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Trustee resigns from board

Two other trustees reappointed

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

HUNTSVILLE | The University of Alabama System board of trustees on Friday re-appointed two members and elected a replacement for trustee John D. Johns, who decided to step down from the board. When asked why he was leaving, Johns noted the positive direction of the board.

"I really think the University of Alabama System is just in great shape. As I look to the future, I have great optimism for the University of Alabama system," Johns said.

The board appointed UA alumna Stancil Starnes of Birmingham to replace Johns. Starnes is the chairman, chief executive officer and president of ProAssurance Corp.

Johns, who was elected in September 2013 to succeed trustee John McMahon Jr., was in his first term on the board. Trustees may serve up to three consecutive six-year terms or until they reach the age of 75. Johns said Friday's meeting was his last as a board member.

Starnes will be able to join the board in June. The system's bylaws allow members to begin work immediately after they are elected by the board, but the appointment must still go to the Alabama Senate for confirmation.

SEE BOARD, B3

Starnes, who was the only nominee put forward for John's seat, was not present on Friday.

"I would like to first say it has been a great honor and privilege to be elected to and serve on this board of trustees," Johns said. "It has been an interesting time since I have been on the board. There has been a good bit of turbulence and controversy. We have gone through several presidents and you know all the things that have happened in academic life. I hope I will be remembered as someone whose contributions who were well-intended and constructive. I certainly hope so."

The board re-appointed trustee John England for another term as representative of the 7th congressional district and Davis Malone to another term representing the 2nd District.

In other business, the board voted in increase tuition for medical, dentistry and optometry students. Medical school tuition would increase 3 percent to $27,582 per year during the next academic year for Alabama residents and remain flat at $61,848 for non-residents. Tuition for dentistry students would increase 1.9 percent to $26,076 for first and second year students who are residents. Tuition would increase 3 percent to $62,392 for nonresidents in their first and second years. Tuition would not change for students in years three and four.

Optometry students would see tuition increased by 1 percent for Alabama residents to $17,584 per year. Non-residents would see no increase.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA SYSTEM BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACTION

In other action taken Friday by the University of Alabama System board of trustees:

**UAB**

- Approved establishing a science, technology, engineering and mathematics education center to provide professional development for STEM teachers and research on STEM education.
- Approved establishing a division of genomic diagnostics and bioinformatics in the department of Pathology in the School of Medicine.
- Named Linda Lucas as provost emerita.
- Approved negotiating architectural agreements for the $7.1-million renovation of the fifth and sixth floors of the Buris R. Boshell Diabetes Research and Education Building and the new $3-million intramural athletic fields.
- Approved a preliminary budget and plans for a new $25-million, two-story, 36,000-square-foot information technology center at Ninth Avenue South and 17th Street.
- Approved the preliminary scope and budget of $33.8 million for a Gardendale freestanding emergency room at 960 Olive Road in Gardendale and executing an architectural agreement with Sims Architectural Services.
- Increased the scope and budget of the Intraoperative MRI Suite at University Hospital from $13.5 million to $15.1 million.

**UA**

- Increased the project budget for the Delta Zeta sorority house from $14.7 million to $17 million and authorized execution of construction contracts with WAR Construction.
- Authorized negotiating architectural agreements for the new $19.4-million alumni building, the $11.1 million renovation of Barnwell Hall, and the new Tutwiler residence hall.
- Authorized executing an architectural agreement with Cole and Cole Architects of Montgomery for the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority house.
- Approved the preliminary scope and budget of $3.4 million for the fit out of the third floor of Russell Hall and executing an architectural agreement with Turner Batson Architects of Birmingham.
- Approved the preliminary scope and budget of $6.2 million for a new university archive facility, which will be a 14,919 square-foot addition.

- Approved purchase and installation of T2 parking Access and Revenue Control System (PARCS) for $1.4 million.
- Authorized a five-year tower lease agreement with New Cingular Wireless PCS with a first-year rent of $50,000 and a 3-percent increase annually.
- Authorized an 18-month timber contract with Total Forestry Services Inc. of Centreville for 80 acres in the Old Hargrove tract in Bibb County with an estimated revenue of $56,186.

- Approved departmental structure for the College of Business Administration and changing its name to the College of Business. Authorized purchasing 58.25-acre executive plaza property adjacent to campus for $7.1 million from Country Life Insurance Co.
- Authorized lease agreement with Sealy Management Co. for 94 units with 209 beds from July until July 2019 as overflow student housing. The rent rate is dependent on the actual number of beds with a maximum rate of $1.7 million annually.
Board set to OK tuition hikes

By: Ed Enoch

The University of Alabama System board of trustees on Friday will vote on increasing tuition for its medical, dentistry and optometry students from 1 to 3.3 percent and plans for a new archive facility at UA.

The proposals were approved by committees on Thursday, sending them to the full board for consideration on Friday.

Medical school tuition would increase 3 percent to $27,582 per year during the next academic year for Alabama residents and remain flat at $61,848 for non-residents.

The increase in medical school tuition will continue to help fund the learning communities, which help improve students’ learning experiences and ability to succeed, according to information in the board packet.

Tuition for dentistry students would increase 1.9 percent to $26,936 for first and second year students who are residents. Tuition would increase 3.3 percent to $62,392 for nonresidents in their first and second years. Tuition would not change for students in years three and four.

The increases would fund instruction and new clinical technologies and expand community service rotations, according to the packet.

Optometry students would see tuition increase by 1 percent for Alabama residents to $17,584 per year. Non-residents would see no increase. The increase will help fund facility needs to enhance recruitment.

The decision to keep out-of-state tuition flat for dentistry and medicine is meant to help the programs be more competitive in attracting out-of-state students, according to the packet. The increases are expected to generate about $623,000 in total.

Last April, the board approved 1.5 percent increases for medical and optometry students and increases of as much as 3 percent for dentistry students.

The increases affect students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the UA College of Community Health Sciences and will go into effect July 1. The board typically considers tuition rates for undergraduate and graduate students at its June meeting.

The archive at UA was among the new projects presented Thursday.

The Physical Properties Committee approved preliminary plans and a budget of $6.2 million for the 14,919 square-foot addition to the existing book storage facility at 1425 14th St. in Tuscaloosa.

See next page
"This project is going to be very, very impactful for our campus," Provost Kevin Whitaker said.

Currently, the university has "a lot of square footage" dedicated to storage in the core of campus. The specialized facility to store important documents would free up space for academic programming, he said.

The archive will house printed materials previously stored in existing libraries buildings. The space freed up by the new archive will be used for study spaces, faculty offices and collaborative spaces.

Shelving can be added in phases, according to the proposal. The first phase of the archives will be used for collections currently located in Gorgas library, Mary Harmon Bryant Hall. Future phases would house materials currently in the Bruno, Rodgers, and McLure libraries.
Trustees to weigh tuition increases

Hikes could affect medical students

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Committees for University of Alabama System board of trustees will consider tuition increases for medical students and new construction projects including an archive facility at UA when they meet Thursday in Huntsville.

The finance committee will consider a tuition increase for medical, optometry and dentistry students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the UA College of Community Health Sciences. Details will be released at the meeting Thursday, which will be in the Student Services building at University of Alabama in Huntsville.

The physical properties committee will consider a proposal for a new $6.2-million university archive facility at UA's Tuscaloosa campus. The facility will be a 14,019-square-foot addition to the existing book storage facility at 1425 14th St., according to the agenda packet.

The new archive is a part of a long-term plan strategic plan. The archive will house printed materials previously housed in existing libraries buildings. The space freed up by the new archive will be used for student study spaces, faculty offices and other collaborative uses.

Shelving will be added in phases as needed. The first phase of the archives will be used for collections currently located in Gorgas library, Mary Harmon Bryant Hall. Future phases would house materials currently in the Bruno, Rodgers, and McLure libraries.

The committee will also consider a preliminary budget and plans for a new $25-million, two-story, 36,000-square-foot information technology center at UAB at Ninth Avenue and 17th Street.

The trustees will consider proposals for UAH, including purchasing a 58.25-acre executive plaza property adjacent to campus from Country Life Insurance Co. for $7.1 million with an leasing off-campus apartment units from Sealy Management Co.

Agenda items approved by the committees will be considered by the full board on Friday.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosa news.com or 205-722-0209.
I’ll admit it. As a kid — an upstart pulling guard — I was in awe of the Hannah family. There were John and David and Charley, and their dad, Herb, before them.

They were the First Family of Alabama football. John and David were monsters. And John, well, he was the best football player Alabama ever saw. And maybe the best offensive guard ever to play the game.

But it wasn’t just that. These were people who were quietly good, who sunk their money, without press conferences or one, according to this report, who Bentley blamed most for his problems. Not himself, but her. He threatened to have her arrested and tried to make it happen. He vowed she would “never work in the state of Alabama again” if she told anyone about the affair. Like a twisted, tyrannical old man he pointed his finger in her face and warned that she should “watch herself” because she “did not know what she was getting into.” And — and this says it all — he told her that because he was governor he had power over her. Because people “bow to his throne.”

Bow to his throne. It was abusive and pathetic and wrong. And it is the kind of tactic that often works for would-be despots. But Robert Bentley — it is hard, after reading this report, to think of him as anything but the Abuser-in-Chief — had no idea who he was threatening. He had no idea of her mettle or makeup.

Because Heather Hannah did not bend. She planted her feet like her uncle did for far worse than we ever imagined. Rebekah Mason. too, is clearly far worse than we ever imagined. And that is saying something. They are mismatched and perfectly matched all at the same time, arrogant and incompetent and dangerous to all they touch.

But there are heroes, too. Heather Hannah. She’s what a hero looks like in today’s Alabama.

Heather Hannah was chief of staff to former First Lady Dianne Bentley. She was, according to the report released Friday by lawyers for the Alabama House impeachment committee, the person who helped Mrs. Bentley create the damning and disturbing recordings of the governor’s lovel-y-dove-y phone conversations with his aide, Rebekah Mason.

But she was more than that. She was the one who became the target of Gov. Bentley’s blind rage and paranoia. She was the
OUR VIEW

Bentley should put state first and resign

We said it on March 23 of last year. We've said it again several times since then. Today, we're saying it again: Gov. Robert Bentley should do the right thing. He should resign.

Regardless of precisely which laws were broken, and regardless of the never-ending and bizarre scandal involving his advisor, Rebekah Caldwell Mason, Bentley should resign today because his resignation clearly is in the best interests of the people of Alabama. Bentley remaining in office as criminal investigations and the move to impeach him begin to pick up steam is not just a distraction. It is further evidence that he is more concerned with his own self-interests than he is for the state as a whole. And it is that line of thinking that has placed him in the situation he finds himself.

Del Marsh, the Senate Pro Tem, who would preside over a legislative trial in impeachment proceedings, was quoted in reports from Montgomery today as saying Bentley can no longer effectively lead the state. Marsh is late in coming to that realization, or at least late in publicly stating it, but there is no question that he is correct.

At this point, it isn't that Bentley used the state helicopter to retrieve a wallet. It isn't that he's reportedly taken dozens of trips on the state plane to go home or to the beach. It isn't that the 73-year-old was taped by his wife of half a century making lurid and inappropriate comments to Mason, his 44-year-old senior policy advisor. It isn't that he named that advisor's husband to head up the state government's faith-based initiatives. It isn't that he's thumbed his nose at the entire state and again with a level of arrogance that boggles the mind by continuing to show no understanding of what is wrong with all of that. It isn't that he tried to destroy the reputations and careers of men who had been key parts of his administration in an attempt to stay in power. It isn't that he utterly disregarded the inappropriateness of naming the state attorney general to an open U.S. Senate seat, though that attorney general had indicated he was conducting an investigation into the governor's actions. It isn't that the state Ethics Commission found probable cause that Bentley has committed felonies in office. It isn't even all of that combined.

This state has real issues. There is a looming budget crisis, a prison system that is past the boiling point and a failing education system, to name a few. And none of it is going to be addressed in the manner it deserves as we watch the Bentley saga unfold.

It is about to get a lot worse for Bentley. He has never been an effective leader as governor. His opportunity at leadership ended a long while ago. If he cared at all about this state, he'd walk away and let it get on with the business at hand.
GROWING BEYOND THE AUTO MALL

Maserati, Nick Saban-backed Mercedes potential sparks for development in small Jefferson County town

Erin Edgemon eedgemon@al.com

Over the past 15 years, the small town of Irondale has become central Alabama’s hub for luxury cars, at times pulling dealerships away from the city of Birmingham. But now it has designs on growing beyond the auto mall.

"It would be nice to have choices for restaurants in the area — fast food to fine dining," said Terry Spitzer, president of one of those dealerships. "There is just nothing here."

The town's abundance of commercial property and convenient location along Interstate 20 and I-459 continues to lead automotive groups to move dealerships there.

City officials have sweetened deals by offering incentives to attract more.

The Nick Saban-backed Mercedes-Benz of Birmingham received $13 million in incentives, mainly tax breaks. The dealership is expected to join other luxury carmakers — Porsche BMW, Jaguar, Audi, Lexus and Land Rover — on still-rural Grants Mill Road by December or January, said general manager Randy Powell.

Benchmark Auto Group's new Maserati, Alfa Romeo and Fiat dealership is set to open by mid-May, said Spitzer, president of the auto group.

The dealerships are a big win for the town of just over 12,000 residents.

Irondale Mayor Charles Moore said the city collected more than $3 million in sales tax revenue from the auto mall last year, accounting for a third of all sales tax revenue collected by the city each fiscal year.

Yet Irondale, just east of affluent Mountain Brook, continues to be skipped over by retailers. The city is left with few dining options and no grocery stores.

Moore, who took office in November, said one of the reasons he ran for office is his belief that the city has missed growth opportunities.

SEE IRONDALE, A3
IRONDALE
FROM AL

"I think there has been a huge amount of projects that we have missed for various reasons," he said. "I think the future is very bright for Irondale. We have land available. We have momentum building in that direction, I think it is a good time to move Irondale forward."

With momentum spurred by Mercedes-Benz and Maserati, city officials are currently drafting a plan to lure hotels, restaurants, a grocery store and other service-oriented businesses over the next several years.

AUTO MALL

Former Irondale Mayor Allen Ramsey said it all started around 1999 when the city received a call from Tom Williams Automotive Group, now owned by Charlotte, North Carolina-based Sonic. Birmingham's largest car dealer was looking to move to a more suburban area where customers could easily test-drive vehicles.

Another perk: The interstate provides an easy link to motorists from Birmingham, Vestavia Hills and Mountain Brook.

Irondale ran with the idea, Ramsey said, and invested millions in land and infrastructure to create a 64-acre auto mall. They knew that once one dealership came, others would follow, he said.

"They feed off each other," Ramsey said. Spitzer relocated his Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram dealerships from Roebuck in 2002.

"Accessibility by way of the interstate was important," he said. Moving dealerships from southeast Birmingham's Roebuck neighborhood to Irondale, put Benchmark closer to buyers in Mountain Brook and Inverness, Spitzer said. Also, car buyers would drive out to Roebuck to make a purchase, but they weren't driving back for maintenance, he said.

Luxury car buyers will drive long distances to purchase a vehicle, but they want convenience when it comes to parts and service, Powell said.

A SHOWPIECE

Mercedes-Benz of Birmingham is expanding operations to a new state-of-the-art facility in Irondale to better serve customers in Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills including Liberty Park, Homewood and the Greystone community in Birmingham and Hoover.

These customers make up the vast majority of the dealership's sales and service customers, Powell said. The dealership also has enough customers in Shelby County to maintain some operations in Hoover, he said.

Irondale's Mercedes dealership will front Grants Mill Road and overlook I-459. From the interstate, motorists will see the Mercedes-Benz sign and fountain. The dealership will feature a glass tower, where a vehicle appears to float in air, Powell said.

"When we move, we will have set a new standard of ... luxury experience," he said. "It will be a showpiece."

Spitzer said the dealership will help combat Irondale's lack of eateries by adding an Edgar's Bakery. He said the small shop will open with the dealership. It will feature complementary items for customers, as well as sandwiches and pastries, including the bakery's famous lemon bars, for sale to the public.

Employees at the other Irondale dealerships have jokingly asked if they can come over and receive an employee discount at Edgar's, he said.

Benchmark's Italian car brands will be located on 6 acres directly across Grants Mill Road from the existing auto mall. Spitzer said the company owns 33 acres there. The plan is to subdivide it for potential restaurants, retail and service-oriented businesses.

A retail center is in the early planning stages, he said, and is likely a couple years away.

Grants Mill Road has paid off for Benchmark, Spitzer said.

"The volume has increased since the move from Roebuck in new and used car sales and service, he said. Most of Benchmark's sales come from the 35242 zip code, Spitzer said, which is the Highway 280 corridor, south of I-459 from Vestavia Hills. The dealerships sell a lot of cars from residents in Trussville and Leeds, as well, he added.

HOTELS? GROCERY STORES? RESTAURANTS?

Robert Jolly, chief executive officer of Retail Specialists, said Irondale didn't seek out automotive dealerships in order to attract retail. They did it for the millions in sales tax revenue that car dealers alone generate.

Yet today Irondale lacks a grocery store and such basic services as pizza and Chinese food delivery and a dry cleaning service, Moore said. The city also needs new hotels to accommodate visitors to Alabama's largest church, the Church of the Highlands, and EWTN, Global Catholic Network, the world's largest religious media network.

Auto dealerships on their own don't attract retail, Jolly said.

"Car purchases are not impulsive," Jolly said. "They are destination-oriented. (Car buyers) aren't going to be drawn in to shop at other retailers."

One thing that can make retail development happen in Irondale is if the city can attract a big-box retailer, he said.

"The retailers follow the anchors," Jolly said. "A major big-box retailer needs to choose the (Grants Mills Road) Interstate exit. That would then be a catalyst for retail development."

This big-box retailer would have to be one that isn't represented on Highway 280 or Trussville, he said. The heavy amount of retail along Highway 280, including The Summit, makes recruitment a challenge, Jolly added.

Also, retail recruitment is a long process, he said.

"It could take several years (to secure one) even when a retailer is interested. Walmart looked (on Grants Mill Road) before they went to Eastwood," Jolly said. "Obviously, if Walmart had gone to the interstate (exit), the whole conversation would be different."

A major building materials retailer has also looked there, he said.

"I am optimistic about Irondale," Jolly said. "I think (the city) is underdeveloped. There is opportunity for restaurants and convenience-oriented business."

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Darryl Washington, executive director of the Irondale Commercial Development Authority, said Irondale is looking to leverage the success of the automotive corridor and develop an economic strategy.

It involves quality of life: parks, green space, education and services; what type retail the city wants and needs; and securing industry and workforce development, he said.

"Right now, we are in a great place in our city's history, but we need to make sure we strategically capitalize on where we are now in sustaining," Washington said. "That means we need to have a good plan." Improvements to major thoroughfares and commercial facades, improving signage and promoting the city's outdoor amenities such as Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve, Cahaba River and Shades Creek are a part of the plan. Vibrant parks and a downtown can also spur development, Washington said.

Spitzer said he is working to sell outparcels adjacent to the Maserati dealership for possible restaurants.

Deborah McGill Smith, a vice president at EOS Commercial Real Estate, said Irondale's Mercedes dealership is being built on a 63-acre tract. The city is building a road through the property.

"The road will open up access to the parcel located on Grants Mill Road that hopefully will provide an opportunity for future commercial growth," she said.

NEW RESIDENTIAL

Ramsey, who served as mayor from 1996 to 2004, said city leaders at the time the auto mall was formed hoped it would spawn residential development.

More than 15 years later, "that is happening now," he said. According to city records, 701 permits for new houses were filed in the past five years.

Tower Homes has built more than 300, Moore said, while speaking before the Greater Irondale Chamber of Commerce in February.

"That means more residents," he said, during his first State of the City address.

"When you get more residents, you get more retail and more businesses. When you get more residents, you get a grocery store and national chains. More rooftops should mean more opportunities for retail," he said.

Tower Homes owner Price Hightower said his company began investing in Irondale in 2009 because of its proximity to downtown Birmingham.

"We are seeing a real premium being paid for proximity," he said.

Homebuyers are willing to pay a little bit more, he said, to live closer to work and for quality of life.

That premium, though, isn't as high as Irondale's lack of retail along Highway 280, including Trussville, where residents are paying higher prices to have their children attend some of the best school systems in the state. Hightower said. Irondale is zoned for Jefferson County Schools.

Tower Homes has about 200 new homes in the works for Irondale, including the 140-home Grants Mill Valley, off Grants Mill Road. The subdivision will contain three- to four-bedroom craftsman-style homes that Tower is known for, according to the homebuilder.

Tower homes has added about 10 percent to Irondale's housing stock in the past several years, Hightower said.

"That is pretty significant," he said. "Irondale has a 'vibrancy' that hasn't existed before due to the traffic from the auto mall, residential growth, Church of the Highlands and unified city leaders, Hightower said.

"I think Irondale is definitely on the move," he said. "I think you will see a small grocery store coming, some food establishments coming. They are going to follow the rooftops and the commercial success of the auto mall."
Party’s over for everyone as ethics panel draws a crystal-clear line

Kyle Whitmire
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No doubt, Alabama lawmakers will feel giddy while watching Gov. Robert Bentley’s slow-motion self-destruction.

He, who has flaunted his modicum of power and his — shall we say — bad life decisions in front of them, could now face as many as four felony charges for abusing his office, after the Alabama Ethics Commission referred him to the Montgomery County District Attorney for prosecution.

But at some point, after the partying is over, those other elected officials will realize that the commission sent a message Wednesday, and not just for Bentley. It was also for them. They will soon wake up to that fact like a bad hangover. And it’s going to hurt.

You see, of the four complaints the commission referred for prosecution, three were for possible violations of the Fair Campaign Practices Act. That’s the law that governs how public officials may use their campaign funds.

Unlike some of Alabama’s ethics laws, the FCPA is relatively explicit. It draws clear, bright lines, and it says just as clearly that crossing those lines can be a Class B felony, which carries between two and 20 years in prison.

To give you some perspective, bribery is a lesser Class C felony.

This law has been ignored and allowed to atrophy from disuse, but with its decisions Wednesday, the commission said, “No more.”

In its decisions Wednesday, the commission did not explicitly connect each of the complaints to particular events, but we know enough about what the governor has done to make educated connections.

For one, the governor accepted payments into his campaign account outside a legal window when candidates may do so — a year before an election or 120 days after an election if there’s campaign debt to repay. In 2016, the governor accepted a reimbursement for attending the Republican Governors Association conference in Las Vegas, where he traveled with his senior political adviser and love interest, Rebekah Mason.

Second, the governor loaned his campaign account money when he was not a candidate for office. (Term limits prohibit him from seeking another term, so he can’t argue that he might one day use this money for another gubernatorial campaign.)

Third, the governor used his campaign account to pay some of Mason’s legal fees. The FCPA says officials may use funds only to influence the outcome of an election, to pay their own legal fees or for reimbursed expenses incurred in the normal course of their duties in the office. The commission evidently decided that Mason’s legal fees (which she incurred before the scandal even became public) didn’t fall into any of those buckets.

This isn’t the first move the commission has made toward drawing brighter, clearer lines for the proper use of campaign funds. Earlier this year, the commission approved a self-generated opinion outlining permissible uses of campaign cash.


These are campaign funds. If you aren’t using them to campaign, the onus is on you to make sure the expenditures are legal.

The commission hasn’t been known for drawing such a hard line on these issues and I have given them a lot of grief for being lax. So let me now give them their props.

Good job. Thank you.

The commission had to draw these lines because officials, especially lawmakers, have been blurring them for years, turning their campaign accounts into slush funds — a party account for trips and tickets and cars and ... on and on.

But no more.

Gov. Bentley’s party barge is sinking. Lawmakers may celebrate if they want, but if they aren’t careful, they may find themselves in the same boat.

Whitmire writes a regular opinion column on politics for AL.com.
Mayor Battle confirms he may run for governor

Decision coming by end of April; would run as Republican

Paul Gattis pgattis@al.com

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle is about halfway through an evaluation process to determine if he will run for governor. Battle told AL.com Thursday he expects to make a decision by the end of April.

Battle’s interest in the job comes as no surprise — he’s long been considered a potential candidate and explored a gubernatorial run in 2014 — but it’s the first time he has publicly acknowledged that he is exploring a 2018 campaign to become the state’s chief executive.

“It’s just a thoughtful process, a prayerful process,” Battle said. “It’s one you look at very, very seriously. I have a great job sitting here in the city of Huntsville. It’s a great community to be mayor of. It takes a lot to make you move from a great position to one that has challenges.

SEE MAYOR, A6
MAYOR
FROM A1

"The state does have challenges. At some point, those challenges have to be addressed."

Battle is in his third term as Huntsville’s mayor, having won re-election the past two years with more than 80 percent of the vote — the largest mayoral election margin in the city’s history. Huntsville has been one of the state’s most prosperous economic regions and is on pace to become the state’s largest city in about 10 years, according to U.S. Census data.

He considered a run four years ago but opted not to run against Gov. Robert Bentley, who was seeking a second term. Bentley is limited to two terms and cannot seek re-election.

Battle is first cousins with Bill Battle, the recently retired athletic director at the University of Alabama.

No Republicans have publicly declared their candidacy but names have begun to emerge as possibilities. Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh, chair of the Public Service Commission, has formed a campaign committee for governor but stopped short of announcing her candidacy. State Auditor Jim Zeigler has also indicated he is considering a run for governor as has former Auburn University football coach Tommy Tuberville.

An expected leading candidate was eliminated earlier this year when Luther Strange was appointed to the U.S. Senate by Bentley. Strange will also be on the ballot seeking election to the Senate for the first time next year, which could siphon some potential candidates away from the gubernatorial race in order to run for Senate.

Battle, who said he will run as a Republican, added he has done no polling himself to evaluate his candidacy but he has seen polls done by other people.

"It tells you, obviously, that we would run strong in north Alabama because we’re in that media market," he said. "And south Alabama and all the way down to Baldwin County (on the Gulf Coast), we’ve got some work to do.

"It’s just a natural progression of what you do in a campaign. You’ve got to get your name out and tell them why you’re running and what you’re running for."

Battle repeatedly talked Thursday that the ability to make a difference in Montgomery was a critical factor in his thought process.

"There’s only so many years in your life and you don’t want to tilt at windmills," he said. "You want to make sure you make a positive difference in what you do and what you put your time and efforts into."

Along with the priority of being able to make a difference as governor, Battle said two other factors he is considering are his ability to win a statewide election and, if he wins, leaving his post as Huntsville’s mayor.

"We’re talking to a lot of friends from all over the state and letting them weigh in on it, too, and try to make a good decision," Battle said of himself and wife Eula. "It’s a very, very hard decision if you decide to get into this to leave Huntsville because it’s such a great place and got such great things going on."

"It’s something that Mrs. Battle and I will look at, will pray about and talk about. We’ll come up with an answer by the end of April."
Appointmnet of Strange raises hackles on Goat Hill

Lots of folks are still mad about lame duck Gov. Robert Bentley naming Attorney General Luther Strange to Jeff Sessions’ U.S. Senate seat.

If the sitting attorney general of a state openly states that he is investigating the governor for malfeasance and then the governor appoints an attorney general to the senate seat it looks funny. It gives new meaning to the word collusion.

This brazen move has incensed legislators who have heard from their constituents back home. It has especially upset members of the House Judiciary Committee. They were asked to cease the impeachment proceedings last year in deference to Strange’s request to lead an investigation of the governor’s shenanigans. Needless to say, they have reinstated their impeachment proceedings against Bentley with renewed vigor.

Several legislators have taken issue with the governor’s calling for the senate seat election in 2018, rather than immediately. The constitution says the election should be held forthwith. That is open to interpretation. The more prudent path is 2018, since there are elections anyway. That is traditionally the way it has been done in the state in the past. However, most seats in bygone days were vacated by the death of one of our senators and the governor usually appointed the deceased senator’s widow for the remaining year or so on the term. She was considered a caretaker to the seat. There has been so much grief and acrimony with regard to Strange’s appointment that he may be a caretaker.

I have never before seen a governor treated with such disdain and irreverence by a legislature as Bentley. They probably will not technically impeach him. He only has about 20 months left in his tenure and he is essentially impeached from power anyway. Most of them look at him as a buffoon. He has about as much relevance in the legislative process as one of the former goats that used to graze on Goat Hill.

The ultimate fallout from Bentley’s actions and unpopularity may accrue to Luther Strange in his election race in 14 months. Winning the GOP primary in this Senate race is tantamount to election in Alabama. Therefore, the race culminates in June of next year. Big Luther stands a good 6’-9” and his height is daunting. He was a college basketball player at Tulane. Strange spent the first 20 years of his career as a corporate lobbyist in Washington. Seeing the power and deference given to a U.S. senator made an impression. He came home to run for a secondary constitutional office and get ready to run for a Senate seat vacated by either of his friends, Richard Shelby or Jeff Sessions. He chose the right stepping stone job, attorney general.

Strange is basically a shy and reserved fellow. He is not a natural politician. He was on the right course when he initially said that he would not seek nor accept Bentley’s appointment and that he was running for the post independent of the discredited governor’s appointment.

He changed his mind and met with Bentley and took the appointment.

His trusted advisors convinced him that folks have short memories and that over the next year as a sitting U.S. senator he can raise so much Washington campaign cash that he can outspend his opposition to such an extent that it will wash away the taint of the Bentley appointment. He may be right. That may be a good bet.

However, folks may be smarter and more cognizant of bold, brazen backroom deals than some think. Just ask Bill Baxley how that worked out in 1986 when some Democratic Party leaders got behind closed doors and selected Baxley to be the Democratic nominee over Charlie Graddick, who got the most votes. The people were so incensed they elected an unknown Republican named Guy Hunt as governor.

However, there is the pragmatic side of the equation. During that 1986 debacle, Baxley, who was lieutenant governor, had become close with the King of Alabama politics, Gov. George Wallace. Wallacce was in his last term as governor and Baxley had sensed a backlash might occur with such an audacious brazen move by his Democratic Party buddies, so he went to Wallace for his advice. Wallace took a puff on his cigar and looked at Baxley wryly and said, “Bill you know what they call a governor who gets to be governor by a back-room deal?” Baxley asked “What?” Wallace said, “They call him Governor.”

See you next week.

Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature. Readers can contact him at www.stev(flowers.us)
Cliff Sims, the Yellowhammer News CEO-turned-White House staffer, entered into an agreement to sell the conservative news site to a Birmingham analytics and marketing company for $250,000, according to his financial disclosure released over the weekend. The disclosure also showed that Sims earned about $14,000 in salary for positions he held with the Donald Trump campaign and transition team. As the head of Yellowhammer Multimedia—the entity that operates Yellowhammer News—Sims gave himself $65,000 in salary and bonuses last year. Sims also earned $265,000 in salary as a principal of Yellowhammer Strategies, a media consulting firm. He wrote that the company “submitted documents to dissolve this entity.”

Sims signed off on the disclosure on Jan. 15, five days before he was tapped as the White House’s director of message strategy. It’s unclear whether the sale of Yellowhammer Multimedia to Birmingham-based StrategyWise for $250,000 has been finalized. Joshua Jones, StrategyWise’s managing partner, could not immediately be reached for comment. — Howard Kaplowitz
Ethics commission finds probable cause that Bentley broke state law, ethics scandal that has engulfed him for more than a year.

The Alabama Ethics Commission, after an all-day meeting, voted to refer the matter to the district attorney's office for possible prosecution. The commission found probable cause that Bentley misused state resources and campaign funds, improperly accepted a campaign donation and loaned himself campaign money when he was not a candidate.

The decision was a legal blow to the two-term Republican who has been dogged by accusations and questions after recordings surfaced in 2016 of him making suggestive remarks to a female aide before his divorce.

State Auditor Jim Zeigler, a frequent Bentley critic who has also sued the governor multiple times, filed an ethics complaint against Bentley accusing him of using state resources to pursue a relationship with Rebekah Caldwell Mason, who resigned shortly after the recordings became public. Bentley has acknowledged making personal mistakes but maintained he did nothing wrong.

Bentley attorney Bill Athanas said Wednesday that the governor maintains his innocence.

"We disagree strongly with the result but I think it is important to keep in mind that it is a finding of probable cause, not finding of a violation. ... The battle goes on," Athanas said.

Bentley was photographed by the Montgomery Advertiser leaving the Ethics Commission building through a back entrance while more than a dozen reporters waited in the lobby, and police would not allow reporters to stand in the stairwell or near the building loading dock.

In a possible nod to the subject matter before them Wednesday, one commissioner, during a public portion of the meeting, suggested that sex should be included as a "thing of value" under state ethics law, including it in the list of items that politicians are forbidden from swapping for political favors.

Commissioner Stewart Hill Tankersley said he thought it was common sense to include it. His motion failed without a second from the four other commissioners.

The scandal has tarnished the reputation of the governor, a mild-mannered dermatologist and former Baptist deacon who attracted voters to his longshot Republican primary campaign in 2010 with his nice-guy image and promises not to accept a gubernatorial salary.

The outcome could give also political ammunition to lawmakers who want to impeach him.

The special counsel for the House Judiciary Committee, which is conducting the impeachment investigation, tentatively plans to release his report Friday.
TUSCALOOSA CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCE

Documenting a movement's history

Tina Jones, left, interviews Emma Baxter on March 25 at the Tuscaloosa Career and Technology Academy about life in Tuscaloosa during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Jones is a member of the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force, which is collecting testimony and items from the period to create a civil rights trail in the city one day. [DREW TAYLOR/STAFF PHOTO]

Group seeks people's memories of turbulent era

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Emma Baxter believes that the younger generation has it too good.

Baxter, a longtime Tuscaloosa resident, was part of the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa in the 1960s at a time when most of the focus was on what was happening in Montgomery, Selma and other places across the country.

"You have to work for what you get. If you want something, you have to go get it," said Baxter, who was a student at Stillman College when students decided to protest discriminatory practices against blacks on the city bus. Because of what she values, Baxter decided to participate in a project conducted by the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force to document the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa. On March 25, the group held two different collection sessions where they filmed the oral histories of people who lived in Tuscaloosa in the 1950s and 1960s.

Tina Jones, president of the task force, said it is important to document that point in U.S. history.

"For some time, the importance of the movement has been somewhat overlooked," Jones said.

The nonprofit task force was formed in 2016 with a mission to establish Tuscaloosa as an important tourist destination for civil rights history. In addition to collecting the

On the web

For more information about the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force, visit civilrightstuscaloosa.org or "Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Trail," the group's Facebook page.

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stories of Tuscaloosa’s civil rights movement, the task force aims to establish a civil rights trail of notable historical sites in the area. The task force seeks to include Tuscaloosa in state- and area-wide tours of civil rights events. Another of the task force’s objectives is to create a Tuscaloosa civil rights museum.

A draft of Tuscaloosa’s civil rights trail on the task force’s website currently includes 14 sites, including two of the city’s best-known civil rights moments:

- The “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door” took place on June 11, 1963. Then-Gov. George Wallace stood at the entrance of Foster Auditorium in an attempt to block black students Vivian Malone and James Hood from registering for classes at the University of Alabama. Federal officials threatened to remove Wallace, but the governor stepped aside peacefully, clearing the way for desegregation in Alabama.

- “Bloody Tuesday” took place on June 9, 1964. A peaceful march from the First African Baptist Church to the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse turned violent after law enforcement beat dozens of men, women and children, sending 33 to the hospital and arresting another 94. Marchers were seeking to abolish the whites-only drinking fountains at the county courthouse.

Jones said it is important to catalog the memories of people who lived through those events as well as the lesser-known events in Tuscaloosa’s civil right movement. The group is working to conduct more interview sessions with people who lived through the civil rights movement. The task force is also seeking to collect artifacts from the time period.

“The Alabama civil rights story is an amazing story and it brings people from all over the world,” she said. “We need to have as much as possible to tell the story.”

Betty Duncan Wells was another woman interviewed for the project March 25 at the Tuscaloosa Career and Technology Academy, where she discussed her time taking part in marches and attending weekly meetings.

“We were always at the high school every Monday night,” Wells said. “We would just look at what the needs of the community were at the time.”

Wells, who grew up on Herman Avenue, said Tuscaloosa in the 1960s was very different than it is now.

“There were many places where we weren’t allowed to eat or work,” she said. “All we wanted was jobs and equality.”

Jones said the project will be ongoing and that the ultimate goal is to unveil a civil rights trail in Tuscaloosa.

“I think we’re going to uncover some amazing things that people don’t know about, so it’s going to be a lot of fun,” she said.

For more information, visit civilrightstuscaloosa.org or “Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Trail,” the group’s Facebook page.
OUR VIEW

Guns at games is a harebrained idea

ot everyone who attends a college football game gets drunk, but anyone who has attended a game knows there are more than a few who have overindulged.

Not everyone who attends a college football game has an underdeveloped emotional maturity level that causes them to place too much of his or her self-worth upon the decisions others might make in a high-pressure situation. But anyone who has attended a football game knows there are many of those folks in the stands, and they’re often unhinged.

If you’re an Alabama fan and happened to witness the initial moments after the “Kick Six” in 2015 at Jordan-Hare Stadium or the “Camback” in 2010 at Bryant-Denny Stadium, you know there were several around you with more than a little frustration.

Regardless of where you stand on the right to bear arms, all it takes is a little common sense to determine that it would be a very bad idea to add guns to this mix.

But that debate is happening. And it is ridiculous. Some, such as state Rep. Mack Butler, R-Rainbow City, want to do away with so-called “gun free zones” such as college campuses. The argument is that mass shootings are more likely when someone with bad intentions knows he is likely to be the only one armed. Butler thinks everyone would be safer if law-abiding citizens could carry concealed weapons.

There are many who agree with Butler. But that is an argument for another day. We’re specifically talking about college sporting events. And anyone who has attended a college football game also knows there is no absence of police presence at these events.

Should a mass shooter manage to get a firearm into a stadium, the last thing we would want would be dozens of nearby fans pulling their own weapons and trying to take down the bad guy in a crowd. Collateral damage would likely be the result. In that event, it could also be difficult for those who are trained law enforcement officials to determine who the bad guy actually is. Butler’s line of reasoning breaks down quickly, in that scenario.

Arkansas lawmakers passed a bill last month allowing guns in many public places, including collegiate athletic events. The new law in Arkansas allows concealed carry permit holders who undergo up to eight hours of extra training to take their guns onto public college campuses.

The University of Alabama released a statement Thursday reiterating its opposition to weapons being allowed inside athletic venues and on campus.

“At the University of Alabama, we take seriously the safety and well-being of our student-athletes, coaches, officials and fans. We believe allowing weapons inside athletic venues would increase safety concerns,” UA officials said in the statement.

Of course, what the UA officials had to say was not surprising. What was surprising was that they had to say it at all.
Report details governor's affair with Mason

By: Leada Gore

New details of the relationship between Gov. Robert Bentley and his former adviser Rebekah Caldwell Mason emerged Friday in a report that at times reads more like a cheap romance novel than a legal report.

The report was compiled by Jack Sharman, attorney for the House committee investigating Bentley's actions before possible impeachment hearings. At issue is the misuse of state resources to further Bentley's relationship with Mason, as well as possible violations related to campaign finance laws.

Sharman’s report is more than 3,000 pages, including exhibits, with charges laid out in 130 pages. Some of the revelations related to Bentley and Mason’s relationship include:

Text messages between Gov. Robert Bentley and Rebekah Caldwell Mason included in the House judiciary report. (Contributed photo/House Judiciary Committee)

Text messages between Gov. Robert Bentley and Rebekah Caldwell Mason included in the House judiciary report. (Contributed photo/House Judiciary Committee)

In 2013, with Mason’s family still living in Tuscaloosa, she began spending her nights in the Governor’s Mansion pool house, which is sometimes use to house guests. Dianne Bentley became concerned when she noticed Mason was frequently texting her husband. Later, Mrs. Bentley’s chief of staff, Heather Hannah, reported that Mason and Bentley both jumped when she walked in the room, an experience later reported to Mrs. Bentley.

Dianne Bentley reported the governor was at home in Tuscaloosa recovering from hernia surgery when she returned from a trip to the grocery store to find Mason sitting on the couch with Bentley and the pair "reacted awkwardly" when she arrived.

Heather Hannah later reported she had seen makeup on the governor’s shirt. Mrs. Bentley began noting in her journal that her husband was not as affectionate and no longer told her he loved her.

Dianne Bentley routinely posted prayer requests for her husband on sticky notes in her Bible.

Rebakah Mason allegedly directed seating arrangements at the 2014 State of the State address. Mrs. Bentley became angry that one of her children was not seated near the family and confronted the governor with allegations about an affair, which he denied.

While on a trip to Washington D.C. in 2014, Dianne Bentley saw text messages during a dinner in which the governor said he couldn’t take his eyes off Mason. Later that evening, Mason told people in a Washington, D.C. bar that Gov. Bentley had opened the hotel room door to hotel staff while wearing only boxer shorts, expecting Mason to be on the other side.
Mrs. Bentley reported finding towels in the dryer of the couple's Gulf Shores beach house which was unoccupied. The governor also mistakenly sent Mrs. Bentley a text message that said "I love you Rebekah."

Dianne Bentley also commented that her husband no longer held her hand when they were walking together. The governor reportedly told his security guard Ray Lewis holding his wife's hand "made him look weak."

Gov. Bentley scheduler Linda Adams reported Mrs. Bentley took a photo of the "love bench," as Capitol employees dubbed the spot where the governor and Mason would meet. Dianne Bentley reportedly told Adams that she was "praying that God would prick (the governor's) heart to change his mind to get him back to his senses."

Rebekah Mason provided a statement to the governor following Dianne Bentley filing for divorce in which she wanted the First Lady to dismiss the "erroneous and unsubstantiated media reports" of the Bentley/Mason relationship.

The statement drafted by Mason said:

The erroneous and unsubstantiated media reports of the last few weeks have been very hurtful to our family and to [the Caldwell and Mason Families] [others families] as well. We ask for your continued prayers in the days and weeks to come. It has been an honor to serve this great state as your First Lady.

Mrs. Bentley did not deliver the statement.

The governor referred to Mason as "baby" in meetings.

By mid-2014, Gov. Bentley restricted access to his calendar to conceal hours he and Mason spent in his office. Security personnel reported seeing Mason leaving the office with her hair tousled and her clothing in disarray. Mason used a back elevator known as the Wallace Elevator to access the governor's office.

The governor directed security personnel to address "gossiping" by women in the office, especially Executive Assistant Wanda Kelly who questioned why Bentley was locking the door when Mason arrived. Kelly's desk was later moved away from the governor's office.

In addition to previously reported phone conversations between Bentley and Mason, another recording exists in which they discuss spending more time together.

Among the exhibits are multiple text messages between the governor and Mason, including repeated professions of love. "You handsome, wonderful, amazing, delicious, funny, sweet man," Mason texted the governor. "You are wonderful my sweet love," Bentley replied. "I love you." In another exchange, Bentley tells Mason "you are the only one."
In a later text exchange, the governor asks Mason "do you know how much I love you? More than anything or anyone." In another exchange the two talk about their desire to run away together.

Gov. Bentley once sent his security officer Ray Lewis to break up with Mason. The governor then walked in the room, put his hand on Mason's shoulder and told her it would "be alright."
LURLEEN WALLACE BOULEVARD

Work aims to enhance safety, traffic flow

Traffic moves north on Lurleen Wallace Boulevard at rush hour Thursday. The Alabama Department of Transportation said more than 79,000 vehicles per day use the boulevard, an increase of 9,000 since 2013. (STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.)

Road project could begin this fall

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

When news broke last week of $23.2 million in construction for Lurleen Wallace Boulevard, opinions on social media ranged from the excited to the exhausted.

“This is a long time coming,” said one reader on The Tuscaloosa News’ Facebook page.

“Downtown is more vibrant and full of activity each year.”

Imagine that. More reduction of downtown parking,” wrote another. “We are

INSIDE

Detailed look at the Lurleen Wallace Boulevard renovations Page A5

fixing to be consumed with construction.”

There was one who said she was happy to be getting out of Tuscaloosa because of road projects like this. Yet another lamented the looming construction that is expected to begin sometime during football season.

But officials said the goal of the project is not meant to frustrate, but rather improve vehicular and pedestrian safety while boosting the aesthetics and the appeal of one of the primary gateways into downtown Tuscaloosa.

The project is a joint effort by the city of Tuscaloosa City and the Alabama Department of Transportation.

Elected leaders approved the city’s involvement — and $5.7 million commitment — on Tuesday. City funds will go toward decorative streetlights

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and traffic signals as well as utility relocations and upgrades.

ALDOT, meanwhile, is contributing $17.5 million. This will fund the actual construction of the new roadway surface as well as the installation of the new lights and traffic signals funded by City Hall.

"Our investment, I believe, needs to be made in this project or else two years from now or five years from now, we'll realize we missed an opportunity when it comes to transforming west Tuscaloosa and enhancing pedestrian access into our central city," said Mayor Walt Maddox.

Both the city and ALDOT will contribute funding toward sidewalk improvements, landscaping and walking path extensions intended to keep pedestrians away from one of West Alabama's busiest roads when walking to downtown entertainment areas.

ALDOT said more than 70,000 vehicles per day use Lurleen Wallace Boulevard, an increase of 9,000 since 2013.

"The overall purpose is to increase the effective capacity of Lurleen Wallace while providing a safer experience for motorists and pedestrians," said John D. McWilliams, public information officer for ALDOT's West Central Region, which includes Tuscaloosa. "The traffic growth and desire to increase safety, paired with the city's partnership, spurred the improvement project."

Specifically, ALDOT plans to use concrete because of its durability, the shallow depths of utilities and storm drainage. McWilliams said the rigidity of concrete can be placed at a thinner section to stay above the utilities and "we expect a long service life from concrete."

The renovation, which could start as early as the fall and take about two years to complete, will remove 139 parking spots and traffic signals as well as utility relocations and upgrades.

A planned $23.2 million improvement project will make changes to Lurleen Wallace Boulevard in Tuscaloosa. A primary concern is the crossing of Lurleen Wallace and University boulevards near the downtown Embassy Suites hotel. From certain directions, there is never a time when vehicles are not coming.

A secondary benefit to all this work is expected to be a boost for area businesses.

Mike Page, president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, said infrastructure enhancements tend to lead to a boost in commerce.

For areas along Lurleen Wallace Boulevard, he predicts these improvements could lead to further redevelopment in some areas while the safety enhancements could serve as a boost for existing businesses nearby.

"With making it more pedestrian friendly, that lends itself to commerce and economic development, making people more comfortable to get out and shop and visit," Page said. "I think, for that area, it's going to be a great jump start."

"By installing bump outs, it helps with the flow of traffic," McWilliams said.

Maddox said last week that three pedestrians recently had been struck by vehicles along Lurleen Wallace Boulevard and one of them had died.

That's why Tera Tubbs, executive director of the city's Department of Infrastructure and Public Services, said a main goal of the city's involvement is to boost pedestrian safety along this corridor.

A primary concern is the crossing of Lurleen Wallace and University boulevards near the downtown Embassy Suites hotel. From certain directions, there is never a time when vehicles are not coming.

To counter this, the project will install dense landscaping to push pedestrians to safer areas, such as the southern side of University Boulevard, in order to access the downtown's thriving bar and restaurant scene.

But the city also is installing a walking path north of Embassy Suites and under the Hugh Thomas Bridge to provide an even safer path to Temerson Square and areas east of Lurleen Wallace Boulevard.

"We want to use landscaping to really define where the pedestrian crossings are," Tubbs said, adding that the walking path behind the hotel will be "the best option" to reach the city's entertainment areas.

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Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@ tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Alabama couple has designs on sunglasses industry with Maho Shades

By: William Thornton

If you're going to Maho Bay, you expect to need sunglasses.

A place of blue skies, pristine beaches and coconut palm trees, this part of St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands is a favorite destination of families and travelers, just as it was a few years ago to Alabama residents Kris and Alex Anderson.

Out for a day of paddleboarding, they both managed to lose their sunglasses and ended up lamenting the exorbitant price of paying $250 or more to keep the sun out of their eyes.

"So we spent $65,000 to start our own sunglasses company," Kris said.

The couple founded Maho Shades in 2015, and are looking to bring its production to Alabama sometime in the near future. The challenge they set for themselves that afternoon on the island was to design stylish sunglasses that would provide clear, crisp vision at affordable prices. Maho Shades come in styles designed by the Andersons, with prices ranging from $95 to $125. They hope, when they bring the manufacturing to Alabama, that this will drive the cost down further. Each frame style conjures up travel with names like Capetown, Charleston, Buenos Aires, Key West and Mandalay.

It all sounded like a good idea, amid the exuberance of the Caribbean, but Kris is a corporate attorney, while Alex's background is in interior design. Neither of them had ever worked in eyewear. Kris called that a "blessing."

"What you see in this industry is bad habits," he said. "You have 25 people working on the design of a particular style, and sunglasses are not very complicated. You've got the hinges and the frames that have been made the same way for the last 80 years. Most of the elements are off-patent and can be utilized by anybody with the right suppliers."

Kris, 31, and Alex, 29, met at the University of Alabama while in school. Kris is an Arizona native while Alex grew up in Arab. When they met, Kris had already visited about 30 countries. Alex had never left the United States. Since their marriage, Alex said, they averaged about five trips a year to distant parts of the globe until their son Whit was born last year.

Those excursions inform the way Alex designs the frames. For example, "Stockholm" incorporates elements she saw around the Swedish capital. When the couple visited last March, they snapped pictures while Alex devoured information on the area architecture. But a pair of sunglasses isn't a building or a room - design elements are smaller, more focused and concentrated, she said. The differences between frames involve fractions of inches.

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"We came across a bridge, and everything was beautiful and clean, fresh and clear," she remembered. "We took some of the ovals and shapes we saw, and there was a striking clock tower that gathered my attention. For the style, we made rounded features, with a gray color for the lenses and inside the clear frames, a small silver bar.

"I don't like doing the same thing again and again."

Kris said the global sunglasses market strains between two extremes - stylish frames that don't do much to eliminate glare, and frames with good optical qualities and no style. What's more, most of the business lies in the hands of only a few companies. That keeps prices high and innovation from flourishing, he said.

"Twenty years from now in higher income places, Lasik surgery and other factors are going to make glasses less and less relevant," he said. "Sunglasses are never going away. And it's going to be extremely important to people around the world to protect their eyes, not just when they go to the beach but year round."

Currently, Maho Shades are produced in China, but Kris said the company is looking to locate its manufacturing in Alabama. Maho is one of the finalists in the Alabama Launchpad competition, with the potential to win a share of the $250,000 prize. Alabama Launchpad is a program of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, which funds and mentors aspiring entrepreneurs.

That money, if won, would go toward buying equipment. But regardless, the move is coming, as the Andersons line up a site and workforce training.

Maho is also looking at custom frames for people with rounder, thinner or smaller facial structures than the greater market. The process involves a 3-D scan of the customer's face to determine the exact dimensions, and then giving the customer about 10 options to choose from for a customized frame.

"I'm really excited about it," he said. "We're talking about up to 25 percent of the population who hardly have any choices."
Final terms of the sale, including its price, were not disclosed.

"NorthRiver is a tremendous multi-amenity facility that will allow us to develop and train students from the University of Alabama's hospitality program in a variety of disciplines," said Dana Garmany, the chairman and CEO of Troon and a graduate of UA's Alabama's restaurant, hotel and meetings management program, in a news release announcing the sale. "Members and guests of NorthRiver will continue to experience the same incredible service, playing conditions and amenities that they have all along."

The sale of NorthRiver Yacht Club is in line with the Westervelt Co.'s decision in 2011 to rid itself of paintings and other works of art amassed by Jack Warner, the former chairman and CEO of Gulf States Paper, now known as the Westervelt Co., during his tenure.
Company representatives at the time said the company was more interested in being "stewards of the land" instead of an art and entertainment provider.

The Westervelt Co. initially extended the sale of NorthRiver Yacht Club to its members, but the members turned that offer down.

Troon, a golf course management, development and marketing company, led the partnership to acquire NorthRiver Yacht Club, the private club located on the banks of Lake Tuscaloosa.

Honours Golf, a division of Troon, has managed NorthRiver since 2012.

"The hospitality management program at the University of Alabama welcomes the opportunity to partner with Troon, Dana Garmany and NorthRiver Yacht Club," said Milla Boschung, dean of UA's College of Human Environmental Sciences. "Being nationally recognized, the hospitality program will work closely with Troon and NorthRiver to place students for internships in club management operations and provide professional support to continue to make NorthRiver a premiere golf destination and launching pad for many future golf and hospitality careers."

NorthRiver Yacht Club began operations in the 1970s under the management of Gulf States Paper Co. It celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2013.

The Yacht Club's 18-hole, par 71 golf course was originally designed by Gary Player in 1978 and re-designed by Bob Cupp in 1999, and in 2015, Cupp oversaw the complete redesign and renovation of NorthRiver.

The club maintains a practice facility, two practice
greens, a “wee links” mini-course and a short game area and teaching center.

“We continue to see tremendous global growth in the club and hospitality industry,” said Bob Barrett, chief executive officer of Honours Golf. “With its location just down the road from the University of Alabama, NorthRiver presents an excellent training ground to grow well-qualified individuals to work at facilities around the world.”

The NorthRiver Tennis Center features 11 tennis courts, including four hydro clay, four traditional har-tru, two hard and one red clay court for a variety of play, and the club's tennis program offers training to members of all levels of interest and skill. In addition to the golf and tennis facilities, NorthRiver Yacht Club also features an on-site fitness center and massage therapist, an indoor/outdoor heated pool and a 50-meter Olympic-sized pool as well as a fully-stocked golf shop and men's and women's locker rooms.

There also is a 76-slip marina on Lake Tuscaloosa, lakeside dining and a special event area at “The Captain's Cabin, while NorthRiver's main clubhouse offers its members a choice of fine dining overlooking the 18th hole of the golf course or a more casual dining experience in The Grille at NorthRiver, and the two-story Yacht Club building is a sought after wedding venue.

—Reach Jason Morton
TAPPING ON THE MOUND

UA honors top students, faculty
Annual ceremony recognizes excellence

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Hundreds of students and their families gathered Friday afternoon on the University of Alabama Quad for the joint induction ceremony of the school’s most prestigious honor societies.

During the annual Tapping on the Mound, representatives from the Anderson Society, the Mortar Board, the Blue Key Honor Society and the Iota Circle of Omicron Delta Kappa recognized UA’s top students for their academic excellence, extracurricular activities and more.

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More than 100 students were honored, including outgoing SGA President Lillian Roth, who was one of only five students inducted into each of the four organizations present.

Eight students were given Premier Awards, which are considered UA’s highest honor.

Mackenzie Ross was named Outstanding Senior, and her sister Morgan was named Outstanding Sophomore. Lavinia Bao Nhu Doan was Outstanding Junior, and Jackson Bryant and Lauren Cook were named Outstanding Freshman. Ibukun Afon was named Outstanding Transfer Student, and Candace Chambers and Billy Clark were named Outstanding Graduate Students.

Accolades were also given to outstanding UA faculty, staff and alumni.

Former athletic director Bill Battle was named an honorary member of the Mortar Board, a national honor society. Former gymnastics coach Sarah Patterson was given ODK’s Living Legend Award. Robert Witt, the former chancellor of the UA System, was given ODK’s Francis S. Summersell Award as well as the Capstone Men and Women’s Amanda Grace Taylor Watson Distinctive Image Award.

“To see the number of scholars and students with a servant’s heart being honored today, that was what I wanted my career to focus on — helping students be successful. To hear their accomplishments just signifies what this University is truly all about,” Patterson said. “And I couldn’t be more honored to receive awards with Dr. Witt and Bill Battle, people I’ve respected and worked for during my career.”

A full list of recipients of these and other honors is available at www.ua.edu/news.

—Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
RISE CENTER

Golf tournament raises funds for education program

Staff report

The Rise Tournament of Champions benefiting the University of Alabama's Rise Center will be held April 20-21 at NorthRiver Yacht Club, 3100 Yacht Club Way NE.

The tournament is a four-person scramble, handicaps required, with tee times at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. on both days and shotgun starts.

"Our Rise Center is the only Rise program that doesn’t charge tuition for children with special needs," said Andi Gillen, Rise director. "This is the biggest fundraiser for the center. The money raised ensures that our children can attend at no cost."

Gillen said their goal is $225,000.

The Rise Center, a part of the University of Alabama's College of Human Environmental Sciences, serves children with disabilities and their typically developing peers, from ages 8 weeks to 5 years. The children are divided by age among six classes, each with 16 students, one teacher and three assistants.

The integrated preschool program not only benefits families in the community, it serves as a practicum and internship site for students from UA and other colleges. The program is not an inexpensive one — it costs about $18,000 per child each year — and while it does receive funding from the university, an endowment and contracts with local school systems, fundraisers like the golf tournament are crucial to the school's success.

Registration for the golf tournament starts at $2,500 for a four-person team. Morning and afternoon prizes will be awarded to the top four teams with the best gross and net scores. Golfers will also receive a gift upon check-in. Lunch will be provided by Moe's Original BBQ.

UA's Nick Saban, Clemson football coach Dabo Swinney and other "champions" are scheduled to be in attendance.

No teams will be allowed to play with fewer than four members. For more information, or to register, contact RISE at 205-348-7931. Registration deadline is April 11.

In addition to the tournament, golfers and guests are invited to Chip-in for Rise from 6 to 8:30 p.m. April 20, at the Yacht Club at NorthRiver.

The event, which is open to the public, includes a silent auction and light refreshments. Former UA football coach Gene Stallings will be the special guest.

The silent auction includes, among other items, two international golf experiences — one in Italy and one in London. There are also helmets signed by Saban and Stallings and other Alabama memorabilia.

Tickets are $30 for individuals and $50 for couples. Those registered for the golf tournament receive one ticket to the event.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Interview set for vice president of research

Carl Pinkert is a candidate for Southern Illinois job

The University of Alabama's vice president for research and economic development has emerged as a candidate for chancellor of Southern Illinois University's Carbondale campus.

Carl A. Pinkert has interviews scheduled for April 26-28, according to the Southern Illinoisan in Carbondale. Pinkert was named vice president for research and economic development at the University of Alabama on Nov. 1, 2013. He came to UA from Auburn University where he had served as associate vice president for research since 2009. Pinkert's career also includes stints at the University of Rochester, the University of Missouri and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Pinkert earned his master's degree at Southern Illinois University. He earned his bachelor's degree at Colorado State University and his doctorate at the University of Georgia. He completed postdoctoral studies on a National Institute of Health fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania.

The other candidates for SIU chancellor are University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Arts and Sciences dean J.S. Elwell, Oakland University President George Hynd and current SIU interim chancellor William Colwell.

The Southern Illinoisan reports that each candidate will participate in a public forum for students, faculty, staff and community members. The interviews will also include meetings with student government representatives, multiple faculty and staff groups, campus leaders and SIU President Randy Dunn.

The finalists were identified following a national search that attracted 31 applicants and nominees. Dunn says the four bring "significant academic and administrative experience to the table."
Team touts creation’s social impact

Vaccine cooler wins business plan competition

Three University of Alabama students who won the top prize at business plan competition say their creation could change how life-saving medicines are stored and transported.

Business majors Andrew Johnson and Grant Becker and chemical engineering major Kyle Pecot are the founders of KuLVAX, a start-up company that has created a more efficient cooling process for the transportation of life-saving vaccines, particularly in developing countries that have unreliable access to ice and electricity.

KuLVAX won the $50,000 grand prize at the Edward K. Aldag, Jr. Business Plan Competition held March 30 at UA. Business leaders from throughout Alabama judged the 40 teams that entered the competition.

Pecot said that although KuLVAX’s viability is not yet to the level of other companies in the competition, the potential social impact likely led to them winning the grand prize.

“We’re talking about 30 million kids that don’t have access to basic vaccines,” Pecot said. Johnson said desired temperatures for vaccines typically range between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius.

Lack of infrastructure in developing countries can lead to a struggle to store vaccines at these temperatures, which can lead to spoilages and undermine aid efforts.

“KuLVAX is essentially a cooler, and in its lid is a water storage tank, from which water runs into a cylinder and through a valve that meters the flow-rate of the water, which is calculated through a simulation of the heat loss through the cooler’s walls,” Pecot said. “When the water gets into the cylinder it mixes with a chemical compound, which, when mixed with water, keeps the cooler at a stable temperature.”

The students will now pursue patents and work on creating a prototype. In addition to the $50,000, KuLVAX will receive mentorship from UA faculty and business professionals affiliated with The Edge. KuLVAX will also receive space at The Edge, an entrepreneurial hub located on 22nd Avenue in Tuscaloosa. KuLVAX will also receive mentorship from UA faculty and business professionals affiliated with The Edge, NeuroPress, which plans to license NASA technology to measure intracranial pressure to better detect and treat concussions, earned the first prize of $5,000.

Team members are mechanical engineering majors Matthew Mims, Lizzy West and aerospace engineering major Jake Zalesky.

Food Drop, a web-based grocery delivery system, took second prize and won $3,000. Team members are Ethan Mergen, a finance and hospitality management major, Ryan Keelin, a finance major, Trey Byers, a finance major, and Lake Jackson, an accounting major.

Gift.me, a web site that allows customers of existing retail sites to build and store shopping profiles for multiple people, took third prize and won $2,000. Its team members are Brandon Locke, a master of business administration student, Derek Legenzoff, a management information systems major and Anna Claire Smith, a management information systems major.

The Alabama Entrepreneurship Institute sponsored and hosted the event, held at the Bryant Conference Center. AEI provides learning opportunities and mentorship to young entrepreneurs and is located at The Edge.
Douglas Walker Named Senior Associate AD at Texas A&M

By: Staff

“Doug is well-respected across the country for his organizational, management and communication skills,” Woodward said. “He will be a great addition to our leadership team. We welcome Doug and his family back home.”

Walker, a 1989 Texas A&M graduate with a degree in journalism, comes to Aggieland after almost 11 years at The University of Alabama, where he is currently the Senior Associate Athletics Director for Communications. The Athletics Department’s chief strategic communicator at Alabama, Walker’s role influences messaging, crisis management, brand management and communications. During his career, Walker has earned a strong reputation as a collaborative leader while effectively managing external and communications efforts involving football programs at the University of Miami, the University of Notre Dame and Alabama.

“I am honored and humbled to continue my professional journey at a place that has such special meaning to myself and my family,” Walker said. “I have been very fortunate to work at some outstanding institutions with great people who have been so impactful in my life and professional development. I appreciate the opportunity Scott Woodward and the Aggie athletics staff is entrusting to me and am keenly aware of the responsibility and honor in representing Texas A&M.”

During a career that includes tenures at A&M, Florida, TCU, Miami, Notre Dame and Alabama, Walker has worked with five football national championship teams, including seven national championship football game appearances. Those programs have produced numerous national award winners and multiple first-team Academic All-Americans. Walker’s tenure at Alabama coincided with one of the most successful overall athletics periods in Crimson Tide history as the program won team national titles in five different sports.

Walker began his work in Tuscaloosa in 2006 as an associate athletics director for communications and was promoted to senior associate athletics director in 2015. Prior to his time at Alabama, Walker served as Notre Dame's football information director from 2004-06, serving as the primary media strategist and contact for the Fighting Irish football team. Walker worked at Miami from 2000-04, first as the football information director from 2000-02, then as the Hurricanes' sports information director from 2002-04. From 1998-2000, Walker served on the athletics media relations staff at TCU.

Walker’s career path began as a student assistant and a graduate assistant in the sports information office at Texas A&M before serving an internship in the University of Florida sports information staff. He also worked in the Southwest Conference media relations office for three years. Walker also has international athletics experience through stints as a volunteer with USA Track & Field and the U.S. Olympic Committee.
In addition to his bachelor's degree from Texas A&M, Walker holds a master's degree from Alabama. Originally from Texas City, Walker and his wife, Pilar, are the parents of three children — Cecilia, Benjamin and Dominic
Sam Hunt talks about his love affair with Alabama, from Montevallo fiancee to UAB football

By: Mary Colurso

Sam Hunt might not be the King of Country Music, but he's definitely one of the Nashville's country-pop princes.

With six hit singles to his credit -- he's the antithesis of a hat act, so we won't say "under his belt buckle" -- plus two headlining tours and seven music industry awards, Hunt's future appears to beckon brightly.

Shunning traditional twang in favor of a hybrid sound that takes inspiration from earworm pop, melodic hip-hop and a touch of slow-jam R&B, Hunt caught the public's ear with his 2014 album, "Montevallo."

He kept it, too, via a slew of radio-friendly releases that range from a lovelorn ballads ("Take Your Time," "Make You Miss Me," "Breakup in a Small Town") to a lightweight romp ("House Party").

Some critics have been skeptical about Hunt's style -- debating, for example, if the artist is serving up rap interludes or talking bridges on "Drinkin' Too Much" -- but a growing fan base has embraced his music enthusiastically.

Now, as he moves into his third year as a celebrity, it's an appropriate time to ask: Has success changed Sam Hunt?

The answer, as you might expect, is yes and no. And that's what Hunt says during an interview this week.

Hunt, a native of Cedartown, Ga., confirms that his life has changed radically, as he's transformed from a struggling songwriter to a rising star. But at heart, Hunt says, he's still the same guy who studied philosophy at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and played quarterback for the UAB Blazers, about 10 years ago.

"New experiences give you new perspectives on life," says Hunt, 32. "But if you're asking, 'Has fame and money soured who I am?' the answer is no. People kind of look for you to put your nose up, but I want to make sure the people who knew me then would know me now.

"I was a little older when things started happening for me (in the music business), and my identity as a man was a little more galvanized," Hunt continues. "I was more sure of who I am as a person. Prior to getting into music, I interacted with, on a daily basis, about 5-10 percent of the people that I've interacted with since then. I've been meeting people from different backgrounds and different cultures. That did allow for a lot of change. I've changed as a product of that, but it's been positive."
During a 20-minute phone conversation, Hunt maintains a vibe that's friendly and upbeat, straightforward and humble. His 2017 tour has yet to start, but it'll bring Hunt back to Alabama on June 3, for a headlining set at the Rock the South festival in Cullman.

First, though, Hunt is likely to return here for his wedding to Hannah Lee Fowler, an Alabama native who made heads turn at this year's Academy of Country Music Awards. Fowler, a Montevallo homegirl who usually shuns the spotlight, accompanied her fiance to the April 2 ceremony in Las Vegas, wearing a glamorous black dress.

Although she wasn't photographed with Hunt on the red carpet, Fowler was featured during the broadcast, red-faced and smiling. Hunt, while performing "Body Like a Back Road," left the stage and sang the tune directly to his sweetie -- sitting next to her, putting his arm around her and lavishing her with attention. The cameras followed, giving Fowler her first close-up on national television.

"She was a good sport about it," Hunt says, laughing. "She was reluctant, but I warned her that I might do it. She was OK with it. She had fun. I think she felt a little out of place for the first part of the show, with the interviews and everything, but I think after I pulled her into it a little bit, she felt more comfortable."

Fowler -- whose on-and-off romance with Hunt prompted several of the songs on "Montevallo" -- evidently is learning to make do with less privacy in her life. Hunt mentions her by name in the 2017 song "Drinkin' Too Much," and "Body Like a Back Road," released shortly after the couple announced their engagement, is widely regarded as a tribute to her.

"I think she'll get used to being a part of what I do," Hunt says. "I'm going to sort of introduce her to that in stages. She's accepting of what I do and willing to make changes in her life, just as I'm willing to make changes in mine."

Hunt isn't about to spill the details of their wedding plans, but during an interview with Entertainment Tonight at the ACMs, he did reveal that the ceremony is happening in "a few weeks" and the goal is to keep things "intimate and hometown." (Fowler's sister, Rebekah Fowler Miller, is a key part of the planning team, Hunt said in an interview with Sounds Like Nashville.)

Hunt told ET's Sophie Schillaci that he's already wearing his wedding ring, a black band by Qalo. "I put it on to try it on, and decided it felt too good and I didn't want to take it off," Hunt said.

Will Hunt and Fowler tie the knot in Montevallo or in his hometown near the Georgia-Alabama line? Your guess is as good as ours. For now, all we know for sure is that Hunt has spent plenty of time in Alabama over the past year -- "more than any other state," he says.

Hunt's love for Fowler plays a significant role in his fondness for Alabama, of course, but he also points to his football past and his affinity for the outdoors.
"I grew up really close to Alabama, about 10 minutes from the Alabama line," Hunt says. "We'd make trips to Alabama, and I feel at home there. I spent time there, fishing at Lake Weiss. Folks in Alabama seem like folks in Georgia to me. I feel like you can just about combine the two."

Also, UAB fans will be glad to hear that Hunt -- who started 19 games at quarterback in 2006-2007 -- hasn't forgotten his old college team. In fact, Hunt says he followed the controversy over UAB football, as the team was shut down in December 2014 and reinstated six months later, after an outcry from students, business leaders and the community.

"I was disappointed (the team was killed)," Hunt says. "I'd hoped that my time at UAB wasn't just an investment in my own life, but a program I could be part of as an ex-player, fan and alumni. To see that fizzle out was disappointing and really unfortunate."

Hunt says he wishes he could have done more to help the Blazers as the team faced its demise, but the demands of his music career, in overdrive at that point, prevented him from doing so. Friends recently sent him a video that shows some former UAB players at the April 1 spring game at Legion Field, Hunt says, and he was happy to hear that more than 7,000 people attended the inter-squad scrimmage.

"My heart was with the football program, and I'm proud to see they've gotten the program back," Hunt says. "I hope to become more involved as an ex-player and alumni. Now that my life is more stabilized, I can get more involved and give back."

Although it's been about a decade since Hunt took the field here, he says any mention of the university makes "things come right back to me." Case in point: One of his first public music performances was with the UAB Gospel Choir, at the troupe's 2008 spring concert at the Alys Stephens Center.

Hunt, on lead vocals and guitar, joined the choir for a rendition of "Nothing Goes Unnoticed." This inspirational anthem, composed by Kevin P. Turner, served as a tribute to the victims of the 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech.

"That was one of my favorite experiences, in terms of public performing, to this day," Hunt says. "It was awesome for me, in terms of playing in front of people. There was real meaning to the performance, as well."

Ask Hunt if anything he learned during his football years has served him well in the music business -- or if being a quarterback is anything like being a touring artist -- and his answer comes immediately.

"Writing songs requires a lot of discipline and hard work and practice and persistence," Hunt says. "All of these are important traits for success in football. I think there's a similarity there. Anything in life that tends to be worth doing requires these -- I don't want to say sacrifices -- these qualities. The motivational skills and leadership skills that came from being a
quarterback and leading the offense on a football team, those skills have paid off for me, big time, in music."
Record return

‘Amazing crowd’ turns out for revived Blazers’ spring game

Joseph Goodman  jgoodman@al.com

More than two years after canceling UAB football, the university’s president, Ray Watts, stared out from a suite at Legion Field and watched the rebirth of the team he killed. Dragons, it turns out, are not so easily extinguished. Revived by a city that rallied to save its Blazers, the UAB football team held its spring game Saturday, and a record crowd came out to celebrate the day. Legion Field wasn’t expecting so many fans, and in the end, the parking authorities had to open extra lots to accommodate the traffic and the tailgaters.

“It brings tears to my eyes,” said UAB football coach Bill Clark, the miracle worker who did what no one thought possible, bringing back the team after its shuttering in 2014.

With a new football operations center under construction on campus, something the program never had before it was killed, Southside is abuzz for its Blazers, which opens the 2017 season with a home game against Alabama A&M. The Southside Dragons scrimmaged against themselves, and the green team defeated the white team 49-7 for an announced crowd of 7,822.

“Everybody is so happy it’s coming back and everyone is at the spring game, and it’s not even a real game,” said Jimmynia Jones, a freshman at UAB. “Everyone is so excited for this.”

Jones, who is from Madison, said she might not have attended UAB without the return of football. Now she and her friend, Camryn Samuel, are members of the largest freshman class in UAB history.

"College is supposed to have football, and that’s what I’m looking forward to," said Samuel, who wants to be a nurse. “I feel like it’s part of the college experience, so I’m excited about it. It’s fun to think about.”

A large group of former players attended the game, including some who were in the team’s fieldhouse when Watts, the university president, announced his decision to end the program.

SEE UAB, A6
"It's a bittersweet feeling, because you would like to be out there with them, but at the same time we're just happy to continue this legacy," said Bobby Baker, who was a safety on the 2014 team before it was killed. Baker later transferred to Georgia State to finish his college career.

Munching on a hamburger patty during kickoff, Watts said he was "not surprised," but "glad" by the way citizens of Birmingham, business leaders and UAB alumni have supported the return of football. Watts, who ended football for financial reasons, brought the team back after months of turmoil within the university. Adding to the weirdness of the saga, the University of Alabama Board of Trustees supported Watts' decision to kill the program, and then supported his decision to bring it back.

"It's the kind of support and passion we need to be successful," Watts said of the crowd.

No UA Board of Trustees members attended the spring game, according to a university spokesman. But newly appointed U.S. Senator Luther Strange was at Legion Field with state representative Jack Williams of Vestavia, who was a vocal advocate for UAB football's return.

"You can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel," said Alec Bartow, the grandson of Gene Bartow and third generation Bartow now affiliated with UAB. "Just everyone who has come together within this community, just to realize what UAB is. To see how much this city has come together. We are one UAB, and UAB has been through so much."

In the days leading up to the spring game, Clark and supporters of the team canvassed downtown Birmingham by going door to door with stickers and decals promoting the event. The players were hoping for a large crowd, but the record turnout surprised everyone on the field.

"It was a different feeling on the sidelines than before," said linebacker Shaq Jones, who was on the team in 2014. "We've never had so much support like that from local people."

Outside the stadium before the game, tailgaters toasted the large turnout and the beautiful weather. Large lines for UAB apparel lasted through kickoff. "It's a great day, and it's awesome as a player and an alumni, just to come out here and see all the support that we have, and see the rebuilding of hopefully a good thing to come," said Robert Porter, a former player.

With children running through his tailgating tent, Matt Taylor of Clay-Chalkville soaked in an atmosphere he once thought was gone forever.

"It's an amazing crowd," Taylor said. "This is like a crowd for what would be a normal Saturday game during the fall season. But I think that is what Birmingham is coming back to. Birmingham is enjoying the Blazers being back in town, and everyone rallying around the city. "Birmingham is our city, and we all need to rally around UAB."
Coach Bill Clark, Blazers put emotions aside to wrap up final spring practice before returning to competition in fall

Bill Clark walked off the bus two hours before UAB's spring game Saturday at Legion Field to a Blazer Walk with a crowd bigger than he expected. It was a good thing, he told wife Jennifer, that he had worn sunglasses to cover emotions that may have emerged from his eyes. UAB is five months away from its return to the gridiron after the program was shut down on Dec. 2, 2014 and reinstated six months later.

But then, it was time for action.

UAB's Green team, featuring first and second teamers, defeated the Gold, mostly third and fourth teamers, 49-7 in a score that was expected in front of an announced 7,822 fans.

Clark made the teams that way so his top players would get into a rhythm of rotating into games like they would this fall. Obviously, there is still ongoing competition among spots before the Sept. 2 season opener against Alabama A&M.

Quarterbacks A.J. Erdely and Tyler Johnston each topped 100 yards and threw for touchdowns. Erdely hit 7-of-10 passes for 108 yards and threw a 38-yard touchdown pass to Thair Blakes. Johnston hit 8-of-12 for 161 yards and a 58-yard touchdown pass to Collin Lisa. He also ran for a 7-yard score.

Clark said the play-calling was limited, as to not give much away. He was pleased with the addition of four new offensive linemen. One, Justice Flowers, started at right tackle. New tight ends Blakes, Logan Scott and veteran Steve Pickren, who just moved from offensive tackle, were heavily involved.

"We knew we had to be able to run the football," Clark said. "We've thrown the ball a lot this spring, but we've come out (wondering) can we run the football."

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UAB
FROM BI

UAB is still looking for a go-to back, but the Green team ran for 326 yards on 50 carries. Donnie Lee, who moved from linebacker two weeks ago, ran for 68 yards on nine carries, scoring on runs of 25 and 8 yards. James Noble got the start and ran seven times for 62 yards and a 2-yard score on the first possession.

Kalin Heath ran 13 times for 79 yards and UAB held around 8 to 10 players out, including receivers Jonathan Haden and Andre Wilson and potential starting safety Will Dawkins, due to minor injuries. Clark said the team will add some more players this summer, but the offseason will be key.

"I feel like we're going to have great support in the fall," Clark said. "Our job is to put a good product out there. I believe we will."

It's been since Nov. 2014 when the Blazers last played a competitive football game, but Saturday's spring game felt like any other team's spring game. That's how it should have felt.

Lucious Stanley was limited because of a shoulder injury, but added a 10-yard scoring run late.

Carlos Stephens ran for a 5-yard touchdown for the Gold's only score.

"We really ran the ball well," Erdely said. "The offensive line did a great job to make holes for the running back. The tight ends played really well in the passing game."

Fitz Mofor and Tevin Crews led a balanced defensive effort with four tackles each with the Green. Craig Kanyangarara had seven tackles, two for loss, for the Gold.

"It's normal," said linebacker Shaq Jones, who was part of the program when it originally disbanded and stayed with UAB despite having multiple offers to finish out his career.

"We're on the same track as every football program there is in the country. It's absolutely normal. If it wasn't normal, we were in trouble. We've all got a grasp of what we're working toward.

"Come Sept. 2, we're ready to put on a show."
Alabama career fair for workers with disabilities to be held this month

By: Lucy Berry

A career fair designed for workers with disabilities will take place this month in Huntsville.

The University of Alabama in Huntsville and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services will host the second-annual Ability Career Fair from 8:30 a.m. to noon April 19 at the Conference Training Center on the UAH campus on 1410 Ben Graves Drive N.W.

The hiring event will connect employers and individuals with disabilities. On-site interviews, job seeker workshops, prizes and a business toolkit will be available.

For information and to register, visit tinyurl.com/uahjobseekers or call 256-539-7881. Residents can also email huntsville.regional.center@gmail.com for additional details.
NASA to launch telescope on super-pressure balloon in search for cosmic rays

By: Military News

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration is preparing to use a super-pressure balloon to launch into near space a pioneering telescope designed to detect ultra-high-energy cosmic rays as they interact with the Earth’s atmosphere.

“We’re searching for the most energetic cosmic particles that we’ve ever observed,” said Angela V. Olinto, the Homer J. Livingston Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago and principal investigator of the project, known as the Extreme Universe Space Observatory—Super Pressure Balloon. “The origin of these particles is a great mystery that we’d like to solve. Do they come from massive black holes at the center of galaxies? Tiny, fast-spinning stars? Or somewhere else?”

The extremely rare particles hit the atmosphere at a rate of only one per square kilometer per century. To assure that it will capture some of the particles, the telescope’s camera takes 400,000 images a second as it casts a wide view back toward the Earth.

NASA is preparing to launch a super-pressure balloon to carry a pioneering telescope designed to detect ultra-high-energy cosmic rays from near space. The telescope’s camera takes 400,000 images a second as it casts a wide view back toward the Earth.

Preparations are complete in Wanaka, New Zealand, where a number of scientific balloons have been launched over the years.

NASA’s Super-Pressure Balloon fully inflated and flying at 110,000 feet as seen from the balloon gondola. The balloon is made from polyethylene film, which is similar in appearance and thickness to the type used for sandwich bags, but stronger and more durable.

Prof. Angela Olinto is the principal investigator of the Extreme Universe Space Observatory, which will use a super-pressure balloon to launch a pioneering telescope designed to detect ultra-high-energy cosmic rays as they interact with Earth’s atmosphere.

Preparations are complete in Wanaka, New Zealand for the balloon’s launch, which will happen as soon as scientists and engineers have the right weather conditions. Researchers hope the balloon will stay afloat for up to 100 days, thereby setting a record for an ultra-long duration flight.

NASA describes the super-pressure balloon as the “most persnickety” of all the flight and launch vehicles it operates. Launching the balloon depends on just the right weather conditions on the surface of the Earth all the way up to 110,000 feet, where the balloon travels.

The project will set the stage for a space mission currently being planned. “That would enlarge even more the volume of the atmosphere that we can observe at one time,” said Olinto, who serves as chair of UChicago’s Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics. “We need to observe a significantly large number of these cosmic messengers to discover what are their sources and how they interact at their energetic extremes.”

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When an ultra-high-energy cosmic ray reaches the Earth’s atmosphere, it induces a series of interactions that stimulates a large cosmic ray shower. The new telescope, which detects at night, will capture the ultra-violet fluorescence produced by the interaction of these particle showers with the nitrogen molecules in the air.

“High-energy cosmic rays have never been observed this way from space,” said Lawrence Wiencke, professor of physics at the Colorado School of Mines and co-leader of the project. “This mission to a sub-orbital altitude is a pioneering opportunity for us. Our international collaboration is very excited about this launch and about the new data that will be collected along the way.”

The project lends itself to participation by graduate and undergraduate students, Olinto said. Leo Allen and Mikhail Rezazadeh, two UChicago undergraduates, built an infrared camera under the supervision of UChicago Prof. Stephan Meyer and Olinto to observe the cloud coverage at night under EUSO-SPB.

Sixteen countries were involved with the design of the telescope. The U.S. team, funded by NASA, is led by UChicago, Colorado School of Mines, Marshall Space Flight Center, University of Alabama at Huntsville and Lehman College at the City University of New York.
UAH alum brings jobs to Huntsville, donates $500K to hockey team

By: Jennifer Statham

Sheldon Wolitski, the founder and CEO of the multi-million dollar company The Select Group, attributes much of his success to his time playing for the Chargers hockey team at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

However, Wolitski says his time in Huntsville was almost finished before it began, when he ended up in the hospital in 1992 after fighting off two would-be robbers.

As a freshman at UAH, having been on the Chargers team mere weeks and far from where he grew up in Alberta, Canada, Wolitski says he escorted two girls to their apartment to protect them in a "bad neighborhood."

"Two guys broke into the apartment and they didn't know I was there. I walked into it with the girls screaming, and one of the guys had a knife to one of the girl's neck, and the other guy had the other girl pinned," Wolitski said. "A big fight ensued and I started fighting the two guys. Long story short, I ended up in the hospital with 80 stitches."

He was ready to pack up and head back to Canada until his teammates convinced him this was not a usual happening in Huntsville.

"Everyone rallied, the team, the boosters, the coaches, everyone rallied around me and that was the reason why I stayed. If I didn't have that I would have probably went home," Wolitski said.

Wolitski ended up graduating from UAH in 1996 with a degree in marketing. He played hockey at UAH from 1992 to 1996. In his last year, he was on the school's first NCAA Division II Hockey National Championship Team.

"What a lot of people don't know is that as I was looking at different schools to go to get a scholarship. Huntsville, or UAH, was the only school that took a chance on me because my grades were not the best coming out of high school, focusing on only hockey," he said. "Doug Ross, the coach, he knew that going into it and he still gave me the opportunity where no other school would do that for me. I don't know where I'd be in life if they didn't give me that chance to prove myself."

Wolitski went on to start his own staffing company in 1999, called The Select Group. Today, the company has 13 branches across the U.S. and Canada, and in 2016 brought in $131 million in revenue. The Select Group, "provides managed services, direct placement, and contingent staffing services" to a variety of industries.

Wolitski got to give back to UAH and Huntsville in January when he donated $500,000 to UAH. He wants to help solidify the hockey program at UAH, in the future, possibly helping to fund a center on the UAH campus geared towards "student life," supporting the hockey and basketball program.
programs, as well as the performing arts at the school. Wolitski also gave $10,000 toward the renovation of the coaches suite at Spragins Hall on the UAH campus.

Wolitski said helping to strengthen the hockey program at UAH and giving back to Huntsville has been a long-time dream. He said, "I want my kids to play there one day, you know."

Recruiting economic fuel

Wolitski brought The Select Group's 13th branch to Huntsville in January. "I know that I wouldn't be where I'm at today if it wasn't for the years that I spent in Huntsville. It's just so many defining moments in my life," Wolitski said. "I've always wanted to find a way to come and give back, in multiple ways, not just with the donation to UAH but also to bring some economic fuel to the community."

What Huntsville needs, Wolitski said, is trained recruiters, who live here and can talk about the progress being made in the area and industries, who can sell the opportunities in Huntsville.

"We place some of the top technical talent in the U.S. and Canada," he said. "People are looking for top talent. They're looking for a place to raise a family, a good cost of living, great companies, a technology hotbed, and Huntsville has that. We want to be able to bring some of that talent into the Huntsville area."

The Select Group is committing to the creation of 500-plus jobs for the Huntsville area within their first three years here, Wolitski said, to be generated through companies that have positions open, or jobs that The Select Group brings through "outsourced managed service projects."

The Select Group will also add value to the market, he said, by initiating "round table" talks in Huntsville. The Select Group has had success being a "connector of executive IT" in other cities, such as Raleigh, N.C. and Washington, D.C., and they want to do the same in Huntsville.

"It's about bringing all the brilliant minds together in a room to talk about what are the key issues that they're facing right now, so they can all collaborate and develop a network" Wolitski said.

The Select Group's goal is to have regular "roundtable" meetings with several IT executives beginning in the summer.

The Ross connection

Wolitski got his first break-away toward the goal of a Huntsville branch when a fellow Charger, Jared Ross, contacted him.

Ross is the lead account manager at The Select Group's newest branch located on the square in downtown Huntsville. He is also a former Chargers hockey player and the son of the former UAH Chargers coach, Doug Ross, who coached 25 seasons at UAH from 1982 to 2007.
Ross grew up in Huntsville watching his dad coach hockey, and while in middle school even watched Wolitski play for his father's team. He attended Grissom High School before moving to live with family in Michigan where he could play high school hockey.

Ross came back to Huntsville for college at UAH, where he played hockey for the Chargers also under the coaching of his father. Ross went on to play professional hockey for 11 years, with six years in the National Hockey League and the American Hockey League in the U.S., and then five years playing pro-hockey in Germany.

Ross and his wife Evy always knew they wanted to live and raise their children in Huntsville, near both of their families.

"I love the way Huntsville has come through the years," Ross said. "I've seen it develop and grow from what it was back in the 1990s and I've seen the way the city's done a great job at developing the downtown area, Bridge Street, and now the old Madison Square Mall area. It's every five years or so that something cool or new is coming, so it's great."

When Ross finished his professional hockey career, he ended up asking Wolitski for career advice. After talking with Ross, Wolitski said he knew Ross was the right leader to bring The Select Group to Huntsville.

Ross, who has a degree in business management, spent three months at The Select Group, Washington, D.C. branch, before helping to open the Huntsville branch. He hopes to bring his business and team player experience to The Select Group in Huntsville.

"It's a goal-driven, motivated position where it's competitive. There's different goals you set for yourself to try to meet. That's something I did yearly playing professional hockey. Also, obviously, to go in and build personal relationships with people that's something we did yearly," Ross said. "There's players coming and going, new people, new friends, new faces, new coaches, new managers, always. So, to be able to relate to people, to be able to be personable, those are all things that I think professional hockey players have to have even though that's off the ice stuff. But those things are what translate to being successful here."

Ross will serve as the lead account manager for the Huntsville branch, working alongside Delivery Manager Keith Murray, and Associate Delivery manager Jonathan Pierce. The Huntsville group reports to Manager of Branch Operations Kelly Domínguez, and Regional Director Chris Rhine, both based in Washington, D.C.

"We're looking forward to being able to bring people jobs, bring jobs to the area, and find jobs to support local companies," Ross said. "It feels really good when you're able to find a candidate that needs something and you're able to place them, that's one of the most gratifying things about this job. It's such a good feeling to be able to do that for people."
UAH head coach Les Stuedeman claims 1000th career win

By: Taylor Tannebaum

University of Alabama in Huntsville head softball coach head softball coach Les Stuedeman passed another career milestone on Saturday, becoming just the fifth active Division II softball coach to record 1,000 career victories.

Stuedeman – in her 22nd year as UAH's only softball coach – now owns a career record of 1000-320-1 and is only the 34th NCAA softball coach across all divisions to reach the astonishing 1,000-win mark.

During the NFCA Hall of Fame member's tenure, the Chargers have been to 19 NCAA tournaments including a current stretch of 14 in a row, and the team owns four South Region titles (1999, 2001, 2009, and 2011) while finishing as the national runner-up in 2009 and 2011.

Stuedeman has been honored as the GSC Coach of the Year nine times while leading her team to eight Gulf South Conference championships.

Stuedeman entered the 2017 season as the 25th winningest coach all-time across all NCAA divisions and the sixth winningest coach in Division II history, and her teams have featured more than 40 All-Americans, 10 GSC Players or Pitchers of the Year, and seven GSC Freshmen of the Year.

In addition to being a member of the NFCA Hall of Fame, Stuedeman has also been inducted into the Huntingdon Athletic Hall of Fame for her terrific career as a collegiate player, and she is also a member of the Vestavia Hills Sports Hall of Fame.
Should Congress fund climate-change skeptics?

By: Ben Rosen

Two high-profile scientists skeptical of the international scientific consensus on climate change urged Congress on Wednesday to fund a “red team” to probe the conclusions of a United Nations panel that perennially reviews the scientific basis for climate change and is considered an authority on it.

One of the scientists called for between five and 10 percent of US funding for the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to be reallocated for a “red team” – a “group of well-credentialed scientists,” he said, “to produce an assessment that expresses legitimate, alternative hypotheses that have been (in their view) marginalized, misrepresented or ignored in previous IPCC reports.”

“I would expect such a team would offer to Congress some very different conclusions regarding the human impacts on climate,” John Christy, director of Earth System Science Center at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, said in prepared testimony for the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. “The term ‘consensus science’ will often be appealed to regarding arguments about climate change to bolster an assertion.... Consensus, however, is a political notion, not a scientific notion,” he said, reciting his 2012 testimony where he advocated for a “red team” during another congressional hearing.

Dr. Christy and Judith Curry, president of Climate Forecast Applications Network, suggested that the creation of such a team would restore credibility in the way the scientific method is applied to climate change, as hypotheses would be tested and challenged. Christy, in particular, has repeatedly said groups associated with the IPCC suppress findings that contradict mainstream views about the impact of human activity on climate change.

But the skepticism he and Dr. Curry profess (they acknowledge human activity influences climate change, but question its extent) stands in contrast to the overwhelming scientific consensus on the subject that says climate change is, beyond a reasonable doubt, the result of humans releasing fossil fuels and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Ninety-seven percent of climatologists, earth scientists, and meteorologists say they believe humans are contributing to climate change, an assertion Politifact has said is “mostly true.” Of the 70,000 peer-reviewed articles on global warming published in 2013 and 2014, only four authors rejected the idea that human activity is the main force driving climate change.

Critics of the proposal by Christy and Curry warn that a team tasked with presenting an alternative viewpoint could undermine the credibility not just of the IPCC, but of the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Established in 1863 by President Lincoln to independently and objectively provide policy-relevant science to the federal government, NAS has reviewed and verified content of IPCC reports multiple times.

“There is no value added to adding an additional body. Their very premise assumes implicitly that the National Academy of Science is biased. That is a very serious charge and that’s...
unfounded,” Peter Frumhoff, director of science policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists, a
science advocacy organization headquartered in Boston, tells The Christian Science Monitor in a
phone interview.

“I don’t see this as a financial issue. It’s really a fundamental issue of where should Congress
and the administration go for its scientific advice,” he adds, referring to Christy’s proposal for
congressional funding. “To cherry pick this topic and to try to create an additional body of what
would clearly be hand-chosen politicians rather than chosen by scientists ... it’s not about money.
It’s about credibility.”

This proposal comes as the politicization of climate science is shifting in the United States and
abroad. Among the scientific and international communities, the subject has risen above politics
in recent years, especially after 174 countries and the European Union signed the Paris climate
agreement in April 2016. But a Republican controlled Congress and White House have brought
the subject back into the political arena. In addition to President Trump slashing climate
regulations and proposing doing the same for funding for research, chairman of the House
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, Rep. Lamar Smith (R) of Texas, has questioned
the findings and motives of climate science researchers.

Christy and Curry, two of three witnesses called by the committee’s Republican majority to
testify on Wednesday on a hearing about the scientific method and climate change, suggested the
IPCC reports were biased, and that Congress would be better served by a red team.

“Playing ‘devil’s advocate’ helps a scientist examine how their conclusions might be misguided
and how they might be wrong,” Curry said in her prepared testimony. “Overcoming one’s own
biases is difficult; an external devil’s advocate can play a useful role in questioning and
criticizing the logic of the argument.”

“One way to aid Congress in understanding more of the climate issue than what is produced by
biased ‘official’ panels of the climate establishment is to organize and fund credible ‘red teams’
that look at issues such as natural variability, the failure of climate models and the huge benefits
to society from affordable energy, carbon-based and otherwise,” added Christy, who was a lead
author of a section of a 2001 IPCC report, and the co-recipient in 1991 of NASA’s medal for
exceptional scientific achievement for building a global temperature database, according to The

In an interview with The Christian Science Monitor, Christy pointed to his own research
included in his testimony, which questions why certain climate models from the past
overpredicted real-world results.

The concept of a red team is drawn largely from the defense community. The military and
intelligence communities use it, as has the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a way to
look for weaknesses in the system. But critics of this proposal say science already has a tried-
and-tested system to push back on findings in order to ensure it meets scientific standards: peer
review.
“Public policy needs to be based on the best available science. That science, as we’ve come to understand it, is based on a system of independent peer review,” says Dr. Frumhoff of the Union of Concerned Scientists. “That doesn’t mean every piece of it is final. It doesn’t mean there are not opportunities for new evidence to change our understanding.”

“But the pushback on this is not about available evidence that suggests that somehow the broad 97 percent of climate scientists who understand the risks based on science are somehow wrong,” he adds. “It’s based on a political view who find this inconvenient to fossil fuel interests who want to avoid regulation of their products and political leaders who are supported by them.”

The IPCC has previously weathered accusations of being political. In 2007, the panel released a report that said it is very likely – with more than 90 percent certainty – that the rise in global temperature over the past 50 years is because of greenhouse gases released by human activity. A minority (including Christy) said the report was politically skewed because the IPCC is an extension of the United Nations, the Monitor previously reported.

"Some of my comments and reviews were sort of rejected," Christy then told the Monitor. "I'm sure that [I] wasn't the only one."

But IPCC does not conduct research itself. Instead, it calls on a diverse group of scientists from around the world to review existing research.

A study at the time also found that not one of 928 papers on “global climate change” in a database of scientific journals questioned whether the event was human-induced or natural. This implied that since the IPCC must draw from scientific literature, it didn't find many papers that argued against human-driven change.

“Contrarian studies didn't make it through science's portal to respectability: scientific journals,” wrote Pete Spotts for the Monitor.

But IPCC’s public standing was shaken two years later by an email scandal known as “climategate.” Some of the emails hacked or leaked depicted a small but influential group of scientists trying to prevent skeptics of their work from gaining access to raw data, while others suggested researchers manipulated data and tried to block publication of papers that called their work into question. But a six-month investigation by British civil servant Sir Muir Russell found that the emails don't undermine the basic science behind man-made climate change.

Now, some climate scientists and political scientists warn that the actions of some Republicans, specifically the chair of the House committee on science, are politicizing a debate that has largely been settled within the scientific community.

“It creates the appearance of a scientific debate when there isn’t one,” says Patrick Egan, a professor of politics and public policy at New York University. “It’s a very effective strategy for casting the scientific as political instead of a rigorous and objective investigation of this phenomenon.”
Climate Change Skeptics to Congress: Too Much Politics in Science

By: Seth Augenstein

A panel of climate scientists inveighed against the vast majority of the scientific community, telling Congress that human-driven climate change beliefs are “premature” – and driven by politics.

Three of the four scientists told the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology on Wednesday that politics was driving the bulk of science, as they fielded questions from politicians like Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), the Committee’s Chair.

Those three – Judith Curry, formerly of Georgia Tech, John Christy of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and Roger Pielke of the University of Colorado – have all appeared frequently in front of Congress to testify against anthropogenic climate change theory.

From their seats in the Rayburn House Office Building, the trio suggested that science needs to be removed from politics.

“Let’s make scientific debate about climate change great again,” said Curry, echoing the campaign slogan of President Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again.”

The three talked about how their scientific views broke from the majority. Curry, who resigned from her Georgia Tech position in January due to “growing disenchantment,” said she realized she had been a victim of Orwellian “groupthink” about a decade ago. Christy presented atmospheric temperature readings in large graphics and concluded, “there’s no clear certainty on what the climate might do in the future.” Pielke explained how he had undergone an investigation from his university due to claims he had received fossil fuel funding in exchange for his work – and then said extreme weather has actually decreased since the year 1900.

A “pathological politicization of science” was skewing the climate change debate, Pielke told the politicians in Congress during the nearly three-hour hearing.

The fourth climate change scientist in attendance was Michael Mann of Penn State University. Mann is known best for his “hockey stick” temperature graphic showing predicted warming in the late 1990s. Mann called the other three a “tiny minority” who reject the consensus reached by 97 percent of the scientific community. But Mann said the imbalance in Congressional testimony is “an inauspicious start for an honest discussion about science.”

The Democrats on the Committee posed most of their questions to Mann, while the Republicans split their questions between the other three. The politicians spoke as much from their own climate stance as they asked specific questions.

Smith, at one point, said Science Magazine and one of its writers were not “objective,” based on a recent piece by Jeffrey Mervis.

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"That is not known as an objective writer or magazine," said Smith.

"Well, it’s Science Magazine," said Mann.

One of the toughest questions was posed by Rep. Clay Higgins (R-La.), known as the “Cajun John Wayne” who started his first term in January. Higgins demanded that Mann provide proof he was not “associated” with the “Union of Concerned Scientists.” Mann referred him to his curriculum vitae.

Smith is an avowed opponent of climate change theory – and has used his position to subpoena agencies and climate change activists. He has called climate change more “science fiction” than science.

Smith has also written multiple opinion pieces for Breitbart, the online news site that assumed national prominence during the victorious presidential campaign of Trump. (Trump’s budget proposals have reportedly proposed drastic cuts for climate science).

Smith’s peers on the Committee have blasted him continually for what they say is abuse of his position for political ends.

A vast majority of scientists believe in human-driven climate change. But the public is more skeptical. A Pew report in October indicated that climate belief is largely determined by political affiliation.

Climate change denial contends scientific consensus has not yet been reached proving humanity’s effects on global conditions. Some refer to a conspiracy leading to global governance and massive wealth distribution. No connection between the hundreds of studies and thousands of scientists has yet been established. Many skeptics have predicted that the theory would be debunked within a few years.

The global warming “hiatus” from 1998 to 2013 has been one of the key arguments for skeptics. The most recent NASA research indicates the warming slowed due to the heat-absorbing influence of the world’s oceans over that time.

Rep. Bill Foster (D-Ill.), who holds a doctorate in physics, summed up the hearing as, “a very strange mixture of science and... not.”
UAH research team studies tornadic activity on top of Sand Mountain

By: Tre Ward

Scientists are working to find out if tornadoes are more prone to develop in Northeast Alabama. Researchers at the University of Alabama in Huntsville said more tornadic activity is likely on top of Sand Mountain.

Melissa Morgan is a survivor of the deadly tornado that hit her community of Rosalie in November. It killed three people.

"You just brace yourself and try to prepare," Morgan said.

That tornado joined the list of many others that have hit Sand Mountain over the years.

"There is, most often, a more favorable environment on top of Sand Mountain," Doctor Knupp said.

Dr. Knupp is with Vortex Southeast at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Researchers said within the past ten years, 32 tornadoes have formed in the Sand Mountain area. Of those 32 tornadoes, researchers said 16 hit within three miles of Northwest Sand Mountain, which is where communities like Rosalie are located. Dr. Knupp said when you're dealing with tornadoes, then location matters.

"The wind speed and direction increases substantially with height more so than in the Tennessee River Valley," Dr. Knupp said.

"We just stick it out, because this is where we're from," Morgan said. "This is where our roots are."

Researchers said their end goal is to gather enough physical evidence to help forecasters whenever severe weather strikes in the Sand Mountain area.

Researchers told WAAY 31 that crews went to several locations in Sand Mountain on Thursday night to collect data as storms moved through.
Seven UAH students in Space Hardware Club place at AIAA regional

By: Staff

Research presentations involving seven students at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) placed at the recent AIAA Region II Student Conference in Starkville, Miss., and all UAH students who placed are members of the Space Hardware Club.

Placing first in the team design competition category was "Concept Study of a Reusable Suborbital Launch Vehicle" by Matthew Haskell, Jared Fuchs, Benjamin Thompson and William Hankins.

Taking second place in open topic competition for freshmen and sophomores was "Design Considerations When Upgrading the Impulse of a High-Power Rocket" by McKynzie Perry.

Third place in undergraduate technical competition went to "PILOTS: Embedded Software Testing for High-Power Rocketry Payloads" by Sarah Dangelo and Daniel Corey.

"We are ecstatic about this sweep by SHC of UAH papers presented at AIAA! Every year we have more members participate in this conference, and every year we could not be prouder of what they are able to accomplish," said Eliza Dellert, the newly elected SHC president. "The purpose of the Space Hardware Club is to create a professional environment for these brilliant students to prosper in, and they continue to exceed our expectations in what they are able to do with these already complex projects."

A total of 25 UAH students attended the regional conference, where a total of eight papers were presented from UAH in various competitive categories. From the SHC, 11 members delivered five paper presentations. Dr. Francis Wessling, professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, is the SHC advisor. AIAA student chapter advisor Dr. Brian Landrum, associate professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, accompanied the UAH AIAA student competitors to the conference.

"All the UAH presentations were professional and were great advertisements for our quality students and academic program," Dr. Landrum said.

Dr. Shankar Mahalingam, dean of the College of Engineering, and Dr. Keith Hollingsworth, chair of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, congratulated the SHC on its achievement.

"This is an impressive outcome of Space Hardware Club participation," said Dr. Mahalingam.

"I am always proud of the performance of our students at the AIAA Student Regional, and this year is no exception," Dr. Hollingsworth said. "Congratulations to your members who presented."

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ALABAMA GYMNASTICS

Duckworth walking her own path to success

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Among all the trophies, awards and pictures that spell out recent University of Alabama gymnastics history in Dana Duckworth’s office, there’s something that doesn’t quite fit in with the abundance of memorabilia. Perhaps it looks out of place, but the artifact was actually one of the first pieces to really personalize the room.

It’s a ceramic stiletto — customized with the Alabama Crimson Tide logo — that was not only a gift from Sarah Patterson, but also a message.

“You need to walk in your own shoes. Not follow in my footsteps,” the legendary head coach told her replacement more than three years ago.

Duckworth will be taking Alabama to the NCAA Championships in St. Louis next week for the third time in her three seasons as she makes the program in her image.

Switching the shoes

The only request Patterson made when she announced her retirement to former UA Athletics Director Bill Battle was that it was seamless. She didn’t want the gymnasts to question their standing on the team, and she refused to let the program she spent 36 years building to drop its standards all of a sudden.

Battle did not disappoint. The day Sarah and David Patterson told the team they were stepping down was the same day they named who was stepping up. Battle promoted from within, too.

“I had a conversation with one of the seniors, and the conversation was, ‘You didn't sign up for me to be your coach. I was an assistant coach when you got recruited. I was an assistant coach when you came here,’” Duckworth said. “No one knew Sarah and David were going to retire.”

But they did anyway.

“It didn’t change anything,” said senior Aja Sims, who was a sophomore when Duckworth took over. “I just did my gymnastics. If a different coach was coaching me at the time, they knew what to say and how to respond.”

The coaching switch was made a few months after the Crimson Tide won the 2014 SEC championship and finished fourth in the nation. That marked the end of Sarah Patterson’s long-time coaching career, one that

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rivals any in the nation.
It was time for a new regime.
"We knew we were under pressure," said associate head coach Bryan Raschilla, who has worked with Duckworth for almost 18 years. "There were some examples out there of what happens to a staff when they take over for a legacy and they don't do well. They update the resume."

Duckworth's first season ended the same as Patterson's last one, with a conference title and top-four finish. The following year Alabama finished third nationally.

The legacy was protected.
After this season, dynamics are about to change. The current senior class was the last bunch Patterson personally coached.
"I don't ever want to look like I don't appreciate what Sarah and David built here and did," Duckworth said. "But I do believe that every class that comes in here that has not experienced being coached under them, it's part of the progression."

Comparing the shoes
Thirty-six years is quite a feat. Except, Duckworth already has 21 years to her name. It's just in a different way.

Before Duckworth became the head coach, she was an assistant for six years, and before that, a volunteer coach for nine. Way before that, she was an athlete at Alabama for four years.

"That's really amazing to see that Sarah and David molded Dana," sophomore Ari Guerra said. "This is why a lot of the same values and ideas Patterson had remain today. Duckworth is a product of the program, a product of Patterson. The only difference now is Duckworth has full reign to add in her own twist."

She has full permission to do so, too.
"You wouldn't want her to be the way I was," Patterson said, "and I wouldn't necessarily be comfortable in her shoes."

More than one gymnast has acknowledged Patterson and Duckworth's coaching styles are very similar, but also very different. Even the two coaches would say so.

In the gym and competition, Patterson believes while she was more subdued, Duckworth is much more outgoing. That's due to their personalities.

"Sarah was more step-offish and would kind of just be like, 'Go ahead. Do your thing.'" Sims said. "So having Dana and just knowing she's right there with me, almost on the beam with me, it's kind of nice to have that, too."

If there ever were any doubts about the change, Duckworth's positivity negated them. The current team always raves about how much it loves her optimism. It keeps the morale high.

So there was an adjustment to be made with leadership styles. The philosophy, however, stayed the same. There has always been an emphasis on community involvement (Patterson's Power of Pink, Duckworth's Read BAMA Read) and academics (UA gymnastics has averaged more than 10 Scholastic All-America honors per season over the past 19 seasons).

The betterment of the gymnasts always comes first. It wasn't just about their athletics abilities, it was about what was about their character.

"It's giving college a completely different person than I came," senior Katie Bailey said. "I've just matured in a lot of different ways, and I can only thank both of them for that."

Filling the shoes
To address the elephant in the room: No, the Crimson Tide has not won an NCAA championship since Duckworth took over - Patterson won six. But, it has been only three years.

Even Patterson knows Alabama wasn't always perfect with her in charge.
"I remember vividly there was a period of time we finished second three years in a row," Patterson said. "I received sympathy cards in the mail."

The next year, in 1996, Alabama won its third national title. It took six years to win its fourth, then another nine years for the fifth and sixth.

When it comes down to it, Patterson thinks fans expect the Crimson Tide to compete for a championship every year. It's the nature of fandom and having a history of success.

In reality, it's one day at a time, one meet at a time and one year at a time.
"Every team is different; there will be pros and cons to everything," Duckworth said. "But tradition never graduates."

Duckworth was actually a part of the 1991 national championship team. The next two years, she individually won a pair of NCAA balance beam titles, the latter coming from a perfect 10 to close out her competitive career. At the end of it all, Duckworth was named the 1993 NCAA Woman of the Year for the state of Alabama.

Sometimes when Patterson sees Duckworth, she is reminded of the young gymnast she coached back in the early 1990s.

"Her excitement is the same," Patterson said. "But the way she has matured as a young woman - there are some things that will always be the same - I couldn't be more proud of her growth and the person that she has become."

"It's not over yet either. Patterson expects Duckworth to have a long, successful career, and Duckworth isn't giving up anytime soon."

Every now and then, the notion still comes back up that Duckworth has big shoes to fill. It's like a flashback to three years ago.

"My answer would be, 'Yes, I do. I wear a 9½, and I gladly fill them,'" Duckworth said. "Sarah would say, 'Yes, she does. She has her very own shoes, and she will wear them proudly.'"
The Crimson Tide scored 196.625 to advance to the NCAA championships for the 35th consecutive year, which is something the team never takes for granted even after making it the last 35 years in a row," UA head coach Dana Duckworth said. "It wasn't easy tonight, but we fought hard and earned a place in the national championships." Alabama has the second-longest streak in NCAA gymnastics history when it comes to consecutive national championship berths, one behind Utah.

"Our sole focus at this meet was advancing to the national championships," UA national championship head coach Dana Duckworth said. "It wasn't easy tonight, but we fought hard and earned a place in St. Louis." The Crimson Tide started strong with a 49.350 on the uneven bars led by 9.9s from senior Amanda Jetter and junior Kiana Winston. On the balance beam, Alabama overcame a pair of wobbly routines to post a 49.00 powered by 9.85s from senior Aja Sims, freshman Wynter Childers and junior Nickie Guerrero.

Alabama posted the highest floor exercise total of the night, a 49.475, paced by a 9.95 from Sims and 9.9s from freshman Maddie Desch and Winston. Sims' floor score was the highest of the night. Alabama closed with an uncharacteristically shaky vault rotation, scoring a season-low 48.800 behind sophomore Abby Armbrrecht's 9.85.
ALABAMA BASKETBALL

Ar'Mond Davis will transfer from UA

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

Ar'Mond Davis, who played in all 32 games as a reserve for the University of Alabama men's basketball team this season after transferring from a junior college, has elected to transfer from UA. He is the third player to decide to transfer since the season ended, joining Nick King and Brandon Austin.

Davis' decision leaves Alabama with 11 players on scholarship, two under the NCAA 13-player limit.

"This has been an extremely tough decision to come to," Davis said on his Twitter account on Tuesday. "(However), with the support of my family, I have made the decision to transfer. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Coach Avery Johnson and the coaching staff, and my teammates and the UA fans. I am grateful for the staff emphasizing excellence in both academics and athletics here at the University of Alabama.

"I am appreciative for everything the University of Alabama has taught me. Thank you, and God bless as I move on to the next chapter in my life." Davis played in all but two games this season, averaging 6.0 points and 1.4 rebounds per game.

His best outing came in the Crimson Tide's four-overtime win at South Carolina, where he played 38 minutes and scored 19 points, including a pair of crucial overtime 3-pointers.

The 6-foot-3 guard from Tacoma, Wash., made 32 of 120 3-point attempts on the season.

Alabama is expected to add at least one transfer in the offseason to offset the three transfers.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecilhurt@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Expect to see both Bama and Auburn in tourney next year

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

Call me a dreamer, a homer or the Don Quixote of hoops in the Heart of Dixie, an outlier out of touch with present-day reality.

Accuse me of living in the past or foolishly believing the good old days of the 1980s can come to life once again.

The day after another college basketball season has ended, with North Carolina outlasting Gonzaga in a mud-wrestling match of a championship game, it's impossible for some of us not to envision what dreams may come next year.

Based on everything I've seen from the returning players and everything I've been told about the newbies, I believe we're going to see something new next March.

I believe we're going to see Alabama and Auburn in the NCAA Tournament — in a sport other than softball, golf and gymnastics. Men's basketball has been on the rebound at both programs since the hires of Bruce Pearl and Avery Johnson, and next year is the year they both should take a giant leap forward.

I believe we're going to see Alabama play in the tournament for the first time since 2012 and win a game there for the first time since 2006. There's a bit of history and serendipity in that prediction.

Three players have been named Mr. Basketball in Alabama in back-to-back seasons. The last two — Ronald Steele and Trevor Lacey — played prominent roles on Alabama's last two NCAA Tournament teams, Steele in 2006, Lacey in 2012.

The third double winner of Mr. Basketball is Alabama signee John Petty. He'll be in a Crimson Tide uniform next season, joined by Class 6A player of the year Alex.
Reese and 4A player of the year Herb Jones. For all their diverse talents, none of them is the most celebrated member of the program’s most highly rated recruiting class ever.

That would be point guard Collin Sexton, who provided a preview of his attack-mode athleticism during the McDonald’s All-American week. Alabama could win a few 3-on-3 tournaments with Sexton, Petty and rising sophomore Braxton Key.

As good as Sexton is, he wasn’t named Mr. Basketball in his home state of Georgia. Auburn signee Chuma Okeke was. The 6-foot-8, 220-pound Okeke is one big reason Auburn’s talented baby Tigers, coming off the program’s first winning season in eight years, should move the needle even more next season.

Okeke has the ability to play power forward, which would move Danjel Purifoy back to his more natural position at small forward, which should give Auburn one of the more balanced and talented rotations in the SEC. “The ceiling is the roof,” you might say, for Austin Wiley, Mustapha Heron and company.

Barring unexpected defections or injuries, Auburn should do more than compete with Alabama on the court after winning the last two and three of the four overall meetings between Pearl and Johnson. The Tigers and Tide both should be in the mix to finish in the top four in the conference to earn a double-bye in the SEC Tournament.

Alabama’s already getting plenty of way-too-early but well-deserved love for the 2017-18 season.

It would be wise for the national pundits to send some of that good feeling toward the Plains.

I believe Auburn will end the SEC’s longest NCAA Tournament drought and return to the Big Dance for the first time since 2003, and do you know what happens traditionally when the Tigers go dancing? They win.

On seven of their eight all-time NCAA trips - the last seven in a row, in fact - they’ve won at least one game. On four of their eight trips, they’ve won at least two games.

Granted, it’s a small sample size, but it’s a pretty strong Sweet 16 batting average just the same.

Come October, when basketball practice starts again, everyone’s going to be looking for the next South Carolina, the SEC program poised to shock the world. Look no farther than Alabama and Auburn.

For both, it’s about time.
Rough seas or good sailing for Tide?

By: Cecil Hurt

There is no smooth sailing when it comes to managing a college basketball roster these days. Avery Johnson knows that, and knew it before this weekend. His University of Alabama men’s basketball team didn’t capsize with the news of a third transfer, shooting guard Ar’Mond Davis. There was just a little choppiness on the seas and, like any good admiral, the Little General will have to set a course around it.

The way things work in college basketball these days follows this general pattern: the elite players at the highest level play a year, possibly two, and then try to go earn some money, potentially millions on top of millions if they make it — as few do — to the NBA. The best players at what are loosely called the mid-majors often transfer up to test themselves at the power conference level. Meanwhile, players who were not happy with their playing time at the highest level often drop down to another level of competition to be guaranteed minutes in a “showcase” season — or at least to have a better shot at a starting spot. All that motion, and boats — or programs — are bound to rock.

What’s obvious is that the three players who are leaving Alabama knew that they’d have to battle for playing time this year, as all saw limited minutes in the just-concluded season. Davis played more than the other two, Nick King and Brandon Austin, but less than returnees Dazon Ingram and Avery Johnson, Jr. — and that’s before you factor Collin Sexton and John Petty into the equation.

There’s a give-and-take going on right now between expectations, somewhere between the realistic and the wildly inflated. The problem is, the more you watch Sexton play in the April all-star events, the more you think that “wildly inflated” is realistic. At this point, it’s best to say “he’ll have the ball in his hands a lot” and then wait to see what the harvest will be.

You never can tell just how postseason transfers and related movement will affect your team, though. Sometimes the waves lift you up. Take Texas A&M, whose sure-fire lottery pick, power forward Robert Williams, is coming back for another year. For all the “too-early top 25” love that Alabama is getting, I think the Aggies are a bona fide NCAA team if any guard play materializes. Take Memphis, which lost its best player, Dedric Lawson, as well as his brother K.J. in an unexpected departure on Wednesday. That’s a double-edged sword for Alabama, which has a nonconference game set against Memphis in November. The Crimson Tide wants to win, but it doesn’t want Tubby Smith’s team to implode and have a dismal RPI.

Back to Alabama. The Crimson Tide still has a good returning nucleus — Ingram, Johnson, Braxton Key, Donta Hall, Riley Norris and walk-on Lawson Schaffer — and six newcomers. That leaves two scholarships open. Finding the right grad transfer might be difficult — even a good player might look at that roster and wonder where his minutes are coming from. Perhaps a traditional transfer would work, sitting out a year. There’s a chance that Alabama might hold a scholarship to use in 2018. All those options are on the table. A high school signee is possible
but the late signing period is like Christmas Eve at Toys-R-Us, where you are fighting a frenzied crowd for a handful of good items.

So far, nothing has happened to rock Alabama’s boat. It will be worth watching to see if the coaching staff adds to the crew.
COMMENTARY

What a year it’s been for SEC hoops

CECIL HURT

The SEC men’s basketball season is over, but it expired honorably.

The SEC women’s basketball season ends Sunday night, with even more glory, an NCAA championship already guaranteed for either Mississippi State or South Carolina.

The combined success marks the best ending to an SEC basketball history in years, arguably better than Kentucky’s national championship run in 2012. That’s no disrespect to the Wildcats -- it’s just that they are expected to have success at fairly regular intervals (much like Alabama football) and that success is not always regarded as reflective of the conference as a whole.

This year it wasn’t just about Kentucky, although the Wildcats came close to making the Final Four as well, pushing North Carolina to the margin of one of the postseason’s two most exciting buzzer-beaters. Luke Maye’s game-winner was surpassed only by Morgan William and her overtime game-winner against UConn.

This year, the success went deeper. There was great achievement by schools who hadn’t "been there before," notably the Gamecock men and the MSU women. That should bring hope, more so than another Kentucky win (or, in the not-too-distant past, the Tennessee women) would have.

If South Carolina can do it, why not Alabama or Vanderbilt, Tennessee or Auburn, or teams that have been to the Final Four but are enduring a long exile, like Georgia or LSU? The necessary administrative moves -- improving facilities, hiring accomplished coaches -- were already under way but this should only accelerate them.

The hopes at two schools aren’t solely from reflected glory, either. The McDonald’s All-America game was earlier this week and both the MVP -- 6-foot-9 Michael Porter -- and the unquestioned most dynamic player -- Alabama signee Collin Sexton -- are headed to the SEC as well. Porter wound up at Missouri through a domino effect of events involving Lorenzo Romar’s firing at Washington and Cuonzo Martin’s subsequent hiring at Mizzou. The Tigers have a long climb

SEE HURT, C3
HURT
Continued from C1

back to respectability but Porter, a smooth 6-foot-9 forward, is a huge first step. Add that to some late-season improvement by the Tigers -- and perhaps some more recruiting help -- and at worst, Missouri should no longer wallow in the depths of a 200-plus RPI. That alone will help the entire league.

At Alabama, Sexton will provide plenty of highlights, although he will probably tone down the flashiest passes from All-Star week, at least while Avery Johnson is watching. He will bring much-needed scoring punch and the infusion of talent, both from his presence and the addition of John Petty and Herb Jones (who is being overlooked in the glare of this incoming class), should give Alabama the push it needs.

On the women's side, the SEC will be good, as it has been good for years, a fact obscured by Connecticut's long stretch of dominance. Mississippi State's win didn't just unite the SEC in support. It united an entire nation. The Bulldogs won in no small measure by standing up to UConn and playing without fear. Here's a lone consolation thought for the Huskies, one that people in Tuscaloosa understand better than those in most places: when everyone aside from your own fans is thrilled to see you lose, that's means you've been very good for a very long time.

Ultimately, the reaction to the end of basketball season in the SEC this time around. There has been a lot less "I'm glad that's over" and a lot more "I'm ready for that to start again." Football is still king -- but for the first time in years, spring football wasn't the Crown Prince.

--Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Tide reflects on strong finish, next season

By Drew Hill
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

The generic ‘it was a roller coaster of a season’ type of recap doesn’t quite fit the body of work from Alabama women’s basketball in 2016-17. In many ways, the Crimson Tide’s season was actually linear, from the beginning the team’s progression could be mapped to a straight line headed in a positive direction. Alabama completed the non-conference portion of its schedule at 12-1, and finished the year at 22-14. The team’s 22 wins is its highest total since the 1997-98 season.

Sure, there were also losses, but the Crimson Tide did not have the highest of expectations after being bounced in the first round of the Women’s NIT to end 2016. Alabama played in one of the strongest conferences in the country – the only conference with two teams in the women’s Final Four – and even after blowout losses to the SEC’s elite talent, UA never experienced a drop-off in confidence.

“At the beginning of the season, looking at it, I’m sure not a lot of people would have thought we would make it to where we were,” Alabama freshman Jordan Lewis said. “Although most people would see seasons as a roller-coaster, we were always able to recover, and made something out of a season that could have been different.”

The biggest testament to the team’s steady progression was its surprising run to conclude the season. Alabama dropped five-straight games between January and February before defeating rivals Tennessee and Auburn in two of the last four regular season games. The team’s confidence snowballed into the SEC Tournament as it reached its first quarterfinals since 2005, and went on to secure a spot in the Elite Eight of the WNIT for the first time since 2002.

“We didn’t focus on the negatives, but focused on the positives and moving forward each day,” coach Kristy Curry said. “I thought that as we headed into the conference tournament the win at Auburn (a big win) was the win that we go all year as far as we’ve been in the past. I thought that the season went on our team continuously improved.”

It was also a big year for Alabama as individuals. Juniors Hannah Cook and Ashley Williams became the 15th and 16th members of Alabama women’s basketball’s 1,000-point club. Inexperienced players Lewis and Ashley Knight were named to the SEC All-Freshman team. Knight earned 90 blocks to pass Alabama legend Yolanda Watkins for the single-season blocks record, and Lewis became the first Alabama player ever to earn SEC Newcomer of the Year.

“(The individual awards) are just a step forward for the program altogether,” Lewis said. “Alabama isn’t known as ‘the basketball school’, but as a team, we’ve tried to create a different perspective on the whole thing. We tried to show that our players came together, and made a good team this year.”

The news gets even better for Alabama’s coaching staff, the current Crimson Tide players are not going anywhere. UA is set to return its entire roster next season after playing the past year without a single senior.

Curry will also add three transfers, 2016 Alabama Miss Basketball Jasmine Walker from Florida State, Tennessee Martin’s Daijia Ruffin and N.C. State’s Amber Richardson. 6-foot-3 Atariyah Copeland is the only high school senior currently signed to play under Curry next season, but Alabama will look to add one more to its 2017 recruiting class.

“These three (transfers) have made practices instantly competitive,” Curry said. “It doesn’t matter how many minutes you’ve played here, next year is a brand new season. Those three give us a dimension on the perimeter and at (power forward) that will be very, very good for us next season.”
McKee helps take program to new heights

Tide earns national attention with 10th-place finish

By Sami Harb
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Alabama senior Anton McKee was one of nine Alabama swimmers to be named an All-American at the NCAA Swimming and Diving Championships en route to a 10th-place finish at nationals. McKee was good enough to earn an All-American nod to add to his career total (11), if didn’t come without some adversity for him and the team during the early stages of the meet.

McKee was disqualified in the other two events he competed in, one as an individual and the other as a part of the 400 Medley relay team, which was expected to score major points for the Crimson Tide.

“Early on in the meet, the team as a whole really had some ups and downs, that was no different for him. The DQ in the relay was the biggest blow,” assistant coach Will Leonhart said. “All the credit goes to the guys for coming together and putting it together and doing an awesome job in every race after that.”

For McKee, making the podium in the 200 breaststroke was a career-defining achievement in his final race, especially after coming so close during his other attempts. He finished fourth, fifth and fourth in his appearances at nationals as a freshman, sophomore and junior, respectively.

After being disqualified in two previous events and doing enough to earn an honorable mention All-American spot in his third, McKee felt the pressure to perform closer to expectations in his final race of the meet, and of his career. However, none of that pressure affected his mindset prior to competing in the 200. Instead, he remained confident in his preparation, and he said the work he has put into the Alabama program during his tenure allowed him to approach the starting blocks with zero regrets, regardless of the outcome.

“Anyway, the prelims and semi-finals were both kind of weird leading up to it, knowing it would be my last race of college,” McKee said. “I told myself that no matter what I do, I’m satisfied knowing that I’ve done everything I could for the university. For me, it kind of took the pressure off to know that it was the last one.”

As a graduating senior, the individual success for McKee is just a part of what he and his fellow seniors, Connor Oslin and Pavel Romanov, have done to elevate the men’s swimming program to national relevance under coach Dennis Pursley.

Together, the trio has earned 20 total All-American honors and been a part of three teams that have earned a top-10 finish at the national meet. To put those accomplishments in perspective, consider that the Crimson Tide finished in last place at SEC Championships the year before their arrival.

“It’s really about the culture that has been ingrained in this program,” McKee said. “It’s been fun to see all of our hard work result in something as great as this has been.”
HURTS' WILD, CRAZY RIDE

So much has changed for Tide quarterback since this time last year

Jalen Hurts could only chuckle at the comment.

"It's different," he said, smiling.

"So much is for Hurts these days that it's difficult to process. The past 12 months have been dizzying, crazy, wild, unbelievable and amazing. Over the last year and the rising sophomore was a rookie. He was an early enrollee and a long shot to win the quarterback competition. Cooper Bateman, Blake Barnett and even David Cornwell were viewed as more realistic candidates for the starting role.

A true freshman starting at the most important offensive position under Nick Saban? It seemed unfathomable. But then Hurts grabbed the reins of the offense in the third series of the first game and stole the show.

From that point forward, he led Alabama to the precipice of a national championship, becoming the SEC Offensive Player of the Year along the way. Hurts did so while enduring plenty of turmoil.

In less than seven months, Hurts has seen Barnett, Bateman and Cornwell leave the program. He has also watched as Alabama cycled through three offensive coordinators — switching from Lane Kiffin to Steve Sarkisian and now Brian Daboll in rapid fashion.

"It's been an adventure I guess," Hurts said. "It's a lot. But I think that a lot of things can be thrown at you and you have to be able to respond to certain situations."

Hurts' makeup helped him persevere. He has performed in his last season against LSU in crunch time and versus Ole Miss in one of the most adverse situations imaginable.

"He's very focused, nothing affects him, nothing fazes him," Saban said last September. He's the guy who has played a snap, late started against Ole Miss in the national title game — the first and only of his career.

"It's a big game you lost, the first game of the season we're losing," he said. "It's not a good feeling but, I mean, we're onto bigger and better things now."

"It's the only way he's the only way we've handled this whole year."

It's why Hurts didn't dwell too long on the crushing, last-second defeat to Clemson in the national title game — the first and only of his career.

"It was a big game you lost, the first game of the season we're losing," he said. "It's not a good feeling but, I mean, we're onto bigger and better things now."

It's the way he's handled this whole year.

"He's really stepped up as a leader," Alabama left guard Ross Pierschbacher said. "Naturally, he's become more of a leader even in this offseason just leading us in the huddle or on the sideline telling us the direction that we want to go."

It only makes sense. In 2016, Hurts had only played a few snaps of Alabama's season opener and no one could have foreseen Hurts would be the face of the Tide program this season. It's why Hurts has played a snap, late started against Ole Miss in the national title game — the first and only of his career.

"The maturation process, the leadership part, the experience part of it has helped a lot this spring," Hurts said.

"It's the only way he's the only way we've handled this whole year."

"It's the whole process, the being part of the offensive coordinator, the head coach, the game plan, all of that. It's the only way he's the only way we've handled this whole year."

After all, he knows he's come a long way.
Teammates, coaches see Hurts as a star

Tide quarterback has worked on decision-making, other aspects after numbers dipped late last season

Matt Zenitz mzenitz@al.com

Jalen Hurts watched safety Ronnie Harrison, waiting patiently to see whether Harrison was going to stay deep or come down to cover a shorter route.

Eventually, Hurts pump-faked, tricking Harrison into breaking forward. Hurts then completed a long pass in the area where Harrison should have been.

After the play, which came during a recent practice, Harrison thought to himself, "Dang, Jalen's coming along."

That's been the consistent feedback from Alabama teammates and coaches this spring, that Hurts is making noticeable strides as a passer entering Year 2 as the Crimson Tide's starting quarterback.

"He's learning defenses and learning how to read better, and he's making a lot of great throws," Harrison said, "so he's definitely progressing."

The college football world is already well aware of Hurts' athleticism and running ability. The reigning SEC Offensive Player of the Year ran for 954 yards and 13 touchdowns last season and recently posted one of the top 40 times on the team during the Tide's spring testing, a 4.48.

The question mark with Hurts is his passing, especially after he threw for an average of just 109 yards in Alabama's final three games last year while competing only 48 percent of his passes in those three games.

SEE ALABAMA, B4
Helping Hurts improve as a passer has been a primary focus this spring for Tide coach Nick Saban and new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Brian Daboll.

Alabama lost to Clemson in the national championship game Jan. 9. One day later, Saban called Hurts and said, "OK, this is what we need to improve on."

"We’ve been working on it ever since the 10th of January," Hurts said Wednesday during his first meeting with the media since the end of last season.

Originally, it looked like Steve Sarkisian was going to be Hurts’ offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach.

Instead, Sarkisian left for the Atlanta Falcons in early February, leaving an opening that Saban filled with Daboll.

Daboll visited with Hurts early on, going over his history with the New England Patriots and as an NFL offensive coordinator, talking about his philosophy as a coach and telling Hurts about his plans for him and the Tide offense.

The two have "gelled really quick," according to Hurts.

With Hurts around, Daboll will periodically FaceTime with some of his former Patriots players, like superstar quarterback Tom Brady and star tight end Rob Gronkowski. Daboll also uses game film from his time in the NFL as a teaching tool with Hurts and the Tide’s other quarterbacks.

“He’s cool, laid back and about his business," Hurts said of Daboll.

Saban recently shared some of the coaching staff’s goals for Hurts — getting better with decision-making, getting the ball out quicker, not drifting in the pocket and improving with reading defenses and consistently having his eyes in the right place.

Hurts is already doing a “much better job” in those areas, Saban said.

Improvement was noticeable as early as Alabama’s first spring practice.

After practice, offensive analyst Alex Mortensen told Hurts, “The game looks slower to you.”

“Yeah,” Hurts responded.

“He saw me make a check and just do things we haven’t covered yet, that we haven’t got to,” Hurts said. “It’s just instinctive stuff I did and he noticed that. He said ‘It’s slowed down,’ and I was like ‘I guess it did.’”
Cecil Hurt: The touching story behind Jalen Hurts’ viral video

By: Cecil Hurt

University of Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts attracts attention with almost everything he does on the football field. He’s just as recognizable off the field, a statewide celebrity even though he’s just finished his freshman season as a football player.

So when Hurts posted a short video on his Twitter account Thursday afternoon, showing him making a surprise visit to Arts ‘n Autism – an after-school program in downtown Tuscaloosa – the tweet quickly went viral.

In the video, Hurts surprises a fan who is talking about Hurts without knowing the quarterback is behind him – until a tap on the shoulder brings the two face to face in a moment to treasure. In his Tweet, Hurts says he “couldn’t wait to meet” the fan, Justin, after hearing “his touching story.”

I wondered what that story was, so I called Arts ‘n Autism and found that the story has two heroes, not just one. Justin’s full name is Justin Mixon. He was part of the very first class of autistic children to participate in Arts ‘n Autism when the program began in 1994.

“He has been with the program since kindergarten,” said Patricia Thomas, the program director. “He was a part of our first class that graduated. We are an after-school program, but as the class grew up, (we learned) that many of these kids suddenly had no place to go, even though they still needed a place. So we began our LIFEE (Learning Is Fundamental to Education and Employment) program to assist them as adults.”

Mixon, after finishing the program in 2007, was able to attend the University of Alabama and received a music degree – and decided to give back.

“When he graduated from college in 2011, he came back to teach music to other kids and to serve as a role model and an example in our LIFEE program,” Thomas said. “He teaches piano, percussion and voice, but he can really do anything. We have a ukulele, for instance, and he uses that, too.

“One characteristic of many people with autism is that they have very big interests. They will became experts in one or two things that they have an interest in, and things they don’t have an interest in, they don’t focus on as much. Justin’s big interests are music and sports.”

Last season, that sports interest was centered on Alabama’s new quarterback.
“His big idol is Jalen Hurts,” Thomas said. “That’s very important to him. Justin is a very solid, truthful, loving person and he takes the idea of a hero very seriously. He can tell you everything you want to know about Jalen, maybe more than you want to know if your time is limited.”

Eventually, a student volunteer at Arts ‘n Autism recorded Mixon talking about Hurts. The volunteer knew the player from a part-time job at the UA athletic department. She took the video to Hurts, who then took the initiative for the surprise visit.

In addition to a joyful moment, the video gave exposure to a worthy cause. Arts ‘n Autism (artsnautism.org) is a privately-funded program and a United Way agency.

“We are here to serve the entire community,” Thomas said. “We do not turn away any kid due to an inability to pay or family circumstances.”

Hurts will be back on the practice field on Friday, focusing on football and classes. But the few minutes that he took out of his off day from football to visit a loyal fan, music teacher and role model, will have a lasting impact.
New voices bring insight on Alabama football

By: Aaron Suttles

There are a couple of new faces around the Mal Moore Building these days, faces belonging to accomplished football men.

Neither is an on-the-field assistant coach for the University of Alabama, but if and when the NCAA approves football programs to add a 10th assistant coach, either might be considered.

Dan Werner and Chris Weinke aren’t average football analysts, a position that’s come to be utilized heavily under Nick Saban. Yet, both are at Alabama as such for the 2017 season.

Dan Werner is an experienced offense coordinator, one Crimson Tide fans should be familiar with by now. His offenses at Ole Miss gave UA defenses fits for several years in a row.

Finding himself out of work when Ole Miss coach Hugh Freeze parted ways with him, Werner headed south east. Werner, who still lives in Oxford, is a gifted offensive mind and quarterback developer. Saban jumped at the opportunity to add him to the staff.

Under his tutelage, Ole Miss quarterbacks Bo Wallace and Chad Kelly grew into formidable passers in the SEC.

“Werner had a reputation in Oxford as being a strong evaluator of quarterbacks, something that will likely serve him and Alabama well,” Ole Miss beat writer for RebelGrove.com Neal McCready said. “His presence was one of the key factors in Ole Miss’ landing of both Kelly and Shea Patterson.”

Kelly threw for 4,042 yards and 31 touchdowns in the 2015 season, one that found Ole Miss in its first Sugar Bowl since 1970. Kelly was off to another great season in 2016 before a knee injury derailed his year.

Jalen Hurts’ dual-threat abilities seem particularly suited for Werner’s offensive mind of run-pass option plays. Werner can’t work with Hurts, but his ideas will help the offensive coaching staff in that regard.

“Do I need to tell our fans or anybody on our staff the issues that we’ve had with their offense that last couple of years?” Saban said of Werner. “I’ve always had a tremendous amount of respect for what they do, how they coach it. I think it’ll help us on offense and defense to have a guy around here that can add some knowledge and experience to the way they do RPOs. Some of the things they did in the passing game.”

In Weinke, Saban landed a coach with high school (IMG Academy) and NFL (St. Louis/Los Angeles Rams) experience. Oh yeah, he also won the Heisman Trophy as the Florida State quarterback in 2000.
It should be stressed that neither Werner or Weinke can work with Hurts. However, both are available to provide ideas, tips and suggestions to the offensive coaches.

“(Weinke) played a long time in the league,” Saban said. “He’s very knowledgeable. He’s very smart. He was a great high school coach at IMG. He went to the NFL and got a couple good years of experience in the NFL.

“So we thought he’d bring some knowledge and experience and certainty be helpful to us off the field and helping us with game plan.”

Most importantly perhaps is the value both bring to Saban, who has fully accepted college football’s new offensive ways. As he memorably noted in his first press conference of spring, Saban has no desire to move UA’s offense backwards.

The game has changed and Saban is on board with utilizing every weapon available to stress opposing defenses.

“I think those two guys, having coached in high school and college, certainly helps a guy that’s coached in the NFL be able to balance some of the things that will help us have a well-rounded, pro-style offense that has the college elements that helps you take advantage of some of the college rules,” Saban said.
Players adjusting to life under Brian Daboll

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Something's different. That's quickly clear.
No longer is Lane Kiffin patrolling the quarterbacks warm up routine in the baggy gray sweat suit. Brian Daboll won't be easily confused for his high-profile predecessor either.

After a three-year run with Kiffin and about two months of Steve Sarkisian, Nick Saban went a different route for the next offensive coordinator. Daboll arrived as something of an enigma to the Alabama following. He's been outside the college football orbit since serving as a Saban graduate assistant back in the Michigan State days.

While Kiffin and Sarkisian came to Alabama with more notoriety than they would've probably preferred, Daboll still remains somewhat of an unknown outside the four walls of the football complex. A few of his players were able to shed some light on what Daboll is and how he coaches.

"I feel like I have a personal relationship with him already even though he's only been here for a couple of months," said tight end Hale Hentges. "So that's something that I really enjoy. Just getting to know him better and something that I hope to just continue to grow and foster this personal relationship that I have with him."

Like all coordinators and assistant coaches, Daboll doesn't do interviews. He's been an offensive coordinator with three NFL teams — the Browns, Dolphins and Chiefs.

"Every coach has a different coaching style," Alabama running back Damien Harris said. "Everybody has their own personality, their own persona that they bring. But he's a real high-intensity guy, and you really emphasize attention to detail, focus, high energy on the field, attention to detail in the meetings. So, he just brings those good qualities to our offense, and I think he's done a great job coaching us and we all enjoy him, so I think things will go smoothly in the future."

Daboll spent 10 years in two separate tenures coaching for the New England Patriots. Can they see any Bill Belichick in his prototype?

"He's definitely different," a smiling Hentges said. "Belichick is a one of a kind person. He's funny. He's got a good sense of humor. He is always really positive in his meetings. He's upbeat. And there's a real, yet big goal in place."

He says, "OK guys, this is what we're going to do," Hentges said. "Alabama has always been about defense but we want to start making it more about offense. We want Alabama to be known for great offense. That's something that he's said to us, preached to us. That's something I've responded to really positively."

"It took a little time to adjust. The first couple of days weren't necessarily perfect," Harris said. "But we had to come to the conclusion that when you have so many known moving parts, it's not going to be that way. But if you continue to work on them, then things will get better. And as time has gone on, things have gotten better for us, and we're doing what he's asking us to do, and him coaching us the way he needs to coach us. I think things are going better."

Daboll's arrival in late February brought stability to an interesting few months. First, Kiffin took the FAU job in December with the idea of coaching through the playoffs. After the Peach Bowl, Steve Sarkisian was handed the playbook and Kiffin went to Boca Raton a game early.

That lasted two months since the Atlanta Falcons hired Sarkisian to be its offensive coordinator two days after losing the Super Bowl. Though not ideal, Harris acknowledged the situation was out of their hands and he trusted Saban's management of it all.

Hentges offered a specific observation he made about Daboll's interactions with the three young quarterbacks.

"Personally, I've just seen a guy who really cares about his quarterbacks," he said. "Whether it's in practice or in the meeting room, he's always taking them under his wing and saying, 'What were you seeing on this read?' or 'Why'd you throw that ball?' or 'Hey, that was a great pass.'"

"Even at practice I always see him complimenting guys, questioning guys, just really trying to be interactive with them and teach them why they're doing these things or why they shouldn't be doing these things. From that aspect, I can tell he's really hands on."

Every offensive coordinator under Saban has also served as the quarterbacks coach. Daboll's style isn't like the others Hentges has seen in Tuscaloosa.

"I mean, it's definitely different," the tight end said. "Each coach has their own unique style that they like to do. Daboll, I can tell he's all about the players and he's extremely hands on. That's something that I personally really love. I think you're going to continue to see that and just see how we all have personal relationships with him."

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Final score on that controversial Arkansas gun law: SEC 1, NRA 0

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Who's afraid of the NRA? Not the SEC.

The National Rifle Association, one of the most powerful lobbies in American politics, was no match for the most powerful intercollegiate athletics conference in the land.

The final score on that controversial Arkansas gun law: SEC 1, NRA 0.

Maybe Greg Sankey should run for governor of Alabama at the end of Tommy Tuberville's second term.

Thanks to an exemption passed by the Arkansas House and Senate, which the governor is expected to sign, the expanded list of places where you'll legally be able to carry a concealed weapon in the Natural State will not include college sporting events.

A well-worded statement from Sankey, the SEC commissioner, helped bring the Arkansas lawmakers to their senses. He urged them to exempt "athletic events and sports venues" from the new concealed carry law.

The best part of the statement: "Given the intense atmosphere surrounding athletic events, adding weapons increases safety concerns and could negatively impact the intercollegiate athletics program at the University of Arkansas in several ways, including scheduling, officiating, recruiting and attendance."

As if the Razorbacks don't have enough trouble recruiting. And who wants to play all their conference games on the road? Or in another conference? Sankey didn't exactly say any of that, but the lawmakers understood.

It's never a good idea to "negatively impact" your school's good standing with the money-printing machine that is the SEC.

The Sun Belt and Southland conferences added their voices to the intelligent opposition, and despite the NRA's support for the broader original legislation, college games in Arkansas hopefully will continue to be...

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shootouts in the sporting sense of the word only.

Thank goodness. Aside from the fact that you can't get there from here — often without some sort of unplanned travel hijinks — I've always enjoyed my trips to Fayetteville. Just not sure I could've expensed a Kevlar vest.

Spare me the lecture on the Second Amendment. This debate was never about taking away your guns or your rights. It was about common sense.

Have you ever been to an SEC football game? Have you ever stood on the sideline at an SEC football game?

Here's a partial list of things I've seen fly from the stands toward the field at SEC football games: Empty miniature liquor bottles; half-full water bottles; AA batteries; and, Hotty Toddy, Gosh Almighty, are those red high-heel shoes?

If it's all the same to you, Yosemite Sam, I'd really rather not add bullets to that list.

Imagine if Dr. Lawton Nalley had a pistol in his sock last October in Razorback Stadium. Imagine if the allegedly inebriated and certainly overheated Arkansas professor had been packing as he watched Alabama 49, Arkansas 30.

Nalley was so unhappy with the events of that evening, he was arrested and charged with public intoxication and disorderly conduct after reportedly shouting obscenities at Arkansas coach Bret Bielema.

Imagine how easy it would've been for Nalley or any other fan with a short fuse in the future to cross the line from obnoxious to deadly had legislators in Arkansas not done the right thing with a little urging.

Given his clout on the political front, maybe Sankey can throw the NRA a bone. He could encourage other SEC schools to take up an NCAA sport that's currently contested only at Kentucky and Ole Miss.

Who doesn't love a good game of rifle?