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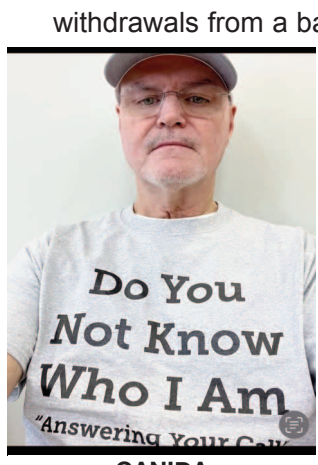
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Willis still supports Canida contract extension

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When three members of the Russellville Electric Board voted to extend Manager Charles Canida's contract on August 17, 2020, meeting, it was a very different time for Canida and the board.

REB Chairman Nick Willis, one of the three board members to approve Canida's five-year contract extension, recently told the FFP he still stands behind his vote, even with a lengthy list of revelations over the past 15 months including cash



CANIDA

withdrawals from a bank account Canida hid from the public. Since November 2021, the public has learned about Canida attending eight-hour conferences where

See 'WILLIS,' Page 9

Born to play: Globetrotters offer Winston chance to see the world

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It was two years ago when the Harlem Globetrotters made Lucius Siran "Too Tall" Winston a full-time member of the internationally famous team.

But those who've known the Russellville native realize he's been a full-time basketball player since he was old enough to walk.

Winston grew up with a basketball in his hand. While his older brothers' teams played games at the Russellville Recreation Center, Siran would grab a basketball and practice dribbling on the sidelines.

More than once, the three-year old would be scolded for interrupting the

real game on the court. But all that dribbling paid off, mightily.

"Basketball has always been part of my life, from watching PJ and Bobby (his brothers) playing rec league, to when I finally got to play rec league, to school, AAU (Amateur Athletic Union), college and now with the Globetrotters," Winston said. "I'm thankful for every opportunity I've had and I thank everyone who's been a part of my life mentoring me and giving me the chance to play the game I love."

"I thank each of them for what they gave to me," Winston added.

Winston is featured in a new video produced by The Sport Dealer, posted January 31, 2023, on its Facebook page. And there's a lot

See 'WINSTON,' Page 7

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**Cody Eugene "Hot Sauce" Yearwood, 29,
of Russellville, passed away on Sunday,
February 05, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel
assisted the family.**

**April Elaine Mullinix, 55, of Hoehnwald,
TN (formerly of Tuscumbia), passed
away on Monday, February 06, 2023.
Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the
family.**

**Jerry Kyeth Boyles, 78 of Haleyville,
Alabama passed away February 7, 2023.
Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the
family.**

**Carol Butler Harris, 71, of Russellville,
passed away on Monday, February 6,
2023. Pinkard Funeral Home of
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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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Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Kiel announces Space Camp scholarships opportunities

Submitted

State Representative Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) announced today that two middle-school students who live in Alabama House District 18 will receive scholarships to attend a special Space Camp program free of charge. This includes students who live in Colbert and Franklin counties.

"The importance of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) cannot be emphasized enough. I want to be sure that our students in rural Alabama have the same opportunity to attend Space Camp as other kids in the state", said Rep Kiel.

Students ages 12 to 14 may apply for Space Academy for Leading Students in Alabama, or SALSA. A male and female student living in House District 18 will receive a scholarship to attend SALSA, which promotes science, technology, engineering and mathematics education along with leadership skills.

To be eligible for a SALSA scholarship, students must apply at www.spacecamp.com/salsa or through their school counselor. Representative Kiel has notified all school systems in District 18 and they have the information needed to apply. Applications will be accepted through Friday, March 31, 2023 at 11:59 pm.

The two students chosen will be notified by the end of the school year and the camp will take place in July 2023. Each scholarship includes tuition, room and board for the Space Academy program. Travel to and from the U.S. Space & Rocket Center is not included.

During their week long program, students will learn the history of the space program, learn to work together as a team to solve complex problems using STEM concepts and critical thinking, learn to train like an astronaut using authentic simulators, and embark on their own simulated space mission to the International Space Station, the Moon or Mars.

This life-changing experience inspires students to get engaged in mathematics and science, while exposing them to career paths in the aerospace industry and beyond where these STEM and 21st century learning skills are used.

"I would suggest that parents encourage students who are either interested in STEM now, or students who might become interested in STEM due to this camp, to apply immediately. This experience might open the eyes of a future scientist, astronaut, doctor, or engineer," said Kiel.

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Opinion: REB document policy needs immediate change

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to inspecting and/or copying public documents, the Alabama Open Records Act provides the right of every citizen to “inspect and take a copy of any public writing of this state, except as otherwise expressly provided by statute.”

Unfortunately, at the urging of its Manager Charles Canida, the Russellville Electric Board recently made it more expensive and difficult for the public to access records the law dictates they have a right to see.

Alabama's Open Records Act lacks any teeth for enforcement, though, and that can open the door for some public agencies to be less than forthcoming with public records requests.

Last month, Gov. Kay Ivey signed an executive order making the process of obtaining public records more accessible and affordable for all executive branch agencies.

Her order requires executive branch agencies to establish a portal for the public to file requests online, and a 15-day response limit for simple requests, 45-day limit for complicated requests and a maximum of \$20/hour research and \$.50 per page copying fee.

Conversely, Canida recommended last year that the REB increase its per page copy fee for public records requests, from \$.50 to \$1.

He even had the audacity to tell the board he wasn't sure the \$1 per page fee would cover REB's cost to make one copy.

“I think it will be close. I'll have to talk with Amy (Rickard) about that. But it's a good starting point,” Canida said.

Last month, the Franklin Free Press made an Open Records Act request for Canida's 2022 W-2, along with two other W-2s. Additionally, since Canida has provided three different copies of his employment contract, none of which matches the board's action in 2020 when it extended Canida's contract, the January 2023 Open Records Act request asked for a copy of his current contract.

Once again, the contract provided (5 pages) did not match the board's minutes from its 2020 meeting, but that conversation is for another day.

The request consisted of four documents, each of which was readily avail-

able. No research was required.

Just make copies of three tax forms and a five-page contract. It was that simple. But with Canida, nothing comes easily, particularly when it comes to the local newspaper knowing his salary.

When we went to the REB attorney's office to pick up the eight pages of documents, we received an invoice for \$73.97, payable in advance of receiving any documents.

It included \$8 for copying eight pages, and 1.5 hours of 'research' by Canida and one other employee. Although the employee names weren't listed on the invoice, one employee's 30 minutes of research to copy eight pages cost \$39.45, which comes out to \$78.90/hour and a base salary of \$164,112.

With a rate that outrageous, Canida would be the lone employee taking in that much money.

The second employee's time, one hour, was billed at \$26.52/hour, for an annual base salary of \$55,161.60.

This invoice was nothing but legalized extortion, with no provision to question the cost. Either pay or go away.

What research was needed to make copies of three tax forms, or an employment contract you've previously provided in response to a separate Open Records Act request?

This invoice comes out to \$9.25/page. This outrageous charge is exactly what some public agencies do to prevent the people they serve from seeing their records.

Do most people in the Russellville Electric Board service area have the financial means to pay \$9.25/page?

Or is this ridiculous rate saved for the local newspaper that keeps a watchful eye on Canida and the REB?

Either way, it's wrong. It's shameful. And it should be criminal.

This is exactly what Ivey wants to eliminate—public agencies charging usury rates that most citizens can't afford.

In 2021, Sen. Arthur Orr introduced a bill that would have changed the Open Records Act for agencies at all levels of government. The bill would have set time deadlines and cost ceilings for 'research' and copying. Unfortunately, the bill died before coming up for a vote.

He's announced plans to refile it this session. And Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) has told the FFP he supports legislation to strengthen the public's right to inspect public documents.

For Canida, whose compensation package including salary, AFLAC insurance, retirement and bonuses, tops the \$200,000 mark, \$9.25/page wouldn't impact his financial bottom line.

But for the rest of us, it does just that. And the board not only allows it, they increased the cost of obtaining REB records.

It's yet another example of Canida's and the board's complete detachment and lack of understanding of the people in their service area and the demographics it comprises.

And it needs to be stopped.

The board should, at its next meeting, rescind the current Open Records Policy, and replace it with the guidelines contained in the governor's executive order.

Will that happen? Not likely. There's hope through legislative action though. And the public should be suspicious of any elected official who doesn't support making public access to public records easier and more affordable.

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Russellville BOE okays LED screen purchase

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved the purchase of a full color, RGB LED scoreboard screen at its January 30th meeting.

The screen will be purchased from Scoretime Scoreboard Sales, who submitted the low bid amount of \$60,290.

In other agenda items, the board:

--approved a 12 month contract with SANOA Consulting, a public health and education consulting firm.

--approved a trip request for RHS track to attend meets as scheduled.

--approved a facility use request for RHS Auditorium on May 20, 2023, for Addie's Flip, Tip and Tap for a dance recital, with practice date on May 19, 2023.

--approved the following personnel moves:

--Resignation in Position: Corey Flanagan, RMS teacher and coach, effective December 16, 2022.

--Temporary Employment: Jacob Wallace, Jessica McSpadden, Challice Langston, Jessica Cummings and Alissa Moore, 21st CCLC teachers, Chloe Reynolds Young, temporary employment to fill Madison Thompson's leave of absence, McKayla Aswell, temporary employment to fill Kayla Thorne's leave of absence, Katie Brooke Cummings, 21st CCLC Aide, Challice Langston, Tyrone Wilson, Kellie Sturdivant, teachers Afterschool Learning Program, Magda Lopez, aide Afterschool Learning Program, Gracie Martin, temporary employment to fill Alannah Hill's leave of absence, Rebecca Tedford, temporary employment to fill Sara McDill's leave of absence.

--Leave of Absence: Joana Macias, Aide at WES, from Jan. 3-16, 2023, Yesenia DeLaRosa, Aide at WES, from Jan. 10-Feb. 17, 2023, Tori Padron, WES teacher, from May 1-26, 2023, Doris Vincent, bus driver, from March 24-31, 2023 and Alannah Hill, RMS teacher, from Feb. 6-March 31, 2023.

--Employment in Position: A.J. Vang, RMS teacher.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education will be Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023, at 8 a.m.

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 **T**he Senior Center at Phil Campbell is under new management. The Town of Phil Campbell would like to invite and encourage everyone in our area that is 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 8:00 a.m. to 12:00. A delicious lunch is served around 11:00 a.m. Come on out and join in on the games or just sit and have a cup of coffee and socialize!! So if you, your parents, grandparents or your neighbor is 60 or older, pass the word and come out and enjoy a morning of fun.


 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host a "I Promise" Ladies Conference, free for ladies of all ages, March 10, 2023, from 6-9 p.m., and March 11, 2023, from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Come for a meal, music and a message! Church is located at 25100 Highway 24, Russellville.


 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County is hosting "Love Month" all through February. Their speaker for every Sunday in February will be Jennifer Welch. She will be speaking about love. You won't want to miss this! The church is located at 25100 Highway 24 West in Russellville. Everyone invited!

 **T**he next meeting of the Franklin County Community Development Commission will be Friday, March 31, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex. All grant requests must be submitted to a member of the commission by Friday, March 24, 2023, at 12 p.m. Commission members include Brad Bolton, Jeremy Campbell and David Grissom.

 **M**y Father's House Ministries will host a Revival from February 19-24 and February 26-March 2, 2023. Sunday services at 5 p.m., Monday-Friday at 6:30 p.m. Invite or bring your family and friends! Revival Ministers include Evangelist Mickey Wilson, Sis. Pam Patterson, Bro. Paul Colburn and many more! Praise and Worship from Sis. Kay Quade, MFH Music Minister along with Special Singing. Pastor Pearl Shelton and Pastor James Williams invite you and your family to attend. Call 256-460-1376 for more information or if you need a ride.

 **B**elgreen High School will hold Kindergarten registration on Friday, March 31, 2023, from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., in the Belgreen High School Library. Parents or guardians of children who are 5 years old on or before September 1, 2023, may register their child. Please bring child's birth certificate, Social Security card, proof of residency and updated immunization records. If you are unable to attend, please register your child through the online registration. It is preferable to register kindergarten students BEFORE the end of May to account for accurate numbers for the upcoming school year.

 **T**he Kingsmen Quartet will be in concert Sunday Night March 12, 2023 at 6:00 pm at North Russellville Baptist Church 1401 Waterloo Road Russellville. \$10.00 per person will be taken at the door.

 Children under 12 are free. Doors open at 5:00 pm. No love offering will be taken. For more information call Randy Pike at 256 436-3422.

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For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net. Send your letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

'WINSTON,' from Page 1

about Winston packed into that three-minute video.

After graduating from Russellville High School, Winston was a two-year starter for Marion Military Institute. He transferred to Tuskegee University, where he earned All-Academic honors and averaged 13 points and five assists per game for the Golden Tigers. Winston earned his degree in Business Administration.

Ball handling and dribbling—those are Winston's meal tickets. And they carried him to the Globetrotters in 2017. First dubbed 'Turbo' due to his speed and agile dribbling, Winston made the team but it was on a part-time basis.

Now, the 5'10" guard travels full-time with the Globetrotters' White Team, coached by Globetrotter great Sweet Lou Dunbar. The team's schedule has taken Winston to Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom and Mexico internationally. The rest of the time the Globetrotters play a full performance schedule across the United States. And that includes "Too Tall," as he's now known, with his

You might not know what all those mean, but they all relate to his expertise in dribbling and shooting. His long-range skills, including a backwards half-court shot, are often featured in the Globetrotters' shows.

Winston is working on a Master's degree from Louisiana State University and he helps his brother PJ coach basketball at Covenant Christian High School. It's a full plate but basketball remains the main dish. And Winston loves what he's doing.

"As long as my body stays healthy, and I can continue playing at the level I'm at, and as long as the Globetrotters will have me, I want to keep doing this," Winston said. "I love what I'm doing and I hope I'll continue to make my family proud."

After his career with the red, white and blue basketball ends, Winston plans to remain involved with the sport he loves.

"I still want to be part of sports, whether it's working with kids or doing accounting work in a team's front office," Winston said. "Definitely something where I'm still part of the game, maybe working in a community with kids and giving them the opportunities I didn't think I would have the chance to experience."

"Who would think a kid from Russellville would get the chance to travel the world dribbling a basketball as part of Harlem Globetrotters? So any way I can help kids achieve their success would be amazing," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO

specialty trick shots and dribbling skills.

Winston holds four world records. You'll find him in the Guinness Book of World Records for most figure eight dribbles in one minute, most three-point shots made by a pair in one minute, most layups in one minute and most consecutive alley oops in one minute.

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Health ratings okay for 64 of 65 businesses

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

64 of the 65 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the period of December 1, 2022 through January 30, 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.

64 of the 65 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 100, shared by Red Bay Hospital, 211 Hospital Road, Red Bay, and Bulldog Nutrition, LLC, 15485 Hwy. 24, Russellville.

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

- Bay City Nutrition, 910 4th Street, Red Bay, 87.
- Best Western Breakfast, 13770 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- Big Star Russellville, 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 99.
- Burger King, 15455 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
- Cano's Tienda y Taqueria, 10047 Hwy. 75, Russellville, 90.
- Cedar Creek Chevron, 11477 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 81.
- Coco Michoacana 2, 318 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 91.
- Daily Bread BBQ, 305 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 92.
- Dollar General, 212 4th St. SW, Red Bay, 91.
- Dollar Tree, 15485 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- El Buen Sabor, 104 Montgomery St., Russellville, 85.
- El Patron, 13665 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 89.
- El Quetzal Buena Vista, 118 East Franklin St., Russellville, 89.
- El Quetzal Buena Vista Bakery/Rest., 118 E. Franklin St., Russellville, 94.
- Frosty Inn Drive-In, 12805 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 92.
- Gas Mart North, 17060 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94.
- Hilltop Diner, LLC, 808 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville, 95.
- Jack's, 521 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 92.
- Jack's, 13640 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 86.
- Jay Raja, Inc., 109 Madison St. NE, Russellville, 89.
- Kidz Korner, 14131 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- Little Caesar's Pizza, 13655 Hwy. 43 Ste. A, Russellville, 90.
- Little Divas and Dudes Daycare, LLC, 1100 4th St. NE, Red Bay, 94.
- Little Tigers Preschool, 1003 E. Lawrence St., Russellville, 98.
- Los Primos, 105 Marion St., Russellville, 96.
- M&H Food Mart, 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 87.
- Mamita's Mexican Restaurant, 17901 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- McDonald's, 15254 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 92.
- McDonald's, 606 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 97.
- Mexico Bakery, 111 Franklin St. SW, Russellville, 93.
- New Freedom Daycare, 508 St. Clair St., Russellville, 96.
- Panaderia Adonai, 311 S. Jackson Ave., 94.
- Papa John's Pizza, 14520 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94.
- Phil Campbell Deli Mart, 3515 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 95.
- Piggly Wiggly Deli, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 93.
- Piggly Wiggly Market, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 98.
- Pilgrim's Place, 1314 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 92.
- Pizza Hut, 13450 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- Priceless Food-Deli, 14001 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
- Priceless Foods, 14001 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Quick Stop No. 7, 606 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 94.
- Red Bay Nutrition, 102 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 98.
- Red Bay Senior Center, 115 5th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 98.
- Russellville Nutrition, 14130 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.

- Russellville Senior Center, 238 Montgomery St., Russellville, 98.
 - Sonic Drive In, 15376 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 88.
 - Southside Quick Mart, LLC, 15376 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 90.
 - Steak Ops Russellville, dba Doe's, 114 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 94.
 - Stockyard Cafe, 14330 Hwy. 243, Russellville, 93.
 - Subway, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.
 - Taco Bell, 13831 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 92.
 - The Grind Cafe & Coffee Shop, 13760 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 89.
 - The Hang Out Nutrition, 13684 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
 - The Ville Nutrition, 112 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 99.
 - Tienda Latina Mi Refugio, 412 Madison St. NE, Russellville, 99.
 - Vulcan Food Mart, 28485 Hwy. 24, Russellville, 92.
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- Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

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Council okays pyrotechnic contract

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved an agreement with Alabama Pyrotechnics, LLC, to once again provide fireworks for the annual Fourth of July Jam at Sloss Lake event.

The council approved the action at its February 6th meeting. The cost of the fireworks show will be \$35,000, and the city will pay \$25,000 on or before February 10, 2023.

In other agenda items, the council:
--approved an agreement with JMCM Consulting to handle preparation and filing of a grant application under the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

--approved the resignation of Russellville Police Officer Kerry Hallman, and declared a vacancy for a Patrol Officer. Additionally, the council declared vacancies for two RPD Lieutenant vacancies, one Captain and one Sergeant position.


--authorized submission of the Rebuild Alabama grant application in the amount of \$250,000. If approved, project funds would be used for leveling, resurfacing and striping on Clay Avenue from Adams Street to Summit Drive.

The next meeting of the Russellville City Council will be Monday, February 22, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

PUBLIC NOTICE

RUSSELLVILLE HOUSING AUTHORITY SECTION 8 (HCV PROGRAM) IS NOW ACCEPTING NAMES FOR A WAITING LIST. COME IN THE OFFICE MONDAY FEBRUARY 13TH THRU MONDAY MARCH 20TH 7:00 AM UNTIL 4:00 PM TO DO A PRE-APPLICATION. MESSAGES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

'WILLIS,' from Page 1

ratepayers paid for his four or five night vacations in a spacious beach condo, Canida's purchases (without board approval) of thousands of dollars in gourmet chocolates, high-end knives, tickets to Dollywood, unexplained online purchases from a boutique and numerous other examples of questionable spending.

Canida also sent a bizarre selfie photo to Russellville City Councilman Darren Woodruff while the council was conducting a work session last year with Canida sitting in the audience. Canida drove his luxury Denali to that council meeting.

Last year, Canida recommended the board increase electricity rates for a community already suffering economic hardship from the COVID-19 pandemic, based on his claim of 'declining revenue.' Just five months earlier, ratepayers footed the bill for Canida's new \$84,000 luxury SUV Denali.

The FFP reported last fall about an account Canida opened in October 2017 at Alabama Central Credit Union with a \$25,000 initial deposit in the name of the Russellville Electric Board.

From October 2017 through the summer of 2021, more than \$8,700 was withdrawn from the account in cash or in gift cards, all of which took place without the knowledge or approval of the board, Willis said.

Canida's Executive Assistant Sherry Smith and former REB employee Harlan L. Winston II were listed as joint owners on the ACCU account when it was opened. Winston told the FFP he never made any withdrawal from the account.

Smith did not respond to a request from the FFP for comment. Canida did not respond to an interview request either.

Cash, including a \$3,500 withdrawal in December 2019, was never accounted for and never explained to the board or the public. Canida had the account closed, again without board approval, on March 1, 2022. Only \$16,546.18 remained in the ACCU of the original \$25,000 deposit.

When the FFP made an Open Records Act request for all REB bank records in December 2021, Canida withheld the existence of the ACCU account, something the board later learned about.

Even with these revelations, Willis said he has no regrets about extending Canida's contract.

"I have no concern as a board member," Willis told the FFP in a January 18, 2023, interview. "Most of what is out there is partial truths, partial accusations. Things are misconstrued from what really was going on."

As for the hidden ACCU account, Willis said he was unaware of cash withdrawals being made but he was aware the account existed and Canida listed the balance of the account each month in board members' packets.

"Everybody on board was aware of the Alabama Central account and the CB&S Bank account," Willis said. "Why you (the FFP) were not given the ACCU records I can't answer that. The account was opened before my time on the board."

"I did not know any cash was pulled out of the account. I never heard (Canida) say he had done that or was going to do that. The account was there and we saw a balance each month," Willis added.

Willis was specifically asked whether he knew about ratepayer funds being used to purchase gift cards or make cash withdrawals.

"I had no idea that was being done. We did not see monthly statements of the account. One month it might have \$25,000 and one month \$20,000. We only saw the end results," Willis said. "The fact that gift cards were bought out of it, it is what it is. If I knew cash withdrawals were coming out of there, that shouldn't be happening."

"There's no reason for anyone to handle cash. That's a legitimate concern," he added.

Willis also said he did not receive any cash or gift cards purchased from the ACCU account.

Last year, REB board members paid back more than \$28,800 in illegal bonuses which violated the maximum compensation they could receive under Alabama law. These bonuses, labeled 'performance and safety incentives' by Canida, were paid to board members at Canida's direction, with assurances he had personally checked the legality of the bonus payments.

As for Canida's current employment status, there remain unanswered questions about that as well. Canida has provided three different contracts in response to a request for his current employment contract. And none of them match the five-year extension Willis and the board approved in August 2020. Minutes from that meeting also state the

board would discuss Canida's compensation under the five-year extension when his contract at the time expired in December 2022, something Willis said was never done.

"The compensation to be honest was never brought back up or discussed. So it's remaining the same rate as his former contract," Willis said. "The five percent (annual raises for Canida) are still in place. It's just an extension of his original contract with the same terms and conditions. However, he has not been given a pay increase. It's in there for five percent, but has not been accepted. His pay is frozen right now."

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

Career expo set for Feb. 15th

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When Melissa McHenry talks with Franklin County high school seniors, she's often surprised about how few of them have defined career plans.

McHenry, one of Franklin County Schools' two Career Technical Coaches, along with Jennifer Cook, said that's why they are starting earlier introducing students to career opportunities.

The February 15th Career Expo will afford Franklin County sophomores and juniors the chance to learn about more than 35 industries, companies, and governmental and/or military careers in and around northwest Alabama.

"So many of our seniors don't have a clue what they want to do after graduation. That's why we're doing some job shadowing with some students and doing career interest surveys to at least get an idea of what they might want to do," McHenry said.

Wednesday's expo will be at the A.W. Todd Centre from 8:30-11:30 a.m. 535 students from all Franklin County high schools will learn about each of the vendors and career opportunities they have.

McHenry said the response from businesses was positive and most gladly accepted the invitation to participate.

"Some of the ones in desperate need of employees were very excited to hear about what we're doing," McHenry, in her first year as Career Coach, said. "Most were very good about participating. It's a challenge right now to get good employees."

Some of the participants scheduled to attend include the Air&Space Force, the National Guard, the United States Army, Go Vertical! Aviation, the Machinists Apprenticeship program, Tiffin Motor Homes, Pilgrim's, Kith Kitchens, Kontoor, Russellville Hospital and more.

Many of these businesses are looking for students seeking employment after high school graduation. Franklin County Schools, in partnership with Northwest-Shoals Community College, offers dual enrollment courses that provide necessary training and certification for some jobs.

Some will even pay for college if they need it for their particular job. Some local schools have co-op programs where students can take their academic courses in the morning and work in the afternoon. G&G Steel, in partnership with Phil Campbell High School, offers students the opportunity to work for the company while in high school, and if students complete what is required of them, they have a full-time job waiting for them.

The Career Expo is part of Franklin County Schools' efforts to promote February as Career and Technical Education Month.

"The Career Expo is a great way for our students to see what some area businesses have to offer them after graduation," said Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton. "It continues to grow and we are very proud of that."



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Saving the best for last: Vina boys set to face Covenant Christian

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It was a night of firsts for the Vina boys varsity basketball team last Tuesday as the Red Devils defeated Phillips to advance to the 1A Area 14 Tournament finals.

The Red Devils, seeded #4 among the four teams in the tournament, knocked off the host team Phillips Bears 71-67. Vina's 51-49 loss to Hackleburg Friday evening was the program's first Area Championship appearance in more than 35 years after its first playoff win in 35 seasons.

In the win over Phillips, Hunter Griffith led all scorers with a 30-point night, which included sinking 8 of 9 free throws. Conner Davidson had 14 and Nate Stidham 12 for Vina, which led 17-9 after one quarter.

That lead was cut to five, at 27-22, at half-time. But Coach Randy Barnes' team put themselves in great position after their 20-15 scoring advantage in the third period.

Phillips exploded for 30 points in the final period, but Vina racked up 24 points of its own, including nine points from the free throw line. Griffith was a perfect 5-5 from the line in the final period.

Brayden Ricketts led Phillips with 19 points. Bryant Saylor had 17 and Lathen Burton 14.

HACKLEBURG 51—VINA 49:

In a tight game, Vina's fourth quarter rally

See, 'VINA,' page 12

Golden Tigers grab 5A Area 15 title

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Golden Tigers clinched the 5A Area 15 title this past Friday with a 62-61 victory over Lawrence County.

The Golden Tigers held a two-point lead at the end of the first quarter, 15-13.

Both TJ King and Braylon Vincent finished the first quarter with four each to lead the Golden Tigers.

"We didn't shoot particularly well. We went two for 21 at the three point line which allowed the game to stay close. We had multiple opportunities to push out and take control of the game and we didn't," RHS head coach Patrick



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASCOW
Braylon Vincent attempts a dunk against Lawrence County.

Odom said.

By halftime, it seemed the Golden Tigers would pull away,

leading 35-28.

"We led the whole game until the very last minute when they

scored the tying basket. We ultimately found a way to make it out still alive," Odom said.

"We found a way to win with a lot of things going wrong. I'm proud of our kids and happy for our program to be able to play a subregional game at home this Tuesday night."

King was the top scorer for the Golden Tigers with 15 points.

The Golden Tigers face 5A Area 16 runner-up East Limestone February 14th to decide who makes it to Wallace State Community College for Regionals.

Belgreen girls area champs again

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

Last Thursday night, the Belgreen Lady Bulldogs defeated Hackleburg in the area championship for Class 1A Area 14, 71-48.

Coach Chad Green's team improved to 23-8 with the win.

Hackleburg jumped out ahead within the first few minutes of the game after the top two scorers for the Bulldogs found themselves in foul trouble.

Noelle Willingham had two fouls within the first two minutes of the game. Also Dakota Green had two early fouls.

This forced Green to turn to his bench and ask some younger players to contribute in a high-pressure setting.

Carson Hovater came in and scored seven points and contributed blocked shots and two

steals.

Lilly Green came off the bench and hit seven three-pointers and finished the game with 21 points.

"I thought Hackleburg came out and played well. They were hustling and getting to the ball quick," Green said.

"Their post player, Jordan Ware, had 22 points on us in the first half. Taylor Cooper also came out swinging for Hackleburg," Green added.

At the half Belgreen led 43-20, after an 18-12 scoring advantage in the second quarter.

In the second half, Belgreen controlled the floor finished the game with a 71-48 win. There's no time to celebrate, though, in the state basketball playoffs as the Lady Bulldogs immediately began preparing for their next opponent.

The Lady Bulldogs' season ended Monday evening with a 48-44 loss to Shoals Christian.

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'VINA,' from Page 11

wasn't enough to overcome Hackleburg in the 1A Area 14 Championship.

Vina led 11-6 after the first quarter, but an 18-point second put the Panthers ahead at halftime, 24-21. Hackleburg expanded its lead to six, 40-34, going into the fourth quarter.

Vina outscored the Panthers 15-11 in the final eight minutes, but lost the game by two.

Davidson led the Red Devils with 18 points. Griffith had 16 and Stidham nine, seven of which came in the fourth quarter. The loss snapped a four-game win streak for Vina, but the team continues to play its best basketball as the playoff move along.

Hackleburg defeated Belgreen's boys, 29-28, to reach the championship. That loss ended the Bulldogs' season at 11-17.

The Bulldogs were led by Braycen Johnson's 13 points. Austin James had eight.

Hackleburg was paced by Jaquan Reeder's game-high 15.

Belgreen led 13-8 after one quarter, but a five-point second quarter put the Bulldogs down 20-18 at halftime.

The game was tied at 25 after three quarters, and the Panthers' four-point fourth quarter effort was one better than Belgreen's three points.

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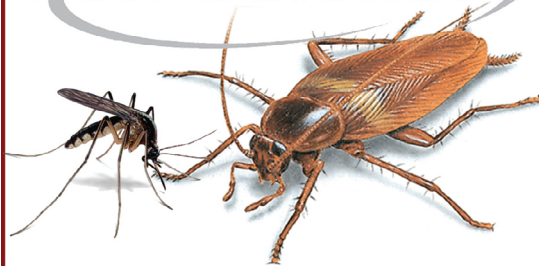
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Vina travels to Covenant Christian High School for a 6 p.m., Valentine's Day subregional game. As the Area 14 champion, Hackleburg will host Shoals Christian Tuesday.

Covenant Christian won the 1A Area 15 title with a 72-51 win over Shoals Christian.

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COURTESY PHOTO

Vina's boys celebrate after defeating Phillips.

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**GENERAL NOTICE ANNOUNCEMENT
CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE**

PATROL OFFICER – POLICE DEPARTMENT

DEFINITION OF JOB: Patrols a designated sector of the city of Russellville and responds to complaints. Serves warrants and subpoenas and testifies in court. Provides traffic control assistance. Performs dispatching duties. Performs other police related duties as required.

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

Knowledge of: the city buildings and street system of Russellville; city, state and federal laws; court procedures; department rules, regulations and procedures; maintenance and use of weapons; radio codes, surveillance equipment and legal procedures involved with illegal drug cases. Ability to: operate a motor vehicle; read; safely fire a weapon; communicate on telephone and radio; generate written documents such as reports and tickets; bend, crouch; stretch; stretch; walk; run; respond to emergency situations on short notice when off-duty; and do the essential functions of the job as directed in this description.

Willingness to: work overtime, irregular hours, weekends and holidays; travel and attend seminars and workshops.

QUALIFICATIONS and SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Possession of a high school diploma or GED

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Must meet or exceed the minimum requirements established by the State of Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission

Possession of a valid Alabama Drivers License

Possess the ability to obtain an Alabama Police Academy diploma or its equivalent

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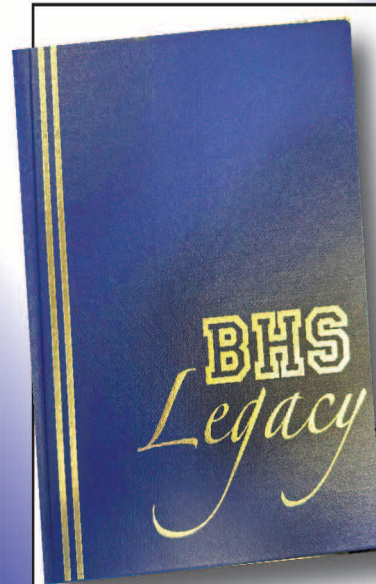
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Black History Month program set for RHS, RMS

Submitted

Russellville High School and Russellville Middle School will host a joint Black History Month Program on Friday, February 17 at 9:00 am in the RHS Auditorium. The RHS Musical Theater Class will perform.

The guest speaker for the program will be Mansfield Key III. Everyone is encouraged to attend the program.

Mansfield Key III, known to most as Ole Pete Key, is a coach, consultant, speech writer, certified HIV/AIDS Instructor, social entrepreneur, and mentor. Mr. Key is an International Motivational Speaker who is a leading Growth Development Strategist. He has impacted the lives of over a million people through presentations, programs, and products. His proudest accomplishment other than his relationship with God is his devotion to his loving wife, Sharlene. He is the proud father of two beautiful daughters, Erin Ruth and Joi Da'Nae.



COURTESY PHOTO

He has provided technical assistance to the Federal Government's Health and Human Services for all 50 states. He has worked directly with The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) in the United States. Pete has also completed consultant work for the Department of Education, Department of Public Health, The Juvenile Justice System, The Foster Care System, the Dream Development Center in Johannesburg South Africa and Liverpool England's Hope Organization. He has spoken at the Ryan White National Conference, SAMSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), NASTAD (National Alliance of State Territorial AIDS Directors) and many more.

While Pete has been successful in many endeavors, he is mostly known for his ability to use music, drama, and motivational teachings to educate and empower people to unlock their potential and determine their destiny. His character Ray Ray, the Drop-Out Bully, has been presented at thousands of presentations and impacted lives in schools, churches, and community centers.

Pete has accomplished several things professionally but his personal life was once a complete disaster. The kid who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks in a small city called Florence, Al., has not always

been a positive person.

He spent years of promiscuous living experimenting with alcohol, drugs, and sex after he dropped out of school. Growing up in school he couldn't read so he struggled tremendously until a teacher named Ms. Stockard gave him some life changing advice. She introduced him to someone who would help him and she gave him a method to help him overcome his weaknesses in school. Today he is still benefiting from that teacher's advice that he said he could never repay her for.

His purpose and passion today is sharing his story and strategies to help others. He believes that everyone has something special, but sometimes people just need others to help them discover it. He said he wanted to be a Ms. Stockard to someone else in need.

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