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Officials optimistic about AT&T plans

Company tentatively set to install wireless internet towers in county

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Officials working to bring affordable broadband wireless internet to rural Franklin County are cautiously optimistic about an announcement last week that AT&T plans to install two fixed wireless internet deployments later this year in the county.

Specific details of the range, cost and location of the base stations were not revealed. An AT&T spokesman said more information will

be released later this fall. But when it comes to providing broadband wireless internet to areas in Franklin County outside of municipalities, any news is good news.

"Any time you have a company like AT&T coming to your county as an internet provider," Morrow said, "that's a positive thing."

AT&T's plans were revealed by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, who heard last week

about a similar announcement in Greene County. Morrow contacted AT&T officials to see what plans have been made for his legislative district.

"Any time you have a company the magnitude of AT&T coming to your county as an internet provider, that's a positive thing," Morrow said.

Morrow, who serves as vice-chairman of the legislative rural caucus, also serves on the Franklin County Broadband Task Force,

See 'INTERNET,' Page 11

Kiel running for House seat in District 18

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Seeking political office is not a new consideration for Jamie Kiel. But he wanted to wait until the right time.

That right time has arrived with Kiel's announcement that he will be a candidate for State House District 18, hoping to represent the voters of Franklin, Colbert and Lauderdale counties.

"For the first time, my business has grown to the point where I can do it," Kiel said. "My family is at the point where I can do it, and I've established myself in the community."

"My wife and I discussed public service

and decided it was the right time."

Kiel, 42, is a graduate of Russellville High School. He started his company, Kiel Equipment, while working toward his management and marketing degree at the University of North Alabama. What began as a local business 22 years ago now serves customers across Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. Kiel sells and leases mowers, tractors and other heavy-duty equipment.



Jamie Kiel

Kiel will run in the Republican primary. He explained that the Republican ideology lines up more with his personal beliefs.

"The Republican Party most closely mirrors my values from a personal and business perspective," Kiel said, "so it made sense to run on the Republican ticket. I am a businessman. I have balanced my budget, met payroll and made ends meet. What Montgomery needs is a common-sense, conservative businesslike approach."

"That is what I intend to do as your next representative."

Kiel is a founding member of the Franklin County Broadband Taskforce and has served

See 'KIEL,' Page 5

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Juanita Mae Borden, Russellville, age 83
Died Saturday, July 15, 2017. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Opalene Kinard, Russellville, age 81
Died Sunday, July 23, 2017. Funeral held at Oak Grove Free Will Baptist Church in Russellville. Interment in the adjoining cemetery. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Patricia Ann "Patsy" Russell, Russellville, age 80
Died Tuesday, July 18, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Curtis Olen Turner, Russellville, age 86
Died Friday, July 21, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Winston Memorial Gardens in Haleyville.

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New AP program at RCS making major impact

Number of qualifying scores among RHS students more than doubles

Submitted to the FFP

Russellville High School principal Jason Goodwin said the recent Advanced Placement score results for RHS are a clear indication the specialized AP program they have implemented for their students is most definitely paying off.

Goodwin said the school recently received word they had 60 qualifying scores from this year's AP exams, which was an astonishing 122-percent increase from last year's 27 qualifying scores.

"A 122-percent increase is absolutely remarkable and is such a win for our students and teachers," Goodwin said. "This marks the beginning of what I believe will be transformational learning, not only for one group of students in Russellville but for many years to come."

"With the level of teaching currently occurring throughout Russellville City Schools and the program implementation in feeder grades, there is no doubt that next year's growth can be just as substantial."

Advanced Placement is a nationally recognized program under the direction of College Board. According to Goodwin, AP teachers must undergo intensive training and submit a syllabus to College Board for approval. At the conclusion of an AP course, an exam is administered to students and graded on a scale from 1 to 5. An AP exam, unlike other standardized tests such as the ACT, focuses solely on the knowledge and skills gained from that particular course and its prerequisites.

"The difficulty level of these exams is extreme," Goodwin said, "which makes sense since these courses are designed to better prepare students for college-level courses."

He said the exams are graded by elite AP teachers from across the nation, and a score of 3 or higher is deemed "qualifying," which means the student has gained the equivalency of college-level knowledge and abilities in that particular course. He added that in most instances, students are provided college credit for scoring a 3, although some universities require a minimum score of a 4 in order to obtain credit.

The school received word they had 60 qualifying scores from this year's AP exams, an astonishing 122-percent increase from last year's 27 qualifying scores.

"We are so fortunate to have so many dedicated teachers at RCS who truly want to see their students succeed," Grimes said, "and we are equally as fortunate to have hard-working students who are constantly looking toward their future and striving to meet the goals they set for themselves...."

"We are extremely proud of these 60 qualifying scores, but we are equally proud of the number of two's made on the exam and the growth in our AP enrollment numbers," Goodwin said. "As statistics show, students scoring a two on the AP exam have an overall advantage once they enter college in comparison to students who chose not to take AP courses. This is because they gain such beneficial study habits, skills and knowledge, which better prepares them for when they leave high school and enter a collegiate setting."

Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath

Grimes said he was extremely proud of the exceptional results and the students and teachers who worked hard this past year to make these results possible.

"We are so fortunate to have so many dedicated teachers at RCS who truly want to see their students succeed," Grimes said, "and we are equally as fortunate to have hard-working students who are constantly looking toward their future and are striving to meet the high goals they set for themselves."

"Students, teachers, and all involved at Russellville High School have bought in to protecting the educational environment. Students were asked to raise their expectations in Russellville City Schools, and the growth in scores proves they accepted this challenge."

Goodwin agreed that he couldn't be more proud of the staff and students at RHS for this amazing achievement.

"There was no doubt we would have success this year in our AP classes because of an amazing teaching staff and the hard work of these teachers and our students," he said. "These results indicate a paradigm shift for the level of education students can receive at Russellville High School if they so choose."

"So much hard work, time and focus has been placed on building a program that prepares our students so that when they walk out our doors, we know they are ready for college."

He added that six of the eight AP classes offered at Russellville High School were double-blocked this year, meaning they were given twice the normal class time.

"By doing this, teachers were able to go deeper into their lessons and still cover all of their curriculum,"

See 'PROGRAM,' Page 10

Replacing ACT Aspire with actual ACT makes no sense

Last week, our state superintendent of education announced a decision that is so spectacularly stupid, you almost have to assume the intention is to hurt our schools. That decision is to replace the ACT preparation exam, called the ACT Aspire, with the actual ACT as a measure of school accountability.

Think about that for a second. Replacing the preparation exam with the actual exam is like sending a minor league baseball player who has a low batting average up to the major leagues and expecting him to start knocking balls out of the park.

When half of all kids from Alabama never attend college, and half of those who do leave before graduating with a four-year degree, do we really expect the majority of them to score highly on the ACT?

In fact, the whole point of college is that the standards are supposed to be above average. If everybody had a four-year degree, then that college degree wouldn't be any more valuable than a high school diploma is today. The reason a degree often means more money is because not everyone has the degree and that level of training.

Yes, government should make sure that no child misses the chance to go to college because they can't afford it or weren't given the resources they needed while in K-12 to be successful. That's why I have pushed every year for a lottery to fund college scholarships for at least the first two years of school.

But expecting every child to be college-ready is unrealistic! This plan of using the ACT to measure whether we are meeting federal accountability requirements is only setting our schools up for failure, because the college standards are supposed to be above-average.

It is not the job of the government and the public schools to make sure that every child goes on to get a four-year degree. What is the government's and the schools' job is to make sure that every child is prepared for life after high school. For some kids, that is a college degree. For others, it's a trade certification or lower-level degree.

Somebody has to be a plumber. Somebody has to be an electrician. Somebody has to work in the Gadsden Goodyear plant.



**Rep.
Craig Ford**

Replacing the preparation exam with the actual exam is like sending a minor league baseball player who has a low batting average up to the major leagues and expecting him to start knocking balls out of the park.

Even registered nurses don't have to have a four-year degree [many nurses have an associate's degree from one of Alabama's community colleges]. Most jobs, in fact, don't require a four-year college degree.

And the problem we have in this state is not that we don't have enough people with college degrees to do the jobs that require a degree. Our problem is that we have too many people who don't have that middle level of education and experience that is required to do the jobs that are available--jobs that pay well (sometimes even better than some of the jobs that require a college degree) but require specialized experience and training, such as construction, welding or machine automation.

This unrealistic goal of having every child ready to earn a four-year degree is leaving the vast majority of our kids without the education and experience that employers are actually looking for.

When the recession happened, employers did what they always do during recessions: They replaced human workers with computers and machines where they could, and started requiring higher levels of qualifications from the workers they did hire. As the recovery has continued, employers have kept these higher standards and haven't gone back to hiring less qualified workers.

The result is that the middle class is shrinking, and it will continue to shrink until we start providing our children and those already in the workforce with the skills and education they actually need to get one of the thousands of good-paying jobs that are available in Alabama but aren't currently filled because employers can't find workers who can do the job.

This decision to use the ACT exam as a measure of federal accountability standards is about as foolish as it gets. I can tell you right now that the majority of kids will not meet the standard, because that's the whole point of the exam!

The problem isn't the test, educators or students. The problem is the philosophy coming out of Washington and Montgomery. It's a philosophy that can't see the forest for the trees, and is being pushed by bureaucrats (some of whom haven't spent a single day in the classroom as a teacher) instead of actual educators and employers.

Rep. Craig Ford represents Gadsden and Etowah County in the Alabama House of Representatives. He served as the House Minority Leader from 2010-2016.

The Honey Do List: The time has come

Not very many years ago, I remember the first cordless screwdrivers came onto the market. They sold for around 20 bucks, and they made great Christmas and Father's Day gifts. I'll bet some of you still have one hidden away in a drawer somewhere.

But, compared to the battery-powered tools today, well...you've come a long way, baby.

Professional carpenters and handymen have realized the convenience and speed of "cutting the cord" with battery-operated tools, and now landscapers and lawn maintenance companies are converting quickly as the tools and batteries have evolved into machines that have great benefits over gas-powered equipment.

Here are a few reasons.

- They run quieter. There will be little

Professional carpenters and handymen have realized the convenience and speed of "cutting the cord" with battery-operated tools...which have evolved into machines that have great benefits over gas-powered equipment.

need for hearing protection or risk of hearing loss with quieter electric motors. Professionals or homeowners who live or work in close neighborhoods can run chainsaws or weed trimmers almost any time without violating noise ordinances.



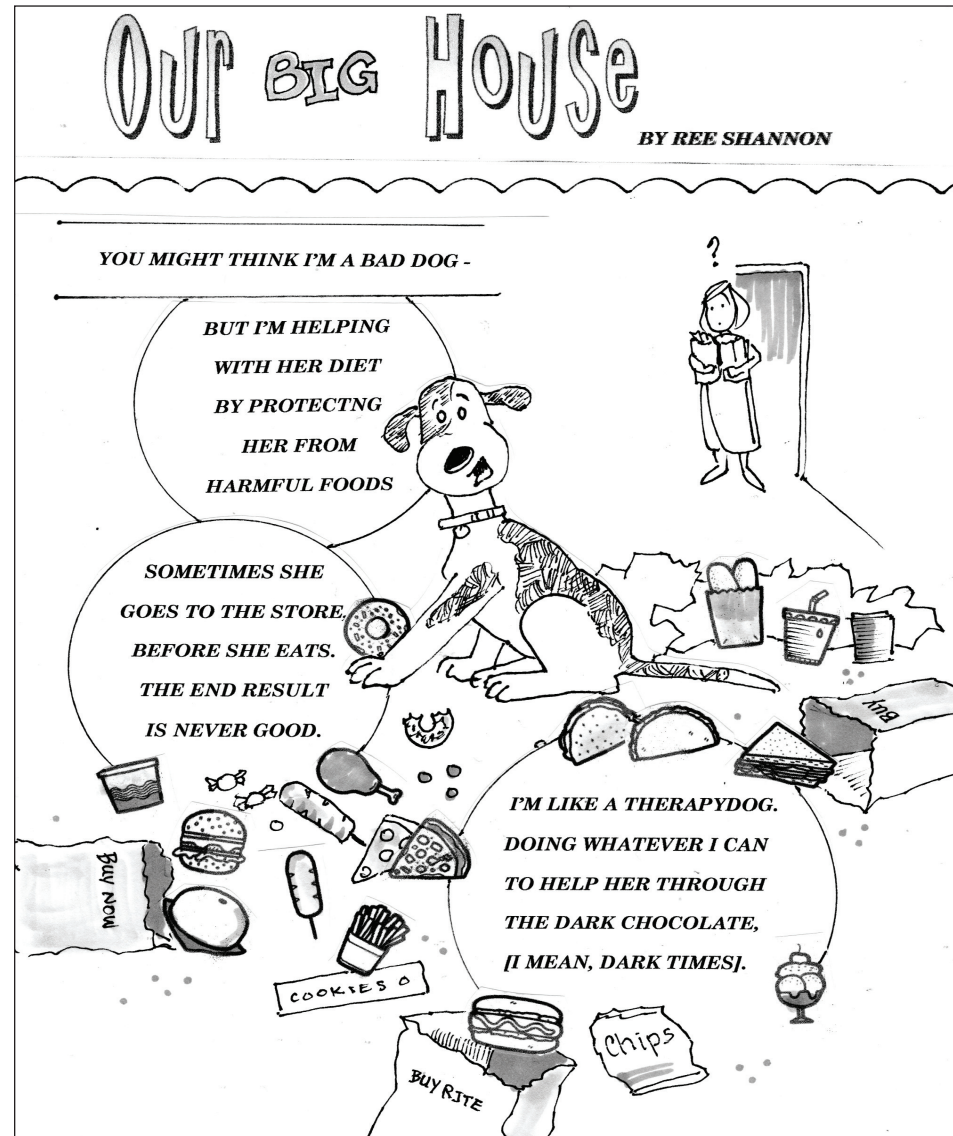
Doug Green

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My take I'm proud to be a year older on this.... (That's right...I'm bragging)

Gail Motes
For the FFP

I turned 62 years old on July 18. If you think it's crazy to admit my age, then you will probably think I'm really out in left field when I tell you that I consider aging to be a "bragging right."

I've never had a problem with telling someone my age, but I have forgotten my age when asked before. I'll just say, "I was born in 1955. You tell me!" [I'm not being sarcastic, either.] How old I am doesn't matter. Getting older is what's important to me.

I have learned life isn't easy. Rules are made to be broken, and those we love can hurt us the most deeply.

Laughter is my favorite sound. Hugs make me happy, and honesty is important. I've always loved animals more than people. My pets always loved me and never betrayed me. Those are traits I wish so many people had.

I'm always for the underdog. I respect someone who has worked for a living and helps others, and I'm disappointed in those who think everything is owed them and welfare is an inheritance.

Very little has been given to me, but that was just made everything I have that much more special. The things I have accomplished have been through a strong determination and perseverance.

I do more for someone who shows appreciation, and I appreciate everything anyone does for me. I think a smile is one of the prettiest things there is. I have the utmost respect for elders, and I enjoy being around the ones with a sense of humor and a positive attitude.

If you think it's crazy to admit my age, then you will probably think I'm really out in left field when I tell you that I consider aging to be a "bragging right."

I've never had a problem with telling someone my age, but I have forgotten my age when asked before. I'll just say, "I was born in 1955. You tell me!" [I'm not kidding, either.] How old I am doesn't matter. Getting older is what's important to me.

The older I get, the more I appreciate my family and friends. I wish I could be with them more, because every day is closer to the last day we'll see each other. Yes, I like having birthdays. I've not even given up on the "right one" to come along.

I'm a firm believer in these special words: 'As long as there's life, there's hope.' And it can't go without saying: I can only get older with life.

Until later, I'm 62 and counting....

Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



Using the grandchild for money

Dear Dave,
My wife and I have been helping our adopted daughter financially for some time. She's 25 and has been married for three years, and we don't see this cycle stopping any time soon. The worst part is, they will often throw in that our grandchild will go without something unless we help. We're certain this isn't teaching them to stand on their own feet, but we don't know what else to do.

David

Dear David,
You're right about one thing. It's time they both learned how to handle money like mature, responsible adults. I don't know how much you tried to teach her about finances when she was growing up, but it sounds like this "needing help" thing is turning into an endless cycle.

You're giving them money left and right, and it's not working. You're giving them fish, and you've heard that whole saying. You could also teach them to fish and then not give them any fish, but I like a third choice in this scenario—give them fish only if they take fishing lessons. They get no more money from you unless they get financial counseling together and make a serious move toward straightening up their lives.

If they try to play on your feelings by saying your grandchild is hungry, tell them to send the child over for a meal. If they run out of money until payday, tell them to go to their financial counseling session to find answers. Right now, every time they have a problem they call Mom and Dad. Guess what? They don't have any problems as long as you're doing what you're doing.

'KIEL,' from page 1

on the SACS Accreditation and the Federal Monitoring committees for the Franklin County School system. He is known for being a community activist and for his financial generosity to the sports teams, school events, dance squads and charities in the Franklin County area.

Kiel has also served as a youth league basketball coach and public address announcer for Tharptown High School football games.

Kiel and his wife Melissa have three daughters: Sarah Kate, Audrey Claire and Lydia Grace. Their children attend Tharptown School. Melissa, a teacher at Tharptown, was named Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Teacher of the Year for 2016. The family is actively involved at Tharptown Baptist Church, where Kiel has served as the music director for 20 years.

No other Republicans have announced their intentions to run in the primary.

Kiel is seeking the seat held by long-time Democrat Johnny Mack Morrow. Morrow announced recently that he would not be seeking reelection in District 18, instead choosing to run for Alabama Senate.

In addition to Russellville, State House District 18 includes portions of Florence and Tuscumbia, as well as the cities of Cherokee, Red Bay and Waterloo.

Love them well. Hold their hands and say, "When I was your age, I wish someone had done this for me. I'm not going to give you any more money unless you go to financial counseling sessions regularly and together. If you do this, turn in a budget to us and let us coach you on how to be adults and handle your own money well, we'll help and set up a matching system. If you don't do the matching part though, you won't see anything from us."

They've figured out that if they hold your feet to the fire when it comes to this grandbaby, you're going to open the wallet. They're playing you, and it's not to their benefit—or yours!

Dave

Borrow against retirement?

Dear Dave,
I have an opportunity to take a loan against my 401(k) retirement, and pay myself interest. Is this a good idea?

Susan

Dear Susan,
Actually, you'll end up *costing* yourself interest. Never take a loan against your retirement! When you pay interest against your retirement, you cost yourself interest. If you leave the company—which you will someday—the loan against the 401(k) is due within 60 days. If you don't pay it off, they consider it an early withdrawal and you'll get taxed and penalized big-time.

If you have a certifiable emergency, like owing the IRS or facing a foreclosure, you may have to withdraw some. You'll still get taxed, but please don't ever *borrow* against retirement!

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.*

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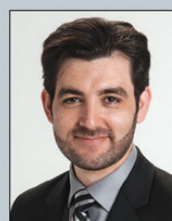
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 **G**entiva Hospice offers a grief support group, "Grieving Well Together," that meets the fourth Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Lenox room at Calvary Baptist Church in Russellville. The next meeting will be held July 27. You are invited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


 **Y**ou're invited to a singing with Heaven's Mountain Band this 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.


 **N**ew Jerusalem M.B. Church (Hwy. 24 West) will have revival Monday, July 31 through Wednesday, August 2 with services at 7 p.m. each night. Rev. Robert E. Pearl, pastor of Pleasant Grove M.B. Church in Courtland, will be the evangelist. Everyone is invited to attend! Rev. Thomas Bates, pastor at New Jerusalem, asks that you come and be blessed with a word from God.


 **V**illage Square Apartments in Russellville host George's Country Boys each Monday night from 6-8 p.m. for some Gospel and Country singing. Come join in the fun!


 **F**or 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!


 **T**he Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, August 3 at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center on Ash Avenue. Camp #1833 meets the first Thursday of each month EXCEPT January and July. For more info, call 256-324-2317. Everyone welcome!


 **R**ockwood Baptist Church will have Vacation Bible School on Saturday, August 5 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. There will be classes for children ages 4 through sixth grade. The church is located on Highway 36 in Russellville. Bro. Brent Palmer is pastor.


 **T**he gospel group Purpose will be celebrating their sixth anniversary with a special concert on Saturday, August 5 at 6 p.m. at Russellville Church of God. Special guests will be New Ground and Day Three. Everyone is invited. Free admission. Lots of giveaways. Free meal after the service. For more information, call 256-627-8784 or go to www.facebook.com/purpose.al.


 **T**his year's PCHS Alumni Day will be held Sunday, August 6 in the PCHS lunchroom. Program and meal will commence at 12:00 noon (immediately after church services.) Each plate lunch is \$10. Each alumnus is asked to bring a dessert to accompany the meal. All PCHS alumni from years past and present, including the Class of 2017, are invited and urged to attend. All PCHS faculty, administration, support personnel, coaches and sponsors, both present and from years past, are also invited. Donations will be accepted the day of the luncheon to cover the costs of this and future reunions. Due to the generous donations of alumni, we have been able to award two \$500 scholarships to a PCHS senior boy and girl for the past two years. This cash scholarship is for a senior boy or girl who plans on attending Northwest-Shoals Community College. Your support and donations are welcome in an effort to continue this new endeavor. Feel free to bring your yearbooks and old photos from the past for others to view. For more information, please contact Lynn Landers, PCHS Alumni, at 256-810-4572. We look forward to seeing you there!


 **S**iloam Missionary Baptist Church will celebrate Homecoming on Sunday, August 6 with Sunday School at 10 a.m., preaching at 11 a.m. and dinner right after services. There will be a singing at 1:30 p.m. with the Abundant Life Trio. Revival begins Monday night, August 7 and will last through Friday, August 11 at 7 p.m. each night. Neal Clark, a full-time evangelist from Arkansas who has made 38 trips to Israel, will be preaching. Nursery provided. Pastor Bro. Jarrod Helms and congregation invite everyone to attend! The church is located at 1657 Hwy. 60, Russellville, AL 35654, across from King Drive-In.

 **A**merican 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, August 10.

 **T**he Travis Wammack & the Snakeman Band will play at Mountain Valley Hee Haw 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 info, call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

 **T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, August 12 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 toward the renovation of the historic Roxy Theatre.

 **J**onesboro Baptist Church will celebrate Homecoming on Sunday, August 13 with a singing at 1:30 p.m. featuring the group Southern Image. The church is located at 5061 Waterloo Road in Russellville. Everyone is invited!

 **J**onesboro Baptist Church is seeking a songleader. Interested persons should contact Bro. Kent Walker at 256-331-0995.

Assisted Living: Important things you need to know

By Regina Lawler,
Managing Director, Country Cottage

Assisted living is senior care that is designed for our loved ones who are still independent but need some help with activities of daily living. These tasks vary from resident to resident and include (but are not limited to) housekeeping, meals, mobility, medication management and transportation.

When considering which assisted living community is the right one for your loved one, do your research. Visit different communities. Know what questions to ask yourself while you are visiting, and know what questions to ask others who are already a part of that community.

Let's explore the topics you need to research and the specific questions you should consider with each one.

1. Your Loved One's Needs

- Why does your loved one need to move to an assisted living community?

- What are your loved one's particular daily living and medical needs?

2. Cost and Finances

- How much can you afford to spend monthly on assisted living?

- Is there a security deposit?

- Are there different costs for different levels of care or is it a flat fee? Which one fits your loved one's situation?

- Are there government or private programs available that can help cover the cost of care for your loved one?

- Does the community accept long-term care insurance?

- Does the community participate in the Veteran's Administration Aide and Attendance Program?

3. Resident Care

- Is there a written care plan for each resident? How often does the community update their residents' care plans?

- What is the procedure for assessing a resident's needs? Who is involved in a resident's needs assessment—the staff, the resident, the resident's family members, the resident's doctor or doctors?

- How often are a resident's needs assessed?

4. Assisted Living Community Features

- Do you like the area in which the community is located?

- Do you like the way the outside and the inside of the community looks?

- How many units are in the residence?

- Can residents come and go as they please?

- Does the staff make you feel comfortable and welcome? Do you feel at home?

- Does the community have specific visiting hours?

- Are loved ones allowed to spend the night with a resident in the resident's unit? Is there a fee if a loved one stays the night?

- Are there volunteer opportunities for residents' family members or for other people who wish to help in the community?

5. Apartment Features

- Are the bathrooms, doorways, hallways, and other rooms built to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs?

- Are the floors carpeted or made of non-skid material so walking is easy?

6. Additional Amenities

- Are there staff members available to provide 24-hour assistance with activities of daily living if needed?

- Are housekeeping services provided or available in living areas? Are laundry/linen services provided or available?

- Are transportation services available to residents for

needs like doctor's visits, shopping, haircut appointments and worship services?

- Are worship services offered on-site?

7. Social and Recreational Opportunities

- When you are there visiting, do the residents seem to interact warmly with one another? Do they seem comfortable and happy?

- What social, recreational, and exercise activities are available on-site?

- Does the community encourage residents to participate in activities?

- Do residents participate in activities and events outside of the assisted living community? Is transportation provided to these activities and events?

8. Food Services

- How often do the dining room menus vary? Daily? Weekly?

- Does the community provide three meals a day, seven days a week, to all residents? Do they provide snacks?

- Is there a common dining area or areas available where residents can eat their meals together?

9. Security

- Are there emergency call buttons located in easily accessible areas in every apartment?

- Are background checks conducted on all of the staff?

Finding the right assisted living community for your loved one is an important decision. Do your research and find a community where your loved one feels at home and you gain peace of mind knowing they are safe.

We would be happy to help with your search. If you have questions about senior living or want to know more about Country Cottage, visit us online at www.cottageassistedliving.com or call us at 256-277-4081.

Temp workers a welcome addition to highway department

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When you're dealing with a tight budget, sometimes the numbers at first glance don't add up.

In the case of the Franklin County Highway Department, for example, nine is greater than 150. The nine temporary employees who began working for the county in June have placed a sizable dent in the more than 150 pending work orders for the department.

For a department with only 17 permanent employees, the nine temporary employees have been a welcome addition.

"With just seventeen employees, if that's all you've got, you're not going to do any work orders or routine maintenance," said county engineer David Palmer, "because it takes every guy you've got to do the large projects. So from May to October, that's five months where you basically do no work orders.

"At any time, we have between a hundred and a hundred-fifty work orders that are open. If you can't plug in these guys, that hundred to a hundred-fifty goes to three hundred to four hundred work orders. We're able now to keep a work order crew going, and that is a huge thing for Franklin County."

The Franklin County Commission approved the hiring of nine temporary highway department employees, at a rate of \$10/hour, in June. Those employees were Butch Harkness, Harold Harp, Sheldon Ergle, Donnie Hastings, Tristan Johnson, Jaydee Phifer, Michael Shivers, Barry Walker and Bailey Motes.

For several years, the county used state inmate labor to bolster its highway department work force. Recently though, it became more difficult to maintain an inmate work force as numbers of work-release-eligible

inmates declined. At only \$15/day per inmate, the cost was minimal, but inmate labor brought other problems, Palmer explained.

After several full-time employees left the highway department due to retirement or accepting new jobs, Palmer said the funds opened up for the temporary employees.

"We lost a couple of permanent employees, or we couldn't hire these temporary folks," Palmer said. "Between losing some employees and not replacing them and not paying for inmates, we had enough money to hire these nine guys.

"These employees include a wide variety of experience and personalities and represent all ages and walks of life. Some have their CDLs and are driving dump trucks, helping us haul equipment, rock and materials. Some of the younger ones help with pothole patching, flagging, etc. We have some compacting equipment that's easy to operate. We stick them right in there. They're right in the middle of the battle—every one of them."

The temporary employees work under construction manager Steve Pounders or with John Payne, the highway department road foreman.

"John's crews concentrate on day-to-day work orders and maintenance activities like patching, pipe installations, ditching and things like that," Palmer said.

Franklin County commissioner Chris Wallace said he's noticed the increased productivity in completing work orders since the temporary employees started.

"You've only got a limited window of opportunity with the weather," Wallace said, "so our temporary guys have done real well. I've had several work orders on the books for a while get done. They do a good job.

"We cut back in other areas to get this done. We lost

several employees in the highway department, so that freed up some money to make these hires."

Palmer hopes to hire temporary employees again next spring to work during the summer months when the weather is favorable. In the past, temporary employees have also opened the door for permanent employment when positions come open.

"The great thing about working as a temporary is you get to audition for a permanent job," Palmer said. "The last couple employees we've hired permanently were hired from the temporary pool because we knew them and what kind of work ethic and ability they had.

"We didn't just wake up one day and say we didn't want inmate labor anymore. Those guys don't have to come up here if they don't want to come. And the people we had were inmates, for the most part, in the final part of their sentences. We got some really good people from time to time who were talented but just made a mistake or two in their lives.

"We'd get a guy and train him, and he'd work six months and then one day we'd find out he's gone and had been released. Then we'd have to start again with someone else. When using inmates, it's not like interviewing temporary employees with CDLs and other skills and experience. You get what you get for your labor with inmates."

Palmer credited the county commission for having the foresight and willingness to work with him in hiring the temporary employees.

"I really appreciate the county commission," Palmer said. "They understand what we're up against and allowed me to do this. It takes them seeing the situation and being willing to work through it.

"I appreciate them allowing us to hire these guys during a time when everyone is underfunded."

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YARD SALES/ ESTATE SALES

Estate Sale this Thursday-Saturday, July 27-29 at 505 N. Washington Ave, Russellville.

Multi-Family Yard Sale this Friday & Saturday, July 28-29 from 8 am-untill. 9804 Hwy. 75, Russellville. Take Hwy. 24 E. toward Moulton. Turn right on Hwy. 75. Third house on left after you cross Hwy. 724. One-dollar bargains galore! Men's, women's boys', girls' and plus-size clothes, household items, etc. Don't worry about the heat—plenty of shade!

Yard Sale this Friday & Saturday, July 28-29 from 7 am-untill. Home of Jack and Mary Williams. 243 Auburn Street, Russellville. Directly behind Russellville Church of God in subdi-vision. Lots of every-thing. Come see us!

Yard Sale next Saturday, August 5 from 7 am-3 pm at the corner of Madison Street and College Avenue. Lots of clothes and housewife items.

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Boxer puppies, \$75 each. Call 256-332-4354. (1)

Chess set, marble board, crystal figurines. Regular \$350. Asking \$95. Call 256-332-5081 or 256-332-1916. (4)

Sewing machine cabinet. 20"x40", 32" from floor. Four-drawer. 72-inch table unfolded. \$30. Call 256-332-5081 or 256-332-1916. (4)

Wood for sale from recently torn down hundred-year-old house. Will sell separately or all together for \$1,500. Tongue-and-groove wood, wide boards. Also have some stone. Call 256-221-7814. (4)

Posture Beauty mattress for sale. Full Set. \$100. Pick up Russellville. Call 256-762-9551. (5)

Hello Kitty child's watch, 30th anniversary, silver band, pink & blue watch head w/white center. HK letters in blue on band. \$20. Call 256-577-5843. (5)

Discontinued Corelle "wild flower" pattern dishes. 2 sets, a few pieces missing. \$45. Call 256-577-5843. (5)

King-size floral sheet set, used only a few times. \$35. Call 256-577-5843. (5)

Pinky & Blue Boy wall prints, really pretty. \$20/set. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

Beautiful set of bowls & pitchers. \$20/set. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

Old sewing machine in cabinet, \$20. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

FURNITURE

3 piece bedroom suit, dark wood, full size, mattress and springs, chest and night stand, excellent condition. \$500. Please call 256.810.4530. (5)

2 living room chairs, like new, \$50 each. 3-drawer wooden desk, nice, \$25. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

Metal filing cabinet w/4 drawers, good condition, \$20. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

Youth bed, complete and in good shape, \$40. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

APPLIANCES

For sale: Whirlpool 30-inch smooth-top range, almond in color. Power cord included. \$100. Call 256-332-5914. (4)

ELECTRONICS/ OFFICE EQUIPMENT

Brother printer, used, black in color, model MFC-255CW. Includes instructions, printer, start-up disc and 2 new ink cartridges. \$50. Call 256-577-5843. (5)

HELP WANTED/ LOOKING TO BUY

Jonesboro Baptist Church is seeking a songleader. Interested persons should contact Bro. Kent Walker at 256-331-0995.

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Businesses, 15 words or less for six weeks. Ads exceeding word limit add \$10 per additional 15 words. The number in parentheses represents the number of times the ad has appeared. Call us at 256-332-0255 to place, cancel or renew your ad. Payment is required in advance of publication for ads.

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'PROGRAM,' from page 3

Goodwin said. "Students had more time to complete in-class assignments, enabling immediate feedback from their teachers. This scheduling component and Saturday study session attendance are only a few pieces that illustrate the importance placed on this program and on the overall learning experience at RCS."

Goodwin and Grimes said they are both excited for the increased enrollment in the AP program at RHS this past year, and they feel the sky is the limit when it comes to receiving a top-notch education from Russellville City Schools.

"By increasing AP enrollments each year, we are merely exposing more students to a much higher level of instruction, challenging students to write and think more critically, and growing each student to become responsible as they prepare to depart from high school," Goodwin said. "We are extremely excited to see future growth, as the middle school continues to implement the preparatory courses at the sixth-, sev-

enth- and eighth-grade levels. With students arriving more and more prepared as we move forward, the success in these AP courses will continue to prosper.

"As exciting as these scores are, I am confident in saying we have not reached anywhere near our potential, because we have not yet seen the rewards of our middle school Pre-AP courses."

Due to the overwhelming growth in qualifying scores and student enrollments, A+ College Ready has selected RHS as the host site for the statewide celebration for Advanced Placement success in September.

"Being selected to host an event of this magnitude is such an honor for our community, our schools, and our teachers and students," Goodwin said. "And to be able to honor the success of our teachers and students alongside the success of other schools throughout the state is exciting."

Goodwin and Grimes both said they hope this level of recognition for the system at an event where the gover-

nor and state superintendent of education usually attend will bring renewed excitement about the quality of education students are receiving in Russellville City Schools.

Grimes said the school will also hold their own recognition ceremony this fall during halftime of a home football game to present students and teachers monetary incentives of \$100 per qualifying score.

"Once this date is released, we welcome the public's attendance in celebrating our students' and teachers' successes with us," he said. "Success at our schools should also be viewed as success for our community."

"This kind of exceptional growth is something our community can and should be extremely proud of. We have so many in our community who continually support our students and teachers, and we are thankful for a community that considers it a privilege to celebrate our victories with us, whether on the field or in the classroom."

Red Bay Museum holds many historical treasures

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

There are a lot of great museums around the world, like the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. and the British Museum in London, but for the local history buffs out there, there is no better place to visit than the Red Bay Museum.

Located in downtown Red Bay, the Red Bay Museum has been giving visitors a sense of the town's past since opening in 2006.

"It's important so people can see how local people used to live," said Scotty Kennedy, the "unofficial" curator at the museum. "Our goal is to really just preserve a way of life that no longer exists."

But establishing the Red Bay Museum was not the first step in preserving the history of the town. In 1995, the Red Bay Civitan Club published *One Hundred Years of Memories: An Oral History of Red Bay, Alabama 1888-1988*. Former Alabama congressman Carl Elliott authored the history book, which took a decade to research.

"The book is the real history of Red Bay. It's got a lot of details and specific information about the town's history," said Kennedy, who served as the book's photographer. "I think the museum gives visitors an overall general visual of what the book offers. We want to be as educational as possible."

Kennedy and others, before and throughout the book research process, told people to hold on to old, historical artifacts and pieces and to keep old photographs in hopes of one day being able to display those items in a future museum. In 2004, nine years after the history book was published, the Red Bay Civitan Club secured a building downtown to display all of the items they asked people to hold on to over the years.

"The building itself, when we got it, needed some work," Kennedy said. "After we fixed the building, we put in a lot of the original pieces. The stairs to the second floor are the original stairs from the Red Bay Hotel. So renovations like that also took time before we could open."

Kennedy also spent that time putting together the many displays the museum has to show off.

Today, the museum's displays include the Red Bay Hotel, the Bay Theater, the drug store and soda fountain, the Red Bay Depot, the Bank of Red Bay, a local church display, a military display, a Native American display and a school display, among others.

"We've tried to recreate well-known Red Bay landmarks in our displays with original and authentic pieces," Kennedy said. "We've added a lot over the years, and that has just made the displays even better."

Perhaps Red Bay Museum's most popular attraction is one that has not been mentioned yet. That is the large Tammy Wynette display located on the second floor of the building.

Wynette was a legendary country singer and songwriter whose career spanned three decades. Among many other accomplishments, Wynette had 20 No. 1 singles and, following her death, was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998.

The Tammy Wynette room at the Red Bay Museum holds many articles of Wynette's clothing, album covers, miscellaneous personal items and photographs.

"We have the largest exhibit on Tammy anywhere," Kennedy said. "Tammy was known for her generosity, and it has rubbed off on others. Many of the items we have here were donated by fans and by her family members, including her daughter Georgette."

Interestingly enough, Wynette was never actually from Red Bay, though. Wynette attended Tremont High School in Mississippi, but Red Bay was the closest town to her birthplace, so she adopted it as her hometown.

"The folks from Tremont and Bounds Crossroads still aren't happy about that," Kennedy said.

Nonetheless, the Tammy Wynette exhibit attracts fans of the artist and the genre. "The Tammy exhibit is very popular," Kennedy said. "We have had people come here from all over the country just to see it."

Kennedy said he is unable to pick a personal favorite exhibit.



PHOTO BY KADIN POUNDERS

Today, the museum's displays include the Red Bay Hotel, the Bay Theater, the drug store and soda fountain, the Red Bay Depot, the Bank of Red Bay, a local church display, a military display, a Native American display and a school display, among others.

"That's like picking your favorite kid, and I can't do that," he said. "All the displays are like my babies."

But for every visitor, there is usually one display that stands out from the others.

"Everybody is different," he said. "For some of the older people, the soda fountain may bring back fond memories. There's a lot of people that enjoy the military display, and, obviously, a lot of people are drawn to the Tammy Wynette exhibit. It all just depends."

"I don't think there is one better than the other."

Over the last 11 years, the museum has grown a lot, adding more space and more items to the museum, but Kennedy said they are always looking for more things to add to the exhibits.

"There are some displays where I'm honestly running out of room to put items, but we don't want to take anything out," he said. "We're always looking for Red Bay and Tammy Wynette items to add to our displays."

"You don't have to donate it if you don't want, either. If you own an item and want to keep it, you can loan it to us. We'll make sure it is taken care of, and we'll display it here, but you still own it."

Despite being open for over a decade, Kennedy says he still hears of those from Red Bay who have not been to the museum and occasionally greets first-time visitors.

"I think that's something that's probably normal with smaller local attractions, and even though they may pass it every day, they don't know its there," he said. "Red Bay has a lot of history and tradition. It doesn't cost much to learn a lot about where you're from."

And after visiting the museum, Kennedy encourages everyone to check out the Civitan Depot, Red Bay's thrift shop, which is located next door.

"It's open on Fridays all day, and that supports the museum," he said. "We couldn't stay open if it wasn't for them."

The Red Bay Museum is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Large groups can call 256-356-8758 to make appointments for other days. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$2 for students and free for children under six.

'INTERNET,' from page 1

which has been working to provide affordable broadband for several years. Katernia Cole-Coffey serves as chairman of the task force.

"We just hope this is something where if everybody wants it, they can afford to have it," Cole-Coffey said. "Our overall goal is affordable broadband to all the people of Franklin County. We're hopeful with this news but still need more information."

AT&T fixed wireless internet works through an antenna installed on the user's home and an indoor Wi-Fi Gateway router. That antenna communicates with the nearest cell tower to ensure the strongest, more reliable signal. Tentative plans call for AT&T to install two such towers "west of Russellville," with two additional

locations "east of Russellville" targeted for 2018.

Morrow stressed that AT&T's plans were tentative and subject to change.

According to AT&T's web site, their fixed wireless internet includes high-speed internet with download speeds of at least 10Mbps for downloading, at least 1Mbps for uploading and 160GB of internet usage per month. Interested users can log onto AT&T's web site to find out if they qualify in their area for AT&T Fixed Wireless Internet.

AT&T participates in the Federal Communications Commission's Connect America Fund Phase II program. The company pledges, by 2020, to have used funds from the program to "deploy, maintain and offer

internet access and voice service to 1.1 million mostly rural homes and small business locations in FCC-identified areas."

The company's first wave of fixed wireless came earlier this year in rural Georgia. Projections call for future projects to reach more than 440,000 locations across 18 states by the end of 2017.

Morrow compared efforts to bring broadband wireless internet to rural Franklin County to efforts in the 1980s to bring quality water service to rural residents.

"We worked to create the Franklin County Water Authority," he said, "and through the Broadband Task Force we will continue efforts to make reliable internet service a reality for all Franklin County residents."

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Tharptown looks to take a step forward in head coach Kevin Lacey's second season at the helm.

Several local standouts were among those selected to take part in the inaugural North Alabama East-West All-Star Basketball Game.



Have a Sports Story?

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franklinfreepress@yahoo.com
256.332.0255

How did the Media do in the SEC East?

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

The poor track record of the SEC Media with regard to preseason predictions has been well documented. As we discussed in this space last week, the rise of the Saban Dynasty in Tuscaloosa has made picking the SEC West much easier; the SEC East, however, remains devilishly tricky.

If recent history is any guide, though, we can be reasonably sure of one thing: Florida will not win the East in 2017. Since 1996 (when Steve Spurrier's 'N Gun Gators captured the crown for a fifth consecutive year), no team has managed to win three straight SEC East titles. Repeats have been remarkably common, with seven teams (Tennessee in 1997-98, Florida in 1999-2000, Georgia in 2002-03, Florida in 2008-09, Georgia in 2011-12, Missouri in 2013-14 and Florida in 2015-16) going back-to-back. The first six teams on that list all failed in their bid for a three-peat; will this year's Gators fare any better?

The SEC Media, collectively, said no, picking Georgia to edge out Florida and win its first division championship under Kirby Smart. Did they get it right? Time to tell you whether we agree or disagree with the media's predicted order of finish in the East for 2017.

Georgia (1st in media polling with 1,572 points)

FFP: Agree

Smart and his staff hauled in an impressive 2017 recruiting class that included 20 players with either four- or five-star ratings [the other six teams in the East signed a total of just 26 such prospects], but the biggest shot in the arm to Georgia's title hopes might have come from the handful of veteran players who spurned the NFL for another year in Athens.

The offense should again revolve around running backs Nick Chubb (a preseason first-team All-SEC selection) and Sony Michel (preseason third-team All-SEC), who between them have accounted for three 1,000-yard rushing seasons with the Bulldogs. Injuries have essentially been the only thing capable of slowing down either. On the same day that Chubb and Michel made public their intentions to stay in school, outside linebackers Lorenzo Carter and Davin Bellamy (who combined for 10 sacks in 2016) also announced that they would be returning to Athens.

Carter (a preseason third-team All-SEC pick) and Bellamy are just two of 11 returning starters on a defense that ranked fourth in the SEC in yards allowed and fifth in points allowed last season. Lineman Trent Thompson and inside linebacker Roquan Smith (95 tackles in 2016) are

See 'MEDIA,' page 17

Local hoops standouts earn All-Star selection

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Eight players from the *Franklin Free Press* coverage area have been selected to participate in the 2017-18 North Alabama High School Basketball All-Star Extravaganza.

The inaugural East-West All-Star event features 48 of the top Shoals-area players—24 boys and 24 girls. Full rosters and details on the date and venue of the game had not been announced at press time.

Russellville junior Devin Buckhalter, Colbert Heights senior Kevin Shaw, and Belgreen juniors Mason Bragwell and Brant Bragwell were announced last week as participants in the boys All-Star game.

Phil Campbell junior Abby Davis, Vina senior Abby Hester, Colbert Heights junior Emma James and Belgreen junior Gabbie Moore were selected to play in the girls All-Star game.

Buckhalter earned second-team All-County honors from the *Free Press* after a breakout sophomore season at Russellville. The 5'11 guard topped the 20-point mark five times in 2016-17 and finished the season

See 'HOOPS,' page 18



FILE PHOTO

Buckhalter (left) was one of eight players from the *Free Press* coverage area selected to play in the inaugural North Alabama High School Basketball All-Star Extravaganza.

Former Golden Tiger lands first head coaching job at Holtville

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Looking back on it now, Torey Baird is not afraid to admit it. He was nervous.

When Baird, a 2008 graduate of Russellville High School, traveled south to Deatsville, Alabama, in late spring to interview for the position of head baseball coach at Holtville High School, he took more than a few butterflies along for the ride. All it took to settle him down, though, was a little intervention from above.

"I'm telling you, man, it was one of those things. I was very nervous at first when the interview started," said Baird, who spent the 2017 season coaching middle school baseball at Deshler. "Then all of a sudden we could all hear somebody running on the roof. They were doing maintenance up there or something. When we heard that noise, there was just this pause in the interview, and then immediately the whole room relaxed. Somebody made a joke about the place being haunted or something and would I have a problem with that. After that I just took a breath and went with what I prepared for.

"I was *really* prepared. Over-prepared, probably."

Baird, a former All-State catcher at RHS who also played linebacker and center for the Golden Tiger football team, was a notoriously hard worker and intense competitor as a prep athlete. Evidently, the Holtville administrators in the interview room saw that the past decade had done nothing to diminish those qualities.

"Passion. Energy. Commitment. Coach Baird had it all," Holtville principal Kyle Futral told the *Wetumpka Herald* last week.

Baird, who hit better than .500 with 10 home runs as a Russellville senior in 2008, left Deatsville that day feeling like he had knocked one out of the park.

"When the interview was over, I really felt confident," Baird said. "I got about twenty minutes down the road, and I had people from Deshler calling me and telling me [Holtville] was already calling and checking up on me. They had started doing their homework, I guess."

Clearly, they liked what they found. Holtville offered Baird the job in late June, and he quickly jumped at the chance to be a head baseball coach at the varsity level for the first time.

"It's a surreal feeling, it really is," he said on Sunday afternoon. "Every coach dreams of becoming a head coach, but I didn't know if I was quite *ready* to be a head coach."

In fact, when Josh Dobbins—a friend of Baird's who had coached football with him at Russellville before leaving to become Holtville's defensive coordinator—called this spring to let him know about the Bulldogs' baseball opening, Baird didn't exactly envision himself as the right man for the job.

"[Dobbins] told me that I should apply, and I did," said Baird, who got his feet wet as a volunteer assistant at Russellville before landing his first teaching job in January of 2016 at Winston County High School,



Torey Baird

See 'JOB,' page 16



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Lacey, Wildcats eager to improve in year two

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Things have been a lot more crowded around the Tharptown football facility this summer—and that suits head coach Kevin Lacey just fine.

“It’s going really good. We’ve got double the numbers we had last summer,” said Lacey, now in his second year at THS. “Last summer we had about ten to fifteen guys showing up. This year, we’ve got thirty. So the summer’s going good.”

“The players are excited, and I’m excited.”

After stumbling to an 0-5 start in Lacey’s debut season, the Wildcats knocked off Class 1A, Region 8 opponents Waterloo (29-21) and Vina (27-26) down the stretch, matching their win total from the previous two years combined. With several key contributors returning in 2017 and better attendance at off-season workouts, Lacey believes his team is capable of taking another step forward in year number two.

“It’s gone a lot smoother,” he said on Sunday. “Last year I was just getting my feet wet. This year has definitely gone smoother, and the guys are the main reason for that. With this being our second year, they know what we’re doing, and they’re excited about what we’re doing. That’s made my job a lot easier.”

One of Lacey’s first jobs when fall camp kicks off on August 7 will be choosing a quarterback. Returning starter Carson Petree gained valuable experience last season as a sophomore and demonstrated good command of Tharptown’s run-heavy, flex-bone offense.

“He ran the offense really well,” Lacey said of Petree, who helped the Wildcats top the 20-point mark three times in their last five games of 2016. “We moved the football last year. We just struggled stopping some people from moving it. But I was happy with how Carson ran the offense.”

“He’s good at making the right read and getting the ball where it needs to go, and he adds the running element. He struggled throwing the ball, but I do think he’s grown some and his arm’s gotten stronger. I’m excited to see where he’ll be this year as far as that goes.”

“It’s gone a lot smoother,” Lacey said on Sunday. “Last year I was just getting my feet wet. This year has definitely gone smoother, and the guys are the main reason for that. With this being our second year, they know what we’re doing, and they’re excited about what we’re doing. That’s made my job a lot easier.”

Petree will compete with fellow junior K.J. Hamilton, a Russellville transfer whom Lacey described as “super-athletic.” Both will play key roles this season regardless of who winds up under center; Petree is a willing and capable receiver, and Hamilton could see snaps at running back.

“They’ve both been working this summer,” Lacey said of the quarterback battle. “It’s definitely gonna be a competition—a friendly competition.”

Whoever wins the quarterback job will be responsible for distributing the ball to a talented—and now more experienced—group of skill players led by senior running back Payton Price, senior back/receiver Trent Risley and junior receiver Luis Macias.

“We’re excited about our skill guys,” Lacey said. “They were all young last year, but they all did well last year. Now, with them being juniors and seniors, we’re excited to see what they can do.”

The Wildcats still qualify as young on the offensive line, where sophomores Ruben Alfaro and Gunner Lane are slated to start once again at center and guard, respectively. Junior tackle Evan Franks also returns, and senior Frank Miguel will see plenty of snaps at guard.

Defensively, Lacey and new defensive coordinator Jonathan Odom hope to see the Wildcats improve on last year’s number of 31.3 points allowed per game. Red Bay, Shoals Christian, Phillips and Decatur Heritage all topped the 40-point mark in wins over Tharptown, and too many teams found too little resistance when it came to running the football.

“We had some trouble keeping guys in their lanes, and we had a lot of missed tackles,” Lacey said. “Most teams we face run the ball, and if you have a hard time stopping the run, it’s very tough.”

The key to improving on defense, Lacey said, is at the line of scrimmage.

“One of the biggest things we’ve emphasized this summer is getting better up front,” he said. “We’re

See ‘WILDCATS,’ page 15

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'WILDCATS', from page 14

working those guys hard, and I'm happy with where we're at. All of our big guys have been showing up, and they're working hard. They've gotten better. Their footwork has improved, and they're a little bit quicker and stronger. We're excited to get the pads on and see who's gonna jump in those spots."

There is experience at the second level of Tharptown's 4-4 defense, where senior middle linebacker Skyler Fields is flanked by Price and Risley at outside linebacker. Petree brings experience and play-making ability to the safety position, and Macias is a returning starter at corner.

Lacey is hopeful that better numbers and a deeper roster will mean fewer guys playing both ways this season.

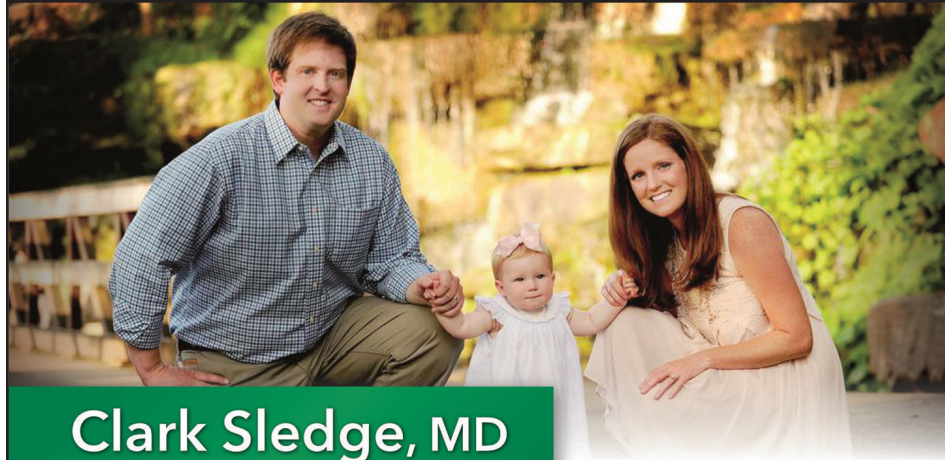
"We were in a lot of games last year against some teams that our guys didn't think we stacked up with," Lacey said. "We'd be up seven or down seven in the fourth quarter, and the wheels would fall off. Now, before the game starts, these guys feel like they have a shot. We just have to be able to finish games."

"We're gonna have a lot of two-way guys," he said, "but with better numbers we're hoping to be able to find spots to rest guys this year and cut down on a lot of that. That's one of those deals that will work itself out when we put the pads on."

That day is rapidly approaching. Fall camp starts in two weeks, and then the 2017 season will open on August 25 with a home game against county rival Phil Campbell. Tharptown was competitive last season in losses to the Bobcats (20-0), Hackleburg (30-14), Lynn (24-14) and Phillips (44-21), and Lacey said a greater sense of self-belief will be the key to getting over the hump this season.

"Our goal last year was simple," he said. "Our main goal was to get these guys emotional about the game, and we feel like we did that. They learned how to get in the game. We just struggled to finish. Our goal this year is to know before the game starts that we have a chance to be competitive, and then to learn how to finish things."

"We were in a lot of games last year against some teams that our guys didn't think we stacked up with. We'd be up seven or down seven in the fourth quarter, and the wheels would fall off. Now, before the game starts, these guys feel like they have a shot. We just have to be able to finish games."



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'JOB,' from page 13

where he coached jayvee baseball. "I basically did it for the interview experience." After he visited Deatsville—roughly 20 minutes from Montgomery—and got a closer look at everything the Bulldog program could offer, though, Baird changed his tune. The Holtville administrators weren't the only ones who came away impressed that day.

"I'm very fortunate and very blessed," Baird said. "Most coaches just starting out on their first job have to go somewhere and literally build from scratch. It's not like that here. Our facilities are really nice. The field is in great shape. It's ideal for any head coach. I walked into a budget that's just unheard of. They've got everything here."

"I'm very fortunate to have this opportunity. I'm working every day. I don't wanna blow it."

Baird is taking over a program accustomed to having success. Holtville has been to the Class 4A playoffs in each of the past four years, losing a tight second-round series to LAMP this past season. Former coach Michael Dismukes left to become the head man at Class 6A Wetumpka, but Baird inherits an experienced roster led by ten returning seniors—all of whom have high expectations for their final season of high school baseball.

Baird's hiring became official at a board meeting on Monday, June 26. He met with his new players the very next day. That Wednesday, he was holding his first practice as a varsity head coach.

"I really had no choice but to come in and hit the ground running," Baird said. "These guys know how to win. The players expect to win. People here expect to win. I expect to win, too, so it kind of works out. I'm not gonna take a job and go into it not expecting to win."

Baird is especially sensitive to the responsibility he bears as a new head coach toward those ten returning seniors. He's been in their shoes before.

Baird remembers what it was like at Russellville in 2007, when former head football coach Perry Swindall stepped down and Doug Goodwin arrived from Demopolis to take his place. The Golden Tigers, not too far removed from making three straight trips to the Super Six in 2002, 2003 and 2004, had put together a record of 64-8 over Swindall's final five seasons. Baird and his fellow seniors in the Class of '08 had no interest in devoting their final season of high school football to a "transitional year." For them, there was no future—only the present.

Baird could almost see those same thoughts running through his new players'

minds when he met them for the first time the day after being hired.

"What I saw in those guys, I could relate to because of what happened when Coach Goodwin came in," said Baird, who helped lead Russellville to a 10-2 record in Goodwin's first season. "Any time there's a coaching change, it's hardest for the seniors because they're used to one way of doing things, and it's their last year to play. We were looking at Coach Goodwin like, 'We're relying on you, because this is our last year to play football. We're used to winning, and we wanna trust you.'

"These guys are looking at me the same way. They're relying on me, because it's the last year of their baseball career, for some of them. We're working hard. This whole town loves baseball, and these kids love baseball. We've started to establish some trust."

"I really had no choice but to come in and hit the ground running," Baird said. "These guys know how to win. The players expect to win. People here expect to win. I expect to win, too, so it kind of works out. I'm not gonna take a job and go into it not expecting to win."

Baird likely won't have much trouble winning over the troops. His work ethic and competitive nature come with an impressive resume, both as a player and a coach. As an outstanding defensive catcher and big-time run producer, Baird helped lead Russellville to 42 wins (then a school record) and the first state semifinal appearance in program history in 2007; the following year, he had his best individual season and led the Golden Tigers to 33 more wins and the state quarterfinals.

After graduating in 2008, Baird played two years of baseball at Snead State Community College. He was behind the plate in a game during his sophomore season when he sustained a torn meniscus in his knee while shifting his weight to block a wayward pitch. He worked his way back from the injury and earned a scholarship offer from Mississippi College, where he tore his meniscus again while running bleachers in 2011.

At that point, Baird knew he had a decision to make.

"After I had my second knee surgery, it was hard for me to keep playing the game at the level I was used to," he said. "I had to decide if I wanted to keep playing or if I was ready to hang it up and start coaching."

The timing may have been uncertain, but the ultimate destination was not. Baird had known for a long time that coaching was in his future.

"In high school, nothing else really intrigued me at all," he said. "Some of the most influential people in our lives are coaches. It's just one of those things where I always wanted to make an impact on young people's lives like coaches made on mine."

After leaving Mississippi College, Baird landed a gig as a volunteer assistant at Russellville while he worked toward finishing his degree in education at Athens State University. He coached at RHS for four years, earning himself a state championship ring with the baseball team in 2015 when the Golden Tigers brought home the first Blue Map in program history.

Baird played four years of varsity baseball at RHS for former head coach David Ward and then served as an assistant under both Ward and current head coach Chris Heaps, who has led the Golden Tigers to three consecutive state titles. Baird credits both men with helping him grow his knowledge of the game and shape his coaching philosophy—not to mention building Russellville into a baseball powerhouse.

"They've built a dynasty, man," Baird said. "Coach Ward did a great job. He coached me since I was ten years old, and I learned a lot from him. Then when Coach Heaps came in, it was kind of like my situation [at Holtville]—he hit the ground running. Coach Heaps got in there and changed some things, but he had some kids who knew how to play the game."

"One of the things I wanna do that Coach Heaps has done so well is build it from the bottom up. He's really hands-on and really involved with the middle school program and the jayvee program. By the time those guys get to be in the tenth and eleventh grade, it's a well oiled machine, because they've been doing things one way for four years. That's what I wanna do here. I'm lucky enough to have enough coaches so that we can all do it together."

As he prepares to help Holtville take the next step in its pursuit of a state championship [the Bulldogs last won it all in 1983], Baird is already borrowing from one of Heaps' favorite principles: *'Do the common things uncommonly well.'*

"Another thing I took away from Coach Heaps was how he never accepts mediocrity," Baird said. "His whole thing was about being uncommon. That's kind of become my team motto. Everything we do, we wanna be uncommon. We wanna give uncommon effort. When we stretch, it's uncommon. They've instilled that mindset at Russellville, and it's impressive."


This has already been a big summer for Baird. He and his wife Dana, an RN, got married on June 3; one month later, they moved into their new place in Deatsville, where Baird is a varsity head coach for the first time at an established program built to succeed. He almost can't believe his good fortune—but he's enjoying every minute of it.

"This is a winning program," he said. "These guys love it here, and they love the game. They get after it everyday. We've been having a big time so far."

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'MEDIA', from page 13

both preseason first-team All-Conference picks, and safety Dominick Sanders (12 career interceptions) is a second-team selection. With all that veteran talent returning and some big-time recruits coming in, the defense should only be better in year number two under Smart and coordinator Mel Tucker.

Quarterback Jacob Eason—assuming he holds off true freshman Jake Fromm—needs to show more week-to-week consistency as a sophomore, and an offensive line that often underwhelmed last year must replace three veteran starters. But if the offense can hold up its end of the bargain, Georgia should be the favorite to reach Atlanta for the first time since 2012.

Florida (2nd in media polling with 1,526 points)
FFP: Agree

Massive losses on defense [eight starters are gone] could be offset at least in part by Florida's best offense since the days of Tim Tebow. Granted, that's not saying much—in the seven years since Tebow left, the Gators have ranked 10th, 10th, 12th, last, 12th, 12th and last in the SEC in total offense while using nine different starting quarterbacks. If Notre Dame transfer Malik Zaire, who has seen precious little game action over the past two seasons, can bring stability, play-making and production to the position, then Florida should remain in the SEC East hunt.

Left tackle Martez Ivey (first-team), receiver Antonio Callaway (second-team) and tight end DeAndre Goolsby (third-team) are all preseason All-SEC selections, and the top three rushers from last season are back, lending hope that the Gators can avert the offensive flameouts that have sunk them the last two Novembers.

Defensively, the cupboard is hardly bare, with corner Duke Dawson (first-team), ends CeCe Jefferson (second-team) and Jabari Zuniga (third-team), and safety Marcel Harris (third-team) all earning preseason All-Conference honors, though Harris will miss the season due to an injury. The kicking game should be great.

The non-conference schedule (bookended by Michigan in the opener and Florida State in the finale) might be the nation's toughest, but Florida gets an extra conference game at home due to last year's hurricane-forced relocation of the LSU game.

Tennessee (3rd in media polling with 998 points)
FFP: Disagree

Tennessee's window to reclaim the SEC East is getting smaller by the minute, and it may have already slammed shut. The Volunteers had a major edge at quarterback over chief rivals Florida and Georgia last season, but that advantage left with Josh Dobbs.

Tennessee is now starting over at the position with plenty of young talent but virtually zero experience.

Aside from Dobbs (who accounted for 3,777 yards of total offense and 39 touchdowns last season), Butch Jones must also replace productive skill players Alvin Kamara (988 yards from scrimmage, 13 TD) and Josh Malone (972 receiving yards, 11 TD), along with all-time sack leader Derek Barnett and standout corner Cam Sutton on a defense that fell apart down the stretch last season.

Factor in a brutal schedule that includes crossover games with Alabama and LSU and a road trip to Florida (where the Vols haven't won since 2003), and it's not hard to imagine UT falling into the middle of the SEC East pack. Jones gets props for having recruited well, but it's worth noting that Tennessee had only three players—none on defense—selected by the media for preseason All-Conference honors.

South Carolina (4th in media polling with 897 points)

FFP: Disagree

It's tempting to go with Kentucky (which has a friendlier schedule and 16 returning starters) as the breakout team in the East this season, but South Carolina is better on defense and might have a rising

star at quarterback in sophomore Jake Bentley.

Bentley should have been a high school senior in 2016; instead, he enrolled a year early at South Carolina and won the starting job midway through the season, guiding the Gamecocks to a 4-3 record down the stretch and completing 65 percent of his passes with nine touchdowns and four interceptions. He was lights-out in the Birmingham Bowl against South Florida, throwing for 390 yards and three touchdowns.

Bentley has some terrific weapons to work with, too, including preseason All-SEC picks Hayden Hurst at tight end and Deebo Samuel at receiver. If tailback Rico Dowdle can pick up where he left off late last season as a freshman [he rushed for 127 yards and 149 yards in back-to-back wins over Tennessee and Missouri], then the running game should take the necessary steps forward.

The defense is still thin in spots by SEC standards, but Will Muschamp has a proven track record of getting positive results on that side of the ball. The return from injury of three-time leading tackler Skai Moore at linebacker should help, and the secondary could be a strong suit.

Divisional road games at Tennessee and Georgia will be tough, but remember that South Carolina beat a better Tennessee team last season in Columbia. If the Gamecocks take care of business at home against the likes of Kentucky, Arkansas and Vanderbilt and pull off a surprise or two, a top-three finish in the East is a very real possibility.

Kentucky (5th in media polling with 869 points)
FFP: Disagree

As mentioned, the schedule (with crossover games against Mississippi State and Ole Miss and a couple of the tougher divisional games at home) looks conducive to a big year—by Kentucky football standards, anyway. The Wildcats went 7-4 over their final 11 games last season and bring back 16 starters, including 1,000-yard rusher Benny Snell, Jr. on offense and preseason All-SEC picks Denzil Ware, Jordan Jones and Mike Edwards on defense. This should be Mark Stoops' most talented and experienced team yet.

On the other hand, some of the key swing games Kentucky won at home last season (South Carolina, Vanderbilt, Mississippi State) are on the road this year, and the defense still has to get a lot better—particularly against the run. If it does, and if the Wildcats can repeat their success in close games [they went 4-1 last year in games decided by seven points or less], then they could finish in the top half of the division.

Vanderbilt (6th in media polling with 554 points)
FFP: Agree

It's a toss-up between Vandy and Missouri for the bottom two spots in the East, but the Tigers must come to Nashville this season, so we'll go with Vandy.

All-World linebacker Zach Cunningham is gone, but Derek Mason knows what he's doing on defense. On offense, Kyle Shurmur showed flashes late last year of becoming a bona fide SEC quarterback, and he'll have the luxury of leaning on preseason third-team All-SEC pick Ralph Webb (the school's all-time leading rusher) and a strong ground game. Vanderbilt's top five pass-catchers from last season all return as well.

Missouri (7th in media polling with 338 points)
FFP: Agree

Over the last five seasons, Missouri has either won the SEC East (2013-14) or failed to qualify for a bowl game at all (2012, 2015-16). The Tigers have surprised us all before, but this certainly feels like the latter kind of year.

Missouri does return a 3,000-yard passer (Drew Lock), a 1,000-yard receiver (preseason second-team All-SEC pick J'Mon Moore) and a 1,000-yard rusher (Damarea Crockett), so the offense has some pieces in place. But Missouri's overall numbers were inflated last season by monster performances against bad

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teams: 61 points vs. Eastern Michigan, 79 points vs. Delaware State. In conference play, the Tigers averaged just 22.6 points per game.

Defensively, Missouri ranked last in the league last season in total defense (479.7 yards per game) and bottom-three in points allowed (31.5 per game), giving up a ton of big plays. Now the Tigers must replace eight starters on that side of the ball. Yikes. Head coach Barry Odom has his work cut out for him.

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'HOOPS' from page 13

averaging a career-high 13.0 points per game, helping the Golden Tigers win 18 games and a second straight area championship. Buckhalter knocked down 34 threes and shot 74 percent (66-for-89) from the foul line while also averaging 4.6 rebounds and 2.1 assists per game. He will head into his junior season at RHS with 481 points scored at the varsity level.

Colbert Heights' Shaw earned first-team All-Area honors in Class 1A-3A from the *TimesDaily* as a junior last season, leading the Wildcats in scoring at 19.2 points per game and also pulling down 5.2 rebounds per game.

As sophomores last season, Mason Bragwell and Brant Bragwell helped lead Belgreen to a 22-9 record that included a Franklin County tournament title, an area championship and a trip to the Class 1A Northwest Regional. Mason, a 6'5 post player, earned first-team All-County honors from the *Free Press* after averaging 16.1 points per game on 58 percent shooting from the field. He also shot 77 percent (94-for-122) from the foul line and knocked down 14 threes, reaching double-figures in scoring in each of the Bulldogs' final 29 games and topping the 20-point mark eight times. Mason led Belgreen with 6.8 rebounds per game and also recorded 39 blocked shots and 28 steals. He has already scored 726 points in his varsity career.

Brant Bragwell also had a standout sophomore season for Belgreen, earning second-team All-County honors from the *Free Press*. He knocked down 51 threes and shot 34 percent from beyond the arc. Bragwell put up four games of 20-plus points and finished the season as the Bulldogs' second-leading scorer, averaging 10.6 points per game. He also ranked second on the team in assists (47) and steals (48) while shooting 74 percent (53-for-72) from the foul line.

Phil Campbell's Davis was a first-team All-County selection by the *Free Press* as a sophomore last season after averaging a career-high 15.2 points and 10.2 rebounds per game. The 5'11 forward topped the 20-point mark seven times and also excelled on the defensive end, where she totaled 50 blocks and 32 steals. Heading into her junior season, Davis is already closing in on 900 career points at the varsity level.

Vina's Hester earned All-State honors in Class 1A and was a second-team All-County selection by the *Free Press* last season after leading the Lady Red Devils to 22 wins. The 5'2 point guard put up prolific numbers, leading Franklin County in scoring (18.0 points per game), three-pointers made (a career-high 75) and free throws made (185 in 247 attempts, a solid rate of 75 percent). Hester put up 20-plus points 14 times and also averaged 8.3 assists, 6.5 rebounds and 5.7 steals per game. She has already eclipsed the 1,000-point mark in her varsity career, totaling 1,067 heading into her senior season.

Colbert Heights' James, a sharp-shooting guard, earned All-Area honorable mention in Class 1A-3A from the *TimesDaily* after leading the Lady Wildcats in scoring and three-pointers made as a sophomore last season.

Belgreen's Moore, a sweet-shooting combo guard, averaged 6.5 points per game last season as a sophomore. She knocked down 30 threes (second-most on the team) and shot a solid 65 percent (28-for-43) from the foul line. In two years at the varsity level, Moore has scored more than 450 points while knocking down 66 threes.

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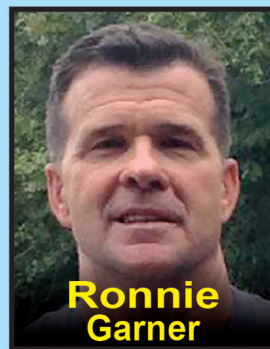
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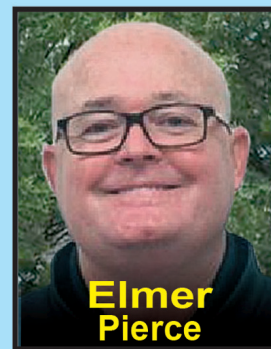
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