

The Russellville-based Gospel group is hosting the inaugural Spring Sing! See story, Page 3.

The Russellville Senior Center offers local senior citizens the opportunity to share a meal, socialize and connect. See story, Page 11.



PRSR - STD US POSTAGE  
PAID Franklin Free Press  
113 Washington Ave. NW  
Russellville, AL 35663

# Local legislation on school security could be used as statewide model

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

In 2013, Franklin County Schools became the first Alabama school system to establish a volunteer security force after passage of House Bill 404, introduced by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay).

With school security again in the news after the recent mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, some Alabama legislators are considering using the Franklin County legislation as a template for statewide legislation.

A press conference held last Friday at the A.W. Todd Centre saw Morrow and former state senator Roger Bedford, officials from Franklin County and Russellville City Schools and law enforcement officials sharing the process of how HB 404 became law.

Rep. Allen Farley (R-McCalla) attended Friday's event to learn more about what is being done in Franklin County to keep students safe.

"We can model what passed in 2013 here in Franklin

County and take it to the rest of the state," Farley said. "The key is training. It's about training, communication and understanding what your designated role is."

**"We can model what passed in 2013 here in Franklin County and take it to the rest of the state," Farley said. "The key is training. It's about training, communication and understanding what your designated role is."**

Morrow and Bedford presented a copy of House Joint Resolution 20 (Act. No. 2018-21) to Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton. The resolution commends Franklin County Schools on being the safest county school system in the state.

According to a 2017 study by www.niche.com, Franklin County Schools ranked as the seventh-safest school system in Alabama. The six systems ahead of Franklin County were all city school systems. The same study, done in 2018, ranked Franklin County Schools as Alabama's 40th-safest school system and 12th-safest

See 'SECURITY,' Page 11

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# East Franklin community thanks Bishop family for years of selfless service

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

This time, William and Barbara Bishop didn't have to do a thing but show up and eat.

When you ask folks in the East Franklin community about how many times they've enjoyed William Bishop's famous smoked chicken or barbecue, they usually say it's more times than they could count. But when the Bishops went to the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department for dinner last Monday evening, they were the guests of honor.

No cooking. No preparation. No cleanup.

It was the East Franklin community's way of saying thank you to William and Barbara for their many years of selfless service to both the community

See 'BISHOP,' Page 8



This commemorative cake was served at last week's event honoring William and Barbara Bishop.

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**Deborah Ann "Debbie" Borden**, Tuscumbia, age 64  
Died Tuesday, February 20, 2018. Funeral held at Isbell Chapel  
Missionary Baptist Church. Interment in the adjoining church  
cemetery.

**Elizabeth "Betty" Hyde McCollister**, Russellville, age 87  
Died Thursday, February 22, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral  
Home. Interment in Colbert Memorial Gardens in Tuscumbia.

**Prathen Oxendine**, Russellville, age 75  
Died Tuesday, February 21, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral  
Home. Interment in East Franklin Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

**Gloria Charlene Whitlock Seal**, Haleyville, age 77  
Died Friday, February 16, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial  
Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Robinson Cemetery.

**Mary Faye Stout**, Russellville, age 81  
Died Monday, February 19, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial  
Chapel. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

**Eva Lee Venuti**, Russellville, age 88  
Died Sunday, February 18, 2018. The family held a private service  
at the Mausoleum at Franklin Memory Gardens.

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through March 6\*



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# CON board ruling key step for proposed cancer center

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

There was good news for advocates of a proposed cancer center to be built in Florence last Wednesday, as the State of Alabama Certificate of Need (CON) Review Board granted Certificate of Need for the project by a 4-1 vote.

While that vote isn't the final potential legal hurdle for the proposed cancer care center, it was an important step in that direction for the Northwest Alabama Cancer Care LLC, the entity that applied to the CON Board seeking to construct a 19,000-square-foot facility adjacent to the new North Alabama Medical Center in Florence.

The cancer center would be a joint project between the North Alabama Medical Center and the University of Alabama Birmingham health care system.

Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) was ecstatic to hear the board's ruling. Morrow has taken an active role in supporting the project to make quality cancer care more accessible for north Alabama residents.

"Franklin County folks shouldn't have to go to Huntsville or Birmingham for their cancer treatment," Morrow said. "That's why this project is so important."

A spokesperson for the State Health Planning and Development Agency confirmed the board's approval last Wednesday morning. There is an appeal process for the intervenors who opposed the project, among them Alliance Oncology, a division of Alliance HealthCare Services, Inc., a national provider of outsourced healthcare services. Alliance Oncology has a partnership agreement with Huntsville Hospital Health System.

**"Franklin County folks shouldn't have to go to Huntsville or Birmingham for their cancer treatment," Morrow said. "That's why this project is so important."**

Alliance's opposition was based on the project "not being in the best interest of the public," according to a statement from Alliance officials.

RegionalCare applied with the board in 2013 to build the cancer center, but that application was denied by the Certificate of Need Review Board.

Alliance, or any other intervenor, may now request an appeal hearing or file an appeal of the CON Board's ruling directly with the Alabama Court of Civil Appeals, according to a State Health Planning and Development Agency spokesperson.

Morrow held a press conference in December to publicly support the project. He was joined by sev-

eral other elected officials and Russell Pigg, ECM Hospital CEO. Morrow said the proposed facility would give northwest Alabama residents more options when it comes to making health care choices.

"The Shoals area can have a state-of-the-art cancer center that's easily accessible to all of our citizens," Morrow said. "UAB is willing to invest its time, money and clinical expertise in our area, and this will give patients who are leaving Franklin County and the Shoals a choice to be treated by UAB in the Shoals area instead of having to travel a long distance."

"The intervenors took the position that the conditions from 2013 when the CON Board denied the request haven't changed. Obviously, we disagreed strongly with that," added Morrow, who attended last Wednesday's hearing.

Morrow recalled how opponents of the new North Alabama Medical Center delayed that project moving forward with extended appeals and court battles.

"They kept that project tied up several years, and we hope they won't do that in this case," Morrow said. "For the people in the Shoals, Franklin County, southern Tennessee and Mississippi, there's no reason to deny them these important services."

# Gospel group 'Purpose' hosting inaugural Spring Sing

Submitted to the FFP

Alabama is known for music, and that's nowhere more true than in the Shoals! People in the Russellville area are proud of the music that is offered, and that pride is evident in the attendance at the Jam on Sloss Lake, the Franklin County Watermelon Festival, the monthly Kerry Gilbert concerts at the Roxy, and gospel music events offered by Russellville's own "Purpose."

Purpose is hosting a brand new event, the Russellville Spring Sing, this Saturday, March 3, beginning at 5 p.m. at the A.W. Todd Centre. The group is excited about this event and invites people from all over north Alabama and northeast Mississippi to come be a part of this night.

During their travels, Purpose has had the opportunity to sing at gospel music venues in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. The group has long desired to hold such an event here in

Russellville. After much prayer and consideration, everything fell into place.

The talent lineup for the inaugural Russellville Spring Sing (along with Purpose) will be The Singing Epps, Ava Kasich, McKay Project, The Riders, Chronicle and The Drummond Family.

Each of these ministries has received numerous awards, and each brings a unique musical sound. Purpose is pleased that each of these groups will be with them in Russellville this Saturday night.

# Red Bay student charged with making terrorist threat

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

A Red Bay School student has been charged with making a terrorist threat after an incident last week, the *Franklin Free Press* has learned.

The male student, according to law enforcement sources, is in ninth grade and is charged as a juvenile, so details including the suspect's name, age, address, etc., are sealed by law.

Making a terrorist threat is a Class C felony under Alabama law, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. In the juvenile court system, a defendant faces the prospect of being adjudged delinquent by the court. In that event, the juvenile court judge, district judge Paula McDowell in Franklin County, has discretion to impose punishment, which can range from probation to being sent into the custody of the Alabama Department of Youth Services.

The case is being investigated primarily by the Red Bay Police Department. Franklin County sheriff Shannon Oliver confirmed the arrest and said his department transported the juvenile to and from the Tennessee Valley Juvenile Detention Center in Tusculumbia.

A person commits the crime of making a terrorist threat when he or she threatens to commit a crime of violence or commit damage to property by intentionally or recklessly causing the disruption of

school activities, according to Alabama Code Sec. 13A-10-15 (a)(1)b. Franklin County Board of Education member Mike Shewbart, whose district includes Red Bay, said last week he was aware of the charge and school authorities were cooperating with law enforcement.

"I was made aware of the incident this week, and we take it very seriously," Shewbart said. "We treat every threat with severity and absolutely will not tolerate these actions, no matter what the age or grade of the student."

**"We treat every threat with severity," Shewbart said, "and absolutely will not tolerate these actions no matter the age or grade of the student."**

"We will let local law enforcement take care of the situation and will give them assistance as requested. We want to give them assurances they have full authority to handle these matters."

Details of the incident were not available from law enforcement sources, who cited the confidentiality of juvenile proceedings. Shewbart said he and other Franklin County board members and superintendent Greg Hamilton received an update last Friday as to the progress of the investigation.

The recent mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida, again brought the issue of school safety back into the public limelight.

"We hope there will be no more incidents of this type. We are setting a precedent here that we

won't tolerate actions of this type," Shewbart said. "And the important message to law enforcement is we will give them our full cooperation and authority to do what they need to do to investigate and prosecute these incidents."

Hamilton said Friday he was aware of two investigations relating to alleged threats at Red Bay School, but one of those, after investigation, was determined to be unfounded. As for the student who was charged, Hamilton said it is now a matter to be handled by the court system and law enforcement.

"They have our complete support and resources available as needed in these matters," Hamilton said. "As I said when I ran for office, there is nothing more important than the safety of our students. We will do everything we can as a school system to ensure the daily safety of our students, faculty, administrators and our school campuses."

"These are serious allegations and are being handled as such."

News of the arrest came on the day Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) held a press conference in Russellville on the success of a 2013 local bill that established a volunteer school security force for Franklin County Schools.

A 2017 survey by [www.niche.com](http://www.niche.com) showed Franklin County to be Alabama's seventh-safest school system and the highest-ranked county school system.

# Honey Do: Use it or lose it

Batteries can be a sore subject this time of year. They are a huge part of our lives now in so many different ways: Power tools, cell phones, cars and trucks, and, of course, lawnmowers. Here are a few tips on battery maintenance that may be useful.

**USE IT OR LOSE IT.** Mowers tend to sit idle for several months over the winter, and batteries will go bad. It's a really good idea to crank your mower about once a month and let it run for a bit. Catch a decent day and take a drive around the yard, contemplating the coming spring honey-do list. If you are fortunate to have a climate-controlled storage area for your mower, that will help with battery life as well.

**REMOVE AND STORE.** It's a good idea to remove your lawn mower battery for the winter and store it in a cool, dry place. Be sure to store it away from gas cans, the water heater or furnace. Disconnect the battery cable from the battery, starting with the negative cable (it will have a minus sign). Remove the battery and wipe it off with a cloth. Clean the battery terminal using a metal brush, or clean it with a battery cleaner product.

**CHARGE IT.** Trickle chargers are

available that will feed your battery a small charge to keep it built up. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions and set these up in a safe place away from any flammable liquids or materials.



Doug Green

If your engine won't turn over, or clicks, your battery may be dead. If the mower makes no sound at all, the issue may be a safety switch or wiring problem. **REMOVE THE KEY FROM THE SWITCH** and then check the connections to the battery, making sure they are tight. There will be a red (positive, +) and a black (negative, -).

The battery can be tested with a multimeter. Test the battery's voltage by setting the multimeter to DC. Touch the red probe to the positive terminal of the battery and the black probe to the negative terminal of the battery at the same time. Read the meter. If it has 12.7 DC volts or higher, the battery is good and something else is causing your starting problem. If the voltage reading is lower, the battery is discharged to some degree but may

See 'USE,' Page 11



## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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# Being a light means being a leader

Sheryl Hamilton  
For the FFP

*"I believe there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow..."*

These were the words uttered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Just last month, many individuals in our country paused on January 15 to observe the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.

Dr. King was a servant of the people. Many individuals found several ways to serve others on that day. Some of the students attending the University of North Alabama packed food bags for those in need. Dr. King's question to the people of his time is still relevant today: "What are you doing for others?"

Several from Franklin County attended the 27th annual Martin Luther King Unity Breakfast hosted by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. Dr. Roderick Sheppard, president of Kappa Nu Lambda Chapter, said that the Unity Breakfast shows that communities can come together for a common cause. We gather to celebrate Dr. King's life, sacrifices and leadership, as stated in his welcome.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. King in Memphis, Tennessee. Eric Jalen Kirkman, youth speaker, urged the youth to be a light in the school and community. Being a light is choosing to be a leader. As a leader, it is very important to know how to love, because love can drive out darkness. Kirkman challenged the youth to not only dream but to dream *big* and to want a better tomorrow.

In closing, Kirkman reminded us that the eyes of the youth are watching us. His question to all

adults was, "What will you teach us?" Jalen, 14, is Student Council president of the ninth-grade class at the Florence Freshman Center. He is the son of Drs. Eric and Tera Kirkman.

Rev. Clinton Johnson, Sr. of Mobile spoke on the topic, "The Moment We Have is Now." The future is in front of us, the past is behind us, and what we have is a NOW moment. To do, to achieve, to engage...that time is NOW.

It is our time to give a hand and not point a finger; we have not reached our destination, so we must keep working. The servant Dr. King is dead, but the Lord of the servant is alive. You can never move forward by looking back; all we have before us is right now. Life is like a relay. Pass on the baton.

The next generation of young people must be prepared and ready to step in when we step out, so the fight for justice can continue and the challenges can be overcome. Some need to carry on the message of hope and the message to get involved. Also, Rev. Johnson told us to value the work and dignity of every individual.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) became a civil rights advocate early in his career as a Baptist minister. Although his life was cut short, King left a legacy of hope and inspiration that continues to influence people today.

In 1955 he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1963, during the March on Washington, he delivered his now famous "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he expressed hope that people would not be judged by their skin color.

King showed the world that people could wage a struggle without resorting to violence. For those efforts, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.



**Debt and income crisis**

Dear Dave,  
I received a call the other day from a company saying it could negotiate the balance on my credit cards to a lesser amount. The caller also said they could get me a zero-percent interest rate until the debts were paid off, and then the accounts would be closed. I'm kind of starting over again financially, because I sold a company I had run for almost 15 years, then got into real estate and lost almost everything. I'm making just enough to squeeze by, and my credit card debt totals \$40,000. Would this be a good idea?

Bill

Dear Bill,  
No, this is not a good idea. You're looking at two major problems with a company such as this one. One, they will absolutely destroy whatever credit you may have. Their plan is to take your cash and spend some time beating down the credit card companies until they agree to accept a lesser amount. Then, they use your cash to settle loans you will have—by that time—defaulted on. This will put you in a situation very similar to if you had filed Chapter 13 bankruptcy. Stay away from these people.

You have an income crisis, in addition to a debt crisis, at this point. For starters, I want you to start living on a tight, written, monthly budget. I'm talking rice and beans, no vacations, and no eating out until you pay off this debt. Where your income is concerned, maybe you should consider getting back into the kind of business you ran previously for a while. Look for a mana-

gerial or supervisory position, at least until you're able to get back on your feet and save some cash.

Finally, cut up the credit cards, close the accounts and put as much money as you can spare toward paying off that debt using the debt snowball system. Never go back into debt again!

Dave

**Pay off house first?**

Dear Dave,  
My husband and I are in our 40s. We have no children, and we bring home \$95,000 a year combined. We're also debt-free except for our home. We owe just \$10,000 on the house and can take care of that in a few months. Would it be okay to rearrange the Baby Steps a bit and pay off our home before getting serious about saving for retirement?

Nan

Dear Nan,  
I don't usually give folks any wiggle room when it comes to sticking with the proper order of the Baby Steps. But if you're that close to being completely debt-free, I don't see anything wrong with paying off the house first.

Most people I talk to still have anywhere from \$100,000 to \$300,000 left on their mortgages. This is a little bit different story, however, and you two are obviously managing your money well.

Knock out that mortgage, and start pouring at least 15 percent of your income into retirement. You're going to love the feeling—and the freedom—that comes with being completely debt-free!

Dave

*\*Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 13 million listeners each week on 585 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

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**T**he libraries at Russellville First Baptist Church and Red Bay First Baptist Church are accepting donations of new and used Bibles (in good shape) and New Testaments to send to the Love Package Ministry (formerly Edwin Hodges Ministry). They will be sent to foreign missionaries to use and distribute. Please drop them off Monday through Thursday during office hours. For more information, call 256-332-4085, and thanks for your support!

**R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling hams for Easter. Hams are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be Saturday, March 31 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street in Russellville.

**A**ARP 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.

**M**embers of the Shoals Area 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, March 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. Janice Nix will be speaking. 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 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!

**T**he RHS Annual Staff will sponsor the 36th annual Miss RHS pageant this Friday, March 2 at 7 p.m. in the RHS auditorium. The pageant offers an array of talent and beauty. Miss Jessica McSpadden, Miss RHS 2016, will be emceeing the pageant. Miss Hailey Peters, Miss RHS 2017 and student at Northwest-Shoals Community College, will also be assisting and performing. The contestants will be competing in Judge's Interview, Evening Gown, and Talent. Escorts are John David Aycock, Calen Bragwell, Nick Chadderdon, Wesley Cook, James Sandoval and Cameron Vandiver. Ms. Cindy Smith Coan is the director of the pageant, and Dr. AnnaKay Holland is the coordinator of the pageant and Annual Staff sponsor. Tickets will be sold on the night of the pageant at a cost of \$10.00. Programs will be available for \$5. This event is one of the highlights of the year. There will be lots of entertainment that you will not want to miss! The proceeds from this event will benefit the students by defraying their cost of the yearbook. We hope your schedule will permit you to come and support our RHS students!

**T**he Russellville Civitan Club will hold a chicken stew fundraiser to benefit the Franklin County Relay for Life at Burns Nursing & Rehab (701 Monroe Street NW in Russellville) this Saturday, March 3 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. To pre-purchase your stew, please stop by the office of Joe M. Tucker, C.P.A. on North Jackson Avenue or see Eric Fike at the CB&S Bank location across from Family Pharmacy in Russellville to get your ticket today!

**T**he gospel group "Purpose" will host the inaugural Russellville Spring Sing this Saturday, March 3, beginning at 5 p.m. at the A.W. Todd Center in downtown Russellville. Special guests will include: Ava Kasich, McKay Project, Chronicle, the Epps Family, the Drummond Family and The Riders. Everyone is invited! Admission is free, but a love offering will be collected. Concessions (BBQ and hot dogs) will be available. For more info, call 256-627-8784 or go online to [www.facebook.com/purpose.al](http://www.facebook.com/purpose.al).

**T**he Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts in Red Bay announces auditions for its third and final production of the season, "Southern Hospitality" by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten. Auditions will be held Sunday, March 4 at 2 p.m. and Monday, March 5 at 7 p.m. at Community Spirit Bank's Weatherford Centre in Red Bay. The play will be directed by Scotty Kennedy, and performance dates will be April 26-29 with rehearsals beginning Monday, March 12. For groups interested in attending the play, you may contact Beth Hammock, ticket coordinator, in advance at 256-356-9286. There are roles for five males and eight females, teenage and older, and auditions will consist of cold readings from the book. You may contact Scotty Kennedy for additional information at [scottydk@att.net](mailto:scottydk@att.net) or 256-356-8758.

**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 March 8.

**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, March 8 at 5 p.m. - "Ready or Not, Here I Come," Dee McNalley, UCP; Thursday, March 22 at 5 p.m. - "Ways Babies Learn When You Sing to Them," Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama.

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

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

**T**he Alabama Cooperative Extension System will hold a Gardening Series at the Russellville Public Library on the last four Fridays in March from 11 a.m.-noon. Topics will be Petals & Pollinators (March 9), Spring Vegetable Gardening (March 16), Garden & Landscape Pest Management (March 23) and Urban Forestry/Tree Maintenance (March 30). Everyone is welcome! Volunteers are needed at your Russellville Public Library. Are you interested and available? Give us a call at 256-332-1535, stop by the library or email us via our website at [www.russellvillepubliclibrary.com](http://www.russellvillepubliclibrary.com)

**K**indred Hospice (formerly 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.

**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.

**A** benefit golf tournament for David Boutwell will be held Friday, March 30 at Twin Pines Country Club. Registration and lunch starts at 11 a.m. with a 12:30 p.m. shotgun start. The tournament is a four-man scramble with a donation of \$240 per team. For more information, contact Ernest Presley at 256-460-5805 or Ronnie Boutwell at 256-324-0960.

**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. For more information, please call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

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

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

## RPD hires five new officers

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved the hiring of five new police officers at its February 19 meeting.

Among the new hires is Josh Tompkins, who previously worked for RPD before resigning last May. Other hirings included Derek Henderson, David Romans, Krista McLennon and Adan Abarco.

The council also approved the hiring of Kelsey Bullock as a dispatcher for RPD. One vacancy for dispatcher was also declared.

The Russellville Fire Department saw the promotion of Chris Watkins as EMS Officer.

In other action, the council:

- Authorized mayor David Grissom to sign a contract of employment of the law firms of Friedman, Dazzio, Zulanis and Bowling, P.C., and McDowell, Beason and Hamilton, P.C., to represent the City of Russellville on multi-district litigation relating to claims for damages as the result of opioid marketing. The attorneys will receive one-third of any damages awarded to the city.

- Approved the hiring of two maintenance/programmers in the Russellville Park and Recreation Department. Carrie Dover and Frederick Mosley were hired. Councilman Gary Cummings voted against the motion.

- Hired Charlie Ross Chard as a maintenance worker in the Russellville Park and Recreation Department.

- Authorized advertisement to solicit bids for the purchase of a 2018 Ford F350 4X4 Crew Cab 160" wheel base and to solicit bids for the trade-in of a 2006 Ford F350 Crewcab 4x4 Dually.

- Approved the purchase of a new Xerox copier for the Russellville Public Library at a cost of \$3,920. \$1,000 of the purchase price was received from a grant from the Franklin County Community Development Committee.

- Approved a request from the Russellville City School Foundation Board of Directors to waive the rental fee for the A.W. Todd Centre on April 23, 2018, for the annual fundraising dinner.

- Retroactively approved the request to waive the rental fee for the A.W. Todd Centre from the RHS varsity baseball team on February 10, 2018 for its annual Valentine Drawdown dinner.

*Come Hear An Evening of Inspirational Music from*

# Purpose

*Russellville Spring Sing*  
*March 3 @ 5.00*

*AW Todd Centre*  
205 Montgomery St SW

**Additionally:**  
Ava Kasich • Chronicle  
Drummond Family  
Epps Family • The Riders  
McKay Project

No Admission Fee  
A love offering will be received.

BBQ plates and other concessions will be available for purchase.

## 256-627-8784

# Stutts launches re-election bid for State Senate seat

Submitted to the FFP

One of Alabama's most conservative legislators, State Senator Larry Stutts has officially launched his re-election bid. The local physician sent shockwaves during his first campaign with the defeat of Democrat Roger Bedford.

"Four years ago, I promised to fight for jobs, education, conservative values and reduced government," said Stutts. "During my time in the State Senate, I have consistently delivered those results. I have been hard at work in Montgomery, advancing our principles and helping grow northwest Alabama's economy. I have fought for our schools, our teachers, our students and our parents. And I'm also working to bring rural broadband to our district.

"Together, we have gained more influence in our state, and we are seeing more jobs and more renewal projects come to our district."

Stutts, who has delivered more than 12,000 babies, is a pro-life, pro-Second Amendment and pro-limited-government senator. He has been rated among the most conservative members of the Alabama legislature. During his time in the State Senate, northwest Alabama's unemployment rate has fallen to the lowest in more than a decade, and the state's unemployment has sunk to 3.5 percent--proof that the policies he has advocated for are working.

"Conservative principles matter, the free market works, and values are important," said Stutts. "Every day I have worked relentlessly to deliver



Senator Larry Stutts

results for the people of northwest Alabama. Our economy is growing. Our values are being promoted. There is more work to be done, but I have spent the last four years relentlessly advancing the interests of our district and working for the people of northwest Alabama.

"It is pivotal that we have leadership in Montgomery that is willing to stand up to special interests, fight for conservative values and reduce the size and scope of government. That is exactly the kind of leadership I have delivered, and I look forward to four more years of delivering results for our district."

Larry Stutts and his wife Jackie live in Tuscumbia, where he has served as an elder at the First Presbyterian church. They have been married 38 years and have four children and five grandchildren. His medical practice, Colbert OB/GYN, has served more than 22,000 patients.

For more information, visit [www.LarryStutts.com](http://www.LarryStutts.com).

# More local eateries receive satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati

Franklin Free Press

The 15 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of February 12-16 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 "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 15 Franklin County businesses listed in the

most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 91 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 99, shared by Redmont Skateland, 312 Hospital Road, Red Bay, and Discount Grocery and Variety, 201 E. Lawrence St., Russellville.

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

- McDonald's #23035, 606 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 91.
- Taylor's Restaurant, 808 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville, 91. (Cracked food bowls).
- City King Buffet, 520 4th St. SE, Red Bay, 92. (No soap in men's restroom)
- El Patron Tex-Mex LLC, 13665 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94. (Mold in fountain heads).
- Kelly's Kitchen, 17901 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 95.
- Wayne's Catfish Haven, 18437 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
- Russellville's Doughnuts, 14204 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.
- C.J.'s Groery, 14545 Hwy. 24 East, Russellville, 97.
- Wendy's of Russellville 514, 13679 Hwy. 43

South, Russellville, 97.

•Parade Food Mart, 4141 Hwy. 24 East, Red Bay, 98.

•Mexico Bakery, 111 Franklin St. SW, Russellville, 98.

•Los Dos Hermanos, 409 Madison St., Russellville, 98.

•Daisy Grocery, 125 N. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 98.

Of the 15 inspections done in Colbert County from February 12-16, one restaurant scored below the satisfactory range. Rhoda P's Restaurant and Catering, 312 North Montgomery, Sheffield, scored a 73. Violations included dish machine not sanitizing, no date mark on cut melon, other violations on food dating, flat of eggs sitting out in 61-degree temperature, pan of meatloaf 74 degrees and bowl of raw chicken 54 degrees, bowl of pasta salad on food bar not protected/shielded by food guards.

The high score for the week in Colbert County was 99, shared by the Littleville Senior Center, 1400 Jackson Hwy., Tuscumbia, and Yogi's Food Mart, 700 George Wallace Hwy., Littleville.

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

## 'BISHOP' from page 1

you can bank on the Bishops being there for others.

In addition to a dinner, the Bishops received a plaque from the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department and from the East Franklin community thanking them for their years of support.

**"William does so much and won't ever take any pay for it," said EFVFD chief Rodney Alexander.**

**"He'll do the cooking all night long and won't take a dime for it. There's probably not a person in the community he hasn't helped or touched in some way. He was all over after the 2011 tornado, building houses and doing this or that for others, and Mrs. Barbara was right behind him."**

"He does so much and won't ever take any pay for it," said EFVFD chief Rodney Alexander. "He'll do the cooking all night long and won't take a dime for it. They go and get everything we need, even the stuff we serve with.

"There's probably not a person in the community

he hasn't helped or touched in some way. He was all over after the 2011 tornado, building houses and doing this or that for others, and Mrs. Barbara was right behind him."

Recently, William and Barbara hosted a dinner for all of the EFVFD volunteers. Delmer Duboise, who serves on the department's board, said it was time for the community to do something for the Bishops and just to say thank you for all they had done for East Franklin.

"Last Saturday we had our annual stew fundraiser," Duboise said. "William spent four days collecting stuff and preparing onions and getting ready. He never accepts anything for his time and effort. He and Barbara truly love serving others."

For at least one night, though, the Bishops enjoyed being served by their community. But Bishop won't get used to that.

"Everyone here needs our fire department, and we just want to support it and our community," he said. "There are a lot of people who make this community special."



# 2018 Miss RHS Pageant

The RHS Annual Staff will sponsor the 36th annual Miss RHS Pageant this Friday, March 2 at 7 p.m. in the RHS auditorium. The pageant offers an array of talent and beauty. Miss Jessica McSpadden, Miss RHS 2016, will be emceeing the pageant. Miss Hailey Peters, Miss RHS 2017 and student at Northwest-Shoals Community College, will also be assisting and performing. The contestants will be competing in Judge's Interview, Evening Gown, and Talent. Escorts are John David Aycock, Calen Bragwell, Nick Chadderdon, Wesley Cook, James Sandoval and Cameron Vandiver. Ms. Cindy Smith Coan is the director of the pageant, and Dr. AnnaKay Holland is the coordinator of the pageant and Annual Staff sponsor. Tickets will be sold on the night of the pageant at a cost of \$10.00. Programs will be available for \$5. This event is one of the highlights of the year. There will be lots of entertainment that you will not want to miss! The proceeds from this event will benefit the students by defraying their cost of the yearbook. We hope your schedule will permit you to come and support our RHS students!

**Abby Brooke Montgomery**



Talent: Vocal Performance "How Far I'll Go" original artist Alessia Cara

Abby is the daughter of Barry and Samantha Montgomery. Abby is a sophomore at RHS. She is an active member of The Marching Hundred-Tigerette Danceline, Christian Students United, Annual Staff, and Theatre, along with RHS Acapella Jazz Ensemble.

**Alison Hope Bryant**



Talent: Flag and Rifle Routine to "Unsteady" by X Ambassadors.

Alison is the daughter of Loni Bryant. She is a senior at RHS. Alison is an active member of National Honor Society (Officer-Leadership Committee), Student Booster Club, RHS Color Guard Captain, and Haiti Mission Team, as well as Relentless Student Ministry.

**Amberly Brown**



Talent: Vocal Performance "Stone Cold" original artist Demi Lovato.

Amberly is the daughter of Trent and Kristie Wells and Ross Brown. Amberly is a freshman at RHS. She is an active member in Musical Theatre, The Marching Hundred-Tigerette Danceline, and Concert Band, as well as RHS Acapella Ensemble.

**Cecilia McLemore**



Talent: Baton Routine to "Hey, Pachuco!" by Royal Crown Revue.

Cecilia is the daughter of Amy McLemore and the late Jeff McLemore. She is a senior at RHS. Cecilia is an active member of The Marching Hundred-Majorette, Student Booster Club, Mu Alpha Theta, and National Honor Society, as well as HOSA.

**Destiny Cooper**



Talent: Vocal Performance "I Have Nothing" original artist Whitney Houston.

Destiny is the daughter of Alicia Cooper. As a senior, Destiny is an active member of Musical Theatre, Acapella Ensemble, and Church Choir, along with Advanced Chorus.

**Destiny Hatton**



Talent: Jazz Dance to "Momma Knows Best" by Jessie J.

Destiny is the daughter of Dennis and Loretta Hatton. She is a freshman at RHS. Destiny is an active member of Junior Varsity Cheer Squad as Captain, the Varsity Tennis Team, Student Council, Student Booster Club, and Christian Students United.

**Elizabeth Pierce**



Talent: Vocal and Piano Performance "Rise Up" original artist Andra Day.

Elizabeth is the daughter of Alison Pierce. She is a junior at RHS. Elizabeth is an active member of The Marching Hundred-Tigerette Danceline, RHS Musical Theatre, RHS Acapella Ensemble, and Concert Band, as well as Percussion Ensemble.

**Ellie Kerby**



Talent: Musical Theatre Dance to "Life of the Party" by Indina Menzel.

Ellie is the daughter of Steven and Marla Kerby. As a senior, Ellie is an active member of National Honor Society-Secretary, Varsity Cheer-Captain, Chemistry Club-President, and FBLA-Secretary, as well as Student Council 12th Grade Representative.

**Emma Claire Bragwell**



Talent: Jazz Dance to "Emergency" by Icona Pop.

Emma Claire is the daughter of Brian and Amy Bragwell. As a junior, Emma Claire is active in the Varsity Cheer Squad, Varsity Tennis Team, Future Business Leaders of America, Christian Students United, and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America.

**Emma Reed**



Talent: Baton Routine to "Champion" by Carrie Underwood.

Emma is the daughter of Amy Reed and the late Steve Reed. As a sophomore at RHS, Emma is an active member of The Marching Hundred, Robotics Team, Rocketry Team, Future Business Leaders of America, and Mu Alpha Theta.

**Kylee Grace Plott**



Talent: Vocal Performance "A New Life" original artist Linda Eder, Jekyll & Hyde.

Kylee is the daughter of Hugh and Sheryl Plott. As a freshman, Kylee is an active member of the Junior Varsity Cheer Squad, the Junior Varsity Basketball Team, Show Choir, RHS Ensemble, the Varsity Golf Team, and Annual Staff.

**Lauren Mae Sturdivant**



Talent: Vocal Performance "Ain't Misbehavin'" original artist.

Lauren is the daughter of Leslie and Kellie Sturdivant. She is a freshman at RHS. Lauren Mae is an active member of the JV Cheer Squad, the JV Basketball Team, Christian Students United, Student Booster Club, and First United Methodist Church Youth Group.

**Rachel Hannah Griffin**



Talent: Pointe Ballet to "Cinderella" by Steven Curtis Chapman.

Rachel is the daughter of Tim and Christa Griffin. She is a senior at RHS. Rachel is involved in RHS Show Choir, Shoals Ballet Company, Church Choir, Christian Students United, American History Honors Club, Chemistry Club, and SADD.

**Shelby Carson**



Talent: Tap Dance to "Beggin'" by Madcon.

Shelby is the daughter of Ken and Denese Carson. As a Freshman, Shelby is active in Junior Varsity Cheer Squad as Co-Captain, Future Business Leaders of America, Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America, Cosmetology, and Student Booster Club.

**Sydney Grace Medley**



Talent: Vocal Performance "One Moment in Time" original artist Whitney Houston. Sydney is the daughter of Jamie and Cassie Medley. As a sophomore, Sydney is an active member of The Marching Hundred-Tigerette Danceline, Student Booster Club, 10th Grade Student Council Representative, Golden Tiger BIGS (Big Brothers Big Sisters), and RFB Church Youth Worship Team.

**Yada Na'Vea Winston**



Talent: Praise Dance to "Now Behold the Lamb" by Kirk Franklin.

Yada is the daughter of Harlan and Linda Winston. As a freshman she is an active member of the Mt. Pleasant Church Choir, Student Advisory Committee, Spanish Club, and the Junior Varsity Basketball Team.

## Congrats Ladies, and Best of Luck!

### County Commission amends tax abatement agreement

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved an amended tax abatement agreement with the two corporations involved in the construction of a 172,000-square-foot building that will be located on Highway 243 in the Mike Green Industrial Park.

The agreement was originally between the Franklin County Commission as the granting authority and Franklin Industrial Properties, LLC, as the company.

But the investment includes both real and personal property. The real property investments is from Franklin Industrial, and the personal property (i.e. the manufacturing equipment) will be owned by Road Gear Truck Equipment, LLC, so the agreement had to be amended to include both companies.

The total capital investment of the project was originally \$3,090,000 but with increased construction costs is now \$3,530,000.

The abatement is for a legal waiver of state and local noneducational property taxes and all construction related transaction taxes, except local construction transaction taxes levied for educational purposes.

The state and local noneducational property tax abatement will be for 10 years.

The agreement states that the new facility will initially have 23 employees, with at least 47 after one year and at least 60 after year two. Annual payroll is estimated to be \$624,000 initially, increasing to \$2,080,000 after year one and \$2,704,000 after year two.

The amended agreement was signed by Franklin County Commission chairman Barry Moore and Jason Gist, managing member for Franklin Industrial Properties, LLC.



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American Realty Company of Russellville.</p>	<p><b>ESTATE, PROPERTY FOR RENT OR SALE</b></p> <p><b>Commercial/Office Building FOR RENT</b>          Fred's Shopping Center in Russellville. 1,200 Square Feet. \$700/mo., if updated by owner. \$450/mo. if tenant does updates including painting, etc. Please call 256-331-3800.</p>	<p><b>YARD SALES</b></p> <p>Big Yard Sale this Saturday, March 3 from 8-4. 1 mile east on Hwy. 48 by Deb's Hair Shop. First yard sale of the year! Call 256-332-0068.</p> <p><b>LOST AND FOUND</b></p> <p>Lost Dog. White, male boxer bulldog. Lost from 1641 West Lawrence Street, Russellville. If found, please call 256-332-3954. (2)</p> <p><b>FURNITURE</b></p> <p>4 Piece Antique Bed Suite. Springs/Mattress. Full. \$400. Call 256-398-0629. (1)</p> <p>For sale: 94" sofa, very</p>	<p>good condition. 6 throw cushions, rust-gold color. Call 256-332-7779. (4)</p> <p><b>ELECTRONICS</b></p> <p>5 x 8 Apple Tablet/with Charger, \$100. Call 256-398-0629. (1)</p> <p><b>HELP WANTED/ SERVICES PROVIDED/ LOOKING TO BUY</b></p> <p>Looking to buy chickens, ducks and quail. Please call 256-627-9691. (3)</p> <p>I will do private sitting for the elderly. Have experience. Night shift only. Call 256-291-7671. Leave a message if no answer. (5)</p>	<p><b>MISC. FOR SALE</b></p> <p>Box of Romance Novels, \$20. Box Kids Story Books (New), \$30. Call 256-398-0629. (1)</p> <p>2 Boxes Ponsetta Dishes (New), \$50. Call 256-398-0629. (1)</p> <p>Battery Pak/Car Jumper, \$40. Call 256-398-0629. (1)</p> <p>Softball equipment for sale. Like new. Women's Nike cleats, size 11, \$25. Softball helmet, \$25. Call 256-291-5745. (4)</p> <p><i>Franklin Free Press Classified Rates</i>          Yard Sale Rates: <b>FREE, Deadline Monday at Noon; Real Estate-Homes, acreage, lots for sale or rent. \$25 for six consecutive weeks. Up to 40 words per ad; Vehicles, Boats, RVs, Motorcycles for sale. \$15 for six consecutive weeks. Up to 25 words per ad; Pets For Sale only \$10 for six consecutive weeks. Up to 25 words per ad; Free of Charge: Lost &amp; Found,</b></p>	<p><i>Giveaways, and Items Under \$100 (Private Parties Only). 15-word limit; Commercial Classified Rates: \$25 for Businesses, 15 words or less for six weeks. Ads exceeding word limit add \$10 per additional 15 words. The number in parentheses represents the number of times the ad has appeared. Call us at 256-332-0255 to place, cancel or renew your ad. Payment is required in advance of publication for ads.</i></p> <p><b>ALASCAN FOR SALE</b></p> <p><b>ACORN STAIRLIFTS.</b> The affordable solution to your stairs! Limited time -\$250 off your Stairlift purchase! Buy direct &amp; save. Please call 1-800-471-4651 for free DVD and brochure. <b>DIGITAL HEARING AIDS</b> - Now offering a 45-day risk free offer! Free batteries for life! Call to start your free trial! 1-866-960-5928.</p> <p><b>SAWMILLS FROM only</b></p>	<p>\$4397.00. 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## BCDA Board of Directors approves annual budget

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Bear Creek Development Authority Board of Directors approved an annual budget of \$719,795 at its February 9 board meeting.

With anticipated revenues of the same amount, the fiscal year 2018 budget sees the largest individual expense in the category of recreation expenses, for salaries and benefits, at \$249,000. An additional \$7,400 is budgeted for workers compensation insurance, \$25,000 for vehicle expenses, \$7,500 for vehicle insurance and \$85,000 for utility expenses.

The budget includes \$34,145 for operation and maintenance of public use areas, with an addition-

al \$20,000 for cabin utilities and \$6,000 for cabin-cleaning payroll and maintenance supplies.

Under the heading of general administration and office expenses, an additional \$205,000 is budgeted for salaries and benefits. The next largest cost is for shoreline liability insurance, at \$24,500.

Under the heading of capital investments, \$18,000 is budgeted this year for a vehicle purchase.

BCDA anticipated revenues include a carryover of \$25,000 beginning balance operation fund. The largest revenue source is recreation permits, with an anticipated \$223,000. Camping fees from Slickrock are expected to be \$104,200, with \$53,000 from Elliott Branch camping fees, \$32,500 from Williams Hollow camping, \$21,500

from Horseshoe Bend and \$12,000 from Piney Point camping.

The second-largest revenue source comes from cabin rental, with an expected \$171,000 and an additional \$6,000 in cabin cleaning fees revenue.

Water supply program revenues are expected to bring \$41,000 from the Upper Bear water grid and \$22,500 from the Franklin County Water Authority.

Tanglewood sewer revenue is expected to be \$4,500, and \$995 is anticipated from agricultural licenses.

The board plans to move forward with timber sales from a tract of land near Elliott Branch. These revenues are expected to be part of a strategic plan that includes building a \$700,000 reserve account over the next five years.

## Lockheed Martin donates 50 laptop computers to TES

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

With the focus on STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) curriculum, computers are becoming the rule, rather than the exception, in Alabama public school classrooms.

And thanks to a generous donation from Lockheed Martin, Tharptown Elementary School now has 50 laptop computers for students to use.

Lockheed Martin is an American global aerospace, defense, security and advanced technologies company with worldwide interests. The computer donation was coordinated by a Tharptown parent who works for the company.

The company was reorganizing much of its

equipment, and that included new computers, so the laptops were offered to Tharptown.

TES principal Kelby Daniel was excited to hear about the donation and discussed how the computers will aid his students.

**"It will allow our students to grow and get exposed to some things that weren't previously available," Daniel said. "And it will help them learn their way around a keyboard as well."**

"Some laptops will be used with the Robotics program, and we'll distribute the others throughout our classrooms," Daniel said. "We can get the students into small groups and utilize the computers through various math and STEM programs."

"It will allow our students to grow and get

exposed to some different things that weren't previously available. And it will help them learn their way around a keyboard as well."

Daniel said the laptops are in good working order and will provide teachers another resource that otherwise would not have been available due to limited funding.

"We want to recognize Lockheed Martin and let them know we appreciate all they have done for our school," Daniel said. "When you're talking about 50 laptops, that's quite a bit of money we don't have available. So that makes this donation really important."

"It's a tool we'll utilize for a while, and we're thankful for the friendship and partnership we've made with this company."

# Senior Center a place to eat, socialize and connect

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

We now live in the era of social media, where communication with the world is at our fingertips. Unfortunately, for many senior citizens who haven't jumped on board the smart phone express, today's world can be a lonely place.

According to a study from [www.agingcare.com](http://www.agingcare.com), 18 percent of seniors live alone, and 43 percent report feeling lonely on a regular basis.

There's a place in Russellville where local senior citizens can go to socialize, enjoy activities and eat lunch five days a week. And it's right in their backyards at the A.W. Todd Centre in downtown Russellville.

The Russellville Senior Center operates under the leadership of center manager Cathye Garrison, who has been a part of bringing seniors together for food, fellowship and fun for more than 26 years.

Garrison said she and her fellow seniors develop close friendships, and they look forward to getting together daily and catching up on the news around town.

"We're like a family," Garrison said. "We are really close with the ones who come. It's a good group of people. And when we lose someone, we just gather 'round and comfort each other."

The Department of Aging Services, a division of the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments, operates 25 senior centers across the five-county area it serves.

The Russellville Senior Center is open to seniors 55 years of age or older for recreation. Daily lunches are served to seniors 60 years of age or older as part of the congregate meal program. Garrison said approximately 23 to 25 seniors eat at the center five days a week. While there is no charge, many give a small donation to help offset the costs of the meals. An additional 28 meals are delivered daily to homebound seniors, and 12 more seniors receive frozen meals each day.

In order to receive homebound meals, applicants must meet three major medical criteria. Garrison does an intake interview to determine whether the applicant is eligible.

The Russellville Senior Center offers a variety of recreational activities, including cards, quilting, bingo twice each month, and a room with two pool tables. The newest pool table came to the center courtesy of Garrison's husband, Hugh.

**Garrison said she and her fellow seniors develop close friendships and look forward to getting together daily and catching up on the news around town.**

**"We're like a family," Garrison said. "We are really close with the ones who come. It's a good group of people. And when we lose someone, we just gather 'round and comfort each other."**

After Hugh retired from a 40-year career doing auto body repair, he picked up woodworking in his shop at their Russellville home. Garrison also built and donated a cue stick rack along with a beautiful pool table. The workman-



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Hugh Garrison stands next to the pool table he hand-crafted and donated to the Russellville Senior Center.

ship that went into the pool table compares to that of any professionally built table. But Garrison admits it took a while to get the final project correct.

"This is actually the third one I built," Garrison said as he stood next to his table. "The first one went into the garbage. The second one I built with a plywood bottom, and it didn't last. I took the slate off it and built this one.

"I'd work a little while here and there. Then I'd have to figure out the next step."

Garrison plans to build another pool table, but first on his list is rebuilding his kitchen. And he's currently constructing a pier on a cousin's fish pond.

He is one of a few seniors who regularly play pool at the Russellville Senior Center.

"We just have a small group right now, but we'd like to have some more," Garrison said.

Garrison works as the Russellville Senior Center maintenance supervisor and custodian. He began as a volunteer after he retired, and after a year-and-a-half he began as a part-time employee. Other employees include van driver Carolyn Stanford, who delivers meals, and substitute van driver Sandra McCullar.

The Russellville Senior Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. The center is located in the back of the A.W. Todd Centre at 205 Montgomery Street. For more information on the center, its programs or meal delivery, call Cathye Garrison at 256-332-8780.

## 'USE,' from page 4

perk up after charging. If it reads 11.5 volts or lower, the battery is weak or damaged and needs replacing.

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## 'SECURITY,' from page 1

county school system.

Morrow said he remains in contact with Franklin County sheriff Shannon Oliver to receive updates on how the school security program (which includes qualified employees, retired school employees and citizens of the school district volunteering to be trained as reserve deputies and carry firearms on school grounds) works.

"I don't need to know the details of what is being done," Morrow said. "My role as a legislator ended when we passed the bill. The idea was to bring school officials and law enforcement together to move forward together if they wanted to do so."

Some of Franklin County's nine schools are in remote parts of the county, and the wait for law enforcement responses can take up to 30 min-

utes.

Russellville City Schools have a school resource officer, either an active or retired law enforcement officer, at each of the system's four different campuses.

Morrow stressed that HB 404 was not designed to 'arm teachers.' Instead, he compared the intent of the bill to the role of a neighborhood watch program.

"House Bill 404 created an emergency security force, like a neighborhood watch program, especially for rural remote schools that can not afford school resource officers," Morrow said.

Morrow took issue with some media reports that suggest his legislation was designed to arm teachers.

"The word 'teacher' does not appear a single time in Act 2013-268 (HB404)...We in Franklin County are simply trying to protect our children with the very limited resources that we have available," Morrow said.

Farley introduced three bills last week during the Legislative session related to school security, but none of them provided funding to pay for school resource officers to be hired and placed into Alabama public schools.

"That money would have to come out of the Education Trust Fund, and every dollar they have is designated," Farley said. "We would have to take out of someone's pocket to do that. I don't think it's in our budget, and the money's just not there."

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## After four years at Russellville, Heaton leaving with 'no regrets'

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

Mark Heaton's four-year tenure as Russellville's head football coach was not lacking for highlights: A 26-25 win over J.O. Johnson (secured on a last-second field goal by then-sophomore kicker Marvin Betancourt) in Heaton's second game at RHS; a region championship (the team's first in five years) in 2015, followed by a thrilling first-round playoff win over Anniston and a run to the state quarterfinals; heart-pounding victories over Lee-Huntsville and Mae Jemison in September of 2016 that extended the program's region win streak to 13 games [it would reach 14 before ending with a 31-21 loss at Brooks that October]; and even a gutsy, backs-against-the-wall 17-13 win at East Limestone this past season that revived the Golden Tigers' playoff hopes on the heels of an 0-5 start.

The wins were special. The achievements were commendable. The moments were memorable. But they were not foremost in Heaton's mind last Thursday morning, shortly after he announced his resignation as Russellville's football coach and athletic director.

"I think you look back at what the kids have done. The overall region record, the playoff runs we've had, being a part of six playoff games—those are some great accomplishments for the program, and the kids and

See 'HEATON,' Page 18



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Heaton resigned last week after compiling a 30-16 record with the Golden Tigers, including a 22-6 mark in region play.

## Phil Campbell run ends with loss to Samson in Final Four

Mike Self  
Franklin Free Press

BIRMINGHAM - Craig Thomas did two things on Monday that he doesn't ordinarily do.

For starters, Phil Campbell's fourth-year head coach dressed up a bit for his team's Class 2A state semifinal battle with top-ranked Samson at the Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center. Thomas traded in his customary black zip-up pullover for a long-sleeve dress shirt and—*gasp*—a tie.

"I don't know," he said afterward in response to a query about the change in game-day attire. "I got pressured into that."

For the record, Thomas attributed the tie idea to his wife Amy, a third-grade teacher at Phil Campbell Elementary. He also confessed to searching the internet for a quick how-to on actually *tying* the tie. ["Had to Google it," he said.] In the end, he wound up looking just fine ["spiffy," according to assistant coach Tracy Pace] as he patrolled the sideline inside Legacy Arena.

**"I'd really like to put in the paper that I appreciate the girls letting me come along on this ride," Thomas said, his voice catching and his eyes reddening as he started to choke up. "It was....I don't know, more than it was me."**

But the upgrade in wardrobe was not the most surprising development with regard to Thomas on Monday afternoon. That came at the post-game press conference following Phil Campbell's 64-43 loss to the hot-shooting Lady Tigers, when he became visibly emotional as he discussed his team's postseason run to Birmingham—the Lady Bobcats' first Final Four trip in 31 years.

"I'd really like to put in the paper that I appreciate the girls letting me come along on this ride," Thomas said, his voice catching and his eyes reddening as he got choked up. "It was....I don't know, more than it was me."

Emotional displays are by no means unusual in the interview room at the Final Four. Seasons—and, in some cases, high school careers—come to an abrupt end every year at the BJCC; the weight of that reality sets in, and the tears begin to flow. But Monday's expressive moment was out of character for Thomas, an affable, easygoing kind of guy marked more often than not by a wide grin and a loud laugh.

"I usually don't do that," he said after choking up. "I'm sorry."

Thomas, of course, didn't need to apologize. The truth is that only 14 teams—seven on the boys side and seven on the girls—will leave Birmingham happy this week. Samson knows that feeling, having beaten R.C. Hatch in the championship game in 2016 to win its third state title in 11 years. After surviving a pair of Phil Campbell rallies—one in the first half, one in the second—on Monday, the Lady Tigers (30-3) will get a shot at another Blue Map when they face Sand Rock (23-



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW

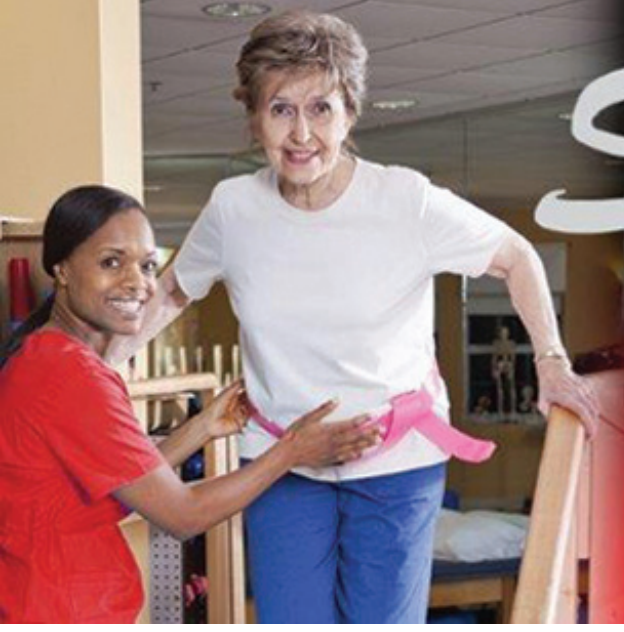
Thomas (above) and the Lady Bobcats saw their 16-game win streak come to a close in the state semifinals despite a season-high 18 points from Roberson (below).

8) in Friday morning's final.

"First of all, congratulations to Phil Campbell on a great year," said head coach Chad McKnight, who also brought Samson to Birmingham back in 2014. "Their coach did an outstanding job. They're a very good ball team, a very sound, fundamental ball team. That's a dang good team we just beat right there. They made a run [early] and got up, and then we came back to get back up eight or ten

See 'RIDE,' Page 14





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## 'RIDE' from page 13

again. It was a game of runs, and we were able to withstand a little bit longer.

"It helps to have experience here. Coach [Thomas] and I were talking about that after the game. Our three seniors have been through the wars. They've been here before, and it showed a little bit today."

Those three seniors (twin guards and Shelton State commits LaTascya and LaTora Duff, along with 5'6 guard Kaitlyn McKnight, a cousin of the head coach) combined to score 50 of Samson's 64 points on Monday. The Duff twins—making their third appearance in the Final Four—arrived in the Magic City having scored 4,635 points between them in their varsity careers; LaTascya, averaging 30.5 points per game on the season, got rolling after a slow start on Monday and finished with 23, while LaTora matched her sister with three three-pointers and scored 17.

McKnight made two back-breaking threes in the second half and finished with 10 points, helping the Lady Tigers shoot 9-for-17 as a team from

beyond the arc.

"Gotta give Samson credit," Thomas said. "Samson is a really good basketball team. Our goal today was to try and slow down the twins. We watched film, and it's like they had unlimited range. They'd back up five feet behind the line and make it. We thought about going zone, but we didn't feel like we could extend it out far enough. So we decided to go man-to-man, but they *still* shot 9-for-17 [from three]. That's with a girl in your face, shooting 17 times and making nine of them.

"Actually, I think the twins were bigger in person than what I gave them credit for. [The Duffs are both listed at 5'8.] With their quickness, they got up and down the floor about as fast as we did, and I thought we were quick. On film, it didn't seem like they run-and-gunned quite as much as they did today. They got several transition layups on us, and the bad thing about it was sometimes we were guarding them with two or three people and they still got layups. They're good. Give them credit."

Samson struggled for stretches with Phil

Campbell's trademark pressure, committing eight turnovers in the first quarter alone and 21 for the game.

"They had a lot to do with that," Chad McKnight said. "They do a really good job with pressure, and their man defense was very good. We played some really good teams this year, some of those Florida-panhandle teams who are really tough man-to-man teams, to get us ready for this point. There were a couple of times where we kind of buckled, but we didn't fold the tent. We held it together and made plays when we needed to.

"They're good on defense. I wouldn't say it's the best defense we've seen all year, but they're pretty dadgum good."

Unfortunately for the Lady Bobcats (26-6), the majority of Samson's possessions that didn't end with a turnover ended with points. The Lady Tigers shot 60 percent or better from the floor in every quarter but the third and finished the game at 51 percent (24-for-47). Phil Campbell, by contrast, shot just 28 percent (17-for-60) and made only one three-pointer.

"One thing we really, really wanted to do was focus on cutting down on their fast breaks," McKnight said. "They get a lot of points in transition. We wanted to make them slow down and run a set or two."

The Lady Bobcats, who arrived in Birmingham on a streak of 16 straight wins during which they averaged 61.8 points per game, primarily run their half-court offense through junior post player Abby Davis and sophomore guard Kallie Allen, the team's top two scorers on the season. Samson held Davis and Allen to a total of just 12 points on 4-for-31 shooting.

McKnight credited 5'10 junior Diamonique Williams with slowing down the 5'11 Davis, who entered the game averaging 14.0 points per game this season and had scored 1,328 points in her varsity career. [She finished with six on Monday.]

"Diamonique did a great job on [Davis]," McKnight said. "[Davis] is an outstanding player; we knew that coming in. I told Diamonique I didn't care if she scored a point for us today. Just play good defense on [Davis] and make her earn everything she gets. I think she did that today. She did a good job."

Despite their struggles from the field, the fourth-ranked Lady Bobcats went toe-to-toe with the state's No. 1 team for much of the afternoon. Trailing 15-6 after a three by LaTora Duff at the 2:00 mark of the first quarter, Phil Campbell responded with a 12-0 run to go in front by three.

"I think we were all a little nervous at first," said senior forward Chloe Roberson, who scored six



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

**SISTERS, TIMES TWO** - The Elliotts (Dakota, 23, and Darby, in background) made things difficult for the Duffs (LaTora, with ball, and LaTascya, 4) at times, but Samson's twin Tigers were too much in the end, totaling 40 points on 15-for-26 shooting.

# 'RIDE', from page 14

points during the run and finished the game with a season-high 18 on 7-for-11 shooting from the floor and 4-for-5 from the line. "Once it got on into the first quarter, we got into our groove and got used to it."

Roberson sparked the spurt with a pair of free throws to end a four-minute scoring drought for the Lady Bobcats, and then Darby Elliott did what Darby Elliott does. The 5'2 senior guard, who had been left in the wake of a lethal crossover move by LaTascya Duff on a driving layup barely 30 seconds into the game, redeemed herself with a pair of dandy defensive plays. On back-to-back possessions, Elliott first stole the ball from Duff and dashed the other way for a lefty layup to make it 15-10, then picked Duff's pocket a second time and assisted on a layup by younger sister Dakota Elliott that trimmed the lead to three and ignited the Phil Campbell crowd.

"Their defense was pretty good," LaTascya Duff said after the game. "We had some turnovers, and we had to get it back on the defensive end."

Roberson banked home a pull-up jumper to close out the first quarter and then made a 15-footer off an assist from Allen to open the second. Following a steal by freshman guard Caitlynn Mills, Davis grabbed the rebound off an Allen miss and stuck it back in to cap the 12-0 run and give Phil Campbell an 18-15 lead with 7:20 remaining in the first half.

Junior Michelle Duff—the twins' younger sister—nailed a three to tie the game, and then LaTascya Duff connected from beyond the arc to make it 21-18 at the 6:20 mark. LaTascya pulled up for another three in transition with 3:15 left in the half, finishing off a 15-2 run by the Lady Tigers that restored their lead to 10 at 30-20. The margin swelled to 13 before Roberson scored off a nice give-and-go feed from Darby Elliott to make it a 36-25 game at the break.

Samson shot 14-for-22 from the floor in the first half, compared to just 9-for-27 by Phil Campbell. Roberson picked up the slack with 10 first-half points to help keep the Lady Bobcats in it.

"They were helping off a lot on screens," Davis said, "and that put us in some hard scenarios. We were open a few times on the roll, and Chloe was open a lot. They weren't guarding her as much. But they played really well on defense. They're a really good defensive team, too."

LaTascya Duff—who scored 42 points in the first half of a win over rival Geneva County earlier this season—opened Monday's second half with a short jumper to make it 38-25. Roberson again answered the bell, scoring six points in a 7-2 run that cut the lead to 40-32. McKnight made a big three from the left wing to push the lead back into double-figures, but the Lady Bobcats kept coming. Mills splashed a three from the right wing and then came up with a steal, leading to a layup by Roberson off an assist from Darby Elliott that brought Phil Campbell within six at 43-37 with 1:14 left in the third.

See 'RIDE,' page 16



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Samson coach Chad McKnight (not pictured) praised Williams (above) for her defensive effort against Davis (3), who came into the game leading the Lady Bobcats in scoring at 14.0 points per game.



## Chloe Roberson Senior Forward, Phil Campbell

Roberson was at her best on the big stage Monday afternoon, putting up a season-high 18 points for Phil Campbell in the state semifinals versus Samson. She shot 7-for-11 from the floor and 4-for-5 from the line, but the Lady Bobcats saw their season end with a 64-43 loss.

Roberson closed her career with a strong senior year, averaging 7.3 points per game and also shooting a team-best 75 percent (48-for-64) from the foul line, helping Phil Campbell finish 26-6.



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**'RIDE', from page 15**

"Chloe toted us today," Thomas said of Roberson, who scored eight third-quarter points on 4-for-5 shooting. "They were focusing on Abby and Allen, trying to shut them down, and she made them pay."

Two points by each of the Duff twins pushed the lead back to 10, but Davis assisted on a layup by Dakota Elliott to make it 47-39 at the end of three. The Lady Bobcats were within striking distance to pull off what would have been a significant upset, but they simply ran out of gas down the stretch, missing 15 of their 17 shot attempts in the fourth quarter. Samson, meanwhile, finished strong, shooting 6-for-7 from the floor in the fourth with three more threes to run away and hide.

"Our goal coming in was to score 60 points and hold them in the low 40s," McKnight said. "We accomplished it, but I didn't think we were going to for a while. We made some plays at the end of the game when we needed to."

Samson finished with a 33-23 rebounding edge and hurt the Lady Bobcats on the offensive glass. Williams had 12 rebounds—including seven offensive boards—to go along with her seven points, and LaTascya Duff also pulled down 12 rebounds.

**"Everybody this year...it was like we all worked together, even in practice, pushing each other to do our best and everything," Davis said. "I think that's what got us down here—us pushing each other to do what we could."**

Roberson led Phil Campbell with seven rebounds to go with her season-high 18 points. Davis finished with six points and six boards, and Allen added six points, five rebounds, four assists and three steals. Darby Elliott chipped in with four points, four assists and five steals, and Dakota Elliott also scored four. Mills had three points, and senior reserve Carley Nix scored two.

Thomas wasn't the only one to get emotional at the post-game presser. Davis fought back tears as she reflected on the Lady Bobcats' most successful season in three decades [they won their first county title since 1998, their first area title since 1993 and their first-ever regional championship in Hanceville, making the Final Four for the first time since 1987] while also coming to grips with that season now being over.

"Everybody this year really...it was like we all worked together, even in practice, pushing each other to do our best and everything," Davis said. "I think that's what got us down here—us pushing each other to do what we could."

The ending was tough to swallow, but the journey was one that seniors

See 'RIDE,' Page 17

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## 'RIDE', from page 16

Roberson, Elliott, Nix and Megan Bullock will never forget.

"The memories that we made," Roberson said. "That's what was important about this year."

The Lady Bobcats will have a chance to make more special memories next season. Davis and Dakota Elliott (8.2 points per game this season) will be seniors, and Allen—this year's Northwest Regional MVP—will be in line to surpass the 1,000-point mark for her varsity career as a junior [she's currently at 869]. Mills didn't look the least bit intimidated under the bright lights of Hanceville and Birmingham the past two weeks; she'll be joined as a sophomore by a handful of classmates who led Phil Campbell's ninth-grade team to a 15-1 record this season. Further down the line, more talent is on the way from a 7th-8th grade team that also won the county title.

"It's gonna be hard to replace all four of our seniors," Thomas said. "Those girls practiced hard, and they played hard. As far as replacing them goes, it's gonna be tough. But we do have some good young talent coming through, and our core group—Abby, Allen and Dakota—will set the standard for us. They'll push the other girls this summer about coming back down here. The girls had a good time down here."

Thomas did, too. There are only two things he would change for next time. One is the result. The other is that doggone tie.

"If we make it back down here next year," he said, grin firmly back in place, "I probably won't wear it."



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Allen, this year's Class 2A Northwest Regional MVP, leads a strong group of returning players that should keep Phil Campbell in the hunt for more postseason hardware next year.

A benefit golf tournament for David Boutwell will be held Friday, March 30 at Twin Pines Country Club. Registration and lunch starts at 11 a.m. with a 12:30 p.m. shotgun start. The tourney is a four-man scramble with a donation of \$240 per team. For more info, contact Ernest Presley at 256-460-5805 or Ronnie Boutwell at 256-324-0960.

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## 'HEATON', from page 13

coaches did a great job to accomplish that," Heaton said. "But what's most important to me is, I'm thankful for the relationships. That's the best part of this—getting to know those kids, getting to know other people, building relationships and seeing them grow as young men, seeing some of those guys coming back and doing great things. It's about what they accomplish and who they become after they leave here.

"It's an honor to just be a little piece of their life." Heaton was being modest. The truth is, to a great number of the players he coached and mentored over the past four years, he was much more than a little piece of their lives. He was a father figure to some, a friend and confidant to others, a trusted advisor and faithful encourager to many more—on matters far more important than what took place under the Friday-night lights.

"The thing I want to focus on moving forward from here is how thankful I am for the community and the kids we had here, the kids who were placed in our lives at this time," Heaton said. "We built great relationships here, relationships with these kids that will last a lifetime. We've seen God do a lot of great things in the lives of these kids, and that's what it's all about."

Lord willing, Heaton will have the opportunity to continue pouring into players' lives and molding young men; at 39 years old, he's remarkably young for a man who's already been a head coach for 10 years at four different schools, and his competitive fire burns as hot as it ever has. He's nowhere near finished, even though his time at Russellville has run its course.

"I felt it was time for a change for me and my family," said Heaton, who has a wife, Betty, and two daughters, 11-year-old Jae and nine-year-old Payton. "I did discuss this with Mr. [Heath] Grimes [RCS superintendent], and I felt like now was a good time for me to turn in my resignation, so they can move forward and hire a new head football coach and athletic director. I don't want Russellville to be in a bind. You've gotta be able to get the best candidate you can get, and it's still early enough for them to do that.

"At the same time, there are opportunities out there that I'd love to pursue. I feel like it's the right time for our family to make a change and pursue other opportunities. Hopefully, soon, we'll have a real good idea about what we're gonna do."

Heaton declined to specify those opportunities on Thursday, but you can bet your bottom dollar he'll be coaching somewhere in the very near future—either running his own program or serving as an offensive coordinator with a keen eye toward becoming a head coach again soon.

"I want to be a head football coach," he said. "That's what I love to do. That's what God made me to do. Now, that's all in His timing and His will, so I'm just gonna be pursuing all the options I have and praying that I get to be a head football coach again. Whether that's now or later is up to God and his timing.

"Right now, I want to find a good place for me and my family to grow in, and we'll see where that takes us. I do believe we're making progress in that area, and we should know something soon."

Heaton certainly should have focused on the future last Thursday morning, but he consented to spend a moment or two looking back on his time at Russellville.

"As far as here goes, the last four years have been tremendous," he said. "I'm very thankful for the opportunity that [former superintendent] Rex Mayfield and [former RHS principal] Dr. Tim Guinn and the board of education gave me four years

ago to come here. It's been great for my family and for my coaching career. Russellville is just a tremendous place to coach football and community to be a part of."

Heaton took over a Russellville team that had gone 4-6 in 2013 and guided them to an 8-3 record in his first season. The Golden Tigers went 6-1 in Region 8 play (finishing second to East Limestone) and spent the final nine weeks of that 2014 season ranked in the ASWA Class 5A Top 10 (peaking at No. 4 and finishing at No. 10). They hosted a first-round playoff game but lost 36-14 to eventual state finalist Pleasant Grove.

**"The thing I want to focus on moving forward is how thankful I am for the community and the kids we had here, the kids who were placed in our lives at this time," Heaton said. "We built great relationships here, relationships with these kids that will last a lifetime. We've seen God do a lot of great things in the lives of these kids, and that's what it's all about."**

Heaton's second team at Russellville was also his best. The 2015 Golden Tigers went 7-0 in Region 8, claiming the program's first region crown since 2010. They narrowly avoided an upset in the first round, slipping by Anniston 10-7 on a 75-yard touchdown sprint by quarterback Payton Nichols in the final minutes. Russellville then pounded Parker 41-21 on the road in round two before letting a late lead slip away in a gut-wrenching 22-14 quarterfinal loss to Alexandria.

Alexandria lost in overtime the following week to Mortimer Jordan in the state semifinals. Heaton is a firm believer that his 2015 team—which finished 11-2 behind a record-setting season from running back Deyon Hill and a talent-laden defense—was good enough to make the Super Seven.

"It's all relative to how things fall in the playoffs and how you match up against certain people," he said. "That year, we had a great group of seniors who really came on and bonded. We got better every week and were really playing good football when the playoffs got there. We had a really good draw. We found a way to win that first one, and then we played really well in the second round. It was a close game in the quarters, too.

"We were just as good as any football team in the 5A north that year. I think it very easily could have been us or Mortimer Jordan or Alexandria in the finals. It just came down to making a play here or there. That was one of those great years, with a lot of great memories. Those kids come back all the time. They're Russellville, through and through, and it's neat to have been a part of that."

The Golden Tigers followed that up with a solid season in 2016, finishing 8-4 overall and winning another playoff game. They beat Guntersville 35-28 in the first round before falling 33-13 on the road at Briarwood Christian in round two.

Russellville, ranked No. 5 in the preseason by the ASWA, remained in the poll through the first seven games of the season, extending its streak of consecutive weeks ranked in the Top 10 to 29. That streak—along with the 14-game region win streak—ended with an October loss at Brooks.

Prior to the 2017 season, there were significant changes to Russellville's coaching staff and roster. Defensive coordinator Andy Lambert was let go, and offensive coordinator Ryan Brewer also departed; both men, close friends and long-time lieutenants of Heaton for the better part of the previous decade, took coaching positions at Haleyville High School. Meanwhile, running back Zaye Boyd, fresh off a sophomore season in which he had rushed for 1,401 yards and scored

25 touchdowns, transferred to Lawrence County.

What was already going to be a transitional year became even more challenging in the preseason jamboree last August, when junior quarterback/receiver/safety Devin Buckhalter—the team's best and most indispensable player—suffered a broken bone in his foot and was ultimately lost for the season. The Golden Tigers stumbled out of the gate 0-5 before rallying down the stretch to win three region games in a four-week span, putting themselves in position to make the playoffs. [Their postseason hopes ended with a 23-16 loss to rival Colbert County in Week 10, in what turned out to be Heaton's final game.]

"I'm super-proud of last year's group," Heaton said last Thursday. "To go through what we went through, battling the way they did, overcoming adversity week in and week out, putting us in position to have a chance to make the playoffs at the end—I couldn't be more proud as a coach. I'm proud of these other coaches and these kids and the way they fought through everything last year."

Russellville finished 3-7 in 2017, marking Heaton's first losing season as a head coach. Between the changes to his coaching staff, the defections of some key players and a series of injuries and illnesses that impacted others on an almost weekly basis, one has to wonder if Heaton had ever experienced a season quite like it.

"I have not. No I haven't. But that's part of it," he said. "Any time you're in any profession for a long period of time, you see the valleys and the tops of the mountains, and everywhere in between. This was something I haven't experienced and didn't want to experience, but if you handle it the right way it ends up being a positive experience to go through because it allows you to grow and find ways to be better."

Heaton finished his tenure at Russellville with an overall record of 30-16, including an 18-6 mark in home games, a 22-6 record in Region 8 play and three wins in six playoff games. His career record in 10 seasons as a head coach (two at J.U. Blacksher, two at Escambia County, two at Haleyville and four at Russellville) now stands at 74-40, including a 50-21 mark in region play. Heaton's all-time playoff record is 7-7, with two trips to the state quarterfinals.

When asked if he had any regrets about his time in Russellville, Heaton did not hesitate.

"No. Zero regrets," he said. "When we came here from Haleyville, we were excited about the opportunity to be here. From day one when my feet were on the ground until today, it's been a tremendous experience. I wouldn't trade any part of it for the world. Russellville is a great place.

"I wish the entire system the best, the football program the best. I wanna see these kids be successful and finish out their years having success on the football field and off it. I'll keep up with them. We've built strong bonds with those kids, and we're a close-knit family. Sometimes family moves, but that doesn't mean you're not family any more or you don't still love them. I'll always be a phone call away or a drive away."

Heaton's resignation is effective June 30, 2018, but it's likely he'll be gone to a new job well before then. He's no stranger to leaving one program and one group of student-athletes behind for another, but it doesn't get any easier. And he wouldn't have it any other way.

"That's right. If it's not tough, you're probably not doing it right," he said. "That's the thing about it. When you build those strong relationships, the timing is tough in the end. But the foundation you built is long-lasting, no doubt about it."

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