



All Academic
Diane Peebles of Muscle Shoals and Josh Pinkard of Russellville were selected to the 2018 All-Alabama Academic Team for Northwest-Shoals Community College. See Page 11 for details.

Follow the Leaders
Two RCS board members completed the Leadership Alabama program. See story Page 5.

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Town official questions Twin Forks Campground deposits

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A Bear Creek city councilman has serious concerns about the financial integrity of his town and Twin Forks Campground, and he's taken those concerns to the State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts.

"I realized the numbers weren't adding up," Green said. "Our 80 camping spots stay full mostly year round. Yet, in money terms, we average 56 spots rented per month, not 80. There were months where the deposits were half of what they should have been."

Daniel Green, in his first term on the Bear Creek City Council, met with Rachel Riddle, chief examiner of public accounts, at the Montgomery legislative office of Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) on April 9 of this year. Green contacted Morrow and asked him to arrange a

meeting with the Department of Public Examiners of Public Accounts to present information related to Twin Forks Campground.

Green presented information to Riddle about bank deposits he believes were significantly less than the revenue that should have been generated from Twin Forks' 80 campsites.

The Town of Bear Creek entered into a 30-year lease with the Bear Creek Development Authority in 1986 to operate and manage Twin Forks Campground. That lease expired in 2016, but according to Bear Creek mayor Connie Morrison, the parties' agreement continues based on action by the BCDA Board of Directors on September 9, 2008, when the board voted to renew the lease "for the maximum allowable time according to the TVA/BCDA contract."

Terms of a contract between Tennessee Valley Authority and BCDA require that TVA be allowed the

See 'DEPOSITS,' Page 9

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The efforts of county engineer David Palmer (below) and other officials led to the addition of new stop signs illuminated by flashing lights.

Multiple wrecks prompt new safety measures at intersection of 24 & 77

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Several safety enhancements have been added at or near the intersection of Alabama 24 and County Highway 77 after a number of recent motor vehicle accidents at the intersection.

At the request of Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore, Franklin County engineer David Palmer contacted officials with the Alabama Department of Transportation to discuss the intersection after multiple wrecks at the location earlier this year.

"We received some citizen concerns about the intersection, so I asked David to meet with the state officials and see what could be done," Moore said. "We appreciate the cooperation of ALDOT officials in working with us

See 'SAFETY,' Page 9

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James Ray Brazell, Russellville, age 72
 Died Friday, June 22, 2018. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Liberty Hill Cemetery.

Donald Lee Cantrell, Red Bay, age 58
 Died Friday, June 15, 2018. Memorial service held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville.

George Franklin Hubbard, Russellville, age 55
 Died Monday, June 18, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home.

Floyd M. Montgomery, Russellville, age 97
 Died Friday, June 22, 2018. Graveside service held at Knights of Pythias Cemetery. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Judy F. Raper, Russellville, age 74
 Died Tuesday, June 19, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Mildred Karen Senkbeil, Hackleburg, age 69
 Died Thursday, June 21, 2018. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Liberty Hill Cemetery in Phil Campbell.

James Howard "B.J." Thomas, Jr., Russellville, age 63
 Died Sunday, June 17, 2018. Memorial service held at his residence.



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Sunset Committee to review BCDA operations

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

News that could affect the future of the Bear Creek Development Authority came out of Montgomery last Thursday, as the Alabama Legislature's Sunset Committee announced its intent to conduct a sunset review on the BCDA.

The Sunset Committee is required each year to review the operations of state agencies scheduled for review in the sunset law or in the agency's enabling law.

According to the Alabama Department of Public Examiners of Public Accounts, the Sunset Committee can review the operations of any additional state agency and can recommend one of three alternatives for each agency: Continue without modification; Continue with modification; Termination.

Termination is automatic for agencies named in the sunset law or in their enabling law as subject to the sunset process. A bill to continue them is necessary to prevent termination. Other agencies, like BCDA, will not terminate unless a bill to terminate them becomes law.

The Department of Examiners of Public Accounts assists the Sunset Committee by obtaining, compiling and evaluating information and producing a report on each agency for use by the committee.

When the *Franklin Free Press* spoke with chief examiner Rachel Riddle last Thursday about an inquiry into BCDA's Twin Forks Campground, which is operated by the Town of Bear Creek,

Riddle said the Sunset Committee was meeting that morning and she was awaiting direction from the committee as to what information, if any, her office would be requested to compile.

The Sunset Committee directed Riddle's office to "conduct a sunset review on the Bear Creek Development Authority and present its findings to the Sunset Committee during the 2019 interim sunset review process."

Morrow received news of the review last week and expressed chagrin that "BCDA has become the dysfunctional state agency that it is today."

"Because of this vote today, we can now say that we have taken the first step in rebuilding BCDA into the organization that it once was," Morrow said. "Fiscal responsibility, transparency, services to our citizens and economic development is what this action is all about. Let's all now begin the task of rebuilding BCDA."

BCDA was submitted to the Sunset Committee through a letter from Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay). Morrow sent a letter dated May 25, 2018, to Rep. Howard Sanderford, chair of the Sunset Committee, in which he described BCDA as having been "a dysfunctional entity for some time."

In that letter, Morrow cited the board's inability to have a quorum of members present at board meetings as a major problem. He also cited the board's February 9, 2018, meeting where officer elections took place in a manner Morrow believes to be violative of the board's own policy.

The election of officers was conducted by voice vote, and Bear Creek mayor Connie Morrison was elected to be the new chairperson of the board of directors. Morrow maintains that election was void based on an opinion from attorneys with the Alabama Department of Public Examiners of Public Accounts and the Legislative Services Agency.

Morrow contends former chairperson Trisha Montgomery should have remained in her position because the February 9 vote was not conducted in accordance with BCDA board policy.

BCDA attorney Jeff Bowling said he has reviewed the bylaws and the election procedure, and his legal opinion is that Morrison's election was legal and there is no reason to set aside the vote.

A letter from John Treadwell, deputy director for the legal division of the Legislative Services Agency, raised three potential challenges to the election of officers that day, including the manner of voting, notice of the meeting and notice of the purpose of the meeting.

Nine of the 14 BCDA directors attended that meeting, and Morrison was elected by a 5-4 margin after a voice vote.

According to Treadwell's letter, "the election was conducted in violation of BCDA bylaws. If challenged, a court may hold the vote to be invalid and order a new vote to be conducted."

Morrison forwarded Treadwell's letter to Bowling for review. Bowling said that an election held as a secret ballot, which the bylaws called for, would

See 'SUNSET,' Page 10

Abuse, exploitation of elderly a growing problem

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Not a week goes by that someone at First Metro Bank doesn't see some sort of financial exploitation of the elderly, First Metro president and CEO Rodney Howard told the crowd at the A.W. Todd Centre last Friday afternoon.

First Metro Bank hosted an Elder Abuse Seminar to help make the community more aware of the growing problem of abuse and exploitation of the elderly. The free event, complete with lunch from Pilgrim's Place BBQ, featured speakers from First Metro Bank, the Franklin County Department of Human Resources and the Russellville Police Department.

Eleven percent of senior adults have suffered some sort of elder abuse. Elder abuse is defined simply as any act carried out with the intent to cause injury or pain, whether physical, emotional or financial, to a person 60 years of age or older.

And it's not just seniors with mental impairment who are at risk. Alana Parker with First Metro Bank told the crowd that one of every 18 cognitively intact elderly adults have suffered some sort of fraud or financial scam.

The seminar focused on three areas to combat elder abuse: Prevention, detection and reporting.

When it comes to prevention, Parker offered several suggestions to reduce the risk of elder abuse:

- Avoid isolating elders.
- Stay in touch with them.
- Keep elders active.
- Encourage them to attend religious services and community activities.

• Don't allow them to live with someone known to be abusive or violent.

• Be wary of caregivers or friends needing financial help or with drug or alcohol issues.

• Be aware of their own financial situation.

• Don't allow a caretaker or family member to impulsively alter an elder's will or add names to accounts or land titles.

• Inform elders of known fraudulent scams.

• Educate elders to be wary of solicitations from the phone, internet or email.

According to Parker, elders can reduce their risk by taking care of their health, attending support groups, seeking professional help for drug, alcohol or depression problems, planning their own future, staying active in the community and opening their own mail.

"And elders can reduce their risk by taking care of their health, attending support groups, seeking professional help for drug, alcohol or depression problems, planning their own future, staying active in the community and opening their own mail," Parker said.

Another general rule for seniors—never give out any personal information over the phone.

Lynne Graves, who works in the Adult Protective Services division of the Franklin County Department of Human Resources, addressed the detection aspect of avoiding elder abuse.

She explained the basic information needed for DHR to open a file and investigate possible abuse or neglect of a protected person.

"We need the name of the victim, age, address, and as many facts and circumstances the reporter can give," Graves said. "In most cases, the

reporter can remain anonymous."

Graves reviewed some of the most prevalent scams, including Medicare/health insurance scams, funeral and cemetery scams, investment schemes, homeowner/reverse mortgage scams and sweepstakes and lottery scams.

Recently, a scam has been reported in Franklin County where the caller tells the victim he or she has won the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes and all he/she needs to do is send \$1,500 for 'processing fees' via Western Union or credit card.

As Graves explained, you never have to send money to win money. Publisher's Clearing House directly notifies its sweepstakes winners, most of the time in person at their homes.

The typical victim of elder abuse is over the age of 75, female and has one or more disabilities, including confusion, incontinence or wandering, and needs help with day-to-day living.

When reaching out to help a potential victim of elder abuse, Graves recommends visiting the home personally, giving the senior some privacy to talk in confidence and separating him or her from the suspicious party.

Jake Tompkins, investigator with the Russellville Police Department, said his department is seeing a steady increase in elder abuse.

"This crime is becoming more and more rampant in recent years," Tompkins said. "We've seen families torn apart by abusers. Mainly, it's financial exploitation cases we deal with."

While elder abuse is a felony in Alabama, Tompkins said only one in 44 elder abuse cases are reported because of fear of being hurt or embarrassed.

Honey Do: Asphalt repair

It's a hot and messy job, but if your asphalt driveway is in need of repair, now is the time to do it. Most asphalt-based products require a temperature of at least 65 degrees or more for proper application. Here are a few tips for a good job.

Products you may need include crack filler, bagged asphalt patch, spray-on driveway degreaser, a tamper and a piece of plywood that will cover the largest hole in your driveway. Oh yeah, don't forget some old clothes and shoes.

Prepare by cleaning. A pressure washer is great, but a water hose with a good sprayer will work as well. Spray on asphalt cleaner that contains degreaser, let it work according to the label, and hose it off. You will need to spray out cracks and get loose material out of holes.

Bagged asphalt patch usually comes in 50-pound bags that will cover about seven square feet. Cut the bag completely down three sides, and dump the asphalt into the hole. Leave the product mounded up just a bit to allow for packing. You may need a shovel to spread it out a little or to move excess to another hole.

Lay the plywood over the hole,

and slowly drive over it with your vehicle several times. Be careful and don't get asphalt on your tires or vehicle. This should pack and smooth out the asphalt patch.

Some folks like to go back with a heavy tamper, especially around the edges, but this may not be necessary. (Did I mention it's hot while you're doing this?)

Cracks up to one inch can usually be filled with blacktop filler from a jug or caulking tube. I think the caulking tube is easier because the jug is heavier and has to be shaken occasionally. The caulking generally dries faster and can be coated with sealer in about an hour on a hot day, as opposed to 24 hours with some other products. Deep cracks can be packed with foam filling rods or sand before applying the crack filler.

Now you are ready for sealing. A good quality sealer will have filler in it that will take care of very small cracks. Be sure to stir it well. It's a good idea to turn it upside down for a day or so to allow the settled product to mix in. But be careful.

See 'REPAIR,' Page 5



Doug Green



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

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Dear Dave,
My father died recently. He walked out of my life 25 years ago when I was a teenager, and he never wanted anything to do with me after that. His brothers, who have already paid for some of his final expenses, asked if I wanted to pay to have his body cremated. They didn't ask for money, they just offered it as a chance to be part of things. I'm in good shape financially, and I could easily afford the cost. Morally, I wonder if I have a responsibility to help with things. Do you feel I'm obligated in any way?

Julie

Dear Julie,
I'm sorry for your loss. I'm sorry, too, about what happened with your father. I can't imagine the mixed emotions you must have in your heart. When someone asks me a question like this, I try to put myself in their shoes. Under the circumstances, I don't think you have any obligation whatsoever—morally or legally—to help pay for anything. If you want to help, and you can afford

to do so, then follow your heart. At the same time, I don't think you should lose one wink of sleep over this if you decide not to contribute.

Twenty-five years is long, long time. I don't know your dad, and I have no clue about his situation or state of mind back then and in the time since. I can't imagine doing that to a child of any age, though.

Do what you feel in your heart is best. But in my opinion, there's no obligation here. God bless you, Julie.

Dave

Step by step

Dear Dave,
When is the right time to buy a house when someone is following your Baby Steps plan?

Samuel

Dear Samuel,
That's a good question. Let's start by going over the first few Baby Steps. Baby Step 1 is saving \$1,000 for a beginner emergency fund. Baby Step 2 is paying off all consumer debt, from smallest to largest, using the debt snowball. Baby Step 3 is where you increase your emergency fund to the point where you have three to six months of expenses set aside.

Once you've done all that you can begin saving for a home. I'll call it Baby Step 3b. For folks looking to buy a house, I advise saving enough money for a down payment of at least 20 percent. I don't beat people up over mortgage debt, but I do advise them to get a 15-year, fixed rate loan, where the payments are no more than 25

See 'DAVE,' Page 5

Two RCS board members finish leadership program

Submitted to the FFP

RUSSELLVILLE – Russellville City Schools is proud to have two of its board members as recent graduates of the prestigious Leadership Alabama program.

Board president Bret Gist and board member Jerry Groce recently completed the class, which serves to give established leaders across Alabama a place to develop a network of relationships with other leaders who are dedicated to moving Alabama forward and helping the state reach its full potential in many different aspects.

Leadership Alabama is an exclusive group, and attendees must be nominated for participation from someone who graduated from a previous Leadership Alabama class. Gist and Groce were nominated by RCS superintendent Heath Grimes, who was a member of Class XXI.

"I learned so much from my participation in Leadership Alabama, and I was able to make connections with people that will be a benefit to our schools," Grimes said. "After seeing how beneficial this organization is, I felt it would be great to have two of our board members attend this class and receive the same kind of training and establish the same kind of connections and professional relationships.

"We are constantly looking for ways that we can be a better school system all the way around. We never want to get complacent, and I think it's important to take the initiative to make sure that doesn't happen. Being part of Leadership Alabama is

a great way to do this, because we can learn from other leaders in our state, share ideas and be part of a group who is committed to moving our state forward. I was proud to nominate Mr. Gist and Mr. Groce for this opportunity, and I was glad they accepted the nomination and took the initiative to better themselves and help better our schools."

Groce said he learned many valuable lessons because of his participation in Leadership Alabama.

"It was really an honor for me to be a part of Leadership Alabama Class XXVIII," Groce said. "True to its name, the program provided me the opportunity to network and form new partnerships with great leaders from across the state. My classmates came from a variety of occupations, including private industry, government services, economic development, education, the legal system and non-profit organizations.

"My Leadership Alabama experience also made me acutely aware of the critical need for real leaders to step forward and bring people together for the creation of a positive strategy to address the challenges we face. I believe that a number of people, including those in Class XXVIII, will be part of that process."

Grimes said the selection process for Leadership Alabama is rigorous, and it was a great accomplishment to have two of RCS's board members accepted to attend. Grimes, Gist, and Groce are three of only four graduates of Leadership Alabama who live in Franklin County. The other graduate is former state senator Roger Bedford.

'REPAIR' from page 4

You don't want this stuff getting on anything, as it is very hard to clean off. You will need an applicator that looks like a squeegee on one side and a short stiff brush on the other. Don't be stingy with it, and work it into the cracks as you go.

When tackling this project, try to get a couple of days with no rain in the forecast to allow all products to dry and cure out.

Keep all vehicles off the driveway for a couple of days, and you should have a beautiful driveway that will make the whole place look better. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

'DAVE' from page 4

percent of their monthly take-home pay.

Doing it this way may take a little more time and delay your dream of becoming a homeowner a bit, but buying a house when you're broke is the quickest way I know to turn something that should be a blessing into a burden!

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 14 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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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.

Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park in Hodges will host a Fun Day and Donkey Penning this Saturday, June 30 at 5 p.m. There is no admission, but donations will be taken at the door. There are a variety of fun events, including Buddy Pick-Up Race, Flag Race, Pony Express Race, Key Hole Race and Scoop Race, as well as the donkey penning event. For more information, contact Kayla Ables at 256-436-9591 or Kaysha Galbreath at 205-412-3675.

Just a little reminder that this is the off year for the Reedtown Roundup. But if you plan to be in the city of Russellville during the week of July 4, we have a couple of family-friendly events scheduled. On Tuesday, July 3, there will be a Meet & Greet held at the Back to Basics Life Skilled Center, Inc. from 4:30-6:30 p.m. The annual talent show will be held that night from 7-9 p.m. at the Chucky Mullins Center (\$5 donation to attend). All proceeds will go toward the Back to Basics Life Skilled Center, Inc. If you are interested in displaying your talent, whatever it may be, please call Ella West at 256-332-7721, Rose Hillman at 256-412-2296, Tammy West at 256-668-7649 or Michelle Nelson at 256-324-4442. Let's get excited, and let the fun begin!

The Cotton Flats Cruisers will hold their ninth annual Car Show on Wednesday, July 4 at Sloss Lake on Hwy. 24 East in Russellville. All cars, trucks and bikes are welcome! Registration is from 7-11 a.m. Registration fee is \$25 for the first car, truck or bike, and \$15 for each additional entry. Multiple registrations must have the same name and address. There will be a grand prize of \$1,000 cash, plus a 50/50 drawing and many other cash prizes. There will also be a People's Choice Award, Mayor's Choice Trophy and Memorial Trophy. Swap meet space is available as space permits. Open to car, truck, bike parts and tools only. Fee is \$10 for 20' X 20' space. For more information, call Barry at 256-332-6585, Daryl Gholston at 256-436-2499 or Gary Hester at 256-394-3904.

The Shoals Area Chapter of the Order of St. Luke will meet in the Sheffield Room at Park Place, 501 N. Montgomery Avenue in Sheffield, on Thursday, July 5 at 6:30 p.m. Dr. Jim Anderson will teach from John Chapter 9 (Jesus heals the blind man). We believe that God heals spiritually, physically and emotionally. All are welcome.

The next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be Thursday, July 12 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Coby Greer 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. For more information, please 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.

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) weight loss support group meets each Monday evening at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center. Weigh-ins begin at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more information.

For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, First United Methodist Church of Russellville will host *Celebrate Recovery!* on Tuesday nights with supper at 6 p.m., worship at 6:30 and groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. The church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue in downtown Russellville. Come and join us!

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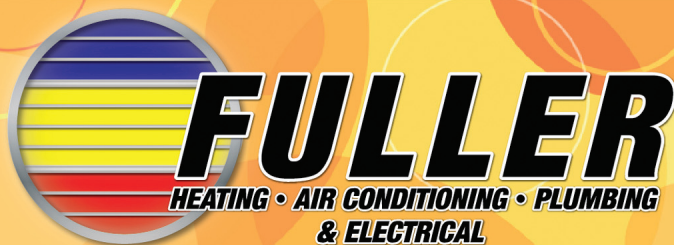
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Council transfers beer/wine license to new Chevron owner

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council agreed to transfer a retail beer and table wine license at the Downtown Chevron to the new store owner at the council's June 18 meeting.

The retail beer and table wine (off-premises consumption) license had been granted to Sibley Oil and was transferred to Jay Raja, Inc., d/b/a Downtown Chevron, 109 East Madison Street, Russellville.

In other action at its regular meeting on June 18, the council:

- Selected Brad Williams with Civil Group to

serve as construction, engineering and inspection consultant for the sidewalk improvements along Madison, Lauderdale and Coffee streets.

- Approved a franchise agreement with Marcus Cable Associates, LLC, d/b/a Charter Communications.

- Approved the renewal of Air Evac memberships for all civil service employees.

- Authorized the abatement of a nuisance related to grass and weeds at 1233 City Lake Drive.

- Approved the hiring of Aaden Abarco as a dispatcher with the Russellville Police Department.

- Declared a vacancy for patrol officer in the RPD.

- Approved the contracts for music at the upcoming Jam on Sloss Lake set for July 4.

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'DEPOSITS,' from page 1

opportunity to review all legally binding documents, including leases, to be entered into by BCDA.

The *Free Press* requested a copy of that lease renewal in 2016 and was presented with minutes from the 2008 board meeting, but no actual lease. There is a document that extends the original 30-year lease for six months to allow TVA "to review and accept the previous extension accepted by the Board of Directors," but the BCDA Board has not approved a new lease at any meeting since 2016.

In an exclusive interview last Tuesday with the *Free Press*, Green said he has been concerned for some time about the town's financial situation and, specifically, the revenue generated from Twin Forks.

According to Green, Twin Forks, which is managed by Debbie Corbin, has 80 campsites that rent for \$300/month. Rates by the week or weekend are higher than the monthly rate of \$10/day per campsite. With full capacity, 80 campsites should generate \$24,000 in fees each month. Green said the town receives additional revenue from fees for tent camping.

Green said the council receives no financial information at meetings. He went to Traders and Farmers Bank in Bear Creek, where the city has its general fund account, and was told he did not have authority as a councilman to review account records.

"I was notified that only the mayor, city clerk and one other person have access to records," Green said. "I was told I couldn't get information on the town's loans, how much we owe, or how much was in the bank. I was told this by Gina Berrian (assistant vice president and manager)."

So Green turned to city clerk Ava McCurley for more information on the town's finances.

"I started looking at deposits," Green said. "Where do we get our money from? One of the big deposits every month comes from campground rentals. There are usually two deposits, sometimes three. Debbie Corbin, the park director, is in charge of collecting rent; then she takes it to the town clerk, who makes the deposit."

"I realized the numbers weren't adding up. Our 80 camping spots stay full mostly year round. Yet, in money terms, we average 56 spots rented per month, not 80. There were months where the deposits were half of what they should have been."

Green said he went to Morrison last year with his concerns and requested an executive session at an upcoming council meeting. Green said three council meetings went by with no executive session before Morrison called one at the fourth meeting after Green's request.

While details from that executive session are

confidential, Green said both Corbin and McCurley were present during the executive session, and no action regarding Green's inquiry about campground revenue was taken.

"So I laid low for a few months. They brought balances to the meetings for two months, then back to normal where we were getting nothing," Green said. "Around July of 2017, I popped into the city clerk's office and asked for a copy of the general fund ledger for the last four months. [McCurley] said she could give me March-May but not June because it wasn't done yet."

Green was shocked by the information he found in those monthly ledgers, particularly for the month of May 2017.

According to records provided by Green, the general ledger he received on July 17, 2017, showed only one deposit for the month of May was made from campground rentals. That was for \$2,977.50 on May 1, 2017.

The only other deposit shown for May was a garbage fee deposit on May 15, 2017.

By comparison, April 2017's ledger showed three campground deposits totaling \$18,304.50. In June 2017, the monthly ledger indicated three campground deposits totaling \$20,782.00.

Green said he again went to Morrison with this information and was told she would get the clerk to run the reports and review them. He says Morrison later told him there were four deposits totaling more than \$19,000 for campground fees in May 2017.

Green received a Town of Bear Creek general fund report dated October 2, 2017 that showed four camping fee deposits were made into the town's account in May 2017: May 1 for \$2,977.50; May 12 for \$7,147.50; May 18 for \$5,992.50 and May 24 for \$3,610.

Only the May 1 deposit appeared on the May general fund ledger given to Green in July.

When Green asked the clerk for the checking account statement for May, he found three of the four deposits had been made. But the May 1 deposit was actually deposited on May 8, and there is no record on the Traders and Farmers Bank statement of any deposit on May 24 for \$3,610, or any time during the month for a deposit of that amount.

In fact, the town was charged an overdraft fee on May 24 for having a negative balance when a check was presented. The daily balance as of May 24, 2017, was -\$2,480.96.

At a council meeting last year, Green requested that all campground fees be paid by check, money order, credit or debit card. He says he was given a variety of reasons why that was not feasible and no action was taken.

Yet at last week's special meeting, Green said the council approved a new policy beginning July

1, 2018, that no longer allows the campground director to accept fees in cash.

Morrow said the information presented by Green to the chief examiner of public accounts was troubling, to say the least.

"Daniel presented some very disturbing financial information to Ms. Riddle involving the Twin Forks Campground, which is BCDA property," Morrow said. "The disturbing financial information included insufficient bank deposits compared to the number of campers who were camping at the campgrounds for several months."

"In addition, he reported that some campers were being allowed to stay at the campground at no charge while other campers were required to pay the regular amount."

Morrow said Riddle took the information from Green, and he has not heard anything further from her office since the April 9 meeting.

Green stopped short of accusing any individual of intentional wrongdoing, but at a minimum, he said, there are serious shortfalls in the revenue from Twin Forks.

"I took what the clerk gave me from Traders and Farmers Bank and found three of the four deposits shown on the ledger I received in October," Green said. "I have no idea what the deposits were really for. And the fourth one wasn't even on the bank statement."

In a special meeting held last week, the town council approved a \$100,000 line of credit for the Bear Creek Water Department to pay delinquent bills, Green said. Green was out of town and did not attend the special meeting.

In a Facebook post made last Wednesday, Green says the Town of Bear Creek "is broke, beyond broke," and is "spending more money than we are taking in."

Additionally, Green is concerned that the \$25 per month per campsite fee increase implemented last year is not going to where it was intended.

"We raised the rent to \$300 per month last year, and I wanted \$25 per month to go to our Parks and Recreation Department to use to help our fields improve," Green said. "The council agreed to split the \$25, with \$12.50 to go for campground maintenance and \$12.50 to the Parks and Recreation. So far, not one single dollar has gone to the Parks and Rec account."

The \$25 per month fee increase began in April of 2017, Green said.

Green says he felt an obligation to let the people of his community know what's happening, and he's still searching for answers.

"I'm simply doing what I think I should for the people I represent," Green said. "Right or wrong, now you know some of what we are facing."

Riddle and Morrison did not return phone calls seeking comment for this article.

'SAFETY,' from page 1

on this matter."

Palmer met with Mark Dale, an area engineer with ALDOT, and they traveled to the intersection to look at what could be done to make it safer.

Although 77 is a county road, the intersection is maintained by the State of Alabama because it includes a state road, Ala. 24, Palmer explained.

That meeting resulted in several safety enhancements, including the installation of oversized stop signs on both sides of 77 where it intersects with 24. Additionally, the stop signs are illuminated by a solar powered red flashing light.

Prior to the intersection, new 'stop sign ahead' signs were installed. Those signs are illuminated

by solar powered yellow flashing lights.

Palmer said there would be rumble strips installed on both sides of 77 as well to help make motorists more aware of the intersection.

"ALDOT also came out and mowed the intersection, and that has helped with visibility issues," Palmer said.

While Palmer believes there is adequate visibility both ways on 24 for traffic on 77 to see oncoming vehicles, he said the larger number of recent accidents was reason to look at the intersection.

"When there is a greater than normal number of accidents over a period of time, especially at an intersection, and if a larger number of people are

running stop signs, that's an indicator something's not right," Palmer said.

Russellville resident Brenda Hopson is concerned about the 24/77 intersection. Hopson's grandson was recently involved in an accident there. He suffered a broken collar bone in the wreck.

"They need a light, so drivers on 24 can see traffic on 77," Hopson said. "It's one of the worst intersections on Highway 24. They need a traffic light there."

"I called the Department of Transportation. They met with David Palmer and put some signs up on 77."



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'SUNSET,' from page 3

violate Alabama law. Morrow's letter to the Sunset Committee referenced Morrison "claiming legitimacy to the election and declaring herself the chairperson of the Bear Creek Development Authority Board of Directors and planning a board meeting," which was set for Friday, June 22. "This legitimacy is not shared by many of the current board members; therefore, I foresee a major problem if the board meets and takes a vote on any issue," Morrow said. Morrow also told Sanderford that Morrison was

going to "push through a lease agreement that is favorable to the City of Bear Creek, where she currently serves as mayor." Bear Creek originally leased Twin Forks Campground from BCDA pursuant to a 30-year lease that expired in 2016. Minutes from a September 9, 2008 BCDA board meeting indicate the board voted to approve an extension on that lease "to the maximum allowable time according to the TVA/BCDA contract." An agreement that purports to extend the original 30-year lease for a six-month period was

signed by Morrison as BCDA chairperson and by Morrison as Bear Creek mayor. But no actual lease renewal between Bear Creek and BCDA for Twin Forks has been approved by the BCDA board. Morrow received news of the sunset review last week and expressed chagrin that "BCDA has become the dysfunctional state agency that it is today." "Because of this vote today, we can now say that we have taken the first step in rebuilding BCDA into the organization that it once was," Morrow said. "Fiscal responsibility, transparency, services to our citizens and economic development is what this action is all about. Let's all now begin the task of rebuilding BCDA. "I would like to thank Chairman Sanderford and the Sunset Committee for their hard work, and I look forward to working with them and the Examiners of Public Accounts as we move through this process." A sunset review of a state agency doesn't necessarily mean the agency's future is in jeopardy. The committee will have available several options, including recommendations to amend the manner in which the BCDA Board of Directors is selected. The Code of Alabama provides the 14-member board shall consist of one appointee from each of the Franklin, Colbert, Marion and Winston County Commissions; one at-large appointee selected by the governor; and the mayor or other chief executive officer of the municipalities of Red Bay, Vina, Hodges, Hackleburg, Bear Creek, Haleyville, Phil Campbell, Russellville and Cherokee.

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COURTESY PHOTO

The 2018 NW-SCC All-Alabama Academic team consists of Diane Peebles (pictured on the left) and Josh Pinkard (pictured on the right). They are joined by NW-SCC president Dr. Glenda Colagross. Pinkard, a Russellville resident and Pre-Engineering major at NW-SCC, plans to attend the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Eight local eateries receive satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Only eight of the 11 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of June 11-15, 2018 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.

Eight of the 11 Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 91 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range. Two scored ratings in the 70-84 range and one had a failing score of 65. The highest score was 100,

received by Los Primos, 105 Marion St., Russellville.

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

- Dismals Canyon Fountain and Deli, 901 Hwy. 8, Phil Campbell, 65. (Toxic items stored with clean dishes, no hot water at handwashing facilities, open personal drink being consumed on active prep table, no date mark on chili, reach-in cooler holding foods at improper temp, employer using bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food).

- Piggly Wiggly #87 Deli, 3625 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 80. (Excessive number of flies in deli, no dates on shredded chicken or cut melon and food being held out of temperature).

- Piggly Wiggly #87, 3625 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 82. (Lysol bottle stored above single service in produce area, no food probe thermometer).

- El Quetzal Buena Vista, 118 East Franklin St., Russellville, 91. (Cooked food not date marked).

- Little Caesar's Pizza, 13655 Hwy. 43 Suite A, Russellville, 94.

- Big Star of Russellville, Inc., 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 95.

- Burger King #10859, 15455 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 96.

- Marty's Meat Market, 85 Scotty Moore Dr., Russellville, 96.

- Russellville Foodland #110, 14001 Hwy. 43, Suite 11, Russellville, 96.

- Best Western Breakfast, 13770 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.

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After a season spent toiling in the shadows as a redshirt, former RHS football standout Austin Stidham is ready to make an impact for Troy this fall. See story Page 14.

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Boutwell looks back on nearly flawless first round at state

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

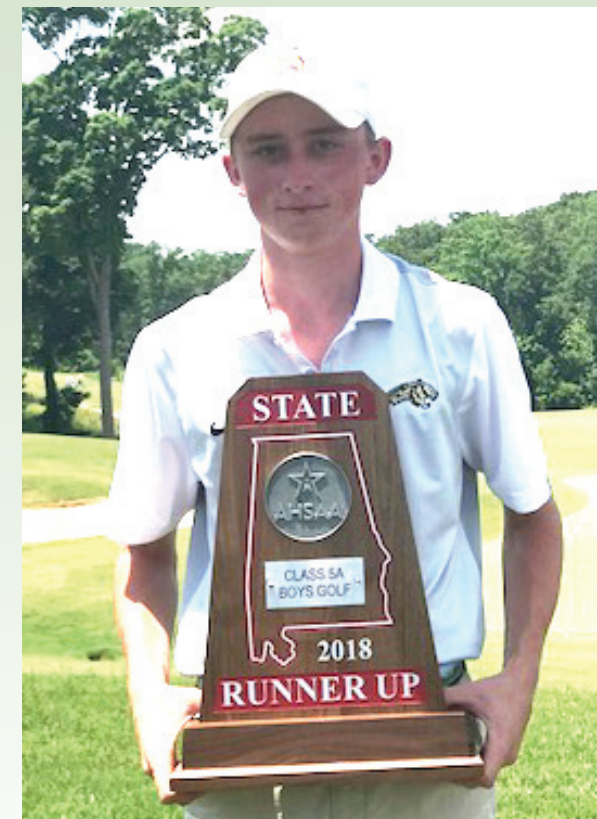
On the second Friday in May, Eric Boutwell did what he had done countless times since his grandpa Ronnie and his dad David first introduced him to the game of golf at the tender age of five. He laced up his spikes and hit the links.

Boutwell, winding down his freshman year at Russellville High School, played a practice round that day at Fighting Joe, one of the two Shoals courses on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and the site of the 2018 AHSAA state tournament, which was to begin three days hence.

In Boutwell's own words, his practice round did not go well.

"It was pretty rough," he recalled last Thursday morning. "I struggled the whole way through it."

See 'BOUTWELL,' Page 16



COURTESY PHOTO

MAP QUEST - Boutwell's bogey-free round of 68 on day one at the state tournament helped Russellville finish runner-up in Class 5A for the second time in three years.

Blazing a trail



TALL ORDER - The 6'4 Bohannon, who started 25 games in two years at Shelton, has added a few miles per hour to his fastball while also tweaking his breaking ball.

After two strong seasons (and a slight change in approach) at Shelton State, former RHS standout Austin Bohannon has achieved his D-One dream and will continue his baseball journey at UAB

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

Over the course of his two years at Shelton State Community College, Austin Bohannon started 25 games on the mound for the Buccaneers.

The former Russellville High School standout was asked last week if any one outing in particular stands out in his memory as he prepares to embark on the next phase of his baseball journey.

"Three, actually," Bohannon replied without a moment's hesitation. "There are three outings I definitely remember."

A quick glance at Bohannon's game log from his two-year stint at Shelton reveals a number of potential candidates. Perhaps he was alluding to April 29 of this year, when he held conference rival Wallace State to one earned run in seven innings in an 8-2 win in Hanceville. Or maybe he was

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Redshirt pays off for bigger, stronger Stidham

Former Russellville standout slated to start at tackle for Troy this fall

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

When Austin Stidham graduated from Russellville High School in May of 2017, he was a four-year varsity letterman, a two-time first-team All-State left tackle, a 6'5, 270-pound student-athlete fully equipped with agility, quick feet, a blue-collar work ethic, a sharp mind in the classroom and a mean streak in the trenches.

In other words, Stidham—who had signed with Troy University in February of that year—was the total package, as college football-ready as they come. Until he realized he wasn't. At least, not yet.

"I had a good idea about halfway through the summer," Stidham recalled on Sunday afternoon. "My weight hadn't got to where it needed to be. Halfway through that [2017] summer, I was still only 280, at most. Plus, [Troy] had a solid left tackle [Steven Rowzee] who was gonna be a senior."

So when head coach Neal Brown and his staff elected to redshirt him for the 2017 season, Stidham wasn't the least bit surprised—though the prospect of not playing in any actual games for an entire year certainly took some getting used to.

"Going from being a big-time guy at Russellville to being back at the bottom of the totem pole...it hurts for anybody," Stidham said. "Especially when you're an athlete who's been looked up to so much. But I just tried to look at it as part of the process. It's just part of it. Honestly, I didn't look at it as a negative thing. I knew I needed it, so I just embraced it."

While the Trojans were putting together an outstanding season that saw them go 11-2 and win the Sun Belt Conference championship, Stidham was doing what redshirt guys do—prepping the starters for their opponent each week as a member of the scout team during practice; constantly training and working out to get bigger, stronger and more athletic; and making sure the energy on the sideline during home games stayed cranked to an 11.

"Basically, it's a building year," Stidham said. "I needed that extra year to get accustomed to a college program, you know, and to put on weight and get stronger. When I went in, I was definitely underweight, and I needed that year to put on weight so I could compete at the college level."

The concept of Stidham not being big enough is a difficult one to grasp for anybody who ever stood next to him during his days as a Golden Tiger, but college football players—linemen, in particular—are enormous. Troy's coaches (including Brown and O-line coach Matt Moore, who also serves as the team's offensive coordinator) wanted Stidham to add 20-25 pounds to his long frame in preparation for doing battle with opposing D-linemen.

Their prescription?
"Chicken and carbs," Stidham said. "We eat pasta for every meal, it seems like. You get sick of eating pasta, but it's something you've gotta do."

Loading up on protein and carbohydrates is only part of the process, of course. Russellville's strength and conditioning program has long been second to none at the high school level, but Stidham said Troy's training staff helped him take things up a notch or three.

"It's a whole different world at that level," Stidham said. "It's a different form of strength program, of eating, of nutrition management. Stuff like that—it's down to a science, the way they have it. I was fortunate at Russellville to have Coach [Tony] Buckhalter, who was an amazing strength coach. But at this level, the expectations are so much greater."

"They find new ways to push your body to the maximum. Each level you get to, they push you to get stronger."

As he prepares to head into his redshirt freshman season, Stidham now carries 295 pounds on his 6'5 frame. He bench-presses 340 pounds and squats 530. Rowzee, a first-team All-Sun Belt performer as a senior in 2017, has moved on, and all that added weight and strength—not to mention a year's worth of practice reps—helped Stidham stake his claim to the Trojans' starting left tackle spot this spring.

"I've switched back and forth some from left tackle to right tackle, but I primarily play left tackle," Stidham said. "I was the first-string left tackle in the spring. It's been a battle, especially with the competition you're gonna have at a program like Troy that has grown so much in recent years. It's one of those things, though, where I always set my bar for excellence high. I push myself to be the best I can."

"I knew it was gonna be a tough battle to earn that spot going into the spring, but I worked hard and put myself in position to be the first-string left tackle."

Should Stidham hold on to that starting spot this fall, he'll be the only new face on an experienced O-line that returns its other four starters from last season.

"I'm the new guy," Stidham said on Sunday. "Those guys have been mentors to me since day one. Everybody in that position group helps each other out."

After a season spent toiling in the shadows, Stidham soaked up the comparatively bright lights of Troy's spring practice, which kicked off on March 21 and wrapped up on April 21 with the annual T-Day Game at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

"It was amazing," Stidham said. "At the end of spring practice, to actually get to go through the game-type scenario (T-Day is what we call it) was amazing. Being able to be a player now at that level, not having to be on the sidelines, was extraordinary. It was definitely worth the work I put in my redshirt year."

Needless to say, everyone involved with the Troy program is counting the days until the 2018 opener at home against Boise State. But for redshirt freshmen like Stidham and his roommate Luke Whittemore (a receiver out of Gainesville, Florida), September 1 absolutely can not get here fast enough.

Stidham says he's thought a lot about what it would be like to line up as the starting left tackle against a name-brand opponent like Boise State on Kickoff Saturday.

"You know, I've been going to camps and working on getting to this point since middle school," Stidham said. "But it's hard to imagine just exactly what it is until you get to that spot. It's something I've dreamed about, obviously, since I was young, but I'm still just awestruck by it all. It's a big stage. A lot of people don't realize that, but [Troy] is a pretty large stage."

"It feels good to see something you've worked so hard for pay off."

The Trojans must replace the record-setting duo of quarterback Brandon Silvers and running back Jordan Chunn from last year's 11-win team, but Stidham said the program's expectations for 2018 haven't changed in the least. If anything, they're even higher. He mentioned Central Florida's unbeaten run through the 2017 season as a frame of reference.

"Our motto this whole spring and summer, with everything we do, has been '13-0.' That's what we're shooting for," he said. "UCF did that. They're a Group of Five school, and they accomplished that great feat. So our attitude is, 'Why can't we do that?' Our goal this year is 13-0."

The fan support is certainly already in place. In their third season under Brown, the Trojans shattered the school's single-season attendance record at Veterans Memorial Stadium in 2017 for a second straight year.

"Our fans are awesome," Stidham said. "The support we have has been amazing."

Barring something unforeseen, Stidham is on track to get his first chance to show those fans what he can do on September 1 when the Broncos come calling. The vision of that day served to keep him motivated as he worked to improve, day after day, behind the scenes.

"During the season, the traveling guys, the starters, they don't really lift as hard because they have to keep their bodies ready to play," Stidham said. "But we got after it. Redshirt guys are constantly trying to get better, so when that next year rolls around, we'll have a chance to be out there."

For Stidham, next year is finally here.



Austin Stidham

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Boutwell is very familiar with the aptly named Fighting Joe, having battled the challenging course many times while playing with Russellville graduates and UNA golfers Eli Hodges and Aaron Jackson. The first Trail course to exceed 8,000 yards, Fighting Joe offers more than mere length in the way of testing.

"It's got a lot of fescue," Boutwell said. "If you miss the fairway, you can really get in some trouble in the tall grass. You pretty much have to take an unplayable or try and hack it out sideways. The greens are big, and they're really undulating with a lot of slope in them. I think it's normally one of the harder courses I've played. If you're not getting off the tee well, it can be real tough."

After his frustrating Friday practice round, Boutwell spent the weekend—where else—at Twin Pines Country Club, hitting range balls and working on his putting stroke. He returned to Fighting Joe with the rest of his Russellville teammates on Monday morning, May 14, ready to compete in the state tournament for the third time in his three years at the varsity level.

Almost immediately upon reaching the practice range, Boutwell felt an entirely different vibe than he had just three days earlier.

"It's got a lot of fescue," Boutwell said of Fighting Joe, where he previously won the Brooks Invitational in 2016. "If you miss the fairway, you can really get in some trouble in the tall grass. You pretty much have to take an unplayable or hack it out sideways. The greens are big, and they're really undulating with a lot of slope in them. I think it's one of the harder courses I've played. If you're not getting off the tee well, it can be real tough."

"When I got out there Monday, I felt good, pretty much as soon as I got to the range," Boutwell said. "Warming up, I was hitting it good. I was hitting all my shots the way I wanted, they were moving how I wanted them to. I was pretty confident before we started."

Boutwell was placed in a threesome with two players from opposing schools (one from Briarwood Christian, the other from either Scottsboro or St. Paul's; he can't recall which), and the group teed off around nine o'clock.

For Boutwell, that's where any and all conversation pretty much ceased. "I don't really talk a lot when I'm playing," he said. "Some guys do. Once I get going, I'm kind of in my own little world. I don't really say anything."

The first hole at Fighting Joe is an uphill par five with water to the right in front of the green. Establishing a pattern that would last throughout the round, Boutwell—who says he drives the ball "300-ish" on a typical day—found the fairway with his tee shot on No. 1, leaving himself a shade over 200 yards to the green. He knocked a six-iron to within 10 feet of the pin, then missed an eagle putt before tapping in for birdie.

"It was kind of disappointing to miss that putt," Boutwell said, "but just to start out with a birdie was still a good start. It gets your confidence up."

Boutwell certainly made the most of that early momentum. He birdied two more holes on the front nine, missing a 15-footer for eagle on the par-five seventh, and made the turn at three-under 33. He made birdie again on No. 12, the longest hole on the course, playing the par-fives at three-under for the day.

"I normally hit my drive really well," Boutwell said, explaining his affinity for the par-fives. "If you can control it really well, that helps a lot on some of the longer holes."

Boutwell displayed uncanny accuracy with his driver all day on Monday, hitting every fairway but one. He reached 17 greens in regulation, missing the green on No. 16 by "six or eight inches." That type of ball-striking and iron play, combined with a steady putter, left Boutwell with a bogey-free round of 68, matching his best-ever score in a school competition and placing him one stroke ahead of St. Paul's Will McFadden for the low round of the day.

"I had never played that course bogey-free before," Boutwell said. "I was just hitting my driver really well, and I putted really well inside of eight feet. I think I only missed one putt inside eight feet on the first day."

Every facet of Boutwell's game was so buttoned down in his Monday round that he can't recall having to scramble even once to save par.

"Not really," he said. "I had a couple of long putts, maybe thirty feet. They were long birdie putts, and I was able to two-putt them. Nothing too crazy."

Even though he was on his way to besting his previous low round in state tournament play by eight strokes, Boutwell tried his best not to get too caught up in how well he was scoring.

"You're always aware of that," he said. "You try not to think about it, but it's really hard not to, especially when you've got to sit there and write down your score after every hole."

Boutwell says he crossed paths with Russellville coach Patrick Odom "every four or five holes" during his round.

"He would just give me some water," Boutwell said, "and tell me to keep it up."

As Boutwell left the 18th green following yet another par, the first person he

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ran into was Blake Bendall, a former Russellville golfer whose brother Brayden is now a Golden Tiger junior.

"I walked up to him," Boutwell said, "and he told me, 'I think you're in the lead.' I was like, 'Really?'"

Really.
So what was it like seeing his name atop the leader board after day one of the state tournament?

"Really, it was no different than any other tournament," Boutwell said. "I knew I had to go out there and compete with some really good players on the second day. There were still a bunch of people in it."

Almost inevitably, Boutwell slipped a little on Tuesday, largely due to a bad start. He went in the water on No. 1 and No. 2, making back-to-back doubles and falling to four-over through two holes. He played the remaining 16 holes at one-over, finishing the day with a respectable 77.

"It was about the same as the first day," Boutwell said. "I hit a lot of fairways and greens."

McFadden shot one-under 71 on day two, overtaking Boutwell and out-distancing the freshman by five strokes to win low medalist honors. Boutwell was asked on Thursday if, going into the state tournament, he would have signed up for a two-day score of 145 and an overall second-place finish.

"Umm....after my practice round," he said, "I would have happily taken that."

On the other hand, an opening-round 68 and a one-stroke lead have a way of altering one's expectations.

"Yeah," he admitted, "it definitely did. But I'm still happy with finishing runner-up."

Boutwell is no stranger to finishing first, having taken the Brooks Invitational title—at Fighting Joe, no less—as a seventh-grader and then adding to his hardware collection with another tournament win in 2017. Later that summer at Twin Pines, he posted the best 18-hole score of his golfing life, shooting nine-under 62—just three strokes off the club record.

Still, shooting 68 on a course like Fighting Joe in a pressure-packed environment on day one of the state tournament might qualify as Boutwell's most impressive achievement yet. [His previous best round in state tournament play had been a second-day 76 as an eighth-grader in 2017.]

"I've improved a lot since last summer," he said. "My game was in a good spot [last month at Fighting Joe]. I had been playing a lot, and I was confident. Plus, I just had more experience this time."

Boutwell says he's been playing a lot of golf this summer. He shot five-under on day one of the annual Twin Pines Invitational on his way to a top-eight finish. He was scheduled to play in a tournament at Cypress Lakes in Muscle Shoals starting this past Sunday, and he'll play in the Spirit of America Tournament at Burningtree Country Club in Decatur next month.

Including Boutwell, Russellville's top four players will all return in 2019. Brayden Bendall (76-74) and Jaceton Murray (74-78) also finished in the Top 5 at Fighting Joe last month as juniors, helping the Golden Tigers finish as runners-up and earn their second Red Map in the last three years. Lucas McNutt—another junior—rounded out Russellville's scoring at state with a two-day total of 177 (90-87).

With all that firepower coming back, Boutwell and the Golden Tigers should be strong contenders next season to win the program's first state championship since 2015.

"As an individual, I'd like to at least shoot the score I shot this year, or maybe better," Boutwell said. "I think if we just play good as a team, we can make it back to state, and once you get there, anything can happen."

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recalling a start from a few weeks earlier at Lawson State, where he threw seven innings of three-hit ball in an 11-1 rout. And, surely, his 136-pitch complete game win against Snead State at the conference tournament in May of 2017 is a lock to make the list.

Right?
Wrong.

As it turns out, Bohannon (a 6'4, 220-pound lefthander) is wired a little differently than most. For him, the highlights tend to run together. It's the heartache that leaves a mark.

"The bad ones...those are the ones I remember," said Bohannon, a 2016 graduate of RHS who helped the Golden Tigers win the first two state championships in program history before heading down to Shelton. "Those are the ones that keep me going. The first one was against Southern Union my freshman year, when I got knocked out in the first inning. Then, my sophomore year, there was one against Northwest Florida where I shoved the first inning and then came back out in the second inning and gave up [seven] earned runs—three of them on bunts. They kept bunting, and I just could not field it.

"The third one—and the one that really sticks out and keeps me in gear when I'm working out or whatever—was our last game of the season this year. I was pitching against Wallace State. I think I had given up one run until the sixth inning, and I just ran out of gas. I blame that on my conditioning. I gave up [six] runs. Those are the ones I remember. Those are the ones that get me going in the morning."

Bohannon, who earned state finals MVP honors as a Russellville senior in 2016 after tossing a two-hit shutout in an elimination game against Faith Academy, isn't looking for fanfare these days. He's looking for fuel. Those two rough outings—two rough *innings*, really—against Northwest Florida and Wallace State may have skewed his final season numbers [take them out of the equation, and his ERA drops from 4.05 in 66.2 innings to 2.35 in 64.2 innings], but they should also serve to keep his engines hot all summer as he gets ready to make the jump from the JUCO ranks to Division One.

Bohannon announced last week on social media that he has accepted an offer to continue his baseball career at UAB, choosing the Blazers over UAH, West Florida and Louisiana-Monroe.

"It's been stressful some days," Bohannon said of the decision-making process. "You go visit all these different schools, and you've got all these different coaches trying to get you to come there. You wanna go to all of them—that's what it feels like right off the bat. You just kind of have to keep riding it out and praying about it, trying to find the right fit for you.

"One day, I woke up, and UAB was it."

Bohannon sees the school as a great fit for him, for a number of reasons. Sure, UAB is a D-1 program a couple of hours from home, but Bohannon—who has his eye on pharmacy school—also believes it's a place where he can continue to grow personally, academically and spiritually.

"It's D-One baseball, a great opportunity, and that's something I've always wanted to do," Bohannon said. "Honestly, I just woke up one morning and had a reckoning. They have the kind of program where they put God first in everything, and they develop you into men. That's something that will be good for me. It'll help me make that next step where you go from those teenager-ish years to adulthood. That was one of the biggest factors to me—getting the chance to grow up and keep growing at UAB."

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The school's relative proximity to northwest Alabama (where Austin's parents, Joel and Ginger Bohannon, and much of his family still live) didn't hurt either.

"That was a huge factor," Bohannon said. "My grandma had some [health] complications a while back, and had I went somewhere far off, them coming to watch me play wouldn't have been easy and probably wouldn't have happened much. That was a big factor in my decision."

UAB head coach Brian Shoop and pitching coach Josh Hopper (the latter of whom attended three of Bohannon's starts at Shelton this past season in person) are getting a slightly different pitcher than the one most Russellville fans were accustomed to seeing. Back in 2016, when he went 14-1 with a 1.22 ERA and 108 strikeouts in 86 innings for a Golden Tiger team that won 48 games and a second straight Class 5A championship, Bohannon primarily relied upon one pitch, albeit a filthy one—a low-80s two-seam fastball with tons of natural late movement that rendered it virtually barrel-proof.

Bohannon was essentially the same pitcher as a freshman at Shelton State; his velocity topped out at 83-84, and his success was still largely predicated on that running two-seam fastball. He maintains that all 136 pitches he threw in that conference tournament win over Snead State in May of 2017 were two-seamers. ["It was one of those things where, if I don't know where it's going, they don't either," he said.]

In his second season under Shelton State head coach and renowned pitching guru Bobby Sprowl, Bohannon made some significant changes to his approach. He moved his arm slot up a little, to more of an over-the-top release point, and he worked out harder and heavier, maxing out more and focusing on building his leg strength.

The result was a fastball that doesn't move quite as much on its way to the plate but gets there a little more quickly. Bohannon also tweaked his breaking ball and started throwing it more often; he now complements a mid- to upper-80s fastball with a hard-biting slider. It was his ability to consistently throw both of those pitches for strikes—in any count—that caught the eye of Hopper.

"They said the biggest thing they liked was my command, my ability to throw two pitches for strikes," said Bohannon, who went 5-3 for Shelton in 2018 with 50 strikeouts and 23 walks in 66.2 innings. "I've actually developed my breaking ball into more of a slider with bite. My fastball doesn't move as much as it used to. I wish it did. But the velocity has picked up a lot. It's a straighter, harder fastball, with more of a biting slider. I have a changeup, too, but I didn't throw it much this year.

"My sophomore year, I grew up a lot. I started throwing harder and throwing my breaking ball more, trying to put guys away with swings and misses."

Hopper had scouted Bohannon in person when he was pitching at Russellville, but UAB didn't offer the big lefty coming out of high school. For his part, Bohannon believes everything worked out for the best.

"Oh yeah, one hundred percent," he said. "I'd definitely do it the same if I could do it over again. Those JUCO years are the best years. I'd tell any kids who have D-One dreams that JUCO is the way to go. You can go somewhere else, but you might end up redshirting or just sitting there for two years instead of getting the kind of college experience I got.

"I got a lot of innings and got to be a starter for two years. It worked out for

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me.”
In those 25 starts at Shelton (12 as a freshman, 13 as a sophomore), Bohannon went 8-7 with a 3.56 ERA and three complete games. He worked a total of 123.2 innings, allowing 116 hits, striking out 88 batters and walking 43. He'll have every opportunity at UAB to become a key member of the Blazers pitching staff.

“The sky's the limit,” said Bohannon, who plans to room with Hewitt-Trussville product Keegan Morrow, a teammate and roommate of his at Shelton State who is also signing with UAB. “It all depends on how I produce. I'd like to think I'll have a chance to be one of their top-line guys. If I don't produce, I may end up being a reliever out of the pen. It all depends on me.”

Bohannon said he has kept a watchful eye on some of his former Russellville teammates who have likewise found success at the college level. Jacob Green, a 2015 RHS grad, was on Shelton's staff with Bohannon in 2017 before moving on to Western Kentucky, where he pitched last season and has one year of eligibility remaining.

Reed Smith, a classmate of Bohannon's at Russellville, just finished an All-Conference season at Dyersburg State and is on his way to play at Troy University. Meanwhile, Cody Greenhill earned freshman All-America honors at Auburn this season, while fellow 2017 RHS alum Judd Ward made SportsCenter recently with a highlight-reel diving catch in left field in the Tigers' Super Regional series at Florida.

“I talk to Goober [Green] all the time,” Bohannon said. “We got real close at Shelton, and now we're gonna be playing in the same conference. [UAB and Western Kentucky are both members of Conference USA]. Cody and Judd, I've kept up with them, too. Every game, every ball hit to Judd, he's diving and catching it, just like in high school. Cody, he's a bulldog, just like in high school. It's fun to watch. Reed's playing summer ball in Orlando. I saw on Twitter where he's tearing it up.

“You put those Russellville boys at the next level, and they show out.”

Bohannon will get his chance to show out at UAB—but only on the mound. Russellville's all-time record holder with six career postseason home runs, Bohannon begrudgingly admits that his days in the batter's box are now firmly in the past.

“I do miss hitting,” he said, “but it's not something I want to pick back up. I miss it, though. Striking somebody out is great, but I swear hitting a home run is the best feeling.

“I actually took BP at Shelton late in the season, and I was one of the worst-

hitting pitchers. I hadn't swung a bat the whole spring, and I couldn't square anything up. My hitting days are absolutely over.”

“It'll be surreal,” Bohannon said of the day when he hangs up his cleats for good, “but every player reaches that day. All I can do now is plan for what I'm gonna do after baseball while at the same time taking advantage of all the baseball I have left. Every player has to move on at some point. There comes a day. I'm gonna quit playing when they make me.”

His pitching days most definitely aren't, though he knows at some point in the future he'll be stepping off a mound for the final time.

“It'll be surreal,” Bohannon said, “but every player reaches that day. All I can do now is plan for what I'm gonna do after baseball while at the same time taking advantage of all the baseball I have left. Every player has to move on at some point. There comes a day.

“I'm gonna quit playing when they make me.”



GO GREEN - Bohannon, who set career-highs at Shelton in 2018 with five wins, 50 strikeouts and 66.2 innings, will have every opportunity to become a key part of the UAB staff as well.

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