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MAY 19TH REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Pub. Pol. Adv. by: Shannon Oliver • 1048 Hwy. 49 • Russellville, AL 35653



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February 10th roundtable bringing statewide candidates to Franklin County

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Two events will allow Franklin County residents to meet and hear from Republican candidates at the federal, state and local level as they prepare for the May 19, 2026 primary election.

The Republican Women of Franklin County (RWFC) are sponsoring 'Candidate Roundtables' on Tuesday, February 10th and Tuesday, April 14th. The roundtables will take place at the Frog Pond Community Center, 5680 County Road 22 in Spruce Pine. Each event will begin at 6 pm, and both are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

RWFC President Denel Wardell said although her organization is hosting the event, it will not be endorsing candidates in the May Republican Primary.

A Tufts University 2020 study concluded that voters who are encouraged to vote and are familiar with candidates are twice as likely to participate in elections over those who are unfamiliar with candidates or issues.

All Republican candidates appearing on statewide Republican ballots, both federal and state, and all Franklin County Republican candidates were invited to attend one or both of the roundtables, although candidates will only speak at one event.

See 'ROUNDTABLE,' Page 9

FCCDC quarterly grant recipients include Phil Campbell High School musical theatre program and Belgreen varsity baseball

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At its January 20th business meeting, the Franklin County Commission approved a report outlining 13 road and bridge improvement projects completed in FY2025 using Rebuild Alabama Act gas tax funds.

Those 13 projects included 16.71 miles of roadways in Franklin County at a total cost of \$2.178 million. The projects were funded entirely by proceeds Franklin County receives through a 10 cent per gallon tax approved by the Alabama Legislature in 2019. Proceeds from that tax are earmarked for road and

bridge improvements. Counties must document how the tax proceeds are spent and submit reports annually to account for all spending.

Franklin County Rebuild Alabama Act projects completed in FY25 included:

- resurfacing and traffic striping of Highway 25 from Hwy. 23 to AL 24 at a cost of \$213,313.57.
- resurfacing Bedford Circle from Green Road to Morrisette Drive at a cost of \$37,230.74.
- resurfacing Morrisette Drive from Green Road to the dead end at a cost of \$41,418.19.
- resurfacing and traffic striping of Hwy. 152 from AL 187 to Hwy. 52 at a

See 'FCCDC' Page 4



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Linda Gail Shelnutt, age 68, of Russellville, passed away on Sunday, January 25, 2026, at North Alabama Medical Center. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Imojean "Jean" Ricketts, age 92, of Spruce Pine, passed away on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, at her residence. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Jimmy D Fretwell, 80, passed away peacefully on Thursday, January 29, 2026. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Benji Keith Braden passed away unexpectedly on January 28, 2026. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted with the arrangements.

Elva N. "Sis" Jones, 88, of Vina passed away Monday, January 26, 2026 at her residence. Deaton Funeral Home assisted with the arrangements.

Kerry Cooper, age 63, of Phil Campbell passed away on January 30, 2026. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted with the arrangements.



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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler:

Matthew 12:1-8

On a Sabbath, Jesus' disciples grabbed some grain, rubbed it between their hands and ate it. The Pharisees accused them of doing something unlawful. In reality, the disciples had not broken God's Law. Really, all the Sabbath Law said was "Remember the Sabbath. Keep it Holy. Don't work." It did not provide much detail. Jews in the period between the Testaments added those details and they became synonymous with "Law" for the Pharisees and scribes. The disciples had only broken this tradition.

Jesus exposed their hypocrisy. He cited an event where David had eaten bread that was not lawful for him to eat. Jesus wasn't excusing David's actions— He said they weren't lawful (Lev. 24:9). Jesus didn't believe that hunger was a good reason to not trust in God (Mt. 4:3,4). Wouldn't that set aside all self-denial, sacrifice, and any obedience that might cause discomfort? David's life surrounding the occasion Jesus mentions is characterized by a series of decisions that revealed a lack of trust in God (1 Sam. 21-22).

Jesus reveals their bias showing they were critical of Him and His disciples when they hadn't done anything wrong, yet, they didn't criticize David at all even though he had actually done something wrong,

Beyond that, they had missed the point of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not to be a burden; it was given as a day of rest. Jesus, as "Lord of the Sabbath," was in the best position to pronounce upon it. The Sabbath itself pointed to Jesus. It was a shadow of Him in whom we find our rest (Col. 2:14-17; Mt. 11:28-30).

Lessons to Learn:

Don't be bound by human tradition. These men condemned because they were more devoted to standards passed down from men than they were to the will of God. Sometimes that meant they were over critical and sometimes that meant that they gave themselves a pass when they were violating God's will (Matthew 15). Using the Bible as our standard helps us hold to exactly the right standard for ourselves and others.

Don't judge hypocritically. They were harsh towards the ones they didn't like and easy on the ones they appreciated.

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

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'FCCDC,' from Page 1

- \$250 to Belgreen High School Special Education Classroom for supplies and learning materials.
- \$500 to Bay Tree Council of Performing Arts for purchase of costumes, materials and supplies.
- \$800 to the Place of Grace for purchase of operating materials, transportation expense, education.
- \$1,500 to Blue Springs Volunteer Fire Department for purchase of Pro/Pak portable foam system
- \$500 to Franklin County Chamber of Commerce for Junior Leadership Montgomery visit.
- \$4,000 to Town of Phil Campbell Fire Department for purchase of two Lion V-Force coats.
- \$250 to East Franklin Junior High School for math field trip.
- \$800 to City of Red Bay Weatherford Library for purchase of new books and participant incentive program.
- \$5,000 to Franklin County Board of Education for Phil Campbell High School Musical Theatre Program expenses.

The next meeting of the FCCDC will be March 27, 2026, at 8:30 a.m., at the Red Bay City Hall. Grant requests for the March 27, 2026, meeting must be received by a commission member before 12 p.m., March 20, 2026.

Russellville Mayor proclaims February Career and Technical Education Month

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

On the morning of Friday, January 30, Russellville Mayor David Grissom presented Russellville City Schools Career and Technical Education (CTE) Director Dr. AnnaKay Holland—joined by fellow educators, students, and Superintendent Tim Guinn—with a framed and signed copy of his mayoral proclamation declaring the month of February Career and Technical Education Month in the City of Russellville.

The proclamation states that “career and technical education programs in the Russellville City School System have become a rigorous, progressive, and vital part of the total educational system, which is committed to providing students with rewarding opportunities to gain valuable experience in career and life skills;” that CTE programs at RCS are committed to preparing students for post-prep school life by providing opportunities to explore different career paths; and that the “ever-increasing cooperative partnerships of career and technical educators and business/industry professionals are stimulating the growth and vitality of our local economy and that of the entire state by preparing graduates for career fields forecast to experience the largest and fastest growth in the next decade.”

Grissom’s proclamation couldn’t have come at a more appropriate and meaningful time for the CTE department at Russellville: In early January, RCS opened its expanded and renovated Career and Technical Education Building, a \$6.2 million project. This year, a record 688 RHS students are taking or have completed at least two CTE courses.

“The Mayor’s proclamation of CTE Month validates the hard work of Russellville’s educators and students, highlighting the program’s vital role in connecting classroom learning to in-demand, high-skill careers in our community,” Holland said. “It acts as a powerful public endorsement, raising awareness among local businesses for potential partnerships, increasing student enrollment, and fostering community support for our programs. The proclamation serves as a powerful validation of our mission to prepare students for the “Three Es”: being employed, enrolled, or enlisted.

“We have an amazing faculty and staff at RHS CTE, and I cannot say enough about how hard they work to prepare RHS students for their future,” she added. “This recognition is particularly meaningful this year following the January 2026 opening of Russellville High School’s newly remodeled Career Technical Building.”

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Oliver: Passion to serve community as Sheriff 'stronger than ever'

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver announced recently he will seek a fifth term serving Franklin County citizens as sheriff.

Oliver faces opposition from law enforcement veteran Brian "Spanky" Shackelford in the May 19, 2026, Republican Primary. No Democrat qualified to run for Sheriff, so the May 19th primary will serve as the de facto election.

Oliver has served as Franklin County Sheriff the past 15 years and has more than 31 years of experience in law enforcement.

A lifelong Franklin County resident, Oliver said his passion to work daily to better serve his community remains as strong as it was when his law enforcement career began.

"We have made progress in moving law enforcement forward through a team effort and I've always had an open door policy when it comes to being accessible to the citizens of Franklin County, and that won't ever change," Oliver said.

"Our efforts to modernize the Franklin County Sheriff's Office remains a priority and with today's advances in technology and equipment, it's more important than ever to continue to make those steps forward," Oliver added.

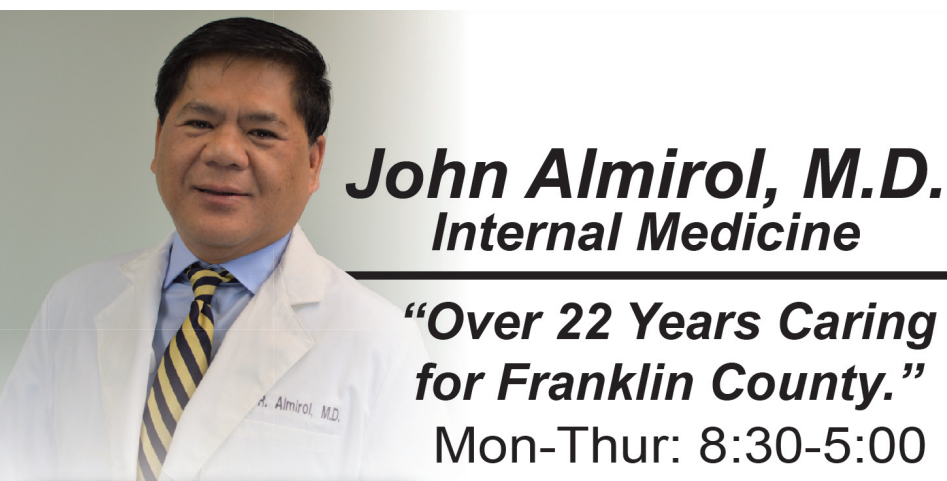
Oliver was hired at the Franklin County Sheriff's Office in 1993, but left in 2005 to accept an officer position with the Russellville Police Department, where he remained until his election in 2011 to the office of Sheriff.

While both Oliver and Shackelford have extensive law enforcement experience, Oliver believes his experience with the FCSO and as sheriff give him a stronger foundation to serve citizens in the next four years.

Of particular importance to Oliver when he was first elected was expanding the number of School Resource Officers working at Franklin County Schools. Through a team effort with the Franklin County Board of Education, the number of SROs assigned to Franklin County Schools has grown, with officers on the campuses of Tharptown, Belgreen, Phil Campbell and Vina, and Oliver hopes to add a full-time SRO at East Franklin Junior High School in his next term. The Red Bay Police Department provides the SRO for Red Bay School.

"It has been an honor to serve the citizens of Franklin County as Sheriff since 2011 and I would again be honored to have your vote in the May 19th Republican Primary," Oliver said.

Polls will be open Tuesday, May 19th from 7am-7pm.



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The Franklin County Democratic Executive Committee invites you to 'Meet the Candidate,' Tuesday, February 17th, at the 43 Grill on Highway 43 to meet Democratic candidate for Alabama Governor, Dr. Will Boyd. The event starts at 6:30 p.m. For more information, contact Rick Neighbors at 205-306-1249. 43 Grill is located at 15110 Highway 43 in Russellville.





United Way has partnered with One Gen Away to host a large food giveaway at Russellville High School on Saturday, February 7. The giveaway will begin at 9 a.m. and last until all food has been distributed. Drive-thru only, please stay in your vehicles. Limit one distribution per vehicle.



LifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on Wednesday, February 18th from 10am-5pm. Please contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or by email at Deborah.lindsey@russellvillehospital.org. Please bring photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a t-shirt from LifeSouth and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. Door prizes will also be given away. Call with any questions, and thank you for giving the gift of life!

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Operation 'Clean Sweep' making an impact in beautification efforts in the City of Russellville

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Before the February 2nd Russellville City Council meeting began, Mayor David Grissom and several council members expressed their appreciation to the city employees taking part in Operation Clean Sweep, an aggressive program designed to clean up the city and address the many compliance issues plaguing it.

Operation Clean Sweep team members include City of Russellville License and Building Inspector Bill Fuller, Chief Joe Mansell, Justin Green and Michael Hall from the Russellville Fire Department, Chad Sheffield, the Russellville Police Department compliance officer and Street Department Manager Shannon Wilson.

The Operation Clean Sweep team met Monday to discuss ongoing cleanup efforts on properties where compliance notices have already been given to the property owners, as well as a list of new complaints they will investigate.

"I sat in on today's meeting and I appreciate the good job these men are doing on compliance issues in the City of Russellville," Grissom said. "Our citizens are noticing the improvements as well."

Mansell said the effort is an everyday one, with across the board enforcement that doesn't target one specific part of the city or demographic.

"This is something our mayor and council have wanted to see for a while and Mr. Fuller has taken the lead with this effort," Mansell said. "We want our citizens to be aware these guys are coming around. If you move into Russellville, your property value shouldn't decrease because of your neighbors."

Compliance issues include a range of violations, from unkempt lawns to junk cars stored on property to trash and debris piled up at a property. Violation of the city's ordinances dealing with property condition is a criminal offense that may be prosecuted in Russellville Municipal Court.

Fuller said as they address more properties, he's starting to see increase cooperation from property owners.

"We had two the last week where the owner volunteered to tear down dilapidated buildings themselves without us having to get involved, other than notifying them of the violation. And we appreciate their willingness to correct the problems," Fuller said.

Councilman Lonnie Freeman rode with compliance officials recently and saw first-hand how their work is making a difference in the way the city looks.

"I appreciate their efforts and I like how it's being done in every district, not singling out just one. People may get a little upset about it, but it's not a new policy. We want residents to know these ordinances are going to be enforced," Freeman said.

Residents wanting to report a compliance violation are encouraged to call Russellville City Hall at 256-332-6060 and ask for Fuller.

In other agenda items at its February 2nd meeting, the council:

—approved a Russellville Municipal Airport agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration for a flight inspection.

—authorized the Russellville Fire Department to submit changes in educational requirements for job descriptions to the Civil Service Board. Assistant Chief Randy Seal said the changes were needed to update the names of courses offered at the Alabama Fire College. Many courses have consolidated or changed names and the city's job description for firefighters included the old names.

—accepted a letter of resignation effective immediately from RPD officer Randy Mansell and authorized advertisement for the position.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be February 16, 2026 with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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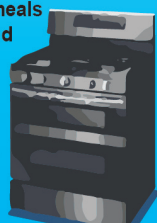
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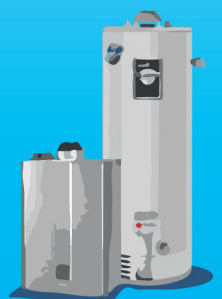
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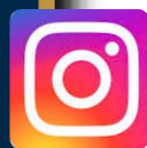


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2026
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'ROUNDTABLE,' from Page 1

Collectively for both events, Wardell has received confirmations from two United States Senate candidates, one U.S. House of Representatives candidate, three Lieutenant Governor candidate, one Attorney General candidate, one Secretary of State candidate and one State Auditor candidate, along with three Franklin County Commission candidates and one Franklin County Sheriff candidate. The local candidates are not expected to speak at the February 10th roundtable, as they will return in April to speak, but several have committed to attend.

Candidates scheduled to speak February 10th include Seth Burton and Rodney Walker (U.S. Senate), Tommy Barnes (U. S. House District Four), Pat Bishop and Rick Pate (Lieutenant Governor), Derek Chan (State Auditor).

April 14th commitments include Dale Shelton Deas Jr. and Morgan Murphy (U.S. Senate), Nicole Jones Wadsworth (Lt. Governor), Katherine Robertson (Attorney General), Glenda Jackson (Secretary of State), Jeremy Oden (Public Service Commission Place One), Priscilla Andrews (Public Service Commission Place Two), Joey Norton, Miles Gaston, Curtis Baker and Jeff Fleming (Franklin County Commission District One) and Shannon Oliver (Franklin County Sheriff).

Wardell said she's heard from three additional local candidates 'hoping to attend,' but does not have a firm commitment yet. State candidates trying to work out their schedules to attend include John Wahl (Lt. Governor), Tommy Tuberville and Ken McFeeters (Governor).

Wardell is hoping that United States Senate candidate Jared Hudson will attend the RWFC's 'Honoring Veterans' Dinner event on May 12th. Hudson is a former United States Navy Seal.

The following candidates have declined to attend either event: Steve Marshall, Barry Moore and Jared Hudson (United States Senate), Andrew Sorrell (State Auditor) and Corey Hill (Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries).

These roundtables will represent the largest gathering of state and federal candidates to attend a Franklin County. While statewide candidates often visit Franklin County, there has never been an event of this magnitude locally.

"We are thrilled with the response so far and we expect to hear from many more candidates in advance of February 10th and the April 14th events," Wardell said. "We are looking forward to a good turnout from Franklin County voters as well."



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Golden Tigers medal twice at AHSAA Indoor Track & Field State Meet

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School indoor track and field team had an impressive showing at the AHSAA Class 4A/5A State Meet over the weekend, rewriting the program record book and compiling several top finishes.

The most notable finishes for Russellville came in the track events. RHS had four top 10 finishes on the track, including two performances that sent Golden Tigers to the podium.

Sophomore Darron Jones had the best finish of the bunch, earning a silver medal in the boys 60-meter hurdles with a time of 8.63. The time was also a new personal best for Jones and set a new school record.

Russellville's boys 4x200m relay team also ended up on the podium, grabbing bronze—and setting a new program record—with a 1:32.17 finish.

Other top 10 finishes on the track included senior Connor Devaney's sixth-place finish in the boys 60m final and the Golden Tigers' 4x400m relay team's 10th place finish. Devaney's qualifying time of 7.16 in the 60m prelims set a new school record as did the 4x400m relay team's time of 3:45.05 in the final heat.

Junior Julyun Francisco and sophomore Pascual Felipe had top 15 finishes in the boys 400m and boys 1600m, respectively.

See, 'STATE MEET,' Page 14

Phil Campbell varsity basketball squads split with Belgreen on Bobcats' Senior Night

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball team hosted county rival Belgreen High School for the Bobcats' Senior Night at the PCHS gymnasium on Thursday night. Both schools walked away with a win after all was said and done; the Lady Bulldogs pulling off a late comeback over the hosts while the PCHS boys held on to beat Belgreen by 10 points.

The PCHS-BHS girls game started the evening off and it was an eventful one.

Looking like they might avenge their Franklin County Tournament championship loss to BHS, the Lady Bobcats held a double-digit advantage going into the fourth quarter, 42-31, but Belgreen rallied to overcome PCHS and spoil the Senior Night mood. Belgreen, aided by five second half three-pointers from Randi Terry, put together a massive performance in the final period of play to outscore the Lady Bobcats 25-12 and win by two points, 56-54.

Terry, who finished with a game-high 21 points, was the driving force behind the Belgreen

See, 'BOBCATS,' Page 12



Phil Campbell High School seniors from left to right: Kayden Headlee, Lola Mays, Leela Baker, Hagen Raper, and Madden Welch.

Tharptown sweeps Vina on basketball Senior Night

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Tharptown High School celebrated basketball Senior Night on Friday with two victories over county foe Vina High School; the THS girls routed the Lady Red Devils 57-16, while the THS boys pulled off a 42-39 win over the visitors.

In the girls' game, Tharptown wasted no time dispatching Vina, which was playing without key contributors Layla Hester and Lana Bell, both injured. The Lady Wildcats were up 18-3 at the end of the first period and led by 36 points by halftime.

In the second half, Tharptown continued to outscore the Lady Red Devils but at a slower clip. THS added 16 points to Vina's 11 in the third and fourth quarters to win by a 41-point margin.

"I'm proud of these girls," Tharptown head coach Abby Ward said of her team after the game. "All you can ask for as a coach is improvement throughout the season, and they have shown me just that."

Eighth-grader Lindie Easterling led Vina with six points in the loss.

Tharptown's Raeleigh Harrell led all scorers in the game with 13 points, and senior Alyssa Fischer, the lone senior on the team, also hit double figures with 12 points.

Fischer, along with the boys' basketball and cheerleading seniors, was recognized between



Tharptown High School seniors from left to right: Cesar Rueda, Daniel Jimenez, Bryson Borden, Kaiden Hallmark, Caden Hill, Lexi Little, Leonela Bela Jaquez, and Alyssa Fischer.

See, 'THARPTOWN,' Page 13

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'BOBCATS,' from Page 11

comeback, scoring all 21 of her points in the second half and 16 of the Lady Bulldogs' 25 fourth quarter points.

The first of three consecutive made three pointers from Terry in the fourth gave Belgreen its first lead, 43-42 with four minutes remaining. Later, two more Terry three balls extended the visitors' lead first to 49-45 and then to 52-47 before Phil Campbell called a timeout with 1:51 to play.

"Randi Terry got hot and she really carried us there at the end," Belgreen girls' basketball head coach Chad Green said.

But Terry wasn't the only one able to sink shots from long range. Two big three-pointers from Phil Campbell's Layla Baker made it all the more interesting late. Down by five points, Baker hit a three to pull the Lady Bobcats back within a basket, 52-50. And then with just 15 seconds left, Baker hit another three to tie the ball game up 54-54.

Unfortunately for hosts, an inadvertent foul by PCHS with 11 seconds to go sent Belgreen senior Isabella Tate to the free throw line where she sank both attempts to put the Lady Bulldogs back up by two points, 56-54. Phil Campbell's effort to tie or win the game in the final seconds fell short.

"I just don't think we played with much energy in the first half, but we came out in the second half and played with a lot of energy; we quit turning the ball over and we were able to pressure well and get turnovers," Green said.

"All year long. the close games we've played have been nail-biters. We've hit two game-winners at the buzzer this year, we beat Haleyville the other day with a shot with seven or eight seconds left, and we've had two close games here lately with Phil Campbell. Going down the stretch, I think playing these close games helps your kids in those situations," Green added.

In addition to Terry's 21 points, Isabella Tate, who was a perfect 6-6 from the free throw line in the fourth quarter, finished in double figures with 10 points for Belgreen. Senior Leela Baker was Phil Campbell's top scorer, finishing with 19 points. Layla Baker scored 10 points for the Lady Bobcats.

With the win, Belgreen, which is receiving votes in the latest Alabama Sports Writers Association poll of Class 2A, improved to 19-7 overall. Phil Campbell fell to 13-14 overall after the defeat.

After the girls' game was over, Phil Campbell held its Senior Night ceremony and recognized five seniors: cheerleaders Kayden Headlee and Lola Mays, girls basketball player Leela Baker, and boys basketball players Hagen Raper and Madden Welch.

The boys' game tipped off next, and it proved to be a competitive contest from start to finish.

In the first half the Bulldogs and Bobcats traded buckets and there were a few lead changes in the opening 16 minutes, but Phil Campbell led at the end of both the first and second periods. The hosts, led by junior Austin Elliott who scored 14 points in the first half, held a two-point, 31-29 advantage over BHS going into the locker room at halftime.

In the second half, the Bobcats, thanks to a suffocating defense, were able to force low-percentage shots and more turnovers which led to fast-break opportunities; those efforts eventually created just a little more separation between themselves and the Bulldogs. Phil Campbell also did well rebounding on both ends of the court.

That defensive work was critical to the final result, Phil Campbell head coach Shannon Benford told the Franklin Free Press.

"We're just playing better defense. Belgreen has some shooters that you've got to close out on them and lock them down," he said. "(Braycen) Johnson and (Jake) Dill are two great shooters and you have to guard them."

Phil Campbell took a seven-point lead into the fourth quarter, and that's where the margin hovered for the remainder of the game until Belgreen, forced to foul late, sent the Bobcats to the free throw line. There PCHS was able to boost the final margin of victory to double digits.

Benford said his team played well offensively in the second half of the game, but that's an area the second-year head coach believes his team can still improve on as the regular season nears its conclusion.

"We've just got to keep getting better offensively. We shoot a lot at practice, and we've just gotta keep putting the ball in the hole," he said.

Elliott finished the contest with 20 points for Phil Campbell. PCHS seniors Raper and Welch ended the night with 10 points each.

"Those guys went through football season and had a great year, and they come out and work their butts off for basketball season, too," Benford said of Raper and Welch. "They're hard workers and we're going to miss them, I can promise you that."

Belgreen senior Braycen Johnson scored a game-high 26 points in the loss. Chris Bentley added 11 points for BHS.

The win improved Phil Campbell's record to 15-10. Belgreen dropped to 10-12 with the loss.



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'THARPTOWN,' from Page 11

games. After the girls' contest, Ward commended Fischer for her leadership.

"She has been a true leader for us. We call her 'Coach Fischer' all the time because she truly is a leader on and off the court," Ward told the Franklin Free Press. "We're going to miss her a lot next season. It's been an honor to coach her her final season, but we're sad that she's going to be leaving us."

Up next the THS and VHS boys were slated to tip off, but before that happened there was a very special moment for a massive Tharptown basketball supporter. Caden Hill, one of the seniors recognized between games, hit the court, made a few steals and sank a few baskets, including a three-pointer, against Red Devil opposition. Hill's sharp shooting received a roar of applause and he got standing ovations from Tharptown and Vina fans alike after being subbed off the court.

"We are so proud of Caden Hill for scoring on the court last night!" Tharptown High School posted on its Facebook page. "We love his enthusiasm for Wildcat Basketball! He had the best cheering section! Thanks to all who helped make this a special night for Caden!"

Following Hill's cameo, the teams went to center court for the tip and a low-scoring but competitive battle ensued.

In the first half, the two sides traded blows and the lead changed hands multiple times, especially in the first quarter, but by halftime the Wildcats had accrued a five-point, 24-19 lead.

After the break, the fight continued as neither side could assert dominance on the other. Tharptown maintained a slight edge going into the fourth quarter up 29-27. The final eight minutes were evenly matched with THS just outscoring Vina 13-12, but that was enough to secure the 42-39 win for the hosts on their Senior Night.

Vina's Colton Davis led all scorers with 15 points in the loss.

Tharptown had two players finish with double figures: Zach Riley led his team with 13 points and Jackson Knighton was right behind him with 12 points. Evin Lawson added nine points for the Wildcats.

After the game, Wildcats' head coach Chuck Simmons praised his four senior players for their character.

"We have four seniors: Bryson Borden, Cesar Rueda, Daniel Jimenez, Kaiden Hallmark. They are a really good group that work very hard in practice and games. They understand what their roles are on our teams, and do that to the best of their ability. They are good role models for our younger guys in the classroom and the court," Simmons said. "They are all very coachable and give their very best effort in practice and games. They display high character at school and games. We will miss these guys, but we are very proud of them, we know they will succeed in their professional lives after school."



Tharptown High School senior Caden Hill, center left, with his supporters on Senior Night. (Photo courtesy Tharptown High School)

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'STATE MEET,' from Page 11

In the field events, RHS had one top 10 placement. Sophomore Keira Cruse came in sixth place in the girls long jump final and set a new program record with a jump of 15-8.25 (4.78m).

Cruse also competed in the girls triple jump final and finished 13th. Sophomore Sir Williams and senior Gavin McDaniel had top 15 finishes in the boys high jump and junior Jasen Noel came in 13th in the boys triple jump.

As a team, the Russellville boys' team finished tied for 11th place with 17 points; Cruse, the lone competitor on the girls side for RHS, garnered three total points.

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REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

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

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Vina varsity basketball teams honor seniors during contests against Cherokee

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

On Thursday, January 29, the Vina High School girls' and boys' basketball teams held Senior Night and took on Cherokee High School for their final home game of the regular season. Both Red Devils squads came up just short in their efforts against the Indians, the VHS girls falling 43-41 and the VHS boys losing by a final of 49-45.

The girls' contest got things rolling in what proved to be a hard-fought battle with multiple lead changes.

The Lady Red Devils were the ones rolling early on in the game. At the end of the first quarter, VHS held a 16-10 lead over CHS. But the hosts flagged in the second period and only scored three points.

At halftime, Cherokee led Vina 21-19.

The game remained tight all the way to the very end, Cherokee needing a couple points extremely late to win in regulation.

The visitors led 33-30 at the end of the third quarter and it was knotted up 41-41 with just a few seconds left. Unfortunately for the Lady Red Devils, a foul sent Cherokee's Brooklyn Ricks to the line with three seconds remaining. Ricks had missed her previous six free throw attempts but sank the two that mattered most to give Cherokee a 43-41 victory.

Vina eighth-grader Miley Pannell led the Lady Red Devils with 14 points and seven steals in the game, followed by seven points from freshman Marissa Lamar. Seniors Braxtyn Quinn and Miranda King scored six and three points, respectively; Quinn also recorded eight assists. Vina's third senior, Harleigh Ridge, started the game and made an impact on the contest with an aggressive defensive effort.

Vina girls' basketball head coach Richie Hester said he is proud of his three seniors—Quinn, King, and Ridge, who were honored during the course of the evening—and they will be missed.

"Over the years I have coached several seniors, and some of them I am coaching against now. It is a bittersweet situation because you are going to miss them and the team is going to miss them, but you are proud of their accomplishments and the young adults they have become," Hester said. "These three seniors will really be missed, but we wish them the very best in their future endeavors."

Next up was the boys' contest between the Red Devils and Indians, another game that was decided by less than a handful of points.

Vina fell behind 14-8 to start but was able to cut the deficit to four points before halftime, going into the locker room down 23-19.

The Red Devils came out hot after the intermission and overtook the visitors to end the third quarter with a 38-36 lead. However, that Vina advantage was not to last. Cherokee came out and played the final period much like the first, outscoring VHS 13-7 in the final eight minutes to win by four.

VHS senior Matthew Patterson led all scorers with 17 points. Vina's other senior, Brody Raper, scored seven points for the Red Devils in defeat.

Randy Barnes, head coach of the VHS boys' basketball team, praised his two seniors for their contributions to the program over the years.

"I'm about to be done with my fifth year and they've been with me every year since they were in middle school. They're actually the last remaining players from the team we took to sub-region (2022-23 season) for the first time since 1995," Barnes said. "As a coach, they mean the world to me. They've been with me since the beginning, they've trusted me, and it's really hard to see them go."

"I really appreciate them and the time they've put toward our program and our school. They're both multi-sport athletes, and you have to have that at a small school. They've really helped us out, and we appreciate them."

"They're good leaders, good people to look up to, and good teammates," he added of Patterson and Raper. "We've been able to accomplish a lot together, and we're really going to miss them."



Vina High School basketball seniors from left to right: Brody Raper, Braxtyn Quinn, Harleigh Ridge, Miranda King, and Matthew Patterson. (Vina High School Basketball/Facebook)

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Have a tip or sports story idea? Want to share you local sports photos? Email sports editor Kadin Pounders at franklinfreepress.sports@gmail.com



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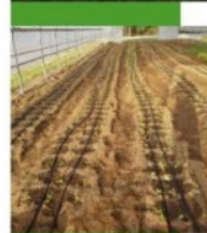
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