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Meeting final step College Avenue demolition begins

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The next step in the demolition process for 11 properties, including College Avenue School, will be a meeting next month to include City of Russellville Building and License Inspector Bill Fuller, Brad Williams from the Civil Group and Ralton Baker, whose company R. Baker, Inc., submitted the low bid of \$268,000 for the job.

The Russellville City Council approved the bid at its June 5th meeting. The bid includes the demo-

lition of and removal of debris for the following properties:

- 401, 501, 503 Montgomery St. SE.
- 902 S. Washington Ave.
- 502, 515 College Ave. N.
- 726 Jackson Ave. S.
- 801, 807 Franklin St. NE.
- 108 Lauderdale St. NE.
- 550 Fourth St.

The pre-demolition meeting will allow officials to discuss the job and make sure all documents are in order before demolition begins.

The city applied for a Community Development Block Grant to pay for

See 'DEMOLITION,' Page 4

Council approves log truck route on Underwood Road

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved a logging permit application for Tim Baker that will allow his company, M22, Inc., to transport log trucks through a portion of city limits.

The Commercial Vehicle Permit Agreement is required for any operation requiring "movement of heavy loads" through city limits.

Bill Fuller, the city's Building and License Inspector, told the council at its June 19th meeting that Baker's tract to harvest is located off Holland Drive. The application sought a permit for the trucks to travel on Holland Drive, then turn east on Underwood Road en route to County Highway

48. Fuller said the travel distance inside city limits is just over .25 miles.

The permit is valid between the hours of 7 a.m.-5 p.m., and for semi-trailers not exceeding 40 feet in length. The permit expires 120 days after its approval.

The application requires a performance bond in the amount of \$50,000 to be posted by the applicant.

In other agenda items at the June 19th meeting, the council:

--approved contracts with entertainment acts at the Jam on Sloss Lake, set for July 4, 2023, including: Purpose, the Kerry Gilbert Band, Austin Bohannon, Shenandoah and the Cotton Flats Cruisers, who will host their annual car show on site during the day.

See 'COUNCIL,' Page 7

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Fleeta Mae Scott, 91, of Russellville, passed away June 24, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Donald Wayne Fleming, 82, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, June 23, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Mary Jane Carter, 83, of Russellville, passed away June 24, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Phillip Ray Wilson, 62 of Russellville passed away on June 24. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

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



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Consultant tells REB no rate hike needed for foreseeable future

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A private financial consultant hired by the Russellville Electric Board told board members they are in solid financial position and he will not propose a rate increase this year or in the foreseeable future.

"I see you have a good chance of no action this year and I think we can say we do not have a rate action plan in the horizon," said Chris Mitchell of Chris Mitchell Management Consultants, LLC, of Norris, Tenn.

"I don't see a (rate increase) this year or in future years because of the action you've taken. I feel extremely good about where you are at financially," he added.

Mitchell's company offers consulting services to local service providers, many of whom purchase their power from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Mitchell addressed the board at its June 20th meeting.

At the urging of Manager Charles Canida, the REB raised rates 3.1% last year, an increase that was approved last January and went into effect after TVA approval in July 2022.

That rate increase came 13 months after Canida, according to REB minutes from December 2021, said the board was in strong financial position and he did not foresee a rate increase for at least the next three years.

Mitchell said REB's number of customers has remained flat over a 20-year period, but usage has declined over time, which "added some outside stress because you have costs that go up."

He distinguished between what he would recommend a private business do in that situation from what the board, being a non-profit entity, would do.

"If you were in private business with shareholders there would be more discussion about this, but you are in a public power setting and are a non-profit entity, so the goal is to have equitable stability, but not to create retained earnings over time," Mitchell told board members.

Mitchell said the board's available cash is stable. The REB has received pandemic credits from TVA the past three years in the amount of \$220,000 per year, which he said has helped their cash sum grow, but Mitchell said those credits were expected to end after the current year.

In other action, the board:

--heard a report from Canida about theft of power at a residence on North Jackson Avenue, where the person was running jumper cables from the meter into the house. The matter was referred to the board attorney, he said.

--heard a report from board attorney Jeff Bowling about the status of a civil action filed by a former employee. Bowling said summary judgment motions had been filed in the case.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville Electric Board will be Tuesday, July 18, 2023, at 6 p.m.

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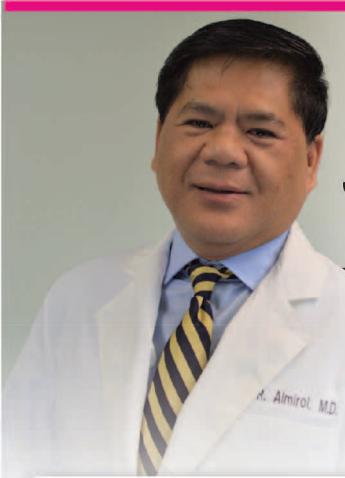


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‘DEMOLITION,’ From Page 1

the demolition of the structures. The grant was approved, but required a historical study of all the buildings set for demolition. That process took more than a year, primarily related to College Avenue School, before it was finally completed.

The school site will feature a marker highlighting the history of the former building. The school was constructed in 1936, with a lower level added approximately 20 years later.

Each of the property owners of the structures gave their prior consent to have their properties included in the grant application. College Avenue School is owned by Russellville City Schools.

There have been multiple options discussed as to how to use the property once the building is razed, but no plan or timetable has been decided.

Fuller said he expects the demolitions to begin later in July after the meeting.

Baker said he will likely raze the houses first, before demolishing the old florist building on South Jackson and College Avenue School.



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Kiel vows to reintroduce 'ballot harvesting' bill in '24

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As a member of the Alabama Legislature, Jamie Kiel sees bills die in committees or on the House or Senate floor all the time.

And that was the case for HB209, legislation Kiel sponsored that would have made it a felony for someone to "knowingly distribute, order, request, collect, complete, obtain or deliver an absentee ballot application or absentee ballot" other than his or her own.

The bill cleared the House last month, and got through committee in the Senate. But HB209 never reached the Senate floor for discussion or a vote.

Kiel understands the legislative process and he plans to reintroduce the bill next year. What remains unsettling to the Russellville legislator is a wave of what he described as 'disingenuous' reporting on HB209 from the Alabama media.

Some of the biggest opposition came from disabled voters, many of whom believed they would not be able to vote with assistance from someone of their choosing if HB209 became law.

Not the case, Kiel explained.

"The media portrayed it as if we were trying to hurt their right to vote," Kiel said. "It almost always came back claims that disabled voters would not be able to vote any longer under this bill. That was completely untrue."

HB209 stipulated that any voter requiring assistance to order, complete or deliver an absentee ballot could be assisted by another person, as long as that person fit into one of seven categories. Those included: any family member to the second degree of kinship, a resident of the voter's household who has resided with the voter at least six months before voting, the Alabama Secretary of State or an employee of the Secretary of State, the probate judge in the voter's home county, the absentee election manager in the voter's home county or a guardian,

conservator or another person appointed by the probate court.

Kiel believes certain media members who opposed HB209 disseminated misinformation about the proposed legislation and that impacted the bill's advancement.

After several amendments were made to the bill, Kiel anticipated it would pass the Senate. When that didn't happen, Kiel said he didn't receive an explanation why.

Kiel said he introduced the legislation to eliminate a practice called ballot harvesting, where a person or persons, often driven by political motives, collect ballots from voters and take them to election sites.

Opponents to HB209 said there was no evidence of ballot harvesting, or voter fraud in general, in Alabama.

Rep. Ontario Tillman (D-Bessemer) told the Alabama Daily News HB209 was 'a solution looking for a problem.'

Kiel maintains there are instances of voter fraud and his bill would deter similar behavior in future elections.

"We've seen across the country that early voting gives the greatest opportunity to cheat," Kiel said. "An Alabama county commissioner was indicted just this year for absentee voter fraud. I just want to be sure that every legal vote is counted and there is no undue influence from outside groups on the voting process."

With Kiel's commitment to re-introduce the legislation next year, the debate on HB209, or whatever it's called in 2024, will continue.

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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 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!

The Harris/Trapp Family Reunion will be Saturday, July 8, from 10-2 at East Franklin Community Center. Everyone bring something as it's a Pot Luck Lunch. For more information, call Diane Halsey at 205-485-4616 or Cathy Harris at 205-486-4387. Friends of Lena Trapp Harris and Andrew Jackson Harris invite you to join them. They can't wait to see everyone!

The 12th annual Cotton Flats Cruisers Car Show will be July 4, 2023, at Sloss Lake on Hwy. 24 East. They welcome cars, trucks and bikes. Registration is from 7-11 a.m. There will be a \$25 registration fee for each car, truck or bike. Grand prize is \$1,000 cash. 50/50 Drawing and many other cash prizes. There will not be any Swap Meet spaces available. For more information, contact Barry at 256-332-6585 or Darryl at 256-436-2499.

Russellville First Methodist Church will sponsor a Fifth Thursday Food Giveaway, Thursday, June 29, 2023, at 1 p.m., at the church, 311 North Jackson Ave. Groceries will be given out while supplies last. Please stay in your vehicle, have a photo ID handy and allow the church volunteers to serve you!

The Bragwell Reunion will take place Saturday, July 1, from 10-2, at Belgreen Baptist Church Christian Life Center, 18375 Hwy. 24. Please bring a covered dish/dessert.

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If you should desire an appointment with them, you may file a written protest giving your name, address, daytime phone number, parcel identification number and an explanation of why you think the value of your property is incorrect.

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'COUNCIL,' from Page 1

--granted a request by Ray Smelser, the owners of a lot on Aycock Loop, for the property to be de-annexed out of the City of Russellville.

--authorized solicitation of sealed bids for the construction of a ramp and steps for the new permanent stage at Sloss Lake.

--appointed Scott Adcock to the Civil Service Board. Adcock replaces Jerry Kimbrough as the District Two representative. Kimbrough passed away last month. District Two Councilman Darren Woodruff expressed his appreciation to Kimbrough for his service to the city.

"I want to publicly acknowledge Jerry Kimbrough's service to the City of Russellville and District Two. We will miss him. He was a good person and his contributions to the city will be missed," Woodruff said.

--approved the 100% grant-funded purchase of a fire skid unit for the Russellville Fire Department.

--approved the purchase of a First Due EMS Software Reporting System by the RFD. The new system was needed because of a change in forms the department must file for EMS reports. The cost is approximately \$11,200.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be July 3, 2023, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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Mansell 'likely' to step down as fire chief at end of year

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At the Russellville City Council's June 19th meeting, Russellville Fire Department Deputy Chief Randy Seal updated the council about a fire science class that will be offered to Russellville High School students through the Career Technical Education program.

Seal explained the serious shortage of fire department applicants and, through the course, he hopes to generate interest in local students to consider a career in firefighting.

"We hope this helps bring some interest in our field of firefighting," Seal said. "We've been fortunate that the shortage hasn't affected us, but that will change soon."

Chief Joe Mansell's department is stacked with veteran firefighters who are eligible to retire. And when that happens, the concern is Russellville will face the same problems plaguing other departments experiencing a dearth of applicants.

Mansell then said he could be among those retirees, as he's eyeing a resignation as fire chief at the end of 2023.

"I'm looking at retiring toward the end of this year," Mansell told the council. "I came into the City of Russellville in 1991 as a volunteer. I was hired in 1992 and have served as chief since 2002. "I've never seen cities across the state offer and pay these guys what they're paying now to try and keep them from leaving. It will catch up with us because so many in our department are nearing retirement," he added.

Mansell said he wants to remain with the department in some capacity to continue his career after he resigns as chief. Mansell also told council members he's been contacted by other departments about whether he'd be interested in coming to work for them. "That tells you a lot about how serious this situation is when several departments are contacting a 51-year-old firefighter to see if he wants to come to work for them after I step down as chief," Mansell said.

The fire science class is one way the department can be proactive in looking for future firefighters. John James will teach the course, and Chris Watkins and Grant Tarascou will serve as substitutes. Seal said they need eight or more students to sign up for the fire science course, with a maximum around 15.

"The shortage of firefighters in our area is pretty bad. We hope this gets some people in our community interested in going into our field," Seal said.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s): Corrections Officer/Dispatcher, Franklin County Jail Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, July 7, 2023.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, by calling (256) 332-8850 or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

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A busy summer for Golden Tiger football includes upcoming 7 on 7 Day

*Michael Rice
 Franklin Free Press*

As football season nears, the Russellville Golden Tigers are preparing for the 2023 campaign.

John Ritter is entering his sixth year as varsity head coach and has a superb winning record with the Golden Tigers.

While under his leadership, the Golden Tigers are 43-16 with a record of 29-3 in 5A Region 8.

"Our program has had a great turnout so far. All sports programs at Russellville workout together, and we have a turnout of about 124 kids," Ritter said.

The Golden Tigers' football program had an outstanding June and is seeing potential and growth from the freshman class according to Ritter.

"We have a very talented freshman class with good players in it. It's a large class, and they are ready to step up and contribute," Ritter said.

The Golden Tigers do not compete in a Spring game, so they get a first look at their players when summer workout and practices begin.

"We always wonder how the next group of young kids will pick up, but they came in ready. Their middle school team runs 25% of our offensive playbook. They came in and picked it right up," Ritter said.

See, 'FOOTBALL,' page 13

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Phil Campbell Dixie Youth teams rolling thru state tournaments

*John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press*

The Phil Campbell 12 and Under Dixie Youth Baseball All-Stars started their quest for a state championship with an opening round win over the South Dale All-Stars last weekend at the Division II Ozone 12 and Under State Tournament in Headland.

On Friday evening, Phil Campbell took game one 15-4, on the strength of winning pitcher Kruz Cochran's three inning, nine strike-out performance.

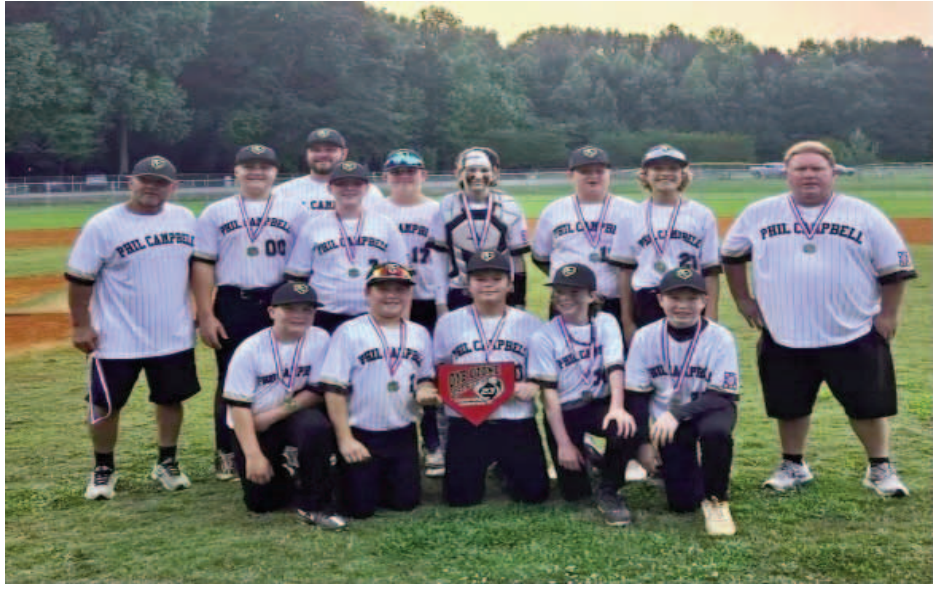
Phil Campbell received plenty of offense from Ty Hamilton (two hits including a two-run home run, two runs scored), Noah Miller (two hits including a two-run home run, two runs scored) and Eli Baker (two-run home run). Max Robinson added a run-scoring single as well.

The team next faced Winfield Sunday evening, and advanced with a 11-7 victory.

Baker was the winning pitcher, throwing two innings with four strikeouts in relief of Hamilton, who went the first two. Cochran also threw two innings against Winfield.

Phil Campbell's offensive explosion included a grand slam from Robinson. Baker added two hits with a run scored. Jack Owens had a hit and scored.

The tournament included 14 All-Star teams from across the state. Barring rain, the tournament was scheduled to run through Tuesday.



COURTESY PHOTO

Phil Campbell 12U All-Stars after winning their District Tournament.

See, 'TOURNAMENT,' Page 12

From the ground up: Raper building foundation for Belgreen gridiron program

*Michael Rice
 Franklin Free Press*

After 26 years of coaching baseball and football, Jonathan Raper has landed as head football coach at Belgreen High School, where he is starting a brand new football program from scratch.

Along with his years of coaching baseball, Raper coached football at Phillips High School and Phil Campbell High School for 26 years.

Starting a football program from nothing is challenging in all aspects, from making sure facilities are ready to ordering game jerseys.

"You're starting from scratch, no one has played football before, but that's a good thing. There is excitement in the community, the school, and most importantly the kids," Raper said.

Raper has coached everything in football from offensive coordinator to defensive coordinator, but a brand new team brings more skill positions

to coach, from quarterback to kickers.

"We're gonna try to be a hard nosed team, and we're going to make sure we do the little things right. When you do the little things, the bigger things fall into place," Raper said.

Since Raper has been around the game for close to 30 years, he has built his own philosophy and coaching process.

"We're gonna get 1% better every day. That's what I always tell my kids because, at the end of the year, your accomplishments grow exponentially," Raper said. "We don't have to be in a hurry-- we have two years of junior high and then we start varsity football. We have to do all the fundamentals correctly," Raper added.

The Belgreen Bulldogs' inaugural season will begin this fall.

"I look forward to learning about the kids and teaching them what it takes to be winners. The kids have been working out all summer and are ready to get on the field this fall," Raper said.



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'TOURNAMENT,' From Page 11

Phil Campbell played Ariton in the semi-finals of the winners' bracket Monday afternoon. If the team wins that game, they would be in Tuesday's championship and would have to lose twice to their once-defeated opponent.

The World Series for the 12U division begins July 27th in Ruston, La. Phil Campbell's 12 and Under All-Stars are coached by Brian Scott, Anthony Cochran and Greg Hamilton.

PHIL CAMPBELL 6U ALL-STARS FINISH AS STATE RUNNER-UP:
The Phil Campbell 6 and Under Dixie Youth Baseball All-Stars team members might not have heard of Center, Texas, before last Sunday, but they'll get a lesson in geography when the Dixie Youth Regional World Series begins July 20th in the small East Texas community.

Phil Campbell advanced as state runner-up to qualify for the Regional World Series even though they lost the Alabama championship game to Mims 8-7.

On Sunday afternoon in Dothan, the Phil Campbell 6U Dixie Youth All-Stars lost a heartbreaker to Mims. The good news is both teams qualified for the Regional World Series.

Phil Campbell led 7-5 in the bottom of the fifth, but Mims scored three runs in walkoff fashion to earn the state championship.

Coach Matt Waid's team includes: Zander Maddox, August Hamlet, Beau Harris, Beck Waid, Ben Duboise, Bentley Franklin, Carson White, Chase Vandiver, Ellie Williams, Gunnar Rambo, Jacob Adams and Kenden Snider.

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

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'FOOTBALL,' From Page 11

The Golden Tigers are returning their starting quarterback this season, a definite strength for this year's team.

"What makes Harrison Burch so good is his leadership ability. He is a leader and does the little things people don't see because it's behind closed doors. He's done an outstanding job mentoring Tripp Cleveland, who is in the freshman class," Ritter said.

The Golden Tigers lost an All-State receiver, Randell Johnson, to graduation. Johnson recently announced plans to continue his football career at Central Georgia Tech College.

"You can't replace Randell with one person. It's how we're going to get production out of the kids we have. Cash Crumpton played well last year, along with Michael Scofield. Mike Young is another guy who will be a key contributor to our pass attack. Bralynn Vincent is the guy that will

hold our receiving core together. He started every game last year, and he brings a unique skill set to our offense. Vincent may not beat people deep, but he's deceptively fast and is a good blocker," Ritter said.

The Golden Tigers' 7 on 7 Day is scheduled for July 14th. The games are to begin at 9a.m., and end around 1 p.m. Schools from all surrounding areas will be attending to better their programs.

Teams scheduled to participate include: Fayetteville High School (Tenn.), Good Hope High School, West Morgan High School, East Limestone High School, West Limestone High School, Hayden High School, Colbert Heights High School, Central High School, Lauderdale County High School, Tanner High School and Hanceville High School.

The games will be open to the public.



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Hamilton wins national skills competition for customer service

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Northwest-Shoals Community College student Kayla Hamilton came home a champion, as in 'national champion,' from the Skills USA National Skills and Leadership Conference, held last week in Atlanta.

Hamilton, a graduate from the college's Salon and Spa Management Instruction Program, won first in the nation for College/Postsecondary Customer Service.

Hamilton, a hair designer/stylist at Creative Image Salon in Spruce Pine, said she was apprehensive at first about entering the competition, but with the support of her advisors, MeLinda Grissom and Beth Wallace, she signed up.

SkillsUSA is a nonprofit, national education association serving middle school, high school and college/postsecondary students

preparing for careers in trade, technical and skilled service occupations.

SkillsUSA serves more than 331,000 students and instructors annually.

Hamilton also works as a cosmetologist at Oasis Spa and Salon.

"I am so thankful for my advisors, MeLinda Grissom and Beth Wallace, who pushed me to compete and believed in me when I did not believe in myself," Hamilton said on a social media post.

"I hope I am half the educator and role model they both are to me."

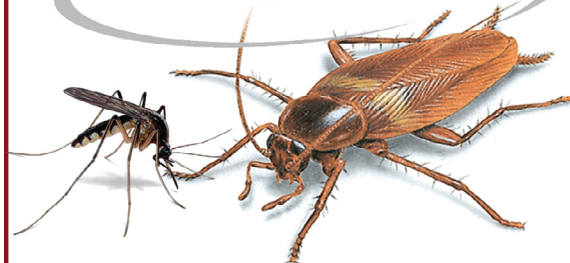
Hamilton also congratulated fellow Salon and Spa competitors Robyn Culver (10th in nation in Cosmetology) and Jasmine Pierce (6th in nation in Nails).



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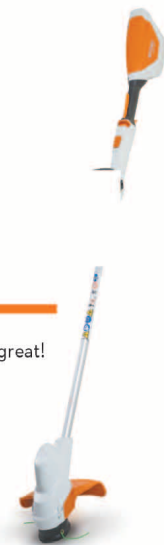
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