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RCS recognized nationally for EL program success

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Schools system has received statewide acclaim for its unprecedented success working with English Language Learners (ELL) and helping them become English proficient. Now, the entire country is learning what RCS teachers, administrators and staff have done to improve the system's overall test scores, even with demographics that have changed markedly over the past 10 years.

The system was the subject of a feature article in Education Week, a national publication that reports on K-12 education news and information. With more than 1.6 million readers, Education Week offers a footprint that spreads to all corners of the country. The article profiled what RCS is doing as a district to help its ELL students and the nation took notice. Last week, Grimes was a guest speaker on a webinar seen by more than 600 educators across the U.S. His topic? What school systems can do to help English learners thrive,

See 'RCS,' Page 9

Miller attends Alabama GOP Winter Meeting

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

As he campaigned last year to become Franklin County's representative on the Alabama Republican Party State Executive Committee, Jason Miller promised voters he would be a voice for them at the state level, and he would keep Franklin County citizens informed of what's happening with the GOP at the state level. Miller's first opportunity to be that voice came February 24-25 at the Alabama GOP Winter Meeting in Birmingham. Miller, who also serves as a Franklin County Commissioner representing District Two, said the win-

ter meeting was a good time to network and built relationships that extend beyond county lines. He also vows to keep Franklin County citizens abreast of what happens at state meetings. "I felt like there needed to be more transparency between local Republicans and Franklin County citizens, so I'll do a report after each meeting and let the people I represent know what's going on at the state level," Miller said. On Friday night, Miller attended a reception for new members of the state committee. That was followed by a reception for all members. On Saturday, the GOP Committee held its business meeting, which is typically followed by a Saturday night

See 'MILLER,' Page 7

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Helen Virginia Taylor, 84, of Phil Campbell, passed away Wednesday, March 08, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Martha "Marti" Lenn Fisher Darnell, 78, of Sheffield (formerly of Russellville), passed away Monday, March 06, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Eunice (Faye) Duncan Swick, 83, of Russellville, passed away Friday, March 10, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Donald Reece Jordan, 69, of Phil Campbell, passed away March 11, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Robert Earl Marbutt, 78, Bear Creek, AL, passed away Saturday March 11, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Rickey Gene Jackson, 68, of Russellville, passed away March 9, 2023. Akins Funeral Home assisted the family.

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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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Thieves destroy ATM, steal 'significant amount' of cash

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A group of unknown suspects got away with a 'significant amount' of cash early Saturday morning after using a vehicle and chain to steal money from an automated teller machine (ATM) at a local bank.

According to Russellville Police Department Investigator Jake Tompkins, the suspects broke into the ATM at the Highway 43 Bank Independent location, smashing the machine into a pile of metal rubble and getting away with a 'significant amount' of cash, Tompkins said.

Although Tompkins would not state the exact amount that was stolen from the ATM, a source familiar with the investigation said more than \$100,000 was taken.

A joint investigation with officers from RPD, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and the Red Bay Police Department is underway.

Surveillance video shows two vehicles at the ATM around 1 a.m., Saturday, March 4. Tompkins said there were multiple suspects wearing masks.

Earlier that night, the same vehicles were observed at the Red Bay Bank Independent, but the suspects left before attempting to access the machine. Red Bay Police Chief Janna Jackson said the suspects did not hook up to the ATM as it appeared they were not able to position the vehicle in order to pull the chain. One of the vehicles involved had been stolen from the Red Bay area, Jackson confirmed.

The investigation has resulted in the issuance of multiple search warrants for vehicles, records and some undisclosed locations.

Investigators are following up on some identifying information on the vehicles obtained by a FCSO deputy.

The suspects chose an ATM across the street from one of Russellville's only 24-hour businesses, Legacy Chevron. Additionally, the ATM is visible from the motel located north of the bank.

"That's what's so frustrating about this," Tompkins said. "They knew what they were doing. We are aggressively investigating this along with several agencies."

Thefts where suspects use vehicles to access ATMs are on the rise. In many cases, thieves will ram their vehicles into store fronts or windows to gain entry into businesses where ATMs are located, or stores that carry expensive inventory like jewelry.

The crimes have led to the creation of a new name, ram-raiding, to describe these smash and grab offenses. And ATMs, at least certain models, are frequently the targets of ram-raiders.

The subjects involved in the Russellville theft are also suspects in ATM thefts in several other locations in Alabama as well as out of state.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL RICE

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Country roots run deep for singer/songwriter Merovich

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When Nathan Merovich describes growing up in his hometown of Dillsburg, Penn., it's immediately apparent the 24-year-old singer's country roots are genuine.

Dillsburg (population 2,635) is the textbook rural community where young men grow up focused on hunting, fishing, trucks, sports and girls.

"It's just a country area where I love to hunt, fish and hang out with my buddies," Merovich said. "We had bonfires in the middle of the fields, raised

some (heck) in our trucks, and those were the lifted trucks, you know."

Merovich, on a radio tour of the southeastern United States, visited Russellville's WGOL-FM 100.7 on March 9th for an interview and to share some of his new music.

Merovich's new release, Tonight's on You, was recorded last year at Nashville's Sound Stage with producer Sam Grow, also a rising star in country music. The song was written by Danny Orton, who specifically pitched it to Merovich. When the young singer heard the demo, he didn't

not to really push and get out there to different areas."

Merovich, also an accomplished guitar player, did an acoustic version of Roped In while at WGOL studios. It's a song about a country guy who falls for a city girl, and he's all in.

She's a little bit red wine and I'm all whiskey. I'm a little more country. She's a little city. She never heard of George Strait til she met me. How the hell it worked out is still a mystery. Man, I could tell the first time she kissed me that I was roped in.

Merovich's tour schedule this spring is packed with dates across his home state, and his national popularity has grown immensely since his 2021 debut album, Raised in the Stx.

You can find Tonight's on You and all of Merovich's music on several different platforms, including iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify. Merovich keeps an active social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok. Visit his website, www.nathanmerovich.com, for more information on this rising star.

He's opened for country stalwarts Big & Rich, Chris Jansen, Lee Brice, Tyler Farr, Dylan Scott and more. Merovich hopes to continue opening doors by opening shows for established artists, but there will come a day where he hopes to flip that script.

"In five years, I'd like to be opening up for some big name people. Maybe someone will reach out and take me under their wing. And one day someone will be opening up for me where I can help their career," Merovich said.



Merovich

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wait long to record Tonight's on You.

"As soon as I heard it, it was a song I wanted to record. Sam hooked us up with Danny. We met at his house and must have listened to 100 songs," Merovich said. "I needed an upbeat love song and this song was too good

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The 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 fun.

The next meeting of the Franklin County Community Development Commission will be Friday, March 31, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex. All grant requests must be submitted to a member of the commission by Friday, March 24, 2023, at 12 p.m. Commission members include Brad Bolton, Jeremy Campbell and David Grissom.

Belgreen High School will hold Kindergarten registration on Friday, March 31, 2023, from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., in the Belgreen High School Library. Parents or guardians of children who are 5 years old on or before September 1, 2023, may register their child. Please bring child's birth certificate, Social Security card, proof of residency and updated immunization records. If you are unable to attend, please register your child through the online registration. It is preferable to register kindergarten students BEFORE the end of May to account for accurate numbers for the upcoming school year.

The East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be serving William Earl Bishop's smoked chicken and pulled barbecue pork plates from 4-7 p.m., March 17th. Proceeds will go toward the department's purchase of the Fire Engine #1. The plates will be sold at the EFVFD, 10443 Hwy. 81, Phil Campbell. Plates are \$10 each. Dessert donations will be appreciated.

Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling Smoked Hams during Easter weekend. Hams are \$35 each and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pickup is Saturday, April 8, between 8-10 a.m., at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.

There will be an Easter Egg Hunt after morning worship on Sunday, March 26, at North Russellville Baptist Church, 1401 Waterloo Road. The church will have morning worship, followed by an Easter meal. Egg hunt will be after meal. You will have the opportunity to have a picture with the Easter Bunny as well.

You're invited to North Russellville Baptist Church for Easter Bunny Pictures, Saturday, March 25, from 2-4 p.m. Photos will be set up in the Fellowship Hall. Bring your own camera.

The Mom-Son Prom 2023 is set for Saturday, April 15, from 5-9 p.m., at the A.W. Todd Centre, 201 S. Washington Ave., Russellville. There will be food, great music and pictures. Church attire or formal wear please. \$25 for one mom and son. \$5/additional son. Please call Tammy west at 256-668-7649 for tickets or more information.

You are invited to Women's Brunch 2023, Saturday, April 1 from 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m., at the A.W. Todd Centre, 201 Washington Ave. S, Russellville. There will be speakers, vendors and door prizes. A full brunch meal will be served. There will be singing and more! \$30 entry fee. Doesn't matter where you're from. Come join us! Call Tammy West at 256-668-7649 for tickets or information.

Russellville author Lonnie Freeman will host a book signing for his new book, Focus, Refocus, Maintaining Focus, on Saturday, March 25th from 12-2 p.m., at the Russellville Public Library on East Lawrence Street. You are invited to come by and visit with Freeman. He will be signing copies of his book, which will be available for \$20 per copy.

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.

'MILLER,' from Page 1

banquet with a guest speaker.

With Florida Governor and Presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis coming to Birmingham March 9th to address the state GOP, there was no guest speaker at the winter meeting.

Response to DeSantis' visit to Alabama was so strong the state committee had to secure a larger venue to host the event.

Miller said one of the committee's most important agenda items at the winter meeting was approving a resolution to "abolish diversity, equity, inclusion bureaucracies and policies in public institutions and restore equality in public universities."

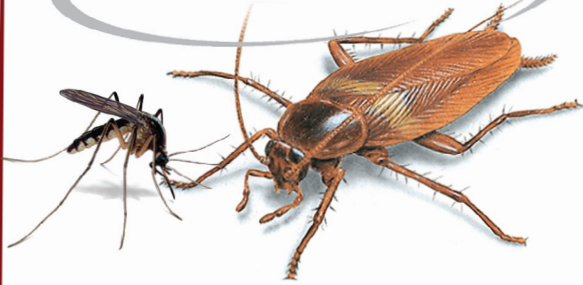
The resolution passed overwhelmingly, but there is no legal effect to a measure approved by

the state Republican Executive Committee, other than the impact it could have on lawmakers in the upcoming legislative session.

Republicans on the state and national level remain steadfastly opposed to school curriculum based on race, gender or sexuality. And the resolution seeks to end Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies in Alabama public institutions.

Alabama Republican Chairman John Wahl was elected to serve another term. Joan Reynolds (Shelby County) was elected Vice-Chairman, Carol Jahns (Autauga County) Secretary and Sallie Bryant (Jefferson County) Treasurer.

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NW-SCC honor society garners 11 state awards

Submitted

Northwest-Shoals Community College's Alpha Zeta Iota chapter received 11 awards during last Saturday's (3/5) Alabama Regional Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Convention at Calhoun Community College in Huntsville.



COURTESY PHOTO

PTK officers and Advisor Pam Peters with their 11 ARC awards.

Distinguished

Honors in Action Theme Award

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Most Distinguished Chapter - Third Place

Chapter officers are Alana Jenkins, Hannah Hendon, Hannah Foster, Adrianna McCleese, Tesley Callahan, Quinton Davs, Amanda Neito, and Irene Crandall. Advisors are Pam Peters and Jacque Jeffreys.

Phi Theta Kappa, the International Honor Society of the Two-Year College, has recognized academic excellence in the two-year college since 1918. The Society is comprised of more than 3.5 million members in the United States and 10 sovereign nations.

Regional Vice Chairman for Congressional Districts Four and Five (which includes Franklin County) will be Josh Dodd of Lauderdale County.

Miller said he will continue to put pressure on the Franklin County Republican Executive Committee to become more active, something he believes should start with replacing Chairman Jerry Mays.

"Until we elect a chairman who resides in our county I don't believe we will move forward locally," Miller said. "I've been an elected Republican seven years and have never been invited to a local party meeting or told when or if they are taking place."

Miller said the GOP Summer Meeting will be August 4th-5th at the Renaissance in Montgomery.

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Franklin County Revenue Commissioner Strat Byars will be holding the 2022 Tax Lien Auction on May 2, 2023 at 10 am CST on the website www.govease.com. In accordance with Title 40, Chapter 10, Code of Alabama 1975 (§40-10-180 through 201), the Franklin County tax collecting official has authority to auction and sell tax liens on properties for which ad valorem property taxes are delinquent.

An updated list of delinquent parcels from the 2022 tax year is posted and can be found inside the Franklin County Courthouse on the first floor bulletin board and inside of the Red Bay office.

All potential bidders are required to register at www.govease.com before the auction commences.

For more information about the upcoming tax lien auction, please contact the Franklin County Revenue Commissioners Office at 256-332-8841.

and how to do it without compromising the quality of education for all students.

This is a challenging dilemma for any system, and Russellville City Schools is seen as one of the guiding lights to help others navigate through that challenge.

"Something we stress is by being a good EL school it makes us better teachers for all our students because we have to be by using best practices," Grimes said. "We have such drive to succeed in spite of the demographics and challenges with the language barrier, and that prepares our teachers to be better.

"They give me a lot of credit, but for the mindset change to take place, you principals and teachers have to buy in and follow or this doesn't happen. Any time you change things and have different standards people get upset, and we had that for a short period of time. But we worked through it and our people were able to do some amazing things," Grimes added.

Approximately 30 percent of kindergarten students enter RCS without English proficiency and live in homes where the primary language is something other than English. The system's Hispanic enrollment numbers have increased every year over the past decade. As of last fall, 54 percent of all Russellville City Schools students are Hispanic.

The increasing Hispanic presence in Russellville City Schools is not a trend—it's a reality—although the changing demographics were initially met with resistance by some educators.

Kristie Ezzell, who retired last year after serving 15 years as principal of Russellville Elementary School, saw this first hand.

"When this (demographics) change started, there were some who said we just need to keep this quiet because they were afraid people would leave Russellville," Ezzell said. "And some did leave. There were concerns that other students would not get the same education because we were 'paying more attention' to EL students.

"After (Grimes) came to Russellville, we started realizing we have a very good thing and we can educate these kids. It was time to embrace this is the new us. Heath said we were going to educate every child and every child will get the best they can get. No excuses. Let's move forward and embrace what we have," she added.

Last year, the system received an overall "A" on the Alabama State Department of Education Report Card, one of only 24 school districts to score an "A."

Russellville City Schools were the only majority minority school system in the state to earn an "A." The closest EL percentage of the other 24 top districts was Fort Payne Schools, with 20 percent.

Only 10 Alabama school districts have more than 10 percent EL students, according to 2022 state report card data.

"It took a lot of work and leadership to bring people over to say 'hey, we can do this,'" Ezzell said. "In our first meeting with Dr. Grimes, he said 'I know where we are. I've looked at the data and we can be one of the best systems in the state. I'll never forget that statement. We can be, if not the top, in the top 10 in the state. And we just started working toward that.'"

The challenges continue each year, especially when the State Department of Education regularly changes the criteria to measure English proficiency.

"That standard changes each year, but our first goal remains getting those kids language proficient as quickly as possible," Grimes said.

Another issue will come next year when the federal COVID-19 funds that were used to employ 10 aides to work with EL students expire. Grimes plans to make a case to his legislative delegation to provide funding sufficient to keep those aides in place by showing how the EL numbers have improved over the past two years.

Grimes and Ezzell will travel to Washington, D.C., to present a program at the Education Week leadership symposium in May. It's yet another opportunity to share the good things happening in Russellville City Schools.

"Kristie was here and supported everything we did. She saw the struggle, resistance and buy-in and the absolute turning of anxiety and concern into a lot of celebration and success," Grimes said.

"The State of Alabama is recognizing that Russellville City Schools is doing some great things and now we are able to share what we're doing at a national level and that's pretty cool," Grimes said.

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RV softball has successful week, goes 3-2

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville varsity softball team had a bit of a back-and-forth week over the last few games in its schedule in recent days.

Starting its week with a 10-7 loss to West Morgan on Tuesday, March 7, Paisley James started in the circle for the Lady Golden Tigers four innings allowing three hits, one run, one walk and striking out four.

Addison Holcomb came on in relief and pitched two innings allowing six runs, three hits and five walks with Bailey Butler pitching one inning allowing three runs, four hits and one walk.

The Golden Tigers didn't have any trouble providing offensive firepower of their own as they were able to string together 13 hits on the day.

Offensively, Holcomb went 2-3 scoring two runs and tallying one walk whereas Jenna Whitfield also went 2-3, scoring one run and drawing a walk.

Just two days later, the Lady Golden Tigers were able to right the ship as they picked up a road win at Mars Hill winning 14-8.

Holcomb pitched two innings allowing three runs and three hits.

Butler got the win on the mound pitching five innings allowing six hits and five runs and striking out four.

Whitfield went 4-5 scoring three runs and walking once.

On March 10, the Lady Golden Tigers won

See, 'SOFTBALL,' page 12

Patriots split softball dh with ICC

Submitted

The Northwest-Shoals Community College softball team split a home doubleheader with Itawamba Community College to start a week where the Patriots went 1-3.

Coach Angel Brown's team won game one of the February 28th doubleheader 5-3, behind a stellar pitching performance by Taylor Cameron.

The freshman from Russellville threw a complete game seven-inning effort allowing only five hits, two walks and three earned runs, while striking out three. The Patriots got home runs from Alyssa Brown (2-3, 2 RBI) and Brooklyn Owens (1-3, 2 RBI). In the nightcap, Itawamba gained a split with a 7-1 win. The loss overshadowed a strong outing on the mound by Mycala Mitchell, who gave up only two earned runs with six strikeouts over seven innings.

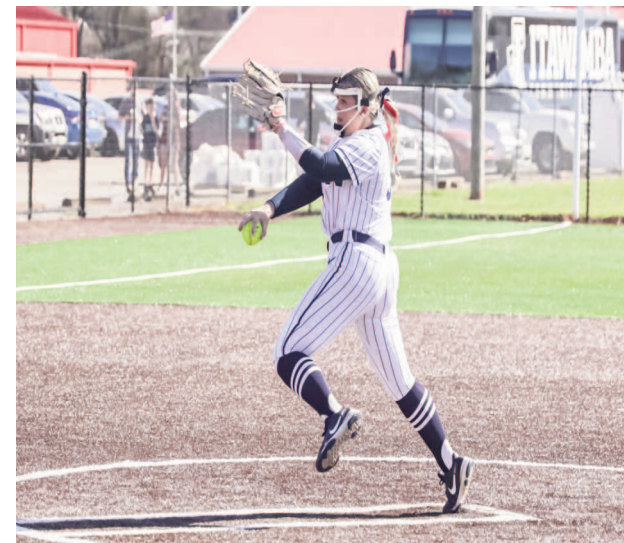
The lone NW-SCC run was driven in by freshman Jade Roberson.

The Patriots returned to play in the Alabama Community College Conference on March 4th with a home doubleheader against Marion Military Institute. The Tigers swept NW-SCC by a score of 10-2 in each game.

Game one saw both Patriot runs come off the bat of Madalyn Scott's home run. She finished 2-4 on the day and was one of two Patriots with multiple hits (Chloe Handley 2-4).

In the game two loss, seven Patriot batters had at least one hit, but Marion Military's pitching helped the Tigers quell NW-SCC scoring threats. Courtney McGraw and Brown had one RBI each.

The Patriots (6-18) will host Calhoun Community College Saturday, March 11, with a



COURTESY PHOTO

Cameron pitching against ICC.

doubleheader at Muscle Shoals' Gattman Park. Game times are 1 and 3 p.m.

The Patriots will travel to Wadley, Al., on March 16th for a ACCC matchup against Southern Union Community College. Game times are set for 2 and 4 p.m.

Southern Union will travel to Muscle Shoals for a doubleheader on Saturday, March 18, with game times of 1 and 3 p.m.

Brown's nominations for ACCC Player/Pitcher of the Week were:

Chloe Handley (Player): .385 average, one stolen base.

Taylor Cameron (Pitcher): 1-1 record in 12.1 innings, 3.97 Earned Run Average, 5 strikeouts and opponent's batting average of .222.

Golden Tigers extend win streak to five before falling to Hazel Green

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

After an 0-5 start to the season, the Russellville Golden Tigers have bounced back to briefly get their record to .500 before falling one game under for the time being.

Last Tuesday, March 4th, the Golden Tigers routed the Austin Black Bears at home, 14-4.

Brayden Spurgeon got the start on the mound for Russellville, tossing six innings allowing six hits, four runs, one walk, and five strikeouts.

At the plate, Brandon Cummings went 2-4 scoring twice and earning three RBIs.

Banks Langston and Brodie Vandiver both went 1-3 and both scored twice. Langston added two RBIs to his credit while Vandiver drew a walk.

Fast-forward to Saturday's doubleheader,

Russellville took on the Southside Panthers in game 1 and the Hazel Green Trojans in game 2.

The Golden Tigers defeated the Panthers 9-3 after an early 8-1 lead in the 5th inning.

Cayden Jones pitched one inning for the Golden Tigers allowing one hit, one walk, and two strikeouts.

Logan White earned the win for the Golden Tigers on the mound, spinning six innings allowing five hits, three runs, one walk, and striking out 10 batters.

At the plate, Eli Boutwell and Michael Scofield both went 1-2, with Boutwell scoring twice and walking once and Scofield scoring one run and driving in a run as well.

In the nightcap, the Golden Tigers lost game 2, by a final of 5-1 against the 6A Trojans.

On the bump, Spurgeon got the start and

See, 'STREAK,' page 13

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'SOFTBALL,' from Page 11

both games at home against Florence 11-3 and Wilson 4-3.

In game 1 against Florence, Holcomb pitched 1.2 innings allowing one hit and two runs while Holcomb received the save pitching 3.1 innings allowing one hit and one run while striking out seven.

At the plate, Whitfield went 3-4, scoring two runs and Butler went 2-3 scoring two.

In game 2 against Wilson the Lady Golden Tigers won 4-3.

James pitched eight innings allowing eight hits, two runs, and striking out six Warriors in the process.

At the plate, Holcomb went 1-3 scoring once and earning one RBI.

Capping off the week on Saturday, March 11, the Lady Golden Tigers played a doubleheader against Deshler and Lauderdale County.

In game 1 against Desher, the Lady Golden Tigers won 7-5.

Butler was on the mound five innings and allowed eight hits, four runs and struck out six batters.

Jaiden Calvert went 2-2 scoring once and earning one RBI.

The Lady Golden Tiger lost game 2 against Lauderdale County by a final of 10-5.

James pitched 2.1 innings and Holcomb was on the plate 2.2 innings while at the plate, Holcomb went 1-3 scoring one run and earning one RBI.

The Lady Golden Tigers next game will be at home against Deshler starting at 4:30.

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'STREAK,' from Page 11

pitched 1.2 innings allowing two hits and two walks while whiffing three batters.

Seth Burns entered in relief of Spurgeon and threw 3.1 innings, allowing six hits, five runs, three walks, and striking out four batters.

White went 0-1 at the plate and walked once while also scoring the Golden Tiger's lone run.

Boutwell went 1-2 and Vandiver went 1-2 while drawing a walk.

Russellville takes on the Florence Falcons this Tuesday, March 14th at Golden Tiger Stadium with first pitch slated for 4:30.

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More layoffs loom at Tiffin Motorhomes

Jason Collum
The Red Bay News

Just more than four months from a mass round of layoffs, Tiffin Motorhomes has informed its employees that more will be coming soon as the company adjusts to changes in the marketplace and declines in sales of new recreational vehicles.

Employees were told last week that more layoffs will be coming by the end of the month as company leaders determine where staff reductions are necessary. While layoffs in late November 2022 were each approximately 25 percent across the board at all plants, this round will be more specifically related to helping stabilize business by reducing staffing where necessary but keeping it where it is needed to ensure business carries on in a sustainable manner. Still, a memo dated Friday, March 3, to Tiffin's management and service staff, stated the cuts could be felt deep within some departments.

"We will conduct a thorough review across every department to determine the appropriate number of personnel needed to produce the high-quality motorhomes we're known for at Tiffin at a cost that allows the company to remain viable," Tiffin Motorhomes President Leigh Tiffin wrote in the memo. "Some areas may require cuts of about 30% while others may already be

close to the right size requiring little or no cuts. We will make necessary staffing adjustments on 3/31/23."

The memo stressed that the cuts are necessary as the company pivots to adjust output to better reflect market demand and reduce a buildup of inventory on dealer lots. Tiffin Motorhomes and its parent company, Thor, are not alone in seeing these kinds of declines. Sales of recreational vehicles nationwide dropped by 18 percent in 2022 and saw a dramatic

50 percent decrease in December. According to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, RV sales peaked in 2021 with just more than 600,000 units sold. This includes both self-propelled units (motorhomes) and towables (travel trailers). In 2022, that number declined to 493,268 units, and for 2023, the RVIA has projected wholesale sales of 379,000-404,000 units.

The RV industry was hit in 2022 by several factors, including higher loan interest rates, high gasoline and diesel fuel prices, and a weakening economy. And, as inventory on dealer lots has grown, manufacturers have had to cut output – and employment rolls – as a result.

"We don't build open units," Tiffin wrote in the memo. "We work to ensure all scheduled units are sold.

We are watching dealer inventory very closely and will continue to focus on driving it lower."

Additionally, the memo, which was titled "Business Restructuring Talking Points," points to the company positioning itself for the future, which it has done several times in its 51-year history.

The most recent major decline for the company came after the economic meltdown in the United States in 2008. The fallout of that era saw Tiffin Motorhomes output and employment fall to frighteningly low numbers. Still, the company survived and grew to its present size.

"We will come out of this with stronger dealers, a stronger brand, and a more desirable product," Tiffin wrote in the memo. "We believe in the future of our company and our team."

Times like these present opportunities to improve our business for future growth and excellence."

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Balding set to begin as radio voice of RHS baseball

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

There's not much doubt Austin Balding loves sports.

Last week he attended a home game for the Northwest-Shoals Community College baseball team, and on Friday afternoon, he headed to Tuscaloosa to watch the Alabama Crimson Tide gymnastics team's home meet against Boise State University.

The next morning, Balding called his first game on WGOL-FM 100.7/AM-920 as the new radio voice for the Russellville Golden Tigers.

Balding follows Brady Petree, who handled play-by-play duties for the past two championship season for the Golden Tigers. Petree moved to Mobile last year.

Balding, 23, is a 2018 graduate of Russellville High School. While at RHS, he was a member of the Russellville High School Marching Hundred and was active in musical theater, so he's sure to have a good 'radio' voice.

Austin is employed at North Alabama Lighting in Muscle Shoals. He's the son of David and Dana Balding of Russellville. He has one sister, Rachel.



COURTESY PHOTO

RHS Health Sciences students Brayden Malone and Kara Moore demonstrate an EKG at a RCS Board meeting.

Austin's grandparents are Gene and Jeanie Balding. Gene is the former pastor of First Baptist Church Russellville.

Balding made his broadcast debut last Saturday when the Golden Tigers hosted Hazel Green High School.

WGOL, the home of Russellville Golden Tiger sports, will air most RHS varsity baseball home games and area road games this season.

"We're excited to have Austin on board to be the voice of Golden Tiger baseball," said WGOL Station Manager John Pilati. "He's got the passion for sports and for his community, so we know our listeners will enjoy the game broadcasts this season."

For fans out of town, there is a free app, Simple Radio, you can download and install on your smart phone to take WGOL with you anywhere in the world. Just go to the App Store, search "Simple Radio" and when it's downloaded, search for WGOL radio.

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