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Byars, Oliver and Thorn receive Lifetime Agricultural Achievement Awards at Farm-City Awards Luncheon

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

A slate of families and individuals who've made a significant impact on Franklin County were honored at Monday's Farm-City Awards Luncheon, held at the A.W. Todd Centre.

As with other years, the honorees were well-deserving. The only difference this year was they were honored at a lunch, rather than an evening event during the week of Thanksgiving.

This year's Farm-City Week carries the theme, Our Community Counts on Farmers. The featured speaker

was Kristen Nunley, Agricultural Education Specialist. Nunley, a 2002 Red Bay High School graduate, serves as a liaison between the State of Alabama and agricultural education classrooms. She accepted that position after a 15-year agricultural education teaching career that saw her Hamilton High School Envirothon team win a state championship.

Nunley and her husband Gannon own a family farm and their two children take active roles in farming and caring for the animals.

"Farming has taught them both the values of hard work, versatility and resilience. Our farm is not just a

See 'FARM-CITY,' Page 9



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Commission approves solid waste rate increases effective January 2025

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Minutes after the four members of the new Franklin County Commission each took their oaths of office at their November 13th meeting, they were faced with their first difficult decision—whether to approve an increase in residential and commercial fees for Franklin County Solid Waste Services.

Talk about a brief honeymoon...

Commissioners unanimously approved new monthly solid waste fees recommended by Franklin County Solid Waste Manager Gene Ward. The fee increases were necessitated by a significant increase in the per ton fee Franklin County pays for municipal solid waste transport and disposal.

The county's old contract with Hillsboro-based Republic Services Morris Farm Landfill ended September 30, 2024. That contract

See 'COMMISSION,' Page 3



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Kenneth Clayton Pierce, age 77, of Russellville, passed away on Wednesday, November 13, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Jeannette Scott Franks, 87, of Russellville, Alabama, passed away on November 13, 2024. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Betty Joyce Cantrell Clement, 90, Muscle Shoals, Alabama formerly of Russellville, Alabama passed away Thursday November 14, 2024. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

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'COMMISSION,' From Page 1

included a per ton fee of \$30.48 to haul and dispose of municipal solid waste picked up at the transfer station at the Franklin County Landfill.

The county let bids for a new contract and Republic Services Morris Farms was the only bidder, but at a new contract rate of \$53.60/ton, almost twice the amount of the old fee.

The outgoing Franklin County Commission approved that bid and contract but voted to table consideration of any rate increase, instead passing that decision to the new commission of Michael Murray, Greg Hovater, Tracie Clark and Joseph Baldwin.

The budget for the Franklin County Solid Waste Department for FY2024-25 was approved with the increased solid waste disposal fee built in, but with no accompanying rate increase. Additionally, Solid Waste Department employees did not receive the hourly raise approved for all other Franklin County full-time employees.

The new fees will take effect with January 2025 billing statements. The increased fees mark the first increase Franklin County residents have seen in monthly garbage rates since 2005.

New rates are as follows:

- Residential Services: \$25/month.
- Extra Can: \$15/month.
- Late Fees: \$5 assessed after the 15th of each month.
- Secondary Dwelling: \$150/year.
- Dumpsters: \$40 additional fee per dumpster.
- Landfill Residential: \$65/ton.
- Landfill Inert: \$30/ton.

Additionally, free residential drop-offs at the landfill will no longer be allowed after December 31, 2024.

Baldwin told the FFP commissioners plan to revisit the raise for Solid Waste Department employees as soon as doing so will be economically feasible in the budget. That raise, though, will not be retroactive to October 1, 2024, the date other county employees saw their raises take effect.

In other agenda items at the November 13th meeting, the commission: —approved a bid of \$485,000 from Hovater Metal Works for construction of the Franklin County Animal Control Facility, to be built behind the Franklin County Jail on land already owned by Franklin County. That company is owned by Commissioner Greg Hovater, but Hovater abstained from the vote and took no role in the opening of bids. Additionally, County Attorney Evan Hargett said he researched whether a county commissioner's business could bid on a county job and Hargett cited two Alabama Code sections that he said allow it to be done. Alabama Code 11-3-5 allows for a company associated with a commissioner to be a party to a contract with the county if the contract is competitively bid and the commissioner takes no role in the bid preparation or review and doesn't vote on acceptance of the bid.

Hovater Metal Works' bid was more than \$200,000 less than the next lowest of the four bids the county received.

—approved Commissioner Baldwin to be Chairman Pro Temp in the absence of Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore.

—approved Christmas Eve and Christmas Day as county holidays.

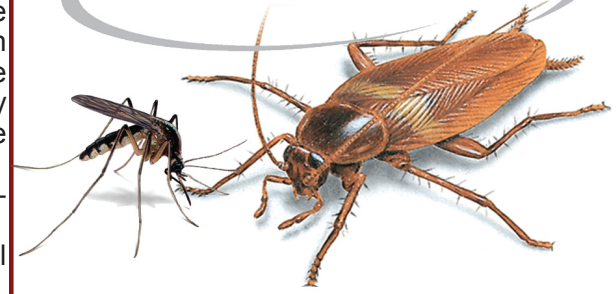
—accepted the low interest bid of 3.95% from Community Spirit Bank for a five-year financing of \$488,870, to be used to purchase two dump trucks for the Franklin County Highway Department.

—accepted the retirement of Roger Grissom, Roadway Maintenance Technician, effective December 1, 2024.

—approved designating a 2018 and 2019 Ford Explorer as surplus property in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

—approved a proclamation designating November 20-27, 2024, as Farm-City Week in Franklin County

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Sealed Bids will be received by The Russellville Water and Sewer Board until Wednesday November 20, 2024, at 10:00 A.M., local time, for the work according to Specifications and Contract Documents on file in the office of the Owner, the improvements hereinafter described. No bids will be received after the time set forth hereinabove; and the Bids will be publicly opened and read.

The Bid Documents will be opened at the Russellville Water and Sewer Board on Wednesday November 20, 2024, at 10:00 A.M., 721 Jackson Ave S, Russellville, AL 35653. If your Bid Documents are mailed, they should be received prior to November 20, 2024, at 10:00 A.M. at Russellville Water and Sewer Board, 721 Jackson Ave S, Russellville, AL 35653.

The work of providing labor, equipment, and material for the of the Russellville Water System Infrastructure Improvements Project, Contract 2, H. E. Neal Water Treatment Plant Residuals Pond Improvements Project DWSRF Project No. FS010075-05. The principal items of work are detailed herein below:

1. Miscellaneous Site Work within the WTP Residual Pond Property Boundary
2. Improve Access Road
3. Miscellaneous Berm Improvements along with removal and disposal of existing residuals
4. Miscellaneous Baffle Wall Replacement

Plans, Specifications and Contract Documents are open to public inspection at the office of Owner, the Russellville Water and Sewer Board, 721 Jackson Ave S, Russellville, AL 35653 or may be obtained from the office of the Engineers, Utility Engineering Consultants, LLC, 130 Southcrest Drive., Suite 100, Homewood, AL 35209 upon deposit of \$0.00 per set, the actual cost of printing, reproducing, handling and distribution for each set of documents. No refunds will be made except to Prime Contractor Bidders, which shall be refunded for one bid set.

The Contract will be awarded to the lowest, responsible and responsive Bidder. No bid may be withdrawn after the time for opening bids has passed. The Owner reserves the right to hold the bids for a period of sixty (60) days after the date of receiving the Bids.

The Contractor is hereby advised that **TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE** on this project and that the contract time of 60 consecutive calendar days total and noted restrictions shall be strictly observed. **LIQUIDATED DAMAGES WILL BE ASSESSED IF CONTRACT TIME IS EXCEEDED.** The Contractor may apply for an extension of time in accordance with the provisions of the contract; however, such an extension must be approved prior to the contract completion date to avoid the imposition of liquidated damages.

The Owner reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to waive any informality in any bid, and to accept any bid considered advantageous to the Owner.

The contractor shall note that funds for this project are provided through DWSRF (Drinking Water State Revolving Funds). All Applicable Federal Guidelines must be met. There will not be a Pre-Bid meeting.

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Full slate of Christmas events set for all corners of Franklin County

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Christmas season is nearly upon us and there are a plethora of Christmas events and parades set for the next 35 days.

Annual Christmas parades will again take place in the cities of Red Bay, Vina, Phil Campbell and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Christmas Parade in downtown Russellville.

Red Bay's parade will take place Monday, December 2, at 6 p.m., in downtown Red Bay. Vina's parade will be the next day, Tuesday, December 3, at 6 p.m., and will follow along the traditional Highway 19 route.

The downtown Russellville Chamber of Commerce Parade takes place Thursday, December 5, at 6 p.m., along Jackson Avenue and the Phil Campbell Christmas Parade will be Thursday, December 12, at 6 p.m., along the traditional Broad Street downtown route.

2024 parade themes include: 'Trains and Candy Canes' in Red Bay, 'Christmas in Toyland' in Vina and 'Christmas Classics' in downtown Russellville.

Other Franklin County Christmas events include 'Peppermint in the Bay,' an all-day shopping special event in downtown Red Bay. Participating businesses will have special offers for the upcoming holiday season.

The Red Bay Christmas Open House takes place from 1-4:30 p.m., Sunday, December 1, with horse and carriage rides available in Bay Tree Park, and the town's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in Bay Tree Park at 5 p.m.

The Russellville Main Street's 'Who-Ville' event will take place December 5th, before and after the Christmas Parade in downtown Russellville. The event will be hosted by the Downtown Russellville Coalition.

Also on Thursday, December 5th, the Every Light a Prayer for Peace event will take place in front of the Franklin County Courthouse at 4:15 p.m., and the Russellville Christmas Tree Lighting at the Byars Building will start at 5 p.m.

The Christmas at City Lake Park Tree Lighting Ceremony begins at 7:30 p.m., after the parade and the Christmas Tree Trail will be open until January 1, 2025.

The Russellville Parks and Recreation Department's 'Miss Merry Christmas' Pageant is set for Friday, December 6, from 6-8:30 p.m., at the Russellville Rec Center, 201 Ash Avenue. Ages 0-12 are eligible with six age divisions. For more information, contact Jennifer Cook at jenniferreed623@gmail.com.

Application and payment deadline is November 29th.

Northwest Shoals Community College's Breakfast with Santa will start at 9 a.m., Saturday, December 8th, on the Shoals Campus. It includes breakfast, crafts, Christmas carols and an appearance from Santa himself. Tickets are \$14 per person. Children under two are free. Proceeds benefit the NWSCC Foundation.

'Christmas at Sloss Lake' is set for Sunday, December 8, from 12-7 p.m., at Russellville's Sloss Lake on Highway 24 East. It will include craft vendors, activities, music, food trucks, a Christmas program at 4:30 p.m., Santa's arrival at 4 p.m., all leading up to a live Bethlehem nativity scene.

The Town of Hodges will host its Memory Tree Lighting at Hodges Town Park on Sunday, December 8, at 5 p.m. Angels may be purchased at Harold's Gas & Grocery or at Hodges Town Hall. And 'Christmas Around the Trail' at Hodges Park will be ongoing through January 7, 2025.

The Roxy's Christmas Spectacular will feature public performances on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, December 12-15, at the historic Roxy Theatre. Tickets are \$15.

'Cookies for Santa' takes place at the A.W. Todd Centre from 5:30-7:30 p.m., on Tuesday, December 17th. This event is sponsored by the Russellville Parks and Recreation Department and includes a cookie decorating class, story time with Dianne Pace and customized popcorn creating at the popcorn bar. There's a \$25 registration fee and participants should be in grades K-5th.

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Supreme Court ruling brings former REB accountant's lawsuit to an end

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

A 2017 lawsuit filed by the former accountant for the Russellville Electric Board finally ended recently after the Supreme Court of Alabama affirmed the ruling of the Franklin County Circuit Court granting summary judgment in favor of the defendants.

Andrea Murphy, who was hired as an accountant for the REB in 2006 and rose to the position of Chief Financial Officer, filed the lawsuit against the board, former General Manager Charles Canida, as well as each individual serving on the board when she was fired in 2015.

The complaint was filed by Russellville attorney Sharon Hindman Hester. It alleged multiple counts against the defendants, including breach of contract, negligence, wantonness, wrongful termination and defamation claims.

Through the past seven years, most defendants and claims were dismissed by the Franklin County Circuit Court. The lone exception was a defamation claim against Canida and former REB Chairman Darren Woodruff.

That remaining claim was dismissed on August 17, 2023, when Franklin County Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton granted a Motion for Summary Judgment filed by the attorney representing Canida and Woodruff.

Hester filed notice of appeal on September 22, 2023. The Supreme Court of Alabama's October 4th ruling affirmed Hamilton's order dismissing the case.

When Murphy was terminated in 2015, she alleged the REB employee handbook allowed termination only 'for cause' and that she was not provided any due process or hearing before the board's action. The lawsuit followed.

Murphy's breach of contract claim alleged the REB violated its agreement with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and as a result, she was harmed as a third-party.

All defendants and causes of action were dismissed in May 2021, save the defamation counts against Canida and Woodruff. After almost two years of discovery and depositions, the court found, as a matter of law, there were no facts to support a claim that Canida or Woodruff defamed Murphy.

Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to visit us online at [www.franklinfreepress.net!](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)

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Russellville City Council to rebid micro-surfacing paving project

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville City Council rejected bids received for a grant-funded micro-surfacing paving project and authorized the project to be rebid at the council's November 18th meeting.

In order to facilitate micro-paving contractors being able to bid on the project, the City of Russellville Street Department will use city paving equipment to do pre-paving work including leveling and patching. This will allow a per ton asphalt cost of \$65 rather than \$200 per ton, as the city will use its own equipment and do the prep work in-kind, explained Russellville City Councilman David Palmer.

Microsurfacing consists of the application of a mixture of water, asphalt emulsion, aggregate and chemical additives to an existing asphalt concrete pavement surface. Then a polymer additive may be added to the asphalt emulsion to provide better mixture properties, according to <https://pw.lacounty.gov>.

In other agenda items at its November 18th meeting, the council --accepted a retirement letter from Russellville Police Department Sergeant Reece Coan, effective December 1, 2024, ending Coan's 15-plus years as an officer.

--declared a vacancy for patrol officer in the RPD and authorized advertisement of the same.

--declared a vacancy for Heavy Equipment Operator III in the Russellville Street Department and promotion from within the Classified Service.

--promoted Jamie Reeves to Assistant Street Superintendent in the Russellville Street Department.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be December 2, 2024, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Federal lawsuit alleges excessive force, civil rights violations by officers in 2022 incident

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Russellville man has filed a federal lawsuit against the City of Russellville alleging excessive force was used against him as well as alleging negligence and/or wantonness stemming from an August 3, 2022, incident at Ridgecrest Plaza Apartments in Russellville.

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Jagger Williams filed the three-count civil complaint through his attorney, Terrinell Lyons of Florence.

The lawsuit also names fictitious party defendants A,B and C, representing City of Russellville agents or employees, whose names he plans to obtain through discovery.

According to Williams' complaint, filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama on August 1, 2024, Russellville Police Department officers, along with the Franklin County Drug Task Force, executed a search warrant at a Ridgecrest Plaza apartment on August 3, 2022.

Williams alleges that he and his wife, who did not reside at the apartment in question, were notified a 'raid' was happening and they should

come to pick up Williams' minor step children who were inside the apartment visiting with their natural parent.

The complaint alleges Williams and his wife arrived and told officers they were there to pick up the children. Williams maintains he was not allowed to get the children and he continued to request officers allow him to do so, and one officer shouted 'one more word out of him, put him in jail for disorderly.' (Williams' complaint Pg. 3 of 9).

Moments later, after Williams told the officer 'you can't do that,' he alleges three officers wrestled him to the ground, handcuffed him and 'used force behind Williams' neck to bend him forward and place him on the ground.' (Williams' complaint Pg. 3 of 9).

The lawsuit alleges officers tased Williams multiple times while he was handcuffed on the ground. Williams alleges as a result of the officers' actions, he suffered physical injury.

Russellville Police Department records show Williams was arrested on August 3, 2022, and charged with three offenses: Disorderly Conduct, Obstructing Governmental Operations and Resisting Arrest. Those cases remain pending in Russellville Municipal Court according to a RPD spokesman.



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Additionally, a source familiar with the case said police video of Williams' arrest will show he was not tased while handcuffed on the ground.

Williams is seeking monetary damages for his injuries, lost wages and benefits and future earning capacity incurred as result of the defendants' 'excessive force' and violation of his civil rights.

His negligence/wantonness count alleges the officers violated the standard of care applicable to police officers, as well as Alabama state law and RPD policy by 'negligently and/or wantonly accosting, cuffing and tasing' him.

The Franklin Free Press contacted Russellville Police Department Chief Chris Hargett, who said he was aware of Williams' lawsuit but could not comment due to department policy regarding matters of pending litigation.

The city is represented by the Huntsville law firm of Lanier, Ford, Shaver & Payne, P.C., and has denied the allegations of Williams' complaint.

Interestingly, the City of Russellville was served with the lawsuit on August 20, 2024, and failed to file a response in Court within the allowable response time. That led to an entry of default being entered against the City of Russellville by the Deputy United States District Court Clerk on October 8, 2024.

Attorneys for the city have since filed a motion to set aside the entry of default with an explanation for why the city's answer wasn't filed in a timely manner. District Judge Liles C. Burke will ultimately decide whether that motion is granted.

Franklin County Circuit Court records show Williams was charged with two counts of Unlawful Possession of Suboxone and Fentanyl, Unlawful Possession of Marijuana, 2nd Degree, and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia one week prior to the August 3, 2022, search warrant executed at Ridgecrest Plaza.

Those cases were settled in March 2024 with Williams' guilty plea to one misdemeanor count of Possession of Drug Paraphernalia and dismissal of the remaining charges, after Franklin County District Attorney Jeff Barksdale agreed to dismiss the remaining charges.

The United States District Court entered a scheduling order that outlines deadlines for discovery and motions as well as setting a trial date next year.

'FARM-CITY,' From Page 1

business. It's a family legacy," Nunley said.

Farm-City Week is designed to deepen understanding of the relationship between rural farmers and urban workers. Since 1955, Farm-City committees have hosted educational events and invited city folk to visit local farms for a first-hand look at how their food is raised.

Three Franklin County men received Lifetime Agricultural Achievement Awards, including Jimmy Byars, Gary Oliver and John W. Thorn.

Stephen Hall was named Franklin County Farmer of the Year and Franklin County Farm Family of the Year went to Youngblood Ranch.

Jimmy Byars: A farmer for more than 60 years, Byars owns Angus cattle on his 400-acre farm and has nearly four decades' experience in poultry farming. He operated Byars Feed Mill in the 1960s and 70s and founded the Northwest Alabama Feeder Pig Association, where he served as president for 25 years. He served as Franklin County Probate Judge from 1977-1983 and was company commander of the Russellville Alabama National Guard unit. Jimmy and his late wife Sue Francis have two children, five grandchildren and four great-great grandchildren.

Gary Oliver: Gary owns and operates Hillside Farms, started by his father 70 years ago. In addition to its beef cattle operation, Hillside Farms produces row crops including corn, wheat, soybeans and hay. He was an early innovator of no-till farming practices, showing a commitment to protecting the land's valuable resources and preserving soil health. He and his wife Joyce have two daughters, who grew up on the farm. And today, their granddaughters are learning to carry on the family's farming legacy.

John W. Thorn: A lifetime farmer, John bought his first calf for \$6 in 1946. A veteran of the United States Army, John retired from TVA in 1988. His 500-acre cattle farm is in the Waco community. With support from NRCS, he installed a solar water pumping system at a spring that supplies water to a freeze-proof watering system throughout his farm. He also owns and operates a 154-acre cattle farm in Colbert County. A member of Cherry Hill Baptist Church and Franklin County Church Builders, John received a 50-year pin from Russellville Masonic Lodge 310. He and his wife Sarah have been married nearly 48 years and between them have four children, seven grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and one great-great grandson.

Stephen Hall: His annual investments in purchasing bulls with superior genetics ensures the herd quality and continued success of his cattle farm. His use of energy-efficient upgrades to his commercial poultry farm show his forward-



Katernia Cole-Coffey, right, presents Gary Oliver with the Lifetime Agricultural Achievement Award Monday.



Jimmy Byars, recipient of the Franklin County Lifetime Agricultural Achievement Award, addresses the crowd at Monday's Farm-City Awards Luncheon.

thinking farming practices, as he does his active role in land management. His operation includes a herd of 125 of Angus cattle and four commercial broiler houses. Stephen is a proud multi-generational farmer and he credits his late grandfather, Ollie McGuire, for teaching him to respect and sustain his land.

Youngblood Ranch: A woman-owned cattle ranch that began in 1995 as a small garden, Youngblood Ranch is truly a family operation including Dane, Kirsten, Emlyn, Abbi, Marissa and Sydney. Youngblood Ranch runs a herd of 45-70 premium Wagyu cattle, with some Angus. Their beef is all-natural, hormone and steroid-free. And the family's 'Everybody Eats' initiative allows Youngblood Ranch to offer reduced-price or free beef to qualifying families.

Franklin County Extension Service Executive Director Katernia Cole-Coffey presented special recognition awards to the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, Madden Brangus Farms and the Miller Family Dairy.

Ali and Will Gotcher received the Excellence in Agriculture Award.

The 2024 Farm-City Contest winners were also announced Monday. They included:

Poster Contest (Kindergarten-Third Grade): First Place, Jonathan Tzep, Third Grade, Tharptown Elementary, Keslie Scott teacher. Second Place, Armando Tellez, Third Grade, Tharptown Elementary, Keslie Scott, teacher, and Third Place, Aubrey Fuller, Third Grade, Russellville Elementary, Chastity West teacher.

Poster Contest (Fourth-Sixth Grade): First Place, Megan Gissell Alvarado Amador, Sixth Grade Tharptown Elementary, Kristy Smith teacher, MaKenna Garrison, Sixth Grade Tharptown Elementary Kristy Smith teacher, and Third Place, Catarina Esteban, Sixth Grade, Tharptown Elementary, Kristy Smith teacher. Honorable mentions went to Elsie Greenhill, sixth grader at Belgreen and Emily Diego, sixth grader at Tharptown.

Essay Contest (10th-12th Grade): First Place, Emma Rambo, 11th Grade, Phil Campbell High School, Caleb Beason teacher, Second Place, Sadie Hill, 11th Grade, Phil Campbell, Caleb Beason teacher, and Third Place, Roxana Molina, 11th Grade, Phil Campbell, Caleb Beason teacher.

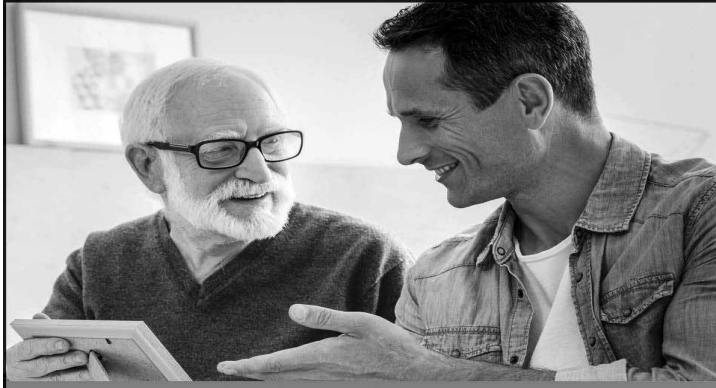
Cole-Coffey also recognized several organizations, businesses and individuals for their support of this year's Farm-City Awards Luncheon, including CB&S Bank, Community Spirit Bank, the Franklin County Commission, the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association, the Franklin County Farmers' Federation, Commissioner Michael Murray, Phil Campbell FFA and the Russellville Parks and Recreation Department and the A.W. Todd Centre staff.



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Belgreen girls' basketball team off to early season 3-0 start

*Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press*

The Belgreen High School varsity girls' basketball team is off to a great start to the 2024-25 campaign, picking up wins in its first three games. The Lady Bulldogs started off the season with a narrow victory against Pine Grove in Belmont, Mississippi; Belgreen followed it up with big wins over Smithville and Red Bay.

"It was a close game (against Pine Grove). First game of the year...you've gotta get some kinks out," Belgreen head coach Chad Green said. "We had some turnovers and things of that nature, but we ended up winning 55-52.

"We came back home the following Tuesday and played Smithville—we won 65-29. Then Friday we hosted Red Bay and we beat them," Green added.

Senior Dakota Green led Belgreen with 15 points in the win over Smithville. Green added another 11 points in the victory versus Red Bay, while Mackinley Hogan led all scorers with 12 points.

The fantastic start bodes well for a Lady Bulldogs team that is returning all of its players from last season, a year that saw Belgreen fall shy of a berth to Birmingham in

See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 13

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Introducing the Franklin Free Press All-County Volleyball Team

*Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press*

- 2024 All-Franklin County Volleyball Team
 Morgan Lauderdale, outside hitter/defensive specialist, Belgreen
 Bryn Scott, libero, Belgreen
 Gracie Weatherford, outside hitter, Red Bay
 Laila Hill, outside hitter, Russellville
 Blevyn Sappington, outside hitter, Russellville
 Carly Cason, middle hitter, Tharptown

- Honorable Mention
 Lilliana Willingham, middle hitter, Belgreen
 Carson Hovater, middle hitter, Belgreen
 Britney Coffman, outside hitter, Phil Campbell
 Bri McCulloch, libero, Russellville
 Fatima Ramirez, setter, Russellville
 Karrah Nichols, outside hitter, Tharptown
 Malia McCullar, middle hitter, Tharptown
 Alyssa Fischer, setter, Tharptown

Franklin County Volleyball Coach of the Year: Julianna Taylor, Phil Campbell

The Franklin Free Press has announced its All-Franklin County Volleyball team for the 2024 season. The team, chosen by the FFP sports editor, is based on nominations by the head coaches. This season there were six county volleyball players from four schools made up the all-county team with eight honorable mentions and a Coach of the Year.

Belgreen High School had two players selected for the All-Franklin County squad. Senior outside hitter and defensive specialist Morgan Lauderdale was a major contributor to the Lady Bulldogs' success this season serving as an invaluable leader for the team. Lauderdale finished the season with 149 kills, 239 digs, 52 aces, a successful serve rate of 89 percent, and also added three solo blocks. Lauderdale, who signed with Northwest Shoals Community College on November 1, is the first Belgreen volleyball player to sign with a collegiate program.

Lauderdale was joined on the All-Franklin County team by junior libero Bryn Scott, who finished with a remarkable 574 digs. Scott had 204 perfect passes off serve receive and she added 18 kills from the back row.

Red Bay's Gracie Weatherford was the Lady Tigers lone All-Franklin County Team member. The senior outside hitter was a force both on and off the court for the Lady Tigers. A team captain for Red Bay in 2024, Weatherford displayed strong leadership ability and "works just as hard in the classroom as she does in the gym," according to Red Bay head coach Elizabeth Scott. Weatherford, the first player offered to sign with the nascent Northwest Shoals Community College volleyball program according to the Patriots' head coach Susie Tverberg, made it official on November 1, giving her signature to NWSCC.

Russellville had two players selected for the All-Franklin County Team: junior outside hitter Laila Hill and freshman outside hitter Blevyn Sappington. Hill led the Lady Golden Tigers in kills this campaign with 246. Defensively, Hill did her part with 84 digs, seven solo blocks and 13 block assists. Sappington was right behind Hill in the kills department as she finished with 214 for the year. Sappington, one of two freshmen first team all-county selections, was Russellville's leader in aces with 66, and she was second on the team in digs with 259.

The other freshman rounding out the All-Franklin County Team and representing Tharptown High School is the Lady Wildcats' middle hitter Carly Cason. The tall ninth-grader recorded a remarkable 95 total blocks to go along with her 201 kills on the year. Cason also tallied 38 aces and picked up 21 digs in 2024.

The Franklin County Coach of the Year is Phil Campbell's Julianna Taylor. The Coach of the Year selection was made based on votes by other coaches and team performance. Taylor led the Lady Bobcats to a runner-up finish in Class 3A Area 15 and a berth in the North regional for

See, 'ALL-COUNTY,' Page 12

'BELGREEN,' From Page 11

the Class 1A regional.

"I've got a great group. I didn't graduate anybody from last year, and they're good kids that know the system," Green said. "Dacota Green's been with me for a long time. She's started since the eighth grade. She's a senior this year, and she's our leading scorer. Makenna Fisher, she's our second-leading scorer. And then we've got our point guard Bryn Scott. She just does an outstanding job. She broke the school's single-season steals record last year, and she's got on (AHSAA) all-time steals record, as far as single season.

"Ball-handling and defensive-wise, boy, she's tough," Green added of Scott. "She's a true point guard, for sure."

In addition to his returning starters Green's team also has a deep bench that is already making its mark this season.

"Against Red Bay 10 of the 11 girls (on the team) scored. Against Smithville 11 out of 11 girls scored. Against Pine Grove nine out of 11 girls scored," he said. "We've got girls that'll start and girls that'll come off the bench, but everybody's got a role that they do."

With so many returning players Belgreen has its sights set high this season. The Lady Bulldogs have moved up a classification to Class 2A, so achieving their ultimate goals may be more challenging, but Green is confident this group of players have the talent and drive to get there.

"We've jumped up to the 2A level...so it's a different look for us, but we're excited," Green said. "We've got everybody back and feel like we've got a great team and a great chance to get back in the playoffs and make some noise. We're looking forward to the opportunity to get to play.

"We're hungry for Birmingham. We made it to the region final last year and got beat," Green added. "This group is hungry to get back to Hanceville and see what we can do. We know we've got some improvement we've got to make from now to then, but it's a long sea-

son and I think we're headed in the right direction."

The Belgreen Lady Bulldogs will travel to Deshler and Shoals Christian for their next two games on November 18th and 21st, respectively.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, be sure and visit us online at www.franklin-freepress.net!

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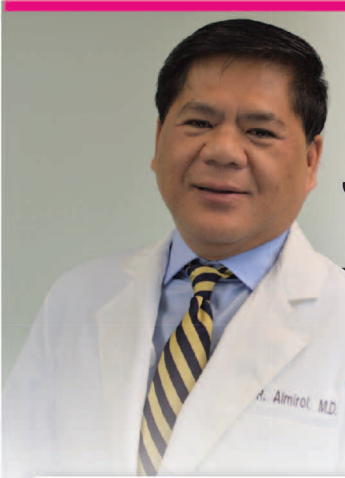
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A Lifetime of Achievement



John Thorn, left, holds the Franklin County Lifetime Agricultural Achievement Award he received at Monday's Farm-City Awards Luncheon. Also pictured is Katrina Cole-Coffey, Franklin County Extension Service Director.



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‘ALL-COUNTY,’ From Page 11

the second straight season. Phil Campbell was the only Franklin County team to make it to Hoover this season.

The eight All-Franklin County Volleyball honorable mentions are middle hitters Lillianna Willingham and Carson Hovater of Belgreen; Phil Campbell’s Britney Coffman, who was an FFP Athlete of the Week recipient in September; libero Bri McCulloch and setter/defensive specialist Fatima Ramirez from Russellville; and outside hitter Karrah Nichols, middle hitter Malia McCullar, and setter Alyssa Fischer from Tharptown.

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Court to determine whether criminal trespass case against former REB employee will be dismissed or tried

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Almost three years after he was arrested for paying his electric bill in person at the Russellville Utilities office, a Russellville man's case remains pending to determine if he violated the City of Russellville's municipal code section on trespass.

Dwight Jackson, a former Russellville Utilities employee who retired from his meter reader position in 2016, was charged with Criminal Trespass Third Degree on February 10, 2022, after former Russellville Electric Board General Manager Charles Canida signed a criminal complaint against Jackson based on a no trespass order that was served on Jackson in August 2019.

The case is pending in Franklin County Circuit Court, and was assigned to visiting Circuit Judge Glenn Thompson. Jackson's attorney filed a motion to dismiss the case, asserting that Canida and the other managers 'have failed to produce any evidence that they had authority to issue trespass notices on their own' and without prior approval of each utility's board of directors.

That motion was set for hearing Monday, November 18th, by Judge Thompson.

The 2019 trespass order, served on Jackson by the Russellville Police Department, directed Jackson to 'have no contact with any employee of the Russellville Electric Board, Russellville Gas Board and Russellville Water and Sewer Board,' and that he was 'not allowed to enter or be on the property, premises or outbuildings located at 721 Jackson Avenue South, Russellville,' the address for Russellville Utilities' main office.

The no trespass order was signed by the managers of each of three boards.

On February 10, 2022, Jackson, along with a friend who recorded their entry into Russellville Utilities, went and paid his bill without incident. Jackson said he did not see Canida while he was there.

Jackson contends the trespass notice was unlawful because it bans him from a public building where Russellville residents go to pay their utility bills, and that he had not been in the building since he retired, so there was no reason for him to be banned.

Canida alleges Jackson had threatened two former managers, pulled a gun on a co-worker in the Russellville Utilities parking lot and that he brought a live rattlesnake into the office area where employees were working, as well as verbal altercations with a utility employee at a local convenience store.

Jackson says the trespass charge was one of several actions by Canida designed to harass and intimidate Jackson.

When the case came to trial in Russellville Municipal Court, Jackson was found guilty and fined. Jackson was not represented by an attorney at that time.

Jackson appealed the case to Franklin County Circuit Court and hired Tuscumbia attorney Max Wright to represent him.

Wright's motion to dismiss maintains that Canida acted without the authority of the REB in signing a trespass order against Jackson. Although the Court previously indicated board managers could have implied authority to trespass individuals from board property, the Court ordered the three boards to provide to Jackson's attorney 'Board minutes or other documents as may evidence the authority of Board managers to issue the trespass notice served on Jackson.'

Almost a year later, Wright filed a motion to dismiss supported by his assertion he'd received no such evidence from any of the three utility boards.

Additionally, Wright asserts that a document that was provided to him by the REB supports his assertion that Canida acted without legal authority.

That document is an email from Canida to board attorney Jeff Bowling updating him on the Jackson situation.

In that email, Canida wrote: I did speak with the Chief of Police Chris Hargett who agrees that a trespass order should be placed against this individual. If this trespass order is approved Mr. Jackson could simply mail his utility bill each month or set it up to draft electronically.

Wright maintains that email demonstrated that Canida and the other board managers 'require approval to trespass an individual,' prior to doing so. Whether that argument is valid or not will be decided by the Court after the hearing on the motion to dismiss.

At the original trial in Russellville Municipal Court, former City Judge Roger Bedford, Jr., noted his decision to find Jackson guilty did not address the issue of whether the trespass order was valid or not. It was undisputed the order had been served on Jackson, and Bedford found that was sufficient for a conviction.

Jackson, who has never been arrested prior to this case, says there were never any police reports, arrests, suspensions or disciplinary actions taken against him by Canida while he worked for Russellville Utilities.

"If I pulled a gun on a co-worker, I would have been arrested and fired. They have video outside the building. If I had threatened a manager, I would have been fired. That never happened," Jackson said.

Canida retired from his GM position at the end of October 2024.

The Criminal Trespass case is being prosecuted by Russellville Municipal Prosecutor Eddie Beason. If the Court grants Jackson's motion, the case would be over. If it's denied, the case will be set for a jury trial in 2025.

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Our Community Counts on Farmers

Phil Campbell High School junior Emma Rambo won the 2024 Farm-City Essay Contest with the following entry. Rambo's sponsoring teacher is Caleb Beason. Congratulations to Emma!

In every society, farmers play an essential role that extends far beyond the act of producing food. The work of farmers is foundational, enabling communities to thrive by sustaining local economies, preserving the environment, and ensuring food security. Their commitment to the land provides people with the resources necessary for daily life, from the food on our tables to the materials that make up our clothing and even our homes. However, the significance of farmers is often taken for granted, despite them being one of the most essential pillars of any community. The truth is that every community counts on farmers, not only for survival, but for a higher quality of life and a sustainable future.

At its core, the importance of farmers is evident in the food they provide. From fresh vegetables to dairy and grain products, farmers work hard to supply a variety of foods that cater to the dietary needs and preferences of everyone in a community. Without local farms, communities would depend on distant suppliers, which could lead to food shortages, higher prices, and limited options. When people have access to local farms, they benefit from fresh produce and a more secure food supply chain. Locally grown food tends to be fresher and more nutrient-dense because it travels a shorter distance, arriving at markets quickly. In this way, farmers contribute to public health, giving people access to nutritious food that strengthens their immunity, helps prevent diseases, and enhances their overall well-being.

Beyond providing food, farmers stimulate the local economy in powerful ways. Agriculture often serves as a backbone for many rural communities, creating jobs directly on farms and indirectly through businesses that depend on farm products, such as restaurants, grocery stores, and food processors. Also, farming supports related industries like equipment manufacturing, fertilizer production, and transportation services. By keeping their money within the community, farmers contribute to local economic growth and stability. They support other businesses, encourage entrepreneurship, and promote a sense of independence, reducing the reliance on distant, multinational corporations for food and resources.

Farmers also play an increasingly crucial role in environmental stewardship. Farming done sustainably not only meets current needs but also protects the land for future generations. Many farmers are adopting methods such as crop rotation, organic farming, and permaculture, which help conserve soil quality, reduce the use of harmful pesticides, and protect biodiversity. These practices prevent soil erosion, preserve clean water sources, and create habitats for beneficial insects and animals. Sustainable farming acts as a defense against climate change, as methods like cover cropping and no-till farming reduce carbon emissions and promote carbon sequestration. By choosing to farm in ways that honor the environment, farmers safeguard their communities against the adverse effects of environmental degradation, ensuring that fertile land, clean water, and fresh air remain available for years to come.

Another indispensable aspect of farming is its role in fostering a sense of community identity and resilience. Farming has deep cultural roots, often serving as a unifying force for communities. For generations, farms have brought people together, teaching essential values like hard work, patience, and respect for nature. In many areas, local farms host festivals, farmers' markets, and school tours that connect people to their food and their land, strengthening the bonds between neighbors. These events remind everyone of the value of hard work and how interconnected our lives are with the land and those who cultivate it. Supporting local farms creates a great sense of pride and appreciation within the community, reinforcing the idea that when local farmers prosper, so does everyone else.

Also, the recent challenges brought about by global disruptions have stressed the need to strengthen local food systems. During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chains faced extraordinary disruptions, and many communities relied heavily on their local farmers to meet essential needs. In this regard, farmers not only feed communities but also increase their resilience against unforeseen global events. Their work helps communities build self-sufficiency, reducing the risks associated with heavy reliance on external sources.

Investing in farmers is an investment in the future. This support can take many forms, from buying directly from farmers' markets to advocating for policies that help farmers access resources and training. Communities that acknowledge and support the vital role of farmers also create opportunities for younger generations to pursue agriculture as a viable and fulfilling career. Farming remains a demanding profession that often requires innovation, resourcefulness, and an understanding of complex ecosystems. As communities continue to support their farmers, they cultivate a culture of resilience, environmental responsibility, and economic strength.

In conclusion, our community depends on farmers in countless ways. Their work sustains our bodies, drives our economy, preserves our environment, and binds us together with shared values and resilience. Farmers are far more than just food providers; they are caretakers of the land, protectors of community identity, and pillars of economic stability. By recognizing and appreciating the work of farmers, we honor a tradition of sustenance, sustainability, and interconnectedness that keeps our communities healthy and thriving. Supporting local farmers is not just an act of gratitude, it is an essential step toward a resilient, sustainable, and flourishing future for everyone.

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