April 25, 2013

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Education tops State of the Community talks

Maddox warns of funding issues, says tax vote on the horizon

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

TUSCALOOSA | Education took center stage at Wednesday's State of the Community breakfast, with Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox warning that city schools could face a major funding shortage in a few years.

Also, Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge Hardy McCollum told the audience that money could be saved if the county and city school systems merged.

Maddox said that sometime within the next two to three years, Tuscaloosa will hold a referendum asking city voters to reauthorize an 11-mill property tax for city schools. The tax, approved by voters in 1986, raises $10 million to $20 million yearly for the city school system, he said. It supports advanced-placement classes, robotics classes and even the Strings in Schools orchestra. Maddox said.

"Sometime in the next 36 months, there will be a city referendum to renew the property tax," Maddox told about 250 people attending the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama-sponsored event at Hotel Capstone. "If it is not renewed, it will be catastrophic for our school system.

"If the referendum fails, it will affect more than our schools," he said. "A defeat would affect the quality of life."

The mayor said failure to renew the tax would hurt the city's efforts to attract new business and industry and harm existing businesses' opportunities to grow.

Maddox said after the breakfast that the referendum most likely will be set in 2015, with the City Council calling a special election.

In response to a question on education, McCollum, the county's chief administrator, said he believed a combined city-county school system would result in an economy of scale. Right now, school buses from both systems pass each other on the road, he said in citing one example of duplication of services.

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TALKS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

"I think a complete study needs to be done on combining the school systems," McCollum said. "There is no doubt in my mind that it would save money."

McCollum's remarks followed comments from Northport Mayor Bobby Herndon, who said his city is doing a long and thorough job in researching the possibility of creating its own school system, which would become the third public school system in the county. Northport now is part of the Tuscaloosa County School System, with nine county system schools within its city limits. Northport accounts for about 30 percent of the county system's students, Herndon said.

"We just want to investigate whether it makes sense," he said. "A great school system is very important to us. We want to take our time to see if it is the right thing to do."

In other comments:
Maddox announced the city and the University of Alabama are discussing possibly expanding UA's Bryant Conference Center. He said the city needs a larger meeting place to attract major conventions, which now bypass the city.

He also said the city has a serious rental housing shortage, particularly for lower-income renters.

About 70 percent of the homes destroyed in the April 27, 2011, tornado, were rental properties, with most of those homes built between 1940 and 1970, he said. Because of the age of the buildings, they did not meet current building...
codes. The new codes will make replacement housing more expensive. “The private market to rebuild (for the low income) is not there,” he said.

The rental housing problem is most acute in the Alberta area, where 80 to 90 percent of the destroyed residences were rentals, he said.

The Tuscaloosa mayor criticized the state for shifting too much of its responsibility to the cities, expecting them to pick up the cost for corrections and mental health. He said the state's funding cuts in those two areas have put a heavy burden on local police.

He said the city desperately needs funding for parks and needs to focus on improving its knowledge-technology infrastructure if it wants to remain competitive.

Maddox also acknowledged that downtown parking is a growing concern with the city losing several lots to private development—most recently the CityPest lot where a new hotel will be built.

He said there are one or two more major developments that will affect the downtown area. Among the things being considered are offering a downtown valet parking service for restaurant-goers and having developers set aside parking spaces with their developments.

McCullum said infrastructure improvements, particularly roads, remain the county's greatest challenge. The eastern bypass needs to be built and improvements need to made to Alabama Highway 69, he said.

Herndon said Northport has shed its image as being a little Mayberry-like town and is seeing retail and residential growth with a population of about 25,000.
With new rule, online classes likely to be more common

By Lisa Singleton-Rickman  
(Florence) TimesDaily

Under the state’s new diploma requirements, there’s mandatory college and career preparedness course that incorporates computer applications. 

FLORENCE | Alabama educators have long known that online classes provide experience and preparation students need for life after high school, either for college or the workforce.

But the state has never done much more than suggest schools implement them in the curriculum, until now. Under the state’s new diploma requirements, which go into effect this fall and begin with incoming ninth-graders, there’s a mandatory college and career preparedness course that incorporates computer applications.

Though Alabama schools have discretion as to how to implement that part of the career preparedness course, online classes will likely become more commonplace, according to Alabama Department of Education officials.

“In the past, it was suggested that schools encourage that online (course) experience because in today’s world it is needed, but it wasn’t an actual mandate,” said Malissa Valdes-Hubert, a spokeswoman for the Alabama Department of Education. “We just left it up to schools to recognize the need and incorporate it into their curriculums. But now it’s a firm part of the college and career preparedness course.”

While area high schools don’t require online courses for graduation, there’s interest in making those options readily available to students.

Online courses have been a trend in the Southeast for more than a decade. According to data collected by the Southern Regional Education Board, it’s so popular among the 16 Southern states that 15 of them have sponsored a state-run virtual school, with 11 of them having done so for six years or more.

See Online | 3B
more. Alabama is among those with the ACCESS program, which equips schools with computer labs to accommodate online learning.

But with the interest in state-run virtual schools waning, the number of local school districts providing online courses is increasing.

This fall Florence High School will join those ranks as it begins the Florence Virtual School, with numerous online course offerings across the curriculum.

Superintendent Janet Womack called the virtual school a franchise based on what the state is doing with ACCESS distance learning. The difference is that instead of educators in other school districts across the state teaching, only Florence teachers will teach Florence High School students.

“We know we can control the teaching quality when it's our own teachers, but you don't have that control when they're across the state,” Womack said.

Nearly every course, with the exception of foreign languages and courses with lab components, may be taught through the virtual school.

“Today's students need options, so if they want to take an online English course at 10 p.m., they have that choice,” she said. “We see this as an opportunity for our students to stretch their limits and accomplish well beyond what's ever been possible before.”

School districts that haven't offered online courses are adding a more structured online component to their curriculum, such as with the new college and career readiness course.

Muscle Shoals High School Principal Brian Lindsey said school administrators are working out the dynamics of that diploma requirement.

He said the course will likely be handled in one semester because the school is on a block system.

There are no online courses offered at the high school. “We can certainly see the value in it,” he said.

Sheffield High School offers five online courses through the school's ACCESS computer lab, which allows students to take courses they need that are no longer offered locally, such as physics, marine science and upper level Spanish and Latin.

Guidance Counselor Melissa Ryan said she believes in online courses for high school students.

“These students have to be prepared to utilize online resources because the first couple of years of college will certainly be heavily computer-based,” she said.

About 30 Sheffield students have taken online courses this year.

“These are students who otherwise wouldn't have had access to these courses, so it's always a good thing,” Ryan said.

“We'll be learning more about the new requirement, but we certainly see it as a needed opportunity for students.”
High court: PACT doesn’t have to pay full tuition

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Alabama's financially troubled prepaid college tuition program can pay participants less than full tuition, the state Supreme Court ruled Friday.

In its opinion, the high court affirmed a ruling that a law passed by the Legislature last year to permit reduced tuition payments is constitutional and can be applied to participants who entered the program years before the law passed.

Under the Prepaid Affordable College Tuition plan, families could pay a fixed amount when a child was young and upon graduation from high school receive four years of full tuition at a state university. The program invested the payments and used the income to pay tuition without any problems for nearly two decades. But it faltered when stock...
PACT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

values plunged in 2008.

The Legislature created PACT to allow families to pay a fixed amount when a child was young and upon graduation from high school receive four years of full tuition at a state university. The program invested the payments and used the income to pay tuition without any problems for nearly two decades. But it ran into financial problems when stock values plunged in 2008 and tuition increased faster than expected.

The program's leaders worked out a settlement with most of the participants to pay tuition at fall 2010 rates, with parents making up the difference. Some parents sued to keep full tuition. They won an Alabama Supreme Court ruling in March 2012 saying state law didn't allow reduced tuition payments.

At the urging of the PACT board, the Legislature amended state law a month later to allow reduced payments. Then the Supreme Court decided to take another look at the case, including determining the constitutionality of the new law, but had asked Circuit Judge Johnny Hardwick to review the law before the high court considers it.

State Treasurer Young Boozier said the ruling is in the best interests of PACT participants because it provides benefits for all contract holders, preserves substantial value, and protects the program with a long-term financial plan.

State treasurer's office spokeswoman Gina Smith said 33,263 people participate in the plan, and 11,721 were enrolled in college in the fall 2012 semester. The program has been paying current tuition rates while the case was pending at the Supreme Court. The reduced tuition rates will begin with the summer semester, she said.

"It's not what we wanted. It's not the state-backed program that we bought into, but it is something," commented Patty Lambert, the president of Save Alabama PACT. "This way, students will have access to college at 2010 hourly rates."

Lambert was relieved. "I'll sleep good tonight knowing that families can know make decisions even if they are based on reduced rates. Now they can know what the tuition gap will be."
Residents claim feds want personal student info

Concerned citizens alleged during a public legislative hearing Tuesday that a massive federal campaign would use public schools to collect psychological and other personal data on students and their families.

"These would be assessed through facial-expression cameras, posture-analysis chairs, pressure mouses and emotional skin sensor wristbands, which will be worn at all times by the children," said Rose Shannon a resident of Talladega County.

A bill that would prohibit schools and school boards of all kinds from disclosing any "personally identifiable student information" without consent does not go far enough, they believe.

"The only way to protect (student data) is not to collect it," said Kenneth Freeman, a Morgan County resident and chairman of the Alliance for Citizens Rights.

State Education Superintendent Tommy Bice said Alabama does not collect nonacademic data on students and makes its mandatory reports to the U.S. Department of Education only in aggregate form, thereby protecting individual student information.

He objected to the Alabama Department of Education being targeted by proposed privacy protection laws when the department has had a flawless compliance record.

"At some point, we've got to step back into reality and not be totally consumed with conspiracy theory," he said following the hearing.

Evan Belanger, al.com
Common Core divides GOP

Standards also test party unity with business interests

By Phillip Rawls
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Alabama's Common Core standards for public schools have divided the state's Republican leaders, pitting the current governor against his predecessor and undoing the party's customary unity with Alabama's business leaders.

School standards don't usually generate hot debate in Montgomery, but Common Core has done so since the standards were embraced by President Barack Obama's Democratic administration.

"It's easy to bash Obama in Alabama," said Earl Franks, executive director of the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools. Franks was among an estimated 300 educators and businesspeople who gathered on the Capitol steps Tuesday to show their support for the standards. Others included the Alabama Association of School Boards, Alabama School Superintendents Association and Alabama PTA.

The Common Core standards were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of State School Officers to improve public schools through more rigorous requirements for math and English that would be followed across state lines.

The Alabama Board of Education adopted them on a 7-2 vote in November 2010, with the chairman, Republican Gov. Bob Riley, voting in favor. Riley said the standards were "in the best interest of our children." Republican Gov.-elect Robert Bentley tried to get the board to wait but couldn't stop Riley's push for approval.

Two months later, Bentley

See COMMON | 6B
replaced Riley and began working to undo the standards. In November 2011, the Republican-controlled State Board of Education voted 6-3, over Bentley’s objections, to keep Common Core.

Bentley wants Alabama-designed standards.

“It is a state function, and the standards to educate our children should be based on state and local standards that are set by Alabama local school boards and parents and not by the federal government or a consortium of states,” he said.

Alabama’s school board made Common Core part of the state’s more expansive College and Career Ready Standards. The push to undo Common Core has drawn support from some of Alabama’s top Republicans, including House Speaker Mike Hubbard, Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, and state Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead.

Some Republicans have been lining up against Common Core since the Obama administration announced that states seeking federal Race to the Top grants would be scored in part on whether they adopted the Common Core standards. They fear the nationalization of public education and a loss of local control. They are also concerned that the standards will lead to personal information about Alabama students and their families being shared with the federal government.

“We must continue to defend our rights and oppose the Obama administration at every turn as he and his Democratic cronies chip away at our individual freedoms,” Armistead said.

Alabama’s business leaders ordinarily side with the state’s GOP leadership, but not on Common Core. The leaders of the Birmingham Business Alliance and the Chambers of Commerce in Huntsville, Montgomery and Mobile are supporting Common Core. The Business Council of Alabama, one of the most influential lobbying groups in Montgomery, has been one of the most vocal proponents.

“While some will continue a campaign of fear on this issue, we will continue to stand united in the business, education and military communities in offering our children the hope of a bright future regardless of the ZIP code they live in,” Business Council President William Canary said Tuesday.

Mary Scott Hunter of Huntsville, a Republican on the State Board of Education and a Common Core supporter, said last week that the standards are causing a “rift in the Republican Party.”

Republicans on the Senate Education Committee split April 17 in narrowly approving a bill to repeal Common Core. The House Education Policy Committee is scheduled to consider a similar bill today.

The Democratic minority in the Legislature has generally been supportive of Common Core.

Proponents of Common Core say it lays out the basics for all students to learn and that the standards are needed as more families move from state to state. They say Common Core is particularly important in a state like Alabama with many military families moving frequently. Republican Sen. Bill Holtzclaw of Madison, who has many military people in his district, said Common Core has become the bogeyman of the 2013 legislative session, and it shouldn’t be.

“Common Core Standards represent a minimum standard, so that a child in a grade in one state is taught the same level of math as a child in any other state. The importance of this minimum standard to education, business and industry is to ensure a globally competitive, college and career ready workforce — needed for a vibrant, recovering U.S. economy,” he said.

State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice said fears of Alabama ceding control of its public schools to the federal government and sharing personal information about students are unfounded because Alabama is not a Race to the Top state and is not part of two federally funded assessment consortia.

The Legislature has until mid-May to decide whether to repeal Common Core. If it does, Bice said it will be the first time the Legislature has taken over the state school board’s authority to set standards for public schools.
Senate leader: No repeal this session

Mike Cason
mcason@al.com

The top-ranking member in the Alabama Senate said Tuesday that legislation to repeal common core curriculum standards for K-12 schools is “off the table” for this legislative session.

State Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, the president pro tem of the Senate, said he believes the issue is too important and too complex to rush into. He has heard from people on both sides who made convincing arguments, he said.

A Senate committee last week approved a bill that would repeal the common core standards adopted by the state Board of Education as part of what are now known as the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards.

Opponents of the standards say they are a federal intrusion into state education policies and could require the state to share some personal student information with the federal government.

Proponents say the standards help to ensure that Alabama students are ready for college or the workplace, and that student privacy is not threatened.

Marsh said he plans to set up a group that includes Senate and House members to study the common core standards and consider whether to propose legislation next year or possibly during a special session.

“I think it’s the responsible thing to do at this point in time,” he said.

Rally in support

The decision to call off the repeal effort came the same day as a rally that drew a crowd of common core supporters to the state capital, including representatives of the business and military communities, educators and students.

Alleging the repeal effort is a campaign of fear and misinformation, they emphasized the state does not cede any control by following the common core.

“Until last week, I think most of our teachers did not take these bills seriously because honestly the claims are so far-reaching and ridiculous,” said Melissa Shields, curriculum director for the Etowah County School System.

“It’s hard for them to believe that anyone, especially our elected officials, would take these accusations to heart.”

Evan Belanger of al.com contributed to this report.
Mayor presents plan to spend $48 million in disaster money

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | Mayor Walt Maddox's recommendation for spending $48 million in federal grant money includes infrastructure upgrades, housing programs and improvements for businesses and libraries.

INSIDE
For a full list of Mayor Walt Maddox's proposals for neighborhood lakes, use of the $48 million in Salvation Army near federal grant money, see Page 7A.

Maddox presented his recommendations to the City Council on Tuesday night. The council will review the list, and the council's Public Projects Committee will discuss and vote to approve, amend or reject them on April 30.

Should this project list or an amended version be approved by the committee, it will go before the full City Council for a vote by May 7.

The money is from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which awarded Tuscaloosa $43.9 million in March and another $4.1 million earlier this month, and is earmarked for storm recovery projects and initiatives.

Once a project plan is approved by the City Council, it will then be submitted to HUD for an up to 45-day review period because the funding comes from the same HUD program — the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery Program — that provided $16.6 million to the city in December 2011.

The difference, however, is that City Hall has two years to spend the $43.9 million award.
CITY FIRES SECURITY FIRM OVER POT BUST

TUSCALOOSA | A security contract with TCB Security was unanimously revoked Tuesday night by the Tuscaloosa City Council.

The decision was made after the security company's principal owner, 32-year-old Matthew Martindale Colson, was arrested earlier this month on charges of first-degree possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia following a six-month investigation by the West Alabama Narcotics Task Force.

Colson and Elizabeth Helen Dovey, 23, were charged Tuesday afternoon after investigators searched their residence in the 3200 block of Hargrove Road East and confiscated 164 grams of marijuana, $26,390 in cash, four assault rifles, three shotguns and a handgun.

Dovey faces charges of distribution of a controlled substance within three miles of a school, first-degree possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Both suspects have been released on bond.

The city had recently renewed its contract with TCB Security, which provided security services for the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater, the Mildred Westervelt Warner Transportation Museum and the city's River Market on Jack Warner Parkway, before revoking it on Tuesday.

Instead, the city will use West Alabama Security Services on a portion of the City Walk as part of that process.

But qualifying as a part of this public input requirement is the community-based process that led to the Tuscaloosa Forward Generational Master Plan.
LLC for the John Mayer concert set for Thursday night before re-opening the bid process to find a permanent security provider.

COUNCIL AGREES TO PAY $1.31M FOR LAND

TUSCALOOSA | The Tuscaloosa County Probate Court has ordered the city of Tuscaloosa to pay $1.31 million for 17 parcels of land that it wants to seize off University Boulevard in Alberta.

The City Council, which approved the court-ordered payment Tuesday night, has said the land seizure is needed for public use.

City officials said the land is needed for the reconstruction of Fire Station No. 4, which was destroyed by the April 27, 2011, tornado, and the improvement of city streets. The 17 total tracts — 16 entire lots and a sliver of one more — are all owned by Tuscaloosa real estate businessman Lang Ray through either Ray Inc. or Del-Ray LLC.

Ray declined to comment Wednesday on why he rejected the city’s final offer of $1.098 million for the nearly 2.6 acres of land, saying only that he felt justified in holding out.

It was unclear as of Tuesday night whether Ray intends to appeal the probate court’s decision.

— From staff reports

Plan, and many of the proposed projects on Maddox’s list come from that document.

However, the city will not immediately receive money from HUD once the project list is approved by the federal agency. Instead, the city will front the costs for any project or program and submit routine invoices to HUD for reimbursement.

The mayor said that the city’s track record with HUD for being good stewards of these dollars is one reason Tuscaloosa was awarded a second round of storm recovery funding this year.

“Our staff, they understood early on what it would take to get federal funds,” Maddox said. “I think we’re seeing the benefits of that in this recommendation today.”

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Mercedes receives statewide honor

Vance plant named Alabama Manufacturer of the Year

Staff report

Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Vance on Friday was named the Alabama Manufacturer of the Year for the state's largest manufacturers.

The honor was given by the Business Council of Alabama and the Alabama Technology Network. The honor was given to manufacturers in three categories based on the size of their employment.

MBUSI was honored as the top large manufacturer, which includes companies with at least 400 employees. Other finalists in that category were BP America Inc. in Decatur and Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in Gadsden.

MBUSI is the only U.S. automotive assembly plant for German automaker Daimler AG, which announced plans to build the plant in Vance 20 years ago.

MBUSI started producing its first vehicles in 1997, marking the start of Alabama's modern-day automotive industry. Since then, Honda and Hyundai also have built automotive assembly plants in the state, and dozens of automotive suppliers have built factories here to serve a growing number of automotive plants here and in other Southeastern states.

In naming MBUSI as Manufacturer of the Year at a luncheon in Montgomery, the BCA noted that Mercedes has continued to increase its investment in Alabama from its initial $300 million to a total projected investment of $4.5 billion by 2015.

MBUSI builds all of Mercedes' M-Class and GL-Class sport utility vehicles and its R-Class crossover vehicles. It will begin building C-Class sedans later this year, with the first C-Class destined for sale scheduled for 2014. Mercedes also has announced plans to build a fifth model, a new SUV.

MBUSI employs about 2,900 people and has announced plans to add another 1,000 positions.

Last year, MBUSI built a record 180,379 vehicles, bringing the 15-year total production to more than 1.7 million vehicles.

The 3M plant in Guin was honored as the medium-sized Manufacturer of the Year, and GATR Technologies Inc. in Huntsville received the small-sized Manufacturer of the Year honor.
Capital investment up in area

Growth pushes jobs to more than 500,000

Stan Dial
sdial@al.com

The Birmingham metro area saw a sharp jump in capital investment last year as the economic recovery gained traction and development officials worked to attract and retain industry, a new Birmingham Business Alliance analysis indicates.

The accompanying growth in employment pushed the metro area’s total employment over 500,000 for the first time in several years.

The seven-county area saw a total of $643.4 million in announced capital investment, three times the annual average for the decade ending in 2011. A total of 3,831 new jobs also were announced last year, twice the annual average over the same decade. Comparable data for 2011 alone wasn’t immediately available.

The data, released Friday, consists of jobs and investment in key industrial and business sectors, excluding retail and health care jobs.

The numbers represent jobs and investments announced, but not necessarily brought online, during the year.

In total, 71 companies announced capital expenditures, new jobs or both in the seven-county area.

Brian Hilson, president and CEO of the BBA, said the growth occurred across a broad swath of industries, making it more sustainable and increasing the likelihood that the community will see continued gains.

See CAPITAL, Page 9C

SOME MAJOR PROJECTS

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Source: Birmingham Business Alliance

See next page
long-term benefits.

"I think it encourages more growth," Hilson said. "Success breeds success."

In addition to the economic recovery, Hilson and other BBA officials also credited Blueprint Birmingham, the organization's 3-year-old strategic plan. The plan, which is updated annually, sets an agenda that includes goals for fundamental changes in how the community does business.

"It's not just a marketing strategy," Hilson said. "It's an opportunity to improve the product being marketed."

The BBA also previewed changes to its website, including the addition of pages where companies can post job and internship openings.

Those services will be formally announced soon, BBA officials said.

2012 GAINS

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Source: Birmingham Business Alliance analysis

Fred McCallum, president of AT&T Alabama and BBA chairman, said the growth announced in 2012 was a product of planning and hard work, not chance.

"The Blueprint plan has proven that when we respond as one, great things can happen for Birmingham," he said.
Alabama lawmakers meet astronauts and talk space on 'NASA Day' in Montgomery

By: Lee Roop

Alabama lawmakers and state officials gathered around two NASA astronauts like fans around a top football coach Thursday in Montgomery as Huntsville's Marshall Space Flight Center brought "NASA Day" to the state capital.

Speaking at the annual luncheon that capped a day of greeting, exhibits and maybe a little politics, Marshall Director Patrick Scheuermann thanked the state for help to NASA that began when the Legislature funded the young University of Alabama in Huntsville in the 1960s to keep NASA engineers current in their training. From those beginnings, Scheuermann said NASA has grown to employ 6,000 people in Alabama with an annual economic impact of $2 billion, including $37.5 million in taxes and $817 million in contracts with state companies. Nearly a quarter of those contracts went to small businesses, Scheuermann said.

Scheuermann said Marshall comes to Montgomery each year because decisions there affect the center's future. From general issues such as education, which involves what Scheuermann called "our (employee) pipeline," to specific decisions such as support for new roads, Scheuermann said the state makes a difference. "Even though our money is from the federal government," he said, "partnerships mean a lot, and for the state of Alabama to put the money that they put on the table to build the University of Alabama-Huntsville, for instance, and actually facilitate companies moving into Cummings Research Park and other places around Redstone Arsenal is of huge importance to us."

"It's partnership in two ways," Scheuermann said "partnership with industry so they can be successful and partnership in education so that pipeline continues to go."

One topic on Scheuermann's mind Thursday was President Obama's national manufacturing initiative. If funded, the initiative will invest in centers of innovative manufacturing around the country, and Huntsville would like to be one. Marshall is already a center of new additive manufacturing processes for the space industry, and its presence in Huntsville could help bring a center to North Alabama. But making that happen will also require state help, Scheuermann said.

Scheuermann was well-received by the approximately 40 senators and representatives at the lunch, but the big smiles went to NASA's trump card: the two astronauts who flew in from Johnson Space Center in Houston for the day. The backgrounds of Jack Fischer and Dr. Kate Rubins, both members of the astronaut class of 2009, had heads shaking in admiration. Rubins earned a doctorate in cancer biology from Stanford University before trying out for NASA, for example, and Fischer is an Air Force lieutenant colonel, veteran combat pilot and has a master's degree in aeronautics and astronautics from MIT.
"Strong," one state agency director commented to the person next to him at the table, shaking his head with a smile as Fischer's biography was read.

Rubins said her interest in space took flight when she attended U.S. Space Camp at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, and both she and Fischer thanked the lawmakers for supporting NASA.

"To the governor, the lieutenant governor, all the Legislature, the business enterprise of Alabama and the people of Alabama," Fischer said, "you are supporting the future. We are right now planting those seeds of inspiration up at Marshall Space Flight Center and it is going to be something great."
Bill addressing Alabama double-dipping exemptions dies

By Phillip Rawls  
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — The Republican leader of the Alabama Senate found no support in his own party for his bill to allow public employees in the Legislature to remain after the 2014 election.

The bill by Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, failed 11-18 late Tuesday night. He voted for the bill along with 10 Democrats. His fellow Republicans either voted against the bill or didn't vote.

After Republicans gained control of the Legislature in the 2010 election, they pushed through a law that prohibits state employees and public education employees from serving in the Legislature after the 2014 election. The ban on drawing two state paychecks, a practice known as “double dipping,” came after an investigation of corruption in Alabama’s two-year college system. It resulted in guilty pleas or convictions of three legislators who either worked for the colleges or had financial ties to them.

Marsh said the Republican-controlled Legislature has protected existing employees when consolidating state agencies. He said the Legislature should follow the same precedent by grandfathering in existing legislators and applying the ban on drawing two state paychecks to future legislators.

“I believe that is a fair position to take,” he said.


Marsh said he was not surprised by the vote. “I did not put pressure on any of my colleagues to support it,” he said.

Some Democrats praised Marsh for having the courage to introduce the bill. “I gain nothing from the introduction of this bill,” Marsh said.

If Marsh’s bill had passed the Senate, it would have had a tough time in the House. House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, supported the enactment of the ban three years ago and said last week his position had not changed.

Double dipping

In a 2010 special session on ethics, the new Republican majority approved a so-called double-dipping ban which will prohibit lawmakers from holding other government jobs. The ban, which will kick in on Nov. 5, 2014, was approved after criticisms that some legislators had "no show" jobs or contracts with state entities. Critics of the ban argued it will prohibit dedicated citizens in fields such as law enforcement and public education from serving in the Legislature.

What the bill would do

Exempt current legislators from the ban. It would allow legislators who worked for public schools, colleges or state agencies as of Dec. 1, 2010 to continue to hold those jobs beyond the 2014 deadline.

What happened

The Senate Education Committee approved the bill Wednesday morning in a non-roll call vote.

What opponents say

Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Pike Road, believes it is a fundamental conflict of interest to get two state paychecks.

"If you are getting a paycheck from a state agency, there is no way as a legislator you can be dispassionate when that agency is before you.... It gives you a persistent conflict of interest that is just not appropriate to governing," he said.

What you're saying on al.com

- The only good thing that will come of this is hopefully many people who voted Republican will now realize that the legislators really don't care for the common man, and maybe they'll do something about that in the next election. Just remember, when we are all digging ditches and starving, they'll still be swimming in their pools that we, the taxpayers, bought them.

Posted by Bama

- When running for office, they stand for great principles and ethics. When they get into office, the slimy ooze of political sleaze overwhelms them.

Posted by coastal

- I know some of the legislators from both parties personally. Most really are concerned about ethics. On a personal basis, they seem to be good people regardless of party affiliation.

Posted by Blaine McAvoy

Legislators with public jobs

(According to their official biographies)

- Sen. Rusty Glover, R-Semmes, a high school teacher
- Sen. Quinton Ross, D-Montgomery, director of the Adult Education Consortium of H. Trenholm State Technical College
- Rep. John Rogers, D-Birmingham, an administrator at the University of Alabama at Birmingham
- Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Alabama State University
- Rep. Todd Gresson, R-Imer, an employee of Northeast Alabama Community College
- Rep. Dexter Grimsley, D-Newville, a juvenile probation officer for Henry County
- Rep. Alan Boothe, R-Troy, an administrator at Troy University
- Rep. Donnie Chesten, R-Geneva, a high school coach
- Rep. David Colston, D-Hayneville, a state trooper

Reporting by Kim Chandler of al.com and by The Associated Press
Ex-Ala. senator Barron indicted

Former official, aide allegedly misused funds

By Phillip Rawls, The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Lowell Barron, who used to be one of Alabama's most powerful state senators, and one of his former campaign aides were charged Tuesday with misusing campaign funds, authorities said.

Attorney General Luther Strange announced that a DeKalb County grand jury had indicted Barron, D-Fyffe, and former campaign aide Rhonda Jill Johnson of Scottsboro on six counts of ethics charges and campaign finance law charges.

Barron, 71, and Johnson, 47, are accused of diverting $58,000 from Barron's campaign account for Johnson's personal use and for non-campaign uses.

They are also accused of transferring a 2007 Toyota Camry from campaign property to Johnson for non-campaign purposes.

DeKalb County Sheriff Jimmy Harris said Barron turned himself in Tuesday afternoon in Fort Payne and was released on $10,000 bond. He said Johnson was arrested and bond was set at $10,000. Barron, who was seriously injured in a tractor accident in November, was wearing a neck brace when he surrendered.

"I am saddened to stand here before you today, the victim of a vicious witch hunt by Luther Strange from Montgomery. If it had taken my life during my injury, it would not have been . . . SEE INDICTED | 7A
worse than Luther Strange trying to take my good name," he said.

His attorney, Joe Espy, said Barron reported all the transactions on his campaign finance reports, and they were legitimate transactions to pay Johnson for her work. Espy portrayed the charges as a witch hunt by the Republican attorney general to keep Barron from returning to politics.

The attorney general had no comment beyond a statement announcing the indictments. Barron, a pharmacist and real estate developer, served as mayor of Fyffe before being elected to the Senate in 1982 as a Democrat. When all senators had to run in a court-ordered special election in 1983, the Democratic Party dumped Barron, but he got re-elected as a write-in candidate, which was a first for the state Senate.

He soon rejoined the Democratic Party and moved up the ranks in the Senate, serving as president pro temp from 1998 to 2006 and Senate Rules Committee chairman from 2006 to 2010. In 2007, he gained worldwide attention when Republican Sen. Charles Bishop of Jasper punched him on the Senate floor after the two exchanged words. Video of the punch became a hit on YouTube. Barron did not press charges.

Barron lost his re-election bid in 2010 to Republican newcomer Shadrack McGill. Campaign finance records show Barron spent nearly $1.6 million in that election, when Johnson was helping him, and McGill spent $124,915.

Barron also served as a trustee of Auburn University from 1993 to 2003.

Barron's last campaign finance report in 2012 showed he had $464,483 remaining in his campaign fund, but Espy said any discussion of returning to politics has been put on hold because of Barron's serious injuries.

If convicted, Barron and Johnson face up to 20 years in prison and up to $30,000 in fines on each count.
Former UA president is a candidate at NMSU

Former University of Alabama president Guy Bailey is among five finalists for the presidential job at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, according to the Albuquerque Journal's website.

Bailey is now a tenured linguistics professor at UA. He left the UA presidency in October 2012 after 58 days in office.

Bailey, 62, said Tuesday that his wife Jan, a two-time cancer survivor, had developed a problem absorbing nutrients, which caused her to lose weight at an alarming rate.

Bailey said his wife received treatment and got her weight up when they arrived in Alabama but that the problem quickly surfaced again, leading to his resignation.

According to news reports last year, Bailey said he resigned so that his wife would not push herself to carry out the social duties expected of a university president's wife.

Bailey said his wife's condition has improved, so he was able to pursue a new post.

He came to UA after serving as president at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.
UA team welcomes Auburn to University Hoverbowl Challenge

By Lydia Seabolt Avant  
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | The University of Alabama will confront Auburn University on Saturday — but not in a usual sports competition.  
Instead, a team of University of Alabama engineering students will compete against a team of Auburn engineering students in a hovercraft race at Lake Lurleen State Park. The competition is part of the University Hoverbowl Challenge.

The race, hosted by the Hoverclub of America, will pit the UA Hoverteam against the Hovering Tigers. Amateur hovercraft racers from across North America will also compete. Racing starts at 10 a.m. and should end about 4 p.m. The event is free, but admission to the state park is $8.

Hovercrafts are amphibious vehicles that ride on a small cushion of air capable of traveling over most relatively smooth surfaces. For the race at Lake Lurleen, the hovercrafts will glide over the lake and its shore.  
Saturday's event will be the first race in the state sponsored by Hoverclub of America, a nonprofit organization that promotes the hover sport. The organization was formed when a group of five seniors studying aerospace engineering at UA decided to build a hovercraft for their senior design project, said Hisham Ali, senior aerospace student from Muscle Shoals.

The students needed to test their hovercraft, so Ali contacted the Hoverclub about competing in a race, but races are usually held in the summer, too late for the students who needed to complete their project by the end of spring semester. Ali contacted peers at Auburn, which has had a hovercraft team for several years, about a race. The students worked with Hoverclub to host a race at Lake Lurleen after examining several sites around the state.

"We put this race together to have a design event, but I'd like for this to become permanent," Ali said.

Kent Gano, racing director for the club, said the race is a way to promote the hover sport to college students.

"I'm always behind students who want to do projects like this," Gano said. "It's a big event for the club."

The UA seniors designed and built their hovercraft from scratch using parts either bought or built by the team along with donated pieces. Using computer-aided design software and 3-D printing, the team designed the craft from what they learned studying in the College of Engineering, said Dillon Malone, a team member from Robertsdale.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

"We have no template, so we're learning as we go," Malone said. "What we know now, we taught ourselves or learned it through our education."

Support of the team is provided by the College of Engineering, the department of aerospace engineering and mechanics, the UA Student Government Association, the Alabama Space Grant Consortium, the Hoverclub of America, and the Design Industry Workroom along with support from individuals.

For information about the race, visit the event website.

Reach Lydia Seabol Avant at 205-722-0222 or lydia.seabol avant@tuscaloosanews.com.
Two Tuscaloosa businesses make finals

Staff report

Two Tuscaloosa companies are among the five finalists in the Alabama Launchpad competition, which promotes high-growth, innovative startup companies from across the state.

The Tuscaloosa companies, both affiliated with University of Alabama researchers, are MagnaPro, a company that uses nanotechnology to create a new MRI contrast agent that is safer and more effective than currently used contrast agents, and Thrupore Technologies, a company that uses nanotechnology to provide catalysts for chemical manufacturers based on advanced materials science.

The five finalists were picked this week by judges. The business will now undergo a "proof of commercial relevance," which entails an independent market assessment review of their business model and an evaluation of the companies' market viability.

The Economic Partnership of Alabama Foundation, which sponsors Alabama Launchpad, will pay for the reviews.

The winners of the Alabama Launchpad competition will share in a $100,000 prize that will be used as seed money to further develop their businesses. The winners will be announced May 3 in Birmingham.

Alabama Launchpad started seven years ago to support and encourage entrepreneurship.

The 2013 competition started with 22 competitors, with 12 selected to pitch to a five-judge panel comprised of entrepreneurs, investors and corporate stakeholders in March. The judges narrowed the 12 to seven at that time. The five finalists were selected from those seven.

Registration for a new "Proof of Commercial Relevance" round begins on Monday, again with as much as $100,000 in funding possible. This is the first time that two back-to-back pre-seed phases will occur in the same year.

For more on the competition, go online to www.alabamalaunchpad.com.
Former Alabama players indicted

Robbery, credit card charges stem from alleged February spree

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | A grand jury has indicted three former University of Alabama football players on charges related to two campus robberies in February.

The grand jury indictments against Eddie Lee Williams, 20, Dennis Edward "D.J." Pettway, 20, and Tyler Jamal Hayes, 18, were handed up in March but only recently appeared on Alacourt.com, the state's online court database.

Arraignments for each have been set for June 6 before Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court Judge Chuck Malone.

Court records indicated that Williams, Pettway and Hayes were each indicted on two counts of second-degree robbery.

Williams also was indicted on 23 counts of fraudulently using a credit card and for carrying a pistol without a permit, a misdemeanor charge.

Brent Calloway, 20, a former UA player, was indicted on 23 counts of fraudulent use of a credit card in connection with the case, according to al.com, but those records were not on the state's court database Friday morning.

According to arrest warrants and depositions filed by University of Alabama police officers, Pettway, Williams and Hayes admitted involvement in separate attacks on two students that left the victims unconscious in the early hours of Feb. 11.

The depositions said the three former players punched a student's head and face and kicked him in the ribs and back near a men's dorm.

Williams and Hayes admitted to the attack, which caused cuts to the victim's face, a mild concussion and severe swelling, as well as stealing the victim's backpack, which contained his Apple laptop computer, the documents said.

In a second robbery, Williams admitted to police that he punched a student's head and face while Pettway and Hayes stood by and watched. The investigative documents said he stole the student's wallet, which contained cash, credit cards and a student identification card that he later used to buy snacks from a vending machine in the football players’ dorm.

According to the documents, Calloway, who also bought snacks with the stolen student ID card.

All four were arrested on Feb. 11 and released from jail the following day after posting bail.

All four have been kicked off the team and dismissed from school.

They were backup players on the Crimson Tide’s 2012 national championship team.
Lawsuit: UAB caused harm to preemies

Says parents not told of potential risks

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Parents of premature babies involved in a University of Alabama at Birmingham-led study to determine the best level of oxygen to sustain the tiny infants filed suit Friday, claiming negligence and failure to properly inform them of the risks.

The lawsuit was brought by the parents of five Alabama children, who allege that wrongdoing by overseers of the study led to a range of severe health issues, including eyesight disorders, respiratory disease, and permanent brain damage.

"As a result of the careless, negligent, and reckless conduct of the defendants the plaintiffs and the class were caused to suffer excruciating and agonizing pain, physical discomfort and emotional distress," alleges the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Birmingham.

The suit seeks class action status to represent all who participated in the study. Damages would exceed $5 million, it said.

The study, called the Surfactant, Positive Pressure and Oxygenation Randomized Trial (SUPPORT), involved 1,300 premature infants and was conducted at 23 hospitals between 2004 and 2009.

The study sought to determine oxygen saturation levels ideal for sustaining extremely premature infants. Higher levels of oxygen lead to retinopathy of prematurity, which can cause blindness, but too little can risk brain damage and death.

As a supporting document, the lawsuit includes a March 7 letter to UAB from a federal office overseeing human-subjects research. The letter criticized UAB for failing to warn parents of the risks involved in the study.

"It would have been appropriate for the consent form to explain that the study involves substantial risks, and that there is significant evidence from past research indicating that the level of oxygen provided to an infant can have an important effect on many outcomes, including whether the infant becomes blind, develops serious brain injury, and even possibly whether the infant dies," the letter states.

That letter, from the Office for Human Research Protections under the Department of Health and Human Services, was obtained and released last week by the citizen watchdog group Public Citizen, which called the study unethical and demanded action be taken against the study's investigators.

The five children listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit were born between 2005 and 2009 at UAB Hospital and are living with parents in Alabama, except for one who now lives in Ohio.

"The experiment exclusively targeted those who are among the most vulnerable members of the population: very premature, extremely low-birth-weight neonates, many of whom come from difficult economic backgrounds," the lawsuit alleges.

UAB spokesman Jim Bakken said the university does not comment on pending litigation.

MEDICAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

- In a letter to the journal earlier this week, UAB's Dr. Wolcemar Carlo, the SUPPORT study's principal investigator, joined other investigators in writing: "Ill-informed allegations create unwarranted apprehension that serves no one. Our consent forms were conscientiously drafted according to the Code of Federal Regulations and were based on the best available evidence." Carlo is a defendant in the lawsuit filed by attorney Reginald McDaniel of Birmingham. Other defendants include members of the university Institutional Review Board, which oversees ethical guidelines for such studies.

- On Wednesday, the journal published an editorial that invoked the premature baby of a Kennedy in praising the study. "The results of the study have been critical in informing treatment decisions for extremely premature infants," the editorial stated. "We are dismayed by the response of the OHRP and consider the SUPPORT trial a model of how to make medical progress."
Fewer getting health insurance from employer

State number fell nearly 10 percentage points since 2000

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The number of Alabama residents who obtain health insurance through their employer has declined nearly 10 percentage points since 2000, according to a new report.

The decline is part of an ongoing national trend reflecting higher health care costs and the effects of the recession.

The report sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that 60 percent of Alabamians received health coverage through an employer in 2011, down from 70 percent in 2000. That's 240,000 fewer residents covered by employers, the report stated.

Alabama's numbers, for the most part, were similar to the national averages, said Julie Sonier, one of the report's researchers.

"There are a lot of factors," said Sonier, deputy director of the State Health Access Data Assistance Center at the University of Minnesota, which prepared the report. "One factor is the cost of health care. The share of employers that offer it has declined over time. And the people who sign up for it when it is available has declined."

The recession, which played out during the study, also played a role as employees were laid off and lost their insurance altogether, Sonier said. But it's the ongoing rise in health care costs that is the underlying force to the shrinking numbers as employers drop coverage or shift higher costs to employees.

Nationwide, 11.5 million fewer people received health insurance through an employer in 2011 than in 2000, according to the report.

"It really is a trend going on longer than the last decade," said Paige Powell, an assistant professor in the UAB School of Health Professions, who was not involved in the report.

Employees and employers
INSURANCE

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alike are doing what they can to save money.

"It's not that employers are necessarily being greedy," she said.

"They are trying to stay afloat, and many are trying to offer benefits."

While Alabama was in the middle of the pack when measured against other states on the drop in employee coverage, Alabama employees were shelling out more, on a percentage basis, toward their plans.

Alabama employees covered by employer plans contribute 23.7 percent of the insurance costs. Only employees in Louisiana and New Mexico had a bigger share.

But one thing to note, Sonier pointed out, is that premium levels are slightly lower in Alabama than the national average.

While the premium for an Alabama resident in 2011 was $4,700 for a single employee, the national average was $5,081; for families it was $12,675, while the national average was $14,447.

Additionally, the study found:

- Premiums went up. Premiums for an employee increased from $2,376 in 2000 to $4,700 in 2011. In that same period, family premiums increased from $5,766 to $12,675.
- Employers offering coverage went down. The percentage of private sector employers in Alabama offering coverage declined from 63.1 percent in 2000 to 57.8 percent in 2011.
- No increases nationwide. No state saw an increase in the health care coverage by employers. The five states with the largest drops are Michigan, South Carolina, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina, the study reported.

Sonier said researchers did see a small gain in people ages 19 to 25 with insurance due to a provision of the Affordable Care Act, dubbed Obamacare. But since most of the provisions of the health care reform law had not taken effect, there was no other measure of its impact in this analysis, she said.

Birmingham HR society to conduct salary survey

Stan Diel
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The Birmingham Society for Human Resource Management has launched a salary survey, the results of which will be used by businesses to determine compensation and to recruit talent.

The organization has conducted similar surveys since 1985, but this year is attempting to collect data "far beyond the borders of its membership," it said in a prepared statement.

"A local survey spanning all area industries assists my team in tracking how our pay practices are aligned with the external market," said Jeff Buck, the University of Alabama at Birmingham's manager of compensation and a BSHRM board member. "While national surveys are needed for some of our positions, there is no substitute for the local data we get in the BSHRM Salary Survey."

Birmingham Business Alliance President and CEO Brian Hilson said accurate compensation data is a necessary tool for industrial recruitment. The BBA has endorsed the survey.

To participate, employers can download an Excel document from the Society for Human Resources website. The deadline for submission of data is May 31.
New coach has several connections to Blazers

Drew Champlin
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Randy Norton was officially introduced as UAB's new women's head basketball coach on Monday, but his connections to UAB go back much further.

For instance, in the summer of 1983, Norton pitched for the Jamestown Expos and Athletics Director Brian Mackin played for the Auburn (N.Y.) Astros in the New York-Penn League.

Also, Norton has been friends with men's basketball assistant Jeff Wulbrun for the last 10 years. In fact, when this job became open, it was Wulbrun who first contacted Norton and convinced him to give UAB a strong look. Wulbrun had previously coached Norton's oldest son Tom in high school.

That turned into an interview with Mackin at the Final Four in New Orleans and eventually a job offer. Norton comes to UAB after spending three years as an assistant at Missouri and seven before that as an assistant at Illinois State, all under Robin Pingeton.

Norton also had a connection with Matt Zimmerman, a former UAB assistant who coached under Mike Anderson at UAB and Missouri. Anderson's last year at Missouri was Norton's first year there.

"It's a little ironic about how things work in life," Norton said.

The 53-year-old Norton, who comes from a basketball family but pitched for three years in the Montreal Expos minor league system, is fulfilling a dream by becoming a head coach at this level. He spent 14 years as the head coach for boys at Assumption High in Davenport, Iowa.

"I loved being a head coach," said Norton, who had the title of associate head coach last year. "Robin Pingeton treated me as a co-head coach and allowed me to do so much. I was really blessed to be able to do that."

...I left a family, but I want to do the same thing here. Everybody that touches our program, I want it to be a great relationship with.

UBA returns eight players off last year's team, including all-conference players Karisma Chapman and Ashley Grimes.

"I really like him," Chapman said. "He's a down-to-earth-type person. I'm just ready to get on the court with him and see what it's all about."

Norton replaces Audra Smith, who took the head coaching job at Clemson.

Norton said he's already on the recruiting trail. He met with the returning players earlier Monday and started offseason workouts on Tuesday.

"We are definitely here to win championships," Norton said. "The most important thing is that I want to have a positive impact on their lives."
IN BRIEF

HUNTSVILLE MSFC director to give UAH graduation address

Marshall Space Flight Center Director Patrick Scheuermann will deliver the spring commencement address at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The commencement will be May 4 at 10 a.m. at Propst Arena in downtown Huntsville’s Von Braun Center.

UAII expects to award 860 diplomas. Scheuermann will receive an honorary doctorate from UAH during the ceremony.

Scheuermann came to Huntsville in September 2012 to take over what is one of NASA’s top field centers. Before coming to Marshall, Scheuermann headed NASA’s engine-testing Stennis Space Center in Bay St. Louis, Miss.
University of Alabama in Huntsville Works with US Army on UAS Development

The University of Alabama in Huntsville and the US Army’s Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Management Office signed an agreement last week to explore ways to work together on the next generation of unmanned aircraft systems. Under the agreement, UAH and the Army will work together to find ways to develop graduate and undergraduate courses as well as perform UAS research.

Work is already underway at UAH’s Rotorcraft Systems Engineering and Simulation Center and the Systems Management and Production Center.

According to UAH President Robert Altenkirk, drones have already proven useful in reconnaissance, border control and homeland security. But they also could improve quality of life through mapping, agricultural imaging and search and rescue.

“Unmanned aircraft systems are seeing unprecedented levels of growth in military and civilian applications,” Altenkirk said.
UAH, Army Will Collaborate on Unmanned Aircraft Systems

The University of Alabama in Huntsville issued the following news:

The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and the Army's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Management Office (PM UAS) will explore opportunities for collaboration to promote the development of the next generation of unmanned aircraft systems.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on Tuesday, April 16, by UAH President Dr. Robert Altenkirch and U.S. Army Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Manager Col. Timothy R. Baxter.

The agreement is intended to further the education of future American engineers, scientists and other professionals. PM UAS and UAH will work together to explore opportunities to support the development of courses at the graduate and undergraduate level as well as research in the field of unmanned aircraft.

"Education and research into unmanned aerial systems is quickly emerging as a critical discipline for this university and the U.S. Army agencies at Redstone Arsenal," said UAH President Robert Altenkirch. "Our diligence in this field is just one of the many ways our faculty and students are able to support our partners in the greater Huntsville area. While the military benefits are obvious, we are also seeing an increasing interest among the nation's law enforcement forces and first responders as well."

UAHuntsville President Dr. Robert Altenkirch and Col. Timothy Baxter signed a an agreement to explore opportunities for collaboration to promote the development of the next generation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems.Tuesday, April 16, 2013. Baxter is the Program Manager for Unmanned Aircraft Systems.

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"Universities see unmanned aircraft technologies as the way of the future and we are seeing more and more schools stand up programs for the research and development of unmanned systems," said Col. Baxter, PM UAS project manager. "This effort will allow the Army to further promote independent research and development at the university level and develop student interest in the Army's UAS program. Ultimately, UAH, the Army and the students themselves will benefit from the student work."

UAH's Rotorcraft Systems Engineering and Simulation Center (RSESC) and Systems Management and Production Center (SMAP) are already doing UAS research.
Under Acting Director Sue O'Brien, RSESC has a unique skill set for a university research center in that its expertise applies to the engineering design, analysis, fabrication, integration, and flight testing of a wide variety of vehicles, including aircraft, rotorcraft, satellites, and spacecraft. RSESC has a multi-disciplined engineering staff, currently employing over 35 engineering students to support research and test efforts.

RSESC just recently completed the development and flight certification of a UAS trainer for the AH-64 Apache. RSESC personnel have decades of experience in the engineering processes required to achieve airworthiness and/or flight worthiness certification. RSESC is currently working with the Army to improve the procedures used to handle crash damaged aircraft, including the UAS Gray Eagle. RSESC is also leading a team of commercial companies and universities to compete nationally for one of the Federal Aviation Administration's UAS Test Sites.

SMAP is researching employment of micro-Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for low-cost surveillance by using remotely controlled helicopters with funding from the U.S. Army's Aviation and Missile Research and Development Center (AMRDEC). Directed by Dr. Gary Maddux, SMAP is the largest of the university's 15 research centers and institutions.
GeneCapture developing new device with one-hour pathogen testing capabilities

A company hatched as a partnership between The University of Alabama in Huntsville and chemical engineering professor Dr. Krishnan Chittur is in the design phase for a device that can provide physicians one-hour pathogen testing capabilities.

GeneCapture, a resident company at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville, Ala., has proven its patented technique in the lab and is now developing an automated prototype for higher throughput testing. The product involves unique DNA probes that "capture" a genetic signature quickly, and thus can be used to identify the presence of one of many specific pathogens in a sample, be it human, plant, food or animal. The company has recently collaborated with Huntsville Hospital in a validation study using human samples.

"It's one thing to say you can do it, and to show it in the lab, but it's another thing to develop it for manufacturing and third party use. " Dr. Chittur said. "How do you make it reliable, simple and rugged? We are designing this to be generic enough so that it can be used in a variety of clinical tests and research applications.

"We want to get a prototype perfected and begin more testing," said Dr. Chittur. When used as a medical device, the unit will require U.S. Food & Drug Administration clearance. Other applications will not require certification in order to begin commercial sales. So far, the device has successfully detected 16 different pathogens, including E. coli bacteria, synthetic severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus, Lyme disease bacteria and Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteria.

MRSA and other hospital-acquired antibiotic resistant infections are particular areas of focus for GeneCapture. Highly sensitive performance is necessary because so many bacteria that reside in the human body are beneficial.

"Our job is to pick out that one problem bacteria or virus that is causing infection," said Dr. Chittur.

Physicians are often faced with a modern-day needle in the haystack search when presented with a patient exhibiting a certain symptom set. The doctor may draw blood or take swab samples and send them off to the laboratory, but while waiting for the results to return, the patient may be treated based on an assessment of observed symptoms. Those assessments are less accurate than test results, sometimes causing incorrect or overtreatment.

"Suppose I told you to go look for a needle in a haystack," said Dr. Chittur. "Maybe there's a whole barn full of hay, and you have to go and find that needle. How would you do it? Would you go through it one piece at a time?"

"Now imagine if I handed you an inexpensive, portable, powerful magnet to help you find that needle. "

See next page
Dr. Chittur is a cofounder of GeneCapture, the company formed to pursue the commercialization of the technology patented by Chittur and three other scientists while performing early research at UAHuntsville.

"Right now, we are trying to answer the question, 'Can I detect the presence of a particular pathogen within one hour of getting a sample?'" Dr. Chittur said. "Because when you go to the doctor, you have the pathogen in you at that time. I am not a biologist. I am an engineer, a problem-solver. If the pathogen is in your body, why can't we find it fast?"

Rather than traditional tests that require cell culturing or those that look for antibodies or other reactive agents created by the body in response to the disease, Dr. Chittur uses stem loop DNA probes designed to bind specifically to the DNA in a targeted pathogen. It's a direct proof of the presence of the causative agent, rather than indirect evidence.

The probe and the pathogen bind through the hydrogen bond of complimentary DNA pairs, the bond that gives DNA its distinctive double-helix appearance. Once a probe binds to a molecule, the probe will fluoresce, easily identifying the culprit.

"What we've done is design a magnet for genes," Dr. Chittur said of the stem loop DNA probes. "In one challenging experiment, we took sludge samples from the Huntsville Wastewater Authority and we asked, 'Can I pick out a specific bacterium from that very complex sample?' The answer was yes, we have done that."

The potential applications for a quick pathogen test range beyond the physician's office to include hospital screening, veterinary medicine, food testing and environmental assessment, Dr. Chittur said. "Our entire team is quite passionate about this product - we know how important it is."
University Partner Company is Designing New Pathogen ID Device

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“We want to get a prototype perfected and begin more testing,” says Chittur. When used as a medical device, the unit will require Food and Drug Administration (FDA) clearance. Other applications will not require certification in order to begin commercial sales. So far, the device has successfully detected 16 different pathogens, including E. coli bacteria, synthetic severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus, Lyme disease bacteria and Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteria.

MRSA and other hospital-acquired antibiotic resistant infections are particular areas of focus for GeneCapture. Highly sensitive performance is necessary because so many bacteria that reside in the human body are beneficial.

“Our job is to pick out that one problem bacteria or virus that is causing infection,” says Chittur.

Physicians are often faced with a modern-day needle in the haystack search when presented with a patient exhibiting a certain symptom set. The doctor may draw blood or take swab samples and send them off to the laboratory, but while waiting for the results to return, the patient may be treated based on an assessment of observed symptoms. Those assessments are less accurate than test results, sometimes causing incorrect or overtreatment.

“Suppose I told you to go look for a needle in a haystack,” says Chittur. “Maybe there’s a whole barn full of hay, and you have to go and find that needle. How would you do it? Would you go through it one piece at a time? Now imagine if I handed you an inexpensive, portable, powerful magnet to help you find that needle.”

Chittur is a cofounder of GeneCapture, the company formed to pursue the commercialization of the technology patented by Chittur and three other scientists while performing early research at UAHuntsville.
“Right now, we are trying to answer the question, ‘Can I detect the presence of a particular pathogen within one hour of getting a sample?’” Chittur says. “Because when you go to the doctor, you have the pathogen in you at that time. I am not a biologist. I am an engineer, a problem-solver. If the pathogen is in your body, why can’t we find it fast?”

Rather than traditional tests that require cell culturing or those that look for antibodies or other reactive agents created by the body in response to the disease, Chittur uses stem loop DNA probes designed to bind specifically to the DNA in a targeted pathogen. It’s a direct proof of the presence of the causative agent, rather than indirect evidence.

The probe and the pathogen bind through the hydrogen bond of complimentary DNA pairs, the bond that gives DNA its distinctive double-helix appearance. Once a probe binds to a molecule, the probe will fluoresce, easily identifying the culprit.

“What we’ve done is design a magnet for genes,” Chittur says of the stem loop DNA probes. “In one challenging experiment, we took sludge samples from the Huntsville Wastewater Authority and we asked, ‘Can I pick out a specific bacterium from that very complex sample?’ The answer was yes, we have done that.”

The potential applications for a quick pathogen test range beyond the physician’s office to include hospital screening, veterinary medicine, food testing and environmental assessment, Chittur says. “Our entire team is quite passionate about this product – we know how important it is.”
Dying Supergiant Stars Implicated in Hours-long Gamma-Ray Bursts

By: Francis Reddy

Three unusually long-lasting stellar explosions discovered by NASA's Swift satellite represent a previously unrecognized class of gamma-ray bursts (GRBs). Two international teams of astronomers studying these events conclude that they likely arose from the catastrophic death of supergiant stars hundreds of times larger than the sun.

The astronomers discussed their findings Tuesday at the 2013 Huntsville Gamma-ray Burst Symposium in Nashville, Tenn., a meeting sponsored in part by the University of Alabama at Huntsville and NASA's Swift and Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope missions.

GRBs are the most luminous and mysterious explosions in the universe. The blasts emit surges of gamma rays -- the most powerful form of light -- as well as X-rays, and they produce afterglows that can be observed at optical and radio energies. Swift, Fermi and other spacecraft detect an average of about one GRB each day.

"We have seen thousands of gamma-ray bursts over the past four decades, but only now are we seeing a clear picture of just how extreme these extraordinary events can be," said Bruce Gendre, a researcher now associated with the French National Center for Scientific Research who led this study while at the Italian Space Agency's Science Data Center in Frascati, Italy.

Prior to Swift's launch in 2004, satellite instruments were much less sensitive to gamma-ray bursts that unfolded over comparatively long time scales.

Traditionally, astronomers have recognized two GRB types, short and long, based on the duration of the gamma-ray signal. Short bursts last two seconds or less and are thought to represent a merger of compact objects in a binary system, with the most likely suspects being neutron stars and black holes.

Long GRBs may last anywhere from several seconds to several minutes, with typical durations falling between 20 and 50 seconds. These events are thought to be associated with the collapse of a star many times the sun's mass and the resulting birth of a new black hole.

Both scenarios give rise to powerful jets that propel matter at nearly the speed of light in opposite directions. As they interact with matter in and around the star, the jets produce a spike of high-energy light.

Gendre and his colleagues made a detailed study of GRB 111209A, which erupted on Dec. 9, 2011, using gamma-ray data from the Konus instrument on NASA's Wind spacecraft, X-ray observations from Swift and the European Space Agency's XMM-Newton satellite, and optical data from the TAROT robotic observatory in La Silla, Chile.

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The burst continued to produce high-energy emission for an astonishing seven hours, making it by far the longest-duration GRB ever recorded. The team's findings appear in the March 20 edition of The Astrophysical Journal.

Another event, GRB 101225A, exploded on Christmas Day in 2010 and produced high-energy emission for at least two hours. Subsequently nicknamed the "Christmas burst," the event's distance was unknown, which led two teams to arrive at radically different physical interpretations.

One group concluded the blast was caused by an asteroid or comet falling onto a neutron star within our own galaxy. Another team determined that the burst was the outcome of a merger event in an exotic binary system located some 3.5 billion light-years away.

"We now know that the Christmas burst occurred much farther off, more than halfway across the observable universe, and was consequently far more powerful than these researchers imagined," said Andrew Levan, an astronomer at the University of Warwick in Coventry, England.

Using the Gemini North Telescope in Hawaii, Levan and his team obtained a spectrum of the faint galaxy that hosted the Christmas burst. This enabled the scientists to identify emission lines of oxygen and hydrogen and determine how much these lines were displaced to lower energies compared to their appearance in a laboratory. This difference, known to astronomers as a redshift, places the burst some 7 billion light-years away.

As a part of this study, which is described in a paper submitted to The Astrophysical Journal, Levan's team also examined 111209A and the more recent burst 121027A, which exploded on Oct. 27, 2012. All show similar X-ray, ultraviolet and optical emission and all arose from the central regions of compact galaxies that were actively forming stars. The astronomers conclude that all three GRBs constitute a hitherto unrecognized group of "ultra-long" bursts. To account for the normal class of long GRBs, astronomers envision a star similar to the sun's size but with many times its mass. The mass must be high enough for the star to undergo an energy crisis, with its core ultimately running out of fuel and collapsing under its own weight to form a black hole. Some of the matter falling onto the nascent black hole becomes redirected into powerful jets that drill through the star, creating the gamma-ray spike, but because this burst is short-lived, the star must be comparatively small.

"Wolf-Rayet stars fit these requirements," explained Levan. "They are born with more than 25 times the sun's mass, but they burn so hot that they drive away their deep, outermost layer of hydrogen as an outflow we call a stellar wind." Stripping away the star's atmosphere leaves an object massive enough to form a black hole but small enough for the particle jets to drill all the way through in times typical of long GRBs.

Because ultra-long GRBs persist for periods up to 100 times greater than long GRBs, they require a stellar source of correspondingly greater physical size. Both groups suggest that the
likely candidate is a supergiant, a star with about 20 times the sun's mass that still retains its deep hydrogen atmosphere, making it hundreds of times the sun's diameter.

Gendre's team goes further, suggesting that GRB 111209A marked the death of a blue supergiant containing relatively modest amounts of elements heavier than helium, which astronomers call metals.

"The metal content of a massive star controls the strength of its stellar wind, which determines how much of the hydrogen atmosphere it retains as it grows older," Gendre notes. The star's deep hydrogen envelope would take hours to complete its fall into the black hole, which would provide a long-lived fuel source to power an ultra-long GRB jet.

Metal content also plays a strong role in the development of long GRBs, according to a detailed study presented by John Graham and Andrew Fruchter, both astronomers at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore.

Stars make heavy elements throughout their energy-producing lives and during supernova explosions, and each generation of stars enriches interstellar gas with a greater proportion of them. While astronomers have noted that long GRBs occur much more frequently in metal-poor galaxies, a few of them have suggested that this pattern is not intrinsic to the stars and their environments.

To examine this possibility, Graham and Fruchter developed a novel method that allowed them to compare galaxies by their underlying rates of star formation. They then examined galaxies that served as hosts for long GRBs and various types of supernovae as well as a control sample of 20,000 typical galaxies in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey.

The astronomers found that 75 percent of long GRBs occurred among the 10 percent of star formation with the lowest metal content. While the study found a few long GRBs in environments with high-metal content, like our own galaxy, these occur at only about 4 percent the rate seen in low-metal environments per unit of underlying star formation.

"Most stars form in metal-rich environments, and this has a side effect of decreasing the prevalence of long GRBs as the universe grows older," Graham explained. "And while a nearby long GRB would be catastrophic to life on Earth, our study shows that galaxies like our own are much less likely to produce them."

The astronomers suspect this pattern reflects a difference in how well a massive star manages to retain its rotation speed. Rising metal content means stronger stellar winds. As these winds push material off the star's surface, the star's rotation gradually decreases in much the same way as a spinning ice skater slows when she extends her arms. Stars with more rapid rotation may be more likely to produce a long GRB.
Graham and Fruchter hypothesize that the few long GRBs found in high-metal environments received an assist from the presence of a nearby companion star. By feeding mass -- and with it, rotational energy -- onto the star that explodes, a companion serves as the physical equivalent of someone pushing a slowly spinning ice skater back up to a higher rotational speed.
Police: Student killed in sex-for-money ruse

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A UAH student fatally shot shortly before graduation day in December was killed after his fake escort service was discovered by a woman he'd failed to pay for sex, a Huntsville Police Department investigator testified Thursday.

The details of the investigation into the death of Jarrod Lockett, 23, business administration student graduating with honors, offered a stunning twist in a case of a promising life cut short.

Huntsville Police Department investigator Charlie Gray outlined the case against twin brother and sister Jovontai Dickerson and Javonta Dickerson are charged with murder in the Dec. 4, 2012 shooting of UAH student Jarrod Lockett. (Courtesy/Huntsville Police Department)

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ESCORT

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Hundley.
Lockett was shot in the head on Dec. 4, 2012, and died on Dec. 15, the day he was to graduate from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Lockett's brother marched in his stead on graduation day to accept his diploma.

A fake madam

Gray's testimony included revelations that Lockett had apparently set up a Facebook page that involved a fake madam named "Ashley" who was looking to recruit young women interested in having sex for money with out-of-town businessmen. He also posed as the businessman and was the only "client."

Gray said they've identified three to four women who answered the call, with an expectation of about $1,000 for a sexual encounter. Among those who apparently participated was Jovanta Dickerson.

They were told Gray they were picked up by the businessman and brought to an apartment off Old Madison Pike where they had sex. The meeting place was a vacant apartment in a building next to Locketts apartment, Gray said.

But when they tried to text Ashley to get paid, "she" was unavailable or put them off with promises. In some cases, Ashley would suggest another encounter so they could make even more money.

A demand for $4,000

The night Lockett was shot, Gray said, a Lockett family member went into his computer, looking for information about who might have been involved. The details of the escort service then began to emerge, Gray said.

For Ashley, Lockett apparently used a computer program that masked the actual phone number that a text was being sent from and a number of "Ashley's" texts were gathered and shared with police.

Gray said in the course of the investigation police talked to two women who said they were in the car with the Dickersons that night.

The women had discovered that the businessman they were seeing was the same man and they wanted to get paid.

Gray said Jovanta Dickerson first told her brother she'd been raped in trying to enlist him to confront Lockett.

He was then told by another woman that his sister had been involved in a prostitution ring.

The Dickersons and the two women went to meet Lockett, with the idea being one of the women would meet him for sex and then the others would confront him. Jovanta Dickerson had a knife and a sock filled with rocks that she planned to beat Lockett with, Gray said.

Jovanta Dickerson had a gun, Gray said, citing the women's testimony.

Lockett was eventually confronted that night, with Ms. Dickerson demanding to be paid $4,000 or more that she was owed. Mr. Dickerson told Lockett he needed to come up with some money, Gray testified.

Lockett went outside and they followed him. At some point, Ms. Dickerson told her brother that he needed to "hit" Lockett, Gray said. Ms. Dickerson then asked for the gun, the witness told Gray, but Mr. Dickerson shot Lockett once in the head.

Lockett died of his wounds 13 days later.

Hundley determined there was enough evidence against the Dickersons to bring the case to a grand jury.

The case is being prosecuted by Madison County Assistant District Attorney Jay Town and Assistant DA Thomas Glover.

Ms. Dickerson is represented by attorney Corrie Collins and Mr. Dickerson is represented by attorney Richard Jensen.
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Faculty: Next president should be an outside candidate

Sally Pearsall Ericson
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The University of South Alabama's presidential search committee planned out a timeline for its search and heard the results of a faculty survey during a meeting Thursday on campus.

Bill Funk of R. William Funk & Associates, the search firm selected by the committee, described the search process in detail.

The committee is seeking a successor to President Gordon Moulton, who will retire July 1 after more than 46 years with the school. The Board of Trustees appointed John Smith, who came to USA as vice president for student affairs in 2008 and served as special assistant to the president since 2010, as the university's acting president.

The fact that the university is searching for its second president in 50 years is a strength, Funk said. "The institutions that I see making the greatest progress are those with a continuity in leadership."

Doug Marshall, president of the faculty senate and a professor in the department of sociology, anthropology and social work, presented the results of a survey in which the faculty were asked to rank the most important attributes for the new president.

Overwhelmingly, the survey stressed the importance of making an outside hire and having a true national search, Marshall said.

"Hiring an external candidate signals that the university is ready to take the next step," one faculty member wrote. Another said, "The successful candidate should fit USA's future, not past. We are better than we often think. Do not sell us short."

The faculty wants its new president to bring in fresh ideas, Marshall said, and the group's overall vision is for the president to lead the university into a new role. "The idea is that we will become a center for creative activity."

The committee agreed upon a timeline in which they will gather a list of 30 to 50 candidates, then winnow it down to 10-12 names for the next round. The next meetings are June 6, July 18 and Aug. 8.

The goal is to have a new president in place to begin work Jan. 1.
IN BRIEF

Presidential search team meets Thursday at USA

The University of South Alabama’s presidential search committee is set to meet at 3:30 p.m. Thursday in the Frederick P. Whiddon Administration Building on campus. The meeting is open to the public.

Bill Funk of R. William Funk & Associates, the search firm selected by the committee, will discuss the process and the timeline. The Dallas-based firm has found presidents for Louisiana State University, the University of Georgia and the University of Virginia, among others.

The committee is seeking a successor to Gordon Moulton, who will retire July 1 after more than 46 years with the school. Moulton, who is recovering from surgery, announced March 8 that he planned to step down as president.

The committee was chosen by James Yance, chair of the USA Board of Trustees. Board member Stephen Purr is heading the panel.
Patterson rebuffed trying to balance school funding

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A temporary setback in seeking to balance funding among Alabama's two largest minority universities may lead to a new template for dividing up the money.

State Rep. Jim Patterson, R-Meridianville, introduced an amendment on the House floor last week to shift $1 million in funding from Alabama State to Alabama A&M in an effort, Patterson said, to make the allotment more equitable.

The House voted 41-39 to great Patterson's amendment but he said a light had been shined on the funding that tilts more toward Alabama State.

Patterson said that even though his proposal failed in the 2013 session, Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard said the legislature would take a new approach to funding colleges next year.

'A&M is not getting a fair shake'

Alabama State and Alabama A&M are the state's two largest universities with the designation of being Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The schools frequently compare themselves to each other as peer institutions.

"You don't have to be a rocket scientist to look at that budget and tell that A&M is not getting a fair shake," Patterson said.

According to the preliminary 2012 fall enrollment report compiled by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Alabama State had 8,73 more students than Alabama A&M.

Alabama State gets $1,000 more per student

In the Education Trust Fund budget the House is currently considering, Alabama State is in line to receive about $4,7 million more than Alabama A&M.

Patterson's issue, however, is that Alabama State is in line to receive $9.98 million more than Alabama A&M in operations and maintenance in the ETR. That breaks down to more than $1,000 per student extra that Alabama State would receive over Alabama A&M, Patterson said.

Patterson said Alabama State has historically been funded better than Alabama A&M because the school has more legislators fighting for it. In the 2013 fiscal budget, Alabama State received $4.2 million more than Alabama A&M from the Education Trust Fund.

And since budgets often use past budgets as a pattern, Patterson said Alabama A&M is at a disadvantage from the start.

"If you start with bad budgets, you end up with bad budgets," Patterson said. Patterson, said Hubbard, R-Auburn, indicated the issue would receive closer scrutiny during the 2014 legislative session. "I've got a commitment from the speaker that next year, we're going to start at zero on all of our colleges and come forward and make sure we're not having any politics played with the budgets," Patterson said.
AUBURN ATHLETICS

Committee will conduct review of AU athletics

Brandon Marcello

Following one of the worst calendar years in Auburn athletics history, a top-to-bottom review of the athletics department has been ordered by the university’s president.

The wideranging review will address the Auburn athletics department’s management structure and the “effectiveness of its leadership,” according to a letter released by Athletics Director Jay Jacobs.

Current and former coaches, athletics administrators, players and business executives will serve on the committee selected by Auburn University President Jay Gogue. The announcement was made Monday in a letter addressed to fans and penned by Jacobs.

“There is no question that this has been a tough year for Auburn athletics,” Jacobs said in the letter. “We all expect better, and we know we have to win. As disappointing as this year has been, rest assured we will bounce back.”

Auburn’s three major sports have struggled in the Southeastern Conference over the last academic year.

The three major programs—football, men’s basketball and baseball—have a combined record of 9-35 in SEC games. The baseball team is in the middle of its season and is 6-12.

The football team had its worst season in 60 years, finishing 3-9 overall to go along with an 0-8 SEC record last fall.

The basketball team under coach Tony Barbee was 3-15 and also lost its first game in the SEC Tournament, finishing the season with losses in 16 of its final 17 games.

The only change among the three sports arrived in December, when football coach Gene Chizik was fired.

Gus Malzahn, hired as Chizik’s replacement, has since rekindled some excitement in the fan base, which showed up in droves with a record crowd of 83,401 at the A-Day spring football game on Saturday.

Jacobs says the committee’s review is part of a “regular evaluation process that takes place annually for all senior administrators and campus units” under Gogue.

Three of the committee members are Auburn graduates, Mac Crawford, John Irwin and Quentin Riggins.

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The committee’s recommendations could be made as soon as next week.

The committee will focus on five areas of the athletics department: academic and support services; the department’s financial management and health; the game day experience for fans and customer service; all aspects of competition, including sportsmanship, compliance and winning; and the department’s management structure. Brandon Marcello covers Auburn athletics for al.com and the Alabama Media Group.
Auburn removes dying oak trees from corner

University plans to make memorabilia from famed timber

By Jay Reeves
The Associated Press

AUBURN | Crews removed Auburn University's poisoned oak trees from their iconic posts at Toomer's Corner, bringing an end to an era and a drastic change to the landscape Tuesday morning.

Auburn fans traditionally drape the trees with toilet paper after a big victory, and tens of thousands rolled the trees after the school's spring football game last Saturday. The trees were all but dead after being poisoned by a University of Alabama fan during Auburn's 2010 run to the BCS football championship.

Workers used chain saws and heavy equipment to remove what was left of the once-lush hardwoods as throngs of people stood by taking photos, reminiscing and crying while crews dropped stumps next to piles of sawdust.

"I mean, my mom went here, my aunt went here, my grandpa went here," Erin Dye said as she wiped her eyes Tuesday. "I was hoping my future kids could roll this, too."

Some, including Cathy Tucker of Eufaula and her husband, Jan, visited Toomer's Corner Monday night to see the oaks one last time before they were cut down.

"To see this, which will at least temporarily stop this tradition, it's like a funeral," Tucker said.

Harvey Updyke Jr. is serving a jail term after pleading guilty to spiking the oaks with a powerful herbicide, and experts say they can't be saved.

Auburn University officials have said they plan to make memorabilia out of the trees' remains.

"The university is going to market a lot of it, mementoes available to Auburn fans," said Gary Keever, an Auburn University horticulturalist. "Some of it's going to be used to make..."

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museum-quality bowls."

Auburn is also planning to sell framed memorabilia featuring twigs, leaves and other parts of the oak trees, jewelry and other items, said school spokesman Mike Clardy.

"It's an attempt to get pieces of the trees into the hands of our fans," Clardy said, adding that royalties merchants pay from selling the memorabilia will be used to fund scholarship programs. "That's the one good thing that's gonna come out of this," Clardy said.

Although the oak trees are gone, Auburn fans will have opportunities to continue the rolling tradition. School officials announced they plan to replace the trees with a system of wires strung between concrete pillars to allow Auburn fans to continue rolling while Toomer's Corner is renovated. The pillars are set to be installed before football season, Clardy said, adding that the university is working with the city of Auburn to install the poles.

"We're looking at them as temporary. We'll be planting new trees more than likely in January or February of next year," Clardy said. "We'll be trying to go back to the way things were."

Auburn is looking to plant oak trees at the corner, and Clardy says it is not yet clear which species will be chosen. Additionally, Auburn recently launched a free mobile application featuring a game allowing iPhone and iPad users to drape digital versions of the trees in toilet paper using their touch screen devices.

Associated Press writer Phillip Lucas in Atlanta contributed to this report.
Record spring crowd ushers in Malzahn era

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Gus Malzahn spent the week leading up to Auburn’s A-Day Game promising more meaningful action than the tame, sometimes confusing scrimmages that have marked recent Auburn spring games.

Drawn by the game-like format, the promise of Malzahn’s new regime as head coach and the final chance to roll the oaks at Toomer’s Corner, a record-breaking 83,401 Auburn fans flooded Jordan-Hare Stadium on Saturday to see Malzahn make good on that promise.

The Tigers’ new head coach delivered, pitting Auburn’s No. 1 units against the No. 2s in a scrimmage where the Orange, knocked off the Blue 35-14.

“We wanted to use this thing as still an evaluation,” Malzahn said. “It wasn’t just trying to window-dress it as far as making it nice for a spring game.”

Under Gene Chizik, A-Day looked all too much like window dressing the past four years. Chizik’s scrimmages pitted the offense against the defense, used a complicated scoring system and limited reps for key players.

Malzahn made sure all of Auburn’s key veterans got plenty of work in a whirlwind 80-play first half that showed off the Tigers’ hurry-up, no-huddle pace.

Cameron Artis-Payne, a junior college transfer competing for a starting job at running back, carried 18 times for 117 yards and a touchdown.

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AUBURN

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He added 47 yards on two catches, including a nice fingertips grab on a bootleg. Tre Mason, the returning 1,000-yard rusher who has missed most of the spring due to a sprained right ankle, carried 11 times for 60 yards in his first extended action.

"We see how we complement each other," Mason said. "We like putting it together, and it's going to be fun when we get to sub in and out."

Quarterbacks Jonathan Wallace and Kiehl Frazier also got plenty of work, alternating with the Orange and Blue units to allow both passers to play with the first team.

Wallace finished 18-of-26 for 191 yards, two touchdowns and forced an interception into coverage that safety Ryan Smith picked.

Frazier finished 10-of-16 for 125 yards, took three sacks and fumbled a handoff to Patrick Lymon that Kenneth Carter recovered.

Wallace also had to deal with a bad snap on his first series that Justin Garrett recovered and took into the end zone for an Orange touchdown, but the quarterbacks came back to lead seven touchdown drives in the first half.

"The biggest thing they told us, if you mess up, go to the next play," Wallace said. "It's just a matter of putting those things behind you and fighting through the adversity."

Auburn slowed the pace and put on a running clock in the second half, partially because the Tigers accomplished so much with 80 plays in the first half.

Having a school-record number of fans in the stands didn't hurt.

"Certain players, especially young guys, you are curious to see how they're going to respond to being in front of the crowd," Malzahn said. "Of course, this was a great atmosphere, and it gave us a lot of good information."

"This was a great atmosphere, and it gave us a lot of good information."

Gus Malzahn, Auburn head coach
Blazers’ offense bounces back a day after defense dominates

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During a back-and-forth spring, the offense bounced back in Saturday’s scrimmage at Legion Field even without starting quarterback Austin Brown.

Statistics were provided by the UAB sports information department.

"Our guys have a lot of energy and enthusiasm," UAB head coach Garrick McGee said. "I like the way we were able to run the ball on offense, so it was a good give and take. I like how the practices go back and forth. Our defense had a huge practice yesterday and pretty much dominated the practice.

"Today, our offense came out with more enthusiasm and energy and they were able to control the ball. Our team is going back and forth like I want them to."

Brown, a rising sophomore, didn’t play because of a "leg injury," according to McGee, but "he’ll be all right."

Brown sported a walking boot and appeared to be walking around fine after the scrimmage.

Senior Jonathan Perry hit 13-of-19 passes for 162 yards, leading the first team offense. He threw a 15-yard touchdown pass to Jackie Williams, but did have passes intercepted by LaMarcus Farmer and Destin Challenger.

Freshman Jeremiah Briscoe, who had a solid showing in last weekend’s scrimmage, hit 5-of-10 passes for 97 yards, including a 51-yard touchdown pass to Jamil Hundley late in the scrimmage. Mike Miller hit 13-of-20 passes for 70 yards.

Farmer’s interception was along the sideline, and Challenger’s was at the 1-yard line to stop a long drive. Even while the offense moved the ball, the defense proved it could bend but not break.

"I thought the offense did some good things," linebacker Daniel White said. "I thought the defense did some good things. We’ve still got a long way to go. Hopefully we can clean those up between now and next week’s practice and the spring game."

Williams led the receivers with four catches for 67 yards. Other leaders included Hundley with two catches for 56 yards, D.J. Vinson with two catches for 53 yards, Nyiaikki Height with four catches for 43 yards and DeQuandre Adams with three catches for 41 yards.

Darrin Reaves led the running backs with nine carries for 81 yards and a score from 9 yards out. David Calloway had 11 rushes for 50 yards and a 3-yard touchdown run and Greg Franklin had nine carries for 61 yards and two touchdowns (both 1-yard runs).

McGee listed a few young players who didn’t play much or at all last year who have stepped up this spring.

"Rickey Hrabowski and Nyiaikki Height made some plays at receiver," McGee said. "Victor Saleko (offensive tackle) didn’t play last year and he’s starting for us and doing a good job. (Linebacker) Tevin Crews didn’t play much last year and he’s doing really good for us."

"Vashon Landers moving inside to safety, he’s doing a good job. He hasn’t played that position. We’ve got a lot of really good young players on our team."

UAB has three more practices left on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Weather permitting, the Blazers will be at the UAB practice fields at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday and Friday. It ends with Saturday’s spring game at 11 a.m. at West Campus Field.
Hudson out as coach, reassigned within UA athletic department

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

TUSCALOOSA | After five seasons, Wendell Hudson will no longer be head women's basketball coach at the University of Alabama. Hudson has been reassigned to administration within the UA Department of Athletics.

The Crimson Tide went 13-17 in 2012-13, leaving Hudson with a 68-87 record. His teams went a combined 14-65 in Southeastern Conference play, winning two or fewer league games in three seasons. Alabama went 18-15 in 2010-11, making it to the quarterfinal round of the Women's NIT, in Hudson's best season.

"Today's decision is a mutual one between Wendell and me," athletics director Bill Battle said. "We have had several discussions over the last few weeks that led to this decision. Wendell has been an excellent ambassador for Alabama Athletics for many years and I am pleased that he will continue to serve in that manner for us while also contributing to our ongoing mission in a variety of other ways as well."

Hudson, 62, played basketball at Alabama as the school's first scholarship African-American athlete, earning SEC Player of the Year honors in 1973 and attaining All-America status. He served as an associate athletics director from 2003-08.

"I want to thank the University for the opportunity to help rebuild the women's basketball program over the last five years," Hudson said. "I am particularly thankful for the efforts of the young ladies that competed for us these..."
Hudson

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last five seasons, in addition to the dedication of the coaches that have worked on our staff and the many people throughout the University that have provided such tremendous support over the years. I look forward to continuing to serve my school in a productive way over the next few years.”

With Hudson stepping down, new UA athletic director Bill Battle will be making the first coaching hire of his tenure.

The hottest possible candidate Alabama could pursue would be Louisville coach Jeff Walz, just off a runner-up finish in the NCAA tournament, but he would likely be out of UA’s price range. Walz’s salary is $775,000, considerably more than the $300,000 Hudson was making in a contract that runs through 2016. Walz also recently told the Louisville Courier-Journal that he intends to stay at Louisville after his name surfaced as a possible candidate for the Ohio State job.

If Battle wants to look within the Alabama women’s basketball family, he can find several candidates.

Madonna Thompson, head coach at Shelton State, is coming off a 33-1 season and quarterfinal finish at the National Junior College Athletic Association Tournament. She has guided Shelton State to the national tournament in seven of the last eight seasons. Thompson played on UA’s 1993-94 team that made it to the Final Four.

Another former Alabama player, Sandra Rushing, has won more than 400 games in her 24 seasons, including a 10-year stint at Delta State where her teams made it to the NCAA Division II Final Four twice and averaged more than 25 wins. She is coming off a 15-15 season in her first year at Central Arkansas, and also previously served as head coach at UTEP.

Brittney Ezell, a former Crimson Tide point guard, is coming off an 18-14 season in her third year at Belmont. She also served as head coach at Montevallo and at Okaloosa-Walton Community College in Florida, and has had stops as an assistant at Alabama and Nebraska.

Betsie Harris, who played at Alabama, has gone 43-19 in two seasons at Coastal Georgia, an NAIA school that hired her to restart its women’s basketball program.

Joni Crenshaw, who spent one season as an assistant to Hudson, has been at Georgia for the last two seasons, including an Elite Eight run in 2012-13. She has also coached at LSU, Louisiana Tech and Troy.

Some coaches at successful midmajor programs who may merit attention are Samford’s Mike Morris, Drexel’s Denise Dillon, Florida Gulf Coast’s Karl Smerek, Toledo’s Tricia Cullop, James Madison’s Kenny Brooks and Middle Tennessee’s Rick Insell. Another intriguing candidate would be Mike Diviabiss, an assistant coach at Illinois who was previously head coach at Idaho and who was the staff at Green Bay over a four-year period where the school went 122-13.
Crimson Tide wins SEC honors

BIRMINGHAM | The University of Alabama women’s tennis team collected a host of Southeastern Conference awards when the league announced its honorees Wednesday.

Antonia Foehse brought home Scholar-Athlete of the Year honors, marking the third consecutive season the award was earned by a Crimson Tide player.

Alexa Guarachi and Mary Anne Macfarlane made the first team, while Foehse made the second team and Natalia Maynetto the all-freshman team.

Foehse has clinched a team-leading six matches and is 17-8 in singles and 16-5 in doubles. Her biggest victory was her come-from-behind 6-7, 7-6(5), 6-1 win that clinched the Crimson Tide’s win against 14th-ranked Baylor at the ITA Indoor National Team Championship. Foehse holds a 3.975 grade-point average in psychology, is a two-time ITA Scholar-Athlete and twice made the SEC Academic Honor Roll. She has been a member of the dean’s list in every semester and made the president’s list on three occasions.

“Toni has worked tirelessly in the classroom to set herself apart from the rest,” Alabama coach Jenny Mainz said. “She’s incredibly driven to achieve greatness scholastically and will not settle for anything but her best. She’s sharp, articulate and very disciplined with her studies. This is a prestigious award as there are more than a few standout student-athletes in our conference.”

Guarachi is making her third straight appearance on the first team after earning second-team honors as a freshman. She holds a 22-14 mark in singles and a 22-10 record in doubles and is ranked nationally in both categories. Guarachi has the most singles and doubles in UA history and made the SEC all-tournament team.

Macfarlane, who plays No. 1 singles and doubles, has 17 wins in singles, including eight against nationally ranked opponents. She leads the team with 27 doubles victories as well, with 11 against teams ranked nationally. Macfarlane has been ranked as high as No. 2 in doubles and No. 10 in singles and is one win away from entering Alabama’s top-10 list for career singles victories.

“I’m proud of Alexa, Mary Anne and Toni for being named to the All-SEC teams,” Mainz said. “These three players have done a commendable job of leading our team on and off the court. Their positive influence and guidance have proven to be key reasons for the success of this team. They’ve done an excellent job of infusing their work ethic, team spirit and positive attitudes on the younger players.”

Maynetto has been a force at the bottom of the lineup for the Crimson Tide, going 10-0 in SEC singles play. She holds an overall record of 28-8, including an 18-1 mark in dual-match play. She clinched five of Alabama’s 19 wins, including three of its 4-3 victories, all of which came against top-20 teams.

Mary Anne Macfarlane, left, and Alexa Guarachi made the All-Southeastern Conference first team for Alabama.

Maynetto, who ranked as high as No. 89 this season, enters NCAA championship play on a 12-match winning streak in singles.

“Natalia is truly deserving of this distinction among the freshmen in the SEC,” Mainz said. “We had an impressive group of impactful freshmen in our league this year, and Natalia most definitely stands out as a forerunner. She has established a reputation as a relentless competitor with a fiery temperament.”
Crimson Tide men repeat as SEC champs

Combined reports

ST. SIMON'S ISLAND, Ga. | The second-ranked University of Alabama men's golf team battled through 30 mph winds on the challenging Seaside Course at the Sea Island Golf Club on Sunday to hold off South Carolina for the program's fourth Southeastern Conference championship and second straight.

The Crimson Tide began the day three shots back of the Gamecocks, and the teams went back and forth throughout the round. The Crimson Tide sealed the win with a 10-over-par round of 290 to finish at 8-over 848 for the tournament. South Carolina shot 295 on Sunday and 850 for the 54-hole event.

Auburn was third at 860 with, Texas A&M (864) fourth and Mississippi State (866) in fifth place.

"I am really proud of the guys," Alabama coach Jay Seawell said. "They faced 30 mph winds all day — I've never seen anything like it, especially in a championship. They battled hard, never gave in and I am proud of all five of them. They never got discouraged, even when it looked a little bleak. In the end, we did just enough to win and that is an awesome feeling."

Alabama's break came when South Carolina's Caleb Sturgeon, who was leading the tournament, took triple bogey on the par-4 16th hole to break a tie atop the leaderboard. In the same group, UA's Cory Whitsett made birdie on the 16th for a four-shot swing that gave the Crimson Tide a lead it did not relinquish.

Whitsett closed with a bogey on the 18th but still secured the title. He finished tied for third individually at 1-under 209. Arkansas' Sebastian Cappelen won medalist honors at 8-under 202.

Trey Mullinax joined Whitsett with a 73 on Sunday and finished at 213. Bobby Wyatt carded a 74 and tied for 10th at 214.

Justin Thomas fired Alabama's lowest round with an even-par 70 to tie for 12th at 215. Scott Strohmeyer's 75 on Sunday was dropped from the UA team score. He carded a 220 total to tie for 27th.

Alabama will now await word on which of six regional sites it will be headed to in an attempt to qualify for the NCAA Championships at the Capital City Club in Atlanta in May.
Milliner leaves Los Angeles with vault championship

"I'm just glad I could bring something home for my team. I did it for my team. I wanted to show everybody that Bama is still here and that we'll be back next year."

Diandra Milliner on her vault title

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

LOS ANGELES | Diandra Milliner made sure the University of Alabama did not leave Pauley Pavilion without national championship hardware, capturing the vault title in Sunday's individual event finals at the NCAA Gymnastics Championships.

While the Crimson Tide fell short of winning a third straight team championship with a third-place finish Saturday, Milliner was lights-out on both vault and floor exercise. The junior from Wichita, Kan., scored 9.925 to share the vault championship with LSU's Rheagan Courville, and finished second on floor exercise with an identical score, bested only by Michigan's Joanna Sampson.

"I'm just glad I could bring something home for my team," Milliner said. "I did it for my team. I wanted to show everybody that Bama is still here and that we'll be back next year."

Milliner's individual title was the 24th in the history of the Alabama program and 10th since 2004. It was the fourth vault championship for UA, with the other three won by Ashley Miles in 2003, '04 and '05.

Said Milliner, "That's an honor because she was a great gymnast and I really looked up to her."

The NCAA vault finals format changed this year, with each gymnast just performing one vault. Previously, competitors had to do two different vaults, with both judged.

"It kind of moved pretty fast," Milliner said. "I was a little nervous, but I've done pretty ones in my life, so I wanted to do it like that."

See Milliner | 7C
MILLINER
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Alabama coach Sarah Patterson pointed out that there were 23 performers in the vault final, giving Milliner the largest field of competition in the individual finals.

"That's never happened," Patterson said. "As we were counting them down and she was more toward the beginning of the lineup, I just kept waiting. I thought it was a great vault, but you just don't know if the score will hold.

"I thought it was exciting. To me that's one of the hardest championships to win when it's one vault and everything is on the line for one time."

Milliner's second-place finish on floor marked the third year in a row that Alabama finished first or second on that event. Patterson credited UA assistant coach Dana Duckworth with helping Milliner develop her floor presence.

"I think that's where Diandra has come the farthest," Patterson said. "She's always been powerful and a great tumbler. I think Dana has done a great job with her choreography, but I also think it's the maturity on Diandra's part. We have told her over and over that she can be as good as she wants to be, but she had to become a performer. While she was a floor exercise worker, she wasn't a performer, and that's what she's turned into."

Sampson edged Milliner for the floor title with a 9.9375. Florida's Bridget Sloan won the balance beam with a 9.9 score, and teammate Alaina Johnson won the uneven bars at 9.9125.


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No third straight title for Alabama

Tide comes up short on final rotation to take third; Gators win title

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

LOS ANGELES | When the University of Alabama gymnastics team fell Saturday, it fell hard.

In the final rotation of the NCAA Championships at Pauley Pavilion, the Crimson Tide fell off the balance beam.

It tumbled out of first place.

It plunged from having a third straight national championship within its grasp and landed instead in third place.

Alabama scored 197.350 as Florida overcame its own early falls on beam to capture its first-ever national gymnastics championship with a winning score of 197.575. Oklahoma finished second, just ahead of UA at 197.375.

"It's definitely a disappointment," junior Kim Jacob said. "We know how it feels to win and now we know how it feels to lose."

The Crimson Tide went into the final rotation with the narrowest of leads — just .025 — over Florida, which had surged back after a bad rotation on beam at the beginning of the meet. It came down to the two Southeastern Conference heavyweights trading big scores in the meet's final turn, with the Gators on the uneven bars and Alabama on beam, until UA faltered.

TEAM RESULTS
1 Florida 197.575
2 Oklahoma 197.375
3 Alabama 197.350
4 UCLA 197.100
5 LSU 197.050
6 Georgia 196.675

INSIDE
ALABAMA RESULTS:
Individual scores | 6C

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Dijandra Milliner and Kaitlyn Clark started Alabama off with twin scores of 9.875 as Alabama increased its lead and seemed poised to pull away for victory. Then Kayla Williams had two major wobbles, twice catching herself before falling off the 4-inch beam, to score 9.625.

Had UA righted itself after that, it still could have won, as the lowest score for each team on each event is dropped. Instead, Sarah DeMee, up next, fell off and Alabama's hopes went crashing to the floor.

"The only disappointing thing for this team is when you're in position to finish on beam at the end and we had a little bit of pressure, we counted a 9.65," Alabama coach Sarah Patterson said. "We've been a good beam team and we haven't really had a struggle and a 9.65 most of the time is not a score that we count.

"I think every team out there felt the pressure in one capacity or another, and I'm so proud of the ladies and how they've done. I wouldn't trade this team for any team."

That Jacob and Ashley Priess finished Alabama's beam rotation off with scores of 9.925 only made the final result sting more. Those scores, minus the falls, could have been difference-makers.

"We really focused on putting on a performance and going for it and not holding anything back and leaving it all out there on the floor," Priess said, "and I think we did that."
Lacey second Tide starter to transfer

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

TUSCALOOSA | Trevor Lacey, the most high-profile recruit Anthony Grant has brought to Alabama, has decided to transfer out of the Crimson Tide basketball program after two seasons.

Lacey is the second starter from the 2012-13 team to transfer, joining center Moussa Gueye, who will graduate and play elsewhere in his final season. Lacey, the team’s No. 2 scorer, will be more difficult to replace.

The Huntsville native and former Parade All-American was the only player on the Crimson Tide team to start all 36 games. He averaged 11.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game. He led the team in assists per game (3.2) and 3-pointers made (62) and attempted (166) during the 2012-13 season.

Lacey was a major part of Alabama’s 2011 recruiting campaign, choosing the Crimson Tide over Kentucky, among others, in the late signing period.

“I enjoyed having the opportunity to coach Trevor for the two years he was here,” Grant said in a UA release.

“We certainly wish him the best of luck as he continues to pursue his education and his basketball career.”

“It was a family decision to pursue other opportunities,” Lacey said. “This definitely was not an easy decision to make. It’s been great at Alabama during my two years. It was tough my freshman year coming off surgery and having to work my way back. I wanted to improve during my sophomore season, and I thought I did that. I want to thank the coaches and staff, my teammates and all the fans for their support.”

During his two seasons at the Capstone, Lacey played in 69 games while making 52 starts, averaging 9.3 points, 3.4 rebounds and 2.5 assists a game.

His departure leaves Alabama, which played short-handed for much of the 2013 season, with 10 available scholarship players for the upcoming year. An 11th, Tulane transfer Ricky Tarrant, will not be eligible to play until 2014-15.
Lacey plans to leave Alabama

Don Kausler Jr.
dkausler@al.com

With two seasons of eligibility remaining, Alabama guard Trevor Lacey has decided that he wants to finish his college basketball career somewhere else.

The former star at Butler High School in Huntsville has been granted his release so he can transfer, Alabama coach Anthony Grant announced Tuesday in a news release.

"It was a family decision to pursue other opportunities," Lacey said. "This definitely was not an easy decision to make.

"It's been great at Alabama during my two years. It was tough to make my freshman year coming out surgery and having to work my way back. I wanted to improve during my sophomore season and I thought I did that. I want to thank the coaches and staff, my teammates and all the fans for their support."

Lacey has Alabama's permission to contact schools outside the Southeastern Conference, according to a source close to his family who said that Kansas, Miami, Pittsburgh and Arizona already have expressed interest.

Lacey, a two-time Alabama Mr. Basketball, was the only Tide player who started all 36 games this past season. As a sophomore, splitting time between point guard and shooting guard, he averaged 11.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game. He also led the Crimson Tide in assists (3.2 per game) and made 3-pointers (62) and attempted (166).

"I enjoyed having the opportunity to coach Trevor for the two years he was here," Grant said. "We certainly wish him the best of luck as he continues to pursue his education and his basketball career."

In two seasons at Alabama, Lacey started 52 of 69 games. He averaged 9.3 points, 3.4 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.

Lacey was a five-star prospect when he signed with Alabama, picking the Crimson Tide over Auburn, Kentucky and Kansas.

He is the second player this month to announce plans to transfer, Center Moussa Gueye will not be back for his final season of eligibility.
NOT THEIR ‘A’ GAME

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

TUSCALOOSA | Quarterback AJ McCarron stood out in the early going and the late going Saturday, and that made up for a lot of rough going in between.
McCarron led the White team on two touchdown drives as it claimed a narrow 17-14 win over the Crimson team before 78,315 fans at the University of Alabama’s annual A-Day game.
Despite a back-and-forth fourth quarter that infused a little late excitement in the contest, the scrimmage was filled with what head coach Nick Saban called “sloppiness.”
“I am not disappointed with where we are, and I don’t want anyone to think that,” Saban said. “But I am not satisfied.”
That was largely because the day’s nine turnovers.
McCarron made the opening drive look easy.
After a holding penalty erased a 13-yard T.J. Yeldon run, the senior quarterback hit his first four passes to lead the White team on an 80-yard touchdown drive. The score came on a 40-yard completion to Kenny Bell, back this spring after breaking a leg last November.

After that long toss, turnovers became the story of the half. Crimson team quarterback Blake Sims threw two interceptions, including one that set up a 29-yard Cade Foster field goal. Alec Morris and McCarron also threw interceptions, and there were two fumbles lost before intermission.

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A-DAY

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It was the McCarron interception on the final play of the first half that put the Crimson team on the scoreboard. Safety Vinnie Sunseri intercepted the ball at the Crimson 14-yard line, then raced both down and all the way across the field, finishing with an 86-yard touchdown that cut the White team's lead to 10-7 at the break.

There was no scoring for most of the second half, played with a running clock at some points.

The interceptions continued, but at a reduced rate. (There were two, one thrown by McCarron and one by freshman Cooper Bateman).

In the final minutes, though, there was a point explosion of sorts.

First, the Crimson team scored a surprising go-ahead touchdown with 2:01 to play as cornerback Deion Belue forced a Brian Vogler fumble that Ha Ha Clinton-Dix returned 55 yards for a score that put his team ahead 14-10.

McCarron came back to lead the White team for the winning score.

A 50-yard completion to Christian Jones put the White team at the 7-yard line, and game MVP Yeldon scored the winning touchdown from there with 1:04 to play.

Freshman quarterback Alec Morris put the Crimson team in scoring position, but his 11-yard pass attempt to Chris Black in the end zone went high, allowing the White team to hold on.

"I really do think we have a lot of components, but too many people are too comfortable, and that does not lend itself to great competition," Saban said.

"I am talking about the overall attitude of a comfort zone because of what we have done in the past. We need to forget that, because that's history. We need to concentrate on what we are going to do in the future."

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New offensive line holds its own

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

TUSCALOOSA | When you lose three highly decorated players from one group, no matter how talented the returning unit is, three little words are bound to surface. Area of concern.

With the loss of Chance Warmack (left guard), Barrett Jones (center) and D.J. Fluker (right tackle), the University of Alabama offensive line knows it is subject to pundits’ questions and labels of the group as a question mark heading into the 2013 season.

The unit began spring practice motivated by such discussion and set out to quell that talking point during Saturday’s A-Day Game.

“They’re talking about the offensive line as an area of concern because we lost three guys,” sophomore center Ryan Kelly said. “We’ve had a little chip on our shoulder coming into the offseason because people were saying that about us. That’s been the point of emphasis this spring. We’re going to control the offense and control who we are. I think after 15 practices we’ve kind of showed that as an offensive line.”

Kelly did his part Saturday, taking home the Dwight Stephenson lineman award.

Kelly started at center with Cyrus Kouandjio at left tackle, Arie Kouandjio at left guard, Anthony Steen at right guard and Austin Shepherd at right tackle.

Alabama coach Nick Saban praised the unit’s efforts throughout spring practice, including reserves still competing for playing time.

“The offensive line has done a really good job all spring,” Saban said. “I think Anthony Steen and Cyrus Kouandjio have done a really good job from a leadership standpoint. Ryan Kelly has played well all spring long. He got a lot of experience last year, which I thought was helpful to him.

“Arie had a really good spring. Austin Shepherd had a really good spring. Leon Brown is a guy that has ability that can give us reps. So can Kellen Williams. Those guys are still in competition for positions, and rightfully so based on what they’ve been able to do. We need to continue to try and develop more players at that position, but I’m pleased with the progress that that group has made.”

The starting unit paved the way for the White team’s steak-dinner victory keeping AJ McCarron clean, as the senior quarterback threw for 223 yards and a touchdown. T.J. Yeldon rushed 15 times for 69 yards and a score behind the group.

“The chemistry is coming along with them,” McCarron said. “They just have to keep building on it. Summer will be a great starting platform for us to keep going and keep working on it. I’m very pleased with them.”

Of most importance to McCarron might be Kelly, the third center he’s worked with in as many seasons.

Kelly has leaned on Jones for advice and will continue to learn from 2011 starting center William Vlachos, who has a role with this year’s team.

“Just between those two guys, the more experienced guys that can help you out, the better off you’re going to be.”

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Agent: ‘We know who’ Fluker’s Twitter hacker is

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The agent for former Alabama football star D.J. Fluker is going beyond saying that a hacker is behind a volatile Twitter message sent early Tuesday morning.

"We know who did this," said Deryk Gilmore, who represents the right tackle and former Foley star who is expected to be selected Thursday night in the first round of the NFL Draft.

"This is totally fiction, but I'm waiting to get some proof. I've been on the phone with Twitter."

Gilmore did not identify the hacker.

A tweet sent after midnight from Fluker's Twitter (@DjFluker76) stated:

"Yea I took $n college so wat. I did wat I had to do. Agents was tryin to pimp me so I pimped them. Cast da first stone."

The tweet quickly was deleted, and Gilmore, who works out of Atlanta for the Chicago firm of Priority Sports and Entertainment, soon sent a tweet that said the account had been hacked. In another tweet, he said the account will be reactivated after the draft.

"I'll tell you, of course, this wasn't him," Gilmore said when reached by phone Tuesday morning. "It was (expletive), and it's a shame. And anyone who believes it was him and wants to believe the worst, you go ahead and do it.

"I mean, my company has an outstanding reputation. This kid, we didn't even give him a guarantee to sign with us. We gave him nothing. My whole point is that for all the people who are out there saying the worst, let them believe the worst."

D.J. Fluker
Former Alabama and Oakland Raiders linebacker Rolando McClain allegedly yelled obscenities at police officers Sunday as they were trying to disperse a large crowd of more than 700 people at a local park after they responded to calls about a fight, Lt. John Crouch of the Decatur police department said Monday.

"The officers got out, starting moving everyone out of the street when they heard somebody out of the crowd, yelling 'f the police,'" Crouch, the public information officer for the department, told a Baltimore radio station.

They continued trying to move the people out of the street and they heard it again. They eventually identified the person in the crowd, they moved in, told him he was under arrest for disorderly conduct, at which point he tried to jerk away.

"The officers grabbed his arms, he continued to struggle, trying to pull the officers further into the crowd. They did eventually get handcuffs on him and at that point they recognized him as Rolando McClain. So he's since been charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest," he said.

The Decatur Police Department also released a statement recounting the details of McClain's arrest to several media outlets.

According to the release, police officers twice ordered McClain to stop walking after they identified him as the individual shouting obscenities, but he kept walking and said, "You told me to walk and I'm walking."

The police also allege that other individuals tried to prevent them from arresting McClain but they eventually took him into custody. The police are trying to identify the people who tried to interfere with the arrest.

The release also said that one officer suffered a minor cut on his hand during the incident.

McClain, who recently signed with the Baltimore Ravens after being released by the Oakland Raiders, is out of jail after posting a $1,000 bond. The Ravens told The Baltimore Sun that they are reviewing the linebacker's case.

\section{TROUBLED WATERS}

\begin{itemize}
\item Sunday's incident was the third time former Alabama All-American linebacker Rolando McClain has been arrested in his hometown of Decatur since 2011.
\item Last May, McClain was convicted of four misdemeanors — reckless endangerment, menacing, third-degree assault and firing a gun in the city limits — but he appealed the verdict and the charges were dropped when the accuser told prosecutors he no longer wanted to pursue the case.
\item He was out on bond related to his arrest on January for providing a false name when he was pulled over for a window-tint violation. The Decatur prosecutor's office hasn't yet decided whether to ask the bonds from the previous arrest to be revoked.
\item McClain had a rough final season in Oakland, serving a two-game suspension for conduct detrimental to the team. He also was demoted from the starting lineup a month into the season because of his struggles in pass coverage and because Raiders coaches thought he got tired too much playing every down.
\end{itemize}
Playoff system ‘a clear break’ from the BCS

By Ralph D. Russo
The Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. | The Bowl Championship Series will be replaced by the College Football Playoff.

The BCS conference commissioners announced the name of the new postseason system that starts in 2014 on Tuesday, the first of three days of meetings at a resort hotel in the Rose Bowl’s backyard.

They also will choose the remaining three sites for the six-bowl semifinal rotation in the new system and the site of the first championship game to be held Jan. 12, 2015, this week.

The website www.collegefootballplayoff.com is already up and running and allowing fans to vote on a new logo. It also has a Twitter handle: @cfbplayoff.

“It’s really simple. It gets right to the point,” BCS executive director Bill Hancock, who will hold the same position in the playoff system, said at a short news conference with the 10 commissioners of the FCS conferences.

“Nothing cute. Nothing fancy. We decided it would be best to call it what it is.”

Premiere Sports Management in Overland Park, Kan., was hired to help come up with a name and brand the new system. A committee of commissioners handled the naming of the new system. Hancock said they ran through “in the neighborhood of three dozen” names.

Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott said, “We’re clearly trying to make a clear break from the BCS.”

Before the news was reported, Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany said he’d be happy with whatever was selected.

“I’m not good with names — obviously,” Delany said during a break in the meetings, referring to the Big Ten’s division names, Legends and Leaders, that produced so much negative feedback the conference has already decided to change them.

The new postseason format will create two national semifinals to be played New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day, with the winners advancing. The six bowls in the playoff rotation will host marquee, BCS-type games on New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day during the seasons they do not host a semifinal.

“I don’t think you can ever go too wrong calling something what it is,” Scott said. “Things that make sense tend to stand the test of time.”

Three semifinal spots have already been decided: the Rose, Orange and Sugar bowls.

Four other bowls have bid for the final three spots. The clear front-runners are the Cotton, Chick-fil-A and Fiesta. The Holiday Bowl in San Diego also put in a bid, but even its organizers have acknowledged they are a long shot at best to land the game.

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Those decisions will be announced today.

The coaches on the Big 12's spring teleconference were already talking about the Cotton Bowl having a spot in the rotation as if it were a done deal.

"I think it's really exciting for this region, for everybody, and I think all of the schools in this region, to have Dallas as one of those sites is great for everybody in this region, and exciting for everybody," Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said. "Obviously, everybody knows what a great and quality, what an awesome stadium it is, then the location for us is an advantage, or should be."

The first semifinals will be played at the Rose and Sugar bowls.

The site of the first national championship game in the new system will also be determined at these meetings. The finalists are Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, the billion-dollar home of the NFL team and the Cotton Bowl, and Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla., home of the Buccaneers.

Arlington is the favorite to land that first championship game, but the competition from Tampa has been serious.

"I'm glad it has," Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said Tuesday. "I think it will give us a better outcome."

Also on the agenda this week for the commissioners will be the composition of the selection committee that will set the field for the playoff. They have said they would like the committee to be similar to the one that picks the teams for the NCAA basketball tournament, made up of conference commissioners and athletic directors.

Bowlsby said he expected both current and former administrators to have a spot on the committee.

"The hardest thing is making sure we're arming whoever is on the committee with the tools that it takes to differentiate among closely proximal teams," Bowlsby said. "You have to have some metrics available to differentiate between three, four, five, six and seven."

"You can't just say we like blue uniforms and not gold uniforms. You've got to arm the committee with the tools that it takes to do their job."
Louisiana university to teach development of video games

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS | Students interested in making a career out of developing computer and video games may be interested in a new discipline to be offered by the University of New Orleans.

The university says its computer science department is now offering a concentration in game development.

The (Baton Rouge, La.) Advocate reported that a 2011 study by market research company the NPD Group found that video game sales in the United States generate about $8.8 billion annually, while sales of computer games total about $450 million.

The game development concentration could become a recruiting tool for the university, computer science chair Mahdi Abdelguerfi said.

"The pervasiveness of computer gaming on personal computers, game consoles and handheld devices has generated significant student interest and job opportunities after graduation," Abdelguerfi said.

Both introductory and advanced courses in game development and mobile appli-