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Palmer to retire as county engineer at the end of the month

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Shortly after he was honored as the 2022 County Engineer of the Year by the Association of County Engineers of Alabama last month, David Palmer reflected back on his 1991 hiring as Franklin County Assistant Engineer.

"To be totally honest, I had never heard of a county engineer," Palmer said. "When I graduated from the University of Alabama, my first job was with a consulting engineering firm in Jasper. In that job, I worked with a state agency, the Alabama Mining Commission. All the designs I was responsible for had to be submitted to the Mining Commission for

approval.

"I got to be friends with one of the Mining Commission engineers and one day he asked me if I would be interested in a career in county engineering. My answer to him was 'what is that?' I didn't know anything about county or city government. I don't believe to that point of my life I had ever made contact with any person related to any local governmental body at all," he added.

The job Palmer was told about was an Assistant County Engineer position in Marion County. Seeing an opportunity to return to his home county, Palmer applied and interviewed. Ultimately, though, county officials decided not to hire an

See 'PALMER,' page 3

Russellville police officer rescinds resignation letter after 'change of heart'

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Russellville police officer who resigned at the city council's June 6th meeting has submitted a letter asking the council to rescind his resignation so he can retain his employment.

Chad Sheffield, who serves as the RPD's Compliance Officer, was hired by the Russellville Electric Board at the recommendation of REB Manager Charles Canida at the board's May 24th meeting. Canida asked the board to approve the hiring of Sheffield as a First Period Tree Trimmer at a rate of \$20.96/hour.

Sheffield had a 'change of heart' after deciding he was "happy where

I'm at," he told the *Franklin Free Press* on June 9th.

"I really like working for the city and the reason I withdrew (from the job) was I'm happy where I'm at," Sheffield said.

Russellville City Attorney Danny McDowell said since Sheffield was still working as a police officer and had not left his job yet, that Sheffield could submit a letter rescinding his resignation. That will have to be approved by the council, McDowell said. Sheffield will remain in his job until the council votes on the letter. If approved by the council, he would not have to reapply for a job as a police officer.

Sheffield said he applied for a job

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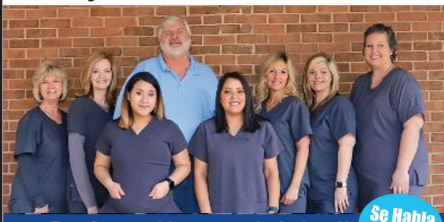
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Evie Odessa Greenhill, 95, of Russellville, passed away on Sunday, June 12th. Interment at Bolton Cemetery.

James 'Doc' Frederick Hafey, 71, of Russellville, passed away on Wednesday, June 8th. Akins Funeral Home assisted the family.

Glenn Hale Mayfield, 86, of Russellville, passed away on Tuesday, June 7th. Interment at Gravel Hill Cemetery.

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'PALMER,' from page 1

Assistant Engineer.

During that waiting time, though, Palmer learned of a job opening in Franklin County for an Assistant County Engineer. He was hired in 1991. Four years later, Palmer became the eighth Franklin County Engineer since 1980, an unusually high turnover rate for the position.

Palmer will retire from that position as Franklin County Engineer effective June 30, 2022, more than 31 years after being hired. Not bad for a young man who took a pseudo-political job with absolutely no political knowledge.

A retirement reception for Palmer will be held Tuesday, June 28, from 1:30-3:30 p.m., at the Elizabeth Lucas Annex of the Franklin County Courthouse. The public is invited.

"I knew when I took the job I would be answering to an elected body (the Franklin County Commission) but I had no idea about the political nature of the job," Palmer said. "Engineers are trained to be problem solvers. There are a lot of engineers who get engineering degrees but never work one day in their particular field. But they end up in positions that utilize their training as problem solvers. That's how I have always considered the political structure of this job—as another problem you have to solve.

"Besides the engineering requirements that come with a county engineering position, you learn quickly there are a whole other set of problems you immediately inherit related to the political climate and the public in general. The people in this county encounter problems and issues day-to-day, and those become your problems. Your skill set as an engineer is just as applicable to solving those problems, which are sometimes not even related to infrastructure," Palmer added.

Those issues generally boil down to one common problem—No governmental agency will ever have enough resources to solve all the problems with roads, bridges, etc., so the county engineer and his staff, along with elected officials, must find ways to prioritize and solve those problems systematically while being transparent and holding people accountable.

That's where the engineering 'problem solving' comes into play. Palmer recalls one of his former Alabama professors contacting him in the early 1990s to assist with a research project to determine whether certain materials would provide a better way for local governments to handle resurfacing issues and bridge maintenance and repair.

"What (we) found out was not so much that there was some magical material out there that we could put our hands on to solve all our problems. Instead, the big deal was finding a better way to manage the resources we already had," Palmer said.

"That revelation led to our design and construction of a state-of-the-art system that models our assets and produces pertinent information for the county commission to set priorities," he added.

Franklin County has more than 800 miles of roads and more than 300 bridges, one-third of which are listed on the National Bridge Inventory System, which means they are maintained with a higher level of scrutiny.

"When you're faced with 800 miles of road and 300 bridges, you look at that in its totality and you begin to get overwhelmed," Palmer said. "Compound that with the pressures that come with politics and dealing with the public, and it's a daunting job for a young engineer.

"With the skill sets you learn as an engineer, though, you don't need to look at it that way. You begin to break it down into smaller components and start analyzing not as a whole, but in individual units. Then, all of a sudden, it becomes manageable," he added.

And Palmer has done that effectively for more than 31 years. So well, in fact, he's received statewide recognition for Franklin County in its ability to maximize use of its limited financial resources. Palmer has been called on to assist other counties more times than he can count, and that didn't go unnoticed by the Association of County Engineers of Alabama.

"David is often consulted by other county engineers in our state because of his extensive knowledge of the profession, and he always makes himself available to lend a hand," said Sonny Brasfield, Executive Director of the ACCA. "Franklin County, along with Alabama's 66 other counties, have benefited extensively from his decision to devote his career to sharing his extensive and well-established skill set with county government."

Throughout Palmer's tenure, Franklin County has secured more than \$50 million in extra grant funding.

But Palmer stops far short of taking all the credit. When he began in 1991, Franklin County's Highway Department had 62 permanent employees. That number was at 48 when Palmer was hired as County Engineer four years later.

When he retires at the end of the month, there will be 18 full-time and 8 temporary employees. The decline wasn't due to terminations or layoffs. Instead, a steady attrition led to the reduction in employees as a result of limited funding.

"We have all understood because of the limited resources available to us, and the large maintenance demands, we're always willing to work outside

the box to find more innovative solutions to solving the problems we're faced with," Palmer said.

"I've been fortunate to have people around me that share the same passions and same innovative spirit that I've had through the years. That's been a true blessing. I've had literally hundreds of people working alongside me throughout my career who are honestly outstanding people from a personal standpoint and a professional standpoint. They're the best. Not only does that apply to the employees I had, but also to the political leaders in our county. We've had some outstanding commissioners through the years and I'm very blessed in that way, too. It was definitely a team effort," he added.

Palmer said that spirit of teamwork also extends to the municipal governments in Franklin County, and the state and federal agencies he's worked with.

As for the people of Franklin County, Palmer said he'll be forever appreciative for the opportunity to serve them.

"I can't imagine a better place to have spent the biggest part of my life," Palmer said. "I came here literally as a child and was very fortunate to have people who took me in, understood I was young and would make mistakes. They showed patience. They shared their many years of wisdom with me and I can never really thank them enough for all the love and support they gave me."

Palmer and his wife Kim, a Russellville City Schools elementary teacher, have three children, two of whom are Russellville High School graduates and one a junior at RHS. Although he

was raised in Marion County, Palmer is proud to call Franklin County home. And that young man who knew nothing about local government in 1991 must have liked what he learned. Palmer is in his third term as a Russellville City Councilman, where he sees politics from a different perspective.

His advice for those considering a career in public service? First, you need a true love and commitment to those you serve. Second, you should have a true humility and respect the institution you serve.

"You need to understand you're just the next guy that was blessed with the opportunity to serve that institution which existed long before you came and will continue long after you're gone," Palmer said.

"If you don't understand that, and you feel like you're more important than those you serve, you need to get out. I have given Franklin County and the City of Russellville everything I have for the last 31 years. I'm proud of our accomplishments and for me, that's good enough," he added.

As for his next career step, Palmer is considering several options that range from engineering jobs in the private sector to a possible teaching career. He won't rush the decision.

"I may take a little time off and step away for a little while. I'm not sure what the future holds, but I appreciate the time I've spent here. It is time for me to move on to the next chapter of my life. I'm excited about that, but I will certainly miss being the County Engineer in Franklin County," Palmer said.



COURTESY PHOTO
After 31 years on the job as Franklin County engineer, Palmer will retire effective on June 30, 2022.

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

My take on this... Requesting prayers for Dr. Richards

Do you have a doctor you can trust? My doctors tell it like it is. I've always told them I have to know what you have where I'll know how to deal with it. Unknown is scary! But "knowing" always began a game plan for me. I know what questions I wanted answered and a plan if it required a journey of some kind.



Gail Motes

Knowing I had cancer was a journey. Some was unknown, but some things were expected. Well, my primary doctor is going on an unknown journey and he doesn't know what to expect. I do know my scariest unknown required my faith and belief in my doctors and a sense of humor.

My doctor has all these things, but he is like everyone else who goes through life's struggles. Prayers help! My doctor's name is Dr. Brian Richards. He went on a vacation to Canada and one dive has changed his life for now. I should say for a while. One wrong dive and he broke his neck. He can move his arms now, but still waiting on his feet and legs to move. The term I heard used was waiting for that part of his brain to wake up. To me, it simply means, "prayers are needed!"

There was a prayer vigil this past Friday behind Helen Keller where his office is located. A friend of mine came around from the front of the hospital saying the parking lot in front and even the sides were full of people standing. He is probably not even aware of the many people who love and appreciate him.

I know I have been surprised at the new friends that I have now because of the articles I've been writing in this paper. There was so much support when I began writing about my cancer journey. Support is such a great motivator.

Dr. Richards could use all our prayer and support as this journey will be strenuous. But he is the type of person that will never give up. And I have the type of friends who believe in the power of prayer.

I am asking each of you to help me (help him) by earnestly praying for his

complete recovery.

As of now, he is still in Canada. He will need to get better to travel and at a time like this, home would have to be more of a comfort.

He is a doctor who shows compassion for his patients. He treats us like family and in some cases, better than family.

I had a surgery and had a reaction to being put to sleep. As many surgeries as I've had, I never experienced anything like it. I was so confused that I couldn't find my lips to put lip gloss on. I was scared for the first time ever after a surgery. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. When Dr. Richards came into my room, I told him I was scared. Something was bad wrong. All he said was, "I'll take care of you" and I knew right then everything would be okay! So please, pray for him! Thank you for your time, and your prayers are deeply appreciated!

Until later...

PUBLIC NOTICE

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 July 27, 2022, at M&N Wrecker & Service Center, 11833 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, AL, 35653. Seller reserves

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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Brady Petree

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

John Pilati

Content Contributors

Christian Medina, Gail Motes, Lori Skinner

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

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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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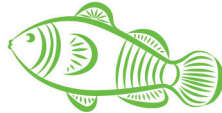


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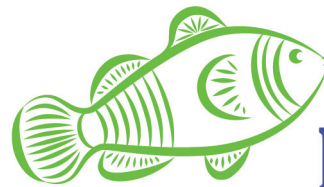
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There will be an Antique Tractor Show as part of the City of Russellville's Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake. The Antique Tractor Show will be held at Sloss Lake from 7:30-2 on July 4. If you're interested in bringing a tractor to the show, call Jacob Murray at 256-668-7607.

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My Father's House will host "Celebrating the Mighty God," a Kid's Crusade, June 15-17, 2022, beginning at 6:30 p.m., nightly. There will be food, refreshments, games & crafts. Church is located at 104 East Lawrence Street in Russellville. For more information or a ride, call 256-460-1376.

A Fish Fry Benefit will be held for Mary Jo Beecher, a five-year cancer survivor, on Saturday, June 25. The event will be at the Hillman Pavilion, 901 Mullins Ave, from 11-3. Plates are \$15 and include fried catfish, baked beans, slaw and a drink. Call ahead for larger orders by calling 256-460-1195. Delivery is available.

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'OFFICER,' from page 1

more than a year ago, but he was not offered a position until last month, when Canida recommended the board hire Sheffield after a position came open when REB employee Gabe Wallace was promoted into the Apprenticeship Program for linemen, which left a tree trimmer job open.

The vacant position was not posted publicly. Instead, Canida told the board of Wallace's transfer and the vacant position at its May meeting, where he also recommended Sheffield be hired.

Canida's recommendation came approximately seven weeks after Sheffield said he was asked by Canida to notify a citizen who had requested to appear on an upcoming REB meeting agenda to 'give Canida a call' regarding his upcoming appearance at a meeting.

That citizen was Russellville resident Gary Blackburn, who was in fact visited by Sheffield, while on duty, at Blackburn's home around six days after his request to be placed on the agenda. Blackburn said Sheffield told him 'he was a good friend of Charles Canida' and that Sheffield gave Blackburn Canida's cell phone number and asked Blackburn to call him, saying that Canida would "give him some facts" about the ongoing controversy regarding allegations of illegal and wasteful spending by Canida and the REB.

Blackburn called Canida and said Canida asked him to come by his office, which he did on March 28th.

Canida gave Blackburn some unsolicited documents relating to former REB Chairman Darren Woodruff's expenses while he was on the board, as well as a letter Canida sent to WGOL-FM, records relating to fees paid to Elliott Cleaning Service and records of his purchase of two SUVs in an eight-month period, including an \$84,000 Yukon Denali which Canida told him was purchased for only \$14,000.

Blackburn said Canida also showed him an advance copy of a mailer that would be sent the following week to all REB ratepayers. After citizen objections to REB funds being spent for printing and postage of the mailer, Canida told another media outlet the mailer was paid for "by an anonymous donor" even though the board never approved or discussed any donation by an anonymous donor at any business meeting.

Blackburn said Canida called in his Executive Assistant Sherry Smith and directed her to write a receipt showing Blackburn had paid \$10.50 for 'documents' even though Blackburn said he never paid anything for the copies since he didn't request them.

Blackburn said Canida told him he was 'going to pay for the copies' but Blackburn said he never saw any money change hands and the receipt showed the money was "received from Gary Blackburn."

Sheffield said he did not know why Canida wanted to speak with Blackburn and that Sheffield "never brought up anyone's name" while speaking with

Blackburn at his home.

"I didn't know what it was about. I didn't ask what it was about. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. I thought I was just giving him Charlie's number. I consider Charlie a friend but I did not feel any pressure to do this for him. If I had felt something like that, I would not have done it," Sheffield said.

Sheffield said he did not believe the job offer from Canida was conditional on him going to see Blackburn to deliver Canida's message. Sheffield said he also went to Blackburn's home to inquire about some dogs in the area the city had received complaints on.

"I had no agenda. I wasn't trying to gain anything with Charlie Canida. I was looking for two huskies in the area and we started talking and I gave Mr. Blackburn the message," Sheffield said. "We also talked about guns and I invited him to come with me to the shooting range."

Blackburn contacted Woodruff, his city councilman, to express his concern about an officer coming to his home while on duty to deliver a message for Canida.

Although Sheffield denied feeling pressure to deliver the message to Blackburn and he doesn't believe his job offer was conditioned on him doing so, he was told by RPD Chief Chris Hargett not to be running personal messages for the public while on duty, and that any subsequent violations would result in disciplinary action.

"I see how it looks and if I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't have done it," Sheffield said.

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Federal lawsuit filed against RV Police Chief Hargett

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Littleville man has filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that Russellville Police Department Chief Chris Hargett violated his civil rights when Hargett arrested him on May 11, 2020.

Henry Eudone Donnie Vinson, through his attorney, Griffin Sikes, Jr., of Montgomery, filed the two-count complaint in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama on April 28, 2022, naming Hargett as the lone defendant.

Hargett, through his attorney Gregory Burgess of the Huntsville law firm Lanier, Ford, Shaver & Payne, P.C., filed an answer denying the material allegations of Vinson's complaint.

According to documents filed in federal court, Vinson, who was 65 at the time, alleges he was unlawfully detained and arrested by Hargett on May 11, 2020, after he was taken into custody in the driveway of his Colbert County residence. Court records show Vinson was charged in Russellville Municipal Court with Attempting to Elude, a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail, violation of Alabama's Move Over Law, which carries a fine and Resisting Arrest, a Class B misdemeanor.

Vinson was convicted of Attempting to Elude and violation of Alabama's Move Over Law in Russellville Municipal Court. He has appealed those convictions to Franklin County Circuit Court, where a new trial will be held at a future date. Vinson was acquitted of the Resisting Arrest charge, as it allegedly took place in Colbert County.

Vinson alleges he was driving north on U.S. Highway 43 on May 11, 2020, with his wife, daughter and son-in-law in the car with him. Vinson's complaint says he was driving home, which would have entailed him making a right turn onto Lakeview Lane, where he lives about .5 mile down the road where Lakeview Lane intersects Sheffield Circle.

Vinson said he was nearing Lakeview Lane when he drove over a rise in Highway 43 and noticed a Russellville police vehicle on a traffic stop of another vehicle. According to Vinson's complaint, both vehicles were "stopped or parked barely off the right-hand side of the roadway."

The police vehicle was being driven by Hargett, who was working traffic overtime detail that afternoon.

Vinson maintains he slowed his truck in preparation to move into the left lane but a white SUV was traveling in the left lane and prevented him from safely moving over.

Vinson's complaint states neither Hargett nor the driver of the vehicle stopped were out of their vehicles and he passed the two vehicles "without incident" in the right lane, since he could not change lanes due to the SUV.

The Move Over Law requires a motorist, when driving on a highway with two lanes or more traveling in the direction of the law enforcement vehicle which is stopped to "vacate the lane closest to the law enforcement vehicle."

The lone exception is when it is "not safe to move over," and a driver is then required to slow to a speed at least 15 miles per hour less than the posted speed limit.

Vinson said he turned right onto Lakeview Lane, which he describes as a "very narrow roadway...choked with knee-high to waist-high weeds."

As Vinson, who alleges he is hard of hearing, neared his driveway, his daughter told him there was a police vehicle coming toward them with its lights and siren on. Vinson drove into his driveway, and the police vehicle, driven by Hargett, pulled in behind him.

From there, the parties' versions of what happened differs greatly. Vinson got out of his vehicle, and Hargett approached him "angrily and menacingly with his hand on his holstered weapon," the complaint alleges.

The complaint describes Hargett "visibly shaking with rage...with veins bulging in his neck." Vinson states Hargett accused him of "almost running over him."

He further states Hargett told him to turn around and get up against the side of his truck. Vinson said he started to reply to Hargett, but Hargett then "forcefully grabbed Vinson's right arm and twisted it behind his back." Vinson said he protested this action, as he has had rotator cuff surgery on his right arm, and Hargett then threw him to the ground, pinning him to the ground and forcibly placing handcuffs on him.

Vinson said he sustained injuries to his neck, back and hips as a result of Hargett's actions.

Vinson was then taken to the Russellville City Jail by another police officer.

His first count for damages alleges Hargett unlawfully arrested and detained him. Vinson's second count claims the use of unlawful and/or excessive force by Hargett in the course of arresting Vinson.

Vinson has requested a jury trial in federal court.

In Hargett's answer, filed on June 1, 2022, he alleges that Vinson "failed to slow down while passing him and his patrol vehicle...and continued to drive in the right-hand lane at the same rate of speed toward Lakeview Lane before turning onto Lakeview Lane."

Hargett further alleges he pursued Vinson with his lights and siren activated, but Vinson continued to drive down Lakeview Lane and did not pull over.

He further admits he instructed Vinson to put his hands on his truck, and when he failed to comply, Hargett "grabbed Vinson's right arm."

Hargett's answer states Vinson was placed in the back of a patrol vehicle and transported to the Russellville Police Department. Hargett denies the use of any excessive force and maintains he acted reasonably and in good faith while arresting Vinson.

Hargett also asserts that Vinson's claims may fail because he was in violation of one or more of Alabama's Rules of the Road Act.

The case has been set for a pretrial conference on October 11, 2023 and a jury trial is set for November 13, 2023. The case has been assigned to United States District Judge Abdul K. Kallon.

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In remembrance: Karl Henry Pilati

Karl Henry Pilati

(October 15, 1926 – June 9, 2022)

Karl Henry Pilati, 95, passed away on June 9, 2022, at Russellville Hospital. Mr. Pilati was born in Germany. He and his family moved to the United States when he was very young and they settled in New York City, where he was raised. After completing high school, he served in the United States Marine Corps.

Mr. Pilati enrolled at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa after his military service to pursue a Bachelors Degree in Geology. It was in Tuscaloosa he met the love of his life, Jimmie Sue Woodruff. They were married 66 years until her death in 2019.

Mr. Pilati was described by those who knew him as an intelligent, interesting and fun person. He was also a wonderful husband and father.

His distinguished professional career saw Mr. Pilati work in Louisiana and Texas for several companies, including SONAT (Southern Natural Gas). His search for oil and natural gas took Mr. Pilati around the world. He and his wife loved to travel and the couple visited six continents. He also loved to work with his hands and he was an accomplished craftsman, wood worker and he could fix most anything. Mr. Pilati also enjoyed working outside in the garden, swimming (he did daily laps until the age of 91) and reading. He had a love for animals, especially dogs, and the Pilati household always had at least one pet as part of the family. Mr. Pilati was a member of the Russellville Civitan Club.



Karl Henry Pilati

He was preceded in death by his wife, Jimmie Woodruff Pilati, his father, Carl Pilati, and his mother, Marie Adelmann.

Mr. Pilati is survived by his sister, Inga Cheries, his daughter, Anne Burke Firouzbakht (Ali) and his son, John Pilati (Angel), two grandchildren, John Burke and Helena Burke, sister-in-law, Doris Woodruff, nephews Mark Woodruff (Patty) and Copeland Woodruff.

Per Mr. Pilati's wishes, there will be no funeral service or visitation. Spry Memorial Chapel will assist the family and his ashes will be buried next to his wife in Franklin Memory Gardens in Russellville.

Family members want to express their gratitude to a number of people who assisted and cared for Mr. Pilati, including: Luz Cortez, Efraim Cortez, Mario and Melissa Andres, Nancy Hulsey, Beth Pounders, the Country Cottage staff, Dr. John Almirol and his staff, the nursing staff in the Russellville Hospital ICU and Heather Mims.

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SPORTS

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Taking a sneak peek: A closer look at Franklin County football schedules

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

With football summer workouts in full swing and we are just about two months away from opening week of high school football, there's never a better time to break down a few schedules from schools across Franklin County.

As region alignments shake up and new opponents make their way into regions vying for titles and playoff berths, there's a lot on the line for teams in the county looking to have success in the coming year.

So this week, we will take a look at all three team's schedules and examine a few games that should be of note to fans of every team. Next week we will examine the remaining two teams schedules and give you a few noteworthy games to mark on your calendar.

So without further ado, we will open up our look with a region champ from last season...

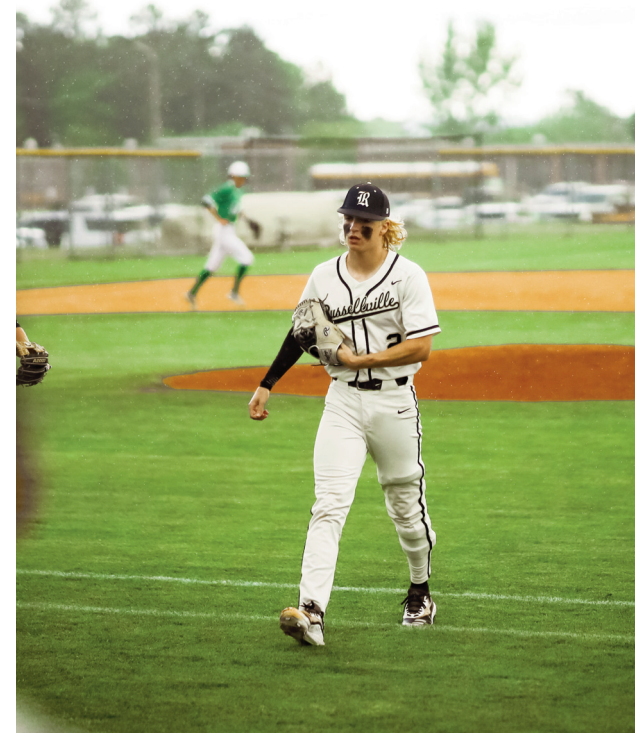
Russellville Golden Tigers

Coming off another region championship, the Golden Tigers will look to make it three-in-a-row in 2022 but they will have a new region opponent to square off against in pursuit.

The Golden Tigers kick things off on the road at 7A Grissom before traveling to long-time rival

See 'FOOTBALL,' page 14

ALL-STATE TALENTS



Pace, left, swatted 12 home runs in his historic senior season for Russellville en route to being named the 5A hitter of the year. Langston, right, led the Golden Tigers in innings pitched while striking out 82 batters.

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

At the celebration for the Russellville Golden Tigers state championship victory at the RMS gym weeks ago, head coach Chris Heaps made a remark that his squad may *potentially* have an all-state hitter on their team - a nod to Canyon Pace's stellar year without naming any names.

But as his teammates nudged him and gave him looks of confidence, Pace wasn't totally convinced that when it came time for the honors to be handed down for the year that he would be the one standing with the crowning 5A individual accolade.

After all, despite his video game-like numbers, Pace was in a loaded 5A class with some of Alabama's best and brightest stars on the diamond.

"At that point I knew that I did pretty well, but I didn't think that I had the stats to be hitter of the year. Going up against guys like Alex Wade, who is just one of the great players in 5A, I knew he was going to be my main competition so I had no idea if I was going to get it or not," Pace said. "And I knew I was going to have to work my tail off to hit better than him and I had a great year and it all worked out."

However, as the ASWA announced their all-state teams over the weekend, it became apparent that Pace's stellar season had caught the attention of media members throughout the state as he was named the class 5A hitter of the year.

En route to the 5A hitter of the year wasn't as easy as Pace made it look.

Suffering a thumb injury just two games into the

season, Pace had to take a backseat from catching for a while and just focus on hitting, once he got the clearance from doctors of course.

Luckily the Golden Tigers had as good a backup catcher in the state in Shayden Romans (who will now take over the reigns behind the dish) so the defense certainly wasn't lacking.

But even with Romans still-talented bat in the lineup, there was a certain *pop* that was missing.

And once Pace's bat came back into the lineup, he took off.

"After that game where I got the thumb injury, I said that it's my senior year. I can't just wait and let it go to waste. I knew I had to put in the work and I did. I did hitting drills and some catching drills while not being able to actually catch," Pace said. "I changed my workouts a little bit and focused more on my core strength and I really think that having a central point in my body where I could control my energy and how much power I put into the ball paid off."

Over the course of the season Pace played in 48 games, hitting .361 (56-155) while swatting an astounding 12 home runs and driving in 61 RBIs on the year with a team-leading 1.120 OPS. Yes, you read that number correctly.

Having accomplished all there is to accomplish including two state championships, being named 5A hitter of the year and a baseball scholarship on top of everything else, Pace now has a little time to reflect on his historic Golden Tiger career.

"It's unbelievable and I'm just truly blessed. I talked with my dad about all of this and I knew that it wasn't just going to be handed to me. I had to

See 'ALL-STATE,' page 13

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'ALL-STATE,' from page 11

work hard for it. And to be able to sit back after these four years and look at all the hard work that I put in and see where it has taken me is just a true blessing to me," Pace said.

While having one all-state player of the year on your roster is fantastic as is, the Russellville Golden Tigers have a plethora of luxuries on this year's squad.

Pace wasn't the only Golden Tiger to come away with top-tier honors this season as Banks Langston was also named the 5A pitcher of the year, beating out the likes of Madison Academy's Matt Manley and others.

As for Langston, despite winning a state title just weeks ago, the baseball train never stops as this week he is participating in a tournament in Troy, Alabama.

But there was a brief period where it seemed as though Langston's sports career might have to regress in terms of his pure abilities.

After suffering an ACL injury during a football game for the Golden Tigers last fall, Langston had a long, difficult road to recovery. So the fact that he was on the mound at all should have been sufficient enough... right?

Well to the junior, he didn't *just* want to be out on the mound. He wanted to thrive while out there.

And thrive he did.

As the ace of the Golden Tiger staff, Langston spun 78.1 innings pitched across 16 games (15 starts) while going 9-3 with 82 strikeouts and 18 walks to his credit.

Throw in 6.2 shutout innings in game one of the state championship series and it's easy to see why Langston was the 5A pitcher of the year.

Langston also made sure to give proper credit to his stellar defense behind him as well.

"It means a lot to me that my hard work has paid off and the routine that I go through has helped me get this far in my career. Even when I tore my ACL and was going through rehab and everything, I was able to fight through that and to be able to come back and be the 5A pitcher of the year, means a lot," Langston said. "But I wouldn't be here without my teammates turning double plays and having great defense behind me. Also my catcher Canyon Pace too, I sure wouldn't be here without him."

To be named alongside one another as the best hitter and pitcher in the state is something special and it certainly isn't lost on either Pace or Langston.

After all, you would be hard-pressed to find two players that know more about each other's style of play and tendencies better than the two.

"Canyon is a great player and an even better dude. He knows all the pitches I throw and what I want to throw in any situation. So it's always good to have a guy behind the plate that knows you very well," Langston said. "When I was down, he always kept me confident and brought me up so it's been nice to have a guy like that catching me when I'm out there."

And Pace echoed Langston's sentiments about being able to play together and getting a feel for how each other prefers to play on the field.

"When he moved to Florence years ago, I had played with him for the first time the year before. But when he moved in, we just clicked automatically," Pace said. "We started working together and I learned from him and he learned me and we just grew a bond together over the three or four years we were playing together."

See 'ALL-STATE,' page 15



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'FOOTBALL,' from page 11

Deshler in week two.

This will be the first meeting between Russellville and Grissom as the Golden Tigers will look to start off their year with a signature win over a 7A team.

Three familiar region foes await in the next three weeks in Lawrence County, West Point and East Limestone take the Golden Tigers into their September 23rd matchup with a local powerhouse.

The Mars Hill Panthers will come to Golden Tiger Stadium in week six. And with the Panthers coming off of a class 2A semifinals appearance (and make the jump to class 3A in 2022) and multiple D-1 recruits on their squad countering against multiple D-1 prospects for Russellville, this is easily one of the must-watch games of the season for any two schools in Northwest Alabama.

Russellville will wrap up their season on October 28th against Athens for their first meeting since 2013, a game in which the Golden Eagles won. The Golden Tigers lead the series however, 20-8 all-time.

Phil Campbell Bobcats

In a region that was already competitive as-is, the Bobcats 3A region eight didn't get any easier.

A region that already possessed powerhouse Lauderdale County and the always-solid Colbert Heights now welcomes in 2A semifinalist Mars Hill who makes the leap up to 3A as we mentioned above, as well as Colbert County who was a playoff team a year ago.

With that said, the Bobcats return a decent amount of firepower from last year's playoff squad and should be right in the mix for a top region standing once the dust settles.

To open up the season, the Bobcats will play three of their first four games on the road at Hackleburg, Lamar County and Colbert County with a home region game against Elkmont sandwiched between.

While the Bobcats do get home-field advantage for Lauderdale County in week seven, they then make the travel to Florence to take on Mars Hill before coming back home to face Colbert Heights in what is *always* a high-stakes matchup late in the season.

To finish out the regular season, Phil Campbell travels to Clements and then makes a short trip to Red Bay.

The Bobcats non-region schedule features the likes of rival Hackleburg, Carbon Hill, Lamar County and Red Bay.

Red Bay Tigers

Head coach Heath Childers will look for a bounceback season after his first season with the Tigers finished with a 2-7 record with a very young Tigers squad.

This year's schedule features much of the same opponents from last year's schedule with a few newcomers.

After opening up with Hamilton, Lexington and Sheffield over the first four weeks of the season, the Tigers will play host to Lindsay Lane Christian, who is fielding their first team in program history in 2022 and is inside 2A region eight with the Tigers.

A rivalry game with Belmont returns for another season for Red Bay following the Lindsay Lane game and then the Tigers go on the road for games against Tharptown and a new addition to region eight, Falkville.

As for Falkville, the Blue Devils went 4-6 while being ranked in the top 10 in class 2A for a majority of the season.

And to wrap up their season, we have a rare Franklin County, non-region game between the Tigers and the Bobcats as they will square off on October 28th to wrap up both teams' seasons.

The last time the two teams squared off was in 2019 where the Tigers took home their 14th straight victory over the Bobcats with Phil Campbell's last win coming in 2005.



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'ALL-STATE,' from page 13

For Langston, he has had pitching wisdom right by his side for a large portion of his playing career. With his father David Langston, who is now the Northwest-Shoals Community College head baseball coach, being the pitching coach for most of his high school career, he has picked up on valuable insight and information day-in and day-out.

And while playing for a parent certainly has its fair share of pros and cons, the amount of help and information that Langston has been able to draw from his father is something that isn't lost on the righthander.

"It has its good and its bad. He stays on me of course, but it's been really good having him as my pitching coach just having the same routine as I've had because he's basically always been the coach that I've had over the years," Langston said. "He's a very knowledgeable person when it comes to pitching so having someone like that, for all of us pitchers, it's been very good."

Much like Pace, Langston had eye-popping numbers during the title campaign. But before the news came out that he was not only named to the all-state team, which was his initial goal, Langston wasn't sure about the prospects of being named the best pitcher in his classification.

Once he got the word, it was another achievement on the resume of the young Golden Tiger rightly.

"I didn't really know 100% that I was going to get it. But I kind of felt a little bit like I had a good shot. Because there's some very good arms like Matt Manley from Madison Academy had a good year," Langston said. "But I thought I had a good chance to at least make all-state and stuff but I didn't think pitcher of the year so I'm just extremely happy about it."

Pace and Langston weren't the only Golden Tigers named to the 5A all-state team by the ASWA.

Eli Gipson, Casen Heaps and Nathan Brockway were also selected to the

first and second teams in class 5A as well.

Gipson, who will continue his playing career alongside Pace at Union University, solidified himself as the two-hole hitter near the top of the lineup for Russellville while playing elite defense at shortstop for head coach Chris Heaps and company.

In his senior season, Gipson played in 48 games while batting .380 (57-150) with four homers, 37 RBIs and an astounding OPS of 1.028, good for third-best on the team amongst all qualifiers.

As for Heaps, who manned centerfield for Russellville, he had a breakout year in his junior season. An up-and-comer in his sophomore year, the speedy Heaps was selected to the first team alongside Gipson, Pace and Langston.

Across 44 games played, Heaps went 38-109 (.349 average) with a .986 OPS batting out of the ninth spot in the lineup oftentimes. In the field, Heaps had a fielding percentage of .981, only committing one error the entire year roaming centerfield.

Nathan Brockway was chosen to represent Russellville as a second team selection. The senior right fielder with massive power was rewarded for his breakout season.

Playing in 46 games, Brockway mashed four home runs with 26 RBIs, posting a .360 average with an OPS of 1.108 with nine doubles to his credit as well.

Now that his playing career at Russellville is finished, Brockway heads to Northwest-Shoals Community College to play for David Langston.

Check back next week as the FFP will feature a story on the Phil Campbell Bobcats players Mason Swinney and Cam Habada who were named the 3A hitter and pitchers of the year as well as others who were named to the all-state team.

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