JUNE 20, 2017

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
JUNE 2, 2017 - JUNE 20, 2017

FOR SPECIFIC NEWS STORIES, SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE NUMBERS:

NEWS ABOUT

TRUSTEE/SYSTEM INFO 2
STATE ISSUES 8
UA CAMPUS ISSUES 28
UAH CAMPUS ISSUES 46
SPORTS 52
UA gives final approval to tuition hike

Increase will take effect this fall

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

MOBILE — Students at the University of Alabama System's three campuses will see tuition

from $600 to $1,500 depending on residency.

While the system was appreciative of state funding allocated by lawmakers, state appropriations haven't kept up with growth in inflation and fixed costs such as benefits and retirement contributions, system officials said.

"These leaner times call for innovation, collaboration and commitment," Chancellor Ray Hayes said.

The increase, the latest in a series of annual hikes that stretches more than a decade, prompted discussion Thursday among trustees, who weighed the financial impact on students and a changing funding model.

"This is a big concern to all of us. But the one thing I would hope we would all think about a little bit is the pressure on us is not going to decrease is it is going to increase. There are people in government who want to give us even less," trustee Finis St. John said. "I hope we can stay vigilant about that. We need to talk to our elected officials and be involved in the process because this can get a lot worse than it is now. And one thing I think is our responsibility is to maintain the excellence that we have achieved and continue to achieve. We don't want to give that up."

The tuition increases at the three campuses would support debt service, research, merit-based scholarships, faculty hires, compensation and benefits, mandatory fixed costs and student life enhancements.

In action on construction and renovation projects, the board approved revising the budget and designs for the Second Avenue railroad overpass bridge from $13.8 million to $14.7 million to lengthen the span on the south side and add barriers between the sidewalk and roadway. The bridge will be a three-lane roadway with bike lanes and sidewalks.

For UAB, the board approved preliminary plans for a new $3.5 million track and field venue and a new $60-million, nine-floor residence hall and dining facility.

The new track field will be located at the current site of the west campus intramural fields and will replace the field which was demolished as part of construction of the new football operations building.

It would include a new running track; space for jumping, vaulting and throwing events; seating for 300 spectators, and nighttime lighting.

The new dorm will house around 780 undergraduates and seat 400 in the dining space. The project, to be located on 10th Avenue South between 16th and 17th streets, would open in 2020.

INSIDE
Other action taken by the University of Alabama System board of trustees, B3
UA System moves to raise tuition

Trustees cite inadequate state appropriations

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

MOBILE — The University of Alabama System board of trustees will vote Friday whether to increase tuition rates this fall by about 3 or 4 percent at its three campuses.

The board's finance committee met on Thursday and approved the tuition increases. System officials said increases in the combined net revenue of tuition and state appropriations haven't kept up with growth, inflation and fixed costs such as benefits and retirement contributions. The officials noted that state funding for the upcoming year would not include increases for higher education. The state appropriation for UA System operations is $474 million.

System Chancellor Ray Hayes again cited the shift in the funding model of universities away from state funds and toward tuition revenue.

"It is a difficult arena, but I am convinced these recommendations are what is necessary for the presidents and the campuses to deliver the quality of education our students our families and our state deserves," Hayes said.

See TUITION, A7

See next page
The tuition increases at the three campuses would support debt service, research, merit-based scholarships, faculty hires, compensation and benefits, mandatory fixed costs and student life enhancements.

The board also approved 3 to 4 percent increases last year, citing similar reasons. It also approved tuition increase for medical and other professional students in April.

Tuition at UA would increase roughly $310 annually to $10,780 for in-state undergraduate and graduate students taking full course loads. Out-of-state students would see tuition increases of about $1,150 annually to $28,100. Law school students would see increases of about $600 annually in-state and $1,500 out of state. Housing rates would increase on average by 3.5 percent at UAH.

The increases proposed for the fall would represent roughly a 190 percent increase over the last decade. The trend prompted a discussion among the trustees as the committee gave preliminary approval for another increase.

"When we have had this issue come up before us, I have said at some point I am going to say we don't need to have another tuition increase," trustee John England said. "This isn't the year, but I am just saying again because at some point we need to let the citizens of the state of Alabama know -- and quite frankly everybody who is a stakeholder, students, parents -- that we are sensitive to the cost of higher education. That we are doing our best to control those costs and we are just not automatically raising tuition."

The campuses and system office remain conscious of the financial burden, Hayes assured the trustees.

"We give as many scholarships as we possibly can to our students. We give as many jobs (to students) on campus ... We talk about that considerably ... we do everything we can to support the students," Hayes said.

Trustee James Wilson III said he shares England's frustration, but he argued the system was also dealing with cost increase beyond its control.

"If you look at the straight facts, our expenses have increased because of other funding that the state has taken away from us and the fact that the state has not had the money to give us. Sometimes, you are dealt cards and you just have to play the best hand you can, and I kind of think that is where we are," Wilson said. "I do agree with you. I can't wait not to raise it a lower it if we could."

"We give as many scholarships as we possibly can to our students. We give as many jobs (to students) on campus ... We talk about that considerably ... we do everything we can to support the students."

System Chancellor Ray Hayes
A Confederate monument stands on the Hale County Courthouse grounds in Greensboro on May 26, 2017. A new state law that protects Confederate monuments also applies to historic buildings and structures. (STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.)

New law that protects monuments could affect colleges, local governments

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Administrators with the state's two-year colleges and the University of Alabama System are still trying to determine how a sweeping new state law meant to protect Confederate monuments and other historic structures will affect projects involving campus buildings.

See MONUMENT, A3

Why it matters

The Alabama Memorial Preservation Act, passed by proponents with the goal of protecting historical monuments and buildings, could affect local governments and public entities like universities as they make decisions about changes to buildings, parks, streets and monuments older than 20 years that fall under the broad definitions of the law.

University of Alabama administrators are studying to see whether the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act applies to historic buildings on its campus, such as Julia Tutwiler Hall on Paul W. Bryant Drive.

(STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON)

See next page
MONUMENT
Continued from A1

Meanwhile, Tuscaloosa city and county officials don’t anticipate any issues with the Alabama Monument Preservation Act, which was sponsored by state Rep. Glenda Allen, R-Cottontdale.

While discussion of the monument issue dominated much of the debate about the law in the Legislature this spring, the Alabama Monument Preservation Act could also have broader implications for projects involving public structures more than 20 years old and the public institutions overseeing them.

"We are studying the legislation to determine its effect on our campuses going forward," said University of Alabama spokesman Kellee Webb.

The university is working with UA and the Alabama College Community System to determine what the new state law means for their campuses, which are dotted with buildings and other structures named in honor of donors and historic figures.

For example, the UA System owns hundreds of millions of dollars in construction projects and many spaces on its campuses named for historic figures, donors, and others who have played roles in the history of the communities.

"Our legal division is still reviewing the bill and its impact on our colleges moving forward," said Boone Kinard, special assistant for governmental affairs, legal and community relations for the Alabama Community College System.

"We don’t think it is going to affect Tuscaloosa County at all to be honest," Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge Hardy McCollum said.

The county lacks the monuments that have been lighting rods in the debate the last few years, he said.

"It think it is much ado about nothing," McCollum said.

While there appears to be some ambiguity in the legislation, Tuscaloosa City Attorney Brian Westrick said there is no reason the City Council, a county official or City Webb doesn’t believe the city will have any issues, noting that the city has not been provided for in the new law.

Historic review is nothing new for the city, according to Webb. Depending on a project’s funding source, the city has been subject to approval of the Alabama Historical Commission, the state’s historic preservation agency, she noted.

The new law also notes a patchwork of local, state and federal requirements for review that apply to public and private projects involving historical structures and sites.

Webb also noted the city had its own Historic Preservation Commission in recognition of historic structures in the city.

Protecting history

The new law, which went into effect upon being signed by Gov. Kay Ivey last month, prohibits the relocation, removal, alteration, renaming or disturbance of architecturally significant buildings, courtyards or monumental buildings or structures on public property that have been in place for 40 or more years. It allows for changes to monuments, buildings or streets that have been in place for at least 20 years but less than 40 years through a waiver process overseen by an 11-person commission appointed by the governor and leaders of the Alabama House and Senate.

Public entities that make changes to buildings, streets or monuments in violation of the law can be fined $25,000 for each violation.

Proponents of the bill argue it protects the history of Alabama, both as a state and before, from reactionary changes.

"This purpose is to place a safeguard for administrators and policymakers to take a closer look at what they are doing that might disturb historical buildings and the meaning of those structures and the historic meaning behind those structures," Allen said. "Let’s take some steps backward and review this before we take action."

Critics, including Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa, have argued the law was merely a vehicle to preserve Confederate monuments in the face of an ongoing debate about removing Confederate symbols from public spaces across the Southeast.

"[Lawmakers who supported the bill] just wanted to pass a bill that deals with Confederate monuments," England, who voted against the bill, also raised a question of constitutionality with the Alabama System and Auburn University.

The state constitution grants the authority to govern the campuses to their respective boards of trustees. Historically, the trustees have fallen back on this constitutional authority as they have argued against attempts by lawmakers to set tuition rates or legislate other changes.

The proposals to name programs, buildings, or individual rooms and structures require approval from the UA System board of trustees. Typically, a proposal would first have to be approved by the University of Alabama Degrees and Recognitions Committee before going to the full board.

"I don’t think the bill actually impacts the University of Alabama," Webb said.

England argued an amendment to the Constitution would have to be passed for the law to apply to the UA System and Auburn University.

Among the challenges are interpreting the definitions of architectural structures and monuments and the mechanics of a review process set up to grant waivers to the restrictions.

Allen said the new Committee on Alabama Monument Protection would be able to address questions about the application and interpretation of the law. The committee has the authority to adopt rules to help implement the act and give it broader implications and to further defining architecturally significant buildings.

The committee members are supposed to be in place by Sept. 1, and begin meeting sometimes that month.

The governor, who will appoint five of the members, has yet to take action on the appointments, according to Rep. English.

The Senate president pro tempore and House speaker, who each make three appointments to the board, did not return calls about the status of their appointments.

A matter of definitions

The act defines an architecturally significant building as a structure located on public property that by its inherent nature or design not apply to buildings in museums, libraries or archives.

Clarifying the definition of a portrait in the law, Allen used the example of a painting or bust installed in recognition of a substantial gift by a donor or in memory of the individual.

"Something that’s significant that goes into a building or something to capture the moment," Allen said.

Petitions for waivers

The entities with control of public monuments and buildings between 20 and 39 years old may apply for changes to buildings or something to the public transportation systems, utility services, or the public infrastructure and activities.

While the law lays out the waiver process for monuments and buildings between 20 and 39 years old and memorial schools specifically, it is less clear on a review process with the committees for proposals relating to structures 40 years or older.

However, Allen points to a paragraph in the act, which provides for judicial review of committee decisions.

"If it is 40 years or older, it would have to go into the court process," Allen said.

England argued jurisdiction for the appeals is unclear.

"There is really nowhere in the law that can provide us based on the reading of the law where you can go to challenge a decision that is made, England said.

Reach Ed Shor at ed.shor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-2020.

The Tuscaloosa News
Thursday, June 15, 2017

What the bill does

Here are some of the highlights of the Alabama Monument Preservation Act:

- Prohibits relocation, removal, alteration, or renaming of architecturally significant buildings, memorial buildings and streets or monuments on public property that have been in place for 40 or more years, but allows public structures in place from 20 to 39 years to be altered through a waiver process.
- Includes exemptions to the requirements for public law.
PROTECTIVE LIFE NAMES NEW CEO

Protective Life Corp. announced longtime CEO John D. Johns will assume a new role as the company's executive chairman, with current president and COO Richard Bielen tapped to become the company's new CEO.

These changes are effective July 1.

Johns joined Protective in 1993 as the company's executive vice president and chief financial officer, and became CEO in 2002. He also led Protective through its acquisition by Japan-based Dai-ichi Life Insurance Co.

Bielen joined Protective in 1991 as vice president of securities. He became chief investment officer in 2002 overseeing a portfolio that started at $13.3 billion and grew to $27.9 billion in five years before being named vice chairman and chief financial officer in 2007.
Ivey hires PR firm

Direct Response LLC was hired to support transition

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey’s office is hiring an outside firm to work for Ivey who was suddenly catapulted to the governor’s office this spring.

Under the contract, the governor’s office will use state funds to pay $46,000 to Direct Response LLC over the next six months. The contract description says the firm will do "communications and public relations support, external affairs development."

The Alabama governor’s office has its own press office with several state-paid employees who send out news releases and answers to reporters’ questions. Ivey spokeswoman Eileen Jones in an emailed statement said that Direct Response is needed to "support the ongoing transition to the Ivey Administration on a number of topics."

"Direct Response is a PR firm that did contract work for the Lt. Governor’s office for two years and has worked in the transition. The contract is to allow them to continue work on PR support and messaging strategy as the Ivey administration continues to steady the ship of state," the statement read.

The firm was founded by Brent Buchanan, a Montgomery-based political consultant, who will be performing the work for Ivey. State records show that the lieutenant governor’s office paid Direct Response $66,581 in fiscal year 2012 and $39,600...
Continued from B1

in 2011 for writing work. Buchanan said his job will be to work on whatever the governor's priorities are, adding that it was a role he filled for her first two years as lieutenant governor.

Jones said governors typically have a two-month transition period between being elected in November and taking office in January. She said Ivey did not have that typical transition period after she was catapulted into the governor's office in one day by the sudden resignation of Gov. Robert Bentley in April. Bentley abruptly resigned amid fallout from an alleged affair with a staffer. He announced his resignation on the same day the House Judiciary Committee began impeachment hearings. Bentley also agreed to plead guilty to misdemeanor campaign finance charges to end a state investigation.

The Legislative Contract Review Committee approved the contract earlier this month. Ivey is not the only politician to turn to outside public relations help and to use state funds to do so. The house majority leader also proposed a $36,000 contract for a social media strategist to run through September. House Republicans have employed the firm of Azbell Communications to provide strategic communications and public relations consulting services. Bentley created a nonprofit organization to work on his message. While not funded by taxpayers, such nonprofits are often called dark money groups because they promote a political agenda without being required to disclose donors.
Trump's infrastructure focus is good, and Alabama must be ready

Gov. Kay Ivey for AL.com

The need for infrastructure improvements and advancements across the state of Alabama is critical.

The deterioration of our roads, bridges, waterways, and ports hinders public safety, economic growth, and quality of life. The importance of gaining a portion of the Federal infrastructure investment and putting projects in place to further the advancement of our roads, bridges, waterways, and modern infrastructure such as high-speed internet and telecommunications, is monumental in bettering our future and not leaving these needs for future generations.

I proudly joined President Donald Trump in Washington recently as he designated an entire week to focusing on the nation's failing infrastructure. I appreciate the President taking this important step in leading our country forward. For a state to take advantage of the President’s plan, it must be “ready, willing, and able” to make a financial investment of its own.

Investing more in our state’s infrastructure is simply a good business decision for Alabama.

The roads in Alabama received a D-plus rating in the report card of the American Society of Civil Engineers in 2015. The “poor quality” of roads throughout the state hurts our advancement of business production and transportation, which in turn hurts our economy. Roads throughout the state also need improvement to make day to day traveling safer for our citizens. There were 4,280 traffic fatalities from 2011 to 2015, then from 2015 to 2016 Alabama saw a 25 percent increase in traffic deaths.

Our state’s bridges only earned a grade of C, partly because 20 percent of them are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, according to the National Bridge Inventory. The Association of County Engineers of Alabama estimated in 2011 that the
state spends more than $2 million annually

detouring school buses around weight-re-
stricted bridges.

It is simply unacceptable that our school
buses must travel miles out of their way to
avoid failing bridges and that the wheels of
commerce are slowed by failing roads.

Many of these are in rural areas and we
as a state must step up to address these
issues, and shouldn't wait on the federal
government to do it. We can do better. We
must do better.

Also, many communities throughout
the state are experiencing major problems
with their water delivery systems. They are
faced with broken, cracked, clogged, and
disjointed pipes resulting in families not
having access to necessary water supplies.
We must support our fellow Alabamians as
they address these pressing needs.

We should also consider one of the larg­
est deep water ports in the country, which
is in Mobile. It is a major hub for the ship­
ping and moving of critical commodities
for our state on a daily basis, providing
jobs and the opportunity for businesses to
expand on a large scale. For Mobile — and
Alabama as a whole — to stay a key player
in the global economy we must continue to
improve our ports and waterways.

Investing in our infrastructure will not
only provide increased safety to our citi­
zens but will help advance our economy
through providing opportunities to our citi­
zens, and ease the logistical burdens cre­
ated by job growth.

We have abundant resources from our
ports on the Gulf to companies growing in
our cities to the north - and everywhere in
between. In order to keep these treasures,
attract new businesses and create more
jobs in Sweet Home Alabama, we must pro­
vide the best infrastructure possible.

We seek these vital infrastructure
improvements in hopes that we will con­
tinue to grow the Great State of Alabama,
and in turn, rebuild the United States of
America.

I support President Trump’s efforts to
pass a national infrastructure bill, and I
promise the people of Alabama, I will do
everything in my power to make sure we
are ready to get our fair share once the plan
is in place.
Alabama unemployment rate down to 4.9%, lowest since ’08

Mike Cason mcason@al.com

Alabama’s unemployment rate dropped to 4.9 percent in May, the lowest rate in the state since March 2008.

The rate dropped from 5.4 percent in April. It’s down almost a full percentage point since March, when the rate was 5.8 percent. It was also 5.8 percent in May 2016.

The rate announced Friday by Gov. Kay Ivey is a preliminary, seasonally adjusted rate. It is higher than the national rate, which is 4.3 percent, a 16-year low.

The Associated Press reported the states with the largest percentage gains in jobs in May were Alaska, Alabama and Louisiana, according to the U.S. Labor Department.

One key measure showed the number of people employed in Alabama in May was the fourth highest for any month since that record was kept.

Members of Ivey’s cabinet joined her for the announcement in the state Capitol and applauded the numbers.

“The numbers we celebrate today indicate what happens when people work together, we work hard together and we work strategically to declare that Alabama is open for business,” Ivey said.

BREAKING DOWN THE NUMBERS

Counties with the highest unemployment rates were Wilcox at 10.9 percent and Clarke at 8 percent and Lowndes at 7.4 percent.

Counties with the lowest rates were Shelby at 3.1 percent, Elmore at 3.4 percent and Cullman at 3.5 percent.

The current population survey, conducted by the Census Bureau, showed there were 2,089,217 employed Alabamians in May, about 500 more than in April and about 50,000 more than in May 2016. The survey sample size is about 1,500 households.

“We believe that the unemployment numbers are important,” said Alabama Department of Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield. “The real story is the employment numbers behind them.”

WAGE AND SALARY SURVEY

The Alabama Department of Labor compiles a separate number on wage and salary employment by surveying about 20,000 businesses.

It found that wage and salary employment in May was 2,014,600, an increase of 13,100 over April, and the fourth-highest total since the state began keeping that record in 1939.

It was exceeded only by December 2007 (2,026,700), November 2007 (2,022,000) and June 2007 (2,018,400).

There were about 6,100 more jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector than the previous month. The construction sector grew by about 3,100 jobs and the manufacturing sector by about 1,500.

“We’ve been strategic in our approach in terms of making sure that Alabamians know there are jobs out there, and I think our message is getting across,” said state Department of Labor Secretary Fitzgerald Washington.

TO THE AIR SHOW

Ivey, Canfield and others are preparing to go to the Paris Air Show next week, an event they say is crucial to attracting more jobs to the state.

“It’s all about building relationships,” Ivey said. “People do business with folks that they know and feel comfortable with.”

Washington said confidence in the economy is a key factor contributing to more hiring. Washington said four job categories are consistently in high demand — truck drivers, retail managers, registered nurses and welders.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.
Fragmentation of government has wreaked havoc on city’s regional prominence — study

Erin Edgemon edgemon@al.com

A new study shows the fragmentation of government in Jefferson County has caused a decline in Birmingham’s prominence and its ability to lead the region.

“(Birmingham) is arguably the most fragmented community in the Southeast because we developed in this fragmented pattern,” said Thomas Spencer, a researcher with the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama.

He said Jefferson County contains 35 municipalities and each “operates in its silo.

“Birmingham has been losing population because it is hemmed in by these surrounding suburbs,” Spencer added.

Also, Birmingham city leaders and Jefferson County leadership don’t communicate with each other, or with other municipalities in the metro area, he said. There is no leadership that represents the entire county.

Lack of cooperation causes competition for jobs, Spencer said.

The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham commissioned PARCA to conduct a yearlong study of the current structure of government in the greater Birmingham area with a focus specifically on Jefferson County. The study examines the development of Birmingham and the metro area, and compares it to other cities.

“In cities where government is fragmented, growth is slower, and social and economic problems are more concentrated,” the study states.

Birmingham was the 34th largest city in the United States in 1950. The city’s population has now fallen out of the top 100, population estimates show.

“Though the latest estimates indicate the city may have halted its population decline, other Alabama cities where growth is strong may eventually displace Birmingham as Alabama’s largest city,” the study states.

Today, the population of the city of Birmingham represents only 32 percent of Jefferson County’s population compared to 60 percent in 1950.

“The city still holds a position of regional leadership thanks to its ability to draw taxes from businesses and commuters who come into the city to work or shop,” the study states. “Over 90,000 people commute into the city each day, filling more than half of the jobs in the city.”

The report compared job growth in seven metro areas whose governmental structures foster cooperation vs. job growth in seven metro areas — Birmingham included — that are fragmented. Between 2000 and 2016, the seven cooperative metro areas experienced job growth ranging from 20 percent to 50 percent. The seven fragmented metro areas experienced job growth no greater than 12 percent; Birmingham had 0 percent job growth, PARCA’s report shows.

“The results are clear: When there is more cooperation in a metro area, there is more growth in jobs, incomes, and overall prosperity,” said Christopher Nanni, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham. “While there are different styles and degrees of cooperation, communities benefit when they are able to speak with one voice and unite behind a common purpose or goal.”
State officials ‘misreported’ grad rates

Alabama could lose up to $8 million in federal funding for programs

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

Alabama education officials ignored rules and inflated graduation rates beginning in 2010, federal inspector general’s findings confirmed in a report released Friday.

Rates were also found to be inaccurate because school officials miscounted and miscategorized students and couldn't provide documentation as to why they did so.

The full consequences of the findings are still unknown, but Alabama Superintendent Michael Sentance told AL.com last December up to $8 million in federal funding could be withheld from the state department.

Sentance said any funding that is withheld would not be taken from local school districts, but rather from the federal funding for the Alabama department of education to oversee the administration of federal programs.

Though the Office of Inspector General audit was originally intended only to review the 2013-2014 graduation rate, all of Alabama’s graduation rates back to 2011

SEE GRADS, A7
GRADS
FROM AL
were called into question because of the inaccuracy of student data kept at the district level.
Graduation rates for school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014 must now be publicly marked as not reliable wherever the state publishes them.
High school graduation rates became an important measure under President Barack Obama's administration.
Beginning with the class of 2011, federal requirements for calculating who counts as a high school graduate stated only those students who started ninth grade four years earlier and graduated with coursework fully aligned with a state's academic standards could count in that group of graduates, known as a "cohort" graduation rate.
Graduation rates could then be compared among states and began to get a lot of public attention.
The state board of education made many changes that ultimately impacted graduation rates, including removing the requirement for the high school graduation exam in 2013.
Alabama was one of three states chosen for the audit. The report states. Alabama was chosen because the increase in Alabama's graduation rate from 2012-2013 to 2013-2014 was the most significant in the country, according to the report.
Alabama's graduation rate increased from 72 percent in 2011 to 86 percent in 2014. By 2015, Alabama had the third highest graduation rate in the nation at 89 percent.
The report, dated June 14, outlined the federal OIG findings in the audit of the Alabama State Department of Education's calculation of high school graduation rates, first reported by AL.com last November. The full report is posted on AL.com.
There are two main findings in the audit. The first is the state department did not have an effective way to ensure school officials were reporting graduation rates accurately. The second is the department misreported the graduation rate to the federal department of education by including students as graduates who shouldn't have been counted.
From the report:
"We found that ALSDE's (Alabama State Department of Education) system of internal control did not provide reasonable assurance that reported graduation rates were accurate and complete during our audit period. In addition, ALSDE misreported ACRG (adjusted cohort graduation rate) data to the Department because the former State Superintendent decided to continue counting students who earned an alternative diploma after being advised by the Department that those students could not be included as graduates in the ACGR."
The alternative diploma, known as the Alabama Occupational Diploma (AOD), was designed for students with disabilities who did not plan to attend college but planned to pursue work opportunities after graduating high school.
The academic standards in the coursework for the AOD are not fully aligned with Alabama's college and career-ready standards and AOD recipients cannot be counted as graduates.
FORMER STATE SUPERINTENDENT DISREGARDED FEDERAL RULES
The OIG report said former state Superintendent Tommy Bice had been told in written correspondence not to count students who took courses that were not fully aligned with Alabama's academic standards, but counted them anyway.
The report outlines a series of correspondence with Bice, who tried to convince the federal department of education that students graduating with AODs should be counted. The correspondence occurred between March 6 and May 21, 2012.
The report states a final letter was sent from Bice to federal officials on May 21, 2012, disagreeing with federal officials' stance that students graduating with an AOD could not be counted as graduates. No further correspondence between federal and state officials was found, the report states.
Alabama state board member Stephanie Bell, R-Montgomery, called the OIG findings "disappointing," saying Bice has now brought into question the credibility of the state department of education.
Bell said she was not aware of the correspondence between Bice and the federal department of education as it was not shared with the state board.
Bell said Bice should have kept the board informed about the questions being asked by federal officials, adding, "Dr. Bice was not being completely candid with the board." Bell said if the board had known Bice was not following federal guidelines, they likely would have voted to remove him.
Bell made clear she never suspected teachers or students of doing anything wrong, but felt the graduation rate increases should be questioned. When interviewed in December after the initial findings were announced, Bice said he believed it was accurate to count students on the AOD track as graduates.
State officials have estimated around 600 graduates are taking AOD coursework, renamed "Essentials" coursework in 2013. Bice did not respond to a request for comment on Friday.
Bice, first appointed in November 2011, retired in March 2016, just weeks before the OIG made the first of two visits to state offices in Montgomery. Sentance was appointed state superintendent in August.
LOCAL SUPERINTENDENTS VINDICATED
"We are glad to see local school systems and superintendents completely vindicated from any wrongdoing," School Superintendents of Alabama Executive Director

See next page
Eric Mackey wrote in a statement to AL.com. “All along, I have been saying that local superintendents and school leaders have followed (state department) directives with fidelity, so I am not surprised to see them fully vindicated.”

Mackey said he is disappointed that students earning an AOD are not counted as graduates under federal guidelines, but leaves that to state and federal officials to resolve.

COUNTING STUDENTS INACCURATELY

The OIG reported a second finding, providing evidence of an inability to ensure accurate data was being kept showing when students began ninth grade and documenting why students were removed from the cohort.

Two Alabama school districts were chosen for further review. The report states Birmingham City Schools were chosen for review because the graduation rate showed the most “significant” increase from 2012-2013 to 2013-2014. Federal officials visited Mobile from June 20 through June 23, 2016. The results of those visits are contained in the report, and Sentance said at the time no significant concerns were found in Mobile County.

However, the report shows that in both Mobile and Birmingham, a significant number of students (86 percent of the students sampled in each district) were not first-time ninth graders in the 2010-2011 school year but were counted as such.

“Through our testing, we found that students were both erroneously counted as graduates and removed from the AGGR cohort without sufficient documentation or for unallowable reasons,” the report reads.

Specifically, Birmingham did not have adequate documentation for five of the six students and Mobile lacked documentation for one of the six students to support their removal from the cohort,” the report reads.

The OIG sampled 42 student records in Birmingham and 44 student records in Mobile.

Another problem found was when districts were given the opportunity to remove students from a cohort in the 12th-grade year, the state department did not make sure it was for allowable reasons, such as moving to another state, to home school, to private school, or to a juvenile detention center.

In one instance, the report notes a state department employee knew a student was being removed from a ninth-grade cohort for an unallowable reason but approved the district’s request to remove the student and added a comment in the system saying, “I will give you this one. Students cannot withdraw to a GED (General Education Diploma) School.”

Federal officials met with state education officials in February to discuss the results of the audit.

Sentance responded on May 2 and agreed with the OIG’s findings.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The report contains corrective actions proposed by Sentance in accordance with the OIG’s recommendations.

Most of those actions include additional procedures and monitoring to ensure local school officials are categorizing and calculating graduates correctly.

School officials will now have to certify to the state department that their graduation rate is calculated accurately and transcripts are accurate.

Graduation rates for the class of 2016 have not yet been released. State officials published those rates in April, but removed them after local superintendents found the rates to be inaccurate. The inaccurate posting of those 2016 graduation rates has generated a new investigation, conducted by former Jefferson County Superintendent Philip Hammonds. Sentance updated board members at their June 8 work session, saying results will be shared with the board when the investigation is complete.

Graduation rates for previous years will not be recalculated, the report says, and no estimates of actual rates can be given due to the multiple concerns about the accuracy of remaining data.

Sentance, in an e-mail to AL.com, said the federal Office of Elementary and Secondary Education now determines what the next steps are, including whether any actions, including fines, are imposed on the state department of education.

Business and Education Alliance President Joe Morton retired as Alabama state superintendent in September 2011.

In a statement to AL.com, Morton said, “This all occurred after my retirement, so I am reluctant to add opinions or thoughts about a matter with which I was not involved. I do know that removing any exam as a graduation requirement (an action that was taken after I retired) contributed to the mercuric rise in graduation rates as much, if not more than counting (Occupational Diploma) students.”

If the federal directions not to count those students as graduates was ignored, Morton continued, “and I have no way to know if it was, such an action can never lead to a good outcome — it would definitely put a target on a state’s back.”

The state board meets again on Wednesday in a regularly-scheduled work session.

The Birmingham News
Sunday, June 18, 2017
A new plan to fix fragmentation

The fragmented nature of metro Birmingham – with its dozens of municipal governments and competing interests – has long been cited by business leaders as an obstacle to long-term prosperity.

A new report unveiled today by the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama highlights the challenges caused by fragmentation, as well as several potential solutions that have worked in other metro areas.

Chris Nanni, CEO of the Community Foundation, and PARCA’s Thomas Spencer presented the report, which was the result of a year-long research project commissioned by the Community Foundation and conducted by PARCA.

The report analyzed job growth since 2000, and it found that fragmented metros like Birmingham, St. Louis and Pittsburgh had significantly lower job growth than more unified metros like Austin, Charlotte, Nashville and Denver.

Metro Birmingham had only a 0.24 percent increase in average annual employment over that time frame, which paled in comparison to regional neighbors with more collaborative government models.

The unified metros had job growth ranging from 20 percent to 50 percent. The fragmented government’s job growth ranged from -12 percent to 5 percent.

During his talk, Nanni pointed to the fragmentation in the governing structure of the metro area, where different municipalities from Birmingham to Mountain Brook to Irondale all have competing economic policies and priorities. A BBJ in-depth report in 2014 found that local governments spent millions of dollars in incentives to recruit companies from inside the metro area or to defend their turf against neighboring cities. Other areas, such as Denver, have initiatives in place to avoid that type of intra-metro competition.

While the report doesn’t recommend any course of action, it highlights a number of options that include decreasing duplication of services through cooperative agreements between governments, modernizing the county government structure to provide regional leadership, using regional bodies to coordinate strategy on a regional basis and the potential of actual political consolidation like the setup in Louisville.

One fact that was made clear by the report is that government consolidation is not a requirement for increased collaboration or cooperation in metro Birmingham.

“Cooperation is not the same thing as consolidation,” Nanni said. “Cooperation simply means recognizing that we have a shared fate and working together toward a future that will be more prosperous for all.”

Instead of offering a plan of action to solve the problem, the Community Foundation presented four different options that other cities have pursued for a more unified metro area.

“We hope this report is a starting point for a community discussion that needs to occur about how the greater Birmingham area can prosper and remain relevant in the future,” Nanni said.

The almost 200-page report is available online, along with an executive summary, at togetherweprosper.org.

- dbudhwani@bizjournals.com
The Staples-Pake building was constructed in downtown Mobile before the Civil War, served as office space for a cotton broker, and then became a bank before sitting in deteriorated condition for years. Thanks to $1.3 million in state tax credits, the building is undergoing a $5.5 million renovation into loft-style apartments, with commercial space on the ground level.

The project is expected to be completed this year, and add much-needed apartments to the downtown scene.

"It's another great example of buildings that are bringing a lot of general value to the city because of those credits," said Carol Hunter, spokeswoman with the Downtown Mobile Alliance.

Hunter and supporters of the tax credit are celebrating in the 2017 Legislature's agreement to reinstitute the tax breaks meant to encourage historic preservation.

The passage of the bill known as HB345 ended a year of disputes and tussles.

From 2013 to 2016, the credits fueled 52 historic rehabilitation projects across Alabama, with an estimated investment value of $334 million.

It included the rehabilitation and opening of high-profile projects such as the $12.5 million remake of the Lyric Theater in downtown Birmingham.

But there was concern smaller cities were being left out, that some of the rehabbed properties weren't truly historic, and that the state's budget was being strained.

'A GOOD OPPORTUNITY'

The renewed program caps the amount of tax credits per year at $20 million. Also, no single project can receive more than $5 million. In the program's previous incarnation, several projects received up to $5 million, although none received more.

Another key change is a requirement that 40 percent of the tax credits be reserved each year for counties with 175,000 or fewer people. That excludes Jefferson, Mobile, Madison, Montgomery, Baldwin, Shelby and Tuscaloosa counties.

The lion's share of the previous tax credits — 69 percent — went to projects in Birmingham and Mobile. The new program, however, stipulates that if all or a portion of the 40 percent isn't used by smaller counties, then projects in larger counties can have a chance to claim it.

SEE TAX CREDITS, A16
Waymond Jackson, senior vice president of public policy with the Birmingham Business Alliance, said the new approach gives every county and town a "fair shot" at the incentive dollars.

Jackson said the previous program added about $200 million in new investment in Birmingham.

"I truly think this legislation will be one of those things that for it to stay around, that it will need to be successful in all parts of the state," Jackson said.


"This gives the smaller populated counties a good opportunity to participate," he said. "If they don't participate, the credits go back for everyone else."

A property eligible to receive the credits needs to be at least 60 years old, a difference of 10 years from the previous 50-year-old standard.

Also, a new Historic Tax Credit Evaluating Committee will review and rank each application. The Alabama Historical Commission will set the review cycle for the new group beginning on Jan. 1, 2018.

The emphasis on smaller counties stems from the results of an independent study by experts at the University of Tennessee, who gave the Alabama state historic tax credit program a "B" grade. The study recommended that the tax credit be spread out more equitably.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, who requested the study, halted an extension of the tax credits in 2016. Marsh, however, supported the retooled credits this year, saying the goal is to achieve an "A" grade.

The Alabama Historical Commission will be required to report to the Legislature, fol-
The status of Alabama’s children is improving, according to a report released Tuesday. The 2017 Kids Count Data Book measures the health and well-being of children in each state and in the nation, based on 16 indicators of economic, education, health, and family and community well-being.

“It’s a great reflection on the state moving forward,” said Rhonda Mann, policy and research director at Voices for Alabama’s Children, which reports and publishes the Kids Count Data Book for Alabama.

SEE HEALTH, A6
HEALTH
FROM AI

"It’s not that we don’t have a lot of work still to do, but we’re excited about seeing improvement."

Kids Count ranked Alabama 44th in the nation overall this year, two spots better than in 2016. Out of the 16 indicators highlighted in the book, Alabama improved in 11 of them. In six, Alabama ranked the same or better than the national average.

The report ranked Alabama 38th in economic well-being, 42nd in education, 42nd in health and 43rd in family and community.

Mann credited the state’s recent investment in high-quality pre-K programs as a major reason the state has made improvements in child welfare overall.

"The road out of poverty is education, and starting early is important," said Mann. "When children are more successful in school, they feel better about themselves and are more likely to avoid risky behavior as they enter their teen years, she said.

"In Alabama our research shows those (high-quality pre-K programs) work very well, not only to help children be ready for kindergarten, but to help close achievement gaps."

Alabama’s brightest spot on the report is that it ranks fifth in the nation for children covered by health insurance. Only 3 percent of children in Alabama had no health insurance in 2015, compared to 5 percent nationwide.

Mann said Medicaid funding affects that number, but Alabama’s Children’s Health Insurance Program, known as ALL Kids, plays a role as well.

"ALL Kids was one of the first and is considered one of the best models for children’s health insurance," said Mann. "It uses a sliding scale for eligibility/assistance, which helps those families that might not qualify for Medicaid but can’t really afford to pay for health insurance on their own if they don’t have family benefits through their employer."

Mann said Voices for Alabama’s Children has been working for 25 years to improve the quality of life for children in the state, and the organization would like to see funding increased incrementally for high-quality pre-K programs, and to improve Alabamians’ access to healthy food options. She also wants to see child care regulated, an issue debated in the state legislature this year.

"We encourage lawmakers to make children and families a priority," Mann said. "Programs are working. Data shows we’re heading in the right direction. To continue to keep up with or outperform the rest of the nation we need to keep improving our commitment to families."
Black legislators file objection to new districts

By: Kim Chandler

MONTGOMERY — African-American lawmakers in Alabama urged federal judges on Tuesday to reject newly redrawn legislative districts, saying Republicans are still using racial gerrymandering to maintain white GOP control of the state’s largest county. The Alabama Legislative Black Caucus filed its objections to the latest plan approved by the GOP-controlled Alabama Legislature. The caucus argued that “race is the predominant reason” the districts of white Republicans still extend into Jefferson County “to maintain more majority-white than majority-black districts” in the county’s delegation.

“There is no non-racial excuse for the Legislature’s refusal to reduce the number of majority-white House and Senate districts extending outside Jefferson County into surrounding counties, when eight majority-black House districts and three majority-black Senate districts are contained wholly within Jefferson County,” lawyers for the caucus wrote.

The caucus did not object to the redrawn lines of the majority-black districts, which had been the chief concern in the lawsuit that led to the redistricting order.

A three-judge panel in January ordered lawmakers to redraw legislative districts before the 2018 elections. In that decision, federal judges struck down a dozen Alabama legislative districts, saying Republicans relied too heavily on race in deciding where to draw lines. The Legislative Black Caucus and the Alabama Democratic Conference had argued that African-American voters were “stacked and packed” into designated minority districts to make neighboring districts whiter and more likely to elect Republicans.

Racial and partisan control of Jefferson County, which also is the home of the majority-black city of Birmingham, has been a bitter point of contention between lawmakers debating legislation affecting local governments. The new map is expected to maintain a slim Republican majority in the Jefferson County delegation.

Tuesday’s filing noted that there is close correlation between race and party affiliation in the state.

Republicans have argued that the new map addresses the problems found by the court in January.
OUR VIEW

City's short-term rental plan needs some work

We were happy to see that the city of Tuscaloosa has drafted a plan that would allow short-term rentals, rather than prohibiting them altogether. But we were even happier that Mayor Walt Maddox and Brendan Moore, director of the city’s Department of Urban Development, have stressed that the proposed plan is just a starting point. That is because it needs some work.

The City Council will hold a public hearing on the rules on July 11, and could vote on the matter. Though the city has worked for months on the new policy governing short-term rentals, the proposed set of rules appear to us to be arbitrary.

The new rules allow for the practice in some areas of the city, while banning it in others. There's a limit on how many homes can be rented for a short term in the city’s historic district and a different limit on multi-family homes, such as condominiums, but no limit for homes on Lake Tuscaloosa.

We hope the upcoming meeting can shed some light on the application of rules that do not apply to all homeowners.

A short-term rental is when a homeowner rents his or her home, or part of the home, to someone for a night or a weekend, perhaps a little longer. The practice has spread throughout the world with the advent of online services such as AirBnB.com and VRBO.com — that serve as a liaison between homeowner and renter.

The real catch is that the city does not collect the lodging tax on these transactions that hotels have to pay. As with Amazon and Uber, the Internet has provided a way to fill a niche that has harmed traditional businesses. The result is that the city isn’t getting the same cut it was able to get out of brick and mortar retailers and traditional taxi services.

The city finds itself in much of the same quandary as traditional retailers, and much of the rest of the local economy, including newspapers, is in. If the city is going to continue to employ the same number of people and provide the same level of services, it has to figure out a way to protect traditional revenue streams or create new ones.

By far, the biggest demand for short-term rentals is going to be during football season. Already, most hotel rooms are booked for most of next season’s home games, even those far outside the city limits.

Compared to the rate a hotel could command for tonight, the rates are astronomical. Most require a three-night minimum. As a result, many fans choose to get rooms as far away as Birmingham and Meridian, Miss. That results in a loss of sales tax revenue that would come from more of those fans staying, shopping and dining in Tuscaloosa.

Tuscaloosa is poised to be the first city in Alabama to impose short-term rental rules. Cities across the globe have figured this out.

Certainly, we can too.
State’s request to ditch ACT Aspire rejected

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

The Alabama state Board of Education learned last week that its plan to drop the ACT Aspire has hit a road block. The U.S. Department of Education rejected Alabama Superintendent Michael Sentance’s request to use different tests next spring.

Sentance and board members have expressed their dislike for the ACT Aspire in recent months and need the waiver to keep from having to renew the ACT Aspire contract for another year. The board must either renew or cancel the contract with ACT Aspire by July 1. Sentance told board members he and other state education staffers held a phone conference recently with Acting Assistant Secretary of Education Jason Botel and other federal education officials to ask for permission to stop using the ACT Aspire.

Instead, Sentance wanted to use a series of interim tests, given throughout the 2017-18 school year, to measure student progress and growth while Alabama decided on a new annual test to use for federal accountability. Telling board members the phone call was “pretty unsatisfactory,” Sentance said, “It was pretty clear right from the start that the answer was going to be no.”

Board members were not pleased, directing Sentance to ask again in a more formal way and to bring Alabama’s Congressional delegation to the table as well. Board member Ella Bell, D-Montgomery, said she already contacted U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell and U.S. Sens. Richard Shelby and Luther Strange. Bell said she expects to hear from them Monday as to what they might be able to do to help with the board’s request.

Board member Mary Scott Hunter, R-Huntsville, said the rejection from the U.S. Department of Education is surprising given the Congressional directive to give more control and flexibility to the states. Students in Alabama have not scored well on the ACT Aspire, which has been used to test students in third, eighth and 10th grades since 2014.

Board members said many local superintendents feel it is too late to change tests for next spring’s testing, as any change would likely require teachers to change instruction and there just isn’t enough time to do it right.

Sentance agreed, saying time is not on their side. He told board members he will bring a recommendation for action at the next work session on June 21.
PROFILE: CARL BARRANCO

CPA answers the call

Montgomery's new cyber strategy coordinator intends to harness talent to attract business to area

William Thornton wthornton@al.com

Montgomery tech and business leaders will be getting together soon to map out a strategy for Montgomery as it seeks to leverage the state's only Internet Exchange into an economic engine.

Carl Barranco was named this week as Montgomery's cyber strategy coordinator. Next week a group will meet to begin mapping out that strategy in what Barranco described as a six-month process.

Barranco, a consultant and former CPA with 50 years' experience, said he is looking forward to the challenge. He is a former chairman of the Montgomery Chamber and the Committee of 100.

"I consider this as answering a call," Barranco said. "I've always been very active in Montgomery, and this is an interesting subject. Mayor Todd Strange saw a need to bring together the various players and give this project some direction."

Last week Montgomery announced an upgrade to the state's only Internet Exchange, known as MGMix, which can now handle 100 Gigabits of traffic per second. City officials said this can position the city to attract companies handling large amounts of data, such as Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft and Apple.

Barranco said he sees the strategy as resembling a wheel with several spokes radiating out of MGMix: business development, collaboration, innovation, data science, communication and cyber security. Each of these components can not only contribute to the success of MGMix, but also position Montgomery as a tech leader in Alabama and the Southeast.

"These things are already active out there," he said. "They're just not under any umbrella. What we intend to do is harness them into a strategy."

Take collaboration. MGMix already has a peering agreement with Auburn University at Montgomery. That means access to a pipeline of data research. City leaders also see a collaboration between government, education and the military with Maxwell Air Force Base.

There's also the potential for jobs. The first group of classes for TechMG, a program of the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce, the Alabama Community College System and the local IT industry, finishes up later this month. Participants will earn Security+ certification, one of the most sought-after certifications for IT professionals.

Having a trained workforce is yet another way to attract tech jobs.

SEE BARRANCO, A14

BARRANCO
FROM A13

"We are already creating a talent pipeline," he said. "And with secondary and post-secondary education, we're providing a teaching point."

Cyber security also makes sense as a focus, Barranco said, because of the growing need among firms for trained people proficient in its needs.

The pieces are in place. CoWerx46, a developer-centered co-working space, opens this month on Commerce Street. And Montgomery hosts the annual Air Force Information Technology Conference. That's a lot of collaboration already in existence, and it's a resource to draw from.

"What we're trying to recognize is that we are situated well, not just geographically but technologically, to be a leader," Barranco said. "Nobody else has what we have here."

"We are already creating a talent pipeline."

Carl Barranco
City could be first in state to regulate market

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa is poised to become the first city in Alabama to impose rules on the short-term rental market, a business practice that has grown exponentially in the past decade.

A short-term rental is when a property owner or tenant leases a room or their entire living space to someone for a night, a weekend or sometimes a week or longer.

Various websites — among them AirBnB.com and VRBO.com — act as a liaison between renter and property owner, and in some cases offer to facilitate the payment of state taxes.

But none handle the payment of local or municipal taxes. And with almost every short-term rental the city of Tuscaloosa is losing out on at least 11 percent in lodging taxes.

Right now, the use of a private residence for short-term rentals violates the city’s zoning, building, fire and business license code regulations, among others.

See APPROVAL, A4
But according to the plan that was adopted by the City Council's administration and policy committee on June 6, property owners would be allowed to rent out their personal living spaces in two areas of the city — around Lake Tuscaloosa and in a downtown district bordered by the Black Warrior River, McFarland Boulevard, 15th Street and 29th Avenue.

Within these areas, called "Tourist Overlay Districts," some properties would be allowed to operate "by right," meaning they would not need special permission.

Others, like single-family homeowners within historic districts, could only rent out the home as long as it's their primary place of residence while needing special permission from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA).

Those living outside these zones also would be permitted to operate a home-sharing business, but would first need to seek permission from the ZBA.

Additionally, the ZBA could impose additional restrictions — such as the number of days an individual property could be rented or the maximum number of renters that could occupy the space in granting such permission.

And any property owner seeking to operate as a short-term renter would have to be properly licensed and inspected to ensure compliance with a number of life safety requirements put forth by Alan Boswell, the city's chief building official.

This means that individual, single-family homes being used for this practice would have to feature smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, operable windows in sleeping areas, hand and guard rails, fire extinguishers and emergency lighting to indicate exits.

"By no means is this a complete list," Boswell said.

As for those who oversee the short-term rental of multiple properties, they would be required to obtain a real estate license, as well.

The proper licensing, protections and inspections are expected to add significant costs to those who want to legally abide by the city's proposed rules.

**Ripping the rules**

On June 6, the city's plan met with criticism from members of the home-sharing community who have been in talks with the city since October on how to impose rules on what is now an outlawed practice.

"I don't sell houses. I rent properties. I don't see any reason I should have a real estate license..." said Kim Roberts, owner of Bama Bed & Breakfast, who oversees the rental of 43 homes across the city.

"This is onerous and just over the top of everything we've heard while we've been working on this.

"I cannot — in any way — support (the fee proposals)."

She also said the caps detailed in the proposed rules would unfairly hamper the market.

While the proposed guidelines would establish rules to sanction home-sharing, not every property owner will be allowed to do so.

For example, of all the residential properties within the city's downtown historic districts maximum of 10 percent would be permitted to operate as a short-term rental.

This means no more than 53 homes of the more than 1,000 in the historic districts could be rented out to visitors, based on city data.

A similar three percent cap is placed on multi-family developments, such as apartment or condominium buildings.

But these caps do not apply to the Lake District, where almost 400 homes would be eligible to seek short-term rental status.

Roberts said some condo owners purchased them with the goal of renting them out when not in use.

And in smaller historic districts, the caps would allow just one or two property owners to practice home sharing.

"We're not being realistic in what should be allowed in the caps," she said.

**Going too far**

Others, though, contend that the city's proposed plans go too far.

"Many of us are very concerned about what this is going to do to our historic neighborhood," said Kelly Pitts, a resident of Audubon Place and president of the Original City Association, a volunteer group that acts as an advocate on behalf of historic district residents.

While she praised the suggestion of Councilman Matt Calderone to require historic district short-term rental operators to live in the houses that will be rented, she was concerned about the lack of blanket limitations on the number of days a house could be rented.

Fitts encouraged the council to impose limits on the number of days a property can be rented out, even if it's just for the historic areas.

"I don't believe having a lot of short-term rentals popping up near campus is beneficial for the city," Fitts said. "That's not helpful to me and it makes me uncomfortable in my own home."

City officials, including Mayor Walt Maddox and Brendan Moore, director of the city's Department of Economic Development, which spearheaded the policy making effort, acknowledged that the proposed rules were far from perfect.

But they defended the plan, saying it was a necessary starting point in regulating a practice that, while popular, is not allowed within the city limits.

"This is not perfect and it could have a death by a thousand cuts," Maddox said, "but it's important that we take the step forward."

Calderone also defended the policy, comparing it to the city's efforts in recent years to license ride-sharing operations and permit alternative dining options in the downtown area.

"Just like with Uber and food trucks ..., we've got to start somewhere," Calderone said. "In the meantime, follow the law."

A public hearing on the rules, along with a possible vote by the City Council, is scheduled for July 11.

--Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
By Stephen Dethrage  
Staff Writer

On what would have been her 24th birthday, friends and family of Libby Hankins delivered dozens of toys and books to University of Alabama Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic on Friday morning.

Hankins, a Gordo native, was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis when she was 2 years old and she fought the disorder for more than 20 years. She received a bilateral lung transplant at Duke Medical Center in April 2016, but complications following the procedure claimed her life in March.

Her mother, Susan Estes, said Hankins had a heart for children with special needs and was less than two months shy of graduating from the University of West Alabama with a degree in special education.

Estes said her friends and family decided donating the toys would be the best way to honor Hankins’ legacy on her birthday.

“Libby taught me more than I would ever be able to teach her. She taught me to love and she taught me to spread joy wherever I could,” Estes said. “When those children walked in that room and their eyes lit up and they start playing with the blocks and the fidget spinners and the kitchen toys - it’s not going to bring her back, nothing will ever bring her back, but we all know Libby well enough to know she would absolutely love what we’ve done today. She would have been the first one in there on the floor with those children.”

See MEMORY, A4
MEMORY

Continued from A1

Jennifer Baggett, a clinical supervisor and speech language pathologist at the clinic, said she was overjoyed by the donation and that the toys will see plenty of use.

“We use toys to teach language skills and social skills, which are very important for kids with autism because sometimes they have difficulty socializing in different settings,” Baggett said. “The more we can play with toys here and teach them how to socialize while playing, the better. We are going to use these toys in every session here.”

Hankins did not go through her battle with cystic fibrosis alone. Support groups came together on Facebook and other social media and people from all over the U.S. donated money to help pay for the cost of her transplant last year. After her death in March, many of those supporters came together to form the Live Like Libby—Love Like Libby Foundation to support cystic fibrosis research and organize events like Friday’s toy drive.

Estes says the foundation is what Hankins would have wanted her loved ones to be doing.

“Even though she’s in heaven now, she loved us enough to lay out a plan for what she wanted done for her legacy,” Estes said. “She knew how much we loved her and that we would need a reason to get up every morning. She got up every morning no matter how badly she felt and I think she realized that we were going to need that, too.”

The UA Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic was founded in 2003 and serves students with autism by serving as a bridge to tutoring, housing and disability services across campus.

Baggett said the clinic also serves Tuscaloosa and much of the state as a diagnostic clinic, where speech pathologists, pediatricians and psychologists work together to assess and medically diagnose children on the autism spectrum.

“We get a lot of people from rural communities and from all over Alabama, really,” Baggett said. “We’re the only clinic that does a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary evaluation that I know of.”

Baggett said they stay busy at the clinic, where she evaluates two children a week and hosts parent-mediated therapy sessions for 35 children in the same period.

“We’re really, truly touched that (the Live Like Libby—Love Like Libby Foundation) chose us today and donated these gifts on Libby’s birthday,” Baggett said. “It’s so special that they wanted to spend it here at the autism clinic and it shows how important kids with special needs were to Libby.”

Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
More than 400 volunteers spruce up community

By James Benedetto
*Special to The Tuscaloosa News*

More than 400 volunteers rolled up their sleeves and worked Friday during the United Way of West Alabama’s annual Day of Action.

Organizers said 30 groups sent volunteers to spruce up United Way agencies and schools, some working indoors some toiling outdoors in an effort to lend a hand and improve the community.

One of the groups was University of Alabama Capstone International Center, which participated in the Day of Action for the second year in a row. The center, which provides a variety of international education programs and services, had faculty, staff and students cleaning up around the Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter and walking some of the shelter’s dogs.

“Our faculty and staff are invited to come as part of their work day so it helps with team building, community outreach, and it builds a culture of service within our office,” said Megan Wagner, Capstone International Center team coordinator.

Wagner said that last year the center had two teams of volunteers, but this year the center had five teams. She said about 40 volunteers from the center worked Friday.

In addition to the work at the animal shelter, the center’s volunteers installed smoke alarms for the American Red Cross, helped Easter Seals move into its new building and sorted donations at Temporary Emergency Services.

She said the Day of Action provides a great opportunity for UA’s international students.

“We also invite our international students to participate because volunteering is a part of American culture, and giving back is something that a lot of Americans value and benefit from,” Wagner said.

Julie Mann, communications director for the United Way of West Alabama, said that the Day of Action especially helps smaller nonprofit groups that don’t have the resources to conduct renovation and maintenance projects.

As for the Capstone International Center, Wagner said the Day of Action strengthened their resolve to get more involved in the community.

“Because of this event last year, we are going to plan more volunteer activities throughout the year because of the great turnout we had from the international students,” Wagner said.

Some of the groups that benefited from Friday’s Day of Action were Arts ‘N Autism, the American Red Cross, the Arts Council, Caring Days, Children’s Rehabilitation Services, the Community Soup Bowl, the Department of Human Resources, Eagles’ Wings, Easter Seals of West Alabama, Focus on Senior Citizens, the Good Samaritan Clinic, Holt Elementary School, Hospice of West Alabama, the Humane Society of West Alabama, the King’s Home, Meals on Wheels, Oakdale Elementary/the Druid City Garden Project, the Salvation Army, Success by 6, Temporary Emergency Services, the Arc of Tuscaloosa, Turning Point, Tuscaloosa’s One Place, United Cerebral Palsy, the West Alabama Food Bank and Wings of Grace.

Volunteer groups included West Alabama Bank, Wells Fargo, Adams Beverage, Bryant Bank, Bank of Tuscaloosa, Buffalo Rock, Capstone Bank, Randall-Reilly, Hunt Refining, Tuscaloosa Baha’i Communities, Alagasco, Eta Xi Omega chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, UA’s School of Social Work, Nucor Steel, Target the Young Leaders Society, Children’s Rehab Services, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, the Public Relations Council of Alabama and Southland Benefit Solutions.

For more photos of the United Way of West Alabama’s Day of Action, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com.

See ACTIONS, B2

*Members of Capstone International Center at the University of Alabama volunteer Friday at the Metro Animal Shelter during the United Way of West Alabama’s annual Day of Action. Isabella and Jack Berry, children of Capstone International employee Chad Berry, play with Ann, one of the shelter’s dogs.*
UA names first chief diversity officer

Ex-Purdue official to assume new role Aug. 1

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A former Purdue University official will be the first chief diversity officer at the University of Alabama.

The university announced G. Christine Taylor as the new vice president and associate provost for diversity, equity and inclusion on Tuesday. Taylor will start Aug. 1, pending approval by the University of Alabama Board of Trustees.

"This role is critical to supporting the university's strategic goal for an inclusive and diverse community," Provost Kevin Whittaker said in comments released by UA. "We believe Dr. Taylor will provide the leadership, vision and oversight necessary to enhance our already strong commitment to diversity, equity and inclusiveness."

Taylor will report to Whittaker and UA President Stuart R. Bell, who announced plans to add a diversity officer to the administration last year.

"I am excited and honored to come to the University of Alabama to serve as the inaugural vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion," Taylor said.

The new vice president will be tasked with establishing the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which will collaborate with and serve as a creative resource for diversity related initiatives and activities at UA. Responsibilities will also include development and coordination of a five-year strategic diversity plan.

Taylor previously served as a chief diversity officer at Purdue University and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from Middle Tennessee State University and her doctorate from Ohio University.

Taylor was selected from a field of four finalists brought to campus in March. The others included Wanda R. Head-Grant, vice president for human resources, diversity and multicultural affairs at the University of Vermont; Bryan K. Fair, the Thomas E. Skinner Professor of Law in the UA School of Law; and Shaker A. Abdullah, assistant vice president for equity and diversity at the University of Minnesota.
Former Crimson Tide football walk-on now serving in the Army as a combat medic

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

From the lush green field inside Bryant-Denny Stadium to the dusty, barren landscape of Iraq.

For Hunter Bush, former walk-on defensive back at the University of Alabama from 2009-13, that was the transition.

Bush was a part of three national championship teams during his years at Alabama. It's not glamorous, the life of a walk-on player, but Bush always sought to be a part of something bigger than himself. Those championship rings are forever mementos of that sacrifice.

Now the Wetumpka native is still part of a team, still giving of himself for the benefit of something greater. Only this time it's as a sergeant in the U.S. Army in service of his country while stationed in Mosul, Iraq.

"It's honestly one of the best things I can possibly think of..."
that I could be doing with my life,” Bush said. “I get to be a part of a team that’s actually making a difference for everything. That’s the greatest part about it.”

He enlisted in September 2013, shortly after graduating from UA. His interest throughout his time in Tuscaloosa was always in medicine. He shadowed doctors, watched them work, and knew that’s what he wanted to do.

Serving as a combat medic, Bush now assists in the evacuation of wounded soldiers.

“I’ll load up the patients, make sure they’re ready to go and get them transported back to the bird (helicopter) to get them flown back to wherever our medical facilities are,” he said.

So far’s he’s been stationed in Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Italy and Iraq. A simple mention of Iraq is enough to fill the mind with images of war and conflict. For Bush, who has been in the country since January, it’s a rush.

“It’s kind of the scariest, most exciting moment of your life,” Bush said. “It’s kind of an adrenaline rush most of the time. You get to be around people that you care about and you spend your day to day around them and they become a support system for you. Even when things get rough they’re there to watch out for you.

(It’s) stressful, but considering the people I’m here with and how good they are at their jobs, it’s really not been that bad honestly. (It’s) a lot of highly-skilled people who know what they’re doing and they generally take care of us the best they can. They do a great job at it.”

Bush recently re-enlisted in the Army for an additional six years. He hopes to attend the military’s medical school and eventually practice cardiology.

Football is a game, but Bush’s five years in the Alabama football program did help prepare him for the highly-regimented life of a soldier.

“It did. Exponentially actually,” he said. “I got used to being on a schedule. I got used to getting up early, being expected to act like an adult and do the things I was supposed to do without people asking me to do it. It definitely prepared me for it.”

The stories from his gridiron days are popular fodder when he’s sitting around talking with his fellow soldiers.

“People talk to me about football all the time, and it was a big deal, especially back in Alabama to say I played football there,” Bush said. “For me, though, being in service to people is more important. I loved every minute of it, being at Alabama, but I’m fulfilling something bigger and being a part of something greater than myself now.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
The evolution of the AD

Changes in college athletics open doors for athletic directors

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The evolution of the athletic director is on display for Greg Byrne every day as he walks to his office. The walls on his way to the office include displays detailing the careers of the University of Alabama ADs before him. The early days, just over 100 years ago, include men like J.W.H. Pollard and D.V. Graves, who coached football and other sports at UA while also serving as directors of athletics. Football came to dominate athletic departments later, and coaches like Wallace Wade, Hank Crisp and Paul W. "Bear" Bryant all worked as athletic directors as well.

More recently, UA's director of athletics has taken a combination of administrative and coaching experience. Bob Bockrath's career started as an assistant football coach at Arizona and Purdue. There were five years after Mal Moore's coaching career ended where he worked for the athletic administration before becoming director of athletics. Bill Battle, another former football coach, had

See AD, C3

See next page
Foley's career began at about the same time college athletics began to shift from a Pangea-like state to its current orientation. Kentucky athletics director Mitch Barnhart, one of Byrne's mentors, began his career in the early '80s. He said there were five major forces in the late '70s and early '80s that set college sports on a course to today.

Nike was created in 1971. It took off before going public in 1980, changing sports marketing and equipment deals. Title IX was passed by Congress in 1972, guaranteeing equal opportunity for women's sports. Multimedia rights to broadcast games on radio and television became more important in that decade. ESPN went on the air in 1979, changing the appetite for college sports and how it was marketed. The Collegiate Licensing Company, founded by future Alabama AD Bill Battle, was created in 1981.

"Those five things sort of all hit at the same time in the late '70s," Barnhart said. "When it hit, it brought forward a whole new group of people that said, 'OK, now we're going to figure out how to move the enterprise of college athletics.' It was a huge time. I think it really put a lot of interest from a lot of different sectors of people."

The money grew bigger and bigger. Stadiums expanded. TV deals and equipment contracts came in. Athletic departments were no longer just a handful of sports, but included dozens of programs and hundreds of athletes.

"When I first started, the budget I think was $7 million bucks," Foley said. "Forty years later it's $100 million—plus. That all changed, which required people to have maybe a different skill set than before."

That brought in people with experience in finance, fundraising, contracts and more. The biggest change may have been in marketing.

"Coaches had experience marketing their teams, but not departments as a whole. Professional teams like the Dallas Cowboys or New York Yankees started to expand on the fan experience at games, upgrading facilities. They looked beyond simply selling tickets, and colleges began to follow their lead."

"As time went on, I think people began to see that there were pieces of this thing that needed to be tied together a little more succinctly than a retired coach could do," Barnhart said.

Even if those people weren't prepared to be athletics directors at the time, they grew into the job as years went by. The position wasn't just for former football coaches anymore. The current SEC athletics directors are a testament to that. Tennessee's John Currie and Byrne started their careers in fundraising, Foley's successor at Florida, Scott Stricklin, began in sports information and media relations. Vanderbilt's David Williams taught at law school earlier in his career. Some began in coaching, like Arkansas' Jeff Long and Auburn's Jay Jacobs, but switched to administration early.

Only two current SEC athletics directors moved into their positions after being head coaches. South Carolina's Ray Tanner and Mississippi State's John Cohen were both baseball coaches before taking the jobs.

"I think the sport of baseball itself really lends itself to understanding a little bit more of the inner workings of an athletic department," Cohen said. "When you're a young baseball coach, you are a marketer. You're marketing your program. When you're a young baseball coach, you work on your own facility. Something is broken? You have to fix it. You have to mow your field. In some respects when you're really young, you have to work on your own compliance issues, depending on where you are."

"That's become possible in the years since then. It's no longer required that athletics directors have a lot of the knowledge that the business is about coaches and student-athletes," Foley said. "Nobody has a better perspective on that than Ray and John in my opinion."

That brings us to today. The era of football coaches retiring and automatically moving into the athletic director's office—or doing both at once—has likely seen its extinction event. The career path for most college athletics directors has changed.

Byrne always wanted to be an athletics director. That may not have been in Foley's mind in 1976, but Byrne thought about it when his fourth-grade teacher had his class write about what they wanted to do when they grew up.

"I wrote about being an athletics director," he said.

"That's become possible in the years since then. It's no longer required that athletics directors have to work their way up the coaching ladder and into the position."

The position of athletics director has come into its own. Departments boast budgets into nine figures and hundreds of employees. College athletics has evolved too. The men and women leading college athletics departments have evolved too.

"It's just that the world changed," Foley said. "The world changed and the job became so big, you couldn't do justice to both jobs now. There's only so many hours in the day. The way recruiting has changed and the expectations of coaches with media obligations, talk shows, on and on and on. Plus the advent of 21, 22, 23, 24-sport programs, there's no way you could do justice to both jobs. It'd be almost impossible."

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0166.
Jackson expected to join UA baseball staff

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama baseball program is expected to name Florida Atlantic pitching coach Jason Jackson to its staff, The Tuscaloosa News has learned.

FAU head coach John McCormack tweeted on Tuesday that Jackson had accepted a position with UA.

"Today I received bittersweet news that Coach Jackson has accepted a position at the Univ. of Alabama," McCormack wrote in a note with the tweet. "I am so happy for him and his family. Jason thank you for taking a chance on me as a rookie head coach 9 years ago. We were able to accomplish some great things; 4 conference championships; 4 regionals berths, numerous draft picks. You will always be part of my family. Go tear it up at Bama."

UA has not formally announced the hire.

Jackson has been on staff with the Owls since the 2009 season. They made the NCAA tournament four times, including in 2015 and 2016. FAU finished first or tied for first in the conference three times and won the Sun Belt tournament in 2013. The Owls advanced to the semifinals of the Conference USA tournament this season and just missed another NCAA tournament appearance.

FAU finished second in Conference USA with a 4.43 ERA in 2017. Opponents hit
Jackson

Continued from C1

.262 against the Owls, tied for best in the conference. His staff led the conference and ranked 14th nationally with a 3.24 ERA in 2016. The Owls also led the conference in walks, runs and doubles. They ranked 15th nationally with a 1.21 WHIP. Jackson was promoted to associate head coach at FAU after the 2016 season.

FAU had 14 pitchers chosen in the MLB draft across Jackson’s first eight seasons, including three each after the 2015 and 2016 seasons.

Before coaching at FAU, Jackson spent the 2007 and 2008 seasons at the University of South Alabama. He was an assistant coach at Mercer from 2003-06 and was named recruiting coordinator there in his final season. Prior to that, he coached at North Florida Community College.

Jackson, a Tallahassee native, graduated from Florida State University with a degree in physical education and earned his master’s from FSU in sports administration.

Jackson would be Alabama’s second and final full-time assistant coach. UA announced the hiring of Jerry Zulit from Louisiana Tech as an assistant coach on Friday. That leaves an opening for a volunteer assistant to complete UA’s on-field coaching staff.

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
Business incubator to have new home

Ground is broken on new $11 million facility

Staff report

Tuscaloosa business, government and community leaders gathered Monday to break ground on a new home for The Edge, the city’s business incubator.

The Edge helps start-ups and existing businesses in developing business skills and fine-tuning day-to-day operations. Now housed in space donated by Regions Bank in downtown Tuscaloosa, The Edge has outgrown its facility on the way mentoring more than 300 businesses and serving as a work space for more than 75 emerging companies.

The entrepreneurial hub’s new home will be at 2627 10th Ave., the site of the former Armed Forces Reserve Center armory.

“The home of the new Edge is on property that was ground zero of the devastating tornado a little over six years ago,” said Jim Page, president and CEO, Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. “This project is yet another example of Tuscaloosa building back stronger, safer and smarter.”

The new 26,300-square-foot facility will cost more than $11 million. The Edge will have 25 offices, 100 workstations, training rooms and a working lounge.

See NEW, B5
The Tuscaloosa News
Tuesday, June 13, 2017

Continued from B1

The Edge is a partnership between the University of Alabama, the city of Tuscaloosa and the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

"This project is collaboration at its finest," Page said. "Many of us have long talked about the importance of diversifying our economic base in order to not only attract new residents, but also retain a larger percentage of college graduates. This new Edge facility will play a critical role in creating the entrepreneurial ecosystem that will do just that."

University of Alabama President Stuart Bell said that UA is grateful for the opportunity to form a partnership with Tuscaloosa, expand the school's economic outreach and improve the quality of life for West Alabamians.

"As the city's largest employer, we recognize the significant impression we have on Tuscaloosa, and this comes with great responsibility," Bell said. "It's part of our vision and mission at the Capstone to continue investing in our city and potential businesses, and helping to mature young and small businesses across the city, and through that, leading our city to a more prosperous future. The Edge center is a unique and strategic resource for businesses in our area. The university, through the Culverhouse College of Commerce, is proud to partner with the city and the Chamber in this endeavor, and we at the university are committed to its success."
A crowning achievement

Tuscaloosa native earns title of Miss Alabama

Jessica Procter, Miss Leeds Area, is crowned Miss Alabama 2017, by Hayley Barber, Miss Alabama 2016, at the Miss Alabama Pageant finale in Birmingham, Ala., held at Samford University’s Wright Center on Saturday. [TAMIKA MOORE/AL.COM VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

Though a much-sought tiara, the actual Miss Alabama crown doesn’t weigh uneasily on the head of Jessica Procter.

“You can almost forget it’s there,” said the Tuscaloosa native just days into her reign, having won the title Saturday night in Birmingham. The 21-year-old University of Alabama student bonked it on things a few times, which didn’t feel great. “But you’ve got so much hairspray on, it doesn’t move.”

The pageant, a preliminary for Miss America, isn’t about the jewelry, or glory, she said, but about the friendships, scholarships and skills acquired. The third time was the charm for Procter, who’d

See PROCTER, A3
PROCTER
Continued From A1
entered Miss Alabama previously as Miss Tuscaloosa and Miss Centerpoint, winning this year as Miss Lees Area. Women 17 to 24 can compete in any city or region where the pageant isn’t closed, such as Miss University of Alabama, which is open only to students.

The journey Procter began as a 17-year-old, doing quick catch-up on the pageant world for the potential college benefits, would be immensely valuable without the title.

“I’ve learned and grown so much,” she said. “I feel like I’ve grown in the last 48 hours,” forcing her best food forward even when it might be tired of wear­ ing heels. “Every year, there’s no way to lose Miss Alabama. There’s only winning the crown, and learning so much.

“It is so much more than the pretty faces and pretty dresses, for sure.”

A procession of pageants

At 17, Procter heard about the Miss America’s Outstanding Teen Pageant, a little sister to Miss America, for girls 1 to 17. Not only did the scholarship money look good, but a title couldn’t hurt college applications, she thought. The application process overwhelmed her, at first.

“Initially, when I signed up, I couldn’t even have told you the current Miss Alabama or Miss America,” she said. The application process overwhelmed her, at first.

“No, she doesn’t rest, she worked hard for some­ thing you could wish for the top 12 succeed. There’s too much to see.

“We’re really not com­ peting against each other,” she said. “We’re all working hard for some­ thing. We’re all working hard for our dreams.” But after a third try, this

Next stop, Miss America

For the next year, she’ll rep­ resent her generation of Alabama women. In Sep­ tember, she’ll compete in Miss America. After that, there’s too much to see.

“I can’t really perceive (long-range) because I’m too busy. We’re really not com­ peting against each other,” she said. “We’re all working hard for some­ thing. We’re all working hard for our dreams.” But after a third try, this

PROCTER
Continued From A1
entered Miss Alabama previously as Miss Tuscaloosa and Miss Centerpoint, winning this year as Miss Lees Area. Women 17 to 24 can compete in any city or region where the pageant isn’t closed, such as Miss University of Alabama, which is open only to students.

The journey Procter began as a 17-year-old, doing quick catch-up on the pageant world for the potential college benefits, would be immensely valuable without the title.

“I’ve learned and grown so much,” she said. “I feel like I’ve grown in the last 48 hours,” forcing her best food forward even when it might be tired of wear­ ing heels. “Every year, there’s no way to lose Miss Alabama. There’s only winning the crown, and learning so much.

“It is so much more than the pretty faces and pretty dresses, for sure.”

A procession of pageants

At 17, Procter heard about the Miss America’s Outstanding Teen Pageant, a little sister to Miss America, for girls 1 to 17. Not only did the scholar­ ship money look good, but a title couldn’t hurt college applications, she thought. The application process overwhelmed her, at first.

“Initially, when I signed up, I couldn’t even have told you the current Miss Alabama or Miss America,” she said. The application process overwhelmed her, at first.

“No, she doesn’t rest, she worked hard for some­ thing you could wish for the top 12 succeed. There’s too much to see.

“We’re really not com­ peting against each other,” she said. “We’re all working hard for some­ thing. We’re all working hard for our dreams.” But after a third try, this

Next stop, Miss America

For the next year, she’ll rep­ resent her generation of Alabama women. In Sep­ tember, she’ll compete in Miss America. After that, there’s too much to see.

“I can’t really perceive (long-range) because I’m too busy. We’re really not com­ peting against each other,” she said. “We’re all working hard for some­ thing. We’re all working hard for our dreams.” But after a third try, this
The day the doors opened

UA was desegregated
54 years ago

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

The day began with a tense confrontation between Alabama’s governor, federal officials and the National Guard on the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa. The day ended with Alabama taking a major step toward desegregating schools.

The day was June 11, 1963. Gov. George C. Wallace attempted to block the enrollment of two black students at UA that day, which has come to be known as “The Stand in the Schoolhouse Door.”

Here’s a look at the key players of 54 years ago:

**The students:** James Hood of Gadsden and Vivian Malone of Mobile, two black students, registered for classes that day after Wallace stepped aside from the doors at Foster Auditorium. Malone graduated in 1965 with a degree in personnel management. She died in 2005. Hood withdrew from UA after a few months, but he returned to earn a doctoral degree in 1997. After Wallace renounced his segregationist past, Hood became friends with Wallace. Hood died in 2013.

**The deputy attorney general:** Nicholas Katzenbach told Wallace to step aside and allow Hood and Malone to register. When Wallace refused, Katzenbach communicated with President John F. Kennedy, who federalized the National Guard, giving them authority to remove the governor by force, if necessary. Katzenbach continued working for the federal government through 1969, leaving to become general counsel for IBM. He died in 2012.

**The general:** National Guard Gen. Henry Graham saluted Wallace and then told him it was his “sad duty” to ask him to step aside, which Wallace did after giving a short speech. Graham also played a role protecting the Freedom Riders in Montgomery in 1961 and Selma marchers in 1965 after the “Bloody Sunday” confrontation. He retired from the National Guard as a major general in 1976. He died in 1999.

**The governor:** Wallace went on to serve four terms as governor and ran for president three times. He survived an assassination attempt in 1972, but was paralyzed and used a wheelchair until his death in 1998. In winning his final campaign as governor in 1982, Wallace apologized for his segregationist past and earned a substantial
portion of the black vote.

The school: UA today has a black enrollment of 12 percent and a minority enrollment of around 18 percent. In 2010, UA dedicated the Malone Hood Plaza outside Foster Auditorium to honor the students who desegregated the university.

Quote: “I was wrong. Those days are over, and they ought to be over.” — George C. Wallace in 1979
UA team’s flexible invention may help military meet energy goals

Andrew Hanebuth, 20, a student at the University of Alabama and CEO of the start-up company NextPrinted Solar, explains the basics of the project and the research used to develop efficient and flexible solar panels in a lab at the North Engineering Research Science Complex in Tuscaloosa on Wednesday, June 7, 2017. [PHOTO/MARIE WALKER]

"The team's flexible solar cells solve the problem of durability and makes harvesting solar energy more efficient."

—Dawen Li

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A start-up technology company run by University of Alabama students and an associate professor is developing a thin, flexible solar cell with the goal of helping the military meet goals for renewable energy.

The team pitched their solar cell technology and business plan on Friday to a panel of investors, entrepreneurs and other experts as part of MegaWatt Ventures, an annual business competition funded by the U.S. Department of Energy as part of the Cleantech University Prize. University student teams competed for a $50,000 prize to launch and grow their technology into a successful business.

While the team was not selected among the top finalists, it was a great experience, said Andrew Hanebuth, a junior chemical engineering major from Madison, Mississippi, and CEO of NextPrinted Solar.

"I am happy with our performance," Hanebuth said.

The UA team was among 10 teams that participated in the start-up competition. The team won the Crimson Innovation start-up contest in April as part of UA’s AIME Day, an annual showcase of technologies and business plan competitions.

The solar cell the team is working on is a flexible alternative to rigid solar arrays that is more durable and efficient in harvesting solar energy than other existing flexible cells.

"It is literally as flexible as a plastic bag," Hanebuth said.

NextPrinted Solar includes Hanebuth and Zhongliang See SOLAR CELL, B6

See next page
“Ben” Ouyang, a graduate student in electrical engineering from Wuhan, China. They are using technology being developed in the lab of Dawen Li, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering.

Li’s lab is developing a type of thin, flexible solar cell made of mix of organic material and perovskite that can be printed onto a base material, or substrate, which is also more stable in real-world environments. The lightweight cells should be able to harvest about 15 percent of the sun’s energy, better than many existing thin-film solar cells, Hanebuth said.

“The big problem is stability,” Li said.

Chemically, it is easy for some existing perovskite cells to degrade in the air, Hanebuth said.

Their product is a new mix of chemicals that is cheaper, more stable and longer lasting in real work settings, Hanebuth said. It can also be quickly mass produced using roll-to-roll printing, similar to the process for printing newspapers.

The team’s flexible solar cells solve the problem of durability and makes harvesting solar energy more efficient, Li said.

The current samples are made in Li’s lab using a spin coating process but the team hopes to secure money and move on to develop prototyping with roll-to-roll printing.

The company has its eyes on possible contracts resulting from a Department of Defense mandate to get 25 percent of its energy needs for the Army from renewable sources by 2025, Hanebuth said. The department also has an overall goal of getting 20 percent of its energy needs from renewables for all operations by 2020.

“That is a lot of energy,” Hanebuth said.

The team’s vision is arrays of the flexible solar cells that could be put atop tents to supply energy at forward operating bases as an alternative to fuel-powered generators, Li said. The tarp-like arrays could be easily stored and moved and would not require the additional space necessary for rigid solar arrays, Li said. The arrays would also help reduce demand for fuel at the bases.

Hanebuth pointed to the potential vulnerability of fuel convoys to forward operating bases and the risk of casualties.

“Hopefully, we will be able to get those casualties down,” he said.

The hope is to tailor for the military applications in the short term but potentially open up for other customers in the future.
7th grader representing Alabama in national chemistry challenge

By: Shelly Haskins

Who remembers as a child mixing up baking soda and vinegar to make a bubbly concoction that looked like something a real scientist might come up with?

Most of us probably just succeeded in making a mess, and having some fun, but Minh Phan of Madison has taken that childhood curiosity all the way to a national chemistry competition.

The seventh grader from Liberty Middle School recently won a statewide chemistry competition for fifth through eighth graders, sponsored by BASF and hosted by the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

As the state champion, Minh will be in Washington, D.C., Monday representing Alabama against other state champions in the Chemical Education Foundation's 2017 You Be the Chemist National Challenge. The top four finalists at the national challenge will receive scholarships totaling $18,500.

If you have images of lab coats and beakers and 12-year-olds potentially blowing something up, this challenge is more cerebral. Like in the state competition at UAH, competitors will answer questions about chemistry, though they do some hands-on experiments just for fun.

So how does a seventh-grader become a chemistry whiz? By having a love of learning.

"Since I was a little kid, I loved to learn about my surroundings," said Minh. "I discovered my talent for chemistry by trying to explore scientific facts and was just reading about them. Then I keep learning more and more every day."

As a seventh grader, Minh is a member of the Science Club and did some chemistry in after-school activities, but the science curriculum last year was mainly biology, he said.

"I did more chemistry studying on my own at home with my Dad," Thuan Phan, who owns his own business. His mother, Oanh Tran-Phan, a quality assurance/quality control laboratory technician at Bunge North America in Decatur, knows her way around a lab as well.

At the national competition, Minh will go against the best and brightest young chemists in the country.

By sponsoring and hosting the state competition, BASF and UAH are doing their part to stimulate interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, or STEM, studies that are so important to our economy and future.

"As the world's leading chemical company, BASF understands the importance of engaging students in science education at an early age," said Prashanth Rao, BASF Site Director in Huntsville. "We are proud to support this chemistry challenge because it provides the opportunity for young learners to delve into a particular topic, to test their knowledge of chemistry concepts and real-world applications."
Minh obviously loves to test his mind. "My hobbies are math, biochemistry, solving puzzles and making origami," he said, in addition to teaching his younger sister to play chess.

But he also exercises his body playing soccer and basketball.

He's still got a while to determine his career field, but right now Minh sees himself as an emergency room doctor one day.

"Though I very much like chemistry, I feel more suited in the medical field," he said.
Northrop Grumman teams with UAH on student drone project

By: Dawn Azok

From military ops to package delivery, drones are popping up everywhere, and Alabama college students are at the forefront of developing even more ways to control, use and defend against them.

At the University of Alabama in Huntsville, a senior design class tackled a project for defense contractor Northrop Grumman Corp., which asked the students how they would take out an enemy drone without shooting it down. In other words, a cyber takedown.

This year’s project followed a similar one last year, in which the company wanted ideas on how to physically capture a drone. The team’s work included interactions with various engineering disciplines, presentations in front of company officials and live demonstrations of their proposed strategies.

There are several reasons behind Northrop Grumman’s collaboration with UAH, said Mark Thornton, a program manager for the firm.

“We wanted to establish a relationship with the university, because it’s a big part of the community here in Huntsville,” he said. “A lot of UAH engineering students come to work at Northrop Grumman, and we wanted to give back to the university on one level, be involved on another level and get to see students and know them ahead of graduating.”

Targeting Drones

“A lot of times, there’s a misperception that universities are focused on basic research or on solutions that are years away.”

From a technology standpoint, Thornton said, UAH’s engineering activities are interesting to the company. In this project, students aimed to exploit programming vulnerabilities built into various drone types to disable them. “We wanted to challenge the students to come up with innovative approaches, something different than physically capturing or shooting down the drones,” he said.

This type of electronic capture is important to the military because of the potential risk to nearby populations if drones are shot down.

“If you can jam it, confuse it electronically or disrupt the signals from the ground, a lot of these devices have the mode that if they are confused, they gently land somewhere,” Thornton said.

Challenging Students

“We would like more talent, and it’s a lot easier to recruit from the local base than it is to recruit nationally.”

Dr. Phillip Farrington, professor of industrial and systems engineering at UAH, said the Northrop class project is similar to the type of work these students will soon face in the real world.

See next page
“Senior design is an opportunity for students to transition from student engineer to working engineer,” he said. “This gives them a chance to learn more about Northrop and to do a very realistic project similar to what Northrop is doing now.”

In his classes, Farrington said he’s always tried to focus on application-oriented research.

“A lot of times, there’s a misperception that universities are focused on basic research or on solutions that are years away,” he said. “And while we do that, there’s also a lot of focus on how you take that research and solve problems that need to be solved today.”

Thornton said that’s one of the benefits of Northrop Grumman’s participation in the project: Seeing the latest technologies, techniques and disciplines that are being taught in today’s university classrooms.

Another benefit is strengthening the pipeline of talent into the company’s job rolls.

“This is absolutely critical for us because we have needs all the time, holes on every program in town. We would like more talent, and it’s a lot easier to recruit from the local base than it is to recruit nationally,” he said.

Thornton, himself a UAH engineering graduate, said it’s been gratifying to be back in the setting that provided a solid foundation for his own career.

“The best thing that ever happened to me at UAH was to be involved in the senior design program,” he said. “We had to work as a team and compete against others, and that was a great microcosm for what we were going to see later.”

Northrop Grumman employs around 1,200 people in Alabama, and its base in Huntsville positions it to serve customers such as NASA, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, and the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Agency.
Cool Spaces - UAH Student Services Building

By: Lou Gathany

The University of Alabama in Huntsville continues to experience record growth in enrollment. When prospective students and their families visit UAH, they begin at The Welcome Center located on the first floor of the new Student Services Building on Sparkman Drive.

While meeting with Frank Nola and his team at Nola/Van Peursem Architects, university president Dr. Altenkirch gave a directive to create a physical space from which a student could stand and visually see all of the key departments with whom they would need to interact: Registration, Bursar, Financial Aid, Admissions, Enrollment. By staggering office fronts in an angled fashion in the atrium this aim has been met.

This same spot is also a beautiful vantage point of glass walls looking out to the landscaped courtyard/central plaza and walkway. The interior walls are also covered with oversized murals and photographs depicting every aspect of the college experience. Long, linear LED box lights inset into the ceilings almost seem unnecessary with the flood of natural light created by the use of extensive glass.

Indeed, if the aim is to warmly welcome prospective students and their families that begins with the dramatic cantilevered overhang that provides a very modern version of a Southern front porch at the building entrance. This is a sheltering space that allows a car or bus to deliver visitors who will be protected from the elements.

The 1st floor space also encompasses a separate conference space useful for orientation sessions or catered events for university purposes as well as the welcoming theater. Every detail of these spaces integrates the UAH color scheme of charger blue into the walls, carpet and furnishings.

The "front porch" gravity-defying cantilever contains a 2nd floor conference center looking out to Research Park and the Space and Rocket Center. Floors 2 and 3 are devoted to uniting the university administration, executive team and trustees.

This building was designed to reflect the modern, progressive research university environment at UAH. It is modern yet warm, friendly and welcoming. It is a cool space.
UAH campus grows as the student population continues to climb

By: Sarah Macaluso

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. - The University of Alabama at Huntsville is growing and doing so quickly. In 2016, UAH had its largest population ever at 8,500 students.

With the growth, there's a big push to get more students to live on campus.

"We are experiencing not only just growth in terms of freshman, but transfer students as well," said UAH Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Peggy Masters.

The University has a goal of getting to 10,000 students by 2020.

Masters says one example of the campus growing to meet student needs is a new residence hall.

"It's going to add at least 400 additional beds on campus, which we really need," said Masters.

Masters says a perfect example of growth, that is completed, is the student services building.

"This building is just a year old and really was built for the students in mind," said Masters. "It's a front door so students can access all the offices that they need to. Instead of having to go around to multiple different places, they can come to the student services building."

Much of the time spent on student recruitment takes place out of the state, but Masters says UAH still targets in-state students to add to its growing population.
Tying the knot and loose ends with offseason questions

A conversation to catch up with UAB's Robert Ehsan

Drew Champlin dchamplin@al.com

UAB head men's basketball coach Robert Ehsan is no stranger to speaking in front of a large crowd.

On June 3, he did that again but in a different role: ordained minister.

The second-year head coach, entering his sixth with the Blazer program, performed the wedding ceremony for assistant coach Kevin Devitt and his wife Alex in Chicago.

Ehsan attained an online certification and performed the ceremony for one of his best friends two years ago in California.

"Obviously, the whole coaching staff knew that," Ehsan said. "Kevin and Alex wanted to do something different and something personal, so he asked me to do it. It's a great experience. It's a special day, obviously, for them. It's a unique experience to be able to stand up there."

Devitt joined the UAB staff under Jerod Haase in late 2012. He was an assistant at Wright State during the 2015-16 season and hired by Ehsan after he was promoted to the head coaching spot in April 2016.

Ehsan relished the fact this was the same location where movie star Vince Vaughn got married. The 25-minute ceremony went off without a hitch.

"After you’ve done it before, it wasn’t as nerve-wracking," Ehsan said. "Kevin and Alex wanted to do something different and something personal, so he asked me to do it. It’s a great experience. It’s a special day, obviously, for them. It’s a unique experience to be able to stand up there. It was awesome, a beautiful wedding."

Devitt joined the UAB staff under Jerod Haase in late 2012. He was an assistant at Wright State during the 2015-16 season and hired by Ehsan after he was promoted to the head coaching spot in April 2016.

Ehsan relished the fact this was the same location where movie star Vince Vaughn got married. The 25-minute ceremony went off without a hitch.

"After you’ve done it before, it wasn’t as nerve-wracking," Ehsan said. "Kevin and Alex wanted to do something different and something personal, so he asked me to do it. It’s a great experience. It’s a special day, obviously, for them. It’s a unique experience to be able to stand up there. It was awesome, a beautiful wedding."

After you’ve done it before, it wasn’t very nerve-wracking," Ehsan said. "Kevin and Alex wanted to do something different and something personal, so he asked me to do it. It’s a great experience. It’s a special day, obviously, for them. It’s a unique experience to be able to stand up there. It was awesome, a beautiful wedding."

Kevin and Alex wanted to do something different and something personal, so he asked me to do it. It’s a great experience. It’s a special day, obviously, for them. It’s a unique experience to be able to stand up there. It was awesome, a beautiful wedding." — UAB coach Robert Ehsan, on performing a wedding for one of his assistant coaches
Ready for the return

Bill Clark glad ‘people didn’t give up’ during shutdown

By Cody Estremera
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

BIRMINGHAM — When Bill Clark took over the UAB football program, the team was struggling. It finished with a 2-10 overall record and went 1-7 in the conference the year before he arrived. Clark left Jacksonville State and became head coach at UAB on Jan. 21, 2014. He started the program’s transformation, leading the Blazers to a 6-6 record in his first season; UAB was bowl-eligible for the first time since 2004. That year he also had the second biggest increase in attendance in the country behind Texas A&M.

However, shortly after the team played its final game of the season, a win over Southern Miss, the school announced that it was shutting down the football program.

“Obviously, there were tough times, but when you know that you are needed, and when we saw there was a chance that it would come back, that’s of course what I wanted to do,” Clark said Sunday at the Alabama Sports Writers Association’s annual conference.

Just six months after announcing the program’s termination, UAB announced that football was coming back. The Blazers will take the field this fall for the first time since the shutdown.

“We were poised to be good that year (2015),” Clark said. “The belief and excitement in that group that was coming back, they were believers. As a coach, that is a big deal, when your team believes in what you’re telling them.”

The program will return much better off than before the shutdown. The football program raised more than $40 million for new facilities and equipment.

“I would say the best thing (about the team returning) is the people that didn’t give up on our city, school and our program,” Clark said.

See CLARK, C5

CLARK

Continued from C1

As of Sunday, two practice fields with artificial turf have been completed, one of which has a roof for protection from weather. The new facilities also include a two-story state-of-the-art weight room, coaching offices, team meeting rooms, locker and training rooms. There will also be a recreational basketball court for the players. The new football building will open in July in time for the start of fall practice.

Clark believes UAB has the best facility in Conference USA.

“You want (players) to go to the rec center, but they are always so busy,” Clark said. “You want them to have a place they can just hang out and have a place to call their own.”

One of Clark’s favorite rooms is the multipurpose room. There players will meet and have a chance to eat as a team. The wide receivers will also have their position meetings there.

The most important detail that Clark added to the coach’s offices is a deck that overlooks the practice fields.

Twenty players made their return to the field when UAB plays its first game against Alabama A&M on Sept. 2. Those players were freshman or were injured when the program was shut down, but they have become leaders in their senior seasons.

“We expected leadership out of those guys, because they knew what we wanted,” Clark said. “Those guys helped recruit as much as the coaches did.”
Alabama golfers get stellar showings

Staff report

Former and current members of the Alabama men’s golf program had reason to celebrate over the weekend. Current golfer Jonathan Hardee and former standout Robby Shelton won tournaments, while former greats Justin Thomas and Trey Mullinax recorded top-10 finishes at the 117th U.S. Open.

Hardee was the first to claim a victory as he captured the 88th Southeastern Amateur championship at the Country Club of Columbus in Columbus, Ga., on Saturday afternoon. Hardee finished with a final round total of 5-under par 65 to close the event with a four-day score of 18-under par 262 (65-66-66-65).

Former Crimson Tide standout Justin Thomas made U.S. Open history on Saturday when he carded a round of 9-under 63 – the lowest round vs. par in the tournament’s 117-year history. He matched the record set by Johnny Miller, who shot a round of 63 during the 1973 U.S. Open. Thomas entered Sunday’s final round just one stroke back of the overall lead, but carded a 3-over par 75 during his final round to end the event tied for ninth overall with a 72-hole total of 8-under par 280 (73-69-63-75).

Trey Mullinax matched Thomas, his former teammate at Alabama, with a ninth-place showing at the U.S. Open. Mullinax, who teamed up with Thomas on the Tide’s 2013 NCAA national championship team, ended with a score of 8-under par 280 (71-72-69-68).

Another former Alabama great, Robby Shelton, led wire-to-wire as he captured the title at the GolfBC Championship – his first career professional win – on the Mackenzie Tour (Canadian PGA). Shelton, who is in his first year as a professional, finished with at 19-under par 265 (63-68-65-69) to claim a one-stroke victory.
Alabama golf expects to rebound in 2018

Crimson Tide returns five members with the addition of the No. 1 signing class

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

One doesn’t need look far this week to gauge the success of the University of Alabama golf program. Four former Crimson Tide players are currently teeing it up at the U.S. Open, including Bud Cauley, Dru Love, Trey Mullinax and Justin Thomas.

However, it was an up-and-down roller coaster kind of year for UA head men’s golf coach Jay Seawell. All told, though, the team rounded into shape down the stretch as the Crimson Tide qualified for the NCAA national championships. It was the ninth such trip in 11 seasons under Seawell.

The team struggled to find consistency due to not having its full lineup for much of the season.

“It was probably the craziest year I’ve ever had as a coach,” Seawell said. “Most adversity from injuries to all the things that went with it. But it’s probably the proudest I’ve been as a coach also because of all that.”

See GOLF, C4

GOLF

Continued from C1

The team didn’t have its full lineup until March. Even so, the team rallied to finish on an upward trend.

The good news? All five members that participated in the NCAA championships are back. More good news? The addition of the No. 1 ranked freshman class in the country by some analysts.

Ben Fuller, Wilson Furr and Davis Shore instantly give the Crimson Tide intrasquad competition.

“It’ll be the first time we don’t have anybody leave early in a long time,” Seawell said. “So we’ll have a little bit of stability on our team.

“I think the biggest thing we want to do is get back to a little more competition. I think we’re going to have a roster that can do that, really challenge guys to get better. We have a lot of talent on our team. We have the talent, in my opinion, to be an elite top two or three team.

“I think we need to challenge the guys that have been here and the new guys need to come in and be challenged by the guys that are here and to see how much each one can take there game. That’s the biggest thing I’m looking forward to is getting back to true head-up competition.”

The freshman class includes Shore, who ranks as the No. 3 prospect in the country, per golfweek.com, and Furr, No. 6 in the nation. Fuller is also regarded as one of the top junior golfers in the country.

They’ll join a tested group that includes Jonathan Hardee, who finished tied for 19th individually at the NCAA Championships.

“We should have a very competitive team,” Seawell said. “We’ve had a lot of guys come in here as five stars that have a great ego, a great expectation. The better competition you put them under the better kids get."

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229
Father-son outing

Former Tide golfer Dru Love has his famous dad on bag

Doug Ferguson  Associated Press

ERIN, WIS. — Davis Love III is making his 24th appearance in the U.S. Open, with one big difference.

He'll only have clubs in his hand to clean them, not hit any shots. And for the first time, he'll be wearing shorts at a major championship.

Love is caddying for his son.

Davis Love IV, who just finished at Alabama and turned pro, qualified for his first U.S. Open as an alternate from the Georgia sectional qualifier.

"I'm excited for him," Love said Sunday afternoon as he watched from some 300 yards away as his son, who goes by "Dru," teed off during a practice round with Ryder Cup captain Jim Furyk. "I've played with a bunch of 19- and 20-year-olds. But it makes me feel old that he's playing."

Dru Love won't officially be in the U.S. Open field until the world ranking is published. The USGA held back six spots for anyone who moved into the top 60 in the world ranking after this week. Chris Wood of England finished right at No. 60, meaning the other five spots are distributed to alternates. The Georgia section, where Love was first alternate, was No. 5 on the list.

The son will have plenty of experience on the bag.

Love won the PGA Championship in 1997 at Winged Foot when Dru was only 3. He also is a two-time Ryder Cup captain who will be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame this fall. Love played his first U.S. Open at age 24 in 1988, and he was a runner-up in 1996 at Oakland Hills.

The 53-year-old Love has been slowed by a bad back this year and had no intention of trying to qualify for the U.S. Open until he caddied for his son at the first stage of U.S. Open qualifying and Dru made it to the sectional qualifier.

Love played in the Columbus, Ohio, qualifier and missed out by eight shots.

"The main reason I went is because he was going," Love said. "I thought, 'If I don't try and he gets in ... I had to try.'"

Erin Hills was busy for a late afternoon with strong wind. Playing ahead of Love group was two-time U.S. Open champion Ernie Els. Walking off the second tee, he looked back at the green and recognized a longtime colleague in shorts and carrying the bag.

"Hey, caddie!" Els called out to Love.

"I finally found a job," Love replied.

"Ryder Cup captain. PGA champion. Caddie. I think you finally found something," Els said with that easy smile.

Dru Love will be making his second start in a PGA Tour sanctioned event. He played in the 2015 RSM Classic at Sea Island, which his father hosts, and missed the cut.

Love hopes to impart some knowledge gleaned over three decades playing majors, mainly how to prepare and pick out lines off the tee and not to get rattled when something goes wrong, which it often does for everyone at a U.S. Open at some point.

Beneath the instruction was no small amount of proud. Dru Love is the third generation to play in the U.S. Open. Davis Love Jr., a noted teaching pro, played in the U.S. Open six times. Love's entire family is coming to Erin Hills to watch.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," Love said.
Four Crimson Tide players, playing for the Alabama Stars team, face off against Team USA in a softball doubleheader in July.

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

There will be five players with University of Alabama ties on the field when the USA Softball Women's National Team visits Rhoads Stadium next month.

One of them — four-time All-American Haylie McCleney — will be wearing the red, white and blue.

The others still wear crimson and white as current players. Pitcher Alexis Osorio, catcher Reagan Dykes, catcher/first baseman Bailey Hemphill and first baseman Caroline Hardy have been selected to play with the Alabama Stars team that will play against the U.S. squad in a doubleheader on Thursday, July 20. Games are slated for 6 and 8 p.m.

The teams will play in Auburn two nights later. Full rosters will be released this week.

“This will be a rare opportunity to see the best players and coaches in the world and the elite athletes and coaches from the state of Alabama,” said Natalie Norman, state commissioner for the ASA/USA Softball association. “As softball fans, we will have the privilege of sending our red, white and blue off with a bang to the Pan American Games and Japan Cup in August.

“We look forward to an exciting, family-fun event, and how awesome it will be to see potential 2020 Olympians.”

McCleney, who finished her Alabama career in 2016, was a three-time top-10 finalist for the collegiate player of the year award.

See SOFTBALL, C3

SOFTBALL

Continued from C1

An outfielder from Morris, Alabama, she played for the U.S. junior team in 2013 and has played on the senior national team since 2014. She has consistently batted .400 for the USA over the past two seasons.

Other USA players include former Auburn star Kasey Cooper, Florida pitcher Kelly Barnhill and former Gator Michelle Moultrie.

Osorio is a two-time All-American who earned first-team honors for her play as a junior in 2017. The Riverside, Calif., native has 834 strikeouts in three seasons.

Dykes is a two-year starter from Collins, Mississippi, who batted .250 as a sophomore with four home runs and 24 RBIs. She was an SEC All-Freshman selection two seasons ago.

Hemphill, from Lafayette, La., started at catcher and first base and earned SEC All-Freshman recognition in 2017. She batted .309 with a team-high nine home runs and 41 RBIs. She also led the team in walks with 47 and had a .493 on-base percentage.
Sophomore Chandler Taylor one of eight chosen for annual college home run event

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama baseball team will have a representative in Omaha this summer after all.

Sophomore outfielder Chandler Taylor has been chosen to participate in the 2017 College Home Run Derby on July 1. The College Home Run Derby is an annual event held at TD Ameritrade Park after the College World Series.

The College Home Run Derby includes eight hitters that compete in three rounds before a champion is named. It will be televised on ESPN.

Taylor was Alabama's only All-SEC pick this season. He was named to the second team after batting .282 and leading the team with 16 home runs and 34 RBIs. He finished the regular season third in the conference in home runs and fifth with a .634 slugging percentage. His seven stolen bases also led Alabama.

He was the only UA hitter chosen in this month's MLB draft, going in the 27th round to the Minnesota Twins. Taylor has not signed a professional contract and could return to Tuscaloosa for his junior season.

Taylor's season started slow, but he was a dangerous hitter during SEC play. He batted .295 with 10 home runs and 15 RBIs in 30 conference games. He led the team in hits, doubles, home runs, RBIs, walks, total bases, slugging percentage and on-base percentage in SEC play. He hit .263 against nonconference competition.

The Montgomery native has been named to an All-SEC team after each of his first two seasons. He was on the All-SEC freshman team in 2016. Taylor was also named SEC player of the week after UA's sweep of Auburn in May. He led the team in every major offensive category that weekend.

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.

See DERBY, C3
Bohannon settling in as Tide's baseball coach

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

New Alabama baseball coach Brad Bohannon has been on the job for a little less than a week after being introduced on Monday. It's the first head coaching job for the former assistant coach who spent the last 14 years at Auburn and Kentucky. He built a reputation as one of the conference's top recruiters and assistant coaches.

Bohannon spoke with The Tuscaloosa News late last week about his first few days on the job and what he sees for the future of the program. For the full Q&A, visit TideSports.com/category/other-sports/baseball.

You seemed a little bit nervous at the press conference Monday.
A little bit nervous?
Yeah.
I was way nervous. There's nothing you can do as an assistant coach to prepare you for a press conference like that. I'm comfortable talking to the team, I'm comfortable on the field because that's what I've been doing my whole life. But I've never done a press conference. Yeah, I was very nervous.

See COACH, C4
COACH

Continued from CI

Old did you ever think about what it would be like when you were introduced as a head coach or what your first day as a head coach would like be?

I've been through it with three other guys that have been somewhat new head coaches. From a different perspective I kind of had an idea, but it was a fairy tale. Monday was my first day and it was a fairy tale day. It's like your wedding day. It just didn't seem real. It was awesome. It was just the most amazing day.

The job was open last year. Were you interested in it then?

If any baseball coach in America that's not a head coach in this league says that they're not interested in a head job in this league, they're lying. This is every young coach's dream. As an assistant coach in this league, I think a lot of things about timing. Twelve months ago I had been at another school in the league for eight months that had just finished 8-12 in the league. When you've been around the league, I think you become more of a realist. That's a pretty tough sell 12 months ago. (Alabama athletic director) Greg Byrne can answer that better than me. I've been having a lot of conversations in the last 12 months about how I got there. I think the better way I put it is that I was actually talking to the coach that I brought to the table. I think a lot of people who've been in this league know that I've been talking a lot about the turnaround in this league, and that's how I became a head coach in this league. I think a lot of things about timing.
all the coaching clichés. I really hope down the road that the fans will look at our team and say ‘Gosh, these kids love playing for each other. They’re playing with a lot of positive energy. They’re gritty, they’re resilient. They’re just competitive and tough.’ All those things, I think any coach wants their team to be described that way. I think if we practice that way, and if I bring that type of mentality myself and lead by example, I hope the kids will follow over time.

Not to denigrate other schools, but I think it’s safe to say that neither Kentucky nor Auburn is among the traditional baseball powers in the SEC. What did you learn from being at those programs and the challenges you faced?

I am so fortunate that I started my career where I did because it wasn’t easy. Early on, it’s human nature to feel sorry for yourself and make excuses. At the end of the day, you realize there’s no asterisk in the box score that says ‘Hey, they did a really good job, they were really close. But their facility is terrible, the weather is terrible, there’s no players in their state, they don’t have a bunch of extra (scholarship) money.’ At the end of the day, the score is what it is. Your record is what it is. I was forced to figure it out and I thank John Cohen for that. Because John was like ‘Hey, this is the only option, to figure it out. There’s not another option.’

And like I mentioned in the press conference, let’s talk about what we have and not what we don’t have. We have an awesome place. We have so much to sell. We’re going to focus on our beautiful ball park and this fan base and this national brand and the college experience of being a student here and going to Alabama football games. There are a lot of great baseball players out there that would love to play at a place like Alabama and in this league. We just have to pick the right ones.”

What’s the best recruiting story you’ve got? A long day with a flat tire? Eating weird food with a kid’s parents? Found a guy no one offered before?

There’s a million of those. I need to write a book. I think anybody that’s been in my position for any period of time has done it all. I’ve slept in the car. I’ve slept in the airport. I’ve driven through the night to a game and the kid got hurt or didn’t play. I’ve recruited the walk-on that ended up being a good draft pick. The All-American that never did anything. I’m only 42 but I feel like from a recruiting standpoint, I’ve been there done that from pretty much every perspective.

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
NCAA taking aim at football staff sizes

By Aaron Suttles  
Sports Writers

Should the NCAA have the ability to regulate football staff sizes?

Perhaps that’s the question that should be asked instead of the now nearly ubiquitous query of “Will the NCAA limit staff sizes?”

The NCAA has dabbled in the restriction of the free market economy in relations to football programs in the past. In 1991 it attempted to limit the amount of money coaches could make by instituting “restricted earnings coaches” that sought to regulate big schools from loading up on off-the-field coaches to fill staffs. Restricted earnings coaches were paid no more than $16,000 per season.

The move was met with pushback, a legal challenge and subsequent loss in federal court.

Now the NCAA is setting its sights on staff sizes, and the general consensus is that it’s using the University of Alabama as its portrait of staff sizes that have ballooned.

It is widely believed, though no one has reported an exact number, that Alabama has the largest staff in the country. Bob Bowlsby, the chair of the Division I Football Oversight Committee, recently said one school “employed a football staff of 97.”

Bowlsby didn’t name a school, but to the reporters he relayed the information to, there was a strong indication he was looking toward Tuscaloosa.

An accurate count of Alabama’s staff size has never been revealed, though a recent NCAA survey published by cbssports.com put the number at 31.

An examination of the A-Day spring game roster showed a total of 66 staff members, but even that number is murky at best. That total was comprised of 10 on-the-field coaches (Nick Saban and his nine assistant coaches), 16 staff

See STAFF, C4
staff

Continued from C1

members listed as offensive/defensive coaches, six strength coaches and 34 individuals listed as "staff." Of the 34 listed as staff, included were

trainers, academic advisors and miscellaneous.

Which leads to the pertinent question "What roles are considered or should be considered to count toward a staff for a football program?"

Is an administrative assistant counted the same as an analyst? How about trainers and student workers? And who defines what staff is counted and what staff isn't?

The survey obtained by cbssports.com listed staff in five categories: on-the-field coaches, strength and conditioning, graduate assistants, football operations and off-the-field/recruiting.

What seems certain is the NCAA appears determined to address staff size limits, and big schools like Alabama are likely to stand their ground.

"I think that door has been open for a while," Bowlsby said. "We're seeing very large staffs. We see non-coaching personnel doing coaching duties. It is one of our two priorities for the Football Oversight Committee for the coming year... looking at personnel and how personnel should be deployed in the football coaching staff environment."

Saban, who is weary of overreaching legislation changing the game, countered that these changes stem from fear not bound in reality.

"A lot of the things that happen in college football - this is no disrespect to anyone - is there's a lot of paranoia that someone else has an advantage on someone else, whether it's a conference, whether it's one team versus another, whether it's one conference versus another," Saban said. "So if we can sort of create some rules that sort of, some kind of way negate that advantage that somebody creates or pass a rule that creates some advantages for us... I think there's some of that that goes on."

Saban has correctly pointed out that football has the lowest coach-to-student-athlete ratio of any collegiate sport. To that end, recently passed NCAA legislation will soon allow programs to add a 10th on-the-field assistant.

At Alabama, an analyst is assigned to each assistant coach to help shoulder the burden of the coaching staff, which is charged with not only developing the talent already on campus but to add to it by constantly recruiting the next student-athlete.

That pressure to recruit is immense, especially if you're going to coach for Saban. Recruiting is essentially non-stop.

And Saban gives his coaches resources via the analysts, which help break down film and game plan.

From the NCAA's perspective, it's wrestling with the question of should Alabama and deep-pocket programs of the same ilk be allowed to have an "advantage" of a bigger staff?

The question the Alabamas of the world will soon have to address is should they allow the NCAA to institute rules that govern them the same as schools with less resources.

Alabama Director of Athletics Greg Byrne, who has been both at big budget and lower budget athletic departments, understands the debate and he clearly understands Alabama's position.

"Well, I think Coach Saban and how we've structured our program has worked really well for Alabama and for Coach Saban," Byrne said at SEC Spring Meetings. "I'm very respectful of that fact as you can see in the results.

"I think what's important is to make sure that we have a seat in the table in discussions, if there are discussions, and it's important to find that right balance, but I'm extremely respectful of the fact that we have a model that works very well at Alabama."

Other schools, especially in the SEC, are catching on, too. The race to add support staff to catch the Crimson Tide has taken off.

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart said addressing the issue is difficult.

"I think it's hard to pick a number," Smart said. "I think that's why we're all talking about it. It's no different than, are there four teams in the playoff, are there six teams or are there eight teams?

"I certainly think when you look at the player to staff ratio, football is usually the most under(represented) because we've got 130 guys. It's hard to manage 130 guys when you're talking about class, off-field, behavior issues, everything. Just support. We need the support that we have. Picking a number on that, I think that's tough."

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
After minor stroke Stallings ready to get back to old self

Mark Heim mhelm@al.com

Gene Stallings has cabin fever.

Four weeks after suffering what was reported as a minor stroke, the former Alabama coach is itching to get back to it.

"I've been antsy for the past two or three weeks," said Stallings, 82. "I drive my golf cart around the ranch. We're bailing hay as we speak. I need to be on a tractor doing something, and I just can't. It's not normal for me to not do anything."

Stallings' peripheral vision in his right eye is gone, he said. "I can raise my right arm straight up. I just can't see it."

He did, however, say he can turn his head, and that he is in good health.

Stallings said doctors told him to stay away from "anything work-wise" for six weeks.

"I'm creeping up on that time," he said. "They said quote, 'just rest my brain for a while.'"

"(The stroke) effected the left side of my brain, which effected the right side of the eye."

He plans on honoring speaking engagements he is committed to, including events with Dye.

The former Auburn coach this week made headlines when he compared the Tigers' tradition to the Crimson Tide's.

"We could play football for another 500 years and we couldn't catch up with the tradition Alabama has got, but that doesn't mean we can't have a good football program and a strong football program," Dye said. "It doesn't mean we can't have football teams that recruit good enough to beat Alabama on occasion."

Stallings didn't hesitate.

"I think he's right," the former Texas A&M player said. "Coach (Paul) Bryant set the bar extremely high when he was coaching there, and coach (Nick) Saban is doing just a fabulous job."

"I think he's right. Auburn is a great football town, and they support their program. They are a good program. I still think they are a little behind Alabama."

Earlier this week, Stallings' name came up when talking to Palmer, Alabama's versatile playmaker during Stallings' tenure at Alabama.

Palmer, who teaches special-education at Hoover, said his college coach and his family impacted his life.

"Coach (Gene) Stallings influenced me a whole lot to get into coaching," Palmer said. "I'm glad he was able to influence David. He influenced lots of people really. Saddest day of my life when he passed away. He left his little mark, and he influenced lots and lots of people."
Zulli joins Alabama baseball coaching staff

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Alabama named Louisiana Tech hitting coach Jerry Zulli to its baseball staff as an assistant coach on Friday afternoon. Zulli is the first addition to the staff for new head coach Brad Bohannon.

Zulli arrives at Alabama after spending last season as hitting coach and recruiting coordinator at Louisiana Tech. He worked at Missouri in 2016 as hitting coach, infield coach, recruiting coordinator and third base coach.

"I am so excited to add Jerry to our staff," Bohannon said in a news release. "When you’re heavily involved in recruiting, you know who does a great job on the road, and he is clearly one of the best recruiters. I’ve known him a long time, and he checks every box that I am looking for. He’s a guy of high integrity and character, he has a high motor, he can relate to a wide variety of personalities, he has a great network and is a very talented evaluator. In addition, he is a very talented instructor, and we share a lot of the same ideas regarding team offense. Jerry is a tremendous addition to my coaching staff and will be a huge part of helping us build this program at Alabama."

He spent four seasons in Mobile as an assistant coach at South Alabama from 2012-15. The Jaguars reached the NCAA tournament in 2013 and won the regular season Sun Belt championship in 2015 during his tenure there.

Zulli is following Alabama assistant Jake Wells for the second straight year. He was named to the Louisiana Tech staff after Wells left Ruston to join Greg Goff in Tuscaloosa. Now he’s taking a position with the Crimson Tide. Wells was not retained following Goff’s firing at the end of the season.

Louisiana Tech batted .305 as a team while hitting .409 on-base percentage while scoring almost 7.5 runs per game last season. The team was second in Conference USA in slugging percentage, on-base percentage, doubles and runs scored. Five Bulldogs batted .330 or better. They finished 39-20 but missed the NCAA tournament.

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
RECRUITING

Quick got in early, sees momentum rising with current Crimson Tide class

Drew Champlin
dchamplin@al.com

Alabama's low number of verbal commitments for this class will soon rise, some top recruits say.

Cordele, Ga., four-star linebacker Quay Walker became Alabama's third commitment for the 2018 class, matching the number of Crimson Tide commitments in the 2019 class.

"I feel like with Quay Walker committing, the momentum will get that going," said Pierce Quick, the Hewitt-Trussville offensive tackle committed to Alabama in the rising junior class.

Walker himself thought that Alabama's class will grow soon.

But there was not much wait for Quick, as the 6-foot-6 four-star tackle committed to Alabama back in April not long after being offered. He still has two years of high school left.

Pierce participated in Alabama's camp on Sunday, battling five-star North Carolina defensive end K.J. Henry a few times, and he hung out Monday in Tuscaloosa. He'll be back Saturday for the offensive and defensive line camp and plans to compete.

"It was really fun getting to get coached by (offensive line) Coach (Brent) Key and all that stuff," Quick said. "It was awesome. There was a lot of talent there. He helped me with some 1-on-1 stuff, especially with my hands. That's been my main focus this spring."

Quick worked his personality on several top recruits, including Utah four-star offensive tackle Penei Sewell, who visited with his family.

"I'm trying to get the best guys to come play at Alabama also," Quick said. "I tell them straight up how it is, that Alabama's the best."

"I hung out with (Sewell) a lot on Sunday. He's a really cool guy. I think he loved Bama and his family loved it. I think we definitely have a really good shot with him."

Quick embraced the camp competition, and said going up against Henry was similar to facing Alabama five-star signee LaBryan Ray last fall when Hewitt-Trussville played James Clemens.

Last year, Quick went to Alabama's camp, but didn't have an offer yet.

Soon, he's expecting more recruits to join him in Alabama's commitment class.

"I feel like a lot of guys are close and just waiting to see what happens," Quick said.

"I'm trying to get the best guys to come play at Alabama also. I tell them straight up how it is, that Alabama's the best." — Pierce Quick
COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Only Nick Saban has more support than Hugh Freeze

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

Look at the bottom line alone, and there's only one conclusion to draw about Hugh Freeze as an SEC head football coach: He's done a really nice job.

Look at the Ole Miss response to the NCAA allegations against him and the school's football program, and it leads to another conclusion: Freeze has more support at the moment from his administration than any SEC coach not named Nick Saban.

The Texas A&M AD just told the world that his head coach, Kevin Sumlin, "has to win, and he has to win this year."

Ole Miss just told the world in great detail that its head coach has won by doing things the right way, and anyone who says otherwise — including the NCAA enforcement staff — is wrong.

Instead of throwing Freeze under the bus in the face of potentially crippling sanctions, Ole Miss has circled the wagons around him.

Painted him as the picture of personal and professional integrity. Argued that if rules were broken, they were broken by rogue staffers and boosters, and the head coach didn't know and couldn't have known despite his best efforts to run a clean program.

Wow. Beat Saban, not once but twice, and you get supported like Saban. Not many coaches coming off a 5-7 season would inspire this kind of loyalty.

Of course, the NCAA enforcement staff has a different view of Freeze, accusing him of violating head coach responsibility legislation and Ole Miss of a lack of institutional control. The school strenuously objects to both charges.

It'll be up to the NCAA Infractions Committee to rule, likely sometime this fall, whether Freeze is a total saint, a terrible sinner or something in between.

The Ole Miss response paints Freeze as an upstanding head coach dedicated to rules compliance who was betrayed by a trusted staff member in Barney Farrar. Read this passage from the response:

"The University has concluded that former off-field staff member Barney Farrar committed significant violations during his recruitment of [Student-Athlete 39] (Allegations Nos. 14(a)-(d) and (h)-(i), 16(a), 17), intentionally hid this misconduct from the University's compliance staff and his head coach, and used multiple intermediaries in his scheme."

Student-athlete 39 has been identified as former Ole Miss recruit and current Mississippi State linebacker Leo Lewis, whose allegations about his recruitment by the Rebels sit at the heart of this case. Ole Miss portrays Lewis as an inconsistent, biased and unreliable witness and Farrar as the bogeyman who skirted the rules to help land him.

"Farrar purposely and actively circumvented the University's monitoring system and disregarded his head coach's repeated directives," the Ole Miss response says.

In summary, according to the university, Freeze regularly told Farrar not to break NCAA rules but Farrar broke them anyway.

Farrar's attorney released a response to the Ole Miss response directly refuting that allegation: "Coach Farrar wants it to be known by the alumni, friends and fans of Ole Miss that he did not 'purposely and actively circumvent the university' nor did he 'disregard (coach Freeze's) repeated directives.'"

So which is it? Freeze as a champion of NCAA rules who trusted the wrong staffer? Or Freeze as a see-no-evil head coach who wanted results but not details?

Both arguments can't be right here. It'll be up to the Infractions Committee to decide, but Ole Miss is standing by the man who beat Alabama twice and led the Rebels to two New Year's Six bowls.

The loyalty from the university is admirable. The risk to the university is obvious.
Georgia on their Minds

By: Charles Hollis

Alabama is favored to make a fourth consecutive visit to the SEC title game in the Peach State, but will a former protégé be waiting for Nick Saban in Atlanta?

What are the chances of Nick Saban, the teacher, opening the season against one of his coaching pups, and then closing the year against one of them? In the same ballpark? Alabama’s Saban already has one piece of the puzzle on the board with Jimbo Fisher — his offensive coordinator from his LSU days — bringing Florida State to Atlanta to play the Crimson Tide on Sept. 2 in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game in the city’s new $1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

The chances of Saban meeting another one of his former assistants to end the year look pretty good, too. According to voters in the 71st annual AL.com SEC Preseason Football Report — judged by the league’s 14 football information directors — Alabama and Georgia are the picks to win their respective divisions and meet in the SEC Championship Game in Atlanta on Dec. 2.

Alabama winning the Western Division hardly raises an eyebrow, the Tide having been to Atlanta the past three seasons. Georgia, coached by Kirby Smart, the Bulldogs’ second-year coach and Saban’s defensive coordinator for eight of his nine seasons at Alabama, will have to beat out Florida to claim the Eastern Division race.

Even if Smart’s Bulldogs don’t win their division and Jim McElwain’s Gators do, McElwain is another former Saban assistant.

Georgia received four first-place votes and two seconds from the seven Eastern Division football information directors to top its division with 34 points.

Florida, which has been to the past two SEC title games, was a point behind with 33 points based on three first-place votes and three second-place votes.

Alabama has an easier path to Atlanta, according to the seven Western Division voters. The Tide received six first-place votes for 36 points. LSU was second with 29 points based on one first-place vote, three seconds and two thirds.

In the overall poll, with all 14 football information directors taking part, Alabama was first with 169 points and Georgia was fourth with 137. LSU and Auburn tied for second, each with 142 points.

A school’s football information director could not vote for his team in the polls.

Auburn was third in the Western Division with 28 points. Texas A&M was fourth with 18 points, followed by Arkansas (15), Mississippi State (11) and Ole Miss (10).

Kentucky might be the surprise in the league this year, according to voters. The Wildcats were voted third in the Eastern Division with 22 points. South Carolina and Tennessee tied for fourth with 19 points apiece. Vanderbilt was sixth with 14 points and Missouri was last with six points.

See Next Page
The 40-year-old Smart expects his Bulldogs to be improved in 2017, maybe even good enough to win their division. They are coming off an 8-5 season in which they finished third in the East. “Let’s be honest. Georgia, if you get the best players in this state, you should be winning championships,” says Smart. “I think we’re getting there in recruiting. I see our talent level going up.”

Georgia returns almost all of its defensive starters and the majority of its offensive starters. The offense has plenty of firepower with sophomore quarterback Jacob Eason and running backs Nick Chubb and Sony Michel. Tight end Isaac Nauta may be the most dependable receiver entering the season, as well as one of the league’s top tight ends.

“We still have some questions, although we liked what we saw in the spring,” especially in the play of his line and wide receivers. “We should be a team that will contend,” Smart said. “At the University of Georgia, that is the expectation. We should be a team that is favored to win the East each year. We should recruit the best players in our state, which is a very productive state, and develop those guys into really good players.

“We’re still a young team in my mind. Because over half of our roster will be freshmen or sophomores. But we’ve got some good football players coming back, and I’m excited.”

For all the buzz Alabama usually generates, Saban isn’t saying much with passing game questions and uncertainty hovering over a defense that lost seven players to the NFL Draft. But then, what else is new?

“I said this after spring practice (was) over we’re not an elite team yet,” Saban said. “Probably adequate but we don’t want to settle for that. We have a lot of development to do going into the fall.”

The good news for Tide fans is that this is usually his take every year coming out of the spring.

“I don’t want people to think I’m misstating,” he said. “I don’t usually ever think we have an elite team coming out of spring practice.”

Alabama’s defense will be in the headlights starting with the first snap of the FSU game after a record number of players were taken in the draft’s first four rounds. Developing a dependable passing game behind SEC offensive player of the year Jalen Hurts will likely be the biggest priority for the offense. Opponents know Hurts’ reputation for running. His accuracy is another story. As for pass catchers and runners, they’re practically stacked up. The line? At least the left side with tackle Jonah Williams and guard Ross Pierschbacher, two preseason All-SEC players, bring confidence up front.

“We have a lot of challenges ahead,” said Saban. “More than we usually have entering the fall? Just a lot of young players we need to develop because we have a great challenge starting in the first game with Florida State.”
Julio Jones named ASWA pro athlete of the year

The Associated Press

HOOVER — Julio Jones is the Alabama Sports Writers Association's pro athlete of the year.

The Atlanta Falcons wide receiver earned the award after helping the Falcons make their first Super Bowl appearance since 1998 and second in franchise history.

He will be honored at the association's annual convention Sunday night in Hoover.

Jones made his second straight Pro Bowl. The former University of Alabama star from Foley had 83 catches for 1,409 yards and six touchdowns despite missing two games with a sprained toe.

In this Jan. 22 photo, the Atlanta Falcons' Julio Jones reacts after catching a pass during the second half of the NFC championship game against the Green Bay Packers in Atlanta. Jones, a former University of Alabama player from Foley, is the Alabama Sports Writers Association's pro athlete of the year. [THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

But Jones' biggest game came in Week 4. He had 12 catches for a Falcons-record 300 yards against the Carolina Panthers, including a 75-yard touchdown late in the fourth quarter.

The 300 yards represented the fourth-best single-game total since 1960 and the most since Detroit's Calvin Johnson had a 329-yard game three years earlier.

Jones shared the credit with his teammates after the huge performance.

"You can't do this by yourself," Jones said following the game. "You can play really well by yourself, but you can't win and have success by yourself. It's a team game and team effort. The way we practice and the way we love each other showed today."

Against Carolina, he had six receptions for 152 yards at the seven-minute mark of the second quarter.

Jones has nine games with at least 160 yards receiving. Only Lance Alworth, with 12, and Jerry Rice, with 11, had more in their first six seasons.

The 6-foot-3, 220-pounder has 497 catches for 7,610 yards and 40 touchdowns with the Falcons.

Jones was the No. 6 overall pick in the 2011 draft after starring for the Crimson Tide for three seasons. At Alabama, he was the first true freshman receiver to start a season opener.