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Sibley hoping to restore tradition of Northside Grocery

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Russellville businessman Jim Sibley recently purchased Northside Grocery on Waterloo Road and he plans on renovating and reopening the long-standing local business that used to be a fixture for students and staff at Russellville City Schools.

When Northside Grocery burned in the fall of 2022, owner Bhupinder Cheema took no action to repair the building or property. Last March, City of Russellville Fire Marshal Justin

Green spoke with Cheema about the status of repairs and safeguards to secure the property located at 1328 Waterloo Road.

Rather than making those requested improvements, Cheema sold the property to Sibley approximately six months ago.

In an January 4th interview, Sibley told the FFP he is in need of a roofing contractor to replace the roof. Sibley invited any interested roofing contractor licensed in Russellville to contact him at 256-710-4170.

Additionally, Sibley said the

See 'NORTHSIDE,' Page 3

Denied medical cannabis applicants hope lawsuit will hold Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission accountable in public eye

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When the Alabama legislature approved the Wesley 'Ato' Hall Compassion Act in 2021, it legalized the pathway for medical cannabis for Alabamians who meet one of several qualifying health conditions.

More than two years later, though, not one Alabama resident has received the first dose of medical marijuana as the Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission continues to stumble out of the starting gate with allegations of improper scoring of applicants all the way to secret meetings.

The commission's third attempt to

issue the state's five licenses to Integrated Facility applicants was met with another lawsuit by a group of unsuccessful applicants. This time not only the scoring process for the licenses is under attack. Additional challenges have been made to the small number of licenses available as well as legality of the commission's investigative hearing process.

Natural Relief Cultivation, LLC, was among the 28 applicants denied an Integrated Facility license. These licenses are particularly valuable because the license holder can cultivate cannabis, process it into medical cannabis, including packaging and labeling it,

See 'LAWSUIT,' Page 4

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**Stevie Sandusky, 69, of Russellville,
passed away on January 6, 2024.
Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the
family.**

**Janet Sue Myers, 77, of Russellville,
passed away January 4, 2024. Pinkard
Funeral Home assisted the family.**

**Christina Louise Isbell, 52, of
Russellville, passed away Thursday,
January 04, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel
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'NORTHSIDE,' From Page 1

building's structural integrity remains intact, although ceiling and other repairs inside must be made before the business can be reopened. "It needs a new roof and to replace some equipment inside. The cooler is fine as well as the heating system. Once we get a new roof and complete those other repairs, it will be ready to reopen," Sibley said.

Sibley said his plans are to reopen Northside as an independent gas station and to lease the store. He hopes to add some deli items and groceries similar to what Northside offered years ago.

The fire caused extensive damage to the building's interior. Investigation by local fire department officials indicated the origin of the fire appeared to be an electrical accident, possibly in the break room or bathroom.

Northside Grocery has been a part of Russellville for more than 80 years, Sibley said, and he wants to see it reopened and operated as it was during its heyday.

"It's been there a long time and we'll try to keep that tradition there," Sibley said. "You'll see the kind of convenience store it used to be. Like Mac's Market, for example, Northside is part of the history of this city and we want to continue that tradition."



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

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'LAWSUIT,' From Page 1

and may transport, dispense and sell medical cannabis to registered patients at up to five dispensary locations.

Natural Relief Cultivation, LLC, is co-owned by Brian Faught, who owns Arkansas' largest medical cannabis dispensary. Faught and his company reached an agreement with the City of Russellville to purchase 28 acres on Highway 24 East from the city, conditioned on Natural Relief Cultivation's license being granted, which it wasn't when the commission announced its five grantees on December 12th.

The lawsuit is pending in Montgomery County Circuit Court, where a judge will allow the plaintiffs to conduct depositions of commission members. Judge James Anderson's ruling is being challenged by attorneys for the Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission, who don't want their clients having to answer questions in a deposition.

While there have been no direct allegations of corruption in the licensing process, there's plenty of foul-smelling finger pointing that addresses the integrity of the commission's decisions.

Last month's licenses were awarded for the third time after legal challenges forced the process to start fresh two times.

The depositions would allow the plaintiffs to specifically question committee members about the process, which hasn't exactly been open and obvious to this point.

Judge Anderson entered an injunction halting any Integrated Facility Licenses moving forward after the December 12th awards were made. Attorneys for the plaintiffs may conduct six depositions with only five days' notice, and all of them must be done by January 19th, a very small window in the legal world.

Some have pondered why attorneys for the commission don't want their clients to have to answer questions under oath. But allowing depositions to move forward should bring some transparency to a process that has, at times, seemed cloak and dagger.

Sen. Larry Stutts, who represents District Six including Franklin County, has been a critic of the entire licensing process.

"You have a few people selecting a few applicants and to get selected is worth millions of dollars," Stutts told the FFP. "That opens up the floodgates for corruption.

"And I'm not sure some of this controversy isn't an intentional attempt to attack the process and then finally get the commission to say 'okay we'll just let everyone have licenses. You can only fight it so long. This is the first step toward legalizing marijuana for recreational use in our state and I remain opposed to that,'" Stutts added.

Council approves three-year renewal of municipal insurance policy

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville City Council approved the renewal of a three-year insurance policy with the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation, or AMIC.

The annual premium for the three-year quote will be \$319,781. The city receives a 2% discount by renewing the policy for three years.

AMIC is a non-profit mutual insurance company insuring local entities including cities, towns, utilities and municipal associations.

The action was taken at the council's January 2nd meeting. Other agenda items approved by the council included:

--declaring a copy/fax machine, an Epson copier and two HP LaserJet printers surplus property in the city's Municipal Court and authorized the sale of the same.

--accepted a letter of resignation from Russellville Police Officer Brianna Johnson and authorized advertisement to solicit job applications for a Patrol Officer.

--requested from the Retirement Systems of Alabama to submit retirement match payment for Andrea Ricketts.

--heard a report from Russellville Fire Department Chief Joe Mansell

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Women's Leadership Committee members with assembled bags for residents at Arabella Health Care, Russellville. L-R: Megan Murray, Shannon Murray, Yvonne Herring, Shirley Ezzell, Libby Daniel, Becky Hester, Carol Glass, Lauren & Annie Murray. Not pictured: Annette Sturdivant, Elizabeth Glass, Kathy Glass, Stephanie Glass.

The Franklin County Farmers Federation Women's Committee would like to thank each and every one of you who contributed to our annual "Cottons for Christmas" sock drive.

With your help we collected more than 275 pairs of socks and were able to gift each resident at Arabella Health Care, Russellville a nice gift bag which included 5-6 pairs of socks along with lotion for each of them as well.

The Committee members also provided extra gifts to 14 of the 44 Arabella Health Care residents who had little or no family.

We sincerely appreciate your generosity for this wonderful project.

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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 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.

Pastor 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.

Tennessee 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.

The Frog Pond Volunteer Fire Department is holding a fund raiser Gun Raffle with proceeds going to benefit the Frog Pond VFD. Tickets are \$10 or \$25 for 3 and may be purchased through Cash App or PayPal. Call 256-263-0825 for more information. One AR-15 and one Glock 19 Gen 5 will be given away. 16" AR-15 5.56/223 with 15" MHR. And Glock 19 Gen 5 9mm. Drawing will be held at the Fire Department on February 23, 2024, at 6 p.m.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES, RUSSELLVILLE, AL, 104 E. Lawrence St., Pastor Pearl Shelton, would like to invite you to our weekly Prayer Meeting every Monday evening at 5:30 p.m. Come join us as we pray together in unity and power! Anyone needing prayer please be sure to join us! Everyone is welcome!

New Ground will be in concert at North Russellville Baptist Church on Sunday, January 21, 2024, at 4 p.m. Everyone is invited. A love offering will be taken up. Church is located at 1401 Waterloo Road.

Community Action Partnership of North Alabama is now taking applications for Head Start and Early Head Start. Give your child a head start on kindergarten readiness. No-cost services for eligible families in a classroom setting, programs for children ages birth through four years old, priority points for children in specific need categories and prenatal services for pregnant women teens. Call 256-331-0162 for an appointment today.

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21 facts to help you battle through mental health issues

Stanley Popovich
For the FFP

I dealt with fear and anxiety for over twenty years and there are 21 facts that I discovered during my mental health struggles that can help anyone who struggles with fear and anxiety.

Knowing these important mental health facts can save someone you know a lot of time and money in the long run.

1. Getting help for your mental health is the best thing you can do.
2. Ignoring your mental health issues will only prolong the problem.
3. Running away from your mental health issues does not work.
4. There is no such thing as a quick fix when it comes to your mental health.
5. There is nothing wrong in asking for assistance for your anxieties and stresses.
6. Your situation is not hopeless regardless of what you may think.



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7. Focus on your recovery rather than trying to please others.
8. Go to the nearest hospital if you are experiencing a mental health crisis.
9. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health.
10. You have to make an effort in finding the answers to your mental health issues.
11. Focus on the facts of your situation rather than your fearful thoughts.

12. Joining a support group is a great way of finding people who can relate to you.

13. Follow the advice from the professionals, rather than your friends.

14. Do not try to manage your mental health problems all by yourself.

15. Determine the source of your anxieties and then find ways to overcome them.

16. Do not make assumptions regarding your current mental health situation.

17. Do not underestimate the power of God when it comes to your mental health.

18. Learning from your past mental health experiences will help you in the present.

19. Drugs and alcohol are not the answers. They just make things worse.

20. It takes practice in managing your mental health. Be patient but persistent.

21. Do not be afraid to ask questions when dealing with your mental health.

If you happen to struggle with fear, anxiety, or any other mental health related issues, it is important to admit that you have a problem and get some help.

Your doctor or other medical professionals in your area will know of some qualified mental health professionals who can give you some assistance.

The key to overcoming your mental health issues is to "learn" effective techniques to manage your anxieties and stresses and "applying" these skills to your life. The best way to learn these techniques is by talking to a mental health professional.

Everyone deals with stress and anxiety sometime in their life. You are not alone and there is nothing wrong with asking someone for advice on how to deal with these mental health related issues.

BIOGRAPHY

Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" which covers a variety of techniques that can drastically improve your mental health. For more information, please visit Stan's website at <http://www.managingfear.com>.



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After busy 2023, Russellville Police Department looking to add officers

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It was a busy 2023 for the Russellville Police Department and some statistics recently released by the department detail just how busy the year was.

From January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023, RPD received 10,636 calls for service, excluding traffic stops. That's an average of more than 29 calls per day.

RPD officers made 905 arrests, with 905 of those for felony charges. Felony convictions carry a prison sentence of at least one year and a day, while misdemeanor convictions carry a possible sentence of up to 12 months in jail.

There were 760 warrants executed by officers. Arrests included 297 drug related charges, 79 for domestic violence allegations, 120 driving under the influence charges, 133 retail theft charges, 26 resisting arrest charges and 31 vehicle/foot pursuits.

Officers worked an average of one motor vehicle accident per day, with a total of 370.

Officers made 4,754 traffic stops that resulted in 2,307 citations. An additional 3,512 written warnings were issued.

RPD Chief Chris Hargett said the 2023 numbers exemplify the work ethic of his officers and the need for the department to remain at full staff.

"This is some of what this department accomplished in 2023. The vast majority of this work was done by our patrol officers," Hargett said. "They are a motivated group of professionals dedicated to serving this community. We appreciate their efforts and the we appreciate the support of our community."

And Hargett said they're looking for men and women to join their ranks. The City of Russellville is now accepting applications for the position of Patrol Officer.

Starting pay for certified officers is \$20.54/hour, based on an 84-hour pay scale. That amounts to an annual salary of \$44,859, with overtime available.

For applicants not already certified, the city will send them to the academy with a starting pay of \$16.48/hour. Upon graduation, pay will increase to that of a certified officer.

Applications must be mailed and postmarked by January 26, 2024. Download an application at russellvillepd.org or pick one up at Russellville City Hall.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net.



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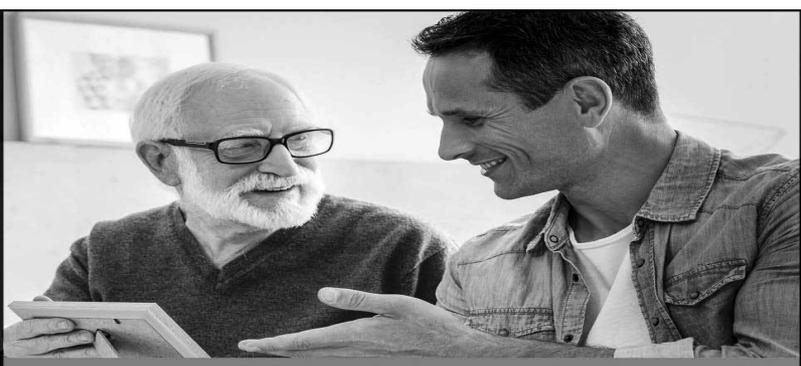
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Mon-Thur 8-5

'COUNCIL,' From Page 4

about the number of calls his department responded to during the period of December 23, 2023 through January 1, 2024. The department responded to 11 structure fires, 24 medical calls, three auto accidents and five brush fires during the nine-day period.

"We had some construction fires in those. We want to thank Bill Fuller and the Russellville Police Department for keeping the roads blocked on those calls," Mansell said. "We also appreciate our utility departments. They were right there when we needed them."

"A good fire to us is when we put it out in the same room it started in. We've got smoke detectors available at the station. All our citizens need to do is call us and we'll put them up. Most of the fires (from December 23-January 1) were during the day and there were no injuries from the fires," Mansell added.

--heard a report on the RFD's Helping Santa program, which provided toys for 260 children in December. Special thanks were extended to RPD Sergeant Brandi Whiteley for her assistance, as well as RFD Lieutenant Andy Devaney.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be Tuesday, January 17th with business meeting at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Russellville girls start 2024 with win over Belgreen

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School Lady Golden Tigers opened up 2024 with a win over in-county rival Belgreen, 56-52.

Russellville trailed the Lady Bulldogs 19-18 after one, but led by one, 30-29, at halftime.

The game remained close with Russellville holding a one-point lead after three quarters. The Lady Golden Tigers outscored Belgreen 16-13 in the final eight minutes to secure the win.

Ella Copeland led Russellville with 22 points. Desiree Medina had 14, Laila Hill seven, Avery Watts and Jacey Moore five apiece and Jemma Moore added three to round out the scoring.

Dacota Green scored 19 to lead Belgreen. Morgan Lauderdale and Makenna Fisher added 10 apiece. Carson Hovater scored six, Bryn Scott four and Lilliana Willingham three.

Russellville's junior varsity girls also hosted Belgreen January 2nd and notched a 50-26 win.

Lourdes Ellis' 14 points led the scoring for Russellville. Blevyn Sappington had 10, along with Bella Malone. Alexia Groce scored seven and Kaylee Suggs and Hayleigh Chaney had three apiece.

See, 'RUSSELLVILLE,' Page 12

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Experienced RHS boys soccer team begins 2024 season with high expectations

Michael Rice
 Franklin Free Press

As Russellville High School varsity boys soccer coach Trey Stanford enters his 8th season at the school, he's looking for his team to use their depth as a motivating factor this spring.

The Golden Tigers were very junior heavy last season and lost only three starters from last year's 15-3-2 team, including a 4-3 playoff loss to Guntersville High School.

"We have several starters returning this year that are real competitors," Stanford said.

One of those is senior Erik Jacobo who is the starting striker for the team.

"Jacobco is very talented. He had a great season last year and he'll be an absolute playmaker for us," Stanford said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Last season's RHS boys soccer team.

Jacobco finished last season with 13 goals and six assists.

See, 'SOCCER,' page 13

Phinizee one of three finalists for 5A Back of the Year after standout sophomore season

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

After his first year as a starting running back for the Russellville Golden Tigers, sophomore Cam Phinizee continues to achieve more firsts, the latest coming when he was named one of three finalists for The Alabama Sports Writers Association's Class 5A back of the year.

Phinizee will learn whether he wins the award at a January 16th luncheon banquet in Montgomery.

Phinizee became the first Golden Tiger to be named All-State after his sophomore year. He hopes to follow former RHS standout Brent Calloway, the last Golden Tiger to be a finalist after his 2010 season. Calloway went on to receive the 5A back of the year accolade that year.

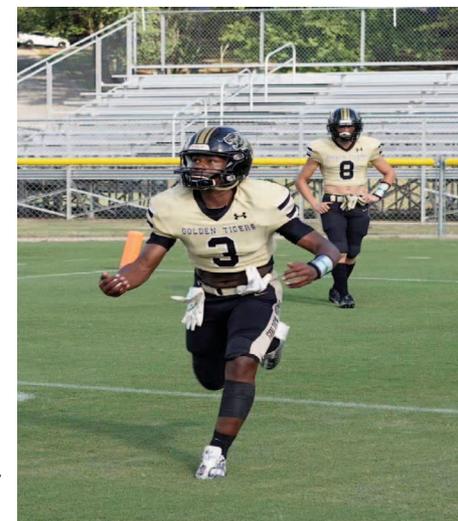
With 266 rushing attempts in the 2023 season, Phinizee ran for 2,389 yards, an average of 8.98 yards per carry. Additionally, his 40 touchdowns were also a first, as Phinizee set the school record.

Phinizee was recently named Times-Daily

4A-7A Player of the Year. Two other Golden Tigers were named to the Times-Daily 4A-7A First Team,

including senior defensive lineman Matthew James and senior line-backer Malachi Duncan.

Junior offensive lineman Neyland Baker, senior quarter-back Harrison Burch and junior kicker/punter Manny Martinez were named Times-Daily 4A-7A honorable mention.



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'RUSSELLVILLE,' From Page 11

Russellville traveled to West Point High School Friday to resume area play and came home with a 64-48 loss to the Warriors. West Point built a seven point lead after one, led by 17 at halftime and 15 after three periods. Copeland's 18 points led Coach Jermaine Groce's team. Hill had 12, Jacey Moore six, Jemma Moore five, Watts three, and Sadie Odom and Alexia Groce two. Russellville, 7-9, 1-1, was scheduled to face Brewer Tuesday, January 9th.

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'SOCCER,' From Page 11

Another returning starter is Miguel Andres, the team's keeper. "Andres played several years and has always contributed very well," Stanford said.

Gabriel Tomas is the returning center back for the Golden Tigers and is coming off of a great 2023 campaign.

The Golden Tigers will also return two very talented players that had to miss last season, Martin Tomas and Ronaldo Augustin.

"Both of those guys are star defensive players," Stanford said.

Brian Lara is another key contributor, who was selected to participate in the AHSAA's North-South All Star Game last season.

Lara finished the season with 23 goals and six assists.

Stanford will also rely on some talented young players this spring, including Isais Jose.

"Jose is an outstanding player. Manny Martinez is a returning striker who contributed in the state championship win when he was a 9th grader," Stanford said.

"We're also returning Erik Jacinto who played wing last season. Jacinto plays hard and no matter what he's doing he gives 100 percent," Stanford said.

"This season will be interesting with all the young guys who can play. If we can find the right combination, we will make a good run in the playoffs this year," Stanford said.

The Golden Tigers first game will be on the road at Tharptown High School on February 6th.

"Tharptown is always a very talented team. We'll get a good look at our team right out of the gate with this match," Stanford said.

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

Belgreen girls begin 2024 with loss to Russellville, win over Tharptown

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

The Belgreen Lady Bulldogs evened their 2024 record at 1-1 after a 57-32 road win over the Tharptown Wildcats January 5th.

Coach Chad Green's team was led by Dacota Green's 16 points. Makenna Fisher added nine and Carson Hovater and Lilliana Willingham had eight apiece. Morgan Lauderdale had seven points for Belgreen.

The Lady Bulldogs pulled away early after finishing the first period with a 23-2 lead.

Dacota Green finished the night as the lead scorer with 16 points. Makenna Fisher finished the night with nine points.

Tharptown was led by Angeleah Smith's 20-point performance.

The Lady Bulldogs' next regular season game is at home against the Red Bay Tigers on January 16th. The Lady Bulldogs' next area game will be against the Vina Red Devils.

Both teams will participate in the Franklin County Tournament this week.

RHS junior set to represent Franklin County at Alabama Distinguished Young Women competition

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Russellville High School junior Stella Hill will represent Franklin County later this month in the Distinguished Young Women of Alabama program in Montgomery.

Hill was selected as Franklin County's Distinguished Young Women representative last year, which advanced her to the state program set for January 19-20.

She is the daughter of Eric and Tara Hill. Stella is president of RHS' Health Occupation Students of America, a varsity cheerleader and member of Family Community and Careers Leaders of America, Future Business Leaders of America, Mu Alpha Theta, RCS Youth Leadership Academy, National Honor Society, National Technical Honors Society and the ACT 30-plus Club.

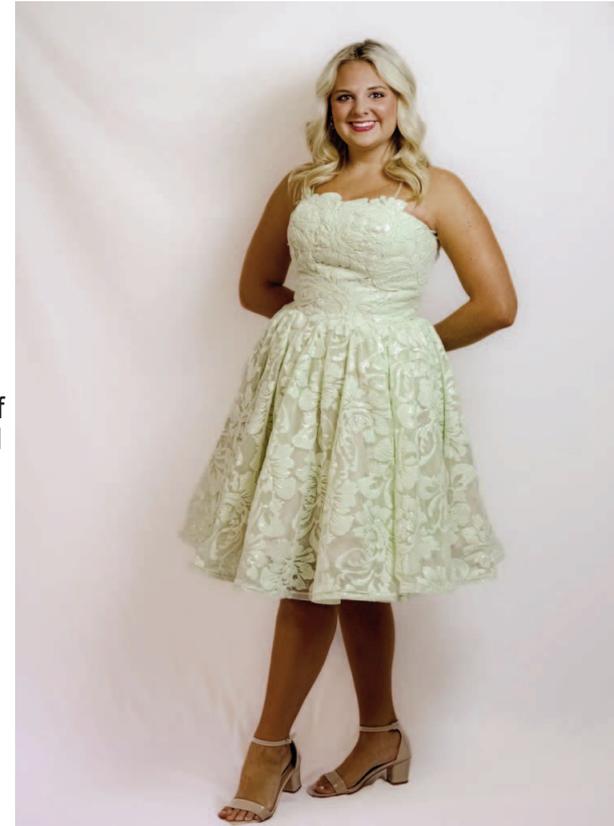
She plans to attend the University of North Alabama with the goal of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

Distinguished Young Women was founded in 1958 as a way to reward the accomplishments of high school girls seeking to pursue higher education. Scholarships are awarded at the state and national level.

It's the oldest and largest scholarship program of its kind for high school girls. More than 780,000 young women have competed in the program and received more than \$118 million in cash scholarships.

Participants are scored in five categories: Scholastic, interview, talent, self-expression and fitness. Hill will put her dance talents on display at the state competition.

To learn more about the Distinguished Young Women program, visit www.distinguishedyw.org.



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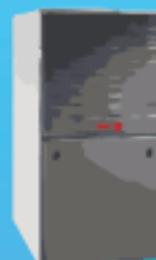
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REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

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Reader offers prayerful poem for new year

“A New Year’s Prayer”
By Katie Martin

For peace to overflow my heart and into the world,
For faith not to waver,
For holiness, abounding and abundant,
For joy and love to take root in our hearts,
For the church to grow, and grow stronger,
For us to know there is hope and purpose,
For children to know they are loved,
For families to cling to one another,
For forgiveness through brokenness and tears,
For jubilation when all is right in the end,
For Hope and Promise to be believed,
For the Majesty of the Lord to be seen,
For this I pray.

The above poem was submitted by reader Katie Martin. We invite your submissions, original works only, to the Franklin Free Press.

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