APRIL 21, 2017

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
MARCH 24, 2017 – APRIL 21, 2017

FOR SPECIFIC NEWS STORIES, SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE NUMBERS:

**News About**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUSTEE/SYSTEM INFO</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATE ISSUES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA CAMPUS ISSUES</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAB CAMPUS ISSUES</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAH CAMPUS ISSUES</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER STATE UNIVERSITIES</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPORTS</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL NEWS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

500 University Boulevard East
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401
(205) 348-5938
kreinhart@uasystem.ua.edu
http://uasystem.ua.edu
BOY SCOUTS

Saluting a leader

Robert Witt, former president and chancellor of the University of Alabama, listens to his introduction Wednesday during a luncheon in his honor at the Embassy Suites in downtown Tuscaloosa. Witt was honored by the Black Warrior Council of the Boy Scouts of America with its Circle of Honor Award. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]

Award honors former University of Alabama chancellor

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

On Wednesday, Nick Saban stood outside the ballroom of the Embassy Suites in downtown Tuscaloosa, shuffling through note cards. Saban was preparing to honor his friend and longtime colleague Robert Witt, president emeritus of the University of Alabama, presenting him with the 2017 Circle of Honor Award from the Boys Scouts of America's Black Warrior Council.

After walking onstage, the University of Alabama football coach directly addressed the honoree.

"I'm surprised he's not heading out the door now," Saban joked with the audience.

The award has been given out every year for the past three years and honors those in the community who exemplify the code of Boys Scouts. As opposed to previous years, Witt was the only recipient of the award this year.

Throughout his speech, Saban said that while he has been blessed with good relationships over the years, he holds his relationship with Witt very high, adding how important his leadership was in transforming the Crimson Tide football team through academic support, as well as leading the University of Alabama during his time as president and later as chancellor of the system.

See WITT, B5
WITT
Continued from B1

"When I talk about leadership, I always say 'You better be what you want to see,'" Saban said. "He sets the greatest example for all of us in terms of the kind of person he is, the kind of honesty and integrity he has and the decisiveness that he has in decisions that he makes that are always made with tremendous integrity and value, not for himself, but for the university and for other people."

Before giving Witt the award, Saban said he set a high standard at the University of Alabama that has made the campus and those who work there better.

"I cannot tell you how it's been an inspiration to me to strive to meet the standard that Dr. Witt has set for all of us at the university, which I think has made us a very special place, a place we can all be proud of," he said.

As Witt walked onstage, he and Saban embraced before receiving the award.

"Thank you very much, Nick," said Witt, who served as UA's president from 2003-12, then as chancellor of the University of Alabama System from 2012-16. "Receiving this award directly from you makes it even more meaningful."

Bill Gosselin, chief executive officer of the Black Warrior Council, said Witt was an easy choice to make for the award because of what he has done in the community.

Witt, who was involved in the Boy Scouts as a child, also served on the board of the Black Warrior Council.

"When you speak to other people in the community, one of the things they mention about Dr. Witt is his honesty and integrity and his spirit to benefit others," Gosselin said. "That is what we teach: service to others."

Before receiving the honor, Witt said he carried many of the tenets of Boy Scouts with him in his professional life.

"It gave me a sense of discipline," Witt said. "The process of moving up through the ranks of scouting and the process of earning merit badges teach you discipline and focus."

Witt said scouting was a very important endeavor.

"Scouting has never been more important than it is today because growing up today is much more difficult than when most of the people in this room were growing up."

The Black Warrior Council was formed in 1922 and serves more than 3,400 scouts across West Alabama.

-- Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
POLITICS

SOME EXPECTED
'SOMETHING BIG'

See next page
Governor's college friends remember a 'natural leader' focused on politics

Anna Claire Vollers avollers@al.com

When Kay Ivey enrolled as a freshman at Auburn University, the school had two student government associations — one for the campus as a whole, and a separate one for women. Ivey wasted no time jumping into politics, joining the main SGA as a freshman senator. "She was just a leader," said Patsy Arant, a friend and college roommate. "She almost had to hold back because she was so capable. Her verbal skills were so strong that she put into words so many times exactly what we were trying to do in campus or sorority projects."

Ivey arrived at Auburn in the fall of 1963. George Wallace had just been elected governor, declaring in his inaugural address, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!" The battle over civil rights had reached a boiling point with Alabama at its center. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested in Birmingham; law enforcement officers there turned hoses on black protesters, and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing left four little girls dead. Shortly after Ivey's classes began in August, King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Three months later, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Kay Ellen Ivey was an only child and an ambitious Girls State alumnus from the small south Alabama town of Camden, in Wilcox County. She'd won the county's Junior Miss pageant in 1963.

SEE IVEY, A6
At Auburn, she pledged Alpha Gamma Delta, a sorority whose members had some of the highest grades on campus. That’s where she met Arant, who was the Alpha Gam pledge trainer. “We were immediate friends,” said Arant. “She was, honestly, like our governor back then in the things we did with friends, or sorority things, or student government.”

**FUTURE HOMEMAKER**

Bobbie Umbach met Ivey a few years before, when Ivey was in high school. Both were active in Future Homemakers of America, a club that had district, state and national organizational. “In a small school back then, the best place for leadership, especially for girls, was the Future Homemakers of America,” said Umbach, who rose through the FHA ranks at Auburn High School and became a district leader. That’s when she met Ivey, who was a FHA district leader from Camden.

Umbach eventually was elected FHA national secretary. That’s when Ivey called and asked if the two could meet. “She came and spent the weekend with me, to talk to me about running for a national office,” said Umbach.

Future Homemakers of America was all-female, making it one of few school organizations “where you could run for president and be the president,” said Umbach. “Future Homemakers was an organization where girls could really rise through the ranks.”

Holding a national office through FHA opened a whole new world for girls like herself and Ivey. Umbach took her first airplane ride on a trip to a national FHA conference in Washington, D.C.

“Conferences in St. Louis, Chicago, Washington — those were experiences small town girls didn’t have much,” said Umbach. “I think Kay saw the opportunity for leadership and she took it.”

A few years later, Umbach saw Ivey again during sorority rush at Auburn. Umbach was a junior in Alpha Gam and knew she wanted Ivey in her sorority. “I knew her background and what a leader she was, and of course I supported her,” said Umbach. “We were very happy to get her.”

In Ivey’s senior year, she became the first woman elected vice president of the Auburn Student Government Association. She’d been SGA secretary the year before and a senator the prior two years.

In Ivey’s senior year, she became the first woman elected vice president of the Auburn Student Government Association. She’d been SGA secretary the year before and a senator the prior two years.
Leaders meet with new governor

Economic issues, infrastructure top agenda

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Infrastructure, economic development and ride-hailing rules were among the key topics Gov. Kay Ivey discussed this week with the mayors of Alabama's five biggest cities.

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox along with Birmingham Mayor William Bell, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson and Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange met Wednesday and Thursday in Montgomery to discuss issues these cities face with Ivey and key cabinet members and state legislative leaders.

"As mayors of Alabama's largest cities, we understand that the future of our state depends largely on our ability to produce results," Maddox said in a news release. "Our quarterly meetings provide a unique opportunity to share best practices and create alignment on key state initiatives."
LEADERS
Continued from B1

"I believe we are the level of government where we can still get things done and improve the quality of life in our community."

Maintaining and improving Alabama's infrastructure topped the list of concerns by the mayors who represent one-third of the state's population.

The road network is critical to economic development efforts, said Deidre Stalnaker, media relations coordinator for the city of Tuscaloosa, in a news release highlighting the topics discussed with Ivey.

While cities allocate larger portions of their budgets to local infrastructure, the mayors contend that state and federally controlled roadways must keep up with the demands of commerce, Stalnaker said.

The mayors urged legislators to pass a bill renewing the historic tax credit, which aids public sector investment into older, historic properties. They also said they supported increasing the cap limits on tax credits intended to aid economic development as detailed in the Alabama Jobs Act.

Created in 2015, this act created two tax credits that can be awarded by the governor, at the recommendation of the Alabama Department of Commerce, to qualifying development projects.

One of the tax credits is based on the previous year's annual employee wages. It is capped at 3 percent. The other tax credit is based on capital investment. It's capped at 1.5 percent of qualified annual capital investment.

Each of these tax credits is available for up to the first 10 years of a project and eligible projects can claim one or both, as determined by state officials.

Additionally, ride-sharing companies -- and a city's ability to regulate them -- were discussed with Ivey.

The mayors said they would work together with state elected leaders and ride-sharing companies to find compromises allowing for the expansion of these operations in Alabama while ensuring municipalities can institute adequate safety measures, Stalnaker said.

A bill pending in the Alabama Legislature, HB 283, establishes a statewide regulatory framework for the operation of transportation network, or ride-sharing, companies, like Uber or Lyft.

Uber is on record as supporting the bill, which would require thorough background screening standards for drivers and establish consumer protection provisions.

But it also eliminates an individual city's ability to provide public safety oversight in regards to vehicles-for-hire, something the mayors did not support.

—Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Cynthia Almond will be the next president of the Tuscaloosa City Council [STAFF FILE PHOTO]

She's the first new president in 12 years

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Cynthia Almond has been selected to succeed Harrison Taylor as president pro tem of the Tuscaloosa City Council.

Almond, 51, will be the City Council’s first new president in 12 years.

Taylor, who represents District 2 and has held the position for three terms, was ousted in the March municipal election by political newcomer Raevan Howard.

“I’m honored to be chosen

SEE COUNCIL, B4

Council committees

Here a list of City Council committees and members as selected during an informal meeting on Tuesday.

Administration and policy:
Eddie Pugh, chair; Phyllis Odom, vice chair; Sonya McKinstry, member; Cynthia Almond, alternate

Finance: Matt Calderone, chair; McKinstry, vice chair; Pugh, member; Odom, alternate

Properties: Almond, chair; Kip Tyner, vice chair; Raevan Howard, member; Calderone, alternate

Public safety: Howard, chair; Pugh, vice chair; Calderone, member; Tyner, alternate

Public projects: Tyner, chair; Almond, vice chair; Odom, member; Howard, alternate

Litigation and insurance: McKinstry, chair; Calderone, vice chair; Almond, member; Pugh, alternate

Community development: Odom, chair; Howard, vice chair; Tyner, member; McKinstry, alternate

See next page
to serve as council president for this next term and I'm just looking forward to working with all the council members, especially (Howard), our new council member who's on board, and working with the mayor to move the city forward," Almond said.

Almond was selected during an informal meeting of the City Council on Tuesday. She's expected to be officially elected as council president when the council is sworn into its new term next month.

She was chosen over six-term veteran Councilman Kip Tyner and Councilwoman Sonya McKinstry, who was unopposed in her bid for a second term last month.

Tyner, 61, pointed to his longevity on the council and seniority. With Taylor's defeat, Tyner is now the longest-serving member on the City Council.

"I do think seniority should not be the only factor but seniority should matter," Tyner said. "I feel like I have paid my dues."

McKinstry said she thought it important that the council president remain black under the leadership of a white mayor to assure city residents that they were led by a diverse group of representatives.

"Not only do I bring a sense of diversity, being a woman, but I'm also African-American," said McKinstry, 47. "We have a Caucasian mayor and this puts the diversity somewhat even."

The council members not seeking the president's position, however, voiced their support for Almond.

Councilmen Eddie Pugh and Matt Calderone, after confessing that they would rather not have to make a choice, said that they favored Almond as council president.

And when Councilwoman Phyllis W. Odom agreed, Tyner said he saw no more reason to continue the discussion.

It was the first time that day that the council was in total agreement.

While the council president position receives a $5,000 bump in pay -- the president receives a salary of $31,829 while the six remaining council members receive $26,413 -- the seat also carries an added level of responsibility.

The president sets the council's agenda for its weekly pre-meeting -- which takes place an hour before the weekly round of committee meetings are held -- and also presides over the nightly council meeting when the mayor is absent or unavailable.

But the council president also acts as a liaison between the council members and mayor's office. And after the tension that swelled during Tuesday's informal selection process, that job may not be as easy as it has been in the past.

Not only was the council president seat up for debate, but so, too, was the chairman position of the council's finance committee.

The finance committee and public projects committee are the only two committees that meet each week. They also are the two committees that oversee the most in taxpayer spending.

Almond, who has headed the finance committee for four years, made no effort to retain the seat once she was selected as council president.

And after being rejected as council president, Tyner said he wanted to exchange his seat as chairman of the public projects committee and take over as chair of the finance committee.

"I am disappointed about the council president," Tyner said, "so I'd at least like to have an opportunity to pick the committee I'm chair of."

And he was disappointed again, as the council -- in a silent tabulation -- selected Calderone over Tyner as chairman of the finance committee.

Calderone, who faced no opposition in his bid for a second term and has chaired the administration and policy committee for the past four years, said he had plans for the city's financial future that he wanted to pursue as chair of the finance committee.

These included a "hard analysis" of the city's debt and the examination of discretionary spending for council members, he said. Currently, there are no individual spending accounts for the council members.

"And we're going to have to evolve our economic model and funding sources for what we do," said Calderone, 26. "I think I've got the track record to ask the hard questions ... (to make sure) we have more to do more."

After being thwarted on two fronts, Tyner then said he wanted to retain the chairman seat for the public projects committee that had, by this time, fallen to McKinstry.

It took multiple requests, but McKinstry ultimately agreed to let Tyner remain as head of the public projects committee.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Del Marsh, Arthur Orr seek accountability for higher education spending

By: Elizabeth Lauten

Facing a perennial budget shortfall, the Alabama Legislature is forced to consider how to best spend each and every hard-earned taxpayer-dollar each year.

Which is exactly why Anniston-Republican Sen. Del Marsh and Decatur-Republican Sen. Arthur Orr submitted a plan in the Alabama Legislature that seeks to establish greater accountability for the state’s higher education spending by creating the Alabama Community College Council on Outcome-Based Funding. The council would be tasked with rethinking the current postsecondary funding model and create a plan to shift to outcome-based funding for Alabama’s community colleges.

Like many state across the country, Alabama currently allocates funds on the basis of enrollment, which by-and-large ensures equitable distribution of per-student spending across institutions. Essentially, dollars follow students high school to higher education.

But the current system doesn’t always take in account whether or not students complete their college courses, transfer to other institutions, or even graduate. Which is why Marsh and Orr are hoping to change the system to one where dollars don’t simply follow students, but rather they follow successful students, by shifting the funding to what educators call an outcome-based or performance-based system.

Switching to an outcome-based system, endeavors to ensure taxpayer investments yield the best possible returns as they incentivize not only college access, but also college completion.

“The goal here is to bring more accountability to taxpayer dollars that are spent by higher education institutions,” Orr remarked. “The Legislature appropriates over $1.5 billion annually to Alabama’s colleges and universities, and we need a mechanism for rewarding those institutions that are providing great value to Alabama’s students.”

According to the plan set forth — Senate Joint Resolution 85 — an advisory council will develop a specific outcome-based funding model for the allocation of Education Trust Fund appropriations to publicly-supported community and technical colleges in Alabama.

“Making government more accountable to the taxpayers is a top priority of the Alabama Legislature,” Marsh said. “We are committed to making any changes necessary in order to achieve that goal.”

Alabama isn’t the only state looking to make a change. Across the country, other budget-strapped states have been forced to carefully consider how their limited dollars are spent on higher education. Currently, thirty-two states — including neighbor-states Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee — now use, or are in the process of transitioning to performance-based formulas to determine higher education spending.

See next page
"Historically, many colleges have received state funding based on how many full-time equivalent students are enrolled at the beginning of the semester," said the National Conference of State Legislatures. This model provides incentives for colleges to enroll students and thus provide access to postsecondary education, but this model does not necessarily provide incentives for institutions to help students successfully complete degree programs. Many states are reconsidering the enrollment-based funding model and instead are aligning funding models with state goals and priorities.”

Pending what the advisory council puts together, Alabama could be poised to join them soon.

A shift in process could not only help the state’s ongoing budget crisis, but also bolster state’s higher education graduation rate. Only 23.5 percent of Alabamians between the ages of 25 and 64 have an associate’s degree or better. In comparison, 40.4 percent of Americans in the same demographic do, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2011-2015 data.

“This process is in line with our vision of providing all Alabamians with an affordable pathway to succeed through quality education and training,” said Jimmy Baker, Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System.

“We look forward to working with the Legislature to create a funding model that ensures we are accountable with every dollar provided to us and shows the successes of our students.”

According to SJR85, “the advisory council shall report its findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the Governor, the Chair of the House Ways and Means Education Committee, and the Chair of the Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee not later than January 1, 2018” to be considered during the 2018 Legislative Session.
$700 million deal will take Mobile-based Southern Light 'to a national level,' CEO says

By: Lawrence Specker

The CEO of a Mobile-based telecommunications company that is the subject of a $700 million acquisition deal says he sees the blockbuster figure more as an investment than a jackpot.

"This is the best story I could think of, in terms of Southern Light's next phase," company co-founder Andy Newton said this week. "This really does take Southern Light to a national level."

On April 10, Uniti Group announced that it had "entered into a definitive agreement" to buy privately-held Southern Light for approximately $700 million in cash and equity. Providing more detail, Uniti said the deal would involve about $635 million in cash aThe two companies have very different stories. Their fusion gives Uniti Fiber, which builds and operates fiber-optic infrastructure, a footprint that covers a large swath of the Southeast.

Uniti Group is a fairly recent creation. According to Bloomberg.com, the Arkansas-based real estate investment trust was incorporated in 2014 as a spin-off of Windstream Holdings. Originally named Communications Sales & Leasing, it took on the Uniti name in February 2017.

Southern Light has been around since 1998, when it founded in Mobile by Newton and Lee Wallace. In previous interviews, Newton has said that the company had to adjust its game plan over the course of its first few years. It originally put a heavy emphasis on "dark fiber," meaning that it laid fiber-optic lines that would then be available for leasing to other companies. It's a somewhat speculative business model, like building a pipeline on the assumption somebody else will need to move a lot of water someday. But a slump in high-tech fields drove Southern Light to focus more on building networks for municipalities and other governmental institutions.

In a 2015 interview with industry site telecomramblings.com, Newton said really found its footing about 2001. That was due partly to funding from "a very tight-knit group of family friends who have long-term horizons" and partly due to a keen focus on ownership of all-fiber networks. "We want to own and control both our metro networks and the last mile to the customer," he said.

From there, the company was on its way to a steady stream of accolades. Southern Light was recognized repeatedly by Inc. Magazine as one of the country's fastest-growing private companies. The Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce honored Southern Light as "innovator of the year" in 2010, and recognized Newton as its outstanding entrepreneur earlier in 2017. In 2015, Fortune Magazine ranked Southern light as the 51st best place to work for women and in 2016 Great Place to Work put it 52nd on its list of the country's best medium workplaces.

The company found its first opportunities for growth along an east-west coastal corridor. But it also grew northward, building networks in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa and the Huntsville area, and expanded into the data center business, including a multimillion dollar facility in the University of South Alabama Technology and Research Park.
Southern Light was itself a regional company, doing business in five states. But a map illustrating Uniti Fiber's holdings shows how it fits neatly into a larger regional entity: Uniti already had extensive network holdings in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida and an eastern swath of Alabama. (That's in addition to holdings in the northeast and Illinois.) Another recent Uniti purchase, Hunt Telecom, filled in north Louisiana. Southern Light adds a coastal swath stretching from deep in Louisiana into the Florida Panhandle, with additional pockets to the north.

"We were almost a perfect piece," of the new Uniti footprint, Newton said.

Newton said that Southern Light has about 270 employees, with about 230 of them based in Alabama. In Mobile, it struck a deal in late 2014 to lease seven floors in the 34-story RSA Trustmark Building at 107 St. Francis St. Newton said his company is on the verge of moving into that space, and the acquisition deal hasn't changed that.

"Uniti Fiber has committed to that office space," he said.

Southern Light's current leadership team will continue to run the company, he said, and he doesn't anticipate a loss of local jobs. "This is certainly a story of growth, not a downsizing," Newton said.

"This is a very capital-intensive business," Newton said. Building those pipelines takes a lot of money up front. So far the effort has paid off because the demand for data service has continually grown over the last decade, fueled in part by the widespread adoption of smartphones.

The infusion of money from Uniti allows Southern Light to keep building. Newton said he doesn't think the demand is slowing, though it's shifting as businesses find they need more and more data capacity to stay competitive.

"Every company in our footprint has become a potential customer," Newton said. "Overall the dependence on connectivity is growing exponentially."

When Uniti announced the transaction, it said "Southern Light's dense regional fiber network comprises nearly 540,000 fiber strand miles, 5,700 fiber route miles, and over 4,500 on-net locations. Southern Light and Hunt will double Uniti Fiber's operational network to encompass over one million fiber strand miles, and increase Uniti's aggregate strand miles to over 4.8 million." It also said that "Southern Light enters 2017 with revenues under contract exceeding $435 million and an average remaining contract life of over 10 years, providing excellent forward revenue visibility."

Kenny Gunderman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Uniti, said in that statement that "Southern Light's revenues are well diversified, with 50 percent from national wireless carriers, 30 percent from wholesale and enterprises, and 14 percent from government and E-Rate customers."

See next page
In a conference call discussion the deal, Gunderman said that Southern Light was adept at "establishing a network presence with high quality anchored customers and then leasing the networks to higher margin customers" and "also has a very effective in-house construction capability, which we expect to play a critical role in executing on our growing backlog of small cell deployments at Uniti Fiber."
Trump taps Alabama leader for Ex-Im Bank post

By: Tim Steere

President Donald Trump on Friday named former Alabama Congressman Spencer Bachus to a four year term with the Export-Import Bank.

Bachus is a former member of the Alabama House and Senate who was later elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1993. He served in the House until his retirement in 2015.

The Export-Import Bank provides financing for the trade of American goods.
High school grad rate down after inflated year

Report on federal investigation into 2015 statistics expected to be released soon

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

Alabama Board of Education members had mixed reactions after learning the graduation rate for the class of 2016 at Thursday's work session in Montgomery.

That rate is 85 percent, 4 percentage points lower than the reported 89 percent in 2015, which federal education officials said was artificially inflated.

The decline reflects 2,492 fewer students graduating than in 2015.

The report was unexpected, and Alabama Department of Education officials appeared to be caught off guard when, during a discussion clarifying what it takes to earn a diploma, board member Dr. Cynthia McCarty, R-Jacksonville, point-blank asked for the report on federal investigation into what was formerly referred to as the Alabama Occupational Diploma.

Students on the Essentials pathway take courses not fully aligned with Alabama academic standards. Prior to 2013, students taking those courses did not count in the official federal graduation rate. Former superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice issued instructions in January 2013 that students taking courses on the Essentials pathway would count as graduates.

A PATHWAY CHANGE

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, only students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Program will be allowed to take Essentials coursework.

Students without IEPs must take courses on the General Education pathway, which is designed to prepare students to be successful in college or in a career, Felton-Smith said.

"I'm not going to feel like there is closure until I see that (federal) report," she said.

The department has been slow to release the 2016 rate, delaying it months later than in previous years. The detailed data showing graduation rates by system has not yet been released, and a department spokesperson said they're working on it.

Alabama superintendent Michael Sentance said, "A decline of 4 percent is pretty significant, and we're still working through issues, making sure ... things are being done properly, so I wouldn't say this is a closed issue."

Sentance said the federal Office of Inspector General's official report on the investigation into the 2015 graduation rate numbers is expected to be released by the end of May.

McCarty said she was "pleasantly surprised," at the 2016 graduation rate, adding she had no idea what to expect.

"We can believe in this number," McCarty said, adding, "In the past sometimes, with the big unveiling (of the increase in graduation rate), it was almost too much."

McCarty said school districts have taken the federal investigation seriously and are doing their best to ensure students graduate and the numbers are accurate.

Hunter took more of Sentance's tone, saying, "It's a significant drop," adding she's at least relieved they actually know the rate now, as she, like McCarty, hadn't known what to expect.

THREE PATHWAYS

Chief Academic Officer Dr. Barbara Cooper clarified Thursday the three pathways for students to earn a diploma: the Alternate Achievement Standards pathway, the Essentials pathway and the General Education pathway.

The AAS pathway is for students with significant disabilities who have an Individualized Education Program. Students on this pathway should not be counted in official graduation rates.

The Essentials pathway is designed for students preparing for work or a two-year college after high school, said Dr. Linda Felton-Smith, director of learning support, adding the National Collegiate Athletic Association doesn't accept coursework on this pathway for athletic eligibility. It is what was formerly referred to as the Alabama Occupational Diploma.

Students on the Essentials pathway take courses not fully aligned with Alabama academic standards. Prior to 2013, students taking those courses did not count in the official federal graduation rate. Former superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice issued instructions in January 2013 that students taking courses on the Essentials pathway would count as graduates.

"I'm not going to feel like there is closure until I see that (federal) report," she said.
How could Robert Bentley fall so hard? Now we know

By: John Archibald

On the morning of March 24, 2016 - the day after then-Gov. Robert Bentley stood in blinding camera lights and admitted speaking clumsy love lines to his top political aide - the governor's press office sent him this rundown of the day's news:

AP: Alabama legislature approves General Fund budget
AL.com: Constitutional amendment would declare that life begins at conception
Montgomery Advertiser: VictoryLand, GreeneTrack bills approved by committees

On and on it went, a dozen stories of politics and policy - all the news fit to read in the Alabama atmosphere. There was no mention of scandal, not a word on the most explosive story in the state; the most important story to his life, his career and his legacy. It was the same every single day that followed.

Gov. Robert Bentley was in a bubble.

This is the story of how he came to be there and how, in the span of seven years, he climbed to the peak of Alabama politics, achieved more than anyone thought possible, and tumbled over the edge.

The Beginning

Robert Bentley was, by anyone's standard, Alabama's accidental governor. He was a small-town doctor and back-row legislator who polled about 3 percent support when he chose to run for governor in 2010.

His rise was stunning. With help from friends and campaign staff in his hometown -- backed by powers at the University of Alabama, the Alabama Education Association and a core that became known as the Tuscaloosa Brain Trust -- he beat Bradley Byrne in the primary and Democrat Ron Sparks in November.

Despite his House seat, he convinced Alabama he was an outsider's outsider. He was a devoted family man and he would not be corrupt, he said, because he didn't need money. He was a doctor, after all, so he wouldn't even take a salary.

By the time he faced Parker Griffith in the 2014 governor's race he was a different man. The country doctor was gone. The man who sometimes forgot to put on a jacket in the Legislature, who campaigned in short sleeves, was slicker and straighter and almost Brooks Brothers by his second term. He beat Griffith like his beloved Crimson Tide beats a PAC 12 opponent.

The landslide was historic, and Bentley entered his second term with a mandate, a 63-to-36 percent coronation. He was trusted and revered, a man who stood for the things Alabama admires.

See next page
It was, we know now, a mirage.

Because Bentley's personal and professional life had already begun to unravel.

"He listened to her like she was the Bible."

By 2013 - even as Bentley prepared for re-election - he had begun to push away the people closest to him.

He chose not to rehire Angi Horn Stalnaker as campaign manager, despite the fact she had run his first miraculous campaign. Instead he chose Rebekah Caldwell Mason, a woman he met at First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa, who he felt a bond with and wanted to help. He had already hired Mason's husband, Jon, to a $91,000 state position over "faith-based services," and despite her lack of experience or apparent qualifications, he gave his campaign to her. Stalnaker and others still loyal to the governor would serve in other roles.

It was in the middle of 2013, former staffers say, that Mason issued an edict saying Bentley was not to be shown negative news, whether in daily briefings or conversation.

It was shocking to those who had helped him reach office. Anyone in power needs truth as armor. They need someone to tell them to shut up or to brush their teeth, or to warn them when political winds blow ill.

But such truths were frowned upon. Staffers who spoke bluntly were dismissed, or maligned, or punished.

Mason, some said, drew closer to Bentley by telling him, in meetings with staff, that those who questioned him "don't believe in you like I do."

"The people love you," Mason told Bentley again and again. "They don't understand the way the people love you."

It was a frequent and maddening refrain.

"They don't respect you as governor," Mason would say. Or "God put you here."

A former cabinet member, who later fell out with Bentley because of Mason's increasing role, said the governor began to ignore friends and trusted advisers, and despite Mason's questionable credentials, Bentley heard only her.

"He listened to her like she was the Bible," Spencer Collier said.

Bentley grew closer to Mason, and farther from all those who made him.

By the start of 2014 even the Tuscaloosa Brain Trust began to step back, to distance itself from the governor. Paul Bryant Jr. quietly retreated, and supporters such as longtime Bentley

See next page
accountant Mike Echols began to question him. Friend and staffer Blaine Galliher walked away, Chief of Staff Seth Hammett felt as if he was not being heard, and old legislative buddies - and staunch supporters - were ignored by a man who seemed to believe only the words Mason whispered in his ear.

And those whispers were a concern, even before the impossible thought of an affair occurred to any of them. Staff members knew they had to be careful about what they said to Bentley, because if he heard something more than once he was apt to repeat it in public.

So it wasn’t surprising, in speeches and interviews and public comments, that Masonisms began to slip from his lips.

The people love me.

I was put here by God.

It made seasoned staff members cringe. It made columnists like me salivate.

But Bentley didn’t see it. He was handed only the good news.

"It is illegal to record the governor!"

It was early in 2014 that Bentley’s wife, Dianne Bentley, began to suspect something was amiss in her marriage. After almost 50 years her husband did not look at her the same way, nor hold her hand the way he used to, and when she began to see his suggestive text messages with Mason, she acted.

"Baby, I love you. I know we are in a difficult situation. Unless I make things as normal as possible here, it is going to be hell."

Working with aide Heather Hannah, and possibly with her own children, she used an app on her phone - stuck in her purse when she left the room - to record their conversations. And that was the beginning.

Staff members were stunned in April of 2014 when Bentley stormed into a meeting exclaiming "It is illegal to record the governor!"

"We didn’t know what he was talking about," a former confidante said.

But they soon would.

Despite the political success - Bentley was soaring in the polls and erecting billboards with the Mason-advised and soon-to-be-broken promise of "More Jobs, Less Government, No New Taxes," - those in his own circle were seething.

He was getting bad political advice. He was becoming somebody he wasn’t.

See next page
"If I can't go he can't go."

Legislators had pushed for an education budget that would fully fund PEEHIP, the teacher's insurance program, but House Speaker Mike Hubbard and Senate Majority Leader Del Marsh were convinced there was no money for teacher pay raises. They discussed it with Bentley, who told them he would support their budget.

But after the Legislature passed it, Bentley had a change of heart.

"Over the weekend Rebekah talked him out of it," one former lawmaker said. "He lied to Mike and Del."

It may seem a small thing, inside-baseball politics. But if a governor loses the strongest voices in both houses of his legislature - particularly a legislature as powerful as Alabama's is set up to be - he loses his clout and ability to lead.

To make matters worse, Mason had begun to emphasize to Bentley that he was the chief magistrate of Alabama, and he took it to heart. He began to speak publicly about being "chief magistrate," and began to order law enforcement officials to do his bidding.

He claimed powers and authority that did not belong to him.

The same can be said for Mason. In mid 2014, Bentley was chosen by the National Rifle Association to receive an award - a big thing for a GOP politician, particularly in Alabama. The presentation was to be in the Midwest, and the date and location were mentioned in a staff meeting.

"I can't go on that date," Mason said.

"Then I'm not going," Bentley responded.

Staff members tried to convince him it was politically important. Spokeswoman Jennifer Ardis could go with him. He was, after all, involved in a political race. But he was adamant. And so was she:

"If I can't go, he can't go," Mason said.

Dementia?

The middle of 2014 was chaos for Bentley, though his staff scrambled to keep it quiet in the days leading up to the election.

It became clear that Bentley family members had recordings of Bentley phone calls with Mason. Bentley's two closest confidantes other than Mason - bodyguard Ray Lewis and Alabama Law
Enforcement Secretary Spencer Collier - saw suggestive texts between the two, and both confronted him.

Collier said he asked Bentley about the affair in August, and Bentley vowed he would break it off - but didn't. Bentley actually told Lewis to go upstairs and break up with Mason on his behalf, and Lewis did it in the lieutenant governor's office. Still, it did not end.

Bentley's children were worried about their family and their dad. Some were concerned for his health. They thought, perhaps reasonably, that his change in behavior might be due to medical problems. They went so far as to make him an appointment at the Cleveland Clinic - somewhere he could receive the best care and not be recognized - to be tested for dementia.

But Bentley would not go. He saw it as a trick, an attempted coup. Because he knew - everyone knew - that if he was diagnosed with dementia he would be obligated to pull out of the governor's race. He refused.

Lemons to lemonade

In August of 2014 I began a series of columns about the governor's many flights on state aircraft, and the amount of money Ray Lewis received -- he was almost doubling his pay -- in overtime on the protection detail.

Former staffers in the administration said last week that Mason had claimed credit for "feeding" that Lewis story. Given politics, that's possible, though the initial tip came from grizzled old troopers with personal knowledge and their own axes to grind. But the implications of such a claim are enormous, and telling.

For if Mason did convince those men to push that story, she hastened her own demise. Despite the fact that Bentley knew and approved Ray Lewis's overtime, he demoted Lewis and eventually forced him into retirement. Lewis, like Collier, would become a formidable and believable witness to all of Bentley's sins.

Yet Bentley had a different reaction. On Aug. 17, 2014, the day of the story about the flights and pay, Bentley demanded that all his staffers -- but not Mason -- sign confidentiality agreements. In some meetings he refused to allow his staff to bring cell phones into the room.

There was no mention of those stories in the press clippings selected for him, though. The next day his report began with a story headlined:

"Governor Bentley buys a lemonade to help BARC."

BARC is an animal shelter.

"We can do anything. We're famous!"
November of 2014 should have been a high point in the life of any politician. Bentley doubled Griffith's votes to win a second term. But a day of elation turned into a nightmare. Bentley thought his scheduling director, Linda Adams, had a recording of him and Mason, and as the post-election celebration played on, he sent Collier to Greenville to confront her. He was chief magistrate.

Collier says he had already warned Bentley that chasing the recording was dangerous. He says he previously told him to leave Heather Hannah and others alone, but Bentley ordered him to go. And he went.

And trouble piled up.

Bentley, according to the sworn testimony in a report by the House Judiciary Committee, tried to get Mason a job with Alabama Power or UA, but nobody wanted her. He decided to hire her as his chief political adviser, but was warned it would be a risk. If she was a state employee the trysts and trips could quickly become crimes. So ACEGOV, a shadowy non-profit, was set up to pay her from private sources. After months of research by investigators and media, we still can't say for certain who contributed.

Dianne Bentley

But as the election ended and inauguration loomed, Bentley was on top of the political world. And Mason was right there with him.

A campaign staffer asked Mason what she planned to do after the race.

"We can do anything," she said. "We're famous."

But trouble was coming. It was coming fast.

In December of 2014 an event occurred that has become known in Alabama simply as "The Wallet." Bentley fought with his wife and drove away mad - without his wallet. A state aircraft took off from Montgomery, picked up the wallet in Tuscaloosa and brought it to Bentley at the beach.

"Will that woman be there?"

By January's inauguration day, Bentley's personal life was in ruins. Members of his own family did not want to come to the ceremony or the inaugural ball, and Dianne Bentley had asked, "Will that woman be there?"

Mason was there. In a dress the staff described as "scandalous."

Collier remembers how the governor and Mrs. Bentley walked in silence through the corridors before the swearing in. But as they reached the door, opening to the public, she reached down and grabbed the governor's hand.

See next page
"The only reason she did it is because Dianne Bentley has a world of class," he said.

That night troopers mapped and remapped ways to "set picks" for Mason if she came too close, and extraction was planned if the First Lady became upset.

"We had a plan to get her out of there quickly and quietly," Collier said.

It was a long and sordid year. At one point a fight erupted over what tie Bentley should wear to a speech -- one chosen by Mason or one chosen by the First Lady. Bentley chose the Mason tie, but never wore it.

Somehow -- no one will say exactly -- the tie was destroyed before he could put it on.

So while it may have been a surprise to the state when Ms. Bentley filed for divorce a month after her 50th anniversary, it was no surprise to those who had witnessed the last several months.

But the indignities continued.

Mason, the other woman, wrote a statement for Mrs. Bentley to read about the divorce. Ms. Bentley did not give it.

Mason apparently helped devise a plan to close driver license offices in rural counties -- a decision for which both Bentley and Collier took substantial political heat.

And in October rumors of the affair began to blow up in blogs and social media. They were greeted mostly with disbelief.

All the while Bentley continued to tell the public he was put in office by God, humbled by how much the people loved him.

He believed it. He deserved it. So he took Mason and Ardis and others on a state plane to the Republican Governor's Association meeting in Las Vegas. He didn't attend a lot of meetings while he was there, according to testimony. He did go backstage at a Celine Dion concert.

Revelations of that trip -- and his attempt to cover it up -- would later lead to charges of campaign violations that helped to bring him down.

Another turning point came in December 2015 when the governor, in an interview with AL.com, for the first time addressed the rumors of the affair. He denied it.

Members of the Bentley family and the Tuscaloosa Brain Trust felt the story allowed Bentley to blame his wife for their marital troubles. Bentley's family further felt he'd violated an agreement made with Dianne Bentley not to throw stones in the wake of the divorce.
It would come, perhaps ironically, to mobilize state employees and family members and ignite a fire under those who would see Bentley's sins unveiled.

The beginning of the end

At that time, though, there was far more at play than politics. House Speaker Hubbard was facing trial on ethics charges, special prosecutor Matt Hart was scouring the Statehouse and the Capitol, and Mason became convinced she was next on Hart's to-do list.

She began to step across the line, and that was the biggest political blunder of the entire saga. She sat in on meetings with Collier and the Governor and tried to prevent Collier from responding to a request for an affidavit in the Hubbard case. When Collier signed an affidavit for Hart - something he thought was part of his sworn duty - Bentley and Mason were furious.

Bentley put Collier on medical leave for back problems and installed former Bentley bodyguard Stan Stabler in his place. At the same time, though, Bentley told another AL.com reporter Collier's leave had more to do with punishment for disobeying him than Collier's health.

Mason and the governor's office began to push stories about Collier's "instability." They spoke of personal problems but never provided details. They treated him like he stole something, but never provided evidence.

They took a man who knew too much, and pushed him away. They took a man who had been loyal, and betrayed him. They took a man who kept notes like the investigator he was trained to be, and gave him reason to reveal all.

An affair revealed

On March 22 of last year Spencer Collier called me on the phone as I was driving home from work. He told me he had seen explicit texts between Mason and Bentley and had confronted the governor. He told me what witnesses have since confirmed under oath.

And by the time it was done I was on the side of the road, calling editors to say the top law enforcement officer of Alabama had confirmed a gubernatorial affair. I called the governor's office, leaving detailed messages about the allegations.

It has become part of the public perception that Collier spoke about the affair only because he had been fired. That's not the way I saw it. When I spoke to Collier, I spoke to him as the head of ALEA. When the governor's office got back to me -- saying Collier was crazy and this was all my fault -- they had fired Collier.

AL.com published the story that evening, and it exploded. Later that night, about midnight, I received recordings of the phone calls that haunted Bentley until his resignation last week.

AL.com did not publish them immediately because we could not confirm the voice on the phone was Bentley. Hours later, the governor took care of that for us.
Speaking words penned by Mason in a disastrous press conference, Bentley stood in the glow of television lights and denied having a physical affair. But he acknowledged it was his voice on the recordings, and that he was talking to Mason.

So the recordings were widely published. And Bentley became the Luv Guv.

Mason resigned, but remained in contact with Bentley. We learned that Bentley bought burner phones to cover up his affair, that Stabler lied during that ill-fated Bentley press conference, that Bentley took Mason as his "plus-one" to a White House dinner, and that Bentley had erectile dysfunction drugs sent through the mail in his ex-wife's name.

We learned that Bentley sought to discredit Collier through an investigation at ALEA, but the attorney general found more wrong with the investigation than with Collier. Criminal probes began, ethics complaints were filed and impeachment proceedings intensified after it was learned that Mason accompanied Bentley on a state plane to a Trump inaugural event this year. Through it all Bentley received morning briefings of happy news.

The unceremonious end

A week ago Friday, as the state hummed with expectation and news that the House Judiciary Committee would release its damning investigative findings, the governor's morning press briefing contained no mention of problems.

Any governor has responsibility to educate himself about the world around him, of course, but a curtain hung around Bentley. He was so snug in his Rebekah bubble he could not see anything but his margin of victory.

Three days later -- last Monday -- Bentley pleaded guilty to two misdemeanors and resigned the governorship. He spoke to Mason on the phone and was, according to some, advised on what to say. Then he went before cameras again, and gave an ungubernatorial, unapologetic speech to the people of Alabama.

He said he wanted to find a new way to serve Alabama, though critics said it sounded like O.J. saying he'd devote his life to finding the real killers.

Minutes before, Bentley had been in the sally port at the Montgomery County jail, having a mugshot made and fingerprints taken.

There, one cop turned to another and said this:

"I bet he's not saying God put me here now."
BENTLEY SCANDAL

BOTH SIDES AGREE: THIS MESS IS ON US

Even a child could point out Bentley hasn't been wearing clothes; it's painfully obvious we've grown accustomed to being embarrassed by our politicians.

Any child could point out that many of our political "emperors" in Alabama aren't wearing clothes. It should take about two seconds to recognize that Bentley directly ignored the Alabama Ethics Commission's opinion about the use of "loaned" staff. In that sense, we've watched him parade around without clothes for a year, and only a precious few have called him on it.

When Mike Hubbard was indicted, it was the same story. Plenty of politicians stood by his side even after they read emails from him that should have given them serious doubts about his innocence. In Alabama politics, preservation of political power seems heavily prioritized over ethical common sense.

Democrats should stop laughing because they can't figure out how to flush their own debilitating party leadership. Given the GOP's recent ethical track record, you'd think Democrats might have a fighting chance to again become power players in Alabama politics. You'd be wrong.

A few of our politicians have tried to deal with the problem. Rep. Will Ainsworth, R-Guntersville, and a number of his colleagues hoped to empower Alabamians with a tool to keep state politicians accountable. In 2016, they introduced a bill which created a process to force a recall election for a wide range of officials. Sadly, most legislators won't touch a bill that might be used against them if they step out of line.

There are two ways to modify the bill for it to have a better chance in the legislature. The first is to limit it to statewide office holders. If legislators aren't at risk, a bill like Ainsworth's HB301 could move much easier. The better way is to increase the percentage of signatures needed to force a recall election. A trigger at 35 percent to 40 percent of the votes cast in the last general election probably moves the bar high enough that any recall would effectively need to be bipartisan.

None of that helps us elect better politicians; it's just a way to deal with them after the fact.

I frequently hear that if we had as high expectations for our politics as our football, we wouldn't have these problems. That's true, but our low expectations for politicians are there for a reason. We're accustomed to being embarrassed. We're routinely the butt of national jokes. While we expect so much from our football teams, we're just happy when the dumpster fire of state politics doesn't smell too bad as it burns.

To be fair, we have seen positive laws enacted over the years. Great legislators who represent their constituents still exist in Montgomery. But how long can those great politicians remain so when they're silent in the face of corruption and bad judgment from peers?

We need to dig a little deeper than a politician's stance on God, guns and babies. Asking about those positions might be necessary, but it's definitely not sufficient. We ought to press them further on issues like budgeting, eliminating pointless licensing boards, prison maintenance or adequately addressing a growing opiate abuse problem.

We don't expect much in our politics, and we're getting it in spades.

Smith is a regular conservative columnist for AL.com and vice president for the R Street Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C.
GOV. ROBERT BENTLEY
SCANDAL

Donors to Bentley’s ‘dark money’ group still a mystery

Lawyers will seek to depose ACEgov officers for lawsuits

Kent Faulk kfaulk@al.com

An April 7 legislative report that detailed Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley’s affair with an adviser and intimidation tactics used to cover it up led to the governor’s resignation and guilty plea to two misdemeanor charges.

But as much as he tried, the special investigator and author of that report for the Alabama House Judiciary Committee couldn’t shed any new light on who may have donated money to the Alabama Council for Excellence in Government, better known as ACEgov. That non-profit “dark money” group, which had been formed by Bentley, paid for at least part of the salary of his senior political adviser and love interest Rebekah Mason.

The word ACEgov appears 38 times in that 130-page report, plus numerous other times in letters and emails attached to that document.

Special investigator Jack Sharman, however, wasn’t the only one trying to get a

See ACEGOV, A8
ACEGOV
FROM AI
peek into the inner-workings of ACEgov and who donated money to it.

Lawyers in at least three different lawsuits against the former Bentley administration also have questions: Who donated to that group? How much did each give? And did anyone get special access to the governor if they donated to ACEgov?

"I don't think we know anything more about ACEgov than we did a year ago," Spencer Collier, former director of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, who was fired by Bentley, told AL.com.

Collier filed a lawsuit in April 2016 against ACEgov, the governor, Mason, her company RCM Communications, and Stan Stabler, the man who replaced him at ALEA.

The suit, among other things, claims he was punished by Bentley, at the direction of Mason, because he refused to lie to the attorney general's office about prosecutorial misconduct alleged by the defense in the case of now convicted Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard.

After his firing Collier became the first person to publicly confirm the long-rumored affair between Bentley and Mason.

Collier said he and his attorneys will try to depose, among others, ACEgov officers, Bentley and Mason for his lawsuit.

Collier said they want information as to who Mason was working for and whose interest she was serving. "She was paid from so many different sites at different times," he said.

An attorney for Bentley's former chief of security, Ray Lewis, says they also want to depose ACEgov officers. Lewis' wrongful termination lawsuit also names ACEgov as a defendant.

"Given that ACEgov remains a defendant in Ray Lewis' lawsuit, we are interested during the course of discovery to find out who is ACEgov, who are their donors, and what, if anything, did the donors get in return for their donations," John Saxon also said this week.

Circuit Judge Truman M. Hobbs ruled last week that Bentley is protected by state immunity in Lewis' case because he was acting in his official capacity when Lewis claims he was forced to retire. The judge said Lewis' claims against ACEgov and Mason can proceed. But the judge said she can't be forced to sit for a deposition but can provide evidentiary discovery unless she believes it would infringe on her right to herself in other cases.

The Alabama Ethics Commission, while earlier finding Bentley probably violated ethics laws, on Thursday announced that it had found no probable cause Rebekah Mason had violated ethics laws. A stay of Collier's lawsuit was granted by another judge after Mason also argued she should not have to provide discovery in the case because of the pending ethics or criminal investigations.

ACEGOV RESPONSE
Sharman's report to the House Judiciary Committee identifies ACEgov as being among the groups and individuals it says didn't cooperate with the investigation of Bentley.

Text messages between Bentley and persons related to the formation of ACEgov "are almost entirely blacked out." Emails regarding Mason's compensation are blacked out. And while Mason admitted to getting $15,000 from ACEGov, that compensation did not show up on the group's IRS form, the report notes.

Cooper Shattuck, a former legal adviser to Bentley who
helped form ACEGov, denied the group refused to cooperate.

"Neither ACEGov nor its officers refused to cooperate with any entity. ACEGov has responded to inquiries and provided the information that it could provide to a number of requesters, including news outlets," he wrote.

Shattuck stated that, as previously reported, ACEGov "ceased operations and resolved to wind down its operations."

"At that time, it (ACEGov) had around $20,000. There are two pending lawsuits (Lewis and Collier suits) which include ACEGOV as defendant. Any remaining funds will be used to wind down operations, including dealing with these lawsuits. There is less than $10,000 remaining."

ACEGov is tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code § 501(c)(4)218 and by law is not required to identify its donors, the report noted. "We requested information from ACEGov, including the identity of the donors and attempted to serve ACEGov through its counsel but service was refused."

Shattuck responded to questions about the donor list and allegations in an email to Al.com last week.

"With regard to the donor list, the IRS regulations that permit the creation of entities such as ACEGOV provide confidentiality for such lists and donations," Shattuck wrote. "When the inquiries about ACEGOV's donors began last year, I asked the donors if they would allow me to disclose this information publicly, and they would not. Therefore, as I have said before, I cannot provide this information without subjecting myself to liability."

A lawyer for ACEGov, according to the report, stated "even though we believe that Mr. Sharman is without the authority to issue subpoenas (and no subpoena has been formally served), I have provided answers to the questions propounded a few weeks ago, confirming that there is no correspondence between ACEGov and any public official; there were no payments made by ACEGov to or on behalf of any public official; there were no funds received by ACEGov from or on behalf of any public official; ACEGov did no business with the State of Alabama and received no state funds; and ACEGov has no documents relevant to the impeachment of Governor Bentley."
Tommy Battle for governor?
It’s sounding more likely.

Lee Roop lroop@al.com

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle is crossing Alabama this month, eating food with lots of groups and tweeting like a candidate for governor. Battle still won’t confirm that he’s running, but it’s looking more likely.

On Monday, for example, Battle tweeted that it was a “sad day” when the announcement of 800 new jobs in Huntsville “gets lost in the culture of corruption of our state leaders.” The tweet ended with, “We can do better.”

That was a reference to Aerojet Rocketdyne’s announcement that it will build a rocket engine factory in Huntsville and create 800 jobs. The word came just as former Gov. Robert Bentley was in court pleading guilty to misdemeanors related to campaign finance violations and preparing to resign.

Three days earlier, Battle turned up in the background of a photo tweeted by another possible 2018 gubernatorial candidate, Public Service Commission Chair Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh’s tweet showed herself and state Republican Party Chairman Terry Lathan at the annual Winston County Ronald Reagan Dinner in Double Springs.

“He’s behavior up to now is not disinterested in running for governor,” state political analyst Dr. Jess Brown observed Wednesday. Brown is a retired professor of government and public affairs at Athens State University.

Battle said Wednesday that he has “been all over the state” to events like the Reagan dinner, including a dinner with homebuilders in Florence Tuesday night. “It’s still exploratory, but it’s getting down to time to make a decision,” he said. He’ll make that call at the end of this month, Battle said.

Battle said the decision boils down to three questions: “Can you be effective, can you make a difference, and can you win?”

People are looking for leadership,” including a plan or strategy to move Alabama forward, Battle said. But now, “It is getting down to the trust issue. We’ve got to build the trust back. We’ve been able to do that in Huntsville. Is that transferable?”

“We’ve got to build the trust back. We’ve been able to do that in Huntsville. Is that transferable?”

Mayor Tommy Battle, on a possible run for governor.
Tide tradition fading over time

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

A workout class met on the steps of Denny Chimes one evening this week. Waiting to get started, the Alabama students stretched on the worn concrete next to the iconic structure on the campus quad.

Nobody seemed to take note of the history on which they stood.

It's hard to blame them.

After years of natural punishment, the indentations in the concrete — handprints and footprints of Alabama football legends — have seen better days.

The Walk of Fame, which will get four new members before Saturday's A-Day game, turns 70 this year.

Harry Gilmer was the first to put his hand and cleat print in wet cement just off the University Boulevard sidewalk in 1947. Since then, the tradition has progressed to the chimes steps, gone around the east and west sides and continued north toward Gorgas Library.

SEE ALABAMA, A8
ALABAMA
FROM AL

At this point, some of the names — Jim Loftin from 1957, for example — are nearly unreadable.

Constant exposure to the weather and a lack of uniformity over the years have taken a toll.

"Honestly," said Brandon Sevedge, Alabama assistant athletics director for facilities, "we try to not pressure wash them and try to leave them alone as much as we can because anything you do further degrades them and makes it harder to read."

Clear uniformity wasn't a concern in the early days. The size of each player's concrete square varies greatly. The basic layout wasn't consistent until the practice was a few decades old. Even the type of concrete has changed over time — some years had a mixture heavy on sea shells.

"Yeah, they're just eroding away," Sevedge said. "They're real inconsistent from a concrete and the quality of the handprint — how deep it is. But they're really in different states, all of them."

The fragility of the patchwork tributes makes repairs difficult.

"We've looked at stuff, but there's really nothing," Sevedge said. "If you start messing with them, they just look worse."

All they can do now is focus on each new class. A new row of uniform squares was added to the north side for Saturday's ceremony. A few thousand A-Day fans will pile in around the quad to bear witness.

Eddie Jackson, Reuben Foster, Jonathan Allen and Cam Robinson will add their hand and footprints to the 180 already enshrined. The ceremony is scheduled for 12:15 p.m. before the 2 p.m. kickoff in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

A special set of all-capital letters was purchased several years ago to assure the new captains would have a uniform look. Walk through the area and the different eras of footwear also become obvious. The old-fashioned spikes eventually became logoed cleats that preserve the shoe sponsors along with the captains.

Sevedge, who is always out there on A-Day, said the same crew has supervised the process to assure quality work in recent years.

"They've been a lot more consistently sized and the quality of the concrete," he said. "It's still hard trying to time it and get everything timed perfectly with the weather."

That doesn't always go as planned.

Just take a look at the 2009 captains. That was a particularly warm A-Day in Tuscaloosa with a bright sun beating down on the drying cement. Add in the late arrival of the players, and the facilities crew got anxious.

A few minutes longer and the whole thing would've been blank. As it is, Javier Arenas and Rolando McClain have handprints and footprints that are visibly shallower than a few of the neighbors.

The perfect prints aren't easily achieved, as that class proved.

"There really are lots of factors," Sevedge said. "Pressure, weather, even the consistency of the concrete. You have to know when they mix it and when they put it on the truck. So yeah, there are a lot of factors."

As cameras surround the imprint process, some of the burden falls on the captains themselves.

"You're also relying on the guys not pushing too hard," Sevedge said. "That's something that's a problem, too. Some of them get a little heavy-handed, I guess."

Kindal Moorehead's trench of a footprint is the best example of this issue. His impression from 2002 reaches a few inches into the earth.

For the most part, everything north of Denny Chimes is in good condition. There's a crack down the middle of 1994 captain Sam Shade's print, but nothing that threatens the future readability.

Others aren't as fortunate.

Runoff from nearby sprinklers left Joe Namath's square in a puddle Tuesday evening. Other big names were fading faster. At a certain point, they won't look any different from an average sidewalk. Redoing the prints simply isn't possible for everyone on the Walk of Fame.

That isn't lost on the keepers of the quad tradition.

"We've looked at other ways of identifying them," Sevedge said, "and that might be something we look at in the future."
A-DAY GAME

Trophy display set for pre-game

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Alabama fans attending Saturday's A-Day Game will have a unique opportunity to have their photos taken with awards amassed during the Nick Saban era.

"It'll all be there," said Cameron Hutchinson of Crimson Tide Sports Marketing. "National championship trophies, Heisman trophies and 15 individual trophies. And we'll have staff members at each tent available to take photos of the fans with the trophies, so fans should be sure to bring their smartphones or cameras."

The "Decade of Dominance" trophy tents will be set up from 8 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. outside Bryant-Denny Stadium facing University Boulevard. The A-Day Game will kick off at 2 p.m. Admission is free.

Five separate tents will house the most prestigious awards earned during the Saban:

- One tent with 15 individual player awards, like the Butkus Award, the Lombardi Award and the Outland Trophy
- One tent with the University of Alabama's first two Heisman trophies, earned by Mark Ingram in 2009 and Derrick Henry in 2015
- One tent with the four SEC championships trophies earned

See TROPHY, A3

- One tent with the three Bowl Championship Series' crystal football trophies earned by the 2009, 2011 and 2012 UA teams
- One tent with the College Football Playoff trophy earned by defeating Clemson University after the 2015 season

Hutchinson said all that hardware is usually stored at the Hall of Champions at the Mal Moore Athletic Facility, where the football staff's offices are.

"It'll be a great opportunity for fans to have their photos with a piece of Alabama football history," she said.

The tents will be near the Mercedes-Benz Fan Fest, which will also open at 8 a.m. adjacent to the stadium. The fan fest features giveaways, musical entertainment, the Coca-Cola Kids Zone, the annual UA athletic apparel sale and more. Food vendors, which will include Texas Roadhouse, McAlister's, BojanglesMoe's Southwest, Popeye's, Local Roots and Smoothie King, will open at 10 a.m. along the Walk of Champions.

Hutchinson said fans will also be able to get autographs from players from last year's UA team: defensive back Eddie Jackson will be at the Alabama Credit Union tent at 10:30 a.m. and defensive lineman Dalvin Tomlinson will be at the same tent at 11:30 a.m. Wide receiver ArDarius Stewart will sign autographs at 11 a.m. at the Corner Super Store, 807 Paul W. Bryant Drive.

Andre Smith of the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals will sign autographs 11 a.m. at the KS Services tent along with ABC meteorologist James Spann, who provides the drive-home weather forecast at UA's home games.

The first 15,000 fans who arrive inside the stadium will receive a commemorative poster featuring Saban, more than 40 notable UA players and the 2017 football schedule. Also, the first 2,500 UA students will
be given a “Decade of Dominance” koozie. A commemorative program highlighting achievements in the Saban era will be on sale for $5.

A flag football game with former UA players will begin at 11:30 a.m. inside the stadium.

At 12:15 p.m., the annual Walk of Fame ceremony will be held at Denny Chimes on the Quad. The captains from the 2016 team -- Jonathan Allen, Reuben Foster, Eddie Jackson and Cam Robinson -- will have their hand prints and cleats set in concrete for display along with past captains outside Denny Chimes.

Fans can line up outside the stadium to welcome the 2017 team as they arrive for the Walk of Champions at around 12:50 p.m.

After the game, Saban will present spring awards to this year's players. After the awards, fans will have access to the field.

Fans are also invited to attend the UA softball team's 4:30 p.m. game against the Washington Huskies at Rhoads Stadium. Go to www.rolltide.com for ticket information.

Also after the game, the Post-Spring Game Comedy Show will be featured at the Bama Theatre, from 7-10 p.m. It's intended for adult audiences of 18 and older. Featured will be Jermaine "FunnyMaine" Johnson, Rocky Dale Davis, Brad Sativa, Monty Mitchell and Eunice Elliot. Doors open at 6. General admission is $20; VIP $50. VIP admission includes front-row seats, complimentary food and drink, and a meet-and-greet with performers. The Bama, a landmark movie palace converted to use as a performing arts space, is downtown at 600 Greensboro Avenue. For more on the show and comedians, or to buy tickets, see www.funnymaine.com.
The University of Alabama's annual spring football game will celebrate Nick Saban's 10 seasons as head coach of the Crimson Tide.

The A-Day Game, set for 2 p.m. April 22 at Bryant-Denny Stadium, will feature displays of Crimson Tide. 

**A-Day Game**

- **What:** University of Alabama's spring football game
- **When:** 2 p.m. April 22
- **Where:** Bryant-Denny Stadium
- **Admission:** Free
- **TV:** ESPN

*See next page*
of trophies earned during the Saban era, appearances by some of the star players of the past 10 years and a free commemorative poster for the first 15,000 fans. Saban is entering his 11th season as UA's head coach, with four national titles and five SEC titles at the Capstone.

Saban's tenure in Tuscaloosa has also been marked by a sharp increase in attendance for A-Day. Alabama leads the nation in spring game attendance during the last 10 years with a total of 809,744 fans, for an average of 80,974 fans per game.

Admission to the A-Day game, which serves as the football team's 15th and final practice of the spring, is free. Gates will open at 11 a.m. The A-Day Game will be televised on ESPN, with commentary by Kirk Herbstreit, Joe Tessitore, Joey Galloway and Laura Rutledge.

Activities will begin at 8 a.m. with the Mercedes-Benz Fan Fest, adjacent to the stadium. Fan Fest will include giveaways, music, food and drink sampling, the Coca-Cola Kids Zone, live radio remotes, vehicle displays, the annual UA athletic apparel/game program sale and more. Food vendors are scheduled to open at 10 a.m. on the Walk of Champions Plaza.

National championship trophies, SEC championship trophies and Heisman trophies will be on display for photos under a number of sponsor tents. Former Alabama football players will also be in attendance signing free autographs in the Fan Fest. Fans can check www.rol tide.com and the UA Athletic Facebook pages for updated appearance confirmations and times.

A-Day posters will feature Saban and more than 40 key players during the last 10 seasons, along with the 2017 schedule and will be given away at the gates before the game. A-Day programs with highlights from the past 10 seasons will be sold for $5. At the UA student entrance gates, 2,500 commemorative "Decade of Dominance" koozies will be given away, while supplies last.

A flag football game featuring former UA players will begin at 11:30 a.m. inside the stadium. The game will have two 20-minute halves and should wrap up around 12:15 p.m. The 2010 captains, Jonathan Allen, Reuben Foster, Eddie Jackson and Cam Robinson, will have their hand prints and cleats set in concrete in front of Denny Chimes at 12:15 p.m. The ceremony, which is open to the public, will include brief speeches by Saban and each captain.

At 12:50 p.m., fans can watch the 2017 team file into the stadium during the Walk of Champions on the north side of the stadium.

The halftime entertainment will feature the Alabama Dodgeball Challenge with former Crimson Tide players competing.

Throughout the game former UA standouts will be recognized. Those scheduled to appear include Derrick Henry, C.J. Mosley, Amari Cooper, Rolando McClain, Andre Smith, Courtney Upshaw and more. Saban will present the spring awards to the team at midfield after the game. Once the team has cleared the field, for the fourth straight year at A-Day, all fans will have post-game field access. Fans can enter through any of the four corner gates.

Public parking for A-Day is free and first-come, first-serve basis with Crimson Ride shuttles running from the east side of campus to the Quad beginning at 11 a.m. There will also be buses running from the University Mall, beginning at 11 a.m. For more parking, traffic and A-Day information go to UAGameday.com.

Only clear bags will be allowed inside the stadium for the 2017 season, beginning with the A-Day Game. The policy limits the size and types of bags that may be brought into the stadium by fans.
A fraternity at the University of Alabama will hold a benefit to support an organization that helps victims of human trafficking.

On Friday, Delta Kappa Epsilon will hold a benefit with proceeds going to Camille Place, an Alabama organization that is in the process of building a house to help underage victims of human trafficking. The benefit will be held at the fraternity house, which is across from Bryant-Denny Stadium on University Boulevard.

"I wanted to help raise money for the organization," said Jack Dailey, philanthropic chair of the fraternity.

Tickets to the event will be $5 each and will include hotdogs and other food from 2-6 p.m. Friday. Camille Place merchandise will also be sold during the benefit.

Dailey said he became aware of the organization through friends and found how they were looking for money to take care of basic operational costs.

"If we can help bring awareness, we're happy to do that," he said. Camille Place was first started in 2015 and is named in honor of Camille Coats, children's minister of Opelika's Trinity United Methodist Church who was killed in a car accident on Feb. 27, 2015. For a time, Coats worked at Mission at Serenity Ranch in Texas, which helps trafficking victims.

"She had a passion to help these people," said Chris Ziebach, founder of Camille Place. Since 2015, Ziebach and others have traveled to different schools and churches across Alabama to talk about human trafficking and its effects in the state. The house that the group is building will be in an undisclosed location and used to house minor female victims of trafficking.

"Right now, there are no beds in this state for minors," she said. "There's not a home in the country that offers these kinds of services."

Sex trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar business in the U.S. and experts have cited Interstate 20 in Alabama as being a major corridor in the state used for human trafficking.

For more information on how to donate to Camille Place, visit www.camilleplace.com.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Ex-US attorney to join law school

Joyce White Vance will be a visiting lecturer

Staff report

Former U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance will join the University of Alabama School of Law as a visiting lecturer in August.

As a distinguished visiting lecturer in law, Vance will teach in the areas of criminal justice reform, criminal procedure and civil rights.

"I am delighted that Joyce Vance will be joining the School of Law," said Mark E. Brandon, the law school’s dean. "Her knowledge and experience — both as U.S. attorney and in private practice — will make her a valuable presence in the classroom and a tremendous resource for our students. She will also be a splendid colleague."

Vance retired as the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Alabama in January. She was appointed by President Barack Obama to the post in 2009.

"I'm honored to be able to work with students who will shape the future of the legal profession and our communities and to share my experience, which underlines the critical importance of the rule of law, with them," Vance said. "I look forward to the opportunity to continue to make a contribution to important issues of social justice, criminal justice reform, civil rights and good government."

Vance
BUSY WEEKEND

Expect traffic snarls, road closures

Spring football, triathlon to affect motorists

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

With Tuscaloosa hosting a road race on A-Day weekend, visitors and residents alike can expect traffic snarls and blocked routes.

The USA Triathlon's Collegiate Club and High School National Championships will be Friday and Saturday, with top collegiate triathletes from across the country traveling to Tuscaloosa to compete in the race.

The event centers around the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater, meaning most of the streets affected will be in this area.

While the swim portion is taking place in the Black Warrior River and the running route is along the Tuscaloosa River-Walk, the cycling portion will use Jack Warner Parkway and Paul Bryant Bridge, including the intersection of Rice Mine Road Northeast.

To accommodate this, the following roads and walkways will be closed on Friday from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.:

- Jack Warner Parkway from 28th Avenue to McFarland Boulevard,
- On and off ramps at McFarland Boulevard and Jack Warner Parkway,
- 28th Avenue from Jack Warner Parkway to University Boulevard, and
- Tuscaloosa Riverwalk from Tuscaloosa Amphitheater to the River Market.

And the following roads and walkways will be closed on Saturday from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.:

- Jack Warner Parkway from 28th Avenue to Crescent Ridge Road
- On and off ramps at McFarland Boulevard and Jack Warner Parkway
- Paul Bryant Bridge from Jack Warner Parkway to Rice Mine Road Northeast
- Tuscaloosa Riverwalk from Tuscaloosa Amphitheater to the Boathouse at Manderson Landing

On Friday, the racing will begin at 8:15 a.m. and on Saturday the competitions begin at 7:30 a.m.

On both days, there will be full and complete road closures which may require detours and delays. Motorists are asked to drive with caution in all affected areas.

Local accommodations and police escort systems will be in place for those needing access to businesses and residences along the north side of Jack Warner Parkway via

See TRAFFIC, 84
TRAFFIC
Continued from B1
via Greensboro Avenue, 21st Avenue, Queen City Avenue and Guildswood Drive.

Those planning to attend the University of Alabama’s spring football game also are asked to be mindful of the triathletes, construction and bottlenecks.

On the UA Game Day web page, fans can find road closure and detour information as well as pre- and post-game traffic maps.

For those who arrive via Jack Warner Parkway, officials are asking that motorists use Campus Drive as an alternate route to and from campus. The University Boulevard crowd is being alerted to construction that is limiting the roadway to two lanes between Fifth and Second avenues. These motorists also are being asked to use Campus Drive as an alternate route to parking areas.

Parking will be free on the east side of campus. For McFarland Boulevard South, one turn lane is being used to access the northbound lanes of Interstate 20. When leaving Tuscaloosa, delays can be avoided by using Alabama Highway 216 through Cottondale.

And the ongoing construction on Interstate 59 will slow drivers between exits 79 & 76. To avoid this, Game Day officials are urging motorists to use exits 100, which leads to Alabama Highway 216, or exits 89 and 79, which lead to U.S. Highway 11. Both of these surface roads will serve as alternate routes to campus.

As usual, roads around Bryant-Denny Stadium will close three hours before kickoff and be limited to those with proper credentials.

For more information on the UA Game Day traffic plan, visit www.uagameday.com/a-day-info.php.

For more information on the triathlon, visit www.usatriathlon.org/usatcn17.

Additional questions were directed to Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports at 205-391-9200 or ttsevents@gmail.com.
LAKE TUSCALOOSA

Two women found dead

Police don't suspect foul play

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Police do not suspect foul play after two women were found dead in Lake Tuscaloosa early Saturday morning. Investigators believe that the deaths of the women, 34 and 41, were accidental.

Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit assistant commander Capt. Kip Hart identified the women as Liz Whipple and Shelly Darling.

Whipple was concluding her second year as interim director of the law school's Domestic Violence Clinic. Darling worked as a staff attorney in the Elder Law Clinic since 2014.

"Both were committed to values of equal justice, and
Darling's husband called police when she did not return home by dinner. Officers found the women's belongings on a dock, but did not immediately find the women.

Authorities searched the lake and recovered their bodies near the 15000 block of West Winds Drive early Saturday morning.

Autopsies will be conducted by Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences in Montgomery.

Further information will be released as it becomes available, Hart said.
LAKE TUSCALOOSA DEATHS

Autopsies point to electrocution

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Preliminary autopsy findings indicate that two women found dead in Lake Tuscaloosa Saturday were electrocuted.

Results list accidental electrocution as the causes of death for Shelly Darling and Elizabeth Whipple.

"We're still awaiting a complete autopsy report, which will include toxicology and other tests that need to be done," said Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit commander Capt. Kip Hart.

Darling, 34, and Whipple, 41, went to the lake on Friday, he said. Darling's husband, an assistant athletics director for the University of Alabama, contacted police when his wife didn't return home by dinnertime.

Officers searched overnight and located the women's bodies during the early morning hours Saturday. One of the investigators was shocked during an initial search of the dock where the women had gone to sunbathe, an early indicator that electricity near the water played a part in their deaths.

"We're still doing investigations into how things happened," Hart said. "Perhaps we can find a better determination of how this happened. It could be a combination of events, or items they came in contact with."

Investigators are still working to determine the direct source of the electricity.

"It would appear that the it was going straight to the dock, to power a lift and the electrical outlets down there," Hart said. "Our divers noticed an arcing between the police boat and the dock as they got close. We may never know exactly how this transpired, but at least this is a step toward closure for their families."

The women's deaths brought awareness to electric shock drowning, which happens when improper or faulty wiring at docks sent currents through the water. Swimmers can become immobilized and drown.

On Monday, Premier Service Company advertised on the company's Facebook page that they will offer free electrical dock inspections.

Both women worked for legal clinics at the University of Alabama School of Law.

Whipple was interim director for the school's domestic violence clinic and Darling worked with the elder law clinic.
LAKE TUSCALOOSA DEATHS

Electrical link investigated

Two women’s bodies were found in lake
By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Authorities are investigating the possibility that two women, Darling and Whipple, who were involved in the search for Shelly Darling and Liz Whipple, were shocked by a current on the dock where the women had been sunbathing Friday, said Capt. Kip Hart, Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit assistant commander. The officer wasn’t injured, but he may have discovered what caused the women to drown.

"At this time, we still do not have a clear understanding of what happened," Hart said Monday morning. Investigators were back Monday at the dock in the 15000 block of West Winds Drive to examine whether electricity played a part, he said.

Darling, 34, and Whipple, 41, went to the lake on Friday, he said. Darling’s husband, assistant athletics director for the University of Alabama, contacted police when his wife didn’t return home by dinnertime.

Officers searched overnight and located the women’s bodies in the lake during the early morning hours Saturday.

Both women worked for legal clinics at the University of Alabama School of Law. Whipple was interim director for the school’s domestic violence clinic and Darling worked with the elder law clinic.

“These two young ladies were very involved in the community, and obviously touched a lot of people’s lives with their jobs,” Hart said. “I feel for their families right now and hope we’re able to find some answers as to why this happened.”

A Tuscaloosa orthodontist died in August 2015 after he was shocked. Dr. Eric Hughes, 37, had gone swimming in the lake after cutting his grass one afternoon. His friends found him in about four feet of water near his pontoon boat. Investigators believe that he was shocked before he drowned.

The Electric Shock Drowning Prevention Association discourages swimming around boats, docks and marinas that use AC electrical power for boats, electrical outlets, lighting, boat lifts or other purposes. The organization’s position is that swimming around those areas should be prohibited, with “no swimming” signs posted and facility monitoring.

ESD happens when a typically low-level AC current passes through the body with enough force to cause skeletal and muscular paralysis. Victims are unable to help themselves, and eventually drown. Electric shock drowning can occur in any location where electricity is provided near water, but the majority of drownings have happened in public and private marinas and docks, according to the ESD Prevention Association. Children are often victims, according to the association.

The ESDA recommends that people have their boats and facilities inspected by certified electricians. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and American Red Cross also warn that ESD can occur around pools, hot tubs and spas.

Hart said that people should routinely check their boat houses, piers or docks with electricity. "Make sure it’s inspected and up to code so we don’t have this happen again," he said.
What they did
for love

Students thrive in production of Broadway mainstay

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

To the acting-singing-dancing students in "A Chorus Line," this is not just another kick line, not just another show.

"These kids love it," said Stacy Alley, associate professor of musical theater and dance at the University of Alabama, who's directing this week's production. "They Love This Show.

"It's their life."

Almost literally, though the two dozen of the cast are closer to the opening than the middle or end of performing careers. Aside from master of fine arts graduate acting student Billy Green, who plays director Zach, it's populated by undergrads, including a number of freshmen and sophomores. But seniors such as Daniel Hulsizer, Craig First, Bailey Blaise Mariea, Victor Castro III and Sandra Gates will soon move on, some to New York to try for lives like those of the characters they're playing.

Physical and emotional demands wear on performers, even of such youth. Injuries can happen to anyone, even if you've striven your whole life to do this one thing.

"So what do you do when you can't dance? Where is your self-worth?" said Alley, who's been through a bit of the life herself, having worked more than three decades as a professional performer, including five years as a featured dancer.

SEE BROADWAY, B3
"A CHORUS LINE"

What: Smash musical about dancers navigating Broadway, performed by the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, with a 2 p.m. matinee Sunday

Where: Marian Gallaway Theatre, Rowan-Johnson Hall, UA campus

Cost: $20 general, $17 seniors/UA faculty and staff, $14 students and children.


Covered by numerous artists, the show of all time with the 1975 smash, sixth-longest running Broadway show of all time with 6,137 performances, evolved from taped late-night sessions among dancers who mostly worked chorus roles. Colloquially known as gypsies, for the constant movement from show-to-show, they gathered midnights in 1974, as most of them were working on Broadway, under the guidance of dancers Michael Peacock and Tony Stevens.

“They drank some wine, smoked some pot, danced some, and just talked,” Alley said. “It didn’t feel more intimate than (Michael Bennett) ever thought they would.”

Bennett, who choreographed Stephen Sondheim’s original productions of “Company” and “Follies,” among others, was invited to observe, but soon began shaping the stories toward a show; he eventually choreographed and directed.


It begins with auditions in progress, where dictatorial Zach and assistant Larry (Micah Glover) are running dancers through paces. Seven quickly get cut; the rest move forward, and we begin to hear stories from behind the head shots. Some are pros, with the confidence of experience coupled to the fear of losing youthful edge; newer kids share yearnings from broken or un-supportive homes. There’s a high school dropout, a former male stripper, a woman whose husband finished her phrases for her, and more.

Raphael Crystal, who created the musical theater program at UA in 2001, knew about the show from early days. Crystal was in the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop, premier training ground for emerging composers, lyricists, and librettists, with Kleban.

“Ed was a very sort of crusty fellow,” Crystal said. “And the one song Ed didn’t like was the big one, because it was more sentimental.”

“For most, he wrote the lyrics first based on the stories, then Marvin Hamlisch wrote the music.

Despite the lyrics’ dis-taste, “What I Did for Love” became the standout hit, covered by numerous artists. Kleban died of cancer in 1987, but Crystal stayed in touch with Linda Kleban, his significant other, who shared a recording of Hamlisch’s original track, nearly note-for-note identical to the version that wound up in the show, with the late composer singing nonsense syllables over his piano.

“That was the only one that didn’t really grow out of atony.”

As Kleban had shared tales of the work-in-progress, Crystal said they knew back then it was something different, even revolutionary, but had no conception of how far it would eventually reach.

“A friend of mine played piano for ‘Chorus Line’ for 14 years. It put one of his kids through college. After the show, he left and went back to Kansas,” Crystal said, laughing. “He had enough, but before that, he couldn’t afford to quit.”

UA staff pianist Terry Moore saw the original cast while living in New York City. He was playing auditions, showcases, and off-Broadway work. The show became one of his favorites: Moore and his oldest daughter would dance to it in their living room.

“I knew people who lived this,” he said. “There hadn’t been a show like that before.”

Strikingly, students in UA’s production aren’t that far removed from the people he saw on Broadway.

“There’s a lot of energy in this show,” he said, then corrected himself, laughing: “They’re ALL young.”

It’s a credit to Crystal’s shepherding of the program that UA can confidently stage “A Chorus Line,” requiring only two students from the dance program to round out the ensemble.

“One student had barely graduated high school, Alley said. All the rest are theater majors, triple threats who can also sing and dance to levels required.

“There was no musical theater track when I was a graduate student,” Bubela said. “Now recent UA alumni fill major positions.”
and chorus roles in Broadway hits including "Hamilton," "Kinky Boots," "Something Rotten" and others.

"This is definitely the theater geek's musical," said First, who's playing Paul, a gay man who suffered a troubled childhood, but built strength from his trials. "It's showing that under all the costumes and makeup and lights and all that, it's real people with real lives. We smile and sing and dance as our profession, but offstage we're just as human as anyone in the audience."

Like many in this cast, First has carried featured roles, but said life as a professional gypsy wouldn't be so bad. For one thing, there's job security, the kind leads don't often have.

"And there's something really fulfilling about being in an ensemble, being the heartbeat of the show, pushing it forward."

That's captured in the physical equality of the line: Alley choreographed with nods to Bennett's iconic work, while adapting to suit this cast.

"It's a really important message, in our day and age, what we're going through in the world, that we're all one, we're all on this planet together," First said. "No matter where we come from, we're all here for the same reason."

If cast and crew do their jobs, Alley said, that will reach the audience. They'll want each of the gypsies to get "it": It being a job, specifically, but also whatever goal performing represents to their lives.

"We have seniors here who are about to go into the real world, about to be put on display, and be shot down, and be vulnerable," she said.

The raw honesty of "A Chorus Line" touches them all, leading to emotional moments, many tears, she said.

"Then I've got to go 'Suck it up!,'" Alley said, laughing. "'The show's got to keep moving!'"

—Reach Tusk Editor Mark Hughes Cobb at mark.cobb@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0201.
IMPACT FEES

City says growth spurs a need for fees

Construction continues Friday at Capewood Terrace at 181 Reed St, that will house 50 units with a total of 150 bedrooms in Tuscaloosa. The city is considering fees to cover the additional strain on city services would be applied to new multi-family, attached complexes - student housing developments, primarily - of 100 bedrooms or more like the development at Capewood Terrace. (STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON)

Some developments would pay price

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

It’s taken years of discussion, recommendations and taxpayer-funded studies, but the Tuscaloosa City Council stands poised to enact the first citywide impact fees for certain developments.

According to the proposal unveiled last week, fees to cover the additional strain on city services would be applied to new multi-family, attached complexes - student housing developments, primarily - of 100 bedrooms or more.

Impact fees are commonly imposed on new developments by governments across the nation to offset the burden they create on existing city resources. Funds generated by these fees legally must be applied toward resolving those strains, whether it be expanding, improving and maintaining the city’s water and sewer system or expanding its public safety capabilities.

Adopting such fees was recommended by the mayor’s Student Rental Housing Task Force, which urged the City Council in 2013 to adopt the fees as a way to pay for the infrastructure repairs and improvements that large, multifamily developments demand.

Proposed Service Delivery Fee structure

To determine an appropriate service delivery fee structure, Tuscaloosa city officials are looking at the costs required to perform certain city services. Based on Tuscaloosa's 2015 U.S. Census estimated population of 94,865, the cost-per-resident breakdown to provide the following services is:

Tuscaloosa Police Department

Precincts construction cost: $34,472
Total amount of precincts: 4
Cost to train one officer: $31,668
Total number of officers: 288
Equipment cost (patrol car and officer): $71,152
Average number of residents served by each precinct: 23,716
Average number of residents served by each officer: 332
Average TPD service cost-per-resident: $49.40

Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Service

Station construction cost (11 stations): $5.17 million
Equipment cost (1 pumper truck, 1 ladder truck): $1.69 million
Training cost (per 8 firefighters): $381,625
Total number of stations: 11
Average number of residents served per station: 8,624
Average cost per resident: $86.88

Arts & Entertainment and Recreation

10-year average arts & entertainment investment: $2.95 million
10-year average recreation investment: $3.1 million
Annual cost per resident: $65.80
10-year service cost per resident: $698.73

Source: city of Tuscaloosa

Adopting such fees was recommended by the mayor’s Student Rental Housing Task Force, which urged the City Council in 2013 to adopt the fees as a way to pay for the infrastructure repairs and improvements that large, multifamily developments demand.

See next page
If the current plan is adopted, these "service delivery fees," as city officials have labeled them, would ensure new, large-scale developments pay for the necessary services, maintenance and upgrades that otherwise would be passed on to existing taxpayers. This also means that city leaders could maintain the 2 percent sales tax structure that now funds about one-third of the city's operating expenses without reducing the current level of services that Tuscaloosa residents enjoy.

"As the city grows, we need to provide our citizens with the same level of service," said Brendan Moore, executive director of the city's Department of Urban Development.

The City Council has, so far, taken no action on the service delivery fee proposal, but some members seemed open to the idea.

"If we can't provide services to these people, they're not going to want to live in these apartment complexes and things," Councilman Eddie Pugh said. "Some people, like developers, may look at this like a negative, but I look at it as the city being able to provide the services they need for whatever it is they want to build."

"It's kind of a two-way street."

Crunching the data

Pulling from a multitude of studies -- including last year's $49,900 review by Raffels Financial Consultants Inc. -- which examined several ways the city could impose these fees -- Moore and a team of city employees developed a mathematical model by which to impose these costs.

Based on their calculations, a new 100-bedroom student-housing complex would bring garner an additional $246,625 that could be directed toward water and sewer infrastructure, roads, police and fire, recreation and overall quality-of-life investments.

Additionally, the proposal would allow for an offset in the fees if developers are replacing an existing apartment complex or adding on to an existing one.

For the water and sewer fees, the cost would be applied to the size of each of the water meters throughout the development. So, for 100 bedrooms that would equate to $1,090 each, if the smallest meter for both water and sewer services were used.

The cost-per-resident for a police officer and fire station were derived using Tuscaloosa's 2015 population of 94,865 as estimated by the U.S. Census. This equates to $340.40 and $806.88, respectively.

For the quality-of-life investments into recreation and arts & entertainment venues, city officials totaled the overall investment and related costs into these areas during the past 10 years and developed an average, said Katy Metcalfe, director of accounting and financial reporting for the city's Accounting and Finance Department.

This grand total of $92.5 million during that time period worked out to about $587.73 per year.

For the road fee, the city used a baseline cost of $1.65 million that it currently takes to add one lane of road for 2 miles, said Jeremy Jones, transportation engineer for the city of Tuscaloosa. The city then broke down the estimated traffic generated by new complexes and developed a percentage cost-per-vehicle using outlined by Institute of Transportation Engineers, an international educational and scientific association of transportation professionals, according to its website.

So, for that 100 bed apartment complex, the city's current plan would assess a $44,225 fee.

"We are continuing to vet our actual calculation with industry professionals," Jones said. "What we could justify."
IMPACT FEES

Developer Stan Pate calls fees unfair

Rule should apply to all new construction, he says

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

While city officials currently plan to impose service delivery fees only on multi-family developments, at least one commercial developer finds that unfair.

Tuscaloosa-based developer Stan Pate has built commercial projects throughout Alabama and much of the Southeast in areas with and without impact fees. He said he believes the city should apply impact fees to all new construction.

"Good services are the backbone of people feeling very good about where they live and where they work and where they play. It's what people pay taxes for," Pate said. "Every city the size of Tuscaloosa that we do business in has impact fees - there's nothing new about it. Tuscaloosa is actually behind the curve."

But limiting them to multi-family projects only "is just wrong-headed," Pate said, noting that national, name-brand companies expect the fees as part of doing business.

Corporations anticipate these costs before they arrive and are surprised to learn that Tuscaloosa does not assess them.

And Pate, whose projects in Tuscaloossa include Outback Steakhouse, the Lowe's home improvement store and Starbucks, among others, said those costs and fees get arranged for and settled in the normal course of business.

Typically, commercial impact fees are based on the number of water and sewer access points -- sinks, toilets and the like -- as well as the number of chairs or seats, in case of a restaurant, or expected traffic for a shopping destination.

And with Alabama's traditionally low property tax, Pate said commercial developers will gladly trade low property taxes for a one-time impact fee.

"It will not deter one single business from locating in Tuscaloossa, Alabama," Pate said. "I have a lot of experience and it's never stood in the way of a deal."

"The businesses we do business with expect to pay."

Residential recall

For the development the current service delivery fee will address, according to the current plan, fees of this nature could chill the student-housing apartment market.

While numerous student-based apartment complexes are planned for Tuscaloossa on Helen Keller Boulevard, they're likely safe from the effect.

Had the fees been imposed - - will affect their feasibility and the size of the project could have changed.

Judd Bobilin, founder, of Atlanta-based Chance Partners, which developed the 440-bedroom Riverfront Village apartment and commercial complex on the Black Warrior River, said the impact fees that the city is considering would have forced him to consider alternatives.

"It certainly has an impact when you're doing an economic analysis on a project on whether it's going to affect the feasibility of the project," said Bobilin, whose company has developed student-based complexes in university cities across the Southeast.

Under the current structure, the fees under consideration by City Hall would have added about $1 million to the estimated $42 million project.

And that could have meant the difference in materials or the size of the development as a whole because, Bobilin said, lenders and financial institutions want at least a 7 percent return on cost before a project will get financed.

Should the fees be adopted, Bobilin said he foresees a period of a year or so where property owners adjust the prices to reflect the new market.

"What's supposed to happen, is there would be an adjustment to the land price to account for that," Bobilin said.

Costs usually are balanced out through a combination of land prices, material choice or rental fees.

Overall, Bobilin said he isn't opposed to the idea of an impact, or service delivery, fee for new construction. But he, like Pate, believes it should be for all new construction, not just some.

"I get it," Bobilin said. "The city needs to pay for their infrastructure and this is one way to do it, and it will slow things down for a couple of years until everyone figures out that land costs have to adjust or rents have to go up.

"I would want it to be fairly applied."
UA students engineer special car for Rise School pupil

Justin Carter, a child with special needs at the University of Alabama Rise School, got a specially fitted electric car as a birthday gift from the Astrobotics department Friday. Justin's classmates gather around as he drives his car for the first time.

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

As with many young drivers, a new car means a bit more independence for Justin Carter. Justin, a student in the Rise School at the University of Alabama, got his new car, a sporty white Audi with an Alabama script "A" on the hood, on the day before his fifth birthday. The car came courtesy of a team of UA engineering students who worked on the vehicle as part of a senior project begun in the fall.

Teachers at Rise approached the team about adapting a toy car for Justin, who was born with femur-fibula-ulna syndrome. The syndrome shortened his arms and legs, limiting his mobility.

"I am so full of tears. My heart is full of gratitude and joy," his mother Shirley Carter said on Friday.

Family, classmates and teachers gathered at the Rise School's Stallings Center to watch Justin drive his new car, one meant to help him get around but also make him feel more included. Justin arrived on the playground carried by his father, Charles Carter.

SEE DRIVE, 44
customized the toy car for Justin adjusted the seat and steering column for his first official ride on Friday.

The team of students included Rebecca Dietz, a mechanical engineering major from Waleska, Georgia; Tyler Gester, a computer science and mechanical engineering major from Birmingham; Joseph Kabalin, a mechanical engineering major from Loveland, Ohio; and Joshua Yarbrough, a mechanical engineering major from Huntsville.

The students modified a store-bought car, reconfiguring the controls to allow Justin to drive his car with a joystick and buttons instead of pedals and a steering wheel. They also added a second motor for more power, more battery capacity for a longer run time, and an internal computer with wireless internet allowing his parents or teachers to operate the vehicle on a smartphone.

Previously, Justin had to rely on someone to pull him in a cart or roll on the ground to move, said Kabalin, the team leader.

"This will, hopefully, allow him to be independent," he said.

The car was chosen because he could use it at recess and at home. The idea was to modify a toy his peers could use, said Andi Gillen, Rise director. One that would include him rather than single him out.

"Children play on these Jeeps and Barbie cars and all that stuff. These are not necessarily accessible to people with physical challenges," Gillen said.

The modified car helps Justin become just another child playing at recess or after school.

"Rise is all about inclusion," Warren said.

— Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Sam Hunt talks about his love affair with Alabama, from Montevallo fiancee to UAB football

By: Mary Calurso

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."

See next page
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 County Music Awards. Fowler, a Montevallo homegirl who usually shuns the spotlight, accompanied her fiancé 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.

See next page
"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."
Construction projects forging ahead on UAB campus

It's been just over one year since the University of Alabama at Birmingham rolled out its new master plan that included several transformative construction projects that will shape the campus — and the surrounding Southside area — for many years to come. As investors and developers have been buying up properties in close proximity to UAB for future developments, let's take a look at how few of the major on-campus projects are progressing.

NEW FOOTBALL FACILITIES
Ground broken: August 2016

Project details: The 46,000-square-foot operations facility on 11th Street South is now vertical and parts of the roof have been completed. The facility will include office space, team meeting and film rooms, a weight room, training facilities, locker rooms and a unique covered practice facility called Legacy Pavilion. The project had an estimated cost of $22.5 million and secured sizable donations from several Birmingham businesses. MJ Harris Construction is the general contractor, and Goodwyn Mills & Cawood is the lead architect.

Estimated completion date: July 2017

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
Ground broken: December 2016

Project details: Located on University Boulevard, work is well underway on the 104,000-square-foot building which will house the UAB Collat School of Business and the Bill L. Harbert Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which is expected to work closely with groups like Innovation Depot and others to help foster business startups from UAB research. It's a $37.5 million project and contractor Brasfield & Gorrie is leading the work.

Estimated completion: Summer 2018

SCHOOL OF NURSING
Ground broken: October 2016

Project details: Work is about to go vertical in a matter of days on a project to add five floors and 72,000 square feet to the UAB School of Nursing. General contractor M.J. Harris said this week that deep foundation work and basement shoring has been completed, while required demolition to the existing structure is about 75 percent complete. The project is indicative of the school's master plan that focuses on density and building up rather than expanding the campus outward.

Estimated completion: June 2018
Meeting the Challenges of Staffing in a Small Town
EFI's Lynn Lane fills top jobs in a rural Alabama town

By: Nancy Mann Jackson

When EFI Automotive opened its first U.S. office in 1995, the company headquartered in Beynost, France, selected a location near Detroit, Michigan. But as the industry expanded, EFI Automotive, also known as Electricfil Corp., which fabricates electronic components used in transmissions and engines, looked south for its second U.S. location and in 2005, EFI opened a plant in Elkmont, Alabama, a remote town outside Huntsville, to produce sensors for its OEM customers.

That location turned out to be a positive decision. In May 2016, EFI celebrated 10 years of production in Alabama, along with the grand opening of its new North American Headquarters — a new, 81,000-square-foot facility in Elkmont. The company has grown by nearly 40 percent in the past year and a half, and with 250 employees, it is the largest employer in Limestone County.

Lynn Lane, human resources manager for EFI Automotive’s North American operations (including research and development and manufacturing operations in Alabama, an office in Michigan and a plant in Mexico), has played an important role in recent growth. Although EFI’s parent company is a Tier 1 automotive supplier that supplies “nearly all the OEMs in the world,” recruiting top-notch workers to rural Alabama is no small feat. “When EFI arrived here, the market in the Southeast was really starting to take off,” Lane says. “But as we are located just outside of Huntsville, we are competing for talent with a larger labor market. EFI Automotive is not a household name, but we have a great story to tell.”

Prepared for the Role

When she arrived at EFI Automotive, Lane wasn’t new to the electronic manufacturing business. In the early 1990s, she worked in human resources for Plexus Technology Group Inc., a successful and growing electronics development and manufacturing company. In 1994, she joined Menasha Corporation/Menasha Packaging, a 150-year-old family-owned company with a presence in all regions of the United States. There, she progressed through the ranks as corporate recruiter, human resources manager and regional human resources manager.

See next page
Originally from the Midwest, Lane moved to Tennessee in 1995 with her job at Menasha, and in 2002, a bit further south to Athens, Alabama, not far from Elkmont. Because she had worked with Menasha’s launch in Limestone County, local leaders asked for her help when EFI began considering the location. “Tom Hill, president of the Limestone County Economic Development Association, called on me to assist an area newcomer by sharing information about available resources, the labor market, benefits and compensation strategies,” Lane says. “This newcomer was EFI Automotive. I didn’t realize I was being interviewed; I thought I was just helping out.” Eventually, EFI offered Lane a job, and she decided to join the company’s start-up team. Both of her previous companies shared commonalities with EFI, she says, as one manufactured electronics and the other was a longtime family company.

“EFI Automotive encompasses both; as an 80-plus-year-old, family-owned company and one that focuses on advanced technology, innovation, sustainability in manufacturing, its people and its customer base,” she says. “I have learned a tremendous amount in the 13 and a half years I have been with EFI Automotive and I continue to have the pleasure of working with a team of talented and dedicated employees from all over the world.”

Meeting Demands

While Lane knows firsthand the advantages of making a career at EFI Automotive, it can be challenging to communicate those positive attributes to the right candidates in a competitive labor market. Not only is the company’s headquarters located in a remote town, but Huntsville, the largest nearby city, is home to booming technology and defense industries that employ large numbers of engineers. “We struggle a bit because we compete with the Huntsville marketplace and defense contractors go after the same type of employees that we do,” Lane says.

Being in a such a competitive marketplace hasn’t kept Lane from hiring scores of qualified employees in the past year or so. “This is a challenge that we faced head on and one that we have met by offering opportunities to interns and entry-level engineers, technicians and others looking for a place to learn and grow in their careers,” she says. “We offer challenging and rewarding work at all levels of the organization and, in many cases, the opportunity for international travel, customer and supplier involvement and a variety of career pathways to be explored.”

See next page
For instance, Lane works closely with local schools and colleges to provide pathways from the classroom to a career. EFI has partnerships with the University of Alabama at Huntsville, Calhoun Community College and the Limestone County Career Technical Center. While hiring has leveled off currently, she expects to start ramping up again next year.

“The people we recruit tend to stay here,” Lane says. “There are lots of opportunities for advancement, involvement in the business and international travel, and that’s attractive to a lot of people. EFI Automotive is firmly rooted in its long-standing values of entrepreneurship, sincerity, responsibility to its employees, customers, shareholders and the environment, respect, flexibility and agility, and being focused on our targets and what lies ahead.”

With more than a decade of experience building electronic components in north Alabama, EFI is going strong. And Lane’s appreciation for the company and the area makes her an ideal leader to continue building a strong workforce for EFI’s future. “I look forward to the company growing its presence in North America and globally, and I am grateful to work for a forward-thinking organization, such as EFI Automotive,” she says.
HUNTSVILLE

Young Alabama scientist led breakthrough in breast cancer

Dr. Joy McDaniel’s work at HudsonAlpha is ‘personal’

Lee Roop lroop@al.com

A team led by a young Alabama scientist has brought the world one step closer to a cure for one of the most aggressive forms of breast cancer.

Dr. Joy McDaniel’s research on triple negative breast cancer has now led her to a postdoctoral fellowship at the prestigious University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. But how she got there and where she may be heading is a story of Alabama science today.

McDaniel, a Birmingham native, was a student at the University of Alabama in Huntsville working in the laboratory of

See next page
Biology Department Chair
man Gopi Podila. "He knew
I wanted to stay for my
Ph.D and I was interested
in genomics," McDaniel
recalled this week.

McDaniel was one of
many students encouraged
by Podila, who was among
those killed by former pro-
fessor Amy Bishop during
a shooting spree at UAH
in 2010. Professors in the
department continued that
couragement and helped
McDaniel get a position in
the laboratory of leading
genomic researcher Dr. Rick
Myers at the HudsonAlpha
Institute for Biotechnology.

As she was beginning her
Ph.D program, McDaniel's
best friend died of breast
cancer at age 24. That made
McDaniel's desire to make
a difference in this disease
"personal."

At HudsonAlpha, McDan-
el and her team would find
a key genetic insight into
tiple negative breast can-
cer. It's one of the most
deadly forms of the dis-
 ease, because it doesn't have
any of the three most com-
mon receptors for treatment
drugs. It is "triple negative."

Triple negative is also one
of the forms of breast can-
cer most likely to kill Afri-
can-American women. "One
out of every three breast
cancer diagnoses in Afri-
can-American women is tri-
ple negative," McDaniel said.

WHAT ARE THE
SWITCHES?

The team wanted to
known what protein
switches are active in triple
negative breast cancer. What
turns on and off the runaway
cellular reproduction that
defines the disease?

Using publicly available
DNA data and the power of
HudsonAlpha gene sequenc-
ing technology, they found
a suspect in the protein
STAT3. The results were
published in the journal
Oncotarget in December.

Early on, McDaniel
wasn't sure the team was
really on to something. Then
she checked the activ-
ity of STAT3 in actual tumor
samples provided by the
University of Alabama
in Birmingham. It's one
thing to test in a laboratory
cell line, she said, but it's
another to verify the results
in actual tumors.

"We were able to identify
the same binding pattern in
actual triple negative breast
cancer patients," McDaniel
said. "This was very impor-
tant because, by identifying
where the binding occurs,
we have a framework for
what genes are being turned
on or off by STAT3. That was
the first sign we may have
identified something that
may be important."

The genes regulated by
STAT3 also turned out to
be the same genes active in
spreading triple negative
breast cancer. The tendency
to spin off cancer cells that
migrate to other parts of the
body and start other tumors
is one of the cancer's dead-
lie characteristics. It's
called metastasis.

"What we found was that
therapies that target STAT3
could prevent metastasis in
triple negative breast can-
cer," McDaniel said. That
result could lead to new tar-
geted therapies for a disease
that now has none.

WONDERFUL SCIENCE

Looking back at her Ala-
bama research from her cur-
rent position at MD Ander-
sen, McDaniel praised the
level of Alabama's research.
"We have wonderful sci-
ence going on back home," she said. "The fact we have
such a wonderful place to do
genomics and that there's
a lot of collaboration with
UAB is going to progress
personalized medicine, not
just in cancer but in other
diseases as well. UAB and
HudsonAlpha are going to
continue to be shining stars
in Alabama."

Will she come home
when the fellowship is com-
plete? There's no guarantee,
but it's possible. McDaniel
will be looking for her own
laboratory and faculty posi-
tion where she can teach,
mentor and do research.
"That's always an
option," McDaniel said.
"Alabama is always home."
“Tornadoes ... tend to be more deadly in the Southeast U.S. than in the Great Plains, which is also not as well known.”

Erik Rasmussen, Vortex-Southeast project manager

Chasing storms in Alabama

Scientists will converge on the South this spring to monitor storms affecting the state

Leigh Morgan for AL.com

Alabama is again at the center of a major research project focused on tornadoes. Vortex-Southeast kicked off its second field campaign earlier this month. The in-the-field part of the project will last until May 8. The behind-the-scenes work will stretch out much longer.

Some of those involved in the project, including NOAA, the National Severe Storms Laboratory, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, other universities and the National Weather Service, were in Huntsville this week to give an overview of this year’s field campaign and a preview of what’s to come.

Vortex-Southeast is funded by a $10 million allocation from Congress to NOAA. Operations this spring will again be based in and around the Huntsville area.

This is the third in a series of Vortex projects. The first two incarnations focused on the Great Plains.

WHY NOW IN THE SOUTH?

"In the Southeast U.S. tornadoes affect more land area than they do in the Great Plains. That may not be well-known but the fact is in the Southeast the tornado paths tend to be longer and wider so more land area gets affected," said Vortex-Southeast Project Manager Erik Rasmussen of the National Severe Storms Laboratory.

He added that the population in the South tends to be more evenly spread out as opposed to the Plains.

Those two things "increase the vulnerability of the public. Tornadoes therefore tend to be more deadly in the Southeast U.S. than in the Great Plains, which is also not as well known," he said.

Scientists and researchers will converge on the South and specifically Alabama when severe weather threatens this spring and will monitor storms as they impact the state.

They will chase storms — in a sense, Alabama’s wooded and hilly terrain makes traditional tornado chasing difficult and dangerous.

Instead, researchers will move their equipment into the path of approaching storms. A powerful F5 tornado left a path of destruction more than 14 miles long across Jefferson County, killing 22 people and injuring 150 on April 4, 1977, according to a National Weather Service database based on The Birmingham News file photo.

See next page
STORMS
FROM AI

storms or monitor them from afar.

"The thing about Vortex-Southeast that separates it out from other similar severe weather research campaigns like this is that it's an end-to-end process," said Kevin Laws of the weather service in Birmingham, who is serving as the operational chairman of the scientific steering committee.

"In other words, we're looking at every aspect of the warning process and the physical science -- actually taking data measurements all the way through the warnings that go out from the National Weather Service and then how they are communicated and how people are receiving and taking action."

This is the second year for Vortex-Southeast. Last spring, which was relatively quiet in terms of tornadoes, researchers deployed six times over four different periods.

"We have gotten a very clear understanding now about what we can and can't do in the Southeast U.S.," Rasmussen said. "What we can't do is the classic Vortex-style tornado chase. It's just not possible. So we can do experiments where we take instruments ... and go out and parking them in one spot all day and setting the storms pass by. But it's not the same thing. It's not like converging on a storm and making those fine-scale observations."

This year researchers have the funding to deploy for four periods, "and if we're lucky each one will have a couple of days," he said.

DRONES, AIRCRAFT
Not only are scientists gathering in Alabama, but they're bringing their specialized equipment along. That includes 13 vehicles, five mobile radars, weather balloons, StickNets, drones and even a NOAA P-3 aircraft that is also used as a hurricane hunter.

"It's an exciting opportunity to integrate all these -- we all have separate physical science objectives, but the strength is in integration of all of these mobile systems," said Ryan Wade of UAH, which is serving as a "home base" of sorts for the project. Also playing a major part is the National Weather Service.

"Our role is a little bit unique, because the Vortex-Southeast domain is mostly centered over north Alabama and southern Tennessee. So we're kind of in the center of it," said Chris Darden, the meteorologist in charge at the weather service in Huntsville.

"We're helping with daily forecast support, providing input and decision making to give far-flung researchers a few days' notice about upcoming severe weather, he added.

The office will for the second year have a social scientist in the office to help assess the warning process from the inside out.

COLD POOLS AND TERRAIN
Rasmussen said there will be two areas of particular interest this go-around.

One is how cold air in a storm, or outflow, can affect tornado development.

"... you have to have some of that to generate the spin that results in a tornado in a supercell," Rasmussen said. "If you have too much of that, it rushes out from under the storm and prevents the tornado. We're going to continue looking at that, how are those cold pools different in the Southeast compared to all the studies we've done in the Plains."

Another area of interest will be how terrain influences storms, whether it's forests, farmland or urban areas. those little variations in terrain and land use, can perhaps cause little disturbances in the lower atmosphere," Rasmussen said, and "when the storm moves through those little disturbances it would find itself in conditions more favorable for producing tornadoes, or vice versa."

"So a lot of people suspect that's going on because of the patterns when tornadoes happen, but we don't have any hard evidence so we're going to start looking at that."

Nighttime storms and wintertime tornadoes are also areas to be studied.

INTEGRATING SOCIAL SCIENCE
Another vital and pioneering component of Vortex-SE is incorporating social science -- particularly how the public receives severe weather warnings and reacts to them.

Dr. Laura Myers, the director and senior research scientist at the Center for Advanced Public Safety at the University of Alabama, is heavily involved in Vortex-SE as well.

Myers said her team is working on what she called a household cohort study. They have 600 volunteer households from north and central Alabama involved so far.

"It's unbelievable, actually," she said of the participation numbers. "That's how weather aware people are -- they are so interested in this."

One of the things they will be looking at is where people take shelter -- where do you go when a tornado is headed your way?

"Vulnerable populations -- people who live in mobile homes, do they know that during a watch they need to get out of that mobile home?" she asked. "They don't. So that's one of the things we're trying to do is we're trying to make sure we have a lot of respondents from mobile homes and locations that are vulnerable, hard to get to places, places that terrain-wise get a lot of tornadoes."

The social science side will also look at how warnings are received by the public. Do they pay attention when a warning is issued? Do they get the warning in the first place?

"There's a lot that say 'I never got the warning.' So we try to break that down," Myers said. "If you didn't get the warning and we know the warnings went out, what was the breakdown between the warning going out and them not hearing it?"

While the field work is taking place now, it may be a while before researchers roll out their results.

There's a lot of data to sifting through.

"The way these programs go in terms of the science and producing reliable new knowledge ... that takes usually two or three years before that starts to come out," Rasmussen said. "And so we're going to start getting our results from last year in the next few months."

Vortex-Southeast brings it all, the brainpower, the high-tech equipment and a big budget into play.

"But all of this doesn't mean a whole lot if we can't transition what we learn into the forecast operations and into the warning system," UAH's Wade said. "And so being able to integrate the physical science objectives with the operational meteorology with the National Weather Service with the social science objectives with the warnings, that is particularly exciting for us."
Documentary highlights struggles of Huntsville's homeless population

By: UAH Staff

Chakravarthy "Chakri" Deverapalli, Director of Information Systems for the College of Business at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), will present the documentary "Homeless in Huntsville" on Wednesday, April 26, at 6 p.m. in the atrium of the Redstone Federal Credit Union on Wynn Drive. The screening is free and open to the public, and will be followed by a Q&A session. Those interested in attending are encouraged to RSVP.

An exploration of the struggles faced by the city's homeless population and the organizations dedicated to helping them, the documentary is an outgrowth of a small-team project for Leadership Huntsville/Madison County, the largest community leadership program in Alabama. In addition to Deverapalli, the team comprised engineer and former Navy SEAL Brett Jones, physicist and UAH alumnus Isaiah Williams, Avilution CEO and Digium founder Mark Spencer, Higher Echelon CEO Joe Ross, Madison County Schools Director of Special Education Mary Stump, Redstone Federal Credit Union EVP Fred Trusty, Crestwood Medical Center Director of Pharmacy Marshall Robbins, Heritage Church Pastor Suzanne Katschke, and UAH College of Business graduate student Ranny Maurer.

"There were many ideas and organizations that our group wanted to focus on before we chose the homeless topic," says Deverapalli, explaining that the assignment required them to develop a project that would effect change in one of the city's major community sectors. "But as the idea grew, we decided that we could use this platform to bring attention to an entire community of organizations working tirelessly to help an often-overlooked part of our society rather than just focusing on one. And the fact that it developed into a documentary just made sense, since it meant that we could share the experience with people outside the group."

Of the team's nine members, two - Deverapalli and Jones - ended up volunteering to spend four days and three nights living on the streets last December. "We were the ones able to be away from our families and businesses for that period of time," says Deverapalli, who credits the remainder of the team with supporting "the many logistical challenges surrounding a project of this magnitude."

First and foremost, that meant capturing the experience on camera. "Isaiah was enlisted to gather, edit, and narrate the footage," he says. "His role was as involved as Brett's and mine, because he would be there with us on the street before we woke up and until we went to bed." Just as important was ensuring the three men's safety, which required working closely with the Huntsville Police Department. Though it didn't hurt that, as a former Navy SEAL, Jones had "extensive personal protection experience," says Deverapalli.

With the documentary now complete, the team is hopeful it will help highlight and potentially resolve some of the many challenges faced by the city's homeless population, whether it's the lack of funding and mental health facilities to "how difficult it is to be homeless and not break
the law," he says. "Through Isaiah's talent as a storyteller, we hope that people will be able to identify with the struggles of being homeless, and fully appreciate the selflessness of organizations in our community."

But no matter how the documentary is received, Deverapalli can attest that it has already had a profound impact on the nine people responsible for bringing it to the screen. "It was an eye-opening experience for everyone involved," he says. "It changed everybody involved on personal level in different ways."

For more information, contact Chakri Deverapalli at 256.824.6510 or Chakri.Deverapalli@uah.edu.
Acquisition Soldier students tour Redstone Test Center

By: Christy Barnett

The Army can’t just stop in at the local big box retailer to pick up boots or vehicles, and definitely not weapons. The process to procure items used by the Army is implemented by the Acquisition Corps. When a Soldier decides to switch careers and transfer to the acquisition side, they make their first stop at the Army Acquisition Center of Excellence located on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. At the AACoE, former infantry Soldiers, tankers, logisticians, even pilots, learn everything they need to know to eventually become certified for Level 2 Program Management and Level 1 in Contracting for Acquisition.

Each class also learns the importance of test and evaluation in the acquisition process. And for the past three years, when the students are at week three of their nine week course, they get a firsthand look at testing with a field trip to the Redstone Test Center.

The third class of fiscal 2017 visited the center on April 6. The 30 Army officers and five NCOs received a briefing on the center’s test capabilities from Redstone Test Center Commander Col. John Jones and toured the center lab campus.

“We teach the students about testing throughout the acquisition process,” Tony Liller, AACoE intermediate program management instructor, said. “Everything developed has to be tested: we have to test the components, and the system, to make sure it is safe and meets the requirements. We conduct developmental testing at the component and systems level and operational testing is done by the customer (Soldiers) in the field in simulated combat conditions. The students really enjoy the trip to RTC, and for them to see the different types of tests that have to be used to verify the products ... it’s one thing to talk about it in the classroom, it’s another thing to see it. You see the light bulbs go off.”

During their afternoon tour of the center, the AACoE students learn about the center’s mechanical, environmental, missile and flight testing capabilities. The students tour the center after learning three weeks of program management. The rest of the course will be focused on contracting. The students are receiving Defense Acquisition University level training so that, after graduating the course, they will have the acquisition skills necessary to be successful at their first developmental assignment and will eventually receive DAU certification.

One day these students will be acquisition leaders and make decisions on procurement of Army weapons systems, including where those systems are tested.

The next AACoE course will begin in June.
Looking to 'March For Science' Saturday? No problem

By: Lee Roop

Huntsville organizers think a thousand people or more could turn out Saturday for the city's March For Science, assuming the weather cooperates. Ditto, organizers of a similar march in Birmingham. And a third march in downtown Mobile.

The gatherings planned on Earth Day are among more than 500 marches worldwide. The movement started after early Trump administration proposals to cut federal funding for science research and change government policies related to climate change.

Now, organizers in Huntsville say they want to avoid partisanship and instead stress the benefits of science. They even have sign tips for those planning to attend.

"Around 500 people on Facebook say they're going, and another 700-800 are interested," Huntsville organizer Kevin Counselman said Tuesday. The event's Facebook page is here.

Nearly 1,000 people have also expressed interest or plan to come to a similar march Saturday morning in Birmingham. There's also a Saturday morning event in downtown Mobile and another in downtown Montgomery.

A crowd of 1,000 wouldn't be too surprising in Huntsville. The modern city owes its existence to rocket science at Marshall Space Flight Center and missile science based at Redstone Arsenal. One of its fastest-growing economic sectors is genetic research and biotechnology.

In Birmingham, research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham totals hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Medical research at the University of South Alabama and marine research on Dauphin Island are also extensive.

The Huntsville march begins at 1 p.m. at Shelbie King Hall on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. It will start with the launch of a weather balloon. "We thought it would be nice to do some science at a science march," Counselman said.

Marchers will travel about 1.3 miles to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, listen to a few remarks and then return. No politicians have been invited to speak.

Counselman said organizers plan "a family friendly event" with children carrying banners. To avoid political controversy, they are urging participants "not to be too partisan with their signs."

"We are focusing on science and the good it does for mankind and, in our case in particular, for our local community and the economy of our local community," Counselman said.
Rocket City scholars: UAH posts impressive academic profile

By: Jordan Laporta

With high school spring semesters wrapping up around the country, more and more students are choosing to attend the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and they’re doing so for good reason. UAH is on the rise, and its latest academic profile reflects an increasingly elite student body.

The average ACT score for UAH freshmen is an incredible 27.6, which is almost eight points above the national average for high school students taking the test. 35 percent of UAH students have an ACT score of 30 or higher.

But UAH’s incoming students don’t just test well; they performed well throughout their academic careers. 40 percent of the University’s incoming freshman had a high school GPA of 4.0 or higher.

Almost one-third of current undergraduates at UAH are pursuing an engineering degree. Engineering students are often attracted to Huntsville because of the city’s prime location for employment and history with NASA. A 2015 study by Forbes found that the Rocket City was the top location in the United States for engineers. At the time, the average salary for an engineer in Huntsville was $102,766.

The University strives to put students in a prime position to take full advantage of the rich opportunities that surround its campus. Back in 2014, UAH had five of its programs in the top 20 of the National Science Foundation federal research funding rankings, highlighted by its top-five ranked aeronautical/astronautical engineering program.

Several top names in the STEM fields hold degrees from UAH, including former NASA Astronaut Dr. Jan Davis, Dynetics CEO Dr. Marc Bendickson, and Dr. Werner Dahm, Chief Scientist of the US Air Force.

U.S. News and World Report rates UAH as a Tier 1 university and describes its admissions process as “more selective.” UAH also boasts remarkably small class sizes. According to the data compiled by U.S. News and World Report, the school’s student to faculty ratio is 16:1. With a total undergraduate enrollment of 6,013, 44.5 percent of students sit in classrooms with fewer than 20 students.
Union of Concerned Scientists Hates Truth About Global Warming

By: William Briggs

No scientist I have ever met has ever — and I mean never — denied the earth’s climate has changed. So obvious are observations of change, that I have never even heard of a civilian denying change, either.

No scientist I have ever met has ever — and again I mean never — denied the earth’s climate has changed in part because of human activities. But then, these same scientists also know that every creature, from aardvarks to zebras, has an influence on the climate. (Didn’t we read recently that spiders both weigh and eat more than men? Think about the climatic havoc these eerie arachnids wreak!)

Planets cannot be healthy or ill. Only things that are live can be healthy or ill. Planets are not alive — though pantheists believe they can be.

Nobody, save the odd lunatic, denies the earth’s climate has changed. And all scientists agree that mankind affects the climate. So the term climate change denial has to be one of the dumbest, inapt, and foolish slogans of our times.

Anybody who uses it proves that she is clueless of the science of climatology. Or that she has something other than the practice of science of her mind. Like, say, politics.

Take the comments of Ann Reid and her two co-authors writing for the Union of Nervous — oops, make that Concerned — Scientists. Motto: Science for the healthy planet and safer world. (Before we get to Reid, note that planets cannot be healthy or ill. Only things that are live can be healthy or ill. Planets are not alive — though pantheists believe they can be.)

Anyway, Reid (and her pals) write “Is No Place Safe? Climate Change Denialists Seek to Sway Science Teachers.”

There’s the telling phrase: climate change denialists. This is a sure signal we’re about to be treated a political and not scientific discourse.

Seems Reid isn’t happy that Heartland Institute had a conference to which they invited scientists to opine on how likely global warming will destroy us all (as I have spoken before). Their answer? Not likely.

Heartland also sent the booklet “Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming” to science teachers across the country. When Reid angrily referenced this book, she twice appended the notation “sic.” That is a sign to readers that the error present in quoted material was not put there by the quoter.
Well, there is nothing wrong with the booklet title. Nothing is misspelled. And, indeed, the booklet is about why scientists disagree about global warming.

Global warming used to be what they called “climate change” — before the science of global warming went sour. Reid doesn’t like to be reminded that the science of global warming is a failed science.

So what was the mistake Reid wanted to signal?

Global warming used to be what they called “climate change” — before the science of global warming went sour. Reid doesn’t like to be reminded that the science of global warming is a failed science.

How do we know it’s failed? Easy.

The key purpose of any scientific theory is to make skillful predictions of reality. Any theory that cannot do so, is a false or flawed theory. And we should not rely on false or flawed theories to make decisions about the world, especially ones that greatly influence all people.

The theory of dangerous man-made global warming has not made skillful predictions of reality. Congress was reminded of this recently by John Christy (hat tip: Manhattan Contrarian). He’s a Professor of Atmospheric Science and Alabama State Climatologist University of Alabama in Huntsville. Christy said:

I demonstrate that the consensus of the models [relied upon by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] fails the test to match the real-world observations by a significant margin. As such, the average of the models is considered to be untruthful in representing the recent decades of climate variation and change, and thus would be inappropriate for use in predicting future changes in the climate or for related policy decisions...

What’s evident is that the model trends in which [man-made greenhouse gases] are included lie completely outside of the range of the observational trends. That means, again, that the models, as hypotheses, failed a simple “scientific-method” test applied to this basic, climate-change variable. That this information was not clearly and openly presented in the IPCC is evidence of a political process that was not representative of the dispassionate examination of evidence as required by the scientific method.

Christy shows a depressing picture of the range and mean of model predictions against reality. Reality wins and the models lose.

Here’s what really miffs Reid: Heartland, and scientists like Christy (and your present author), “disparages the well-respected, Nobel-Prize-winning, IPCC.” If by “disparages” she means pointing out their glaring errors, then Reid is right. And do we need a reminder that even Barack Obama won a Nobel Prize?
Perhaps seeing her own fuzzy reflection, Reid ends with “climate change deniers … [contribute] nothing except vitriol, achieving nothing except confusion.”

Truth is now called “vitriol.” And how dare truth soil a beautiful theory with such lofty political goals?
An invitation to support science: Our city’s history is based on this

By: Steve Johnson

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. - It's a famous photo. It shows the German Rocket Team that came to north Alabama, the team that made so much history in Huntsville and at Redstone Arsenal.

"I don't think Huntsville would be here without science. Really, when the rocket team came, that was the beginning of Huntsville being really special in the state of Alabama," said Judy Franz, one of the organizers of the upcoming March For Science.

Huntsville and north Alabama have actually become famous in the world, famous as the Rocket City. It began with work for the Army. The engineers, physicists and mathematicians led the effort to develop the Redstone missile. Those same men and women built the Saturn V moon rocket, and the Pershing missile and helped end the Cold War. Now, whether in space, defense or genetic research, science keeps Huntsville and north Alabama going strong.

Huntsville's March for Science is Saturday, April 22.

"Those of us that know and care about science, as most people in Huntsville do, need to get out there and say science is important," said Franz.

Franz, along with Kevin Counselman are two organizers for the March For Science. "We're really coming out in support of science, and support of evidence-based policy making, but it's not targeted to any administration or any party. It's just all about supporting science," said Counselman.

Science and scientific research in several fields appears to be on the chopping block in the blueprint for the proposed 2018 federal budget. "I was very disturbed about cuts to science, decisions that were made that seemed not to take science into account," said Franz.

The organizers for the March understand there are those who will say this effort is political. "In Huntsville, Alabama the march is not about politics. It's about supporting science, supporting evidence-based policy making. It's about coming out and showing support for the thing that makes our community great," said Counselman.

The March For Science is set for Earth Day, Saturday, April 22nd. The organizers want it to be a family friendly event, and they encourage people to bring their children. Marchers are asked to gather at 1:00 p.m. on the 22nd, at Shelbie King Hall on the UAH campus. The short march will proceed to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. The organizers are hoping for 1,000 people and they are emphasizing that the event is non-partisan. Let the organizers know you're coming through the Facebook Event.
Diversity and inclusion are core values for UAH

By: Robert A. Altenkirch

The University of Alabama in Huntsville is pleased to be a sponsoring partner of the Future and Beyond Diversity and Inclusion Expo. Like most universities across the nation, UAH actively identifies, attracts and recruits students, faculty, staff and researchers from around the world. Our continued efforts in this regard are strategic and focused because we know well that the active presence of a diverse faculty, staff and student body strengthens the university as a whole and continually adds to scholarly advancements and research. We see and experience every day the benefits of cross-sectional and critical exchanges of culture, ethnicity, and race and how they are foundational to our mission as an institution.

The benefits of this diverse focus and compendium of ideas, collaborative interaction and interchange is attracting some of the brightest and the best to our campus who realize that the quality of education and intercultural exposure prepares them not only academically, but as world citizens. The university works collaboratively with area and international companies and organizations who look to the university for graduates and professionals trained in human interaction and educated in academic excellence. We are keenly aware that our graduates will enter a global work place and our everyday focus is to prepare them to be successful and to thrive in the marketplace of business and ideas.

As an institution, we espouse the foundational principles expressed by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who delivered the opinion of the court, in a seminal diversity and inclusion academic case. Justice O'Connor resolutely stated,

"The educational benefits that diversity is designed to produce...are...substantial,...important and laudable...Student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals...These benefits are not theoretical, but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints." (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003).

See next page
Diversity and Inclusion are core values of UAH's Strategic Plan 2020 in which, "We honor the individual. We celebrate differences and use them to create unity." It is in the plurality and diversity of thought, collaboration and exchange that we find our strength and value as an institution. We are committed to and continue to build on these core values as we prepare our students to be informed, enlightened, culturally aware and competent to engage an ever-changing society. The Future and Beyond Diversity and Inclusion Expo is an excellent opportunity to highlight these perspectives, and we enthusiastically invite you to join us.
Aerojet Rocketdyne’s 800 new jobs to be high-paying

Aerojet Rocketdyne will build a plant to produce its liquid-fueled AR1 engine in the North Huntsville Industrial Park just north of Toyota Motor Manufacturing on Pulaski Pike, creating up to 800 jobs for the area.

Conceived by Marty Sellers/ www.sellersphoto.com

Salaries range from $40,000 for production to $100,000 for engineering

Lucy Berry lberry@al.com

Eight hundred jobs are coming to Huntsville to help build Aerojet Rocketdyne’s next-generation rocket engine.

Leaders announced Monday that Aerojet will launch a state-of-the-art production plant at North Huntsville Industrial Park on Pulaski Pike. The plant will provide a range of services, including additive manufacturing, composites production and research and development.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said Aerojet will have plenty of skilled local employees to fill jobs at the plant, which will need production, engineering and design, and high-tech manufacturing workers.

"We’ve been able to work on our workforce, bring people here, and also get some of those who are here to apply for these jobs and get better jobs," he told AL.com. "The long-range look of it is we can still afford a little bit more growth."

Battle said the production jobs will range in salary from $40,000 to $45,000, high-tech manufacturing $60,000 to $70,000, and engineering and design $80,000 to $100,000 per year. The full-time positions will also offer company benefits.

The aerospace and defense leader provides medical/dental/vision insurance, short- and long-term disability and life

AERONET
FROM AI

insurance, paid vacation and sick time, a 401(k) savings plan, career development and more. The company currently has dozens of Huntsville openings on its website.

Aerojet Rocketdyne is consolidating facilities and eliminating or moving jobs in California and Virginia to open the AR1 engine production facility in Huntsville. The operation should be ready for production by mid-2019.

Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County President and CEO Chip Cherry said he believes most of the new positions will be filled by local workers, though some employees may transfer from facilities outside Alabama.

Cherry said the universities have performed an important role for companies like Aerojet that are looking to expand their workforce in Huntsville. The University of Alabama in Huntsville’s aeronautical and astronautical engineering research program, for example, ranks sixth in the nation, according to the National Science Foundation.

"Huntsville and Madison County have all of the elements that allow aerospace companies such as Aerojet Rocketdyne to thrive," said UAH President Robert Altenkirch. "The talented students that we produce along with our research capabilities are valued by our corporate partners."

City of Huntsville Director of Urban Development Shane Davis said incentive details are still being finalized. The city will present that information to the Huntsville City Council once a final package is complete.

AIDT, the state’s workforce development agency, is providing in-kind and direct reimbursement assistance valued at just under $8 million for Aerojet’s expansion. Stefania Yuhas, a spokeswoman for the Alabama Department of Commerce, said AIDT has committed its full-service program to recruit, screen and train the new Aerojet hires.

"The program includes the AIDT Pre-employment Selection System, instructor development and on-the-job training assistance," she said. "In addition, AIDT committed the Robotics Technology Park and other in-kind training assistance."

Want more?

Job seekers should monitor AIDT.edu for updates on employment.

Aerojet Rocketdyne's 800 new jobs to be high-paying

Aerojet Rocketdyne will build a plant to produce its liquid-fueled AR1 engine in the North Huntsville Industrial Park just north of Toyota Motor Manufacturing on Pulaski Pike, creating up to 800 jobs for the area.

Conceived by Marty Sellers/ www.sellersphoto.com

Salaries range from $40,000 for production to $100,000 for engineering

Lucy Berry lberry@al.com

Eight hundred jobs are coming to Huntsville to help build Aerojet Rocketdyne’s next-generation rocket engine.

Leaders announced Monday that Aerojet will launch a state-of-the-art production plant at North Huntsville Industrial Park on Pulaski Pike. The plant will provide a range of services, including additive manufacturing, composites production and research and development.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said Aerojet will have plenty of skilled local employees to fill jobs at the plant, which will need production, engineering and design, and high-tech manufacturing workers.

"We’ve been able to work on our workforce, bring people here, and also get some of those who are here to apply for these jobs and get better jobs," he told AL.com. "The long-range look of it is we can still afford a little bit more growth."

Battle said the production jobs will range in salary from $40,000 to $45,000, high-tech manufacturing $60,000 to $70,000, and engineering and design $80,000 to $100,000 per year. The full-time positions will also offer company benefits.

The aerospace and defense leader provides medical/dental/vision insurance, short- and long-term disability and life

AERONET
FROM AI

insurance, paid vacation and sick time, a 401(k) savings plan, career development and more. The company currently has dozens of Huntsville openings on its website.

Aerojet Rocketdyne is consolidating facilities and eliminating or moving jobs in California and Virginia to open the AR1 engine production facility in Huntsville. The operation should be ready for production by mid-2019.

Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County President and CEO Chip Cherry said he believes most of the new positions will be filled by local workers, though some employees may transfer from facilities outside Alabama.

Cherry said the universities have performed an important role for companies like Aerojet that are looking to expand their workforce in Huntsville. The University of Alabama in Huntsville’s aeronautical and astronautical engineering research program, for example, ranks sixth in the nation, according to the National Science Foundation.

"Huntsville and Madison County have all of the elements that allow aerospace companies such as Aerojet Rocketdyne to thrive," said UAH President Robert Altenkirch. "The talented students that we produce along with our research capabilities are valued by our corporate partners."

City of Huntsville Director of Urban Development Shane Davis said incentive details are still being finalized. The city will present that information to the Huntsville City Council once a final package is complete.

AIDT, the state’s workforce development agency, is providing in-kind and direct reimbursement assistance valued at just under $8 million for Aerojet’s expansion. Stefania Yuhas, a spokesman for the Alabama Department of Commerce, said AIDT has committed its full-service program to recruit, screen and train the new Aerojet hires.

"The program includes the AIDT Pre-employment Selection System, instructor development and on-the-job training assistance," she said. "In addition, AIDT committed the Robotics Technology Park and other in-kind training assistance."

Want more?

Job seekers should monitor AIDT.edu for updates on employment.
Free speech battle brings violence, arrests at AU

Court allowed ‘alt-right’ Spencer to speak after university canceled event

Connor Sheets
csheets@al.com

At least three people were arrested and at least one was left bloodied after dueling demonstrations outside Auburn University’s James E. Foy Hall turned raucous before Richard Spencer spoke there Tuesday night.

The speech was a lightning rod for controversy both on campus and online, as the “alt-right” leader’s past white supremacist rhetoric proved divisive enough to cause Auburn to cancel the event Friday.

But Spencer obtained a federal court order Tuesday afternoon that forced the university to allow him to speak as scheduled.

“We won a major victory for the alt-right,” Spencer said of the order during his remarks, which were repeatedly interrupted by shouts from the crowd.

Spencer did not fail to deliver the kind of inflammatory speech that had raised concerns among many members of the Auburn community and beyond last week.

“The alt-right is about being a white person, being a European in the 21st century,” Spencer told the capacity crowd at one point.

“There’d be no history without us,” he added later.

Hundreds of people gathered outside Foy Hall before Spencer’s speech, many of whom were there to protest his appearance. Auburn police spokesman Capt. Lorenza Dorsey told the Associated Press on Tuesday night that three people were arrested on disorderly conduct charges.

Richard Spencer, who identifies himself as alt-right and speaks about white supremacy, spoke on Auburn University’s campus Tuesday night.

Conservatives also came out to show support for Spencer’s free speech rights. One conservative waiting to attend the event, who identified himself only as Chad, wore a helmet in order to avoid being injured by any rocks “the other side” might throw if the event descended into chaos.

“We’re here to support free speech and defend it because, you know, if that’s gone for anybody — whether you agree with them or not — they still have the right to speech, and it’s a slippery slope once you get rid of that,” he said.

A Trump supporter who also identified himself only as Chad was holding an American flag as he waited in line for Spencer’s speech.

“I think it’s important for everybody, even people who are on opposite ends of the political spectrum as me, to be able to come out and speak,” he said.

“If people want to hear Mr. Spencer speak, they should be able to do that and he should be able to speak. This is America, it’s not the Soviet Union.”

Spencer drew loud boos from people on both sides of the political divide when he declared the following during his speech at football-loving Auburn:

“If I could wave a magic wand, I would absolutely ban football!”

Signs posted around Auburn’s campus Tuesday cautioned students to stay inside in order to stay safe.
AU students ask for stronger stance against 'White Student Union'

Jonece Starr Dunigan jdunigan@al.com

An Auburn University student organization wants the institution to take a stronger stance against white supremacy after a group claiming to be the "Auburn White Student Union" distributed flyers expressing anti-Semitic messages on campus last week.

The group, which identifies as alt-right, said it was created in response to political and racial tension across the nation. "White people are hungry for a group that will give them real, organic community, based on kinship, sincerity (rather than self-censorship and Political Correctness), and commonality," AWSU said on its website. "They're fed up with the false idols of consumerist and sports teams as a substitute for real community."

The group once identified as W.A.R. E.A.G.L.E., an acronym that stands for Whites of the Alt-Right Educating Auburn Gentiles for Liberation and Empowerment. AU said in a statement through the Office of Communications and Marketing on Tuesday afternoon it had plans to look into any copyright violations for using the slogan.

"This group isn't an Auburn student organization, and we find the views expressed in their materials reprehensible and unrepresentative of those of the university," the university said. "Auburn University supports the constitutional right to free speech and encourages the campus community to practice that right in a constructive atmosphere with respect to others. Auburn also encourages the campus community to respond to speech they find objectionable with their own views in the spirit of robust exploration of ideas."

As of Tuesday night, AWSU put a disclaimer on its website stating it was not affiliated with the university and it removed the popular slogan from the group's logo.

The Auburn University chapter of Southern Poverty Law Center on Campus hosted a town hall meeting Tuesday night. President Beth McDaniel said minority students expressed concerns about the university's stance on the issue and the timing of the statement. Although SPLC on Campus started receiving emails about the flyers April 7, the university didn't make a statement until April 10.

The town hall meeting was planned before the flyers were handed out. While AWSU's presence on campus didn't dominate the dialogue, McDaniel said it contributed to the topic of the social climate at the predominantly white university. She said minority students talked about the loneliness they feel when they are the only non-white student in their classes and how students refuse to work with them because of their race.

AWSU's flyers added to the tension, McDaniel said. The website includes several "essential reading materials," including one blog stating blacks and Hispanics are more likely to commit crime because of their genetics.

RECRUITING FLYERS

A report by the Anti-Defamation League said white supremacist groups are using flyers to recruit members on campus. As of March 6, ADL said there were 107 incidents of "fliering" at colleges nationwide since the start of this past fall semester. About 61 percent of those happened after January.

The AWSU has three different types of membership, according to its website. Those of "white ancestry and good character" are considered trial members who will read about white history and psychology. The trial members who have a "good character, sound mind, and knowledgeable and dedicated to our Cause" will move on to full membership. An auxiliary membership is offered to allies who "have some affinity for White culture." None of the memberships are open to non-white individuals.

Alinne Pereira, a Latina biological science graduate student, said she had heard about alt-right groups before in other places, but she doesn't like the presence so close to home. She said a friend received what appeared to be a white supremacist flyer on his mailbox late last year.

"It's one thing to hear about it, but when a group forms inside your school with people that you can potentially interact with, things get more real," Pereira said.

WHITE SUPREMACIST SPEECH

Meanwhile, self-avowed white supremacist Richard Spencer paid Auburn University $700 to rent space in the school's James E. Foy Hall for a speech he planned to deliver Tuesday night. The university decided Friday, however, to cancel the speech, citing safety concerns.

Students and others who disagree with Spencer's divisive views planned to protest Spencer — a white supremacist and "alt-right" leader described by many opponents as a "Neo-Nazi" — both before and during the controversial event. Spencer set off an online firestorm when he announced via Twitter early Wednesday morning that he planned to speak at Auburn. Scores of people, including Auburn alumni and students, decried the event on social media.
Fundraising effort makes progress

Stillman College is still tallying contributions after a plea to alumni last month by the interim president, who is seeking help to cover debt payments and operating expenses this summer for the small historically black institution.

The Tuscaloosa college has repaid the short-term bank loans it sought last summer to cover its operating expenses, and checks are coming in daily after last month's announcement the college could potentially run out of money by mid-April, Interim President Cynthia Warrick said. While it is too early to announce a total for the alumni fundraising effort, Warrick noted the college was able to make its April debt payment on a $40 million federal loan. In a letter last month, Warrick said the college needs $2.8 million to cover operating expenses and debt service through August when the fall semester begins. Warrick also encouraged alumni to help recruit new students, a key part of her strategy to reverse the college's financial fortunes.


—Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer
Former UAB assistant hired to lead Bulldogs

Daniel Boyette

Donnie Marsh is returning to familiar territory.

The former UAB men's basketball associate head coach was introduced as the new head coach at Alabama A&M during a press conference Wednesday in Huntsville.

"Emotions are kind of all over the place, but all in a good place," Marsh said. "This is a wonderful institution and a great opportunity. I feel blessed to have been selected to be the person. I know it was a thorough search. To finish up as 'the guy', the face of Bulldog basketball, is an absolute incredible blessing for me."

"This is a wonderful institution and a great opportunity. I feel blessed to have been selected to be the person."

Donnie Marsh

Marsh spent the last two seasons at Texas Southern working under Mike Davis, his boss at UAB from 2006-12. During their time together in Birmingham, the Blazers made one NCAA tournament appearance and three NIT trips.

Marsh has head coaching experience, having gone 31-84 at Florida International from 2000-04. He also led small-school programs College of New Jersey (1989-93) and Elizabethtown, Pa. (1988-89).


"I felt like this was an opportunity for me to continue my work at an HBCU," Marsh said, "to continue trying to help young men develop as people and as players. It was an opportunity to take something that I learned from a really good place and bring it to a place I think really, really wants it. This fan base, the support network, Bulldog nation all want a championship. They all want a chance to cheer in March. I think that's the ultimate for college basketball fans and I think this is a place where you can do that."

Alabama A&M went 2-27 last season under Willie Hayes, who stepped down in early March after going 54-121 in six seasons.

Marsh was selected by the Atlanta Hawks in the third round of the 1979 NBA Draft after starring at Division III Franklin & Marshall (Pa.).

The former UAB men's basketball associate head coach Donnie Marsh was introduced as the new head coach at Alabama A&M during a press conference Wednesday in Huntsville. Hal Yeager / The Birmingham News file
Tide 6th at NCAA Championships

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

ST. LOUIS - The University of Alabama gymnastics team dug itself a hole during the first two rotations of the Super Six that was too deep to climb out.

In the end, the Crimson Tide placed sixth at the NCAA Championships, scoring a 196. Alabama could have had a season-best performance, and it wouldn’t have mattered. Oklahoma dominated, posting a 198.3875 to reclaim its championship title. LSU finished second with a 197.7375. Florida was third with a 197.7. UCLA (197.2625) and Utah (196.5875) were fourth and fifth, respectively.

UA now has 33 top-six finishes and is the only program to do so in each of the last 10 years. “Team 43 has been quite a journey,” UA coach Dana Duckworth said. “I am very proud of how far we came. We are a top-six team in the country.”

On the uneven bars, junior Mackenzie Brannan was the Crimson Tide’s first competitor. She earned a 9.825, which was lower than her semifinals score, and then so did freshman Shea Mahoney. Senior Keely McNeer followed with a 9.9 that ended up being the highlight – and peak – of UA’s bar rotation. It went downhill quickly after that.

Senior Amanda Jetter botched a release and landed on the mat. She got back up to complete her routine for a season-low 9.325. Then, even though she held on, junior Klana Winston had a shaky routine that garnered a 9.5875. Senior Katie Bailey, who was named the NCAA uneven bars champion the night before, scored 0.2 lower than her season-high for a season-low 9.75.

The Crimson Tide could have managed with its
its 48.8875 bars score, but everything else would have had to gone smoothly, maybe even flawlessly. That didn’t happen, thanks to the beam.

Even with junior Nickie Guerrero’s 9.9 in the anchor spot, Alabama was bound to end up with a season-low beam score, and it did with a 48.625. McNeer saved herself after two close calls but ultimately ended up falling off the beam for a 9.0375. Originally, McNeer was also supposed to compete during semifinals, but she was switched out before the rotation.

It didn’t stop there like a team normally hopes. Freshman Maddie Desch also fell to end up with a season-low 9.225 that hurt Alabama.

"Of course I’m disappointed for them," Duckworth said. "Many of the mistakes were some of the seniors’ last routines and you hate that for them, but at the same time, I shared with them that gymnastics is what we do, it does not define who we are, and I love them no matter what."

During UA’s first bye, Duckworth told the gymnasts it’s not how they start, it’s how they finish.

There weren’t any notable mishaps during Alabama’s floor rotation, and as the lineup progressed, the performances kept improving.

UNEVEN BARS
Mackenzie Brannan: 9.8125
Shea Mahoney: 9.825
Keely McNeer: 9.9
Amanda Jetter: 9.325
Kiana Winston: 9.5875
Katie Bailey: 9.75

BALANCE BEAM
Wynter Childers: 9.8125
Aja Sims: 9.85
Keely McNeer: 9.0375
Maddie Desch: 9.225
Kiana Winston: 9.8375
Nickie Guerrero: 9.9

FLOOR EXERCISE
Amanda Jetter: 9.8
Wynter Childers: 9.825
Ari Guerra: 9.8375
Katie Bailey: 9.8625
Aja Sims: 9.875
Kiana Winston: 9.925

VAULT
Wynter Childers: 9.825
Abby Armbrrecht: 9.85
Kiana Winston: 9.775
Katie Bailey: 9.85
Nickie Guerrero: 9.85
Keely McNeer: 9.7875

It started with a 9.8 from Jetter, who wasn’t in the initial lineup, and finished with a 9.925 from Winston.

On vault, Childers initiated things again, as the only UA gymnast to leadoff on more than one event, and got a 9.825. The rest of the scores remained around that range and topped off at 9.85s from sophomore Abby Armbrrecht, Bailey and Guerrero. McNeer finalized Alabama’s final score with a 9.7875.

"You have to look at all the good things," Duckworth said. "We are here. We gave our heart and soul."
ALABAMA WOMEN'S GOLF

Knight has early impact for Tide

Sophomore the No. 2 golfer in the country

By Matthew Speakman
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

When sophomore Cheyenne Knight stepped on campus at Alabama, she immediately formed an important relationship.

Emma Talley, a national champion in 2015, took Knight under her wing. Talley gave her the leadership she needed and helped her be the golfer she is now - the No. 2 golfer in the country.

"She told me that it was all about believing in yourself," Knight said. "She said 'if you believe, you can reach that level. You can win a national championship. You can. It's all about the mindset.'"

Knight made a massive impact on the team her freshman year. She was WGCA freshman of the year last season, a first-team All-American and first-team All-SEC.

Knight said Talley's example was a big reason why she had so much success early.

"Your coaches can tell you to practice, but it's all about how motivated you want to be," Knight said.

"Having her on the team, she helped me so much mentally. Seeing her work ethic made me better."

Even with Talley moving on to the LPGA Tour, Knight's sophomore season has been more of the same.

She leads the team in scoring average and score vs. par, and picked up an individual win at the Darius Rucker Invitational on March 3. She's a large reason why Alabama is ranked No. 1 heading into the SEC Tournament this weekend.

"She understands her game," Crimson Tide head coach Mic Potter said. "She's not very often going to overpower a golf course. She plays to her strengths. She capitalizes like her, who is successful, to understand that even the best players in the world don't win every week," Potter said. "So, you have to learn and take away what you can from every effort, no matter if it's a win or a top 10 or a top 20. You still have to learn from it."

She's embraced that mindset now, and it is helping her become more comfortable on the course. As Alabama competes in the SEC Tournament this week, Knight will play a big role. This is one of the biggest tournaments of the year, but she wants to be relaxed. She is not letting the pressure get to her. She knows it will play itself out.

"I just want to be committed to every shot and not get ahead of myself and stay good mentally," Knight said. "I feel like if I do that well, at the end, the results will come."
Hall of fame opens at Sewell-Thomas

The new "Joe" has a new attraction for fans to check out. Sewell-Thomas Stadium's Hall of Fame opened over the weekend for the University of Alabama's weekend baseball series against Texas A&M.

The "Legends of the Joe" exhibition is located on the main concourse behind home plate, adjacent to the team store. It includes displays from every era of Alabama baseball history.

Alabama's All-Americans have honoring their accomplishments, and every draft pick and Major League Baseball player in program history is listed on a plaque on the wall. There's also an interactive display where fans can search for former UA players by their professional teams.

"There's multiple levels, for fans, former players, even recruits," associate athletic director Chris Besanceney said. "All of those elements are part of it."

Among the highlights of the hall of fame is a glass case stacked with scores of baseballs. Former players who visit the stadium are invited to sign a ball, which will then become part of the display.

The program's trophies are all encased in the hall of fame, and several team and individual records are displayed on a scoreboard on the wall.

Another display honors the stadium's namesake. Joe Sewell starred on the Alabama baseball team in the late 1910s before going on to play in the majors. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977 and the College Baseball Hall of Fame in 2007. Sewell returned to Alabama to coach the baseball program from 1964-69, winning the SEC in 1968.

His bat and one of his major league contracts are among the items now displayed at the stadium bearing his name.

"His grandson Joe Cash had an amazing collection over the years that he kept and his daughter kept," Besanceney said. "Just a treasure trove of items that they were able to allow us to display."

The Crimson Tide faced Texas A&M at Sewell-Thomas on Saturday. [STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]
ALABAMA BASKETBALL

Key entering NBA draft

Freshman won’t hire agent, which leaves door open to return to UA

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

Braxton Key, a Freshman All-SEC Team forward for the University of Alabama basketball team, will enter the 2017 NBA Draft but will not hire an agent. The move will allow Key to receive evaluations from NBA teams yet return to Alabama after the NBA draft combine in May, if he so chooses.

Key became the first Crimson Tide men’s basketball student-athlete to earn a spot on the league All-Freshman team since 2013-14 season. He led UA at 12.3 points and 29.3 minutes per game, while also topping the team in double-figure scoring games (18) and games scoring more than 20 points with three. He was second on the team in assists with 2.4 per game and third in rebounding with a 5.7 average.

Key was even better in SEC play, ranking...

SEE KEY, C3

KEY

Continued from C1

17th in league games only at 14 points per game and 14th with 6.1 rebounds per contest.

He was named the league’s Freshman of the Week on Jan. 30, after leading the Crimson Tide to wins at Georgia (½) and vs. Mississippi State (½). In those games, he averaged 22.5 points and 9 rebounds.

The award winners at Alabama’s 2017 men’s basketball banquet were sophomore Avery Johnson, Jr. (Most Improved); freshman Braxton Key (Outstanding Freshman); senior Bola Olaniyan (Outstanding Defensive Player); freshman Dazon Ingram (Outstanding Offensive Player); and senior Corban Collins (Coach Avery Award for competitiveness and character).
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Legislation won't beat Saban and Alabama

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

You can take him off the recruiting road in the spring.
You can speed up the game to a pace that makes him uncomfortable.
You can limit the number of people he can hire to his support staff.

As opposing coaches, athletics directors and commissioners can do everything in your power to change the rules to try to compete with him, but after a decade of dominance, there's one thing you should realize about Alabama football coach Nick Saban.

You can't beat him with legislation. You have to do it the way Dabo Swinney and Clemson did — with good players, good coaches and a lot of hard work.

The latest attempt to put a stop to Saban may be an effort to limit the number of people Football Bowl Subdivision programs can employ on their support staffs. Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby, in his role as chairman of the NCAA Football Oversight Committee, said as much last week.

"I think that door has been open for a while," Bowlsby said. "We're seeing very large

Rules changes have done little to slow the success of Nick Saban and Alabama.

Vasha Hunt / vhunt@al.com

staff. We see non-coaching personnel doing coaching duties. It is one of our two priorities for the Football Oversight Committee for the coming year ... looking at personnel and how personnel should be deployed in the football coaching staff environment."
army of people to give itself every possible advantage within the rules. The Crimson Tide’s contingent of experts, analysts, etc., just seems larger and more effective.

Not every program has the juice to hire a former SEC offensive coordinator as an analyst, as Alabama did recently with Dan Werner of Ole Miss. Or a former Heisman winner and NFL quarterback such as Chris Weinke.

Those hires continued a Saban practice of stockpiling quality football minds, which includes hiring former head coaches such as Steve Sarkisian, who left to become the offensive coordinator for the Atlanta Falcons, and Mike Locksley, who was promoted to an on-field assistant.

Alabama’s ability to hire quality coaches for relatively minor staff roles irks some people in the profession. Take Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy, perhaps still bothered by his team’s 2011 BCS snub, who took a shot.

“The mistake they’re making is they don’t have control of these analysts,” Gundy told CBSSports.com. “It’s ridiculous. I don’t care what the number is, the analyst position is a good thing for coaches who got left out of the coaching search. We bring them in here and pay the $50,000. But there needs to be a limit. Why should one school have 15 and I have two?”

A question for Gundy: If they’re cheap and there’s no current limit, why do you have only two? Perhaps you should take that up with mega-booster T. Boone Pickens.

The real issue here is the professionalization of college football, where more and bigger is better, and it’s disingenuous at best for the likes of Bowlsby and Gundy to complain about it. In 2014, for example, Bowlsby made $2.3 million, according to the Washington Post. Gundy’s annual salary is $3.775 million, according to USA Today.

Gundy makes about half of what Saban does, which sounds generous considering their accomplishments, but it’s a bad look to ask for parity to help you compete when you’re one of the highest-paid public employees in your state.

Saban has done more than his share to turn major college football into a lucrative and professional operation — for everyone but the players — but there are a lot of fingers in the ever-expanding pie.

The NCAA got wise a few years ago and changed its focus from trying to level a playing field that can never truly be level to focusing on what it could do for its players, short of paying them a fair wage relative to the revenue they generate.

If Bowlsby and others want to try again to legislate parity, good luck. All the evidence of the last decade suggests that whatever they do, it won’t work. They won’t beat Saban, at least not with legislation.
Veterans advice to young Tide players: Take it step by step

By Tyler Waldrep
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Few guys have been with the Crimson Tide longer than the redshirt junior linebacker, but watching the freshmen come to him for advice still caught Keith Holcombe by surprise.

"It's kind of crazy like the new guys coming in asking me questions, because I remember when I was doing the same thing a couple years ago when I was in their role," Holcombe said.

To date, the former four-star prospect from Hillcrest High School has primarily contributed on special teams (where he led the team with 12 tackles in 2016), but now Holcombe finds himself taking the first reps in spring practice alongside fellow inside linebacker Rashaan Evans.

One of the hardest lessons for newcomers on the team to learn every year is patience. Everyone wants to see the field on Saturdays, but Holcombe said the guys that take on more than coaches ask of them actually set themselves back.

"Being the guy everybody looked to make that one play (in high school) - yeah you might have to reel yourself in every now and again," Holcombe said. "But once you understand your role and what you're doing, how to play here together with everybody, that you can lean on each other, it goes a lot smoother."

Instead of looking for big play opportunities, younger guys should sweat the small stuff. Center Bradley Bozeman said it all starts (for the offensive line at least) before the ball is even snapped.

"First off it's knowing your play, and then after that, it's knowing what the defense is about to do so you can correct your technique before it even starts," Bozeman said.

Quarterback Jalen Hurts didn't have to wait to see the field, but that doesn't mean his teammates expect his jump in performance to be less significant than guys like Holcombe and Bozeman.

Wide receiver Calvin Ridley said the difference is night and day.

"When the pocket breaks down, he just steps into it and makes a good throw," Ridley said. "And sometimes he used to, when the pocket breaks down, he would take off."
Meet one of the unsung heroes of the Alabama football program

By: Matt Zenitz

Hanging on a wall in Jeff Allen's office is a constant reminder of some of his most notable recent work, a picture of Kenyan Drake stretching across the goal line during his iconic touchdown in the 2016 national championship game.

Sitting in his office before a recent Alabama practice, Allen looked at the picture and reflected.

"I don't know if I'll ever be able to top that moment in my career in terms of the pride and just the feeling I had for him to see him make that play," said Allen, the Crimson Tide's head athletic trainer. "Literally, just talking about it gives me chill bumps."

That play, that critical moment in Alabama's win over Clemson wouldn't have been possible without the behind the scenes work of Allen and the Tide athletic training staff.

Two months before the game, Drake broke his right arm against Mississippi State, his second serious injury in as many years.

Even after receiving a favorable prognosis from one of Alabama's team doctors, Allen was still skeptical that Drake would be able to return at any point that season. Until talking to the then-senior running back after surgery.

"If you don't want to try to do this, don't worry about it. I understand," Allen remembers saying to Drake. "You had an injury last year. You had this injury. You're going to go play in the NFL. I want to do what you want to do."

"My career at Alabama is not going to end this way," Drake responded adamantly. "I'm not going out like this."

So, Allen constructed an innovative plan to get Drake back as quickly as possible.

Countless hours were spent doing special wound therapy to expedite the healing of the seven-inch scar on Drake's arm. After his daily rehab, Drake would go home and be hooked up to a bone stimulator or sometimes a cryotherapy machine.

Allen also worked with Alabama's engineering department, using a 3D printer to make a form-fitting splint out of a lightweight Kevlar material that was both protective and flexible enough that Drake could bend his arm and handle a football.

It typically takes six to eight weeks to recover from a broken arm. Aided by Allen and the athletic training staff, Drake was back for the SEC championship game just three weeks later and is using that right arm in the picture on Allen's wall, reaching the ball across the goal line with the arm he broke just two months earlier.
One of Alabama's team doctors, Norman Waldrop, paused while describing Allen and his value to the Tide program.

"People may laugh at me saying this," Waldrop said, "but I honestly think you can credit several wins and at least a large portion of credit towards a national title to Jeff and the training staff. I don't think we would have won as many games over the Saban era without Jeff and the training staff being as good as they are. I feel very firmly about that."

Allen is that good, an unsung hero and core member of the Alabama football program who is widely considered one of the best and most innovative athletic trainers in the country.

"I think he's as good as there is in the business as an athletic trainer," said Lyle Cain, one of Alabama's other team doctors.

Only three members of the football staff have been with the Tide since the beginning of the Saban era. Allen is one of them, hired after three years as the head athletic trainer at Central Florida.

The introduction to Saban came from former Alabama outside linebackers coach Lance Thompson, who worked with Allen at Central Florida.

Knowing Saban needed a new head athletic trainer, Thompson recommended Allen.

Allen interviewed in June 2007, expecting to have to wait before hearing anything more about the job.

Instead, a member of the Alabama staff told Allen as he was getting ready to leave for the airport, "Hey, coach Saban wants to meet with you one more time. He wants to offer you the job."

So, Allen called his wife and told her, "I think he's about to offer me this job. Are you OK coming to Tuscaloosa?"

She was, and Allen accepted the job when it was offered during that subsequent meeting.

Allen has been at Alabama ever since, the driving force behind the Tide continuing to be likely the best in the country at injury prevention and injury recovery.

"He's one of the rocks," Waldrop said. "He's not as big of a name as some other guys, but he's invaluable. It's impossible to overstate his value."

***

In March, Allen posted pictures on Twitter that showed one of his current projects.

Allen is working with Alabama's computer science and engineering departments to develop virtual reality rehab, trying to find a way to use virtual reality games to help players work back from injuries.

See next page
Allen recently tested it out on an Alabama player rehabbing from a knee injury. Playing an art game, the player had to paint the alphabet while bending the knee and doing mini squats.

"It's something to get them engaged vs. just laying on the ground," Allen said. "These kids are so technology-oriented, so we're going to get a virtual reality system with games that we think will translate into rehab. Plus, it gives me a score. Our rehab, I like to have a scoreboard mentality. Think about a player. They're constantly looking at a scoreboard. I want to give them a score in rehab like 'Hey, man, you got beat today' or 'No, you're better today than you were.'"

That's part of why Allen is so respected. He's a creative, outside-the-box thinker consistently finding new ways to prevent injuries and expedite the healing process.

Last year, Allen wanted to find a way to cut down on hamstring injuries. That was accomplished.

Allen found a machine called the "NordBord" that tests hamstring strength and shows whether a player is more at risk for a hamstring injury. Allen and head strength and conditioning coach Scott Cochran then worked together to improve hamstring deficiencies for at risk players.

Aided by that, Alabama's hamstring injuries were down 75 percent last season compared to 2015, Allen said.

The Tide also continues to use the sideline medical tent created by Allen and the school's engineering department in 2015, which allows Alabama's athletic trainers and doctors to privately evaluate injured players on the sideline during games.

"He's always looking for that new device or that new development or new technique to help the players get better quicker and get back on the field sooner and do what they want to do," Cain said. "He's open-minded. A lot of people that have been in the business for 15 to 20 years, they get kind of set in their ways, but I think Jeff does a really good job of investigating and evaluating new techniques and new devices that are available to help the players."

Drake is one recent success story. Cam Robinson is another.

In 2014, the former Tide star offensive lineman sustained a high ankle sprain, an injury that typically sidelines players for six to eight weeks and sometimes even longer.

Robinson didn't even miss a game, playing against LSU two weeks later thanks largely to an aggressive, individualized rehab program designed by Allen.

Playing two weeks after suffering a high ankle sprain was fairly unprecedented at the time.

Two days before the game against LSU is the only time Waldrop has been called into Saban's office.

Saban wanted to make sure Waldrop felt comfortable with Robinson playing.

He was. So was Allen. So, Robinson started against LSU and helped Alabama beat one of its biggest rivals.

See next page
Like with Drake, that likely wouldn't have been possible without Allen and the athletic training staff.

"We've been very fortunate in getting our guys back quickly, and that's a testament to Jeff and the training staff," Waldrop said.

Allen and the medical staff are particularly prideful about Drake and the storybook ending to his college career after the two serious injuries.

In addition to the picture on Allen's wall, there's also a mural of the touchdown inside Alabama's doctor's office that shows Drake using that right arm to reach the ball into the end zone.

"That picture embodies everything that we're trying to do in here every day," Allen said. "That one moment summarizes our total philosophy."
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Tide coordinator to earn $1.2M

Contract has to be approved by board

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

New offensive coordinator Brian Daboll is on pace to make $1.2 million a year, The Tuscaloosa News has learned.

Daboll, whose hiring was announced by the university on Feb. 20, earned $100,000 in March. His contract has yet to be formally approved by the UA board of trustee’s compensation committee. The committee normally meets in the summer.

His predecessor, Steve Sarkisian, was scheduled to make $1 million a season before he left to take the same position with the Atlanta Falcons. Lane Kiffin, who served as Alabama’s offensive coordinator for three seasons (2014-16), made $1.4 million in 2016.

According to the USA Today assistant coach database, 12 assistant coaches earned more than a million in salary in 2016, including both Alabama coordinators (Kiffin and Jeremy Pruitt).

First-year wide receivers coach Mike Locksley will make approximately $600,000 after earning $45,000 as an offensive analyst in 2016.

subject to approval by the UA board of trustees.

Shuffling the deck

Through two scrimmages there has been just as many combinations on the right side of the offensive line. Don’t expect the shuffling to stop until the coaching staff finds the right combination.

During the first scrimmage, Lester Cotton worked at right guard and Matt Womack earned repetitions at right tackle.

A week later, Cotton was at right tackle and Deonte Brown was at right guard.

Center Bradley Bozeman said there is no pressure to field a starting lineup this Saturday.

“The spring is the time to experiment,” Bozeman said. “That’s the best time to because there’s nothing on the line right now. There’s no games to go into. You kind of figure out the best combination and the best chemistry. We’re trying things out and seeing how people fit.”

When will the offensive line be sorted? The answer is as simple as it will be sorted out when it is.

“That’s the going question,” Bozeman said. “You never know what’s going to go on down here. Coach will see something that we’ve never thought of before, and that’ll be the next substitution. You never know.”

— Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
NCAA adopts early signing period and 10th coach

Michael Marot  Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The NCAA endorsed a football recruiting rules overhaul on Friday that will allow high school football players to sign with colleges as early as December and put a two-year waiting period on Bowl Subdivision teams from hiring people close to a recruit.

If the package is approved by the Board of Governors on April 26, the signing period change would take effect Aug. 1. The Collegiate Commissioners Association would need to change the dates, a move expected to happen in June. The other significant change to the recruiting calendar would allow recruits to make official visits between April and June of their junior year in high school.

The Division I Council also backed a measure to eliminate two-a-day practices that would take effect immediately if approved.

"Today's adoption of the football legislation marks the most significant progress in recent years to improve the football environment and culture for current and prospective student-athletes and coaches," committee chairman Jim Phillips said in a statement. Phillips is Northwestern's vice president for athletics and recreation.

Not all of the proposals passed, including a push for a June signing period.

"The June date, there was resistance to that, especially among coaches, but we're going to take a look at whether we can find one that's earlier than December," said Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby, chairman of the Division I football oversight committee.

Schools will now be limited to signing only 25 recruits per year, in hopes of eliminating "oversigning." Exceptions will be made for current players who have attended classes for at least two years and athletes who suffer incapacitating injuries.

Other highlights of the rules changes up for final approval by the board:

» FBS schools will be barred from hiring people "close to a prospective student-athlete" for a two-year period before and after the athlete's enrollment at the school. This provision was adopted in men's basketball in 2010.

» FBS coaches will be limited to participating in camps and clinics to 10 days in June and July, and the camps must take place on a school's campus or in facilities regularly used by the school for practice or play.

» Coaches employed at a camp or clinic will be allowed to have recruiting conversations with prospects.

» FBS schools can hire a 10th assistant football coach effective Jan. 9.
The NCAA Division I Council implemented several changes to the off-the-field administration of college football. In the spirit of the uplifting Easter holiday, we'll review the one that everyone likes first and then get into the others.

In a move that almost everyone liked, the Council passed the popular proposal to expand college coaching staffs from nine full-time, on-field assistants to 10. The rule won't take effect until January 2018, a reasonable compromise for Group of Five and smaller schools, most notably the MAC, which worried about expenses but also about the possibility of losing staff members in midsummer as they took higher-profile, higher-paying jobs in the Big 10, SEC and other Power Five conferences. Ultimately, the proposal passed unanimously.

Even Alabama coach Nick Saban liked it.

"I'm very much for that (10th assistant)," he said on Friday. "I know there are a lot of people out there that complain about staff sizes, but we actually have the fewest number of coaches per player of any sport in college, ratio-wise."

To illustrate Saban's point simply look at three major sports. The ratio of player to coach in men's college basketball is 3.25 to 1. In women's basketball it is 3:75 to 1 and in baseball it is 6.25 to 1. Even with the addition of a 10th coach (and counting the head coach, as in the other sports), football will still be 7.7 to 1, with 11 full-time coaches for 85 players. The new rule does reduce that ratio and improve the teaching time for proper technique.

"To have a 10th coach really balances the staff better, so you can have special teams coach and not have a position coach that has to double up and do that," Saban noted.

The rest of the rules that passed, or were facilitated (a December signing date for football still must be approved by the Conference Commissioner's Association in June but passage is expected), were more of a mixed bag.

A quick rundown of rules changes in addition to the 10th assistant and the three-day December signing date:

- A change in the calendar for official visits, allowing prospects to...
visit from April of their junior season into June. The move is complementary to an early signing period since official visits are difficult to coordinate during the high school (and college) season.

Restrictions on hiring of individuals associated with a prospect to non-coaching (analyst/administrative) jobs. Saban has already taken a couple of heavy whacks of outrage at this rule (as has Gus Malzahn, among others) but he once again broke out his trusty verbal cudgel on Friday.

"I guess it’s the paranoia that we all have that somebody else is doing something that I’m allowed to do," Saban said. "Everybody else is allowed to do it, but you choose not to do it. Just like when I used to go on the road in the spring. Everybody could have gone on the road in the spring. Urban Meyer and I were the only two that went out every day like assistant coaches. Everybody else complained about it, but they could have done it. It wasn’t against the rules. So they just don’t want to work?"

"All these people that complain about staff sizes, we pay interns really, really little money. A very small amount of money. You would be shocked at how cheap the labor really is. Almost criminal. And why we have administrators complaining about how many cheap labor you have, trying to promote the profession, trying to do something to develop our game and the coaches in the game. How else do you develop guys? Then you pass the rule where we can’t ever hire a high school coach to do anything here. You can’t have a high school coach do camp. So do we do anything to develop coaching in high school? Pretty soon they’re going to make it so they can’t speak at clinics, because we pay them for that, so we can’t do that, either. So we really can’t do much to promote our game, so we can’t do anything to develop coaches either, by having a few extra guys on staff?"

Restrictions on satellite camps.

Saban didn’t gloat about this one, but this was a clear SEC win, returning the "satellite camps" to their proper place on campus. There was no reaction from Jim Harbaugh, who is not talking to the media this spring.

Limitation of annual football scholarships to a "hard" 25.

This was a major issue for the "oversigning" critics a few years ago. Technically, there has been a 25-scholarship limit all along but schools could sign more than that as long as they made their roster numbers work by August. Alabama, among others, has done that, and will probably continue to add top-ranked recruiting classes under the new rules, when all the ramifications are shaken out.

In a safety-related move, two-a-day practices were banned. Saban’s view was that by eliminating two-a-days and pushing a team’s reporting date into late July, you create as many safety issues as you solve.

"I cannot see bringing our guys in in July to start practice and having four or five weeks for practice before we play our first game with summer school still going on," Saban said. "I don’t disagree with a day off. I think if we thought two-a-days was too much we should have not made it longer. We should have just eliminated two-a-days and kept the number of practices a little less because it’s a long season."

Saban indicated he may choose to take less than the full amount of allotted practice opportunities in order to avoid a six-month season and the toll it would take on players.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Alabam coach Nick Saban works with his players during Alabama's scrimmage Friday.

Vasha Hunt / vhunt@al.com

Saban annoyed by complaints about size of his coaching staff

Rainer Sabin saabin@al.com

For a brief moment Friday, Nick Saban was pleased.

He said he was "very, very much" for an NCAA rule adopted hours earlier that would allow for a 10th assistant coach to be hired as soon as Jan. 9, 2018.

But shortly thereafter Saban grew visibly annoyed as he addressed concerns he's heard about bloated staffs.

Saban's ire was provoked by comments made by Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby, who said the NCAA Football Oversight Committee he chairs will take a "deep dive" on personnel in the next year. At one point Bowlsby mentioned that one unspecified school employed a football staff of 97 people that included analysts, coaches and other administrators. The assumption was that Bowlsby was talking about Alabama.

"All these people who complain about staff sizes — we pay interns, really, really little money, a very small amount of money," Saban said. "You would be shocked at how cheap the labor really is — almost like criminal. And why we have administrators complaining about how many cheap-labor people you have, trying to promote the profession, trying to do something to develop our game and the coaches in our game because how else do you develop guys?"

Saban wasn't done.

"I hate to go off on something," he continued. "But I really don't get it. I don't. I guess it's the paranoia that we all have that somebody else is doing something that I am allowed to do and everyone else is allowed to do it but you choose not to do it. Just like when I used to go on the road in the spring. Everybody could have gone on the road in the spring. Urban Meyer and I were the only two who went out every day like assistant coaches. So, everybody else would complain about it. But they could have done it. It wasn't against the rules, so they just don't want to work?"

But there is more to it than that. And it has almost everything to do with the budgetary gap that exists between the universities at the top of the NCAA food chain and the ones nestled at its bottom.

The package of legislation passed Friday, including an amended rule supporting the addition of a tenth assistant coach, reflects the growing divide between the FBS's biggest programs and the institutions buried in the division's lowest caste.

An amendment sponsored by the Mid-American Conference on Jan. 31 delayed the addition of a tenth assistant coach until Jan. 9, 2018 and in the process raised concerns of smaller programs that don't operate with the same financial resources that Alabama does.

"There are many concerns with the timing of the current immediate effective date," the proposed amendment stated. "An April effective date is in the middle of the budget year for the membership and is late in the hiring period for a football staff. If the effective date is amended to occur to the conclusion of the 2017 football season, member institutions will have the opportunity to budget for the addition of a full-time countable coach and associated costs related to recruiting. In addition, a delayed effective date will better fit the hiring timeline for a football staff and will not require readjustments following the spring practice period."

That of course would not have been an issue for Saban and Alabama.

"We actually have the fewest number of coaches per player of any sport in college," Saban said. "We have the fewest number of coaches relative to the players of any sport in college."

Over the years, Saban has worked around that by augmenting his support staff — something that has now caught the eye of the NCAA and rankled Alabama's coach in the process.
NCAA: Ex-assistant acted unethically

Bo Davis hit with two-year show cause for providing information about recruiting violations

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Former University of Alabama assistant coach Bo Davis was found to have acted “unethically” by the NCAA and received a two-year show cause, the organization released Friday.

The Division I Committee on Infractions panel found that Davis provided “false or misleading information about impermissible recruiting contacts.” The group also stated that Davis “knowingly committed a recruiting violation” when he had contact with four prospective student-athletes at their school set up through an Alabama booster.

Alabama received a public reprimand and censure, a withholding of his replacement (Karl Dunbar) from off-campus recruiting, telephone contact from April 22, 2016 through May 31, 2016 and a $5,000 fine and a disassociation from the booster who was deemed to help set up the meeting.

Davis received a two-year show cause from April 14, 2017 through April 13, 2019. (Davis currently is the defensive line coach for Texas at San Antonio). Davis was alleged to have visited out-of-state prospective student-athletes at a time of year during the recruiting calendar when coaches aren’t allowed to contact recruits. When questioned about the visits, Davis was found to be untruthful to both UA and to the NCAA.

He chose to resign rather than be fired. Davis did not coach during the 2016 season, but was hired in February by the University of Texas at San Antonio to serve as the defensive line coach.

— Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
A bill that would require TOPS recipients who leave the state to repay some of their assistance was defeated Thursday in the Senate Education Committee.

The party line vote was 4-2 to shelve the measure, with Republicans prevailing.

The proposal, Senate Bill 110, would generally require TOPS graduates to repay 50 percent of their assistance if they left the state less than four years later. The same would apply to TOPS recipients who quit school – repay half of the money for each year they got the money.

"We pay for 50 percent of their education," said Sen. Jay Luneau, D-Alexandria and sponsor of the bill. "That is still a pretty good deal."

He added later, "The citizens of this state who fund this program expect us to be responsible with their dollars. That is what this bill does. It places the responsibility on students who either quit or move away to pay a portion back."

Opponents said the bill would cause more bright students to leave the state, especially amid fears that they could not find top jobs after graduation.

The new rules would also make it easier for the University of Alabama and other out-of-state schools to lure away Louisiana's top students, they said.

"I am afraid a bill like this would allow other states to cherry-pick our kids," said Sen. Conrad Appel, R-Metairie and a member of the committee.

James Callier, executive director of the Patrick F. Taylor Foundation, which is named for the founder of the scholarship, said it is a mistake to say TOPS pays for a student's entire education.

Callier said the aid finances a maximum of about $7,200 on an $11,000 annual bill, with students responsible for fees and other charges. "TOP was always intended to be a limited scholarship," Callier told the committee.

TOPS stands for Taylor Opportunity Program for Students.

It pays for tuition, and in some cases other costs, for students who meet academic requirements.

About 52,000 students get the assistance.

However, state budget problems forced a reduction in what TOPS recipients are getting in the spring semester, about 70 percent of the traditional amount.

Sen. Beth Mizell, R-Franklinton, said it was unfair to require students to remain if Louisiana cannot offer abundant job opportunities.
Sen. Bodi White, R-Central, said TOPS is one reason the state is ahead of three states in the percentage of adults with college degrees.

Said Luneau, "I think there are a lot of kids who don't plan to stay in the state and take advantage of TOPS."

Louis Reine, head of the state AFL-CIO, said the bill would serve as a wakeup call for students on TOPS who party for a semester or two, then quit school. "Right now there is a carrot and not much stick," he said of rules governing the aid.

Committee members voting to shelve the bill were Sens. Conrad Appel, R-Metairie; Beth Mizell, R-Franklinton; Bodi White, R-Central and Mike Walsworth, R-West Monroe.

Voting against the motion were Sens. Gerald Boudreaux, D-Lafayette and John Milkovich, D-Shreveport.
Whittier Law School Won't Enroll New Students

After college announces decision by board, law school denounces the move.

By: Scott Jaschik

Whittier College announced Wednesday that it will no longer admit students to its law school.

While currently enrolled students will be able to continue through graduation, the law school is effectively shutting down.

Many law schools in recent years -- with fewer students applying and a tough job market facing graduates -- have shrunk the size of their student bodies. But actually shutting a law school is highly unusual. (Two law schools in Minnesota merged in 2015.)

A statement from the board of Whittier College said the board has been considering the future of the law school since 2015 and considered options such as having the law school become part of another institution. But none of those plans worked out, the statement from the board said. "We believe we have looked at every realistic option to continue a successful law program. Unfortunately, these efforts did not lead to a desired outcome," the statement said.

A statement posted on the law school's website (since removed), with a notice that it could be attributed to the law school, criticized the board's decision.

"We are obviously devastated by the Whittier College Board of Trustees’ decision to discontinue the program of legal education at Whittier Law School," the statement said. "For more than 50 years, we have provided a high-quality education to students of diverse backgrounds and abilities -- students who might not otherwise have been able to receive a legal education and who are now serving justice and enterprise around the world. As is well-known, the last few years have been extremely difficult for law schools across the country. Whittier Law School felt those challenges keenly, and we took significant steps to address them. Sadly, our sponsoring institution opted to abandon the law school rather than provide the time and resources needed to finish paving the path to ongoing viability and success. We believe this action was unwise, unwarranted and unfounded."

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the students at the law school are not white, and Whittier law faculty members have long pointed with pride to their efforts to promote diversity in the legal profession. A slight majority of students are women. The college says that it is the third most diverse law school in the country.

At the same time, Whittier law graduates have struggled on the job market. Data published by the law school about job placement show that just 30 of the school's 141 graduates in 2015 had gained full-time employment that required passing the bar. Preliminary data for 2016 show that 38 of that year's 128 graduates were employed in such positions.

Some law school faculty members have gone to court -- so far without success -- seeking to block Whittier from moving to close its law school. A brief filed by the faculty members says
that Whittier College is seeking to profit from the land on which the law school is located and is violating agreements with professors.

Students at the law school are planning a rally to protest the decision to shut the law school.

The Orange County Register reported that students said they were stunned by the news when they attended an emergency meeting called by the law school on Wednesday. “They dropped a bomb on us a week before finals,” one student said. “People were in tears.”