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Huntsville’s Ritch now chairs board, faces cutting costs

Brian Lawson
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Huntsville attorney and community leader Joe Ritch is now officially chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority’s board of directors. It’s a historic day, as Ritch becomes the first Alabama resident to hold the gavel in the 81-year history of the public utility.

Ritch is only the second Alabamian to serve on the TVA board. Former Adtran President Howard Thrallkill earned that distinction with his appointment to the board in 2005 and served for more than five years.

An attorney with the firm Sirote & Permutt, Ritch was nominated to the TVA board by President Barack Obama. He received confirmation by the U.S. Senate and joined the board in January 2013. His term as chairman runs for two years, and Ritch is conscious of TVA’s key role in the growth of the Tennessee Valley.

“One of the reasons (Franklin D.) Roosevelt pushed through the TVA act was concerns about poverty,” Ritch said.

“We had malaria outbreaks, no electricity, certainly no flood control. I’ve had people say, ‘I don’t know where we’d be without TVA.’ It’s a federal program that has produced.

“There would have been no Redstone Arsenal without TVA. It allowed us to have legitimate industrial development and for people to start making more money.

The utility’s mission includes providing low-cost electricity to the region, environmental stewardship and river navigation and economic development, an area where Ritch has particular expertise.

He is the longtime chairman of the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee. Under Ritch’s leadership, the BRAC committee successfully marketed Huntsville and north Alabama as a good destination for military commands shifted around under the Base Realignment and Closure Commission’s 2005 and 1995 moves. Those moves have led to thousands of jobs coming to Redstone Arsenal and North Alabama.

Ritch said TVA starting offering more industry recruitment resources to smaller communities in the valley who don’t have full-time staff or experience on how to land new companies.

Ritch said his experience has shown industrial recruitment requires communities, who all stand to benefit from a new arrival, working in concert. But it requires more than happy meetings.

“I think TVA plays a role in attracting good-paying jobs, but companies want an educated and skilled workforce,” Ritch said.

That means communities have to concentrate on their school systems and infrastructure, Ritch said.

The utility is in discussions with the Obama Administration, which has suggested in the past two federal budgets that a different ownership model for TVA might be appropriate. TVA is a government agency, but it is self-funded and receives no federal government funds. The discussions have included the possibility of retaining the public power model through regional, community ownership, rather than as a federal agency. The Office of Management and Budget has also praised TVA for reining in its costs and moving toward reducing its $23.6 billion debt.

TVA earns about $11 billion in total revenue annually.

TVA’s cost-cutting is ongoing. Ritch said TVA is making good progress toward its goal of cutting its operations budget by $500 million by the latter part of 2015. That effort has included buyouts of employees, some job cuts, primarily at coal plants and some job cuts on the Bellefonte Nuclear Plant project in Hollywood. TVA is also leaving about 1,000 jobs unfilled and Ritch said they are hopeful retirements and attrition will continue to reduce TVA’s costs.

The costs matter because they affect everybody’s rates, Ritch said.

“The challenge TVA had was that we got larger than we should have been, and that’s made it very difficult to keep rates down,” he said.

Ritch said because there are a large number of low-income residents in the Tennessee Valley, a rate hike can be especially painful and the board does not want to “spend money on the backs of people least able to pay for it.”
SLOW TO GROW

IRS ANALYSIS: ALABAMA’S GROWTH IS MOSTLY THROUGH BIRTHS, NOT FROM PEOPLE MOVING INTO THE STATE.

Brendan Kirby

Where do new Alabamians come from, and where do the former ones go? Every year, a bunch of people move to and from Alabama, and even more people move from one part of the state to another. The net result is a near wash. An analysis of Internal Revenue Service statistics gleaned from tax returns in 2011 confirms what the U.S. Census Bureau data long has shown: Alabama is growing very slowly.

Much of that modest growth has come from births outnumbering deaths. In 2011 — the most recent years IRS data are available — the state had a net gain of 1,858 people coming from other states and foreign countries. According to the nonpartisan Tax Foundation, Alabama has averaged 108.5 newcomers for every 100 people it has lost since 1992.

“Alabama is one of those states clustered in the middle,” said Lyman Stone, an economist with the Washington-based group’s Center for State Tax Policy.

While population change has been modest in Alabama, it was much more dramatic in some other states. Stone noted that Nevada, for example, has had 140 newcomers for every 100 people who have left, while New York has replaced only 60 people for every 100 who have left.

The 2011 IRS data offers a one-year snapshot. Because the numbers are tied to tax returns, the statistics do not capture everyone moving in a given year. People who do not file a tax return and their dependents, are left out. Also, the IRS does not report migration trends at the county level in cases where only a small number of people moved to and from another county.

But the numbers offer a revealing glimpse of the relationship between Alabama and other states, and among Alabama’s counties. The data indicates that Alabama enjoyed the biggest net gain from Georgia. From 2010 to 2011, Alabama received 480 more new residents than it lost to the Peach State. Other states where Alabama had a triple-digit net gain were Kentucky (232), Arizona (211) and Arkansas (118).

States where Alabama experienced the biggest net loss of residents tended to be fast-growing states that are pulling newcomers from across the country. Texas led the way, drawing 1,444 more residents from Alabama than it lost. Tennessee (534), Florida (427), Colorado (303), North Carolina (285) and Virginia (224) also grew at Alabama’s expense.

INTERNAL MIGRATION MORE DRAMATIC

While migration to and from Alabama might not have a large impact, internal movements — usually rural, shrinking counties to large, growing ones — have had a large and continuing effect, according to experts.

See next page
"It’s long-standing in so many of these places," said Larry Childers, a spokesman for the Alabama Department Economic and Community Affairs. "Barring some new, major industrial developments, it’s probably not going to change."

Childers cautioned that while economists can make educated guesses about why people move, precision is impossible.

"People are complex. It’s hard to reduce them to a simple formula," he said.

The Alabama counties with the biggest net gain in residents were the same ones that show up at the top of census reports for the fastest-growing areas in Alabama. Baldwin County had the biggest net gain in population, with 2,488 more people moving in than out. Lee (1,996), Madison (1,736), Russell (1,541) and Limestone (1,445) rounded out the top five.

But some of the biggest counties had trouble keeping residents. Jefferson County saw 2,254 more people leave than arrive. Montgomery County (1,670) and Mobile County (1,495) also had more leave than come.

More than half of Alabama’s counties experienced a net loss of people from migration, and an even higher number of counties had an aggregate loss of personal income.

Some counties that had a net increase in population ended up with less personal income because the newcomers had lower incomes than the folks who moved. Tuscaloosa County, for instance, had a net gain of 527 people from migration but lost $5.6 million in personal income.

The county with the biggest gain in personal income was Baldwin, whose newcomers had $87.1 million more in income than the people who left. Madison was second, with a net gain of $67.3 million.

OUTPACING OTHER COUNTRIES

Stone, the Tax Foundation economist, said the United States historically has seen much greater movement of people within the country and, even after a slowdown since the 1990s, internal migration rates continue to outpace most other countries.

He noted that about 1.5 percent of the U.S. population has moved to a new state within the previous year. While that might sound small, Stone said, that is "quite a few. That’s greater than the populations of many states."

It also is greater than the rates in Mexico, Canada and the European Union, Stone said. Even within the European Union, only Denmark has an internal migration rate that exceeds that of the United States, he said.

People moved across state lines with even greater frequency a generation ago.
Stone said the 1993 rate, for instance, was about 3 percent. Stone attributed those high rates to frictionless state borders, regional disparity in economic opportunity and a frontier ethos that dates back to the nation’s founding.

“That’s a huge part of our national narrative,” he said.

Stone argued that high rates of movement have served the country well. It was an important safety valve during the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, as farmers headed for California and other destinations where work opportunities were better, he said. He added that migration also aided the country’s industrialization and the growth of the Sun Belt.

“It’s a major reason why the U.S. has been successful,” he said.

WHAT IS THE BEST MIGRATION TO HAVE?

Why has state-to-state migration slowed and is it a bad thing?

Stone said those are difficult questions to answer. If the reason is that there are greater barriers to interstate relocation — teacher certifications not recognized by all states, for example — then it is a negative, he said.

But Stone said some economists have suggested that declining rates are the result of less variation in economic opportunity from region to region, relative declines in the cost of air travel and greater ease of interstate road travel. Another possible reason for the decline, he said, is that people have better information about job opportunities. That means that fewer people move to a place and, failing to get a job, move again in less than a year.

“People don’t need to move as much,” he said.

When looking at migration, people are only half the equation. Their income matters, too. Alabama, for instance, enjoyed a net gain of more than $22 million income from migration even though more people moved out than in between 2010 and 2011. That’s because incomes of the newcomers were a little higher, on average.

But Stone suggested that assessing the desirability of migration is more complicated than adding up income. He said the long-term advantage goes to states that do the best job of attracting entrepreneurs, who may have low incomes when they arrive.

“What really matters, unfortunately, (is with) a piece of data you can’t really see and a put a color on a map,” he said. “It’s the type and quality of migration. … You want to gain people, really, who are interested in investing in a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.”
ALABAMA
The migration of people into and out of the state is generally flat, averaging 108 newcomers since 1992

92,180 in
90,322 out
1,858 gain

$1.85B in
$1.83B out
$22.2M gain

The net loss of people didn't mean a net loss of income, since those moving in had higher-paying jobs than those leaving the state

IRS ANALYSIS: ALABAMA'S GROWTH IS MOSTLY THROUGH BIRTHS, NOT FROM PEOPLE MOVING INTO THE STATE.

MOBILE COUNTY
Coastal Alabama's largest county lost population, mostly to its bayside neighbor

6,654 in
8,159 out
1,505 loss

5,875 in
4,300 out
1,575 gain

BALDWIN COUNTY
One of the state's fastest-growing counties was among the top 5 gainers

Source: Internal Revenue Service (Statistics of Income, 2010-11)
New tax credit could boost program

Lawmakers, officials see more funding for career dual enrollment program

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

State lawmakers and representatives with the Alabama Community College System predict a new tax credit will help boost funding and enrollment in the state's career technical dual enrollment program for high school students.

"In my opinion, this is the beginning," said Rep. Bill Poole, R-Tuscaloosa.

Poole was among legislators and officials with Shelton State Community College, the Department of Postsecondary Education and Mercedes-Benz U.S. International who discussed the dual enrollment program Monday, using a lab filled with mills and other precision machining equipment at Shelton as a background.

The bill enacted during the regular legislative session earlier this year would give an income tax credit beginning in 2015 to individuals and businesses that make contributions to cover tuition, fees, books and other costs associated with participation in the career technical dual enrollment program. The act allows the contributors to direct as much as 80 percent of their donations to a particular career technical program.

Terry Waters, executive director of economic and workforce development for the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, speaks about the the career technical dual enrollment tax credit on Monday at Shelton State Community College as state Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Cottontale, listens.
or courses at a specific two-year campus. The two-year system will work with business and industry partners, the state’s workforce training council and the Regional Workforce Development Councils to ensure the donations for the dual enrollment program address regional workforce needs, according to the speakers.

Terry Waters, executive director of economic and workforce development for the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, said taxpayers can contribute as much as $10 million annually under the new tax credit program, which allows them to receive a credit for as much as 50 percent of their total contributions. The tax credit cannot exceed 50 percent of the taxpayers’ total state income tax liability or $500,000 in any year. The act caps the annual tax credits given by the state at $5 million. The bill was sponsored during the 2014 regular session by Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman.

Waters, Poole and State Sen. Gerald Allen said there has been an ongoing conversation between two-year officials and lawmakers during the past couple years about the growing need for additional funding for the dual enrollment program, which allows high school students in grades 10-12 to enroll in career technical courses at community colleges.

This year, the program was only able to award 2,100 scholarships, Waters said. "We hope to be able to expand career technical dual enrollment scholarships to 10,000 annually," he said.

In a best-case scenario, the tax credit could lead to as many as 300 to 350 scholarships and waivers per two-year campus in the state, with a third being needs-based awards, according Allen.

Waters said the combination of an additional $5 million line item for the program included in the fiscal year 2015 education budget for the dual enrollment program and the tax credit are expected to allow the program to expand. The $5 million will help buy new equipment and assist with transportation needs in rural areas, Waters said.

“What a difference this program is going to make in Alabama,” Waters said.

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Alabama lands nearly 17,000 new jobs in 2013

TWO KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS LAST YEAR

Boeing Co.'s plans for a $6 million, 350-job research and technology center in Huntsville.

$70 million, 500-job logistics hub at the Mercedes-Benz auto plant in Tuscaloosa County.

Dawn Kent Azok  dazok@al.com

New and expanding businesses announced nearly 17,000 new jobs and capital investments topping $4.4 billion during 2013, Gov. Robert Bentley's office said.

In all, there were 445 projects that spanned a variety of sectors— including automotive, aerospace, chemicals, metals and technology — and 16,847 jobs, according to the 2013 New and Expanding Industries Report.

The report does not include data on the amount of project incentives.

Bentley credited the state's strategic plan for economic development, Accelerate Alabama, for growth in targeted industries.

In 2012, Alabama's industry announcements topped 20,000 jobs and $5.4 billion in investment.

In 2013, 62 companies announced new operations in the state, with 5,178 jobs and $2 billion in capital investment. Meanwhile, 383 companies announced expansions, with 11,668 jobs and nearly $2.4 billion in investment.

Key announcements last year included Boeing Co.'s plans for a $6 million, 350-job research and technology center in Huntsville and the $70 million, 500-job logistics hub at the Mercedes-Benz auto plant in Tuscaloosa County.

Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield said projects in advanced manufacturing and research and engineering are key.

"Increasingly, products are not just made in Alabama, they also are engineered and designed in Alabama," he said.

For capital investment, the top-ranking county last year was Mobile, with $1.4 billion. Also high on the list were Montgomery, $333 million; Morgan, $327.2 million; Madison, $266.5 million; and Lee, $231.3 million.

In terms of jobs, the top county was Jefferson, with 7,755 positions announced.

Others in the top were Madison, 1,602 job announcements; Montgomery, 1,176; Tuscaloosa, 1,164; and DeKalb, 862.
State jobless rate increases again

Economic forecaster says numbers still good despite third straight monthly increase

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

Alabama's unemployment rate inched up from 6.7 percent to 6.9 percent in April, according to a report released Friday by the Alabama Department of Labor.

It's the third consecutive monthly rise in the state unemployment rate, which is now higher than the national rate.

At the same time, however, the unemployment rates in all but one of the state's 67 counties decreased—a result of comparing apples to oranges. The official unemployment rates for all 50 states are seasonally adjusted, allowing for comparisons across the country. County unemployment rates are not seasonally adjusted. Had the state rate not been seasonally adjusted, it would have fallen from 6.9 percent to 6.2 percent.

Amad Ijaz, director of economic forecasting at the University of Alabama's Center for Business and Economic Research, said there were two reasons the state's unemployment rate rose.

"One reason was the increase in labor force," he said, "meaning more people looking for work. The other was an increase in number of unemployed.

SEE JOBLESS | 3B
"But overall the numbers look good; the state added 10,000 nonfarm jobs last month, primarily in administrative support and remediation services, and health care and social assistance. There were also some jobs added in automotive products and parts manufacturing."

The Tuscaloosa metro area's unemployment dropped from 6.5 to 5.9 percent. That "was mainly because of a drop in labor force from 102,102 to 100,885 while the total employment also saw a decline," Ijaz said.

But the metro area, which includes Tuscaloosa, Hale and Greene counties, also added 200 manufacturing jobs in April, and another 200 jobs in the services sector, he said.

The decline in the size of the metro area's labor force could be because of graduating college students who were working in Tuscaloosa or students leaving their jobs in town to return to their hometowns for the summer, he said.

Statewide, only Greene County saw an increase in its unemployment rate, while all other counties saw declines ranging from 0.4 percent in Winston County to 1.2 percent in Perry County.

Counties with the lowest unemployment rates are: Shelby County at 4.2 percent, Lee County at 4.9 percent and Cullman County at 5.1 percent. Counties with the highest unemployment rates are: Wilcox County at 15.5 percent, Greene County at 12.7 percent and Perry County at 11.9 percent.
JVC plant being sold

Company was first foreign firm to build in Tuscaloosa County

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

JVC America Inc., which has its headquarters and manufacturing plant in Cottondale, is being sold to Toronto-based company, Cinram Group Inc. JVC America, a division of JVC Kenwood Holdings, makes DVDs used in games and has about 175 employees at its Cottondale facility.

Terms of the sale by JVC Kenwood Holdings, a Japanese company, were not disclosed although statements from it and Cinram said they expect to close the deal within the next few weeks.

JVC Kenwood also said it expects to record an extraordinary loss of about $11.8 million during its current fiscal year as a result of the sale.

The sale will include the JVC America's 100-acre site in Cottondale, which includes two plants — a 225,000-square-foot plant used for manufacturing and packaging and a 250,000-square-foot plant that the company no longer uses for production. Some of that space is now leased to other companies for warehouse use.

JVC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

JVC America also has a 368,000-square-foot warehouse and fulfillment center in the Atlanta suburb of Kennesaw, Ga. That facility also is part of the sale.

Officials at the Cottondale plant said they expected the plant will continue to operate as usual but referred additional requests for comments to Cinram CEO Steve Brown. A call to his office was not returned.

JVC was the first foreign manufacturer to open a new plant in Tuscaloosa County when it came here in the mid-1980s. The company announced its plans in 1985 to build a plant here to make video tapes. When it broke ground for that plant in April 1986, its officials surprised those in attendance by announcing that they would build a second plant at the site to make compact discs. The first plant began production in fall 1986, and the second plant opened a year later.

JVC’s early success here was cited by industrial recruiters in efforts to attract additional foreign manufacturers — including Mercedes-Benz — to Tuscaloosa County.

Changing video technologies in the last two decades, however, have altered the demand for products being made by JVC America. As video tapes became obsolete, JVC ended their production. In 2010, declining consumer demand for CDs resulted in a 10 percent reduction of the company’s workforce in Cottondale. And in June 2012, JVC America outsourced part its workforce in a move that it said would make it more flexible and competitive in the changing marketplace.

In its statement announcing its acquisition, Cinram describes itself as "a leading service provider to the entertainment industry and one of the largest global manufacturers and distributors of pre-recorded media products for the world’s leading motion picture studios, record labels and game publishers.

Cinram is a wholly owned affiliate of Najafi Companies, an international private investment firm based in Phoenix.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Four counties in the far southwest corner of the state accounted for more than one-third of Alabama's total economic development investments in 2013, according to figures released last week by the Alabama Department of Commerce.

Mobile County — which welcomed only two new companies and nurtured the expansions of eight existing ones — captured the lion’s share of that activity garnering a total of 585 jobs that represent total investments of slightly more than $1.4 billion.

The commerce department's “New and Expanding Industry” report for 2013 indicates Mobile and its five closest neighbors — Baldwin, Clarke, Escambia, Monroe and Washington counties — generated collective investments of $1.57 billion that created 793 new jobs, or nearly twice the $846 million invested in 2012.

Kelli Dungan
BIG (BEACH) BUSINESS

BEACHES: GULF SHORES TOURISM SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS BALDWIN COUNTY'S RECORD-BREAKING NUMBERS AND FUTURE VACATION TRENDS.

Dennis Pillion • dpillion@al.com

From Fort Morgan to the Florida state line, the beaches of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach are big business, and the speakers presenting at the 2014 Gulf Shores Tourism Summit at the Erie Meyer Civic Center last week came bearing numbers to back that up.

Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Tourism CEO Herb Malone started off the forum quoting from the state's 2013 economic report, which found that nearly 5.5 million visitors traveled to Baldwin County in 2013, spending $3.2 billion and generating $1.1 billion in wages for the 44,000 people who work in the tourism industry. Baldwin County was No. 1 in Alabama in each of those categories.

Last year was the third consecutive record-setting year for tourism in Baldwin County, and noted travel market researcher Peter Yesawich told the assembled crowd of tourism stakeholders that he predicted another year "or two" of double-digit growth in the area's tourism sector.

Yesawich delivered a presentation titled "Portrait of the American Traveler," in which he shared insights into traveler behavior through extensive surveys his company has conducted since 2007. The report featured information on where travelers want to go, how they get inspired to take vacations, learn more about potential destinations, book trips and spread the word about their experiences.

Yesawich also highlighted what he perceived as an opportunity for growth in the vacation home and condo rental market. According to the survey, 49 percent of respondents said they would be interested in booking a vacation home for their next vacation instead of a traditional hotel, while only 23 percent had actually used vacation rentals in the past.

For condo rentals, 45 percent said they were interested in condo rentals compared to traditional hotels, with just 22 percent having stayed in one previously.

In addition to remarks from Yesawich and Malone, Alabama State Tourism Director Lee Sentell demonstrated the state's new "road trips" tourism ad campaign, as well as sharing some figures from the state's lodging tax revenue haul in 2013.

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner Gunter Guy updated the crowd on the progress of the proposed convention center and lodge at Gulf State Park, as well as the ongoing celebration of the 75th anniversary of Alabama's state park system.

Guy said contracts have been signed with a Memphis firm to complete a feasibility study for the project, and that he hopes to start construction in the next eight to 12 months, with a target completion date before the end of a potential second term for Gov. Robert Bentley.
Shopping center on track for fall 2015 opening

Shoppes at Legacy Park are located on old Cedar Crest site

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The developers of a proposed shopping center at the corner of McFarland Boulevard and 13th Street say they are on pace to break ground by late summer or early fall.

Keith Owens of Alumni Development & Construction LLC of Clanton said construction on the Shoppes at Legacy Park was delayed because of talks with the Alabama Department of Transportation.

ALDOT and the developers had been working out plans on how the 16.25-acre project would fit in with planned upgrades to McFarland Boulevard and 13th and 15th streets.

Now those plans have been finalized and the retail development is set to proceed.

“ALDOT has just been unbelievably easy to work with for us,” Owens said. “We’re just excited about getting this thing close to getting done.”

Barring any unforeseen delays, the retail center is expected to open by fall 2015, Owens said.

The Shoppes at Legacy Park will be built on the site of the former Cedar Crest neighborhood. It could reach a total investment of $60 million and create about 500 new jobs, at least $37.2 million in annual sales taxes, up to $120,000 in yearly business license fees and generate property taxes of more than $160,000, which will increase each year for the next three decades.

Tuscaloosa city officials said they are ready to see it take shape.

“This development will enhance walkability, include new retail opportunities and improve the infrastructure in the surrounding area,” said Brendan Moore, the city’s Economic Development director. “The community expressed their desire for high-quality developments during the comprehensive planning process, and this project will exceed the expectations.”

See Shoppes | 3B
community's expectations once completed.

"Alumni Development, ALDOT and the city of Tuscaloosa have worked tirelessly to make this project a reality."

Bed Bath & Beyond has been announced as one of the 250,000-square-foot shopping center's six anchor stores, and Cost Plus World Market will go into one of the development's smaller spaces.

Other stores will fall into the category of specialty grocers, sporting goods, pet supplies, a mattress retailer and a wireless communication provider, but Owens said that as of Thursday, none of the remaining tenants were ready to announce.

However, he said a flurry of announcements could come soon.

The anchor space is planned to encompass 142,000 square feet of retail area with 20,500 square feet designated as one-story retail space and 38,400 square feet planned for two-story spaces. An additional 47,370 square feet is set aside for future retail space. The buildings will surround a large parking lot planned for the center of the project.

The Tuscaloosa City Council finalized an incentive package of up $16.57 million in January.

The tax rebate package offers no upfront cash from the city to the developer, but instead relies on the success of the project to generate the incentives.

Property taxes for city schools, which are estimated to reach $430,000 a year — or $12.9 million over a 30-year span — will not be affected by the incentive package.

Rather, City Hall will rebate to Alumni Development 78 percent of the sales taxes generated from the six anchor stores over 15 years or a total of $9.8 million, whichever comes first.

Additionally, the city will rebate property taxes for the next 30 years or a total of $6.77 million, whichever comes first.

The agreement also contains stipulations requiring Alumni Development to use a certain percentage of developers from the Tuscaloosa area along with disincentives should an existing Tuscaloosa retailer relocate to the new shopping center (thereby eliminating some of the new sales tax generation).

Research data compiled by Retail Strategies, a Birmingham-based consulting firm, was used to determine the level of tax rebates.

Robert Jolly, principal for Retail Strategies, told the City Council's Finance Committee in October that there was a significant retail spending gap in the Tuscaloosa area.

Much of the gap falls in the categories of retail stores that Alumni Development is proposing to bring, the data indicated.

Using information compiled from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census and estimates from the developer and its own internal resources, the retail gap for the types of stores Alumni Development is proposing to bring to the Tuscaloosa market totals at least $276.9 million, Jolly said.

But if the development is completed, the shopping center could offset the shortfall by $49.6 million to $67.2 million.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Auto supplier gets land in industrial park

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

The Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority on Thursday transferred 40 acres in the Tuscaloosa Airport Industrial Park to a German automotive parts manufacturer that plans to build a plant on the site that will employ about 350 people by 2018.

Bolta Werke GmbH, which is based near Nuremberg, Germany, announced plans to build its first American plant in Tuscaloosa in September 2013.

Thursday’s action was one of the final steps before construction begins this summer, said Johannes Carl, the future managing director of the plant, which will be called Bolta US Inc.

TCIDA Executive Director Dara Longgear said the land is valued at $25,000 an acre, making the value of the transaction $1 million.

Bolta US Inc. plans to invest $45 million in the project — $15 million for the plant, $28 million for new high-tech equipment and $2 million for infrastructure improvement, Carl said.

Bolta hopes to have the plant in operation by the end of 2015 and will have about 250 employees then, Carl said.

It will continue to increase its work-force and have about 350 employees by 2018, Carl said.

Carl said the company will advertise in local media when it is ready to start hiring workers. It plans to eventually have about 250 hourly employees and about 100 salaried workers, he said.

Bolta will make galvanized plastic parts for the automotive industry. Its initial customers will be Mercedes-Benz in Vance, Volkswagen in Chattanooga, Tenn., and Audi in Mexico, Carl said.

Bolta Werke is the biggest supplier of galvanized plastic components in Europe and is a major supplier to the German automotive industry. Carl said the company is in discussions with additional automakers that it hopes to add as customers.

Plans call for the plant to have 170,000 square feet of production space and 10,000 square feet of administrative offices. The production area will have 12 molding departments, a plating line, a paint line and assembly and logistics areas.

City and county officials first met with Bolta officials in Germany about two years ago, when they learned the company might be interested in building its first production facility in the United States, said Andy Jocham, TCIDA’s director of industrial recruitment and retention.

As discussions continued, Bolta Werke focused on building its U.S. plant in either Mississippi or Alabama before picking the Tuscaloosa site.

Carl, a former head of the Brose automotive parts plant near Vance, is slated to become managing director of Bolta US Inc. next Thursday.
FIRST CLASS TRAINING

The Alabama Aviation Training Center is open for business with its first class of 22 hourly workers preparing on-site for future employment with Airbus' A320 final assembly line under construction a few blocks away.

“Everything is on schedule for providing Airbus the employees it needs just in time. We don’t want them running around twiddling their thumbs with no work, and the hiring will continue through the next year at least,” said Lee Hammett, assistant director for the Alabama Industrial Development Training program.

Hammett said the $7 million project, which broke ground less than one year ago, is under budget, leaving a little breathing room should new equipment needs arise.

Mobile-based Watermark Design Group designed the multi-story AIDT training facility, and Rod Cooke Construction Inc., also based in Mobile, served as general contractor.

The facility includes six classrooms, five laboratories, general office space, a conference room, break room and an expansive shop floor where the majority of the hands-on, on-site training for the aerospace giant's first final assembly line on U.S. soil is expected to take place.

The labs, Hammett said, will focus primarily on electrical, composite, paint, welding and assembly operations and are designed flexibly to encourage free exchange with the adjoining shop floor.

Although a formal grand opening ceremony is not slated until June 24, Hammett said AIDT is coordinating pre-employment assessments "to get our workforce in place and identify any gaps or lacking skills, so we can expand training as needed."

Among the six classrooms are two computer labs, dedicated primarily to software training, but Hammett said they could ultimately support CAD and operations training, as well.

"This facility is designed to be very flexible, very fluid, for both theoretical and hands-on operations. It's a planned, phased process, and right now, we're on target," Hammett said.
In with the new
State celebrates rebirth of Bryce Hospital

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Noting historic Bryce Hospital's
innovative beginnings, Alabama
Gov. Robert Bentley said a new
hospital bearing the same name
would continue the legacy as a cut-
ting-edge mental health facility.
"This is one of the most fantas-
tic facilities I have ever seen," Bent-
ey said.

Bentley, joined by lawmakers and
officials with the Department of
Mental Health and other state
offices, toured the new Bryce Hos-
pital in Tuscaloosa Wednesday
during the grand opening of the
268,000-square-foot, 268-bed fa-
cility.

During the tour, the governor
and other officials peeked into ex-
amination rooms, pharmacies,
and patient rooms where plastic
wrapping still covers the mat-
tresses.
"This is very nice. This is well
designed," Bentley said as he
toured rooms for deaf and hear-
ing-impaired patients.

The staff and patients of the hos-
pital are expected to complete a
phased move from the old Bryce
Hospital grounds by June 24, ac-
cording to Mental Health Com-
misioner Jim Reddoch. Currently,
some of the administrative func-
tions have moved, while the pa-
tients remain at facilities on the
old Bryce grounds. The operating
budget for the new hospital, which
has a staff of about 500, is approx-
imately $32 million, according to
Reddoch.

During a ceremony ahead of the
ribbon-cutting for the new hospi-
tal, Bentley said the state is at the
forefront of mental health treat-
ment nationwide.
"We are the model across the
country," Bentley said.

Bentley and Reddoch said the
new hospital will serve patients

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BRYCE
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who need longer term and
more acute care. They said
the goal remains to provide
treatment in community-
based programs whenever
possible.

"There are people that have
real diseases and have real
problems," Bentley said. "This
hospital will help take care of
those needs."

Reddoch said the 268 beds
of the new facility — the same
capacity as the facilities on the
old Bryce grounds it is replacing — are adequate to meet
the needs of patients.

The new hospital will back
up the community-based
treatment programs by offer-
ing a more restrictive envi-
ronment for the patients who
need it, Reddoch said.

Reddoch, a former director
of Bryce, noted the old hospi-
tal served patients continu-
ously for 153 years.

"We are certainly looking
forward to the future, but I
think it is important to take a
moment to pay tribute to the
past," Reddoch said.

The hospital, a state-of-the-
art facility in its day, was es-

tablished by the Legislature
as the Alabama Insane Hospi-
tal in 1852 on a tract of land
east of the UA campus. The
hospital opened in 1861 with
Peter Bryce, as its first super-
intendent. The hospital was
renamed for Bryce in 1900 by

Reddoch — a few weeks
from primary elections in the
state — drew chuckles from
the audience with an anecdote
about the first patient admis-
ted in April 1861, a soldier
from Fort Morgan diagnosed
with political excitement.

At its peak the original
Bryce Hospital had more than
5,000 patients. A landmark
federal class-action lawsuit in
the 1970s over the conditions
at Bryce led to the deinstitu-
tionalization movement in
mental health treatment in
the state and nationwide.

In Alabama, the shift away
from institutional settings
saw the closure of other facil-
ities across the state, includ-
ing Searcy Hospital in Mount
Vernon, Partlow Develop-
mental Center in Tuscaloosa and
Greil Memorial Psychiatric
Hospital in Montgomery. The
department still operates
Mary Starke Harper Geriatric
Psychiatry Center on the old
Bryce campus, the North Ala-

bama Regional Hospital in De-
catur and Taylor Hardin Se-
cure Medical Facility in
Tuscaloosa.

UA purchased the Bryce
property from the Depart-
ment of Mental Health in 2010,
paying nearly $77 million for
the 168-acre property and an-
other $10 million for environ-
mental cleanup and historic
preservation as part of an
agreement with the state. UA,
managed construction of the
new $81 million hospital as
part of the agreement.

Bentley and Reddoch said
there are no immediate plans
for the rest of the former Part-
low campus, though there are
some possibilities being con-
sidered. Bentley said it was
too early to discuss possible
plans for the Partlow grounds
at this time. Reddoch added
the possibilities for Partlow's
old buildings did not include
use by the new hospital at this
time.

State Rep. Bill Poole, RTus-
caloosa, called Bryce Hospital
— new and old — an integral
part of the Tuscaloosa
community.

"There is something about
Bryce Hospital. It gets in your
blood. It becomes a part of
you. It stays with you the rest
of your life," Reddoch said.
Texas regents OK hiring of Guy Bailey

AUSTIN, TEXAS | Texas’ new university on the border formally has a president, former University of Alabama president Guy Bailey.

University of Texas System regents gave final approval Tuesday to naming Bailey as president of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Bailey was president of Texas Tech University before taking the UA job.

Bailey was named the sole finalist for the Rio Grande Valley job in April. He will start in June, and his salary is being negotiated.

The new university is a merger of Texas-Pan American and University of Texas-Brownsville and will include a medical school in an area experts say is underserved in healthcare. The university’s first class will start in fall 2015.

Bailey, a sociolinguist, resigned as president at Alabama in 2012 to care for his ailing wife, who died in September.
New UAB walk-in, urgent care clinic opens in downtown Birmingham

By: Mike Oliver

UAB Medicine Urgent Care is opening for business Thursday morning at 7 a.m. to treat adults with non-life-threatening injuries and illnesses.

Located at 125 20th St. South, Suite 103, in the old Cityville 121 building, the clinic will be open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday, UAB announced today.

A doctor and nurse practitioner will be on-site.

"This is ideal for the downtown community, UAB employees, UAB patients who do not have a primary-care physician, and established primary-care patients who either are unable to see their physician or need to be seen after hours," said Dr. Stuart Cohen, associate professor of Internal Medicine.

The clinic expects an average of 65 to 70 patients per day.

"It is a walk-in clinic, so no appointment is necessary," said Dr. Andrew Allen, UAB School of Medicine graduate and lead physician for the facility. "We won't be equipped to handle codes or unstable conditions. Those cases will still need to go to the ER. Everything else should be fair game."
UAB prof, a key figure in booming field of 'digital forensics,' gets national press from Inc. magazine

By: Jesse Chambers

A professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) who is becoming a major figure in the growing field of digital forensics -- the use of data mining to help fight crime -- drew national attention on Monday when the business publication Inc. featured him on its web site.

Dr. Ragib Hasan, the director of the UAB Secure and Trustworthy Computing Lab, also known as the UAB SECRETLab, tells writer Will Yakowicz the digital forensics industry will "expand dramatically" the next few years because the world is entering what he calls "a new age of computing shaped by the Internet of Things."

In this new age, according to Hasan, "everything will be smart, including our cars, thermostats, and refrigerators. But this means we will generate and leave a visible trail at every place we visit, on everything we touch, and with everything we do."

Because of this, Hasan says, "every activity, including any law enforcement investigation, will have a digital forensics component."

As Yakowicz says, police will break cases by "mining location data from a suspect's smart car and extracting files from her cloud accounts and communications from her smartphones."

The article -- "Digital Forensics: A Billion-Dollar Market in the Making" -- is part of Inc.'s 2014 Best Industries package. Being a "digital detective" is one of the "most promising ground-floor opportunities" in business this year, according to the magazine.

Hasan said that his lab, and the UAB Department of Computer and Information Sciences, is attracting interest from a lot of students.

"(The lab gets) a lot of interest from students and researchers worldwide," he told AL.com in an email on Monday. "UAB also has a digital forensics master's program which gets many students. As the digital forensics market grows in the coming years, there will be a huge demand for personnel trained in digital forensics analysis techniques, so I anticipate a large growth in the job market. As a result, I predict that UAB's Computer and Information Sciences program as well as the digital forensics program will attract more students and grow."

Hasan started the UAB SECRETLab right after he came to UAB in 2011 to join the department. The lab conducts work in such areas as cloud forensics, security and privacy; computer security; data waste; data and location provenance; and mobile malware defenses.

The presence of the lab is a point of pride for UAB, according to Hasan. "While there are no such rankings of security labs nationally, I'd say we are unique in our expertise on cloud security and cloud forensics," he said in the email. "Very few, perhaps less than a handful of groups or academic research labs are working on cloud forensics in the country or even the world."

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Hasan said that he and his lab collaborate closely with other UAB researchers and with the local-spin off firm Malcovery Security.

"UAB possesses a unique position among universities nationally as a top-class center of research on all things related to digital and cloud forensics," Hasan said. "We are also one of the first to take on the emerging field of Internet of Things forensics."

Does Hasan see any dangers -- including a loss of privacy and anonymity -- stemming from the fact that, as he told Inc., we will leave that "visible trail" everywhere we go?

He said in the email that we are already in the age of the Internet of Things with our cars, watches, phones and other smart devices.

"We can't turn back the time and go back 50 years ago," he said. "The advanced sensing capabilities of our devices or even places have many practical advantages. It is true that there is a privacy implication of this. However, the solution is not to discard these very useful technologies, rather the correct way is to design appropriate safeguards and mechanisms to protect the privacy of the information. Privacy and anonymity are important rights we need to protect, and we can do that by proper access control and authorization schemes."

He also said that there is a need for teachers and researchers in the field to "educate and prepare the society for such technology," a role that he said his program at UAB is currently seeking to play.

Hasan talked to Inc. about the large grant he received from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to develop software and a mobile app for location provenance, which helps people record and then prove their physical location history on any given day.

The app, which Inc. said would launch this summer, can be used for alibis by legal defendants.

And there are other applications, among them a way to secure supply chains and make them "trustworthy," according to Hasan.

"We all use various supply chains unknowingly every day, from how do we know the everyday products such as food or medicine we get from these supply chains are authentic or good?" Hasan said in the email. "The location provenance technology we developed at UAB will allow securing our supply chains and making them trustworthy."

The DHS grant has brought about $600,000 to UAB over the last two years to fund the research and is also another sign of the growing prestige of UAB's digital forensics program, according to Hasan.

"The DHS program was highly selective, and only 34 projects were funded from more than 1,000 proposals," he said. "The other awardees include the top-ranked and well-known schools, such as MIT, Cornell and Princeton."

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"This award also allowed my lab to gain recognition in the academic and security research community," he said.

Hasan has won several other grants. Among them, he was recently awarded the Faculty Early Career Development Award by the National Science Foundation. The amount of the five-year award is $487,000. He received it for his research on cloud security and accountability.

In addition to telling Inc. about the opportunities in his field, Hasan also told the magazine about some of the challenges.

These include the difficulties faced by law enforcement in tracing documents that have been uploaded to the cloud, the need to adjust every time a new smart device is released and the difficulty for law enforcement in keeping pace with rapid changes in technology.
Hospitals like UAB should not exclude smokers from employment -- it's discriminatory, says report

By: Mike Oliver

Since Cleveland Clinic quit hiring smokers in 2007, an estimated 50 to 60 health care systems created similar policies.

UAB Hospital, a research facility and academic health center, instituted such a plan last year declining to hire smokers. A nicotine test is part of the pre-employment screening.

But the problem with smoker bans at healthcare institutions, a trio of professors aver, is that the policies may disproportionately impact lower-skilled and lower-paid staff.

The report in the June edition of the Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges, includes two authors with UAB ties: Dr. Thomas Huddle, a professor in the UAB School of Medicine and Birmingham's VA Medical Center; and Dr. Stefan Kertesz, an addiction specialist and associate professor of medicine at the VA and UAB.

"Smokers are only 18 percent of the adult population in the United States, but they make up 26.1 percent of those with incomes less than $35,000/year and 25.5 percent of those without a high school diploma," according to the report.

Similar proportions are true in the health care professions.

"Smoking is uncommon among physicians and pharmacists but moderately prevalent among persons in most other health care occupations, especially service staff and licensed practical nurses," the report notes.

{Readers weigh in some more}

"In many urban settings where large medical schools operate, it is likely to be poorer individuals, including those from minority groups, who, under a ban on employees who smoke, will lose the opportunity to work for an employer that offers health insurance, long-term advancement, and retirement benefits."

But William Ferniany, CEO of UAB Health System, told Health Care Finance News that he sees it as a "non-event."

"We hire as many underprivileged people as we did before," Ferniany told HCFN.

He said less than 20 out of 1,000 applicants at UAB hospital failed the nicotine test.

"I don't worry that people of lower socioeconomic classes are impacted, because many of them don't smoke," Ferniany said. "We're not having trouble hiring."

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The authors argue such hiring bans send the wrong message.

"In the case of smokers, health care institutions ought to hire them freely and then encourage them to quit smoking," the report stated. "The message actually conveyed by an employee smoker ban to smokers is unlikely to be one of an affirmation of health; it is far more likely to be received as a personal affront or rejection. Such a message is incompatible with who we are as physicians and health care professionals."

In the Birmingham area, Baptist Health System also has a ban on hiring smokers effective September 2013.

Dr. Ryan Nash, director of the Ohio State University Center for Bioethics, also helped author the report.
STEM, Robotics Summer Education Programs Set Students Up For Success

By: Daniela Perallon

School is almost out for summer, but that doesn’t mean the learning has to stop. The Huntsville City school system is offering several summer academic programs to set students up for success.

The STEM Summer Institute focuses on ACT prep. It is the second year the STEM summer program will be hosted at Lee High School.

In its first year, in 2013, the institute served only 16 students. This year enrollment jumped to 45, including students from Butler High School.

“[The students] do a lot of stuff independently. We give them the tools and they take it and run with it,” said Winston Crute, a Lee High School math teacher and one of the founders of the program. “That’s really the goal. To give them the tools to be that fantastic leader and that great success.”

Last year, the 14 Seniors who attended the program received more than $950,000 in scholarships combined, ACT scores rose 2.25 points, and one student even received the Bill Gates Millennium Scholarship — one of 1000 students chosen nationwide, out of 52,000 applicants.

“If you’re the type of student that not only wants to reach the next level but be able to do it on your own and be independent and learn those math and science skills and develop yourself into somebody that everybody’s going to want colleges and companies included, this is a fantastic opportunity to spend that downtime you get in the summer,” said Crute.

Summer Engineering Camp 4 Robotics

It will be the third year Huntsville City Schools, partnered with the National Society of Black Engineers, will host the 3rd Annual Summer Engineering Camp 4 Robotics. In its first year the program only attracted 50 students. This year they have 250 open spots at both each camp location.

The program will be held at Columbia High School and Grissom High School locations and is for 5th through 8th grade Huntsville City Schools students.

“They see how engineering works out in the real world, what kind of future opportunities and careers could be available,” said Susan Moon, Career Academy Coordinator for the district.

The students will work in teams of 5, mentored by a high school robotics student and a teacher. On the final day of camp the students will compete with the robots they designed and built.

Industry professionals will speak with the students each day about their work in the engineering field, showing students how the skills they are learning making robots can translate into the real world.

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"They work with their peers to solve a problem," said Moon. "It's really a beautiful thing to see they have to use the math they've learned, they have to use their communication skills, they have to work collaboratively and use their analytical skills and they feel like they're playing."

The camp is June 2nd through 6th, from 8 am. to 4 pm. The camp is free to students.

The official deadline for registration is May 16th, but they will be accepting applications until they fill the last 200 empty spots.

To register, or find more information on the district's summer programs, visit the Huntsville City Schools website. You can also register at the Annie Merts Center, at 200 White Street or call 256-428-6800.
Physics students ‘inspire’ with win

By Jennifer Edwards

Leella Holt’s Muscle Shoals physics students knew expectations were high when they walked into the University of Alabama-Huntsville InSPIRES engineering program.

After bringing home a win last year, Holt expected to repeat, and the students came through. Two of the three teams that competed won their division and the third team took third place.

“She expected that we would win,” senior Reid Ruggles said of his teacher. “We wanted to perform to that level.”

Each team designed a payload that would theoretically travel to Venus onboard a NASA spacecraft and conduct a scientific investigation. The mini-science labs had to weigh less than 5 kilograms. It was up to students to design the project and figure out the math and science elements to make it work.

Team Pompeii, led by project manager Ruggles, designed a model-rocket-sized instrument that contained a mass spectrometer to investigate the elements present on the surface of Venus, a thermographic camera to measure heat and a meter to determine seismic activity.

“We know there were volcanos on Venus,” said Jacob Butler, a senior. “We wanted to look for recent volcanic activity.”

The other winning team, CloudNine, designed a bouy-shaped container that would fall through Venus’ atmosphere to collect atmospheric and meteorological data. Jared Leeceh, a senior, said the structure was designed using computer-aided design software. He said the design changed throughout the project to make sure the final product fit the weight parameters.

“There was a lot of compromise,” he said. “We had to remove some flaps to make sure it fit the parameters.”

Emily Laster, a senior, said the group chose climate as their research focus because it had a practical application.

“If NASA does exploration of Venus, they are going to need to know about the climate,” Laster said. “It just made sense.”

A third team, ET, designed a spherical probe that would collect atmospheric data to investigate the presence of life on Venus.

Each team had to complete a community education project by teaching elementary school students simple physics lessons based on the projects.
For winning the divisions, two representatives from each team will travel to Washington, D.C., during the summer for a showcase at NASA headquarters.
AHS students use weather balloon to capture Earth's curvature

By: Lora Scripps

Four Athens High School engineering students have literally reached new heights — the stratosphere.

The four young men including Robert Autrey, Reggie Battles, Conlon Farmer and Benton Key recently completed a project they believe hasn’t been accomplished by any other high school students in this part of the state.

The challenge by their engineering II instructor Michael May was to design a payload that would take video of the curvature Earth and the darkness of space. They dubbed the project “Reaching New Heights.”

The students designed and built a 2 1/2-pound payload that contained three video cameras. The payload was attached to a parachute and a weather balloon containing helium.

Students worked on the project for about three months, according to Autrey. They had to write progress reports and keep an engineering notebook.

Students constructed the payload using a minnow bucket with plexiglass windows. “Hot Hands” or hand warmers were used to keep the electronics warm. Two Kodak PlaySports and a GoPro Hero3 were used to capture footage.

“We did a lot of testing with cameras, checking battery lives and how long they would record,” Farmer said. “Also, how cold it got the higher you got in the atmosphere. We did a lot of tests to make sure to control everything we could.”

Two years ago, another group of Athens students attempted the flight, but the electronics overheated before getting above the clouds.

This year’s students used temperature probes and the lunchroom freezer to collect and analyze data to “fine tune” the internal temperature of the payload.

The payload along with the parachute was thrown off the Golden Eagle football stadium to ensure the survival of the electronics and predict the descent speed close to the ground.

The launch was set April 26 from the Athens High School campus.

The ascent took an hour and a half as the payload climbed almost 20 miles above Earth’s surface.

“We sent it up about 90,000 to 100,000 feet,” Battles said.

During the flight, video captured images of Athens, Decatur, Madison, Huntsville and Scottsboro. Wheeler and Guntersville lakes were also observed in the footage.

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“Definitely the curvature of the Earth was my favorite part,” Key said. “But also we had a camera on the bottom that captured footage of the bucket going up. It got all of northern Alabama.”

The payload traveled through thermal winds also known as jet stream. At that point, the camera is seen shaking and flipping, according to the students.

As the balloon ascended it expanded due to the decrease in pressure and altitude. The temperature was approximately minus 50 degrees.

The balloon expanded from 6 feet in diameter to 20 feet before it burst. The descent took 30 minutes.

The payload, containing three camera views and a GPS transmitter, floated down by parachute.

“It went up and came down pretty fast,” Farmer said.

The payload landed in Section, 60 miles from the launch site. All electronics survived the crash.

“Section is directly south of Scottsboro,” Autrey said. “Coach May called the Jackson County Sheriff’s Department and one of their deputies picked it up and took it to the Scottsboro Courthouse.” May retrieved the payload at the courthouse.

The payload landed further away than students thought it would. “We figured out the winds down here do not have anything to do with it,” Autrey said. We thought it would go up, go one way and then come back the other way, but the thermal winds have more to do with it than the actual winds down here. The thermal winds are what carried it farther out.”

The project cost $1,200, according to the students. They raised the money through grants and class fees.

Battles said the project allows students to see the different sectors of engineering.

“There are so many different fields in engineering that are interesting,” he said.

In fact, the students are already interested in engineering beyond high school.

Farmer, a junior, would like to become involved in agricultural engineering or forestry.

Battles, a senior, plans to attend Tuskegee University and major in mechanical engineering.

Autrey, also a senior, would like to mix pre-med and engineering into possibly biomedical engineering.

Key is headed to UAH to study mechanical engineering. He would like to work for NASA.

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The four young men appreciate their instructor.

“He is really good about letting you figure it out for yourself,” Farmer said.

“He is very inspiring,” Autrey added. “One of the best teachers there is,” said Battles.

He did, however, mess with the students a little after the project.

“He texted us all and said something happened and we didn’t get the picture that we wanted,” Farmer said. “When we came in the school Monday, he showed us the video and it shocked us.”

“They caught some incredible footage,” May said. “All in the name of science education and fun.”
French Foreign Minister: 500-Day Deadline Before “Climate Chaos”

By: Warren Mass

Speaking with Secretary of State John Kerry at the State Department on May 13, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius (shown, left) asserted: “We have 500 days to avoid climate chaos.”

Expanding in English on his startling statement, made first in French, Fabius said: “We have 500 days to avoid climate chaos. And I know that President Obama and John Kerry himself are committed on this subject and I’m sure that with them, with a lot of other friends, we shall be able to reach success on this very important matter.”

However, since not even the most alarmist climate-change doomsayer would predict catastrophic climate change is just 500 days away, Fabius was pointing forward to the next major UN climate conference, scheduled to open in Paris from November 30 to December 11, 2015. The conference, formally called the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is concurrent with the 11th Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. According to a communiqué issued by Fabius and two other French ministers on May 21, 2013: “The main purpose of this meeting, in accordance with the Durban agreements (2011), will be to conclude a new international climate agreement, applicable to all countries after 2020.”

The UNFCCC was first negotiated at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The parties to the convention have met annually since 1995 in Conferences of the Parties (COP) to assess progress in dealing with climate change. Perhaps the most well known of these was the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which established legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The United States signed the Kyoto Protocol on November 12, 1998 during the Clinton presidency; however, to become binding in the United States, the agreement had to be ratified by a majority both houses of Congress, and the Senate had already passed (95-0) the 1997 non-binding Byrd-Hagel resolution expressing disapproval of any international agreement that 1) did not require developing countries to make emission reductions and 2) “would seriously harm the economy of the United States,” so the protocol was never submitted to the Senate for ratification.

After George W. Bush was elected president in 2000, he was asked by Hagel what his administration’s position on climate change would be. Bush replied that he took climate change “very seriously,” but that he opposed the Kyoto treaty, because “it exempts 80% of the world, including major population centers such as China and India, from compliance, and would cause serious harm to the U.S. economy.”

The United States, then, is a UNFCCC party, but not a party to the Kyoto Protocol.

During his regular press briefing on May 13, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney was asked by a reporter, “The French Foreign Minister also dramatically said that the world has 500 days to avoid climate chaos. I’m wondering what your countdown clock says.”

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Carney replied,

I would point you to the National Climate Assessment that was released last week that made clear in the view of the science that climate change is upon us and the effects and impacts of climate change are being felt today.

We’ve laid out a comprehensive strategy aimed at helping communities around the country prepare for the effects of climate change, as well as a strategy to reduce our carbon pollution, enhance our energy independence, and address climate change in the future to try to mitigate future impacts.

There’s no question that this is a global effort that has to be undertaken because of the nature of carbon emissions around the world. But I don’t have a specific reaction to that statement except to say that the National Climate Assessment that was released last week I think paints a pretty stark picture about the fact that these impacts are already here.

The Obama administration’s position on climate change (and so-called global warming) is apparent to anyone visiting the White House website in recent days. The site displays a large photo of the planet Earth from space bearing the message: “New Report: National Climate Assessment. The most comprehensive look yet at how climate change is affecting our country right now.”

A link below takes the visitor to “President Obama's Plan to Fight Climate Change.” A description notes: “President Obama believes we have a moral obligation to lead the fight against carbon pollution. Share the details of his plan to help make sure people in your community know the facts, and click here for the latest info on how climate change is affecting the U.S.”

Lest anyone miss the point as to how serious climate change is, the White House points to plagues of almost biblical proportions including record heat, droughts, wildfires, floods — even Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Isaac!

The page includes a quote from President Obama (who, the last we heard, is not an expert on meteorology): “We can choose to believe that Superstorm Sandy, and the most severe drought in decades, and the worst wildfires some states have ever seen were all just a freak coincidence. Or we can choose to believe in the overwhelming judgment of science — and act before it’s too late.”

There are, however, several problems with the administration’s relentless campaign to advance this gloom-and-doom scenario. The most basic fallacy is that such hysteria is based on the unproven theory that climate change is anthropogenic — or caused by human activity. Another is that global warming (if it exists at all) is detrimental to mankind. And yet another false premise is that the belief that we are suffering from the catastrophic effects of global warming is supported by “the overwhelming judgment of science.”

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Of course, not every false assertion can be refuted in a single article. But several respected scientists have written books and research papers debunking the claim that climate change is anthropogenic, unusual, or harmful.

The University of Houston's Larry Bell, an professor of space architecture who wrote Climate of Corruption: Politics and Power Behind The Global Warming Hoax, was quoted by UH's Daily Cougar newspaper as saying, "The notion of carbon dioxide being a pollutant is silly because carbon dioxide is what makes plants grow."

"A misrepresentation is that global warming is bad; that it's a crisis. No. There is no scientific evidence that we're in a crisis," Bell said. "These warming periods happen with the irregularity of [an] electrocardiogram for lots of reasons."

The Daily Cougar reported that The Global Warming Petition Project has been signed by over 31,400 scientists to refute the claim that most scientists support the idea of man-made global warming.

Martin Hoerling, a scientist with the NOAA, said of claims that Superstorm Sandy was caused by global warming: "As to underlying causes, neither the frequency of tropical or extratropical cyclones over [the] N. Atlantic are projected to appreciably change due to climate change."

One of the most prolific scientists refuting the global warming propagandists has been Dr. S. Fred Singer, who wrote Global Climate Change (1989), The Greenhouse Debate Continued (1992), and Hot Talk, Cold Science (1997). He also co-authored Unstoppable Global Warming: Every 1,500 Years (2007) with Dennis Avery, and Climate Change Reconsidered (2009) with Craig Idso.

Singer said in an interview with the British Telegraph in 2009: "We are certainly putting more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. However there is no evidence that this high CO2 is making a detectable difference. It should in principle, however the atmosphere is very complicated and one cannot simply argue that just because CO2 is a greenhouse gas it causes warming."

More recent research goes beyond arguments about whether global warming is beneficial or harmful because it indicates that the process may already have reversed itself. Steven Goddard, an independent analyst at Real Science (who served as senior scientist for climate studies at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center before joining the faculty at the University of Alabama in Huntsville) has noted: "NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] made a big deal about 2012 blowing away all temperature records, but the temperature they reported is the result of a huge error. This affects all NOAA and NASA U.S. temperature graphs, and is part of the cause of this famous shift."

Goddard also cited satellite data indicating that by 2008, U.S. temperatures, far from increasing, had actually cooled down below 1980s and '90s levels.
NASA scientist Dr. Roy Spencer, also skeptical of government agency claims, stated: “I can’t bring myself to believe any U.S. government pronouncements regarding record warm temperatures.”

The more Americans research “climate change,” the less they believe the government’s assertion that catastrophic human-caused climate change is a fact. Those who want to discover data that has not been “adjusted” by NOAA or other government agencies might do their own research at credible privately created climate websites such as Climate Depot: http://www.climatedepot.com/.
UWA President Holland resigns

John Blackwell to head the university as the search for a new leader begins

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON | University of West Alabama President Richard Holland submitted a letter of resignation Thursday to the institution's board of trustees, which voted to name the special administrator overseeing the campus the interim president during the search for Holland's replacement.

The trustees voted 9-1 to accept Holland's resignation as president and voted unanimously to name administrator John Blackwell, appointed after Holland was put on leave in March, as the interim president. Trustee Alex Saad was the dissenting vote on accepting the resignation and retirement terms, details of which were not immediately available Thursday.

"I think it is not right to give a free pass to someone who did such grievous (harm) to this university," Saad said.

Trustee Thed Spree shared the sentiment but voted to accept the resignation.

"I am a little unhappy, but I will get over that. For the best of the university, I will move on," Spree said.

Board president Terry Bunn and Blackwell urged unity moving forward after the campus community saw divisions over the question of extending Holland's contract and public allegations by the president that board members and campus administrators conspired to undermine his presidency.

"This storm also will pass, and our future is as bright as our heritage is strong," Bunn said, reading from a prepared statement.

The resignation letter, presented to the board by Holland's attorney, George D.H. McMillan

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Jr., was preceded by an open letter apologizing for his actions and those taken on his behalf to have his contract extended by two years beyond its Sept. 30 expiration.

The trustees voted in March not to extend Holland's contract and put him on leave while consultants investigated whether there was any unethical or improper conduct related to the annual presidential evaluation.

"My actions and those taken by others on my behalf to force an extension of my tenure were wrong and unprofessional. These actions have caused division within the UWA family and I deeply regret and apologize for causing the division," Holland wrote.

Holland went on to say he overreacted to an evaluation by consultant Thomas Z. Jones.

"I placed documents on the UWA web which were overly critical of Dr. Jones and erroneously made allegations, which I now retract," Holland said.

Holland alleged trustees Jerry Smith and Bunn conspired with Vice President of Institutional Development Clemitt Spruiell and Business College Dean Ken Tucker to undermine Holland. Holland also apologized directly to the men in his letter.

Holland claimed the evaluation last fall was skewed when Bunn, Smith and the others colluded to include hand-selected biased respondents to provide negative feedback.

Holland's public allegations of tampering were followed by social media campaigns and lobbying by supporters of state and university officials on his behalf.

Head of the letters from Holland, the trustees heard a lengthy presentation from Livingston attorney and former UWA trustee Drayton Pruitt and former Tuscaloosa County District Attorney Tommy Smith, who were hired by the board as special investigators in March.

The investigators said there was no evidence of corrupt, unethical or illegal behavior by trustees and other administrators accused by Holland, but they did report evidence of a conspiracy by the president, former Provost David Taylor, former UWA professor Gary Stone, alumnus Mike Holliman, Paul Hamrick and employees John Key and Bill McFarland to extort a contract extension for Holland from the board. Key is the director of International Programs, and McFarland is director of the Center for Business and Economic Services and an assistant to the provost.

McFarland declined to comment on the allegations. Holliman, Hamrick and Stone could not be reached for comment Thursday night.

Smith, who began the presentation, said there was
“overwhelming evidence” of a collaborative effort by Holland and the group to craft the responses to the annual presidential evaluation and marshal public support to influence the board to extend the president’s contract. Smith concluded the extension was not to allow Holland to complete projects, but rather to protect Taylor in his role as provost. Smith, based on email records, argued the group allied with Holland tried to use the threat of an investigation by UWA’s accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, to help achieve their goals. Smith alleged the group began preparing its push for the contract extension before the annual presidential evaluation and misused UWA resources in the process.

Holland said in his open letter that he was aware of the SACS complaint being crafted. “This was unwise and harmful to the university. I did not do enough to stop that from happening,” Holland wrote.

Smith said Holland and the provost conspired with Holliman, the past president of the UWA national alumni association who filed a complaint with SACS earlier this year. Smith also alleged the emails and testimony indicated Holland worked to protect and reward Taylor, Key and McFarland for their support with contracts and appointments.

Smith said Taylor exercised a contract modification added in late February to allow himself to step down as provost and teach online literature courses while continuing at the pay rate for the provost.

Taylor addressed the allegations in an emailed response. “I enjoyed serving as provost under Dr. Holland and am proud of all the many things that were accomplished under his administration. I supported Dr. Holland in whatever endeavors that he requested, which included assisting him in drafting and editing his responses to his last performance evaluation.

In retrospect, I agree with Dr. Holland’s statement that the responses constituted an overreaction,” Taylor wrote. “Any contract or contract modification given to me by Dr. Holland was not in return for any help or support that I gave him, but was because I believed that my performance merited recognition.”

Key’s attorney James Anderson said his client’s activities to aid his supervisors at their request, while potentially politically questionable, were not illegal or prohibited and that use of university resources was appropriate.

“These are just all things that can be explained,” Anderson said.

The report by the investigators was approximately 54 pages. The men interviewed 34 people and compiled approximately 3,500 pages of sworn testimony.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosasnews.com or 205-722-0209.
Ex-UWA president won't stay on faculty
Richard Holland retiring July 1

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Former University of West Alabama President Richard Holland will retire July 1 and not remain on faculty at the Livingston-based institution.

Holland announced his resignation through his attorney at a UWA board of trustees meeting on Thursday. The trustees voted Thursday to accept his resignation.

The resignation followed a lengthy report by special investigators Thursday that dismissed Holland's pointed criticisms of an annual presidential evaluation last fall as unfounded and alleged the popular president and a group of supporters misused university resources and tried to force the trustees to extend his contract by two years for their own gain.

Holland called for the investigation of the evaluation after claiming the process was tampered with by members of the board and administrators to undermine his presidency.

Holland's attorney read an open letter from his client at the board meeting in which the former president retracted the claims, apologizing for the effort to extend the contract and the division it caused.

Holland's letter, the report by the investigators and a message from board President Terry Bunn were posted on the UWA website Thursday after the meeting.

"It is now time for this great institution of higher learning to move on. The board will immediately initiate a search process to find new leadership for our school. From adversity will spring opportunity as the university family pulls together to shape a new, dynamic vision of the future," Bunn wrote.

Holland was named president in 2002, with his most recent contract set to expire Sept. 30. Holland, a tenured professor at UWA, has been part of the faculty since 1967.
RESEARCH GRANT

Ajay Singh, a researcher with the University of South Alabama's Mitchell Cancer Institute, has been awarded nearly $1.6 million in federal funding to study the molecular causes of racial disparities in prostate cancer.

The five-year grant, awarded by the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health, represents Singh's second and the fourth NCI grant awarded to MCI researchers in 2014, totaling more than $3.5 million.

According to MCI, the incidence rate for prostate cancer is nearly two-thirds higher and the associated mortality rate is more than twice as high among African-American men than the rates reported among European-American men.

"An estimated 233,000 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed in the United States in 2014, and an estimated 29,480 men will die from this disease," Singh said of the affliction that continues to be the second most prevalent cause of cancer-related deaths for men in both Alabama and across the nation.

Earlier this year, another project on which Singh is a collaborator was one of six selected by peer review to receive a portion of the first $300,000 in seed funding made available through the USA's Abraham A. Mitchell Cancer Research Fund.

Kelli Dugan
Civil rights center
to remain at ASU

MONTGOMERY | A civil rights interpretive center will remain on the Alabama State University campus for now, following a vote by the Montgomery City Council.

WAKA-TV reported that after some debate, the council voted not to reconsider the location.

The station reported that the National Park Service selected ASU as the site of the center in 2011.

Montgomery City Councilman Tracy Larkin has proposed a resolution to reconsider the current location at Alabama State, favoring a site along the route of the historic Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march.
2 selected to serve on ASU board of trustees

MONTGOMERY | Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley has chosen two replacements to serve on the Alabama State University Board of Trustees.

On Tuesday, Bentley nominated Elmore County Schools Superintendent Jeff Langham and Regions Bank Vice President Angela McKenzie.

Langham and McKenzie will replace two of Bentley's appointments who were blocked by the Senate Confirmation Committee in April. Bentley had initially selected Macon County Schools Superintendent Jacqueline Brooks and Tuscaloosa businessman Fitzgerald Washington for the posts.
Letters outline tension between ASU leaders

MONTGOMERY | Two members of the Alabama State University board of trustees have questioned University President Gwendolyn Boyd's understanding of the school's governance structure, and Boyd has called claims they've made against her intimidation and harassment.

A series of letters obtained by the Montgomery Advertiser outlines a disagreement between Boyd and board members Elton Dean and Marvin Wiggins.

The issue arose after Boyd distributed a revised organizational chart just before a late April trustee meeting.

Dean wrote a letter to Boyd April 28 saying the board is concerned with the way Boyd has managed her interaction and relationship with the board, and that a state statute authorizes the board to approve all personnel moves.

Boyd said she's been responsive to the board and called Dean's claims unfair and inaccurate.
UAB advances to men's golf NCAA Championships

The No. 21 UAB men's golf team has advanced to the 2014 NCAA Championships after finishing second at the Sugar Grove Regional at Rich Harvest Farms. The Blazers shot a 298 (+10) in the final round and finished 882 (+18) overall.

"I am pleased that we are going to finals," said head coach Alan Murray. "Right now we are probably a little disappointed that we didn't win the tournament. We came up a shot short so that was a little disappointing, but overall the guys were excellent. Paul (Dunne) finishing third was superb. Martin Rohwer had a good tournament. Everyone contributed over the week so I am very pleased and proud of the guys."

UAB had a great start in the final round, as each of the five players birdied on the second hole. Junior Paul Dunne led the Blazers with a third place finish overall after a three-round total of 218 (+2). He finished with an even par 72 in the third round with three birdies and an eagle on the seventh hole.

Sophomore Martin Rohwer also finished the third round even par. He tied for sixth with a 220 (+4) over the three days. Rohwer had three birdies in the first seven holes on Saturday. It was his first appearance in the NCAA regionals.

Finishing tied for 11th was senior Sam Love. Love recorded a total of 222 (+6) over the three rounds. He shot a 77 (+5) in the third round on Saturday. He notched birdies on the second and seventh holes on the final day.

Senior Wilson McDonald closed out the tournament with a 77 (+5) in the final round. He finished with a total of 224 (+8) to tie for 17th. McDonald had two birdies in Saturday's round. He also recorded an eagle on the 17th hole in the second round.

Also recording a 77 (+5) in the final round was redshirt senior Thomas Sutton. Sutton had three birdies in Saturday's action. He finished with a three-round total of 233 (+17) to tie for 42nd.

It is the fifth time in school history that UAB has advanced to the NCAA Championships. The last time the Blazers made it to nationals was in the 2011-12 season. This is the team's first appearance under Murray, who is in his first season as head coach for the Blazers.

"We will have a few days in Birmingham before we travel to Kansas so we will do a lot of short game work," said Murray. "The golf course is meant to be tough. From what I hear the condition,
it gets a lot of wind so no matter how good you are playing you are always going to miss a few greens so chipping and putting will become vitally important. The guys will get a little bit of rest as well. It has been a long week.

UAB will have a week off before it travels to Hutchinson, Kan. to play in the National Championships at the Prairie Dunes Country Club May 23-28.
UAB's Kirk, Tisher Break C-USA Track & Field Records

UAB track and field athletes Elinor Kirk and Neal Tisher combined for victories in three events— all in record-breaking fashion—to highlight the Blazers' performances Sunday on the final day of competition at the 2014 Conference USA Outdoor Championships.

Kirk, who has had a remarkable year with a combined six conference cross country and track titles, won a pair of races Sunday and achieved both in record times. Kirk captured first in the 1,500-meter run and two hours later, claimed the 5,000-meter run to become the first C-USA athlete to double in those events since 2005.

The Swansea, Wales native, who had not run the 1,500 this season until this weekend, won the event with a time of 4:15.93, breaking the 16-year-old C-USA mark (4:17.99) held by Tulane's Hanne Lyngstad set in 1998. She also broke the UAB mark of 4:19.31 set by Sarah Hudak, who won C-USA 1,500 titles in 2012 and 2013, with her performance.

This is the third consecutive year that a UAB runner has won the 1,500-meter competition at the conference outdoor meet. Sarah Hudak won the 1,500 titles in both 2012 and 2014.

Kirk also set a conference record in the 5,000 as she won the event by more than 34 seconds. She finished with a time of 16:05.29 and shattered the record previously held by Tulsa's Paula Whiting of 16:17.48 (2010).

Including the 2013 C-USA cross country crown won by Kirk, the Blazers' graduate student has won six league individual titles this year. And she didn't compete this weekend in the event in which she ranks No. 1 collegiately in 2014 — the 10,000-meter run.

Meanwhile, Tisher, a Mobile native who transferred to UAB from Ole Miss to attend medical school prior to this year, won the pole vault with a record effort.

Tisher joined the 14-foot club as she claimed first place with a vault of 14-0 ½. She broke the six-year-old record held by Rice's Rachel Greff. On Sunday, she easily won the competition as Rice's McKenzie Johnson was second at 13-4 1/2.

UAB also had a pair of sprinters who scored for the Blazers. Shakima Knox finished seventh in the 100-meter dash with a time of 12.03 while Kyana White was seventh in the 400-meter dash at 55.10.

See next page
The Blazers finished with 46 points to finish eighth in the meet. East Carolina was the women's winner with 140 points while UTEP placed second with 88.
NOW WHAT?

EMPLOYMENT: COLLEGE GRADUATES FACE AN UNEVEN JOB MARKET.

Michael Kanell • McClatchy-Tribune

Neal Caldwell of Woodstock, Ga., has an enviable dilemma. The Kennesaw State finance major, who graduates this month, must choose among “five solid offers” from employers. They include sales positions in Denver, Boston and England, he said. “The compensation is quite good,” he said. “It’s really about deciding where I want to live.”

At the other end of spectrum is Leah Daniell of Austell, Ga. She’s also 22 and graduating with a political science degree from Georgia State. She’s applied for more than 30 jobs and spent hours sniffing out clues on websites, sending out resumes and strolling into Big Box retailers to find someone’s hand to shake.

“It’s not promising” she said.

As the pair’s stories show, this year’s graduates step into a modestly improving but uneven economy. Some skills are in demand, while many grads — and not just those with liberal arts degrees — scrap for a paycheck healthy enough to keep them out of their parents’ basements.

Nearly 39,000 undergrad degree will be awarded this spring by metro Atlanta colleges and the University of Georgia in Athens. The job market is a lot stronger than when they were freshmen: As the summer of 2010 ended, the national jobless rate was 9.5 percent. Now, the unemployment rate is 6.3 percent.

In Georgia, where the recession was harsher than average, the jobless rate in mid-2010 climbed to 10.2 percent. The most recent figure for the state was 7 percent, down from 8.4 percent last spring.

There’s no doubt prospects have brightened.

“In the past year, I would say that we have seen a subtle shift,” said Eileen Buecher, associate director of the Emory Career Center. “Our students are getting offers. It is not substantial, but it’s almost across the board.”

Almost.

Companies are more willing to hire than in the last few years but still more selective than they were before the recession, Buecher said.

For college grads age 20 to 24, the jobless rate in April was 4.4 percent, down from 7.2 percent a year ago, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The jobless rate for their peers who have only a high school diploma is 13.8 percent.

Improvement is in the air, said Scott Williams, director of the University of Georgia career center. The autumn career fair at UGA drew 2,000 students — just like the year before. But the number of employers showing up to hire increased from 199 to 228.

“That would indicate that there is greater opportunity,” he said. “The anecdotal evidence has been positive. We have been hearing about multiple job offers. We certainly see what looks like an increase over last year’s graduating class.”

College grads average much higher pay than their non-college peers, according to government statistics: The median weekly pay for college grads of 25 or older is $1,108, compared to $651 for those with just a high school diploma, according to the BLS.

In a slow-growing economy, more grads choose temp work, said Stephanie Searcy, regional vice president for Robert Half International.

“New grads know technology — often they know things that five years ago didn’t even exist,” she said. “So companies get someone with less experience, but they are often getting advanced technical skills and that really sets them apart.”

But with the right mix of skills and job, many grads make progress without moving.

Angelica Calderon, 22, a product of North Gwinnett High School, is graduating from Emory’s Goizueta Business School. She has a job in sales and analytics in the Chicago offices of Colgate-Palmolive.

“If you are in business school you are more than likely to come out with a job,” she said. “A lot of my friends are still wondering what they are going to do.”