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## A voice for retired educators: Britton creates PAC for retirees

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Politics have been part of Eddie Britton's life for many years. Britton has been a candidate, running for Franklin County Superintendent of Education, the Franklin County Board of Education and most recently, Alabama House District 18. Britton has served as chairman of the Franklin County Democratic Executive Committee since former chairman Brian Hamilton resigned when his brother Greg ran for

Franklin County Superintendent of Education. Britton recently resigned from the post he held for more than seven years. He's taken up a new venture—the creation of a statewide association for retired educators, a large segment of public educators who Britton believes haven't had a voice at the state level. "AERA (the retired division of the Alabama Education Association) is supposed to be working for retirees but really does nothing for retirees other than efforts to protect RSA (Retirement Systems of Alabama)," See 'BRITTON,' Page 4

## Coming out of the dark: Mental health an important part of overall health, Mosley says

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Although May was Mental Health Awareness Month, the national movement to raise awareness about mental health is a year-round priority to mental health professionals like Ciji Mosley. Mosley, a 2002 Russellville High School graduate, has 11 years' experience as a clinical social worker, including working with juveniles in Lauderdale County and now at a local mental health facility. Mental Health Awareness Month is a nationwide effort each May to fight the stigma of mental illness, provide support to those afflicted and educate the public and advocate for poli-

cies that support the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. While Mosley says progress has been made toward destigmatizing mental illness, there's still a ways to go. "There remains a stigma from society toward mental health issues," Mosley said. "We have a ways to go because of cultural differences as well. Not every family background accepts mental health. Some with mental health issues come from backgrounds that believe what happens at home should remain at home. "But we're getting to a place where we're seeing people talk about it more and my hope is people are now

See 'MENTAL HEALTH,' Page 7

  
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**Larry Dwight Saint, 73, passed away Tuesday, May 30, 2023. Atkins Funeral Home assisted the family.**


**Debra West, 58 of Corinth MS, passed away June 3, 2023. The visitation only will be 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. Thursday, June 08, 2023, at Spry Memorial Chapel, Russellville, AL.**

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

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## Franklin Free Press

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The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.  
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## Free summer meal program underway at Russellville and Franklin County schools

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Seamless Summer Feeding Program is underway at Russellville City Schools and Franklin County Schools.

The program provides free breakfast and lunch to any child to age 18 years or younger. These children can eat breakfast and lunch at the Russellville Elementary School cafeteria at no cost during the summer. Seamless Summer meals are also available at Belgreen, East Franklin Junior High, Phil Campbell, Vina, Red Bay and Tharptown Schools.

The program runs through July 21, 2023. You may come to the circle at the back of Russellville Elementary School and pick up breakfast from 8:30-9:00 a.m., and lunch from 11:30-Noon.

"This is an excellent opportunity to help with the high rising food cost in feeding children," said Elaine Vaughn, Child Nutrition Program Director for Russellville City Schools.

Franklin County school locations will have breakfast available Monday thru Thursdays from 7:30-9:30 a.m., and lunch from 10:00 a.m.-noon. Dates for the Franklin County program are June 5-8, 12-15, 20-22, 26-29, July 10-13 and 17-20.

According to statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture, when schools close for the summer, more than 12 million fewer meals will be served to children of low income families who had been receiving a free lunch through the National School Lunch Program.

The Seamless Summer Feeding Program, part of the National School Lunch Program, serves approximately 25 million meals each day, with more than half of those served free or at a reduced price.

The program is open to anyone 18 years of age or younger, and those persons over age 18 who meet the state agency definition of mentally or physically disabled.

For more information, contact the RCS Child Nutrition Program at 256-331-2011, or Franklin County Schools' Robynn Bragwell at 256-331-2136.

Email us at franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

## Russellville, Red Bay score well on career readiness

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

A recent study by the Alabama Education Lab at www.al.com ranked Alabama high schools on how well they are preparing their students for the next step of their education, whether that be a four-year university, community college, military service or workforce entry.

And Russellville City Schools is among the state's top 20 school districts when it comes to graduating students who are career or college ready.

Russellville City Schools ranked 13th highest in the list of school districts with the largest percentage of seniors graduating with at least one college or career ready indicator.

Starting with the 2023-24 eighth grade classes, the Alabama State Department of Education will require all students to earn a 'college or career ready indicator' in order to graduate. Those indicators include: A benchmark score on the ACT; a qualifying score of three or higher on an Advanced Placement exam; a qualifying score of four or higher on an International Baccalaureate exam; earning college credit while in high school; earning silver or gold status on the ACT WorkKeys exam; completing an in-school youth apprentice program; earning a career technical industry credential; attaining career and technical education completer status and acceptance into a branch of the military before graduation.

Those requirements will not apply to special education diplomas.

Russellville City Schools' score of 95.5% ranked higher than Mountain Brook City Schools, Muscle Shoals City Schools and Florence City Schools, according to the www.al.com results.

Those numbers represent the percentage of seniors graduating with one or more college or career ready indicators. Information for the study was obtained from the Alabama State Department of Education.

With only one high school in the district, Russellville City Schools' score was based on Russellville High School's numbers. The 2022 career or college ready percentages for RHS students were: ACT benchmark score 46%; ACT Work Keys 1%; Advanced Placement exam scores 29%; College Credit 66%; Career Tech Credential 52%.

Among individual high school rankings, Red Bay High School's score of 98% was 19th best among all Alabama high schools.



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## ‘BRITTON,’ from Page 1

Britton said. “We’re not against anyone but we’re just trying to bring a little more recognition to the need for cost of living adjustments for retirees.”

Britton said his organization will be a voice for retired educators in Montgomery and across Alabama. He’s now expanded the new association to include all retired state employees, not just educators.

Britton said retirement is based on years of service and unless it’s adjusted with a cost of living adjustment, a state employee’s retirement is set from then on. He and the association are working to pass legislation to change this. A bill has been drafted to set up funding to provide COLAs to education retirees and to do so without taking away legislative dollars allocated into the Education Trust Fund. HB 437 is being sponsored by Rep. Randall Shedd, a Republican representing the 11th District. The bill remains in committee and is unlikely to be considered this year.

“It’s in committee. We’re mainly looking to get a funding mechanism in place for next year when it will be reintroduced,” Britton said.

Britton is also concerned with Republican-sponsored legislation he describes as “making it harder for Alabamians to vote.”

In particular, Britton takes issue with a bill sponsored by Rep. Jamie Kiel that would make it a felony for most individuals or organizations to assist another voter with an absentee ballot.

“That bill will make it harder to vote, particularly for elderly voters. If they keep doing things like that it will eventually catch up and the people of Alabama will see what’s happening and the ulterior motives behind these bills,” Britton said.

“My mother is so upset by this bill because it’s trying to take away the ability of elderly residents to vote. Voting is sacred to her. I’ve never known her to miss an election. She studies it more than most people probably do and she does not like her right to vote being infringed upon,” he added.

Kiel said his motivation in sponsoring the bill is to ensure the absentee voting process remain as secure as possible by criminalizing absentee voter fraud that is disguised as ‘help.’ The bill has a family exception and Kiel said there’s no intent to prevent anyone from voting except if they’re attempting to illicitly complete a ballot belonging to another voter.

Britton said his new association is a cause he believes in and as someone heavily invested in education, he believes Alabama should take care of its retired educators.

Britton, a 38-year veteran of education, retired in 2007 after 21 years as Belgreen High School Principal. He then served as principal of Tishomingo County High School in Iuka, Miss., for six years.

Although the local Democratic Executive Committee has maintained membership of approximately 50 members, the Democratic Party at the state and local level is a fragment of what the party used to be.

Up until 2010, Democrats held all local elected offices in Franklin County. That changed with the 2012 election cycle, which saw multiple Republican candidates elected in Franklin County.

When Britton took over as committee chair, the Democratic Party was already in free fall at the state and local level.

With his leadership, though, the committee kept its membership and an active presence well beyond that of the local Republican Executive Committee, although that wasn’t carrying over to election day.

As more and more Franklin County voters decided to vote straight party tickets, the gap between the parties has expanded further. And that proved perplexing for Britton and other longtime Democrats.

“It was frustrating at times. When you have two-to-one straight party Republican ballots over Democratic ballots, there’s really no way to win an election,” Britton said. “There really are more Democrats out there than what you hear about. We actually have a stronger local party than the other party does. And I think it will change in time and the public will swing back to the Democratic Party.”

Heather Cade, who served as vice-chair of the Franklin County Democratic Executive Committee, has assumed chairman duties since Britton stepped down. Britton believes the leadership is in place for the local party to make a comeback.

“There’s lots of young blood and I was ready to turn it over to them. I’ll help any way I can. It’s a good and strong group we have here in Franklin County and I’ll continue to support it,” Britton said.

Send your letters to the editor, guest columns, cartoon panels and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



# 1983 RHS grad Tiggs selected to UNA Athletics Hall of Fame

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The easy part for the selection committee for the University of North Alabama Athletic Hall of Fame was nominating Luther Tiggs. The much harder challenge was finding a way to include all of Tiggs' awards and accolades throughout his basketball playing and coaching career.

Tiggs, a 1983 Russellville High School graduate, will be among the six inductees when the 34th class is introduced into the school's Hall of Fame on September 30th.

Tiggs will be inducted with former UNA football All-American Will Batson, All-American pitcher Trey Mitchell, national championship winning volleyball coach Matt Peck, national soccer player of the year Chloe Roberts and four-time volleyball conference champion Pasola Swoope Jackson.

A three-year starter for UNA's men's basketball team from 1986-1988, Tiggs holds numerous records for the Lions, including highest career free throw percentage (85.9%), most assists in a game (19), season (250) and career (486).

The Lions went 18-9 and 18-10 in Tiggs' first two seasons. In 1988, UNA won the Gulf South Conference Tournament and earned a spot in the NCAA Division II South Regional.

Prior to setting records for UNA, Tiggs made his mark in Coach Jack Tucker's Russellville Golden Tiger varsity team. A two-time All American high school player, Tiggs was part of Russellville's 1982 Class 3A State Champion team.



Tiggs earned his B.S., in Education from UNA in 1988, his Masters of Arts in Education from UNA in 1995 and a Masters of Arts in Education/Instructional Leadership in 2011.

Tiggs' teaching career spanned 33 years and his coaching career 22 years. Tiggs retired last month after seven years at Bob Jones High School. Tiggs earned his 400th win in January 2022 and went on to compile a career coaching record of 427-248.

That included tenures at Buckhorn, Sparkman and James Clemens High Schools in addition to Bob Jones. His 2004-05 Sparkman team reached the Final Four.

Tiggs and his wife Sylvia have two sons, Adrian and Jordan.

Since it started in 1990, the UNA Athletic Hall of Fame has inducted at least four members each year.

With the 2023 inductions, the total number of inductees will increase to 161.

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 **T**he annual Woodruff Family Reunion is set for Saturday, June 17th, from 10-2 at Cedar Buff Farm, 3449 County Road 78.

 **F**ranklin County Schools will provide a Seamless Summer meal program at the following Franklin County Schools: Belgreen, East Franklin, Phil Campbell, Red Bay, Tharptown and Vina Monday through Thursday, Breakfast - 7:30 – 9:30 a.m, Lunch - 10:00 - 12:00 p.m. June 5-8, 12-15, 20-22, 26-29; July 10-13, 17-20 All meals are FREE and served to children ages 0-18. Students do not have to attend a Franklin County school to participate. If you have questions, please contact Robynn Bragwell at 256-331-2136 or by email at [robynnbragwell@franklin.k12.al.us](mailto:robynnbragwell@franklin.k12.al.us)

 **P**ets Unleashed Vacation Bible School. Kickoff on June 11 at 5:00 p.m. hotdogs and inflatables. VBS on June 12-13 6:00-8:30 p.m. Family Night June 14 6:00p.m. At Siloam Missionary Baptist Church, 1657 Hwy. 60, Russellville, AL 35654, across from King Drive-In. If you need a ride or have any questions call 256/331-9502.

 **T**he Senior Center at Phil Campbell is under new management. The Town of Phil Campbell would like to invite and encourage everyone in their area 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 a.m.-noon. A delicious lunch is served around 11 a.m. Come on out and join in on the games or just sit and have a cup of coffee and socialize!



**FUTURE TEACHERS:** Russellville High School recently held a Future Teacher Signing Day where seniors planning to enter into education make that commitment. This year's seniors planning to become teachers include: Front Row, L to R: Silvie Miller, Allie Scott, Ashlee Moon, Selena Pounders. Back Row, from left: Cindy Coan, FTA sponsor, Hank Cartee, Conner Warhurst and Supt. Heath Grimes.



## 'MENTAL HEALTH,' from Page 1

thinking that what they hear may apply to them. It's getting better for sure, and I hope that continues," she added.

Mosley earned her undergraduate degree in Social Work in 2008, and went on to earn her Master's from Alabama A&M University in 2009.

Mosley said there's no 'typical' mental health patient. Like other diseases, there can be factors that may increase a person's likelihood of facing mental health issues, but it's important to see those as legitimate health issues.

"I tell my clients and other people in general mental health is health. You go to the doctor when your blood pressure is high. If you're struggling with something and need to talk with someone, that's a mental health issue that's just as much a health issue," Mosley said.

"The health of your mind and emotions is just as important as your physical health," she added.

Another challenge in mental health treatment is overcoming preconceived ideas that seeking out treatment is a sign of weakness, something men are more likely to use to justify not getting help.

"There are generally more females than males who seek out individual therapy," Mosley said. "That doesn't mean men won't, but I definitely see more referrals for women. That's an area we could do more to improve and it's why I'm a strong supporter of Mental Health Awareness Month.

"I see less motivation and more hesitation with people of color as well because that deals with cultural issues as to how different ethnicities view mental health and trusting the health care system. There's definitely more hesitation with persons of color, whether they be African-Americans or Hispanics," she added.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, men are more likely than women to die from suicide. Men are less likely to have sought out mental health treatment in the previous year than women are.

A key milestone toward getting treatment is realizing you or someone you love may have a mental disorder. That's the first step and the earlier a mental health issue is diagnosed, the more likely it can be effectively treated, according to the CDC.

Mosley wants people to be aware that help in dealing with a mental health crisis is only a phone call (or text) away. By dialing 988, anyone can access

the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. It can also be reached by texting 988.

Trained crisis counselors are just a call or text away and are available 24 hours a day.

Another option for information on how to receive mental health treatment is the web site [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).

Another barrier to seeking treatment is the concern that you'll have to take strong anti-depressant prescription medication. Mosley explained there can be a variety of treatment options that don't involve medication.

"Sometimes we have people come into therapy and find their safe space with people who listen and hear them, or they need help learning how to navigate family relationships. Those coping skills, along with a safe space to talk can really help relieve some of those symptoms and many patients don't need any medication to see improvement," Mosley said.

Mental health treatment comes in many varieties and durations. Seeking out help doesn't mean you're getting into a lifelong treatment program.

"Some clients with serious mental illness who have significant symptoms who are almost always symptomatic might be dealing with a lifelong issue," Mosley said.

"But you can also be in a place in life where you're experiencing grief and loss because a family member passed away, or you lost a job or you're dealing with some other family issue. I love to see when clients in therapy make progress and get to a place where we're in agreement they've progressed to the point they're able to cope without continued therapy," she added.

While there's no 'bright line' test to determine if you would benefit from mental health treatment, Mosley encourages people to ask the following question: Is what I'm dealing with starting to interfere with my basic daily functioning? If so, it's worth reaching out to ask some questions, she said.

"If you're having some issues with anxiety and find it's getting to that point, it may be that talking about some coping skills will allow someone to bounce right back," Mosley said. "If you feel your issue is starting to interfere and you're unsure about what to do, it's worth reaching out to ask for some help. Let someone help you determine to what level things have gotten. That's what mental health professionals do."

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# Ford, Velcro Pygmies to headline Watermelon Festival

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The 42nd annual Franklin County Watermelon Festival is still more than two months away, but organizers are already excited about the feedback they've received after announcing this year's talent lineup.

The festival is hosted by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. This year's event will take place August 18-19 in downtown Russellville.

Friday night's entertainment begins at 7 p.m., with Tremayne. The Velcro Pygmies, who played last year's festival, return to headline Friday night with a show starting at 8:30 p.m.

"They played at last year's festival and we were amazed at the age range they attracted," said Cassie Medley, Executive Director of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. "It went from little kids who knew all their songs to 60-70 year olds who also knew all the songs, so they were just great for everybody."

On Saturday, two local entertainers, the group Rewind and singer/songwriter Austin Bohannon, kick things off. Rewind takes the stage at 6 p.m., and Bohannon follows at 7.

Country-rap artist Colt Ford headlines Saturday's slate and will take the stage at 8:30 p.m.

Ford has sold more than three million albums and recently surpassed one billion music streams.

"He was our guy from the start, so it worked out really well. When he was suggested, I contacted April Potter, who's from Franklin County and lives in Nashville now. She made all the arrangements so she made it easy on us," Medley said.

For more information on the 42nd annual Franklin County Watermelon Festival, visit [www.franklinchamber.org](http://www.franklinchamber.org) or visit their page on Facebook.

# Grimes to retire as RCS Superintendent of Education in June 2024

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Russellville City Schools Superintendent of Education Heath Grimes will retire from his position on June 19, 2024, after the Russellville City Board of Education accepted Grimes' retirement letter at a special meeting held Tuesday morning.

The retirement letter was approved on a 3-1-1 vote by the five-member board. Board members Kim Clonts, Greg Trapp and Radford Hester voted to approve Grimes' retirement letter. Board member Jerry Groce voted against the measure and board member Greg Batchelor abstained.

Earlier in the special meeting, the board approved by a split vote of 3-2 an amendment to Grimes' employment contract that extends his final date of employment from May 31, 2024 to June 19, 2024, and increased his salary for the period of June 1, 2023 through June 19, 2024, to \$222,155, to be paid monthly.

Clonts, Trapp and Hester voted in favor of the contract amendment, while Groce and Batchelor opposed it.

Trapp, who will serve as RCS Board President for the coming year, said the search for a new superintendent will begin immediately. Trapp said the plan is to have the position filled prior to Grimes' departure on June 19, 2024.

According to a source close to the board, possible in-system candidates include Jason Goodwin (Assistant Superintendent), Tony Bonds (Russellville Middle School Principal), Natalie Bendall (Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator) and Jeremy Madden (Russellville High School Principal).

Former Assistant Superintendent Tim Guinn, who was a finalist for the job in 2015 when Grimes was hired, is another possible candidate. Guinn is Superintendent of Satsuma City Schools.

Franklin County Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton has also been motioned as a possible candidate, but Hamilton said he would not be interested in the job.

"The people of Franklin County elected me to serve as Superintendent of Education for Franklin County Schools and that's what I will continue to do. I have the privilege of working with top-notch administrators, faculty and staff and we will continue to work daily to provide the best educational opportunities for our students," Hamilton said.

"Being mentioned for another job is a reflection of what we have done with the Franklin County School System and that is admirable," he added.

Grimes was hired to lead Russellville City Schools in May 2015. Prior to coming to Russellville, Grimes served in the elected position of Lawrence County Schools Superintendent of Education for six years. He resigned upon accepting the Russellville City Schools' position.

Grimes' current contract runs through May 31, 2024. The 19-day extension approved by the board supersedes the rollover clause contained in that contract. That clause required the board to give Grimes written notice no later than 12 months in advance of the contract's expiration if the board's intention was not to renew it. Otherwise, the contract would rollover for one additional year.

That deadline was May 31, 2023, so the special meeting came one day before board members had to decide whether to offer Grimes a contract renewal.

Terms of the contract amendment required Grimes to submit written notice of retirement on or before May 30, 2023, at 8 a.m., the time of Tuesday's special meeting.

The Franklin Free Press has learned that the board was sharply divided on whether to renew the superintendent's contract, with three board members in favor of non-renewal and two in favor of extending the contract. According to a source familiar with the RCS Board, Grimes' employment was the subject of the board's lengthy work session on May 22nd.

The board did not address Grimes' contract at its regular monthly business meeting the following day though.

The board gave public notice of a work session set for 10 a.m., on May 25th. Grimes and a representative from the Alabama Education Association were present, but board members voted to end the work session shortly after it began to go into a confidential conference with board attorney Danny McDowell, who attended the work session by telephone.

Grimes and his AEA representative were not present for the board's conference with McDowell.

Grimes' contract, which runs from August 1, 2020, through May 31, 2024, included an annual salary of \$159,137 for the first year, with a minimum of a two percent increase, or any state-funded pay raise, whichever is greater,

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## Simmons tabbed as THS basketball coach

Michael Rice  
 Franklin Free Press

Chuck Simmons had no idea when he dropped his daughter off at basketball practice 14 years ago it would lead to a lifelong love of coaching.

Simmons started his coaching career with his daughter's rec league after her previous coach backed out of coaching her 8 and under basketball team.

So Simmons stepped up to coach the team.

"I never thought about coaching kids until I started working with my daughter and her friends. Not only were they learning the game but I was learning how much I loved coaching," Simmons said.

Simmons was hired in May to take over the boys varsity coaching position at Tharptown High School.

Simmons graduated from Belgreen High School where he developed his passion for basketball.

"At Belgreen, we lived basketball. You either played or you didn't," Simmons said. "I loved it from the first time I played."

The past four years, Simmons served as an assistant coach at Belgreen.

"I was lucky enough to work under good coaches there. I learned a lot from those guys," Simmons said.

See, 'SIMMONS,' page 14



## Forever Golden: Stidham joins RHS FB staff

Michael Rice  
 Franklin Free Press

Summer workouts are right around the corner for the reigning 5A Region 8 football champion Russellville Golden Tigers. And once they hit the turf for the first snap in the coming weeks, they'll do so with a new, yet familiar coach on the sidelines.

Former Golden Tiger elite offensive lineman Austin Stidham is returning to his roots as he was recently named a co-offensive line coach for Russellville's varsity squad.

After a stellar college career with the Troy University Trojans which saw him named to three All-Sun Belt teams as well as playing a vital part in the team's 2018 bowl win, Stidham was invited to participate in a mini-camp with the NFL's New Orleans Saints.

Stidham said while the experience was something he will never forget, education is where he ultimately wanted to end up assuming the camp didn't pan out.

Once the three-day tryout wrapped up, Stidham was informed he didn't make the cut, as the team only retained one offensive lineman out of nine total that had participated in camp.

In the days following, Stidham fielded offers from other professional leagues including the XFL, USFL and the Canadian Football League. However, after taking a long look in the mirror, he knew which direction he needed to go in.

"I ultimately decided that between where my body was health-wise and the position that I'm getting ready to be at in my life with a wife and the transition period, I just thought the best spot to be in and where the Lord is leading me right now is to start being successful in coaching," Stidham said.



COURTESY PHOTO

After a stellar career at Troy, Austin Stidham is RHS' newest football coach.

See, 'STIDHAM,' Page 12

## Like father, like son: Jeffreys hired as head FB coach at Colbert Heights

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

As the son of a successful high school football coach, it seemed a given Tyler Jeffreys would play the sport that defined his father's career.

Play he did, and Jeffreys, a two-way starter at Colbert County High School, had an outstanding career that included the Indians reaching the state semifinals in 2015 and Honorable Mention Class 3A All-State recognition for Tyler.

Jeffreys moved on to play two years at the University of North Alabama, where he earned his degree in Physical Education in 2020.

Jeffreys' playing career ended after two years at UNA, and now he's followed his father Dale into coaching. Last month, Tyler was named the new varsity football coach at Colbert Heights High School, his first head coaching job after four years as an assistant.

Dale Jeffreys retired from coaching after 20 years. He compiled a career record at Red Bay

and Colbert County High Schools of 160-78, including a run of 14 consecutive playoff appearances.

Tyler hopes to start his coaching career 1-0 when the Wildcats play Lexington on August 25th.

When Jeffreys started at UNA, he planned to become a physical therapist. But when he began volunteer coaching at Colbert County, it didn't take long for him to pivot career plans.

"Football has always been a way of life for me because it's all I ever knew in our family," Jeffreys said. "When I finished at UNA and started volunteering in Leighton, it was about day two that I knew this is what I wanted to do."

"I ended up coaching a kid I actually played with as a senior when he was a freshman. I enjoyed it and it's been addictive to me ever since," he added.

Tyler, the son of Dale and Tammy Jeffreys, has seen a lot of life changes since he signed with UNA seven years ago. He earned his

See, 'Jefferys,' page 13

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## 'STIDHAM,' from Page 11

Stidham said he wasn't sure if there would be a path allowing him to return home to Russellville to educate and coach the next generation of Golden Tigers.

After all, he spent six years at Troy after taking advantage of the NCAA's "COVID-19 year" rule which allowed players to exercise another year of eligibility originally deemed lost due to the pandemic. Being gone for so long meant a lot of turnover with both coaches and administrators had taken place since he last donned the black and gold uniform.

But in the end, things worked out and Stidham kept a steady line of communication open with RCS officials.

"I reached out to them one day and told them I was going to this rookie mini-camp and if things don't work out, I know I want to be an educator," Stidham said. "So I just sort of asked if there would be a position open and they reached back out to me and so far it's been going good... I've tried to keep in touch over the years because Russellville is home to me and it's a place I have a lot of love and admiration for."

While just a coach for now, Stidham is hoping to land a teaching job with Russellville City Schools with a bachelor of science degree in biology. He's also in the process of obtaining his master's degree in education from Troy, which would provide him with a teaching certificate.

For Russellville head coach John Ritter, having the opportunity to add someone with Stidham's resume to his coaching roster was a quick and easy decision.

"It's something we're very excited about," Ritter said. "Anytime you can bring in a guy that's been part of the NFL and had an elite collegiate career like Austin had, plus add in the fact that he's from here and understands the expectations and plans of this program, it was a no-brainer."

Ritter said the topic of Stidham coming back to coach for the Golden Tigers had long been discussed, but knew that the NFL remained a top priority for the time being. But once things broke the way they did, Ritter knew he had to jump at the opportunity to bring someone with Stidham's experience — and more importantly, knowledge about what the Golden Tiger program stands for — on board.

"You don't really understand what Russellville football is all about until you're entrenched in it," Ritter said. "Number one, he's been here and he knows those expectations."

"And number two, when you go to a division one football program and not only are part of the team, but be one of the studs, the experiences he's had playing in bowl games and the NFL process, I think it's going to add another dimension to our coaching staff," Ritter added.



**FINE ARTS SIGNING DAY:** Russellville High School held its annual Fine Arts Signing Day on May 9, 2023. Six students signed various scholarships valued at more than \$22,000. After the signing ceremony, students and their families attended a reception in their honor, with Senior Tables for the signees set up by their families. Bailey Bishop and Allie Scott signed with the University of North Alabama to be members of the Marching Pride Band as Majorettes. Acy Evan Davis, Briley Palmer and Antonio Santamaria signed with Northwest-Shoals Community College to be members of the Vocal Point Chorale. Senior Jorge Pineda signed with NW-SCC to be a member of the school's Jazz Band. Congratulations to these students!



# 'Jefferys,' From Page 11

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# 'SIMMONS,' from Page 11

Simmons' interest in the Tharptown basketball coaching job began years ago when previous principal Ann Scott talked to Simmons about the opportunity.

Simmons was named Tharptown's basketball coach at the May 2023 Franklin County Board of Education meeting. He plans to apply for a teaching position at a later time.

"I am working on my degree and all I have left is my student teaching," Simmons said.

While Simmons will not be teaching for now at Tharptown, he will coach the Wildcats in the upcoming season.

"I like coaching at the high school level. There's a lot more at stake between the bragging rights among the county schools and the competition of coaches," Simmons said.

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# 'GRIMES,' from Page 9

each year thereafter.

Grimes will serve as President of the Board of Directors of the School Superintendents of Alabama for the coming school year. That organization provides learning opportunities and collaboration and networking for Alabama's public school superintendents of education, along with providing a voice for advocacy and public school development.

Grimes read a six-page prepared letter at Tuesday's meeting that reviewed a list of the system's accomplishments since he was hired. The tone of the letter indicated that retiring from Russellville City Schools was not Grimes' choice.

"After much consideration and many discussions with the Russellville City Schools Board, it has been determined that the 2023-2024 school year will be my final year as superintendent of Russellville City Schools," Grimes said, reading from the letter.

Board member Greg Batchelor told Grimes the impact he's had on Russellville City Schools will live on long after his retirement takes effect.

"I personally appreciate your dedication to this school district and what it's meant," Batchelor said. "All the accomplishments have been unreal. I never believed the day you came that we'd accomplish so much in such a short period of time."

Trapp acknowledged Grimes' leadership while also giving credit to the system's administrators and faculty for their efforts.

"Anytime there's change it's not always an easy thing to go through," Trapp said. "It's not easy for our teachers and our administrators. I appreciate the job they do. And I give Dr. Grimes credit for his leadership. We've done a lot of great things here."

Since Grimes submitted his letter of retirement, his contractual status moving forward is no longer an issue. That means board members will not have to publicly state why they supported, or opposed, a contract renewal for Grimes.

But Grimes believes most of those points, whether in support or opposition to a contract renewal, are already out there in public.

"I don't think there's a lot that's not out there already," Grimes said. "You

see today's board action was split because they could not reach an agreement that I should get a contract extension.

"I'll let everyone else speak for themselves, so that's the underlying story," he added.

During Grimes' eight year tenure at Russellville City Schools, the system implemented an out-of-district tuition policy that includes a \$600 annual fee for students who don't live in Russellville city limits.

Other RCS milestones under Grimes' leadership include:  
--a \$10.5 million, 40,000-square foot addition to Russellville High School that features state-of-the-art biology and chemistry labs and additional classroom space for special education and English Language Learners.

--additional AP course offerings and enrollments to assist students once they enter college.

--improvement in ACT scores, graduation rates and College and Career readiness rates.

--taking on management of the City of Russellville's Parks and Recreation Department, which has seen significant improvement in facilities and programming while maintaining a surplus budget.

--numerous awards and accolades for the system, including: U. S. News and World Report Best Schools award winner for multiple years, one of 24 districts to receive an 'A' on the Alabama Report Card, an A+ College Ready School of Excellence.

Perhaps Grimes' biggest legacy will be Russellville City Schools' model for educating English Language Learners. That included the formation of a statewide Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) affiliate program called Alabama Leaders Advocating for English Learners. This program led to significant additional funds for EL instruction and Russellville City Schools has become a model at the state and national level for school systems with large EL populations.

More than 54 percent of Russellville City Schools' enrollment is classified as Hispanic.



GRIMES



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