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Alabama tourism hits new heights

Baldwin County beaches lead way; Jefferson County sees slight dip

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Alabama's tourism industry continues to race ahead, leaving the 2010 BP oil spill disaster and the Great Recession in the rear-view mirror.

For the sixth year in a row, Alabama set a new record in annual tourism expenditures for 2016, and for the number of visitors coming to the state.

More than 25.8 million people visited last year, up 2.5 percent over the 25.2 million people who came in 2015.

And travelers spent more than $13.3 billion, an increase of 5.4 percent over the 2015 figures.

For the past 14 years, from 2003 to 2016, tourism expenditures in Alabama have increased a whopping 96 percent, according to data from the Alabama Tourism Department.

The numbers are compiled annually by Keivan Deravi, an economist in the School of Business at Auburn University Montgomery.

SEE TOURISM, AS
TOURISM
FROM AL

"The great news is that all areas of the state experienced growth for a variety of reasons," said Lee Sentell, the state's tourism director. "The fact that the economy was stronger last year in the Midwest and Southeast contributed to the increase. People just seem to have been more relaxed and wanted to reward the family with a vacation to the South."

'LOVE THE BEACH'

Much of the growth is linked to five counties — Baldwin, Jefferson, Madison, Mobile and Montgomery. They account for 68 percent of the total number of visitors.

Baldwin County, home to Alabama's sugar-white sand beaches, leads the way — by far — in tourism activity. The 6.3 million visitors to Baldwin County represented a 3.3 percent bounce from 2015, and is nearly one-fourth of all the tourists who visit Alabama each year.

"People love the beach when its blue skies and sunshine," said Herb Malone, president/CEO of Gulf Shores & Orange Beach, the tourism arm of coastal Alabama. "But besides the growth over the summer, we have grown in our shoulder seasons, particularly our fall and early winter.... It's a lot of dynamics at work coming together."

In booming Baldwin, which is also Alabama's fastest-growing county in population since the 2010 U.S. Census, Malone and others anticipate further spikes in tourism with an influx in sporting-related events in Foley, Gulf Shores and Fairhope as well as the summer opening of the OWA amusement park in Foley.

Said Sentell: "OWA is going to be a game changer for the Gulf Coast."

Added Malone: "It will add greatly to the offerings we have for traveling guests. It will introduce a new element we haven't had in the past."

Baldwin and neighboring Mobile County combined represented more than 40 percent of the visitors to Alabama in 2016.

Mobile County saw a 5.5 percent increase in visitors in 2016.

"Those numbers don't surprise me," said David Clark, president/CEO of Visit Mobile, who has been involved in the coastal Alabama hospitality sector for 30 years. "It comes back to great leadership among coastal Alabama and the city of Mobile. It comes down to stakeholder investments over the last 10 to 15 years."

But there were some anomalies in the data. Jefferson — Alabama's most populous county and home to the city of Birmingham — saw a 2.9 bump in travel-related spending and recorded $262,323 more in state lodging tax receipts, representing an increase of 2.9 percent from 2015.

Jefferson County's decline was reported in hotel occupancy rates. According to the data, the county's average occupancy rate was 62.6 percent in 2016, down from 63.6 percent in 2015.

Baldwin, Mobile, Madison and Montgomery counties reported hotel occupancy rate increases in 2016.

John Oros, CEO of the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the statistical dips can be attributed to a last year's slowdown in weekday corporate travel. He said that can also be linked to the uncertainties surrounding the 2016 presidential election.

"Last year was an unusual election year and no one knew what would happen on the impact of the economy," said Oros. "It can typically cause corporations to slightly reduce their travel until things become more clear politically."

Oros said that despite the small dips, 2016 was a "positive for the tourism industry and travel in general throughout the United States."

And 2017 has started off on a positive note for Jefferson County, Oros said.

"The hotel occupancy numbers are up about 1 percent and we may be back to the 2015 numbers in Birmingham and Jefferson County," he said. "It's been a good first quarter with sporting events and tournaments taking place. We think demand for hotels ... will be extremely strong."

Other Southern states and locales that promote their beaches also enjoyed a lucrative tourism year. Hilton Head Island, S.C., for example, saw 6.1 percent increase in its hotel and resort occupancy rate, to 64 percent.

In Mississippi, that state's three Gulf Coast counties attracted 6.2 million visitors last year, up 8 percent over 2015. The Mississippi Gulf Coast, punctuated with the casino industry, recorded an 8 percent increase in non-casino revenues in 2016, according to Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The three Mississippi counties — Hancock, Harrison and Jackson — employ 30,000 people in the leisure and hospital-
MONTGOMERY

Legislature hitting home stretch

Big issues ahead:
Redistricting, autism insurance, gun permits

Mike Cason  mcason@al.com

Alabama lawmakers enter the home stretch of their annual session with plenty of key issues unresolved, including the thorny task of redrawing legislative district lines. Today marks the 23rd day of the session, which can include up to 30 days and must end by May 22. Lawmakers met Tuesday, and will meet today and Thursday this week. Here's a look at some of what's being considered this week and where key issues stand.

REDISTRICTING

In January, a three-judge district court found the Legislature improperly used race as the predominant factor in drawing nine state House districts and three state Senate districts. The court ordered those districts redrawn before next year's elections.

The judges, in a case returned to them by the U.S. Supreme Court, ruled the redistricting plan, approved in 2012, split certain precincts to put black voters in majority black districts and white voters in neighboring districts.

SEE ISSUES, A3
ISSUES
FROM AL

The ruling came after lawsuits filed by the Alabama Legislative Black Caucus, Alabama Democratic Conference and others, which claimed the Republican-led Legislature put race ahead of the principles of preserving county and precinct lines and communities of interest. The federal court upheld the district lines for 24 other districts challenged by the plaintiffs, but redrawing the 12 districts will affect many others.

On Tuesday, a committee held a public hearing on a new House district plan, while the Senate Tourism and Marketing Committee was scheduled to review a new Senate plan. The plan drew strong opposition from the Legislative Black Caucus during the public hearing, raising the likelihood of filibusters that could threaten other bills during the final nine days of the session.

The House committee approved the plan on a party line vote, with Democrats opposed. After the meeting, Reps. John Knight, D-Montgomery, and John Rogers, D-Birmingham, said the Republican majority was not willing to compromise and predicted the dispute would have to be settled in federal court.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, who chairs the tourism board, assigned the bill to his committee. "I wanted the minority caucus to know they're going to get a fair shake," Marsh said.

Sen. Gerald "Jai" Pittman, R-Lineville, the Senate co-chair of the reapportionment committee, said the line is to have a plan ready to submit to the court for review by May 25.

BUDGETS

House Speaker Mac McCutcheon said the House will consider the education budget today, it already has passed the Senate. The General Fund budget, which has passed the House, will be considered in the Senate Finance and Taxation General Fund Committee today.

CHILD CARE LICENSING

On April 20, the House passed a bill to require state inspections for church-affiliated child care centers that are exempt from licensing by the Department of Human Resources. The bill is a compromise measure that stops short of removing the licensing exemption for church-based centers. But it will require licenses for church-based centers that receive state or federal funds, and it will require annual state inspections for all church-based centers. The Senate Judiciary Committee will consider the bill today. During the same meeting, the committee is scheduled to consider a bill that would make it legal for midwives to deliver babies in Alabama. That bill passed the House last week.

AUTISM THERAPY

On the same day the child care licensing bill passed, the House voted 100-0 in favor of a bill requiring insurance plans to cover behavioral therapy for children with autism. Sen. Trip Pittman, chairman of the Senate General Fund committee, told the Associated Press there are concerns about state costs and said the bill won't be considered in a public hearing until next week.

DEATH PENALTY

The House Judiciary Committee today is scheduled to consider a bill that would require those convicted in death penalty cases to pursue certain appeals concurrently, a change that could shorten the duration of the appeals process. That bill has passed the Senate. A similar bill failed in 2014. The committee also will consider a Senate-passed bill that would allow death by nitrogen gas as a third option in Alabama executions. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, Mississippi and Oklahoma have authorized nitrogen executions, but have not used the method. Lethal injection is the primary method of execution in Alabama, but the law allows condemned inmates to opt for the electric chair. None have since lethal injection was adopted.

PISTOL PERMITS

The Senate passed a bill eliminating the requirement for a permit to carry a concealed handgun. The House Public Safety Committee held a hearing last week on a similar House bill, but did not take a vote. Five law enforcement officers spoke in opposition to the bill. Supporters who spoke were advocates from gun rights groups, except for Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale. Public Safety Committee Chairman Allen Treadaway, R-Morris, a captain with the Birmingham Police Department, said the bill needed more study and probably would be assigned to a subcommittee.

PRISONS

In March, the Senate passed a bill that would allow local authorities and the state to build three new regional prisons, close most of the existing prisons and renovate others. It was a scaled-down version of former Gov. Robert Bentley's plan to build four prisons with an $800 million bond issue. The bill has not been considered in the House and is not on this week's agenda in the House Judiciary Committee.
‘SOMEBODY’S GOT TO STEP UP’

Battle says he can lead state out of quagmire

Lee Roop lroop@al.com

Alabama’s leaders have led it into a swamp, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle says, and if he’s elected governor in 2018, he’ll lead the state out.

“We need to make this state a better place,” he said Friday. “Somebody’s got to step up and do it.”

Battle, who was elected to his third term as Huntsville mayor in 2016, announced his candidacy Thursday. He said in an interview that he can take statewide the process that has made his city Alabama’s fastest-growing urban area.

The goals of that process, he said, are “how to add jobs, how to add better paying jobs, how to bring back some leadership, how to get people to have confidence in this state again, because over the past year people have lost confidence.”

It’s done by having an end game, a way to get there and clear results, Battle said.

“You have to explain it time and time again,” he said, “but when we do that, people start to understand there’s a system in place, and this is what we’re trying to do.”

‘IN A QUAGMIRE’

Battle said Alabama has “been in a quagmire.” He cited state Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, who was suspended and resigned from office; House Speaker Mike Hubbard, a convicted felon; and former Gov. Robert Bentley, who resigned after a sex scandal.

SEE BATTLE, A6
"All those actions make people lose confidence in their government," Battle said. "We need to turn that around.

Battle's administration has lured thousands of new jobs to Huntsville and Madison County. "What's going on in Montgomery" has cost Alabama jobs, he said.

"There have been some who have looked and said, 'Maybe it's not time for us to get into that,'" Battle said of prospects. "They moved somewhere else. I can't give you names, but I will guarantee you that if you look and compare us to other places, that's happening."

Asked what he can do given Alabama is strapped for money and voters don't like new taxes, Battle said he faced a similar situation during his first term in Huntsville. America was in a recession and money was tight, he said.

"The first thing you have to do is freeze hiring, and you have to cut outside agency spending by 10 percent, which we did," he said. "We did all the things to make ourselves fiscally responsible. You've got to be fiscally responsible."

"You help them with infrastructure," Battle said of Alabama's cities. "Look at the industry around the inner sections of I-75 in Georgia versus the industry around the intersections or cloverleafs of I-65 in Alabama. In Georgia, they have distribution centers, restaurants, hotels, employment centers because it's a 3-, 6-, eight-lane interstate. In Alabama, we've got a four-lane that's over capacity. Every once in a while we have that slowdown that we always have in Calera. ... We have to have a transportation system that supports our cities."

Mobile just won a new Walmart international distribution center, Battle said. Goods will arrive by ship and be trucked to other distribution centers and eventually stores.

"What does that do to I-65, which is already over capacity, when we add all those trucks to I-65?" he asked. "What does it do to I-10 where Mobile already has a problem? We've got to take on those challenges."

"BUY-IN BY THE PUBLIC"

He did the same thing with Huntsville roads, Battle said. "We went from place to place and held news conferences at every one and talked about the need for roads and how that was important. By the time we got
finished, the public realized we needed to do this. This was something important. There was buy-in by the public. We've got to do the same thing in the state.

Battle said Huntsville voters can be assured that the city's momentum will continue if he goes to Montgomery. He noted he wouldn't be sworn in until 2019 — "a long time." The city's capital plan, road improvements and downtown development push are working, he said.

"The hard part's been done, and we're ready to move forward," Battle said, "It's going to take five- to 10 years to build out, and I feel very good about where Huntsville is now."

Battle also said he won't "back up an inch" on trumpeting Huntsville's success even when much of it is based on federal spending at Redstone Arsenal and NASA.

"Missile defense is going to be done somewhere in the U.S.," Battle said, "and if it's done in Huntsville, Alabama, it's done cheaper than anywhere it will ever be done in the United States. We save the federal government money."

"If you look at the last successes we've had," Battle said, "Remington, 2,000 jobs, not Redstone Arsenal; Polaris, 2,000 jobs, not Redstone Arsenal; GE Aviation, 300 jobs, not Redstone Arsenal; Aerojet, 700 jobs, not Redstone Arsenal. You go down the list. We've had success because we have had a strategy that has kept us moving."

"What's going on in Montgomery" has cost Alabama jobs, Battle said.

"There have been some who have looked and said, 'Maybe it's not time for us to get into that.'"
Tide athletes among weekend graduates

Staff report

More than 80 University of Alabama student-athletes, four of those NCAA champions, are slated to receive their degrees during this weekend's commencement ceremonies.

Former Alabama football player and Director of Athletics Bill Battle will also be recognized during Saturday's 6 p.m. ceremony in Coleman Coliseum with an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

The spring Class of 2017 includes nine members of the Crimson Tide's football team, including starters Tony Brown, Bradley Bozeman and Shaun Dion Hamilton, as well as four members of the men's basketball team, including Corban Collins and team captain Jimmie Taylor.

NCAA champions and All-Americans graduating include Katie Bailey (gymnastics), Connor Oslin (men's swimming and diving), Hayden Reed (men's track and field) and Erin Routliffe (women's tennis).

There are 22 All-Americans among the May graduates. Among the athletes who earned graduate degrees are Collins, Chandler Dare (softball), Northport's Cammie Gray (women's golf), Mike Oczypok (baseball) and Robby Prater (men's golf).
Five Tide teams earn NCAA academic honor

For the third year in a row, five University of Alabama athletics teams have been honored with the NCAA Division I Public Recognition Award, the NCAA announced Wednesday. UA, Vanderbilt, South Carolina and Tennessee were the only SEC schools that had more than four teams earn the honor.

The Alabama gymnastics, women's golf, women's tennis, women's swimming and diving and men's cross country squads all earned the honor in 2017. The women's golf team was honored for the seventh consecutive year while women's tennis was recognized for the sixth time in as many years. Gymnastics and men's cross country both earned the accolade for the third year in a row, while women's swimming and diving notched its second consecutive honor.

"We are very pleased to maintain such high standards when it comes to this important academic metric and to rank among the best in the Southeastern Conference year-in and year-out when it comes to this award," UA Director of Athletics Greg Byrne said.

Each year, the NCAA honors selected NCAA Division I sports teams by publicly recognizing their latest multiyear NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate. This announcement is part of the overall Division I academic reform effort and is intended to highlight teams that demonstrate a commitment to academic progress and retention of student-athletes by achieving the top APRs. Specifically, these teams posted multiyear APRs in the top 10 percent of all squads in each sport.

"To sustain this kind of consistent excellence over the life of this award is a testament to the importance the University of Alabama puts on balancing academics and athletics, and, ultimately, achieving at a high level in both areas," Byrne said. "We are extremely proud not only of the five teams that earned this honor in 2017, but also of all the teams that have earned this recognition over the span of the award."

Crimson Tide teams have earned the NCAA honor 33 times over the past decade. The overall APR report covering all sports will be released next week.
BIRMINGHAM — Former University of Alabama assistant head football coach, the late Ken Donahue, will be one of eight to be inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame on Saturday. He will be joined by former University of Alabama administrator, the late Jim Goostree, and former Alabama and NFL football player, the late Kevin Turner.

During his 21 year run at Alabama, Donahue served as the assistant head coach and the defensive coordinator. In that time period, the Alabama defense led the SEC in least yards allowed seven times, rushing yards nine times, and overall pass defense three times. Alabama won the SEC title 12 times and the national championship 5 times during his tenure. He passed away in March of 2001.

Goostree served as an athletic trainer for 27 years at Alabama. In 1984 he was promoted to Assistant Athletic Director. He was in charge of the Tide Pride Donor program during that time. He supervised the renovation and expansion of Bryant-Denny Stadium, the building of the indoor practice facility, and various other football structures. He passed away in 2016 after a long battle with ALS.

Turner played fullback at Alabama from 1988-91 and was a third-round pick in the NFL by the New England Patriots. He passed away in 2016 after a long battle with ALS.

Other members of the ASHOF Class of 2017 include: Lee Defore (Basketball), Jeff Herrod (Football), Todd Jones (Baseball), Takeo Spikes (Football), and Carnell Williams (Football).
The history of Nick Saban's rising salary, how it's been viewed

By: Michael Casagrande

Ten years can change a lot about how we value $4 million.

Nick Saban's first Alabama contract sent shockwaves through the college football world when Mal Moore lured him back from the NFL. The eight-year deal for $32 million total would make Saban's annual check of $4 million a game changer.

Adjusted for inflation, Saban (at $4.8 million) would only be the eighth-best compensated coach in the game now. His fourth new contract of the Alabama tenure helped assure Saban wouldn't be down the salary depth chart any time soon.

Announced on Tuesday, Saban's new eight-year, $65 million deal will pay an average of $8.2 million a year -- more than double the pre-inflation adjusted total from that initial 2007 contract.

The latest refresh to Saban's contract makes this a good time to revisit the evolution of his deals with Alabama. This one, presumably negotiated with Greg Byrne, would be the third athletics director to make a deal with Saban and his agent, Jimmy Sexton.

There are fewer complaints about the value of Saban's salary after winning four national titles in 10 Alabama seasons.

It's also far from universal praise. Hours after his new deal was announced Tuesday, the Chicago Tribune had a column headline "Nick Saban's obscene new salary blurs the line between college and pros." The counterpoint was covered by outlets like USA Today and Forbes.

Either way, a pay raise for Saban draws attention at levels unlike his peers.

Nick Saban got his fourth contract extension on Tuesday morning.

Every new contract came with a story -- some more urgent than others. As it stands contractually, Saban is set to coach until age 73. According to Alabama records that run through October 2009, Saban's been paid $48,061,973.12 in the past seven-plus years.

Working the entirety of this contract would push him well over the $100 million mark for what would be 17 years at Alabama.

Let's take a look back at the string of contracts, amendments and extensions that led to Tuesday's latest refresh.

2007

Deal: $4 million a year ($32 million total) for eight years.
Record: A proven winner at the college level who led LSU to a national title before two unremarkable seasons with the Miami Dolphins.

When the contract was signed, Saban's salary jumped well past the current leader. Oklahoma's Bob Stoops was making $3.45 million a year at the time.

There were immediate concerns voiced from state politicians and a few on the national level. The explosion of revenue in collegiate sports drew the attention of the U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means committee.

"I'm concerned... about the finances and how it will affect the rest of us in the years to come," LSU athletics director Skip Bertman, AD at the time of Saban's departure in 2004, told USA Today in early 2007. "Congress is already talking about 'What can we do?' And presidents are saying 'What can we do?' This will not just fuel the fire. This will set off all the alarms."

The initial criticism led UA Board of Trustees members to defend the then-record-breaking salary.

"I tell you something we've already got that you can't judge in terms of dollars - you saw it yesterday and I think you're going to see it over the next few days - the literal enthusiasm of our people," said Joe Espy, then president pro tempore of the trustees. "That means so much."

Espy was also quick to point out the money wasn't coming from the academic side of the university's operation. In retrospect and knowing how things turned out, the comments take on almost a comical quality.

They were confident that wild airport reception Saban received was a sign of momentum that was ultimately realized.

"You see today, we've got more media than the governor's got," Espy said Jan. 5, 2007. "President Ford's funeral was going on, but this was the top story in America."

Nick Saban's contracts

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2009

Deal: $4.7 million a year ($42.35 million total) for nine years

Record: 19-8, led Tide to SEC West title and undefeated season in second season.

This was, of course, signed early in the season that Alabama won its first national title under Saban. Mal Moore had already been proven right by hiring Saban in 2007 and the payoff was about to come for both.

These were also different times. Saban was in his third season at Alabama when his reputation wasn't for staying places very long. Locking him down was crucial but nobody could be sure this run would be entering a second decade this year.

AL.com at the time asked former Tide coach Gene Stallings if he thought Saban would be in Tuscaloosa for the duration of his newly inked second deal.

"I think he intends to, or he wouldn't have signed it," Stallings said. "But who knows what will happen six or eight years down the road?"

2012

Deal: $5.6 million a year ($45 million total) for eight years

Record: 55-12.

Saban had just won a second national title in three seasons and would get another that following season.

Now five years into his Alabama tenure, Saban was about to cross an important barrier. He'd never been in any job more than five seasons. The fall of 2012 would make it six in Tuscaloosa. There was interest from the NFL about a return after Alabama beat LSU 21-0 in the BCS title game.

For the first time since arriving at Alabama, Saban began publicly stating his intention to spend the rest of his career with the Tide.

"From my standpoint, the acceptance of this extension represents our commitment -- my commitment, our family's commitment -- to the University of Alabama for the rest of our career," Saban said. "We made that decision after the season when other people were interested."

Saban didn't say who came calling.

"It doesn't really matter," Saban said. "We wanted to stay at Alabama. We're staying at Alabama, and we're not interested in going any place else."
2014

Deal: $6.5 million a year ($55.2 million total) for eight years

Record: 79-15.

The deal was made when Texas made the most tangible run at hiring Saban away at the end of the 2013 regular season. He's gone 40-4 with three SEC titles and three playoff appearances (2015 title) since then.

How serious of a player Texas was that fall is still a matter of debate, but the slipping power's coaching search coincided with a considerable raise for Saban. The deal was made in December 2013 in the aftermath of one of the two losses Saban would later say will linger for as long as he lives.

In the wake of the Kick Six Iron Bowl loss at Auburn and a Sugar Bowl loss to Oklahoma, Saban said he looked at the new contract as hitting the restart button on his Alabama tenure. The program had lost its edge after consecutive titles in 2011 and 2012 contributed to the loss of focus in 2013.

Looking back on the Texas talk and the renegotiation process, then Alabama athletics director Bill Battle noted a degree of anxiety.

"There were a few weeks that were kind of interesting," Battle said several months later.
The funny, sometimes crazy things you find deep in Nick Saban's contract

By: Michael Casagrande

Contracts are boring.

Written by lawyers in language typically only understood by lawyers, they can make a room spin. Nick Saban's employment contract with the University of Alabama, originally drafted in 2007, is 34 pages long.

Almost all of it remained unchanged after the UA board of trustees approved amendments Tuesday. Only a few sections changed -- most notably the salary, bonus structure and length of service.

The full version of contracts for state employees such as Saban is available to the public through open records laws. If you're a fan of legalese, knock yourself out. For everyone else, we went through the document and translated the lawyer-speak back into English.

Here's the basic rundown of what's interesting about the paperwork that officially ties Saban to the university and the Alabama football program.

The basics

The first few pages deal with the formalities. It states Saban "agrees to be a loyal employee of the University" and goes on from there.

The job responsibilities are listed on Page 3.

"... planning and supervising practices, games, and off-field and off-season training and activities; developing and supervising recruiting plans and strategies; and running a stable and successful program," the contract reads.

That seems obvious, but the official wording of these documents always make it sound so rigid.

A few pages later, it states Saban agrees to meet with the athletics director (now Greg Byrne) within 45 days of the season.

Of course, the headliner in these contracts is the money. The structure of the compensation isn't quite as simple as with most jobs. Saban's base salary is relatively modest. He gets $245,000 a year for that. The real cash is in the "talent fee" that's tied to his radio, and television shows, speaking engagements and other such promotional activities.

Saban's talent fee for the remainder of his contract is $6,480,000 a year. Basically, his pay for public appearances is 26.4 times higher than the coaching part.
Other benefits

Saban receives more than the base pay and talent fee. The contract also spells out the other forms of liquid and non-liquid compensation.

-- Two "full-size automobiles" on a loan basis for use by Saban and immediate family members. The school also agreed to pay for liability insurance.

-- Money for football camps/clinics "based on the net income generated by the football camps and the number of campers that attend each football camp session."

-- Use of a 15-seat skybox located in the north end zone of Bryant-Denny Stadium and seven additional tickets. Saban is also eligible to receive 12 "general admission" tickets per game.

-- Country club membership: The school will provide a membership to a golf or country club in Tuscaloosa County. Alabama will pay the monthly membership dues while Saban is responsible for all other costs.

-- Athletic apparel: From time to time the University may, but shall not be required to, provide the Employee for personal use athletic shoes and apparel in such amounts as may be determined by the Athletic Director." (So, Greg Byrne has final say how many free pairs of Nikes that Saban can get).

-- Airplane use: Saban has access to the school's private plane for up to 25 hours of personal use. Flight time is use-it-or-lose-it from year to year. No carry over balances.

-- Life insurance: As long as he's employed, Alabama will pay for life insurance with a death benefit of $5 million. Saban would have to agree to any requirements like a physical exam to be eligible.

And the bonuses are spelled out clearly.

-- $75,000 for playing in the SEC Championship Game.

-- $125,000 for winning the SEC Championship Game.

-- $65,000 for playing in a bowl game.

-- $90,000 for playing in a New Year's Six bowl game.

-- $200,000 for playing in a playoff game.

-- $300,000 for playing in a championship game

-- $400,000 for winning the national championship game.
-- $25,000 for being voted SEC coach of the year.

-- $50,000 for being voted national coach of the year.

-- $50,000 if Alabama academic APR is above 925.

-- $50,000 if Alabama's graduation rate is in the top 50 percent of the SEC

-- $100,000 if Alabama's graduation rate is in the top four of the SEC.

Termination

The compensation portion covered 13 pages. The next eight-plus covers the number of ways the contract could end early. Given the state of the program, Saban's job would appear pretty safe.

There's a whole list of sometimes extreme, other times mundane reasons the university could fire Saban for cause. The complete list:

-- Purposely breaking a university rule after getting written notice from the AD.

-- "Reckless breach" of the contract.

-- "Conviction of any criminal violation (excluding minor traffic offenses or non-criminal offenses)." (Note: This one caught my eye as notable since it didn't require the crime to be felony level).

-- Fraud or dishonesty in the job.

-- Participating in conduct that brings Alabama "into public disrepute, contempt, embarrassment, scandal or ridicule that negatively impacts the reputation or high moral or ethical standards" of the school.

-- A Level I or Level II NCAA violation with aggravating circumstances.

-- Failure to immediately report an NCAA rules violation to the AD.

-- Failure to participate in endorsement activities (radio, TV shows, etc.) listed in the contract.

-- Fabrication or falsification of documents for the school, NCAA or SEC.

-- Instructing football employee or staff member to not report a rules violation.

-- Soliciting, placing or accepting a bet on any college or professional sporting event.

-- Providing insider information to a bookmaker/gambling enterprise.

See next page
-- Using drugs or alcohol "in such a degree and for such appreciable period as to impair significantly" or to impact his ability to do his job.

-- Selling drugs.

-- Permitting, encouraging or condoning the use of drugs by a player.
UA to pay Saban $11M in '17
Coach's contract extended through 2025

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

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SABAN

Continued from Al

is then employed as head football coach of the university as of the date of the completion of the final football game in a given contract year. The total remains at $400,000 until 2018, jumps to $800,000 in 2019-20 and goes to $3.6 million in 2021 before returning to $400,000 in 2022-24.

"Terry and I are pleased and happy to agree to the contract extension the University of Alabama has offered us, ensuring our time here in Tuscaloosa will continue for many more years," Saban said via a UA release. "This has become our home and we are looking forward to finishing our career at Alabama.

"It is an exciting day when we can announce that the best football coach in the country has agreed to a contract extension," Byrne said via release. "Before I came to Alabama, I was always impressed with Coach Saban and how he ran his program. After being here and seeing first-hand the job that he does, I’ve come away even more impressed. Coach Saban has obviously won a lot of football games and championships, but he has also done an outstanding job when it comes to academics and community service. I don’t think you can measure the positive impact he and Ms. Terry have made over the last decade. We look forward to working with them for many years to come."

Byrne also had his contract extension approved, though he’s been on the job for more than two months. He will earn a salary of $600,000 with a scheduled $25,000 increase each year through June 30, 2022.

Outside linebackers coach Tosh Lupoi, who is also listed as the team’s co-defensive coordinator, was given a $400,000 raise to take him to $950,000 annually. Lupoi turned down multiple offers to be a defensive coordinator at Power 5 school programs. He is widely considered one of the top recruiters in the country.

As The Tuscaloosa News previously reported, first-year offensive coordinator Brian Daboll will annually earn $1.2 million. His is a three-year contract.

Other contracts approved:
- Jeremy Pruitt, defensive coordinator, $1.3 million (with $100,000 raise every year), contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;
- Derrick Ansley, defensive backs coach, $405,000, contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;
- Brent Key, offensive line coach, $400,000, contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;
- Joe Pannunzio, tight ends/special teams, $375,000, contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;
- Karl Dubar, defensive line coach, $275,000 (with $300,000 raise in 2018), contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;
- Mike Locksley, wide receivers coach, $600,000, contract expires Feb. 28, 2020;

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
COMMENTARY

Saban worth every penny of new contract

We're long past the point of debating whether Nick Saban is "worth" his salary. The question of whether Saban should be the highest-paid coach in college football was heated for a while.

Detractors, aghast, decried the $4 million contract that Saban was given, even though he took a pay cut to move from the Miami Dolphins and back to college football. That dismay lasted roughly until the first A-Day game under Saban packed Bryant-Denny Stadium and changed the way colleges around the country approached intrasquad games. The last starveling pockets of resistance disappeared after Alabama won the 2009 BCS championship. These days, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single person who'll admit to being outraged by the salary, or a single SEC school that doesn't wish they'd paid Saban $5 million themselves.

That's because Saban has been as good an investment as Alabama could possibly have made. He's generated 10 times more money that he's been paid, and that's just from his on-the-field accomplishment. He and his wife, Terry, have been just as valuable to UA and Tuscaloosa off the field through charitable giving and community building, some of it publicized and much of it done away from the spotlight.

Thus, Saban getting a raise and bonus, while it may have raised eyebrows in some places, didn't really strike anyone but contrarians as excessive. Whether he makes $11 million, which is the approximate figure if you include the entire retention bonus in his 2018 salary, or whether it is "just" $8 million, if you prorate that bonus over four years, Saban is worth it.

That doesn't mean people don't have opinions about coaching salaries. Every time a coach gets paid, it leads to discussion about whether the system in which coaches receive monetary compensation while players are compensated with scholarships is fair. There can be reasonable debate on that issue and good points can be made on both sides. It's just that starting at the top isn't necessarily the right place to begin.

There are reasons, as we've said, that Saban now

See HURT, C4
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an eight-figure salary. Attempting to deprive the players isn't one. While Alabama and the rest of the Southeastern Conference programs still support the NCAA "amateurism" model, there is no doubt that if pay-for-play did become the law of the NCAA landscape, UA could write the checks. In fact, SEC programs could write bigger checks than anyone (with the possible exception of the Big Ten."

What happens then?
After all, just because Alabama can do it, that doesn't mean that New Mexico and Eastern Michigan (to cite two random examples) has the same cash flow. Their budgets, and those at dozens of other football-playing schools, are already tight. (We are sticking strictly to football players here, even though the implications in other sports are huge as well).

If Alabama is able to "pay" players more than Texas State, how long before that becomes a "competitive balance" issue? Bob Bowlsby, the Big 12 commissioner, has already raised the issue of staff sizes at some schools being an "advantage," which was nothing more than a veiled shot at Alabama for having enough money to hire more assistants than Iowa State. So if conferences are already complaining about being outspent, how much louder will it be when players start getting a paycheck? I'm not saying they shouldn't. I'm just curious about how compensation will be calculated, and whether Alabama will somehow have to start footing part of the bill for Eastern Washington.

For now, programs that can afford to pay a coach should do it, by all means. Alabama just fortunate to have a coach that's worth it.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Alabama is giving coach Nick Saban plenty of incentive to stick around — and to sign a contract extension in the first place.

University trustees on Tuesday approved a three-year extension through the 2024 season that could pay Saban at least $65 million over the next eight years and again make him college football's highest-paid coach. Saban will make $11.125 million this year, counting a $4 million signing bonus and a $400,000 completion bonus.

Michigan's Jim Harbaugh is making $7 million a year, including a $2 million annual life insurance premium. He made $9 million last year, when he received the insurance payouts in both June and December.

The 65-year-old Saban, who has led Alabama to four national titles in the past seven seasons, said the extension ensures "our time here in Tuscaloosa will continue for many more years."

"This has become our home and we are looking forward to finishing our career at Alabama," he said in a statement.

SEE SABAN, B3
SABAN
FROM BL

Saban, who won the 2013 BCS title at LSU, and Bear Bryant are the only coaches to win five national championships in the AP poll era dating back to 1936. In January, Alabama lost to Clemson in the championship game after winning its fourth Southeastern Conference title in five years and third straight.

Saban will get up to $7.2 million in annual completion bonuses, with half of that due after the 2021 season. His base salary and “talent fee” will be $6.725 million each year, a slight decrease more than made up for through the bonuses.

It was the big-money deal among a number approved Tuesday by the trustees’ compensation committee in a conference call.

The trustees also approved a five-year deal for new athletic director Greg Byrne and raises for his assistants. Byrne will make $900,000 a year, with $25,000 annual raises starting next year.

New offensive coordinator Brian Daboll will make $1.2 million annually under his three-year deal. Defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt’s new three-year contract is worth $4.2 million, including $100,000 raises each year.

Alabama gave Saban an eight-year deal worth $6.9 million annually in 2014. That marked a $1.3 million raise.

The Tide has won double-digit games for nine straight seasons and made each of the first three College Football Playoffs.

“It is an exciting day when we can announce that the best football coach in the country has agreed to a contract extension,” Byrne said. “Before I came to Alabama, I was always impressed with Coach Saban and how he ran his program. After being here and seeing firsthand the job that he does, I’ve come away even more impressed.

“Coach Saban has obviously won a lot of football games and championships, but he has also done an outstanding job when it comes to academics and community service. I don’t think you can measure the positive impact he and (wife) Ms. Terry have made over the last decade.”

University President Stuart Bell said Alabama’s success in football under Saban has helped the school overall.

“It is truly remarkable when you look at what Coach Saban has accomplished here over the last decade and how the success of the football program has raised the overall profile of our institution,” Bell said. “Those accomplishments are not just on the field, as he has also done an outstanding job emphasizing academics and character development with our student-athletes.”

Outside linebackers coach Tosh Lupoi got the biggest raise among the other assistants, a $400,000 pay increase to $950,000.

The new deals for the rest of Saban’s assistants, with two-year deals except where noted:

> New co-offensive coordinator Mike Locksley, an analyst last season, will make $1.2 million over the next two years.
> Joe Pannunzio, tight ends/special teams, $375,000.
> Brent Key, offensive line, goes from $350,000 to $400,000.
> Burton Burns, running backs coach, gets a $15,000 raise to $490,000.
> Derrick Ansley, defensive backs, will make $405,000, up from $395,000.
> Karl Dunbar, defensive line, will make $275,000 this year and $575,000 in 2018.
> Scott Cochran, strength and conditioning, will make $335,000 annually under his three-year deal, a $10,000 raise.
Why wouldn't Nick Saban coach out his new contract?

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

Nick Saban’s new contract was approved Tuesday morning by the Compensation Committee of the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees. It was approved for two reasons:

1. Duh.
2. While you can occasionally question the intentions of some trustees, you usually can’t question their intelligence.

After a decade of dominance in Tuscaloosa, Saban has proved to be the best investment in school history. His players tend to win games and championships, earn their degrees and go on to lucrative careers in professional football.

If he’s slowed down a step, no one has noticed.

The only real question remaining is how long Saban will continue to grind and rant. His old contract ran through 2021. His new deal puts him under contract through 2024, which is eight more seasons from today.

SEE SCARBINKSKEY, B3
That doesn’t mean he’ll coach that long. He’ll turn 73 in October of 2024. While he remains the picture of health at 65 and the Alabama job hasn’t aged him as it did others, it’s a long way from 65 to 73, especially at the pace he keeps.

That disclaimer aside, why wouldn’t Saban coach out this new contract? Why would he leave the best job he’s ever had as long as he’s able to keep getting the job done?

He has the freedom to walk away whenever he likes, but there would have to be a more powerful incentive to depart, especially with the $4 million signing bonus in the new contract.

It makes no sense to leave Alabama and start over at another college program. Winning a national title at a third program would prove nothing he hasn’t already proved. Unless, perhaps, it were Kentucky or Vanderbilt.

It makes no sense to leave the SEC for the NFL for a second time. He’s been there, done that and didn’t much like it, despite having a terrific owner in Miami in Wayne Huizenga.

Walking off the field and into a TV studio or broadcast booth would make the least sense of all for his Type Triple-A personality. The waiting between takes and opportunities to talk would almost certainly drive him bonkers.

Saban is doing exactly what he was meant to do at the best possible place for him to do it. He’s also still doing it as well as he or anyone else has ever done it.

Earning a statue on the Walk of Champions outside Bryant-Denny Stadium didn’t cause him to stop and smell the roses.

Getting to seven SEC championships, more than any coach in league history save Bear Bryant, didn’t send him to a rocking chair to count his trophies and records.

Besides, he still has trophies to win and records to break. The big target has to be Bryant’s record of six national championships. Saban is one shy of tying that mark and two away from breaking it.

Does anyone doubt his ability to climb that mountain?

There’s a well-intentioned but incorrect statement in the sub-headline of Alabama’s press release announcing Saban’s new deal. It reads: Agreement will keep Coach Saban as the Crimson Tide’s head coach through January 31, 2025.

No, it won’t. No contract keeps a coach in place. Coaches come and go all the time before their contractual expiration dates. If Saban continues to produce as he has for the last decade, he’ll coach at Alabama as long as he likes.

Given the power and control he’s enjoyed from Day One in Tuscaloosa, what’s not to like?
How much tuition has increased at Alabama and Auburn in the last 10 years

By: Leada Gore

College is expensive. And, as a recent analysis shows, it's not getting any cheaper.

StartClass recently used data from the National Center for Education Statistics to identify the 100 American universities that have experienced the largest tuition hikes in the last decade. To do this, they used tuition and fee costs for the 2005-2006 school year and compared them to the 2015-2016 school year, adjusting numbers for inflation. Only schools with at least 5,000 students were included in the rankings.

Alabama's two largest universities both made the list of schools with the highest price increases.

Auburn University landed at number 96 with its tuition for in-state students increasing 63 percent ($6,405 to $10,424) from 2005-2015. Out-of-state tuition increased by 55 percent during the same period of time.

Auburn's total enrollment is 27,287.

The University of Alabama was ranked 60th.

UA saw an in-state tuition increase of 72 percent from 2005-2015, from $5,902 to $10,170. Out-of-state tuition increased 58 percent.

Alabama's total enrollment was 37,098.

Two other Alabama schools made the list.

Tuition at Alabama A&M University increased from 5,364 to $9,366 - or 75 percent - from 2005-2015, putting it at 52nd on the list. Out-of-state tuition increased 70 percent.

Alabama A&M has 5,628 students.

The highest rate of increase in the state was at Alabama State University, ranked 40th overall.

In-state tuition at ASU grow 79 percent from $4,864 to $8,723 from 2005-2015 Out-of-state tuition grew 61 percent.

ASU's enrollment is 5,383.
UA adds third day for graduation ceremonies

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama is adding a third day for spring graduation ceremonies because of the number of graduates.

The university is preparing for about 5,300 students to graduate in the spring with about 4,400 planning to walk, bringing the total graduates for the year to 8,000, UA President Stuart Bell said. The ceremonies will be held this weekend in Coleman Coliseum.

The College of Arts and Sciences will have a ceremony at 4:30 p.m. on Friday. The Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration will have its ceremony at 9 a.m. Saturday. Graduation for the colleges of education, engineering, and nursing will begin at 1:30 p.m.

The colleges of Communication and Information Sciences and Human Environmental Sciences and Social Work will have graduation at 6 p.m. on Saturday. The law school will have its graduation ceremony at 2 p.m. on Sunday.

The university also expects to continue steady growth, Bell said. As of mid-April, it has received more than 38,000 applications for next fall, with 7,200 having paid housing deposits. Enrollment was 37,665 in the fall with a freshman class of 7,559.

Here are the four faculty members who will serve as commencement marshals for spring graduation:

Edwin Stephenson, professor of biological sciences, will lead the platform party to the stage during the Friday and Saturday morning ceremonies. Stephenson just completed his 26th year at UA, where he has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in general biology, genetics and cell biology.

Melondie Carter, assistant dean of Undergraduate Programs and professor in the Capstone College of Nursing, will lead the Saturday afternoon ceremony. She has 24 years of teaching experience at UA. She is a recipient of...
Continued from B1

the National Alumni Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Award and the State Nurse Educator Award. Carter served as chair of student life on the Faculty Senate for seven years and co-chaired the textbook committee, which developed UA's textbook rental program. She also co-developed the WellBama program.

Norman Baldwin, professor of political science, will lead the Saturday night ceremony. Baldwin teaches courses on how to lead and manage public service and is the author of “Winning at Following.” He conducts research on followership, diversity, whistle-blowing and differences between government and business. He also founded a program that placed 210 students in jobs in the tornado relief effort and led a Faculty Senate task force that partnered with Student Life to enact 47 measures to enhance campus diversity.

Debbie Long, executive vice president, secretary and chief legal officer for Protective Life Corp., will deliver the University of Alabama School of Law commencement address. Long, a UA alumna, joined Protective Life as General Counsel in 1992. Before joining the company, she was a member of the Maynard, Cooper & Gale law firm in Birmingham, where she practiced in the areas of insurance, banking and finance, business acquisitions and mergers and general corporate law.

The ceremonies will be broadcast live at ua.edu/commencement and will be archived on the same page for 30 days following the ceremony.
After six years, it’s still hard to feel normal on the anniversary of disaster

Meredith Cummings for AL.com

Editor’s note: This essay was published on AL.com on April 27 and written to mark the anniversary of the tornadoes that ravaged Alabama on that day six years ago.

Those of us who feel normal, don’t today. Those of us who go about our business with ease any other day. We drop the kids off at soccer and dance. We check our email. We buy groceries.

Yet today — or perhaps earlier this month when the leaves began to push through the branches of trees and birds arrived on our porches — we found that normal suddenly stopped. We were abruptly a maelstrom of emotions. We remember a time when nature turned and attacked us. Then some of us implode. Some of us explode.

March, as I unearthed Easter decorations that day. Except for dirr. An SUV was flipped in the closet on the floor, body draped over cross the street, some of us implode. Some of us explode.

Yet today — or perhaps earlier this month when the leaves began to push through the branches of trees and birds arrived on our porches — we found that normal suddenly stopped. We were abruptly a maelstrom of emotions. We remember a time when nature turned and attacked us. Then some of us implode. Some of us explode.

Many of us have to search to figure out why.

For me it happened early this year, in April, as I unearthed Easter decorations from a closet. An Easter wreath, made of delicate pink bird eggs and ribbon. Given to us by our 8-year-old daughter.

I hate myself for forgetting. I hate myself for realizing that I do not have to stop and force myself to swallow the lump in my throat. To keep the tears from streaming down my face. I no longer have to stop and force myself to swallow the lump in my throat. To keep the tears from streaming down my face. To keep the tears from streaming down my face.

I can talk about that day without overwhelming emotion in my voice. I no longer have to stop and force myself to swallow the lump in my throat before I speak about it. I don’t cry in my office.

However, I am uneasy that the memories are getting too far away. That I might forget lessons learned. Forget my old neighborhood and the good times. Forget to be thankful for life every single second. Forget the stories of loss from friends, students and neighbors.

Anyone who has ever lost a loved one knows. As the years pass, their funny jokes begin to fade from memory. A laugh, once seared in your brain, becomes hard to remember. You might strain to hear their voice.

It’s tempting to move forward because it hurts less. But living through this day reminds me of the tree sap from thousands of snapped pine trees that covered our city that day. We have to reach back in time through that sticky film and pull those memories out of the rubble, especially the painful ones we want to forget. They are so important. We must move on, even as we remember.

There is a difference in dwelling and remembrance. Today, we must speak the names of those we lost.

Cummings teaches in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama.
Technology to detect gunshots

University of Alabama will soon employ system

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama will soon employ technology used in larger cities to detect gunshots.

The gunfire detection system called ShotSpotter has sensors that triangulate sounds of gunfire in a manner similar to cell phone technology.

"ShotSpotter real-time alerts use acoustic technology to notify local police departments precisely if, when and where gun incidents occur so officers can respond faster and more safely," said Chris Bryant, assistant director for UA's Office of Media Relations.

The sensors can distinguish between sounds similar to gunfire, such as fireworks or engine backfire.

"The benefit is the security of knowing local police will be notified in real time if a shooting ever occurs," Bryant said.

University of Alabama Police will test the listening devices after the semester ends and should have the system up and running soon, said Chief John Hooks.

UA needed permission to place audio sensors on city property, prompting a discussion among Tuscaloosa City Council members last week.

Some council members asked Tuscaloosa Police Chief Steve Anderson to look into possibility using the technology in the city.

Anderson said that he met See DETECT, B14
Continued from B1 with a ShotSpotter sale representative in 2009 and ultimately decided it wasn't worth the investment of around $200,000 for one square mile of coverage.

"I decided it was not feasible to invest the limited funds in TPD's budget on ShotSpotter," he said. Anderson said he intends to contact the company again and find out whether the service has become more affordable.

Birmingham recently expanded the city's ShotSpotter technology to cover 20 square miles. City and police officials said that it helps them to identify problems areas and plan their policing accordingly.

ShotSpotter is used in about 90 cities worldwide, according to the company's website. Sensors capture the precise time, location and an audio snippet that may indicate a gunshot. Machine algorithms filter the data, which are reviewed by ShotSpotter staff at a 24/7 Incident Review Center — a process that takes around 45 seconds, according to the company. Digital alerts are then transmitted to local 911 call centers.
Blazers nearing major completion

Construction on UAB's Football Operations Center and Legacy Pavilion is in the homestretch. Football coach Bill Clark led a tour Thursday morning of the $22.5 million, 46,000-square-foot facility. UAB broke ground this past August. It's expected to be completed by July. It'll include office space, team meeting and film rooms, a weight room, training facilities and locker rooms. The complex will also include practice fields, one of which will be covered by an open-air pavilion.

— Staff reports
UAB plans to create green gateway into Five Points South

Erin Edgemon
edgemon@al.com

UAB is looking to transform a two-block area that serves as a gateway to the Five Points South neighborhood into a green space. The university is seeking input from the community as part of its master planning process. The first meeting was held Thursday night at Highlands United Methodist Church.

The two-block area includes UAB-owned property between 11th and 12th avenues south and 16th and 18th streets south. Medical Towers is located on a portion of the property, as well as a large parking lot.

“We are looking at that space to kind of be a shared space,” said Brian Templeton, a project manager for UAB Planning Design and Construction. “We are seeking input from the neighborhood on what they would like to see in that space.”

He said the hope is for the green space project to help integrate the UAB campus with the Five Points South neighborhood.

The project will not include private property, Templeton said. Some UAB-owned buildings on the site, including one that currently houses the Undergraduate Admissions Office, could be demolished as part of this process.

The proposed green space is a long-term project for UAB, he said, and work may take a few years to complete.

As parking is being expanded to other areas of campus, the UAB parking lot along 12th Avenue South between 16th and 17th streets south could be removed, Templeton said.

“We feel that parking is probably not the best solution,” he said, “but a field may not be the best solution (either).”

Danny Jones, president of the Five Points South Neighborhood Association, said UAB has been a responsible neighbor in recent years, though encroachment into the neighborhood is a concern for some. He said residents appreciate having an opportunity to participate in UAB’s planning process.

He said UAB has been clear that residents will be able to use the green space when it is not being used by the university.

The possibility of taking parking away from the area, though, is a possible point of contention for some residents, Jones said.

Templeton said UAB has already received ideas for the green space from campus groups, including practice ball fields, space for team building activities such as a ropes course, beach volleyball courts and community gardens and orchards.

Also, a portion of the space could be the future home of a solar-powered house built by UAB’s Solar Decathlon team, he said.

Templeton said a preliminary plan for the space will be drafted following Thursday’s meeting. A second neighborhood meeting to present that plan is set for 6 p.m. June 8 at Highlands United Methodist.
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Faces

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Butterfly Lamp in Sea Blue
$150

Pepper Place
Near King's House

Oriental Soup

A life of pure magic

Author and Alabama School of Fine Arts Ashley M. Jones on teaching, poetic activism and her Magic City Gospel. 16

Robots in the workforce

Businesses, nonprofits prepare for a job market impacted by automation and say you should, too. 20
THE PRICE OF GROWTH

By JESSE CHAMBERS

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, the largest employer in the state, has made a huge cultural, economic and even physical impact on the city of Birmingham since the 1980s. That impact shows no sign of lessening, given UAB's continued, aggressive expansion. UAB posted a record enrollment of 19,535 in fall 2016. School President Ray Watts has set a target of 20,000 students by 2018.

And enrollment could be well beyond that number within about five years, according to Bradley Barnes, UAB's vice provost for enrollment management. This rapid growth is part of a long-term strategy, one driven in part by the university's need for revenue, Barnes said.

While managing this growth is not easy, Barnes and other school officials believe they are planning for and handling it effectively. This includes the task of providing adequate facilities for this larger student body, as well as retaining students — and helping them thrive academically — once they are enrolled.

Perhaps most importantly, the UAB students Iron City Ink contacted seem satisfied with the school — both socially and academically — though many of them also complained about recurring headaches such as parking, housing and transportation.

In this, the first in a series of stories about UAB's growth and its impact on downtown Birmingham, we examine the reasons behind the school's push for higher enrollment, the selling points that make the school attractive to students, and the steps being taken to increase retention and graduation rates and the apparently fruitful relationship between the campus and the city.

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That’s a lofty goal, but in terms of campus infrastructure and the way we are growing and expanding, that would be a reasonable goal,” Barnes said. One important reason to foster this rapid growth is simply, according to Barnes: the need for revenue.

Like other public universities in Alabama, UAB has suffered from declining state funding. In fact, Alabama is one of nine states where per-student funding is down by more than 15 percent since the start of the Great Recession in 2008, according to The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

To make up the shortfall, UAB needs more money from tuition — especially that paid by international and out-of-state students. Non-residents pay higher fees than Alabama residents — sometimes twice as much, depending on their majors — Barnes said.

Academic factors also drive the quest for nonresident students, according to Barnes. ACT scores in Alabama are below the national average, and high school graduation rates in the state are “paltry,” Barnes said.

“ar increase enrollment with quality, high-paying students, more tuition is going to out-of-state markets,” he said.

But UAB remains committed to making a place for in-state students, according to Barnes.

“One reason we are going out of-state students is because in-state students are a priority to us,” he said. “Out-of-state students help subsidize some of the expenses for in-state students. If we did not have out-of-state students attending UAB, in-state tuition would be much higher.”

In addition, Barnes said, UAB is committed to making room for students from the city and Jefferson County, including those whose high-school academic performance was less than stellar. The university also brings the racial and ethnic diversity of its community, which includes staff, faculty and students from 110 countries, according to UAB Media Relations.

“UAB has one of the highest African-American populations of any university in the country, about double that of [The University of Alabama],” Barnes said.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Since starting his job in 2013, Barnes, who formerly worked at the University of Alabama, has taken a number of steps to boost recruitment and enrollment and to “level the playing field with the large schools in the state.”

In addition to the focus on out-of-state markets, UAB conducted a reassignment of scholarships, which Barnes said allows the university to compete more for students in Alabama and around the nation.

“We now award the value of tuition to students with a 30 ACT and a 3.5 GPA or higher. In the past for those scores, a student may have only received partial tuition. This allows us to target prospective students in a greater extent based on the quality of academic programs and less on the cost of tuition,” Barnes said.

UAB also upgraded its campus tours, adding an air-conditioned bus that allowed prospective students and their parents to see more of the campus without walking for blocks in the Alabama heat, according to Barnes. “This allows us to leverage the city of Birmingham and the medical district in ways we have never done before,” he said.

UAB also is attracting students by redesigning the amenities expected on a traditional residential campus, such as new dorms, a recreation center and a new student center. Non-traditional students, including part-time students and graduate students, are still “integral to UAB’s success,” Barnes said.

“But we can create an environment more conducive to traditional students,” he said.

Mark Booker, executive director of housing and dining, grew up in Pell City and said UAB is now viewed differently than in the 1960s.

“It was a medical school, and if you weren’t a med student, it was sort of like high school part two,” he said. “You could stay at home and commute to campus because it was in Birmingham.”

The new facilities on campus, including the Campus Green, have changed that perception and made UAB more competitive with other campuses in the South — be they traditional or urban — according to Booker.

“You’ve got something here in Birmingham that you can experience,” he said. “[UAB] is very affordable, and I think a lot of students are drawn to it more today because of the other things that they can do outside the classroom,” he said.

STUDENTS GENERALLY SATISFIED

Students seem to appreciate the new campus amenities.

“Hill Student Center is wonderful,” said Nada Herdes, a sophomore from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a double major in theater and health care management. “I like to call it the living room of UAB.”

“When I give tours, I like to tell students that you can sit on the Campus Green and not realize that you’re in the biggest city in Alabama,” said Ell Usery, a junior from Columbus, Georgia, majoring in industrial distribution.

“I love the new facilities,” added Adair Perrin, a junior from Hoover majoring in information systems.

Perrin chose UAB over the University of Alabama and Auburn University, in part because he grew up visiting the

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It is still a very young university, so it's in that annual, awkward phase of transitioning from a commuter campus to a more residential campus," she said.

And it isn't fair to compare UAB to the other large, long-established schools in the state in terms of campus life on weekends or the number of on-campus residents, according to Jacobs.

"It's exciting that it is becoming more traditional campus, but you can't compare it to the other campuses as of yet," she said.

However, Jacobs noted that, beyond the campus itself, the city of Birmingham offers students plenty of weekend diversions. "The university is as much a part of the city as the city is part of UAB," she said.

This is not to say that the students had no complaints about UAB. Like many other students, Premani, Saddruddin, Harden and Whitlefield expressed complaints about on-campus parking. Saddruddin and Harden also had concerns about housing, including the difficulty students can face when searching for adequate lodging off-campus.

IS IT AFFORDABLE?

The students said they have found UAB to be a pretty good bargain overall.

"With all the amenities, I think it's very affordable," said Usery, who added UAB boasts "some of the top professors" and has a degree from the school "has a lot of value." "I would say it's very affordable than [the University of] Alabama," Whitlefield said.

For the two semesters of the 2016-17 school year, UAB tuition for an in-state, first-year freshman taking 12 credit hours per semester ranges from $15,840 to $19,340, which includes fees, books and supplies, a meal plan, housing and personal expenses. Students must take at least 15 credits per semester to qualify for federal loans and a significant number of students work part- or full-time jobs or work study programs to pay for school, according to Premani, who has federal loans and also works 25 hours a week in the information technology department at the Division of Preventive Medicine.

Usery said there are "hundreds of different ways" for students to find or earn money, but they must be proactive in their search. "Students have to be their own advocates," he said. "You have to sell yourself. No one will just hand you money.

BOOSTING RETENTION, GRADUATION

Once students arrive at UAB, the university does everything it can to keep them there, despite the cost of tuition programs, according to Barnes.

"Retention is such a critical part of this growth strategy, not just enrollment," Barnes said. "Retention usually decreases by a rate of 3.1 percent from 2015-16, according to a UAB news release.

The freshman residency program, which began last fall, allows the university to "consistently target [students] throughout their first year" and help them get the resources they need to succeed academically, Barnes said. There is also the Blount Retention program for first-year students at the Vulcan Materials Academic Success Center. UAB will also seek to boost graduation rates through a new program called "Finish in Four."

"If they agree to finish in four years, the school will guarantee they can get the classes to do that," Barnes said.

The university also plans to ramp up its tuition structure, which was designed for non-traditional students and included 12 hours of coursework a full-time load, even though students must take at least 15 hours per semester to graduate in four years.

"On average, our students take about 12.3, so it's not hard to see why our graduation rates are low and why so many students leave," Barnes said. "We are looking at our tuition structure to incentivize them to take closer to 15 hours per semester."
WATCH: Huntsville's lightning tracker sees dangerous, electrifying storm

By: Josh Barrett

The new NASA/NOAA spacecraft, GOES-16, is the first operational weather satellite outfitted with an instrument called the Geostationary Lightning Mapper, or GLM. The GOES satellites sit in geostationary orbit watching the entire western hemisphere, providing weather forecasters valuable data about storms.

The GLM, according to Huntsville scientists, will help with that task. Hugh Christian at the University of Alabama in Huntsville led teams from both UAH and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in the development of lightning meteorology, and the GLM has been Christian's goal all along.

According to Christian, tracking the number of lightning strikes and the rate of strikes will give a good indication of when a storm is building up energy. Christian hopes the GLM will help increase warning times for everything from tornadoes to severe thunderstorms.

GOES-16 launched on an Alabama-built Atlas V rocket in November 2016 and it is still in the experimental checkout mode. It should begin full weather operations later in 2017.

NOAA posted the above video on their Facebook page along with this description:

"GOES-16's Geostationary Lightning Mapper (GLM) captured this electrifying imagery of the lightning associated with the recent severe weather over the Mississippi Valley and southern Plains this past weekend. (The animation begins at approximately noon on Friday, April 28, 2017, and ends at midnight on Saturday, April 29.)

According to a variety of media reports, the storms caused the deaths of at least 13 people, produced widespread heavy rain resulting in flash floods, high winds that down trees and left thousands without power, a late-season blizzard in Kansas, and several tornadoes.

GLM observes total lightning, including in-cloud and cloud to ground lightning, and will continually observe lightning flashes day and night across the Western Hemisphere. Of particular note in this animation is the horizontal propagation of lightning flashes occurring behind the line of intense storms. Rapid increases of lightning are a signal that a storm is strengthening and could become more dangerous. GLM, in concert with other forecaster tools, will help provide more accurate and earlier warnings of developing severe storms and give communities more time to prepare for impending severe weather."
Scientists Find Giant Wave Rolling Through The Perseus Galaxy Cluster

By: Ashley Morrow

Twenty-five years ago this week, NASA launched the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory, an astronomical satellite that transformed our knowledge of the high-energy sky. Over its nine-year lifetime, Compton produced the first-ever all-sky survey in gamma rays, the most energetic and penetrating form of light, discovered hundreds of new sources and unveiled a universe that was unexpectedly dynamic and diverse.

'The instruments were really a great leap forward, and they showed us for the first time just how varied and interesting the gamma-ray sky really is,' said Neil Gehrels, the mission's project scientist, at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

Compton's many findings included the discovery of a new class of galaxies powered by supermassive black holes, the surprising detection of gamma rays from thunderstorms on Earth, and the most persuasive evidence to date that gamma-ray bursts (GRBs) were the most distant and powerful explosions in the cosmos.

'When scientists saw the early results, it wasn't long before discussions turned to the need for a new mission with improved instruments so we could get a better look at these exciting phenomena,' said Goddard's Julie McEnery, the project scientist for NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope. 'Fermi is essentially the direct descendant of Compton and even involves many of the same people, including Neil.'

These images encapsulate 25 years of progress in gamma-ray astrophysics. Left: The EGRET sky as seen in gamma rays above 100 MeV. Brighter colors indicate greater numbers of gamma rays. The most prominent feature is the central plane of the galaxy, which runs across the middle of the map, a result of gamma rays produced when accelerated particles strike interstellar gas and starlight. The largest yellow spot on the right side of the galactic plane is the Vela pulsar, one of five new gamma-ray pulsars EGRET discovered. The prominent reddish blob at top right is the blazar 3C 279. Right: The all-sky map produced by Fermi's Large Area Telescope (LAT), using data from Aug. 4, 2008, to Aug. 4, 2015, is sharper, more detailed and shows higher-energy gamma rays than EGRET's. The LAT has detected more than 10 times the number of gamma-ray sources seen by EGRET. In fact, the LAT has captured more high-energy gamma rays from a single source, the Vela pulsar, than the total number detected by EGRET from all sources.

Credits: NASA/EGRET Team (left) and NASA/DOE/Fermi LAT Collaboration

Compton was launched April 5, 1991, on STS-37, the eighth flight of the space shuttle Atlantis. On board were Commander Steven R. Nagel, Pilot Kenneth D. Cameron, and Mission Specialists Linda M. Godwin, Jerry L. Ross, and Jay Apt. At the time, the 17-ton observatory was the heaviest astrophysical payload ever flown, a record not broken until the launch of NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory and its propulsion stage in 1999.

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On April 7, the crew prepared Compton for its release into orbit. Godwin guided the observatory out of the payload bay using the shuttle's robot arm so the solar panels had room to unfurl. 'We were elated when we saw the solar panels deploy properly, since those had been problematic on the ground,' said Apt, now a professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business and College of Engineering in Pittsburgh.

Then came the bad news. Ground controllers couldn't unfold the high-gain antenna needed to send science data back to Earth. Efforts to free the structure included varying its temperature by rotating the shuttle's payload bay in and out of sunlight and gently wiggling the shuttle arm, but it wouldn't budge. With no options left, Ross and Apt were cleared for an unscheduled spacewalk, NASA's first in nearly six years.

The astronauts saw no apparent reason for the failure, and Ross, who retired from NASA in 2012 as the first person launched into space seven times, received approval to apply what he has called 'a good old farm boy whack.' Supporting himself on Compton with his right hand, he reached out with his left and shoved the boom twice with about 40 pounds of force. Nothing happened. 'I pushed a third and fourth time and it started to move a little. Finally, on the fifth and six tries, the boom swung free,' he recalled. With that, the spacewalkers proceeded to the opposite end of the boom, manually swung the antenna to its full extent and locked it into place, clearing the way for Compton's release.

Then known simply as the Gamma Ray Observatory, it was soon renamed in honor of Arthur Holly Compton, an American physicist and Nobel laureate who discovered that high-energy light underwent a change in wavelength when it scattered off electrons and other charged particles. This process played a central role in gamma-ray detection techniques used in all of the observatory's instruments.

Cosmic gamma rays are few and far between -- and the higher their energy, the rarer they become. Compton's four gamma-ray instruments were the largest orbited to date and achieved better than 10 times the sensitivity of previous missions. In increasing order of their energy ranges, they were the Burst And Transient Source Experiment (BATSE), the Oriented Scintillation Spectrometer Experiment (OSSE), the Imaging Compton Telescope (COMPTEL), and the Energetic Gamma Ray Experiment Telescope (EGRET). Taken together, they covered an unprecedented energy range, from 20,000 electron volts (eV) to 30 billion electron volts (GeV). For comparison, visible light ranges from about 2 to 3 eV.

BATSE was developed at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and provided the first compelling evidence that brief, intense, almost daily gamma-ray bursts resided far beyond our galaxy. 'GRBs had bedeviled astronomers for several decades before Compton was launched, and the consensus among astronomers was that they came from neutron stars within our galaxy,' said Gerald Fishman, who led the experiment and is now a co-investigator on Fermi's Gamma-ray Burst Monitor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

It was quickly evident GRBs were distributed all over the sky instead of in a pattern reflecting the structure of our Milky Way galaxy, strongly suggesting the bursts were originating far beyond our cosmic neighborhood. Proof of this came in 1997 when ground-based observatories
were able to rapidly perform follow-up studies of GRBs seen by the Italian-Dutch satellite BeppoSAX. We now know these bursts are extraordinary explosions located millions to billions of light-years away, usually a result of the deaths of massive stars or mergers of neutron stars and black holes. Both Fermi and NASA's Swift satellite continue to study GRBs, and each mission has detected more than a thousand to date.

When Compton launched, most astronomers thought gamma-ray bursts were related to dense neutron stars in our galaxy. With enough bursts, they thought, the distribution of GRBs would concentrate in certain regions, such as the galactic plane. Instead, BATSE showed that gamma-ray bursts occur all over the sky and their distribution bears no sign of the galaxy's underlying structure. This was compelling evidence GRBs were exploding in distant galaxies, an interpretation later shown to be correct.

Credits: NASA/BATSE Team

The EGRET instrument on Compton, led by Goddard's Carl Fichtel, was built in collaboration with Stanford University, the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and Grumman Aerospace. It conducted the first all-sky survey of high-energy gamma rays, which have energies above 100 million electron volts (MeV). A major finding was the discovery of a new class of active galaxies that produce most of their light at these energies.

An active galaxy is an otherwise typical galaxy with a compact and unusually bright core. The greater-than-normal luminosity of this central region is produced by matter falling toward a supermassive black hole weighing millions of times the mass of our sun. As it approaches the black hole, some of the material becomes channeled into particle jets moving outward in opposite directions at nearly the speed of light. In quasars and blazars, the most luminous active galaxy types, one of these jets happens to point almost directly at Earth. When viewing these sources, we're effectively looking down the barrel of a black-hole-powered cosmic cannon. EGRET showed these jets reach much higher energies than previously suspected.

When Compton launched, high-energy gamma rays had been detected from only one galaxy other than our own, a quasar named 3C 273. Yet when EGRET imaged the area in June 1991, scientists saw another quasar, 3C 279, undergoing an outburst that made it one of the brightest objects in the gamma-ray sky. It became the archetypal gamma-ray blazar, and most of the discrete objects identified by EGRET, as well as those now being cataloged by Fermi, fall into this class. 3C 279 has since produced even larger flares.

Compton's other instruments also produced impressive results. OSSE, led by James Kurfess of the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, mapped gamma rays from a cloud of antimatter surrounding the central region of our galaxy. COMPTEL, a European-led instrument with principal investigator Volker Schoenfelder at the Max Plank Institute in Germany, identified locations in our galaxy where newly formed radioactive elements, such as aluminum-26, could be found.

Compton was the second of NASA's Great Observatories, a series of ambitious astronomical satellites designed to explore different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. The first mission in
the program was the Hubble Space Telescope launched in 1990. Compton was followed by the Chandra X-ray Observatory in 1999 and the infrared-sensitive Spitzer Space Telescope in 2003. All of them remain operational today except Compton, which was deliberately deorbited in 2000 following the failure of one of its gyroscopes. Its scientific legacy continues in Fermi, Swift and other space observatories exploring the universe's highest-energy light and the extreme phenomena producing it.
Climate Change, Scientism, and the Politics of Certitude

New York Times columnist notes the uncertainties in climate science; progressives want him fired.

By: Ronald Bailey

The balance of the scientific evidence supports the claim that man-made climate change is happening. That being said, there are many uncertainties with regard to how fast the climate might warm over the course of this century, how much it might warm, how fast sea level will rise, and so forth.

Climate scientists try to get a handle on the trajectory of climate change using computer climate models. When compared to observational temperature trends, the models' outputs have been somewhat less than robust. University of Alabama at Huntsville climatologist John Christy, who is a long-time skeptic of projections of future catastrophic warming, finds that computer model temperature increases average about 3 times greater than the actual temperature trends. A January 2017 paper in the Journal of Climate by researchers who unquestionably represent mainstream climate science corrected for satellite data trends and the inclusion of stratospheric cooling and also found that the models are warming 1.7 times faster than the observational temperatures.

In his column "Climate of Complete Certainty," New York Times opinion writer Bret Stephens sought to account for the skepticism of high percentage of Americans toward the dire warnings from environmentalists about impending catastrophic climate change. Stephens accepts that man-made warming is real; however, he observes that much else is still a matter of probabilities.

From his column:

That's especially true of the sophisticated but fallible models and simulations by which scientists attempt to peer into the climate future. To say this isn't to deny science. It's to acknowledge it honestly....

Claiming total certainty about the science traduces the spirit of science and creates openings for doubt whenever a climate claim proves wrong. Demanding abrupt and expensive changes in
public policy raises fair questions about ideological intentions. Censoriously asserting one's moral superiority and treating skeptics as imbeciles and deplorables wins few converts.

None of this is to deny climate change or the possible severity of its consequences. But ordinary citizens also have a right to be skeptical of an overweening scientism. They know—as all environmentalists should—that history is littered with the human wreckage of scientific errors married to political power.

As it happens, hundreds of thousands of climate activists this past weekend participated in the Peoples Climate March in Washington, D.C., along with subsidiary marches in 300 other cities. It is evident that many progressive marchers would eschew Stephens' warning against marrying uncertain science to political power and are entirely certain that climate change requires the complete transformation of the U.S. economy and society along more communitarian lines. It is not too much to say that environmentalists' apocalyptic climate rhetoric helped elect our current president.

The New York Post is reporting the nasty progressive backlash against Stephens who aim to get him fired from the Times.
Small drones are safer to operate near people than originally thought, according to research results presented to Congress Friday by an expert from the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

David Arterburn, director of the Rotorcraft Systems Engineering and Simulation Center at UAH, briefed members of Congress and Federal Aviation Administration Drone Advisory Council members on Friday in on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

The conclusion of research done at UAH and other universities was that small drones pose less of a hazard to people than originally thought.

Arterburn said that testing showed that the injury potential from someone being struck by debris from a small unmanned aerial system, 55 pounds or less, was much less than the standard currently being used, which are similar to the standards used when a space vehicle or missile breaks up.

Currently, FAA rules that cover drones that weigh less than 55 pounds say operators must keep the craft within their line of sight and cannot fly over people who are not directly participating in its operation.

"Flight over people is the next step in the evolution of rule-making in the FAA's strategic plan," said Arterburn, the principle investigator in the research.

UAH led the research effort, along with four other universities — Mississippi State University, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, The University of Kansas and Wichita State University.

"The collision dynamics of these small vehicles is very different from metal objects," says Arterburn. "(Small Unmanned Aerial System) platforms are flexible and retain much of their energy, while inelastic metal fragments or objects transfer nearly all of their energy to a person."

Arterburn said the report on Friday was the first in a series by the FAA Unmanned Aerial System Center Of Excellence intended to inform the FAA and the public on the injury potential of small unmanned aerial systems.
A falling drone probably won’t kill you

*It’s still not advised to have a drone fall on your head, though.*

By: April Glaser

The FAA released a new study Friday to help determine how dangerous it really is to get hit with a drone falling out of the sky.

While the idea of having a drone fall on your head isn’t pleasant, it turns out you’re much more likely to suffer an injury from getting hit by a block of wood or a hunk of metal than a flying robot of the same size, according to the new report.

That’s because the shape of a typical four-propeller consumer drone causes it to fall more slowly than a block of wood. Drones are also more likely to deform in some way during a collision and absorb more of the energy from the impact, the researchers found. The report was written with the help of a consortium of universities, led by the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

DJI’s Phantom 3 drone, for example, was found to have about a .03 percent chance of causing a head injury if it fell on a person, compared to a block of wood of the same mass, which was found to have a 99 percent chance of a head injury. But while your head may not be injured by a falling drone, the chances of suffering a neck injury if hit by a Phantom 3 drone increased to around 13 percent.

The report also found that blade guards used to protect the rotors help to decrease the severity of an injury from collisions and should be required for safe flight over people.

These findings could impact the outcome of new rules on flying drones, which are still being written in many countries around the world, including the United States. The Federal Aviation Administration is expected to continue to seek input from the public and industry experts on how drones should be allowed to fly over people, beyond line of sight of the operator and at night.

The current threshold for determining if a drone needs to be registered with the FAA — unmanned aircraft weighing more than 250 grams — was decided in part using Cold War-era military projections on the lethality of being hit with debris in a nuclear fallout, as Recode reported last month.

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The FAA will begin a new phase of research on drone safety in June, the results of which will be used to develop tests for drone manufacturers to certify their aircraft for safe flying over people.
What happens if a drone hits you in the head?

By: Doyle Rice

What happens if a drone hits you in the head?
The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) wants to know, so they conducted a study to understand and mitigate the risks of drones flying over people, and what happens if a drone loses connection to its pilot or just crashes to the ground.

It turns out that small drones are safer near people than was thought.

"We were able to identify blunt force trauma, penetration injuries and lacerations as the most significant threats to people on the ground," said David Arterburn, an engineer at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and lead investigator for the study, which was conducted by several universities and released Friday afternoon in Washington, D.C.

As part of the test, the researchers dropped a typical drone (a Phantom 3, weighing 2.7 pounds) on a crash test dummy at a typical speed of about 34 mph. They found that while there was only a 0.01 to 0.03% chance of a serious head injury, there was an 11-13% chance of a serious neck injury.

The team classified collision severity by identifying hazardous drone features, such as unprotected rotors.

Some good news out of the study was that multi-rotor drones fall more slowly, due to aerodynamic drag, and cause less damage than the same mass of metal or wood. Drones also deform and flex more than wood and metal debris, imparting lesser amounts of energy and, therefore, less damage.

As for potential fatalities, blunt force trauma would be the most significant contributor, the study found. For lacerations, the report said that protective blade and rotor guards should be required for all flights over people.

Flying over people not associated with the flight is one key to deliveries and other urban uses of drones.
“The results of this work are critical to the successful commercial operations of flying unmanned aircraft over people and beyond the pilot’s visual line of sight,” said Mississippi State University’s Marty Rogers, director of the FAA’s Alliance for System Safety of Unmanned Aircraft Systems through Research Excellence (ASSURE).

UAS is the industry acronym for drones, which are aircraft flown remotely without a human pilot on board.

The next phase of the research will begin in June 2017, and will verify the findings of this study, as well as develop tests that manufacturers can use to certify their drones for flights over people.
Aerojet Rocketdyne executive to speak at UAH commencement

By: Myra Arnold

Eileen P. Drake, chief executive officer and president of Aerojet Rocketdyne Holdings Inc., will deliver the University of Alabama in Huntsville commencement address May 7.

The ceremony begins at 2 p.m., and will be in the Von Braun Center Propst Arena, 700 Monroe St. S.W., Huntsville. No tickets are required for guests.

UAH is expected to award more than 800 diplomas at its spring graduation ceremony. Drake will be awarded an honorary doctor of science degree from UAH during the ceremony.
Are some communities more prone to tornadoes?

*Researchers are in town studying storms to find whether your town is more prone*

By: Austin Winfield

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. - Here in the Tennessee Valley we are nestled into the heart of the most active tornado alley in the country and are unfortunately accustomed to the destruction they cause.

While there are many pieces to the puzzle, researchers from around the country have come to Huntsville each spring to study our storms with one goal in mind.

Richard Henning, a NOAA Flight Meteorologist, says, "Everyone has their piece of the pie and when you assemble it all together what you end up with is a lot better understanding of how tornadoes develop and the end result is that the National Weather Service will have a lot better idea of how to warn people and save lives."

And while there is a focus on growing our knowledge of storms, the information we gather is going straight into developing better computer models.

Dr. Kevin Knupp, UAH Atmospheric Science Professor, says, "It's going to be the computer models that will tend to extend warning time out to the goal of a one hour time frame."

Computer models may sound boring, but that warning time can be the deciding factor on whether you have enough time to get to your safe spot or now.

As for the research approach, it's two-pronged, with the first coming from the ground.

Ryan Wade, UAH Atmospheric Science Professor, says, "We are going to be looking at radar data to figure out what's going on in the boundary layer, what's going on in the lowest few hundred to few thousand feet, where the tornado lives, so that we can assess what's going on with the winds, what's going on with the temperature, humidity, to make an unstable environment, to see if areas in the Tennessee Valley versus up on the Sand Mountain Plateau to see if one environment is more favorable than another for tornadoes."

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The second, is from the air, as NOAA's Hurricane Hunters were stationed here to fly into the storms to use a special radar on the plane's tail.

And I got the privilege to fly with the team.

As for the difference between flying into our storms versus a hurricane, well, there isn't much.

Commander Scott Price, NOAA Aircraft Commander, says, "Between a hurricane and a squall line there isn't a lot of difference. It can be very turbulent and uncomfortable as you felt today. Hurricanes are normally very well formed storms."

For the pilots, rapid development of storms can be tricky.

Richard Henning, a NOAA Flight Meteorologist, says, "There is going to be new storms that develop out ahead of it and if that's where we are, then we'll have to be aware of that and make sure that the thunderstorm isn't literally growing up underneath us and through our level as we are trying to fly."

While the research process is still in full swing, looking back at past tornado paths can tell us a lot. It points to tornadoes often taking one of two main paths across the valley.

Dr. Kevin Knupp, UAH Atmospheric Science Professor, says, "One is over Sand Mountain that points to a topographic influence that we are trying to understand and the other points to the region of Huntsville and to the west, which I believe is related to the surface that we have, variations in the surface roughness and land use characteristics."

Despite new data coming in every tornado event, this research is vital in getting our current tornado lead time from a little over ten minutes to a full hour.
Toyota inspires Alabama girls to enter STEM fields with $150,000 grant

By: Lucy Berry

Girls will have more opportunities in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields as a result of a new $150,000 grant from Toyota USA Foundation.

Toyota announced the funding Wednesday at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, where a weeklong residential camp for 8th grade girls will take place June 18-24. Tech Trek Alabama, an American Association of University Women program, provides hands-on experiments and STEM-based activities including building robots, developing apps, and studying cybersecurity.

The grant will help support and grow Tech Trek Alabama, which is offered in partnership between UAH and the Huntsville branch of the AAUW at a cost of $50 per person. The camp expanded to Alabama in 2014.

"Interest in Tech Trek has grown in the three years we have been holding the camp," Dr. Rhonda Gaede, camp director and associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at UAH, said in a statement. "Increasing the number of counties served and selecting a group of campers who reflect the demographics of the state are priorities in our fourth year."

Click here for additional details about Tech Trek Alabama.

New Toyota Alabama President David Fernandes said STEM education is an important initiative for the company.

"We want to support programs that provide students with exciting opportunities in STEM to help cultivate the next generation of engineers, researchers, and science leaders," he said.
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1 Will retire and be replaced by Steven Leath in summer of 2017
2 Intern president

NOTES: NA - not applicable, not available or not approved
Knight, Gillman receive SEC top honor

By: Staff

The Southeastern Conference announced its women’s golf awards on Thursday, and two University of Alabama golfers took home two of the league’s top honors.

Sophomore Cheyenne Knight was named the SEC Player of the Year. Kristen Gillman was selected as the SEC’s Freshman of the Year.

Knight, Gillman and sophomore Lauren Stephenson were named All-SEC, first team, and Gillman was named to the SEC All-Freshman team. Senior Cammie Gray of Northport was named to the SEC Community Service Team for the second consecutive year.

Alabama has produced two SEC Players of the Year. Knight joins Stephanie Meadow, who won in 2013 and 2014. Knight becomes a two-time All-SEC selection.

Gillman joins Jennifer Kirby (2010), Meadow (2011) and Emma Talley (2013) as Alabama’s fourth SEC Freshman of the Year in program history.

The first-team selections for Knight, Gillman and Stephenson mark the third time in program history that Alabama has landed three golfers on the All-SEC first team. Camilla Lennarth, Stephanie Meadow and Brooke Pancake were honored in 2011 while Meadow, Pancake and Jennifer Kirby were selected in 2012.

Alabama is preparing for the May 8-10 NCAA Athens Regional, which will be held at the University of Georgia Golf Club in Athens Ga. The top six teams at the regional advance to the NCAA Championships May 19-24 at Rich Harvest Farms in Sugar Grove, Ill.
Simon off basketball staff

UA assistant coach's replacement not announced

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

The contract of University of Alabama men's basketball assistant coach Bob Simon will not be renewed for the 2017-18 season.

Simon was not available for comment on Monday, and UA officials responded to questions by saying they would comment "at a later time." However, Simon has not participated in UA team activities ranging from off-campus recruiting to attending the team's postsea­son banquet since early April. He has also had no activity on his Twitter account since April 24 when he passed along a quote from television pastor Joel Osteen about "extraordinary challenges."

Simon joined the Alabama staff as associate head coach soon after head coach Avery Johnson was hired in April 2015. Prior to joining the Alabama staff, Simon had coached for nine years as the top assistant to Ed Cooley in tenures at both Fairfield and Providence. He continued to hold the associ­ate head coach title last season even after former Arkansas head coach John Pelphrey joined the staff last summer, also as an associate head coach.

Alabama landed a recruiting class ranked as high as No. 4 in the nation with assistant head coach Antoine Pettway spear­heading those efforts.

No replacement for Simon has been announced, although Johnson is expected to conduct interviews for the vacancy before the upcoming weekend.

In other basketball news, ESPN reported that Alabama had agreed to a non-conference series with NCAA participant Rhode Island in the coming season. URI would visit Tuscaloosa on a December 2017 date to be determined, with Alabama returning the trip to Rhode Island in December 2018.

— Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
NFL teams shying away from Tide? Hardly

For a college football program, the NFL Draft is what you make it. If you look at it one way, the draft is simply a departure ceremony, albeit one with some very nice multimillion-dollar parting gifts for a fortunate few. Players who turn pro can't do a thing on the field to help the alma mater win another game. Depending on the level of the program those stars are departing, they can leave an aching void. At the highest level, there is usually enough talent to replace the departed and move on.

That's not the point of view that most programs take, though. A prominent draft presence, both in a single class and over a span of multiple years, is perhaps the most powerful part of a program’s recruiting portfolio. That doesn't mean draft success (and subsequent pro success) is the only tool in a recruiting toolbox. There are other components — academics, geography, personal relationships.

But let's be honest here. Elite prospects want to play in the NFL after their college career, three years or four, is over. They want to follow a proven path of success. For an obvious example, look at Alabama’s recent run of gifted young wide receivers. Does a Jerry Jeudy or Henry Ruggs want to be the next Julio Jones or Amari Cooper? Of course. Are next year’s top prospects likely to pay special attention to the program that has had the most first-round draft choices (by a substantial margin) over the past four years? Of course. Alabama is smart to use that fact, just as Michigan would be wise to market its achievement in having the most total draftees in 2017 with 11, just edging out Alabama’s 10.

This is ultimately a PR battle, though. The Crimson Tide’s rivals, detractors and those who seek clickbait aren't simply going to sit back and concede the fact Alabama is annually producing top draft class after top draft class. Part of it is the inevitable thicket of “expectation confusion” that surrounds Nick Saban’s team. That is just another symptom of the silly idea that any season in which Alabama doesn’t finish as the national champion (or, in its most extreme version,

See HURT, C3
HURT

Continued from C1

The undefeated national champion is somehow "underachievement." The corollary notion is the Crimson Tide has so many great players, any year in which it doesn't produce five of the top 10 picks is "a disappointment."

One national talk-radio host (Colin Cowherd) even advocates the debunked notion that NFL teams shy away from Alabama players who, Cowherd contends, are overused in Tuscaloosa and have limited upside. If that were true, why would four teams use their first-round pick on Alabama players?

Why wouldn't you avoid them altogether? And is the same logic true for other schools? USC recruits well every year, yet had far less players drafted than Alabama, both in the first round and overall. That must mean NFL players think USC players are burnouts that should be avoided, right? I mean, shouldn't the same logic apply? How about for Florida State? Oregon? NFL front offices must really be wary of those teams, right?

Of course not. It's an argument that makes no sense. The draft status of a particular individual depends on myriad factors, ranging from a team's needs to the individual personality of each player. Alabama has had some players whose NFL careers have fizzled, like Dee Milliner and Trent Richardson. They've also had plenty of success stories: Julio, Amari, Don't'a Hightower and more.

Here's the fact: Twenty-seven different NFL franchises have picked Alabama players since Saban became the head coach. Nine Alabama players were chosen in the first three rounds this weekend. And there is no way to fit those numbers into a narrative where teams are "shying away" at all.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Crimson domination

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

The depth of the 2016 University of Alabama football team shined through Friday night in Philadelphia.

Five more Crimson Tide players were drafted in the 2017 NFL Draft, bringing Alabama’s total of players drafted in the first three rounds to an astounding nine. Those nine went in the first 70 picks, an NFL record.

The seven UA players chosen in the first 55 picks also set an NFL draft record.

Three-year starting left tackle Cam Robinson got the night started. He was the second pick of the second round (No. 55 overall) by the Jacksonville Jaguars, where he’ll help create running lanes for former UA star running back T.J. Yeldon.

“Cam Robinson became the eighth UA offensive lineman drafted in the last five drafts, which at the time of his selection was three more than any other school.”

Outside linebacker Ryan Anderson was the next Crimson Tide player to have his name called. Anderson, a first-team All-SEC selection in 2016, was chosen with the No. 49 overall pick to the Washington Redskins. He’ll join forces with his former teammate Jonathan Allen, who was Washington’s first-round selection Thursday night.

“It’s about to get real,” Anderson said. “When I get on the field, [combine drills] has nothing to do with kicking a man’s [behind] in front of you.”

Defensive lineman Dalvin Tomlinson was the next man up, going to the New York Giants with the No. 55 pick. He’ll rejoin former Alabama teammate and Pro Bowl safety Landon Collins.

See NFL, C5

Alabama offensive lineman Cam Robinson celebrates with fans following the Crimson Tide’s 10-0 win over LSU in Tiger Stadium on Nov. 5, 2016. Robinson was taken by the Jacksonville Jaguars in the second round of the NFL Draft on Friday. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]
Collins.

"I'm super excited to play with Landon (Collins) again," Tomlinson said. It'll be like the old days back at 'Bama."

Outside linebacker Tim Williams and wide receiver ArDarius Stewart both went in the third round with the No. 78 and 79 picks, respectively. Williams heads to Baltimore, where he play with Marlon Humphrey, who was the Ravens' first-round selection Thursday night.

Stewart goes to the New York Jets.

Saturday is the final day of the draft with rounds four through seven.

This report was filed before the close of the third round.

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
The Tuscaloosa News
Sunday, April 30, 2017

SEC headlines NFL Draft, again

With 53 draft picks, SEC leads nation for 11th straight year

The Associated Press

It started with Texas A&M’s Myles Garrett going No. 1 overall and ended with Mississippi’s Chad Kelly going last as “Mr. Irrelevant.”

For the 11th straight year, the SEC led all conferences in number of NFL draft picks. The league had 23 players taken during the final four rounds Saturday to increase its three-day total to 53, 11 more than the Atlantic Coast Conference.

The ACC closed with a flurry, with 31 of its 42 drafted players taken on the last day. The Pac-12 edged out the Big Ten 36-35 in picks. The Big 12 had only 14

See DRAFT, C3

See next page
Continued from C1

players drafted, the fewest since the conference formed from the merger of the Southwest Conference and Big Eight in 1996. The Big 12 had 26 picks last year, and the previous low was 17 in 2014.

While Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh and his current team wrapped up their trip to Italy, the Wolverines set a school record with 11 players drafted. Nine came in the first four rounds, another program record.

Miami led the ACC's charge on Saturday, when six of its eight players went. National champion Clemson finished with six draftees.

Utah, which had four offensive linemen drafted, led the Pac-12 with eight picks.

Ohio State, which led the nation with 12 players taken in 2016, had seven go this year.

The 53 SEC picks were the third-most in conference history, behind only the 63 in 2013 and 54 in 2015.

"I think about the process when it comes to getting guys from high school, developing them and then putting them into the NFL," SEC Network analyst Marcus Spears said. "That's something (recruiters) tell a lot of these guys when they go into their homes: 'You come, you take care of school, do the right thing and develop as a player and you'll have an opportunity to play on the next level.'"

Alabama led the SEC with 10 selections, including four first-round picks. Florida and LSU each had eight players taken.

"It's not a coincidence that these teams have been revered as the top programs when you talk about winning," Spears said. "The type of players they put on the field, it goes directly to the success."

Blue-blood programs Nebraska, Texas and Penn State each had only one player taken.

The Cornhuskers had not had fewer than two players drafted in a year since 1963, the longest streak in the nation.

For Texas, it was the second straight year only one player was picked. Big Ten champion Penn State had its leanest draft since having no players taken in 2005.
8 charged with manslaughter in fraternity hazing death at Penn State

By: Cody Boteler

Eight members of Beta Theta Pi fraternity at Pennsylvania State University are being charged with involuntary manslaughter and aggravated assault in the death of Tim Piazza, a Penn State sophomore who died after participating in hazing rituals at the fraternity house in February, according to documents from the Centre County District Attorney’s office.

Eighteen men total, all fraternity members, are being charged with crimes including hazing, furnishing alcohol to minors, tampering with evidence and more.

Beta Theta Pi, the fraternity that Piazza was pledging when he died, is also being criminally charged, with a total of 147 charges.

Piazza died after consuming massive amounts of alcohol during a hazing ritual and then falling down a flight of stairs, then falling again, repeatedly throughout the night on Feb. 2, 2017. He died of irreversible spleen and brain stem damage, according to the district attorney.

“This is a very sad day,” Centre County District Attorney Stacy Parks Miller said in a press conference after a months-long grand jury investigation. “It’s been sad ever since we lost a child for reasons that are totally preventable. We are all heartbroken as we stand here.”

Miller was joined by Piazza’s parents, who made a brief statement eulogizing their son and saying his death “did not have to happen.”

THE GRAND JURY FINDINGS

According to the grand jury’s findings, Piazza died after falling multiple times during an alcohol-fueled party at Beta Theta Pi fraternity house on bid acceptance night.

At the Beta fraternity house, Piazza was made to “run the gauntlet,” according to testimony. A fraternity member testified that the purpose of the gauntlet was to “get pledges drunk in a very short amount of time.” They were made to have four to five drinks within two minutes.

Beta Theta Pi was supposed to be a dry fraternity, but the grand jury found evidence that the brothers had what they called a “slush fund” for alcohol purchases. They had bought over a thousand dollars in alcohol — vodka, beer, wine and potent malt beverage Four Loko — for this particular party, according to receipts.

Around 11:50 p.m. the night of the party, after Piazza’s fall, fraternity member Greg Rizzo wrote to others in the house in a group message that Piazza “might actually be a problem. He fell 15 feet down a flight of stars, hair-first, going to need help.”
Video footage from a security system in the Beta house shows that in fact Piazza fell multiple additional times during the night and the early morning. Fraternity brothers and the pledge class testified to those falls as well.

Video shows fraternity brothers carrying a limp Piazza up the stairs with a bruise that had bloomed and was visible on video.

In the early hours after the initial fall, brothers poured liquid on Piazza’s face and slapped him in attempts to rouse him.

A little after 3:30 a.m. video footage shows Piazza attempting to stand and moving around the house, falling and striking his head multiple times. Around 7:15 a.m., video shows Piazza “staggering” toward the basement steps.

The grand jury report concluded that “the severity of Timothy Piazza’s condition was obvious and noticed by the fraternity brothers and pledges around him that evening.”

Around 10 a.m., a fellow pledge, Daniel Erickson, found Piazza in the basement. According to Erickson’s testimony, Piazza was “breathing heavy,” had “blood on his face,” felt “cold to the touch” and appeared “pale” with his eyes half-opened.

Nobody called 911 until 10:48 a.m.

The grand jury also concluded that there was an “active attempt to conceal and/or destroy evidence” after Piazza was transferred to the hospital. For example, several brothers discussed deleting or actually deleted GroupMe messages.

On Feb. 5, Brendan Young, the president of the Penn State chapter, discussed concerns about “lawsuits” with another member. “The guys taking care of him didn’t call an ambulance right away, so they could get in trouble for negligence,” Young wrote in a text message. “I just don’t know what I’m liable for as president.” (Young is being charged with 200 crimes: 1 count each of involuntary manslaughter, aggravated assault, simple assault and tampering with evidence, plus 50 counts of recklessly endangering another person, 50 counts of hazing, 48 counts of furnishing alcohol to minors and 48 counts of unlawful acts relative to liquor.)

After learning that Piazza had died, evidence shows brothers considered “erasing the video surveillance” from the house.

The fraternity website shows the group’s motto was “Men of Principle.”

PIAZZA’S DEATH HAD ALREADY AFFECTED GREEK LIFE AT PENN STATE

Greek life is a deeply embedded part of campus culture at Penn State, which recognizes 81 fraternities and sororities. About 17% of all PSU students are a part of Greek life.
Weeks before the grand jury investigation findings were released, Penn State Vice President for Student Affairs Damon Sims told Philly.com that the university knew the party included a "hazing ritual" that involved "gross misuse of alcohol."

Even before the criminal charges were announced, Piazza’s death rocked Greek life at Penn State:

Penn State officials banned Beta Theta Pi from campus for at least five years, with the possibility of the ban becoming permanent pending the results of the investigation.

Other fraternities and sororities at Penn State are restricted from recruiting new members until 2018 as well as limited as to the number of social events they can hold and how much and what kind of alcohol they may serve.

Several fraternities and sororities then violated new rules over parents weekend. Sigma Alpha Mu was suspended after violating "every rule that was imposed."

President Barron wrote an open letter to the Greek community citing several rule violations coming from Penn State frats. And, he said, if that disregard for rule continued, he envisioned "many empty houses and then the end of Greek life at Penn State."

In a statement responding to the grand jury investigation and charges, Penn State President Eric Barron called the findings "heart-wrenching and incomprehensible." Regarding what happened on the night Piazza sustained his fatal injuries, Barron said,

"The alleged details in the grand jury presentment, which suggest the inhumane treatment of a student forced through hazing to consume dangerous amounts of alcohol and endure hours of suffering, are sickening and difficult to understand. It is numbing how an atmosphere that endangers the well-being and safety of another person could occur within an organization that prided itself on commitment to each other and to its community."

Nine members of the fraternity are expected to surrender to police for arraignment at the Centre County Court House at 2 p.m.