

RCS superintendent Heath Grimes is no fan of the state's A-F grading system. See Page 4.

State and local officials are busy making plans for a pair of Bicentennial celebrations. See Page 11 for details.

# County school board approves final step on Tharptown project

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved the final step that clears the way to construct much-needed classrooms and a cafeteria at Tharptown School.

The board approved a resolution authorizing the issuance of the capital outlay pool warrant, Series 2017. These funds will be used for the Phase II construction of Tharptown Elementary's classroom addition.

This means the system will go to the bond market to fund Phase II of the project.

This is good news for Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton, who's seen several setbacks slow the project over the last year.

The most recent setback came when the contractor of the cafeteria project was held in default after repeated notices of cure, which are legal demands for the contractor to correct conditions causing it to be in default.

Hamilton said the company was seriously behind on its

time schedule to start the project, and, as a result, the system had to take legal action.

Early last year, the project appeared dead after the Alabama Building Commission stated that in order to renovate the school's existing cafeteria into four new classrooms, the cafeteria would have to be converted into a safety shelter. The cost of that would have grounded the project.

That was resolved when, through a \$1.4 million leverage bond, another six-classroom facility was to be constructed that will meet the parameters for a safety shelter, giving Tharptown 10 new classrooms and a new cafeteria, as well as a tornado room that will fit the entire elementary school enrollment.

The new contractor, First Team Construction of Auburn, was the next low bidder and was awarded the \$2,495,425 project.

The board is financing the first phase of the Tharptown project with its annual \$175,000 of capital outlay money.

See 'THARPTOWN,' Page 8

Have an opinion?  
Story idea?



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# Collier loves 'close-knit' gas industry

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

As he stood with his family enjoying the Monroeville (Alabama) Christmas parade, Blaine Collier commented to his wife that they knew half the people in the parade and half the people on the street watching.

That small-town life was comfortable to Collier, so when he took over as the new manager for the Russellville Gas Board (RGB) on January 1, he didn't have to get used to the friendly, small-town aura of his new community.

Collier succeeded Roger Enchiff, who served as RGB manager the past three years. Collier worked the last seven years as the director of natural gas operations for the South Alabama Gas District. His career in the natural gas industry includes work in consulting, engineering and mapping for Alagasco for eight years.

Collier hasn't just made a career in the natural gas industry. He's also an advocate of the safety, efficiency and value of natural gas.

"I guess you could say I love the gas industry. It's a close-knit industry that's like family," Collier said. "I had done some consulting and engineering in the past, but I found that I loved working with people, both the employees and administrative side and with customers. The natural gas industry is a service-oriented business. You're providing a service to the community, and I enjoy the problem-solving to find the best ways to serve the community."

"I believe it's the safest energy you can get, and the numbers show it's the most economical energy you can get. It's a good product that I believe in."



Blaine Collier  
Russellville Gas Board

See 'COLLIER,' Page 8

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**Lois Louise McCalpin**, Vina, age 78

Died Thursday, January 25, 2018. The family was planning to hold a private graveside service at Franklin Memory Gardens. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family.

**Etta Mae Seay**, Nesbit, MS, age 67

Died Sunday, January 21, 2018. Graveside service held at Bethsaida Cemetery in Russellville. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

**Claudie Sue Hatton Speck**, Russellville, age 95

Died Sunday, January 28, 2018. Visitation will be held Wednesday, January 31, 2018 from 10 a.m. to noon at Pinkard Funeral Home, with funeral service to follow. Interment in Cherry Hill Cemetery in Russellville.

**Mary Gladys Vinson Taylor**, Phil Campbell, age 93

Died Tuesday, January 23, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Mt. Home Cemetery in Belgreen.

**Martha Louise Gandy Winstead**, Russellville, age 81

Died Monday, January 22, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home.

\*Sale good January 31 through February 6\*



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# AT&T to Vinson: Fixed wireless 'currently not available'

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When Junior Vinson read a *Free Press* article about the ribbon cutting for AT&T's new fixed wireless service in eastern Franklin County, it didn't take long for him to log onto AT&T's website and sign up.

Unfortunately for Vinson, that sign-up process was easier said than done.

After a month of going back and forth in communications with AT&T, Vinson finally received the answer to his question of whether the company's new service was actually available to him.

And that answer was what Vinson expected all along—AT&T's fixed wireless internet service is not available to him, even though he lives less than a half-mile from the tower AT&T activated for the fixed wireless service.

"Today [last Thursday, January 25] I finally got what I had been asking for," Vinson said. "Roger Pereira with AT&T sent me this [email] reply: 'The service is currently not available. We apologize for any inconvenience.'"

The tower in question is located just east of Macedonia Baptist Church on County Road 724. With AT&T's announcement and December 19 ribbon cutting, Vinson saw an opportunity to see his internet speed double from the current AT&T cell-based five-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.

At its ribbon cutting ceremony, AT&T's Dave Hargrove shared the company's tentative plans to install at least three more towers in Franklin County in 2018 that would bring fixed wireless internet to additional areas in the county.

AT&T's fixed wireless internet works through an antenna installed on the user's home or business and in 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>.

**After a month of going back and forth with AT&T, Vinson finally received the answer to his question of whether the company's new service was actually available to him. And that answer was what Vinson expected all along—AT&T's fixed wireless internet service is not available to him, even though he lives less than a half-mile from the tower AT&T activated for the service.**

According to AT&T officials, location of the towers is determined by census information and a formula used by the Federal Communications Commission.

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

According to AT&T public relations spokesper-

son Catherine Stengel, the company's fixed wireless internet service availability for a particular cell site "depends on many factors, including location of the cell site, topography of the land and potential sources of interference. Clutter, such as trees or buildings, can impact the radio waves used to propagate the signal.

"Importantly, AT&T's fixed wireless internet service is currently being deployed as part of the Federal Communications Commission's Connect America Fund Phase II program. As a result, service availability is currently limited to CAF II eligible areas as defined by the FCC," Stengel said in a statement.

Vinson is frustrated that, in his view, the company held a ribbon cutting ceremony for a service that it's not prepared to offer its customers. Conversely, AT&T officials explain that just because Vinson lives within three to five miles of the tower, there are other factors that determine his eligibility for the service.

"I don't know of one single person around here who checked their website and was told they are eligible for the service," Vinson said. "So I now have written documentation from the Office of the President at AT&T that AT&T fixed wireless service is not available in Newburg, Alabama. I have been asking Dave Hargrove to provide me with his source at AT&T who told him AT&T fixed wireless internet was available in Newburg, Alabama, and he has so far refused to provide me with his source."

# Three more local eateries receive satisfactory ratings

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The three Franklin County restaurants that received health ratings during the week of January 15, 2018 through January 19, 2018 each had scores that fall into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

On the other hand, Cajun's Seafood in Sheffield scored a 68, which, according to Alabama Department of Public Health procedure, requires a follow-up inspection to gauge compliance within 48 hours.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. 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.

Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

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

The three Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 88 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 95, given to Monchi's, 121 N. Washington Avenue, Russellville.

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

- Daisy Restaurant, 125 N. Jackson Avenue, Russellville, 88. (No test papers, Cooked food not date marked).

- Wicked Marinara, 502 4th Avenue SE, Red Bay, 91. (Sprayer falls below flood rim of sink).

Of the 10 inspections done in Colbert County

from January 15-19, 2018, all but two received scores of at least 85. Those scoring below 85 included:

- Cajun's Seafood, 4301 Jackson Highway Sheffield, 68. (Screen cleaner stored on shelf/counter with and above food. Windex stored on counter next to hinged to-go food containers/single service. Sterno stored on top of hinged to-go containers/single service. Hose connected without backflow—three day notice given. Several cracked food containers (meat lugs) containing food in walk-in cooler. No dates on gallon or pints of jambalaya, dating boiled shrimp for eight days, Cajun catfish mix dated 1/10 (beyond limit). Shrimp and crab claws stored 52-63 degrees. Jambalaya in reach in cooler 49 degrees.)

- Chiska Food Mart, 6220 Hwy. 72 West, Cherokee, 84. (No drying device at food prep hand sink. Container holding food cracked/large hole. Mold on fountain nozzles.)

Health ratings are available at and may be viewed by city or county.

# RCS recognizes board members for their commitment

Submitted to the FFP

Russellville City School System is joining all the public school systems across the state to celebrate School Board Member Recognition Month and honor local board members for their commitment to the Russellville community and its children.

"It takes strong schools to build a strong community, and our board members devote countless hours to making sure our schools are helping every child learn at a higher level," RCS superin-

tendent Heath Grimes said. "They make tough decisions every month and spend many hours studying education issues and regulations in order to provide the kind of accountability our citizens expect."

Grimes said the key work of school boards is to raise student achievement by:

- Supporting the creation of a vision for what the community wants the school system to be and for making student achievement the top priority;
- Reviewing standards for what students will be expected to learn and be able to do;

- Helping to ensure progress is measured so that the systems goals are achieved and students are learning at expected levels;

- Being accountable for their decisions and actions by continually tracking and reporting results;

- Reviewing the system's resources—human and financial—around its improvement goals;

- Encouraging a safe, orderly climate where students can learn and teachers can teach;
- Encouraging partnerships with others in the

# Honey Do List: Shark bite

We're not talking *Jaws* here, and this type of shark bite won't ruin your summer vacation. These plumbing fittings are quick, durable and the coolest thing to hit the plumbing industry in a while.

Last week we talked about the advantages of PEX plumbing pipe. When you combine PEX with "Shark-bite" fittings, most plumbing jobs become much easier.

**When it comes to hardware and plumbing, someone is always coming up with a better idea. In this case, it appears they really did well.**

"Shark-bite" fittings simply push on the end of the pipe, and they grab on with stainless steel teeth as an o-ring compresses to form a watertight seal. Of course, they are available in a variety of sizes and styles including elbows, male/female adapters and in-line valves.

These fittings can be used on many different types of plumbing pipe, and they are color-coded to make applications simpler. The plastic sleeve in the end of the fitting

may be white for regular PVC (which is white in color), almond for CPVC or copper, or gray for polybutylene (which is gray).

"Shark-bite" fittings can be removed and reused using a special tool. They can also be rotated on the pipe after assembly without harming the connection.

The most important factors to remember on installation have to do with the condition of the pipe. It must be cut square, smooth and clean. These fittings can be placed inside of walls, under floors and even buried in the ground. It is recommended that you wrap or insulate any buried fittings.

When it comes to hardware and plumbing, someone is always coming up with a better idea. In this case, it appears they really did well.

Next week, the remedy for polybutylene pipe. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green

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

## Our House

by Ree Shannon



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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### Correction Policy

The *Franklin Free Press* strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

### Letters to the editor

The *Franklin Free Press* is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The *Franklin Free Press* reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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## State report cards miss the mark

During the past several months, our community has had several opportunities to be extremely proud of the students, teachers and administrators at Russellville City Schools because of the achievements, honors and recognition we have received—things that are no doubt the result of hard work, dedication and a pursuit of excellence that we try to instill each day in our schools.

On February 1, our community will have another opportunity to be proud of our system and our schools as the first ever state report card grades are released. While the specific scores are embargoed until this time, I want to say that I am pleased with the scores RCS received.

However, even though I am pleased with our scores, I am still disappointed today in our state leadership for making teachers, students and administrators across the state feel less than what they are through these scores.

Grades (ranked A-F) for the state report cards are determined primarily on ONE SINGLE TEST, the ACT Aspire, which is a standardized test that was given over a one-week period that won't even be administered any more because it was found to not fully align with state standards.

For schools without a grade 12 (elementary and middle schools), 90 percent of the school score comes from an invalid test. And our schools, our teachers and our students are MORE THAN A SCORE.

The state report card unfairly reduces countless hours of classroom instruction and dedication to a single score for the purpose of promoting the School Accountability Act, which takes public tax dollars and gives them to private schools. While I am pleased with the scores RCS received (especially considering how these grades were deter-

mined), it is abundantly clear that our system, and many other deserving systems across the state, are being punished by an unfair grading system. Unfortunately, they never had a chance with this formula to receive an "A" or "B", regardless of how strong the school is.

In the past several months, Russellville High School has been named a 2017 CLAS School of Distinction; RCS was chosen to host the statewide AP Celebration thanks to the amazing growth shown on our students' AP scores from last year to this past year (a 122-percent increase); at that celebration, Russellville was named the first School of Excellence by A+ College Ready, which was a great honor for our system; and Russellville High School was named the #1 Standout High School in Alabama by Niche.com.

**Even though I am pleased with our scores, I am still disappointed today in our state leadership for making teachers, students and administrators across the state feel less than what they are through these scores.**

With all of these accolades, it would seem that Russellville City Schools would have more than an ample opportunity to receive top scores on the state report card, but because it doesn't factor in the unique challenges that each district faces with equal weight—things such as poverty, local funding, the number of English Language Learners (ELL) and special education students a school or district has, and other factors—then



Heath Grimes  
RCS Sup't



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Dave  
**Well meaning, but misguided**

Dear Dave,  
My sister has bad credit due to a lot of late payments. She has finally started to change her ways and get control of her finances, because she and her fiancé want to make an offer on a house. The bank won't approve it if she is on the loan, and his income alone isn't enough to get the amount they need. His parents are well off, and they have offered to co-sign on the loan. Is this a bad idea?

Rhonda  
Dear Rhonda,  
It's a *really* bad idea. Those two have no business thinking about a house right now, and his parents are about to make things even worse with their loving, misguided help.

If you need a co-signer, you're nowhere near ready to buy a home. They need to slow down. I mean, they're just engaged. They don't even need a house at this point. They should get married, live in a cheap apartment for a while and work on paying off their debts. After that, they need to save up an emergency fund of three to six months of expenses, then start setting cash aside for a huge down payment on their first, modest home.

These two have a bad case of house fever. And mom and dad need to step back, look at things objectively and realize they would not be blessing these kids by helping get them into a home they obviously can't afford!

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.*

**Boss says get a credit card**

Dear Dave,  
I recently got a new job that requires monthly expenses of almost \$5,000 that are reimbursed. I can't swing that kind of money right now, and my company told me to get a credit card to cover things. I'm trying to get out of debt, and I don't like this idea. What should I do?

John  
Dear John,  
Your company should be fronting the money for these expenses. When you talk about the cost of doing business, it's the responsibility of the company—not the employee—to pay expenses.

If I send someone on the road to make money for my company, I pay the bills. It doesn't matter if it's hotel rooms, airfare or rental cars, those are *my* expenses. If it's someone who travels a lot, we give them a company debit card. If it's just an occasional thing, we'll give them money out of petty cash. But a company shouldn't treat its employees this way. That's just plain wrong.

It's a mystery to me how some segments of Corporate America have sold their employees on the idea of being the company bank. Ultimately, the decision is yours. If you don't, the decision is yours. If you don't mind covering your company's expenses and getting reimbursed, but you don't want to go into debt, you'll have to save and build up a \$5,000 business expense fund in a separate checking account. This should be used *only* for business expenses, and what's spent should be replenished immediately when they reimburse you.

You're in an unusual spot, John. Personally, I think this is an unprofessional way to run a business. But if you like your job and want to stay without taking on any more debt, the good news is you'll only have to

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# GO RED



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Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals



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# What's Happening


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 **A**ARP Tax-Aide will be offering free income tax preparation at DHR on Thursdays from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. beginning February 1 and ending April 12. You do not have to be an AARP member, be retired or be a certain age to use this service. Call Ben at 256-332-0252 for an appointment.


 **M**embers of the Shoals Chapter of the Order of St. Luke will be available to pray for you in the meeting room at The Rock Christian Bookstore, 310 N. Montgomery Avenue in Sheffield, this Thursday, February 1 from 4-5:30 p.m. followed by our monthly meeting in the Sheffield Room at Park Place, 501 N. Montgomery Avenue in Sheffield, at 6:30 p.m. Teaching by Dr. James Anderson on healing. We believe that God heals spiritually, physically and emotionally. All prayer is confidential. All are welcome.


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


 **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 this 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, 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.


 **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.


 **E**ast Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be selling beef stew and chicken stew as a fundraiser on Saturday, February 10. Serving will not start until 11 a.m. Please bring your own containers! The East Franklin VFD is located at 10443 Hwy. 81, Phil Campbell, AL 35581. Please support us! Thank you.

 **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.

 **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.

 **T**he Spruce Pine Historical Society will be having Craft Night on the third Thursday of each month at the Spruce Pine Community Center at 6:30 p.m. For more information, please call Kim at 256-436-3992.

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# Kiel qualifies to run in House District 18

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Russellville businessman Jamie Kiel qualified last week to run for the Republican nomination for Alabama House District 18, the seat that has been held for decades by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (R-Red Bay).

Morrow announced last year he was running for the Democratic nomination for Alabama Senate District Six, held by Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia).

Kiel is the founder and owner of Kiel Equipment, a company he began while earning his Management and Marketing degree at the University of North Alabama. Kiel Equipment serves customers in Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi, selling and leasing mowers, tractors and other heavy-duty equipment.

Kiel is a graduate of Russellville High School. He and his wife Melissa have three daughters who attend Tharptown Elementary School.

Melissa is a teacher at Tharptown Elementary and was named Franklin County Schools' Teacher of the Year in 2016. The family attends Tharptown Baptist Church, where Kiel served as the music director for 20 years.

"It would be a privilege to represent the people of Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale counties," Kiel said.

"What we need representing us is a businessman with common-sense solutions to the state's problems.

"I am a Republican who has built and grown a business right here in House District 18. I know what it takes to meet payrolls. I also know our state government unnecessarily regulates small business."

Kiel is a founding member of the Franklin County Broadband Taskforce, and he's served on the SACS Accreditation and the Federal Monitoring Committees for Franklin County Schools. He has donated his time as the public address announcer for Tharptown varsity football, and he's served as a youth basketball coach for his daughters' teams.

In addition to Kiel, Tony Riley has qualified to run in the Republican Primary for House District 18.

House District 18 includes Russellville; portions of Florence, Tuscumbia and Muscle Shoals; and the cities of Cherokee, Red Bay and Waterloo.



Jamie Kiel

# Shewbart, Baker seeking reelection to school board

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Both incumbent members of the Franklin County Board of Education whose seats are up for election in 2018 have announced their intentions to seek another term.

Mike Shewbart, District Five board member, and Ralton Baker, District One board member, both confirmed to the *Franklin Free Press* last Tuesday that they will qualify with the Franklin County Democratic Party for another six-year term.

Alabama's primary elections are Tuesday, June 5, 2018. Qualifying for public office is ongoing and runs through Friday, February 9 at 5 p.m.

Shewbart defeated Ralph Winchester in 2012 for the right to represent the west end of Franklin County on the board.

Shewbart is the new manager of the Colbert County Landfill and a Red Bay resident. He serves as president of the Franklin County Board of Education. He's a member of the Youth Basketball Board in Red Bay and a past president of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce.

For the residents of Franklin County's Board of Education District One, it's difficult to remember a time when Baker hasn't represented them.

He was first elected in 1990 and served a four-year term. The board terms have since changed to six years, so Baker has been elected five times.

His district includes Tharptown and East Franklin Schools. Baker plans to continue working to expand the physical facilities at Tharptown, the county's fastest-growing school, and to seek funding to either build a new gym or

See 'SCHOOL,' page 8

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Construction on the project is expected to begin by February.

Tharptown has seen meteoric growth in recent years, due in part to the announcement two years ago

that Russellville City Schools would charge non-city resident students an annual \$600 tuition. Tharptown School has more than 900 students enrolled, Hamilton said.

**'SCHOOL' from page 7**

make significant improvements on the existing East Franklin gym.

"We've come a long way since I was first elected in 1990," Baker said. "Not that I've done it, but with everyone working together, we're making progress in our facilities, buses and the quality of education in Franklin County."

Baker said he was initially uncer-

tain whether he would seek another term, but he was encouraged by friends and supporters to do so.

"Several people came to me and asked if I would run again," Baker said. "And if people are interested in having me represent them again, I'd be honored. There just aren't too many people interested in running for elected office these days."

**'COLLIER' from page 1**

Collier, 36, grew up in Hueytown. He graduated from Shades Mountain Christian School in Hoover before attending the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he earned a degree in Civil Engineering in 2004.

Even though wasn't raised in a small town, he and his wife Heather adapted well to life in Monroeville (population 6,072), and the similar size of Russellville was one of the things that excited him about the position of manager at the Russellville Gas Board.

"That's definitely something that attracted me coming to Russellville," Collier said. "I've had the opportunities in my career to go with larger companies in larger areas, but we enjoy the small-town environment and getting to know people."

Collier was familiar with the Russellville Gas Board and the outstanding work done by its 14 employees before he came to town.

"I did my homework before I came," he said, "and the reputation of Russellville is that of a solid system. I had a number of people tell me it may be one of the best systems in the entire state."

His day-to-day duties as RGB manager are similar to what he did with the South Alabama Gas District, Collier said, other than a change in title. He worked closely with the South Alabama Gas District board, something that will also be an important part of his new job.

"I was reassured when I met with the board here that what I'd heard about Russellville Gas Board was true," Collier said. "It's a solid board with folks from different walks of life. It's a good board with some diversity."

Collier said he appreciates the job done by his predecessor, and he knows he's taking over a system that was in capable hands.

"Everyone has been so welcoming," Collier said. "Roger is very well respected in the gas industry, and the reputation of Russellville Gas Board is certainly related to what he did here as manager."

**"Everyone has been so welcoming," Collier said. "Roger [Enchiff] is very well respected in the gas industry, and the reputation of Russellville Gas Board is certainly related to what he did here as manager."**

Collier realizes that he works in an industry that's largely unknown to the public. And there's one important aspect of the natural gas industry he hopes the community understands.

"The number one thing I would encourage people to understand is natural gas is a safe product," Collier said. "And that starts from the folks working with it and the training of the operators."

And the statistics support his position.

According to the American Gas Association, natural gas safety-related incidents have declined 30 percent since 1988, even though natural gas usage has increased 20 percent in that time.

Collier says there is a tight-knit relationship among workers in the industry. And his style of leadership will be based on building relationships with his employees.

"I like working with people. This is not a dictatorship," Collier said. "You spend a lot of time together. I probably will spend more of my waking hours with the folks I work with than my own family."

"You become a family with those people, and in my opinion you should always be able to work with family."

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# Franklin County Board of Ed approves personnel moves

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved several personnel moves at its January 23, 2018 meeting, including a new principal at East Franklin Junior High School and the resignation of the varsity football coach at Phil Campbell High School.

Jonathan King was unanimously approved as the new East Franklin principal. King replaces Nancy Hallman, who accepted a position as the system's assistant federal programs coordinator. King served as Agri-Science teacher at Phil Campbell High School through the 2017 fall semester.

After four years as head football coach at Phil Campbell, Ryan Swinney submitted his resignation to the board, effective immediately. Swinney will remain on the faculty at PCHS as a physical education teacher, according to board member Terry Welborn.

Welborn said Swinney's resignation was his own decision and he was not forced out by the board.

"He decided he needed some more time with his family," Welborn said. "He wants to spend more time with his brother and dad, and he gave up the position to help take care of his family."

The coaching position was posted last Wednesday. Welborn said a thorough search for a

new coach would take place. And he promised the best coaching candidate would be hired, regardless of whether that candidate comes from within or outside the Franklin County school system.

"It could be a hiring from within or not," Welborn said. "We're not holding out either way. We want the best coach we can find, and hopefully we'll be able to accomplish that."

**"It could be a hiring from within or not," Welborn said of the head football coaching vacancy at Phil Campbell High School. "We're not holding out either way. We want the best coach we can find, and hopefully we'll be able to accomplish that."**

In other action, the board:

- Accepted the resignation of Sara Gillentine, child nutrition program assistant at Red Bay High School; approved the hiring of Nathan Vincent, in school suspension teacher at Belgreen, effective Jan. 24, 2018, and Tamla Whitten, part-time temporary school nurse.

- Approved Cheretta Hill Chandler, Melissa Klose, Chelsey Pounds, Renita Wells and Madalan Morgan Benford as new teacher substitutes and approved Trevor Farley as a volunteer baseball coach for PCHS.

- Approved out-of-state trips including: Belgreen senior class to Pigeon Forge, Tenn., and Six Flags

Atlanta, May 2-5, 2018; Tharptown Elementary Sixth Grade to Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga, March 23, 2018; Tharptown High School seniors to New York City May 7-11, 2018; Red Bay second grade to Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga on Feb. 23, 2018, and PCHS varsity baseball team to Caledonia, Miss., Feb. 24 and Nettleton, Miss., April 16 for baseball games.

- Approved a mileage reimbursement increase to \$0.545 per mile from \$0.535 per mile, effective January 1, 2018.

- Approved a resolution authorizing the issuance of the capital outlay pool warrant, Series 2017. These funds will be used for the Phase II construction of Tharptown Elementary's classroom addition.

- Approved compensation of \$900 for Debbie Rambo, special education aide at East Franklin for taking care of, picking up and selling items for concession. The school will reimburse the board for this expense.

- Approved compensation of \$500 for LeAnn Moore, PCHS yearbook sponsor, for after school work hours creating yearbook and monitoring students. This stipend shall be reimbursed to the board by PCHS.

The next regular scheduled meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education is set for February 27, 2018, with work session at 5 p.m., and meeting at 5:15 p.m.

## 'BOARD,' from page 3

community to solve common problems;

- Focusing attention on the need for continuous improvement by questioning, refining and revising issues related to student achievement.

The members of the RCS Board of Education are Bret Gist, president; Judy Pounders, vice-president; Greg Batchelor; Jerry Groce; and Greg

Trapp.

"Even though we make a special effort to show our appreciation in January, their contribution is a year-round commitment," Grimes said. "Each one of our board members is active in the community through their businesses, jobs and other involvement, which makes them even more of an asset to

our school system. They are keenly aware of the importance of educating well-rounded students who are prepared to be contributing members of society once they leave our schools. We appreciate all they do for RCS and for the community."

The RCS Board was honored at its meeting on Thursday, January 25.

## 'MISS,' from page 4

these state report card grades can not be a true reflection of how well a system or school is educating its students.

One way I know this is by the way RHS was chosen as the #1 Standout High School in Alabama. Niche.com, a nationally recognized school ranking site, came to this determination by not only considering test scores but also factoring in the percentage of students considered to be economically disadvantaged; the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who are math and reading proficient; the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who graduate high school; the percentage of minority students who graduate; and the student racial diversity index.

When these unique challenges were considered along with our test scores, Russellville came out on top. When all of the factors that go into educating our students were acknowledged, we were the number one high school in the state of Alabama. This is because these things matter.

At RCS, we are proud of our diversity and those challenges that make us stronger, build good character and make all of us better, both individually and as a whole. But we, along with many other districts statewide, face challenges that other districts may not face. A higher percentage of ELL students, a higher percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch—these things aren't excuses, they are sim-

ply the facts of what our educational environment looks like. And instead of making excuses for the challenges these situations present, we are educating students at a high level and seeing significant growth from both teachers and students. This should be recognized on something as important as a state report card.

We need to think about what this current kind of scoring says. If we were judging the socioeconomic makeup of communities, then this might be an accurate scoring mechanism, but it is woefully inadequate in scoring a school's effectiveness and quality. The report card doesn't take into account scholarships received, school accolades, student involvement, teacher degrees, or professional and instructional growth, etc., and this is a flaw that should not be overlooked.

If we continue with an A-F grading system that doesn't account for these challenges, all of the affluent schools in our state will continue to score "As", schools in the middle of affluence and poverty will struggle to stay above average, and the more impoverished schools will consistently score "Ds" and "Fs". How is this fair? Do we need a state report card to tell us that? How is it even remotely accurate to let a school's poverty level be a judge of how well a school is doing?

Our teachers are working extremely hard. Our teachers are learning and growing now probably more than they ever have in their life instructionally. I see that translating into amazing instruction

in classrooms each day. I know our teachers are doing an amazing job, and our students are growing. Why? As an effective system with effective school leaders, we monitor this growth and progress regularly, and we see the results. These types of processes are truly what schools should be scored on to determine effectiveness, and that can't be measured with a single score.

As an educator, I welcome accountability. I welcome the opportunity to see where we as a system need to improve and where we have the most room to grow. I want to know what we can work on so that our students can receive the best education possible, because that's what all of this is about, after all.

But if we're going to do this, if we're going to grade all of the school systems and individual schools in our state, it needs to be done in a way that is fair and that takes into account more than one test score, because the real measure of learning, achievement, and success can not be reduced down to one single test.

As school and district leaders, we should already know if we are being effective or not. At RCS, we do, and I can answer that with a resounding "yes." One score can not define all the growth and the amazing things happening in our district.

Heath Grimes  
Superintendent  
Russellville City Schools



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**RCS Board approves calendar for 2018-19**

Students will begin new school year August 7

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Russellville City Schools students will begin the new school year on Tuesday, August 7, 2018 after the Russellville City Board of Education approved the 2018-19 school calendar at its January 25 meeting. The new school year begins for faculty with an institute day on Thursday, August 2, with a teacher workday the next day. Teachers will have a professional development day on Monday, August 6 before classes begin the following day. Students will enjoy a fall break from Monday, October 22 through Wednesday, October 24. Other fall holidays include Labor Day on September 3 and Thanksgiving break November 21-23. Christmas break begins December 20. Teachers will return for the spring

2019 semester on January 3 for the first of two professional development days, with students returning Monday, January 7, 2019. Spring holidays include a teacher

**The new school year begins for faculty with an institute day on Thursday, August 2, with a teacher workday the next day. Teachers will have a professional development day on Monday, August 6 before classes begin the following day.**

professional development day February 15, President's Day on Monday, February 18 and spring break from March 25-29. A spring holiday is scheduled for April 19. The last day of the school year will be Friday, May 24, which is also the last day for teachers. The school calendar is available online at [www.rcs.k12.al.us](http://www.rcs.k12.al.us).

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)! Send your submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

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# State, local officials busy with Bicentennial plans

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Pres

In conjunction with next year's celebration of Alabama's 200th birthday, Gov. Kay Ivey recently announced the Alabama Bicentennial Schools Initiative.

The initiative is designed to encourage students to take part in bicentennial events. Alabama became a state on December 14, 1819.



Schools that participate in the bicentennial Initiative are eligible to receive a gubernatorial commendation, a bicentennial flag and bicentennial-themed school resources for the 2018-19 year.

Schools may apply to be designated an Alabama Bicentennial School by developing a school/com-

munity project. Designated schools will receive a \$2,000 grant to support the project.

Three high-achieving schools from each Alabama Congressional district will be recognized as Bicentennial Schools of Excellence during commemoration ceremonies to be held in Montgomery on December 14, 2019.

Franklin County will celebrate its bicentennial with a kickoff event at 10 a.m. on February 6, 2018. The activities are being coordinated by Franklin County and Russellville Bicentennial chairperson Chris Ozbirn.

The public is invited to attend the February 6 event at the Franklin County Archives on Limestone Street in Russellville.

Alabama 200 was created to help the state prepare for and celebrate its 200 birthday. Alabama 200's mission is to support, create and execute events through 2019 that commemorate the people and places of Alabama.

The theme for 2018 is "Honoring Our People," and the 2019 theme is "Sharing Our Stories."

Locally, Ozbirn has created a Franklin County Historical Trail 'Pastport' promotion, which starts on March 1, 2018.

Participants can visit the Franklin County Archives and pick up their 'pastport.' After you have visited each of the 20 historic places in

Franklin County and had your 'pastport' stamped and verified, completed 'pastports' can be turned into the Archives office.

On November 22, 2019, one winner among all completed 'pastports' will be drawn, and that person will win a large gift basket full of products made in Franklin County. The promotion is free and runs through November 20, 2019.

To learn more about Alabama's bicentennial celebration, log onto [www.alabama200.org](http://www.alabama200.org).



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## Handing out the Hardware

Russellville held its annual football awards banquet last week. See story, this page, for details.



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# RHS football holds annual banquet at Todd Centre

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School football team held its annual postseason banquet last Tuesday at the A.W. Todd Center and handed out several awards.

Senior linemen John David Aycock and John David Palmer were honored as Team Captains, along with senior defensive end Jeff Lloyd, senior receiver/linebacker Calen Bragwell and senior running back/linebacker Bernard Phinizee.

Phinizee, who led the team in both rushing and receiving in 2017, was recognized for earning All-State honors from the Alabama Sports Writers Association. [He was a second-team selection in Class 5A.] The 5'8, 180-pound senior took over as the team's Wildcat quarterback in Week 7 against Brooks and rushed for 515 yards and six touchdowns on 78 attempts the rest of the year.

Phinizee, who was also named the Golden Tigers' Offensive MVP at last week's banquet, finished the season with 669 yards rushing and seven touchdowns on 109 carries, adding 332 yards receiving and two scores on 18 catches. He also had two kickoff returns for touchdowns and totaled 1,001 yards from scrimmage.

Lloyd won the team's Defensive MVP award. The 6'2, 205-pound senior led Russellville with 77 tackles (including eight for loss) and six sacks, while also forcing two fumbles and picking off a pass. Lloyd also received the Turnover Belt Award at the banquet.

The Most Improved Offensive Player Award was shared by Aycock, who started at right tackle and graded out as the team's second-best O-lineman; freshman receiver Rowe Gallagher, who finished second on the team with 20 catches; Bragwell, who caught 18 passes for 191 yards and two touchdowns in his first season of varsity football; junior lineman Will Rushing, who solidified the left tackle spot after playing exclusively on defense the previous season; freshman quarterback Luke Barnwell, who completed 60 percent of his attempts for 1,314 yards and 10 touchdowns as a varsity rookie; freshman lineman Edgar Amaya, who started at guard; and junior lineman Ondre Armstead, who also started at guard.

See 'BANQUET,' Page 19

# Who's headed to HANCEVILLE?

## With area tournaments set to tip off next week, local teams prepare to make a postseason run

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

The final week of the regular season tipped off Monday, and tomorrow is the first day of February. In the world of high school hoops, that can mean only one thing.

Tournament time is almost here.

The postseason begins with area tournaments next week, followed by sub-regional games on February 12-13. Then, for a select few, it's on to Hanceville for the Northwest Regional, with the bright lights of Birmingham a mere two wins away.

So, which teams in Franklin County have the best shot at making a deep postseason run? We'll examine the road to Hanceville for all the local contenders and make a few predictions about how

the next couple of weeks will play out.

Let's start in Class 2A, Area 14, where Phil Campbell's girls have that Final Four look about them.

**Class 2A, Area 14 – Girls**  
**The Favorite: Phil Campbell**  
**Challengers: None**

The Lady Bobcats (19-5 through Sunday and ranked No. 4 in the state by the ASWA) won their six area games by an average margin of 33 points. County rival Red Bay is the No. 2 seed, and the Lady Tigers lost to Phil Campbell by 29, by 18 and by 19—with all three games essentially decided by the end of the first quarter.

The Lady Bobcats are a lock to win the area title, which would earn them a sub-regional game at

See 'HANCEVILLE,' Page 14



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**UNDER PRESSURE** - The Lady Bobcats' relentless defense (applied here by, from left, Chloe Roberson, Darby Elliott and Dakota Elliott) should carry them to the regional, and an improved offensive attack gives them a better shot (pun intended) to reach Birmingham.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW  
 Red Bay's girls (led by first-year coach Sonya Marks) have a chance to reach the regional for an eighth straight year--but they'll have to get by Lamar County first.

## 'HANCEVILLE' from page 13

home—likely against Altamont, which finished runner-up to Cleveland in the Area 11 regular-season race. A win there would send Phil Campbell to Hanceville for the third time in four seasons under head coach Craig Thomas.

The real question is not whether the Lady Bobcats will reach the regional tournament, but rather how they'll do when they get there. Phil Campbell routinely destroys bad teams, mostly because bad teams—generally speaking—don't handle the ball well, and teams that don't handle the ball well are doomed against the Lady Bobcats' trapping pressure defense.

The postseason, however, weeds out bad teams, and Phil Campbell will have to beat two quality opponents to win the regional. [Third-ranked Mars Hill looks like the biggest obstacle, with perennial powers Cold Springs and Tanner also lurking.] Quality opponents are more equipped to handle full-court pressure, which would in turn keep the Lady Bobcats out of transition [where they're lethal] and force them to play a half-court game.

The good news for Thomas is that his team has been more effective this year scoring in the half-court, due largely to improved perimeter shooting and their ability to attack the offensive glass.

Sophomore guard Kallie Allen, a Russellville transfer averaging 11.6 points per game in her first season at PCHS, led the Lady Bobcats through Sunday with 25 threes made; junior guard Dakota Elliott (13 threes), junior forward Abby Davis (12 threes) and freshman guard Caitlynn Mills (11 threes) are also threats from beyond the arc.

Allen and senior forward Chloe Roberson (7.2 points per game) both have a knack for getting on the offensive boards, which helps create extra shot opportunities—and those extra shot opportunities are a vital piece of the puzzle for Phil Campbell's girls. They average a robust 61.5 points per game, but they don't generally do it by shooting a high percentage; their game is about volume more so than efficiency.

Thomas simply can't abide possessions—for his team, anyway—that don't result in shots at the basket. The Lady Bobcats aim to flood the market with attempts (often 20 to 30 more than their opponent in a given game) with the belief that, sooner or later, they'll make enough of them to win. And

when in doubt, they can always dump the ball inside to the 5'11 Davis, who put up a career-high 30 points in last Friday's 73-53 win over Lamar County and had scored 1,225 career points at the varsity level through Sunday.

In Davis (13.8 points per game this season), Allen, senior guard Darby Elliott (9.0 points per game), Dakota Elliott (8.4 points per game), Roberson (team-best 75 percent from the foul line) and Mills (4.7 points per game), Phil Campbell has six players who have scored at least 16 points in a game at some point this year. Pressure defense should get the Lady Bobcats to Hanceville, and that offensive balance gives them a legitimate chance to go even further.

Phil Campbell was 9-0 through Sunday against Class 2A competition this season, including a 67-59 win over fellow contender Cold Springs back in November. It says here that the Lady Bobcats will win a Top 5 showdown with Mars Hill in the regional semifinals and then beat Cold Springs again to punch their ticket to Birmingham.

Red Bay's girls, incidentally, could also find themselves in Hanceville. The Lady Tigers (9-14 as of last week) are not the state title contenders they were before long-time stars Allie Kennedy and Darby Madden departed for the college ranks, but they've remained competitive under first-year head coach Sonya Marks (who, as it happens, is no stranger to winning postseason basketball games). Of those 14 losses through last Thursday, five had come by six points or less.

Junior forward Reagan Kuykendall—who totaled 60 points in back-to-back overtime games against Hatton and Tremont in December—has taken over as the featured weapon on offense, averaging 14.1 points per game. Red Bay has a skilled point guard in junior Mallori Miller and a handful of capable perimeter shooters, including senior Charlie Lindley (8.1 points per game, 24 threes made), freshman Macy Faulkner (6.1 points per game, 22 threes) and senior Savannah Shaw (4.6 points per game, 15 threes). Destiny McCollister, a 6'0 freshman, can be a factor as a shot-blocker, rebounder and low-post scorer.

If the Lady Tigers survive a first-round game with Lamar County (a team they beat twice by a total of eight points during the regular season) at the area tournament, a sub-regional trip to Cleveland could

be in the cards. Win that, and Red Bay will be right back in Hanceville for an eighth consecutive year.

**Class 2A, Area 14 – Boys**

**The Favorite: Sulligent**

**Challengers: Red Bay, Phil Campbell, Lamar County**

Red Bay (16-8 overall through Sunday) and Sulligent each finished 4-2 in area play, and a coin flip was set for this week to determine the top seed and home-court advantage. Regardless of how that turns out, the Blue Devils—who stumbled to a 1-2 start in area play before getting their legs under them in January and beating Red Bay by 30, Lamar County by 18 and Phil Campbell by 20—have asserted themselves as the team to beat at next week's tournament.

The good news for Red Bay and head coach John Torisky is that they won't have to deal with Sulligent until the area final—provided they get there. The gritty Tigers showed some resolve last week, grinding out three straight wins on the heels of a gut-wrenching double-overtime loss to Belgreen in the county finals.

A tough-minded defensive team allowing just 49.7 points per game, Red Bay can also create some matchup problems on the other end of the floor thanks to versatile post players Gath Weatherford and Braden Ray. Weatherford, a 6'3 junior averaging a team-best 15.9 points per game through Sunday, is a physical presence on the low block who can also knock down threes (39 of them on the season, third-most in Franklin County) or face up and make things happen off the dribble.

Ray, a 6'2 freshman averaging 8.9 points per game, possesses a similar skill set, so much so that Torisky referred to him as "Gath Junior" after Ray came off the bench to score 17 points and spark a 71-49 win over Tharptown in the county semifinals.

The Tigers (who average 51.6 points per game) have their occasional dry spells on offense, but they're dangerous because they can put five shooters on the floor at any given time. In addition to Weatherford and Ray (who had made 14 threes through Sunday), guards Clay Allison (8.7 points per game, 28 threes made) and Colton Corum (6.8 points per game, 26 threes) also pose a threat from the perimeter, and junior Hunter Bays—who

See 'HANCEVILLE,' Page 15

# 'HANCEVILLE' from page 14

nailed the go-ahead three late in last Friday's 50-47 win at Tremont—has also been shooting the ball well lately.

As a team, the Tigers have been productive from both the three-point line (125 makes in 24 games) and the foul line, where Weatherford (79 percent), Ray (72 percent) and Allison (65 percent) are all assets. Red Bay has solid depth, too, with rugged junior post player Peyton Green and athletic freshman guard Jalen Vinson also playing key roles.

Impressive wins over good 4A teams Central and Hamilton and also over Class 5A Russellville suggest that the Tigers—should they lose to Sulligent in the area final—are more than capable of going on the road and winning a sub-regional game against the likes of Cleveland, Tarrant or Altamont, all of whom had losing records through Sunday. The tricky part for Red Bay might be getting past a first-round matchup in the area tournament with either Lamar County or Phil Campbell. The Tigers split two regular-season meetings with Lamar County, and any game with the rival Bobcats is guaranteed to be a knockdown drag-out.

Speaking of Phil Campbell, head coach Brett Thomas's veteran team is looking the part of a very dangerous No. 4 seed heading into next week. The Bobcats (8-12 through Sunday) dealt with key injuries early in the season and stumbled to a 1-7 start; they had gone 7-5 since, notching noteworthy wins over the likes of Belgreen and Lamar County along the way and positioning themselves to make a postseason splash.

The return to health of senior guard Joe Hardy (9.0 points per game, with 16 threes made in 12 games) has been huge, adding another capable scorer/shooter to go along with the likes of junior Nate Owens (9.0 points per game, 31 threes) and seniors Daniel Smith (7.4 points per game) and Brody Nix (6.7 points per game). But what makes Phil Campbell most dangerous is the presence of 6'1 senior forward Peyton Thomas, an inside-outside scorer capable of taking over a game on any given night.

Thomas, the county's active career scoring leader on the boys side with 1,322 career points through Sunday, has been on a roll of late, averaging 20.9 points in ten games in the month of January. At a solid 200 pounds, he has the strength to get shots off in the paint against taller players, plus the touch to make them. A selective perimeter shooter, he had made 14 threes through Sunday and was averaging 17.6 points per game on the season while shooting 64 percent from the foul line.

The injury-related absence of gusty senior guard Rhett Benford (8.4 points per game, 17 threes made) is a blow, but the Bobcats are still capable of

See 'HANCEVILLE,' Page 16



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE** - A healthy Hardy (with ball) has made a major difference for the Bobcats, who are 7-5 with their senior leader in the lineup and just 1-7 without him.

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## Peyton Thomas Senior Forward, Phil Campbell

Thomas continued his January surge last week, averaging 21.0 points in three games for the Bobcats. After scoring 21 points in a loss to Hamilton last Tuesday, Thomas hit his first 10 shots of Wednesday's game at Tharptown on his way to matching his season-high with 26 points in a 62-46 win. The 6'1 senior capped the week by scoring 16 points on Friday to help the Bobcats beat area rival Lamar County 65-52.

Through Sunday, Thomas was averaging 20.9 points in ten games this month and a career-high 17.6 points per game on the year.



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## 'HANCEVILLE', from page 15

advancing beyond next week's tournament—although a first-round matchup with Sulligent could certainly lead to an early exit. For the record, we'll take Red Bay's boys to finish runner-up to Sulligent and then win a sub-regional game on the road. It's only fitting that the Tigers' remarkable turnaround from last year's two-win season should culminate with a trip to Hanceville.

### Class 1A, Area 13 – Boys

#### The Favorite: Belgreen

#### Challengers: Tharptown, Hackleburg

A basketball season is a three-month grind, and most teams hit a bump or two along the way. Belgreen was no exception, dropping back-to-back games to Phil Campbell and Tharptown in mid-January. As of Sunday, the Bulldogs (19-5 overall) had bounced back with five straight wins, beating Red Bay in double-OT to win their second straight county title and then crushing Hackleburg 79-45 last Friday to wrap up home-court advantage for the area tournament.

Head coach Clint Isbell's team is in the midst of a challenging final week of the regular season (versus Fayette County Monday, at Red Bay Tuesday, at Sheffield Friday), but they look primed for another postseason run—particularly if junior guard Brant Bragwell (second on the team in scoring at 13.4 points per game and first in threes made through Sunday with 26) returns from a knee issue in time for next week's tournament.

During Bragwell's nearly four-week absence, senior guards Seth Taylor and Eli Hiser have risen to the challenge. Taylor, a reserve on last year's regional semifinal team, had averaged 12.6 points in nine January games through Sunday, knocking down 17 threes. Six of those threes came in last Friday's area clincher, when he scored 22 points. Hiser, meanwhile, was on fire last week, hitting a total of 10 threes and averaging 15.3 points in wins over Red Bay, Phillips and Hackleburg.

"I think it took us some time to get used to playing without him. Brant is our second-leading scorer, and he's a big part of our offense," Isbell said last week. "It took a few games for some of the guys to adjust to new roles. Eli and Seth have definitely stepped up their scoring game lately, and now when we get Brant back out there it will be like an added bonus."

The Bulldogs will need all the firepower they can muster if they are to emerge from a loaded Northwest Regional bracket potentially headlined by sixth-ranked R.A. Hubbard and 2017 state finalist South Lamar. They'll also need 6'6 junior Mason Bragwell to be dominant on both ends of the floor. Through Sunday, Bragwell had topped the 20-point mark 10 times this season and was leading the county in scoring at 18.2 points per game.

Then there's 6'1 senior point guard Jacob Mayberry, who had also picked up the slack in the scoring department during Brant Bragwell's absence. Through Sunday, Mayberry—whose old-school game is built on dribble-drives and mid-range jumpers—had reached double-figures in seven of his last eight games, averaging 13.0 points during that stretch and a career-high



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**HOME COOKIN'** - Jake Taylor (20) and Belgreen wrapped up home-court advantage for the area tournament with last Friday's 79-45 rout of Hackleburg, their fifth straight win.

10.7 points per game on the season. He and 6'0 senior forward Payton Scott (6.1 points per game) set the tone for Belgreen's pressure defense, and Scott is also one of the team's top rebounders.

If the Bulldogs cut down the nets again next week as area champions, they'll likely host either No. 8 Meek (20-5 through Sunday) or Marion County (13-9) in a sub-regional game. The bet here is that Marion County will be the one making the trip to Belgreen on February 13, with a regional berth hanging in the balance. The Red Raiders split two games this season with Hackleburg (a team Belgreen drilled twice) and also got blown out twice by South Lamar (by 40 and 32 points) and twice by Hamilton (by 36 and 29 points).

We're booking the Bulldogs for a trip to Hanceville, but they'll probably have to beat R.A. Hubbard in the regional semifinals and then South Lamar in the final to make their Final Four dreams come true. That's a monumental task.

The ceiling for Tharptown's boys stretches all the way to Hanceville, as evidenced by their 58-50 win over Belgreen on January 13. In order to get another crack at the Bulldogs in next week's area finals, the second-seeded Wildcats (10-11 overall through Sunday) will first have to win a rubber match with third-seeded Hackleburg in the semifinals. The teams met twice in a two-week span in December; Hackleburg threatened the century mark in a 93-56 win at Tharptown, getting a career-high 37 points from point guard Collier Cantrell, and then managed barely that much production as a team on December 15 in a 54-39 home loss to the Wildcats.

Hackleburg's Kaleb Moore, a big-bodied athlete drawing interest from D-1 schools as a football player, missed the second meeting with Tharptown after leaving the team just a few days prior. He was back in the fold as of last Friday at Belgreen, playing major minutes and scoring 12 points off the bench in a blowout loss to the Bulldogs.

Tharptown is led by the one-two scoring punch of seniors Cole Daniel and Levi McCormack, whose numbers are strikingly similar but whose games could hardly be more different. Daniel, a 6'0 forward who averages 13.5 points per game, does the vast majority of his damage in the paint. He had reached double-figures in 17 of 21 games through Sunday, posting three games of 20-plus points. McCormack, a 6'0 guard who averages 13.0 points

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**'HANCEVILLE', from Page 16**

per game, is the county's most prolific perimeter threat, with 50 made threes through Sunday. He had reached double-figures 16 times in 21 games, also topping the 20-point mark on three occasions.

It's hard to imagine the Wildcats winning two games at the area tournament next week without getting top-shelf performances from both Daniel and McCormack. But if they can pull it off, then head coach Shannon Benford's team would certainly have a shot to win a sub-regional game at home and punch their ticket to Hanceville.

**Class 1A, Area 13 – Girls**  
**The Favorite: Phillips**  
**Challengers: Belgreen, Vina**

There's little doubt that second-ranked Phillips, which went 8-0 in area play and won every game by at least 20 points, will cut down the nets in Bear Creek next week. Head coach Scott Veal's team, 20-2 overall through Sunday, is a legit state title contender and might even be the favorite to win the whole thing. Hence, the only real drama at the area tournament will center around who wins the two-three matchup between Belgreen and Vina—and whether or not that team can then go on the road and win a sub-regional game to join the Phillips girls in Hanceville.

The Lady Bulldogs (15-9 through Sunday) and the Lady Red Devils (22-7) met three times during the regular season, with Belgreen winning twice by 20-plus points and Vina winning 56-55 in between on a late three by Abby Hester. The two teams have played six times over the past two seasons and eight times in three years since Chad Green took over as Belgreen's head coach.

"They know our strengths, and we know their strengths," Green said last week. "They know our weaknesses, and we know their weaknesses. First and foremost with them, it all starts with Hester. She's the point guard, she's their leading scorer, and she gets shots for other girls."

It's a safe bet that most of those shots are going to come from beyond the arc. Sophomore guard Kaitlyn King (13.1 points per game this season) had made a staggering 79 threes through Sunday, with junior forward Emma Humphres (11.0 points per game and 73 threes) hot on her heels. Hester had tossed in 63 threes of her own while averaging a county-best 17.4 points per game. Add in 28 threes from reserve guard Kaley Vandiver and a handful from eighth-grader Rayleigh Guin (9.2 points per game), and Vina's girls



**PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW**

There is a path to Hanceville for Gracie Dempsey (22) and the Lady Bulldogs, provided they survive an opening-round battle with Vina.

## 'HANCEVILLE', from page 17

have already become only the 12th team in state history (according to the AHSAA website) to make 250 threes in a season. [They were at 251 through Sunday.]

The challenge for Green and the Lady Bulldogs next week will be devoting enough defensive attention to Hester to keep her from totally going off while at the same time minimizing open looks on the wings for King and Humphres. When Vina visited Belgreen on January 9, Hester scored 24 points and hit the game-winning three in a one-point victory; eleven days later, at the county tournament, the Lady Bulldogs limited Hester to 15 points and cruised to a 64-44 win.

"The last time we played them," Green said, "we tried to focus on her but also stay close enough to the shooters to keep them from getting too many open looks. You have to contain [Hester] as best you can, defend the three-point line and chase down those long rebounds."

Defending the three-point line will be a priority for the Lady Devils, too. In last Friday's 92-17 rout of Hackleburg, Belgreen buried 16 threes—one shy of the single-game county record set by (who else) Vina two years ago in a loss to Tharptown at the county tournament. Vina's preference on defense is to play zone, and the Lady Bulldogs have a plethora of zone-busters in senior guard Jasmine Martin (37 threes made through Sunday) sophomore guard Autumn Bragwell (28 threes), junior guard Gabbie Moore (26 threes) and sophomore guard Gracie Dempsey (21 threes), plus two more capable perimeter shooters in juniors Emma Willingham and Camie Terrell (nine threes apiece).

"What I really love about this team is how balanced we are," Green said. "On any given night, you don't know who the leading scorer is gonna be. That can be tough to defend."

That balance came in handy earlier this month when Moore, the team's second-leading scorer on the season, missed five games due to injury. Players like Willingham, Bragwell and Gracie Dempsey stepped in to pick up the slack.

"Emma has been playing great lately," Green said after last Friday's win. "On the defensive end, she's gonna make something happen. And she's been shooting the ball better. Gracie has stepped up her game, too, and so has Autumn Bragwell. She had 19 points in the county tournament [in a semifinal win over Vina] and was our leading scorer. She's been playing really well."

Through Sunday, the Lady Bulldogs had seven

players averaging between four and ten points per game: Freshman post player Emma Dempsey (9.8), Moore (9.4), Martin (7.7), Gracie Dempsey (7.2), sophomore post players Ansley Tate (6.7) and Katie Dempsey (6.7), and Bragwell (4.6). That balance—plus a strong effort on the glass—should be enough to carry Belgreen's girls past Vina next week and earn them an opportunity on the road in sub-regional play, quite possibly at Area 12 regular-season champion Marion County.

The bet here is that the Lady Bulldogs, who played long stretches of high-quality basketball against Final Four contenders Phil Campbell and Phillips last week, will make it to Hanceville for the second time in three seasons under Green.

### Class 5A, Area 16 – Boys

#### The Favorite: Brooks

#### Challengers: Russellville, East Limestone, Lawrence County

There is a difference between being unbeaten and being unbeatable. Head coach Brian Wright and Brooks deserve a ton of credit for being the former [they were 24-0 through Sunday, with tough tests still remaining against Mars Hill on Tuesday and at Central on Friday], but you'd be hard-pressed to find anybody who thinks the Lions are the latter.

For starters, they haven't played any of the consensus top three teams in the Shoals this season (Muscle Shoals, Florence and Deshler). Secondly, they've played enough close games—eight decided by single digits, five of those by six points or less—to cast doubt on any air of invincibility that might have otherwise developed. And, finally, though they have an abundance of good players (Dusty Quillen, Clay Miller, Ben Hamner), the Lions lack a true standout, next-level individual star, the kind of eye-catching talent that most elite teams are going to have.

For example, the Russellville team that ran the table in the regular season roughly a decade ago boasted no fewer than four future collegiate players—one of which (6'3 guard Terence Smith) eventually played major minutes for an Ole Miss team that made the NCAA Tournament. It's doubtful that anybody on the current Brooks roster will ever get a taste of March Madness beyond filling out a bracket like the rest of us.

What the Lions *do* have is size, shooting, poise, shooting, intelligence, shooting, unselfishness and—oh yeah—shooting. Wright has a lot of guys who can serve as interchangeable parts, most of whom are capable of sticking a three at any given



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Patrick Odom (above, left, talking with Red Bay assistant David Corum) will try and lead the Golden Tigers to a third area title in three seasons.

moment. The Lions have the confidence that comes from having closed out so many tough games this season, and they'll also have the home-court advantage next week in Killen.

They'll have something else, too—pressure, and plenty of it.

The first round of the area tournament can be an unnerving experience; Russellville coach Patrick Odom doesn't call it "the scariest night in high school athletics" for nothing. It's usually most frightening for the favored teams and the top seeds; that pressure will only intensify if Brooks makes it to the finish line unscathed, particularly when you consider how competitive some of the Lions' area games were this season.

They were leading Russellville by just three points with 1:12 remaining on January 9 before pulling away for a 66-56 win—and that was on a night when the Golden Tigers' leading scorer, junior guard Lucas McNutt, was home with flu. Brooks also had two tight battles with Lawrence County, winning in overtime at home and by three points in Moulton.

Russellville (5-15 through Sunday) will get first crack at the top-seeded Lions next week. The Golden Tigers lost by 16 in Killen in December, but they pose a threat for two primary reasons. One is the presence of Odom, a 19-year veteran who knows how to push all the right buttons come tournament time [he's two for two when it comes to winning area tournament titles at Russellville]. The other is the dynamic scoring duo of McNutt and fellow junior guard Devin Buckhalter, both of whom are capable of dizzying hot streaks.

It's not often that a tournament's No. 4 seed boasts the top two scorers in the area, but that's undoubtedly the case with McNutt and Buckhalter. Through Sunday, McNutt was leading the team in both scoring (16.1 points per game) and threes made (41) while shooting 80 percent (66-for-82) from the foul line. He had topped the 20-point mark in a game six times—the same number as Buckhalter, who was averaging 15.7 points per game with 36 threes made.

McNutt and Buckhalter had 47 points between

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## 'HANCEVILLE', from page 18

them in a season-opening win at Colbert County; they totaled 42 in a rout of Colbert Heights at the *TimesDaily* Classic and 46 last Monday in a game at Central. All told, the two have combined to score at least 35 points nine times this season; Russellville's record of 4-5 in those nine games speaks to the importance of getting solid contributions from the supporting cast.

Freshman Chandler Dyas is third on the team in both scoring (8.3 points per game through Sunday) and threes made (25). He also shoots 79 percent (27-for-34) from the foul line. Junior Caden Parker (5.6 points per game) might be the team's top playmaker/facilitator and also shoots 71 percent (25-for-35) from the line. Calen Bragwell, an athletic 6'2 senior and the team's only true post player, leads Russellville in rebounding, and senior Logan Jones brings energy, quickness and occasional scoring punch off the bench. Senior guard Brock Malone (3.2 points per game through Sunday, with nine threes made) and freshman post player Brooks Scott also play key roles.

Brooks is by no means unbeatable, but it will take the best versions of McNutt and Buckhalter—plus meaningful contributions from everyone else—for Russellville to pull the upset next week. Back in Odom's first year, the Golden Tigers lost a bunch of close games and never seemed to hit their stride in a frustrating regular season before beating Lawrence County and top-seeded West Point in February to claim the area title. Let's reverse the order this time. It says here the Golden Tigers will take down top-seeded Brooks and then survive a battle with the rival Red Devils in the finals to win a third straight area tournament championship.

One thing's for certain—whoever comes out of Area 16 has a tough row to hoe to reach Hanceville. The area runner-up will likely head to Wenonah for a sub-region game against the second-ranked Dragons (22-6 through Sunday), who own victories this season over two of the top three teams in Class 7A (Mountain Brook and Hoover), plus two wins over Class 6A No. 8 Parker and four wins over teams ranked in the 5A Top 10.

The Area 16 champion gets to play at home in the sub-regional round, but the matchup won't be much friendlier. Fairfield (19-7 through Sunday and ranked No. 10 in Class 5A) also has a victory over Class 6A No. 8 Parker and twice played Wenonah tough, losing by 10 and by seven. Pleasant Grove already has 20 wins this season, including a 65-51 victory over Fairfield. In other words, the Area 9 runner-up will be a handful.

**Class 5A, Area 16 – Girls**

**The Favorite: East Limestone**

**Challengers: Lawrence County, Russellville**

The Lady Golden Tigers (8-17 through Sunday) were rolling in late December and early January, winning six out of eight games during a hot stretch that culminated with a 65-32 spanking of area rival Lawrence County on January 9. As the two teams prepare to meet again next week in the first

## 'BANQUET', from page 13

Palmer, who started at center and graded out as the Golden Tigers' top lineman in 2017, won the O-Line Award at last week's banquet. The Wide Receiver Award went to senior Robert Hamilton, who led the team with 33 catches for 233 yards and three touchdowns while also rushing for 375 yards and two scores on 96 carries.

The Most Improved Defensive Player Award was shared by freshman inside linebacker Brooks Scott, senior lineman Andres Tomas, junior strong safety Wylie Boyd and freshman defensive back Ashaad Williams.

Lloyd and fellow senior Roman Cortez (who recorded 30 tackles, including five for loss, and forced two fumbles in eight games) shared the Defensive Line Award. The hard-hitting Boyd won the Defensive Back Award, and senior corner Kevin Partrich took home the Hawk Award.

Kenner Perez, who handled place-kicking and punting duties for the Golden Tigers, shared the Special Teams Award with dynamic senior kick returner Logan Jones. The Iron Man Award went to Aycock, Lloyd and Phinizee. The Coaches' Award was shared by Bragwell, Lloyd, Palmer, Rushing, Barnwell and Austin Ashley, along with three players who missed the season due to injuries—junior Devin Buckhalter and freshmen Peyton Ray and Grayson Eady.

Perez, Lloyd, Phinizee and Palmer also received awards recognizing their status as All-Area selections.

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round of the area tournament at East Limestone High School, much has changed—and none of it in a positive way for Russellville.

Lawrence County was without injured starting guards Sadie Thompson and Chloe Orr in that 33-point loss at the RMS gym earlier this month; both have since returned to the lineup for the Lady Red Devils. Meanwhile, Russellville lost sophomore guard Madison Murray last week to a season-ending knee injury. Murray was leading the Lady Golden Tigers in scoring (14.1 points per game), threes made (35), free throws made (93), and free throws attempted (151) when she went down, and her absence could be crippling for a team that struggled at times to find consistent offense even *with* Murray on the floor.

"We got together as a coaching staff to try and figure out how to piece together some production with Madison out," head coach Corey Thomaston said last Friday following a 50-43 loss to Haleyville. "We don't have one player on our roster who can replace what she was giving us. She's our leading scorer, she's a good defender, she rebounds the basketball—she does a lot of things for us."


Thomaston raves about the character and the resolve of his team, but the Lady Golden Tigers are fighting an uphill battle without Murray. Freshman guard Treyvia Pruitt, who averages 9.4 points per game and was tied with Murray through Sunday with 35 threes made, will have to pick up the slack in the scoring department. So will senior guard Madison Hargett (6.4 points per game, 12 threes), who scored in double-figures last Friday for the third time in the last five games. Sophomore post player Autumn Logan (6.3 points per game) must stay out of foul trouble and provide consistent production in the paint.

Given the reversal of fortunes on the injury front [Thompson and Orr combined to score 29 points for Lawrence County in a 44-37 win over Russellville in early December], it will be a major challenge for the Lady Golden Tigers to make the area final. If they do, they'll have to deal with top-seeded East Limestone (19-5 through Sunday) and freshman phenom Jirah Rogers, who averages 22.1 points per game on 66-percent shooting from the floor.

The Area 16 runner-up will likely have to deal with second-ranked Wenonah (19-7 through Sunday), which owns victories this season over Class 7A No. 5 Huffman, Class 5A No. 3 Eufaula and Class 3A No. 1 Lauderdale County.

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