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Bradford leaves legacy as Franklin County Schools' first nurse

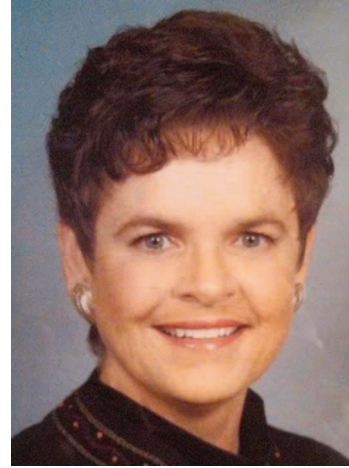
*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

When Franklin County Schools hired its first school nurse in 1982, the choice of Wanda Bradford set the standard for the system's future.

The Franklin County native dedicated herself to doing her best, and bringing out the best in others.

Bradford died November 8th after an extended battle with dementia. She was 72.

In 1989, Bradford was selected as Alabama School Nurse of the Year by the Alabama Association of School Nurses, based in large part on the innovative health program she implemented for all Franklin



Wanda Bradford (Courtesy photo)

See 'BRADFORD,' Page 4

\$500,000 grant will allow Russellville Water & Sewer Board to return to full wastewater treatment capacity

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

A grant announced this week by Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey's office will provide half a million dollars to the Russellville Water and Sewer Board (RWSB) for the final improvements needed to restore its daily wastewater capacity back to full strength of 11 million gallons a day.

That was the previous capacity in the holding pond at the Russellville Sewer Treatment Plant before an Alabama Department of Environmental Management order three years ago prohibited use of the pond until significant improvements were made to it.

With that limited capacity came the

ability to treat only 3.5 million gallons of water a day, a concern in the event the board's customer base saw growth from industry expansion and/or subdivision and new home construction.

The RWSB will match the \$500,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission with \$791,000 of its own funds to complete the two-phase project, the first of which was done last year with a separate \$350,000 Appalachian Regional Commission grant and \$600,000 of RWSB matching funds.

The first grant paid for aeration and baffle curtains that allowed RWSB to put its holding pond back online. Baffle curtains allow treatment plants to improve efficiency by forcing the

See 'RWSB,' Page 4

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Evelyn Janette Stepp, 86, died November 9th at Burns Nursing & Rehab in Russellville. Visitation will be Wednesday, November 12th from 12-2 at Deaton Funeral Home in Red Bay. Funeral will follow at 2 p.m., at Deaton Funeral Home.

Linda Gail Pickard, 73, of Russellville, passed away November 8th. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family with arrangements.

James Douglas "Doug" Reed, 71, of Russellville, passed away November 6th. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Harold Loyd "PeeWee" Washington, 69, of Russellville, passed away on November 5th. A memorial service will be held at a later time. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family with arrangements.

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*The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.
Our publication is available at newsstands and online at no charge.*

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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler:

Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus came back to Capernaum. A group brought a paralyzed man on a bed to Jesus. He saw their faith and first said, "Your sins are forgiven." The religious leaders questioned His right to say something like that.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. He asked if it would be easier to proclaim forgiveness or to tell someone to stand up and walk. He could just say sins were forgiven. No one would be able to see if it happened. But, if He told Him to walk, the power of His word would be evident quickly.

So, Jesus told Him to walk so that they would see that He did, in fact, have the authority to forgive. The man got up and went home.

The crowds were scared and gave God the glory because they saw Jesus possessing such great power.

Lessons to Learn:

The miracles were signs pointing to something bigger. The signs were not the point. What they were pointing to was. The miracles served to testify that Jesus did have authority and that He could indeed forgive sins. When we look at Jesus' miracles, we should reflect on what they show about His identity and His purpose.

Jesus' words of forgiveness show us who He is. This miracle indicated that Jesus was not blaspheming when He forgave sins. Such a declaration of forgiveness was something only God could do. Jesus' authority was not just over nature, disease, or demons. He also has the authority to forgive. If we value His authority to forgive our sins, we should also submit to His authority to guide our lives.

See Jesus' focus on forgiveness here. I wonder how the ones who carried this man reacted when Jesus forgave the paralytic of his sins. Did they say, "That's not why we brought him here?" Was the paralytic disappointed to hear that? Couldn't Jesus see his real problem. But, Jesus shows us what really matters. Walking was a great gift. But, its value would run out, if not because of age, certainly because of death. But, the value of forgiveness would never cease. That man, now dead for 2,000 years, still cherishes his forgiveness! We must make sure our focus, as individuals and local churches, is on addressing the sin problem. If we address health concerns and social issues, but don't call people to repent and find forgiveness in Christ, we're just rearranging the furniture in a burning house. And, while physical health is a blessing, let's make sure our soul prospers. We can be sick and be right with the Lord. We can be healthy and outside of Christ. Let's consider that as we pray.

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'RWSB,' from Page 1

wastewater to take a longer path, increasing retention time.

Russellville Water and Sewer Board General Manager Eric Hill said the final phase will involve installation of new head works screens and a new grit removal system at a total cost of \$1,291,000.

The grant will assist the RWSB in increasing its sewage capacity an additional 7.5 million gallons a day, back to previous capacity. This will return the treatment plant to a capacity well above state-permitted wastewater levels.

"Both grants go hand-in-hand and provided the wastewater plant capacity needed for industrial and residential growth," Hill said.

Ivey said the grant will not only meet the needs of RWSB's current customer base but also for the future.

"The upgrade and expansion of the Russellville sewer treatment plant will ensure the growing needs of businesses and residents are met, as well as being a benefit for future economic development," Ivey said. "I commend the Russellville Water and Sewer Board for taking this step to serve its customers, and I am pleased to announce this grant to help complete the project."

Hill said the RWSB received assistance with the grant application from the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments' Morgan Tittle, Sherye Price with the Franklin County Development Authority and letters of support for the project from Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville), officials with G&G Steel, Southeastern Commercial Fabricators, LLC, Russellville City Schools, and several individuals in the community. Hill also expressed appreciation to his board for supporting the grant application and the capacity expansion project.

The plant services 2,552 residential customers and 616 commercial customers, according to the governor's press release.

"I would like to thank and congratulate Eric Hill, General Manager of the Russellville Water and Sewer Board and the board members for applying for and being awarded the grant," said Russellville Mayor David Grissom. "And special thanks to Governor Ivey and ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell for helping the city secure the ARC funds."

Hill hopes to let the final phase out to bid by year end, he said.

'BRADFORD,' from Page 1

County Schools.

That program was designed to include health screenings, home visits and health education programs for Franklin County students.

Bradford remained with Franklin County Schools until 1992 when the University of North Alabama, from which she graduated in 1980, hired Bradford as an associate professor who taught Community Health Nursing.

Bradford also helped coordinate UNA's online Registered Nurse (RN) to Bachelor of Science (BSN) four-year academic degree program.

A BSN is a more comprehensive degree that includes leadership and management skills that can lead to higher earning potential and more career options compared to an RN.

Bradford earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from UNA, then began pursuit of her Master's Degree at the University of Alabama Huntsville. After she earned her Doctorate in Nursing from Rush University in Chicago, Bradford would be promoted to Department Chair of UNA's Online Nursing Department.

During her 33-year association with UNA, Bradford created a legacy that will never be forgotten. UNA's online BSN program opened the doors to future nurses who, for a variety of reasons, could only have pursued such a degree online.

As important as her career was to Bradford, family came first. She is survived by her husband of almost 45 years, Howard Bradford. The couple had two daughters, Donna Hines (Shawn Sr.) and Katina Bradford Petree, a former Tharptown Elementary School first grade teacher who was part of the school's first kindergarten class, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren and a very special aunt, Doris Sockwell Craig.

"Her family was just everything to her, especially the old house she and my dad remodeled that was built in the 1800s and was her grandparents' home," Katina said.

"She absolutely loved that place and all her family being there. She always had the Sockwell (her mother's maiden name) family reunions there until they grew too big and it had to be moved. She also loved nursing and helping people. She would help anyone day or night any way and every way she could," she added.

Her grandchildren include Brooke Vandiver, Shawn Hines, Jr. (Savannah), Brady Petree (Stacy), Carson Petree (Gracey), Macy Petree (Devin), Patrick Hines and Hollie Hines. Her great-grandchildren are Chancellor "Chance" Hines, Lakely Hine and Elizabeth "Ellie" Petree.

Bradford was preceded in death by her parents, Billy and Mary Quinn, siblings Steve and Randy Quinn, grandson Chance Vandiver and stepson Stephen Bradford.

Bradford delighted in planning family get-togethers, whether it be for holidays, birthdays or any other occasion. Some of her fondest days came just sitting on the front porch with Howard as they watched what was going on in their Bethsadia community.

Bradford also loved family vacations, particularly at her special oasis of St. George Island in Florida.

"My parents just happened upon that place one time coming back from taking my niece to Disney World," Katina recalls. "They stayed there a day or two and fell in love with it. She planned on buying a house down there after she retired, but that never happened. But it was truly her little piece of Heaven on earth."

Bradford also loved gardening, Alabama Crimson Tide football and her beloved dog Lucy.

Her grandson Brady Petree recalled his grandmother's dedication to her garden.

"She really took pride in that garden, as she possessed our family's 'green-thumb,' and she was often able to nurse plants back to health when seemingly no one else could," Petree said.

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\$46,000 grant to allow Franklin County Water Service Authority to purchase replacement tank

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A grant announced Gov. Kay Ivey's office this week will help the Franklin County Water Service Authority (FCWSA) replace a leaking fiberglass tank at its water treatment plant in western Franklin County.

The \$46,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission will be matched by the FCWSA to fund the \$92,000 cost of replacing one of the plant's three tanks used to filter water through a calcite filter. The tanks also contain limestone. After the water is treated, its alkalinity is stripped out causing it to have a low ph.

When the treated water goes through the limestone, it reaccumulates that lost alkalinity. Most water treatment plants feed lime into their treated water to increase its ph, but the FCWSA's tanks use limestone instead.

One of FCWSA's three tanks is new, having been installed early this year. One is functioning properly and one needs replacing, according to FCWSA's Manager Steve Swinney.

"These tanks are very unusual," Swinney said. "Our plant was built different than just about any other. We need water to be at a neutral ph or a little over. Most plants feed lime, so this is just a different way of doing it."

A ph of 7.0 is neutral and the Environmental Protection Agency recommends municipal drinking water have a ph between 6.5 and 8.5.

The \$92,000 project will ensure better water quality for FCWSA's 1,681 households and the 16 businesses it serves, as well as some Marion County residents in the Bull Mountain community, which is expected to be supplied water from FCWSA starting sometime in 2026.

Marion County officials obtained a \$1,000,000 grant to install approximately six miles of lines to connect to the water supply in the Town of Vina, which purchases its water from Franklin County Water Service Authority. The expansion into Marion County will provide much-needed additional income for the FCWSA.

"We have done our budget for the coming year and, unless some catastrophic event hits us, everything looks okay for next year," Swinney said. "Marion County officials say they're still on track to be purchasing water by this time next year."

Swinney said the expansion into Marion County will provide water service to an unserved community that must rely on well water.

"The use rate range is between 75,000 and 100,000 gallons a day. That's not a tremendous amount of water, but the area it's going to has more than 500 people who don't have access to public water," Swinney said.

"Marion County received grant monies to get water to every resident who wants it. The potential for growth is really big as far as residential water service in that community," he added.

Ivey said the Franklin County grant was awarded to help ensure the FCWSA plant can continue to provide reliable service to the homes and businesses that depend on it.

"I commend local leaders in Franklin County for their dedication to improving the safety and reliability of their utilities," Ivey said.

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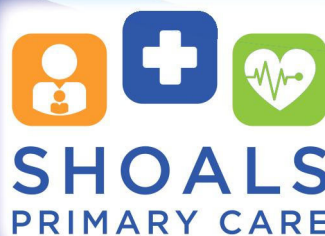
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Bids in sealed envelopes clearly marked "Lawn Care Service Bids", should be mailed to the Russellville Housing Authority, P.O. Box 966, Russellville, Alabama 35653, or delivered to 73 Flippen Street, Russellville, Alabama 35653, in time to be opened and publicly read aloud at 9:00 a.m. on December 3, 2025. Bids received after this deadline will not be opened and shall not be considered. Any questions, comments, or requests to schedule a site inspection can contact Omar Tompkins at (256) 332-1561.

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Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling Hams for Thanksgiving. Butts are \$35 each and may be pre-ordered by dialing (256) 810-1970. Pickup is Wednesday, Nov. 26 between 8-10am at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.



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From Exposure to Action: Alabama Needs a Mesothelioma Registry to Protect Its Veterans

Jonathan Sharp
for the Franklin Free Press

Long after ending their military service and hanging up their uniforms, veterans in Franklin County, Alabama, and across the nation are fighting an invisible enemy called mesothelioma. It's a rare and aggressive cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. For many, this exposure occurred decades ago during their military service, when asbestos was everywhere around them, from naval ships and aircraft hangars to barracks, insulation, and vehicle parts.

Even though science has long confirmed the deadly link between asbestos and mesothelioma, the U.S. still lacks a national registry to identify and track at-risk veterans. Such a system could help the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proactively detect potentially affected veterans and provide timely, life-prolonging care to those who served their country.

Each year, 3,000 new mesothelioma cases are identified in the U.S., and veterans make up nearly 30% of them, a striking figure that highlights how deeply asbestos was embedded in military life. For decades, the armed forces relied on asbestos as a "miracle material" for its durability and fire resistance. These qualities, along with its cheap manufacturing process, made it ideal for infrastructure and equipment construction.

But when asbestos particles are inhaled or ingested, they lodge in the linings of the lungs, heart, and stomach, causing chronic inflammation and scarring. Over time, even 20 to 50 years after the exposure, this mineral starts altering the cellular structures, which leads to malignant tumors and mesothelioma. Due to the long latency of this disease, veterans who served way back in the 1960s to 1980s are only now being diagnosed.

After the 1980s asbestos ban, hundreds of military bases began cleanup programs. Still, for Alabama veterans who served at facilities such as Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base or Fort McClellan, with clear asbestos exposure history, the damage was already done.

Between 1999 and 2017, Alabama reported over 3,800 asbestos-related deaths, with more than 600 directly tied to mesothelioma, according to CDC data. Even in the small community of Franklin County, the estimated number of asbestos-related deaths was 38.

If these numbers seem small, that's mostly because they only represent the reported and confirmed cases. They could be significantly higher if only the healthcare providers could have a registry to link the veterans' condition to their asbestos exposure from the start.

Unfortunately, without knowing about the patient's service history, pathologists often fall into the trap of misdiagnosis. That is mainly because the initial symptoms of mesothelioma, such as shortness of breath, chest pains, coughing, or digestive problems, are mistaken for far more common illnesses such as pneumonia, bronchitis, lung cancer, or acid reflux.

Studies have shown that mesothelioma cases are misdiagnosed in up to 80% of cases at the first stage and 70% at the second stage of the disease. Even in the third and fourth stages of the illness, misdiagnosis rates are highly concerning as well, at 35.4% and 12.8% respectively. This situation leads to delayed diagnosis and treatment, drastically shortening the veterans' life expectancy.

For veterans in small communities like Franklin County, this challenge is even greater. Rural hospitals often lack specialists experienced in diagnosing mesothelioma, forcing patients to travel long distances for proper care. Tragically, for many, the diagnosis is coming too late to explore all the possible treatment options.

A national mesothelioma registry could change this tragic and unfair cycle. By integrating the VA medical records with the Department of Defense's (DoD) service history information, such a registry would allow doctors to identify veterans with potential asbestos exposure in the early stages of the disease. This would provide veterans with faster diagnoses, specialized treatment, and ultimately, longer lives among their loved ones.

Beyond a more effective identification system, the registry would provide researchers and policymakers with vital data to better understand the extent of this health crisis. It would help federal institutions run compensation and support programs, ensuring that the veterans and their families receive the benefits and recognition they deserve.

Creating a mesothelioma registry is a moral obligation, not just a bureaucratic initiative. It's a promise that the government won't abandon the very people who protected our lives and democracy. With simple cooperation among federal organizations, they can finally close the gap between sacrifice and support, ensuring that veterans in Franklin County and across the nation receive the medical care, justice, and recognition for their suffering.

About the Author:

Jonathan Sharp is the CFO of the Environmental Litigation Group P.C., a law firm in Birmingham, Alabama, that provides legal services to victims exposed to toxic chemicals.



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Russellville City Council approves mayor's reappointment of Miller, Hargett and Mansell

John Pilati

Franklin Free Press

At the first meeting of the new City of Russellville administration, the agenda consisted primarily of procedural matters that must be done once the new mayor and council take office.

At the November 3rd meeting, Mayor David Grissom re-appointed Danny McDowell as City Attorney for the upcoming four year term at a monthly compensation of \$2,000.

Grissom also reappointed Cliff Wright as Russellville Municipal Court Judge and Eddie Beason as Municipal Prosecutor, both at a monthly compensation of \$1,400.

Belinda Miller was reappointed as City Clerk/Treasurer, Joe Mansell as Russellville Fire Department Chief and Chris Hargett as Russellville Police Department Chief.

All of Grissom's appointments were approved by the city council.

District Three City Councilman Gary Cummings was elected as Mayor Pro-Tempore, to stand in whenever Grissom is absent.

In other agenda items, the council:

—extended the job application deadline for Patrol Officer in the Russellville Police Department until November 17, 2025.

—approved holding council meetings the first and third Monday of each month, except those dates that fall on recognized holidays, when the meeting will be held the following Tuesday. Work sessions will begin at 6 p.m., and meeting will follow.

—approved the lowest responsible bid from Rogers Group, Inc., for Hot Plant Mix to be sold and delivered to the Russellville Street Department.

—approved a claim by Russellville resident Jonathan Wilson for \$2,285.55 for damages to his vehicle incurred on Adams/Seminole Street when Wilson met another vehicle and was forced to pull to one side of the road to let it pass. His claim alleged the edge of the roadway was breaking away and incurred tire and rim damage as a result.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be Monday, November 17th, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Bowen named 2025 Factory Sales Representative of the Year by manufactured housing professional association

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Spruce Pine husband and father Cody Bowen generally succeeds in whatever venture he undertakes.

A standout athlete at Russellville High School in the early 2000s, Bowen has also seen success as a singer/songwriter and has a songwriting contract with CDX Nashville.

Bowen's latest accolade comes in his professional career with TRU Homes of Alabama, where he joined the company, a subsidiary of Clayton Homes, as a materials manager in 2022.

The following year, Bowen joined the TRU Homes sales force. Bowen now services retail accounts throughout the Southeast for TRU Homes, with a sales territory of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri and portions of Georgia and Tennessee.

And he was recently named the 2025 Factory Sales Representative of the Year by the Arkansas Manufactured Housing Association at its Annual Meeting and Convention held October 22-23rd in Hot Springs.

Bowen was the lone individual to receive the award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the association and to the manufactured housing industry as a whole.

Clayton Homes of Savannah, Tenn., also received the association's 2025 Manufacturer of the Year award.

A native of Spruce Pine, Bowen is the son of Johnny Bowen and Jadonna Bowen. He and his wife Joshlyn have four children—Triston, Bailey, Jaiden and Alivia.

Bowen said the award meant so much because it's decided by the very customers he serves.

"I'm beyond honored to receive this award. This one is perhaps more special because it's voted on by my retail customers. So in my role there is no greater feeling than having those people that you service think that highly of you," Bowen said.

Bowen said his work ethic and constant desire to improve how he serves his customers is something he learned as a youth working for his father Johnny's lawn care business.

"There are several things that I learned in my younger years working for my dad's business that have translated into what I do now, treating people right, attention to details and the small things, a drive to be better each day," Bowen said.

"But I have several things that make my role easier as well and allow me to focus on my retail partners. I work for an amazing company with resources that are second to none. I'm blessed to have the best General Manager and mentor in the business that anyone could ask for in John Mitchell. My sales team at TRU Alabama are the absolute best around, so having all of those things makes it much easier to keep things rolling in the right direction," Bowen added.

The Arkansas Manufactured Housing Association, established in 1967, has as its goal the protection and promotion of the state's manufactured home industry through legislative representation, industry and consumer education, public relations and communication efforts.



Courtesy photo

Theft trial for former Frog Pond Fire Chief continued again

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The case against a man accused of embezzling more than \$16,000 from the Frog Pond Volunteer Fire Department has again been rescheduled for a third time at the defendant's request.

Jamie Russell Bingham, 37, was indicted by a Franklin County Grand Jury in April 2024 on one felony charge of Theft of Property 1st Degree. Bingham was charged after an investigation by the Franklin County Sheriff's Office that allegedly showed Bingham, from 2022-2023, had misappropriated approximately \$16,000 of the volunteer fire department's funds.

Sheriff's investigator Clint Holcombe was contacted by officers with the Frog Pond VFD in January 2024 concerned about Bingham misusing funds while he served as Frog Pond VFD Fire Chief.

"He is accused of misappropriating funds belonging to the fire department by using them for personal expenses unrelated to his duties as fire chief," Holcombe said.

"We found some discrepancies in their records and bookkeeping that support the allegations. The fire department had a treasurer but Bingham was accessing the funds without going through any channels," Holcombe added.

One FPDVFD member told the *FFP* the department continues to face financial difficulty in paying its bills almost two years after the Sheriff's Office began its investigation.

If convicted, Bingham faces a sentence of 2-20 years, a fine and an order of restitution.

As with all defendants charged with a crime, Bingham is presumed innocent until or unless proven guilty in a court of law.

Bingham is represented by Florence attorney Tim Case.



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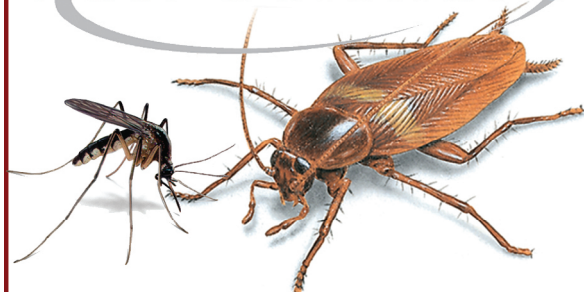
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Phil Campbell's football campaign ended by No. 2 Piedmont in first round

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity football team's 2025 season came to a close on Thursday night after the Bobcats were beaten on the road by No. 2 Piedmont 59-19.

The game was the last in a campaign that saw Phil Campbell reach a final 6-5 record, the program's first winning season since 2022; score a record-setting 76 points in single game in a region win over Hanceville; and score a record 387 total points, the most any PCHS team has scored in one season.

In the game against Piedmont, the Bobcats fell behind early to the undefeated Bulldogs and trailed 59-6 at the halftime break.

Phil Campbell's lone first half score came early in the game on a short touchdown pass from junior quarterback Hayston Scott to receiver Austin Elliott. The score followed a long kickoff return that gave the Bobcats' offense possession at the Piedmont two yard line to start the drive. The touchdown made it 8-6, Piedmont, at the time.

The next two touchdowns for PCHS were scored in the third quarter.

Early in the second half, Scott completed another short touchdown pass to Elliott, this time from eight yards out, to cut Piedmont's lead to 59-13 after the extra point. The final touchdown of the game was scored with 1:40 left in the third when Scott hit senior

See, 'BOBCATS,' Page 14

Red Bay crushes Sand Rock for first postseason win since 2020

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Red Bay's five-year wait for a home playoff game at Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium ended on Thursday night, as did the wait for a postseason victory. In the opening round of the AHSAA Class 2A football playoffs, the Tigers routed the visiting Sand Rock Wildcats 53-14 to improve to 9-2 on the season and advance to the second round for the first time since 2020.

"This means a lot," said Red Bay head coach Tyler Jeffreys, who has orchestrated the program's total turnaround in his first season. "I don't think there's been (a playoff game) here in five years, and we just preached to the kids, 'don't worry about the score, just play as hard as you can'—and we did that. That, to me, means everything."

Red Bay got off to a fast start in the game.

After the Tiger defense forced a Sand Rock three-and-out, the Red Bay offense needed just one play from scrimmage to get on the scoreboard. For those who have kept up with RBHS all season, it will come as no surprise that it was the senior running back Jaxon Vinson who opened the scoring on a 52-yard run to make it 7-0 with 9:41 left in the first quarter.

Red Bay's next offensive possession did not go as well as the first, however.

Senior quarterback Jeremiah Thorne threw an interception to give Sand Rock the ball right back after the RBHS defense was able to get a turnover on downs. The visitors took advantage of the turnover and the good field position that came along with it, driving 46 yards to tie the game up on a 20-yard pass from quarterback Alec Ashley to receiver Alex Stone.

Apart from the interception, a mistake the RBHS head coach took the blame for—"That was my fault. It was a bad call by me," Jeffreys said—and a few penalties, the Tigers played mostly mistake-free football.

See, 'RED BAY,' Page 13

'Gutsy' Golden Tigers earn comeback 29-28 overtime playoff win vs. No. 10 Boaz

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Down 14-0 to No. 10 Boaz (8-3) with just over nine minutes left in the third quarter of a win-or-go-home first round playoff game, things were looking pretty bleak at Golden Tiger Stadium for the Russellville High School varsity football team (7-4) on Friday, November 7.

An extremely lackluster first half by the RHS offense—featuring three punts and two turnovers on downs—was only slightly offset by a tremendous display by the Golden Tiger defense which allowed just seven points and forced two punts and a turnover (an interception by freshman Drake Ergle) in the first half.

To compound things, coming out of the halftime break down a score, the Russellville offense, once it got the ball back after a Boaz three-and-out, had a disastrous beginning to its third quarter.

Sophomore quarterback Whit Goodwin was strip sacked and the fumble recovery was returned by Boaz down to the RHS five-yard line. From there the Pirates were able to easily march it in to take a 14-0 lead with 9:07 to go in the third.

"It's not a secret to our kids: We did not play well offensively for two and a half quarters," Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin told the Franklin Free Press. "Even when we did do something well or got a drive going, we'd make a mistake and put ourselves in long-yardage situations which are hard to overcome in games like this."

"We went in at halftime and I told them that there was going to be a storm. There's always going to be storms in games like this, but you just have to take a step back, take a deep breath and keep on fighting," he added.

See, 'OVERTIME,' Page 12

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'OVERTIME,' from Page 11

Down two scores and with their backs against the wall, Russellville's defense still continued to battle to get the football back to its offense. On Boaz's next possession after the touchdown, the Golden Tiger defense forced the Pirates to punt, and an unnecessary roughness penalty gave RHS great field position at the Boaz 40-yard line.

The Golden Tigers took advantage of the short field and a couple plays later were finally able to score on a 36-yard passing touchdown from Goodwin to senior receiver Connor Devaney to make it 14-7 with 10 seconds left in the third quarter.

Russellville was back in the fold.

But another Russellville mistake two possessions later—a thrown interception—had the Golden Tigers teetering again on the verge of falling two scores behind with under six minutes to play.

After the interception, Boaz took possession on the RHS 15-yard line and was in prime position to put the ball back in the endzone.

Right on cue, though, the RHS defense came to the rescue again, pushing the Pirates back, getting a sack, and forcing the visitors into a 40-yard field goal attempt which was missed wide left.

It was yet another break for the Golden Tigers, but unlike the others they'd had in the game, Russellville was able to take advantage of this one.

Starting at their own 20-yard line, the Golden Tigers drove the ball down the field and—after a long run by junior running back Tarus Davis set it up—Goodwin ran the ball in from a yard out to make it 14-13, Boaz.

The extra point would have tied the game up at 14 all, but David Tomas' second missed extra point of the season would, of course, come at the most dramatic time possible. The PAT was doinked off the goal post and that left RHS down 14-13 with 4:58 to play.

The missed extra point was an example of a moment when the Golden Tigers could've folded and ceded the game to the Pirates. But Goodwin said his team wasn't going down without a fight.

"I'm not saying there was never anybody that had a doubt or that there wasn't any frustration, but when the rubber meets the road and it's time to act, I thought our kids continued to fight," he said. "That's never a question with these guys.

"We have that 'never panic' mentality, and I saw a lot of that on our sideline tonight," he added.

"If there's time on the clock, there's time to get the job done."

In the remaining five minutes of regulation, A LOT transpired.

Boaz had not one but two opportunities to ice the game, and similarly the Golden Tigers had two chances to take (and hold) the lead. Neither happened.

On Boaz's next possession, sophomore linebacker Braxton Duncan picked off Boaz's quarterback. Unfortunately for RHS, the Golden Tigers were pushed back because of a chop block penalty—a penalty that Goodwin didn't agree with—which chalked off a go-ahead touchdown. The Golden Tigers were ultimately forced to punt on that drive.

Still down by a point, the Russellville defense got yet another stop after Boaz regained possession.

With less than two minutes to play now, Russellville took over on the Boaz 43-yard line and, after a 34-yard pass from Goodwin to senior Bryson Cooper, Goodwin was able to scramble into the endzone from four yards out to give Russellville its first lead of the game with 1:05 remaining.

RHS went for two and converted on a pass from Goodwin to senior Ben Pounders to make it 21-14.

Still, it's wasn't over.

For the first time since Boaz's opening drive of the game, the Golden Tiger defense, with less than a minute to play, allowed the Pirates to drive down the field and score.

As time expired, Boaz connected on a 21-yard touchdown pass and then made the ensuing extra point to tie the game up 21-21.

"It was a wild night. These games are crazy. That's why you never quit, why you never let your guard down," Goodwin said. "As we saw tonight and in games across the state the last two days, these games are never over."

After the Pirates tied the game up to send the contest to overtime, Goodwin gathered his entire team up in a huddle on the sideline to give one simple message:

"We've found a way to get to this point," he said. "Yeah, we gave up the game-tying touchdown to send us to overtime, but we were behind and we've found a way to get to this point.

"I just told them to continue to fight. We deserved to win this game and told them to just do the job that they were called to do—and they answered that call," he added.

Russellville deferred on the overtime coin toss and went on defense to start the overtime period.

It didn't take long for Boaz to reach the endzone and give the Pirates a 28-21 lead after the extra point.

But then it was Russellville's turn. And the Golden Tigers didn't wait around to score either with Goodwin rushing in on first down to make it 28-27.

Initially, Russellville was content to send the PAT team out there to tie things up. But Boaz, remembering the earlier missed extra point, decided to call its timeout in the hopes of "freezing" the kicker. That decision, it turns out, didn't pan out well for the Pirates.

The timeout break, Goodwin said, allowed him to gather up his small group of senior players. With the season on the line, Goodwin (who hasn't had the best experience with overtime games in his time at Russellville) gave the decision over to his upperclassmen—their high school careers on the line—and they delivered their verdict.

"We were gonna kick the extra point, but when (Boaz) called timeout it allowed us to get our seniors together. Our seniors decided they wanted to go for two, so that's exactly what we did," Goodwin said.

Fittingly enough, though it was a sophomore quarterback that took the snap, it was a senior receiver that caught the game-winning two-point pass. Rolling out to his right, Goodwin found Devaney wide open in the back corner of the endzone for a simple pitch-and-catch to win the game, 29-28, and send the Golden Tigers to the second round of the Class 5A playoffs.

"These guys always believe they can win, which I think is a great characteristic to have," said Goodwin, who earned his 50th career win as a head coach. "Even in the bad moments, we get just a little bit of momentum and take it one play at a time.

"Things never got out of control because I think deep down they know that they've worked hard to be where they're at and to get the job done and that there's always a chance," he added. "We preached to our guys to keep fighting and they did, and ultimately we were able to be victorious because of it.

The win sends the Golden Tigers to the second round of the playoffs for the fifth time in six years. Russellville will travel to Briarwood Christian, a program Russellville has plenty of history with, for the round two game.

"It's been really fun to see the smiling faces in the field house tonight and for these guys to know that their hard work has paid off. They deserved this win tonight, but I know they won't take it for granted. They'll be excited and ready to get back to work on Monday," Goodwin said.

'RED BAY' from Page 11

Red Bay did not allow the game-tying touchdown to phase them. On the Tigers' very next possession, Vinson scored his second rushing touchdown of the night on a 45-yard scamper to make it 14-7.

And once the Tigers retook the lead, they never looked back.

Thorne, after throwing a pick earlier, made up for it with an interception of his own on defense. In addition to the turnover, Red Bay forced three Sand Rock punts during the game and three turnovers on downs.

"Our defense stepped up and played really well tonight—and they're going to have to continue to do that," Jeffreys told the Franklin Free Press.

Thorne's defensive takeaway eventually led to a third rushing score for Vinson after the senior powered it over the line from a yard out, giving RBHS a 21-7 advantage with 3:30 left in the half.

The Red Bay defense came up big again on Sand Rock's next possession, forcing a punt with 40 seconds left before halftime.

The Tigers only needed about 20 of those seconds, though.

A couple plays after the punt Thorne threw his 10th passing touchdown of the year, hitting sophomore receiver Davien Colburn down the sideline for the 54-yard score to make it 28-7.

Explosive plays were massive for the Red Bay offense in the game. As has been the case all season, it was Vinson and Colburn who continually made them throughout the night.

"I think (the explosive plays) are huge for us. And I'm really proud of our offensive line for protecting and blocking for Jaxon and (Colburn)," Jeffreys said. "Those two guys are really good players. You know, (Colburn) is just a sophomore, and he's still got a little learning to do, but he has come out of his shell and played really, really hard. Jaxon is the same way.

"Having those guys makes it a lot easier to call plays," he added.

After the halftime intermission, Red Bay received the kickoff to start the third quarter. A couple plays later, Colburn got his second touchdown reception of the night on a 52-yard pass from Thorne to make it 36-7 after the two-point conversion.

A 31-yard field goal by Thorne put the Tigers up 39-14 with 2:02 remaining in the third, and then a 10-yard run by sophomore running back Joshua Thorne (set up by another long reception by Colburn) gave RBHS a 46-14 advantage early in the fourth quarter.

Red Bay's final touchdown of the night came on a 31-yard rush by freshman running back Andre Brownlee with 7:04 left.

The blowout win and his team's effort—in all phases of the game—left Jeffreys with a smile at the end of the contest.

"I thought we played really hard and I think we played really well," he said. "We made some mistakes...but our kids played really hard and I'm super proud of them.

"I'm really excited for this bunch," Jeffreys added.

The result in the team's first home playoff game in five years sets the Tigers up to host again in the second round of the playoffs next Friday. It will be the first time RBHS has hosted back-to-back playoffs games since 2019.

On November 14 the Tigers will welcome the Southeastern Mustangs to Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium. Southeastern eliminated Red Bay from the playoffs last season, beating RBHS 47-0. Red Bay, 7-0 at home this campaign, will look to avoid that same fate this time around.

Jeffreys said he's looking forward to another home game as his team tries to keep the season going for as long as they can.

"I think (the atmosphere) was great tonight, and I think it will be even bigger next week with it being a Friday night," Jeffreys said.

"I think we have to take how hard we played in this game into next week. The mistakes that we did make tonight, we've got to limit those and keep working to get better. Each week is going to get harder and harder and each team we play is going to get better and better, and we have to get better along with them," he added.

"I don't want to get complacent. I want us to keep going because I'm not ready for this season to end."

Four Russellville volleyball standouts earn AHSVCA All-State nods

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Four Russellville High School varsity volleyball players were named to the Alabama High School Volleyball Coaches Association (AHSVCA) Class 5A All-State team, the organization announced on Monday, November 3.

Sophomores Bri McCulloch and Blevyn Sappington and seniors Laila Hill and Fatima Ramirez were the four Lady Golden Tigers to receive recognition from the state's coaches. McCulloch, the team's libero, was tapped for the All-State Second Team, while Hill, Ramirez, and Sappington were named Honorable Mentions.

"Having four athletes recognized at the state level is a tremendous accomplishment," Russellville head coach Madison Lamon told the *Franklin Free Press*. "These girls have worked tirelessly all season and have been outstanding leaders for our program. I couldn't be prouder of what they've achieved so far and can't wait to continue to watch them grow on the court, on the field and in life, as well."

McCulloch, who finished her 2025 season with the program record for career and single-season digs, led the entire state of Alabama in that category, according to MaxPreps.com. The sophomore finished the year with 894 digs which, as of writing, was the fourth best tally in the entire nation, according to MaxPreps.

The senior outside hitter Hill led the RHS attack this campaign with a team-high 450 kills, good for an average of 3.2 kills per set. She also set a new program record for kills in a season.

Sappington was right behind Hill in kills, finishing second on the team with 366 for the year. The sophomore outside hitter also recorded a team-best 80 aces and was second on the team in digs behind McCulloch.

Ramirez was pivotal in aiding both players in their attacks, finishing her senior campaign with 576 assists, also a new program single-season record. The setter didn't just set up attacks, though; she contributed to the team all over with 108 kills, 61 aces, and 337 digs.

All four All-State Lady Golden Tiger players were crucial to the team's overall success in 2025, helping lead RHS to many triumphs including a 41-win season, a first-ever area tournament title, and the longest playoff run for the team in decades.

According to available records online, Hill, McCulloch, Ramirez, and Sappington are the first four All-State players for Russellville since Janet West in 1979.

'BOBCATS,' from Page 11

receiver Hagen Raper for a 20-yard score.

Scott, who is fifth in the state in all classifications in total yards, finished the night with seven completions for 56 yards, three touchdowns, and an interception. Elliott, who caught five of Scott's passes, ended the game with 33 yards receiving and two touchdowns.

The quarterback also led his team in the ground attack with six carries for 86 yards. Braxton Downey added five carries for 12 yards for the Bobcats.

The morning after Phil Campbell's final game of 2025, Bobcats' head coach Jacob Hamilton reflected on the season—his third in charge of the program.

"It was a great year, and we accomplished our goals of having a winning season and making the playoffs. Everybody wants to make a run at it, but you have to take these things as they come, one step at a time," Hamilton said.

"When you first take a (head coaching) job, everybody says, 'You can't change your seniors, you can try to mold your juniors, but everything else is yours.' Well, this is year three so the seniors this year and everyone below them are mine," he added. "I told them last night that they've made their mark on this program, and they've set the standard for years to come.

"(This season) and what we've done is a big credit to our players and our coaches," Hamilton said, listing off his team's accomplishments.

"Now (the players) know what to expect—what the expectations are—and know what they can do, and we can build on that and be even better next year."



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Phil Campbell senior Leela Baker scored her 1,000th career point in the Lady Bobcats' season opener against Tharptown on November 10. (Courtesy: Phil Campbell High School)

NWSCC Adult Education announces Rx Ready Scholarship opportunity

Submitted

The Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) Adult Education program, in partnership with the Women's Foundation of Alabama, is offering a new RX Ready scholarship for individuals interested in pursuing a career as a Pharmacy Technician.

This scholarship opportunity is open to students within the NWSCC five county (Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence and Winston) service area who are ready to begin a career in the healthcare field.

According to Crissy Broadway, NWSCC Manager Adult Education Workforce Initiatives, individuals can enroll in Pharmacy Technician training without the scholarship. "We encourage everyone interested in becoming a pharmacy technician to attend one of our interest meetings on November 18th."

Interest meetings will be held on Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on the Shoals Campus in Building 103, George Wallace Blvd., Muscle Shoals, AL 35661.

Attendees will learn about program requirements, scholarship eligibility, and next steps for enrollment.

To register for the interest meeting, visit <https://alabama.getconnectable.com/northwest-shoals-adult-education/start> . For more information, contact 256-331-8035.



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Possession of a valid Alabama Drivers License

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

THE CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER. ALL QUALIFIED APPLICANTS WILL RECEIVE CONSIDERATION WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE, RELIGION, COLOR, SEX, NATIONAL ORIGIN, POLITICAL AFFILIATION, DISABILITY, OR ANY OTHER NON-MERIT FACTOR. THE CITY OF RUSSELLVILLE ENCOURAGES APPLICATIONS FOR POSITIONS IN ALL PROTECTIVE SERVICE DEPARTMENTS FROM WOMEN IN AN ATTEMPT TO INCREASE THEIR REPRESENTATION IN PROTECTIVE SERVICE DEPARTMENTS.

Pay Range is from \$46,278.96 – 71,384.18.

Applications and copies of the Job Descriptions may be obtained at the Russellville City Hall, Office of the Mayor, 304 North Jackson Avenue. Applications submitted to the Russellville Civil Service Board less than one year ago remain active. Those individuals do not need to reapply in order to receive consideration for this appointment. They need to call the city hall and ask to pull their application. Applications must be returned no later than November 17, 2025, by U.S.

Mail to:

**The Russellville Civil Service Board
P. O. Box 308
Russellville, AL 35653**

The appointees will be required to successfully complete a physical examination including drug and alcohol screening prior to employment.