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Ivey unveils ‘Strong Start, Strong Finish’ to improve education

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

Gov. Kay Ivey unveiled a new education initiative this week, focusing on three stages of education: early childhood, computer science in middle and high school, and post-high school workforce preparedness.

Calling this her first formal initiative as governor of Alabama, Ivey said “Strong Start, Strong Finish” calls for various existing education groups to work together in a collaborative way from pre-kindergarten through workforce development.

The event was held at the Innovation Depot in Birmingham. Standing at the lectern alongside Ivey were representatives from the state departments of commerce, education, early childhood education and labor, the Alabama Community College System, School Superintendents of Alabama, A+ Education Partnership, Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools, Business Education Alliance, and the Alabama Workforce Council and Alabama’s Teacher of the Year, Dana Jacobson.

SCHOOLS

Ivey said, “Bringing this diverse group together today illustrates that we are all serious about education and the effect it has on the overall state but also how much it means for the success of individual citizens.”

In previous years, “Instead of working together, individual efforts have been divided, separated and just disjointed,” Ivey said.

“Alabama’s education system is ripe for some opportunity for improvement,” Ivey said, but was quick to add she isn’t blaming teachers for problems in education.

The initiative will focus on those three areas, Ivey said, to address current problems facing Alabama.

“Pre through 3” will focus on making sure students get a strong start, with a focus on reading, she said, adding that students who aren’t reading on grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

Computer science jobs are growing, Ivey said, but students aren’t learning those skills in school. In Alabama, Ivey said 4,700 computer science jobs, paying an average of $82,000 a year, are currently unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants.

“CS for AL,” which stands for Computer Science for Alabama, will focus on ensuring students receive science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) classes in middle school and high school, she said, adding that courses in computer coding will also be made available.

“Advanced Training, Better Jobs” aims to increase the percentage of adults holding some type of post-secondary certificate or degree, Ivey said. According to Ivey, only 37 percent of adults in Alabama have obtained either a two-year or four-year degree or an industry credential, and by 2020, 62 percent of jobs in Alabama will require that level of attainment.

Few details of how the initiative will be implemented were shared, but Ivey said she didn’t anticipate needing any additional funding to get this collaborative working, because the work is ongoing. The group will work together in a new way, she said, through the seven Alabama regional workforce development councils.

Alabama Workforce Council Chairman
Zeke Smith said Ivey asked the AWC to bring all of the various business and education groups together, in a public-private partnership, "to develop an attainment goal for the state of Alabama and a plan to reach that."

EDUCATORS AT THE TABLE
Jacobson spoke at the event and thanked Ivey for including teachers and educators in setting the agenda for the initiative. Speaking to Alabama students, Jacobson said, "We want you to know we are working for you to support, encourage, and educate you today for a better Alabama tomorrow."

School Superintendents of Alabama Executive Director Eric Mackey said he is excited that Ivey asked professional educators to be a part of the discussion, saying it was the first time in over six years that members of the superintendents' association have been asked for input. Mackey said he is pleased that Ivey sees value in bringing business and education leaders together. "She's got a great positive outlook and she wants to invest in education and she wants what's best for the children and it is a breath of fresh air," he said.

Ivey said she invited professional educators and education officials to the Capitol last week, "and y'all, we had a very frank conversation about what we can achieve for our students when we work together better."

Ivey said the education and business sectors depend on each other and this initiative will keep the groups working together.

IVEY: GIVE SENTANCE TIME
When asked her view on the strain between the state board of education and state superintendent Michael Sentance, Ivey said, "I've been in office 106 days. The superintendent's been on the job a little over 300 days. I just think, I'm hopeful that the state board will focus on providing all of our children a quality education in the upcoming days as we go forward. I think the superintendent might need y'all to give him a chance to bring about some of the needed reforms that everyone seemed to agree that needed to be brought about before he gets axed."

Ivey, who serves as the president of the state board of education by virtue of her office, did not participate in Sentance's evaluation on Tuesday, saying she didn't think she should because she had only been in office since April.
State ends plan for Medicaid shift

Officials stop efforts to swap program to managed care

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — Alabama officials on Thursday ditched a long-running plan to shift the state’s Medicaid program to managed care after multiple implementation snags and expectations that the Trump administration and Congress could bring sweeping changes to the health care program for the poor and disabled.

The announcement ended a proposed overhaul that had been in the works for five years and had been heralded as the “transformation” of Alabama’s Medicaid program. It would have switched some of the state’s 1 million Medicaid patients to managed care, provided by regional care organizations, or RCOS, in the hopes of controlling costs and improving patient outcomes.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said President Donald Trump’s administration has assured her it wants to allow states more flexibility over their Medicaid programs so the state will “pursue new reform options.”

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MEDICAID

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which bring less risks and similar outcomes,” Ivey said because “circumstances surrounding Medicaid have changed, thus our approach must change.”

“It’s a good sound business decision when you are a crossroads to stop and take a breath and look at what is best,” Medicaid Commissioner Stephanie Azar said.

Azar said the state could have continued the managed care approach but had a “rocky, cliffy path” ahead. Azar said she wanted to take the work that was done to build the case management approach and apply it to particular Medicaid populations, such as women in maternity care, in the hopes of improving outcomes for babies.

Alabama lawmakers had approved the overhaul in 2013. The idea was that managed care would make sure patients got check-ups and preventative care, and limit expensive medical emergencies and emergency room visits down the line. Legislators looked to the program with hopes of saving money since Medicaid consumes nearly 38 percent of the state’s general fund budget.

Unlike commercial managed care which relies on private companies, the Alabama plan would have used local consortiums to fill that role.

However, the plan hit difficulties, largely involving whether lawmakers could fulfill a promise to federal health care officials to maintain Medicaid funding during the switch to avoid short-changing patients.

“It started unraveling almost as soon as it happened,” said Jim Carnes, policy director at Arise Citizens’ Policy Project, an advocacy group for the state’s poor.

The regional care organizations would manage patients’ care, were originally supposed to begin work on Oct. 1, 2016, but were delayed amid state budget concerns. Several of 11 organizations withdrew because of investor nervousness, Carnes said.

The state was moving ahead with partial implementation, with managed care set to begin Oct. 1 in two of five state regions.

Carnes said the plan was designed to protect patient care. He said he is concerned that proposals such as block grants, or state flexibility to cut services, would further slash health care for the poor and disabled in a state that has already “cut our Medicaid program to the bone.”
Education evaluation

If board fires Sentance, hold them to same standard

Cameron Smith

The State Board of Education seems primed to fire State Superintendent Michael Sentance. If they insist on that course, we should subject them to the same “evaluation.”

Sentance’s tenure shouldn’t hinge on anything other than his performance on the job. It’s hard to argue that he’s not taking strides in a positive direction for Alabama. He was the driving force behind freeing Alabama from the ACT Aspire standardized test that the state board voted to reject. According to one source familiar with the discussion between Alabama and the U.S. Department of Education, “the reason we received permission to end use of the ACT-Aspire was because Sentance was so impressive and persuasive.”

He’s also undertaken the politically difficult but necessary task of raising the bar for teacher preparation and certification.

At an education summit in March hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, Sentance noted, “We have a majority of our people coming through (the certification) system who could not be teachers in other states for mathematics.”

Changing that type of inadequacy undoubtedly makes Sentance unpopular with Montgomery’s education cartel.

Sentance also brings experience from Massachusetts, one of the best school systems in the nation, into Alabama, one of the worst. That’s extremely valuable even if it might hurt our pride a little to admit it.

The drive to push out Sentance seems most fueled by the controversy surrounding state superintendent runner-up Craig Pouncey. After failing to secure the post in August of 2016, Pouncey sued state officials, alleging they fabricated an ethics complaint that harmed his chances at becoming superintendent. While Pouncey is well within his rights to sue, nobody is alleging that Sentance was somehow involved in that controversy.

We don’t owe it to Pouncey to fire Sentance. That’s simply ridiculous.

Sentance is learning the hard way about how politicized education is in Alabama. It’s not enough for him to have the right ideas and conduct business behind the scenes. He has to sell it to the public, and he simply hasn’t done enough of that. If he’s going to push for changes that ruffle the feathers of the current education power structure, he needs allies. I’ve spoken with people close to Sentance who recognize that he’s a smart guy with confidence bordering arrogance. If he’s going to survive, he must acclimate to his new surroundings quickly.

But he’s been on the job less than a year.

Stephanie Bell, the longest-tenured member of the state board, has been on the job for 22 years. Ella Bell has put in 16 years, and Betty Peters has racked up 14. The other four board members combine for a total of 18 years of experience.

If they’re willing to get rid of Sentance after less than a year, how about we “evaluate” them for how Alabama education has performed during their tenures?

If the state board isn’t confident of our resounding affirmation, they should give Sentance a little more time and space to see if he can deliver results.

Otherwise, we should hold them to the same impatient standard they seem bent on applying.

Maybe it’s time we start asking whether we really need the Alabama board of education at all.

Smith is a regular columnist for AL.com and vice president for the R Street Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C.

If the state board isn’t confident of our resounding affirmation, they should give Sentance a little more time and space to see if he can deliver results.
This board can't do math — among many things

John Archibald
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What's left to say about another stupid rift between politicians?
What's left, that is, that Mark Twain didn't already write?
"In the first place, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards."

There is a little more to add: When he got really good, God made the Alabama School Board.

Whew. This school board is so bad that even its president — Gov. Kay Ivey — avoids it like jury duty.

I asked her, as she announced her new education plan in Birmingham on Wednesday, why she only attended one of seven board meetings held on her watch.

"There are just so many hours in the day," she said, "and so many days in a week."

I feel ya, governor. Except I'm not the president of the school board. Or the governor preparing to unveil an education initiative.

But after Tuesday's board meeting, I'd give most anybody a pass for playing hooky.

It was a meeting representative of all that's wrong with schools, a contentious display of bad blood, bad intentions and bad math.

A majority of the board wants to get rid of beleaguered Superintendent Michael Sentance, who is, I'll give him this, not an educator, cannot spell the word sentence, and is as popular in schools as head lice.

They think his hiring was a scam and a conspiracy, aided and abetted by board member Mary Scott Hunter and those who would destroy public schools, so they rushed to evaluate Sentance as a precursor to firing him.

Sentance supporters argue that board member Stephanie Bell and the others just want to put Sentance in a bad light so they can get rid of him and preserve the old status quo, and the machinery that created it.

There is some truth on both sides. But there's ugliness too. Sort of makes you want to look the other way, like the governor.

But if you look away you'll miss a lot.
Like the way the board tried to pull a math fast one, but wasn't so swift.

There are nine members of this board, including Ivey. Each member was asked to evaluate Sentance on a range of topics, using a scale of 1-3.

Ivey declined to evaluate, saying she hasn't been in office long enough (or often enough) to judge him. Hunter refused to evaluate because she disagreed with the process.

So there should have been seven evaluators.

But no. The board calculated Sentance's scores by totaling the results and dividing by the number of board members. But it didn't divide by seven. It divided by eight. It counted Hunter's protests as zeros.

It used the wrong divisor. Which an Alabama third-grader could figure out.

Which ought to be hilarious. But it's not.
Because a few things are true.

Alabama's education system is as broken as a political promise. It was broken before Sentance got here and it is broken now. It scored a D- on last year's Quality Counts survey by Education Week, and there weren't any Fs.

Some people applauded because it wasn't the worst.

It ranked 47th.

The more the school board fights to preserve the status quo, the more education in Alabama will stay exactly the same. Is that worse than Sentance? Or the way he was hired a year ago?

It depends on whether you are happy with the way things are, and the way they've been.

It's great. If D- is good enough.

Archibald writes a regular opinion column for AL.com.
State school board gives low marks to superintendent

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — State school board members on Tuesday handed low performance evaluation scores to Superintendent Michael Sentance, the education reformer they picked less than a year ago to lead the state's public school system.

The evaluation, which took place in a specially called meeting, could signal a move by some board members to try to demand changes or force his ouster before his contract expires.

Board members ranked the superintendent's performance on a scale of one to three in several categories. Sentance scored averages between 1.28 and 2.07, although one board member did not participate because she thought the process was unfair to Sentance.

"The idea of an evaluation is not only to have a discussion from the point of the employer but to give the employee an opportunity to address concerns," Vice President Stephanie Bell said at the meeting's start as she pushed for the evaluation.

Board members largely did not discuss their views of Sentance in Tuesday's meeting — or what concerns they had — but mostly argued over the process.

"I think this was an illegitimate process," board member Mary Scott Hunter said. Hunter said the evaluation should not have been placed on the agenda without a board vote. Hunter did not submit a performance review.

The meeting became heated at times after board members clashed over whether to proceed.

"I did not approve this," Hunter said.

See MARKS, B4
City examines rules for restaurants, bars

Eateries that morph into nighttime bars draw complaints

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

To better regulate bars, restaurants and nighttime entertainment in the downtown area, Tuscaloosa city officials are first seeking to define what those businesses do.

But these efforts have drawn the attention of downtown historic residents, who want to ensure their neighborhoods and way of life aren't encroached upon any more than some residents say they already are.

The Tuscaloosa City Council has yet to reach any kind of consensus, but the conversation over these definitions and potential rule changes has dominated two committee meetings in recent weeks.

The latest was on July 18, when the public was shown a second look at potential definitions for bars, restaurants, cafes, coffeehouses and something the city is calling "gastropubs," which are businesses that start the day as a restaurant but morph into a bar during nighttime hours.

According to the city's Office of Urban Development, said the only definitions the city code currently has regarding businesses of this sort are for brewpubs and breweries.

Nothing else is legally defined.

"The intent of the discussion is to get definitions into the zoning ordinance that will allow us to regulate food and beverage establishments"

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RULES

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correctly and accurately,” said Tuscaloosa Planning Director Philip O’Leary.

Another part of this discussion, though, is the addition of buffers around Queen City Avenue and the city’s historic districts to prevent night-oriented businesses from disturbing those who live in these areas.

At issue is the inclusion of a proposed 150-foot buffer from Queen City Avenue and a 200-foot buffer from historic homes or detached dwellings in the historic areas.

“These buffers are still under discussion, however,” O’Leary said.

And last week, the buffers drew heavy discussion from those who stand to be affected.

Developer Phillip Weaver, who has renovated and upgraded a number of downtown structures, questioned how far the city was willing to go to limit the use of certain buildings.

Weaver now owns the former AlaGasCo building located less than a block from Queen City Avenue on University Boulevard, which could stand to be affected by the new buffer rules.

He said there was no plan to put a bar or business that stayed open until the early morning hours in there, but he may want a restaurant that converts to a bar and offers live music at about 10 p.m.

“I’m looking for the right thing to put in there,” Weaver said, “but you’re not letting (a property owner) use their place.

“It makes it hard to recruit somebody – maybe a real top-notch restaurant – that wants to come in here,” Al Spencer, the vice president for economic development and public policy for the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, agreed and said buffer rules like the ones proposed by City Hall make it difficult to lure new businesses into the area.

“It adds a level of complexity,” Spencer said.

Noting that around 60 percent of all restaurants fail within the first three years, Spencer said a case-by-case consideration of the type of business proposed for a location would help.

“All bars are not created equal,” Spencer said, adding that whatever the council chooses should have room for flexibility.

But residents living near Queen City Avenue had a different set of concerns.

They said the proposed buffers weren’t enough to keep out the noise of traffic, slamming car doors and nighttime revelry out of their neighborhoods.

“We don’t want to inhibit restaurants downtown,” said Kelly Fitts, president of the Original City Association. “It’s when these things turn into late-night activities that it becomes a real problem for us.”

The Original City Association, or OCA, is a volunteer group that acts as an advocate on behalf of the downtown’s historic district residents.

Fitts, a vocal advocate for the rights of these residents, was joined by other members of the group who said businesses that operate until 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. make life difficult for those who call these areas home.

“It is not compatible with residential properties to have those things that close to us,” she said. “Would you want to have a bar ... that operates until 3 o’clock in the morning 200 feet from your home? I don’t think any of you would.”

While no decision was reached by the City Council’s administration and policy committee – it was tabled for two more weeks the council members expressed skepticism on the need for additional rules and regulations.

“We’re creating these different things when there’s not really a problem,” said District 7 Councilwoman Sonya McKinstry.

Councilman Matt Calderone questioned how city forces could police these businesses and ensure those with a restaurant definition weren’t secretly converting to a bar later in the night.

That, according to Ashley Crites, the associate director of planning in the city’s Office of Urban Development, is why the new definitions are needed.

“It’s all going to be a matter of operation and how that space is being used,” Crites said. “That’s why the (updated) definitions are so important.”

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Bolta marks new plant's opening

By: Stephen Dethrage

The Bolta Group celebrated the grand opening of its first production facility in the United States on Friday afternoon in the Tuscaloosa Airport Industrial Park.

The multinational company specializes in automotive surface finishing, applying nickel and chrome plating to plastic parts and decorative trim. Among other things, workers at the new facility will produce the iconic three-pointed star hood ornament for the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant in Vance.

The $50 million plant employs 200 today and expects to increase that number to at least 350 workers by the end of 2018, although the head of Bolta’s parent company, the Purico Group, said they expect even more growth than that.

“We do not hope to expand, we expect to expand, to employ a lot more people,” said Nathu Puri, who founded the Purico group in 1983. “It’s very difficult when you come to a new place and have to find the right people, but here we can train them ourselves and it will be easier. Wherever we are, we try to work hard there and end up with a much bigger operation.”

The grand opening drew political and business leaders from around Tuscaloosa County, the state of Alabama and international locations.

U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt said no one does industrial development better than Tuscaloosa and said there was no end in sight to the growth going on in this community.

Greg Canfield, the state’s secretary of commerce, called Tuscaloosa the birthplace and cradle of Alabama’s automotive industry and promised to support Bolta’s operations here.

“Our pledge to you, on behalf of everyone in our economic development community, is that we stand with you as part of your team, as an extension of your growth and success not only today but well into the future,” Canfield said.

The 200,000 square-foot plant was built on the industrial complex’s Boone Boulevard, but Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox used his executive privilege to rename the road Puri Drive on Friday afternoon.

Maddox said he and County Commission Chairman Hardy McCollum have been working to see a Bolta plant built in Tuscaloosa since 2011 and they were thrilled to see those efforts come to fruition.

“One of the things I will always remember about this particular initiative is that we really wanted it bad,” Maddox said. “Over the years the right opportunity finally met with the right circumstances, and that culminates today.”

Johannes Carl, who will serve as the plant’s managing director and vice president, said Bolta US is committed to following the example of the Purico Group, which has donated more than $30 million to charitable causes worldwide.

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To that end, Carl said each of the plant’s workers has agreed to donate a hot meal to the hungry in Tuscaloosa every day for a week. Carl presented Amy Grimstead, the executive director of the Community Soup Bowl, a $3,600 check from Bolta US.

“In this country and in Tuscaloosa, there are people that have basic needs go unmet,” Carl said. “I hope this will make an impact – not forever, but maybe for a little moment.”

Bolta US is the latest of more than 20 suppliers that have set up shop in Tuscaloosa County since Mercedes began producing vehicles at the Vance plant in 1997. According to the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority, those suppliers employ nearly 5,000 people and represent capital investments of more than $700 million.
Hang in there

It is vital that good people like Jeff Sessions continue to anchor Trump administration

Ed Rogers  Special to The Washington Post

In an extraordinary interview with The New York Times, President Donald Trump was inappropriately critical of Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

It is stunning that a president would so publicly criticize one of his most loyal senior supporters. Trump's interview was almost an invitation for Sessions to resign. The attorney general should not do so.

Jeff Sessions, please hang in there.

There are many good people serving in this administration, under difficult circumstances. The circumstances are not difficult because of a foreign threat, economic calamity or effective political opposition. They are difficult because of the conduct, temperament and character of the president.

Nonetheless, it is vital that the good people who function as the anchors of the Trump administration stay in place and serve for as long as they can. Without them, things would be worse. The American political system could become more fragile and our country could be in peril.

Everyone working in an administration always wants the president's confidence. But if the things you have to do to maintain that confidence are inconsistent with performing in a way that best serves American interests, then you should keep doing your job despite knowing that the president is dissatisfied with your work.

It is easy to see how people such as national security adviser H.R. McMaster and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis are pivotal in ensuring the worst does not happen. Their presence guarantees that America's weapons arsenal is safe and our defenses are at the ready. But there are also scores of other White House staff members and executive agency leaders who are vital to keeping some semblance of a rational functioning of the bureaucracy.

Jeff Sessions is one such person. He knows what to do as attorney general and what is best for the country — even if the president does not. We owe Sessions and others more because they are serving in the Trump administration, not less.

Trump is erratic and too often unappreciative of those serving in his administration. He is unnecessarily dismissive of their contributions and peddles unsubstantiated mis­truths that degrade morale throughout the White House, his administration and the entire federal government.

Given the president's predilection to throwing anyone and everyone around him under the bus when the times are tough, I worry that there could be a wholesale exodus from the administration after the midterm elections (if not before) and an inability to refill vital posts with good people.

So, to Sessions and others who are serving in the Trump administration, remember that your commitment may not always be to the man, Donald Trump, but to the institution that you serve and to the presidency itself. Hang in there. Don't quit.

And for those of you thinking about accepting a job in the administration but have doubts after reading stories such as the one in the New York Times, ignore them. Take that job and do your best. A lot of people will be thankful you did. And a lot of people will be pulling for you.

Even if the president fails to realize that he needs good people around him, the fact is, America needs good people. Perhaps that much is true now more than ever and becoming more true as conditions deteriorate.

The honorable thing to do at a time like this is not quit, but stay and try to keep the worst from happening.

Rogers is a political consultant and a veteran of the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush White Houses. He is chairman of the lobbying and communications firm BGR Group, which he founded with former Mississippi governor Haley Barbour in 1991.
Gas tax increase for roadwork on horizon?

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Recent proposals to raise the gasoline tax in Alabama have drawn influential supporters, but a serious push is probably two years away, the leader of the Alabama House of Representatives said.

Proponents of an increase say the gas tax, last raised in 1992, does not bring in enough money to maintain state and county roads and improve main corridors to meet traffic demands.

Speaker Mac McCutcheon, R-Monrovia, said a House vote on a gas tax bill is unlikely next year, an election year for all 140 seats in the Legislature. He said that could change if Congress approved a federal highway and infrastructure plan, which President Trump calls a high priority.

"I think the only thing that would push us in that direction, if the federal government came out with a program during the election-year session; I think it would at least help the public realize that the need is there, the timing is now," McCutcheon said. "We must do something. But without that, I don't think we're going to be able to have any kind of a gas tax bill on the floor for this coming session."

McCutcheon has supported a gas tax increase the last few years and sponsored a bill in 2015. The Business Council of Alabama, the Alabama Farmers Federation and other groups supported a bill this year. It would have raised the gasoline and diesel tax by 4 cents a gallon this year and 2 cents a gallon in 2019. The bill dedicated the money to bonds for road construction and maintenance.

McCutcheon declared the bill dead after it failed to gain traction in the House.

Gov. Kay Ivey has also supported an increase, saying it's needed for Alabama to have money available to draw federal dollars for any large infrastructure plan from the Trump administration and Congress.

Proponents of an increase say the revenue from Alabama's 18-cents-per-gallon gas tax has not kept pace with the cost inflation of road maintenance and construction. Another factor is that cars use less gas than 25 years ago.

McCutcheon said well designed and maintained roads and highways are essential to the economy.

"You cannot have economic growth unless you've got a good infrastructure system in place," McCutcheon said. "Simply put, we haven't addressed it in 25 years. So we can't stay on this course."

Alabama drivers pay less tax on gasoline than those in most states.

The American Petroleum Institute publishes reports on state gasoline taxes. As of July 1, federal, state, city and county taxes and fees totaled 41.3 cents per gallon in Alabama. The API averaged the state's various county and city taxes, weighted by volume, to reach that number. The average for states overall was 50 cents per gallon.

For diesel, Alabama taxes and fees were 46.3 cents per gallon, below the national average of 56 cents.

Alabama's gasoline taxes and fees were less than three neighboring states, Florida (55.2 cents), Georgia (49.5 cents) and Tennessee (43.8 cents). Mississippi's taxes and fees totaled 37.2 cents, according to the Petroleum Institute.

The federal gasoline tax is 18.4 cents per gallon and was last changed in 1993. President Trump has said he's open to raising it, but there's no consensus in the GOP-controlled Congress.

House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels, D-Huntsville, said all important issues should be on the table, regardless of whether it's an election year.

"We have an obligation to solve the state's problems," Daniels said. "And I just hope that we would address these issues head-on and not run away from them in an election year."

McCutcheon said efforts to show the need for a gas tax increase over the last few years, including public hearings around the state, have not gone to waste, even though the bills have failed.

"All of these things that we've been talking about people are beginning to respond to now," McCutcheon said. "It's been 25 years since we've addressed the state's highway needs when it comes to revenue."
Jefferson County

$1.5M grant helps county tackle rape kit backlog

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The Jefferson County district attorney's office doesn't know how many untested rape kits it has — but it plans to find out and test them all.

There have been more than 27,000 rapes in Alabama in the past 19 years, according to the office. Of those, 21 percent took place in Jefferson County.

Last week, District Attorney Pro Tem Danny Carr announced the DA's office doesn't know how many untested rape kits the county has.

That realization, along with support from local advocates and groups, prompted the office to apply for a grant from the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. Last year, the Jefferson County DA's office won the $1.5 million grant. It will fund a three-year project to create a county-wide inventory of backlogged rape kits and build a database to store the kits' information.

SEE RAPE KITS, A4
RAPE KITS
FROM AL

"With 27 jurisdictions and two DA's offices (including Bessemer Cutoff), additional resources are needed to develop a common language and protocol for addressing sexual assault county-wide. The inventory should give us a clear picture of the status of the kits in our county," Carr said.

The money will also go toward a new model for the DA's handling of sexual assault cases. Carr said the grant will allow the office to hire three court advocates to help sexual assault survivors through the judicial system, and hire a prosecutor specifically for sexual assault cases.

The DA's office will also build a multidisciplinary team of police, prosecutors and community partners to address the needs of survivors and develop a protocol for testing and investigating cases.

The Joyful Heart Foundation — a national organization started by actress Mariska Hargitay of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" — recently released information about the backlog of rape kits in Birmingham. According to the organization website, in 2014 they issued an open records request for the number of untested kits in Birmingham. According to the organization, in 2014 they issued an open records request for the number of untested kits in Birmingham. According to the organization, the Birmingham Police Department stated that they submit all kits to the lab for testing, and that, as of February 2015, there was a backlog of 442 kits from Birmingham awaiting testing at the state lab, the group stated.

Information from the group showed in 2015, the Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded the Mobile Police Department $828,203 to test 1,793 kits. Last year, the BJA awarded the Mobile Police Department $118,111 to sustain its work.

PETITION

An Alabama woman, who identified herself as Alexis Sharpe, recently started an online petition directed at the Alabama Legislature to test all backlogged rape kits. Her petition on Care2 (thepetitionsite.com/492/058/746/) has a goal of 35,000 signatures and, as of Friday afternoon, already had more than 33,000.

Sharpe was 16 in 2015 when she was raped by a man in his 20s, according to the petition. She went to a child advocacy center in Birmingham for an examination, and says she was made to "feel like a criminal." After that, she heard nothing.

"All I have is my police report. And as far as I know, my rape kit was never tested and my rapist was never even questioned," she said.

Ilse Knecht, director of policy and advocacy at Joyful Heart Foundation, said she applauds agencies like the Jefferson County DA's office that apply, and are awarded, SAKI grant funds.

"It's the first step toward comprehensive reform," she said.

She explained the backlog of rape kits is a problem in several ways, because it represents the failure of the criminal justice system to prioritize sexual assault cases and put resources toward them. Also, the backlog sends a message to victims and offenders.

"What happened to them doesn't matter and what they've done (in seeking justice) ... doesn't matter," is the message victims receive, Knecht said.

To offenders, the backlog sends a message that "we're not going to hold you accountable for your crime and you can do it again."

"There's a level of awareness I've never seen," Knecht said about sexual assault. "We've got to get (law enforcement) up to speed."

In addition to prosecuting individual cases, Knecht said the foundation's research shows agencies that test all rape kits often make connections between offenders, and realize one person has committed several sexual assaults in a community. Usually, police discover that same offender has committed other crimes, such as burglary, theft or homicide.

"When we aren't testing rape kits, we are letting dangerous offenders remain on the street ... (The testing of backlogged kits) brings increased safety to our communities by taking these people off the streets," she said.

Knecht was not surprised the Jefferson County DA's office doesn't know its number of untested rape kits. She said that's actually pretty common. "Very few communities have tracking for rape kits ... AKI addresses the kits that never made it to the lab, that are still sitting on law enforcement shelves."

The Birmingham News
Sunday, July 23, 2017
Double the achievement

Twins with Down syndrome graduate from Rise Center

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Cathleen Hines set a goal for her twins, Sally Cate and Anne Rogers, to walk into the 1-year-old classroom at the Rise Center at the University of Alabama.

Cathleen and Bo Hines first came to the Rise Center on the UA campus when their girls were still infants in a neonatal intensive care unit. The twins have Down syndrome, and the couple was researching the school, which is part of UA’s College of Human Environmental Sciences and offers an integrated program for preschool students with disabilities and their regularly developing peers. Cathleen and Bo Hines met with then-Rise director Martha Cook about the possibilities.

“She told us that the girls could do anything they wanted to do, they just might take a little bit longer,” Cathleen Hines said. “And that has been the truth.”

Five years on, the girls run and walk, and swing as high as they can on the playground. Anne Rogers is the quiet one who is happy playing by herself. Sally Cate is more outgoing with a flair for the

See GRADUATION, A6

Twin sisters Sally Cate Hines and Anne Rogers Hines are robed for dress rehearsal for graduation at the Rise Center in Tuscaloosa on Thursday. (STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.)
GRADUATION

Continued from A1

dramatic. The girls' interests are similar to their peers, their parents said. They love swimming, dancing, reading books and playing on iPads.

“They are great swimmers,” Bo Hines said. “They are little fish, swimming fast and far. They could probably out-swim me at this point.”

On Thursday, the Hineses watched their daughters graduate from Rise, bound for Verner Elementary in the fall.

“There is nothing they can’t do. Can’t is really not part of the vocabulary at all,” their mother said.

It was mix of emotions as the Hineses watched the girls rehearse the ceremony Thursday morning at the close-knit school they had attended since infancy.

“Watching Sally Cate be such a big girl,” Bo Hines said, “she was so serious and wanting to walk down and not say ‘hi’ to daddy. You could tell she was trying so hard. I was so proud of that moment. It’s a little moment, but it is the little things that bring us joy.”

The graduation's cinematic theme was “That’s a Wrap.”

The children bopped down the aisle in tie-dye shirts as they rehearsed for their graduation that evening. The boys and girls performed skits along to songs from movies including “Rocky,” “Top Gun,” “Ghostbusters,” “Despicable Me” and “Madagascar.”

After receiving their diplomas and hugs, the students went through their last costume change. They traded graduation robes for T-shirts with the message “Straight Outta Rise.” They left as they entered, with smiles and waves to the audience.

“It's an amazing milestone in our family's life,” Bo Hines said. “We are so proud of what they have done. It is kind of like we are going to the grownup real world now.”

Rise Director Andi Gillen reflected on the class and the students' futures as they left to join new schools in the fall.

“Above all, they are caring, kind and protective of their friends,” she said. “They serve as models...”

—Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
UA, Bell added to Rondini lawsuit

Suit cites failure to assist her after rape report

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Attorneys for Megan Rondini's family have added the University of Alabama and President Stuart Bell to the wrongful death lawsuit that claims her suicide resulted from the school's failure to assist her after she reported that she was raped.

Rondini hanged herself in February 2016, almost eight months after she reported to police that T.J. Bunn Jr. raped her in his home in Cottondale. She was a UA student at the time of the alleged assault. Investigators and prosecutors ultimately claimed they didn't have enough evidence to charge Bunn, who has denied the allegation through his attorney. Rondini's family believes that the Bunn family's connections to the university and Tuscaloosa community influenced the lack of prosecution and support she was offered.

The Maxwell Law Firm in Birmingham filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit on behalf of her parents earlier this month, naming T.J. Bunn Jr., the Tuscaloosa County sheriff, two investigators and two University of Alabama employees, alleging that all of them contributed to their daughter's suicide. An amended complaint filed Wednesday dropped the two...
UA employees from the suit and added the university and its president. UA must follow the federal Title IX civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities. A school that receives federal funding can be held legally responsible when it knows about and ignores sexual harassment or sexual assault.

"The facts underlying the failures of UA and the other defendants to protect Megan and to prefer its relationship with a wealthy donor family are shocking," the Rondinis' attorneys wrote in the amended complaint. The attorneys claim that the university retaliated against Rondini after she filed complaints.

According to the lawsuit: "If a student files a complaint with a school receiving federal funding, the school must process the complaint in accordance with its established procedures, regardless of where the conduct occurred. The school's inquiry into any such complaint must be prompt, thorough, and impartial, and it must disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest to the complainant."

UA issued a response to the amended complaint Thursday:

"The university has been made aware that the lawsuit concerning the alleged sexual assault against Megan Rondini has been amended," the statement read. "Not surprisingly, the plaintiffs' lawyers have dropped their claims against our Title IX coordinator and our former counselor. We will vigorously defend the new claims against the university and the president. Despite Megan's reported assault occurring off-campus and not involving allegations against a university employee or student, the university's Title IX office and our Women and Gender Resource Center handled their responsibilities with care at all times, keeping Megan's well-being as their absolute highest priority from the moment they became aware of the alleged assault.

"Megan's death is a tragedy. Our hearts go out to her loved ones who grieve her loss alongside our university family. Out of respect to Megan, the Rondini family, and the judicial process, the university does not intend to comment further on the substance of the lawsuit's allegations."

Rondini met T.J. Bunn Jr. and his friend at Innisfree, a downtown Tuscaloosa pub, where "upon information and belief, Megan became either intoxicated or drugged," her family's attorneys wrote in the complaint. Rondini then called her parents, sought treatment at DCH Regional Medical Center and filed the report with police.

Bunn's father, Terry Bunn, and uncle, S.T. Bunn, own ST Bunn Construction, a company that claims to have paved every road in Tuscaloosa and has made the family a wealthy one. The Rondinis' attorneys noted in the lawsuit that the company is a member of the Crimson Tide Foundation for having given between $100,000 and $500,000 in lifetime gifts to UA Athletics and that S.T. Bunn serves on Bell's President's Cabinet and the Engineering School's Leadership Board.

Attorneys wrote that UA was "deliberately indifferent" to Rondini's claims of rape, creating "an abusive and hostile educational environment for Megan, sufficient that she was forced to leave the campus, and was ultimately a cause of her loss of life."

As president, Bell should have ensured that employees were properly trained and that practices were in place to meet the Title IX requirements and provide adequate services and care for sexual assault victims, the attorneys said.

Rondini was treated for post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression in her hometown in Texas before returning to Tuscaloosa for the 2015-16 fall semester, according..."
to the lawsuit. She sought treatment from the Women and Gender Resource Center and became distraught when, after telling her story to a counselor, the counselor revealed she couldn’t help her because she knows the Bunn family. A second counselor said she couldn’t meet with Rondini until she began taking anti-anxiety medication, the lawsuit states, and she was forced to wait several weeks before she was able to meet with a professional.

Once she did have an appointment in September of that year, Rondini told the counselor that she was uneasy and afraid she would see Bunn on campus, saying that she had seen a suspicious car outside her apartment. The suit claims that UA should have banned T.J. Bunn from campus under Title IX requirements, but did not do so.

T.J. Bunn’s attorney, Ivey Gilmore of Tuscaloosa, placed a full-page ad in Thursday’s edition of The Tuscaloosa News titled “Character Assassination in the Internet Age.”

The text maintains T.J. Bunn’s innocence, and criticizes a BuzzFeed News article published online last month that first made the Rondinis’ allegations public.

“These Internet-based ‘digital media journalists’ have no regard for the truth or for our community,” the ad reads. “They have taken generations of civic involvement, support of education, support of law enforcement, support of our hospital and civic generosity and condemned it as nothing more than a broad conspiracy.”

The ad purports that “the horrible, misleading and blatantly false accusations of BuzzFeed and malicious false assertions of social media attackers attempt to extort money with a lawsuit,” saying “these ‘journalists’ have used selective facts, gossip and have outright lied about the facts of the case.”

Gilmore wrote in the advertisement that he has viewed all of the evidence collected by law enforcement in the case, which The Tuscaloosa News has requested via a public records request.

“While the lawsuit alleges that a sexual assault occurred, the young woman’s own text messages to friends immediately before make it clear her sexual encounter was consensual,” he wrote, saying that the evidence he’s reviewed is what led to decisions by law enforcement, prosecutors and a grand jury not to press charges. That evidence will eventually be made available to the public as the lawsuit proceeds, he said.

“It is regretful that the young woman’s own texts, emails, photographs and statements will bring such embarrassment and intense examination for her friends and associates,” Gilmore wrote.

As of Thursday afternoon, none of the defendants in the case had filed formal responses to the lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. District Court in Birmingham before Magistrate Judge T. Michael Putnam. The Rondinis are seeking a jury trial and unspecified damages.
TUSCALOOSA

Defense goes on offense in case of university student's alleged rape

Carol Robinson crobinson@al.com

The attorney for a Tuscaloosa man implicated in the alleged sexual assault of a former University of Alabama student went on offense Thursday with a full-page ad in the Tuscaloosa News.

Megan Rondini later killed herself after alleging the rape and transferring to another college. Her parents filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit against the accused, 36-year-old T.J. Bunn, as well as two university employees, the Tuscaloosa County sheriff, a sheriff's deputy and a sheriff's office investigator.

Bunn's lawyer, Ivey Gilmore, said in the ad — titled "Character Assassination In The Internet Age" — that he has now reviewed all of the evidence obtained by law enforcement in the case and that while the lawsuit

SEE DEFENSE, AS

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DEFENSE
FROM A1

claims a sexual assault took place, Rondini's text messages to friends immediately before the incident make it clear that she intended to have a sexual encounter with Bunn.

"To be clear, this case is not a matter of 'he said, she said,'" Gilmore wrote. "It is this young woman's own words, and her own text messages that led every investigating authority to conclude she had not been sexually assaulted."

An attorney for the firm that filed the wrongful death lawsuit said the ad "reeks of desperation and is a clear attempt to bully the Rondini family."

"The text messages ... show exactly how a situation can devolve into a nightmare in a matter of minutes," said Ontario Tillman, of the Maxwell Law Firm. "It's no accident that this paid ad carefully avoids to mention the messages and phone calls that occurred immediately after that tragic night. This is a classic case of victim blaming and a sad attempt to justify a sexual assault."

2015 INCIDENT

Rondini was a UA student from Texas when she reported to police she was raped by Bunn in 2015. Rondini's story went public in a June Buzzfeed story, as told by her parents, Michael and Cynthia Rondini, family and friends. They claimed the 20-year-old was mistreated by Tuscaloosa investigators, the university and DCH Regional Medical Center.

The lawsuit, filed by attorney Leroy Maxwell Jr., identifies Bunn as being part of a family that is "well connected and powerful in the Tuscaloosa community, and were major financial supporters of UA." Bunn works at ST Bunn Construction Company, which is across the street from the Innisfree Pub, where Rondini reportedly became drunk, or was drugged, before being raped for 30 minutes in July 2015.

Gilmore has previously said in a statement that Rondini invited Bunn and another man to her apartment where they shared drinks. She then left her apartment with Bunn of her own free will and went to Bunn's home.

Here are excerpts from the Buzzfeed article:

"Bunn brought her over to his bed and pulled her shorts to the side while she looked away from him, she told investigators. The incident report would later state that she 'verbally informed Bunn that she did not want to have sex with him and that she needed to rejoin her friends at Innisfree,' but that he 'ignored these statements and continued to engage in intercourse with her.' Afterward, Bunn passed out, and she felt she could leave safely, she said. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't open his door. She started texting friends around 1 a.m., begging for help.

"OMG," she wrote to one, 'I can't get out of the room.'

"Megan told police that, in a panic, she climbed through Bunn's second-story window, jumped onto a gate and then to the dark, unfamiliar street below. When she realized she didn't have her keys, she started frantically searching for them, even climbing back into Bunn's room and then out again. Next, she checked Bunn's Mercedes, where she found his wallet and a pistol. She grabbed $3 in case she had to take a cab and
the gun ‘for safety,’ she told investigators. Megan didn’t know how to handle guns, she’d later explain, and she accidentally fired it before dropping the weapon to the ground. Finally, a friend picked her up. They arrived at Tuscaloosa’s DCH Regional Medical Center around 2:40 a.m.

**RONDINI FAMILY LAWSUIT**

The lawsuit filed on behalf of her family claims authorities sided with Bunn’s version of events and did not thoroughly follow up on Rondini’s story, and that an investigating officer was more interested in finding out whether Rondini committed any crimes on the night of the rape.

The university allegedly “deliberately and repeatedly denied services and mishandled accommodations with hostility toward” Rondini, the suit goes on to say. The lawsuit claims Rondini confided in a UA counselor who told her she could no longer give her therapy because she was a family friend of the Bunn’s, and that a second counselor would not see Rondini unless she first took anxiety medication.

The lawsuit also claims UA did not accommodate Rondini after the rape, alleging she saw Bunn’s car outside her apartment and saw her alleged rapist on the Tuscaloosa campus. Prior to the lawsuit, the university had issued this statement:

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

**GILMORE’S ADVERTISEMENT**

Gilmore’s ad, however, states, “The horrible, misleading and blatantly false accusations of BuzzFeed and malicious false assertions of social media attackers are designed to do nothing more than attempt to extort money with a lawsuit. These ‘journalists’ have used selective facts, gossip and have outright lied about the facts of the case.”

“So why is the tragic suicide of this young woman now the subject of a lawsuit? It is because some of those involved have determined that money can be gained, one way or another, at the expense of this young woman’s reputation,” Gilmore wrote. “This matter is now before the Court, and in an open court, ALL the evidence, the text messages, the statements she made, photographs on her phone, everything will be aired for consideration. The full review of the evidence will show that law enforcement, the grand jury, the hospital and others involved acted properly because no sexual assault occurred.”
Ad says dead former UA student's text messages exonerate alleged assailant

By: Carol Robinson

The attorney for a Tuscaloosa man implicated in the alleged sexual assault of a former University of Alabama student has gone on the offense with a full-page ad in Thursday's Tuscaloosa News.

The student, Megan Rondini, killed herself after alleging the rape and transferring to another college. Her parents have since filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit against the accused, 36-year-old T.J. Bunn, as well as two university employees, the Tuscaloosa County sheriff, a sheriff's deputy and a sheriff's office investigator.

Bunn's lawyer, Ivey Gilmore, said in the ad - entitled "Character Assassination In The Internet Age." - that he has now reviewed all of the evidence obtained by law enforcement in the case and that while the lawsuit claims a sexual assault took place, Rondini's text messages to friends immediately before the incident make it clear that she intended to have a sexual encounter with Bunn.

"To be clear, this case is not a matter of 'he said, she said,'" Gilmore wrote. "It is this young woman's own words, and her own text messages that led every investigating authority to conclude she had not been sexually assaulted."

An attorney for the firm that filed the wrongful death lawsuit had this to say about the ad: "This paid advertisement reeks of desperation and is a clear attempt to bully the Rondini Family," said Ontario Tillman of the Maxwell Law Firm. "The text messages Sweet-T's lawyer refer to show exactly how a situation can devolve into a nightmare in a matter of minutes. It's no accident that this paid ad carefully avoids to mention the messages and phone calls that occurred immediately after that tragic night. This is classic case of victim blaming and a sad attempt to justify a sexual assault."

Rondini was a UA student from Texas when she reported to police she was raped by Bunn in 2015. Rondini's story became public in a June BuzzFeed story, as told by her parents, Michael and Cynthia Rondini, family and friends. They claimed the 20-year-old was mistreated by Tuscaloosa investigators, the university and DCH Regional Medical Center.

The lawsuit, filed by attorney Leroy Maxwell Jr., identifies Bunn as being part of a family that is "well connected and powerful in the Tuscaloosa community, and were major financial supporters of UA." Bunn works at ST Bunn Construction Company, which is across the street from the Innisfree Pub, where Rondini reportedly became drunk, or was drugged, before being raped for 30 minutes in July 2015.

See next page
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The lawsuit filed on behalf of her family claims that authorities sided with Bunn's version of events and did not thoroughly follow-up on Rondini's story, and that an investigating officer was more interested in finding out whether Rondini committed any crimes on the night of the rape. The university allegedly "deliberately and repeatedly denied services and mishandled accommodations with hostility toward" Rondini, the suit goes on to say. The lawsuit claims Rondini confided in a UA counselor who told her she could no longer give her therapy because she was a family friend of the Bunns, and that a second counselor would not see Rondini unless she first took anxiety medication.

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Gilmore’s ad, however, states:

"The horrible, misleading and blatantly false accusations of BuzzFeed and malicious false assertions of social media attackers are designed to do nothing more than attempt to extort money with a lawsuit," he wrote. "These 'journalists' have used selective facts, gossip and have outright lied about the facts of the case."

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The ad goes on to say, "It is regretful that BuzzFeed and a group of trial lawyers have chosen to potentially expose the most intimate and sensitive (and embarrassing) aspects of this young woman's life in this lawsuit," he wrote. "Further, it is regretful that the young woman's own texts, emails, photographs and statements will bring such embarrassment and intense examination for her friends and associates. But that is their choice and the result of their actions."

Gilmore said Bunn's family is consulting with their own attorneys in the aftermath of intense scrutiny of the entire family. "The Bunn family, T.J. Bunn's mother and father, his other relatives and S.T. Bunn Construction have nothing to do with the civil action that has been brought against T.J. Bunn. But these internet 'news' sources have gone beyond misrepresentation of facts, they maligned, insulted and in fact probably libeled members of the family and their friends and associates."
University Boulevard upgrade is part of $13.6 million in improvements

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Crews in the next few weeks are scheduled to complete the latest phase of an ongoing road improvements project on the east side of the University of Alabama.

The stretch of University Boulevard between Paul W. Bryant Drive and Anna Avenue near the marching band practice field is open, though crews are still completing a punch list and waiting for the pavement to fully cure before striping the road, according to Tim Leopard, associate vice president for construction at UA. Leopard estimated it will take three weeks for the pavement to cure.

The work this spring and summer included replacing concrete slabs with asphalt and adding medians, landscaping, a transit lane, a bike lane and making lighting improvements as part of the second phase of the project.

The scope of the second phase included widening the roadway between Dr. Edward Hillard Drive and Bryant Drive for an additional left turn lane, landscaping and moving power lines underground along the north side of University Boulevard from Second Avenue to Hackberry Lane. Workers also built a new connector road linking University Boulevard and Johnny Stallings Drive near the Capstone College of Nursing.

Phase one of the work began last spring with similar work between Sixth Avenue and the marching band field.

The phased, $13.6-million road improvements project is meant to enhance aesthetics and reduce the speed of traffic entering the eastern side of campus.
Research connects low birth weight, racial identity

Mothers' perception could hold key, UA researcher says

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Research points to a link between the significance and meaning blacks attach to their race and mental and physical health. So University of Alabama assistant professor Wanda Martin Burton wondered if racial identity also had a role to play in explaining the persistent disparity between the birth weights among children of black mothers and their white counterparts.

Stress experienced by mothers can have an impact on birth weights, noted Burton, who is a faculty member in the College of Human and Environmental Science. Positive racial identity has been shown to act as a buffer against the stress of discrimination, so Burton was curious if that buffering effect would influence birth weights.

Burton explored the hypothesis in 2011 and 2012 as a graduate student at UA by surveying black mothers in Tuscaloosa and the surrounding area. She said she found a correlation between racial identity and birth weight. Mothers who reported having full-term babies with normal birth weights reported a stronger racial identity than mothers who reported having preterm babies.

"The only thing that was significantly different about them was racial identity," Burton said, noting the research screened for other factors in low birth weights such as socioeconomic status, education level and maternal age.

Low birth weight is the leading cause of infant mortality in black infants in the United States.

See BIRTH, B3

See next page
States, and in Alabama, the low birth weight rate for black babies is nearly double the national average. Burton's research aims to change that disparity.

Her research was published in the spring use of the Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice in an article titled “Addressing the Racial Disparity in Birth Outcomes: Implications for Maternal Racial Identity on Birth Weight.”

Burton’s co-authors were UA professor Maria Hernandez-Reif and Brad Lian of Mercer University, formerly at UA, who were faculty members on Burton’s thesis committee.

The study yielded interesting results, but Burton said further research is needed to investigate the possible link.

"These finding are interesting and provocative and should lead to further research on why perhaps being immersed in your culture might protect you as a pregnant woman and lead to better health outcomes for your children," Hernandez-Reif said. "There is that whole issue of support that might me underlying those effects."

The average rate for black mother’s in Alabama who have infants born with low birth weights was 14.6 percent compared to a statewide average of 10 percent, according to 2014 data cited in the paper. Nationwide, the rate of low birth weights among blacks was roughly 13 percent compared to an overall average rate of 8 percent of births.

There have been several different strategies to reduce racial disparity in birth weight, but the rates have largely remained the same, Burton said.

“This has long been a disparity between blacks and whites," Burton said.

Defining racial identity

Burton was at a conference where research was presented about the impact of relationship quality on birth weights when she became curious about the impact of racial identity. Racial identity is defined in her paper as the significance...
and meaning that blacks attribute to their membership within the black racial group.

The study focused on women who were in the optimal maternal delivery range of 21-35 years of age. Of the 107 women surveyed, 72 were included in the analysis. The average age was around 25. The majority, 42, were married and fell into the middle of the socioeconomic scale. The study excluded women who did not complete high school to account for the negative impact of education on birth weight.

In the study, birth weights were categorized in relation to using a standard of 5.5 pounds. Birth weights below 5.5 pounds were considered low. Of the participants, 17 percent reported low birth weights.

The women reported their children's birth weight, length and term status. They also provided their socioeconomic status and measures of their mood and racial identity and identification with black culture.

Survey participants were asked what their race meant to them and how important it was to how they felt about themselves.

"It is actually pretty individualized," Burton said.

Positive racial identities can help people better deal with stressors like racist interactions and perceived racial discrimination, Burton said. Conversely, negative views can contribute to poorer health.

High scores indicated greater identification with their race and more immersion into black culture.

While the researchers expected there would be some correlations, Burton said she was surprised by the results.

Birth weights increased 4.2 ounces for each additional degree of positive self-image related to being black, according to the analysis of the data collected by Burton.

"I am very much surprised in the difference in the amount of weight," she said. "Usually when you do birth weights, you change an ounce if you are lucky."

The study also found birth weights decreased nearly 2 ounces with each additional year of age, supporting a theory of "weathering" in which blacks experience early health deterioration as a consequence of the cumulative exposure to racialized and socioeconomic stress.

"I did not expect younger women would have better birth weight outcomes than women (who were in the traditionally accepted optimal range)," she said.

The weather hypothesis is similar to accelerated aging, she said.

"Basically, the stress of injustice oppression can be internalized and change the way the body ages," she said. "... Racism almost becomes embedded in our bodies physically."

**Dealing with racism**

Burton sees her research as an interesting starting point for longer-term and broader projects. She would like to see a statewide data collection project and possibly longitudinal that track racial identity perceptions over time. Burton used the example of a study assessing racial identity in high school and following up 10 years later.

Burton also sees the findings as an opportunity for the community to begin discussing and dealing with racism in a sincere way. Hernandez-Reif said the work can help create awareness.

"What I do think is it's important that black women have the space and opportunity to talk about stressors that are related to black women in a way they can challenge the debate narrative around what it means to be a black women so they can be more validated empowered," Burton said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Ballet company’s program began in Tuscaloosa in 1997

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

Twenty years ago, Edie Barnes teamed with fellow Birmingham native Gage Bush Englund to choreograph a line from Tuscaloosa to the Big Apple.

The world-renowned American Ballet Theatre chose the University of Alabama as site for its first summer intensive training program, also first for the ABT with any university. The concept’s now spread to other campuses, but UA continues premier status. At noon and 1:30 p.m. Saturday there’s a closing showcase of performances at the Moody Concert Hall, demonstrating some of the past three weeks’ work.

“The show’s about 35 to 40 minutes long, with six different dances, each one an excerpt from various classical repertory,” said Sarah M. Barry, associate professor of dance at UA, and one of the local faculty working with ABT instructors. “Both are the same work, but with different casts.”

When it began in 1997, the summer intensive at UA derived from a vision, said Michael Kaiser, then

See BALLET, B3

UA-AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE SUMMER INTENSIVE SHOWCASE

What: Dances from classical repertory performed by students at the annual summer intensive; both shows will feature the same pieces, but with different casts
When: Noon and 1:30 p.m. Saturday
Where: Moody Concert Hall
Cost: $10
Ballet
Continued from B1

executive director of the company. "... ABT wanted a Southern presence, and the University of Alabama was just perfect for us," he said in a written release. "It's just an amazing campus."

"The American Ballet Theatre has always been a company whose home is the whole country — not just New York City — so we always think of ourselves as a national company. Having activities outside of New York is something that is part of our mission."

Barnes guided the UA dance program toward national renown while serving as its director from 1987 to 2005. Englund, who died in 2009, danced with the Joffrey Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, among others, later serving as ballet mistress for those prestigious companies. In addition to their Birmingham connection, Barnes and Englund knew each other because dance, like so many other arts forms, encompasses a relatively small world.

On donating a collection of dance books to the UA in 2006, Englund noted Barnes had been "indispensable" in creating the workshops, "... and her work here has been an example to other ABT intensive programs, begun around the country because of her."

The UA program continues much as it was created in 1997: dancers 11 to 17, chosen from auditions across the country, studying ballet for three hours each morning, Monday through Friday for three weeks, with ABT instructors working on techniques, pointe work, partnering and more. Afternoons, another pair of classes instruct the pieces they'll be performing today. Locally hired faculty teaches other courses in the afternoons.

"We usually have about 170 students," Barry said, "and this year we have 168, which is where we like to be for our facilities."

Barry taught modern; her fellow faculty members Stacy Alley and Sheena Gregg worked on jazz and nutrition, respectively. Mary Margaret Scalici, a 1998 UA dance grad and member of the Alabama Ballet Theatre's faculty, taught Pilates. UA dance majors served as counselors, living in dorms with the intensive students, helping guide them through the process.

In addition to being ABT's first summer intensive outside NYC, it's "the oldest and most consistent one, all these years," said Barry, who's been part of it since 2007. One highlight for 2017 is greater male presence: 20 young men made the cut.

"Normally we have more like six to eight," Barry said. "This is kind of a record."

The ABT, founded in 1940, established the American ballet identity worldwide through the choreography of George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille and Twyla Tharp. Others who've set works for the ABT include legends such as Anthony Tudor, Jerome Robbins and Alvin Ailey. Its performing alumnae include Mikhail Baryshnikov, Cynthia Gregory, Alexander Godunov and Natalia Makarova; superstar Misty Copeland performs among its current roster of principal dancers.

In addition to professional connections and training, the summer intensive also serves as a recruiting ground for UA.

"We have had several students come here, get familiar with the campus, meet the counselors, and later become dance majors here," Barry said.

Tickets for today's performances are $10 general admission, and will be available at the Moody Music Building box office.
By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

As temperatures rose into the 90s Thursday, high school students gathered at the University of Alabama’s Recreation Center for some time in the pool.

However, these students were at the pool for more scientific reasons than just to cool off.

During the afternoon, rising high school juniors and seniors involved in the university’s Students Introduction to Engineering (SITE) camp brought floatation devices made of cardboard that they had created during the week. The students, divided into teams, sought to test their creations in the pool in an effort to show which team’s device could float in the pool the longest before sinking.

“They get a simple lesson on buoyancy,” said Marcus Ashford, a mechanical engineering professor who worked in the camp. “We just like for them to do it as opposed to talking about equations.”

Throughout the week, 50 students from across the country lived on campus at the university and took courses related to science, technology, engineering and math careers. Specifically, many of the students took lessons in math, English and engineering.

“Basically, this is what engineers do,” Ashford said. “This is how you matriculate your way through engineering school and what we do.”

SITE first began in 1987 as a way to reach more minority students to consider engineering careers, but throughout the years, the camp has expanded to become more inclusive.

“When we first started, it was only one week with 30 students,” said Greg Singleton, director of engineering student services at UA. “Now, we go three weeks with more than 50 students per week.”

Singleton said that as much as the camp is about finding
SWIM
Continued from B1

students interested in engineering, the camp also aims to give students a sense of college life.

"Many of these students have never even set foot on a college campus," Singleton said. "We would like to give them a little bit of exposure to college life."

Helen Hodgetts, a rising senior at Alan C. Pope High School in Marietta, Georgia, said she had always loved math and wanted to major in it in college, but that through the camp, she has become more interested in engineering and other related careers.

"It's really opened the idea that there is a lot more that I can do with math," Hodgetts said.

Lauren Miller, a rising junior at Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock, Arkansas, said she is interested in aeronautical engineering and that the camp was a great experience for her.

"For me, the camp has been about going through the skills we already have and then strengthening them," Miller said.

Singleton hopes the camp attracts more students to the university and helps them discover different fields in science.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
Tensions high between Trump and Sessions

By: Shelia O’Connor

Tensions are high between President Donald Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

On Tuesday morning, Trump tweeted that “Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes.” In a press conference, Trump stated that he was very disappointed in Sessions.

University of Alabama in Huntsville professor Clarke Rountree said these recent developments are “self-destructive” and that it’s hurting him.

Trump stated that Sessions should have told him that he was going to recuse himself from the Russia Investigation and that he would “have quite simply picked somebody else.”

But Sessions has been receiving an outpouring of support from representatives all over the state. Rep. Mo Brooks tweeted “Jeff Sessions is a man of integrity – keeping us safe by faithfully enforcing our laws and supporting our brave law enforcement officers.” Rep. Robert Aderholt tweeted that Sessions “has done more in 6 months to uphold our laws than in the previous 8 years combined. I fully support him.”

Rountree said Trump’s outburst against Sessions could cause panic among the other White House staff and “that can’t help him.”
Community colleges to offer officer exam

Tests will determine aptitude for law enforcement work

Staff report

Alabama’s community colleges are now the exclusive testing centers for the basic ability test for applicants seeking admission to law enforcement academies in the state.

The Alabama Community College System and the Alabama Peace Officers’ Standards and Training Commission announced the partnership on Tuesday, but community colleges began offering the tests July 1 for candidates seeking to become law enforcement officers or correctional officers.

As part of the partnership, the system’s campuses will begin offering the ACT WorkKeys assessment, which includes skill areas for applied math, graphic literacy and understanding workplace documents. The ACT test is offered at two-year colleges as part of workforce development program testing. The tests will cost $45, with $15 charges for any individual sections that need to be retaken.

The standards and training commission adopted the basic ability assessment as an additional education requirement in 2014, according to the announcement. The basic ability test is required of all applicants who have a valid high school diploma or General Educational Development certificate but do not have previous Alabama Peace Officers’ Standards and Training Commission certification, or an associate’s degree or higher from an accredited higher education institution.

The commission adopted the ACT WorkKeys Assessment as the test.

“This partnership will allow law enforcement agencies across the state to easily schedule assessments at our local community colleges and will provide them with better qualified officers who have the basic skills they need to succeed,” system Chancellor Jimmy Baker said in a statement released Tuesday.
Local to play for UAB bowling

By Molly Catherine Walsh
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Cameron Snyder woke up one morning in early June with a plan to sign up for a new life. The 18-year-old from Tuscaloosa headed to Oak Mountain Lanes in Pelham to sign her letter of intent to bowl with the University of Alabama at Birmingham women's bowling team.

"I was excited but more nervous," Snyder said. "I knew that this was the first step towards my future and that everything was about to change."

Bowling tournaments and after-school practices became a lifestyle for Snyder. She played the sport she loved and also earned funds for college from her championship winnings.

Snyder won masters champion in Hendersonville, Tennessee, in February, and classics champion at the Super Bowl competition in June.

It was a lifestyle. Every day after school she could be found at Oak Mountain Lanes practicing her form, or attending practices and games for American Christian Academy's first girl's bowling team.

At the beginning of her senior year of high school, she tore a labrum in her right shoulder, her bowling shoulder.

During her recovery, she could be found practicing at home on a space in the living room covered in blankets so she could bowl on a smooth surface, or watching her bowling idols - Diana Zavjalova, New Hui Fen and Kelly Kulick - online to study technique.

"I signed in front of my bowling family," Snyder said.

See BOWLING, C3
Bowling

Continued from C1

"They were my supporters and they were there for me through my surgeries last year and helped me come back."

That special moment Snyder shared with her team almost never happened. Two years ago the headlines in the papers and online read that it was official: UAB had cut its football, bowling and rifle programs.

Snyder wanted to get out of state when she was applying for colleges. She looked all around for a new start.

UAB, however, was close to home, it wasn't as big as some other schools, and most important of all, it no longer had a bowling program. So she never considered it until the program was reinstated and her ACA coaches and teammates introduced her to it.

Day by day, it became clear that it was the place for her. UAB's nursing program helped solidify her decision.

The restarted bowling program also has appeal.

"Seeing how far the team has come as a whole was great," Snyder said. "Seeing all the improvement made it easier because I know I've got work to do, but it gives me more confidence and peace of mind that I can actually do this and I'm not walking into this big, established program feeling like the underdog."
Locals earning big bucks on the Tour

I thought I'd take a look at who is where on the various money lists. Some players with local connections are well placed to reach various goals such as the Tour Championship or keep their PGA Tour cards, while some need to make a push to ensure playing privileges next season.

Let's take a look ...

On the PGA Tour, former University of Alabama golfer Justin Thomas leads the way for all locals as he's third in the FedEx Cup Standings with three wins and more than $5.1 million banked. Others include Auburn's Dominic Bazzelli, 100th, $868,000; UAB's Graeme McDowell, 114th, $639,000; former Daleville resident Brian Gay, 115th, $734,000; UA's Trey Mullinax, 117th, $742,000; Auburn's Blayne Barber, 119th, $700,000; Faulkner State's Bubba Watson, 123rd, $837,000; and Ben Martin, who has a number of family members who went to UA, is 125th, $670,000.

Outside the all-important top 125 and thus with work to do are: former UA player Michael Thompson, 131st; Smylie Kaufman of Vestavia Hills, 136th; Boo Weekley, 160th; former Pell City resident Willy Wilcox, 194th; former UA golfer Jason Bohn, 196th; Central Alabama Community College's Carl Pettersson, 198th; Wallace State player Freddie Jacobson, 215th; Danny Willett, who attended Jacksonville State, 220th; UA's Dicky Pride, 221st; UAB's Zack Sucher, 222nd; and UA's Bobby Wyatt, 229th.

There are just five events left in the regular season in which they can move up before post season play begins with the FedEx Cup Playoffs.

On the Web.com Tour, the feeder tour to the PGA Tour, the top 25 at the end of the regular season earn PGA Tour cards for next season. The leading player with local ties is Birmingham resident Casey Wittenberg, who is 28th on the money.
list with $106,000 won. Former UA golfer Tom Lovelady is 47th, followed by former Auburn golfer Michael Johnson in 97th.

Other locals also on the tour, but needing to make up ground, are Michael Hebert, Willy Wilcox, Nick Rousey, Wade Binfield and Sam Love.

The Mackenzie Tour Canada is just five events into an 12-event season, which will conclude in mid-September, with former UA golfer Robby Shelton leading the money list with $ss,ooo banked and including a win.

The top five finishers on this tour at the conclusion of the season earn cards on next year's Web.com Tour.

Former Auburn golfers Matt Gilchrest and Will McCurdy are in the top 50 on the money list.

The PGA Tour Champions includes former Huntingdon College golfer Joe Durant, who leads the way for locals with $557,000 won, good for 12th place. Gene Sauers (CACC) is in 20th with $463,000 won, followed by Glen Day (born in Mobile), who has won $380,000 and is in 29th place.

Also playing the tour to various degrees are UA golfers Steve Lowery and Jerry Pate; John Huston (CACC); and Larry Nelson (born in Fort Payne), plus Old Overton's Todd McCorkle has played two events.

On the European Tour former UAB golfer Paul Dunne is enjoying a breakout second season. He's 25th in the Race to Dubai with 654,000 euros won. Willett is in 70th, followed by McDowell and UA's Gavin Moynihan.

On the LPGA Tour, former Auburn golfer Cydney Clanton is in 51st place in the Race to the CME Globe, while former UA golfers Brooke Pancake and Stephanie Meadow have work to do to keep their cards.

And last but not least, on the Symetra Tour, the LPGA's developmental tour, former UA standout Emma Talley is well placed with a win and $46,000 banked, good for sixth place in the Volvik Race for the Card, with the top 10 on the list at the end of the season earning LPGA Tour cards for 2018.

The Birmingham Golf Association Junior Tour covers 22 events over the summer with six age groups, featuring boys and girls, ages 10-18 who reside in Jefferson County or one of the six counties that touch Jefferson, including Tuscaloosa county.

At the conclusion of their regular season, the top three in each age group were as follows.

**Girls 9-hole, 10-18**
1st, Annamarie Thompson; 2nd, Kaitlyn Shields; and 3rd, Elly Truxall.

**Girls 18-hole, 10-18**
1st, Annamarie Thompson; 2nd, Kaitlyn Shields; and 3rd, Elly Truxall.

**Girls 9-hole, 13-18**
1st, Emily Baker; 2nd, Ashlee Allen of Berry; and 3rd, Scout Phillips.

**Girls 18-hole, 13-18**
1st, Emily Baker; 2nd, Ashlee Allen of Berry; and 3rd, Scout Phillips.

**10-11**
1st, Chase Kyed; 2nd, Christopher Yeilding, grandson of former UA golfer Allen Yeilding; and 3rd, Thomas Norris.

**12-13**
1st, Vinay Yerramsetti; 2nd, Alex Roberts; and 3rd, Srijan Meesala.

**14-15**
1st, Matthew Madden of Northport; 2nd, Cam Copeland; and 3rd, Andrew McCary.

**16-18**
Tied-1st, Dylan Webb & Winston Smith (co-champions of the Hudson Cup); and 3rd, Thomas Caddell of Vance.

The Hudson Cup is presented by former UA golfers Steve and Tab Hudson and other Hudson family members in honor of their father, Travis Hudson, who was the long-time head golf professional at Musgrove CC in Jasper.

Also at stake in the championship was the Elbert S. Jemison Trophy, played for since 1965, and won by Michael Fain after fine rounds of 71-68-139 over the East Course at the Country Club of Birmingham. Fain also won the 16-18 age group, with Madden winning the 14-15. Roberts won the 12-13, with Yeilding capturing the 10-11 after an exciting three-hole playoff over Philip Cook.

Thompson won the girls nine holes and Helen Lunsford won the girls 18 holes.

The BGA also announced their scholarship winners: Nick Robillard of Spain Park High School, who will play golf for UAB, and Nick Lyda, Oak Mountain High School, who will attend the University of Alabama.

Ian Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for over 24 years. His weekly "Mr. Golf" column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thomponteesoff@gmail.com.
BASEBALL
Former Tide coach hired as Purdue assistant

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Greg Goff has joined Purdue baseball as an assistant coach, completing Mark Wasikowski's staff for the 2017-18 school year.

Goff was fired as the University of Alabama baseball coach after the 2017 season after just one season. The baseball program went 19-34-1 in his first year, including 5-24-1 in SEC play. It was the fewest wins by the program since 1980 and its worst SEC record since 1994.

"It truly is a great day for the Purdue baseball program to add Greg Goff to our coaching staff," Wasikowski said. "Having worked alongside Greg at Southeast Missouri State while winning the 1998 OVC championship and first-ever NCAA Regional appearance at that school, I know Greg's ability as a coach is second to none. Without my longstanding personal relationship with Greg, this opportunity would never have been a possibility. Greg's body of work shows he is a proven winner. He has a remarkable track record of success on the baseball field. However, his tremendous character, dedication to his faith and family, and commitment to excellence are the reasons why Greg Goff is so highly regarded to me and my family. To assemble a coaching staff that can rival the nation's best is every head coach's dream and now we have that staff at Purdue."
Maybe Tide can step on the gas pedal this season

For two seasons now, Alabama men's basketball coach Avery Johnson has been driving around with one foot on the brake.

That metaphor doesn't mean Johnson has been contributing to Tuscaloosa's stop-and-go traffic. It does mean that during basketball games, he hasn't been able to floor the accelerator. That's not out of personal preference. Johnson would love to play like a Ferrari on the open highway. The problem is, you've got to have a real Ferrari to make that work, not one made largely of parts from a 1975 Gremlin.

Johnson may not have the fully operational Ferrari yet -- but you could tell in his Monday press conference, carefully placed in the last lull before football season -- that he's getting closer.

There has been so much bubbling excitement about the upcoming season that Johnson, a natural promoter but a cautious coach, has had to perform a balancing act. He wants fans excited about the incoming freshman class, including prep All-Americans Collin Sexton and John Petty. At the same time, he wants to give all his new faces a chance to acclimate and become college students before piling expectations to the sky.

Alabama fans aren't waiting, and their excitement is on two fronts. First and foremost is getting the Crimson Tide back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2012. A close second, though, is this: those fans want to get their in a Ferrari. Starved

See HURT, C5
for success? Yes. But also starved for speed.

Whether because of philosophy or because recruiting demanded it, Anthony Grant's Alabama teams played at a methodical pace, to put it mildly. His best teams were good enough defensively to win that way, but there were many close decisions that went the other way without being especially entertaining.

That's the leopard Johnson inherited, and he couldn't change all the spots in a year -- especially in terms of quickness.

"One of the things we talked about when I came in was the slogan 'Buckle Up,'" Johnson said. "We've been able to buck, but we haven't been able to Buckle Up. Hopefully, we'll be able to play faster, make better decisions. All of our guys on the perimeter, we feel like everybody is capable of passing, dribbling and shooting. (So) your plays tend to work a little bit better, because you need people to pass it, handle the ball (and) problem-solve, especially against trapping defenses.

"We had a game here against Florida last year when they were playing pretty good. They put a little 1-3-1 press on us and we couldn't pass, dribble or shoot. We hope when we are in situations like that this season, we'll not only be able to start games better but to close out games better because of our talent on our roster and because the players that are coming back have some experience."

As much as the star ratings, the recruiting class is anticipated because it ups the octane rating. Sexton can fly, at a pace that Alabama hasn't seen since Hollywood Robinson. He can also pass to other speedy players, which Robinson could rarely be bothered with.

Still, Johnson is wise enough to know that even a Ferrari has brakes, and you use them occasionally.

"We hope to eventually get to the Buckle Up, scoring in five to seven seconds, or if we can't score in five to seven seconds, then scoring (out of a set offense) in the next eight to 12 seconds. We hope to have players that can get their shot off because they are better one-on-one players."

That word "eventually" does matter. Not that Alabama fans -- or Johnson himself -- want to wait much longer.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
SPORTS DIGEST FOOTBALL

Alabama’s Fan Day set for Aug. 5

The University of Alabama’s football Fan Day is set for Saturday, Aug. 5 at Bryant-Denny Stadium, the school announced in a news release. The team’s open practice will be held from 2:30-4:30. Coaches and players will sign autographs from 4:45-5:30 after practice ends. Gates 9 and 19 open for fans to enter Bryant-Denny Stadium at 1:30. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis on the west side in the lower bowl. The first 150 fans lined up for fan day at gate 25 at 1 p.m. on Saturday will receive numbered wristbands to enter the autograph session first. Fans with wristbands will line up at 4 p.m. at gate 25 to enter the autograph session. Fans can receive one of 3,000 autograph posters, bring their own items or purchase Alabama merchandise to be signed at fan day. Players and coaches will only sign one item per fan to maximize their time during the autograph period. Posed pictures will not be permitted. Parking for fan day is available at the west ten Hoor lot north of the stadium. In the case of inclement weather, practice will be moved to the Hank Crisp Indoor Facility.
No doubt about it

Nick Saban makes it clear Jalen Hurts is the Crimson Tide’s starting QB

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Editor’s Note: This is the first in a series looking ahead to the start of Alabama’s fall football practice. We begin with a breakdown of the quarterback position.

Nick Saban put everyone on notice during SEC Media Days, and he’s since repeated it: There is no quarterback competition.

Saban has said repeatedly that Jalen Hurts is the starting quarterback. Still, he also said in the same breath that true freshman Tua Tagovailoa needs to play.

That’s not all that surprising given the fact there is zero experience behind Hurts. It’s also not surprising Tagovailoa is the guy that needs to play given his play at the spring game.

The starter

Anytime Saban’s been asked about Hurts, the UA coach is quick to point out that the sophomore remains the starter.

He’s also repeatedly stated the need for balance on offense, that Hurts must develop as a consistent passer in order to unlock the potential of the offense. Saban has shouldered the coaching staff’s responsibility in that role, saying they took a risk-averse approach with Hurts a year ago.

With a new offensive coordinator, Saban said goal one is to develop the passing game.

“I think Brian Daboll has done a great job of creating that balance in your offense and helping Jalen develop into a

See HURTS, C4
more efficient passer,” Saban said. “Our system is flexible enough on offense to feature the players that we have.

“I think we’ve done what our quarterbacks could do the last three years. I think we want Jalen to develop in a quarterback who could be multifaceted in terms of being a great threat as a runner and a passer. I think our offense will reflect that this year.”

The backups

Tagovailoa had a productive spring, and he caught fans’ attention.

With virtually no experience among the backups, Tagovailoa is the best option to see action this season. Saban said the team needs it.

“Tua is a very, very good player and we’re glad to have him in the program,” Saban said. “He’s someone who needs to play some. Now, I’m not creating a quarterback controversy here because Jalen Hurts is our starting quarterback.”

True freshman Mac Jones is the only other scholarship quarterback on the roster after the departure of David Cornwell and Cooper Bateman in the offseason.

The outlook

Increased consistency and production is the name of the game, and the outlook is positive with Daboll calling the plays. His interaction with the quarterbacks during the spring was more than the media usually saw under former offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin.

If Hurts can manage to become a consistent passer in the intermediate passing game and hit the deep ball enough to keep defenses honest, this Alabama offense could be one of the best of the Saban era.

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
A year ago, Alabama needed a breather the week after its annual near-death experience with Ole Miss. Fortunately, the program had invited Kent State to visit Bryant-Denny Stadium and stroked a check to Nick Saban's alma mater for $1.5 million.

The Golden Flashes lived up to their end of the bargain by losing 48-0. Kent State enjoyed the experience paycheck so much it'll continue its SEC tour at Ole Miss in 2018, Auburn in 2019, Arkansas in 2020 and Georgia in 2022. The Athens Banner-Herald reports Georgia will pay Kent State $1.9 million for that 2022 trip between the hedges.

That's good for Georgia, which doesn't want to play every non-conference game against Notre Dame. It's also good for Kent State, which would like to continue playing football and needs that kind of revenue stream to do so.

Given the prevalence of these guarantee games, a lot of people involved in the college football business subscribe to the win-win nature of the transaction.

It seems Saban is not one of those people. If the Alabama coach had his way, none of those games would happen, and his old school would have to find another way to raise that money. It wouldn't be easy. Hard to imagine 85 football players selling more than $1 million worth of Krispy Kremes in an afternoon.

Saban's notion that Power 5 teams should play only other Power 5 teams isn't a new one.

His scheduling suggestions also include playing as many as 10 conference games — not a bad idea there — and having bowl teams selected like NCAA Basketball Tournament teams, based on their overall resumes rather than a minimum of six wins.

"In this scenario, there would be more opportunity to play more teams in your league, as well as to have more games that people would be interested in," Saban said. "We all play three or four games a year now that nobody's really interested in. We'd have more good games, more public interest, more fan interest, better TV."

Spoken like a man who coaches a program that prints money who's forgotten what it was like to play for one that doesn't. Is this about what's good for the sport or what's good for the networks?
Saban in no mood for 'best conference' talk

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Posed with what was meant as a light-hearted question from one of ESPN's myriad of made-for-TV debate shows, Nick Saban wasn't in the mood for jokes.

The veteran coach refused to be pulled into the fray of the recent discussion of which college football conference is best. Saban sternly reminded his hosts that those types of discussions are media-created controversy.

On that front, Saban was only partially correct. For it was Clemson's Dabo Swinney and Florida State's Jimbo Fisher that crowed unprompted about the ACC's superiority at the conference's recent media days.

Swinney, in his opening remarks, declared the ACC "the best conference in college football," while Fisher said it was "the premier league in college football."

Still, Saban didn't travel to ESPN to field largely unprovable questions. He doesn't see much utility in those.

"These kind of arguments are creations that you make in the media so you have something to talk about," Saban said. "It means nothing to me, it means nothing. I respect the players in the league, I respect the coaches in the league, I respect what they've been able to accomplish and I respect the fact that they would ever come up in a meaningful way is if a one-loss SEC team was being compared to a one-loss team from another conference for the seeding into the College Football Playoff.

Saban did, however, speak highly of the SEC.

"I love our league, I think it's a great, competitive venue," Saban said. "We have great attendance, great fan interest, we have lots of players drafted, lots of All-Americans, we won a lot of national championships. If someone else does better than that, so be it."

What about Tua?

Saban remained clear on the quarterback competition during Wednesday's various ESPN platform appearances.

Namely, there is no competition. Jalen Hurts is the starting quarterback.

That said, Saban said the team needs the talented freshman, Tua Tagovailoa, to play this season. That's not a surprise given that there is literally no experience behind Hurts with Tagovailoa and Mac Jones both being true freshmen.

"Tua is a very, very good player and we're glad to have him in the program," Saban said. "He's someone who needs to play some. Now, I'm not creating a quarterback controversy here because Jalen Hurts is our starting quarterback."

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
Tide players on Walter Camp Award watch list

Staff Report

University of Alabama football players Minkah Fitzpatrick, Calvin Ridley, Bo Scarbrough and Jalen Hurts were named to the 2017 Walter Camp Award watch list, announced by the Walter Camp Foundation on Friday. Fitzpatrick, Ridley and Scarbrough are all juniors, while Hurts will be a sophomore.

The quartet is among 40 players named across the country. Alabama’s four candidates lead the nation as the most among FBS schools. Derrick Henry was the first Alabama player to win the award (2015).

Fitzpatrick is the leader of the Crimson Tide secondary. His four career pick-sixes are an all-time record at the school. He led the team with six interceptions last season and was tied for seventh in the nation.

Hurts finished the 2016 season with a 13-1 record. He set the school record with 36 total touchdowns and 954 rushing yards by a quarterback. Hurts completed 62.8 percent of his passing and threw for 2,780 yards and 23 touchdowns as a true freshman.

Ridley had 72 catches for 769 yards and seven touchdowns as a sophomore. Ridley either picked up a first down or scored a touchdown on 39 of his receptions in 2017. He set freshman records in 2015 with 89 receptions and 1,045 yards receiving.

Scarbrough rushed 109 times for 719 yards with nine touchdowns as a sophomore.

See CAMP, C4

CAMP

Continued from C1

He ran for 180 yards and two touchdowns against Washington in the College Football Playoff Semifinal.

The award is named to honor Walter Camp and has been presented annually since 1967 by the Walter Camp Foundation. It recognizes the nation’s most outstanding player.

The list will be narrowed down to 10 semifinalists in November and a winner will be announced on Dec. 7.

Several members of the Crimson Tide were named to a watch list:

- Da’Ron Payne, Fitzpatrick - Bednarik Award
- Rashaan Evans and Shaun Dion Hamilton - Butkus Award
- JK Scott - Ray Guy Award
- Hale Hentges - Mackey Award
- Evans, Payne, Fitzpatrick, Ronnie Harrison - Bronko Nagurski Trophy
- Fitzpatrick and Harrison - Jim Thorpe Award
- Bradley Bozeman, Jonah Williams, Payne - Outland Trophy
- Bozeman - Rimington Trophy
- Hurts - Davey O’Brien Award
- Ridley - Biletnikoff Award
- Ridley, Hurts, Fitzpatrick and Scarbrough - Maxwell Award
- Damien Harris and Scarbrough - Doak Walker Award
- Fitzpatrick - Wuerffel Trophy
- Fitzpatrick - Paul Hornung Award
Bo Scarbrough and Damien Harris have been named to the 2017 preseason Doak Walker Award watch list. The award is given annually to the nation’s premier running back for his accomplishments on the field, achievement in the classroom and citizenship in the community.

The University of Alabama duo is two of 61 running backs from around the country named to the preseason list. Alabama has produced two Doak Walker Award winners in the last six years, with Trent Richardson winning in 2011 and Derek Henry in 2015.

Last season, Harris rushed for 1,037 yards and two touchdowns while adding 14 catches for 99 yards and two more touchdowns. He rushed for a career-high 144 yards on 19 carries in Alabama’s 48-43 win over Ole Miss last season, including 115 yards on 10 second-half attempts.

Scarbrough was Alabama’s power back throughout the 2016 season, rushing for 719 yards and nine touchdowns. Scarbrough broke out during Alabama’s last three games (SEC Championship Game, College Football Playoff Peach Bowl semifinal and the CFP Championship), carrying the Alabama offense while rushing for 364 yards and six touchdowns. Scarbrough earned offensive MVP honors for his performance in the semifinal against Washington, rushing for 180 yards and two touchdowns against the Huskies.
Officials cracking down on coaches stepping out onto the field to argue calls

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Get back, get back
Get back to where you once belonged
- The Beatles, "Get Back"

The Beatles sent the message out in 1969. Almost 50 years later, college football coaches are hearing it from officials.

Get back. Back on the sideline.

Coaches have been warned that in the coming 2017 season, they will be flagged for a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty if they step onto the field of play to argue a call or berate a referee.

University of Alabama coach Nick Saban thinks it's about time.

"I think some of the things that's happened in college football should not be tolerated," Saban said at SEC Media Days in Hoover.

The emphasis on keeping coaches off the field isn't a new rule, but Steve Shaw, the SEC coordinator of officials for the sport, said it will now be enforced nationally. He has gone over it with league coaches and shown them video of incidents that weren't penalized in the past, but will be now.

"You know, we saw Steve Shaw showed us a lot of examples of coaches going all the way out to the hashmark," Saban said, "and I think those coaches should have been penalized. And if those coaches were penalized, and we don't have sort of that kind of tolerance for that kind of behavior, maybe we wouldn't need a rule like this that is really sort of a sledgehammer."

Shaw admitted that things have gotten out of hand, in part because college coaches are powerful.

"The coaches, especially the head coaches, they are the face of our game," he said. "And so officials probably haven't done as good a job as we should have done in keeping the sideline clear. So we've had coaches kind of come out on the field in protest.

"In fact, somebody said to me, you take a lot more off a coach than you ever would with a player. That's very true."

Not any more. Shaw said that a coach coming onto the field to protest or question a call will now be "an automatic" penalty.

See FOOTBALL, C7
Scandal reveals Freeze as a fraud

John Talty  jtalty@al.com

On Jan. 21, 2016, Hugh Freeze tweeted, “Been a great week of recruiting but so glad to see my girls and be back in Oxford for the weekend. And LOVED the call I just got. #SIPBOYZ16”

Less than three hours earlier, he called a Florida-based escort on his university-issued cell phone.

That phone call led to his resignation Thursday after Ole Miss discovered a “pattern of conduct” unbecoming of the football program’s leader following media inquiries about the escort.

It’s a stunning fall from grace for Freeze who was making more than $4.7 million annually at Ole Miss and will now receive no buyout because the school had enough to fire him through a moral clause in his contract. He’s earned himself the ignominy of being one of college football’s biggest frauds.

This was a man who made religion his public persona, even using the NCAA’s long inquiry into Ole Miss as an example of the persecution he faced.

“Coach Freeze told me when you’re that big and out there with faith in Christ, he’s like ‘What do you expect? Jesus got nailed to the cross,’” recruit Chevin Calloway told SBNation though the Ole Miss coach denied that characterization.

His Twitter was full of daily Bible messages, Christian allegories and other inspiring messages about football. He was a living embodiment of the cliche “Faith, Family and Football.” When he interviewed for the job, he even said that “Jesus Christ will be at the center of it all” and “if that’s not what you want, I’m not your guy,” according to former linebackers coach Tom Allen.

Unfortunately for Ole Miss, that proved to be a facade. The school’s highly paid football coach believed more in the “Do as I say, don’t do as I do” mantra.

Freeze was holier than thou, smarmy even, about his religion and the type of man he was. He organized public displays of goodwill to boost his image, but privately was paranoid and lashed out over small misgivings. No coach in the SEC cared more about how the media portrayed him.

It’s a safe bet your favorite college football writer has a story of Freeze calling him and invoking his Christian beliefs over even a remotely negative story about Ole Miss. He loved to dish out accusations and blame others for any of the Rebels’ shortcomings, rarely if ever acknowledging his role in them.

Even when presented with evidence of a phone call to an escort, Freeze claimed to Yahoo Sports it was a “misdial.”

A rough patch awaits Freeze. He’s lost an incredibly lucrative job and likely will never get one as good again in his career. He must explain to his players and his family why he couldn’t live up to the lofty standards he set for himself. He’ll likely face additional NCAA penalties, including potentially a show cause, once the Committee of Infractions concludes the Ole Miss case.

“He admitted that conduct to us,” Ole Miss athletic director Ross Bjork said Thursday. “None of us are perfect. Nobody in this room is perfect. I think we need to respect how he resigned and respect his privacy.”

Life will ultimately go on for Freeze and Ole Miss. Our society readily forgives far worse sins than cheating, even if both on
and off the football field. Freeze wouldn’t be the first — or the last — football coach to engage in extramarital activities. Coaches have done worse than place a call to an escort and kept their jobs though Bjork’s comments Thursday strongly indicate it goes beyond that.

But Freeze is different because of everything he did leading up to this moment. He put himself on such a pedestal that even a minor scandal threatened his perch. Ole Miss supported him throughout the NCAA investigation and likely would have continued to do so had his extracurricular actions not come to light. He was cocky and defiant the whole way, a display of hubris that rival coaches couldn’t believe. He’ll never live down that infamous tweet asking anyone with knowledge of NCAA violations, to email Ole Miss’ compliance department.

If you sense rejoicing over Freeze’s resignation, it’s centered around the satisfaction of a sanctimonious person receiving his comeuppance. If judged on hypocrisy alone, Freeze would be the kind of five-star recruit that’d get Ole Miss in trouble.

The end result of Freeze resigning shouldn’t come as a surprise. His time in Oxford was bound to end badly eventually given the multi-year investigation into his football program. The NCAA invested too much time and resources to walk away with nothing. He was going to leave sooner than later though in most scenarios his bank account would be far more flush than it’s going to be now.

It’s the timing that came as a shock to many, only days after Freeze went before hundreds of reporters at SEC Media Days and offered an award-worthy filibuster. He did not look like a man who knew it was all about to come crashing down. He was still lamenting that he wasn’t able to talk as much about his football team because of outside distractions.

Those outside distractions finally brought him down albeit few could have predicted it’d be Houston Nutt and a one-minute phone call to an escort that did it. Nutt, a former Ole Miss head coach, taking down the school’s most successful coach in more than a decade over Freeze pushing the NCAA violations blame on him to reporters is a soap opera so absurd it’s still difficult to comprehend. Amazingly, it could have been avoided had Freeze shown humility, apologized to Nutt and taken his fair share of the blame.

Now, Freeze departs Oxford as a discredited sham, a man who preached words he didn’t believe in.

He has only one person to blame for his precipitous fall: The man in the mirror.
Kiffin ready for start of his first camp at FAU

The Associated Press

BOCA RATON, Fla. — Lane Kiffin went out and spoke to some colleagues earlier this week.

They weren’t football coaches. Kiffin’s first training camp as coach at Florida Atlantic opens Thursday, and ordinarily at this time of year he’d be swamped by writing practice scripts and locked in meeting rooms getting ready to tweak his offense. At FAU, for his fourth stint as a head coach, Kiffin is back in more of a CEO capacity — one where he will incorporate some things he learned while watching Rod of a coach is taking over an FAU team that went 3-9 in each of the last three seasons. This time a year ago, Kiffin was the offensive coordinator at Alabama and dealing with perennial national-title expectations. He’s now at a school that hasn’t played in a bowl game since 2008 and where empty seats almost always outnumber filled ones on game day, often by a significant margin.

He is starting anew. So are the Owls, officially doing so when practice No. 1 of the fall begins at 9 a.m. Thursday.

“Anytime you bring anyone new in, it’s always a breath of fresh air,” FAU offensive lineman Antonyo Woods said. “Whatever you did in the past really doesn’t matter. You get to rewrite your own history once again.”

Woods was speaking of the Owl players.

The same can also be said for the coach.

Kiffin has grown to be amused by the circus that seems to get stirred up by everything he says and does. His history is well known — hired as coach of the Oakland Raiders as a 31-year-old in early 2007 and fired there after 20 games, then spending one year at Tennessee, three-plus years at Southern California and famously getting fired there at an airport in the middle of the night.

Then came the Alabama stint, and his peculiar removal by the Crimson Tide as offensive coordinator before the national-title game last season — a move that came after he accepted the FAU job. Not being in Tampa for the title game still bothers Kiffin, though he insists there is no looking back.

“We don’t look in the rear-view mirror,” Kiffin said.

He has found the time in this offseason to scoop ice cream for charity, talk to various groups, spend time with the key people on FAU’s campus and this week talk to CEOs. But make no mistake, Kiffin is plenty busy with the football matters as well. His office door is often shut when he’s at work, not out of an anti-social stance but because he’s trying to avoid getting pulled in too many directions.

He’s already a celebrity in his new home, and FAU’s first game of the Kiffin era is still five weeks away.

“If I don’t shut that door, I’m never getting a thing done,” Kiffin said. “Sometimes a head coach, especially your first year, you’re like a firefighter. Every day you’re trying to put out fires. And there’s a lot to do here.”

KIFFIN

Continued from B6

Florida Atlantic University coach Lane Kiffin thinks he’s more ready to lead a program than ever before. Kiffin spent the past two years as the offensive coordinator for the University of Alabama. [THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]