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## Murray, Hovater victorious in low turnout primary runoff

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Dorothy from 'The Wizard of Oz' said it more than 85 years ago—"There's no place like home. There's no place like home. There's no place like home."

And that timeless saying also applied to the runoff for the Republican nomination for Franklin County Commission District Two, where Greg Hovater learned 'there's no place like your home precinct.'

Hovater, who trailed Heath Ayers for much of the evening as election returns came in, was bolstered by a monumental 95-5 vote in his home

precinct of Jonesboro, as he won an airtight runoff by 25 votes, 866-839.

In District One, Michael Murray defeated Curtis Baker 904-799, to win the Republican nomination. Murray will face Democratic nominee Charles Mitchell in November. Incumbent District One Commissioner Chris Wallace did not seek re-election.

On a day that saw two local Republican runoffs decided by only a handful of eligible voters, Hovater's strong showing in his home box flipped the script and carried him to victory.

With no Democratic opponent in the November 5, 2024, general

See 'RUNOFF,' Page 9



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## April 20th event an outreach to homeless population, combined with a day of great music, food and fun

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

A shower. A haircut. A healthy meal. Hygiene products.

These are everyday basics for most Northwest Alabama residents, but for the area's growing homeless population, they're from everyday occurrences.

Hope Fest, a special event set for Saturday, April 20, is a benefit concert that will also provide each of those 'basics' to any homeless guests at the event.

Additionally, there will be resources available for educational, medical,

spiritual and mental health professionals for any homeless who want to utilize those services.

Employers will also be on hand to provide information on jobs available in the Shoals area.

Former Russellville resident Trent Stephenson is one of the hosts of this special event, which will also feature an outstanding lineup of musical entertainment all day long.

Hope Fest 24 will be held at Natchez-Trace Harley Davidson, 595 Highway 72 in Tuscumbia. Transportation for the homeless will be available to bring them to the event, where they can enjoy a

See 'EVENT,' Page 8

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**William Joseph "Joe" Pounders, age 87 of Russellville, passed away on Monday, April 15, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.**

**A.B. Hall, age 90, of Russellville passed away Wednesday, April 10, 2024. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.**



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# Letter to Editor: Reader takes issue with Arts Council for ending KGB shows

Dear Franklin County Arts Council:

I am saddened to learn that the Roxy Theater managed by the Franklin County Arts Council has eliminated the iconic band KGB (Kerry Gilbert Band) from its offerings. It appears from your comments posted in this publication that your decision was based on economics and public demand to offer "younger" entertainment choices.

While I can understand the need for a variety of offerings, I fail to comprehend the elimination of this long time, successful, and highly popular band. My husband and I have attended almost every Kerry Gilbert show for the past 12 years and are uplifted by the sea of gray heads attending these wonderful wholesome entertainments.

In order for this "Arts Council" to fully appreciate the impact of their booking decisions, I respectfully request that their names and contact information be published immediately so that the hundreds of people they have affected may contact all of you. I know that I was never asked for my opinion.

As to the claim by your Council that you lost money on KGB performances, I am simply dumbfounded that this could be true. I have personally seen a very solid number of attendees, at almost every perform-

ance, and frankly, if you are unable to show a profit with a dedicated group of followers (yes, we are Gray Head Groupies) then there is zero chance to be profitable by booking miscellaneous, untested bands.

Because you published that statement it is imperative that you publish or make available the complete financial records for the Roxy Theater for at least the last five years including attendance records for every performance, as well as any grants or sponsorships you have received.

In closing, while it may be a viable decision to add different types of bands to our local venues, it is a grave error to exclude this demographic from your consideration. When I must choose where to spend my money on goods or entertainment, I think of the bitter taste that this decision has left in my mouth and I turn my car away from Russellville. I believe you have damaged our community deeply. In our world, Kerry Gilbert Band is the voice of Russellville.

Sincerely,

Patricia and Robert Murphy

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

## Franklin Free Press

113 Washington Ave. NW  
Russellville, AL 35653  
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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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Jeff Elledge's

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# Tammy's Grammy on loan to Red Bay Museum from Wynette's family

Jason Collum  
The Red Bay News

Calling it the best possible way to display and share their late mother's latest award, family members of country music legend Tammy Wynette have placed Wynette's Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award on loan to the Red Bay Museum.

The award was bestowed upon Wynette at a ceremony in Los Angeles in February, with Wynette's daughters, Georgette Jones and Jackie Daly, along with Daly's daughter, Kristina, on hand to receive it. Now, it will be displayed in what is the largest collection of memorabilia in the world that pays homage to the "Stand By Your Man" artist who was born and raised in Itawamba County and claimed Red Bay as her hometown.

An unveiling ceremony was held Thursday, April 11, at the museum in downtown Red Bay with some two dozen fans, relatives, and area residents gathering in the Wynette room of the museum to see and hear from Jones, Wynette's daughter with another country music legend, George Jones, and to see the award donated to the museum for display.

Jones said having the award placed in the Red Bay Museum was the most appropriate way to honor her mother's legacy.

"We were actually at family's house just a minute ago and we were talking about how this part of the country, both Red Bay and Tremont, meant so much to mom," Jones said. "And we were saying that she was literally a kid at Christmas if she got to come visit here or when she was at home. Some of our family would be able to visit her. I know this is the best place for this (award) to be and Scotty (Kennedy) and everyone here at the Museum works so hard. It is such a beautiful place in her honor, and it means the world to our families."

Kennedy, curator of the museum who was also a close friend of Wynette, said he was ecstatic when he learned the family wanted the award to be displayed in Red Bay.

"About two days after the (Grammy) event, Georgia sent me just a really sweet text saying, 'Jackie and I have talked, and we'd love to loan you the Grammy Award to display at the museum.' I got a little teary-eyed. I was more than thrilled."

Wynette, who died at her Nashville home on April 6, 1998, was one of six musical artists and groups honored February 3 with the 2024 Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Also honored were Gladys Knight, Donna Summer, the Clark Sisters, Laurie Anderson, and N.W.A. Jones said the fact her mother was honored more than a quarter century after her death speaks to how her trailblazing work still resonates in the industry.

"I was full of pride, for sure. I was so happy and proud for Mom," Jones said about receiving the award for Wynette. "Mom always felt like the Grammys were the ultimate accomplishment in a career for her because you're voted on by your peers there. It's not just your fans, which of course mom loved her fans, but the recognition coming from other artists really meant a lot to her, that she would be acknowledged with this kind of award. We were really thrilled for her, and it was kind of terrifying being there at the same time. We were surrounded by so many people who we admire and have grown up listening to and being around, so it was kind of a moment for us to be there on her behalf, to be able to accept that for her. I just know she's looking down from heaven with a big smile on her face."

Jones said the decision to place the award on loan to the Red Bay Museum made perfect sense for her family.

"That was probably the easiest decision we could ever make," Jones said. "There are four of us girls and the thought of trying to figure out who was going to keep it where and if we were going to share it and what house . . . it just seemed so complicated and silly, especially when it's kind of hard to appropriately have it admired or observed in any way that would be special at our houses. And so, the first thing that popped in our mind was Scotty here in the museum, because they've done so much to honor Mom. I think this is probably the biggest exhibit of anything for Mom anywhere and they've done such a good job at putting things together, and with her family and our family and friends being right here in this area, it just seemed like the perfect place for her to be honored. She would love that that it's here in Red Bay."

In order to make room for Wynette's latest award, Kennedy and the Red Bay Museum, with Wynette's family's blessing, recently transferred two awards that had been on display in Red Bay to the Tammy Wynette Legacy Center in Tremont. One of those was the Hall of Fame award bestowed on Wynette and given to her family in 2020 from the Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience, or MAXX, in Meridian. The other award is the Academy of Country Music Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award from 1999, one year after her passing. Kennedy has also been pivotal in helping steer other pieces of Wynette memorabilia too big for the Red Bay Museum for display in Tremont, including the gate to Wynette's mansion in Nashville as well as a car Wynette once owned.

Legacy Center director Larry Cantrell also attended Thursday's presentation, and thanked Kennedy, the Red Bay Civitan Club, and Jones for helping the Tremont center in promoting Wynette's legacy. He shared about an upcoming annual event in Tremont that will pay homage to the "First Lady of Country Music" and also mark the official opening of the Tammy Wynette Legacy Theater.

"It's going to seat about 500 folks and we're really proud of that," Cantrell said. "It's going to be the May 3-5."

Cantrell said one of the unique aspects of the new theater is the stage, which was built using wood from an old home Wynette – who was born as Wynette Pugh – lived in during her first marriage to Euple Byrd.

"She and Mr. Euple Byrd lived in that house when they were very young," Cantrell said. "The old house has fallen in, but (family members) have given us the lumber off the house, so when you look at the stage when you come to the Tammy Wynette Legacy Center, it is a model of the home that Tammy grew up in with two doors the two windows and the wood off the house where she actually lived. We're so proud of it."



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# TVA offering incentive rebates for HVAC system inspections, tune-ups

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

With almost half of your home energy costs consumed by your heating and cooling system, it's important to know about a new rebate program being offered by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

To help make sure your HVAC system is operating as efficiently as possible, TVA is offering a \$50 rebate to homeowners who have an annual HVAC tune-up for their existing heat pump or central air conditioning systems.

TVA will pay \$50 per heat pump or central air unit, to homeowners who get their systems inspected in advance of the summer Alabama heat.

A TVA-quality contractor HVAC professional can do an annual tune-up and inspection on your unit at a cost typically ranging from \$49-\$150, depending on the company you choose.

To apply, visit [www.energyright.com/rebates](http://www.energyright.com/rebates) and check the list of eligible rebates and select one of the TVA qualified contractors. Other possible rebates include \$1,500 for new HVAC systems, \$800 for new water heaters, \$300 for insulation and \$300 for duct sealing.

You must use a member of TVA's Quality Contractor Network in order to have eligible upgrades installed.

Since October 2023, TVA began investing \$1.5 billion through 2028 to help homeowners and businesses save money on their power bills, particularly in the hot summer and cold winter months, through energy efficiency incentives that help consumers lower their energy costs.

Having your HVAC checked annually not only will help prolong the

life of the unit, it will allow the unit to run at maximum efficiency.

"An inspector will look at the overall condition of the unit. They'll come in and check for any refrigerant leaks, they'll look at electrical wires to make sure they're in good condition and charge the refrigerant if it's low," said Terence Williams, TVA Home Energy Inspector.

Another service available to TVA customers is a home energy evaluation through EnergyRight. One of TVA's expert home energy advisors will come and do a full inspection of your home and let you know all the ways you're losing energy and give you a list of ways to save energy in your home.

To see if you're eligible for the EnergyRight home evaluation and to schedule an appointment, visit [www.energyright.com](http://www.energyright.com).

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

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s):

**Utility Maintenance Technician, Franklin County Highway Department**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

**Corrections Officer/Dispatcher, Franklin County Jail**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

**Custodian/Housekeeper/Groundskeeper, Franklin County Courthouse**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, by calling (256) 332-8850 or applications are available at [www.franklincountyal.org](http://www.franklincountyal.org) under the Careers tab.

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

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

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

**M**Y FATHER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES, RUSSELLVILLE, AL, 104 E. Lawrence St., Pastor Pearl Shelton, would like to invite you to our weekly Prayer Meeting every Tuesday 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!

**Y**ou are invited to sign up for a free Introduction to Pickleball class, sponsored by the Russellville Parks and Recreation Department. The one-day class will take place Sunday, May 5, 2024, at 4 p.m., at the Recreation Center at 201 Ash Avenue. Spots are limited, and all equipment will be provided. The class will be taught by Joseph Murray. Please call 256-431-8382 to sign up or with any questions.

**A** Bean Supper will be held at the Frankfort Community Center on Saturday, April 27th. Serving begins around 2 p.m. Beans & ham, corn, slaw, turnip greens, cornbread, drink and dessert for \$10. FREE live music. Bring your own lawn chair. Proceeds go to the upkeep of the Frankfort Community Center. Hosted by Frankfort Extension Homemakers Club, a non-profit organization.

**I**t's that time again! Time to remove old flowers from the graves in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery on Highway 724 near Newburg. It is also time to make that donation for cemetery maintenance. (Decoration Day is Father's Day). Please mail donations to: Mt. Pleasant Cemetery Fund, 941 Highway 87, Russellville, AL, 35653.

**O**sborn Hill Cemetery -Decoration Day will be on May 4, 2024. The first Saturday of May has been observed as Decoration Day for well over 100 years. Please make plans for that special day to come to the cemetery. If you would like to donate to the Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, please send your donations to: Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, c/o Mrs. Lana Duncan 2330 Colburn Mtn. Road, Tuscumbia, AL 35674

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## 'EVENT,' From Page 1

shower courtesy of ShowerUp, and new clothing including jeans, underwear, socks, shoes and t-shirts.

The outreach for the homeless guests is expected to begin around 10 a.m. Each guest will also receive a wristband that allows them to eat free at all vendors/sponsors throughout the day.

The goal is to outreach to those who need assistance the most in an effort to help them get on their feet again, regardless of how or why their lives took them to this stage.

The day's music features a mix of Christian and country, all coming from artists donating their time for Hope Fest 24.

The event is free to the public and will include food trucks, vendors, games, a jump house, a silent auction, speakers and of course, live music.

Bring your lawn chairs for the musical lineup, which begins at noon. Artists scheduled to appear include L.A. Shepherd, Ascension, Caleb Storie, Lucie Tiger, Joseph Baldwin,



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For more information, visit the Hope Fest 2024 page on Facebook.



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# 'RUNOFF,' From Page 1

election, Hovater will take office in November. He follows current District Two commissioner Jason Miller into office. Miller did not run for re-election. Instead, he ran for Probate Judge against incumbent Probate Judge Barry Moore.

Four candidates qualified to run for the vacant District Two seat—Hovater, Ayers, Cory Cummings and Doug Aaron.

Hovater and Ayers advanced to the April 16th runoff as the two leading vote getters on March 6th.

On Tuesday, Hovater won 17 of the county's 25 precincts. Ayers had strong showings in Phil Campbell, Lawler's, Spruce Pine and Churntown, but could not overcome a 90-vote loss in the Jonesboro box.

For Hovater's first run at public office, he relied on support from family and friends and those were the first folks he thanked Tuesday evening.

"I want to thank everyone who voted for me and especially the voters in my home box that overwhelmingly supported me," Hovater said.

"And I appreciate my family and friends who helped put up signs or did anything else that was asked of them, or just had words of encouragement along the way. I appreciate the clean race that all the candidates ran," he added.

There are 19,655 registered voters in Franklin County. The runoff election drew only 1,734 to the polls, a dismal 8.82% of all voters.

Tuesday's Republican runoff was open to anyone who voted in the March 6, 2024, Republican Primary and any voter who did not vote at all in the March 6th primary.

A few precincts had shockingly low turnouts Tuesday. Only 13 voters cast ballots at the Chucky Mullins Center. 19 voters made it to the Pleasant Site Volunteer Fire Department, the same number of ballots cast in Hodges.

And only 21 voters showed up in the Newburg precinct on Tuesday. Franklin County had a 29% voter turnout in the March 6th primary, a

low number but nine percent more than the state average.

In District One, Baker won six boxes, including a 38-37 edge in absentee votes and 11-8 in Hodges.

In the other four precincts he won, Baker had massive vote totals (72-32 Phil Campbell, 72-35 Spruce Pine, 130-36 Churntown and 97-24 Union).

But Murray took the remaining 19 precincts, with his biggest wins coming in Tharptown (67-21), the Franklin County Courthouse Annex (63-29), Mountain Star (40-16) and Jonesboro (64-26).

Murray attributed his win to 'staying consistent' with his message to voters throughout the campaign and a large support base leading up to the April 16th runoff.

"We were able to get to that second circle by staying consistent with what my campaign was about," Murray said. "Our advertising in the Franklin Free Press and the Red Bay News gave us a boost and I want to thank Michael Eady for endorsing and supporting me after the March 6th election."

Eady and Kirk Sparks were the other two candidates seeking the District One nomination on March 6th. But Baker, as the leading vote-getter and Murray, who finished second on March 6th, advanced.

Eady's public support of Murray was a rare occurrence in a local election, where defeated candidates don't often get directly involved in the runoff.

Murray plans to take down his signs as mowing season is upon us, and he will start to put them back up in September. He plans to relax a few days and not think about the campaign.

"I'll take a few days to relax and enjoy the win. I want to thank the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, all the county bus drivers and my family for really coming together the last six weeks and supporting me," Murray said. "I couldn't have done this without each of them."



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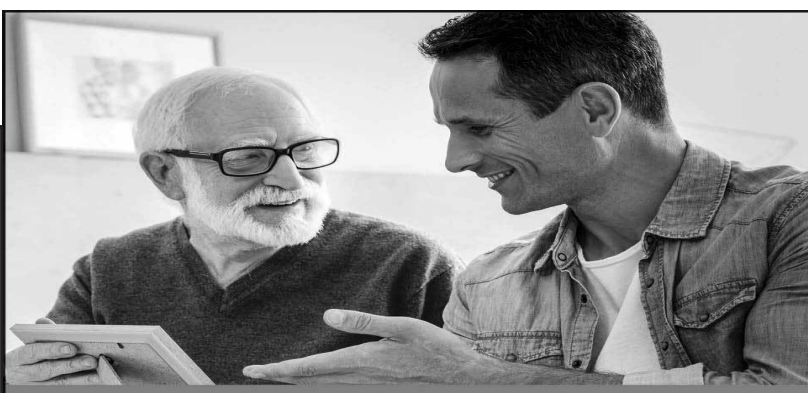
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## Bahena introduced as Russellville Main Street Executive Director

*Submitted*

As a newly Designated Main Street Alabama City in 2023, Downtown Russellville Collective, "Russellville Main Street," is excited to introduce Yaneli Bahena as the full time Executive Director, effective April 15th.

Ms. Bahena's experience in local small business and her established relationships align seamlessly with the Main Street Four Point Approach. Her fluency in both English and Spanish will be particularly advantageous as we articulate our vision and execute our Strategic Plan.

A lifelong resident of Russellville with a commitment to remaining here, she was educated in Russellville City Schools and is co-owner of a downtown small business.

"I'm excited to be a part of this organization and cannot wait to pour into our Downtown. Russellville has so much potential to be a place that people want to visit and live. With it being a historic downtown, I hope I'm able to bring it back to life and continue traditions," said Ms. Bahena. "My aspiration is to be a representative voice for my community, fostering pride among all residents and supporting the success of downtown businesses regardless of ownership background. Leveraging the resources provided by Main Street, I am confident that this is possible."

Russellville Main Street's Board of Directors is excited for her to begin. "We're very much looking forward to Yaneli joining our team. With her experience as a small business owner in the downtown district, her energy and ability to bridge the gaps with all cultures of the district, we are excited to see what can be done in the future, said Mitch McKinney, current Board President.

About Russellville Main Street:

The Downtown Russellville Collective d/b/a "Russellville Main Street" is a 501(c)(3) formed to stimulate downtown revitalization in the City of Russellville, AL through organization, economic vitality, promotion, and design. The organization will encourage public-private partnerships, community engagement, attract visitors, and spur growth.

About Main Street Alabama:  
Main Street Alabama is a private non-profit and state coordinating program of Main Street America. The National Main Street Four Point Approach™ is an over 40-year model that focuses work in four areas: organization, design, promotion, and economic vitality with strategies unique to the community and based on market-based outcome. Visit [www.mainstreetalabama.org](http://www.mainstreetalabama.org) for more information.

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## RHS boys soccer team wins rare Saturday game

*Kadin Pounders  
Franklin Free Press*

A pair of matches against non-area opponents capped the Russellville High School varsity boys soccer team's week last week as the Golden Tigers downed Mars Hill and Tanner, both by a score of 2-1.

After a 10-2 drubbing of area opponent East Limestone earlier in the week, Russellville (12-3-1) traveled to Florence to face Mars Hill for the second time this season on April 11. The Golden Tigers, ranked No. 6 in Class 5A according to the Alabama Sports Writers Association, opened this year's campaign with a 2-0 victory over the Panthers on Feb. 13.

"Mars Hill has gotten quite a bit better as the year has gone on," Russellville head coach Trey Stanford said. "They have a great goalkeeper, and he's one of the better keepers that I've seen. He had a lot of saves against us."

The Golden Tigers scored a goal in each half. Erik Jacobo, one of the squad's top goalscorers, found the back of the net in the first half, while Isais Jose, who has been a major contributor with assists this season, bagged Russellville's second goal in the final 40 minutes.

The Panthers pulled one back to make it 2-1 midway through the second half. After going up 2-0 Stanford said he made a tactical change, pulling off an attacking player and substituting on an extra defender.

"We went from three in the back to a back four. I don't know what happened, but it was the first time in my career I've added a defensive player and we

**See, 'SOCCER,' Page 14**

## Pleasant Grove first playoff matchup for RHS baseball team

*Kadin Pounders  
Franklin Free Press*

Another year, another Golden Tiger baseball season, another postseason place secured, another Area 14 championship won. The Russellville High School varsity baseball team was victorious all three of its games last week, two of which came with major implications.

The Golden Tigers, ranked No. 6 in the latest Alabama Sports Writers Association poll, downed area foe West Point twice in the two game set, earning a playoff bid with the first win and capturing the area crown with the second.

"I think this depicts the culture that we're trying to create in our program. We expected to do this. Winning the area was an expectation," Russellville head coach Jess Smith said. "It certainly makes me super proud to be associated with them, this team, you know?"

"I've challenged these guys as often as I can and they've responded to every challenge, so I couldn't be more proud of this team," he added.

Russellville defeated the Warriors 19-3 on April 8, run-ruling its opponent to purchase a playoff spot. Senior Daniel Askew had a team-high three RBI in that game, while catcher Michael Scofield was a perfect 3-for-3 at the plate. Starter Cayden Johns went five innings, allowing just one earned run, before being relieved by Ty Engelthaler, who sat down the side in order in the sixth to end it.

"I think we put a lot of pressure on West Point to make plays," Smith said after the game. "They had some unfortunate mistakes, but credit to our guys. We had double-digit hits again—12 hits from our guys."

Due to last week's weather, pinning down an exact time to play out the remainder of the series was a task. On Thursday, the originally scheduled day to play, word came down that the second and final game of the series would be played on Friday at Northwest Shoals Community College. The teams decided to forego a third game since any result in that one would have no effect on the area standings.

Prior to confirming the game time, Smith was alert to the potential adverse effect waiting around to play could cause and he said he challenged his players to stay "locked in."

Challenge accepted.

While the Golden Tigers' Friday victory wasn't quite as thumping as the Monday result, it was pretty close. Russellville dispatched West Point 16-5, run-ruling the Warriors in five innings.

Wasting no time, the Golden Tigers opened the scoring in the bottom of the first. A leadoff triple by Askew was immediately followed up with a sacrifice fly by Brayden Entrekin to score the second baseman from third to make it 1-0.

**See, 'RHS,' page 13**

## Belgreen baseball team set for fourth consecutive playoff appearance this weekend

*Kadin Pounders  
Franklin Free Press*

Playoff baseball begins this weekend and the Belgreen Bulldogs, who finished runner-up in Class 1A Area 14, are one of the teams looking to make their mark in the postseason.

Coming out of a series loss to area rival and No. 6 Hackleburg (the Bulldogs handed the Panthers one of their six losses this season), Belgreen entered the week with an 11-11 overall record this season against opponents from a variety of classifications, not just 1A. Belgreen head coach Nathan Vincent said the schedule was set up to prepare his team for the kind of baseball they will be facing this weekend when they travel to Pell City to face Victory Christian School.

"Throughout the season we played some bigger schools. We played some 2A, 3A, 4A teams to see how we competed against them and against the pitching," Vincent said.

That experience against tougher competition will help the Bulldogs in their attempt to make a postseason run, but this season's schedule is not the only experience Belgreen will be able to tap into. Friday's doubleheader will mark four straight playoff appearances for the Bulldogs. Although Vincent said he has a relatively young team, most of his players have already gotten a taste of the postseason.

"I think I've got four eighth graders starting and then I've got a mix of a few seniors and a few juniors, so we're still pretty young but I've got pretty much the same team as last year minus just a few," he said. "The seniors now this will be their fourth year of playoff experience...and the eighth graders now I've got three that played on the playoff team last year, so they know how it is and they know what it's all about."

Vincent said the Bulldogs have improved their game in many areas since the beginning of the season, but he's been impressed with the performances of his pitching staff this season. A bulk of the work has gone to a trio of upperclassmen—Will King, Alex Guidry and Landon Cox have all pitched over 30 innings—but younger players have put in innings on the mound, as well.

**See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 12**

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## 'BELGREEN,' From Page 11

"I've got two seniors and one junior that have pitched a majority of the season and the rest of the innings have been eighth graders, so it's been a learning experience for them and they've done a really good job," Vincent said. "We've played some bigger schools and they've pitched against those bigger schools to get them ready for the playoffs."

"We're probably a hitting team, but (the pitchers) have done a good job of coming in and working every day," he added.

A pair of tune up games against Brilliant on Monday and Tuesday are all that remained on Belgreen's regular season schedule, but the focus for the Bulldogs is now on its round one series against Victory Christian.

"Last year we got beat by the reigning state champions, Appalachian, obviously a really good team. I think it was good to play them," Vincent said. "This year going into the playoffs we've got another year of experience. We've just got to make the routine plays, throw strikes, have an approach at the plate and be ready to go. At this point it's win or go home, but I think we're excited about the opportunity and we'll be ready to play."

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# 'RHS,' From Page 11

Askew, who went 6-for-7 against West Point, finished the week with a remarkable eight RBI and eight runs scored.

"Daniel Askew this week had outstanding performances," Smith said. "That's stellar (performance) from your leadoff hitter and one of your older leaders, getting hot before the playoffs."

The Golden Tigers did not let up in the second inning, scoring seven runs to make it 8-0. A two-RBI single by Askew, a three-run double by designated hitter Neyland Baker, an error, and a wild pitch were responsible for the massive seven-spot second.

Russellville nearly doubled its lead again in the third with six more runs to bump its advantage up to 14-1. A Cayden Johns single scored two runs before Askew, once again, drove in two more with a double. A sac fly from Baker scored Askew and then another West Point wild pitch scored Brandt Cummings from third base.

The Warriors tacked on two runs in both the fourth and fifth innings, but an added two runs in the bottom of the fourth—an error scored Askew and Ty Willis—was enough to seal the game for the Golden Tigers.

"It was an overall great team win for us," Smith said.

Brayden Entrekin started the game on the mound for Russellville and tossed four innings, allowing three runs, one earned, off five hits with five strikeouts.

"Tripp (Cleveland) received an injury that may sideline him for a couple weeks, so we gave Brayden Entrekin an opportunity to get a start on the mound," Smith said. "He's been primarily used out of the bullpen for us, but I thought he did a great job. He threw strikes and threw fastballs and offspeed pitches for strikes in any count, so it was good to see, especially from a young guy in an area championship game."

Looking at the Golden Tigers now—area champions and a top 10 team—one might forget Russellville opened the season with a 3-5 February, sluggish bats, and had some issues making routine plays routine. Like all athletes, like all teenagers, like all mortals, the Golden Tigers were not immune to doubt—coaches included. But at the end of the day, Smith said, perseverance won out.

"I heard one of our seniors...over spring break in conversation say that, you know, he was a little unsure when we were (8-7) at one point this season. Now here we are, in the last week of the regular season, and we're 22-9," Smith said.

"I think I said it last year, but I'm not naive to the situation that in the transition from Coach Heaps to my taking over the program that, you know, there may have been question marks about what this program will continue to be. And I don't mean that in a negative sense because that curiosity is valid and, I'll be honest, I've shared that same curiosity," he added. "Contrary to popular belief, coaches need the players more than the players need the coaches, so I'm extremely thankful to be associated with this program and this team and I'm super proud of them."

"It's been a really special run by these guys, and they've bought into the mentality that I've asked them to, which has been huge."

The Golden Tigers capped the week with a 5-1 road win over Brooks on Saturday. Coming off a huge win and an area title game the previous evening, Russellville didn't show many signs of a let down. The Golden Tigers jumped out to score four runs in the opening three innings and added one more insurance run in the seventh. Brandt Cummings tossed five innings and had a no-hitter going through four. He finished with one hit and one unearned run allowed and four strikeouts.

"I thought we could have executed some situations offensively better. I think we left some runners in scoring position more than we'd have liked to, but there are going to be days like that in baseball where your offense isn't firing on all cylinders," Smith said. "You want to consistently, no matter what, pitch well and play good defense. I think with our offense not clicking on all cylinders, it's good to see us win games by pitching and playing good defense."

"I told the team...we want to play the brand of baseball that is our standard (against Brooks) but I wanted the guys to just enjoy the game together. I want to see how much fun we can have playing baseball and try to make memories together for however long we have together," Smith added. "I think the guys played with an edge, but they also played loose enough that they were enjoying being out there with each other. That was special for me to watch."

The Golden Tigers honored their seniors in their final regular season game against Mars Hill on Monday before the beginning of the playoffs on Friday. Russellville will host Pleasant Grove in a doubleheader starting at 5 P.M. with a game three on Saturday, if necessary.

The stakes are even higher now, but the message heading into the weekend, Smith said, will be the same the coaching staff has been preaching all season.

"Your focus has to be on winning each day and winning each pitch. You can't look ahead and try to create matchups or situations down the road. You've got to be where your feet are and dominate every single day of preparation leading up to that playoff series," Smith said. "I'm looking forward to this journey with our team. A lot of this season we've prepped our guys for these moments, talking about focusing on one day, one pitch, one play at a time; being present in the moment; not looking ahead. This is when it comes to fruition, this is what you work for."

Grateful for the support his team has received all season, Smith's last word was a message to Golden Tiger fans:

"I've been extremely thankful to our community throughout the season. I think Russellville provides, arguably, the greatest home field advantage in the state of Alabama in all classifications," he said. "I'd like to ask the community to continue to do that in support of our players."

"We feed off of your energy and we'd love to have a huge crowd that gives us that Russellville home field advantage," he added.

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# 'SOCCER,' From Page 11

played worse on defense," Stanford said with a laugh. "They ended up scoring their goal right after we went to a 4-4-2."

"I don't know if they were thinking someone else was going to pick up the (attacking player) because there was another guy in or what," he added. "That's a mentality thing. You know we're still a pretty young team. As kids mature and get older they understand the importance of playing every minute of every match."

Mars Hill had other opportunities to equalize in the second half, including a shot that hit the crossbar, but the Golden Tigers held on to win at the final whistle.

"It absolutely could've ended 2-2," Stanford said. "It was a hard-fought match, but a good win for our kids. It's good for us to play matches like that because we're getting closer to the playoffs, and you're going to be in some pretty sticky situations come playoff time."

In its next game Russellville returned home to Golden Tiger Stadium on Saturday, April 13 to battle Tanner, the reigning 1A-3A state champions.

"Tanner is an extremely talented team, and they've got one of the best strikers in the state," Stanford said. "We knew going in we were going to have to play really well defensively. We knew it was going to be a tough match, and it was. They came ready to play."

The two sides fought to a scoreless stalemate at halftime. The Golden Tigers did not play up to standard in the first half, Stanford said, and it took the players a half to find a foothold in the game. Not accustomed to playing on Saturday, Stanford said it had an effect on the players.

"We don't play many Saturday games, and I know that's an excuse, but I do think that had a part in the match," he said. "A lot of our kids work on Saturdays and a lot of them worked Saturday before we played that match, so I think some of them came in a little tired, you know?"

"The first half we played okay, but we didn't play up to our capability. In the second half we came out and looked like a million bucks. We made a little change in the formation in the midfield, and I felt like we controlled the rest of the match," he added.

Russellville scored both of its goals in the second half. Defender Richard Scott headed in a ball off a corner kick to make it 1-0 before Brian Lara, from around 30 yards out, smashed in his free kick around the Tanner wall.

"The second goal was an absolute banger," Stanford said. "(Tanner) set their wall slightly too far to the left, and all the coaches on the sideline—me, Fred,

Gabby—we were all hollering, 'Look right, look right, look right!' Brian understood what we were saying and he curved it right around the right side of the wall and into the bottom corner of the goal. It was a great goal."

Just like Mars Hill, Tanner was eventually able to claw one back, but it came very late with just a few minutes left. In the end, the Golden Tigers were once again able to hold on to the 2-1 scoreline.

"We would've loved to have finished it out

2-0—that sounds sweeter than 2-1, but we knew it'd be a tough one," Stanford said. "Coach (Matt) Smith does a great job at Tanner. It doesn't matter who you are, if you're winning state championships then you're doing something right. His kids play hard for him and they care about winning, so it's a great program. It was a great, great match for us to play against them and come out with a win."

As the regular season approaches its conclusion, the Golden Tigers still have a few more area matches to play in a bid to win a fourth consecutive area title. It will be a thick and fast slate of games. Russellville will travel to East Limestone for its next match on April 19 before facing Brewer on April 20 and Ardmore on April 22.

"East Limestone will be a tough match. They're a lot better team than the score shows from the last time we played them," Stanford said. "The next day we've got to turn around and play a really tough Brewer team and both of those games are on the road, so it's going to be a challenge."

"With the way the games between the other teams have played out it's kind of a mess (in the standings) and I don't want us to be anywhere near that mess," Stanford said. "We obviously want to win the area, that's our goal. We're undefeated in the area right now, and we're going to try to do our best to keep it that way

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# IRS warns taxpayers of seasonal telephone scam

Submitted

April is Financial Literacy Month and IRS Criminal Investigation, Atlanta Field Office is bringing awareness to impostor scams, which according to the Federal Trade Commission was number one in the top fraud category in 2023.

"With the end of the 2024 tax season, we want to make taxpayers aware that scammers posing as IRS personnel are increasing their phone calls to potential victims stating they owe taxes and face arrest if not paid," said Special Agent In Charge, Demetrius Hardeman, IRS:CI Atlanta Field Office. "It is important that people know that the IRS will not call them to demand immediate payment, nor will it call about taxes owed without first mailing the person a bill."

In addition to phone calls, scams involving the impersonation of the IRS usually take the form of e-mails, tweets, or other online messages to taxpayers. The FTC released data in February 2024 showing that consumers reported losing more than \$10 billion to fraud last year. According to the FTC, impostor scams lost victims \$2.7 billion to criminals.

Taxpayers are advised to follow the tips below should they be contacted by a suspected scammer:

- ~ Phone calls
- ~ Do not give out any information. Hang up immediately.
- ~ Contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration to report the IRS impersonation scam call.
- ~ Report the caller ID and callback number to the IRS by sending it to phishing@irs.gov. The subject line should include "IRS Phone Scam."
- ~ Report the call to the Federal Trade Commission.

- ~ Receiving email claiming to be from the IRS:
- ~ Don't reply.
- ~ Don't open any attachments. They can contain malicious code that may infect your computer or mobile phone.
- ~ Don't click on any links. Visit our identity protection page if you clicked on links in a suspicious email or website and entered confidential information.
- ~ Send the full email headers or forward the email as-is to phishing@irs.gov. Don't forward screenshots or scanned images of emails because this removes valuable information.

Delete the original email.

CI is the law enforcement arm of the IRS, responsible for conducting financial crime investigations, including tax fraud, narcotics trafficking, money-laundering, public corruption, healthcare fraud, identity theft and more. CI special agents are the only federal law enforcement agents with investigative jurisdiction over violations of the Internal Revenue Code, obtaining a nearly 90% federal conviction rate. The agency has 20 field offices located across the U.S. and 12 attaché posts abroad. Atlanta Field Office covers the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. You can reach the Atlanta Field Office at atlantafieldoffice@ci.irs.gov and on the IRS:CI Atlanta Field Office LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/irsci-atlanta/>.

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# Porter directing Suite Surrender, a BTCPA production set for April 25-27

Submitted

The BTCPA announces its third and final production for the 2023-2024 season, Suite Surrender, by Michael McKeever and directed by Russellville native Anna Carol Porter.

The performance dates are April 25-27 at 7:00 PM and Sunday April 28, 2024, at 2:00 PM. Tickets are now on sale at the Weatherford Centre in Red Bay, AL between the hours of 2:00 to 4:00 PM weekdays. You can go by to purchase your tickets, or you can call and reserve them.

If you are interested in dinner theater it is available only for Thursday, April 25, 2024, and must be reserved in advance. If you are interested in bringing a group, please contact Beth Hammock at 256-668-0045.

The cast includes: Doninic Rogers, Theron Struzik, Mason Cook, Sharon Strickland, Anna Lindsey, Holly McKinney, Austin Henderson, Brandy Cook, Morgan Miller, and Brittany Faris as stage manager. Extras include: Brittany Faris, Vickie Cook, Gary McKinney, Dot Morrow and Eric Faris.

It's 1942, and two of Hollywood's biggest divas have descended upon the luxurious Palm Beach Royale Hotel -- assistants, luggage, and legendary feud with one another in tow. Everything seems to be in order for their wartime performance...that is, until they are somehow assigned to the same suite.

Mistaken identities, overblown egos, double entendres, and a lap dog named Mr. Boodles round out this hilarious riot of a love note to the classic farces of the 30s and 40s.

# Council approves Chard to fill Accounts Payable Clerk position

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved the hiring of Camie Chard as Accounts Payable Clerk at the council's April 15th meeting.

The Russellville Civil Service Board conducted candidate interviews last week. At Monday's meeting, Chard was the recommendation of City Clerk Belinda Miller. Chard was approved by 4-1 vote, with councilman Dexter Hamilton voting against the motion.

In other agenda items, the council:

--approved the submission of a FY 2024 amended Rebuild Alabama Act grant application. The proposed grant is for funding to micro-surface Summit St., from Waterloo Road to Wilson Blvd., Underwood Road from Jackson Ave. North to Highway 43, Washington Ave., from Robinson St., to Highway 43 and Hester Line Road from Highway 43 to Highway 63. Work would include patching, leveling, scrub seal and a micro-surface wearing layer.

--was scheduled to hear a presentation from representatives of the Healing Place, a center for loss and change located in Muscle Shoals. Representatives were to provide information on the services provided by the Healing Place to the residents of the City of Russellville.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be May 6, 2024, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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*Internal Medicine*

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