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Ivey won’t ‘kick the can,’ disbands Bentley study groups

She pledges to tackle issues with Legislature

Mike Cason mcason@al.com

Continuing to put her own stamp on the governor’s office, Gov. Kay Ivey on Wednesday disbanded 18 task forces, commissions and councils that former Gov. Robert Bentley set up.

“I believe strongly that my role is to make decisions and lead, not kick the can down the road. I am choosing to tackle some of the issues that have previously been sent before a task force,” Ivey said in a statement.

She said she would work with the Legislature to tackle problems.

“Since the first day I took office, I have been committed to efficiency in government, cutting bureaucratic red-tape, and saving tax-payer resources; removing these groups, many of which have either completed their work or have become inactive, is just a part of that process.”

The groups disbanded were:
- Alabama Commission on Improving State Government
- Alabama Coastal Insurance Commission
- Alabama Forest Recovery Task Force
- Alabama Health Insurance Exchange Study Commission
- Alabama Economic Development Alliance
- Integrated State Law Enforcement Task Force
- Governor’s College and Career Ready Task Force
- Alabama Medicaid Pharmacy Study Commission
- Alabama Industrial Energy Advisory Team
- Alabama Small Business Commission and Small Business Advisory Council
- Alabama Health Care Improvement Task Force
- Alabama Human Resources Task Force
- Tax Exemption Advisory
- Health Literacy Partnership of Alabama
- Alabama Consumer Credit Task Force
- Alabama Solid Waste Management Task Force
- Alabama Advisory Council on Gaming
- Grocery Tax Task Force

Also, Ivey named replacements for two cabinet members whose resignations she accepted last week. She named James “Jim” Purcell Sr. acting secretary of information technology and Todd Cotton acting commissioner of the Department of Senior Services. Both were in-house promotions.

Purcell had been chief operations officer for the Alabama Office of Information Technology since December. He replaces Joanne Hale.

Cotton had been chief fiscal officer and assistant commissioner of the Alabama Department of Senior Services since 2015. He replaces Neal Morrison.

Ivey replaced Bentley on April 10, when Bentley resigned as part of a plea deal over fallout from an alleged affair with a former adviser.

Ivey has not said whether she would seek a full term next year. She has said she might not make an announcement until the fall.
Don Staley comes home to direct tourism agency

No matter how much we want things to stay as they are, they never do.

Things change. People change. Situations change.

The passage of time can be mercilessly unfair in that regard. That was the underlying theme of Thomas Wolfe’s novel “You Can’t Go Home Again.”

We hope Don Staley proves that theory wrong.

The Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports board of directors on Wednesday approved a three-year contract and compensation package for Staley as he officially returns to lead an organization he helped form in 2010. His first day on the job will be Monday.

Staley, 58, formed the soccer program at the University of Alabama and led that organization for 14 years. When he left that position, he was a driving force behind forming the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation in 2008. Two years later, he was also a driving force when that organization combined with the Tuscaloosa Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Three years ago, Staley left to become executive director of the city of Foley’s Sports Tourism Complex. In his absence, the TTS has undergone two major leadership changes and has seen its funding sources change. Meanwhile, the board of directors that oversees the organization has also changed. As a result, so has its mission.

Mayor Walt Maddox wants to see the organization develop an “experience-based” economy in Tuscaloosa, where revenue is driven by luring visitors to the city for a unique experience.

With Staley’s experience and knowledge of the area, it appears the board of directors hit a grand slam by luring him back home.

There were 20 candidates for the position, but it would be hard to imagine that any one of them would have a resume that fits the job description more completely than Staley’s.

Even more, Staley has a solid reputation for being able to build relationships with key people. That skill set may prove to be the most important of all. In his new role, Staley will not only have to answer to a board of directors with high expectations for TTS, he’ll also have to be able to navigate the pull of City Council members and other community leaders who will have their own ideas of how he should direct his efforts.

He will inherit a staff that has also gone through a great deal of change. Several key staffers have left during the transition that has taken place since he was last at the helm. Other new faces have joined.

We’re optimistic that Staley knows the lay of the land and the challenge he is facing. He has his work cut out for him, no doubt.

“I am thrilled and excited to no end to get back home,” Staley said after the TTS board of directors approved his contract Wednesday. “Because that’s what it is.”

One thing we’re certain of is that Tuscaloosa will give Staley a better welcome back than the harsh greeting the fictional George Webber received in Wolfe’s novel.
Contract approved for new TTS CEO

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa’s tourism division officially has its new leader.

The Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports board of directors on Wednesday unanimously approved a three-year contract and compensation package for new president and CEO Don Staley.

Staley, 58, was chosen last month from a pool of 20 candidates to succeed ex-president and CEO Gina Simpson, who announced her resignation in March.

"I can’t get up there quick enough," Staley said following the vote. "I’m excited about getting with so many stakeholders there in Tuscaloosa and the area. ...

"I’m looking forward to taking the meetings but, for the most part, I’m in a gathering mode - a learning mode - and I’m looking forward to coming up with an (action) plan."

Monday marks his first official day on the job and the approved contract pays Staley an annual salary of $120,000 with stipends for business-related phone expenditures, travel and the use of a vehicle for TTS-related purposes.

In addition to managing the day-to-day operations of the group, he is given a list of additional responsibilities - from strategic learning and upholding the organization’s mission and core values to maintaining constituent relationships and the brand of TTS - while developing an annual budget and answering to the TTS’ executive committee.

Little of this, however, will be new to Staley, who helped form the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission in 2010 when the Tuscaloosa Sports Commission and Tuscaloosa Convention and Visitors Bureau joined forces.

Staley and Chuck Sittason, a board member and ex-president of TTS, formed the Sports Commission in 2008. When the groups combined, Staley was named its executive director of sports.

On Wednesday, Sittason said he was pleased his former partner was returning to Tuscaloosa.

"I think what it will mean for the city is we’ve got somebody who is very familiar with Tuscaloosa," Sittason said. "He knows the players here and understands this business. ...

"And I know that Don’s the hardest working guy you’ve ever seen."

Incoming TTS president Gene “Poodgie” Poole agreed.

"Foremost, he knows Tuscaloosa inside and out since he's been here before," Poole said. "He's an extremely hard worker and he'll be able to develop an overall team to position this place for the future."

Amid a period of turmoil at TTS, Staley left three years ago to become the executive director the city of Foley’s Sports Tourism Complex.

But he returns to the city where he made his mark by forming the soccer program at the University of Alabama, which he led for 14 years before forming the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation.

And since being named as the group’s new president and CEO, Staley has 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.

“I am thrilled and excited to no end to get back home,” Staley said. “Because that’s what it is. ...

“I’m coming home.”

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Donald Trump nominates two for Alabama federal court positions

By: Ivana Hrynkiw

President Donald Trump announced his fifth wave of judicial candidates Thursday, which included two possible Alabama appointments.

Annemarie Carney Axon and Liles C. Burke were both nominated for positions as District Judges on the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama.

Axon is a member of the Birmingham law firm Wallace, Jordan, Ratliff, & Brandt, LLC, where she litigates trust, estate, and business cases in both trial and appellate courts. She received her B.A. from the University of Alabama and J.D. from the University of Alabama School of Law.

Before joining the firm, Axon was an Assistant Vice President of AmSouth Bank and an associate at a Rhode Island law firm. Immediately after graduating law school, Axon served as a law clerk to Judge Inge P. Johnson of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama.

She serves as President of the YWCA Junior Board, President of the Girls on the Run Board of Directors, a member of Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation Board, and a member of the American Cancer Society.

Burke, of Marshall County, currently serves as an Associate Judge on the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals. He received his B.A. from the University of Alabama and J.D. from the University of Alabama School of Law.

Burke served as a Marshall County District Judge as Acting Circuit Judge and as a City of Arab Municipal Judge. Prior to ascending to the bench, Burke practiced at the law firm Burke & Beuoy, P.C., where he represented businesses and individuals in general practice, including domestic, criminal, civil litigation, juvenile, and probate matters.

He has also served as a municipal prosecutor and municipal attorney.

Burke was named in February 2011 by Former Gov. Robert Bentley to the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals to fill the office left vacant by Judge Kelli Wise's election to the Alabama Supreme Court.

Burke leads the Marshall County United Way fund drive, is President of the Arab Chamber of Commerce, and is President of the Alabama Appellate Judges Association. He also serves as an officer in the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps of the Alabama Army National Guard.
2016 state high school graduation rate: 87%

Investigation calls previous year's flub a 'perfect storm'

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

State education officials announced Tuesday that the class of 2016 graduation rate for all students statewide is 87 percent. That rate is higher than the 85 percent announced in April, but lower than the 89 percent rate from 2015, now found to be artificially inflated.

For the first time, however, state officials are now differentiating between Alabama graduates and federal graduates. Students who take coursework on the “essentials” pathway — designed for students who are preparing for work or for a two-year college after high school, formerly called the Alabama Occupational Diploma — are counted as Alabama graduates, but not federal graduates.

Officials said 50,366 students are considered Alabama graduates, while 49,164 students (roughly 85 percent) are considered federal graduates.

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Though no timeline for the public posting of 2016 graduation rates was shared, Sentance said it should be soon.

Just prior to that announcement, the board heard the results of an internal investigation conducted by former Jefferson County Superintendent Dr. Phil Hammonds.

Calling events leading up to the public posting of 2016 graduation rates a "perfect storm," Hammonds told board members there is no one person to blame for the mistake.

Hammonds reported the results of an internal investigation the state board requested after the inaccurate rates were shared with the public on April 21. After local school officials started questioning the accuracy of the rates, the state department removed them from the website on April 25 after admitting those rates were inaccurate.

"Bottom line, the communication broke down," Hammonds said, all along the way within the state department of education, adding his review showed no one willfully did anything wrong.

Hammonds said protocol from previous years always called for local districts to have a chance to review graduation rates prior to sharing them with the public. That step was skipped this year, he said, but couldn't say exactly why.

He noted that in previous years, graduation rate data from the previous school year is typically shared in January or February, and as time went on, it became more urgent to get the rates published.

Hammonds interviewed school officials in local districts, as well as key personnel in the state department as part of his investigation.

Scantron replacing ACT Aspire

Alabama Superintendent Michael Sentance told state board members on Tuesday that school districts will be expected to use the Scantron, formerly GlobalScholar, assessments for federal accountability for grades three through eight for the 2017-18 school year. There will be no federal accountability testing in 10th grade. Instead, Sentance proposed using the ACT college entrance exam for required federal accountability for the high school span. The ACT is given to all 11th-graders each spring.

The announcement came after the state board voted in June not to renew the contract to continue using ACT Aspire. —Trisha Powell Crain

Hammonds cautioned against assigning blame, saying the mistakes created an opportunity to better the processes and protocols. Gathering and verifying the data is a monumental task, and department and school officials must communicate better throughout the process to ensure the process works.

Stephanie Bell, R-Montgomery, who was elected vice president of the board of education during the meeting held just prior to the work session, said she wants better communication between the department and the board, as well.

Board members were given the impression at the April 13 work session where the inaccurate graduation rate was first announced that the rate was ready to be released to the public, Bell said.

"We thought the information had been checked and rechecked," she said, saying the board was a victim in this, too.

After the meeting, Sentance he is satisfied with Hammonds' report, saying it shows the department has a lot of work to do, but that work has already begun.
Short-term rental rules approved

New regulations go into effect Monday

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Despite vocal opposition, the Tuscaloosa City Council approved regulations concerning the home-sharing industry at its meeting Tuesday. The sweeping attempt at regulating the practice of home sharing and short-term rentals was approved unanimously after a lengthy public hearing. Those who spoke against the measure included downtown residents and home-sharing advocates, most of whom were opposed to the plans advanced last month by a City Council committee.

The new regulations spell out who can rent their properties on a short-term basis and addresses concerns such as proper licensing and building standards.

Kelly Fitts, president of the Original City Association, a group that represents downtown historic district

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RULES

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neighborhoods, asked the council members to take more time to craft a policy.

"This isn't ready yet to be accepted," Fitts said. "This needs to be thought out some more."

But District 4 Councilman Matt Calderone and others defended the move, calling it a necessary first step toward legally allowing a practice that is prevalent despite its current illegality.

"I've said it all along - we've got to start somewhere," said Calderone, whose district includes most of the historic residential districts that stand to be affected. "The majority of my district is publicly opposed because of their fear over the loss of the integrity of the neighborhoods.

"I hear them, but we have to find a balance."

Calderone said the City Council would monitor the implementation of the rules and, if needed, make changes and alterations.

"I agree that it's not perfect and it's not where it needs to be," Calderone said of the rules approved by the City Council, "but we won't know until we try."

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

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

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

Until Monday, when the new policy takes effect, the use of a private residence for short-term rentals violates the city's zoning, building, fire and business license code and other regulations.

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

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

Those who oversee the short-term rental of multiple properties will also be required to obtain a real estate license, according to state law.

"We confirmed that with the state," said City Attorney Glenda Webb.

The proper licensing, protections and inspections are expected to add significant costs to those who want to legally abide by the city's proposed rules, but the plans adopted by the City Council will allow residents to legally rent out their personal living spaces in two areas of the city: around Lake Tuscaloosa and in a downtown and campus district bordered by the Black Warrior River, McFarland Boulevard, 15th Street and 20th Avenue.

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

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

Each historic district will be limited in the amount of homes that can be used as a short-term rental. These caps will be monitored and enforced by City Hall.

While there are a total of 1,589 properties that could be used for a short-term rental in the downtown district, just 10 percent of those residential properties within the city's downtown historic districts would be permitted to operate as a short-term rental.

This means no more than 58 homes of the about 605 parcels in the historic districts - - 246 of which are owner-occupied - - could be rented out to visitors, based on data provided by City Hall.

A similar 3 percent cap is placed on multi-family developments, such as apartment or condominium buildings.

No caps apply to the Lake District, where about 360 homes would be eligible to seek short-term rental status.

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

Also, no more than 10 adults can occupy a short-term rental property and the rental cannot be for less than 24 hours.

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

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Ex-Lamar County superintendent appointed to 2-year college board

By: Ed Enoch

Gov. Kay Ivey has appointed former Lamar County Schools Superintendent Jeff Newman as the state board of education representative on the Alabama Community College System board of trustees.

“Jeff Newman is a committed public servant who is passionate about public education and the development of a skilled workforce to support Alabama’s growth,” System Chancellor Jimmy Baker said in a statement released by the system. “The people of Alabama are lucky to have him helping to steer the future of Alabama’s community colleges.”

Newman, the District 7 representative, was named the ex-officio non-voting member of the two-year board on June 30. He replaces fellow State school board member Mary Scott Hunter, who is rotating off the board after serving since the creation of the board of trustees in 2015.

Hunter said she asked the system leadership last year to plan to select another board of education member to be succeed her once her term concluded. Hunter expressed confidence in Newman in a farewell letter to Ivey and the system’s leadership.

The board appointments require confirmation by the Alabama Senate.

The board of trustees also include includes the governor as an ex officio member, trustees representing each of the state’s seven congressional districts, and an at-large trustee.

The board meets Wednesday in Montgomery for its regularly scheduled meeting.
EDPA president excited about future

William Thornton wthomton@al.com

It's been a good month for Alabama. Aerospace manufacturer Blue Origin, set up by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, is coming to Huntsville. Austal Inc. announced that it had received a half-billion-dollar contract to build its 14th Littoral Combat Ship for the U.S. Navy. International Beams will invest $20 million in a Dothan manufacturing facility.

As good as that news is, Steve Spencer believes there are better stories on the horizon. "People always tend to focus on the negative," Spencer said. "What you don't have, what you didn't get. If you look at what's going on right now, there's a lot of things going on in Alabama."

Spencer is president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, a private, non-profit organization funded by more than 60 Alabama companies. The EDPA's mission is to attract, retain and grow jobs in Alabama. It was formed in 1990 by a group of the state's largest corporations as part of the push to attract Mercedes-Benz to Alabama.

This year, EDPA moved into a new headquarters across from Birmingham's Railroad Park in the old Merita Bakery building. Part of that building is a 34-foot long by 9-foot tall curved video board, which plays images of businesses in Alabama that can be seen through the building's windows.

"It's a great spot, it's a great showcase," he said. "If you're from another part of Alabama, or another part of the country, or the world looking to expand into Alabama, we think this is a great location for showing what Alabama can be."

Telling stories about Alabama, Spencer says, is part of his job.

Spencer spent 38 years with Alabama Power before coming to EDPA, working in the company's real estate group, external affairs, government and public relations, economic development and customer service.

"I spent a little time in a lot of places," he said. "I had heard about EDPA for years and been involved with them to some degree. I wanted to carry on what they had been doing. Mainly," he joked, "I didn't want to screw it up."

The video board is part of EDPA's strategy to highlight Alabama's overall atmosphere in business and life. That involves a multi-pronged approach aimed at pointing out the state's business climate as well as its, well, climate. People learn as much about Gulf Coast beaches as they do about automobile factories.

"It's infrastructure, it's coffee shops, it's music, it's transportation," he said. "One of the greatest assets Alabama has is the simple graciousness of its people. People who come here are amazed at how kind, nice and helpful our people are. We ought to market that."

The message will hopefully appeal to students in Alabama looking to forge a career, or those coming to study in Alabama, he said. Whether with individuals or companies, its about creating an environment of entrepreneurship and experimentation.

Spencer said Alabama still has a focus on traditional manufacturing among its large companies. However, the state is moving into a new phase that's more focused on technology and innovation. Digitization, for example, will push every business in every field toward change. That will also impact the workforce, as Alabama schools press on toward adequate training for IT jobs to fill needed jobs.

EDPA is also working to assist startups with its popular Alabama Launchpad program. After starting another Launchpad competition in the Shoals area, EDPA is now initiating one in the Auburn-Opelika region. It's also looking in the future to the Wiregrass and Mobile areas.

"We want people with ideas to get started here and stay here," he said. "We want them to grow and become big employers. Launchpad can be something that really energizes the state. If you give people a process and ensure that they can bring ideas forward, great companies can get started."

"One of the greatest assets Alabama has is the simple graciousness of its people," says Steve Spencer, president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, in front of the EDPA's new 320-square-foot video board. William Thornton / wthomton@al.com
Tuscaloosa developer Stan Pate, who has worked to influence elections at the local, state and federal levels, is now focusing his attentions on defeating U.S. Sen. Luther Strange.

Pate has registered the Swamp Drainers Foundation political action committee (PAC) with the Federal Election Commission to fund an advertising and media campaign against the Republican senator.

"There's no place in government, in my opinion, for Luther Strange. That's my opinion," Pate said. "If you believe in draining the swamp, there is no more obvious swamp creature than Luther Strange."

Strange's campaign brushed aside any possibility that Pate's PAC will have a negative effect on his efforts to win that election.

"If Pate is against him," said Shana Teehan, a Strange campaign spokeswoman, "it's clear that Sen. Strange is the right person to help President Trump clean up Washington."

Pate said his opposition to Strange isn't party-based. The businessman said he tends to lean Republican on several issues.

And he's not supporting directly any of the other 19

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candidates — 11 Republicans, eight Democrats — who have qualified for the Senate seat.

Rather, Pate is taking action against what he believes is Strange’s questionable appointment to the U.S. Senate after years of acting as a registered lobbyist in Washington, D.C., in the 1980s and 1990s. After leaving law school, Strange worked to work for Sonat Offshore, a subsidiary of the Birmingham-based natural gas utility Sonat Inc. He joined the company in 1980 as a lawyer and, five years later, Strange was named head of Sonat’s office in Washington, D.C.

He left the company in 1994 and was made partner of the influential Birmingham law firm Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP before forming his own firm, Strange LLC.

Strange first ran for elected office in Alabama as a Republican in 2006, when he battled – but ultimately lost to – Democrat Jim Folsom Jr. for lieutenant governor.

His second attempt in 2010 saw him knock out incumbent Troy King for attorney general in the June primary, a position he held until his appointment to the U.S. Senate in February by ex-Gov. Robert Bentley.

Though Strange would later say the attorney general’s office was not directly investigating Bentley for abusing his state powers to conceal an affair with a top aide, his appointment to the Senate drew criticisms from both sides of the political aisle.

And it did not go unnoticed by Pate.

“Luther Strange, if he had some character or credibility, would’ve said to the governor ‘no thank you.’ I’ll let the voters decide, not a criminal,” Pate said, referring to Bentley’s guilty plea to two misdemeanor charges before resigning as governor. “The voters of Alabama are now the real jury and they have the opportunity to tell Luther what they think of that kind of behavior.”

While Bentley intended allow the 2018 election cycle serve as the special election to choose the permanent successor to Jeff Sessions, who served as an Alabama senator for 20 years before being named U.S. attorney general by President Donald Trump, Gov. Kay Ivey altered that plan once she was sworn into office. The primary now will be held in Aug. 15 with a runoff, if needed, on Sept. 26. The special general election is set for Dec. 12.

Pate, a self-made millionaire, has funded attacks on politicians before, including anti-Trump messages flown above college football bowl games in January 2016, a banner calling for the impeachment of ex-Alabama Gov. Bob Riley in 2010 and a media campaign opposing the re-election of six-term City Councilman Harrison Taylor, who was defeated by a political newcomer earlier this year.

While the Swamp Drainers Foundation PAC has no registered funding as of yet – a bank account was formed just this week – Pate said his plan to oppose Strange’s Senate hopes already is in place.

And he’s aware that he will be facing the Senate Leadership Fund, a super PAC with ties to which has ties to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, which announced in May that it was reserving $2.6 million to pay for television advertisements supporting Strange’s election bid.

“My simple goal is to see that Luther Strange does not become a United States Senator from Alabama,” Pate said. “This is a big deal for Alabama, whoever it is ... , and I’m a guy that’s willing to stand alone and suffer the consequences of it.”

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Exploring new options

UA hosts career camp for hearing-impaired

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

On Monday, Matt Kochie taught a group of students about the intricacies of computers without saying a word.

Kochie, who works in information technology at the Alabama Institute for the Blind and Deaf, showed the inside of a computer to a group of high school students who were either deaf or hard of hearing at Bibb Graves Hall at the UA campus.

When discussing a motherboard, Kochie made hand gestures as an interpreter turned the sign language into words.

“What do mothers do,” Kochie signed. “They make sure everything is working together and that’s why they call this a motherboard.”

Kochie’s lesson was part of a special day called “STEM Wars,” when students with hearing issues learned about different fields in science, technology, engineering or math. “STEM Wars” was part of a weeklong camp to teach

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students with hearing issues the different careers that are available to them.

The camp is organized by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, which works to find employment for people with disabilities. The career camp has been going on for four years.

"I think the important thing is that it allows them to financially create the life they want and to play on equal footing with others when it comes to career or salary," said Bedarius Bell, state coordinator of the deaf/hard of hearing services in the ADRS.

In addition to computers, the eight-person group also learned about robotics on Monday. They also took part in hands-on practice with welding equipment. The group of students came from around the state to participate in the camp.

J.R. Iser, an independent welder based in Montgomery, said a career in welding can work for those with hearing issues. According to the 2012 U.S. Census, there are at least 83,376 people in Alabama between the ages of 18 and 64 with hearing disabilities.

"Most of the time when I weld, I have to put earplugs in, so they are more of an advantage than a disadvantage," Iser said.

For Bell, career opportunities for those with hearing issues can be hard to find because of the communication barrier.

"Sometimes there is need for accommodation in the workplace and sometimes that may scare some employers off," Bell said.

In addition, Bell said some students may be unaware of what kind of career they can have.

"With some of our students, they don’t know what’s out there, so exposing them to different types of jobs and training that is required to have a job like this is a great opportunity for them to start thinking about their future," he said.

Diane Mwai, a junior at Thompson High School in Alabaster, is deaf in one ear and wants to one day work as a lawyer or an engineer. Before Monday, Mwai did not know anything about welding, but was intrigued by the field after getting to work a weld torch.

"I thought it was really interesting and interesting to be around other kids like me," Diane said.

Andrew Tompkins, a junior at Baker High School in Mobile, cannot hear high-pitched noises and he said he liked what the camp does for people with hearing disabilities.

"You get to see what you can do," he said.

The camp will continue throughout the week at the University of Alabama.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
UA, city aim to cut health costs

Patients will be treated in their homes

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

An ambitious new medical program aimed at reducing costs while improving patient care is set to be launched later this year by the city of Tuscaloosa and University of Alabama.

The city and UA’s College of Community Health Sciences are gearing up to launch a paramedicine program — the first of its kind in Alabama — with the intent of treating certain patients in their homes.

Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Chief Alan J. Martin said the program is aimed at "low acuity" patients, like those who call 911 over a nose bleed, stomach ache or flu-like symptoms, for example.

Nurse practitioners and, possibly, physician assistants will ride with fire department first-responders on these calls and offer treatment at the patient’s residence.

This will eliminate the need for an ambulance ride and emergency room visit, "which is the most costly way of treating these type of patients," Martin said.

"I think once the other insurers see the cost savings, I think they’ll be interested in expanding the program a little bit," Martin said.

Funded with a $500,000 allocation through Medicaid by the Alabama Legislature, the program will use employees through the Department of Family and Internal Rural Medicine, a division of UA’s College of Community Health Sciences.

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HEALTH

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Sciences, to provide the care.

The Tuscaloosa City Council is expected to approve a memorandum-of-understanding with UA during Tuesday's meeting. This will allow preliminary work to get under way before Oct. 1, when the state funding is expected to be available.

Martin said he hopes that the city and UA can provide some initial funding before then in order to generate as much data as possible before the Alabama Legislature convenes in February.

He anticipates the city and UA will again seek funding to continue the program next year.

The paramedicine program is being modeled on a similar program in Arizona. A key difference, though, is that the Arizona example does not have a university as a partner.

But based on the preliminary findings from the Arizona model, the medical cost savings could be $6 for every $1 that's invested, said Richard D. Friend, chair of the Department of Family and Internal Rural Medicine.

Friend is serving as the co-director of the paramedicine program alongside John Higginbotham, chair of the UA's Department of Community Rural Medicine. He said the program also will use a full-time social worker and clinical psychologist to study the results and offer assistance on managing the nearly 30 percent of low acuity calls that are related to mental health.

"We feel like putting a licensed provider on the low acuity Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue unit will allow us to intervene and treat many of these patients on the scene," Friend said. "We really want to have an impact on the community."

This isn't the first time UA and the city have teamed up to improve patient care in Tuscaloosa.

Last year, the University of Alabama School of Social Work and the city of Tuscaloosa partnered on an EMS Prevention Program, which helps residents identify and use the proper community resources in order to lessen the frequency of non-emergency calls to 911.

Of the estimated 11,000 to 12,000 medical calls into 911 each year, at least 25 percent of those are considered low-level emergencies, such as toothaches or sinus infections.

It's not uncommon for these calls to come from those who don't have easy access to primary care, so they use the 911 system for care.

The EMS Prevention Program was an expansion of the Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Service's efforts in 2014 to address these calls with its own program, which resulted in a reduction of non-emergency calls by about 50 percent.

That year, the fire department also rolled out an alternative response unit, an SUV staffed by one firefighter-paramedic who responds to calls that aren't life-threatening.

This also serves to free up fire crews for critical calls, such as fires and cardiac arrests.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
AT A GLANCE

UA extends deal with radio stations

Radio stations affiliated with Townsquare Media will continue to broadcast University of Alabama athletics programming in the Tuscaloosa area.

According to a news release Monday, Townsquare and UA extended their deal through 2024.

Townsquare Media will broadcast all regular season and post-season games for football, men's and women's basketball, baseball and softball. The stations will also air the weekly "Hey Coach" show, along with other coaches' shows. The deal also includes the "Crimson Tide Rewind" show on Mondays during football season and "Crimson Tide Today," which provides daily updates on all UA sports.

Fans can hear the programming on 95.3 FM The Bear, Tide 102.9 FM, Catfish 1230 AM and 101.1 FM and Praise 790 AM ad 93.3 FM.

UA Director of Athletics Greg Byrne said in the news release, “The University of Alabama has enjoyed a lengthy partnership with these flagship stations, and we're excited that the relationship will continue well into the future.”
Student housing site to open in August

The Tuscloosa News
Saturday, July 8, 2017

The Harbor on Sixth will have 628 beds

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

A student-housing complex first proposed in 2013 is now nearing completion.
The Harbor on Sixth, a 628-bed student housing development near the University of Alabama, is set for an August opening along the banks of the Black Warrior River.
CA Student Living, the

See SITE, B3

This artist's rendering shows The Harbor on Sixth, a 628-bed student housing development under construction in the shadow of the Woolsey Finnie Bridge near the University of Alabama. It is set for an August opening. [SOURCE: CA STUDENT LIVING]
SITE

Continued from B1

The ramp work didn't begin until 2015 and, by mid-March of that year, the $1 million project – which included rebuilding part of Sixth Avenue – was nearing completion.

Construction on the new residential areas, though, was in flux as Campus Crest had recently sold its Tuscaloosa site along with five others to an investment group as part of its corporate realignment.

That group involved CA Ventures and CA Student Living, its student housing investment and development division.

When complete, the project will consist of four four-story buildings and one three-story building situated adjacent to Riveredge Apartments and The Bluff at Waterworks Landing along the Black Warrior River.

Apartments come fully furnished and include two- and three-bedroom floor plans ranging from 931 to 1,282 square feet.

Pet-friendly, each bedroom includes its own private bathroom with common areas featuring granite counter tops and stainless steel appliances, flat-screen TVs, high-speed Wi-Fi and a premium cable subscription, among other amenities.

For the complex as a whole, The Harbor on Sixth will offer a 24-hour fitness center, a hospitality room with kitchenette and fireplace, a club room, multiple study rooms and a computer lounge with free printing.

The outdoor areas will feature a swimming pool – including a tanning shelf and volleyball net – as well as a basketball and sand volleyball courts.

"We know how popular beach volleyball is in the South, so The Harbor on Sixth wouldn't be complete without a court -- just one way residents can spend their free time outdoors," said J.J. Smith, president of CA Student Living, in a news release.

The Harbor on Sixth's leasing office is located at 1110 15th St., Suite B.

For more information, visit www.harboronsixth.com or call the leasing office at 205-737-3669.
A senior at the University of Alabama has earned a $5,000 scholarship awarded by a real estate investment company.

Mary Hale was one of four people nationwide to win scholarships, awarded by Castle Lanterra Properties. This is the second year Castle Lanterra Properties has awarded the scholarships to residents living in the company’s properties throughout the U.S.

Scholarship applicants were required to write an essay covering a self-identified issue of “personal, local, national or international” concern. Additionally, applicants were asked to provide academic history records and demonstrate leadership, school and community activities, work experience and career goals.

In her entry essay, Hale wrote about her work advocating for individuals with disabilities.

“I dedicated one week of my student teaching during my junior year to inform my first grade students about different types of disabilities, and how we all may appear differently but are still cut from the same cloth,” she said. “We engaged in a variety of activities that enabled my students to fathom the viewpoints of different individuals with a variety of disabilities.”

Hale said being one of the recipients of this scholarship assured her that hard work and dedication do not go unnoticed.

“I believe it is a blessing for Castle Lanterra to take pride in the communities that they are invested in and show the residents that their education is valued,” she noted. “Acts of kindness of any sort, whether voluntary or monetary, are always priceless in my eyes.”

Hale, a dual major in early childhood education and special education at UA, is a resident of Castle Lanterra Properties’ Heights at Skyland community in Tuscaloosa.

The other scholarship recipients were:

– Stacy Novick, a resident at Villas Tech Ridge in Pflugerville, Texas, who is studying to become a family nurse practitioner at the University of Texas at El Paso

– Cheyenne Saldana, also a resident at Villas Tech Ridge in Pflugerville, Texas, who is studying communication disorders at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas

– Yolanda Toby, a resident of Harbor Pointe in Bayonne, New Jersey, who is studying business management at Howard University, in Washington, D.C.
“One of our company’s key values is to improve the lives of people that reside in our multifamily communities. Our scholarship winners this year had incredibly motivating career goals, and it is rewarding to be able to contribute to their success,” said Elie Rieder, the company’s founder and CEO. Since 2009, Castle Lanterra Properties – a national multifamily real estate investment firm – has amassed a portfolio of more than 8,500 residential units, valued in excess of $1.5 billion.

“Our scholarship winners have very admirable ambitions that will bring positive change to their communities,” Rieder said. “They represent what we strive for at our properties: improving the lives of residents. We enjoy helping tenants succeed by supporting them as they advance their education and lay the foundation for their futures.”
Study: Hackers using brainwave-sensing headsets to steal info

Jonece Starr Dunigan
jdunigan@al.com

Researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham believe brainwave-sensing headsets need better security after they conducted a study revealing hackers could guess a user's passwords through the device.

The electroencephalograph headsets, also known as EEG headsets, are becoming popular in the gaming industry because it gives users the ability to control video games and toys by thinking about the movements.

Nitesh Saxena, associate professor in the UAB College of Arts and Sciences Department of Computer and Information Sciences; student Ajaya Neupane; and former master's student Md Lutfor Rahman found hackers can use malicious software to steal sensitive information if a user pauses their activities and logs into their personal accounts while wearing the headsets.

The team used one EEG headset bought online and one clinical-grade headset used for scientific research to prove how easy it can be for hackers to use the technology to their advantage.

While typing, a user's inputs correspond with their visual processing, as well as hand, eye and head muscle movements. All these movements are captured by EEG headsets.

Researchers asked 12 people to type a series of generated pin numbers and passwords into a text box as if they were logging into an actual bank account while wearing the EEG headset. This allows the software to train itself on the user's typing and the corresponding brainwave.

After the users entered 200 characters, researchers found hackers can use algorithms within the malicious software to make educated guesses about new characters the user entered by monitoring the brainwaves the headset recorded. The algorithmshortens the odds of a hacker guessing a four-digit pin from one in 10,000 to one in 20 and increased the chance of correctly guessing a six-letter password from about one in 500,000 to roughly one in 500.

"In a real-world attack, a hacker could facilitate the training step required for the malicious program to be most accurate, by requesting that the user enter a predefined set of numbers in order to restart the game after pausing it to take a break, similar to the way CAPTCHA is used to verify users when logging onto websites," Saxena said.

Researchers suggest the insertion of noise anytime a user types a password or pin while wearing an EEG headset.

EEG has been used in the medical field for more than a half a century to record electrical activity in the brain. Electrodes are placed on the surface of the scalp to detect brain waves. Those waves are then amplified by an EEG machine, which records them in a wave pattern on graph paper or a computer.

"In the medical field, the technology has been used to help disabled patients control prosthetic limbs by thinking about their movements. Now, consumers can spend $150 to $800 to buy headsets for leisure purposes. Given the growing popularity of EEG headsets and the variety of ways in which they could be used, it is inevitable that they will become part of our daily lives, including while using other devices," Saxena said.

"It is important to analyze the potential security and privacy risks associated with this emerging technology to raise users' awareness of the risks and develop viable solutions to malicious attacks."
Alabama's two-year colleges will be a little bit more expensive this fall

By: Associated Press

Tuition is going up for students in Alabama's two-year college system.

The Tuscaloosa News reports that trustees have approved a 1.4 percent tuition hike for the Alabama Community College System.

The price of credit hour will increase $2 to $119 for Alabama residents. The price rises to $234 for nonresidents beginning in the fall.

Trustee chairman Al Thompson calls the price increase "modest." He says it is part of an annual adjustment first established by the Alabama Board of Education, which used to run the system.

The system includes 25 two-year colleges statewide. More than 83,000 people are enrolled in courses that offer credit hours.
Board taps Ashley as president

College official chosen for office at Shelton State

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A Mississippi two-year college official has been named the next permanent president of Shelton State Community College.

The Alabama Community College System board of trustees approved William J. "Bill" Ashley, vice president for Student Affairs at Southwest Mississippi Community College, as the next leader of Shelton State on Wednesday. System Chancellor Jimmy Baker made the recommendation during the regular board meeting.

"I have spent a lot of time looking for someone to fulfill the mission I felt was needed in Tuscaloosa," Baker said. "As you know, Tuscaloosa is another one of those golden opportunities ... But it is not just a great university town. It is one of the most vibrant economic growth towns in this state. The community is waiting for someone to take the reins and move forward and be aggressive about making the school what it needs to be."

Ashley thanked Baker and the system leadership, and said he looked forward to beginning work.

"I am deeply committed to the mission of community colleges, which is to provide accessible education and opportunities to people throughout their lifetimes," Ashley said. "I'm especially eager to be a part of the exciting things happening today in Alabama's community college system."

Ashley will begin work full time in October, Baker said. Beginning Monday, Jason Hurst, senior director of workforce development for the system, will lead the campus until Ashley

See ASHLEY, A10
ASHLEY

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arrives.

Interim President Cynthia T. Anthony, who has led Shelton State since September 2015, will return to Lawson State Community College, where she served as dean of students and director of the Bessemer campus, Baker said.

Baker praised Anthony’s work as an interim president at Shelton State and Enterprise State.

“Cynthia is one of those people who has been called on on more than one occasion,” Baker said. “She proved her worth as an interim. She did a superb job while she was an interim.”

The search to fill the Shelton State position began in January, and Ashley was not among the initial finalists brought to campus this spring for interviews. Darrell Cain, a vice chancellor of Student Affairs at Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis; Andy Clark, who served as a vice provost at Middle Georgia State and vice president at Valdosta State University in Georgia; and Dianne Piper, executive vice president and special counsel for Diversity to Blake, Chavis and Parks, P.C., were interviewed on campus in March.

The system office did not reply by press time to a question about the search process and the introduction of Ashley as a candidate.

The Myers McCrae Executive Search firm assisted an advisory search committee with the search. Ashley, a Mississippi native, earned an MBA from Delta State University and a doctorate in community college leadership from Mississippi State University.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosa-news.com or 722-0209.
The 5-year impact of Texas A&M, Missouri joining the SEC

By: John Talty

Whether it expanded or not, the Southeastern Conference was never in real danger of extinction. It had too much legacy and power for such an unseemly fate. But it risked falling behind in the revenue war if it didn't capitalize on the most tumultuous modern period of college athletics.

SEC commissioner Mike Slive had long been interested in starting a conference television network, but the timing wasn't right when the SEC signed a 15-year television rights deal with ESPN in 2008. That deal was historic at the time, but the market was booming, and it risked paling in comparison to even more lucrative deals that other conferences would soon get.

Enter Texas A&M and Missouri which officially joined the conference five years ago last Saturday. The SEC pounced on the Big 12's dysfunction to add two large TV markets that would pave the way for the most successful television network launch in cable history. From revenue alone, the SEC's decision to add two schools has proven to be a brilliant decision. In the year before the expansion, the SEC distributed $248.1 million, good for $19.5 million per school. Compare that to the SEC's 2016 distribution when it shipped out $565.9 million or $40.4 million per school.

The best part? That number should only keep going up.

"Being a member of the Southeastern Conference has a lot of advantages," says South Carolina athletic director Ray Tanner. "The distribution to a member institution is very, very strong."

"The revenue poured in"
Bill Byrne's initial preference was to stay in the Big 12.

Realignment talk was heating up in 2010 and Texas A&M was a top target of Larry Scott's grand vision of a 16-team PAC conference. Scott and his team spent months building out what that conference would look like, from scheduling to travel, before even asking Texas A&M leaders if they were interested in joining.

As Texas A&M's athletic director, Byrne wasn't sold. He didn't like the idea of long, late night flights back from the West Coast after a game. That didn't seem beneficial to the school's student-athletes especially compared to the situation the Aggies had in the Texas-centric Big 12 where athletes' parents could reasonably travel to home and away games. He wanted to keep the Big 12 together.

Although Scott was close to achieving his dream, he was ultimately only able to pluck Colorado away from the Big 12. The rest committed to staying in the Big 12 though it wasn't long before Texas A&M officials were privately reaching out to the SEC. They heard through back channels...
that the SEC would be receptive to adding the Aggies but wouldn't pursue them publicly. If Texas A&M wanted the SEC, it would have to be the aggressor.

Ultimately, the anger over the Longhorn Network finally got all of A&M's power players on the same page after serious division in 2010 over whether the Big 12, Pac-10 or SEC represented the best option. Byrne was leery about both options.

"We had built our program to be very competitive in the Big 12, and if you go back and look at our last few seasons in the Big 12, we were very competitive," Byrne says. "I was concerned whether we had the depth to compete with the SEC in the sport of football. I knew we could be competitive in all the other sports."

By 2011, almost everyone including Byrne realized it was time to leave the Big 12 and pursue SEC membership. The school worked with Slive and other SEC officials behind the scenes to secure Texas A&M's spot, resulting in a public announcement on Sept. 26, 2011 that the Aggies were joining the conference. The move wasn't well-received in the Big 12, to put it lightly, with lawsuits threatened and in-state rivalries destroyed. Texas A&M and Texas have still yet to schedule football games against each other, and it's unlikely they'll do so anytime soon.

Even with the loss of a treasured rivalry, the positives have far outweighed the negatives according to the school's former leaders.

"It was the right decision to make," says former Texas A&M president R. Bowen Loftin. "Everything that has happened since that time, in my mind, has confirmed that the movement of A&M to the SEC was exactly the right thing to do."

Says Byrne: "I think it was a great opportunity for A&M to get out of the shadows of the University of Texas. That has proved to be so. A&M has blossomed as we went into the SEC and things have changed over in the state capital of Texas."

Financially, it certainly has been a boon for the school. Texas A&M's athletic department generated the most money in the country, $194.3 million, in 2016, according to a USA Today Sports database. That represents a 122 percent revenue increase over its last year in the Big 12. A good chunk of that came from donations for Kyle Field renovations, but even that is linked to the Aggies' magical first year in the SEC. The planets perfectly aligned that year when Johnny Manziel took down Alabama as part of a Heisman Trophy-winning year that invigorated the fanbase. The school spent almost half a billion dollars to turn Kyle Field into the largest, and possibly nicest, stadium in the SEC.

"Our timing was we had Johnny Football and oil at $100 a barrel," Byrne says, "and the revenue poured in."
Texas A&M since hasn't been able to recreate the magic of that 11-2 season lending some credence to Byrne's initial concerns. Since 2012, the Kevin Sumlin-led Aggies have never finished better than fourth in the SEC West, totaling a 33-19 record that has featured multiple last-season collapses. Scott Woodward, the school's current AD, made waves in May when he said on the Paul Finebaum Show, Sumlin "knows he has to win, and he has to win this year."

It stems from a burgeoning dissatisfaction that Texas A&M hasn't been able to better capitalize on its move to the SEC. Recruiting was gangbusters after Manziel's magic, the money was pouring in and there was a real chance to overthrow a Texas program that floundered in the Charlie Strong era. And yet, Texas A&M has strung together three consecutive 8-5 seasons and has lost by a combined 133-37 in its last three games against Alabama.

"The last few years have not been that great at A&M," Loftin admits. "They've done fairly well by many measures but not what they wanted to go given the recruiting strength and facilities they've had. That's disappointing to some of the fans including me."

Even amidst the relative disappointment, no one in College Station is pining to be back in the Big 12. In fact, Loftin says a few of his most vociferous opponents against moving A&M to the SEC have since admitted he made the right decision.

"That," Loftin says, "was very gratifying."

"An opportunity Missouri couldn't turn down"

Auburn athletic director Jay Jacobs' very public push to switch divisions with Missouri illustrated a concern that could always follow the Tigers: Geographic fit in the SEC.

Missouri, as Jacobs explained, would benefit more from being in the SEC West than the SEC East for a litany of reasons including easier travel for its fans. Jim Sterk, Missouri's AD, told AL.com the school likes its spot in the SEC East and a switch has never been formally discussed.

Residing in the SEC East does come with financial challenges, though. Missouri spent $6.65 million on travel in 2015-16, a 50.1 percent increase over its travel costs during its final year in the Big 12, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Tim Hickman, Missouri's executive associate AD, told the paper the Tigers were "on the upper end of the league in travel costs because we're on the outer edge of the conference's limits."

However, Sterk says, "None of our coaches are complaining about travel."

It helps that Missouri's athletic revenue has improved 51.6 percent from its last year in the Big 12. The school raked in $97.27 million in 2016, its largest total ever in spite of lagging ticket sales. That still only ranks 13th best in the SEC -- 30th best nationally -- but has been important
as it fights to stay vital in an athletics landscape where displays of ostentatious wealth are often the marks of relevance.

"The revenue has really helped us grow the program and be able to develop facilities," says Sterk who has been Missouri's AD since September. "They did a lot before I arrived and we continue to do that."

Beyond geographic, there have been questions from the start about the cultural fit of Missouri in the Deep South-centric SEC. Do the Tigers fans of Columbia, Mo. have all that much in common with the Tigers fans down in Baton Rouge? Missouri leaders initially expressed interest in joining the Big Ten during the realignment carousel -- the conference ultimately took Nebraska -- and at least on paper, there's a reasonable argument to be made the school has more in common with Iowa, Indiana and Illinois than Alabama, Mississippi State and Georgia.

Loftin, who served as Missouri's chancellor for 22 months before resigning in Nov. 2015, believes it works when you consider the other type of schools in the SEC. It fits with the land-grant institution makeup of the conference and shares specialties in agriculture and engineering with quite a few of the conference's other universities.

"I think the A&M fit is probably, if you measured every way possible, a little bit better than Missouri's," he concedes. "I think five years in and there's recognition how competitive Missouri can be in some areas."

Missouri does own something Texas A&M doesn't: two SEC football divisional titles. The Tigers won the SEC East twice in its first three years in the SEC, quickly exceeding expectations for a school that wasn't a traditional Big 12 power. There has been a drop-off since head coach Gary Pinkel retired following the 2015 season -- the Tigers won only two league games last year -- but winning two titles in a division with the likes of Florida, Georgia and Tennessee proved Missouri can be competitive in the SEC. The basketball program hasn't been quite as stout, but the recent hiring of Cuonzo Martin and arrival of five-star phenom Michael Porter Jr. has the fanbase fired up.

Stealing Martin away from California, another Power 5 school, and giving him a 7-year, $21 million deal might not have been possible for Missouri before the influx of SEC money. It's one more piece of a compelling argument that the move has been smart for Missouri even with the geographic and cultural fit questions. Sterk says he'd like to win more championships, calling the SEC a "tough, tough league," but loves the overall trajectory of his athletic department.

"I think there was an opportunity that Missouri couldn't turn down as far as joining the SEC," he says, "and it's proven to be a really prudent move."
"It's been 100 percent positive"

After stealing Texas A&M and Missouri away from the Big 12, and later launching the most successful network launch in cable television history, it's easy to imagine Mike Slive as Scrooge McDuck diving into the SEC's massive pile of doubloons. Slive is, by all accounts, a humble man but could you blame him after securing such a massive windfall for the SEC?

If the SEC wanted a vault full of gold coins, it certainly could afford to get one. And that, in itself, is the most tangible benefit of adding Texas A&M and Missouri. It made all 14 conference schools richer -- it's striking just how much additional revenue schools have added in the last five years -- and further solidified the premier football conference brand. Six of the top 10 athletic department revenues reside in the SEC, according to 2015-16 numbers.

"It's funny because you almost have to think back to when we didn't have them," says David Williams, Vanderbilt's vice chancellor of athletics. "But I think it's been 100 percent positive. I think they've been great."

It has unquestionably helped in other areas, too. South Carolina head coach Will Muschamp says it's improved visibility and recruiting in Texas, one of the nation's most fertile recruiting areas. In the state of Alabama alone, the two expected starting quarterbacks, Jalen Hurts (Alabama) and Jarrett Stidham (Auburn), are both Texas natives and may have never made it to the SEC otherwise. Texas A&M head coach Kevin Sumlin believes the Aggies' offensive philosophy has led to a shift in the SEC to more open, spread-friendly offenses. It certainly forced schools to start recruiting differently after Johnny Manziel tore up the league. The SEC Network has provided comprehensive coverage for smaller sports like softball and gymnastics, among others.

Like most things in life, though, it all comes back to the money. The money is so good and lets schools do so much, for everyone from their student-athletes to their fans, that it will always be the most significant impact of the expansion. The SEC's decision guaranteed that it would be a leader -- and not fall behind -- in revenue.

Five years later, there is no buyer's remorse for the SEC's most significant decision in decades.
Arkansas coach Bret Bielema needs to produce results

By: Cecil Hurt

Fayetteville, Arkansas, is a great college town. You can walk down Dickson Street on a spring day and enjoy the atmosphere, take a few steps off Dickson and stop into Hammontree for a gourmet grilled cheese or have a frothy cappuccino at Arsag. Or, if you prefer to tour the area on the Baker Mayfield plan, you can start later and party stronger.

The surroundings — the Ozarks, the Buffalo River — are beautiful and hikable. The campus area and the student body combine several elements, from true Midwestern to Austin-style hippie funkiness.

But let’s make no mistake about it — Arkansas is an SEC town, a good expansion fit for 25 years now. It’s not Oberlin, or Cal-Santa Cruz. Football matters there and, as Bret Bielema enters his fifth year as the head coach of the Razorbacks, one suspects we are going to find out just how much it matters. There is concern, not just in Fayetteville but across the state — a state that has no other NFL team or Power 5 conference football program — about whether Arkansas football is really any closer to relevance than it was when Bielema was hired in 2013.

Bielema was no random choice when he was brought in to scrub away the Bobby Petrino/John L. Smith collapse that had seen the Razorbacks plummet from huge expectations (there was talk of a Top 10 season before Petrino was caught in an off-the-field scandal that led to his departure.) The Arkansas administration looked at it this way, with some prompting from Bielema himself. Taking over for Barry Alvarez, Bielema had led Wisconsin to three straight Rose Bowls. He ascended to the top of the Big Ten by building tough, physical, run-oriented teams at a program with (like Arkansas) tradition and (like Arkansas) state-wide support and (like Arkansas) no history of out-recruiting the power programs in the conference (Ohio State and Michigan, mainly.) If it could happen with Badgers, why couldn’t the same approach work at Arkansas?

The difference was that the athletes at Ohio State and Michigan, particularly five years ago, weren’t quite the same thing as the athletes in the SEC, especially at Alabama and LSU. Those teams were also committed to physical football and were implementing that plan with physical freaks. Thus, Arkansas was caught trying to build one with one style and survive with another — which brings us to SEC Media Days on Monday.

Bielema, who seems like a jolly guy, caught attention with a new baby back home and a butt-dialing story (to the SEC Commissioner) that drew some laughs. But he’s also got to do something about an overall 10-22 SEC record and a fizzle (losses to Missouri and Virginia Tech) in the final two games of 2016, scuttling any momentum coming into the spring.

“Obviously, the end of last season was a unique situation for me,” Bielema said in Birmingham. “In fact, even when we went 3-9 (in 2013), I felt at the end of the year we were ... moving in the right direction. And last year, our last two games were not highlights, especially the way they both ended.”

See next page
Bielema cited “internal changes” and proclaimed the Arkansas players “have been great” in the off-season. Still, the Razorbacks don’t have the look of a juggernaut. They will rely on quarterback Austin Allen, who threw for 400 yards against Alabama last year, to put up points and hope that will help a defense that has to make some progress in stopping the run against quality teams.

If not, we may not get a live update on Baby Bielema’s first birthday at the 2018 SEC Media Days, unless the Arkansas administration is exceedingly patient — or Bielema accidentally butt-dials the next Arkansas coach at the podium.
Sankey sets record straight

Commissioner says SEC not considering Auburn change, but is open to 14-week regular season

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

HOOVER | The annual SEC state of the union, delivered by commissioner Greg Sankey, served as an opportunity to deflate at least one recent trite conversation, which was fueled by an offseason of discontent by at least one conference member.

Although Auburn University Athletics Director Jay Jacobs and former AU head coach Pat Dye publicly expressed the willingness for their athletics program to move from the SEC West to the SEC East, it's never been an official topic of conversation for the league. It was, however, much discussed after those gentlemen initiated the conversation.

Sankey, for the second time since the spring, shot down any such notion.

"(It) has not been an agenda item in the meeting," Sankey said. "It is a conversation in most large press conferences in which I appear, and that's the extent of the conversation."

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The commissioner also spent time discussing a 14-week season, which would come with two bye weeks instead of the standard one.

When up for discussion at the annual SEC Spring Meetings, coaches didn't express much desire for a common reason: It would extend the season.

“I want to be clear about the perspective that came out of those conversations,” Sankey said. “There’s not opposition here to a 14-week season. There’s curiosity and interest. There are two important points that were communicated; one, we don’t want to see practice begin even earlier in the summer. It moves back this year a few days because of the health and safety changes introduced.

“As I understand the start dates for practice, not everybody moves back a week. There is sensitivity to student athletes who are completing summer school and not adding further interruption to their process. There’s also an interest in keeping the number of preparatory practice opportunities. The number is 29 right now, and we’ll do the math at the podium for you. Not all of our programs use those 29 opportunities, but all were clear that they wanted that flexibility if the situation dictated that that was appropriate to be used. “We’re open to those ideas.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
CAIRO, Egypt – UAB sophomore guard Nate Darling made history on Sunday when he helped Team Canada capture a Gold Medal at the FIBA U19 World Cup.

Darling, a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Team Canada defeated Italy, 79-60, in the finals to claim the country's first-ever FIBA U19 World Cup title. Darling finished with 12 points, four rebounds and two assists Sunday against the Italians. On Saturday, Darling and Team Canada upset the United States with a 99-87 victory in the semifinals to reach the Gold Medal game for the first time in its history. Darling scored 13 points and made three assists in the semifinal game, averaging 7.6 points in the tournament which saw Canada finish 6-1.
Taking the high road doesn't always get you where you want to go. For Brian Mackin, it took time, but his patience has led him back to the profession that's also his passion.

More than two years after resigning his dream job as athletics director at his alma mater, UAB, Mackin is back in the game as the new deputy commissioner of UAB's conference home, Conference USA.

Mackin will report directly to C-USA Commissioner Judy MacLeod and occupy the league's No. 2 position, which had been vacant since she was promoted from second-in-command to commissioner in 2015.

"To be given the chance to get back in this industry does not come easily," Mackin said Friday. "I really appreciate Judy MacLeod giving me this opportunity. Sports is my passion. To be able to go back and make a difference in the conference that I left, it's a great opportunity for me."

Mackin likely wouldn't have been afforded this opportunity had he handled his departure from UAB differently. He decided he couldn't stay as AD because he disagreed with UAB President Ray Watts' widely unpopular decision to kill the school's football, rifle and bowling programs in 2014, but he didn't throw fuel on the fire on his way out the door.

"He's a proud alum of the school," MacLeod said. "He cares a lot about that place. He handled it professionally and moved on. He took the high road."

Tommy Brigham, an original board member of the new UAB Athletics Foundation, echoed those sentiments.

"Brian did a really good job (as AD) really with both hands tied behind his back," Brigham said. "Even on the sideline, he continued to be an honorable champion for UAB, Conference USA's gain is Birmingham's loss."

Former C-USA and SEC Commissioner Mike Slive applauded Mackin's move.

"I'm delighted for him," Slive said. "I've known Brian for a long time both personally and professionally. As we stayed in contact over the last few years, it's always been obvious to me that his heart and soul was in intercollegiate athletics.

"This opportunity to help Conference USA is significant not only for him but for Conference USA. He will make a great contribution."

Last month, the C-USA board approved the addition of a deputy commissioner to report directly to MacLeod, who appointed a search committee of three athletics directors to narrow the pool of candidates.

Mackin's name surfaced quickly in the search. He'd been working in the private sector for PNC Financial Services Group in Birmingham but hadn't lost his passion for athletics. He recently interviewed for another job in college sports but decided "it was not the right fit."

The C-USA deputy commissioner job seemed like a natural for him given UAB's history as an original member of the
SCARBINSKI
FROM BI

conference and Mackin’s history at UAB, dating to his days as a baseball player for the Blazers. MacLeod said only two questions about Mackin came up during the search process: “Is Brian OK with UAB and is UAB OK with him?”

The commissioner said the answer to both questions was yes.

“I talked to both President Watts and (AD) Mark Ingram and everybody was good,” MacLeod said. “I think everybody’s ready to move forward.”

Mackin’s new role will evolve, MacLeod said, but it will include overseeing the league’s business and communications functions. He’ll also be the go-to guy at the league office for Ingram and the other athletics directors.

UAB wasn’t exactly warm and fuzzy in reacting to Friday’s news. The school’s chief communications officer, Anne Buckley, provided this curt statement: “UAB and UAB Athletics wish Mr. Mackin well in his future endeavors.”

Calling him “Mr. Mackin” seemed cold. He’s a high-profile alumnus who worked in the school’s athletics administration for 13 years, the last eight as AD, and hired the highly respected Bill Clark as head football coach. Not to mention, Mackin’s “future endeavors” involve playing a key role in the conference that kept UAB as a member after the move to drop football and worked with UAB and the NCAA to bring the sport back.

Perhaps not everyone in the administration is fully ready to move forward, but Mackin already has. His UAB experience through good and bad times makes him uniquely qualified for his new position.

“I’ve been in that seat,” Mackin said. “I think I can help these ADs, whether it’s mentoring or providing some out-of-the-box thinking, because of my experience and what I went through at UAB.

“There will be a learning curve with the conference office, but I know that staff very well and we’ve always worked together when I was athletic director. It should be seamless.”

Mackin expects to attend Conference USA Football Media Days July 19-20 in Irving, Texas, home of the C-USA office, and will start work Aug. 1. In his new position, MacLeod said, “Brian has a chance to help the school that he loves in UAB but still help 13 other schools as well. I think it’s going to be a really good fit for us.”

So the most amazing comeback story in memory has an unexpected new chapter. UAB football’s back, and in a different role, so is Mackin.

Call it the power of positive karma.
GOLF

Former Alabama golfer named Vanderbilt assistant

NASHVILLE - Former University of Alabama golfer Gator Todd has been hired as assistant men's golf coach at Vanderbilt University. The announcement was made by Vanderbilt head men's golf coach Scott Limbaugh who was an assistant golf coach at Alabama when Todd was an All-SEC golfer at Alabama.

Todd is the son of former NFL and Alabama quarterback Richard Todd.

Todd, an Alabama state high school golf champion from Florence, comes to Vanderbilt after spending one season at Marquette, where the Golden Eagles captured the Big East Championship in 2017, and along with Golden Eagle head coach Steve Bailey, was named the Big East Coaching Staff of the Year.
SPORTS DIGEST

Keely McNeer earns NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship

Senior gymnast Keely McNeer finished her University of Alabama career as a Second Team Championship Uneven Bars All-American, and was a key member of the Crimson Tide’s 2017 team that finished sixth in the nation at the NCAA Championships Super Six.

Away from gymnastics, McNeer is finishing her undergraduate degree in chemical engineering, which she holds a 4.0 GPA. After she finishes her undergraduate, McNeer plans to go to medical school.

McNeer was one of four Alabama athletes who received the NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship. She joins Krystal Rivers, Anton McKee and Connor Oslin to receive the $7,500 scholarship.

“What an amazing cap to Keely’s career,” head coach Dana Duckworth said. “The NCAA Scholarship is not only a tremendous honor, but it will be a great boost as she starts her journey through medical school.”

She is the 20th gymnast to receive the scholarship in Alabama gymnastics history.

With McNeer’s name being added to the scholarship list, Alabama is the only Division I school to have three athletes named from winter sports. Overall, Alabama has earned 16 Postgraduate Scholarships in the last four years, with spring sports still to be tallied.

— Staff report
Hoop dreams

Camp teaches skills to wheelchair athletes

By James Benedetto
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Adam Lancia sees the University of Alabama's wheelchair basketball camp as an opportunity to show kids the depth of UA's commitment to adapted athletics.

"Nobody in the U.S. college system has a stand-alone adapted athletics recreational training facility," said Lancia of the $10 million addition to the Student Recreation Center that will provide an NCAA-regulation game venue for wheelchair basketball, locker rooms, rooms for strength conditioning and study halls. Construction on the facility is expected to finish up in the fall.

More than 30 wheelchair athletes between the ages of 12 and 18 participated in the basketball camp at UA this week. The camp began Thursday and wrapped up Sunday. This is the 13th year UA has hosted the wheelchair basketball camp.

Lancia, who serves as coach of the women's wheelchair basketball team at UA, is one of the camp's instructors. Ford Buttram, coach of the UA men's wheelchair basketball team, also serves as an instructor, along with UA wheelchair sports players and guest instructors from national wheelchair teams.

Campers practice for six hours a day and Lancia said he hopes the camp will increase the students' basketball skills while showing them that the sport can provide a path to college.

"What I hope to see is that there is more retention so kids that stay with the sport longer have the opportunity to go to a school that will pay for their See HOOPS, BS
HOOPS

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education. I just hope that it opens that door and broadens itself for more students to get an education and play basketball at the same time," Lancia said.

In addition to men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball teams, UA has a wheelchair tennis program. The women’s basketball team has earned national titles in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015 and 2017. The men’s basketball team won a national title in 2013.

The tennis program has earned national titles in 2013, 2015 and 2017. Also, more than 20 UA student-athletes participated in the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio.

At the groundbreaking for the adapted athletics facility in February, adapted athletics director Brent Hardin said the facility will build on the program’s momentum. "This facility will raise the bar nationally for all sports programs for athletes with disabilities and especially for high performance college student-athletes with disabilities," Hardin said.
Wherever Fitzpatrick is, he’s gold

Alabama DB covers plenty of ground at SEC Media Days

Rainer Sabin rsabin@al.com

In a span of nineteen minutes, Minkah Fitzpatrick answered 54 questions from print reporters. He was asked whether he could yell like Alabama’s raspy-voiced strength and conditioning coach Scott Cochran (I can get loud.”) and his thoughts on defending the run-pass option (“It kind of messes you up.”).

He was queried about whether mighty Alabama can have a chip on its shoulder (“For us, it’s having a target on our back.”), how his mind works like Nick Saban’s (“Me and Coach Saban are almost identical. I guess you can say we think alike.”), and whether he has thought about entering the draft after this coming season (“I am worried about a national championship.”).

This was his indoctrination to SEC Media Days at the Wynfrey Hotel, where Alabama’s top defensive back did a two-hour, ten-minute circuit during which he moonlighted as a talking head.

Over that time, Fitzpatrick covered a lot of ground. He did so with the same smoothness that has characterized his play as a versatile secondary star who has lined up at corner, safety and the nickelback position.

It’s also why this fall Fitzpatrick’s every move will be scrutinized.

That’s what happens to a prominent player at Alabama, as former offensive lineman Cam Robinson explained this past spring.

“We’re seen a lot so that probably gives them more time to find something to critique, if I had to guess,” Robinson said.

Of course, it’s hard to identify anything that is wrong with Fitzpatrick. In 2016, he was a first-team All-American after leading the Tide with six interceptions and moving from one spot to the next in Saban’s secondary. Fitzpatrick’s ability to excel wherever he was slotted is one of the reasons he has earned the admiration of Alabama’s coach.

“It’s really unique to have a guy that’s as smart as he is, has a good understanding of the game that really can play all those positions,” Saban said in March.

It’s no wonder then that Fitzpatrick was one of three players representing Alabama at this media powwow Wednesday.

Sporting Jos. A. Bank threads Wednesday to visit radio row and the fans at SEC Media Days. Vasha Hunt /vhunt@al.com

Flashing the occasional smile, he seemed to enjoy his day in the spotlight.

“It’s fun,” Fitzpatrick said before pausing and noting, “You guys ask a lot of questions.”

Fitzpatrick also gave a lot of answers, playing the role he was given on this day (Alabama ambassador), as well as all the others he’s been handed during his time in Tuscaloosa.
Saban was smart to ignore Auburn

Possibly the most innocuous question of all time, right? Saban didn’t see it that way.

Not wanting to leave anyone out, Saban went through his entire NFL roster naming off every player. Saban then laid into his interviewer during the commercial break.

Keep in mind this was during one of Saban’s official weekly radio shows as a sports bar in South Florida. Imagine Saban dressing down Alabama radio host Eli Gold at Bob’s Victory Grille in Tuscaloosa. You get the picture.

Here’s the point: Saban doesn’t miss a thing. And if he does, then it’s usually on purpose.

Like on Wednesday at SEC Media Days when he left Auburn off a list of teams “catching up” to the Crimson Tide.

During his news conference with print reporters at Hoover’s Wynfrey Hotel, Saban dutifully answered a question about the perception of the SEC. The question was from Mike Blanchard, a legendary columnist for the Orlando Sentinel:

“Coach, you guys have won 17 straight SEC games now. You pretty much dominated the league over the last few years. How do you respond to those who say that your program is turning the SEC into a one-team league? And do you sense anybody getting closer to catching up with you guys?”

It was a slightly loaded question, to be sure, and hit on a popular theme in the SEC this week — Alabama’s dominance.

Here’s Saban’s response in its entirety:

“Well, I have a tremendous amount of respect for a lot of teams in our league. I mean, LSU is very, very good. Ole Miss has beaten us a couple times in the last few years. Mississippi State has got a good quarterback coming back. Arkansas’ got a good quarterback coming back. A&M’s always a very challenging team.

I think Kirby’s doing a great job at Georgia. Jim McElwain is doing a good job at Florida. Tennessee has gotten better and better every year. I am trying to think of somebody in our league that I don’t have a tremendous amount of respect for. Vanderbilt went to a bowl game last year and had a winning season.

I think there’s a lot of parity in our league. I think it’s very challenging from a consistency standpoint in our league. I think that we have one of the youngest teams that we’ve ever had. So it’s going to be a real

See GOODMAN, B3
challenge for us to maintain the standard that we've been able to maintain in terms of — especially on defense, especially in the front seven — for all the good players that we lost."

If you're counting, Saban mentioned nine teams and none were Auburn.

I was thinking about picking Auburn to win the SEC before Wednesday, but after listening to Saban omit the Tigers from that very thorough and thoughtful answer, I'm more confident now than ever that Auburn can be the surprise team this year in the league. Why mention Auburn as a team on the rise when the Tigers are already there?

Matching up well against Alabama, Auburn will be experienced along their offensive and defensive lines, and it's talented running game will finally be balanced by a competent if not standout quarterback in Baylor transfer Jarrett Stidham. Auburn plays at Clemson during the second week of the season. A victory in South Carolina should put them on a collision course with Alabama for the SEC West title.

My way-too-early Iron Bowl prediction because this is sports and sports are fun: Auburn 31, Alabama 28. Don't @ me, bro.

The winner of that game will represent the SEC West in the league's championship game, and defeat Florida for the SEC crown. They're saying at SEC Media Days that Florida doesn't have a quarterback. I'm saying it doesn't matter.

It didn't hurt Alabama much last year.

Saban got by with starting a run-first freshman quarterback in 2016 because he knew he had the defense to do it. Alabama then lost three defensive linemen (Jonathan Allen, Dalvin Tomlinson and Tim Williams) and the best linebacker in the country (Reuben Foster) to the 2017 NFL Draft. Auburn, meanwhile, has veterans returning this season along the offensive line, at tight end and in the backfield. In Marlon Davidson, Auburn should have the best defensive lineman on the field come November.

By ignoring Auburn at SEC Media Days, Saban offered Alabama's chief rival the biggest compliment possible. It goes without saying that the Tigers are coming for the Crimson Tide.
How socks factored into Alabama’s title loss when leadership got ‘careless’

Michael Casagrande  mcasagrande@al.com

Comfort is among Nick Saban’s worst enemies. It’s that opponent that creeps into the subconscious when times are good and the healthy fear fades.

Six months and two days after that cerebral rival caught up to Alabama on the grandest of stages, players offered some insight into what contributed to the national title game loss to Clemson.

Given time to reflect, stars Calvin Ridley and Minkah Fitzpatrick explained what changed after routing Florida in the SEC Championship Game.

Even before losing to Clemson on the final play of the title game, it was clear something had changed in the weeks after claiming the third straight league championship.

“There were small things like people coming late to a meeting or just not wearing the right socks,” Fitzpatrick said Wednesday in Hoover. “It might sound crazy but it builds up in the end.”

Ridley, now a junior like Fitzpatrick, said the leadership “has gotten way better” as 2016 transitioned to 2017. That’s interesting considering last year’s group was known for its experience, which typically translates into strong voices in the locker room.

“Not to say our leadership was bad from last year but it was kind of careless,” Ridley said. “We lost ourselves in that last game. We weren’t ourselves. Right now, I think we’re finding ourselves and we’re going to be all right if we just stay this way all season, we’re going to be fine.”

This isn’t an uncommon theme when Alabama seasons fall short of January confetti showers.

At the 2014 SEC Media Days, Tide receiver Christion Jones said leadership “got divided” at the end of the previous season. That, of course, culminated in the infamous Kick-Six Iron Bowl that snapped a 15-game winning streak and a bid for a third straight national title.

The motivational response has been similar this time. Ridley, who rooms with quarterback Jalen Hurts, said his dorm walls have turned into a constant reminder of the 35-31 loss to Clemson.

“We have a couple posters around the dorm just showing the score so we can remember that we lost,” Ridley said.

There’s a shot of the final play, the scoreboard and another of Hurts getting sacked.

“If we had a better offense,” Ridley said, “we probably would have won that game.”

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ALABAMA

FROM B1

Strength and conditioning coach Scott Cochran invokes Clemson's name as the dangling carrot to finish a drill.

Fitzpatrick was quick to note the issues weren't isolated to the championship game. They simmered behind the scenes as Alabama raced to Tampa with a 14-0 record. Any cracks are just amplified when the stakes go up.

There were signs in the Peach Bowl. The 24-7 win over Washington was sloppy with 11 penalties and just 57 passing yards. It was ultimately Lane Kiffin's final game in an Alabama visor as his abrupt departure was announced a week before facing Clemson.

"We're not letting the small things slide," Fitzpatrick said. "That's the reason we lost last year because we let little things slide and they added up toward the end of the season. We lost because of the small details. Leaders learn from that. We're not letting nothing slide. We're not letting the small things go away. If you're not wearing the right socks or pair of shoes, we're going to say something to you."

For the most part, they've moved past what happened in January. Fitzpatrick said he got over it within a day.

After the relatively disastrous end to the 2013 season, Saban said he was treating it like he was starting over at Year 1 in Tuscaloosa. Any issues that contributed to the Clemson loss fall short of those faced three years ago. They weren't glaring enough to be seen with the naked eyes or to cause a loss before the final game.

Still, the vocal members of this 2017 team say what you didn't see won't be a problem in any realm this time.

"Personally, I'd say we were different," Ridley said. "We weren't ourselves in those last games. We did a lot of different things. We dressed different. We just thought different. We thought we were better and we thought we just had it. So far, we know what we messed up and how to fix things."
The Tuscaloosa News
Friday, July 14, 2017

Tide players named to award watch lists

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

HOOVER - A handful of University of Alabama football players saw their names added to preseason watch lists for end-of-the-season awards Thursday morning.

Three players — sophomore left tackle Jonah Williams, senior center Bradley Bozeman and junior defensive tackle Da'Ron Payne — were among 81 nationally placed on the Outland Trophy watch list, given annually to college football's best interior lineman.

Four UA players — Payne, inside linebacker Rashaan Evans, safety Ronnie Harrison and cornerback Minkah Fitzpatrick — were named to the Bronko Nagurski Trophy. Former Alabama defensive lineman Jonathan Allen became the first player in program history to win the award when he took it home in 2016.

Evans has primarily played outside linebacker during his career, but he's slotted to play inside for the majority of his snaps this season (although he could slide outside on third-down situations).

Harrison is a returning two-year starter at safety and Fitzpatrick is one of the best defensive backs in the nation. He lead the league in interceptions with six in 2016.

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Nick Saban has a knack of using failures to breed success

By: Cecil Hurt

A failure, to paraphrase Nick Saban, is a terrible thing to waste.

Perhaps because failures have been so rare at Alabama since 2008, Saban has learned to treat them as resources, to use them like fuel. The new phrasing from Saban when asked at SEC Media Days about the national championship loss to Clemson – “We certainly don’t want to waste a failure” – certifies that as the motto for 2017.

Does that mean Saban, who hates losses to his very core, likes having a defeat to build upon? Of course not. But he is constantly pondering ways to keep his team motivated and away from entitlement. He’s dealt with the syndrome before, and made history. The 2008 SEC Championship Game loss to Florida was the genesis of the 2009 SEC title win over the Gators, still the closest any Saban team has come – perhaps the closest any college team has come – to reaching the full potential of a powerful roster.

The same thing happened in 2011, with a little bit of luck. The home loss to LSU was a massive disappointment, a textbook definition of what Saban means by “failure.” Events gave Alabama a second shot at the Tigers that season, in the BCS title game. The failure of November was not wasted.

Like most coaches, Saban isn’t likely to rank his Alabama teams, but one could make a strong argument that the 2016 edition of the Crimson Tide was as good as any team that he has coached, whether in 2009 or 2012 or any other year he might care to choose. But 2016 also reinforced a lesson: It is impossible for a team to play at its peak for 15 consecutive weeks over the course of a season, or for 25 straight games if you stretch back into the 2015 championship season.

There isn’t a counter-example. Clemson, the national champions, didn’t do it either. They lost to Pitt, for goodness’ sake. What Clemson did, though, was play its best football in the postseason. How much of that was the Tigers learning from the previous year’s mistakes, drawing on the 2015 loss to Alabama for motivation? There’s no way to measure that, although Dabo Swinney certainly didn’t deny that was a factor.

Clemson peaked at the perfect time. For the second time in three years, taking nothing from those Ohio State or Clemson teams, Alabama did not. It is a point that Saban has spent most of the offseason pondering.

“Well, we really try to do it the same way because whether you win or lose, we’re always trying to self-assess to see what we need to do to get better,” he said. “I think when you lose,
everybody’s much more – the mind-set is much more ‘I’m willing to change. I want to learn. I don’t want to waste a failure. What could we have done better?’

“Because everybody’s hurt by the fact that they lost, especially the way we lost that particular game on the last play of the game – but it wasn’t the last play. It’s what led up to the last play. I think our players realize that.

“It takes a tremendous amount of accountability to be able to execute and sustain the execution for 60 minutes in the game. And we played against a really, really good team, which I think when you get in the playoffs, that should be what you expect.

“We weren’t able to finish the game like we needed to. And I think there’s a lot of lessons to learn, and hopefully we won’t waste a failure.”
There may be a dropoff in experience, but Crimson Tide has an abundance of talent on defense

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

HOOVER – Despite the challenges that each season brings, there has remained one constant for the Alabama football program. The defense, no matter the changes to personnel or the coaching staff, remains steady.

Just once in the last nine seasons has the Crimson Tide failed to finish in the top 10 nationally in total defense. And that one season (2012), it finished 12th. Three times during that stretch, the defense ranked No. 1 nationally, including last season.

Suffice it to say, there exists a certain faith that no matter the obstacles that must be overcome, the defense will rebound each season to be one of the best in the country.

That’s the expectation this season, although UA coach Nick Saban pointed out Wednesday at SEC Media Days just how youthful the defense will be in 2017.

“I think this is going to be one of the youngest teams that we’ve had probably since maybe 2012, especially on defense, where we lost a ton of really, really good players, I think seven guys drafted off the defense, all in the first four rounds,” Saban said. “So it’s going to be a challenge to replace those guys.”

Those guys include national defensive player of the year Jonathan Allen, Dalvin Tomlinson, Ryan Anderson, Tim Williams and elite inside linebacker Reuben Foster. And that’s just in the front seven. Throw first-round draft pick Marlon Humphrey (defensive back) into the mix and it’s clear the challenge UA defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt faces.

“We’re going to be very young on that side of the ball, but it’s also something that we’re excited about as coaches to try to help those guys develop to

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play the kind of football that will allow them to be individu­
ally and collectively successful defensively,” Saban said.

Starting positions and roles on the defense are still up for
grabs, but the names are famili­
lar even if their play as a unit
remains uncertain.

Call it a byproduct of the
Saban machine, but there is
just a faith that exists that the
defense will remain stout.

“We just had the No. 1
recruiting class, so we always
have talent,” junior defensive
back Minkah Fitzpatrick said.

As Fitzpatrick eloquently
year is, I've heard everyone of
them – Christian Miller, Ter­
rell (Lewis), Isaiah Buggs – I've
heard them all. But two years
ago I saw Tim Williams do it
and be effective. Three years
ago I saw Jonathan Allen do
it. The year before last I saw
Ryan Anderson and Dalvin
Tomlinson do it. I haven't seen
this wave of guys do it within
meaningful reps.”

Of course that doesn’t mean
those new replacements can’t
be effective. But to expect them
to pick up where last year’s
defense left off is unreasonable.

Having stated that, the
defense has leaders.

“I think Minkah Fitzpatrick

he’s going to have to be one
of those guys because he’s the
one who’s been in all the huge
games, made the huge plays,
knows what the atmospheres
are like. He knows what it’s
like when the other team gets
rolling and you have to make a
stop. He’s the one who knows
that.

“What you’re looking for is
guys who take that personal
responsibility. You get 11 of
those and you’ve got nothing
to worry about. If you don’t
find them, I think what it
does is it puts more stress on
Jeremy Pruitt to try to create
and find something, and make
something and manipulate
something.”

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points out, it’s not a talent
issue. Rather it’s the experi­
ence level of the talent or lack
thereof that’s the question.

Allen and Anderson brought
an edge to their game: Call it
purposeful hate. Saban often
called the 2016 unit hateful.
How will the new faces fare
in that regard? Only mean­
ingful snaps will answer that
question.

“You're going to get talent,
you're going to get guys who
can move, guys that are 260,
280 (pounds) who can run,
can flip their hips, that have
lateral quickness, and maybe
that play hard, but the mental
makeup of those kinds of (play­
ers like Allen and Anderson)
can’t be replaced easily,” SEC
Network analyst Cole Cubelic
said. “The difference to me this
Crimson Tide still the team to beat in the SEC, despite loss of key players

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

HOOVER — There has been rumbling in the offseason about realignment within the Southeastern Conference, revolved around the idea of swapping teams from one division to the other to create more competitive and geographic balance.

So far, it's just talk. And no one, so far, has suggested putting the University of Alabama in one division, with the other 13 teams in another.

Maybe it's time, given the Crimson Tide's dominance under Nick Saban, who represented Alabama at SEC Media Days on Wednesday at the Wynfrey Hotel. It was Saban's 16th appearance at the event and his 11th as head coach at UA, with the previous ones coming when he was at LSU from 2000-04.

"I'm sure there's nobody in this room who thought that would ever happen," Saban said of his longevity at Alabama.

The rest of the league might wish Saban had moved along by now, but he doesn't embrace the idea that the SEC has become an Alabama-and-everybody-else conference.

"I'm trying to think of somebody in our league that I don't have a tremendous amount of respect for," he said. "I think there's a lot of parity in our league. I think it's very challenging from a consistency standpoint.

"I think we have one of the youngest teams that we've ever had, so it's going to be a real challenge for us to maintain the standard that we've been able to maintain."

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Saban has won four national championships at Alabama to go with one that he won at LSU. UA is coming off its third straight College Football Playoff appearance. The Crimson Tide finished 14-1 last season, with the only loss coming in the CFP National Championship Game in Tampa in a contest that came down to the final play.

"I think when you lose the mind-set is much more, 'I'm willing to change, I want to learn, I don't want to waste the failure, what could we have done better?' because everybody's hurt that they lost, especially the way we lost that particular game on the last play," Saban said. "We weren't able to finish the game the way we needed to. I think there's a lot of lessons to learn, and hopefully we don't waste the failure."

Alabama is also coming off its third straight College Football Playoff appearance and will be seeking its fourth straight SEC championship and fifth in the last six years. UA hasn't lost a conference game since 2015.

The Crimson Tide returns six starters on each side of the ball — including quarterback Jalen Hurts, wideout Calvin Ridley and tackle Jonah Williams on offense, and interior lineman Da'Ron Payne, linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton and defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick on defense — as well as punter JK Scott.

Offseason workouts have been promising, the coach reported. "We're pleased with the team's progression this summer," Saban said.

Alabama will be trying to replace seven players on defense who were drafted in the first four rounds by the National Football League.

"We're going to be very young on that side of the ball, but it's something we're excited about as coaches.

Having Hurts back at quarterback should provide a foundation for new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll to build upon. Saban said Hurts has progressed in the passing game since last season.

"Offensively this is the first time we've had a returning starter at quarterback since 2013," Saban said, "which creates the opportunity for that guy to develop the things that he needs to do better."

UA should have a lot of offensive firepower to complement Hurts' talents.

"We have some good running backs and we have some good receivers and skill guys and the offensive line has developed really nicely," Saban said.

Alabama will open its season Sept. 2 against Florida State in Atlanta in the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

"It will be a very challenging game," Saban said. "Florida State is built like an SEC team. They're built like us."

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UA player Fitzpatrick nominee for community service team

TUSCALOOSA – Alabama junior defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick has been named to the Allstate American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) Good Works Team Nominee List.

Fitzpatrick is among 76 players from Football Bowl Subdivision nominated for this year’s team. Eleven of the nominees will make up the 2017 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team, which will be announced in September.

Fitzpatrick has been a team leader in the community and on campus, working with the YMCA, TAP, Inc. and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, mentoring at-risk youth in the Tuscaloosa area. Most recently, he spent his spring break with a group of Alabama student-athletes as part of an FCA mission trip that did relief work in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Tide players named to Maxwell Award Watch List

TUSCALOOSA – Alabama junior defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick, sophomore quarterback Jalen Hurts, junior wide receiver Calvin Ridley and junior running back Bo Scarbrough have been named to the 2017 Maxwell Award Watch List announced today by the Maxwell Football Club of Philadelphia.

The four, the most selections for any school, are among 85 players picked from around the country. Alabama student-athletes have won the award twice in the last four seasons.

The leader of the Crimson Tide secondary after a pair of standout seasons in his first two years in Tuscaloosa, Fitzpatrick made the move to safety midway through the season in 2016 and will once again direct the Tide secondary in 2017. He has returned four interceptions for touchdowns during his career to set the Alabama all-time mark for pick-sixes.

Hurts became the first freshman to start at quarterback under Nick Saban when he took control of the offense in the second game of the season in 2016 and finished 13-1 as starting quarterback. He was selected as a Freshman All-American by USA Today and ESPN and earned SEC Offensive Player of the Year accolades from conference coaches and the Associated Press.

One of the nation’s most explosive wideouts, Ridley had 72 catches for 769 yards and seven touchdowns as a sophomore in 2016. Thirty-nine of his receptions went for a first down or a touchdown in 2016. He had 21 explosive receptions of 15 yards or more to lead the last season.

Scarbrough provided a power option in the backfield as a sophomore. He rushed 109 times for 719 yards and nine rushing scores in 2016 with 42 of his rushes going for a first down or a touchdown. He finished the season with some big performances, rushing 46 times for 364 yards and six touchdowns over his final three contests to average 7.9 yards per carry.
UA juniors on Bednarik Award Watch List

TUSCALOOSA – Alabama junior defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick and junior defensive lineman Da’Ron Payne have been named to the 2017 Bednarik Award Watch List announced today by the Maxwell Football Club of Philadelphia.

The two are among 85 players from around the country named to the preseason list.

Fitzpatrick, an Old Bridge, N.J., native was a first team All-American by the Associated Press, American Football Coaches Association and Pro Football Focus in 2016 and earned second-team honors from Walter Camp and The Sporting News. He led the team in interceptions (6) and interception return yards (186) as a sophomore and his 186 return yards ranked near the top nationally while his six picks tied for seventh in the FBS.

One of the key cogs along the Tide’s vaunted defensive front, Payne totaled 36 tackles, three quarterback hurries, one pass breakup and a fumble recovery for a touchdown in 2016. He added 3.5 tackles for loss (-13 yards) and 1.5 sacks (-10 yards) from his nose guard spot on one of the top defenses in Alabama history. The Birmingham native scored a key touchdown in Alabama’s come-from-behind victory at Ole Miss last season.

Staff report
A perennial favorite

Preseason publications pick Alabama as the No. 1 team

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

At this stage of the game it should come as no surprise that those who make a living prognosticating — a guesswork that understandably irritates Nick Saban — are in consensus that the University of Alabama is the top team in the land.

That doesn’t mean much when a game hasn’t been played and not so much as one fall-camp reputation has been taken. Yet a study of three college football preseason magazines (Phil Steele, Athlon and Lindy’s) reveal that Alabama is the consensus No. 1.

This fact will undoubtedly be one of the subjects during Saban’s upcoming stop at SEC Media Days this week, and the veteran head coach will rightfully point out that this team has accomplished nothing.

But armed with a returning starting quarterback for the first time since 2013, Alabama is loaded for bear offensively and has enough talent on defense that most think a steep drop off isn’t in the cards on that side of the ball.

All in all, the college football world thinks highly of Alabama.

“T'heir ceiling is a national championship,” said Chris Van Dine of Phil Steele Publications. “We have Alabama, in the magazine, as our No. 1 team in the country and the national champion at the end of the year.

“It’s a different Alabama team because they’ve built a little bit differently. They have a returning starting quarter­back, which Alabama hasn’t had in a little while. There’s more experience on the offensive side of the ball than they normally have, and their running game is absolutely potent with (Bo) Scarbrough, Damien Harris and adding a guy like Najee Harris. So one through five, their running backs are just loaded.”

See PREVIEW, C7

Here are the rankings from each of the premier preseason college football magazines:

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<th>School</th>
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<th>Athlon&amp;Lindy's</th>
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Others receiving votes in the Composite Top 25: Northwestern (5), West Virginia (4), Boise State (2), Virginia Tech (2), Utah (1)

See next page
PREVIEW

Continued from C1

According to Phil Steele's 2017 College Football Preview, widely considered the best resource on the market for college football fans, the Crimson Tide fields the top-ranked SEC unit at every position save for two: receiving (No. 2) and special teams (No. 7). You didn't misread that. Steele has Alabama ranked No. 1 in the conference at quarterback, running back, offensive line, defensive line, linebacker and defensive back.

That may come as a surprise given all the front-seven talent UA lost from last year's stingy defensive unit. But when you recruit and develop as well as Saban and company, you earn the benefit of the doubt.

"Defensively, they do lose some guys from the front seven, but they have a lot of talent coming in," Van Dine said. "A guy we like is Terrell (Lewis) out of Washington D.C. He was a freshman last year and played a little bit. He's stepping into a starting role maybe this year, and he can be a big-time talent for them.

"The secondary is absolutely fantastic with (Minkah) Fitzpatrick and (Ronnie) Harrison returning. So Alabama is going to be just as strong on defense as they normally are. We have them rated as our No. 1 defense in the country this year."

Steele has seven Alabama players rated as First-team All-SEC selections, including quarterback Jalen Hurts, wide receiver Calvin Ridley, offensive tackle Jonah Williams, defensive tackle Da'Ron Payne, linebacker Rashaan Evans and safeties Fitzpatrick and Harrison.

Steele projects Alabama as the No. 1 seed in the College Football Playoff matching up with USC in the semifinal with Ohio State and Florida State in the other semifinal. He predicts Alabama to defeat Ohio State in the CFP National Championship Game.

Interestingly enough, Alabama meets Florida State on Sept. 2 to kickoff the season the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game in Atlanta.

That challenging game starts a relatively favorable schedule for the Crimson Tide, one that features key home games against Ole Miss, Arkansas, Tennessee, LSU. Key road games include Texas A&M and Mississippi State and Auburn.

"I don't know that there's a question mark so much as can they get through some of those tougher games," Van Dine said. "The Florida State game is the big one because if they don't win that game it definitely puts them behind the eight ball as far as getting through the season. They get LSU at home this year. The big road game will be Auburn at the end of the year. The question will be how well does Jarett Stidham jell by then. A lot of their tougher games are at home."

One big question fans still have is the development of Hurts as a passer. Obviously, Phil Steele's publication doesn't have those same questions.

"We have Jalen Hurts as a possible Heisman Trophy contender," Van Dine said. "He's a very talented quarterback, and he's a true dual-threat for them which is something a little bit unique for Alabama."

"The talent around him obviously helps, but he absolutely, we think, is going to have an excellent season. He looked great in the spring, and it should be a very strong offense for them. He should continue to grow as a quarterback."

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
No more tickets available for Tide's season opener against FSU

Staff report

The University of Alabama's first football game of the 2017 season is officially sold out. UA will meet Florida State at 7 p.m. CT on Sept. 2 in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game. The match-up will be the first college football game played at the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Various preseason polls have ranked the Crimson Tide and the Seminoles as high as No. 1 and neither team is ranked lower than No. 4.

"We're calling this game the GOAT, the Greatest Opener of All Time, because of the projected rankings, the dominance of these two programs and the fact that this is the toughest ticket I have seen in my 20 years in college football," said Gary Stokan CEO and president of Peach Bowl Inc., in a news release.

"To possibly have No. 1 against No. 2 in the first game of the season is a credit to the programs that (UA coach) Nick Saban and (FSU coach) Jimbo Fisher have built and their willingness to play this game shows their desire to compete at the highest level," Stokan said.

Stubhub.com, an online ticket broker, has seats for resale starting at around $450 and climbing to more than $1,000 for premium seats.

"We knew this was going to be a special game, but I'm not sure we fully expected it to reach historic levels like this," said Percy Vaughn, chairman of the Peach Bowl.

Fans who don't want to pay for high-priced tickets can still watch the game on ABC, which is televising the game nationally.

The nation's longest-running kickoff game, the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game has now sold out nine of its 12 match-ups. The game averages 67,645 fans — higher than the attendance of 35 bowl games last year — and has an average payout of $4.7 million, which is higher than 27 bowl games last year. Television viewership is also traditionally strong, with more than 47.4 million viewers tuning in to the series since its inaugural game in 2008.

The teams will battle for The Old Leather Helmet Trophy, which will be awarded after the game.
OUR VIEW

GOP’s changing view of higher ed is concerning

It is no secret that universities are often widely viewed as bastions of liberal thought. Some might argue this is the natural product of an environment that promotes free thought, where young people are encouraged to challenge preconceived assumptions. Others might argue that it is the product of insulated campus communities that have evolved in a protective bubble, free from the challenges of real-world pressures.

That most college campuses lean to the left is no surprise. What is surprising is a new report by the Pew Research Center on Americans’ view of national institutions. The report shows that a growing number of Republicans hold higher education in disdain. According to the annual report, which was released Monday, a remarkable shift in attitudes about higher education has occurred among people who identify as Republicans and people who lean Republican.

Two years ago, 54 percent of those who identified as Republicans said colleges had a positive impact on America, with only 37 percent saying that higher education has a negative impact on the country’s direction. But the latest edition of the survey found that a whopping 58 percent now rate higher education as having a negative effect while only 36 percent say colleges have a positive effect.

The survey was conducted last month, and included 2,504 adults. Within that group, younger Republicans think more highly of higher education — with 44 percent of 18- to 49-year-olds and 52 percent of those 50 and older saying it has a positive impact on the direction America is heading.

Older and more educated Republicans, however, now say that higher education has a negative impact on the country. Among Republicans who hold a college or graduate degree, a positive view of higher education dropped by 11 percentage points, from 44 percent to 33 percent, in the past two years. And it fell at an even sharper rate, 20 percent, among Republicans without a college degree.

Even more troubling, the wealthiest in the group have among the most negative opinions of the impact colleges have on our nation. Only 31 percent of those who earn $75,000 a year in family income held a positive view, while 46 percent of Republicans who earn less than $30,000 had a positive outlook on colleges.

It isn’t entirely clear what has led to the dramatic change in attitudes. It could be that more GOP politicians are touting the value of traditionally blue-collar trades in a changing economy. Or perhaps it is a push back on the increasing cost of tuition and the burden of college loans. Further still, it could be the reaction to several high-profile news stories about controversies that have exploded on college campuses recently when conservative speakers have been invited to speak only to meet with raucous opposition.

Whatever the cause, it doesn’t bode well, either for the universities nationwide that count on public funding, or for the public they’re trying to serve.