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Rushing to Retirement: 25 year career as prosecutor to end soon

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When Joey Rushing accepted a position in the Franklin County District Attorney's Office in 1997, the Russellville native hoped it would become the foundation for his legal career.

It did. And 25 years later, Rushing will soon retire, making way for District Attorney-elect Jeff Barksdale.

But the path Rushing took to become District Attorney in 2005 was a road full of political potholes that required careful navigation. He must

have traveled carefully, though, as he will soon finish a third term in elected office.



In November 1997, District Attorney Chris Hargett made Rushing's assistant district attorney position full-time. Hargett was defeated in his bid

for re-election by John Pilati in 1998, so Rushing wasn't sure what would happen next.

Elections bring change to political

See 'RUSHING,' Page 10

'Funniest Man in America' to perform at Roxy Jan. 15th

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

After his September 9, 2022, show in Russellville was canceled due to an injury, the James Gregory Show has been rescheduled for Sunday, January 15, 2023, at 3 p.m., at the Roxy Theatre.



Gregory's September date, along with several other scheduled appearances, was postponed after the comedian fell and injured his leg, requiring hospitalization.

He's rescheduled most of those dates and is back to performing a couple shows each week. Gregory offered his own unique flavor in describing his improving physical condition.

"Moving slowly, but still moving," Gregory told the FFP last week. "But I'm excited to be back out there. In recent years, I started to prefer the closer to home, the better. The hard work isn't the show itself. The hard work is the traveling—packing the suitcase, getting in the car and checking into hotels. That takes the time and work. Being on stage is the easiest part of the day."

Gregory wore many hats before he launched into comedy in 1982.

The legendary comedian, known

See 'GREGORY,' Page 4

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**Georgia Hunter Johnson, 81, of Russellville, passed away
Sunday, December 18, 2022. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted
the family.**

**Adam Wade Baker, 38, of Leighton, passed away on
Wednesday, December 14, 2022. Spry Memorial Chapel
assisted the family.**

**Daniel Ellis Thomas, 85, Phil Campbell, AL. passed away
Thursday December 15, 2022. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted
the family.**

**William "Jerome" Green, 59, passed away on December 15,
2022. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.**

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and sports through-
out the week, visit us
on the web at
www.franklinfreepress.net! Send your
guest columns,
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'Christmas to Remember' draws more than 50 nominations from readers

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

More than 50 nominations were made for the Christmas to Remember holiday promotion sponsored by the law firm of Bedford, Rogers, Bowling and McReynolds, PC, El Patron Mexican Restaurant and the Franklin Free Press.

The nominations were reviewed by a panel of three people who were not connected with any of the sponsors.

Three families were selected to receive a \$500 Christmas to Remember to be spent however it would best benefit each family.

One family will receive clothing, shoes and gifts for their three children. Another will stay warm this winter as the \$500 will be used to fill the family's propane tank.

There were so many heartwarming nominations for families dealing with different life issues. And because someone close to them told their story and nominated, we are able to make a small difference in their holiday seasons.

We want to thank Russellville attorney Jeff Bowling and his firm, Bedford, Rogers, Bowling and McReynolds, PC, the owners of El Patron Mexican Restaurant and each of you who nominated a Franklin County family to receive a Christmas to Remember.

Please remember someone or some family you know who could use an extra hand this Christmas. It can be something as simple as preparing them a meal or special holiday dessert. Let the people you care about know you love them.

And please say a prayer for those in our community who are struggling. There's power in prayer. And it doesn't cost a thing.

Please send your guest columns and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Franklin Free Press

113 Washington Ave. NW
Russellville, AL 35653
256-332-0255

The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.
Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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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

The Franklin Free Press is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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

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‘GREGORY,’ from Page 1

as the “Funniest Man in America,” Gregory worked at a small country grocery store when he was 12. He went on to work for the United States Department of Defense, the United States Postal Service and he was in sales for more than a decade.

At age 36, Gregory became the emcee for shows at Atlanta's Punch Line comedy club. It was February 17, 1982, when Gregory did his first set as a stand-up comedian. 40 years later, he's still making audiences laugh.

Gregory did not dub himself the “Funniest Man in America.” Instead, that moniker had its origins with a Huntsville Times entertainment columnist named Billy Joe Cooley.

“In 1986, I was doing a show at a Huntsville comedy club and he was in the audience, but I didn't know it,” Gregory explained. “There was a paragraph in his Friday column that said he'd 'never heard of this guy Gregory before, but he's got to be the funniest man in America.'”

“Back then, there was no Internet, so you mailed a press kit to the papers of the towns you were coming to perform. So I put that article in my press kit and a month later I was doing a show in St. Louis, and the St. Louis Post Dispatch mentioned that coming to the Funny Bone this weekend was the 'funniest man in America. Then it was in a Fort Worth, Texas, newspaper, and it appeared we may have found something,” Gregory added.

Gregory will come to Russellville's Roxy Theatre for the first time on January 15th. Tickets are available online at <https://www.itickets.com/events/461964>, or by calling 1-800-965-9324. Tickets are \$50 for Gold Circle seats (first 12 rows) and \$40 for general admission. More than 130 Gold Circle tickets have been sold, so only limited quantity remain for the premium seats.

The show's promoters said all tickets from the September 9, 2022, show will be honored at the January 15, 2023 afternoon show. The promoters also announced there will be no refunds on tickets previously purchased.

The 76-year-old Gregory makes his home in Woodstock, Ga., about 20 miles northwest of Atlanta.

When you see a James Gregory show, it's more than just a stand-up comedian firing off one liners. Gregory is a master storyteller who weaves humor and Southern common sense into his hilarious observations on 'life from the front porch.'

He talks about snooping in his vegetarian neighbors' refrigerator and finding a bottle of mustard. What does a vegetarian need with mustard? Aha! Hidden behind the carton of almond milk was a pack of weenies!

And Gregory has no problem poking fun at himself along the way.

They have officially categorized obesity as a disease! Fat people can't help it. It's like polio. Maybe someday they'll find a cure! Now, nobody really believes obesity is a disease. Where did I get this (patting his rotund belly)? Got too close to a fat person! They sneezed, and now I got it!

Gregory's stories are a crafty mix of modern problems looked at through a perspective of when life was simpler. Gregory describes that era as “before the death of common sense.”

His shows are primarily devoid of vulgarity, with the exception of a word or two here or there. It's family friendly humor that can be enjoyed by all ages.

“I have lived long enough to know people, know life,” Gregory said. “My comedy is based on my life experiences. It's real, it's funny and the audience loves it. That's why I'm still in business.”

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s):

Corrections Officer/Dispatcher for Franklin County Sheriff's Office and Jail

Deputy Sheriff for Franklin County Sheriff's Office

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, January 6, 2023.

Heavy Equipment Operator for Franklin County Solid Waste

Assistant County Engineer

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until the position has been filled.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

Franklin County is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in the employment or provision of services.

RV Council to buy firetrucks

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council authorized the purchase of two new custom pumper fire trucks, at a cost of more than \$1.5 million, at the council's December 5th meeting.

The purchase of the two Sutphen heavy duty custom pumper trucks will be tiered, with the city paying \$753,310.63 up front for the first pumper. The funds will come out of the city's American Rescue Plan Act grant.

By paying 100 percent of the purchase price for the first pumper, the city will receive a discount of \$33,265.62 off the \$786,576.25 list price.

The second pumper will be ordered, but not paid for until its delivery date, expected to be between 30-32 months for both trucks.

In other agenda items, the council:

--heard a report from Street Department Manager Shannon Wilson that the city will temporarily place roll-off dumpsters in eight locations around town in the days leading up to Christmas and a few days after. This will allow residents a place to dispose of empty boxes, gift wrap, etc., that would otherwise take up space in their garbage containers.

Wilson said the dumpsters are NOT for household waste. They will be in place at the following locations three days before Christmas Day: Chucky Mullins Center, College Avenue School, Cedar Creek Subdivision at Walnut Gate Road, Waterloo Road at the Driver's Education lot, Sloss Lake at the John Blackwell Sports Complex, Old National Guard Armory location, Hester Heights subdivision at intersection of 43 and Underwood Road behind McDonald's.

--approved a resolution encouraging all Russellville residents to 'Spend \$23 in Russellville' on December 23rd, as a way to promote shopping local.

--approved a contract with Russellville Police Department Chaplain Bobby Brown for 12 months at a rate of \$1,200 per month.

--authorized advertisement to let bids for annual street materials for the Russellville Street Department.

--approved the hiring of Joey Franks and Albert Kerry Hallman as patrol officers with the RPD.

--authorized advertisement to solicit job applications for patrol officer with the RPD.

--authorized several nuisance abatements, including:

--188 Cemetery Street, for violations including tall grass and weeds, household items and trash in front and back yard.

--708 Burgess Street, for inoperable vehicle stored on property, building materials in yard, car parts in yard.

--608 Filmore, for tall weeds and vegetation, inoperable vehicles onsite, building materials in yard.

--111 Polk Street, for tall shrubs and trees grown against residence, vegetation, household items piled up in front, structural inadequacies.

406 Marion Street, for inoperable vehicle in yard, tall grass and weeds, household items on property, lumber and building materials scattered in yard.

With each violation, once the council authorizes the abatement of the nuisance at the property, city officials can come correct the violations and the cost of that is taxed to the property owner in the form of a lien against the property.

--received an invitation from Russellville High School Principal Jeremy Madden for the mayor and each councilman to spend a day at RHS on December 13, 2022. Each elected official will hear a brief State of the School message from Madden, and then will be paired up with a teacher to see first-hand how a school day works.

"When someone asks you about an issue at a later time, this will allow you to have a better frame of reference," Madden said. "You can say you've been in our schools and seen how they operate on a day-to-day basis."

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Notice is hereby given that on December 31, 2022 from 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., units will be sold by sealed bid. Tenant may satisfy their indebtedness prior to the time of sale. Will be able to inspect units and bid on this date. All units have miscellaneous items, furniture, and boxes.

#45 Angela Tiggs
#55 Nathalie Crane



We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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

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 **T**he Senior Center at Phil Campbell is under new management. The Town of Phil Campbell would like to invite and encourage everyone in our area that is 60 years and older to come be a part of the group. This is for men and women. They meet at the Phil Campbell Community Center Monday thru Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00. A delicious lunch is served around 11:00 a.m. Come on out and join in on the games or just sit and have a cup of coffee and socialize!! So if you, your parents, grandparents or your neighbor is 60 or older, pass the word and come out and enjoy a morning of f

 **R**ussellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling hams for Christmas. Pickup is Friday, December 23, between 8-10 a.m., at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue. Hams are \$35 each and may be preordered by calling 256-810-1970.

 **Y**ou are invited to a special time of musical worship with New Ground, on Sunday, January 8, 2023, at 4 p.m., at North Russellville Baptist Church. The church is located on Waterloo Road before you get to Russellville High School. Pastor Jason Swinney and congregation invite everyone to attend. A love offering will be taken.

We love to hear from you! Please send your guest columns, cartoon panels, letters to the editor, recipes and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

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Mainstreet committee to hire part-time director

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In order to achieve economic development and growth in downtown Russellville, the Russellville Main Street Committee must understand the strengths, weaknesses, goals and concerns of the people who live, work and shop in our community.

At an informational meeting held in September, the public was asked to complete an online survey to indicate what each respondent likes (and doesn't like) about downtown Russellville.

At its November meeting, Main Street Alabama Assistant State Coordinator Trisha Black shared the answers to the survey.

Russellville is the pilot Alabama community in a new tier of service under Main Street Alabama called Aspiring.

It's a one-year track designed to prepare communities for Main Street designation and helping them build capacity, establish organizational structure and recruit volunteers for short-term projects.

The Russellville Main Street Committee is also in the process of employing a part-time director, a position committee members expect will later become full-time. The committee has three applicants, and hopes to begin interviews later this month.

Main Street Alabama began in 2010 as a way help communities rebuild and promote traditional downtown commercial districts. This is done through inspiring people to come back to their hometowns to live, shop and maybe to open their own businesses.

The organization's goal is to maximize each community's downtown potential and make it successful, vibrant and relevant.

So what do the people of Russellville believe is great about their community? Here are the top 5 answers: 1. Schools. 2. Tradition. 3. Small Town Feel. 4. Friendliness. 5. Diversity.

When asked what the strengths and assets of downtown Russellville are, respondents' top 5 answers were: 1. Roxy Theatre. 2. Historic buildings. 3. Proximity to the Shoals/other large metropolitan cities. 4. New businesses. 5. Russellville Florist.

In the coming months, the Russellville Main Street Committee will develop and implement a policy to create positive change in the community, and will draft and approve a mission statement.

Committee members will also have information on what residents believe are the weaknesses of downtown Russellville. The top 5 were: 1. Lack of major retailers. 2. Not enough shops. 3. Appearance of surrounding residential neighborhoods. 4. Vacant buildings. 5. Need for more restaurants.

Respondents' Top 5 events they would like to see in downtown Russellville include: 1. Live Music. 2. Movies. 3. Hispanic Event. 4. First Friday or similar type merchant event. 5. Christmas event in addition to parade.

For more information on Main Street Alabama and Russellville's progress toward Main Street Alabama designation, visit www.mainstreetalabama.org.

Please send your guest columns and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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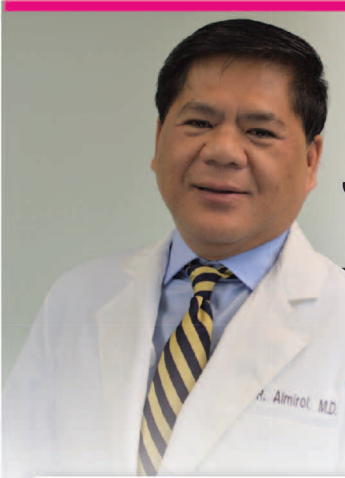
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FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Financial Statement for period of October 1, 2021 - September 30, 2022
(Unaudited Statements)

| | General | Special Revenue | Debt Service | Capital Projects | Expendable Trust | Total |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| REVENUES | | | | | | |
| STATE REVENUES | \$27,662,260.82 | - | 371,469.00 | 1,068,762.00 | - | 29,102,491.82 |
| FEDERAL REVENUES | 29,109.59 | 11,350,562.15 | - | - | - | 11,379,671.74 |
| LOCAL REVENUES | 6,615,945.28 | 1,926,328.85 | 315.03 | 92,867.00 | 876,904.12 | 9,512,360.28 |
| OTHER REVENUES | 194,408.36 | 53,158.69 | - | - | - | 247,567.05 |
| TOTAL REVENUES | \$34,501,724.05 | \$ 13,330,049.69 | \$ 371,784.03 | \$ 1,161,629.00 | \$ 876,904.12 | \$ 50,242,090.89 |
| EXPENDITURES | | | | | | |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES | \$20,904,969.95 | \$ 4,490,331.94 | \$ - | \$ - | \$ 379,086.22 | \$ 25,774,388.11 |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES | 4,646,331.07 | 974,395.64 | - | - | 91,184.84 | 5,711,911.55 |
| OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE | 3,264,814.86 | 1,487,556.37 | - | 278,985.00 | 19,159.45 | 5,050,515.68 |
| AUXILIARY SERVICES | 2,693,722.94 | 4,442,445.02 | - | - | 18,199.62 | 7,154,367.58 |
| GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES | 1,493,848.08 | 188,704.54 | - | - | - | 1,682,552.62 |
| CAPITAL OUTLAY | 138,263.72 | 111,094.00 | - | 115,841.97 | - | 365,199.69 |
| DEBT SERVICES | 34,641.00 | - | 1,186,669.00 | 551,975.68 | - | 1,773,285.68 |
| OTHER EXPENDITURES | 680,019.94 | 1,768,158.85 | - | - | 297,960.85 | 2,746,139.64 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURES | \$33,856,611.56 | \$ 13,462,686.36 | \$ 1,186,669.00 | \$ 946,802.65 | \$ 805,590.98 | \$ 50,258,360.55 |
| OTHER FUND SOURCES (USES) | | | | | | |
| OTHER FUND SOURCES | \$ 512,949.27 | \$ 1,200,876.98 | \$ 814,216.52 | \$ - | \$ 26,639.20 | \$ 2,554,681.97 |
| OTHER FUND USES | 1,651,296.73 | 128,679.92 | - | 290,894.01 | 77,496.15 | 2,148,366.81 |
| TOTAL OTHER FUND SOURCES (USES) | \$(1,138,347.46) | \$ 1,072,197.06 | \$ 814,216.52 | \$(290,894.01) | \$(50,856.95) | \$ 406,315.16 |
| BEGINNING FUND BALANCE - OCTOBER 1, 2021 | \$3,708,844.11 | \$ 1,665,962.99 | \$ 407,607.19 | \$ 76,067.66 | \$ 429,360.35 | \$ 6,287,842.30 |
| ENDING FUND BALANCE - SEPTEMBER 30, 2022 | \$3,215,609.14 | \$ 2,605,523.38 | \$ 406,938.74 | \$ - | \$ 449,816.54 | \$ 6,677,887.80 |

This is to certify that the above receipts and expenditures are true and correct as reflected in the records of the office of the Superintendent of Education of Franklin County.

Signed: Greg Hamilton
Greg Hamilton, Superintendent



John Almirol, M.D. Internal Medicine

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Sears' plea, sentencing set for Dec. 21

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Russellville man's guilty plea to a manslaughter charge was set aside after the judge who accepted the plea withdrew from the case due to a conflict.

Antonio Sears pled guilty to manslaughter on October 12, 2022, in Franklin County Circuit Court. Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton, who took Sears' plea

set the case for sentencing last week but Hamilton withdrew from the case, and set aside Sears' plea, after he learned his former law partner, Danny McDowell, represented the family of the 27-year-old woman who died as a result of the one vehicle accident.

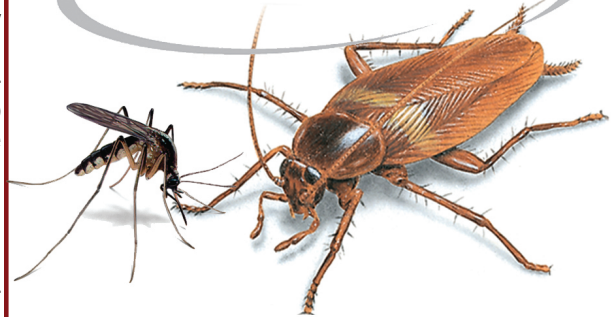
Sears entered an 'open plea,' meaning there is no sentencing agreement or recommendation from the State of Alabama. The victim's family will have an opportunity to address the Court, as will Sears and his attorney.

Sears' plea and sentencing were rescheduled for December 21, 2022, at 2:30 p.m., and will be handled by Morgan County Circuit Judge Glenn Thompson.

Sears faces a range of two to 20 years on the manslaughter charge. As a condition of his guilty plea, Sears' remaining felony drug charges, a DUI and a Possession of Drug Paraphernalia charge will be dismissed by the State of Alabama.

Sears was charged in the woman's death after crashing his vehicle, in which the woman was a passenger, near Woodland Hills subdivision in Russellville. Police reports indicate Sears was traveling approximately 70 miles per hour (in a 25 mph zone) without his headlights on.

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Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays from My Family to Yours!

Murphree, Welborn begin BOE terms

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Carol Murphree and Terry Welborn were sworn-in at a brief ceremony preceding today's meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education.

Murphree, who represents District Four, defeated incumbent Shannon Oliver in the general election. She won the nomination after defeating Heath McKee in the Republican Primary.

Welborn, the BOE District Two member, did not have opposition in the general election. He defeated Curtis Baker in the Republican Primary.

The board also elected its officers for the coming year. Welborn will remain as Board President, with Kacey Johnston serving as Vice-President.

In other agenda items, the board:

--approved an update to its 'Procedures to Access Public Record Documents' for when public records are requested. The cost increased to \$60/hour research fee and \$.50 per page for copies.

--approved out-of-state trips, including: Phil Campbell Elementary sixth grade to Tennessee Aquarium/Ruby Falls on May 12, 2023, Belgreen School fifth grade to Atlanta Braves baseball game and Top Golf, May 19, 2023, Vina ninth and 11th grades to Shiloh National Military Park, Shiloh, Tenn., April 14, 2023, Tharptown High School seniors to Itawamba Community College, Itawamba, Miss., Dec. 2, 2022, Belgreen sixth grade to Atlanta Braves game and Atlanta Aquarium or World of Coke, May 5, May 19 or May 26, 2023, Red Bay girls' and boys' varsity basketball teams to Alcorn Central High School, Glen, Ms., Dec. 28-29, 2022 and to Belmont, Miss., Jan. 6, 2023.

--approved the following personnel moves:

Resignation: Stephen Henry, Special Education Aide, PCHS, Brandi Gholston, 7th and 8th grade teacher, PCHS and Annette Hargett, Central Office Receptionist, effective March 1, 2023.

Retirement: Carol Fretwell, PCES teacher.

Employment: Jessica Snow, Stacia Long, Child Nutrition Program Assistants, Tharptown Schools, Cimperlyn David, Rhonda Santoni and Carolyn Pennington, Special Education Aides for Franklin County Schools.

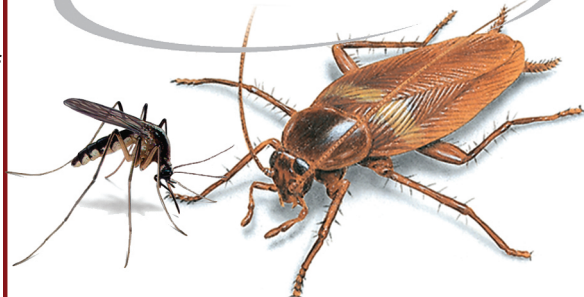
Transfer: Ladana Haley, Child Nutrition Program Assistant from Tharptown to East Franklin Junior High.

Leave of Absence: Brittney Williams Hovater, CNP Assistant, from October 24, 2022, through the end of the current school year, Victoria Lynn Jones, half-time special education teacher, EFJH.

Substitute Bus Drivers: Kimberly Davidson, Sarah Kirk and Ricky Johnson.

The next meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education will be February 7, 2023, with work session at 5 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Carol Murphree, Terry Welborn with Supt. Greg Hamilton

'RUSHING,' from Page 1

jobs, as the incoming official often wants people of his or her choosing to staff the office.

But Pilati told Rushing he wanted him to remain on staff, and after assistant district attorney Paula McDowell was elected Franklin County District Judge in 2000, Rushing became the lone assistant D.A.

A federal investigation of Pilati ended with his resignation in April 2004, on the eve of his reelection.

With Republican Bob Riley serving as governor, the vacant appointment didn't go to Rushing, even though he applied for it. Instead, Lee Ozbirn was appointed to serve the final nine months of the six-year term.

Rushing decided to run for the job on the Democratic ticket. Ozbirn, hoping to use his appointment as a spring board, ran as the Republican nominee, creating the dicey situation of Rushing running against his boss for his boss' job.

"That was the most awkward nine months of my life," Rushing said. "After I won the general election, it was again awkward to tell (Ozbirn) I did not plan to retain him once I took office in January 2005."

In need of an experienced assistant district attorney, Rushing struck gold by hiring longtime Lauderdale County assistant district attorney Doug Evans to come to Franklin County.

Evans was a casualty of politics in Lauderdale County. Once new District Attorney Chris Connelly let him go, Rushing moved quickly to reach out to Evans.

"He came on in January of 2005 and stayed with us nine years. Doug had experience trying multiple capital murder cases and really, just about every kind of case," Rushing said. "I worked with him when I was in Florence and he was a very fair, honest person."

Prior to coming to the Franklin County D.A.'s Office, Rushing's legal career began as a judicial assistant to Lauderdale County Circuit Judges Don Patterson and Larry Smith.

After a year in that role, Rushing went into private practice in Florence before coming to Franklin County a year later. That limited time in private practice showed Rushing his heart was in criminal law, and prosecution in particular.

"I started doing some criminal defense work as a private attorney. I realized then I would enjoy being on the other side more based on how I felt about those cases," Rushing said. "My goal was to leave private practice and move into prosecuting if I could find a job."

As his professional life fell into place, Rushing's personal life was also shaping up. He met Tessa, his future wife, when he worked in Florence. They began dating and when Rushing took the job in Franklin County, Tessa found a job with the Russellville law firm of Lowery & Dempsey.

The couple wed in August 1998. More than 24 years and two children later, they are still happily married.

Rushing credits Tessa with a big part of his professional success. When you marry a district attorney, the phone calls can come very early or very late at night.

"She knew with what I was going into I'd be gone a lot. Throw in some long hours on some cases I had to work, but she was always understanding and supportive," Rushing said. "Also, I was a youth leader at First United Methodist Church, so that added more time I was gone."

Three years into the first term of three Rushing would serve, he faced the most challenging, and heart-wrenching, case of his career, State of Alabama vs. Christie Scott.

Scott was charged and convicted of capital murder in death of her six-year-old son Mason, who died in a fire at the Scott's Russellville home on August 16, 2008. Scott and her four-year-old son escaped from the fire, which was determined to have started in or near Mason's bedroom. Scott's husband was out of state at the time.

Scott was charged with multiple counts of capital murder for setting the fire days after she took out an additional life insurance policy on Mason.

The four-week trial required Rushing to prove his case primarily through circumstantial evidence, always a challenge, particularly on a case of this magnitude.

"We did not have a confession or direct evidence to prove her guilt. We had more than 60 witnesses we called in order to present our case to the jury," Rushing said. "The sheer stress of the length of the trial, along with the level of severity of the charges as well as the complex nature of an arson investigation was all something I had not experienced prior to that case. It was a very difficult case to take to trial."

Scott's sentence of death turned out to be the only death penalty case Rushing prosecuted. There was one other capital murder charge that ended with a sentence of death, but the conviction was overturned on appeal and the defendant later pled guilty to a life sentence, Rushing said.

As he looks back at his time in office, Rushing expressed his appreciation to the local attorneys for what he described as an 'outstanding' working relationship.

"We have some really great defense attorneys who are very competent and we are good friends outside the office or courtroom," Rushing said. "We have a mutual respect for each other and I have always tried to maintain that good relationship, particularly with attorneys who we work with on a daily basis."

Russellville attorney Rebecca Thomason, whose practice specializes in criminal defense, said she will miss working with Rushing.

"Joey is one of the best prosecutors I've ever worked with. He's knowledgeable of the law, but he has a heart for people," Thomason said. "He deals with people's hurts and pains and tragedies. He represents the people in a professional manner while maintaining a joyful heart. I'm really going to miss him."

One of the biggest challenges Rushing faced in his 18 years in office was learning to tell people he could not do what they were asking for in certain cases. A non-confrontational person by nature, Rushing said that took some time to get used to.

"My personality has always been to try and make people happy. I don't like conflict, but the nature of this job involves conflict," Rushing said. "I've made a lot of people angry over the years by not doing what they asked for, or by prosecuting their loved ones, but I've always done my best to be fair to everybody."

"Most people can handle what you say to them as long as you're professional and courteous, rather than being rude or short with them," he added.

Prosecutors often are asked why it seems like the 'same people' are always arrested over and over, and Rushing said a primary reason for that involves the softening of criminal laws by the Alabama Legislature.

As the legislature deals with the chronic issue of prison overcrowding, Rushing has seen changes in criminal laws that reduce the number of people sentenced to prison, something that's been met with objection by prosecutors across Alabama.

"Our inability to send people to prison based on the softening of laws is frustrating," Rushing said. "Sentencing guidelines that were passed prevent prosecutors from sending people to prison unless they are repeat offenders. When people wonder why the same folks get arrested over and over, that's why. They've added lower level felonies that don't allow someone convicted of them to serve prison time."

Through his 25-plus years as a prosecutor, Rushing has seen changes in the types of crimes committed in Franklin County, including drug offenses.

"When I got here, it was cocaine, then crack. Then it moved to manufacturing methamphetamine. Then it was meth possession, rather than manufacture, and now, it's fentanyl," Rushing said.

"That's the evolution of drugs we've seen in our county, and most cases we make are drug cases or related to drugs. We've had murders, burglaries and thefts all because of drugs. Approximately 85 percent of every case we prosecute is related to drugs," he added.

The logical question for the 53-year-old Rushing, a 1995 graduate of the University of Alabama School of Law, is what's next now that his time in elected office nears its end? Rushing's last day in office will be January 17, 2023.

"I've applied for several federal jobs. I still enjoy prosecuting, so I've looked into some opportunities for a part-time prosecution role (perhaps very close to where he works now) and I hope one of those works out," Rushing said.



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REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

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Ability to: operate a motor vehicle; read; safely fire a weapon; communicate on telephone and radio; generate written documents such as reports and tickets; bend, crouch; stretch; stretch; walk; run; respond to emergency situations on short notice when off-duty; and do the essential functions of the job as directed in this description.

Willingness to: work overtime, irregular hours, weekends and holidays; travel and attend seminars and workshops.

QUALIFICATIONS and SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Possession of a high school diploma or GED

Minimum of 21 years of age

Must meet or exceed the minimum requirements established by the State of Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission

Possession of a valid Alabama Drivers License

Possess the ability to obtain an Alabama Police Academy diploma or its equivalent

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

The appointees will be required to successfully complete a physical examination including drug and alcohol screening prior to employment.

James awarded service award from regional collegiate commission

Submitted

MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA. -- Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Timmy James was recently awarded the 2022 Carol A. Luthman Meritorious Service Award by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which is the accreditation agency for institutions of higher education.

The annual award was presented to five individuals across the Southeastern United States as part of the SACSCOC Annual Meeting held in Atlanta, Ga. on December 3-6, 2022. It honors outstanding service to the peer review accreditation process, including volunteerism, leadership and commitment to the principles of accreditation.

James has served on 17 SACSCOC peer review teams, including nine as the chairperson of a peer review committee. He has served as Cluster Coordinator of the 5th year review committee and also serves on the Differentiated Review Committee.

After being awarded the Meritorious Service Award, James expressed his appreciation and surprise for the award. "I'm at a loss for words for this honor but extremely grateful for being selected to receive such a highly esteemed award," said James. "I am humbled that I was selected to receive this award. I feel that so many have done so much more than I, but it is truly an honor to receive this award. I began working as an evaluator about 15 years ago and can truthfully say it has been a great professional development experience from the beginning. As Accreditation Liaison for Northwest-Shoals, the knowledge gained through my work as an evaluator has enhanced our ability to meet the demands of the accreditation process at the College."

Luthman Service Award winners have demonstrated extraordinary commitment to the accreditation processes in various volunteer capacities, and they are respected by their peers for their integrity and the meritorious quality of their service over a sustained period of time.

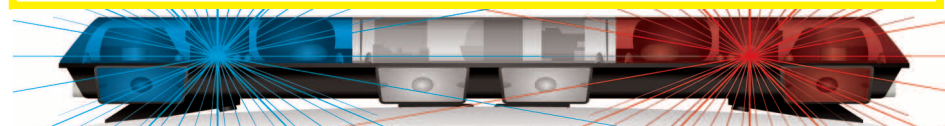
SACSCOC is the nation's largest accrediting body that accredits approximately 800 institutions. SACSCOC is the recognized regional accrediting body in the 11 U.S. Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia) and in Latin America for those institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees.



COURTESY PHOTO

NW-SCC Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Timmy James receives the 2022 Carol A. Luthman Meritorious Service Award by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

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Red Devils split a pair of varsity games against St. Bernard Prep

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Coach Richie Hester's Vina girls varsity basketball team improved to 7-5 with an impressive home court win over St. Bernard Preparatory School, 50-44.

Sophomore Sara Harper led the Red Devils with 20 points and six assists. Senior Kaitlyn Athey added 17, including four three-point field goals.

"This was a really important win for us," Hester said. "Now, we'll have some time off for Christmas and get ready to play Waterloo."

Vina will compete in the Waterloo Tournament December 28-29, with an opening game against Woodville on Wednesday, Dec. 28.

Last week the Vina Red Devil's boys basketball team got its fourth victory over the Brilliant Tigers.

The Red Devils won 72-54 with Hunter Griffith pouring in a team high 24 points.

Coach Randy Barnes said Griffith is the type of player who thrives in clutch situations.

"Griffith does a great job getting a shot off when you need him," Barnes said.

Hunter Banks also had 22 points in the game.

The Red Devils then faced St. Bernard Preparatory School in a game that came down to the final possession.

St. Bernard took advantage of the last shot, a three-point field goal that just beat the final buzzer for a 46-43 win.

Familiar name to head Belgreen softball program

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

After a three-round run in Regionals and a 28-19 season record, the Belgreen varsity softball team is getting a new look with Susie Tverberg handing over the reins to her husband Sander Tverberg.

Sander Tverberg has been a part of the Bulldog program for four years, all as an assistant coach.

The first three years, Tverberg was an unpaid assistant. While helping coach, he decided to pursue a degree in education and left the program.

This past spring was his first year as a paid assistant at Belgreen.

Tverberg has always enjoyed coaching, whether that sport be basketball, football or softball.

"I always wondered what I could do with my own program and if I could have success doing it," Tverberg said.

Tverberg spent time at Tharptown helping coach when his oldest daughter Meagan started playing sports.

Tverberg has also helped coach baseball at Russellville Middle School and was an assistant for the high school team under former coach Chris Heaps.

"My time helping with the Russellville program was so beneficial. It taught me what it takes to win championships. Not only do the kids put in the work, but the coaches have to put in maximum effort to build that success. From a look on



TWERBURG

the inside, it was a struggle and we put in a lot of work," Tverberg said.

Tverberg is ready to get to work and have repeated success with the Bulldogs.

"We only lost a couple players last year, so I am excited to see our growth. This year we have two seniors. I like to see how much growth we've made from the off season because we have a lot of players that play in summer programs," Tverberg said.

Belgreen girls roll to 3-0 week

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Belgreen girls varsity basketball team improved to 10-5, 3-0 in 1A Area 14, with a Friday night defeat of Hackleburg, 60-34.

Coach Chad Green's team was led by Dakota Green's 23 points, including 12 in the first quarter, as Belgreen raced out to a 20-8 lead. Noelle Willingham added 17 points for the Bulldogs.

Belgreen carried a 31-18 lead into halftime, and seized firm control of the game in the third quarter, when the Bulldogs outscored the Panthers 23-6.

The Bulldogs' win over Hackleburg completed a 3-0 week for the Belgreen girls.

On Tuesday, the Bulldogs raced past Phillips 68-20. Belgreen led 43-9 at halftime, paced by Noelle Willingham's 12 first half points and Green's 11.

Ten Bulldogs scored, as Green was able to give his reserve players extensive playing time in the second half. Carson Hovater had six points, all in the fourth quarter. Makenna Fisher scored six of her 13 points in the third quarter.

Belgreen took care of Cherokee on December 15, with a 50-15 road victory. Belgreen led 19-4 after one, and 32-8 at halftime.

Green led a balanced scoring attack, with nine. Bryn Scott had eight points and three Bulldogs, Noelle Willingham, Isabella Tate and Makayla Willingham, seven points.

Coach Marty Cooper's Belgreen boys team had a 1-2 week, with a win over Cherokee and losses to Phillips and Hackleburg.

In the 56-27 defeat of Cherokee, Austin James led the Bulldogs with 25 points, including nine in the third quarter. Jonathan Mendoza added 12.

In Hackleburg's 47-33 defeat of Belgreen, the Panthers were led by Joquan Rader's 16 points

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'BELGREEN' from Page 13

and Conner Whitfield's 12.
Belgreen's high scorer was Braycen Johnson with 13.
The Bulldogs return to the court Thursday, Dec. 22, with varsity girls
and boys games at Shoals Christian High School.

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Three Golden Tigers named to 5A All-State Football Team

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

Senior Russellville Golden Tiger receiver Randell Johnson was recently named to the 5A All-State Football first team by the Alabama Sports Writers Association.

The recognition comes as no surprise as Johnson finished the season with 1,158 receiving yards in 12 games. His 45 receptions resulted in 14 touchdowns and he was part of a record-setting performance in the first round of the 5A playoffs against Boaz, as Johnson and Russellville quarterback Harrison Burch teamed up for 377 yards and six touchdowns.

"He transferred into our program raw and not understanding what it took to be successful," Russellville head coach John Ritter said. "There's a lot more attention to detail here than where he came from. It's impressive to see how far he's come in two seasons.

"Randell was an all-around great player at 6'3 225 pounds, but I was also proud of what he did on the practice field. He was a really good blocker. There were a lot of games we didn't throw to him and relied on our run game and he stepped up for that," Ritter added.



Red Bay senior running back Brady Hardin was named to the 2A All-State Football first team after his standout career with the Tigers' program.

Golden Tiger junior quarterback Harrison Burch and senior running back Conner Warhurst were named to the 5A All-State Honorable Mention team. "To see Conner through his four years has been a treat. He's a warrior," Ritter said.

Warhurst amassed 1,550 yards on 188 carries. The senior played in only six full games and four only in the first half, Ritter said. He finished with 21 touchdowns.

Defensively, Warhurst was also a standout performer, with 39 solo tackles, 31 assists and five tackles for loss.

His career numbers for the Golden Tigers were 475 carries for 3,899 yards and 54 touchdowns.

Unlike Johnson and Warhurst, Burch will be back next year looking for repeated success.

"There's a lot more to playing football than just throwing it and he was very impressive under pressure. He understood not every play had to be a 75-yard touchdown. I'm glad to have him back next year," Ritter said.

In 12 games, Burch completed 124 of 218 attempts for 2,524 yards, 27 touchdowns and only four interceptions. He had eight games of more than 150 yards passing, including one over 400 yards, two over 315 yards and two over 225 yards.

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My take on this...Christmas Emotions

Gail Motes
Franklin Free Press

Christmas Day is almost here. Some folks are looking forward to it. Others are dreading it. There are even those who have mixed feelings about it. I'm one with mixed feelings.

I'm glad to see the smiles on the faces of children because it helps to sweeten a heart that is breaking.

Whether it's been days, weeks, months or years, losing a family member or a friend the ache is still there. For instance, it could be a favorite chair that looks sad and empty, even though a relative has it occupied, it still feels empty to me because the one who sat in it is no longer there.

This is one time that the phrase 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' does not apply.

Dwelling on the past too long is taking away from the love and appreciation of the family still here to enjoy. Let's not deprive the living. One day will come when someone else is not around. The love they deserved was wasted.

Decisions are a part of life. I can think of one most of us go through every year--the moment we go through a 'brain overload' trying to find that perfect gift. It seems you have seen everything in the store, until one item speaks the name. Hours have been spent, but it's all worthwhile.

Then on to the long line getting to the register. A few days after Christmas and you see your friend standing in a long line having to wait hours to return the gift. While waiting, the brain is going through a 'thought process.' Oh yeah! What to exchange this gift for! Something perfect, maybe.

Another dilemma is finding a day that everybody can get together. It ends up trying to find a day that most of the family can come.

Then on to the food. Why does it seem everybody wants to bring potato salad?

Then someone recommends a person, stating hers is better than anyone else's. Everyone laughs in my family--We laugh a lot!

Choices are many, but decisions come down to one.

I'm making a decision to wish each of you a Merry Christmas!

Always know I appreciate my faithful readers.

Until later....



Wishing your family a

Merry Christmas!

Ralton Baker,
Franklin County Board of Education



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From left: Commissioners Chris Wallace, Jason Miller, Joseph Baldwin and David Hester. Seated: Probate Judge Barry Moore.
~ The Franklin County Commission

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Most Franklin County businesses receive satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

29 of the 30 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the period of October 1, 2022 through November 11, 2022, had scores that fell into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

29 of the 30 Franklin County establishments listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The high score was 100, shared by East Franklin Junior High School lunchroom, 1815 Hwy. 89, Phil Campbell, EconoLodge, 13600 Hwy. 43, Russellville and Red Bay High School Cafeteria, 800 Eighth Street, Red Bay.

Other inspection scores of Franklin County businesses, in alphabetical order, included:

- 306 BBQ, 13670 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 92.
- 43 Grill, 15110 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 91.
- Backwoods Grill & Fish Camp, 2937 Hwy. 43, Phil Campbell, 87.
- Bel Haven Heights, 107 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 99.
- Big Star of Russellville Deli, 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 98.
- Budget Inn, 14184 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- CJ's Grocery, 14545 Hwy. 187, Belgreen, 94.
- Coco Michoacana 2, 318 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 83.
- El Patron Tex-Mex, LLC, 13665 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 87.
- Harold's Gas & Grocery, 1425 Hwy. 172 East, Hodges, 99.
- Hodges Senior Center, 1942 Hwy. 172, Hodges, 98.
- Jay Raja, Inc., 109 Madison St. NE, Russellville, 94.
- La Nina Mexican Food, 113 North Jackson Ave., Russellville, 88.
- Legacy Chevron, 13518 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 96.
- New Freedom Daycare, 508 St. Clair St., Russellville, 97.
- Panda Buffet, 14633 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 90.
- Red Bay Yacht Club, 996 9th St. W, Red Bay, 95.
- Subway, 504 4th St. SW, Red Bay, 94.
- Swamp John's Country Store, 5181 Hwy. 24, Red Bay, 91.
- The Hang Out Nutrition, 13684 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Tokyo Sushi and Steakhouse, 14001 Hwy. 43 Ste. 17, Russellville, 97.
- Vina High School Cafeteria, 8250 County Road 23, Vina, 99.
- Waffle House #2186, 14005 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 89.
- Weatherford Centre, 303 4th Ave SE, Red Bay, 89.
- Wendy's of Russellville, 13679 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 89.
- Willi's, 5680 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 98.

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.



Letters to the Editor

We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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

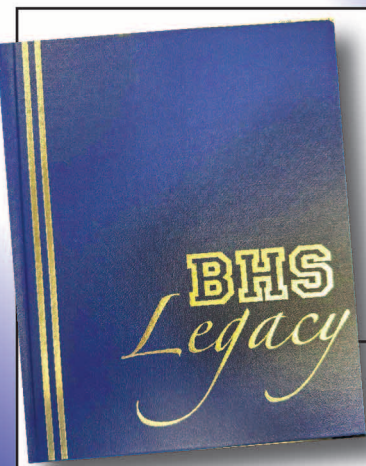
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