

# 'Toyland' returns, makes Roxy debut

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

For the thousands of students who were part of "The Legend of Toyland" at Gordon State College in Georgia and Northwest-Shoals Community College in Phil Campbell, the show was a highlight of their college experience.

And that experience sometimes included one of "Toyland" playwright/director Lanny McAlister's legendary blow-ups. While it was always a love-love relationship when it came to McAlister and his students, he was, to say the least, passionate about his production.

This year's version, "The Roxy's Legend of Toyland," features a script and set modified to fit the stage at the Roxy Theater, and it features a kinder, gentler McAlister.

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COURTESY PHOTO

'The Legend of Toyland' was an annual tradition at Northwest-Shoals for 30 years. This year's version, 'The Roxy's Legend of Toyland,' will hit the stage at the Roxy Theater next Wednesday, November 29.

# FCC proposes extension on one-cent tax

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission was expected to approve a resolution Monday that would pave the way for Franklin County citizens to vote on a proposed 30-year extension of the existing one-cent sales tax.

The tax, originally approved by voters for a two-year period in 2010, is a countywide one-cent tax that benefits Franklin County Schools and Russellville City Schools, proportionately. The 2010 and 2012 amendment called for all of the proceeds to go to schools.

That changed in 2014, when the commission requested local legislators to introduce a bill that allowed Franklin County citizens to consider a two-year tax where 75 percent of the proceeds would benefit schools and 25 percent would go to matching funds needed to secure Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) grants.

That modified tax proposal, criticized by some who

wanted to see education receive all of the approximate \$2 million generated annually, was overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2014 and 2016.

The Franklin County Commission was expected to approve a resolution Monday that would pave the way for Franklin County citizens to vote on a proposed 30-year extension of the existing one-cent sales tax.

Based on the commission's action Monday, there would be two primary differences in the tax this time around.

First, it would be for a 30-year period and not two years. Second, the county commission would still receive 25 percent of the one-cent tax, but it would not be earmarked for ATRIP matching funds. Instead, it would be used for road and bridge repairs and improvements across Franklin County.

That would allow the funds to be applied to improvements on smaller roads across Franklin County that did not benefit from ATRIP funds. ATRIP requirements call

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**Hattie Earline Johnson**, Athens, AL (formerly of Russellville), age 86  
Died Thursday, November 16, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Dempsey Cemetery in Red Bay.

**Aaron Cale Manley**, Muscle Shoals, age 44  
Died Tuesday, November 14, 2017. Memorial service held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville.

**Linda Britnell Martin**, Russellville, age 70  
Died Thursday, November 16, 2017. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

**Todd Swinney**, Phil Campbell, age 54  
Died Saturday, November 18, 2017. Funeral arrangements had not been announced at press time. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville was assisting the family.

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# Fugitive facing murder rap returned to Franklin County

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Taking a page from Nick Saban, when it came to returning a man with pending capital murder charges from Mexico, Franklin County district attorney Joey Rushing stuck to 'the process,' even though that process took more than 11 years.

Vincente Soto remains in the Franklin County Jail, where he will be held without bond until his case comes to trial next year. Custody of Soto was transferred from U.S. Marshals to the Franklin County Sheriff's Department at the Birmingham Airport earlier this month.

That was the final step in a lengthy process to return Soto, 41, to Franklin County to stand trial for the August 7, 2005 shooting death of Dionicio Bahena, 31. The incident is said to have taken place at a residence on Franklin 48 just outside of the Russellville city limits.

Soto is alleged to have lived with a 16-year-old female at the residence. The shooting took place outside of the residence, reportedly over the two men's mutual interest in the girl.

Rushing said he was first notified that Soto had

been located in Chimalhuacan, Mexico, in March of this year. The lengthy process to extradite him back to the United States involved the filing of affidavits from officers and witnesses, the indictment and other court documents, all of which had to be translated into Spanish for use by the Mexican government.

**"After ten years, we figured we'd never find him—that he had died or changed his identity," Rushing said of Soto. "It was definitely a team effort at all levels."**

Since Mexico does not have capital punishment, the Mexican government imposed a condition that Rushing not seek the death penalty in case of a conviction in order for Soto to be returned to Alabama. The maximum punishment he faces is life without parole in prison.

The process started with a warrant in the National Crime Information Center network. Officials with the Federal Bureau of Investigation worked to get the warrant into an international law enforcement network. Over the years, Rushing said law enforcement received some leads but

nothing ever materialized.

"We had several leads he was in Chicago, the Shoals and in Texas. Also, we were told he had been killed with an axe and buried," Rushing said. "There were also several reports he had returned to Mexico. After ten years, we figured we'd never find him—that he had died or changed his identity."

"It was definitely a team effort at all levels. The Department of Justice, once he was found, has helped me tremendously on what we had to do."

Franklin County sheriff Shannon Oliver said Soto is in a high security classification at the Franklin County Jail due to his being a flight risk.

"He is secured in the maximum security part of the jail," Oliver said. "Right now, he's in a cell to himself. He isn't in general population and probably won't be at all due to his being a flight risk."

Although Greg Pinkard, the FCSO investigator who handled the case in 2005, is no longer with the department, Oliver said his investigators have been reinterviewing witnesses since Soto was taken into custody in March.

"Our guys did that, and the investigator who was here back at the time of the incident will testify to what he did," Oliver said.

# Highway officials still working to fix THS traffic issues

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Highway Department is once again working to help alleviate traffic issues at Tharptown High School that have resulted from the school's unprecedented growth in enrollment. The latest project for Franklin County engineer David Palmer's department includes the construction of a roadway that will allow traffic a second route to flow onto Franklin 48.

Tharptown School has seen massive growth the last two years, and highway department officials erected "Reduced Speed Ahead" signs on 48 earlier this fall after a two-vehicle accident during drop-off time in the morning when an eastbound vehicle on 48 collided with a vehicle attempting to turn onto County Road 80.

With long lines of traffic wrapped onto CR 80 and then back onto 48, the new roadway will connect into the gravel road that turns off into the baseball/softball facility.

"We looked at what we could do and thought, 'What if we cut out a road right there along the easternmost part of the school?' Even if it has to be gravel for a while, we could put a cul de sac there and everyone coming from

the east could turn in there," Palmer said. "You can drop kids off, go around the cul de sac and come out the same road and never have to get into that traffic."

THS principal Kelby Daniel and Franklin County Schools superintendent of education Greg Hamilton met with Palmer and supported the idea in an effort to help eliminate some of the traffic congestion at a minimal cost.

Palmer said his department wouldn't be able to do all the work at one time, but they would complete the job as time was available. The county will provide the bulldozer work, and Franklin County Schools will be responsible for the cost of the materials, Palmer said.

So far, highway department workers have installed pipe, connected into 48 and done much of the dozer work, as well as compacting some gravel.

"We just can't do it all at one time, and they understand that," Palmer said. "But it's an opportunity to help save the school a bunch of money, and, like the rest of us, every dime we can save is a big deal to them."

Hamilton expressed his appreciation to Palmer and his department for working to help remedy traffic problems at Tharptown.

"They were quick to respond and offer their assistance, and we certainly are appreciative of that," Hamilton said.

# One in five Alabamians has concealed weapon permit

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

By the millions, more Americans are applying for concealed weapons permits, and it comes as no surprise that Alabamians are at the top of that list.

A recent study completed by the Crime Prevention Research Center found that the number of Americans with concealed weapons permits increased by 1.83 million people in 2016, to a total of 16.3 million permit holders.

The study shows that number to be a 256-percent increase from 2007 numbers.

Alabama has the highest rate of any state per capita for the number of permits issued. The study finds that 20 percent of the adult population in Alabama holds permits. The next highest percentage is Indiana, with 15.8 percent of adults having a concealed weapon permit.

According to Tim Schmidt, founder and president of the U.S. Concealed Carry Association, a pro-gun rights group, the reason for the increase is just what you might expect—protection.

"More Americans are feeling the need to be able to protect themselves, to be able to be that first line of defense," Schmidt said. "The figures show that the largest increase in concealed weapons permit holders is among women and minorities."

**Alabama has the highest rate of any state per capita for the number of permits issued. The study finds that 20 percent of the adult population in Alabama holds permits. The next highest percentage is Indiana, with 15.8 percent of adults having a concealed weapon permit.**

"So we are seeing people that you normally wouldn't consider as maybe having a concealed weapons permit, those people are applying for and receiving the permits in larger and larger numbers. I don't think you will see the numbers of permit holders decreasing any time soon. I think you will see this trend of permit numbers increasing continue for the next several years."

Franklin County sheriff Shannon Oliver esti-

mates the percentages of adults in Franklin County with concealed weapons permits is even more than the state average of 20 percent. The department began selling multi-year permits in 2013, so while the total of permits sold has declined each year, the total number of permit holders continues to increase.

In 2016, Oliver said his department issued 1,636 permits for concealed carry and to possess a pistol in a vehicle. Alabama law does not require a permit for open carry.

"We hear so much in the media about shooting these days, and there's so much uncertainty in society," Oliver said of the reason for so many permits. "People are looking for that additional protection for themselves and their families."

The U.S. Concealed Carry Association provides education, training and self-defense insurance to responsible, American gun owners. The organization is based in West Bend, Wisconsin, and is the largest and fastest-growing member-owned private association whose focus is the responsibly armed American.

# Thankful for our veterans

Every Thanksgiving, I like to write an editorial about the things that I am thankful for. I've written about how thankful I am for my family, and for public servants like Alabama's educators. But this year, I want to say how thankful I am for our country's veterans.

We just celebrated Veterans Day, of course, and we are blessed to live in a part of the country where our nation's veterans are still revered and respected. Still, I feel that Thanksgiving is the perfect time to say thank you to the men and women who have served our great nation.

Memorial Day is meant to remember those who died in service to this country, while Veterans Day is meant to thank those who served, whether in peace time or during war. Thanksgiving is the perfect time to not only thank these veterans again but also to thank their families for the sacrifices they make while their loved ones are serving, and especially while their loved ones are deployed overseas.

As a member of the Alabama National Guard, I have the great privilege of serving with many outstanding men and women who have all committed to take up the call

and, if necessary, give their lives for this country. That kind of commitment and service is a rare and special thing, and is only surpassed by the One who gave his life so that we could all be forgiven for our sins.



Rep. Craig Ford

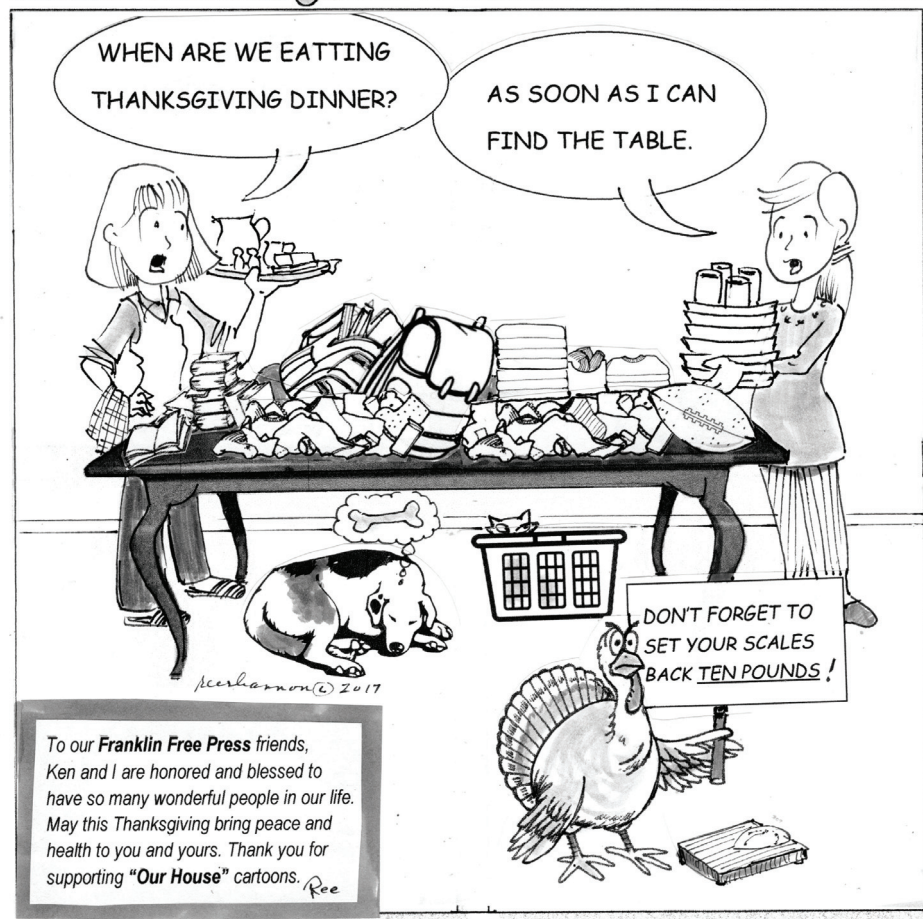
This nation would not be what it is today without our veterans, past and present. Millions have served, and over a million have given their lives on the altar of freedom over the past two centuries. The thought of that sacrifice is something that still brings tears to my eyes.

The men and women I know that serve don't do it for the medals or the praise. Many of those who have served in war don't want to relive the stories of their wartime experiences; they simply want to get back to their lives and spend time with their families.

But every one of them are heroes to me. Any man or woman who is ready to put their life on the line for their country and protect millions of people they will never even meet is a special person. They deserve to be thanked, even though most

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## OUR HOUSE By: Ree SHANNON



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## System-wide growth a sign of progress

After reviewing the recently released results from the Spring 2017 administration of the ACT Aspire for Russellville City Schools, I couldn't be more proud of the tremendous gains made across all subject areas and grade levels.

The purpose of the ACT Aspire is to measure proficiency in the subject areas of reading, math and science from grades 3-8 and reading, math, science, English and writing in 10th grade in an effort to chart students' college-readiness throughout their school career.

The results for RCS showed overall gains in 18 of 23 subject areas system-wide, which is very strong. At Russellville Elementary School, growth was seen in six of the nine areas tested (third- and fifth-grade reading, third- and fifth-grade math, and third- and fourth-grade science).

At Russellville Middle School, growth was seen in seven of the nine areas tested (sixth- and eighth-grade reading; sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade math; and sixth- and eighth-grade science), with a strong 20 percent gain in sixth-grade math from 42 percent in 2016 to 62 percent in 2017.

At Russellville High School, gains were seen in all five subject areas tested (10th-grade English, reading, math, science and writing), with an amazing 34 percent gain in writing from 16 percent in 2016 to 50 percent in 2017.

I am so proud of our students and our teachers for their hard work that resulted in so much growth over the past year. These numbers show that we are making gains and our students are learning, truly learning, things that are going to help them throughout their school career and beyond that. When a group collectively scored 16-percent proficiency in writing and the following

year earns a 50-percent proficiency, that's tremendous. And the same can be said for all the gains we saw. Any growth is positive, so we have a lot to be thankful for with these results.

I also believe it's important to note that looking at this year's data and comparing it to the system's data from the previous year is the best way to determine where the system currently stands, as opposed to comparing current results with other systems' results.

It's so tempting when scores like this come in to immediately try to compare our scores with the scores of other school systems around us to see where we stand. But the problem with that is the fact that one set of results doesn't tell the whole story. It's only part of the picture. It isn't an accurate way to gauge the type of learning taking place in that system.

Measuring schools against schools doesn't show the whole picture, while measuring growth inside a school system more accurately shows the success of teachers and students.

For instance, one system's results could be several points higher than ours, which on the face looks like their school, system and/or teachers are performing better than ours. However, if you look at the past few years of results, that school system could have had the exact same numbers for a few years without showing any type of growth.

Our scores are indicative of not only student



Heath Grimes  
RCS Sup't

See 'PROGRESS,' Page 9



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Dear Dave,  
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 The balance on the loan right now is around \$30,000. He has a job waiting for him after he graduates, so we're thinking about telling him it will be his responsibility to finish paying off the loan at that point.  
 Is that wrong?

Pat  
 Dear Pat,  
 There's absolutely nothing wrong with a young law school graduate earning a living and paying off his own debt. I hope he appreciates how generous you both have been, but you shouldn't feel as if you're obligated to continue making these payments after he finishes school and begins working.  
 Now, if you decide to pay it off for him as a gift for successfully completing law school—and you're in a financial position to do so without hurting yourselves or your future—that's fine, too. It would be another incredibly generous act. And in my mind, generosity of that magnitude should be met with gratitude and appreciation of equal measure.  
 If you choose this route, let him know how and why you were able to give him this gift. Don't hold it over his head or beat him up with it, but

stress the importance of being wise with money, saving and investing, and staying out of debt in the future.

Let him know that if he'll follow your example, he might be able to do the same kind of thing for his kids someday. That would be a wonderful thing to see, wouldn't it?

Dave

**Used car mileage?**

Dear Dave,  
 I know you advise most people to buy used cars. Do you have a rule of thumb for a mileage limit when it comes to buying a used vehicle?

Paul

Dear Paul,  
 No, not really. Sometimes mileage alone can be a good indicator of the quality of a used vehicle, but that's not always the case. I would also advise doing a little research and

maybe letting a trusted mechanic have a look to determine if there are any issues that might give you trouble soon.

The more inexpensive (and cheaply made) a car is, the more likely it becomes that it would be worn down by higher mileage. Some vehicles start to get a little ragged at 100,000 miles, while others—some of the better makes—are just getting a feel for the road at that point. Of course, a lot depends on your budget, too.

Overall, I would advise you to look for something that has a good reputation, a solid history and as little mileage as possible. There are good, used cars out there that will last for years!

Dave

*\*Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. Follow Dave on the web at [daveramsey.com](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

# Lewey's custom clothing lines growing in popularity

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Lewey's Sports and Custom Apparel is a great example of a small, family-run business.  
 And Larry and Melissa Lewey have seen their family grow in recent years. With two grown children and four grandchildren, the Leweys adopted four siblings three years ago. The kids, ranging in age from 5 to 17, now have another sibling thanks to another recent adoption by the family.  
 While their Muscle Shoals business is moving away from the sale of sporting goods, the Leweys are excited about their new lines of custom clothing, "God is Life" and the Lewey & I Co. line.  
 Lewey's specializes in bulk screen printing, but their custom clothing lines continue to grow in popularity. As with the business, the clothing lines are also a family affair.

**The "God is Life" clothing isn't just part of their business. It's also the foundation of the Lewey family's life.**

"I lay them out, and my wife and kids usually come up with the designs," Larry Lewey said.  
 The "God is Life" clothing isn't just part of their business. It's also the foundation of the Lewey family's life.  
 "We have wanted to do something like this for a long time—to do our own shirts and show our faith and where we believe life comes from," Lewey said. "The God is Life line has nothing crude, rude or offensive to anyone. We want to promote a positive message and something that's at the heart of our family."  
 In addition to many different custom shirts available both in the store and online at [www.leweys.com](http://www.leweys.com), jewelry and accessories are also for sale online. Lewey's will hold a special Black Friday sale both online and in the store, with savings starting at 35 percent off.  
 The online sale begins at midnight Friday, and store hours on Friday, November 24 are 9-3. Saturday, November 25 hours are 10-2.  
 Younger shoppers will enjoy Lewey's "Hip" line of clothing, designed by their daughter Chezley. Lewey said they are constantly creating new designs

for customers to enjoy.  
 "We keep coming up with designs and putting them on the website," Lewey said. "And if people locally buy online, there's no shipping if they come into the store and pick their items up. Most of the shirts we also have in stock in the store, and if we run out we just print more."  
 Lewey's also offers performance-style shirts printed with silicone ink that stretches with the lightweight material.  
 "All our printing is done on top-quality shirts, either soft-style or high-quality Next Level or Comfort Colors shirts," Lewey said.  
 Lewey's is offering some Christmas-themed shirts now through the holidays. Other Black Friday specials include 50 percent off all baseball pants. And anything purchased Friday or Saturday, Lewey's will decorate for any team of the customer's choosing at no additional cost.  
 Also, the first 20 customers Friday get a free T-shirt.  
 Lewey's is located at 204 Woodward Avenue, next to Swamp John's in Muscle Shoals.



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# What's Happening

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EVENTS OF INTEREST • FAMILY REUNIONS • PLAYS • CHURCH GATHERINGS • EDUCATIONAL • CLUB MEETINGS

**R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling hams for Thanksgiving. Hams are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Wednesday, November 22 from 8-10 a.m. at the Lodge on Coffee Street.

**M**ountain View Baptist Church will sponsor a free Thanksgiving dinner this Thursday, November 23 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Dine in, carry out or delivery available (within a 15-mile radius of the church). Call the church office to arrange delivery. Please limit request to six plates per residence. The church is located at 2110 Highway 81 in Phil Campbell. For more info, call 205-993-4610.

**F**ranklin County probate judge Barry Moore is asking teachers and students across Franklin County to help decorate the 2017 Franklin County Courthouse Christmas Tree. The ornament theme is Santa's Toyland. Ornaments should be sturdy and non-breakable, approximately 4-6 inches in size. They are due November 27-December 1 and can be delivered to the first floor of the Franklin County Courthouse. Security guards will accept your ornaments. The 2017 courthouse tree will be ready for public viewing on Wednesday, December 6 through January 2, 2018, from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. For more information, call 256-332-8880.

**T**he Roxy's *Legend of Toyland*, a much-loved musical written and directed by Lanny McAlister, will premiere at the historic Roxy Theatre on November 29 and run through December 3, with 12 performances. Tickets will be sold the second Saturday of each month prior to the Kerry Gilbert Band and Guests Show at the Roxy. For updates on events and ticket sales, visit the Facebook page, The Legend of Toyland.

**T**OPs (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) weight loss support group meets each Monday evening at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center. Weigh-ins being at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more information.

**T**he Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris, Jr., Camp #1833, will meet Thursday, December 7 at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec 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!

**T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, December 9 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.

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# Spokesperson: Lakeland closing won't affect local hospital

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Lakeland Community Hospital, a fixture in Winston County for decades, will close its doors on December 31, 2017.

A spokesperson with Curae Health confirmed the closing of the Haleyville facility. Lakeland Community Hospital is one of five hospitals owned by the non-profit rural healthcare company Curae Health. Curae also owns Russellville Hospital, Northwest Medical Center in Winfield, and two Mississippi hospitals, Gilmore Memorial Hospital in Amory and Panola Medical Center in Batesville.

The spokesperson said the Haleyville closing would not affect the operations of Russellville Hospital. The Medical Detox program at Lakeland will be transferred to Russellville Hospital. Other services/departments may be combined or transferred, depending on regulatory requirements.

The *Free Press* spoke with a Lakeland employ-

ee who said he received an email last Friday informing him of the December 31 closing.

Curae purchased the Haleyville, Russellville and Winfield facilities from LifePoint in November of 2014. The hospitals officially became part of the Curae family on December 31, 2014.

**"We explored every viable option to avoid closing the hospital," said Debbie Pace, CEO of Lakeland Community Hospital. "Unfortunately, as with many other rural healthcare facilities in the Southeast, we are unable to continue operations due to drastic reductions in reimbursement."**

Lakeland Community Hospital is a 59-bed facility and the only hospital serving Winston County.

In a Friday news release, a Curae spokesperson said reduced reimbursements from the government as well as commercial insurers have "taken a tremendous toll on rural hospitals across the

nation."

Lakeland Community Hospital was on track to have reimbursements reduced by nearly \$2 million dollars, and this financial loss made it impossible for Curae to continue to operate the facility at a deficit.

"Our team explored every viable option to avoid closing the hospital," said Debbie Pace, CEO of Lakeland Community Hospital. "Unfortunately, as with many other rural healthcare facilities in the Southeast, we are unable to continue operations due to drastic reductions in reimbursement. I want to thank the Lakeland hospital staff, physicians and board for their dedication and service to the community."

The closing will affect 87 employees. Curae said Lakeland employees would be given priority to fill open positions at other area hospitals in the network, and employees will be assisted in identifying other healthcare entities in the area that are looking to hire.

## 'TAX,' from page 1

for those funds to be used on major collector roads and bridges, meaning roads that meet certain standards for daily traffic usage and that connect on both ends with highways or other major collectors.

Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore stressed that the proposed amendment is not a new tax. Rather, it is an extension of the already existing one-cent tax, just for a longer period of time.

Moore met with Franklin County Schools superintendent Greg Hamilton and Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes about the proposal, and both were supportive. The superintendents wanted to see a longer period for the tax so they would have financial sustainability to show when they go through the bond market for capital improvement projects.

Moore hopes the amendment can make its way through the legislature's 2018 session in time to appear on the June 2018 ballot. If not, it would likely appear on the November 2018 general election ballot, he said. The session would have to end 90 days before the June 5, 2018 primary.

When reminded that he and commissioners said they would only ask for the 25 percent while ATRIP funding was available and this proposal deviates from that, Moore explained why the commission was still asking voters for 25 percent of the tax.

"ATRIP only applied to certain roads with certain criteria," Moore said. "If this passes, commissioners can get with [Franklin County engineer] David

Palmer and do some roads that didn't fall under ATRIP.

"We had some complaints as to why we couldn't improve certain roads as part of ATRIP, so this falls back on the commissioners to decide if they get these funds that we need these roads improved as well."

Moore said he and the commission had been good stewards of the approximately \$500,000 received annually by the commission as part of the tax, and he believes Franklin County citizens will entrust them to continue to take care of needed road and bridge improvements across the county.

**"ATRIP only applied to certain roads with certain criteria," Moore said. "If this passes, commissioners can get with [Franklin County engineer] David Palmer and do some roads that didn't fall under ATRIP. We had some complaints as to why we couldn't improve certain roads as part of ATRIP, so this falls back on the commissioners to decide if they get these funds that we need these roads improved as well."**

Both Grimes and Hamilton attended last week's commission work session, and both publicly supported the proposed changes to the tax.

"Our four schools are at maximum capacity. We need to be able to add additional buildings," Grimes said. "We can't borrow for capital projects without showing some long-term sustainability.

## 'PROGRESS,' from page 4

growth—as the growth we are discussing is not among the same students—but the growth is actually comparing last year's group to a group in the same grade in the spring of 2017. This indicates a growth in instruction and programming. The results have been analyzed for growth from one grade level to the next and for individual student growth as well.

We still have work to do, of course, but in both areas we are seeing progress and that is positive. At RCS, we want our students and teachers to be continually growing and learning. We don't want our educational environment to become stagnant. As long as we are making gains and

showing that we are progressing as a system, I think that is a huge win, and that's exactly what this data shows. And I'm confident we will continue to make gains this year as well so that our data next year reflects the growth taking place at RCS.

In the coming months you will likely see a report card delivered by the state of Alabama that will compare our proficiency to other schools based on these results. As I mentioned earlier, I believe this is an inaccurate representation of how an individual child or even a school is doing. However, for now, this is how the state has chosen to grade us. I hope you will consider this

data when the report card is released.

Measuring schools against schools doesn't show the whole picture, while measuring growth inside a school system more accurately shows the success of teachers and students. While we anticipate average to good scores on this report card, we already see from this data that collectively our students grew a tremendous amount last year. The data is proof that RCS is a highly effective learning environment, and we are very proud of both our students and teachers.

As always, it's GREAT to be a Golden Tiger!  
Heath Grimes  
Superintendent, Russellville City Schools



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**Russellville's Goodwin wins principal's award**

*John Pilati Franklin Free Press*

Russellville High School has received several distinguished accolades recently, including www.niche.com's ranking as Alabama's No. 1 standout high school and being named an A+ College Ready "School of Excellence."

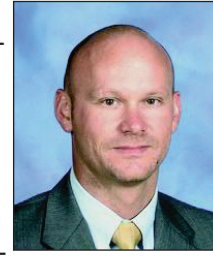
Those honors came under the leadership of RHS principal Jason Goodwin, so it's no surprise Goodwin was named the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) District Seven Principal of the Year.

Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes made the announcement at the November 15 board meeting. Goodwin will now be eligible to be named CLAS Principal of the Year.

Goodwin is in his second year as RHS principal. He was hired as assistant principal for RHS in June of 2015.

Goodwin is a graduate of the University of North Alabama with a bachelor's degree in secondary education/chemistry and a master's and Ed.S degree in instructional leadership.

He previously worked as a chemistry teacher and assistant principal at Lawrence County High School.



Jason Goodwin

"When you get those types of honors in a year, you can understand how and why he was recognized," Grimes said. "Mr. Goodwin was nominated from among his peers in administration and selected by them."

CLAS is a professional association focused on children, professional development and the needs of school administrators. Its mission is to "coordinate and facilitate the resources of all members for the advancement of public education," according to its website, www.clasleaders.org.

Russellville High School saw a 122-percent increase on AP qualifying scores last year as compared to 2015-16.

The school was also recognized for the tremendous growth in student enrollment in AP (Advanced Placement) courses.

# School board hears report on upcoming Bicentennial

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Russellville City Schools Board of Education members heard a report from Russellville Elementary School teacher Carol Fretwell Raney about the upcoming Alabama 200 Bicentennial celebration at the board's November 15 meeting.

Raney is one of 12 teachers selected across Alabama as Bicentennial Master Teachers. She has taken an active hand planning and helping promote activities scheduled to celebrate the state's 200th anniversary. Alabama became the nation's 22nd state on December 14, 1819.

Raney, a fifth-grade science teacher and former Alabama history teacher, has worked to organize and lead 360 teachers across the state in professional development institutes, all of which explore a different theme or period in Alabama history.

"We are very proud of Mrs. Raney and her efforts in representing Russellville City Schools as one of Alabama's Bicentennial Master Teachers," RCS superintendent Heath Grimes said. "Any time we have the opportunity to promote the outstanding faculty in our school system, we do so."

In other action at last week's meeting, the board:  
•Approved use of Russellville Middle School facilities on January 6, 2018 for the RMS Scholars'

Bowl Invitational.

•Approved a trip request from the JROTC from November 17-19 to conduct Army JROTC training at Camp Westmoreland in Florence.

•Approved the purchase of ten propane-powered new school buses at a cost of \$84,703 each, and two 2015 propane-powered demo buses at a cost of \$54,995 each. The bids were awarded to Southland International for the new buses and Busworx-Bluebird for the demo buses.

•Approved a three-and-one-half-year extension on the contract of employment for Grimes as superintendent. The extension runs through June 30, 2021.

## 'TOYLAND,' from page 1

"I'm much mellower this time around," the 74-year-old McAlister said, "even though I was a nice guy back then, too."

"Toyland" began when McAlister was at Gordon State College and continued when he joined the faculty of NW-SCC, where it was an annual tradition for 30 years. This year's version marks the 34th anniversary of "Toyland," a project led by McAlister, Hillary Hall and Chase Sparks.

McAlister is again directing the show, and, as he describes it, Hall and Sparks "are handling everything else." There are seven public performances of "Toyland," from Wednesday, November 29 through Sunday, December 3. An additional six performances will be for students in northwest Alabama.

Tickets are \$10 for the public performances and are available online at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com). Public sales are also available at the Roxy Saturday at 6 p.m. and from 1-3 p.m. Sunday afternoon.

"Toyland" tells the story of how Santa Claus was chosen to deliver the toys to all the children. In revising his original production, McAlister kept the same story but modified it to fit the smaller stage. The NW-SCC stage was 90 feet wide, compared to 32 feet at the Roxy.

McAlister never dreamed when he retired the show after the 2011 season that it would make a return, but he said it's special to see "Toyland" right in the heart of downtown Russellville.

"It feels marvelous. I never thought I'd do it again, but here we are," McAlister said. "I feel very good about it. I enjoy these kids, and we have a lot of high school students involved."

McAlister said the cast consists of approximately 45 actors. Rehearsals began in late September, and most days some or all of the actors are on sight at the Roxy. Even though the venue is smaller, McAlister said there are some advantages to the Roxy as the "Toyland" venue.

"I like it here. You can see the faces up close to you, whereas on the gym floor you couldn't," McAlister said. "There's very much a nostalgic feel being at the Roxy."

Hall and Sparks approached McAlister last year after Christmas wanting to do something in Russellville for the community. That's how "The Roxy's Legend of Toyland" began.

"They came to me and asked if I could be persuaded to produce it or agree to allow it to be redone, and I said yes," McAlister said. "I spent much of the

winter rewriting it and several more weeks putting together the sound track."

Chase Gilmer, a former NW-SCC student who appeared in "Toyland" for three years, finds himself once again a cast member this year. Like many of the actors, Gilmer has multiple roles. You'll see him as a cow, Elvis, a Caribbean dancer, an elf and a parade participant.

"It was a great experience for me in college," Gilmer said. "Now I'm glad other people in the community get the experience to do it, and we can all put smiles on kids' faces."

Approximately one-fourth of the cast consists of former "Toyland" actors, McAlister said. With tickets nearly sold out for most shows, he expects the return of "Toyland" to last for years to come.

"I see no reason why we shouldn't," he said. "It will be much easier to do next year with all the sets built and with it already made to fit the Roxy."

More than an estimated one million people have enjoyed "The Legend of Toyland" over its 33-year run. And thanks to the efforts of some civic-minded local residents, that number will continue to grow for years to come.

Public show times are 7 p.m. on November 29-30 and December 1. Show times are 10 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Saturday, December 2. The final show will be Sunday, December 3 at 3 p.m.

"We're planning to have the horse standing by for Sunday afternoon if I don't make it through the week," McAlister joked.

## 'VETERANS,' from page 4

never ask for that "thank you" or any kind of special recognition.

Alabama has certainly produced its share of decorated heroes, including 33 Medal of Honor recipients. But every soldier, sailor, airman and marine who has served has made an invaluable contribution to this nation's security and status as the world's greatest superpower, regardless of how many medals they wear on their uniforms.

As my family and I gather around the dinner table this Thanksgiving, I will of course be thankful for the many other blessings I have had in this life: My time in public office, my successful businesses and outstanding staff that make those offices run smoothly, a wife and chil-

dren who are more than I deserve, and a million other small blessings that all add up to a pretty great life.

But outside of God's mercy and the health and well being of my family, I can think of no other blessing that I could be more thankful for than the men and women who serve this country and put their lives on the line each and every day to protect our nation.

I wish you all a blessed and happy Thanksgiving! And to all the men and women who have served in the military, past and present, and especially to those serving overseas during this holiday season, thank you!

Rep. Craig Ford represents Gadsden and Etowah County in the Alabama House of Representatives.

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## Auburn D will be key



Mike Self  
Sports Editor

How many years has it been since Auburn just plain ol', you know, *beat* Alabama?

The Tigers, of course, have won just two of the previous nine Iron Bowls, and both were monumental in nature. There was the Cam Newton-led comeback from a 24-0 deficit to win 28-27 in Tuscaloosa in 2010, followed three years later by the Kick Six at Jordan-Hare. [It's no coincidence that Auburn wound up playing for the national title in each of those seasons; it takes a championship-caliber team to beat Bama.]

The last time Auburn beat Alabama in a manner that didn't require a miraculous comeback or the single most stunning play in the rivalry's history was 2007, when the Tigers earned a ho-hum (relatively speaking) 17-10 win over Nick Saban's first Tide team.

A win by Auburn this Saturday would be far from ho-hum [the stakes are exponentially higher than they were in 2007], but the consensus seems to be that the Tigers—should they reach peak performance—are capable of simply lining up and beating Alabama.

That belief stems primarily from the events of November 11, when Auburn dominated the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball in an impressive 40-17 thrashing of then-No. 1 Georgia and injury-riddled Alabama looked as vulnerable defensively as it has in a long time in a 31-24 win over Mississippi State.

So what will happen this Saturday? Here are three keys to keep an eye on:

•**Jalen Hurts.** The game is bound to be close, and Hurts has a habit of coming through with clutch plays in the fourth quarter. He's unflappable, he takes care of the ball, and his ability to make game-changing plays with his legs gives the Tide a dimension that Georgia's offense simply didn't have.

•**Auburn's defensive front.** It's perhaps the best unit on the field, on either side of the ball. And D-line also happens to be the facet of the game most likely to be enhanced by a raucous home crowd. If Derrick Brown, Marlon Davidson, Jeff Holland and company dominate, Auburn has a great chance to win.

•**Kerryon Johnson.** Yes, Jarrett Stidham will have to play well. Sure, Auburn's receivers can't afford to disappear the way they did in losses to Clemson and LSU. But Johnson is the identity and the engine of this offense. Will his patient, probing style be effective against an Alabama front that has struggled some of late to create penetration? Can he continue to gain those yards after contact? If so, that's another plus for Auburn.

For the first time since 2013, the Iron Bowl truly feels like a toss-up. It has a chance to be an outstanding game. A Kick Six won't be necessary this time. A clutch kick from Daniel Carlson will suffice.

**The Pick: Auburn 23 Alabama 21**

# No GUTS, no GLORY



Last week's record-setting win at Weaver earned the Wildcats another chance to play at home, where they are 6-0 this season.

## A daring decision in OT capped off a thrilling win that has Colbert Heights in round three for the first time ever

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Late last Thursday night, a little less than 24 hours before his Colbert Heights team was slated to kick off perhaps the biggest game in the program's 52-year history, head coach Taylor Leathers was asked if he had a gut feeling on how the Wildcats would fare in their second-round matchup with Weaver in the Class 3A playoffs.

"I don't really get gut feelings," Leathers said, "but I know this—our guys will show up and lay it all on the line for forty-eight minutes, and we'll see what happens."

Hindsight, of course, is 20/20, but in retrospect Leathers' response could use a little clarification.

For starters, he may not get gut feelings *before* a game; *during* a game, on the other hand, is a different matter entirely. Secondly, Leathers knows his players will play as hard as they can for 48 minutes—assuming those 48 minutes are enough to settle things. On occasion, they're not.

Last Friday night, as it turns out, was one of those occasions. Down 21-0 early in the game, Weaver would not go quietly into the November night. Over the course of the final three quarters, the Bearcats took advantage of a questionable fourth-down targeting call against Colbert Heights, an onside kick, a high snap on a punt, an untimely fumble and their own quick-strike offense to pull even at 28-28 with barely a minute remaining.

As the game headed to overtime, Leathers looked across the field at Bill Bryan Stadium, stud-

ied Weaver head coach Daryl Hamby for a moment and had—wouldn't you know it—one of those gut feelings.

Leathers thought back to the previous week, when Hamby and the Bearcats, trailing by a point, had elected to go for two following their touchdown in the second overtime against first-round opponent Plainview. They converted, pulling out a 30-29 win on the road that punched their ticket to round two.

**"I knew if we didn't execute the play, our season would end, but there were a lot of factors involved,"** Leathers said of his decision to go for two and the win after the Wildcats' touchdown in OT. **"I felt like it was the right call. Sometimes, in the moment, you just get a gut feeling."**

With the film-study image of that two-point play still fresh on his mind, Leathers made a decision.

"The first thing in my mind when I looked across the field was, 'He's gonna do it again,'" Leathers said. "I looked at Coach Hamby and thought, 'If I don't do it first, he's gonna do it.' We decided to try and beat him to the punch."

The Bearcats got the ball first in overtime [at the Colbert Heights 10, as AHSAA rules dictate] and scored on their third play, kicking the extra point to take a 35-28 lead. The Wildcats answered with a score on their third offensive play when senior quarterback Kevin Shaw found the end zone on a keeper to cut the lead to one.

Leathers didn't hesitate.

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### Abby Hester

Senior guard, Vina

Hester helped the Lady Red Devils start their season strong at the Vina Holiday Tournament last week. The 5'2 senior guard averaged 20.7 points and hit 70-of-80 free throws, leading Vina to a 6-1 record and the tournament title.

Hester handed out double-figure assists in six of the seven games, including a state-record 19 in an 80-32 rout of Waterloo on Saturday. She also put up a triple-double with 20 points, 11 assists and 10 steals in a 69-24 blowout of Paint Rock Valley, and she scored a season-high 29 points in a 68-46 win over Class 4A Fayette County.



## 'GUTS' from page 13

"They had moved the ball effectively in the second half," he said, "and we had stalled somewhat offensively. We felt like the best decision to be made there was to go ahead and end the game, rather than try and extend it.

"I knew if we didn't execute the play, our season would end, but there were a lot of factors involved with that decision. I felt like it was the right call. Sometimes, in the moment, you just get a gut feeling. I knew that if we kicked [the extra point], they would score and put the pressure back on us offensively. I didn't want to be in that position."

The Wildcats immediately lined up to go for two, tried—unsuccessfully—to draw the Weaver defense offside with a hard count and then took a timeout to finalize the play call (without question the most important play call of Leathers' coaching career, and probably the most important play call in the history of Colbert Heights football).

They came back out in the same formation, with Shaw—who had already rushed for 161 yards on 21 carries at that point—taking the shotgun snap. The senior QB gave the ball to his younger brother, freshman receiver Carson Shaw, moving toward the right sideline on a jet sweep.

"It was an incredible moment for everybody there," Leathers said. "We always talk about leaving your mark, leaving your legacy on Colbert Heights football. We challenged our guys before the game. We reminded them that no team in Colbert Heights history had ever won eleven football games, and no team had ever earned a third-round berth. That was fresh on their minds. We told them, 'Don't let this be the last time you wear the blue and white.'"

"It's been a good play for us," Leathers said. "Carson's got the option to run or throw. It's an RPO, a run-pass option. In our timeout, we went over the X's and O's again of how to execute the play, just to make sure we were familiar with it. We thought he would either run it into that front pylon or he'd be able to throw it to an open receiver.

"When we said, 'Hey, let's go for the win here,' all the players were on board. They were excited about finishing the game right there. The execution was perfect."

Carson Shaw took the ball on the jet, and the Bearcat defense took the bait. Just as he had done on a far less consequential two-point try roughly a month earlier in a rout of Colbert County, the freshman lofted a pass over oncoming defenders and into the waiting hands of senior receiver Devin Holt in the end zone. Ball game.

"As soon as Devin caught it," Leathers said, "it was pure elation."

Colbert Heights players stormed onto the field and mobbed Holt, forming a blue and white dog pile just beyond the back of the end zone. Wildcat fans who made the long journey to Weaver made sure they got their money's worth, rushing the field to celebrate a 36-35 win that propelled their team into the state quarterfinals for the first time ever.

"It was an incredible moment for everybody there," Leathers said. "We always talk about leaving your mark, leaving your legacy on Colbert Heights football. We challenged our guys before the game. We reminded them that no team in Colbert Heights history had ever won eleven football games, and no team had ever earned a third-round berth. That was fresh on their minds. We told them, 'Don't let this be the last time you wear the blue and white.'"

"I couldn't be more proud of the players. The Lord has blessed us all year, and I feel like He had His hand on this football team right there at the end of the game."

Given the drama that unfolded in overtime, the events of regulation—those first 48 minutes—must have seemed like a distant memory by late Friday

See 'GUTS,' Page 15

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# Phil Campbell boys open season with rout of Tharptown

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

PHIL CAMPBELL - As they adjust to life without a handful of key seniors from last year's team, Brett Thomas knows his Phil Campbell boys will face their share of challenges this season.

He does not expect scoring points to be one of them.

"People think I'm lying," Thomas said, "but I think this can be one of the best offensive groups I've had. We can put five guys on the floor who can shoot, penetrate and post up. And this is a really unselfish group. These guys share the ball well."

The Bobcats looked sharp offensively last Friday night, shooting 49 percent from the field and assisting on more than half of their 24 made baskets in a season-opening 67-34 rout of visiting Tharptown.

Guards Rhett Benford and Nate Owens each knocked down three threes for Phil Campbell (1-0), and senior Peyton Thomas finished with 15 points, 11 rebounds and a team-high five assists.

It was Thomas, the Bobcats' leading scorer last season at 15.8 points per game, who set the pass-first tone right from the start, assisting on an early basket by senior post player Brody Nix that made it 9-0 less than two minutes into the game.

Thomas, who entered the night just 30 points shy of 1,000 for his varsity career, didn't even attempt a shot until midway through the second quarter and finished a highly efficient 6-for-8 from the field.

"I've told Peyton in front of the whole team, we're gonna go as he goes," Brett Thomas said. "He's our leader. For a guy like him who's such a profound scorer to come out and get his teammates involved the way he did tonight, that really set the tone. He's capable of putting up twenty-five or thirty a game, but he was really unselfish tonight."

Maybe a little too unselfish.

"There were times when we might have shared

See 'ROUT,' page 18

## 'GUTS' from page 14

night. There were plenty of highlights for the Wildcats (11-1), though: A fumble recovery by senior linebacker Korey Saint in the game's opening minute that set up senior fullback Dylan Chandler's one-yard touchdown run, his 21st of the season; a fumble recovery by defensive tackle Isaiah Miller that led to a 23-yard touchdown toss from Carson Shaw to tight end Evan Norton on the final play of the first quarter; Kevin Shaw's three-yard touchdown pass to Chandler early in the second quarter to make it 21-0; and a fumble recovery by Kevin Shaw on Weaver's first drive of the third quarter, which set up his own 41-yard touchdown strike to Chandler Willis that made it 28-14.

The Bearcats (7-5) completed their comeback, however, tying the game and setting the stage for the heart-pounding finish in OT.

"I knew they were very talented," said Leathers, whose team had allowed a total of just 42 points during a seven-game win streak heading into the second round. "They're a fast-strike team. They run a lot of zone read, a lot of RPO's, and that puts you in a bind defensively. They have some tremendous athletes at Weaver. They made some big-time plays, and that's a credit to them. They had a great plan going in, a solid plan."

"It was just a pleasure for me as a coach to be a part of a game like that. Our guys played with passion. They really wanted to make a statement and

do something that had never been done before. I couldn't be more proud of our players and especially our seniors. They took it upon themselves to make history."

With their eighth straight win, the Wildcats earned themselves a home game in the quarterfinals at Amos Mitchell Stadium. The day after Thanksgiving, they'll be battling two-time defending Class 3A champion Piedmont (11-1, including a 33-27 win over Weaver in the regular season) for a spot in the state semifinals.

"It's amazing," Leathers said. "All the glory goes to God. To be in this position, playing football on The Mountain the day after Thanksgiving, is just amazing."

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**COURTESY PHOTO**

Phil Campbell senior Leeah Jackson (seated, middle) is headed to Snead State on a softball scholarship. She is pictured above at last week's signing ceremony with her parents Doug and Nina Jackson and her sister Lindsey, a 2012 graduate of PCHS.

**Jackson signs with Snead**

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Coaches are reluctant by nature to compare players past and present. They—quite understandably—don't want to step on anybody's toes. Especially when the players in question happen to be the coach's own daughters.

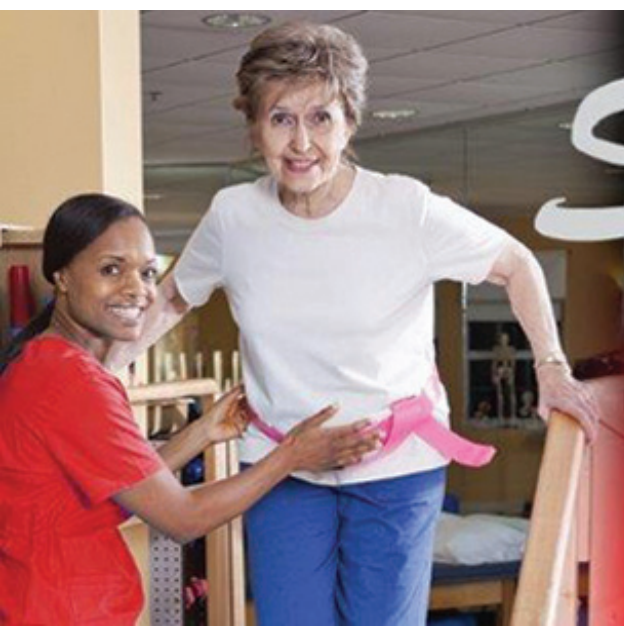
"No way," said Doug Jackson, now in his fifth year as head softball coach at Phil Campbell High School. "I'm not doing that."

Jackson, leaning against a bookcase in the PCHS library last Friday morning, smiled as he politely declined to even entertain the question: Who's the better player—his youngest daughter, Leeah, a senior who just moments earlier had signed a letter of intent to play at Snead State Community College; or his oldest daughter, Lindsey, a 2012 graduate of PCHS who went on to play two seasons of college softball at Calhoun?

Fortunately, Leeah was more than willing to take her father off the hook. "Oh, that's easy," she said, trying hard to keep a straight face. "I am."

All kidding aside, it's practically impossible to compare Lindsey, who made her living in the circle as a dominant pitcher, with Leeah, a slick

See 'JACKSON,' Page 18



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Clemson at South Carolina	Clemson	_____
Florida State at Florida	Florida State	_____
Texas A&M at LSU	LSU	_____
Alabama at Auburn	Auburn	_____
Ohio State at Michigan	Ohio State	_____
Notre Dame at Stanford	Notre Dame	_____
Washington St. at Washington	Washington	_____
Tiebreaker Score:	Alabama _____	Auburn _____
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Submit your picks to us each week in one of two ways: Fill out the entry form on this page and mail it to us at 113 Washington Ave. NW, Russellville, AL 35653, or email your picks to us along with your name and phone number at franklinfreepress@yahoo.com. Picks sent in by mail for Week 13 must be postmarked by Friday, November 24, and picks submitted by email for Week 13 must be received by Saturday, November 25 at 10 a.m. Each week, the contestant who correctly picks the most games will win a free T-shirt and the chance to pick in the grand-prize final-week contest. If multiple contestants correctly pick the same number of games in a given week, the tiebreaker score will be used to determine a winner. Contestants are only eligible to win the weekly contest once.

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## 'ROUT' from page 15

the ball a little too much," Brett Thomas said. "I may have to kick Peyton in the tail to get him to be a little more aggressive. He should never go a whole quarter without taking a shot."

With Thomas in set-up mode early, other scorers stepped to the forefront for Phil Campbell. Benford and Nix combined to score all nine points in the game-opening 9-0 run, and senior reserve Daniel Smith buried a three midway through the first quarter to quell a 6-2 spurt by Tharptown (1-2). A layup by senior Joe Hardy—off an assist from Thomas—made it 16-6, and the Bobcats led by eight at the end of one quarter.

The Wildcats hung around for most of the first half, trimming the lead to 22-14 on a basket by Misael Saldana midway through the second quarter. Thomas then found reserve post player Cody Cotham for a bucket to push the lead back into double-digits and spark a game-turning 12-0 run by Phil Campbell.

Thomas knocked down a mid-range jumper for his first field goal to make it 26-14 with 2:35 left in the first half and then followed it up with a pair of free throws. Benford added a free throw and a layup to push the lead to 31-14 and then closed

out the half with a key defensive play. He stole an inbounds pass on the press and then found Thomas for a back-breaking three that pushed the lead to 20 at 34-14 with just 12 seconds left before the break.

Benford, wearing a brace on the surgically repaired knee that slowed him down considerably throughout the second half of last season, finished last Friday's game with 16 points, two assists and two steals. He also keyed a Bobcat defense that held Tharptown to just 28-percent shooting (14-for-50) and forced 22 turnovers.

"Rhett really set the tone for us on defense tonight," Thomas said. "He's not all the way back to where he was, but he's getting there. He was really disruptive tonight. He did a good job keeping them from getting into any kind of a fluid rhythm on offense."

The Bobcats kept their own rhythm going early in the third quarter, getting a three from Owens and four quick buckets from Thomas to open up a 45-18 lead. Edward Lopez scored seven points to try and keep Tharptown close, but Phil Campbell shot 7-for-9 from the field in the fourth quarter to pull away. Back-to-back threes by Owens and Benford

midway through the fourth pushed the lead to 30 and triggered the running clock.

Owens finished with 13 points and four rebounds, and Nix added seven points, four boards, three assists and two steals. Hardy also scored seven, and Cotham had four points and four rebounds off the bench. Isaac Cummings added two points. The Bobcats hit eight threes and shot 11-for-15 from the foul line, but their head coach was less than pleased with 19 turnovers.

"That's too many," Thomas said, "especially for a team with the experienced guard group we have. We also gave up a few backside rebounds, but those are things we can work on in practice and get corrected. Overall, I think we did okay."

"Our kids busted their tails the whole game, and that's what you're looking for first and foremost in the first game of the year."

Lopez led Tharptown with 14 points and six rebounds on Friday. Saldana added eight points and six boards. Senior guard Levi McCormack, who torched Waterloo for six threes and 26 points in a win last Thursday night, managed just five points against Phil Campbell, though he did add five rebounds and three assists.

## 'JACKSON' from page 16

fielder with speed whom Snead State coach Tracy Grindrod calls "a true second baseman." This much, however, is certain—Leeah wanted to follow in her older sister's footsteps.

"I've wanted to play softball in college probably since I was seven years old," said Leeah, who also drew interest from Covenant College in Chattanooga, Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, Wallace-Hanceville and even the University of South Carolina. "My sister played, and I wanted to be like her."

Well, except for the whole pitching thing. Leeah took pitching lessons alongside Lindsey as a youngster and briefly spent some time in the circle as a seven-year-old playing travel ball for the North Alabama Kraze, but her speed and athleticism had her ticketed for the infield. Second base was a natural fit for her hard-nosed style.

"I like to get dirty," said Jackson, who has been playing varsity softball at Phil Campbell since the end of her seventh-grade year. "I don't like those routine groundballs that are hit right at me. I like the ones where I have to move one way or the other and dive for it. And the good thing about playing second base is, you can get dirty and still

have time to get up and make a throw."

Jackson believes her glove to be her greatest asset, but she's no slouch at the plate—or, for that matter, on the bases. As a junior in 2017, she put together her best offensive season to date, setting new varsity career-highs with a .521 batting average, eight home runs, 46 RBIs and 32 stolen bases. She helped lead the Lady Bobcats to their first regional appearance in 10 years, winning the team's Most Valuable Player Award and earning All-County and All-Area honors as well.

Individual accolades aside, Jackson said her greatest thrill at Phil Campbell thus far was playing in Huntsville this past May in the Class 2A North Regional Tournament.

"That was our goal," said Jackson, who homered and drove in four runs in an 8-3 win over Sulligent at the Area 14 tournament that punched the Lady Bobcats' regional ticket. "We had been working for that for a long time."

Jackson can certainly appreciate the satisfaction that comes from achieving a longstanding goal. She saw how hard her older sister worked and trained, and she knew there would be no short cuts to the collegiate level.

"It's taken a lot of practice," Leeah said, "and a lot of hard work."

Grindrod first watched Jackson play with the Kraze as an 11-year-old, and Snead State offered her a scholarship in August of 2015, just a few months after Jackson had batted .505 with 44 RBIs and 26 stolen bases as a freshman at PCHS. She verbally committed to Snead that December, then went on to bat .417 with two homers, 32 RBIs and 29 steals for the Lady 'Cats as a sophomore.

Jackson had no qualms about committing to Snead State so early in her high school career. The invite to go work out for South Carolina was enticing; the eight-to-nine-hour drive, not so much.

Two hours to Boaz was plenty. And, besides, Grindrod had worked hard to cultivate a relationship with the Jacksons, an effort that didn't escape Leeah's notice.

"He really stayed in contact with me and kept up with me," she said of Grindrod, who led Snead State to the NJCAA National Tournament in Utah this past spring. "He's a good role model, too. He believes in putting God first, and that's something I can look up to."

Jackson looks forward to helping Snead State make another postseason run in the spring of 2019, but first there's the matter of her senior season at Phil Campbell. A .495 career hitter with 12 home runs, 174 RBIs and 110 stolen bases, she already has some individual and team goals in mind for her final year in the black and gold.

"I'd love to help us get back to the regional again and this time go to state," said Jackson, who went 4-for-8 with two walks, two runs and two RBIs in her three-game regional debut last season. "I want to keep improving as a hitter, too. I know the pitching at the college level is going to be tough."

Surrounded by family, friends, neighbors, teammates and classmates in the PCHS library at last Friday's ceremony, Jackson sounded eager to get started on her career as a college softball player.

"I'm so excited. It's been my dream forever," she said. "I've got so many people to thank, starting with my mom [Nina], my sister and my dad. I want to thank my grandparents, too, and the rest of my family. And also all my coaches, Coach Witt [Carl, who coaches the Kraze], Tracy Pace [an assistant at PCHS], my dad and of course Coach Grindrod."

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## LISTEN EACH WEEK FOR...

**FOOTBALL FRIDAYS**  
only on  
Real Country  
**WGOL 100.7 FM**  
920AM

## CHURCH

**Come Worship with Us!**  
**First Presbyterian Church**  
Sunday: 11:00 - 12:00  
Adult Sunday School: 10:00 - 11:00  
Everyone is invited to join us for this special time of worship.  
201 N. Green Street, Russellville

## PUBLIC SERVICE

BUCKLE UP! It Could Save Your Life!  
franklinsheriff.org  
(256) 332-8811  
Compliments of  
**Shannon Oliver**  
SHERIFF  
SHERIFF FRANKLIN COUNTY

## CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Franklin County Chamber of Commerce  
P.O. Box 44 • Russellville, AL  
Cassie Medley, Executive Director  
256.332.1760 • 256.332.1740 fax  
info@franklincountychamber.org  
franklincountychamber.org

## HEALTHCARE

**GET NOTICED!**  
IN THE BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY  
256.332.0214

**PREGAME@6:30**  
**GAME@7:00**

# Grand Opening SALE

# BLACK FRIDAY ONE DAY ONLY!

**Closeouts & Overstock**

## PARKER'S Merchandise

**Wholesale to the Public! Over 9,000 sq. ft.!**



Concealed Carry

Purses  
\$29.95



Ford F-150

Power Wheels  
\$249.00



Several Scents

Candles  
\$5.99



Over 1,000 in Stock

Tools & Flashlights  
All Kinds



Many Styles

Large Fireplace Heater  
\$99.99



Queen • Many Designs

Fleece Blankets  
\$15.99



Toddlers to Teens

Toy Shopper's  
Paradise!



Stack-On • 10 Gun

Gun Safes  
\$249 and Up

**Alabama & Auburn**

Blankets, Tumblers, Flags, Magnets,  
Tailgate Supplies and more!

**PLUS**

**BEDDING • SPORTING GOODS • JEWELRY  
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256.398.8939



Hwy 43 at Littleville  
Next door to Littleville City Hall  
Former Community Marketplace Bldg

**Even Santa Shops at Parker's!**

Regular Hours: Mon-Sat 8 - 7

Special Holiday Hours: Black Friday 11/24  
thru Dec 23 Mon-Sat 8 - 9, Sun 1 - 6

