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Russellville, AL 35663

Legislators differ on child care bill

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to House Bill 76, also known as the Alabama Child Care Safety Act, a definite difference of opinion exists among Franklin County legislators.

The bill, which was approved in the Alabama Senate and was awaiting signature from Gov. Kay Ivey, provides that day care facilities that receive federal or state monies must now be licensed by the State of Alabama.

Currently, religious-affiliated day care centers are exempt from state licensing requirements.

Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) supported the bill and voted for it in the Alabama House.

"It's the least we can do to assure moms and dads in Alabama that their children are being cared for in licensed facilities with employees who have cleared background checks," Morrow said.

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Morrow said half of Alabama's day care facilities are operated through churches and thus are exempt from licensing.

"I'm one hundred percent in favor of safe day care centers," Stutts said. "But I think care for your children is primarily a parental responsibility. If you entrust your children to someone else, it's your responsibility to make sure you're placing them in a safe place."

Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) was present for the vote on HB 76 but decided not to vote for or against the legislation. Stutts, who advocates that less government is better government, believes placing children in a safe day care facility is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents.

"I'm one hundred percent in favor of safe day care centers," Stutts said. "But I think care for your children is primarily a parental responsibility. If you're going to entrust your children to someone else to take care of, it's your responsibility to make sure you're placing them in a safe place."

The bill originally provided for mandatory licensing for

See 'CHILD,' Page 8

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Blackburn in favor of arming teachers

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to arming teachers in Alabama schools, count Russellville resident Gary Blackburn among those in favor of the idea.

Blackburn, the Franklin County coordinator for BamaCarry, Inc., believes arming trained teachers would serve as an important deterrent as well as a means of protecting students in a rural area whose school doesn't have a law enforcement officer on campus.

"Teachers who are willing should be armed and trained," Blackburn said. "They can be trained either by an outside source qualified for training or by the local sheriff's office, police department or whoever we can get to do quality training. It could be retired police or veterans, whatever we can afford."

"Money needs to be appropriated for this. Governor [Kay] Ivey formed a task force. We don't need a task force. We need action."

Franklin County teachers may become part of a volunteer school security force pursuant to a local bill that became law in 2013. House Bill 404, while not specifically mentioning teachers, provides for certain school employees, retired school employees and citizens of the district to become reserve deputies once they complete training through the Franklin County Sheriff's Department. The program is optional and subject to the approval of the sheriff.

"Teachers who are willing should be armed and trained," Blackburn said. "Money needs to be appropriated for this. Governor [Kay] Ivey formed a task force. We don't need a task force. We need action."

Rep. Allen Farley (R-McCalla) introduced statewide legislation this year that mirrors the language of the Franklin County bill and would create a volunteer school security force for all Alabama schools.

See 'TEACHERS,' Page 8

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Wanda Gay Willis Miller, Russellville, age 67
Died Wednesday, March 21, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Brenda Katherine Vandiver, Russellville, age 75
Died Monday, March 19, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Hopewell Church of Christ Cemetery in Lagrange.

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.

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County school board approves financing for purchase of 44 new propane buses

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved financing for the purchase of 44 new propane buses with Valley State Bank at the board's March 20 meeting. Valley State Bank's low bid of 2.76 percent over a 10-year financing period was significantly lower than other bids received, superintendent Greg Hamilton said. The buses are scheduled to arrive in April.

Total financing requested was \$3,506,939.92.

"We are extremely happy about the rate we received," Hamilton said. "The interest rate will allow us to save more than \$104,000 over the life of the loan. We appreciate this low interest rate."

Hamilton said that although \$3.5 million was a significant investment, he believes the reduced maintenance costs and lower costs for propane fuel over diesel will "be like these buses paid for themselves."

The 44 buses will be part of the system's total fleet of 65 buses. Hamilton said once the new buses are delivered, all Franklin County buses will be under 10 years old.

The propane tanks will be placed on 10' X 24" pads that are being poured at Belgreen, Tharptown and Vina schools. At Phil Campbell and Red Bay, the tanks will be installed on asphalt. Each tank will have a crash barrier around it.

East Franklin Junior High will not have a tank, as that school will continue to use diesel buses, Hamilton said.

Hamilton updated the board on an insurance settlement arising out of a vehicle that struck Vina Elementary School earlier this year. The driver's insurance company paid \$25,000, and the system's insurance carrier, Risk Management Services, paid an additional \$13,000, which covered the repair costs to the building.

In other action, the board:

- Approved the resignation of Tonya Bostick as varsity cheer coach at Phil Campbell; the employment of Amy Gunderman as varsity cheer coach at Phil Campbell and Kevin Barnwell as head football coach at Phil Campbell; the retirement of Neva Armstrong as Red Bay bus driver; the employment of Georgia Jeffreys as temporary tobacco grant coordinator at Red Bay High School; Britni Coats and Cassidy Fuller as substitute teachers; and the rescinding of Jeremy Donahoe as volunteer boat captain at Belgreen High School.

- Adopted the Franklin County Schools Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy, in accordance with the Jason Flatt Act State of Alabama

Annual Relay for Life fishing tournament set for Saturday

Staff reports

The 14th annual Relay for Life Open Bass Tournament is set for this Saturday, March 31.

The annual tournament is a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society and is coordinated by Rhonda Boyles and Jamie Sumerel.

"This is our fourteenth year to do the tournament, and it's always been a big success," Boyles said. "We want to thank everyone who helps make it happen."

The tournament will begin at Slick Rock Boat Ramp on Cedar Creek at 7 a.m. this Saturday and will run to 3 p.m. Entry fee is \$70 per boat, with \$10 per boat for luncheon (with 100 percent pay-

back). 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.




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SB11 Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention, which amends the 16-28B-8 of the Code of Alabama and includes prevention of harassment and violence.

- Approved out-of-state trips for East Franklin seventh grade to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee on May 17-19, 2018; Red Bay health science class to International HOSA Conference in Dallas, Texas on June 16, 2018-July 1, 2018; Vina High School to Incredible Pizza Company in Cordova, Tennessee on May 15, 2018.

- Approved an \$850 supplement to be paid from the Phil Campbell High School softball fund to LeAnn Moore for assistant coach duties.

- Approved the nomination of Terry Bolton as a member of the Franklin County Board of Equalization to fill the remainder of the term held by resigning member Glen Vinson.

- Heard from a Phil Campbell parent about concerns regarding a teacher in executive session. No votes were cast nor any action taken in the executive session.

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Honey Do List: Time to spring into action

Hey everyone, what are you waiting for? It's already the second week of spring. Even if it's still a little damp outside, there are some projects you can do now to prepare for the bigger projects soon to come.

Now is the time to survey your outdoor tools. Shovels, rakes and hoes that have been hanging in storage for several months may need cleaning, sharpening or replacing.

Hopefully you cleaned away dirt and mud from your tools before storing them last winter, but, as the old Neil Young song goes, "rust never sleeps."

Metal parts can be cleaned with sandpaper, steel wool or a wire brush. You should then protect the bare metal by applying a light coat of machine oil with a rag.

An eight-inch flat file is great to restore an edge to a blade. For the best cutting edge on shovels and hoes, only sharpen from one side.

Wooden handles that may have weathered can be smoothed with fine sandpaper or steel wool.

Treating the wood with a light coat of linseed oil will help prevent future decay.

These techniques can also be used on your wheelbarrow. Clean away rust from the metal tray, and sand and oil the handles. Invest in a can of "rust-inhibiting" spray paint, and paint bare metal areas.

Check tires for cracks and dry rot. If you have a flat, replace the tire or install an inner tube. Be sure to check the size of the tire before going to the store. There should be numbers on the side of the tire such as 4.10 / 8. There will also be information on the tire that tells the proper inflation. A properly inflated wheelbarrow tire rolls and balances much more easily.

Spring is here, and "Good Friday" is only a couple of days away, so we're almost ready to start planting in the ground.

Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green



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113 WASHINGTON AVE. NW
RUSSELLVILLE, AL 35653
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The *Franklin Free Press* is published weekly by
Pilati Investments, Inc.

Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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Letters to the editor

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Love, compassion become golden

I wish I could write you something cheerful, but it's not in my heart to do so at this time.

I've been trying to comfort a special aunt of mine who knew, as I did, that her life would soon be over. She had congestive heart failure, among other things, but over the past few months her worn out heart could no longer keep up with her weakening lungs.

She was so weak that sitting up was only done when she sat in her recliner. Even then, she would often fall forward to one side. Getting her from the recliner to her bed was a challenge for both of us. She'd place those weak arms around my waist and somehow find the strength to pat me on my back and tell me she loved and appreciated me. That would always put a lump in my throat, but a smile in my heart.

I'd hold her up while she'd drag her feet or stand on mine as I walked to place her in the middle of the bed. She had a fear of falling off the bed. That was very unlikely because she would be in the same position the following morning as she was the night before, but I would do anything I could to ease her mind.

My goal was to be her rock and strength, and to give all the comfort there was left to give, which was very little. She deserved at least that much. Of course, I wasn't alone in this, because God remained my strength and support, and I was just passing one blessing for another.

My heart stayed torn in pieces during this time. I have two grandchildren who live with me that I love very much, so I'd carry guilt when I had to leave one alone to take care of the other. I told my aunt I needed two of me, and she agreed.

The sweetest moments I shared with my aunt were when I'd say or do something to make her

laugh. Those times were few and far between.

In less than two weeks she had gone from home to rehab to the ER. Adding to everything else she had going wrong, she was now in kidney failure. She was in a no-win situation. The IV's needed to help her kidneys would fill her lungs up with fluids. During this time I kept telling my aunt I loved her, and even though her voice had become so weak she still managed a light whisper telling me she loved me, too.

The fluids had begun to swell her left arm, which I expected. Her kidneys were only acting because of medication she was being given.

It was now time to explain all that she was going through to her son and grandchildren. I had to find a way to deal with such a difficult and touching subject. It broke their hearts, but they finally realized it was time to let her go.

I explained that the nurses were heeding the doctor's orders but that the family could refuse treatment. Then, and only then, all IV's would be removed and she could go as she wanted.

Within ten minutes, she took one last gasping breath, and her pain, fears and heartaches were over. I miss her, but I did everything I could for her, so my heart is at ease.

I would like to end this article by giving you something to consider. Give those you love your kindness, support and love. Do those little things they ask for. They may seem like senseless things to you, but they mean something to the person you love. While they are living, it is so, so important. That way, you won't have any regrets after they are gone.



Gail Motes



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Two extremes

Dear Dave,
I'm about to graduate from college, and while I've been in school my mom has been handling most of my finances. Recently, I discovered she's been taking my student loan money and spending it on herself.

So far, it looks like she's taken around \$12,000, and I have a total of \$25,000 in student loan debt. Since I realized this was happening, I've been reading your books and learning how to manage my own money. I don't know how to deal with this situation with her, though.

She admits the wrong but says she can't pay it back. Can you help?

Alan

Dear Alan,
I hate hearing this. There's no easy way to deal with these kinds of situations. The first thing you need to do is take over complete and total control of all your finances. Shut down any accounts that have her name on them, and anything else financially related that she can access. I know this sounds harsh, but she has proven she's just not trustworthy. It's a hard thing to hear about a parent, but at this point you've got to take steps to protect yourself. What she has been doing is theft and financial child abuse.

One extreme is to press criminal charges. The other extreme is to just forget it, and pay it. In between is a promise from her to repay everything she has taken, but she's already out of control. That's a promise that wouldn't be kept. The problem with prosecuting someone criminally for this type of action—other than the obvious emotional toll—is the money's already gone. It doesn't make them magically have the money to repay you. On top of all this, you'd have a really hard time legally getting the student loans removed from your name due to theft.

Honestly, under the circumstances I think you're probably going to end up eating this. But sit down and try to have a calm, clear discussion about what has happened, and why it happened. Let her know first, without a doubt, that you will criminally prosecute her if she ever uses your name to put money into her own pocket again. Second, tell her you're prepared to forgive her and forget about it—and she pays you back at some point, if she can—if she agrees to get some financial and emotional counseling.

Try to get her some help and get her under control, Alan. If you don't, I'm afraid things are only going downhill from here.

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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 Russellville 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.


 The Alabama Cooperative Extension System will hold a Gardening Series on Urban Forestry/Tree Maintenance at the Russellville Public Library from 11 a.m.-noon this Friday, March 30. Instructor: Taylor Reeder, Regional Extension agent - Home Grounds, Gardens, Insects. Everyone is welcome! Call the library at 256-332-1535 to pre-register.


 A benefit golf tournament for David Boutwell will be held this 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 Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, April 5 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!


 Members 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, on Thursday, April 5 from 4-5:30 p.m. Monthly meeting to follow in the Sheffield Room at Park Place, 501 N. Montgomery Avenue in Sheffield, at 6:30 p.m. Charlotte Heaps, who was healed of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, will share her testimony. We believe that God heals spiritually, physically and emotionally. All prayer is confidential. All are welcome.


 The gospel group Purpose will be singing at Tharptown Friendship Holiness Church on Saturday, April 7 at 7 p.m. Everyone is invited! For more information, call 256-627-8784.


 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 classes of 1951-53, 1961-63, 1971-73, 1981-83, 1991-93, 2001-03 and 2011-13. Everyone is invited. \$12 for meal tickets. Please RSVP for meals to 256-332-1376. For more information, call Judy West at 256-277-1211.

 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Cari Ann Cornelius at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, April 14 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.

 The Helen Keller Volunteer Auxiliary will host their \$5 jewelry sale April 16-18 in the Aerobics Room at the Keller Wellcare Center, located on the campus of Helen Keller Hospital. Masquerade Jewelry will be on site with earrings, necklaces, pins, bags, rings and more! All items are only \$5 each! Proceeds benefit the projects of the Helen Keller Hospital Volunteer Auxiliary, including the Louise Isbell Ashe Scholarship Program. These scholarships are given out each spring to graduating high school seniors who are pursuing careers in healthcare. For more information, call 256-386-4476.

 The gospel group Purpose will be singing at Gray Rock FCM Church on Saturday, April 21 at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is invited! For more information, call 256-627-6404.

 The Helen Keller Hospital Foundation is bringing a familiar face from Facebook and YouTube to the Marriott Shoals Conference Center on Saturday, May 5. Heather Land, known for her "I Ain't Doin' It" series of videos, is bringing her comedy and music show to Florence as a fundraiser for the Foundation. The show will begin at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are on sale by calling 256-386-4747. Ticket levels include: Bronze Level \$30; Silver Priority Seating \$40; Gold VIP Level \$100. The Gold VIP Level includes cocktail tickets, hors d'oeuvres, meet and greet with Heather Land, and a group photo. The proceeds from this event will benefit the Pediatric Unit at Helen Keller Hospital. For more information, call 256-386-4747.

 SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, May 12, for Pioneer Day, part of Franklin County's Bicentennial Celebration, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Russellville on the east side of Sloss Lake on Hwy 24. Living history demonstrations to show how people lived, worked and played 200 years ago. Actors will portray historical figures. Native Americans. War of 1812 soldiers. Civil war camp. Food and artisan products for sale. Free admission. Free parking in the field across Hwy. 24 from the entrance. Free shuttle bus service. Join in the fun and wear pioneer clothing, if you wish. For more information, email archive@hiwaay.net or call 256-332-8827 or 256-332-4085.


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'CHILD' from page 1

all child care facilities, whether church-operated or not, but was amended to only apply to those facilities receiving state or federal monies.

The bill was introduced in 2017 but did not pass. Stutts voted against the bill last year. A spokesman for Ivey's office said the governor would review the bill before deciding whether to sign it into law.

Stutts said he previously saw the bill as a "complete intrusion into churches that operate day care centers." He softened that stance this year after some Christian day care groups were allowed input as the bill worked its way through the legislative process.

Stutts also said federal law already requires day care facilities receiving federal monies to run background checks on all employees. He said the two day care centers where children died in Alabama in recent years "were already in violation of federal law."

Morrow said he's been contacted by several residents wanting him to support the bill.

"I've gotten a number of calls from people who believe it's a very important bill to the children of Alabama who attend day care," Morrow said. "Why would we, as legislators, not want to do everything we can to contribute to the safety of Alabama's children?"

'TEACHERS' from page 1

Rep. Will Ainsworth (R-Guntersville) introduced a bill in this year's legislative session that would give teachers an option to be armed in classrooms. Ainsworth's proposal calls for teachers to go to APOST certified law enforcement training for 40 hours. If they pass the training, subject to mental health background checks, they will be able to carry a concealed weapon on campus.

A representative of Ainsworth's office spoke to the Franklin County BamaCarry group at their March meeting to provide an update on the proposed law.

Ainsworth is a candidate in the Republican primary for lieutenant governor, along with Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh and Rusty Glover.

"It's voluntary. It's not going to be mandatory," Ainsworth said recently. "It will have some people armed in a school to actually make sure that if there is a gunman he's going to be able to be taken out."

Blackburn supports Ainsworth's bill.

"I like it. We plan to have Rep. Ainsworth speak to us this spring, as well as more candidates between now and November," Blackburn said.

BamaCarry Franklin County meets the second Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at Taylor's

Restaurant in Russellville. Blackburn said meeting times will change to the second Tuesday of the month beginning in May.

Past speakers at the group's meetings include Jamie Kiel, sheriff Shannon Oliver and Russellville Police chief Chris Hargett. Blackburn said Chris McCool, a candidate for the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, is scheduled to speak later this year.

BamaCarry is a statewide organization that labels itself Alabama's only no-compromise gun rights group. Blackburn and the group advocates for constitutional carry rights.

"We think permits and fees are an infringement on that right," Blackburn said. "We think we're singled out paying taxes to support the sheriff's office, when the county commission should support the sheriff's office with monies from everyone in the county, not just those who buy permits."

"As long as a law-abiding citizen is legally allowed to own and carry a gun, he shouldn't need a permit or have to pay a fee."

Membership in BamaCarry is \$20 per year. For more information on BamaCarry, log onto www.bamacarry.org or visit their Facebook page at BamaCarry/FranklinCounty.

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Riley seeking Republican nomination for District 18

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When it comes to industrial recruiting, Tony Riley has a unique perspective.

As human resources director and general counsel for Tiffin Motorhomes, Inc., Riley has been on the receiving side of local governments and development authorities courting Tiffin to their communities. And Riley hopes to use that experience to more effectively recruit business and industry to House District 18.

Riley is seeking the Republican nomination for the seat that's been held since 1990 by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay). Riley will face Russellville businessman Jamie Kiel in the June 5 Republican primary. Retired educator Eddie Britton is unopposed in the Democratic primary for House District 18 and will face the Republican nominee in the November 6 general election.

"I've been on the other side of recruiting efforts, and it's been my experience that a lot of things that governmental entities think are attractive to businesses actually are not," Riley said. "They're often things we're not even looking at. If you invest a few million dollars on infrastructure, you can't do it based on the hope that a labor force will appear.

"You have to do it on facts because of the money involved. Frequently, companies are recruited based on what recruiters think would be important rather than the hard numbers and facts based on the reality of their situations."

Riley grew up in Muscle Shoals. After graduating from the University of Alabama with a degree in political science and history and a minor in English, he attended the University of Alabama School of Law, where he earned his Juris Doctorate. Riley had a private practice in Colbert County for 18 years until he was hired by Tiffin in 2007.

Riley has three daughters. He attends church at New Beginning Church, where he has served as a Sunday School teacher and been a member of the church board of directors for 16 years. Having operated a small business, Riley knows the importance of small business in Alabama, but he also sees an important nexus between small business and larger employers.

"Small business is the backbone of the community," he said. "But if you take Tiffin Motorhomes out of Franklin County, how many small businesses would go under? If you don't have a few anchor businesses to prime the economy, small business would disappear."

When it comes to Republican politics and ideology, Riley is no Johnny-come-lately. He was a charter member of the Shoals Republican Club and has been active in the Republican Party since the 1980s.

"I was always a Republican based on principle and not because it was politically expedient," Riley said. "I had the opportunity to run for political office as a Democrat in the 1990s when a Republican could not win locally.

"I chose not to do that because that was not what I believed. I've showed I'm consistent in what I believe over a long period of time. There's very little in campaigns I haven't done for other people, from knocking on doors to putting up signs."

House District 18 includes the majority of Franklin County, and portions of Colbert and Lauderdale counties. Although Riley isn't a Franklin County resident, he works for Tiffin, Franklin County's largest daytime employer, and he shares the dedication the Tiffin family has to Franklin County.

"I work for a family absolutely committed to Franklin County and who has been in business here since 1972," he said. "I don't think living in Colbert County and representing the people of Franklin County are mutually exclusive. It's not an either/or. There are very few times that Colbert and Franklin Counties are in competition. In reality, what's good for Franklin County is almost always good for Colbert County. There's rarely a situation where they are in conflict.

"I work for a family absolutely committed to Franklin County and who has been in business here since 1972," Riley said. "I don't think living in Colbert County and representing the people of Franklin County are mutually exclusive. It's not an either/or. There are very few times that Colbert and Franklin are in competition. In reality, what's good for Franklin County is almost always good for Colbert County. There's rarely a situation where they are in conflict."

"I look at it the other way. If you assume conflict, then you assume if it's good for Franklin, it's bad for Lauderdale or Colbert, and that's not what I



Tony Riley

believe."

When it comes to education, Riley said he will focus on training the northwest Alabama workforce with marketable skills they can use to land quality jobs that will allow them to remain at home in District 18.

"Education is always an issue," Riley said. "They've been talking about education in Alabama all my life, 54 years, and we're still 49 [out of 50 states], so obviously what we're doing is not working. We need programs outside the box. We need to train our workforce appropriately for jobs here. A significant portion of kids in Franklin County won't go to college. They need to be trained for an economy completely different than the economy we are in today.

"With the unprecedented economic growth that parts of Alabama have experienced over the past few years, it is now more important than ever that we, in the more rural areas of the state, concentrate on improving education. This must be our goal so that our children have the advantage for opportunity and success and the ability to stay and thrive in their hometown."

Riley said another asset he can take to Montgomery is his legal background and the experience of representing a diversity of clients over his 18-year career in private practice.

"I know the practical way laws passed by the legislature are implemented. There aren't too many attorneys in the legislature any more," Riley said. "There's a disconnect at times from the way laws are intended when passed and how courts interpret them. As an attorney, I know and understand that.

"And representing people from all walks of life gives me a different perspective, because I realize how our laws affect them. When you're a small-town lawyer, you have the opportunity to represent all kinds of people."

Finally, Riley said a cooperative effort among the legislature, law enforcement, treatment facilities and community support is needed to tackle Alabama's opioid crisis.

"There's not a family not touched by this issue," Riley said. "There's not an employer who doesn't deal with it every day. New employees can't pass drug screens because it's such a big problem. And it can only be addressed by the legislature in a limited way. It requires a cooperative effort beyond that."

For more information on the Riley campaign, visit his Facebook page @TonyRileyHouseRepresentativeDistrict18.

Legislative efforts lead to grant for Cherokee grocery

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When asked about the importance of teamwork, legendary pro football coach Vince Lombardi once said, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

And teamwork is what led to a \$50,000 grant to help a Cherokee businesswoman reopen the town's only grocery store later this year.

Tracy Wix, who operates a pharmacy in Cherokee, will soon open People's Piggly Wiggly. The store closed last November.

Through the efforts of the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments, the Alabama Department of Economic & Community Affairs,

Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay), Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) and Sen. Tim Melson (R-Florence), a \$50,000 grant was awarded through ADECA's Healthy Food Financing Program to help Wix with purchasing equipment and making upgrades to the grocery, located at 8075 U.S. 72.

Once the Piggly Wiggly reopens, it will be the only grocery store in a 15-20 mile radius.

The grant announcement was made earlier this month. Wix said she appreciated the work of the legislators, as well as Keith Jones and his staff at NACOLG.

"This town was a food desert. There was no food, no grocery store for more than fifteen miles," Wix said. "This money will be a tremendous help to allow us to have new, up-to-date equipment and

be able to keep everything fresh in the store.

"Rep. Morrow, Sen. Stutts and Sen. Melson helped a whole lot in getting that grant approved, and I appreciate their efforts."

Morrow said the Piggly Wiggly meets an essential need for the citizens of Cherokee.

"This was an important project and an important tax base for the community," Morrow said. "I was excited to be able to share the news about this grant to help reopen a business right here in northwest Alabama."

It's estimated the grocery will provide between \$6,000 and \$7,000 per month in sales tax revenue to the Town of Cherokee.

According to Cherokee mayor Terry Cosby, the Piggly Wiggly grossed more than \$3.4 million in 2016.



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Yard Sale on Friday, April 6 from 7 am-6 pm and Saturday, April 7 from 7 am-3 pm at Born Again Auto Collision Center at the intersection of Hwy. 243 and Hwy. 81 in the Trapptown Community. Pancakes & biscuits/ chocolate gravy for breakfast, and hot dogs/ hamburgers for lunch. Bake sale also on Saturday. We will be

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Local establishments earn satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The 11 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of March 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 11 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 100, received by Dollar General #17373, 18625 Hwy. 43, Russellville.

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

- Piggly Wiggly #87 Deli, 3625 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 89. (Hot food out of temp in warmer).
- Piggly Wiggly Market #93, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 91. (Cut melons out of temperature).
- Piggly Wiggly #87, 3625 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 93.
- Cardinal Drive-In, 602 4th St. W, Red Bay, 95.
- 43 Grill, 15110 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.
- Russellville Foodland #110, 14001 Hwy. 43, Suite 11, Russellville, 96.
- Bojangles #6, 13810 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.
- Marty's Meat Market, Inc., 85 Scotty Moore Dr., Russellville, 98.
- Red Bay Hospital, 211 Hospital Road, Red Bay, 99.
- Red Bay Senior Center, 115 5th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 99.

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us.

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Bobcats off to 2-0 start in area after sweep of Red Bay

Staff reports

Nate Owens struck out eight batters in five innings and also delivered a go-ahead three-run double for Phil Campbell last Thursday, helping the Bobcats finish off a two-game area sweep of rival Red Bay with an 11-6 win at Roger Bedford Sportsplex.

After winning last Tuesday's series opener 10-1 behind a dominant outing from senior ace Peyton Thomas, Phil Campbell (ranked No. 8 in Class 2A by the ASWA) had to battle back from a three-run deficit on Thursday.

The Bobcats (12-7 overall through Sunday, 2-0 in Area 14) trailed the Tigers 5-2 before mounting a big two-out rally against Red Bay starter Hayden Murray in the bottom of the fourth. With Joe Hardy on first and two down, Cole Motes and Austen Baker delivered back-to-back singles. The Tigers (8-7, 0-2) committed an error on Baker's hit, allowing Hardy and Motes to score and cut the lead to 5-4.

Freshman Ridge Raper kept the line moving with a single, and then Thomas walked to load the bases. Owens cleared them with a double to left, putting Phil Campbell in front 7-5.

After Owens struck out two in a one-two-three top of the fifth, the Bobcats broke the game open in the bottom of the inning. They took advantage of five Red Bay errors to score four runs and extend the lead to 11-5.

Hardy relieved Owens to start the sixth and pitched around a pair of errors, picking off a runner at second base and getting a key strike-out. Hardy hit two batters in the top of the seventh but limited the damage to just one run as Phil Campbell turned a game-ending double play to seal the win.

Owens (4-1 through Sunday) needed 101 pitches to get through five innings, striking out eight and walking five. The junior lefty allowed five runs (just one earned) on five hits. Hardy did not allow a hit in his two innings, striking out two and walking one. He allowed one earned run.

Murray (2-2 through Sunday) took the loss despite not allowing an earned run in five innings. Eight Red Bay errors contributed to 11 unearned runs by the Bobcats. Murray allowed eight hits, struck out four and walked two, throwing 65 of his 89 pitches for strikes. Kolby Bragwell threw a scoreless sixth inning in relief, striking out one and walking one.

Both starters were locked in early. Owens pitched around a two-out walk to Bragwell in the top of the first, striking out the side. Murray worked around a two-out error in the bottom half, and then Owens retired Red Bay in order in the top of the second. Murray followed suit

See 'BOBCATS,' Page 16

Three from Franklin County earn All-State hoops honors

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Three Franklin County basketball players who led their teams on deep postseason runs were selected by the Alabama Sports Writers Association for All-State honors earlier this month.

On the boys side, junior big men Mason Bragwell of Belgreen and Gath Weatherford of Red Bay earned second-team honors in Class 1A and Class 2A, respectively. Phil Campbell forward Abby Davis, also a junior, was a second-team selection in Class 2A on the girls side.

Davis, a three-time first-team All-County selection by the *Free Press*, led the Lady Bobcats to a 26-6 record this season, highlighted by their first county championship since 1998, their first area tournament title since 1993 and their first Final Four berth since 1987.

The 5'11 Davis led the team in scoring (13.8 points per game) and rebounding (6.9 boards per game) while also racking up 40 blocks and 48 steals. She knocked down a career-high 16 threes and topped the 20-point mark six times, including a 22-point effort in the Northwest Regional semifinals against Mars Hill that earned her a spot on the All-Tournament team in Hanceville.

Davis will enter her senior season with 1,334
See 'HOOPS,' Page 14



FILE PHOTO

Davis was a second-team selection after leading Phil Campbell to the Final Four.

Q&A with RHS football coach John Ritter

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

The voice that answered John Ritter's cell phone on Saturday morning was not that of John Ritter.

"Wait just a second," said Ritter's wife, Lauren. "He's changing our one-month-old's diaper."

Ritter, 33, is much, much more than the new head football coach at Russellville High School.

He's a husband to Lauren, who hails from Fredericksburg, VA and has taught music at Russellville Elementary School for the past ten years. He's a father to two young children, three-year-old Lillian and the aforementioned one-month-old Lincoln. He's a former college football player (at the University of North Alabama in 2003-04) and the son of a very successful high school football coach. [His father, Ronnie Ritter, led Lauderdale County to 106 wins and 12 playoff appearances—including two trips to the state semifinals—in 16 seasons in Rogersville.]

John Ritter is also a cancer survivor, having been diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in December of 2010, when he was a 25-year-old

assistant coach at Muscle Shoals. [He underwent several months of treatment before doctors declared him cancer-free in July of 2011.]

He's a two-time selection as state Coach of the Year by the Alabama Sports Writers Association, first in 2012 at Red Bay and again in 2016 at West Morgan.

Diaper duty done ["Perfect timing," he joked], Ritter (at right) spent a generous chunk of the rest of his Saturday morning chatting with the *Free Press* about all those things and more, including his deeply held admiration for the tradition of Golden Tiger football and his plans for taking the program to the next level.

Franklin Free Press: How has being a dad changed your life and your perspective on things?

See 'RITTER,' Page 14



'RITTER' from page 13

John Ritter: "I know this. Making it to the state championship game at Deshler [as an assistant coach in 2014], getting my first win as a head coach at Red Bay [41-12 over Hatton on September 14, 2012], winning the region this year at West Morgan, beating Colbert County [42-41 in a thriller at C.T. Manley Stadium], winning ten games—all those big moments in my coaching career, when that little girl and little boy came along all that other stuff paled in comparison to becoming a dad. There's nothing like it. These kids...they're crazy, just like I am, unfortunately. They turned our world upside down, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

FFP: Speaking of life-changing events, finding out you had cancer as a 25-year-old must have rocked your world.

JR: "It was rough. It was one of those things where, for the first two or three weeks, I was just in shock. I was healthy, I worked out and ran, I was in the best shape of my life. I went to the doctor with some stuff that was going on, and he told me what he thought it was. I had a biopsy done, and it came back that it was cancer. That next eight months, I went to the doctor twice a week, I took chemotherapy every other week, I got shots to help my white blood cells regenerate. I kind of tackled it head-on. I have an aggressive personality, so I just attacked it like we would a football practice.

"It was a traumatic experience, but it was also a learning experience. It definitely changed my life for the better. We're a really close family anyway, and it brought us even closer together. [Ritter was not married in 2011, but he was—and is—extremely close with his father, his mother Terri and his sister Katherine, now 28.] I had some friends of mine who stepped up and were there for me. The whole experience shaped who I am and

how I coach, how I treat kids. As a coach, you have a lot more understanding for kids and what they've got going on when you've been through something like that."

FFP: You had a really good thing going at West Morgan after turning that program around. What appealed to you about the Russellville job?

JR: "It appealed to me on different levels, personally and professionally. Professionally, it's *Russellville*. Growing up in north Alabama, I know Russellville has made it to the state championship numerous times [seven, to be exact, in Ritter's lifetime, including five Super Six appearances in an eight-year span from 2002-09], and a lot of great coaches have come out of there—Coach [Don] Cox, Coach [Perry] Swindall, Coach [Doug] Goodwin. All three of those guys had teams that played in the finals. When you hear 'Russellville,' the first thing you think about is football. As a coach in north Alabama, it's one of the premier jobs if not *the* premier job around, so I'm very excited about the opportunity to be there.

"When you hear 'Russellville,' the first thing you think about is football. As a coach in north Alabama, it's one of the premier jobs if not *the* premier job around, so I'm very excited about the opportunity to be there."

"Personally, of course, my wife's there. We've got two small children, and we live in the Shoals. Commuting back and forth to West Morgan was tough, even though we love Trinity and the people there have been great to us. It was very hard to leave. At the same time, my family is over here. At Russellville, I'll be able to take my little girl to day care and pick her up occasionally. And when it comes to the football part of it...it's Russellville. It's still Russellville."

'HOOPS' from page 13

just had a really good year for us."

The 6'6 Bragwell was a dominant force for the Bulldogs this season, earning *Free Press* Player of the Year honors after averaging a county-best 18.4 points per game on 52-percent shooting from the field and 68-percent shooting from the line. He topped the 20-point mark a dozen times, scoring a season-high 30 to lead Belgreen past Marion County 82-46 in sub-regional play.

Bragwell averaged a team-best 7.9 rebounds per game and also blocked 48 shots, leading the Bulldogs to a 25-6 record that included a second straight county championship, a second straight area title and a second straight regional berth.

"He had a great year for us," head coach Clint Isbell said of Bragwell, who has scored 1,297 career points. "He stepped up his game from last year. He is a talented kid and has unbelievable potential. I look forward to what he can bring to our team next season."

Bragwell will continue to go head-to-head with Weatherford, a first-team All-County performer whose breakout junior season propelled Red Bay to a 16-win improvement over the previous year.

Weatherford averaged 16.5 points and 7.4 rebounds per game for a Tiger team that finished 18-13 and made its first regional appearance since 1995. The 6'3 post player ranked second in Franklin County in threes made with 57 and was remarkably efficient, shooting 53.3 percent from two-point range, 40.3 percent from beyond the arc and 78.8 percent from the foul line. He topped the 20-point mark 11 times, including a 23-point effort in a sub-regional rout of Tarrant that punched Red

FFP: With that in mind, let's talk about the current state of the program. Russellville went 3-7 last season and missed the playoffs for the second time in the last five years. Since 2010, the Golden Tigers have advanced beyond the second round just once (in 2015 under Mark Heaton). Can the program still be elite?

JR: "I think so. There are some pieces there, coaching-wise, some great coaches there. I've met with part of the staff, and I think we'll have the ability to bring in some pieces of the puzzle to finish the staff out. I believe we'll have the best staff in north Alabama, without a doubt. The support there from the community is outstanding. I've only been there for two days, but the people I've talked to are very excited. We want to continue the tradition that's already in place and take it to another level. I'm every excited about the possibility of what the future holds.

"Kids are kids. Sometimes a school goes through a period of time...every high school is gonna trend up and trend down. I believe we can put some things in place to make sure we start trending back up at a fast pace."

FFP: You said the schematics of football are especially interesting to you, and you really enjoy the strategic aspect of the game. What will your team look like from an X's and O's standpoint, on both sides of the ball?

JR: "Offensively, we're gonna do whatever it takes to be successful. I'm a two-back, Auburnesque type of guy on offense, without some of the fancy stuff they do. The base stuff is the same—two backs, in the gun, two-by-two, trips. We're gonna be balanced, but we're gonna run the football. When you can run the ball in high school football, it's gonna open up the passing game, the screens, the down-the-field passes. I know we've

See 'RITTER,' Page 15

career points scored.

"Abby had a great year for us," head coach Craig Thomas said. "She led us in a lot of categories, and she matured a lot when it came to reading defenses. If she saw a team was double-teaming her, she would dish it off to an open player. She



Bay's ticket to Hanceville.

"What makes Gath so valuable to our team is not only his scoring ability but also his work ethic," coach John Torisky said. "He set a standard for the other guys around him and willed the team to improve and reach new heights."



FILE PHOTOS

Weatherford (above, 15) and Bragwell (at left, 23) both earned All-State honors after leading their respective teams to Hanceville.



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'RITTER', from page 14

got the Buckhalter kid [Devin, a rising senior who led the team in receiving as a sophomore in 2016 before missing his entire junior season with a broken bone in his foot] at receiver who's a big, big tool and a big-time player. I expect him to have a monster year. If we don't have the personnel to do things a certain way, we'll do what we need to do to be successful. We're not gonna try to put a square peg in a round hole. If we have to be two-tight end wishbone, then that's what we'll do.

"Defensively, we'll be a 3-4 team, a very aggressive, slanting-front kind of team. It's the same defense we've run at Muscle Shoals, Deshler, Red Bay and West Morgan, at completely different levels with completely different kids, and the scheme has made us effective on defense. At all four places, we've been able to put a good defense on the field."

"You can't expect to not work very hard and be successful, whether we're talking about Friday nights this season or fifteen years down the road."

FFP: How will you ultimately define success for your program at Russellville?

JR: "The first thing I told our kids when I met with them on Thursday was, we're gonna take care of the little things. We're really gonna strive to do the little things right. Our goal is to put a good product on the field and to put a good product in the community. If we play hard, play disciplined, play aggressive and play physical, that other stuff will take care of itself. With my dad's teams at Lauderdale County, whether they were good or bad, you always knew they were gonna play hard, they were gonna be physical, they were gonna play aggressive, and they would hit you. That's a mentality I definitely stole from him. For each guy, it's about doing your job and filling your role. What are you willing to sacrifice to be successful?"

"At the same time, I'm not an idiot. I know that at the end of the day it comes down to wins and losses. But if we play hard and do the little things right, if we'll ball out in the weight room and make those sacrifices, the wins and losses part will take care of itself. But you can't expect to not work very hard and be successful, whether we're talking about Friday nights this season or fifteen years down the road."

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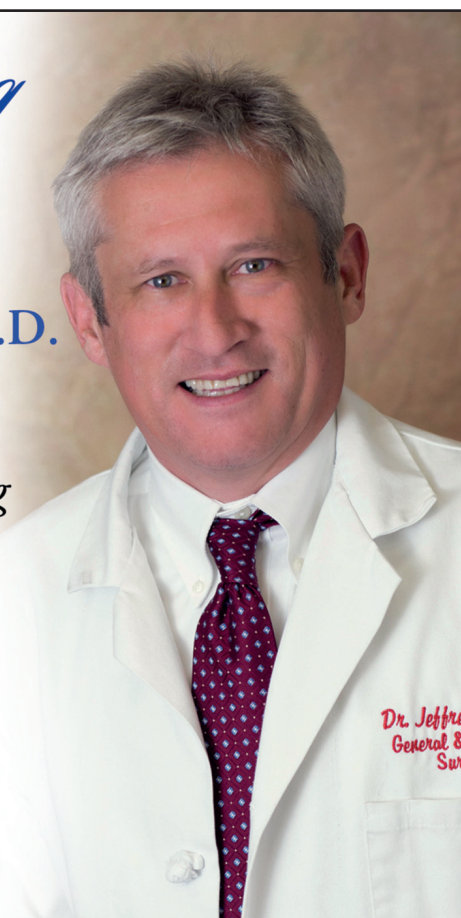
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'BOBCATS', from page 13

in the bottom of the inning, striking out two.

The Tigers took the lead in the top of the third when Alex Burroughs singled to center, stole second and scored on Bragwell's hit to right. Phil Campbell came right back with two runs in the bottom of the inning, getting an RBI groundout from Baker and an RBI single from Owens to take a 2-1 lead.

Red Bay made the most of three walks, two Bobcat errors and a wild pitch in the top of the fourth, getting RBI singles from Burroughs and Skylar Brazil in a four-run rally that made it 5-2. Phil Campbell went back in front in the bottom of the inning on Owens' big hit and never looked back.

Owens finished 2-for-4 with four RBIs. Raper went 2-for-4 and scored twice, and Thomas was 1-for-2 with a double and two walks. Hardy and Daniel Smith each scored two runs, and Motes was 1-for-3 with an RBI and a run. Baker went 1-for-4 with an RBI, and Brody Nix was 1-for-4 with a run.

Burroughs led Red Bay at the plate, going 2-for-4 with an RBI and two runs scored. Bragwell was 1-for-2 with an RBI and two walks, and Brazil went 1-for-3 and drove in a run.

Thomas was in top form on the mound last Tuesday for the series opener at Red Bay, striking out 11 and holding the high-scoring Tigers to just one hit and one unearned run. Hardy was the offensive star for Phil Campbell, going 3-for-4 with a go-ahead two-run homer to lead a 12-hit attack.

Red Bay came in averaging 10.1 runs per game and batting .385 as a team, but they couldn't get much going against Thomas (2-3 through Sunday). The hard-throwing right-hander gave up an unearned run in the bottom of the first but nothing thereafter, retiring nine straight batters during one early-game stretch and striking out five consecutive hitters in the fourth and fifth innings.

Thomas threw 65 of his 100 pitches for strikes, walking just one batter and hitting two. He got nine groundball outs to go along with his 11 K's and had 47 strikeouts and only five walks in 30 innings this season through Sunday.

Brazil started on the mound for Red Bay and pitched a scoreless first inning, working around a two-out double by Thomas. The Tigers took the lead in the bottom of the first when leadoff man Burroughs reached on an error, stole second, moved to third on a groundout and scored on a wild pitch. Thomas struck out Chase Allen with a runner at third to keep it a 1-0 game.

The Bobcats answered with a long ball in the top of the second. Nix singled with one out, and then Hardy hit a two-run homer to left—his second of the season—to put Phil Campbell in front.

After Thomas set the Tigers down in order in the bottom of the second, the Bobcats scored three runs in the top of the third. Raper led off the inning with a double to left and scored one out later on a base hit by Owens. After Chase Hutchens reached on an error, Owens scored when Brazil was called for a balk. Nix then capped the inning with his second hit of the day, an RBI single to make it 5-1.

Thomas got three groundball outs in the bottom of the third, running his streak of consecutive batters retired to nine. Brazil pitched a one-two-three top of the fourth, and then Bragwell led off the bottom of the inning with a single. Murray reached on an error to put two men on with nobody out, but Thomas recovered to strike out the next three batters and end the threat.

Phil Campbell added a run in the top of the fifth. Thomas drew a walk, and courtesy runner Brandon Thomas moved to third on a pair of wild pitches before scoring on a groundout by Hutchens to make it 6-1.

Thomas struck out the first two batters in the bottom of the fifth before plunking Burroughs and Luke Rooker to put two men aboard. He avoided any damage, though, by getting Bragwell to ground out to second.

The Bobcats tacked on two more runs in the sixth on a pair of two-out RBI singles, one from Baker and the other from Raper. Thomas retired Red Bay in order in the bottom half, and then Phil Campbell finished off the scoring with a two-out rally in the top of the seventh. Hardy and Mike Wrona both singled and later scored when Baker reached on an error to make it 10-1.

Thomas finished strong on the mound, striking out two in a one-two-three bottom of the seventh.

Hardy finished 3-for-4 with the two-run homer and three runs scored. Peyton Thomas was 2-for-3 with two doubles, and Nix and Raper also had two hits apiece.

Phil Campbell, the reigning Area 14 champion, has area series remaining with Lamar County (April 3 and 5) and Sulligent (April 10 and 12).

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For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at franklinfreepress.net!

Lady Golden Tigers finish second at Cherokee Ridge

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Russellville's varsity girls golf team finished runner-up last Wednesday in the Arab Invitational at Cherokee Ridge Golf Club with a score of 279.

Senior Ashton Moore led the way for the Lady Golden Tigers, shooting 85 and earning a spot on the All-Tournament team.

"This is where our sectional will be played this year," coach Deedra Moore said, "so it was good for us to see the course. We've never played that course, and it was a cold, windy day. It wasn't a good day for golf."

"This is where our sectional will be played this year," coach Deedra Moore said, "so it was good for us to see the course. We've never played that course, and it was a cold, windy day. It wasn't a good day for golf."

Juniors Josie Willis and Morgan Moon shot 94 and 100, respectively, at Cherokee Ridge, rounding out Russellville's team score of 279. Fellow junior Carley Grace McCalpin shot 114. Other team members include freshmen Alayna Fish, Ashlyn DeArman and Kylee Plott.

The Lady Golden Tigers are off this week for spring break. They will return to action next week with their second 18-hole match of the year at a tournament in Cullman.

"April will be very busy for us," Moore said. "We've only played two other matches [aside from last week at Cherokee Ridge] because we've had two that were rained out. The season has been so wet and cold."

Previously this season, Russellville won a pair of nine-hole matches at its home course, Twin Pines Country Club. The Lady Golden Tigers shot 129 on March 12, cruising past Colbert Heights (147) and Lawrence County (167). Moore shot 40 to lead the way, followed by Moon at 44 and Willis at 45.

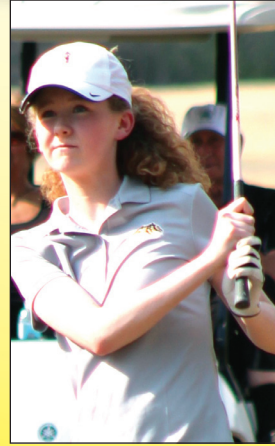
One week earlier, Moore shot 43 at Twin Pines to lead Russellville past Deshler and Colbert Heights.



Ashton Moore Senior Golfer, Russellville

Moore led the Lady Golden Tigers to a runner-up finish at last week's 18-hole Arab Invitational. The senior continued her strong season, shooting 85 at Cherokee Ridge Golf Club and earning a spot on the All-Tournament team.

Moore previously performed well in two nine-hole matches at Russellville's home course, Twin Pines Country Club. She shot 40 on March 12, helping the Lady Golden Tigers (129 team total) cruise by Colbert Heights (147) and Lawrence County (167). She also shot 43 the week before to lead RHS past Deshler and Colbert Heights.



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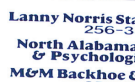











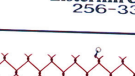


















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Russellville tennis teams grateful for community support

Submitted to the FFP

The Russellville High School and Russellville Middle School tennis teams want to extend a huge thank you to all of the sponsors for their generous donations to the tennis program this season.

Because of support from local businesses, the tennis program has the equipment, uniforms and resources necessary to enjoy great success this year.

A sign at the Russellville Tennis Complex proud-

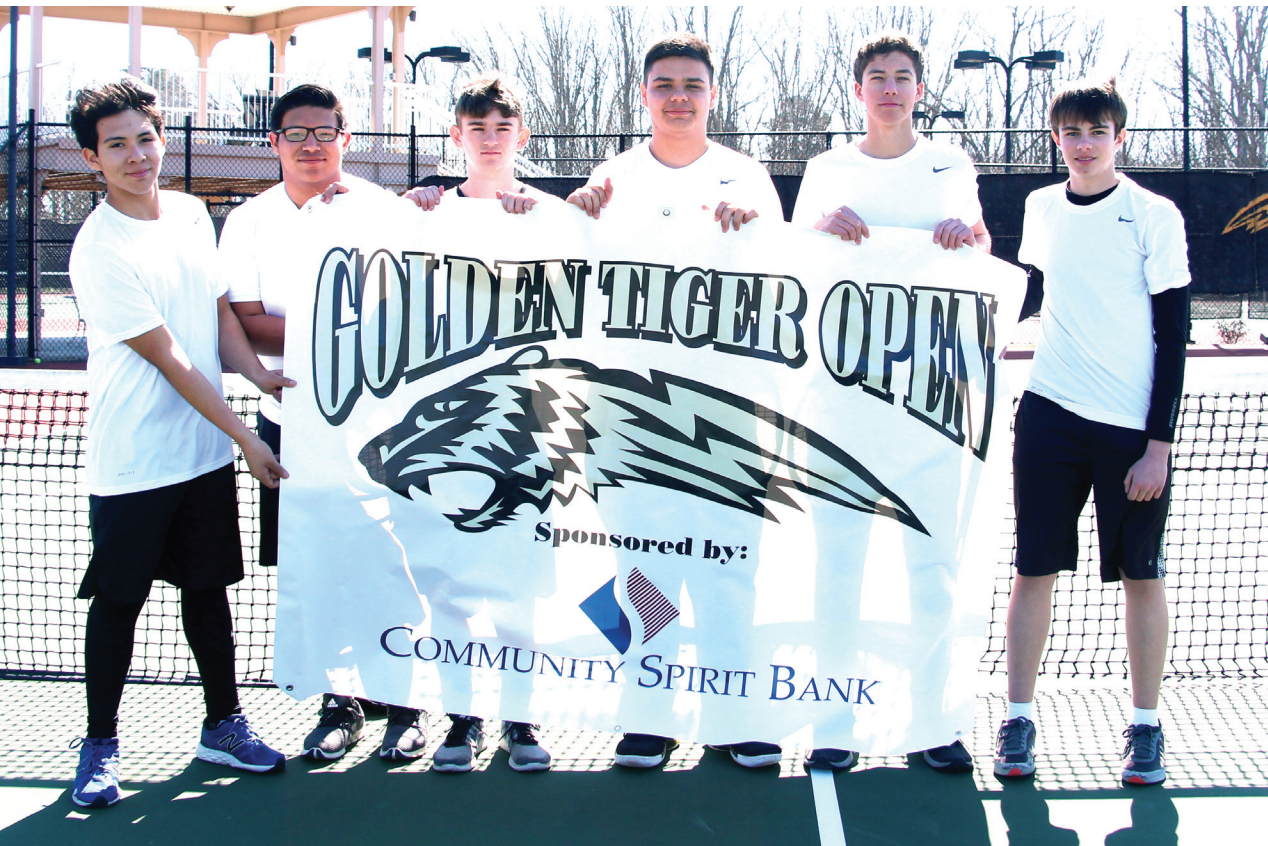
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Members of the RHS varsity girls tennis team are pictured above with the sign. On the left of the sign are Ellyse Strickland, Emma Claire Bragwell, Rebecca Parrish and Kaydee Holland. On the right are Anna Woods, Katie Burns and Callie Palmer. Not pictured is Addie Scuggs. The girls are coached by Charlotte Dollar.

The RHS varsity tennis teams also want to extend a huge thank you to Community Spirit Bank for their tournament sponsorship this season. A banner depicting their sponsorship is proudly displayed at the Russellville Tennis Complex.

Members of the RHS boys varsity tennis team pictured with the banner (at left) are Eduardo Vargas, Joel Vargas, Samuel Franklin, Tino Soto, Ethan Howard and Kiah Derrick. Not pictured is Anthony Ruiz. The boys are coached by Brett Voss.



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!

RHS pitchers hold Hartselle to two hits in DH sweep

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - Two Russellville pitchers—junior Caden Parker and senior Landon Ezzell—who between them had not allowed an earned run all season combined to shut out Hartselle 3-0 in the first game of Saturday's doubleheader at Russellville Baseball Stadium.

And neither one of them had the best performance of the day on the mound for the Golden Tigers.

That distinction belonged to senior side-armor Jaret Ward, who one-upped his teammates in Saturday's second game by holding Hartselle hitless for six innings in his first start of the season. Ezzell earned his second save of the day with two strikeouts in a dominant seventh inning, giving Russellville (ranked No. 3 in Class 5A by the ASWA) a 3-1 win and an impressive two-game sweep of the Class 6A No. 2 Tigers.

"Did we give up a hit in that game?" head coach Chris Heaps asked as he walked back toward the home dugout after bidding farewell to long-time mentor and friend William Booth and the other members of Hartselle's coaching staff. Told that the answer was no, Heaps responded by raising his arms to shoulder level and flexing his biceps in mock celebration, not unlike a heavy-weight boxer at a pre-fight weigh-in.

It was a fitting gesture, given how the Golden Tigers (14-7 through Sunday) had flexed their mound muscle all day long. Parker, Ezzell and Ward combined to hold Hartselle—a team less than 24 hours removed from pounding out 16 hits in a 16-4 win over Class 7A Thompson—to a measly two hits and one unearned run in 14 innings.

"That was pretty fun," said Ezzell, the staff ace who made his first two relief appearances of the year on Saturday and extended his streak to 26 innings on the season without allowing an earned run. "I kinda liked being the closer. I had two really good pitchers going in front of me. I'm really proud of both those guys. I just wanted to come in and fill it up and let our defense keep making plays. Our defense was really good today."

That was especially true in game one, when the Golden Tigers turned 14 groundballs induced by Parker into 14 outs in their most efficient defensive performance to date.

"I'm not really a big strikeout guy," said Parker, who didn't record a single K on Saturday but still held Hartselle to just two hits in six scoreless innings while extending his own streak to 22.2 innings on the season without giving up an earned run. "I just try to keep the ball down and work in that bottom level of the zone. Coach Fuller [Eli, a Russellville assistant who serves as the team's pitching coach] does a great job calling pitches, so I just trusted him and trusted my defense to make the plays."

Parker's pitch-to-contact approach was highly effective against the Tigers (14-11), who managed only a two-out single by Ethan Ellis in the third and a one-out single by Andy Lamb in the fifth.

"Caden's not a guy who's gonna beat you with velocity," Fuller said. "He has to stay on top of everything and pound the bottom half of the strike zone. He's got some late movement, and he does a good job of keeping the ball away from the barrel of the bat. He got a lot of weak groundballs today, and our defense made the plays for him."

"He was through four innings today on forty-seven pitches, so he was really locked in."

Parker helped himself at the plate in the bottom of the second inning, following up a one-out single by Devin Buckhalter with a two-out RBI double off the base of the fence in left to break a scoreless tie. Parker, who had retired seven of the first eight batters he faced on groundballs, yielded a two-out single to Ellis in the top of the third and then plunked leadoff man Charlie Ord before getting Taylor Easterling on a grounder to third to end the inning.

Russellville later added to the lead in the bottom of the fourth. Tom Barkley Scott led off with a single, and then Buckhalter bunted for a hit. A double-steal put runners at second and third with one out, and Parker came through again with a sacrifice fly to right to chase home Scott. The throw to the plate got away for an error, allowing Buckhalter to race home and make it 3-0.

Parker (4-0) pitched around Lamb's hit in the fifth before running into his first real spot of trouble in the sixth. He retired Ord on a groundball to second but then drilled Easterling, who promptly stole second. Garrett Wade followed with (what else?) a groundball up the middle, and shortstop Rudy Fernandez alertly trapped Easterling in a rundown that ultimately resulted in the second out of the inning.

Wade moved to second on a balk, and then Parker issued his first and only walk of the game to cleanup hitter Drew Nix. Parker's 1-1 pitch to the next batter, Grayson Bray, missed inside, and Bray immediately dropped the bat and headed toward first as though the pitch had grazed him—or his jersey—on the way by. Nix started to move up as well, but the home plate umpire pointed at the batter's box and instructed Bray to return to the plate, ruling

that the pitch had in fact *not* hit him.

Since there was no hit batter, the ball was live, and the Golden Tigers alertly threw down to second, where Nix had stopped just short of the base still occupied by Wade. Nix tried to get back to first and was caught in a rundown before ultimately being tagged out to end the inning.

Ezzell relieved to start the top of the seventh, with Bray back at the plate. He reached on Russellville's only error of the game, but Ezzell responded by striking out Jackson Terry and Lamb and then retiring Walton Ferguson on a comebacker to seal the 3-0 win.

The hard-throwing Ezzell, who had struck out 22 batters in 24 innings as a starter on the year, fanned four of the seven hitters he faced in Saturday's two relief appearances.

"Ezzell is a guy who relies a lot on his fastball anyway," Fuller said. "You know what's coming with him. His approach is, 'Here's my best pitch, and if you can beat me, go ahead.' Coming in out of the bullpen to just pitch one inning and knowing he wasn't gonna have to go the whole game probably added three to four miles an hour to his fastball. He could really let it go."

Ezzell (who was 4-1 on the year through Sunday after not pitching at all last season due to an elbow issue that required surgery this past summer) has provided a major boost to the Golden Tiger staff. So, too, has Ward, who had allowed only three earned runs and 10 hits in 20.1 innings across eight relief appearances before shutting down Hartselle on Saturday with his sidearm arsenal of sinking fastballs and sweeping breaking balls.

"Jaret put in a lot of work in the off-season," Fuller said. "We sat our guys down before the season started and told them, 'Look, we know we've got a lot of guys who can pitch. But you're gonna have to earn your spot.' Jaret was a little up and down in his first outing or two, but after that he really started locking in and giving us what we need. He's solidified himself as our No. 1 guy out of the bullpen."

Ward (1-1) got the call to make his first start of the season on Saturday and merely responded by holding Hartselle without a hit for six innings. He struck out four, walked two and hit one, retiring the first seven batters he faced and the last seven batters he faced before giving way to Ezzell in the seventh.

"Jaret's ball has a lot of natural run on it, and it's got a little sink, too," Fuller said. "We've worked with him on starting his fastball in the middle of the plate and then letting it run. He's another guy who gets a lot of groundballs."

Ward got three of them in the top of the sixth, and then Russellville broke a 1-1 tie with two runs in the bottom of the inning. Brock Malone got things going with a one-out single to right off Hartselle starter Drew Cartee, and then Scott ripped a single through the hole between third and short. Both runners moved up on a wild pitch, and then another wild one allowed Malone to score the go-ahead run. Buckhalter followed with a bouncer to third, and Scott beat Nix's throw to the plate to make it 3-1.

Ezzell came on to finish things in the top of the seventh, though without the added pressure of trying to preserve the no-hitter. He (along with Russellville's coaches) didn't know a no-hitter was in progress.

"I'm glad I didn't," Ezzell said after the game, smiling with relief.

After Ezzell struck out Bray and Lamb to start the seventh, the day ended fittingly on a Gold Glove defensive play, with senior third baseman Houston Kitterman diving to his left to snare a groundball off the bat of Wright and firing to first for the final out.

Buckhalter had a big day at the plate on Saturday, going 4-for-6 in the two games with an RBI and two runs scored. The junior outfielder is now batting a team-best .365 (19-for-52) on the season. Scott went 2-for-6 Saturday and also scored twice.

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