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Magazine features Pounders' Little Bear Valley

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

There's a lot to learn when it comes to Little Bear Valley, part of the 360 acres owned and managed by Spruce Pine natives Jeff and Joel Pounders.

The Pounders' forest paradise, with its biodiversity and a cornucopia of wildlife, was named a Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest recipient and was featured in Alabama's Treasured Forest magazine.

For the magazine's 40th anniversary issue, published last fall, the editorial staff revisited the valley and featured the Pounders families once again.

That spoke volumes about Little Bear Valley, considering all the beautiful lands featured by ATF the past four decades.

There's even some folklore the valley and a fugitive from justice who hid from authorities in the early 1800s in the many cliffs and mountains. The fugitive was right about one thing—Little Bear Valley was a good place to hide from the world.

What started as Joel and Jeff's

See 'POUNDERS,' Page 7

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Colbert municipal solid waste not flowing through FC

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

After being contacted by several Franklin County residents asking whether the Franklin County Landfill was now collecting municipal solid waste (MSW-household garbage) from Colbert County at the Franklin County transfer station, the FFP has learned the county has not added Colbert County or any of its municipalities to the list of entities who utilize the transfer station in Belgreen.

Since an application to expand a private landfill to allow collection of MSW was filed with the Franklin County Commission last year, there has been increasing public concern about the environmental footprint of

allowing more household solid waste to come through the county.

Collection of household solid waste involves significantly more environmental safeguards than other types of debris. These include a leachate collection system to prevent contaminants from MSW from entering into ground water.

Although that application, filed by Franklin Land Management owner Neil Hargett, was withdrawn before the commission voted on it, it jump started the debate about how, and if, allowing MSW to be permanently placed in a local landfill would impact the environment.

Landfills, whether public or private, are subject to the regulations and inspection of the Alabama

See 'LANDFILL,' Page 9

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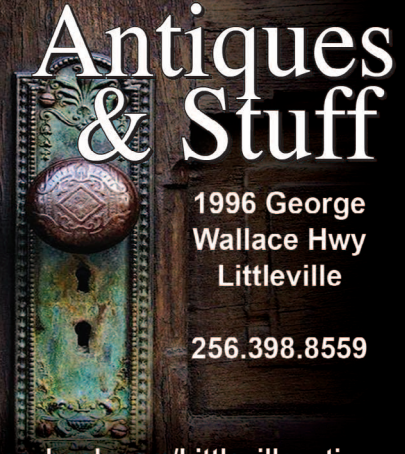
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Doris June Hamilton Grissom, of Russellville, passed away March 27, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Amaya Rayne Arnett, 6 weeks, passed away March 27, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

Lonnie Paul Cummings passed away March 31, 2023. Akins Funeral Home in Russellville will be assisting the family.

Wanda Kay Cantrell, 77 of Russellville passed away April 2, 2023. Akins Funeral Home assisted the family.

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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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Opinion: REB deposit demands violate its policy

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When Russellville's historic Roxy Theatre first opened its doors in 1949, it's a safe bet there was electricity running to the downtown landmark.

Although it didn't form until 1976, the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council has managed the operation and restoration of the Roxy for 46 years. So when the Russellville Electric Board sent a demand letter earlier this year requiring the Arts and Humanities Council to pay a \$1,200 deposit, immediate questions were raised by some council members.

According to Arts and Humanities Council President Susie Malone, the council's electric bill is paid by automatic draft each month, so there is no chance the bill could ever be past due.

But an additional \$100 was drafted out of the Arts and Humanities council's bank account in February to be paid toward a \$1,200 deposit. After that, Malone went and paid the remaining \$1,100 at the Russellville Utilities office. It wasn't something council members wanted to do, but as with most of the churches and non-profit organizations who have recently received curious demand letters for fat deposits, they believed there was no choice—either pay or have your electric service terminated.

When questioned about why he suddenly began demanding large deposits from certain churches, non-profit organizations and small businesses, REB Manager Charles Canida has consistently deflected the practice as a requirement from the Tennessee Valley Authority.

This is inaccurate, though. TVA does not set operational policies for its Local Power Companies, or LPCs. Instead, it gives LPCs like Russellville Electric Board the flexibility to set its own rates and service practice policies, with only one requirement: All customers within a rate class must be treated fairly and consistently, with no special concessions.

As stated by TVA regulators, TVA gives its LPCs "autonomy to establish policies based on their management philosophy and leadership imperatives."

Simply stated, the Russellville Electric Board sets its own policies and as long as they're fairly and consistently applied, there's no intervention

from TVA regulators.

The Franklin Free Press obtained a copy of the REB Schedule of Rules and Regulations through an Open Records Act request. The board's own policy reads: A deposit or suitable guarantee shall be required of any customer before electric service is supplied.

So the board's own policy clearly states that it will collect a deposit before any electric service is established. Yet in the case of the Arts and Humanities Council, and many other churches, non-profits and small businesses, Canida and the board demanded deposits from customers whose accounts were opened decades earlier.

Canida was hired as CEO/Manager of the Russellville Electric Board in 2012. So either he and the board were in violation of their own policy for more than a decade under his leadership by establishing accounts where no deposit was collected or the REB made demands for a second deposit to customers who paid deposits decades earlier.

Either way, it's wrong and there are unanswered questions as to why this has happened. Russellville City Councilman Darren Woodruff is one of those waiting for answers.

"It's a shame and disgrace that this board continues to let Charles Canida basically do whatever he wants to do to this community with zero accountability whatsoever," Woodruff said.

The Arts and Humanities Council also had questions, so the council sent a letter to the Alabama Attorney General's office asking for clarification on REB's deposit policy.

The Attorney General's office forwarded the letter to the Tennessee Valley Authority as it has "regulatory oversight of local power companies distributing TVA power, including REB."

As long as all customers within a rate class are subject to the same deposit criteria, that criteria is left to the discretion of the Russellville Electric Board.

Once again, the REB's discretion raises more questions. And nobody's answering those inquiries.

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Spring the perfect time for car care, protection

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As temperatures warm up (finally) with the onset of spring, you might think about spring cleaning around your house.

But spring is also a good time to clean and protect your vehicle, according to Aviator's Detailing owner Brandon Seay.

Aviator's Detailing provides professional quality detailing on cars, trucks, SUVs, boats, trailers and aircraft. The services range from vehicle washing and detailing all the way to ceramic protection packages for all types of vehicles.



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on it and just put a towel on the carpet and soak it up. It's pretty cool," Seay said.

Aviator's Detailing is located at the Russellville Municipal Airport on Highway 243. Ceramic coating, whether applied to the exterior or interior, is UV resistant, so the sun won't bother your vehicle. "It's like putting a permanent sun block on your car," Seay said. Another spring protectant for your vehicle is window tinting, another service offered by Seay. "It helps keep your vehicle's interior cooler in hot weather. We can match tint to any of your vehicle's windows that are already tinted. And we can tint windshields, too," Seay said. Most coatings and tint installation can be done in one day and Aviator's Detailing offers free pick up/drop off of your vehicle. Seay also offers weekly/bi-weekly packages for vehicle cleaning that offer discounts for recurring customers. Seay opened Aviator's Detailing in a hangar at the Russellville Airport last year. He became part of the Ceramic Pros of America team two years ago as a certified installer of the high-end protective coatings. For more information on Aviator's Detailing, visit www.aviatorsdetailing.com.

Ceramic coating provides a longer-lasting coating that protects your paint by acting as a protective coating. Cars stay cleaner longer, something important with the onset of pollen season, and ceramic coatings enhance the look of your paint. "Ceramic coating protects your car from heat," Seay said. "It helps keep contaminants from baking into the paint. We offer coating packages good for a year all the way to the lifetime of the vehicle. It depends on the package you want."

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COURTESY PHOTO

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 **R**ussellville 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.

 **T**he 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.

 **L**ifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on THURSDAY, APRIL 13TH, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.. LifeSouth is the primary supplier of blood products to Russellville Hospital. Please contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or by email at atdeborah.lindsey@russellville-hospital.org. Please be sure to bring your photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive a free T-shirt, an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a free cookie dough card from Papa Murphy's and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. All donors will receive a free cholesterol screening. We will also be giving away DOOR PRIZES!

 **E**veryone is invited to a free concert by the gospel quartet Resound at 6 p.m. on April 30, 2023, at Red Bay First Baptist Church. A Love Offering will be received.

 **T**he Franklin County Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee and the Reedtown Back to Basics Skills Center will hold a benefit Fish/Chicken Plate fund raiser on Friday, April 7, from 11-2, at the Skills Center, located on Hamilton Street in the former Reedtown School location. Plates include choice of fish or chicken, cole slaw, fries, bread and drink or water. Dine-in or Carry Out. \$15/plate. Pre-order larger orders by calling 256-668-2228.

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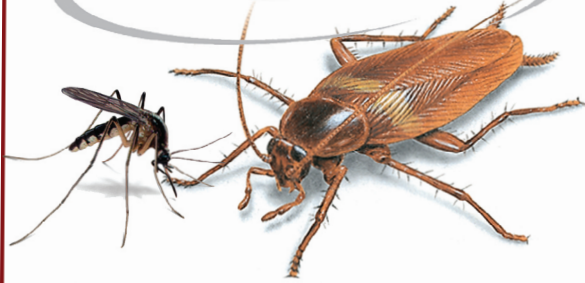
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'POUNDERS,' from Page 1

1998 investment in 20 acres that helped frame their childhood has grown into a nationally-recognized property for private turkey and deer hunting. But Little Bear Valley is about much more than just hunting. It's literally a treasured forest that incorporates a financial component for the brothers, a

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wildlife component and a water quality component.

And the Pounders families are more than willing to share their slice of paradise with others.

"We've had a number of schools and other organizations visit the farm strictly for the educational benefits," Joel said. "We don't do this for recognition. We do it for the love of the land and of God's creation."

"We were raised in the wild. Our parents were very rural farmers. That's how we spent our pastime. We'd go listen to the turkeys or catch rainbow darters in the stream. It's a genuine love for the

logical diversity of the valley. That was a driving force in their efforts to purchase the land in 1998.

We just didn't want to see it changed. It was too beautiful for development or clear cutting or building homes and residences. It's biologically unique and we wanted to preserve that," Pounders said.

And in case you were wondering, Little Bear Valley's not for sale.

"We're not greedy. We know we can't hold it forever. We're just temporary caretakers of it," Pounders said. "And we need to leave it in better condition than how we got it, just the way God created it. And either our children, the community or the State of Alabama can keep it and protect it after we're gone."

Pounders expressed his appreciation to the Alabama Forestry Commission and its Franklin County staff, each of whom Pounders describes as 'wonderful resources.'

The brothers have also developed a reputation as wildlife 'answer men.'

They frequently make social media posts designed to inform and

educate local residents on wildlife. It's yet another way the Pounders brothers are working to grow public appreciation for our natural resources.

There was a time, more than 200 years ago, when settlers in the area made the valley the original site of the Spruce Pine community. There was a wagon trail that's still used today.

But the plan to cross the Jackson Highway through the valley was scrapped and rerouted toward Hackleburg as the terrain was too rugged. The grave of one of those settlers is still there, marked Josh Hill—1814.

While Hill's story is unknown, at least he was able to enjoy a small slice of God's handiwork in Little Bear Valley before he passed.

Joel and his wife Rhonda became grandparents two years ago, and their grandson Isaac is already developing his own appreciation for the land.

"We'll be out there and he'll be playing with a lizard. He's got a favorite tree and I can already see where it's rubbed off on him. There are a good number of children taken on hunts, camping trips or fossil hunting trips down there and this will forever be part of their future," Pounders said.

You can read the feature article by searching the Fall 2022 edition of ATF at www.forestry.alabama.gov



COURTESY PHOTO

One of several waterfalls in beautiful Little Bear Valley.

outdoors," he added.

The care taken by the Pounders to preserve Little Bear Valley also benefits those who use Little Bear Creek Reservoir for recreation, as Little Bear Creek runs through the entire valley.

"It feeds Little Bear Reservoir. People talk about how clear Little Bear is and that's because a lot of upper watersheds where the water originates is forested and well cared for," Pounders said. "It's also a source of drinking water along with Cedar. They provide drinking water as well as recreation and flood control."

Even as young men, the brothers learned about and appreciated the bio-

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Real Estate Tips

- By Willodean Davis

Buying a Home-Part Two

Willodean Davis
Contributor

To buy your new home you need to think about what you really want and need.

Do you want to live in the city limits or have a county setting? If you have children, check out the different school systems and the different programs they offer.

How large of a home do you want? Bedrooms, bathrooms, garages, barns or buildings—the larger the home, the more expensive it is to purchase and maintain.

You need to drive by several subdivisions or take a ride through the country just to check out the neighborhood. It helps to get a feel of the area to make sure you would want to live there.

I used to say “take your time,” but not anymore. You need to get serious because we have a shortage of homes available. Interest rates are rising faster than ever. Your home is not only important for your family now, but it can also benefit your family after you're gone.

If we get a good home for sale, sometimes we sell it that day or within the week of listing it. Real estate is changing so fast, a good agent/broker can help you with all the steps involved. We are here to help people and the community.

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see a property you are interested in it's always best to make an appointment to see it in person.

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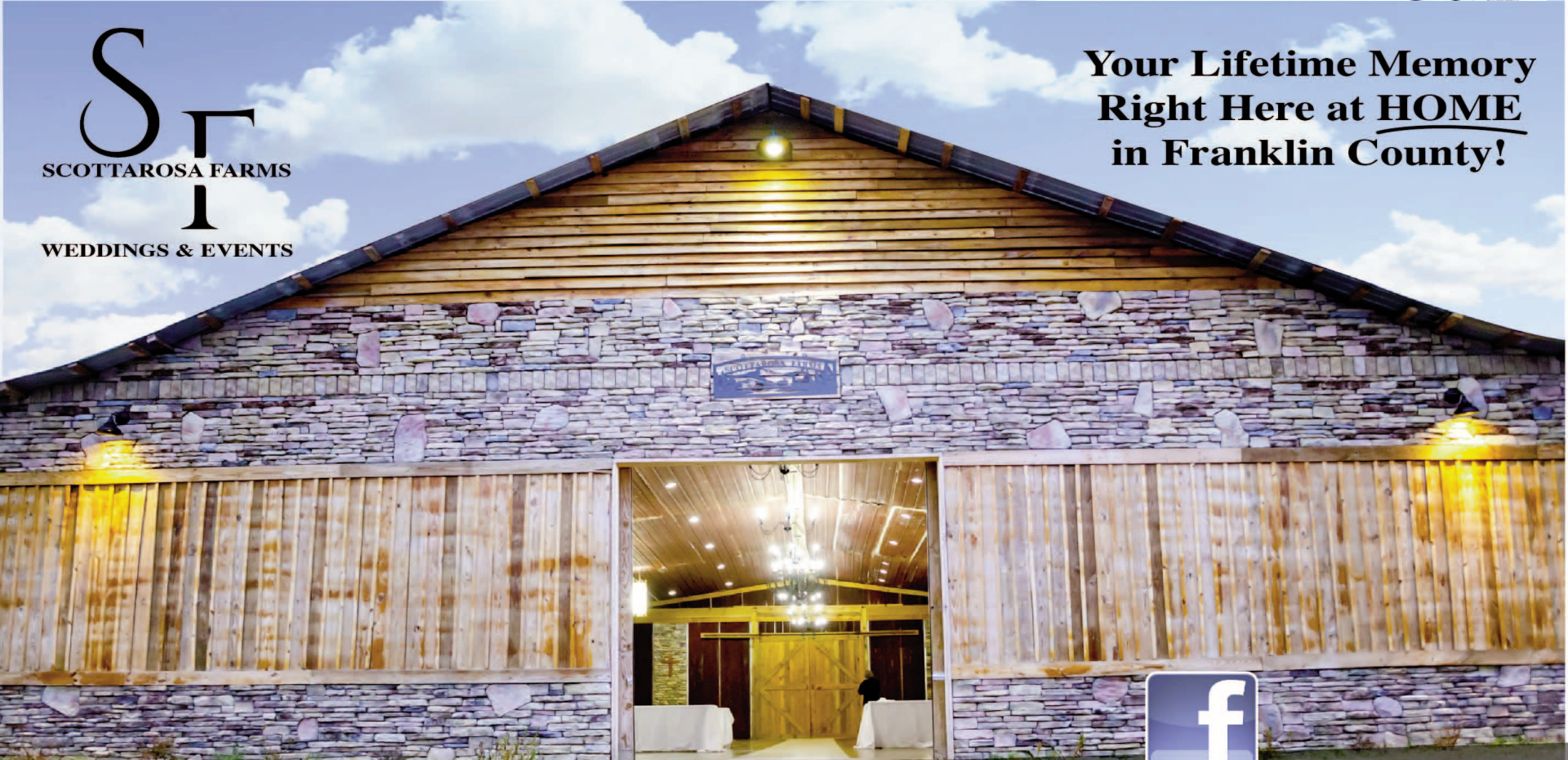
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'LANDFILL,' from Page 1

Department of Environmental Management, or ADEM.

On March 1, 2023, ADEM issued a cease and desist order that effectively shut down the Cherokee Industrial Landfill in Colbert County. That created long-term issues for the Colbert County Commission about where the county's household solid waste will go.

It was reported last month by multiple media outlets that Colbert County commissioners made temporary arrangements to use the Franklin County Landfill until a long-range answer is found.

While that is true, Franklin County is collecting construction and debris (C&D), not municipal solid waste, from Colbert County, according to Franklin County Solid Waste Manager Gene Ward.

MSW in Franklin County is not permanently deposited into the Franklin County Landfill. Instead, it's stored temporarily in a transfer station until it's transferred, often the same day, to Morris Farms Landfill in Lawrence County where it is permanently deposited.

Although the landfill in Colbert County has been closed, the county's transfer station is still operational. That means Colbert County's MSW is taken to the local landfill before it is transferred to a permanent deposit landfill in another county.

"We're just getting C&D construction and debris from Colbert County," Ward said. "That's the debris we've gotten since the closing of their landfill. We got a little before, but nothing like we're collecting now."

Ward said there was a brief time when Colbert landfill officials did not have a contractor to transport the county's MSW, so it was taken to the Franklin County transfer station. But Ward said that was a short, emergency situation and was more than six months ago, he recalled.

Colbert County officials now have a contract with a different contractor to haul its municipal solid waste.

Ward said the Franklin County Landfill continues to run MSW through its transfer station for Franklin County, Red Bay, Phil Campbell, Pilgrim's, Sunshine Homes, Marion County, the City of Russellville and the Town of Hackleburg. "We received municipal solid waste at our transfer station for about two weeks from Colbert County then they resumed a contract with a different contractor," Ward said.

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Bama bound: Warhurst to join Tide

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press



PHOTO BY MICHAEL RICE

Warhurst at Wednesday's signing.

Conner Warhurst has always been a team player.

So when the Russellville High School senior joins the Alabama Crimson Tide football team next year, he'll be ready to contribute, regardless of how he's asked to do so.

At a ceremony held March 29th at the Russellville Field House, Warhurst signed as a preferred walk-on for Coach Nick Saban's program. Although he will not initially receive an athletic scholarship at Alabama, Warhurst's preferred walk-on status means he will have a spot on the Crimson Tide's roster at the start of camp. That puts him ahead of other walk-on players and presents an opportunity for Warhurst to impress coaches and earn a scholarship later in his playing career.

"As a preferred walk-on, they said they look at me as a guy they want down there to try and earn a spot rather than trying to make the team, which is a longer route," Warhurst said.

Former Golden Tiger Roge Bedford, Alabama's Assistant Director of Player Personnel, set up the visit to introduce Warhurst to

the Crimson Tide program and coaching staff.

When Warhurst visited Alabama last fall, the Crimson Tide was hosting Austin Peay University at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Warhurst met the team, including several walk-on players, as well as Saban and his coaching staff.

What impressed him the most was how his future teammates described not just the school's football program, but the university itself and the educational support they receive.

"They talked about how it's the best place to be because it's the best school and football program. The professors work with you and help you the best they can," Warhurst said. "That education

See, 'WARHURST,' Page 13

Patriot softball struggling thru first season

Michael Rice
 Franklin Free Press

The Northwest-Shoals Community College Patriots softball program continues its learning process as Coach Angel Brown's team winds its way through its inaugural season of Alabama Community College Conference play.

On March 23rd, the Patriots hosted Snead State Community College and were swept 10-0 and 4-1.

In game one, Snead's Lydia West hurled five innings of shutout softball, allowing five hits, walking none and logging two strikeouts.

NW-SCC starter Taylor Cameron pitched four innings, allowing six hits and five runs, with one strikeout. Chloe Handley threw the final two innings out of the bullpen.

Five Patriots managed hits against West,

including Katie Dawson, Ava Brumley, Kailey Armstrong, Madalyn Scott and Handley.

Game two was a much closer affair, with Snead State holding on to a 4-1 edge to earn the sweep.

Snead State scored once in the second inning and added three more in the third to build a 4-0 lead.

Mycala Mitchell started for the Patriots and kept her team in the game, going seven innings, allowing eight hits and four runs with four strikeouts and only one walk.

In the bottom of the sixth, Emily Ahonen drew a one-out walk, followed by an Armstrong single for NW-SCC. Brooklyn Owens singled to center driving home Ahonen. A ground out by Dawson ended the rally for the Patriots.

Owens and Handley both posted multi-hit efforts for NW-SCC to pace the Patriots'

See, 'NW-SCC,' page 12

A defining moment: Golden Tigers rebound to take series from Jasper

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

In a week that saw his team go 4-1, the most important game for Russellville varsity baseball coach Jess Smith's team may have been its 8-7 loss to Jasper on March 28th.

After his team blew a 5-0 lead and lost the opening game in a best-of-three series against 5A Area 14 rival Jasper, the Golden Tigers swept two must win games from the Vikings Thursday to win the series and improve to 14-11.

After the game, he told his young team about defining moments in life and how they don't come in easy situations.

"With a younger team that's less experienced one through nine (in the lineup) gets punched in the mouth Tuesday in an area game, that was a major response to play the way we did Thursday," Smith said.

"It was more than just two wins. Those games were us executing on all cylinders and they were really our best offensive games of the year. Defining moments don't happen in comfortable situations. We talked about being good when you're uncomfortable. That's when defining moments take place," he added.

Russellville defeated Jasper 12-1, 10-0 in games two and three. The team's momentum carried over into the weekend, as the Golden Tigers garnered wins against Arab, 6-3, and Ardmore, 5-3.

In the 12-1 victory, Logan White threw five innings and allowed only five hits and one run, while striking out six Viking batters.

Neyland Baker and Banks Langston had home runs. Baker's blast came in the second inning. Langston's homer was in the fourth, an inning that saw the Golden Tigers score four runs. Baker went 2-3 with three RBI to lead the 12-run offensive output.

The pitching got even better in the decisive game three. White got the unusual task of starting both ends of a doubleheader on the mound. He threw two innings of no-hit baseball, paving the way to a three-pitcher combined no-hitter. Cayden Johns pitched the third and fourth inning and Seth Burns threw a perfect fifth inning as Russellville won a run-rule shortened 10-0 game in five innings.

Russellville had its strongest inning of the year in the second, as the team scored 10 runs in the frame. Brodie Vandiver, Eli Boutwell, Shayden Romans, Johns, Baker and Cummings each had RBIs in the inning.

Russellville will play its final area series next week. The Golden Tigers will open Tuesday, April 11th at West Point for one game. The teams will play two at RV on April 13th.



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'NW-SCC,' from Page 11

offense.

On Saturday, the Patriots traveled to Boaz for another doubleheader. The homestanding Parsons won both games, 13-4 and 9-1.

After the Patriots took a 1-0 lead in the top of the first, Snead State plated three in the bottom of the inning.

Alyssa Brown's single in the first drove in Handley to give NW-SCC a 1-0 lead.

Although the Patriots played from behind, the game remained close until the bottom of the sixth inning, when the Parsons broke through for six runs.

The Patriots had two home runs in the game, a Scott blast in the fourth and a Brown home run in the fifth inning. Owens, Armstrong and Brown each had two hits to lead the Patriots. Game two saw Snead State score four in both the second and third innings to once again take an early lead en route to a 9-1 win. Brown's fourth-inning home run gave her two for the day and accounted for the lone NW-SCC run. On Thursday,

March 30th, the Patriots hosted conference foe Wallace State Community College for a pair of games at Muscle Shoals' Gattman Park. Wallace State scored in each of the game's five innings on the way to a 11-2 win in game one. Handley went 2-3 for NW-SCC. Scott went 1-1 and had an RBI single in the first inning. Game two began as a pitcher's duel, as Wallace State led 4-2 after five innings. Wallace took a 2-0 lead in the top of the second, but the Patriots tied the game in the bottom of the fourth. Jade Roberson's bases-loaded walk brought home the first Patriot run, and Alyssa Brown's single scored Ahonen to tie the game. Wallace regained the lead in the top of the fifth with two runs, as the game moved to the sixth inning with the Patriots down 4-2. Wallace State broke it open with five in the sixth, en route to the final score of 11-5. Mitchell went the distance on the mound, yielding 11 runs (nine earned) on 16 hits with four strikeouts. Northwest-Shoals rallied for three seventh-inning runs. Armstrong scored on a Stefanie Price sacrifice fly to make it 11-3. Roberson followed with a two-run double that ended the scoring. The Patriots (10-30) host Beville State Community College on Thursday, April 6. The doubleheader will begin at 2 p.m. The teams will travel to Sumiton, Al., for a Saturday DH, with first pitch at 1 p.m.

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'WARHURST,' from Page 11

gives you an opportunity for whatever you want to do in life. It's not just always about football."

The son of Chad and Jennifer Warhurst, Conner was a key piece of Coach John Ritter's Golden Tiger program as a running back and safety.

His impressive senior season saw Warhurst rush for 1,550 yards on 188 carries. He scored 21 touchdowns. His junior season, Warhurst had 197 touches for 1,712 yards and 18 touchdowns.

After suffering a high-ankle sprain in Russellville's week 10 game against Athens last fall, Warhurst returned two weeks later in the Golden Tigers' playoff game against Pleasant Grove. For an injury of that magnitude, returning to game action in two weeks was a minor miracle.

"It was my senior year and I didn't want to miss another game," Warhurst said. "That's the big thing about me. I'll play if I can play. If I'm hurt, I'll play hurt. But I'm going to play whenever I can and help my team. That's what you do as a senior leader on a team."

Ritter has no doubt Warhurst will be able to contribute at the game's next level.

"He embodies what we want our program to be about. Warhurst has that physical brand of football that everyone should strive to be. I know Conner will do great things at Alabama," Ritter said.

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TVA grant to help RMS host STEM competitions, buy equipment

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A \$30,000 grant from the Tennessee Valley Authority's Community Relations Program will provide funding for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) instruction and competitions to be hosted by Russellville Middle School.

On the morning of March 24th, TVA officials made the check presentation at Russellville Middle School to Principal Tony Bonds and RMS Science teacher and STEM teacher Lee Brownell.

The grant application, prepared by Brownell, outlined four STEM competitions that will be hosted by RMS over the next school year.

Russellville City Schools has experienced success in past STEM competitions, including the Russellville High School Rocketry Team winning the Team America Rocketry Challenge in 2015. That group of seven students went on to win the international rocketry competition at the Paris Air Show in June 2015.

Brownell said the grant will be used to host the Russellville Rocketry Competition in the spring of 2024 and an underwater remote operated vehicle competition, also planned for spring 2024.

Russellville will also host two robotics competitions in late fall 2023 or early winter 2024, one for grades K-5/6 and one for grades 6-12. Brownell also said the school will host a drone competition with a grade 3-6 event and a middle/high school event.

Additionally, some grant funds will be used to purchase drones and robotics equipment.

"My objective is to get our students interested in STEM and to set Russellville up as a destination for STEM competitions/learning in our region," Brownell said. "I hope to bring in people from across the state to see our program and to help attract the type of students that are interested in STEM."

Brownell's proposal fit perfectly into TVA's criteria for the Community Relations grant awards, which support "educational programs and competitions in STEM and robotics in both primary and secondary schools."

The program's emphasis on STEM assistance helps "educate the future workforce and builds a pipeline of future employees in the Tennessee Valley," according to TVA's website.

TVA Community Relations representatives, along with officials from the Russellville Electric Board, were on campus Friday morning to make the check presentation.

"We are grateful for the \$30,000 in grant money from TVA and the Russellville Electric Board," Bonds said. "This grant money will go to fund various projects at RMS. Two major portions of the grant will purchase drones to seed local areas with wildflowers and robotics equipment, allowing us to host various STEM competitions at RMS."

"Both of these projects will bring students and faculty from the University of North Alabama and surrounding areas to RMS to see the great things we are doing here," he added.



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Voice winner Sundance Head to perform Friday in Decatur

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

For an artist who didn't get 'serious' about music until age 33, Texas native Sundance Head has come a long way the past 11 years.

He was a 2007 Top 13 finalist on American Idol and he won season 11 of NBC's The Voice, under the leadership of coach Blake Shelton.

Head's father Roy was a popular Texas artist known for his 1960s hit song Treat Her Right.

And Songwriters Hall of Fame member Dean Dillon signed Head to his Wildcatters Record label four years ago, in advance of his first album, Stained Glass and Neon.

But it's not his musical competition success, his association with Dillon or his family's musical roots that serve as the impetus for his 2023 tour that will see the singer/songwriter perform in more than 30 American cities.

Instead, it's an old-fashioned grass roots effort to grow a fan base through live shows and increase awareness of his music thru the many venues he'll play this year, including Decatur's Princess Theatre this Friday, April 7th, with a 7 p.m., showtime.

Tickets are \$30/\$40 and are available online at www.princess theatre.org.

Now on his own after his time with Wildcatters Records ended, Head is starting over, again. So what better title for his new 11-song album than Starting Again?

"This is my third or fourth time now to start over, rebrand and start my career again amidst an ever-evolving music business," Head told the FFP in an interview last week. "I just try to get a little smarter each time and figure out how to do it."

After winning The Voice and making it to Idol's Top 13, you'd think Head's career would be on the fast track, but he describes his successes in the reality competitions as both a blessing and a curse.

"Sometimes you lose credibility doing a show like The Voice," Head explained. "People don't realize before you went on the show you'd been doing this for many years trying to figure out what avenue it takes to get people to hear your music."

"Sometimes, those shows are looked at as the easy way and people say you're not a 'real' artist. But as many negative aspects as there are there also positive ones. You have to figure out how to use those to your advantage when you can and that's the tough part."

After finishing his first album, Stained Glass & Neon in early 2020, Head was set to go on tour under Dillon's management. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and he found himself depressed and unable to write.

"If I sat in a room all day and thought about it, I'd get pretty depressed and I had a lot of time to do that during COVID," Head said. "When I think about (the competition shows) I'm not sure I'd do that again, but I definitely don't regret it. What I regret is not being able to see all the B.S., and real opportunities I wish I had taken advantage of, which at the time seemed a bit less shiny than the other things being dangled. I didn't see the full picture until it was too late."

After winning The Voice, Head wanted to make his own record and had the songs ready to do so. But he was signed with Republic and they wanted him to go in a different direction. With Wildcatter, Head recorded songs from some great songwriters he was 'lucky to get his hands on,' and he put everything into that album before the onset of COVID.

"My dad died, my mom was in hospice at my house," Head said. "I wasn't touring and it was a pretty dark place. Misty (his wife) bought me some studio time, so I went to record some songs and got everything done in one day."

"I still had more studio time so I went home and wrote Starting Again, featuring songs about my daughter, who had just turned 13 and about how I felt about missing my dad. I was able to produce and record it with my own band and you can hear the difference from Stained Glass & Neon. It's not me, even though my name is on it. But Starting Again is my work and my blood. That's the way I like to record," he added.

Starting Again is available on Apple Music, iTunes and most major streaming services.

The first single was Three People (Me, Jim Beam and You), inspired by an argument he overheard his parents having when he was a teen. Each song shares a piece of Head's life, and that's his musical comfort zone.

You can find more information on Sundance Head by logging onto www.sundancehead.com.



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Find Your Way Back Home **Easter Sunday**

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It was at this point of despair that he remembered the love of his father and the family life he left behind and realized it was time for him to go back home! Thinking his father was angry with him for wasting his life, he set out for home to eat bread at the servant's table, only to have his father run anxiously to meet him! The father sent his servant to get a ring, robe and sandals to put on his son along with instructions to kill the fatted calf for a homecoming celebration in honor of the son who had returned home!

To the father, the price of the fatted calf was worth everything he paid to be able to celebrate his lost son's return. Has it ever occurred to you that we are all just like that son who left home, wasted his life and was separated from the Father's love and care by wrong decisions and sins we committed? God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pay a price for our sins through His death on the cross of Calvary. The merciless beating He endured, the crown of thorns piercing his brow, the abandonment of His disciples, the mocking of the crowd, the plucking of his beard from His face, the nails through His hands and feet, the puncture wound of a spear in his side, the sins of mankind laid upon him were all a part of that price!

You might ask the question, 'Why would God be willing to send His Son to pay such an incredible price for us?' His love is a love that goes beyond our limited understanding and can only be fully understood when we realize the Father prepared the way home for us through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His Resurrection three days later!

This Easter the greatest thing you can do for you and your family is to take them to church to hear the timeless message of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Father hasn't forgotten you, ignored you or turned His back on you, so it's time for you to bring your family back to church and...Find your way back home!



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