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Russellville City Schools earn 'A' on state report card for third consecutive year

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

For the third consecutive year, Russellville City Schools earned an 'A' on the Alabama State Department of Education State Report Card. 2023-24 scores were released November 22nd. Scores are calculated for all Alabama public school systems and each individual school. RCS' score of 90 was the same as the system received the previous two years. Overall, the average score for public school systems for 2023-24 is an 85. Both Russellville City Schools and Franklin County Schools' (88)

scores were above that state average. There are several criteria used to calculate overall grades. Those include: academic achievement (20%), academic growth (25%), progress in English language proficiency (5%), chronic absenteeism (10%), graduation rate (30%) and college and career readiness (10%). The system's score on academic growth was 100. RCS received a 95.21 grade on college and career readiness. RCS scored above the state average in both of those categories, as well as chronic absenteeism. Just over 60% of Russellville City

See 'RUSSELLVILLE,' Page 5



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Franklin County Schools trend upward again on state report card

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

It was report card day Friday, but this time, it wasn't for students. Instead, the Alabama State Department of Education released its annual report card for all public schools, with grades for overall systems and individual scores for each school. Once again, Franklin County Schools Superintendent of

Education Greg Hamilton was able to share with his Board of Education a good report card that shows both success and improvement. For the 2023-24 school year, Franklin County Schools scored an 88, the upper end of range for the 'B' letter grade. That's an improvement of two points from the system's 86 received for the 2022-23 academic year. "I would like for you to join me in celebrating the tremendous success

See 'UPWARD,' Page 3

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Carl James Holland age 52 of Vina, passed away Monday, November 25, 2024. Visitation will be Friday, November 29, 2024 from 10:00 am - 11:00 am at Akins Funeral Home in Russellville.

Earlene (Richardson) Noble, age 85, Russellville, AL. passed away Saturday November 23, 2024 . Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Woren Lincoln Frost, age 78 of Haleyville, passed away on Thursday, November 21, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

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Franklin Free Press

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'UPWARD,' From Page 1

of the Franklin County School System," Hamilton told board members in an email. "As you know, our school system is woefully underfunded by the State of Alabama. To achieve such a high level of success and to continue to see improvement within our schools, considering the lack of resources needed, is absolutely amazing.

"I want to recognize and thank our administrators, teachers, staff and students for a job well done. And thank you for trusting me with the decisions that help to guide our school system," he added.

And there's good news for Franklin County Schools' financial picture after Alabama voters overwhelmingly approved Amendment One in the November 5, 2024, general election. The school system will now have legal authority to sell or lease Section 16 lands it owns on Interstate 22, at the intersection with Alabama 13.

Sale of these lucrative 329 acres, located at the exit for the primary north-south Tuscaloosa to Shoals corridor, could dramatically improve the financial future of the school system, Hamilton said, although the process of how to market and/or sell the property is in its infancy stages.

The state report card uses six indicators to determine a school system's overall score and a score for each of its schools. Just like grades in schools, 90-100 is an 'A,' 80-89 a 'B,' 70-79 a 'C,' 60-69 a 'D,' and below 60 is a failing grade.

Those indicators include academic achievement, academic growth, graduation rates, college and career readiness, chronic absenteeism and progress in English efficiency for schools. The English language efficiency indicator applies only to schools with at least 20 students learning the English language in tested grades.

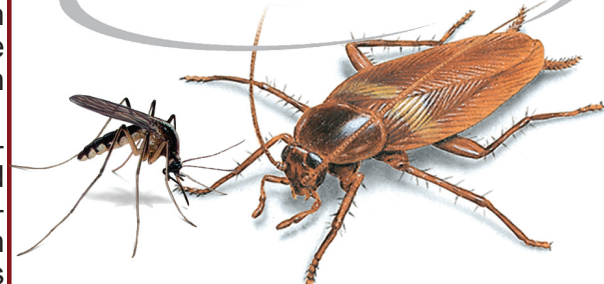
Of the system's nine graded schools, Red Bay Elementary School received the top individual grade, a 90-A. That's an improvement of six points from the school's 84 grade last year.

Vina High School and East Franklin Junior High School each scored an 88, the second-highest among Franklin County Schools. Red Bay High School was next with an 87, followed by Phil Campbell Elementary School's 86. Phil Campbell High School and Belgreen High School received an 85, with Tharptown Elementary School scoring an 84 and Tharptown High School an 83.

Six of the nine schools saw their report card overall grade improve from 2022-23, including East Franklin (85 to 88), Phil Campbell Elementary (82 to 86), Phil Campbell High School (78 to 85), Red Bay Elementary (84 to 90), Tharptown Elementary (81 to 84) and Vina (82 to 88).

Red Bay High School's numeric grade remained the same from 2022-23. Belgreen High School (88 to 85) and Tharptown High School (85 to 83) saw their scores drop from the previous academic year.

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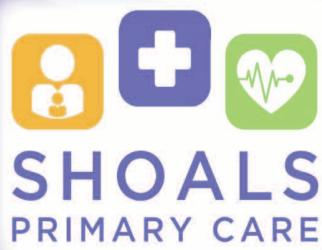
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'RUSSELLVILLE,' From Page 1

Schools' 2,612 students are Hispanic/Latino, based on information submitted to the State Department of Education.

RCS Superintendent Tim Guinn was pleased with the report card, but said providing a quality education is something at the core of Russellville City Schools.

"Even before the days of mandated testing, going back to the inception of Russellville City Schools in 1929, our logo says 'A Tradition of Excellence.' I think our teachers, administrators and staff do an outstanding job and all the report card does is just exemplify that. We're looking forward to next year and doing even better," Guinn said.

Russellville Middle School's 87 grade represents an improvement of four points from the 2022-23 grade of 83. RMS received a perfect 100 on academic growth and one of the state's top scores in chronic absenteeism.

West Elementary School and Russellville Elementary School each scored an 87, the same number received the previous year.

Russellville High School's score dropped from 87 to 77, a 'C' grade, something that has certainly caught the attention of Guinn, RHS Principal Norman Lier, and assistant principals Derek Engle and Nichole Ergle.

RHS dropped in graduation rate from 2022-23 (96.1 22-23 and 94.52 23-24), academic achievement (48.6 22-23 and 36.32 23-24) and academic growth (100 22-23 and 82.4 23-24).

Guinn will meet this week with administrators and faculty from RHS to look at their goals and to set some parameters for next year. The administrators will then take those back to their school, pull together teacher leaders and see what our faculty believe they need to improve and where they're falling short.

"When we work together as a team, we want input from our teachers as part of that process. Our teachers are the people in the trenches," Guinn said. "Are we doing something wrong as administrators? Is there too much non-academic activity going on during the day? Are we giving our teachers the resources, support and professional development they need? How do they feel and what do they think are the paths to move forward?"

Guinn said one topic of discussion will be whether there's sufficient instructional time each day at RHS, and said that will be a priority moving forward.

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

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

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This 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.

North Russellville Baptist Church will host Breakfast with Santa on Saturday, December 14, from 8:30-11 a.m. The event includes a pancake breakfast and all the pictures you want with Santa. (Please bring your own camera). \$10 for adults. \$7 12 and under. Proceeds benefit the NRBC Youth Group. Church is located at 1401 Waterloo Road, Russellville.

CARINGPLACE of the Shoals will host a fund raiser Enchanted Tour of Homes on Friday, December 6th from 5-9 p.m., and Saturday, December 7th from 2-7 p.m. 11 homeowners in the Shoals will open their homes to the community. The homes are located in Florence, Sheffield and Tusculmbia. Tickets are \$50 and available for purchase at Kennedy Douglass Art Center, Sheffield Library, First United Methodist Church of Florence and Colbert County Tourism Association. All proceeds benefit CARINGPLACE of the Shoals. For more information, call 256-335-5245.

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'Every Light a Prayer for Peace' ceremony set for December 5th

Submitted

The Cultura Garden Club has planned an outstanding Every Light a Prayer for Peace and Christmas Tree Lighting program scheduled for Thursday, December 5th.

This annual event starts at 4:15 at the Franklin County Courthouse and will conclude by 5 p.m. The public is invited to attend and encouraged to take pictures at the Christmas Tree following the program. The annual Russellville Christmas Parade will begin at 6 p.m.

The Every Light a Prayer for Peace Ceremony began 70 years ago. This ceremony has been observed and sponsored by the Cultura Garden

The program was adopted by the Federated Garden Clubs of Alabama and has been observed in towns all across Alabama and on the steps of the Alabama Capitol each year in December.

This program also recognizes Veterans, Frontline Workers, First Responders, EMA, Volunteers. They will be recognized for their valor, dedication, and service to our city, state, country, and internationally as duty calls.

Dr. Wade Wallace of Calvary Baptist Church will present the Prayer for Peace Message.

The Invocation and closing prayer will be given by Joel Davis, Youth Minister of First Baptist Church.

Entertainment will be performed by combined singers of Russellville High School, Middle School and RES Fifth Grade Chorus. The RHS Junior ROTC will present colors and Madeline Cooper, Miss UNA, Miss Alabama Contestant and Franklin County Distinguished Young Woman, will sing the National Anthem.

The Lighting of the Candles will be coordinated by the garden club members as the combined choirs lead the congregation in the singing of "Let There Be Peace on Earth." The reading of the "Light A Candle" Poem will be led by the RHS Drama Department. The playing of the Taps will be performed by Jeremy Willis, RHS Band Director.

The official lighting of the Christmas tree will conclude the program.

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RCS Board approves personnel moves at short meeting

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Schools Board of Education approved 10 personnel moves at a short meeting held November 19th.

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The board approved the resignation of Russellville High School softball coach Taylor Cameron for the softball supplement only, and the resignation of Russellville Middle School teacher Tracy Barnett. Temporary employment was approved for Cesar Rueda, student worker for the Parks and Recreation Department, Brenda Boyles as custodian for Russellville City Schools, Beth Pounders as RES/WES aide, Nicole Jensen and Lauren Mills as teachers for the RES 21st CCLC and West Elementary School Afterschool Programs and Laura Pruett as RHS Nurse Substitute, and transfers for Hannah Hulseley and Harley Smith, from Parks and Recreation Department lifeguards to student workers.

Other agenda items approved by the board included:

—approval of a trip request for basketball teams, indoor track and Scholars' Bowl students as presented to the board, as well as any changes that could occur due to cancellations, rainouts, etc.

—contract with Leann Strickland and the RHS Band Parent Organization for stadium cleaning services for the 2024-25 school year in the amount of \$425 per event. Events will include all home varsity football games and the Northwest Alabama Marching Classic. Funds will be paid out of the Band Parent Account.

—facilities use requests for RCS Auditorium and Fine Arts Building by the RHS Marching Hundred on January 10-11, 2025, for the Northwest Alabama Honor Band, and RCS Auditorium and Fine Arts Building February 7-8, 2025, for the Alabama Bandmasters Association District 3 Honor Band.



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Local superintendents, NWSCC President give updates in annual 'State of the Schools' event

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

Although the reasons were different, each of the three featured speakers at the November 21st 'State of the Schools' event projected optimism and excitement about their school systems moving forward.

Dr. Tim Guinn, Russellville City Schools Superintendent of Education, Greg Hamilton, Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education and Dr. Jeff Goodwin, Northwest Shoals Community College President, shared with an audience in the Russellville High School Auditorium updates on what's happening with their systems.

The annual 'State of the Schools' is hosted by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. This year's event included, for the first time, recognition of Outstanding Employees of the Year at each of the combined 15 Franklin County and Russellville City Schools and one employee at each central office.

Guinn said he is pleased with the number of Advanced Placement exams taken by Russellville High School students, 544 this year compared to 492 last year. With a pass rate of 38% receiving a qualifying score of 3-plus, that's another improvement from 2023.

Financially, Russellville City Schools is in solid condition, Guinn said, with a 4.5 month operating balance, is more than four times the one-month balance required by the State of Alabama.

"We're fortunate to have such a cooperating, supportive city government and that, along with ESSER funds we've received, have allowed us to amass a 4.5 month reserve," Guinn said.

Two schools, Russellville Middle School and West Elementary School, were Blue Ribbon Lighthouse Schools of Excellence this year.

Guinn gave an update of the Career Technical Education Center renovation, which will include the addition of four new classrooms and a renovated shop area.

18 RHS students received their Food & Beverage credentials through Northwest Shoals Community College's Culinary Center this fall.

Guinn discussed the new Golden Tigers Core Values Challenge, a community initiative that recognizes RHS alumni who demonstrate the core values of respect, integrity, kindness, responsibility, self-control, positive attitude, determination and honesty.

Russellville Fire Department Chief Joe Mansell was the first recipient of the initiative.

Franklin County Schools' 2024 enrollment of 3,497 students is 'consistent' with recent years and is an increase of 24 students from last year, Hamilton said.

He discussed the importance of Alabama Amendment One having been approved in the November 5, 2024, election. Its approval will allow the Franklin County Board of Education to sell or lease approximately 329 acres of Section 16 land located at the Alabama 13-Interstate 22 intersection, a location with massive development potential.

"The 329 acres are located in Walker and Fayette Counties and it became a game changer for us when they ran Interstate 22 right through our land," Hamilton said. "We're blessed beyond measure over this."

Proceeds from the sale of this property have the potential to provide a major revenue stream for Franklin County Schools for decades to come, Hamilton said.

Two schools, Tharptown Elementary and Vina High School, were among the 25 most improved schools in Alabama and Tharptown High School won the national championship in the 2024 Team Rocketry Challenge. A Red Bay High School student scored an eye-popping 34 on the ACT and a Phil Campbell High School student was the Student Achievement Regional Recipient of the Bryant-Jordan Achievement Award for 3A Region 7.

Franklin County Schools' Diane Baker was named the Alabama School Nurse Association's School Nurse Administrator of the Year in 2024. And Franklin County's Class of 2024 received \$1,727,000 in scholarship awards.

Two Franklin County schools principals gave updates on their schools, including East Franklin Junior High's Leann Trapp and Tharptown Elementary's Molly King.

When it was his turn, Goodwin went right to a subject near and dear to Franklin County residents—the college's \$30 million renovation of the Phil Campbell campus.

Construction of the 'Patriot Plaza' is expected to be completed by August 2025. The building will, in layman's terms, serve as the front porch of the campus. It will be the point of entry for visitors and will house the Student Activities Center with construction designed to maximize the social interactive experience for students.

All interior demolition on the Phil Campbell campus is now complete, with mechanical and electrical work ongoing, Goodwin said.

The gym renovation is 75% complete and 'coming along nicely' according to Goodwin.

Extensive work will be done on the retaining wall behind the campus to stabilize the embankment to reduce or eliminate erosion, but that part of the project remains under design.

A new roof has been installed on the welding building and classrooms are due to be completed next July.

"When we said we were doing a total renovation of the Phil Campbell campus, we meant it," Goodwin said.

713 Franklin County high school students are enrolled in NWSCC dual enrollment classes, with 408 of those in Russellville City Schools. Those students are enrolled in a total of 1,606 classes, and are benefitting from grant funding in the amount of \$842,000, Goodwin said.

Outstanding Employees of the Year for 2024, as voted on by their peers, included:

- Kristi Gargis, Belgreen High School.
- Bo Weeks, East Franklin Junior High School.
- Todd Johnson, Franklin County Career Technical School.
- Jill Harris, Phil Campbell Elementary School.
- Jenny May, Phil Campbell High School.
- Linda Markham, Red Bay Elementary School.
- Kendra James, Red Bay High School.
- Rebecca Allen, Russellville Elementary School.
- Kim Burney, Russellville High School.
- Lee Brownell, Russellville Middle School.
- Gayla Mills, West Elementary School.
- Cheryl Tverberg, Tharptown Elementary School.
- Karen Robinson, Tharptown High School.
- Sharon Sparks, Vina High School.
- Cyndi James, Franklin County Schools Central Office.
- Randy Dowdy, Russellville City Schools Central Office.

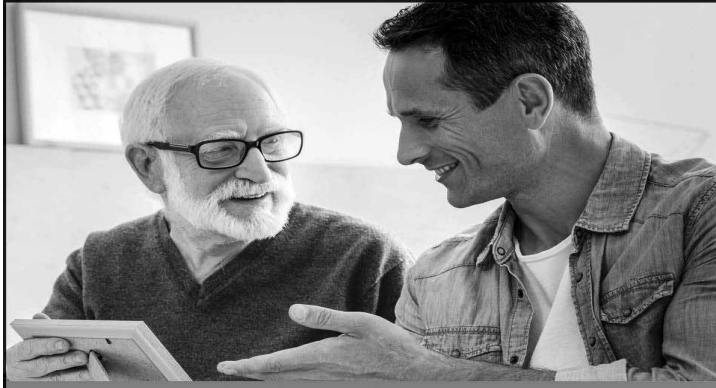
Lex May was honored as NWSCC Phil Campbell Campus Outstanding Employee of the Year.



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Golden Tiger girls' varsity races past Red Bay for a road win

*Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity girls' basketball team picked up its second win of the season at Red Bay High School on Monday night, defeating the Lady Tigers 66-27 to improve to 2-2 on the young season.

Coming off a home defeat to Deshler Friday night, the Lady Golden Tigers were able to rebound from that loss behind 20 points from Angeleah Smith. Successfully applying pressure and forcing turnovers, Russellville pulled away from Red Bay after the first period to secure their first road victory of the 2024 campaign.

"Angeleah coming off the bench provided a lot of scoring. She was able to get her three-point shot going," Russellville head coach Jermaine Groce said.

"What we wanted to see tonight, really, is if we could generate a lot of transition points with our defense, and it looks like we were able to do it," Groce added.

While Smith's 20 points off the bench led all scorers in the contest, nearly a dozen different Lady Golden Tigers got to the rim during the game. Laila Hill added 12 points and Sadie Odom tacked on six more, while eight others scored at least one basket.

See, 'GOLDEN TIGER GIRLS,' Page 13

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Former Tharptown softball star joins EMCC softball coaching staff

Submitted

Former Northwest Shoals Community College standout pitcher Taylor Cameron has been hired as East Mississippi Community College's assistant softball coach. The announcement was made by EMCC head softball coach Mackenzie Byrd.

A native of Tharptown, Cameron recorded 267 career strikeouts in 326.1 innings pitched during her two seasons as an original member of Northwest Shoals' reinstated softball program. In addition to limiting opposing batters to a .246 composite batting average during her career for head coach Angel Brown, Cameron totaled 13 career wins and seven saves. Her 76 career appearances included 46 starts in the circle and 24 complete games.

"I am blessed that Coach Mack (Mackenzie Byrd) has given me this opportunity to fulfill my dream of becoming a college softball coach," Cameron said. "I'm so excited to be a part of the EMCC softball program. Coach Mack has worked hard for this team, and I can't wait to work just as hard."

This past spring as an NWSCC sophomore, Cameron won a career-high seven games with six saves, including a three-hit shutout over Motlow State, along with striking out a career-most 142 batters in 167 innings pitched on the year. The previous season for the Patriots, she



COURTESY PHOTO

See, 'EMCC,' Page 12

RHS varsity boys win hoops thriller over Red Bay

*Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity boys' basketball team came out on top in its road county clash against the Red Bay Tigers on Monday night. Following up on a close 75-70 home win over the Deshler Tigers to start the season, the Golden Tigers ran away with it against Red Bay, taming the hosts 86-61.

"We're 2-0 and that's where we wanted to be," Russellville head coach Patrick Odom said. "Our guys are playing with great effort."

"I like these guys. They're playing together. I feel like everybody's kind of understanding their role, and so far it's a fun team to coach because of that," Odom added.

Fun to coach for Odom and surely fun for Golden Tiger fans to watch. Russellville and Red Bay both played fast-paced basketball Monday night and pushed it up and down the court, each getting their opportunities on turnovers and in transition. In the end, though, it was Russellville that made the most of its chances. Russellville's reigning all-state guard EJ King was, per usual, a force to be reckoned with, leading all scorers with 29 points. Not far behind him was Jah Williams, who dropped 23 points. Together the two seniors accounted for over half of Russellville's offensive production, but five other Golden Tigers pitched in, as well. Parker Odom hit three three-pointers to give him nine points, while junior Cameron Phinizee, who came alive in the fourth quarter, totaled 16 points. Zaye Hubbard, Malachi Groce, and Daniel Aycock added a handful of baskets, too.

"EJ is EJ. We know he's a great player, but Jah's been great, too," Odom said. "It sure helps when you've got guys like Jah and EJ with as much experience as they have and play with the motor that they have."

"We've had great contributions all across the board. We have some other guys step up, make some shots tonight. So, you know, as long as we continue to play tough—and again, we gotta

See, 'HOOPS,' Page 12

'EMCC,' From Page 11

had a team-best 125 strikeouts in 159.1 innings while recording six victories during 26 starts and 17 complete games. Cameron's freshman season was highlighted by an Alabama Community College Conference Pitcher of the Week nomination after combining for 19 strikeouts during back-to-back starts versus Calhoun.

"I'm very excited to have Taylor as our full-time pitching coach here at EMCC," Byrd noted. "She was a great pitcher at Northwest Shoals, and she knows the game and how to teach. I believe our pitchers will flourish under her guidance, and I'm eager to see her in action with the players in the spring."

Off the field at Muscle Shoals-based Northwest Shoals, Cameron was a two-year member of the ACCC Commissioner's Honor Roll. Cameron owns previous softball coaching experience at Russellville (Ala.) High School and with the KRAZE travel ball club.

A two-sport athlete at Tharptown (Ala.) High School, Cameron capped her prep career as an honorable mention selection on the 2022 Alabama Sports Writers Association All-State Softball Team. She also lettered in volleyball for head coach Kamri Fleming's THS Wildcats.

'HOOPS,' From Page 11

have guys making shots to take pressure off EJ because he's gonna have a lot of bodies thrown at him just like he did tonight. But our guys understand their roles. We gotta clean some things up, but we like how we're playing."

Russellville and Red Bay battled basket-for-basket for much of the opening period, but after the first eight minutes the Golden Tigers led 21-15. The hosts' tall sharpshooter Khalil Luster, who finished with 28 points and a game-high four three-pointers, gave the Golden Tigers a lot to think about throughout, but the visitors were able to contain Red Bay's other shooters to 10 points or less. After each period, Russellville continued to extend its lead and really had the game tucked away after outscoring Red Bay 23-14 in the third period.

Odom was, overall, pleased with his team's performance on Monday, but like most early-season games it highlighted some areas the Golden Tigers still want to improve in. The Russellville head coach, now in his 10th season with the program, said the Golden Tigers will try to clean up some of their mistakes while maintaining momentum as some difficult opponents lie ahead.

"There were some defensive things," he said. "We're a better defensive team than we played tonight. A little bit sloppy at times with execution and turnovers. "We turn around. We've got a couple days off for Thanksgiving and then we host (Class) 7A Austin on Monday, so we're going to get challenged, but that's what we want. It's about us continuing to grow each and every night



COURTESY PHOTO

Russellville's EJ King during Monday's game at Red Bay.

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'GOLDEN TIGER GIRLS,' From Page 11

Groce said he was happy with the many contributions he saw from his players against the Lady Tigers, and it's something he'd like to see continue going forward.

"Laila played well around the basket, Alexia Groce and Jemma Moore were attacking the rim and kicking out a lot, Sadie Odom initiating the fast break—if those girls continue to do the same thing over and over then we've probably got a pretty decent chance of competing in the area and advancing to the sub-regional," Groce said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Russellville's Jemma Moore during the Golden Tigers' Monday night win at Red Bay.

The rout of Red Bay will give Russellville a bit of momentum as it enters a spell of tough games. The Lady Golden Tigers travel to Belgreen on Tuesday before taking on Austin and Brooks next week after the holiday break. Groce said he will push his team to take a similar approach in those games as it did against Red Bay.

"We've got Belgreen (Tuesday), and it's going to be a tougher team," he said. "They've got a lot of senior and junior leadership, so I'd like to take the aggressiveness from tonight and the defense and take it on the road (at Belgreen) and see if we can generate something.

"After Thanksgiving we've got a couple of decent games. We play Austin right after Thanksgiving, so I'd like to give our defense a little bit more of a challenge (against Belgreen) by running a couple more pressure packages and seeing what we can do," he added.

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Austin Elliott - Phil Campbell boys' basketball
@FCgoodnews

Welborn again elected President of Franklin County BOE

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education elected Terry Welborn as board president and Kacey Johnston as vice-president for the next year at the board's November 19th meeting.

Additionally, Johnston and Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton were sworn-in prior by Franklin County Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton before Tuesday's meeting.

Hamilton expressed his appreciation to Franklin County citizens for the tremendous support they gave Amendment One on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot. The amendment passed overwhelmingly, allowing Franklin County Schools to move forward with the sale or lease of Section 16 lands the school system owns in Winston and Fayette Counties. The land is located at the intersection of I-22 and AL-13, the primary corridor from the Shoals area to Tuscaloosa.

"I want to thank everyone who supported Amendment One and we're excited about what we see happening in the future with this revenue from our Sectino 16 land," Hamilton said. "I appreciate the support locally and statewide as well. I'm excited about a revenue stream never seen before for a rural school system."

Rep. Jamie Kiel attended the November 19th meeting and presented the board with a grant for \$71,686, representing supplemental funds from the Education Trust Fund. This year was one where more money was taken in than was budgeted for education, so the result was legislators had discretionary funds to be distributed for educational purposes.

Kiel allocated more than \$71,600 for Franklin County Schools as it is the largest school system entirely in his House District 18.

In other agenda items, the board:

--approved setting board members' monthly salaries at \$850, as mandated by the Alabama Legislature's Act 331, which requires boards of education to set salaries that will take effect when the next board member comes into office, which will be 2026. The increase to \$850/month, less than the maximum \$900/month compensation set by the state, is the first for the Franklin County BOE in more than 17 years, Hamilton said.

--received recognition from Hamilton for each board member completing all required training hours for the 2023-24 academic year.

--approved compensation of \$1,500 to Emily Taylor, yearbook sponsor at Red Bay High School, for yearbook supplement for the 2024-25 school year, with RBHS to reimburse the board for the \$1,500 plus applicable benefits.

--approved out-of-state trips including Red Bay boys' basketball to Baldwin, Miss., on December 7, Dyersburg, Tenn., December 20-21, and girls' and boys' basketball to Belmont, Miss., December 10, RBHS seniors to Toyota Experience Center, Blue Springs, Miss., January 29, 2025 and Belgreen High School softball to Belmont, Miss., on March 3, 2025.

--approved personnel moves including: Resignation for Patricia Nix, special education aide, PCES and Kamri Fleming, head volleyball coach, Tharptown High School. Retirement for Delores Hester, bus driver, Vina. Transfer for Dollie King, from special education aide at Belgreen to Pre-K special education teacher at Belgreen, Keslie Scott, from elementary teacher at Tharptown to library media specialist at PCES. FMLA leave for Drenda Holland, child nutrition assistant, Belgreen High School, September 16, 2024 through December 19, 2024. Personal Leave of Absence for Teresa Simmons, child nutrition assistant, Belgreen, with return September 30, 2024. Teacher substitutes including Teresa Murner Miller, Emma Whitfield, Alexandra Greer, William Bonner, Sabryna Conner, Jeremy Sibley, Bryan Ramirez and Sarah Mosley. Superintendent's contract for Greg Hamilton and volunteers Andrew Heath, rocketry, THS, and Kristy Vandiver and Tyrone Lowry, volunteer assistant softball coaches at Belgreen.

Vina man facing felony electronic solicitation of a child charge

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Vina man faces a felony charge after he allegedly sent sexually explicit messages and attempted to meet with a girl under the age of 15.

Jonathan Lowery, 37, was booked into the Franklin County Jail November 19th on charges of Electronic Solicitation of a Child and Possession of Prohibited Liquor. Jail records as of November 25th show Lowery is no longer in the Franklin County Jail.

According to Franklin County Sheriff's Office investigators, they received a complaint that Lowery was communicating with a child under the age of 15 and was sending 'sexually inappropriate messages' according to the FCSO. Additionally, the investigation showed Lowery allegedly took steps to meet the child for illicit purposes, investigators said.

Electronic Solicitation of a Child is defined as follows in Code of Alabama Section 13A-6-122:

"A person who knowingly entices, induces, persuades, seduces, prevails, advises, coerces, lures, or orders, or attempts to entice, induce, persuade, seduce, prevail, advise, coerce, lure, or order, by means of a computer, on-line service, Internet service, Internet bulletin board service, weblog, cellular phone, video game system, personal data assistant, telephone, facsimile machine, camera, universal serial bus drive, writable compact disc, magnetic storage device, floppy disk, or any other electronic communication or storage device, a child who is at least three years younger than the defendant, or another person believed by the defendant to be a child at least three years younger than the defendant to meet with the defendant or any other person for the purpose of engaging in sexual intercourse, sodomy, sexual contact, sexual performance, obscene sexual performance, sexual conduct, or genital mutilation, or directs a child to engage in sexual intercourse, sodomy, sexual contact, sexual performance, obscene sexual performance, sexual conduct, or genital mutilation is guilty of Electronic Solicitation of a Child."

After a warrant was issued for Lowery's arrest, he was seen driving and a traffic stop was made. He was arrested for the felony charge and allegedly had alcohol in the passenger area of his vehicle, thus forming the illegal possession charge.

The case is pending in Franklin County District Court. Lowery has the right to request a preliminary hearing, where the State of Alabama must show probable cause that he committed the offense. If such a finding is made, the case will be presented next year to a Franklin County Grand Jury.

Upon conviction, the felony carries a penalty of 2-20 years in prison.

As with all defendants charged with crimes, Lowery is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

NWSCC Patriots join ACCC in launch of women's flag football

Submitted

Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) joined the Alabama Community College Conference (ACCC) in the launch of women's flag football as an official sport on Tuesday (11/19) at a press conference held at the Cramton Bowl in Montgomery.

NWSCC will be one of the colleges with teams in the ACCC beginning in fall of 2025, with the season taking place in the spring of 2026.

NWSCC President Dr. Jeff Goodwin started girls flag football in 2021 at Oxford High School and looks forward to seeing it provide more opportunities to local female athletes.

"This is an exciting time for Northwest Shoals and the Alabama Community College Conference," said NWSCC President Dr. Jeff Goodwin. "Women's flag football is gaining popularity and growing extremely fast across the nation. I have seen first-hand how impactful women's flag football can be for students on the K-12 level, and I am looking forward to Northwest Shoals helping lead the way on the community college level."

"We are grateful to the ACCC for the opportunity of offering a new sport for female athletes in Alabama," said NWSCC Athletic Director Taylor Franks. "We love football in the state of Alabama and our community has been so supportive since we returned sports in 2022. We look forward to engaging in conversations with our high school partners and working together on this new offering for female athletes."

Alabama Association of RC&D Councils announced a sponsorship of \$50,000 to be distributed between the participating colleges to offset start-up costs.



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

**GENERAL NOTICE ANNOUNCEMENT
CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE**

PATROL OFFICER – POLICE DEPARTMENT

DEFINITION OF JOB: Patrols a designated sector of the city of Russellville and responds to complaints. Serves warrants and subpoenas and testifies in court. Provides traffic control assistance. Performs dispatching duties. Performs other police related duties as required.

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

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Ability to: operate a motor vehicle; read; safely fire a weapon; communicate on telephone and radio; generate written documents such as reports and tickets; bend, crouch; stretch; stretch; walk; run; respond to emergency situations on short notice when off-duty; and do the essential functions of the job as directed in this description.

Willingness to: work overtime, irregular hours, weekends and holidays; travel and attend seminars and workshops.

QUALIFICATIONS and SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Possession of a high school diploma or GED

Minimum of 21 years of age

Must meet or exceed the minimum requirements established by the State of Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission

Possession of a valid Alabama Drivers License

Possess the ability to obtain an Alabama Police Academy diploma or its equivalent

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