



Key Player

Rev. Charles Dale of Russellville was front and center for the NAACP State Conference. See story Page 3.

Award Winner

'Toyland' took home several honors at the annual Franklin County Partnership Awards Banquet last week. See story Page 3.



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Madden enters guilty plea

Former county administrator confesses to theft of more than \$750,000 in taxpayer money over ten-year period

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Early Monday afternoon, former Franklin County administrator Crista Madden pled guilty to two felony ethics charges and stealing more than \$750,000 from the taxpayers of Franklin County.

Madden pled guilty before special-appointed judge Pride Tompkins, a retired circuit judge from Colbert County. The case was handled by the Alabama Attorney General's Office, and Madden was represented by attorney Ralph Holt of Florence.

The public became aware of the investigation on March 5, when the *Franklin Free Press* published an article that told of financial records of Franklin County dating back to 2007 being seized by investigators with the Attorney General's office that day.

Madden resigned from her county administrator position on August 31, 2017 to take the same position with Chilton County. The Chilton County Commission placed Madden on administrative leave March 5, after an executive session at an emergency meeting. Madden was removed from all county bank accounts, and another employee was added as the new authorized signature on those accounts.

Madden began working for Franklin County on September 1, 1992, when she was hired as county accountant. She became assistant county administrator on October 1, 2005. Madden was appointed as county administrator by Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore on October 1, 2009. Madden is the daughter of Franklin County commissioner Rayburn Massey.

Moore, who was the official who reported the financial discrepancies to law enforcement authorities, released a statement Monday afternoon:

See 'MADDEN,' Page 9

Child custody bill passes Senate

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A bill known as the "Children's Equal Access Act," sponsored by Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia), has passed the Alabama Senate and is expected to be voted on by the House this week.

Senate Bill 211 provides that in child custody proceedings, whether pursuant to a divorce case or not, there shall be a rebuttable presumption that joint custody is in the best interests of the child.

Stutts said the bill cleared the Senate last week and was scheduled to be on the House Judiciary Committee schedule March 21 before a vote on the entire House floor. Stutts said he's confident the bill will clear the House and become law.

"It's an encouraging sign that the Speaker of the House [Rep. Mac McCutcheon, R-Huntsville] is one of the co-sponsors of the bill," Stutts said. "I am encouraged it will get favorable response in the House."

This is not the first time such legislation has been introduced. A similar bill was presented the last two years, but efforts to pass the bill into law failed in large part due to opposition from Alabama judges who believe their legal 'hands will be tied' with a presumption of joint custody.

Senate Bill 211, sponsored by Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia), provides that in child custody proceedings, whether pursuant to a divorce case or not, there shall be a rebuttable presumption that joint custody is in the best interests of the child.

"The fact is we have guidelines for judges on all sorts of things," Stutts said. "Take sentencing guidelines in criminal cases. There are starting points in the law for all sorts of things that a judge has to decide."

Stutts said a 2008 joint House/Senate resolution passed that formed an Alabama Child Custody Task Force. He said the exact language in SB 211 about a rebuttable presumption for joint custody was found in the

See 'CUSTODY,' Page 11

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Martha Elizabeth Ford Bixler, Russellville, age 79
Died Friday, March 16, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home.
Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Kenneth Ray Borden, Russellville, age 55
Died Thursday, March 15, 2018. Graveside service held at Knights of Pythias Cemetery. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Beaman T. "Jack" Brannon, Moulton, age 74
Died Sunday, March 11, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Masterson Cemetery in Moulton.

Ronnie Lee Grissom, Spruce Pine, age 69
Died Tuesday, March 13, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home.
Interment in Grissom Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

Ronald Kenneth "Kenny" Nichols, Spruce Pine, age 58
Died Sunday, March 11, 2018. Graveside service held at Franklin Memory Gardens. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

Elzie Weston Scott, Jr., Phil Campbell, age 74
Died Sunday, March 18, 2018. Funeral will be held Wednesday, March 21, 2018 at 2 p.m. at Vandiver Hollow Missionary Baptist Church in Tuscumbia. Interment will be in Vandiver Hollow Cemetery. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.



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'Toyland' steals show at Partnership Awards Banquet

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

It wasn't the Academy Awards, but "The Legend of Toyland" and its creators swept the slate of awards last Thursday night like a blockbuster movie piles up Oscars.

The efforts of those who brought "The Legend of Toyland" back to Russellville were rewarded at the 11th annual Partnership Awards Banquet held at the A.W. Todd Centre. The event, co-sponsored by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and the Franklin County Development Authority, recognizes outstanding local contributions in community service and business and industry.

Lanny McAlister, who wrote and directed "Toyland," received the prestigious Hall of Fame Award. Hillary Hall and Chase Sparks, who led the project and worked with McAlister to bring the show to Russellville, received the Volunteer of the Year Award and the Distinguished Service Award for Russellville, respectively.

And the Roxy's "Legend of Toyland" was named Franklin County's Best Kept Secret.

McAlister is a Russellville native who has dedicated his life and talents to promoting music education.

His teaching career began at Rogers High School, where he organized the "Buccaneers in Blue" band. He went on to teach in Dadeville and Gordon Military College in Barnesville, Georgia, before returning home to Franklin County and Northwest Junior College, where he taught the next 32 years.

McAlister directed 15 major Broadway musicals at Northwest, and his "Toyland" creation was a

Northwest fixture for 30 years.

After a five-year retirement, McAlister revived "Toyland" in 2017 for the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council. More than 6,000 people saw the show during its five-day run.

McAlister said he knew he'd been nominated for an award, but had no idea he would be the winner.

"It was a very nice surprise," he said. "I very much appreciate it. I'd like to thank the many people who went into making Toyland. I enjoy doing it and enjoy that time."

And if you're wondering about the return of "Toyland" this year, count on it.

"We've started work on it already," McAlister said. "Hopefully, we will be able to buy some of the costumes so the expense won't be so extravagant this year and we can return more money to the community. We're looking into some new options, and I've started a rewrite on it. We'll add some things to this year's show."

Other Partnership Awards Banquet honorees included:

- Beautification Award: Leisure Creations (Phil Campbell); Clarion Couture (Red Bay); The Bricks Restaurant (Russellville).

- Business of the Year: Cottontails Children's Boutique.

- Franklin County's Best Kept Secret: The Roxy's Legend of Toyland.

- Distinguished Service Award: Carl Cooper (Phil Campbell); Jarod Massey (Red Bay); Chase Sparks (Russellville).

- Volunteer of the Year Award: Hillary Hall.

- The Roger Bedford Unsung Hero Award: Scotty Kennedy.

- Excellence in Industrial Growth: Road Gear



COURTESY PHOTO

'Toyland' creator Lanny McAlister with his wife Gayle and members of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council at last Thursday's annual Partnership Awards Banquet.

Truck Equipment.

- Industrial Support Award: CNC Stone Crafters.

- Industry of the Year: Sunshine Homes.

- Educator of the Year Franklin County Schools: Leah Torisky.

- Educator of the Year Russellville City Schools: Cindy Coan and Dana Crummie.

Dale plays key role in annual NAACP state conference

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the Alabama State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took place earlier this month, Russellville resident Rev. Charles Dale was right in the middle of the action.

The annual event commemorates the anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," the Selma-to-Montgomery march and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This year's theme was *Celebrating the Bridges We've Crossed: It Takes Leadership and Courage*.

Dale serves on the state executive committee that plans the three-day event. With activities both in Selma and Montgomery, the annual weekend features more than 40 events for participants.

At the March 3 gala, Dale helped present awards to the 2018 recipients. Included among the honorees were men and women who staged a 'sit-in' in Washington, D.C. to protest the appointment of Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions as the U.S. Attorney General.

Several other trailblazers in the civil rights movement were recognized, including Dr. Wendell Wilkie Gunn, the first African-American citizen to enroll and graduate from Florence State Teachers College (now the University of North Alabama). Gunn enrolled in September of 1963 and graduated two years later.

UNA's Board of Trustees recently voted to rename the UNA commons building to the "Wendell W. Gunn University Commons."

Gunn's courage to break the color barrier in 1963 opened the door for many more young men and women to follow the trail he blazed, Dale said.

Gunn was surprised and humbled by the honor.

"The new Wendell Gunn Commons will stand out on the UNA campus as a permanent reminder of the university's expanded mission, bringing focus and gravitational pull for our community to bond and to embrace the university experience," Gunn said. "With a humble heart, I accept this honor on behalf of the many people who have worked to make this journey a success."

Other NAACP honorees included Rep. John Lewis, Rep. Terri Sewell, civil rights attorney Fred David Gray, Autherine Lucy Foster (first student to integrate the University of Alabama), Jerry and Bernice Burnet, Tracey Williams



COURTESY PHOTO

Rev. Charles Dale, far right, and Benard Simelton, president of the NAACP State Conference, present Wendell Wilkie Gunn with a 2018 Trailblazer Award at a gala banquet held in Montgomery.

and Jerry-Pule Mokolo for work on the association's website.

Dale was also honored with a plaque thanking him for serving on the planning and executive committees.

Honey Do: The outside itch

You have it, I have it, and so does just about everybody else.

The outside itch.

The temps are rising, the buttercups are blooming, Daylight Saving Time has kicked in and you are just itchin' to get out in that yard, get some dirt under your nails and start your spring projects.

The only way to scratch that itch is to get out there and lay out the garden or flower beds, clean up the winter debris from the yard or maybe even paint something.

Here's an idea. Stand in front of your house or apartment and really take a look at what your guests or folks passing see. Could your home be a little more friendly, inviting or colorful? Consider these small projects to jazz up the place a little.

THE FRONT DOOR. How about a new coat of paint here. Consider a vibrant color that will stand out from the rest of the house. Reds, bright blues, greens and yellows can really give life to the whole house.

Freshen up other paintable areas such as railings, trim and steps with a neutral color or bright white to frame the door and really give a clean look.

GLASS. Clean all glass windows and fixtures, including security light-

ing with glass cleaner. This may require some ladder climbing, so be safe.

HARDWARE. Polish or replace tarnished door knobs, house numbers and other metal surfaces.

THE MAIL BOX. Whether it be mounted on the house or by the road, clean or replace it and make sure house numbers are in good shape and visible. Mail boxes that are in the yard or by the road are great places for colorful vines or flower beds, or maybe a hanging basket of flowers on the side away from traffic.

SOLAR LIGHTS. Nothing is easier to install than solar lights, and the ones on the market now are more durable and brighter than ever. Sidewalk lights, or pathway lights, are great for ambiance and safety, while spots and floods add security to your home.

Each of these projects cost very little, can be done easily in one day, and are sure to help cure that outside itch.

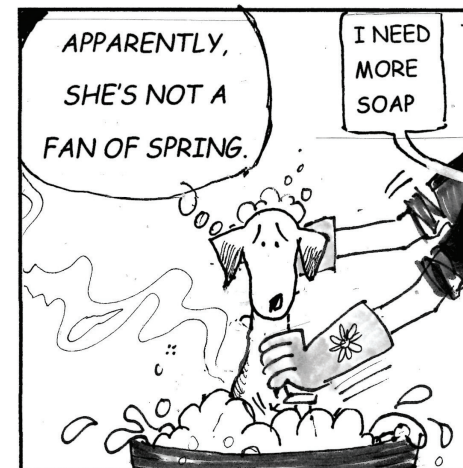
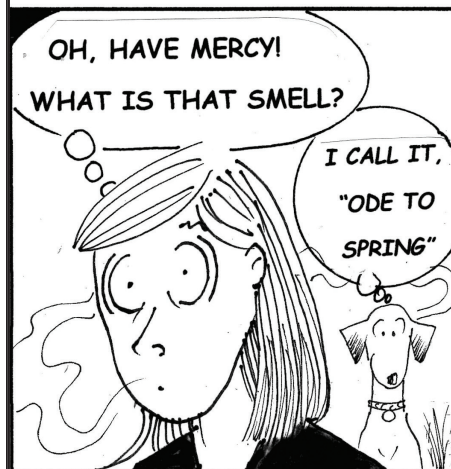
Be bold, have fun and remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green

OUR HOUSE

BY Ree Shannon



An unseemly beauty in our midst

By Taylor Reeder
Regional Extension Office

Spring is literally slapping us in the face (and by literally, I mean you probably have been whacked by a limb or two while doing your seasonal pruning). Not only is it time for pruning, but blooms are leaping out from limbs all across north Alabama! Some of the most stunning displays are right in our front yards. These beautiful trees may seem delightfully docile; however, one species holds a dark secret...

You may have noticed we celebrated National Invasive Species Awareness Week February 26-March 2 this year. During the week, we highlighted several invasive plant and animal species that are common in our area. One of the top emerging pests is none other than the snowy, white-blooming Bradford pear. Yes, you read that right, Bradford pears are INVASIVE! How, you might ask, can these pretty trees with a profusion of blooms be so bad? Well, let me tell you.

Bradford pears have been a favorite tree for homeowners and landscapers for years. They line driveways and fences. You even see them in parking lots on commercial properties. They have showy white flowers in early spring and bright reddish foliage in the fall. They grow quickly and provide excellent shade throughout our sweltering summers. All of these factors make this tree a popular choice for most southern landscapes.

However, the negative qualities of a Bradford pear far outweigh the positive.

First, I don't know about you, but my opinion is that they stink! Have you ever walked by a row of Bradford pears in bloom? You may have thought you stumbled across an overflowing dumpster or

that someone cleaned a fish nearby and left the carnage to bake in the sun. I'm probably exaggerating here, but Bradford pears do not have a pleasant odor.

From a structural standpoint, Bradford pears aren't very stable. Their growth habit is such that their main branches come out from the trunk at very narrow angles. This trait, combined with weak wood, results in splitting during heavy winds or snow and ice events. This makes the Bradford pear a risk for any person, animal or object that is within striking distance of its branches.

Bradford pears have been a favorite tree for homeowners and landscapers for years. They line driveways and fences. You even see them in parking lots on commercial properties. They have showy white flowers in early spring and bright reddish foliage in the fall. They grow quickly and provide excellent shade throughout our sweltering summers. All of these factors make this tree a popular choice for most southern landscapes. However, the negative qualities of a Bradford pear far outweigh the positive.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of Bradford pears is the tendency they have to invade our cultivated and natural landscapes. To understand this, you might want a little history on these trees.

Bradford pears were originally cultivated to develop fire blight-resistant fruiting pear trees. The fruit from Bradford pears can often be sterile; however, they can sometimes cross-pollinate with other pears, which ends up producing non-sterile fruit. Birds and animals will take this fruit and spread it near and far. I'm sure you've driven

See 'BEAUTY,' Page 10

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Letters to the editor

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

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Here's a better idea

Dear Dave,
I'm 27 years old and have no debt. I have a five-month emergency fund of \$14,000. Recently, I started a new job making \$60,000. I've been offered a 401(k) with no match, but I was wondering if instead I should open a high-yield CD.

Kris

Dear Kris,
You're doing very well at a young age. Congratulations! I'm glad you're thinking about your financial future, too. But I have a better idea.

How about opening a Roth IRA with good growth stock mutual funds inside? Fund it up to \$5,500 a year, and make sure the mutual funds have strong track records of at least 10 years. This investment—growing tax-free—will be superior to a non-matching 401(k) or certificate of deposit. If you want to invest even more, you could *then* put additional cash into the 401(k) offered by your company.

With your income and maturity, plus the proper investment strategy, you're likely to retire a very wealthy lady. Keep up the great work, Kris!

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.*

Not as bad, but still not smart

Dear Dave,
How do you feel about check cashing companies?

Norman

Dear Norman,
I'm not a big fan of check cashing companies. They're not nearly as bad as payday lenders, but it still seems kind of silly to me that there's even a market for this kind of thing. If you want a place to cash your checks and store your money, all you have to do is walk into a bank and open an account.

I realize there's a small segment of the population that some people in financial circles like to call "the unbanked." This means that, for whatever reason, they avoid banks. That's their choice, but in the process, they leave themselves susceptible to bad deals.

As I said, I don't feel the same way about check-cashing companies as I do about payday lenders. But it's still not a financially smart move to regularly pay a storefront operation fees just to cash your checks.

Dave

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What's Happening


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


 **R**ussellville Masonic Lodge 371 is selling hams for Easter. Hams are \$30. Pre-order 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.


 **T**he Community Action Agency of Northwest Alabama's Gerald Williams Cooperative Garden Program is offering free vegetable seeds, plants and fertilizer to help qualified local residents wishing to grow their own gardens. Sign-up runs through Friday, March 23. To participate in the program, applicants must reside in Franklin/Colbert/Lauderdale counties, and gross monthly income must not exceed \$1,507 for a single-person household, \$2,030 for a two-person household and \$2,552 for a three-person household. For each additional person in the household, add \$522 per month. Plants will be distributed on April 17 at the Russellville Farmers Market. All residents should call 256-248-1921 from 1-4 p.m. Monday-Friday to apply or for more information.


 **S**pring Revival will be held at St. Paul CME Church (406 Hamilton Street in Russellville) March 21-23. Guest evangelist is Rev. Christopher Reeves, Greater St. Paul CME Church in Florence. Service times are 7 p.m. nightly. Everyone is invited!


 **K**ids and Kin dates 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 22 at 5 p.m.—“Ways Babies Learn When You Sing to Them,” Alisha Albright, Family Guidance Center of Alabama.


 **T**he Alabama Cooperative Extension System will hold a Gardening Series at the Russellville Public Library on the last two Fridays in March from 11 a.m.-noon. Topics will be 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? Call 256-332-1535, stop by the library or email us via our website at www.russellvillepubliclibrary.com.


 **B**elgreen Kindergarten Registration will be held this Friday, March 23 from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the school's library. Students registering must be 5 years old on or before September 1, 2018. Please bring your child's birth certificate, social security card, immunization record, and proof of residency (current utility bill or copy of lease/mortgage) to register. For more information, please call Belgreen High School at 256-332-1376.


 **B**elgreen Pre-K Registration will be held this Friday, March 23 from 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m. in the school's library. Students registering must be 4 years old by September 1, 2018. Please bring proof of residence, immunization record, birth certificate and social security card. All paperwork is due before 2:30 p.m. For more information, please call Bridgett Rickard at 256-332-1376.


 **K**indergarten registration at Tharptown Elementary School will be held this Friday, March 23 from 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. in Mrs. Tverberg's room. Child must be 5 years old on or before September 1, 2018. Please bring child's birth certificate, immunization record (blue slip), Social Security card, and proof of where the child lives (utility bill, gas bill, water bill, rental agreement/lease or deed).

 **T**harptown Pre-K online registration is now open! Child must be 4 years of age on or before September 1, 2018. You may register your child at <https://alprek.asapconnected.com>. If you have already registered your child online, please bring child's birth certificate, immunization record (blue slip), Social Security card, and proof of where the child lives (copy of utility bill, gas bill, water bill, rental agreement/lease or deed) to the school this Friday, March 23. Tharptown Pre-K onsite registration will be held that day from 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Bring all forms mentioned above. A drawing will be held that afternoon.

 **T**he Vina Civitan Club will hold an Easter Egg Hunt this Saturday, March 24 at 10 a.m. at the Vina Senior/Community Center on Hwy. 19 next to the Vina Fire Department. Children up to age 11 are invited to participate. There will be refreshments available at the event.

 **T**he Franklin County Extension Office will host a Mother-Daughter Tea this Saturday, March 24 as part of National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. The event will be held from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Florence-Lauderdale Coliseum, 702 Veterans Drive, Florence. To register, call 256-766-6223.

 **J**oin North Russellville Baptist Church for a Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser on Saturday, March 24 from 9 a.m.-noon at the North Russellville Baptist Church Fellowship Hall on Waterloo Road. Tickets are only \$5. Proceeds from the fundraiser will go toward the North Russellville Baptist Church Youth Department.

 **T**he Franklin County Chamber of Commerce will host the annual Easter Egg Hunts on Saturday, March 24. Easter Egg Hunts will be in Russellville at 10 a.m. at Eastside Ball Park, in Phil Campbell at 12:30 p.m. at Memorial Park and in Red Bay at 3 p.m. at Bay Tree Park. A drawing for bikes will be held at the conclusion of each hunt. We welcome children fifth grade and under to participate. Remember to bring your baskets!

What's Happening

256.332.0255

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

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.

St. Paul CME Church of Russellville (406 Hamilton Street, Russellville) will hold a Seven Last Words Service on Good Friday, March 30 at 6 p.m. Program participants include Rev. Charles Dale, Rev. Bo Lloyd, Rev. James Coffey, Rev. Nick McSpadden, Rev. Charlie Johnson, Jr., Rev. Johnny Smith and Rev. Christy Gill. Everyone is invited!

The 14th annual Relay for Life Open Bass Tournament is set for Saturday, March 31. The annual tournament is a fund raiser for the American Cancer Society and is coordinated by Rhonda Boyles and Jamie Sumerel. The tournament will begin at Slick Rock Boat Ramp on Cedar Creek at 7 a.m. and will run to 3 p.m. Entry fee is \$70 per boat, with \$10 per boat for lunger (with 100 percent payback). First place finishers in the tournament are guaranteed \$1,000. There is a five-fish limit per boat. Door prizes will be awarded, and entries are now being accepted. Take-off will be done by drawing, and the tournament will be held regardless of weather conditions. Two contestants are permitted per boat. Large mouth, small mouth and spotted bass only will be counted. Fish must measure 12 inches with mouth closed and roll tail. All fish, except trophy fish, will be released after the tournament. For more information or to register for the tournament, contact Boyles at 256-627-4112 or Sumerel at 256-762-5123.

West Elementary School will hold Kindergarten registration and verification on April 2-17, 2018. Registration packets may be picked up at the Russellville City Schools Board of Education and returned with the required documents. A Kindergarten screening will be administered to all registered students. Please refer to the following information to determine the appropriate time for you and your child to be present for the screening. All screenings will be conducted at the RCS Board of Education building located at 1945 Waterloo Road, Russellville, AL. Hours are 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-2 p.m. Wednesday, April 18, 2018 - Students with last name beginning with A-H; Thursday, April 19, 2018 - Students with last name beginning with I-Q; Friday, April 20, 2018 - Students with last name beginning with R-Z. It shall be the policy of the Russellville City School System to provide nondiscriminatory basis educational opportunities for children. No person shall be denied the benefits of any education program or activity on the basis of race, color, disability, creed, national origin, age, or sex. Pursuant to the requirements of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, all homeless children, migrants and English language learners must have equal access to the same free appropriate public education provided other children and youth. All programs offered by schools within the School System shall be open to all students in compliance with statutory and judicial requirements. The enrollment of homeless, immigrant, migrant and limited English proficient children shall not be denied due to any of the following barriers: Lack of birth certificate; lack of school records or transcripts; lack of immunization records; lack of proof of residency; lack of transportation; unaccompanied; no guardian.

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 April 12.

The Belgreen Alumni Banquet will be held Saturday, April 14 at the Belgreen High School cafeteria with social hour from 4-5 p.m., dinner from 5-6 p.m. and annual alumni meeting from 6-7 p.m. This year we will honor the Class of 1968 on their 50th anniversary. Also, we will give special recognition to the Class of 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011. Everyone is invited. \$12 for meal tickets. Please RSVP for meals by calling 256-332-1376.

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Six local eateries receive satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The six Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of March 5, 2018, through March 9, 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 "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 six Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 89 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 98, received by Williams Hollow Camp Store, 569 Williams Hollow, Russellville.

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

- J&L Convenience and Bait, LLC, 23791 Hwy. 24 West, Russellville, 89. (Date marked food past seven day limit).
- Piggly Wiggly Deli #93, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 92. (Cracked food pans).
- El Quetzal Buena Vista, 118 East Franklin St., Russellville, 93. (Ants present in meat market).
- Swamp John's Country Store, 5181 Hwy. 24, Red Bay, 94.
- Vina Convenience Inc., 7454 Hwy. 19, Vina, 96.

Of the 26 inspections done in Colbert County from March 5, 2018 through March 9, 2018, no restaurants scored below the satisfactory range. Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us.

Letters to the Editor

We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.
For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at franklinfreepress.net!

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Feeling hungry

PHOTO BY
JASON HILL

The Bricks Restaurant and Inn celebrated a ribbon cutting Monday, March 12, as owners Trent and Michele Stephenson hosted members of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and others. The new restaurant is located on North Jackson Avenue in downtown Russellville and is open for lunch and dinner.



'MADDEN,' from page 1

"Several weeks ago, I was made aware of some discrepancies in our financial records that needed to be analyzed to check for any instances of wrongdoing," Moore said. "I immediately contacted the Department of Examiners, and I, along with the rest of our staff, have cooperated fully with this investigation. Now that the investigation has concluded and our former county administrator has taken responsibility for her errors in judgment, I want to express my thanks to the Alabama Attorney General's Office for handling this case and reaching a quick resolution.

"Also, I appreciate those who have been supportive throughout this process and who understand that things like this aren't as simple as they might seem. The county commission, just like any other business, has checks and balances in place, such as audits, to try and prevent instances like this. However, the nature of how these events took place allowed for the discrepancies to go undetected. I will be working with our staff, county commissioners and others to see how we can more effectively strengthen our checks and balances and our ways for reviewing financial records so that something like this will not occur again in the future. As an employer, it is never easy to discover that someone who works for you has engaged in behavior that compromises the integrity of your business or office, which I know many people feel has happened in this instance. It's even harder to learn of instances such as this when you work closely with your employees and consider them to also be friends.

"Because of this, the events that have taken place over the last few weeks have been very difficult for me personally as well as the county commission. However, I believe it was of the utmost importance and my duty to the citizens of Franklin County to set aside my personal feelings and any negative effects this could have on me professionally, especially in light of the upcoming elections, and to make sure this instance of impropriety was investigated immediately and that the truth was brought to light. Honesty, integrity and doing what

is right will always be my top priorities, not just as probate judge of Franklin County, but as a person. These are values I hold in the highest regard, and as long as I am serving the people of Franklin County these are values I will fight to make sure are also emulated by others who serve our county. And if it is discovered these values are not being upheld, I will always do what is necessary to make sure truth and transparency are restored."

Very little public information was released relating to the Madden investigation. Chilton County Commission chairman Allen Caton released a statement March 5 that said his commission was made aware of Madden being the subject of an ongoing investigation by the attorney general's office.

According to court documents, Madden's crimes date back to December 15, 2007 and ran through July 27, 2017, one month before she left her position in Franklin County.

The terms of Madden's plea were as follows: She pled guilty on information to two counts of intentionally violating the Alabama Ethics Law. The first count was Ala. Code Sec. 36-25-5(a), Use of Official Position for Personal Gain. The second count, Ala. Code Sec. 36-25-5(c) was Use of Equipment for Personal Gain.

Both are Class B felonies that carry a prison sentence from two to 20 years and a fine up to \$30,000. Madden will be sentenced at a later date.

A plea upon information means the defendant is pleading to a felony charge before the case is presented to a grand jury.

Franklin County district attorney Joey Rushing said his office did not handle the Madden case and he was not consulted regarding the matter.

As part of the plea, Madden waived any issues for appeal and agreed that sentencing would be left to the "sound discretion of the court."

Restitution will be ordered in the amount of \$753,889.21 and payable to the County of Franklin, Alabama. The plea did not specifically mention whether Madden would be required to

pay interest on the stolen funds.

Madden resigned from her position as a public employee and agreed to never again seek or accept employment or enter into any relationship or contract with a governmental agency in the State of Alabama.

Interestingly, the plea agreement noted that the State agreed to two terms and conditions that could affect Madden's sentence. First, as stated in the plea, "The State will ask the Court to take into consideration at sentencing the cooperation of the Defendant." Second, "The State will not seek additional charges from the same nucleus of operative facts," meaning Madden won't face any additional charges other than the two felonies she pled to.

According to court documents, Madden's crimes date back to December 15, 2007 and ran through July 27, 2017, one month before she left her position in Franklin County.

The scheme used by Madden was as follows: As County Administrator, she would create false purchase orders and generate checks made payable to the business listed on the false purchase order. Before printing the checks, Madden placed tape over the space where the payee name was to be printed. She then printed the check to the company and made copies of the check for the county records.

Madden would then remove the tape and reprint the payee section making the check payable to herself. Madden, according to the information, deposited the checks into "various checking accounts" in her name.

Over the 10-year period, the scheme totaled \$753,889.21 of county funds. The theft was discovered by the State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts and investigated by special agents with the AG's office.

Madden, according to court documents, confessed fully to both offenses.

Madden turned herself in to Franklin County sheriff Shannon Oliver's office Monday morning. After being booked and processed, she was released on \$10,000 bond, Oliver said.



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Blue Springs Cemetery Committee is taking bids for the mowing and weed-eating at the cemetery for 2018. Terms of contract:

- 1st cutting, 3rd week of April.
- 2nd cutting 4 or 5 days before first Sunday of May (definitely not on Saturday before first Sunday of May) for 1st Sunday Decoration.
- After first Sunday in May, cut grass every two weeks, preferably first week and third week of the month.
- During the months of July and August, use discretion in determining if a rotation may be skipped if drought conditions are present.
- The month of October will be at the discretion of the committee, based

on a will call status, giving a 10-day window to cut.

•Committee will have the right to cancel agreement at any time committee is unsatisfied with work of contractor. All bids need to mail to address below by March 16, 2018:

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'BEAUTY,' from page 4

down the highway and seen white blooms waving at you from a stand of trees as you pass by.

Bradford pears have another issue. The top of the Bradford pear (scion) is grafted onto root stock of a pear from China that produces fertile fruit. This isn't a problem until a Bradford pear is damaged back to the root stock. Which, as we discussed earlier, happens in Bradford pears quite often. Once the scion is damaged all the growth will come from the root stock. This growth will be vigorous and fertile and hard to control if not handled early on.

I hope this gives you some per-

spective on an unseemly beauty in our midst. Maybe, you are considering taking a chainsaw to your Bradford pear this spring...You won't see me shedding any tears. And when you look to replace your tree, consider some of our native blooming trees instead! You can contact your local Extension Agent for more information.

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County Commission approves purchase of dump trucks

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

At a short meeting Monday, the Franklin County Commission approved the purchase of four dump trucks with beds for the Franklin County Highway Department. The total cost for the four trucks will be \$569,940, which will be financed by Valley State Bank over six years at a rate of 2.28 percent fixed annually. Commissioners also approved the purchase of two garbage trucks by the Franklin County Solid Waste Department at a total cost of \$299,000. The trucks will be financed over six years at a rate of 2.28 percent fixed annually.

In other action on Monday, the commission:
•Approved the resignation of Colton Hallmark from the Solid Waste Department and the hiring of temporary employee David Nulph, and permanent

employee Anthony Wesley Pickett.

•Approved the temporary hiring of Trace Norris and Hunter Butler as corrections officers/dispatchers at the Franklin County Sheriff's Department and the hiring of permanent employees Renee Findley and Dustin Hargett.

•Approved participation in the annual PALS "Don't Drop It on Franklin County" anti-litter campaign during the week of April 21-28, 2018.

•Authorized the bidding out of the county's annual uniform/mat contract to include mats for the courthouse and uniforms for the Solid Waste and Highway Departments.

•Approved several annual bids for annual contracts in the Franklin County Highway Department, including: Aluminized metal pipe by Fallen Farm D/B/A Harvey Culvert at 18 percent below standard price; coarse aggregate by MK Materials,

LLC, for all items excluding natural sand; concrete pipe by Fallen Farm D/B/A Harvey Culvert at 35 percent below standard price; asphalt by Ergon Asphalt and Emulsions, Inc., at \$1.40/gallon for CRS-2 and \$1.65/gallon for CRS-2P and \$85/hour detention; galvanized CMP by ADCO Pipe and Supply, at 22.5 percent below standard price; grader blades by Thompson Tractor at 6' blade \$37.27, 6' blade bundle \$372.70, 7' blade \$44.28 and 7' blade bundle \$478.30; HDPE plastic pipe by Fallen Farm D/B/A Harvey Culvert; hot bituminous pavement by Rogers Group; on-site mixed cold mix patching material by Cold Mix, Inc., at \$52.50/ton; off-site mixed cold mix by Advanced Asphalt at \$91.75 cold mix jobsite and \$75 cold mix plant; petroleum products by Carter Oil Co.; bulk portland cement by LeHigh Portland Cement Co., at \$134.50/ton.

'CUSTODY,' from page 1

Child Relocation Act and in Alabama's grandparent visitation law.

The bill outlines several factors for judges to use to determine if the presumption of joint custody is appropriate in each case. Those factors include any agreement by the parents; allegations of child abuse; spouse abuse or kidnapping; the geographic proximity of the parents to each other; the moral, physical and mental fitness of each parent; the preference of the child (in cases of older children); home environments; criminal histories of the parents; and several other factors.

Stutts said he sponsored the bill because it's

supported by social science data that says the more children are involved with both parents, the better chance they have to be successful in life.

"Judges still have discretion to award custody to one parent. All the bill says is the judge has to put in writing why he or she is ruling that way," Stutts said. "If we agree that parenting is a fundamental right and children do better when both parents are involved in their lives, then we ought to have a good reason not to set it up that way."

Stutts said the bill provides that each parent shall submit a parenting plan to the court and the court can accept or reject the plans.

"At least ten times in the bill you can find the language 'in the best interest of the child,'" Stutts said. "It's not about mommas or daddies. All data says shared parenting is in the best interests of the child. That's the point we ought to start at and then work our way in either direction the evidence may lead. It in no way ties judges' hands."

Historically, Alabama law used to favor custody to the mother as being presumed to be in the child's best interests. The legislature changed that language to state both parents should have "frequent and continuous contact" with the child, but there are no specific definitions for that term.

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MEDICAL CENTER

Barnwell eager to go to work at Phil Campbell

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

One gets the feeling from talking with Kevin Barnwell that he's been preparing to be a head football coach at the high school level for quite some time.

"Football is a sport I've always loved," he said. "It's the perfect stage to be able to reach kids and teach them some really valuable lessons. Sports is a great platform to reach kids, and that's what I'm trying to do. If I can reach just one or two different kids, then I've given back to what some of my high school coaches gave to me."

Barnwell (at right), a 1989 graduate of Hackleburg High School who has spent 12 years teaching and coaching at Russellville, was expected to be hired as the new head football coach at Phil Campbell at a meeting of the Franklin County Board of Education on Tuesday.



"The decision was made because I know how hard he will work, and I know what kind of character he has," superintendent Greg Hamilton said of Barnwell, who has coached defensive backs, quarterbacks and just about everything in between at RHS. "He is someone who will be an excellent fit, both for Franklin County Schools and for Phil Campbell."

Phil Campbell is, in many ways, home for Barnwell. His mother's side of the family is Bobcat born and bred, and he and his wife Jacqueline—along with their two boys, Luke and Jacob—attend services at Bear Creek Free Will Baptist Church, situated just between Phil Campbell and Hackleburg.

"Phil Campbell is a great community," Barnwell said. "Half my family lives there, and I've got a lot of family and friends that are from there. We go to church down in that area, and I've always been close to that community. There's a tradition there, and I'm looking forward to joining up with that. Hopefully we can build something special there. I'm excited to be a part of such a great community."

"The opportunity came open, thanks to Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Odom [Gary, principal at PCHS] and Mr. Riddle [Darit, the school's athletic director], plus the Franklin County Board of Education members and a lot of people in the community who kind of spoke highly in my favor. I appreciate that, definitely. It allowed me to have this opportunity, and it was an opportunity I couldn't turn down."

See 'BARNWELL,' Page 15

Pitching powers Russellville to sweep of Lawrence County

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - A guest being given a guided tour of the Russellville baseball facility last week bumped into head coach Chris Heaps and mentioned that he wouldn't mind watching the Golden Tigers take batting practice.

"Batting practice?" Heaps replied in mock confusion. "Batting practice is overrated. We're about to take an hour-and-a-half of groundballs."

Heaps was being facetious—maybe not about the 90-minute defensive workout he had planned but certainly about the relative unimportance of BP. Still, beneath the good humor was a bedrock principle near and dear to the heart of his coaching philosophy.

"Hitting comes and goes," Heaps said, "but pitching and defense had better be pillars of your program."

Heaps has been a part of seven state championship teams (one at Hartselle as a senior second baseman in 1990, three with the Tigers as an assistant coach under William Booth and three more as a head coach at RHS), and all seven of those teams had at least one thing in common: They pitched, and they played defense.

"Hitting comes and goes," Heaps said. "But pitching and defense had better be pillars of your program."

Hitting most definitely came for the Golden Tigers in last Tuesday's Class 5A, Area 16 opener in Moulton, when they blasted three home runs

See 'PITCHING,' Page 16



FILE PHOTO

After going 8-0 while primarily pitching in relief last season (above), Fernandez has settled in as the Golden Tigers' No. 2 starter. With an emphasis on pounding the strike zone early and often, he held the Red Devils to two hits and struck out six last Thursday in a 1-0 win.

Golden Tigers set to hire Ritter

Submitted to the FFP

RUSSELLVILLE - Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes said West Morgan head football coach John Ritter has been selected for recommendation to be the new head football coach for Russellville High School.

Grimes said Ritter will be formally recommended to the Russellville City School Board at their meeting this Thursday at 8 a.m. and, if approved, will begin his position on Monday, March 26.

Grimes said he is excited about the possibility of adding Ritter to the RCS staff and believes he will be a good fit for the high school's football program.

"Coach Ritter has a decade of experience as a coach, with five of those years being a head coach," Grimes said. "He has an impressive record, a great work ethic, and has proven to be a good leader who we believe will motivate, encourage and strengthen our student-athletes."

"During the interview process it was obvious that he is very driven and has a clear plan for success here. We are looking forward to what Coach Ritter

can do at Russellville, and we know our community will support him and his efforts as he moves into this position."

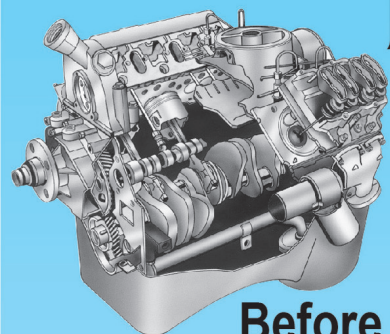
Grimes said Ritter, who is no stranger to Franklin County after serving as Red Bay's head football coach and athletic director from July of 2012 through July of 2014, expressed a strong desire to be part of the Russellville community, where he will raise his family along with his wife, Lauren, who has been the music teacher at Russellville Elementary School for the past 10 years.

"You could tell that Coach Ritter really cares about this community and cares about making sure the football program is not only something our community can be proud of but will also be something our student-athletes can benefit from," Grimes said. "With he and his wife Lauren both being invested in our school system, we know Coach Ritter will have our students' best interests in mind."

RHS principal Jason Goodwin said Ritter's previous accomplishments give him more than enough

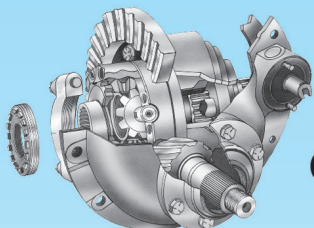
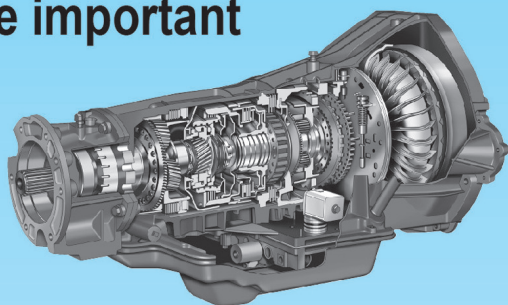
See 'RITTER,' Page 16

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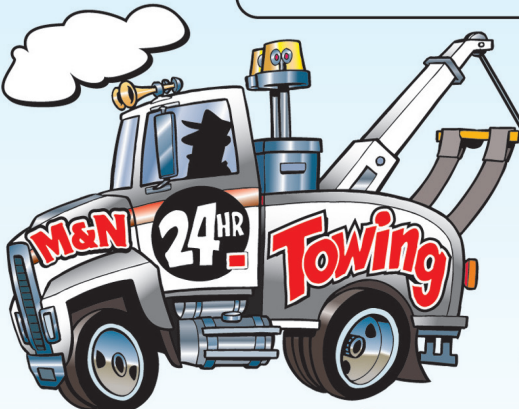


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Jackson homers in three straight, Davis also has big weekend for Lady Bobcats

Staff reports

Phil Campbell split a pair of games with two Mississippi teams this past Saturday, beating Tishomingo County 5-1 and then suffering a 5-4 walk-off loss to Corinth.

The Lady Bobcats (9-3 through Sunday) were tied 1-1 with Tish Couny in the top of the third when senior shortstop Leeah Jackson went deep for the third straight game and the fifth time this season, launching a solo shot to center to make it 2-1. That was enough offense for sophomore pitcher Emily Swinney (4-0), who allowed just one earned run on four hits in a five-inning complete game.

Phil Campbell scored three insurance runs in the top of the fifth. Kenner Scott doubled to left, and Jackson was intentionally walked. Both runners scored on a two-run single by Abby Davis, and Davis eventually came home on a groundout by Olivia Knight to make it 5-1.

Swinney, who did not strike out a batter but walked only two, got three groundball outs in the bottom of the fifth to finish off the win.

The Lady Bobcats scored their first run in the top of the second. Senior outfielder Darby Elliott doubled to right and then came home when Kaci Harris reached on an error to tie the game 1-1.

Jackson finished 1-for-1 with a home run, two walks and two runs scored. Davis was 2-for-3 with two RBIs, and Scott, Elliott and Swinney each had one hit.

In Saturday's second game, Phil Campbell trailed Corinth 3-1 before scoring three runs in the top of the fifth. Katie Thomas reached on an error with one out, but Scott flew to center for the second out. Corinth elected to intentionally walk Jackson [the Snead State signee was batting .640 on the season with five homers and 13 RBIs through Sunday] rather than risk her tying the game with another long ball.

The move backfired when Davis smacked a two-run triple to right field. She then scored when Chloe Roberson reached on an error, putting the Lady Bobcats in front 4-3.

The lead wouldn't last, however, as Corinth scored twice in the bottom of the fifth on a double and two singles, including a walk-off hit that gave them a 5-4 win.

Emma Ertle (5-3) took the loss for Phil Campbell, allowing five earned runs on eight hits in 4.1 innings. She struck out three and walked two.

Corinth jumped in front in the bottom of the first, scoring twice on a

single, a triple and a sac fly. The Lady Bobcats got on the board in the top of the fourth, loading the bases on a single by Davis and walks to Roberson and Knight. Elliott came through with a sacrifice fly to chase home Davis and make it a 2-1 game.

Corinth scored a run in the bottom of the fourth to go up 3-1 and set the stage for the wild fifth inning.

Davis finished 2-for-3 with two RBIs and two runs scored. She was 6-for-11 in four games this past weekend with five RBIs and four runs scored. Harris had Phil Campbell's only other hit against Corinth and also stole a base. Jackson and Thomas each scored a run and stole a base.

In previous action:

Hamilton 13 Phil Campbell 1

Leeah Jackson's solo home run in the top of the fourth was Phil Campbell's only hit in last Friday's lopsided loss to Hamilton.

The Lady Aggies broke up a scoreless game with six runs in the bottom of the second before adding two more in the third and five in the fourth.

Phil Campbell 7 Belgreen 1

Leeah Jackson, Katie Thomas and Abby Davis had two hits apiece, and Emily Swinney did not allow an earned run for Phil Campbell in last Friday's win over the county rival Lady Bulldogs.

Thomas walked to lead off the top of the first, and Jackson singled with one out. Thomas scored on a groundout by Davis, and Jackson later stole home to make it a 2-0 game.

Thomas sparked another rally in the top of the third with a base hit. Kenner Scott walked, and one out later Davis reached on an infield single. Thomas came home on Chloe Roberson's grounder to third, stretching the lead to 3-0.

Swinney allowed a leadoff hit in the bottom of the third before retiring the next six Belgreen batters in a row.

The Lady Bobcats broke the game open with a four-run top of the fifth, highlighted by Jackson's two-run homer to center. Senior Darby Elliott also drove in a run with a bunt single, and Karley Ertle had an RBI groundout.

Swinney got the complete game win, holding Belgreen to five hits and one walk in five innings. Jackson was 2-for-3 with a homer, two RBIs, two runs and two stolen bases. Thomas went 2-for-3 and scored three times, and Davis was 2-for-3 with an RBI and a run.

Roberson was 1-for-3 with an RBI and a run, and Knight and Elliott also had one hit each.

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'BARNWELL', from page 13

Barnwell, who attended Northwest-Shoals on a manager's scholarship [serving as a manager for the baseball team Greg Hamilton played for some 28 years ago at Northwest] before earning a degree in physical therapy from Wallace-Hanceville and his bachelor's in education from Athens State, began his career in teaching and coaching in 2004 at Russellville when then-head coach Perry Swindall brought him on to coach defensive backs for the middle school team.

Barnwell moved up to the varsity staff when Doug Goodwin took over the RHS program in 2007, coaching quarterbacks and also serving as offensive coordinator for the jayvee team.

It was in 2009 that Barnwell stepped away from his career in education, driven by a desire to spend more time with his wife and their two young boys. [Luke is now a freshman who started at quarterback for Russellville's varsity team this past season, and Jacob is 12 years old.]

"It was a decision to spend more time with my kids, because they were younger then," said Barnwell, who worked for two years in physical therapy at ECM Hospital. "You know how the coaching profession is, and I was doing basketball and football at the time. I decided to try and spend more time with my kids, but it turned out that my heart was still in teaching and coaching, so that's where I returned."

Barnwell broke back into the education ranks at Phillips High School, where he served for one year as defensive coordinator for the varsity football team and also head coach for the varsity girls basketball team. An opportunity came open in 2012 for him to return to Russellville, where he joined Michael Jackson's staff as outside linebackers coach. He coached at the middle school level in 2013 while finishing his Masters degree through the University of North Alabama, and then he returned to the varsity level as an assistant under Mark Heaton in 2014. Barnwell coached outside linebackers for the Golden Tigers until this past season, when he took over defensive line duties.

Now, for the first time, he'll have the chance to run his own program, and he's got a clear vision of precisely what he wants to build at Phil Campbell and how he wants to build it.

"You've got those pillars for success that you base your program on," Barnwell said. "For us, those things are commitment, discipline, effort, toughness and pride. The first thing is, you've gotta have commitment—from the coaching staff first, then from the players and also from the parents and the community. This isn't a 'me' thing. It's a 'we' thing. The goal is to inject positive energy into the program, always positive. That's the most important thing."

"At the same time, we have to get everybody committed to first being there and then to doing the things on a day-to-day basis that will make this a successful organization. There will be days when you don't feel like doing the things you're required to do, and you're going to have a choice to make."

That's where Barnwell's second program pillar

comes in—discipline.

"There's the old-school idea of discipline, where you rule with an iron fist," Barnwell said. "But as far as I'm concerned, discipline is a matter of choice. You have two choices as an individual. Do I want to feel the pain required to be successful *now*, or do I want to feel the pain of failure later? Discipline is a choice, and we're gonna reiterate that to the players. Do I want to go hang out with my friends, or do I want to put in the work it's gonna take to get those wins—not only on Friday nights but in life."

"The effort has to be there, too, and that's another thing we're gonna instill—constant effort, not only from me and our staff but also from our players. Playing with toughness, that's something you've gotta work on every day. And then the last thing is playing with pride. Do I have the pride to consistently do the things that will not only make myself proud but also my family proud, my community proud and my school proud. That's our goal—to hopefully give this community something they can be proud of."

Phil Campbell made the playoffs twice in five years under former head coach Ryan Swinney, but the Bobcats have not had a winning season since 2001. They've had five different head coaches during that span, and Barnwell knows he has his work cut out for him—particularly with Phil Campbell making the jump to Class 3A this fall. He's going into the job with his eyes wide open, but they show no fear.

"It's gonna be a challenge, but it's also an opportunity, and I'm excited," Barnwell said. "I understand there's a lot of work to be done, but I'm not afraid of work. Hopefully we can get that mentality into our program, so we can work together."

Barnwell, who enlisted in the United States Army to help pay for college, didn't play football at Hackleburg until his senior season in 1988. He credits former Hackleburg coach Bill Smith (who also coached for years in Franklin County at Red Bay, Vina and Tharptown) with helping him make a decision he calls "life-changing."

"I wasn't born in a football player's body," Barnwell said with a laugh. "That's not what God gave me. I played basketball and baseball in high school, but I didn't play football until my last year. Coach Bill Smith asked me to play football, and it was really a life-changer for me. I'd always hung around football, but getting to play and getting to play for him was a real honor. Had he not reached out, I may not have played."

"It was a life-changer. After that, there were times when I was in the Army doing basic training where it was hard for some people, but it wasn't hard for me. Not after going through Coach Smith's practices in high school and basketball practices with Coach Anglin. Hopefully I can give back to other kids what those coaches gave to me."

Asked if his sons would be joining him at Phil Campbell, Barnwell replied in the affirmative, saying, "We're in this together." Luke Barnwell completed 60 percent (132-of-220) of his attempts as a freshman for Russellville, throwing for 1,314 yards and 10 touchdowns with 10 interceptions.



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'PITCHING', from page 13

with the wind blowing out at H.A. Alexander Park and hung multiple crooked numbers on Lawrence County in a 15-0 rout. Hitting most definitely went for the Golden Tigers last Thursday when the series shifted to Russellville Baseball Stadium, where a stiff wind was blowing in and Red Devil ace Cole Turner—who had allowed a total of just two earned runs in his first four starts—was dealing on the mound.

“Outstanding,” Heaps said of Turner’s performance in Thursday’s opener, the all-important second game of the series. “He’s a strike-thrower, a locator. It seemed like he threw about 85 percent strikes. If you throw 70 percent strikes, how many guys are you gonna walk? Probably none.”

Turner issued just one free pass—an intentional walk to the red-hot Houston Kitterman with runners at first and second and two outs in the bottom of the sixth—and held Russellville to just three hits and no runs through six innings. It was exactly the kind of game Heaps had in mind when he convened a team meeting the Sunday before area play was to begin, at which the primary topics were—you guessed it—pitching and defense.

“We can’t always rely on out-hitting our pitching and out-hitting our mistakes,” said Heaps, whose team had started to swing the bats better coming into the Lawrence County series following a slow start at the plate.

Heaps is a firm believer that a team is good at what it emphasizes, and there was at least one clear point of emphasis at the Sunday meeting.

“Throwing first-pitch strikes,” Heaps said. “When we throw a first-pitch strike, we only walk people about six percent of the time. So we basically eliminate walks when we throw first-pitch strikes. And if you eliminate walks and don’t make errors, you force the other team to beat you, rather than you beating yourself.”

Rudy Fernandez, Russellville’s No. 2 starter, was evidently all-ears at the pitching pow-wow. Fernandez, for whom command of the strike zone is ordinarily a strength, was coming off a rough outing the previous week, when he walked three batters, hit one and failed to get out of the second inning in a loss to Austin. Matched up against Turner last Thursday, Fernandez got back in the saddle and then some.

The senior right-hander filled up the zone all day, tossing seven innings of two-hit, six-strikeout ball and dueling Turner zero for zero. The Red Devils blinked first in the bottom of the seventh when Russellville senior Tom

Barkley Scott beat out an infield hit and eventually scored on Caden Parker’s walk-off sacrifice fly, giving the Golden Tigers a 1-0 win that could hardly have been more different than the Game 1 romp just two days prior.

“They had a very good pitcher on the mound today,” said Fernandez, who threw first-pitch strikes to 16 of the 23 batters he faced. “So we knew it was gonna be a lot tougher. I was expecting a pitcher’s battle. When it’s going like that, you just have to take it pitch by pitch, keep executing and keep doing what you can to give your team a chance to win.”

Fernandez (2-1 on the season through Monday and 10-1 in his varsity career) certainly did that, getting nine ground-ball outs to go along with his season-high six K’s and facing just two batters over the minimum.

“Rudy pitched a great game,” Heaps said afterward. “It wouldn’t have mattered who we were playing tonight—they would have had a hard time with Rudy. He was able to throw his curveball for strikes, which was key. He threw really well for us at times last year, when he was 8-0, but early this year it kind of seemed like he’d been getting in his own way mentally a little bit. Something would happen that, as a senior, he ought to be able to bounce back from, but he’d have a tough time getting past it.

“That’s what we told him coming into today—just get out of his own way from a mental standpoint.”

Of the 89 pitches Fernandez threw last Thursday, 62 were in the zone—a strike rate right at Heaps’ target mark of 70 percent. The credit for that, Heaps said, doesn’t go to the pitcher alone.

“There’s a reason Hunter Briles has been behind the plate for just about every game lately,” Heaps said, referring to his junior catcher. “The difference between throwing 70 percent strikes and throwing 48 percent strikes is about one pitch per batter, and Hunter does a great job of getting us that one pitch. He’s a good framer.

“There are three pillars to being a great catcher. Receiving comes first, and then blocking is a distant second. Then, at a distant third, is throwing. Hunter’s a great receiver, and that’s the most important thing a catcher can do.”

Fernandez fell behind leadoff man Brayden Proctor 3-0 to start the game before retiring him on a pop-up. He breezed through the first two innings, six up and six down, and later had a stretch where he set down nine straight batters.

“I was just trying to get ahead with the fastball and then get some swings

See 'PITCHING,' Page 17

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Kolby Bragwell

Junior 3B, Red Bay

Just how hot at the plate has Bragwell been? The junior slugger collected 10 hits in 15 ABs last week, and his season average actually went down a few points. Through Monday, Bragwell was batting an absurd .703 (26-for-37) on the year, with five home runs, 21 RBIs and 20 runs scored for the 8-4 Tigers. He had hit safely in each of his team’s first 12 games (with multiple hits in nine of them) while drawing 11 walks and striking out once. Coach Richard Maggerise said Sunday that Bragwell is “seeing the ball as well as any high school hitter I’ve been around.”



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'PITCHING', from page 16

and misses with my curveball," said Fernandez, who did indeed finish off five of his six strikeouts with a breaking ball. "It's about executing pitches and hitting your spots."

In the one inning where Fernandez struggled to hit his spots, that other championship program pillar—excellent defense—rode to the rescue. Fernandez started the top of the third by hitting Chandler Daniel with a pitch and then walking No. 8 hitter Braden Clement. No. 9 man Hunter White tried to bunt the runners over, but Daniel took off for third on a ball in the dirt and was cut down by Briles for the first out.

Clement moved to second on the play, and then White hit a sharp grounder up the middle that was ticketed for center field. Junior shortstop Caden Parker ranged far to his left and flagged the ball down near the second-base bag, turning a likely go-ahead RBI single into a not-as-easy-as-it-looked 6-3 putout. With Clement at third, Fernandez struck out Proctor on a curveball to end the threat and keep it a scoreless game.

After Turner retired Russellville (12-5 overall through Monday, 2-0 in area play) in order in the bottom of the third, Chip Proctor led off the Lawrence County fourth with a single to left, the first hit of the game for the Red Devils (11-3, 0-2). Proctor moved to second on a bunt by Braxton Terry but then got a little too greedy and tried to take third as well. First baseman Jeff Lloyd fired a strike across the diamond to Kitterman, who tagged out Proctor to complete the 1-3-5 double-play and end the inning.

Turner pitched around a two-out single by Kitterman in the bottom of the fourth, and senior second baseman Brock Malone flawlessly handled three groundballs in the top of the fifth. Turner got Russellville in order in the bottom of the inning, and Fernandez followed suit in the Lawrence County sixth.

Turner was cruising along until Gist singled with one out in the bottom of the sixth. Fernandez flied to center for the second out, and then Gist stole second to put the go-ahead run in scoring position. Turner hit Landon Ezzell with a pitch, and then Lawrence County made the unusual decision to intentionally walk Kitterman—who was 4-for-6 in the series at the time with two home runs—with runners at first and second.

"That," Heaps said after the game, "showed a lot of respect."

The move nearly backfired when Malone drove a ball into the gap in right-center, but rightfielder Ashton Allen tracked it down for the third out, and the scoreless duel continued. Fernandez struck out Chip Proctor to start the seventh, but Terry followed with a double down the left-field line. At that point, Heaps came out of the dugout to make a change—but not on the mound, where Fernandez wasn't going anywhere.

"Coach told me, 'Whatever you're doing, just keep doing it,'" Fernandez said after the game. "I told him, 'I got this guy, Coach. I'll get us out of this.'"

Heaps brought Jaret Ward into the game to take over in left field for Gist, who has been dealing with shoulder issues that have affected his throwing. With the go-ahead run at second base, Heaps wasn't taking any chances.

"Noah has had some shoulder problems," the coach said, "and Jaret's a stronger arm and an accurate thrower. We didn't want to not make a move there and see it get us beat."

Fernandez rendered the move moot, retiring cleanup hitter Dalton Hill on a pop to third and then getting Allen on a grounder to third to end the inning. Scott then legged out an infield single to start the bottom of the seventh, and Devin Buckhalter pushed a perfect bunt to the right side. Turner fielded it on the move, but his throw to first got by Clement for an error and allowed the runners to move up to second and third.

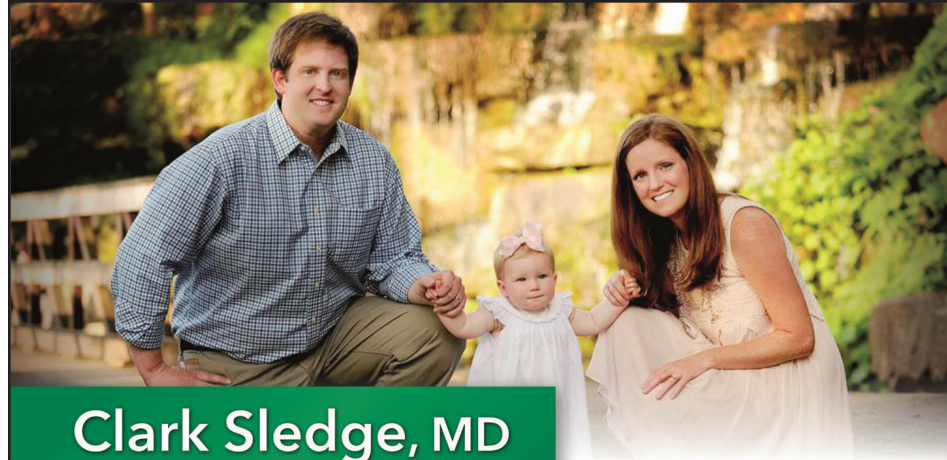
Parker nearly won the game with a suicide squeeze bunt, but the ball rolled inches foul up the first-base line. He got the job done in the end with a fly ball to left, chasing home Scott with the only run of the game and giving the Golden Tigers an all-important two-game sweep.

"It's big for us to beat a good team like that to start off area play," Fernandez said. "We just have to keep working and keep getting ready for the next team."

Russellville won't begin its next area series until April 3 at Brooks, but, for the first area series at least, the Golden Tigers' pitching certainly seemed to be in postseason form. Parker (3-0) struck out four and allowed only three hits in five shutout innings in last Thursday's nightcap (another 1-0 win), extending his streak to 15.2 innings to start the season without allowing an earned run—impressive, to be sure, but only the second-best such streak on the staff. Ezzell, the team's senior ace, had not allowed an earned run in 19 innings this season through Monday and was 4-0 with 20 strikeouts and only six hits allowed.

Ezzell, Fernandez, Parker and reliever Jaret Ward combined to throw 19 scoreless innings in the Lawrence County series. The Golden Tigers relapsed against Westbrook Christian on Saturday, walking 12 batters and making three errors in a 6-4 loss, but Malone, a senior right-hander, got them back on track with nine strikeouts in five shutout innings in an 11-1 rout of Hamilton. Once again, pitching and defense prevailed.

Maybe Heaps was right. Maybe batting practice *is* overrated.



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Tennis, anyone?



PHOTO BY LEANN STRICKLAND

The Russellville High School varsity girls tennis team edged rival Deshler 5-4 last week to improve to 5-0 in section play this season and 7-3 overall, with the only three losses coming to Class 6A programs Decatur, Florence and Hartselle. Team members pictured above are: Front row (L to R) - junior Addie Scruggs, sophomore Kaydee Holland, sophomore Anna Woods, senior Rebecca Parrish; Back row (L to R) - sophomore Katie Burns, junior Emma Claire Bragwell, freshman Callie Palmer, sophomore Ellyse Strickland. The team is coached by Charlotte Dollar.

Roberson named to All-Tournament team at Final Four

Staff reports

Phil Campbell's 16-game win streak and bid for a state championship ended with a loss to Samson in the Class 2A state semifinals in Birmingham, but senior forward Chloe Roberson was selected to the All-Tournament team when the Final Four concluded.

Roberson (at right), a three-year starter for the Lady Bobcats, capped her career with a terrific game against Samson, scoring a season-high 18 points on 7-for-11 shooting from the floor and 4-for-5 from the foul line. She also pulled down a team-best seven rebounds.



"Chloe toted us today," head coach Craig Thomas said of Roberson, who scored eight third-quarter points on 4-for-5 shooting. "Samson was focusing on Abby [Davis] and [Kallie] Allen, trying to shut them down, and she made them pay."

Phil Campbell finished the season 26-6, winning the program's first county championship since 1998, its first area tournament title since 1993 and its first-ever regional title in Hanceville.

The ending was tough to swallow, but the journey was one that seniors Roberson, Darby Elliott, Carley Nix and Megan Bullock will never forget.

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

As a senior, Roberson averaged 7.3 points and 5.1 rebounds per game while shooting a team-best 75 percent from the foul line.

'RITTER', from page 13

reason to believe he will be successful at Russellville as well.

"Coach Ritter was very successful at Red Bay and led the way for a strong turnaround at West Morgan, which was a traditionally strong program before they saw somewhat of a decline prior to

Coach Ritter's tenure," Goodwin said. "He was able to get their program turned around and back on track, and we believe he will do that at Russellville as well. His motivation and determination will be a great asset to our football program."

In his five years as a head coach, Ritter amassed a 33-23 career record, was a playoff qualifier four out of five years, won a region championship and was selected as the AHSAA All-Star Game North Team offensive coordinator in 2013.

He was named the 2012 ASWA Class 2A Coach of the Year, the 2016 ASWA Class 3A Coach of the Year, the 2017 3A Region 8 Coach of the Year, the *Franklin County Times* Coach of the Year in 2012 and 2013, and the *Decatur Daily* 1A-4A Coach of the Year in 2016 and 2017. Ritter also has five years of coordinator experience and overall in his career has had eight playoff appearances, four region titles, one state championship appearance, and an overall record of 76-41. He holds Bachelor's degrees in Secondary Education, Physical Education and Health Education.

As for the athletic director position, Grimes said they would be making changes to this position as well. Instead of one of the head coaches serving as AD, Grimes and Goodwin will serve as athletic directors for the school system moving forward.

"We know that traditionally the athletic director position has been held by the head football

coach," Grimes said, "but we decided this would be a good chance to change things up in the hopes that we can add some stability and uniformity to the position."

Goodwin added that having the athletic directors be non-coaches allows for each coach to focus more specifically on their own sport and for the athletic directors to focus on the athletic program as a whole.

"We want to make sure that we are making the best and most fair decisions for all of our sports teams, and we think this is the best way to do this," Goodwin said. "Having an athletic director that is also the head coach of one specific sport can either come across as an advantage for that sport because of a perceived bias, or it can be seen as a disadvantage since the coach can not focus solely on his or her sport because of the responsibilities of being the athletic director."

"By having Mr. Grimes and myself serve as athletic directors, we can make unbiased decisions that will be best for everyone. We can spread our focus to multiple sports without taking away from the coaching responsibilities of one specific sport."

"All of our sports teams and student-athletes are important at RHS, and we think we will be able to give the proper attention to each sport and offer a unified vision to serve as the foundation for the athletic program as a whole."

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