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State Superintendent of Education attends FCBOE meeting to congratulate Tharptown Rocketry Team

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When the Alabama State Superintendent of Education shows up at a local school board meeting, chances are good there's something important taking place. That was exactly the case Thursday morning at the Franklin County Board of Education meeting, as Dr. Eric Mackey was among the many folks who came to honor the national championship Tharptown Rocketry Team.

The team is in England this week competing in the International Rocketry Challenge as part of the Farnborough Air Show outside of London. Alabama State Board of Education District 7 board member Belinda McRae also attended the meeting. But before team members flew across the pond, Alabama's chief public education administrator personally congratulated the team as he told them what they've done for their school, community and beyond. "I'm thankful to be here this


See 'FCBOE,' Page 8

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Phil Campbell Rescue Squad purchases underwater drone to help in waterway search and rescue missions

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

A recent purchase by the Phil Campbell Rescue Squad will assist the agency, as well as first responders across Franklin County, in underwater search and rescue. Rescue Squad members are practicing the use of a new QYSEA FIFISH V-EVO underwater drone. The ROV (remotely operated vehicle) drone is used to observe the depths of large bodies of water and assist first responders by providing an immediate tool to go below water and search for a missing person. In these types of search and rescue

missions, time is of the essence and the new drone will definitely allow underwater searches to begin sooner. Phil Campbell Fire Chief Andy Marbutt said the drone and its attachments cost approximately \$2,000 and was purchased with funds generated, in part, from the sale of an old ambulance. Marbutt said PCRS members are going to practice operating the drone first in a swimming pool. And once they become proficient in its operation, simulated rescues and training will move to Upper Bear Lake. The drone will be available to help other agencies in their search and rescue

See 'DRONES,' Page 4




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**Bobbie Jo West, age 65, of
Russellville, passed away on
Monday, July 22, 2024. The visitation
will be 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon,
Saturday, July 27, 2024 at Spry
Memorial Chapel.**

**Ray Linden Lawler, age 87, passed
away on Saturday, July 20, 2024.
Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the
family.**

**Joyce Marie Poss Swinney passed
away July 18th., 2018. Pinkard
Funeral Home assisted the family.**



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Franklin Free Press

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Donation from Green's Hardware to help area rocketry teams

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

By the time you read this, eight Tharptown High School students, along with their coaches and mentors, will be competing in the International Rocketry Challenge at the Farnborough Air Show just outside of London.

After a week that saw the team honored at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, at the Franklin County Board of Education's July business meeting and a Sunday afternoon reception at Green's Dependable Hardware in Russellville, it was finally time to head to England and represent the United States in the International Rocketry Challenge.

The team members include: Kylee Beard, Angie Chavez, Shyla Martinez, Angel Franco, Adrionna Ashley, Jessie Mitchell, Isabella Hall and Frank Gutierrez. Coaches and sponsors of the team include Marsha Inmon, Areanna Orozco, Darrel Baker, Julie Madden and Andrew Heath.

Seven of the eight students will return to Tharptown High School next month to begin the 2024-2025 school year in pursuit of another national championship.

And those students, along with rocketry teams for all area schools, will benefit from a generous \$5,000 donation from Green's Dependable Hardware to the Propel Science Foundation that will be used to outfit a trailer for use by rocketry teams in and around Franklin County.

Heath is the founder and president of the Propel Science Foundation. PROPEL is an acronym for Providing Resources and Opportunities for Promoting Engaged Learning. Through its mentoring program, the foundation offers guidance and support to teams who participate in the American Rocketry Challenge.

It seems a natural fit for Heath, team captain of the 2015 Russellville High School Rocketry Team that won the International Rocketry Challenge. Workshops focus not only on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) projects, but also provide a platform for students to unlock their full potential and achieve both personal and professional goals.

For Dependable owners Doug and Betsy Green, supporting local rocketry teams was a calling they felt led to answer.

"Brian Hall's daughter is on Tharptown's Rocketry Team, and he was working on a fund raiser for the team, and he told me about Andrew wanting to outfit a trailer for use by rocketry teams," Green said. "Andrew came by and he had developed the Propel Science Foundation and had this idea to outfit a trailer so students could use it on sight at competitions and at practices through the school year.

"It's a large donation for us, but it will help every school in the county who has a rocketry team so we thought about it and said let's do it. It just seemed like something we needed to do to support an event that has seen extensive local success," he added.

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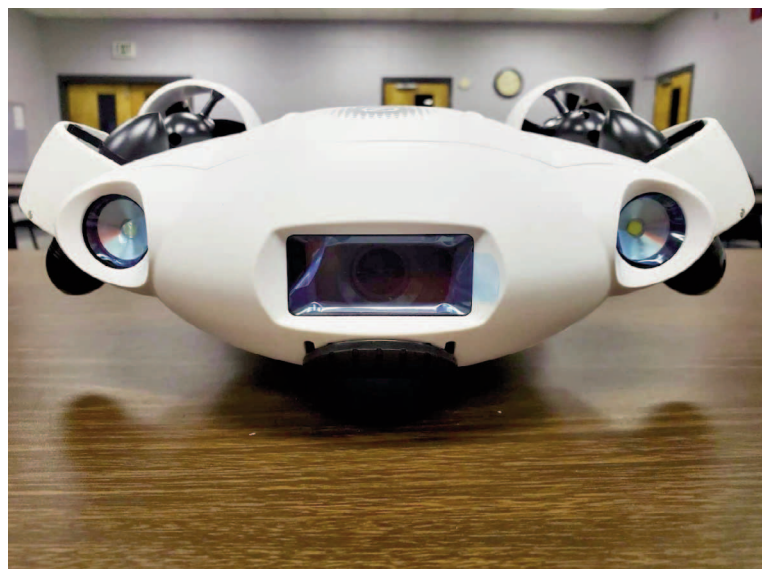
'DRONES,' From Page 1

calls.
"We work with the Franklin County Emergency Management Agency and we respond whenever they call us out," Marbutt said. "We train a lot on Upper Bear, but we'll go anywhere in the county where we're needed."

The ROV drone, Marbutt said, is the first one of its kind in Franklin County.

"We're proud to have it and we've been wanting one for a while. We can go anywhere we're needed," Marbutt said. "Upper Bear is known for its murky water, so we're hoping for good results when we get it into Upper Bear. It's made for deep water and to provide visibility in dark, murky waters."

With a 4k UHD camera system and frame rate of 50 frames per second, the drone can provide the eyes for divers in low-visibility searches and greatly reduce the time required to conduct a grid search of an area underwater.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Phil Campbell Rescue Squad's new ROV underwater drone.

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Baggett eyes September start date for Highway 75 bridge project

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When work begins in September to repair a 30-foot bridge/culvert on Highway 75, it will be the direct result of the efforts of Franklin County Engineer Jason Baggett working with officials from the Alabama Department of Transportation to secure \$175,000 in grant funding.

The \$175,000 was awarded as part of the Rebuild Alabama Act Annual Grant Program. The 2019 law imposed an additional tax on each gallon of gas purchased in Alabama with the promise of using the tax revenue to improve the state's road and bridge system.

Each county and municipality receive a monthly payment pursuant to the Rebuild Alabama Act, which is based on population. Additionally, the annual grant program offers another way for cities or counties to obtain additional monies to make improvements to roads and bridges.

These discretionary funds are awarded, in large part, by Gov. Kay Ivey and ALDOT after a consideration of the project need and anticipated cost. Cities or counties may apply for up to \$350,000 in annual grant funds, but applicants requesting over \$250,000 must also commit \$100,000 in local funds, potentially bringing the committed funds total to \$450,000.

With the grant received by Franklin County for \$175,000, it's a 100% state grant with no local match required.

Baggett met with ALDOT Transportation Director John Cooper and ALDOT North Alabama Regional Office Director Curtis Vinson about the Highway 75 project after Baggett originally applied for a grant to resurface another road.

ALDOT officials encouraged Baggett to redo the county's application to request grant funding for Highway 75, and the project was approved and funded in the first phase of annual grant funding.

Highway 75 starts in Phil Campbell near the railroad tracks, and travels north until it splits off from Highway 81. Highway 75 intersects with Alabama 243 in the Churntown community. It crosses 243, and reaches all the way to Alabama 24 in Waco.

The bridge to be repaired is on Highway 75 a couple hundred yards south of the 75/Highway 74 intersection, Baggett said.

Although labeled a 'bridge,' it's really three precast box culverts that span more than 20 feet, so it's considered a bridge. Each box is 10'x10', totaling 30 feet in length.

Baggett said the outlet side of the pipe is starting to undermine under these box culverts, so the work will involve going in and core drilling in each box, then filling in all the voids with concrete. New wing walls will be built along with aprons to hold everything in place.

"It's a project that will prevent us from basically having to replace the bridge," Baggett said. "We will start advertising for bids July 31st and will open the bids in mid-August, with plans to award the project in September.

"We really want to get this done before the state closes 243 right where it meets 74 to work on a bridge on 243. That will greatly increase the traffic going down Highway 75, so if we award it in September, we're hoping we'll be done by November with what we need to do," he added.

Baggett expressed his appreciation to Cooper and Vinson for their support of the grant application and for taking the time to meet with him. "They didn't know me when I walked into their office other than I followed David Palmer as Franklin County Engineer," Baggett said. "They took the time to speak with me about the project and why it was important and I very much appreciate their support."



COURTESY PHOTO

This damaged culvert on Highway 75 will soon be repaired.

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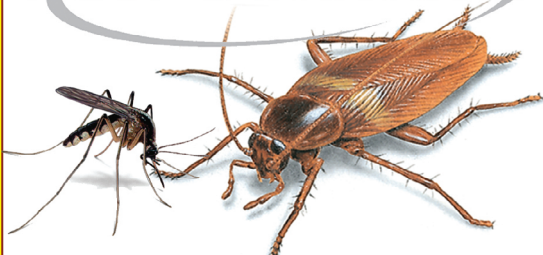
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 **T**he Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools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


 **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. 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.

 **N**orthwest Regional Library is proud to announce audiobooks are now available through our Books-By-Mail program. This program is completely free to those that are medically homebound, live more than 10 miles from a town with a public library, or require large print or audiobooks only. Must be a resident of Marion, Franklin, or Lamar counties. Contact us today at 205-487-2330 or visit our website at northwestregional.net to find out more information about the program! We are accepting donations of new or gently used CD audiobooks. Donations can be dropped off at any member library. Contact us for more information. "

 **T**he 2024 Franklin County Watermelon Festival Car Show will take place on Saturday, August 17, from 7 a.m.-1 p.m. Prizes will be awarded throughout the day. 50/50 raffle. Winner drawn at 1 p.m. Must be present to win. Entry fee \$25 for first car and additional cars \$15. Call 256-443-5919 for more information. The event is sponsored by the Russellville High School Marching Hundred Band Parents.

 **M**y Father's House Ministries will host a Kids' Crusade July 24-26, Wednesday-Friday, from 6-8 p.m., nightly. Bring your children for a blessed time of Biblical fun, crafts, puppet shows and food! Friday will be Fun Night with games and food! The theme will be the Hero Hotline, Called Together to Serve God. Everyone is welcome. If you need a ride, call 256-460-1376. Church is located at 104 East Lawrence St., Russellville.

 **S**iloam Missionary Baptist Church will host Summer Revival July 29-August 2, Monday-Friday, at 7 p.m., nightly. Evangelist Dr. Josh Lancaster. Pastor John Powell and Congregation invite you to attend. Church is located at 1657 Co. Road 60, Russellville. For more information, call 256-331-9502.

 **T**here will be a fundraiser for the Franklin County Branch of the MLK Memorial Scholarship Committee with the Swamp John's Food Truck on site this Friday, July 26, in the parking lot of Green's Dependable True Value Hardware on Highway 43. We appreciate your support.

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RCS board amends admission policy to include children of city employees

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved a new schedule of prices for meals for visitors and staff at all Russellville City Schools at the board's July 16th meeting.

As has been the case the past several years, all RCS students will receive breakfast and lunch at no cost. Students participating in activities approved by the board may also receive an after-school snack at no cost upon request by the activity sponsor.

Meal prices for the coming school year will be:

- No cost for student breakfast and lunch.
- No cost for Employee Breakfast at West Elementary, Russellville Elementary, Russellville Middle and Russellville High Schools.
- \$4.75 for Employee Lunch.
- \$3.25 for Visitor Breakfast.
- \$4.75 for Visitor Lunch.

Other agenda items approved by the board included:

- approval for the Child Nutrition Program to provide breakfast, lunch and a snack for the child care center at Head Start.
- approved a rollover of the system's contract for milk and ice cream, for an additional 12-month period to cover the coming school year. Milk and ice cream will be provided by Purity Dairy.
- approved the use of \$15,000 in local funds to provide meals for the SPAN Program from August 1, 2024 through July 31, 2025.
- approved the use of \$1,000 of local funds to provide meals to the Foster Grandparents when on campus as volunteers for Russellville

City Schools from August 1, 2024, through July 31, 2025.

—approved a contract with Ed Farm from August 1, 2024 to July 31, 2025.

—approved contracts for School Resource Officers Sammie Washington, Rick Itter and Rodney Belue, from August 1, 2024, through July 31, 2025.

—approval of personnel moves including:

—Retirements/Resignations/Terminations/Leave of Absence: Gary Odom, part-time temporary retiree at Pre-K at WES, termination, and Chloe Reynolds, WES teacher, resignation.

—Employment: Rhonda Ponders, Part-Time director at Pre-K, WES, Shelly Kent, ELA teacher at RHS, Deion Belue, PE teacher at RHS, Tracey Barnett, math teacher at RMS, Macey Vandiver, choral teacher at RMS, Suzanne Wilson, first grade teacher WES, Kaylee Smith, teacher at RES, Ana Lopez, EL aide at RES, Lisa Shipman, business teacher at RMS, Aaron Paden, Welding teacher RHS, Lindsey Warren, science teacher RHS, Thomas Goode, instructional aide RHS, Wendy King, CNP worker at WES, Beth Ponders, CNP worker at RHS, Joyce Malone, CNP worker at RMS.

—Transfers: Cortney Green, from RES teacher to special education teacher RHS, Jordan Shelton, from 9-month CTE teacher to 10-month CTE teacher at RHS, Chelsea Puckett, from pre-K to first grade teacher at WES, Elizabeth Alonso, from EL aide to teacher at RES, Angie James, from CNP Manager at RES to CNP Administrative Assistant at Central Office.

—Volunteers: KJ Melson, 8th grade basketball and Reece Carson, tennis.

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'FCBOE,' From Page 1

morning to send you off to Europe. I thank each of you for investing the time and work into getting here," Mackey said. "Not a lot of people know the work that goes into this.

"People now know about Tharptown High School. You've put your school on the map, Franklin County Schools on the map and you've put our state on the map as a result of what you've done, and I congratulate you. You've shown we can be leaders in technology and I'm proud to be here with you this morning," he added.

Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore also attended the FCBOE meeting to present the Tharptown Rocketry Team a framed resolution signed by the Franklin County Commission formally recognizing the team's accomplishments.

"You've made Franklin County very proud and we appreciate what you've done. Best of luck next week and safe travels," Moore told team members.

Franklin County Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton presented the team a trophy that will be displayed in the school's trophy case, a Recognition of Achievement and a check, approved by the board, for \$5,000 to the Tharptown Rocketry Team to help with expenses.

"You've set the standard when it comes to rocketry and we thank you and can't say enough about what you've done for your team, your school and your community," Hamilton said.

Rocketry team members include Adrianna Ashley, Kylee Beard, Angie Chavez, Shyla Martinez Duarte, Angel Garcia, Frank Gutierrez, Isabella Hall and Jessie Mitchell. Sponsors/coaches include Areanna Orozco, Marsha Inmon, Andrew Heath, Julie Madden and Darrel Baker.

There were regular items on the agenda as well. Those action items approved by the board included:

—approval of 12-month rollover bids awarded by the Northwest Alabama Child Nutrition Program Cooperative Group for the 2024-2025 school year for produce to O.K. Produce, supplemental grocery bid with Osborn Foodservice and milk/ice cream bid with Dairy Farmers of America/Purity Dairies. The board also rescinded the previously approved rollover bread bid with Flowers Bread/Bakery Company and awarded it to Flowers Baking Company as lowest responsible bidder.

Personnel actions approved by the board included:

—Resignation: Heather Eubanks, Belgreen High School teacher, Alexandra Lovett, Tharptown Elementary School teacher, Mary Motes, BHS teacher, Kim Coker, Part-Time Special Education teacher, Tim Vandiver, bus driver, Kristin Nunley, Agriscience teacher Vina High School, Ben Guin, Assistant Football

Coach, VHS, Thomas Horton, Varsity Baseball Coach, THS, DeAnni Lindsey, Special Education Aide, BHS, Angela Gilliland, Sena Haddock and Joyce Malone, Child Nutrition Program Assistants, Brady Ramey, Girls' Varsity Basketball Coach, Red Bay High School and Suzanne Wilson, Elementary Teacher at Belgreen.

—Employment:

Sarah Fretwell, Alyssa Gentry and Kaitlyn Bragwell, Child Nutrition Program Assistants, Tiffany Baker, Special Education Teacher PCES, Nicole Kennemur, Special Education Teacher, TES, Courtney Sandlin and Cortney Thorn, Elementary Teachers Belgreen School, Alexis Henson, English Language Arts Teacher, BHS, Ellie Counts, Elementary Teacher, TES, Emily Hodges, Elementary Teacher, TES, The Tharptown Rocketry Team with Dr. Eric Thomas Horton, Jerome Mackey, State Board of Education Member Morgan, Greg Smith, Angela Belinda McRae, Tharptown Principal Tyler Gilliland, Randy Hester, Berryman, Superintendent Greg Hamilton and the Denise Morrow, Hulon Heath and Robert Langley, Bus Franklin County Board of Education Drivers.



COURTESY PHOTO

—Transfers: Byron Gann, from PCHS Aide to THS Aide, Sarah Motes, from THS Aide to PCHS Aide, Byron Gann, from Bus Driver PCHS to Bus Driver THS, Lionel Landers, from Bus Driver EFJHS to Bus Driver THS, Lisa Norton, from Bus Driver THS to Bus Driver, PCHS, Valerie Copeland, from Bus Driver PCHS to Bus Driver EFJHS, Tim Stehno, from Bus Driver PCHS to Bus Driver EFJHS, Rhonda Hellman, from Bus Driver VHS to Bus Driver RBHS and Regina McKinney, from Bus Driver BHS to Bus Driver VHS.

—FMLA Request: Kimberly Willingham, Custodian, BHS, from August 1, 2024 through November 1, 2024, Anna Jeffreys, TES Elementary Teacher, from August 7, 2024, through November 6, 2024.

—Personal Leave of Absence: Kimberly Willingham, Custodian BHS, from November 1, 2024 through end of school year in May 2025 and Teresa Simmons, Child Nutrition Program Assistant, BHS, for the 2024-25 school year.

—Principal Contracts: Brady Ramey, Red Bay High School, Probationary Period of 12 months, effective July 19, 2024, and Brandi Miller, RBES, Probationary Period of 12 months, effective July 19, 2024.

—New Teacher Substitutes: Kelsey Cooper, Dovie Lowery, Amanda McCarley, Regina McKinney, Shantell Mink, Misty Nelson, Jennifer Saint and Abram Thorn.

The next regular meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education will be August 6, 2024, with work session at 4 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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NWSCC to host free concert with band Winston Ramble

Submitted

Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) will host Party with the Patriots, a W.C. Handy Music Festival event, featuring Winston Ramble on Thursday, July 25, from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. in front of the fountain on the Shoals campus.

The southern rock band Winston Ramble, originated in Winston County Alabama. They now perform all over the Southeast entertaining their audiences with their self-proclaimed, "Alabama style, southern-fried rock n' roll."

The event will be free and open to the public. It will include live music, inflatables, food trucks, corn hole, face painting, and other activities for children. Guests are encouraged to bring outdoor folding chairs.

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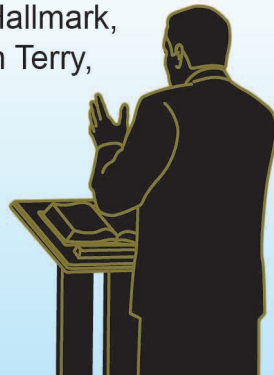
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Coaching vacancies to be filled for RBHS girls' varsity basketball, Tharptown varsity baseball

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

Two new coaching positions have opened up in Franklin County following the resignations of the Red Bay High School varsity girls' basketball coach and the Tharptown High School baseball coach, which were accepted at the July 18th meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education.

Brady Ramey resigned as the coach of the Lady Tigers basketball program and was then promptly hired as principal of Red Bay High School.

"Brady Ramey has experience as an administrator in the past, and there's no question he'll do a fabulous job as principal," Franklin County Superintendent Greg Hamilton said. "His qualifications are very good, not only as a coach but as an administrator. That's why we moved him to administration."

At Tharptown High School, Thomas Horton stepped down as head coach of the Wildcats' baseball team. Horton remains in the system and has taken on a bus route, according to Tharptown High School principal Tyler Berryman.

Both jobs have been posted, and, according to Hamilton, the Franklin County Board of Education is looking to make hires for the two coaching roles soon.

"We hope to fill both positions at the August 6th Board meeting," Hamilton said.

Belgreen's King to continue baseball career at Rust College

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

Will King, a standout baseball player at Belgreen High School during the 2024 season, is the latest Franklin County athlete to announce his decision to play college athletics. On June 17th, the recent Belgreen graduate announced on Facebook his commitment to continue his baseball and academic career at Rust College.

"I'm happy," King told the Franklin Free Press. "I worked really hard to get this opportunity to play at this level. It's been my goal since I was little to play college ball."

Belgreen head coach Nathan Vincent is excited for his now-former player, who has been an important member of the Bulldogs program for the last half-decade.

"I'm super proud of Will and what he has accomplished at Belgreen," Vincent said. "Starting in seventh grade we knew what he was capable of. He's been one of the most competitive players I've had

See, 'KING,' page 14



WILL KING

COURTESY PHOTO

Belue, Baird highlight additions to Goodwin's RHS coaching staff

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

When the Russellville High School varsity football team hits the field for its season opener in less than a month, the Golden Tigers will be coached up on the sideline by a couple of names that may ring a bell to local football fans.

Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin, entering his first season in charge of the program, bolstered his defensive coaching staff with the additions of former Deshler High School and University of Alabama player Deion Belue as defensive backs coach and Russellville High School alum Torey Baird as inside linebackers coach.

"We're extremely blessed to have all of our new coaches in," Goodwin said. "(Belue and Baird) both came from two really successful programs, so being a part of a winning culture and being part of good staffs always helps.

"With success comes expectations and both these guys know those expectations. I think both of them are going to do a fine job, and we're glad to have them," he added.

Belue, who was hired at the July 16th Russellville City Schools Board of Education meeting, was a two-time Alabama Sports Writers Association Class 4A All-State First Team selection during his career at Deshler. After two seasons at Northeast Mississippi Community College, Belue transferred to Alabama where he started 25 games and, as a senior, helped the Crimson Tide win the 2013 BCS National Championship, routing Notre Dame 45-14.

"(Belue) was playing at Deshler when I was first here so we got to see what a special player he was first-hand," said Goodwin, whose first stint at Russellville as an assistant under Doug Goodwin overlapped with Belue's high school career. "He was able to further his education and playing experience

See, 'STAFF,' Page 15

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Four new coaches taking reins of varsity athletic programs at RHS

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

In a flurry of activity last week, Russellville High School announced four new head coaches to lead varsity athletic programs.

Madison Lamon will lead the volleyball team, Tyler Malone will take over the girls' golf program, Lee-Taylor Bishop was named the boys' tennis coach, and Emily Evans will serve as cross country coach. Three of the four are Russellville High School alumni, and all four have some connection to the program they were picked to lead.

"Where they came from didn't really matter when we were looking for candidates for these different positions," Russellville athletic director Dustin Goodwin said. "Fortunately we did have some people who we knew would do a really good job that were already here. Some were already helping in programs already, and we thought they were ready to take the next step to start leading a program and so we gave them that opportunity.

"Our biggest deal is we want to surround our student-athletes with great people who are going to be professional, do things the right way, and give our kids every opportunity they can to be successful," Goodwin added. "I think the candidates we narrowed these positions down to and ultimately hired are really good fits for Russellville and will do a really great job."

Madison Lamon, a 2017 graduate of Russellville High School, is stepping in to take over the varsity volleyball program following the departure of Will White, who is now an assistant coach at Freed-Hardeman University.

"I'm really thankful for the opportunity to come back and lead these girls," Lamon said. "This program gave a lot to me and helped me become the woman I am today.

"I really just want to give back to the program that gave so much to me," she added. "I'm really thankful to have the opportunity to lead this team because I have a strong passion for this program and girls athletics in general."

Lamon is a more recent graduate of the Mississippi University for Women where she played four seasons on the Owls' volleyball team. According to the MUW sports information department, she is the program's current career record holder in total assists with 882. After graduating with a degree in education from MUW in 2021, Lamon joined Russellville City Schools. She currently teaches sixth-grade science at Russellville Middle School.

Since coming back to her alma mater Lamon has been involved in the volleyball program, coaching the junior varsity team. She believes her youth and the relationship she's already built with her players will be advantageous as she enters her first season as the head coach.

"I've already coached all of them because I started out coaching JV when I first got here," she said. "I feel like I've already gotten that respect from them already, and I feel like they can relate more to me because I am younger and I have gone through what they're going through."

As an insider Lamon has also been privy to the preseason preparations.

"We've had some play dates already, so I've been able to see what we need to improve on," she said. "It also showed me some really good things that I think we can capitalize on, as well.

"As we figure out who works best together on the court in each position we'll figure out what will be most beneficial for our team and what will help us to excel," Lamon added.

If Russellville is to reach the level of excellence it is aiming for this season Lamon said the team will be relying on the performances and leadership abilities of a handful of its older players.

"Lalia Hill—she'll be going into the 11th grade—I think has come a long way, and I think she'll be a big asset to us," Lamon said. "I really do think she could be one of the ones that pulls through for us throughout the year.

"I've also got three seniors this year—that's Haylee Rikard, Kaylee Garner, and Hope Bonman—and I've already talked to them about being leaders and holding the other girls accountable," she added. "I think they'll do a great job leading our team."

One of the priorities for Russellville this year, Lamon said, will be team and individual development, not just on the court but off it, too.

"We're going to have team goals, specifically, and then personal goals," she said. "I want them to work on bettering themselves on the court and outside, as well. I want them focusing on their academics and in class because obviously they're not going to be able to play if they don't have their grades up.

"Being an active member of the community, being a role model for younger players—we want to emphasize things like that, as well," Lamon added.

As the season inches closer—Russellville's first matches are scheduled for August 22nd—Lamon said the Golden Tigers will continue pushing to improve in the hopes of enjoying success like the program has had in the past.

"I was on the team that went to regionals back in 2016 and we haven't been back since," Lamon said. "I'd like for us to get back to that point where we can win the area, go to regionals, and then advance to state."

Tyler Malone, also no stranger to the Golden Tigers, was selected to lead the girls' golf team last week. After spending a year as an assistant under head coach of the boys' golf team, Patrick Odom, Malone received his promotion to head coach of the girls' team.

A 2009 graduate of Russellville High School, Malone spent five years at Haleyville where he was a part of two Class 4A boys' golf state championship teams before coming back to coach at his alma mater.

"The opportunity came to come back home to Russellville and work with Coach Odom, who I've known for a long time and is really close to me and been a mentor to me," Malone, who is also an assistant under Odom on the varsity boys' basketball team, said. "We worked together last year with golf with me in a different role. It's kind of special to try to build the program with him.

"We're going to try to build this program and try to establish the girls' team like the boys' program has been established," he added.

One of Malone's first steps will be to try to increase participation and enthusiasm around the program.

"One of the main things, I think, is going to be getting girls excited and getting girls out to build a team," he said. "We want to build a team where they can be with their friends and be competitive."

From there, Malone said, the objective will be to lay the foundations for a consistently successful program in the future.

"I know the girls four or five years ago advanced to sub-state, so that's what we want and that's what we're chasing after," he said. "Hopefully we can build to that and make that the baseline. Once we make that normal then the obvious next goal is state.

"We've got to take it one step at a time and right now the first step is getting girls out, getting them excited, and getting them playing."

Lee-Taylor Bishop, who was previously assisting with the Russellville varsity girls' tennis team, is moving over to head up the boys' tennis squad. A graduate of Shoals Christian Academy, Bishop played three years of college tennis at North Alabama while earning her degree in elementary education. She knows the game as a player, but she's also familiar with the coaching side of it. Bishop's father, Brice, over three stints, served 20 combined years as head coach of the UNA tennis program, and she has siblings in the profession, as well. Coaching, she said, feels like a natural fit.

"I've always wanted to stay around sports. Growing up my dad coached and my brother and sister have all been coaches. It's something I've been around my whole life," said Bishop, who teaches fourth grade at Russellville Elementary. "One of the reasons I went into education was so that it would be possible for me to have this kind of opportunity, so this is really special and it means a lot to me."

Bishop has seen the success of both the girls' and boys' tennis teams in her year at Russellville and said she is looking to continue that trend.

"This is something that I've always wanted to do," Bishop said. "Coming in last year and working under Coach (Charlotte) Dollar, she has really inspired me to lead this program to the best of my ability, and I know that I'll have her guidance."

The boys' and girls' tennis teams at Russellville spend a lot of time in close proximity, so Bishop's players will be familiar with her. She said the relationships she's already built with them will make the transition easier.

"Being here the last year I think I've already established that trust with the boys," she said. "They know me. They know what I expect going in. They know that I just want them to work hard, and I want us to be successful. I think because I've worked with them before, knowing what I expect is going to

'RHS,' From Page 12

really help us come out strong.

"I expect everyone to come in with an open mind and work hard. As long as they're working hard and giving me their best ability they're going to improve," Bishop added.

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Rounding out Russellville's varsity appointments is Emily Evans, who was put in charge of the cross country team. Evans, who manages the Russellville Municipal Airport and owns Go Vertical Aviation with her husband Jason, accepted the role after coach Larsen Plyler stepped away due to health reasons. Evans, whose son Connor is a member of the cross country team, said she sees her role as more administrative, but she wants to continue to build on the gradual momentum that's been growing in the program over the last few years.

"When our son Connor started running in eighth grade there were barely enough people out to have a team," she said. "It was a very, very small team, but it's grown to the point where we have about 50 athletes this year."

"Last year, to my knowledge, was the first year that our boys team has qualified for state. Our goal this year is for our girls, who actually did pretty well in sectionals last year, to qualify for state, too," Evans added. "What we want to see from all the hard work is our girls qualify for state as a team and the boys finish in the top three at state. Of course we'd love to win it, but those are our two main goals we're pushing this year."

"They can do it. They have the potential, and they've definitely been putting in the work running all summer long and putting in the miles to accomplish that."

In addition to the four varsity head coaching hires, Russellville announced two new head coaches to lead the middle school programs. Dylan Seabolt was named athletic director for RMS and will lead the football team. Luke Baker will be the new RMS baseball coach

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'KING,' From Page 11

since I've been here.” King was a versatile member of this past season’s squad, playing in multiple positions as he helped lead the Bulldogs to an appearance in the second round of the AHSAA Class 1A playoffs. The 2024 postseason run was just one of many King was able to experience during his career at Belgreen.

“He’s been a staple for this program for six years,” Vincent said. “He and this senior class have made it to the playoffs four times out of the last six years.”

On the mound King finished his final high school campaign with a team-high 44 and a third innings pitched, a team-best 5-2 record, and a team-leading 2.68 earned-run average. He struck out 51 batters and held opponents to a .161 batting average.

At the plate King ended the year with a stellar .475 batting average,

leading the Bulldogs in home runs and doubles with two and nine, respectively. With his 38 total hits, King knocked in 30 batters and scored 44 runs. He struck out just 10 times in 108 at-bats. King was also no joker on the basepaths, swiping 28 bags.

For his efforts, King was named a Franklin Free Press All-County First Team pitcher. He was also the first player in the program’s history to be selected to the All-State team, earning a spot on the Class 1A Second Team as an infielder.

“I know he got All-State for infield—of course, he is a really good infielder—but I threw him more on the mound than anyone else this year, and he did a great job pitching for us, too” Vincent told the Franklin Free Press after the All-State team was announced in early June. “I think, offensively, his stats speak for themselves. Batting average, on-base percentage, extra base hits, stolen bases—he can really do it all.

“I’m proud of him, and we’re really happy that he was recognized,” Vincent added.

King believes that his ability to play any position on the field is one of his biggest strengths and will help him be successful at the next level.

“I can play almost any spot on the field,” he said. “If they ask me to play it, I can play it. I’m a utility player.”

His former head coach concurs:

“Will can play any position on the field,” Vincent said. “He’s a very versatile player, and I think that will help him once he starts college ball.”

Rust College is a private, historically black college located in Holly Springs, Mississippi. The Bearcats play in the HBCU Athletic Conference, formerly known as the Gulf Coast Athletic Conference, associated with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The school’s colors, blue and white, King will certainly be familiar with, but it was Rust’s size—enrollment ranges from 700 to 900 students—that attracted King.

“I didn’t want to go to a place with a really big campus, and (Rust’s) campus is pretty small,” he said. “I like that it’s small like my hometown.”

King plans to study education in the hopes of one day returning to his hometown.

“I want to be able to come back and coach baseball when I get older,” King said. “I know I’ll miss playing in high school with my friends, and I want to be able to come back and coach high school.”

Until that time, King said he’ll always take with him a lesson he learned at Belgreen:

“I know there are some times it’ll be hard, but I know I can get through them,” he said. “I know I’ve got people I can call on if I need help and they’ll help me.”

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'STAFF,' From Page 11

at Alabama and a little bit in the NFL. Anytime you can get someone in who the kids know has done it before and at a very high level, that's just sort of validation that what they are saying is true.

"Deion is someone we started to make contact with back in May and we're blessed to have him. I'm looking forward to working with him," Goodwin added.

After closing the book on his playing career, Belue decided to get into coaching in order to help give players a chance to fulfill their dreams of playing at the next level.

"Whenever I got done playing and when I got back home I wanted to pour into the kids as much as possible, to give them the opportunity like I had for a chance to go play college ball," Belue said. "I'm not saying that's got to be at an Alabama, but just a chance to go.

"As much as I can, I want to help push them in the right direction," he added.

Belue, who previously coached for a couple years at Sheffield, said he's elated about joining the Russellville coaching staff and looking forward to working under Goodwin.

"It came down to timing and it was the right opportunity," he said. "It was one of those things I couldn't turn down, and I'm excited to join Coach Goodwin because of the experience he brings in from Chelsea and Thompson and schools like that."

Belue's first game as a Russellville coach will be against his alma mater on August 23rd. The Russellville and Deshler series goes back to 1923 and the two have met every year since 1988 (Deshler forfeited the game in 2020). The rivalry is a tight one with the Golden Tigers holding a narrow 47-46-4 series lead. On the black and gold side this time, Belue is anticipating another tough fight between the two Tiger teams.

"I'm expecting a great game, and I'll probably be reliving some of those moments when I played against Russellville," Belue said. "When those two teams meet it's always a great game. I'm going to be coaching my guys as hard as I can and expecting a Russellville victory, of course, but also enjoying that rivalry once again."

Next to Belue on the sidelines this season will be his former high school opponent Baird, who graduated from Russellville in 2008. Baird—coached by two Alabama High School Sports Hall of Famers, Perry Swindall and Doug Goodwin—was a member of Russellville's state runner-up football team in 2004 and a football class that won three region championships and finished with a 47-7 record over four seasons. He was also a standout baseball player for the Golden Tigers, helping the team to a Class 5A playoff semifinal appearance in 2007, a quarterfinal appearance in 2008, and he earned ASWA Class 5A All-State First Team recognition as a catcher his senior season.

"(Baird) is a Russellville guy, a Russellville native. He played for us and he's been a friend for a long time," Goodwin said. "He's done a good job on the field everywhere he's been, and he was definitely a guy I was interested in bringing back to Russellville to help us win football games and do things the right way. I'm glad to have him."

Before coming back to Russellville, Baird had coaching stints at Deshler, Holtville, Prattville, and Colbert County. In his first year as head baseball coach at Holtville in 2018, Baird led the Bulldogs to an area championship and an appearance in the Class 4A playoff quarterfinals.

After all this time, Baird said to come home is a great feeling. As a former Golden Tiger player Baird knows the expectations that come with putting on the uniform; now as a coach, he said it's surreal but invigorating to be back in that same environment.

"I think this is year 15 coaching but year 10 teaching, so to finally get to come back home, I can't tell you how excited I am," Baird said. "One of the things that I've found to be pretty cool is, you know, walking down the same hallways that you did when you played and now you're seeing these guys go through the same things you went through."

"What the expectations were then, those haven't changed. Now to be on the other side of it, it's very cool just to try to help these guys have the kind of success we had back in the day. They have the talent to do that," he added.

Goodwin also added Thomas Goode to his defensive staff. Goode, who was hired during the July 16th RCS Board meeting, as well, will join Belue in coaching the defensive backs.

"Goode is another guy I met several months ago, and we struck up a good relationship," Goodwin said. "He's good with speed training and conditioning and has trained kids at all ages."

"Sitting down and talking about how we want to do things and who we'd like to get involved, he was definitely high on that list," he added. "We're happy to have him and give him an opportunity to do what he loves to do."

Football was not the only program to add new assistants. In total, Russellville announced on July 17th the addition of five other varsity assistants who will coach in the boys' basketball, girls' basketball, and softball programs.

KJ Melvin and former Belgreen boys' basketball coach Marty Cooper will join Patrick Odom's staff in the boys' basketball program, while Russellville alum Angela Woods was named assistant coach for the girls' basketball team. Head softball coach Rick Lawson added two assistants: Annalise Rogers and Taylor Cameron, who played college softball at Northeast Mississippi Community College and Northwest Shoals Community College, respectively.

Head strength and conditioning coaching duties for Russellville's athletic programs have been assigned to Jacob Danley.



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