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Newfoundland resident becomes first Canadian to visit 'his' town

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

It wasn't until he passed by Phil Campbell High School until Newfoundland, Canada resident Phil Campbell realized where he going.

All Campbell knew was that his cousins were taking him on a day trip from their home in Birmingham, with the destination unknown to him.

Campbell had arrived, much to his surprise, in the town that shares its name with him.

And there was VIP treatment for the town's honored guest as his family pulled up to Phil Campbell Memorial Park.

On Friday morning, 'Canadian Phil' (his new nickname) became the 51st Phil Campbell to visit the Town of Phil Campbell and erect a sign displaying his hometown to commemorate his visit.

Phil Campbell Mayor Mike McQuary, along with Councilmen Phillip King and Eddie Marbutt, Town Clerk Jennie Eagle, Police Chief Jessica Clements, Fire Chief Andy Marbutt and a host of other town officials and residents greeted Campbell and his family.

McQuary presented 'Canadian Phil' with a resolution decreeing him an honorary Phil Campbell citizen 'for all time,' and a custom made

See 'CANADIAN,' Page 4



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Evetts' newest venture will surpass 100 rental units in Russellville

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When it comes to investing in his home town, Russellville resident Blake Evetts is 'all in.'

In 2022, Evetts opened The Jameson Apartments, a 37-unit complex offering studio efficiency apartments. The Jameson is located in the former Lawrence Place assisted living facility on East Lawrence Street.

Evetts saw a need in Russellville for affordable rental housing and he took a leap of faith, investing more than \$1 million in the renovation for

the Jameson. Now in its second year of operation, the Jameson is fully occupied.

Less than two years later, Evetts purchased Holiday Plaza Apartments and the Jackson Avenue Townhomes, two properties that will add 64 newly remodeled rental units in Russellville.

"We have a real need for conventional rental housing in Russellville. These properties are not going to be government subsidized homes. I'm just trying to fill a need in my community," Evetts told the FFP in 2022.

After completing a massive renovation of a 67-unit motel-turned-apart-

See 'EVETTS,' Page 10

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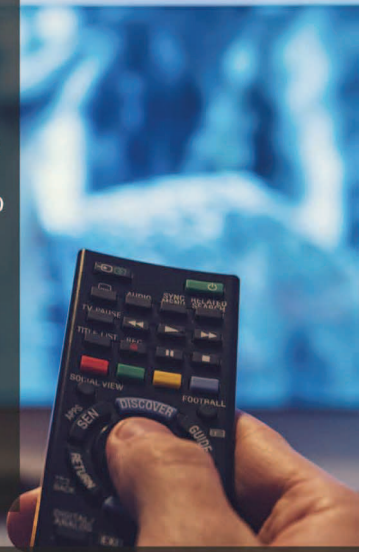
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**JoArthur “Jo” Clinton McDonald,
age 37, of Russellville, died on
Saturday, May 04, 2024. The visita-
tion will be 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Wednesday, May 08, 2024, at Spry
Memorial Chapel.**

**Lennis Inez Reams, age 86, of
Russellville, passed away on
Saturday, May 04, 2024. Spry
Memorial Chapel assisted the family.**



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Correction Policy

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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ANNOUNCEMENT

Legend Bodie May born at Northwest Alabama Medical Center, April 21, 2024 to parents Scott May and Emily Johnson and big brother River, weighing 5 lbs. 12 oz, 20 inches long.



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'CANADIAN,' From Page 1

t-shirt to celebrate the occasion.

More than 2,200 miles from his home in Canada's easternmost province, standing in Phil Campbell Memorial Park in downtown Phil Campbell, Alabama, with town dignitaries there to welcome, the emotion in Campbell's face was evident as he took a moment before speaking.

"I'm so honored. I don't think there are words to express how I feel today. It's overwhelming," 'Newfoundland Phil' said. "I was definitely surprised and a little shocked. But I'm grateful to my cousins who arranged this for me."



COURTESY PHOTO

'Canadian Phil' erected a sign commemorating his 2,206 mile journey to the Town of Phil Campbell, as Phil Campbell Mayor Mike McQuary looks on.

Campbell said he saw a newspaper article many years ago about a small Alabama town named Phil Campbell and that Phil Campbells from all over the world were coming there to visit. But he never expected to be among that number.

It was 1995 when a group of 25 American Phil Campbells converged upon the town in what was likely the largest-ever group of Phil Campbells gathered together.

Brooklyn, New York, resident Phil Campbell planned the inaugural International Phil Campbell Convention for June 2011, but on April 27, 2011, a devastating tornado that ripped the town apart, leaving 27 of its residents dead, put any talk of a fun Phil Campbell convention on the shelf. Instead, 'Brooklyn Phil' converted the event to a fund-raiser to help the town and its residents move forward after the effects of an EF-5 tornado.

'Brooklyn Phil' continues to serve as an ambassador for the town. He co-produced a documentary, 'I'm With Phil,' that chronicled the story of the town and its 'honorary' citizens all across the world.

Included among the 51 Phil Campbell signs is one that honors Phillip Campbell, an English railroad engineer from Liverpool, who was told by area residents if he would build a railroad depot in their area, they would name the town that grew around it in his honor.

And 'Liverpool Phil' did just that in the late 1880s. And the town's residents kept their word on naming the town after him.

It was a real-life 'Build It and They Will Come.' But who knew 'they' would include more than 50 Phil Campbells from Australia, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Canada and 23 of the 50 United States of America.

'Canadian Phil' becomes the first Canadian Phil Campbell to visit the town, although a second Canadian Phil Campbell has plans to come next month. That could necessitate changing 'Canadian Phil's' moniker to 'Newfoundland Phil,' to avoid confusion as more Canadian Phils visit their adopted town.

What started almost 30 years ago as a quirky idea that brought 25 Phil Campbells together to visit their town has evolved into a lasting legacy embraced by Phil Campbell residents and Phil Campbells from across the country and world.

Quirky? Not anymore. There's a connection between the town of 983 residents and its adopted Phils. As they visit the town for the first time, their world suddenly becomes smaller.

As they stand in a memorial park in front of a granite marker with the names of 27 folks who perished on April 27, 2011, the connection is about more than just a name.

It's an emotional bond that will remain forever. Just ask 'Canadian Phil.'

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Real Estate Tips

- By Willodean Davis

Understanding how different deeds work an important step in home buying process

Willodean Davis
Special to the FFP

I am often asked by clients to explain different types of deeds and how they differ from each other. Here are the various types of deeds with an explanation about what makes each different.

A Quit claim Deed: The grantor stops any claim to the property and simply passes it to the grantee. It only transfers whatever interest the grantor has in the property and doesn't guarantee ownership. In other words, it offers NO warranty to the grantee. It doesn't protect the grantee from a invalid title, liens or encumbrances, or mortgage responsibilities. The quick claim deed transfers ownership, but it doesn't affect the mortgage obligations, leaving the grantor liable for any existing mortgage. This means that Foreclosure can happen. Since it is risky in nature, a quick claim deed is commonly used to transfer property when there is a high degree of trust between the parties involved. It is sometimes also used to correct a title defect such as misspelling of names.

A Gift Deed or a deed of gift allows the grantor to transfer money or property as a gift without receiving money in return. These are commonly seen in estate planning. Similar to a quick claim deed, the grantor that has a gift deed relinquishes their ownership interest in the property, without any warranties or guarantees. A gift deed has 3 distinct characteristics that differ from other types of deed, such as Flexibility, Gift Tax, or Involvement of a Third Party. Flexibility can be either revocable or irrevocable. Revocable gift deeds give the grantor the option to change their mind before the transfer takes place, while irrevocable gift deeds typically can't be changed. When transferring property through a gift deed, gift tax implications may rise. A gift deed can sometimes involve an agent who acts on behalf of the grantor to ensure the gift is successfully transferred to the recipient. This is common when the gift is transferred later or when the recipient is a minor.

Warranty Deeds assure the grantor has a clear title to a parcel and has the full legal right to transfer or sell it to the grantee. It also guarantees that the property is free and clear of any outstanding claims, debts, liens, or other encumbrances. A warranty deed is the most commonly used because of the strong guarantees it has. General warranty deed is typically used in residential real estate transactions. A general warranty deed guarantees the seller has the full legal right to sell the property, and free from any encumbrances for the life of the

deed. This one comes with the most significant protection for the grantee and provides them with legal recourse if an unsettled debt or issue should arise. For these reasons a general warranty deed is the most common type of deed used to transfer title from sellers to buyers in the United States. A special warranty deed, also known as limited warranty deed, assures the grantee that the grantor is the legal owner of the property and that it was not encumbered during ownership.

Grant deeds are commonly used in Tax or foreclosure sales. The grantor has not previously transferred the property to someone else. Generally, a state will use either a grant deed or a special or limited warranty deed, but not both. To determine which type of deed is used in your state, consult your county land or recorder's office.

Mortgage deeds are used when there is a loan involved and it is being held as collateral. A mortgage deed is a document signed between a homeowner and a bank or mortgage company to secure a loan. It secures the property as collateral for a loan which means a "mortgage payment" is paid towards a debt with the house serving as security in the event of default. A mortgage deed doesn't transfer ownership of the property. A mortgage deed is in effect, the borrower retains equitable title to the property, which means they can legally enjoy or use the property, while the lender holds a legal title as collateral. If the borrower defaults on the loan, the lender then has the right to foreclose on the property to recover the outstanding debt. Foreclosing on a property with a mortgage deed requires the lender to go through the judicial process, which consist of a court order for foreclosure, known as judicial foreclosure.

Deed of trust is used in mortgage scenarios of real estate transactions. A deed of trust aka a trust deed establishes a legal arrangement involving a borrower, lender, and trustee (title company). This arrangement holds the property title in trust for the lender until the borrower satisfies the loan. When the loan is paid in full the trustee transfers the title to the borrower. In a standard home loan, the homebuyer is the borrower, and bank is the lender, and the title company acts as the trustee. The borrower makes monthly payments, but if they default, the company can initiate a foreclosure on behalf of the bank. Deeds of trust usually contain a power-of-sale clause. This enables the trustee to sell the property without a court order in case of foreclosure. This type of foreclosure is known as non-judicial foreclosure.

Survivorship deed is used when leaving property to a surviving spouse or family member. It allows all co-owners to automatically transfer a deceased owner's share to the surviving owner(s). It can help avoid use a a probation process after the death of a joint property owner, as the property automatically passes to the surviving owner(s) with the use of a will or trust. Someone may use this type of deed if they want to add their spouse, children, or other co-owner to ensure automatic inheritance of the other's share upon death. A survivorship deed is primarily used of one owner.

Bargain and Sale deed are used with foreclosure, tax sales, or estate settlements. Bargain and sale deeds include a warranty that the grantor owns the property but does not guarantee against claims or liens. Bargain and sale deeds are commonly used in situations such as foreclosure, tax sales, or settlements of a deceased person's property or estate.

I have used all of these different types of deeds listed. They are all important in their own way, and they all do different things. Never sign a deed that says Statutory unless you talk to a lawyer.

If I may assist you in selling or purchasing a home, please contact me at 256-762-5671 or come by my Exit 8:28 Realty office at 115 North Jackson Ave., in downtown Russellville.

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The Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools for the coming school year. Please call 256-332-6800 for an application.

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

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

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

The Frog Pond Volunteer Fire Department will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its Grand Re-Opening on Saturday, May 18th, from 10 am-3 pm, at the station, 5215 Highway 22, Spruce Pine. There will be Family Fun, Music, Food and More! Everyone is invited!

It'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.

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The annual Woodruff Family Reunion will be held on Saturday, June 1, 2024, at Cedar Bluff Farm, 3449 Highway 78, Russellville. The reunion will begin around 10 a.m. Please bring your favorite covered dish. All family descendants are invited and encouraged to attend.

Russellville Headstart is hosting Spring Application Day on Thursday, May 9th, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m., at Russellville Headstart, 976 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville. They are now accepting applications for 2024-2025. Required documents include Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, Insurance/Medicaid Card, 2023 Income Tax/W-2 or SNAP/TANF/SSI. Walk-ins are welcome!

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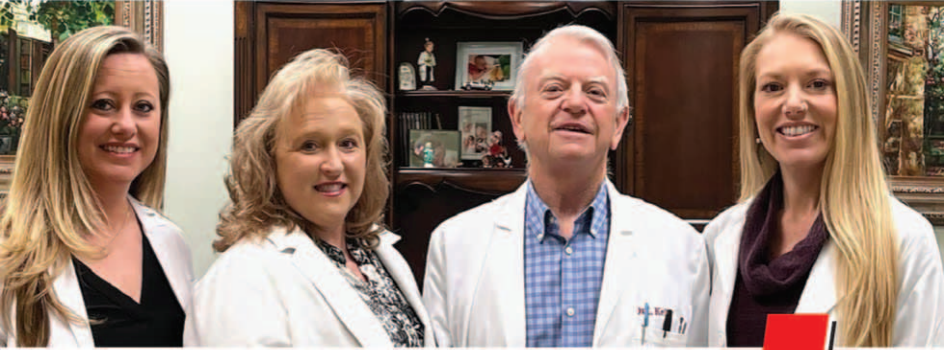
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'EVETTS,' From Page 1

ment complex in Haleyville, Evetts decided to continue his investment in Russellville.

Holiday Plaza, located behind the Franklin Shopping Center just off St. Clair Street, is a 57-unit complex that, to say the least, is in need of significant repair and renovation. Holiday Plaza is a mix of 1BR/1BA, 1BR/1.5BA, 2BR/1BA, 2BR/2BA and 3BR/2BA units, covering a wide variety of rental housing needs in Russellville.

The purchase of Holiday Plaza Apartments might raise some eyebrows, Evetts said he's confident the complex will quickly fill once the renovation is completed.

"People thought I was really crazy for buying (The Imperial Inn) in Haleyville. They said it won't ever rent, but it stays full," Evetts said. "When people move out of an apartment, I have four or five waiting in line to move in.

"Housing is and will always be a need, so we're always looking for a way to fill that need," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO

Interior of a renovated unit at Jackson Ave. Townhomes.

Before undertaking the Holiday Plaza project, Evetts had to get the property vacant. He gave every tenant a notice to vacate, as tenants were living there on a month-to-month basis.

"We cannot fix these apartments while people are living there, so everyone was to be out by March. These will be renovated top-to-bottom for this investment to make sense and the property to be what we want it to be after the renovation is complete," Evetts said. "There were years and years of deferred maintenance. There were needs to be addressed and they were not, so it kind of cascaded."

Evetts started some preliminary work at Holiday Plaza, including cleanouts of units once vacated and removal of fencing. The plan is for renovations to begin on the single-level units first. Once complete, major renovations of the 2BR units

will begin. That plan, Evetts hopes, will allow for a stair-stepped leasing process where he will be receiving at least some income as the renovation progresses.

Before launching into the Holiday Plaza project, Evetts' contractor began a major renovation of the Jackson Avenue Townhomes.

Located at the intersection of North Jackson Avenue and Underwood Road, the Jackson Avenue Townhomes were among Russellville's finest rental property when first constructed.

After looking at the property, Evetts knew he would be buying a 'diamond in the rough' that he believes will be the most premium property he owns.

Six of the seven townhomes are 3BR/2BA, a size most in demand by renters due to a dearth of 3BR rental units. The seventh townhome is a 1BR/1BA.

The project includes new vinyl siding, new windows, new flooring, paint, extra outlets and new countertops and appliances.

"This will be the nicest property I own. The transformation will be huge. There's a lot to like about these townhomes. I got inside them and saw 'good bones,'" Evetts said.

"Structurally, it's very sound. I didn't realize how many 3BR/2BA units there were and there's a really neat layout. When they were first built, they may have been plans for them to be individually owned like condos. No two units there are the same. Of the six 3BR/2BA, all have something that makes them unique from the others," he added.

Evetts' investment into his hometown hasn't gone unnoticed by city officials, including Russellville Mayor David Grissom.

"The latest two properties (Evetts) bought definitely needed some repairs and we know he will do it right," Grissom said. "We're glad he made the purchase and investment in our city. It's something we really needed and he and his team are doing a great job so far on the townhomes. We appreciate his investment in Russellville."

Plans are to have an on-site property manager at Holiday Plaza, and a two-employee team handling the Jameson and the Studio 11 Apartments in Haleyville.

Evetts said he anticipates monthly rents at Holiday Plaza to begin at \$675 and up, water included. The 1BR unit at Jackson Avenue will rent for \$750/month and the 3BR units for \$1,150/month.

"We have an oversaturation of low income tax credit housing in Russellville. We think these properties fill that void perfectly for what Russellville needs. Rents will be very affordable but sufficient to return our investment," Evetts said. "I'm always happy to do things in Russellville, but they have to make sense and cents. These properties checked both boxes for me."

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Franklin County 4-H Shotgun, Archery teams bring home state honors

*Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press*

The Franklin County 4-H program had two clubs compete at state competitions in April, performing well at their respective events and winning multiple honors.

In early April, the Archery Club traveled to Columbiana to compete in the state contest. Later that month, the Shotgun Club was a part of a three-day competition at Selwood Farms in Alpine and Red Eagle Skeet and Trap Club in Childersburg.

On Saturday, April 13 the 4-H Archery Club had a number of individuals place high in multiple events at the state meet. Whitley Radford was the top individual in FITA junior compound with sights, took second in the 3-D compound with sights, and was the overall first individual in junior compound with sights. Radford was also a member of the team that took first place in junior compound with sight, alongside team members AnnaClair Borden, Jayden Weeks, and Willow Crosier. Crosier finished third in FITA junior compound with sights.

Radford, Borden, and Crosier were also invited to compete in the Buckmaster's Shoot Off in Montgomery in June. Other competing members were Farrah Proctor, Grayson Templeton, Madelyn Long, Rayme Spiegle, Xander Cantrell, Zachary May, and Freya Cantrell.

See, '4-H,' Page 12

Springville sweeps Golden Tigers out of 5A playoffs in third round

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

The 2024 campaign came to an end for the Russellville High School varsity baseball team last Thursday night as the Golden Tigers were swept at home by Springville and eliminated in the quarterfinals of the AHSAA 5A playoffs.

"It's never easy finishing a season, and no matter how it ends, it's always heartbreaking," Russellville head coach Jess Smith said. "You want to play perfect baseball and your brand of baseball, but sometimes things just don't go your way. You've got to tip your cap to Springville. They're a great team, a young team, and you know they're going to be around as a top opponent in 5A in the north in the years to come."

The Golden Tigers were shut out 6-0 and 3-0 in the two games hosted by Russellville. Both teams relied heavily on the performances of their pitching staffs. For Russellville, its errors on defense were most costly as only four of Springville's nine total runs were earned. On offense, the Golden Tigers were unable to scratch runs across with runners on base.

"A lot of the errors—they were errors, no doubt—but a lot of the errors weren't routine plays. Springville did a good job of putting pressure on us and making them really, really tough plays to make," Smith said. "Offensively, we usually do a good job of getting runners in scoring position frequently. We don't always succeed at a high clip, but we usually put ourselves in opportunities to be successful in that respect. I think Springville's pitchers did a great job of attacking our hitters and executing on their scouting report. We just couldn't get that big hit when we needed it."

Senior Cayden Johns got the start on the mound for the Golden Tigers in game one. Johns tossed a complete game, seven innings, and allowed six runs, just two earned, off nine hits. He had one strikeout.

"I think Cayden Johns had his best pitching performance of the postseason in that game," Smith said. "Unfortunately we just weren't able to make some of those plays behind him defensively. He kept competing hard and that's what you want from the guy out there on the mound."

Springville's breakthrough came in the third inning on a groundout that scored a runner from third base. The Tigers scored once in the third, another two in the fourth and fifth, and added a final run in the top of the seventh.

Game two was an even tougher struggle between the two Tiger squads. Pitching, once again, kept

See, 'BASEBALL,' page 15

Guntersville ends RHS boys' soccer season for second consecutive year

*Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity boys' soccer team was eliminated from the AHSAA 5A playoffs last Friday after suffering a 2-1 overtime defeat at Guntersville.

The loss in the quarterfinal round came after a thrilling 3-2 home win over Boaz in the opening round the previous Tuesday.

"It didn't go how we wanted it to or how we planned it on going," Russellville head coach Trey Stanford said after the Boaz loss. "I felt like we dominated in every aspect of the game. We out-shot, out-possessed, outplayed them—everything we were supposed to do we did, and our guys did everything they were supposed to do. For whatever reason, you know, it just didn't turn out how we think it should've turned out."

Russellville's week ended with the disappointment of defeat, but it started in the jubilation of victory. The Golden Tigers hosted Boaz, ranked No. 3 in the final coaches' poll of the season, in the first round of the playoffs on Tuesday, April 30, overcoming the Pirates with a late game-winning goal in normal time.

"Hats off to Boaz...second year in a row they come to our place they absolutely play their tail off," Stanford said. "It's such a battle, such a battle...(Boaz) had good shots, they had good chances, they played probably better than we did in the first half, for sure."

It required a comeback and a steely defensive effort for the Golden Tigers to finally dispatch the Pirates in the end. After opening the scoring in the eighth minute on a corner kick headed in by defender Richard Scott, Russellville fell behind 2-1 going into the halftime break. Boaz quickly responded to the hosts' opening salvo, firing in the equalizer two minutes later. The visitors then took

See, 'SOCCER,' Page 14

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'4-H,' From Page 11

The 4-H Archery Club coach, Dwight McCay, explained the differences between the two types of events at the state tournament.

"We have what is called field archery and field archery is where they shoot so many arrows at 10 meters and then so many arrows at 25 meters and so many at 30 meters," McCay said. "3-D is where you shoot animal targets set up at different distances. With 3-D the distance isn't marked so they basically have to judge each target. They have to figure out how far the target is before they draw back to shoot it, so it's a little bit harder and the targets are a little bit different."

McCay said the 4-H Archery Club and archery itself are important because it teaches youth about focus and preparation.

"Archery is something you can use all the way through life," he said. "Every time you come out of practice with archery you learn something different, something a little bit new. It teaches you to focus on a target, how to mentally prepare for every shot, and basically everything you do daily in archery you have to come up with a plan."

Apart from the intangible benefits of archery, McCay said there are tangible benefits for young people to take up archery, such as scholarships. And unlike many other high school sports, McCay said, archery is one you can practice throughout life and become a professional in, no matter your age.

"What I like about archery is that no matter how old you are, you can actually work your way up all the way up to what you call pro level, and that's something you can do after high school," he said. "I've been shooting archery for 25 years now and I've won my way up to pro level. So once you get out of school it's something you can keep doing and keep working on. You can always get a little better, go a little higher."

The 4-H Shotgun Club had several members take part in the three-day state tournament Friday, April 26 through Sunday, April 28.

The participants competed in three different events: sporting clays, skeet, and trap.

In the junior division, which comprises ages 9-13, Rhodes Berryman, Alex Gray, Lucas Burchfield, and Jeremiah Wilson ranked third in team trap shooting competition. In the senior division, ages 14-18, Nathan Richardson was the first place trap individual and also the highest overall individual. Richardson was also a part of the first place trap team which also included Kade LeMay, Davis Lindsey, and Colton Martin. Richardson, LeMay, Lindsey, and Martin were the second highest overall scoring team in the tournament.

Of all the teams that competed in the event, coach Wade Willingham said his team finished second overall in points.

"I was very proud of them," Willingham said. "The highest team down there had 388 and we had 385. They beat us by just three targets."

Like McCay said of the Archery Club, Willingham said there are practical benefits of being in the Shotgun Club.

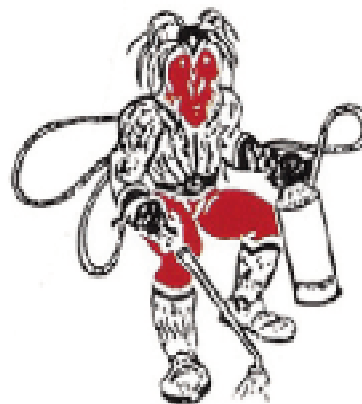
"It gets the kids used to firearms and teaches them safety on firearms, and it's all around just a good sport," he said.

Kade LeMay, 17, who competed in the tournament, said he's been involved for around three years and he's glad there's a program that allows students to get involved in competitive shooting.

"I think it's nice that the state still has something to do with encouraging the youth in hunting and the firearms aspect, instead of drawing away from it," he said. "You meet a lot of interesting people."

Other competing members of the Shotgun Club were Logan Burchfield, Joshua Spiegle, Dixie Hester, Tristan Hamm, and Jonathan Miller.

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'SOCCER,' From Page 11

the lead thanks to a set piece goal by Jose Arreguin.

"At halftime we challenged them. I said, 'Look. It's up to you, boys. It can be over now or we can come out and play like you're capable and good things can happen,'" Stanford said. "I was proud of them for answering the way they did in the second half."

It didn't take long for the Golden Tigers to level it going into the final 40 minutes of play. Just six minutes after the restart, Manny Martinez leveled it 2-2 and tilted the momentum in the end-to-end game in Russellville's favor.

Even with that swing in momentum, though, there were still a few frightful moments for the Golden Tigers. The biggest of these came in the 60th minute when, with Russellville's defense scrambling back and goalkeeper Miguel Andres coming out to make an attempt on the ball, a Boaz attacking player put a rolling shot on target. Hustling back, Isais Jose, known as "Chuck" to his teammates and coaches, in front of an open net was able to clear the ball off his own goal line to keep the score square.

"Hustle: We preach it every day," Stanford said. "Positivity plus intensity equals success. That's our slogan and I've had it since I got here... and that's what we're talking about. It doesn't matter what's going on, doesn't matter how bad things are, how good things are. None of that matters. What matters is if you're going to play as hard as you can for a full 80 minutes, and getting back to clear that ball off the line, that's a guy putting his body on the line for his teammates."

"That's a sophomore putting his body on the line. That's outstanding effort by him and just a great play," he added.

From the equalizing goal the match seemed to teeter on a knife's edge. Already open and fast-paced, both sides looked to pick it up a notch. However, towards the end of the game, Stanford said, the Golden Tigers' substitution strategy and depth appeared to be paying off.

"It was a hot day and it was probably one of the hottest days we've had to play in. We tried to sub our wingers and our strikers every 20 minutes," Stanford said. "Honestly, I think playing in that heat hurt Boaz who I don't think had the same depth as us."

All tied up, as the game crept closer and closer to the end of regulation, the tension was thick. As sometimes happens in the game, a moment of near joy for one team can quickly be turned into rapture for the other.

In the 75th minute, Boaz, with its speed, appeared to be in on goal but the Golden Tigers were able to get back and put in multiple challenges to avert the danger. All of the Pirates' players piled forward, the last of these Russellville clearances found Hailezgy Tekle around midfield. The sophomore, one of the Golden Tigers' best finishers, in a flash of great individual brilliance, dribbled past the two remaining defenders in his way and, with his coach's shouts of "shoot!" audible across the stadium, coolly slotted the go-ahead goal home past the goalkeeper.

"Sometimes he doesn't shoot when he should be shooting," Stanford said. "He's a good player. He makes things happen when he's supposed to, and he's just a good guy. He plays hard. He's still learning that right wing position a little bit...but when we get him figuring it out, he can be really, really deadly for us."

With the go-ahead goal and just under five minutes to play, all that was left for the Golden Tigers to do was defend and bleed clock, which the hosts did effectively, advancing to the quarterfinals of the state tournament for the fourth consecutive season.

Thankful for the win, Stanford also voiced his gratitude for the support the Golden Tigers received during the game.

"What an atmosphere," he said. "I'm very grateful. It's the best program in the state...You'll never prove me any different."

"Just a great atmosphere. The community, they love it, we love it, we love them."

Russellville's next match proved less loveable from the Golden Tiger coach's point of view. Traveling to play Guntersville in the quarterfinals for the second consecutive season, Stanford and the Golden Tigers felt hard done by officiating decisions made in a match he felt his team dominated.

"I've never said anything or hardly anything about the referees...but this is the second year in a row now at Guntersville that multiple situations should've been called and didn't get called," Stanford said. "It's been two years, back-to-back years, to get calls that really affected us and affected the game and the outcome of the game or to not get calls that changed the outcome of the game."

Russellville took the opening lead in the first half with a goal scored by Richard Scott off a free kick. It was Scott's third straight game with a goal.

"(Scott) does a great job for us on corners and free kicks. He does a really good job at going up and heading the ball. He's good at fighting for the ball in the pile, is what he's good at," Stanford said. "It was a pretty cool goal. He's had a great year for us, and he's played well. If he keeps working and keeps getting better and playing with these guys throughout the summer, I think we've got a shot at being really good next year and him having a good senior year."

The Golden Tigers took the 1-0 lead into halftime, but the Wildcats were able to equalize in the second half to make it 1-1.

"We made a mistake and let them score off a free kick in the second half," Stanford said. "It was a good kick. It was lobbed up, hit a heel and bounced into the back corner on the opposite side. So, just a bad luck situation for our kids really."

Now tied at 1-1, Stanford felt there were two major incidents of officiating that changed the course of the game: one that could have potentially sealed the win for the Golden Tigers, the other a call that cost them the game.

The first was a challenge on Manny Martinez in the box which, if called, would have awarded Russellville a penalty kick.

"It was a foul, clearly. (The defender) slid through Manny in about the middle of the box. Manny's about the score and the kid slides through Manny, completely through his legs," Stanford explained. The referee, evidently, in the back of his mind felt he needed to make sure it wasn't a foul because he stopped the entire game and talked to two different referees about it...and then they ended up not giving us the (penalty kick), which to me that's unacceptable."

Play resumed after the decision to not award a penalty, and Russellville and Guntersville took the game into overtime with the score tied 1-1. It was in the overtime period when Stanford said the second, and more consequential, error was made: A Guntersville goal that wasn't ruled out for offside.

"The guy is so far offside, it's not even funny," Stanford said. "It was a clear, clear offside. The Guntersville kid didn't do anything wrong. He did what he was supposed to do and go score, you know? So props to him."

"You could tell that everybody knew it was offside. Everybody saw it was offside but the line judge," he added. "I don't know who he was looking at, but unfortunately when you play a sport...there's going to be human error and mistakes made."

The Guntersville goal in overtime was the winner and the Wildcats eliminated the Golden Tigers in the quarterfinals for the second straight year.

"Last year I'm not going to say that we were better than we were better than them because, honestly, they played probably better than we did," Stanford said. "This year, they absolutely did not play better than us. I think, 100 percent, we outplayed them in every aspect."

"(The players) did everything we asked them to do, and unfortunately it's human error that is the reason for them to lose. That's heartbreaking for the kids, but what I wanted these guys to understand is that sometimes you're going to have to overcome some adversity which isn't always the easiest thing," he added.

Russellville ends its season with a 16-5-1 record. This season over, Stanford said there's nothing to do but to remember the lessons of this season, learn from it, and start preparing for the next campaign.

"I hate it ended like it did for these seniors that worked so hard to get back to Huntsville and deserved to get back to Huntsville. I hated it for them, but they're good young men and they'll be just fine. They're hard-nosed mentally and they're tough and they understand you're not always going to get the correct calls in life," Stanford said. "We've had a great year and I'm proud of our guys."

"We've got a lot of kids coming back next year," he added. "We've got a lot coming back in our starting 11, and we've got guys in our junior varsity group that went 9-1-1 this year that are extremely good soccer players."

"We've got a bright future and I think these guys are so close and on the verge of breaking through. We just have to keep going and eventually it's going to happen. It's going to be a special moment when it finally happens."

'BASEBALL,' From Page 11

both teams reigned in. Russellville and Springville had just three hits each in the contest.

"It was tough and it was a real fight," Smith said. "Our offense wasn't clicking, but there was no doubt that when Brandt (Cummings) went back out there he was going to get us back in the dugout pretty quick. It felt like, you know, we're not doing it right now, but we're going to because Brandt's giving us a chance to bust this thing open."

Cummings, Russellville's starting pitcher, made it through three innings before cramps forced him off the mound in the fourth.

"Brandt Cummings was locking up from cramps it seemed like every other pitch there in the fourth," Smith said. "He's competing, he's battling and then he starts cramping...his hamstring was like a piece of rebar when he came out of the game. He couldn't go. And I hated it for him in that situation because he was battling."

Springville scored all of its runs in the fourth with the three runs allowed falling on Cummings. He exited with seven strikeouts and just two hits allowed when he was relieved by Ty Engelthaler, who saw out the rest of the game.

Down 3-0 coming out of the bottom half of the fourth, the Golden Tigers looked like they would respond in the top of the fifth. After a leadoff single by Eli Boutwell and a fielder's choice, Russellville had a man on first with one out. That's when a couple of back-to-back decisions by umpires in the field—decisions much disputed by those in black and gold—killed whatever momentum Russellville had in that half inning and ultimately saw the head coach ejected from the game.

"I don't want to make anything personal with anybody, with officials. But I'm going to fight for our guys and defend them when I think they need to be fought for," Smith said. "Our guys deserve for me to go fight for them there."

What set Smith off on the officials first was when Gunner Sappington was called out in an attempt to steal second, a call Smith strongly disagreed with and made sure the umpire knew it. That made it two outs. Then, in a tight footrace to first base, Michael Scofield was called out for the final out of the inning. It was Smith's fiery tirade after this call that sent him into the locker room early. Both of the decisions, Smith said, were mistakes.

"I can go on and on all day about the calls that were missed and it's my belief that they were missed," Smith said. "They were the wrong calls and they came at the wrong time. Unfortunately, sometimes that's how the game goes. It's really, really unfortunate, but I hope everyone understands I'm going to fight for our players in those moments and defend them because I know they deserve better."

"I hate that (the ejection) took me away from them, but they didn't blink. They kept competing and that's all I've ever asked for them to do," Smith said.

Despite Smith's haranguing of the umpires' calls on the field, he said it's not an excuse he wants to use for the final result.

"At the end of the day we're not going to make it about umpires being the reasons behind wins and losses," he said. "We didn't execute in other moments that could have made those moments not matter, but it wasn't from a lack of effort. Again, I think Springville did a good job of executing their scouting report on our hitters and that was combined with some things just not going our way."

Smith's ejection did, in a noticeable way, fire up the home crowd in the standing-room-only stadium and the players, but in the end the Golden Tigers didn't have enough firepower in the game to crack Springville.

The loss eliminated the Golden Tigers in the quarterfinal round for the second straight year. The team finished with a 27-12 overall record. Smith said going out is always hard, but he said it's especially hard to see this senior class, a class that compiled a 126-47 record and two state titles, move on.

"It's especially heartbreaking for our seniors, who I felt like they deserved a chance to go further; they certainly worked hard enough to," Smith said. "The worst part of it is always saying goodbye to the seven young men, who impacted not only the program but the school and the community and had an impact on my life as well."

The disappointment in the result of the series and in the end of the season is real, Smith said, but he hopes that both the players graduating and the returning players will take away lessons from it.

"Sometimes I think that the lesson is greater than the outcome. At the

end of the day, we have to evaluate what we're doing and as high school coaches, as much as we want to win, we have to evaluate are we preparing young men for the world," Smith said. "We want to positively influence these guys so that they're better men having been a part of our program. That's what I tried to tell them after the game was that they did nothing wrong, and sometimes things don't go your way, but they fought their tails off and those guys competed."

"We're not going to cut down a high school athlete for playing bad, but we are going to demand a standard of effort and competitiveness always. Those guys did that and no matter what they can look themselves in the mirror and know they did everything they could and they kept competing," he added. "I think the lesson outweighs the loss. If you keep competing and giving life everything you've got, regardless of the outcome, you're going to be successful. So I hope our older guys take that with them into the next chapter of their lives and our young guys take that with them throughout their careers here with us."

Even in defeat, or especially so, Smith said he was reminded, too, of how great it is to be a Golden Tiger, thanking the community for all the support during the season and throughout the playoffs.

"Walking around Friday after the loss, I think my biggest thought was how blessed I am to coach here in this community," Smith said. "I think about how many of our fans traveled to Leeds and were just with us all year long...I'm extremely thankful for this community, our school, our school leaders, and our teachers. The teachers, man, they care about our players and they care about our success and they show up. They're there for the players and for us coaches, too. So, I just want to say a thank you to all of Russellville for the opportunity to be a part of something so special as this community."

Finally, looking at the 2024 season as a whole, even though the Golden Tigers didn't advance as far as they would have liked, Smith believes it was a special season. The head coach has a high regard for the character shown by his players throughout the year.

"It was a season that I'm extremely proud of for multiple reasons, and not just making another quarterfinal appearance, but more so watching this team grow up and come together," he said. "What was really special to me is that we had a lineup that rotated consistently throughout the year, and that's not necessarily common in high school baseball."

"It felt like our lineup changed like every two weeks and the thing that makes it so special is typically, in a high school setting with kids that are young and may not be as mature, you can deal with some selfishness, and I've been a part of teams where that's the case," Smith said.

"These guys never did that, they were never selfish, and I think that's what I'm most proud of...I cherish the fact that these guys truly embodied that spirit that, you know, no one cares who gets the credit. I'll do whatever it takes to help my team win today and they lived that out. You couldn't tell who the every day starters were between the guys who were asked to serve in a different role. They all cared for each other and when their number was called they performed; when it wasn't, they were all great teammates," he added.

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