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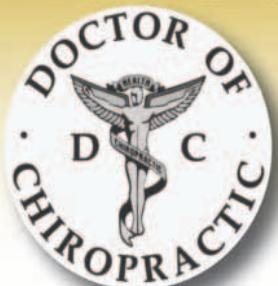
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New Postal Service postmark policy can create unexpected late fees on payments sent through the mail

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

With recent changes in the United States Postal Service's postmark rule, Franklin County Probate Judge wants residents to be aware of the new rules in an effort to avoid unexpected late fees when paying monthly solid waste fees or property taxes.

Moore and the Franklin County Commission discussed the new policy at the commission's January 12th work session.

The USPS postmark rule change took effect December 24, 2025. Essentially, the new policy clarifies that a postmark reflects the date mail enters a USPS regional sorting facil-

ity, NOT when the postal customer drops the mail off. The Postal Service said the change was necessary due to 'network consolidation.'

This policy change can impact deadlines for bills, taxes, ballots and other time-sensitive mail, meaning the mail now needs to be sent several days earlier, although the customer can enter the post office and ask for a hand-stamped postmark representing the deposit date.

Otherwise, it may be several days after you drop a check in the mail before it's postmarked, creating the risk of late fees being added to the account.

The new policy applies to all domestic mail.

See 'POSTMARK,' Page 4

Franklin County woman sentenced to 60 month federal prison sentence on fraudulent identity and voter registration charges

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

A Franklin County woman who fraudulently assumed the identity of a United States citizen and voted in multiple elections was sentenced to 60 months in prison by a United States District Court last week.

Angelica Maria Francisco, 42, of Russellville, pled guilty to two counts of false claims of citizenship in connection with voting, one count of false statements in application for a United States passport, five counts of use of a United States passport

obtained by false statements and one count of aggravated identity theft.

Francisco entered that plea in September 2024 and sentencing was delayed until January 2026.

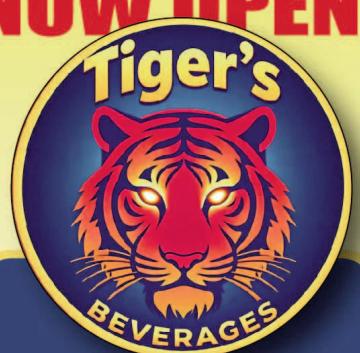
In 2011, Francisco assumed the identity of a United States citizen and used that false identity to obtain a passport, which she used to travel to and from Guatemala in 2012, 2015 and 2018.

She used that same false identity and registered to vote in Alabama in 2016, casting ballots in the 2016 and 2020 primary and general elections.

See 'FRAUD' Page 4



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Thomas Wayne Boyd, Sr., 87, of Florence, passed away January 14th at Glenwood Healthcare and Rehab Center. Akins Funeral Home assisted the family with arrangements.

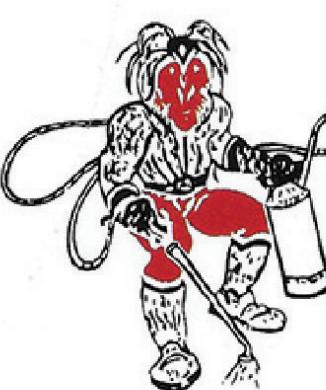
Barbara Elaine Hutcheson, 80, of Spruce Pine, passed away January 14th at Helen Keller Hospital. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family with arrangements.

Glenda Fay James, 82, passed away January 14th. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

Carolyn Jean Dawson Davis, 87, of Russellville, passed away January 13th at Burns Nursing Home. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family with arrangements.

Steve Reace Hill, 70, of Russellville, passed away January 13th. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family with arrangements.

Donald Ray Jackson, 62, passed away December 20, 2025, at Helen Keller Hospital. A memorial service was held January 19, 2026, at Deaton Funeral Home in Red Bay.



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The Franklin Free Press strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

The Franklin Free Press is published by

hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler: Matthew 11:20-30

Jesus had done many miracles in Galilee, but they didn't turn away from sin. He said that if the cities God brought judgment on in the past (like Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom) saw what they had seen, they would have repented sincerely and been saved.

But, the Galilee cities would face judgment knowing that they had seen Jesus and His miracles and rejected them. They'd be brought down to Hades (the place of the dead). When judgment came, their condemnation would be worse because of the evidence they ignored.

Then, Jesus gave thanks that it was the simple who had seen God's will. God had revealed Himself by His grace. Only those who know Jesus can know the Father. Jesus made Himself known to those He chose. The ones He chose were those who didn't see themselves as "wise" and "understanding" but who would come to Him as "little children" and learn from Him.

So, Jesus offered an invitation. If you're burdened, He will give rest. Take His yoke on your shoulders and learn from Him. He is a gentle and lowly teacher. He offers rest for your soul. The yoke He calls you to take on is easy and the burden is light.

Lessons to Learn:

Don't ignore the evidence. We don't have Jesus right in front of us, but we have the word of God revealed to us. On this side of Jesus' coming with such easy access to the Bible, we are in a very similar position to the cities of Galilee. If we refuse to turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, we will have no excuse. We will stand in judgment knowing that we had God's will right at our fingertips. You may think you're too smart for this religious stuff. Jesus isn't surprised people think that way. He is thankful when people realize they don't have the answers and come to Him to hear God's word.

Jesus' burden is light. Wait! Isn't the way hard? (Mt. 7:13-14). Doesn't discipleship require total commitment, even to the point of the cross? (Mt. 10:38-39). Yes. But, the forgiveness and hope He offers make His commands a joy, not a burden (I Jn. 5:3). We obey Him with confidence that His instructions are always for our good. He's not making us jump through hoops for no reason. But, He has called us to become His disciples in view of the real rest it will give our souls.

We can always rest assured that whatever Jesus calls us to do or not do is never because He doesn't love us or is demanding the unnecessary. His requirements and boundaries come from His gentle, lowly leadership.

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.



'POSTMARK,' from Page 1

Postmarks previously reflected the actual date the customer drops a letter into the mailbox, but that's no longer the case and it could be several days before the letter is postmarked at the regional sorting facility.

Most utility bill payment policies use postmarks to determine if a payment is mailed on time. With the new policy, utilities and other entities receiving payments by mail will see the later postmark, which could fall after the payment deadline.

The one method to circumvent this possibility is for the customer to go into the post office and ask the clerk to denote a local postmark on the letter. That will keep the postmark on the actual day the sender mails the payment.

You can read the new policy, as well as access all USPS policies and procedures, by visiting www.about.usps.com.

'FRAUD,' from Page 1

After she used the same false identity to apply for and receive a renewed passport in 2021, federal agents in the Diplomatic Security Service began an investigation with assistance from the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency.

The case represents a renewed focus by federal authorities to enforce and monitor noncitizens illegally registering to vote and participating in elections.

Last week, the Alabama Secretary of State's Office announced the identity of 186 illegally registered noncitizens who were purged from Alabama's voter registration list.

The investigation showed 25 of those individuals had actually cast ballots in Alabama elections.

Of those 186 illegally registered noncitizens, three were living in Franklin County according to Secretary of State Wes Allen's office.

Jefferson County saw the removal of 25 illegally registered noncitizens, the largest total for all Alabama counties. 21 illegals were residing in Madison County, the second highest total across the state.

The 186 illegally registered noncitizens represent 0.00005 percent of Alabama's 3,596,679 registered voters, so the issue does not appear to be a rampant statewide problem.

"Through a cooperative effort with the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, my office used the federal SAVE database to identify the names of people who are not American citizens but who registered to vote and, in some cases, cast ballots in our elections. I will not tolerate this," Allen said in a January 12, 2026, press release.



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Russellville Police Department sees marked decline in 2025 DUI arrests from previous year

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Police Department released its composite statistics for 2025 and the numbers show some interesting changes from the 2024 totals.

The statistics show total numbers of calls, traffic stops and tickets written by offices, along with a breakdown of the different types of arrests made.

In 2025, the RPD received 9,323 calls for service, not including traffic stops, for a daily average of 25.4 calls.

Additionally, the department's 13 patrol officers made 5,687 traffic stops, representing a daily average of 15.5.

Of those 5,687 traffic stops, 2,504 traffic citations were issued, representing 44% of all stops resulting in at least one citation being written.

This is consistent with the 2024 percentage of citations being issued in 45% of the department's traffic stops, although the 2025 total stops decreased by almost 1,000 over the 2024 total of 6,647 traffic stops.

Officers responded to 277 motor vehicle accidents in 2025, an increase of 63 accidents from 2024's 214 total. Officers provided motorist assistance 363 times last year. The assistance ranged from motorists running out of gas to having flat tires.

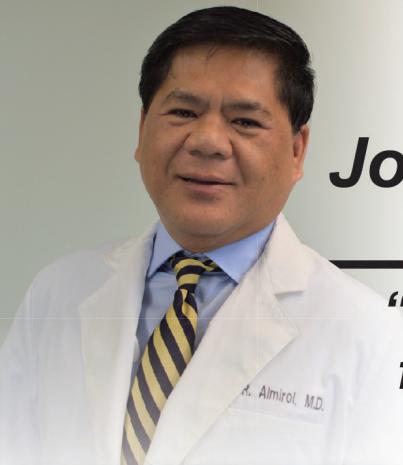
RPD officers arrested 701 people in 2025, down 15 arrests from 2024. Of those 701 arrests, 168 were felony charges, close to the 173 felony arrests in 2024.

There were 61 arrests in 2025 for driving under the influence of alcohol/controlled substances, a significant decline from the 116 DUI arrests in 2024.

Domestic violence arrests declined last year to 47, compared to 53 domestic violence charges in 2024. 2025 charges of resisting arrest (16) and attempting to elude (18) were close to the department's 2024 totals.

RPD Chief Chris Hargett said the statistics reflect the dedication of the department's officers and investigators.

"They are a motivated group of professionals who are dedicated to protecting and serving the City of Russellville," Hargett said. "We appreciate their efforts and we appreciate the support of this community."



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 Love 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.

 The Northwest Regional Library is proud to announce audiobooks are now available through our Books-By-Mail program. This program is completely free to those that are medically homebound, live more than 10 miles from a town with a public library, or require large print or audiobooks only. Must be a resident of Marion, Franklin, or Lamar counties. Contact the Northwest Regional Library at 205-487-2330.

 The Russellville First Methodist Church will have a 5th Thursday Food Giveaway on Thursday, January 29th, 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.



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Even with the cold weather and wind, the 2026 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration March took place Monday morning in downtown Russellville. The annual event rotates among Lauderdale, Colbert and Franklin Counties each year as an important time for reflection, community service and celebration of King's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement.

The march was organized by the Franklin County Branch of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship Committee. This year's theme was "From Dreams to Reality, the Work Continues: The Courage to Care, The Power to Change."

In addition to the approximately 50 marchers, several vans and buses carried elderly participants along the march route, as well as those with chronic health conditions that prevented them from walking.

The March was followed by a program at the A.W. Todd Centre, featuring the Rev. Dr. John H. Curry, Senior Pastor, Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, Tuskegee, and Mariah Wiggs, host of WHNT's Day to Day show.

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Franklin County Board of Education approves 2026-27 school calendar

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved the school calendar for the 2026-2027 school year at the board's January 13th meeting. The new school year will begin for students on August 7, 2026. Teacher professional days will begin August 3rd and run through August 6th.

When students are dismissed early on Friday, May 21, 2027, the school year will conclude.

Students will be dismissed early on Friday, December 18, 2026, and the Christmas break will conclude January 6th, with classes resuming the following day.

Spring Break will begin on Friday, March 27, 2026 and students will return to class Monday, April 5th.

In other agenda items at the January 13th meeting, the board:

—was presented with appreciation gifts from Belgreen and Phil Campbell High School students as part of Alabama's annual School Board Member Recognition Month in January.

—approved a mileage rate reimbursement increase to 72.5 cents per mile, consistent with the State of Alabama reimbursement rate for individuals traveling in privately owned vehicles on official business.

—approved out of state trips for Phil Campbell High School 12th grade to New York, New York, March 16-20, 2026 and Phil Campbell FFA to attend the NCBA Convention in Nashville on February 5, 2026.

—approved the following personnel items: RETIREMENT: Connie Funderburk, School Nurse, Red Bay. RESIGNATION: Lora Gravitt, Child Nutrition Program Bookkeeper, Franklin County Schools. EMPLOYMENT: Laura McKinney, Bus Driver, Franklin County Schools, Alice Pitts, Amber Crawford and Melissa Baker, Child Nutrition Program Assistants for Franklin County Schools. TRANSFERS: Teresa McGlaughn from Child Nutrition Program Assistant at Tharptown Cafeteria to Child Nutrition Program Manager at Tharptown, Deedra Raper, from Bookkeeper/Secretary at East Franklin to Child Nutrition Program Bookkeeper for Franklin County Schools, Ridge Raper, from Special Education Aide for Franklin County Schools to Computer Science Drivers Education Physical Education teacher at Belgreen. PERSONAL LEAVE: Tonya Wallace, Special Education Aide, Tharptown Elementary School, from January 22-end of school year. PAID PARENTAL LEAVE: Kaitlyn Sienkowski, Elementary Teacher Vina, effective February 16th. NEW TEACHER SUBSTITUTES: Scott King, Addison Hester, Peggy Lankford, Summer Wilson and Anna Garrison Hutcheson. SUBSTITUTE BUS DRIVER: Jonathan Dill. CHILD NUTRITION SUBSTITUTES: Melissa Baker. VOLUNTEERS: Jamie Hovater, Assistant Softball Coach Tharptown, Jonathan Motes and Macy Hardy, Assistant Basketball Coaches Phil Campbell.

The next regular meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education will be Thursday, February 12, 2026, with work session at 4 p.m., and meeting to follow.



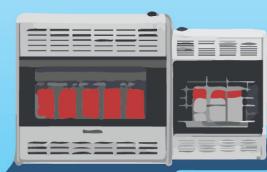
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RCS Board of Education recognized during School Board Appreciation Month

Kadin Pounds
Franklin Free Press

At the Russellville City Schools Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, January 13, it was the Board itself receiving the most attention.

January is School Board Appreciation Month. In honor of that, Russellville Elementary principal Jennifer Warhurst, representing the administrations of Russellville's other schools, as well, thanked the RCS Board of Education for its hard work and dedication.

"We could not do our jobs without your support," she said before showing a short video of Russellville students thanking the Board.

Board members were also gifted banana bread and banana cream cake baked homemade by Russellville Elementary fifth-grader Lindsay Rush. Rush, who has won school-wide and regional 4-H baking competitions, will be competing in a state-wide baking competition this year.

After the Board was recognized it began its business. In agenda items at the January 13 meeting, the following actions were taken:

—Approved the 2025-26 athletic schedules for tennis, golf, baseball, softball, track, and soccer, subject to changes due to cancellations, rainouts, or other unforeseen circumstances. Approval includes authorization for out-of-state and overnight travel and permits coaches and sponsors to take the teams and cheerleaders to away games and matches. Students will travel to away games by bus or other approved vehicles.

—Approved revised salary schedules for Technology and Extended Contracts, Supplements and Other Pay.

—Approved the following personnel moves:

RESIGNATION: Peyton Balentine, RMS PE aide; Pamela Herring, bus driver; Shannea Flanagan, CNP worker; Dustin Goodwin, RHS Athletic Director/Head Football Coach. **EMPLOYMENT:** Jordan Baccus, RHS custodian; Jonathan Dill, bus driver; Rebecca Green, RHS JROTC (10 month); Amanda Butler, RHS CNP worker; Braydon Bolton, RCS Technology Assistant; Isabella Archer, RCS Technology Assistant. **Temporary Employment in the Afterschool Program:** Ellie Willis, WES/RES aide; Amy Hall, RES teacher; Melissa Greenhill, RES teacher; Chelsey Graves, RES teacher; Joy McLaughlin, RES teacher; Christina Baker, RES teacher; Madison Calderon, RES teacher; Suzanne Parrish, RES teacher; Carol Fretwell, RES teacher; Lety Vargus RES aide. **Temporary employment:** John James, substitute bus driver (pending certification). **TRANSFER:** Caley Farris voluntary transfer to Technology Specialist.

—Approved contract with Jonathan Willis to provide public relations services for the Russellville City School System for the period of February 1, 2026, to February 1, 2027.

Of the personnel moves, the most notable was the approval of the resignation of Russellville football head coach Dustin Goodwin, effective January 15. As previously reported by the FFP, the head coaching position was posted on January 9 after Goodwin informed Superintendent Tim Guinn of his intention to take the vacant football head coach position at Demopolis High School.

Guinn said the job posting for RHS football head coach will be open until January 23, and added that if the Board has found a qualified candidate a new head coach could be hired as soon as that two week window closes. If not, the search will continue.

"The Board and I are committed to the finding the right, qualified person to lead the football program," Guinn said.

The next RCS Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 17.



Pictured from left to right: RES principal Tiffany Warhurst, Board member Radford Hester, Board member Howard Hillman Jr., RES student Lindsay Rush (front), Board member Kim Clonts, Board member Greg Trapp (back), Board member Ike Rogers, and Superintendent Tim Guinn. (Courtesy Russellville City Schools)

Seniors need to apply now for 2026 Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Card

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

With reduced funding this year for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Franklin County Extension Service Director Katernia Cole-Coffey is encouraging seniors to apply now for their 2026 \$50 benefit card.

The portal to apply for 2026 benefits is now open.

The program provides \$50 benefit cards for seniors who meet certain income and age criteria. The card may be redeemed at Farmers Markets, including the Franklin County Farmers Market located behind the A.W. Todd Centre in Russellville.

Funding for the program in Alabama was cut to \$36,000 this year, so once those funds have been awarded, no more applications will be accepted.

Seniors age 60 and older meeting the following income levels are encouraged to apply online at ago.alabama.gov/farmersmarket/.

To be eligible, recipients' gross household income must not exceed \$2,414/month for households of one, \$3,262/month for households of two, \$4,109/month for households of three, \$4,958/month for households of four, \$5,805 for households of five, \$6,653/month for households of six, \$7,502/month for households of seven and \$8,349/month for households of eight persons.

The federally funded program is administered through the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries.

Seniors without internet access can call the Franklin County Extension Service at 256-332-8880 for assistance.

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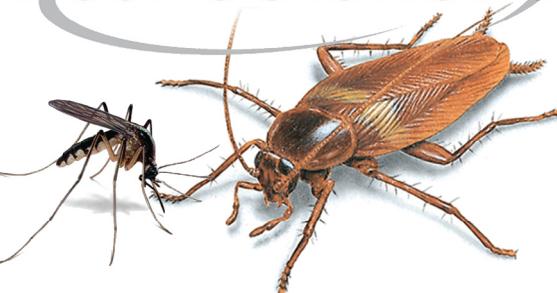
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RHS varsity girls win, boys fall at home to Fairview

Kadin Pounds
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams saw mixed results when Fairview came to town on January 13, the Lady Golden Tigers earning a win over FHS but the RHS boys suffering a double-digit defeat.

The Russellville and Fairview girls featured in the first varsity matchup of the night. Led by junior guard Ella Copeland, who recorded 26 points, her 10th 25-plus-point scoring performance this season, the Lady Golden Tigers won by a comfortable 14-point margin in the end, beating the Lady Aggies 66-52.

Russellville led at the end of the first quarter 18-14 and continued to build on its advantage throughout the contest. At halftime the Lady Golden Tigers had moved the margin to eight points; by the end of the third their lead was 11 and they finished strong in the fourth, outscoring Fairview 18-15.

Key to Russellville's success on the night was the Lady Golden Tigers' ability to score from all over the court.

"I was excited about our shooting tonight. Our ability to space the floor has been better than it has been," RHS head coach Jermaine Groce said in his postgame interview on WGOL 100.7 FM.

As Russellville has moved into the back half of its campaign, more focus has been placed

See, 'RVL HOOPS,' Page 14

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SPORTS

Belgreen varsity girls outlast Phil Campbell to secure third straight Franklin County Tournament title

Kadin Pounds
 Franklin Free Press

For the third consecutive season, the Belgreen High School varsity girls' basketball team has captured the Franklin County Tournament title. In an intense battle on Saturday night, the Lady Bulldogs downed Phil Campbell 58-54 to defend their crown.

"This is the first time the Belgreen girls, in the school's history, have won three (county tournaments) in a row, and that's huge," BHS head coach Chad Green told the Franklin Free Press after the game. "Winning the county tournament is big anyway, but three in a row is a little bit special."

Before getting to the championship round to take on PCHS, Belgreen, ranked No. 10 in Class 2A, had to first take care of Vina in the first round on Tuesday and then the host Tharptown in the semifinals Friday night.

In the semis, Belgreen dispatched the Lady Wildcats without much trouble, beating them by a final score of 71-17. The 54-point win was the largest margin of victory for the Lady Bulldogs this season.



See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 12

Red Bay boys dominate competition to win fourth straight Franklin County Tournament championship

Kadin Pounds
 Franklin Free Press

The reign of the Red Bay Tigers continued at the Franklin County Tournament on Saturday night as the RBHS varsity boys' basketball team dispatched Phil Campbell en route to a fourth straight county tournament title.

Red Bay, winning its games in the tournament by an average of 38 points, dominated Tharptown 61-17 on Thursday night to advance to the championship on Saturday. Against the Bobcats, who just held on to beat Belgreen 46-45 in the semifinals the night before, the Tigers used their physicality and a pestering defense to rule over their county rivals 74-41.

"Anytime you play a tournament, especially in your county, you want to win it," said RBHS head coach John Torisky, whose squad is ranked No. 6 in Class 2A in the latest Alabama Sports Writers Association poll. "You want to win it because of the rivalries and the tradition and things like that."

"We're getting close to the end of the (regular) season, so we wanted to win this and hopefully pump the guys up about playing later in the year once we get to the postseason," Torisky added.

In the championship contest, Phil Campbell held Red Bay in check for about five minutes of game time before the Tigers found a firm foothold and really started to assert themselves.



See, 'RED BAY,' Page 13

'BELGREEN,' from Page 11

Led by 12 points from senior Alayna Tate, twelve different Belgreen players contributed to the point total in the win. Defensively, BHS limited Tharptown's top scorer, senior Alyssa Fischer, to just five points.

On to the county championship game, Belgreen's showdown with Phil Campbell was much more competitive and came down to the final minute of play.

Tied up 10-10 at the end of the first quarter and 21-21 at halftime, it was apparent that the contest would come down to a handful of plays—and it did.

Thanks to five made three-pointers in the third, Belgreen managed to take a two-point, 40-38 lead going into the final period of play.

"In the third quarter, those three-point shots were big because we were struggling to score," Green said. "(PCHS) did a great job of defending us and scoring, as well, so I was glad we were able to hit those three point shots."

In the fourth, the Lady Bulldogs started well, creating a little more separation to go up by eight points—50-42—with around four minutes remaining. The Lady Bulldogs appeared to be gaining the upper hand, but a called timeout by Phil Campbell head coach Craig Thomas did the trick for his squad; after the timeout, the Lady Bobcats went on a 9-0 run to go up 51-50 with 2:24 remaining.

After going down, Green called a timeout of his own to rally his troops and stall Phil Campbell's momentum. Just a little later, after PCHS knocked down a free throw to make it a 52-50 game, Belgreen's Jemma Moore hit a big three-pointer with just over a minute left to regain the lead for her team, 53-52. That was Moore's only bucket of the game, but it proved to be a massive one; after retaking the lead, BHS never gave it back up.

A turnover by Phil Campbell gave BHS senior MaKenna Fisher an easy fast break layup to make it 55-52, and, with time running out and no other option for Phil Campbell but to foul, Fisher was able to ice the game making three of her last four free throws.

"It wasn't perfect but we gutted it out," Green said.

"All year long this team has been a resilient team. They're veterans, they're older, and they've been with me for awhile. They've won two buzzer-beater games this year. At the end of the game, I think we know that we always have an opportunity to win, whether we're up or we're down," he added.

After the final buzzer sounded, the All-Tournament Team was announced and trophies were handed out by Tharptown High School principal Dr. Tyler Berryman.

The 2026 All-Tournament Team selections were Red Bay's Katlyn Lindley, Vina's Layla Hester, Tharptown's Raeleigh Harrell, Phil Campbell's Leela Baker and Layla Baker, and Belgreen's Jemma Moore, MaKenna Fisher, and Randi Terry, who was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

In the championship game, Leela Baker and Layla Baker led the Lady Bobcats with 16 and 17 points, respectively. BHS' Terry, who hit four three-pointers in the title game, led the Lady Bulldogs with 16 points. She finished with 40 points over three games in the tournament.



The 2026 Franklin County All-Tournament Team. Pictured here, from left to right: Layla Baker, PCHS; Leela Baker, PCHS; Randi Terry (MVP), BHS; Raeleigh Harrell, THS; Jemma Moore, BHS; MaKenna Fisher, BHS.

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'RED BAY' from Page 11

RBHS led 19-9 at the end of the first period, and despite allowing PCHS 18 points, outscored the Bobcats by eight points in the second to go into halftime up 45-27.

Red Bay turned up the heat even more to start the second half. The Tigers forced a lot of turnovers in the third quarter, allowing them to convert easy layups and uncontested jumpers in transition. Red Bay allowed just one point in third and increased its advantage by 18 points heading into the final period.

Up by more than 30 points in the fourth quarter, the Tigers were able to cruise during the last eight minutes to a 74-41 victory.

After beating Tharptown in the semifinals, Torisky told the Franklin Free Press his emphasis during the tournament was on defense. Against Phil Campbell, Torisky said his team didn't quite receive full marks in that department, but he was proud of the effort and energy his players displayed.

"We knew that they (PCHS) played a tough game (Friday) night and their legs probably weren't going to be as fresh as ours, so we wanted to play fast. I felt like in the first half Phil Campbell scored too many points, but I think with the pace we were playing at once we got in the third quarter they were tired and we were able to wear them out," Torisky said. "The kids did what I asked them to do, and when they buy into the defensive side of the game our offense seems to get better because we get easier buckets."

"There are always things we can do better, and we'll see that on film, but the intensity we're playing with with what we're trying to do is pretty good," he added. "I'd say we're probably a seven out of 10, but we need to be at 10 out of 10 at the end of the year. Right now we're really focusing on a few things that we haven't done much of this year, so for where we're at I'm pretty happy."

Following the championship game, the All-Tournament Team was announced and Tharptown High School principal Dr. Tyler Berryman distributed the hardware to the two teams.

The 2026 Franklin County All-Tournament Team selections were Tharptown's Zach Riley, Vina's Colton Davis, Belgreen's Jake Dill, Phil Campbell's Austin Elliott and Madden Welch, and Red Bay's Bryant Harris, Jaxon Vinson, and Khalil Luster.

Luster, who scored a game-high 22 points in the championship, was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

Elliott scored 11 and Welch scored six points for PCHS in the tourney final. Vinson finished with 16 points and Harris had eight for RBHS in the championship.



The 2026 Franklin County All-Tournament Team. Pictured from left to right: Zach Riley, THS; Jaxon Vinson, RBHS; Khalil Luster (MVP), RBHS; Bryant Harris, RBHS; Austin Elliott, PCHS; Madden Welch, PCHS.



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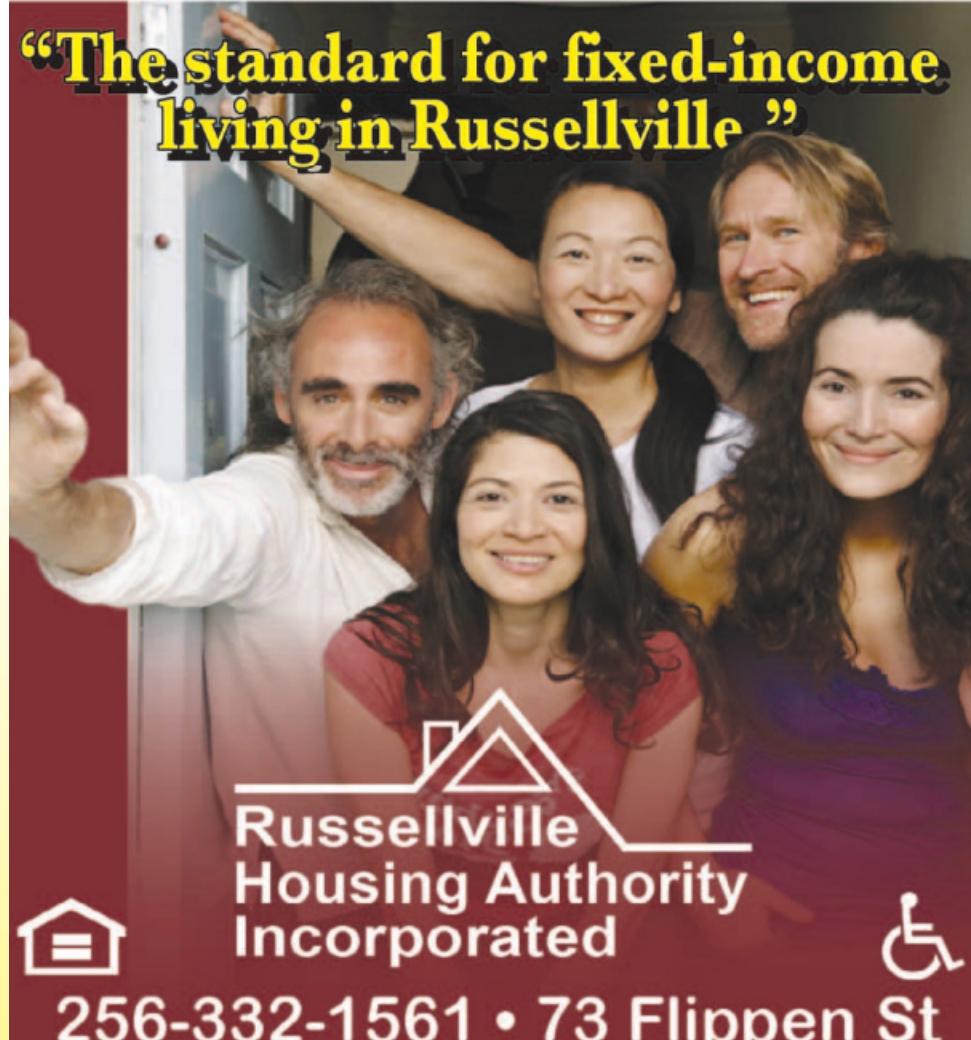
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'RVL HOOPS' from Page 11

on shooting well and shooting more consistently, Groce said.

"The first half of the season, the main thing you want to do is figure out your scheme, figure out what you want to do, and implementing that and making sure everyone is good to go on that," he said. "What we've been able to do here lately is, because we're not having to allocate time to implementation, we're able to spend a lot more time on shooting and we're starting to see the benefits of that."

In addition to Copeland's 26 points, guard Sadie Odom hit five three-pointers to give her 15 points—that was a season high for Odom—and senior Laila Hill hit double figures with 10 points.

"Ella came out and was super aggressive, and I think the officials probably let (Fairview) get away with a lot more than they should have. I think she should've gone to the free throw line a little more than that," Groce said. "But she's tough and she figured out how to get shots up and get to the free throw line. She did a great job being aggressive and tough."

"We had four players that hit a three tonight. Sadie went off tonight and had a great percentage from the field, hitting five threes," he added. "If you put it all together like we did tonight—Ella's aggressiveness and scoring and our ability to hit shots from the perimeter—we're going to be a tough out."

The win improved Russellville's record to 12-8 overall.

In the boys' game, the Golden Tigers' offensive struggles continued against the Aggies.

The first quarter saw Fairview double up on RHS 12-6 and then take a nine-point, 20-11, lead into halftime.

Russellville's point total increased in each of the final two periods of play, but not enough to keep pace with the visitors.

"I felt like we just came out really flat," Russellville head coach Patrick Odom said. "We probably played the best we've played all year (Monday) night (against Haleyville), and maybe we were just a little tired but we just didn't play with the same intensity tonight."

"I knew if we got behind, with the way Fairview plays, it was going to be tough to catch back up. They hold the ball and they move the ball, and we just could never get the game moving at all," he added.

Junior Tripp Cleveland led RHS with eight points in the loss and Daniel Aycock scored six points.

The defeat drops the Golden Tigers to 4-14 this campaign.

Vina varsity girls, boys eliminated by Belgreen on opening night of Franklin County Tournament

Kadin Pounds
Franklin Free Press

The Vina High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams were knocked out of the Franklin County Tournament on Tuesday night after being swept by Belgreen High School in the opening round.

The games, being played at Tharptown High School, ended in a 62-25 win for the BHS girls and a 73-17 victory for the Bulldogs over the Red Devils.

In the girls' game, Belgreen opened up a 12-3 advantage in the first period and then exploded with a 25-point second quarter to take a big 37-12 lead into the break.

To start the second half, in the third quarter, Vina had its best eight minutes of the night, scoring 12 points. However, it wasn't enough to outdo the Lady Bulldogs, who scored 17 and added even more to Vina's deficit.

Belgreen finished strong, allowing just one point in the final quarter and ending the contest with a 37-point lead.

Ten different players scored for Belgreen in the win. Randi Terry led the Lady Bulldogs with 15 points; Mackinley Hogan and Jemma Moore each scored seven points.

Vina's Layla Hester led the Lady Red Devils with 15 points in the defeat.

The game's result eliminated Vina from the County Tournament. Belgreen's girls advanced to face the host Tharptown.

In the boys' game, Belgreen proved to be just as dominant in victory over Vina, winning by over 50 points.

The first period proved indicative of how the rest of the game would play out. BHS went on a 20-2 run to start the game and then added another 20 points in the second quarter to take a 40-12 lead into halftime.

Led by Jake Dill, who hit four three-pointers and finished with a game-high 26 points, Belgreen continued to control the contest in the second half. The Bulldogs did not allow a bucket in the third quarter and ultimately outscored the Red Devils 33-5 in the back half.

Besides Dill, two other BHS shooters hit double digits: senior Braycen Johnson scored 18 points and Jaxon Wood added 11 points for the Bulldogs.

Colton Davis and Matthew Patterson had four points apiece for Vina.

As a result of the game, Vina was eliminated from the tournament; Belgreen advanced to play Phil Campbell in the semifinals.

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Russellville's Hill officially signs with NWSCC volleyball program during ceremony



Russellville volleyball senior Laila Hill (seated, center) is pictured with her family (seated), RHS volleyball head coach Madison Lamont, and NWSCC head coach Susie Tverberg. Hill signed with NWSCC volleyball on January 14. (Courtesy photo)



The Belgreen High School junior varsity girls' basketball team, led by head coach Chad Green. (Courtesy photo)

2026 Franklin County Tournament Junior Varsity Champions

The Red Bay High School junior varsity boys' basketball team, led by head coach John Torisky. (Courtesy photo)



Russellville High School volleyball senior Laila Hill made it official on the afternoon of January 14, signing with the NWSCC volleyball program during a ceremony at the Russellville Field House. Hill thanked her family, her coaches, her teammates, and God for helping her reach this point.

"Thank you to everyone for coming out to support me. I want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to play at Northwest Shoals. I can't wait for this new chapter," she said.

NWSCC volleyball head coach Susie Tverberg was also in attendance at the signing event.

"We're so excited Laila chose to come to Northwest Shoals," Tverberg said. "We're excited to have you and looking forward to have you dressed as a (Patriot)."

The *Franklin Free Press* published an article on Hill's intention to sign with NWSCC when she announced her decision in early December. That article is available to read online at franklinfreepress.net.



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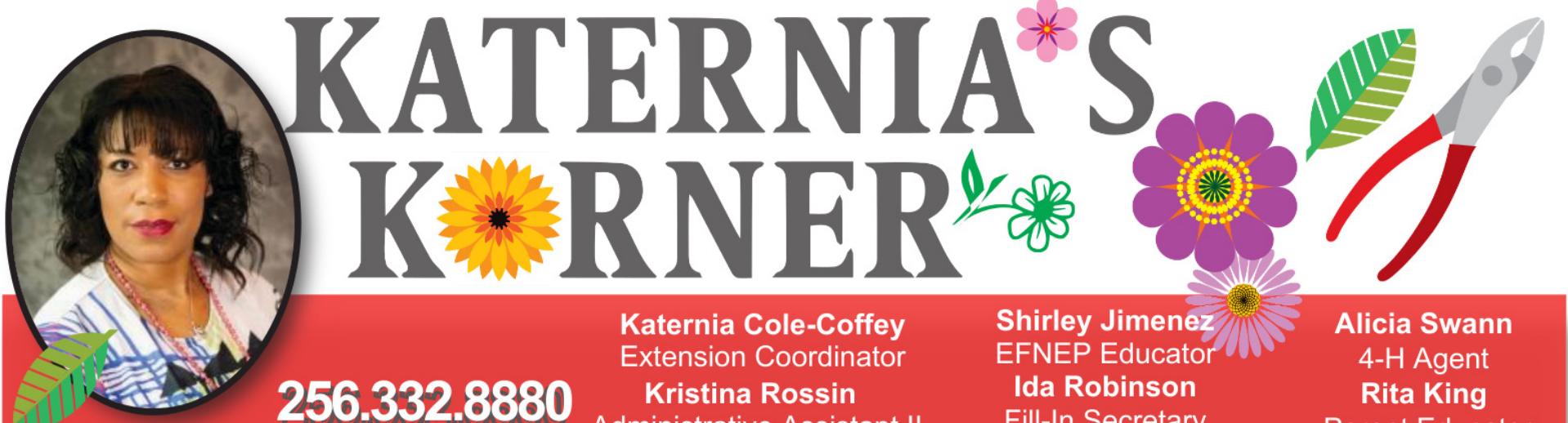
ATHLETE

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WEEK

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The FFP Athlete of the Week for January 5-10 is Belgreen's MaKenna Fisher. The senior scored 39 total points in two area wins last week. Fisher dropped a career high 24 points in a rout of Covenant Christian and added 15 points in a victory over rival Tharptown. Fisher's efforts helped keep BHS flawless in area play this season.



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