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County commission approves \$1/hour employee raise in FY23-24 budget

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved a \$16.895 million budget for fiscal year 2023-24 at a special meeting called Friday morning.

The county's annual budget falls into three parts: General Fund (which includes the Franklin County Sheriff's Office), Solid Waste Department and Highway Department.

The general fund is budgeted for \$9,052,462.43. All Franklin County

employees will receive a \$1 per hour raise as well as any step raises earned in the 2023-24 fiscal year. There are approximately 125 employees working for Franklin County.

Additionally, although there was a 3.5% increase in health insurance premiums for all county employees, the county will absorb that increase in the new budget.

Retiree health insurance reimbursement for single coverage health insurance for employees who retire with at least 15 years of service

See 'RAISES,' Page 5

Future of KGB Roxy concerts remains unknown

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

There are certain events that will always be associated with Russellville's Roxy Theatre.

These include country singer Ronnie McDowell's 30 years of shows in the historic venue, the newer traditions of the W.C. Handy Festival's Great Pretenders, the Roxy's Christmas Spectacular and the monthly KGB show, featuring local musician Kerry Gilbert and his band, along with a special guest.


The future of the KGB shows at the Roxy is uncertain, though, and nobody seems to agree as to why. Gilbert's account of what led to the cancellation of his September 2023


show varies drastically from the reasons stated by the Arts and Humanities Council.


The Roxy is operated by the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council. Susie Malone has served as President of the council for decades. The work of the Arts and Humanities Council is to raise funds to restore and operate the theatre and to make it once again the anchor of downtown Russellville. And much progress has been made, including a reliable HVAC system, new seating and a video screen on the back of the stage, just to list a few improvements.




In 2008, Gilbert and the KGB began renting the facility on the second Saturday of each month to do a

See 'ROXY,' Page 8

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Jennifer "Jen" Lachelle Fugate Fretwell, age 38, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Wednesday, September 27, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Austin Jase Fretwell, age 11, of Russellville, passed away on Wednesday, September 27, 2023.

Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Tamla Morgan Whitten, age 50, of Phil Campbell, passed away September 29, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.



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The Franklin Free Press strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

The Franklin Free Press is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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My take on this: Facebook: Friend and Foe

Gail Motes

Franklin Free Press

Facebook can be so informative and a great place to find out personalities, likes and dislikes, the people who go on vacation and the extent of their stay and so much more personal information.

Stalking is made easier by means of FB. No more driving around days and nights. No more gas expense. Just sit back in your easy chair at home, food available, rest whenever the need, and investigate safely within the coments and texts and sources available to learn more.



Gail Motes

You will soon know where a person lives, daily activities, marital status, number of family members and the type of vehicle they drive.

Understanding a personality trait is a big plus. Are they givers or takers? Do they have a tendency to help someone with car trouble on the roadside? Daily activities, sports involvements and locations and times give a clearance to house break-ins.

Keep a list of your friends who grow gardens, do canning and make homemade jams and jellies.

It gives insight to the right places to visit because they have posted a beautiful picture of all the hard work and lists of foods. It can be simpler than grocery shopping since their house will remain in the same place, while grocery items are changed from one aisle to another or on a different shelf.

I find complaints unnecessary about FB. It's not a reading requirement. It can be scrolled through or simply ignored. It's as simple as watching TV. Watch what you like. Choices are available. There is a way to solve issues without saying a word. Try it if you haven't yet.

The years I've been on FB have reunited me with friends I'd never been able to reach. A few years ago I had a childhood friend from Spruce Pine School get in contact with me who I'd went to school with when we were in the second grade. That would not have been possible without FB.

I enjoy wishing happy birthday and happy anniversary to family and friends.

Finding a reliable business or a favorite restaurant or asking opinions about things are all pluses to FB. Never forget, if you don't want a personal opinion, it's better not to ask on FB. Just go ask someone personally.

Always remember FB is read by millions if you don't select friends only or text person-to-person. It's read and repeated and copied and saved. If it's better to be left unsaid, please don't text it or post it on FB.

As always....until later!



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Real Estate Tips

- By Willodean Davis

What you need to know about the ever-changing housing market

Willodean Davis
Franklin Free Press

The housing market has seen a lot of unusual trends in the past couple of years. I know you want the latest updates in the market before you decide to buy or sell. The truth is housing predictions are as reliable as the weather forecast. No one knows what's going to happen. You never want to let a prediction control your decisions, only you really know about your finances.

The crazy way houses were getting multiple offers, selling over asking price within hours of going on the market is "over". The market is still real strong people still need homes and we also have a very low inventory. The housing supply is still super low and probably won't catch up. There are little chances of home prices dropping like a rock, since there's still strong buyer demand and a shortage of homes for sale. Prices are not going down; a lot of my customers are getting houses with higher interest rate because they need a home and planning to refinance when the rates come down. Just don't buy more than you can afford. Make your payments where you can live. Don't live for a house, let the housework for you. It shouldn't really influence your plans one way or another. I sold houses when the interest rate was 20%, it was a very hard time to be in the real estate business. That

really gave me a lot of experience. Today's buyer's demand is still greater than the housing supply.

If you are thinking about selling, don't stress, houses in 2023 is still higher than in past years. If you are waiting to sell because you think your home will double soon, don't count on it. To "cool down" the market, there would need to be twice as many homes for sell. People say is it a "sellers' market" now? A sellers' market is where demand is higher than the supply of homes, if you plan to sell your home, you can expect to sell it fast for close to asking price if your price is realistic within the market. When will it be a "buyers' market"? When there are more homes for sale than buyers. If you are waiting to find a good deal on a foreclosure don't hold your breath. Foreclosure homes come with their own set of issues, know what you are doing before you purchase a foreclosure.

You may have to give up some wants to get a house that has everything you need. So, whatever you do, keep saving for a big down payment. A big down payment can lower your monthly payments. I want your home to be a blessing, also I want sellers to be pleased with their sell.

Remember do something good for someone today.
Willodean Davis 256-762-5671

Main Street Resource Team hears public opinions on downtown Russellville

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Several members of the Main Street Alabama Resource Team spent last week in Russellville meeting with local officials, business owners and citizens to determine recommendations for the Main Street Downtown Russellville Collective moving forward.

Last Tuesday, a community input session was held at the A.W. Todd Centre. Participants were asked what they believe downtown Russellville strengths and weaknesses are, as well as what they believe downtown Russellville is best known for.

The Main Street Alabama Team compiled 435 responses into a preliminary report that the team revealed at a Thursday evening meeting.

The Downtown Russellville Collective received Main Street Alabama designation earlier this year after the city served as a pilot for MSA's 'Aspiring' program last year.

Main Street uses a four point approach that includes organization, design, promotion and economic vitality to help restore downtowns of communities across the United States.

The objective is to recommend a course of action for the Russellville Main Street group to move forward. Thursday's meeting was a preliminary report and a final report will be delivered to the Downtown Russellville Collective within six weeks.

The most frequent strengths of downtown Russellville identified by respondents included growth opportunities, the fact that downtown has many local businesses owned by local residents and the Roxy Theatre was named as a consistent strength.

On the flip side, the most common weaknesses of downtown Russellville include not much community involvement or support, vacant properties and storefronts and a lack of foot traffic.

A tentative five-year goal for downtown would include the Roxy Theatre showing first-run movies, restaurants with outdoor dining and boutiques. Possible attractions and activities that would enhance downtown include monthly events (like a Third Thursday or First Friday), live music at restaurants and murals in downtown.

Preliminary recommendations by Main Street Alabama for Russellville include improvements to alleyways, the addition of green spaces downtown, and converting abandoned buildings to community spaces. The team credited the city's efforts in making streetscape improvements already to downtown, but said that could be enhanced with, for example, matching benches.

From a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the strongest agreement, respondents gave downtown Russellville's 'sense of community' a 2.9

Asked what downtown Russellville was known for, answers ranged from the 'Roxy' to the 'Watermelon Festival' to 'Mexicans' and 'nothing.'

38% of respondents believe downtown Russellville is improving/making progress. 34% said it's steady or holding on and 28% believe it's declining or losing ground.

The MSA Resource Team reported that total retail, food and drink sales in Russellville last year was \$171,736,145, and \$56,545,657 of that total came from downtown Russellville retail sales, food and drink sales, representing 33% of the total amount.

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'RAISE,' From Page 1

with Franklin County increase from up to \$500 per month to up to \$600 per month.

The Franklin County Solid Waste Department's FY23-24 budget is \$3,730,861.89.

The Franklin County Highway Department will have a budget of \$5,111,834.75 in the upcoming year.

Capital outlay items for the Sheriff's Office, Highway Department and Solid Waste Department will be purchased through each department.

Probate Judge Barry Moore expressed his appreciation to those who worked to prepare the FY23-24 budget.

"I want to thank Leah Mansell (Franklin County Administrator) for working through the numbers and doing diligent work," Moore said. "And I want to thank the commission and department heads for the work you did. And we thank the employees of this county for the work you do every day."

In other agenda items at the September 29th meeting, the commission: --approved a \$907,325.12 budget for the Franklin County Reappraisal Department and sent the approved budget to the State of Alabama for final approval.

--approved annual contracts with Franklin County 911, the Soil and Water contract, and Alabama Department of Youth Services Agency Grant Agreement.

--approved the 2024 School Resource Officer agreement with Franklin County Schools.

--approved the hiring of Christy Hester as a part-time employee in the Revenue Department through January 12, 2024.

--reappointed Dawn Thorn to the Department of Human Resources Board and appointed Laura Guidry and Jennifer Warhurst to the board.

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 **A**shaKiran 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.

 **T**he Senior Center of Phil Campbell is under new management. Everyone age 60 and over are invited to come join us and be part of the group. This is for men and women. We meet at the Phil Campbell Community Center Monday thru Friday from 8-noon. A delicious lunch is served at 11 a.m. Meals are \$1 donation. Some come and play Rook. We also do Bingo when we have enough people. There are several games to play or just sit and socialize with other seniors.

 **P**astor Bro. Eric McKinney and the congregation of Crestview Missionary Baptist Church, 24131 Hwy. 24, Russellville, invite you to worship with them. Sunday morning Bible Study is from 10-Noon and Sunday morning worship from 11-Noon. All are welcome to our services! Call 256-324-0179 for more information.

 **T**ennessee River Bass Club is seeking members for our 23/24 season. Club fishes monthly on Tennessee river and Bear Creek lakes. We welcome boaters or non-boaters 16 or older of all experience levels to join. Club is based in Sheffield. For more information, contact Tommy 256-627-5662.

 **T**he Franklin County Chamber of Commerce will host the annual State of the Schools on Thursday, October 10th at 6 p.m., in the Phil Campbell High School Gymnasium. Superintendents from Franklin County Schools and Russellville City Schools will speak, as well as Dr. Jeff Goodwin from Northwest Shoals Community College. The event is free and the public is invited.

 **R**ussellville High School will host Homecoming Week October 16th-20th. The Annual Homecoming Parade will take place on Friday, October 20th and the Golden Tigers will host Ardmore with kickoff set for 7 p.m., at Russellville Stadium.

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Vina Homecoming Week culminates with game against Phillips Bears

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Vina High School will host Homecoming Week October 2-6, and a number of events are taking place each day leading up to the Red Devils' Homecoming football game against Phillips.

On Tuesday, Oct. 3rd, at 8:45 a.m., a faculty team will play Vina students in a volleyball game in the Multi-Purpose Building. On Wednesday, Oct. 4th, the faculty/student basketball game will be played starting at 8:45 a.m.

The Homecoming Parade will make its way through Vina on Thursday, Oct. 5th with lineup at 5:15 p.m., in the school parking lot. The parade begins at 6 p.m. A pep rally in the gym will follow the parade.

The deadline to enter a community float in the Vina parade is October 4th at 3 p.m.

The 2023 Homecoming Queen will be selected from the three seniors on the Homecoming Court. They include Jalyn Shotts, Makayla Mitchell and Emily Rice. One will be crowned Queen during halftime of the Phillips game. One will be named Football Queen and one will wear the title of Senior Representative.

On Friday night after the football game, a Homecoming Dance will take place in the gym from 10-12.

Students in the 2023 Vina Elementary Homecoming Court for grades Pre-K through 6th grade include a boy and girl representative. They are:

- Pre-Kindergarten: Marleigh Kelton and Noah Upton.
- Kindergarten: WillaGray Barnes and Ledger Gintz.
- 1st Grade: Stormy Davis and Ryder Pannell.
- 2nd Grade: Kaylee Shelton and Holton Childers.
- 3rd Grade: Egan Raper and Karter McEuen.
- 4th Grade: Alivia Willis and Clayton Adams.

See 'HOMECOMING,' Page 9

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'ROXY,' From Page 1

show. Less than two years later, KGB member Jim Seals had some serious health issues and left the band. And Gilbert said he stopped doing the monthly shows as a result.

"We missed the fall of 2009 after Jim had a stroke," Gilbert said. "Then the Arts and Humanities Council came to me and asked me to continue the shows in January 2010, which we did.

"We had a verbal agreement when we started (in 2010). I was not renting the Roxy. We worked as a team with the Arts and Humanities Council. Our agreement was that I would receive the first \$1,000 of ticket sales for each show. All revenue from ticket sales after that went to the Roxy along with all of the concession sales. I used that \$1,000 to pay my band, to pay Sweettree (sound production) and to pay our monthly guest, as well as buying a meal for the band and our guest. I also had to pay two sound crew members to help unload and load their equipment," Gilbert added.

A few years ago, Gilbert said his payment from ticket sales increased to \$1,050. Until 2018, Gilbert was paid the monthly amount even if the show didn't bring in more than \$1,000 in ticket sales. In those cases, the Roxy made up the difference. In 2018, Gilbert said the arrangement changed and if a show didn't bring in more than \$1,050, he would only receive the actual revenue from tickets sold.

After the KGB's August show, which featured local singer/songwriter Luke L.A. Shepherd, Gilbert arranged to have Jamie Kiel as his guest for the show on September 9th. That show never happened, and once again, the explanations as to why are in conflict.

Gilbert said he was asked to meet with Malone and two other Arts and Humanities Council members in July. Gilbert said he was presented with a list of 'demands' from the council, one of which called for Gilbert to split revenue he receives from sponsorships he sells for the monthly show. Other stipulations, according to Gilbert, included a ban on airing the show on Facebook Live, no videos of the show without prior approval from the council and he was told not to use the Roxy's name when selling his sponsorships.

"I didn't agree to their terms and didn't sign anything. So those demands haven't gone into effect and won't because I won't agree with them," Gilbert said.

After Gilbert posted on social media his September 2023 show was canceled, he began receiving private messages asking if his cancer had returned. Gilbert has dealt with pancreatic cancer for more than a decade. At times, he's not been able to perform due to health issues, so that led friends and Facebook followers to inquire about his health when he posted that the September show would not

take place.

He then updated his post to explain that the Arts and Humanities Council, not Gilbert, canceled the show.

The fallout from that post led Malone to post a social media statement on the Historic Roxy Theatre Facebook page. She explained the council voted in July to postpone Gilbert's September Rockin' at the Roxy show and told Gilbert there would not be a show that month.

"Kerry was made aware of the board's decision to postpone the September show because we had so many board members who would not be able to be there," Malone said. "Kerry continued to advertise the show and said he would rent the Roxy. A standard rental contract is required to rent the Roxy and only two board members have to be present to manage the facility. He declined to sign the contract, so there was no show."

Malone said the Roxy will host the KGB show in October and November, but there will be no December show because of conflicts with other downtown events and Roxy events (First Baptist Church's A Walk Thru Bethlehem and the Roxy's Christmas Spectacular).

Malone said the Arts and Humanities Council will do the October and November shows under the same agreement

they previously had with Gilbert, but if the gate for a show is less than \$1,050, then Gilbert will not be paid the full amount.

After the first of the year, Malone said she hopes Gilbert will meet with the council and come up with a working agreement suitable for both parties moving forward. She said the council does not support continuing the current arrangement because there have been too many months where it has lost money on the KGB show.

"We are a non-profit, but we have to run this as a business. We have bills to pay and we're trying to make the Roxy first-run movie worthy," Malone said. "We will try to work with him but Kerry will have to work with us too. It's a two-way situation where we need to work together and try to help each other."

Whether that will result in continued KGB shows each month at the Roxy remains to be determined. And that uncertainty doesn't sit well with some of Gilbert's fans.

Charles Frederick, a Franklin County native who lives in Florence, faithfully attends the KGB show each month at the Roxy. He sent a letter to each member of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council this week wherein he describes their actions regarding Gilbert as 'erratic.'

"It's easy for the Arts Council to say the KGB concerts are losing money for the Roxy over the years, but I would like to see a financial report with a monthly table of gains/losses for the Roxy through the entire period the KGB has had concerts at the Roxy," Frederick said. "If the Arts Council is confident of their statement about the Roxy losing money on the KGB concerts they should not mind making the financial report available to the public showing that their conclusion about the KGB being a financial burden to the future of the Roxy is accurate."

Frederick said he knows of several senior citizens for whom the second Saturday of each month is their highlight.

"When you arbitrarily cancel a regularly scheduled concert by the KGB at the Roxy, you rob us fans of a night of much anticipated entertainment and that is a big deal to us," Frederick said.

Frederick went on to say his letter was not a "wholesale condemnation" of the Arts Council. Rather, he just takes issue with the council's actions related to the monthly KGB show.

"The Council has served a significant purpose in raising funds and applying those funds to refurbishing the historic Roxy Theatre and updating it to make it a great venue for concerts, plays and other public events," Frederick said.

For his part, Gilbert hopes to resume monthly shows, without interruption, in 2024.

"I've always had a good working relationship with the Arts and Humanities Council until some recent bumps in the road," Gilbert said. "I've never been anything but helpful to the Roxy. If they have been losing money, they would not have continued doing the shows. I've never asked what the gate was in any month. I've taken the amount we agreed to and gone on."

"Several shows have sold out, like the Secret Sisters and Darryl Worley. Those months, the Roxy made a lot of money," he added.

Overall, though, Malone said the Arts and Humanities Council had to make changes to the monthly KGB shows in order to "continue opening the doors of this historic jewel," and cannot afford to take financial losses on any show, including Gilbert's.



COURTESY PHOTO

Future of KGB show at Roxy uncertain beyond November.

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New mobile detailing trailer makes a professional vehicle cleaning easy and convenient

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It wasn't the best of months for Aviator's Detailing owner Brandon Seay.

Just weeks after his new mobile detailing trailer made its debut, and was featured in an August 16th edition of the Franklin Free Press, Seay's trailer was totaled in an accident.

Combine that with his father falling and breaking a hip, and it's been a rough stretch for Seay and his family.

"This year has been the true definition of a roller coaster with us," Seay said. "But he came through surgery great and is taking physical therapy now, so maybe we're on the up and up now."

The brand new replacement mobile detailing trailer was the result of Seay listening to, and responding to, customer requests for a way to have their cars detailed without having to take time to drop them off



and/or pick them up.

Seay custom designed both trailers to allow him to perform detail work anywhere, making the process even more convenient for his customers.

The new trailer has water and power onboard. It's a one-of-a-kind unit with state of the art detailing tools that will leave your vehicle looking shiny and like new.

Aviator's Detailing is located at the Russellville Airport. Seay got his start detailing planes in Russellville. That soon spread to other airports and he then expanded the business to offer services ranging from maintenance washes to protective ceramic coating for vehicles.

"All the services we offer can be provided with the trailer, with some regulations," Seay explained.

Aviator's maintenance wash program includes biweekly full details at a reduced cost of \$50 each, compared to \$125 for a full one-time detail. The full detail includes a wash, scrub, wipe blow & hand dry, door jams, debug, engine detail, windows inside and out, wheels and tires, dress exterior plastics and tires, seal plant, vacuum, dust, blow out cracks and crevices, condition plastics and leather and clean trunk or bed.

And all that can be done wherever the customer chooses.

"Our location now is literally anywhere our customers need us. We're always working to enhance our customers' experience and the trailer has been a major hit and game changer," Seay said.

To learn more about Aviator's Detailing and to learn about specials, giveaways and new services offered, follow the company on Facebook, visit www.aviatorsdetailing.com or call 256-436-0465.

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'HOMECOMING,' From Page 7

- 5th Grade: Braizley Johnson and Ryker Watson.
- 6th Grade: Lindie Easterling and Kendon Rhodes.
- Vina 7th-11th grade representatives include:
- 7th Grade: Nolee Powell.
- 8th Grade:

Kaylee Davis.

--9th Grade:

Alyx Raper.

--10th Grade:

Braxtyn Quinn.

--11th Grade:

Aimee Shotts.

Students dressed each day this week in themes ranging from Marvel Monday to Country vs. Country Club.

Vina Media Specialist Patti Swinney, along with other Vina faculty members and students, have worked

hard to plan this year's Homecoming Week.

"I worked with her a long time and Ms. Swinney is a good worker, a good librarian and she does everything she can to promote Vina High School from the annual to community events," Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton said.

"She is an ambassador for Vina and her work is appreciated," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Senior Homecoming Court at Vina High School includes, from left: Makayla Mitchell, Emily Rice and Jalyn Shotts.



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Yard Sale. Fri./Sat. 6/7. 7 a.m.-until. 492

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Roxy's Christmas Spectacular to have five public shows starting December 7th

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The performance schedule for the Roxy Theatre's Christmas Spectacular has been announced and once again it includes five public performances.

The Roxy's Christmas Spectacular will be December 6-10, 2023. It will once again feature Fred the elf, along with a host of Christmas characters dancing and singing their way through the holiday season.

Public performances will be Thursday, Dec. 6th at 7 p.m., Friday, December 8th at 7 p.m., Saturday, December 9th at 2 and 7 p.m., and a 2 p.m., matinee performance on Sunday, December 10th.

All tickets are \$15, and are reserved and will be main floor only, as the balcony at the Roxy is in the midst of a renovation.

Tickets will be available beginning October 15th. The Roxy will post more information on how to purchase tickets on its Facebook page.

School performances are scheduled for 8:30 a.m., 10:15 a.m., and 12:15 p.m., on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, December 6th, 7th and 8th. Tickets for all Franklin County and Russellville City Schools students and teachers were purchased by Russellville attorney Jamie Sumerel. Sumerel, who is running for Franklin County District Judge, said he wanted every child in the county to have the opportunity to see the Christmas show, regardless of whether the child's family could afford to pay for the ticket.

Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council President Susie Malone announced Wednesday the council has received a \$5,600 grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts to help pay for costs associated with the Roxy's Christmas Spectacular.

The funds will be used for costume purchases, production costs, ticket printing, and other related expenses.

"We were very excited to receive this grant and it will help make this year's Christmas Spectacular even better than previous years," Malone said.



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Undefeated RMS now focused on Northwest Middle School Playoffs

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Middle School football team wrapped up its undefeated regular season Tuesday evening with a 42-6 victory over West Morgan.

The Golden Tigers are now preparing for the playoffs with their plethora of skill players.

"We have so many guys playing well right now including Drake Ergle who threw the best he's ever thrown the other night and our four running backs really showed out," head coach Brett Voss said.

Darron Jones, Tavien Jones and Ryland Calvert each had five touches and all scored. Logan Alexander had four touches and scored.

"Our line blocked really well the other night, even Tavien Jones blocked well when he wasn't running the ball," Voss said.

"He sprung a lot of big runs for us," Voss added.

At half, the score was 28-0. Voss said holding West Morgan to six points means the defense played extremely well.

"Frank Baltazar has been the surprise of the season. Coach Kyle Taylor has done a great job with him just moving him along each week. He does a really good job interrupting plays at nose guard for us," Voss said.

With the win, the Golden Tigers clinch the

See, 'RMS,' Page 12

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Sprint Football opened door for Colbert Heights grad to continue playing career into college

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

Samuel Ray is a 2023 graduate of Colbert Heights and this fall he's getting to do something only 7.3% of high school athletes get to do... compete in college football.

However, Ray is not competing in the standard NCAA football.

Ray is attending Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky on an athletic scholarship playing Sprint Football.

Sprint football is a full-contact varsity sport with the same rules as NCAA football except for a weight limit of 172 pounds. Every athlete is weighed on Thursdays for games that weekend.

"I took my first snaps last weekend. They have me at special teams on PATs and I played one snap in the first quarter at right guard," Ray said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Bellarmine University's Samuel Ray(#55).

See, 'SPRINT,' page 13

Mars Hill uses fourth quarter comeback to hand Russellville first loss

Hayden Moss
Franklin Free Press

For the second straight year, the Mars Hill Panthers stole a win from the Russellville Golden Tigers.

Russellville's first drive of the game had big plays with a 20-yard pass completion and a 22-yard run from Cam Phinizee but he then fumbled 10 yards from the end zone and Mars Hill recovered.

The Golden Tigers' defense held strong after the fumble and forced a Mars Hill three and out.

The next possession, Russellville managed to get on the board first with a 30-yard field goal by Manny Martinez, making the score 3-0. The Panthers were driving, but fumbled with Russellville recovering. The next play, sophomore Phinizee ran for a 39-yard touchdown, extending the lead to 10-0.

Phinizee and the Golden Tigers' offensive line had a good night, as Russellville's workhorse carried 31 times for 158 yards and two touchdowns.

Trailing 10-0, Mars Hill soon responded with a big play of their own with a 68-yard touch-

down run by quarterback Griffin Hanson, making the score 10-6.

The Panthers' defense came up with a stop of their own and the offense scored on a 41-yard touchdown run by William Owens, giving Mars Hill the lead 13-10.

The Golden Tigers managed to score before the half on a six-yard touchdown run by Cam Phinizee, making the score 17-13.

Both the Golden Tigers and the Panthers opened up the second half with three and outs on their first two possessions. The Golden Tigers managed to force a Hanson fumble and Russellville regained the lead with a 2 yard run by quarterback Harrison Burch, extending the

Friday Night High School Football Schedule 10/6

- Russellville @ Brewer
- Phil Campbell @ Lauderdale County
- Tharptown @ Red Bay
- Vina vs. Phillips

See, 'RUSSELLVILLE,' Page 12



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'RMS,' From Page 11



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first seed of the Northwest Middle School Conference playoffs beginning October 3rd. "Finishing off the regular season undefeated is nice and all but winning this first round of the playoffs will make it worth it so we need to continue to get better and everything will work out like it's supposed to," Voss said. On Tuesday, October 3rd, the Golden Tigers will host East Limestone in the semifinals.

'RUSSELLVILLE,' From Page 11

lead to 24-13. Mars Hill mounted a comeback and scored on a 23-yard touchdown pass with 7:49 left in the game, making the score 24-19 after a failed two-point try. After forcing a three and out by the Golden Tigers, the Panthers retook the lead on a 48-yard touchdown reception by Tanner Caudle. The two-point conversion made the final score 27-24. Russellville head coach John Ritter talked about the key takeaways from the intense game. "We did a lot of good things, we did a lot of not so good things. But I did a very poor job of making some adjustments in the second half and not having our guys juiced up enough or not making enough adjustments to what those guys were doing on both sides, but I'll take that 100% on me." Russellville outgained Mars Hill 337-231. Burch had a solid game going 14-26 for 195 yards. But the Golden Tigers had six crucial penalties compared to one flag on the Panthers. Ritter was asked what role the penalties and non calls made during the game. "I mean obviously it doesn't help but we've got to overcome those types of things. This was a great game to overcome that adversity and see how we're a going to respond in not only this game but moving forward," Ritter said. The Golden Tigers return to Region 8 play Friday with a road game at Brewer High School.

CHECK, PLEASE:



Franklin County native and former Tharptown High School student Ethan Beets recently received a \$1,750 scholarship from the Alabama Farmers Agriculture Foundation and the Franklin County Farmers Federation. Beets, a student at Auburn University, received his scholarship during the Alabama Farmers Federation Scholarship Reception on September 25th at Lazenby Farms in Auburn. He is a sophomore on the pre-forestry track. He is pictured with, from left: Federation President Jimmy Parnell, Franklin County Farmers Federation President Derek Jackson and Federation District 1 Director Dorman Grace.

'SPRINT,' From Page 11

Ray's freshman season has gone well so far with his team now at 3-0. The season began on September 16 with Bellarmine beating Oakland City 43-23. In week 2, the Knights defeated Calumet College of St. Joseph 25-14 (This is when Samuel played in his first game.)

This past weekend, Bellarmine improved to 3-0 with its win over Midway University 27-7.

Samuel is currently behind two seniors at left and right guard on the team. Bellarmine runs a similar offense to the 'Wing T' so the offensive line is the most important part of the offense.

Samuel was recruited by other Sprint Football teams. Samuel started by putting himself and his stats on Twitter. Colbert Heights is a small school, so Samuel relied on promoting himself on Twitter for college coaches to see.

"I was told my whole life I don't have the size or the skill to play college football or even just the character to play. I was an underdog and within months, I had a meeting with Bellarmine scheduled," Ray said.

Before Ray could receive an offer from Bellarmine, he had to be accepted and Bellarmine is a prestigious school.

Ray is majoring in computer science. Ray's intended major was engineer-

ing, but Bellarmine didn't offer that degree program.

Bellarmine is known for exceptionally high rates of its student athletes gaining employment after college.

Last year, Bellarmine had 100% of its student athletes in careers within six months after graduation.

Ray's father implanted a lot of wisdom in his son. Nick Ray is a preacher at Sunnyside Church of God in Tuscumbia.

"There were about two dozen schools recruiting Samuel for the Sprint program. It was ultimately Samuel's decision at the end of the day," Nick said.

"We didn't think he would have a lot of opportunity and he would have just walked on to one of the smaller schools like UNA. We certainly weren't expecting an athletic scholarship," Nick added.

Nick Ray left the decision to his son to make since he was 18 and Samuel hasn't looked back since deciding on Bellarmine.

"My whole life I was told I wasn't up to someone's standard, but I was of the mindset I can do anything I set my mind to. I also rely on my faith. I live my life on Psalms 37. The Lord has truly blessed me. I see a lot of athletes my size. It might not be something for everyone, but it gave me an avenue to continue football," Ray said.

Bellarmine will travel to Saint Mary of-the-Woods College this weekend in Indiana with hopes of improving to 4-0.

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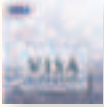


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McKinney seeking Republican nomination for Franklin District Judge

Submitted

Franklin County welcomes the announcement of Mitch McKinney's candidacy for the District Court Judge position. With a rich background in law, a commitment to family, and active involvement in various community organizations, Mitch is excited to bring his expertise and dedication to the role of District Court Judge in Franklin County.

Background

Mitchell McKinney, "Mitch," has deep roots in both Georgia and Alabama. Born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, Mitch has a strong connection to Alabama through his parents' and grandparents' ties to the state.



Courtesy Photo

Russellville attorney Mitch McKinney, with his wife Julie and their son.

His wife, Julie Herring McKinney, is a Russellville, Alabama native, and a proud graduate of Russellville High School. Julie holds both undergraduate and master's degrees in accounting from the University of Alabama, further strengthening their ties to the local community.

The McKinney's are the proud parents of a fifth-grade son who attends Russellville Elementary School, where he actively participates in soccer, baseball, and flag football. Their family is completed by their beloved German Shorthaired Pointer, Lillian.

Mitch pursued his education at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, earning a B.B.A. in Economics. He continued his education at the University of Alabama School of Law in Tuscaloosa, graduating with a Juris Doctor in 1998.

Professional Experience

Mitch has an extensive legal background, with seven years of prosecutorial experience as an Assistant District Attorney and Assistant Solicitor General. He also served as the prosecutor of the Magistrate Court of Forsyth County for four years. During this time, Mitch was an Assistant County Attorney for Forsyth County, Georgia, one of the nation's fastest-growing communities.

After his years in public service, Mitch opened his own private practice, focusing on family law and criminal defense. Since moving to Russellville, he has maintained a solo practice on Jackson Avenue South and has dedicated a significant portion of his time as a court-appointed Guardian Ad Litem for children in the Juvenile/District Court of Franklin County. He has also ventured into the field of real estate.

Community Involvement

Beyond his legal career, Mitch is an active member of the community. He serves on the Russellville Hospital Foundation Board and the Russellville Hospital Ethics Committee. Alongside his wife, he is actively engaged in the effort to revitalize Downtown Russellville and was part of the team that secured a Main Street Alabama designation. He is currently the Chairman Elect for the Board of Directors for the 2024-2025 year and is a member of Tharptown Baptist Church.

Campaign Aspirations

Mitch McKinney is excited about the opportunity to run for the open District Court Judge position. He looks forward to meeting more of the people of Franklin County during the campaign. Running for Judge has been a long-standing aspiration for Mitch, dating back to his time living in Georgia.

For more information about Mitch McKinney's campaign for District Court Judge, please visit www.mckinneyforfranklincounty.com.

Franklin Free Press Football Picks Contest

Each Week's Winner Receives a \$25 Pilgrim's Place BBQ Gift Certificate!

Congratulations to Alicia Elliott, who was a perfect 10-0 in her picks last week. She wins a \$25 gift certificate from Pilgrim's Place BBQ.

Submit your picks by email to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com by Saturday morning, September 30th, at 10 a.m. Include your name, phone number and game selections, including tiebreaker.

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QUEEN FOR A DAY!



It's Homecoming Week at Red Bay High School as the Tigers prepare for a Friday night game against Tharptown. Abby Hicks is this year's Homecoming Queen. Kenzlee Bohannon is the Football Queen and the Homecoming Princess is Hannah Butler. The 2023 Red Bay Homecoming Court, front row, from left: Bohannon, Hicks and Butler. Back Row, from left: Kamryn Kuykendall (7th Maid), Jada Pettigrew (8th Maid), Blake Oliver (9th Maid), DaRilee Colburn (10th Maid) and Ashley Epps (11th Maid). Congratulations to these young ladies!

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TVA and Franklin County SWCD partner to stabilize two Red Bay stream sites

Submitted

TVA recently partnered with the Franklin County Soil & Water Conservation District, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore and stabilize two stream sites on Bear Creek at the Red Bay City Park.

Bear Creek is a Strategic Habitat Unit, with a high priority for focal watershed for aquatic habitat restoration. The project location is upstream of designated critical habitat for federally endangered and at-risk mussel species, as well as occupied habitat of the recently delisted snail darter.



COURTESY PHOTO

The project consisted of contouring (sloping) and placement of riprap on approximately 375 feet of streambank.

This partnership effort directly aligns with TVA's Natural Resource Plan, to protect water quality and improve aquatic biodiversity throughout the Tennessee River watershed.

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Angel Harris

Licensed Massage Therapist LMT #1495

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