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Mayor-elect Williams ready to begin turning goals into realities for his hometown Phil Campbell

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As he campaigned for the Phil Campbell Mayor position, Greg Williams didn't make a lot of promises, with one exception.

In an interview with the Franklin Free Press two weeks before the August 26, 2025, election, William's only promise was he would continue to run a positive campaign—no 'getting in the mud' as he put it.

When Williams and incumbent Mayor Eddie Marbutt both

addressed voters in the Phil Campbell Candidate Forum the final week before the election, both men stayed positive.

Marbutt spoke about several accomplishments of the current administration, and when it was Williams' turn, he acknowledged Marbutt in the instances Williams believed town benefited from the accomplishment. And when he differed from what was done, or how long it took the town's elected leadership to act on certain issues, he expressed his opinion without hesita-

See 'WILLIAMS,' Page 4

No sponsoring church for religious instruction this year, but Guinn says RCS remains ready and willing to begin the program next year

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Schools Board of Education and Superintendent Tim Guinn are ready to start a religious instruction course for students but, at least for the 2025-26 school year, no local church was interested in hosting the program.

In 2019, the Alabama Legislature approved a bill that allowed public school districts to adopt a policy to establish an off-campus religious instruction program and allow students sufficient time each day to leave campus for the classes.

Six years after the bill's passage, very few Alabama school districts have taken steps to offer religious instruction though, as logistical and

legal questions have made finding a sponsoring church difficult.

In this year's legislative session, the Alabama Senate approved Senate Bill 278, which would have changed the law by requiring all school systems to establish a religious instruction program, whether they moved forward with offering the program or not.

That bill died in the Alabama House, with some legislators arguing the 2019 law already allows school districts to set up religious instruction programs and there should not be a state mandate for this to be done.

The bill isn't going away though, as Senate Bill 4 has already been pre-filed for the 2026 legislative session. SB4 would require all public school systems to adopt a policy allowing

See 'RCS,' Page 9

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Salvador Blanco Mendez of Russellville passed away on Sunday, October 5th, 2025. Visitation and service was held at Calvary Baptist Church in Russellville. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family with the arrangements.

Jenny Mae Madden, age 95, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Thursday, October 9, 2025, at her residence. The visitation will be 1-2 p.m. on Thursday, October 16, at Spry Memorial Chapel. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Barbara Jane Pennington, age 88, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, October 9, 2025, at her residence. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Roy Collins, age 90, of Red Bay passed away peacefully at home on October 11, 2025. Deaton Funeral Home assisted the family with the arrangements.



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Back to the Bible
by Larsen Plyler:
Matthew 7:21-29

Just because you call Jesus “ruler” doesn’t mean much. What matters is doing what the Father wants. The people pictured in this passage may have had amazing powers, but they didn’t follow the instructions, so Jesus didn’t know them. They were not what they claimed to be. Just having a “spiritual gift” power didn’t indicate right standing with the Lord (see I Cor. 13:1-3). They were guilty of lawlessness, working outside the will of God (I Jn. 3:4). While Jesus motivates with the promise of eternal life (Mt. 5:10-12; 6:19-20) He also motivates with warnings of judgment (Mt. 7:13-14).

Jesus explains that the way to build a life that will stand is to hear His words and do them. That is a way to build on the sure foundation. That’s a wise approach.

But, if you hear Him and don’t obey, you’re building on sand. Notice Jesus isn’t saying they don’t know. They have heard, but won’t heed. That’s foolish because that won’t stand in the face of trials and it certainly won’t stand in the face of judgment.

When the crowds heard Jesus talk like this they were struck by His claim to authority. He spoke as if He had the right to command and expect to be obeyed. He didn’t cite other references to bolster His points. He called for obedience to His words.

Lessons to Learn:

Claiming Jesus as Lord isn’t worth anything if you don’t obey Him as Lord. Following Jesus demands our allegiance to Him. We won’t be perfect, but we strive to obey Him. And, we don’t pick and choose the ways we will and won’t. He is Lord. Don’t be tricked by those who say your obedience doesn’t matter. Check out these passages: Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 6:46; Romans 6:17-18; II Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 5:8-9; James 1:19-27

How do you build a good life? If you obey Jesus, then all that Satan throws at you will not throw you down. Faithfulness to Jesus can bring you through the storms of sickness, loneliness, suffering, and temptation.

A life that doesn’t heed Jesus’ instruction is hopeless— now and eternally.

Jesus has authority. He has the right to command and expect to be obeyed. He is the expert on the way things are and on the way things should be. He is the risen King on heaven’s throne. He sits in the highest place of honor. Let’s respond with loyalty to the Lord (Phil. 2:5-11).

We’re thankful to share these considerations of God’s word. It’s best if you have a Bible close to evaluate what we say. We want to go “back to the Bible” for all we teach.

Tune in to 100.7 WGOL Sunday at 8:30am for our Back to the Bible Radio Program.

Reach out with your questions, comments, or requests for personal Bible study at backtothebiblepodcast.com or at info@backtothebiblepodcast.com.



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'WILLIAMS,' from Page 1

-tion.

Williams demonstrated remarkable transparency while campaigning, something not often seen in today's politics. And some would label it a risky strategy.

Williams has spent a lifetime speaking his mind about what he believes is important, and he wasn't about to stray from that in a political campaign, win or lose.

The result of Williams' campaign strategy was an Election Day victory by a margin of 17 votes, 97-82. A light turnout, indeed, but a win nonetheless.

"I'm glad they got some work done, especially toward the building downtown that's been a long time problem for the town. But I just would have gone at it a different way," Williams said. "They may not know the liability they're exposing the town to by taking ownership of that building, or the insurance costs were going to have to pay and they don't even know what it will take if they can be repaired."

That issue, what should be done with the 10-partition building located in the heart of downtown Phil Campbell, became a central issue in the campaign.

When Marbutt announced plans for the town to take title to the property in an agreement with owner Al Cartee where a group of businessmen in Phil Campbell would pay \$30,000 and the town \$10,000 to Cartee, some saw it as a welcome step toward some resolution on what has become a running eyesore. Others were skeptical. And when the deed transfer didn't move forward as scheduled the following week, once again the issue remained in limbo, at least temporarily.

"The main thing to concentrate on (once he takes office in November) is that building if (Cartee) signs the deed. We need to get some grants and we need a professional to come in and tell us how much it's going to cost," Williams said.

"The job's not done just because the town takes ownership of the building. It's only the beginning. We've got to talk with state officials about not taking that right of way away from us. I plan to speak with (U.S. Rep.) Congressman Aderholt to try and get some assistance," Williams added. "Right now, if we tore the building down, the state would take the right of way on the west side. Some folks have said if we keep the sidewalk the state wouldn't take it from us, but I want to get it in writing before we do anything."

As he prepares to take office, Williams shared his priorities for his hometown, including annexing the Phil Campbell Industrial Park into the city, another problematic issue that's lingered since town officials first purchased the land in Spruce Pine where the industrial park is located.

"That's a priority for sure, as well as doing something with the Bates crossing. That's one of my pet peeves and I've wanted something done about it for years," Williams said.

Williams also mentioned getting a campground for the town, something that's been a financial shot in the arm for the Town of Bear Creek for years.

"We've got that lake down there and we're just wasting a good opportunity. We have to work with BCDA and annex part of the land along the lake," Williams said. "Bear Creek gets the fees and we could do that and there's no telling what kind of money we could bring in. All those campers would also go to stores in town to buy gas, groceries and supplies. And that would just keep the investment rolling."

As a long-time member of the carpenter's local union, Williams has a career of experience building homes, roofing houses, and he served as a foreman on most of the jobs he worked. He served the past 15 years as Director of Training for Mid South Carpenter, where he was over the training for millwright and carpenter apprentices in three states.

Williams believes that experience and knowledge will aid him and the Phil Campbell Town Council when dealing with building issues.

Another issue he plans to tackle, realizing it won't be easy, is to build back a swimming pool for the town. After the 2011 tornado, town leaders decided to build a splash pad over rebuilding the pool.

"Most people I talked to during the campaign wanted the swimming pool built back. That's going to be another issue to tackle," Williams said.

Williams outlined his goals and plans for Phil Campbell if he became mayor on a Facebook post prior to the election.

"I outlined everything I wanted to do in that Facebook post and laid out what my plans are," Williams said.

And immediately after winning the election, Williams stressed his support for the Phil Campbell Police Department, answering campaign claims he intended to defund the department if elected. That rumor gained legs when Williams' son was arrested on a drug offense.

"I have no idea why people said that. I've got no issue with our police department. Yes, my son got busted for drugs but I can't help what a grown man does and he's a grown man. Yes, I bailed him out but I have no idea where that turned into claims I'd defund the police department," Williams said.

"It ain't gonna happen. We need our police department. People pay taxes and our businesses pay taxes and they've got to have protection. When we didn't have a full police department, that gas station on the south side of town got robbed. I told the mayor then you better get some more policemen up here. People paying taxes expect that protection," he added.

While Williams campaigned with full transparency of his goals, concerns and plans for Phil Campbell, he realizes there are five other elected officials who have an important voice in the town's leadership.

"I don't want a council up there just saying yes or no. I want them working on whatever they are put over. But if they don't tell me before our meetings so I can put those issues on the agenda, it's not going on there. I want our agenda set three days before our meeting. If there's something I'm wanting to do, I'm going to put it out there and not hide it. The people of this town didn't elect me to hide things," Williams added.



Phil Campbell mayor-elect Greg Williams

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ALFA in support of Department of Labor interim rule making H-2A ag guest worker program more accessible, affordable for farmers

The Alabama Farmers Federation is praising an interim final rule by the Department of Labor (DOL) which makes the H-2A agricultural guest worker program more accessible and affordable for farmers who produce America's food and fiber.

"Farmers rely on legal guest workers to fill the gap when the local workforce can't meet their needs. Unfortunately, rule changes during the Biden Administration made the H-2A program increasingly costly and complicated," said Federation President Jimmy Parnell. "The rule announced today is another step toward fixing the H-2A program by applying common sense to wage calculations."

Farmers hiring H-2A guest workers are required to pay an Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) to ensure the local workforce is not negatively impacted. The rule updates AEWR methodology by:

Using wage data reported for each U.S. state and territory by the DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) survey. Under the Biden Administration, use of unreliable Farm Labor Survey data led to skyrocketing labor costs for farmers. In Alabama, the minimum hourly H-2A rate increased from \$11.99 in 2021 to the current rate of \$16.08, a 34% increase.

Continuing a single AEWR for the five traditional occupational classifications. The AEWR will be divided into two skill-based categories to account for wage differentials arising from qualifications contained in the employer's job offer. Other occupational classifications will have corresponding AEWRs set from the OEWS. Classifying jobs for AEWR purposes based on the duties performed for most work days during the contract period.

Addressing differences in compensation between U.S. workers and H-2A participants — who receive employer-provided housing at no cost — by implementing a standard adjustment factor to the AEWR for non-monetary compensation.

New AEWR wage requirements are effective immediately. In Alabama, 92% of all on-farm jobs are expected to fall in Skill Level I.

Shelby County Farmers Federation President Phillip Hunter chairs the American Farm Bureau Federation Ag Labor Issue Advisory Committee. He said the AEWR rule ensures the H-2A program remains effective in addressing farm labor shortages.

"These changes are welcomed news for farmers who utilize the H-2A program," said Hunter, who also serves on the Federation's state board of directors. "By using reliable data, classifying jobs based on the majority of work done and taking into account employer-provided housing, the Trump Administration is restoring this program to its original mission — providing legal, temporary labor for American farms. This benefits consumers who rely on our products and the families of guest workers who receive financial support from the work done on U.S. farms."

Parnell echoed Hunter's praise for President Donald Trump and cabinet leaders. "We appreciate the president, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins and DOL Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer for making this rule change a priority," Parnell said. "They understand strong and profitable farms are vital to America's national security."



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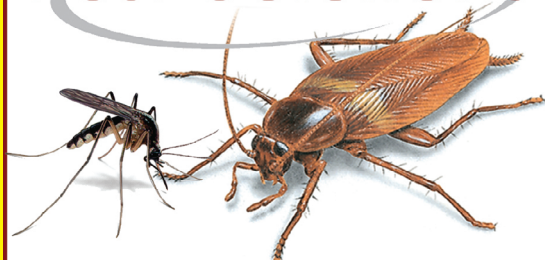
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 **M**y Father's House will host 'Friends and Family Day Fall Festival,' Friday, October 17, 2025, from 6-8 p.m. Come join them for a great time of fellowship and fun! Bouncy house, games, cake walk, hayride, food, candy and fun! Everyone is welcome. For more information or if you need a ride, call 256-460-1376.

 **S**iloam Missionary Baptist Church, located at 1657 County Rd 60, Russellville, will have a Fall Festival on Sunday, October 26, from 5-7 p.m. There will be a Trunk or Treat, crafts for kids, a cake walk, and hot dogs will be served.

 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host a Trunk 'R Treat on October 31, 2025, starting at 5 p.m. There will be candy-filled decorated trunks and fun for all ages! Church is located at 25100 Highway 24, Russellville. For more information, call Michelle at 256-668-2344.

 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County invites you to a Judgment House Experience Chili Cook-Off, Saturday, October 25th, at the church, located at 25100 Hwy. 24, Russellville. Bring your best chili, if you dare! Chili drop-off by 4 p.m. Judging begins at 4:30 p.m. 'Judgment House: The Last Ride, a hayride drama experience will begin immediately following the Chili Cook-Off. Free admission. Family-friendly Western-themed fun with a powerful message of eternity. For more information, call Jean at 256-275-0730.

 **T**here will be a Car Show as part of the Leighton Fire Department's 2nd annual Fall Festival, Saturday, Oct. 25th, 4-8 p.m., 2225 Railroad Street, Leighton. Sponsored by Why Knot Show 'Em Off. Free to spectate. \$20 registration paid day of show in person. Cars, trucks, bikes & RatRods. Trophies, door prizes, 50/50 drawing. Call 256-668-2585 for more info.

 **T**he Russellville First Methodist Church will have a 5th Thursday Food Giveaway on Thursday, October 30th, at 311 N Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL, beginning at 1 pm. Please use the back entrance from Washington Ave. Remain in your car, have your ID ready, and allow our volunteers to serve you. Note: In case of inclement weather, the giveaway will be rescheduled.

 **L**ove Packages Ministry is in need of donations of new and used Bibles (in any condition). They will be sent to ministers and missionaries around the world who will distribute them. Donations can be dropped off in the church office of Red Bay First Baptist Church or Russellville First Baptist Church.

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‘Now or never’: Red Bay council approves 10-cent vape tax ahead of deadline

Jason Collum
The Red Bay News

City officials joined municipalities across the state in rushing to meet a deadline to establish a new 10-cents-per-milliliter tax on vape products on Wednesday, Oct. 1. The new ordinance will allow Red Bay to collect the full allowable 10-cent tax on vape products instead of being limited to just a small percentage of what the State of Alabama will collect when its law goes into effect on October 1, 2026.

“It’s either now or never; today’s the day,” Mayor Charlene Fancher told council members on whether they adopted the ordinance, noting the state’s deadline.

The City of Red Bay’s ordinance text was based on the text of the ordinance written by the City of Lincoln, Ala. The ordinance calls for a 10-cent per milliliter of consumable vapor product sold inside the city limits, and a five-cent per milliliter tax on the same sold outside the city limits, but within the police jurisdiction. Other cities around the state approving similar ordinances by the October 1 deadline include Muscle Shoals, Decatur, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery and Mobile, among others. Many more were expected to act on and adopt their own ordinances by the deadline last week.

According to a story by AL.com, there is some confusion around the state on whether ordinances like that approved by the City of Red Bay will amount to double taxation. The law seems fairly clear, at least in a notice published by the Alabama Department of Revenue, in that the municipal tax and the state tax, while being for the same item and stacking on top of each other, will not mean cities or counties collect twice. The concept is the same as sales taxes, wherein municipalities collect sales taxes on top of what those collected by the state.

Municipalities in Alabama were allowed to enact their own tax if approved by the deadline last week. Those that did not already have a tax in place or approve one by October 1 will be barred from enacting their own ordinances in the future but will still receive a small percentage – 2.5 percent – of the 10-cent levy the state will collect, allocated according to city or county population. The notice from ALDOR states municipalities or counties with their own tax ordinance will not be allowed to receive a distribution from the state’s tax.

The new vape tax is an excise tax, meaning it is collected over and above sales taxes.

Red Bay council hires Baggett as city clerk, appoints McNeil to fill Water & Gas Board vacancy

Jason Collum
The Red Bay News

Councilmen voted last week to hire a new city clerk and appoint a new member to the Red Bay Water & Gas Board. Hannah Baggett, who comes to the city after working with the Sparks CPA Firm, was hired as the city’s new clerk. She was hired on a 90-day probationary basis, with former city clerk Sarah McKinney having previously agreed to work with the new clerk on training. McKinney resigned the post last month to accept a job in the private sector.

Shane McNeil was appointed by the City Council to complete the unexpired term of Mike Shewbart on the Red Bay Water & Gas Board. Shewbart resigned that post after winning election as the city’s next mayor. The position will expire on November 6, 2030. In education funding requests, the city approved an expenditure request from D’Andra Robinson, Candi Fuller, and Carrie Seahorn, on behalf of 51 students at Red Bay Elementary School, for \$200 for financial relief for families on the expense of a field trip to Isbell Farms on October 31.

In other action, the council:

- Approved making Thursday, October 30, 2025, the city’s recognized date to hold Halloween activities. The date was changed from October 31 due to there being a home football game that night, and council members didn’t like the idea of moving it forward to Saturday, Nov. 1.
 - Approved a three-year information technology agreement with SmartFox Solutions;
 - Tabled a discussion on a new policy regarding coaches with the city’s Parks and Recreation and Little League teams;
 - Announced the posting of a position on the city’s Senior Citizens Board. Currently held by Evelyn Davis, anyone wishing to be considered for the role should sign up at City Hall. The new expiration date of the position is October 1, 2031.
 - Approved a resolution regarding a purchasing/procurement policy in order to be in compliance with state and federal guidelines for grant funding from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA).
 - Authorized an agreement for the North Alabama Council of Local Governments (NACOLG) to work on the city’s behalf on a grant through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) on a major project involving upgrades at Red Bay’s Family Fun Park.
- The next meeting of the Red Bay City Council is set for Wednesday, Oct. 15, at 3:30 p.m.

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students to attend off-campus religious instruction classes daily.

Similar legislation died in the House Education Policy Committee, as a 9-4 vote sealed its fate. So what's different for the 2026 session? Possibly nothing other than sponsors of the legislation, including Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth, steadfastly maintain they will continue to introduce the bill until it passes both the House and Senate.

Guinn said Russellville City Schools was ready to move forward with a religious instruction course for the 2025-26 school year, and he attended a meeting last spring and invited pastors from local churches to learn about the program and what expectations would be for any sponsoring church.

"We had a good turnout from several churches in the area, and tried to explain what would be expected of any church willing to provide a teacher and host the class," Guinn said.

"If a church provides a teacher each day, it could be someone for an entire week, an 18-week semester or the entire 36-week school year. They could use multiple teachers as well, as long as a teacher is there to receive our students every day. And they would have to pick up students from Russellville Middle School who enroll in the religious instruction class," Guinn added.

The course curriculum would be reviewed by RCS officials and the church would also be responsible for students returning to campus on-time for their next class. For example, in a 95-minute block, there could be 65 minutes of instruction with 15 minutes each way allotted for transportation, Guinn explained.

Guinn contacted Russellville City Councilman Darren Woodruff to solicit his help in setting up a meeting with local churches. A meeting was already scheduled with local churches to discuss the feasibility of a local warming center available during extreme winter storms, so discussion of the religious instruction program was added to that meeting agenda. At that meeting, Father Victor Salomon Cardona from Russellville Good Shepherd Catholic Church expressed interest in his church sponsoring the religious instruction class, and there was interest from First Baptist Church and Gateway Church of God as well.

"I'm not asking local churches to do this," Guinn said. "It's not something I told (local pastors) we need them to do. It's an opportunity to work with you in a partnership. If parents are okay with their children receiving religious instruction from a church of their choice, we are willing to release students for those classes."

Guinn was encouraged by the interest shown not only by Good Shepherd, but a few other local churches. But as the new school year approached, none had moved forward from the preliminary meeting. If that changes during the 25-26 school year, Guinn said his district has the policy in place to start a religious instruction class as soon as next year.

Guinn offered any church who sponsors the class support from RCS instructors, possibly in the form of a workshop to give a brief overview of how a classroom setting works. Religious instruction students would receive a grade for the course just like any other class and attendance records would have to be kept and sent to school officials, Guinn said.

"This needs to be something you and your congregation feel led to do," Guinn told the pastors. "And if you don't feel led to do it, don't do it."

"We are not supplying an instructor. We are not supplying a classroom. We are supplying time for students to take this elective course if or when it's offered," he added. "We are still teaching core values on a daily basis. If you want to do this, you're solidifying those core values with those students you have in your churches. You're also solidifying your congregations with students coming out of these classes with so much core knowledge. It would be more than 100 hours a year of instruction," Guinn told the pastors.

After the meeting, Guinn was optimistic RCS would have a religious instruction class debuting in the Fall 2025 semester, but that didn't happen.

"With the excitement we saw in that room, I thought they're going to be ready to do this and we can kick it off in time for the Fall 2025 semester, but that didn't happen," Guinn said.

He gave out copies of the RCS Board-approved proposal for religious instructional studies to those who attended the meeting. The proposal contained a mission statement and aligned with Russellville City Schools' Strategic Plan core values. It outlined the program framework and defined who would be eligible to take the classes. Essentially, each church was given a road map they could use to navigate clearly through the process of setting up the religious instruction program.

Alabama Act 2019-508 allows public schools to offer elective courses 'in the objective study of the Bible and religious history in grades 6-12,' so that's why middle school students would also be offered the course.

Even with no sponsoring church for the 2025-26 school year, Guinn said Russellville City Schools remains ready and able to assist any church that takes on the religious instruction program.

"Local church leaders and Christian educators may partner with Russellville City Schools in implementing this impactful initiative. Together, we can offer students a pathway to grow spiritually and ethically in alignment with our shared values," Guinn said.

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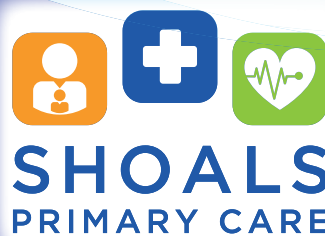
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Red Bay celebrates Homecoming with 53-0 rout of Tharptown

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

There's no place like home, especially on Homecoming.

For the Red Bay High School varsity football team, home—Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium—has been a fortress this season, and the Tigers' 53-0 rout of Class 2A Region 8 opponent Tharptown Friday night was more proof positive of that.

Red Bay (6-1, 3-0) jumped out to a commanding 34-0 lead on Tharptown (1-6, 0-3) before the first quarter was out.

Senior running back Jaxon Vinson opened up the scoring on the first play from scrimmage with a 65-yard touchdown run to make it 6-0. Vinson would add another long 60-plus-yard rushing touchdown later in the first to make the score 20-0 and increase his total number of rushing touchdowns this season to 16, a team high.

Sandwiched in between Vinson's two rushing scores, junior Jaxon Swann added a special teams touchdown, returning a THS punt 62-yards to the endzone for the Tigers' second score of the evening.

As the first quarter neared its end, senior quarterback Jeremiah Thorne hit sophomore wide receiver Davien Colburn over the middle for a 42-yard touchdown before sophomore running back Joshua Thorne capped

See, 'HOMECOMING,' Page 12

Phil Campbell clobbers Carbon Hill 56-12 for third straight win

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

In its final road game of the regular season, the Phil Campbell High School varsity football team traveled to Carbon Hill and put a beatdown on the Bulldogs 56-12 to improve to 4-3 overall and 3-2 in Class 3A Region 5 play.

"We were able to jump up quick and execute early," Phil Campbell head coach Jacob Hamilton told the Franklin Free Press.

"We're excited for any win—any region win, especially in the tough region that we're in," Hamilton added. "That was our first road win of the season, so we're happy to get that and hope to continue to do well in the region so we can lock in that fourth spot (in the region) and meet our goal of making the playoffs."

The Bobcats opened the scoring early on a touchdown run of about 35 yards by senior Logan Cooper and converted on the two-point attempt to give them an 8-0 lead with 8:47 to go in the first.

The hosts responded with a quick score on their first drive to make it 8-6, but PCHS was able to once again put together a methodical touchdown drive capped by a short touchdown run. The ensuing two-point conversion was successful and the Bobcats led 16-6 with just over three minutes left in the first quarter.

On Carbon Hill's next drive the Bobcat defense came up with a score of its own to increase their advantage on the road. The Bulldogs were driving but a fumble on an option play was picked up by Chandler Benford and returned about 60 yards for a touchdown that made it 24-6 with just over a minute remaining in the opening period.

"We were able to get a scoop-and-score and that really shifted the momentum," Hamilton said.

"Us getting our first three two-point conversions was huge," the head coach added.

See, 'PHIL CAMPBELL,' Page 12

Russellville uses second half to surge past Hatton 35-26, improve to 4-3

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

In the final game of a three-game road stretch for the Russellville High School varsity football team, the Golden Tigers gritted out a 35-26 win at Hatton on Friday night.

Trailing 20-14 at the halftime break, Russellville (4-3) scored 21 unanswered points in the second half to go up 35-20 before Hatton (4-3) was able to score late in the game to make it a nine-point victory for the visitors.

"I said all week how talented Hatton is. Credit to them and their kids—they played really hard and they made plays," Russellville second-year head coach Dustin Goodwin told the Franklin Free Press postgame.

"I think we came out...but we weren't playing to the best of our ability," Goodwin added. "We challenged our kids at halftime; we did some good things (in the first half), but obviously we couldn't get off the field on defense. So we just challenged them to play the game the way they're supposed to and how they know how to, and I think we did a much better job of that in the second half."

"All in all I thought our effort was better in the second half, and I'm proud of our guys for being able to get the win."

After an opening punt by the Russellville offense to start the game, Hatton went down the field and capped a 10-plus-play drive with a 10-yard passing touchdown to go up 6-0.

Russellville responded on its next possession when sophomore quarterback Whit Goodwin, who finished with over 180 yards passing, found receiver Julyan Francisco streaking wide open down the visitor sideline for a 55-yard touchdown.

The two teams traded touchdowns again to tie it up 14-14 with 5:25 to go in the first half:

See, 'RUSSELLVILLE,' Page 13

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'HOMECOMING,' from Page 11

the opening period with a 30-plus-yard rushing TD to make it 34-0.

Red Bay's dominant opening quarter allowed the first team players a well-deserved breather, and the second team Tigers were able to get a majority of the reps for the remainder.

"We preached to our (first team players) to play hard and execute well, not make any mistakes, and they did that," first-year Red Bay head coach Tyler Jeffreys told the Franklin Free Press. "I think you can take a lot of things away from the (second team) offense and (second team) defense who played quite a bit tonight. That got better and that's moving in the right direction."

In the second quarter, freshman Sawyer Humphres dashed into the endzone for an 11-yard score to make it 40-0, the advantage the hosts took into halftime.

In the second half, Red Bay would score twice—once in the third quarter and once in the fourth. RBHS freshman Andre Brownlee capped the game's scoring with a rushing touchdown from a little over 10 yards out to make it 53-0.

Jeffreys said it was nice—"absolutely"—to get the win on Homecoming and added that his team had a good week of practice despite the potential for Homecoming distractions.

The victory over Tharptown maintains the Tigers' perfect region record so far this campaign. The Red Bay head coach said, with two region games remaining on their schedule, that the Tigers just have to continue to focus on their own game and keep striving to improve.

"Obviously there's always areas where you can get better," Jeffreys said. "I think we've just gotta continue to get better at what we do. It's really not about the people we play, it's about our team and us getting better each day."

Red Bay's Homecoming game also served as its regular season home finale. The Tigers will continue region play and travel to Decatur Heritage Christian for their next game on Friday, October 17.



Red Bay senior Jaxon Vinson (34) races by a Tharptown defender to find the endzone.

(Photo by Caleb Ramey)

'PHIL CAMPBELL,' from Page 11

From then on it was all Bobcats.

After a couple changes of possession, Phil Campbell's offense found the endzone again on a short touchdown run by Braxton Downey which capped a 75-yard drive with 7:25 left in the half. The Bobcats took a 30-6 lead into the intermission.

After halftime, a Carbon Hill turnover on downs to start the third quarter gave Phil Campbell good field position in plus territory. The Bobcats took advantage and added to their lead on a 36-yard touchdown pass from junior quarterback Hayston Scott to receiver Austin Elliott to make it 36-6.

A four-yard score by senior Logan Cooper and then two rushing touchdowns by Downey—one from 49 yards and the other from 21 yards out as time expired—rounded out the scoring for the Bobcats.

"We were able to run the ball very well, so I was really proud of my offensive line," Hamilton said. "We were still able to throw the ball when we wanted to. Hayston (Scott) and Austin (Elliott) had really good games. It was a balanced night and it was fun, so I'm very proud of them."

The region victory keeps the Bobcats in fourth place—the final playoff spot—in the region behind Vinemont, Gordo, and Winfield.

Hamilton told the *FFP* that Phil Campbell's recent run of form comes down to his team playing as one.

"We've just played together. It's been a team effort and we're a tight group," he said. "For us to go on a stretch like this...and for us to have a three-game win streak, all it is is just a team effort. I've got a great group of kids that play together and work hard and there's no selfishness. We play as a team; that's the main thing for us, and it's awesome."

Phil Campbell has two crucial region games remaining, both to be played at Parrish Stadium over the next two weekends.

The next contest for PCHS is against Gordo, who came into the weekend ranked No. 3 in Class 3A but were knocked off by Vinemont 22-19 Friday night.

Hamilton said momentum is with his team after their three consecutive wins. The Bobcats get the Green Wave at home next Friday, and the fact that Gordo was defeated by a team that Hamilton stated his side probably should've beaten back in week two may prove to buoy the Bobcats' confidence even more.

"We've won three in a row and the kids are feeling good and confident," Hamilton said. "Our kids are confident and we feel that we can play with anybody when we do things right and execute. But us coming home with the momentum—we know (Gordo) is still going to be good, but we also know that we're good. It'll be a good game, and we're excited to play them."

Phil Campbell is set to host Gordo at Parrish Stadium on Friday, October 17, with kickoff scheduled for 7 p.m.



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'RUSSELLVILLE,' from Page 11

First, Hatton's Savarius Evans crossed the goalline on a two-yard rushing touchdown to make it 14-7, Hornets, after the successful two-point try; and then Goodwin accounted for his second touchdown of the night—this time scoring with his legs on a 12-yard run—to knot it up.

Though there were more opportunities for both sides to add more points in the dying minutes of the first half, the last score of the opening 24 minutes was made by the hosts, who went up 20-14 after the Hornets' quarterback hit a receiver on a perfectly-thrown 36-yard pass to the back corner of the RHS endzone. Missed chances for each team included Hatton throwing an interception to Russellville's Daniel Aycock, and an RHS turnover-on-downs as well as a fumble at the pylon that went through the endzone for a touchback.

"We had a tough play right there before halftime...where it looked like we had two hands on the football and knocked over the pylon before it got loose. But that's just one of those judgement calls...that just is what it is," Goodwin said of turnover in the endzone. "It was a big moment in the game and it could've been disastrous for us, but in the second half our kids answered the call."

Cue Goodwin's halftime challenge to his Golden Tigers.

Coming out of the halftime break, Russellville made a big special teams play to start the third quarter. (Challenge accepted, apparently.) A pooch kick on the kickoff and a loose ball ended up in Russellville's hands, so the visitors were able to begin the second half with possession.

The Golden Tigers, starting the drive at the Hatton 30-yard line, made the most of their good fortune, retaking the lead on a 16-yard touchdown pass from Goodwin to junior receiver Gavin Willis and ensuing extra point.

On Hatton's first offensive possession of the second half, the Russellville defense came up with a big stop, forcing a turnover on downs inside the redzone. The Golden Tiger D would go on to rebuff the Hornet offense twice more, forcing a punt and then a fumble on the next two HHS possessions.

Meanwhile, the Russellville offense scored on its next two drives to increase its advantage to 21 points. Junior running back Tarus Davis, who totaled over 80 yards on the ground on the night, made it 28-20 after a five-yard touchdown scamper with 10:50 remaining in the fourth. Then with 5:34 left, Goodwin, adding his second-rushing touchdown, made it 35-20 after sprinting in from the 13-yard line.

Hatton capped the scoring in the contest with a 30-yard touchdown pass with 2:57 remaining to make it 35-26; but the Hornets' perhaps questionable decision to go for the two-pointer and then failing kept it a two-score game, and the Golden Tigers' recovery of the ensuing onside kick attempt effectively iced it. The victory over Hatton puts the Golden Tigers back over .500 for the season and is another example of this youthful Russellville team's fight and ability to find a way to win tough games.

"They always believe they can win, and they love and care about each other enough that they don't want to let each other down—and that goes a long way," Goodwin said of his players. "We're really proud of them. I do think they're a great team. They give you everything they've got, and that's all we can ask out of them."

The triumph at Hatton also gives the Golden Tigers a bit of a morale boost heading into their upcoming Homecoming game against region opponent West Point next week. But Homecoming comes with its own unique pitfalls at the same time; Goodwin said the players will have to manage those and keep the main thing the main thing.

"We know Homecoming has a ton of distractions, so we have to limit those. We have to focus on our job and that's the region opponent," he said. "Hopefully our kids are able to limit those distractions and focus on the task at hand and get a region win that we need."

Russellville is set to kickoff against the West Point Warriors at 7 p.m. at Golden Tiger Stadium on Friday, October 17.

"They always believe they can win, and they love and care about each other enough that they don't want to let each other down—and that goes a long way."



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The **FFP Athlete of the Week** for Oct. 6-11 is Russellville volleyball's Laila Hill. The senior recorded a match-high 25 kills in the Lady Golden Tigers' come-from-behind 3-2 win over area rival West Point on Oct. 7. The win clinched home-court advantage for RHS in the upcoming area tournament.

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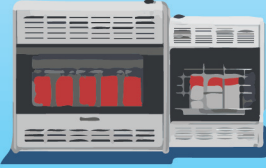
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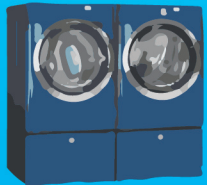


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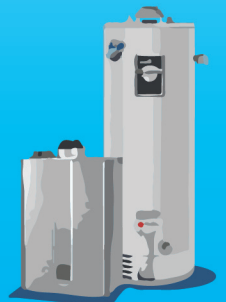
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Four local cross country teams compete at Decatur-hosted Dew It On the Trails meet

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Cross country student-athletes from Belgreen, Russellville, Tharptown, and Vina competed at the Dew It On the Trails meet, hosted by Decatur High School at Point Mallard Park in Decatur, on Saturday, October 11. The four teams from Franklin County were among the over 70 programs participating. The meet consisted of girls' and boys' one mile, junior varsity 5k, and varsity 5k races.

Belgreen had three girls and four boys compete in their respective varsity 5k races. On the girls' side Briseyda Luna led the Lady Bulldogs with a 21st place finish, completing the event in 22:31.48. Luna had the best varsity finish among competing local runners. Finishing up behind her were Elizabeth Motes (51st; 23:59.55) and Lilibeth Cruz (135th; 32:07.20).

Belgreen's boys were led by Miguel Perez, who came in 72nd with a time of 20:01.78, and Jose Gabriel Estrada, who placed 74th at 20:06.17. Skylar Hardy (159th; 23:28.66) and Aaron Rubido (164th; 23:58.93) also competed for the Bulldogs.

Memoree Par and Casein James represented BHS in the girls' and boys' one mile run, respectively.

The Russellville Golden Tigers had a large contingent of runners at the meet. For the RHS girls it was Heidy Jacobo who finished first. Jacobo placed 66th overall by finishing the 5k race in 21:14.49. As a team the RHS girls came in 15th place.

Russellville's boys' team had Pascual Felipe leading its charge. Felipe came in 60th place with a time of 17:03.38. Russellville's varsity boys earned a 17th place finish out of 26 qualifying teams.

Tharptown had two girls and nine boys runners participate in the respective 5k races. Sophie Waldrep came in 43rd place for the THS girls with a time of 23:37.19. Isabella Hall finished 87th with a time of 26:33.19.

On the boys' side, Emmanuel Campos was the top finisher for the Wildcats. Campos ended his 5k with a performance good enough for 21st, the best finish among local boys runners. Campos completed the 5k in 18:16.34. Daniel Jimenez (77th; 20:22.26), Melvin Gutierrez (81st; 20:35.12), and Edgar Perez (94th; 20:59.62) also finished in the top 100.

In the JV boys standings Tharptown placed 12th among 24 teams.

Angel Martinez competed in the boys' one mile run for Tharptown.

Vina had six girls runners compete at Dew It On the Trails. Samantha Elders, who placed 102nd with a time of 28:33.92, was the lone Lady Red Devil to race in the 5k.

The other five Vina competitors ran in the one mile race. Lindie Easterling was top among them; she placed 19th with a time of 14:14.41 and had the best one-mile time among local runners. Easterling was joined by teammates Bella Creekmore (71st; 17:47.42), Kinsley Newton (82nd; 18:17.24), Maralynn Peterson (84th; 18:23.51), and Cecilia Rowbottom (97th; 20:29.48) who helped the Lady Red Devils grab a ninth-place team finish in the girls' one mile run standings.

To view all the results from the 2025 Dew It On the Trails cross country meet visit the Alabama Runners website at www.al.milesplit.com



Belgreen's Briseyda Luna finished 21st in the Dew It On the Trails 5k race on October 11. (Courtesy photo)



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