

# CURTIS BAKER

## Franklin County Commissioner, District 1

**April 16, 2024**  
**Republican Primary Runoff**

Pd. Pol. Adv. By: Curtis Baker • 322 Austen Dr, Phil Campbell, AL

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# Two Franklin County Commission primaries to be decided next Tuesday in local runoff

*John Pilati*  
*Franklin Free Press*

About the only positive from only 29% of local voters showing up to vote in the March 6th primaries was that Franklin County was eight percentage points ahead of the 21% of all Alabama voters who cast ballots that day.

Those low numbers don't bode well for the Franklin County primary runoff next Tuesday, April 16th.

Four local candidates remain in two Franklin County Commission Republican runoffs—Curtis Baker and Micheal Murray in the District One runoff and Heath Ayers and

Greg Hovater in the District Two runoff.

The challenge for these four men is to find a way to get their supporters to the polls on April 16th.

Runoff elections, as a rule, see significantly lower voter numbers than the primaries, so every vote will be significant in a runoff that might not see 20% of local voters take the time to cast ballots.

Historically, Franklin County voters turn out in large numbers for general elections where the Presidential race is on the ballot. This will be the case in November.

But local voters usually show up in larger than average numbers in

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# 'York, England' Phil becomes 50th Phil Campbell to erect hometown sign in Phil Campbell

*John Pilati*  
*Franklin Free Press*

4,200 miles.

That's how far a York, England resident traveled to visit the small north-west town that bears his name—Phil Campbell.

On Wednesday, April 3rd, 'England' Phil Campbell became the 50th Phil Campbell to post his hometown's sign at the Phil Campbell Memorial Park.

They've traveled from all over the countr and the world. Australia, Scotland, England and beyond.

After 'Brooklyn' Phil Campbell visit-

ed the town many years ago, he organized a June 2011 event where Phil Campbells from other states and/or countries would visit the town and celebrate its 100th anniversary.

But after the April 27, 2011 EF-5 tornado ravaged Phil Campbell, 'Brooklyn' Phil pivoted to organize the Phil Campbell event into a cleanup of the town and a fundraising campaign to benefit Phil Campbell's recovery.

It wasn't until recently that 'England' Phil Campbell learned there was a town that shared a name with him. When he found the 'Phil Campbells & Phil Campbell, Alabama' Facebook

See 'YORK,' Page 8



# Heath Ayers

Franklin County Commissioner  
 District 2

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**George E. Taylor Jr., 92, passed away on  
April 6, 2024. Akins Funeral Home assisted  
the family.**

**Peggy Hamilton, age 79, of Russellville,  
Alabama, passed away on Friday, April 5,  
2024. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the fam-  
ily.**

**Wanda Jean Bates, age 71, passed away on  
Sunday, April 27, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel  
assisted the family.**

**Billy Joe Lawson, age 70, of Russellville,  
passed away on Friday, April 05, 2024.**

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# Dist. 1 candidates make final pitches

## Support for first responders, community service anchor Baker's bid for District One Commissioner

## Murray: Work experience, business ownership prepare him for commission

To the Citizens of Franklin County:

Dear Registered Voters of Franklin County:

I am a lifelong resident of our great county. My wife, Tiffany Hallman Baker, and I have three children: Austen (21), Natalie (16), and Millie (12). Tiffany works in the special education department for the Franklin County Board of Education. I have worked at R. Baker Inc. for 24 years, owning and operating Curtis Baker Trucking for the last 20 years.

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Micheal Murray. I am writing this letter to ask for your support on April 16th. I am running for the position of County Commissioner District 1.

Our Franklin County roots run deep. This is our home and this is where we want to be. If you hire me as your District 1 Commissioner, I will do my part to make sure Franklin County is a place where our children want to live, work, and raise their families as you and I have.

With a strong background in community service and a passion for Franklin County, I am confident that my skills and experience make me an ideal candidate for this role.

Doing my part to ensure I am an asset to my community has always been important to me. In 2022, I was awarded the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Service Award. As a lieutenant in the Blue Springs Fire Department, I understand firsthand the importance of our first responders across the county.

I have served the community as a business owner for 25 years. During the last 10 years with the Franklin County Transportation System, I assisted Donald Borden in purchasing new buses for the County Schools. I also helped Dr. Johnny Cleveland secure funding to add air conditioning to all route buses.

As your commissioner, I will continue to support our volunteer fire departments, police, and sheriff's departments, and ensure that they have the tools necessary to serve the citizens of Franklin County.

Through bus transportation, I also have experience with budgeting for repairs and upkeep for the transportation department.

Throughout my campaign, my platform has stayed true to who I am as a person. I haven't promised anything that I can not deliver. So I ask you the voter to hire me as your District 1 Commissioner for honesty, integrity, transparency, a cleaner safer Franklin County, a man who will always tell you the truth even if it isn't what you want to hear, and a good steward of your tax dollars.

I have been a member of the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association for the last 20 years. I appreciate what they do for the students of Franklin County by awarding scholarships to deserving students. My daughter and son were both recipients of these scholarships.

Vote Baker on April 16, 2024.

On April 16th please come out and support Michael Murray, candidate for Commissioner District 1. It would be an honor and a privilege to serve you for the next four years.

Thank you,  
Curtis Baker for District 1 Commissioner

Sincerely,  
Micheal Murray

### Franklin Free Press

113 Washington Ave. NW  
Russellville, AL 35653  
256-332-0255

The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.  
Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

- Publisher**  
John Pilati  
E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com
- Sports Editor**  
Kadin Pounders
- Layout Design**  
Michael Rice
- Sales Representatives**  
John Pilati
- Content Contributors**  
Willodean Davis
- Graphic Design**  
Jason Hill

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# 'PRIMARY,' From Page 1

years where the county commission seats are on the ballot.

March 6, 2024, was an exception to that rule. Perhaps the lack of a credible opponent for former President Donald Trump in the Republican Primary kept some voters at home. Perhaps the intermittent rain that fell the afternoon of March 6th contribute to the low turnout.

And perhaps voters just didn't think voting was important enough to take five minutes of their time.

In District One, Baker was the leading vote-getter on March 6th with 1,881 votes (37.7%). Murray finished second with 1,473 votes (29.55%).

Both Baker and Murray have been candidates previously—Baker for Franklin County Board of Education and Murray for Franklin County Commission. Neither won those races, so someone's political fortunes will change Tuesday, although the winner will have a Democratic opponent, Charles Mitchell, in the general election.

Baker's theme during his campaign has been 'accountability and transparency.'

"Those will be a priority," Baker said. "My goal is after we are a few months into my term the voters can say 'we hired the right man.'"

Baker and his wife Tiffany have three children. He has been an employee of R. Baker, Inc., for 24 years, as well as owning his own trucking business for two decades.

He enjoys volunteering his time and was honored by the Franklin County Chamber with a Distinguished Service Award in 2022.

Murray also knows a thing or two about running his own business. He's employed by the Franklin County Board of Education as a shop foreman at the bus barn. Murray also owns and operates an automotive business in Russellville, something he's done for 25 years.

Murray and his wife Kathryn have two children, both graduates of Russellville High School.

Through his employment with the Franklin County BOE, Murray worked with former Assistant Superintendent Donald Borden in purchasing new buses for Franklin County Schools. He also worked with former Assistant Superintendent Johnny Cleveland in securing funds for air conditioning to be installed in all county route buses.

Murray's campaign has been about protecting fundamental beliefs including reverence to God, dedication to family and a solid work ethic.

"I value these beliefs that our county was founded on and, as District One Commissioner, I want to fight for those who hold the same beliefs," Murray said.

In the District Two March 6th primary, Hovater received 2,117 votes (42.20%) to Ayers' 1,271 (25.33%), in what was each candidates' first run for elected office.

Ayers and his wife Amy have two children and have two grandchildren and a third on the way.

Ayers holds a leadership role through his employment, as he serves as local President of the United Steelworkers Local 200. He's also served as Guard and Vice President.

When it comes to elected officials, Ayers believes it's essential for an effective leader to have good listening skills.

"What most people need (on the commission) is someone who will listen and work with them," Ayers said. "This is what my current job consists of...listening to the members, addressing their concerns and coming up with a solution.

"I will work with the other commissioners and probate judge to make sure the people of Franklin County know what's going on and make sure the people are heard when they have a concern," he added.

Hovater is a lifelong resident of Franklin County's District Two. He and his wife Kathy have three children and four grandchildren.

Hovater has owned and operated his metal works business for over 25 years, along the way learning to manage money and make the best out of the resources you have available.

"Working with the public as I have has helped me get a better understanding of the best way to meet the different needs of people and how different things are to different people," Hovater said.

If elected, Hovater will be guided as District One Commissioner by making decisions 'based on what is morally right and what is best for all the people of Franklin County.'

\*\*\*\*\*Each of the four candidates on the April 16th runoff ballot has penned an open letter to the citizens of Franklin County in this week's Franklin Free Press.

We invite you to read these, written in the candidates' own words, to help you decide who the best candidates are.

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# Open Letters to Voters: Final words from Ayers, Hovater in Dist. 2 runoff

## Hovater: Faith, hard work at foundation of District Two candidacy

## Ayers' campaign based on the four 'F's: Faith, family, friends and Franklin County

Dear Franklin County Voters:

My name is Greg Hovater and I am in the runoff for Commissioner District 2 of Franklin County which will take place on April the 16th.

I would like to thank those of you who supported me on March the 5th and would humbly ask those that maybe didn't support me before to consider doing so this time.

My family and I have lived in Franklin County all our lives. I have operated a construction business in Franklin County for almost 30 years. I have three children that live in Franklin County. I will not make any empty promises to anyone about what I can or can't do as your Commissioner but only to promise you to do the best job I can do and work hard for you.

As I said in the last article in this paper, I want any actions or decisions that I make to be what a Christian would do and what will be the best for the County and not to do anything or bring anything in that would be a negative for the County.

Thank You, Greg Hovater

To the Citizens of Franklin County:

Hi. I'm Heath Ayers. I'm in a runoff for Franklin County Commissioner, District 2.

I want to thank the people of Franklin County and my family and friends for all of the support. I am asking for everyone to get back out on April 16, 2024, to vote again. Franklin County is the best county in the state of Alabama to live.

I have raised my family here and they are raising their families here. It is our responsibility to make sure Franklin County is still the best place for our grandchildren to raise their family. I'm asking for your votes so I can be the voice for your concerns and problems, making sure the people of Franklin County can be heard.

Working together, we can keep Franklin County the best! It's our time to help make a difference and together we can. But it starts with all of us, Franklin County.

If I am elected, I will answer your telephone calls and I will listen when you see me out somewhere. I would be honored to be your Commissioner in District 2.

I humbly ask you Franklin County for your votes and support.

I have four 'F's in life that I live by: 1) Faith 2) Family 3) Friends and 4) Franklin County.

Thanks and God bless. – Heath Ayers



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# Michael Murray

## Commissioner District 1

# 'YORK,' From Page 1

page, he and his wife thought they would one day visit the small community. When he learned that his York, England sign would be the 50th sign to be posted at the downtown park, 'England' Phil, along with his wife Andrea and son Jacob, planned an April 3rd visit where he would erect his sign personally. The fourth member of the family, Abigail, who is Jacob's twin, stayed home to take care of the family's beloved cats.

So 'Brooklyn' Phil sent 'England' Phil his sign, rather than sending it to town officials as is normally done. And 'England' Phil had a smile on his face as he proudly hung up sign number 50.

"When 'Brooklyn' Phil let Andrea know we would have the 50th sign, it made this trip even more special," Campbell said. "'Brooklyn' Phil made the sign with a beautiful heart design which symbolizes the (Great West) window at York Minster."

York Minster, located in 'England' Phil's home town, is considered one of the world's most magnificent and historic cathedrals. And it's highlighted

by the stunning 'Heart of Yorkshire' design in the Great West Window that was inserted almost seven centuries ago.

'England' Phil and his family flew into New York last Friday and spent four days there before flying to Birmingham on April 2nd. The family is staying at a rental property on the shores of Pickwick Lake in Waterloo.

'England' Phil, who was born in Manchester, chose education as his career. After many years as a history teacher, he now trains new teachers who are just starting their own teaching careers.

Phil Campbell City Councilmen Phillip King and Eddie Marbutt met 'England' Phil and his family to offer them an official welcome from the town. King presented the family with t-shirts from the Phil Campbell Festival.

"We're very happy y'all are here and we want to welcome you to our town," King said. "We appreciate you and all of our Phils and your families. You've brought a lot of attention to our town and our Phil Campbells were very involved in helping the town rebuild after the tornado."

Marbutt said he never envisioned how popular the Phil Campbells visiting Phil Campbell

scenario would become. Like King, Marbutt said it has brought favorable attention on their town.

"I really think this has turned into something special and we try to get as many Phil Campbells as we can come to the festival each June," Marbutt said. "It's hard with everyone's schedule to get them all together. But we have Phil Campbells from all over the world coming here and 'Brooklyn' Phil is the center cog in organizing this."

"He takes time to make all the signs and today, we'll see the 50th Phil Campbell sign going up. That's really cool," Marbutt added.



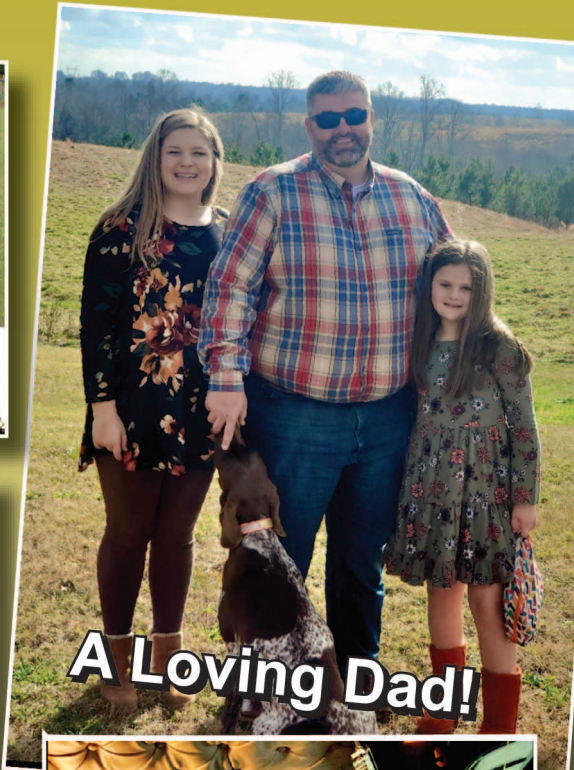
# So WHO is Curtis Baker?



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**A Bear Whisperer?**



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**Belgreen softball team, fresh off county tournament title, now set on making playoff run**

*Kadin Pounders  
 Franklin Free Press*

Coming off a fourth consecutive Franklin County Tournament championship, the Belgreen High School varsity softball team is aiming to continue improving as the season progresses and nears postseason play.

Belgreen head coach Sander Tverberg said the season did not get off to the hottest of starts, but the Lady Bulldogs have faced some hard outs thus far and are getting better day-by-day because of it.

"We're improving. I feel like we've played a lot of tough competition and it's paying off. We've been playing good teams, higher classification teams, and I think it's helped us grow," Tverberg said. "I think we are improving and getting better each game."

"Our pitching is improving. We still need to improve on our defense a little bit, but our bats have come around since the beginning of the year."

A few players in particular have stood out to Tverberg in the process of developing their game.

"I think Hannah Borden—her and Lily Blackman are my two pitchers—and I think Hannah's pitching has improved, and she's helped us out a lot along with Lily," he said. "Defensively, we made a move with one of my seniors (Morgan Vandiver) from second to shortstop, and she's played really well. She's learning the position on a different side of the field, so she's working hard on that and making daily improvements."

"My center fielder (Bryn Scott) was very good last year and she's kept it going this year. And my right fielder, Mackinley Hogan: she's a 10th grader this

**See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 14**

**Russellville boys tennis team sets sights on another Section title**

*Kadin Pounders  
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity boys' tennis team is primed for a run at another Section title with the tournament right around the corner. The tournament, hosted by Russellville and set for April 15-16, is when the Golden Tigers are hoping to start firing on all cylinders.

"We've performed well this season, but the good thing is we still haven't played our best tennis yet," Russellville head coach Ben Phillips said. "I'm looking forward to seeing if we can do that in the section tournament."

"I'm just waiting to see us put a whole match together, a whole tournament together, and see our full potential," he added.

Phillips admits repeating as Section champs won't be any easy task given the strength of the competition.

"I think I said this last year and this year I'll say it again: I think our section, top to bottom, is probably one of the best in the state," he said. "Typically you have two teams playing for (first and second), and I don't think that's the case in our section."

The entire regular season, Phillips said, has been a proving ground for the Golden Tigers. Russellville has competed in a number of big tournaments and scheduled tough non-section competition to better prepare the players for the most important matches of the season.

"We have really challenged our kids this year...with a really tough schedule. We haven't played anybody in any non-section matches or tournaments that don't go to state and win a lot of matches," Phillips said. "We started off the season off at Jasper's tournament and did really well. Win a few matches here and there and we would've been in the championship (of the tournament)."

Led by a trio of seniors, Phillips said the Golden Tigers have really worked hard to get to where they are up to this point.

"My three seniors, Reese Carson, Bralynn Vincent, and Malachi Duncan, they're my three seniors in my top six this year. They've done a really good job of preparing and getting ready for matches," he said. "Those three seniors have come a long way. Reese only started playing tennis in 10th grade, and last year he was my number one seed as a junior; this year as a senior he's my one seed."

"Really my whole team is playing well. I've also got the twins, David and Josue (Tomas) and

**See, 'TENNIS,' page 13**

**Golden Tiger baseball team on two-game slide after 11-game win streak**

*Kadin Pounders  
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity baseball team was defeated twice this week, falling to James Clemens and Haleyville on Monday and Thursday. Coming off an 11-game winning streak, the two losses signal consecutive defeats for the Golden Tigers for the first time since late February.

"It's a classic case of the game humbling you," Russellville head coach Jess Smith said. "We try to preach it into our guys. The game rewards those who deserve it and it is just to those who don't."

The Golden Tigers' week started off on Monday with a 7-4 home loss to 7A James Clemens. The loss snapped No. 4 Russellville's 11-game winning streak, which the Golden Tigers started back on March 14.

A five-run first inning by the Jets put the Golden Tigers in an early hole.

"Our last two losses, I believe, it was a similar situation. Our loss to Lawrence County we got into a

hole early and against Cullman, a five spot in the first (inning)," Smith said. "You can't do that against a really good team like James Clemens."

James Clemens knocked in two more runs off starter Ty Engelthaler in the fifth before the Russellville pitcher was relieved by Brayden Entrekin. That made it 7-0, Jets.

The Golden Tigers still had more fight left in them, however. The hosts pulled one run back in the sixth when an error scored Brennon Thorpe. Russellville then added three more runs in the next inning on a two-run Brayden Entrekin home run, his first of the season, and an RBI double by Neyland Baker. Though the comeback fell short, Smith said his team's fight to get back in the game was a positive takeaway.

"Typically in the other games where this has happened, giving up five runs in the first inning, that's led to an implosion," Smith said. "We were able to salvage some things and fight there at the end."

"If you look at it, James Clemens had five hits that accounted for those five runs in the first. After

**See, 'BASEBALL,' Page 12**

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## 'BASEBALL,' From Page 11

that they had one hit. Our two errors contributed to at least three of those runs so if you take those away, it's a 4-4 game in the bottom of the seventh," he added. "You've got two options and two ways to look at it: You can pout and be in the dumps after losing the game and dropping the streak, or you can look at it as a positive and be thankful that it happened so it brings our guys back to reality, you know? We've got to get better."

Unfortunately for the Golden Tigers, their winning streak was replaced by a losing streak. Russellville traveled to Haleyville on Thursday and fell 4-2. The Lions scratched across solo runs in the second, third, fourth and fifth innings. Russellville's two runs came in the third and fifth innings thanks to an RBI single by Neyland Baker and a walk that moved Engelthaler in from third base.

Though the Golden Tigers outhit Haleyville with six hits to the Lions' five, Russellville was unable to string hits together to produce the runs needed to win.

"Every time we got runners into scoring position it felt like we followed it up with a strikeout," Smith said. "It's hard to win ball games when you do that."

The loss, Smith said, will hopefully serve as a wakeup call to his team.

"Haleyville is a good team. They're a talented, scrappy team and it was going to be a tough game no matter what. It's even harder when you don't show up," Smith said. "I've said it before in the past but you need these moments to bring you back to reality."

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)!

Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

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# Official Ballot R-1

Republican Primary Runoff Election  
Franklin County, Alabama  
April 16, 2024

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		<b>OFFICIAL BALLOT</b> R-1	<b>REPUBLICAN PRIMARY RUN-OFF ELECTION</b> FRANKLIN COUNTY, ALABAMA APRIL 16, 2024
<b>INSTRUCTIONS TO THE VOTER</b> TO VOTE YOU MUST BLACKEN THE OVAL <input type="radio"/> COMPLETELY! ● IF YOU SPOIL YOUR BALLOT, DO NOT ERASE, BUT ASK FOR A NEW BALLOT.			
	<b>FOR MEMBER, FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT NO. 1 (Vote for One)</b>		
	<input type="radio"/> CURTIS BAKER		
	<input type="radio"/> MICHEAL MURRAY		
	<b>FOR MEMBER, FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION, DISTRICT NO. 2 (Vote for One)</b>		
	<input type="radio"/> HEATH AYERS		
	<input type="radio"/> GREG HOVATER		
<b>END OF BALLOT</b>			Type02 Seq0001 Spl01

# 'TENNIS,' From Page 11

they're probably the hardest workers I've ever seen," he added. "I've got a bunch of competitors on my team."

The goal all season, Phillips said, is for the Golden Tigers to improve match to match, regardless of the result, all with the aim of playing their best tennis in the section tournament.

"I tell our kids all the time, I don't care how we play in the (regular) season, I just want us to get better every match, every day and then start peaking at section," he said. "Our goal is always to win section. That's most important and that goal never changes."

"There's a lot of good teams in this section, but I think we've set ourselves up, as far as draws go, to be successful in the tournament," Phillips added.

Should all go to plan the Golden Tigers will add another section title to the trophy case and really be humming along heading into the state tournament. At that point, Phillips said, Russellville will decide its next goal.

"At state we need to be hitting on all cylinders. Our main goal is always to win the section, and then we reevaluate our goals after that. Two years ago we wanted to go down to state and be top 10—we were 11th. Last year we wanted to be top five and we were fourth," he said. "So the most important thing right now is the section tournament and then we'll change our goal and lock in on that."

Wherever the Golden Tigers end up, Phillips said he's happy with what his team has done this season and thankful for the support he and the team receive.

"I'm really proud of this team. I'm really proud of the parents that we have, who give their support and for everything they do on both the girls' and boys' sides," he said. "Coach Dollar does a phenomenal job...and she crosses a lot of t's and dots a lot of i's when I'm not there, and I'm really thankful for her. And then our school system, they support us a lot, too."



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The average pay for this position is \$32,260.80 – 49,732.80  
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**'BELGREEN,' From Page 11**

year and has improved tremendously over the last year, making a lot of plays offensively and defensively," Tverberg added. "I've got other kids making plays, as well, but those five have really made an improvement from last year."

The Lady Bulldogs' advancements have produced one very tangible result this season: a fourth-straight Franklin County Tournament crown.

On paper, Belgreen didn't have the best win-loss record heading in, but Tverberg said the county tournament is any team's to win.

"That's always one of our goals, to win the county tournament. It's so competitive. All the county teams, no matter what the records are, everybody plays their best. At the county tournament they do and everyone feels like they've got a shot to win it," he said. "We had a chance in that first game of the county tournament to fold when Tharptown made a run at us, but they fought back and got that close win."

The Lady Bulldogs defeated Tharptown 5-3 in that contest and just kept going, defeating Phil Campbell and Red Bay on their way to the county trophy.

"They never looked back. They played with determination to win. I was very proud of them for that and how they just fought and never gave up," Tverberg said. "I think it's a testament to our kids. Our season wasn't going the way we were wanting it to go going into (the tournament), but they just made up their minds that they wanted to win."

With that feather in their cap, the Lady Bulldogs are looking down the road to other potential hardware. Belgreen has one vital game left against Hackleburg, which will determine who hosts the area tournament. The Lady Bulldogs would welcome home field advantage in a tournament that Tverberg said fields stout opposition.

"We're hoping to go into it playing well because it's going to be a tough area this time," he said. "Vina has improved a whole lot, and they've played us tough every time we've played them this year. Hackleburg is very good. It's going to be a tough area to get out of, so I hope we go in playing well. We're looking forward to the competition, and I think the girls will be excited and ready to go."

"I'm excited to get towards the end of the year, towards the area tournament and the playoffs," Tverberg added. "Those are what you're always playing for, and it's exciting for your kids to get to that point. I'm looking forward to seeing what they can accomplish."

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# Micheal Murray

## Commissioner District 1

**ATTENTION FRANKLIN COUNTY VOTERS—AN OPEN LETTER FROM MICHAEL EADY ENDORSING MICHEAL MURRAY FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT ONE:**

Hello, I'm Michael Eady. I was a candidate for the Franklin County Commission District One nomination in the March 5, 2024 Republican Primary.

I want to thank those of you who supported my campaign and voted for me. Although I came up short in the end, I'm still going to do my part to make sure Mr. Micheal Murray, the best man for the job, wins the April 16th runoff.

And I'm asking those of you who supported me to vote for Micheal Murray, a hard-working man of character who is our best choice for District One Commissioner.

Please go to the polls Tuesday, April 16th and help send the right candidate, Micheal Murray, to represent us on the commission.

Thank You,  
Michael Eady



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