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Upchurch retiring as president of CB&S

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In the competitive world of banking, you're either "growing and moving forward or losing ground." Those are the words of Dennis Upchurch, who's served as president and CEO of CB&S Bank the past 27 years. As Upchurch prepares for his retirement at the end of this month, there's no doubt about the direction his bank has moved for nearly three decades under his leadership. Upchurch began with CB&S Bank in 1988 as executive vice president and president-elect after Gene Pace announced he would retire as bank president in 1990.

At the time, CB&S, still known as Citizens Bank and Savings, had branches in Russellville, Red Bay and Hodges, and assets in the range of \$72 million. Today, CB&S Bank has 55 branches in Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi, and assets totaling \$1.635 billion. "We're the fifth-largest bank in total assets of banks headquartered in Alabama," Upchurch said. "We want to get up to that \$2 and \$3 billion mark and continue to grow. In banking, you're either growing and moving forward or losing ground. "We're doing real well and exceeding budget expectations. We're in as good a shape with the regulators as



Dennis Upchurch

See 'UPCHURCH,' Page 7

Gist, Groce selected for Leadership AL

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

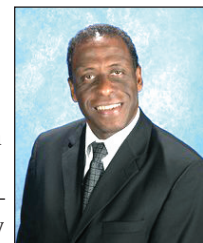
Russellville residents Bret Gist and Jerry Groce are among the 66 Alabamians selected for the 28th class of Leadership Alabama. According to the site www.leadershipal.org, Leadership Alabama gives established leaders across the state exposure "to the broader fabric of the state" by developing a network of relationships and providing a structure for this network to seek mutual understanding of the state's problems and priorities. Leadership Alabama members are encouraged to act both individually and together to move Alabama forward to help the state reach

its full potential. Russellville attorney Roger Bedford, Jr. is one of the participants of the current class of Leadership Alabama. Gist's and Groce's class will begin in October. Gist is owner/president of G&G Steel, and Groce is district administrative specialist for Franklin County Department of Human Resources. Both men serve on the Russellville City Schools Board of Education. Leadership Alabama consists of an annual class that participates in four two-and-a-half-



Bret Gist

day retreats in a nine-month period. The retreats are spread across the state. The program's objective is to present participants with a series of issues-oriented forums based on the principle that knowledge is a key element and prime motivator of leadership. Founded in 1990, Leadership Alabama has seen more than 1,000 citizen leaders participate. Criteria for selection includes leadership abilities, career accomplishments, volunteer activities, contributions to the community and



Jerry Groce

See 'LEADERSHIP,' Page 9

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Died Tuesday, July 4, 2017. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Mt. Zion Cemetery in Itawamba County, MS.

Shirley Jean Arrington Bray, Florence, age 79
Died Wednesday, July 5, 2017. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Shoals Memory Gardens in Tuscumbia.

Jimmy Floyd Jones, Russellville, age 73
Died Friday, July 7, 2017. Funeral with military honors held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Dempsey Cemetery.

Bobby Jean Montgomery, Russellville, age 73
Died Saturday, July 8, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

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you're telling them what to do or presenting an ultimatum, you're asking questions and presenting information. If someone did that in my office with a respectful and professional manner, it would go a long way.

Dave

Hands off the emergency fund!

Dear Dave,
Sometimes our budget gets busted because of home improvements and various other things. I think we should take money from our emergency fund when this happens, but my wife says it should come out of our restaurant or fun money. What's your opinion?

Josh

Dear Josh,
Overspending isn't an emergency. If you budget a set amount in one category and you go over that amount, you've got to reduce something in another area to stay within your budget for the month.

If something happens on a pretty regular basis, it's not an emergency—it's a predictable event. That means you need to budget a larger amount for home improvements or whatever the problem area may be.

On a month-to-month basis, if you have \$200 budgeted for household repairs, and any work turns out to be \$300, I'd rather you cut back on eating out or another non-essential category to make up the difference.

Your wife is right on this one!

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 13 million listeners each week on 585 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

Discussing and negotiating

Dear Dave,
I've accepted a promotion that would take me from an hourly wage to a salaried position. Do you have any advice for negotiating a salary?

J

Dear J,
The quick and simple answer to this question is you negotiate it based on what you're worth to the company. Now, how do you figure that out?

There are a couple of measuring sticks you can use. One is associated with the revenue you bring in, and that's a nice, concrete reference. Another thing you can do is research some of the more reputable career websites and develop a compensation study based on comparable positions in your area.

If you're a valuable team member of mine who's moving from hourly to salary, it wouldn't be a "negotiation"—it would be a discussion. Honestly, most positions are priced initially at the amount you can be replaced for in the new role. In other words, what's the going rate for someone in your position?

If it were me, I'd produce two or three well-researched compensation studies. Give them to your bosses, and talk it through with them. Depending on the size of the company, they may not have done that much work figuring it out themselves.

It's kind of like deciding what to ask for when you sell a car. You try to appraise it for what it's worth in the marketplace to other people. That's the way you have a discussion. It's not that

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Powerful principles to help your company win

By Dave Ramsey

When I started writing *EntreLeadership: 20 Years of Practical Business Wisdom from the Trenches*, I asked myself the question, "What are the fundamental principles that caused my company to win?"

In the process, I came up with six concepts that helped transform my business from a card table in the living room to a nationally recognized brand that has helped change the lives of millions of people.

Regardless of the size or age of your organization, these concepts will work for you, too.

Team - You should be consumed with the needs of your team. Treat your team like family, and they will act like family. You'll be paid back several times over with faithfulness, dependability and profits.

People - Everyone around you is unique and important. Your customers, coworkers, community, vendors and, yes, even your competition all have hopes and

dreams. Each and every one of them are human beings, not units of production. And they all deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and a caring heart.

Excellence - Having the right people in the proper roles allows you to do your best work. Take plenty of time when filling positions. Be diligent, and ask for God's blessing when it comes to bringing in new people. We take the hiring process very seriously at my company. My leaders and I look at the whole person—family and all. Remember, every organization is only two or three bad hires away from a crash. Don't rush things when adding people to your team.

Slow and steady - We live in a fast and furious, gotta-have-it-now world. Slow down. Take a breath. Believe me, there's no such thing as an overnight success. Make long-term plans and short-term course corrections as you go.

Financial principles - Manage your money and other resources God's ways. In other words, operate

on a strict budget and avoid debt. The Bible says, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender." Stop being a slave. Start prospering!

A higher calling - If you play for something bigger than yourself, you'll play much harder and smarter. The same holds true for your team. You'll be surprised how passionate they become when there's a sense of calling. Successful leaders never focus strictly on the *what*. The *why* is just as important.

By sticking to these simple but powerful concepts, you can take your company and your team to incredible heights. Everyone will be a winner when you concentrate on what matters most!

**Small-business expert Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored numerous best-selling books, including EntreLeadership. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by 13 million listeners each week on more than 585 radio stations and multiple digital platforms.*

Honey Do List: Like a rock

Whether you need a place to set the grill, a walkway to the garden, or to set a post, bagged and premixed concrete is a great tool. If done right, you will have completed a project that will last for years with no upkeep except to trim the grass around it.

Here are a few basic tips for getting it right.

1) USE THE RIGHT PRODUCT. Quikrete brand concrete has more than 200 products with the homeowner in mind, for tons of different applications. Basic concrete is great for walkways and patios, while fast-setting concrete is better for filling holes around various kinds of posts. For laying block or brick, choose mortar mix, which has no gravel. There are also several products for resurfacing floors and driveways.

The great thing about pre-mixed concrete is that all you need is water. The trick is to get the proper consistency of finished product and eliminate dry spots.

2) PROPER MIXING. The great thing about pre-mixed concrete is that all you need is water. The trick is to get the proper consistency of finished product and eliminate dry

spots. This is very important, as dry spots are weak spots in the finished project.

If you are using the whole bag, mix it in a wheelbarrow. Just dump the dry mix in and add water. The sloping sides allow you to move the product around with a hoe or shovel, ensuring that the product is saturated and you can easily move and dump the concrete when it's ready to pour. For small amounts of concrete, a bucket will do fine. It may be easier to mix the product if you put water in the bucket first and add the dry concrete mix a little at a time.

Concrete consistency is determined by "slump," or how much the wet concrete settles after it's been formed into a cone shape. Using a sturdy, plastic cup, cut off the bottom and fill it with wet concrete. Remove the cup, and the cone should settle down to about half its size. If the slump is less than it should be, mix a little more water into the batch; a larger slump is too wet and requires additional dry mix.

Starting with the right product at the right consistency will help ensure a durable and long-lasting project.

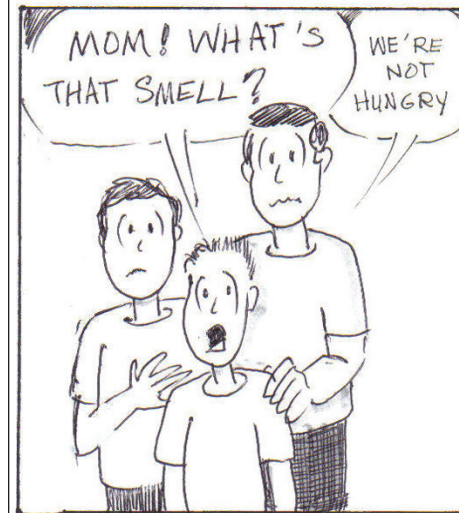
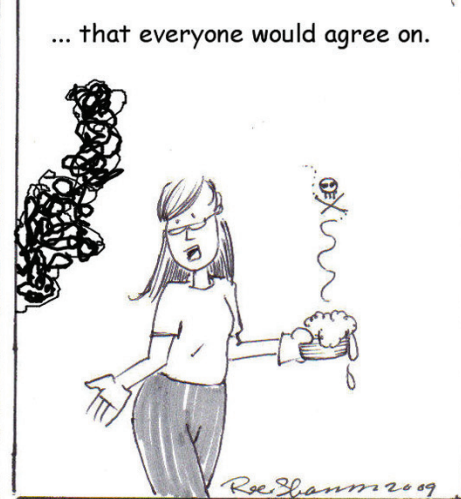
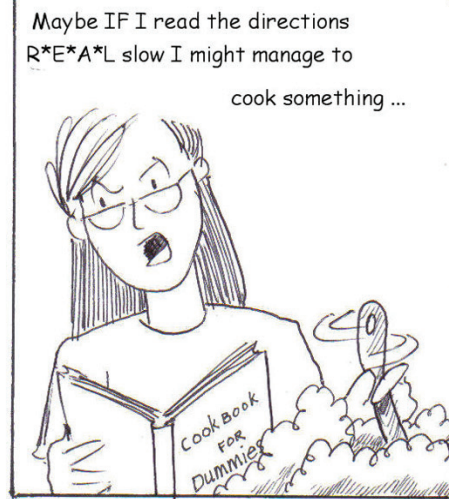
Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green

OUR HOUSE

BY Ree Shannon



Legacy of Reedtown still resonates

Sheryl Hamilton
For the FFP

The 28th Reedtown Reunion, held July 1-3, was another unforgettable experience. The legacy continues with rich history to be shared from one generation to the next.

Many residents came to support the reunion, and many out-of-town alumni and friends returned to their place of beginnings for an informal meet-and-greet. It was a wonderful time to catch up on how things were moving forward in each other's lives and hear stories with fond memories of teachers and staff at the all-Negro school. This is where so many got their start that helped them have successful careers.

The funds for Reedtown School may have been limited, but the investments in the students were rich. Joe Graham, president of Back to Basic, was appreciative to everyone who worked to make the reunion a success. He has started a Pledge 100+ Club. To join the club, you will need to pledge a yearly donation of \$100.00. You may increase your donation at any time. This year's goal was to raise \$5,000.

The teachers really cared about the students, and their love was not only shown but also felt. Reedtown High School will always have a warm place in so many hearts, of not only the students who walked the halls but also the teachers who gave daily instructions.

Several others committee members both young and old worked with Joe Graham. It's about passing the torch and keeping the reunion alive.

The talent show was a wonderful evening of entertainment that was presented on and off the stage. The show opened with a praise dance by Portia. We were so thankful to come together one more time, and I began to reflect on the words to the Reedtown High School Alma Mater: 'To Thee, our Alma Mater, we

sing in grateful praise, As loyal sons and daughters...'
Portia danced in grateful praise.

There was so much rich talent presented by former students and friends that it kept you on the edge of your seat. There was a lot of singing and dancing. A guest gym team from Tusculumbia presented their tossing, cheer building and dance talents. A poem, "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou, was read by Sheryl Hamilton in memory of a Blue Devil, the late Rev. C.D. Hamilton. Young rappers who took the stage are sure to hit it big in entertainment one day soon, and they will say they are from Reedtown, AL.

Some people have moved away from Reedtown/Russellville, but some people like me have a reason to remain connected.... As it says in the school song, 'We'll never forget old Reedtown, tho scattered far and wide...To speed her upward and onward shall be our joy and pride.'

An impression of the Jackson Five stole the show. The children of Tammy West had their guitars and made moves almost like Michael Jackson and his brothers. Ella West chaired the talent show and had a team of wonderful organizers to put it all together.

Sometimes you just have to sit and listen to the stories of Old Reedtown and the Blue Devils, how they persevered. Although there may have been approximately 85 to 95 people to register, the community of Reedtown had several hundred people supporting the talent show and the parade. It was an honor for Geraldine Box, a return alumni, to be the parade marshal. Several classic cars were entered in the parade, and the NWA Riders spiced things up with those shiny motorcycles.

See 'REEDTOWN,' page 9

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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Mike Self

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

Linda Bumpers, John Pilati, Kadin Pounders, Mike Rice

Content Contributors

Mike Self, John Pilati, Alissa Young, Brady Petree, Mike Rice, Kadin Pounders, Ree Shannon, Doug Green, Rebecca Thomason, Sheryl Hamilton, Ashley Cummins, Gail Motes

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

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Cobb honored by support in bid for governor's office

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press



Sue Bell Cobb

She was the first female chief justice on the Alabama Supreme Court, and a little more than a year from now Sue Bell Cobb could become just the second woman elected governor of Alabama.

Cobb, one of the state's most distinguished judges, announced her entrance into the 2018 gubernatorial race on Wednesday, June 14, but the decision was no shocker to those that know her.

"I've traveled all around the state, and I've had many, many people—both Democrats and Republicans—tell me that I should run for governor," Cobb said. "That is very humbling to me, and it's a responsibility I don't take lightly."

Cobb, a Democrat, said Republican executives and lawmakers have tarnished the state's reputation, and it is time for the voters to shake things up.

"Now is the perfect time for a Democrat to run," she said. "At the top we've had a Republican governor involved in scandal resign and a Republican Speaker of the House go to prison. The people of Alabama are tired of being embarrassed by the people that are supposed to represent and serve them."

"The Republicans hold nearly every major elected office in this state. We've lost the balance that is needed when it comes to debating the issues, and Democrats can bring back that balance."

For those unfamiliar with Cobb's life, it could be one described as devoted to the law and to the justice system. For 30 years, Cobb served in Alabama's courts and was eventually voted to serve on the highest court in the state, the Alabama Supreme Court, from 2007 until her resignation in 2011.

Although she no longer serves in the courts, her passion for the judiciary system and the role it plays in society has not wavered. Since stepping down from the Alabama Supreme Court, Cobb has been a vocal advocate of change in the judicial election system.

In 2015, she penned an op-ed in *Politico* detailing her disgust and displeasure with the money and partisanship involved in judicial elections.

Cobb, in her interview with the *Franklin Free Press*, also said that prison and sentencing reform is a major concern. Currently, Alabama prisons are at around 180 percent of capacity.

"As a judge, I wanted to work towards comprehensive sentencing reform," she said.

During Cobb's tenure as chief justice, she established the Chief Justice's Public Safety and Sentencing Reform Task Force, which was co-chaired by Republican senator Del Marsh. This task force brought forth sentencing reform legislation but could not get enough support for anything to be passed.

"I was very disappointed that we couldn't get anything passed," Cobb said. "We'd have removed a number of non-violent drug offenders and significantly reduced our prison population."

"Prison and sentencing reform is definitely something that is a bipartisan issue. It's something Democrats and Republicans can work together to fix. Making the justice system better, making the court system better, that makes us safer and helps people in this state live in peace."

Health care is also a big issue for Cobb, who is worried about the future of rural community hospitals.

"Sixty-five percent of our community hospitals are operating in the red," she said. "That's extremely concerning to me. I'm from Evergreen, and I know the importance of community hospitals. The thought of losing thirty to fifty percent of rural community hospitals is harrowing."

"I've traveled all around the state, and I've had many, many people—both Democrats and Republicans—tell me that I should run for governor," said Cobb, who announced her entrance into the 2018 gubernatorial race last month. "That is very humbling to me, and it's a responsibility I don't take lightly."

"I felt trapped," Cobb wrote. "I had made it to the top of my profession. I was the chief justice of Alabama, the first woman to head the state Supreme Court. It was, for a lawyer like myself, the pinnacle of achievement. And I'd earned it the hard way. To get to the justice's chambers, I had won the nation's most expensive judicial race that year. But at what cost?"

The health care issue also ties in to Cobb's passion for child advocacy.

"One of the things I've been most involved in and passionate about during my career and during my life is child advocacy," said Cobb, who helped found the Children First Foundation. "If we care about our children in Alabama, we can not be cutting Medicaid."

See 'COBB,' Page 8



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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, July 13.

The Russellville Parks & Rec Department will hold its eighth annual basketball camp with sports Hall-of-Famer Rayfield Ragland this Thursday and Friday, July 13-14, from 8 a.m.-noon at the Russellville Rec Center. Camp is for boys and girls ages 6-16. Registration fee is \$35 per camper. For more information, please call the Rec Center at 256-332-8770.

The third annual Red Bay High School Alumni Baseball Game will be held this Saturday, July 15 at 7 p.m. Sign-up fee is \$25 per player. Game shirts will be given with number on back for only pre-registered players. To pre-register, call RBHS baseball coach Richard Maggerise at 205-495-1170. Players signing up on July 15 will receive game shirts with no number and will be added to teams as evenly as possible. All players are to be at the field on July 15 no later than 6 p.m. so that rosters may be finalized. RBHS baseball will provide catcher's equipment, uniform top, bats, balls and batting helmets. Game will be seven or nine innings, depending on the number of pitchers available.

TTravis Wammack & the Snakeman Band will play at Mountain Valley Hee Haw this Saturday, July 15 and again on Saturday, August 12. Show time is 7-10 p.m. Please bring your lawn chair. Hamburgers, hot dogs and cold drinks will be served. No alcoholic beverages or drugs allowed. Admission is free! From Russellville, follow 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on the left. Sponsored by Welch Roofing & Home Repair. For more information, call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

Summer Revival will be held at Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church (305 Bethlehem Road, Russellville), beginning with an all-day service this Sunday, July 16. Revival will run Monday-Friday, July 17-21, beginning at 7 p.m. nightly, with evangelist Bro. Merrell Potter. Pastor is Bro. Randy Taylor. Everyone is welcome!

Revival will be held at the Gateway Church/Russellville Church of God on July 16-19 with Sunday services at 10:45 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Monday-Wednesday services at 7 p.m. Special singing each night. You're invited!

For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, FUMC 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 child-care provided. Church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue. Come and join us!

TTharptown High School will hold registration for new students on Wednesday and Thursday, July 19-20, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the office. All new students entering grades 7-12 at THS should register at this time.

The American Red Cross will hold a community blood drive in the fellowship building of Russellville First Baptist Church (213 N. Jackson Avenue, Russellville, AL 35653) on Thursday, July 20 from 1-6 p.m. Sponsored by the RHS National Honor Society and RFB. To schedule an appointment, please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit redcrossblood.org and enter RussellvilleFBC.

Red Bay's first "back to the future" Men's Wood Bat Baseball Tournament will be held July 21-22 (Sunday, July 23 would be used based on number of teams) at the Red Bay High School baseball field. All men ages 18 and over are eligible to play. Rosters must be submitted before the first game and can not be altered once the tournament starts. Double-elimination tournament begins on Friday night. Tournament bracket will be provided, and each team is guaranteed at least two games. AHSAA registered officials will be utilized in all games. All game baseballs will be supplied. No wood bat will be supplied to any team, but the use of catcher's equipment can be requested prior to games starting. Standard baseball rules will be applied. Entry fee is \$25 per player or \$225 per playing team. If you desire to play but can not come up with a team, please call RBHS baseball coach Richard Maggerise at 205-495-1170. To register, call Coach Maggerise. Entry deadline is Friday, July 14. Send entry form and \$225 entry fee to Red Bay Baseball Diamond Club, 109 Truman Street, Red Bay, AL 35582. If you need help with uniforms, please call.

New Life Ministries Church will celebrate Homecoming on Sunday, July 23. A special singing with the group "Grace Way" will start at 1 p.m. The church is located on Hwy. 24, five miles west of Russellville and four miles east of Belgreen. Everyone is welcome!

CChildren ages three and up are invited to attend Vacation Bible School at Praise Tabernacle July 24-28 at 6 p.m. each night. Theme is "Galactic Starveyors." Parents, let your children learn about Jesus during this exciting time. For more information, call Cindy Roden, VBS director, at 256-412-8280.

Gentiva Hospice offers a grief support group, "Grieving Well Together," that meets the fourth Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Lenox room at Calvary Baptist Church in Russellville. The next meeting will be held July 27. You are invited to attend.

You're invited to a singing with Heaven's Mountain Band on Saturday, July 29 at 7 p.m. at Liberty Chapel Church, 10780 Highway 81 in East Franklin. Doors open at 6 p.m. Love offering will be received. For more information, call 256-324-8430 or 205-486-3026.

'UPCHURCH,' from page 1

we've ever been. We have well-trained, motivated employees, so it's a good time to leave while the bank is profitable and growing."

A graduate of the University of Mississippi and a veteran of the Mississippi banking industry, Upchurch served as president and CEO of Corinth-based Alcorn Bank and Trust, and he started with Clay County Bank in West Point, MS.

It wasn't CB&S Bank that brought Upchurch to Alabama. He came to Franklin County in 1984 to organize Valley State Bank, where he served as the bank's first president. Valley State Bank opened its doors April 1, 1985.

He later met Cecil Batchelor, CB&S chairman of the board, at a conference, and the two became friends. That friendship led to Upchurch making a career move three years later.

"When Gene announced his retirement, I heard through a mutual friend the bank was interested in me," Upchurch said. "I visited with Cecil several times. Valley State Bank [\$18 million in assets] was a smaller bank, as Citizens Bank was \$72 million in size, so that's what got me interested.

"Cecil and I both shared a desire to see profitable growth, and one of our strong suits was the ability to work with the staff and boards of the banks we acquired to turn a not-so-good situation into one good for them and us, too."

Citizens Bank's first acquisition came inside Franklin County with the purchase of Phoenix Federal branches in Russellville and Red Bay in the early 1990s. That was followed by the acquisition of First State Bank in Phil Campbell.

Upchurch and the bank's board of directors had the further vision to expand into other states, and that process began with the purchase of the Bank of Faulkner, the first Mississippi expansion, with branches in Ripley, Walnut and Corinth.

As the bank continued to grow, it ran into a problem with its name, something Upchurch took an active hand in solving.

"We'd had the name Citizens Bank since 1906, but as we were growing, we were going into markets where there were already Citizens Banks," Upchurch said. "So we engaged a marketing company and had a contest for the best new name for the bank.

"One day I said, 'Why not just use the initials for Citizens Bank and Savings Company?' And we changed officially to CB&S Bank, Inc."

After his retirement, Upchurch will remain on the bank's board of directors. He will also be available to work with and assist the new president if needed.

"Dennis is one of the finest bankers I've ever known and certainly one of the finest people I've ever met," Batchelor said. "He's not only a good banker—he's a good man. We're not losing him completely. He'll remain on the board of directors and will continue to offer advice and counsel as time goes on to the person replacing him.

"He's been our leader, and we've depended on his knowledge of banking. He certainly got us to where we are, and we are thankful to have had Dennis here. We've seen the fruits of his labor in our growth and in our relationships with our customers, which is so important."

While CB&S Bank has nearly 150 shareholders, the Batchelor family retains majority ownership and control of those shares. It may be a family-owned bank, but Upchurch said he was always made to feel part of that family.

"I have a very close relationship with Cecil and Greg [Batchelor]. I think of them like family," Upchurch said, "and I believe they think of me as family. Cecil and I are best friends. And since Greg became chairman, he and I have developed a close relationship, and we talk every day. There's a lot of trust and confidence we have in each other."

Upchurch reflected on his 29-year tenure with CB&S, something of a rarity in the banking industry these days.

"I remember when Mr. Pace retired," Upchurch said. "He'd been here more than twenty years, and he said how unusual it was for someone to stay with a bank that long. There are a lot of mergers in the banking industry, and I'm fortunate and blessed to have been here almost thirty years."

After retiring, don't expect Upchurch to find the nearest rocking chair. He'll be 70 this week, and Upchurch and his wife Sheila plan to remain active.

"Sheila and I bicycle a lot. We love to travel," he said. "And those are two things we will continue to do. Also, we're building a new home at Twin Pines Country Club, so that will keep us busy for a while."

The couple will visit Michigan's Mackinac Island in August.

"It's going to be 100 degrees here, and the temperature there is about 70 degrees, so I'm looking forward to that," Upchurch said. "Sheila and I are very blessed to be in good health, and each of the last five years we've taken a trip overseas. The next one we want to do is Germany, Switzerland and maybe Austria."

Sheila volunteers with the Salvation Army and Meals on Wheels, and Upchurch said he plans to get involved in some worthwhile community volunteer organizations. The couple is active in First United Methodist Church in Russellville, where Upchurch teaches an adult Sunday School class, and they want to sign up for some of the adult continuing education classes through the University of North Alabama.

He has served on the board of directors of the Alabama Bankers Association for more than a decade, and Upchurch also serves on the board of directors of First National Bankers Bank, headquartered in Baton Rouge, LA. He's past president of the Russellville Kiwanis Club and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce

From his first banking job in 1974 to today's version of that industry, Upchurch has

seen tremendous change, although he says there remains one constant—character.

"When I started, a note and all the paperwork would fit in a 3"x8" plastic envelope," he said. "That's changed so much with compliance. To get a personal loan today, there's a thick tablet of forms. Some of that's good, with the truth in lending laws, for example.

"When I think about the changes from back then, we always relied a lot on a person's character. We knew our customers. There were credit bureaus, but not every bank reported to them. If someone came in for a loan, we applied the 'three C's' of lending—collateral, cash flow and character. And character remains the most important, even after forty-three years in this business."

"We're doing real well and exceeding budget expectations," Upchurch said last week. "We're in as good a shape with the regulators as we've ever been. We have well-trained, motivated employees, so it's a good time to leave while the bank is profitable and growing."

Even though today's credit scores are the primary consideration in lending, Upchurch said CB&S Bank remains a commercial bank and still does a lot of small business loans.

"Those loans are driven by relationships," he said. "We try to establish and maintain relationships with our customers and get to know both them and their business."

In Russellville, where 'everybody knows everybody,' there have been occasions where Upchurch has charged off a loan on a friend, fellow church member or neighbor. While such situations can be awkward, Upchurch said he never changes how he treats people.

"Over time I've realized that 99 percent of people would pay us if they could have," he said. "When I see people in the community we have losses on, I speak to them, I'm nice to them, and then if the time comes where their situation changes, many of them come back and pay us. We do everything we can to try and avoid foreclosure on people by going the whole nine yards before we do that."

Upchurch said the bank expects to have a new president in place before July 31, his last day, and he's been actively involved in the process of selecting his successor.

"We have some good people interested in the position and some we're interested in," Upchurch said. "Ideally, that news will be announced before I leave. I've been very active with the executive committee and search committee to help find my replacement. We've talked to some good folks, and there's a lot of interest in the job."

Though he'll soon be out of the day-to-day operations of the bank, Upchurch said he will remain active in the community which embraced him back in 1984.

"I'd like to thank the people of Russellville and Franklin County for the great reception I've had here. I've never come to a community like this where you're accepted at face value," Upchurch said. "When I came here to organize Valley State Bank, people accepted me, and that's unusual for a community this size. I thank the community for accepting me and putting up with me all these years."

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Shewbart joins elite group of risk administrators

Submitted to the FFP

The Alabama Public Personnel Administrators Association and the Government and Economic Development Institute at Auburn University announced recently that Mike Shewbart, director of operations for the City of Red Bay, has met all the requirements to be designated an Alabama Certified Risk Management Specialist.
Shewbart joins an elite group of 11 Alabama risk administrators throughout the state with this distinction.

“Municipal leaders are to be commended for supporting Mr. Shewbart’s efforts to complete this structured and tested professional development program,” said Andrea Roberson, president of the APPAA. “They recognize that all of the citizens of the City of Red Bay benefit from quality services provided by highly motivated and well-trained municipal employees like Mike Shewbart.”



Mike Shewbart

Graduates of the program must complete four courses

of detailed practical and applied tested course work involving all aspects of risk management.
“Mr. Shewbart’s achievement underscores a strong commitment and dedication to public service in our state and the commitment of the City of Red Bay to the betterment and improvement of government in Alabama,” said Dr. Joe Summers, executive director of the Government and Economic Development Institute at Auburn University.
The certificate will be presented to Shewbart on July 27, 2017, at a special ceremony held during the annual conference of the association in Montgomery.

‘COBB,’ from page 5

Seventy-one percent of Medicaid recipients in Alabama are children, according to the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

In her interview with the *Free Press*, Cobb also discussed her thoughts on education. Cobb is a proponent of public schools and is an advocate of vocational and career technical education programs.

“I do not believe the state of Alabama should be funding private schools,” she said. “I think it hurts public schools, and we need to be appropriately funding public schools.”

Cobb believes more emphasis should be placed on career technical programs, which give students a choice other than attending a college or university.

“College isn’t for everybody, and some kids just don’t want to go to college,” she said. “We should be asking students in high school if they want to go to college,

and if they say no, we should be asking if they want to learn a skill that will get them a job and make them money when they graduate. I believe the answer to that would probably be yes.”

Putting more emphasis on non-traditional forms of education will lead to a greater, more diverse and highly trained workforce, Cobb said.

Closing her pitch, Cobb said she announced her run after much thought and was honored by those who offered their support. If she’s elected governor, Cobb said Alabamians could expect more transparency and honesty from her administration.

“I really want to see more citizen involvement, but the people can’t get involved if they’re left in the dark and don’t know what is going on,” she said.

The final question posed to Cobb was about honesty and integrity. Every politician claims those qualities,

but lately Alabamians have seen that that isn’t always the case. Cobb made a case for why Alabamians should trust her.

“I’ve been in public life a long time as a judge, and as a judge I’ve always applied a higher standard to myself than I have other people,” she said. “I don’t believe the people in power are the ones who need protection. Government is for the people, and as elected officials that is who should be served.

“I can tell you that there are no skeletons in my closet. Real honesty is when your words match the things that you do, and my words have always matched my actions. That’s what I’m most proud of.”

Cobb’s campaign website is suebellcobb2018.com. The 2018 Alabama gubernatorial election primaries will be June 5, 2018, with the general election on November 6, 2018.

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Opioid abuse problem hits home in Franklin County

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In the latest example of Alabama ranking first nationally in an undesirable poll, a study by Blue Cross Blue Shield shows our state to be the highest prescribing state in the nation for opioid pain reliever prescriptions, according to the Center for Disease Control.

And the problem hits even closer to home, with Franklin County ranking ninth among Alabama's 67 counties in opioid prescriptions per capita in 2015, with 1.6 prescriptions written per person.

According to www.drugfreeworld.org, opioids are drugs that act on the nervous system to relieve pain. Opioid drugs bind to opioid receptors on cells in the brain and throughout the body. Some of the more common opioid brand names include Dilaudid, Demerol, Oxycontin and Percocet.

According to the CDC, Alabama also ranks highest in the nation as having more opioid prescriptions than people, with Alabama doctors writing 5.8 million prescriptions for opioids in 2015. Alabama's 2015 population was 4.859 million.

Nationally, 100 Americans die daily from opioid overdose, according to the CDC. In Alabama, opioid overdoses have caused more deaths than overdoses from cocaine and heroin combined.

A recent look at the grand jury indictments in June shows how rampant drug charges are in Franklin County. Although not limited to opioids, of the 50 individuals indicted on felony charges in June of 2017, 26 were facing drug charges.

Across Alabama, 26 percent of BCBS commercially insured members filled at least one opioid prescription

in 2015, compared to 21 percent nationally. And 6.5 percent of BCBS members were on long-duration opioid regimens in 2015, compared to only 3.8 percent nationally.

And opioid use is a growing problem locally. According to www.thewellnesscoalition.org, Franklin County saw a 6.1 percent increase in filled opioid prescriptions in 2015, earning the county a rank of fourth-highest in Alabama. Cleburne County, which ranked first, saw an alarming increase of 97.4 percent in opioid prescriptions written in 2015.

A recent look at the grand jury indictments in June shows how rampant drug charges are in Franklin County. Although not limited to opioids, of the 50 individuals indicted on felony charges in June of 2017, 26 were facing drug charges.

All of Franklin County's neighboring counties saw decreases in the number of opioids prescribed to their residents, including Marion (-6.6 percent), Winston (-9.1 percent), Lawrence (-10.2 percent), Lauderdale (-12.4 percent) and Colbert (-14.9 percent).

All those prescriptions have also led to an increase in opioid addiction in Alabama, with 16.4 per 1,000 BCBS members having been diagnosed with opioid use disorder in 2016, double the national average of 8.3.

Opioid abuse isn't a male-dominated problem. In fact, the BCBS study shows among those 45 and older, women have a higher rate of opioid abuse than do men. Among those younger than 45, men have the higher rate, although women fill more opioid prescriptions than men across all age groups.

"We recognize that it's crucial for us to be a proactive partner in the fight against the opioid epidemic in Alabama," said Dr. Anne Schmidt, medical director for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama. "We strongly support best practices and are collaborating with primary care doctors to appropriately apply recommendations and guidelines from the CDC."

BCBS's efforts to reduce opioid abuse are concentrated in three primary areas:

- Promoting the health and safety of Alabamians through public awareness and education of opioid risk by partnering with local and state agencies, including the Alabama Department of Public Health.

- Supporting appropriate prescribing of opioids for pain management by providing CDC treatment guidelines to primary care physicians and offering medication-assisted treatment options for members with opioid use disorder.

- Encouraging and supporting public outreach initiatives to prevent prescription opioid misuse, abuse, fraud and diversion, including supporting and promoting National Drug Take-Back Day, which provides free, anonymous collection of unwanted and expired medications.

The BCBS Health Index has identified substance use disorder as the fifth-most impactful condition affecting the health of commercially insured members in the U.S.

Alabama has similar results, with substance use disorder ranked as the fifth-most prevailing health condition. The BCBS Health Index shows the top five conditions affecting the health of Franklin County residents to be hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, depression/anxiety and substance use disorder.

For more info, visit www.bcbs.com/healthofamerica.

Mayor: Jam on Sloss Lake draws 'biggest crowd ever'

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council met on Monday, July 3. Originally, there were eight items on the agenda, but during the work session, one item was omitted. Item No. 6, which asked the council to consider approving quotes received for roof repairs at the John Blackwell Sports Complex, was taken off.

With only seven items, the meeting was shorter than usual. The council unanimously approved the Jam on

Sloss Lake contracts. The Fourth of July celebration, according to mayor David Grissom, was a success.

"It went great," he said. "According to our police department and those who were doing our parking, we estimated it was our biggest crowd ever.

"Every year the event continues to grow, and I am always getting positive feedback about it."

In other action, the council approved the solicitation of bids for the construction of the community storm shelter at the John Blackwell Sports Complex.

The council also approved the purchase of two vehi-

cles from the Alabama Department of Transportation. One vehicle was a used pickup truck, which the city agreed to purchase for \$22,475. That vehicle will be used by the Russellville Parks and Rec Department.

"The department received some funding from the Summer Feeding Program," Grissom said. "Some of that money was designated specifically to purchase new equipment or vehicles."

The other vehicle is a 2015 Chevrolet Tahoe, which cost the city \$37,000. That vehicle will be utilized by the administrative department.

'REEDTOWN,' from page 4

end. Even if you did not walk the halls of Reedtown High like me, you gained respect for all the accomplishments acquired.

In the Farewell Address presented at the close of the school in 1968, it was stated that "the most challenging and fascinating subject to us is the future, our future. What will it be? As we transfer to different schools, we will carry with us not only the things we have learned from our books but the pride, dignity and

high ideals we have learned at Reedtown."

Some people have moved away from Reedtown/Russellville, but some people like me have a reason to remain connected to Reedtown/Russellville.

Although I live in Russellville, I attend church in Reedtown. As it says in the school song, 'We'll never forget old Reedtown, tho scattered far and wide...To speed her upward and onward shall be our joy and pride.'

'LEADERSHIP,' from page 1

and/or Russellville, I am pleased," Grimes said. "This is an excellent program where participants learn a lot about the state and some of the roadblocks that hamper our progress. I think it gives participants a whole new perspective. Any time you expand the knowledge of leadership in your community, you are improving that ability to lead as well as improving that community.

"I absolutely love the program and am excited we were able to get two nominees in."

Leadership Alabama allows participants to focus on

issues challenging the state in politics and government, education, business and economics and quality of life.

Grimes believes Gist and Groce to be exactly the type of leaders that Leadership Alabama needs.

"They are both excellent leaders with G&G Steel and the Department of Human Resources," Grimes said. "They will bring a lot to the table and will be able to promote our county and city in a very positive way."

For more information on Leadership Alabama, visit www.leadershipal.org.

commitment to help shape a better Alabama. Leadership Alabama operates on the belief that leaders from all walks of life must come together to play a role in Alabama moving forward.

Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes completed Leadership Alabama several years ago while superintendent for Lawrence County Schools. Grimes said the program had a profound effect on his vision for Alabama.

"Any time we have selections from Franklin County

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tree, needs a safe
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and still playful. An
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adopting Dottie. She is
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Friday, July 14 from 3-
7:30 pm and Saturday,
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Hwy. 43 Hester Heights.
Entertainment center,
furniture, clothes, out-
door items, shoes/boots,
lots of other misc. items!

Yard Sale this Saturday,
July 15 from 8 am-4 pm.
One mile east on Hwy.
48 by Deb's Hair Shop.
Weather permitting.

Yard Sale this Saturday,
July 15 at 173 Hill
Avenue, three streets
past Frosty Inn on the
right. 7 am-1 pm.
Furniture, household
items, dishes, men's &
women's clothes.

Yard Sale this Saturday,
July 15 from 7 am-4 pm
at 26 Cedar Avenue,
Russellville. From North
Jackson, take Lawrence
Street west, go 1 mile to
Walnut Avenue, turn
right, go to Cemetery
Street, turn right, yard
sale on the right. Or take
Limestone Street to
West Highland Baptist
Church and follow signs.
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COURTESY PHOTO

Chamber of Commerce executive director Cassie Medley presents Chase Sparks of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council with a \$500 grant to help promote tourism in Franklin County.

Chamber receives grant to promote local tourism

Submitted to the FFP

In December of 2016, the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association graciously made available to the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce a one-time \$5,000 grant to promote and benefit tourism in Franklin County. The Chamber chose three projects.

The first project involved reprinting the Franklin County brochure. The brochure was first printed in 2014 with the financial assistance of Sen. Roger Bedford and Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow and the State of Alabama Tourism Department's matching grant. In two years, all 15,000 brochures have been distributed throughout Alabama.

The second project involved awarding five mini-grants in the amount of \$500 each to tourism sites in Franklin County. Each mini-grant will require the site to follow specific guidelines and criteria to benefit tourists. The five sites chosen by the Chamber were the Red Bay Museum, the Dismals in Phil Campbell, the historic Roxy Theatre in Russellville, Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park in Hodges and Bear Creek Lakes in Hodges.

The third project will showcase Franklin County's tourist sites with postcards of each site. The sites selected are the Red Bay Museum, the Dismals, the historic Roxy Theatre, Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park, the Franklin County Watermelon Festival in Russellville, Bear Creek Lakes in Hodges and Tiffin Motor Homes in Red Bay. Each of these seven sites will receive 1,000 postcards to promote their tourist destination.

The goal of each project is to promote Franklin County by Building, Connecting and Discovering!

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Among top East contenders, UGA has schedule edge

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Last week we took a look at the 2017 schedules for each team in the SEC West, ranking them from the most challenging (Auburn) to the least (Alabama). This week we move over to the East, which hasn't produced a conference champion since Tim Tebow was a junior at Florida (2008).

Once again, the schedules are ranked from toughest to easiest. As a side note, remember that SEC Media Days in Hoover wrap up Thursday, and the season kicks off in exactly 50 days!

Tennessee

Non-conference games: Georgia Tech (in Atlanta), Indiana State, UMass, Southern Miss
Cross-divisional games: At Alabama, vs. LSU
Division opponents on the road: Florida, Kentucky, Missouri

The Volunteers will be challenged in their Labor Day Monday night opener against Georgia Tech, which closed last season on a four-game winning streak that included victories over SEC East teams Georgia and Kentucky. But what truly turns Tennessee's schedule into a meat-grinder is that double-whammy from the SEC West with Alabama (October 21) and LSU (November 18). It's without a doubt the toughest cross of any team in the league this season.

Factor in the mid-September trip to The Swamp (where the Vols haven't won since 2003), a home date with Georgia to close out the season's first month and a tricky trap game at much-improved Kentucky right after the Alabama game, and the odds of this being the year when UT finally breaks through under Butch Jones and gets back to the conference title game appear slim.

Florida

Non-conference games: Michigan (in Arlington), Northern Colorado, UAB, Florida State
Cross-divisional games: Vs. LSU and TexasA&M
Division opponents on the road: Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina

Granted, the Gators get both games against the SEC West at home this season after moving last year's LSU game to Baton Rouge in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. But, wow, does anybody in the country have a more daunting non-conference schedule than opening with Michigan (a Top 5 team for most of last year) and closing with Florida State (sure to be a Top 5 team this year)?

The Wolverines must replace 17 starters from last year, so playing them early is not the worst thing in the world. Florida gets FSU at home, but

See 'SCHEDULE,' page 18

Game of **INCHES**

After missing the playoffs by the slimmest of margins, Colbert Heights has some unfinished business in 2017

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Taylor Leathers is a man who appreciates a good motto.

"I'm a big slogan guy," said Leathers, now in his second year as head football coach at Colbert Heights.

The Wildcats' slogan for 2017 began to take shape last fall, on a late-October Friday night in Caddo, a small community along Highway 24 between Decatur and Moulton. Trailing East Lawrence High School in the fourth quarter of the final regular season game, the 'Cats—poised to clinch a playoff spot with a victory over the Eagles—were driving for the go-ahead score when they found themselves facing a critical fourth-and-short near midfield.

For Leathers, a 2003 graduate of Winfield High

See 'INCHES,' page 14



FILE PHOTO

Quarterback Kevin Shaw (5) will try and help the Wildcats snap a five-year playoff drought.

Just for kicks

Start of new league signifies soccer growth in Russellville

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The game of soccer is continuing to expand in the city of Russellville. In the past, there have been very few opportunities to get involved with the game in Franklin County, and many of those serious about playing the game had to travel to surrounding areas like Muscle Shoals and Florence.

In the last year, Russellville High School has added boys and girls soccer to get students involved, but now there is a new soccer league in Russellville, one that is open to boys and girls and men and women of all ages.

"A lot of people around here who are serious about playing have to drive to Muscle Shoals or Florence or Decatur to play," Duron said. "We want to give them a place to go so they can play here."

Luis Duron and his wife, Nelly Martinez, a native of Russellville, have started the Alabama International Soccer League, or Alabama ISL, in Russellville. Their goal is to provide soccer lessons, training and competitive leagues for all ages in an area that has always had the demand but never an organization to fulfill it.

"Soccer is really big here, and a lot of people love the sport," Duron said. "This a good location to start a club, which has never really had one before. I've always wanted to do a club here in Russellville, and now we've got the chance to do it."

Currently, Alabama ISL is offering soccer lessons to youth ages 2-19 and holds classes on Saturdays from 11 a.m. until 1 or 2 p.m.

See 'SOCCER,' page 16



COURTESY PHOTO

Luis Duron and his wife, Nelly Martinez, a Russellville native, have started the Alabama International Soccer League, or Alabama ISL, in Russellville.

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'INCHES' from page 13

School who walked on at UNA and ultimately earned a scholarship as a defensive lineman, it was the exact situation that exemplifies everything he loves about the game of football.

"Football is a physical game," Leathers said. "It's meant to be played that way. That's why you have all that gear. Football is the only game that allows a kid like me, when I was growing up—not very talented, not the best athlete—to succeed, where good, old-fashioned will power counts for something. It's not always like that in other sports.

"You can't just use will power and gumption and get a mad on and make more baskets or shoot the ball better. You can't just grit your teeth in baseball and get more hits. Football is a battle of wills, a battle of toughness, and I like to play it that way."

And that's why what happened next on that do-or-die, season-defining play at Caddo has haunted Leathers for the last eight months. Almost immediately after arriving on The Mountain following a four-year stint as an assistant at Lexington, Leathers set his sights on getting Colbert Heights back to the playoffs for the first time since 2011. On the verge of achieving that goal, the Wildcats fell excruciatingly short.

They failed to convert the fourth-down play, and the Eagles (who came into the game with just one win on the season) prevailed 30-24. The loss, coupled with West Morgan's stunning upset of Lexington that same night, left Colbert Heights on the outside looking in for the fifth consecutive postseason.

"The thing that haunts me the most about that [East Lawrence] game is, we were driving late in the game with a chance to tie or take the lead," Leathers said last week. "We had a fourth-and-one right around midfield, and we failed to get the first down by about an inch. I've taken that clip and put it on Twitter for our guys to see—we're an inch away from fulfilling our goals."

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"All of our goals are player-set. We meet before the season starts in fall camp and say, 'Okay, what are our goals?' Last year one of those team goals, aside from being competitive in every game and just general things like playing hard and giving great effort, was to go to the playoffs. And we were an inch away."

Rather than forgetting that fourth-down failure, Leathers bottled it to use as fuel going forward. Last year's regret would become this year's rallying cry.

A new slogan was born.

"Our slogan for this year is, *Get that inch*. It's just a reminder for us to take care of business the way it should have been handled last year," said Leathers, whose team finished the 2016 season 4-6 overall and 3-4 in Class 3A, Region 8. "That's definitely our driving force. It's disappointing we weren't in. We know what happened at Lexington—they fumbled five times, and West Morgan beat them. But, for me as a coach, the lesson I'm trying to instill in our players is that if we don't take care of our own business, we don't deserve to be there. We were unable to take care of our business that night, and as fate would have it West Morgan—a team we beat by two touchdowns—takes our playoff spot.

"That is something we have used ever since the final game. We got a week off, and then we started back in the weight room last winter with our off-season program, pressing our juniors to become seniors. That's something that comes out of our mouth a lot—we've got unfinished business. That's the attitude I'm trying to instill in our kids. We're playing this season with unfinished business."

The sour taste of watching West Morgan (a team Colbert Heights had beaten 42-27 in early September) steal the fourth and final playoff spot in Region 8 has pushed the Wildcats through the winter months, through two weeks of spring football in May and through grueling summer workouts. Motivation, Leathers said, hasn't been an issue.

"I'm very pleased with our work ethic," he said. "With this being my second summer, I've really had the opportunity to compare this year and how things go each day with last year, and I think we've really improved as far as our level of intensity when we work. There's definitely a difference in the purpose of how we lift and the attitude we have and the attendance we've had for summer workouts. We're not where I want us to be, but we're making progress there. We haven't arrived by any stretch of the imagination, but we're on the right track.

"My goal here hasn't changed. I want Colbert Heights to be a competitive postseason team. We were really driven to return Colbert Heights to the playoffs last year, and that goal remains the same. We got as close as you could possibly get without getting in."

Thirteen seniors are gone from last year's team, including standout defensive linemen Carson Peoples and Justin Roberts, big receivers Ricky Thomas and Austin Davis, and two-way stalwart J.J. Alexander, a bruising fullback and linebacker. This year's 18-member senior class is even larger, but Leathers pointed out that many of

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'INCHES', from page 14

those players are still adjusting to more prominent roles.

"We lost quite a few guys on both sides of the ball," he said. "Some of the guys stepping in for them are older guys, but that doesn't necessarily mean we have a lot of [game] experience."

The Wildcats do, however, have a few established veterans they can lean on, starting with dynamic dual-threat quarterback Kevin Shaw, who rushed for more than 700 yards and 12 touchdowns last season on his way to earning Offensive MVP honors as a junior.

"I have very high expectations for his performance this year at quarterback," Leathers said of Shaw, whose 2016 highlights included 129 yards rushing on just 11 carries in a 47-26 win over Phil Campbell. "It's his second year as the starting quarterback, so he's played the games and had the chance to get a season under his belt. We should see a more polished quarterback out of Kevin. He's still progressing as a passer, and he's always been a great runner. He's a dual-threat guy. We expect a lot out of him."

"My goal here hasn't changed," Leathers said. "I want Colbert Heights to be a competitive postseason team. We were really driven to return Colbert Heights to the playoffs last year, and that goal remains the same. We got as close as you could possibly get without getting in."

Shaw passed for more than 700 yards last season as well, but much of that production came courtesy of Thomas and Davis, who combined for 50-plus catches.

"Ricky and Austin were six-four, six-five," Leathers said. "We don't have big, tall receivers this time. We just don't have those guys. We don't have a guy like that in the house. The wide receiver position will be by committee. We've got some kids who are gonna rotate, and we'll see who ends up being a playmaker."

There is more clarity in the backfield, where senior fullback Dylan Chandler takes over Alexander's role as the featured runner (along with Shaw) in the ground game. Senior Chandler Willis will also get carries, and Leathers praised senior Bevin Foust for his work ethic. Foust, who played H-back last year, will play more tight end this season.

The Wildcats are now entering year number two of their transition from the Air Raid spread attack they ran for years under former head coaches Chip Lindsey (now the offensive coordinator at Auburn University) and Ivan Denton to the more physical, run-heavy offense Leathers favored during his time as Lexington's offensive coordinator.

"As best we could, we paired the spread they'd been using since Chip Lindsey was here with that run-first offense, that physical brand of football we wanted to play," Leathers said of last year's team, which averaged 23.5 points per game. "We're gonna build on that. We're not gonna be one-dimensional, but at the same time we lost our big receiving threats."

"We're gonna play a physical, hard-nosed brand of football. We really want to balance our carries with our backs. We're gonna utilize the option game and try to balance out our carries."

Shaw, Chandler and company will be operating behind an experienced offensive line that returns four key members—senior tackle Cain Phifer, senior guards Chason Scott and Brannon Bradford, and junior Tyler Tubbs, who saw a lot of snaps last season as a sophomore at both guard and tackle.

Defensively, the contributions of Peoples and Roberts will be sorely missed up front. Tubbs figures to see plenty of snaps at defensive end, but Leathers hopes the Wildcats won't have to rely on too many guys to play both ways.

"We're in a situation this year where I think we'll be able to play more one-way guys than we did last year. For a small 3A school, we've got the ability to play more one-way players than I've seen just about anywhere else I've been."

Questions must be answered along the line, but there is more experience at linebacker, where seniors Korey Saint and Brendan Borden both return. Leathers said that improved play in the secondary has been a focus all throughout the off-season. Shaw brings a play-making presence to the back end, where he'll play safety in certain situations.

With the start of fall camp less than a month away, Leathers and his staff have made sure that the memory of last year's painful finish is still fresh on his players' minds. All they have to do is go back and watch the fourth-down clip on Twitter again or glance at the wristbands Leathers had designed for them to wear, the ones bearing the new team slogan.

For Leathers, though, *getting that inch* is about so much more than merely converting a fourth down, winning a game or even making the playoffs. Coaches can use football as a vehicle to teach the value of things like toughness and teamwork, and that opportunity to mold young men is why Leathers does what he does.

"Trying to instill all of that, to me, is why I coach—because all of that is what they need in life," he said. "We talk about not being results-oriented. When these guys get out of here and get into their lives and I see them some time down the road, it's not gonna be about, 'Man, you remember that year we won seven games, or eight games?' or whatever. What I want to know is, did the boy become a man? Did the young man mature and become tough? Are they able to handle those situations life throws at them?"

"That's why we play the game the way we do, with that physical style, that tough style. When you play it that way, you get more of those life lessons you can take with you. Not that I want these guys to grow up and be cage-fighters. But out there in the real world, you might lose your job, or things might not go well at work. They might not go well at home. Being married is tough, being a parent is tough. I want these guys to be able to pull from what we're doing now and say, 'If I can make it through Coach Leathers' practice, I can make it through this.'"

In the short term, Colbert Heights will open the 2017 season on August 25 at home against Red Bay, which has won the last six meetings with the Wildcats. Red Bay coach Michael Jackson enters this season just one win shy of 100 for his career as a varsity head coach.

"He'll have to get that against somebody else," Leathers said with a laugh. "I've gotten to know Coach Jackson a little bit. That's a great accomplishment for him. We just don't want him to get it at Amos Mitchell Stadium."

Week 2 will bring another non-region game against Phil Campbell, and then the Wildcats will dive into region play against Clements and continue their quest to *get that inch* and earn a playoff spot for the first time in six years. With perennial powers Lauderdale County, Colbert County and Lexington still lurking and teams like West Morgan rapidly improving, Leathers knows that cracking the top half of Region 8 will be no small feat.

"Clements was much-improved last year, and they'll continue to get better," he said. "I look for West Morgan to be one of the top teams in the region. They've really improved. Our schedule gets tougher as we go along, but we've got some tough games right off that bat, too. We'll have to play well each week throughout the season. There's not really a stretch where we can take a breath."

"It'll be a battle. There are no guarantees in any shape, form or fashion. In a lot of ways it will be harder to get there this year than last year."

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'SOCCER,' from page 13

Those lessons are \$20 per person on the first visit and \$5 per person for every lesson after that, Duron said.

"I know a lot of parents want their kids to learn to play soccer," Duron said, "but there's nowhere around here that gives lessons, and they're too busy to get out and teach them. That's why we're offering soccer school, so these kids can learn the game."

Duron, a former high school and semi-pro player, said lessons are also available for adults who want to learn. Soon, Alabama ISL intends to start offering competitive club soccer and youth and adult leagues. These leagues will be for all ages, Duron said, and he believes it will be a big hit among Russellvillians.

"A lot of people around here who are serious about playing have to drive to Muscle Shoals or Florence or Decatur to play," he said. "We want to give them a place to go so they can play here."

Alabama ISL plans to start organizing 7-on-7 teams and traditional 11-on-11 teams for the youth first and then eventually get adult leagues started. Right now, Duron said, they are just trying to get the word out about Alabama ISL.

"We're just getting started, and the start is always slow," he said. "But once the word gets out, I think a lot of people will be interested and things will start to pick up."

Starting a league and club like Alabama ISL in a town that has never had one before would be a daunting task for some, but this is not Duron's first time embarking on a venture like this. In fact, Duron has about two decades worth of experience.

"For 19 or 20 years, I've been doing this," he said. "I started a small league in Georgia, and it eventually grew into six locations. It was a big success, and we had a lot of people who played."

Starting around Fayetteville, Georgia, Duron's league expanded to areas south of Atlanta and into Gwinnett County. In the long run, Duron wants Alabama ISL to blossom with similar success.

"What we did in Georgia is what we want to do here," he said. "Like I said, things will be slow at first, because they always are. But I think Russellville is a perfect place to start, and we hope to expand from here."

Duron's long-term plan is to have multiple leagues for all ages playing year-round.

"Some people think that soccer is seasonal," he said. "I want to get that out of people's heads. Soccer is played all year long."

Alabama ISL would also like to add an indoor facility and multiple outdoor fields in the years to come, Duron said.

Starting the club, Duron said his true desire is to get people playing soccer, learning the game and having fun.

"I love the sport. I've played it all my life, and my wife plays it, too," he said. "I know there are a lot of people who love the game, and I want to be able to give them a place where they can play and share that love of the game."

For more information about the Alabama ISL, call Luis Duron at 256-980-5735 or contact Alabama ISL by email at 79aisl@gmail.com. The club can also be found on Facebook by searching "Alabama ISL."



Luis Duron with some of the first participants in the Alabama ISL.

COURTESY PHOTO

RHS set to host 7-on-7 camp, Lineman Challenge

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Thirteen schools from five different classifications will descend on the campus of Russellville High School this Friday for the annual Northwest Alabama 7-on-7 and Lineman Challenge.

Pool play for the 7-on-7 competition will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Friday morning. Russellville (Class 5A) will be joined by Sheffield (2A), Central-Florence (4A), W.S. Neal (4A), Crossville (5A) and West Morgan (3A) in Pool A, while Colbert County (3A), Jacksonville (4A), Haleyville (4A), Deshler (4A), West Point (5A), James Clemens (7A) and Montevallo (3A) comprise Pool B.

"Most of these teams are returners, guys who keep coming back," said Mark Heaton, now in his fourth year as Russellville's head coach. "When we first started doing this thing, there were some bigger schools in 6A and 7A that went. A lot of those guys are competing in other tournaments now. Just for example, some of them are in the Select 7-on-7, and some of them qualified for other bigger tournaments like the ALFCA tournaments. With a lot of the bigger schools, it's harder to get them in here.

"But I like the group we have. It's a mixture of anywhere from 3A to 4A and 5A, mostly, and it's gonna be a very competitive bracket. It helps, too, that a lot of schools from around here are involved."

Heaton estimated that roughly 600 athletes and 150 coaches, officials and volunteers will take part in Friday's event.

"We're gonna have somewhere between seven and eight hundred people on campus," he said. "We're looking forward to it."

Russellville will open 7-on-7 pool play at 8:30 a.m. against West Morgan. The Golden Tigers are scheduled to face Crossville at 8:55, W.S. Neal at 9:45, Sheffield at 10:10 and Central-Florence at 11:00. Tournament play will begin in the afternoon.

Late last month, Russellville competed in two other 7-on-7 tournaments at Birmingham Southern College (where the Golden Tigers went 3-3 in six games on June 27) and Hoover (where they finished 4-2-1 on June 29).

"We lost in the quarterfinals of that [Hoover] tournament by three points," Heaton said, "so we were right there, just one possession away from being in the semifinals of that event. All in all, it was a very successful trip. Everything went great.

"We went to the one at Birmingham Southern, and we rotated quarterbacks at that one with Devin [Buckhalter] and Luke [Barnwell]. We went 2-2 in pool play and 1-1 in bracket play. There's only three rounds in bracket play, so we essentially got put out in the semifinal game. We were kind of feeling our way through that one, but we improved. Everybody got better, no doubt about it."

On the Wednesday in between those two camps, the Golden Tigers traveled to Montevallo High School for an organized team activity (OTA).

"We had about a two-hour practice that morning, basically just a competition with Montevallo at their place," Heaton said. "It gave us a chance to compete against another team and do some one-on-one drills, some seven-on-seven stuff and some eleven-on-eleven stuff. That was huge. We found out a lot about ourselves.

"It gave us a great idea moving forward in July of who we can count on to give us serious minutes in a game on Friday nights. It gave us a look at what our personnel packages will be going into fall practice. We've got a lot of those opportunities coming up this month, too, that will allow the kids to step up and show us what they're capable of."

Russellville was scheduled to host Haleyville for an OTA on Monday, and the Golden Tigers will travel to Haleyville for another OTA on July 24. Russellville and W.S. Neal will take part in an OTA this Thursday evening at 6 p.m. at Golden Tiger Stadium, and the 7-on-7 camp and Lineman Challenge will begin the following

morning.

Ten schools (Russellville, Haleyville, Sheffield, Colbert County, Montevallo, Jacksonville, Deshler, West Point, W.S. Neal and West Morgan) will take part in the Lineman Challenge, which includes events like a pass-rush competition, a tug-of-war, a sled relay, an obstacle course and a bench-press competition.

The Russellville Middle School football team will host a 7-on-7 camp with Haleyville and Deshler on Thursday morning starting at 9 a.m.

"We've had a really good summer," long-time RMS coach Larry Gilmer said on Monday. "We've got a good group of kids, and they've been working hard. We've got about sixty-five kids all told in the seventh and eighth grade. The group we've got coming into the eighth grade this time has really improved. They got better toward the end of last year, and they've continued to work hard and improve this summer.

"Being able to play a few games on their own as seventh-graders last year really helped them. They were much improved by the end of the season."

Gilmer's eighth-grade team last season lost just one game, by two points to Lawrence County (a team the Golden Tigers would later beat 30-8 in Moulton). Several players from that team practiced with the varsity for the last few weeks of the 2016 season and are now poised to make an impact this season as freshmen on the varsity level.

"I've had some teams that didn't lose a game as eighth-graders and one group that didn't lose a game and didn't get scored on, but last year's team was one of the best I've ever had," said Gilmer, who has coached football at RMS for more than two decades. "They had size, they had speed, they were coachable—it was a really good group. And it wasn't just a few of them. We had about twenty-five kids who could really play."

The group of potential impact freshmen includes quarterback Luke Barnwell, lineman Edgar Amaya, receivers Rowe Gallagher, Cole Barnett, Caden Watts and Ashaad Williams, and safety/running back Grayson Eady, among others.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see six or eight of those guys starting as freshmen," Gilmer said. "Or if not starting, definitely being in the rotation and playing big roles. I don't expect they'll be standing on the sidelines."

The varsity Golden Tigers will open fall camp in early August. The 2017 schedule kicks off with a pre-season game at Athens on Friday, August 25.

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'SCHEDULE' from page 13

the Seminoles have owned that rivalry regardless of venue in recent years, winning the last four meetings and six of the last seven.

A tough October slate starts with LSU and ends with Georgia, and the trip to South Carolina on November 11 could be tricky. Rest assured, if the Gators manage to win at least nine games again for the third time in as many seasons under Jim McElwain, they will have earned it.

Vanderbilt

Non-conference games: At Middle Tennessee, Alabama A&M, Kansas State, Western Kentucky

Cross-divisional games: Versus Alabama, at Ole Miss

Division opponents on the road: Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee

Vandy has gone bowling in back-to-back seasons just once in program history, and that isn't likely to change in 2017. A sneaky-tough non-conference slate, an early-season visit from Alabama and road trips to Gainesville and Knoxville figure to make matching last year's total of six wins a tall order for Derek Mason and company. As a matter of fact, if the Commodores aren't careful, their hopes for a bowl bid could be all but dashed by mid-season, thanks to a brutal stretch of five tough games (K-State, Alabama, at Florida, Georgia, at Ole Miss) in five weeks from September 16 through October 14.

Things get easier after the bye, but a 1-6 start is not out of the question.

South Carolina

Non-conference games: N.C. State (in Charlotte), Louisiana Tech, Wofford, Clemson

Cross-divisional games: At Texas A&M, vs. Arkansas

Division opponents on the road: Missouri, Tennessee, Georgia

The Gamecocks had better make hay early, because the second half of the schedule includes road trips to Knoxville and Athens, a home date with Florida and a visit from the reigning national champions. Win the opener against N.C. State, though, and a 4-0 start is within reason.

Home games against Kentucky, Arkansas and Vanderbilt are absolute must-haves if South Carolina is to take a step forward in year number two under Will Muschamp.

Georgia

Non-conference games: Appalachian State, at Notre Dame, Samford, at Georgia Tech

Cross-divisional games: Versus Mississippi State, at Auburn

Division opponents on the road: Tennessee, Vanderbilt

Most of the Bulldogs' off-season attention is bound to be focused on that Week 2 trip to South Bend, when they will become the first SEC team since Tennessee in 2005 to play Notre Dame in the regular season. They would be wise, however, not to look past game one against App State, which took Tennessee (last year's pre-season SEC East favorite) to overtime in Knoxville in the 2016 season opener.

In addition to Notre Dame, Georgia also has some big rivalry games (Tennessee, Auburn, Georgia Tech) on the road this season, but overall the schedule doesn't look quite as tough as those of other SEC East contenders. As always, the Florida game in Jacksonville on October 28 will be pivotal.

Missouri

Non-conference games: Missouri State, Purdue, Idaho, at UConn

Cross-divisional games: Versus Auburn, at Arkansas

Division opponents on the road: Kentucky, Georgia, Vanderbilt

Last season, two of the Tigers' four wins (and a disproportionate amount of their offensive production) came against non-conference pals Eastern Michigan and Delaware State; dates with Missouri State and Idaho should provide similar opportunities for coordinator Josh Heupel and company in 2017. Purdue and UConn aren't exactly world-beaters either, making Missouri's overall non-league slate one of the softest in the SEC.

The crossover game with Auburn is a tough one, but (aside from a trip to Georgia) the conference road schedule (Kentucky, Vanderbilt, Arkansas) doesn't look too frightening.

Kentucky

Non-conference games: At Southern Miss, Eastern Kentucky, Eastern Michigan, Louisville

Cross-divisional games: At Mississippi State, vs. Ole Miss

Division opponents on the road: South Carolina, Vanderbilt, Georgia

The Wildcats, who recovered from a disastrous 0-2 start last season to go 7-4 the rest of the way, have the most favorable draw from the SEC West in 2017, dodging the likes of Alabama, Auburn and LSU and getting the two Mississippi teams instead. Speaking of teams from Mississippi, you know Kentucky would like to avenge last year's 44-35 loss at home to Southern Miss in the season opener in Hattiesburg.

Of the first seven games, only one (on September 23 versus Florida, whom the Wildcats haven't beaten since 1986) looks like a surefire loss. With 16 starters back from last season, it's not outside the realm of possibility that Kentucky could be sitting on seven or eight wins heading into the final two games against Georgia and Louisville.

Next week, we'll take a look at SEC Media Days predictions for 2017.

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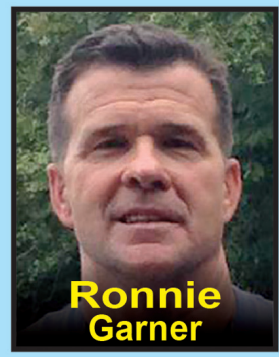
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**Dr. Sledge is now seeing patients every Wednesday
at the Littleville clinic.**

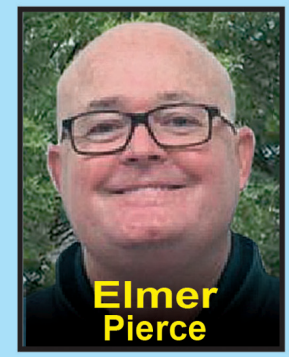
An Alabama native, Dr. Sledge completed his OB/GYN residency at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, TX (top 10 national medical residency programs). He is able to communicate with both his English and Spanish-speaking patients.



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