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Stutts' sponsored bill would compel Alabama Medicaid to pay for colorectal cancer screening tests

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

A bill sponsored by Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) has been pre-filed that would require the Alabama Medicaid Agency to cover all noninvasive colorectal cancer screenings per recommendations of the United States Preventive Services Task Force.

SB27 was first read in the Alabama House on December 16, 2024, and referred to the Alabama Senate Committee on Health Care, a committee that includes Stutts.

If approved, SB27 would also require Alabama Medicaid to cover a colonoscopy based on a positive test result.

The bill was also filed in the Alabama House as HB45, sponsored by Rep. Ed Oliver (R-Dadeville).

Statistics from the American Cancer Society show Alabama has a colon cancer rate of 40.1 per 100,000 residents, higher than the national average of 36.4. Alabama's death rate per 100,000 colon cancer patients is 14.4, more than the 12.9 national average.

The Affordable Care Act requires private insurers and Medicare, a federal agency, to cover colorectal screening tests, and it authorizes states to cover colorectal screenings under Medicaid but does not compel it.

The American Cancer Society

See 'STUTTS,' Page 4



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A Family Affair: Russellville graduate Kate Grissom, parents attend Trump inauguration events in D.C.

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

As the daughter of Russellville Mayor David Grissom, Kate Grissom has accompanied her father and mother Melissa to official functions most of her young life.

But when the Grissom family spent last week in Washington D.C., attending events associated with President Donald Trump's inauguration, it was her parents who were on

Kate's guest list, as she received an invitation from Rep. Robert Aderholt to come to Washington ahead of her scheduled trip this March.

In March, Kate and her classmate Lydia Uptain, will meet with members of Congress to present the findings of a research project conducted by her University of North Alabama class, Characterizing Our DNA Exceptions, taught by Dr. Cynthia Stenger.

Their bioinformatics research will

See 'GRISSOM,' Page 5

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Jeffrey Mark Utley age 62, of Phil Campbell, Alabama, passed away at his residence Thursday, January 23, 2025. Akins Funeral Home assisted the family.

Dorothy "Dot" Lee Knight, age 89, of Russellville passed away on Sunday, January 26, 2025. The visitation will be 11:00 a.m.- 12:00 noon Thursday, January 30, 2025 at Spry Memorial Chapel. The funeral service will follow at 12:00 noon in the funeral home chapel.

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In Memoriam: Jacqueline Fay Hutcheson

Submitted

Jacqueline Fay Hutcheson, age 79, of Phil Campbell, passed away on January 20, 2025.

Visitation was at Pinkard Funeral Home January 23rd with Bro. Jason Vinson officiating. Pallbearers were family and friends. Burial was at Mountain View Baptist Church Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

Jackie is survived by her husband, Tommy "Hutty" Hutcheson; daughter, Tammy Jay Jeffreys (Dale); siblings, Sarah Nix, Terry Benford, Jessie Benford, and Janice Anderson; grandchildren, Tyler Jeffreys (Anna), Dirk Jeffreys (Julianna); great granddaughter's, Brynleigh, Jaycee, and Emmie; as well as a host of loving nieces, nephews, cousins, and beloved friends.

She was preceded in death by parents, Jessie Marvin Benford & Sarah Rebekah Hughes Benford; Father & Mother in-law, Lowell & Louise Hutcheson; siblings, Olive Logan Berry, Aaron Benford, Genoma Crisler, Shelby Epperson, Jeannie Abbott, Troy Benford, and Jerry Benford.



HUTCHESON

2024 Rebuild Alabama Act Franklin County funds used on eight road improvement projects

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved a report documenting all road work done during FY24 using Rebuild Alabama Act funds.

Commissioners approved submitting the report to the Alabama Department of Transportation at their January 21st meeting.

The act, approved by the Alabama Legislature in 2019, raised the state's gasoline tax six cents per gallon, implemented over three years. This brought the state's gas tax total to 10 cents per gallon.

The revenue generated from the additional tax must be used in one of three ways by the Alabama Department of Transportation: economic development, construction relief or providing grants to cities and counties across Alabama.

Funds paid to counties and cities require the receiving entity to submit an annual report listing how the money was spent and what road and/or bridge projects were completed.

Franklin County Engineer Jason Baggett prepared the report that was submitted to the commission for approval.

It shows \$1,423,116.40 in Rebuild Alabama Act funds spent in Franklin County in FY24. Those monies were used for eight road improvement projects, two of which are complete, five that are 95% complete and one that's 50% complete. Four projects were doing utilizing competitive bid work and four were completed utilizing county works.

The two completed projects include:

--resurfacing Hooty Hoot Holler (a loop drive) from Pritchard Road to Prichard Road. Cost \$35,799.96.

--resurfacing Bedford Circle from Green Road to Morissette Drive. Cost \$28,543.50.

The five projects at 95% completion include:

--Highway 25 resurfacing and traffic striping from Highway 23 to Alabama 24. Cost \$203,859.12.

--Highway 152 resurfacing and traffic striping from AL Highway 187 to Highway 52. Cost \$133,140.40.

--Highway 26 resurfacing and traffic striping from Highway 59 to Alabama 13. Cost \$67,641.92.

--Highway 162 resurfacing and traffic striping from Highway 58 to Highway 62. Cost \$145,536.04.

--Highway 83 resurfacing and traffic striping from Highway 81 to Highway 724. Cost \$788,205.63.

The project with 50% completion is the resurfacing of Morissette Drive from Green Road to a dead end. Cost \$20,389.83.



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'STUTTS,' From Page 1

supports Stutts' SB27 and other policies that give all people access to early detection tests for cancer, as recommended by its guidelines for colorectal cancer screening.

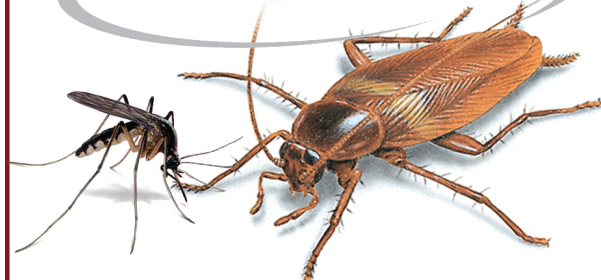
The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends people at average risk should begin colorectal cancer screenings at age 45.

Supporters of the legislation say colorectal screenings, which can be done for a nominal cost, will save the state millions of dollars in the long run on what would have been payment for treatment, hospitalization and surgery for colon cancer.

"Basically any disease and specifically cancer is more easily treated if it is diagnosed earlier," Stutts said. "The whole purpose of screening is to make an early diagnosis. This is especially true for colon cancer when precancerous conditions may be found.

"To utilize all of the modalities available makes sense for the patient and is more cost effective in the long run," Stutts added.

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Under the Affordable Care Act, health plans that started on or after September 23, 2010, to cover colorectal cancer screening tests, including a range of test options, with no out-of-pocket costs such as co-pays or deductibles.

Specific language of SB27 states: "The Alabama Medicaid Agency shall provide coverage for any non-invasive colorectal cancer screening test that is assigned a

grade A or B under recommendations of the United State Preventive Task Force, as the recommendations of the task force may be amended from time to time.

The Medicaid Agency shall also provide coverage for any colonoscopy performed based on a positive screening test result. Coverage of the tests shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following tests, provided the test maintains a grade A or B rating based on recommendations of the task force:

- (1) The guaiac fecal occult blood test (gFOBT).
- (2) The fecal immunochemical test (FIT).
- (3) The multi-target stool DNA test (sDNA-FIT).

The act would become effective immediately upon passage.

The task force guidelines categorize all colorectal screening tests for adults ages 50-75 as Grade A, and all colorectal screening tests for ages 45 to 49 as Grade B.

The 2025 Alabama Legislative Session begins February 4, 2025.

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'GRISSOM,' From Page 1

help to characterize unknown variants in DNA that may cause genetic disorders by analyzing available biological data online.

When Aderholt learned about Kate's scheduled visit in March, he reached out to invite her to be his guest during the three-day weekend of Trump's inauguration. Fortunately for David and Melissa, they were invited to 'tag along' with their daughter.

"I was the guest of my daughter. I asked Congressman Aderholt if it was okay for her dad to tag along," Grissom joked. "We flew out Saturday morning and there wasn't a minute over the next three days we didn't have something going or some place to go. We've never been to anything like that."

On Saturday night, the Grissoms attended the Republican National Committee's Southern States Inaugural Ball, held at the Ronald Reagan Building.

Sunday began with the family attending a prayer brunch hosted by Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Delegation at the Hyatt Regency Washington.

The featured devotional at that event was presented by Auburn University men's basketball assistant coach Chad Prewett and his wife Tonya. Prewett, who overcame substance abuse issues through faith and prayer. The Prewett's founded 'Unite Us,' a ministry bringing the gospel to college campuses with the three objectives of salvation, freedom and community.

Sunday evening saw the family attend the Southern States Gala at the Hamilton.

After Trump's Monday inauguration, which they did not attend, the Grissoms were Aderholt's guests at the Liberty Ball, where they had the opportunity to see Trump for the first time. Grissom met several nationally prominent elected officials, including South Carolina Senator Tim Scott and Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

Kate expressed her appreciation to Aderholt for the invitation, as well as Russellville chiropractor Dr. Rick Wooten, who also attended inauguration events and helped get the Grissom's invitation as well.

"I received the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C., during the Presidential inauguration because of my involvement in the STR Advocacy Program as part



COURTESY PHOTO

Kate Grissom, daughter of David and Melissa Grissom, with Fox personality Laura Ingraham last week in Washington.

of UNA's team and through the generosity of Congressman Aderholt and his wife, and Dr. Rick Wooten," Kate said. "I look forward to going back to Washington to represent the University of North Alabama in March."

Tuesday morning the family took part in a tour of the Capitol Building arranged by Aderholt for a delegation of Alabama attendees. They did some sightseeing later that day to put a bow on their trip.

"Congressman Aderholt has been in Washington a long time and he's got a great relationship with the President. When we look at opportunities for our city, he's been very helpful in the grant department. He's done a lot for our city," Grissom said.

With unprecedented security presence for an inauguration with a president who recently survived an assassination attempt, Grissom said the trip required some patience, but was more than worth it.

"Before the Liberty Ball, everyone waited outside in below freezing temperatures to get through security. But for a once in a lifetime opportunity, it was worth it. We were fortunate and got to go inside eventually. But I've never been through so many metal detectors," Grissom said.



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 **T**he North Russellville Baptist Church Youth Group will host a Charity Golf Tournament Four-Man Scramble on Friday, March 14, 2025, at Twin Pines Country Club. Lunch will be served at 11 a.m., and the shotgun start begins at noon. \$400 per team entry, or \$100 per person. All proceeds benefit the North Russellville Baptist Youth Fest 2025. For pre-registration or more information, call Jason at 256-412-9786 or Randy at 938-646-4656.

 **P**lease join us for a presentation on Saturday, February 8, at 1pm at the Florence Indian Mound Museum. This talk explores Cherokee Removal in Alabama by looking at Wills Valley and the family of George Lowrey, Assistant Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. Lowrey rose to leadership after serving in the Creek War of 1813-1814. He and his extended family claimed land in Tennessee before being driven south of the Tennessee River, some of them settling in Wills Valley. Lowrey's leadership strategy reflects a focus on unity and community, sustained through multiple "removals" in the 1820s and 1830s. Stuart Marshall is a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Sewanee—The University of the South and Secretary of the Tennessee Trail of Tears Association (TNTOTA). He completed his Ph.D. in 2023 with his dissertation, "The Age of Junaluska: Eastern Cherokee Sovereignty in the Long Civil War Era." Since arriving at Sewanee, he has worked on a database about the Bell Route of the Trail of Tears—"Retracing the Bell Route: An Archive of Cherokee Removal" (cherokee-bell-route.org). This program is free and is sponsored by the City of Florence Department of Arts and Museums and the Alabama Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association. The Florence Indian Mound Museum is located at 1028 S. Court St. Florence, AL, and is open Tuesday - Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Call 256-760-6427 for more information.

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No TVA service interruptions during January 22nd all-time peak electricity usage

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When Tennessee Valley Authority officials asked customers to reduce their power consumption during an anticipated peak usage four-hour period the morning of Wednesday, January 22nd, they were dead on.

TVA announced later in the day that the Wednesday morning 6-10 a.m., usage period set the all-time record for electric consumption in the utility's 91-year history.

More than 35,319 megawatts of electricity came at 8 a.m., CST, with an average temperature of 11 degrees across the Tennessee Valley.

The good news was TVA's power system remained stable throughout the record usage period, with no interruptions. The bad news will come when residents and commercial customers open their electric bills next month.

When the request was made for customers to reduce their power usage Wednesday morning, TVA officials were quick to say the request did not indicate TVA was experiencing any emergency conditions. Instead, the request was made to help alleviate any supply concerns during the 6-10 a.m., peak period.

TVA's power system remained stable throughout Wednesday morning, and officials credit reduced usage for at least part of that stability.

"It's a testament to employees at TVA and local power companies who work around the clock in the elements to provide power and make sure 10 million people are safe and warm," said Greg Henrich, TVA Senior Vice President, Grid.

"We also appreciate all of our partners in the Tennessee Valley—residents and businesses—who heeded TVA's call to conserve power during the peak morning hours on Wednesday. Working together, we were able to make history," he added.

Russellville Electric Board General Manager Derrick Moore said he was contacted by TVA Tuesday with a request for curtailment on Wednesday. Curtailment refers to the reduction of power production, but in some cases, also describes reduction of power consumption, as was the request made by TVA.

That curtailment began with the Russellville Electric Board's own building and offices, as lights not being used were turned off, and thermostats were lowered at both the Electric Board Warehouse and the Russellville Utilities office.

"We also reached out to our top (usage) customers and informed them TVA was calling for curtailment on steps 10 and 20," Moore said. "That starts with us at the warehouse and at the office, then reaching out to our top customers and asking them to do the same thing," Moore said.

TVA Step 10 calls for TVA and its local power companies to reduce the electric loads inside their own facilities. Step 20 involves a public appeal for voluntary load reductions by all TVA consumers.

TVA offered several suggested ways to reduce your energy usage, including:

--set your thermostat at 65-68 degrees. Each degree you lower your thermostat can save you as much as three percent on your monthly energy bill.

--postpone use of your clothes dryer, dishwasher and stove/oven during peak times.

--turn off non-essential appliances and lights during peak times.

--For commercial businesses, turn off any lights and office equipment (or place in sleep mode) when not in use and turn off heating outside of business hours.

In fiscal year 2024, TVA invested \$430 million to harden its system and enhance the reliability of its natural gas, coal and hydro generating fleet. That included thousands of winter readiness activities. These included reviewing lessons learned and best practices from previous winters, as well as thorough inspections.

The Tennessee Valley continues to grow in number, three-times the national average. As a result, TVA will invest nearly \$16 billion over the next several years to build additional generation and infrastructure while also enhancing reliability.

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Applications may be picked up at Russellville City Hall in the Office of the Mayor, 304 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, Alabama. Applications must be returned no later than February 7, 2025 by U.S. Mail to:

**The Russellville Civil Service Board
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The average pay for this position is \$40,060.80 – 61,734.00

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QUALIFICATIONS: Possess a high school diploma or GED. Possess a minimum of two years of vehicle mechanical work experience. Previous experience in welding and fabrication work. Possess and maintains a CDL – B license. Ability to be available for emergency call out 24.7.

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**The Russellville Civil Service Board
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Russellville, AL 35653**

The average pay for this position is \$44,865.60 – 69,160.00.

The successful candidate will be required to successfully complete a complete physical examination including drug screening prior to employment.

Drugs, alcohol not a solutions to life's problems and fears

*Stan Popovich
Special to the FFP*

Using drugs and alcohol will not take away your problems and fears. In the short run, they might make you feel better, but in the long run these addictions will only make things worse. As a result, here are eight tips on how to manage your persistent fears and anxieties without using drugs and alcohol.

1. Take it one day at a time: Instead of worrying about how you will get through the rest of the week or month, try to focus on today. Each day can provide us with different opportunities to learn new things and that includes learning how to deal with your issues. In addition, you will not feel overwhelmed with everything if you focus on one thing at a time.

2. Learn how to manage your fearful thoughts: When experiencing a negative thought, read some positive statements and affirmations that will help lift your spirits and make you feel better. Remember that your fearful thoughts may be exaggerated so balance these thoughts with realistic thinking and common sense.

3. Do not do everything all at once: Learn how to break your fears into a series of smaller steps. Completing these smaller tasks one step at a time will make the stress more manageable and increases your chances of success. You will also feel more confident in getting things accomplished rather than worrying about what you need to do.

4. Drugs and alcohol are not the answers to your problems: Getting the help you need and learning how to deal with your situation are the most effective ways in managing your fears, anxieties, and addictions. In time, you will be become better able to maintain your mental health.

5. Managing your anxieties will take some hard work: Trying to avoid your addictions will do nothing in getting rid of your fears and anxieties. Sooner or later, you will have to confront your mental health issues. Remember that all you can do is to do your best each day, hope for the best, and take things in stride.

6. Drugs and alcohol can make things difficult: Drugs and alcohol can make your problems even more complicated. Many professionals have said that substance abuse will only add more misery to your situation. Be smart and learn how to cope with your mental health issues the right way.

7. Talk to a former addict: If you think that drugs and alcohol will solve your problems, then try talking to someone who has already been down that road. By talking to a former addict, you will get the truth on how substance abuse can ruin your life.

8. Take advantage of the help that is available around you: If possible, talk to a professional who can help reduce your fears and anxieties. They will be able to provide you with additional advice and insights on how to deal with your current situation. By talking to a professional, a person will be helping themselves in the long run because they will become better able to deal with their problems in the future.

Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" which covers a variety of techniques that can drastically improve your mental health. For more information, please visit Stan's website at <http://www.managingfear.com>.



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Belgreen junior Johnson nets 1,000th point for Bulldogs

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

A mixed bag of results for the Belgreen High School varsity boys' basketball team did produce one exemplary individual achievement as the Bulldogs hit the road this weekend.

The Belgreen boys' team saw split results as they earned a win over the Lions on Friday before a defeat versus Deshler High School the following day. It was in the Bulldogs' loss to the Class 4A Tigers, however, that junior Braycen Johnson scored 32 points to push him past the 1,000 career points milestone, etching his name alongside other Belgreen basketball greats.

"I just remember when he (Johnson) was in eighth grade and he got his first little taste of varsity basketball," first-year Belgreen head coach Will Bonner said. "From then on I knew what he could be capable of."

"He means so much to our program, really. He works so hard every day. He's our leader," Bonner added.

Coming into the weekend Johnson was 20 points shy of the 1,000-point mark, but he cut that in half with 10 points on the road at Haleyville on January 24. Johnson was one of four Belgreen players to hit double-digit points as the Bulldogs beat the Lions 61-53. Jake

See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 14

A Senior Sweep: Phil Campbell boys, girls defeat Belgreen on Senior Night

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity basketball teams celebrated Senior Night in winning fashion on Thursday, both squads knocking off county rival Belgreen at home. The Lady Bobcats stunned Class 2A's No. 5 team and avenged last week's Franklin County Tournament loss by coming from behind to beat the Lady Bulldogs 38-35, while the Phil Campbell boys' team held off Belgreen 42-30.

No doubt the highlight of the evening—at least from the neutral's perspective—was the Lady Bobcats' double-digit second-half comeback.

Phil Campbell, giving away more points than they found, fell into a hole in the early stages and couldn't find a path out before halftime as they trailed 25-9 at the break. The final 16 minutes, however, were a different story—a very



COURTESY PHOTO

See, 'PC,' Page 12

RHS girls varsity earns home tournament game with blowout of Lawrence County

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

After the opening eight minutes, Russellville had a relatively comfortable 11-point, 22-11 lead, but as they are wont to do, the Red Devils came back in the second quarter to make the hosts uneasy; Lawrence County cut the deficit before halftime to six and the Golden

Tigers took a 34-28 lead into the break. In the second half the visitors came all the way back and, after trailing by just three points after three, took the lead at one point in the fourth quarter. That doubtlessly sent Russellville fans' minds back to the first meeting between the two teams when the trailing Golden Tigers needed a last-second steal and go-ahead layup to make a comeback win in Moulton. Fortunately for the blood pressure of the many black and gold faithful packed into the bleachers, the usual Golden Tiger suspects didn't allow it

to get quite that nery. A couple of fast-break baskets and forced fouls saw Russellville retake the lead shortly thereafter, seal it late with a seven-point cushion, and complete the sweep of the area with a perfect 4-0 record. "Even when (Lawrence County) made their runs, I knew we were gonna win the basketball game," Russellville head coach Patrick Odom said in his postgame interview on WGOL 100.7 FM. Odom added that the Red Devils' surges in the game came at times when senior point guard Jah Williams, who found himself in foul trouble, was

sitting on the bench. "They made their best runs when we had number five (Williams) off the court," he said. "He's our motor. I said the other day on the radio EJ (King) is the best player around but Jah is so important to us. I knew we were just trying to get to a manageable time to get him back on the court with four fouls. Then when we got him back onto the floor you see

See, 'RHS,' Page 13

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'PC,' From Page 11

different story. The Lady Bobcats came out of the intermission and, in less than 12 minutes, erased the 16 point deficit, took the lead, and then held on to it for dear life.

"We were two different teams," Phil Campbell head coach Craig Thomas told the Franklin Free Press. "We came out in the first half, we were not disciplined, turned the ball over. We had more turnovers than we did points. Second half we came out and it was right the opposite. We didn't turn the ball over hardly any, executed the offense the way it's supposed to be run. Things worked out."

In the third quarter the hosts outscored Belgreen 16-4 to shrink the deficit to four points, 29-25. Then, just a couple minutes into the fourth, two Phil Campbell steals put the Lady Bobcats in the driver's seat. A steal and a fast-break layup pulled PCHS within one point with 5:31 to play; then on the ensuing Belgreen possession the Lady Bobcats forced another take-away to set up Leela Baker, Phil Campbell's top scorer with 12 points, who sank a three-pointer to give the hosts their first lead of the game, 33-31, with 5:05 remaining.

"We just talked about turnovers real hard (at halftime)," Thomas said. "Turnovers and points off turnovers was what the difference was in the game."

"We're a good defensive team, we just struggle sometimes on the offensive end," he added. "Getting (Belgreen) to turn it over instead of us was very important. It switched the ballgame around."

But the Lady Bobcats didn't quite get to run away with it. With 1:29 to play, Belgreen senior Dakota Green hit two free-throws to tie the game back up at 33, so Phil Campbell needed to make a few more shots to seal the comeback.

Senior Kaylie Motes sank a go-ahead lay-up and senior Siddalee Rogers hit a free throw to make it 36-33, PCHS, with just over 30 seconds left. Green forced another shooting foul and was sent to the line where she promptly pulled the Lady Bobcats back within one, but with just 16 seconds left Belgreen was forced to foul. With just 11 seconds on the clock, senior Macy Hardy made both her free throws to essentially ice the game as Belgreen's last ditch effort to tie fell shy.

It wasn't pretty, Thomas said after the game, but it was a win—and a win on senior night, which made it that much sweeter for the Lady Bulldogs' four seniors: Mia Ambrosio, Kaylie Motes, Macy Hardy, and Siddalee Rogers.

"I told them they'll remember this for the rest of their lives. Down (16) at half, come back and win on senior night; they'll remember it for the rest of their lives," he said.

"These seniors are great. This is the most seniors I've graduated in six or seven years. Most of them have been in the program for five years, so that's pretty good for them to be able to stick around that long and put up with me," Thomas added with a laugh. "But they're a dedicated bunch, these seniors. Very dedicated."

The Phil Campbell boys' team capped the evening with a 12-point win over the Bulldogs, though it didn't have near the fireworks of the girls' game.

After a tight opening period, which ended with Phil Campbell up by one point, the Bobcats outscored Belgreen 12-2 in the second quarter to take a 20-9 advantage into the break. In the second half, Phil Campbell, despite a few offensive spurts by the visitors, were able to keep the Bulldogs on a leash and come away with the low-scoring 42-30 victory.

"It was about as ugly as you can get," Phil Campbell head coach Shannon Benford said. "Both teams stayed in foul trouble the whole time—our star (player), their star. So it was ugly. It was tough to score tonight. Both teams played well defensively."

Benford said his main takeaway from the game was his team is going to have to focus more on offensive production, especially with some very important games coming up.

"We're just not scoring, not making shots, you know? Which is typical of us lately," he said. "Defensively we're playing well and holding opponents down, but we're gonna have to get our scoring up for the area tournament that starts very soon."

"Getting into the gym to shoot—that's gonna be our main thing," he added.

Phil Campbell's two seniors Hayden Wingo and Logan Wright, who were honored pregame, were the Bobcats' two top-scorers on the night, dropping 17 and 10 points, respectively. Benford said he was proud of the way Wingo and Wright have helped lead the team in their final season, his first as the head coach.

"Hayden Wingo...works hard at everything he does, and Logan Wright's the same way," Benford said. "They're there every time at practice and good leaders for the team. Good guys to look up to."

'RHS,' From Page 11

what happens.

"There wasn't any panic," Odom added. "You know Lawrence County is gonna make some runs and it's gonna be a tight game like that. We're used to it. But I love the fact that our guys just continue to compete. "We know we didn't play our best tonight, but at the same time it's nice to know that we can win these games with not our best and just continue to grind because here in a week it don't matter what it looks like, you just gotta find a way to win."

The RHS head coach, now in his 10th season at the helm of the program, admitted his team didn't win with the exact style the Golden Tigers wanted, but they did win with toughness. In whatever way Russellville manages to beat opponents, there's no doubt that they're good at it. The victory over Lawrence County Friday marked the Golden Tigers' 18th consecutive win against area opposition, including area tournament games. It's a remarkable run that dates back to 2022, but nonetheless it's difficult, Odom said.

"When you look at our roster, we've got two guys that have played in a billion of these (area games), right? They're used to it. And I think our young guys have played enough high-caliber people; we've played a tough schedule," he said.

"These games are hard. Our area is very good. People, I think, sometimes take for granted that you'll just keep winning these games, but it's hard. Winning's hard and you've gotta earn it," Odom added.

Russellville has three road games at Hamilton, Austin, and Desher before the close of the regular season and the beginning of the area tournament. It was decided before Friday's game, but the Golden Tigers' position in the area championship game is secure. It's a position Odom and his Golden Tigers are grateful to be in. "I've always coined the (area) semifinal night—it don't matter if you're

the one-seed or whatever, it's always the scariest night in high school basketball because I've seen so many crazy things happen. But we don't

have to do that; we're sitting in the finals and we know we're going to play state playoff basketball," Odom said. "I think it allows us the freedom to go play in the championship game and know, one way or the other, we're still playing in the state playoffs." Russellville, looking for a fifth-straight area tournament championship, will host the winner of the West Point and Lawrence County game in the Class 5A Area 15 title game on Tuesday, February 4.



COURTESY PHOTO

Russellville's Angeleah Smith at the FT line for the Golden Tigers.

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'BELGREEN,' From Page 11

Dill and Jonathan Mendoza co-led BHS with 12 points each in the victory, while Rush Berryman added another 10 points alongside Johnson.

The next day, January 25, Belgreen competed in the Red Bay Shootout where the Bulldogs were matched up with Deshler. Despite leading by two points, 22-20, at halftime, Belgreen couldn't maintain its advantage in the final 16 minutes as the Tigers went on a 35-20 run to close out the game.

Scoring 32 points, Johnson was the main offensive threat to Deshler as only two other Bulldogs—Dill and Berryman—found their way onto the scoresheet.

"Obviously we play better when we play together, but there are times when our team can't get going and it's nice to have (Johnson) there to help carry that load," Bonner said. "When we played Haleyville we had four guys in double digits and it was more of a team effort, and we really locked in on the defense end. On Saturday (against Deshler) we didn't play the best defense...but we were also missing a starter, so that kinda hurt us—our second leading scorer. Just having (Johnson) there, he's gotta pick up the slack, and he does a really good job of that for us."

Johnson scored his 1,000th career point in the second quarter of the game, hitting a two-pointer to give him 11 points in the game to that point.

"I think it's a pretty big accomplishment in high school basketball to achieve 1,000 points. I also think being able to do it as a junior is a little more impressive, especially when teams are so heavily focused on him game in and game out," Bonner said. "To be able to do the things he does, I really think it's a special thing."

Johnson would go on to score 21 more points after that, including four three-pointers in the fourth, to push his career total to 1,022. Bonner told the Franklin Free Press he's excited to see what the future holds for their



COURTESY PHOTO

Braycen Johnson leads the offense against Covenant Christian.

star Johnson with the remainder of this season and his senior year to look forward to.

"He's made major strides from last year to this year, scoring-wise. I just hope he can continue that the rest of this year and into next year, but we've gotta lot of time to work and get better this offseason," Bonner said. "He's huge for our program—he really is—and I'm excited about what he can do in the future."

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Bryn Scott



ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Bryn Scott – Belgreen girls' basketball

January 13-18, 2025

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.

RHS Stadium turf replacement bids due by January 30th

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At a short meeting held January 21st, the Russellville City Schools Board of Education heard a report from Superintendent Tim Guinn regarding the turf replacement at Russellville High School Stadium.

Last month, the board approved advertising for bids to replace the artificial turf at the stadium. Turf was originally installed at the stadium in 2016. A pre-bid meeting was held Thursday, January 23rd, to allow prospective bidders to inspect the field and ask any questions prior to bidding.

The bid deadline is January 30, 2025, and bids will be opened at 2 p.m., that day. Guinn said anyone interested in watching the bid opening is welcome to attend that day.

Guinn told board members that once the lowest responsible bid is approved, his goal is to have the new turf project completed prior to graduation ceremonies in May 2025.

January is School Board Recognition Month, and this year Russellville Middle School Principal Monica Moon and RMS students shared a message of appreciation to board members, presented each with a gift basket and hosted a reception after the meeting for the board.

Guinn told board members Kim Clonts, Howard Hillman, Ike Rogers, Radford Hester and Greg Trapp how much they are appreciated for their dedication to Russellville City Schools.

"On behalf of the Russellville City Schools Central Office staff and administration, we want to thank you personally for all you do for us," Guinn said. "You are our liaison to the community. You're also the ones who hear the counterpoints and concerns to decisions we make every day...That's not an easy job and we appreciate all you do every day."

In other agenda items at its January 21st meeting, the board: --approved a Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) contract with Trina Franklin.

--approved facility use requests for RHS Auditorium for Addie's Flip, Tip & Tap Dance Studio recital on May 17, 2025, with practice on May 16, 2025, and the RHS Driving Range parking lot for the Russellville Police Department to conduct skid car training from May 27-June 6, 2025.

--approved the 2025-2026 school calendar.
--approved the following personnel moves:
--Retirements/Resignations/Terminations/Leave of Absence: Lyndia Underwood, bus driver, retirement, Kelly Dowdy, Pre-K Nurse, Family Medical Leave Act from January 6-31, 2025.
--Employment: Josh Ables as RHS custodian.
--Temporary Employment in Position: Macey Vandiver, supplement for RHS and RMS Choral Director, Kathy Sanchez, supplement for Assistant Varsity Soccer Coach, Amy McCollum to fill a leave of absence from January 21-May 23, 2025 as a RHS teacher, Lauren Mills, supplement for RHS Yearbook Sponsor and Macey Vandiver, Teacher for RES 21st CCLC and WES Afterschool Program.
--Transfer: Madison Lamon from assistant RMS softball coach to head RMS softball coach.



COURTESY PHOTO

RMS students honored the Russellville City Schools Board of Education during School Board Appreciation Month.

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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

Senior Equipment Maintenance Technician, Highway Department

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until the position is filled.

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

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Thank You!: County commission recognizes Russellville Electric Board employees for assistance in cutting trees

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission took time at its January 21st meeting to say a big thank you to the Russellville Electric Board and its tree trimming crew for their assistance in removing several large overgrown trees around the Franklin County Courthouse. The commission invited the REB employees to attend its January business meeting to personally extend its appreciation. In other agenda items at the January 21st meeting, the commission:



COURTESY PHOTO

Commissioners with employees of the Russellville Electric Board at their January 21st meeting.

--approved purchasing an Active Alert system that will be used to communicate messages to all Franklin County employees in times of emergency, closings or severe weather. The system comes at a cost of \$1,900.

--tabled consideration of roof repairs to the former Franklin County Rescue Squad building in order to obtain bids for a metal roof.

--declared two dump trucks in the Franklin County Highway Department surplus property and authorized listing them for sale with J.M. Wood.

--tabled consideration of the removal of stumps around the Franklin County Courthouse, including a large stump in front of the courthouse near the marble step entrance.

--approved the hiring of Taylor Crumpton as a Roadway Maintenance Technician I in the Highway Department.

- agreed to advertise for several bridge painting projects around the county.
 - approved hiring Lila Duncan as a temporary Corrections Officer/Dispatcher and Cindy Emerson as a part-time Corrections Officer/Dispatcher with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.
 - tabled consideration of hiring three full-time Corrections Officer/Dispatcher positions.
 - declared two pick-ups surplus property in the Solid Waste Department and authorized their sale on GovDeals.
 - approved the termination of Greg Haithcock from the Highway Department, and approved advertising for the position of Senior Equipment Maintenance Technician.
 - approved hiring Diane Miller as a part-time employee in the Probate Office.
 - approved an increase in mileage reimbursement rate to \$.70 per mile, the same rate used by the State of Alabama.
 - approved dividing the \$15,000 annual Constable allocation among the eight Franklin County Constables, including: John Cantrell, Belgreen, Jonathan Frederick, Churntown, Bobby Brown, College Avenue, Antonio Melecio, Courthouse, Clint Holcombe, Halltown, Chase White, Newburg, Rodney Belue, Red Bay and Terry Zills, Union.
- Constables are elected by voting precinct, with each of the eight constable's home precinct listed above.

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