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Commission to consider broadband recommendation at July 17th meeting

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When the clock struck 2 p.m., Friday, June 30th, that was the deadline for internet service providers (ISPs) to submit bids for the Franklin County Broadband Grant, a potential \$5 million build out to provide broadband to Franklin County's unserved and underserved areas. According to Franklin County Administrator Leah Mansell, the only ISP to submit a bid was Freedom Fiber, a company already heavily involved in broadband build out to

rural Franklin County. With only one bidder, it would seem logical that Freedom Fiber would be awarded the bid, subject to its having complied with bid specifications. But with government funds, what seems black and white often remains gray. Based on what Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore said at the commission's July 10th work session, an answer should come at the commission's July 17th business meeting. "The application period for the Franklin County Broadband closed Friday, June 30th," Moore said

See 'BROADBAND,' Page 5

Almost all Franklin businesses score satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

62 of the 64 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the period of April 1, 2023 through June 1, 2023, had scores that fell into the "satisfactory compliance" range. Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale. Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected

again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed. Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage and an inspection of the physical facility or property. 62 of the 64 Franklin County establishments listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range. The high score was 99, shared by five businesses: Bay City Nutrition,

See 'HEALTH,' Page 7

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James Thomas Hardin, 80, of Hodges, Alabama passed away on July 6, 2023. Atkins Funeral Home assisted the family.

Sharon J. DuPont age 61 of Hampton Cove, Alabama passed away on July 6, 2023. Atkins Funeral Home assisted the family.

Olen Roger Roberts, age 72, of Spruce Pine, passed away on Thursday, July 06, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Mark Edward Woodruff, age 75, of Russellville, passed away, July 8, 2023. Visitation will be Sat. July 29th, 1-2p.m., with funeral at 2p.m., at Pinkard Funeral Home.

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Four East Franklin students part of World Classroom Washington, D. C. trip

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Four East Franklin Junior High School students were among a group of Alabama students who toured Washington, D.C., and Gettysburg, Pa., with World Classrooms last month.

EFJH ninth graders Jonah Stancil, Daylee Trapp, Chaley Bullington and eighth grader Cade Baker spent June 27-30 in the nation's capital, historic Gettysburg and at George Washington's home, Mt. Vernon.

World Classrooms was started in 2014 as a way to provide educational and experiential learning for students outside the classroom. The program handles the entire trip, from travel reservations to daily activities and transportation and lodging.

More than 50 World Classroom team members work with more than 500 schools to teach students about history, government and patriotism. The organization's goal is to "approach each day with the same energy and drive we had when we started," according to <https://worldclassrooms.com>.

Among the stops included on the trip were Arlington National Cemetery and the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Lincoln Memorial and the historic Gettysburg Battlefield.

EFJH Principal Leann Trapp described the students' experience as 'exciting and dynamic.' "World Classrooms provides an exciting and dynamic learning adventure outside of the walls of a classroom. Our students toured famous memorials, historic sites and interacted with new friends from different schools across the country," Trapp said.



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'BROADBAND,' From Page 1

Monday. "A review team, made up of county employees and officials, is currently evaluating the application with the goal of providing a recommendation of award to the Franklin County Commission at its July 17th meeting.

"The commission will make the final decision to award grants based on the review team's recommendation," Moore added.

Moore declined to enumerate which county officials and employees comprise the review team. But when a conference call was held last week with representatives from the Investing in Alabama Counties (IAC) group, Moore, County Administrator Leah Mansell and Franklin County Commissioner Joseph Baldwin took part in the call.

Last month, the Franklin County Commission rejected IAC's request to extend the deadline until mid-July in order to allow ISPs more time to review a newly-received map of Franklin County sent to Moore on a Friday afternoon before a three-day weekend with the county commission's business meeting set for the following Tuesday at 8:30 a.m.

IAC was formed by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama as a voice to guide county commissions through the process of spending American Relief Plan federal funds for broadband expansion into unserved or underserved areas.

A consulting firm, Sain Associates, was hired by IAC to navigate through the often-cloudy waters of federal funds and the rules attached to them.

The additional map sent by Sain Associates showed areas of Franklin County that were included in a bid from Charter Communications in the Federal Communications Commission's 2020 Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction.

Although there were portions of Franklin County contained in the 2020 bid award, Charter has never followed up its 'winning' bid with any steps toward expanding affordable, reliable, last mile fiber optic broadband to the county's most rural areas.

The problem of winning RDOF auction providers not following through with build outs is not unique to Franklin County. In fact, some have

described it as the 'fatal flaw' in the entire auction process.

Some rural areas face the predicament of the auction winner never following through with their 'winning' bid, and potentially at the same time, losing the prospect of new funding because it overlaps into a previously awarded area.

The language in the county's broadband expansion grant 'questions, answers and additional information' states the county "must ensure that recipients provide funding for broadband projects that are not otherwise met by existing federal or state commitments. ARPA funds cannot be used to supplement grant funding for a project that has already received other modes of grant funding."

Applicants were also advised of their responsibility to "confirm (they) have not been awarded other grant funding for any areas (they) propose to serve with any granted ARPA funds."

While he agreed the issue of broadband expansion in Franklin County is a time-sensitive priority, Moore said the bid process was handled the same way any other bid process is conducted.

"In order to protect the integrity and fairness of the review process, I'm unable to provide additional details at this time," Moore said.

"This matter was handled like any other competitive process performed by the county and pertinent information will be presented publicly at a future commission meeting," he added.

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NWSCC to host 'Party with the Patriots' on July 27

Submitted

Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) will host Party with the Patriots, a W.C. Handy Music Festival event, featuring The Midnighters and Winston Ramble on Thursday, July 27, from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. in front of the fountain on the Shoals campus.

The Midnighters are a staple of entertainment for the W.C. Handy Music Festival and in the Shoals. The six-person soul band have been performing in the Shoals since 1986. Band members include Earnest Davis, James Roy, Barry Billings, Marcus Burke, Libby Counts, and James Counts.

The southern rock band Winston Ramble, originated in Winston County Alabama. They now perform all over the Southeast entertaining their audiences with their self-proclaimed, "Alabama style, southern-fried rock n' roll."

The event will be free and open to the public. It will include live music, food trucks, car show and an opportunity to spend time with NWSCC Patriot coaches and players. Guests are encouraged to bring outdoor folding chairs.



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'HEALTH,' From Page 1

910 4th St., Red Bay, Phil Campbell Nutrition, 3415 Broad Street, Phil Campbell, Piggly Wiggly #87, 3625 Broad Street, Phil Campbell, The Hang Out Nutrition, 13684 Hwy. 43, Wal-Mart #0403 Market, 13675 Hwy. 43.

The businesses who received scores below 'satisfactory compliance' were Casa Fiesta Mexican Grill, 520 4th Ave., Red Bay and La Nina Mexican Food, 113 North Jackson Ave., Russellville, both of which received a score of 84.

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

- 306 Barbecue, 13670 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 89.
- Backwoods Grill & Fish Camp, 2937 Hwy. 43, Phil Campbell, 90.
- Bay City Nutrition, 910 4th Street, Red Bay, 99.

- Big Star of Russellville, 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 98.
- Black & Gold Nutrition, 700 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 94.
- Bojangles Famous Chicken & Biscuit, 13810 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.

- Burger King, 15455 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- Cano's Tienda Y Taqueria, 10047 Hwy. 75, Russellville, 90.
- Captain D's, 15434 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
- Cardinal Drive In, 602 4th St. SW, Red Bay, 95.
- Coco Michocana 2, 318 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 86.
- Dismals Canyon Fountain & Deli, 901 Hwy. 8, Phil Campbell, 95.
- Dollar General, 212 Montgomery St. SW, Russellville, 98.
- El Buen Sabor, 104 Montgomery St., Russellville, 93.
- El Quetzal Buena Vista, 118 East Franklin St., Russellville, 95.
- El Quetzal Buena Vista Bakery/Rest., 118 East Franklin St., Russellville, 91.
- Farmhouse Table, 116 Jackson Ave. N, Russellville, 93.
- Frosty Inn, 12805 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 95.
- Gas Mart North, 17060 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
- Harold's Gas and Grocery, 1425 Hwy. 172 East, Hodges, 99.

- Hilltop Diner, 808 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville, 96.
 - Homestead Cafe, 6631 Hwy. 43, Spruce Pine, 93.
 - Huddle House, 15477 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 87.
 - Jack's, 521 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 98.
 - Jack's Family Restaurant, 13640 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
 - KFC, 15045 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
 - Little Caesar's Pizza, 13655 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 86.
 - Los Primos, 105/107 Marion St., Russellville, 93.
 - M&H Food Mart, 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 91.
 - McDonald's, 15254 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
 - Mexico Bakery, 111 Franklin St. SW, Russellville, 98.
 - Mountain Top Nutrition, 6595 Hwy. 43, Ste. A, Spruce Pine, 98.
 - Panaderia Adonai, 311 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 95.
 - Phil Campbell Deli Mart, 3515 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 97.
 - Piggly Wiggly Deli, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 89.
 - Pilgrim's Place, 1314 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 94.
 - Priceless Food-Deli, 14001 Hwy 43, Ste. 11, Russellville, 92.
 - Quick Stop No. 7, 606 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 89.
 - Red Bay Nutrition, 102 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 93.
 - Red Bay Tobacco Mart, Inc., 908 4th St. NW, Red Bay, 93.
 - Russellville Hospital, 15155 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
 - The Grind Cafe and Coffee Shop, 13760 Hwy. 43 Ste. 1, Russellville, 94.
 - The Thrift Store, 109 Lawrence St. W, Russellville, 96.
 - Tropical Nutrition, 15480 Hwy. 43, Ste. C, Russellville, 98.
 - Vulcan Food Mart, 28485 Hwy. 24, Russellville, 98.
 - Wendy's, 13679 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 92.
 - Willi's, 5680 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 97.
 - Yogi's Spruce Pine, 6675 Hwy. 43, Spruce Pine, 98.
- Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county



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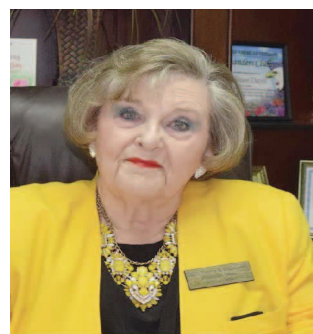


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Veteran team returns for Tharptown this season

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

High school football season is fast approaching and the Tharptown Wildcats are ready to make a statement in 2023 after last year's 2-8 campaign.

"We've had a great turnout this summer. We are senior heavy this year and those guys have been showing up to workouts. Our younger underclassmen have also been coming, which is more impressive because those guys can't drive yet. They have to ask the parents and rely on other people to get them there and they're doing it," Tharptown head coach Jacob Hamilton said.

The Wildcats are returning nine key players on offense, including starting quarterback Hunter Reynolds. Dawson Higgins will also be returning.

"We have about four key guys on offense we will be able to count on this year to move the ball well," Hamilton said.

The Wildcats' defense is also stacked with 10 returning starters from last season. That includes two players, Dylan Dolley and Jackson Clement, who were named to the Class 2A, Region 8 All-Region team last season.

The Wildcats don't have their first region game until week three against the Tanner Rattlers, but will first have to pass early tests against the Shoals Christian Flames and the

See, 'SEASON,' page 12

Barnwell: 'time was right' to step down as Bobcats' head football coach

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Sometimes in life, the decisions we make follow a predictable path based on what's taking place in our lives. Those decisions are easily understood by others.

There are also decisions we make that others might not understand. What's important though is whether it's the right decision for the one making it. And that's the category Kevin Barnwell's recent decision to resign as Phil Campbell High School's varsity football coach falls—as one he knew it was the right time to make, even though the reasons why aren't apparent to others.

Barnwell's resignation as a teacher and varsity football coach came as a surprise to many, but in Barnwell's own words, he 'knew it was time.'

"I called (Franklin County Schools Superintendent) Greg Hamilton and said I'm not the guy anymore for this job," Barnwell said. "I just felt it's time for some fresh blood to be there, for someone new to take the program over and hopefully take it to a better level. I needed a break for me and my family. I'm a dad and I take that role seriously



COURTESY PHOTO

Kevin Barnwell is expected to join the Haleyville coaching staff.

See, 'BARNWELL,' Page 15

Childers challenges experienced LB corps to have big season for Red Bay

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

After a round one playoff loss against the Fyffe Red Devils last year, the Red Bay Tigers are preparing for another opportunity to make it further in the playoffs this season.

The summer workout program has been underway for the Tigers for a few weeks now after their spring jamboree. The jamboree was a test for Tigers and they defeated both Lynn and Smithville, Mississippi.

Red Bay varsity coach Heath Childers said he's excited about his players' effort and what he's seen so far.

"Turnout has been real good and our guys show up every day preparing for this season," Childers said.

The Tigers lost their first team All-State running back Brady Hardin and will look to several seniors this year to help fill his shoes.

"It's never easy replacing 2,000 yards rushing," Childers said.

The Tigers' offense will rely on Kyler Watson, Holder Inmon along with Will and Jack West to move the ball.

All linebackers are returning this year as part of what Childers describes as a senior-heavy team. And Childers isn't shy about his expectations for his linebacking corps this fall.

"We basically have three-year starters at linebackers. It's about time for these guys to start playing like linebackers. All this game experience is good, but it ain't worth nothing unless our guys start playing like it," Childers said.

The Tigers face their first Class 2A Region 8 opponent in Week 3 against the Lexington Bears. They'll play the Bears at home after a bye week in Week 2.

"Lexington had our number the last few years and they're coached well. It'd be great to start this year off 1-0 in region play," Childers said.

See, 'RED BAY,' page 11

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 The Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools for the coming school year. Please call 256-332-6800 for an application.

 AshaKiran serves victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking across Alabama. Their vision is to be a 'ray of hope' by bridging the gap between service providers and culturally diverse communities. Their 24-hour crisis line number is 1-800-793-3010. Learn more about AshaKiran by visiting www.ashakiranonline.org. Consultations are free and confidential, and available in 45 different languages.

 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 Extension Office will host a Pond Management Basics Workshop July 13, 2023, from 5:30-7:30 p.m., at the A.W. Todd Centre. Dinner is included. To register, call 334-350-0485.

 My Father's House Ministries will host Kids' Crusade, July 26-28, 2023, from 6-8 p.m., nightly at the church located at 104 East Lawrence St. in Russellville. There will be food, games, teaching and singing, with a Bouncy House Friday night. For more information or a ride, call 256-460-1376.



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'RED BAY,' From Page 9

The Tigers' season begins Friday, August 19th against the Hamilton Aggies at home. Last year the Tigers won a thriller, downing the Aggies 22-20.

Ainsworth: Job of eliminating grocery tax 'half-complete'

Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth

Alabamians may have felt their wallets bulge a bit last month when the Legislature approved our bill that slices the sales tax on groceries in half and implements the single largest tax cut in state history.

Alabama was one of only three states that taxed groceries at the full rate - South Dakota and Mississippi are the others - and we were one of only 13 states in the nation that levied any tax on food.

But beginning on September 1, 2023, Alabama's 4% state sales tax on groceries will be cut to 3%, and another percent will be automatically deducted when revenues in the Education Trust Fund reach a trigger point that is set in the bill, which is expected to occur as soon as the next fiscal year.

Safety provisions have been put in place to ensure that education dollars are protected as the \$300 million tax cut goes into effect, and we remain dedicated to fully funding our K-12 public schools, community colleges, and public universities at all times.

Once lawmakers were briefed on our proposal, support for it spread like wildfire. All 35 members of the Alabama Senate agreed to serve as sponsors along with 100 of the 105 members of the House. I am told by many longtime State House observers that no major bill of such significance has ever achieved the same unanimous and bipartisan support.

Our success in cutting the grocery tax demonstrates what can be accomplished if we stay true to our conservative beliefs, build consensus among lawmakers, and have the courage to attempt to accomplish what many say can't be done.

But the job is only half-complete, and work still lies ahead as I am determined and fully committed to abolishing the grocery tax altogether.

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'SEASON,' From Page 9

Phillips Bears in weeks one and two. Both Shoals and Phillips were close games last year. The Wildcats defeated the Flames, 28-14, and lost to the Bears, 37-22. The Wildcats will also play a Jamboree game against Decatur Heritage on August 18th. "I feel great about the upcoming season. This is only my second season with the Wildcats and I'm still working on implementing a winning culture here. Our main goal is to compete in our region and I feel like we can do that," Hamilton said.

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RCS board approves loan to purchase nine new buses

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved a \$1.055 million loan at a short meeting July 10th.

The 10-year term loan from CB&S Bank will be used for the purchase of nine new school buses.

The approved signers for the loan will be RCS Superintendent Heath Grimes and Chief Financial Officer Lisa Witt.

Board member Greg Batchelor abstained from the vote.

Funding for buses from the State of Alabama is provided for the first 10 years a new bus goes into service through a state formula used to calculate fleet funds per school system.

renewal funds we have, or they could be sold to a salvage yard.”

The new buses will be fuel-powered Grimes said. The school system purchased 10 propane buses a few years ago, taking advantage of grant funding and rebate incentives specifically for propane buses.

These 10 propane buses remain the only ones of their kind among the school system's 30 bus fleet.

“(Transportation Director) Alan Wilson took advantage of grants and rebates available at the time is why we purchased propane buses, but we haven't seen enough benefit to change over our entire fleet to propane,” Grimes said.

In other agenda items, the board:

--approved the employment of Sarah Brock as a teacher at West Elementary School and the voluntary transfer of Challice Langston from part-time retired instructional coach at Russellville Middle School to part-time retired teacher at West.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education will be Tuesday, July 18th at 8 a.m.



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After 10 years, Grimes explained, a bus rolls off fleet renewal and is no longer funded by the state, as was the case with nine buses that will be replaced.

“If you keep a bus for 11 years, the system no longer receives funds for it, so these nine buses are rolling off through the fleet renewal,” Grimes said. “We may keep two or three of them and sell the other ones either to another system that needs them and doesn't have the fleet

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'BARNWELL,' From Page 9

too. I need to be around more on Saturdays and spend time with my family. My oldest son is at the University of Alabama now and my younger son is a junior in high school. It was just the right time."

Barnwell said he notified school personnel about his decision last month, but was asked to stay a few additional weeks.

"I told (PCHS Principal) Bart Moss I'm trying to do the correct thing for you and these kids. They need to have their new coach there this summer and start learning with him," Barnwell said.

Barnwell is expected to join the Haleyville High School coaching staff as a receivers coach. He will also teach history at Haleyville. Barnwell said he could not comment on his next teaching/coaching move

because no board of education has yet approved his hiring.

Barnwell's coaching record over his five years at Phil Campbell was 26-27, by far the best record since Jimmy Pounders went 6-5 in his one season as Phil Campbell head coach in 1996.

The Bobcats posted winning records the past three seasons, reaching the playoffs as well. Last season's team went 7-4, as did the 2021 Bobcats. In 2020, the team went 6-5.

Competing in Class 3A, Region 8, Barnwell's most recent region records were 3-3 (2022, 2020) and 5-1 (2021).

As an assistant coach, Barnwell said his role will be diminished from that of a head coach, which is what he wanted while his sons are still in school.

"I'm not finished coaching. I hope my career as a head coach isn't over, but it was time for me to make that decision after this past school year ended," Barnwell said. "I literally watch film 12 months a year. We try to devise our plans based on what our players can do.

"We don't get to recruit players we get into our system so we're constantly devising systems to fit the personnel we have. It's a fluid process due to injuries, graduation, kids moving to other schools and kids changing positions," he added.

As for the future of Phil Campbell football, Barnwell said he's optimistic the program will continue to improve under a new head coach.

"The cupboard is not bare. There's a lot of talent out there with those kids. I poured my heart and soul into this program the past five years, and at times, I've felt I didn't have a lot more to give to the program," Barnwell said.

"That's not fair to our players, or to everyone involved in the community with this program if I can't continue to give absolutely 100 percent. I'll always be appreciative to Mr. Hamilton and the Franklin County Board of Education for giving me this opportunity at Phil Campbell," he said.

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