

Is AT&T's fixed wireless internet available? See Page 8 for details.

The Russellville Police Department is seeking a new bilingual officer to replace Danny Gomez.

Several local eating establishments earned satisfactory health ratings.

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Franklin County's Bicentennial Celebration begins February 6

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Alabama will celebrate its 200th birthday on December 14, 2019, but there's another important bicentennial to be celebrated well before that date, as Franklin County turns 200 on February 6 of this year.

And Franklin County Archives director Chris Ozborn is in charge of planning the party.

The public is invited to a special Franklin County Bicentennial Kickoff Celebration on Tuesday, February 6 beginning at 10 a.m. at the Franklin County Archives, 300 Limestone Street NE in Russellville.

The day's events will include a performance of the Star-Spangled Banner by the Russellville Marching Hundred, an invocation by Jackie Richardson, a song written by the late Betty Starnes titled "Franklin County," a presentation on Franklin County's history by probate judge Barry Moore, posting and retrieving of the colors by the Tuscumbia Color Guard, and an unveiling of a commemorative Franklin County Bicentennial marker by the Franklin County Commission.

Russellville attorney Roger Bedford, Jr. will serve as master of ceremonies.

Additionally, coffee and refreshments will be served

See 'CELEBRATION,' Page 7



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Enchiff retires from RGB after 44 years

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

There are mornings when Roger Enchiff still wakes up preparing to go to work for the Russellville Gas Board.

After all, that was his life routine for 44 years.

Enchiff retired December 31, 2017, after almost four-and-a-half decades with the gas board. He served most recently as manager for the past three years.

"It took some getting used to," Enchiff said of retirement. "Sometimes I still want to get up and go to work."

Blaine Collier took over as manager January 1. During Enchiff's tenure with RGB, he served as an apprentice welder, journeyman and acting manager twice before becoming manager in October of 2014.

Russellville Gas Board employees held a retirement reception for Enchiff, his wife Brenda and their family before his final day.

"That was a bittersweet day," Enchiff said. "All of them are my friends. We got along real well, and I will miss that."

Linda Epperson, executive secretary/bookkeeper for RGB, worked with Enchiff for 40 years.

"It's been different without him. It's taken some getting used to," Epperson said. "He worked out with the guys until three years ago when he came into the office as manager. He liked his job and the employees he worked with. He had a good crew to work with, and the employees respected him."

As he approached retirement age, Enchiff said he was told by friends that he'd know when the time was right to retire, and that he might even wake up one day and decide that right then was the right time.

"I woke up one day and said it was time to go. Everyone said it would be like that, and it was," Enchiff said. "I'm not getting any younger, and I need some time on my own to get around and fish and go places, and that's what I'm going to do."

"We'll travel a little, I'll fish a little, hunt a little and just

See 'ENCHIFF,' Page 9

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Dustin Marvin Borden, Phil Campbell, age 32
Died Tuesday, January 9, 2018. Funeral held at Blue Springs
Baptist Church. Interment in Blue Springs Cemetery.

Ronnie Dewayne Cummings, Sr., Phil Campbell, age 70
Died Friday, January 12, 2018. Funeral held at Union Hill
Methodist Church. Interment in Union Hill Cemetery.

Travis "Doug" Thelton McAlister, Phil Campbell, age 78
Died Sunday, January 14, 2018. Funeral held at Akins Funeral
Home in Russellville. Interment in Blue Springs Cemetery.

Elizabeth Jean Potter, Russellville, age 78
Died Wednesday, January 17, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial
Chapel. Interment in Old Bethel Cemetery.

Mazel Renee Winstead Saint, Phil Campbell, age 75
Died Saturday, January 20, 2018. Funeral arrangements had not
been announced at press time.

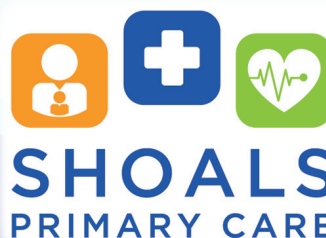
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RPD seeking bilingual officer to replace Gomez

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Police Department is once again without a bilingual police officer after the Russellville City Council approved the resignation of officer Danny Gomez at the council's January 18 meeting.

The council also declared another vacancy for a patrol officer and asked the Russellville Civil Service Board to add another name to the list.

Gomez began with RPD in 2016 after completing the law enforcement academy in Selma in December of 2015. Gomez's interest in law enforcement came after he learned of opportunities for Spanish interpreters through his wife's work with domestic violence victims. Gomez, who is fluent in Spanish, hit the streets of Russellville in February of 2016.

RPD chief Chris Hargett said at the time of Gomez's hiring that he hoped to add more Spanish-speaking officers, to the point where he could have one on duty during each shift. But

Hargett said the department receives few applications from bilingual candidates.

"Officer Gomez was our only fluent Spanish officer," Hargett said. "The problem is we just don't get a lot of bilingual applicants. It's a big blow to us to lose him."

"Officer Gomez was our only fluent Spanish officer," Hargett said. "The problem is we just don't get a lot of bilingual applicants. It's a big blow to us to lose him."

Hargett said Gomez is taking a position with the police department on the University of North Alabama campus.

In addition to his patrol officer duties, Gomez also served as an interpreter when the department dealt with non-English speaking crime victims or defendants.

"He received an interpreter's fee of two hours of overtime per week. It's been a big benefit to the city to have him," Hargett said. "I want to encourage anyone who wants to get into law enforcement and is bilingual to apply. It's a benefit for us

and for our Hispanic community, so we can communicate more easily with Spanish-speaking residents."

Gomez's departure brings the number of police officer vacancies to five. Hargett said the civil service board would be conducting interviews this week and he hopes to have four or five new officers hired soon.

In other action, the council:

- Approved a resolution entering into an agreement with Nelms & Gasque, LLC, to perform repairs on the Lawrence Street sidewalk in an amount not to exceed \$6,200. The repairs will be near the intersection of Jackson and Lawrence.

- Approved a quote of \$5,792 from Affordable Heating and Air for a new unit at the Russellville Municipal Airport.

- Approved a contract for baseball umpires with Mike Johnson for the upcoming youth baseball season in the amount of \$3,800.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council is set for Monday, February 5, with work session at 6 p.m. and meeting to follow.

Local businesses earn satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It was a good week for the Franklin County food/lodging establishments that received health ratings during the week of January 8 through January 12, with all scores falling in the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. The scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. A score below 60 results in immediate closing.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensil; linens cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage; and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

All of the 16 Franklin County operations listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment

health ratings scores 92 or above, making them all within satisfactory compliance.

The highest score received was 100, given to Wal-Mart #403 Deli, 13675 Hwy. 43.

Inspections of Franklin County businesses, with critical item violations noted, resulted in the following scores:

- Pollo Lo-Quillo, 115 Franklin Street, Russellville, 92. (Buffet food out of temperature).

- Legacy Chevron, 13518 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 92. (Dented cans).

- Yogi's Food Co., 501 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 92. (No hot water in public restrooms).

- N&F No. 1, Inc., 12301 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 92. (Rodents present in cabinets).

- Cardinal Drive-In, 602 4th Street W, Red Bay, 92. (Dented cans).

- Jack's #148, 13640 Hwy. 43 By-pass, Russellville, 95.

- Big Star Supermarket #345, 406 4th Street NW, Red Bay, 96.

- Wal-Mart #403 Bakery, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.

- Tiger Food Mart, 1202 4th Street, Red Bay, 96.

- Red Bay Hospital, 211 Hospital Road, 97.

- Wal-Mart #403 Market, 13675 Hwy. 43, 97.

- Belgreen High School, 14220 Hwy. 187, Russellville, 98.

- Red Bay High School Cafeteria, 800 Eighth Street, Red Bay, 99.

- Vina High School Cafeteria, 8250 Cty. Road 23, Vina, 99.

- Red Bay Sno Biz, 404 1st Street SE, Red Bay, 99.

- Wal-Mart #403 Deli, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 100.

Of the 17 businesses inspected from January 8-12 in Colbert County, all but three received scores of at least 90. Those scoring below 90 included:

- Yogi's Texaco, 17750 Hwy. 72 West, Tuscumbia, 83. (Rodent droppings in cabinet, Wings, BBQ and spicy chicken sandwiches being held at insufficient temperature, no proof of food-service employee reporting agreement).

- Steak and Stuff, 401-F Cox Blvd., Sheffield, 85. (Employee washing hands in the mop sink/service sink, mold in the ice machine).

- Jack's Family Restaurant, 1105 South Montgomery Avenue, Sheffield, 86. (Grease being dumped on pad, fry scoop broken).

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

Commission approves disbanding of water systems

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission voted at its meeting on Monday morning to accept resolutions from the Isbell and Rockwood Water Systems requesting they disband and have their service absorbed by the Russellville Water and Sewer Board.

Both systems receive water through Russellville already but handle billing and service themselves. Isbell and Rockwood manager Frank Bishop said it was no longer economically feasible for the water systems to continue operations.

Isbell Water System serves approximately 340 customers, and Rockwood serves 85.

In other action at Monday's meeting, the commission:

- Approved the termination of Miles Anthony Allen from the Franklin County Solid Waste Department and authorized the hiring of a temporary employee for that position.

- Approved a request from the Franklin County Sheriff's Department to purchase a telephone system from Ambient Solutions in the amount of \$7,737, with a monthly charge of \$431.20. The department is currently paying approximately \$2,000 per month for telephone expenses, so the new system is expected to provide a cost savings.

- Approved a promotion of Shane Oliver to sergeant from corrections officer.

- Authorized the removal and resetting of guardrails on a bridge on Highway 44 back to where they were originally set. A group of citizens appeared at the recent work session and addressed safety concerns about the bridge to the commission.

- Accepted a proposal of 2.48-percent fixed rate on a \$500,000 line of credit with Community Spirit Bank. The line of credit would be used to pay required up front expenses for road and bridge grant projects that will later be reimbursed to the county.

Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore said he hoped the line of credit would not be needed, but it is in place if the general fund can not absorb a required up-front payment on reimbursable grants.

Honey Do List: Pex pipe

Crosslinked polyethylene (PEX) is the new kid in town and is quickly changing plumbing as we know it.

Copper, polybutylene, PVC and CPVC are all being replaced by PEX, and for many good reasons, including flexibility, ease of installation and durability.

You may have noticed the red, white and blue pipe on the shelves of the local hardware store. No, they aren't trying to be patriotic. The assorted colors give the installer the ability to color-code the plumbing pipe. Commonly, red is for hot water, blue is for cold, and white may be used for incoming water lines to the house. There is no other difference in the colors.

Copper, polybutylene, PVC and CPVC are all being replaced by PEX, and for many good reasons, including flexibility, ease of installation and durability.

Pex is available in different lengths from five feet to 100 feet or more. The flexibility of this product allows it to be sold in a roll. The longer lengths lessen the number of connections, and the flexibility greatly reduces the number of elbows needed. Using PEX can result in

about 40 percent fewer connections, and that equals 40 percent less potential leaks.

PEX eliminates the mess of glue. Connections are made using a crimp ring and crimpers, or "push-fit" connectors such as "Shark-bite."

PEX is much less likely to burst when the water freezes. Any water-carrying pipe that is exposed to cold temps should be insulated. PEX can be insulated using foam sleeves just like any other pipe. The flexibility of the pipe gives it a hedge against copper, PVC or galvanized when it comes to freezing.

PEX is also less corrosive than other common pipe. Minerals and chlorine don't wear through like they can in copper and PVC.

Is PEX the perfect plumbing solution? No, not by a long shot. But, if properly installed, it will last longer than anything else out there. Plus, it's quicker, easier and cheaper to install.

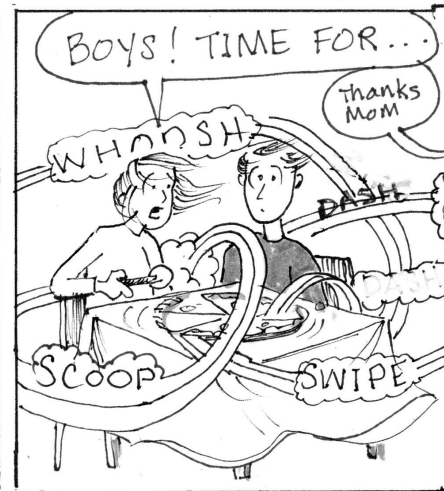
Next week, we'll discuss "Shark-bite" fittings. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green

Our House

by Ree Shannon



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How to save big on your next home

Courtesy of DaveRamsey.com

When you're planning to buy a home with a mortgage, it's natural to focus on how much your monthly payment will be. After all, Dave Ramsey recommends you keep your payment at 25 percent or less of your monthly take-home pay.

As you're browsing homes with your real estate pro, it's also natural to be tempted to get a 30-year mortgage rather than a 15-year mortgage. An \$800 monthly mortgage payment could buy you a \$120,000 home on a 15-year mortgage, or a \$185,000 home on a 30-year mortgage. That's quite an upgrade in home!

But, while the difference in price is \$65,000, you'll end up paying way more than that over 30 years. Here's the breakdown:

With a 15-year mortgage on a \$120,000 home, you'll pay a total of \$145,350—\$25,350 of which is interest on the loan. With a 30-year mortgage on a \$185,000 home, you'll pay a total of \$292,177—\$107,177 of which is interest. That's twice as much total and more than four times the interest.

If that's not enough to convince you that a shorter-term mortgage is worth it, let's look at the numbers a different way. Instead of comparing two homes at two prices with the same payment, we'll look at one \$200,000 home with two different terms and payments.

With a 15-year mortgage, the payment on a \$200,000 home is \$1,330 a month. We're assuming our homeowner made a 10-percent down payment and got a four-percent interest rate. The payment on the same home with a 30-year mortgage would be \$860 a month, but 30-year mortgage rates are almost always higher than rates

for 15-year mortgages. If we bump the interest rate up to 4.75 percent, the payment jumps to \$940 a month.

A \$940 payment fits into most people's budgets a lot easier than \$1,330, but again, the extra interest you pay on a longer-term mortgage is mind-boggling. You'll pay nearly \$100,000 more for the same home with a 30-year mortgage than you would with a 15-year mortgage.

The wrong mortgage can cost you future opportunities. Clearly, a 30-year mortgage is much more expensive than a 15-year mortgage. But what about the opportunity cost of a longer-term loan? What could you do with an extra \$100,000 and 15 more years of being debt-free?

Consider the impact of that money on your retirement plans. Once your 15-year mortgage is paid off, you could begin investing your \$1,330 payment for retirement. Over the next 15 years, that would add nearly \$560,000 to your nest egg. Let that money ride for five more years, and you'd have an extra million dollars for retirement!

Or maybe your retirement is in good shape once you've paid off the house and you're completely debt-free, but now you've got a kid heading to college. Your payment would go a long way toward cash-flowing expenses not covered by scholarships, grants and part-time work.

Freeing up that money 15 years sooner provides plenty of opportunity to invest, travel and give. Don't let the temptation of a lower payment, or a bigger home, lure you into giving up those opportunities!

*Used with permission from DaveRamsey.com.
For help deciding which mortgage is right for you, visit <https://www.daveramsey.com/mortgage-calculator>.



DAVE SAYS

Financial Straight-Talk

www.davesays.org

by Dave Ramsey

No-cash businesses?

Dear Dave,
What is your opinion of businesses that no longer accept cash?

Heath

Dear Heath,
Honestly, I think the whole scenario is kind of silly. Businesses that are suddenly into the "no cash" thing lose out on a lot of transactions. Believe it or not, there are still tons of people out there who make purchases only with cash. So, from a business owner's perspective, this philosophy can cut into your market share.

I really don't spend a lot of time thinking or worrying about the situation, though. When it comes right down to it, most businesses are doing that kind of thing for one or two reasons. Some of them just think cash is old-school, and they want to give the impression that they're cutting edge and into technology. Others do it—depending upon the space they're in—because their sales using plastic are higher than with cash.

I'm a cash guy. There are some situations where I might walk away if someone wouldn't accept hard, cold cash, but in most cases I don't think anything about it. I'll just use my debit card instead and buy what I need.

Dave

When can I have some fun?

Dear Dave,
At what point can you spend, and have a little fun, when you're follow-

ing the Baby Steps plan?

Jen

Dear Jen,
Everyone likes having fun, and there's nothing wrong with spending some cash if you can afford it. I just want people to make sure they have their finances in order first.

I recommend completing the first three Baby Steps before you run out and buy a bunch of toys. Just to review, Baby Step 1 is saving \$1,000 for a starter emergency fund. Baby Step 2 is where you pay off all debt—except for your home—using the debt snowball method. In Baby Step 3, you go back and fully fund your emergency fund with enough cash to cover three to six months of expenses.

Completing the first three Baby Steps puts you on pretty solid financial ground. At this point, once you've saved up the cash, it's okay to take a vacation or buy a reasonably priced toy. But don't have so much fun that you forget about the other Baby Steps.

Baby Step 4 means putting 15 percent of your income into pre-tax retirement plans, like mutual funds and Roth IRAs. Don't neglect saving for college if you have kids. That's Baby Step 5. Baby Steps 6 and 7 are paying off the house early, and building wealth and giving like never before.

Remember, there are only three things you can do with money—spend, save and give. You can do all three of those things without putting yourself in a bind by following my plan!

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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 **R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston Butts during Super Bowl weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, February 3 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.


 **K**ids and Kin dates for January through March in Franklin County are as follows and will be held at the Franklin County Baptist Association Building, 128 Guard Street NE, Russellville, AL: Thursday, January 25 at 5 p.m.—“Sensory Processing Disorder Signs in Infants and Toddlers,” Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama; Thursday, February 8 at 5 p.m.—“Teaching Children Tolerance,” Rebecca Richmond, Child Care Central; Thursday, February 22 at 5 p.m.—“Healthy Habits,” Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama; Thursday, March 8 at 5 p.m.—“Ready or Not, Here I Come,” Dee McNalley, UCP; Thursday, March 22 at 5 p.m.—“Ways Babies Learn When You Sing to Them,” Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama.


 **T**he Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris, Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, February 1 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!


 **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 February 8.


 **T**he Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, February 10 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Call 256-335-4356.


 **M**ountain Valley Hee Haw features live music every Friday and Saturday night. Show time is 6 p.m. Karaoke at 7 p.m. on Thursday nights. Free admission. No alcohol or drugs. From Russellville, take 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on left. Call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

 **N**ew Life Ministries would like to invite you to join them for Sunday School at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings and for worship services on Sundays at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Wednesdays at 7 p.m. On the first Sunday of each month, there will be a fellowship lunch after morning services. You and your family are invited to come worship and fellowship with the Lord of Hosts and his children. New Life Ministries is located on Hwy. 24 west toward Red Bay, right behind Tompkins Feed.

 **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!

 **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.

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

 **G**entiva Hospice offers a grief support group, “Grieving Well Together,” that meets the third Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Lenox room at Calvary Baptist Church in Russellville. You are invited to attend.

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'CELEBRATION' from page 1

with the assistance of the Order of the Easter Star Charity Chapter #1.

Along with six other counties, Franklin County was formally created by the Alabama Territorial Legislature on February 6, 1818. Lauderdale County also celebrates its Bicentennial that same day.

The City of Russellville was incorporated on November 27, 1819, so its Bicentennial will fall on November 27, 2019, a few weeks before Alabama's 200th birthday.

Ozborn was appointed chairperson of the Bicentennial Committee for both Franklin County and the City of Russellville in 2016. Ozborn formed a Franklin County Bicentennial Committee to assist in the preparation of events. Those committee members include Buffie Ozborn, Cassie Medley, Tracie Clark, Doris Hutcheson, Jackie Richardson, Grant Atkins, Nicole Pell and Sharon Hester.

"We very much want this to be a community-wide celebration," Ozborn said. "If anyone has any suggestions or wants to help in any way, we need all the help we can get and would appreciate it. We're going to try and have something everyone can be proud of, and hopefully it will come out like we want it to."

When the song "Franklin County" is played on February 6, it will be a recording of Starnes' voice singing her original work. Starnes, who never lived in Franklin County, had ancestors from the area.

She was the great-great-granddaughter of Jessie Amos Bolton, Ozborn said. Starnes wanted to start a family reunion and learn about where her ancestors lived. So Ozborn helped her start a family reunion for the Bolton, Massey, Strickland and Carpenter families, along with a few other related families. The result was a massive family reunion with more than 300 people in attendance.

"We very much want this to be a community-wide celebration," Ozborn said.

"If anyone has any suggestions or wants to help in any way, we need all the help we can get and would appreciate it. We're going to try and have something everyone can be proud of."

"Betty loved Franklin County," Ozborn said. "There's nobody who never lived here who loved Franklin County like she did."

Ozborn said Starnes' son, John, plans to attend the February 6 Bicentennial Celebration.

Ozborn wants to see Franklin County and Russellville City Schools get into the Bicentennial Celebration as well. She applied for and received a grant through the Franklin County Development Community Development Commission for \$1,620.

That money was used to purchase six sets of 45 books, one set for each high school in the county, that portray historical figures native to Alabama. Some of those profiled include Nelle Harper Lee, Henry Aaron, Nat King Cole, Paul Bryant and Wernher Von Braun.

A Bicentennial poster contest will be held through the Franklin County Extension Office as another way for students to get involved in the celebration.

There are two additional major events planned to celebrate Franklin County's Bicentennial. There will be a Pioneer Day at Sloss Lake on Saturday, May 12, and a Franklin County Historical Trail 'Pastport' promotion.

Pioneer Day will feature living history vendors from the era when Franklin County was born. There will be portrayals of Andrew Jackson, Major Andrew Russell, Chief George Colbert and a group portraying soldiers from the War of 1812.

"We want that day to have the look and feel of how Franklin County and Russellville may have looked back in the early 1800s," Ozborn said.

Ozborn is particularly excited about the Franklin County Historical Trail 'Pastport' promotion, which starts on March 1.

Participants can visit the Franklin County Archives and pick up their 'pastport,' which has boxes for 20 different historical locations in Franklin County. Each time you visit one of the locations, you get your 'pastport' stamped and signed.

When all 20 locations have been visited and verified, participants turn in their 'pastports' to the Franklin County Archives.

The promotion will run through November 20, 2019. On November 22, 2019, one 'pastport' will be drawn out, and the winner will receive a gift basket full of products made in Franklin County.

"I'm so excited about the Franklin County Historical Trail Pastport," Ozborn said. "Not only is it a way to learn the history of Franklin County, but you get to visit places and learn first-hand about them. Also, we hope you'll want to go back and learn even more about our local history."

"It's something that's good for Franklin County in every way."

For more information on the Bicentennial Celebration for Franklin County and the City of Russellville, contact Ozborn at 256-332-8827.

To learn more about the State of Alabama's Bicentennial celebration, log onto www.alabama200.org.

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Local man frustrated by 'mixed messages' from AT&T on fixed wireless

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When AT&T held a ribbon cutting ceremony December 19 recognizing the first of a planned series of towers in Franklin County to be equipped to offer wireless broadband internet service, it was good news to Junior Vinson.

The tower is located just east of Macedonia Baptist Church on County Road 724. Vinson, who lives half a mile from the tower, saw an opportunity to see his internet speed double, from the current AT&T cell-based 5-megabit-per-second speed to the company's promised 10-megabit-per-second speed to all users within a three-to-five-mile range of the tower.

After a series of attempts to sign up for AT&T's fixed wireless internet though, Vinson still doesn't have the new service, and he continues to receive what he describes as mixed messages from AT&T officials as to whether it's even available yet in his area.

"I've talked to network services with AT&T, and they say they haven't put that network in service yet," Vinson said. "Then I have a text message from Dave Hargrove confirming to me it is available. If it's available, why is it nobody in this community can get it? Every single person I've talked with says they were told it's not available."

Hargrove, who works for AT&T governmental affairs, said at the ribbon cutting that there were approximately 250 to 300 residences and businesses within range of the tower that were eligible to subscribe to the service.

AT&T fixed wireless internet works through an antenna installed on the user's home or business and an indoor Wi-Fi Gateway router. That antenna communicates with the nearest cell tower to ensure the strongest, most reliable signal, according to <https://www.att.com/internet/fixed-wireless.html>.

Hargrove said AT&T's plan was to install at least three more towers in Franklin County this year, although he cautioned those plans were tentative. Location of the towers is determined by census information and a formula used by the Federal Communications Commission, he said.

"They came and did this grand opening for this service, and it's not even available," Vinson said. "I told them, 'Find me one person who's got it and I'll leave you alone', and they can't do it."

The cost for AT&T fixed wireless service was projected to be \$60/month (\$50/month if bundled with another AT&T service).

AT&T's web site allows interested users to log on and find out if their address qualifies in their area for AT&T fixed wireless service. That's what Vinson did, hoping to see his internet speed double.

"They came and did this grand opening for this service, and it's not even available," Vinson said. "I told them, 'Find me one person who's got it and I'll leave you alone', and they can't do it."

An official with AT&T public relations spoke with the *Franklin Free Press* Monday and indicated that there are additional technical and FCC requirements that determine who can get the fixed wireless product. The spokesperson said she would forward an official statement from AT&T on the issue.

Vinson has spoken with several AT&T representatives, including the company's office of the president. He says a representative with the president's office referred him back to Hargrove, causing Vinson more frustration.

"It seems strange to me that Dave Hargrove is the person you are now relying on to investigate the availability of the new Wi-Fi service," Vinson said in an email to AT&T. "Why would you rely on Dave Hargrove to investigate something he already believes exist when it does not exist? The day you transferred my call to someone at the AT&T network, I was told by that person that the new Wi-Fi service was not yet installed on the Newburg tower."

"When I asked that person at the AT&T network to provide me that information in writing, he refused. The fact that no one at AT&T is willing to provide to me in writing that the Wi-Fi hasn't been installed yet is why I'm still asking."

Vinson received the following response from Anthony Henn with AT&T's office of the president: "I have been in contact with Dave Hargrove. I apologize that I was not able to get back with you sooner. Dave has assured me that he is working diligently to investigate the availability of the Fixed Wireless service in your area."

"As of my last communication with him on 1/19/18, we are still awaiting a response from several key individuals in this investigation. I assure you that

See 'WIRELESS,' page 11

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Rain or shine, every day is a brand new blessing

Gail Motes
For the FFP

Since I wrote this a few days before you're reading it, I have no idea about today's weather forecast. But that won't change my way of seeing things.

Whether it's a beautiful, sunny day or a stormy, rainy day, it doesn't lessen my appreciation. I consider every day a blessing.

I'm not saying the weather can't be an inconvenience at times. If I had planned on wearing my new shoes and showing my friends a new hair style, then pouring rain and 40-mile-an-hour winds would change my plans—but not my attitude. It doesn't ruin my day.

[I'm not about to get my new shoes muddy and wet or have my new hair-do end up looking like Phyllis Diller's, though.]

Being blessed with another day will give me another opportunity to wear my new shoes. And, even if my days are up, I could still wear them; I won't know anything about it, but it would give my boys a chance to make a well known comment—"It was the last thing we could do for her, since she never had the chance to wear them."

Now don't go getting offended by my comment. It's just the way I think, and I usually say what I think. On that note, I would like to say that people who always see things in a negative way really irritate me. They are also the ones who complain the most.

You know the ones I mean—the ones who seem to think the weather should match their plans. That has got to be a miserable life.

It can also be another way of thinking, which puts everything in perspective.

It's kind of funny, in a way. After all, we ask God to change our situation, not realizing He put us in that situation to change us.

Life is full of challenges. I challenge myself by getting out of unusual situations. I challenge others by trying to help them understand the way I see life in a positive way, or, when they tell me that I don't make any sense, by convincing them, "Oh yes I do!"

I refer to that as my "words of wisdom."

I hope you appreciate each day you are given.

Changing the way we measure success in education

By Larry Lee

Dr. Steve Edwards is the real deal. With 43 years in the education field, he knows of what he speaks. He runs a consulting firm in Virginia and has done work in 49 states and 55 counties. Clients include the United Nations and the World Bank. The author of five books, Edwards has also taught at two major universities.

As Edwards says, "I have been in the profession long enough to figure out what does not work."

So, when he says A-F school report cards do not work, I pay attention. Here are some of his thoughts:

"The A-F scale is looking at education through a 20th-century lens," Edwards said. "[It is] a very backward approach. Legislators like this because it is easy; an A or B is good, a C is average and so on. Research supports that negative reinforcement does not work. Think about being a child who struggles in school. They find out their school gets an F, what does that do for morale??

"A MUCH better approach is to look at a set of both quantitative and qualitative indicators," Edwards continued. "Have each school establish

a baseline on the indicators and then recognize growth. No one individual and no one organization is good at everything, but what if you had a set of multiple indicators where schools could highlight growth in particular areas and identify areas for specific assistance?

"No one individual and no one organization is good at everything," Edwards said, "but what if you had a set of multiple indicators where schools could highlight growth in particular areas and identify areas for specific assistance?"

"Let me give you an example. If I play golf, I may work hard at it every day but will never shoot par. Am I a failure? What if over the next five years my handicap drops from 25 to 15. Now that is growth. I can look at specific elements of my game that I have improved such as off the tee, short game, chipping, putting. I can work on my mental game, focus, etc. You get the picture.

"We know there are so many aspects to success," Edwards said, "and traditional measures don't always capture these. The other day I was reading an article in *Forbes* that talked about how the vast majority of self-made millionaires

were C and D students in school. Frankly I am one of them. I finished in the bottom 10 percent of my graduating class in high school. I repeated fourth grade because I could not read. My parents were of modest means [I was not born with money, nor did I inherit money; my parents died broke], and I have become a multi-millionaire. I am not trying to brag; I am trying to make a point.

"By every measure in school, I was a failure," Edwards goes on. "Our educational system values the wrong things. Look at any of the international education experts, Ken Robinson, Yong Zhao, Tony Wagner—the list goes on and on. We don't listen to them, we don't look at the research. Would you go to a doctor who made decisions based on 20th-century practices? Of course not, but that is what we do in education.

"I speak all over the world on education, leadership and reform. People love to hear what I have to say, but then they go back and do the same thing."

Isn't it amazing how we ignore voices like Steve Edwards'?

Larry Lee is a public-school advocate and co-author of the study, *Lessons Learned From Rural Schools*. Email him at Larrylee133@gmail.com.

'ENCHIFF,' from page 1

take it easy."

Enchiff said there's one place he's always wanted to visit, and he plans to make the trip in the near future.

"New York City. I've always wanted to go there, but I'll probably wait until it's a little warmer," he said. "It's where my granddaddy came into this country, through Ellis Island. He came in from Bulgaria, and I'd like to see that."

"I think our gas department is one of the best in the state," Enchiff said. "Our people really care about their jobs. And the way it's run is a big part of its success."

The Enchiffs have two children and three grandchildren, so retirement will allow Roger to spend more time with family as well. But he'll never forget about his second family and the 44 years he spent with them.

"I think our gas department is one of the best in the state," he said. "Our people really care about their jobs. And the way it's run is a big part of its success."

"Retirement has been nice so far, but it was hard to do."



Recently retired from the Russellville Gas Board after 44 years, Roger Enchiff (fourth from left) plans to relax, travel and spend more time with family.

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Courtesy of DaveRamsey.com

Starting a new business is one of the most exciting and frightening experiences an entrepreneur will ever have. Not only do you have customers to care for, you have a team that is counting on you, too.

Most small business owners can't afford to provide for their employees the way they would like right off the bat. Growing the business means more money, and more money means more opportunity to give back to the folks who help get you there. But how do you take care of your team when things are just getting started?

Benefits are expensive, especially when it comes to something like healthcare. If you have less than 10 people on your team, you will often find they can buy health insurance for themselves cheaper than you can buy it for them. In

scenarios such as this, there's nothing wrong with putting an emphasis on salary over benefits. Pay them a little more—even if it's more than you had originally planned—to give them a little help paying for healthcare coverage. Keep in mind, too, that if they're married there's also the possibility they could get insurance through a spouse's workplace.

If you can't afford to go a little higher in terms of regular compensation, give them benefits that aren't traditional corporate-type benefits. By this, I mean treat them like family.

Bring in coffee and doughnuts every couple of weeks, or plan simple, inexpensive holiday celebrations. Be there when babies are born, and recognize professional *and* personal milestones in their lives. Slip them some extra cash when they've performed especially well on a project or task. Around my office, we call it a \$100 hand-

shake.

If there's a death in the family, make sure to attend the funeral services and rally the rest of the team around them. When someone has lost a loved one and is hurting, simple things like making time to talk, giving them a couple of extra days off or arranging meals for the family can be a tremendous help. These are the kinds of things people don't forget.

In other words, you can treat them like human beings. Most people aren't treated that way in corporate America these days.

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

'WIRELESS,' from page 8

every effort is being made to address your concerns. I apologize for any inconvenience caused and appreciate your patience as we work to provide more information regarding your request." In spite of his difficulty in getting a direct answer

from AT&T, Vinson said he still wants the fixed wireless service because of its promised speed. But he believes the company held a ribbon cutting ceremony for a service that it's not prepared to offer to customers. And he let his frustration show

in a recent correspondence to the company's office of the president.

"If the office of the president of AT&T can't get answers," Vinson said, "then AT&T has some serious problems."

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Hamilton's late basket lifts B-team Tigers to title

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - Tanner Hamilton's putback of his own miss with 25 seconds remaining on Monday night gave Red Bay's B-team boys the lead for good in a 41-39 victory over Belgreen in the finals of the Franklin County Tournament.

Hamilton finished with 13 points to lead the Tigers, and Dawson Wright added 12 points on four three-pointers.

Scout Bragwell shot 11-for-14 from the foul line and also made a pair of threes, finishing with a game-high 21 points for Belgreen.

Bragwell's high-arching three from deep on the left wing closed out the third quarter and gave the Bulldogs a 32-31 lead. A free throw by David Plott early in the fourth stretched the lead to two, but Wright buried his fourth and final three of the night at the 4:07 mark to put the Tigers on top 34-33.

Alex Kennedy scored for Red Bay to stretch the lead to 36-33, but Plott came right back with a bucket to get Belgreen back within one. Hamilton hit two free throws for the Tigers, but Isaac Willingham made two at the line for the Bulldogs to cut it back to a one-point game at 38-37.

After a turnover by Red Bay, Willingham dropped in a runner from the right baseline to give Belgreen a 39-38 lead with 40 seconds to play. The Tigers turned the ball over again, but the Bulldogs missed the front end of a one-and-one. Lane Shewbart grabbed the rebound for Red Bay, giving the Tigers a chance to regain the lead.

Hamilton drove the paint and missed his initial shot, but he grabbed the rebound and stuck it back in to give the Tigers a 40-39 edge. After a miss on the other end by the Bulldogs, Shewbart grabbed another big rebound and was fouled with 3.3 seconds remaining. He was fouled and made 1-of-2 at the line, stretching the lead to 41-39.

Willingham rebounded the miss on the second free throw, but his 65-foot heave came up short as time expired, and the Tigers took home the county title.

Belgreen got five early points from Bragwell and a three from Koby Collins, but Wright countered with a three-pointer for Red Bay and the game was tied 8-8 at the end of one.

See 'TITLE,' Page 19

Long time coming

Phil Campbell's girls won their first county title in 20 years. Even more exciting? They're just getting started.

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - At 5'2, Darby Elliott is closer to the floor than just about everybody else on it. But few players—if any—cover quite as much of the playing surface, quite as quickly, as Phil Campbell's senior guard.

Elliott scoots around the hardwood like a souped-up Roomba that's been modified to operate at warp speed. She is a human energy drink, a tiny shot of espresso in a uniform. Surely she must be exhausted after a game.

"I hustle," Elliott says matter-of-factly, "so I'm pretty tired. But at the end I'm always glad I did it."

Harassing dribblers all over the floor, darting in and out of passing lanes and zipping to the basket for lightning-fast layups, Elliott sets a frenetic tone—and the rest of the Lady Bobcats follow.

She was at it again on Monday night at Belgreen High School, slicing and dicing her way to 13

See 'TIME,' Page 14



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

SISTER ACT - Dakota (23) and Darby Elliott helped the Lady Bobcats beat Red Bay and Belgreen to claim their first crown since 1998.

Bulldogs go back-to-back

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

BELGREEN - Eli Hiser heard the chatter.

Belgreen is vulnerable.

Belgreen is struggling.

Belgreen might not be the favorite any more.

Hiser and his Bulldog teammates ("brothers," as he calls them) listened to all the talk in the days leading up to the Franklin County Tournament. They absorbed it. They channeled it. They *owned* it.

"We kind of kept it to ourselves," said Hiser, a senior guard. "And we used it as fuel."

To be fair, the notion of Belgreen's sudden vulnerability wasn't entirely without merit. After dropping just two of 16 games against county competition since the start of last season, the Bulldogs lost that many in the span of three days the week before the tournament, falling by three at home to Phil Campbell and by eight on the road to Tharptown. They also weren't healthy, with junior guard Brant Bragwell—the team's second-leading scorer and top perimeter threat—sidelined by a

See 'BULLDOGS,' Page 16



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

TAYLOR MADE - Seth Taylor (22) scored 15 points in Saturday's semifinal win over Phil Campbell and then had a crucial late bucket in Monday's double-OT thriller with Red Bay.

'TIME' from page 13

points and helping Phil Campbell put the finishing touches on its first county championship in two decades with a 58-47 win over Belgreen.

"It's exciting," said Elliott, who shot 6-for-10 from the floor and also had three steals and two assists. "We haven't won it in twenty years, so we're all really excited."

Indeed, neither Elliott nor any of her teammates were born the last time Phil Campbell's girls took home the county crown. That was in 1998, when then-head coach Jerry Thomas led the Lady Bobcats to a win over host Red Bay in the final. Thomas sees about as many games now as he did then, mostly because his son Craig is the current head coach.

According to Elliott, the original Coach Thomas [most folks simply call him 'CT'] still dispenses the occasional word of encouragement—or correction, when it's needed.

"He tells us good job," she said, "and he tells us what we did wrong. He helps us."

The Lady Bobcats (16-5) did precious little wrong in their two previous meetings with Belgreen, overwhelming the Lady Bulldogs with pressure defense and routing them by a combined margin of 54 points. To hear Belgreen coach Chad Green tell it, it could have been worse.

"They beat us by twenty-three at Phil Campbell and then by thirty-one at our place," Green said, "and Craig was being nice."

Most observers expected more of the same on Monday night, particularly with Belgreen (14-8) missing a key scorer and facilitator in junior guard Gabbie Moore (sidelined by injury for the fourth time in the last five games). The Lady Bulldogs

proved worthy challengers, however, beating up Phil Campbell on the boards early and minimizing their turnovers to make it a four-quarter game.

"We had nothing to lose," Green said. "There was no pressure on us. I thought our girls came out and played with confidence."

Thomas likewise saw no fear in Belgreen's girls. "Their game plan was good," he said. "Coach Green did a great job. They handled our press as well as anybody has all year. They took away the transition game from us and slowed the game down. They made us play in the half-court."

A half-court game is not typically the Lady Bobcats strength, but they don't typically shoot the ball from the perimeter the way they did in Monday's first quarter. Trailing 7-2 right out of the gate, Phil Campbell got one three-pointer from Dakota Elliott—Darby's younger sister—and two from junior post player Abby Davis in a 15-6 run that put them on top 17-13 at the end of one.

"Abby played about as well as I've seen her play," Green said of Davis, who finished the night with 21 points and 11 rebounds. "When she comes out hitting those threes, she's tough, because you know if you don't close out on her the right way, she's gonna put it on the floor and go to the basket and either score or draw a foul."

Davis, the team's leading scorer at 13.7 points per game, was in shot mode from the opening tip, hoisting 24 of them on her way to topping the 20-point mark for the third time this season. But it was the quality, not the quantity, of those looks that impressed her head coach.

"Abby Davis took better shots tonight," Thomas said. "She did a good job of attacking the basket.

She was aggressive."

Davis had 14 points by halftime, helping Phil Campbell take a 35-25 lead into the locker room. Belgreen hung around in the third quarter, getting three-pointers from Jasmine Martin and Emma Willingham and then a basket from freshman post player Emma Dempsey at the 2:15 mark to cut the lead to 43-36.

On Phil Campbell's next two trips down the floor, sophomore guard Kallie Allen grabbed two critical offensive rebounds and scored a pair of putbacks to spark a 9-2 run that stretched the lead to 52-38 and proved decisive.

"We hit a couple of shots there in the third quarter and were right in the game," Green said, "and that's when Allen got two offensive rebounds on that back side and made two big baskets. That was huge."

Those were Allen's only two field goals of the night, but she got to the foul line ten times and also had 10 rebounds and three steals to go along with her nine points. A transfer from Russellville, Allen has meshed seamlessly into what was already a talented, veteran mix; her arrival has given Thomas another dynamic two-way guard on the perimeter while allowing senior Chloe Roberson (who totaled 12 points and 13 rebounds in two tournament wins) to slide down into the post and devote more energy to doing the dirty work.

The addition of Allen (who averages 11.9 points per game) and, to a lesser degree, the development of freshman guard Caitlynn Mills, has meant a lighter load—but also fewer shot attempts—for Darby Elliott. As a junior last season, Elliott averaged a career-high 12.9 points per game; she's down to 9.5 per game this year, but she's scoring in a highly efficient manner. In two games at the county tournament, Elliott totaled 31 points on just 21 shots, shooting 71 percent from the floor.

To her credit, she has taken her somewhat reduced role on offense in stride.

"My role really didn't change," said Elliott, who entered Tuesday's game against Hamilton having scored 935 career points at the varsity level. "Kallie has come in and helped us a lot. She makes three-pointers, she gets rebounds, she's great on defense. She does a lot to help us. And Caitlynn comes in the game when we get tired and does a really good job."

Thomas knew coming into the year that Phil Campbell's fortunes would largely be determined by how quickly and how thoroughly each of his players adapted to the new personnel and embraced their changing roles.

"That was gonna be a big key for us," he said, "and I think the girls have done a super job. They've done exceptional."

Winning helps, of course, and the Lady Bobcats have done plenty of that. Monday night marked their sixth straight win, and the fact that it didn't come quite as easily as expected made their first county title in 20 years all the more satisfying.

"I guess it was, in a way," Davis said. "We had to work harder for this one, instead of being up 40 the whole game. It just makes the win that much sweeter."

"It's amazing that we brought something like this back to our school. And we have so much more to look forward to."

Thomas, for his part, seemed to enjoy the heck out of Monday night's game. He especially likes the challenge of matching wits with Green, whom he considers one of the better sideline strategists around.

"This was a great environment. I love coaching in



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW
Jasmine Martin (30) hit two threes in a semifinal win over Vina and two more in the finals against Phil Campbell, but Belgreen's title bid fell short.

'TIME' from page 14

games like this," said Thomas, a PCHS alum now in his fourth season with the Lady Bobcats. "I'd rather be in a game like that than in a thirty-point blowout any time. It's all about trying to figure out what they're doing and what you're gonna do to respond. That's the fun part.

"The crowd was great tonight. We'd hit a shot, and our crowd would erupt. Then they'd hit a shot, and their crowd would erupt. That makes it fun."

Dakota Elliott finished with nine points and eight rebounds on Monday night. She, Davis, Allen and Mills will all return next season, and Phil Campbell also won titles in both the ninth-grade division and the seventh-and-eighth-grade division at the junior high county tournament. The varsity championship was just the big, fat cherry on top.

"It's a building block for our program," Thomas said. "I think we're on the rise. We've got some good athletes coming up through the program right now, some good players. The next five years ought to be pretty good."

In other words, it probably won't be 20 years before the Lady Bobcats claim their next county crown.

"No," Thomas said. "Our goal is to repeat and win it again next year."

In the meantime, there's plenty of unfinished business to handle this season. The area tournament looms, with Hanceville—and perhaps even the bright lights of Birmingham—beckoning in the distance. Elliott was asked if Monday night's championship would be the last one the Lady Bobcats win this year.

"No," she said with a smile. "Area is next."

Should the Lady Bobcats make the regional tournament as expected, they might have company in Hanceville. Belgreen is steadily improving and building quality depth. Emma Dempsey led them with 11 points and eight rebounds on Monday night, and sophomore post player Ansley Tate had eight points and 11 boards. Had the Lady Bulldogs hit a few more shots [they finished the night at 29 percent], things might have gotten really interesting.

Either way, Green likes where his team is headed.

"I definitely think playing Phil Campbell three times has helped us get better," he said.

As for Thomas, he's just thankful there won't be a fourth.

"I'm just glad we don't have to play them again," he said. "It keeps getting closer."



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

After scoring nine points in Saturday's semifinal rout of Red Bay, Abby Davis (3) dominated Monday's final with 21 points and 11 rebounds.

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'BULLDOGS', from page 13

bum knee.

And so the talk grew louder, and the vultures started circling. Despite being the defending county champs and the No. 1 seed, the Bulldogs were suddenly the Underdogs.

"Dropping a couple of games the way we did kind of left the door open," head coach Clint Isbell acknowledged. "But that wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Instead of coming in as the favorites by far, our guys got a chance to play with a chip on their shoulders.

"I still thought we had a great opportunity in front of us."

If this year's county tournament taught us anything, it's this: A Bulldog, cornered and wounded, still has its bite.

After settling a score with Phil Campbell in Saturday's semifinal, Belgreen grinded out a 64-53 double-overtime win over second-seeded Red Bay in Monday's final, claiming its second consecutive county crown in front of a raucous over-flow crowd in the Belgreen High School gym.

Rumors of the Bulldogs' demise, it seems, were slightly exaggerated.

"These were two gutsy wins," said Isbell, whose team improved to 17-5 overall. "You have to give credit to Phil Campbell and Red Bay. They made it tough on us. Red Bay played extremely hard tonight. Coach [John] Torisky has done a great job with them. We have nothing but respect for the job he's done and the way he runs that program. They've really turned things around since last year."

Hiser echoed his coach's sentiments, heaping praise on a Tiger team that has gone from 2-24 a year ago to 13-8 this season.

"That's a really good team we just beat," said Hiser, who knocked down Belgreen's only three three-pointers of the night and also went 4-for-6 from the foul line in the two overtime periods on his way to scoring a team-high 17 points. "Red Bay deserves a lot of credit. That was a great game."

The largest lead of the first half for either team was six points by Belgreen following a three by Hiser that made it 24-18 late in the second quarter. Red Bay responded with a closing 9-2 run, getting a pair of buckets from 6'3 junior Gath Weatherford, a three-point play from 6'2 freshman Braden Ray and a fast-break layup from Jalen Vinson (another ninth-grader) to take a 27-26 lead into the locker room.

Weatherford, limited to less than 10 minutes of game action due to foul trouble in Saturday's semifinal win over Tharptown, made up for lost time on Monday night, scoring 11 first-half points and then adding seven more in the opening four minutes of the third quarter to help the Tigers stretch the margin to five at 34-29.

The Bulldogs responded by going to work at the foul line, hitting six straight free throws to trim the lead to one at 36-35. Peyton Green scored in the paint for Red Bay, but Hiser drilled his third three of the night to tie the game. A tip-in by Ray barely beat the third-quarter buzzer and put the Tigers on top 40-38.

As it turned out, though, the drama was only just beginning.

Belgreen opened the fourth quarter with an 8-0 run, surging to a 46-40 lead when Payton Scott found fellow senior Seth Taylor for a layup right around the 4:00 mark. Junior guard Hunter Bays

answered with a huge three for Red Bay, and then a spinning lefty layup by Weatherford cut the lead to one at 46-45 with 2:35 left in regulation.

After five straight empty trips between the two teams, Torisky called timeout with less than a minute to go and drew up a play designed to get Ray a clean look from the right block. The freshman came open off a cross-screen along the baseline, caught a pass from Weatherford and dropped in a layup to give the Tigers a 47-46 lead with 45 seconds remaining.

The Bulldogs didn't blink. A silver lining in the recent absence of Brant Bragwell (who sat out Monday for the sixth time in seven games and is expected to miss another week or two with his knee issue) has been the emergence of Seth Taylor as a reliable third option alongside 6'6 junior Mason Bragwell and senior point guard Jacob Mayberry. Taylor entered Monday's action averaging 12.7 points across six January games, and his driving layup with 25 seconds left in regulation put Belgreen back in front 48-47.

"Those two guys right there are the heart and soul of our team," Hiser said after the game, pointing in the direction of Taylor and Scott. "They do so much for us. They get us going."

Weatherford, who would finish with a game-high 22 points, drove the lane on Red Bay's ensuing trip and was fouled with 14.7 seconds remaining. An 84-percent foul shooter on 97 attempts coming into Monday, Weatherford hit the first to tie the game but then missed the second (following a timeout by Belgreen in between).

The Bulldogs had a chance to take the lead, but Red Bay junior guard Colton Corum came up with a clutch defensive play, sliding over in front of a driving Scott to take a charge with 4.7 seconds left. Red Bay called timeout and then inbounded the ball to speedy point guard Clay Allison, who in turn got the ball to Ray, whose open 16-footer bounced off the front of the rim as time expired.

Whereas the fourth quarter featured two teams trading clutch shots, the two extra periods featured, well, two teams running on fumes and plainly feeling the pressure of overtime with the county title hanging in the balance.

"Maybe both teams were tired, but I hope that's not it," Torisky said afterwards. "I know Belgreen's not very deep with Brant being out, and we're not real deep either. But we've been dealing with that all year. There were times when we executed well in key moments, but at other times we just didn't execute from a mental standpoint."

Specifically, the foul line proved to be Red Bay's undoing—an ironic twist considering that the Tigers came into Monday shooting 70 percent from the line as a team. After attempting only three free throws in regulation, Red Bay shot just 3-for-12 from the line in the two overtime periods. Combine that with 1-for-8 shooting from the field, and the Tigers scored just five points in eight minutes of overtime action.

"We had some really good free throw shooters at the line, guys like Gath and Braden and Clay and Colton," Torisky said. "Those are our four best guys. They all shoot at least 65 percent, and two of them shoot over 80. Getting those guys to the line is about as good as we can hope for."

Weatherford and Peyton Green each made 1-of-2 at the line in the first OT, and Mayberry countered with two free throws for Belgreen. Neither team made a field goal in the first extra period, and after Bragwell's drive to the basket came up empty in the waning seconds, the game went to a second overtime.

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Before taming the Tigers, Belgreen first had to get by Daniel Smith (3) and Phil Campbell.



'BULLDOGS', from pg 16

Belgreen took the lead on a pair of free throws by Hiser at the 3:18 mark, and then Mayberry hit a driving bank shot to make it 54-50. Hiser then took a charge on one end and grabbed an offensive rebound on the other, finding Bragwell for a layup to stretch the lead to six. The Bulldogs went 8-for-12 from the foul line from that point on, including 3-for-4 from Bragwell and 3-for-4 from reserve guard Gaven Taylor, who played several key minutes down the stretch after Seth Taylor fouled out.

Weatherford and Corum also fouled out in the second overtime, conjuring up memories of Red Bay's previous trip to Belgreen in mid-November. Weatherford, Ray and Allison all fouled out that night, and the Tigers let a late 10-point lead slip away in a 56-53 loss. Their largest lead on Monday was five points, but Torisky still couldn't shake the feeling that his team had let another one get away.

"We had them again," he said, "and we let them out of the box. Belgreen is a good team. They know how to win. Our guys have to learn how to finish off a game. It's the biggest thing keeping us from becoming a great team instead of just a good one."

The Tigers couldn't overcome a huge discrepancy at the foul line on Monday, when they finished just 5-for-15 compared to 27-for-35 by Belgreen. This win couldn't have been more different than last year's county final, when the Bulldogs blitzed Phil Campbell with a 30-4 run to open the game and cruised to a 73-52 rout.

So was this one more fun?

"I don't know if I'd say that," Isbell said with a weary smile. "This one took a lot out of us. But our seniors really came through for us. I thought that was the difference late in the game. We had some senior guys step up and make senior plays when we needed them. This was their last opportunity to win a county championship, and they wanted to make the most of it. They got one last year, and they really wanted to go out on top."

Hiser and his teammates accomplished exactly that.

"I'm so proud of these guys," he said. "These guys are my brothers. We wanted to do this for each other, and for Coach Isbell, who works his butt off every day and does such a great job coaching this team, and for these fans, too."

Monday's capacity crowd took Torisky back to his formative days playing high school hoops in southern Illinois.

"Basketball up there is like football down here," he said. "We had crowds like this and games like this in the regular season. It's the way basketball should be played. I thought the atmosphere was great, and the support we got from our fans was great. Our guys just have to learn to feed off that."

Hiser finished with eight rebounds to go along with his 17 points. Bragwell shot 7-for-8 from the line and had 15 points and six boards. Mayberry went 5-for-6 at the line and scored 13 points, and Seth Taylor added eight. Scott had six points and six rebounds.

Weatherford shot 9-for-17 from the field to finish with 22 points and nine rebounds. Ray scored nine points, and Allison finished with eight.

Afterward, Isbell was asked to compare this year's county title to last year's.

"This one feels just as good," he said, "and maybe better."



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Mason Bragwell (at right, 23) had 19 points and 16 rebounds Saturday, helping Belgreen overcome a 21-point, 11-rebound effort from Phil Campbell's Peyton Thomas (above, 12). Below, Red Bay's Colton Corum (12) was one of four Tigers to score double-figures in a semi-final win over Edward Lopez and Tharptown.



Golden Tigers send message with first area win

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

ATHENS - As Russellville head coach Patrick Odom walked toward the visiting locker room at halftime of last Friday night's area game at East Limestone, he smiled in the direction of the Golden Tiger radio crew and mouthed four simple words.

"Here we go again."

During the course of a six-game losing streak that started two days after Christmas, Odom's team had been in position to put one in the win column on multiple occasions only to come up a bucket short here, a stop short there. Losses are losses, but it's not a stretch to say that Russellville was maybe a dozen or so key plays away from being 5-1 in its last six games instead of 0-6.

The most galling of those recent defeats came January 11 at home against Lawrence County, when the Golden Tigers squandered a seven-point fourth-quarter lead and lost by nine. Leading East Limestone by four at the break on Friday night, they found themselves yet again on the brink of snapping the streak.

All they had to do was finish.

"That's what we told our guys at halftime," Odom said. "We were in that same position we've been in so many times lately, where we just needed to make some critical plays. We just needed to finish."

The Golden Tigers made enough of those critical plays on Friday night, holding off a pair of second-half rallies to beat the Indians 62-55 for their first area win of the season—and first win of any kind since a 77-52 rout of Sheffield on December 26.

"I feel like our guys have been playing hard and fighting throughout all of this, and that's why we've been in a position to win as much as we have," Odom said. "I was glad to see them finally get the reward tonight. It was good see smiles on those faces in the locker room after the game—me included."

The fact that Russellville (5-13, 1-5 in Class 5A, Area 16) carried a four-point lead into the break was an impressive feat unto itself, given that starters Caden Parker and Devin Buckhalter both played limited first-half minutes due to foul trouble. Buckhalter, the team's second-leading scorer at 15.4 points per game, hit a tough runner and a deep three to get going early, but he picked up his second foul late in the first quarter and his third



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Devin Buckhalter went 6-for-7 from the foul line down the stretch last Friday night to help Russellville seal a 62-55 win at East Limestone. Buckhalter finished with 13 points.

midway through the second—just a few seconds after checking back into the game.

"If you had told me that Devin was only gonna play twenty seconds in the second quarter and we'd still have the lead at halftime," Odom said, "I would have taken it."

Junior guard Lucas McNutt and freshman guard Chandler Dyas scored seven points apiece in the second quarter, helping the Golden Tigers rally from an early seven-point deficit to take a 30-26 lead into the locker room. Dyas opened the third quarter with a three, and then a basket by McNutt stretched the lead to nine at 35-26.

East Limestone (12-10, 3-2) rallied to within two at 39-37, and Russellville took a 43-39 lead into the final quarter. The margin was two midway

through the fourth when Buckhalter drove the lane and kicked to Dyas, who buried a corner three—his third of the night—to make it 50-45. Senior guard Brock Malone nailed a transition three on the next trip to push the lead to eight with less than four minutes remaining.

"Those were two really big shots," Odom said. "We had been hitting some shots lately, just not big shots in big moments. That's what those were."

The Indians rallied again behind junior Isaiah Robinson, who scored 11 of his game-high 18 points in the fourth quarter. Robinson scored six straight points to cut the lead to two at 53-51, but Russellville responded by sealing the deal at the foul line. Buckhalter missed his first two free throws of the fourth quarter before locking in and going 6-for-7 the rest of the way, including four straight clutch makes in the final minute.

"Devin has hit so many big ones in the past," Odom said. "When he missed the front end of a one-and-one and then split two the next time, I turned to our guys and said, 'We've got the guy we want at the line, he just has to make them.' He did that down the stretch, and Calen Bragwell stepped up there and made a couple of big ones, too."

Bragwell, a 6'2 senior, converted a key offensive rebound into a pair of late free throws, helping the Golden Tigers go 11-for-15 from the line in the fourth quarter and 18-for-24 in the game. East Limestone, meanwhile, shot just 3-for-9 from the line on the night and couldn't connect from beyond the arc on its last few trips, allowing Russellville to pull away.

"We got a couple of key stops down the stretch," Odom said, "and we made some hustle plays on the offensive end that were big. I thought the second half was all about guts for our guys. Tonight, we were able to make those critical plays we needed to make in order to finish a game."

Dyas finished with 15 points, just two shy of his season-high. Buckhalter and McNutt each scored 13 points, and Parker added eight. Malone, Bragwell and senior reserve Logan Jones finished with four points apiece, and freshman Brooks Scott had one.

The Golden Tigers, who have won two area tournament title in two tries under Odom, will be the No. 4 seed for next month's Area 16 tournament, which will likely be played at Brooks High School. [The Lions, 18-0 overall through Thursday, need to win just one of their two remaining area games to wrap up the top seed and home-court advantage.] Russellville went from 6-0 in area play last year to 1-5 this year, but winning only one area game in December and January will be forgotten if the Golden Tigers can win two in February.

"I'll take that swap every time," Odom said on Friday night. "And I believe this team is capable of doing that. Momentum is a powerful thing come tournament time, and this win can really give us some confidence going forward. Tonight showed what this team is capable of when we play well."

"I think we have the kind of team that nobody wants to play in the first round. We have two guys [in Buckhalter, who has five games of 20-plus points this season, and McNutt, who has six and averages a team-best 16.3 points per game] who can take over a game at any time. We can be a dangerous team."

Varsity girls

East Limestone 52 Russellville 42

The Lady Golden Tigers stormed back from a 20-point deficit to get within three points late in the

See 'WIN,' Page 19

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'WIN', from page 18

fourth quarter, but East Limestone went 7-for-8 from the foul line in the final minute to seal the win and clinch the top seed for the area tournament.

The Lady Indians (17-5, 5-0 in Class 5A, Area 16) were up by 20 in the third quarter and carried a 37-20 lead into the fourth. Russellville (8-15, 3-3) rallied behind 11 fourth-quarter points from Madison Murray and three-pointers down the stretch from Treyvia Pruitt, A.J. Taylor and Madison Hargett.

Hargett's three cut the lead to 45-42 late in the game, but East Limestone's Hailie Smith made a pair of free throws to halt a 15-0 run by Russellville. The Lady Golden Tigers turned the ball over on their ensuing trip, and East hit five more free throws to put the game away.

Freshman post player Jirah Rogers led the Lady Indians with 23 points.

Murray, a sophomore guard, finished 8-for-12 from the foul line and led Russellville with 19 points. Pruitt scored nine of her 10 points in the second half, and Hargett finished with seven points.

'TITLE', from page 13

Bragwell scored nine-second quarter points, shooting 6-for-8 at the foul line and hitting a three with 30 seconds left in the half to give the Bulldogs a 23-20 lead. Hamilton answered with a jumper for Red Bay, and the Tigers trailed by a point at the break.

Bragwell scored seven more points in the third, but Red Bay kept pace with a three-pointer from Wright and buckets from Hamilton, Shewbart and Hunter Burks. Belgreen's lead was still one at 32-31 heading to the fourth, following the long three by Bragwell.

Hamilton finished with six rebounds to go along with his 13 points. Shewbart had three points and five boards. Kennedy scored six points, and Burks added five. Cam McKinney had two points.

Alex Betts went 2-for-2 at the line and scored six points for Belgreen. Willingham finished with four points and six boards, and Plott scored five points. Collins had three points.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Belgreen's Isaac Willingham drives to the basket against Tharptown in Saturday's B-team semifinal game. The Bulldogs beat the Wildcats but came up two points short in Monday's final against Red Bay.

Legacy ATHLETE of the WEEK

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Darby Elliott

Senior Guard, Phil Campbell

Elliott helped the Lady Bobcats win their first county championship in 20 years, totaling 31 points on 15-for-21 shooting from the floor in wins over Red Bay and Belgreen at the county tournament. In Saturday's 59-40 rout of Red Bay, Elliott shot 9-for-11 and led all scorers with 18 points. She followed that up with 13 points on 6-for-10 shooting in Monday's title-game win over the Lady Bulldogs.

Through Monday, Elliott was averaging 9.5 points per game on the season and was just 65 points shy of 1,000 for her varsity career.



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