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Morrow's career of philanthropy foundation for induction into prestigious TICUA Hall of Fame

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Former Russellville optometrist Dr. Martha Morrow was recently inducted into an elite fraternity that recognizes distinguished alumni from schools in the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA).

Morrow, a 1974 graduate of Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, one of 34 TICUA member institutions, was among the TICUA's Hall of Fame 2024 inductees.

The association created the Hall of Fame to recognize distinguished alumni of its member institutions

while highlighting their contributions to the state of Tennessee, the national and the world.

Each member institution may nominate one alumnus each year, living or deceased, who exemplifies the values and mission of his or her institution, has contributed to the betterment of humanity through remarkable service, work, leadership or other achievement.

Morrow, who practiced optometry in Russellville for several decades and owned Eye Care Professionals, P.C., has been recognized as one of her profession's leaders in a field of medicine she was introduced to by shadowing her father, Dr. Fredric M.

See 'MORROW,' Page 10



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Fretwell leaves legacy of faith, family and friendship

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

In 1989, when Milford 'Mousey' Brown accepted the job of plant manager at the recently reopened U.S. Reduction, Brown's return to work at the non-union facility didn't sit well with many of his former co-workers and friends.

After union workers at the facility went on strike in the mid 1980s, the company closed the plant and

reopened a few years later as a non-union facility. There were legal challenges, but ultimately, a federal court said the company could reopen, and when presented with the opportunity to serve as plant manager with a significant increase in income, Brown made a decision he believed best for his family. But it came with consequences, as he endured vandalism to his car, received threats and some nasty phone calls and lost some life-long friendships.

See 'FRETWELL,' Page 5



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Izella Sartin Lanford, age 94, of Tuscumbia, away Monday, November 04, 2024. The visitation will be 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. Thursday, November 07, 2024, at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville.

Jessie Ray Turbyfill, age 76 of Spruce Pine, Al, passed away on Saturday, November 02, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Melba Jean Nichols 86 of Foley Alabama, formerly of Russellville Alabama passed away Saturday, November 2, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

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Franklin County Women's Leadership Committee's 'Cottons for Christmas' sock drive underway

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As the holiday season approaches, it will soon be time for the many Christmas events and traditions that Franklin County residents enjoy each year.

Included among those are the Franklin County Women's Leadership Committee's annual 'Cottons for Christmas,' a community effort that provides local nursing home residents with new socks and other sundries.

The Women's Leadership Committee is asking Franklin County residents and businesses to donate new socks for distribution to a local nursing home.

Donation boxes are located in three locations, including the Franklin County Courthouse/Extension Office. You may leave your donations with the deputies working the security desk located at the entrance of the courthouse.

The other two boxes are at the ALFA Insurance offices in Russellville and Red Bay.

'Cottons for Christmas' is one of the many ways the Franklin County Women's Leadership Committee gives back to community each year.

Sock donations are being collected now through December 2, 2024. If you have any questions about the 'Cottons for Christmas' sock drive, contact Carol Glass at 256-810-5446 or Shannon Murray at 256-668-3893.

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Hester's charges in abeyance pending results of mental examination

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The case against a Franklin County woman facing four misdemeanor charges stemming from a fatal motor vehicle accident is on hold pending the results of a court-ordered mental examination.

Pam Hester, 66, remains free on bond awaiting the results of a mental examination conducted by a State of Alabama Department of Mental Health forensic evaluator.

Franklin County Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton ordered the mental examination for Hester after a motion filed by Franklin County District Attorney Jeff Barksdale requested the same.

Hamilton's order was signed April 9, 2024, and according to Hester's attorney, Jeff Bowling of Russellville, the examination has been completed and now the parties are awaiting the report from the evaluator.

The purpose of a court-ordered mental examination is twofold: To determine the defendant's mental capacity at the time of the alleged offense and whether she was able to understand and appreciate the nature and quality of her actions, and to determine whether the defendant is able to understand the charges he or she is facing and is competent to aid in his or her own defense.

The burden of proving, by clear and convincing evidence, that a defendant meets the criteria of severe mental disease or defect falls on the defense under Alabama law.

Hester faces two counts of Criminally Negligent Homicide and two counts of Assault Third Degree. The first two are based on Hester allegedly causing the death of 34-year-old Jennifer Fretwell and her 11-year-old son Jase in a September 27, 2023, two vehicle accident on Highway 43 North.

According to police reports, Hester was traveling north on 43 after turning out of Hester Heights subdivision. Moments later, her vehicle hit the median and she began traveling north in the southbound lane of 43. The impact with Fretwell's vehicle occurred in front of the former Catfish Haven restaurant. According to Fretwell's family members, Hester did not have her headlights on at the time of the accident, approximately 10:15 p.m.

When a Franklin County Grand Jury indicted Hester on four misdemeanor charges, that did not sit well with Fretwell's family, who believed the more appropriate charge would have been manslaughter.

According to the police investigation, Hester is believed to have early onset dementia at the time of the accident. She is now residing in a residential facility.

In March 2024, Fretwell's sister, Nikki Murray, told the Franklin Free Press her family had seen videos where Hester was talking about the accident with other people. She questions how Hester could be unable to understand her actions at the time of the accident if she discussed it with other people after the fact.

Murray also told the FFP she and her family would work to have a law passed in Alabama that requires the revocation of a person's drivers license once he or she is diagnosed with dementia. Additionally, the family wants to see mandatory reporting by family members and/or doctors to the Alabama Department of Public Safety in such cases.

A petition started by Fretwell's family on www.change.org will be presented to Alabama legislators. As of November 1, 2024, there was 1,479 signatures on the petition.

The court's ruling on Hester's mental competency will dictate what happens next in the case. If granted, the prosecution would effectively end until such time (if ever) when Hester would understand the nature of the charges she's facing.

If the motion is denied, the case will move forward in Franklin County Circuit Court for trial.

As with any defendant facing criminal charges, Hester is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

'FRETWELL,' From Page 1

"When I went back to U.S. Reduction, I was not thought of too highly by some people because I went back," Brown, who was active in the union before the plant closed, said. "But he stuck with me. You find out who your friends are when you do something that's not too popular and he was one who always stood beside me."

The 'he' Brown referenced was his best friend, Ray Fretwell. Friends since high school, Brown and Fretwell worked together for more than two decades at U.S. Reduction. They played softball against each other and they shared their passion for the Alabama Crimson Tide football team.

And when many folks in Brown's life jumped ship, Ray stayed the course, and that friendship continued to last a lifetime, until Fretwell's passing on October 16, 2024.

"When you run into problems in life you know who your true friends are. Some drop you like a wet duck. They'll turn you loose in a hurry, but Ray stuck with me and was always a friend through everything in our lives," Brown said.

Sometimes quick tempered but fiercely loyal to his family and friends, Fretwell's legacy lives on beyond his life, especially in his two oldest grandchildren, Adam and Alex McCluskey. Tina Murray, their mother, sees many of her father's attributes in her twin sons.

"They were daddy's heart and soul. They were his first grandchildren and twins on top of that," Murray said. "He raised them like they were his. Daddy and J.L. McCluskey (the twins' other grandfather), made sure the boys achieved all their dreams and always made sure they understood right from wrong.

"My mom (Betty Jean Taylor Fretwell) and dad would take them on vacations somewhere every year. My mom and dad taught the boys how to respect people and always put their families first. The boys loved my mom and dad beyond words," she added.

Faith and family were at the heart of Ray Fretwell's life. Fretwell was one of 12 children born to James Bascomb and Lassie (Smith) Fretwell. Five of those brothers and sisters are still alive, including Benny, Gary, Ronald, Randy and Denise Pounders.

Ray and Betty had two children, Tina Murray (Jeff) and Chris Fretwell (Kari), and a total of 16 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Fretwell also had a core of customers at the convenience stores/gas stations he owned and managed for more than two decades.

After his union at U.S. Reduction went on strike, Fretwell bought his first store, Ray's Southside Grocery on U.S. 43 South, in the mid-80s. And it was a true family affair. Both Tina and Chris worked at the store, as did four of his brothers and sisters. And, of course, his grandsons Adam and Alex spent a lot of time at Ray's store as well.

Fretwell built many new friendships working at his various stores in Vina, Red Bay and Russellville. More often than not, Mousey Brown could be found at Ray's Southside, just spending time with his friend.

"We could always be honest with each other and we didn't have to agree on everything. Ray was the neatest dressed person I know. He never had a hair out of place. I think he could have worked in a coal mine with a starched white shirt on and he'd come out at the end of the day without a mark on it," Brown joked.

When Brown was diagnosed with cancer and undergoing treatments, not a day went by without Ray calling or visiting to see how his friend was doing.

Fretwell coached youth sports, including some of his son's teams, and he regularly sponsored local sports teams making sure they had the best uniforms possible.

You might not have known Ray Fretwell personally, but there's a good chance you've heard him singing gospel music, either with the Believers in Christ or Heavenly Jubilee. Fretwell was a regular on the Russellville gospel television station in the early 2000s, where he would sing sometimes with his twin grandsons by his side.

While receiving visitors during Ray's visitation, Tina said several people shared stories about her father's music and how it was special to their lives. Whether signing at funerals or on television, Fretwell touched so many through his message of music.

Fretwell loved interacting with his customers, but those who tried to steal from him were introduced to a very different Ray. Tina recalls one time a young man filled up with gas and drove off without paying.

"Daddy grabbed a roll of quarters and chased them toward Spruce Pine Mountain. They stole \$50 worth of gas and the boy gave daddy \$60. Daddy told him 'thank you and never come back to my store.' The boy asked about his \$10 in change and daddy said 'thank you for that. It's for my gas and my time having to chase you.'"



COURTESY PHOTO

Ray and Betty Fretwell

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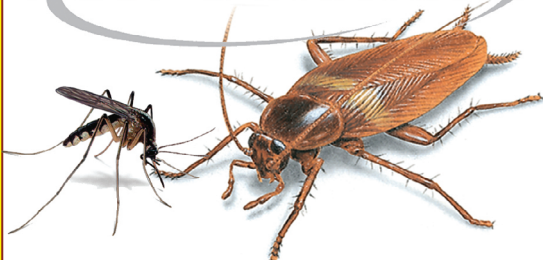
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 **C**ommunity Action Partnership of North Alabama, also known as Russellville Head Start and Early Head Start, is a non-profit agency serving 3, 4 and 5 year old children absolutely free. We are located at 976 Ronnie McDowell Avenue in Russellville. 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 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.

 **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!

Email us at franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

\$4,500 for musical theatre start-up at Tharptown High School among FCCDC fourth quarter grants

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Community Development Commission met November 1, 2024, and approved a number of grants to local schools and non-profit agencies.

The commission, which includes Brad Bolton, Jeremy Campbell and Russellville Mayor David Grissom, meets quarterly to review grant applications. The commission is comprised of two appointees from Franklin County's legislative delegation and a rotating seat between the mayors of Russellville and Red Bay. Sen. Larry Stutts reappointed Bolton and Rep. Jamie Kiel reappointed Campbell to another four-year term.

With the most recent grants, more than \$2.742 million has been returned to Franklin County since the inception of the funding. The funds come from in lieu of tax payments from the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Grant awards for the November 1st meeting included:

- \$6,000 to Future Economic Development Fund.
- \$2,500 to Tharptown High School Basketball (resubmission) for purchase of 10 foot scorers table.
- \$3,800 to Belgreen High School (resubmission) for handicapped playground project.
- \$4,500 to Tharptown High School (resubmission) for musical theatre start up project.
- \$250 to Tharptown Elementary School for expenses with field trips for special needs class.
- \$800 to Tharptown High School Rocketry for purchase of equipment.
- \$250 to Phil Campbell High School JAG and SADD clubs for expenses for trunk or treat event for elementary students.
- \$800 to Red Bay High School juniors and seniors to build and test remote rockets.
- \$800 to East Franklin Junior High School for purchase of table and chairs.
- \$800 to Belgreen School for Learning Experience Classroom supplies.
- \$1,250 to Tharptown High School Softball for purchase of Hack Attack Pitching Machine.
- \$2,500 to Vina Fire Department for replacement of fire suits/helmets/masks.
- \$250 to Red Bay High School juniors and seniors for ACT Workshop.
- \$250 to Phil Campbell FFA Club, for expenses for trip to national convention.
- \$1,000 to Vina High School Softball for updates to concession stand.
- \$750 to Vina High School Boys Basketball for gym floor refurbishing.
- \$250 to Vina High School for expenses for supplies for annual school fundrais-

er.

- \$250 to Vina High School Youth League for fees/equipment updates.
 - \$250 to Vina High School FFA Club for expenses to National Convention trip.
 - \$500 to Vina High School Drama Class for costume purchase, audio cabinet and materials.
 - \$250 to Vina High School Cross Country for purchase of uniforms, shoes, necessities.
 - \$1,250 to Vina High School Cheerleading for purchase of competition mats.
 - \$250 to Vina High School for expenses for Misc. trips.
 - \$250 to Vina High School for NSTA Conference expenses.
 - \$800 to East Franklin Junior High for special education program and expenses for Learning Experience Classroom supplies.
 - \$1,500 to Belgreen High School Baseball for purchase of viewing equipment, protective backstop padding and equipment.
 - \$1,500 to Russellville High School Moving Music Forward Project for updates to band program transportation needs.
 - \$2,000 to Easterseals of NW Alabama for resources to fund services for the disabled.
 - \$250 to PCHS for setup of student fund for necessities.
 - \$500 to PCHS sports medicine class expenses for classroom supplies.
 - \$1,500 to Vina High School Band for uniform purchases.
 - \$500 to Big Brothers/Big Sisters for scholarship funding for Russellville and Red Bay.
 - \$800 to Franklin County Board of Education for health services purchase of otoscope and other supplies.
 - \$800 to Belgreen Elementary Computer Lab for upgrades to equipment.
 - \$1,500 to Red Bay Elementary for implementation of musical programs.
 - \$2,500 to Russellville High School volleyball for purchase of VeriMax V8 Training System.
 - \$250 to Belgreen High School for Academic Booster Club for expenses for reward breakfasts.
 - \$800 for Belgreen High School Second Grade purchase of headphones with microphones and supplies.
 - \$250 to Belgreen High School for special education classroom supplies.
- The next meeting of the FCCDC will be January 31, 2025, at 8:30 a.m., at Red Bay City Hall. Grant requests for the January 31, 2025, meeting must be received by a commission member before 12 p.m., Friday, January 24, 2025.

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Russellville City Council approves \$125,000 renovation project for Russellville Tennis Complex

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The tennis courts at the Russellville Sports Complex will soon undergo a major renovation project after the Russellville City Council approved a bid to do the repairs.

At its November 4th meeting, the city council approved a bid of \$125,000 from Birmingham-based Lower Bros. Tennis Courts. The renovation will include filling in cracks, installation of 1,400 feet of crack membrane, black resurfacer, red and green colored surface and white playing lines on the complex's 12 courts.

No timetable was given on when the renovations would begin.

In other agenda items, the council:

--approved a preliminary engineering and construction agreement for a Transportation Alternatives Program Project with the State of Alabama, acting by and through the Alabama Department of Transportation, and the city, to make improvements on the sidewalks along Washington Ave., from

Marion St. to Franklin St., along Jackson Ave., from E. Limestone St., to Cotaco St., and lighting along Montgomery St., from Jackson Ave. to Washington Ave.

The total construction cost of \$521,194.92 will be funded with \$416,955.94 of federal TAP funds and \$104,238.98 of City of Russellville funds. The \$57,910.55 preliminary engineering costs will be funded by \$46,328.44 in federal TAP funds and \$11,582.11 in city funds.

--approved a professional services agreement with Civil Group for the Harrison Ave., box culvert project, in the amount of \$12,000 engineering and surveying fees and construction observation fees not to exceed \$3,000.

--approved a Master Services Agreement with Danmark Technologies for IT services at Russellville City Hall.

--approved a claim for \$240 from Darren Pounders for damages to a vehicle from a manhole on City Lake Drive. The road had recently been paved but the manholes had not been filled in yet. This resulted in damages in the amount of \$240.

--accepted a letter of retirement effective January 1, 2025, from city employee Donnie Franks.

--approved the hiring of Trenton Martin as a police officer in the Russellville Police Department.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be November 18, 2024, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Oregon pig diagnosed with avian flu not indicative of outbreak into commercial food supply

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

You've likely heard of avian flu, or as it's more commonly known, bird flu. It's a respiratory virus that affects wild birds, but has spread through the years to domestic poultry. But the latest case of bird flu that has health professionals concerned wasn't diagnosed in a bird. Instead, the first H5N1 avian flu case in a pig came last week in a backyard farm in Oregon.

The farm, a non-commercial operation, does not provide any meat for the commercial food supply, according to the Oregon Department of Health. And the farm reported an outbreak of bird flu in more than 70 chickens earlier in the week. So it's believed the pigs and poultry shared water from a common source, along with housing and equipment in close proximity.

The birds and the farm's five pigs were humanely euthanized for additional diagnosis and study. And officials continue to study whether the pig was truly infected or if its nasal passages were contaminated simply by environmental exposure.

Still, though, it's drawn the attention of United States Department of Agriculture and animal science experts because pigs are a 'mixing vessel for zoonotic and human influenza viruses,' according to the USDA.

And Ali Gotcher, Regional Extension Agent for Animal Science and Forages says there are no immediate concerns that animals with avian flu will create additional risks for humans.

"Avian flu is a zoonotic disease (meaning it can be transferred from animals to humans) but when humans get it, it's usually not much more than a common cold," Gotcher said. "There was evidence (of avian flu) found in buried cattle last summer in Texas because those cattle had come in close contact with poultry, as was the case at the Oregon farm, and drank out of the water where birds had died.

"There are systems in place to be sure none of this ever gets into our food supply and this is a good instance of those protections in place catching it before it got away and became a problem in the food supply," she added.

In commercial operations like poultry farms, the risk of an animal contracting avian flu is minimal because the chickens don't come into contact with other animals in their controlled environment, Gotcher explained.

But if the avian virus starts to regularly infect pigs, scientists worry the virus may mix with other virus strains creating a new virus more likely to affect humans.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the ongoing bird flu outbreak in the U.S. has affected more than 104 million poultry and 403 dairy herds in 14 states.

The CDC also reported 39 cases of H5N1 in humans, including nine in Washington this week — three of which were detected in Oregon when they traveled during their infection.

With more than 100,000 pigs on Alabama farms, according to the Alabama Farmers Foundation, whether the Oregon pig's diagnosis is an isolated incident or the start of a 'pork pandemic' bears watching.

For now, though, go ahead and enjoy another bacon biscuit or BLT.

There should not be any issues in that front (commercial food supply)," Gotcher said. "Obviously the systems in place are working because they were able to catch this in time."



COURTESY PHOTO

A pig on a rural Oregon farm was the nation's first to test positive for bird flu last week.

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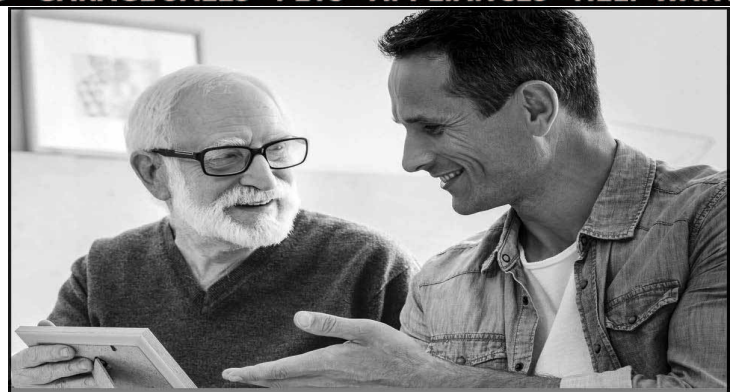
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'MORROW,' From Page 1

Rosemore, in his Alabama optometry practice from the age of five. Morrow's professional career includes many milestones. She was the first woman to chair the Southern College of Optometry's Board of Trustees, and she served as President of the Alabama Optometric Association where she represented our state at the American Optometric Association's Congressional Congress.



MORROW

Morrow also served on the Alabama Medicaid Optometric Peer Review Committee and the Vision America of Huntsville Advisory Board. She's been an active supporter of the American Optometric Foundation throughout her career.

Morrow's leadership in the business arena includes serving on the PNC Capital Board of Directors and as Trust Manager of PMC Commercial Trust on the American Stock Exchange. Morrow also served as trustee of her family's private foundation, which supported, among other causes, Southern College of Optometry's Eye Center, a public eyecare facility in Memphis.

Southern College of Optometry honored Morrow in 2003 with an honorary Doctor of Ocular Science degree, and she received the school's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006, following her father who also received that honor.

Morrow, who is married to former State Representative Johnny Mack Morrow, now lives in Starkville, Miss. Each of her three children followed their grandfather and mother into careers in optometry

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Playoff journey begins for Russellville, Red Bay

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

Red Bay (2-7)
 at Southeastern (8-2)
 Date: Friday, November 8, 2024
 Time: 7 p.m.
 Location: Southeastern Stadium
 Last week:

Red Bay finished out the regular season with a home loss against rival Phil Campbell, 64-22.

What to watch:

The Tigers snuck into the playoffs, finishing fourth in Class 2A Region 8, after beating Tanner 46-6 in week nine, giving Red Bay the head-to-head advantage over the Rattlers.

Red Bay and Southeastern average about the same number of points per game (24), but the Red

Bay defense has given up significantly more points than Southeastern. The Mustangs are certainly beatable—they lost their opening three contests of the season before being awarded a

forfeit win against Coosa Christian. However, Southeastern is on a seven-game winning streak

going into this one, while Red Bay is coming

See, 'PLAYOFF,' Page 15

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Vina varsity ends 6-4 for best finish in decades

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Berlin Wall still stood the last time the Red Devils tore down the barriers to a winning season, but, with its 55-0 shutout of Belgreen (2-5) on Friday night, the Vina High School varsity football team pushed past .500 and secured its first six-win campaign since 1989.

"At the beginning of the year we had two goals: one Kadinof those goals was the playoffs and the second goal was to be able to have the first winning season since 1989," Vina head coach Cody Renfrow told the Franklin Free Press. "Although we came up short of the playoffs, it was a really special year for our program to be able to get that winning season for the first time in quite some time. I'm super proud of this team for sticking together through the hard times over the last couple years, and to have the season that we did is still something to be extremely proud of."



COURTESY PHOTO

At Sparks Stadium, Vina jumped out to a 22-0 halftime lead thanks to two rushing touchdowns by senior quarterback Christian McCarley and, on a halfback pass, a 52-yard touchdown toss from senior Trevor Baker to freshman Branson Vick.

McCarley's second touchdown of the game, a 14-yard dash to the endzone right before the halftime intermission, capped a drive that allowed the Red Devils to run something they've not had much experience with in games this season: a two-minute drill.

See, 'FINISH,' page 12

Bobcats finish season strong with blowout win over Red Bay

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity football team (4-6) ended its season on a high note Friday night, notching a big 64-22 win over rival Red Bay (2-7) at Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium. The victory was Phil Campbell's third in its last four games of the 2024 season.

"It's a huge win for us. Obviously, anytime you beat a rival it's a huge win, but just to end the season, the last two games on a great, positive note, having things going our way, it was huge for morale, huge for the kids and for our seniors to end (their careers) the right way beating Red Bay," second-year Phil Campbell head coach Jacob Hamilton told the Franklin Free Press.

"I'm proud of my kids, and it was a great night," Hamilton added. "You know, any time you can beat Red Bay it's a great win."

After falling down 8-0 to start the contest, the Phil Campbell offense responded right away and tied the game up on a 35-yard Hayden Wingo touchdown run. The Bobcats took the lead 16-8 early in the second quarter after a 17-yard Chandler Benford score and from there never surrendered their advantage. The visitors ended the half with two rushing touchdowns by sophomore quarterback Hayston Scott. Scott's second, an 85-yard sprint to the endzone, came right before halftime and gave the Bobcats a 32-14 lead at the break.

Entering the game, Scott was sitting on 841 yards rushing for the season and needed 159 yards against the Tigers to break the 1,000-yard milestone and join his teammate Wingo, who eclipsed the mark in Phil Campbell's previous matchup against Hanceville. The sophomore scrambler nearly reached the number he needed in the opening 24 minutes.

See, 'BOBCATS,' Page 13

'FINISH,' From Page 11

"We were out of timeouts, and it was really the first time all year we've been faced with the situation to try and push the ball down the field and score—like a two-minute offense," Renfrow said. "The team really responded well and did well with that."

Four different Red Devils found the endzone after the break and play resumed. Senior Cai Lawler got the scoring started early in the third quarter with a four-yard touchdown run, before senior Tristan Farr scored a few minutes later on a three-yard rush.

After utilizing his arm to score Vina's second touchdown of the night, Baker tacked on the visitors' fifth score using his legs; the senior back took the ball in from six yards out early in the fourth. In the final minutes of regulation, McCarley closed out the game with his third score of the contest, an 80-yard touchdown run to make it 55-0—a memorable way to end a high school football career.

After a 1-8 season in 2023, the Red Devils' 6-4 record in 2024 represents the best single-season turnaround for the Vina football program since 1987, when the Red Devils went 7-5 and won the school's only region title following a 2-8 record the previous campaign. Renfrow credits the perseverance of the team and the leadership ability of its senior players for his team's success this season.

"I think it was really just the resiliency of the group we had this year," the second-year Vina head coach said. "We're very senior heavy and we had a ton of leadership. I really think that had the biggest impact. Coming into the year we had a large group of seniors that really bought into what we were preaching over the past couple years, especially last season. That really set the tone going into this season, and we were able to set our goals and knew if we stuck together, stuck with the process that these are attainable goals. It's a credit to our seniors, a credit to our team for believing in that, and I couldn't be more proud of them."

Renfrow added that Vina's senior players, who battled through two winless seasons in 2021 and 2022, have displayed a lot of character

and shown themselves to be more than just good football players.

"They've meant everything to this program and this team as a whole. Personally, they mean a whole lot to me," he said. "Not only are they good football players and very coachable kids, they're great kids off the field, too, and I don't want that to be lost in everything."

"They're great kids, very respectful, very coachable, and I think that's one of the main things that made this senior bunch great for our program," he added. "You can lean on them and they can take coaching, take criticism and turn it into a positive. I'm very proud of them."

Looking ahead to next season, Renfrow said it now falls upon this year's junior class to take up the mantle. Using the 2024 campaign as a building block, Renfrow is optimistic about the future of the program.

"We have a fairly large, for us, junior group. We've got six juniors and now everyone sees what we can do when everyone buys in, takes the summer seriously, and shows up willing to work," he said. "I think our younger guys see that, they see the success that we can have. There are some guys that need to step up in that leadership role so we can lean on them in the future, but it's a very exciting time to be a part of the program. We're excited to be moving forward."

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net! Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



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'BOBCATS,' From Page 11

"(Scott) hadn't had 160 yards rushing in a game before, but anytime you need to put the game on his back, that's when he comes in clutch," Hamilton said. "He knew that he was close to (the 1,000-yard rushing mark), and I would say that it was a goal he had going in. He needed 159 (yards) for the game and he had 155 in the first half."

"There was 31 seconds left in the half and we were up 10 and...he breaks one for 85 yards. So, I knew when he broke that 85-yarder, I knew he was getting closer," Hamilton added. "They came and told me he was at 155 at halftime, and I said, 'Oh, he's gonna get it then. All he has to have is four more yards.' But he's an awesome kid, and he's only a sophomore."

Of course, Scott found the four yards he needed early on in the second half of the game and tacked on an additional 73 yards for good measure. He finished with a team-high 232 yards rushing and in the process played his part in achieving a Phil Campbell first:

"I've been told it's the first time in program history where we've had two kids rush for over a thousand yards in a season. Hayden Wingo got that against Hanceville and then (Scott)...reached a thousand in this one," Hamilton said.

Scott's accomplishment, Hamilton said, was well-deserved. The sophomore serves as a leader on the squad, and, according to his head coach, he's dedicated to the work necessary to improve his game.

"He's the heart and soul of our team. He's our quarterback, so obviously he's a leader in that respect, and he's my little cousin so I'm the hardest on him. But he's the hardest worker in the room, he's always got a great attitude, and he's a great kid. We put a lot on him and we have high expectations for him," Hamilton said. "He's gonna work. He's already putting in the work right now to get ready for next season. (Monday) he came into seventh period and started to get to work to get ready for next season. That's the kind of kid he is, and we expect a lot out of him."

"We're very proud of him. I can't wait to see him continue to grow and develop, and he's gonna be the backbone of this team for the next two years."

In the second half, Scott continued to drive the offense and had a hand in two more touchdowns: Phil Campbell's opening score in the third quarter, a 49-yard touchdown pass to Jayden Taylor, and his third rushing touchdown of the night, a 47-yard dash early in the fourth quarter.

The senior running back Wingo added a long 85-yard rushing touchdown midway through the third quarter for his second score of the night, while Logan Cooper capped the night for the Phil Campbell offense with a short, two-yard touchdown run with eight minutes remaining. Red Bay tacked on a late touchdown with around three minutes left, but the Bobcats' dominant performance in the second half left no doubt about the outcome.

In addition to Scott's rushing accolade, the game also proved to be one of historical significance for the Phil Campbell football program in two other ways: the Bobcats' 64 points were the most in program history and the 42-point margin of victory was Phil Campbell's largest ever over Red Bay. Those two facts highlight Phil Campbell's control in all facets of the game against the Tigers.

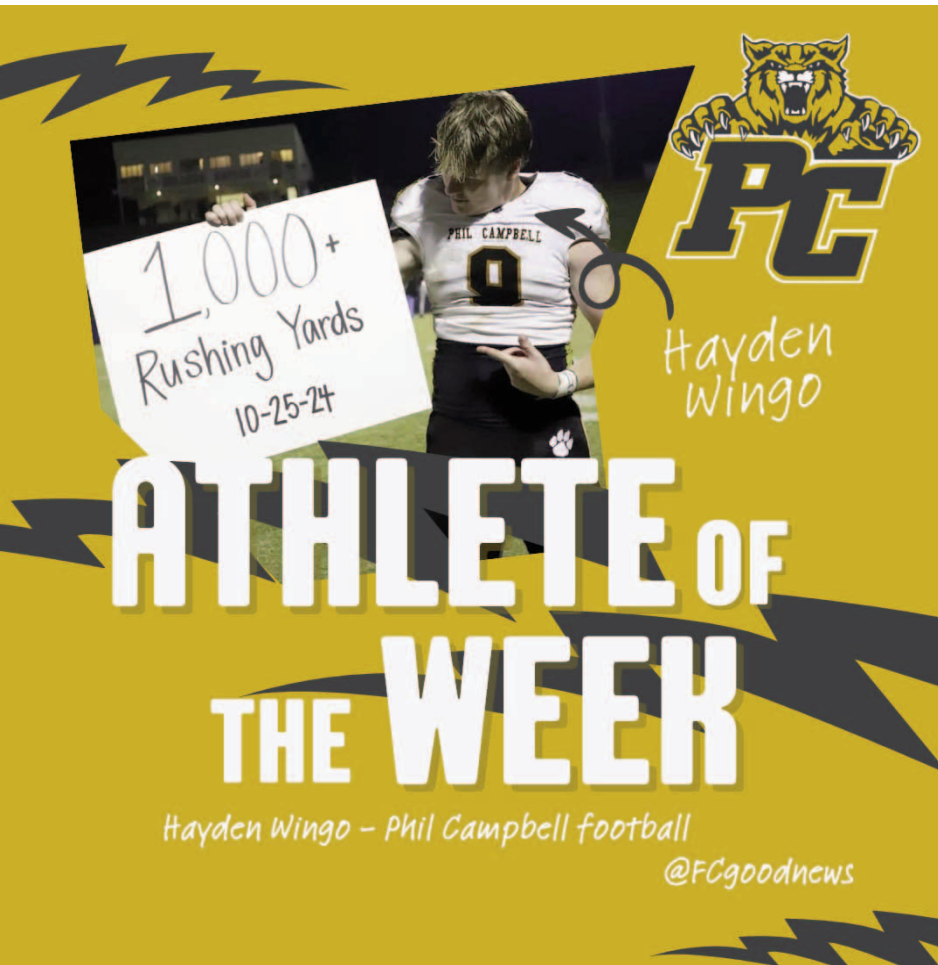
"We played a great game both offensively and defensively, and having that come together was awesome," Hamilton said. "Our defense played lights out, and we held them in the run game pretty well."

"We were very physical, and that's what I was very proud to see was the physicality that we brought to the game," he added. "Offensively we were just clicking and only punted one time and that was at the very end of the game. We were just firing on all cylinders and it was awesome. I think we had 580-something yards of offense and we had 503 of that on the ground. Anytime you're rushing like that, you're gonna have a good night. It was a great night, man, and it was a lot of fun."

Fun—and, Hamilton said, a great way to end a campaign that didn't go exactly as planned. Full of pride for his players, Hamilton added that throughout the season the Bobcats kept persevering, and he believes the 2024 season will prove to be a solid building block for future success.

"There's a lot of ups and downs throughout the season and, I mean, some things didn't go our way. Every coach is gonna have calls that they wish they could get back, calls they wish they could change, but, you know, my kids showed up every day ready to work," Hamilton said. "They were always prepared, always fought to the very end, and that's something I think we can build a foundation on and going into next year."

"We're losing some great seniors, but you're gonna have that in every program, you know, so we're gonna build on the positives of the ones that we have. We got a lot of guys that are ready to put in the work already for next season, and that's all we can do is show up every day, punch that clock and continue to work and continue to improve and set our goals high and work every day to try to achieve them," he added. "Eventually we'll get there. We've got a solid foundation that we've built. We've got some good kids coming back. So, all we can do is work, man, and that's what we're going to continue to do starting right now."



A graphic celebrating Hayden Wingo as the Athlete of the Week. It features a photo of Wingo in a white Phil Campbell football jersey with the number 9, holding a white sign that reads "1,000+ Rushing Yards 10-25-24". To the right is the Phil Campbell Bobcats logo, a yellow tiger head above the letters "PC". Below the photo, the text "Hayden Wingo" is written in a cursive font. At the bottom, the words "ATHLETE OF THE WEEK" are written in large, bold, white letters. Below that, it says "Hayden Wingo - Phil Campbell football" and "@FCgoodnews".



A graphic for the Food Bank of North Alabama. At the top is an illustration of various fruits including purple grapes, a corn cob, an orange, red tomatoes, and yellow bananas. Below the illustration, the text reads "North Highlands Church of Christ in partnership with Food Bank of North Alabama" with a small silhouette of a church building. Below that, it says "FREE Every 3rd Saturday of each month Sat., Nov 19th" and "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".

New coach, new excitement for Phil Campbell boys varsity basketball this sea-

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity boys' basketball team is poised to pounce on the 2024-25 season beginning next week. Led by first-year PCHS head coach Shannon Benford, who was hired at the end of May, the Bobcats feel satisfied with their preparation in the summer and fall leading up to the start of the campaign.

"The offseason's been pretty good," Benford, a 1997 PCHS graduate, told the Franklin Free Press. "The guys are working hard, and we're looking forward to starting the season."

In practices and workouts this summer, Benford said there were two main areas that the Bobcats focused on improving: relationships and offense.

"One main thing we really concentrated on was on is improving our attitudes and team chemistry," he said. "And we, for sure, need to improve offensively. They struggled to score a lot last year, so we're looking to play fast-paced and put a lot more points on the board."

On average, the makeup of the Phil Campbell roster this year skews younger with two seniors, a junior, and six sophomores listed. Unfortunately, the Bobcats will be without one starter from last year, senior Noah Raper, who was injured during the football season—a "big loss," according to Benford. Still, PCHS still has a few returning play-makers from that group, and the less experienced players will receive opportunities to make their mark.

"We're sophomore heavy, for sure," Benford said.

"We've got three returning starters: seniors Hayden Wingo and Logan Wright and sophomore Austin Elliott," he added. "We have one junior and then six or seven other sophomores that are definitely gonna have to contribute for us to be successful."

The experience and age disparity can pose a problem for some teams, but Benford said the Bobcats have good leadership and all the

players work well together.

"The good thing is Hayden Wingo and Logan Wright, they're good leaders. They play football, and I think they'll gel with the young guys and help them come along," he said. "And all of (the players) are willing to work—they're coachable. There are no rifts between anyone and everyone gets along, so that's a good thing."

"But definitely, the senior leadership is going to have to go a long way to help with the inexperience aspect because we don't have a lot of varsity experience except for those three that's returning," Benford added.

Phil Campbell will take help from wherever and whomever they can get it because the Bobcats' road won't be an easy one, especially in all-important area contests. Phil Campbell is joined in Class 3A Area 15 by Sheffield, Colbert Heights, and reigning 2A state champs Mars Hill, none of which are pushovers.

"Mars Hill won a state championship last year and they return a lot of players from that team, so they'll be a juggernaut," Benford said. "Colbert Heights, Sheffield, and us, I'd say we're all pretty similar, so it could go either way in a fight for second (place in the area). We wanna shoot for first, but the three teams other than Mars Hill are very similar to each other, so it should be competitive to get a subregional game."

Given the expected parity of the area, it will be a tough fight for post-season places, but the Bobcats are aiming for one anyway. Benford said his team's top two goals this season are to make the playoffs and compete for the county tournament crown.

Whether Phil Campbell can accomplish its objectives, fans will have to wait to see. But Benford also added that he also views this 2024-25 year as a bridge to success down the road if the Bobcats do it the right way.

"We've got a good future ahead of us with our younger guys and our junior high group is pretty good," he said. "If we can build this year, play better, end up with a better record and more success, that's going to help our younger guys to keep working and get the program built back up."

Phil Campbell is set to start the season on the road at Cherokee on Tuesday, November 12th.



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More than 60% of Franklin voters cast ballots in November 5th election

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Almost 61% of Franklin County's registered voters cast ballots in the November 5, 2024, election, a number more than double the turnout in the March primary held earlier this year.

One local race appeared on the general election ballot, the Franklin County Commission District One position vacated when incumbent Chris Wallace chose not to seek another term.

Republican Michael Murray received 9,809 votes (84.42%) to Democrat Charles Mitchell's 1,792 votes (15.42%). Murray will take office along with new commissioners Tracie Clark and Greg Hovater, and incumbent Joseph Baldwin when their terms begin this month.

In his first run for elected office, Mitchell faced long odds as the Democratic nominee. Those long odds became insurmountable when more than 50% of local voters cast Republican straight party ballots. There were 6,643 Republican straight party voters, compared to only 962 Democratic straight party ballots, so any local Democratic candidate trailed by almost 5,700 votes before any non-straight party ballot was counted.

Franklin County voters overwhelmingly approved Amendment One, with 9,834 voting in favor of the amendment and 1,092 voting against it.

That translates to more than 90% support for the amendment that will give the Franklin County Board of Education the ability to sell or lease land it owns at and near the I-22/AL-13 intersection, a prime location for commercial and/or retail development.

Statewide, Amendment One was supported by more than 70% of Alabama voters, even though it only impacted Franklin, Fayette and Walker Counties.

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'PLAYOFF,' From Page 11

off a big loss against rival Phil Campbell. The Tigers are an 18 point underdog in this matchup, according to AHSFHS.org; they'll need to put together, by far, their best performance of the season to advance on the road.

Series history:

This is the first meeting between Red Bay and Southeastern.

Next week: The winner between Red Bay and Southeastern will play the winner of the Pleasant Valley-Sulligent game in round two.

Russellville (7-3) vs. Wenonah (7-3)

Date: Friday, November 8, 2024

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Golden Tiger Stadium

Last week:

Russellville finished the regular season with a home loss against Athens, 45-23.

What to watch:

The numbers don't lie: Home field in the playoffs is a big advantage, one which

will certainly be appreciated by Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin and his Golden Tigers

as they take on the Wenonah Dragons in the first round. Russellville is 30-7 all-time in first

round playoff games, 25-3 when hosting the opening round, and 46-14 overall at home in the

postseason. Another number to keep an eye on is 150: over the last two seasons, the Golden

Tigers are 1-3 when all-state running back Cameron Phinizee rushes for less than 150 yards. Last

season, Phinizee rushed for over 300 yards in Russellville's first round win over Fairview, but he

was held to 105 in the second round loss to Moody. The playoffs are meant for big players to

make big plays—Phinizee will need to make a few to give Russellville its best chance to

advance. The final number is two. In games where the Golden Tiger defense, led by ball hawks

Zay Hubbard and Keifer Hallmark, record two or more turnovers, they are 6-0 and have won by

an average of 30 points; in games where they've gotten one or no takeaways, the Golden Tigers

are 1-3.

Series history:

The Golden Tigers have faced off against Wenonah just once; that was in the

second round of the 1994 playoffs. Russellville won the game 21-14 on the road.

Next week:

The winner of the Russellville-Wenonah game will play the winner of the Moody-

Arab game in the second round

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STATEWIDE AMENDMENT 1

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. (Proposed by Act 2024-301)

YES

NO

Vote *Yes* on Amendment One!