



## Right on track

A Tharptown High alum is headed to Pharmacy School. See story Page 8.

## Job Shadow

Junior Leadership students got a peek at potential careers. See story Page 3.



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# Report card time

## Local school systems receive state grades

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Before the State of Alabama's A-F public school report cards were released last week, Russellville City Schools superintendent of education Heath Grimes had already voiced his displeasure with the scoring criteria used by the Alabama Department of Education.

In an editorial in the January 31 edition of the *Free Press*, Grimes expressed concerns about academic achievement and academic improvement standards being based on one test, the ACT Aspire, a standardized test that will no longer be used in Alabama schools.

"For schools without a grade twelve [elementary and middle schools], ninety percent of the school score comes from an invalid test," Grimes said. "And our schools, our teachers and our students are more than a score."

Grimes also outlined his reservations about the test failing to consider what he described as "unique challenges" faced by systems such as Russellville City Schools. Those include poverty, local funding and the number of English Language Learners (ELL) students who have a language other than English as their primary language.

**In the area of academic growth, Russellville High School was perfect. The school earned a 100 based on the number of individual students who show improvement in reading and math from one year to the next using multiple years of data. The state average score was 87.86.**

"These state report card grades can not be a true reflection of how well a system or school is educating its students," Grimes said. "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 A's, schools in the middle of affluence and poverty will struggle to stay above average, and the more impoverished schools will consistently score D's and F's. How is this fair?"

See 'RUSSELLVILLE,' Page 9

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

It's usually the schools sending students home with report cards, but this time it was the schools on the receiving end of grades, as the Alabama Department of Education's 2016-17 report cards came out last Thursday.

Each school system in Alabama was graded on the same criteria. The overall system received a letter grade from A-F, and each school received its own letter grade.

**In the category of graduation rate, Franklin County Schools scored 88.80, above the state average of 87. This score reflects the percentage of high school students who graduate within four or five years from the time they enter the ninth grade.**

For high schools, grading criteria included: Academic achievement (20 percent); academic growth (30 percent); graduation rate (30 percent); college and career readiness (10 percent); and chronic absenteeism (10 percent).

Schools without a grade 12 had a different set of criteria, which included: Academic achievement (40 percent); academic growth (50 percent); and chronic absenteeism (10 percent).

Alabama Act No. 2012-402 requires the Alabama superintendent of education to develop a school grading system reflective of school and district performance. The act requires the school profile be based on a combination of student achievement scores, achievement gap, college and career readiness, learning gains and other indicators selected by the Alabama superintendent of education.

Franklin County Schools received an overall system grade of C and a numeric score of 78.

In the area of academic achievement, Franklin County Schools received a score of 53.35. This is based on the percentage of proficient students in the areas of reading and math utilizing assessments in tested grades. The system's score of 53.35 fell below the state average.

See 'FRANKLIN,' Page 9

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**Jimmy Wayne Aldridge**, Phil Campbell, age 68  
Died Monday, January 29, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Blue Springs Cemetery.

**Teresa Gay Scott Cansler**, Phil Campbell, age 69  
Died Tuesday, January 30, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Spruce Pine Cemetery.

**Jerry Clayton Nix**, formerly of Russellville, age 80  
Died Friday, February 2, 2018. Graveside service held at Liberty Hill Cemetery in Phil Campbell. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family.

**Rosa Darlene Tompkins**, Tuscumbia, age 64  
Died Thursday, February 1, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Oak Grove Cemetery.

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# Local students take part in Job Shadowing Day

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

While Punxsutawney Phil may have seen his shadow last Friday, indicating six more weeks of winter, some Franklin County businesses and elected officials had shadows in their offices last Thursday morning.

The Franklin County Junior Leadership students, under the supervision of Franklin County Chamber of Commerce executive director Cassie Medley, took part in job shadowing last week. Students submitted jobs they might be interested in as careers, and Medley contacted local chamber members to see if they would participate.

Forty-two high school juniors from across Franklin County went out in the field last Thursday to learn more about potential careers.

"They gave options of professions they might be interested in as a career," Medley said. "Very few of the businesses turned me down. We had really good participation from our business community for Job Shadowing Day."

Kaylee Smith, a Russellville High School junior, spent her morning with Willodean Davis and Marty Vandiver at Davis Realty and Associates.

Smith, who is interested in real estate as a career, asked Vandiver questions about what he does as a realtor, and Davis and Vandiver included her in their efforts to find an Arizona resident a suitable home in Franklin County.

"I want to help people, and I think helping them find their first home or their forever home would be a great career," Smith said. "I learned this morning that when you get your license you become certified as a realtor in several different agencies."

**Smith, who is interested in real estate as a career, asked Vandiver questions about what he does as a realtor, and Davis and Vandiver included her in their efforts to find an Arizona resident a suitable home in Franklin County.**

**"I want to help people, and I think helping them find their first home or their forever home would be a great career," Smith said. "I learned this morning that when you get your license you become certified as a realtor in several different agencies."**

Davis, who has participated in the Job Shadowing Day for several years, said she loves the opportunity to share her profession with local students.

"I just enjoy being with young people," Davis said. "I let them go with me if we have reason to go out of the office. This morning we have a man from Arizona looking for a certain house. Marty and I are trying to tailor to his needs and find the appropriate house."

Smith, who plans to attend Northwest-Shoals Community College after



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

RHS junior Kaylee Smith spent time with Willodean Davis and Marty Vandiver at Davis Realty and Associates during Job Shadowing Day.

RHS, said Davis told her about a letter she received from a man who she helped find his first home when he was only 19.

"He told her it really changed his life, and that opened my eyes to how you can really help people in this job," Smith said.

Davis told Smith being an effective realtor isn't about how much you make—it's about how you make people feel.

"That's what this job is all about," Davis said. "It's not about money. It's about the service you can provide to people."

Junior leaders shadowed a variety of businesses, including Bowen Family Dentistry, Russellville Hospital, Family Pharmacy, Hometown Pharmacy and probate judge Barry Moore, who hosted RHS student Yaslin Perez and Red Bay junior Matthew Williams.

"I always appreciate the opportunity to do job shadowing," Moore said. "It's good to have these young men and ladies and show them what we do at the courthouse. They were very well mannered and asked good questions."

"It's a good program that shows students what happens in businesses and professional offices."

## Friday is National Pizza Day

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

This Friday, February 9, will see Americans celebrating National Pizza Day.

While this might not be up there with Thanksgiving, Christmas and Independence Day, most of us won't limit our pizza intake to the day we celebrate the delicious food.

Italian baker Raffaele Esposito from Naples is credited with inventing the modern pizza as most of us know it. Esposito, according to [www.wonderopolis.com](http://www.wonderopolis.com), was called upon to make a pizza for Italian King Umberto I and Queen Margherita during their visit to Naples in 1889. That pizza featured fresh tomatoes, mozzarella cheese and basil and is still known as pizza Margherita today.

What would National Pizza Day be without some pizza trivia, so here goes:

•98 percent of Americans, according to a survey from [\[day.com\]\(http://day.com\), like pizza. And one in three Americans eat pizza at least once a week.](http://www.nationalto-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

•Pineapple as a topping is disliked by 90 percent of those surveyed. Pepperoni came in as the favorite of 35 percent of pizza eaters, followed by sausage (13 percent), bacon (11 percent), pineapple (10 percent) and mushrooms (10 percent).

•More than 42 percent of respondents said they eat three slices when they eat pizza. Twenty-five percent eat four or more, and 22 percent said they can eat an entire pizza by themselves. Only three percent of Americans stop their pizza gorging at just one slice.

According to the survey, Papa John's pizza is the favorite of almost one fourth of Americans. Russellville has a Papa John's located at 14520 Highway 43. There are also Papa John's stores in Russellville, Arkansas and Russellville, Kentucky.

According to the site [www.expand-edramblings.com](http://www.expand-edramblings.com), Papa John's Pizza

See 'PIZZA,' Page 8

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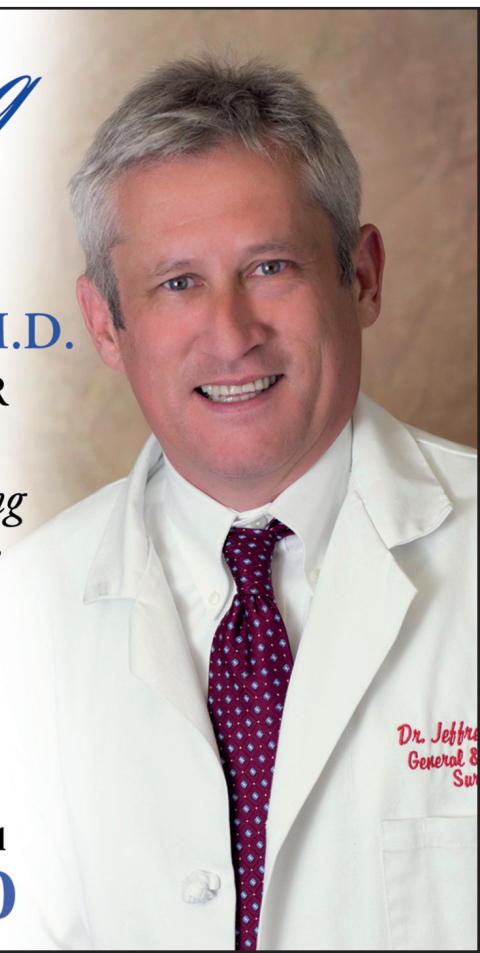
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# Honey Do: Spring garden

It's not quite spring yet, and we probably still have a round or two of ice or snow to contend with, but it's not too early to be pondering the spring garden. For those who just can't wait to get your fingers in the dirt, the next three or four weeks will be a good time to get your seeds started inside. That is, if you want to get a headstart and try for an early crop.

**Timing is critical. If you start your seeds too soon, they may grow out of their containers before spring. Start them too late and they won't be ready in time. A good rule is to start your seeds about eight weeks before the last expected spring frost.**

Timing is critical. If you start your seeds too soon, they may grow out of their containers before spring arrives. Start them too late and they won't be ready in time. A good rule to follow is to start your seeds about eight weeks before the last expected spring frost.

The "Old Farmer's Almanac" ([www.almanac.com](http://www.almanac.com)) gives April 11 as the last frost date of 2018 for our area. This is the Tuesday before Good Friday. A lot of folks like to plant a little earlier, but they do run the risk of losing plants or having to

go to the trouble of covering them up should a frost occur.

Choose a starter planter with proper drainage. Get creative! Seed flats, peat pots, plastic cups, egg cartons and even takeout boxes with holes poked in the bottom work well. In general, your planting containers should be at least three to four inches deep. Fill them to about a quarter-inch from the top with soil. For best results, use a good potting soil or seed-starting soil to provide the best nutrients and to avoid insects or fungi that may be hiding in regular soil.

Peat pots are very inexpensive and very effective. Soak them in water before use to prevent them from pulling moisture out of the soil and away from the plant. Covering containers in plastic wrap can help hold in moisture until plants emerge.

Different plants require different amounts of water and sunlight. The package they come in should be a good guide to follow.

Alright, let's get growing! Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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# Calling all candidates: School's in

By Taylor Dawson  
Alabama Policy Institute

You spoke, Alabama.

We asked, what issues are important to you, and what questions would you ask of your candidates to answer? Since last week was National School Choice Week, let's explore questions on promoting education and supporting Alabama's schoolchildren.

And it probably won't come as much of a surprise—Alabamians are very vocal on these issues.

Here are a few questions posed by our readers, and some background information for candidates to consider when responding.

### What are your thoughts on school choice?

Historically, Alabama has been slow to embrace school choice. The fight for Alabama's very first piece of school choice legislation, the Alabama Accountability Act in 2013, was one for the ages. When charter schools were authorized within the first few weeks of the legislative session in 2015, I thought that Alabama was finally embracing school choice, until last session when changes to broaden the AAA suffered a massive defeat. If elected, would you support efforts to broaden school choice opportunities for Alabama families?

**An innovative way other states are allowing parents to have more choice over their child's education is through Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Are you a proponent of ESAs?**

A brief explanation for those who don't know what ESAs are: ESAs are private accounts managed by the parents of students for use on their child's education expenses. Under ESAs, funds

that the state would spend on a child at their discretion are now up to the parents' discretion. Do you agree that Alabama should empower families to customize their children's education based on their specific needs?

**An Obama-era policy that's been largely rejected in Alabama is common core standards. What is your opinion on common core?**

A policy that would allow the federal government to tell our teachers how and what they're to teach our schoolchildren has been a hot issue in Alabama since it was introduced. A percentage of Alabama's current system of standards—"College and Career Ready Standards"—are based on common core. There have been multiple attempts to shake these standards, whether through revising them or bucking them completely to revert to the previous standards. Would you encourage action on these standards?

**The current Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Betsy DeVos, is a proponent of localizing education as much as possible in an effort to give parents more choice. Do you agree?**

It's a common opinion among school choice advocates that parents—not government—should determine the best course for their child's education. In a speech at Harvard University, Secretary DeVos said, "The future of choice does not begin with a new federal mandate from Washington." One way to allow localities to take ownership of education is through charter schools, which have a proven record of success nationwide and help reduce barriers to school choice. What would you do to encourage local

See 'SCHOOL,' Page 8





### Rent-to-own ok?

Dear Dave,  
Is it okay to buy something using a rent-to-own plan?

Josh

Dear Josh,  
I advise against rent-to-own deals. Rent-to-own places get people in the door with promises of low monthly or weekly payments. But when it comes to rent-to-own furniture, washer and dryer sets, and that kind of thing, you'll end up paying much, much more than if you saved up and bought the item outright. The amount you'll pay out of pocket is even more ridiculous if you compare it to buying the same item, slightly used, somewhere else.

I don't recommend rent-to-own scenarios when it comes to buying a home, either. Most of those offerings are listed at full retail price and then some. Plus, the contracts are tilted toward the seller's side of the equation. And very few people who sign a rent-to-own home deal follow through and become homeowners.

When it comes to real estate deals, the only thing I would consider—other than an outright cash purchase—is leasing with an option to buy. That's different than rent-to-own, because in a rent-to-own situation you've committed to purchase. On a lease with an option to buy deal, you have the *right* to purchase, but not the obligation.

Josh, most of the people who use rent-to-own deals are not in good financial shape. They're deeply in

debt, and they have no money. Rent-to-own ensures they'll stay there.

Dave

### Disability insurance elimination period?

Dear Dave,  
I'm looking at long-term disability insurance policies. What does the term "elimination period" mean?

Glen

Dear Glen,  
The elimination period is, by definition, the time from the point you're declared disabled by a doctor until you begin receiving payments from the insurance company. If you have a 90-day elimination period, it will be about that long from the time you're officially declared disabled until you see your first check.

I recommend 90- to 180-day elimination periods, depending on what kind of financial shape you're in and how much money you have stashed away in savings, investments and your emergency fund. If you have a fully loaded emergency fund of three to six months of expenses—and you have little or no debt, plus other money stashed away—you should be able to carry a policy with a longer elimination period.

And remember, the longer the elimination period, the lower your premiums will be. Hope this helps, Glen!

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](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

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**AARP Tax-Aide will be offering free income tax preparation at DHR on Thursdays from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. through 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.**

**Kids 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 McNameley, UCP; Thursday, March 22 at 5 p.m.—“Ways Babies Learn When You Sing to Them,” Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama.**

**American Legion Post 64 meets the second Thursday of each month at the Chamber of Commerce office on Jackson Avenue. Meal served around 6 p.m., meeting at 7 p.m. Next meeting will be February 8.**

**East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be selling beef stew and chicken stew as a fundraiser this 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.**

**The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Tyler Jones at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville this 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.**

**Gentiva 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.**

**The 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.**

**The Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts in Red Bay will present its second production of the 2017-2018 season, “One Toe in the Grave” by Jack Sharkey, February 15-17 at 7 p.m. each night and February 18 at 2 p.m. at Community Spirit Bank’s Weatherford Centre in Red Bay. Tickets are on sale now at the Weatherford Centre and are \$8.00 for the play and \$17.00 for the dinner. Dinner tickets must be purchased in advance. You may go by or call the Weatherford Centre at 256-356-9829 weekdays between the hours of 2 and 4 p.m. to purchase or reserve your tickets. For group sales, contact Beth Hammock at 256-356-9286, or for more information concerning the play, contact Scotty Kennedy at 256-356-8758. Cast members include: Stacy Stepp, Abbey Jones, Montana Bates, Scotty Kennedy, Ethan Ray, Brittany Russell and Mary-Elizabeth Moore.**

**Mountain 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.**

**The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris, Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, March 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!**

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# Medicaid expansion could help save state hospitals

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Although Haleyville's Lakeland Community Hospital was scheduled to close its doors December 31, 2017, the 87 employees set to be impacted received a three-month reprieve as the closing was delayed until March 31, 2018.

While the closing of a hospital that's been a fixture in Winston County for decades is obviously bad news, the reasons cited for the closing of rural hospitals in Alabama follow predictable political party lines, depending on whom you ask.

Curae Health, a non-profit rural healthcare company, announced the closing of Lakeland in mid-November. The company also owns Russellville Hospital, Northwest Medical Center in Winfield and two Mississippi hospitals, Gilmore Memorial Hospital in Amory and Panola Medical Center in Batesville.

Plans call for the medical detox program at Lakeland to be transferred to Russellville Hospital. Curae officials have said Lakeland's closing will not affect the operations of Russellville Hospital.

Unless the reasons for Lakeland's planned closing are addressed, though, the reduction of Alabama's rural hospitals seems inevitable. Once it closes, Lakeland will become the seventh Alabama hospital to close in the last nine years.

"Unfortunately, as with many other rural healthcare facilities in the Southeast, we are unable to continue operations due to drastic reductions in reimbursement," said Debbie Pace, CEO of Lakeland Community Hospital in November.

Lakeland was set to see its reimbursements from the government reduced by almost \$2 million, and Curae officials saw no viable option to continue operations.

U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-Haleyville), was quick to blame the Affordable Care Act, the bell-cow of Barack Obama's presidency, as the reason.

"This makes the fact that the House passed a repeal plan this year, only to see it fail in the Senate, all the more disappointing and devastating," Aderholt said in a statement last year.

"I am deeply saddened to learn of the closing of Lakeland Hospital. As the only hospital in Winston County, its closure will be felt far outside of Haleyville. In addition to the Haleyville community and the entire area being impacted, dozens of people will lose their jobs at what should be a joyous time of year," Aderholt added in his statement.

In 2014, then Gov. Robert Bentley announced he would not expand Medicaid, which was a provision of the 2010 Affordable Care Act and would have opened coverage up to Alabama residents living below 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

According to healthinsurance.org, an additional 435,000 Alabama residents would be covered if the state accepted expansion.

The act provided that the federal government would pay 100 percent of new enrollee costs the first three years of the expansion. That number would then drop to 90 percent.

According to the same website, that translates to \$14.4 billion for health care not available for

Alabama.

Combine that with the fact that Alabama has, by comparison to other states, low Medicare reimbursement rates. Medicaid reimbursement numbers in Alabama also fall below the national average.

Jim Carnes with Alabama Arise, an advocacy group for low-income families, believes the expanded Medicaid coverage would have been a great opportunity for Alabama.

"The health outcomes for the people of Alabama will improve, and we think it's an economic win because there will be an infusion of federal tax dollars coming back to Alabama," Carnes said in 2012.

Don Williamson, president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said the Medicaid expansion would significantly reduce the number of uninsured Alabamians.

Estimates after the passage of the ACA showed that Alabama would have to account for an extra \$470-\$693 million between 2014-2019 if the state expanded Medicaid, but that would result in \$10 billion in new federal healthcare dollars.

"That's a little like investing \$500 and getting \$10,000 back," Williamson said in 2012, when he served as State Health Officer.

Whether through Medicaid expansion or some alternative means of funding, Alabama's hospitals, particularly those in rural areas, are in dire need of improved reimbursement rates.

Otherwise, there will be more closings, making it more difficult for rural Alabamians to obtain quality health care in their communities.

# My Valentine...

Submit the name of your Valentine and why this person is so special. Entries must be received by Saturday, February 10th. Winning entries will be published in the February 14th Edition of the Franklin Free Press. Winning entries will also receive a Valentine prize pack.

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## NW-SCC helps Franks find path to Pharmacy School

*Submitted to the FFP*

As valedictorian of her senior class, MaKayla Franks knew she wanted to be a pharmacist and had several college scholarship opportunities.

However, one college was at the top of her list when she finished her research: Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC).

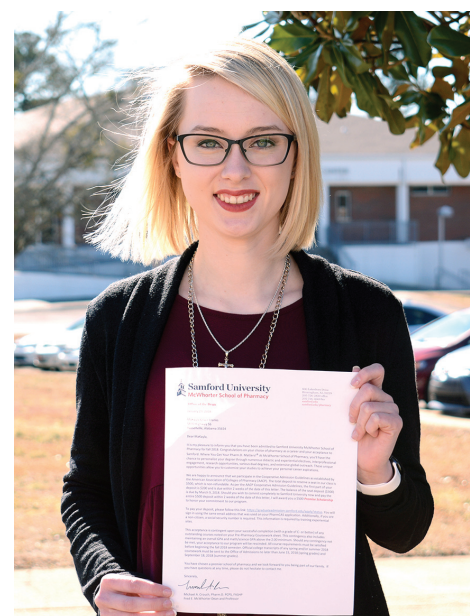
Franks, a sophomore at Northwest-Shoals, found out last week that her dreams were one step closer to becoming a reality when she received her acceptance letter into the McWhorter School of Pharmacy at Samford University.

Franks knew her freshman year at Tharptown High School that she wanted to be a pharmacist.

"There are so many different opportunities as a pharmacist, such as community or institutional pharmacy, that allow one to have hands-on experiences that go far beyond filling prescriptions," said Franks.

According to Franks, NW-SCC offered several opportunities that were important to her when she was selecting a college.

"Northwest-Shoals always seemed



**COURTESY PHOTO**

NW-SCC sophomore MaKayla Franks holds her acceptance letter into the McWhorter School of Pharmacy at Samford University.

to be at the top of my list," she said. "I was instantly attracted to Northwest-Shoals due to many factors, including the smaller class size,

**See 'FRANKS,' page 11**

## 'PIZZA' from page 3

originated in 1983 in Jefferson, Indiana. The company makes more than 350 million pizzas annually, comprising 2.8 billion slices. Papa John's prepares more than one million pizzas each Super Bowl Sunday.

Papa John's is located in 43 countries and there are more than 4,700 United States locations. The company surpassed \$3.7 billion in sales in

2016. With our nation's population of 323,000,000, that averages out to more than \$10 spent at Papa John's each year by every American.

To learn more about National Pizza Day, go online and check out <http://nationaltoday.com/us/national-pizza-day>.

And mark your calendars for February 22, National Margarita Day!

## 'SCHOOL' from page 4

innovation in education and promote growth of charter schools in Alabama?

**Last year, the Alabama School Board was surrounded by controversy, and they have nobody to blame but themselves. How would you institute accountability with the board?**

Alabama's most recent state superintendent held his office for a year before the education establishment forced him out. Under the previous superintendent's administration, Alabama's graduation rates were deemed inflated and misreported by federal officials. Throughout the entirety of 2017, the Board seemed to play politics more than they actually made strides for Alabama education. Seemingly as a result of that, two bills have been filed this year to restructure the school board. What would you do to ensure that the board is working for the children?

I think we can all agree that we would like to hear from our candidates. In my conversations with candidates this year, I'm going to be asking these questions, and I hope that you will, too.

What do you want to talk about next? Let us know on Facebook or Twitter using the hashtag #CandidateCall, or e-mail me at [communications@alabamapolicy.org](mailto:communications@alabamapolicy.org).

Taylor Dawson is Director of Communications for the Alabama Policy Institute (API). API is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to strengthening free enterprise, defending limited government, and championing strong families. If you would like to speak with the author, please e-mail [communications@alabamapolicy.org](mailto:communications@alabamapolicy.org) or call (205) 870-9900.

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## 'RUSSELLVILLE,' from page 1

When all the factors that go into educating students are utilized, Grimes said Russellville City Schools came out on top in being named last year's No. 1 standout high school in Alabama by [www.niche.com](http://www.niche.com).

In spite of the superintendent's concerns, Russellville City Schools scored an overall B, with a numeric grade of 85.

Alabama Act No. 2012-402 required the Alabama superintendent of education to develop a school grading system reflective of school and district performance.

For high schools with a 12th grade, the scoring criteria is as follows: Academic achievement (20 percent); academic growth (30 percent); graduation rate (30 percent); college and career readiness (10 percent); and chronic absenteeism (10 percent).

For schools without a 12th grade, the scoring criteria includes only three categories: Academic achievement (40 percent); academic growth (50 percent); and chronic absenteeism (10 percent).

Individual school scores for Russellville City Schools are listed below. There is no score for

West Elementary, as only schools that have at least third grade or above are graded. West is a kindergarten through second grade school.

### •Russellville High School: B (84)

First, the bad. The school's 47.29 score in academic achievement is a failing grade, well below the state average of 60.27. This number is based on the amount of proficient students in the areas of reading and math utilizing assessments in tested grades. This is the portion of the grading criteria Grimes took issue with, as he believes the system's large number of non-English-proficient students limits their abilities to succeed on a standardized test given in English.

In the area of academic growth, Russellville High School was perfect. The school earned a 100 based on the number of individual students who show improvement in reading and math from one year to the next using multiple years of data. The state average score was 87.86.

RHS also scored an A (92.80) in graduation rate, based on the percentage of high school students who graduate within four or five years of entering ninth grade. The school scored above the state

averages in college and career readiness and chronic absenteeism as well.

### •Russellville Middle School: B (80)

RMS also scored a failing grade in academic achievement, with a 58.15, more than two points below the state average.

The school graded a strong 93.62 on academic growth and had one of the state's lowest chronic absenteeism scores (in this category, the lower the number the better) with a 4.98. Absenteeism is based on the percentage of students having more than 15 absences in a given school year.

### •Russellville Elementary School: C (78)

As with the other two RCS schools, Russellville Elementary scored a failing grade in academic achievement, with a 58.15. The state average score for academic achievement was in the low D range, with a 60.27.

RES outpaced the state average in academic growth with a score of 89.57. RES had an A score in chronic absenteeism, with a 7.92.

Scores for every Alabama public school system and individual public school are available online at <https://ap.alsde.edu>.

## 'FRANKLIN,' from page 1

Franklin County Schools received a score of 84.64 in academic growth, based on individual students who demonstrate improvement in reading and math from one year to the next using multiple years of data. The system's score fell below the state average of 87.86.

In the category of graduation rate, Franklin County Schools scored 88.80, above the state average of 87. This score reflects the percentage of high school students who graduate within four or five years from the time they enter the ninth grade.

College and career readiness is scored based on the percentage of high school students who meet at least one of the college and career-ready indicators. Franklin County's score of 68 is above the state average of 66.

Finally, in the area of chronic absenteeism, where the lower the number the better you score, Franklin County Schools earned a 13.86, below the state average of 17.68. The score is the percentage of students having 15 or more absences in a given school year.

Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton said he and the Franklin County Board of Education, along with administrators from county schools, would review the grades to determine areas that need increased attention across the system and at each individual school.

"There are some numbers that we were pleased with and some that caused concern," Hamilton said. "Our job is to use this information to determine what we are doing right and what improvements are needed within our system."

Hamilton said he remains confident that Franklin County students are receiving quality classroom instruction as part of a positive overall learning environment.

"I am a strong believer in public education," he said. "I believe the Franklin County School System is providing outstanding educational opportunities to its many students through the hard work of the administrators, teachers and support personnel."

Hamilton had particular concerns with the scoring criteria for absenteeism, which he said included student absences for field trips and excused absences.

Franklin County Schools' individual school grades, in descending order, were as follows:

### •Red Bay High School: B (86)

Red Bay scored above the system average in all five criteria, and above the state average in four of the five criteria. The lone exception, academic achievement, saw Red Bay's score of 60.21 fall just below the state average of 60.27.

Red Bay's graduation score of 98.40 is more than 10 points above the state average.

### •Phil Campbell Elementary School: B (81)

PCES outpaced the state average in all three criteria for schools without a 12th grade. The school scored an impressive 92.78 on academic growth, well above the state average.

### •Tharptown Elementary School: C (77)

The school's scores in chronic absenteeism and academic achievement both were higher than state averages, while the academic growth score of 87.25 fell just below the state average.

### •Vina High School: C (77)

Vina's strong graduation rate score of 91.80 was impressive. Chronic absenteeism is not a problem at Vina, with a score of only 12.46, and college and career readiness scored 10 points above the state average. Areas of concern were the scores in academic achievement and academic growth, both of which were below state averages.

### •Belgreen High School: C (76)

Belgreen scored well above state and system averages in college and career readiness, with a score of 79. Areas of concern include academic achievement (50.37) and academic growth (81.16), both of which are below system and state averages.

### •Phil Campbell High School: C (72)

PCHS lagged significantly behind the state average in academic achievement, with a 38.38. The school was above or near state averages in graduation rate (86.60) and college and career readiness (68).

### •Tharptown High School: D (69)

THS fell below state averages in four of the five criteria, with its graduation score of 87.20 the lone exception. The school's academic achievement score of 32.97 was in the failing range, as was the college and career readiness score of 54.

### •East Franklin Junior High School: D (66)

While East Franklin's chronic absenteeism grade scored in the A range, the school posted a failing grade in academic achievement with a 48.60.

The grades for each school system and individual public school in Alabama are available online at <https://ap.alsde.edu>.

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## Local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The 18 establishments that received health ratings during the week of  
January 22, 2018 through January 26, 2018, each had scores that fall into  
the "satisfactory compliance" range.

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 "satisfac-  
tory 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 estab-  
lishment 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 18 Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodg-  
ing establishment ratings scored 90 or above, within the satisfactory compli-  
ance range.

The highest score was 100, given to the Hodges Senior Center, 1942 Hwy.  
172, Hodges.

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

•Backwoods Grill & Fish Camp, 2937 Hwy. 43, Phil Campbell, 90. (Can  
opener blade dirty).

•Sonic Drive In of Russellville, 15376 Hwy. 43 N., Russellville, 92. (Onion  
cuber dirty).

•Blue's Diner, 3145 Hwy. 237, Phil Campbell, 93.

•Jack's #136, 521 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. SE, Red Bay, 95. (Cracked utensils).



# Board accepts fuel bid

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

After two of the 12 propane fuel buses purchased by the Russellville City Board of Education were delivered, the board accepted a bid for propane fuel from AmeriGas at its January 25 meeting.

Russellville City Schools solicited bids for a five-year lease agreement with a liquefied petroleum gas supplier. AmeriGas, the only bidder, proposed propane per gallon at a rate of \$.655 above the published index, and \$1.20 per gallon above the published index for temporary on-site direct-fill bus service.

RCS superintendent Heath Grimes said the plan is to install a propane fueling station at the bus barn, and propane will be delivered on-site.

The two buses that have been delivered are demo buses with limited mileage on them, Grimes said.

In other action, the board:

- Approved a contract with Larry Kennedy to clean the Russellville Middle School gymnasium after basketball games for RMS and RHS this season.

- Approved the Russellville City Schools calendar for the 2018-19 school year.

- Approved leave of absence requests for Lauren Ritter, teacher at RES, from May 17-25, 2018 and LeJoy Winston, WES intervention teacher, from February 1, 2018 to April 9, 2018.

- Approved temporary employment of Caitlyn Smith to fill Lauren Ritter's position and Jennifer Lindsey to fill LeJoy Winston's position.

The next regular scheduled meeting of the Russellville City Schools Board of Education will be Thursday, February 22 at 8 a.m., with work session Tuesday, February 20 at 3:30 p.m.

## 'RATINGS,' from page 10

- Waffle House #2186, 14005 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
- Daily Bread BBQ, 305 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 96.
- West Elementary School, 1340 Clay Ave., Russellville, 96.
- Phil Campbell School Cafeteria, 55 School Ave., Phil Campbell, 96.
- Little Tigers Preschool, LLC, 1003 E. Lawrence St., Russellville, 97.
- East Franklin Junior High, 1815 Hwy. 89, Phil Campbell, 97.
- Russellville Middle School, 765 Summit St., Russellville, 97.
- Harold's Gas and Grocery, 1425 Hwy. 172 East, Hodges, 98.
- Russellville Elementary School, 133 Chucky Mullins Dr., Russellville, 98.
- Russellville High School, 1865 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 98.
- Tharptown High School Cafeteria, 145 Cty. Road 80, Russellville, 99.
- Fourth Street Grill and Steakhouse, 607 4<sup>th</sup> St., Red Bay, 99.
- Piney Point Camp Store, 2696 Hwy. 37, Vina, 99.

Of the 21 inspections done in Colbert County from January 22-26, 2018, all received scores of at least 90.

Dollar General, 1674 South Wilson Dam Road, Muscle Shoals, and Hatton Elementary School, 2130 Hatton School Road, Leighton, both shared the high score in Colbert County of 99.

Health ratings are available at [www.foodscores.state.al.us](http://www.foodscores.state.al.us) and may be viewed by city or county.

## 'FRANKS,' from page 8

the accessibility of classes due to two campuses and the many scholarship opportunities."

Franks says the part of NW-SCC that was most important to her and what really separates NW-SCC from other schools is the relationships the College provides.

"When I say Northwest-Shoals is my second home, I mean it," said Franks. "I have met amazing people here that have welcomed me with open arms. I will always have a network of friends and mentors that I can call on at any time."

As a student at the NW-SCC Phil Campbell Campus, Franks has represented the College as an ambassador. As an ambassador Franks said she obtained some of her most

valuable skills.

"As an ambassador, I have enhanced my leadership and organizational skills, which I feel are key factors to succeed in not only Pharmacy School but in any career field," said Franks.

After graduating from pharmacy school, Franks would like to return to Franklin County and give back to the community. She would like to eventually own her own pharmacy.

Regardless of the direction her pharmacy profession takes her, Franks will always be grateful for how NW-SCC helped her.

"I have been blessed to attend Northwest-Shoals Community College, and I am forever grateful for my family here," said Franks.

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Area tournaments are underway all over the state of Alabama, including at Belgreen, where the top-seeded Bulldogs will tip off their postseason run on Thursday night.

Vina senior point guard Abby Hester will continue her playing career at Blue Mountain College. See story this page for details.



# Swinney steps down at PCHS

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Make no mistake about it—Ryan Swinney is a competitor.

A three-sport athlete at Phil Campbell High School, Swinney played on both sides of the ball (and also punted) for Bobcat football teams that went 24-8 from 1982-84. After graduating from PCHS in 1985, he went on to play two years of baseball at the local junior college before finishing out his education at the University of North Alabama.

Swinney's teaching career started in 1991 at Belgreen, where he coached junior high and B-Varsity basketball while also heading up the varsity baseball team. He's been coaching in some form or fashion for the past 27 years, and through it all his desire to win never wavered.

But it never consumed him either, and he's just fine with that. Swinney, who officially stepped down last month after five seasons as the head football coach at his alma mater, measures success a little differently.

"My prayer was always that I hope I had a positive influence on kids every day, whether I was teaching or coaching," Swinney said. "If you're not in it for the kids, then you're doing it for the wrong reasons. Everybody wants to win, but you're in it for the kids. That opportunity to have a positive influence on lives, especially as a Christian—even if it's just one kid, you feel like it was well worth it."

Swinney made the most of his opportunity to positively impact young lives, first at Belgreen, then for 17-and-a-half years at East Franklin Junior High, then for the last seven-and-a-half years at Phil Campbell. He's not finished yet, either, as he hopes to continue teaching P.E. at PCHS, perhaps until he reaches his ultimate goal of having 30 years in as an educator. But, as this past football season progressed, Swinney started to believe that it might be time to close the book on his coaching career.

"It was something that I had actually started thinking about back during the season," he said on Monday morning. "Sometimes, you feel like you're not having the impact you wanna have. As a coach, you're competitive, and you want what's best for the program—especially with me being from here and graduating here and living here all my life. You start to think, 'I'm doing all I can do, and it's not enough. Maybe somebody else can have that impact.'"

Swinney had taken the Bobcats from an 0-10 record in his first season as head coach to the state playoffs in 2014 and 2015, marking the program's first back-to-back postseason berths since a four-year run from 1999-2002.

See 'SWINNEY,' Page 14

# No excuses

Refuting the notion that Russellville is 'a 5A school with 3A talent,' Heath Grimes demands excellence from every corner of the Golden Tiger athletic program

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Heath Grimes hates excuses.

In his quest to achieve success for Russellville City Schools in the classroom and on the field, he won't be deterred by excuses made by some people, whether they are part of the RCS faculty or members of the community.

In recent years, there has been a growing perception, or excuse, that when it comes to athletics, Russellville "is a 5A school playing with 3A numbers."

This excuse comes from the thought that Hispanics, who comprise nearly one-half of the system's enrollment, don't participate in athletics in the same numbers as other students.

See 'EXCUSES,' Page 16



FILE PHOTO

Head coach Chris Heaps (above) has led the Golden Tigers to three straight state titles on the diamond, but RCS superintendent Heath Grimes (inset) doesn't buy the idea that the baseball team's success has come at the expense of other programs.

# Hester signs with Blue Mountain

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press



FILE PHOTO

**SMALL WONDER** - Hester finished the regular season averaging 18.1 points per game and helped Vina go 24-8.

Watching Abby Hester do her thing on the basketball court (finding teammates with pinpoint passes, swiping the ball from unsuspecting opponents, tossing in a trademark runner or floater to complement a steady barrage of threes), it's hard to believe there was a time not too long ago when Hester considered herself a softball player first.

That all changed in 2014 when Hester, then a freshman, transferred from Belgreen to Vina after her father, Richie, was named the Lady Red Devils' new coach.

"I always thought softball was my favorite sport," Hester said on Sunday afternoon. "But when I transferred back to Vina, I sat out a year, and I missed basketball so much. I said to myself, 'I can't do that again.'"

Hester's hoops withdrawals were so severe that she had to steer clear of the gym on game nights. Some folks just aren't cut out to be spectators.

"I didn't go to the games," she said. "I knew that would just make me even more sad. So I stayed away and focused on

See 'HESTER,' Page 18



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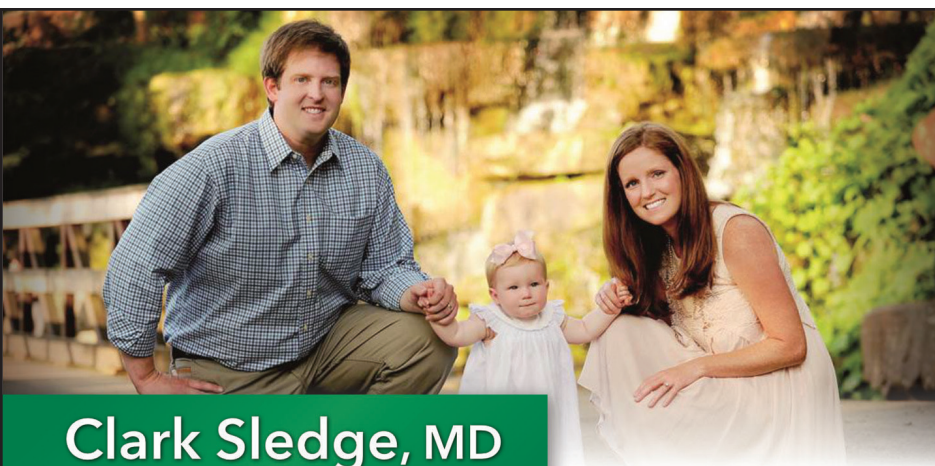
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## 'SWINNEY' from page 13

But a series of injuries to key players took its toll, and Phil Campbell fell to 2-8 in 2016 and then 1-9 this past year.

As the losses and the frustration mounted, Swinney started to seriously consider that perhaps his coaching career had run its course. When he picked up on a similar vibe coming from others around the program, it only served as affirmation.

"You start hearing things that maybe other people are not really happy," Swinney said, "and that just drove the point home. [Stepping down] was something I was pretty sure I was gonna do anyway. You start thinking about things and praying about it, and then other things began to happen, and it was like I got that answer I had been praying for.

"I wish we could have won more. I knew we'd be down this year, but you start looking at things and realizing that you're not having the impact you wanna have. That ultimately falls on the coaches, and I know that. I've been doing this long enough to know that. You start to have those doubts, and you start to think that maybe somebody else can do this better than me, can bring in some new ideas. Then you hear that people aren't happy with what's going on, and it's like the Lord saying, 'It's time for you to go. It's time for you to get out of the way and let somebody else try.'"

And if that sentiment was shared—and even expressed—by some in the earthly realms, Swinney gets it. Such criticism is par for the course when you're in the coaching business.

**"My prayer was always that I hope I had a positive influence on kids every day, whether I was teaching or coaching," Swinney said. "If you're not in it for the kids, then you're doing it for the wrong reasons. Everybody wants to win, but you're in it for the kids. That opportunity to have a positive influence on lives, especially as a Christian—even if it's just one kid, you feel like it was well worth it."**

"That stuff happens everywhere," he said. "I went down with one of my assistant coaches to watch Sulligent and Mars Hill play this past season during our bye week. Sulligent was [ranked] third in the state and undefeated, but they were struggling in that first half with Mars Hill. We were sitting on the Sulligent side, and we heard stuff like, 'What are the coaches doing? Why are they running this? Why aren't they calling that?' I remember thinking, 'They're number three in the state and undefeated, and these fans are griping about the coaches. I wonder what [fans] are saying about me?'"

Probably nothing Swinney wasn't already saying about himself.

"I'm my own worst critic," he said. "There were very few Friday nights when I wasn't on the computer watching film right after a game, either at the field house or at home, breaking things down. 'Why did I do this? Why did I do that? Why did I run this?' It wears on you after a while."

Swinney understands—better than most—the challenge of sustaining a high level of success at Phil Campbell, where the football program has posted just 10 winning seasons since 1980 (none since 2001). But he sincerely hopes the coach who replaces him is able to turn things around.

When Swinney says he'll always be a Bobcat, he means it. [His wife, Tina, graduated from PCHS in 1987 and teaches fourth grade at Phil Campbell Elementary. Their children, Chase and Abby, are both recent Phil Campbell grads.]

"I've been doing this pushing thirty years now," he said. "It's time for somebody else to do it. Maybe they can take the program to another level. Ultimately, it came down to this being something I needed to do. I probably won't ever coach again. I've had the opportunity to be at several different places and to work with a lot of different coaches and to be around a lot of kids."

When Swinney sees former players like Brett Thomas (now the boys basketball coach at Phil Campbell) and Jordan Benford (the Bobcats' junior high football coach) succeeding and impacting the young people around them, he remembers why he got into coaching in the first place.

"I coached both of those guys at East Franklin," Swinney said. "I remember when Brett was my manager as a little bitty first-grader. When you look back and see kids you coached having success, whether it's in coaching or whatever else they're doing now, you definitely take a little bit of pride in that, just to know you impacted those kids' lives in a positive way."

Swinney grew up on a cattle farm in Phil Campbell, and that's where he still lives today. Life after coaching figures to remain plenty busy.

"My family's been farming together for a long time, and ultimately that's what I wanna home to," he said. "Good Lord willing, that's what I wanna do. I was raised there, and that's where I wanna end up. This will free me up to do more. Summers [as a coach] are full with workouts and field work and mowing the grass. This will free me up to do things I was able to do in the past."

"It's time for somebody else to take over the reins. I'm tickled to death to have had the opportunity. I enjoyed coaching—basketball, baseball, football, all of it. I loved it."



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King had a monster game last Thursday against Hubbertville, setting new career-highs with nine threes made and 36 points in Vina's 90-36 rout of the Lady Lions. The sophomore sharpshooter scored 22 points in the first half and then went over the 1,000-point mark for her varsity career with a three early in the third quarter.

King hit two more threes Friday at Waterloo and finished the regular season with 90 makes from beyond the arc. She went into the area tournament averaging 13.5 points per game.



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## 'EXCUSES', from page 13

When Grimes was hired as Russellville City Schools superintendent three years ago, he heard excuses about large Hispanic enrollment driving down when it came to academic success for the system.

"It was just an excuse," Grimes said. "When we as a system overcame that excuse, we saw tremendous growth. Our motto in academics at Russellville City Schools is 'no excuses,' and the same is true with athletics.

"We want to see our students and coaches achieving maximum potential in all sports."

That was a primary message when Grimes called together every coach in the Russellville City Schools system on January 3 for a 'state of athletics' meeting.

"We realized our standards were not being met in some programs, and we want to continue to build all our programs, especially girls sports," Grimes said. "The ethnic diversity of our school system shouldn't have a bearing on our athletic success, but it takes a mindset to change that."

Russellville's varsity soccer program, which began last year, is comprised of primarily Hispanic students. When Grimes watched RHS soccer games, he didn't see Hispanic students—he saw athletes, some of whom were top-notch.

"We had tremendous athletes on the field," Grimes said. "They are fast, skilled, with great hand-eye coordination. Some of those kids in our school could help football, baseball, softball or volleyball.

"When we reach out to those students, we will see diversity on all teams. But right now, the diversity on our athletic teams does not match the diversity in our schools."

**"Our mutual goal is to maximize potential and make things better in our schools, including athletics," Grimes said. "We have a sign out front of our school that reads 'Tradition of Excellence.' If we are to be a school of excellence, we can't have pockets of excellence. It can't be only one sport, or only male sports. We need to understand that level of success is the standard in all sports."**

Grimes wants to have an environment where all students are made to feel welcome and are urged to get involved with athletics.

"We need to reach out to every student in our system to encourage athletics," he said. "I never want a student to feel like he or she isn't wanted to play. Whether they are white, Hispanic, black or any ethnicity, we need to make all students feel they are encouraged to get involved, help our programs and not make excuses that we are a 5A system with 3A talent."

While Grimes doesn't believe there is any effort to discourage any students from participating, he's primarily being proactive to avoid these problems down the road, he explained.

"We all can see where if we don't change the mindset it will be an issue in the future," he said. "Our mutual goal is to maximize potential and make things better in our schools, including athletics. We have a sign out front of our school that reads 'Tradition of Excellence.' If we are to be a school of excellence, we can't have pockets of excellence. It can't be only one sport, or only male sports. We need to understand that level of success is the standard in all sports.

"Take tennis, for example. Some might say it's a small spring sport. But if we are going to have a tennis team, we must expect that it will be a highly competitive tennis team."

Grimes urged each coach to self-evaluate and make sure he or she is fully

See 'EXCUSES,' Page 17

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## 'EXCUSES', from page 16

dedicated to maintaining that standard of excellence.

"I asked them to check themselves and see what they've done in the past that's been successful," Grimes said. "Are they still doing those things, and what things can they do better?"

And when it comes to diversity in athletics, Grimes believes that must be a two-way street.

"I'm at most of our sporting events," he said. "We have some tremendous talent from our Hispanic students on our volleyball teams, our football teams and our soccer program. But with the exception of soccer, we're still below the percentage of our student demographics.

"Conversely, in our soccer program, we need to seek diversity on those teams as well."

Grimes came away from the coaches' meeting with a "sense of family" and really believing the athletic program is going to pull together and succeed if three tenets are followed.

"The first is our mindset. We must have a positive mindset in order to succeed," Grimes said. "Second, there can be no excuses. We need to start developing our young athletes year-round, even in the youth leagues. And we need to market our own system. It's important what we say, how we address Russellville athletics and what we put on social media. We need to reach out and bring more kids into our athletic programs."

**"I've talked with Coach Heaps a lot," Grimes said, "and he's very supportive and constantly trying to get kids out to play football. His sons play football. We've had numerous conversations about how the success of one sport contributes to the success of the entire athletic program.**

**"When a program is successful, students tend to gravitate to that program. Kids are drawn to discipline, success and camaraderie. If you want to get multi-sport athletes, make sure your program is doing those things."**

And a positive mindset, Grimes explained, includes focusing on what a special place Russellville is, including its community, the resources the system has, the facilities and the community.

"Our success is predicated by that continued support," Grimes said.

"What I see happening is, our diverse population is learning from our more traditional population that Russellville is a special place with community support and we have a part to play in that. And now, by following that lead, Russellville has become a very special place to our diverse community as well."

And when it comes to Russellville's athletes, their attitudes are formed in large part by what they see from their coaches, Grimes believes.

"We tell players every day to be positive and never make excuses," he said, "so as coaches and leaders we must have a positive attitude and not make excuses. We want to have a standard with our coaches as they go through the rest of this year, and beyond that we do everything we can to build success and have a championship-

caliber program, because that's the level everyone expects of us."

Grimes also addressed what he describes as a misconception that the success of Russellville's varsity baseball program, which has won three consecutive state titles, is somehow hurting the football program because some of the baseball athletes are deciding not to play football.

"We have a rumor that one program may be hurting another sport," Grimes said. "I can't say that student choices may not affect that, but there's no effort from one program to hurt another, or one coach to hurt another. I've talked with Coach [Chris] Heaps a lot, and he's very supportive and constantly trying to get kids out to play football. His sons play football. We've had numerous conversations about how the success of one sport contributes to the success of the entire athletic program.

"When a program is successful, students tend to gravitate to that program. Kids are drawn to discipline, success and camaraderie. If you want to get multi-sport athletes, make sure your program is doing those things."

Grimes said the growing popularity of travel baseball has led some young athletes, through the influence of their parents, to focus on one sport.

"In the community, we have some parents listening to travel coaches," Grimes said. "They believe their son is on track for Division One or the major leagues. And the truth is, a lot of parents encourage their kids to play only one sport, and that contributes to the lack of success of other sports."

Grimes plans to meet with Russellville's student athletes this spring to share some of the messages and ideas discussed at the coaches' meeting.

"I'm going to meet with them and focus on the fact that we have a tradition here," Grimes said, "and in order to maintain that, we have a responsibility as student athletes to contribute to other programs. And if we don't, then obviously we will lose some of that tradition."

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## 'HESTER', from page 13

softball. But when basketball came back around the next year, that's when I made up my mind. Basketball was what I loved doing the most."

Hester resolved then and there to make basketball a part of her life for as long as she could—and three more years of high school simply wouldn't be enough. The pint-sized point guard set her sights on playing at the next level, and nothing—neither the size of her frame [she says she's 5'1, "officially"] nor the size of her program [only eight schools in the entire state have an enrollment smaller than Vina, according to figures released by the AHSAA]—was going to hold her back.

"Really, I just had to get a lot of self-confidence first," Hester said. "I've always been told that I was too little to do this or that."

Hester's dream of playing college hoops will soon become a reality. She signed with Blue Mountain College, an NAIA school in Ripley, Mississippi, on Monday afternoon in a ceremony at Vina High School.

"God has blessed her with talent," Richie Hester said. "She's been given the opportunity to keep playing, and I think she'll take advantage of it. First and foremost, [Blue Mountain] is a Christian atmosphere, and Abby puts Christ first in her life. So that's a really good fit. There's no doubt she can play at the next level. Of course, size may be a bit of a disadvantage, but she makes up for size with quickness and speed and, most of all, her heart. She gives it all she's got all the time."

"I think it's a good fit for her and a good fit for Blue Mountain, too."

Abby agreed.

"I'm feeling very excited," she said on Sunday. "I love that place. I've been up there several times visiting, and I feel at home every time."

Hester's most recent visit to Ripley was the one that sealed the deal. She and Richie watched Blue Mountain's junior varsity women [the team she signed with] beat Martin Methodist 76-69 in overtime, and then Abby spent some time with head coach Misty Snyder and the players in the locker room afterwards.

"I hadn't seen them in action yet," Hester said. "As soon as we got there, the coach turned to us—while she was coaching—and told us hey. We talked as soon as the game was over, and she told me I must have been their good luck charm, because it was their first win of the season. She took me downstairs to the locker room, and all the players introduced themselves to me. They were all so nice."

"I prayed with the team after the game, and then

we stayed thirty minutes after that and just continued to talk with her. I told her a couple of days later that I had made my decision and I wanted to come."

Hester chose Blue Mountain over interest from Snead State Community College in Boaz, where she recently took part in a tryout and toured the campus with her family.

"I was kind of in between," she said, "but that last visit [to Blue Mountain] sealed the deal. I told my dad that night, 'Yeah, this is where I wanna go.' Blue Mountain is closer [Ripley is only 90 minutes from Vina], and I just felt more at home."

One can hardly blame Blue Mountain for rolling out the red carpet; they're getting a special player.

**Hester resolved then and there to make basketball a part of her life for as long as she could—and three more years of high school simply wouldn't be enough. The pint-sized point guard set her sights on playing at the next level, and nothing—neither the size of her frame [she says she's 5'1, "officially"] nor the size of her program [only eight schools in the entire state have an enrollment smaller than Vina, according to figures released by the AHSAA]—was going to hold her back.**

**"Really, I just had to get a lot of self-confidence first," Hester said. "I've always been told that I was too little to do this or that."**

Hester scored her 1,000th career point at the varsity level late last season, and she handed out her 1,000th career assist earlier this year. Through Sunday, she was averaging 18.1 points per game this season, with 13 games of 20-plus points—including a season-high 34 last Tuesday in a Senior Night win over Brilliant.

Hester finished the regular season with 73 threes made and shot 83 percent (195-for-236) from the foul line. Heading into Tuesday's Class 1A, Area 13 semifinal against Belgreen, she had handed out 346 assists—the second-most in a single season in state history, according to the AHSAA website.

That's awfully big production from such a small player, but Hester has never viewed her size—or lack thereof—as a (pardon the pun) shortcoming.

"Being so small, I get to be fast, too," she said. "My speed is one of my biggest strengths, and I use that. I definitely can't get in there and rebound like I want to....but I try."

Hester's speed and shooting ability are by no

means her only assets. Her court vision and basketball IQ are off the charts, and she's highly adaptable.

"I've said this several times—she's like a coach on the floor," Richie Hester said. "She can handle almost every kind of play anybody can run. We run all types of plays. She's played at Belgreen and at Vina. She's played on different types of teams—slow teams, fast teams, big teams, small teams. She'll do whatever she has to do to help the team."

Over the past two seasons, Hester has helped the Lady Red Devils post a record of 46-17 while frequently cracking the Top 10 in the ASWA Class 1A rankings. She's clearly adept at both scoring and facilitating, but passing is her preference.

"I would say I'm a passer first," she said on Sunday. "When I'm watching games, I'm not really paying attention to who made the basket. I'm always like, 'Did you see that pass?' People kind of look at me funny and go, 'Yeah, that was good.'"

Evidently, there are some things that only a true point guard can appreciate.

"Right," Hester said. "That's how it feels sometimes."

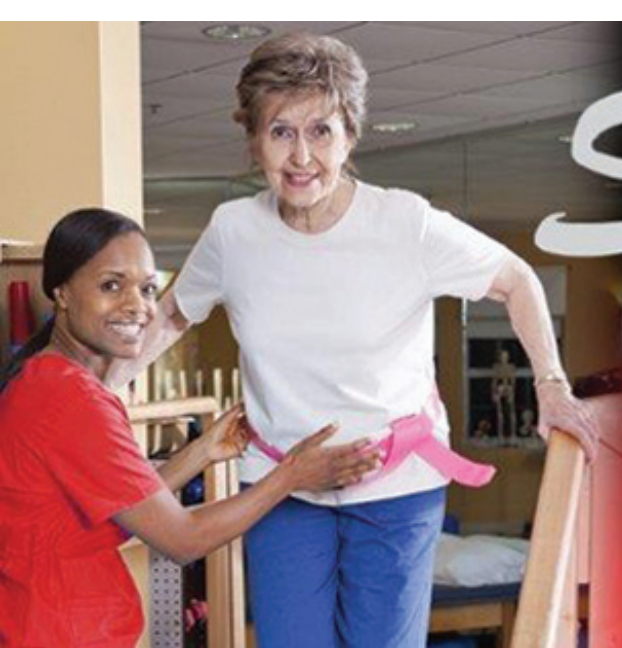
That unselfishness and pass-first mentality should serve Hester well at Blue Mountain—provided she can withstand the pounding she figures to take at the next level.

"That's what I noticed the most—the fouling," Hester said of watching Blue Mountain's recent OT win over Martin Methodist. "Me and Dad were both surprised at how much more physical the game was. You know how little I am. I was sitting there thinking, 'Man, I'm gonna be falling down all the time. I have got to get some knee pads.' They really let them play."

"All the girls are so much bigger and taller than me, but I feel like I can use my speed and quickness and maybe help them get the ball down the court faster, and maybe get some steals."

It's no coincidence that the family vibe at Blue Mountain appealed so much to Hester; she's experienced the same thing during her time at Vina. Asked what she would remember most fondly about her days with the Lady Red Devils, she didn't hesitate.

"My team, for sure," she said. "We're all family. We're a close-knit bunch. That will be the saddest thing—leaving and having to pick up with another team. But everybody at Blue Mountain was really nice. When I talked to them, I told them, 'Ya'll make it a lot easier than I thought it was gonna be.'"



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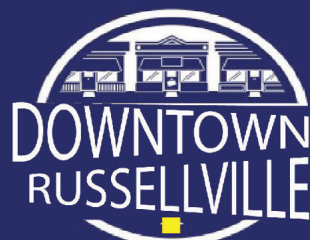


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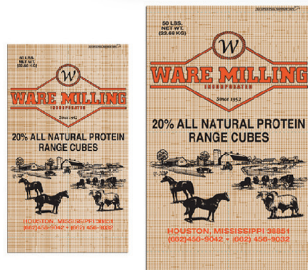


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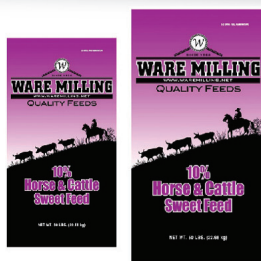
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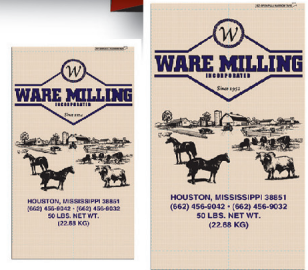
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