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Highway named in memory of Morrow

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It was 1997 when congressman Tom Beville first asked that a stretch of Highway 24 between the Mississippi state line and Russellville be named in memory of David Morrow.

Twenty years later, that request will become a reality, as the newly expanded 24 from Belgreen to Russellville will be formally dedicated as the "David Morrow Highway."

Morrow, a Red Bay native, was instrumental in garnering support from Beville for the

Hwy. 24 project. Without his efforts and dedication, an expanded 24 from Mississippi to Moulton would have remained a dream.

David Morrow, a Red Bay native, was instrumental in garnering support from Beville for the Hwy. 24 project. Without his efforts and dedication, an expanded 24 from Mississippi to Moulton would have remained a dream.

Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, David Morrow's nephew, said he wanted to wait to

formally name the highway in his uncle's memory until the four-lane expansion from Mississippi was complete. Now that it is, a dedication ceremony will take place this Friday, June 9 at 2 p.m. at Belgreen United Methodist Church. The church is located at the intersection of Hwy. 187 and 24. The public is invited to the dedication ceremony.

In addition to naming a stretch of 24 in David Morrow's memory, the portion of the highway from Belgreen to the Mississippi state line will be dedicated as the Tammy Wynette Highway.

See 'MORROW' Page 9



Downtown Russellville's first loft apartments will soon be available to lease.

Reed Building to host open house

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

For the first time ever, loft apartments will soon be available to lease in downtown Russellville.

This Sunday, June 11, an open house will be held at the newly named Reed Building to give interested individuals the opportunity to check out the two new one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartments at 110 Jackson Avenue North.

"We've got two upstairs loft apartments with balconies that we'll be leasing," said owner and Russellville mayor David Grissom. "This is the first time Russellville has had loft apartments. It's something new and hopefully something that can help revitalize downtown."

Grissom and his business partner Chris Wallace, who together comprise Made in USA Properties, LLC, purchased the two-story building in October of 2016. Since then, they have worked to renovate the second floor into a modern living space.

"One of the first things we did was hire an architect," Wallace said. "We got him started early in the process, and then from there we really got going on it."

The next step was making sure the building was safe for future tenants and had all the necessary amenities.

"We basically started working from the roof down," Grissom said. "We put in a new roof, new wiring, new plumbing. It was a complete renovation"

See 'REED,' Page 7

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Raymond Junior Baker, Sheffield, age 64
Died Monday, May 29, 2017. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Gray Rock Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

Patricia Ann Shepherd, Hohenwald, TN (formerly of Russellville), age 78
Died Monday, June 5, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Austin E. Simpson, Dunwoody, GA (formerly of Littleville), age 89
Died Sunday, May 28, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Hyde Cemetery in Littleville.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net!

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We have been blessed to be part of the Russellville community for seven years. It is with mixed emotions that I announce the closing of my practice in Russellville and Haleyville effective June 30th. I want to thank the community for your support.

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Morrow appointed to BCDA Board of Directors

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A new law opened the door for a familiar face to join the Bear Creek Development Authority Board of Directors as Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow was named to the board recently as the designee for mayor D.W. Franklin of Vina.

Act No. 2017-362, signed by Gov. Kay Ivey on May 17, 2017, provides that mayors in Class 8 municipalities (those with populations of 5,999 or less), who are ex officio members of a state or local agency, board, commission or other entity by virtue of their position as mayor, may designate a person to serve in their place, who shall assume all duties of the elected official relating to the board.

Franklin, who sat on the BCDA Board of Directors through his position as Vina mayor, appointed Morrow as his proxy. Morrow's first meeting was last Tuesday afternoon.

Additionally, Terry Cosby, the mayor of Cherokee, appointed Troy Rutland in his stead to serve on the board of directors.

Board chairman Trisha Montgomery proposed that a subcommittee be formed to work on a long-range strategic plan for BCDA. That subcommittee includes Morrow, Jeff Mobley, Chris Gillum, Shannon McKinney and Charlene Fancher.

"A strategic plan is basic. It looks at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats," Morrow said. "You plan to take advantage of your strengths and opportunities and anticipate your weaknesses and threats in advance, and be ready to react.

"Obviously, we start with the strength of a beautiful landscape and four beautiful lakes. The idea is to maximize usage and potential of these properties."

Montgomery hopes to see the committee set goals that will "be a launch pad for economic development in the Bear Creek Watershed area," she said.

One major development at last Tuesday's meeting came when the board approved the return of management of Overton Farm back to the board. After the Town of Hodges took over management last year after a two-year process, town officials decided they could no longer financially manage the property.

Board chairman Trisha Montgomery proposed that a subcommittee be formed to work on a long-range strategic plan for BCDA. Montgomery hopes to see the committee set goals that will "be a launch pad for economic development in the Bear Creek Watershed area."

"They just couldn't do it at this point," Montgomery said. "Overton Farm will be the jewel of the Alabama Legacy Trail, and eventually we hope it will be a historical museum because of the buildings constructed by pioneers on the site. We need to do all we can to preserve and restore and refurbish Overton Farm, and we're working toward that with volunteers through the University of Alabama, the University of Mississippi, Northwest-Shoals Community College and the University of North Alabama."

Board members discussed the low water level in Little Bear Lake and the growing concern about the

effect that level is having on lake recreational usage.

"We're looking at what we can do in different situations and if we can get to the winter pool level and stabilize the usability of the lakes on a year-round basis," Montgomery said.

The board will continue to focus on the development of a kayak trail on a 12-mile stretch from Allsboro to Hayes Landing as part of the Bear Creek system.

"We did not know the kayak trail would develop into a four-city, multi-state international trail, but the need is there and the will is there," Montgomery said. "We're not developing anything new we don't have. It's just a matter of managing and developing maximum potential of existing resources."

Board members heard an update from Kelley Taft with the Kelley Group, a firm working to develop Overton Farm, the Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park and adjoining BCDA lands.

The Kelley Group is also working to obtain grants to help develop and promote the area. The current project is obtaining GIS of existing equestrian trails with the goal of building the trails to federal equestrian guideline standards.

Taft explained that BCDA and the Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park are unique assets that can serve to draw overnight tourists into north Alabama.

"The average stay in north Alabama is 2.7 nights. We want to increase that number through economic development and recreational opportunities with the kayak trail, equestrian trail, Overton Farm and the BCDA lakes," Taft said.

The Kelley Group's efforts are being funded through grants.

AARP warns consumers of five current scams

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) is warning consumers of several telephone scams that are sweeping the country.

With the volume of unsolicited calls surpassing 29 billion in 2016 according to AARP, there's a lot of potential for rip-offs and scams. Fraud complaints have increased by more than 60 percent since 2010, according to the Federal Trade Commission.

Here are five current scams, including four phone scams, to be aware of, according to AARP:

- IRS Scam: A person claiming to be an IRS criminal

investigator threatens arrest if you don't immediately pay back thousands of dollars in back taxes. Individuals are directed to put large amounts of money on iTunes gift cards and turn over the 16-digit codes.

- Computer Caper: Little boxes appear and pop up on your computer screen indicating you have a virus and need to contact technical support. Be advised that computer companies never notify customers of problems through pop-ups.

- Sheriff Scam: The caller claims to be a sheriff's deputy claiming you've missed jury duty and owe the county a large fine. You must pay immediately or go to jail. If you receive this call, AARP recommends you contact the police immediately.

- Lottery Scam: You are told in the call you've won a foreign lottery, often the Jamaican lottery. Just wire \$1,500 to collect. Lotteries never call to give money to people who haven't even bought a ticket. It's a scam.

- Credit Card scam: A call purporting to be from your bank indicates a problem with your account. To correct it, you're directed to give your account number, date of birth and the last four digits of your Social Security number. This is purely an attempt to steal identity.

AARP reminds you to do some research before buying anything, including a Google search of the salesperson and company. Additionally, don't react out of fear and trust your instincts. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Post 31 to provide military honors for Tuskegee Airman

Submitted to the FFP

The American Legion Post 31 Color Guard of Tusculumbia will travel to Nashville this Saturday, June 10, to provide full military honors in memory of Lt. Carroll Napier Langston, Tuskegee Airman, on the 73rd ultimate sacrifice anniversary of his service to the nation in World War II.

Lt. Carroll Napier Langston, a Tuskegee Airman assigned to the 332nd Fighter Group, 301st Fighter Squadron based at Ramitelli Air Base, Italy, lost his life after his squadron completed a strike mission on 7 June 1944 when his P47-D aircraft lost oil pressure.

Parachuting safely into the Adriatic Sea approximately ten nautical miles off Italy's San Benedetto coast, Air Sea Rescue and his unit's subsequent search failed to locate Lt. Langston or his aircraft. His body was found on 26 June 1944 (nearly two-and-a-half weeks later) by

a U.S. Army ground patrol washed ashore near Pineta Italy. The commanding officer reported that he appeared to have received gunshot wounds to the head and chest. With his personal effects recovered by the patrol, Lt. Langston was wrapped in a mattress cover (the only material available in the field) and was laid to rest in a shallow grave near railroad tracks with his I.D. tags and name written on the wooden cross marking the site of his burial.

Lt. Langston is a cousin of Tom McKnight, a Post 31 Color Guard member whose genealogical research began over a decade ago and led to the discovery of his ancestral roots in north Alabama and settlement in the area. McKnight was engaged in a decade-long search to discover if Lt. Langston's remains had been repatriated to the U.S. or were still interred on Italy's eastern coast.

Unrelenting research, guided by what McKnight refers to as "Divine Intervention" and "ancestral-led

shoulder taps" resulting in the receipt of information from unexpected sources so that the "ancestor's stories are not long gone and forgotten," revealed that Lt. Langston's remains were exhumed on three separate occasions: Once from the original burial spot and reinterred at a cemetery not far from the original site; again as the U.S. Army Quartermaster and Graves Registration Unit recovered the Airman and laid him to rest for the third time at Bari Military Cemetery, a location honoring participants in both World Wars; and finally from Bari Military cemetery to the United States to his parents, Carroll Napier Langston, Sr. and wife Vivian, after an agonizingly long wait of four-and-a-half years. This resulted in Lt. Langston's final resting place interment in a privately held family service on 7 December 1948.

Post 31 Color Guard will provide full honors comprising flag fold, rifle volley and the playing of Taps.

Honey Do: Handheld gear

Can you imagine how it was, just a few years ago, when sweat was the only fuel that handheld equipment ran on?

Would you attempt to build a house with just a hammer, a saw and maybe a drill with a crank on it? I think most folks would be looking for nail guns and electric or battery-powered saws and drills.

Handheld equipment has certainly come a long way, especially in the realm of lawn care. There is, generally, a power tool that will fit the physical ability and pocketbook of most any person with a yard to maintain.

For larger or heavier jobs, gas-powered equipment is usually the answer. You may choose dedicated equipment or get a weed trimmer that will accept attachments and perform various functions. For example,

you may need a pole saw a couple of times a year, so rather than having a dedicated machine, get a trimmer that will accept a pole-saw attachment. This will help eliminate problems that come with gas-powered engines being stored and not used. Carburetors, fuel lines and filters can be contaminated by stale fuel that sits inside them.

Battery-powered equipment continues to evolve and has really taken off with the arrival of lithium battery packs. Charge times have been reduced, and power has increased. Newer technology is a bit pricey, but I think we will continue to see efficiency increase and prices come down. Many contractor grade units are available now. These are quieter, cheaper to operate, have less down time and have no harmful emissions during operation.

Technology changes quickly, and it's amazing to see the new products that are continuously hitting the market. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

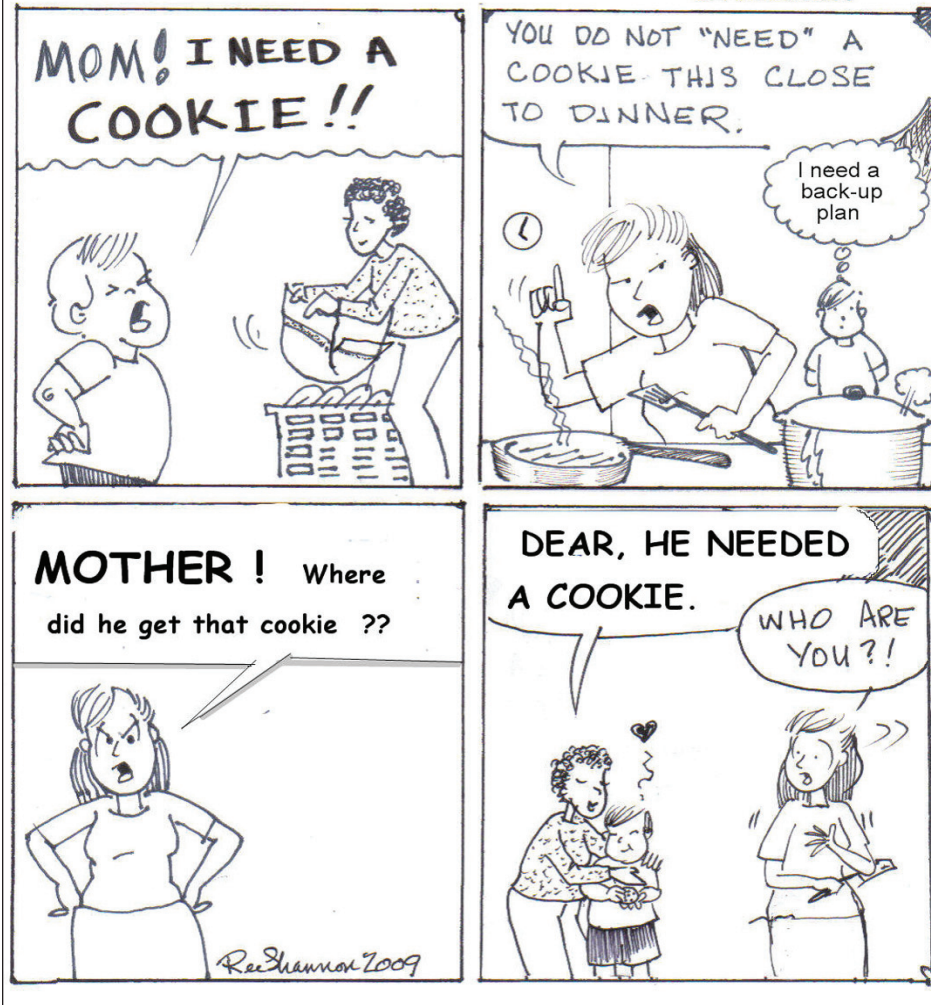


Doug Green

Handheld equipment has certainly come a long way. There is, generally, a power tool that will fit the physical ability and pocketbook of most any person with a yard to maintain.

For many homeowners with small yards, electric-powered tools are a very convenient and affordable way to go. If you have a source of electricity within about 100 feet of the job to be done, electric chainsaws, weed trimmers and hedge trimmers can handle a lot of tasks. Just be very careful with electricity in grass that may be damp, and be sure everything is grounded properly. Always keep cords out of the way of cutting blades, and don't let them get tangled around your feet.

OUR HOUSE by Ree Shannon



FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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Trump's Paris move neglects our future

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Last week, President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Accord, the "world's first comprehensive climate agreement." The U.S. exit from the 2015 Paris deal, which was signed in April of 2016 under the Obama administration, was a major win for Trump and for conservatives and climate change deniers, who have called climate change a "hoax" and a part of a political agenda to (for some reason) kill coal and oil jobs.

This decision comes despite the fact that Trump's daughter Ivanka, tech companies like Tesla and even a few oil giants like Exxon Mobil and ConocoPhillips urged Trump to keep the U.S. loyal to the agreement.

China and the European Union, the No. 1 and No. 3 carbon emitters, respectively, just recently reaffirmed their commitment to the deal, but that did not stop the Trump administration from backing out, either.

Trump did say he would attempt to renegotiate a Paris deal that will, in his opinion, be better for American workers. "We will start to negotiate," he said, "and we will see if we can make a deal that's fair. And if we can, that's great."

But considering his past attitude towards climate change and his rhetoric towards former president Barack Obama, it does not seem likely that Trump would ever re-enter an agreement that quickly became a staple of his predecessor's legacy.

For those who believe the Paris Accord is necessary to stop the threats against our planet, there are a few silver linings. One is that Trump has agreed to follow the exit procedure outlined in the agreement, a process that will take four more years to complete. That will automatically make the Paris Accord and the decision to leave it behind either a point to highlight for the

Republicans in 2020, or a point to pivot away from. [I'm leaning towards the latter.]

Another is the fact that no matter what Trump does, and no matter the promises he makes, he ultimately can not save the dying coal industry. He can only prolong it. And while the coal that dirties our atmosphere dies, clean energy renewables like solar and wind continue to flourish. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the American coal industry has been in a steady decline since 1986, losing approximately 100,000 jobs. Since that time, renewable sources of energy like solar have overtaken coal.

As of 2015, there were approximately 260,000 solar jobs in the U.S., which is nearly quadruple the number of coal jobs. Simply put, renewables are the future, not coal. And while renewables, specifically solar, still haven't caught up to oil in terms of usage, the cost of production of oil is higher, making renewables a cheaper alternative to the erratic oil market.

Whatever Trump and the Republicans' reasons for turning their backs on planet Earth, whether it's greed or ignorance or just another political score to get re-elected, it's clear now that Americans can't rely on current elected officials to protect future generations.

While our president and other Republican leaders continue to neglect the future and alienate the United States from the rest of the world, the Earth will continue to get hotter. Ice caps will melt, hurricanes will grow stronger, wildfires will become more frequent and millions of lives will be lost all the while.

But despite my distrust in our own government, I believe there is still some hope that, if countries like China and India stay faithful, the Paris Accord can accomplish its goal. The U.S. emits 15 percent of the world's carbon dioxide, which leaves the other 147 parties and 85 percent to do what the United States does not have the courage to do: Save our planet.



generous enough to pay for most of my school expenses, and they let me live at home while I complete my degree. Still, I'm trying to figure out how to move out and continue working, while continuing my studies full-time and attending career-related events. We live in an area where the cost of living is high, so I'm not sure how to handle all the facets of this situation.

Joel

Buy leased building?

Dear Dave,
I've operated my own small business for a couple of years. In that time, I've been leasing the building that houses my company. How do you know when the time is right to buy a place and stop leasing?

James

Dear James,
I'm a big fan of leasing the first few years after starting your own business. It's even better if you can work out of your home, but I understand that's not always practical.

In my mind, you should only buy a building when you have a good idea what your building needs will be from a solid track record. Growth is a good thing, but in some cases you may want to hold off buying a building if you're growing too rapidly.

Don't make the mistake of focusing too much on real estate and not enough on generating revenue and managing your growth intelligently. You would also want to make sure you're going to be in anything you buy for a while, because you don't want to be stuck with a residual value. A residual value is the remaining value of an asset after it has been fully depreciated.

In the first three to five years of starting your business, you should lease. After that, you can choose to lease with an option to buy or, in the right situation, buy a building—debt-free, of course.

Dave

Dear Joel,
I think out of three things (school, work and where you live), you need to decide which is your number one priority. If it were me, school would come first.

In order to go to school without borrowing money, you're going to have to work. Getting out of school on time and attending some of the events that will take you toward your career will preempt work. You'll have to work enough to pay for things, but if you can finish school and hit your academic and graduation goals while staying at home a little bit longer, that's a pretty good deal. It's a nice thing your parents are offering, but I can understand your desire to be out on your own.

I want you to be out on your own as soon as you can, too. But if you do that right now, you're going to have extra bills and be forced to work even more. That's going to disturb your entire school process. Guess what your number one priority was in that scenario? Moving out! If it's the tail that's wagging the dog, it has become the number one priority. If it's disrupting work, and thereby disrupting your academics, then you've put your priorities on the wrong thing.

In my mind, the number one priority should be finishing school on time and attending as many connected events as possible. Meanwhile, you're working so much that you're able to continue doing all this debt-free. If that means you're staying at home a little bit longer to pull it off—do it!

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

What's your priority?

Dear Dave,
I work weekends while attending college full-time. My parents have been



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 The Franklin County 21st Century Community Learning Centers is in need of qualified nurses, either RN or LPN, to work in the TRACKS Summer program. This position is to provide for our students who have medical issues that require professional care. It will also include assisting the Site Lead Teacher as an aide in implementing the program activities. If you are interested in joining our team, please contact us! Franklin County Community Education, 14141 Highway 187 Russellville, AL 35653. Phone number: 256-331-0005.


 Community members are encouraged to participate in "Build a Better World," the Russellville Public Library's summer reading program, from June 2-30. All ages from newborns to senior citizens are invited to come to the library and read for prizes, as well as to take part in special events offered throughout the summer. Special events this summer will include a new Lap Baby (Read to Me) program for ages 0-3, our regular summer reading program for ages 4-11, a new teen read program, and special events for adults and seniors. You can register now to attend these free events at the circulation desk of the Russellville Public Library or by calling 256-332-1535. The "Build a Better World" teen summer library program is sponsored by the Friends of the Russellville Public Library and local businesses.


 American Legion Post 64 meets the second Thursday of each month at the Chamber of Commerce office on Jackson Avenue. Meal served around 6 p.m., meeting at 7 p.m. Next meeting will be Thursday, June 8.

 The family of Rev. Sid and Dore Hawkins invites family and friends to the Hawkins Family Reunion. Bean dinner will be held this Saturday, June 10 at 11 a.m. at Hawkins Church on Railroad Avenue in Phil Campbell.

 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest C. Tyler Jones at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville this Saturday, June 10 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Group discounts available! Call 256-335-4356. Profits go directly toward the renovation and restoration of the historic Roxy Theatre.

 Tharptown Elementary School will hold registration for new students on Wednesday, June 14 from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. For more information, please call 256-332-3404.

 The Franklin County Cattlemen's Association will have a steak sandwich sale on Friday, June 16 from 9:30 a.m. until sold out in the Russellville Foodland parking lot next to CB&S Bank. Ribeye steak sandwich, chips and a drink of your choice for \$8. Proceeds go to the College Scholarship Fund for Franklin County high schools and Russellville City Schools. For large orders of 15 or more, please call ahead to Orland Britnell at 256-810-9304 or Bonnie Hargett at 256-412-3468.

 For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, First United Methodist Church of Russellville will host *Celebrate Recovery!* on Tuesday nights with supper at 6 p.m., worship at 6:30 and groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. Church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue. Come and join us!

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'REED,' from page 1

of the entire building. Essentially, we took an old structure and made it into a new one."

While most everything in the apartments is new, the partners did make a couple of décor decisions to keep the history of the building intact.

"The only things we kept were the brick walls and the hardwood pine floors. Everything else is new," Wallace said. "I'm not sure exactly how to describe [the apartments], but I guess it would be more of an industrial look."

Perhaps the most attractive feature of the apartments are the balconies that were added on to the building.

"We put a front and back balcony on the building for the apartments, and that's something that's pretty trendy these days," Wallace said. "Adding the balconies is a first for the downtown area and hopefully something that is appealing to people."

Grissom and Wallace are inviting the community to the open house and hope it will generate some buzz around Russellville.

"We want as many people as possible to stop by

and see the building and the apartments," Grissom said. "Obviously, we think it's something that's new and exciting for downtown Russellville, and it could be a first step for more of this kind of thing in the future."

A special guest will also be making an appearance at the open house. Huntsville mayor Tommy Battle, a Republican candidate for governor of Alabama, will be in attendance and will speak to those who come by to see the new downtown lofts.

Wallace is optimistic that once Made in USA Properties finds tenants for its two new lofts, more owners, businesses and property managers will begin starting similar undertakings on the downtown strip.

"A lot of the buildings downtown are for sale or have been sold, and a lot of them are perfect for renovating and doing what we did with our building," Wallace said. "I think it's just a matter of getting the ball rolling. Once people see that you can lease an apartment downtown, I think people will be more willing to start their own projects like this."



PHOTO BY KADIN POUNDERS

Most everything inside the loft apartments is new, with the exception of the original brick walls and hardwood pine floors.

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Burns celebrates National Nursing Home Week with special events

Submitted to the FFP

RUSSELLVILLE – The staff at Burns Nursing & Rehab in Russellville strives each and every day to make sure their residents have access to things like quality activities, interactive programs and the best care they can possibly receive.

Those who do not visit their facility on a regular basis may not realize all the different aspects of resident life that are available at Burns, but there is one week each year where the community, as well as friends and family of the residents, are invited to come by and see what it means to be a resident of Burns Nursing & Rehab.

The facility held special events during the week of



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above, CNA Ariana Gonzalez smiles for the camera during the outdoor Nursing Home Week festivities with residents of Burns Nursing & Rehab. Below, staff members Jaleesa Ward and Terina McGalliard enjoy painting with resident Grace Hargett. At left, Ruby Duncan was crowned the winner of the Ms. Burns Nursing & Rehab Pageant.

See 'BURNS,' Page 9



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'MORROW,' from page 1

Gov. Guy Hunt first dedicated the highway in Wynette's honor in 1989. New signs will be erected on the highway in Wynette's and Morrow's honor.

Members of both families will be in attendance at Friday's ceremony, along with local elected officials and dignitaries.

It was early 1991 when freshman legislator Johnny Mack Morrow voted against a seven-cent gasoline tax that would be used to pay for the Alabama Development Highway Program, a 20-year plan for four-lane highways in Alabama. Facing intense pressure from speaker of the house Jimmy Clark and Gov. Hunt to support the tax, Morrow voted against it after learning Highway 24 was not included in the 20-year plan.

This could have meant the death of Morrow's expansion dream for 24, but he turned to his Uncle David, who was a close friend of Bevill's.

"The very next week, Uncle David, my dad and I made a trip to Jasper to visit with Mr. Bevill," Morrow said. "We met the congressman at his office, and then the four of us walked a short distance to the home of one of my most admired public servants, former congressman Carl Elliott. My father and my Uncle David had known Carl since childhood. All three grew up in the Vina/Halltown communities in rural Franklin County.

"There on Carl Elliott's front porch, we discussed this project, and Congressman Bevill agreed that Highway 24 becoming a four-lane was now a top priority for him. That day was certainly one of the most productive and enjoyable days of my life. I thank God for letting me experience it."

David Morrow owned Morrow Hardware and Furniture Company in Red Bay. He served three terms

as Red Bay mayor, and he was the first and only president of the Bear Creek Watershed Association.

One of the association's major accomplishments was the Bear Creek Water Control System, a 15-year, \$85 million project that included four dams and 25,000 acres of shoreline with lakeshore industries, permanent subdivisions, vacation-type housing and recreational facilities.

David Morrow was married to Lucille Vinson, and they had three children, Marvalene Morrow Stanphill, Julia Ann Morrow Weber and Horace Morrow.

In a 1997 letter to Johnny Mack Morrow, Bevill stated his affection for David Morrow and the influence he had in the Highway 24 project.

"I committed to him on that date to do everything in my power to obtain funding for the Highway 24 project. Out of respect for your uncle, this immediately became a major objective of mine," Bevill wrote. "I recall how elated you were on the day I called to inform you that Mr. Dave's project, Highway 24, had been funded."

Although Wynette was born and raised across the state line in Mississippi in the Bounds Crossroads community, she often referred to Red Bay as her "hometown," as it was the closest town to where she lived. Wynette shopped, went to the doctor and visited relatives in Red Bay.

Through the years, Wynette performed five benefit concerts for Red Bay School.

After moving to Nashville with her three young daughters, Wynette went on to become the First Lady of Country Music after being the first female artist in country music to sell one million records. She later married George Jones, and the couple had one daughter, Georgette.



COURTESY PHOTO

This photo, taken roughly 25 years ago, shows (from left) Sam Letson, Johnny Mack Morrow, David Morrow and Tom Bevill as they discuss the planning phase of the Hwy. 24 expansion. The project recently was completed and will be dedicated in David Morrow's honor at a ceremony Friday.

Wynette received Female Vocalist of the Year honors from the Country Music Association. She earned two Grammys, the Living Legend Award in 1991, Lifetime Citation of Merit for the American Music Awards and many more honors. Her memory will live on forever on the highway that goes through the town she adopted as her own.

For more information on this Friday's dedication and naming ceremony, contact Scotty Kennedy at 256-356-8758.

'BURNS,' from page 8

May 14-20 in honor of National Nursing Home Week. The event, established by the American Health Care Association in 1967, is something Burns celebrates each year as a way to showcase their unique "community" within the nursing care facility.

The week of events is celebrated by other nursing care centers across the United States, and this year's theme was "The Spirit of America," which was meant to underscore the bond between staff, volunteers and residents that captures the American spirit.

Burns Nursing & Rehab administrator Mark DeArman said this is always a special week for the residents and staff, and they are always glad to see so many visitors come out to be part of the events.

"We really have a great time with our activities here," DeArman said. "Our activities director, Tony Datuin, always plans fun things, and the events that were planned for National Nursing Home Week were no different.

"Everyone seemed to have a great time, especially the residents, and we are always glad to see them having fun."

DeArman said the week's activities included grilling hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken outside and having a fish fry; setting up a campsite with a fire for roasting marshmallows; a staff badminton tournament, where the residents cheered them on; a time for residents to paint patriotic pictures in line with the week's patriotic theme; and performances by different musical groups who came

to entertain residents and guests.

"We also had our annual Ms. Burns Nursing and Rehab Pageant, which is always so much fun," DeArman said. "We have our beautician, Tammy Hutcheson, to come in and do hair and nails for the residents who want to participate. You can tell it makes them feel great to get fixed up, and they have a great time."

DeArman said this year's winner of the pageant was Ms. Ruby Nell Duncan, of Belgreen, who will have a chance to participate in the Ms. Alabama Nursing Home Pageant in Birmingham.

"Ms. Ruby is such a kind and caring person and is always trying to help others at the facility," DeArman said. "She makes the other residents laugh and is a joy to have here. She has made so many friends since coming here over a year ago."

DeArman said he hopes the activities and events during National Nursing Home Week were as uplifting and fun for residents and guests as they were for the staff.

"We truly care about each one of our residents here and want them to have the best experience possible while they are with us," DeArman said. "That is our goal every single day, but we hope those who visited with us during this time were able to see that as well.

"This facility becomes our residents' home and their own community, and it is a community we are proud to showcase to others."

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Woman seeks pet's safe return

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Dogs, over the centuries, have become synonymous as creatures of loyalty and companionship. They are called "man's best friend" for a reason.

But just like with any friend, canine or otherwise, there is a void that is tough to replace when they leave.

For Mildred Jeske of Russellville, the void left behind by her dog Skippy has been especially hard to handle and has caused her more than a fair share of grief.

This is because, according to Jeske, Skippy did not run away or leave willingly. She claims that he was stolen by her neighbor as revenge for an earlier conflict between the two.

"The person next door is the one that stole him, and I know why he stole him," said Jeske, who did not wish to reveal her neighbor's identity. "He threw tree branches in my yard, and I called the police on him. I believe he stole my dog to get back at me for it."

Jeske, who is in her 80s and confined to a wheelchair, said she let Skippy outside for a while, but when she went to call him back in, he was nowhere to be found. That was on February 21 of this year. Jeske has not seen Skippy since.

"We went miles around looking for the little doggy but couldn't find him," said Jeske, who invited relatives to search with her. "I'm positive that my neighbor took him."

According to Jeske, she and her neighbor have had other issues in the past.

"I've seen him in my yard and peeking over my fence," she said. "I was being harassed, and I think they were trying to scare me."

Jeske contacted the police and made them aware of the situation with Skippy. According to Jeske, an officer that is no longer with the Russellville Police Department went to talk to her neighbor but was unsuccessful in getting him to answer the door. Ever since then, Jeske sees RPD patrolling the area and believes they are keeping an eye on her neighbor, but no leads to Skippy's whereabouts have appeared.

Without eyewitnesses or proof that the neighbor stole her canine friend, there is not much the RPD can do to help Jeske find Skippy.

"I don't think I'll ever see him again, because I don't know what [the neighbor] has done with him," she said. "It kills me, because that dog was my little companion and little buddy. He was a good little dog."

Jeske said she has not had any problems with her neighbor since accusing him of dognapping, but she is hoping that by speaking out about the incident that Skippy will be returned to her.

"I haven't done anything to anyone," she said. "My reason for talking about the whole thing is hopefully they'll read this and bring Skippy back to me."

Russellville police chief Chris Hargett said he does not believe there is a problem with dog thieves in Russellville, recalling just a few reports of missing or stolen dogs in the last few months.

"I've heard of two or three instances like that in the last few months," he said. "If someone's dog goes missing or they believe it may have been stolen, they can file a report just like they would with any crime."

To report a crime, individuals may call the Russellville Police Department at 256-332-2230.



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PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Greenhill (above) led the state in wins this season with 12 and finished tied for first in strikeouts with 144. He did not allow an earned run in five playoff starts.

Greenhill, Burns lead loaded field for Mr. Baseball

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

Take a look at *Baseball America's* list of the Top 100 prospects for this month's MLB Amateur Draft, and you'll see five high school players from Alabama: McGill-Toolen outfielder Bubba Thompson at No. 23, Decatur shortstop/pitcher Tanner Burns at No. 37, Cullman left-hander Jacob Heatherly at No. 55, Vestavia Hills right-hander Caden Lemons at No. 96 and James Clemens outfielder Jordan Anderson at No. 98.

Those are just a handful of the players with next-level talent who highlight a star-studded in-state Class of 2017, a group that also includes Cullman outfielder Owen Lovell, Helena catcher Sam Praytor, UMS-Wright infielder/outfielder Tanner Allen, Rehobeth pitcher/first baseman Jack Knight and a pair of Russellville Golden Tigers, outfielder Judd Ward and pitcher/infielder Cody Greenhill.

Factor in standout underclassmen like St. Luke's outfielder Jeremiah Jackson, T.R. Miller first baseman Drew Williamson and Rehobeth slugger Blaine Murkerson, and this year's race to be named

See 'GREENHILL,' page 16

Getting over the hump

To be a playoff team again, Phil Campbell must find a way to win the close ones

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

Whether it was a two-point loss to eventual region champion Lamar County, a one-possession game against region runner-up Sheffield or just a competitive half of football against the likes of Sulligent and Red Bay, Phil Campbell's 2016 football season was filled with close calls, one almost-win after another.

On the one hand, head coach Ryan Swinney looks at those games and sees progress for a program that has come a long way since going 0-10 in 2013, his first year on the job. On the other hand, every one of those almost-wins was ultimately a loss, and Swinney has had about enough of those—eight, to be exact, in 2016, a season in which the battle-tested Bobcats were supposed to take the next step following back-to-back playoff berths the two previous years.

"Last year, we came in with high expectations. I sure did," Swinney said last week. "Like I told the kids, I'm the eternal optimist, but I *really* was last year. We had a lot of experience back and some good athletes, too. Every week, every game we played was competitive, but we just couldn't get over that hump."

"We know we've been there with a chance to win these ball games," Swinney said. "We've just gotta make the plays to do it. We're gonna have to, because we're not gonna blow people out. The teams we play are too good. We're gonna have to make plays to win close games. That's a hurdle we've gotta get over."

"I don't know what the problem was or what the answer was. We played a tough schedule, and that goes along with it, but it was frustrating."

The trouble started in the Class 2A, Region 8 opener, when Phil Campbell fell into a big early hole at Lamar County and couldn't quite climb out, falling 21-19. The following week found the Bobcats attempting a two-point conversion that would have given them a fourth-quarter lead over Sheffield, but the ultra-talented Bulldogs held on for a 35-27 win.

Then came the second-half collapse against Sulligent, a late defensive letdown against Mars Hill, a six-point loss at Hatton and an 11th consecutive defeat at the hands of rival Red Bay.

By season's end, Phil Campbell had failed to win a game in region play and was just 2-8 overall. The high hopes of August were long gone, leaving behind a sense of unfulfilled potential and forcing an eternal optimist like Swinney to squint his eyes in search of a silver lining.

"To be that close to the region champion, just two points, and to be within eight points of the region runner-up...it was frustrating," Swinney said. "But, at the same time, it was good to know we had a chance to win very game we played. A few years ago, there were teams we knew we wouldn't compete with. Last year, that wasn't the case."

Now, with spring drills in the rearview mirror and the 2017 season opener against Tharptown barely eleven



FILE PHOTO

Two-way starter Seth Brindley (38) is a key member of what should be the largest senior class Swinney (below) has had in five seasons.

weeks away, the Bobcats are reloading for another run.

Twelve seniors graduated in May, including key contributors like Colby Baker, Austin Riner, Nick Swinney, Malique Nalls and Trey Nalls. Recurring injury problems have placed the career of senior stalwart and program pillar Joe Hardy in jeopardy, but the cupboard is hardly bare; veteran quarterback Peyton Thomas is back to lead an even larger senior class that also includes tight end/linebacker Brody Nix, running back Seth Brindley, linemen Chase Hutchens and Dustin

See 'CLOSE,' page 18



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Lady Bulldogs looking to build on best season yet

Submitted to the FFP

The Belgreen High School junior varsity and varsity volleyball teams have been chosen for the 2017 season.

Last season was the best season in the program's six-year history. The varsity Lady Bulldogs finished with a 16-14 record and made their fourth consecutive trip to the Super-Regionals, and their first-ever trip to the Sweet 16.

Teresa Whitten, now preparing for her sixth season as head coach, left the Super-Regionals full of optimism about the program's future.

"I understood when I became the coach that it would be a process," Whitten said. "Building a program is tough, but if I continually preach 'process,' then we can evaluate our success in whether or not we are continually growing and meeting goals.

"Although we lost to the number two team in the state, Decatur Heritage, we played very well. Many times there were only ninth- and tenth-graders on the court for us; that was encouraging. We are going to build on what we did that day, correcting areas we could have executed better. I have high expectations for this upcoming team, and I can not wait to

see what this team can do this season."

The junior varsity has only three returning players: Bailey Oliver, Kaley Chandler and Nora Castillo. Whitten believes several new players will be a great addition to the program, including Megan Smith, Maria Estrada, Emmie Scott, Makayla Lane, Kelsey Wilson, Ella Wiginton, Noelle Willingham and Alyssa Ivy.

Several jayvee players who attended Super-Regionals last year will move up to varsity in 2017. Emma Dempsey, Gracie Dempsey and Bailey Wood join returning varsity players Autumn Bragwell, Katie Dempsey, Ansley Tate, Kaycee Wilson and Camie Terrell. The Lady Bulldogs have a returning senior, Callie Barber, and a newcomer in Hailey Vandervort, another senior.

Practices begin next week, and Belgreen will host a summer play date with several schools on July 11. Both teams will have several play dates during the month of July.

The 2017 season kicks off August 31 with a varsity tri-match against Tishomingo County and Colbert County. Belgreen is also hosting its first-ever tournament on September 16, as well as participating in four other tournaments.

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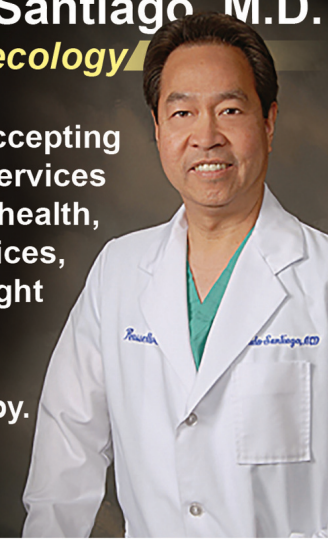
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Heaps long overdue to win Coach of the Year

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

True to the principles he preaches to his players, Russellville baseball coach Chris Heaps is not a 'me guy.' He's a 'we guy' through and through.

As such, Heaps would never make his own case to be named Class 5A Coach of the Year by the Alabama Sports Writers Association, which will announce its All-State selections and individual awards this weekend. He'd rather give credit to his players and his outstanding coaching staff, headed up by chief lieutenants Jay Stanley and Eli Fuller.

So we'll make his case for him. For starters, a little Coach of the Year love for Heaps is long overdue. He didn't win the award in 2015, when he guided the Golden Tigers to a 35-6 record and the program's first-ever state championship. [The ASWA went with P.J. Guy, the head coach of state runner-up Helena.] Heaps didn't win the award in 2016 either, after leading Russellville to a school-record 48 wins and a second straight Blue Map. [The ASWA went with Matt Seymour, the head coach of state runner-up Faith Academy.]

Guy and Seymour were worthy choices, to be sure, but now it's Heaps' turn. If taking a team that lost four of its top five hitters and two of its best pitchers from the previous season and reloading to the tune of a 38-10 record and a third consecutive state title doesn't warrant Coach of the Year honors, what does?

The Golden Tigers stumbled out of the gates to a 5-5 start in 2017, then got their bearings and went 33-5 the rest of the way. The schedule was as challenging as ever. Russellville won two of three meetings with Class 6A champion Helena and picked up victories over Class 4A semifinalist Haleyville, Class 4A runner-up Madison Academy, Class 6A semifinalist Hueytown and large-school contenders Russell County, Bob Jones, Southside-Gadsden and Grissom, while also doing battle with Class 6A powerhouse Hartselle and the top-ranked team in Class 7A, McGill-Toolen.

Despite breaking in a handful of new starters, Heaps and the Golden Tigers navigated that gauntlet of a schedule and still managed to win more games than every team in the state but one—Class 7A champion Hoover. Over the past three seasons, Heaps has helped Russellville win a mind-boggling 121 games while joining Hartselle (1990-92) and Spanish Fort (2010-12) as the only teams in AHSAA history to bring home three consecutive Class 5A baseball championships.

Back in 2012, his first season as a head coach after a long and distinguished run as an assistant at Hartselle, Heaps was named Class 6A Coach of the Year by the

ASWA after leading Central-Phenix City to a 31-16 record and a trip to the state semifinals. Five years later, it's high time he earned some hardware for making history and taking the Golden Tiger program to unprecedented heights.

Elsewhere in today's edition, we've made our case for Russellville stars Cody Greenhill as Mr. Baseball and Judd Ward as a first-team All-State selection in Class 5A, but they aren't the only Golden Tigers worthy of recognition from the ASWA. Skylar Holland also had an outstanding senior season, both at the plate and on the mound. Holland went 7-for-9 in the state finals and finished the season batting .344 with six home runs and 45 RBIs. He tied teammate Landon Ezzell for the state lead in doubles with 18, and he ranked sixth in the state with 53 hits. Holland also went 6-3 with five saves in a team-leading 21 appearances on the mound, posting a 2.29 ERA and striking out 59 batters in 55 innings.

The ASWA should also take a long look at senior Colin Garrison, a spark plug in the leadoff spot and a top-flight defender in right field. Garrison collected 37 hits this season—including 10 for extra bases—and drew a team-best 30 walks, reaching base at a .406 clip. He finished second on the team with 41 runs scored, 16 of which came in Russellville's 12-game playoff run.

Senior pitcher Chad Wray also performed at an All-State level this season, posting an 8-3 record and a 2.77 ERA in 16 starts. The South Alabama signee ranked among state leaders in innings pitched (81), strikeouts (96) and shutouts (two)—one of which came on March 10 in a 1-0 win over eventual 6A champion Helena.

Elsewhere in Franklin County, Phil Campbell junior Peyton Thomas should be in the running for Class 2A Player of the Year. Thomas, a shortstop, tied for third in the state with 12 home runs this season, batting .433 with 12 doubles, 33 RBIs, 48 runs scored, 29 walks and only nine strikeouts in 142 plate appearances. He also posted a .585 OBP and stole 15 bases in 17 attempts. As the Bobcats' ace pitcher, Thomas went 7-1 with a 2.10 ERA and seven complete games in 10 starts. He struck out 80 batters and walked only 17 in 60.1 innings.

Teammate Hayden Copeland is also worthy of All-State honors after sparking the Phil Campbell offense with a stellar season in the leadoff spot. Copeland, a 6'5 first baseman, batted .415 on the year while drawing a team-high 37 walks and reaching base at a .579 clip. He scored 46 runs and stole 28 bases without getting caught. Copeland went a scorching 10-for-15 in four playoff games and finished the season on a 19-game hitting streak. As a lefty pitcher, he finished the season 7-2 with a 3.24 ERA and 46 strikeouts in 41 innings.

Speaking of lefty pitchers, Red Bay's Chandler Allen established himself as one of the state's best in 2017.



FILE PHOTO

Heaps has led Russellville to 121 wins and three state titles over the past three seasons.

Allen, a Blue Mountain College signee, struck out 100 batters in just 55.2 innings while allowing a miniscule 23 hits. He finished the season 6-4 with a 1.38 ERA and six complete games, including three shutouts.

In Class 1A, the ASWA should take a look at Vina senior pitcher James Barnes, whose 2017 highlights included a pair of no-hitters, including a perfect game against area rival Tharptown. Barnes finished the regular season 5-2 with a 2.49 ERA in 11 appearances, including eight starts. He recorded a team-high 82 strikeouts in just 44.2 innings, allowing only 25 hits.

Fellow senior Tyler Renfrow struck out 70 batters and walked only 18 in 47.2 innings, and he also had a big season at the plate for Vina. Renfrow batted .380, drew 12 walks and got hit by a pitch 18 times, reaching base at a stellar .605 clip. He also scored 26 runs.

Senior centerfielder Justin Gravitt was the Red Devils' top hitter, batting .439 in the regular season with eight extra-base hits, 27 runs scored and a .570 OBP. He also stole 14 bases. Andrew Upton hit an even .400 with a .576 OBP, driving in 18 runs and scoring 22. Finally, catcher Austin Childers batted .365 and ranked among state leaders with 13 doubles this season. He led Vina with 29 RBIs in 25 games.

'GREENHILL,' from page 13

Mr. Baseball by the Alabama Sports Writers Association is a fascinating one.

The ASWA is set to announce its choice for Mr. Baseball, along with the rest of its Super All-State selections (the top 10 players in the state, regardless of classification) and its All-State teams for classes 1A-7A, this weekend. With that in mind, our purpose here is two-fold: Firstly, to examine a loaded field of Mr. Baseball candidates a bit more thoroughly; and, secondly, to make the case for Russellville's Greenhill, an Auburn signee who led the Golden Tigers to their third consecutive Class 5A state championship, as the most deserving choice. Let's get to it.

The ASWA first started awarding the title of Mr. Baseball in 1999, and in 18 years there has never been a repeat winner. That doesn't figure to change in 2017. Cullman's Lovell, a 6'4, 225-pound specimen of a centerfielder, won the award last season after posting eye-popping numbers both at the plate (.392 average with 15 home runs, 64 RBIs, 39 walks and a .516 OBP) and on the mound (7-1 record with a 1.51 ERA and 63 strikeouts in 51 innings pitched).

It's not as though Lovell, a Mississippi State signee, had a bad year in 2017; on the contrary, he ranked fourth in the state with 56 hits and tied for third with 17 doubles while batting .427 with seven homers, 44 RBIs and 40 runs scored for the Bearcats, who went 38-9 and finished as state runners-up to Helena in Class 6A. But Lovell was arguably better at the plate as a junior than he was as a senior, and Cullman's absurdly deep pitching staff basically rendered him a non-factor this season on the mound, where he made only five appearances and compiled a record of 1-3 in 15.2 innings.

Lovell isn't likely to become the first two-time Mr. Baseball winner, but his teammate, Heatherly, has a shot to keep the award in-house. [Incidentally, Cullman is already the only school to produce multiple Mr. Baseball winners; Lovell joined former Bearcat Keegan Thompson, who took home the award in 2013.]

The 6'3, 200-pound Heatherly, an Alabama signee whom many expect to be an early-round selection in this month's draft, had an outstanding 2017 season on the mound. Greenhill, however, was better, as the stats below indicate:

J. Heatherly: 10-1 record, 69.2 innings, 11 ER (1.10 ERA), 24 hits allowed, 116 Ks, 39 BB, 6 CG

C. Greenhill: 12-2 record, 95 innings, 12 ER (0.88 ERA), 57 hits allowed, 144 Ks, 17 BB, 8 CG

Both pitchers were darn near perfect in the postseason, where they each made five starts and posted remarkably similar numbers:

J. Heatherly: 5-0 record, 32 innings, 2 ER (0.44 ERA), 12 hits allowed, 46 Ks, 18 BB, 4 CG



FILE PHOTO

In his breakout senior season at the plate, Greenhill smashed a school-record 16 home runs and led the state with 65 RBIs. He batted .338 with more walks (21) than strikeouts (19).

C. Greenhill: 5-0 record, 31 innings, 0 ER (0.00 ERA), 15 hits allowed, 44 Ks, 9 BB, 3 CG

The two are difficult to separate based on pitching alone, though (for what it's worth) Greenhill did beat Heatherly 6-3 in a head-to-head showdown when both were juniors in 2016. Much more pertinent, however, is a comparison of their respective performances at the plate this season. Heatherly was very good, batting .306 with three home runs, eight doubles, 43 RBIs, 23 walks and just 24 strikeouts. Greenhill, on the other hand, was an absolute monster, setting a new school record with 16 home runs and leading the state by a wide margin with 65 RBIs while batting .338 with 21 walks and only 19 strikeouts.

Greenhill's superior command [he walked only 1.3 batters per seven innings, compared to 3.9 by Heatherly] gives him a slight leg up as a pitcher; his record-setting production at the plate gives him a clear

edge on his Cullman counterpart in the race for Mr. Baseball.

Which brings us to our next deserving candidate, Helena's Praytor, who was a Super All-State selection by the ASWA last season as a junior. Praytor, an Alabama signee, was an offensive force in 2017, ranking fifth in the state with 55 hits and sixth with nine home runs. He batted .458 with 13 doubles, 40 RBIs, a .586 OBP and a walk-to-strikeout ratio (37 to nine) that boggles the mind. Further bolstering his case, Praytor was at his best when it counted most, going 17-for-29 in the playoffs with four homers, five doubles, nine RBIs, 10 walks and only one strikeout while leading the Huskies to their first-ever state title.

Greenhill had a big postseason as well, batting .333 and driving in 16 runs in 12 games, but let's not quibble here—Praytor is the better hitter, and he had the better season overall at the plate. He's also an outstanding defensive catcher with a rocket right arm, but Praytor's work behind the plate—stellar though it may have been—can't compare with the impact Greenhill made on the mound.

There have been exceptions, but the ASWA typically bestows the title of Mr. Baseball upon players who excel as hitters *and* pitchers—Lovell last year, Florence's Brax Garrett in 2015, Cullman's Thompson in 2013, Spain Park's Mikey White in 2012, Hartselle's Luke Bole in 2009, etc. Greenhill fits that two-way mold, while Praytor does not.

Nor, for that matter, do a few of the other leading candidates for Mr. Baseball, including Russellville's Ward. The senior centerfielder and Auburn signee tied for second in the state with 59 hits this season and also ranked second with 58 runs scored. He batted .410 with four home runs, five triples, 10 doubles, 24 RBIs, 29 walks and only 12 strikeouts, reaching base at a .521 clip.

Ward was terrific in the playoffs, collecting 20 hits (10 of which went for extra bases) and scoring 19 runs in 12 games, but his overall season numbers weren't quite as good as those he put up in 2015 (when he was first-team All-State as a sophomore) or 2016 (when he was the Class 5A Player of the Year and a Super All-State selection).

Ward is again deserving of first-team All-State honors, as are UMS-Wright's Allen, a Mississippi State signee who led the state with 60 hits this season and went absolutely bonkers in the playoffs, batting .561 with four triples, six doubles and 20 runs scored in 13 games while leading the Bulldogs to a Class 4A state title; Rehobeth's Murkerson, who finished third in the state with 15 home runs and batted .328 with 47 RBIs; and T.R. Miller's Williamson, a 6'4, 210-pound

See 'GREENHILL,' Page 17

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'GREENHILL', from page 16

Alabama commit who led the state with a .616 batting average (45 hits in 73 at bats), a .764 OBP and 63 runs scored while also slugging eight home runs. All of the above are outstanding players, but they lack the two-way chops to truly challenge Greenhill for the title of Mr. Baseball.

If the ASWA were to break with tradition and give the award to someone who is strictly a position player, they could do a lot worse than McGill-Toolen's Thompson, a senior outfielder and the state's top MLB draft prospect according to *Baseball America*. The fleet-footed Thompson, an Alabama signee, batted .429 this season, ranking among state leaders with 51 hits, 11 home runs, 52 runs scored and 18 stolen bases. He shined brightly in the Class 7A playoffs, going 11-for-18 with two homers, seven RBIs and seven runs scored in five games.

For what it's worth, Greenhill and Thompson actually faced off this season when Russellville and McGill-Toolen met in Gulf Shores during spring break. Thompson went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts against Greenhill, who threw eight scoreless frames in a game the Golden Tigers would ultimately lose 1-0 in 11 innings.

Three of a Kind

Russellville's Cody Greenhill, Decatur's Tanner Burns and Cullman's Jacob Heatherly are among the top candidates for Mr. Baseball in 2017. Below is a look at some of their key numbers this season:

Player	Record	ERA	Strikeouts	Innings
C. Greenhill	12-2	0.88	144	95
T. Burns	10-1	0.88	116	64
J. Heatherly	10-1	1.10	116	69.2

Player	Average	HR	RBI	Team Record
C. Greenhill	.338	16	65	38-10
T. Burns	.467	16	46	32-5
J. Heatherly	.306	3	43	38-9

Joining the likes of Greenhill and Heatherly as two-way standouts this season were Rehobeth's Knight and St. Luke's Jackson. The 6'3, 200-pound Knight went 7-5 with a 2.04 ERA as the Rebels' ace pitcher, striking out 103 batters and giving up 59 hits in 71.2 innings; he also anchored the middle of the lineup with a .359 average, eight home runs and 44 RBIs. Jackson, a junior at St. Luke's and a Mississippi State commit, tied for third in the state with 12 home runs this season while batting .485 with 10 doubles, five triples, 37 RBIs and 51 runs in 34 games; on the mound, he struck out 55 batters in 34.1 innings.

Which brings us, finally, to Greenhill's stiffest competition for the title of Mr. Baseball—Decatur's Burns, who helped lead the Red Raiders to a 32-5 record this season and a trip to the Class 6A quarterfinals. The 6'1, 210-pound Burns and the 6'4, 215-pound Greenhill, both Auburn signees, have much in common. Both are right-handed hitters and right-handed pitchers with big-time power, at the plate and on the mound. Both hit 16 home runs this season, tying them for the state lead. Both posted an ERA of 0.88, and both used low-to mid-90s fastballs to rack up strikeouts in bunches [Greenhill averaged 10.6 Ks per seven innings, while Burns checked in at 12.7.]

Burns, who batted .467 with 46 RBIs while also going 10-1 with 116 strikeouts in 64 innings, was named the 2017 Gatorade Alabama Baseball Player of the Year last week. From 2008 through 2014, six players (Hokes Bluff's Tyler Stovall, Hartselle's Bole, Fairhope's Daryl Norris, Spain Park's White, Cullman's Thompson and Ardmore's Cody Reed) won both the Gatorade POY Award and Mr. Baseball. However, the last two Mr. Baseball winners (Lovell and Garrett) were *not* the Gatorade Player of the Year, so the two awards are not always in lockstep.

Clearly, there's no sound argument *against* Burns winning the title of Mr. Baseball; he's a fantastic player and a deserving choice. But here's the argument in favor of Greenhill, in a nutshell: He led the state in wins (12), strikeouts (144), home runs (16) and RBIs (65), all while anchoring the pitching staff and batting third in the lineup for a team that won 38 games and a third consecutive Blue Map. Greenhill capped his career with an otherworldly postseason performance, winning five straight starts and striking out 44 batters without allowing an earned run in 31 innings. He dominated Faith Academy in Game 1 of the state finals, striking out 11 and allowing just two hits in a 9-1 win.

That victory over the Rams was the 39th win of Greenhill's varsity career, tying him with John Herring of American Christian Academy (1992-95) for fifth in state history. His 375 career strikeouts are by far the most in school history and rank 19th on the state's all-time list.

Greenhill, who went 13-1 with a 1.48 ERA and nine complete games in 15 career playoff starts, already owns three state championship rings; after receiving All-State honorable mention in 2015 and being named first-team All-State in 2016, he's a good bet to bring home Class 5A Player of the Year honors this weekend. In other words, he's not hurting for hardware. But he should be clearing space on the mantle for one final high school award.

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'CLOSE' from page 13

Hamby, receiver Hunter Hutcheson and fullback/defensive end Jason Mansell.

Priority number one for Swinney and his players if they hope to get back to the postseason after a one-year absence is to find a way to start turning some of those almost-wins into actual ones.

"Maybe being that close will light a fire under these guys," he said. "We know we've been there with a chance to win these ball games; we've just gotta make the plays to do it. We're still gonna have a lot of experience. A lot of these guys have been there and done that. But we're gonna have to win those kind of games, because we're not gonna blow people out. The teams we play are too good. We're gonna have to make plays to win close games. That's a hurdle we've gotta get over.

"We weren't able to do that last year, and that falls on me. We can't be satisfied with playing close. We've gotta find a way to win."

That starts with keeping Thomas healthy. The 6'0, 190-pound dual threat threw for more than 1,400 yards and 16 touchdowns last season while adding another 400-plus yards and seven scores on the ground.

"Even with the guys we had last year, it all went through Peyton," Swinney said. "As the year went on and we got beat up a little bit, by the end of the season he was not only our quarterback but probably our best running back, too. Peyton can obviously throw the ball, but he's a big, strong kid, and he's not a bad runner. He may not have that breakaway speed for those big runs, but he's a physical guy who runs the ball hard.

"Peyton's gonna have to shoulder a whole lot of the offense—not just in the passing game, but in the running game, too. He runs the option well. He knows what he's doing."

Thomas has thrown a total of 30 touchdown passes over the past two seasons, but this year he'll be breaking in an almost entirely new group of players at the skill positions. Brindley is taking over Baker's responsibilities as a running back/slot back, with Mansell—who didn't play last season but looked good this spring—replacing Trey Nalls at fullback. The physical, athletic Nix returns at tight end, but there's not a ton of varsity experience at the receiver spots. Hutcheson, who missed spring practice after sustaining a knee injury in the 2016 season finale at Hackleburg, and fellow seniors Sam Pierce and Daniel Smith will be asked to step up, along with sophomores Brandon Baker (who caught a 31-yard touchdown pass from Thomas in the spring game against Winston County) and Ben Williams (who missed spring practice while recovering from a knee injury he sustained during basketball season).

"All of our skill positions were different this spring, other than quarterback," Swinney said. "We've got some kids who didn't get as much playing time last year that are gonna have to play a lot this year. The one good thing about having some guys out this spring was, it gave us a chance to build some depth.

"Seth ran the ball well. Jason is a big strong kid with a lot of ability. He's got some upside, if he'll stick with it and work. Riner was our deep threat last year. I hope we develop that this year."

There is some experience up front on offense, where Hutcheson (right tackle), Hamby (center) and fellow senior Caleb Hagood (left tackle) all return, along with junior left guard Gage Cook. Sophomore Caleb Solas stepped in at right guard during the spring and also got reps at defensive tackle. Another sophomore, Imer Ordonez, split time with Mansell at fullback and also figures into the rotation at defensive end along with Mansell and Hutcheson. Cook and Nix are both back to anchor what should be a solid linebacker corps.

Swinney said last week that he has challenged veterans like Thomas and Nix to step up and take a more active role when it comes to vocal leadership in 2017.

"We need those guys to step up and lead, and I think they will," Swinney said. "We had some good, talented seniors last year, guys I would take back in a heartbeat. They were as talented as all get-out, but they were quiet. Sometimes the guys get tired of hearing me scream and holler. In those situations, you need somebody to step up and say something."

Phil Campbell played Winston County in a spring game on May 19 and came away with a 14-6 win. The Bobcats were pitching a shutout until Winston County found the end zone in the final half-minute of the game.

"We gave up a few plays we shouldn't have," Swinney said, "but I think defensively we're gonna be all right. We did lose several guys on that side of the ball, but a lot of these guys played a lot on defense last year.

"Overall, I was pleased. We've got a lot of new faces, especially at the skill positions, but we had some guys who stepped in and did a pretty good job. Obviously, with only seven full days of practice, there were a lot of mistakes, but overall I was pleasantly surprised."

The Bobcats will officially open summer workouts on June 12, with an eye toward fall practice starting on August 7. Swinney's fifth season as head coach at his alma mater will kick off on August 25 at Tharptown.

"It's hard to believe," he said. "I enjoy it. I really would like to have one of those years where we're the team to beat. I don't know if it's gonna happen or not, but we'll keep plugging along and do the best we can for as long as we can, and let the cards fall where they may.

"I'm excited. This spring, I was pleasantly surprised with the way our guys played. During those two weeks of practice, their attitude was great. They worked hard, they pushed each other and they had great attitudes. That goes a long way."



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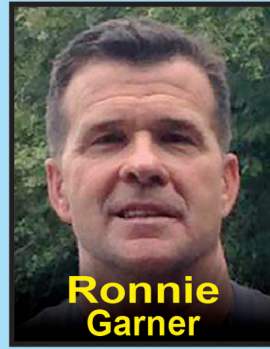


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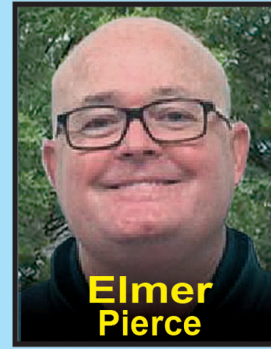
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