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PAID Franklin Free Press
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Madden sentenced to 20 years

Judge denies application for probation, orders full restitution

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Before he sentenced former Franklin County administrator Crista Madden Monday morning, retired Colbert County circuit judge Pride Tompkins said he'd never dealt with a case like this one.

Moments later, Tompkins denied Madden's application for probation and sentenced her to 20 years on each of two felony ethics violations she pled guilty to on March 19.

"I've thought about this case a long time," Tompkins said. "I've viewed the pre-sentence report, letters presented to me, more than once. There are a lot of victims in this case. I've thought about this a lot, not just today. I've never had a case like this one."

Tompkins ordered the 20-year sentences to run concurrently and placed Madden in the custody of the Franklin County Sheriff's Department. Madden was ordered to pay \$753,889.21 in restitution.

Tompkins was appointed to preside over the case after Franklin County circuit judge Terry Dempsey recused

himself from the matter. The case was prosecuted by the Alabama Attorney General's office. Madden was represented by Florence attorney Ralph Holt and Jeff Bowling of Russellville.

Although the State of Alabama did not formally take a position on Madden's sentencing, Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore, as a representative of the Franklin County taxpayers, the victims in the case, read a letter he presented to Tompkins prior to Madden's sentencing.

"I want to convey the feelings that people have expressed to me," Moore told the judge. "For ten years, Mrs. Madden carefully and calculatedly carried out a scheme that cost the taxpayers of our county \$753,889.21. That money could have benefited our citizens. Instead, it only benefited Mrs. Madden. She robbed them of the security and trust the people have in local government and local officials. That was devastating to me as chairman of the Franklin County Commission and someone who has worked very hard to handle things the right way."

See 'MADDEN,' Page 11

Voters say 'yes' to one-cent sales tax

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County voters once again said a resounding 'yes' to the renewal of a one-cent countywide sales tax that benefits local public education as well as providing funds to maintain and improve county roads and bridges.

The local amendment appeared on the June 5 primary ballots for all county voters to consider. The proposed two-year renewal was overwhelming approved, by a margin of 3,405 in favor to 1,554 against, representing a 69/31 percent breakdown.

According to officials with Franklin County Schools, the tax generates approximately \$2.4 million per year. The Franklin County Commission receives one-fourth of that (approximately \$600,000) for road and bridge projects, while the remaining monies are divided between Franklin County Schools and Russellville City Schools based on enrollment. Franklin County Schools received more

than \$1,000,000 from the one-cent tax last year.

"I very much appreciate the people of Franklin County passing that," said Greg Hamilton, Franklin County superintendent of education. "It's critical to our school system, and I pledge to make sure their money is taken care of and spent appropriately."

"I very much appreciate the people of Franklin County passing that," said Greg Hamilton, Franklin County superintendent of education. "It's critical to our school system, and I pledge to make sure their money is taken care of and spent appropriately."

The tax was first presented to voters in 2010. In that initial two-year period, 100 percent of the funds went proportionately to the two school systems in Franklin County. After the 2011 tornado, when ATRIP road and bridge grants exceeding \$12 million became available, the Franklin County Commission needed a method of

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Doise Dean Cobb, Russellville, age 88
Died Tuesday, June 5, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home
in Russellville. Interment in Colbert Memorial Gardens.

Lorine Hallman, Phil Campbell, age 83
Died Monday, June 4, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel
in Russellville. Interment in Mt. Home Cemetery in Bear Creek.

Earline F. Jackson, Russellville, age 87
Died Monday, June 11, 2018. Visitation will be held Wednesday,
June 13, 2018 from noon to 2 p.m. at Pinkard Funeral Home, with
service at 2 p.m. Interment will be in Liberty Hill Cemetery.

Wayne Winsted, Russellville, age 78
Died Friday, June 8, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel.
Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

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Winchester unseats Shewbart in District 5 race

Former BOE member wins Democratic primary, will face Johnston in November

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education will have one new face representing the west end of the county after Democratic challenger Ralph Winchester defeated incumbent Mike Shewbart in the June 5 primary.

Winchester received 59.5 percent of the votes in what was a light turnout for the Democratic primary. Only 296 voters cast ballots in the District Five Board of Education race.

There was no Republican candidate. Red Bay resident Kacey Hester Johnston has qualified to run as an independent candidate and will face Winchester on November 6.

Johnston, a clinical dietitian nutritionist, is the mother of two boys who attend Red Bay School. Her husband Hugh is a science teacher at Red Bay School.

Winchester has previously served on the Franklin County Board of Education. He lost his seat to Shewbart six years ago by a margin of

528-314, with almost three times as many voters casting ballots in that 2012 race.

Ralton Baker, who represents District One on the Franklin County Board of Education, was unopposed in his bid for another term and did not appear on the June 5 ballot.

Shewbart, who will serve into November, ran for Red Bay mayor two years ago against Charlene Fancher. Shewbart said he was proud of the board's accomplishments during the past six years.

"We've been able to get a lot done these six years, and I'm proud of what we've been able to do," Shewbart said. "I appreciate the cooperation of the board working together, because that's what it takes, and we'll just move forward from here."

Shewbart said the light voter turnout was a factor in Tuesday's results.

"The votes were split up between Democratic and Republican," Shewbart said. "The last couple elections, Red Bay has seen a strong Republican vote. The people have spoken, and I respect their decision."



COURTESY PHOTO

Winchester, who lost his seat to Shewbart in 2012, got 59.5 percent of the votes in what was a light turnout for last week's primary.

Kiel takes Republican Primary with landslide win

November battle with Britton looms in general election for House District 18 seat

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As early returns rolled in last Tuesday, it shaped up to be a good night for House District 18 candidate Jamie Kiel. By night's end, Kiel was on the winning side of a landslide victory with some eye-popping numbers.

Kiel defeated Tony Riley in the Republican Primary for House District 18, the seat vacated by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay), by a margin of 4,311 votes to 1,084, representing an 80/20 percent split.

Kiel will face Democrat Eddie Britton in the November 6 general election. Britton, the longtime principal of Belgreen High School and chairman of the Franklin County Democratic Executive Committee, faced no opposition in last Tuesday's Democratic Primary.

House District 18 includes portions of Franklin, Colbert and Lauderdale counties. Kiel defeated Riley, a Colbert County resident and the human resources manager at Tiffin Motor Homes in Red Bay, in all three. Kiel outgained Riley 1,170-363 in Colbert, 330-122 in Lauderdale and 2,811 to 599 in Franklin County, as he garnered 82 percent of his home county's vote.

"I think people saw me as the local, small-town guy they feel they can talk to," Kiel said. "I'll be available as your representative. That's what I can promise people. We went to houses during this campaign no one else has been to, and we talked with people no one else talked with."

"That's what it's about—reaching people and listening to their thoughts and concerns."

Kiel thanked his network of volunteers for their work in going door-to-door across the district.

"I think people saw me as the local, small-town guy they feel they can talk to," Kiel said. "I'll be available as your representative. That's what I can promise people. We went to houses during this campaign no one else has been to, and we talked with people no one else talked with. That's what it's about—reaching people and listening to their thoughts and concerns."

"It was that great organization of volunteers. That's what won this race tonight," Kiel said last Tuesday. "Tony ran the cleanest and most honorable campaign I could ask for. I told him that with my three daughters how a negative campaign might impact my family and my school-aged children, and I thank him for running such a clean campaign."

Kiel is the founder and owner of Kiel Equipment, a company he began while earning his Management and Marketing degree at the University of North Alabama. He is a graduate of Russellville High School. His wife Melissa is a teacher at Tharptown Elementary School.

Kiel touted his small-business experience throughout his campaign and talked about how managing a budget for a business is similar to managing the budget for the State of Alabama.

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

In Britton, Kiel finds himself running against a familiar opponent.

"His grandkids and my kids go to school together. Melissa works with his daughter-in-law. We know each other well and respect each other," Kiel said. "I'll set out to show what my background and qualifications are, what my party stands for and let the people decide who they want to represent them."

Kiel, in his first run at public office, said he received a call from Riley last Tuesday evening congratulating him on his primary victory.

'TAX,' from page 1

funding to secure the required 20 percent match in order to receive the grants.

That led commissioners to change the proposed amendment to provide for 25 percent of the tax to be used for ATRIP matching funds.

Although one-fourth of the tax revenue doesn't reach his school system, Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes has been a vocal supporter of the amendment.

"I think it says the people of Franklin County appreciate and value education," Grimes said, "and it makes the future of Franklin County and

Russellville much brighter when people have that type of vision and belief of the value of an education system."

The amendment passed in 26 of 26 Franklin County precincts, including staggering margins like 369-124 at Russellville High School, 371-161 in Red Bay and 173-78 in Spruce Pine.

Franklin County voters will consider an amendment in the November general election that would extend the one-cent sales tax for 30 years, rather than the previous two-year periods.

Education administrators say the 30-year period

is crucial in order to use the anticipated revenue as collateral to borrow for capital improvement projects across both systems.

The two-year renewal was necessary on last Tuesday's primary ballots in order to prevent a two-month gap of collection of the tax. Had the amendment not appeared on the primary ballots, collection of the tax would stop prior to the November general election.

Franklin County voters approved the same amendment in 2016 by a margin of 73 percent in favor and 27 percent against.

An offer I could refuse....

It was a routine Thursday morning last week at the *Franklin Free Press* until I answered a telephone call from a foreign-sounding man sharing some life-altering news that I'd won a million dollars AND a new Mercedes from Publishers Clearing House.

To begin with, he never asked my name. He just launched into his spiel about how I'd been randomly chosen to receive \$1,000,000 and a new Mercedes. All I had to do was pay a "nominal" fee for taxes and fees.

Aside from the fact that he didn't know who I was, I also wondered how I won a Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes that I'd never entered. My luck isn't exactly the greatest in the world, but to win \$1,000,000 in a contest I hadn't even signed up for? Maybe my luck was changing...

I asked the man for his name and he responded by saying that wasn't important.

"You need to listen to me, not worry about my name. If you want the Mercedes and the money, you need to send the fee today. Will you be using Western Union?" the man asked.

"Easy there with the attitude," I

responded. "You're talking to a millionaire. Show some respect."

I asked the man where his office was and he said "New York." When I pressed for more details, he again became impatient and told me there were "other winners" he could contact if I wouldn't cooperate.

He again requested I send him three items: 1. A valid identification; 2. My address and Social Security number; 3. \$1,572 for fees to process my winnings.

I countered with an even better offer for the nice gentleman.

"I tell you what. If YOU'LL advance me the \$1,572, I'll pay you back DOUBLE out of my million when I receive it," I told him.

He hung up before I could offer him a ride in my new Mercedes.

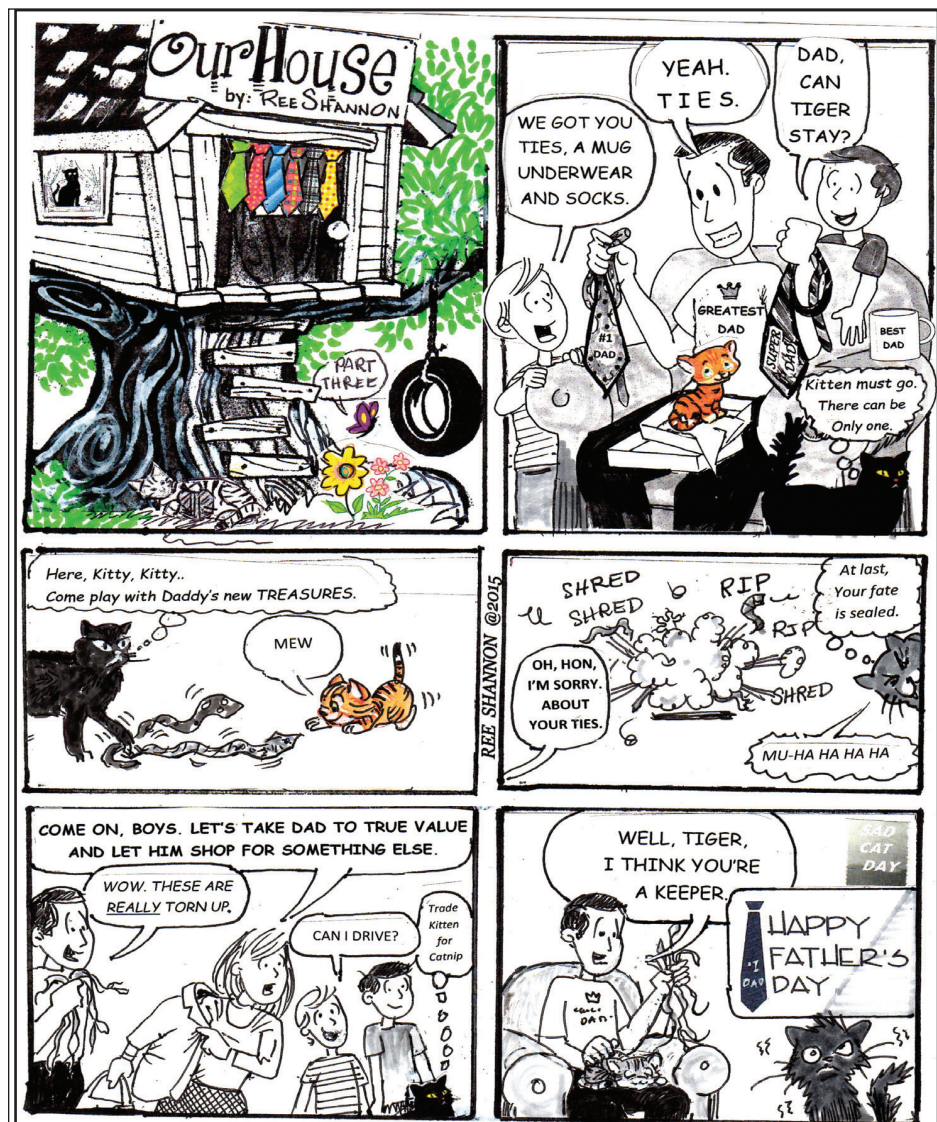
According to the Federal Trade Commission, the fake Publishers Clearing House scam is wide open across the country.

Someone pretending to be with Publishers Clearing House calls and claims you've won the sweepstakes, but in order to collect your prize,

See 'OFFER,' Page 5



John Pilati
Publisher



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Tips for your best Father's Day yet

By Chris Brown

The greatest joy a father can have is serving and caring for his family and community. The more we aim to treat our family like our Father treats us, the more likely they are to live the lives that God wants for them. This Sunday, set the tone early and prepare to enter the day with a grateful heart—even if you add another necktie to your already-full collection. With these six tips, make Father's Day this year the best yet, celebrating family as God's gift to you:

1. *Start with no expectations.* Not only are you setting yourself up to be grateful, but you won't be bummed if your expectations aren't met. Leave these at the door and remind yourself that the day isn't all about you.

2. *Act on your gratitude.* Say thank you as much as possible. To store clerks, strangers who hold the door open for you, or friends and family members. Be especially purposeful about thanking your spouse and your kids. Take time to thank God through prayer and reflection as a family. Let everyone hear the reasons why you're so thankful. Out of the mouth, the heart speaks—Matthew 15 and Luke 6 remind us of this.

3. *Simple acts of kindness.* If your wife normally cooks, makes the bed or cleans the car, do it for her as a surprise. Maybe your kids are at the age where they're learning to clean their own room every morning. You may not care to clean your kids' room for them, but you can grant them one messy day. Completing a chore for your spouse or your kids is a great way to show appreciation for what they do. As Proverbs 11:25 says, those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

4. *Encourage thankfulness.* I'm proud of the

fact that my kids' childhood is different than mine was, but if I'm not careful that can create a sense of entitlement in them. I really want to repel that mindset with all my might. How do I do that? I ask them what they are thankful for all the time. I want my kids to someday be generous, impactful leaders in their families and for the Kingdom, then they need to learn to be thankful. There's no better day to develop this than on Father's Day.

5. *Be a pen pal.* Write to your kids, telling them things you wanted to hear growing up. Our kids want to know that they have what it takes to reach their goals, to be brave and to persevere. We want to encourage them. We also want to point them toward Christ. Let them know they can do whatever they put their minds to, but it's because we can do all things through Christ.

6. *Be present.* When spending time with your family and friends, don't grab your phone every five seconds to check social media. One of the best gifts God has ever entrusted us with is the ability to choose, whether it's where we spend our time or where our focus is. We need to steward that ability like anything else—His way, and for His glory.

The bottom line is you will be amazed by how much better Father's Day feels when it's focused on others. We're truly more blessed to give than to receive—and your Father's Day will be more memorable and meaningful because of it.

*Chris Brown is a pastor and dynamic speaker carrying the message of intentional living nationwide as a Ramsey Personality. Chris and his wife, Holly, live in Franklin, TN, with their three children. Follow Chris online at Stewardship.com, on Twitter and Instagram at @ChrisBrownOnAir, or at facebook.com/ChrisBrownOnAir.

Moore wins another term as probate judge

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore won another term with a resounding victory over challenger Joe Mansell in the June 5 Republican Primary.

Moore, who was appointed to the office of probate judge in 2007, won in 2012 and will serve a third term after last Tuesday's victory. There was no Democratic candidate to qualify for probate judge, and, in spite of some speculation otherwise, no independent candidate turned in paperwork to seek the office in the November general election.

In what was an overall light turnout for Franklin County voters, Moore defeated Mansell by a margin of 2,646 votes to 1,750, representing a split of 60/40 percent. Moore defeated Connie Green in 2012 by a margin of 6,134 to 4,677, more than twice the turnout as compared to last Tuesday.

A central issue in the campaign was the theft of more than \$753,000 by the former county administrator from Franklin County taxpayer funds. Mansell said voters across the county shared their concerns with him about how the pattern of theft lasted more than nine years before being detected.

Moore initially did not publicly address the theft but decided to submit a lengthy letter to the *Franklin Free Press* in April that laid out the timeline of what happened, when it was discovered and what safeguards would be in place to prevent a future similar occurrence.

"As to that issue, I put an article in the paper and explained the details of what happened, because people still had some questions," Moore said. "I wanted to clarify what happened, and I received some good feedback from the article."

Moore credited the efforts of his family and friends in working with him during the campaign.

"We had so many friends and family working together every day, putting up signs, knocking on doors, etc.," Moore said. "We just ran a hard campaign, and I am very humbled, very appreciative to the voters."

"I thank my family and friends for all the help, calls and encouragement I received."

Moore said he thought the large number of grants received by Franklin County through the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) and through Industrial Access Grants, both of which helped improve Franklin County roads and bridges, was an important issue to voters.

"That's something very unique in Franklin County, to see everyone come together, and that's what it takes to get these grants—work at the local, state and federal level," Moore said. "And that's something we'll continue to do over the next six years."

In his first bid at public office, Mansell, the Russellville Fire Department Chief, won boxes in Phil Campbell, Saints Crossroads, Halltown and



Barry Moore

See 'MOORE,' Page 9

'OFFER,' from page 4

you must send money to pay for fees and taxes. The FTC explains this is a sure way to know it's a scammer on the line.

"Paying to collect a prize is a scam. Every time," the FTC explains in a consumer alert dated July 21, 2017. "And scammers like to ask you to send money by Western Union or MoneyGram, or by getting a prepaid card or gift card. Why? Because it's nearly impossible to trace that money—and you'll almost never get your money back."

A few reminders:

•Publishers Clearing House never asks you to pay a fee to collect a

prize. No legitimate prize promoter will ever charge you to win.

•If anyone calls and asks you to pay for a prize, hang up and report it to the FTC.

•Never send money to collect a prize. It's a scam.

If you report it to the FTC and you wired money to a scammer via Western Union between January 1, 2004 and January 19, 2017, you may be eligible for a refund. Log onto the FTC website to learn more at www.consumer.ftc.gov.

Time to cut this column short. I'm going for a ride in my new Mercedes....

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 Attention all young ladies of Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale counties entering 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in the Fall of 2018!!! The Distinguished Young Women Scholarship Program will be held Saturday, August 4 at Norton Auditorium on the campus of The University of North Alabama. Young ladies entering the 12th grade will have the opportunity to compete for cash scholarships as well as many other scholarships to colleges and universities. Also, each county winner will have the opportunity to represent her county at the state program in Montgomery in January of 2019. Young ladies entering the 10th and 11th grades have the opportunity to be "DYW Little Sisters." For more information, contact Susan Hargett at 256-710-9239 or Katernia Cole-Coffey at 256-332-8880, or check information on our Facebook page at Distinguished Young Women of Northwest Alabama, or email dshargett@aol.com. Other information and sign-up is available at www.DistinguishedYW.org. Please contact us no later than June 23, 2018.


 The American Legion Department of Alabama Conference is June 14-17. The next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be Thursday, June 21 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.


 Orange Baptist Church will hold Vacation Bible School this Saturday, June 16 from 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m. The church is located at 8153 Highway 34 in Russellville. VBS will be one day only. For more information, please call 256-332-2296.


 First Free Will Baptist Church, Russellville, invites you to a fun evening at City Lake Park this Sunday, June 17, starting at 6 p.m. There will be a devotion, food, games and lots of fun! Come join us!


 The East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be serving William Bishop's smoked chicken and pulled barbecue pork plates from 4-7 p.m. on Friday, June 22. Proceeds will be used to purchase residential 911 address signs. Plates are \$10 each and will be available at the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department, 10443 Hwy. 81.


 First Free Will Baptist Church, Russellville, will hold a "Kid's Crusade" for Pre-K through eighth grade on Saturday, June 23 from 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. There will be Bible preaching, music, crafts and games. Snack and lunch provided. Church is located at 16140 Hwy. 43 North.

 North Russellville Baptist Church will host Vacation Bible School, "Beach Party, Surfin' Through the Scriptures," on Saturday, June 23 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Lunch will be provided. For more information, call 256-460-2301. The church is located at 1401 Waterloo Road in Russellville.

 The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, July 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.

 The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Lt. Col. John W. Harris Jr., Camp #1833 will meet Thursday, August 2 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 information, call 256-324-2317. Everyone is welcome to attend!

 Mountain Valley Hee Haw features live music every Friday and Saturday night. Show time is 6 p.m. Karaoke at 7 p.m. on Thursday nights. Free admission. No alcohol or drugs. From Russellville, take 243 to Hwy. 79, turn right, go 1/4 mile, third building on left. Call 256-332-5479 or 256-810-4840.

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

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COURTESY PHOTO

Childhood friends and Winston County natives Ben Rubino and Bo Steele make up The Band Steele, the Saturday night headliner for this year's Phil Campbell Hoedown.

Phil Campbell preps for 17th annual Hoedown

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

This weekend's 17th annual Phil Campbell Hoedown promises plenty of food, fun and entertainment in downtown Phil Campbell.

According to Phil Campbell mayor Steve Bell, organizers of the event decided a few years ago to enhance the annual hoedown by upgrading the entertainment and music schedule. This year's Saturday night headliner, The Band Steele, is an example of that effort.

"It's a great event each year to see a lot of familiar faces around town and a lot we don't know, but realize they are from close by," Bell said. "We always have a big crowd, and the last few years we've tried to improve the entertainment, and that's attracted new people to the event."

The Band Steele includes childhood friends Bo Steele and Ben Rubino from Winston County. The Band Steele has performed across the country and has opened for major artists including Hunter Hayes, Diamond Rio, John Michael Montgomery, Jamey Johnson and Mick Fleetwood.

The band has several music videos online, some of which have more than 600,000 views. "The Lineman," written to honor linemen and their families, was inspired by the band's involvement in a 2016 movie, *Life on the Line*, which starred John Travolta, Kate Bosworth and Sharon Stone.

The Band Steele's debut country EP, *Tan Lines & Moonshine*, featured the debut single "Tan Lines" and another original, "Sit Awhile," a tribute to the United States military and their families.

The band recently released "Victory in Jesus," and the video for that song has already exceeded 170,000 views in a few months.

The Band Steele signed a multi-album record deal with Fire River Records in 2016.

See 'HOEDOWN,' page 11

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Barry Moore, Probate Judge



Bonner mulls legal action against state committee

Controversial PSC candidate nearly wins Republican primary despite public censure

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Like him or not, Jim Bonner won't back down from a fight.

And a fight is exactly what Bonner found himself in the middle of in late May after the Alabama Republican Party Candidate Committee publicly censured him and subsequently voted to not certify any votes he received in the June 5 primary.

But Bonner moved full steam ahead with his campaign, and in spite of the decision not to certify his votes, Bonner received 217,016 votes in the most publicized race for Alabama Public Service Commission Place One in history. Bonner narrowly lost to incumbent Jeremy Oden, who received 220,690 votes, representing 50.42 percent to Bonner's 49.58 percent.

Oden will face Democratic nominee Cara McClure of Birmingham in the November 6 general election, unless Bonner prevails in his legal challenge to the primary.

In an exclusive interview last Wednesday with the *Free Press*, Bonner confirmed he will "seek legal action" as a result of the Republican state committee's decision. Bonner is represented by Huntsville attorney Rex Davis.

"I don't know exactly what we're going to do moving forward, because it's so complex," Bonner said. "There are some people taking office after November who might be sympathetic to a court challenge. We'll just have to wait and see. There was an appeal filed within 30 minutes of when the committee voted."

Bonner, 65, lives in Marion County near the Franklin County line. The primary source of the state committee's action resulted from social media posts made by Bonner that were labeled as

"egregious" by Alabama Republican Party chairwoman Terry Lathan.

Bonner's posts were accused of being anti-Semitic and racist by his critics, although he steadfastly denies he's a racist or an anti-Semite.



COURTESY PHOTO

Despite the Republican Party Candidate Committee's decision not to certify any votes Bonner received due to his "egregious" social media posts, he still garnered 217,016 votes (49.58 percent of the total votes cast) in the Public Service Commission Place 1 primary.

"Do I regret any of the Facebook posts? No, I don't think so," Bonner said last Wednesday. "I made a post of a Muslim Barbie doll with a string on it saying no one knows what she says yet because we haven't had the courage to pull the string."

"That's funny. I don't care who you are."

Bonner recently made another post that read "Not racist. I love white people, people of color, Jews and Indians. I just hate Muslims."

Yet another Facebook post of Bonner's referenced his receiving a valentine that read "my love 4 u burns like 6,000 Jews." Again, Bonner said the outrage was misguided.

"It was a Hitler joke, not a Jew joke," Bonner said. "And I regret people didn't get it. I am sick and tired of people who run out with a label maker and stick racist labels and anti-Semitic labels on you."

Two days before the primary election, Bonner posted the following: "I remain amazed that there are still people who don't realize that I posted inflammatory stuff to get free publicity. Some are in denial that I played them like Chinese fiddles."

And free publicity played right into Bonner's hand. State campaign finance reports show Bonner spent less than \$10,000 on his PSC campaign, compared to expenses for Oden exceeding \$550,000.

In spite of that disparity in spending, advance polling showed Bonner leading in much of the state, something his critics attributed to confusion with his last name. In Mobile, home of former Congressman Jo Bonner, James Bonner held a 28 percent to six percent lead in polling two weeks ago. Jo Bonner held a press conference last week to clarify he was not seeking office and that he had

See 'BONNER,' page 9

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Stutts, Lolley headed for runoff in Senate District 6

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Although he received the most votes in four of his district's five counties, Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) fell short of receiving a majority in last Tuesday's Republican Primary and will face runoff opposition from Guin resident Steve Lolley in the Senate District Six race.

Stutts received a total of 7,410 votes, with 4,506 to Lolley and 3,817 to Eric Aycock. Stutts' percentage was 47.10 percent, with Lolley receiving 28.64 percent.

The runoff election will take place Tuesday, July 17. Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) will face the runoff winner on November 6, 2018.

The July 17 runoff will be open to voters who either voted in the Republican Primary on June 5 or those who did not vote at all on June 5. Voters who cast ballots in the Democratic Primary are ineligible under Alabama law to vote in the Republican runoff.

Stutts, 63, an OB/GYN from Tuscumbia, and his wife Jackie have four children and five grandchil-

dren. Lolley, 52, is a retired banker who lives in Guin. He and his wife Sherrae have two daughters.

Stutts won a majority of votes in his home Colbert County, finishing with 3,436 to 768 for Lolley and 1,907 for Aycock, also a Colbert County resident.

Although he received the most votes in four of his district's five counties, Stutts fell short of receiving a majority in last Tuesday's Republican Primary and will face Lolley in a July 17 runoff.

Stutts received 40.60 percent of Franklin County votes, compared to 34.49 for Lolley and 24.91 for Aycock.

In Lauderdale County, Stutts won handily with 63 percent of all votes cast. Aycock received 23 percent and Lolley 14 percent. Senate District Six includes a small portion of Lawrence County, where Stutts also received a majority of votes, 53.42 percent, to Lolley's 19.86 percent and Aycock's 26.71 percent.

Lolley had a strong showing in his home Marion

County, where he received a majority vote of 51.55 percent, to 34.72 percent for Stutts and 13.74 percent for Aycock.

In a social media post late Tuesday, Aycock thanked the voters for "all the support you have shown me and my family. I love you all. I've learned so much," Aycock said.

Late last Tuesday, Lolley posted his appreciation to voters as he informed his supporters he would be in a runoff.

"Thank you everyone who has helped with this campaign. There's no way we could be this far without you! Now, I'm going to bed and will start again at 5:00 in the morning," Lolley said. "I'll be on the road a lot over the next couple of days, but let's all talk."

Stutts said he was looking forward to the July 17 runoff as he thanked his supporters Wednesday morning.

"Our family continues to be overwhelmed by the support and love shown to us," Stutts said. "Looking forward to the runoff on July 17 and continuing to spread our positive, conservative message for northwest Alabama."

Six local eateries earn satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The six Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of May 28 through June 1 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 93 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 99, received by Russellville Hospital, 15155 Highway 43, 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, 93. (Food in warmer out of temp).

- Cardinal Drive In, 602 4th St. W, Red Bay, 94.
- Cedar Creek Chevron, 11477 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94. (Baked beans out of temp).
- Frosty Inn Drive In, 12805 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 95.
- Piggly Wiggly Deli #93, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 96.

Of the inspections done in Colbert County from May 28, 2018 through June 1, 2018, no restaurants scored below the satisfactory range.

The high score for the week in Colbert County was 99, received by Hatton Elementary, 2130 Hatton School Road, Leighton, Leighton Elementary, 8100 Old Hwy. 20, Leighton and Webster Elementary, 200 Webster St., Muscle Shoals.

Updated ratings are available at www.food-scores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

'MOORE,' from page 5

Lawlers. Mansell said he always wanted to continue his public service and seek elected office, and he has no regrets about making his run this year.

"I talked with Barry before qualifying and told him this was just something I've wanted to do, and it was nothing personal," Mansell said. "This was a chance to get my name out and get a feel for politics. When you put your name out there, people

say things, and it's not an easy thing to do. I respect the men and women who run for public office.

"I won't shut the door about running for office again, but it takes a lot of wear and tear on your family. We spent three months beating on doors, and that's time away from your family."

Mansell called Moore last Tuesday evening to

congratulate him.

"I told him any time he needs me, I'll be there," Mansell said. "I'll pray for him every day that the best things possible happen for Franklin County. I want to see him move Franklin County forward."

"The people spoke and are pleased with the direction Franklin County is moving. I'll be there any way I can to support him the next six years."

'BONNER,' from page 8

no relation to James Bonner.

Bonner received a majority of votes in 50 of Alabama's 67 counties but lost large counties including Jefferson, Madison and Morgan.

"I was winning and winning by double digits in all 67 counties, and they had to do something," Bonner said. "Twinkle [Cavanaugh] was winning by double digits, so Alabama Power said if this Jim Bonner guy wins we'll have two empty seats on the Public Service Commission.

"Alabama Power could not stand a rate review. That's the primary reason all this happened. My

AEA rep said they will spend half a billion dollars to beat you. I said I expect them to spend half a million dollars, and he said not a half million, a half billion."

Bonner said he was questioned by the state Republican committee about his being on Social Security, allegedly filing bankruptcy and in-kind election expenses from a prior campaign.

Bonner has sought public office numerous times, including failed runs at Senate District Six, House District 17 and Colbert County Probate Judge, but still believes his close race Tuesday will have rip-

ple effects across Alabama.

"I am pleased because I was vindicated by the voters," Bonner said. "My prediction is my race will cause a lot of people to be aggravated at the Republican Party and cause Walt Maddox to be the next Alabama governor. I've been an influencing agent, a catalyst, in several races I've been in. I just haven't crossed the finish line."

Attempts to reach Oden for comment on this article were unsuccessful, and a message left with him had not been returned as of 5 p.m. last Wednesday.



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YARD SALES/ ESTATE SALES

Yard Sale this Friday & Saturday, June 15-16, at 1212 Scott Ave. NW in Russellville. Baby girl clothes (newborn to 24 months), baby equipment like baths and toys.

Multi-family Yard Sale this Saturday, June 16 at home of Jayne Wells. 4 blocks south of Frosty Inn, Hwy. 43 in A.B. Hester Subdivision. Dishes, lawnmower, kitchen items, furniture, sewing machine, 9 boxes of record albums, DVDs, lamps & decorations, dolls, toys, clothes (baby, boy's, girl's, men's, women's, name-brand), ladies' uniforms (medium to 2XL). Something for everyone! Come check us out!

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for sale. Waterproof. Never used. Paid \$140. Will sell for \$70. Call 256-263-7636. (4)

1964 Chevrolet Truck Hood for sale. Good condition. \$75. Call 256-810-1808. (4)

Trimmer/mower w/big roll of trimmer, \$200. Garden tools, \$5 and \$10 each. Call 205-993-5961. (5)

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Motorcycles for sale. \$15 for six consecutive weeks. Up to 25 words per ad; Pets For Sale only \$10 for six consecutive weeks. Up to 25 words per ad; Free of Charge: Lost & Found, Giveaways, and Items Under \$100 (Private Parties Only). 15-word limit; Commercial Classified Rates: \$25 for Businesses, 15 words or less for six weeks. Ads exceeding word limit add \$10 per additional 15 words. The number in parentheses represents the number of times the ad has appeared. Call us at 256-332-0255 to place, cancel or renew your ad. Payment is required in advance of publication for ads.

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RCS Board okays personnel moves

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved several personnel moves in a short meeting on June 7, 2018.

The board accepted the retirement of longtime bookkeeper Marilyn Keelon at Russellville Elementary School, effective July 1, 2018. Three resignations in position were also approved, including Betty Heaton, RES teacher; Lori Alford, West Elementary School teacher; and Jean Ann Gault, West Elementary School teacher.

The following employees were hired for the 2018-19 school year: Kelly Pouncey, teacher, WES; Caitlan Smith, teacher, RES; Jessica Marsh, English teacher at Russellville Middle School; Meredith Dorroh, special education teacher, WES; Caitlin Witt, teacher, RES; and Rachel Seal, teacher, WES.

The board approved the transfer of Tony Bonds from assistant principal/history teacher at RMS to assistant principal at Russellville Elementary School. Kristie Ezzell was approved for temporary employment as the 21st Century Community Learning Program Administrator, part-time, effective July 1, 2018, and the board renewed her contract as RES principal for a three-year period.

Deedra Moore's resignation in supplement as girls varsity golf coach at Russellville High School was also approved.

In other moves, the board:

- Approved facility use requests as follows: RHS Fine Arts Center and Auditorium on January 17-19, 2019, by the RHS Band Department to host the annual Northwest Alabama Honor Band; RHS football stadium on June 9, 2018, for the "Kick for a Cause" community fundraiser for Arturo Betancourt.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education will be Tuesday, June 26 at 8 a.m.

'MADDEN', from page 1

Moore asked Tompkins to impose a sentence "fitting the crime, one that went on for ten years."

The case began earlier this year when investigators with the Alabama Attorney General's Office obtained a search warrant for financial records from both Madden and the Franklin County Commission related to an investigation of fraudulent activity during Madden's tenure as Franklin County Administrator.

The investigation revealed that Madden stole more than \$753,000 of taxpayer monies over a 10-year period by falsifying purchase orders and then writing herself county checks for the amounts of the purchase orders.

Moore was the only witness called by the State of Alabama Monday. Holt called Madden's daughter and husband, her pastor, her employer Karen Kuykendall and retired law enforcement officer Mike Mayfield.

Kuykendall testified Madden was employed by her in Kuykendall's consulting company. She said her company works with businesses on how to obtain Department of Defense contracts.

"Crista has worked for me the last few weeks. As her friend and employer, I stand behind her on this journey, and she will make right what has been done wrong to Franklin County," Kuykendall said.

Moore asked Tompkins to impose a sentence "fitting the crime, one that went on for ten years."

Mayfield, who is Madden's brother-in-law, said the best interests of Franklin County would not be served by sending Madden to prison. Instead, Mayfield asked the court to allow her to have the opportunity to pay restitution and work while on probation.

Holt told the court his client was prepared to pay \$76,000, approximately one-tenth of the total loss, toward restitution Monday.

"Crista has attempted to prove her good faith in wanting to pay this amount back," Holt said. "She's obtained employment and training and has \$76,000 today to apply toward restitution to show she will continue to make good-faith efforts to pay this back."

Holt also said Madden was willing to apply all monies she receives through her State of Alabama retirement toward restitution.

Prior to Holt's statement, Madden addressed the court.

"I want to express my deepest remorse for these illegal actions," Madden said. "I regret the stress, shame and hardship brought upon the Franklin County Commission and Probate Judge Barry Moore....I apologize to all the employees of Franklin County, the citizens of Franklin County and my church."

"I humbly ask you to decide when sentencing me to consider my entire life. I still feel I have much to contribute to society."

After a lengthy consultation with her attorneys and her family following her sentencing on Monday, Madden was transported to the Franklin County Jail. A sheriff's department spokesman said she would be transported into the state prison system this week.

'HOEDOWN', from page 7

Friday evening's entertainment schedule includes the gospel group Purpose at 7 p.m. on the outdoor stage at the downtown park, with New Ground to follow at 8 p.m.

Saturday's entertainment begins in the morning with the annual Car and Bike Show. Mayor Bell will handle opening ceremonies on the stage at 11 a.m., followed by contests including the annual bubble gum blowing contest. Station Street takes the stage at 1:30 p.m., followed by Fairlane at 3 p.m., the J.J. Scott Band at 4:30, Jerry Martin and the Free State Band at 6 p.m.

A dance contest featuring the twist

and buck dancing begins at 6 p.m., and headliners The Band Steele open their set at 8 p.m.

Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs to enjoy the musical entertainment. Additionally, there will be door prize drawings throughout the day Saturday.

The annual Judy James Memorial 5K Run will start at 8 a.m. on Saturday, June 16. Pre-registration is available online by going to www.philcampbellal.com and clicking on the Hoedown website.

Hoedown shirts are available for purchase at Phil Campbell City Hall and at the event while they last.



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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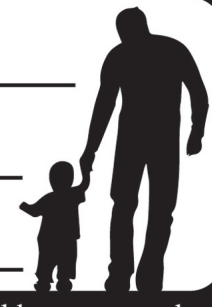
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Former RHS stars Cody Greenhill and Judd Ward both stepped up in the late innings to help Auburn earn a 3-2 win over Florida in Sunday's Super Regional game. See story Page 17.



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Russellville's Taylor earns All-State nod

Vina's Hester, four Tharptown players also honored by ASWA

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Six players from Franklin County—four from Tharptown, plus one each from Russellville and Vina—were named to the 2018 Alabama Sports Writers Association All-State Softball Team, announced last Friday.

Russellville sophomore centerfielder A.J. Taylor was a first-team All-State selection by the ASWA in Class 5A after helping the Lady Golden Tigers win 24 games and earn a third straight regional berth. Taylor batted .406 on

See 'TAYLOR,' Page 14



FILE PHOTO

Taylor provided plus range and a strong arm in center in addition to her steady contributions at the plate, where she hit .406 with five home runs and a .445 OBP.

Ezzell headed to UAH

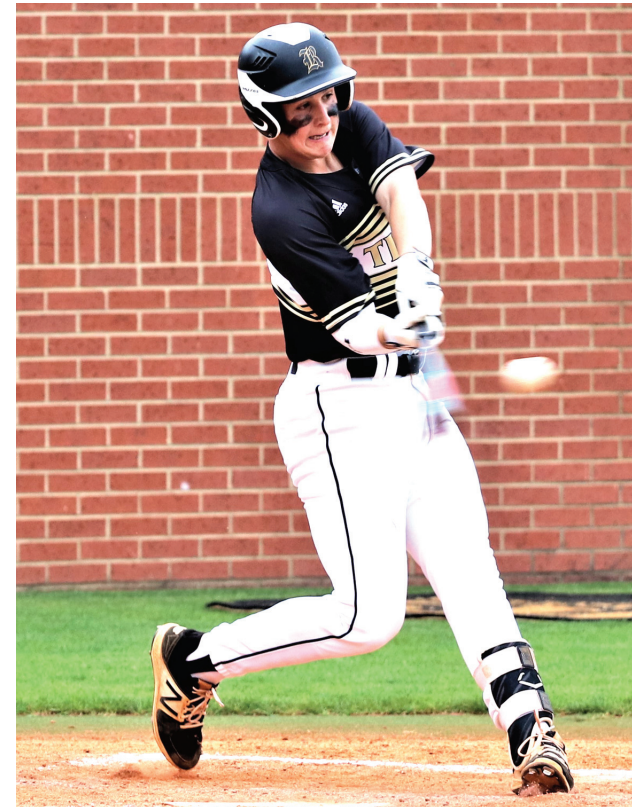
Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Every dynasty has a beginning. Beneath all the wins, all the championships, the postseason successes and the record-setting performances, there is almost always a defining moment—clear as crystal—where everything started.

For the Russellville baseball dynasty, that moment came on a Tuesday night in early April of 2015, with rival Lawrence County in town to open up a pivotal late-season series that would decide the area championship. Ace pitcher Cody Greenhill, then a sophomore, was dominant on the mound for the Golden Tigers, striking out 12 batters and holding the Red Devils to a pair of infield singles. Lawrence County lefthander Preston Montgomery was just as good, however, and Russellville—due to a defensive breakdown in the top of the fifth—found itself trailing 2-1 with three outs to go.

Leading off the bottom of the seventh inning for the home team was Landon Ezzell, a freshman second baseman who had begun the season on the jayvee before quickly hitting his way into the everyday lineup at the varsity level. Just five days earlier, in the first game of a doubleheader at Decatur, Ezzell had cracked the first two home runs of what would become a four-year varsity career. Montgomery left a first-pitch fastball up

See 'EZZELL,' Page 18



FILE PHOTO

CHARGED UP - Nine of Ezzell's 16 career home runs at RHS came in his senior season. He chose to sign with the Chargers over offers from Calhoun, Snead State and Beville State.

Murray signs with Stillman

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Hayden Murray says he's always been a big Alabama fan, but the allure of fall Saturdays at Bryant-Denny Stadium had nothing to do with his decision to sign an offer to play baseball for Stillman College, an NAIA school in Tuscaloosa.

Instead, it was a comment from Stillman assistant coach and recruiting coordinator David Branham that ultimately helped Murray make up his mind.

"I love Tuscaloosa," said Murray, who graduated from Red Bay High School last month. "I've always been a big Alabama fan, but that's nowhere near why I really picked this school. I went down there and watched them play baseball, and I really loved the way they played. I liked the coach. They

See 'MURRAY,' Page 16



COURTESY PHOTO

LABOR OF LOVE - Murray's willingness to work at the game he loves helped him earn a shot to play at the next level.

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Greg Hamilton
Franklin County
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‘TAYLOR’ from page 13

the year and reached base at a .445 clip, both good for second on the team. She also ranked among team leaders in hits (third with 52), home runs (fifth with five), doubles (third with eight), RBIs (tied for third with 34), runs scored (third with 42), stolen bases (first with 25) and multi-hit games (tied for second with 14).

According to head coach Kathryn Montgomery, though, stats alone can't do justice to the value of Taylor's contributions.

“Not only do her numbers leave a lasting impression,” Montgomery said, “but her fight and determination made a huge difference to our season—particularly at regionals in our second game against Scottsboro. She flew in from center field with a spark that set our girls ablaze. I can't remember her exact words, but they left us all with goose bumps and tears. She reminded them of how hard they had worked to get where they were, and that by working together and doing the best that each one could, we could keep moving forward toward our goal.

“That moment, resulting from A.J. and others doing as they have been asked and playing with their hearts exposed, undoubtedly drew the girls together and led to a come-from-behind win.”

Taylor delivered more than merely a motivational speech that afternoon in Huntsville; she also came through with a walk-off RBI single in the bottom of the seventh to give the Lady Golden Tigers a thrilling 5-4 win. They lost their next game 9-8 to Alexandria, finishing one game shy of the state tournament, but Taylor will be back as one of eight returning starters next season who will be looking to lead Russellville to a state championship.

“A.J. is an all-round player,” Montgomery said. “She had an overall stand-out year for us, and I expect that to continue in the last two seasons she has left as a Golden Tiger.”

“A.J. is an all-round player,” Montgomery said. “She brought speed, power, knowledge, range, a strong arm, a team-propelling attitude and many other traits to our program this year that make her worthy of this [All-State] honor. She had an overall stand-out year for us, and I expect that to continue in the last two seasons she has left as a Golden Tiger.”

Amelia Dawson's high school career has come to a close, but Tharptown's senior first baseman went out with a bang in 2018, earning first-team All-State honors in Class 1A. She batted .471 (33-for-70), good for second on the team, and led the Lady Wildcats with a stellar .602 OBP [she drew 11 walks and got hit by a pitch 12 times]. Dawson hit a grand slam in a 9-2 win at Shoals Christian on April 2 and also finished the year with five doubles, 19 RBIs and 17 runs scored.

Dawson helped Tharptown (16-16) reach the North Regional Tournament in Huntsville, where she drove in a run in an 8-2 win over Athens Bible and then went 3-for-3 with a two-run double in an extra-inning loss to Waterloo.

Pitcher Olivia Ergle, centerfielder Brooke Daily and catcher Shaylee Wieting, all sophomores, also earned All-State honors for the Lady Wildcats.

Ergle, a second-team selection, opened the season in dominant fashion, striking out 10 batters in a five-inning no-hitter against Addison on February 23. She no-hit Phillips on March 6, striking out 12 in an 11-0 win, and then threw her third no-no in a three-week span on March 13, striking out nine Hackleburg hitters in a 14-1 romp. Featuring a plus fastball in her four-pitch arsenal, Ergle posted five games with double-digit strikeouts and finished the season with 161 K's (and only 35 walks) in 112.2 innings. She went 13-10 with a 2.29 ERA, and she shut down Athens Bible at the regional tournament with a four-hit, 11-strikeout gem in an 8-2 win.

Daily also earned second-team All-State honors in Class 1A as an outfielder after leading the Lady Wildcats with 42 hits and a .483 average this season. Twelve of those hits went for extra bases, including nine doubles, two triples and a grand slam on April 19 in a 15-2 win at Hackleburg. Daily drove in 24 runs, scored 29, stole nine bases and finished second on the team with a .549 OBP, all while providing standout defense in center.

Wieting, who moved behind the plate on a full-time basis in 2018, continued to spark Tharptown's offensive attack at the top of the order, earning All-State honorable mention from the ASWA for the second year in a row. She hit .389 (37-for-95) on the season, leading the team in walks (14), stolen bases (30) and runs scored (44). Her three triples and nine doubles tied her for the team lead in extra-base hits, and she was third with a .482 OBP.

Over the past two seasons, Wieting has racked up 82 hits, six triples, 22 doubles, 46 RBIs, 99 runs scored, 41 walks and 58 stolen bases in 62 tries.

Vina senior catcher Abby Hester capped off her prolific career by earning All-State honors for a third consecutive year. A second-team selection in Class 1A, Hester hit .537 this season, with 44 hits in 82 at bats. She also drew 23 walks, reaching base at a .645 clip out of the leadoff spot.

Hester stole a remarkable 71 bases in 73 attempts, bringing her career total to 338 steals—the second-most by a single player in AHSAA history. Hester struck out only seven times all season and scored 46 runs in 34 games; she also shined defensively, racking up 21 assists from behind the plate.

Five local players receive All-State baseball honors

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Five baseball players from Franklin County received All-State honors from the Alabama Sports Writers Association this weekend, including Phil Campbell senior slugger Peyton Thomas for a fourth straight season.

Thomas, a UNA signee who graduated from PCHS last month, was a first-team All-State selection in Class 2A at third base. Also in Class 2A, Red Bay junior Kolby Bragwell was named second-team All-State as a designated hitter for the second year in a row.

Russellville, which fell one series short of winning a fourth consecutive Class 5A state championship, had three players chosen to the All-State team. Senior Landon Ezzell was a first-team selection as a pitcher; senior shortstop Rudy Fernandez made second-team All-State; and senior third baseman Houston Kitterman received honorable mention.

Thomas (who earned All-State honorable mention as a freshman and first-team honors as a sophomore before being named Class 2A Hitter of the Year as a junior) capped off his remarkable career with another first-team selection following an outstanding season in 2018.

Thomas (who earned All-State honorable mention as a freshman and first-team honors as a sophomore before being named Class 2A Hitter of the Year as a junior) capped off his remarkable career with another outstanding season in 2018. He slugged 10 home runs, two shy of his career-high, batting .469 (46-for-98) with 12 doubles, 30 RBIs and 32 runs scored.

Thomas drew 29 walks and got hit by a pitch seven times, fueling a stellar .612 on-base percentage. He had more multi-hit games (13) than strikeouts (11) and put together a late-season hot streak during which he collected 14 hits in 14 at bats.

The 32nd and final home run of Thomas's prep career was a two-run blast against Mars Hill in Game 1 of a second-round playoff series. He also finished his time at Phil Campbell with 50 doubles, 135 RBIs, 152 runs scored and a walk/strikeout ratio of 112/38.

As hot as Thomas was toward the end of his season, Bragwell was even hotter at the beginning of his. Over the course of Red Bay's first 12 games, Bragwell batted an eye-popping .703 (26-for-37) with five home runs. He finished the season at .544, pounding out 49 hits (including six homers, two triples and six doubles) in 90 at bats.

Bragwell knocked in 31 runs, scored 36 and drew 21 walks, reaching base at a .637 clip. He struck out only nine times all year, stole 17 bases in 18 tries and led all of Franklin County with 16 multi-hit games.

Ezzell turned heads with a monster postseason at the plate, but the ASWA saw fit to recognize him for his outstanding work on the mound. Fully recovered from offseason surgery to repair the UCL in his right elbow, Ezzell opened his senior season with a streak of 26 consecutive innings without allowing an earned run.

The hard-throwing righthander dropped three straight decisions at one point before righting the ship with an all-time performance against East Limestone on April 10. Ezzell threw an extraordinary 86 of his 115 pitches for strikes, racking up a career-high 16 K's in seven innings. He issued just one walk and finished with a complete game three-hitter in an 8-1 win that put the Golden Tigers back in the driver's seat in the Class 5A, Area 16 race.

Ezzell picked up another complete game win in round one of the playoffs against Etowah and finished the season 6-4 with two saves and a 2.02 ERA in 15 appearances, including 12 starts. He held opponents to just 45 hits in 59.1 innings, striking out 53 and walking 17. He also posted the best strike rate (65 percent) on Russellville's staff.

Fernandez flourished in his first season as a full-time starter, leading the Golden Tigers with 52 hits and a .344 batting average. He smacked six home runs and also ranked among team leaders with nine doubles, 35 RBIs, 37 runs scored, 25 walks, 14 multi-hit games and a .441 OBP.

Fernandez put together a strong playoff run, going 15-for-43 with nine RBIs in 12 postseason games. He hit a three-run homer to seal Game 2 of a first-round series with Etowah and then came through with a clutch RBI double in the sixth inning of a decisive Game 3 win over Springville in the quarterfinals.

Kitterman shook off a slow start to have an outstanding senior season, leading the team with a .459 OBP and finishing second with a .340 batting average and 49 hits. He hit three home runs (all in area play) and walked more times (23) than he struck out (18).

Kitterman drove in 22 runs, scored 34 and had 12 multi-hit games. He was hot in the playoffs, batting .359 (14-for-39) with 10 runs scored in 12 games to help Russellville reach Montgomery for a fourth straight season.

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'MURRAY', from page 13

love to practice, and [Branham] told me, 'You're gonna be out here for a few hours.' I really liked that.

"Their players love to practice on their own—it's not work for them, either. It's more of a love for the game. I love to do the same thing."

Red Bay head coach Richard Maggerise, who had accompanied Murray on his trip to T-Town, knew immediately that Branham had said the magic words.

"When he said that, Coach Maggerise just smiled," Murray recalled. "He knew that was exactly what I wanted to hear. He said, 'They love to work, and so do you.'"

That passion for the game and dedication to his craft were what drove Murray to leave Vina High School after his sophomore year and transfer to Red Bay, where he could work with Maggerise—a kindred spirit and fellow baseball junkie—and play alongside Chandler Allen, a long-time friend of Murray's who was a year ahead of him in school.

Murray, who takes groundballs and extra swings by the bushel but never a day off, is the baseball equivalent of a basketball gym rat, and he was eager to surround himself with like-minded people who shared his affinity for hard work—though you're not likely to hear him call it that. The phrase 'labor of love' may as well have been invented to describe Murray's approach to baseball practice.

"I love every second of it. Everybody calls it work, but it's not work to me," he said. "Me and Chandler, when we get off work, we'll go up to the field at like ten o'clock and practice. We'll hit some, he'll throw me some groundballs, I'll catch for him when he needs to pitch. Baseball has always been fun to me. It didn't matter if I was practicing or playing a game—I loved it. It didn't matter how long practice was, if it was one hour or five hours, I love every second of it.

"It's just my game."

Murray, a 5'9, 155-pound infielder/pitcher who signed with Stillman as a second baseman, appreciates the fact that baseball is a sport where a certain physical size and stature aren't prerequisites for success. Being on the small side never discouraged Murray from envisioning himself as a college baseball player and then doing everything he could to make that vision a reality.

"It's always been a dream of mine, since Little League," Murray said. "My eighth- and ninth-grade year, I really started feeling good about myself, and I wanted to make that my goal. I wanted to prove everybody wrong. I was the kid who never had the body size to make it as a college baseball player, but that's what I was striving for. I worked as hard as I could.

"If you've got the work ethic and you've got the heart to play, then anybody can do it. I'm blessed to be one of the few who get to have that opportunity."

Murray had no reason to doubt that his hard work would be rewarded, and seeing Allen—his close friend and practice partner—accept an offer in November of 2016 to play at Blue Mountain College in Mississippi only served to harden his resolve.

"With me and him working together so much," Murray said, "for that to pay off and for him to get that opportunity really encouraged me to keep working and maybe I would have the same opportunity. I helped him, he helped me—we helped each other out, and now we both have this opportunity."

It's an opportunity that Maggerise always believed Murray would eventually earn. The faith, support and encouragement Murray received from 'Coach Maj-ee' are things he won't soon forget.

"He's always supported me any way I needed," Murray. "He's the one who told me, 'It's not your size that matters.' I'm not like Kolby Bragwell [a rising senior slugger at Red Bay who goes 6'3, 205]. He's a really big boy, and he can launch the ball five hundred feet when he hits it. Coach said, 'It's not gonna be your size that gets you a scholarship. It's gonna be your heart and your work ethic and you striving to get better.' I can't thank him enough for everything he's done for me.

"Coach Maj-ee, I loved playing for him. Early on, before I came to Red Bay, I played summer ball for him, and I loved the way he coached. He's always told me he loves coaching me. We just had great chemistry with each other. He's always been there for me, kind of like a father-son bond. We're really close, me and him."

Murray excelled at Red Bay, batting .348 over the course of his two seasons in a Tiger uniform with a .445 OBP and more walks (30) than strikeouts (23). In 60 games, he collected 63 hits (including two triples and seven doubles), drove in 37 runs, scored 38 and stole 28 bases in 33 attempts.

Murray shifted from second base to shortstop midway through his junior season and played primarily at short this past year—when he wasn't on the mound, that is. Murray stepped into Allen's role as staff ace in 2018 and flourished, going 7-3 with a 2.02 ERA and 62 strikeouts in 66 innings. He completed six of his 10 starts, tossing a pair of shutouts, and demonstrated outstanding command, throwing 68 percent of his pitches for strikes and issuing

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Former Russellville stars come through for AU in Super Regional Game 2

Staff reports

With Auburn's season on the line this past Sunday afternoon in Gainesville, two former Russellville stars stepped up in the late innings to help the Tigers keep their College World Series hopes alive with a 3-2 win over top-seeded Florida in Game 2 of a best-of-three Super Regional series.

The decisive Game 3 was set for Monday night (after press time), with Auburn looking to clinch a CWS berth for the first time since 1994.

Following a leadoff single by Florida's Keenan Bell in the seventh inning of a 1-1 game on Sunday, Auburn coach Butch Thompson lifted starter Tanner Burns and brought in top reliever Cody Greenhill, a 2017 graduate of Russellville High School. Greenhill, named to the 2018 Collegiate Baseball Freshman All-America Team earlier in the week, induced a pair of lazy fly balls, and then Bell was caught stealing for the third out. Greenhill's final pitch of the inning was a high fastball clocked at 95 miles per hour.

With the game still tied in the top of the eighth, Greenhill gave up a leadoff single to Deacon Liput. He struck out the next batter, but Liput stole second and took third on a throwing error. With the infield in, Greenhill got Jonathan India—the SEC Player of the Year and the fifth overall pick in this month's MLB Draft—to hit a groundball to short, and Liput was caught in a rundown between third and home and was eventually tagged for the second out.

With India at second, Greenhill got the final out of the inning on a soft liner to second to keep it a 1-1 game.

Auburn (43-22) took a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the eighth on an RBI double by Will Holland, but Austin Langworthy led off the top of the ninth with a home run off Greenhill to get the Gators back even again. The next batter, Blake Reese, hit a fly ball to deep left, but Judd Ward—a classmate of Greenhill's at Russellville who had just entered the game as a defensive replacement in the top of the ninth—crashed into the outfield fence to make a leaping grab for out number one.

Greenhill walked the next hitter but then got Nick Horvath to ground into a 5-4-3 double play, sending the game to the bottom of the ninth, where Auburn won it on a walk-off hit by Luke Jarvis.

Greenhill (6-2) picked up the win, allowing one earned run on two hits in three innings. He struck out one and walked one.

'MURRAY', from page 16

only 16 walks.

With a playoff berth on the line on April 13 at Sulligent, Murray threw a complete game (on just 79 pitches) and also went 3-for-4 to help the Tigers punch their ticket with a 4-1 win.

"The feeling was completely indescribable," Murray said. "I had never been to the playoffs. My best memory was standing on the mound, with Coach telling me before the last inning, 'You got it. Go finish it.' I knew I had to finish it for everybody.

"After we won, just looking over and seeing Maj-ee smiling and saying, 'You did it,' that was an indescribable feeling. I had never made the playoffs until this year. It was one of the biggest reasons I came to Red Bay."

Murray will be a Tiger at the next level, too, where he'll join a Stillman program that went 19-22 this past season under first-year head coach Terrance Whittle as a member of the Association of Independent Institutions. Priority No. 1 for Murray this summer has been getting stronger, both to provide more punch at the plate and to help him withstand the rigors of a longer college season.

"I really feel like I need to work on getting stronger, and I have been doing that," Murray said. "I'm doing that now, all summer, ever since baseball season ended. The biggest thing as far as my hitting is, I need to get stronger to make the jump from high school to college baseball. My fielding, I'm gonna work at that, too, but I believe my glove is better than my bat right now. I have to get stronger at my hitting."

Work, of course, is not just something Murray can handle—it's something he enjoys. That mindset should serve him well as he heads down to Stillman in August.

He was asked last week if the reality of being a college baseball player had sunk in for him yet.

"It has. Then again, once I'm there, it'll sink in completely," he said. "It'll be great. I'm so ready for it. I'm absolutely honored and happy to have this opportunity. It's what I've always wanted to do."



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'EZZELL' from page 13

and out over the plate, and Ezzell jumped on it, hooking a drive over the fence in left-center for a solo homer.

Ezzell's game-tying blast sent something like an electric current through Russellville Baseball Stadium on that spring night. A walk-off RBI single by senior Jacob Green one inning later ended the game, but Ezzell's lightning bolt started something far more significant—even if nobody knew it at the time.

A dynasty had been born.

That 3-2 victory over Lawrence County was the sixth in a string of 21 consecutive wins by the Golden Tigers on their way to a Class 5A state championship, the first in program history. They repeated as state champs in 2016 and then won another Blue Map in 2017, joining Hartselle (1990-92) and Spanish Fort (2010-12) as the only 5A schools in AHSAA history to win three straight baseball titles.

With Ezzell at the head of an 11-man senior class in 2018, Russellville made it back to Montgomery for a fourth year in a row before falling to Faith Academy in the finals. Hidden beneath those three Blue Maps, those 38 playoff wins (and an overall record of 151-40) in a four-season span and countless other memorable moments is Ezzell's fateful first-pitch swing on that early-April night at Russellville Baseball Stadium some three years ago.

It's the moment that started it all, and it's the one Ezzell remembers most fondly—more than his two-homer game at Decatur, more than his 16-strike-out effort on the mound against East Limestone this past April, more even than the twin grand slams he hit in a quarterfinal game against Springville in May—from a high school career the likes of which few players have ever experienced.

"I think I'd have to go with that home run from my ninth-grade year," Ezzell said last week. "First off, I don't think people really believed in us way back then. The year before, we were 16-24, and we were about to lose our first area game. We wound up winning and sweeping the area, and from then on...."

"I think it kind of ignited a flame in us. It made us believe a little bit."

Ezzell's high school career—during which he batted .305 and placed himself among the school's all-time leaders with 148 hits, 16 home runs, 47 doubles, 125 RBIs, 114 runs scored and 40 multi-hit games—may have ended last month, but his baseball playing days are far from over. He recently accepted an offer to sign with UAH, choosing the Chargers over Calhoun, Snead State and Bevill State.

Ezzell becomes the 12th Russellville baseball player since 2015 to sign with a college program.

"I always dreamed about playing college baseball, just anywhere, really, anywhere that would pay for my education," said Ezzell, who cancelled workouts with Wallace State and Shelton State after officially accepting the offer from UAH. "Once we started winning and I saw guys like Reed [Smith] and Cody and Judd [Ward] going to all these big places, and everybody else who went places, I thought, 'Well, maybe there's a chance I can go somewhere and play four years and get my college paid for.'"

"Once [UAH] started showing interest, I felt like that was definitely the route I needed to take, if they were willing to do that for me."

The Chargers had been talking about Ezzell for some time with Russellville coach Chris Heaps, and they invited Ezzell to Huntsville for a workout early this summer. He received an offer about a week later—along with a text from assistant coach BJ Holloway asking if he had any experience playing left field.

The outfield is about the only place Ezzell didn't play for the Golden Tigers. A catcher at the jayvee level, he broke into the varsity ranks as a second baseman in 2015 and 2016, shifted to shortstop as a junior in 2017, and split time as a senior this past season between short, first base and the pitcher's mound. As valuable as that versatility may be, UAH head coach Hunter Royer was most impressed with the potential in Ezzell's bat.

"I told him I've played just about everywhere," Ezzell said. "He told me, 'I don't care where you play. We just want you to hit.'"

Whether he was in the batter's box or on the football field (where he was an All-State linebacker for the Golden Tigers as a junior in 2016), hitting has always been second nature for Ezzell. But baseball is a cruel game, sparing no one from the occasional slump. Ezzell started slowly at the plate in 2018, pressing a bit too much as he tried to bear the weight of high expectations and the burden of carrying a less experienced lineup.

"I knew coming into the season that a lot of eyes would be on me," Ezzell said, "and I think that got to me a little at the beginning of the year. I had seen other guys struggle a little bit. Even Judd, he would go through short stages—but he sure got out of it quick. I've seen it happen to him and guys like Reed and Landon Oliver, even. Once I stopped thinking so much, it got a lot easier."

Ezzell credits Jess Smith, the Golden Tigers' middle school head coach and

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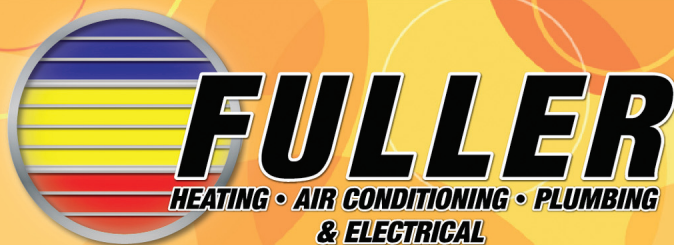


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'EZZELL,' from page 18

a varsity assistant, and the rest of Russellville's staff with helping him turn the corner from a mental standpoint.

"Coach Smith really helped me out, working with me after practice and stuff," Ezzell said. "He knows a lot about the whole mind game of baseball. That's fifty percent of the game, and once I figured that out, things got a lot easier. I'm glad I had coaches who would help me with not only the fundamentals but also the other side of the game."

Ezzell says he stopped fretting about the mechanics of his swing and started focusing more on the quality of the pitches he was swinging at. He credits that more selective approach—along with a shorter stride and a slightly reduced leg kick—as the catalyst behind his late-season surge.

"In the moment, you don't really think about it," Ezzell said of Russellville's remarkable run, "but then after the season it's like, 'Wow, we did it again! Why not do it one more time?' Now that it's over and I'm looking back on it, we did accomplish a lot. People say stuff and you just sort of brush it off, but when you stop and think about it, it's pretty incredible."

After showing signs toward the end of the regular season (a two-homer game against Fairhope on March 28, a homer and a double in an area win over Brooks on April 5, a three-run blast a week later in a rout of East Limestone), Ezzell put together a truly epic playoff performance. In 12 post-season games, he hit .366 (15-for-41) with four home runs and a whopping 24 RBIs—11 of which came in the quarterfinal series against Springville.

Asked to put his monster postseason run in perspective, Ezzell chose to focus on the satisfaction of getting back to Montgomery for a fourth straight year rather than his individual exploits.

"It was definitely one to remember," he said. "I'm glad we made it that far and proved people wrong. I'm glad I could be a part of it and do more than I had been doing for the rest of the year."

Ezzell finished the season batting .284 with team-highs in home runs (nine), doubles (14), RBIs (44) and multi-hit games (15). He also drew 24 walks and reached base at a .413 clip. He was the only Golden Tiger player to start on all four state finals teams, and his three state championship rings

put him in rather select company. Along the way, he went from freshman phenom to grizzled veteran and learned a great deal about being a leader.

"In the ninth grade, I had Bo [Austin Bohannon] and Jacob Green and all those guys, and I learned a lot from them," Ezzell said. "As I got older, I tried to mimic them and be a leader, on the field and off. I took what those other great players gave me and tried to put it into practice once I got older."

"The first year, when we won it, we were like, 'Wow, this is great.' Then the second year comes around, and we're thinking the whole time, 'Let's go back and do it again.' In the moment, you don't really think about it, but then after the season it's like, 'Wow, we did it again! Why not do it one more time?' Now that it's over and I'm looking back on it, we did accomplish a lot. People say stuff and you just sort of brush it off, but when you stop and think about it, it's pretty incredible."

Ezzell is ready to make new memories at UAH, but he'll never forget the time he spent and the lessons he learned playing both baseball and football at RHS. Undeniably, this past year's run to Montgomery—which few observers expected following the graduation of players like Greenhill and Ward the previous May—with his ten fellow seniors will always hold a special place in his heart.

"I'm just blessed that I had coaches in both sports who led me in the right direction—on the field and off the field," Ezzell said. "I'm glad I got to do it, not only with the guys I played with my freshman and sophomore years, but also with the guys I grew up playing with. I'm glad we got to go out and prove people wrong."

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