the Boys and Girls State Class of 2022.

"I think it's such an honor to represent Russellville in this special way," Calderon said. "I love everyone at

See 'STATE,' page 3

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CURTIS BAKER
 Board of Education, District 2
 May 24, 2022
 Republican Primary

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'STATE,' from page 1

this school. I love that everyone knows everyone. It's like a big family and it's special to be selected out of a class where there were many deserving students."

Calderon is the daughter of Marcos and Kellie Calderon of Russellville. She is a member of the National Honor Society and the National Technical Honor Society. Both of Calderon's parents are bilingual, and that led her to sign up to be an English Language Aide, working with classmates who have not yet become English proficient.

"My parents taught me to help other people, especially people who may not fit in because they don't speak the language we do. That is why I became an EL aide," Calderon said.

Calderon, who describes herself as 'shy at first,' looks forward to meeting and spending time with girls from across Alabama.

"It's a really good opportunity to make friendships that could last a life time," Calderon said. "It takes me a little while to open up but once I'm warmed up to people I'm very energetic and loud and I'll talk to everyone."

Calderon credits RHS teacher Stephanie Mayfield with giving her the confidence to meet new people.

"She is my top idol," Calderon said of Mayfield, who was her fifth grade science and ninth grade Spanish teacher. "She's really brought me out of my comfort zone and taught me it's okay to not be okay sometimes. She's such a good, positive role model, especially with her EL students."

Calderon plans to go into education or the medical field after college. Either way, she believes the Girls State experience will help prepare her for the world that awaits.

For Brayden, the son of Bradley and Melanie Malone of Russellville, he knows taking part in Boys State will look good on a resume. More so, though, Malone sees it as a great learning experience.

"When I heard I was selected to go I was surprised. It's an honor and we have a bunch of really smart kids in my class who could have been selected a lot easier than me so I definitely didn't expect to be chosen," Malone said.

"I love doing things like this and meeting new people. I don't get too nervous about that. I'm pretty excited about going," he added.

As the lone representative from Russellville at Boys State, Malone hopes to show his school is about more than just outstanding athletics.

"Most people automatically think about sports when they hear Russellville, but they don't know a lot about our city," Malone said. "They know we're baseball state champions but they don't know Russellville even exists. I hope to go down there and share with others that we have a great school in a great community."

Malone plans to study nursing in college and follow the career path of his mother Melanie, a Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner in Russellville. He's enrolled in RHS' Career Tech program and hopes to receive his Certified Nursing Assistant certification this summer.



Brayden Malone

CONTINUED ->

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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 June 22, 2022, at M&N Wrecker & Service Center, 11833 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, Al, 35653. Seller reserves the right to reject any

'CLAS,' from page 1

Superintendent Dr. Heath Grimes said.

"Russellville City Schools have a higher than average percentage of English language learners, which naturally means our teachers must find ways to make sure these students are able to achieve success academically while working on the language and educational barriers these students face. They care deeply about each student, and that is so evident," he added.

The awards were presented during a May 9th luncheon in Prattville. Each school was nominated by its superintendent, with 166 school programs nominated statewide.

Grimes commended RES Principal Kristie Ezzell and her faculty and staff for "all they do to improve the educational opportunities for our students, and the administration's support of the program and overall learning at the school."



COURTESY PHOTO

After Russellville High School was named one of Alabama's top 25 high schools by U.S. News and World Report, Russellville Elementary School was selected as 2022 overall CLAS Banner School in District Seven.

"Russellville has a really good program if you want to get involved in the medical field or nursing. I'd love to come back home and work in the nursing field. When I get out of school I'm hoping I can work with my mom or take over her business or something," Malone said.

Although he's only been a Russellville student two years, Malone said he's blessed to have been influenced by several great teachers.

"They all have been very influential in my life. If I had to pick one, I'd say Dr. Stephanie Oliver, who does the Nursing/Medical Career Tech Program and HOSA. She's helped me a lot from the first day I moved to Russellville High School," Malone said.

Malone is a member of Future Health Professionals (previously known as HOSA) and he's a member of the boys' varsity golf team, which advanced to Sub State this spring.



Madilyn Calderon

Commission approves safety enhancements at 75/724 intersection

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission authorized County Engineer David Palmer to move forward with several safety enhancements for the Highway 75/724 intersection.

Commissioners took the action at their May 16th business meeting.

Highway 75 is the primary road used by trucks traveling to and from Pilgrim's Russellville. 724 is the former Alabama Highway 24 that gave way to the new four-lane highway that's a part of Corridor V.

Last month, there was another serious accident at the intersection, as a tractor trailer traveling south on 75 allegedly failed to stop at the 75/724 intersection and struck a westbound vehicle, seriously injuring the passenger.

The safety enhancements will include larger stop signs (48") and Stop Ahead signs, both of which will be illuminated with warning lights operated by solar energy. Commissioners also authorized the installation of rumble strips on 75, both north and south of 724.

Contractors will also install rumble strips on Highway 77, both north and south of new Alabama 24.

Franklin County Engineer David Palmer said he met with Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver and District One County Commissioner Chris Wallace about the intersection, which has a history of accidents, including one fatality.

Palmer said there is good visibility at the intersection and there is 'nothing glaring' he can see that would keep vehicles on 75 from stopping at the intersection, but he expects the additional safety measures to mitigate future problems at 75/724.

Palmer told commissioners the work should be done within 3-4 weeks, depending on how quickly the contractor can schedule the project.

In other agenda items, the commission:

—commended Palmer for being honored as the Alabama County Engineers Association County Engineer of the Year for 2022. Palmer received the honor at the state conference last week. Palmer's final day of employment with the Franklin County Highway Department will be July 1, 2022. Assistant Engineer Jason Baggett is expected to be approved to move into the County Engineer

SEE 'INTERSECTION,' page 8

Letter to the editor...

Dear Editor:

In the letter to the editor in the May 4, 2022, *Franklin Free Press*, the letter came from Lynda Kirkpatrick of Winfield.

If you look her up on Facebook, she says: "I am a feminist. I have been a woman for a long time. I would be stupid not to be on my own side."

If you scan through all her selfies to the end, you find she is the Public Relations Director for the Marion County Democratic Party, July 2019-Present; Paralegal Instructor, Davidson College 2002-2008; Litigation Specialist, Retired July 1995-April 2016; Catholic Religion and Alabama Democratic Party, Political Views.

She runs down Republican candidates Robert Aderholt, Tommy Tuberville and Mike Durant, candidate for U.S. Senate.

I don't know any of them personally and may or may not support them, but for the political opposition to run them down makes me wonder about what she says.

She lives in Marion County, but places a letter to the Editor of the *Franklin Free Press*. Sounds similar to what she has been fussing about. If you want to uplift our candidate, do so, but unless you can show absolute proof of wrongdoing by the opposition, you are just spreading misinformation. It seems that all political advocates want to do in in the present elections. I'm so sick of politics and all the lies that are told. If this is true, it should be proven but if it's a lie the liars should be prosecuted for slander if that was possible.

I don't care what party you identify with, **tell the truth** and give proof or stop spreading the misinformation. Lynda Kirkpatrick winds her letter up saying "Are they telling us what their plan is if elected or are they spending their time bashing their opponents?"

I see candidates bashing opponents but I haven't seen Mike Durant bash anyone. Have you?

I am nobody special. Retired from the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries after more than 41 years. I served with the Franklin County Sheriff's Reserve and as Reserve Chief for about 10 years under Sheriff Larry Plott. I'm a member of Orange Baptist Church and have been a life long resident of Franklin County except for a short time away in college and while working for the Department of Agriculture.

I am a life member of the NRA and will defend the Second Amendment to the

SEE 'LETTER' page 9

FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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Correction Policy

The *Franklin Free Press* strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

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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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Candidate profiles: Oliver, Fike running for Franklin County Sheriff

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In the May 24, 2022, Republican Primary for Franklin County Sheriff, there's no shortage of law enforcement experience among the two candidates.

Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver has more than 28 years experience, and his challenger, Joe Fike, has been in law enforcement for 22 years.

With no Democratic candidate in the race, next Tuesday's Republican Primary is the de facto election for the position.

Fike began in law enforcement as a jailer in Lawrence County. He advanced to the rank of sergeant where he supervised daily operations at the Lawrence County Jail.

Fike received his A.P.O.S.T. Certification at Jacksonville State University. He went on to serve as Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE)

Officer in Lawrence County, and worked for Town Creek and Courtland Police

Departments, where he was promoted to Assistant Chief.

Fike was appointed Phil Campbell Chief of Police in 2017. He left that position earlier this year and now works

as a police officer on the campus of Calhoun Community College.

Oliver is seeking his fourth term as Franklin County Sheriff after taking office in

2011. He is a Russellville High School graduate and graduate of the Northeast Alabama

Police Academy. Oliver grew up in the Tharptown community.

Oliver believes his experience serving as sheriff is important for Franklin County

citizens, who rely on the Sheriff's Office in a variety of ways.

"The sheriff has many different duties. These include protecting our citizens, responding

to calls and carrying out the service of civil documents and court orders as well as maintaining a secure jail," Oliver said. "The sheriff is here to

make sure our county is a safe, secure place for people to live and work and I take that very seriously."

Oliver has served as guardian/conservator for more than 30 people who have been deemed wards of the state by a court.

"These are people who have no family or others to care for them. It's a duty I take seriously. I spend time getting to know them and I represent them in a

way to protect their best interests," Oliver said. Fike said his experience working for a sheriff's department and working in

Phil Campbell give him the experience and perspective he needs to effectively serve as sheriff.

"I served the town of Phil Campbell in many roles, from Chief to Town Safety Officer and I occasionally rode the garbage truck," Fike said. "Leadership is about serving others and helping others around you rise. I

have applied this throughout my career and while running my own business." For 11 years, Oliver said he's worked diligently to make changes and

improvements in the Sheriff's Office to improve its efficiency for Franklin County citizens. It's a responsibility he takes personally. "Being elected as YOUR sheriff has been an honor that I take very seriously, and as I've said before, I don't want to be "A" sheriff. I want to be "YOUR" sheriff," Oliver said. "I am someone you can talk to if you need to

and someone you can continue to trust to do this job. I would like to ask for your vote and support on May 24th." Oliver was elected as a Democrat in 2010, 2014 and 2018, but he

changed his political affiliation to the Republican Party because he saw the



Shannon Oliver

Democratic Party continue to detach itself from law enforcement and values important to the people of Northwest Alabama.

Fike describes himself as a Conservative Christian, and he will take that with him into the office of sheriff.

"I will be fair and impartial and free from prejudice. I have grown a robust understanding while working in the correctional system and serving small communities to be empathetic and compassionate while carrying out the daily duties of the job," Fike said.


"I serve on the Franklin County Farmers Federation Board of Directors, the Phil Campbell Housing Authority and the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee. I would humbly ask for your vote in the Republican Primary on May 24, 2022," he added.



Joe Fike



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It's that time again—Mowing Season. Time to remove all old flowers from graves and headstones at the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery on Highway 724, Newburg. Donations are needed for the upkeep of the cemetery. If you have a loved one buried in this cemetery or want to help by contributing, please send contributions to: Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, 941 Highway 87, Russellville, AL, 35654.

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Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 is selling Boston Butts during Memorial Day weekend. Butts are \$35 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup is Saturday, May 28, between 8-10 a.m., at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.

Liberty Chapel Freewill Baptist Church will host Revival Services June 5-8, 2022. The church is located on Highway 81 in the East Franklin Community, just past the Fire Department. Evangelist will be Bro. Jeff Boyles. Pastor is Bro. Brian Galloway. Sunday night services begin at 5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday services at 7 p.m. Everyone is welcome! For more information contact Delmer Duboise at 256-324-8430.

The Woodruff Family Reunion will be held at Cedar Buff Farm, 3449 County Road 78, Russellville, on Saturday, June 11, from 10-2. Please bring a covered dish or dessert of your choice.

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Franklin County BOE District Two candidate profiles: Baker and Welborn

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When residents of Franklin County's School Board District Two vote in the May 24th Republican Primary, they'll choose between two men, each of whom is greatly invested in Phil Campbell School.

With no Democratic candidate, the winner between incumbent Terry Welborn and Republican challenger Curtis Baker will serve a six-year term on the Franklin County Board of Education starting in November.

The same candidates appeared on the ballot in 2016, but Baker was the Democratic nominee that time. He switched to the Republican Party last year, a move Welborn made two years after he was first elected to the position as a Democrat in 2010.

Baker was required to submit a written request to the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee to be considered by the party. Once his request went to a vote, he was welcomed by the committee with a unanimous vote.

"I felt like at the national level Democrats had gone too far left for me to be any part of that," Baker said. "I have genuine concerns about what some Democrats believe should be taught in the classroom."

Welborn was the first Franklin County elected official to change parties.

Welborn, who is seeking a third term, said when he changed parties that the Republican Party was at the forefront of "As a member of the Board of Education, it is my job to look out for the best interests of students and their opportunities," Welborn said

at the time. "The Republican Party is the national and state leader when it comes to putting students first and providing innovative education solutions for our kids."

Baker is a 2000 graduate of PCHS. He and his wife Tiffany have three children. Their oldest son, Austen, graduate from PCHS last year and their other two children are Phil Campbell students.

Earlier this year, Baker was honored with the Distinguished Service Award for Phil Campbell by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, for his many volunteer efforts for his community and school.

"Ever since I got out of school in 2000, I've had a passion to give back to Phil Campbell School. I think we need a positive change and that starts with a new board member representing District Two," Baker said.

Baker has concerns about whether enough is being done to keep illicit drugs and vapes (which often contain marijuana with THC) out of the school. He also said Phil Campbell is dealing with some student issues on transgender that the system's policy makers must address.

"We must make sure we're doing a good job year in and year out with our policy to keep drugs out of our schools," Baker said. "We had a guy charged with selling vape juices with THS right here in our county. We're dealing with a growing problem with fentanyl and must make sure we're at the forefront of that issue."



Terry Welborn

"You can't be reactive to the drug problem. You must be proactive to even have a chance to keep it out of your schools," Baker added.

Welborn talked about his passion for Phil Campbell and all the community has been through since he was elected in 2010.

"I love Phil Campbell. My kids graduated from there. My grandkids are going there as well. We've had some rough times since 2010, when I was first elected," Welborn said. "We went through a devastating tornado in my first term and then the pandemic hit two years ago."

"So we as the board sat down with our superintendent and came up with the best solutions to educate our kids and keep them safe," Welborn added.

Welborn talked about some of the board's accomplishments the past 12 years, in particular bringing the school system out of the red, now with the one-month operating budget required by the state Department of Education.

Capital projects during Welborn's tenure include a new parking lot, artificial turf practice field, resurfaced baseball field, softball field renovations and plans to expand the PCES library. He also mentioned in a social media post that the board approved a budget including important academic programs like 1 Station, Math Coach and EL Intervention.

Baker said he's heard concerns from Phil Campbell parents about the school's policy regarding COVID-19 and how it often changed, leaving parents in the dark as to what measures were being taken to minimize the risk to all students and faculty.

Whether elected or not, Baker plans to remain an active volunteer in school activities, something he believes can save a child from problems in life.

"I have a theory on extracurricular activities like band or athletics or FFA," Baker said. "That may be the only chance you have of reaching a child coming to a crossroads in his or her life. Whether they go the wrong way or stay on the right path. Their love of baseball or band or another activity may be what keeps them from making bad decisions."

"If you don't invest in those activities and give all you can, including your time, are you really doing everything you can to help that child? Giving my time is something I've always tried to do," he added.



Curtis Baker and family

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Dale, Neighbors vying for State Democratic Committee seat

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

After several terms as House District 18's male representative on the Alabama State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC), Eddie Britton decided to retire from the position after his term ends later this year.

Each House District in Alabama is represented by one male and one female resident on the SDEC.

For the first time, HD 18 will have a contested race to select its Democratic representative, as Russellville resident Charles Dale and Phil Campbell resident Rick Neighbors both are seeking the position.

Voters who choose a Democratic Primary ballot on May 24th will select their choice from Dale or Neighbors, who is also running for the Democratic nomination to United States Congress for the Fourth District of Alabama.

Dale, 81, is a veteran of Democratic politics who was part of the historic Selma Bridge Crossing 57 years ago. Dale has been active in Democratic

politics at the local level for years, and he's run twice for Russellville City Council. For Dale, it's hard to remember his life when politics wasn't a part of it.

"Politics has been in my DNA since I was a teenager. It shaped my beliefs when I took part in the March to Selma," Dale said. "That really influenced my initiative into politics and made me want to be a servant of solving problems instead of creating them."

Neighbors, a decorated Army veteran, served three tours in Vietnam, the last ending in the spring of 1971. After his service ended, he took a

job in the apparel industry, where he remained for 35 years.

Neighbors saw the decline of that industry as the result of what he calls 'harmful' legislation including NAFTA and CAFTA, which resulted in Alabama and other rural states losing jobs to Mexico and Central American countries.

His efforts to earn a seat on the SDEC are driven by a desire to help District 18's economy.

"We are poor and our elected leaders are making us poorer," Neighbors said. "In the 1980s, we had people in sewing plants doing their jobs well and our federal and state politicians gave money to these giant corporations who took their profits out of our communities and we ended up losing jobs and making our communities poor."

"When Eddie Britton said he wasn't going to run again, he asked someone to step up. Nobody did, so I said I'll step up. We've got to have people work-

ing at the state level who know their community and want to see their community prosper. We don't have that out of the Alabama Democratic Party quite honestly," he added.

For Dale, the Republican takeover of Alabama politics, all the way down to the local level, results from a marketing message that's not consistent with actual Republican ideology.

"The Democratic message is still there. It's just that people are looking at things from the Republican Party standpoint," Dale said.

"They're saying the things people in rural areas are wanting to hear. Same with the things Donald Trump is saying. But it's not reality. It's just what they want to hear. They think Republicans will solve our problems but they won't."

Dale also believes there should be more accountability demanded from our elected officials.

"The people need to let them know they are serving the people of Franklin County and they took an oath to support the people and not just be there to occupy a seat for themselves and gain political momentum," Dale said.

Neighbors has a similar message that centers on the role of government.

"There are needs all around and the people need to fill those needs and not just talk about them. Government is nothing more than how we want to live together without creating harm to others," Neighbors said. "We need to start talking about these issues and problems and not just calling people names, which doesn't solve anything and just creates ill will and division."

Dale has been honored by the NAACP with the Trailblazers Award, and he served as Chairman of the Martin Luther King Jr. Committee for four years. In 2018, he was given special recognition by the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP for his dedication and hard work to the organization.

Neighbors is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he earned a Bachelors Degree in Political Science. He received his MBA from the University of North Alabama in 2015, and a graduate certification in Project Management from UNA in 2017. His work experience includes management time with Wrangler and his current employer, Pilgrim's.



Rick Neighbors



Charles Dale

'INTERSECTION,' from page 4

position upon Palmer's retirement.

—authorized Franklin County Coroner Charles Adcox to apply for a state grant for a cooler to keep bodies refrigerated until transport . If the grant is awarded, the cooler will be available to other counties in the region with Franklin County.

—authorized repairs to a bridge on Highway 27 that has been closed. Shotcrete submitted the low bid for the repairs. Palmer said the bridge project may not be completed until August, due to other projects ongoing for the contractor. The bridge, after repairs, will still be posted to a three-ton limit.

—approved the FY2022 Franklin County Transportation Plan at a cost of \$1,224,414.24 for repairs/resurfacing/stripping of Lost Creek Road from 49 to 84 and Highway 59 from Gravel Hill Road to 22. These projects will be paid for with gas tax revenue from the Rebuild Alabama Act. Mid-South Paving will be the contractor.

—authorized County Attorney to send a letter to the Marion County Attorney proposing the two counties split costs of a survey to determine the true boundary lines on Highway 70. A 'gentleman's agreement' had been in place for 30 years, Palmer said, where Marion County maintained the stretch of Hwy. 70 west of Alabama 13 and Franklin County worked the east side. Marion County officials have balked at continuing to maintain the road and citizen complaints have led to some urgency to officially determine where the county boundary

lines fall. The survey is estimated to cost \$12,000, Palmer said.

—authorized Franklin County Revenue Commissioner Stratt Byars to enter into an agreement with MaxSouth for internet services at the Red Bay Satellite Office. Byars said the service will be faster and more reliable and will only be a \$20 cost difference per month.

—approved the hiring of Madison Kimbrough and Greg Smith as temporary Corrections Officers/Dispatchers with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, Ovontae Graham as a permanent Corrections Officer/Dispatcher and the termination of Corrections Officer/Dispatcher Joshua Wigginton. Family Medical Leave Act leave was approved for Alana James, who will be on maternity leave through May of 2022.

—amended the Letter of Intent between the Franklin County Commission and Franklin Land Management to provide for 270 days, rather than 60 or 120 days, to comply with new legislation related to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. The two parties entered into a non-binding letter of intent earlier this year on a proposal by Franklin Land Management to petition for the collection of household waste at its Belgreen site.

—declared a St. Cloud dumpster truck previously used by the Solid Waste Department as surplus property and authorized its sale on govdeals.com.

—approved the employment of John Burcham as a part-time employee for the Solid Waste Department.

Miller seeking State Republican Committee seat with hopes of seeing local party growth as well

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As a lifelong Franklin County resident, a local business owner and a member of the Franklin County Commission, Jason Miller is all about seeing Franklin County grow and prosper.

That's why he's seeking the Franklin County Place One position on the Alabama Republican Party State Executive Committee—it's another way, Miller believes, to help our county grow.

"We have seen tremendous change in the political climate here in Franklin County over the past 10-15 years, and that includes a steady increase in Republicans being elected to local offices," Miller said. "We need and deserve a voice at the state level who will actively work for this county and make sure we are properly represented."

Miller is seeking the unpaid committee seat because he wants to be that voice on the State Executive Committee while also helping the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee grow.

In particular, Miller believes the Chairman of the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee must be a Franklin County resident in order to move the local party forward.

He faces long-time State Executive Committee Place One member Lowell Moore of Russellville in the May 24, 2022, Republican Primary. All Franklin County residents voting in the Republican Primary will have the opportunity to vote for their choice on the State Republican Executive Committee.

"This is not about running against someone. We are at an important time in our country

where Americans are being force fed ideology inconsistent with our morals and values, from gender identity to apologizing for who we are. And we need people to stand up and say there's nothing wrong with defining marriage as between a man and woman. There's nothing wrong with not pushing an agenda of different gender identity on elementary aged children," Miller said.

"With limited exception, Alabamians have elected Republicans to fill every state and federal office. We have the opportunity to be a unified voice at the national level and say we're not about hating other people for being different," Miller said. "At the same time, most people in House District 18 and across our state don't want to be *told* that our beliefs are wrong.

"The first line of the Alabama Republican Party Platform is that *we believe every human being is endowed by our Creator with inherent rights to life, liberty and property*. That includes protecting the rights of unborn children as well," he added.

Miller owns and operates Miller's Affordable Furniture, a business his father opened in 1995. He's a former Russellville firefighter and a 2000 graduate of Russellville High School. He and his wife Belinda have three children: Hunter, Jaxon and Eliza.



Jason Miller

Parks amendment another example of legislative spending gone wild

Submitted to the FFP

The following article is an editorial submitted by the Alabama Policy Institute regarding Alabama Amendment One on the May 24, 2022 Primary ballots:

In less than two weeks, Alabama voters will head to the polls to cast their votes in the 2022 Republican and Democratic primary elections. One question that both ballots will have in common is whether to approve a constitutional amendment that would provide additional funding to Alabama state parks and the Alabama Historical Commission.

If the amendment passes, the state will issue \$85 million in bonds that would be paid off over the next 20 years; \$80 million of the funding would be dedicated towards state parks while the remaining \$5 million would fall under the juris-

See 'AMENDMENT,' Page 11

Moore hoping political experience will lead to another term on Republican Committee

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Lowell Moore remembers the day he first got involved in Republican politics. It was his 18th birthday, back in 1957.

The Belgreen High School graduate went to register to vote and later that day, he was voted onto the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee. Talk about an early start...

Moore is seeking another term as Franklin County's Place One Representative on the Alabama Republican State Executive Committee, a position he's held longer than he can remember.

"I ran for the first time when Bill Bouldin came off. That was more than 30 years ago, I know," Moore said.

After Moore was appointed to the county Republican Executive Committee, he went on to serve as County Chairman for eight years.

Through the years, Moore said he's made friendships through politics that have lasted a lifetime.

"One of the greatest men I ever knew was Franklin County's Democratic Chairman, V.L. Franks. He was a great person and an outstanding chairman.

You could look at him and believe what he said," Moore said.

Moore will face Franklin County Commissioner Jason Miller for the State Republican Executive Committee seat in the May 24th primary. All Franklin County residents who vote in the Republican Primary will be able to vote in this county-wide race.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Moore recalls Republicans losing local elections by close margins back in the days of paper ballots. That changed when Larry Jackson was elected as Franklin County Probate Judge, Moore said.

"He promised we would get voting machines and we did. Also, they used to not let Republicans hold elections. But we got where we could have two poll workers at each place," Moore said. "Judge Jackson did everything he promised us."

Moore and his wife Ann, who died almost six years ago, have three children, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

"Ann was always right with me and allowed me to spend time going to the state meetings. I stayed involved with the party because it's something we both believed in," Moore said.

As Moore looked across the courtroom in the Franklin County Courthouse on primary election night in 2020, he reflected on how much the county's political climate has changed in the past 15 years.

"I sat there on election nights alone and took the vote count to call it into the state headquarters," Moore recalled. "Every once in a while I'd get someone to sit with me. Now it's totally changed. The other party kept going in a direction that Christian people don't agree with, and it finally turned around."

Moore said he and Madison County member Elbert Peters are the oldest members of the state committee, but he's okay with that.

"I'd like to serve one more term to represent Franklin County. I've always been active in the party at the state level and that helps to get things done in our county," Moore said. "It's something I enjoy and it's been rewarding to see the strides the Republican Party has made at the state and local level. And I've always worked with Democrats for what's best for Franklin County."

'LETTER,' from page 4

end. I don't believe in abortion or open borders. My mistakes are many and my accomplishments are few.

I leave others alone and desire to be left alone, but sometimes I can't stand seeing others run down or done wrong. I wish our society could get back to the truth, a desire to help each other and just do what is right.

It doesn't matter what side of the aisle you're on it seems we elect who we think is our best and brightest, but somewhere between home and Montgomery or Washington, D.C., they lose all common sense and pick up a case of stupid! This is the very reason we need term limits and not professional politicians.

This is just my opinion and frustration with politics and politicians.

Kenny Pike
Russellville



Lowell Moore



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Murphree, McKee running for Franklin County BOE District Four Republican nomination

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The candidates for Franklin County Board of Education District Four bring different skill sets that would give them a unique voice on the board.

Tuesday's (May 24th's) Republican Primary will decide whether Heath McKee or Carol Murphree will be their party nominee who will face Democratic incumbent Shannon Oliver in the November general election.

McKee is a 1996 Red Bay High School graduate who earned his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Alabama in Industrial Management in 2001. After graduation, he went to work in logistics for Walmart. That preceded a career move into the oil and gas industry, before he moved his family back home to Franklin County five years ago.

McKee and his wife Imelda have one daughter, a third-grade student at Belgreen School. He's employed as General Manager at Alabama Stone.

Murphree is a retired educator whose long teaching career spanned three school systems, including Russellville City Schools. She retired 10 years ago, but was driven to run for office as she saw the direction the country was moving in at the national level.

"In order to be a good citizen, I needed to do more than monitor elections at the poll (Murphree and her husband Jimmy have worked as Rockwood poll workers for more than a decade). I felt a calling to serve on the local level for the community I love," Murphree said.

"I'm not running against anyone. I'm running for the children of Franklin County, Alabama. I have no agenda. I will work hard for them and that's why I got involved," she added.

Murphree believes her experience as an educator gives her a unique perspective for the Board of Education. This is her first venture into running for office.

McKee said he decided to run to serve the school system he's known his entire life and to bring a different mindset to the board.

"My business experience is something I'll bring with me to the job on the Board of Education," McKee said. "I have 20 years in operations efficiency. That was my specialty and my degree program was all about efficiency in



Carol Murphree

business."

McKee said a school system is a business, one with the important challenge of preparing children to enter their adult lives with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful. But there still exists the importance of good fiscal management, he explained.

"How is the (federal and state) funding being allocated? The board decides how that money is going to be spent in the best way to benefit students as much as possible," McKee said.

"I'm not a teacher or educator but I have been in a few different industries and that gives me a different perspective on the board," he added.

Both McKee and his wife come from smaller, rural school districts. That was a driving force in his leaving a successful career in Texas to come home to Franklin County.

"We wanted our daughter to attend school where she was not just a number. It's good and bad for everyone to know everyone, but there are more benefits to it," McKee said. "You don't have all these large student-teacher ratios in Franklin County. And even though we're a public school system, we're still in a conservative area. We still pray before sporting events and that's important to us."

Murphree and her husband Jimmy live in the Spruce Pine community. Her experience as a mother of two, grandmother of three and a teacher would give her a fresh perspective on the Franklin County Board of Education, she believes.

"My plan is to work as a team and ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve academic success," Murphree said. "I will always keep children first and will be a strong, positive voice on our school board who recognizes the many strengths of Franklin County to better serve our students and families."



Heath McKee and family

'AMENDMENT,' from page 9

diction of the Historical Commission.

I'm not here to tell you that our state parks do or do not need the funding for maintenance, renovations and upgrades to facilities. What I can tell you is the fact that our legislators have decided the only way to provide that funding is through taking on more state debt is just the latest example of the fiscal malfeasance we have witnessed over the past four years.

As a refresher, Alabama's state government began 2022 with more cash on hand than at any point in state history. Our government took \$1.5 billion more in taxes from citizens last year than it expected to, resulting in a historic surplus.

What did lawmakers do with that money? They put nearly all of it back into 2022 spending through a massive supplemental appropriations bill. They passed the largest budgets in state history for fiscal year 2023, with almost \$11 billion in combined spending. If revenues are higher than expected this year, like in 2021, that total is sure to climb. They gave raises to every state employee while providing only limited and targeted relief for the rest of Alabama's citizens.

The list goes on, but you get the point. It is unfathomable that somewhere in the almost \$11 billion in spending approved for 2023 or the \$1.5 billion in supplemental funding for 2022 that the Alabama Legislature couldn't find \$85 million, less than 1% of next year's budget, to dedicate towards state park projects.

Instead, if approved by voters, the state will take on \$85 million in new debt to finance the projects. But \$85 million is just the start. The Alabama Legislative

Services Agency estimates that debt service payments will be \$6 million per year for the next 20 years, \$120 million total. In other words, the state will pay an additional \$35 million in interest costs to borrow the \$85 million.

Even if the projects are needed, why would the state take on new debt for what is the equivalent to a rounding error in the scale of an \$11 billion budget, especially when Alabama's government had more cash on hand than ever just a few months ago?

Would you take out a 20-year loan to pay for your family's dinner tonight if you have plenty of money sitting in the bank? Of course, you wouldn't. If such a loan were even possible, the long-term costs would be much more than whatever you paid for your meal.

No family would budget that way. So why does our legislature think it is acceptable?

Maybe the answer is that they don't care about the long-term costs because they aren't spending their own money. They're spending yours.

The current class of legislators has shepherded a historic period of government expansion. Alabama's government spending grew by 36% from 2019-2022, faster than California or New York. By borrowing the money to pay for state park projects, instead of spending \$85 million next year, state government will only make the \$6 million debt service payment. Meaning that they have an extra \$79 million right now that they can funnel into whatever else they choose.

Our legislators are out of touch with the people of Alabama when it comes to spending our taxpayer dollars. It is up to us to bring them back to reality.



Tannon says “Vote for my Poppa” on May 24th in the Republican Primary!





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SPORTS

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STATE FINALS BOUND

Phil Campbell's title repeat campaign comes up just short, falls to Piedmont in 3A semifinals

Staff reports

For the third straight season, Phil Campbell's path to the 3A state championship series had to go through the Piedmont Bulldogs.

Anytime you play an opponent in three straight postseasons, it's bound to be an extremely difficult task.

And while the Bobcats were able to get the upper hand last season en route to their first baseball state title in school history, the Bulldogs were the ones on the victorious side in 2022.

Game one Phil Campbell 10 Piedmont 0

The Bobcats wasted no time in setting the tone for game one as they attempted to jump out to a one game lead in the series.

Cam Habada worked around a one out walk to retire the side, giving way to the Bobcats offense for the first time of the game.

Two straight walks and an error loaded the bases for the Bobcats in the opening frame.

Habada then helped out his own cause, driving in a run on a sac fly into center field to give Phil Campbell a lead they wouldn't give back for the rest of the game.

Third baseman Kyle Pace then doubled home Sage Raper and Mason Swinney to make it a 3-0 game.

Habada would allow a leadoff double to start the second inning but would get a pair of fly outs and a groundout to keep Piedmont scoreless.

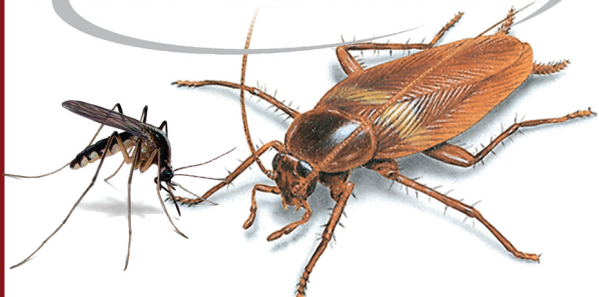
A walk to Jacob Barnwell and a single by Bryant Anthony was soon aided by another walk to

See 'SEMIFINALS,' page 15

Editor's note

News continued on page 14

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PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

The Golden Tigers were able to storm back after losing game one of the series against Madison Academy to sweep the next two games to punch their ticket to their second straight state title series.

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

It's amazing what a little bit of momentum can do.

Through a game and a half, the Russellville Golden Tigers looked as though they had flatlined.

After losing game one by a final of 9-4, the Golden Tigers found themselves in unfamiliar territory at the brink of elimination.

The offense that had averaged 7.3 runs per game during the regular season and had outscored playoff opponents by 68 runs had only managed to score five runs through ten innings across two games.

A pitching staff that had only allowed five runs heading into the semifinals against Madison Academy had seemingly lost its touch and allowed 14 runs through ten innings across two games.

Then, a switch was flipped.

But the flip didn't come from a coach. It didn't come from a player.

It came from the crowd at Golden Tiger Stadium.

With their backs against the wall in a must-win game in the second game of a best-of-three series against the Mustangs, Russellville trailed 5-1 heading into the fourth inning.

As the Golden Tigers prepared to come to bat, a crowd did not have many opportunities to leave their seats so far, all rose to their feet, almost instantaneously.

Cheering and attempting to will their team back to life, wanting to force a decisive game three on

Friday, the crowd got a response – and it was a loud one.

The offense for the Golden Tigers roared back to life as Brayden Spurgeon doubled home Reed Hill to make it a 5-2 game.

It was only one run. But what it signified was much bigger than just that one run.

It signaled that the Golden Tigers weren't willing to go quietly into the night.

Two batters later, Casen Heaps singled into left field, scoring Nathan Brockway and Spurgeon, cutting the Mustang lead to just one run.

And just like that, with a little momentum, the Golden Tigers were back in business.

"That crowd was amazing. It was insane how many people there were and just how they were standing up and shouting the way they were," Casen Heaps said. "Their electricity and just the atmosphere they created was unbelievable and that's the kind of atmosphere you want in a playoff game."

Madison Academy got two runs back in the home half of the fourth inning, making it a 7-4 game. The Golden Tigers would counter that with two runs of their own in the top of the fifth inning while ceding three more runs in the home half, giving Madison Academy a 10-6 lead headed into the sixth inning.

While that lead might have seemed insurmountable just two innings prior, the Golden Tigers knew they still had a shot to win and force game three.

All they needed was that big inning they had

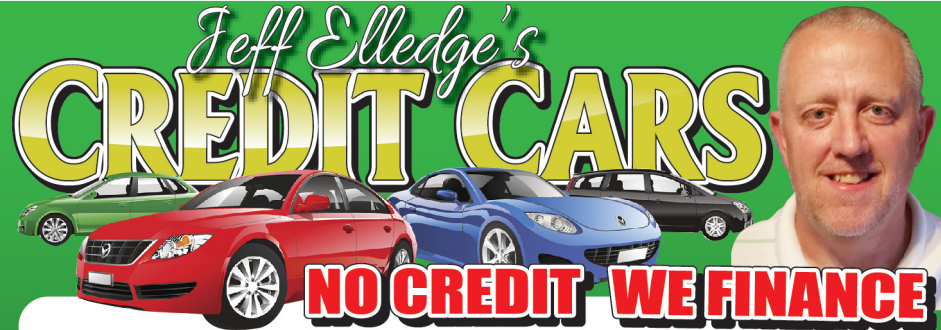
See 'FINALS,' page 16

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Woodruff commends Russellville Gas, Water & Sewer Boards for responsible spending, management

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Russellville city councilman went to two local utility boards this week to commend them for how they manage expenses and handle public funds.

Darren Woodruff, District Three Councilman, addressed the Russellville Gas Board May 9 and the Russellville Water and Sewer Board the following morning at its May business meeting.

"I am not here officially as a city councilman. I come here as a citizen to tell you I appreciate what you do," Woodruff told the Gas Board. "The way you conduct your business and what you've done in the past. All of that works to improve our city.

"You run the place the way you would run your place of business and I want to congratulate you for the fine job you're doing," he added.

Woodruff's appearances at the Gas Board and Water and Sewer Board come at a time when the city's third utility board, the Russellville Electric Board, is facing massive public scrutiny for allegations of wasteful and/or illegal spending, including bonuses for board members, lavish trips where three-bedroom condos are rented for conferences and the purchase of an \$84,000 GMC Yukon Denali for the Electric Board manager.

Woodruff, a former Russellville Electric Board Chairman, has led the public criticism of the board's spending and management.

Gas Board Chairman Jimmy Montgomery told Woodruff he appreciated him coming to the meeting and he gave Gas Board employees for the utility's smooth operations.

"We appreciate your kind words. We have a good group of guys working at the Gas Board and we're blessed with a good board," Montgomery said.

Woodruff told the Water and Sewer Board he appreciated their efficiency and responsible financial management of public funds.

"Eric (Hill, the Water and Sewer Board Manager) is very good to work with. Every time I've had a citizen call me his response in having the issue corrected has been done in a timely way, and I appreciate that," Woodruff said.

At the May 10 meeting where Woodruff spoke, Hill asked board members to consider replacing three work trucks, one of which was a 2008 model and the other two 2011 models.

"You're considering today getting rid of work trucks some of which are 15 years old. It's awesome that you've kept those trucks that long and that allows you to really get your money's worth out of them," Woodruff said.

"I wanted to tell you in person I appreciate you and everything you do for our city," he added.

Volunteers needed for May 21st Bear Creek Lakes Clean Up Day

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The public is invited to take part in the Bear Creek Lakes Clean Up Day, set for Saturday, May 21st.

Volunteers will meet at Elliott Branch Campground, 325 Elliott Branch Road, at 10 a.m., for a brief program. Supplies, including gloves and trash bags, will be provided. Clean Up Day will go from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

You can sign up to volunteer for the three-hour event by sending an email to Angie Pierce, Alabama Mountain Lakes Association, at angie@northalabama.org. Volunteers will receive a free lunch and a t-shirt (while supplies last). The event is made possible by a grant from the Tennessee Valley Authority's Reservoir and Community Cleanups Program. Support for Bear Creek Lakes Clean Up Day comes from professional angler Timmy Horton, the Alabama Mountain Lakes Association, the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and the Bear Creek Development Authority.

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

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net!

'SEMIFINALS,' from page 13

Mason Swinney to load up the bases for Habada. Staying true to form, Habada singled on a line drive into left field to bring in Barnwell.

A bases-loaded walk to Kyle Pace brought Anthony home to make it 5-0 Bobcats heading into the third inning.

Habada retired the side in order in the top of the third inning on a pair of groundouts and a fly out.

Bryant Hyde led off the bottom of the third inning with a homer over the left field fence to make it a 6-0 lead.

A pair of singles by Barnwell and Anthony enables Sage Raper to single home a run and just three batters later, Kyle Pace brought home Anthony and Raper on a single to extend the Bobcat lead to 9-0.

Looking to break double-digits in the game, the Bobcats would get that tenth run off the bat of Hunter Baker who singled and drove in Mason Swinney, giving the Bobcats a 10-0 margin.

While the Bobcats wouldn't score in the fourth inning, Habada managed to go the next two innings without allowing a run, meaning that the Bobcats would run-rule the Bulldogs to take game one.

Game two

Phil Campbell 9 Piedmont 16

In the second game of the series changed pace as the Bulldogs were able to take game two and even up the series at 1-1.

Phil Campbell, playing as the away team in game two, jumped out to an early 3-0 lead after a profitable first inning.

A walk and a pair of singles loaded the bases for Hunter Baker to bring home a run on a walk. One batter later, Bryant Hyde got a pair of RBIs on a single.

Two errors yielded two more runs for Phil Campbell in the top of the second inning, allowing the Bobcats to take a 5-0 lead into the bottom of the second inning.

Piedmont would get three runs back in the home half of the inning, cutting the Bobcat lead to two.

Despite getting their sixth run of the game in the top of the fourth on a single by Kyle Pace that scored Mason Swinney, the home half of the inning would not be friendly to the Bobcats.

A three-run home run tied the game as the Bulldogs got two singles to add two more runs, making it an 8-6 Piedmont lead.

See 'SEMIFINALS,' page 17

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I was appointed Police Chief in 2017 by the Town of Phil Campbell. I served the town in many roles, from Police Chief to Town Safety Officer, and occasionally rode the garbage truck. Leadership is about serving others and helping others around you rise.

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I am a Conservative Christian, and as Sheriff, I will be fair and impartial, and free from prejudice. I have grown a robust understanding while working in the correctional system and serving small communities to reason and be empathetic and compassionate while carrying out daily duties in these positions. I serve on the Franklin County Farmers Federation Board of Directors, the Phil Campbell Housing Authority, and the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee.

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'FINALS,' from page 13

been searching for. And in the top of the sixth, they found it. Casen Heaps singled to drive in Michael Scofield to cut the Madison Academy lead to 10-7 and Grayson Thorpe followed that up with a double of his own to score Heaps and Andrew Hatton to pull the Golden Tigers to within one run. Some heads up baserunning by Thorpe allowed for him to score on a passed ball and just like that, the game was tied up at 10-10. Still looking for their first lead of game two, Spurgeon hit a hot shot to third that ricocheted off the Mustang third baseman's glove and into left field allowing for Emmitt Green and Reed Hill to score. The Golden Tigers finally had that lead they had been searching for and they weren't looking back. Shayden Romans, who came in at catcher for Canyon Pace who shifted to third base after Spurgeon took over on the mound, singled to bring home Brayden Heaps to extend the Golden Tiger lead to 13-10. Spurgeon would retire the side in order in the bottom of the seventh inning to close the door on the win and force a game three.

"I have never seen a crowd change an atmosphere the way that they did last night. There were four rows of cars beyond the outfield fence and rows and rows of people in chairs as well and it was just a remarkable atmosphere to be a part of," head coach Chris Heaps said. "I've got 21 dudes in that dugout that believe in what we do. And if you don't believe it, just look at what they did here tonight. That proves that our guys are committed to what we are trying to do here and it showed."

With a massive comeback win to their credit, the Golden Tigers had less than 24 hours to turn their focus to game three and once again, attempt to stave off elimination while also punching their ticket to the 5A state championship series for the second straight season.

In game three, the Golden Tigers would turn to Samuel Pace to get the Golden Tigers started on the right track on the mound.

After a game two that saw 23 runs scored across seven innings, one would figure that the offense might carry over into game three.

But the baseball gods had other ideas.

A pitching duel ensued between Pace and the Madison Academy starter Brandon Yeager in which there were only five total hits allowed headed into the bottom of the fifth inning.

Pace had pitched brilliantly through three innings for the Golden Tigers. But after issuing a pair of walks in the top of the fourth with his command starting to falter just a tad, the Golden Tigers could have easily made a call to the bullpen for a fresh arm.

But Golden Tiger head coach Chris Heaps and pitching coach David Langston know their guys like the back of their hands and elected to stick with Pace.

How would he respond? Pace would go on to allow only two more baserunners over the next three innings.

Safe to say the decision worked out.

"Sam just had to slow down and I am real cognitive of that while I'm calling the pitches into Canyon. So I just went out there and talked to him and told him that I know he likes to work quickly but you've gotta slow things down. But he took a breath and slowed down and he was able to get back on track," Langston said. "We have seven guys that pitch. And our coaching staff trusts all seven. And there for a couple of weeks, it hasn't taken all seven. But we've been preaching to our guys that at some point, it will take all seven of those guys, and we ended up using all seven of those guys in this series so all of those guys stepped up and did their job and I love those guys and I'm super proud of them."

For Pace, who typically sees most of his time on the mound coming in for relief, getting the start in game three was something the righty didn't take for granted – and the numbers he put up show it.

Pace spun a complete game shutout while allowing just three hits and striking out five batters in the win.

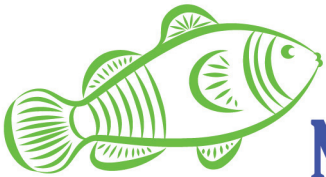
Getting the win is massive in its own right. But to shutout the team that put up double digits in the game prior? That's just pure domination from start to finish.

"It's surreal right now. It's a great feeling anytime you can go out and put up a zero on the scoreboard, but it's even better when you can do it in game

See 'FINALS,' page 19



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PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Canyon Pace, above, launched a three-run homer to break a scoreless tie in the bottom of the fifth inning to give the Golden Tigers the lead en route to a 5-0 state finals berth-clinching win.

'SEMIFINALS,' from page 15

Cole Pace, who got the start on the mound for Phil Campbell got a pair of strikeouts before giving up another two-run single to allow the Bulldogs to extend their lead to 10-6.

Piedmont got two more runs in the fifth inning and four runs in the sixth inning to seal off a 16-9 victory to force a game three.

Game three Phil Campbell 4 Piedmont 8

A start that showed promise for the Bobcats in game three saw Phil Campbell jump out to a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first inning.

Kyle Pace drove home a run on a single into left field after Mason Swinney doubled just two batters before, also bringing home a run.

However, the Bulldogs got those two runs back in the top of the second inning on a dropped third strike and a single, tying things up at 2-2.

Phil Campbell regained the lead in the bottom of the third inning, as Bryant Hyde delivered on a line drive into left field plated Kyle Pace, making it 3-2.

For the third lead change of the game, Piedmont retook the lead in the top of the fifth inning, gaining two runs to make it 4-3 Bulldogs.

The Bulldogs gained four crucial insurance runs in the top of the sixth inning and that would prove to be too much for the Bobcats to overcome despite Phil Campbell getting one run back in the bottom of the sixth on double from Mason Swinney.

The Bulldogs would close out the bottom of the seventh inning unscathed to get the win and advance to the 3A state championship series.

Phil Campbell finished their spectacular season with a record of 30-9.



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'FINALS,' from page 16

three of a huge playoff series like this," Samuel Pace said. "We fought hard last night and we knew when we got to the field this morning that there wasn't a single doubt in any of our minds. So I knew that we would work hard to get the job done and we did it."

Despite having roughed up Yeager in game two, the Golden Tigers hadn't found a way to break through on offense.

That was until Canyon Pace struck gold in his third at-bat.

The senior catcher launched a first pitch breaking ball over the left center-field fence for a three-run home run to give Russellville their first lead of the game.

Still riding high on emotions from the win, Canyon Pace discussed his approach against the Madison Academy starter Yeager that led to his tiebreaking three-run homer that gave the Golden Tigers the lead.

"I'm on cloud nine right now. Just being able to be here and move on to the next round is amazing and I'm just blessed to be a part of this team and get to do it again," Canyon Pace said. "In the first two at-bats, I got a hanging breaking ball on the first pitch followed by a fastball. And I knew that if I could get a hold of that hanging curveball, I'd be able to do something with it. And so that is what I was sitting on and I was able to drive it."

With the way runs had been scored so far in the series, a three-run lead was all but safe for the Golden Tigers headed into the late innings. So insurance runs would be extremely important, and potentially difficult to come by.

However, Russellville did get those all-important insurance runs and they came off the bat of a Golden Tiger who had been hitting everything in sight during the series.

A double by Brayden Spurgeon was then followed up with a walk by Andrew Hatton.

As for Spurgeon, it was a good series at the plate and on the mound. The Golden Tiger third baseman went 1-3 in game three after going 2-4 with a run scored and an RBI in game two while allowing just one earned run in relief with six strikeouts.

Spurgeon has cemented himself as a go-to reliever for the Golden Tigers in high-leverage situations and that role has become more important as the playoffs have gone on.

"We went into that game three knowing that we had the momentum from the big comeback in game two and we knew we had them right where we wanted them," Spurgeon said. "I started at the beginning of the year taking on that role and realized that I've gotta have that type of mentality and that's what I've done the entire season."

As for those aforementioned runs driven in, Casen Heaps, who had been on fire so far in the series, then doubled into deep right field to drive home two more runs and extend the Russellville lead to 5-0.

According to the Russellville center fielder, his approach at the plate was one that was quite simple: keep on keeping on.

"My approach didn't change going into the series. My approach at the plate is just basically see a good pitch and don't do too much and just "do you". That's a saying we have and I tried to just do that and it paid off," Casen Heaps said.

As the Golden Tigers look ahead to the state championship series where they will take on Holtville, they aren't taking their foot off the gas just yet.

Tomorrow morning, the Golden Tigers will go back to work with workouts and practice as they chase that second straight blue map.

"Those guys are about to hear that we've got workouts and practice tomorrow after winning a high-stakes series. But they're going to say "I get to". If you replace "have to" with "get to", you can make a big difference and that's the mindset our guys have here," Chris Heaps said. "I'm just extremely proud of these guys. It was the next man up and guy after guy kept us in the game. I'm tickled for our players, our coaches and also these fans. The energy that they gave us was tremendous and I hope they feel rewarded and I'm glad we got to do this for them."

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