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Meet Southern Research’s newest key hire

By: Tyler Patchen

One of Birmingham’s major research engines recently made a big hire, as Southern Research named a new vice president of drug development.

April Brys is an experienced life sciences executive with a track record in research and management roles. Prior to joining Southern Research, she was the director of clinical and nonclinical business lines at the Columbus, Ohio-based Battelle Memorial Institute, a global nonprofit applied science and technology development organization.

Brys sat down with the BBJ to discuss taking on the big-picture role and plans for drug development, which many believe could play a big role in the future of Birmingham’s economy.

“I’m part of the executive team, which is great because I have more impact on making bigger decisions,” she said. “I also think that Southern (Research) has a little bit more expertise and focus on drug discovery as part of our other division. Drug development and drug discovery work together, so that’s new to me — being able to discover drugs versus just doing applied work for our clients.”

In terms of her growth plans for the drug development division, Brys will be looking at the division’s capabilities and observing opportunities for growth as she aims to align that with the wider industry now and in the future.

“So, there has been a big emphasis over the past few years in breakthroughs in immuno-oncology,” Brys said. “Southern (Research) has a long history in doing work in oncology, so that is a great example of where there is a great fit of being able to meet the needs of our clients — where they’re developing new therapies for cancer that are not necessarily focused on chemo-therapeutics but focused on harnessing the immune system to fight cancer.”

With new therapies in mind, Brys said the company is in a growth period and has hired 24 new employees this quarter into the drug development division. She said that growth will continue.

“We are growing; we still need to hire some key scientists,” she said. “So, we plan on, this year, having a pretty aggressive staffing plan. We are working closely with our recruiting team to fill those positions.”

One of the big areas of focus for Brys and her team is infectious diseases.

“(Infectious disease research) will continue, and there is a strong emphasis on virology. See Next Page
We're doing a lot in the commercial toxicology space, helping pharmaceutical companies with their new drugs," she said. "We are expanding into neurotoxicity, understanding potential impacts on the nervous system and also environmental and reproductive toxicology."

Brys and the department also will examine the potential for new therapeutics to impact child development. This is important, Brys said, as more young people will need drugs or vaccines, and the department will want to understand the further impacts, such as in developing fetuses and impacts on the ability to reproduce.

The drug development goals will require partnerships and good relationships. Brys hopes to further collaborate with the Battelle Institute, as both institutions have worked together in the past in the area of influenza research. Brys also is focused on growing existing partnerships, such as UAB.

"I think we have to think about are we developing IP (intellectual property) and making sure we are keeping that IP as we think about new techniques we develop, new assays?" Brys said. "Can they be utilized for pharma companies or other companies that can utilize that? So, I think we have to look beyond just new drug discoveries, but how are we using our science, how are we developing techniques that can answer questions, new animal models ... or other models that can have some commercial potential for other organizations that we can license."

Brys also said there is a large focus on research dollars coming to Birmingham and utilizing funds to develop IP and actives, including spinoff companies. She said that is an area where Southern Research has had success in the past and will continue to do more in the future.
Southern Flagship Universities See Biggest Bump in Enrollment

By: Shelly Hagan

Enrollment at several universities in the South jumped more than 50% in a decade, according to data from the College Board.

University of Arkansas saw its number of full-time students grow 63% from 2007 to 2016, the most of any flagship university. University of Alabama and University of Mississippi had the next largest increases at 55% and 51%, respectively.

Admissions officers should take note. The high school class of 2012 ushered in a first wave of declines in the number of graduates nationwide, according to a report by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Boulder, Colorado. The trend will worsen after 2025, when the impact hits from a drop in births that began with the 2007 recession.

Some of the boost in enrollment at schools located in warmer locales coincides with a rise in the region’s population growth, with exceptions. Florida’s population grew by 2.45 million since 2010 while its flagship university saw enrollment slide 4.4% from 2007 to 2016.

Flagship Enrollment

Ten-year change in full-time enrollment at flagship state universities

Studying in the Sunshine State comes with a hefty price tag for non-residents. Out-of-state students at the University of Florida pay more than four times what their in-state counterparts pay, the largest premium among the 50 flagship schools. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ranks second. Out-of-state students there pay more than $35,000 in tuition while those in-state pay less than $9,000.

University of Michigan is the most expensive flagship university for out-of-state students, at close to $50,000 per year. Next are University of Virginia and University of California at Berkeley. All three are consistently among the top-ranked U.S. public colleges.

Meanwhile, the cost gap for in-state and out-of-state students decreased the most at University of Georgia over the last decade.

University of Montana, University of Idaho and University of Alaska saw the biggest declines in enrollment despite their in-state tuition costs trailing their faster-growing counterparts. Enrollment also tumbled at University of South Dakota, which has the best deal for out-of-state students. Tuition and fees for the 2018-19 school year there were just $12,425.
Class brings 43 leaders together to help community

Class brings 43 leaders together to help community

Staff report

Forty-three members of the 2018-19 class of Leadership Tuscaloosa, a nine-month leadership development program, graduated at a ceremony held May 9 at the Cypress Inn Pavilion.

Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, the program is designed to make each participant more aware of the wide range of needs in the community through shared experiences with a cross-section of fellow citizens.

Concetta Odongo of BF Goodrich Tire Manufacturing, and a graduate of the program, served as chair for this year's Leadership Tuscaloosa class.

The keynote speaker at the graduation ceremony was University of Alabama gymnastics coach Dana Duckworth.

The David Reynolds Spirit of Leadership Award was presented to Mac Chambers of Frontier Enterprises.

Class members for 2018-19 are:
- Shannon Biddlecome, Broadway Pizza
- Terri Boman, the University of Alabama
- Jewitt Bradley, Community Service Programs of West Alabama
- Daniel Bradshaw, Tuscaloosa Association of Realtors
- Keith Carpenter, city of Northport
- Mac Chambers, Frontier Enterprises
- Vikki Chavis, the University of Alabama
- Laura Chism, Dorroh & Mills, P.C.
- Erica Cochran, Hospice of West Alabama
- Jesse Crane, First Federal Bank
- Wade Dailey, Wells Fargo Bank
- Stacey DeLoach, Ward Scott Architecture
- Caramyl Drake, the city of Tuscaloosa
- Loun Evans, Michelin
- BF Goodrich
- Tanner Funk, Alabama One Credit Union
- Erica Grant, The Charm District/Tuscaloosa City School Board of Education
- Nicole Hampton, Rosen Harwood, P.A.
- Amy Henderson, Shelton State Community College
- Savannah Howell, City of Tuscaloosa
- Dan Johnson, JamisonMoneyFarmer PC
- Elliott Jones, Raymond James & Associates
- Quin Kelly Jr., Stillman College
- Jamie Lake, Insuresoft Inc.
- Javelin Lewis, Community Service Programs of West Alabama
- Hannah McPhillips, the DCH Foundation
- Pam Mixon, the University of Alabama
- Holly Morgan, the University of Alabama
- Adrian Newson, DCH Health System
- Kelly Norstrom, Tuscaloosa City School System
- Danny Owen, Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports
- Alison Phillips, Parker Towing
- Kyle Phillips, Bryant Bank
- Quinton Poole, United Way of West Alabama
- Mason Primm, Stresscrete Inc.
- Lillian Roberts, Shelton State Community College
- Anna Kay Springer, Hamner Real Estate
- Charlie Taylor, the University of Alabama System
- Delshonda Thomas, The Arc of Tuscaloosa County
- Cade Warner, the Westervelt Company
- LaTonya Washington, Alabama Community Care
- Vadonna Williams, Tuscaloosa's One Place
- Caitlin Tubbs Wilson, Hamner Real Estate
- Cyndee Worrall, Echols, Taylor & Associates, PC.
Historic railroad trestle is an iconic symbol of our city

In 1871, the Alabama & Chattanooga Railroad (later known as the Alabama Great Southern) linked Tuscaloosa to Meridian, Mississippi, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and in 1898, thanks to the trestle, the Mobile and Ohio Railroad (later known as the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio) connected Tuscaloosa with Columbus, Mississippi, and Montgomery. A series of locks and dams, opening in 1866, made water transit on the Black Warrior more reliable and available year-round. The Louisville & Nashville rolled into town in 1912, operating initially as the Tuscaloosa Mineral Railroad. Tuscaloosa finally had the transportation infrastructure it needed to tap the region’s coal and iron riches. As a result, mining and manufacturing flourished and the city quadrupled in population from 1900 to 1930. Tuscaloosa was on its way, with positive growth that continues today.

Notably, the trestle and the trains that traverse it have become inextricably intertwined with another, more modern, icon of our city – the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater. The feeling of being at a show at the Amp – as night falls and a train slowly makes its way across the trestle, forming a backdrop to the artist’s performance – is indescribable. No music video can match that imagery. According to legend, when Neil Young was performing at the Amp in 2002, he became so enamored by the imagery of the trestle that he spent hours on the riverbank behind the Amp, alone with his guitar.

Early on, some thought proximity to the trestle would be detrimental to the Amp’s success, but the reality has proved to be the opposite. Ralph Waldo Emerson summed it up well: “Railroad iron is a magician’s rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water.” Such was certainly the case in Tuscaloosa.

So, in our 200th birthday year, embrace our unique trestle, embrace our railroads and river, and embrace everything our Bicentennial Committee is doing to bring our city’s rich history to light.

Al Spencer is a resident of Tuscaloosa.
Shooting for the Moon: UAH M. Louis Salmon Library awarded Recordings at Risk grant

By: Raegan Grimsley

The University of Alabama in Huntsville’s (UAH) M. Louis Salmon Library Archives and Special Collections has been awarded a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Recordings as Risk Grant. UAH was the only Alabama institution selected to receive the award in the fifth grant cycle, and one of 20 selected nationwide. The $18,775 grant project will digitize, make accessible, and preserve 186 film reels, nine audio reels, and 53 audiocassettes relating to the Apollo program and various support operations.

"This grant is very timely, as it allows us to digitize and make accessible on the world-wide-web some of our older audiovisual materials as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11," said Reagan Grimsley, Head of Special Collections and Archives at the UAH M. Louis Salmon Library. Some of the items to be digitized include oral history interviews conducted with individuals who worked on the Apollo program and home movies, which depict various Apollo-related events.

Drew Adan, archivist and primary investigator for the grant, spoke to the fragility and impermanence of older media formats. "These materials are at high risk of loss from media obsolescence and physical degradation. The Recordings at Risk grant enables us to migrate the information they contain from an outdated and unstable analog format to digital files we can preserve and share with researchers."

UAH Special Collections and Archives collects, organizes, preserves, and makes accessible materials of enduring value that support the research strengths of the university. In addition, Special Collections and Archives houses materials that document the history of the university with focus on the following areas: the history of aerospace, flight, and space, science fiction literature, local and regional politics, oral histories, and the history and culture of Alabama’s Tennessee River Valley.

The Council on Library and Information Resources is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. This is the fifth group of projects supported by the Recordings at Risk awards program, a national regranting program administered by CLIR to support the preservation of rare and unique audio and audiovisual content of high scholarly value. Generously funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the program will award a total of $4.7 million between January 2017 and April 2021.
Dr. John Christy named interim dean of UAH College of Science

By: Diana LaChance

Effective June 1, 2019, Dr. John Christy will serve as Interim Dean of the College of Science at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH).

"Please join me in welcoming Dr. Christy to his new role here at UAH," says Dr. Christine W. Curtis, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. "I have full confidence in Dr. Christy and know that he will serve in the best interests of the students, faculty, and staff of the College of Science and our university. He is a proven and dynamic leader, and with your help and support, he will move the College forward."

Dr. Christy joined UAH in 1987 after earning his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in atmospheric sciences from the University of Illinois. He is a distinguished professor in the Department of Atmospheric Science and the director of UAH’s Earth System Science Center. Since Nov. 2000, he has also served as Alabama’s State Climatologist, and in Jan. 2002, he was inducted as a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society.

Together with Dr. Roy W. Spencer, a principal research scientist at UAH, Dr. Christy has developed a global temperature data set from microwave data observed from satellites beginning in 1979. In 1991, the Spencer-Christy team was awarded NASA’s Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement in recognition of this effort, and in 1996, they were selected to receive a Special Award by the American Meteorological Society.

Dr. Christy has served as a Contributor (1992, 1994, 1996 and 2007) and Lead Author (2001) for the U.N. reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in which the satellite temperatures were included as a high-quality data set for studying global climate change. He has served on five National Research Council panels or committees and has performed research funded by NASA, NOAA, DOE, DOT and the State of Alabama and has published many articles including studies appearing in Science, Nature, Journal of Climate and The Journal of Geophysical Research. Dr. Christy has provided testimony to several congressional committees.

Earlier this year, Dr. Christy was appointed to a three-year position on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Science Advisory Board by Trump administration EPA Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler. He joins seven other experts appointed to serve on the 44-member board, which has four committees involved with agricultural science, chemical risk, drinking water and radiation. As interim dean, Dr. Christy replaces Dr. Sundar Christopher, who served in the position for five years and who will now return to his passions: teaching and research.

“We are grateful for Sundar’s leadership and outstanding service and for his many accomplishments as dean,” says Dr. Curtis. “We look forward to his academic contributions as a professor in the Department of Atmospheric Science.”
Bay Minette designated as one of 'Alabama Communities of Excellence'

MOBILE, Alabama -- The Alabama Communities of Excellence announced that Florala and Gardendale will join ACE as the 2019 incoming class and revealed that Bay Minette, Hanceville and Tallassee have earned the designation of an “Alabama Community of Excellence” Saturday, May 4 at the opening session of the Alabama League of Municipalities Annual Convention, held in Mobile.

The graduation of Bay Minette, Hanceville and Tallassee brings the total number of Alabama communities that have achieved designation as Alabama Communities of Excellence to 39. These communities include: Alexander City, Arab, Atmore, Bay Minette, Brewton, Childersburg, Demopolis, Elba, Eufaula, Evergreen, Fairhope, Fayette, Foley, Geneva, Graysville, Guin, Gulf Shores, Guntersville, Haleyville, Hanceville, Hartselle, Headland, Heflin, Helena, Jackson, Jacksonville, Jasper, Leeds, Livingston, Millbrook, Monroeville, Montevallo, Oneonta, Rainsville, Saraland, Spanish Fort, Tallassee, Thomasville and Valley. Other communities currently in the process of working through the ACE program include: Abbeville, Boaz, Center Point, Chelsea and Red Bay as well as the 2019 Incoming Class, Florala and Gardendale.

Bob Wills, Kenneth Nails and John Hammock, mayors of Bay Minette, Hanceville and Tallassee respectively, and other community representatives were recognized Saturday for their ACE designation and received a plaque and signs to be displayed in prominent locations within their communities. To be designated as an ACE community, they must successfully complete the comprehensive three-phase approach to economic and community development.

“We commend the leadership and many stakeholders of the designated communities for their dedication to ensuring long-term economic success for their communities through the Alabama Communities of Excellence process,” said ACE President and Chairman of the Board, Brandon Bias.

Additionally, ACE announced the 2019 incoming class which includes Florala and Gardendale. The two cities will begin the process of becoming ACE communities this summer. To apply, communities with eligible populations complete a competitive application process in order to be considered for the ACE program. The two main criteria used in selecting ACE participants are: the level of local commitment to the ACE program; and the community’s capacity to support the ACE program. ACE strives to guarantee widespread geographic coverage across Alabama.

The ACE program offers a systematic three-phase approach with technical resources and the tools needed to help Alabama’s small towns foster growth and prosperity by focusing on their distinctive assets and resources. The ACE comprehensive program includes: Phase I, known as the assessment phase. During this time, a comprehensive report card detailing community assets and weaknesses will be prepared by an ACE Team and presented to the community along with recommended strategies and actions.
During Phase II, the Leadership Development and Strategic Planning component, each community must establish a leadership development program, prepare an up-to-date strategic plan, and identify a local nonprofit development organization.

Phase III is the Implementation and Comprehensive Planning segment. Issues addressed during Phase III include comprehensive planning, commercial business development, education enhancement, infrastructure, health and human services, retiree attraction, tourism, economic development, and quality of life.

Throughout each of these phases, ACE Partners work with each community to successfully achieve their goals. “The ACE program would not be possible without the financial support and expertise provided by our partners. We thank all of our partners that range from state agencies and associations to banks, utilities, universities and others – to foster unique community development programs to assist smaller towns to plan, grow and prosper” remarks Brandon Bias at the Alabama League of Municipalities Annual Convention.

The ACE Partner organizations for 2019 include: Alabama Department of Commerce; Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs; Alabama Historical Commission, Alabama League of Municipalities; Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, Alabama Municipal Electric Authority; Alabama Power Company; Alabama Small Business Development Center Network; Auburn University – Government and Economic Development Institute; Byard Associates, LLC; David Mathews Center for Civic Life; Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, Inc.; Jacksonville State University; Regions Bank; Spire; The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development; The University of West Alabama, and the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD). ACE also receives grant funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

ACE was created in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation organized to provides technical assistance to select communities with populations ranging from 2,000 to 18,000 that helps to strengthen the communities’ long-term economic success. This year marks 17 years of ACE providing the resources and knowledge for small communities across the state to focus on the importance of planning, leadership development and broad-based community engagement. Community leaders are provided with training and workshops to develop vision and mission statements, implementation strategies and a sustainable leadership development program. ACE assigns each community with a team of experts from the ACE Associates Council that guide them with an implementation strategy as they work through the program.

ACE principles include the active involvement by community stakeholders across a broad demographic spectrum coupled with development of local leaders and leadership capacity and an emphasis on the importance of developing and implementing short- and long-term plans to further the realization of the municipality’s vision.
Marlon Humphrey wants to bowl over NFL in 2019

By: Mark Inabinett

Baltimore Ravens cornerback Marlon Humphrey’s goals for his third NFL season have something in common.

“Anything that ends with a ‘bowl,’” Humphrey said, "whether that’s Super Bowl, Pro Bowl, any of those things are always big goals. Just making big plays -- big plays lead to Pro Bowls, Pro Bowl players lead to playoff teams and then playoff teams can have a chance to win the Super Bowl, so whatever way you can help your team win. I think the best way to help your team win is to try to play your best ball that you can play.”

The Ravens won the AFC North with a 10-6 record last season, but Baltimore's offseason losses include leaders C.J. Mosley and Eric Weddle, and the two perennial Pro Bowlers aren't the only players missing from the 2018 defense.

“We’ve definitely lost a lot of key guys and guys that kind of led the team last year," Humphrey said during a Thursday press conference. "There are a lot of stories you’ve seen about new faces on the Ravens, but you guys see a lot of new faces and I see a lot of new opportunities. A lot of guys, especially in my draft class and the class last year, are stepping into bigger roles -- including myself -- so I look forward to that as an opportunity and for new guys to make plays and make names for themselves, to become those household names that guys like C.J. Mosley and Weddle and those guys who have left. So a lot of opportunity, and I’m just excited to see guys emerge into these new players and new leaders.”

Baltimore yielded the fewest yards in the NFL last season. Despite the personnel losses, Humphrey wants the Ravens to be No. 1 again in 2019.

“It’s definitely a goal, and the thing I love about the NFL is every year is different," Humphrey said. "There are a lot of good players that played well last year, but every year is a whole new year. Nothing ever really gets carried over. So we finished No. 1 last year and that felt really good to get that and end up being a playoff team, but (defensive coordinator) Wink (Martindale) has already started saying, 'No team is the same. Every team is different. Different guys make different plays. Different scenarios happen in games.'

"So that’s always the goal to be the No. 1 defense, and we were able to do it last year. With some new faces, we’ll be able to work and try to be able to do it again.”

While Humphrey isn’t a new face on the Ravens' defense, the former Hoover High School star does have a new number.

When Baltimore signed three-time All-Pro safety Earl Thomas in free agency this offseason, Humphrey gave up the No. 29, which he'd worn in his first two NFL seasons so the nine-year NFL veteran could continue wearing it.

Humphrey chose 44 for his jersey, the same number that his father, running back Bobby Humphrey, wore in his final NFL season in 1992 with the Miami Dolphins.

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"The 44 feels good," Humphrey said. "I had to find myself on film a few times already, but it feels good."

Both Humphreys were standouts at Alabama, and Marlon Humphrey was in Tuscaloosa on May 3 to receive his bachelor's degree from the university.

"It was very important," Humphrey said of completing his degree work. "I definitely didn't think that would be something I would do so close to going into the league from when I left, but it definitely felt really good to walk across the stage and hug my mom, who is a trustee at Alabama. So it definitely felt really good to get that -- something I started and finished.

"Now it's back to football."
UA parking deck to open in August

Four-story deck will have about 1,010 spaces

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A new four-story parking deck is on schedule to open in August on the University of Alabama campus across from the Moody Music Building. The Capstone parking deck will have about 1,010 spaces. It replaces a surface lot that was previously on the site at the corner of Second Avenue and Paul W. Bryant Drive adjacent to the Bryant Conference Center and the music building. Construction began last spring. Bailey Harris Construction Co. is the contractor.

The deck also has additional storage space for Million Dollar Band, whose practice field is to the east of the structure. The deck is also designed serve as shelter for larger vehicles during severe weather.

The deck will also eventually house a $3.5 million event management center for the Department of Public Safety, which will monitor campus events from the site. The center is scheduled to bid soon and is set to open in 2020, said Senior Associate Vice President for Campus Development Tim Leopard.

The university previously considered a pedestrian bridge from the deck over Second Avenue, but those plans remain on hold while UA considers future designs for the music building.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Every year, Scholarship America awards “Dream Scholarships” to a select few students who have overcome huge barriers to achieve their college dreams.

Jasmine Cunningham, a 23-year-old psychology and neuroscience student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, definitely fits that description.

One of only 22 students across the country to be awarded the Dream Scholarship this year, and 86 since its 2014 inception, Jasmine is a study in perseverance.

A home-school student from the Clay-Trussville area, she was diagnosed with a pituitary brain tumor in 2016. That tumor caused a rare endocrine disorder called Cushing Disease, which causes the pituitary gland to release too much cortisol, a stress hormone. The disease causes severe fatigue, muscle weakness, headaches and cognitive difficulties, and a laundry list of other symptoms.

Then the tumor caused a dangerous cerebrospinal fluid leak, which required surgery last fall at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. The fluid leak was fixed, but the symptoms of Cushing Disease persist.

“It definitely affects studying and test taking and even walking around campus is hard,” said Cunningham, who must use a walker to get around UAB.

With the support and encouragement of her parents, Janet and Jimmy Cunningham, she’s not let that stop her. She’s gone at a slower pace through college than some of her peers, but slow and steady is winning her the race.

“She’s had to have two surgeries in the midst of going to college,” Janet Cunningham said. “It’s been really difficult, but she’s gotten through it.”

Jasmine was inspired and supported through the diagnosis and the surgeries by her older brother, Jared, a UAB grad and medical student at the University of Indiana who is pursuing a Ph.D in neuroscience.

“He was actually in his first year of medical school in 2016, so when I was telling him about my symptoms, he was excited to diagnose me and asked me if the doctors had tested me for Cushing’s,” Jasmine said.

On top of the tumor and Cushing Disease and the surgeries and fighting through the fatigue, Jasmine also found out in 2017 that she was on the autism spectrum.

She had always wanted to become a doctor (in addition to her brother’s medical path, her mother is a psychiatric nurse) but the autism diagnosis helped her decide on a discipline of study. The Dream Scholarship, which provided about $8,000 toward her college expenses, will help with the financial side while she powers through the physical and psychological obstacles.

“Finding out about having autism moved me more toward the psychology and neuroscience,” Jasmine said. “I really want to help young kids with autism. That’s what I really want to do with my career.”
The BBA 2.0: Leaders exploring future of the Birmingham Business Alliance

By: Ty West

It's been nearly a decade since the Birmingham Business Alliance was created through merger of the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Development Board.

A lot has changed in Birmingham since then. The revitalization of downtown Birmingham has given the metro newfound momentum and a different vibe.

The region has benefited from a wave of positive national press, much of it focused on Birmingham's food scene, downtown's comeback and local entrepreneurial efforts.

A host of local initiatives — including several that involve the BBA — have formed to address some of the region's most pressing challenges, such as workforce development and regional collaboration.

But for all those positives, one thing hasn't changed: Birmingham's status as a slow-growth market. Since the BBA was formed in 2009, metro Birmingham's job growth rate is 8.9 percent — lower than several other metros in the region. While last year was the region's best year in terms of job growth, Birmingham's growth gap with Nashville, Huntsville and other Southeastern peers widened.

Those trends — both the good and the mediocre — are in focus amid an effort to chart a new course for the BBA's future.

The effort includes deciding both the guiding mission and the strategy for the BBA. It also includes a pivotal hire, as the BBA must find a permanent successor to longtime leader Brian Hilson, who departed the organization earlier this year. Fred McCallum, the longtime leader of AT&T Alabama, is serving as interim CEO of the BBA.

While McCallum is leading the day-to-day operations of the BBA, the strategic planning effort is being spearheaded by some of the most prominent names in Birmingham's business world, with Mayer CEO Nancy Goedecke, the current chair of the BBA, leading the committee.

Both locals and outside experts say Birmingham's economic development efforts are at an important pivot point, with the opportunity to set a course that could break Birmingham's traditional mold and shed its reputation as a metro with perpetual promise but lackluster growth metrics.

Site selectors and experts say the BBA is on the right track with its regional mindset, but also have some advice for Birmingham as it ponders the future of the organization.
When Hilson departed the organization in March, the BBA turned to an established Magic City business leader to head up operations on an interim basis as the BBA evaluates its future.

McCallum is well-connected in the local business world and knowledgeable about the BBA and its history – having been involved in the rollout of the Blueprint Birmingham strategic plan in 2010.

Improving education and workforce development have also been passion projects for McCallum over the years, dovetailing with one of the most critical current focus areas of the BBA, which is working with Central Six Alabama Works and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning on the Building (It) Together workforce initiative.

McCallum said the 10-year mark for the organization, coupled with the change in leadership, provided an opportunity for the organization to look at its overall direction.

He said the leadership of the BBA plans to spend a few months visioning for the organization, which includes meeting with the many stakeholders in the community – corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, government leaders and economic development organizations, among others.

“What are we doing in the city? Who are we doing it with? Are we doing the right things or should we change things?” McCallum said of the overall goals and key questions during the visioning process.

McCallum said one of the goals is achieving alignment in the community and the numerous ongoing efforts both within local cities and counties and broader community initiatives, such as Building (It) Together.

“Hopefully, the result of that is we are more aligned with all of the groups,” McCallum said.

That could include determining when the BBA should take a lead role or be more of a partner on particular projects.

One part of the process is looking at the overall mission of the organization, which was created as both a chamber of commerce and an economic development organization. Some metros have separate organizations for those functions – which is the format Birmingham previously had before the merger that created the BBA.

McCallum said the leadership is exploring ways to best balance the needs of companies of all types, since there are other chambers of commerce in the area – in addition to groups that serve particular industries.

Based on the feedback received at this point, McCallum said the answers often depend heavily on who you are talking to. For instance, local tech executives have told the Birmingham Business Journal they’d like to see a greater focus on the entrepreneurial scene. But a manufacturer may want to double down on industrial efforts.
McCallum said the BBA’s leadership is working to take all of that feedback and different views and put them together in a way that gets everyone working together.

“The answer is ‘and’ not ‘or,’” he said. “But you do have to pick your areas where you are going to make large investments.”

The BBA’s leadership is working with Birmingham consultant Cathy Wright on its visioning process. McCallum said Wright’s local knowledge and involvement with other recent strategic planning efforts in the region have proven beneficial.

Goedecke said she’s been pleased with the current strategic planning process.

“It is very collaborative, inclusive, transparent and engaging of our executive committee, our board, and our community,” she said.

The outsider views

John Boyd and his site selection company, The Boyd Co., is no stranger to Alabama economic development. It’s worked on projects in the state for decades.

Boyd said the BBA is at a pivotal point, particularly when it comes to hiring a long-term leader.

“They need to bring aboard someone who gets the steak and the sizzle,” Boyd said. “The steak is the quantitative assets of the area. The sizzle is the salesmanship element. Being able to develop and maintain relationships with global decisionmakers.”

He said current trends could result in an attractive candidate pool. He said the intense coverage of economic development – as well as the stakes – are attracting a variety of experienced professionals to high-profile regional economic development positions.

In addition to established economic developers, he said major business leaders, political fundraisers and big names from the world of philanthropy are pursuing economic development roles.

But before hiring a leader, Boyd said the BBA needs to determine what it wants to be and its mission moving forward.

He said Birmingham has the right idea of having a regionally focused group, given current industry trends.

Boyd said the big trend in economic development is a regional focus and noted that several of the most successful organizations around the nation utilize a regional or metro-wide focus that spans multiple counties.
He mentioned Nashville, Charleston and Las Vegas among the areas that have successful regional approaches. Boyd said it’s important to have an overarching regional infrastructure with access to detailed information and analytics that site selectors expect.

He also said marketing is a particularly important function for regional groups to play in what is a very competitive environment. That’s one area where he thinks Birmingham should further elevate its game.

One of the most notable areas of success for the BBA has been its ability to garner more national press for Birmingham. The BBA has been a key player behind the scenes in that regard, and McCallum said that is something for the organization to continue building on.

But Boyd said there are even more opportunities out there.

“We view Birmingham as a city with enormous potential to attract regional headquarters, and banking and finance projects over the next decade,” Boyd said.

He said the city should be aggressive in promoting the role research at UAB can play not just in health care, but in fintech and other areas.

“Rule 101 is fishing where the fish are,” he said. “In banking and fintech, Birmingham should be making the type of high-tech aggressive plays that neighboring cities in the South are making. That’s all about promotion.”

Jeff Forsythe, of Forsythe & Associates, said regionally focused groups are becoming more and more common, but he also noted that localized economic development functions for the municipalities within those regions can pay big dividends.

Several cities in the metro area have evolved their economic development strategies since the formation of the BBA.

The city of Birmingham, for example, created the new Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity that represented a strategic shift from past administrations. It’s also partnering with Brookings Institution with a goal of increasing inclusive economic development. It also changed its funding relationship with the BBA. It previously provided $137,000 annually. This year, that total dropped to $80,000 and the city asked the BBA to focus specifically on industrial project management and advanced tradeable sector jobs.

The city of Hoover has beefed up its own economic development efforts, and has had some early successes, particularly on the technology front.

Shelby County formed 58 Inc., which expanded the fast-growing county’s efforts.

Forsythe doesn’t view that as a bad thing for the region’s growth prospects.
He said the local groups can often provide the type of detailed community information that is coveted by site selectors and might not be as readily available at the state level.

"Having them all fully aligned is the challenge," he said.

In some areas, he said friction has resulted from some communities that were helping fund a regional economic development organization, but didn’t feel they were seeing enough benefits. Those comments have popped up from time to time in Birmingham over the past decade.

That’s why communication and setting expectations are key to the process.

Forsythe said sometimes a community may feel that it was overlooked or missed out on a lead that came to a regional organization, when in reality its available sites might not have met all of the prospect’s criteria.

“I’ve seen it all over. At the end of the day, growth within the region is good for the entire region,” he said.

Vyonne Murray, managing director of 58 Inc., said the BBA provides some valuable functions for her small organization, particularly in terms of data and research, as well as lead generation.

“When you’re a shop of just two people, it’s really important to have access to that regional asset with those capabilities,” she said.

From her perspective, Murray said she hopes the BBA’s new model continues focusing on workforce development while also having strong alignment and buy-in from the corporate community.

Amy Liu, director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution, said the traditional world of economic development is being disrupted in a number of ways – from increasing digitalization of the economy to evolving workforce needs and beyond.

She said the types of economic development organizations that are successfully reinventing themselves have a few things in common.

Liu said they are more regional in nature and are managing internal competition to avoid having jurisdictions competing with one another. They’re also moving beyond traditional roles of simply marketing and recruiting – increasing their focus on things like skills development, affordable housing and other ingredients of an inclusive economy. They’re also broadening traditional metrics to reflect those changes.

**Moving forward**

Experts say the BBA’s leadership has the right idea about determining what it wants to be before hiring its next leader.
McCallum said the summer is likely the earliest date the search process would start.

Between now and then, the organization plans to continue its conversations with stakeholders and develop clarity on its mission.

Just like when the BBA was created a decade ago, there is still the recognition of the need for stronger job growth.

From McCallum’s point of view, that’s not all about comparing Birmingham to peers.

“Let’s focus on where we are and how do we improve where we are and be the best Birmingham we can be,” he said. “That being said, I don’t think anybody is particularly happy about where we are in growth in the number of jobs. We have some work to do – focusing on that net number, getting down underneath it and figuring out what we need to do to change the direction in that area.”

But McCallum said the BBA also wants to be conscious of how the region is growing.

“How we grow matters a lot,” he said. “We ought to be strategic about how we do it and put ourselves and our economy in the best position for the long term.”

That’s similar to the vision and the strategy emanating from the city of Birmingham, and site selectors say having that type of alignment between a regional economic development organization and the metro’s largest city is paramount.

Josh Carpenter, director of innovation and economic opportunity for the city of Birmingham, said he believes the data compiled by Brookings can help inform the BBA’s future course. As a local economic development leader, he said he’s been pleased with the conversations and feedback loop with the BBA during its process. From his vantage point, he’d like to see a BBA emerge that has a sector-based focus that’s aligned with base industries and potential areas of growth.

“If we could get sector-based expertise so we can have people in the room who will have gravitas with people in those sectors and know the nuances of the industry, that’s the main thing we’d like to see,” Carpenter said.

Looking around the nation, Carpenter said Birmingham has an advantage over some metros that have siloed themselves by having several franchise organizations targeting particular industries, which creates fragmentation. He said having a sector-based BBA as a unified voice presents a real opportunity.

“We need to have the sort of strategy that is aligned from a regional economic development standpoint, but reflects the many dimensions of what our economy looks like,” Carpenter said. “Sectors all reporting well within one umbrella with different competencies but locked in on the same sort of vision. That’s what we want, and I think that’s where we’re heading.”
Toyota Motor plant in Huntsville gets new president

By: Paul Gattis

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, the engine-building facility in Huntsville, is getting a new president.

Toyota announced Monday that David Finch has been promoted to lead the plant, which is expected to have about 1,800 employees by 2021.

Finch steps in for David Fernandes, the president of the Huntsville motor plant who is the new senior vice president of manufacturing at Toyota South Africa Motors.

According to the Toyota announcement, Finch first joined Toyota in 1991 at its South Africa Motors facility. In his 28 years with the company, he has held many leadership roles including positions in quality assurance, assembly and manufacturing. He joined Toyota Alabama in March as vice president, administration, manufacturing and manufacturing support.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to lead Toyota Alabama,” Finch said in the announcement. “Since joining the team earlier this year, I have seen firsthand the commitment our workforce makes to meet customer demand while focusing on quality and safety. I am excited to be a part of this plant and the community.”

During Fernandes’ leadership tenure in Huntsville, the plant launched a new engine line and produced nearly 2 million engines. The plant announced its fifth expansion in March – a $288 million investment that is creating 450 new jobs.

“It’s been an honor and privilege to be a part of the continued growth and development of this plant, which is a direct result of our team members’ hard work and dedication,” Fernandes said in the announcement. “The ongoing support we’ve received from community partners and elected officials has also created an environment for our plant to thrive.”
Toyota names new president for Alabama plant

Toyota Motor North America has named a new president of its Huntsville engine plant.

David Finch, who joined Toyota in 1991, has been tapped to lead the plant. He came to Toyota Alabama as vice president, administration, manufacturing and manufacturing support in March. Finch will succeed David Fernandes, who will transition to senior vice president of manufacturing at Toyota South Africa Motors after three years at Toyota Alabama.

Under Fernandes’ leadership, the plant launched a new engine line and produced nearly 2 million engines. In March, TMMAL announced its fifth expansion, a $288 million investment and 450 new jobs, increasing the plant’s total investment to $1.2 billion with approximately 1,800 team members by 2021.

Toyota’s engine plant was one of the key factors in the automaker choosing Alabama for a joint manufacturing project with Mazda that will result in a new auto assembly plant in Huntsville.
Alabama reports record tourism year

Beaches, historical sites, space center lead way

Paul Gattis pgattis@al.com

A record number of travelers to Alabama spent more than $15 billion in the state last year, Gov. Kay Ivey announced this week.

It made for a sparkling annual tourism report, highlighted by spikes in visitors to Montgomery and the continued popularity of Alabama’s beaches in Baldwin County.

“We are excited our tourism industry grew by 8.5 percent in 2018, and we are proud to welcome millions of visitors to every region of our state, from the Tennessee Valley to the Wiregrass, to experience our hiking trails, beaches, restaurants and historical sites each year,” Ivey said in the announcement. “This great news not only impacts tourism, but it also has a major impact on our employment sector. Almost 200,000 direct and indirect jobs were maintained by the industry last year, setting yet another record.”

The economic impact of the state’s tourism industry was estimated to be $5.4 billion last year and 198,890 jobs were directly or indirectly attributed to the tourism industry, according to the report.

Alabama has seen annual increases in tourism since 2003, the report said, with the exception of a slight dip in 2010, which coincided with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The $15.5 billion in tourist spending in 2018 marked an increase of 8.5 percent from 2017. The report estimated more than 27.7 million people visited Alabama last year. More than $954 million in state and local taxes were generated by tourism last year, saving each household $507 in additional taxes.

“We are proud that this past year showed the largest growth in visitors and expenditures in the state’s history,” state tourism director Lee Sentell said in the announcement. “We substantially exceeded our goals by attracting more than one million additional visitors and increasing expenditures by $1.2 billion.”

While the report from the state tourism department did not spell out specific popular tourist sites, it’s clear that visitors like Alabama’s beaches. Baldwin County had more than 6.5 million visitors last year — almost twice as many as second-most visited Jefferson County with almost 3.5 million visitors.

Madison County — home of the state’s most popular tourist venue in the U.S. Space & Rocket Center — jumped Mobile County into third place with 3.35 million visitors.

Officials in Madison County celebrated more than 3.35 million visitors to the county last year, an increase of 6 percent over last year. Those visitors had an economic impact in Madison County of $1.4 billion.

Each household in Madison County saved $854 in taxes because of tourism revenue, said Judy Ryals, CEO of the Huntsville-Madison County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Madison County is expecting a surge in tourists this year as part of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

“This is a big deal,” Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said. “It talks about people getting to see our community, be part of our community. And when they go away, they have the typical thing that people say when they come here: ‘Wow, I had no idea.’ That’s reflecting that they didn’t know how special this place is.

“And they leave $1.4 billion behind.”
Leaders note progress

Gas tax revenues will help fund Tuscaloosa projects

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

As federal talks on national transportation infrastructure needs abruptly ended on Wednesday, state and local officials conveyed a spirit of cooperation during the annual Transportation Summit at the Tuscaloosa River Market.

Updates on local infrastructure projects highlighted the meeting that has been hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama since 2014.

"There are big needs on our big road systems," said John Cooper, director of the Alabama Department of Transportation, who opened the summit discussing the plans for new revenue generated from the state gas tax increase approved earlier this year by the Alabama Legislature.

'Rebuild Alabama'

Once the full 10 cent-per-gallon increase is phased in over the next three years — a total that could increase up

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in every two years — revenue from the “Rebuild Alabama” legislation is expected to reach between $300 million and $320 million.

Cooper said $30 million to $50 million of this is slated to go toward “projects of local significance,” such as the estimated overall $35 million expansion of McFarland Boulevard starting next year.

Gov. Kay Ivey’s office announced last month that ALDOT will begin purchasing about $750,000 worth of rights-of-way for the expansion of U.S Highway 82 between Alabama Highway 69 and Rice Mine Road in fiscal 2020 with proceeds from the Rebuild Alabama gas tax increase.

“We simply have more vehicles on our roads than the roads are capable of handling,” Cooper said.

At its earliest, construction would not begin on this project until fall 2020, officials said.

Local efforts, local roads

Hours after President Donald Trump abruptly ended a planned session with top congressional Democrats to discuss national infrastructure needs, there was no hint of partisan politics in Tuscaloosa as the topic shifted to more local projects.

Up to now, attention on projects being funded by the Tuscaloosa County Road Improvement Commission, itself formed by a bipartisan effort of the Alabama Legislature in 2015, that are underway or nearing construction.

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox, who serves as the current chair of the Road Improvement Commission, said the estimated $52 million widening and improvement of Martin Luther King Jr. and Jack Warner Parkway, which also will expand the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk westward, is on pace to begin construction later this year or in early 2020.

“This is going to be a great benefit to the people of Tuscaloosa and, in particular, the people of west Tuscaloosa,” Maddox said.

Efforts now are ongoing to secure the 37 tracts and lots needed to construct this project.

Similar efforts are taking place to obtain the 93 tracts of land needed to construct the $45 million expansion of McWright’s Ferry Road, which also is expected to add to the eastern side of the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk.

This project will extend the existing McWright’s Ferry Road from Rice Mine Road to New Watermelon Road and create a secondary access to areas and neighborhoods near the North River Yacht Club, while providing an alternative route to crossing the Lake Tuscaloosa dam.

Nearing completion is the $5.6 million access management improvement project at Hargrove Road and McFarland Boulevard, which is meant to improve traffic flow through the use of turn lanes onto and off Hargrove Road.

Maddox said this project is close to wrapping up.

In 2017, the Road Improvement Commission and the city of Tuscaloosa reached an agreement that allows the city to oversee, manage and fund these three projects on the condition that the Road Improvement Commission reimburses City Hall for its efforts.

“Those orange barrels and those orange cones signify a great deal of growth and investment in our community,” the mayor said.

Large state projects

Meanwhile, the $80 million to $90 million project to expand Interstate 59 to three lanes between Exit 73 — the McFarland Boulevard exit — and Exit 76 — where Cracker Barrel and the Pilot truck stop are located — is moving along ahead of schedule, said David Kemp, pre-construction engineer for ALDOT’s West Central Region.

Kemp said Birmingham-based contractor Brasfield & Gorrie intends to be working on punch list items for the project, which is bringing a crimson bridge suspension bridge over McFarland Boulevard to serve as a detour gateway to Tuscaloosa, by the 2020 college football season.

Initial plans called for this project to extend into December 2020.

“They really want to finish before the 2020 season and they’re on schedule to do just that,” Kemp said.

Efforts also are continuing to speed along the $23.7 million project to improve Lurleen Wallace Boulevard in downtown Tuscaloosa.

This project, which has served as a source of frustration for thousands of west Alabama motorists, will add left and right turning lanes, for a total of five lanes to both the northbound and southbound corridors, and move parallel parking spots to side streets to increase the effective capacity of the roadway that now handles more than 72,000 vehicles per day.

Kemp, though, wasn’t as optimistic about this 18-month project, which began in July 2018, finishing early.

“It’s just not going to finish before football season starts,” Kemp said, adding that it could last well into the fall or early 2020.

But construction on the Alabama Highway 69 South and Skyland Boulevard improvement project, expected to cost about $55 million, will not begin any time soon.

Kemp said right-of-way still must be purchased and utilities moved out of the path before work can begin in earnest.

The project is meant to improve the intersection of Skyland Boulevard and Alabama Highway 69 South with an elevated bridge over the intersection that will allow Highway 69 traffic to pass through without stopping.

This bridge also includes separate ramps for the nearly 6,000-vehicles-per-day to access Interstate 59 and additional lanes to bring motorists down to the surface to gain access via traffic signals to Skyland Boulevard or Oscar Baxter Drive.

Additional work will add travel lanes between the Skyland/69 intersection and Plantation Road as well as smooth traffic signals, meant to move traffic flow from the Skyland/69 intersection to Plantation Road, and construct a multi-use recreational trail alongside the highway from Plantation Road to Old Greensboro Road to Skyland Boulevard.

“We’re making progress,” Kemp said. “When it’s finished, I think you will really, really enjoy it.”

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.

The Tuscaloosa News

Thursday, May 23, 2019
Foot soldier in civil rights movement dies at 89

Theresa Burroughs also founded museum in Greensboro

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

One of the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement in rural Alabama who devoted her later years to preserving its history has died.

Theresa Burroughs, 89, was one of the first marchers to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma and was attacked during the event that became known as Bloody Sunday. But it was Greensboro, the county seat of nearby Hale County where she lived and fought.

Burroughs opened the Safe House Black History Museum in 2002 that she filled with photographs, biographies and historical artifacts depicting the movement as people lived it in Hale County. The house at 2410 Davis St. she owned is where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spent a night in hiding as he traveled from Eutaw to Selma in August 1965.

Tensions were high as the members of the Ku Klux Klan drove the streets with the dome lights of their cars on and the headlights off so their shotguns and white robes were visible. Members of the black community stationed in the bushes around the two-room yellow shotgun house until King safely departed the next morning.

"[Theresa] Burroughs was a warrior for justice and an amazing person!" U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell said Thursday in a message on Twitter. "Her leadership at Greensboro's Hale House helped ensure we never forget the role it played in the civil rights movement."

As a young woman,

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Burroughs and other black Greensboro residents stood in line to register to vote at the Hale County Courthouse every other Monday for 10 weeks. The wait would take hours, she told The Tuscaloosa News in 2009. They would be quizzed about American history and sometimes unrelated questions.

Burroughs recalled the chairman of the Board of Registrars holding up a bag of jelly beans and asking how many red beans there were. She was told her guess was wrong and she could not register to vote. Another time, the same man asked her to recite the second line of the second paragraph of the U.S. Constitution. Another attempt, he asked her to recite the American Creed.

The walls of the museum are lined with mug shots of the marchers, including one of Burroughs holding a towel and glasses to protect her eyes from tear gas. A black “X” police drew on the bottom of her photo marked her status as a leader among the activists.

Other photos in the museum show Greensboro’s black residents, and a few whites, marking down the city streets during a series of protests in 1965. They were barricaded at first and prevented from marching. The protesters later removed the barricades and were arrested for marching. “I can’t tell you how many times we marched, how many times we demonstrated and how many rallies we had,” she told The Tuscaloosa News in 2005.

“Everybody knows about Selma, Montgomery and Birmingham, but you don’t find much in the history books about Greensboro, Hale County and even Greene County,” she said. “Well, we had quite a bit of history here, too.”
Clotilda, the last American slave ship, found in Alabama, historical commission says

By: Howard Koplowitz

The Clotilda, the last American slave ship, has been found, the Alabama Historical Commission announced Wednesday.

"For nearly 160 years, the waters around Mobile have concealed the final destination of the Gulf Schooner Clotilda," the statement read.

The Clotilda, captained by shipbuilder William Foster, sailed into Mobile Bay with 110 African men, women, and children and young adults between the ages of 5 and 23 on board, according to the Encyclopedia of Alabama. The ship illegally transported 110 people from Benin in Africa to Mobile from February to July 1860.

"After their secret arrival—in 1820 the introduction of Africans was declared an act of piracy punishable by death—about 25 young people were sold upriver to slave brokers, but the majority remained in Mobile. Thirty-two became the property of Timothy Meaher, who had financed the expedition, and his brother James enslaved eight others, including Cudjo Lewis; twenty were sent to Burns Meaher’s plantation in Clarke County; between five and eight went to William Foster as payment for the trip; and others were bought by plantation owner Thomas Buford. The young Africans were employed as deckhands, field hands, and domestics," the entry continues.

"Residents of Africatown have carried the memory of their ancestors who were forcefully and violently migrated from Africa to the shores of Alabama. Since then, the final chapter of the Clotilda story has been shrouded in mystery," the historical commission statement continued.

The Africans spent the next five years as slaves during the American civil war, freed only after the South had lost the conflict. Unable to return home to Africa, about 30 of them used money earned working in fields, homes and vessels to purchase land from the Meaher family and settle in a community still known to this day as Africatown.

The ship was found in April 2018 near Twelve-Mile Island in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

"The discovery of the Clotilda is an extraordinary archaeological find," said Lisa Demetropoulos Jones, State Historic Preservation Officer and Executive Director of the Alabama Historical Commission. "The voyage represented one of the darkest eras of modern history and is a profound discovery of the tangible evidence of slavery."

"We are cautious about placing names on shipwrecks that no longer bear a name or something like a bell with the ship’s name on it," said Dr. James Delgado, a maritime archaeologist and project manager for the dig, "but the physical and forensic evidence powerfully suggests that this is Clotilda."
Delgado credited former AL.com and Press-Register reporter Ben Raines with being the first person to touch the Clotilda since it sank and putting a spotlight on the then-potential discovery.

“We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the role of Ben Raines. Ben brought international attention to this … and I think in no small way [the find] has come as a result of Ben’s initiative and determination. He may not have been in the water with us because of all those restrictions on diving, but he certainly has been part of this in a whole range of ways,” Delgado said. “There’s no one person, there’s a whole group of people [who discovered the Clotilda] …and Ben Raines is certainly a key member of that group, and he’s the first to actually drop down on it and touch that wreck.”

Raines, who previously alerted experts to a ship that could have been the Clotilda that ultimately was determined not to be the sunken slave ship, said he was stunned over the discovery.

“It feels much better to be the guy to find it on the second try than to be the guy that found the wrong ship twice,” he said.

According to the historical commission, confirmation of the discovery was made through comparisons of the schooner’s unique size, dimensions, and building materials comprised of locally sourced lumber and “pig iron” that found an exact match to the specifications of the Clotilda as outlined in historic registries.

“Experts were able to observe the exceptional construction and determine the ship was built prior to 1870,” the statement continued.

“The vessel remains also showed signs of burning, which is concurrent with Captain Foster’s claim that he burned the Clotilda after scuttling her. A detailed survey of all surviving historical survey records for schooners in the entire Gulf of Mexico region, and including those of the port of Mobile, found only four vessels built in the size range as this wreck; only one, Clotilda, out of some 1,500 vessels assessed in the archival records, matches the wreck.”

Delgado explained that experts “worked throughout this to prove that it’s not” the slave ship but “everything kept coming up with a match for Clotilda.”

A descendant of one of the Africans who was brought to the South aboard the ship said she got chills when she learned its wreckage had been found.

“I think about the people who came before us who labored and fought and worked so hard,” said Joycelyn Davis, a sixth-generation granddaughter of African captive Charlie Lewis. She added, “I’m sure people had given up on finding it. It’s a wow factor.”

State Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, announced the discovery today on the senate floor.
The Birmingham News
Friday, May 24, 2019

“I have to tell you, this is huge. As you all remember, the first news came out when they thought it was the Clotilda but we learned that it wasn’t. Well now we know that it is. And this could be such a huge, huge tourist attraction for Alabama,” Figures said.

“This is a significant day for the people of Africatown but also for Alabama and our nation,” added U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope. “We should seize upon this opportunity to help us better understand our complex American history. Harry Truman wisely said ‘the only thing new in the world is the history you do not know.’ Let’s use the discovery of the Clotilda to learn more about our history so we can discuss how best we can move forward together.”

Alabama state Rep. Napoleon Bracy, a Democrat who represents House District 98, which includes much of Prichard, said the discovery could have far-reaching impact.

“It shows where the last African-Americans were brought over,” he said. “It’s really going to do a lot to put the Prichard-Mobile-Africatown area on the map, in terms of historical significance.”

Officials said they are working on a plan to preserve the site where the ship was located and plan to present a report on the findings at a community center in Africatown next week.
Auburn is advancing the state of Alabama on and off the court

Jeff Stone for AL.com

The Auburn Tigers' great basketball season — culminating with a trip to the Final Four — drew much national attention to Auburn and the state of Alabama, as the team touched the hearts of countless fans, old and new, and became the state's first school to reach that milestone.

It's an excitement Auburn and our state should reflect off the court as well, as we partner to move the state forward and build a solid foundation for our great future. But, like on the court, we must have the determination to win by overcoming challenges, such as competition from faster-growing states and poor rankings.

Auburn, as a land-grant university, is poised to lead. Land-grant institutions give citizens access to a practical education that benefits the students, strengthens communities and boosts economic opportunities. As an Auburn alumnus, I was already familiar with many university endeavors, but I learned even more when I served as chair of the Auburn University Foundation. Let's look at facts you may not know.

work with NASA to develop additive manufacturing techniques for improving the performance of liquid rocket engines.

Auburn also provides advanced technology and training with Delta Air Lines to develop the next generation of pilots through Delta's Propel Pilot Career Path Program.

Research and technology have more than economic benefits, though. The College of Veterinary Medicine, which most likely taught your veterinarian, constantly makes breakthroughs to benefit pets and people. One area that comes to mind is the Auburn-developed Vapor Wake training for detector dogs, which keep our nation safe.

Still focusing on safety, Auburn has devoted tremendous resources to become a national leader in cyber security, led by its Charles D. McCrary Institute for Cyber and Critical Infrastructure Security. Students graduate prepared to protect the country, like recent cyber-engineering graduate and Rhodes scholar Matthew Rogers.

In Birmingham, students at Auburn's Urban Studio design neighborhood master plans and create designs for public-use buildings in areas with potential for significant urban impact. In west Alabama, the 20K Initiative through the Rural Studio in Hale County is another great example. The initiative is a collaboration with Fannie Mae to develop quality, sustainable houses that give financially vulnerable citizens the ability to own a home.

Another area in which Auburn leads the way is additive manufacturing. One alliance in this growing field is the university's

Auburn educates more students from Alabama than any other institution, creates an annual economic impact of $5.4 billion, provides an 8-to-1 return on every dollar invested and makes immeasurable research advancements for our state and nation.

For example, many Alabamians earn their living through poultry. Auburn research is helping meet new consumer demands, leading the fight against diseases and providing food for a growing global population.

University research is the key to developing industry partnerships, nurturing entrepreneurs and attracting new companies. The Auburn Research Park is a leading destination for business and industry looking to locate or expand in Alabama, and it is home to the Tiger Cage Accelerator and Incubator, which helps student entrepreneurs fine-tune their business ideas and attract investors.

Along the coast, the Auburn University Educational Complex at Gulf Shores offers veterinary care, aviation instruction and Alabama Cooperative Extension System programs.

It's an exciting time for Auburn as a key institution that inspires students, strengthens communities and boosts economic opportunities — all advancing the state of Alabama.

Stone is executive vice president of Brasfield & Gorrie in Birmingham, an Auburn alumnus, and past chair of the Auburn University Foundation.
University of Oklahoma gave false data to U.S. News college rankings for 20 years

By: Eric Levenson

The company that makes the annual Best Colleges rankings said that the University of Oklahoma gave "inflated" data on its alumni giving rates for two decades.

U.S. News & World Report, which produces the coveted Best Colleges rankings, said Oklahoma would be listed as unranked in its 2019 edition because of the false data, which stretched back to 1999.

For the 2019 Best Colleges rankings, the university originally said its two-year alumni giving rate was 14% but later informed U.S. News that the correct number is 9.7%, the magazine said.

The false data affected Oklahoma's placement in the national universities, best value schools, top public schools, best colleges for veterans and A-plus schools for B students rankings and lists, U.S. News said.

The rankings are based largely on data provided by the universities, such as graduation rates, class sizes and standardized test scores of students. Alumni giving rates make up 5% of the rankings formula because "giving measures student satisfaction and post-graduate engagement," U.S. News writes in its methodology.

Last year, the University of Oklahoma was ranked 97th in the Best Colleges survey, and the school touted that placement as the first time it had been ranked among the top 100 universities and colleges.

"This recognition marks a truly historic moment for the university," then-President David Boren said at the time.

In a statement, OU said that it discovered the "misreporting of donations" in 2018 and provided the updated information to U.S. News immediately afterward.

"We appreciate the work of U.S. News and World Report and continue to have pride in the top rankings of several of our programs including our Masters of Business Administration, online bachelor's and graduate programs, specifically in Criminal Justice, Nursing and programs for veterans," said Joseph Harroz Jr., the interim OU President.

"Rest assured, our University has learned from this occurrence and is working toward the goal of achieving future rankings for 2020 and beyond that reflect OU's excellence and academic success."

Oklahoma is not alone in this type of data issue. Last year, U.S. News said that the Fox School of Business at Temple University had "significantly overstated" the number of new entrants to the 2016-2017 class who submitted GMAT scores, which resulted in it receiving a higher ranking.

The Best Colleges rankings have long been criticized by higher education experts. Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, former president of George Washington University, has called them a "racket" and said schools feel pressure to game the rankings.
"Just as athletes use steroids and gambling happens at Rick's, colleges and universities succumb to their own set of pressures, including the desire to be on top in the rankings," he wrote in a 2012 opinion piece for CNN.

The announcement of the false data comes amid a rocky transition for the University of Oklahoma's leadership. Boren, who had led the school since 1994, retired last year amid an investigation into sexual harassment claims, CNN affiliate KOCO reported.

His replacement, James Gallogly, retired May 12, and the university named Harroz, dean of its College of Law, as interim president last week.

Lauren Brookey, the school's vice president of marketing and communications, said the university has retained the law firm Jones Day to conduct an independent investigation into the Boren allegations.
Another win for Wilder

WBC heavyweight champ part of Showtime projects that earn Emmy Awards

By Terrin Waack
Sports Writer

World Boxing Council heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder's recent success continued Monday night at the 40th Annual Sports Emmy Awards in New York City.

The Tuscaloosa native was an integral part of two Showtime projects that earned trophies. Both were centered around Wilder's title fight against Tyson Fury last December at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences chose Showtime's All Access: Wilder vs. Fury Epilogue as the Outstanding Edited Sports Event Coverage winner. Showtime's All Access: Wilder vs. Fury then won the Outstanding Edited Sports Special or Series honor.

"So, I believe Deontay Wilder is now our official lucky charm," Showtime Sports president Stephen Espinoza said. "Either that or (executive producer) Jody Heaps. We're going to have to keep him around for another 30 years. Thank you again on behalf of everybody who doesn't get the credit, this is for you. Thank you very much.

Wilder was actually in attendance and made a guest appearance on stage. He got to announce the nominees and winners for Outstanding Post-Produced Audio/Sound (NASCAR Race Hub's Feeling Speed on FS1) and then Outstanding Play-By-Play (Mike Emrick from NBC/NBCSN).

But before he did that, Wilder knocked Breazeale out in the first round. (PHOTO/AMANDA WESTCOTT, SHOWTIME)

Tuscaloosa's Deontay Wilder celebrates after his bout against Dominic Breazeale, on Saturday, in Brooklyn, New York. Wilder knocked Breazeale out in the first round. (PHOTO/AMANDA WESTCOTT, SHOWTIME)

WILDER

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"You guys have a great weekend?" Wilder said.

"Well, I know I did. But in case you missed it, here's what I did this Saturday night."

A video recapped Wilder's victory over mandatory challenger Dominic Breazeale at Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. Wilder (41-0-1 with 40 knockouts) knocked Breazeale (20-2 with 18 knockouts) out during the first round. The win marked Wilder's ninth successful title defense in a row, making him just the 10th heavyweight to ever pull off such a feat.

Overall, the fight lasted only 2 minutes and 17 seconds.

"As you can see," Wilder said, "I don't get paid for overtime."

The Wilder-Fury bout was much longer. It lasted a full 12 rounds and ended in a split-decision draw. A rematch between Wilder and Fury (27-0-1 with 19 knockouts) has been wanted ever since.

All-Access: Wilder vs. Fury Epilogue beat out Courtside at the NFL Finals (HBO), Mic'd Up: Super Bowl LIII (NFL Network), Road To The Super Bowl (CBS) and Tiger Woods - Return of the Roar (ESPN) in the Outstanding Edited Sports Event Coverage category.

All-Access: Wilder vs. Fury was picked over 24/7: The Match - Tiger vs. Phil (HBO), A Football Life (NFL Network), NFL 360: Steve Gleason (NFL Network) and UFC 25 Years in Short (UFC Fight Pass) for Outstanding Edited Sports Special or Series.

Showtime's All Access was one of six programs to receive multiple statuettes.

"This is one of rare occasions where we actually get to thank the subject," Espinoza said. "Our heavyweight champion, Deontay Wilder, is here. Thank you for letting us stick a camera in your face and bother you all the time."

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Wilder doing what it takes to stay on top

By Terrin Waack
Sports Writer

BROOKLYN, N.Y. — Nothing has changed.
Deontay Wilder still wants to be the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, and that still requires the World Boxing Council’s titleholder to defeat Anthony Joshua, who holds the World Boxing Association, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organization belts, and Tyson Fury, the lineal champ.

“The heavyweight division is very small,” Wilder said after his first-round knockout of Dominic Breazeale last Saturday at Barclays Center. “So, why not have two fights? Three fights? That’s why I don’t understand how none of the big fights haven’t happened thus far. If you lose, OK. Rebuild yourself and get back up.”

A loss doesn’t signify the end of a career.
Of Wilder’s 42 professional career bouts, only eight opponents were undefeated. That includes his original title fight against Bermane Stiverne in 2015. Stiverne was 24-1-1 at the time and the WBC champion. Wilder obviously took that belt with a 12-round unanimous decision and two years later successfully defended it from Stiverne by a first-round knockout.

“If someone loses, you can come back,” said Wilder, a Tuscaloosa native. “Most of these challengers, they lose so many different times, but how many times do they get title fights?

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"Look at Breazeale. He lost before, and now he's in another title fight."

It's true. Breazeale lost to Joshua in 2016 by a seventh-round knockout. The IBF belt was on the line at the time. That was the only blemish on his record until Wilder made him 20-2-0 with 18 knockouts.

The three biggest names right now are all undefeated. Wilder is 41-0-1 with 40 knockouts. Fury is 27-0-1 with 19 knockouts. Joshua is 22-0 with 21 knockouts.

Wilder wants a rematch with Fury and his first shot at Joshua. Neither has worked out yet, and a big reason is because of coverage providers. Wilder has loyalties with Showtime, while Fury signed a deal with ESPN and Joshua is buddied up with DAZN.

Shelly Finkel, Wilder's co-manager, said he's currently in close negotiations with Joshua's people and in constant contact with Fury's team.

"All of these fights are going to happen," Finkel said. "Whether they happen next or two fights down the road, you will see all of them in the near future, and they'll be on terms that are respectable to Deontay."

There is another name on the table, too. Luis Ortiz showed up at Barclays Center and entered the ring after the Wilder-Breazeale bout ended. Ortiz, who fell to Wilder by a 10th-round technical knockout last year, publicly challenged Wilder to a rematch. Ortiz is 31-1 with 26 knockouts.

Afterward, Wilder danced around the idea. Give it a week, and there will be a better idea of who's next. For now, the only thing that's certain is he's OK to return to the ring ASAP.

"He got in, and he got out," said Jay Deas, Wilder's co-manager and trainer. "So there's no reason to say we'll see you in 2020. I think we're good for September or October."

Just so happens both Fury and Joshua are scheduled to fight next in June, meaning their timelines line up. Joshua will face Andy Ruiz Jr. (32-1, 21 KOs) on June 1. Fury has Tom Schwarz (24-0, 16 KOs) on June 15.

Wilder has made his stance known: Got to risk it all to have it all.

"It's easy to stay on top," Wilder said. "It's easy to be a winner and go around as a winner with no losses and different things like that. Everybody wants to be a winner. But a real winner, a true winner, is someone that falls from that platform because everyone wants to see how they rebuild themselves and get backup in life."

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Grand regional for Hemphill

By Edwina Stanton
Executive Sports Editor

The situation for Alabama couldn't have been better. With one out and the bases loaded, the Crimson Tide's leading home run hitter came to the plate Sunday in the championship softball game of the Tuscaloosa Regional at Rhoads Stadium. The Crimson Tide was staring at a 4-1 deficit to Arizona State and needed a spark. Hemphill provided it. She blasted the second pitch she saw over the left-field wall for a grand slam to tie the game. The Crimson Tide won 9-8, advancing to this week's Super Regional, also in Tuscaloosa. "I thought I was going to pass out when Bailey hit the grand slam," Alabama coach Patrick Murphy said. "It was just a great game for our fans, TV, (media). It was just a hell of a championship game."

Hemphill, who also leads the Tide with 76 RBIs, which ranks fourth on UA's single-season list, played a big part in last weekend's regional sweep. She went 4-for-7 with five walks and seven RBIs. She needs just four RBIs to tied Marisa Runyon for the UA single-season mark of 80, set in 2005. It was a pretty good weekend for Tide leadoff hitter Elissa Brown, who went 6-for-9 in the regional, including a 3-for-3 day against Arizona State on Sunday. She scored six runs and stole four bases in five attempts. She has 46 stolen bases this season, sixth on the program's career list.

Some bad, some good for baseball

Alabama's SEC record of 7-23 is still fresh. The Crimson Tide suffered one more sweep over the weekend to finish the season at Georgia, eliminating the team from the conference tournament for the third straight season. It's also the third straight season in which Alabama finished last or tied for last in the conference.

There are other markers for the season that appear more positive. Alabama's 23-3 nonconference record was the best mark the program posted in the regular season since 2002, when the team went 24-3. That number was anchored by a 13-1 record in midseason games and a 13-3 record against in-state opponents, though three of Alabama's in-state games were SEC matchups against Auburn.

Alabama was ranked 42nd in the RPI after the weekend's games wrapped up. That number will continue to shift as other teams continue their season and Alabama's opponents are factored in based on their postseason performances. But that RPI ranking was also higher than any the program has posted since 2015.

No Alabama player was listed among the All-SEC honorees announced by the conference on Monday. The Crimson Tide was one of four schools without a player named first- or second-team All-SEC but was the only school to be shut out from the awards entirely. Alabama was also shut out from the 2018 awards.

No Alabama player was named to the all-freshman team or the all-defensive team this year. The all-freshman team featured nine pitchers and only three hitters.

Ben Jones
Rojas the sixth signee for Tide basketball

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

Alabama announced its sixth new member of the 2019-2020 men's basketball team Monday, releasing the news that James Rojas, a 6-foot-7 forward from Hutchinson (Kansas) Junior College, had sent in his paperwork to officially join the program.

Rojas was a National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) and National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) first team All-American in the 2018-19 season.

"I've known James since his early high school years and have developed a great relationship with him and his mother," Alabama head coach Nate Oats said in the release. "He's exactly what we've been looking for in a player.... He's one of the toughest players I've ever seen. He's the ultimate competitor and cares about the team winning first and foremost. He plays with a chip on his shoulder determined to prove he can play with anyone in the country and despite having achieved a great deal the last two years, I know James will still be playing with same chip on his shoulder. Experienced, tough, competitive and skilled players are who you win with in today's game. His loyalty, drive, and humility fit our culture we're building here at Alabama. James embodies all those qualities and we're ecstatic to welcome him into our program."

Rojas joins graduate transfer

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ROJAS

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guard James “Beetle” Bolden (Covington, Ky./Holmes HS/West Virginia) and freshman Raymond Hawkins (Oakland, Calif./Findley [Nev.] Prep) as spring signees. Last fall during the early signing period, the Tide inked a trio of ESPN Top-100 players in forward Juwan Gary (Charlotte, N.C./West Charlotte) and guards Jaylen Forbes (Florence, Miss./Florence) and Jaden Shackelford (Hesperia, Calif./Hesperia) who, combined with Rojas, make up the six members of the Tide’s 2019 signing class.

Alabama has seven returning players — guard Kira Lewis, swing players Herbert Jones, Tevin Mack and John Petty and post players Javian Fleming-Davis, Galin Smith and Alex Reese. The Crimson Tide, now at the 13-player limit mandated by the NCAA, could still add an additional player depending on other potential roster movement.

Rojas appeared in 29 games as a sophomore during the 2018-19 campaign. He was Hutchinson’s leading scorer and the Jayhawk Conference’s third-leading scorer at 19.0 points per game, while also collecting 6.8 rebounds and 1.5 steals in 25.8 minutes a contest. The Jamestown, N.Y., native finished the season shooting 50.4 percent from the field and 38.4 percent from beyond the arc, knocking down 28 three-pointers (28-of-73). He was also a 79.5 percent free throw shooter.

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Like any successful competitor, new University of Alabama basketball coach Nate Oats probably realizes that every setback is an opportunity, a chance to reflect and analyze in order to be better prepared to win the next time. Most winning coaches obsess about the smallest details.

In the case of Mountain Brook basketball prospect Trendon Watford, who signed institutional paperwork with LSU on Monday after announcing for the Tigers in a ceremony at his school, there may not have been much that Oats could have done differently. Timing, according to the Watfords (both Trendon and his father, Ernest), worked against Oats, who simply didn't have enough of an opportunity after taking over at Alabama in late March to forge the necessary relationship and sign Watford.

"Coach (Will) Wade and Coach (Bill) Anderson (who played collegiately at UAB) have recruited me a long time," Trendon Watford said. He also added that Wade "kept talking to me and telling me what was going on while he was suspended (for alleged recruiting violations.)"

That's not something you hear a five-star recruit say every day. To say that everyone took Watford's explanations about his reasons for choosing LSU at face value would be a stretch. Again, both father and son stressed that they were "Alabama fans" but that the "timing was wrong" after Avery Johnson's departure. (No reason was given for why the "timing" was not right in November, when Watford could have signed with Alabama but didn't.)

Nonetheless, he and his family are entitled to their

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own choices. Watford is not the first highly rated prospect to follow the Mario Austin-Eric Bledsoe-Boogie Cousins-D.J. White highway out of state. Oats and his staff can’t worry about Watford’s au revoir. Their job is to put Alabama’s program on a higher plateau, to give in-state talent less reason to look around. The best way to slow the exodus is to start stringing together NCAA appearances, and advancing in the tournament once selected.

Alabama isn’t starting from rock bottom. Regardless of what Watford did or didn’t do, the Crimson Tide was likely to add other players. A commitment from 6-foot-8 junior college All-American forward James Rojas, who had signed with Buffalo while Oats was there but was granted a release, could be forthcoming sooner rather than later. That might use all the currently available scholarships and might not be the end of Alabama’s recruiting for the 2019-2020 season. That accounting doesn’t have to be complete until the end of summer. (Freshman forward Diante Wood, a redshirt last season, announced on Monday that he would transfer to Jacksonville University, but his spot was considered available from the point when he entered the transfer portal on April 10.)

One can make the argument that Oats is inheriting at least as much as, if not more than, any of the other new coaches at SEC schools (Vanderbilt, Arkansas and Texas A&M.) Watford would have been a nice addition but Oats’ attitude will almost certainly center on working with players, current and future, who want to be at Alabama, not those who don’t.

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Grumblings about UA scheduling

With the announcement of a three-game football series against South Florida — one that begins in Tampa in 2023, or fairly soon by the standards of future college scheduling — Alabama will once again find itself facing the judges who sit on the court of complaints.

More commonly, that’s known as the “AIN’T PLAYED NOBODY, PAWWWLLLL!!!” scale, named after the distraught callers to Paul Finebaum’s radio show debating whether anyone actually has a hard schedule. One of the better college football podcasts is PAPN — “Podcast Ain’t Played Nobody.” One of the commonly-heard complaints about the Game of Thrones finale: “Bran Ain’t Played Nobody.” You get the idea. The notion is ubiquitous. The loudest debate nationally is about Alabama, in part because of the past decade, the Crimson Tide has lost the fewest games.

There is a fairly significant and vocal segment of college football fans whose idea of a “fair” Alabama schedule is this: Nine SEC games instead of eight (a notion which Nick Saban supports) with all three crossover games against East Division opponents (the three most highly rated) all on the road. Then, three non-conference games — also on the road and at least 1,000 miles from Tuscaloosa — against an opponent to be determined on the preceding Monday by that week’s rankings with the caveat that if Alabama should win, the opponent will immediately be classified as

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as “overrated.” That scheduling model wouldn’t satisfy all the critics but it would be a start.

The South Florida series isn’t the headline-grabber that future home-and-homes against Oklahoma, Texas and Notre Dame will be (no, I haven’t forgotten West Virginia although the hard-core schedule-truthers are dubious about that matchup, too.)

However, it does short-circuit the Central Florida paradox. The argument that Alabama was “afraid” to play UCF was stupid from the outset, but a series with USF — even a 2-for-1 — indicates it was UCF’s petulance about having its scheduling cake and eating it too was the real obstacle. Has anyone shot itself more squarely in the public-relations foot than UCF in its refusal to consider such arrangements because of its “stature” as a college program? It’s hard to think of a bigger display of hubris, unless you go back to Oedipus and even he would schedule the Sphinx and play the occasional road game at Colonus.

This isn’t entirely to lambast the anonymous “them” out there. Several sage college football observers commended the series on Thursday. Furthermore, plenty of Alabama supporters have grumbled about aspects of their own scheduling (and that of other teams) from time-to-time. The November games against FCS may be necessary but they aren’t popular. You’ll hear complaints from Alabama and Georgia fans in December, wondering why they have to spend their time playing each other in an elimination game while Clemson plays a four-touchdown underdog in the ACC title game. And there are Alabama purists who insist the Crimson Tide is “too good” to play a road game at USF. How quickly fans forget that glorious gumbo-soaked Saturday in LaFayette in 1990.

The fact is scheduling isn’t all that easy for a number of reasons, many of them economic and some of them competitive. The neutral-site model has been good for Alabama and nowhere on any of its five recent championship trophies is there a “Didn’t Play Nobody” asterisk. The marquee matchups are on the way, at the glacial pace in which these things work. But that doesn’t mean a creative agreement with South Florida is bad scheduling, either.

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Alabama schedules games with South Florida

Staff report

Alabama football announced three future games against South Florida beginning during the 2023 season.

The Crimson Tide will travel to face the Bulls in Tampa in 2023, then host two games in Tuscaloosa in 2024 and 2026.

“Our future non-conference schedules are really rounding out quite nicely with the addition of series such as this one with USF,” Alabama athletics director Greg Byrne said in a news release. “We look forward to the early-season road test against a quality opponent in an NFL stadium in 2023 and will welcome them to Tuscaloosa for a pair of home games in 2024 and 2026.”

The 2023 game is scheduled for September 16, one week after playing Texas in Tuscaloosa. The Crimson Tide also has a contract to play against Central Michigan in Tuscaloosa on Sept. 2.

Alabama did not previously have any nonconference games announced for the 2024 season. The Crimson Tide has a game at West Virginia scheduled for 2026. Both games against USF are scheduled to be September matchups as well.

“We are pleased to add games with South Florida in 2023, 2024 and 2026 to our non-conference schedule,” coach Nick Saban said in the release.

“Charlie Strong has built a strong program with the Bulls, and playing this kind of competition only makes our team better. It gives our team two really good home games in 2024 and 2026, and we will enjoy the challenge of playing in Tampa in 2023.”

Alabama and USF have met only once previously, a 40-17 win for Alabama at Legion Field in 2003.

“We are very excited to open the Alabama series in Tampa in 2023 and to add one of the most successful brands in American sports to a very exciting list of future opponents that will give our student-athletes and coaches a great opportunity to compete against the best programs in the nation,” USF vice president of athletics Michael Kelly said in a release.
In criticism of Tua, anonymous coach sounds a lot like Saban

The word for Alabama this off-season is "humble." Prepare to hear it a thousand times before the beginning of the football season. Alabama was too arrogant last season. They need to be humbler ... Clemson smashed humble pie in Alabama's face ... Alabama was humbled by the experience ... It's going to be strength coach Scott Cochran's job to humble this team between now and the first day of August ... Alabama's goal this offseason is to be the humblest team in America, etc, etc...

It's all coming, all the humble humble. Alabama is going to be so humble by the time September rolls around they might apologize for beating Duke by 75 points.

A couple weeks ago at the Regions Tradition golf tournament, Nick Saban criticized his team for its lack of humility at the end of the season. Now, an anonymous coach in Lindy's preseason magazine is echoing the same refrain.

Unlike Saban, though, the anonymous coach called out players by name, including quarterback Tua Tagovailoa.

"I think Tua needs to humble himself," said the anonymous coach, that filthy-mouthed coward. "I think he did some bad things in the bowl game that cost the team because he put himself ahead of the team. He needs to understand Alabama won national championships by playing great defense and special teams, not beating itself. In the national championship game, the quarterback play was atrocious, and some would say the play-calling, too."

Tua was very un-Tua like in the national championship game, and some of his passes into double and triple coverage looked desperate, but ... but ... Tua not humble?

Them's fightin' words in this state. I mean, the kid paints crosses on his face for games. What's more humble than that?

Even former Auburn coach Tommy Tuberville felt compelled to defend Alabama's free-wheeling, gun-slinging quarterback. Of course, Tuberville is running for U.S. Senate, so consider the source.

The anonymous coach made some interesting points, though: defense wins championships at Alabama, the starting quarterback needs to be humble and, maybe, understand his job isn't actually to win games, but rather just not lose them. Seems like we've heard all this somewhere before.

Wait, is Saban the anonymous coach? Is Saban the deep-throat source?

"I think Tua needs to humble himself. I think he did some bad things in the bowl game that cost the team because he put himself ahead of the team."

Anonymous coach, talking about Alabama QB Tua Tagovailoa

Joseph Goodman  jgoodman@al.com

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Goodman

FROM B1

Here's what Saban said a couple weeks ago at the golf tournament: "Last year, at the end of the year, I felt like maybe we lost our humility a little bit, and didn't really prepare in practice like we needed to, developed some bad habits and eventually got exposed by a pretty good team."

My, God. Einhorn is Finkle. Finkle is Einhorn.

It all makes perfect sense now, but are we humble enough as a football-fearing state to appreciate the ramifications here?

Saban's words carry considerable weight in Alabama. As a state, we canonize his coachspeak with the prophetical respect given to saints.

He can say the vaguest of things like, "it's a process," and then the word "process" becomes the cornerstone of everything Alabama has accomplished during this unprecedented run of college-football dominance. Eventually, "The Process" gets tattooed on the backs of fans for life, little girls are named "Prócessa" and, of course, various and creative forms of the word "process" are stamped on vanity license-plate tags.

Even our very own Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, John Archibald, a man who appreciates really, really good words, has said in the past that if Alabama's state government could just be run like "the process," then everything would be OK.

Saban's words are so powerful, in fact, that even when Clemson hangs 44 points on Alabama's defense in a national championship game, Saban's response to the bludgeoning is lionized and then slapped on T-shirts. Why did Alabama lose by 28 points to Dabo Swinney's Clemson? Saban said his team didn't play with the "Bama Factor."

Now "Bama Factor" is emblazoned everywhere you look, T-shirts, bumper stickers, bathroom stalls.

Saban says the "Bama Factor" is "a team that plays with a lot of discipline. Players go out and take responsibility for doing their job at a high level and a high standard, and everybody puts the team first. That's the kind of program we've always had, that's the kind of team's we've always had and that's what we've always tried to get the players to buy into. And that's what we're going to continue to do."

In other words, the "Bama Factor" is about "humility" for "the process."

Maybe it's time for Tua's flare for individual offensive brilliance to just accept a backseat to traditional, conservative Alabama values? You know, run the dang ball. After all, Alabama's third-string running back says he's going to win the Heisman.

Not to humble brag or anything.