JUNE 30, 2017

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Pay climbs for college presidents

By Collin Binkley
The Associated Press

Presidents of U.S. public colleges and universities saw their earnings climb by 5.3 percent last year, with several of them topping $1 million, according to an annual survey.

The Chronicle of Higher Education's study of more than 150 college presidents found that their average annual pay increased in fiscal year 2016 to $501,000.

Among the top earners were eight public university presidents whose total compensation exceeded $1 million, up from five the year before, the study found. Most of them come from the nation's largest schools and university systems.

Topping the Chronicle's salary ranking was Arizona State University's president, Michael Crow, who received almost $1.6 million last year. Along with a base salary of $838,000, he received an annual bonus of $150,000 and a 10-year retention bonus of $550,000 paid by the university's private foundation.

Arizona State officials noted that Crow's retention bonus was a one-time payment and that he was eligible for an additional $900,000 that instead went to the university's Public Service Academy.

The Arizona Board of Regents, the governing body of Arizona State, called Crow "a remarkable leader of the highest caliber" and said he has boosted student success and the state's economy.

"Under President Crow's leadership, the four-year graduation rate for Arizona residents has nearly doubled since 2002 and research expenditures are on a strong trajectory of growth, having nearly quadrupled during the same time," board vice chair Bill Ridenour said by email.

Following Crow were the chancellor of the University of Texas System, William McRaven, and the chancellor of the Texas A&M University.

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PAY

Continued from A1

System, John Sharp.

The survey found that two presidents received base salaries of $1 million or more last year, a threshold that had no public university chief had previously crossed in the study's history.

McRaven's $1.5 million pay package included a base salary of $1.2 million, and the president of Texas A&M's College Station campus, Michael Young, was paid $1 million that was entirely base pay. The previous highest salary was $851,000, given by Ohio State University in 2013.

The chairman of the University of Texas System's governing board, Paul Foster, said McRaven's pay is "reasonable and justified" and comes from private donations.

"Our Chancellor is essentially the CEO of one of the largest and most complex organizations in the state of Texas and one of the largest systems of higher education in the country," Foster said in a statement. "He is well recognized as a great leader and manager, and in my opinion, earns every cent."

The Chronicle changed its methodology for total compensation in this year's survey to include nontaxable benefits such as medical insurance and legal services. Using its previous formula, it found that pay for public university presidents increased 4.3 percent in 2015 and 7 percent in 2014.

Public university executives are typically paid less than their counterparts at private universities, whose salaries are gathered separately by The Chronicle. According to the latest study of private colleges, which used data from 2014, almost 40 colleges paid their chiefs at least $1 million, led by $5.4 million at Wilmington University in Delaware.

Colleges of all types have faced pressure to rein in spending in recent years as costs for students continue to rise, and some critics say salaries and benefits for presidents have become lavish. Many colleges counter that they have to pay competitively to hire quality leaders and that even the highest salaries are only a small fraction of overall budgets.
Tuscaloosa mayor would run as a Democrat

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox announced Thursday that he intends to explore an Alabama gubernatorial run.

Maddox, 44, said he’s filed the necessary documents with the Alabama Secretary of State to form the exploratory committee and determine whether he has a feasible shot at winning.

He gave no timetable on making a decision, but said it would hinge on his family’s ability to withstand a statewide campaign and whether, if elected, his administration would be able to govern effectively.

“If elected, can we continue to make a difference?” Maddox said in an interview with The Tuscaloosa News. “I believe Alabamians are looking for real leadership and someone who is willing to run for them.”

Should he decide to enter the 2018 race for governor, he will be joining a field that is increasingly getting more and more crowded.

Since Gov. Kay Ivey was sworn in after ex-Gov. Robert Bentley resigned in disgrace in April, at least six Republicans have declared their intentions to seek the state’s highest executive office:

• Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle
• Jefferson County Commissioner David Carrington
• Evangelist Scott Dawson
• Stacy Lee George, a former Morgan County

“Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox

I believe Alabamians are looking for real leadership and someone who is willing to run for them.”

See MAYOR, A7
Commissioner who led a failed bid for governor in 2014.
• John McMillan, the state's two-term commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Industries
• Businessman Joshua Jones

Additionally, Sue Bell Cobb, the former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, and marriage equality advocate Christopher A. Countryman have said they are seeking the governor's seat as a Democrat.

The statewide primary is less than a year away -- June 5, 2018 -- with a potential runoff, if needed, set for July 17.

The statewide general election will be held Nov. 6, 2018.

Maddox, who has served as Tuscaloosa's mayor since 2005, is not hiding his intention to seek statewide office as a Democrat. He's also aware of the challenges this could present in a state that has voted strongly Republican in recent elections.

But he says he's confident that state voters are willing to look beyond party affiliation and instead at accomplishments.

Since becoming mayor, Maddox has overseen the implementation of a number of services that have become part of Tuscaloosans' regular life, such as the non-emergency hotline Tuscaloa 311, which few cities across the nation had when it was brought online 10 years ago and now serves as a direct phone line to City Hall while monitoring and tracking everything from pothole complaints to garbage cart replacements, and the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative, the program assisting more than 250 at-risk preschoolers across 21 classrooms in nine city schools.

Maddox also was tasked with steering the city's management through the Great Recession and the recovery and aftermath of the April 27, 2011, tornado, the city's worst natural disaster. During these periods, his budget practices kept the city afloat and, in most years, allowed for an operating surplus, all while maintaining the city's 2 percent sales tax rate, which is among the lowest of the state's largest cities.

“I think people are looking for results-oriented government,” Maddox said. “Tonight, when people are at the kitchen table with their family, they're going to be talking about college affordability, looking for a better job ... or the risk of losing their healthcare or health-care provider.

“Those are not Republican or Democratic issues. Those are American issues,”

He’s also not deterred that Alabama’s last elected governor, Robert Bentley, also hailed from Tuscaloosa, maintaining that voters can see the difference between the two candidates despite sharing a home town.

Rather, Maddox said that, should his gubernatorial candidacy proceed, he will be outlining plans for “pragmatic, modern leadership” with the intent of lifting Alabama from the bottom of almost every major quality-of-life category, from education to workforce development.

“That's not only embarrassing, it's immoral,” Maddox said, “and it's time to make Alabama proud again.”

Maddox, a 1991 graduate of Central High School, began his political career in 2001, serving one term as Tuscaloosa councilman, representing District 6.

Armed with a bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in public administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Maddox bested four other challengers for the mayor’s seat in 2004 after six-term Mayor Al DuPont chose not to seek re-election.

Now with Stephanie, his wife of seven years; his daughter, 15-year-old Taylor; and his 3-year-old son, Eli, Maddox said he has no intentions of abandoning the mayor’s office while considering or, ultimately, pursuing the governor's seat.

Alabama law allows for elected municipal leaders to retain their seats while seeking a new office and Maddox said that doing so will serve as experience and practice for being governor, which will demand the ability to perform multiple tasks at a high level.

In his announcement on Thursday, Maddox pointed to the recent scandals involving all three branches of state government as one of the decisions behind this exploratory campaign.

“In just the past two years, our governor, our chief justice, and our speaker of the House have all left office under a cloud of shame,” Maddox said.

“I have heard the voices of people from across Alabama calling for a new beginning in Montgomery — a new covenant between the people of Alabama and the people serving us. “We must create a new covenant together. We owe it to our children. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to each other. We owe it to our children. We owe it to the future. And while the exploratory committee has not yet been fully formed, Maddox said one of its duties in the coming months will be to plot ways to accomplish this vision, Maddox said.

“The more difficult decision of running for governor lies ahead,” Maddox said, “and I take seriously my responsibilities as a husband, father and mayor. For those that I love and serve, they deserve thoughtful answers.

“Wherever this path may lead, it is undeniable that, as Alabamians, we all deserve better.”

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The Tuscaloosa News
Friday, June 30, 2017
Blue Origin to make rocket engines in state

But it needs to beat Aerojet Rocketdyne for contract first

Lee Roop lroop@al.com

Alabama leaders from Gov. Kay Ivey and U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby down to the Huntsville City Council gathered this week to cheer the news that Jeff Bezos’ rocket company Blue Origin will build a rocket engine plant in Huntsville.

Hundreds of jobs, hundreds of millions of dollars in investment. That’s what the crowd heard. But what’s happening between Amazon founder Bezos and Alabama right now is more complicated than it appeared to the casual attendee.

“Blue Origin will build a 400,000-square-foot facility on 40 acres in Cummings Research Park,” Ivey said Monday. “Blue Origin will be investing $200 million to produce the BE-4 rocket engine which will supply the New Glenn orbital launch vehicle and hopefully (be) selected (for) the United Launch Alliance Vulcan rocket.”

Blue Origin President Rob Meyerson followed Ivey to the podium to announce “the selection of Huntsville, Alabama, as the location of Blue Origin’s BE-4 rocket engine production facility.”

But Meyerson also added a caveat.

“After signing a BE-4 production contract with United Launch Alliance, Blue Origin will build a state of the art, high-tech manufacturing facility at the Cummings Research Park here in Huntsville, Alabama,” Meyerson said. He added, “Construction can begin following the signing of such a contract expected to be later this year.”

Lucia Cape, senior vice president of the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce, confirmed the link Monday afternoon. Blue Origin needs the new engine for its own New Glenn rocket, but the Alabama plant depends on Blue Origin getting the ULA engine contract.

“Yes, the ground breaking will follow a production contract with ULA, after down-select of the engine is made,” Cape said. “There is not a set time for this decision.”

NOT THE ONLY ONE

But Blue Origin isn’t the only competitor wanting to power ULA. Aerojet Rocketdyne also announced a new Huntsville rocket plant this year to consolidate some of its operations and to build its own entry in the ULA engine competition. Its engine is the AR-1.

Both the AR-1 and BE-4 are believed still in the running. Contacted Monday, ULA spokeswoman Jessica Rye said, “This is an on-going procurement and down-selection, and we are not commenting at this time.”

So, why a big public announcement for a plant Blue Origin won’t build unless it wins a ULA contract it hasn’t won? Why was a detailed package of state incentives totaling nearly $50 million released, along with details of Huntsville’s own $6 million in incentives? There was even a movie welcoming Blue Origin as an heir to Werner von Braun.

Blue Origin wasn’t answering further questions Monday, either, and it’s possible the answer is as simple as the Huntsville chamber has a good reason to expect Blue Origin will win. That would be exciting because Blue Origin is a major representative of “New Space,” and would signal a new era for Huntsville rocketry. There is another possible clue to the optimism in the presence at the event and remarks of Shelby. First, some background.

ULA uses a reliable older engine called the RD-180 now to lift satellites, including important military assets, into orbit aboard its Atlas V rocket. That engine is built by a partnership of an American and Russian company, and Shelby has helped ULA fight off repeated attempts by some in Congress to ban the RD-180 as tensions have mounted with Russia. In that fight, ULA has needed and counted on Shelby, and Shelby has come through.

If ULA loses its Russian engine before it gets a substitute for its new rocket called the Vulcan, it stands to lose U.S. military satellite launches. That could seriously harm ULA’s plant in Alabama and its 600 workers. As it stands, the substitute will be either the BE-4 or the AR-1.

WHAT SHELBY SAID

“I commend and respect Blue Origin for this announcement today, and they’re on the right track,” Shelby told the crowd Monday. “They’re on the cutting edge of technology, tomorrow’s propulsion, and I can think of no better place in the world than to build your business here and build that rocket here in Huntsville, Alabama. We are about space, we are about business, and you’re going to do well here, and we’re going to replace that Russian engine.”

So, Blue Origin has put down a Huntsville bet, and Shelby publicly backed it in Huntsville on Monday. Aerojet Rocketdyne has also put down a Huntsville bet, but it was announced at a press conference at the chamber of commerce office. Now, Huntsville’s chamber of commerce, the governor and Alabama’s Department of Commerce have all announced the Blue Origin plant in a big production. It isn’t immediately clear if the state has offered similar incentives to Aerojet Rocketdyne or whether Aerojet will build its new plant if it doesn’t win the ULA contract.

Stay tuned to see what ULA does with two big aerospace suppliers and Alabama waiting for its decision.

Incentive package

Job training: Alabama Industrial Development Training to employees valued by the state at $3 million.

Jobs tax credit: Estimated value of $8,707,212 over 10 years.

Investment tax credit: Estimated value of $30 million over 10 years.

20-year property tax abatement: The state approved years 11-20, with an estimated value of $667,745.

Reimbursement for eligible capital costs: $30 million.
TRADE

Cuba? Poultry industry waits

Mary Sell  Decatur Daily

Agriculture officials and industry leaders in Alabama for years have lobbied for expanded exports to communist Cuba, a country they see as a promising market for this state’s poultry products.

Now they’re waiting to see what President Donald Trump’s recent, more restrictive policy change with Cuba will mean for the millions of tons of poultry that leave Mobile for the island nation every month.

Alabama Agriculture Commissioner John McMillan recently said exports to Cuba could be impacted by that country’s response to the president’s directive. “Particularly, with Raul Castro stepping down in early ‘18,” McMillan said. “We’re going to be anxious to see what the Cuban government’s policy is going to be.

“ar something undesirable happens there, that would be on the Cuba side,” he said. “We hope that doesn’t happen.”

This month, Trump said the U.S. would impose new limits on travelers to the island and ban any payments to the military-linked conglomerate that controls much of the island’s tourism industry. Trump also declared, “The harboring of criminals and fugitives will end. You have no choice. It will end.”

The president said the United States would consider lifting those and other restrictions only after Cuba returned fugitives and made a series of other internal changes, including freeing political prisoners, allowing freedom of assembly and holding free elections.

Cuba’s foreign minister rejected the policy change, saying Cubans would “never negotiate under pressure or under threat” and would refuse the return of U.S. fugitives who have received asylum in Cuba.

About 7 million tons of poultry are shipped from the Port of Mobile each month to Cuba. But Cuba has other options for importing agriculture products, McMillan said, including Mexico, South America and Canada.

“They have choices. Some of those choices may be more expensive. That may be our advantage,” said McMillan, who has taken multiple trips to Cuba and advocated for expanded agriculture exports.

There are human rights violations in China, but no one is cutting off trade there, McMillan said. “The bottom line, I think, is that the best way to foment change down there is to continue trade with them.”

Armando de Quesada of Hartselle disagrees. He was 10 when he fled Cuba in 1962. On this issue, he agrees with Trump.

“Any dollars that go to Cuba automatically go to the Castro regime,” de Quesada said. “It’s not like here. … Over there, the government owns everything. There’s no benefit to the Cuban people.”

Growth of private industry is limited, and de Quesada doesn’t think opening relations between the two countries will effect change.

“I don’t think enriching them helps the cause of freedom,” he said. “It doesn’t help the people.”

Agriculture shipments to Cuba weren’t part of former President Barack Obama’s policy with the communist country. In 2000, Congress began allowing a limited amount of agriculture exports to Cuba.

“We’ve been trading with them for some time,” said Johnny Adams, executive director of the Alabama Poultry and Egg Association. While Obama made it easier, it’s still cumbersome.

“We’re not allowed to give them credit. They have to pay us up front through a third party,” Adams said. “Normalizing trade would make it a lot easier.”

Like McMillan, Adams has been to Cuba multiple times. “We have the highest quality, most reasonably priced poultry in the world, and we’re 90 miles away,” Adams said.

“Hopefully, everyone can sit down and work things out between the two countries. We’ve enjoyed our relationship with the Cuban people and would like to see it get better.”
Alabama wonders about Cuba trade in Trump era

Millions of tons of poultry leave Mobile for the island nation every month

By Mary Sell
Decatur Daily

MONTGOMERY — Agriculture officials and industry leaders in Alabama for years have lobbied for expanded exports to communist Cuba, a country they see as a promising market for this state’s poultry products.

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See CUBA, AS

Cuba

Continued from A7

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“Hopefully, everyone can sit down and work things out between the two countries. We’ve enjoyed our relationship with the Cuban people and would like to see it get better.”
The senior vice president of DCH Health System has been elected secretary-treasurer of the Alabama Hospital Association.

Luke Standeffer, who also serves as an administrator at Northport Medical Center, was chosen for the post during the association’s recent annual meeting.

“Luke has been a terrific leader of our association for a number of years, and we are pleased he’s accepted the secretary-treasurer position,” said Dr. Donald E. Williamson, MD, president of the Alabama Hospital Association.

Standeffer has served on the Alabama Hospital Association board of trustees and as a member of its executive committee. He’s also served as president of the Birmingham Regional Hospital Council and the West Alabama Hospital Council.

Other boards Standeffer has served on include the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce, the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, the Healthcare Workers Compensation Fund, Greater Alabama Health Network and Alabama Community Care.

Before joining the DCH Health System, Standeffer was the administrator/CEO of HealthSouth Medical Center in Birmingham and HealthSouth Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia. He also served as assistant administrator/operations at the Fayette Medical Center.

Standeffer earned a bachelor’s degree in commerce and business administration from the University of Alabama and a master of business administration from Mississippi State University.

Founded in 1921, the Alabama Hospital Association is a statewide trade organization that assists member hospitals in serving the health care needs of Alabamians.
MONTGOMERY

State school board at odds with own lawyers

Mike Cason mcason@al.com

Embattled in a dispute with state attorneys on the Department of Education staff, the state Board of Education decided to hire itself an outside law firm.

The board voted 6-0 Friday to hire Lewis Gillis and his firm, Means-Gillis of Montgomery.

"We just felt we needed someone for the board," Board Vice President Yvette Richardson said. "No one is trying to replace anyone who is already here. But we just felt we needed our own counsel at this time."

Board members said the board would use the firm as needed. They did not give any specifics on how they would cover any legal fees incurred.

Board Member Mary Scott Hunter questioned the cost but also voted in favor of the hiring.

"It's not a good idea to continue to spend and spend without a strategy for spending your money," Hunter said.

The decision to hire the outside law firm came two days after most of the board had a sharp disagreement with three staff attorneys, as well as Hunter.

On Wednesday, the board voted 6-1 to accept a report on an internal Department of Education investigation that said General Counsel Juliana Dean and attorneys Susan Crowther and James Ward conspired to malign Jefferson County Schools Superintendent Craig Pouncey to keep Pouncey from being chosen state superintendent last year.

A report written by the state board of education lawyer said there was a conspiracy to malign former Jefferson County Superintendent Craig Pouncey, pictured here. The report implicated a board member, as well as staff lawyers. File

The three lawyers have denied the allegation through their attorney, Dennis Bailey. Bailey spoke briefly to the board Friday and said he planned to present a written rebuttal to the report to the board in seven days.

The investigative report also accused Hunter and former Interim Superintendent Philip Cleveland of taking part in the conspiracy to damage Pouncey's reputation.

Hunter denied the claim, calling the report "garbage." She voted against accepting the report.

"Those are all good lawyers that were accused and it's not fair for them to be maligned in the way that they've been by a faulty report," Hunter said Friday.

Meyer vouched for the accuracy of his report in remarks to board members on Wednesday before they voted to adopt it.

Superintendent Michael Sentance questioned its conclusions, as did retired Supreme Court Justice Bernard Harwood, hired by Sentance to give a second opinion. The board chose not to adopt Harwood's remarks as part of the record in adopting the report.

In February, Pouncey filed a lawsuit against the same five people named in the report, alleging they conspired to keep him from becoming state superintendent. The defendants have denied the claims and moved to have the case dismissed.

The controversy started last summer when board members received an unsigned letter accusing Pouncey of violating the ethics law when he was a top official at the state Department of Education, about eight years ago.

When the anonymous allegations surfaced, Pouncey was one of six finalists for state superintendent. Pouncey denied the allegations, as did others who worked with him at the time.

In August 2016, a day or two after news reports surfaced about the anonymous allegation against Pouncey, the board chose Sentance as superintendent over Pouncey and the other finalists. Pouncey finished second in the voting.

Meyer's says the alleged conspirators could have cleared Pouncey of the allegations last year but chose to let suspicions linger to hurt his chances of getting the state superintendent job. Meyer did not interview the five people accused for his report. Sentance, who assigned Meyer to do the investigation, said he limited its scope to a review of electronic evidence.

Board members said Meyer's report would be sent to the attorney general's office, which had requested an internal review by the department before deciding whether to pursue a further investigation.
Funding at heart of school system secessions

Report: Alabama second in nation in district breakaways

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

Alabama has seen a steady secession, or breakaway, of city school districts from county districts in recent years, due in large part to the financial incentives awaiting the departing district, according to a new report from EdBuild, a national nonprofit that advocates for equitable school funding.

Those fractures have real consequences for those they leave behind, according to the report, including the widening of the resource gap among school districts, and the creation of costly inefficiencies and socioeconomic and racial disparities.

"Fractured: The Breakdown of America's School Districts," released Wednesday, highlights how 10 new Alabama school districts have formed statewide since 2000, including Gardendale's breakaway from Jefferson County.

SCHOOLS

FROM A1

Only 47 new school districts have been formed nationwide during that same time period.

EdBuild's founder and CEO Rebecca Sibilia is quick to say the report isn't condemning communities for wanting the best for their children.

And when the law and the courts not only provide an easy way, but also a financial incentive to secede from the larger county system, Sibilia said, "You really can't blame communities for actually doing it."

Sibilia said lawmakers and leaders are charged with protecting the most vulnerable students, but don't appear to be doing so.

It is the cordoning off of local wealth that weakens educational opportunities for those left behind and exacerbates differences in funding for schools, Sibilia said.

This is not the first time EdBuild has featured Alabama in a report on inequities in school funding. Just last year, "Fault Lines" showed Alabama to have seven of the most segregating school district borders in terms of student poverty levels in the country.

That report highlighted extreme differences in student poverty levels in districts that shared a border.

Mountain Brook and Vestavia Hills, two of Alabama's wealthiest cities, were contrasted with Birmingham, with whom they both share a border.

During the most recent school year, more than 65 percent of Birmingham's students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, according to the Alabama Department of Education. In Vestavia Hills, less than 10 percent of students were eligible, and none were eligible in Mountain Brook.

"There is no doubt that a splintered school system of haves and have-nots today lays the groundwork for a fractured society in the future," the newest report warns.
ALABAMA'S "PARTICULARLY PERMISSIVE" LAW

Alabama's law allowing for a city with 5,000 people to simply decide to break away and form their own school district is "particularly permissive," Sibilia said.

A federal court in 1994, when considering whether the city of Valley could operate a school system independently of Chambers County, interpreted Alabama's law to say a city not only has a right, but an obligation to operate a separate city school system.

Alabama law gives a city of 5,000 or more the opportunity to "enter into an agreement" with the county board of education to operate the schools within the city, but without that agreement, "control of the school or schools ... within the municipality shall be vested in a city board of education."

The 1994 court denied Valley's request because Chambers County was still operating under a federal desegregation order and Valley's fracture would impede Chambers County's progress toward desegregation.

Federal desegregation orders imposed on school districts in the 1960s and 1970s initially made it difficult for districts to splinter, but, the report states, the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Milliken v. Bradley weakened the federal court's ability to oversee broad desegregation efforts, prohibiting courts from ordering integration across district lines.

"The number of secessions that have occurred in Alabama further the notion that Milliken was particularly problematic, almost providing the opportunity to reverse Brown (v. Board of Education), Sibilia said.

"Seeing secessions happen under active desegregation orders in Alabama, I think is a national level story of the consequences of the Milliken decision."

A NATIONAL ISSUE

Alabamians aren't the only ones courting resources for wealthier communities, the report shows.

"There are ongoing secession cases in nine other states," Sibilia said.

Maine has formed at least 15 in that time period, with 11 forming since 2013 after consolidation was pushed in 2007. Maine Public Radio reported the number of districts in Maine went from 290 down to about 160 in 2011, but is back up again, with communities claiming they prefer local control of their schools.

However, unlike Alabama, voters must approve forming a new school district in Maine.

Tennessee lawmakers in recent years passed laws making it easier for a city to secede, the report shows. After Memphis City Schools merged with the surrounding Shelby County in 2010, lawmakers there acted to ease the path for wealthy and white suburbs to secede.

All that is needed, the report states, is for a city to have 1,500 students and a majority vote of the people. No government action is required.

By the start of the 2014-15 school year, six new districts had been formed within the Tennessee county, with an average student poverty rate of 11 percent, lower than the rate in Beverly Hills, according to the report. In contrast, in the larger district left behind, more than one in three students live in poverty.

According to the report, secession is not only harmful on equity grounds, it's also had financial management, duplicating bureaucracies and increasing overhead costs.

Nationwide, "the average new district formed since 2000 serves almost 2,600 students, compared to an average enrollment of over 30,000 in the districts they left behind," the report states.

Costs per pupil are also higher in smaller school districts, averaging $3,200 more in small districts (fewer than 3,000 students) and administrative costs are typically 60 percent more per student.

In Alabama, local public schools are chiefly dependent on state support, although many wealthier systems get a boost by raising local taxes and some poorer systems get more help from federal grants.

A study conducted by national experts, commissioned by the Alabama State Department of Education in 2013, found Alabama's state funding formula to be both inadequate and inequitable.

The state's Foundation Program, enacted in 1995, exacerbates inequities by not providing funding based on student needs. School districts that can raise additional money for schools do. For example, Mountain Brook spent the most per pupil in the state last year.

The range in amounts spent per student, funded only with local money, in Alabama's 136 school districts in the 2014-15 school year is remarkable.

In Mountain Brook, that local spending was $6,356 per student, while in Autauga County, where it is the lowest, $465 in local money was spent per student. Total spending was equally disparate, with Mountain Brook topping the list again, at $12,162 per student and Autauga County at the bottom again, at $7,536 per student.

WHY GARDENDALE IS GETTING SO MUCH ATTENTION

The national spotlight has been shining brightly on Gardendale's battle to separate from Jefferson County, and the report highlights that tug-of-war.

Sibilia said they aren't picking on Gardendale, but it is "just an extreme example" of how city districts are allowed to secede, even while under a nearly 50-year-old federal desegregation order.

The federal judge, in giving Gardendale permission to operate as a city school district, acknowledged racist motives behind the separation, which Sibilia said highlights the consequences of the 1974 Milliken decision.

Calling Gardendale's split a continuation of "a tragic local tradition," the report doesn't aim to fault communities for wanting to break away, but rather calls on lawmakers and policymakers to consider the framework that allows the further splintering of tax dollars among school districts, Sibilia said.

"Education is one of the very few places where we allow people to opt out of the common good, public good," she said. "In no other case would it even be conceivable that someone would ask for a discount on their federal taxes because they don't know anyone who is being supported by Medicare, right?"

Sibilia is hopeful the report will open the eyes of communities across the country, as many of these secessions happen under the radar, she said.

She said she hopes lawmakers and courts will consider their duty to protect the most vulnerable students who likely suffer when districts break away.

"It is our common practice in the United States to just fund schools for our neighborhood. We are allowing folks to bypass the notion that it's the public's responsibility to see all kids as their own."

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The Birmingham News
Sunday, June 25, 2017
GARDENDALE

The latest: Courts stay split — for now

Gardendale won’t be starting a new school system this fall after a federal judge May 30 stayed most of her April 24 order that set out the steps the city must take to split from Jefferson County within three years.

The judge, however, said in the meantime the county system can continue to realign the school zones for two elementary schools to address overcrowding and provide for better integration within those two campuses. She also said Gardendale and Jefferson County could informally meet to discuss Gardendale paying for the high school, although she would not require it.

U.S. District Court Judge Madeline Haikala stayed most of the provisions in her 190-page order from April 24 after both private plaintiffs, all black residents, and the Gardendale Board of Education recently told her they were appealing her ruling to the U.S. 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. She had issued the order allowing Gardendale to form its own system despite having found the push for formation of the school system had racial motives — an allegation city officials have denied.

Under her order, Haikala had, among other things, said Gardendale could begin operating a school system this fall with just the two elementary schools.

Meanwhile, the 11th circuit is still deciding whether Haikala’s order was final and ripe for appeal.

— Kent Faulk
Congressman speaks on former Alabama student Megan Rondini's suicide

By: Ivana Hrynkiw

U.S. Representative from Texas made a speech today about a former University of Alabama student who committed suicide last year after she said her rape case was mishandled.


"I want to tell Megan's story from her point of view and her beliefs. She was smart, kind, ambitious, and funny. She loved other people," he said.

Poe is the co-founder and chairman of the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus.

Poe detailed Rondini's life, which was told to Buzzfeed News earlier this month by her parents and friends. Rondini grew up in Austin, Tex., and moved to Tuscaloosa when she started college at UA. She had a "beautiful life," Poe said.

Poe said Rondini wanted to go home after a night out with her friends, and got into a car with a man from a powerful family in Tuscaloosa. That man, the 20-year-old said, took her to his mansion and sexually assaulted her. Poe said after Rondini was raped and her attacker had fallen asleep, she climbed out of his bedroom window.

"...But it's here, Mr. Speaker, that the system, she says, started to fail her. The hospital wasn't sufficiently trained in sexual assault procedure and botched the rape kit. Megan then went to the police station to give her statement about what happened to her, but it was there she was treated with disdain and disbelief by Tuscaloosa's Police Department," Poe said Wednesday. "But Mr. Speaker, a rape victim can never move on. It's something they carry with them for the rest of their lives. The scars left by the rape do not fade away for victims."

Rondini hanged herself in February 2016.

Poe, who spent over 30 years as a criminal court judge and prosecutor, said, "Rape, Mr. Speaker, is never the fault of the victim, and she deserved better. Now, I don't know whether the perpetrator in this case is guilty or not. I am giving you Megan's point of view. But what Megan believed was that she was failed by the hospital, law enforcement, and the University of Alabama."

Rondini's parents have hired Birmingham lawyer Leroy Maxwell Jr. of the Maxwell Firm to represent them in filing a federal Title IX complaint against the university, and with possibly other complaints. Maxwell told AL.com the complaint will be filed in the coming weeks.

Last week, a spokesperson for UA released a statement that read in part, "Information published by news outlets this week has unfortunately ignored some significant facts... We hope these recent news accounts, which do not tell the full story, will not discourage others from reporting sexual assault or seeking help and support."

The full statement from the university and the Maxwell Firm can be read here.

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Poe ended his speech by saying, "Mr. Speaker, it is important, it is imperative that we understand victims of sexual assault. She got the death penalty for being the victim of sexual assault. She's not here to tell her story today, and I'm telling it for her. And that's just the way it is."
Our View: University of Alabama must take action to stop sexual assault

By: Staff

Sexual assault has been brought to the forefront of campus dialogue once again. Unfortunately, this is an all-too common occurrence that The University of Alabama has chosen to ignore time and time again.

A recent article published by Buzzfeed News told the story of former student Megan Rondini, who accused T.J. Bunn Jr., a member of a prominent Tuscaloosa family, of sexual assault. Ultimately, Rondini was failed by the larger justice system of Tuscaloosa, but most importantly to this publication, by The University of Alabama. Her story, while devastating, revealed many of the inadequacies of the Tuscaloosa Police Department and UA policy regarding sexual assault that many Alabama women already know too well. Too many women each year are forced to go through the same trials of victim blaming and inadequate support that ultimately cost Rondini her life.

The Crimson White has written numerous pieces about sexual assault in recent years. The staff has dedicated months of reporting to the issue, and multiple opinions pieces have commented on the ineffectiveness of the seemingly perpetual PR campaigns like It's On Us that seem to never bring about any actual change in University policy. The students in SGA who run programs like It’s On Us and advocacy groups like Not On My Campus and UA Feminist Caucus try semester after semester, year after year, to chip away at that glaring statistic: one in four college women will be sexually assaulted, along with one in sixteen men. Their efforts should not go unrecognized or unappreciated. The University should be proud that it has such dedicated, community-minded students continually attempting to make this University the place of inclusivity it claims to be. But pride simply isn’t enough anymore. No student group could have made the path any easier for Rondini. Who could have, and should have done this, is the University administration itself.

There are so many sexual assault policies that we could focus on as areas for change and improvement within the administration, many of which are detailed in our past op-ed on University sexual assault policy. DCH, the only major hospital in the area, employs no sexual assault nurse examiners, or SANEs, who are specially trained to gather crucial forensic evidence when an individual comes in to be treated for rape. As the article stated, employing SANEs is a procedure recommended by the Department of Justice and many leading medical professionals. Though DCH is unaffiliated with the University, the administration must realize how crucial it is to students that this hospital have the adequate resources to deal with sexual assault. If the University is unwilling or unable to reach such an agreement with DCH, funding must be found to expand the Student Health Center to employ SANEs who are capable of administering the rape kits crucial to the prosecutions of sexual assault crimes. This is an issue of justice being improperly administered at the expense of the victim, and until the University recognizes and remedies this situation, any talk of wanting to create a campus culture free from sexual assault is simply lip service.

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Additionally, the article elucidated archaic Alabama state laws that require that victims of sexual assault prove that they “earnestly resisted” their attackers. The law also states that if the victim drank alcohol of their own free will, it does not matter that they were intoxicated and thus unable to give consent when the assault occurred. Luckily, the University’s policy is not quite so regressive. Under UA Title IX policy, it does not matter whether a student consumed alcohol of their own volition or not, and there is a special clause that makes clear that “a lack of resistance does not grant consent.” While we recognize the University can only go so far in influencing state policy, but it must be stated that an administration that does not actively fight against the cruel and archaic Alabama sexual assault state laws is one that cannot claim to truly care about its students. Action must be taken by administration to leverage the influence it has over state legislators in this area of policy. If they do not, they all but ensure that individuals will continue to have to show bruises and contusions as “evidence” that they were raped.

The University released a statement in wake of the Buzzfeed article that they were “deeply saddened” by the death of Megan Rondini. They, of course, then proceeded to illuminate all the reasons why they were not truly at fault for what happened with her sexual assault and subsequent suicide. If they truly were “deeply saddened” by what happened to Rondini, and what happens to so many other women and men at the University every single year, they would not simply attempt to save face. They would reflect, revise and challenge themselves to grow and adapt so that no student is ever put through this again.
The University of Alabama, DCH Regional Medical Center and the Bunn family have issued statements regarding a former student who committed suicide after her attempt to press a rape charge was unsuccessful.

In a story published on the Buzzfeed website Thursday, Megan Rondini's family said their daughter's claim against T.J. Bunn was mishandled by local law enforcement, medical providers and the University of Alabama. The lack of support and failure to prosecute, they said, contributed to her suicide in February 2016 at the age of 21.

Rondini filed a rape charge against Bunn in July 2015, telling police that the alleged assault happened at his Tuscaloosa home after the two met at a local bar.

Investigators and prosecutors ultimately claimed they didn't have strong enough evidence to charge Bunn and sent the case to a grand jury.

Days before the hearing took place, Rondini hanged herself in Dallas, Texas, where she had transferred and was studying biological sciences at Southern Methodist University. The hearing went forward without her testimony, with the 18-member panel declining to press charges.

The allegation was not made public because Bunn was never charged. A court order issued in April by Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court Judge Brad Almond required that DCH and the Tuscaloosa County Homicide Unit provide the Rondini family with their case files, which aren't considered public record. For legal purposes, The News does not normally name suspects of crimes unless they have been charged or a warrant has been issued.

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RONDINI

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T.J. Bunn, now 36, is the son of Terry Bunn and nephew of Sonny Bunn, owners of S.T. Bunn Construction.

The Rondinis are represented by Birmingham attorney Leroy Maxwell Jr. of the Maxwell Firm, who said he will file a federal Title IX complaint against the university by the end of the month.

"Megan was loved by everyone who came in contact with her," Maxwell said. "Her loss is everyone's loss. Title IX, the University of Alabama, DCH Regional Medical Center, the Tuscaloosa Homicide Unit and the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office is an intentional distortion of facts in a tragic case. The writer has distorted or disregarded matters of fact and in doing so has potentially defamed an honest man, a reputable family, and institutions that are the foundation of our community.

The article paints a picture of a young woman essentially being abducted against her will; but here are the facts:

- The young woman invited T.J. Bunn and another companion to her apartment where they shared drinks. She then left her apartment with Bunn of her own free will.

- While a police investigation found no evidence of sexual assault, the young woman admitted to acts that subjected her to possible criminal prosecution.

- At one point, the young woman's family took steps to bring civil action against various parties who are the targets of these unfounded accusations. Such action would undoubtedly include demands for financial compensation.

The Bunn family issued a statement to The Tuscaloosa News Saturday, through attorney W. Ivey Gilmore Jr. of Tuscaloosa firm Gilmore, Rowley, Crissey & Wilson:

"An internet blog article attacking the Bunn family, the University of Alabama, DCH Regional Medical Center, the Tuscaloosa Homicide Unit and the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's Office is an intentional distortion of facts in a tragic case. The writer has distorted or disregarded matters of fact and in doing so has potentially defamed an honest man, a reputable family, and institutions that are the foundation of our community.

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- At one point, the young woman's family took steps to bring civil action against various parties who are the targets of these unfounded accusations. Such action would undoubtedly include demands for financial compensation.

- This matter was presented to a grand jury and they found no legal grounds to pursue the case.

- It is tragic that this young woman took her own life, but defaming an entire city, its leaders, its institutions and a prominent family brings no honor to this tragedy and no justice for anyone."

UA issued the following statement late Friday:

"The University of Alabama has been deeply saddened by the death of Megan Rondini, and we continue to offer our sympathy to her friends and family.

Information published by news outlets this week has unfortunately ignored some significant facts. When Megan went to the hospital, a University advocate met her at the hospital to provide support and stayed with her throughout the examination process. Megan also received information from University representatives regarding services available
to her on campus, including counseling through the University's Women & Gender Resource Center. When she sought counseling and her first therapist identified a potential conflict as defined by her professional obligations, Megan was immediately introduced to another therapist, who provided care and support. Additionally, the UA Title IX Office was in contact with Megan, including offering academic accommodations and helping to streamline her withdrawal when Megan elected to return to Texas.

Because the reported incident occurred off-campus, the University's police department was not involved in the formal criminal investigation.

We hope these recent news accounts, which do not tell the full story, will not discourage others from reporting sexual assault or seeking help and support.

UA has been in talks with DCH and local law enforcement agencies to establish a program to employ a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner in Tuscaloosa since at least last fall. At the time, the university was one of four SEC schools without a SANE program. SANE is a qualification for forensic nurses who have received training to conduct evidentiary exams for victims of sexual assault.

"A community effort has been established to work toward strategies to establish a SANE program in Tuscaloosa," UA said in response to an inquiry by The News Friday. "The partnership includes UA, the District Attorney, DCH providers and administrators, local law enforcement leaders, and victim advocate representatives from local agencies. There is a previously-arranged meeting next week to continue the conversation."

DCH posted a response on its website Saturday:
"We have seen the BuzzFeed article and the petition on change.org. While we aren't SANE certified (many communities do not have such programs at this time), you can be assured that our physicians and nurses are trained and experienced in conducting examinations for sexual assault. We follow Lippincott nursing procedures, which are considered an industry standard in health care policy and procedures. That said, there are always opportunities to improve. We're ready to work with law enforcement, courts, rape counselors and other community agencies to improve the level of service provided to sexual assault victims in our community."

The nonprofit group End Rape on Campus (EROC) assisted the Rondini family in filing the complaints against UA. Executive director Annie E. Clark issued a statement Thursday:
"Megan was a loving, bright, and dedicated student, daughter, and sister. She, like all students, deserved to be safe and supported at their academic institution. We at EROC support survivors whether or not they choose to report, and in this case, Megan reported to every institution society asks of survivors of sexual violence; yet, she was failed by all of them. Although Megan is tragically no longer with us, we hope that Megan's story is heard by institutions and lawmakers, and that it leads to meaningful change for survivors."
Alabama must stop making rape victims suspect

John Archibald  
jarchibald@al.com

Alabamians ought to be used to it by now.  
So many laws designed to protect the powerful, at the expense of the powerless.  
There are tax laws, of course, that disproportionately take from the poor with a wink and nod to the wealthy.  
Alabama courts have habitually preyed on and profited from the weak, stringing them along on traffic fines and misdemeanors and tossing them in jail when they can't pay.

It all goes back to the big boogeyman, a state constitution predicated on the belief that those with power earned it, and those without need to be sheared like the sheep they are.

Maybe it all seems big and amorphous, just a bunch of policies and structures too big and cold to get your head around.

Until you look at rape.

The most personal of crimes. The most elemental, intimate display of power and control.

Again Alabama protects the powerful. At the expense of the powerless.

A story appeared on Buzzfeed last week, a powerful piece about a University of Alabama student who told police she was raped by T.J. Bunn Jr., a wealthy and important Tuscaloosa man. She was dismissed and treated badly by Tuscaloosa police, held to a different standard than the man, and she wound up killing herself.

It was tragic. I can't speak to all the facts of the story. It was clearly reported for a long period of time, and made a compelling case that cops in Tuscaloosa are tougher on victims of rape and sexual assault than they are on attackers.

A Tuscaloosa police captain told reporter Katie J.M. Baker, according to the story, that 27 students at UA reported sexual assaults last year. Only two arrests were made. Which is absurd.

But priorities are a discussion for another day. This one is about the law.
Courts have held that a victim doesn’t have to resort to physical violence to “earnestly resist,” but the language is vague and gives cops and DAs cover if they don’t want to make a case.

The victim, Megan Rondini, told police she resisted, that she tried to leave, that she turned away when the man kissed her and continued to say she wanted to go home. It wasn’t enough. Police said there was nothing they could do because she did not resist more violently.

“Look at it from my side,” a cop told Megan. “You never kicked him or hit him or tried to resist him.”

Protect and serve what?
Protect and serve who?

The problem is Alabama law — and cops who want to use it as a shield to protect powerful men. It is a ready excuse to tell victims there’s nothing they can do.

Alabama is one of the few states where victims still have to prove they “earnestly resisted the sexual act” in order to charge an attacker with first-degree rape. The law does provide some wiggle room. Courts have held that a victim doesn’t have to resort to physical violence to “earnestly resist,” but the language is vague and gives cops and DAs cover if they don’t want to make a case.

Too often they don’t understand that victims of rape and sexual assault freeze during the incident, that flight and fight are not the only two instincts, said Meg McGlamery, executive director of Crisis Center Birmingham.

“We tell (victims) to do what feels safest to them,” McGlamery said. “Megan felt she had to comply.”

You can’t tell a rape victim how to respond to that kind of shock. It is a gross misunderstanding, an assault on the assaulted.

No means no. And “I want to go home” means no. Turning away means no.

Just like when the cops said “no” to Megan, when they turned away.

Rape advocates in Alabama plan to introduce a bill next year to remove the “earnest resistance” from Alabama law.

Keep an eye on the powerful. To see who earnestly resists.

Archibald writes a regular opinion column for AL.com.
Drug suspect caught out of state

UA student will be extradited to Tuscaloosa

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

A University of Alabama student wanted on drug trafficking charges evaded police for a month before he was captured in North Carolina on Tuesday.

Kevin James Piccolo, 22, will be transported to Tuscaloosa to face multiple drug-related charges, including marijuana trafficking. He was arrested by U.S. Marshals in his hometown of Waxhaw, North Carolina, according to Union County Jail records.

Further information about the arrest wasn't available late Tuesday.

West Alabama Narcotics Task Force agents raided Piccolo's apartment off the University Strip on May 26, confiscating more than $18,000 of assorted drugs and nearly $60,000 in

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cash. His roommate told police he "didn't know El Chapo was living next door," according to court documents.

Police have warrants to charge him with trafficking marijuana, four counts of possession of a controlled substance, failure to affix a tax stamp and possession of drug paraphernalia. He will be held on $1,596,000 bond.

Piccolo, 22, was reportedly attending a music festival in Colorado when agents served the May 26 search warrant, according to court documents. They spoke by phone, and he agreed to return to Tuscaloosa the following week, but didn't.

An informant told police that Piccolo was part of a "large-scale drug trafficking, distribution and manufacturing ring near the University of Alabama campus," according to the court file.

Agents confiscated nearly five pounds of marijuana, LSD, DMT, MDMA, Ketamine and cocaine, which they said has a street value of $18,420.

Reach Stephanie Taylor at stephanie.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0210.
Ex-coach to lead tourism department

Don Staley returns after stint in Foley

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The former sports director of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports has been chosen as the group's new president and CEO.

Don Staley, who left Tuscaloosa three years ago to take on a similar position in Foley, announced Thursday via social media that he has been named the new leader of TTS.

"I'm thrilled to be home," said Staley, 58, of returning to the city where he built his career.

For 14 years, Staley served as the first head soccer coach for the University of Alabama. Staley then helped form the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation almost 10 years ago with Chuck Sittason, who now serves on the TTS board of directors.

"There's so much to offer this city and I think that if I take that necessary time and listen to the constituents, I can start to form a plan... and then actually execute that to help promote this city in all areas," Staley said.

He acknowledged Mayor Walt Maddox's stated desire of creating an "experience-based" economy in Tuscaloosa, which derives revenue from luring visitors to Tuscaloosa for experiences that cannot be found elsewhere.

"Simply put," Staley said, "it's to make sure those people stay a little longer, and that can be accomplished as long as we have help from our partners.

"I'm looking forward to taking the baton and running the next leg."

Staley was among 20 in-and out-of-state applicants for the position, five of whom were granted an interview.

TTS board chairwoman Lesley Brunton said final salary negotiations are taking place and she expects to have them complete by the time Staley officially assumes his CEO duties on July 10.

"The candidates that we interviewed were stellar candidates — it was really an impressive field," said Brunton, who also serves as spokeswoman for the Tuscaloosa City Schools. "Don really stood out to us with his enthusiasm and passion for selling Tuscaloosa."

She noted his prior experience both with the TTS organization and as the University of Alabama's soccer coach as reasons the board believes he was the proper choice.

"We think that makes him an ideal candidate to bring an experience-based economy to Tuscaloosa," Brunton said.

He officially takes over TTS on July 10 and succeeds Gina Simpson, who announced her resignation as the CEO of the group in March, and takes over for Bill Buchanan, who was named interim CEO upon Simpson's departure.

Staley became the head of the newly formed Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation in 2008 after his stint as UA's soccer coach.

Before starting UA's soccer program in 1994, Staley was the head men's and women's soccer coach at Radford University in Virginia.

As a coach, Staley in 2004 became the fifth coach in NCAA soccer history to reach the 300-win mark. His overall career record of 324-257-38 spans 23 years.

As a head coach at the Division I collegiate level, Staley garnered four Coach of the Year awards in two different leagues.

After retiring from coaching, Staley had looked into other soccer coaching jobs despite his growing interest in getting into the administrative end of collegiate athletics.

That chance came when he was approached to be the executive director of the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation, a position he held until the foundation merged with the Tuscaloosa Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2010 to form the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission, now known as TTS.

"I'm thrilled to return home to lead this outstanding organization and thank the search committees for recommending me to the TTS board," Staley said.

"In the days and weeks to come I look forward to meeting the staff and reconnecting with old friends, business community, elected officials, the arts and the many stakeholders that help make our community great."

"Tuscaloosa is a dynamic and vibrant community that once you take it in, it never leaves your heart."
Ex-UAB director takes helm of Gadsden hospital

James P. Davis has been named as the new CEO of Gadsden’s Riverview Regional Medical Center.

The Gadsden Times reported that Davis will replace David Fuller, who resigned as CEO “to pursue other opportunities,” according to Prime Healthcare, the hospital’s owner.

Davis has been working with Chiron Financial LLC of Dallas as director of its healthcare investment banking practice.

He previously served as a hospital corpsman in the U.S. Navy in Somalia and Iraq from 1991 to 1995. He earned a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Alabama in 1999 and a master’s in nursing from UAB in 2003. Davis held several positions at UAB. He served as charge nurse at UAB Hospital from 2000 to 2002, was director of clinical services for the UAB Health System from 2002 to 2006, and then served for the next two years as senior director for strategy and business development. — William Thornton
Football never really died at UAB, even after it was killed, and now Blazers are back

By: Dan Wolken

Inside the shed by the practice field, where football coach Bill Clark made his players cry thankful tears in 2014 because he scrounged up enough money to turn it into a locker room so they wouldn’t have to use the one in the basement of the basketball arena several hundred yards away, the lockers all have been ripped out.

It happened after the final game in 2014 when, coming off its best season in more than a decade, UAB President Ray Watts entered the very same building, stood in front of a team that clawed its way to 6-6 and killed the program without a hint of sensitivity or inkling of the backlash that was about to come.

“They always had their foot on our neck, so it wasn’t a surprise,” said Tevin Crews, a linebacker who became a key player for the 2014 team. “The surprising part was, hey, we finally broke through and then they took the rug out from under us.”

The shed was never much to look at — for a Football Bowl Subdivision program, it was an outright embarrassment — and is even more straggly these days, with old plastic chairs serving as makeshift locker stalls.

But nearly 1,000 days after Watts used a since-discredited report by a consulting firm to justify disbanding the program — a decision, by the way, that many of the program’s supporters believe had been made months before the report even came out — there’s a different reason they’re not sprucing up the shed.

In a few weeks, UAB football will move into a sparkling $22.5 million operations building attached to a 120-yard, covered practice field, completing a huge step in its rebirth as a program before debuting Sept. 2 against Alabama A&M. By next year, the shed will be knocked down, making way for a third field for the team to train on.

“Now we’re here on the other end, and it’s crazy,” said Clark, who faced a coaching career in limbo between the Dec. 2, 2014, announcement that UAB was killing the program and the June 1, 2015, reversal after months of outcry and behind-the-scenes discussion among community leaders. “You come to work every day and you’re full of hope.”

You could make a reasonable argument that no coach in the country — not Urban Meyer, not Nick Saban, not even Dabo Swinney — is as important to the program they lead at this particular moment than Clark is to UAB.

Without him, UAB football almost certainly would have died in 2014, never to be resurrected.

“It’s my belief that it wouldn’t have been,” said Justin Craft, a former UAB football player and president of a prominent wealth management firm based in Birmingham. “When (former athletics director Gene) Bartow started the program (in 1991), he knew that creating big-time football at UAB was the pathway to more revenue, a better conference and more of a national brand and that it could be a winner because of the great high school talent around Birmingham. It

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took a visionary like Bill Clark coming in and reminding everybody what it was and that it can be done. Without him, I don’t think we’re sitting here today.”

Which, in retrospect, was exactly the opposite of what UAB might have intended when Clark was hired in January 2014.

At that point, the Blazers had recorded just one winning season in the past 12 years, bottoming out at 2-10 in 2013. Adding insult to injury, head coach Garrick McGee had resigned after just two seasons to take the offensive coordinator job at Louisville under Bobby Petrino. During a November game that season against Rice, UAB drew an announced crowd of 5,831 at 71,000-seat Legion Field, a relic of a stadium that long ago abandoned its historic charm and settled into outright decay.

UAB’s on-campus facilities from its locker room to meeting space to training center were well-known throughout the industry as among the worst in FBS. If even a hint of weather disrupted practice, the only place to go was a gymnasium where other sports and physical education classes had first dibs.

Clark, whose roots in the state covered 18 years in the high school ranks, then to South Alabama as defensive coordinator and then to Jacksonville State in 2013 where he guided a team to the FCS playoffs in his first year as a college head coach, overlooked the obvious issues with UAB when he took the job in January 2014 on a three-year contract.

Instead of being set up to fail so the school could shut down the program without much resistance, Clark ignited both his team and the community with energy, positivity and a better brand of football than UAB had seen in a long time.

In its final home game that season, with rumors about the program’s demise growing more prominent, UAB drew 28,355 fans to watch a 23-18 loss to then-undefeated Marshall. The following week, it became bowl eligible with a three-touchdown win at Southern Miss. With the players UAB had coming back, there was a strong argument that UAB was finally about to turn the corner.

None of it mattered.

On one hand, Watts’ decision was rooted in realism: Football was an annual money-loser for an athletic department that has traditionally been more basketball-centric, its fan base had always been relatively small and it was going to take tens of millions of dollars in facility upgrades — money the school didn’t have — just to be competitive. That doesn’t even account for the lack of a long-term solution to Legion Field and the widening resource gap between football schools inside and outside the Power Five conferences.

But killing UAB football — and particularly at the time Watts did it — sparked something in the community. Several days of protests followed the decision, and two-thirds of UAB’s faculty members executed a vote of no-confidence against Watts, who refused to resign. Also, over time, it became clear that CarrSports Consulting included some faulty assumptions about the revenue
picture for UAB athletics without football, failing, for instance, to build in correct assumptions about the impact of league affiliation. Without football, UAB would not be allowed to remain in Conference USA and would have had to join another league, almost certainly with lower revenue shares.

As UAB’s players and coaches dispersed over the following months — some to big-time programs — the anger in the community remained. Roughly a month after UAB’s decision, while Clark was in Dallas at a coaching clinic, he got a request from then-C-USA commissioner Britton Banowsky to drop by his office. As they talked about Clark’s future, Banowsky casually mentioned it would be nice to have UAB football back in the league. Clark was dubious, but the conversation remained in the back of his mind.

“Every day, people here were fighting,” Clark said. “It never stopped, but I’m thinking, ‘OK, how long were people going to fight? How long were they going to work?’ Then January, February, March; it’s not going away. People are calling me, asking what should we do? I wanted to encourage them, but I didn’t know what to tell them.”

Clark, meanwhile, was getting interest from Power Five programs as a defensive coordinator, jobs that could pay him significantly more than he received as the UAB head coach. Complicating matters was that he had two years remaining on his contract and needed to work just one more in the state of Alabama educational system to be fully vested in its retirement benefits. Plus, there was still a glimmer of hope that UAB football could come back.

And despite all the pain of 2014, he couldn’t resist getting back on board when the opportunity became somewhat realistic.

“I’ll be honest, there were days when I said, ‘Why would I even consider doing that?’ ” Clark said. “I always say all of us coaches, there’s something wrong with us. But for me, my dad was a high school coach and I’ve always loved it when you felt like you were making a difference for a place. 2014 did something to me. I can’t even really express it because I’ve been on better teams, better win-loss records.

"But those kids were so hungry for something positive. I remember walking out with some new uniforms, they’re in tears. The former players come back for our flag football game, they’re in tears thanking you. That kind of bled, for me, into the fans when they’re fighting their butts off, like they need us. I know it sounds kinda corny, but that’s kinda why you’re supposed to do this.”

Seeing an opportunity to help resurrect the program, Craft stood in front of six of the city’s biggest business leaders at a key breakfast meeting in May of 2015. Though they weren’t UAB fans or boosters, Craft showed them that UAB’s enrollment had ticked down since the announcement and sold them on what a revitalized football program could do for the school, thus having an economic impact on the city.

“It was a matter of showing people with the right investment, UAB is positioned to be a great mid-major program and can become a national program,” Craft said. “That was what we sold
and when the money was put forward, it was really a convincing argument. Within a month, we'd raised several million dollars.”

That amount blossomed to $21 million in 18 months, most of it in chunks of less than $1 million, validating Clark’s decision to go back to UAB, but only “if we bring it back the right way.”

Without Clark’s involvement, though, that momentum may never have carried very far.

“The one thing UAB has always missed is having a big business presence in support for the team,” Craft said. “We introduced them to Bill, and it took off. There hasn’t been a more important catalyst than Bill Clark and the business community coming together and the vision he has for this program and how it impacts our city as a whole.”

For Clark, of course, the reinstatement of football was only the start of a sprint toward the 2017 season. Left with nothing but a handful of players who stayed at UAB to pursue non-football interests, he had 26 months to build a full roster that could compete right away in C-USA with no time to ramp up against a softer schedule.

Last fall, with the NCAA granting waivers so that any UAB recruit wouldn’t lose a year of eligibility, the Blazers practiced three days a week and scrimmaged on Saturdays while those who stuck around watched many of their former teammates excel elsewhere.

Among the former UAB players who started at Power Five programs were running back Jordan Howard (Indiana), offensive tackle Victor Salako (Oklahoma State), linebacker Jake Ganus (Georgia), receiver Jamari Staples (Louisville). Tight end Gerald Everett transferred to South Alabama and became a second-round NFL draft pick.

“It was a little bit of mixed emotions,” said linebacker Shaq Jones, one of the 13 holdovers from 2014. “I was happy for all my teammates but what bothered me was them having so much success at all these places considering the success we could have had here. Every player we had that left here went to a different team and made great contributions. They led their team in some particular stat no matter who the guy was.”

Now, UAB has to do it all over again. This time, though, there’s something more to sell.

Clark has carefully tried to balance his roster by bringing in junior college players for this season, but he acknowledges there are significant unknowns in how well it will compete right away. Ultimately, though, this is about the future, which now looks brighter than ever thanks to the building that is nearly finished which includes a modern locker room, hot and cold tubs with an underwater treadmill, lounge areas and a brand new weight room that looks out onto the covered pavilion. There also is momentum locally to build a 45,000-seat stadium in a trendy area of downtown, plans for which Clark believes will be finalized in the near future.

“I bring recruits back here and they come back in this office selling me,” Clark said. “One of the hardest things in 2014 is we were getting a better response by bringing in a junior college guy
(from out of town) who loved Birmingham, loved the school, but the local guys had such a bad connotation with UAB and now that’s changed.”

In a few months, though, the passion so many people put in to bringing back UAB football will subside and the business of running a college program with many challenges and very little history of success will go on as usual.
The community was there for UAB football when it was needed most. Whether it stays that way, again, may be up to Clark.

“People talk about all the new upcoming things, which is a big recruiting thing for us, a lot of guys like shiny things and we appreciate the donations and stuff that helped make this possible,” Jones said. "But it all reverts back to Coach Clark. He’s our No. 1 recruiting tool, not the facility, not the return, not making history. He’s the no. 1 recruiting tool we have.”
ON THE MOVE

BIRMINGHAM CEO TAPPED FOR UNIVERSITY TRUSTEE POST

Art Tipton, CEO of Birmingham-based Southern Research, has been selected to serve a full term on the Tuskegee University Board of Trustees.

Tipton was initially appointed earlier this year by then-Gov. Robert Bentley to serve out the remainder of Andy Hornsby's term for the private, historically black university in Tuskegee.

Now, Tipton has joined the board for a full, state-appointed term that will last until June 2021.

Prior to leading Southern Research, Tipton worked in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry.

In addition to Tipton, Tamika Tremaglio, the Greater Washington managing principal for Deloitte, is also joining the board. Her term lasts until 2020.
German company opens office in Depot

A German company that supports the manufacturing industry has opened a new office at Innovation Depot in downtown Birmingham.

The American subsidiary of abatAG, abatUS, opened its new location in June. The new office consolidated previous locations in Hoover and Tuscaloosa.

The company provides SAP software and services for the manufacturing sector, with an emphasis on the automotive industry. The company works with both original equipment manufacturers and suppliers from the planning stage to implementation, including ongoing maintenance and training. AbatUS often gears its services toward German companies with U.S. subsidiaries or companies planning to open one.

In addition to its 15 current employees, the company plans to employ 15 to 20 more people over the next two years.

Company leaders say abatUS is consolidating its offices in central Alabama to be closer to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport and the city's growing technology workforce.

Manfred Heisen, managing director of U.S. operations, said the move is part of the company's efforts to recruit young workers straight out of college.

He said Innovation Depot's proximity to UAB is ideal, allowing students to come to work for a few hours without traveling a great distance.

"We try to make the barrier for them as minimal as possible to work with us," Heisen said.

Local leaders say the project could have major ramifications.

"The impact should be big," said Kirk Atkinson of Adah International Inc., who works as a consultant for the city. He said the move is part of Birmingham's larger strategy to recruit high-tech service providers to support advanced manufacturers in the area.

"Other small- and medium-sized international companies will take note and look to Birmingham as home due to its existing talent pool, career tech and higher education resources, as well as its many entertainment options and beautiful but affordable neighborhoods," said Atkinson.

In addition, bigger, advanced manufacturing companies will move their non-operation employees such as administration, executive, finance and human resources to the city. A move like this also would put them closer to other customers in major cities in and outside the state.

Heisen said J. Iwan Alexander, dean of UAB's School of Engineering, was instrumental in the company's move to the Magic City.

To that end, abatUS is working with UAB to create a partnership that would offer internships to students at its parent company in Bremen, Germany, and in the U.S. Students would explore thesis topics and research projects. Those students may be offered employment as consultants or developers and be engaged in projects at customer sites.

Heisen said UAB sets Birmingham apart from the company's other locations. He hopes to establish a development center that would operate in the city. For example, if a client in Detroit needed customized code, it would be developed at the Birmingham location. Between Innovation Depot and UAB, Heisen said he has found the necessary ingredients to do this in Birmingham.
Teaching STEAM Skills to Deaf Kids Using Drones and 3-D Printing

By: Peter Brown

The more drones permeate our daily lives, the more they are being used for other purposes beyond entertainment. Just recently a drone was used to help entertain sick kids in a hospital and now they are being used for deaf and hard of hearing students to explore a range of career options in science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM).

The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) is offering a free summer program encouraging students in grades 10-12 to get hands on experience with unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and robotic technology. The goal is to give information to the students to help them select a major as they begin to look at colleges.

Students were introduced to 3-D printing and drone technologies while learning about various careers in UAV/robotics, discovering what types of careers fit their interests and hands-on demonstrations in robotic engineering, drone technology and aviation physics.

Furthermore, the students build and fly their own 3-D printed drone using a Raspberry Pi-based laptop, called Pi-Top, as well as tour the U.S. Space and Rocket Center.

"They are taking their own Pi-Top laptops and 3-D printed mini-drone with them when the event is over," says Steven Forney, a research associate at UAH. "And this brings their knowledge of STEM careers closer to home. They will even be able to educate other deaf and hard of hearing students about STEM careers. The most amazing moment was watching all 27 students try to fly their own mini-drone indoors for the first time. Within less than a hour after they tried to fly, they all had already mastered flying the drone. They all are gifted."
Blue Origin selects Huntsville, Alabama for new BE-4 manufacturing facility

By: Staff

Blue Origin announced plans to manufacture its BE-4 engine in a state-of-the-art production facility to be built in Huntsville, Alabama -- the Rocket City.

The new facility will be in Cummings Research Park, the nation’s second-largest research park, and construction can begin once an engine production contract with United Launch Alliance is awarded. The BE-4 is America’s next rocket engine and will power United Launch Alliance’s Vulcan rocket, once down-selected. The production of this engine would end the nation’s dependence on Russia for access to space for critical national security space systems.

Two BE-4s would be used on the Vulcan booster rocket. The BE-4 will also power Blue Origin’s New Glenn reusable launch system with seven BE-4s on the reusable first stage and a vacuum-optimized BE-4U on New Glenn’s second stage. Blue Origin awaits the final public approval processes of the local package by the City and County governments during their respective July meetings.

Using the latest design and manufacturing techniques, the BE-4 is made for both commercial and government missions. The BE-4 uses oxygen-rich staged combustion of liquid oxygen and liquefied natural gas to produce 550,000 lb. of thrust. Development of the BE-4 began in 2011. Testing of the BE-4 is currently underway.

“Alabama is a great state for aerospace manufacturing and we are proud to produce America’s next rocket engine right here in Rocket City,” said Robert Meyerson, President of Blue Origin. “The area’s skilled workforce and leading role in rocket propulsion development make Huntsville the ideal location for our state-of-the-art manufacturing facility.”

Blue Origin will employ up to 342 people in this new facility. The company will make approximately $200 million in capital investment in the state.

"This announcement today is excellent news for our state. I am pleased to see Blue Origin investing in Alabama, and I look forward to working with them and other businesses to continue boosting economic development opportunities," commended U.S. Senator Richard Shelby.

The announcement took place at the historic Davidson Center for Space Exploration under the Saturn V rocket, a nod to the community’s aerospace heritage. Blue Origin builds on that aerospace heritage and positions the Huntsville/Madison County community in the commercial space industry.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey said of the announcement, “We are excited to welcome Blue Origin to Alabama. I must commend founder Jeff Bezos and company President Robert Meyerson for their vision to create this innovative company, and for choosing to make Alabama its home sweet home! Because of this investment, more Alabamians can provide a better living for their families, and it helps cement Alabama as the preferred destination for the aerospace industry.”

See next page
Many economic development partners contributed to the effort to successfully recruit Blue Origin to the state. These partners include the Governor's office, the Alabama Department of Commerce, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the City of Huntsville, Madison County, and the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber.

"Blue Origin's decision to locate its BE-4 engine manufacturing center in Huntsville reflects the deep and longstanding capabilities in the city that became the cradle of the nation's rocket program," said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce. "Huntsville is a hub of innovation in every facet of aerospace, making it the perfect home for this Blue Origin facility."

Blue Origin chose Huntsville, Alabama for this project because of the high-tech aerospace manufacturing workforce and ecosystem, including NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, nearly 300 private aerospace and defense contractors, and the University of Alabama in Huntsville, number 14th in NASA research funding in the nation.

"Huntsville is proud to be the nation's propulsion center of excellence, and we couldn't ask for a better partner than Blue Origin to join our team. When you look at NASA's visionary work at the Marshall Space Flight Center, the talent and capacity of Huntsville's space industry partners, and our expertise in research and development, engineering, and manufacturing, Blue Origin is joining a truly remarkable environment," said Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle.

"Today's announcement ensures that our community will continue to be at the center of the world's rocket propulsion development. Jeff Bezos and Blue Origin will build on the legacy of the German rocket team and the Marshall Space Flight Center to power the growing commercial rocket business that will be a critical part of our nation's future space program," stated Madison County Commission Chairman Dale W. Strong.

In support of Blue Origin, the City of Huntsville, City of Madison, and Madison County have provided funding for their three school systems to launch an experiment on a Blue Origin rocket in Summer 2018. The school systems will determine how to select teams, and then they will work with the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber and Dream Up, an organization that supports space-based learning, to design and develop their payload.

"Blue Origin reinforces our regions' place as the Rocket City, and a center of excellence for rocket propulsion. Blue Origin's presence will have a positive impact on our State, our region and our community," said Chip Cherry, President and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber. "This is an important development for Cummings Research Park's next era of expansion and we look forward to a long and productive relationship with Blue Origin."

For more information about this announcement, Huntsville/Madison County's propulsion expertise, and local job opportunities, please visit www.hsvchamber.org/rocketcity and follow #rocketcity on social media.

About Blue Origin
Blue Origin, LLC (Blue Origin) is a private company developing vehicles and technologies to enable commercial human space transportation. Blue Origin has a long-term vision of greatly increasing the number of people that fly into space so that we humans can better continue exploring the solar system. For more information and a list of job openings, please visit us at www.blueorigin.com.

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Blue Origin FAQ
Blue Origin plans to bring up to 342 jobs to Huntsville, Alabama.

The company will make approximately $200 million in capital investment.

The state and local incentives are in final coordination. Blue Origin awaits the final public approval processes of the local package by the City and County governments during their respective July meetings. All incentives are tied to company performance and capital investment.

The new facility can break ground once an engine production contract with United Launch Alliance is awarded.

The Blue Origin average salary will be $75,000 annually. This is averaged across all employees at the new facility.

All job openings and applications for Blue Origin will be advertised and coordinated by the State of Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT). The Chamber will post a link on www.hsvchamber.org/rocketcity when appropriate.

The site location for this facility is in CRP West on Explorer Boulevard.

Economic Development Partners include:

- State of Alabama
- City of Huntsville
- Madison County
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)
- Industrial Development Board of the City of Huntsville (IDB)
- AIDT
- University of Alabama in Huntsville
- Cummings Research Park Board of Directors
- Huntsville/Madison County Chamber

In support of Blue Origin, the City of Huntsville, City of Madison, and Madison County have provided funding for their three school systems to launch an experiment on a Blue Origin rocket
in Summer 2018. The school systems will determine how to select teams, and then they will work with the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber and Dream Up, an organization that supports space-based learning, to design and develop their payload.

Huntsville, Alabama and Cummings Research Park were chosen from multiple sites across the country. The Blue Origin team indicated Huntsville was selected because it's a proven leader in aerospace manufacturing with the highly skilled workforce, business climate, and leadership we need to produce low-cost rocket engines to protect the nation, explore the universe, and power a future where millions of people live and work in space.

Along with Blue Origin, other rockets and missile companies such as Aerojet Rocketdyne, The Boeing Company, Sierra Nevada, Raytheon, and RUAG, and organizations like NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, the Propulsion Research Center at UAH, the City of Huntsville, Alabama has re-established itself as the #rocketcity.
Blue Origin plans to build BE-4 engine in Alabama

By: Pat Host

Key Points

Blue Origin announced plans to build its BE-4 engine in Alabama
The company is a potential supplier to major Pentagon contractor United Launch Alliance

Blue Origin on 26 June announced plans to build a new facility in Huntsville, Alabama, to manufacture its BE-4 rocket engine in possible supply for a major Pentagon contractor.

The BE-4 is likely to serve as the first stage of the next-generation Vulcan launch system for United Launch Alliance (ULA), a major Pentagon contractor and joint venture of Lockheed Martin and Boeing. Blue Origin is competing with another major Pentagon supplier, Aerojet Rocketdyne, to have its engine served as Vulcan's first stage. Aerojet Rocketdyne is offering its AR1. While a decision hasn't been formally made, ULA has made public announcements that it's leaning toward the BE-4.

Company spokesperson Caitlin Dietrich on 26 June declined an interview request for this story.

Blue Origin chose Huntsville for this 200,000 ft² (60,960 m²) facility because of the high-tech aerospace manufacturing workforce and ecosystem, including NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, nearly 300 private aerospace and defence contractors, and the University of Alabama-Huntsville, according to a statement by the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce. The deal is contingent on ULA formally choosing Blue Origin for its Vulcan first stage. ULA also has its rocket factory in nearby Decatur, where it makes the Atlas V and Delta IV launch vehicles.
Blue Origin to invest $200M in Alabama rocket engine production facility

By: Jerry Underwood

The new facility will be in Cummings Research Park, the nation’s second-largest research park, and construction can begin once an engine production contract with United Launch Alliance (ULA) is awarded.

The BE-4 is America’s next rocket engine and will power ULA’s Vulcan rocket, if it’s selected for the project. The production of this engine would end the nation’s dependence on Russia for access to space for critical national security space systems.

Two BE-4s would be used on the Vulcan booster rocket. The BE-4 will also power Blue Origin’s New Glenn reusable launch system with seven BE-4s on the reusable first stage and a vacuum-optimized BE-4U on the second stage. Blue Origin awaits the final public approval processes of the local package by the City and County governments during July meetings.

Using the latest design and manufacturing techniques, the BE-4 is made for both commercial and government missions. The BE-4 uses oxygen-rich staged combustion of liquid oxygen and liquefied natural gas to produce 550,000 pounds of thrust. Development of the BE-4 began in 2011. Testing of the BE-4 is currently under way.

“Alabama is a great state for aerospace manufacturing and we are proud to produce America’s next rocket engine right here in Rocket City,” said Robert Meyerson, president of Blue Origin.

“The area’s skilled workforce and leading role in rocket propulsion development make Huntsville the ideal location for our state-of-the-art manufacturing facility.”

Blue Origin will employ up to 342 people in this new facility. The company will make approximately $200 million in capital investment in the state.

“This announcement today is excellent news for our state. I am pleased to see Blue Origin investing in Alabama, and I look forward to working with them and other businesses to continue boosting economic development opportunities,” U.S. Senator Richard Shelby said.

UNDER THE SATURN V

The announcement took place at the historic Davidson Center for Space Exploration under the Saturn V rocket, a nod to the community’s aerospace heritage.

Blue Origin’s project builds on that aerospace heritage and positions the Huntsville/Madison County community for a key role in the commercial space industry.

“We are excited to welcome Blue Origin to Alabama. I must commend founder Jeff Bezos and company President Robert Meyerson for their vision to create this innovative company, and for choosing to make Alabama its Home Sweet Home,” Governor Kay Ivey said.

See next page
"Because of this investment, more men and women can provide a better living for their families, and it helps cement Alabama as the preferred destination for the aerospace industry," she added.

'PROJECT EAGLE'

Many economic development partners contributed to the effort to successfully recruit Blue Origin to the state as part of what was called "Project Eagle." These partners include the Governor’s office, the Alabama Department of Commerce, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the City of Huntsville, Madison County and the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber.

"Blue Origin’s decision to locate its BE-4 engine manufacturing center in Huntsville reflects the deep and longstanding capabilities in the city that became the cradle of the nation’s rocket program," said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce.

"Huntsville is a hub of innovation in every facet of aerospace, making it the perfect home for this Blue Origin facility."

Blue Origin said it chose Huntsville for this project because of the high-tech aerospace manufacturing workforce and ecosystem, including NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, nearly 300 private aerospace and defense contractors, and the University of Alabama in Huntsville, number 14th in NASA research funding in the nation.

"Huntsville is proud to be the nation’s propulsion center of excellence, and we couldn’t ask for a better partner than Blue Origin to join our team," Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said.

"When you look at NASA’s visionary work at the Marshall Space Flight Center, the talent and capacity of Huntsville’s space industry partners, and our expertise in research and development, engineering, and manufacturing, Blue Origin is joining a truly remarkable environment."

Added Madison County Commission Chairman Dale W. Strong: “Today’s announcement ensures that our community will continue to be at the center of the world’s rocket propulsion development. Jeff Bezos and Blue Origin will build on the legacy of the German rocket team and the Marshall Space Flight Center to power the growing commercial rocket business that will be a critical part of our nation’s future space program."

'CENTER OF EXCELLENCE'

In support of Blue Origin, the City of Huntsville, City of Madison, and Madison County have provided funding for their three school systems to launch an experiment on a Blue Origin rocket in Summer 2018.

The school systems will determine how to select teams, and then they will work with the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber and Dream Up, an organization that supports space-based learning, to design and develop their payload.

"Blue Origin reinforces our regions’ place as the Rocket City, and a center of excellence for rocket propulsion. Blue Origin’s presence will have a positive impact on our State, our region"
and our community," said Chip Cherry, president and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber.

“This is an important development for Cummings Research Park’s next era of expansion, and we look forward to a long and productive relationship with Blue Origin.”
New Rocket Facility Means $200 million and 342 Jobs For Alabama

By: Staff

Blue Origin has announced plans to manufacture its BE-4 engine in Huntsville, a move that represents 342 jobs and a $200 million capital investment in Alabama’s economy.

The company’s new state-of-the-art production facility will be built in Cummings Research Park, the country’s second-largest research park. The BE-4 is will power United Launch Alliance’s Vulcan rocket, which will end the nation’s dependence on Russia for access to space for critical national security space systems.

The important caveat to this announcement is that it’s contingent on Blue Origin obtaining the contract to build the engine for United Launch Alliance. Anticipating this contract, Blue Origin President, Robert Meyerson, said:

Alabama is a great state for aerospace manufacturing and we are proud to produce America’s next rocket engine right here in Rocket City. The area’s skilled workforce and leading role in rocket propulsion development make Huntsville the ideal location for our state-of-the-art manufacturing facility.

Obviously, Huntsville is attractive to companies like Blue Origin because of its significant aerospace presence that includes NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center and the University of Alabama in Huntsville, which ranks 14th in NASA research funding in the nation. As Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield said:

Blue Origin’s decision to locate its BE-4 engine manufacturing center in Huntsville reflects the deep and longstanding capabilities in the city that became the cradle of the nation’s rocket program. Huntsville is a hub of innovation in every facet of aerospace, making it the perfect home for this Blue Origin facility.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle emphasized this point as well: “Huntsville is proud to be the nation’s propulsion center of excellence, and we couldn’t ask for a better partner than Blue Origin to join our team. When you look at NASA’s visionary work at the Marshall Space Flight Center, the talent and capacity of Huntsville’s space industry partners, and our expertise in research and development, engineering, and manufacturing, Blue Origin is joining a truly remarkable environment.”

Alabama’s senior Senator, Richard Shelby, also embraced the decision: “This announcement today is excellent news for our state. I am pleased to see Blue Origin investing in Alabama, and I look forward to working with them and other businesses to continue boosting economic development opportunities.” Alabama Governor Kay Ivey concurred: We are excited to welcome Blue Origin to Alabama. I must commend founder Jeff Bezos and company President Robert Meyerson for their vision to create this innovative company, and for choosing to make Alabama its home sweet home! Because of this investment, more Alabamians can provide a better living for their families, and it helps cement Alabama as the preferred destination for the aerospace industry.”

See next page
The Huntsville/Madison County Chamber press release notes that a host of entities contributed to Blue Origin’s recruitment to the Yellowhammer state, including the Governor’s office, the Alabama Department of Commerce, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the City of Huntsville, Madison County, and the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber.

“Today’s announcement ensures that our community will continue to be at the center of the world’s rocket propulsion development. Jeff Bezos and Blue Origin will build on the legacy of the German rocket team and the Marshall Space Flight Center to power the growing commercial rocket business that will be a critical part of our nation’s future space program,” said Madison County Commission Chairman Dale W. Strong.

President and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber, Chip Cherry concluded, “Blue Origin reinforces our regions’ place as the Rocket City, and a center of excellence for rocket propulsion. Blue Origin’s presence will have a positive impact on our State, our region and our community.”
The University of Alabama in Huntsville continues to experience record growth in enrollment. When prospective students and their families visit UAH, they begin at The Welcome Center located on the first floor of the new Student Services Building on Sparkman Drive.

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

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

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

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

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

This building was designed to reflect the modern, progressive research university environment at UAH. It is modern yet warm, friendly and welcoming. It is a cool space.
Left, the atrium area in the back side of building provides a view of the UAH campus. Above, a large meeting room integrates the university's color scheme.

A conference room overlooks the front lobby of the UAH Student Services Building.
The UAH Student Services Building features modern touches and amenities. Photos by Bob Gathany/bgathany@al.com

A cantilevered overhang provides a modern version of a Southern front porch at the building's entrance.
Tech Trek keeps Alabama girls in STEM pipeline

By: Shelly Haskins

There was a study several years ago that looked at why so few women end up working in science and technology.

"What they found was that eighth grade is about the time that girls fell out," of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, pipeline, said Dr. Rhonda Gaede, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

The American Association of University Women, which Gaede heads at UAH, stepped in to do something about it. Tech Trek, which began nationwide in 1998 and in Alabama in 2014, brings rising eighth grade girls from around the country to experiential summer camps that immerse them in the wonders of science and technology, led by successful women scientists, engineers and professionals.

This year's Tech Trek just concluded at UAH, where 64 girls from 46 schools in 17 Alabama counties -- including Mobile, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, Jefferson, Madison and more - studied with some of Alabama's brightest women.

Astronaut Jan Davis of Huntsville, now an executive with Jacobs Corp., comes out each year and tells the girls they can go anywhere they want in life, including space.

They learn from female scientists at HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, build rockets and launch them at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, and meet and talk with professional women from all sorts of fields during a forum at the chamber of commerce.

"The girls will sit at a table and the professionals will circulate, talk about what they do, how they got to that field, the challenges," Gaede said. "It's all about the same pipeline, keeping women involved along the way in STEM fields. We want to expose girls to the breadth of opportunities in STEM."

The camp experiences evolve with the times as well. This year's camp included activities in NASA robotics, cybersecurity, mobile app development and sustainable energy, among others.

None of it would be possible without the support of companies that need well-trained scientists, engineers and technologies.

The Toyota Foundation recently gave Tech Trek a $150,000 grant that allows AAUW to keep the tuition cost to $50 for the entire week.

"We want to give opportunities to the girls who have the aptitude for STEM but may not have the resources," Gaede said.

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Toyota will benefit down the road, as Tech Trek campers inspired by a segment on semi-autonomous vehicles perhaps become tomorrow's vehicle designers.

Other sponsors include PPG Aerospace, UAH's College of Engineering, Symantec, Jacobs Engineering, Women in Defense -Tennessee Valley Chapter, Torch Technologies, Simtech and Eleanor S. Lienau.

Davis, who was named a 2016 Distinguished Alumni of the engineering honor society Tau Beta Pi, was given a $2,000 scholarship in her name to give to a deserving young engineering student. She gave that money to AAUW's Tech Trek.

Gaede said AAUW wants to keep expanding the program, and hopes to increase participation in the Black Belt region and the Birmingham area in particular.

To do that, they need people in those areas to help identify and interview candidates to be selected for Tech Trek.

"We do need to involve more women from across the state," she said.

If you want to be involved, or help sponsor the program, visit http://techtrek-al.aauw.net/
Charter school receives approval

A new charter school affiliated with the University of West Alabama is scheduled to open in August 2018 after unanimous approval of the plans by the Alabama Charter School Commission on Tuesday.

"It's a great day for the university, for the local community and the region," said UWA Trustee Justin Smith, who led an ad hoc committee on the proposal. "We truly believe that the university charter school will transfer not only Sumter County but serve as model to transform the Black Belt."

The University Charter School plans to start with pre-kindergarten through fifth grade in 2018 and add grades six through 12 in 2019. The school will be located in existing facilities at UWA in Livingston initially as part of an agreement with the university with future plans for a standalone facility.

The University Charter School will be a UWA-affiliated school with a mission to be a rural, diverse K-12 school, according to its mission statement. The school would feature a rigorous and integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) focused, project-based and place-based curriculum.

"This is going to be a model that is going to impact more than just Sumter County in my view," Alabama Charter

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Continued from B1

School Commission member Ed Richardson said.
UWA officials and members of the charter school’s board of directors presented the proposal to the commission Tuesday in Montgomery. The delegation argued the school would spark renewal in the rural county that has struggled with high rates of poverty and unemployment and a declining population.

“It will allow us to create big opportunities in this very rural setting,” said J.J. Wedgworth, a member of the new school’s board of directors and UWA’s director of Research Integrity.

The University Charter School would be a public school that functions like other local education agencies. The school plans to hire educators and administrators already in Sumter County while also work with UWA’s College of Education and alumni network to fill its staff, Wedgworth said.

The school will receive the same per-pupil appropriation as local schools, and the board is also looking at possible federal funding sources and, so far, has raised around $372,870 to pay for start-up costs with the help of UWA’s advancement office, Wedgworth said.

The school will develop a comprehensive plan for extracurricular activities based on student interests, Wedgworth said. If sports are offered, it will be through the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

The school would primarily serve Sumter County but would be open to any child in Alabama as long as the school is not filled to capacity. Sumter County residents would be given priority for admission at the school. If applications exceed capacity, a lottery would be used for admission.

During the development of the application, the group’s goal has been to target students who live in Sumter County, but attend school elsewhere. Wedgworth estimated there are around 928 students who live in Sumter County but don’t attend local schools.

As planning continues, the delegation for the charter school sought flexibility to make some changes to its plans such as adjusting the opening date and initial grades offered based on the specific needs of the students who will attend when it opens.

“One of the beauties of the charter schools is the flexibility,” Richardson said.

The independent 501-C3 nonprofit organization that governs the school was formed in April, according to state records.

The board of directors includes:

- UWA associate mathematics professor emeritus Micky Smith
- UWA Director for the Center for Business and Entrepreneurial Services Veronica Trippett of Tuscaloosa
- Former UA System Chancellor Robert Witt
- Leslie Prystup Emory of Livingston
- J.J. Wedgworth, UWA’s director of Research Integrity
- Byron Franklin, a former member of the Auburn University board of trustees and an area pastor
- Sumter County engineer Anthony Crear
- UWA Education Dean Jan Miller

Training on reporting standards would be provided by the state department of education, Richardson said.

Richardson also noted the first year of operation would help establish a performance baseline for the new school. The commission contracts with the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama to assess progress based on the stated goals of the school, he said.

Richardson advised the group to plan for more demand based on his experience with start-up systems.

“The issue about numbers of students, I can anticipate, will exceed that you initially predict,” Richardson said. “My only comment is you need to make sure that at the first year you have a number that you can handle and manage successfully.”

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California bans travel to Alabama over adoption law

Leada Gore (gore@al.com)

California's attorney general last week said the state is pulling the plug on state-sponsored travel to Alabama and three other places — Kentucky, South Dakota and Texas.

The addition brings the number of states included in California's travel ban to eight, with Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee placed on the off-limits list earlier this year.

California's law, AB 1887, went into effect Jan. 1. It prohibits state-funded and state-sponsored travel to states with laws that authorize or require discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or same-sex couples.

The travel ban law prohibits state-funded travel for those working at California colleges, universities, boards, authorities and commissions, including those associated with the University of California, the Board of Regents of the University of California and the California State University.

The law puts the responsibility for deciding what states are added to the travel ban on California Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

Thursday, Becerra announced California will prohibit state-funded and state-sponsored travel to Alabama, Kentucky, South Dakota and Texas based on what was described as "discriminatory legislation" enacted in each state.

"Our country has made great strides in dismantling prejudicial laws that have deprived too many of our fellow Americans of their precious rights. Sadly, that is not the case in all parts of our nation, even in the 21st century," Becerra said.

Each of the states included in the ban has recently passed laws involving LGBT rights. In Alabama's case, it was the passage of a law allowing adoption agencies in the state to follow faith-based policies, including the option to not place children with gay couples.

In signing the law, Gov. Kay Ivey said it "ensures hundreds of children can continue to find 'forever homes' through religiously affiliated adoption agencies.

"This bill is not about discrimination, but instead protects the ability of religious agencies to place vulnerable children in a permanent home," the governor said.

Ivey on Tuesday said she is "disappointed" that Becerra added Alabama to California's travel ban list.

"As dysfunctional as Washington is right now, we need our states to get along with one another," Ivey said. "I'm disappointed that the attorney general of California chose to be critical of laws that Alabamians passed for religious freedom.

"I'm disappointed in the AG's response. We in Alabama pass laws that affect our people and are good for us, and California does the same thing. So we'll leave it at that."

OTHERS STATE LAWS IN QUESTION

South Dakota and Texas were included for passing adoption agency laws similar to that of Alabama's. Kentucky was added to the list after state legislators passed a bill preventing school officials from punishing students for wearing religious messages on their clothes and expressing religious or political beliefs in homework, artwork and speeches.

The bill was dubbed the "Charlie Brown law," after a Kentucky school cut a Bible verse from their production of the "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Kansas was added to the list because of a 2016 law that allows college campus religious groups to require that members adhere to their beliefs. Mississippi was declared off limits due to its law that allows businesses, individuals and religious organizations to deny services to LGBT people and others based on a person's "sincerely held religious beliefs."

Tennessee's law allows state-licensed therapists to deny treatment to members of the LGBT community based on the counselor's personal beliefs.

North Carolina was added initially due to its so-called "bathroom bill" that required people to use public facilities that matched their birth gender. Some provisions of that bill were later repealed but North Carolina remains on the travel ban list after the Legislature passed a measure prohibiting local governments from enacting nondiscrimination ordinances covering sexual orientation and gender identity.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?

It's unclear what the economic effect of the travel ban will be, but it could show up in an unlikely place — the football field.

The University of Alabama has Fresno State — technically known as California State University-Fresno — on its football schedule this year for a Sept. 9 game in Tuscaloosa. The travel ban isn't likely to affect that game.

Among the exemptions is travel related to contracts signed before Jan. 1, 2017. Fresno inked its deal to play Alabama in 2015, according to reports.

Claire Dean, a spokesperson for the University of California system, said if a university's athletic team committed to participate in an event before Jan. 1, 2017, "then it's permissible to use state funds. However, if a contract was entered on or after that, then state funds cannot be used for travel."

A request for a legal opinion on whether public university sports travel is exempted from the restrictions has been filed with Becerra's office, but no ruling has been issued, according to reports.

Other California universities have pulled out of plans to play teams in states covered by the travel ban.

According to the California law, the travel ban will continue "while any such law that discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression remains in effect."
The knee-jerk response: Take it down. Remove the retired No. 20 basketball jersey from the rafters at Bartow Arena. Don't delay. Do it today. The emotional argument: Oliver Robinson no longer deserves to be honored by UAB because, when it really mattered, the school's first basketball All-American had no honor.

Robinson has agreed to a federal plea deal in which he admits that, while serving as a state representative, he was a crook. He took bribes. He sold out his constituents and, even worse than the typical disgraced Alabama politician, potentially endangered the health of the people who put him in office.

How do you continue to celebrate a man who, even if he cooperates with prosecutors and fingers the powerful interests who bribed him to cleanse his soul and lessen his sentence, likely is headed to jail? It's understandable if you feel that way. It makes sense that UAB has had internal discussions in the athletics department on whether to take any action in response to Robinson's plea deal. That subject also is on the agenda at this week's meeting of the university-wide Leadership Team, which includes Athletics Director Mark Ingram.

Robinson isn't just another former player. The Blazers have retired three numbers in their relatively short history. They belonged to all-time leading scorer Steve Mitchell, all-time leading rebounder Jerome Mincy and Robinson, who remains perhaps the most important athlete to wear the green and gold 35 years after his last game.

Robinson was the program's first signee, its first conference and conference tournament MVP, the star of its only Elite Eight trip in 1982, its first All-American that same year. He was a Birmingham kid starring for Birmingham's team.

He's on the first page of the remarkable success story of a basketball program Gene Bartow started from scratch in the Football Capital of the South.

Imagine how saddened Bartow would be with how Robinson turned out if the coach were still with us. Robinson was one of the pallbearers at Barrow's funeral.

As satisfying as UAB taking the penal approach might be on a gut level, Robinson is going to be punished for his crimes, and his crimes have nothing to do with his time as a UAB basketball player.

If you take down his jersey or unretire his number, you don't erase what he accomplished as a player or what he meant to the program. He earned those honors long before he imagined getting rich by doing dirty deals involving toxic waste.

The retired jersey is part of his legacy. So, too, may be an orange jumpsuit. One has little to do with the other. The jersey doesn't balance out the jumpsuit. The jumpsuit doesn't invalidate the jersey.

The best course here is for UAB to do nothing because Robinson has done nothing to UAB. He's embarrassed himself, not his sport or his school. His legacy is that of celebrated athlete and disgraced politician, and both sides of that picture should be preserved to paint an honest portrait.

In a way, it'll hurt his memory even more to leave that jersey right where it is. It'll serve as a constant reminder of the heights he reached as a player but couldn't live up to as a man.
UA programs on the right track for success

By: Cecil Hurt

Let’s stress the positive first. An academic year in which a collegiate athletic department is frustrated because it didn’t win a national championship can be viewed as a reflection that, overall, that athletic department is in pretty good shape.

That’s the case at the University of Alabama after the final inventory of the 2016-17 athletic year. There were close calls — in football, a matter of seconds kept Alabama from a second straight title. None of the other marquee sports at UA came quite that close, but there were others that were nationally competitive. Softball came within a game of advancing to the Women’s College World Series despite a tough draw. Women’s golf had the potential but didn’t play its best in challenging weather conditions at the NCAA finals. Gymnastics extended its remarkable streak of Super Six appearances. Those performances are “disappointments” only if the bar is set remarkably high.

That’s a solid foundation for Greg Byrne, who remarkably still hasn’t reached the fourth month of his UA tenure — it seems longer somehow. The job of a modern college athletics director is multi-faceted, and Byrne would probably take exception to this simplified characterization, but there seem to be four main functions as far as on-the-field success.

First, give those programs who have steadily built themselves into championship contenders (see those listed above and add men’s golf) every resource necessary to find that extra few inches that make the difference. Alabama’s been pretty good at this.

Second, elevate those programs that are close to taking the next step. This is where Alabama is on the cusp. It might be overreaching to say that UA can consistently dominate the SEC in every sport, or even match Florida’s success at doing so, for complex demographic reasons. But the Crimson Tide has to be competitive in both coaching and facilities. Money is flowing into most of the SEC athletic coffers. Schools that were limited from big expenditures 30 or 40 years ago because their football revenues were limited are now prospering from SEC affiliation, more than ever. The two variables that are controlled by spending are coaching and facilities.

That’s not a one-to-one correspondence because you can always end up with a coach that is worth more than he’s making (Nick Saban), or less (plenty of SEC examples). Still, once you have established parity (or better) in facilities, coaching is where the difference happens. That’s why Tennessee and South Carolina are changing baseball coaches.

In Alabama’s case, there are sports on the verge of national success that need some extra bump from facilities, more so than coaching. Dennis Pursley will have UA swimming and diving on the championship deck eventually, as soon as facilities, which are already on Byrne’s agenda, are completed. Dan Waters will do the same with track and field. I don’t know if a competition stadium is as important in track these days as training facilities are.

While the facility question is basketball is going to involve a tremendous amount of money, Avery Johnson and Kristy Curry are executing long rebuilding projects (next step for both

See next page
programs: a return to the NCAA Tournament) and — time does not lie — Coleman Coliseum is about to be 50 years old.

Third, don’t let a sport slip away. The SEC is too competitive — fall behind and you might take decades to catch up. That’s not singling anyone out and it’s completely unfair to expect Byrne to have a grasp on teams like soccer and volleyball, which he hasn’t even seen in action yet.

Fourth, if you do face an emergency, fix it. Byrne had to do this with baseball, far before he anticipated when he took the UA job.

The Tuscaloosa News’ annual program ratings — and the five-year trends — show Alabama is great in some sports, growing in others. But there is room for the next five years to be even better, not only because of the golden glow of football.
Alabama has 127 athletes on spring honor roll

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama led all SEC schools with 127 athletes on the spring academic honor roll, the league office announced on Monday. It’s the second year that UA has led the conference in representatives on the spring academic honor roll.

The UA rowing team supplied 36 of the athletes on the honor roll to lead the way. That tied for the most student-athletes from a single team anywhere in the conference this spring.

Alabama baseball had 16 athletes on the honor roll, the second most of any SEC baseball program. Senior reliever Mike Oczypok was on the honor roll for the fourth consecutive year. He was also named to the 2013 first-year academic honor roll. Oczypok completed his MBA in May.

The men’s golf team had seven student-athletes included, tied for second most in the league. That included 2017 Southern Amateur Champion Jonathan Hardee. UA softball had 14 athletes on the honor roll, including Academic All-Americans Chandler Dare and Sydney Littlejohn.

Women’s track and field had 25 members honored. The men’s track and field team had 14 members included. Women’s tennis had five student-athletes on the honor roll, while men’s tennis had four.

The spring academic honor roll includes athletes in spring sports based on grades from the previous summer, fall and spring terms. Athletes must have a 3.0 grade point average in the previous academic year or a cumulative 3.0 grade point average and be at least a sophomore in academic standing.

The 2017 spring academic honor roll included a total of 1,245 student-athletes across all SEC schools. Alabama has had 270 total athletes named to the SEC’s fall, winter and spring academic honor rolls. The list of first-year academic honor roll student-athletes will be...
Alabama athletes earn spots on national track teams

University of Alabama track and field athletes Ruebin Walters and Domonique Williams earned spots on Trinidad & Tobago's national team with victories at that country's national championships while Quanesha Burks posted a fourth-place finish in the women's long jump at the U.S. championships to earn a spot on Team USA on Saturday.

At the U.S. Outdoor Track & Field Championships in Sacramento, Calif., Burks clinched a fourth-place finish in the women's long jump with a leap of 21-11 3/4 on her final attempt. The finish secures her spot on the U.S. national team and a trip to London for the 2017 International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships, Aug. 4-13.

One day after breaking the Alabama school record in the preliminaries of the 110-meter hurdles at the Trinidad & Tobago National Open Championships in Port of Spain, Trinidad, Walters sprinted to victory in the finals in a time of 13.34 to earn a trip to London. Williams, who posted the fastest time in Friday's preliminary round, captured her nation's 400-meter championship on Saturday in a time of 52.74 and will join Walters on the Trinidad & Tobago national team.

The Crimson Tide will also be represented on the U.S. junior national team this summer as freshman Takyera Roberson and signee Jaimie Robinson won the women's 400 meters and women's triple jump, respectively, at the U.S. Junior Track & Field Championships, which was also held in Sacramento. Roberson rolled to a winning time of 51.35 in the women's 400 meters, the fifth-fastest time in Alabama history, and Robinson won the women's triple jump with a leap of 43-10 1/2 (13.37m). The victories qualify both women for spots on the U.S. junior national team that will compete in the Pan-American Track & Field Championships July 21-23 in Lima, Peru.

Alabama's Jereem Richards and Steven Gayle will look to join Burks, Walters and Williams in London on Sunday. Richards competes in the men's 200 meters at the Trinidad & Tobago National Open Championships while Gayle will run in the finals of the men's 400 meters at the Jamaica National Senior Championships in Kingston, Jamaica.
Two more UA athletes earn spots on national track teams

Staff report

Alabama track & field's Jereem Richards and Steven Gayle secured positions on the Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica national teams, respectively, on Sunday and will compete in the 2017 International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships, Aug. 4-13 in London, England.

At the Trinidad & Tobago National Open Championships in Port of Spain, Trinidad, Richards sprinted to victory in the men's 200 meters in 20.15, the sixth-fastest time in Alabama history. Gayle finished third in the men's 400 meters in 45.09 at the Jamaica National Senior Championships in Kingston, Jamaica.

Alabama will see five members of the 2017 track and field team compete at the world championships including Richards, Gayle, Quanesha Burks (USA/women's long jump), Ruebin Walters (Trinidad & Tobago/men's 110-meter hurdles) and Domonique Williams (Trinidad & Tobago/women's 400 meters). Burks, Walters and Williams had already earned spots on their national teams on Saturday.

The Crimson Tide will also be represented at Pan-American Track & Field Championships July 21-23 in Lima, Peru as freshman Takyera Roberson (women's 400 meters) and signee Jaimie Robinson (triple jump) qualified for spots on the U.S. junior national team with victories at the U.S. Junior Championships this weekend in Sacramento, Calif.
The path to Tuscaloosa for Hoover's Guffey started through the mail

Gary Estwick gestwick@al.com

Brock Guffey's journey from under-recruited prospect at Hoover to University of Alabama pitcher started with a surprise letter.

On March 29, Guffey allowed just two hits and two runs (none earned) during a complete game outing against Spanish Fort. He struck out nine with no walks as Hoover won 3-2.

The next day, Guffey received a letter in the mail from an unexpected fan.

"Really enjoyed watching you pitch last night against Spanish Fort! Love the way you compete and are able to throw all of your pitches for a strike. We will be keeping a close eye on you at Hanceville... War Eagle!"

— Coach Bo

That's coach Brad Bohannon, at a time, an assistant coach at Auburn University baseball.

Back to the story.

Guffey pitched on, pushing Hoover to the playoffs, all the way to the Class 7A state championship series. Here, with Auburn leading the best-of-three series 1-0, Guffey cemented his prep legend by tossing a two-hit, complete-game shutout in Game 2. He then entered Game 3 with two outs in the sixth inning, pitching out of a jam and collecting a save to seal Hoover's state baseball title. Guffey earned MVP honors.

Days later, he attended the SEC Baseball Tournament at the Hoover Met where he thanked Bohannon for the correspondence.

"(I) told him it meant the world to me," Guffey said.

Around this time, Guffey, a Wallace State commit, received newfound recruiting attention, thanks to a resume which included ASWA Pitcher of the Year and AL.com's Birmingham Baseball Player of the Year honors. Guffey finished his senior season with an 11-0-2 mark and 0.57 ERA. Guffey posted 111 strikeouts in 86 innings, along with five shutouts.

"A lot of people heard about the season that I had and got in touch with me," Guffey said.

First, Mercer. Then Samford, Arkansas, Ole Miss and Mississippi State.

"I was so excited and honestly, couldn't believe it," Guffey added.

On his way home from visiting Mississippi State, Guffey received his final surprise: a call from coach Bohannon, recently named new baseball coach at Alabama.

Bohannon asked Guffey if he could stop by campus on his way home. Not long after, while in Tuscaloosa, he realized he was home.

"There's just something about that 'A' that I've seen growing up my whole life that made it feel like home," he said.

As the latest recruit in Alabama baseball's incoming class, Guffey is looking forward to competing in the SEC Tournament, his dream competition.

Said Guffey: "Seemed like it was meant to be."
Former players and coaches recount the Crimson Tide’s 1997 baseball team, which fell just short of a national championship

By: Ben Jones

It’s been 20 years since the University of Alabama baseball team came up just one game short of the national championship. The 1997 team is widely considered to be Alabama’s best ever, and no team ever came closer to winning a national championship. The 1997 team was a titanic force on offense. It had four players that hit 20 home runs, seven players with 15 home runs, and batted .340 as a team. The Crimson Tide hit 160 home runs in 70 games that season and averaged 9.7 runs per game.

These are the memories of the 1997, as told by players and coaches from that year.

High expectations

Head coach Jim Wells had guided UA to the No. 1 seed in the College World Series in 1996, but LSU won the national championship. The core of that team returned, and a handful of key pieces were added. When the team gathered that fall, the goal was clear. Alabama was capable of winning a national championship in 1997.

Second baseman Joe Caruso: “I turned down the draft in 1996, when I was drafted by the Oakland As in the 19th round, and one of the things I told the pro scouts that sat in front of me was ‘I’m going back to Alabama to win a national championship and there’s no amount of money that you can give me that would deter me from going back.’”

Outfielder/pitcher Roberto Vaz: “They had players that were returning that were really good like Dustan Mohr, Joe Caruso, (David) Tidwell. We were lucky enough to get (pitcher) Pete Fisher to come. He transferred in. I was the No. 1 junior college transfer at the time. And then we had the No. 1 freshman with Danny Chavis coming from Sarasota. We were lucky with the amount of players that we got to combine with what was already there.”

Assistant coach Mitch Gaspard: “Just about everyone we signed and recruited, we hit on. A high majority of them turned out to be really good players.”

Third baseman Andy Phillips: “My freshman year we went to Omaha. There was expectation but it was new to us, too. The excitement coming into ’97 after we’d been there and had a lot of returning players but also some really good incoming guys. The expectation was really high going into that year. Fortunately for us, we lived up to that expectation.”

See next page
Head coach Jim Wells: “You get out there in the fall and not only did you have a decent core of guys coming back, but we caught a break and recruited some high school and juco guys. I think most of those guys, Frick and Vaz and a couple others were All-Americans and you think you’ll get a portion of them. And all the stars aligned and they all got there.”

Right fielder Dustan Mohr: “In 1997 we knew when we got there, ‘We’re not just here, we’re going to take this to the end.’”

Pitcher Michael Daniel: “I signed at Alabama, and that was the goal. We’re going to the College World Series, we’re going to win a national championship. Anything less than that, I didn’t accept it. That’s why I signed there. When I went in the fall, that was everybody’s mentality: We were going to the World Series.”

Assistant coach Todd Butler: “The national championship was the goal. It wasn’t talk; it was real. To tell you how serious these guys were, when we won the SEC tournament in Columbus, Georgia that year, this team didn’t dogpile. They didn’t celebrate. They shook hands.”

Leader of the pack

The nucleus of the team had been to the College World Series as the No. 1 seed in 1996 but finished short of a national championship. Wells and the coaching staff added a couple more pieces to supplement its strong group of returners. Among those was Roberto Vaz, the nation’s No. 1 junior college player. Vaz became an everyday starter who hit .400 with 22 home runs. He was also a key left handed pitcher, closing games and coming in as a spot starter. He was a national finalist for the Golden Spikes, given to the best player in amateur baseball that year.

Wells: “We were able to pick up Roberto Vaz, who for one nine-month period was the best player any of us had ever been around, because he could do so many things. It was one of those rare times when you were solid at every position.”

Vaz: “When I went on my recruiting trips, I didn’t really know anything about Alabama football at the time. During my recruiting trip I went to a football game. I didn’t know that they said ‘Roll Tide Roll’ on kickoffs. It was just noise. I knew they were saying something but there were so many people screaming and I didn’t know what it meant. So I asked somebody ‘What are you saying during kickoffs?’ They looked at me like I was crazy. They said ‘Roll Tide Roll.’ Then I noticed the Tide boxes, the toilet paper rolls, everything clicked at once. The amount of passion they had for their team was incredible. I felt that at that time Alabama football was struggling and the baseball team was doing really well. So I thought that if the passion for the football team was like this, then the baseball team must be even better. I think what also signed the deal was
that I was coveted by a lot of colleges, a lot of universities. Coach Wells was the only coach that didn't really guarantee me anything."

Caruso: "He bumped everybody back in the order. He made us a more complete lineup for sure."

Gaspard: "The thing that sold me, that sophomore year when he was in junior college, (coach) Ty Harrington called me and said he was walking out to the mound... They had a guy named Frankie Rodriguez on the mound. Frankie later went on to pitch for the Red Sox for a little while. He's playing in the final game against Blinn Junior College to go to Grand Junction for the World Series. He says 'Frankie is done, he's about 120 pitches. They have first and second, one out.' Long story short, he walks out to the mound and he's going 'My god, I've got some guy in the bullpen I know can't get them out. Frankie is done. What am I going to do?' Roberto had not pitched for them all year. He played center field every day. (Harrington) says 'As I'm walking to the mound, Vaz is jogging in from center field during the mound visit. I get to the mound and Roberto comes right up to me as I'm there and says "Hey, you want to go to the JUCO world series?" Yeah. "Give me the ball." And sure enough, pop up, punchout, we go to Grand Junction.' He was that kind of guy."

Numbers machine

The Crimson Tide got off to a hot start, opening up with 15 straight wins. The team was loaded top to bottom, but the lineup was Alabama's strength. Nine players from 1997 would go on to be drafted, including seven hitters. Mohr and Phillips went on to have major league careers.

Phillips: "It wasn't just the wins. It was how we were winning. Really right out of the gate, we were playing pretty well in every phase of the game. I think that just speaks to the preparation that the coaching staff, Coach Wells had."

Butler: "The starters would say 'We have to have 10 runs by the fifth inning so the guys on the bench can get their at-bats.' And when they came in the game, they hit .300."

Caruso: "Even though we were extremely talented, we all bought into each other. 'Hey, nobody swing at this guy's curveball in the third. Hey, this guy is trying to give us a fastball in. Don't do it, turn it around.' We would attack a team's pitcher with all of us instead of just individual hitting. I think that was a big deal."

Gorilla Ball
Offense dominated that era of college baseball, but Alabama took it to another level in 1997. The program set school records for batting average, runs, hits, RBIs, home runs, triples, doubles, slugging percentage that year. All of those records still stand, 20 years later. It was exciting for fans, but frustrating to pitchers.

Vaz: “Gorilla ball is what they called it.”

Daniel: “I had a game against South Alabama in Tuscaloosa there, I gave up three home runs in a row to the same part of the field on really good pitches. It was a ball away at the knees, and they put a barrel on it and it went out to the exact same spot on all three pitches. I remember Coach Wells came out there, like ‘Dang, I haven’t seen that before.’ Stuff like that, you knew there were going to be home runs hit. You just tried to minimize how many. It was crazy how the ball would fly out.”

Wells: “We’re playing Ole Miss later in the year and I’m trying to motivate them, because we’re better than they were. I’m saying ‘Hey, this guy is really good and we’re going to have to play for a run early.’ Robbie Tucker is up and I give him a bunt. He can’t get it down, give him a bunt again, he looks even worse. I said ‘That’s it. Swing it.’ And he hits the longest home run... I don’t know what has happened in the last eight years but it was supposed to be the longest home run ever hit in that stadium. It hit the top of the light pole. I walked to the dugout and I said ‘You know what guys, I think that’s going to be the last signal I give all year.’ ... I think that was the last signal I gave. Because you have to play for the homer. People were doing that because if you played for one run, you could easily give up three to five in the next inning.”

Caruso: “It made it a game where you never felt like you were out of a game because you could score seven runs in an inning.”

Best meets best

Alabama hosted LSU in the season’s final regular season series. LSU was the defending national champion, and most considered it to be a meeting of the two best teams in college baseball. The Crimson Tide needed to sweep the Tigers to win the conference championship.

Vaz threw a complete game to win on Friday, just his second career start. Then the Crimson Tide erupted in a 28-2 win on Saturday to clinch the series. But LSU recovered from losing the first two games and won the third game to clinch the conference championship.
Butler: “We knew in the fall of 1996 that we would play LSU to win the SEC and we would probably play LSU in Omaha. We knew that in the fall of 1996. The scouts were coming through and saying that the best two teams were LSU and Alabama.”

Vaz: “They had Brandon Larson who hit 40 home runs that year and was a Golden Spikes finalist along with myself that year. Really mirror images of each other.”

Gaspard: “Coach Wells, myself and Todd Butler were in the office on a Thursday, talking about pitching and how we’re going to attack LSU. LSU had quite a bit of left-handed hitting, so we were trying to go through, figure out who we wanted to start and those things. Vaz had been throwing mainly out of the bullpen for us. He came up to the office when the three of us were there and knocked on the door, and presented to Coach Wells. He said ‘If you start me on Friday night, I’ll get game 1. Just figure out the next two.’ He had really been throwing out of the bullpen all year. Vaz started that game and hit a big homer late. He started that game and basically rolled out and got that one.”

Mohr: “We knew it would be between us and LSU. We knew what they had coming back. They had an older team coming back too with some good young pieces added. To beat them as badly as we did, all year, not just the 28-2, I feel like we dominated them.”

Caruso: “Being a four-year starter at Alabama, I can tell you I’ve never seen anything like that (28-2 win) against another SEC team, especially the caliber of LSU. But if you know anything about LSU baseball, they figure out a way to get it done. I knew the next day was going to be a dogfight because LSU players are molded to win championships, not just to win games.”

Wells: “I know some of the kids on (LSU) and the coaches. They said (head coach Skip Bertman) got them together and they thought they were getting ready to get chewed out. He brought them into the outfield after the game and he says ‘Hey guys, let’s go back to the motel, get a good night’s sleep, get something to eat. They can’t possibly do that again.’ What a great line. A veteran coach. They came back the next day and basically threw the same guys we shelled the day before and won the Sunday game.”

Phillips: “You can be playing as well as you can be, and you can get beat. Certainly in that last game, that’s what happened. LSU, they beat us in that last game to win the SEC. But it doesn’t diminish anything we accomplished that year up to that point.”
Women's UA basketball finalizes out-of-conference games

By: Cody Estremo
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

The University of Alabama women's basketball team finalized its out-of-conference schedule on Tuesday.

The Crimson Tide will start its season with an exhibition game against Antelope Valley, which finished 19-7 last year. The Marauders are a NAIA school that defeated Pepperdine in its exhibition game a year ago.

Alabama starts its season with a three-game home stand, starting on Nov. 10 against Alabama A&M.

Alabama dominated the Bulldogs last year when the teams played, winning 97-29.

Following its home stand, the Crimson Tide will hit the road for five games, starting on Nov. 19, traveling to Statesboro, Georgia, to play Georgia Southern. Alabama played the Golden Eagles last year, and won that game, 66-48, in Tuscaloosa.

While on its road trip, Alabama will participate in the Puerto Rico Clasico tournament in Fajardo, Puerto Rico. There the team will face North Carolina State and Elon University.

NC State finished the 2016-17 season with a 23-9 record and a 12-4 record in conference play. Elon finished its season 27-7 overall.

Both made it to the NCAA tournament a year ago.

Alabama will finish its home stand against Lipscomb in Nashville on Dec. 7.

Last year the game was rescheduled to Tuscaloosa. Alabama won that game, 82-35, while holding Lipscomb scoreless for the first 17 minutes and 32 seconds.

Alabama begins a five-game home stand to finish its out-of-conference schedule, starting on Dec. 10 against Grambling State.

It will end its December schedule against Florida A&M, who the team beat 81-46 last year, on Dec. 28.

Alabama head coach Kristy Curry watches from the sideline during the second half of a game against Ole Miss at Foster Auditorium in Tuscaloosa on Feb. 4, 2016. [STAFF FILE PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]
Alabama basketball announces details on Canada trip

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

The Alabama men’s basketball team will go on an eight-day trip to Canada in August, which will feature three games against local universities and UA released full details on Monday via its sports information office.

The Crimson Tide will depart Aug. 4 and return Aug. 11, and will make stops in Montreal and Ottawa before returning home to Tuscaloosa.

Per NCAA rules regarding a foreign tour, Alabama will hold 10 days of practices prior to departing Tuscaloosa. The Tide’s trip will begin on Aug. 4 when it departs Tuscaloosa for Atlanta. After spending a night there, Alabama will fly to Montreal on the morning of Aug. 5.

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BASEBALL

Continued from B1

of Aug. 5, where it will spend two days. Following its stay in Montreal, the Tide will travel to Ottawa on Aug. 7 where it will stay for the next three days.

"We are thrilled to have the opportunity to take our team to Canada this August," Johnson said in the UA release. "To have an opportunity to expose our guys to different cultures and historic cities such as Montreal and Ottawa is terrific. It will also allow our team to have practices with our returning players and our new players, which will only better prepare us for next season. There is no doubt that our team will get an educational, social and basketball experience that will last a lifetime."

Alabama will play three games against three Canadian collegiate teams over a span of its five days in Montreal and Ottawa. The first game will be played on Aug. 7 against McGill University at 7 p.m. The Redmen are coming off a record-setting season in which they ended with a 24-11 overall record.

On Aug. 9, the Tide will play the first of two games in Ottawa when it takes on Carleton University at 7 p.m. Carleton finished the 2016-17 season with a 22-1 overall record but lost four seniors from last season's squad. Hosting six NCAA teams prior to last season, Carleton finished a perfect 6-0, including a victory over eventual Missouri Valley Conference champion and NCAA Tournament participant Wichita State.

The Crimson Tide will conclude its game schedule in Canada when it takes on the University of Ottawa at 6:30 p.m. The Gee-Gees are coming off a 16-3 season a year ago, finishing runners-up to Carleton in the North Division.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Optimism high for SEC hoops in 2018

By: Cecil Hurt

Don’t worry, the football onslaught is coming.

After a few Fourth of July firecrackers, SEC Media Days will be upon us and the entire college sports world will be awash in 900 hot takes on Alabama’s depth at defensive end or possible Bret Bielema baby names.

Before the levee breaks though, SEC basketball had one last media call earlier this week, summing up the summer and proving again that optimism for the 2017-18 season is higher, league-wide, than it has been in a decade. Whether there is any validity to reports that Kentucky coach John Calipari is sniffing around Manhattan and the Knicks’ vacant presidency remains to be seen. Calipari is linked to most big NBA openings just as somebody somewhere (can you say Tom Arnold?) is sure to link Nick Saban to every NFL vacancy.

Even in the unlikely event Calipari leaves Lexington, he will still leave a treasure trove of talent for next year — and he isn’t the only one. With the 2017 NBA draft behind us, the 2018 NBA mock drafts have arrived with a vengeance as far as the SEC is concerned. One of the best (at nbadraft.net) has seven of the first 14 picks coming from SEC schools, including a projected No. 1, Michael Porter from Missouri. You can throw Ben Simmons at me, but Porter appears to be a talent that could elevate Missouri into NCAA Tournament contention.

This is now the part of our program where diehard Alabama fans will want to stick their fingers in their ears and sing “La! La! La!” at the top of their lungs if they don’t want to know that incoming Alabama guard Colin Sexton is projected No. 6 overall to the Timberwolves. But, as Calipari said on the SEC teleconference last Monday, “if you don’t want one-and-dones, it’s simple. Don’t recruit those guys.” Avery Johnson is squarely in the “recruit them if you can” camp.

Amazingly, there is even a non-freshman on the list — Texas A&M forward Robert Williams, who surprised many observers by choosing a second season in College Station and making the Aggies an NCAA hopeful as well, if their guard play improves.

It’s not just Missouri and Texas A&M that hope to improve after disappointing seasons. LSU has a new coach and a decent roster. Auburn has recruited well. Only Mississippi State seems to be having a frustrating offseason, capped by the unexpected transfer of big man Mario Kegler.

As an example, here is Auburn’s Bruce Pearl on the Tigers’ excitement over sophomore center Austin Wiley.

“Austin was 17 (as a midseason transfer last year) when he got to Auburn, and he’s going up against guys that are 20, 21 or 22, but you could tell it was there,” Pearl said. “He wasn’t going to dominate in the SEC against older players like he was able to dominate guys his own age.

“But Austin was the most physical player at Team USA camp (earlier this month),” Pearl said. “I think that the fact that his motor always runs were two things that showed up to (Calipari) and that coaching staff. He’s much more explosive. He’s always been fast, but now he’s utilizing that
speed to his advantage. I think the other thing to keep in mind is when Austin is at the trials, he’s
going against other U-19 players; he’s going to physically stand out.”

That’s the key. If the SEC teams that struggled a year ago improve as expected, they will no
longer be a drag on the league’s RPI. A rising Tide, which is expected in Tuscaloosa, will help
raise all boats. But so will rising Tigers, and Aggies, and the continued success of the Kentuckys
and Floridas, and whichever team becomes this year’s South Carolina, as well.
‘EVERY DAY’
INSIGHTS

Five things we learned from Phil Savage’s upcoming book on Nick Saban and his program’s big moments

Creg Stephenson cstephenson@al.com

As radio analyst for the Crimson Tide Sports Network and a long-time friend of Nick Saban, Phil Savage has insight into Alabama’s football program that few others have.

Savage, a former NFL assistant coach, scouting director and general manager who now doubles as the executive director of the Reese’s Senior Bowl in addition to his radio duties, purs that knowledge to work in an upcoming book, “4th and Goal Every Day: Alabama’s Relentless Pursuit of Perfection,” co-authored with veteran sportswriter Ray Glier and including a preface by Saban and a foreword by ESPN’s Rece Davis, will be released Aug. 29 by St. Martin’s Press.

AL.com’s Creg Stephenson obtained an advance copy of the book, and read it from cover-to-cover this past weekend. It’s a fascinating inside look at Saban’s recruiting and development program at various stops in the last 25 years, as well as a behind-the-scenes account of big moments in Alabama football during the last decade.

Here are five things we learned that might interest Alabama fans, and college football fans in general.

1. Savage sends Saban a detailed scouting report prior to every game

Savage and Saban began working together with the Cleveland Browns in 1991, Saban as defensive coordinator and Savage as a low-level defensive assistant. When he became radio analyst for Crimson Tide football in 2009, Savage took it upon himself to email his opposing team scouting report for the season opener against Virginia Tech to Saban. Saban was so impressed with Savage’s work that he requested Savage do so for every game. Savage has continued to send his scouting reports prior to each of the last 111 Alabama games, and Saban includes them with his and his assistants’ own reports in preparation for that week’s opponent.

2. Saban’s ‘Process’ didn’t begin with Bill Belichick

Though Saban was greatly influenced by and borrowed liberally from his old friend Belichick while they worked together with the Cleveland Browns in the early 1990s, the roots of Saban’s program go back some 50 years. In recruiting the best possible talent, Saban uses a version of the Dallas Cowboys’ computerized scouting system, formulated by Gil Brandt, Tex Schramm and Tom Landry in the 1960s. Prospects must meet various ‘critical factors’ in terms of body type, athleticism and character, and are assigned numerical grades in several categories before they are even considered potential recruits for Saban’s team.

3. Cooper Bateman’s starting nod vs. Ole Miss in 2015 is (kind of) explained

The 2015 Ole Miss game is an outlier in Alabama’s 2015 national championship season, and not just because the Crimson Tide lost for the only time that year. It’s also memorable because Cooper Bateman unexpectedly started over Jake Coker at quarterback. Savage writes that Coker and Saban got into a loud argument in Saban’s office following a meeting during Thursday of that week, after Coker grew frustrated that Saban would not decide on a clear No. 1 quarterback. Savage stops short of implying that Coker was benched for disciplinary reasons, but the fact remains that Coker took over midway through the second quarter of the Ole Miss game and started every game after that.

4. Some insight into the famous sideline blowup between Saban and Lane Kiffin

Saban and Kiffin’s shouting match in the final moments of a 38-10 win over Western Kentucky in September 2016 was caught on camera and became a viral moment. Neither Saban nor Kiffin said publicly what caused the dustup, which occurred after a careless Alabama fumble led to a Western Kentucky touchdown in garbage time. Savage writes that Kiffin said into his headset “dumb players make dumb plays,” which all the Crimson Tide coaches heard. Saban snapped back with “no, dumb offensive coordinators call dumb plays.” There were probably a few expletives left out.

5. Texas A&M tipped off its plays during Alabama’s 2016 win over the Aggies

In the weeks leading up to the Alabama-Texas A&M game last October, Savage picked up on film that the Aggies’ offensive tackles would adjust their stances depending on whether the upcoming play was a run or a pass. Saban verified this information through his own film study and incorporated it into Alabama’s game plan, with inside linebacker Reuben Foster checking the tackles’ stances prior to each play. Foster totaled 12 tackles, Texas A&M averaged three yards per carry and Alabama won 33-14.

And that’s just the beginning. Savage puts forth dozens of other anecdotes, insights and opinions that fans are sure to eat up regarding Alabama football and Saban’s success in Tuscaloosa over the last decade.

“4th and Goal Every Day” is available for preorder via Amazon.com.
COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NCAA moving toward removing transfer cuffs

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

If it happens, the next Anwar Jackson Jr. won’t have to transfer from Auburn to a junior college, because Gus Malzahn won’t be able to prevent him from going on scholarship at any four-year school of his choice.

If it happens, the next Maurice Smith won’t have to wage a PR campaign to get Nick Saban to back down and allow him to transfer to Georgia.

If it happens, it’ll be one small step for student-athlete welfare, one giant leap for sanity and fairness in major college football and basketball.

Make it happen, NCAA. Make it happen.

The NCAA Division I Council Transfer Working Group is working toward that end. It’s asked the membership for feedback on a number of major potential changes to the transfer rules. The most common-sense of those changes would end the punitive practice of coaches and schools blocking players from transferring to certain opponents, such as those in the same conference or on an upcoming schedule.

Seven-figure coaches have enough perks. They should no longer be given handcuffs to shackle their players as they please.

Currently, a student-athlete has to request coaches have won’t have to transfer to another school about a potential transfer. If his current school denies that permission, the student-athlete still can transfer to that school, but can’t receive athletics-related financial aid for one year.

In short, you can transfer anywhere you like, but you might have to pay your own way for a year. It’s an unconscionable financial burden for a coach who makes millions to place on a student-athlete.

According to Jackson, Malzahn and players as they

SCARBINSKY
FROM 81

The Working Group also is seeking feedback from the membership on other concepts, such as:

› Institute a national transfer policy and don’t allow individual conferences to adopt their own more-restrictive transfer rules;
› Have all transfers abide by the same rules regardless of sport;
› Have all transfers sit out a year of competition at their new schools or, if they meet certain academic standards, allow them to play right away;
› Have a graduate transfer count against a school’s scholarship limit for two years even if the transfer plays only one season;
› Apply APR standards to graduate transfers;
› Stiffen the penalties for coaches who recruit players to transfer from other schools.

Those two situations added local attention to the growing national outrage against one-sided permission-to-contact rules governing transfers, which allow schools to hold student-athletes hostage financially. The NCAA Working Group wisely disagrees with that concept.

“Group members believe financial aid should not be tied to whether a school grants permission to contact,” an NCAA press release said. “They want to know if others in the membership feel the same way.”

Let’s hope they do.

SEE SCARBINSKY, 83

As Smith said at the time, Saban and Alabama originally blocked his graduate transfer to Georgia last summer. Smith and his family went public, Saban relented and the defensive back played his final college season in 2016 for the Bulldogs. His pick-six helped Georgia beat Auburn, which secured the SEC West title for Alabama.

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Let’s hope they do.
Alabama-Florida State ticket prices are perfect storm of factors

By: Michael Casagrande

A tab on the Alabama-Florida State game's official website offers a cruel tease for eager fans. The tickets page seems promising in title only until it leads you to a tough-luck message.

No tickets are available to the public for the Sept. 2 showdown between teams projected in the top five in the first college game played in the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

That intersection of crucial factors is making this among the most expensive tickets you'll find for a college football game -- regular season or playoffs. Having a full offseason and summer of hype also cultivates a secondary ticket market that'll price just about anyone out of a seat in Atlanta that evening.

As of this week, at least a few hundred tickets were listed at more than $1,000. The cheapest ticket wasn't much more affordable on a few different websites offering second-hand seats. The following prices are listed with service fees that approach $100 a ticket.

-- StubHub: $531
-- SeatGeek: $419
-- VividSeats: $455

Still under construction, Mercedes-Benz Stadium has a capacity of 71,000. It can be adjusted to fit 75,000 for big events such as the Super Bowl. The game kicks off at 7 p.m. CT on Sept. 2 and will air live on ABC. ESPN's College GameDay will also broadcast live from Atlanta that morning.

Face-value prices for tickets were set at $225-$125, according to the contract signed by Alabama in 2015. A block of 2,700 upper-deck tickets for students were priced at $50. Those seats are currently on the market in the $400-$500 range. According to StubHub, the lowest price on a lower-level seat is close to $800.

Both teams were allotted 30,000 tickets with the rest snapped up before going on sale to the general public.

A seat for last season's Alabama opener with USC was as inexpensive as $55 in the days before kickoff in Arlington, Texas, according to Forbes.

If searching for tickets using the cheapest option on StubHub, Alabama-Florida State would be the second most expensive ticket out there for the 2017 season. Georgia at Notre Dame is in the $545 range while Oklahoma at Ohio State is $350.

See next page
Each of those high-dollar games have at least one thing in common with Alabama-Florida State: non-conference pairings. Rivalries are played annually, but the Tide hasn't faced the Seminoles since 2007.

The other expensive tickets are for games played in home stadiums while Alabama's opener is in the neutral home of the Atlanta Falcons. Other made-for-TV matchups in NFL stadiums aren't quite as pricey.

The get-in price for Florida-Michigan in Arlington is currently $105 while LSU-BYU in Houston seats can be purchased for as little as $49, according to StubHub.
Hurts puts national title loss behind; takes part in Manning Passing Academy

By Brent St. Germain
The Courier/Daily
Comet Sports Editor

THIBODAUX, La. — Quarterback Jalen Hurts will never forget how close the Alabama Crimson Tide came to winning back-to-back national championships.

Leading 31-28 with 6 seconds remaining, Hurts and the Crimson Tide offense watched helplessly on the sideline as Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson dethroned the defending national champion at University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz., to close the 2016 college football season.

Watson tossed a 2-yard touchdown pass to Hunter Renfrow, lifting the Tigers to a 35-31 win and the national championship since the 1981 season.

For Hurts, that was not the way he wanted to end his freshman season and he said on Friday he is determined to make the trip to Thibodaux for the camp.

Hurts has spent a lot of time in the summer improving his overall game, and one of those steps was to attend this weekend’s Manning Passing Academy on the campus of Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La.

Although he has attended many football camps as high school player in Channelview, Texas, Hurts had never made the trip to Thibodaux for the Manning Passing Academy.

Hurts, entering his sophomore year at Alabama, said he is enjoying the experience and is trying to learn as much as he can from Super Bowl winning quarterbacks Peyton and Eli Manning and their father Archie Manning, who made a name for himself as a quarterback for the New Orleans Saints.

“It’s a great experience taking part in Manning Passing Academy,” he said. “I’ve been really impressed with his work ethic and ability. He stepped right in and started marking plays right away, which was really impressive. It’s tough for any player to step right in and succeed right away.”

Improving his overall play at quarterback is Hurts’ No. 1 goal heading into the 2017 season.

He is working with Alabama’s new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll to become a more efficient and balanced quarterback.

To become a better quarterback, Hurts said he has been focusing on improving on the little things.

“You’re feet dictate a lot of things for a college quarterback,” he said. “If your feet are good, you can put yourself in a position to make a lot of throws. In addition to my feet, I am working on shoulder movement and looking calm whenever I am in the pocket.”

With a college football season under his belt, Hurts

See HURTS, C7

"He is a big, strong kid and has worked hard throughout this camp. I've been really impressed with his work ethic and ability. He stepped right in and started marking plays right away, which was really impressive. It's tough for any player to step right in and succeed right away."

— Eli Manning

Hurts said he is confident the Crimson Tide will climb back to the top for the 2017 season because of one person — head coach Nick Saban.

“Coach Saban is one of a kind, and he is definitely one of the greatest coaches to ever coach the game,” Hurts said. “It’s been great for my teammates and I because we get to learn from him every day. He has a lot of knowledge on the game, and I am just sitting back every day trying to learn as much as I can.”

Continued from C1

one of the top quarterbacks in college football.

Hurts said he is ready to continue his progression to become one of the top quarterbacks in college football.

"We are really hungry to move past last season’s disappointment," he said. "I think about it every day and it crosses my mind. We are working hard this summer, and hopefully, we can get can back to the championship game."

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Continued from C1
Harvard freshmen’s ouster raises free speech issue

Sally Ho  Associated Press

Few college-bound kids lose their shot, and their slot, at their dream school once they get in, but it happened at one of the world’s most elite institutions and for a reason that has, until recently, hardly registered in the university admissions process: social media.

Harvard University’s decision to rescind admission offers to 10 incoming freshmen because of offensive Facebook posts comes at a time of heightened attention to free speech and student conduct on U.S. college campuses, and has stirred debate far beyond the halls of the Ivy League school.

Other schools say it’s an eye-opener for those involved in the admissions process.

“We’re going to continue to watch how this unfolds and, with other higher ed institutions, learn from it,” said Janet Bonkowski, spokeswoman for the University of Wisconsin in Green Bay.

Harvard rescinded the admission offers after discovering the students had traded offensive images and messages on a private Facebook group, student newspaper The Harvard Crimson reported. The posts were often sexually explicit and mocked Mexicans, the Holocaust, sexual assault and child abuse.

The Cambridge, Massachusetts, university declined to comment, but the school does tell accepted students their offers can be withdrawn if their behavior “brings into question their honesty, maturity or moral character.”

Its decision may have been rare, but the situation it addressed was not: young applicants crossing lines in their social media posts.

Mike Reilly, a former college admissions officer in Washington state and now an executive with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, said Harvard’s move can be seen as incongruent with free speech.

But Nancy Beane, a high school counselor in Atlanta and president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, said zero tolerance for racist comments should be the standard for all institutions of higher education.

“We’re all humans. We’re all going to make mistakes and make poor choices in our lives, but there are consequences,” Beane said. “I’m not sure why we’ve decided people can say whatever they want, do whatever they want, and there are no consequences for it.”

In 2015, the national counselors association surveyed its members at more than 1,700 colleges and found less than a third reported rescinding an admissions offer each year. Nearly 70 percent of those colleges said it was because of a dishonest application, while 20 percent said it was over a disciplinary issue.

Social media behavior wasn’t considered a reason to drop a student.

David Cruz, 22, who is studying hospitality management at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, said Harvard did the right thing. The transfer student pointed to colleges across the country that have been criticized for not doing enough when it comes to troublesome student conduct, from reported sex assaults to racist incidents.

“Their students acted on their own, but that also represents the school,” Cruz said. “Whatever you post, everyone can see it, whether you’re trying to hide it or not.”

Some admissions officers can and do use Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites when assessing applicants, though they generally don’t patrol the internet for damaging information. Instead, they consider online posts when something specific is brought to their attention.

Still, social media content being used to oust a student is uncommon. In general, dropping an admitted student is a last-resort move, reserved for the most egregious cases. Even then, the college usually will attempt to keep the student by confronting them with the hope that an explanation and a slap on the wrist will resolve the issue.

Ho covers education for AP.
OUR VIEW

Sometimes free speech can have consequences

College professors, and students, must be able to speak openly and freely, even when their comments may be unpopular or controversial. But that doesn’t mean every expression should be tolerated.

College campuses should be places where a free exchange of ideas and opinions abound. But that doesn’t mean they should be a safe space to foment hate and divisiveness.

Freedom of speech does not mean freedom from repercussions for what you’ve said, particularly when your words are inflammatory and your job is to help develop young minds.

We’d think these points would be common sense. But these days, emotions often supersede reason. Essex County College in Newark, N.J., is taking a lot of criticism in the wake of its president’s decision to fire an adjunct professor after she made racially charged comments on Fox News. Earlier this month, adjunct professor Lisa Durden appeared on “Tucker Carlson Tonight.” Durden, who is black, discussed a Memorial Day event hosted by a Black Lives Matter group. The group made it clear that white people were not welcome at the event. When Carlson asked Durden her thoughts, Durden interrupted and said, “Boo—hoo—hoo. You white people are angry because you couldn’t use your white privilege card to get invited to the Black Lives Matter’s all-black Memorial Day celebration.”

Two days after the show aired, Essex County College suspended her with about a week left in the summer session of classes. About two weeks later, she was fired.

After she was fired, Durden told The Washington Post that she was “publicly lynched.” Durden, who taught classes on subjects such as mass communication and popular culture, went on to say, “I had a right to free speech, and I exercised that right.” Yes, that’s right. But exercising that right doesn’t mean that your words are without consequences. She wasn’t imprisoned for her comments. She was fired.

Durden isn’t alone in her belief that “reverse racism” doesn’t exist, that those in the majority cannot be subjected to racism. But that is a false narrative.

Essex County College is a federally designated Predominantly Black Institution and a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Its president is Anthony E. Munroe. He had only been on the job for a short while before stepping into the spotlight with his decision to fire Durden.

Munroe is also black.

The college released a written and a video statement from Munroe addressing the issue after Durden was fired.

“I fully believe that institutions of higher learning must provide a safe space for students to explore, discuss and debate, not only academic philosophies, but the harder issues related to living harmoniously and growing together in our communities and as a country,” Munroe said.

The video lasts about eight minutes. At 3:11, Munroe summed up the situation with seven succinct words. “Racism cannot be fought with more racism.” It has been evident recently that more people on more campuses need to understand that point. Those who seek to divide, regardless of their skin tone, are part of the problem.
Mizzou to rent out unoccupied dorm rooms amid falling enrollment, budget cuts

By: Matt Campbell

Now anyone can have that college dorm experience for just $120 a night.

The University of Missouri will rent out empty rooms this fall for home football weekends and other events at the Columbia campus. The move was announced Thursday at the university Board of Curators meeting.

The rooms are “walking distance from Memorial Stadium,” promises the Residential Life webpage.

A “guest housing” page created this week offers furnished, two-bedroom suites with four single beds for $120 per night. Parking is extra.

“Free high-speed wireless access, and economy bed linens and towels are included,” the website says.

The offer comes in the context of falling enrollment and budget cuts. Freshman enrollment dropped 23 percent in 2016 and, as of early May, it was down another 16 percent. Earlier this month, UM System President Mun Choi announced $101 million in budget cuts at Mizzou’s four campuses, resulting in the loss of 474 jobs.

“We have taken seven residence halls off-line temporarily due to the drop in enrollment,” Christian Basi, director of the university News Bureau, said Thursday. “Because of that we have been looking for additional uses for those residence halls instead of letting them sit there. Even if they are off-line, they cost to operate.”

The university will use 12 residence halls for student housing this fall. Of the seven off-line halls, Excellence and Discovery Halls will be offered for weekend rental. Basi said the university plans other uses for the remaining five.

Basi said he is not aware of any other schools offering dorm rentals. He said it was far too early to gauge the level of interest.

The Twitter-verse noticed the unusual dorms-for-rent offer.

“I remember in college them running out of dorm spaces for students,” posted one person. “How do you have extra to rent...?”

“Renting a dorm room in Columbia has to be better than some of those hotels,” posted another.

“The newer dorm rooms are not anything like the dorm rooms when I was at Mizzou,” said another person.
Mizzou is nearing the end of a $300 million, 18-year Residential Life Master Plan approved in 2001, according to The Columbia Missourian.