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University of Alabama System board names new trustee president

By: Hanno van der Bijl

The Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama System has named a new president pro tempore.

Ronald Gray will take over for outgoing Trustee Karen Brooks who served in the role from 2014-2017.

In the space of the board’s 186-year history, Brooks was the first woman to serve in that role. She said her now culminated three-year term will be the highest honor of her life.

Gray was elected to the governing board in 2009. In his new role, he will preside at board meetings when the governor is not present and he will chair the board’s executive committee. He is eligible to serve three successive one-year terms, according to the bylaws.

Gray is a native of Mobile and a longtime resident of Huntsville where he serves as CEO of Thompson Gray Inc., a firm specializing in financial and business management services for the U.S. Army and other customers. He founded Gray Research Inc. in 1998, where he served as president until 2011.

Gray is a graduate of the University of Alabama where he earned a degree in mechanical engineering.

During the past year, the university system has seen 28 construction projects worth $418 million go up, has awarded 15,000 degrees between summer last year and this spring, and has experienced a record enrollment this fall with 68,566 students, representing a 4.5 percent growth in enrollment.

The board also renewed Britt Sexton and Kenneth Vandervoort’s six-year terms.
Trustees appoint new leader

Ronald Gray replaces Karen Brooks as new president pro tempore of the University of Alabama System board of trustees

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama System board of trustees on Friday named Ronald Gray its next president pro tempore and reappointed two members.

Outgoing President Pro Tempore Karen Brooks called Gray capable, energetic and smart. "I will be right by your side every second of the way if you need me," she said.

Brooks, who served as president for the last three years, was the first woman to fill the role in the institution's 186-year history.

"I greatly value the relationships we share on this board and look forward to supporting each of you in this position going forward," Gray said in his first comments as board president. "To the students, faculty, staff, and leadership of our great institutions, know that this board will continue to operate as we always have: with the best interest of each of your foremost in our minds."

Brooks received a standing ovation during her last meeting.

"From here to my grave, this will be the highest honor I have ever had. Thank you all," Brooks said.

Trustee Finis St. John praised Brooks for her "splendid leadership" of the board, which oversees campuses in Tuscaloosa, Birmingham and Huntsville.

"Three years ago, we asked our friend Karen Brooks to do a job she didn't ask for, and that was to lead the board of trustees," St. John said. "For 136 weeks since that time, she has given every ounce of her time, her energy, her talent, her judgment to the service of our universities in the state. We owe her a huge debt of gratitude. As a result of her calm, steady cheerful, wise guidance, the university

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system is at a high point in its history."

Gray is a Mobile native and longtime resident of Huntsville. He is chief executive officer of Thompson Gray Inc., a Huntsville-based company that specializes in financial and business management services for the U.S. Army and other customers worldwide.

The board re-appointed trustees Britt Sexton and Kenneth Vandervoort to additional six-year terms.

System Chancellor Ray Hayes praised Brooks as well and reviewed highlights of the system during the past year. Hayes noted there were 28 construction projects worth $418 million system-wide. Around 15,000 degrees were awarded by the campuses between summer 2016 and this spring. Each of the campuses also saw record enrollment growth this fall. There are 68,566 students enrolled system-wide, representing about 4.5 percent growth in enrollment.
UA System trustees approve budgets

Tuscaloosa campus budget tops $1 billion
By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

In other business at Friday's meeting, University of Alabama System trustees approved operating budgets for the fiscal year beginning in October.

The fiscal year 2018 operating budget for the University of Alabama is $1.01 billion. The University of Alabama at Birmingham's operating budget is $1.27 billion. The UAB hospital budget is $1.93 billion. The University of Alabama in Huntsville's operating budget is $233.4 million. The system office budget is $20.4 million.

Other actions taken by the board:

**UA**

- Approved increasing the budget and scope for the Alpha Omicron Pi sorority house by $1 million to $16 million to add bid alternatives including a finished basement floor, wardrobe closets, and other amenities.
- Approved increasing the budget and scope for the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority house by $1 million to $16 million to add an additional 6,000 gross square feet.
- Approved the preliminary scope and a project budget of $5.45 million for construction of a 1,901 square-foot anechoic chamber in the AIME Center in support of the Remote Sensing Center.
- Approved the preliminary scope and a project budget of $4.5 million for the renovation of Lakeside Dining. The work includes an additional 5,400-square-foot mezzanine that can seat 200 diners.
- Approved the preliminary scope and a project budget of $3.5 million for construction of the Bama Zone—Dining, a sports-themed restaurant, at the Robert Witt Student Activity Center.
- Approved recreation use license agreements for around 25,000 acres of university lands in 102 tracts for uses including hunting. The 10-year agreements are expected to generate about $2.5 million in revenue.
- Designated Rob Cooper as the agent for real estate management and transactions.
- Renamed the Department of Chemistry to the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

**UAB**

- Approved incorporation of the Callahan Eye Hospital Health Care Authority and the Medical West Health Care Authority as university authorities called the UAB Callahan Eye Hospital Authority and the Medical West Hospital Authority.
- Approved reappointment of David Randall, Joan Ragsdale, Michael Callahan and Steve Yoder to the Board of directors of the Callahan Eye Hospital Health Care Authority.
- Approved executing a construction contract for the new $39.5-million Arts and Sciences building with M.J. Harris Construction Services of Birmingham.
- Approved executing a construction contract with Sports Turf Co. Inc. of Whitesburg, Georgia, for the new $4.85-million intramural fields.
- Approved executing a construction contract with Russo Corp. of Birmingham for the $14.8-million project in the second phase of the expansion of the central utilities systems to the Southwest academic campus.
- Authorized negotiating an engineering consultant agreement for the $4.55-million expansion of the central utilities to the northeast medical center district.
- Approved increasing the budget and scope of the new genomics sciences building from $66 million to $78 million and negotiating architectural and engineering services agreements.
- Authorized negotiating architectural and engineering agreements for the $21-million renovation of the eighth and ninth floors of the McCallum Basic Health Sciences Education and Research Building.
- Approved preliminary plans for a $7.5-million project to install around 8,500 feet of piping to connect the central utility systems to Birmingham Water Works Board infrastructure to supply untreated industrial water to generate steam and chilled water in the system. The system currently uses treated city water. The project will also install a supplemental ground water well. The project is expected to decrease the university's water cost by $300,000 annually.
- Authorized execution of a 30-year ground lease agreement for a lot along 20th Street South and Fourth Avenue South with Public Finance Authority on behalf of Proton International which will fund, develop and design a proton therapy radiation center.
- Approved preliminary plans for a $1.35-million project to expand and renovate the histocompatibility and immunogenetic lab at the University Hospital.
- Approved preliminary plans for a $3.7-million renovation of the microbiology lab at University Hospital.
- Approved preliminary plans for a $3.5-million renovation of 19,500 square feet of space on the sixth floor of the Callahan Eye Hospital.
- Authorized purchase and installation of new cardiovascular ultrasound systems and software from Philips Medical Systems North America Co. for $3.4 million.
- Authorized purchase and installation of a new Siemens magnetic resonance scanner at University Hospital for $2.23 million.
- Approved awarding a construction contract with Brasfield and Gorrie of Birmingham for the $33.7-million, free-standing Gardendale emergency department.
- Converted the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery to the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery.
- Changed the name of the Department of Government to the Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

**UAH**

- Approved preliminary plans for a $24.9-million renovation and addition to Morton Hall. The project will renovate the existing 68,880 square feet of the building and add another 29,520 square feet. The project will allow the history department to relocate from Roberts Hall.
- Approved preliminary plans for the $4.3 million renovation of 17,500 square feet on the third and fourth floors of Roberts Hall. The space, vacated by the history department, will be used by the College of Education.
Tuscaloosa County plant to produce electric SUVs

Mercedes-Benz project will create 600 jobs, add 2 million square feet

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Mercedes-Benz on Thursday announced plans to produce electric SUV models at its Tuscaloosa County plant, a new battery plant on the site and a new logistics center nearby in Bibb County as part of a $1 billion investment that is expected to create an additional 600 jobs in the region.

"As you know Mercedes invented the car, but now we are going to reinvent mobility. That is why today it is about celebrating the past and electrifying the future," said Markus Schafer, member of the Divisional Board of Mercedes-Benz Cars, Production and Supply Chain.

The $1 billion investment was part of the Vance plant's 20th anniversary celebrations. Schafer made the announcement to the employees on Thursday standing in front of Job 1, the first M-Class SUV produced in February 1997 at the plant in Vance. The celebration took place in the new body shop for the plant, which features more than 900 robots and is currently still ramping up for production.

Schafer and Mercedes-Benz U.S. International President Jason Hoff recalled how the plant grew from a 1.2 million-square-foot facility with about 1,100 employees in 1997 to its current size of 6 million square feet with more than 3,700 employees. The

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Team members gather around to look at the future design model of the EQ Mercedes-Benz during the 20-year celebration at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International at the 167 body shop at the plant in Vance on Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017.

Online

For video and more photos from the Mercedes announcement, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com.
plant produced more than 310,000 vehicles last year.

The projects in the investment will add about 2 million square feet to the company's operation in the region. The projects will bring the company's investment in the region during the last two decades to around $1 billion.

The 600 jobs will include MBUSA positions and roles at supporting companies, Hoff said.

"It has been a great ride, but the ride isn't over. I am confident that we are only getting started," Hoff said. "As we face the next 20 years, we will exhibit the same commitment that has and continues to make us Alabama's best, building and giving nothing but the best.

The automaker plans to manufacture EQ-branded SUV models in Vance. While the main plant will likely not see an expansion of its footprint, Hoff said, it will see some modification of equipment as it prepares for the electric models.

The EQ brand, announced last year, combines the fields of connectivity, autonomous driving, sharing and electrification, which Schäfer said are reshaping the automotive industry. Earlier this month, Mercedes-Benz unveiled four concept cars in Frankfurt including a fully autonomous model, an all-electric, pre-production GLC model with hybrid battery and fuel cell technology, and a hybrid sports car.

"We are in the midst of the biggest transformation ever," Schäfer said.

Reinventing mobility is about combining the CASE (Connectivity, Autonomous driving, Sharing and Electrification) elements, he said. "Our ambition here is to make the successful transformation to becoming No. 1 in the new world of CASE," Schäfer said. "That means offering customers the most compelling components across these four areas."

The flexible production system at Mercedes-Benz (U.S. International) will allow the plant to build traditional internal-combustion engines and electric vehicles on the same line, Schäfer said.

The plant will start with at least one electric SUV, though Schäfer declined to discuss specifics about the models to be produced at Tuscaloosa or when it will launch. Mercedes-Benz is spreading EQ-model production across the globe at select plants, he said.

Mercedes is building on its electric vehicles, which will be powered by a new battery technology, Schäfer said.

The company is building a new plant in Vance to support the company's electric vehicles, Hoff said. The new plant will be about 1 million square feet, Schäfer said. The global logistics center will be in Bibb County about 7 miles from the MBUSA main plant. The MBUSA plant already exports cars from an existing smaller warehouse to other plants globally for final assembly. The new center will be about 1 million square feet, expanding the company's capacity to supply parts globally, Hoff said. The Bibb County logistical site will be on 200 acres of U.S. Highway 11. Hoff said. It is expected to begin operations by the end of 2020.

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The automaker executives called the anniversary a milestone for the company and the state. The company's investment 20 years ago led to a re-invigoration of the state's manufacturing sector, Gov. Kay Ivey said.

"At the time, Mercedes was taking a risk investing in our state and our community, but I am so glad to say today that it has been a good investment for Mercedes and the state of Alabama. Because Mercedes took the first step, Alabama is now a top-five producer of cars and trucks," Ivey said.

How much the state is contributing in incentives for the projects is still being negotiated, according to Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield.

"We are currently negotiating the project agreements. We will approach the project as we would any other project in this particular sector," he said.

The support provided by the state and local partners will be announced at a later date once the negotiations are complete, he said.

The agreements could include performance-based incentives, tax abatements and tax credits.

The vision for the future laid out Thursday will likely influence development beyond the company's footprint in Vance. The shift toward electric automobiles in the industry has also spurred conversations about future infrastructure needs as well as workforce training.

State officials are beginning to discuss how to support the infrastructure needed for electric vehicles including possible policy changes and potential legislation, Canfield said.

"We are at the initial stages of the process," he said.

The discussion will take place over the next few years as the electrification of the products and battery plant come online, he said.

"This may be an opportunity for Alabama to become a leader in the Southeast," Canfield said.

The emphasis on CASE in the future will influence the engineering and production of the new models, as the sector continues to shift toward computer and electrical engineering. The changes will require changes to workforce development, Hoff said.

"It is going to be significant change in a lot of areas of our business," Hoff said.

MBUSA will discuss its changing needs with Shelton State Community College and the University of Alabama, Hoff said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-732-0209.
UA's relationship with Mercedes evolves into partnership

By Ed Enoch | Staff Writer

As University of Alabama Chancellor emeritus Malcolm Portera tells it, Tuscaloosa was in a "world of hurt" in the early 1980s. The area had lost four manufacturers under the pressure of international competition for steel and the beginning of the end for cut-and-sew textile operations in the state, he said.

Then came the announcement in 1981 that General Motors planned to close its Rochester Products Plant, eliminating 200 jobs.

Tuscaloosa's industrial development director at the time, Mike McCain, approached UA about the possibility of keeping Rochester Products open.

"He came to us and said, 'Fellas, we have had a lot of heartbreak in the last several years and here is another one. Let's talk about what you can do to keep Rochester Products in Tuscaloosa.'"

The university proposed helping the plant find new efficiencies, enough to make it worthwhile to keep it open, Portera said. The community came together to fund the startup of the cost-saving project, which found the $1.5 million. GM reversed its decision and announced plans to modernize the plant instead.

The salvation of Rochester Products in Tuscaloosa became a prelude to the state's attempt to land a new GM auto plant.

The seeds of UA's role in recruiting Mercedes-Benz U.S. International to Vance began with the lessons learned in narrowly missing out on GM's Saturn plant, according to Portera, who was an executive assistant to UA President Joab Thomas at the time.

UA became the lead on the recruitment because of its relationship with GM, Portera said. Tuscaloosa was a finalist for the site, but Saturn ultimately went to Spring Hill, Tenn.

"We licked our wounds," he said. "There were concerns whether the area — everything from schools to infrastructure — could accommodate the influx of 6,000 people, he said.

"We all learned a heck of a lot," Portera said.

UA had helped recruit companies to the area in the past. Portera used the example of the JVC plant. Employers like JVC, which produced compact discs, were valuable additions to the community, and the conversation shifted about the industrial projects being recruited and their products. The team began to think about high-value additions. A disc, he noted, is a piece of plastic and magnetic coating. Automobiles, on the other hand, have thousands of parts and tiers of suppliers to support the primary plant.

"You have an opportunity with a magnet project like Mercedes-Benz, you've got an opportunity to have multiple component part suppliers in the supply chain," Portera said. "So we really got interested in the car project as a result of that."

During a visit to a Mercedes S-Class factory in Germany, he learned the model at the time had 17 computer processors onboard.

"Think about this for a moment, one of the most innovative industrial sectors in the history of the world is the automotive sector," Portera said. "We are talking about cars that drive themselves now... We are talking about a whole new wave of innovation. In the end that is what a university is all about.

Those faculty are out there to teach. They are also out there to do research. They innovate. This was a perfect, perfect fit for us."

The site that was marketed for Saturn became the site where MBUSA is located, Portera said. A team of 17 worked on the recruitment, including lawmakers, state and local economic and development officials, representatives from the community colleges, utility providers and the state retirement system.

"Mega-projects like this don't happen with one entity being responsible," Portera said of the partnership.

UA helped with site visits and set up the German school for children of managers, Portera said.

The announcement that Mercedes was coming was made at the Bryant Conference Center on UA's campus. The company sent 13 vehicles for the announcement, including a rare Steinway Mercedes, the product of a short-lived venture between William Steinway and Daimler to manufacture and sell cars in the U.S.

The vehicles were parked in cul-de-sacs at NorthRiver Yacht Club ahead of the announcement to keep them out of sight. Portera helped drive an S-Class into the conference center.

"The university, if you think about this for a minute, at the origin of recruiting automotive projects to Alabama, the president of the University of Alabama was given the responsibility to recruit the first car company to the state. We lost it but we won it when we were able to land this facility," Portera said.

In 1996, there were no automobiles made in Alabama, Portera said, estimating there were 1.1 million made in the state last year. UA was also involved in the recruitment of Hyundai to the state while Portera was system chancellor.

"I cannot overstate the impact that MBUSA has had on Alabama, a car project like Mercedes-Benz has had on Alabama," he said.

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The relationship between UA and MBUSi has evolved from recruiter and recruiting target to a partnership during the past 20 years.

"It’s really increased interest in the automotive industry," said Chuck Karr, dean of the UA College of Engineering.

The proximity of the plant and partnership have been opportunities for students and faculty to participate in projects and research. The relationship has helped UA recruit students and students find jobs with the company and its suppliers.

"It helps throughout the pipeline because of what we do," Karr said. "It’s really just a huge multiplier effect." UA’s relationship with the automotive industry also spawned new centers, including the Center for Advanced Vehicle Technologies, with focus areas in electronics, energy storage and fuel cells, materials and manufacturing, and powertrains. It offers a pathway for UA graduates to jobs with MBUSi and in the industry.

The center is led by the former head of research and development worldwide for Mercedes, who retired from the automaker and joined the faculty in 2012.

Bharat Balasubramanian teaches a course in advanced manufacturing in German to undergraduate students, who must take an intensive language course and spend time studying in Germany. He also oversees graduate students who are working on dissertations while in Mercedes labs in Germany.

Balasubramanian retired as vice president of group research and advanced engineering after nearly 40 years as a research and development engineer for Mercedes-Benz in Stuttgart, Germany. While with the company, Balasubramanian also taught courses at a Berlin university as part of a tradition of close partnership between industry and higher education in Germany.

Balasubramanian described himself as an advocate for electric powertrains and self-driving cars during his time as a head of research at Mercedes. He says automated driving is going to revolutionize society the world over. That belief helps shape his vision for the research and academics in his role as a faculty member.

"Are cars becoming more and more computer science and electrical engineering? Yes, big yes," he said.

Balasubramanian estimated the cost of a vehicle translates to about 40 percent electrical engineering and computer science today compared to traditional mechanical engineering. In 2020, he estimated the breakdown will be an even 50 percent. By 2025, 60 percent will be electrical and computer science, he said.

"I tell everyone you need to know both sides. So we call them electromechanical systems and it is absolutely necessary," he said.

While MBUSi executive Marcus Schaefer was the plant president, he tried to set up programs for qualifying factory workers along the line of the German apprenticeship system, where half their time is spent with industry and half with the university.

"That is what you see today as a very successful program at Shelton State Community College," Balasubramanian said.

Schaefer also tried something similar in applied engineering at UA while Balasubramanian was still a vice president in group research. They attempted to set up the doctoral program but were initially unsuccessful. The doctoral program idea was resurrected after Balasubramanian’s retirement when he joined the engineering faculty, he said. Currently, he has two doctoral students and plans to take on two more.

"The basic idea is to get them back and get them working here in this region with the German multinationals," Balasubramanian said.

Balasubramanian also wants to get fellow professors and engineers at Mercedes interacting on interesting research projects. The education system is a value-add for the plant and Mercedes, he argued.

"They get engineers who are trained and are qualified in the way their industry operates," he said.
Impact of MBUSI stretches well beyond Tuscaloosa

By Stephen Dethrage | Staff Writer

For many leaders in Tuscaloosa, West Alabama and statewide, industry in the Yellowhammer State can be neatly divided into two categories — before Mercedes and after.

The opening of the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant in Vance in 1997 has led to plenty of quantifiable impact, including the direct and indirect creation of more than 20,000 jobs and an annual economic impact estimated at over $1.5 billion in 2017, according to the company’s website. It also had a more intangible effect, signaling to other manufacturers worldwide that Alabama was an attractive place to do business.

In Tuscaloosa, the MBUSI vehicle assembly plant alone boasted 3,600 full-time employees this year, plus about the same number of contract employees who work for other companies that provide logistical, shipping and other services — more than 7,000 workers are on the site every day. Mercedes has also drawn two dozen companies to the area to supply the plant, and they employ 4,800 more people. Over the years, Mercedes parent company Daimler AG has invested $5.8 billion in the plant. The suppliers bring an additional $730 million in local capital investment to the table, according to the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority.

"MBUSI’s impact stretches beyond the hundreds of millions of dollars it generates within Tuscaloosa," Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox said. "We see it with thousands of families who have great jobs, which allows them to buy a home. Invest in their children’s education, or prepare for the next chapter of life. It is also felt in our pride, because the world’s best automobile is made in Tuscaloosa."

Industry leaders echoed Maddox’s praise of MBUSI, stressing that its impact over the last 20 years extends far beyond the Tuscaloosa area.

Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce, said Mercedes’ arrival and success played a major role in other automotive industry giants, including Honda, Hyundai and Toyota, bringing their own manufacturing plants to the state.

"Two decades ago, the first M-Class rolled off the brand-new assembly line at the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance — and Alabama was forever changed," Canfield said. "The Tuscaloosa County plant became the birthplace and cradle of the state’s auto industry, which has developed into a major economic growth engine, responsible for more than 40,000 jobs. Mercedes’ presence in Alabama also transmitted a powerful signal to companies around the world that the state represents an ideal location for innovative, groundbreaking projects."

Honda’s plant in Lincoln began production in 2001 and directly employs more than 4,000 people. Hyundai’s factory was incorporated in Montgomery in 2002 and boasts more than 3,000 employees. Toyota’s engine facility near Huntsville was completed in 2003, and 1,100 people worked there in 2016.

Alabama now ranks in the top five among states in production of cars and light trucks, and for two years in a row has made more than one million vehicles. And of the 40,000 jobs in the state’s automotive sector, about 27,000 are in the supplier network, which now totals more than 160 companies. Growth in the automotive workforce is also projected to increase in the state by 13 percent by 2019, compared with 2014 figures, according to the ADO.

"Last year, Alabama built a million vehicles," MBUSI CEO Jason Hoff said. "I don’t think anyone foresaw that 20 years ago when we started our production in 1997."

Mercedes is now the largest exporter in the state, and the second largest automotive exporter in the U.S.

Hoff was not ready to claim that Mercedes’ arrival was the direct cause of all that industrial growth, but he said the success of German automakers was almost certainly a factor.

"Did all of those companies come here because of us? I doubt it," Hoff said. "But we’d like to think we showed that we can be successful in Alabama, that Alabama is a great place to do work, and that gave confidence to others who were considering coming here."

Hoff didn’t stop within the automobile industry, either. He also cited Polaris Industries in Madison and the Airbus plant in Mobile as industries whose decision to set up shop in Alabama could have been influenced by Mercedes’ 20 years of success here.

Steve Sewell, executive vice president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, did not disagree.

“When Mercedes started production back in 1997, we all had great hopes for what it could mean to the state, but no one could have imagined the success that would follow over the next two decades, nor the opportunities it would present to Alabama,” Sewell said. "Back in the ‘90s, Alabama was trying to develop its own brand in economic development as a leading state for business and industry. Without the Mercedes success story, we would not enjoy the reputation that we have today.”

Sewell said MBUSI’s arrival was a turning point, and that it’s hard to imagine where Alabama would be today if Daimler had chosen another state back in 1993, when it was looking for a location for its first passenger vehicle production plant outside of Germany.

"The overall economic impact has far surpassed any of our expectations, but that’s just the beginning of what Mercedes has meant to the state,” Sewell said. "To say that Mercedes opened the door for Alabama in the automotive sector is to undersell its importance. It really established Alabama as a state where top global companies from multiple industries could be successful.”

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Longtime employees say plant is integral to their lives

By Drew Taylor  
Staff Writer

For Brandi McDonald, working at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Vance has been a family affair.

After spending several years working in banks, McDonald got a job at the plant in August 2004.

Her inspiration for a change of pace was her older brother, Clay White, who began working for MBUSA not long after it opened in 1997.

"I always wanted to follow in his footsteps," McDonald said.

In the time McDonald has worked there, her younger brother, Jimbo Williams, has joined the plant and she has cousins who have worked there, as well. But it's not just her relatives that she feels a kinship with at MBUSA.

"I have gotten to know a lot of people at the plant," she said. "It's definitely like a family."

After four years of construction, training and preparation, MBUSA began producing Mercedes' first sport utility vehicle -- the M-Class -- in 1997 and it went on sale 20 years ago this month.

The plant brought with it not just thousands of jobs, but thousands of jobs that paid well, transforming the economic landscape in Tuscaloosa County and beyond, a transformation that continues even today as Mercedes continues to expand and invest in the plant.

Of the thousands of full-time employees at MBUSA, McDonald is among many who have worked there, if not since the plant opened, for a decade or more. And

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INSIDE
MERCEDES IN ALABAMA
Special section commemorating the 20-year anniversary of the opening of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International

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she is among those who say the company has played such an integral role in their lives that they feel like they have more than just a job.

White said he began working at the plant in May 1998 after a time of not knowing what to do with his life. After years working on the production line, he is now a team leader in the assembly repair division.

"It's been a great opportunity for me," said White, who noted the dearth of industry jobs available in Tuscaloosa in the early 1990s. "It's definitely given me something that I would not have found elsewhere."

Although Mercedes-Benz does not divulge its base pay for hourly employees, a 2015 report by an independent research firm placed average wages and benefits at MBUSI at more than $60 per hour.

The plant also provides other benefits beyond those offered in most workplaces. Fifteen years ago, a wellness and child care center opened on the MBUSI complex. The center has a gym, exercise equipment and a sauna, and holds programs on quitting smoking, losing weight and nutrition.

In 2013, the company expanded the facility to include a health center, staffed with a doctor, a nurse practitioner and two nurses six days per week. It is open to all employees and their dependents covered under the company's health plan.

"The management of our company wants to look out for us," White said. "They're not looking to hurt us or take advantage of us."

Workers at MBUSI are not unionized and, according to McDonald, there is no need for them to be.

"We don't need a union in 2017," said McDonald, who is now an integrated management systems specialist, charged with ensuring that the plant is operating according to international standards. "We are compensated fairly and we get benefits that we wouldn't have gotten otherwise. If it was 1917, it would be very different."

In 1993, Donna McKee had just moved to Tuscaloosa from Marion when she began looking for work. At that time, the company had just announced it would be building the Vance plant. Soon after, McKee landed a job as a temp there.

"I was the only one in the office besides some of the vice presidents that came on board," McKee said. "I answered phones, planned schedules and arranged travel itineraries."

By October, McKee had begun full-time work at the plant, starting in the communications department, then working her way into human resources. For the last six years, McKee has been one of several recruiters in the company, often searching for talent to fill administrative roles.

McKee, who is the longest-tenured employee at the Vance plant, said it is hard for her to imagine what her life would be like if she had not landed that "temp" job nearly 25 years ago. After all these years, like McDonald, she feels a kinship with the company. To her, MBUSI is more than just a paycheck.

"This is home," McKee said. "This is family."

After a six-month apprentice period, McDonald starting working on the production line, making sure cars were assembled correctly. For the Tuscaloosa native, this was a much-needed change of pace.

"I like doing different kinds of things," she said. "Working on the line, you are constantly busy."

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By 2008, McDonald worked her way up to be an integrated management systems specialist, charged with ensuring that the plant is operating according to international standards.

"I make sure we comply with standards before we get audited," she said.

In 1993, Donna McKee had just moved to Tuscaloosa from Marion when she began looking for work. At that time, the company had just announced it would be building the Vance plant. Soon after, McKee landed a job as a temp there.

"I was the only one in the office besides some of the vice presidents that came on board," McKee said. "I answered phones, planned schedules and arranged travel itineraries."

By October, McKee had begun full-time work with the plant, starting in the communications department, then working her way into human resources. For the last six years, McKee has been one of several recruiters in the company, often searching for talent to fill administrative roles.

"We are trying to find people to do all kinds of things," McKee said.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
MERCEDES MILESTONES

A look at the significant moments in the history of the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant in Vance

September 1993
Tuscaloosa County is chosen as the production location for the future Mercedes-Benz M-Class, a mid-size sport utility vehicle; it will be the company’s first passenger car production plant outside of Germany.

October 1994
Construction of plant begins at a site off Interstate 20/59 in Vance, 12 miles east of Tuscaloosa and 32 miles west of Birmingham. Vance operation will be known as Mercedes-Benz U.S. International.

April 1995
First production employees are hired and travel to Germany for training.

July 1996
Plant construction completed; first of the plant’s original 2,000 employees occupy the new facility.

February 1997
The first M-Class -- Job 1 -- rolls off the production line.

May 1997
The M-Class is unveiled to the public at the plant’s grand opening celebration, which was attended by 6,000 people from 60 countries.

June/July 1997
Mercedes-Benz Visitor Center opens.

September 1997
The M-Class goes on sale in the United States and Canada.

January 1998
The M-Class wins North American Truck of the Year Award at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

August 2000
Mercedes’ parent company, DaimlerChrysler AG, announces a $600 million expansion that will double the size of the plant and create 2,000 more jobs; expansion will enable production of other models.

August 2002
DaimlerChrysler AG announces that MBUSA will build a second vehicle, the crossover R-Class Grand Sports Tourer.

January 2004
Plant produces 500,000th M-Class.

December 2004
Last original M-Class rolls off the production line. More than 573,000 first-generation M-Class vehicles were produced at MBUSA during the vehicle’s eight-year lifecycle.

March 2005
Second-generation M-Class goes on sale in U.S.

May 2005
$600 million expansion is completed; plant is now 3 million square feet, covers 600 acres and has an annual production capacity of 160,000 vehicles.

June 2005
The first R-Class is produced.

July 2005
DaimlerChrysler AG announces that a third product will be built at MBUSA – the GL-Class, a full-size luxury SUV.

March 2006
The first GL-Class is produced.

November 2007
Plant produces one-millionth vehicle.

October 2008
Plant produces the first SUV models powered by new-generation BlueTEC diesel engines.

April 2009
MBUSA announces a $290-million expansion of its body, paint and assembly shops. The 225,000-square-foot addition will provide floor space needed for the overlap of current and successor models produced at the plant; the 100,000th R-Class is produced.

October 2009
The one-millionth M-Class is produced.

December 2009
Daimler AG announces plans to move some of the next-generation C-Class sedan production to MBUSA for launch in 2014.

August 2010
Expansion of the body, paint and assembly shops is completed.

July 2011
Daimler AG announces another $2 billion to be invested in plant, one of the largest manufacturing investments in the state’s history; part of that investment includes a $289 million expansion to accommodate production of the C-Class sedan; first third-generation M-Class vehicle is produced.

October 2011
Company announces $255 million expansion to produce a new model at MBUSA – the GLE Coupe, although the name of the vehicle would not be announced until later.

March 2012
Plant expansions get under way.

May 2013
Construction begins on new $70 million, 900,000-square-foot logistics center, which will streamline logistics operations and support receiving, handling and sequencing of parts.

June 2014
MBUSA starts production of the all new C-Class (for North America).

July 2014
MBUSA builds two-millionth vehicle.

November 2014
Mercedes-Benz announces that it will rebrand some vehicles, including the M-Class, which will become the GLE, and the GL-Class, which will become the GLS. The “-Class” suffix will no longer be used for the company’s SUVs.

January 2015
GLE Coupe officially introduced to the world at the NAIAS in Detroit.

April 2015
Production of the new GLE Coupe begins.

August 2015
MBUSA transfers production of R-Class to contract manufacturer AM General in South Bend, Indiana.

September 2015
Company announces $1.3 billion expansion that will create 300 new jobs to accommodate demand for its sport utility vehicles.

November 2015
World premiere of the new GLE sport utility vehicle (formerly the GL-Class).

December 2015
MBUSA reaches a significant milestone -- 300,000 vehicles built in a single year at the Tuscaloosa plant.

July 2017
MBUSA implements the new AM Supply Logistics system into its plant operations.
Distillery plans toasts in Troy

Conecuh Ridge investing $13.5M in project that will include 'tasting experience'

William Thornton  wthornton@a1.com

Conecuh Ridge Distillery plans to build an $13.5 million artisan distillery, rack houses and a bottling hub in Troy.

The makers of Clyde May's craft whiskey envision a "tasting experience center" for tourists, and will employ 50 within five years, according to an announcement from the Alabama Department of Commerce.

Gov. Kay Ivey said the announcement "affirms that our state's sound business climate."

"In addition to the 50 jobs being created, we are excited about the potential economic impact this company will have in Pike County as this becomes a tourist destination for the official spirit of Alabama," she said.

Conecuh Ridge Alabama Fine Whiskey, an aged moonshine whiskey, was named the state's official spirit in 2004. It is modeled after "Christmas whiskey" produced by Alabama moonshiner and bootlegger Clyde May. During May's heyday, he was said to produce up to 300 gallons of whiskey a week at his still near Almeria.

He died in 1990 and his son, Kenny, took his father's recipe and Alabama Conecuh Ridge water to Kentucky for distilling. The finished product was brought back to Alabama for distribution. The company has since changed hands several times.

Conecuh Ridge Distillery, which is based in Long Island, N.Y., will distill and bottle the whiskey in Troy. One of the goals of the company is to develop an artisan distillery in Alabama, with an interactive way for visitors to see how it is crafted.

The average wage of jobs there will be $54,000, according to the Alabama Commerce Department.

Roy Danis, president and CEO of Conecuh Ridge Distillery, said it was a decision in keeping with the whiskey's namesake.

"We continuously market our Clyde May's brand in the spirit of our founder, Clyde May," he said. "His values of quality, integrity and craftsmanship are the building blocks of our company today. Coming home to Troy, Alabama, where the brand got its start, reinforces these values and makes all of us who work for this great brand so very proud."

Troy Mayor Jason Reeves said the project will make the city a destination location.

"This will be a creative addition to Troy's diverse manufacturing base as well as another wonderfully unique reason to visit Troy," he said.

Conecuh Ridge Whiskey did not become the state's only official spirit without controversy. The bill was sent to then-Gov. Bob Riley, who opposed naming a commercial product to represent the state. He vetoed the measure, but the House and Senate overrode the veto.

The House later tried unsuccessfully to overturn the measure.
Longtime economic leader to resign

Dara Longgrear has led Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority for 31 years

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

The longtime leader of the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority plans to retire.

Dara Longgrear was named executive director of the TCIDA in 1986 and has been a leader of industrial recruitment in the Tuscaloosa area ever since, but after 31 years, he's ready to hang up his spurs and let someone else take over.

"Every time I say '31 years' out loud, that seems like a very long time," Longgrear said Wednesday. "But all that time really went by like it was overnight. I don't know if I could ever have hoped to be involved in a more rewarding economic development career than the one I am fortunate enough to have had."

Longgrear jokes that he never got promoted at the TCIDA -- he came on as executive director, and he'll retire in the same role.

"I guess it quit becoming a career because I knew I was where I should be and I found a community I had a passion for," Longgrear said. "I stopped seeking other opportunities and I think that was the right move for me."

He said he values the overall experience of his time in the position over any single highlight.

The TCIDA has been involved in luring the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant to Vance and attracting

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two dozen automotive suppliers to support that plant. According to TCIDA figures, the organization has assisted in the creation of almost 16,000 jobs and brought $7.5 billion in new and expanded investment in and around Tuscaloosa since Longgrear took the job in 1986.

"Dara's profound impact on economic development is not only felt in Tuscaloosa County, but throughout the state of Alabama," said Jim Page, president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. "He was on the forefront of attracting international investment here at the local level which significantly improved the global profile of the entire state. It's hard to imagine companies like Hyundai, Toyota and Airbus considering Alabama if Mercedes-Benz hadn't first chosen Tuscaloosa County."

Page said when you're a part of a positive change as big as that, it's hard to measure.

"Dara will leave a legacy of more than just recruiting thousands of jobs to our community; he's helped change countless lives by giving them more economic opportunity," Page said. "That's pretty special."

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox said the quality of life of people inside and outside the city limits has improved because of Longgrear's decades of hard work.

"Dara has been a difference-maker for Tuscaloosa, who has led the transformation of our industrial economy. The lives of our citizens are better because of Dara's dedication and leadership. To say he will be missed is an understatement," Maddox said.

Longgrear referred questions about the process of selecting his successor to the TCIDA, which declined to comment until the 4 p.m. Monday meeting of the TCIDA board of directors where Longgrear expects to officially announce his retirement plans.

Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
Q & A WITH DARA LONGGREAR

By Mark Hughes Cobb | Staff Writer

Among the many who helped bring Mercedes to Alabama, and ultimately to Tuscaloosa, was Dara Longrearg, longtime executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority. He's been with the IDA since 1986, and was added to the team, dubbed Project Rosewood, consisting of governmental, public and private figures dedicated to selling Alabama to the Germans.

Q: Few industry watchers considered Alabama even in the running for the Mercedes plant. What kept them from taking the state seriously?

Longrearg: None of the site search committee had any experience with Alabama. They might not have come for vacation, not come for our colleges. Maybe they just knew Alabama from national news media.

Q: So when did a glimmer of hope first appear?

Longrearg: They didn't come with preconceived notions that Alabama couldn't be it. In some respects, the expectations were low enough that we exceeded them, at every point. At some point, they had to start reconsidering if Alabama was actually in the running.

Q: Early on, some on the Project Rosewood team saw this project as training, "something to build on." How did that mindset affect the process?

Longrearg: The incentive package was huge, at that time, but I think everybody realized it was not just to incentivize job creation, but that it had a public relations value. Mercedes had sparked international interest (through the '93 Detroit auto show announcement), I had been working economic development, so I certainly knew some of the headwinds. My goal was that Tuscaloosa was going to be Alabama's site. And if this didn't work, we'd be better placed for the next project.

Q: It's been mentioned that the German team, visiting the University of Alabama's Moody Music Building, felt cheered by the idea that a city this size had its own symphony, and world-class performance spaces, that UA played a tipping factor in offering improved quality of life. What were some other ways UA's presence affected the search?

Longrearg: UA had some pluses, and some minuses. There were worries: Would the UA students be socially active in such a way that they might protest? I told them the only lines would be those applying for jobs.

Q: What differed between what Alabama felt it had to show, as opposed to its competitors, for the Mercedes plant?

Longrearg: "Demonstrating that we had a trainable, capable workforce to support those kind of projects, where our competitors were spending more time on 'Here's the site, here's the quality of life.'"

Q: What's the biggest change Mercedes brought about overall, in your profession?

Longrearg: "Among other sister states who are dealing with the same demographics, the same cultural and poverty limitations; even with that, now we're tending to be competing in high-profile projects."
Clear front-runner

Now that Kay Ivey is officially in, the climb is steep for anyone else who wants to be Alabama’s next governor

Mike Cason mceson@al.com

The party primaries are almost nine months away, but some political observers already say it will be a formidable task to dislodge Gov. Kay Ivey from her position as front-runner in the governor’s race.

Ivey announced last week that she would run, a move that was expected after she had already raised $1 million in campaign contributions for the race.

Ivey became governor April 10 when Robert Bentley resigned from the state’s top office.

Jess Brown, retired professor of political science at Athens State University, said Ivey stands to benefit politically from following Bentley, who resigned over allegations that he used state resources to cover up an extramarital affair with an adviser.

“Almost any time, whether it’s federal level, local level, state level, if you have something that’s viewed as a scandal or a tragedy that leads to a new person in office, you kind of give well wishes and the benefit of the doubt to the new person on the job because they’re not associated in any way with the prior incumbent or administration,” Brown said.

Natalie Davis, a retired political science professor from Birmingham-Southern College, said Ivey has both political savvy and a public persona that is likely to find favor with Alabama voters.

“I think she’s viewed in the mold of women in the South who have been successful,” Davis said. “Tough, straightforward. She certainly knows the Montgomery game.”

Ivey was in her second term as lieutenant governor when she replaced Bentley. Voters twice elected her state treasurer. Before that, she was a lobbyist for the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

“She knows how to navigate politics,” Davis said. “She’s been around it, really for most of her life in one way or another. So, I’ve got a sense that she’s in pretty good shape on the Republican side.”

Two would-be Republican challengers have left the race since it became clear Ivey would run — Public Service Commission President Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh, who switched to the lieutenant governor’s race, and Jefferson County Commissioner David Carrington.

Republicans who are running or raising campaign money include Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, Birmingham evangelist Scott See Ivey, A10
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Dawson, state Sen. Bill Hightower of Mobile, Birmingham businessman Joshua Jones, state corrections officer and former Morgan County Commissioner Stacy Lee George and Agriculture Commissioner John McMillian.

Former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb is running for the Democratic nomination, and Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox is considering whether to enter the Democratic primary.

ETHICS IMPORTANT

Steve Flowers, a former state lawmaker and author of "Of Goats and Governors: Six Decades of Colorful Alabama Political Stories," said Ivey will be hard to beat.

"I would say she is the clear front-runner," Flowers said. "I wouldn't say she's a prohibitive favorite. But she's the clear front-runner and she's doing the right things. She's looking gubernatorial. She's traveling the state. Obviously, she's doing a good job raising money, too. She hit that million-dollar threshold in just a few weeks' time."

Despite Ivey's advantages, Brown believes the governor needs to do more than coast to the primary. Brown said she needs to show scandal-weary voters that she is serious about ethics.

"Because of what's transpired in our state government, and I don't mean an event but a combination of events, the politician who runs in this next election cycle who does not understand the saliency of the ethics issue is a fool," Brown said. "You better understand the saliency, the importance to voters, of ethics. And right now in Alabama I'm convinced it's higher than ever and cynicism among Alabama voters is probably very high right now."

Brown said Ivey needs to take on one of the issues left unresolved by her predecessors, such as problems with prisons, education, the General Fund and roads.

"She needs a legislative initiative so she can show she's got the political management skills, that she's not merely just a nice person who's governor, a nice person who hopes we'll do better, but that she's got the political management skills to make positive things happen," Brown said. "Because one of the frustrations now, whether it's Montgomery or Washington, is everybody talks about a problem and nobody makes anything positive happen."

The legislative session begins in January, five months before the primary.

Davis said the results of that first full legislative session of Ivey's administration could affect the governor's race. But Davis said also said Alabama voters don't generally base their allegiances to a candidate on specific policies or accomplishments.

"Our history is one where we vote for people we like rather than people we necessarily agree with," Davis said.

"We really don't seem to reward performance in this state. I guess that's an understatement."

Ivey supports a gasoline tax increase to fund road and bridge projects. Some of the state's business groups have advocated for the state's first gas tax increase since 1992. But the gas tax bills have stalled in the House.

Flowers is not convinced Ivey will champion an issue as potentially controversial as a gas tax increase during an election-year session.

"She may not want to rock the boat," Flowers said. "If she sees she's in good shape politically, then she may not feel like she needs to have any initiative. It's tough to pass anything during an election-year session. My guess is she wouldn't try to do anything dramatic."

As lieutenant governor, Ivey wielded little power but had a chance to build relationships with lawmakers as the president of the Senate. Flowers said that put her in good
From Mon Louis to AARP CEO: Jo Ann Jenkins' inspiring journey to power

By: Roy Johnson

The Gordon Parsons Bridge connecting Mon Louis Island to the Mobile County mainland didn't exist not too long before the leader of one of the nation's most powerful lobbying organizations was born on the roughly 12 square miles bounded by the Fowl River, Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound.

The only way to get across the river and head towards Mobile some 30 miles north was by boat.

Jo Ann Jenkins, now CEO of the 38 million-member AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), was the youngest of four siblings, all much older--eight, nine and ten years older, respectively. And they were probably related, at least loosely, to pretty much everyone on the island.

"I have a large contingent of cousins," she said, with a laugh, during a telephone conversation last week.

Education matters

Their father was a Merchant Marine; mom was a homemaker. Like many parents of their generation, particularly those raising their children in areas choked by poverty and segregation, they touted education as the best (if not only) mode of escaping Mon Luis, which boasted an eclectic mix of ethnicities, including French Creole, who settled there in the 19th century.

By the time Jo Ann was of school-age, segregation had crumbled, at least somewhat, and she quietly broke barriers. While her older brother attended the all-male McGill Institute (now McGill-Toolen Catholic High School) in Mobile, where he was one of the first African-American students, she could attend the high school closest to her island home, Theodore, just a few miles north.

"I had," Wooten said, "a very different experience than [my siblings] did." She excelled at Theodore, rising to student-body president at a time when "diversity" wasn't yet even a thing. She then caught the "bug" (her word) for the nation's capital while serving as an intern for then-U.S. Congressman Jack Edwards--a Birminghamian who relocated to Mobile and served as 1st District rep for two decades--during her junior year at Springhill College, in the heart of Mobile.

(The bridge opened in 1955 but was destroyed by Hurricane Frederic in 1979; it reopened three years later.)

"I was proud of the public schools in Mobile County," Jenkins said. "You should not look far outside your own family for personal heroes, but there is a host of teachers who helped me along the way--some of whom I still keep in contact with."

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Getting the D.C. "bug"

Her first job out of college was with Alabama Power, but she spent her first paycheck on a plane ticket to D.C., where she landed a job with the presidential campaign of actor-turned California-Governor Ronald Reagan. She's pretty much remained there since.

"Once I got to D.C.," she said, "I was very fortunate to work for people who looked out for me. And if you hang around long enough in D.C., you never who'll end up where."

One of those people who looked out for Jenkins was Elizabeth Dole, the then-Department of Transportation Secretary for whom she served as special assistant for minority affairs between 1985-87. The department included 110,000 employees and the U.S. Coast Guard, which made Dole, Jenkins said, the first female to oversee a branch of the military.

Together, the two trailblazers developed a 10-point program to promote women in the transportation department. "It was a first in the kind of impact it had from someone at the Cabinet-officer level," Jenkins said.

Jenkins became AARP first female CEO three years ago this month, and today she and Dole (who is now retired but overseeing her own non-profit created to support military families) are collaborating again. This time, they're working with Congress to create legislation supporting caregivers, who are often strained mentally, emotionally or financially, particularly in uninsured families living in rural or urban areas who often have to take off work to care for loved ones.

"At some point in our lives, almost everyone will either need care or be a caregiver," Jenkins said. "It's great being able to work on the Hill with Elizabeth again to set in place a national caregiving strategy the helps the young and old."

Caregiving in Alabama

AARP estimates more than 760,000 Alabamians are caregivers at some juncture, and they're typically a female in her mid-40s with a full-time job that must be sacrificed to manage multiple responsibilities.

AARP's primary efforts, of course, are in health care: opposing any "age tax" in which seniors are up to five times more for insurance than younger policyholders ("It's already three-and-a-half times," Jenkins said); preserving Medicare and Medicaid, which "is so important to low-income, vulnerable people and people with disabilities"); and fighting efforts allowing insurance companies to deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions.

AARP's efforts to protect Medicaid are particularly important in Alabama, where the legislature has struggled to fill the $100 million-plus funding gap between what the federal government provided and what Alabamians need.

About 1 million Alabamians are on Medicaid, two thirds of which are children. Six in 10 nursing home patients in the state rely on Medicaid, typically after their life savings have been drained by long-term care costs.
This summer, the U.S. Senate's failed "repeal and replace" healthcare bill included massive slices to Medicaid, likely resulting in hardships and devastation across most states, but particularly Alabama, potentially resulting in hospital closings (most likely in rural areas where healthcare is already beyond measure).

Those goals are augmented with efforts surround data that shows Americans are no longer retiring at past rates ("Over a third of our members no longer retire," she says) and are already living longer than previous generations--and staying active longer, often longer than people themselves had envisioned.

Living to 100+ is upon us

Indeed, she says, a 10-year-old today has a 50% chance of living to be 104.

"This is not the future" said Jenkins, who authored "Disrupting Aging: A Bold New Path to Living Your Best Life at Every Age".

Jenkins and AARP strive to ensure seniors are educated about health and finances. "We want to make sure people don't outlive their income." Especially when Social Security, she said, will become a decreasingly smaller portion of the income seniors will need to live on.

All of those realities point to "retirement" being very different than most Americans had originally envisioned it, requiring planning, preparation and, most important, thinking differently.

"Even the very idea of what retirement means [is changing]," she said "More seniors are taking a break for six months to a year before doing something different.

"How do we think about work in the future as we reimagine what the life cycle will be? How do we prepare for the idea that four or five generations of people make be in the workforce at the same time?

"We have to continue to educate and prepare ourselves in this lifetime."
Meet 2017’s Women Who Shape the State

Everywhere you look in Alabama you can find strong women making a difference in their communities. From business leaders to philanthropists and everything in between, the women of this state invest their time and talents into making Alabama a better place and, in the process, encourage other leaders to step up and do the same. This year, This is Alabama presents the third annual Women Who Shape the State awards.

When we put out a call for nominations, you answered in a big way. After careful consideration, the selection committee chose 30 of the best and brightest from your suggestions. This year's selections for the 2017 class include:

Anita Allcorn-Walker, Vice President and Comptroller, Alabama Power.

Carol Madry Bell, CEO, Huntsville Committee of 100.

Mary Lee Caldwell, President and Co-Founder, Lean On Alabama. The movement promotes collaboration, development and investment in each other and the community.

Katy Eldridge, shareholder, Maynard Cooper & Gale. Eldridge is the current president of Junior League of Birmingham.

Kayla Farnon, Advocacy Communications Coordinator, Alabama League of Municipalities.

Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith, President, Birmingham-Southern College.

Catherine Coleman Flowers, Founder, Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise.

Ginger Harper, Senior Vice President, Private Banking and Retail Market Manager, Iberia Bank.

Tammy Herrington, Executive Director, Conservation Alabama.

Kathie Hiers, CEO, AIDS Alabama. Hiers has devoted her career to ensuring that people living with HIV/AIDS get the necessary care and housing they need to live full lives.

Liz Huntley, lawyer, Lightfoot, Franklin & White, LLC. Huntley is a strong supporter of organizations that help children, serving as a board member for many of the causes she supports.

Alesia Jones, Chief Human Resources Officer, UAB.

Amanda Keller, Director, Magic City Acceptance Center. Her work has transformed the lives of LGBTQ youth in Alabama.

Rebecca Kelly, President and Founder, Element Health.

Michele Kong, co-founder and Chief Medical Officer, KultureCity. Kong is changing the state for the better for members of the special needs community.

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Martha Lavender, President, Gadsden State Community College; Visiting Professor, UAB School of Nursing.

Kimberly Lewis, CEO, Project XYZ, a company designed to provide expertise in the research, design, development, integration and sustainment of innovative solutions in engineering, logistics, information technology and alternative energy.

Kathy V. Lovell, Senior Vice President, Americans with Disabilities Act Manager, Regions Bank.

Mary Elizabeth Marr, CEO, Thrive Alabama. Through her work with Thrive Alabama and her leadership in the community, Marr is a champion for people living with AIDS/HIV in North Alabama.

Lee Marshall, Founder/CEO, Kids to Love. Marshall's non-profit is dedicated to meeting the needs of foster children.

Jerria Martin, Director, Drug Free Communities of Dallas County.

Dorothy McDaniel, owner, Dorothy McDaniel's Flower Market. The longtime business owner is an active member of the Birmingham community.

Allison Muhlendorf, Executive Director, Alabama School Readiness Alliance.

Samuetta Nesbitt, Senior VP Public Relations and Community Affairs, United Way of Central Alabama.

Tanveer Patel, co-founder and President, Red Crescent Clinic of Alabama. The free health clinic is a collaborative effort of the Birmingham Islamic Society and the Associations of Physicians of Pakistani descent, Alabama Chapter.

Sarah Patterson, former head coach, University of Alabama's women's gymnastics team. Patterson is the university's winningest coach with six national championships.

Barbara Royal, Founder and Consultant, Momentum. Royal works tirelessly to change the landscape for aspiring executive women in the state.

Linda Sewell, Director of Community Relations, Coca-Cola.

Ellie Taylor, President, Alabama Grocers Association.

Whitney Wright, Director of Investor Relations, Cook & Bynum Capital Management; founder, Athena Collective, an organization dedicated to empowering women in Birmingham's innovative ecosystem.

Honorees will be celebrated at a luncheon hosted by This is Alabama at The Club in Birmingham, AL on Thursday, November 9, 2017. For additional information, visit womenwhoshapethestate.eventbrite.com.
New director takes reins at art museum

Former director is retiring after 21 years at museum

Staff report

Graham C. Boettcher will take the position of director of the Birmingham Museum of Art on Wednesday, following in the footsteps of Gail C. Andrews, who is retiring after 21 years at the museum.

Andrews announced her plans to step down in March, and after a six-month search, the board of trustees named Boettcher, who’s been with the museum since 2006, as its seventh R. Hugh Daniel Director. Andrews will stay on until Oct. 6 to help with the transition.

“I’m thrilled to serve as the BMA’s next director and lead the institution in the coming years, especially as we explore new and dynamic ways to engage and serve the public,” Boettcher said in a release.

Born and raised in Bellingham, Washington, Boettcher earned his bachelor’s degree and doctorate from Yale University, and a master’s from the University of Washington. He’s worked as a curatorial fellow at the Yale University Art Gallery, and held research fellowships at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, and the Terra Foundation Summer Residency in Giverny, France.

He came to the BMA as the Henry Luce Foundation Curatorial Fellow in American Art. At completion of the two-year fellowship, Boettcher was hired in the newly created position of curator of American art, endowed that year. After six years, Boettcher rose to chief curator and, in February 2016, was promoted to James Milton and Sally R. Johnson Deputy Director. “Over the course of the interview process and indeed over the last decade of his service to the Birmingham Museum of Art, Graham has proven himself as a distinguished scholar of art history, a dedicated steward of our collection, and a highly-regarded community leader who is committed to realizing the mission and vision of our prized institution,” said James K. Outland, chairman of the board of trustees, in a written release.

He’s curated exhibitions including “A Masterpiece In Our Midst: Robert S. Duncanson’s A Dream of Italy” (2010), “Norman Rockwell’s America” (2012), and “The Look of Love: Eye Miniatures from the Sider Collection” (2012), for which he edited and contributed to a major publication by the same name. He has also contributed to publications including “American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1860” (Tate Britain, 2002); “Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Works” (Yale Center for British Art, 2007); “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery” (Yale University Art Gallery, 2008).

Boettcher was a 2014 fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership, and has been a trustee of the Association of Art Museum Curators since 2010, serving as its vice president of finance. He has lectured extensively on American art, at locations around the world.
UA part of German accord

New exchange program will focus on engineering

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Engineering students from the University of Alabama and four peer institutions in the state will have an opportunity to study engineering in Germany as part of a new exchange program.

"This is big business for us," said Bharat Balasubramanian, an engineering professor and executive director of UA's Center for Advanced Vehicle Technologies.

UA Provost Kevin Whitaker and his counterparts at the other partnering universities signed a memorandum of understanding Sept. 14 creating the exchange program.

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ACCORD

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Undergraduates will be able to take English-taught courses at the German universities in mechanical, electrical and computer engineering, said Balasubramanian, who spearheaded the effort at UA.

The exchange joins existing UA programs allowing students to study engineering in Germany.

Balasubramanian also teaches an advanced course in advanced manufacturing in German to undergraduates at UA, who spend part of their time studying in Germany. He also oversees graduate students who are working on dissertations while in Mercedes-Benz labs in Germany.

The other Alabama institutions include the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Auburn University and the University of South Alabama. Seven German universities from the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg will participate, according to the announcement.

The seven institutions focus on applied sciences, Balasubramanian said, noting universities in Germany are typically research-focused or applied-science focused institutions.

“They form the backbone of the German industry,” he said.

Balasubramanian, who retired from Mercedes-Benz in 2012 as vice president of group research and advanced engineering before joining UA’s engineering faculty, taught college engineering courses while he worked for the automaker, a common partnership between universities and industry in Germany. There is a close connection between industry and universities in the country, he said.

About 20 undergraduates from the state will begin studying in Germany beginning next spring. Hochschule Karlsruhe and Hochschule Offenburg universities will participate as the pilot schools in Germany this spring.

Qualified students will have an opportunity to stay in Germany for an internship after the end of the semester, according to the announcement.

“You have the option then, if they have sufficient German knowledge and they’re academically excellent. The university will help them get an internship for another six months till the end of the year,” Balasubramanian said.
Adapted athletics center named for husband, wife

The honor was bestowed as a surprise

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Brent Hardin, the University of Alabama’s adaptive athletics program director, and his wife, Margaret Stran, the program's assistant director, arrived at an informal event Friday to watch the revealing of the name of the new facility that will house their program.

They arrived at the Bryant Conference Center expecting the adaptive athletics facility to be named for Kathy Mouron, half of the couple who had given $4 million to make the new $10 million center a reality. It was to be a surprise, an honor bestowed by her husband of 41 years, Michael Mouron.

But the Mourons had a carefully planned surprise. Michael Mouron began his introduction as his wife, Hardin and Stran watched in front of an audience of students from the adaptive athletics program, family and university officials.

"When (Vice President of Advancement Bob Pierce) talked about naming something after someone and the honor the university is bestowing on you, I think that is right," Michael Mouron said. "But what he failed to say is you should earn that right. Kathy and I purchased that right, but we didn’t earn it. But there are two people here who

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have earned that right.”
As Michael Mouron
turned toward Stran and
Hardin, the true surprise
became clear.
“No you didn’t,” Stran
said.
“I give you the Stran-
Hardin Arena,” Michael
Mouron replied.

The UA System board
of trustees approved the
plan to name the facility
the Stran-Hardin Arena on
Friday. UA President Stuart
Bell praised Stran and Har-
din’s work on the program,
which is now considering
adding track, equestrian,
rowing and other sports.

Hardin and Stran came to
Alabama in 2003. Former
UA System Chancellor
Robert Witt, UA’s presi-
dent at the time, helped find
money to start the program.

The generosity of the gift
conferred naming rights.
But the couple knew early
on whom they wanted to
name the facility after,
Michael Mouron said. They
also wanted a crowd to turn
out for Stran and Hardin,
organizing Friday’s reveal
under the pretense it would
be a surprise for Kathy
Mouron.

The 17,036-square-foot
facility is being built on
the south side of the UA
Student Rec Center and
will provide competition
space for the men’s and
women’s wheelchair base-
ketball teams while also
providing locker, training,
storage and office space
for all program’s coaches
and students.

The couple learned of
the program after meeting
a student who talked of his
experience in it.
“We saw the need for
them to have their own
space,” Kathy Mouron said.

Pierce praised the Mour-
on’s for their support.

“Michael and Kathy
Mouron are two of the most
impressive people I have
met. They have an obvious
passion for the University
of Alabama and this adap-
tive athletic program. But
they also have a passion for
life that is exhibited by their
generosity,” Pierce said.

“There is no question the
Stran-Hardin Arena that
is would not be happening
without their leadership.”

The cost of the $10 mil-
lion project is being split
evenly between university
funds and gifts and fund-
raising. The Mourons have

funded in total $4 million of
the $5 million needed from
gifts.

“All we did was push over
the first domino,” Michael
Mouron said, adding the
university and Hardin and
Stran had all the pieces in
place for the arena.

With a quavering voice,
Hardin thanked the
audience.

“The first thing I want
to say is I am just really
glad Margaret’s name is
first,” he joked. “Because,
otherwise, I would be in
big trouble. And also she
deserves that, being first.
The second thing I want to
say is this is the most hum-
bling day of my life.”

Hardin called the pro-
gram a labor of love and
thanked everyone for their
support.

“This is humbling and it
is going to be really, really
hard to get used to,” he said.

The arena isn’t the final
goal, Hardin said to the
audience.

“We didn’t reach a finish
line today. This is just the
beginning. We are going to
use this as a foundation, a
great foundation,” he said.

Stran, who cried as she
helped pull the cover from
the rendering of the new
facility that will bear her
name, addressed the stu-
dents first as she spoke.

“When we talked about
this years ago in our van in
Georgia, you are the face
of the dream we had,” she
said, “And it has been an
amazing journey and bigger
than I ever imagined. Thank
you for believing in our
dream, growing our dream,
and furthering our dream.”

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UA musician wins international competition

Horn player and doctoral student Josh Williams beat out professionals

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

The city of champions adds another to the pantheon: Horn player Joshua Williams, with one year more on his doctoral work at the University of Alabama, won out over every other player in the International Horn Competition of America, best of the best.

Every one: Labor Day weekend in Fort Collins, Colorado, the Hillcrest High School graduate blew all competition away, taking first prize in the professional category, rather than university, division. For the first time in its 18-year history, the professional level was won by someone who flew back to his day job as a student, said his teacher since ninth grade, and director of UA’s School of Music, Charles “Skip” Snead. It was as if a student won the U.S. Open, said Snead, who deemed it “a stunning, essentially lifetime achievement.”

“In our discipline, it’s hard to describe how huge this is,” he said. Getting seen by musicians from around the world was the original goal. When Williams rolled

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through the first round of 30 to make it to semi-finals with six others, Snead was ecstatic: Goal achieved and exceeded. When Williams made the finals cut, with Markus Osterlund of the National Symphony of Washington D.C., and Jorge Mejia, principal horn of the Bogota (Colombia) Symphony Orchestra, anything seemed possible.

The student felt strangely confident, even against premier players, performing for an audience of musicians from around the world.

"I think at that point, I could sort of feel it becoming a reality," Williams said. "I have actually had dreams about winning this competition. Recurring dreams, for months, about how it would feel."

Though he'd centered by staying in his own head, Williams could feel the response.

"Granted, I'm his teacher, and I'm biased, but I'm telling you the truth: It was stunning," Snead said. "The performance was literally magical."

Sept. 3, when Williams was announced as first prize winner, his professor leaned over and said, "Look, your world has just changed, in ways you can't even comprehend at this point." The honor comes with $3,500, and in days after, a phone blowing up with offers. As a winner of the biannual event, Williams joins its elite Laureates Council. The instant fame, Snead said, is priceless.

Williams has won numerous regional prizes, and performed professionally with Meridian, Starkville and Tuscaloosa symphonies. Until this year, though, he'd psyched himself out of the big game. Austin Larson, 2015 winner of the international competition, inspired Williams.

"He's a fairly young guy, a bit older than me," he said. "Hearing some of my colleagues in the horn studio rave about his work — he's a phenomenal player — I thought: 'I could do that.'"
Snead spoke with Larson, discussing possible team-ups. "I’m happy to get on stage and play with Josh, though I’m not sure I can keep up with him," Snead recalled him saying.

"I’ll be honest, I wouldn’t have got on the plane if I didn’t expect to have success at the competition," Williams said.

He first picked up the horn in seventh grade.

"Honestly, I joined band because my family moved sort of in the middle of the school year, and I couldn’t play football," he said. His sisters also played, flute and clarinet, but it was his father who guided him.

"My dad basically just told me to play the horn because he didn’t feel like buying an instrument, and the school would let me rent one," he said. "It was a really crappy single-F horn, and after about a week, my band director bought a brand-new intermediate-model horn for me to play, because she was blown away. ... I didn’t really know what I was doing, but she told me it was special."

Word reached Snead’s wife, Angie, also a music teacher, who brought the two together. Williams began lessons in ninth grade, then started at UA in fall 2010.

"From the first time I met him and heard him play, there was no doubt at that point, this is an extraordinary talent," Snead said, possessing the physical tools, the ear and the musical intellect, along with a strong work ethic. A year later, Snead challenged the student with a copy of his favorite solo horn recording, "The Golden Echo," by Michael Thompson, one
of the student's favorite players, a member of the London Sinfonietta named principal horn of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at just 18. On the disc was Rosetti's D-minor concerto. A few months later, Williams was back.

"He was fairly quiet. I said, 'Did you work on that Rosetti?' 'Yeah.' 'Well, would you like to play it?' 'Yeah,'" Sneed said.

When his wife asked how it went, "I said, 'Absolute truth, it sounded like Mike Thompson.'"

By junior year of high school, Williams began to foresee a career.

"I considered myself a pretty good operator of the instrument, because I could play the right notes, and all that," he said.

Williams saw college as a chance to start over: UA helped him focus on playing music, rather than playing the horn.

"To me, it's really about the music," he said. "I just like to try to tell a story."

The professor underlined a recent UA slogan: "Where legends are made."

"This qualifies in every possible way," he said.

Down the road, Williams wants it all: recordings, major orchestra stints, his own studio.

"My goal has always been to become one of the most influential horn-players of my generation. ... I'm definitely, probably my favorite horn player," he said, laughing, "but I would never tell anyone that."
A Revolutionary War figure is buried there

By Alexandra Brittenham
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

A group of University of Alabama students dedicated their Friday afternoon to landscape and preserve Darden Cemetery, a historic Tuscaloosa cemetery.

The special project manager, Zachary Heard, said Friday that it is their responsibility as the UA student volunteer club to preserve historical sites and give back to the community.

The students trimmed grass, cleaned headstones and raked

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Many Civil War veterans and their relatives are buried in Darden Cemetery. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]
leaves for several hours.

"I come out here to give back to the community," said sophomore Henry Abrams. "The community does so much for us, so it is the least we can do."

George Washington Darden, who fought in the Revolutionary War in 1779, is buried in a small patch of land near the baseball fields of Bowers Park. The cemetery was built in his name in 1844.

Buried alongside him are his wife, Elizabeth Strozier, and other relatives. The cemetery was originally part of a farm Darden built after moving from Wilkes County, Georgia, to Tuscaloosa in 1820.

Relatives say Darden was related to George Washington, the first U.S. president.

Many other Civil War veterans and their relatives are buried in Darden Cemetery.

The cemetery went through a major restoration six years ago when volunteers cleaned nearly 150 years' worth of dirt and grime off the headstones.

Volunteers with the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority also participated in the cleanup.
Marker honors UA's first black student

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

During the past 60 years, Auhirine Lucy Foster has been at the center of two very different crowds at the University of Alabama.

On Feb. 6, 1956, Foster experienced the brunt of a crowd that numbered in the thousands who protested her admission to the university, making her the first black student to attend the school. After no more than a couple of days as a student, a mob formed that stood outside her own classroom. The crowd even threw rotten produce at her as she left town in a police car. Not long after, UA decided to suspend her for her own safety and for the safety of other students.

On Friday, Foster was welcomed back to the university to celebrate a special marker erected in front of Graves Hall in her honor. As Foster sat under a tent, dozens of students and people passing by stood around the tent to witness the celebration.

"To the student body and to all of you standing around, I want you to know that the last time I saw a crowd like this at the University of Alabama, I didn't know what they were waiting for," Foster said as she was greeted with laughter.

Foster was born in Shiloh and later attended school in Linden, located in Marengo County. Soon after her

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ONLINE

For more photos of Auhirine Lucy Foster and Friday's ceremony, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com

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suspension, Foster worked with the NAACP to get back into school, filing contempt-of-court charges against the UA board of trustees and the administration. Despite a federal court in Birmingham ordering the university to reinstate Foster, the university expelled her based on the court case she and the NAACP had filed against them.

The university later removed Foster’s expulsion in 1988. Foster soon enrolled in the graduate program in education. She received her master’s degree in 1992 from the university.

Foster said although she was once scared of Tuscaloosa and what she went through there, she has friends here now and loves it.

“I go to Birmingham and I shake like a leaf on a tree and I can’t stop, but when I come here, I have courage because I know that I have friends in you,” she said.

Peter Hlebowitsh, dean of the UA College of Education, said that in many ways, the future owes a debt to the past and trying to understand it.

“The past that surrounds Ms. Foster’s story remains very much central to building the future of our university,” Hlebowitsh said.

UA President Stuart Bell said Foster’s story and the challenges she faced in Tuscaloosa early on became a turning point for both the university, as well as Alabama and the United States. On June 11, 1963, Vivian Malone and James Hood gained admittance to the University of Alabama after Gov. George Wallace’s “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door” at Foster Auditorium. Malone later became the first black graduate of the university in 1965.

“Quite frankly, without your courage and without your bravery, we would not enjoy the great university as we have it today,” Bell said.

Before ending her speech, Foster directed her attention at the students who gathered to watch her, telling them that she loved them and wanted the best for them.

“I want you to do well at this college because I believe it is one of the best colleges in the world, don’t you?” she said.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
The Strange World of Sorority Rush Consultants

By: Alyssa Giacobbe

The cards were stacked against Hannah*, a PNM—or “prospective new member”—entering rush week 2017 at the University of Alabama. She was a sophomore, for one thing, not a freshman like most of her fellow PNMs. She wasn’t a legacy, but worse than that, she wasn’t even from the south.

Alabama’s rush—the biggest in the country—is notoriously competitive (“a huge production,” says Hannah), with some 2,300 prospective recruits, and a fair share of “southern belle-type behavior.” Hannah says that “scary websites” like GreekRank.com, which rates sororities and fraternities across the country on things like looks, popularity, classiness, and involvement, “basically said don’t even bother as a sophomore—you’re not going to get in. I had so much anxiety.”

She was down an internet spiral when she happened upon Pat Grant, the founder of Rushbiddies, a Birmingham-based consultancy dedicated to helping girls, in Grant’s words, “prepare for one of the most important aspects of higher education”—that is, rush week.

Grant, a former Auburn University sorority girl, founded Rushbiddies in 2009 after helping see her own daughter through a successful recruitment week at Auburn. She now works with girls, and usually also their moms, in private consultations in person or over the phone (prices start at $100 for a 90 minute session) and through group workshops, covering everything from what to wear to what to say. She’ll also suggest who to ask for recommendations and how to get in if your GPA is under 3.0—essentially preparing girls for every scenario, question, dress code requirement, and trap that will come up.

“This generation of parents is used to asking for extra outside help,” says Grant. “Most moms—and dads, too, dads are just as involved—want to make sure their girls are happy and for many, that means placement in a sorority they’re pleased with.” She will do damage control when needed, like in the case of the PNM whose winter break Snapchat showing her dancing with another girl went viral in the days before her second semester rush.

“All it takes is one image to be misconstrued,” says Grant. “I say, I don’t care if this guy is just a friend of yours. If you’ve got your arms all over him, they’re not gonna know he’s not your boyfriend. Or maybe that swimsuit doesn’t make the best impression.” Over the summer, at Grant’s recommendation, Hannah edited her feeds to delete anything political. “I didn’t want to give anyone any reason to cut me,” says Hannah. “It has to be super vanilla, all the way through.”

Most consultants say that technology is, in fact, their biggest hurdle when it comes to working with the modern PNM. Grant often starts workshops asking the crowd who’s spoken to their best friend today.

“Nine out of ten girls will raise their hands,” she says. “Then I ask who’s spoken to them in person.” Crickets. As a result, says Grant, conversational nuances are getting lost. “Families

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don’t eat dinner at the same time,” she says. “The social niceties you need to have mastered are gone. The girls that get overwhelmed going into a new room—I used to call those girls my little deer in headlights. But that’s more of them these days.”

Brooke Howard, a consultant at the Midwest-based Go Greek Girl, says she spends hours helping girls learn how to have conversations they just don’t know how to have anymore. “You might be a great girl with a lot to offer,” says Howard. “But if all you know to ask another girl is where are you from and what’s your major, you’ll be at a disadvantage. Your time is too limited.”

Perhaps even more crucial, however, is dressing the part. Rush week in August at a place like Alabama can be brutally hot, but there’s no getting around the importance of modesty. “Keep the skin to a minimum,” Grant says. “I’m not saying you have to be prudish, but some girls can wear things better than others. You want to be your best self.”

And don’t try to get too creative. Grant tells the story of one girl who showed up to a pre-rush workshop wearing a dress and cowboy boots. “I said, why did you choose cowboy boots?” Grant recalls. “She said, everyone knows cowboy boots are my signature. I told her, maybe back in high school they were your signature. But here, you don’t have a signature. You have to meet what’s expected until you’re established. Then you can wear your cute little cowboy boots.”

Sarah* worked with Lorie Stefanelli of Manhattan-based Greek Chicto prepare for rush at Texas Christian University. Over the phone, they’d practice typical conversations to determine “what elements of my personality to play up,” she says. “We also paid a lot of attention to my outfits. Lorie was very particular about looking classy, not wearing super-short shorts or revealing dresses. More Audrey Hepburn.” Safe looks included anything Kate Spade, Tory Burch, or monogrammed. At Alabama this year, says Hannah, some girls “didn’t get that you should cover up. They’d show up in backless dresses and they’d get released.”

Grant aims to get her girls into one of their top two houses, and says she hit the mark for every one of the 20 girls she put through recruitment last year. She charges $1,500 for her most popular package, which includes 40 hours of text, chat, and skype, as well as workbooks and handouts, but of course, it’s not about the money.

“I’m not getting rich off this stuff,” she says. “Like a friend said to me, it’s really sort of a ministry for you, isn’t it? If I can strip away some of the mystery and have a girl walk into recruitment confident and prepared, that’s very empowering.”

Hannah’s mother, Lisa, says that working with Grant “was like having a fairy godmother with all the right answers.” She flew across the country to spend rush week with Hannah, offering emotional and logistical support in the form of steaming dresses, replacing broken earrings, finding backup dresses to the backup dresses, that sort of thing. When she had to return home mid-week for a board meeting, Hannah’s father flew out to take her place. Hannah texted with Grant throughout.

Sarah says she talked to Stefanelli every night during rush week, usually for two hours. “She’d help me decide the order of the houses I liked,” says Sarah. “Or I’d say, is this OK to say

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tomorrow if I am invited back? PNMs like to talk. And when you’re insecure, it’s much better to have someone outside of the process to talk with.”

Which is why, though she’ll always be on call, Grant sends girls into recruitment with a few final rules to rush by. Don’t drink (or get drunk). Get more sleep than you think you need. And finally, she says, “Play your cards close to the cuff. You never know who’s listening.”

*Names have been changed due to sorority guidelines that prevent members from talking about recruitment.
UAB breaks ground on $39.5M arts, sciences building

Erin Edgemon  edgemon@lmcal.com

UAB broke ground on a new $39.5 million arts and sciences building on Tuesday morning.

The 650,000-square-foot building on the corner of 10th Avenue South and 14th Street South is expected to open in the fall of 2019.

"As a result of the rapid growth of our undergraduate and graduate programs, and the limitations of the Humanities Building, we proposed the construction of a new Arts and Sciences Building to better serve the students of UAB," said Robert Palazzo, dean of the UAB College of Arts and Sciences. "This new building will provide our campus community with a state-of-the-art facility in which they can work and learn. It will complete the quadrant of high-end buildings around the Green allow for cohesiveness and convenience, and promote a safe and efficient campus for our students, faculty and staff."

The new building will replace the UAB Humanities Building, which has served the college’s growing student population for more than 45 years. The facility will be home to the anthropology, computer and information sciences, English, foreign languages and literatures, mathematics, philosophy and social work departments.

The building will include a 300-seat auditorium, performance space, administrative support offices and a storm shelter.

The UAB College of Arts and Sciences serves more than 30 percent of UAB students through one of its 29 majors and 19 departments. All freshmen, regardless of their majors, are taught by arts and sciences faculty for their core classes. The college also offers more than 30 baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral degrees.

The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees approved Stage 4 of planning for the building on Sept. 15.

In other news

BLUE CROSS DONATION

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama last week donated $1.5 million to UAB’s School of Public Health to establish an endowed chair in health economics.

"This gift is timely given the changes in our country's health care industry," said Max Michael III, dean of the UAB School of Public Health. "We will use the funds to attract a thought leader in health economics to further the development of our students and ongoing research within health economics."

The goal of the position, which is the School of Public Health’s first endowed chair, is to explore and develop practical solutions to health problems; facilitate the translation of solutions into practice, both public health and health care; and strategizing to improve the health and well-being of all residents in the state of Alabama.

UAB HOSPITAL HONOURED

UAB Hospital was recently awarded two Gage Awards for its work improving health care quality and population health.

UAB Hospital was cited for opening a transitional care clinic inside the hospital to serve as a medical home for uninsured heart failure patients without a primary care provider. Since 2014, the program has decreased patient costs and reduced the 30-day hospital readmission rate from 20 percent to 6.7 percent, according to UAB.

"We are proud that this program was recognized for its strategic alignment of hospital nursing, the UAB School of Nursing and our community partners to provide the best care for our patients," said Anthony Patterson, senior vice president of UAB Medicine’s Inpatient Services. "This project reflects the dedication and commitment our staff and faculty have for our patients and demonstrates the importance of UAB Medicine’s assuming a leadership role to bring different partners together to benefit the community."

In the quality category, UAB Hospital’s Golden Week Program was recognized for educating staff to improve care and outcomes of premature infants born at gestational ages younger than 28 weeks. In the eight weeks after starting the program, the rate of severe intraventricular hemorrhage in the first week of life fell from 20.4 percent to 10.3 percent, according to the hospital.
UAB Hospital wins prestigious awards for its work to improve quality health care

By: Erin Edgemon

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"The Golden Week Program, developed by a collaborative multidisciplinary team, shows promising results for preterm infants," Patterson said. "The Golden Week Program demonstrates UAB Medicine's dedication to the highest-quality care for all of our patients."

The 2017 Gage Awards program honors the outstanding work of members of America's Essential Hospitals, whose more than 300 members care for low-income Americans and others in need. Through the Gage Awards, America's Essential Hospitals recognizes the learning necessary for members to successfully carry out improvement projects, spreads best practices and innovative programs to other organizations, and supports research, policy and advocacy work by sharing stories of members.
The University of Alabama in Huntsville sets multiple records during fall semester

By: Sarah Macaluso

At the beginning of every school year, most universities will evaluate their long term plan and growth. This year, the University of Alabama in Huntsville is setting standards when it comes to its growing population.

UAH is seeing the result of a strategic plan put in place by university leaders years ago.

This school year, the university has record enrollment, the largest freshman class and the highest ACT test average in the school’s history.

A few key areas are responsible for this growth.

"We've expanded our recruiting area," said Ray Garner with UAH. "We're bringing in many more students from out of state and it's an attractive place. Huntsville is an attractive place to live and work and of course, the university here offers a quality education."

Another area seeing growth is the school's financial aid process and the chance to be more competitive with other universities.

Although, the once "commuter only" school is no more.

"We're transitioning to more residential," said Garner. "We've got construction on the new residence hall and when that is completed in the fall of 2018, that will give us 2,000 students living on campus."

Garner said the university hopes that will create a new energy on campus, more student life and in turn, make UAH even more attractive for potential students.

Growth by the numbers

- The university currently has 9,101 students, an increase of 633 since last fall.
- The incoming class scored an average of 27.9 on their ACT, the highest in the school's history.
- The freshman class contains 1,345 students -- a double-digit increase when compared to the same number last year.
UAH sets fall semester enrollment record

By: Bayne Hughes

The University of Alabama in Huntsville has set records for the fall semester in total enrollment, size of its freshman class and test score achievement.

This incoming freshmen class also had the highest average ACT score in the school's history.

Total enrollment is a record 9,101 students. It's up 633 students, or a 7.5 percent increase when compared to the fall 2016. This is the third year in a row that UAH has set a record for total enrollment.

The freshman class contains 1,345 students, a 10.6 percent increase of last year.

This incoming class scored an average of 27.9 on the ACT, highest in UAH's history. More than a third, 36.5 percent, scored 30 or higher.

Half of the freshmen scored 4.0 or higher on their high school grade-point average. The overall average GPA is 3.85.
Build a monument to climate change deniers

By: John Archibald

It's time to build another monument.

A big one. In granite or marble, with names etched so deep they'll last a millennium. If we have that long.


A monument to recalcitrance and opportunism. A monument to willful ignorance and blatant disregard for the future.

A monument that stands for future generations like a big stone reminder of who is to blame.

Yeah that's right. A marker naming for eternity those who could have stood up for the future, but instead stood for doing nothing as the earth's climate changed.

Like Cavanaugh berating the "bogus science of global warming." Like Brooks perpetuating the notion that it's all a "cyclical pattern" we can do nothing about.

Like all those who thought it better to equivocate, who thought it better to bet everything on the chance they are right than to bet a little to be safe.

You want a place on that monument, right there with the skeptics and deniers and wishful thinkers? Take it. You want to risk future generations because you are convinced scientists all over the world are part of a grand conspiracy? We'll save you a spot on the monument. So your kids and grandkids, bless their souls, can know you did not care.

Enough.

There's a place on our monument for University of Alabama at Huntsville scientists Roy Spencer and John Christy, Alabama's "official climatologist." They're so sure in their own work that they discount the work of others. The Alabama way. They have a place on that marker.

And a place in history.

It's not about this spate of hurricanes. It's about a bigger picture in which the department of defense has made plans to deal with the effects of climate change, in which - this according to NASA -- more than 95 percent of scientists agree that warming is caused by humans.

But what it's about is not the argument. What it's really about is being a good steward of the planet, in being people as eager to invest in our children's earth as we are in their education and trust funds.

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Pope Francis said it best last week when he urged skeptics to talk to scientists.

"Climate change is having an effect, and scientists are telling us which path to follow," he said. "And we have a responsibility -- all of us. Everyone, great or small, has a moral responsibility ... we must take it seriously ... history will judge our decision."

As if on a monument.

That's the Pope. But you don't have to be a Christian to see it. The Dalai Lama said much the same, that humans made this mess and it's not enough to pray to God or Buddha to make it go away.

"This is not a question of one nation or two nations. This is a question of humanity," he went on. "Our world is our home. There's no other planet where we may move or shift."

Feel free, of course, to disagree.

Hope and pray and decide there's little you can do. Deny the whole thing and argue that we just can't know enough to know. Stand for nothing but the status quo.

Feel free. But know, when you do, that you're buying a spot on that monument. So be sure.

Let the future know where you stand.
UAH grabs part of $20 million dollar grant

By: Staff

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. - A partnership comprising nine universities in Alabama, including The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) as the lead institution, has been awarded a $20 million, five-year grant by the National Science Foundation’s Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR).

The grant will fund the development of new predictive plasma-surface interaction technologies for the nation’s aerospace, manufacturing, energy, environment, and agricultural sectors. Serving as a Principal Investigator on the project is Dr. Gary Zank, director of UAH’s Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomic Research and chair of the university’s Department of Space Science.

Dr. Zank, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, said he views the award as a statewide team effort. “It’s not something that could have been done by one person at all. All the co-principal investigators and the institutional leads were outstanding.”

Zank also credited UAH Vice President for Research and Economic Development Ray Vaughn and his team. “They were outstanding in providing all of the help and resources that we needed to pull the proposal together, and the Alabama EPSCoR committee – led by Dr. Christopher Lawson – went out of their way to provide us with both assistance and expertise.”

Ronald Gray, President pro tem of the Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama System, praised Dr. Zank and his team on the accomplishment.

“Congratulations to Dr. Gary Zank and his team on the new National Science Foundation research award,” Gray said. “In recognition of his global achievements in teaching, research and innovation, Dr. Zank was recently named Trustee Professor, which is the highest award for a faculty member in The University of Alabama System.

“For more than 30 years, our three UA System campuses have been carving a leading edge in research through the EPSCoR consortium, improving education, the economy and scientific knowledge to benefit our state and nation. This new award will bolster the science and engineering infrastructure here in Alabama and promote workforce development. The Board of Trustees is committed to building the knowledge-based economy in Alabama, and we commend Dr. Zank and his colleagues for their breakthrough research to achieve our shared goal.”

Entitled “Connecting the Plasma Universe to Plasma Technology in Alabama: The Science and Technology of Low-Temperature Plasma” (CPU2AL), the project seeks to understand, predict, and control the transfer of power from electromagnetic fields to electrons, ions, atoms, molecules and surfaces, and chemical reactions in plasma.

“Most technologies based on low-temperature plasma are developed empirically, yet low-temperature plasma constitutes more than 90 percent of all matter in the universe, making it the bedrock of much of space physics, non-fusion plasma research, and plasma astrophysics,” he explains. “It also underpins the entire information technology industry as well as most high-tech materials-related manufacturing industries.”

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By leveraging Alabama’s strengths in fundamental low-temperature plasma science, the research team hopes instead to develop new predictive plasma-surface interaction technologies. “CPU2AL addresses two major challenges facing low-temperature plasma science today,” says Dr. Zank. “The first is incorporating the full complexity of particle kinetics and energy flow into theory, models, and experiment, and the second is modeling the transfer of energy mediated by collective processes such as turbulence and self-organization. It’s understanding and controlling these processes that ultimately determines the utility of low-temperature plasma.”

The team plans to address these two challenges by developing three strategic research thrusts. The first is a basic understanding of plasma kinetics, which will determine how distribution functions of ionized and neutral species are formed and what the appropriate kinetic and fluid descriptions are of electrons, ions, and neutrals in low-temperature plasma space, laboratory, and industrial plasma. This in turn will enable the development of diagnostics that measure plasma properties in low-temperature plasma far from equilibrium.

The second is a basic understanding of collective processes in order to develop models of waves, instabilities, nonlinear processes, turbulence, and self-organization in low-temperature plasma that will enable the creation and control of large volumes of quiescent plasma or highly localized turbulent states for the manipulation of physical, thermal, electrical and chemical processes. This, in turn, will facilitate the development of efficient numerical algorithms to model collective effects that influence microwave/THz/laser-produced plasma used in fast electronic devices, directed energy systems, plasmonic, and optoelectronic devices.

And the third is a basic understanding of plasma interactions with solid, liquid, and soft matter (biomaterials) and bio-matter (seeds and food) surfaces, which has a twofold purpose. It will determine what plasma species, concentrations, spatial distributions, and gas/electron temperatures are associated with the synthesis of novel covalently-bonded 2-D and 3-D superhard structures in the C/N/O/B system, as well as how large-area deposition of these super-hard materials can be achieved. And it will determine the processes responsible for the plasma activation of prosthetic biomaterials that do not affect their bioactivity for use in prosthetic biomaterials, tissue scaffolds of complicated geometry, and seed disinfection and food safety.

Along with UAH, the partnership includes the University of Alabama (lead: Dr. R. Branam), the University of Alabama at Birmingham (lead: Dr. Y. Vohra), Auburn University (lead: Dr. E. Thomas), Tuskegee University (lead: Dr. V. Rangari), the University of South Alabama (lead: Dr. E. Spencer), Alabama A&M University (leads: Dr. R. Mentredddy and Dr. E. Cebert), Alabama State University (lead: Dr. K. Vig), and Oakwood University (lead: Dr. A. Volkov), with additional assistance from CFD Research Corporation (lead: Dr. V. Kolobov), a computational fluid dynamics software company located in Cummings Research Park. These members bring “a range of expertise in space science, laboratory plasma physics, materials, biosciences, and manufacturing to this endeavor,” says Dr. Zank. “And any gaps we may have in personnel expertise will be filled with the addition of five new faculty hires over the duration of the grant.”
Sen. Shelby Applauds University of Alabama in Huntsville’s $20 Million Science Grant

By: Chris Simmons

Earlier today, Senator Richard Shelby reported that the National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded the University of Alabama in Huntsville $20 million over five years.

As part of the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) program, UAH seeks to develop technologies for applications ranging from aerospace and manufacturing to food safety, based on low-temperature plasmas. Through the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the grant will support fundamental research and education efforts.

Furthermore, the grant will allow UAH to better share resources with other Alabama institutions of higher learning. In turn, this will lead to greater technology development.

Touching on what the grant means for Alabama, Sen. Shelby said,

“*This award serves as merited recognition of the great work that is ongoing at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. UAH is a nationally recognized institution for its research efforts that benefit students, industry, and the community and will continue to do so in the years to come. Once again, Alabama has set itself apart as a leader in science research and higher education.*”

Senator Shelby is known for his continued support of equipping students with the tools they need to succeed. He has helped raise money for numerous university projects across the state, and state of the art engineering buildings at the University of Alabama and the University of South Alabama bear his name because of those efforts.
NASA Tests First 3-D Printed Rocket Engine Prototype

By: Vishwanath Patil

NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center has tested its first 3-D printed rocket engine prototype part made of two different metal alloys.

NASA has been making and evaluating durable 3-D printed rocket parts made of one metal, but the technique of 3-D printing, or additive manufacturing, with more than one metal is more difficult, NASA said in a statement on Monday.

“It is a technological achievement to 3-D print and test rocket components made with two different alloys,” said Preston Jones, director of the Engineering Directorate at Marshall. “This process could reduce future rocket engine costs by up to a third and manufacturing time by 50 percent.”

Engineers at Marshall, led by senior engineer Robin Osborne, of ERC, Inc. of Huntsville, Alabama, supporting Marshall’s Engine Components Development and Technology branch, low-pressure hot-fire tested the prototype more than 30 times during July to demonstrate the functionality of the igniter. The prototype, built by a commercial vendor, was then cut up by University of Alabama in Huntsville researchers who examined images of the bi-metallic interface through a microscope. The results showed the two metals had inter-diffused, a phenomenon that helps create a strong bond.

A rocket engine igniter is used to initiate an engine’s start sequence and is one of many complex parts made of many different materials. In traditional manufacturing, igniters are built using a process called brazing which joins two types of metals by melting a filler metal into a joint creating a bi-metallic component.

The brazing process requires a significant amount of manual labor leading to higher costs and longer manufacturing time.

“Eliminating the brazing process and having bi-metallic parts built in a single machine not only decreases cost and manufacturing time, but it also decreases risk by increasing reliability,” said Majid Babai, advanced manufacturing chief, and lead for the project in Marshall’s Materials and Processes Laboratory. “By diffusing the two materials together through this process, a bond is generated internally with the two materials and any hard transition is eliminated that could cause the component to crack under the enormous forces and temperature gradient of space travel.”

For this prototype igniter, the two metals — a copper alloy and Inconel -- were joined together using a unique hybrid 3-D printing process called automated blown powder laser deposition. The prototype igniter was made as one single part instead of four distinct parts that were brazed and welded together in the past. This bi-metallic part was created during a single build process by using a hybrid machine made by DMG MORI in Hoffman Estates, Illinois. The new machine integrated 3-D printing and computer numerical-control machining capabilities to make the prototype igniter.

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While the igniter is a relatively small component at only 10 inches tall and 7 inches at its widest diameter, this new technology allows a much larger part to be made and enables the part’s interior to be machined during manufacturing—something other machines cannot do. This is similar to building a ship inside a bottle, where the exterior of the part is the “bottle” enclosing a detailed, complex “ship” with invisible details inside.

The hybrid process can freely alternate between freeform 3-D printing and machining within the part before the exterior is finished and closed off.

“We’re encouraged about what this new advanced manufacturing technology could do for the Space Launch System program in the future,” said Steve Wofford, manager for the SLS liquid engines office at Marshall.
NASA Uses Hybrid Process to 3D Print Rocket Engine Igniter From Two Different Metals

By: Clare Scott

Whenever NASA comes up, it’s a pretty good bet that something exciting is happening. The space agency has been doing some amazing work with 3D printing, including building an entirely 3D printed rocket engine, which they’ve been testing as it gets closer and closer to completion. There are a lot of complex parts that make up a rocket engine, and they’re all important, but one of the most important is the igniter, which is used to initiate the engine’s start sequence; you can’t launch a rocket without the igniter.

An igniter is made from two different types of metals, and it’s typically created through a process called brazing, which combines the metals by melting a filler metal into a joint. It’s a time-consuming process that requires a good deal of cost and manual labor, so NASA found a better way to combine metals: 3D printing. Recently, engineers at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama tested the agency’s first 3D printed part made from two different metal alloys.

“It is a technological achievement to 3-D print and test rocket components made with two different alloys,” said Preston Jones, director of the Engineering Directorate at Marshall. “This process could reduce future rocket engine costs by up to a third and manufacturing time by 50 percent.”

It’s not a simple process to 3D print a single piece with two different metals, so a unique hybrid process called automated blown powder laser deposition was used. The two metals, a copper alloy and Inconel, were 3D printed into one piece rather than having four separate pieces brazed and welded together. The single build was carried out by a hybrid machine, made by DMG MORI, that combined 3D printing and CNC machining capabilities.

Engineers at Marshall, led by Senior Engineer Robin Osborne of ERC, Inc., supporting Marshall’s Engine Components Development and Technology Branch, low-pressure hot-fire tested the igniter prototype more than 30 times in July. University of Alabama in Huntsville researchers then cut up the component to examine it through a microscope, and discovered that the two metals had inter-diffused, creating a strong bond.

“Eliminating the brazing process and having bi-metallic parts built in a single machine not only decreases cost and manufacturing time, but it also decreases risk by increasing reliability,” said Majid Babai, Advanced Manufacturing Chief and lead for the project in Marshall’s Materials and Processes Laboratory. “By diffusing the two materials together through this process, a bond is generated internally with the two materials and any hard transition is eliminated that could cause the component to crack under the enormous forces and temperature gradient of space travel.”

The igniter is 10 inches tall and 7 inches wide at its widest diameter, but this new hybrid technology could be used to build much larger parts and is capable of machining the part’s interior during manufacturing, something that other manufacturing methods cannot do. The hybrid technology can alternate between freeform 3D printing and CNC machining inside the part before the exterior is finished and closed off.

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“We’re encouraged about what this new advanced manufacturing technology could do for the Space Launch System program in the future,” said Steve Wofford, Manager for the SLS liquid engines office at Marshall. “In next generation rocket engines, we aspire to create larger, more complex flight components through 3-D printing techniques.”
University serves as pipeline for educated workforce

By: Amy Guckeen Tolson

When it comes to attracting the best and brightest to the Rocket City, the University of Alabama in Huntsville is charging on.

With the largest freshman class ever this year – 1,345 students – who boast the highest composite ACT scores – 27.9 – in the school's history, UAH is breaking its stereotype as a commuter campus and carving out a new one as the supplier of the one thing that drives the Tennessee Valley's economic engine – employees.

It's a role that UAH has played since the school was established in 1950, but one that is constantly evolving to meet the demands of an ever-changing economy.

"We're a big player in the economy of Huntsville, providing an educated workforce," said Dr. Robert Altenkirch, president of the university.

It's the programmatic offerings that are attracting students to UAH, Altenkirch said. With nine colleges that offer 89 degrees over more than 100 areas of study, engineering remains the university's largest program, comprising nearly a third of the student body population.

But while UAH is known for its engineering, it's not the only area of study that draws students to the university. Cybersecurity is at the forefront of many minds, and UAH is no exception, where a program currently exists at the graduate level, but will soon expand to the undergraduate level, with a link to the current Huntsville City Schools program.

"You've got a pipeline of cybersecurity folks coming out that can populate the industry on the Arsenal and in Huntsville," Altenkirch said. "We've already got people wanting to enroll and the undergraduate program hasn't officially started yet. We adjust to have those types of programs to develop the workforce for Huntsville. We have a lot of out-of-state students who come here with the purpose of graduating and working for the military, NASA or in Cummings Research Park."

University leaders have expanded offerings within the College of Nursing, to include more online coursework, and was listed as one of the top 50 best online master's in nursing programs this year by U.S. News & World Report. The next effort for the college will be a Ph.D. program, which Altenkirch is proposing as a joint degree with the University of Alabama, as finding faculty for such a program can be a challenge.

The school has also heavily invested in its education program, elevating it from a department to a college five years ago, and adding a focus on special education and Department of Kinesiology. "The whole thing skyrocketed," said Altenkirch, who would also like to expand a Masters of Arts in teaching in elementary education.

In recent years the university has also revamped its tuition, allowing students to take 12 to 18 credits each semester at no additional charge, and is making a concerted effort to make campus more aesthetically pleasing, with the addition of new resident halls that will be a mirror image of the current Charger Village, and will open next fall.
Do endorsements help you win an election?

By: Aaron Cantrell

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — There’s only one Republican ticket up for grabs in the Special Senate general election. Both Roy Moore and Luther Strange want it.

Each candidate has been campaigning hard and both have gotten endorsements from political figures and organizations.

President Donald Trump hasn’t been shy about his thoughts on Luther Strange. He announced he will be heading to the Rocket City on Friday to support him.

"Roy Moore won 60 counties in this state, but two of the ones he lost was in this market, Madison County and Limestone County. This might be a good time to try and take some of former Judge Moore’s support away," UAH Associate Professor of Political Science Andree Reeves said.

Who’s backing Moore? President Trump’s former Chief Strategist that helped him win the 2016 election.

Some may see this race as Trump versus Bannon, but Reeves said that’s not true. "On the national level you have the dynamic of Trump versus Bannon, but this was decided long before most people were aware of Steve Bannon. I suspect the voters are not paying that much attention to it," Reeves said.

Reeves said endorsements don’t really help in this election. She said they are more effective during primaries.

But who will win this election? She said only time will tell. She said Strange has the corporate money and support behind him and Roy Moore doesn’t.

She said Moore doesn’t need much money support because his voters are passionate. "And more enthusiastic as evangelicals and true believers, than are Luther Strange’s followers who are more bent on trying to keep someone like Roy Moore out of office," Reeves said.
Huntsville's Geeks and Nerds Corp. more than a funny name

By: Shelly Haskins

When a person walks into Geeks and Nerds, better known as GaN Corp., it is evident that the place is filled with, well, geeks and nerds.

The building truly reflects the characteristics of the technology company and its employees. It is located on South Memorial Parkway in what once was the swanky two-story restaurant known decades ago as Mister C's.

When GaN Corporation Founder and CEO, Dr. Jonn Kim, purchased the building he kept the upscale interior and the open floor plan. These days, however, dangling among the grandiose chandeliers are Star Wars Fighter Ships.

The sprawling mahogany bar is now alongside ping pong tables, a grand piano, video games and the liquor bottles are replaced with an espresso machine.

Contrasting with the decorative brick interior is a conference table built of Legos and a Mario Brothers-themed fish tank complete with Cheep Cheeps.

"The customers that we deal with are very serious customers and some advisors thought that being called Geeks and Nerds would not be taken too seriously in that world, but I think it came down to what am I trying to do. Am I trying to impress somebody? That wasn't the point. It was about being authentic with who I am and what the company needs to be," Kim said. "Being authentic works. It was not our goal to be a multi-million dollar company, it was to be the best technology enabling company we can be, while having a great time at solving problems and making a difference."

The "tech-enablers" at GaN have primarily focused on test and evaluation for the United States Army and most recently are adding a major concentration in the area of cybersecurity, which Kim calls an urgent area. The company offers a variety of other technical services, including systems engineering, modeling and simulation and hardware and software development.

Rethinking the tech biz

Kim, 55, started GaN Corp. in 2004 and was the sole employee. Much like his current office environment, he has thrived on a balance of ingenuity and pragmatic motivations. He was born and raised in South Korea and moved to the United States with his family when he was a senior in high school. His parents wanted to join relatives who lived in California, but his father was offered engineering opportunities in both Oregon and Alabama, ultimately taking the job in Alabama and bringing his family to Huntsville.

Kim graduated from Grissom High School, though he was only there long enough to graduate, enrolling too late to even be included in the yearbook. He went on to earn a Ph.D in electrical and computer engineering from Vanderbilt University and a master's degree in electrical and computer engineering from the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

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Kim said originally he chose electrical engineering because it was the major that required the least amount of English and he had not mastered the language yet.

"I see my education was a means to get to where I am, as opposed to the end. I'm not a typical geek driven by technology. I'm driven by doing things and technology allows me to get there," Kim said. "My big vision as a human being was space exploration — that was how it began — and I wanted to be with NASA and I was with NASA for a while.

"Over time, I became more focused on things that are happening here. So, working for the Department of Defense, and we're going to be working for the Department of Homeland Security, working with cybersecurity, all those things have more imminent tasks that we have to work on, as opposed to space exploration, which might be more of a long-term vision," Kim said. "Basically, I want to use technology to keep our community safe, and our nation safe and that gets me interested and excited, as opposed to my own personal passions."

Kim was fortunate in his early career to be exposed to successful people, technically and professionally, he said, but he was looking for a more meaningful purpose.

"I got to a place in my career, and was fairly young, I was in my mid-thirties, where I was moving up in the corporate world and I decided that the financial and professional success I was experiencing was not really what I wanted. So, I had an early mid-life crisis in my thirties and asked myself 'What is it that I want to do, when I grow up?'." Kim said.

Kim thought about what wasn't working for him in the corporate world and decided he wanted to start a company that brought technology back to the "core roots," he said. Kim wanted an office environment similar to a large coffee shop, with an open office set-up, "sparking interests outside of computers and monitors" encouraging people to talk to each other.

"We are a technology company that tries to help the community and society with our technical geekiness and nerdiness. Our customers tend to be the government customers who are interested in national security and homeland security," Kim said. "That's what I'm passionate about, helping us become more secure, more stable, and keeping our neighbors safe, keeping our communities safe. That has been my focus for the last many, many years, more than a decade now."

Kim speaks with students at both of his alma maters, working with the schools to offer internships and sponsor senior projects. He says his hopes to help direct students in career paths, particularly in cybersecurity.

"There's a huge threat in cybersecurity and the unfortunate thing is that the majority of us know very little about what cyber threats really mean. It's a lot more grave, it's a lot more dangerous, a lot more potent than we realize. So I feel there needs to be an urgency. There needs to be leadership that is pushing our focus into things that we have and things we need to protect, because once we have major infrastructure down, our society's going to go down, it's going to perish. We don't want that to happen," Kim said. "As grim as it sounds I take the business of cybersecurity very seriously. I'm getting not only the company, but I'm getting students at UAH and Vanderbilt excited about doing something good for the good side, not the bad side, and keeping the community safe."

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Kim said he talks to students and employees about the diversity of "left and right brain" tasks in technology.

"The world of cybersecurity is going to be highly multi-disciplinary. We can't just have electrical engineers or computer scientists working on cybersecurity problems. It has to be people who understand psychology, sociology, who understand business, economics, along with the technical world. So it's a combination, it's a very broad and deep topic, it's a challenging topic as well," he said.

Since 2004, the GaN Corporation has expanded to almost 80 employees with offices in Alabama, Texas, Arizona, and Florida. Kim is currently working to open an office in Washington D.C. The company pulled in $20 million in revenue in 2016.

In 2015, GaN officially became an employee-owned company through their Employee Stock Ownership Plan.

"The key thing is I have accomplished more than I had ever imagined accomplishing as a businessman. My first interviewee, he asked me how many people we'd ever have and I told him 'at the maximum we'll have 8 or 9 people, because I don't want the company to ever be bigger than 8 or 9 people.' Through the years we got a lot more successful than we had ever planned on being and I felt like I also lost focus because working for yourself, it seems strange, but working for yourself is not that rewarding. Working for a bigger cause is a lot more rewarding," Kim said. "So I feel like I have more energy about the company now that we are working for an employee-owned company as opposed to working for myself, because when it's all said and done, how much money is really needed to survive? You can't trade time for money so either you get out business, because you have enough money that you don't want to work it, or if you're going to stay in it, you have to stay in it for the right cause. I feel that working for the employees and giving them opportunities to have something more than what they had is more meaningful than me simply getting more."

About a year ago, Kim also established the Geeks and Nerds Foundation as a way to give back to the community at large. The program provides financial assistance through scholarships and grants to promote opportunities for self-reliance.

The Foundation, Kim said, is "uniquely unfocused" in the fact that they are willing to assist all ages, in a very broad range of untraditional ways, to enable people to get to the next level in their lives and careers. For example, it's not about technology, he said, someone may need help with groceries, babysitting, transportations, or job training. Applicants can apply online at geeksandnerds.com.

Being a "Life Entrepreneur," Kim said is not always about business, it's about establishing a mission for your life, and learning to trade strengths and weaknesses to get to that vision.

"Tie your mission and vision to the community, or something more meaningful than you," Kim said. "Some people say I'm at an age where I need to start thinking about retirement. Retirement is not in my horizon because I think I'm just getting started on something different again. It seems like every year I'm starting something different."
Student raped on Tiger Transit

Police: 2 bus drivers arrested

Carol Robinson  crobinson@al.com

Two men — both Tiger Transit employees — are charged in the sexual assault of an 18-year-old Auburn University student.

The Auburn Police Department on Monday announced the arrests of James Don Johnson, 32, and Tony Martin Patillo, 51. Both men are charged with first-degree rape and first-degree sodomy in connection with the attack that happened Friday night on the campus shuttle.

Authorities provided this account of what happened: At about 11:50 p.m. Friday, Auburn police received a report of a man exposing himself while standing over a female in the 700 block of Aspen Heights Lane in Auburn. Officers arrived on the scene and found Patillo near the roadway and detained him.

They weren’t, however, able to find the female at the time of the initial report. Patillo was arrested on four counts of public lewdness and taken to the Lee County Jail.

As the investigation continued, detectives determined the female, who “appeared to be incapacitated,” got on the bus near Magnolia Avenue in Auburn. While on the bus, she was sexually assaulted by Patillo, an employee of First Transit, the operator of Tiger Transit.

Further investigation showed Johnson, who was driving the bus, engaged in actions to perpetuate the crime while Patillo was in the rear of the bus raping the victim. Patillo later exited the bus near Aspen Heights Lane with the female victim, and it was at that point he was seen by passersby standing over her.

Police said they were ultimately able to identify, locate and interview the 18-year-old victim.

Patillo, who lives in Columbus, Ga., is being held in the Lee County Jail on $127,000 bond. Johnson, of Auburn, was arrested at his home and is held in the Lee County Jail on $125,000 bond.

Authorities said the attack happened on the Tiger Ten shuttle, which is an extension of Tiger Transit and operates between 10:30 p.m. and 3:30 a.m. on weekends.

Anyone with information is asked to call detectives at 334-501-3140 or the 24-hour non-emergency number at 334-501-3100. Anonymous tips can be made at 334-246-1391.
State education leaders must reform themselves

Mary Scott Hunter for AL.com

The Alabama State Board of Education and state Department of Education exist to serve local school systems and the students and teachers in those systems. I believe we have lost focus, and we must get it back.

Unfortunately, I hear from local teachers, principals, and superintendents that the department often doesn’t help them. Locals do not get their questions answered, and when they interact with the department, mishandling, bungling and conflicting information is all too common. Others avoid the department altogether because they have totally lost trust and confidence, citing meaningless committees, long compliance reports and the like.

The job of local school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers is to take care of their kids. When they must spend time pacifying state Department of Education bureaucrats, tension erupts.

And the bureaucratic mindset is evident at the department. Internal and external communications are often poor. Hiring, management and business operations are questionable. The budget evidently has been balanced for some years by drawing from reserves, reserves that are now depleted. High performers at the department always seem weary and overwhelmed carrying the entire weight of the organization. Department morale is generally low.

Local school systems, especially the ones with a strong mission mindset, tend to have higher morale despite finite resources.

The State Board and department have some important milestones ahead. We need to submit our strategic plan to the US Department of Education by Sept. 18, or be granted an extension. Standardized testing needs serious attention now that we’ve moved away from ACT Aspire without a clear path forward. The department budget and staffing must be managed and brought in line. Next year, the normal cycle of review of our math standards is scheduled to begin, presenting an opportunity for reconciliation around the issue of standards.

With leadership changes, the State Board and department should take this opportunity to regain focus on the mission.

I’ve recently rolled off a two-year tenure as the K-12 liaison trustee for the Alabama Community College System created in 2014 by the Legislature. During my time, the trustees made tough, purposeful decisions including consolidations and various other cost- and service-conscious decisions.

Today the ACCS “Central Office” in Montgomery and extended network of community colleges they serve are stronger than ever. The dramatic improvements are remarkable and noteworthy, especially in such a short amount of time.

By contrast, the State Board in their governance role over K-12 rarely makes the news with positive stories. This should be different.
In 2013, the Alabama Legislature began requiring that all local boards of education adopt a Code of Conduct and undergo annual training. This move has improved the functioning and credibility of local Boards. Unfortunately, the legislation exempted the State Board.

So my first call for reform is this: the State Board must ask of themselves at least the very accountability measures required of local boards. I am also in favor of term limiting board members. The powers of incumbency are strong, and they fundamentally favor status quo. With respect to our public education system, that’s simply not acceptable. As for the state Department of Education, an approach we should seriously consider is to “reconstitute” it. Kentucky did this in the early ’90s by reducing their department size and scope dramatically and then building it back up slowly and carefully. Here in Alabama, giving local school leadership more autonomy over instruction while the department is being reconstituted would be a relief for local systems and educators.

Whatever reforms are chosen, I’d expect the governor — the standing president of the State Board and a voting member — would get to be very hands on.

No more nibbling around the edges with bills, policies and practices that address symptoms but not root causes. This is a clear call for education reform, starting at the top.

*Hunter, who represents the 8th District on the Alabama State Board of Education, lives in Huntsville.*
Q&A with new Shelton State president Ashley

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Incoming Shelton State Community College President Bill Ashley will officially arrive in early October.

However, last week, Ashley was on campus meeting with faculty and staff. He spoke with the Tuscaloosa News about his plans and vision for his role as president.

Are you still planning to arrive in October?

This week I am going to meet the faculty. I hit the ground running Oct. 2.

What is the role of community colleges in your opinion?

Shelton State’s role is to be accessible both financially and academically. We want to be accessible to a broad group of people. We want to be an active member of our community. Because of our framework, we are providing the students and others a template for how to be active participants as well.

I did my dissertation work on developmental education. It is very important to me for us to be able to be a step on the economic ladder for all. We also need to be providing quality as well we need to meet students where they are as well, but it is important to me to be that first step on the economic ladder.

You walk into the classroom it is important to have engaging faculty members and engaging instructors.

I want us to be a step on the economic ladder, a strong influence on

See Q&A, A5
About Bill Ashley

He comes to Shelton State Community College from Southwest Mississippi Community College, where he was vice president for student affairs.

Ashley has held teaching and leadership positions in Mississippi’s community college system for almost two decades. His prior roles range from student instruction to athletics to academic leadership.

A Mississippi native, he earned a Ph.D. in community college leadership from Mississippi State University. He also holds an master’s of business administration degree in economics and a bachelor of business administration degree in finance and accounting from Delta State University in Mississippi.

New Shelton State president Bill Ashley is introduced to the faculty and staff Friday. Ashley, left foreground wearing a green tie, tours the campus following his introduction. [STAFF PHOTO/ GARY COSBY JR.]
Q&A

Continued from A1

the students as they move throughout their lives. Personally, I was a community college student. It is has been very pivotal I think in me having this conversation. It opened up and allowed me to be in a nurturing environment.

You are just starting, but what are your priorities of goals in the short-term and long-term?

The main thing is I look forward to getting there ... I look forward to, first off, meeting all the faculty and staff and letting them know me. Getting a good feel for their strengths and giving them a good feel for my strengths.

I want to be a community college that helps our students achieve their goals. We want to be encouraging and we want to be a model. We want (people) to look at us and see a model to copy.

Community colleges have many roles as institutions helping preparing people for academic degrees, career technical and workforce development. There has been growing emphasis on the role of workforce development in the state. How do you balance the roles at Shelton State?

The transfer component historically has been a price differential. We have offered the first years of a four-year college education (at an affordable price).

Regardless of any economic development ideas. (the skills learned in the academic track) are very important: reading, thinking, communicating. We are still going to be in that business.

Higher education is becoming increasingly competitive as an environment. How does Shelton State thrive in that environment?

Technical degrees, we have kind of been historically ahead on that. Four-year transfer programs -- looking at dual-enrollment we can go multiple ways. You can go up as well as going from the high school to us. (We want to be) building partnerships and trying to create opportunities. Building off the strengths of the transfer model that has historically been the strength of the two-year model.

System Chancellor Jimmy Baker said the campus needed someone to take the reins and be aggressive about moving the campus forward. How do you envision your role as president?

I know I have seen the multiple types of education. I started out in the college of business. Of course, I got a degree from the college of education.

We want to go in the right direction so to speak. I am going to be studying the organization and making sure we are going in the right direction. Not that I am a micro manager, but I like to know what is going on. I like to be informed. Sometimes, I might need to take a little hands on. Sometimes, I might not need to be hands on. In general, I will be participatory. That is my philosophy.
BLAME GAME

Gus Malzahn isn’t responsible for the mistakes that led to Sean White’s dismissal. The aftermath of that decision, however, is a different story.

Kevin Scarbinsky kscarbinsky@al.com

Of all the issues troubling the Auburn football team three games into the 2017 season, here’s one we didn’t see coming. Sean White is no longer a member of the team.

The former starting quarterback who lost his job when Jarrett Stidham signed up lost his roster spot after White’s arrest for public intoxication early Sunday.

That was the last strike for Gus Malzahn, who dismissed White and explained his reasoning in a three-sentence statement. One of those sentences resonated more than the others.

“He has made poor decisions that are not in the best interest of our program, and more importantly, himself,” the statement said.

Translation: The person most responsible for White’s behavior that led to his dismissal is White himself. Going forward, he has more important things to worry about than football.

Let’s hope, with the help of family, friends and the toughness he’s displayed on the field, he gets back on the right path. If White’s two-game suspension to start the season wasn’t enough of a clue that he might not be handling his backup status well, his arrest after not getting any snaps against Mercer made it clear.

Remember his admirable August news conference after Stidham inevitably was named the starter? White said all the right things that day and was praised for being a stand-up guy by many — me included — but his actions have spoken louder than those words.

His actions suggest he needs to forget about football and focus on life for a while. Now he can do just that.

Now about the embattled head coach. For all his faults, Malzahn remains in the minority as a head coach willing to cut loose a talented player for unacceptable behavior despite his potential value to the team.

See Duke Williams, Jovon Robinson, etc.

Unless White committed multiple violations of an Auburn policy that demanded his dismissal, Malzahn deserves some credit for making a decision that leaves his team terribly thin at the most important position on the field.

Thanks to a combination of questionable evaluation and development, which is on the head coach, Auburn is left with two scholarship quarterbacks on the roster. That’s an uneasy place to be with nine regular-season games to play and an offense that surrendered 11 sacks against Clemson.

If at all possible, it would be in Malzahn’s best interests to get White some help with his issues and keep him around as an experienced insurance policy. What if Stidham can’t withstand another blitzkrieg by a real defense? What if true freshman Malik Willis simply isn’t ready to assume the position should Stidham get nicked and sidelined for a play, a series or longer?

SEE SCARBINSKY, B3

No. 15 Auburn (2-1) at Missouri (1-2)

When: Saturday. 6:30 p.m.

Where: Memorial Stadium. Columbia, Missouri

TV: ESPN

Line: Auburn by 19
SCARBINSKY
FROM B1

Instead the Tigers are left with a starter still shaking off the rust of a two-year layoff and a backup fresh out of high school still learning the ropes.

If you want to blame Malzahn for keeping White in last year's Georgia game far too long with an obviously wounded wing, go right ahead. Be my guest. I've got your back. If you want to blame Malzahn for signing a minimally mobile drop-back passer to compete for the starting quarterback job after Nick Marshall's successful run at the position, join the crowd. White reached his peak during last year's six-game winning streak, but let's be honest. The hyperventilation of Trent Dilfer and others to the contrary, he was never going to be the quarterback to beat Alabama and lead Auburn back to the SEC Championship Game.

So you can blame Malzahn for a number of things where White's concerned, but if you want to blame the coach for the young man's inability to avoid poor decisions, go there on your own. That's a bridge too far from what's fair.
ROAD TEST

Bill Clark hopes Ball State prepared team for what it will face at North Texas

Evan Dudley  For AL.com

It's a daunting task.

A typical game week for a college football player begins in the early morning hours long before the sun is up. They work out, go to class and hit the practice field in the afternoon as the sun begins to set. A few short hours to hit the books, and then the bed.

Wash. Rinse. Repeat.

That is until the typical game week leads into a road matchup with the top offense in the conference. And according to UAB head coach Bill Clark, about 70 to 75 players on his roster will be experiencing it for the first time.

But the silver lining is that Clark and his young squad traveled to unfriendly confines at Ball State earlier this season and hope that experience will serve to guide the Blazers as they face the North Texas Mean Green this Saturday in Denton, Texas.

"When we set this up that was one of the things we were thinking about was that we needed to go to a hostile environment against a good team," Clark said.

The Blazers didn't meet the challenge early and found themselves in a two-possession hole but fought back and took their first lead before Ball State retook it moments later. UAB trailed early in the second half but battled back once more to pull within a touchdown.

It was as close they would get as Ball State capitalized on mistakes and nine Blazer penalties. It was sore spot for red-shirt sophomore Fitzgerald Mbofor and the rest of the defense, but he understands that hostile environments are just that: hostile.

"It's difficult playing on the road and you have to fight through adversity," he said. "You have to play through certain situations, such as flags, holding or whatever it may be, and understand that you might not always get the calls you want on the road."

It was an eye-opening experience for a majority of this new team and Clark feels it served his team well. It's something that can't be replicated unless you've done it before, and the Blazers can now be less surprised at what challenges await them.

"As we get into conference play, that is one of the things you talk about but that's one of the things you don't do -- you don't put guys on the road and put them in a hotel," he said. "There is no way to get ready for a road game or a hostile crowd except to do it. Now we have been in that setting."

And the Blazers responded from that setting with a home standing victory over Coastal Carolina last week. But Apogee Stadium is not the warm confines of Legion Field and the Mean Green are not the Chanticleers.

UAB will need the leadership of its upperclassmen who have seen success on the road and trust themselves and the plan that Clark and his coaching staff have been using since the day he arrived.

"I always talk about that we've always been a good road team because we keep the details that we have at home on the road," he said. "They have to experience it."

UAB running back Spencer Brown ran for 51 yards and score two touchdowns in the win against Coastal Carolina. Brown and the Blazers will face a defense that is allowing 141 rushing yards per game. Mark Almond, AL.com

UAB (2-1) at North Texas (1-2)

When: Saturday, 5:30 p.m.

Where: Apogee Stadium: Denton Texas

TV: BEIN  Line: North Texas by 11
All in the family

Youngest Diggs brother shines in UAB secondary

Evan Dudley AL.com

It should come as no surprise that Mar’Sean Diggs is a talented athlete. His pedigree speaks for itself with two brothers — Stefon and Trevon — both succeeding in their respective careers. But for a few hours Saturday afternoon, the middle Diggs brother had the attention to himself.

He and his fellow Blazers suffocated Coastal Carolina during the first half of UAB’s 30-23 victory over the Chanticleers and was the spark the Blazer defense needed. Diggs corralled his first career interception in the second quarter, which followed a deflected a pass by Diggs into the outstretched arms of Fitzgerald Mofor in the first quarter.

It was the breakout game Diggs has been working toward during his time with the Blazers, and the young defensive back was certain he would receive congratulations from his older brothers — Stefon, a receiver with the Minnesota Vikings, and Trevon, who plays cornerback for Alabama — rather than the usual cliché ribbing from siblings.

“I wouldn’t say we have a rivalry,” he said. “We root for each other, encourage each other and try to keep each other’s heads on straight.”

And Diggs most certainly had his head on straight — although attached to a swivel — near the end of the first quarter when he deflected a pass from Chanticleer quarterback Tyler Keane that landed in Mofor’s hands inches from the turf. Diggs was in the hip pocket of receivers for the majority of the contest and finished the day with five tackles, a pass breakup and an interception.

His own pick came on the seventh play of the second quarter when Keane unloaded downfield and Diggs tracked the ball and caught it just before he stepped out-of-bounds.

It was a moment Diggs will remember for some time as it came in his first start — with sophomore Will Dawkins out for the game — as a UAB Blazer.

“Proud of our defense and the way they played lights out in the first half,” head coach Bill Clark said. “Obviously Mar’Sean made some great plays for us today, he comes from talented bloodlines and is a great athlete. He’s been through a lot with injuries, especially this past spring, but he kept practicing and had a heck of day.”

And Diggs is excited, and feeling confident following his first start. Patience has paid off and although he anticipates some excited phone calls from his family, he’s more concerned with celebrating with his teammates.

“It’s a good feeling,” he said. “I was just doing what I could for my brothers, my UAB brothers.”
For Blazers, a win and the new normal

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

There was a time when what happened Saturday at Legion Field would’ve been considered kind of a big deal.

Under cloudy skies that spied down rain in the first quarter, against a non-descript non-conference opponent in its first year in the Football Bowl Subdivision, UAB played a football game at noon that was televised locally in Birmingham.

It wasn’t the historic first game of #TheReturn.

Instead, it was simply the new normal for the Blazers.

Despite those built-in excuses to stay away, a healthy crowd of 24,789 watched the home team take an early lead, extend the lead and then make just enough plays on both sides of the ball for a 30-23 victory over Coastal Carolina.

For the attendance obsessed, that crowd was more than twice the size of last week’s gathering for UAB’s road loss at Ball State. It also brought the season total for two UAB games at Legion Field to 70,001.

Troll that. Now back to the game.

No one in green on the sideline or in the stands could breathe easy until the last tackle by the Blazers short of midfield, but they’ll gladly suffer this kind of discomfort. Every day, every experience is a teachable moment for a collection of hungry players and coaches who assembled at a rare time and place in college football history.

“We knew it was going to be a fight,” UAB coach Bill Clark said, tipping his cap to the visitors, a successful former FCS program playing its first full FBS season in the Sun Belt. “They’re used to winning.”

UAB’s starting to develop that habit, too. After Coastal Carolina got the ball back down seven points mid-way through the fourth quarter, the UAB defense delivered a critical three-and-out stop. The UAB offense then drove 64 yards for the decisive touchdown.

There was a bit more drama to come, but the visitors got no closer than 60 yards away from the tying score on their final play.

“This was the game we needed,” Clark said. “You need that belief.”

With Conference USA play starting next Saturday at North Texas, this was a game UAB needed to continue its unlikely path toward bowl eligibility. Mission accomplished. The 2-1 Blazers never trailed and led by as much as 23-5 early in the third quarter before experiencing a few growing pains.

The UAB players themselves already believed enough to stick around, return or sign up for this unique rebuilding effort with no blueprint. Their faith has only been strengthened through three games.

To hear them tell it afterward, you ain’t seen nothing yet.

Listen to quarterback A.J. Erdely, who again demonstrated his knack for making plays by land or by air. The way he sees it, “I don’t think you’ve seen the best UAB football team yet.”

No doubt, and it was encouraging to see maybe the premier UAB football alum, former NFL wide receiver extraordinary Roddy White, watching from the UAB sideline.

Now hear current cornerback Darious Williams, who contributed eight tackles, three for losses, and a pass breakup. He suggested this team’s ceiling may be higher than the Legacy Pavilion.

“It’s kind of scary. I guess,” Williams said. “Once we get it all together, I feel sorry for the opponent.”

Don’t misunderstand. The Blazers haven’t arrived, and they know it, but they’re here, and they don’t plan on standing still. Two wins in their first three games is an indication of what’s possible.

“We’re just focused on winning,” Erdely said.

Win, and they will come. Win again, and they’re more likely to come back.

That’s the new normal for UAB.
Alabama baseball begins fall practice with Brad Bohannon

Practice/scrimmage times

Tuesday: Practice – 2:30-3:45 p.m. | Scrimmage – 3:45 p.m. start
Wednesday: OFF
Thursday: Practice – 2:30 p.m. start
Friday: Practice – 2:30-3:45 p.m. | Scrimmage – 3:45 p.m. start
Saturday: Practice: 10:15-11:30 a.m. | Scrimmage – 11:30 a.m. start
Sunday: OFF

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

First practices mean first impressions. New Alabama baseball coach Brad Bohannon and his coaching staff left their mark on Monday as the team began its first practice of fall as a full team.

"We know coach is pretty laid-back but honest at the same time," senior pitcher Jake Walters said. "It feels like it’s a fun atmosphere. I feel like they kind of allowed us to play a little bit looser."

Bohannon and his three assistant coaches will spend the first part of fall practice learning about team and building an understanding of communication, terminology, the pace of practice and the principles of the game. They spent two hours on Monday at Sewell-Thomas Stadium working mostly through individual drills and will scrimmage later this week.

Players took note of the optimistic approach Bohannon brought to practice. The new head coach has a word or phrase for the team before each practice. Monday's was to have a "positive mindset."

"I would hope that people say that we bring positive energy to the field," Bohannon said. "We’re certainly not clowning around or anything like that, but the nature of our sport is that you can work really hard, concentrate at a really high level and have fun doing it."

See BASEBALL, C5
BASEBALL

Continued from C1

For Alabama’s juniors and seniors, Monday’s practice was the third different coaching staff they’ve started fall with. They’ve seen some differences over the last three seasons.

“The energy is always good on the first day, no matter who’s in charge,” second baseman Cobi Vance said. “I guess it didn’t feel like it was fake energy. It felt like it was real energy. That’s no knock on the old staff or anything, it’s just how we felt as players. We felt like we were kind of forced instead of just letting it flow.”

Junior right-handed pitcher Brock Love and sophomore Garret Rukes are both on schedule with their rehab from midseason Tommy John surgery.

Practices and scrimmages this fall are free and open to the public. The team’s schedule will be posted its official Twitter and Facebook pages each week and updated if weather requires changes. Fans can enter the stadium at gate 3 at Sewell-Thomas Stadium behind home plate and sit anywhere in the lower bowl area.

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

Coach Brad Bohannon oversees his first fall practice as the Crimson Tide’s new head baseball coach Monday, Sept. 18, 2017. Bohannon meets with the team on the mound before breaking out into groups. (STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.)

Junior lefty Dylan Duarte is expected to pitch later this week as he continues to recover from an elbow injury suffered late last year.
Tide women's golf shoots 16-under

Team in third at Mason Rudolph

Staff report

FRANKLIN, Tenn. — The University of Alabama women's golf team moved into third place after a shooting a blistering 16-under par 272 in Saturday's second round at Vanderbilt's Mason Rudolph Championship at the par-72, 6,335-yard Vanderbilt Legends Club North Course.

Alabama's second round total, along with the score vs. par, ranks second-lowest in both categories in program history.

Alabama shot 284-272-556 and is 20-under par going into Sunday's third and final round.

On Saturday, the Crimson Tide's golfers combined for 38 birdies and an eagle and had a total of two bogeys. All five golfers finished the round below par.

Lauren Stephenson and Kristen Gillman led the Tide on Saturday. Stephenson (68-68/136) turned in a second consecutive 4-under par 68 round to move into a tie for second place at 8-under par, one shot off the individual lead. Gillman (70-69/139) shot 3-under par 69 and is tied at 10th at 5-under par. Lakeareber Abe (72-67/139) carded a 5-under par round that included an eagle on the par 4, 382-yard 8th hole and joins Gillman in 10th place.

Cheyenne Knight (74-68/142) shot 4-under par and is tied for 24th at two under par for the tournament. Angelica Moreco (77-70/147) is tied for 47th at 3-over par.

Going into Sunday's final round, Arkansas (273-277-550) leads the field at 20-under par. The Razorbacks shot 11-under par, 277. Saturday, Arizona State (277-276/553) is second at 23-under par, followed by Alabama (284-272/556) at 20-under par. Host Vanderbilt (275-283/558) is in fourth at 18-under and Northwestern (285-280/565) is fifth at 11-under par.

Riley leads Fighting Illini Invitational

OLYMPIA FIELDS, Ill. — The No. 19-ranked University of Alabama men's golf team, behind the play of junior Davis Riley, has a three-stroke lead after 36 holes of the Olympia Fields Country Club/Fighting Illini Invitational. The Crimson Tide carded back-to-back rounds of even par 280 on Friday and Saturday. Riley is tied at 32nd (72-73-145), and both Lee Hodges (77-77) and Josh Sedeno (74-72) are among a tie at 37th at 146.

Alabama volleyball sweeps Troy at tourney

The Alabama volleyball team closed its weekend at the Crimson-White Tournament with a three-set sweep over Troy on Saturday in Foster Auditorium, extending its current win streak to eight matches.

Alabama (11-2) played with plenty of energy right from the first whistle against Troy (5-9), defeating the Trojans by 10 and 11 points in the first two sets before battling against a late push in the third to win, 25-22. Senior Leah Lawrence and sophomores Hayley McSparin and Ginger Petinar led the team with eight kills each and all three hit above .500, leading to a season-best .303 team hitting percentage. The trio were named to the Crimson-White All-Tournament team, with McSparin earning MVP honors.

Next weekend, Alabama opens SEC play with a pair of road matches, facing Georgia (10-3) on Friday, Sept. 22 at 6 p.m. and Ole Miss (8-4) on Sunday, Sept. 24 at 1:30 p.m. Friday's match against the Rebels, and Alabama opens the season with a sweep of Troy in Foster Auditorium, extending its current win streak to eight matches.

The Tuscaloosa News
Sunday, September 17, 2017
Guarachi finding success as a professional

Former Crimson Tide tennis player has won 13 doubles titles

By Joe Klingbell
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

You can either start a legacy or you can continue one. Alexa Guarachi did both.

The former Alabama tennis player, whose father also played tennis for the Crimson Tide, has made a name for herself in the professional tennis ranks, as she has won 13 doubles titles in her career, and currently is the 183rd ranked doubles player in the Women’s Tennis Association world rankings.

“She probably has one of the best backhands I’ve ever seen,” Alabama coach Jenny Mainz said. “But what I remember about watching her play is she’s happy. She loves tennis.”

In 2017 alone, Guarachi has captured six ITF doubles titles and has shot up the world rankings like a cannon.

“I still have so much more to go,” Guarachi said. “I can be in the top 50 in the world in doubles, it’s very doable, so that’s very exciting and it motivates me even more to know that I can go so much further.”

Guarachi’s road to stardom may be on a steady climb, but was almost curtailed before it even got off the ground. During a match in Waco, Texas, in November of 2015, Guarachi suffered a torn ACL.

After surgery in December, she was forced to sit on the sidelines for nearly a year. The recovery process was grueling, and tested her in ways like never before.

“When I first got hurt I wasn’t planning on coming back,” Guarachi said. “I thought that this might be it, it may be a sign I need to just call it quits. I’m going to be out for a year, how can I come back from this?”

But her uplifting personality took control of any doubts that crept into the back of her mind as she prepared for the road to recovery. Eleven months after a near career-ending injury, Guarachi returned to the tennis court. She was finally back home.

“I kind of took a second and was like, ‘Wow I did it, I’m back’,” Guarachi said.

“It was just working hard and being positive every day, and also being so close to losing something that I love forever basically, really made me think that I don’t want to lose this yet. I have so much more to give in the sport of tennis.”

Guarachi has cemented her name in Tuscaloosa ground, and now shifts her focus creating a known name across the globe.

“I have no doubt that she is going to be playing for a grand slam pretty soon,” Mainz said. “She was very close this year and I believe she’ll get there.”

Alexa Guarachi, a former Alabama tennis player, has won 13 doubles titles in her career, and currently is the 183rd ranked doubles player in the Women’s Tennis Association world rankings. (Photo:ALABAMA ATHLETICS)
UA announces 2018 schedule

Season kicks off against Louisville in Orlando

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The University of Alabama's 2018 football schedule will include home games against Arkansas State, Texas A&M, Louisiana-Lafayette, Missouri, Mississippi State, the Citadel and Auburn. The SEC released the league's schedule for next season on Tuesday.

Alabama will have road games at Ole Miss, Arkansas, Tennessee and LSU. The Crimson Tide will play Louisville in Orlando, on Sept. 1 to open the season.

Alabama's home dates are Sept. 8 (Arkansas State), Sept. 22 (Texas A&M), Sept. 29 (Louisiana-Lafayette), Oct. 13 (Missouri), Nov. 10 (Mississippi State), Nov. 17 (Citadel) and Nov. 24 (Auburn).

The road games will be played Sept. 15 (Ole Miss), Oct. 6 (Arkansas), Oct. 20 (at Tennessee) and Nov. 3 (at LSU).

UA will have an open date on Oct. 27, between the Tennessee and LSU games.

The SEC Championship Game is wet for Dec. 1 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

2018 Alabama Football Schedule

Sept. 1 vs. Louisville*
Sept. 8 Arkansas State
Sept. 15 at Ole Miss
Sept. 22 Texas A&M
Sept. 29 Louisiana-Lafayette
Oct. 6 at Arkansas
Oct. 13 Missouri
Oct. 20 at Tennessee
Nov. 3 at LSU
Nov. 10 Mississippi State
Nov. 17 Citadel
Nov. 24 Auburn

*Orlando
Crimson Tide sends Colorado State home

By Terrin Waack  
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

For the 2017 University of Alabama football season, TideSports intern Terrin Waack will provide select stellar stats, obscure facts and notable quotes from the most recent game to show how the Crimson Tide uses “The Process” against its opponents.

No. 1 Alabama defeated Colorado State, 41-23, at Bryant-Denny Stadium on Saturday in front of 101,821 people.

Stellar stats

• JK Scott has kicked 200 punts for 9,190 yards in his career. The quantity is the third-most in Alabama history. The yardage is second.
• Running back Damien Harris is the only member of the Crimson Tide to score a rushing touchdown in every game this season. He had a 5-yard run in the third quarter.
• The 78-yard dive Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts threw to wide receiver Calvin Ridley was Hurts’ longest touchdown pass, and the sophomore has thrown 27 of them.
• Make that 33 games in which Ridley has had at least one reception, marking the third-longest active FBS streak.
• The Rams peaked during the second quarter. They scored on consecutive drives, the first time anyone has done so against the Crimson Tide this season. They outgained UA, 155-85, converted five of six third downs, and ran 23 offensive plays compared to Alabama’s eight.

Obscure facts

• Andy Pappanastos didn’t miss a field goal. In fact, he made two from 40 and 43 yards out. Scott, however, sent his 52-yard attempt wide right. It was Scott’s first time kicking a field goal since Charleston Southern in 2015, when he missed a 33-yarder.
• The Crimson Tide has played 77 games as the top team in the nation and is 66-11 in those matchups. So many double numbers:
• Colorado State scored more points against Alabama (23) than any other team this season. The Rams were unranked. Alabama was No. 1.
• No other team has scored against Colorado State on its first offensive drive this season. Hurts ran 27 yards into the end zone to change that.
• So, the Rams scored off a 4-yard pass during the second quarter. It took 11 plays and 86 yards to do so. Clock time? Six minutes and 17 seconds, the longest CSU has taken to score this season.

Around the country

• Mississippi State destroyed LSU, 37-7, the largest margin of victory in series history. Woof, Bulldogs.
• Vanderbilt defensive lineman Nifae Lealao had this to say after the Commodores’ win over Kansas State: “When you come to our house, we show you how to play some SEC ball. ... Alabama, you’re next.”
• The No. 1 Crimson Tide is the only SEC team in the top 10.

Casual plug-in

Check out my new podcast, “That’s Just Waack.”

Two episodes are already up, another coming Wednesday. Link: https://omny.fm/shows/thats-just-waack

Quoting Nick Saban

When the person who orchestrates the press conference interrupted Saban before he was done answering a question:

“You must have a date. You’re like in a real hurry to get out of here.”

Quoting the Crimson Tide

Placekicker Andy Pappanastos, on kicking well for the last few weeks:

“Thank you for the compliment.”

Quoting the opponent

CSU coach Mike Bobo, on what he thought about the Rams’ performance:

“We started off slow — we forgot who we were playing — and we were on our heels.”

See ALABAMA, C3
ALABAMA

Continued from C1

Name of the game

CSU: Isiah Pannunzio
The redshirt freshman is a tight end for the Rams and doesn't appear to be related to Alabama tight ends coach Joe Pannunzio.

GAME LEADERS

Top 3 rushers
1. UA: Jalen Hurts, 11 carries for 103 yards and a touchdown
2. UA: Bo Scarbrough, 12 carries for 66 yards and a touchdown
3. CSU: Dalyn Dawkins, 10 carries for 59 yards

Top 3 receivers
1. UA: Calvin Ridley, three receptions for 92 yards and a touchdown
2. CSU: Michael Gallup, four receptions for 70 yards
3. CSU: Izzy Matthews, three receptions for 47 yards

Top 3 passers
1. UA: Jalen Hurts, 12-17-0 for 248 yards and two touchdowns
2. CSU: Nick Stevens, 21-38-2 for 247 yards and two touchdowns (sacked twice)
3. UA: Tua Tagovailoa, 1-4-0 for 0 yards

Top 3 defenders
1. UA: Keith Holcombe, nine total tackles (a pass breakup)
2. CSU: Tre Thomas, seven total tackles
3. CSU: Josh Watson, seven total tackles

NEXT UP

Alabama (3-0) heads to Vanderbilt (3-0) on Saturday in Vanderbilt Stadium. The game will kick off at 2:30 p.m. CT and air on CBS.
Defense issues makes Vandy matchup more intriguing

Cecil Hurt

Efficient, not overwhelming, on offense. Out of sync on defense, understandable but far from characteristic.

The University of Alabama football team played that way on Saturday night. It might play that way more than a few times this season. There’s nothing wrong with winning like that, no cause for panic or despair, until you face opposition that will require more.

The Crimson Tide came out with a near-perfect first quarter against Colorado State. After that, there were some ups-and-downs that you can attribute to any of several causes. First, while no one likes to credit the opponent, Mike Bobo did a good job coaching CSU, which didn’t crumble after falling behind 17-0, the way Bryant-Denny Stadium visitors sometimes do. The Rams were a better opponent than Fresno State and while they were not better than Florida State, especially on defense, CSU arguably had a better running attack than the Seminoles. They were certainly were more schematically complex. They also kept firing down to their last remaining cartridge, keeping the starters in to score two late touchdowns.

That isn’t enough to beat Alabama, unless Alabama helps you a lot. There were no UA turnovers (supplemented by two takeaways) and only a couple of costly penalties. On the other hand, the Ram offense did expose a couple of things. One was that, no matter how you scour the roster for young

See HURT, C2
five-star linebackers and convince yourself that recruiting rankings mean more than the learning curve, Alabama's linebacking corps has been depleted by injury. At almost any other college in the country, you could replace "depleted" with "devastated" and be correct. Colorado State took advantage of that by using formations and substitution patterns that kept Alabama in its "regular" defense more than usual. Thus, the linebackers seemed to wear down.

"When you've got five linebackers not playing, I don't care who you are," Alabama coach Nick Saban said, "That hurts you."

Saban's explanation was more direct when he was asked "what happened" to the defense. "We didn't execute, that's what happened," he said.

One result was that Alabama didn't get Colorado State off the field as often as it would like. The Crimson Tide ran just 60 offensive plays. Colorado State ran 76. Now, Alabama was very successful with those 60 plays, gaining an average of slightly more than eight yards per snap without a single turnover. The few jaw-dropping athletic plays there were for the Crimson Tide came on the offensive side of the ball. Exhibit A was Robert Foster's lightning-bolt catch in which he showed tremendous speed and an uncanny sense of timing. Had Foster not scored with just over a minute left in the first half, Colorado State would have had the ball and the momentum to begin the third quarter and you might have been looking at a genuine upset bid instead of a merely uncomfortable exercise.

What will help Alabama in the short run will be a quick recuperation by a couple of the injured linebackers. The long run is more interesting and the reality might have to be faced: when you lose four high-round NFL draft choices and replace them with players who, for all their good qualities, are not future high-round NFL draft choices, you are destined to look different.

I'm not sure that you will hear anyone predict an outright Vanderbilt upset against Alabama next Saturday, but with the way the Commodores play defense - and what Saban calls "all the issues" his team is facing - it's going to be a more interesting matchup than anyone expected when the season began just a few weeks ago.

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It's Academic

NCAA reforming transfer rules by tying them to the classroom

Ralph D. Russo  Associated Press

The NCAA is in the process of reforming its rules for athletes who transfer—and the mere suggestion of changes that could make it easier for football and basketball players to leave one school and play immediately for another was enough to stir things up.

"How can you plan a roster or a team when every player is a free agent at the end of the season?" Alabama football coach Nick Saban said last week.

There is much work to be done and any drastic changes to transfer rules across all NCAA sports are likely a few years away at least. But change is coming, and guiding principles already have been established by the university presidents who make up the NCAA board of directors.

One thing is clear: New transfer rules will be rooted in academics, according to a statement released last week by the Division I Council group working on the topic.

Students with better grades could face fewer restrictions if they want to transfer, and schools may end up with less control over where athletes go. Athletes who have graduated could still transfer with immediate eligibility, but the so-called free agent market could be chilled by other steps, such as a different way of counting grad transfers toward a team's academic performance.

"We put a survey out about a week ago which really was to gain some feedback from every area of the membership that could help us understand the different perspectives," said South Dakota State athletic director Justin Sell, who is heading the council's transfer working group.

"Are we headed down the right path? Are these some things that can really enhance the student's experience? And hopefully at the end of the day create positive stories of graduation when a kid transfers."

Transfer rules have been a nagging issue for the NCAA for years. There are 16 pages of Division I transfer rules in the NCAA manual. Rules vary in lower divisions and even within D-I there are differences from sport to sport. Most notably, in all sports—but not in football, men's and women's basketball, baseball or hockey—athletes can use a one-time exemption that allows them to transfer from one school to another without having to sit out a season the way they do in the revenue sports. Conferences also have their own restrictions. Waivers overriding various restrictions are often granted to athletes.

The current rules give coaches the ability to prevent an athlete from receiving an athletic scholarship from another school, essentially blocking a move to a desired school or preventing a transfer all together. Conflicts between amateur athletes and millionaire coaches about transfers are almost always a loss for the NCAA in the court of public opinion. Inconsistency is the norm.

Research shows athletes who transfer are less likely to graduate and more likely to become ineligible, and men's basketball transfers have reached epidemic levels in the eyes of many coaches. The NCAA said 90 percent of those players indicate they leave for athletics reasons.

Hence the emphasis on academics for Sell and his group of administrators, coaches and members of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

The working group is considering no longer requiring athletes to ask their current schools for permission to contact
other schools about transferring. Instead, athletes would notify schools of their intention to transfer, potentially eliminating a coach’s ability to stand in the way.

The group has also discussed creating uniformity in all sports. Ideas there include eliminating those one-time exemptions for non-revenue sports, perhaps making all athletes sit out a year after transferring or creating academic benchmarks that could allow athletes to transfer and be immediately eligible.

“As you look at the transfers world, where everyone starts to panic is the ability to play right away,” Sell said. “But we’re really looking at it from an academic perspective.”

Coaches fear that the combination of immediate eligibility and an inability to block transfers could increase poaching, forcing staffs to recruit their own players just to stick around. Sell said his group hopes to propose regulations and penalties as early as next year that would address unethical recruiting and tampering.

There is already back-channel recruiting of transfers through third parties that is nearly impossible to stop, according to John Infante, a former compliance director at Colorado State and Loyola Marymount.

“I think coaches may be almost underestimating how much of this is going on and how much of their job has become, yes, you need to recruit your current athletes by showing them the same level of interest and making sure you treat them consistently,” Infante said.

Brady Bramlett, a former University of Mississippi baseball player and chairman of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, said changing from permission to notification would bring much-needed transparency to the transfer process.

“Once the student-athlete has reached that point where they’re in the coaches office saying, ‘Hey, I’m transferring because of X, Y and Z,’ then why create more blockades for that student-athlete if they are already at that point?” Bramlett said.

Still, Bramlett said the SAAC supports restricting athletes from transferring within a conference and added there is no interest in creating a “free-agency model, where any student-athlete can go anywhere they want anytime.”

As for graduate transfers, there is concern that a rule originally meant to give athletes more options when pursuing graduate degrees has created, as Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby has called them, “hired guns” in college sports.

Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick disagreed.

“If you’ve got your degree I want to give you as much freedom as you possibly can,” Swarbrick said. “I think people perceive an abuse in it that frankly I don’t.”

Sell said his group is looking at changing rules regarding grad transfers so they are counted toward a team’s Academic Progress Rating more similarly to the way undergraduates are counted. That would mean docking APR points if postgraduate athletes are not progressing toward a degree. An even stricter measure would require a school to commit the scholarship it gives to a grad transfer for the length of the program the athlete enters — even if the athlete leaves earlier.

Infante said the effectiveness of any new legislation regarding transfers will be in the details. The general philosophy, he said, is clear.

“If this really looks like an athlete who is going to go on to the next school and probably get a degree there, then we want to encourage those transfers,” he said. “The ones that look like that by transferring the athlete is going to become less likely to graduate, we’re going to still have restrictions in place or add new restrictions to frustrate those transfers or cool the market.”

“As you look at the transfers world, where everyone starts to panic is the ability to play right away. But we’re really looking at it from an academic perspective.”

South Dakota State athletic director Justin Sell