AUGUST 7, 2014

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
JULY 31, 2014 – AUGUST 7, 2014

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Alabama commerce secretary: Economic development plan working

Michael Tomberlin
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The Accelerate Alabama economic development plan has served to kick-start the state’s economy since it started two years ago, according to Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield.

His proof: More than 38,000 jobs have come to the state through recruitment or expansion and companies have invested more than $9.8 billion in state operations.

Speaking to the Economic Development Association of Alabama at its 2014 Summer Conference in Point Clear, Canfield said the state is making gains in economic development due to the professionalism and teamwork of the state, local and private sector economic developers.

“I tip my hat to you, the professional economic developers,” Canfield said. “Your professionalism and dedication are key to the success of Alabama.”

Canfield said Gov. Robert Bentley is fond of pointing out the teamwork that is exhibited when Alabama is recruiting a project to the state. Site consultants and corporate leaders regularly single out the teamwork aspect — the “speaking with one voice” characteristic — as being one of the factors that tilted the scales in Alabama’s favor, Canfield said.

“In Alabama, we win when we participate as a team,” Canfield said. “Let’s recommit ourselves to keeping that teamwork in place and continuing to build on it.”

Canfield said the way Accelerate Alabama was put together was already unprecedented in the state with the degree of input from throughout the state.

But what really set the plan apart was the Alabama Economic Development Alliance that was formed to implement the plan. That alliance includes heavy representation from the state’s post-secondary education institutions.

Canfield said it is the first time the economic development community has included the education community in implementing a statewide plan in Alabama. The approach is also uncommon in other states and some of them are looking to Alabama as an example of what they may want to try in their own states, Canfield said.
Alabama ranked as top state for auto manufacturing strength

Dawn Kent Azok  dazok@al.com

Business Facilities magazine has ranked Alabama as the No. 1 state when it comes to automotive manufacturing strength.

The ranking, based on production gains and growth potential for the sector, appears in the publication's annual report on states' performance.

"After rising through the ranks of our Automotive Manufacturing Strength category like one of the Saturn V rockets they used to produce in Huntsville, Alabama finally has reached the summit in our flagship auto category," Business Facilities says. "The Crimson Tide rolled into the top spot by edging past Tennessee, our top-ranked state in Automotive Manufacturing Strength for four consecutive years."

The magazine cites the long-term commitment of Mercedes-Benz, which birthed the state's modern auto industry in the 1990s and continues to expand its operations in Tuscaloosa.

Meanwhile, Honda, Hyundai and Toyota also continue to grow their presence in the state.

Elsewhere in the issue, Alabama was ranked:
- 3: Workforce Training Leader
- 5: Aerospace/Defense Industry Leader
- 5: Auto Industry Jobs Leader
- 8: Export Leader
- 9: Economic Growth Potential
- 9: Employment Recovery Leader
- 10: Best Business Climate

Business Facilities targets site selectors and key industry decision-makers.
Protective Life reports bump in second-quarter earnings.

Kathryn Jacoby. kjacoby@al.com

Birmingham-based insurance agency Protective Life reported net income of $108 million, $1.33 per diluted share, for the second quarter.

That was up slightly from the second quarter of 2013, when net income stood at $103.2 million, $1.27 per diluted share. The company also reported after-tax operating income of $106.4 million, up from $77.7 million during the second quarter of 2013.

For the six-month period ending June 30, Protective Life reported $191.6 million or $2.36 per diluted share, compared to $181.5 million or $2.24 for the same period in 2013.

The company’s board of directors declared a quarterly dividend of $0.24 per share, to be paid on Sept. 2 to shareholders of record by the end of trading on Aug. 18.

On June 3, the company announced an agreement for Tokyo-based Dai-ichi to acquire Protective Life for $5.7 billion. Dai-ichi paid $70 per share in an all-cash deal for all outstanding Protective Life shares. The combined company formed the world’s 13th-largest insurance company, with assets of $424 billion.

Protective will become Dai-ichi’s platform for growth in the U.S. No significant changes to Protective’s current strategy, day-to-day operations, distribution channels or employee base have occurred as a result of the deal. Protective’s leadership and management team has continued to operate from its U.S. 280 headquarters since the acquisition.
Tuscaloosa ranks well in survey

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Tuscaloosa is one of the top 10 most affordable mid-size cities in the U.S., according to a survey released by The Simple Dollar, a website that focuses on personal finance.

Tuscaloosa ranked ninth among 150 cities with populations between 50,000 and 150,000 people.

The survey measured affordability through median house prices, average rent of a one-bedroom apartment, median household income and a cost-of-living index, which included housing, utilities, groceries, transportation and health care. The survey also considered climate, employment opportunities, access to cultural activities and amenities as well as natural resources and the landscape.

"Tuscaloosa is an ideal Southern city for those seeking a lively college town experience with plenty of outdoor recreation opportunities without breaking the bank," the website states. "The median house price in Tuscaloosa is $137,000, and the average rental cost of a one-bedroom apartment is $654, with a cost-of-living index score that is 5 points below the national average."

The website's survey summary of Tuscaloosa also touts the University of Alabama and its football team, a thriving downtown and Tuscaloosa's parks, trails and waterways.

Syracuse, N.Y., topped the survey of most affordable mid-size cities, followed by Grand Rapids, Mich.; Harlingen, Texas; Chattanooga, Tenn.; Eau Claire, Wis.; Port Saint Lucie, Fla.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Greenville, S.C.; Tuscaloosa and Asheville, N.C.

Birmingham named most exciting place in Alabama
By: Bryan Davis

It's no secret that Birmingham's night life is heating up with venues like Iron City and the host of breweries, bars and eateries located in the metro.

A real estate website has named the city the most exciting place in Alabama and has the data to back it up.

Movoto ranked 64 cities in the state with a population of 10,000 or more, finding Birmingham has the right combination of music, restaurants and activities.

"It's no surprise that Birmingham-home to more nightlife per capita than anywhere else in the state-came in at No.1 on our list," Movoto’s ranking said. "Even aside from places like Workplay, Blue Monkey and Parkside, though, Birmingham has a lot to offer."

The ranking is based on criteria that includes, nightlife per capita (bars, clubs, comedy etc), live music venues per capita, active life options (parks and outdoor activities), arts and entertainment, fast food (the fewer the better), non-fast food restaurants (the more the better), residents ages 18 to 34 and population density.

Birmingham ranked No. 4 for its number of music venues and arts and entertainment options, the report said. It came in at No. 8 in active life options.

Birmingham's 18-34 crowd makes up 28 percent of its population as well.

Florence came in at No. 2, and Montgomery, Mobile and Fairhope all tied for No. 3.
Northport considers economic developer

Staff Writer

Northport has been without a retail development director for more than a year, but the position soon may be filled.

The Northport City Council is considering hiring a new retail development/economic development director to help attract new businesses to the city. The previous director, state Rep. Alan Harper, R-Northport, retired in March 2013.

"It's a complicated position, and we want to make every effort to get it right," said City Administrator Scott Collins.

Northport City Council members said they want to see what other cities close to Northport's size are doing to attract businesses, and how much similar cities pay for economic development.

"We've got to see what we can afford," Northport Mayor Bobby Herndon said. "We are on the move, and we should see what other cities our size afford and we'll discuss it from there."

If and when the city decides to fill the position, Councilwoman Judy Hayes said, the person needs to be affordable but well-trained in recruiting new businesses.

"We need to find someone who is experienced and had success," Hayes said.

But hiring someone who is experienced requires appropriate compensation, said Councilman Steve Acker. Harper, who worked for Northport as an economic recruiter twice in his career, was paid about $80,000 by Northport at the time of his hire in 2012.

"You better get somebody good, who knows what they are doing, and we'll have to pay them well," Acker said.

Collins agreed, adding that.

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NORTHPORT

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while it’s good for the council to have long-term goals for the eventual person hired, it’s not a position where you can see the immediate impact on the city. Retail development happens over time, he said.

“It’s not going to be a position that comes cheaply,” Collins said.

Collins told the council he would examine what similar cities offer and report back to the council to decide how to proceed.

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City secures $13.07M in new debt for capital projects

Refinancing prior debt nets new cash

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Unanimous votes by the Tuscaloosa City Council on Tuesday secured an additional $13.07 million in new municipal debt along with a cash influx of about $1.3 million from the refinancing of prior bonds.

The $13.07 million in new general obligation warrants, or municipal bonds, was proposed in May by Mayor Walt Maddox as part of an overall capital improvement project plan of almost $20 million.

For the tax-exempt portion of these bonds, the average interest rate was locked in at 3.3 percent, while the average interest rate for the taxable portion was 2.16.

Maddox has said he intends to direct $500,000 from the city’s annual share from the Alabama Oil and Gas Trust Fund and an additional $250,000 from the city’s lodging tax meant for capital improvement projects.

All told, that means $750,000 a year will be needed to cover the annual payment for the borrowed money.

To cover this, Maddox has said he intends to direct $500,000 from the city’s annual share from the Alabama Oil and Gas Trust Fund and an additional $250,000 from the city’s lodging tax meant for capital improvement projects.

Among the projects to be funded by the bond issue will be $5.27 million for improvements at Bowers and Munny Sokol parks. The City Council agreed last year to pick up 70 percent of $7.53 million in upgrades for Bowers and Sokol parks projects with the Tuscaloosa County Commission agreeing to fund the remaining 30 percent, or $2.26 million.

An additional $200,000 from the new debt is going toward a joint $400,000 project with the Tuscaloosa Board of Education.
DEBT

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County Commission to upgrade the parking and access to Hurricane Creek Park.

Also on Maddox’s slate of projects to be funded with the new debt is $2.6 million toward road repairs and upgrades for Rice Mine Road, James I. Harrison Jr. Parkway and Hargrove Road.

An additional $600,000 is being directed toward the Tuscaloosa Municipal Airport, which must undergo more than $1 million in upgrades required by the Federal Aviation Administration.

A recent FAA inspection found that the striping and markings on runway 11-29, the airport’s secondary runway, must be removed and replaced, but city officials determined that the runway’s asphalt could not withstand the blasting process associated with removing the striping.

Now, the only option is to mill away the aged pavement, resurface it and then repaint it at an estimated cost of $1.06 million.

In addition to the $600,000 in new debt for this project, the City Council also has agreed to direct $400,000 from the approximately $1.3 million in re-
fund savings from the 2006 and 2007 bond issues.

Essentially, the council voted Tuesday night to refinance that debt — much like a family may refinance a mortgage — and elected to take the savings in cash instead of rolling it into the payment.

Not all of that $1.3 million has been dedicated, but Maddox urged the City Council in June to allocate the $400,000 for the runway in order to maintain the airport’s certification that allows it to handle commercial flights.

With the money now in place (another $149,000 from the sale of a tract of land to the town of Vance also is going toward this runway project), the bidding process should take about a month with construction lasting between six and eight weeks.

City and airport officials have said they do not expect the work to negatively affect incoming airplane traffic for the University of Alabama’s upcoming football season.

One reason the city of Tuscaloosa was able to get such a higher-than-anticipated return on the refinancing — consultants had anticipated $1 million in savings — and a favorable interest rate for the new debt is its current financial standings with bond rating agencies Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s.

After a trip in July to New York City to meet with both rating agencies, city officials were able to do enough to maintain the city’s Aa1 rating from Moody’s and the AA+ rating from Standard & Poor’s that it had earned prior to the devastating tornado of April 27, 2011.

Maddox and other city officials showed the rating agencies photos and data on how the city has responded to the storm and progressed with rebuilding efforts.

Bob Young, president of the investment banking firm Frazier Lanier Company in Montgomery, said officials with S&P and Moody’s were impressed with the city’s stewardship of taxpayer dollars in the rebuilding process.

Young said the ratings groups were amazed at the progress Tuscaloosa has made when compared with other areas of the country that have had similar disasters in the past three years.

“It really had a profound effect on both Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s,” Young told the council Tuesday night.

“Hopefully, you’ll never have to deal with anything like that again.

“But in the event there is such an emergency, know that you’ll have the financial wherewithal to cope with it.”
STATEWIDE

BEST COLLEGES

Auburn University has bragging rights over the University of Alabama in Forbes' 2014 list of America's best colleges.

But Samford University in Birmingham was the state's highest-ranked college or university in Forbes' annual list, which was released this week. Samford checked in at No. 203 out of 650 universities nationwide ranked by Forbes. Auburn finished one spot behind at No. 204.

The University of Alabama was ranked No. 335. Other Alabama colleges and universities were farther down the list: Birmingham-Southern College, No. 383; Spring Hill College in Mobile, No. 437; University of Alabama in Huntsville, No. 466; University of Alabama at Birmingham, No. 528; University of South Alabama, No. 593; Troy University, No. 630; and Tuskegee University, No. 632.

Steve Doyle
Distance learning accelerates academics

Evan Belanger  ebelanger@al.com

Fifteen-year-old Campbell Escott, a rising junior at Ramsay High School, is a student with a plan. She intends to graduate early, enroll at Tennessee State University and go on to become an engineer.

CITY SCHOOLS: DISTRICT EXPERIMENTS WITH ONLINE LEARNING TO EXPAND COURSE OFFERINGS.

And part of her plan involves a new distance-learning program piloted this summer by Birmingham City Schools.

The program, offered through online learning company Edmentum, is a cost-effective way to expand the school system’s academic offerings with new classes like German, digital photography and anthropology, school officials say.

Perhaps more importantly, it also allows motivated students to continue their coursework in the summer, allowing them to graduate ahead of schedule.

This summer, Escott and about 50 other students attended school from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Thursday at online-learning centers at Wenonah, Huffman and Ramsay high schools.

With a certified teacher on-site to monitor them, they complete online coursework with the assistance of certified online teachers with whom they communicate via email, telephone and video chat.

Working at their own pace — often ahead of schedule — they complete online learning modules, followed by exercises and exams that determine their final grades.

Escott takes digital arts, which will help her with engineering programs like computer aided drafting. She also takes Principals of Engineering. Neither class is offered through the school system’s regular curriculum.

A self-described “hands-on learner,” Escott says it’s more difficult to complete online modules because she’s used to direct oversight from classroom teachers.

“You have to take notes by yourself and get the understanding of it by yourself, but I know this what I’m going to have to do in the real world,” she said.

High-achieving students

Beverly Kimes, Birmingham City Schools mathematics program specialist, said the quality of instruction provided through Edmentum is as good as regular classroom learning.

In some ways, it’s more difficult, she said, because students have to be self-motivated. “They can’t get bored and lose their train of thought in the middle of something or they won’t finish,” she said.

Birmingham City Schools Chief Academic Officer Tisha Nguyen says the pilot program has been successful. About 15 to 20 students finished ahead of schedule, she said, with the rest working to complete their work by the Aug. 4 target date.

School officials have discussed making the program available for students to complete extra coursework during the school year by allowing them to do online coursework during the weekends.

According to Kimes, those taking advantage of the academic acceleration program so far have mostly been high-achieving students.

The program has been particularly popular among rising freshmen coming out of area middle schools. She attributes that phenomenon to parental involvement.

“Elementary parents sign up for everything, and then middle school parents sign up for almost everything,” Kimes said. “High school parents are lucky if they know about the program unless they’ve got an outside source to let them know.”
AEA's future is an open question, but an answer is coming soon: opinion

By: Kyle Whitmire

After the polls closed on June 3, Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard was almost jubilant. He had defeated a well-funded opponent in the GOP primary, and many of his Republican colleagues seemed to be beating back their "RINO" challengers, as well.

The Alabama Education Association and a shadowy, dark money non-profit called Stop Common Core had dumped millions into Alabama races, and many GOP incumbents who would have coasted to easy victories suddenly had to fight for their political lives.

"Clearly this was an attempt to change the leadership in the House and the Senate," Hubbard said then. "There's no doubt about that. Hopefully this will send a message to Henry Mabry and the AEA and others that it's not going to work."

Since then, Hubbard and other Republicans have framed their fight with AEA well. Hubbard has called it a "horrible failure."

The truth, however, is a little more ambiguous.

The final score

Of the 21 races in which the AEA supported Republican candidates in the primary, the organization's picks won nine. Two of those were sympathetic GOP incumbents the organization fought to protect from primary challengers. One faced no real opposition for a vacated seat. The other six victories were against GOP incumbents.

All of the AEA's victories were in Alabama House races. The AEA was shut out completely in Senate races.

What's that mean?

The Alabama GOP holds 66 seats in the Alabama House. It needs to hold at least five of those to maintain its filibuster-proof supermajority.

The likelihood that Alabama Democrats will be able to peel a have dozen seats from the GOP this November seems pretty slim.

The greater question is how those AEA-backed Republicans will vote if and when they take their seats in the Alabama State House. Will they stick with their Republican brethren or dance with those who brung them?

What's more, does the AEA even know what it paid for? Many of the Republican challengers ran as anti-Common Core candidates. It's probably not fair to paint Common Core opponents all with the same brush, but if you spend much time at a few of their rallies you'll see something
interesting — there are a lot of homeschoolers, and even more parents with children in private schools.

AEA backed many of these candidates under the old adage that the enemy of your enemy is your friend, but I have to wonder whether some of the candidates AEA backed might not support public education at all.

A new speaker?

It's hard to imagine six or seven of the Republican House members breaking off to join forces with Democratic lawmakers, unless something dramatic happens.

However, Alabama politicos have been waiting for something dramatic to happen in Lee County for more than a year now. It's now a matter of public record that a Lee County Grand Jury has been investigating Hubbard, and many have wondered, if Hubbard were to be indicted, whether he could hang on to his office as speaker.

With a few GOP allies in the Legislature, AEA could now force the issue if an indictment comes down.

Et tu, Bentley?

Last week, Gov. Robert Bentley said he might call a special session to raid the Education Trust Fund to pay for new economic development incentives.

Later in the same day, he backed off, saying he had been misunderstood.

Regardless, Alabama has a serious problem: Most of the so-called "growth taxes" flow in to the ETF. The much smaller General Fund budget is stuck with taxes that don't grow, such as cigarette taxes, and expenses that do. For several years now, the state has been propping up the General Fund with federal stimulus money and funds it borrowed from its rainy day accounts — money the state must pay back.

In short, Alabama is running at a brick wall and hoping that wall moves before it gets there.

Some Republicans have advocated combining the two budgets, but the party is not united. Other worry rightly that Medicaid and prison costs would eat through the combined budget just like they've consumed the General Fund budget already.

The governor's flailing about last week was for a reason — eventually something must be done. The only question is how long lawmakers can ignore the problem before a war begins over how to solve it.

Just by hinting that the state might raid the ETF, Bentley gave AEA a new reason for being and a way to remind its members that the organization is still relevant in a Republican-dominated Alabama.
Follow the money? What money?

When AEA files its next campaign finance report for the month of July, it could answer an important question about its future. Earlier this year, the organization lost a court battle to continue deducting members' dues from their paychecks. Instead, the organization will have to ask those members for their dues directly.

Meanwhile, the organization has depleted much of its political war chest before the fall elections.

Each month, AEA gets between $175,000 and $250,000 from its members for its political action committee, AVOTE. If the next installment comes in short of that, you'll hear a lot of politicos crowing that AEA is dying, and they might be right.

Two weeks ago, AEA borrowed $500,000 from Regions bank, having depleted its campaign coffers in the primaries. (Amy Marlowe, a spokeswoman for the AEA says the organization typically borrows money during each four year election cycle.) The next campaign finance report could tell us whether that money is a bridge loan or if one of Alabama's biggest gravy trains has finally run off the tracks.
Sabans continue legacy of charity with family-oriented foundation

By Aaron Sutliff
Sports Writer

The little girl in pink came bouncing up behind the most important man in the room, who just so happened to be holding court in front of all the flashes, cameras and microphones.

As Nick Saban turned away from the media scrum, his face lit up, mirroring the happiness staring back at him as the little ball of energy stood at his knees. She didn’t know who he was, but she was happy to see him, and he her.

That moment encapsulated what Nick’s Kids means to the Sabans, and it was demonstrated again moments later when Nick’s wife, Terry Saban, teared up while addressing a full room in the North Zone inside Bryant-Denny Stadium.

During Nick’s Kids eighth annual luncheon, the charity distributed more than $440,000 to 125 different state organizations, which provide aid to children and families. Founded in 1998 to honor Saban’s father, the Sabans and donors have given more than $4.6 million through the Nick’s Kids Fund.

“T’d really like to thank all the people here today who work with the children,” Saban said. “They provide the leadership to affect them so that they have a better chance to live a quality life.

“God knows we want to bless all the children, and that’s why we do what we do.”

On the day players reported to campus in preparation for the opening of fall camp, Artie Rosemond, Jalston Fowler, Christian Jones, Robert Foster, Austin Shepherd, Ryan Kelly, Briana Vogler, Landon Collins, Jarrick Williams, DeAndrew White, Blake Sims, Derrick Henry, Geno Smith, Maurice Smith and Dalvin Tomlinson all gave of their time to participate in the event.
KIDS

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Hundreds of children received autographs and pictures with the Sabans and got the opportunity to meet the 15 Alabama football players, who took pictures, shook hands and signed media guides and T-shirts.

"We get some of the older guys, they kind of volunteer for it, and we're happy for them to do it," Saban said. "The whole team would be glad to do it.

"We try to teach our players to... they're all blessed. They all have bright futures and great opportunities, but they need to learn as a part of this, and the example that we try to give them, is to give back to our community, to give back to those who may not be as fortunate as they are."

It's a family event for the Sabans. It's the commitment to keep Saban's father's legacy alive by providing young people better opportunities.

"My mother, since my dad passed away many, many years ago, has always sort of wanted me to use our position to try and continue that legacy in the Saban family. That's always been sort of the motivation for this."

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron.suttles@tuscaloosanews.com or at 205-722-0229.
HELPING HANDS

UA medical students volunteer at Arc of Tuscaloosa County

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Luke Iannuzzi and 37 fellow first-year students in the University of Alabama School of Medicine spent their fourth morning in medical school painting, sanding and trimming hedges.

The students gathered Thursday morning at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County on University Boulevard in Tuscaloosa as volunteers helping out around the nonprofit agency that serves adults with disabilities.

"I think it's cool there is a program

See Arc | 3B

ABOVE: Medical students from the University of Alabama School of Medicine paint the walls at the Arc of Tuscaloosa on Thursday. The work is part of their introductory week at medical school. About 40 students took part in the event.

AT LEFT: Salmaan Kamal prepares a surface for painting.

To see more photos of UA medical students painting at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County, visit our website at www.tuscaloosanews.com.

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ARC

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out there like this," said Ian- nuzzi, a 23-year-old University of Kentucky graduate from Au- burn.

Donna Callahan, interim di- rector of the Arc of Tuscaloosa, said this is the second year the medical students have volun- teered at the center.

In the skills room of the Arc’s building, the students sanded and outlined fixtures and molding with masking tape in preparation for coats of blue paint. The medical school students painted a stretch of wall in preparation for a planned aquarium mural. The first-year students also trimmed hedges and other tasks around the Arc property.

The stop was part of the student’s medical school ori- entation activities, according to Brook Hubner, program di- rector for medical education for the school.

Iannuzzi and his classmates will spend their first two years at the medical school’s regional campus at the University of Alabama at Birmingham before coming to the regional campus in Tuscaloosa for their third year.

Thursday’s volunteer work was meant to help frame the importance that community service will play in the students’ future careers.

Medical students from the University of Alabama prepare to lend a hand with painting, yard work and other tasks Thursday at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County.

“It’s more than just medical help, it is community help," said Dr. Heather Taylor, di- rector of Medical Student Af- fairs for the Tuscaloosa cam- pus.

The school hopes the expe- rience with the disabled community outside of the clinical setting will be helpful to the students in their professional careers. Hubner said the school has formed similar relationships with other local organizations, giving students opportunities during the third and fourth years in Tuscaloosa to work with different types of patients in the community.

The community service component of the rotation, which is entering its third year, was developed by medi- cal school students, Taylor and Hubner said.

The interaction between the disabled community and the rest of the community is important to the Arc’s mission to help its clients live full lives.

“It’s exactly what we are all about,” Callahan said.

Callahan sees the interactions as an important part of the work to break down preconceptions about the disabled. The Arc has similar partnerships with other groups at UA and the community to foster interactions.

As the students prepared to go into the building, Callahan encouraged them to stop and talk with the Arc’s clients to say hello, shake hands and be prepared for hugs.

“Give them a chance, they will absolutely bless your day,” she said.
Rolling with the rain
Despite downpour, Tide fans line up for autographs

By Lydia Seabol-Avant
Staff writer

It was a hot, muggy day Sunday with scattered thunderstorms, but the rain didn’t deter several hundred people from standing in line for hours to get a chance for an autograph from University of Alabama football coach Nick Saban and many of the team’s prominent players.

Bobby Hunter of Pell City was first in line outside Bryant-Denny Stadium and had been waiting since Wednesday for UA’s football Fan Day.

“I’ve done this now six out of the last seven years,” Hunter said, explaining that he couldn’t come last year because he had started a new job. Hunter’s goal for 2014 Fan Day: Get a plastic bobblehead Saban zombie doll signed by Saban himself.

One of the fun aspects of Fan Day is that many of the people standing in line early are there every year. Aaron Vickers of Charleston, S.C., and Diane Lewis of Montgomery were second and third in line, having waited outside the stadium since 9 a.m. Friday. Chris Phillips of Geraldine was fourth in line. He’s been there.

Blaze Barnard, 2, of Meridian, Miss., runs around the football field wearing an autographed helmet during Fan Day.

To see more photos from the University of Alabama Fan Day, visit www.tuscaloosasnews.com.

UA FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

■ Aug. 30: West Virginia in Atlanta
  Kickoff is 2:30 p.m.
■ Sept. 6*: Florida Atlantic. Kickoff is at 11 a.m.
■ Sept. 13*: Southern Miss. Kickoff is at 5 p.m.
■ Sept. 20*: Florida
■ Oct. 4: at Ole Miss
■ Oct. 11: at Arkansas
■ Oct. 18*: Texas A&M
■ Oct. 25: at Tennessee
■ Nov. 8: at LSU
■ Nov. 15*: Mississippi State
■ Nov. 22*: Western Carolina
■ Nov. 29*: Auburn
  * at Bryant-Denny Stadium
  ** Unless otherwise noted all kickoff times are TBA

■ Ticket info: Call 205-348-2262 or visit www.rollingtide.com

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The Tuscaloosa News
Monday, August 4, 2014

FAN DAY

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since 10 a.m. Friday.

"It's one big family out there, so many of the same people every year," Phillips said. "It's just an experience, to get to meet the players and hang out with these people."

Unlike previous years, UA set up a large tent at the front of the line, and there were portable restrooms nearby.

Fans said they didn't mind waiting outside even though they were soaked during Sunday afternoon's rainfall.

"(Being outside) was actually much better, because inside (the stadium) it's usually like a tomb, with no breathing room," Hunt said. "This was much better."

Johnny Stillwell of Oxford agreed.

"Tell them to keep it out here; it's so much better," Stillwell said.

"We just bring a big umbrella, and there's a nice breeze," added Jeremy Childress of Birmingham.

It was the first time at Fan Day for Christy and Jackie Tipton of Huntsville, who brought two of their sons, ages 3 and 7, with them. They left their youngest son, 18-month-old Saban, at home.

Their target: to get something signed by the coach who inspired their son's name.

"We are going to run toward Nick Saban," Christy Tipton said. "Although the boys asked, 'Where's Big Al?'

By 4 p.m., the line for the Fan Day autograph signing weaved from the south end zone around the eastern side of the stadium to the northern end zone. Not all fans waited in line, however. Several hundred fans came to watch the public practice, which was held before the autograph session on Sunday.

It was the first time in the stadium for Derick Swartz of Chicago, who brought his 11-year-old son, Rockwell.

"We are big Alabama fans," said Swartz, who is in the state visiting family. "We've never been to a game before, so this is cool."

Despite the rain, many of the fans waited out the storm inside the stadium, too.

"(The team) didn't leave the field, so we didn't leave, either," Swartz said.

Although there were long lines of fans, Kelly Hester of The Sports Station store in Irondale estimated that numbers were down from last year.

Hester's merchandise tent was selling houndstooth-printed ponchos along with other Alabama merchandise during Fan Day.

"There were definitely less people than last year. We didn't see the regulars we normally see," said Hester, who has been operating her store's tent in the same location for 15 years. "It's probably because of the rain."
University of Alabama 2014 summer graduates applaud and clap as family, friends and others who supported their academic endeavors during the commencement ceremony at Coleman Coliseum on Saturday. See list of West Alabama graduates on Page 4B.

OH, HAPPY DAY

President Judy Bonner begins the summer commencement ceremony.
University of Alabama students from the West Alabama area who graduated Saturday include:

**BACHELOR'S DEGREE**

**Akron:** Candice LaShelle Williams.

**Alicewil:** Ethan Alexander Floyd.

**Beatrice:** Cody Lee Philen.

**Bessemer:** Lonnie L. Green Jr., Kayla J. Hindman, Meagan Whitney Kiker, Claire Marie Middlebrooks, Tiquela Nicole Mills, Nekisha D. Miles, Brion J. Rembert, Katelyn Joy Sellers, Sarah C. White, Taj W. Young.


**Boligee:** Nicole D. Henley.

**Brent:** Patrick O. Cottingham.

**Brookwood:** Laura E. Carter, Stacey M. Rupert, Stephanie Williams.

**Centreville:** Jessica C. Cox, Brandy M. Edwards, Heather L. Hollfield, William B. Peckstaller.

**Coker:** Laurel Monique Gibson.

**Cottondale:** Leslie G. Agee, Jamari S. Horton, Timothy Hunter Johns, Clay W. Keenum.

**Demopolis:** Lauren K. Jones.

**Duncanville:** Stephen Parker Brooks, Amanda Casey Johns.

**Espanola:** Motell Gynn Fostar.

**Fayette:** Stephanie S. Driver, Jessica C. Lindsey.

**Gallon:** Fallon Victoria Keen, Remington Edward Keen.

**Gordo:** Leah Summers Driver, James Bostick Dyer, Quinderrick Antonio Modern.

**Greensboro:** Camille S. Jones, David E. Tubbs Jr.

**Linden:** Lindsay Osborne Wilkinson.

Livingston: Bo T. Cartwright, Marlon: Kenyetta S. Windmon-Smith.

Maylene: Stacey Leigh Hurst, Taylor S. Sims.


Millbrook: Rebecca Nicole Paulk.

Moundville: Claire Keeney Cole, Davey M. Ward.

Newbern: Caren A. Kirtdoll.


Ralph: Samantha Jones.

Thomasville: Christopher P. East, Matthew P. Tyler, Kyiah L. Worthy.


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MASTERS DEGREE

For the full list of University of Alabama graduates, including those out of state and around the world, visit www.tuscaloosanews.com.


West Blocton: Megan Elizabeth Carver.

Winfield: Meredith Rebecca Reaves.

DOCTORAL DEGREES


Brookwood: Gregory M. Poole.

Cottondale: Daniel Adam Clay-ton, John Wesley Myrick.


Vance: Julie B. McKinnon.

JURIS DOCTOR DEGREE

Tuscaloosa: Joseph Lee Brown.
Keeping the innovation engine rolling

BIRMINGHAM AND BEYOND: AS FUNDING BEGINS TO WANE, RESEARCH LEADERS MUST BE NIMBLE, CREATE EFFICIENCIES.

Michael Tomberlin ▶ mtomberlin@al.com

If you ask someone in Birmingham if the half a billion dollars in federal research spent here each year is important to the local economy, most everyone would say it is.

But if you ask them how important, that would be hard for anyone to answer.

Steven Ceulemans, vice president of innovation and technology with the Birmingham Business Alliance, was recently tasked with answering that question, not only for Birmingham, but for the nation.

It is easier to find that answer in Birmingham than in some other cities.

UAB is the largest single employer in the state.

Southern Research Institute conducts influential work in the fields of pharmaceuticals, defense, aerospace, biotech and the environment.

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RESEARCH

From Page 1

The incubation startups at Innovation Depot generated $248 million in sales impact in 2013. Ceulemans said in Birmingham’s case, the impact is well beyond the federal dollars invested in research here, but the need for strong federal research investments is as great as ever.

“Research flows to knowledge and then to products,” he said.

But, he warns, as federal funding becomes scarce, Birmingham and other centers of research innovation must find the most effective uses for those funds and find new partners to keep that momentum going.

‘Innovation ecosystem’

Ceulemans is one of 18 2012 National Academies Mirzayan Science and Technology Fellows, selected from a pool of more than 200 applicants. The Fellows supported the policy research for the National Academies in Washington, D.C.

Their work will try to identify the ways scientific, engineering and other research impacts an economy. From the jobs and companies that support the research to the commercialization and spinoff businesses that result from it, the full impact can be hard to quantify.

“We know that research is important,” Ceulemans said. “What we want to be able to show is how important.”

The National Academies plan to use the findings to demonstrate how federal research funding creates a substantial economic and social impact even when the return on the investment might not always be direct.

“It’s not always a dollar-to-dollar investment when you invest in research,” Ceulemans said. “For every dollar we invest in research, we don’t always get back an equal dollar in innovation.”

But when you look at what the research spawns — what Ceulemans calls the innovation ecosystem — the growing value of that research starts to become apparent.

Culture of research

The presence of the big research centers has contributed to a larger culture of innovation and research within Birmingham, he said.

Nowhere is that more evident than SRI.

SRI’s research covers a variety of areas, from medical to aviation engineering. While many associate SRI with its medical research and the fact it has seven anti-cancer medications on the market, Art Tipton, chief executive of SRI, recently told the Rotary Club of Birmingham that 51 percent of SRI’s revenues are nonlife sciences.

Still, 71 percent of SRI’s funding is federal with the other 29 percent from the commercial sector.

Tipton said that ratio was apparent during last year’s federal government sequestration and the subsequent government shutdown.

“We felt that,” he said.
That pain could intensify for all entities and communities that rely on federal research dollars.

Congress is evaluating the level of funding to continue to put into scientific research and has left it to the National Academies and the work of Ceulemans and his fellow Fellows to make the case for continuing to invest in research at the current levels.

**Harder to come by**

For the past two years, Ceulemans has contributed as both a Fellow and a consultant to the work of a newly formed committee of national experts evaluating the value of research in advancing national goals.

That report, "Furthering America's Research Enterprise," aims to demonstrate to policy-makers the full effect of research dollars.

And while the report shows the benefits of scientific research often arrive unpredictably and vary widely, the Fellows found research is most successful when it involves a talented and interconnected workforce, stable funding to attract and retain experts, and is in a place known for world-class research in all major areas of science and attractive to scholars.

“it is essential to fully grasp the most effective ways to leverage the $500 million in federal funding that flows into the Birmingham region each year for scientific research,” Ceulemans said.

To do that, Ceulemans said new partnerships among states and regions as well as companies and non-profits will be required to pick up any lost investment from the federal government to keep the momentum of the innovation economy in the Birmingham area.

Ceulemans said he is hopeful a strong case has been made for funding, but he’s also realistic in knowing the federal government is likely to become stingier with those funds — as has been the recent trend.

“Federal research dollars are going to be hard to come by,” he said.
Adults need vaccinations, too

Jesse Chambers  

Everyone knows that children need vaccinations, but it's less well known that adults also need to get their shots, some of which can help save lives, according to an infectious diseases expert at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"Trials show immunizations are effective in adults, and the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) regularly updates vaccine recommendation schedules for this age group," said Paul Goepfert, a professor in the UAB School of Medicine.

Adults who get the vaccinations they need might even live longer, he says.

"Many of these vaccines, though not 100 percent effective, have been shown to decrease death rates," Goepfert said. "So if you want to decrease the chance of dying from a vaccine-preventable illness, get vaccinated."

Unfortunately, immunization rates of adults in the United States are always low, he says.

"There's no system in place like the one children have to keep adults on schedule with vaccines, so they're done on a more voluntary basis," he said.

Vaccines adults may need

Flu: An annual influenza vaccine is recommended for all adults 19 years of age and older. "While flu vaccine efficacy is only 50 to 60 percent, if you get infected after you've been vaccinated, the severity of the illness is often more mild," Goepfert said.

Tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough: The Tdap vaccine is given once to adults, then a Td booster vaccine is recommended every 10 years to help protect against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. He calls this "one of the more important adult immunizations that people often forget about."

While tetanus is less common these days, pertussis — better known as whooping cough — causes a nasty cough in adults that can last a month or more, according to Goepfert. "Antibiotics don't help it," he said. "You just have to survive it when you get it."

Measles, mumps, chicken pox, hepatitis: Goepfert said adults should be vaccinated for the following illnesses if they were not vaccinated for them as children: Varicella, or chicken pox; MMR (measles, mumps and rubella); hepatitis A and B; and the HPV virus.

Shingles: Shingles is a viral infection that causes an extremely painful rash. The Zoster vaccine, for people 60 years of age or older, protects against shingles.

"This is for those who've had the chicken pox, and this vaccine prevents it from coming back again in the form of shingles," Goepfert said. "Though it's not deadly, it causes a lot of pain even after the lesions have resolved."

Ask your doctor

A patient's doctor can help decide the vaccines he or she should have, according to Goepfert, who said the primary factors that help determine the vaccines an adult needs are age, lifestyle, locations of travel and previous immunizations.

Getting vaccinated is not only good for you but should also be considered a part of civic duty, according to Goepfert. "It not only helps protect you, but it also helps others in your community not get the disease," he said.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about immunizations, go to www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules.
Now You See It

A brain surgeon and a CFO launch a startup that brings virtual reality to the operating room and service technicians to any corner of the world.

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT // PHOTOS BY CARY NORTON

The notion of having a technician materialize before your eyes to help you fix your computer might seem as farfetched as a scene from “Star Trek,” but a Birmingham software company is making it possible for people thousands of miles apart to repair and maintain industrial machinery and even perform delicate surgeries together, as if they were standing side by side.

University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) neurosurgeon Barton Guthrie, is co-founder of VIPAAR LLC, a biotechnology company that sells a mobile video platform allowing service experts to interactively assist clients or other technicians anywhere in the world.

Guthrie says he came up with the idea after trying to advise surgeons at small regional hospitals over the phone. The surgeons, he says, were highly skilled at performing most types of operations but would call UAB surgeons for consultations on more difficult procedures when the patients were too ill for transport to larger hospitals. But advising surgeons through telemedicine or video conference calls was challenging, because he had to depend on the surgeons’ verbal descriptions of what was happening in the operating room.

“In neurosurgery, we see a lot of referrals from outside,” says Guthrie, “and a lot of the patients could be dealt with at their local hospital if the local hospital could tap into some experience.”

With a $1 million U.S. Department of Defense grant, Guthrie says he originally considered trying to build a surgical robot that could be controlled remotely.

“But it wasn’t enough money for a robot, so we decided to use it to try and demonstrate the concept of virtual presence instead,” Guthrie says.

So in 2003, Guthrie went to UAB’s Enabling Technology Laboratory in the School of Engineering, where researchers were already working on new uses for virtual reality, a technology in which computers generate simulated environments that can be experienced through sight and sound. Guthrie wanted to find out if virtual reality could be used to help him assist other surgeons hundreds or even thousands of miles away if he were standing next to them.

Six months later, using a pair of networked computers, some stereoscopic cameras and other equipment, the researchers tested their prototype using Duplo blocks.

With virtual interactive presence technology, the software digitally merges local and remote video streams in real time so two people miles apart can connect, see the same view on their computers and interact as if they were side by side.

One difficult part of the project was learning about the perceptual aspects of the superimposition of two video streams into a shared field of view, says Corey Shum, technical director for the Enabling Technology Laboratory.

“The coding was significant work,” Shum says, “but the majority of our effort went toward researching how we perceive others when sharing the same visual point-of-view, including problems of alignment, registration and stereoscopic perception, especially when attempting to integrate with the normal view.”

Putting VIPAAR LLC’s technology to the test, UAB orthopedic surgeon Brent Ponce, M.D., performed a shoulder replacement surgery Sept. 12 at UAB Highlands Hospital in Birmingham.

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'STEM'-ulating: Raytheon grant awarded to city schools

By Rebecca Croomes
rebecca@athensnews-courier.com

Teachers from Athens City Schools convened at Athens Intermediate School Wednesday to pick up tips and tricks to teach students about engineering.

Raytheon Company awarded a $37,000 grant to the school system this month to fund the Engineering is Elementary program, which will give Athens kids a practical insight into how Science, Technology, Engineering and Math work in the world.

Doug Shores, a Raytheon representative from Huntsville, said the company was eager to award the grant to Athens schools in an effort to work with some of its employees from Limestone County.

“This is a great program and a great way to impact students,” he said. “We want to support and encourage students to study STEM education.”

The University of Alabama in Huntsville is one of Raytheon’s national hubs for Engineering is Elementary. UAH partnered with Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative to bring trained professional development instructors to show Athens City educators how to introduce engineering in the classroom.

“It gives relevance to math and science,” said Brenda Terry, coordinator for outreach for UAH Institute for Science Education. “This is the ‘E’ in STEM education.”

Athens submitted an application for the grant, and Terry said the system is just the right size to be able to teach all third, fourth and fifth grades. The Board of Education has also set aside funds to continue the professional development after the grant program ends.

“They want to sustain the program,” she said. “I think that’s important.”

The idea is to give third, fourth and fifth graders a story about a child or a family in a different country and how they interact with certain types of engineering. With a basic definition and some context for the lesson, the students then perform projects and experiments to reinforce the principles.

Third-grade teachers were schooled in civil engineering principles, learning to construct bridges out of everyday materials.

Fourth-grade teachers took a dive into the world of biomedical engineering, learning to construct a knee brace out of household products.

Fifth-grade students will put their minds to the test to solve problems with environmental engineering. Wednesday saw fifth-grade teachers exploring ways to combating oil spills.
Energy Huntsville Initiative, UAH sign memorandum of understanding to partner in energy efficiency research

By: Paul Gattis

Huntsville, Alabama -- Energy Huntsville Initiative and the University of Alabama in Huntsville joined forces Thursday to make the city more energy efficient.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle -- who started EHI, a volunteer-based non-profit collaborative of more than 200 companies in the energy market -- and UAH President Robert Altenkirch signed a memorandum of agreement during a ceremony at Shelby Center for Technology on the UAH campus.

It's an effort to support development of the North Alabama Regional Energy Center of Excellence and the city and UAH together to meet their energy objectives.

"It's turned into a great way we can showcase our industry," Battle said. "This MOU today is talking about pulling together the three legs of every Power Point that we do: It comes together with government, it comes together with private industry and it comes together with academia."

Altenkirch said UAH can play a critical role in the development of Energy Huntsville Initiative.

"Researchers on our campus helped create solutions for many of America's technological challenges over the years, and that expertise can also be used to help address this nation's energy problems," Altenkirch said in a press release.

"At the same time, UAH's role in education will help create high-quality graduates for Huntsville's workforce in this emerging technological field."
THIS RACE COMES WITH ROCKETS

Two student teams from the University of Alabama in Huntsville finished third and seventh in a global competition to create space systems.

Called CanSat, the annual competition is the World Cup of college aerospace works. At this year's event, held in mid-June in Burkett, Texas, UAH's Team Wind Charger won third place, while Team Blackout took seventh place.

UAH was the leading U.S. contender, besting 13 other U.S. college and university teams. More than 30 international teams outside the U.S. also participated in the competition.

The UAH CanSat teams are primarily composed of freshman and sophomore engineering and science students at the university as part of UAH's Space Hardware Club. The teams faced competition from senior design students at most other colleges and universities entered at CanSat.

"We started out as a group of freshman and sophomores and we beat out teams who were composed of seniors and grad students," said Evan Tingley, who led Team Wind Charger. "I feel very indebted to the older members of Space Hardware Club for steering the team in the right direction and helping us fix problems when we made wrong decisions.

"Being first from the U.S. doesn't mean as much to me personally as being third in the world," Tingley said. "We got to compete against the whole world and got to show what UAH's undergraduates can do."

Teams must be able to design and build a space-type system, following the approved competition guide, and then compete against each other at the end of two semesters to determine the winners. Rockets are provided, but teams are responsible for funding the construction of their CanSat and all travel and lodging expenses. CanSat at UAH is funded and supported by the Alabama Space Grant Consortium, the UAH College of Engineering, Student Government Association and the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department.
It's 72 degrees at noon in Alabama on July 31: Where's the global warming?

By: Paul Gattis

It's a joke easier to make than starting a conversation by talking about the weather.

Where's the global warming?

And it's a joke you've likely either made yourself this week or you've laughed as someone told it to you as the state has enjoyed unseasonably cool weather.

Low humidity, pleasant temperatures – if this keeps up, we'll no longer be able to brag about enduring the sweltering summer weather while visitors to the Deep South melt around us.

In northeast Alabama, noon temperatures were as low as 72 in Fort Payne, Albertville and Valley Head, according to the National Weather Service. Most of the state is lingering in the 70s.

Even in downtown Mobile, it's just 83 degrees at noon.

And Alabama is on track for its second straight summer without a 100-degree day -- which has never happened.

So where is the global warming?

The answer lies in that very question: Alabama is not the globe.

When you look at the whole globe, that's a different kind of number than what happens just here in Alabama," said John Christy, the state climatologist and director of the Earth System Science Center at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Christy is perhaps best known for his views on climate change – falling into the category of a "climate denier" in the words of those who believe humans are the driving force behind the world becoming warmer.

Christy's stance, though, is that there is no disputing the world is becoming a warmer place. But he is skeptical that humans are the biggest reason.

"We've had a downward trend in temperature (in Alabama) for the last 130 years," Christy said. "In the southwest of the United States, they've had an upward trend over the last 130 years. When you take the country as a whole, over the last 100 years, there really hasn't been much of a warming trend at all.

"It was very warm in the 30s and the 50s. Then it got cool. And in some places in the country, it's warming back up to where it was in the 30s and 50s."

And even temperatures across the United States, of course, do not dictate "global warming."
"Globally, it is certainly warmer now than it was 150 years ago at the end of the little Ice Age," Christy said. "There is an upward trend that not too many people argue about at all. We just don't reflect that globally right here in Alabama. We're going the other way.

"And maybe the rest of the world thinks that's the way we always go. But I'd rather be in Alabama getting cooler than somewhere else getting warmer."
New public art installed in Gadsden

By: Andy Powell

An outdoor sculpture at the Central-Carver Museum is one in a series of public art installations that will be coming soon to several locations in Gadsden, according to Mario Gallardo, executive director of the Walnut Gallery.

"Type S" by Meredith Randall Knight was unveiled Saturday. Gallardo said at least two other sculptures will be installed in the next few weeks. He said two more works may be added.

Knight’s work consists of three curved panels that viewers can walk through.

Knight said the sculpture “is a reverence to the concrete stucco used to create the forms.” She said the use of synthetic material and natural references “creates a tension in the work that is balanced by the harmonious forms.”

Gallardo said another sculpture that will be installed soon is a bull made of stainless steel and recycled highway road signs by Jim Collins of Chattanooga, Tenn.

It will be placed, appropriately enough, on Wall Street in Alabama City at the Hoyt Warsham Library.

Another sculpture will be at 826 Walnut St., at the new Walnut Gallery. It was created by University of Alabama-Huntsville Dean of Arts and Sciences Glen Dasher, who does metal and marble sculpture.

His work is a set of feet on a marble pedestal with a Gothic arch surrounding it.

Gallardo said the sculptures will be on display at those locations for two years, but they eventually may be permanent like the public art now on Broad Street at three locations.

He said two other works likely will be installed at locations yet to be identified. The expansion of the public art project is paid for in part by a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts with funding from the Hardin Center, the city of Gadsden, the Gadsden Museum of Art and the Walnut Gallery.

Gallardo said having public art shows that the city is interested in promoting the arts.

“I think the people come from out of town and people immediately assume that we’re progressive and trying to make art accessible to everyone — you don’t have to go to a museum to see it,” he said. “You just literally walk down the street and there it is.”

He said eventually there will be maps showing where the pieces are.
Convicted UAH professor appeals sentence again

HUNTSVILLE | A former biology professor is again challenging her convictions in a shooting that killed three people at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Amy Bishop pleaded guilty to shooting colleagues during a faculty meeting in February 2010. Three people died and three more were injured.

But Bishop now claims an appeals court should throw out her case because of several mistakes. Among other things, Bishop claims prosecutors didn't prove she wanted to kill anyone.

Bishop also claims she has severe mental problems that clouded her thinking.

Prosecutor Rob Broussard said Bishop has exhausted other kinds of appeals and that her latest effort won't work either.

Bishop was denied tenure before the killings.
Power to remove ASU trustees doesn't extend to UA, AU

By: Brian Lyman

Gov. Robert Bentley can remove Alabama State University trustees over alleged conflicts of interests, but that power doesn't extend to most majority white universities.

He can't do that with Alabama or Auburn trustees — or with trustees at most of Alabama's four-year colleges.

Because of the state constitution and markedly divergent laws governing the state's institutions of higher education, the chief executive's power over university boards of trustees varies wildly from school to school, ranging from an explicit power to remove trustees at ASU and three other schools to virtual irrelevance at the University of Alabama.

Three of the four universities where the governor can remove trustees are either historically black colleges and universities — ASU and Alabama A&M — or have a majority-minority student population (the University of West Alabama). Athens State University, which only covers junior and senior year, is the fourth. All four institutions had boards of trustees established after 1975.

Bentley removes Wiggins, appoints Ruggs as ASU trustee

The reasons for the disparities, which predate both Gov. Bentley and the controversies at ASU, are complex, incorporating the state's shameful racial history, the provisions of the 1901 state constitution and good faith attempts to give some of Alabama's institutions of higher learning a degree of independence from state bodies.

However, some black lawmakers consider it a double standard.

"This is an atrocious standard," said Sen. Hank Sanders, D-Selma. "With nearly all the majority white universities, there's no such law. But the two major African-American universities have this provision." (Tuskegee University is a state-related private institution.)

Difficult to change

But extending the governor's powers over every other public university would be difficult. In a statement, Bentley spokeswoman Jennifer Ardis noted Friday that the governor has broad power to request reports under oath from a number of state institutions.

"Governor Bentley does not seek additional authority, but (he) does take seriously his responsibility of carrying out the current laws regarding Alabama universities where he is president of the board of trustees," the statement said.

See next page
Most of the state's universities are governed by statute. Alabama and Auburn's existence, however, is written into the text of the Constitution, and altering the arrangements of those universities would require a constitutional amendment, needing approval from the Legislature and then the voters of the state.

In addition, the framers gave Alabama a self-perpetuating board: Unlike most schools in the state, the University of Alabama board members — not the governor — choose their members, which the Senate must confirm.

The University of Alabama board of trustees can remove trustees, but only for cause, and after a two-thirds vote of the board.

Auburn's by-laws, meanwhile, are explicit.

"Under the laws of the state of Alabama, the board of trustees has no power to remove one of its members," it states.

At both schools, trustees must disclose any conflicts of interests they face, but unlike ASU, there is no specific apparatus for removal of trustees found to have conflicts of interest.

'Time to move on': ASU board chairman Dean steps down

Other schools, such as ASU, are governed by statute, but their by-laws are either silent about removal or, like Auburn, explicitly deny the board power to remove its members. Auburn, the University of Montevallo and the University of South Alabama cite Section 60 of the Alabama Constitution — which requires the removal of public officials convicted of "infamous crimes" — as potential grounds for removal.

Conviction does not appear necessary in the laws governing the trustees of ASU and Alabama A&M.

No right to public hearing

In those cases, the conflicts of interest provisions require that a "violation" of the law take place. How a violation is determined is currently a point of contention between Bentley and Marvin Wiggins, a circuit court judge who Bentley removed from the board of trustees last week.

The governor, using a preliminary report prepared by Birmingham-based Forensic Strategic Services, cited evidence that Wiggins' relatives had worked for and financially benefited from the university as grounds for removal.

Wiggins has threatened legal action, saying the governor violated his due process rights by failing to hold a hearing over the issue.
"No governor has exercised that power other than Bentley," said Birmingham attorney Donald Watkins, currently working in a pro bono capacity for Alabama State University. "My criticism is not that he has the power to remove. My criticism is in America, no one should be removed from their job without the opportunity to be heard. That's fundamental due process."

In response to Wiggins, David Byrne, Bentley's chief legal adviser, wrote that the statute "by its plain language, does not give you the right to a public hearing."

Among the remaining public universities, only Troy's by-laws provide for the removal of a trustee, and then only for habitual non-attendance. Three-fourths of the trustees must approve the removal before it can take effect.

The power to remove

Until 1975, Alabama State University and Alabama A&M were under the direction of the State Board of Education, with relatively little independence. In 1961, Gov. John Patterson pressured school officials to expel several Alabama State University students for participating in sit-ins.

Getting the universities their own independent boards of trustees became a priority for black lawmakers, through statute.

"Nobody at that time felt that the state of Alabama was going to establish any more four-year schools through constitutional amendment," said Rep. Alvin Holmes, D-Montgomery, first elected to the House in 1974.

Alumni association supports ASU president

How the removal provision got in is unclear. Both Holmes and former Lt. Gov. Jere Beasley, who presided over the Alabama Senate at the time, said last week they could not remember any significant debate over the legislation. Watkins, whose father helped draft the law, said supporters were less concerned about the governor's power to remove trustees than ensuring an ASU board would have the same power.

"They did not know if the governor would appoint all whites to the board, or if he would appoint people who would be antagonistic to black interests," Watkins said. "If the governor had it (the power to remove trustees), they wanted to have it, too."

Universities that have established boards of trustees since 1975 — including the University of West Alabama (2006) and Athens State (2012) — have had the removal provision included in their statutes as well.

Watkins and Sanders said the power, if it exists, should be applied to all universities.
"This must be protested in various ways, because it's just a terrible situation where a governor can say 'You've got a conflict of interest, you're gone,'" Sanders said. "Particularly when a board is closely divided and control is given to that governor. It's a tragedy."

Power to remove?

A look at universities and whether the governor can remove trustees:

• Alabama State University, Alabama A&M: "It shall be unlawful for any member of the board to derive financial benefit in any form from a contract or transaction affecting the interest of the university; to procure, or to be a party in any way, to procuring the appointment of any relative to any position of financial trust or profit; or to influence the appointment or reappointment, retention, dismissal or compensation of any employee of the university except through the prescribed procedures for such purposes. The violation of this provision shall subject the member so offending to removal by the governor or the board."

• Athens State University, University of West Alabama: "No member of the board, individually, as a partner, as a stockholder, a board member, or an officer of a corporate body, shall conduct any business transaction, directly or indirectly, with the university (or, in UWA's case, 'the University of West Alabama.') Any person who violates this subsection shall be immediately removed from the board, and replaced for the unexpired portion of his or her term by appointment of the governor."

• University of Alabama: Board of trustees is self-perpetuating; nominees confirmed by Senate. Board may remove members for cause and by a two-thirds vote. No power of removal by governor.

• Auburn University; University of Montevallo; University of South Alabama: "Under the laws of the state of Alabama, the board of trustees has no power to remove one of its members. Section 60 of the Constitution of Alabama, which provides that '(no) person convicted of embezzlement of the public money, bribery, perjury, or other infamous crime, shall be eligible to the legislature, or capable of holding any office of trust or profit in this state' sets forth the constitutional grounds and procedure for removing a trustee."

• Troy University: No removal powers in statute. However, the Board of Trustees by a vote of three-quarters of the members may request resignation of members for habitual nonattendance.

• Jacksonville State University; University of North Alabama: No removal powers listed in statute or bylaws.
Ex-ASU trustee goes on offense

Marvin Wiggins takes complaint to university’s accreditation agency

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | An ousted trustee at Alabama State University complained to an accreditation agency that his removal by Gov. Robert Bentley violated the organization’s standards.

The Montgomery Advertiser reported this week that Marvin Wiggins had reported his own removal from the board to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Bentley removed Wiggins as an Alabama State trustee last month, citing a summer camp operated by Wiggins’ wife on the campus. But Wiggins said Bentley’s influence over the trustees and the lack of a due process hearing violate standards of the accreditation organization.

Wiggins accused Bentley and Alabama State of violating rules which ensure that trustee removal is handled fairly and that guard against outside political influence of a board.

A spokeswoman for the accreditation agency, Pamela Cravey, declined comment on whether the association had received Wiggins’ complaints.

“We will check to see if a violation possibly occurred,” Cravey said. “We might request more information from the university, if necessary. But we will look at it as long as there is a specific statute tied to the allegations.”

Bentley and Wiggins have been at odds over a review raising questions about the school’s finances.

Bentley’s office has said state law gives the governor the power to remove trustees from the Alabama State board.

A spokeswoman with the accrediting agency declined comment on Wiggins’ complaint but said the organization generally views state laws as mattering more than university policies.

Alabama State has been in turmoil since late 2012, when Joseph Silver resigned as president after questioning some financial practices at the university.

Some longtime campus leaders now oppose Silver’s successor, Gwendolyn Boyd, but other groups including the university’s national alumni association have rallied to her defense.

EX-TRUSTEE WATKINS QUESTIONS CONTRACT

MONTGOMERY | A former Alabama State University trustee said he believes a contract signed by school President Gwendolyn Boyd violates the school’s anti-nepotism policy.

Former ASU Trustee Donald Watkins told The Montgomery Advertiser that a friend of Boyd’s received a $5,000-per-month contract position despite a hiring freeze at the university.

Boyd told the newspaper the contract went to her “sorority sister,” who is working closely with the student body to get their opinions about ASU and its services.

Boyd described the work as a critical and independent assessment of student affairs.

— The Associated Press

Boyd said earlier this week that the school is committed to turning around its credit rating, which was downgraded last week by Moody’s Investors Service.

It was the third downgrade in the past nine months.

“This is a very serious issue,” Boyd said in a statement. “We are committed to turning the tide through the new ASU reorganization plan, fiscal austerity and the implementations of sound financial best practices to restore our university’s credit rating.”
Ex-ASU trustee threatens to sue

Circuit Judge Marvin Wiggins claims his due process rights have been violated

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Circuit Judge Marvin Wiggins is threatening to sue Gov. Robert Bentley for removing him as a trustee of Alabama State University.

Wiggins sent an emailed letter to the governor, saying the removal violates his due process rights and is in violation of the standards of the university’s accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

“Your unilateral removal deprives me of the rights and liberties bestowed upon me once I was appointed by Gov. Bob Riley and confirmed by the Alabama State Senate,” wrote the judge. Wiggins is a judge in the 4th circuit, which includes Bibb, Dallas, Hale, Perry and Wilcox counties.

A spokeswoman for the governor said Wednesday that he was reviewing the letter and had no immediate comment.

Bentley removed Wiggins as a trustee on Friday after Wiggins refused the governor’s request to resign. Bentley said Wiggins had failed in his duties as a trustee. Among the problems cited by Bentley was Wiggins’ wife making about $30,000 for operating a summer camp hosted by Alabama State.

Bentley has appointed Ralph Ruggs, director of the Tuscaloosa Housing Authority, to replace Wiggins. Wiggins also served as vice chairman of the board of trustees.

Bentley, who is president of the Alabama State board by virtue of his office, has called a trustee meeting Aug. 8 to elect a new vice chairman.

In a related development, The Montgomery Advertiser reported that Alabama State has spent $318,098 in legal fees suing a forensic auditing firm hired by the governor. Bentley hired Forensic Strategic Solutions of Birmingham to review Alabama State’s finances. The majority of the legal fees went to attorney U.W. Clemon’s firm, which took in $224,617.

SEE ASU | 3B
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The university sued the auditing firm in California, but a judge dismissed the suit, saying it belonged in Alabama's courts. Jeff Windham, the in-house attorney for Forensic Strategic Solutions, said he and an outside attorney hired by the company to work on the lawsuit had roughly 300 billable hours working on the case. Those hours and other related expenses cost the company nearly $50,000, he told the newspaper.
Who’s on first?

Solomon Crenshaw Jr.
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More than once in the 2013 season, the UAB football team faded, losing leads late en route to losing the game.

Coach Bill Clark addressed that issue as he faced the media following the first day of fall practice on Monday.

"Briscoe had a heck of a day (Monday) and Clements didn’t have a bad day. I want our guys to feel good about multiple quarterbacks."

But quarterback isn’t the only place where the depth chart isn’t chiseled in stone.

"We don’t have a ton of starters right now,” Clark said. “We’ve got a lot of, as I say, the A-1 and the A-1 ½, battling back and forth. I would say almost our whole team just because we had so many guys injured (last fall and in the spring).”

"One, we want to start fast,” the first-year Blazer coach said. “But then we want to finish. The mark of a great team is finishing. We’ve talked about that every day since we’ve been here and there is some history there.”

Addressing that concern is a part of fall practice, he said.

“We want to start fast, we want to finish, we want to have a great finish to practice,” Clark said. “We’ve got to put them in those situations so they understand and learn that.”

Junior Cody Clements began fall drills on Monday taking snaps with the first unit but on Tuesday it was redshirt freshman Jeremiah Briscoe running the show.

The 6-foot-3, 210-pound Briscoe, from Houston, found himself ahead of Clements and perhaps the early leader to lead UAB in its Aug. 30 11 a.m. game against in-state rival Troy at Legion Field.

Of course the change didn’t come without warning.

“You very well could see that flip the next day,” Clark said after Monday’s practice, and it did. But he also made it clear the race is not nearly over.

“Briscoe went first today and Clements went second,” Clark said.

There are some players who have started the past three years who “probably have got a leg up,” he added, noting that the first scrimmage is set for at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 12, and will likely solidify the pecking order. That scrimmage will likely be closed to media and the public.

But too much can be made out of the depth chart in the early going, according to Clark.

“UAB quarterback Cody Clements looks to throw the ball during the Blazers’ first practice of the season. (Mark Almond/malmond@al.com) establishing balance on offense is important.

“We always want to be able to run the ball and be able to pass off it,” he said. “But I think it’s based on who you’ve got. Obviously our run game, especially early in the season (at JSU), we felt we could hang our hat on it. We developed our quarterbacks. We’ll just have to see.

“We’ve got a lot of skill guys here,” added Clark. “I do want to be balanced but we always want to be able to run the ball.”
EARNING ‘THE RIGHT’ TO BE ROOTED FOR

Bill Clark used to sit in the back room of his parents’ house in Piedmont, poring over game tape with his dad. It was the only room in the house with air conditioning, and Ragan Clark — head coach at Piedmont High back then — turned it on full blast as he prepared for games, scouted teams and analyzed his own performance. Maybe it was the cool air that drew Bill Clark to that room as a child. As we know, Alabama summers are hot. But the air was never what kept him there. It was family, the joy of being with his dad as he taught Xs and Os, as he pointed out those moments that make a play, and the qualities that make players. Pretty soon it was the magic of the game itself — flickering across the screen from an old reel-to-reel projector — that held him. Just as it does now.

Bill Clark learned football from family. Now he teaches football as family. “I always knew I was going to coach,” he says now, watching game film from behind his large wooden desk in his still-new UAB office — where the air blows as cool as he wants it. Clark is about to begin his first season as the Blazers’ head football coach — the fifth coach in the university’s football history.

His team opens fall practice Monday at 9:30 a.m. The season opener is Aug. 30 against in-state rival Troy at Legion Field.

For Clark, family is the most important thing in his life. If he’s not at UAB’s football complex trying to build a family tradition there, chances are he is at home spending time with his wife, Jennifer; daughter, Kate; and son, Jacob. And the football program — the community itself — is part of his family, too.

Clark knows football in the Heart of Dixie, and he knows the passion for the gridiron in this state is both an opportunity and a challenge. It means players are plentiful. But deep loyalties for Alabama and Auburn have sometimes made it hard to generate interest at a place like UAB.

“‘We’re not competing with them,’” he says. “‘We just want to put a great product out there... We have to earn the right to be pulled for.’

Clark’s big break came in his first head-coaching job at Prattville High School in 1999. He coached the Lions to an overall record of 107-11 in nine seasons, including back-to-back, 15-0 class 6A state championships. Clark later coached defense at South Alabama.

Clark hasn’t coached a game for the Blazers, yet things are already changing. He mentioned in March new additions to the weight room and improvements to the video system. Construction has begun on new locker rooms near the football facility, and turf is being added to one of the team’s practice fields.

“As we do well, we have to upgrade the program,” he says.

In just one year at Jacksonville State, Clark led the team to its most successful season in more than 20 years. The Gamecocks broke school records and finished with an 11-4 record, including the first two playoff wins in school history.

It was hard for Clark to leave his alma mater, but the challenge presented by UAB, his lifetime goal of being an Football Bowl Subdivision coach and the promise he saw in the program all helped bring him to Birmingham.

“Guys here are really hungry,” he says. “I want it to be us. I want to be part of setting the standard.”
ALABAMA GYMNASTICS

Jacob the Academic All-American of the Year

Staff report

AUSTIN, Texas | University of Alabama gymnast Kim Jacob was named the 2013-14 Capital One Division I Academic All-American of the Year, as selected by the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), it was announced Thursday.

"Just to be a member of the Capital One Academic All-America At-Large team was such a tremendous honor, but to be named the Capital One Academic All-America of the Year is beyond anything I could have imagined," said Jacob. "I am deeply humbled by this prestigious award and want to thank Capital One and the members of CoSIDA for finding me worthy of it. This honor would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my coaches, teammates and the staff of the University of Alabama Center for Academic Student Services."

Jacob is the third consecutive Alabama student-athlete to win the honor. Football's Barrett Jones was selected in 2013 and women's golfer Brooke Pancake earned the award in 2012.

"That kind of sustained excellence is a tribute to the department-wide emphasis that we put on our mission to educate and prepare our student-athletes to compete at the highest levels in life after graduation," UA Director of Athletics Bill Battle said.

A native of Raleigh, N.C., Jacob was already named the College Woman Athlete of the Year by virtue of winning the 2014 Honda Cup. She has now been named the top student-athlete in all of NCAA Division I, regardless of sport or gender. Jacob carries a 4.0 grade-point average while pursuing her bachelor's degree in exercise science. Jacob was one of a school-record 13 Alabama student-athletes to earn Capital One Academic All-America honors during the 2013-14 academic year.

"To me, she epitomizes what this award is all about — balancing everything it takes to be a champion in the classroom and in the gym," said recently-retired Alabama gymnastics coach Sarah Patterson. "Through this amazing season, she has been a national champion and All-American as well as an NCAA and SEC Postgraduate Scholarship winner and now she is being recognized as the top scholar-athlete among all NCAA Division I athletes."

During her career in Tuscaloosa, Jacob captured 36 individual titles and helped the Crimson Tide win back-to-back NCAA titles in 2011 and 2012. An 11-time All-American, Jacob earned four first-team honors — most in the nation — in 2014, and was the 2014 NCAA All-Around Champion.

STAFF PHOTO | ROBERT SUTTON
Alabama gymnast Kim Jacob was named the Capital One Division-I Academic All-American of the Year.
Familiar territory

Crimson Tide opens camp ranked No. 2 in Coaches Poll

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

For the sixth straight season the University of Alabama football team begins the season ranked in the top five of the Top 25 Coaches Poll.

As the Crimson Tide takes the field today for the opening of fall camp, it does so as the No. 2-ranked preseason team in a vote of 62 head coaches that includes Nick Saban. Defending champion Florida State captured 56 first-place votes to land at No. 1.

A total of seven SEC teams cracked the top 25 with Auburn at No. 5 followed by South Carolina (9), Georgia (12), LSU (13), Ole Miss (19) and Texas A&M (20).

The Alabama veterans go through the first practice of fall camp at 9:30 this morning followed by Nick Saban and select players meeting with the media. In the evening freshmen and younger players practice at 7:30.

It’s the beginning of nine straight days of practice before the first off day.

Sunday’s practice is open to the public from 2:30-4:30 p.m. during Fan Day. Players and coaches will be available for autographs following practice.

The team scrimmages twice during camp, Aug. 9 and Aug. 16.

Saban acknowledged his team enters the season with a different mindset than it did the last two years.

“Our situation as a team is a lot different this year than it’s been the last couple years when we were coming off of successful seasons, championship seasons,” Saban said. “The challenges were so much different in terms of trying to deal with success and complacency. Having lost our last two games last year, I think it’s a little bit different mindset with our players.

“We have to reestablish our identity as a team at Alabama. It’s going to take every player to have a tremendous amount of buy-in for us to be able to do that.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
The Joyless Triumph of Nick Saban
Paul Finebaum Explains How Alabama's Coach Conquered Football—With Hardly a Smile

By: Paul Finebaum


When it comes to college football, the South has no equal, because the Southeastern Conference has no equal. Find me a conference with a better commissioner, better players, better head coaches, better staffs, better game-day atmospheres, better-looking coeds—better anything.

We have so many trophies, banners and national titles that we rent storage space at the National Archives. Our championship teams have spent more time in the White House than the Secret Service. We've presented so many No. 1 jerseys to POTUS that he could open his own Dick's Sporting Goods. DK'S -0.24%

People outside the SEC look down on the South's obsession with college football. I look up to it. The SEC is college football's industrial giant. It makes us Southerners proud again. It helps define us. It makes us a family. College football is our great equalizer. You've got Harvard, Wall Street and Independence Hall. We've got the Iron Bowl, Main Street and Kyle Field.

At the top of the SEC food chain is Alabama and the state's favorite control freak: Nick Saban.

Yes, he can be secretive, manipulative, socially insufferable, dictatorial and imperial. Your point is? All Saban has done is win three of the last five national championships. When the four-team playoff kicks in this season, Saban will figure out a way to win one of those, too. Give him enough time and he'd win "American Idol," the Iditarod and the North Dakota gubernatorial race. He could coach a lingerie football team to the Big Ten championship game.

The next most influential man in his state is probably Governor Robert Bentley. But Saban is Nos. 1 through 10 on the list of Alabama power brokers. He would be in the top 10 even without his three national titles with the Crimson Tide. The position itself—head football coach at Alabama—gives you a platform of power. But because of the program's wild success, Saban is the best-liked person in the state. He has the most visible job in the state, and given the religiosity with which Alabamans apply themselves to college football, Saban now has another title: the pontiff of pigskin.

Opponent's Worst Nightmare

Here's how you know other SEC coaches are in desperation mode when it comes to Saban: At a high-school sports banquet in 2013, then-Vanderbilt coach James Franklin told the audience: "There's this guy at Alabama. I think his name is Nicky Satan. I think you guys have probably heard of him before. I'm going to outwork him, and that's kind of our plan every single day."
Nobody is going to outwork Saban. It isn't possible. Bear Bryant couldn't have outworked Saban. The Mercedes-Benz assembly plant in Vance, Alabama, would have a hard time keeping up with the guy.

If you're an opposing coach, Saban is your worst nightmare. He is a CEO who coaches as if he's a grad assistant trying to get a full-time job. He is a fanatic when it comes to attention to detail. And he is always looking ahead.

The week after Alabama won the 2009 national championship, the Tide's first title in nearly 20 years, I saw Saban at a cocktail party.

"Coach, congratulations on winning the championship," I said. "You must be very gratified."

"I don't know," he said, exhaling as if the whole thing was a major inconvenience. "You win, but with every championship, you've got a new set of problems and issues."

That is quintessential Saban: a joyless winner. He's the kind of guy who would greet a winning lottery ticket with: "How much is this going to cost me in taxes?" As great as it was to reach a BCS Championship, he once told me, "it really sets your recruiting schedule back an entire week."

Saban is no-nonsense, and he doesn't care about inconsequential things, such as radio hosts. I've been to Saban's house, but I'm realistic about our relationship. If I died tomorrow, he might send flowers to my wife. But I don't think he'd cut short a recruiting visit to be there for the funeral.

The One Time He Smiled

I did make him laugh once. Well, not laugh.

In the spring of 2012, my wife and I visited Washington, D.C. I had pulled one of the very few strings I have and got us a private West Wing tour. (A friend of mine who is a former U.S. attorney was buddies with Joe Biden, and, well...) We pulled up to the White House on a Friday night in a yellow cab and tried not to look like 8-year-olds going to Disney World for the first time. But we couldn't help it. As we went through security, a nearby guard said: "You're Paul Finebaum!" He was from Pelham, Ala., and had listened to my show over the years. We were in.

It was a great tour. We were able to do everything except veto a bill. We even saw President Obama—not in person, but there was a huge photo of him on the hallway wall leading from near the Oval Office to the Rose Garden. Posing in the photo with the world's most powerful man was the world's most powerful college football coach: Nick Saban.

Fast-forward to that December. "I happened to be at the White House not long ago," I told Saban, "and there you were, on the wall with Obama."

"Really?" he said.
And that's when it happened: He smiled.

It's All Part of the Process

It's unfair to put it this way, but Saban has created such a machine at Alabama that when you look at any regular-season schedule in any Saban-coached year, you say, "OK, there are nine wins there before the first game is played." Again, these are unfair expectations, but they are also the ultimate testament and compliment to Saban's coaching, recruiting and organizational abilities. Some coaches make us believe anything is possible. Saban makes us believe anything is probable.

You've heard Saban talk about "The Process" until you want to puncture your eardrums. On the surface, the whole thing sounds like New Age, Tony Robbins-like hooey. But it isn't that complicated. It's efficient, just like Saban. It says: "Do this, and you'll be successful." Be purposeful, be smart, be driven and you'll put yourself in a position to win. He's done the football math, and if you adhere to his process, there's a good chance you'll be attending a ring ceremony soon enough.

Saban has spoiled Bama fans. Then again, Bama fans are used to being spoiled. They think it is their birthright to win national championships.

Auburn fans are different. Auburn fans usually have a direct connection to the school, whereas Alabama fans don't necessarily have blood ties or lambskin degrees. Auburn fans attended school there, or their relatives did, or they have a fondness for the underdog. Those who follow Auburn prefer to be called part of the Auburn "family," and the clichéd way to refer to members of that Auburn family is to say they have a chip on their shoulder, that they want Auburn to be Alabama when the program grows up. That's wrong. Auburn folks are actually proud of that chip—proud that they're not Alabama. They embrace their uniqueness. I think they even embrace their inferiority.

Alabama fans don't understand that their expectations are not only unrealistic, but destructive and suffocating. Nobody can function forever under those types of ridiculous expectations. Saban, who has lost four games in the last three seasons, has dealt with those expectations since 2008. It's national championship or bust.

Everyone says that Saban will coach forever—that it's in his blood. But one of these days he's going to get a transfusion. He's going to wake up and realize he's in his 60s, he's accomplished a great deal, and maybe it's time to kick back and enjoy a rosé or two.

I asked South Carolina coach Steve Spurrier once why he left Florida for the Washington Redskins. "Well, we had just won the Orange Bowl and finished No. 3 in the country," he said, "and all people talked about was that we had the best team and we should have won it all."
Spurrier had come face-to-face with the coaching law of diminishing returns. He had created a beast and the beast had to be fed each season. A major bowl victory was met with yawns. A 10-win season was considered a failure. A No. 3 ranking was a disappointment.

So Spurrier left, and Saban will reach a point when it will all become too much. The joy of the chase will be outweighed by the misery of the expectations.

Chasing the Bear?

If I had to rank the coaches, would I put Saban ahead of Bear Bryant?

Bryant has two more national championships. Saban coaches in a football world far more competitive, complex and difficult than the world Bryant's teams dominated. When Bryant coached, you could win a national title without playing a bowl game against one of the top-five teams in the country. Saban's four national championships have come against No. 1 Oklahoma, No. 2 Texas, No. 1 LSU and No. 1 (cough, cough) Notre Dame. Bryant's teams played 12 games max, including a bowl. Saban's teams have played as many as 14 games in a season four different times. Bryant had more scholarships to work with. He never had to play Auburn at Auburn. He never had to survive an SEC championship game.

Saban doesn't coach for the money, the fame or the statues. He isn't chasing Bear Bryant's shadow. Right now, Saban is chasing whatever ideal and goal he has set for himself.

But if I had to pick one coach to win me one game, I'd take Saban. And if I had to rank them right now, I'd give Saban the slightest edge.

I'm not saying Saban is necessarily a better coach. After all, the Bear was a master at adapting to the football times. He would have been successful in any era, including this one. But I think Saban's accomplishments have been achieved under more difficult circumstances than those faced by Bryant.

Bryant loyalists are going to think I'm crazy. They're going to want to strangle me with houndstooth-decorated piano wire. You take the Bear, though. I'll take The Process.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go seek police protection.
N.C.A.A. Votes to Give Greater Autonomy to Richest Conferences

By MARC TRACY

The first step toward an informal aristocracy in college sports was codified Thursday, when the 5 richest conferences and their 65 universities were awarded the right by the Division I board of directors to make their own rules on several issues affecting athletes and competition.

If the endorsement passes through a 60-day comment period, the so-called Big 5 — the Southeastern Conference, the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Pacific-12, the Big Ten and the Big 12 — will receive the power to raise the value of scholarships, improve health insurance, allow players to consult agents and more.

If 75 universities express disapproval during the 60-day period, the board will reconsider its decision. If 125 universities object, the model's implementation will be suspended pending that reconsideration. If the board subsequently reaffirms its decision, all Division I universities will vote, with a five-eighths majority required to overturn.

The board passed the measure by a vote of 16-2, with the Dartmouth president Philip J. Hanlon (Ivy League) and the Delaware president Patrick T. Harker (Colonial Athletic Association) voting against it.

The strongest supporters of the autonomy model say it allows the Big 5 to provide more benefits to athletes.

"What it means is the ability to provide student-athletes with things that meet the 21st-century model of how we think about intercollegiate athletics," Mike Slive, the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference, said last month.

The N.C.A.A. has been targeted recently with high-profile lawsuits, including the Ed O’Bannon case, in which athletes have argued that the N.C.A.A.'s use of their images has violated antitrust law. Northwestern’s football players were also awarded the right to form a union by a regional director of the National Labor Relations Board.

Observers appear to be divided over whether the new model represents incremental reform designed to thwart more drastic change brought on by the courts or Congress.

"Historically, when you look at how the system has operated and responded, it tends to resist genuinely substantive change," said Ellen Staurowsky, a business professor at Drexel who supports more rights for athletes. "It's not an enterprise that willingly acknowledges that something may be wrong and that there needs to be a dramatic change."

She added: "Given that history, what we may be seeing is the pattern repeat itself once more, where there will be as many adjustments as need to be made in order to give the appearance that change has happened."

The new governance structure empowers the Big 5’s commissioners and university presidents to an unprecedented extent. Still, many rules, including most regarding academic requirements and

See next page
amateur status, will continue to apply uniformly throughout Division I’s 32 conferences and its nearly 350 members. All of Division I will have access to revenue-sharing and championships, including the wildly popular N.C.A.A. men’s basketball tournament.

Any other Division I conference or university (pending its conference’s approval) could opt into the Big 5’s rules.

The board approved 11 specific “areas of autonomy” in which the Big 5 may legislate their own policies. If a conference or university within the Big 5 wished to gain control over a new area, they must secure the support of 3 of the 5 conferences and 12 of the newly reconstituted board’s 20 university presidents — only five of whom are from the Big 5.

The N.C.A.A. has appeared to be broadly supportive of autonomy. Although only five of the board’s 18 members are presidents of Big 5 universities, the steering committee that refined previous proposals last month into the current model was dominated by those five.

N.C.A.A. staff, including Mark Emmert, the president of the N.C.A.A., also worked on the proposal.

Approval by the board was widely seen as a foregone conclusion, in part because the Big 5 had threatened an even more severe alternative: breaking from the N.C.A.A. and taking their massive revenue streams with them.

At a news conference last month, Slive said, “If we do not achieve a positive outcome under the existing big tent of Division I, we will need to consider the establishment of a venue with similar conferences and institutions where we can enact the desired changes in the best interests of our student-athletes.”

“The whole governance discussion was already somewhat tilted in the direction of giving more autonomy to the group of five conferences,” said Richard Ensor, commissioner of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. “For us the major thing was to continue to have guaranteed access to championships and revenue-sharing, and secondly, to have some voice in the process.”

“I’m satisfied that we got the best deal possible,” he added.

Most immediately, the Big 5 are expected to submit new rules by Oct. 1 for consideration at the 2015 N.C.A.A. convention, which will be held in January outside Washington. Though they have yet to determine exactly what they will propose, it is almost certain they will push for raising the current scholarship amount from the cost of “tuition and fees, room, board and required course-related books” to the “full cost of attendance,” which accounts for several other factors specific to each university and is generally a few thousand dollars higher than the current scholarship.

Some officials at universities outside the Big 5 have voiced concerns that offering lower scholarships and withholding various perks will cause them to fall further behind in the arms race for recruits, victories and championships.

At the same time, the Big 5’s rules would apply equally throughout the group, maintaining regulation over areas in which schools can use athletic resources to beat their rivals. As before,
Michigan will not be able to offer a prospective athlete more money than Ohio State could; Duke may lure a McDonald’s all-American with the opportunity to learn basketball under Coach Mike Krzyzewski but with the ability to negotiate a sneaker deal while still in college.

As a result of Thursday’s decision, the board will grow from 18 to 24 members. It previously included only university presidents and chancellors, but now will have an athletics director, an athlete and a women’s athletics administrator.

Some argue that the new model does not eliminate the N.C.A.A.'s policy of intensely regulating most facets of college sports in an effort to control costs and eliminate competitive advantages. Instead, critics say, it merely replicates that policy among college sports’ richest schools.

Jeffrey Kessler, a lawyer who several months ago filed an antitrust suit naming both the N.C.A.A. and the Big 5 conferences as defendants, said autonomy is “a recognition that the existing rules are vastly overwrought, unnecessary and, we believe, illegal.”

He added, “It is a very tiny step — a good step — but a very tiny step in the direction of changing this system, of making it a fair and legal one for the athletes.”
Report: Families borrowing less for college

By Andrew Khouri
Los Angeles Times

Americans are borrowing less for college, and instead relying more on savings and income, a study from a student lender found.

In the 2013-14 school year, the typical family paid 22 percent of the total college cost through borrowing, according to Sallie Mae’s annual How America Pays for College study. That’s down from 27 percent in the previous two years.

Meanwhile, the share of college costs paid through savings and income rose. Student savings and income paid for 12 percent of costs on average, up from 11 percent in the previous year. Parent savings and income rose from 27 percent to 30 percent.

A large reason behind the shift was that parents making more than $100,000 significantly boosted their contributions to their children’s education. It’s been easier for them to do so, given a rising stock market and disparities in the economic recovery, said Sarah Ducich, co-author of the study.

“Their savings and income have rebounded a little faster than other people,” she said.

The typical low-income family, however, is also borrowing less. More of their college cost was paid for with income and savings as well, although the decline in borrowing largely came from the increased use of grants and scholarships.

On average, families earning less than $35,000 paid for 45 percent of the costs for college with grants and scholarships, compared to 37 percent a year earlier.

“The federal government has stepped up with more Pell Grants,” Ducich said. “And colleges and universities ... are targeting their aid to students at need and perhaps getting better at it.”

The average family spent $20,882 on college last school year, similar to the last three years, but off a peak of $24,097 in 2010.

To cope with those costs, students often choose a nearby college with in-state tuition and live at home or with relatives, the study found.
STUDENT LOANS

Americans are borrowing less for college, and instead relying more on savings and income, a study from a student lender found.

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Vigorous U.S. economy appears to be emerging

By Martin Crutsinger
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON | The U.S. economy has rebounded with vigor from a grim start to 2014 and should show renewed strength into next year.

That was the general view of analysts Wednesday after the government estimated that the economy grew at 4.5 percent annual rate in the April-June quarter. Consumers, businesses and governments joined to fuel the second-quarter expansion. The government also said growth was more robust last year than it had previously estimated.

Whether the healthier expansion will lead the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates sooner is unclear.

The economy sprang back to life after a dismal winter in which it shrank at a sharp 2.1 percent annual rate. The government upgraded that figure from a previous estimate of a 2.9 percent drop. But it was still the biggest contraction since early 2009 in the depths of the Great Recession.

Last quarter’s bounce-back reinforced analysts’ view that the economy’s momentum is extending into the second half of the year, when they forecast annual growth of 3 percent.

The government also updated its estimates of growth leading into this year. They show the economy expanded in the second half of 2013 at the fastest pace in a decade and more than previously estimated.

The second quarter’s growth in the gross domestic product — the total output of goods and services — was the fastest since a 4.5 percent increase in the July-September quarter of 2013.

At the same time, a higher trade deficit slowed growth as imports outpaced an increase in exports.

Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said that given last quarter’s rebound, he’s boosting his estimate for growth this year to 2 percent, up from a previous 1.7 percent forecast. Ashworth said the economy’s growth also supported his view that the Fed will be inclined to start raising rates early next year.

Most economists have been predicting that the Fed would wait until mid-2015 to start raising rates.

Ashworth is among a group of economists who think growing strength in the job market and the economy will prod the Fed to move faster to raise rates to make sure inflation doesn’t get out of hand.

Stock prices turned generally negative in the wake of the GDP report because some investors saw a greater likelihood that the Fed would raise rates sooner than expected.

The GDP report showed that one measure of inflation rose 2 percent last quarter, up from a 1.3 percent rise in the first quarter. The Fed’s inflation target is 2 percent, and for two years the GDP measure of inflation has been running below that level.

Consumer spending slowed to an annual growth rate of 1.2 percent, the weakest in three years. Last quarter, consumer spending accelerated to a growth rate of 2.5 percent.

"Better job growth, a rising stock market, falling gasoline prices — all those things are starting to resonate on Main Street," said Stuart Hoffman, chief economist at PNC Financial Services Group.

Hoffman suggested that five straight months of job gains above 200,000 were buoying both consumer and business confidence.

For 2013 as a whole, the government said the economy grew 2.2 percent, up from its earlier 1.9 percent estimate. But growth was weaker in 2011 and 2012 than previously estimated. It grew 2.3 percent in 2012, down from 2.8 percent. And growth in 2011 was downgraded to 1.6 percent from 1.8 percent.