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Vote Micheal Murray
 Republican nominee for Franklin County Commission Dist. 1 November 5, 2024 General Election

Located on back of next Tuesday's ballot, Amendment One could provide solid financial foundation for Franklin County Schools if approved by voters

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Next Tuesday could be a monumental day for the future of the Franklin County School system if voters approve the lone Constitutional amendment appearing on their November 5th general election ballot.

Amendment One would allow the Franklin County Board of Education to manage, sell or lease certain 16th Section land owned by the school system and located in Fayette and Walker Counties.

While it takes a bit of historical See 'AMENDMENT,' Page 7

AMENDMENT ONE:
 Alabama General Election
 November 5, 2024
 Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama of 2022, to grant certain sixteenth section and indemnity school land that is owned in fee simple by the Franklin County school system, is located in Fayette County and Walker County, and is for the exclusive use of schools in the Franklin County School System to the Franklin County Board of Education; and to provide for the distribution of any proceeds and interest generated by this land to the Franklin County Board of Education.

Yes ()
 No ()



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Mitchell, Murray bring small business ownership experience into race for Franklin County Commission District One

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

When the votes are counted next Tuesday, November 5th, one thing's for certain when it comes to the race for Franklin County Commission District One—the winner will serve his first term ever in elected office.

In the only contested local race, Democrat Charles Mitchell, who was unopposed in the March 2024 primary, will face Republican nominee

Michael Murray. Murray defeated Curtis Baker in the April 16, 2024, Republican Primary runoff.

Both men have experience operating a small business. Murray has owned and operated M&G Automotive, for 17 years. Murray also works full-time for Franklin County Schools, where he serves as shop foreman in the system's bus barn.

"I work hard and am not afraid of getting my hands dirty," Murray said.

See 'DISTRICT ONE,' Page 8



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Christine Bailey, age 88, of Russellville, passed away on Monday, October 28, 2024. The visitation will be 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 30, 2024, at Spry Memorial Chapel.

Tommy Wiley Beasley, age 67, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, October 25, 2024. The visitation will be 6:00 -8:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 30, 2024, at Spry Memorial Chapel.

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Franklin Free Press

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Letters to the editor

The Franklin Free Press is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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The following is a letter to the editor received by the Franklin Free Press. Your comments are welcome:

Dear Friends of the Watermelon Festival:
The Second Chance Canine Advocates of Franklin County wanted to extend a heartfelt thank you for your incredible support during this year's Watermelon Festival. Your generosity in making donations, participating in games and purchasing animal-themed items has made a significant impact.

A special thank you to Audrey's, Black&Gold Nutrition, Burger King, Hangout Nutrition, Maggie Jo's, McDonald's, Russellville Florist & Gifts, Russellville Nutrition, Subway, Suzy's, Taco Bell, The Ville Nutrition, Tractor Supply and Tropical Nutrition for donating prizes for the games.

Because of your involvement, we were able to raise much-needed funds to create an event that was not only fun but meaningful. Your contributions help us continue our work and for that, we are truly grateful.

Thank you again for being a part of this special community event and for your unwavering support. We look forward to next year.
Second Chance Canine Advocates

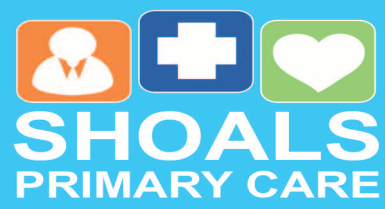


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Russellville Electric Board crews answer the call in hurricane-ravaged Florida and Tennessee

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

When Hurricanes Milton and Helene ravaged coastal cities and towns throughout the southeast United States, the response from the federal government may have been slow, but assistance from the Russellville Electric Board was swift and significant.

The REB is a member of the Electric Cities of Alabama, an advocacy organization working on behalf of the state's local power companies.

In addition to that, ECA has an inter-agency agreement among its members, including the Russellville Electric Board, that facilitates bringing utility workers to areas hit by natural disasters where significant power interruption has impacted the area.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Milton, a group of REB linemen were dispatched to assist with power restoration in and around the Florida city of New Smyrna.

The REB team worked around the clock to restore power to as many homes and businesses as possible.

While there were numerous crews sent to Florida by local power companies in Alabama and throughout the southeast, the Russellville team made a lasting impression on New Smyrna's residents.

Charles and Charlene Hanna shared their appreciation for the work done by the Russellville crew in a message sent to the Russellville Electric Board.

"My wife and I just met your group of awesome linemen from Russellville Electric who came here to bail us out and restore our electric power in short order in the aftermath of Hurricane Hilton," Hanna said.

"We can't thank those great men, their families and all the citizens of Russellville for your kindness and the true American spirit looking out for your fellow Americans in a time of crisis," he added.

The path of Hurricane Helene included the Tennessee community of Bristol.

Once again, a crew of seven REB employees answered the call to help. As was the case in New Smyrna, Bristol residents were thankful not only for the assistance, but also in the professional and courteous way the men went about helping others in need.

Clayton Dowell, CEO with Bristol Tennessee Essential Services (BTES), shared his appreciation for the work ethic shown by the REB crew.

"Your entire Russellville Electric Board was a pleasure to work with," Dowell said. "They served our customers in a way you can be proud of and made a significant impact on the work that needed to be done on our system.

"The work that Chad, Chris Speck, Nate, Chris Swinney, Johnny, Hunter Smith and Gabe Wallace performed was a huge help and a morale boost for our team. They were one of the first ones at our office and quick to start their work each day. They demonstrated true professionalism throughout...We would be honored to have them back on our system if ever needed in the future," Dowell added.

For most New Smyrna and Bristol residents, this was the first, and likely only, interaction they will ever have with the Russellville, Alabama community. And the men of the Russellville Electric Board made sure that interaction left positive lasting impressions with the people they helped.

Email us at franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Seal tabbed as new RFD Chief, to assume duties October 2025

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council hired Randy Seal as the new chief of the Russellville Fire Department at the council's October 21st meeting.

Seal will take over as chief effective October 1, 2025, the day after current Chief Joe Mansell's retirement takes effect.

The vote was unanimous, with Councilman Darren Woodruff making the motion to hire Seal, and Councilman Gary Cummings seconding it.

Mansell's retirement date of September 30, 2025, was approved by the council after it rescinded approval at a previous meeting of an effective date of February 1, 2025, for Mansell's retirement.

Mansell requested the revised date after he discovered what he called a 'miscalculation' in his retirement that, in the event the original retirement date remained in effect, would have cost him a significant amount of money.

"It was just too much money to leave on the table, so I asked Mayor Grissom and the council to allow me to extend my retirement date through September (2025)," Mansell said. "We can still move forward with appointing the new chief and I will work with him for a year as he gets ready to take his position. I've got some vacation time and I'll use that next year and he can step in at that time."

"This was a big opportunity for these guys. We had five great guys who put in for this job," Mansell added.

During Monday's meeting, Mansell asked the council to hire Seal as RFD Chief when asked by Mayor David Grissom for his recommendation.

"This fire department is in the best shape I've seen it in my 32-year career. I'm asking this gentleman to continue that trend and have asked him to give at least 10 years in this position," Mansell said of Seal.

"I've gotten to see this gentleman hired, promoted to lieutenant, promoted to captain, promoted to deputy chief. I think he'll take this department and move it even beyond. He has a great work ethic and the guys really respect him," Mansell added.

In other agenda items at its October 21st meeting, the council:

—declared six vehicles in the Russellville Police Department to be surplus property, including four 2017 Ford Explorer patrol vehicles, one 2021 Chevrolet Silverado pickup and one 2008 Ford F250 pickup. Russellville Police Chief Chris Hargett said he hopes to have most of the department's new vehicles on the streets by next week.

—retroactively authorized Grissom to execute and submit pre-applications for federal assistance for the Russellville Municipal Airport and authorized the City Clerk to execute the resolutions. The funds include \$239,600 of federal funds, \$9,200 of state funds and \$9,200 of City of Russellville funds.

—hired Eric Turbyfill as Heavy Equipment Operator II in the Russellville Street Department.

—accepted a letter of intent to retire from Assistant Street Superintendent Roy Lee Malone in the Russellville Street Department and declared a vacancy to be filled in from promotion within the Classified Service.

—reappointed Milford 'Mousey' Brown to the Russellville Gas Board.

The next meeting of the Russellville City Council will be November 4, 2024, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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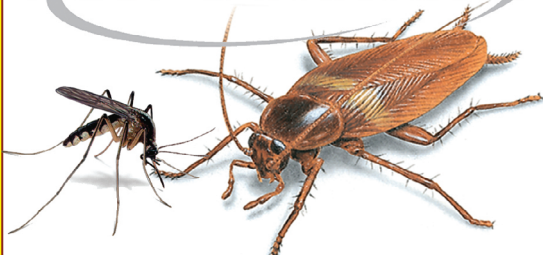
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 **T**he Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools 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.


 **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."


 **C**ommunity Action Partnership of North Alabama, also known as Russellville Head Start and Early Head Start, is a non-profit agency serving 3, 4 and 5 year old children absolutely free. We are located at 976 Ronnie McDowell Avenue in Russellville. Our hours are from 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Monday thru Friday. Call for an appointment today at 256-331-0162. Give your child a Head Start on school readiness! We offer top-quality, comprehensive early childhood educational services provided at no cost to your family. To learn more, visit www.capna.org/children-services.


 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host its annual Fall Fest, Thursday, October 31st, at 6 pm. Join them for this fun event with a Chili Cookoff. Have your chili at the church by 5:30 pm. Fall Fest starts at 6 p.m., and ends at 8 p.m. Free hot dogs and chili until gone. Games, candy and cake walk. Everyone is welcome! Church is located at 25100 Highway 24, Russellville.

 **T**he annual Russellville Veteran's Day Parade, sponsored by American Legion Post 64, will take place on Saturday, November 9th, at 12 p.m. Veterans are invited to gather at the Franklin County Courthouse at 11 a.m., to place flowers on the memorial. Parade will assemble at the Farmer's Market behind the A.W. Todd Centre at 11:15. Parade procession will be north on Jackson Avenue. The Antique Car Club will participate. Horse or mule drawn wagons are welcome as well as any other participants. This year's Grand Marshal will be all Veterans from the Vietnam War and earlier. Vehicles will be provided to carry Veterans through the parade route. Veterans' families are also welcome to drive their own vehicle with their Veteran family member if they wish. Please have identifying signs on vehicles carrying Veterans. For more information, contact Grant Atkins at 256-627-2866.

 **G**et ready for a night of haunting poetry at our Florence Art and Museums' Open Mic Night, happening on October 30th, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. at the Southall House, 209 E. Tuscaloosa St., Florence. In celebration of Halloween, poets are invited to share their original works that explore their deepest fears.

 **T**his event will feature readings by Jason McCall and Nancy Owen Wilson, followed by an open mic for audience participation. Our goal is to promote poetry and create a welcoming space where both published and unpublished poets can share their work while bringing together our diverse communities. This program is free and is sponsored by the City of Florence Department of Arts and Museums. The Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts is located at 217 E Tuscaloosa Street, Florence, AL, and is open Monday - Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. The event will be held at the Southall House, just next to the Art Center office, at 209 E. Tuscaloosa St. Call 256-760-6379 for more information.

 **L**ifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on Thursday, November 14th, 2024 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.. LifeSouth is the primary supplier of blood products to Russellville Hospital. Please contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or by email at deborah.lindsey@russellvillehospital.org. Please be sure to bring your photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive a free t-shirt, an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a 60 minute massage from Shoals Bliss, a \$20 e-gift card and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. We will also be giving away DOOR PRIZES! Please call me if you have any questions, and thank you for giving the gift of life!

 **D**on't miss the Phil Campbell Christmas Bazaar. Saturday, November 9th, 9-4. 132 Sherry Bryce Drive, Phil Campbell. Hosted by the Phil Campbell Arts and Historical Society. Great opportunity for Christmas shopping!

AMENDMENT,' From Page 1

explanation to understand why and how Franklin County Schools own land in Fayette and Walker Counties, suffice it to say if Amendment One, which will appear on all ballots statewide, is approved by a majority of voters, the board of education will be able to sell and/or lease some very coveted land in a prime location, with 100% of the revenue coming back into the Franklin County Schools system.

Amendment One will appear on the back side of all Franklin County ballots, so voters must remember to 'flip their ballots for Franklin County' and vote on the amendment. There are no other races or amendments on the back side of ballots other than Amendment One.

The federal government created 16th Section lands in 1785 to reserve land for schools. These 16th Sections are sometimes called indemnity lands, with any revenue generated from then used to support the public school system that owns the land.

Townships in every county are six square miles, divided into 36 sections, each of which is one square mile, or 640 acres. Every 16th Section of a township was reserved for the use of schools.

Under Alabama law, Section 16 lands were set aside by the Alabama Legislature for the benefit of public schools, but are managed by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the only revenue schools receive is when, or if, the department sells timber on the land. In 2002, the Alabama Legislature approved a bill to allow schools freedom to use and/or sell 16th Section lands and eliminated the limitation that only the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources could manage them.

Some of the lands owned by Franklin County Schools, through nothing other than good fortune, are located at the intersection of Alabama Highway 13 and Interstate 22.

In fact, the school system owns land at three of the four corners of this major intersection that provides the main outlet for traffic from northwest Alabama to travel to Tuscaloosa. Intersections along I-22 are developing rapidly, and there are plenty of opportunities for development of businesses at the AL13/I22 intersection, if Amendment One is approved.

The reason the amendment must pass statewide, rather than just by a majority of Franklin County voters, is because the property is located outside of Franklin County (in Fayette and Walker Counties).

Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) introduced HB302, which would grant money from certain lands owned by the Franklin County School system to the Franklin County Board of Education. The lands involved are the ones in Fayette and Walker Counties.

"This is about what's best for the children of Franklin County and I would hope voters from other counties will see it that way. It's not costing taxpayers anything additional. And these funds could be used for much-needed capital improvement projects at Franklin County Schools," Kiel said.

A similar amendment was approved by voters in Cullman County 10 years ago for property that Cullman County Schools owned along Smith Lake. Those lands sold for more than \$16.1 million, with 10% of the proceeds going into the school system's general fund and 90% deposited into a trust fund for the future benefit of Cullman County Schools.

Only Cullman County voters had to approve that amendment because the land to be sold was all located within Cullman County.

According to Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton, there is 'significant' interest from developers about purchasing the property at the AL13/I22 exchange.

Recent developments at I-22 intersections in the area have included a Love's Truck Stop in Jasper along with retail development. There's a new truck stop at the Winfield exit as well. Conservative estimates, based on the asking price of adjacent lands, show Franklin County Schools could receive in the tens of millions from the sale of the approximate 389 acres at the intersection.

Additionally, Fayette and Walker County governments and citizens would benefit because the new businesses built on the property would pay ad valorem taxes. Section 16 lands are exempt from property taxes, so the counties where the lands are located receive no benefit from them.

"The land is worth significantly more than what we're getting off of it now, which is a few hundred dollars for timber every two years or so," Hamilton said. "If these lands are sold for a substantial amount of money, that could help our schools by putting those (16th Section) lands to their best use.

"With I-22 coming through, there is tremendous economic development potential for truck stops, restaurants and other businesses with that traffic flow coming through Walker and Fayette Counties. Those counties and the small town of Eldridge would benefit because they're not collecting any property tax currently and no sales tax is being generated on the lands. It would be a real boon for that area, especially Eldridge," he added.

Hamilton believes approval of Amendment One would open the door to 'significantly changing' the financial future of Franklin County Schools, at no cost to Franklin County citizens.

For a rural school system in a low income area like Franklin County, the potential sale of these lands could provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set a financial foundation for decades to come.

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'DISTRICT ONE,' From Page 1

"I will bring the same work ethic to the Franklin County Commission. As a business owner and a school employee, I know how to work within a budget. It's not always easy, but we always figure out how to make the best of it."

Mitchell worked with Local 150 Operating Engineers Union following his service in the United States Army from 1965-1971. He has owned and operated Mitchell Welding, helping local farmers by servicing heavy equipment, for the past 10 years.

"I have taken numerous courses in equipment repair and welding with the American Welding Society," Mitchell said. "I have 50 years' experience in construction work, maintenance and repair of heavy equipment. I have been an assistant superintendent, a foreman and a master mechanic all dealing with different projects together to meet completion dates on time and within budget."

Mitchell has worked in 44 of the 50 United States, as well as Mexico, Canada and Panama doing various jobs including boring tunnels, roadwork and cross-country pipelines. Mitchell moved to Franklin County in 1973. He and his wife Helen have been married 10 years and collectively have three adult sons, Trevor, Nathan and Brandon.

Mitchell's military service saw him awarded two Bronze Star Medals for bravery and dedication. Mitchell volunteered for airborne duty in the Army and volunteered to go to Vietnam.

Last year, Mitchell worked with two local businesses to raise more than \$3,000, ensuring that 31 families and 62 children enjoyed a Merry Christmas.

Murray, who has been a regular at Franklin County Commission meetings the past few months, is a 1992 Russellville High School graduate. His wife, the former Kathryn Melton, is a 1989 Phil Campbell High School graduate. They have two children, Madison, a graduate of Alabama A&M

University, and Grayson, a sophomore at the University of North Alabama. Both graduated from RHS.

"My experience includes working with the public since 1992, dealing daily with problem-solving issues as the shop foreman/business owner, and operating within a budget," Murray said.

Murray and Mitchell pledge to be 'open and accessible' with Franklin County citizens if elected. Mitchell said he could be reached at 256-627-2588 and Murray said citizens are welcome to contact him at 256-332-3420, where he can be reached after 4 p.m., during the work week.



One of the first challenges for the new Franklin County Commission, which will take office in November, is to address residential and commercial rates for solid waste pickup. The county recently entered into an agreement with Morris Farms Landfill for the transport and disposal of municipal solid waste, but the cost comes at a significant increase from the previous contract rate (from \$30/ton to more than \$53/ton).

The outgoing commission voted to table consideration of increased garbage collection rates even though it approved the contract for pick up and disposal at a much higher cost than before. That inaction didn't sit well with either candidate.

"When elected in November, I will address the solid waste budget along with other commissioners. I have followed this throughout the budget process and I was there the day the commission approved a motion to table this issue until November. I have some ideas but wish to discuss them with the other commissioners to push the best plan forward," Murray said.

Mitchell acknowledges the need for an increase in garbage fees as well. "I would probably go along with an increase if reasonable, but would question why the current commissioners didn't resolve the issue," Mitchell said

When asked about what voters have shared as the county's most pressing needs and what they would focus on if elected, road issues were near the top of the list for both candidates.

Mitchell said voters have shared with him the need for better roads, better communication by elected officials and the need to hire more qualified people for county jobs. He also pledges to look into property tax breaks for elderly citizens with homesteads.

Murray has heard voters share the need for improved animal control and a new animal shelter, as well as road issues shared by many residents.

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EXPERIENCE: Five to Ten years of increasingly responsible experience in management, preferably in a public utility, is preferred.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF POSITION:

The General Manager is the chief officer of Russellville Electric, working under a five-member Board appointed by the Mayor and City Council. He/she is responsible for carrying out the directives and policies of the Board, advising the Board about the laws, contracts and regulations which must be observed and keeping the Board apprised of the health of the Russellville Electric System both physically and financially.

He/she will work with the staff and all employees to provide utility services to the utility's customers in a courteous and professional manner, keeping the welfare and safety of both the employees and the public in mind.

The General Manager will be initially hired for a Ninety (90) Day probationary period. As a condition of hiring/retaining the position of General Manger, the individual hired, must within 60 days, if not prior to, the expiration of the Ninety (90) Day probation period, reside within the city limits to the City of Russellville, Alabama.

PAY RANGE/COMPENSATION

The pay range/compensation will be determined by a vote of the Board members of the Russellville Electric Board. The beginning pay for the General Manager shall be no less than One Hundred Seventy-Six Thousand Five Hundred (\$176,500.00) Dollars, annually. The General Manager shall have 100 % of his/her family medical and dental insurance provided as part of his/her employment. The General Manager shall be eligible for participation in the Retirement Systems of the State of Alabama.

The full content of the job description for this position and applications are on file with and are being maintained by the Russellville Electric Board and are available at the request of applicant. Any request to receive a job description should be made to Amanda Hitt at Rogers, Bedford & Bowling, P.C. - 256-332-2880 or amanda@rbmattorneys.com.

Any and all applicants are subject to a pre-employment drug screen. The Russellville Electric Board shall perform a credit check of the applicant's credit history as well as a general Background check, including a Criminal History.

The Russellville Electric Board is an equal opportunity employer and will not discriminate in hiring based upon age, race, creed, religion, sex, national origin, or disability.

All applications must be submitted in a manner to be received by the Russellville Electric Board by no later than the 31st day of October 2024.

Applications can be submitted to the Russellville Electric Board via E-Mail at:
jeff@rbmattorneys.com.

or via United States first class mail to:

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Athens at Russellville highlights final week of regular season for local teams

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

Belgreen (2-4)
 vs. Vina (5-4, 3-4)

Date: Friday, November 1, 2024
 Time: 7 p.m.
 Location: Sparks Stadium

Last week: After a three-week hiatus, Belgreen traveled to Victory Christian and was defeated 57-0. Vina, needing a win against Meek to get into the playoffs, came up short and lost the game 54-14.

What to watch: This is the final game of the year for both the Bulldogs and the Red Devils. Vina, no doubt disappointed about not making the playoffs, can still end a much-improved season on a high note with an inter-county win over Belgreen. In the same way, a Belgreen victory would be a great way for the Bulldogs to cap their first varsity campaign.

Series history: This is the first meeting between Belgreen and Vina.

See, 'WEEK 10,' Page 13

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Phil Campbell, Wingo race past Hanceville 57-22

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

A much-needed victory paired with an individual milestone had the Phil Campbell High School varsity football team (3-6, 3-4) feeling pretty good after Friday night's road contest. The Bobcats, in their Class 3A Region 5 finale, traveled to Hanceville (1-8, 1-6) and muzzled the Bulldogs in a 57-22 blowout, earning PCHS its third win of 2024.

"We were able to pounce on 'em and with the momentum going our way we were able to jump up on 'em and take care of the game," second-year Phil Campbell head coach Jacob Hamilton said. "We were having fun (Friday) night."

The Bobcats got off to a flying start in just a handful of plays, scoring three touchdowns in the first seven minutes to run up an initial 24-0 advantage. Logan Cooper, a junior, dashed in from short yardage to put the Bobcats up 8-0 after the two-point conversion. A long, 69-yard touchdown pass from sophomore quarterback Hayston Scott to junior Hagen Raper on the first play from scrimmage on the Bobcats' next drive made it 16-0, and then senior running back Hayden Wingo scored the first of his three touchdowns with just over five minutes to play in the first quarter to increase PCHS' lead to 24 points.

Wingo, who finished Friday night with 339 yards rushing, eclipsed the 1,000-yard rushing mark for the season during the contest. Averaging 28.3

See, 'WINGO,' page 12

New head coach, young roster ready to start varsity basketball season for Belgreen boys

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Belgreen High School varsity boys' basketball team is itching to hit the hardwood after a first offseason under new head coach Will Bonner, who was hired to replace Marty Cooper in June. Even though the Bulldogs haven't had an opportunity to run practice sessions with the entire roster present, Bonner said he is optimistic about what he's seen from his team during its preseason preparation.

"We're really looking forward to getting started," he said. "There are some guys on the football team and they're still playing, so we haven't gotten to practice with everybody, but the guys who have been there to practice, they've been working really hard all offseason."

"You're very limited with time in the offseason with other sports going on, but I think our guys have worked really hard, and I can't wait for the football guys to get back," he added.

The Bulldogs' roster, which Bonner described as "still pretty young," doesn't have a ton of experience at the varsity level, but the first-year coach believes that a tight team bond and good chemistry between the players can go a long way in making up for that.

"I think these young guys who have grown up playing together, that can make a lot of difference," Bonner said. "We have some transfers this year—we've got one transfer that just came in from Hatton—and we've got two seniors who haven't played in the past, but I think they're all pretty close. We're a small school, so everyone knows each other pretty well. I think that's one good thing for us that they're all close and they're all friends."

"That's how I see us gelling together," he added.

See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 12



COURTESY PHOTO

Phil Campbell senior running back Hayden Wingo hit 1,000 rushing yards for the season against Hanceville.

'WINGO,' From Page 11

yards-per-carry against the Bulldogs, Wingo accounted for over half of Phil Campbell's 591 yards of total offense against Hanceville.

"(Hanceville) was running a three-man front and the holes were really opening up for him," Hamilton said. "If you look at (the stats) through nine games, he's averaging 11.1 yards per carry, and that, to me, is the biggest thing. That's an impressive stat—probably the most impressive stat to me.

"Rushing for 1,000 yards is a great accomplishment and the offensive line is a huge part of that. (Wingo) will be the first to tell you that he couldn't do it without his offensive line blocking for him and opening up holes for him," Hamilton added. "He's an unselfish player, a great player, a special player, and no one deserves it more than him. "Hayden Wingo is a very special kid, and I'm super proud to coach him and I love him to death. He had a great night, and we hope he continues it next week and in the future because I think he can be playing on Saturdays."

Hanceville pulled a touchdown back early in the second quarter to cut Phil Campbell's lead to 24-8, but the Bobcat offense was still just getting started. The visitors doubled their lead over the next two quarters, scoring 27 unanswered points to land at the 51-8 scoreline. Scott and Wingo added two rushing touchdowns each during that period of play before a six-yard rush by junior Dylan Barber early in the fourth quarter capped the scoring for Phil Campbell.

Up 57-15, the hosts added one more score to cut into the Bobcats' lead, but with under two minutes left to play it was much too late for any kind of comeback in the game PCHS dominated. While the Phil Campbell offense produced nearly 600 yards, the Bobcat defense allowed under 300.

"There are times when we get undisciplined, but I think our defense had a great night. We played team defense (Friday) night," Hamilton said.

The result puts Phil Campbell back in the win column following a defeat at the hands of top 10-ranked Gordo the previous Friday. Hamilton told the Franklin Free Press following the team's victory over Carbon Hill on October 10th, PCHS' final home game, that, with the Bobcats eliminated from playoff contention, the squad's focus was on ending the campaign on a high note. Winning, of course, is the best way to do that.

The ultimate way to close the season for Phil Campbell now would be to get a final victory over rival Red Bay, which hosts the Bobcats at Tiger Stadium on November 1st. Pulling one over on their county adversary and winning three of their final four games would be just the tonic for Phil Campbell after a tough season that hasn't gone exactly to plan. But that feat won't be an easy one.

"We've got one game left now. We really want to end it on a good note and going out and having a lot of fun; and there's nothing more fun than winning," Hamilton said. "Playing hard, playing all the way through every snap. Every snap is one less that you'll ever get to take if you're one of these seniors. These seniors will never get to play in Parrish Stadium again, but they still have another game wearing that Phil Campbell uniform. Focusing on ourself, focusing on our team and playing team football and going out on a good note is absolutely our goal right now.

"I've got a lot of respect for Coach Childers at Red Bay. Their season hasn't gone how they probably thought it would go, but they've got some athletes on that team. They've got some guys that are threats and can cause headaches. But we also know that we've got a lot of good athletes, too," Hamilton added. "This game against Red Bay, it's a rivalry that means a lot, so not getting too caught up in that will be key. We still have to do our job and play hard and the biggest thing for us will be just doing what we do and playing through the whistle. If we do our job and play hard, when we look up at the scoreboard at the end of the game, it's going to go our way."

'BELGREEN,' From Page 11

But it should be noted, too, that even with their youth or inexperience at the varsity level, the Bulldogs are not without returning playmakers. Belgreen has a few older hands whose performances will be crucial for BHS this campaign, according to Bonner.

"Braycen Johnson is a great player, and we expect him to hit his stride for us this year. He was great for us last year; he had a few games where he had 30-plus points, and we're going to need a lot more of that out of him this year, too," Bonner said. "Jonathan Mendoza is also an 11th grader, and he's worked really hard this off-season. He helped us a lot last year.

"The two seniors that have been with us—which that's Hunter Woodruff and Landon Cox—they're gonna have to play an extreme amount of minutes this year because they're very experienced, they know what we want out of them," he added. "I haven't gotten to see them much because they're both playing football, but I'm excited to get them back and see how we get the season going when we have everyone together."

Once the whole gang is united, Bonner feels Belgreen's style of play will also serve to the Bulldogs' advantage, as well. Belgreen intends to push it up and down the court and play at a high-tempo, which should make for entertaining basketball for fans and, hopefully, give the Bulldogs an edge.

"We're going to play fast and really get after you on the defensive end. We did that in the summer, and it really seemed to work out for us," Bonner said. "I think that's just me putting them in the best position to be successful at the end of the day. They like to play fast and they play hard, so fast-paced basketball is going to be a big thing for us."

Bonner, a BHS alumnus from the class of 2022 and a three-time Alabama Sports Writers Association All-State basketball selection with the Bulldogs, believes this Belgreen squad has the potential to win some hardware this season. Belgreen was crowned the Class 1A Area 14 champion in the 2023-24 campaign; one of Bonner's goals for this year's team is to repeat that feat, this time in Class 2A Area 14, which includes Tharptown and Covenant Christian.

"I think we have the talent to win the area, I really do," Bonner said. "I know Covenant has lost a lot (of players)...but we won't really be able to tell until we actually play them. We did get a look at Tharptown this summer, and we played really well against them, so I'm hoping we can continue that.

"I'm really anxious to see how we play against (Covenant Christian) because in the past they've been very, very good and our guys know that. We're gonna have to be really well prepared for those area games so that we have a chance to host the subregion game," Bonner added. "Covenant could be down this year compared to what they have been in the past, and Tharptown lost eight seniors last year, so there's a very good chance for us to win the area."

Setting his sights on an even higher prize, Bonner doesn't want to rule out a trip to Hanceville late in the year, either.

"After (area) we have a tough cross-region with Red Bay and Sulligent, but when you play at home there's a lot of things that can happen," Bonner said. "If we prepare well for a subregion game, there's a chance you may go to Wallace (State Community College, host of the Northwest Regional). I know we're 2A and this is a new thing for us. We've made it to Wallace in the past at 1A, and I know 2A is a different level, but if we prepare and focus every day, there's good sights for this team."

Belgreen tips off the season at home against Smithville on Tuesday, November 12th.

'WEEK 10,' From Page 11

Phil Campbell (3-6, 3-4)
at Red Bay (2-6, 2-3)

Date: Friday, November 1, 2024
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: Tiger Stadium

Last week: Phil Campbell put it on Hanceville in the Bobcats' region finale. Phil Campbell senior running back Hayden Wingo eclipsed the 1,000-yard rushing mark for the season in the 57-22 win. Red Bay dispatched Tanner 46-6 to clinch the fourth seed and final playoff spot in Class 2A Region 8.

What to watch: The Bobcats started the first of a three-game road stretch to end the season at Gordo last Friday and it didn't go Phil Campbell's way. That was to be expected, considering the injuries the Bobcats have suffered this season and given that Gordo is one of the best teams in Class 3A. The upcoming game at region rival Hanceville, though, is different. The Bobcats are slight road favorites here, and it would be great for the visitors to pick up win number three before traveling to Red Bay for their finale.

Series history: Red Bay, in a series that dates back to 1931, holds the all-time advantage over Phil Campbell 49-32. The Tigers beat the Bobcats 52-20 last season. Phil Campbell's last win against Red Bay was a 30-24 double overtime victory in 2022.

Next week: Red Bay travels to Region 6 champion Coosa Christian in the first round of the playoffs.

Russellville (7-2, 5-1)
vs. Athens (7-2, 4-2)

Date: Friday, November 1, 2024
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: Golden Tiger Stadium

Last week: Russellville finished region play with a 28-12 win at Priceville.

What to watch: Russellville will be a slight home underdog in its regular season finale against Athens, but the game will serve as a great dress rehearsal for the playoffs. The Golden Tigers won't face many teams better than Athens, whose two losses this season were against ranked opponents: region champ and old Russellville rival Muscle Shoals and Hartselle, who beat the Golden Eagles by two points. After Russellville's lackluster performance against Priceville, head coach Dustin Goodwin stressed the importance of cleaning up some of the problems—missed assignments and penalties, specifically—that have plagued the Golden Tigers at times this season. Junior running back Cam Phinzee, chasing the 2,000-yard rushing mark for the second straight season, is just 36 yards shy of the milestone.

Series history: Russellville is 20-11 against Athens. The Golden Eagles won the game last season 41-14. The Golden Tigers' last win over Athens was back in 2012, a 23-7 victory.

Next week: The Golden Tigers host Wenonah in the first round of the AHSAA playoffs.

Tharptown (0-9, 0-5)
at Phillips Bear Creek (2-7, 2-5)

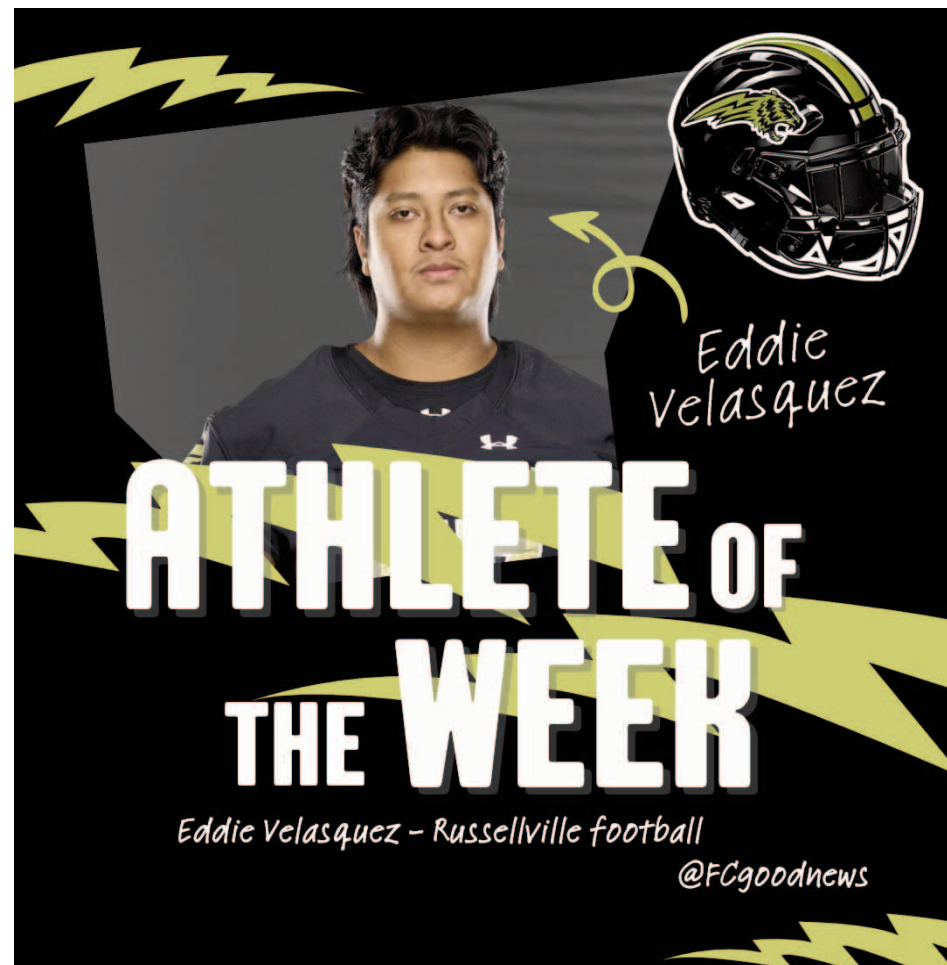
Date: Friday, November 1, 2024
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: James E. Glass Stadium

Last week: Tharptown was beaten 68-0 at Lexington.

What to watch: It's been a tough season for the Tharptown Wildcats, who were shut out again last week. Facing its first winless season

since 2015, Tharptown will try to repeat its performance against Phillips last year and break into the win column in its final game of the campaign.

Series history: Tharptown is 5-10 all-time against Phillips. The



A graphic featuring a portrait of Eddie Velasquez, a young man with dark hair wearing a black Under Armour t-shirt. To his right is a black football helmet with a yellow and white eagle logo. The text 'ATHLETE OF THE WEEK' is written in large, bold, white letters with a black outline. Below the portrait, it says 'Eddie Velasquez - Russellville football' and '@FCgoodnews'. A yellow lightning bolt graphic is on the left, and a yellow arrow points from the helmet to Eddie's name.



A graphic for the Food Bank of North Alabama. At the top is a basket of fresh produce including purple grapes, a corn cob, an orange, red tomatoes, and yellow bananas. Below the basket, the text reads 'North Highlands Church of Christ in partnership with Food Bank of North Alabama' with a silhouette of a church building. A large white stamp with the word 'FREE' is on the left. To the right, it says 'Every 3rd Saturday of each month Sat., Nov 19th'. Below that, in yellow text, is '9:00am-11:00am North Highlands Church of Christ Fellowship Hall'. At the bottom, a quote reads 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat Matthew 25:35'.

Golden Tigers handle Priceville to finish 5-1 in Region 7 play

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School varsity football team (7-2, 5-1 5A Region 7), ranked No. 10 in the latest Alabama Sports Writers Association poll, went on the road and knocked off Priceville (2-7, 1-5) 28-12 on Friday night. It was far from the prettiest game of football Golden Tiger fans have witnessed this season, but Russellville, scoring its fewest points since its week two loss at Mars Hill, was able to come out on top in its last region game of 2024.

First-year Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin was disappointed with the overall performance of his offense, which was without its biggest weapon, junior running back Cameron Phinizee, for all but a few plays and was hurt by over 100 yards in penalties.

"I thought the defense played well enough to keep us in it. I'm proud of them. Offensively, I thought it was probably the worst productivity we've had all year," Goodwin said.

"Missed assignments, too many penalties. I don't know exactly what was wrong with us tonight, but we'll look at it and get back to work to fix it," he added.

For the fourth consecutive week the Golden Tiger defense allowed an opening-drive touchdown to start the game, but, as has also been the case the last few weeks, the Russellville offense answered right back with a score of its own.

Trailing 6-0 after blocking Priceville's extra point, the Golden Tigers marched 63 yards down the field on its first possession, capping the drive with a two-yard touchdown run by senior Elliott Green to go up 7-6 with 3:09 remaining in the first quarter.

Green, typically a mainstay on the defensive side of the ball, made the start at running back over Phinizee, who was dealing with illness throughout the week. After claiming his first rushing touchdown of the season in the opening period, Green, who received all the car-

ries in the first half, would get his second offensive score on the first play of the second quarter after a Priceville turnover-on-downs gave Russellville the ball in plus territory.

"I thought Elliott did a nice job for us stepping in," Goodwin said of Green, who finished the game with 108 yards. "Cam's been sick all week, so we want to make sure he's healthy moving forward."

Phinizee, knocking on the door of another 2,000-yard rushing campaign, didn't hit the yardage mark against the Bulldogs, but he did cross another milestone: the all-state back scored his 25th rushing touchdown of the season on one of the few handoffs he got in the third quarter. Following a one-handed interception by EJ King, the junior finished off a short, six-yard drive with a three-yard touchdown run to make it 21-6, Russellville.

Freshman quarterback Whit Goodwin capped the Golden Tigers' scoring late in the third quarter with a 14-yard, read-option touchdown run.

The victory wrapped up region play for Russellville, who will face Class 6A Athens at Golden Tiger Stadium next Friday in its regular season finale before hosting Wenonah in the opening round of the AHSAA playoffs on November 8th. Following the lackluster performance against the Bulldogs, Goodwin said he wants to see a playoff-level of concentration and energy from his Golden Tigers as they prepare for the Golden Eagles next week and the postseason after that.

"We can go ahead and treat this next week like round one (of the playoffs) as far as intensity and preparation," he said. "We obviously have a lot we need to clean up heading into the playoffs if we want to survive and win football games, so we'll get back to work this week."



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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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

Senior Equipment Technician, Highway Department

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, November 1, 2024.

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

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Pet owners encouraged to take precautions for animals on Halloween

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Halloween is a fun time for the many residents who celebrate the holiday by trick-or-treating, hosting costume parties or braving a visit to a haunted barn or corn maze.

But for many pets, Halloween is far from a festive event. According to Petrendologist (yes, that's a thing...) Charlotte Reed, host of the syndicated weekly radio show 'The Pet Buzz,' there are a variety of ways to include pets into your Halloween fun, but there are also some preventive measures you can do to protect your dog from trauma or sickness this Halloween.

Reed has a collection of more than 300 dog costumes she's accrued through decades of celebrating 'Howl'oween' with her pets. But Reed said not every dog or cat is a good candidate to be dressed in Halloween costumes or apparel.

"It's important to take complete measurement of your dog before you purchase a costume," Reed said. "Although many costumes just come in small, medium, large or extra-large dog sizes, they're not going to be a fit for certain dogs. You need to measure your animal and write down the results. That way you'll buy a costume you can be confident will fit your dog."

"Don't dress up your pet unless you know they enjoy it. Make sure the costume isn't annoying or unsafe and doesn't restrict movement, vision, hearing or ability to breathe or bark," she added.

Costumes with small or dangling accessories that your pet could chew and choke on are another concern for pet owners. Reed advises to make sure costumed pets are supervised at all times.

If costumes are not your pet's favorite attire, try a nice festive Halloween bandana, Reed suggests.

According to the North Shore Animal League, pet owners should consider the following guidelines for a safe pet Halloween.

—No treats for your animals. Candy, candy wrappers and decorations should be kept out of a pet's reach.

—Beware of glow sticks, which can be chewed by pets. If punctured, the liquid inside may cause a pet to become ill. Pumpkins can also upset your pets' stomachs.

—Pets should be kept away from pumpkins with candles, as they can knock them over and run the risk of being burned or starting a fire.

—Give your pets a quiet, safe place to stay on Halloween. Some pets become agitated with constant doorbell ringing or too many strangers in the home.

And Reed urges pet owners not to take them trick-or-treating. Dogs may become excited or uncontrollable and if frightened, they may bite. For their protection, cats should be kept indoors at all times on Halloween.

Reed is the host of the syndicated radio program "The Pet Buzz," which airs on WGOL-FM 100.7 in Russellville Sundays at 12 p.m.

Reed, a leading pet trend and lifestyle expert, has appeared on CNN, Comedy Central, Fox & Friends, The View, as well as many more programs.

She provides health and wellness pet care tips for Prevention.com readers with her 'Happy & Healthy Pets' blog.

A graduate of Lafayette College and Fordham University Law School, Reed served on the New York State Veterinarian Board for nine years.

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If approved by Alabama voters, Amendment One on the November 5, 2024 ballot would allow the Franklin County Board of Education to sell or otherwise utilize land in Walker and Fayette Counties owned by Franklin County Schools.

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YES

NO

Vote *Yes* on Amendment One!

Annual RC&D meeting a review of projects completed to benefit Franklin County

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Although it's a once a year event, the annual meeting of the Northwest Alabama Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) could fill two days recognizing the many ways it impacts the citizens of northwest Alabama.

This year's annual meeting was held October 18th at the A.W. Todd Centre in Russellville.

RC&D's mission is to 'implement projects and activities designed to promote the sustainability and productivity of the abundant, natural and Human Resources of our five-county area (Franklin, Colbert, Lauderdale, Marion and Winston) while improving the quality of life within the community.'

RC&D staff includes Executive Director Lausanne James, Operations Manager Vanessa King and Media Design Specialist Anna Morrison.

Franklin County is represented on the RC&D Board by Probate Judge Barry Moore and Franklin County Extension Executive Director Katernia Cole-Coffey.

Russellville resident Joel Pounders also serves on the RC&D Council.

RC&D is funded through the Alabama Legislature. Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) spoke at this year's meeting about the important role RC&D has in investing grant funds back into the communities it serves.

"One of my primary responsibilities as a legislator is to be sure our tax dollars return to our community," Kiel said. "Rural areas are sometimes at a disadvantage and we have to work extra hard to be sure we are not overlooked.

"RC&D serves a vital function in this process by vetting grant applications and being sure tax dollars are not waste. Lauranne James and her team do a great job getting this money back to our community and being sure it is spent appropriately," Kiel added.

In the fiscal year that ended September 30, 2024, RC&D completed 87 projects in its five-county area and hosted 20 United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resource Conservation Service outreach meetings.

"These outreach projects across northwest Alabama promoted sustainability for our natural resources and investing in our future," James said. "Whether it's a school, a farmer, a firehouse or a senior center, RC&D is all about helping our communities thrive and grow."

With increased funding approved by the legislature for FY2024-25, James said she expects RC&D to exceed 100 projects in the coming year.

Northwest RC&D partnered with USDA/NRCS, the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, FFA, ACES and local farmers and producers to host the 2024 'Farm to Fork' Dinner at Triple H Barn in Russellville.

Jeff and Joel Pounders were recognized at this year's 'Farm to Fork' for their conservation efforts and forestry/wildlife management on their 560 acre Little Bear Valley.

Caleb and Emily Beason received the runner-up award for Excellence in Agriculture presented by the Alabama Farmers Federation and they were recognized for their positive impact on local agriculture.

The Franklin County projects and organizations to receive grants in FY2023-24 included:

—purchase of eight robotics kits for Franklin County and Russellville City Schools to be used by science classes to assemble and operate. These kits allow schools to test for electrical circuits that may be overloaded, electrically hot or improperly protected.

—renovation of the outdoor amphitheater at the Bear Creek Collaborative at Overton Farms and to provide storage for educational items used in the outdoor classroom.

—purchase of a sound system and equipment for Belgreen High School.

—equipment purchases for the Franklin County Technical Response Team, which provides rescue and hazmat response for all of Franklin County. The grant allowed for replacement of equipment that was outdated or had reached its expiration date as mandated by the NFPA.

—funding for Save Our Strays to provide veterinary care, including spaying and neutering, for 43 cats and dogs in Franklin County, meeting at least a small amount of a significant dog and cat overpopulation in the county.

—purchase of new equipment for Russellville City Schols for its building technology program, helping to build a more skilled workforce and providing skills needed by industries in Franklin County looking to add new employees.

—safety improvements including shoreline stabilization of Bear Creek Development Authority's lake system, helping to improve the safety of all who use the system as well as improving water quality.

—funding for a volunteer firefighter certification course for Franklin County Fire and Rescue. This consisted of a 160-hour classroom and practical skills training for 19 Franklin County volunteer fire departments.

—funding for updates to Russellville High School's old main building with school graphics in partnership with Birmingham-based Cre8tive Graphics.

—new office furniture for the Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District's new building.

—purchase of two AEDs for Phil Campbell Ambulance's two rapid response units.

—erosion elimination project at Phil Campbell High School's football stadium, as a massive hole at the bottom of the hill on the home side of the stadium was filled with rocks on both sides of the bleachers and up the hill.

—purchase of a new skid unit for the Russellville Fire Department. A skid unit is a tank of water with a pump, fire hose, piping and a platform. The unit was mounted in the bed of a Ford F-250 truck owned by the department.

—purchase of bleachers at Tharptown Elementary School in the gymnasium, replacing bleachers that were more than 50 years old.

—purchase of new uniforms and helmets for the Tharptown High School football team.

—renovation of the playground at Russellville Elementary School, replacing rocks and dirt with new sod, allowing for a larger and safer play area.



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