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Protective Life names new CEO

By: Michael Seale

Protective Life Corp. announced this week that 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. During his tenure at Protective, the company’s market value grew from approximately $580 million to approximately $5.6 billion in 2015 when it was acquired and became the United States platform for Dai-ichi Life of Tokyo, Japan.

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. In addition to his responsibilities as CFO, Bielen had overall responsibility for the Stable Value, Asset Protection and Acquisitions businesses.

He became a member of Protective’s board of directors in 2015. In 2016, he was named president and chief operating officer and assumed additional overall responsibility for the life and annuity business, operations and information technology.
Bonner to serve on Gulf Coast council

He will continue in UA systems role

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Gov. Kay Ivey has appointed former congressman and University of Alabama System vice chancellor Jo Bonner to serve on the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council. “I am honored to be chosen by Gov. Ivey to serve as her designated chairman of the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council. Much of my life and career has been focused on serving the people of Alabama — including a significant role in crafting the RESTORE Act when I was in Congress,” Bonner said in comments released by the governor’s office. “I look forward to ensuring that the Council’s efforts are effective, efficient and transparent. My focus will be on restoring our coast and promoting all our coast has to offer.” Ivey’s office made the announcement May 24. As the governor’s designee, Bonner, who leads the economic development department for the UA System, will be the council’s designated chairman. The position is unpaid. Bonner, who joined the UA System in August of 2013, will continue to serve in his role with the system, according to a system spokesperson.

The Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council was created with the passage of the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act in 2012, which steers a percentage of the civil penalties levied as a result of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon incident directly to the Gulf Coast states to assist with recovery efforts.

“I can think of no one better than Jo Bonner to serve as my designee to lead its efforts. Jo has a long history of being a tireless advocate for Alabama’s coast. I am excited to see the great things he accomplishes in this new endeavor,” Ivey said in a statement released by her office.

The council is tasked with ensuring the money is spent to protect and restore Alabama’s Gulf Coast, including projects to mitigate wildlife damage, workforce development, infrastructure improvements and tourism promotion, among other efforts.

The other council members include the director of the Alabama State Port Authority, chairman of the Baldwin County Commission, president of the Mobile County Commission and the mayors of Bayou La Batre, Dauphin Island, Fairhope, Gulf Shores, Mobile and Orange Beach.

The council will determine the projects and the funds will be administered by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The U.S. Department of Treasury has authority over final approval of expenditures.
Guide for growth

Mayor outlines plan for Tuscaloosa's next four years

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Mayor Walt Maddox has a vision for Tuscaloosa over the next four years.

The 44-year-old mayor entered his fourth term with a plan to address a number of areas of concern, from land left undeveloped after the April 27, 2011, tornado to road and infrastructure projects that have been planned for years.

"If you're not moving, you're dying -- there's no standing still," Maddox said.

His plan acts as both a road map and a challenge to the City Council, to which the mayor said he intends to use information and facts to guide the next 1,460 or so days remaining in the current term.

"Rhetoric does us no good," Maddox said. "If you don't have the data -- if you can't measure it -- you can't manage it."

A full version of the mayor's four-year vision is available online at www.tuscaloosa.com, but here are some key aspects of the mayor's citywide plan:

Invest 427

Maddox explained this program, a proposal for which he plans to submit to the City Council later this year, is meant to tackle pockets of undeveloped areas of city.

"We want to do our part to incentivize that rebuilding," the mayor said. "Right now, those vacant pieces of property are generating very little in terms of revenue for our city."

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Much of the land in question is in areas that were cleared by the tornado that damaged or destroyed 12 percent of the city in 2011.

Since then, some landowners have put exorbitant price points on their property, which has derailed rebuilding efforts in areas that need it, said Councilman Kip Tyner.

Tyner has made clear his frustration regarding the asking prices for properties in Alberta, which he represents as part of District 5.

"People are asking way too much for their property -- almost equal to 15th Street -- and in some cases $800,000 an acre," the councilman said. "It's not worth it at this time and it's severely hampering growth."

West Tuscaloosa and Invest West

Late last year, the City Council took the first steps toward the development of a master plan for the redevelopment of west Tuscaloosa, the predominantly black, low- to moderate-income area of the city bounded roughly by Interstate 359 and Greensboro Avenue to the west and the Black Warrior River to the north.

The intent of the study is to explore west Tuscaloosa's current zoning, infrastructure and land use for any deficiencies or areas that need improvement. Planners intend to look at the area block-by-block, and decide the best uses for properties while incorporating the wishes of those who live there.

That study is expected to begin in earnest this summer and take about a year to complete.

"I'm as excited about this planning process as I was about the planning process following April 27, (2011)," the mayor said.

From this, Maddox said he intends to introduce the Invest West plan to tackle vacant and blighted tracts throughout this area of town, too.

"It's not just vacant property, but vacant and blighted property can result in lowered property values to the surrounding community," Maddox said.

"We're talking about taking pieces of property that are now generating very little in taxes and finding ways to return them to the tax rolls."

The mayor said he expects to have a more detailed approach to Invest West by summer 2018, once the findings of the west Tuscaloosa study are known.

Hand-in-glove with this plan is the construction and completion of the $23.3 million project to widen Jack Warner Parkway and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard at the historic M&O Railroad trestle near the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater. Current plans call for this project to begin in spring 2019 with completion by winter 2020.

"It is a psychological barrier to any type of reinvestment" in West Tuscaloosa, Maddox said.

Road projects

While City Hall is not the guiding agency on every road project that falls on Maddox's plan, it does have a role or say in every one of them.

The city partnered with the Alabama Department of Transportation on a $23.2...
million project to upgrade Lurleen Wallace Boulevard.

These renovations and improvements that are expected to address road conditions and safety for both pedestrians and vehicles include eliminating the parallel parking along Lurleen Wallace Boulevard by adding turn lanes - many of these spaces will be moved to side streets - while limiting vehicular access in some areas.

Slated to begin in spring 2018 and to take about 18 months to complete, the mayor said he's hopeful that the project will be completed before then.

Another project that the mayor is involved with through his seat on the Tuscaloosa County Road Improvement Commission is the $30 million-$70 million plan to significantly upgrade the intersection of Alabama Highway 69 South and Skyland Boulevard.

This ambitious plan includes the construction of an elevated bridge over the Skyland/69 intersection to allow Alabama Highway 69 traffic to pass through without stopping, as well as the addition of lanes between the Skyland/69 intersection and Plantation Road.

This bridge also includes separate ramps for the nearly 6,000-vehicles-per-day to access Interstate 20/59 and additional lanes to bring motorists down to the surface in order to gain access via traffic signals to Skyland Boulevard or Oscar Baxter Drive.

Another aspect of ALDOT's plan for the intersection is the optimization of traffic signals, intended to smooth traffic flow from the Skyland/69 intersection to Plantation Road, and a multi-use recreational trail also is planned to run alongside the highway from Plantation Road to Old Greensboro Road to Skyland Boulevard.

"When this project goes to construction, this project is going to be invasive," Maddox said.

Work is supposed to begin in spring 2018 with completion by fall 2020.

North Tuscaloosa also falls into the mayor's future plans with the construction of the McWright's Ferry Road extension that will extend the roadway from Rice Mine Road to New Watermelon Road and create a secondary access to areas and neighborhoods near the North River Yacht Club.

Now, an accident or other blockage of the lone access over Lake Tuscaloosa Dam can delay traffic for hours, but this estimated $54 million project is expected to alleviate that.

First planned for in 1979, construction is planned to start in fall 2019 and take about two years to complete with the city providing management of the work.

"We're moving very fast on this project at the city of Tuscaloosa," Maddox said.

**Future projects**

The mayor also mentioned plans increase participation in the city's pre-K program and offer scholarships, in conjunction with the city Board of Education, to make secondary education available for city students.

He also intends to move forward with plans to relocate the Children's Hands-On Museum to a site adjacent to the Tuscaloosa Public Library and Milled Westervelt Warner Transportation Museum while boosting the Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Service's responses to medical calls.

Maddox also wants to bolster the city's pay plan -- something he said is needed to keep quality employees from leaving for the University of Alabama or Mercedes-Benz U.S. International -- while adding a fire station in north Tuscaloosa, improving the Tuscaloosa Police Department's communication systems and developing a convention center and sports complex to give visitors an additional reason to visit Tuscaloosa.

"We need 30 weeks a year when people are coming into our community," Maddox said.

"You can talk about results, but unless you're willing to work to make it happen, nothing is going to change."

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Census: Tuscaloosa booming

City's population now stands at 99,543

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The latest U.S. Census estimates show that Tuscaloosa is the fastest growing of the state's top five cities, according to data released by the city of Tuscaloosa.

According to City Hall, Tuscaloosa has increased its population by 10.2 percent – more than any of the top five cities in Alabama – since the 2010 Census count of 90,353.

According to the 2016 Census snapshot, Tuscaloosa's population now stands at 99,543. This also marks an increase of 1.23 percent over its 2015 estimate of 98,332.

"Strategic, comprehensive planning is an essential core belief of this administration, as is thriving residentially and commercially," said Mayor Walt Maddox in a press release announcing the population increase. "The quality of life in Tuscaloosa is outstanding – people recognize that and want to be a part of our amazing community."

According to Deidre Stalnaker, media relations coordinator for the city of Tuscaloosa, the only other top five city in the state to increase in population Huntsville is at 193,079, which is a 7 percent increase over its 2010 Census totals.

Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile have all slightly decreased, she said.

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Virtual public schools are still fairly new to Alabama, and state Superintendent Michael Sentance has questions.

Sentance said last week that state educators have been "hearing things" about virtual schools operating in Alabama and he appointed a three-person committee to get some answers.

Asked about his concerns, Sentance said, "I have the same questions that others across the country are having: Money and academics." Sentance said that no particular school district in Alabama was being questioned, but the overall way virtual education is delivered and how funding is distributed in Alabama needs clarification.

Two public school districts, Eufaula City and Athens City, have amassed a large number of virtual students, who attend classes online. More systems appear to be following suit. Limestone County Schools recently announced a partnership with education giant Pearson to offer virtual school through the Alabama Connections Academy.

Alabama's law governing virtual, or online, public education is unique in that
SCHOOLS
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virtual public schools cannot operate independent of a public school system. Online public charter schools are not authorized to operate in Alabama.

Research and media reports from across the country question whether virtual education, delivered online through public charter schools, is of a comparable quality to traditional schooling.

Sentence’s three-person committee to look into the matter in Alabama will meet for the first time this week, but Sentence gave no timeline for the scope of their work.

Virtual students interact with their education online and do not necessarily live in the school zone, or even anywhere near the school district. However, the local school boards receive the same state and federal tax support per enrolled pupil whether the enrolled student attends a local school or is at a computer several counties away.

Local tax money does not follow a student who enrolls in a virtual school outside of the zoned district.

Eufaula and Athens were among the first school districts to offer virtual education to students living outside of their school district through flexibility, or innovation, waivers granted by the state department of education in 2015.

As a result, their enrollment numbers have risen dramatically.

Eufaula’s assistant superintendent, John Beasley, said nearly 1,200 students from across Alabama were enrolled in Eufaula City Schools’ virtual school during the current school year.

The school was so popular, Beasley said, that they had to restrict enrollment for the coming year to make certain they didn’t grow too fast. Just last week, their first senior class of 16 graduated.

For Eufaula and Athens, the boon in enrollment has a funding boost, too.

For example, according to state department of education enrollment figures, Eufaula enrolled 3,785 students this year, up more than 40 percent from the previous year’s enrollment of 2,680. Funding is allocated on a per student basis, so Eufaula’s overall budget stands to grow by 40 percent as well.

Athens’ enrollment grew by nearly 30 percent, from 3,851 in the 2015-2016 school year, to 4,980 in the 2016-2017 school year.

GEOGRAPHIC ZONES

And while some believe online education costs less to deliver, Director of Innovative Programs Dr. Rick Carter at Athens said, “It takes every penny to educate those children especially when they’re 200 miles or 100 or even 40 miles away.”

Students considered at-risk take three or four times the amount of funding the state provides, Carter said.

Carter and Beasley strongly believe their districts are delivering a high-quality online education.

However, after both districts began enrolling students outside of their geographic zone, state legislators passed a law reining in the virtual world a bit, at least at the high school level.

That law required every school district to offer an online diploma for students in grades nine through 12 by the start of the 2016-2017 school year. There are a number of ways schools can offer that online diploma, including through the state department of education’s long-distance learning program known as ACCESS.

If school districts want to do so, they can contract with other school districts who have the capability to offer online courses to students outside of their districts. Districts are also free to contract with third-party providers, like K12, Inc. and Pearson’s Connections Academy.

Local school boards retain responsibility for the quality and outcomes. In other words, the local school to which the student is zoned is the school of record for that student. Virtual students are eligible to participate in extracurricular and athletic opportunities at the school of record.
ACCOUNTABILITY

Alabama Association of School Boards Executive Director Sally Smith said her organization worked hard on that law to ensure local school boards retained accountability for the students to ensure virtual students don’t slip through the cracks as they had in other states.

Smith said tighter accountability exists “if students have a local nexus for testing and other provisions,” such as special education services. So if a student begins to struggle in the online learning environment, the student can go back to attending the local brick and mortar school.

Smith is one of the three people who will serve on Sentence’s committee on virtual schools.

For schools offering virtual enrollment after the 2015 law was enacted, the virtual student remains on the books where the student is geographically zoned and the local school district contracts with and pays directly to whomever is providing the online education.

Each board of education makes that decision for their district, Smith said, ensuring the local board is accountable for the student living in their district.

Eufaula contracted with K12, Inc., to deliver online school to its students through the Alabama Virtual Academy, and students interact with teachers on a regular basis, Kayleen Marble said. Marble serves as head of Eufaula’s virtual school for K12, Inc.

‘MISCONCEPTION’

Athens City delivers virtual instruction through a few online platforms, including K12, and most of their students work with Athens City’s teachers, Director of Innovative Programs Dr. Rick Carter said.

Athens offers both blended learning, which means students attend a brick-and-mortar school at times, and also learn online through the Athens Renaissance School. Carter defended the quality of instruction offered through online learning, saying, “Sometimes there’s a misconception that we just stick them in front of a computer,” and that’s not true.

Both districts say the typical virtual school student is coming back to public school from homeschooling. Most of those families are seeking a strong curriculum, Marble said.

Carter said the vast majority of the 900 to 1,000 students that enrolled in Athens virtual school this year came back to public school from private school or homeschool.

Virtual school students enroll for “pretty much any reason you can think of,” Eufaula’s Marble added, including students who are competitive athletes or musicians, and students whose families value traveling. Marble said they have seen an increase in enrollment from children who were bullied.

While students in other Alabama districts aren’t a target for Athens, Carter said, “We have seen a few kids where their public school wasn’t working for them.” In one instance, a mother had been diagnosed with cancer and wanted to spend as much time with her children as possible, he said. The public school district where the family lived didn’t offer a virtual program at the time, so the student enrolled through Athens City.

It appears more white students are enrolling in virtual schools, evident by the increase of white students enrolling in Athens and Eufaula.

Athens launched their virtual school in 2015-2016, and since that time, has seen white student enrollment grow by 55 percent, from 3,360 in 2014-2015 (the year prior to launching the virtual school) to 4,980 in 2016-2017.

While Athens’ enrollment grew equally across black and white students last year, Eufaula’s white population grew by 75 percent, from 1,000 students in 2015-2016 to 1,750 white students in 2016-2017. Black enrollment grew by 18 percent, from 1,458 to 1,733 during the same time period.

Both Athens and Eufaula said they have about 140 students receiving special education services through Individualized Education Programs.

All virtual students had to take the ACT Aspire this past spring. Both school districts tested students statewide, sending faculty to conduct testing.
A new study projects that through 2024, Alabama will have more jobs in the medical and technical fields while continuing to experience a decline in clerical and textile jobs.

"It’s not surprising to see that the medical field and the technical field dominate the list of high-demand and fast-growing occupations in Alabama," said Fitzgerald Washington, Alabama Department of Labor secretary, in a news release.

"The Birmingham and Huntsville metro areas, working with state and local governments and economic development groups, are doing very well at recruiting these types of jobs, and at supplying employers with a trained and qualified workforce."

In West Alabama, expansion at the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant in Tuscaloosa and continued growth at the University of Alabama are expected to drive job growth in the near future. The $1.3 billion Mercedes expansion is expected to generate 300 new jobs, with more jobs coming through various automotive

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suppliers. UA will add 300-400 tenure track faculty as part of its five-year strategic plan in addition to the ongoing trend of annual enrollment growth. The sectors that will likely benefit the most from the university’s growth include retailing, leisure and hospitality and businesses involved in construction-related activities.

The Labor Market Information Division of the Alabama Department of Labor made its projections based on industry growth estimates, online job ads, wage patterns and other information.

Occupations projected in highest demand and their annual salaries are:
- Software and app developers, $93,782
- Registered nurses, $57,170
- Computer systems analysts $80,610
- Physical therapists, $86,538
- Industrial engineers, $86,347

All of the top 10 high-demand occupations have annual salaries above $50,000, according to the study.

“The fact that these jobs come with high salaries is an added bonus,” Washington said.

Additionally, the projected fastest-growing occupations are: occupational therapy assistants, physical therapy assistants, physical therapist aides, ambulance drivers and attendants, and home health aides, among others.

The occupations listed above all have average annual growth of more than 3 percent.

Occupations showing the projected greatest decline are:
- Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks with a net loss of 1,770 jobs
- Postal service mail carriers with a net loss of 1,280 jobs
- Fast-food cooks with a net loss of 1,210 jobs
- Tellers with a net loss of 960 jobs
- Cutting, punching and press machine setters, operators and tenders (metal and plastic) with a net loss of 620 jobs

Projections are also available for workforce development regions. All projections can be found at: http://www2.labor.alabama.gov/Projections/Occupational/Regions2024B.aspx.
Lawmaker won't seek re-election

Northport legislator has held seat since 2006

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

State Rep. Alan Harper will not seek re-election to the legislative seat he has held since 2006, the Northport lawmaker announced Wednesday.

Harper, 59, said he is choosing to "term out" of the office instead of running for re-election in the hopes that someone will take his seat and bring fresh ideas that genuinely benefit the people of Alabama to the State House.

"I believe strongly in the concept of a legislature led by committed citizens, not career politicians," Harper said. "After three terms in the Alabama House, I have decided to step aside and let someone with new blood and new ideas serve the good people of Tuscaloosa, Pickens and Greene counties."

Harper was first elected to represent House District 61 in 2006, and for his first two terms he identified and campaigned as a Democrat. In 2012, he switched to the Republican Party and was elected to a third term in 2014.

Speaker of the House Mac McCutcheon said Harper has earned a good reputation during his 11 years in office and he will be missed when he's gone.

"Alan Harper has proven to be one of the most effective, hardest-working and best-liked representatives during my time in the Alabama House," McCutcheon said. "We hate to see him leave the body, but he has certainly earned the right to an enjoyable retirement. All of us in the Alabama House wish Alan and his family many happy years to come and God's blessings upon them."

Harper and his wife Jean have two sons and three grandchildren, and he said he is looking forward to spending more time with his family after he leaves office next year.

"Serving in the Legislature and holding a post in House leadership has required me to spend significant time away from home," Harper said. "I thank my wife, Jean, and my family for the sacrifices they have made over the years."

Harper thanked his friends, neighbors and constituents for trusting him with three terms in office and said their support over the years has never failed to humble him.

"Serving in the House has been one of the greatest honors and pleasures of my life," Harper said. "I step off of the public stage secure in the knowledge that Alabama is more prosperous, better educated and significantly safer than it was when I took office."

The general election for Harper's seat will be held on Nov. 6, 2018, after party primaries in June.

Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
The lay of the land tilts to the right in US Senate race

With 11 Republicans in the race, it will be highly unlikely that anybody could win without a run-off, so the initial goal is to make the run-off. Amazingly, 19 candidates are in the race, but you can write off the eight Democrats as irrelevant because a Democrat cannot win in Alabama.

Former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore and former state Attorney General and Robert Bentley appointee to the Senate, Luther Strange, are more than likely headed to a Republican run-off. Huntsville and Tennessee Valley Congressman Mo Brooks has the best chance to challenge for a run-off spot. Initial polling has Roy Moore at 30 percent, Luther Strange at 14 percent and Mo Brooks at 7 percent. Roy Moore’s removal from his post as chief justice by some vague Judicial Inquiry Commission ruling for being against gay marriage has made him a hero and martyr among Alabama’s conservative and religious voters. There is a pent up desire to right a wrong among the Alabama people.

Polls are a picture of the total pool of voters. However, the final poll and the one that really matters is who actually shows up to vote on Aug. 15. Moore’s folks will be there; they are ardent and mad. They will not be at the lake or the beach. In fact, if there is an extremely low turnout, Moore could conceivable win without a run-off. That is unlikely, however. More than likely he finishes first and has a spot in the run-off. Strange will be fighting to hold on to the other spot in the run-off, and more than likely he will. Big Luther will have $10 million of Washington establishment super PAC ammunition at his disposal. It is hard to overcome that kind of money. Luther is banking on the fact that most U.S. Senate seats are bought by special interest money. Folks, $10 million dollars washes a lot of taint away from the Bentley to Luther deal. It looks inevitable that Roy Moore and Luther Strange will be in a run-off

FLOWS

Continued from A4

and the prevailing opinion is that Moore cannot get more than 50 percent. In fact, polling indicates that neither Moore nor Strange can get more than 50 percent. They both have a large base of detractors. This race was ripe to be won by an outside rich candidate who could spend $10 million of his or her own money. “Yella Fella” Jimmy Rane walked away from a U.S. Senate seat that was his for the taking.

Brooks has the best chance to knock Strange out of the run-off. He starts off with a base of support in the Tennessee Valley and $1.2 million in his federal war chest. If he were to raise $3 million, he probably would beat Luther and ultimately probably would beat Moore.

Brooks is to the right of Attila the Hun and belongs to a right-wing congressional group known as the Freedom Caucus. There are some very rich right wing zealots around the country who give to Freedom Caucus candidates. They may load of’ Mo up and teach the Elitist Establishment Mitch McConnell a lesson.

If state Sen. Trip Pittman, from Baldwin County could raise $5 million he could sell.

He is the only serious candidate from the vote rich Baldwin/Mobile area.

Dr. Randy Brinson has the perfect background, narrative and family values story. However, like Pittman, he needs $5 million to tell his story.

We will see.

Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature.

Readers can contact him at www.steeflowers.us.
Bringing the Bulls back to Bham
HOW ART CLARKSON REVIVED PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY IN METRO BIRMINGHAM

In a small office atop the Pelham Civic Center, Art Clarkson sits amidst a trove of lesser-known sports memorabilia. They’re cherished relics Clarkson accrued over his lengthy career of minor league sports franchise ownership.

Clarkson, back in Birmingham after a nearly 20-year hiatus, is aiming to restore one of those franchises and solidify the Magic City’s reputation as a hockey town—a label he fiercely defends. The Birmingham Bulls are coming back.

"Everybody asks me, ‘why now,’" Clarkson said in a recent interview with the BBJ. "Why not? The timing was right. I’ve been out of town since 2000. I kind of decided to just come home."

The Southern Professional Hockey League, or SPHL, in April announced its Board of Governors had unanimously approved the Birmingham Bulls as a new member for the 2017-2018 season. The Bulls will play at the Pelham Civic Complex Ice Arena, which is currently undergoing significant upgrades and seating expansion to accommodate the new team.

It’s a move that began as early as January when Clarkson said he wanted to bring hockey back to the Magic City.

The BBJ caught up with Clarkson this week to find out more about the Bulls, his take on Birmingham and his vision for sports in the Magic City.

What about Birmingham makes it a hockey town? We’re in the Southern Professional Hockey League, which has a great footprint. We’ve got Macon, Knoxville, Pensacola, Huntsville, Memphis. We’re in a really good spot, and they want us, too. I’ve always known this is a good hockey town. It’s just a good sports town. People are a little surprised, but look at where hockey has gone. Players are coming from everywhere. With hockey, everyone talks about Canada, but look at the players coming out of Europe. It’s everywhere. Every major sport has become global. These guys are all looking for a shot and are the hungry type. They’ll play an aggressive game here. They want to make a statement.

What cities do you see as Birmingham’s biggest competitors? That’s a tough question. If we’re talking about professional sports, we’re not even in the top 100. Hockey can add another dimension to that.

When I got here in 1980, we played the first year in the Southern League with 10 teams. Here we are 37 years later. Do you realize five of those markets have gone on to get major league teams? Memphis has the NBA, Nashville has the NFL and NHL, Charlotte has the NBA and NHL, Orlando has the NBA. Jacksonville has an NFL team. Where are we?

Where do you want to see the team in five years? I don’t know. The problem is we don’t have the facilities in Birmingham. We don’t have a football

See next page
stadium, we don’t have a hockey arena. You have the civic center right now that doesn’t have a (regular sports) tenant ... Until they change their attitude down there, we’re going nowhere for hockey. Now, that said, if they renovate that thing like they’re supposed to, we’ll have a chance at NHL hockey.

Of all four major sports, the one that has the best chance here is NHL hockey. You can’t do baseball, the market’s not big enough. We’re never going to get an NFL team. Atlanta and Nashville own the TV territory here. I don’t think it’s an NBA town. But if you go up to Nashville, they’re nuts for their hockey team. They’re so fanatical about that team. I think the same thing would happen in this town, but you’ve got to have the facilities.

How do you measure success? There’s two successes: the fans, and winning and losing. But the real success is winning at the bank. You can win on the field but if you lose your assets, have you really won?

What’s Birmingham doing well? I think the resurgence of downtown is incredible. If you do downtown in the day, you can’t get around because of construction, and that’s impressive for people from out of town. Do we have liabilities? Of course. But I think they can be resolved. It’s up to the leadership of the city to give the citizens the tools for success.

What would you change about Birmingham? I think what I’d like to see is more cohesiveness among the communities so we could have a synergy effect to help get more accomplished. I think the biggest problem is the politics. What do we need 26 police forces and fire departments for? Again, I’m not trying to knock the politicians, but you have to look at the politicians in this city.

What draws you personally to hockey? I like the speed. It’s incredible. I don’t think there’s anything tougher than a hockey player. It’s a game of territory and it’s beautiful to watch.

What effect do you think this will have on youth hockey in the area? That’s a good question. I’m not sure, but I know the effects from youth hockey to our program will be very positive. In turn, we’re going to try and be an asset for all the youth hockey programs here in Pelham.

Digital Producer Tim Steere conducted this interview. You can reach him at tsteere@bizjournals.com.
With $24.6 M project, H.M. Comer Hall will be UA’s engineering ‘front door’

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Work to transform H.M. Comer Hall at the University of Alabama into the “new front door” for the College of Engineering remains on schedule.

Renovations began this spring, and the building is on schedule to re-open by next fall, said Tim Leopard, associate vice president for Construction Administration. During the renovation, the occupants have moved to Hardaway Hall and other buildings around the Shelby Quad, Leopard said. The budget for the project is $24.6 million.

The hall houses administrative and departmental offices for the college, a welcome center, and classrooms.

The work includes adding a new entrance on the west side, modernizing the exterior to match with the adjacent North Engineering Research Center, updating the mechanical electrical and plumbing systems, and internal renovations, according to plans approved by the board of trustees.

The project is designed to centralize student services for the college and create a more open office environment to encourage departmental collaboration. It will feature a student and visitor welcome center, and a student services center.

The project will add a Center for Unique Business Enterprises, a lab incubator to support, develop and showcase the latest technology in the college.

Academic functions, with the exception of the large lecture hall, will be relocated to other buildings in the nearby science and engineering complex.

The new entrance will include an open atrium in the central lobby.

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

See COMER, A5
Alabamian with diabetes built her own artificial pancreas, gives away plan for free

By: Lee Roop

Dana Lewis is a good name to remember the next time you hear somebody say Alabama's mostly good for football and barbecue.

Lewis, a University of Alabama graduate who grew up in Huntsville, used social media, computer skills and mail-order parts to invent an artificial pancreas for people with diabetes. Along with co-inventor and husband Scott Leibrand, she's now giving her discovery away.

The device is a success - hundreds of people are using it, including Lewis - and it is bringing the young inventors increasing attention. Just this spring, Fast Company put the 28-year-old Lewis on its 2017 list of America's 100 "most creative people in business."

Diabetes is caused when the pancreas fails to make the insulin that helps the body turn glucose from sugar and carbohydrates into energy. Without insulin, sugar builds up in the blood stream. With too much insulin, it can fall to dangerously low levels. For diabetics, staying in the safe center is a constant challenge.

"You really do make hundreds of decisions a day about things that impact your blood sugar," Lewis said last week from her current home in Seattle. "It's a lot. And it really does impact everybody who cares for a person with diabetes - spouses, siblings, parents, grandparents. Oftentimes, a person with diabetes is surrounded by a half-a-dozen people who help care for them and love them."

Lewis was an example of that. She moved to Seattle for a job after graduating from Alabama. The daughter of a Huntsville engineer, she attended Grissom High School before going to Tuscaloosa.

At the university, Lewis minored in an honors research program that had her spend two years learning to program computers and two years working on projects that used them.

"That's where I got my first hands-on experience with coding," Lewis said, "and what was great about the program is it wasn't about training you to be a computer scientist. Instead, the goal was teaching "foundational skills" in computing to "use for whatever you decide you're interested in."

Living alone in Seattle, Lewis had a continuous glucose monitor and an insulin pump. But it wasn't enough.

"I was afraid at night because I am a super-deep, champion sleeper," Lewis said, "I sleep through the alarms on the device that are supposed to wake me up and save my life. I always thought, if only I could get my data off this thing, then I could use my phone or computer to make louder alarms."
The data Lewis wanted was from the monitor's checks on her blood sugar level every five minutes. The alarms were to warn her to eat sugar to raise a low glucose level or take insulin to lower a high one.

Enter social media.

In November 2013, Lewis saw a picture on Twitter. Someone had figured how to get the data off his continuous glucose monitor. "I reached out to him and said, 'Hey, can you share that?'' she said, "and he said yes."

Lewis was now in the Internet's "DIY (do-it-yourself)" space. She used the shared code successfully to get the data off her own device, then sent it to the cloud and back to her phone to make louder alarms. At first, that's all she wanted.

Then, Lewis thought "it would be nice for somebody else to see my data since I live alone." She programmed a Web interface to share the data with her boyfriend and, if he didn't respond, with her mother in Huntsville.

"Within the first couple of weeks of building this thing, I had two different instances where I was sleeping, I was low (blood sugar), I did not wake up to the alarm, and my boyfriend got his alarm and was able to call me.... And I woke up, drank juice, and everything was fine."

This was a real, meaningful life change, but the couple kept going. "I was giving the system data, and we figured out how to use that data and actually predict in the future what was going to happen," she said. "So, not only was I getting alarms saying, hey, right now you need to do something, but in an hour, your blood sugar is going to be low, but if you do a little bit of something now, you won't be stopped in your tracks later."

They had built an algorithm based on the data to predict the future. But it was still basically just an open loop. She got a recommendation from the monitor and had to act. She had to decide "what level of action do I want to be woken up for?"

The next step came quickly.

"We thought, wouldn't it be nice if, on the insulin side, instead of having to wake up and push a button on my pump, it could automatically adjust the pump for me," Lewis said.

She wasn't sure she needed this - she'd solved the super-sleep problem, after all - but social media stepped in again. "We found somebody else who had figured out how to directly communicate with my insulin pump and actually send commands to it," Lewis said. "And he's like, 'You know, you could plug this into your system and actually send commands to your insulin pump.' And he, too, shared his code. That's what open source is: free sharing of code."

They closed the loop. Result: an artificial pancreas that monitors blood sugar and controls the insulin pump.
"It gets data from what I've done, it gets my blood sugar and it says, huh, your blood sugar is rising, you need more insulin. So instead of 'alarming' and saying, Dana, wake up and take more insulin, it just sends a command to my pump that says increase the insulin a little bit for the next 30 minutes. And then in 5 minutes, it gets more data and sees what it's done ...."

The computer makes these small adjustments every five minutes, never gets tired of doing the math, never sleeps and never fails to calculate precisely.

Lewis couldn't have done this even five years ago.

"I really do think it was the perfect combination of people being on social media, this growing concept of open-source collaboration and sharing the code, but also even the commercial hardware getting to where it was," she said.

"The first computer we used was actually a small Raspberry Pi. That's a small, credit-card sized computer, you can buy it on Amazon for $35-$40, and we plugged the radio stick into that, and that's what I carried with me to become the closed loop."

They've since downsized even more. Using an Intel Edison chip, Lewis's current artificial pancreas is "basically like a Tic Tac case in your pocket," she said.

It was December of 2014 when Dana's system was fully working. "I pretty much knew immediately this is not something I can keep to myself," she said.

To make and distribute it would violate federal regulations, and to become a company would mean dealing with those regulations. But there is no rule about launching a blueprint on the Internet. "So that's what we did," Lewis said, "and that's why we called it Open APS, which stands for open-sourced pancreas system."

You can go to openaps.org now and see Lewis's documentation and her code. You can look at the reference design and decide, in her words, "Do I want to do this?" You can also watch her explain the system further here.

Some people want to wait for a commercial device - some are in clinical trials now - and Lewis supports that decision, too. But if you don't want to wait, you don't have to wait. If you want to take some control back from diabetes, you can.

Since the website went up, Lewis said hundreds of people have built their own device. She and her husband now speak and present at diabetes conferences, and they continue to work on the program with the online diabetes community. They support the development of commercial devices because manufacturers can make enough to help thousands of people, not just hundreds.

The impact is even bigger, Lewis said, because the artificial pancreas isn't just affecting people with diabetes. It's affecting everyone who cares for them.
"This is a really, really meaningful change," she said, "and I can't imagine going back to what I call the dark ages of not having my family having visibility into my blood sugars and what's going on and the ability to control these things."
Among football coach Bill Clark's numerous tasks is turning UAB into a sports medicine mecca

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

To say Bill Clark's plate is full on the second anniversary of UAB football's return would be an understatement.

He has to get his football team ready to play by the first weekend in September for the first time in three years. He also has to move his entire football program into its sparkling new Operations Center in a month.

Those tasks alone would overwhelm some coaches, but Clark has been working behind the scenes on another project near and dear to his heart.

He wants to bring the UAB football program, the undergraduate side of the university and the medical center together in a new way. He wants to construct a Center for Sports Medicine Excellence on campus that could benefit his program, the university and the entire state.

"He's showed more interest in keeping kids healthy at any level, not just his football players but at any level, than just about any coach I've ever dealt with."

Dr. James Andrews said of Bill Clark

"He’s unbelievable. He’s showed more interest in keeping kids healthy at any level, not just his football players but at any level, than just about any coach I’ve ever dealt with."

Clark, who inspired so many people to give their time and money to #TheReturn to save UAB football, said he can see the university playing a role in a larger effort to help sustain the sport that’s been an integral part of UAB for so long.
SCARBINSKY
FROM B1

of the life of this state.

"What if we could save football?" Clark said.

Part of that effort is making the sport as safe as possible. UAB's already invested in that regard in its partnership with VICIS to help develop a safer football helmet. A UAB Center for Sports Medicine Excellence would broaden that investment considerably and wouldn't be limited to research that would benefit football alone.

Clark described a facility that would allow athletes from different sports at different levels to do everything from train, learn to prevent injuries and rehab them if necessary. It sounds like a natural for a world-class research university.

"The best thing Jefferson County has going is UAB," said State Rep. Jack Williams, a supporter of the project. "This is a chance to build on that brand. UAB could be recognized as the world leader in sports medicine."

Williams said the next step in making the project a reality is an economic impact study to demonstrate the financial value of the idea to local and state government officials.

It would be a major undertaking, but if you doubt the ability of Clark and UAB to get things done, drive past the 8th Avenue South exit on Interstate-65 in Birmingham. You can't help but notice the massive Legacy Pavilion rising above the main practice field at the UAB Football Operations Center.

How many people thought the first capital investment in UAB football was actually do-able? Now it's almost done.

Williams said Clark's dedication to this sports medicine venture "says he cares about his profession, the well-being of student-athletes and the community he serves. This could be a real game-changer."
UAB BUYS NEARBY HOTEL

Property: Courtyard by Marriott, 1820 5th Ave. S.

Buyer: The Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama

Seller: IA Urban Hotels Birmingham LLC

Price: $30 million

Why it matters: UAB Hospital officials said that owning the hotel could provide additional space for patients or families of patients. The hotel is connected to the medical facility with an overhead bridge. The deal is another example of interest in city center property and of an overall uptick of investment in hospitality properties.
Good Hope students win awards at UAH engineering competition

By: Staff

Good Hope High School students recently won awards at the University of Alabama at Huntsville for InSPIRESS.

Team ATLANTIS swept their division by winning best open house, best proposal, best final review and overall winner. They will travel to Washington, D.C. to present at NASA.

Team ET won Overall Open House and second-place overall in their division.

The Innovative System Project for the Increased Recruitment of Emerging STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Students (InSPIRESS) is an outreach project that provides the opportunity for high school students to develop and design a scientific payload to be accommodated on a spacecraft which is designed by undergraduate students in the UAHuntsville IPT project.

High school students collaborate with the undergraduate engineering students to understand the engineering requirements, the design process, and the role a customer plays in design. InSPIRESS teams compete for selection by the undergraduate engineering teams.
UAH: Over 300 Valley tornadoes touched down between April 2005 and December 2016
By: Christina Edwards

According to the University of Alabama-Huntsville, as many as 344 tornadoes touched down within 75 miles of the ARMOR research radar located at the Huntsville International Airport. Using data obtained from the Storm Prediction Center, UAH plotted the individual tracks of each tornado that occurred between April 2005 and December 2016.

The majority of the Valley's tornadoes fall within the “weak” category, which includes EF0 and EF1 tornadoes. During that time period, as many as 269 EF-0 and EF-1 tornadoes — about 78 percent of the total amount — impacted the region. Although considered “weak” in category, EF-0 and EF-1 tornadoes can still produce considerable damage to trees, buildings and powerlines, since they generate wind speeds as high as 65 to 85 miles per hour.

In addition, 62 strong tornadoes (18 percent of the total amount) impacted the region during the 10 year stretch (“strong” describes EF-2 and EF-3 tornadoes). These tornadoes generate wind speeds as high as 111-165 miles per hour.

Between April 2005 and December 2016, as many as 12 violent tornadoes touched down in the Valley (“violent” describes tornadoes that produce EF4 or EF5 damage). These violent tornadoes are only 3 percent of the total number that have touched down within the 75 mile range from ARMOR, but they produced such extensive damage that they will remain etched in the psyche of residents who experienced them. Violent tornadoes can produce wind speeds in excess of 166 mph and can exceed 200 mph.
BETTER TOGETHER

ALABAMA UNIVERSITIES WORKING WITH CORPORATE PARTNERS TO FUND RESEARCH, DELIVER PRODUCTS TO MARKET

$24B estimated amount in federal research and development funds spent across Alabama's universities each year.

New research out of Tuskegee University that safeguards food supplies by quickly detecting harmful bacteria is gaining interest around the country and could soon be ready to hit the market.

This is just one of a multitude of pioneering research projects underway across Alabama's universities.

According to a recent report by the Alabama Department of Commerce, there is an estimated $2.4 billion in federal research and development funds spent across Alabama's universities each year.

The goal of Tuskegee's College of Veterinary Medicine is to commercialize a recently awarded patent, which focuses on a new method of detecting live bacteria using a process known as Polymerase Chain Reaction, or PCR.

According to principal investigator Dr. Teshome Yehualaeshet, the new research improves on both time and accuracy of the detection of viable bacteria in food products.

"It is problem-driven," Yehualaeshet said. "There is no fast or reliable detection of viable bacteria."

Yehualaeshet's co-investigative team includes Dr. Temesgen Samuel, Dr. Woubit S. Abeia and Dr. Tsegaye Habtemariam.

Yehualaeshet said the patent his team has earned is unique because it uses a safe and stable dye in the sample preparation.

Finding ways to fund research like the Tuskegee project has become challenging in recent years due to both funding cuts and the high level of competition for available grant opportunities, according to Dr. Chance Glenn, dean of the College of Engineering, Technology and Physical Sciences at Alabama A&M University.

"Grant-related research that universities usually operate under is flattening out as far as the federal budget," Glenn said.

In response to this trend, colleges and universities in Alabama have started working together to identify new funding opportunities for research. One example is the Alabama A&M University Research Innovation Science & Engineering Foundation (AAMU-RISE), which focuses on landing research projects with government contractors.

"If universities could put themselves in a position to compete for contract-related business, there's a new revenue stream available to you," Glenn said. "But it takes work."

Glenn said AAMU-RISE works with multiple colleges and universities.

"We're tapping each other's resources to go after bigger contracts," Glenn said. "We also have what we call the Knowledge Sharing Center. We are actually training other schools on how to go after contracts themselves. Membership in the center is also available to private industry who may be looking to team with university partners."

The original research for the Tuskegee project received funding from the Food Protection and Defense Institute at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

Today, Yehualaeshet and his team at Tuskegee are focused on getting more companies in the private sector involved in the process.

Yehualaeshet said the future of this research depends on its financial security. There are currently multiple grant applications pending, but Yehualaeshet said he is also fielding calls from companies who could act as commercial partners.

"The final expectation from such a venture is to bring the product to the users," Yehualaeshet said.

Written for This Is Alabama by Bryan Davis.
Stillman on the ropes, but there’s hope for the future

Stillman College is on the ropes and staggering badly. The good news is there is a late-round rally gaining steam to help Stillman avoid being knocked out and the college is still swinging.

In March, then-interim President Cynthia Warrick called on alumni to donate money to help the college make a $275,000 payment to cover a loan debt payment for April. Since then, the college has made the payment and Warrick has had “interim” removed from her title. The college has also paid off a bank loan of $1.05 million that the city of Tuscaloosa had guaranteed.

A critical component of Stillman’s survival includes the desperate need to increase revenues through added enrollment. During the spring, roughly 620 students were enrolled. More than 100 of them graduated. The goal is to hit a mark between 800 and 900 students in the fall semester, according to Mason Bonner, director of community relations and dean of enrollment services at Stillman.

These are all very promising developments. But Stillman hasn’t won the fight yet. It is still trying to pay off a $40 million federal loan that it received in 2012 from the Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Loan Program through the U.S. Department of Education.

In March, we said Stillman needed a miracle to survive. It appears the prayers are working and some local churches are going to increase the effort this Sunday. A group of ministers in the area have banded together to make this “Stillman College Sunday” and ask their congregations to dig a little deeper to donate money for the college. The churches belong to different local religious organizations, including the Tuscaloosa County Ministerial Alliance, the Tuscaloosa Prayer Network and the Birmingham/Florence/Tuscaloosa District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.

We’re hopeful they will eclipse their goal of $100,000 in donations and encourage those who can to give to this worthwhile cause. Rallying the faithful to good works like this is the mark of strong leadership in the pulpit.

Stillman offers a chance at a college degree to many who otherwise would not have the opportunity. For 141 years, Stillman has been an important part of the growth and development of our area and our state. But despite all the years of remarkable service, Stillman has an uphill battle to sustained viability.

This kind of community effort gives hope, but there’s still a great deal of heavy lifting to be done. Another thing that gives hope is the realization among the leadership at Stillman that borrowing more money to make ends meet is not a strategy that will lead to better days. The debt load is what has crippled Stillman to this point. Only reducing that debt will provide a chance at a long-term solution. It won’t happen with one haymaker punch, but many a fight has been won with a steady, constant jab. This Sunday, we hope, the faithful will add a needed one-two combination.
Local churches to raise money for Stillman College

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Some local churches have united to encourage their congregations to provide financial help for Stillman College. This Sunday will be declared "Stillman College Sunday," with several churches in the Tuscaloosa area seeking donations to the historically black college, which has been struggling financially for several years. The effort is a part of a number of churches that belong to different local religious organizations, including the Tuscaloosa County Ministerial Alliance, the Tuscaloosa Prayer Network and the Birmingham/Florence/Tuscaloosa District of the AME Church.

The Rev. Schmitt Moore, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church and a member of the Tuscaloosa County Board of Education, said the groups hope to raise more than $100,000 for Stillman. The groups include dozens of churches in Tuscaloosa and central Alabama.

"It's a great program that has produced a lot of powerful graduates across the country and it's worth saving," Moore said.

Moore said he felt it was the churches' responsibility to help out Stillman because of its religious background. The college was founded as Stillman Institute in 1876, with the initial concept to be designated for "the training of colored men for the ministry," according to the original charter. Stillman is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA.

In fact, Stillman requires 12 hours of biblical studies for all incoming freshmen.

"They are definitely in need," Moore said. "We need to keep it going."

Stillman is currently paying off a $40 million federal loan that it received in 2012 through the Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Loan Program, which operates through the U.S. Department of Education.

Mason Bonner, director of community relations and dean of enrollment services at Stillman, said the college is currently working on ways to recruit more students in an effort to have more money coming in through tuition.

During the spring, there were about 620 students enrolled at Stillman, including more than 100 students that graduated.

"We are trying to get about 800 or 900 students for the fall," Bonner said.

In March, interim President Cynthia Warrick called on alumni to donate money to the college, specifically to make a $275,000 payment to cover a loan debt payment for April. Last year, the city of Tuscaloosa guaranteed the college a $1.05 million bank loan.

Mason said that in addition to making the April payment, Stillman recently paid off the

See next page
bank loan from the city. However, the college is still going through financial issues.

"We're trying to get our way out of this without having to borrow more money," he said.

Moore said Stillman also serves an important role in reaching many students who cannot afford to go to a state university. During the 2016-17 school year, tuition for a student living off campus ranged between $5,469 and $7,254 while on-campus student tuition ranged between $8,849 and $9,166.

"I think it serves a segment of people that may not go anywhere else," he said.

Bonner said he will be vetting all the churches to make sure the donations go to the right location.

"They are going to do it right," Bonner said.

Other groups that are assisting in fundraising include the New Antioch Bethlehm Baptist District Association, Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, the Tuscaloosa-Bessemer District AME Zion Church and the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Churches are asking congregations to make any check donations to Stillman College at the Office of Institutional Advancement at 3601 Stillman Blvd., Tuscaloosa, AL 35401.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
Each day at Birmingham Southern College — and as I travel across the state to visit with future students and recent graduates — I am captivated by the creativity, compassion, and energy of the young people I meet. They are filled with infinite potential and are ready to craft a better future for Alabama and for the world.

BSC has been the state's only nationally ranked liberal arts college since 1856, and since its beginning, it has developed professionals in a wide range of fields, from health care to business to arts to the law. And half of our students are Alabama residents.

The trait that stands out most to me about the people who come to our campus is that they aspire to achieve more than financial success. They relentlessly seek ways to improve the societies in which they live. In my travels, I hear from alumni who have gone far beyond our state’s boundaries to follow their passions. Take Dunya Habash, who is using the power of film to illustrate the plight of Syrian refugees; Dr. Bruce Irwin, who has made health care more available by building a national network of urgent care centers; or Jim Pierce, who has harnessed power from a difficult youth in order to provide shelter and nurture for abused children.

When I see the fresh faces of the next generation at BSC, absorbing knowledge, skills, and consideration from our campus community, it makes me proud of our city and our state and thankful for those who support BSC in its mission. I want more Alabamians to know how fortunate we are to have this college — a place that enables students to create and live lives of significance.

Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith
is president of Birmingham-Southern College
Alabama hires Auburn assistant Brad Bohannon as the new baseball coach

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The new University of Alabama baseball coach is moving from one side of the state to the other. He's also moving from one side of the Alabama-Auburn rivalry to the other.

Auburn assistant Brad Bohannon was named the next Crimson Tide baseball coach in a news release on Thursday morning. He has spent the last two years as an assistant coach working with Auburn's hitters.

"This is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I cannot wait to get started," Bohannon said in the release. "My goal is to make The University of Alabama the best baseball experience in the country. We're going to recruit at the highest level, coach and develop our student-athletes and create a positive team culture that ultimately will help us to be successful. Every aspect of our program will play an important part, and Alabama has incredible resources to help us reach our goals. I truly believe we can accomplish anything here."

He will be formally introduced in a press conference on Monday. Bohannon and the Auburn Tigers are playing in the Tallahassee regional of the NCAA tournament this weekend.

Bohannon spent the last 14 years as an assistant in the SEC. He worked at Kentucky from 2004-15 and at Auburn from 2016-17. He built his reputation as a recruiter at both programs. He will arrive in Tuscaloosa with knowledge of in-state programs and a national reputation.

"I studied our past rosters from the years when we have been most successful and there was a balance between Alabama kids, which we have to have, and players from a diverse background from the Southeast and the rest of the country," UA director of athletics Greg Byrne told The Tuscaloosa News. "One thing that stood out about Brad in his 11 years in Kentucky and his short time in our own state was that he had signed players from 25 different states, as well as Canada."

The hire comes just eight days after Byrne announced the dismissal of Greg Goff. It's the first head coaching hire Byrne has made at UA.

Bohannon was named the assistant coach of the year in 2015 by the American Baseball Coaches Association and Baseball America. That was his final season in Lexington before he left for Auburn.

"I can't think of a greater compliment to our baseball program and where it's come in 20 months than for another SEC ball club to offer them a head coaching position," Auburn baseball coach Butch Thompson said. "What a great appointment for him. He'll do great."

Bohannon worked under head coaches John Cohen and Gary Henderson in Kentucky, where the Wildcats went to four NCAA tournaments. He helped Cohen turn the program around more than a decade ago and has helped Thompson rebuild Auburn after Sunny Golloway's departure.

His task at Alabama will be to resurrect a program that tumbled to 19-34-1 this year, including 5-24-1 to finish in...
last place in the SEC. Alabama has not been to the College World Series since 1999.

"Brad was destined to become a head coach," Cohen said. "I'm really proud of him. I obviously think Greg Byrne made a great choice. I think he will do well. He is one of the brightest - I'm not even going to say coaches - he's one of the brightest people I know. He is an exceptional communicator. He's extremely bright. He's somebody who understands recruiting at an unusually high level. He's one of those top five recruiters in baseball."

During Bohannon's tenure at Kentucky, 69 players or signees were chosen in the MLB draft. Every one of his recruiting classes since 2008 has ranked in the top 25 nationally. He was also the primary recruiter for A.J. Reed, the 2014 SEC Player of the Year.

Bohannon becomes the fourth SEC head coach with ties to Cohen (now at Mississippi State). Bohannon, Thompson and Kentucky's Nick Mingione were all assistants when Cohen was head coach at Kentucky or Mississippi State. Cohen also hired LSU assistant Andy Cannizaro as the Bulldogs' head coach after he became athletics director last year.

Bohannon's coaching career started as an assistant at Wake Forest during 2001 and 2002. The Demon Deacons made the NCAA tournament in both of his seasons as an assistant. Kentucky reached the NCAA tournament four times during his tenure there. Bohannon played college baseball at Vanderbilt and Georgia Tech before graduating from Berry College.

The first order of business in Tuscaloosa will be to stabilize the program. Bohannon will be the third head coach in as many seasons. From there he'll be charged to recruit and rebuild.

"I think the wide recognition of the Alabama brand is part of our foundation here and gives us a chance to recruit nationally as well as within our state, and Brad had an excellent plan for that," Byrne said.

Cecil Hurt contributed to this report.
ALABAMA BASEBALL

Tide turns to Auburn assistant to lead program

Former assistant of the year Brad Bohannon spent 12 years at Kentucky before joining Tigers staff in 2016

Auburn assistant Brad Bohannon was named Alabama's new baseball coach eight days after the firing of Greg Goff.

Alabama didn't have to look far to find its next baseball coach. He was working for the Crimson Tide's chief in-state rival, Auburn.

Brad Bohannon was hired Thursday — only eight days after Alabama fired Greg Goff following a turbulent season. The school announced the move on Twitter.

"This is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I cannot wait to get started," Bohannon said in a news release distributed by Alabama. "My goal is to make the University of Alabama the best baseball experience in the country. We're going to recruit at the highest level, coach and develop our student-athletes and create a positive team culture that ultimately will help us be successful. Every aspect of our program will play an important part, and Alabama has incredible resources to help us reach our goals. I truly believe we can accomplish anything here."

Bohannon joined Auburn before the 2016 season and was the 2015 Baseball America and American Baseball Coaches Association National Assistant Coach of the Year during his final year at Kentucky. The Georgia native spent 12 seasons with the Wildcats.

During his tenure there, he handled the role of recruiting coordinator, worked with outfielders and served as the third base coach. Bohannon was able to lure top-flight talent to Lexington and built a reputation for his ability to land blue-chip prospects. He signed 13 Wildcat players who eventually turned pro — most notably 2014 Golden Spikes Award winner A.J. Reed.

"As we began the search and studied our successful rosters from the past regional and College World Series teams, it became apparent that we needed our head coach to be very strong in recruiting in the state Alabama, the Southeast and then completing the roster with national recruits," said Greg Byrne, the Crimson Tide's athletic director. "The vision that Brad shared for Alabama baseball matched that recruiting philosophy and coupled it with a great coaching pedigree and a commitment to the student-athlete, both as a baseball player and as a well-rounded student. We are confident that he will be able to lead our program to championship levels, which we all value here at Alabama."

This marks Byrne's first major hire at Alabama since he became the school's athletic director. Last week, Byrne said he was

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looking for a candidate who has "strong college experience."

Bohannon has plenty. He played at three universities — Vanderbilt, Georgia Tech and Berry. He also had a stint as an assistant at Wake Forest.

But it was at Kentucky where Byrne and Bohannon first crossed paths. Byrne was an associate athletics director for the Wildcats when the school hired Bohannon to join John Cohen's staff in 2004. Four years later, Byrne appointed Cohen as baseball coach Ron Polk's replacement at Mississippi State.

Eighty-five miles over from Starkville, in Tuscaloosa, Bohannon will have his work cut out for him as he takes the wheel of Alabama's listing program. This past season, the Crimson Tide won only five SEC games and finished 19-34-1 — achieving its lowest victory total since 1980. Resurrecting a program that has fallen on hard times will be a challenge. But Byrne firmly believes Alabama baseball can again compete for championships.

"What I promise is we're going to go find the very best baseball coach that fits at Alabama, that wants to be at Alabama and has a good, long-term solution for us and give us the best opportunity to succeed at the highest levels," he said last week.

Eight days later, Byrne determined Bohannon was that guy.
ALABAMA SWIMMING
McKee honored as SEC Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year

DESTIN, Fla. - Alabama swimmer Anton McKee was presented as the 2017 H. Boyd McWhorter Male Southeastern Conference Scholar-Athlete of the Year during the league's annual awards banquet held Thursday night in Destin, Fla., during the league's spring meetings.

McKee, who graduated in May with a degree in management information systems and a 4.0 grade point average, closed out his Crimson Tide career in April as the 2017 NCAA 200 breaststroke runner-up. He also earned multiple CoSIDA Academic All-America honors while helping lead Alabama to three consecutive NCAA top-10 finishes, marking the first time Alabama has posted a trio of top-10 finishes in a row since 1981-83.

In addition to Byrne, Alabama President Dr. Stuart Bell, Faculty Athletics Representative Dr. James King and Senior Associate Athletics Director and swimming and diving administrator Marie Robbins were among those on hand to honor McKee.

McKee thanked SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey and the conference as well as the Alabama administration during the evening's events, saying, "the work that you do makes our dreams as student-athletes possible."
UA hockey player earns All-America honors

By Ehsan Kassim
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

As the University of Alabama club hockey team continues to grow, one of its best players has earned a prestigious honor.

Pierre Ouellette, a sophomore from Dieppe, New Brunswick, Canada, earned third-team All-America honors from the American Collegiate Hockey Association, which governs non-varsity hockey programs at colleges and universities.

Ouellette is the program's first All-American since moving up to Division I.

"Winning this award is a huge honor for myself as a player and also for the hockey program here at the University of Alabama," Ouellette said via email. "Being the first player to win the award in the Division I era is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I want to continue to help this program grow for the remainder of my time here at Alabama."

Ouellette led Alabama in power-play points and was third in points and goals.

He led the nation in points by a defenseman, with 43. He contributed to an Alabama team that led the nation in scoring with 147 points.

Taylor Joseph, a sophomore from Aurora, Ontario, was Ouellette's teammate and roommate last year at Oswego State in New York, a top-five NCAA Division III program. Joseph committing to Alabama played a huge part in why Ouellette came to UA.

Club president James Benedetto, a sophomore, believes both players adjusted well.

"It made my life easy," Benedetto said. "I just gave them the puck and they helped me out. For me, it was such a pleasure to play with Pierre the whole entire season. Taylor Joseph is the same exact way. How they carry themselves on and off the ice is great for our program, trying to represent the university the best we can."

Ouellette, Benedetto and Joseph are among 11 players who were sophomores last season.

"It's really good it worked out that way, that the biggest core group of guys are sophomores and rising juniors and will be here another two years," said coach John Bierchen. "So, they know the way we are trying to approach every aspect of our program."

Bierchen, who led the Frozen Tide to 10 wins in his first season, is the first former UA player to return as a head coach.

He credited Ouellette with taking pressure off his teammates with his steady performances and calm demeanor in the locker room.

With no home arena on campus, the Frozen Tide plays its home games at the Pelham Civic Complex. That has been the program's home since its club inception, in 2005.

Ouellette is hungry for more for the upcoming season.

"Next year, I plan to work just as hard on and off the ice," Ouellette said. "I want to show some leadership to the returning guys and the new players coming in. I am coming in next year to win a national championship and nothing else."
Q&A with Alabama softball coach Patrick Murphy

By: Tommy Deas

The University of Alabama softball team’s season came to an end last weekend when the Crimson Tide lost two out of three games at top-seeded Florida in the NCAA Tournament to finish with a 47-17 record.

Alabama had to twice defeat top-ranked Minnesota to extend its streak of advancing to the super regional round to 13 years. UA remains the only school to have made it to the round of 16 in every year since that format was adopted.

Alabama played its best ball in the postseason after a rocky, up-and-down year, and finished a couple of runs short of making a fourth straight trip to the Women’s College World Series.

The Tuscaloosa News caught up with head coach Patrick Murphy, who was visiting his mother in Iowa, by telephone for a Q&A.

Q: You’ve had a few days to process the end of the season. How much are you disappointed that you didn’t get one more win to make it back to the World Series, and how much are you feeling pride over the way the team turned it around at the end to get as far as it did?

A: Once you get to Oklahoma City (for the World Series), the ultimate goal is always to go back — that’s kind of been, basically, the history of the program to be up there. This was the senior class that really wanted to go all four years (of their careers), which would have been the first (class) ever.

Although they missed it just by a game and maybe two runs, I was really proud of how much adversity they faced head-on. I was really proud of them for that. They never backed down. I think the biggest thing about this team was when they did face adversity, they went right after whatever we were supposed to do; they worked harder, they worked smarter and nobody gave up. That’s probably the best legacy this team will carry forward.

Q: Was there a point before the postseason where maybe you were beginning to wonder if things would ever turn around?
A: Probably at Ole Miss (at the end of April), after the two walk-off losses, that was really tough. Because we had two at Tennessee, we had two against Ole Miss, we had one at Missouri, and then the nine-inning loss to Auburn on that Friday night (the weekend after the Ole Miss series) was equally tough. So they went through a stretch there where they could have easily folded their tents and said this not going to happen this year, and that’s really one of the best things about them was they kept fighting and trying to get better.

It was much better at the end of the Auburn series and going up to Knoxville for the SEC Tournament. I had so many people say after regional was over that it was a totally different team and just everybody looked confident. You just never know what’s going to spark a team.

I think really the expectation at Alabama and the postseason is what did it. They didn’t want to be the team that didn’t make it to super regionals.

Q: So when you look at it now and you see who made it to Oklahoma City and how they made it to the World Series, do you think your team was, the way they were playing at the end, one of the best eight teams?

A: Oh, I think so. I think if it was a different seed or whatever – (Minnesota pitcher Sara) Groenewegen will probably be a first-team All-American and (Florida pitcher) Kelly Barnhill will be a first-team All-American, probably (Florida pitcher) Delanie Gourley will be an All-American, and we faced all three of them the last two weekends – so without a doubt we faced what was the toughest road that we ever have faced to get there. To be one run short is a huge feat in itself.

Q: When you look at the offensive problems, what do you think that stemmed from and what are your thoughts on how to correct it?

A: I just think that No. 1, good hitting is contagious; and No. 2, bad hitting is also contagious, and unfortunately it kind of spread. I even told them one time, ‘You know, this isn’t like the flu. You don’t get it from somebody else. I can understand one or two of you going through some tough times, but not nine people in the lineup.’ For whatever reason, it just continued.
We were winning 1-0, 1-0 and we had really good team defense down the stretch and the pitching was there, and we finally got a couple key hits that won some games for us.

I looked at some of the numbers, compared last year to this year, and there were people that are 100 points off (their batting average) and kids that had 12 less home runs than they did last year. It was just this one poor year.

But we’re definitely going to do offensive things in the fall and we’re obviously going to address it a lot as a coaching staff when everybody gets back, and just hopefully get out of it. I know that there are so many people that are better hitters than what they showed. Instead of having a career-low year, we needed somebody to have a career-high year, and we didn’t have many of those.

**Q:** Do you also look at the power numbers? Will there be any look at the strength program or any tweaks that need to be made there? You probably led the world in warning-track outs.

**A:** I know. I don’t know if it’s the bats, if it’s the strength and technique, there’s so many things that go into it. If you look around the league, the power numbers weren’t there to begin with. This year was just a weird year offensively for a lot of teams, but we’ll definitely look at some things for next fall.

**Q:** What excites you about the freshman class coming in?

**A:** They’re a really good bunch of athletes. They can play a bunch of positions, they’ve all played at a high level of summer ball. Several have won state championships (in high school), a couple of them will probably be the player of the year in their state. A lot of schools in the country were after them and we’re just excited to get them all here.

**Q:** How much do you think the late-season upturn can be attributed to Demi Turner returning (from a fractured eye socket) and being back in the lineup?
A: Oh gosh, a bunch. Down in Florida she lost her voice and could barely talk. It was strange in that way that she was a huge part of our program but at the very end she couldn’t speak. And (Rachel) Bobo stepped up and other people stepped up.

But we really, really missed Demi and obviously it showed; her coming back and going 2-for-3 in the very first game that she got in against a team (Minnesota) and a girl who was probably one of the best pitchers in the country was huge. But we need a Demi that’s healthy for 56 games next year.

Q: You mentioned Rachel Bobo. How much of a pleasant surprise was she going from pinch runner to being one of your toughest ...

A: Outs. It was just an amazing surprise. It couldn’t happen to a nicer kid – almost a 4.0 (grade-point average), chemical engineering major, a walk-on who does everything she’s supposed to do, is all about the team. And when she gets an opportunity she just runs with it, and I know she’s going to work her tail off this summer and she’s going to force somebody to beat her out in the fall. That’s what we need; she’s going to be very competitive, and I think people are going to recognize that.

Q: Finally, what do you most look forward to going into next year?

A: We lost three seniors, only one position player – Marissa (Runyon) was the (designated player), Sydney (Littlejohn) was a pitcher and Chandler Dare was an outfielder – so we basically have two pitchers coming in and some kids that are really, really hungry to get it done. No matter how many you lose or how many you have coming back, every year is a different year. It’s a different team chemistry, and that’s what’s so exciting about being in the college atmosphere because somebody gets a year older, a year wiser, but you get these new kids coming in who are new to the process. How they are molded and how they end up, that’s really exciting to the coaches and the staff.
Tide softball went down swinging

Given the program that Patrick Murphy has built, any University of Alabama softball season that ends anywhere except Oklahoma City is a disappointment in some ways. Softball bears the football burden, with championships being the standard by which they are judged. Murphy probably wouldn’t want fans that thought differently.

This year’s team didn’t make it — but it’s hard to remember any Alabama team, even the best ones, that fought any harder in the post-season to get back to Oklahoma. The Crimson Tide had a difficult draw, even at home, and had to win two classic games against Minnesota to get to Gainesville in the first place. What awaited Alabama there — not in The Swamp itself, but just across the street — was the No. 1 seed Florida and the No. 1 power pitcher in the country. The Crimson Tide pushed that draw as far as it could, to the final out of the third and decisive game. At that point, Alabama couldn’t quite overcome a two-run first inning by the Gators, an inning highlighted by a run that scored when Alexis Osorio hit a Gator batter on an elbow adorned with thicker protective armor than Tony Stark’s.

Would Alabama — with WCWS-level pitching from Osorio and Sydney Littlejohn — have fared better with a higher seed? There’s no way to be certain, but it’s tough to imagine a steeper path than the one through Gainesville. UA brought the No. 16 seed on itself with stretches of inconsistent offense.

The longest of those dry stretches came during the 20 games or so that second baseman Demi Turner missed because of a broken occipital bone. Injuries aren’t an excuse. Every team in every sport encounters them at some point, and not every team can overcome them. It is fair to say though that Turner was a significant loss, both in terms of production and leadership.

Littlejohn, a senior, will be missed, even though Osorio returns in the circle. Chandler Dare and Marissa Runyon will be missed but the returning nucleus is strong and the expectations for the recruiting class are high. There will still be a homefield advantage and Murphy will still schedule at a

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championship level.
The best memories of the 2017 team came in the stretch run. No, there is no Oklahoma City trip this week but there is something to be said for a team that believed it could get there. The buzzword around Alabama athletics during a tumultuous past week has been "stability." That doesn't always mean winning every game, or every tournament. It does mean having a program that's capable of getting there if everything goes well, year after year. That's the sort of program that Nick Saban or a Patrick Murphy has built — and it is fair to mention Mic Potter, Dennis Pursley and Jay Seawell as well. Avery Johnson is taking steps in that direction, and Dana Duckworth. That doesn't mean that any are satisfied with falling short. It means that their programs are on the right path to get back in the fight, again and again.

This year, it would have been easy for Alabama softball to shrug off a bad year, to let the national record streak of Super Regional appearances lapse. Instead, the Crimson Tide fought — and fought hard. The dividends on that may be an important part of seasons to come.

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Almost a done deal

Crimson Tide basketball team finalizing a home-and-home series with Arizona

DESTIN, Fla. - The University of Alabama men's basketball team is finalizing a deal for a home-and-home series with Arizona over the next two seasons, head coach Avery Johnson confirmed on Wednesday. The Tuscaloosa News learned of the series earlier in the day on Wednesday.

The Crimson Tide would travel to Tucson this season and the Wildcats would return to Tuscaloosa in the following season, if the deal is completed.

"We've always discussed about how we need to improve our nonconference schedule and how we need to have some high-level teams come on our campus," Johnson said. "So with that discussion, we started calling a lot of the top teams around the country trying to schedule games. Fortunately Arizona is a team that is a well-respected team. We haven't finalized a deal yet but we're deep in discussions."

Arizona finished last season 32-5 and won the Pac 12 tournament. The Wildcats also advanced to the Sweet Sixteen in the NCAA tournament. The Wildcats could begin the 2017-18 season as the No. 1 team in the nation.

The Crimson Tide has already announced non-conference games with Memphis, Minnesota, Brigham Young, Texas and Central Florida. UA will also host Oklahoma as part of the SEC/Big XII challenge in January.

"We're really excited about that," Johnson said. "We know we're going to have to prepare much better and continue to recruit at a high level to play teams like that."

UA director of athletics Greg Byrne previously held the same position at Arizona.

"Obviously Greg helped us," Johnson said. "He's really serious about helping and continuing to grow our basketball brand. He was a major part of that negotiation."

Women's basketball finalizing nonconference schedule

The first season in Coleman Coliseum for the women's basketball program brought with it a lot of life in recruiting, head coach Kristy Curry said.

"I'd have to say the move to Coleman has impacted it in a way that's hard to express," she said. "It's been a big impact in recruiting, that women's basketball at Alabama is important."

UA finished the year 15-6 at home in Coleman Coliseum this season after playing in Foster Auditorium in previous years. The move across campus isn't all-encompassing for the program, though. The women's basketball coaching offices are still in Foster.

There are no plans to move to Coleman full-time, Curry said. There are still advantages to be had by staying in Foster.

"I know there are basic talks about the future of Coleman Coliseum," she said. "I will say this: We love Foster. That's our home on a daily basis. To have a facility that our kids can access 24/7 to get shots up, work on their game, it really means a lot. We're happy with that being our home every day. As far as any talks in future, I think they're looking at the overall plan for Coleman at some point to see where we all need to be."

Calipari likes Alabama's backcourt

The talent in Tuscaloosa is starting to turn heads among league basketball coaches. Kentucky coach John Calipari listed Alabama as one of the teams with excitement building in the SEC entering this season.

"Alabama now, they've got two legitimate guards and in college basketball that means you have a chance to win every game," Calipari said. "That doesn't mean you're winning every game, it means you have a chance to win every game."

Calipari is likely referring to freshmen Collin Sexton and John Petty, both of whom arrived on campus this week. Avery Johnson didn't do anything to dampen enthusiasm during his time with the media.

"I would say more of Clyde Drexler," Johnson said. "A slasher, still can shoot, can pass the ball. He's an underrated passer and decision-maker and as I alluded to earlier, that's what we need."

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Avery Johnson happy with Braxton Key’s draft process
By: Ben Jones

DESTIN, Fla. - The rest of the University of Alabama fan base may not have enjoyed sweating out Braxton Key’s decision on whether or not to remain in this summer’s NBA Draft. Key waited until May 23, just one day before the deadline to withdraw his name and announce his return to UA for his sophomore year. His head coach didn’t seem to share the same consternation about waiting out a decision.

“He went through the process, the process played out basically how I thought it was going to play out,” Avery Johnson said on Wednesday. “But at the same time, he had to make the decision that he wanted to put two feet back in, return to school and be a major part of our team.”

Key’s return punches up the potential for Alabama in 2017-18. As a freshman he led the team with 12 points per game and was second with 5.7 rebounds and 2.5 assists.

That was good enough to convince Key he should consider a professional career. But his experience between entering the draft on April 17 and withdrawing his name showed him there was more work to be done.

Key was not among 67 players who attended the NBA draft upon the invitation of the league. That didn’t bode well for his chances of being selected in the draft’s 60 picks. He had some workouts with NBA teams but never signed with an agent. He told Johnson he would return to Alabama about a week before making his decision public.

That’s how the process should play out, Johnson said.

“I think the process is solid,” he said. “Players want to get a grade. You’re able to contact what’s called the Undergraduate Advisory Council. They’ll give you a grade on whether a player is going to get drafted or not drafted.

“The kid still decides independent of what the grade is, especially if it’s a non-drafted status, to be able to declare for the draft, which means he’s probably not going to get invited to Chicago or if he does get invited to Chicago, then there’s still some time after that to go and work out for
some teams. They get an idea of what other general managers are going to say about them, and then they can make a better informed decision about whether to stay in the draft or not.

Johnson and Key were in “constant contact” throughout the process, the head coach said. Johnson was pleased with the outcome as well as the process. The NBA’s entry process for underclassmen has drawn some skepticism from college coaches in recent years, but Johnson was pleased with it.

The only change he would make would be to make the deadline for players to withdraw from the draft a bit sooner. The deadline had previously been in mid-April, which abutted against the Final Four. It was moved in 2016.

“May 24, I wish that particular drop-dead date when a kid has to withdraw from the draft, I wish we could move it back to May 17, or immediately after Chicago, pre-draft camps, a day or two after that,” Johnson said. “But I think overall it’s a solid process.”

Players are also now permitted to enter the draft multiple times during their college career as long as they don’t hire an agent. Key could conceivably put his name in the draft again in 2018, then withdraw it again and return for his junior season.

Key’s first chance to test the waters went well enough, for both him and his coach.

“He went through the process, the process played out, he’s back on campus ready to have more of a leadership role and we’re excited to have him back,” Johnson said. “He makes us a much better basketball team.”
ALABAMA FOOTBALL
Kickoff times, TV set for two Tide games

The kickoff times and television networks are basically set for the early weeks of the University of Alabama's football schedule after ESPN released a major portion of its college football programming plans on Wednesday.

The Crimson Tide will host Fresno State in a 2:30 p.m. contest on ESPN2 on Sept. 9 in the second game of the 2017 season. Alabama's home game against Colorado State a week later, on Sept. 16, will kick off at 6 p.m. on either ESPN or ESPN2.

It was previously announced that the Crimson Tide's showdown with Florida State in Atlanta to open the season on Sept. 2 will be carried on ABC at 7 p.m. CT.

Other kickoff times and television arrangements will be released at later dates.
SEC looking to shorten games

Average football game was three-and-a-half hours in 2016

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

DESTIN, Fla. - College football fans aren't the only ones checking their watches as games grind toward four hours. The SEC and other conferences are paying attention, too.

The average SEC football game was 3:26 in 2016, SEC coordinator of officials Steve Shaw told the media on Thursday during the league's spring meetings.

"Everybody is talking about length of game," Shaw said.

There were four SEC games that lasted more than four hours last year, Shaw said. Two of those games went over four hours despite not going to overtime. The longest non-overtime game was Alabama's 48-43 win at Ole Miss on Sept. 17.

No rules changes have been See SEC, C3

Alabama running back Damien Harris (34) breaks away from Ole Miss linebacker Terry Caldwell and defensive back Myles Hartsfield during last year's 48-43 win in Oxford, Miss. The game lasted more than four hours and was the SEC's longest non-overtime game last season. The SEC is looking for ways to shorten the length of games for the 2017 season. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]
made to alter play or speed up games. Instead, officials will be charged with keeping games on pace and cutting down dead time. Shaw thinks games can be shortened by five or six minutes without making rules changes or effecting the sport itself.

One of the obvious changes is to enforce the rule limiting halftime to 20 minutes as stated in the rule book. Sometimes, Shaw said, halftime are stretched out to 23 or 24 minutes. The halftime clock might start after teams have cleared the field instead of after the end of the second quarter. Halftime shows and events might be jammed in and run over by a few minutes. The time adds up.

"Halftime is going to be 20 minutes," Shaw said. "And then at the end of halftime - TV knows this too and they're committed to do it with us - when the clock hits zero, we're going to kick off. A lot of times, you'd see the red hat official signal 'I need a minute, give me two minutes.' When it hits zero, we're going to break and kick off."

Officials will also be charged with restarting the clock when the ball is set, except for during the last two minutes.

"Basically, we had every Division I referee in America in a meeting," Shaw said. "We looked them all in the eye and said 'Look, we're going to be consistent. When the center judge puts the ball down, you're cranking it up.'"

They'll follow a similar procedure after awarding a first down. The rule book, Shaw said, says the clock should be stopped to award a first down. It does not need to be stopped to move the chains. Substitution opportunities were also inconsistent; some referees waited until substitutions were over to wind the clock.

None of these are new rules; it's a matter of being consistent in enforcing rules already in play to keep the game moving.

But for now, there are no plans to make changes to the amount of commercials to shorten the games.

"You watch TV sometimes, and there's touchdown, then an extra point, then run four or five replays, then go to commercial," Shaw said. "They're going to have to find ways to be more efficient, to get out and get back in. Those are the kind of things we want to do. I don't think we're going to break (TV) contracts at this point. I think we can be more efficient."

The goal is to keep the rules of football unchanged while still finding ways to shorten games. These solutions are a step towards that.

"We need to do the administrative components around the game. If we have a 20-minute halftime, the game managers are going to have to be more efficient. But there's time for both bands to play. We're not going to lose the pageantry of the Southeastern Conference."

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Coaches wary of early signing period

No changes coming soon to alcohol sales

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

DESTIN, Florida—College football's early signing period is coming soon. The SEC coaches still have questions about how the change to the recruiting calendar could trickle down to affect other times of the year.

The early signing period will begin Dec. 20 this year. That will move things along considerably seasons, when the signing period for high school recruits began on the first Wednesday in February.

"The fear is that this will become the signing date," Alabama head coach Nick Saban said. "Now everything revolves around December 20th, 22nd, whenever it is. Then everybody will want to take an official visit during the season, which is not the best time to take official visits. Or now we have to change the recruiting calendar and have April, May and June, which we're considering now to have official visits."

Saban also voiced concerns about having to make evaluations and projections on recruits earlier and earlier, dating back to their sophomore year in high school. That could prevent some players who post strong senior seasons

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from gaining attention during the recruiting process, because signing classes will already be close to filling up.

It's not just an athletic projection coaches will have to make. They'll also have to make a judgment call on whether players will qualify academically even earlier in the process, with less information on hand.

"It's going to be difficult for us to do that projection, sign a kid on Dec. 20 and guarantee he's going to get into the University of Florida," Jim McElwain said.

South Carolina's Will Muschamp said the rule also puts high school coaches in a difficult position.

"You have guys getting ready for spring practice their junior year and you've got a young man taking a visit on a college campus during the week and he hasn't finished six semesters of high school so academically where exactly is he?" Muschamp said. "I don't think it's very smart."

Auburn to the East?

Any chatter about the possibility of realigning the divisions and moving Auburn to the SEC East was quickly shot down by commissioner Greg Sankey. It's not a major topic among the league coaches and administrators.

"I really only address that in these conversations," Sankey told the media. "Is that an agenda item? No. You talk about it in press conferences regularly. There's almost this cycle now, every two years where I can predict what will begin happening on May 1st: the national membership conversation, then somebody at some point will talk about divisional alignment. I think the next question is probably about a nine-game conference schedule. None of which are on our agenda."

Alcohol sales not expected soon

Another conversation topic quickly dismissed by Sankey was the sale of alcohol in general seating areas at SEC stadiums. Reports earlier this spring indicated that LSU was working to add a beer garden at its football stadium, though that would be a confined area.

"It's not an agenda item but I expect a conversation," he said. "We've had some discussions, really talking about why we have this policy in place. I don't think there's a majority that thinks we just pull away. But there's also an attentiveness to cultural changes and maybe different interests that will provoke the conversation and see where that heads. I don't expect any destination this week on that particular issue."

The SEC does not permit the sale of alcoholic beverages in public areas of its venues, though that rule does not apply to private, leased areas such as luxury boxes. Other specially designated areas are also exempt from the ban, like Alabama baseball's student section in right field at Sewell-Thomas Stadium.

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Coach opposed to SEC relaxing graduate transfer rules

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

DESTIN, Florida - The Southeastern Conference spent last offseason tussling with questions about graduate transfers. University of Alabama coach Nick Saban fielded his fair share of questions about the topic last summer.

A year later, the SEC is back to talk it over again. Saban's talking points haven't changed.

"I've never been in favor of free agency in our league," Saban said Tuesday at SEC Spring Meetings. "I don't think that's a good thing. I wasn't for it last year. I don't think I'll ever be for it."

The graduate transfer issue means something to Saban partly because of Maurice Smith. The defensive back transferred from Alabama to Georgia to play last season with a waiver from the SEC. The issue means something this week because of Florida and quarterback Malik Zaire.

The two situations aren't identical, but both could be examples as the SEC reviews its policies on graduate transfers.

Zaire is eligible to play immediately under NCAA rules after graduating from Notre Dame. He has expressed interest in Florida, but the Gators are currently unable to accept his transfer because of an SEC penalty. Florida's last graduate transfers in 2015 didn't complete their academic requirements, which imposed a three-year ban on the school from accepting other graduate transfers.

Other conferences don't...
have similar rules. That leaves Florida coach Jim McElwain and some other SEC coaches wondering why the league has voluntarily submitted to a rule that could put it at a disadvantage to other conferences.

"If we have rules in the Southeastern Conference that are different than the other conferences that we’re playing against and competing against, it kind of ... I don't know what we’re trying to prove there maybe," Florida coach Jim McElwain said.

The SEC is considering three different changes to graduate transfer policies. One would allow graduate transfers within the conference. Another would allow graduate transfers from players who haven’t earned all of their APR points, which is currently required. The final change would reduce the penalties on schools if players don’t meet their academic requirements, which could permit Florida to land Zaire. That change would reduce the penalty from three years to one year.

South Carolina coach Will Muschamp said Tuesday that he wants the SEC to have the same rules found elsewhere in college football. He said he’d also be open to allowing graduate transfers move from one SEC school to another.

Smith had graduated from Alabama and wanted to play for Georgia last season. After an extended public battle, the SEC allowed Smith to play immediately.

"I don't know what advantage was created by all that," Saban said. "I don't know who won any more games or lost any more games because of that."

Georgia did get at least some benefit from Smith’s transfer. Alabama may have gotten a bump, too. The Bulldogs beat Auburn 13-7 on Nov. 12 thanks largely to an interception Smith returned for a touchdown. That game clinched the SEC West for Alabama in advance of the Iron Bowl.

Smith went undrafted and signed with the Miami Dolphins as a free agent. Georgia finished 8-5.

Saban would rather not see another situation like that in the future. But if rules on transfers are loosened, Saban thinks Alabama would stand to gain in the long run.

"We would benefit as much as anybody in our league if you said you can transfer (within the conference)," Saban said.

"Kentucky’s got a good player? We’ll go see if we can get him to come to Alabama. Why do we want that? Why do we need that? How does that help the integrity of what we’re trying to do as a conference or as a league? I’m not for having free agency in our conference. When it comes to transfers in other places, I like the fact that we have some kind of academic standard built into it."

That could prove to be true, though Saban would rather not find out. He’ll have his chance this week to make his feelings known to his colleagues.

The rest of the league coaches may decide they’re willing to take that risk anyway.

"Everybody will push their personal agenda if they see the ability to gain an advantage," McElwain said. "As long as we’re all playing under the same rules, OK. Those are the rules. Let’s go play them."

Reach Ben Jones at bjm@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
Auburn to the SEC East has some merit

By: Cecil Hurt

Given the historic dynamic between the athletic departments – and especially the fan bases – of Alabama and Auburn, almost any proposal that one instruction puts forward is going to be viewed with healthy skepticism by the other. That’s especially true when the proposal is as dramatic as reconfiguring the divisional structure of the Southeastern Conference.

Over the past few weeks, Auburn representatives have pushed the topic of realignment, specifically moving Auburn out of the West Division and into the East, swapping places with Missouri in a move that makes perfect geographical sense. The first person to float a trial ball out of Auburn was the former athletics director, Pat Dye. In practice, any Pat Dye idea is going to become a Jay Jacobs idea, too, so Jacobs, the current AU AD, raised the topic again at this week’s SEC meetings in Destin.

The tentative swap hasn’t gotten much traction and won’t be on this week’s agenda, according to SEC commissioner Greg Sankey. That couldn’t have come as any great surprise to Auburn officials. Their idea is probably to plant a seed now and then see how it grows over the course of a couple of years.

That won’t stop Alabama fans from harboring suspicions, of course. Mistrust is a part of most rivalries. Some of the theories floated by Crimson Tide fans are of the usual extreme sort that can come from either side. Frankly, it’s silly to argue that Auburn is “afraid” to stay in the West, or even that the East would be “easier.” Yes, Auburn is looking out for its own best interests. All institutions so. The logic isn’t hard to see.

Moving to the East would be a good move for Auburn. They would almost certainly have four marquee rivalry games annually — Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama. I will add a few more thoughts on whether AU would absolutely be “guaranteed” that there would be no changes in the series later in the column.

That means every season would have two guaranteed high-dollar, television-friendly home games on the schedule. With every bit of due respect to LSU, Texas A&M and the rest of the
West, that’s not currently the case. Auburn-Florida and Auburn-Tennessee, as a pair of series, have tremendous history. Furthermore, those states – especially Florida – have far more exposure value for AU than Arkansas or Mississippi. That’s not just a football consideration but an important factor for the school as a whole.

Whether Auburn can find enough working partners to execute their idea is a different question. The first one would be Alabama. The Alabama-Auburn series means a great deal in this state, obviously, and has the weight of the state legislature behind it, but Jacobs’ unilateral proclamation that AU “would still have Alabama” – without asking Alabama officials about their thoughts – was not an endearing first step.

This isn’t an issue where Auburn can fly solo. My idea to have hippos on jet skis in Lake Tuscaloosa is, I think, a good one but I am not sure I can get the mayor and the City Council to agree. If they don’t, I’m stuck with a lot of disgruntled hippos.

That doesn’t mean Auburn’s idea doesn’t have some merit, especially for Auburn. It would probably be good for Missouri, too. But there would be ramifications for all SEC schools and in the time it will take to discuss them, the entire landscape of the SEC might have already changed.
DAVID LEONHARDT

The Assault on Colleges — and the American Dream

The country’s most powerful engine of upward mobility is under assault. Public colleges have an unmatched record of lofting their students into the middle class and beyond. For decades, they have enrolled teenagers and adults from modest backgrounds, people who are often the first member of their family to attend college, and changed their trajectories.

Over the last several years, however, most states have cut their spending on higher education, some drastically. Many public universities have responded by enrolling fewer poor and middle-class students — and replacing them with affluent students who can afford the tuition.

The situation is particularly demoralizing because it’s happening even as politicians from both parties spend more time trumpeting their deep concern for the American dream. Yet government policy is hurting, not fostering, many people’s chance to earn the most reliable ticket to a good job and a better life.

The decline of economic diversity at top public colleges is the clearest pattern in The Times’s third annual ranking of leading colleges — the roughly 170 nationwide with a five-year graduation rate of at least 75 percent. (Yes, you can be disappointed that so few colleges clear that bar.)

The ranking, called the College Access Index, is based on how many low- and middle-income students colleges graduate and how much those students must pay. The index is a measure of which top institutions are doing the most to promote the American dream.

Many are doing less than they once did. At the public colleges in the index, the average share of last year’s freshman class receiving Pell grants — which means they typically come from the bottom half of the income distribution — fell to 21.8 percent, from 24.3 percent in 2011-12. Campuses with declining economic diversity include the Universities of Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Pittsburgh and Wisconsin, as well as Binghamton, Ohio State and Rutgers.

By comparison, the Pell share has recently held roughly constant at top private colleges, around 16 percent.

Some of the biggest declines have been in the University of California system, which has long been the most economically diverse place in elite higher education. On the San Diego campus five years ago, 46 percent of freshmen received Pell grants. Last year, the share had dropped to 26 percent. When I first saw that number in The Times database, I figured it was a typo.

It wasn’t. The United States is investing less in college education, at the same time that the globalized, digital economy has made that education more important than ever. Gaps between college graduates and everyone else are growing in one realm of society after another, including unemployment, wealth and health.

Given these trends, the declines in state funding are stunning. It’s as if our society were deliberately trying to restrict opportunities, and worsen income inequality.

Since 2008, states’ per-student spending on higher education has fallen 18 percent nationwide, according to inflation-adjusted numbers from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The cuts have occurred in both blue and red states, with somewhat larger ones in Republican-run states. States made deep cuts after the financial crisis and have since failed to restore funding, choosing instead to cut taxes or spend money on health care, prisons or other areas.

“States are making it much more difficult for their residents to get high-quality higher education,” Sandy Baum of the Urban Institute said. “They are causing their institutions to charge more, to take more out of state students, to cut quality. It’s very shortsighted.” That’s exactly the right word, because spending on education often more than pays for itself in the long run.

The budget cuts affect every realm of higher education, with some of the biggest damage happening at community colleges and less selective four-year institutions. These campuses enroll the great majority of lower-income college students. Yet flagship public campuses — like those in Ann Arbor, Mich.; Boulder, Colo.; and Gainesville, Fla. — are important to upward mobility too, given the success of their graduates.

In the last few years, many flagships have begun to recruit more upper-income students from outside their state, including from overseas. Those students don’t qualify for in-state

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tuition or for much financial aid — and thus help bolster the colleges' budgets.

Often, college officials describe the strategy in different terms. They say that they are trying to lift their campus's national profile, not to mention its U.S. News ranking. To do so, they must recruit a larger pool of students with high test scores than exists in their own state.

But the net result, to put it bluntly, is bad for the country. Top state universities are displacing impressive low-income students, who have often overcome troubled neighborhoods and high schools. Many of those students then enroll instead in colleges with fewer resources and higher dropout rates. In the process, the higher-education system becomes a bit less meritocratic.

The story in California is more nuanced, but still disappointing, particularly given the state university's history. Since its founding, during a burst of national investment during and just after Abraham Lincoln's presidency, no other university in the world has combined academic excellence and broad access so well.

John Aubrey Douglass, an education scholar, describes that combination as "the California idea." The top five colleges in this year's

### Change to State Higher Education Funding
Percent change in per-student funding since 2008, adjusted for inflation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2009-2016 Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>+30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Increased funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Decreased funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>-49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>-52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>-56%</td>
</tr>
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Note: North Dakota's state revenue surged thanks to the fracking boom, and the state spent some of the additional money on education.

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
College Access Index ranking are still University of California campuses: Irvine, Santa Barbara, Davis, San Diego and Los Angeles. Berkeley ranks ninth, while the private colleges in the top 10 are Amherst, Pomona and Harvard. The full list is available online.

Yet even as California remains a leader, it is also inching away from its legacy.

With state support down, university leaders have decided that their least bad option is to enroll more high-income students. In only four years, undergraduate enrollment in the University of California system has risen 15 percent, or by 27,000 students. The expansion has allowed the colleges to continue enrolling similar numbers of lower-income students, rather than displacing those students, but it has created severe crowding.

“It's pretty bad,” Gabriel Schneider, an editor of The Triton student newspaper on the San Diego campus, told me. Single dormitory rooms have been turned into doubles and even triples. Libraries and other common spaces are packed. The university tried to convert an art gallery into a classroom, only to back down after an uproar.

On the Davis campus, near Sacramento, the crowding has particularly harmed less affluent students, because apartment rents have jumped. “The housing shortage in Davis is just horrible,” said Scott Dresser, a fourth-year student. Some students are now commuting from Woodland, 10 miles away, said Eli Flesch, another fourth-year student.

What would be a better solution?

For one thing, universities should be scouring their budgets, looking for spending that's less important to their mission than economic diversity and meritocracy are. There is no shortage of suspects: struggling academic programs, spiffy recreation centers, expensive sports teams, bureaucratic bloat.

But such cuts are not the only answer, even if some governors and state legislators claim otherwise. This country should also be investing more of its resources in education.

A century ago, it did precisely that, making high school universal and making possible the so-called American century. Today's economy demands many more college graduates than the country currently has. Producing them won't be free. But it will be worth it.

The alternative — which is the path we're now on — is just about the worst economic-development strategy imaginable.
University of California to end lavish spending on dinners

By: The Associated Press

The University of California has announced it will no longer pay for the meals of its governing board after a newspaper reported lavish spending on dinners.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported Sunday that UC President Janet Napolitano 's office reimbursed regents for more than $225,000 in dinner parties since 2012, including $17,600 for a banquet held the night before the board voted to raise tuition.

UC Board of Regents Chair Monica Lozano and Napolitano said in a statement that regents will "absorb their costs for board dinners" to avoid questions over how money is spent.

The newspaper reports Monday the reversal was the idea of regent Richard Blum.

Dinner costs are paid out of a private endowment designated for university business costs not covered by state or tuition funds.

Earlier this month, California Gov. Jerry Brown announced that he is withholding $50 million from the University of California in light of an audit last month that claimed to have found a stash of $175 million in secret funds while officials requested more money from the state.

A state audit found that under university system President Janet Napolitano, former Department of Homeland Security chief, UC administrators hid $175 million from the public while increasing tuition and asking the state for more money.

The UC Board of Regents in January voted to increase in-state tuition and fees by $336 next academic year. Some lawmakers called for a reversal of the tuition hike in the wake of the audit.
Regents throw parties at UC’s expense

By: Melody Gutierrez and Nanette Asimov

The night before the University of California Board of Regents voted to raise student tuition to help cash-strapped campuses, they threw themselves a party at the luxury Intercontinental Hotel in San Francisco and billed the university. The tab for the Jan. 25 banquet: $17,600 for 65 people, or $270 a head.

It wasn’t the only pricey dinner UC’s volunteer governing board put on for themselves at the university’s expense.

Two weeks ago, on May 17, the regents threw a $15,199 party at San Francisco’s elegant Palace Hotel for 59 people — a $258-a-head event also billed to the university. Hours earlier, angry students shut down the regents meeting, shouting “greedy” in protest of the tuition increase and revelations by State Auditor Elaine Howle that the university president’s office kept $175 million in secret funds. The day after the party, regents defended UC President Janet Napolitano after Howle presented her audit — but agreed to her recommendations.

Documents obtained by The Chronicle show that Napolitano’s office reimbursed the regents for more than $225,000 in dinner parties since 2012. During that period, the regents held four to six dinner parties a year for themselves, their spouses and other guests. Those dinners included:

• January 2016: A $13,600 retirement party for regents Fred Ruiz and Paul Wachter at the Palace Hotel. The regents office initially said 86 people attended the dinner, which The Chronicle reported earlier this month. Last week, the office acknowledged that had been the number of people invited to the party, and that 60 attended. The cost per person was $227.

• November 2014: An $8,800 dinner party thrown as the regents considered raising tuition by up to 28 percent over five years. The regents approved the tuition increase, which was later rescinded following negotiations between Napolitano and Gov. Jerry Brown.

• March 2013: The regents hosted a $15,600 dinner even as former UC President Mark Yudof said at that month’s meeting that UC was “working to weather the financial crisis.”

Regents’ dinners are a tradition going back decades using private funds bequeathed to the university, said UC spokeswoman Dianne Klein. But even some regents say the cost should be borne by those attending, not by a university system that demands more money from students and the state.

“These things are unnecessary,” said Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, a regent who did not attend the January or May dinners. When told the January dinner cost $17,600, Newsom said it was “inappropriate.”

“We should do better,” he said. “It’s jaw-dropping.”

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The governor, also a regent, did not attend the January or May dinners, according to his office, which said he was unavailable for comment.

One government watchdog said the Jan. 25 party on the eve of the tuition increase creates the impression of a conflict of interest.

“These types of dinner events look really, really bad, and they give the appearance that (Napolitano) is buying the support of the regents,” said Jamie Court, president of the good-government advocacy group Consumer Watchdog. He called the dinner parties “outrageous.”

The parties shed light on the close relationship between Napolitano’s office and the board that oversees it: Napolitano’s office reimburses the regents’ expenses, and the regents approve the budget for Napolitano’s office.

These parties also raise questions about the effectiveness of the regents’ spending policy. UC policy prohibits reimbursements for “entertainment expenses that are lavish or extravagant” and limits dinners to $81 a person.

The Chronicle first identified the high-priced regents dinners in documents obtained from the state auditor after Napolitano’s office came under fire last month for keeping secret funds and paying executives salaries much higher than similar positions at other universities or in government work.

That audit questioned how well the 22 regents were doing their job overseeing Napolitano’s $686 million office, headquarters for the university system. Howle recommended that the Legislature take over the job, suggesting that would increase accountability.

Such an action would be unprecedented because, under the California Constitution, UC is an autonomous branch of government that the state has determined is “equal and coordinate” with the others.

Assemblyman Phil Ting, D-San Francisco, who called for the audit and wants to bring Napolitano’s budget under legislative control, said the dinner parties help make his case.

“I’m concerned they haven’t scaled these back,” Ting said.

Documents show that 16 regents attended the January dinner, including the student regent and the incoming student regent for next year, as well as campus chancellors, UC executives, spouses and others. Among the guests was regent and state community college Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley, who said the $270-a-head retirement dinner “does sound high.” To be certain, though, he said he would have to compare it to the practices of other university boards.

“But it’s certainly an area the board should look at and periodically review,” Oakley said. “We need to be able to articulate to the public that we’re being good fiscal agents.”
Another guest was Ralph Washington Jr., president of the UC Student Association and an incoming graduate student in public policy at UC Berkeley. Told how much the dinner cost, he said: “Oh my gosh, wow. That’s a surprise.”

“I don’t think any student would be happy to know about the amount of money used” on dinners, the student representative said, adding the regents should re-evaluate such decisions. “It is incumbent on those of us with the most positional power to make decisions from the perspective of those with the least.”

Like the other guests interviewed, Washington did not remember what was served.

Also at the January dinner was Regent John A. Pérez, who told a reporter at the May 17 regents meeting: “I think we should pay for our own dinners.”

Pérez was one of four regents who voted against the tuition increase that is expected to raise $143 million next year. “We shouldn’t use money (for dinners) that could be used for students. Lavish meals are not the ‘highest, best’ use.”

That night, the regents hosted the $258-per-person dinner at the Palace for Regent Monica Lozano, who is stepping down as chairwoman.

How much the regents spend per person matters, said Regent Dick Blum, who had RSVP’d to attend the January dinner but could not recall if he went.

“If it was $300 a person, that’s too high,” Blum told a reporter during the May regents’ meeting.

Critics say there are better uses for money bequeathed to the university.

“This is money that could go toward scholarships,” said Jessica Levinson, a law professor and government ethics expert at Loyola Law School. “This rubs people the wrong way, including me.”

On Jan. 26, the day after the party at the Intercontinental, the board voted 16-4 to increase tuition, saying they were “regrettably supporting” the hike because the university needed the money to ensure the system could maintain quality and access.

One of the retiring regents, Russell Gould, the state’s former finance director under Gov. Pete Wilson, said at the meeting that the university had done a good job of reducing costs and that the modest tuition increase was not done casually.

“I think we have an obligation to protect this institution and to serve the students,” Gould said.

The other retiring regent who’d been feted the night before was Eddie Island, who also approved the tuition increase.

Island declined to comment Friday. Gould did not return a call for comment.
Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, R-San Ramon, said more information is needed about how the regents and Napolitano’s office are spending money. Baker has urged Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, D-Paramount (Los Angeles County), who is also a regent, to subpoena UC for detailed financial records that the auditor’s office said it never received.

“This is potentially another example of why a subpoena is needed,” Baker said.
The Secret Sorority at Penn State’s Deadly Hazing Party

By: Brandy Zadrozny

After 19-year-old Tim Piazza’s death in February after a night of hazing at Penn State University’s Beta Theta Pi house, a grand jury criminally charged 18 young men in connection with their pledge’s death. Administrators permanently banned the fraternity, and scrambled to announce safeguards intended to protect future students.

Recruitment and rush at Penn State was postponed for a semester, hard liquor and kegs banned, and the school will more closely monitor houses for under age drinking. Socials—or parties between men and women’s groups like the one where Piazza spent his final hours—were cut to 10 a semester and new report cards for the campus’s 83 Greek organizations will make public each group’s history of violations for hazing, alcohol, and sexual and other misconduct.

But one sorority, a group of some 100 young women known as Trilogy, won’t appear on Penn State’s new report cards and is unlikely to face any of these sanctions. Never mind the fact that, according to the grand jury report, its underage members were present at the very party where Piazza was forced to chug cheap vodka, shotgun beers, and run through an alcohol obstacle course while his brothers poured beer on top of him. Piazza was “trying to get around” two of the “sorority women sitting on the stairs,” when he fell, head first, 15 feet down them, according to a lawyer for one of the charged students.

The members of Trilogy won’t be included in these new safety measures. Because, despite its origins and social activities, Trilogy is not a sorority. Not technically. Not in the eyes of Penn State.

Trilogy was born in 2009, out of the ashes of Penn State’s Delta Delta Delta sorority, which had been shuttered by the national executive board due to “alleged hazing and risk-management violations,” according to a press release from the national sorority at the time. Risk-management violations deal with the unauthorized use of drugs and alcohol.

While sororities are often closed for low enrollment numbers, all-women organizations rarely have had their charters revoked for hazing or alcohol abuse. The details of the month-long investigation that led to the closure of Tri Delta at Penn State have remained private. The Daily Beast reached out to former reporters for the college paper and over 50 former members, few of whom were willing to comment on the allegations. “Obviously, no one died,” said one alumni, who asked not to be named.

The national office also refused to elaborate on details of the alleged hazing, but provided a statement from Tri Delta Chief Executive Officer Karen Hughes White:

“Tri Delta withdrew the charter of our Alpha Phi Chapter at Penn State in 2009 for behaviors that do not align with our purpose and standards. There is no Tri Delta chapter at Penn State. We do not support nor do we have any connection with the Trilogy organization.”

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Still, a connection seems obvious. Immediately following Tri Delta’s closure, 61 ex-members handed in resignation letters and formed a new organization—Trilogy—with the purpose of continuing on for Penn State’s main philanthropic campus event: THON, a 46-hour dance marathon that raises money for the fight against childhood cancer. Trilogy even retained Tri Delta’s fraternity partner, Kappa Delta Rho, and the university still considered it a Greek pairing, a Penn State public-relations representative told the college newspaper at the time.

A press release distributed at the time of Tri Delta’s closing by the national office said the sorority hoped to return sometime in the future, but requests for its return had been denied. In 2013, the Panhellenic Council formally invited Delta Delta Delta back on campus, but the national office declined to reinstate the chapter.

And in the last eight years, despite the national chapter refusing Penn State’s efforts to bring the Tri Delta sorority back to campus, the women of Trilogy have continued to recruit members, party with fraternities, and participate in campus-wide events usually reserved for Greek organizations. The only thing missing seems to be the oversight.

“Trilogy is not held to the same rules as other sororities, and does not face the same repercussions,” said one student involved with the student-governing council of Greek organizations, who asked not to be named for fear of administrative backlash. “Panhellenic chapters have rules pertaining to how much they can social, on what days, and how many members. There are ‘social checkers’ and other precautions that sororities must adhere to. Our chapters also register all social interactions with the governing board, so we know where they are, when, and with who. We work hand in hand with the university and operate from our national organization. To be in a Panhellenic chapter there are GPA requirements and other responsibilities. We have standards of excellence, which must be met each year pertaining for educational programming, philanthropy, and community service.”

The student also noted that Trilogy was one of two underground sororities to operate on campus. The other, she said, was ESA, which began operating shortly after the closing of Chi Omega in 2014. That sorority lost its national charter after photos surfaced of pledges at parties dressed in ponchos, wearing sombreros and mustaches, and holding signs that read, “Will mow lawn for weed + beer.”

Trilogy’s current activities are just as secretive as the reason for Tri Delta’s expulsion. An interview request sent to the organization went unanswered, as did emails and phone calls to dozens of current members. And the distinction between Trilogy and other recognized sororities can be difficult for an outsider to identify. In group photos posted to Facebook, the women of Trilogy wear all-white and cock their heads to the side while family and friends comment, praising their freshman for “pledging” and joining Trilogy, whose members refer to each other as sisters, and hold the letters “OG,” a nod to the tradition of Greek letters. Trilogy is also ranked 26th out of 29 sororities on campus on the unofficial, unscientific, crowd-sourced site GreekRank.com. A recent review for Trilogy reads, “Letters schmetters. Hot, fun, and social.” And in various photos on social media, the women form their hands into the shape of triangles—a signal known in the Greek system to belong to Trilogy’s forebear, Delta Delta Delta. (To be
Penn State told The Daily Beast that it had never received “verifiable evidence” of secret sororities on campus. Trilogy, Penn State asserts, is a student organization like 1,100 others, but will eventually be investigated for any wrongdoing on the night of Piazza’s death. “Every aspect of these issues is being scrutinized by leaders at Penn State,” said Lisa Powers, senior director of Penn State’s Office of Strategic Communications. “Student Activities is currently looking at the night in question, including whether Trilogy violated any of the policies or code of conduct for student organizations. If there is evidence of a violation, Trilogy will face a hearing before the Student Organization Conduct Committee.”

The Office of Student Activities did not return a request for comment.

Underground fraternities and sororities aren’t unique to Penn State, and Trilogy has not been accused of any wrongdoing—in Piazza’s death or otherwise. At the same time, Trilogy’s complete lack of advisers, national oversight, general leadership, and risk-management training makes it a worst-case scenario for a campus organization, according to students and parents on campus who told The Daily Beast that placing restrictions on fraternities and sororities and ignoring groups like Trilogy is naive.

“Trilogy has been allowed to continue with no advisers, no oversight, and Penn State is well aware of it,” said a sorority collegiate adviser who asked to remain anonymous because she has a daughter involved in Greek life at Penn State.

Trilogy markets itself to freshman using that limited oversight as an incentive, she said. “Dues for a national sorority are about $700. Trilogy’s are $80. These girls say, ‘We party with the frats, can party as many nights as we want, participate in THON, and we don’t have any advisers or old ladies telling us what we can do. How can you lose?’ I would never let my kids join that.

“If the university wants to protect students,” she continued, “it needs to implement their changes for Trilogy, and across all student organizations.”