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RHS principal Madden leaving to take position in Tuscaloosa County Schools

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

After two years as Russellville High School principal, Jeremy Madden is resigning to take a job with Tuscaloosa County Schools as principal of Northside High School. The Russellville City Board of Education has a special called meeting set for Thursday, August 2nd at 8 a.m., with a limited agenda of 'personnel decisions, bids and contracts.'

Madden was hired in August 2022

to succeed Dr. Jason Goodwin, who was promoted to the system's central office as an assistant superintendent. Madden served as principal of Fayette County High School for 11 years before coming to Russellville High School. At Fayette, Madden started in 2001 as a teacher and would be promoted to assistant principal and high school principal in 2011.

He also ran for Fayette County Schools Superintendent of Education in 2022, finishing third

See 'MADDEN,' Page 3

After five months at helm, Goodwin excited about team, staff and upcoming football season

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When you meet new Russellville High School varsity football coach Dustin Goodwin, he exudes a quiet confidence while talking about his new program. When Goodwin was hired in February, he wanted to start his new job as soon as possible, to be on campus and ready to conduct spring practice. Goodwin's first day was March 1st, which allowed him to do just that, something Goodwin felt was important. There were some missing pieces,

though, as several players were involved in other spring sports, and his coaching staff had several positions to be filled later. But Goodwin turned it into a positive by working with his new players in an introductory way. "We were very foundational in the things we asked them to do, but it's like teaching a new language as every system is different," Goodwin said. "And having some kids playing other sports allowed us to work with some kids who may not get all the reps when everyone is there. It was very beneficial for sure."

Goodwin's resume includes seven years as a head coach at two

See 'GOODWIN,' Page 4

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**Howard Lee Grant passed away
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tation will be 11:00 a.m. – 12:00
noon, Thursday, August 01, 2024, at
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**Billy Ray Baker, age 71, of Phil
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The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.
Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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'MADDEN,' From Page 1

among four candidates in the June Republican Primary. Leaving RHS was a deeply emotional decision for Madden, a 1993 Russellville High School graduate. It's a career move that positively impacts his retirement and one that Madden believes will come with opportunities for advancement.



Madden and his wife Dwan, Marion County Department of Human Resources Director, live in Fayette and their son will be a senior at Fayette County High School this year.

"It's been an honor and a privilege to return home to Russellville High School and this was not an easy decision," Madden said. "After meeting with Tuscaloosa County Schools officials last week, I told them I wanted to go home and talk with my wife and family. I met with Dr. (Tim) Guinn Tuesday afternoon, and let him know what I had decided.

"Coming back to Russellville High School has been wonderful. It was like having my own personal 'time machine.' I will always be a supporter of Russellville High School and the community around it," he added.

Northside High School has an enrollment of 494 students in grades 9-12. It's a 5A school, the same classification as Russellville High School, within the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

When Guinn was hired in March 2024 to replace Heath Grimes as RCS Superintendent, Madden was also a candidate for the position.

Additionally, Madden applied for the system's Administrative Assistant 'A' job, one of two assistant superintendent positions, earlier this summer. Dr. Chris James was hired by the RCS Board on July 3rd as Administrative Assistant 'A.'

"This career move and the additional financial security it offers was the most significant factor for me and my family. Like everyone else, I'm trying to position my later years in the work force to best support taking care of my family after retirement.

"Tuscaloosa County Schools officials really wanted us to come and be a part of the Northside community and it's a larger school system with more opportunities for career advancement," Madden said.

Rep. Jamie Kiel, who has one daughter who's a recent RHS graduate and two more on the way, saw first hand Madden's impact on the students and faculty of Russellville High School.

"I am very appreciative of the work Dr. Madden has done at Russellville High School. Although I regret that he is leaving, I know that he has to do what is best financially for him and his family and this offer was too good to pass up," Kiel said.

For Madden, reconnecting with many of the people he went to school with was a special part of returning to RHS two years ago and something he'll never forget.

"I definitely want to thank all the Russellville alumni who have reached out to me, whether in person, by email, text or social media, since I was hired in August 2022. That meant so much to me. Whether it was to congratulate me on taking the RHS job, or if it was a request for assistance, it was always special to hear from so many within the RHS family," Madden said.

Russellville District 5 City Councilman Jamie Harris and Madden grew up together and have been friends since they were kids. Harris said the character and work ethic displayed by Madden as RHS principal is exactly what he's come to expect from his lifelong friend.

"Jeremy showed his unwavering dedication to Russellville High School in the way he led and worked every day as principal the past two years," Harris said. "He worked extremely hard to strengthen the bond between Russellville High School and the people and the businesses in our city.

"It's difficult to see him leaving our community but as Jeremy has always said, this city and its high school will always remain a special part of his life," Harris added.

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'GOODWIN,' From Page 1

schools, Chelsea and Plainview. His most recent stop before coming to Russellville was as an assistant coach at 7A powerhouse Thompson High School.

Taking over the Golden Tiger varsity program brings Goodwin back to the place his coaching career began. From 2008-2010, he was an assistant coach on his father Doug Goodwin's Russellville staff.

Like his son, Doug Goodwin coached with a quiet confidence. His four-year record at Russellville was 46-9 with two state championship appearances.

Dustin says his personality is similar to his father's, but there are times when that quiet persona can change abruptly.

"We do have a fuse but it's harder to get out," Dustin said. "Some of that is intentional I think. As a coach, if you have a roller coaster of emotions when things are going good, that's good. But when things go bad, and you're on that roller coaster, it can go south really quick. You need to provide some calm in the storm and show that confidence in difficult times to pull your team up."

Among the many things he learned from his father, Goodwin encourages his players to participate in other sports. And that's a good thing for Russellville High School, where many of his most talented players are multi-sport athletes.

"I grew up a coach's kid. My father wanted me to have every opportunity to play what I wanted to play," Goodwin said. "He wanted that for me and I want that for every student athlete we have. That's what high school is about. You only get to do it once and kids should experience all they want to experience so that's what we encourage them to do as coaches."

After some natural spring and summer attrition, the Golden Tiger varsity roster will settle in around 80 players. As you might expect, Goodwin talks about his roster with that same quiet confidence.

"We are pleased with the players we have and we have a chance to have a really good year if we stay healthy," Goodwin said.

Any time a program transitions from one coaching system to another, some players will see their roles redefined, and that can sometimes be difficult for a high school kid to deal with.

"We want every person in our program to feel valued and have their place first and foremost," Goodwin said. "We'll give our kids the opportunity to perform and will play the best ones. If we feel there's a player who can help us in another place from where they were and make us even better as a team, we hope that player is willing to make that change and we'll have those conversations."

"We love all our players and want the best for each of them. We also want to win football games, perform at a high level and give them a chance to be successful," Goodwin added.

With the recent additions of Deion Belue and Torey Baird, Goodwin's coaching staff is set for the 2024 season.

"There's some support help we could add, but as far as the on-field coaches our guys need, we're in a pretty good spot," Goodwin said. "I'm really pleased with the group we have."

Goodwin will handle the Golden Tigers' offensive play calling, a role he's handled successfully at prior stops.

"(Play calling) is one of the things that make the game fun and something I enjoy doing," Goodwin said. "As an offensive staff, we'll game plan and work together on Friday nights, but as far as what's called, the majority of that will come from me. But obviously our offensive coaching staff will have a big input during the week and making adjustments on Friday nights."

With an overall record of 667-365-31, a winning percentage of more than 65%, Russellville High School's varsity football program is recognized among the state's best.

And that wasn't lost on Goodwin when he was offered the job. It's actually something he embraced.

"The tradition of a program is what sort of intrigues you to want to be a part of it," Goodwin said. "There aren't many people I know beating the door down to coach one-win teams."

"Usually if there's sustained success at a program, that means it's set up right and that gives you every opportunity to be successful and Russellville checks all those boxes. We're excited and ready to get started," he added.

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Frustration builds for Russellville man dealing with nursing home on his sister's behalf

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A veteran with 21 years served in the United States Army, Kermit Garrison isn't someone to be taken lightly.

His military career taught Garrison the importance of keeping a paper trail for documentation, as the Army had a form to complete for almost every scenario.

So when Garrison didn't receive the answers he sought from a local nursing home, he reverted back to his Army days—documenting everything he did and was told, while respectfully standing up to the administrator of a facility who wasn't providing him the answers and information he believes the law entitles him to receive.

Garrison has power of attorney from his 83-year-old sister, a bedridden resident of Arabella Health & Wellness of Russellville, a nursing home formerly known as Russellville Health Care, located on Gandy Street.

Garrison's sister, a widow whose son predeceased her, needed someone to help when her health declined and she had to be admitted to Helen Keller Hospital last fall. That's where her brother Kermit stepped in. While he wasn't in a position to financially support his sister, Garrison agreed to serve as her attorney-in-fact, or agent, so she signed a durable power of attorney to allow him to do so legally.

As the agent, or attorney-in-fact, Garrison has the legal right under Alabama law to stand in the shoes of his sister to make financial, business, legal and medical decisions on her behalf, subject to a duty of good faith.

After the first of two hospital stays, Garrison's sister was admitted into Arabella as a rehabilitation resident on September 11, 2023. That meant her Blue Cross/Blue Shield Blue Advantage Plan insurance would pay for her care during the rehab stay, Garrison said.

But after she contracted C.diff., a serious infection of the colon, last October, Garrison's sister went from Helen Keller Hospital to Huntsville Hospital for surgery to repair a bleeding ulcer. She was later transferred back to Helen Keller, followed by discharge to Arabella, where she was admitted as a long-term care resident.

The facility is owned by Arabella Healthcare Management, a corporation with its headquarters in Florida. The Russellville facility has 50 beds.

According to Garrison, the only income his sister received was a monthly Social Security check for \$1707.70.

After BCBS paid for her care during the months of September-November 2023, Garrison said he received a call on November 28th from Ashlyn Nolen, Director of Social Services for Arabella Health & Wellness Russellville.

"She explained that the Blue Advantage plan would stop paying my sister's expenses at Arabella on November 30, 2023, and that she would be financially liable beginning December 1, 2023," Garrison said.

From September through November 2023, when BCBS was paying for his sister's care, Garrison said there was never any mention of a copayment nor did any Arabella employee suggest Garrison should start the process of applying his sister for Medicaid.

The events that happened next, and why they happened, are the reasons Garrison sought the assistance of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program through its Muscle Shoals office, administered through the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments.

The mission of the investigative agency is to protect the rights of long-term care facilities and to ensure they receive fair treatment and quality care.

Garrison maintains he paid every dollar invoiced to his sister, but in spite of that, Arabella officials allege the facility is owed an additional \$4,735.80. Garrison, who has a valid power of attorney for his sister, said Arabella officials refuse to explain what this additional amount results from.

Additionally, he says Arabella's administrator told Garrison his bedridden sister would be served a 30-day notice and evicted if the balance wasn't paid.

In December, Garrison paid \$1,677 for his sister's care and another \$1,477 in January 2024. He provided the FFP a statement from Arabella for \$3,154 for December and January, which he paid in full.

In January, Garrison applied his sister for Medicaid, and received notification she had been approved on January 22, 2024. Garrison says he was told by Nolen that Medicaid would also make all back payments due for the 90-day period immediately prior to approval.

After Medicaid paid the February 2024 bill and Garrison paid Arabella an additional \$1,477, Garrison received a statement on March 1, 2024, that said his sister owed Arabella \$4,735.80, even though Medicaid began paying for his sister's care in January.

After his sister's Social Security check amount increased to \$1,935 in March, he has paid Arabella \$1,906 each month, leaving her \$29 for Alabama's maximum 'personal needs allowance' as outlined in state Medicaid policy.

Alabama's personal needs allowance is the nation's lowest at \$30 per month. This means the long-term care resident must pay all Social Security payments received, less \$30, to the facility.

With his sister's monthly Social Security check of \$1,935, Garrison pays the facility \$1,906 and retains \$29 for his sister's personal needs each month.

He questions why his sister would owe an additional \$4,735.80 when Garrison says he's paid every invoice in full. And when he went to speak with Arabella staff, Garrison said they refused to provide any explanation of what the \$4,735.80 was for.

Richard Walls, Arabella of Russellville's Administrator, told the

Franklin Free Press last week that Medicaid's patient debt liability

is based on the resident's income. Medicaid debt is what the

patient owes to a long-term care facility when they apply for

Medicaid, Walls said.

Although Walls did not discuss Garrison's sister's case specifically due to HIPAA laws, he said all residents or their representatives sign an admission agreement with Arabella and they're given all information up front.

"This is the case whether they come in with Medicare, private insurance, self-pay or a HMO," Walls said. "You can only have Medicaid pay for a nursing home while you're actually in a nursing home. Everyone is directed by Medicaid what their payment will be.

"Arabella has no input on what the payment will be," he added.

Garrison, who keeps a log of every contact, meeting and conversation he has on his sister's behalf, maintains Arabella officials refuse to provide him any documentation on why his sister would owe more than \$4,700 when he's made all payments every month.

Medicaid rules contain a cap on assets, \$2,000 in Alabama, and Garrison said his sister met all guidelines, including limits of assets during the Medicaid look back period. Otherwise, she would not have been approved.

Along with a representative from the Ombudsman's office, Garrison met with Arabella administrators earlier this month but says he received no explanation or paperwork to explain the balance.

"I have the legal authority to handle my sister's affairs, and no one is going to pay a bill when they don't understand what it's for," Garrison said. "It's like a mechanic saying you owe \$5,000 for car repairs and he refuses to tell you what the cost is for.

"I'm able to help my sister and shouldn't be having these problems with Arabella refusing to explain an invoice. There are 49 other residents there who might not have anyone to speak for them. If they'll do this to my sister, what will they do to other residents who don't have someone to speak up for them?," he added.

The suggestion his sister would be evicted after Garrison has documentation showing he's made every payment on her behalf does not sit well with the Army veteran. And he reached out to Rep. Robert Aderholt's office for assistance.

"To say if these supposedly delinquent payments aren't paid they will start the 30-day eviction process makes no sense. Congressman Aderholt wrote a letter on my sister's behalf to Arabella," Garrison said.

Late last week, Aderholt contacted Garrison to say he received billing documents related to Garrison's sister that showed the balance owed to be \$2829.80. Aderholt's letter to Garrison said the charges were not set by Arabella and had been confirmed by the federal government agencies involved as being authorized. As a result, Aderholt said there was nothing further his office could do to dispute them.

Garrison said Arabella is now attempting to set up a direct deposit to directly receive his sister's Social Security check. Yet there has been no explanation to him of where the charges come from.

Regardless of what amount is actually owed, Garrison said his sister is indigent, otherwise she would not have approved for Medicaid. And he questions why the billing explanation has never been provided by Arabella to him as her attorney-in-fact.

"If Mr. Walls has these documents from Medicaid stating how much Arabella Health and Wellness of Russellville can charge, why isn't he providing them to me so that I can substantiate Mr. Walls' claims?," Garrison said.

"What part of my sister's Personal Needs Allowance of \$29.00 (per month) does Arabella Health and Wellness of Russellville Alabama want?

She is already below the State Medicaid Personal Needs Allowance of \$30.00. After paying Arabella each month, my sister is left with \$29 to her name. That's it," he added.

Garrison has documentation showing Blue Cross Blue Shield paid \$27,456.07 for his sister's care last year before she become Medicaid eligible. Garrison said he has billing statements from Arabella that conflict with what the company provided to Aderholt's office.

Garrison says a total of \$49,525.74 was paid on his sister's account from September 2023 through January 2024. Documents sent by Arabella to Aderholt's office show a total of \$28,597.80 for that same time period, Garrison said.

And as her attorney-in-fact, he's repeatedly requested an itemized billing and an explanation of why Arabella claims his sister still owes more than \$2,800. At a minimum, Garrison says there has been a lack of communication from Arabella.

"If it's a charge she really owes, I'll find a way to try and pay it. But they won't explain it and won't show any billing paperwork. How would they expect anyone to pay in that situation?," Garrison said.

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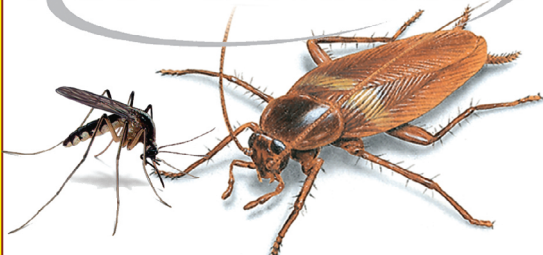
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 **T**he Senior Center of Phil Campbell is under new management. Everyone age 60 and over are invited to come join us and be part of the group. This is for men and women. We meet at the Phil Campbell Community Center Monday thru Friday from 8-noon. 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.

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 **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.

 **C**restview Missionary Baptist Church will host an Indoor Huge Rummage Sale, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, August 1, 2 and 3 from 8 a.m.-until each day. Church is located at 24131 Highway 24, Russellville. LOTS of items! Too much to list!

 **B**IG Garage Sale in Belgreen this Saturday, August 3 starting at 8 AM. A little bit of everything (rugs, sheets, curtains, small appliances, ladies and men's plus-size clothes, children's books, Beanie Babies, and much more)! 424 Mount Home Church Rd., Russellville, AL 35653. Turn off Hwy. 187, go a few miles past Belgreen High School, and follow the signs at Glasgow Corner.

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Secretary of State's office warns of scam voting public service announcement

Submitted

Secretary of State Wes Allen is warning Alabama citizens about a misleading public service announcement currently airing in Alabama.

The PSA, distributed by Vote411, an operation of the League of Women Voters, instructs Alabamians to register to vote using the Vote411 website. The website captures the website visitor's personal data including their IP address and contact information and then, once the information has been captured, the individual is directed to the Alabama Secretary of State's website.

"I'm exposing this data-mining collection effort masquerading as Vote411. It's a sham. This is simply a shady way to collect the IP addresses and personal data of Alabama citizens. In the website's fine print, the League of Women Voters disclose that 'The League may, from time to time, share the name and mailing address of its non-member financial supporters with other non-profit organizations,'" said Secretary Allen. "But they hide that in a small link they hope no one will read."

Secretary Allen wants to ensure that eligible Alabama citizens are able to register to vote securely, using trusted voter registration methods.

"Alabama citizens can rest assured that the Secretary of State's office and local election officials are well-equipped to handle voter registration in Alabama. There is no reason to use a data collection website like the one being managed by the League of Women Voters which will give your personal data to other entities without your knowledge and could likely put your personal data at risk. Skip these data

collecting websites and go directly to the secure website at AlabamaVotes.gov where your privacy will be respected," Secretary Allen explained.

Eligible Alabama citizens may register to vote online www.AlabamaVotes.gov or mail a voter registration form to their local Board of Registrars.

Wes Allen is Alabama's 54th Secretary of State. The Secretary of State is Alabama's Chief Elections Official. To learn more about the Secretary of State and his responsibilities and duties visit www.sos.alabama.gov.



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Tharptown Rocketry Team finishes second at International Rocketry Challenge

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Although it wasn't the finish they wanted, the eight students who comprise the Tharptown High School Rocketry Team came home this week having finished in second place in the International Rocketry Challenge, held last week near London, England. And they'll forever have enjoyed the experience very few high school students have.

After besting 922 teams at the American Rocketry Challenge in May, Tharptown earned a trip to England to vie for a world championship at the Farnborough International Airshow.

In what was the slimmest of margins in the competition's history, the United Kingdom team edged out Tharptown. Japan finished third and France came in fourth.

Team members on the Tharptown Rocketry Team included: Kylee Beard (team captain), Adrionna Ashley, Angie Chavez, Angel Franco, Frank Gutierrez, Isabella Hall, Shyla Martinez and Jessie Mitchell. Coaches and sponsors include Marsha Inmon, Arreanna Orozco, Darrel Baker and Julie Madden, along with mentor Andrew Heath.

Now in its 22nd year, the American Rocketry Challenge offers a fun and challenging way to expose students to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM, not only learning about those important subjects but looking at them as a possible career.

The students were honored at the local, state and national level. Eric Fanning, President and CEO of the Aerospace Industries Association, a sponsor of the American Rocketry Challenge, said the Tharptown students exemplified the ideals the competition embraces.

"Tharptown High School's achievement exemplifies the spirit of innovation and collaboration that drives the American aerospace industry forward," Fanning said. "Beyond the competition, these young minds are contributing to a brighter future where curiosity and ingenuity meet the world's most pressing challenges. Congratulations to Tharptown and all the teams—we can't wait to witness your remarkable work unfold in the future."



COURTESY PHOTO

Seven of Tharptown's eight-person Rocketry Team will resume their high school careers next week, so the 922 other competing teams will have to deal with the reigning national champs, who will be hungry to take that final step in 2025 and bring home a world championship.

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Bonds resigns principal's post at RMS to take job at Hazel Green Elementary

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At a special called meeting Thursday afternoon, the Russellville City Schools Board of Education approved the resignation of Russellville Middle School Principal Tony Bonds, effective immediately.

Bonds resigned to accept the position of principal at Hazel Green Elementary School in Madison County. His wife Jill, a Russellville High School English teacher, also had her resignation letter accepted effective immediately.

Three other resignations, Courtney Sandlin and Maria Juarez, West Elementary School teachers, and Brianne Roberts, RMS teacher, were approved by the board at the short meeting.

Bonds, a Russellville native and RHS alumnus, attended the University of Mississippi, where he received a full scholarship to play football for the Rebels.

In 2015, Bonds while teaching and coaching at Buckhorn High School, Bonds transitioned into administration at Buckhorn before accepting the position of assistant principal at Russellville Middle School in 2018.

One year later, Bonds was promoted to head principal at RMS. Bonds was one of three Russellville City Schools administrators to receive a three-year contract approved by the board this spring.

Bonds' employment as Hazel Green Elementary Principal was approved at the July 23, 2024, meeting of the Madison County Board of Education.

RCS Superintendent Tim Guinn said the principal vacancy was posted on the school system's web page on July 24th, and will be posted for 14 days. While Guinn hopes to have the position filled by the first day of the new school year, that's not a certainty.

"If we fill it after 14 days, that would be the day before school starts," Guinn said. "We could have a special meeting to fill that position if the right candidate emerges. Otherwise, we have adequate administrators in our central office to temporarily fill the position."

The July 25th meeting had only one agenda item, being board consideration of the five personnel moves that were approved.



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Lady Bobcats look to build on last year's varsity volleyball success

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

After a banner season in 2023, in which the Phil Campbell High School varsity volleyball team made a run into the Class 3A regional tournament, the Lady Bobcats have been preparing to achieve similar, if not greater, success in the upcoming campaign.

Phil Campbell head coach Julianna Taylor, who took the reins of the program before the start of the 2023 season, wants to build on the accomplishments the Lady Bobcats achieved in her first year with the team.

"We won area last year. We won 22 games and ended up making it to regionals and into the second round of the regionals—the sweet 16. We made it further than anyone else in this area, so I thought that was awesome," Taylor said. "We had a really good season last year. It was the first year making it past 20 wins in the program. It's just Phil Campbell's fourth year having a volleyball program, so the girls did really good making it that far.

"There's a lot of pressure this year, especially with the season we had last year, but I think that now that we know how to win games—that was a learning experience, as well last year: learning how to take over and win games—but now that we know how to do that I think it'll be a different season this year starting out," she added.

The focus heading into this offseason, in preparation for the new campaign, has been strength and conditioning, Taylor said. The Lady Bobcats

See, 'BOBCATS,' Page 13

Six Franklin County football programs take part in Football in the South media day

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The mounting anticipation for the upcoming start of the 2024 high school football season could be felt as tables and booths, manned by radio personalities and enterprising salesmen of football equipment, were set up in the lobby of the Clarion Inn Conference Center in Sheffield last week.

A backdrop, bearing the logo of the Football in the South Scoreboard Show, the organizer of the event, was standing for photos and video interviews. Coaches and players wearing jerseys chatted with one another. In the adjoining conference room, newspaper reporters, TV camera crews, and other various media members from across north Alabama gathered while, one-by-one, the head coach and a few select players from each team were ushered atop the platform and sat behind microphones to field questions.



COURTESY PHOTO

Phil Campbell coach Jacob Hamilton and his players at last week's Media Day.

The Franklin Free Press was there, of course, on July 23rd, the first day of the Football in the South Media Days, as all six teams from Franklin County, one after the

See, 'MEDIA,' page 12

RHS Booster Club hosting golf tourney fund raiser this Friday

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School Golden Tiger Football Booster Club has organized a golf tournament at Twin Pines Country Club for Friday, August 2nd. The event, set to start at 8:00 A.M. that morning, is one of the ways the newly reinvigorated booster club has devised to fundraise money for the football program.

"It'll be a fun day of golf and everyone will have a chance to win, but it's also a great way to help the football program," booster club president Jonathan Willis said. "We're hoping to keep it growing every year."

Up to 18, four-player teams can enter in the tournament at 400 dollars per team or 100 dollars per person. The cost of entry covers lunch provided at Twin Pines, and the top four teams will receive prizes. Participating players can also buy up to two mulligans for five dollars apiece. Willis said not all 18 spots have been filled yet, but he anticipates the remaining spots will be taken on the morning of the tournament.

According to Willis, all the money raised by the tournament will go into a general fund the football program uses for operational costs such as facilities maintenance and renovations, the purchasing of equipment, and travel.

"It'll help with travel expenses like any charter buses for away games this year and just the overall costs of equipment," Willis said. "Since Coach (Dustin) Goodwin has been here they've made some renovations to the weight room, so things like that because everything costs so much."

After a few years hiatus, Willis said RHS Golden Tiger Football Booster Club is looking to grow its membership after its revival earlier this year.

See, 'BOOSTER,' Page 14

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'MEDIA,' From Page 11

other, took the stage. The Phil Campbell High School varsity football team led off the event. Second-year Phil Campbell head coach Jacob Hamilton, who led the Bobcats to a 4-7 season his first year, was joined by five seniors—Hayden Wingo, Noah Raper, Braxton Mayfield, Johan Vasquez, and Logan Wright—as he gave his spirited introduction to the press. “Starting in the offseason in January...I started referencing this day in the weightroom because I said I’ll tell you in July, when I get on stage and they stick a microphone in front of my face...or any newspaper wants to talk to me, I’m going to say we’re the hardest-working in our region; we’re going to be the hardest working team in 3A; we’re going to be the hardest working team in the state,” Hamilton began. “I’m not trying to be, you know, cocky or arrogant when I say that, but I do believe we’re the hardest working team in our region, and I wanted to say that at media day. These guys have bought into that. They’ve gotten a lot stronger, a lot better. We’re confident. We finally got a little swagger about ourselves.”

Hamilton went on to discuss the Bobcats’ placement in their new region, Class 3A Region 5, where they will join Oakman, Vinemont, Winfield, Midfield, Carbon Hill, Gordo, and Hanceville. “We’re excited about the new region,” he said. “Gordo and Winfield, they’re very tough competition—all of 3A is tough competition—but Gordo and Winfield was at the top of that and we believe they’re going to be very good.”

After Hamilton re-emphasized the Bobcats’ attitude towards outworking opponents this offseason, the experience of his returning starters, and introducing the players on stage, the Phil Campbell group took some questions. One question, directed at senior running back and defensive back Hayden Wingo was about the difference between Hamilton in his first season versus Hamilton in his second year in charge. “He’s more intense. He expects a lot out of us, and he knows what we can do,” Wingo said. “He knows what this team can do, and he pushes us to the limit.” Following Phil Campbell was Red Bay High School. The contingent of Tigers was led by fourth-year head coach Heath Childers. He was joined by seniors Jayden Smith and Reed Hamilton and juniors Brayden Tabbs and Jaxon Vinson. After Childers’ brief introduction of himself and his players, the Tigers started taking questions. The first of these, asked by Jack Ivy of WRMG radio, was how Red Bay planned to deal with the loss of a large senior class last season. “I’ve been doing this for 20 years and losing seniors is just a natural progression of things. You can’t keep these kids forever. They grow up, they move on,” Childers said. “That’s your job as a head coach. Each year your team’s going to be different. You’re going to have different faces, you’re going to have different personalities, and the team as a whole is going to have a different personality. The main challenge is just figuring out who we are and what we can be. Once we do that, we’ll be alright.” Childers went on to answer other questions about team goals—“Our main goal is to try to be the best version of ourself that we can be”—and some of the pressing areas his team still needs to improve in. Brayden Tabbs, who has been penciled in as Red Bay’s starting quarterback heading into the start of the season, was queried about his transition to the role. “I like to scramble and stuff like that, so we’re still working on the passing game because I played receiver and corner all my life so it’s different trying to learn to throw the ball,” Tabbs said. “I think we’ve come a long way since the spring game, and we’re going to continue to get better at it and hopefully be ready by (the start of) the season.” Up next was Vina with second-year head coach Cody Renfrow and seniors Christian McCarley, Cai Lawler, Trevor Baker, and Andrew Shotts taking the stage. Renfrow, who was put in charge of the Red Devils program just before the start of the 2023 season, led the team to a tough 1-8 year last season, but that one win came in the season finale against Waterloo, a 42-32 victory. Renfrow said it was a relief to get that win last season and start the 2024 campaign off on more positive footing. “That Waterloo win last season was huge for us,” he said. “It really felt like we got the monkey off our back because last year...it was a grind and we finally got rewarded that last game of the year. “I think the biggest thing moving forward is just confidence. I think we’ve got to believe in ourselves. We’ve got to understand that we are a small school and we’ve got to play both sides of the ball and with that you’ve got to be tough and you have to play with effort every single play,” Renfrow added. “We can’t afford to take a play off here and there—we don’t have the numbers to do that. But I believe in the guys that we do have, and if we can stay confident and play to our potential, I think we can have a successful season.”

Senior quarterback and defensive back Christian McCarley echoed his head coach’s sentiment when asked what the team’s goals were this season.

“Just to be better than what we were last year, and continue that Waterloo victory that we had—continue to play with that kind of fire and that kind of effort that we put into that game,” McCarley said. “A lot of people underestimate us because of how the last couple seasons have went, and we’re just trying to change that.” McCarley’s teammate, senior running back and linebacker Cail Lawler, also jumped in:

“We’re trying to give Vina a better reputation than we have (had) in the past,” Lawler said. “Most teams when they think about Vina think about, ‘Oh, we’re just going to go in there and beat them.’ We ain’t one of them no more. We want to go in there and fight and come out with a win hopefully.”

Belgreen High School, with its fledgling varsity program, was the next team in the queue. Although the Bulldogs will not be eligible for championship competition, Belgreen will compete in seven varsity games this year. Head coach Jonathan Raper, along with seniors Hunter Woodruff, Landon Cox, Gabe Wilson, and Landon Cantrell were there for the program’s first media day experience. “This is exciting for our young men,” Raper said in his introduction. “We’re excited about the season and getting it started. “We played five games last year total, junior high and some JV games...so we’re just going to keep building as we go and hopefully in two more years we’ll be ready to join a region and participate in the Alabama High School Athletic Association playoffs.”

Senior offensive and defensive lineman Landon Cantrell said he’s looking forward to Belgreen’s first varsity schedule.

“I think it’s going to be a great season,” he said. “I’ve really had fun with Coach Raper and all of our players. It’s just a great atmosphere and I love it.”

The group of Belgreen seniors on the stage will be taking part in the program’s first varsity season but will also have the honor of being the first group of players to play in Belgreen’s nearly-completed football stadium. “I think that it’s going to be really exciting. There’s probably going to be nothing like it from how everyone is talking it up,” senior running back and linebacker Gabe Wilson said. “It’s really just a blessing that we have those facilities and that someone was able to donate the money for us to have those facilities.” Asked what goals the players had for the season, senior running back and linebacker Hunter Woodruff said winning games in front of a home crowd would be at the top of his list. “I think it’ll be good to win some games at home and get the community in it,” he said. “Nobody ever thought they’d see football at Belgreen, and so to hear it talked about the way it has been now, I think it’ll be good.”

When Belgreen’s players were asked who would be the budding program’s top rival, the consensus was Tharptown; and it was the Tharptown Wildcats, as one would have it, that followed the Bulldogs on the platform. Tharptown’s attending players—senior Joah Wilcoxson and sophomore Angel Morales—when asked a similar question said they were most looking forward to playing the Bulldogs this season.

“We don’t really have a rivalry game, but I would say I’m looking forward to the Belgreen game just because our career tech center at our school splits so I’m going to both schools basically,” Wilcoxson said. “That will probably be the rival from here on out,” Tharptown head coach John Johnson said. “The communities are so similar, a lot of the people are related to one another, so that’s probably going to become the rivalry since they’ve started a football program.”

Turning the focus to his own team, which finished 1-9 in 2023, Johnson, heading into his second season, said one of the main priorities was getting players committed to the team and a strength and conditioning program.

“One of the things that I noticed very quickly when I took the job last year was there wasn’t very many kids working out here in the summer,” he said. “We’ve had the majority of our team now working out consistently in the summer. That makes the difference in a sport like football, kids not only developing their strength but how much being in the weight room cuts out nagging injuries and things like that. And just the mentality aspect of those guys being around each other to try to build a bond with one another. “The mentality is starting to change out there. Our principal, Tyler Berryman, is behind all athletics lifting weights, so the mindset’s changing going forward,” Johnson added. Another focus, Johnson said, will be Tharptown’s defense. The Wildcats gave up over 40 points in each of their nine losses last season. “The bulk of my career has been as a defensive guy and, just in my opinion, you have to play good defense in order to win football games, so that’s going to be more moving forward,” Johnson said. “One thing I’ve noticed after doing this for 20 years is if you can get a group of guys to play defense aggressively and be smart, you’re going to win games people didn’t think you had a shot to win.”

The last of the six programs in Franklin County to meet the press was Russellville. The Golden Tigers were represented by head coach Dustin Goodwin, entering his first season at the helm, and seniors Jah Williams, Paxton Wray, and Neyland Baker.

“All three (players in the group) have done a really good job of leading this offseason and this spring,” Goodwin said introducing his players. “The guys are working hard.” Goodwin, an assistant at Russellville under former head coach Doug Goodwin, expressed his enthusiasm to be back with the Golden Tigers.

“I’m happy to be back in Russellville. I think it’s a really special place,” he said. “Being here before I know that athletics is important at Russellville and our community does a really good job of supporting our programs across the board. I’m just really excited to get back in that atmosphere.”

“Being back and coming back 14, 15 years later has been a really neat experience,” he added.

Russellville’s players, asked about life under their new head coach, said there’s a notable difference.

“The way we run things, everything’s going fast-paced,” senior offensive lineman Neyland Baker said. “I think we’re in a better situation with leadership roles and coaches leading us in the right direction.” Senior wide receiver and defensive back Jah Williams jumped in:

“A lot of things are different from last year from our offensive standpoint and defense,” he said. “We run different stuff and the stuff we run this year is better than what we ran last year.”

This season the Golden Tigers moved into Class 5A Region 7 alongside Lawrence County, East Limestone, Ardmore, Fairview, West Point, and Priceville. Asked about Russellville’s scheduled opponents, Goodwin said he was more focused on his own team than the others they would play.

“I’m more concerned with us to be honest with you. I know it’s cliché and you hear that a lot, but we went through spring training and made some strides we felt like,” he said. “We’ve got a ton of new faces. We lost around 24, 27 seniors and we’re returning three on offense and four on defense, so a lot of fresh faces everywhere. Really the Deshler game week one is going to be the first chance for those guys to step up and show what they can do.”

Asked what success looks like to Goodwin, he said it’s all about helping his players be better both on and off the field.

“My definition of success is to help guys become more mature, responsible young men. We want to be good husbands and fathers at the end of the day. I think if you’re going just fighting for wins, I think you’re missing the boat,” Goodwin said. “Ultimately if they get done and they say, ‘That was very hard. That was very fun. I wish I could do it again,’ and we’re maximizing the talent along the way, then I think that’s successful.”

'BOBCATS,' From Page 11

have also placed an emphasis on the service and receiving aspects of their game.

"Our conditioning and our workouts, getting stronger in the weightroom, was really important this year, as far as moving and being quicker," she said. "I've noticed our girls are definitely getting up, they're jumping higher and they're moving quicker. They've worked really hard."

"We've also really worked on our serving and serve receive in our offseason, and I think those are areas we'll see a lot of improvement in," Taylor added.

The Lady Bobcats varsity roster is a combination of experience and youth, but Phil Campbell will be reliant on a core of veteran, senior leadership to guide the way this season. Phil Campbell's three seniors—libero Mia Ambrosio and hitters Britney Coffman and Bradley McDaniel—constitute "the backbone of the team," the second-year head coach said.

"We've got three seniors, three starters, back, and the rest will be newer players," Taylor said. "My setter who we've moved up is only a ninth grader this year. She's going to be really good—Lexxi Santoni—and she'll help us a lot as far as speeding up the game, but our seniors are definitely our backbone this year."

"I expect my seniors to really step up and be leaders this year," Taylor added. "I feel like they can change our game, as far as taking over games and just being leaders on and off the court. A lot of the girls look up to them, especially on JV and the younger girls on varsity. They look up to them, and I think just having them step up will really help us. Whenever we get down in games we're going to look to them to lift us up."

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'BOOSTER,' From Page 11

"There has not been a booster club for a few years now. We started in the spring taking up memberships for 25 dollars," he said. "You get a little booster club sticker for your car but, again, all that money goes towards operational costs and getting things ready for the season.

"We're hoping to bring back a few things that the booster club used to do years ago, too," he added.

Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin, entering his first season in charge of the Golden Tigers, said a booster club is the "life blood" of a program.

"They do a great job of raising funds that we need that makes Russellville so special," Goodwin said. "We're excited about everyone we've got that's a part of it, and we're definitely looking for anyone who's interested in joining."

No matter one's relationship to the Golden Tiger football program, Willis

said everyone is welcome to become a member.

"I encourage anyone, especially if they have kids playing or played at Russellville themselves or are Russellville alumni or just a fan, to join the booster club," he said. "We'll be set up at all the football games this year taking up memberships and just trying to get this thing going again. We want to get as many people involved helping as we can."

Anyone interested in signing up for the upcoming golf tournament can contact Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin or Jonathan Willis at 256-668-9876. Those interested in becoming a member of the RHS Golden Tiger Football Booster Club can contact Willis or other booster club members Neil Willis, Jeff Pounders, Brandi Rogers, Cortney Green, or Mary Scofield.

GENERAL NOTICE ANNOUNCEMENT

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Pay Range is from \$44,865.60 – 69,160.00.

Applications and copies of the Job Descriptions may be obtained at the Russellville City Hall, Office of the Mayor, 304 North Jackson Avenue.

Applications submitted to the Russellville Civil Service Board less than one year ago remain active. Those individuals need not reapply in order to receive consideration for this appointment. Applications must be returned no later than August 9, 2024 by U.S. Mail to:

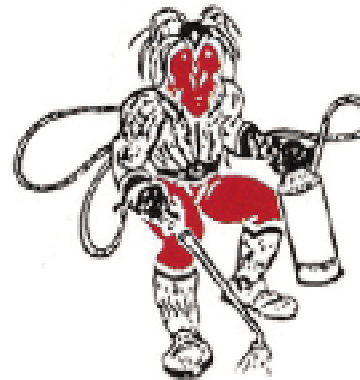
The Russellville Civil Service Board

P. O. Box 308

Russellville, AL 35653

The appointees will be required to successfully complete a physical examination including drug and alcohol screening prior to employment.

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First Responders battle on Flag Football Field!



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASCOW

The Russellville Police Department and the Franklin County Sheriff's Office battled in their latest athletic endeavor, flag football. Above, FCSO's Deyon Hill is closely pursued by the RPD's Antoine Suggs. The game was held at Russellville High School Stadium on Saturday, July 27th. The Russellville Police Department team was a 40-18 winner.

Russellville Main Street board introduces new executive director

Submitted

Russellville Main Street proudly introduces Kara Shelnett as the full-time Executive Director. Her effective start date was July 8th, and she is off to a wonderful and immersive beginning.

Kara graduated Summa Cum Laude with an Associate of Arts in Business Fundamentals from the University of Phoenix and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business. Her volunteer experience will also prove invaluable as she steps in to lead the Downtown Russellville volunteer-led nonprofit.

Her involvement includes working with the Junior League of the Shoals, providing disaster relief in Franklin County, participating in the Hydrate the Homeless initiative, leading youth groups, volunteering at animal shelters, being a Big Sister in the Big Brother/Big Sister program, serving on the Board of a new church plant in Russellville for the Church of God of Prophecy, where she is a member.

Kara leaves a professional career with The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration where she has gained a wide range of skills, not to mention the vital role in reducing injuries and fatalities on the roadways of Franklin County. Her background in business and dedication to volunteer work have already proved advantageous as we articulate our vision and execute a Strategic Plan.

"I am thrilled to take on the role of Executive Director of Downtown Russellville. I am eager to witness and contribute to the restoration of the city's rich history and beautiful architecture", said Kara.

She has been happily married for six years to Josh Shelnett and is blessed with a beautiful blended family. In her free time, she enjoys going camping with her family, (also includes two standard poodles), watching her daughters perform at halftime on Friday nights, and leading a ladies' bible study.

"We are very pleased to announce Kara Shelnett as Executive Director and have been very impressed with her initiative and enthusiasm in just the first few weeks on the job," said Mitch McKinney, Russellville Main Street's Board President. "We are looking forward to moving downtown forward and have a few things in the works that should roll out by the end of the year – all with Kara's help.

Yaneli Bahena Wallace, our previous Executive Director, was presented with an unexpected business opportunity only a month into her new position. We wish Yaneli the best in her takeover of Ville Nutrition and being a partner with Russellville Main Street in the future."

About Russellville Main Street:

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



Kara Shelnett and family



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13th Anniversary

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SPECIAL GUEST:

DR. TIM HILL

PREACHER, SINGER,
SONGWRITER



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