OCTOBER 6, 2017

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
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Alabama helps form Southern Automotive Manufacturers Alliance

By: William Thornton

Gov. Kay Ivey announced today the formation of the Southern Automotive Manufacturers Alliance during an address to the Southern Automotive Conference in Birmingham.

SAMA is being formed by the state automotive manufacturing organizations of Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi. Georgia, which will host next year's Southern Automotive Conference, will be an apprentice member. It also includes the Southern Automotive Women's Forum, the South Carolina Automotive Council and the Kentucky Automotive Industry Association.

In addition, Ivey announced that Alabama will be the first state to offer Manufacturing Skills Standards Council credentials at every state community college this spring.

The MSSC standards are described as a federally recognized training, assessment and certification system focused on the skills and knowledge needed in manufacturing. Students will be able to earn certification as a production technician or logistics technician.

The announcement of a cooperative southern auto association during the final day of the state's hosting the regional automotive conference shows Alabama state and commercial officials are angling for future expansion in the sector that is already the state's leading export.

Ivey said the formation of SAMA will benefit all of its member states, as automotive manufacturing can impact several states through supply chains.

"We can achieve so much more working together than we can working apart," she said. "This new effort is an indication of our spirit of cooperation as well as healthy competition among our states. By joining together, we will enhance each state's attractiveness to automotive businesses."
Why ‘40 years’ in monument law?

Today’s question

"Why does the new law about Confederate monuments say ‘40 years’?"

Christopher Harress
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Reader Robert Jones asks, "Why does the new law about Confederate monuments say ‘40 years’?"

The law, signed by Gov. Kay Ivey in May, actually refers to all historical monuments in Alabama.

It prohibits local governments from removing historical monuments from public property if they have been in place for more than 40 years. It also prohibits the renaming of buildings and streets with historical names. The bill includes more specific rules on what happens to monuments that have been in place less than 40 years and more than 20 years.

An 11-member committee in Montgomery, known as the Committee on Alabama Monument Protection, will make decisions on requests for removal.

While some in the state will and have contended the bill is actually about Confederate monuments, the word "Confederate" doesn't appear anywhere in the 15-page piece of legislation, aka the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act.

The bill, however, was passed during a time when the issue of the Confederacy and its symbolic and historical remnants had been heightened in the U.S. and across the South, seemingly brought to greater prominence after the Charleston shootings and then the election of President Donald Trump.

In the wake of violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, where protesters clashed in August ahead of a planned removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, monuments to the Confederacy were taken down in New Orleans, Austin, Los Angeles, San Diego, Brooklyn and areas all across Virginia and Florida.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell even ordered that a Confederate monument at a downtown park be covered and walled off until a legal means of removing it could be established.

So why the 40-year threshold?

"We did discuss making the time frame limitless so everything was covered, but a constitutional attorney said that might get challenged," said Alabama Sen. Gregory Allen, the sponsor of the Senate bill. "We also discussed 50 years, but then a Birmingham senator said that 40 years would cover any civil rights-era monuments."

Added Rep. Mack Butler, sponsor of the House bill, "We wanted to ensure that civil rights monuments were protected, too."

It’s not clear how many civil rights monuments were erected prior to 1977, since at that point it was still a very recent period of history. However, as the law ages, more and more monuments will gain protection. A 50-year time frame would have meant anything in place before 1967 was protected. The civil rights era ran from 1954 to 1968.

There was some dissent against the bill, primarily from African-American Democrat Reps. Juandalynn Givan and Napoleon Bracy Jr., and longtime Democrat Sen. Hank Sanders. AL.com unsuccessfully tried to contact the three lawmakers via multiple phone calls, email and Twitter.

After the bill successfully passed the Senate in March, Sanders said the bill would protect only selective parts of history to the exclusion of others.

"It says whoever was in power and was able to put their history in monuments, they are protected," he said.

Likewise, the Southern Poverty Law Center said the bill was not about preserving the state’s history, "but about protecting Confederate monuments that celebrate white supremacy and a time in which an entire race was enslaved and oppressed," said Rhonda Brownstein, legal director for the SPLC.

The cynicism over the bill is hardly surprising given the time frame in which it was introduced, according to Jones, who said the committee established by lawmakers will likely "have a tough time" except "to give the governor an excuse to say no to any proposals to move, rename or replace any CSA-linked public statue or building."

"Not surprising since its reason to exist is simply to protect everything that’s tied to the ol’ CSA," Jones said.

As a solution, Jones believes the Confederacy needs some kind of closure.

"A CSA funeral, set in Montgomery in the Capitol building, with speeches on the very steps where the CSA was born, could be quite an emotional closure of the entire affair at many levels."

Have a question?

Reckon by AL.com is taking questions through Ask Alabama, a project that allows readers to pose questions about our state and vote online each week for the question they’d like to have answered. For more information or to make your own inquiry, visit AL.com/ask or www.facebook.com/ReckonAL.
Maddox enters governor’s race

Four-term Tuscaloosa mayor says he can transform Alabama

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox has made it official: He will be seeking the office of governor in 2018.

The four-term mayor announced his decision Thursday morning via his campaign website, waltmaddox.com, and in an interview with The Tuscaloosa News.

"I believe that this is an opportunity to truly transform Alabama," said Maddox, 44.

He will be seeking the Democratic nomination for the governor’s seat during next year’s primary on June 5. A number of candidates have announced similar intentions, including Sue Bell Cobb, the former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

The general election will be Nov. 6, 2018.

Maddox pointed to his own record and accomplishments as Tuscaloosa’s mayor and what he described as a “crisis” in Montgomery as reasons for his candidacy.

Leading one of Alabama’s five largest cities (Tuscaloosa’s fiscal 2018 budget topped $200 million for the first time in its history) through the nationwide recession and the April 27, 2011, tornado — the worst natural disaster ever recorded in this part — without raising taxes demonstrates his readiness to fulfill the governor role, he said.

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MADDOX

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Combine that with the ouster of former Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard, ex-Gov. Robert Bentley and former Alabama chief justice-turned-U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore, and Maddox said it’s time for Alabamians to have their faith in government restored.

"Preserving the status quo is not an achievement," Maddox said, "and it’s certainly not a strategy to move Alabama forward."

A 1991 graduate of Central High School, Maddox holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and master’s degree in public administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

As a former employee with the Alabama Education Association, Maddox has said he saw former AEA head Paul Hubbert as a mentor until Hubbert’s death in 2014 at the age of 78, though he declined to succeed Hubbert as leader of the organization on more than one occasion, he said.

Maddox began his political career in 2001, serving one term as Tuscaloosa councilman, representing District 6. He then bested four other challengers for the mayor’s seat in 2004 after six-term Mayor Al DuPont chose not to seek re-election.

Since then, he ran unopposed in 2009 and 2012 and defeated his 2017 opponent by claiming nearly 89 percent of the vote.

Maddox announced the formation of an exploratory committee in June to gauge the potential statewide support should he formally pursue the governor’s seat. Since then, he has raised almost $100,000 in contributions from supporters across Alabama.

Should his gubernatorial run be successful, Maddox said he intends to tackle issues he described as facing all Alabama residents: failing roadways and transportation infrastructure; ineffective criminal justice, mental health and prison systems; and inadequate medical coverage in rural areas.

“If we do not change this dynamic,” Maddox said, “we will lose a generation (of residents) to surrounding states and it will be exceptionally difficult to catch up.

“Every basic state service is in crisis. Montgomery needs leadership that’s focused every single day — and fighting every single day — for Alabama.”

Maddox said he wants to expand Medicare, which he blames Bentley for opposing because of its connection to then-President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act plan.

The result, Maddox said, is a loss of healthcare access to “tens of thousands” of rural Alabama residents while costing the state $1.8 billion in economic growth.

He also wants to explore the possibility of a legalized lottery, bingo or gambling system to the state in order to recoup lost revenues.

Maddox said conservative estimates put Alabama’s financial losses at about $200 million with legislators standing in the way of a state-sanctioned lottery.

“These are issues that should’ve been solved long ago but have continued to be delayed and denied simply because of politics,” Maddox said.

He is aware that some may view him as unelectable because of his hometown — Bentley also hails from Tuscaloosa — and his party affiliation.

While Tuscaloosa’s municipal elections are nonpartisan, Maddox said he held to his Democratic ideals because he believes in them. And as mayor, Maddox said he found consensus with those who shared his political ideologies and those who did not in order to move the city forward.

If elected, he intends to take this same approach to the governor’s mansion, he said.

“During the past 12 years in Tuscaloosa, it was never about a party — it’s about people. And, ultimately, I’m running for the people of Alabama,” Maddox said.

“I’ve had many opportunities to change parties in my career, but to do so would be dishonest.

“And we’ve had enough dishonesty in our state.”

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Mr. Mayor-elect, be the guy we need for Birmingham

John Archibald
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It appears Randall Woodfin is the new mayor of Birmingham. He took a strong lead Tuesday over a formidable and entrenched foe.

He led 61 percent to 38 percent with two-thirds of the votes counted. He even beat Mayor William Bell at Bell's strongest, topping him by 20 votes in the iconic and important Legion Field polling place.

Woodfin led Bell, who has practiced politics since Three's Company was on top of the charts. Woodfin led a race that saw Bell campaign hard at the end, demolishing houses, cleaning up streets, and using the full power and position of mayor to try to accomplish in six weeks what Bell hadn't been able to do in seven years.

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ARCHIBALD
FROM AL

It wasn't enough.
Things got ugly at the end. The campaign was filled with dirt and innuendo and the kind of subterfuge that made people skeptical of Bell in the first place.
Congratulations, odds-on Mayor-elect. Let it be a lesson. Not just to Bell, but to you.
Birmingham needs a proactive mayor, all the time. Not just before elections. It needs one who is passionate not just about holding office — it has been too much of that — but about providing residents across 99 neighborhoods the kind of service they can be proud of.
Streets. Pave them. Garbage. Pick it up on schedule. Parks. Clean them and mow them and make them safe for all who visit. Government. Make it clear and transparent and easier to trust.
Put the check registers online. Even the state of Alabama can do that. Pass budgets on time. And for Heaven's sake try to get along with the city council.
Which Bell could not do. It will be hard sometimes. It always is.
But learn what Bell never did. If those council members make fools of themselves, it's their heels.
At this writing, Johnathan Austin, the council president who has been the bee in Bell's bonnet, was in a race with Darrell O'Quinn that was too close to call. But it shouldn't matter to you.
Birmingham needs a mayor and council who can get along.
The job is not about wielding power. It's not about trips or the admiration of dignitaries. Recruiting business — like the city has tried to do since the general election with Amazon's second corporate headquarters — is not about putting giant boxes on street corners.
It's about building the things companies like Amazon demand. Like a stable, business-friendly environment free of corruption. It's about a qualified workforce and schools that produce them. It's about building a city where people are not afraid to move. It's about nurturing a creative environment where all diversity is welcomed. It's about thinking big and focusing on details that make living in a city easier, safer and more comfortable.
For all.
It's hard to do that in the wake of a campaign that was dirty and discriminatory and full of innuendo.
It's hard all over Alabama, where recruiting creative people from across the country is difficult in any field. It's harder in a city known for red tape, where it's easier to look somewhere else than to navigate city hall.
It's hard in a city known for its violence, and inequality, and racial politics.
But it is an opportunity to be more than a promising candidate. It is an opportunity to be bigger than a politician. It's an opportunity that no one has seized in a long, long time.
The future will measure you by your dignity, your passion and your ability to see the needs of people.
Go be that guy.
Archibald writes a regular opinion column for AL.com.
Leaders praise Dara Longgrear's business recruiting efforts

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Business and community leaders gathered Monday in downtown Tuscaloosa to celebrate the career and retirement of Dara Longgrear, the executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority since 1986.

The pseudo-ceremony occurred during a meeting of the TCIDA board of directors and included municipal, county and state officials, industry leaders and most of the 16 TCIDA chairmen who served during Longgrear's tenure as executive director.

All the chairmen were given time to talk about their experiences with Longgrear and his accomplishments over the years, including the TCIDA's crown jewel -- the 1993 recruitment of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International to build a massive manufacturing plant in Vance for the production of the M-Class sports utility vehicle for the worldwide market.

Mercedes has since invested billions of dollars into the local economy and enticed a network of suppliers to set up shop in the area. According to the TCIDA, Mercedes is responsible for the creation of 22,000 direct and indirect jobs in the region.

"I hope you take a lot of pride every time you drive by that plant and reflect on the key role that you played in helping to land the economic recruitment gem of the century," former TCIDA chairman Perry Waters told Longgrear on Monday. "I hope you'll also look at all those cars that are there and think of all the lives of the individuals and their families that have been impacted by your hard work and dedication."

Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge Hardy McCollum was an integral part of the foundation of the TCIDA, and said he was proud to have traveled and worked with Longgrear to bring industry to the area for the last three decades.

"I've never seen a more hardworking individual than Dara Longgrear when we were on those trips. He put in the time and he put in the effort. Early mornings, late nights," McCollum said. "It was a tough, tough journey, but the results speak for themselves."

Like Waters, McCollum said Longgrear will never know the impact of the work that he and his staff have done at the TCIDA.

"Years and years, decades and generations are going to benefit from what you've done and the work you've put in," McCollum said.

Those in attendance said that Longgrear will officially retire on Nov. 1, and the executive committee of the TCIDA will meet soon to name an interim executive director and begin the process of finding someone to permanently replace him.

As a last piece of advice to the TCIDA's newest board members, Longgrear stressed the importance of continuing the work, of fighting complacency and always striving to bring more jobs to the area.

"The manufacturing job is still the best way that most of our citizens are going to have a chance to have a career in town and have company-sponsored health insurance and company-sponsored retirement," Longgrear said. "The manufacturing job is the foundation for all economic development, and I know this organization will certainly take that to heart."

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Alabama tops for AP score growth

State has highest increase for sixth straight year

Trisha Powell Crain
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More Alabama students are succeeding in college-level, Advanced Placement courses than ever before.

That's good news for parents of students heading to college because that success, measured by a qualifying score on an AP exam, translates to college credit, saving Alabama families money on college tuition down the road.

For the sixth year in a row, Alabama has had the highest percentage of growth in qualifying scores in AP classes in math, science, and English of any state in the country. Alabama is also No. 1 in the country for the highest growth in qualifying scores for the period from 2008 to 2017.

The numbers were announced Thursday at a celebration at Russellville High School in northwest Alabama. These are the latest results from a public-private initiative of the state Department of Education and A Plus College Ready, a division of the A Plus Education Partnership.

This past spring, Alabama public high school students took 49,860 AP exams and earned 26,279 qualifying scores, earning the equivalent of more than $47 million in college tuition, according to A Plus College Ready.

Students earning a qualifying AP score don't have to take the equivalent course in college and still get college credit for it.

The program has grown steadily since 2008, when Alabama public high school students took 14,634 exams and earned 8,365 qualifying scores.

The number of exams includes students in all Alabama public schools, not just those who are part of the program.

In previous years, the annual announcement and celebration has been held in Montgomery, but Russellville High School was chosen for Thursday's announcement because of the school's exemplary success, according to A Plus College Ready.

Russellville entered the program in 2014, and in 2017, students there earned 60 qualifying scores. Russellville has nearly 750 students, half of whom are white, and 40 percent of whom are Hispanic.

"Our students developed a mindset that they would be better prepared for life after high school regardless of perception," said Jason Goodwin, Russellville High principal. "When I refer to perception, I speak on behalf of an entire school eligible for free lunches, a school system filled with such great diversity that some have said will break Russellville, yet it has made it stronger."

Russellville High is one of five schools statewide to receive the designation as an A Plus College Ready "School of Excellence." Other schools recognized in the category were Albert P. Brewer High School in Morgan County, Carroll High School in Ozark City schools, Prattville High School in Autauga County, and West Point High School in Cullman County.

Schools in that category either met or exceeded the qualifying score goal that was set for them by A Plus College Ready.

Three schools were recognized as "Schools of Distinction," meaning they met an ambitious qualifying score goal one year, and in a subsequent year, reached a second, higher goal: Leeds High School, Springville High School in St. Clair County, and Gulf Shores High School in Baldwin County.

When the program was created in 2008 with a $13.2 million grant from the National Math and Science Initiative, 12 schools became part of the initiative. During the current school year, 170 schools in 82 of Alabama's 138 school districts are in the program.

Schools in the program receive teacher training, support from master teachers, and incentives for teachers and students, in AP math, science, English, social studies, and computer science, according to A Plus College Ready.

In 2016, 24,908 of Alabama's public school students took 46,007 exams, and earned qualifying scores on 17,109 of those exams.
UWA charter school names top official

Former UWA administrator will be chief officer of school expected to open in August

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The new charter school affiliated with the University of West Alabama has named a former UWA administrator as its new chief officer. J.J. Wedgworth was named head of school earlier this month. She will oversee academic programming, personnel matters, enrollment and management of the school's finances and facilities. Wedgworth will also assist the board of directors in its decision-making.

"Head of school is essentially a CEO position. We will also have an instructional leader or principal in the traditional sense of the role," she said.

Wedgworth previously served as director of research integrity in UWA's Office of Sponsored Programs and Research. She was on the team that worked on the school's application, which was approved in July. The school is in its planning year with a goal of opening for students in August 2018.

The school hopes to begin its search for a principal in January, Wedgworth said. Faculty hiring would also begin early next year.

"If we can find a school principal first, that would be ideal and let them play a very important role in recruiting a hiring," Wedgworth said.

The school recently completed a second survey that focused on interest in the school and grade structures that would be best served in first year and subsequent years.

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of the school. Wedgworth declined to discuss the estimated population the school would serve and the opening grade structure until the contract under which the school will operate is approved by the Alabama Public Charter School Commission.

The school recently completed its first round of negotiations on the contract and is waiting to hear back from the commission on its proposed draft.

Charter schools and their authorizing agency must negotiate a charter contract that establishes performance goals as well as the roles and responsibilities of the authorizing agency. UWA created an affiliated domestic nonprofit, the University Charter School, to establish the school. The University Charter School board of directors includes President Micky Smith, Vice President Byron Franklin, Secretary Kyle Edmonds, Treasurer Veronica Triplett, along with Robert Witt, Leslie Prystup Emory, Anthony Crear and Jan Miller.

Once a contract is approved, Wedgworth said the school will announce the grade structure and enrollment periods.

Sumter County residents will receive priority for enrollment, but, if space is available, enrollment will be opened to Alabama residents outside the county. If demand exceeds capacity, a lottery will be used to select students.

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Mercedes to build $250 million logistics center

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

A day after announcing a $1 billion expansion to its plant in Vance, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International broke ground Friday morning in neighboring Bibb County, where the company plans to invest an additional $250 million to build a new Global Logistics Center and an after-sales North American hub.

The project is expected to create 420 jobs, and operations in both buildings will begin in 2019.

Workers were in the process of clearing 205 acres of land in the Scott G. Davis Industrial Park behind Woodstock Town Hall during the ceremony Friday. MBUSA President and CEO Jason Hoff said construction on the two massive buildings should wrap up in late 2018, expanding Mercedes’ operational footprint to include Bibb County for the first time.

“The final size of the buildings is still being determined, but it’s roughly 700,000 square feet for the Global Logistics Center and roughly 1 million square feet for the other,” Hoff said. “Both sites have room for expansion, which is key for us because in this business, we start with one phase and depending on how things grow and develop, we have the possibility to expand.”

Hoff said Mercedes chose the Bibb County location because of the availability of a large, almost shovel-ready site and the possibility of tapping into a new pool of talent as they seek to adequately staff their growing operations.

“Moving east of the plant brings us into another workforce area,” Hoff said. “That’s going to allow us to tap into some workforce groups that may or may not have looked at us in the past.”

Hoff said at the new center, MBUSA will gather each part that goes into a particular vehicle, package it together into a “kit” and export those to countries worldwide -- to India, Russia, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. He said this will allow Mercedes to develop a market presence in those areas without having to source the parts locally.

Hoff was joined at the groundbreaking ceremony by representatives from the

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Alabama Department of Commerce, the Bibb County Commission, the Birmingham Business Alliance and more.

Lee Smith, the incoming chairman of the BBA, emceed the event and praised Mercedes for the "incredible facility" they intend to build.

"This solidifies Alabama's strong position in the automotive industry and signifies that Mercedes is leading the charge, as they have been for the last 20 years," Smith said.

Angela Till, the state's deputy commerce secretary, said Mercedes is already the state's No. 1 exporter and the No. 2 exporter of vehicles in the United States. She said its operations in Woodstock would forever change industry in Bibb County.

"This will fully integrate Bibb County into the state's auto-manufacturing cluster, which they were not able to be a part of until this project," Till said. "At the Department of Commerce, helping rural communities benefit from meaningful economic development projects is a priority, and for Bibb County, this is a game-changer."

The 550-acre industrial park that will house the new Mercedes facilities was donated to Bibb County for the purpose of industrial development by area businessman Scott G. Davis before his death in 2011.

ThyssenKrupp steel and the automobile supplier MollerTech also have plants within the park, but Brian HIlson, the president and CEO of the Birmingham Business Alliance, said none of it would be possible without MBUSA.

"We've met here in Bibb County in Scott G. Davis Industrial Park several times recently for announcements and ground-breakings, but none more exciting than this latest development for Mercedes-Benz," Hilson said. "In fact, because the other projects here are all automotive related, I think it's likely that without Mercedes' presence in Alabama, none of these projects would have happened."

Bibb County Commissioner Ricky Hubbard wrapped things up by thanking MBUSA for its decision to invest in the area for the first time since the Vance plant opened 20 years ago this month.

"You've been a great neighbor for many years," Hubbard said. "Today, we're excited to call you a partner that will offer more jobs and more opportunities for our community and our county."

Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
Empowered by engineering

Students learn about different fields in UA visit

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Abigail Miller does not know who she wants to be when she grows up, but she likes knowing what is out there in the world for her.

Abigail, a fourth-grader from Myrtlewood Elementary School, was one of nearly 1,000 students from the area to see careers up close during "E-Day," where students toured the University of Alabama to examine different engineering programs.

During the tour, students saw what opportunities are available in different fields, from aerospace to chemical engineering.

"Everyone here today is here to help you see what engineering is all about, so please feel free to ask questions, be curious and explore all of the different types of engineering you will see," engineering students Lizzy West and Blythe Johnston wrote in a program published for the students.

Abigail said she has always been interested in math and science, but had never considered engineering as a career for herself.

"We're learning about stuff out here you would not be able to see in a classroom," Abigail said.

Abigail and other students are part of GATE, or Gifted and Talented Education program, that caters to students' interests and exposes them to careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

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Dylan Jackson, 12, a sixth-grade student at Jemison Intermediate, wears a pair of virtual reality goggles to see a First Person View from an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle during "E-Day."

[STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]

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Williams, gifted specialist in the program, said days like "E-Day" go a long way toward nurturing children's ideas about the world.

"It opens the door of opportunity for them to learn about things they did not know as well before," Williams said.

William Wallace, a fifth-grader at Englewood Elementary School, said he would like to be an engineer one day because so many facets of the field are fascinating.

"It's all really cool," he said.

In addition, William said he liked the change of pace from being in an Englewood classroom to walking around on campus at UA.

"It makes me feel like I'm one of them," he said.

For William, "E-Day" was an empowering experience.

"It's empowering to see this kind of thing in education," she said.

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Grant would help start civil rights trail

Online

To learn more about the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force, go to www.civilrights-tuscaloosa.org.

Group wants markers designating places of interest

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

The Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force is ready to move forward with commemorating the city's civil rights history with detailed markers.

The group, which was formed last year to recognize Tuscaloosa's place during the civil rights movement, is in the process of securing a $26,000 grant through Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports for markers to be placed at 14 sites along the city's civil rights trail. The grant will be made official if the city of Tuscaloosa grants permission to the tourism commission to give the money to the group.

"This is all meant to be information to understand how civil rights was fought for and against here," said Scott Bridges, president of the task force.

The grant is meant to cover the first phase of what the task force would like to do, mainly covering the civil rights trail in downtown Tuscaloosa. Proposed sites for these signs include Capitol Park, the Howard Linton Barbershop, the Dinah Washington Cultural Center, the Bama Theatre and First African Baptist Church.

Bridges said that while some sites, such as First African Baptist, have their own markers that

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show the history of the building, there are very few establishments with markers dedicated to their place in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

“What we have are markers that tell us the history of place, but it doesn’t tell us civil rights history of that place,” he said.

Tuscaloosa has had an important place in civil rights over the years. One of the most memorable events that took place in the city was the “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door” in 1963, when Gov. George Wallace attempted to block Vivian Malone and James Hood from entering Foster Auditorium to register for classes at the University of Alabama. In 1964, a number of black men and women marchers were beaten by Tuscaloosa law enforcement officers during “Bloody Tuesday.”

Tina Jones, a founding member of the task force, said there are also plans to contact the National Parks Service in order to have First African Baptist, the old Tuscaloosa County Courthouse and Linton Barbershop on the national register.

If the city approves for the group to move forward with their project, they can begin buying the signs and installing the makers at the sites. The next phase of the plan would include documenting different parts of Stillman College and its civil rights history, as well as the University of Alabama.

Jones said the group would like to use the grant to develop maps and brochures for people to use to find different points of the city’s history.

“This will allow Tuscaloosa to draw visitors here,” Jones said. “As opposed to just stories, there will be brick and mortar to go with it.”

Over the last year, the task force has also been compiling an oral history of the city from different residents that lived in Tuscaloosa during the civil rights era. They plan to continue that project.

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Sabans named honorary UA alumni

Group donates $10K to Nick's Kids foundation

Staff report

The University of Alabama National Alumni Association board has named head football coach Nick Saban and his wife, Terry Saban, honorary alumni of the Capstone.

"This is an unbelievable honor for me because I have so much respect for the university and alumni who have worked so hard to make the tradition of the University of Alabama one of the most special places in America," Saban said in a statement released by the university. "...I can only hope that I have represented you and done what you expect us to do and earned all the things that you have wanted us to do as a coach here, as a leader in the community in a first class way that represents this institution."

The Sabans were recognized at the start of Friday's Nick@Noon luncheon at the Bryant Conference Center. The pair were honored for their embodiment of the Capstone spirit through their community support.

The Sabans have donated $7 million to nonprofit organizations and contributed more than $350,000 to Children's of Alabama hospital as part of their support in the community during their decade in Tuscaloosa.

"It's been an incredible almost 11 years at the university," Terry Saban said. "Our children are adopted, and when they were little we would tell them how special it was that we chose them to be part of our family. And

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The University of Alabama National Alumni Association presents $10,000 to Nick’s Kids Foundation. [SUBMITTED PHOTO]

SABANS

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now, you’ve adopted us. We’re part of your family.”

The association on Friday donated $10,000 to Nick’s Kids Foundation, the Saban family charity organization that is dedicated to raising awareness and resources for deserving organizations in Alabama and the Southeast.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that this University is living its finest hour, and the Sabans have had a lot to do with that,” UA Director of Alumni Affairs Calvin Brown said. “We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.”
Food banks benefit from rivalry

Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger contest begins Tuesday

By Aaron Bonner
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Beginning Tuesday, the University of Alabama will battle Auburn University in a contest designed to combat hunger and food insecurity.

Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger is an annual food drive that began 24 years ago. Through a partnership to benefit the West Alabama Food Bank, UA's Center for Service and Leadership created the drive to bring awareness to food insecurity within Alabama.

"Throughout the name, it obviously alludes to our rivalry

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RIVALRY

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with Auburn, but at the same time that our campaign is going on, they are doing the exact same thing with the East Alabama Food Bank," said Bailey Chandler, the coordinator of volunteer management for the Center for Service and Leadership and the executive adviser for Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger.

This year’s Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger food drive begins with a kickoff event from 11-3 p.m. Tuesday at the Ferguson Student Center on campus. With inflatables and snacks, the event is designed to educate students about food insecurity while providing an afternoon of activities.

"College students love competition and they hate Auburn, so our kickoff really does a lot of fun things to get the competitive nature up and running as well as bring awareness to the real issue that we may be fighting Auburn, but we are truly fighting hunger together," said Courtney Chapman Thomas, the director of the Center for Service and Leadership.

Through partnerships around Tuscaloosa with restaurants, high schools and offices, donations will be accepted at red barrels in multiple locations. As well as food donations, monetary donations are accepted, with each dollar equaling 2 pounds of food for the drive.

At the end of the campaign, the donations are weighed to determine which school hauled in the most food.

In the past 23 years, Tuscaloosa has brought in more than 5.5 million pounds worth of food to the West Alabama Food Bank through this competition, with 150,322 pounds donated in 2016. This year, the Center for Service and Leadership hopes to bring in even more, setting the goal to 175,000 pounds.

"We believe in the mission of our food banks, what they do and the counties they serve," Chapman Thomas said. "It’s an incredible opportunity because they are the experts in their field in how to adequately resource the food to the partners that need it and so we work in hand-in-hand with them. We provide the philanthropy and the food collection in order to help them sustain their vision and serve more people.”

The Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger food drive will continue through Nov. 14, with several events on and off-campus planned to raise donations and get Tuscaloosa involved. More information can be found at beatauburnbeathunger.ua.edu.
When O.J. Simpson partied in Tuscaloosa

By: Drew Taylor

Dangling a beer over the bar at Lee’s Tomb, O.J. Simpson began to playfully taunt Joe Namath.

The two men were sitting at the former Tuscaloosa bar during the spring of 1980. By that time, Simpson and Namath had accomplished more than most athletes had up to that point. In many ways, both men had made the successful move from athlete to personality, transcending the sport that had brought them fame and national adulation.

Simpson, who had retired from the San Francisco 49ers the previous season, had already cemented himself as one of the all-time leading rushers in football history and had begun a new career in acting, advertising and sports commentary. Likewise, Namath had long been established as both a natural athlete with the New York Jets and had become a media celebrity in his own right.

Despite the legacies and careers each had built up for himself in life after football, both men were still very passionate about their alma maters — Namath from the University of Alabama and Simpson from the University of Southern California.

See it for yourself

Click here to see the beer-chugging championships that originally aired as a segment of a pilot television program called "The Sunday Games." O.J. Simpson and Joe Namath coached two student teams from Alabama and USC during a beer-drinking competition. The pilot aired on NBC on April 27, 1980.

Such loyalty was on display at Lee’s Tomb, a Tuscaloosa bar where Wilhagan’s now stands. While the men talked, dozens of people gathered around as an NBC film crew captured the conversation.

“Come on, Joe, I mean, you have to be realistic, man. Sometimes I think you have been sacked too many times,” Simpson playfully said as he sipped a beer from the bar. “We’re talking about USC. You know, pride, poise, tradition, size and power. You guys don’t have a chance, man.”

Namath was not shy to dish it back to Simpson.

“Size? Power? Speed? It sounds like you’re talking about Alabama, and that’s what this thing is all about, by the way: speed and quickness,” Namath said.

In an almost sincere way, Simpson asked Namath if he thought he would come all the way to Tuscaloosa just to watch his team lose.

“Well, you’re used to it,” Namath said.

Overhearing the conversation, the bartender walked up in front of the men to discuss what he assumed they had been discussing: football.

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“Hey, fellas, the season has been over for four months,” the bartender said. “Nobody is talking about football down here anymore.”

Confused, Simpson stared at the bartender, later revealed to be Don Ohlmeyer, a friend of Simpson’s and a television executive producer who would go on to become a major figure at NBC.

“Football?” Simpson asked.

“We’re not talking about football. We’re talking about chugging,” Namath said.

The next moment, the crowd began to cheer, starting what would be a segment of a pilot television program called “The Sunday Games,” where Simpson and Namath would coach two student teams from Alabama and USC during a beer-drinking competition. The pilot aired on NBC on April 27, 1980, and was hosted by Bruce Jenner, who later became Caitlyn Jenner after transitioning to a woman.

The TV segment captured an unusual connection Simpson had to Tuscaloosa, years before the 1994 murder of his ex-wife and a waiter in Los Angeles and the infamous “trial of the century” that ensued. Nearly 40 years later, the show is one full of memories for the people involved, especially of Simpson, who was released from prison Sunday after spending nearly a decade behind bars.

Making the show

Leading up to the premiere of “The Sunday Games,” a lot of changes had occurred at NBC that led the network to take a gamble on the show. Earlier that year, President Jimmy Carter announced that in response to Soviet-Afghan War, the United States would not be participating in the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow. NBC, the network scheduled to broadcast for the Olympics that year, needed to pivot in order to keep viewership high.

Leading up to “The Sunday Games,” Ohlmeyer was serving as the executive producer for the network’s sports division. Before the Olympics cancellation, NBC had been toying with the idea of hosting a program about normal people competing in unusual games, such as a taxicab demolition derby, a belly-flop contest and a competition featuring the “World’s Toughest Bouncer.” The show’s lasting legacy was Sylvester Stallone watching the show and noticing Lawrence Tureaud. Known as Mr. T., he portrayed Clubber Lang in “Rocky III” and starred in the show “The A-Team.”

Donna de Varona, a former athlete who won the gold medal in swimming during the 1964 Olympic games in Tokyo, had previously left her job as a sports reporter at ABC to cover the Olympics for NBC.

“I had little consistent work until I went to NBC,” de Varona said. “When Ohlmeyer called, you answered.”

With no chances of covering the Olympics on the horizon, de Varona was put on duty to cover “The Sunday Games,” reporting on the beer-chugging competition in Tuscaloosa.
"It was a far cry anchoring the night show of Olympic games coverage," she said. "I really wish I had covered the Olympics."

After the pilot episode, the show was ordered to a full series and renamed “Games People Play.” Despite its unusual subject matter, the show failed to find a substantial audience and was canceled that December.

In the book “Real People and the Rise of Reality Television,” author Michael McKenna noted that while “Games People Play” was not a highly influential program when it came to future reality show programming, it was a predecessor of many contemporary reality shows in its use of celebrities.

“In the first decade of the 21st century, celebrities, many of them on the downside of their careers, or limited in talent, found themselves featured in reality shows that were hugely popular (e.g. “The Apprentice,” “The Surreal Life”),” McKenna wrote. “Games People Play’ was one of the few 1980s reality shows to feature prominent celebrities from sports, TV, and films.”

The chug-off

The idea for the drinking competition came from Ohlmeyer and the producers, who focused on trying to get students from Alabama and USC to participate. Before the show aired, both schools’ football programs were considered among the best in the country.

At the end of the 1979 season, Alabama was selected as the best team in the nation in the polls, with USC second. The year before, the AP Poll listed Alabama as the No. 1 team while USC made first place in the coaches’ poll.

“NBC had an idea to put O.J. and Joe Namath in a bar and have them decide who was No. 1 over a beer competition,” said Gary Sawyer, who represented USC in the contest.

The plan for the pilot show was to have two teams from each school compete against each other. Each team had four men and one woman, competing to see who could go through three rounds of beer-drinking the fastest.

Jay Noonan, then a sophomore at USC, was on the university’s fraternity council and a member of Phi Gamma Delta when NBC producers began scouting for students to take part in the competition. After producers approached Noonan and the council about the show, Noonan began assembling a group from other fraternities and sororities on campus.

Across the country, sophomore Jim Ransom had been signed up by UA’s Phi Gamma Delta chapter to compete. For Ransom, what went on behind the scenes at Lee’s Tomb during a two- to three-day television shoot still sticks out in his memory.

“I remember what I remember, but I was pretty hammered most of that week,” Ransom said.

The first day of shooting took place before Alabama’s spring break. However, the shoot was already becoming a difficult endeavor because of television policy at the time to not show real beer being drunk on camera.

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“At the time, the network didn’t know if we would be drinking beer, milk or apple juice,” Sawyer said.

Ultimately, Ohlmeyer challenged the network, saying the teams would drink real beer or he would not be part of the project.

In the edited version of the competition, both Simpson and Namath are seen talking to the teams, building them up through pep talks.

“I’m proud of you,” Simpson told the USC students. “No matter what you do, I’m proud of you. I’ve never had a group of people I’ve enjoyed more.

“Just remember one thing: It doesn’t matter if you win or lose, until you lose.”

In contrast, Namath took the opportunity to have fun with the group and use Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, whose picture adorned a wall in the former bar, as the target of his snark.

“General Lee used to come here, right to this very spot, right here where we’re standing,” Namath said. “He used to come right here and sip the finest Southern whiskey we had. You got to remember: Let’s go out and win one for the Sipper.”

The program featured each student introduced just like sports programs feature individual athletes, citing their full name and their class level. In a twist, the program also featured each player’s best drinking record. For example, Ransom’s fastest time to swallow 16 ounces of beer was 4.2 seconds.

The day of the shoot, the network gave the students passes so that their friends could attend the taping. The crowd seen on film may be due in large part to Ransom, whose friend mimeographed the passes and gave those out to bring in more people.

Simpson and Namath were not the only celebrities at Lee’s Tomb during the shoot. Making sure that the crew turned off their cameras, football coach Paul W. “Bear” Bryant stopped by to see the set.

“I remember him walking over to Simpson and Namath and saying, ‘I hear we have a couple of new recruits with us today,’ ” said Johnny Mack Hutt, co-owner of Lee’s Tomb, who served as referee.

Toward the end of the segment, the students began the competition. Although momentarily keeping up, Alabama lost to USC, which was awarded a silver beer mug on a wooden plaque.

“It’s not the MacArthur Bowl, but I think it’s some students from two fine universities who had a good time here,” Simpson told de Varona during the broadcast. “I just hope it encourages the school to schedule one another in football. I’m a football enthusiast and in recent years, the two schools have had a great rivalry.”

Not wanting to be outdone, Namath had the final word.
“In the famous words of General Lee to General Grant at Appomattox: How about two out of three?” Namath said.

Looking back, de Varona said a competition like that would probably not be aired on a major network today.

“It was a different time,” de Varona said. “We know so much more about binge drinking and alcoholism than we did then.”

Nonetheless, Noonan still holds warm memories of the time he left home to be on television, drinking beer and hanging out with other college students.

“I still have a beer mug signed by both Simpson and Namath,” Noonan said.

Other students remember the competition as being another chapter of their lives.

“Now I look back and it’s part of my college experience,” Sawyer said.

Just a man

People involved with the show distinctly remember how meeting Simpson was an honor, but reflected on how their views on him had changed over the years.

With the exception of the morning leading up to the shoot, both teams fully took advantage of NBC’s accommodations, paying for USC students’ trip to Tuscaloosa, in addition to paying for everyone’s meals and drinks. Even Namath and Simpson kept up with the students.

“They were right in the crowd with us for two or three nights,” Ransom said.

For Ransom, meeting someone of Simpson’s stature was an experience he would always remember. As a boy, Ransom watched Simpson during his college football days, as well as his time with the Buffalo Bills and the 49ers.

“He was very friendly to me, and we had a good time,” Ransom said. “We all got pretty intoxicated together.”

Hutt said what struck him most about Simpson was who was at his side for most of the shoot — his girlfriend, Nicole Brown, who would later become his wife.

“I thought that was a little odd,” Hutt said. “You didn’t see many black men with white women in those days.”

Randy Branch of the band Oakley Hill, which played at the bar after filming, remembered Brown being by Simpson’s side.

“She looked like she could have been one of the co-eds because of how young she was,” Branch said.

Years later, Simpson would be at the center of suspicion and scrutiny after the 1994 killing of Brown and Ron Goldman at her home in Brentwood, California, a suburb on the west side of Los

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Angeles. Simpson was arrested and tried on charges of killing them. Public opinion was polarized regarding whether Simpson was involved in the murders, but a jury ultimately acquitted him of all charges. In 1997, a jury in a civil lawsuit trial found Simpson liable for their deaths.

In 2007, Simpson was arrested in Las Vegas and charged with trying to rob someone in a hotel room who he believed had been in possession of personal memorabilia that had been stolen from him. On Oct. 3, 2008, which coincidentally was the 13th anniversary of his acquittal in his ex-wife’s death, a jury found Simpson guilty and a judge sentenced him to up to 33 years in jail with a possibility of parole after nine years.

On July 20, Simpson was granted parole and is scheduled to be released by Monday at the earliest.

De Varona, who worked with Simpson at ABC Sports and knew him as a friend in those days, said it was sad seeing him lose everything he had and everyone he loved over the years. She pointed to how difficult it can be for some athletes when they are no longer playing sports.

“'I don’t know what part the life in Hollywood played in his downfall, but it was sad,'” de Varona said.

Specifically, de Varona recalled how she had dinner with Simpson once in 1985 to help him with his career. At that time, he was part of the broadcasting team on “Monday Night Football” for ABC, along with Namath. According to de Varona, Simpson had been on thin ice with the network because he was taking his job for granted and “doing what he wanted.”

“I told him, ‘You have to start ramping up your game and you have to articulate more,’ ” she said.

By 1986, ABC had removed both Simpson and Namath from “Monday Night Football.” Simpson later picked up sports reporting work for NBC and was involved in other business ventures. While not speaking about Simpson’s innocence or guilt, de Varona said she believes that his diminished media exposure following his ouster from ABC, in addition to being away from football, were part of many things that ultimately led to his downfall.

“When his whole identity started to fragment, he began to fragment,” she said.

Noonan said that, unfortunately, Simpson’s story is a common one.

“I think we hear about it too much,” he said. “There are a lot of stories of people making tons of money and fame and systematically peeing it away.”

Sawyer said he believes Simpson killed Brown and Goldman, adding that his fall was tragic.

“Like any politicians, I’m sure they did a lot of great work and they are known for those other issues,” Sawyer said. “It doesn’t matter what it is; it just takes one thing to wreck your reputation.”
Although Simpson is now a free man, de Varona said she feels Simpson will never be truly free from scorn and suspicion. Ultimately, she called Simpson’s life over the last 30 years an American tragedy.

“Before he was sent to prison, he was in America’s prison,” she said. “He’ll continue to stay in America’s prison.”
Files detail investigation into Megan Rondini case

By: Stephanie Taylor

The night of July 1, 2015, started as a typical one for both Megan Rondini and T.J. Bunn Jr.

Rondini had finished exams at the University of Alabama and was spending a few days in Tuscaloosa before heading home for the summer to Austin, Texas.

She and a few sorority sisters met at Innisfree Irish Pub on University Boulevard to play trivia and share pitchers of beer.

Bunn finished up work at his family’s business, ST Bunn Construction, that Wednesday evening and walked across the street to Innisfree, where he spent most of the night sitting at the corner of the bar having drinks and talking to friends.

What happened after they left the bar separately that night has become the basis of rape and corruption allegations that have captured the attention of people far beyond Tuscaloosa, eliciting strong emotions, opinions and outrage.

A young woman is dead, leaving behind a mourning family looking to hold someone responsible for her death, while seeking change within the system they believe failed their daughter.

A man has been cast by some as a dangerous predator — not convicted by a judge or jury, but by public opinion in an ongoing “trial by social media.”

Rondini was 20 when she reported to police that Bunn, 34 at the time, raped her at his home that night. The Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit conducted an investigation, and after consulting with prosecutors decided there wasn’t enough evidence to make an arrest. Bunn has denied the allegation, saying the sex was consensual.

That September, the homicide unit turned the case over to the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney’s Office, a common procedure in investigations that don’t result in an immediate arrest. Prosecutors then have the option of presenting the evidence to a grand jury for a final determination, which they did in this case, in February 2016. The grand jury did not issue an indictment.

Rondini moved back to Texas six weeks into the following fall semester, and would never learn the outcome of the grand jury deliberations. She took her life a few days before the panel met, hanging herself with a hammock cord in the bathroom of her Dallas apartment.

Her parents filed a wrongful death suit in early July this year against Bunn, the University of Alabama, UA President Stuart Bell, Tuscaloosa County Sheriff Ron Abernathy and the two lead investigators who worked the case. The suit claims their actions — or inaction — caused Rondini to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, ultimately leading to her suicide.

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The actions of those institutions and individuals will be reviewed by a federal judge and possibly a jury as the lawsuit progresses.

Ten days before the suit was filed, BuzzFeed News published a story online that had been read by 2.3 million people as of Tuesday. The story suggested Rondini was drugged, raped and later failed by medical professionals, law enforcement and UA counseling staff because Bunn comes from a wealthy family.

The BuzzFeed story included clips from videos included in the investigative file, which the court had ordered the Sheriff’s Office to release to the Rondinis’ attorneys. Bunn’s attorneys obtained the same file after the story was published.

The Tuscaloosa News sought the investigative file, not all of which would ordinarily be public record, in order to provide the public with as much information as possible about the case, rather than rely on what might have been selectively released or published elsewhere.

“A lot of information about this matter has appeared online and on social media, much of it unsubstantiated and unsourced,” Tuscaloosa News executive editor Michael James said when the paper requested the files. “We believe that’s irresponsible. Considering the gravity of the accusations and insinuations that have arisen with regard to institutions the public should have faith and confidence in, we believe it would be in the public interest for the court to order the release of the records.”

At a court hearing on Sept. 11, Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court Judge Brad Almond granted The News’ request.

According to the Sheriff’s Office, the file contains all investigative materials related to the case, including audio and video recordings of interviews with Bunn and Rondini. There are recorded interviews with Bunn’s friend, who spent the night at Bunn’s house, and Rondini’s friend who picked her up there after 2 a.m. Also included in the file are photos and video of the house, Rondini’s written statement and her text messages and phone photos dating back to 2013.

The News has made all of the material available online, with the exception of text messages and photos that aren’t relevant to the case. Some names, phone numbers and personal information have been redacted. An interview with Rondini’s friend that was provided as a video has been presented as an audio file to protect her privacy.

What follows is a chronological account of the night of July 1 and the subsequent investigation, based on information in the investigative file.

7 p.m. – 11:47 p.m.: July 1, 2015

Bunn arrived alone at Innisfree Irish Pub at 7:25 p.m. On surveillance video from Innisfree, he can be seen talking on his phone on the outside porch for about two minutes before going inside.

(The time stamps on Innisfree surveillance videos were not altered to reflect daylight saving time.)

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Rondini and five friends arrive at Innisfree at 8:19 p.m., walking past staff members who didn’t check identification. They can be seen entering from the left at the 8:30 mark in the following video.

Four other friends joined them later for trivia. Several hours of surveillance video doesn’t appear to show Rondini and Bunn having any contact while inside the bar.

“T recognized him because we met on Thanksgiving,” Rondini told Investigator Adam Jones in an interview the following day. The interview began at 11:30 a.m. at the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office and lasted more than three hours.

“He probably didn’t remember who I was, but every time I go out, I see him there,” Rondini said. “He’s always there. As soon as we walked in I saw him, and he was sitting at the bar. We didn’t talk at all, he didn’t even acknowledge that I was there, I didn’t acknowledge that he was there. He didn’t talk to any of my friends.”

Rondini can be seen in the video below, sitting under the left arch under the television at the 9:57 mark in the video, at 11:11 p.m. Bunn and his friend Jason Barksdale leave at 11:35 p.m., walking from the left of the screen to the exit in the far right corner. Rondini leaves at 11:36 p.m.

Rondini told investigators she drank around five or six cups of beer she poured herself from shared pitchers. In text messages exchanged with her father the following morning, after she had been examined at DCH Regional Medical Center, he asked whether the nurse had taken a blood sample “to document if he drugged you.” She replied, “I don’t think I was drugged bc my drink never left my friends but I can try to go back.”

Bunn and Barksdale left the bar at 11:35 p.m. Rondini left alone at 11:36 p.m., walking east on University Boulevard. Bunn’s white Mercedes can be seen on surveillance photo as it exits the ST Bunn parking lot at 11:39 p.m. and travels east on University Boulevard.

Bunn and Barksdale can be seen leaving at the 35:33 mark in the following video, with Rondini exiting at 36:46. His Mercedes appears on University Boulevard at 38:47.

Bunn told investigators in an interview that took place at the Sheriff’s Office July 6, that he saw Rondini walking along University Boulevard, about a block from Innisfree, before he stopped to offer her a ride.

“I’ve seen her, I knew her face,” he told Investigator Josh Hastings.

“After we left, I noticed that she was walking by herself down the road,” Bunn said. “I pulled over and asked if she needed a ride home. She gets in the car, as soon as she gets in the car, she calls me by name.”

“I don’t really remember actually leaving Innisfree,” Rondini said. “I feel I would have left with my friends that were going to drive us home. But I do remember being in the car with him on the road, in the back seat.”

Rondini said she remembered passing Denny Chimes on University Boulevard.

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“It wasn’t like hostile, we were just all in the car together,” she said.

She recalled that Bunn asked what she was studying. She replied that she liked animals and wanted to be a veterinarian, and he told her about the room in his home with mounts of animals he’s killed on hunting trips. Rondini said that Bunn drove straight to his home in Cotto ndale, without making any stops.

“Originally, I thought he was just going to drive me home, and then I kind of realize that’s not what was...” she said, trailing off. “After being in the car awhile, I realized that’s not where we were going.

“He was drunk and he was driving and it was kind of concerning me,” she said. “I was kind of watching him drive the whole time because it was scaring me.”

But surveillance photos and cell phone data show that the group did go to Rondini’s apartment at Houndstooth Condominiums on 15th Street for 15 minutes.

“I did exactly what I told her, what I asked her to do, I drove her straight home to her apartment,” Bunn said.

11:47 p.m. – 12:15 a.m.

Surveillance footage from inside the apartment complex shows the group arriving at 11:47 p.m., and leaving at 12:02 a.m. Rondini is leading the way each time, followed by Bunn and then Barksdale.

“She invited us to come in, we go upstairs, she fixes us a drink. I don’t touch anything, she made it,” Bunn said during the July 6 interview at the Sheriff’s Office.

Rondini told officers she didn’t remember going home. With her permission, they used her phone data to look at location history and texts that confirmed she was there for 15 minutes.

“I don’t remember being there,” she said during the interview with investigators on July 2. “There’s a gap. I don’t remember leaving, and I don’t remember getting in the car.”

Rondini voluntarily gave investigators her phone so they could download her location history. The investigators never requested information from Bunn’s phone.

When asked why Bunn’s phone wasn’t examined, Abernathy, in an email, said:

“Ms. Rondini voluntarily provided her cell telephone to law enforcement for downloading to provide investigators evidence supplementary to that provided by her oral statement. After she advised investigators she no longer wanted the investigation to go forward, this documentary evidence was retained, but no other cell telephone evidence was offered to investigators. Documentary evidence voluntarily provided by Ms. Rondini was beneficial to the investigation because it provided supplemented evidence not offered by her oral statement.”

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Investigator Jones accompanied Rondini to her apartment that day, where he took photos and recorded their discussion. A photo shows one cup in the sink and a glass on the coffee table. A bottle of Everclear grain alcohol and a bottle of Canadian Mist whiskey were by the sink. She said she didn’t recall making drinks, but acknowledged there may have been a smaller amount in the bottles than the previous day.

“When we decided to leave, she chose to want to go with us and we got to my house and we pretty much, everybody went straight to bed,” Bunn said. “We didn’t fix another drink, we didn’t stay up. We went to bed, and it’s, of course, unfortunately we both decided to have consensual sex.”

Bunn said he drove from Rondini’s apartment with her in the front seat and Barksdale in the back. Video shows them leaving at 12:02 a.m. It’s about seven miles, an approximately 15-minute trip, to Bunn’s home on Cedar Drive in Cottondale.

Rondini told investigators that she didn’t call or text anyone while in Bunn’s car.

According to her phone records, however, she had the following exchange with a friend who, with Rondini, had met Bunn the previous Thanksgiving at Innisfree and who had been at Innisfree with her earlier that night:

12:05 a.m. Megan: Pick me up in the morning

12:06 a.m. Friend: Kk I have class at 10 so early ish

12:08 a.m. Megan: We are going to gawk

12:08 a.m. Megan: (emoji with sunglasses)

12:11 a.m. Friend: Do it (money bag emoji)

12:11 a.m. Friend: Wear a condom

12:11 a.m. Friend: Good luck

12:13 a.m. Megan: Eww but I’ll make it real good

12:14 a.m. Friend: Hahah like a tru horseback rider

She never writes that she is with Bunn, but had sent two Snapchat photos to that friend at 11:44 p.m. before arriving at her apartment. Investigators were unable to recover those photos from the phone.

Then, while at Bunn’s home, Rondini sent three videos to friends at 12:23 a.m., using the Snapchat app, that she later saved to her phone at 7:14 a.m. The videos were taken inside the room where animals are mounted on the wall — including a leopard, lion, elephant and hippopotamus. Rondini can be heard laughing while walking through the room, naming animals, while Bunn and Barksdale are talking in the background.

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Two different friends responded at 12:29 a.m. and 12:32 a.m.

“Megan, where the hell are you?” one wrote.

“Where the f— are you?? Aren’t you a vegetarian?!”

There’s no activity on her phone until 1:04 a.m.

12:15 a.m. – 1:04 a.m.

Rondini told Jones that Barksdale was “very drunk” and that Bunn told him to stop when he made remarks about her legs. The three of them then went into the room with the mounted animals, where she filmed the Snapchat videos.

“I was just really trying not to be rude. I thought he just wanted to show me that room that had the animals in it and maybe we would leave, so I didn’t say anything at that time,” Rondini said in the interview. “I said, once we were in there, I said ‘I need to go find my friends and he just kind of ignored me.”

Bunn told Barksdale to go to bed because he was drunk, Rondini said. Barksdale and Rondini both went upstairs, she said, and went into separate bedrooms. Bunn had directed her to his bedroom, where she waited 10 or 15 minutes on a chair while he put his dog away, she said.

There doesn’t appear to be any phone activity during that time, according to the records.

“He made comments like he wanted to have sex, and I really didn’t want to. He walked over to me, started trying to kiss me, and I didn’t really want to. I was just like ‘I need to leave, and he just ignored me, and I thought if I kind of let him do whatever…” she said. “When we had sex I didn’t even face him at all. I didn’t look at him.”

She said that Bunn removed her shirt.

“I wasn’t really looking at him. I’d already said I’d needed to leave and he wasn’t really responding to that and I just, I kind of just let him do it.”

“When he started to touch me, I was not responsive to him at all,” she said later in the interview. “I honestly felt like if, because he wasn’t going to stop, if I just kind of let him, then I would be able to leave.”

Jones asked whether she ever felt like she was in danger.

“I did not want to be there,” she said. “I don’t feel like I was in danger, like he was going to kill me, you know, but…”

Later during the interview, Jones continued to ask whether she offered any resistance, and how she communicated to Bunn that she didn’t want to have sex.
“I did try to resist him. I said I wanted to leave, when he tried to kiss me I turned away,” she said. “I didn’t want it to happen, and I’m pretty sure I was clear that I didn’t want it to happen.”

“I believe that you’re telling me the truth about everything we’re talking about,” Jones said. “But when we’re talking about a rape...why didn’t you call the police?”

“I thought about it,” she replied. “At first, I wasn’t even going to go to the hospital, and my friends told me that I should go. I didn’t want to make it a big deal.”

Rondini said that she was on her side during the act. During his interview, Bunn said Rondini was on top of him.

Hastings asked Bunn if Rondini at any point ever told him to stop.

“At no point during y’all having sex did she ever say ‘stop’? She was a willing participant the entire time?” Hastings asked.

“Very willing participant,” he said.

Bunn rolled over and fell asleep afterward, Rondini said.

“I got up to leave, I went to the bathroom and I was kind of panicking,” she said. “I was trying to get my shoes on and that’s when I started texting my friends, saying that I need somebody to come get me right now.”

1:04 a.m. – 2:13 a.m.

Rondini said she tried to leave the room through several doors until she found the right one. She said she panicked when she couldn’t get the door unlocked.

She then sent a flurry of text messages to her friends, starting at 1:04 a.m. and ending more than an hour later when two friends arrived. The messages started with “Cb can you come get me right now” followed by “I need help.” At 1:10 a.m., she wrote “I can’t get out of the room help.”

At 1:12 a.m., she sent a photo to her friends of herself in Bunn’s room, in the dark, with a window in the background.

Some friends responded that they were too drunk to drive to Cottondale and told her to remain calm while they tried to contact someone to pick her up.

She told police that she looked around, but couldn’t find her keys. She found a key ring on a shelf in Bunn’s room, but none of the keys worked on the door she was unable to open.

Rondini texted friends at 1:19 a.m., saying she was going to climb out of the bedroom window. Two minutes later, she reported that she had made it to the ground. After exiting the window, she crossed a flat roof and lowered herself to the driveway using a wrought-iron fence. She said she ran to the street and tried to call friends and taxi services.

See next page
“Please please please help me,” she wrote in a series of texts between 1:40 a.m. and when her friends arrived shortly after 2 a.m.

“Why will no one help me,” she wrote, followed by messages including “Please please please” and “Please I’m crying.”

She tried to go through the locked front door to check the first-floor animal room for her keys, she said, using keys she had taken from Bunn’s room.

She then stacked a trash can on a cooler to climb back on the roof and re-enter the bedroom to look for her keys again, but she crawled back out through the window when she couldn’t find them.

“I only went back inside because I knew he wouldn’t wake up,” she said during the interview at the Sheriff’s Office the following day.

While inside again, she searched Bunn’s pants pockets looking for another key that might open the front door, she said. She said she took $3 cash, some assorted papers and an old football ticket that were bundled in his wallet before leaving through the window again.

Rondini said she then searched the Mercedes for her keys. She found a Ruger pistol in the center console that she said discharged when she handled it. Police never found where the bullet landed, but found a shell casing in the front seat of the car, as if it had fired while she was sitting in the front seat.

She didn’t mention that she had found the gun until Jones asked if there were any details she had left out, and didn’t say that it had fired until later in the interview.

“I didn’t tell you this earlier, but I remembered when I was sitting down – when I went to go look for my keys in the Mercedes there was a pocket pistol, or whatever, and I just put it in my shorts for myself,” she said.

She kept the gun in her pocket, she said, and later left it in the grass by the roadside, along with the items from Bunn’s wallet, when her friends arrived. She gave the $3 to the cab driver who arrived just before her friends.

Bunn told police when they questioned him the following morning and the next week that he was missing a company gas card and more than $300.

In the recorded video of him speaking with his lawyer before the July 6 interview, Bunn said he had searched his house but never found Rondini’s keys.

“You’ve got reasoning behind why you did what you did,” Jones said before reading Rondini her Miranda rights and questioning her about the gun and missing money from Bunn’s wallet, in case they ended up charging her with firing a gun or theft. She never faced any charges, but prosecutors had planned to present charges to a grand jury before she died.
"I need you to tell me what your reasoning was about why you did these things," Jones said. "We’ve just got to touch base on everything, that’s just why we’ve got to go over this. Because we’ve got to find out what happened in every aspect."

"I was not intentionally trying to shoot anything," she said. "At all."

"Did you not tell me this thinking you would be in trouble?" Jones asked.

"I honestly forgot about it," she said. "I knew the gun part, but I forgot about the cash part."

He asked why she didn’t mention the gun sooner.

"I was just, they just make me really nervous," she said. "I was not trying to hurt...I didn’t aim it. I just, I should not have touched it."

She kept the gun in her pocket, she said, and later left it in the grass by the roadside, along with the items from Bunn’s wallet, when her friends arrived. She gave the $3 to the cab driver who arrived just before her friends.

2:13 a.m. – 6 a.m.

Rondini’s friends arrived at Bunn’s house at 2:13 a.m., just as she was getting into the cab she’d called and paid for with the credit card she kept in her phone case.

The two friends who picked her up had been asleep, and hadn’t been at Innisfree that night. They returned to their apartment, where they talked before they drove Rondini about a block to the hospital.

“She was telling me she wasn’t comfortable with what happened," one friend said during an interview at the Sheriff’s Office.

The roommates stayed with Rondini for the next few hours while nurses conducted an exam, collecting information for what’s known as a “rape kit.”

“She was freaking out,” the friend said. “She was very stressed and scarThe nurse collected a urine sample, Rondini told her father in a text message.

Urinalysis results were not included in the exam report provided by DCH to investigators, Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit commander Capt. Gary Hood said.

The exam report is included in the information provided to The News. The nurse noted that Rondini arrived awake and anxious, and was breathing easily. Her eyes were red and she had small abrasions on her thigh and upper calf, which Rondini told investigators were from the wrought-iron fence. She had no other injuries, according to the report.

Hood said that information sent from DCH in rape cases doesn’t always contain urinalysis results.

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“Urine samples are obtained by hospital personnel and tested and stored according to hospital protocols and procedures,” Hood told The News last week. “A urine sample was not included with the kit delivered to law enforcement, and law enforcement did not participate in any medical provider’s decision to draw, test or store urine obtained from Ms. Rondini.”

“Whether to order a urine test in a hospital setting is a private and confidential doctor-patient decision, protected by medical privacy laws,” he said. “No evidence has come to the attention of law enforcement indicating that the patient or her medical care providers requested or obtained a urine test. The observed memory and behavior of the patient at DCH did not suggest drug or alcohol impairment to any investigator and there was no other evidence indicating that a urine test should be requested. To date, no DCH medical record of any urine test has been submitted to the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office.”

Discussing the rape kit, Abernathy said: “In this case, both parties admitted participation in a sexual act, and identified themselves as the only participants in that act. A kit was not needed to identify a suspect, or prove that an admitted sexual act occurred. After Ms. Rondini advised law enforcement she wished to have the investigation terminated, due to a decision to proceed in a different manner, the kit has remained securely locked in evidence.”

Rondini family attorney Leroy Maxwell wrote in the federal lawsuit that the failure to test the urine “shut and locked the door on any evidence that would have established whether Megan had been drugged in addition to being raped.”

The friend who drove Rondini to the hospital said she was “rambling a lot,” and said Rondini told her she didn’t know how she ended up at Bunn’s home.

Tuscaloosa Police were called to DCH at 3:50 a.m. Investigators from the homicide unit, which handles all reported violent crimes in the county, arrived at 4:30 a.m. and took an audio statement from Rondini at 5:37 a.m.

It was the first of three times that day that Jones asked Rondini whether she resisted or felt she was in danger. For someone to be convicted of rape in Alabama, prosecutors must prove forcible compulsion, and that “earnest resistance” on the part of the victim must be demonstrated before the element of forcible compulsion is deemed proven.

Forcible compulsion, according to the law, is defined as force that overcomes earnest resistance, or a threat that places a person in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury.

“Did you ever resist him?” Jones asked.

“I know he’s an influential person in Tuscaloosa and I didn’t want to be like, I didn’t want to burn bridges, you know, so I was trying to be really nice and be like ‘I need to go, my friends are waiting on me’,” she said. Jones ended the interview two minutes later, as Rondini was crying.

The investigators went from the hospital to Bunn’s home.

6:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. July 2
Several investigators from the homicide unit went to Bunn’s house. He invited them in, and gave written consent for them to search. He initially told investigators that no one but Barksdale had been at his home. Within minutes, he changed his statement and gave a recorded interview.

Bunn said he didn’t remember Rondini’s name, but recognized her as someone he’d seen at Innisfree before.

“We had consensual sex, and went to bed and Josh Hastings woke me up, ringing my doorbell at 6:45,” he said that morning.

The investigators took more than 100 photos and videos of Bunn’s home, and found a spent .380-caliber shell casing in the Mercedes.

Barksdale gave a statement that he was drunk, that Rondini went with them willingly and that he didn’t hear anything after going to bed.

Hastings asked Bunn in the July 6 interview why he first said no one had been at his house that night. Bunn replied that he was confused when the officers first arrived and woke him.

“Once I had time...of course when y’all rang the door and I’m thinking the worst, I wasn’t thinking about that, but once y’all were there for a few minutes and I got time to kind of collect my thoughts,” he remembered Rondini had been there, he said. “At that time, to be honest with you, I didn’t recall.”

“Were you scared?” Hastings asked in the interview.

“Of course, yeah, sure,” Bunn replied. “Still scared.”

11:30 a.m.- 3:15 p.m. July 2

Jones interviewed Rondini for about three hours at the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office. They left the department after about two hours to visit her apartment and returned for a final hour of questioning. She told him toward the end of the interview that she didn’t expect to press charges.

Rondini was accompanied by Nesha Smith, a victim advocate who works for UA’s Women and Gender Resource Center, for the first two hours of the police interview.

Rondini told her Smith was comfortable continuing the interview alone after the trip to the apartment. At one point, Jones spoke with Rondini’s father on the phone.

Rondini told Jones toward the end of the interview, after she had recounted her experience, visited her apartment and been questioned about the gun, that she didn’t want to press charges.

“To be honest with you, I’m pretty sure I’m not going to press charges at all,” she said. “I don’t want to make this a big to-do. I want to be done. I just want to move on.”

Before ending the interview, Jones asked whether she had taken medication or felt she had been drugged.

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“I’m glad that they got a urine sample, but when I think of someone being drugged, I think of someone where they don’t remember the whole night, and I only don’t remember parts,” she said. “I don’t know if a drug can do that. I think of roofies, and you’re out.”

“I’m not doubting any part of your story,” Jones told Rondini. “The evidence there on the scene lines up with what you’ve told me.”

“I just feel like he has some advantage over me in this, and I don’t really understand why,” Rondini said. “I just feel like if this isn’t, I don’t know, like he’s getting the benefit of the doubt here because he’s a nice person and everybody likes him.”

“I’ll be honest with you, I don’t know him,” Jones said. “I haven’t gotten any orders from anybody above me that says ‘Hey, we need to sweep this under the rug.’ That’s what I tried to explain to your dad.

“We can’t allow money to influence the way we do our investigations. That’s just the way we do things. But that really stood out to me, because I felt like your dad was insinuating that.”

“He can be like that,” Rondini said. “I’m sorry. I made a big deal about it to him because I’ve seen how other people…but I didn’t make it sound like the police were going to do that, I was just saying he knows a lot of people.”

Jones encouraged Rondini to talk with her parents about her decision not to press charges.

“He’s a lawyer, he’s very hard-headed,” she said of her father.

“He wasn’t rude to me, I would just say matter-of-fact with certain things and I understand that, because you’re his daughter,” he said.

The interview ended around 3:15 p.m.

Since July 2, 2015

Rondini returned to Tuscaloosa for the fall 2015 semester, but withdrew after six weeks and moved back to Texas in October. She transferred to Southern Methodist University in Dallas, where she was living when she took her life in February 2016.

She returned to the Sheriff’s Office to collect her property on Aug. 25. She took the shoes police had recovered from Bunn’s home, but said she’d rather her clothing be destroyed.

Jones told her the case would be closed, and she said that she was looking into pursuing the case through a civil suit.

“Isn’t this going to be written down somewhere?” she asked. “That something happened, or that I said something happened?”
A Birmingham attorney representing the Rondinis had contacted the homicide office a few weeks prior, Jones said, and said he didn’t understand why they were no longer investigating Bunn for rape. The attorney later directed investigators to not contact Rondini, Jones said.

Even though Rondini said she didn’t want to prosecute, prosecutors presented the evidence to a grand jury for a final determination six months later. The grand jury did not issue an indictment. The prosecutors were prepared to present evidence for theft and breaking and entering a vehicle charges against Rondini, but never did because she had taken her life the previous week.

The BuzzFeed story and federal lawsuit came 16 months after Rondini’s death, which led to similar stories published by London’s The Daily Mail, CBS This Morning and other national publications and broadcasts. The resulting social media firestorm has been divided, with much of the anger directed toward Bunn, his family, the university and the Sheriff’s Office.

Online posts refer to Bunn as a “serial rapist,” although investigators told The News that he has never been named a suspect in any other reported sexual assault or rape cases in Tuscaloosa County.

Rondini’s attorney wrote in a motion filed in the lawsuit that a woman in 2012 reported that Bunn drugged and raped her, and that she is willing to provide testimony with her statements under seal for her protection.

“He was not a suspect in that case,” Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office Division Chief Loyd Baker, who was commander of the homicide unit at the time, said this week. “He has never been named as a suspect in any sexual assault case here.”

Other online posts have personally attacked the investigators, because of what posters perceive as their attempts to protect Bunn from prosecution.

One woman posted, and later deleted, a wedding announcement of an investigator’s brother. She included a photo of the announcement listing the groomsmen and ring bearer, adding the comment “May you all burn in hell!” Another post included photos of the wives and children of elected officials, with similar comments.

Bunn has received death threats, called in to the business, said Bunn family attorney Ivey Gilmore. Tuscaloosa Police placed extra patrols near the office in the days following the BuzzFeed publication.

Groups that have formed to support the Rondini family held a march earlier this month, taking a route that started at DCH, traveled past Innisfree and ST Bunn Construction and ended at the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse. They’re planning future activities and outreach to support sexual assault victims.

In July, U.S. Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced the bipartisan Megan Rondini Act, which would require hospitals to have a SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner) available at all times, or have a plan in place to transfer victims to a nearby hospital staffed with one.

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The federal lawsuit was filed in early July. Saying the Rondinis lack standing to assert a wrongful death claim, all of the defendants in the federal lawsuit have filed motions to dismiss the case, citing constitutional and case law.

The Rondinis claim in the suit that UA and Bell contributed to Rondini’s suicide by failing to provide her with adequate counseling, suggesting the Bunn family’s wealth influenced their actions.

Rondini attorney Leroy Maxwell wrote that UA was “deliberately indifferent” to Rondini’s rape claim, and created “an abusive and hostile educational environment for Megan, sufficient that she was forced to leave the campus, and was ultimately a cause of her loss of life.”

“The facts underlying the failures of UA and the other defendants to protect Megan and to prefer its relationship with a wealthy donor family are shocking,” Maxwell wrote in the lawsuit.

Birmingham attorney Jay Ezelle, representing UA and Bell, filed a motion to dismiss Tuesday, writing that it is “absurd” to suggest the allegations against the university had any connection with Rondini’s suicide.

“This case is not about the University of Alabama,” Ezelle wrote. “Whatever happened on the night of July 1, 2015, it is undisputed that the University had absolutely no involvement. Defendant Bunn is not an employee or student; his residence is not owned or controlled by the University; and the University was not a sponsor or participant in the activities that occurred that night, all of which took place off-campus.

“The University, just like Megan Rondini’s parents, were powerless to control whatever happened that night. Further, the asserted details of that evening, which have unfortunately been fodder for yellow journalism and social media sensationalism, have absolutely no bearing on the claims against the University or President Bell.”

Rondini was seen by three mental health professionals at UA, according to Ezelle, after her first visit with a counselor who said she couldn’t treat her because she knew the Bunns.

UA staff provided mental health counseling, personal advocacy, academic assistance, and psychiatric treatment, he said.

The suit claims that Abernathy didn’t ensure investigators were properly trained to conduct sexual assault investigations, and that the officers didn’t conduct a thorough or professional investigation.

Attorneys for Abernathy and Hastings noted that state law makes Abernathy, as sheriff, immune from suits for damages based on official acts, because he is an executive officer of the state.

“In addition, the amended complaint fails to allege that Deputy Hastings had any contact with Ms. Rondini, or had any reason to know that she would be suicidal seven months after she initiated a complaint. The plaintiffs’ claim for wrongful death unavoidably fails,” attorney Robert Spence wrote.
In the lawsuit, Rondini’s lawyer wrote that Jones didn’t ask Rondini questions that would incriminate Bunn, could prove whether she was drugged or about why she would have jumped from a window if the sex had been consensual.

Attorney Christopher McIlwain, representing Jones, said that the investigator’s line of questioning was to determine whether evidence supported a strong enough case to prosecute.

“Any law enforcement officer knows that a rape suspect’s criminal defense lawyer will put the victim on trial and attempt to poke holes in the alleged victim’s credibility and version of the facts,” he wrote.

“In essence, someone in the investigative chain must test the case by role-playing the expected defense strategy. An examination of the questions posed by Jones to the victim about which Plaintiffs now complain — they call it bullying and a reflection of bias — are precisely some of the questions victims face in court.”

“The Plaintiffs say all of Jones’ questions demonstrate bias, but they actually show he was doing his job,” he said.

The Rondinis have asked for a jury to hear the case, presided over by U.S. District Judge R. David Proctor.

They are asking for unspecified compensatory and punitive damages.
OUR VIEW: Investigative file paints a much different picture

By: Staff

Rape is a heinous, deplorable crime that, depending on the circumstances, can be difficult to prove.

When an assailant attacks a stranger in a random encounter, the question of whether a rape occurred is often not in doubt.

When two people are together of their own volition and it’s a matter of one person’s word against the other’s, well, that scenario can be problematic for law enforcement. That doesn’t mean charges can’t be brought in such cases.

In the American judicial system, of course, one is innocent until proven guilty, and the standard for a conviction is proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The less evidence there is, then, the less likely the system is to pursue a case. Victims deserve justice, but so do the accused.

In recent years, however, a movement is growing that challenges the judicial system – society, even -- to take rape and other sexual assault claims more seriously, especially on college campuses. This movement is pushing back against what it perceives as the tendency for law enforcement, campus administrators and the court system to dismiss rape and other sexual assault claims too quickly, or without due consideration.

Against this backdrop is the case of Megan Rondini, the 20-year-old University of Alabama student who reported that she was raped by T.J. Bunn Jr., then 34, at his home in the early morning hours of July 2, 2015. It is an allegation that Bunn denies.

About seven months after she reported the rape, Rondini killed herself after having returned to her home state of Texas. Her family believes that she was driven to make that fateful decision because local law enforcement, the judicial system and UA did not support her in the wake of her claim.

A writer with the website BuzzFeed came to Tuscaloosa earlier this year to report on the Rondini case, but clearly the writer had a predetermined conclusion in mind – a story in service of the movement to take rape claims more seriously. Here was a case that appeared to have all that would fit that narrative. It had other elements that didn’t fit, though.

BuzzFeed’s explosive story, published on June 22, cast suspicion on Bunn and his family’s business, local law enforcement, the judicial system and UA, and set social media ablaze with outrageous accusations, half-truths, and outright lies. The report offered little to support its conclusions – other than supposition itself.

Unable to vouch for BuzzFeed’s reporting, and in light of the response it generated, The Tuscaloosa News went to court seeking to have the investigative file made public so that all the evidence could be examined. On Monday, Sept. 11, Judge Brad Almond agreed and ordered the Sheriff’s Office to release the information. A story in today’s paper and on tuscaloosanews.com, where we have also posted virtually all of the investigative file, lays out our findings.

See next page
In its entirety, the case file reveals a picture very different from the one that Buzzfeed painted in its report. It does not definitively answer the question of whether a rape occurred in Bunn’s upstairs bedroom – we don’t know if that would be possible. It does, in our opinion, explain why the case would have been difficult to prosecute. But our intention is not to sway opinion. Our motives are to offer the community all of the available evidence so that we can all better understand what happened with this case.

Rondini was an intelligent, beautiful young lady with a promising future ahead. Her life ending the way it did is a horrible tragedy. The anguish and pain her family and friends must endure is beyond comprehension. It is natural for all of us to want someone to blame for such a heartrending loss. It is understandable that many would choose to lash out in such a time and naturally want vengeance. But that alone does not make Bunn guilty.

The difference in age between Bunn and Rondini might be disturbing to some, but that in and of itself is not a criminal offense.

We have seen no evidence that wealth or influence shielded Bunn from prosecution or dissuaded law enforcement from thoroughly investigating Rondini’s allegations.

If any good has come from this entire heartbreaking situation, it is that it has focused attention on issues dealing with rape, consent and treatment of sexual assault victims. Many rapes go unreported because the victim is afraid or needlessly ashamed or fearful of the repercussions. While definitive numbers are hard to quantify, there is good reason to believe there are many more unreported rapes than false accusations. That needs to change. Victims need to know they can safely report a rape and be supported.

But those who have exploited this case and cases like it to further an agenda or for their own selfaggrandizement carry some responsibility for the twisted cultural deficiencies in dealing with such an emotionally-charged situation as rape. Those who have piled on with false accusations and manufactured misinformation in an effort to propagate mistrust and inflame emotions have only made the path more difficult to improving future responses to reports of sexual assault in our community.

An honest and thorough examination of how this case was handled is a healthy exercise in what must be a continuing effort to improve how we address future cases.
Masters of disaster

Local high school students in HOSA future healthcare professionals, take their places during a disaster simulation with second semester nursing students at the Capstone College of Nursing on the University of Alabama campus on Wednesday. [STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]

UA nurses use skills during disaster simulation

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

At 1 p.m. Wednesday, screams filled the Capstone College of Nursing at the University of Alabama.

Inside, dozens of Hillcrest and Tuscaloosa County high school students, wearing tattered clothes covered in fake blood, yelled for help during a disaster simulation.

The exercise called for participants to pretend that a bomb had detonated in the foyer of the building.

Among the screaming students, scattered papers and flipped-over chairs, a group of student nurses emerged from the hall.

During the simulation, the nurses employed triage techniques on each person, checking for vital signs and assessing who was injured and who was dead.

See SIMULATION, A7
SIMULATION

Continued from A1

For those who pretended to die in the simulation, the nurses would put a piece of black tape on their shirt. If someone was still alive, they received a piece of red tape and were treated.

Laura Parisi, a senior studying nursing, said that although the “disaster” was a simulation, the screaming and pandemonium made the situation real for her, raising her adrenaline.

“Prior to this, we only had clinicals in the hospital, so this was a completely different experience,” Parisi said.

Taylor Stewart, a senior at Hillcrest, played one of the victims who had a shovel protruding through her torso.

Stewart, who is a member of the school’s Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), said she was impressed with how many of the nurses worked through the chaos of the situation to do what was needed for the patient.

“It can get really stressful and complicated out there, so you have to know what you are doing,” Stewart said.

Leslie Cole, clinical assistant professor at the college, said that the 2011 tornado in Tuscaloosa motivated administrators to focus more on exposing students to disaster scenarios. During the last three years, the college has held multiple simulations.

“Part of the learning experience is to drown out the noise and to be able to make decisions even though things are chaotic,” Cole said.

Over the past year, the number of natural disasters that have occurred — such as hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria — in addition to terrorist attacks in London, have made disaster simulations more crucial than ever for student nurses.

“We have had faculty that have been through 9/11,” Cole said.

“We knew this was a very important tool with the frequency of these types of things that happen.”

Parisi said disaster simulations can only broaden her experience for whatever medical field she decides to pursue after school.

“It’s good to have those skills that if there are more disasters, which there probably will, we will be able to help and be confident in our skills,” she said.

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

“It’s good to have those skills that if there are more disasters, which there probably will, we will be able to help and be confident in our skills.”

Laura Parisi, a senior studying nursing
Kobie Baker resignation tied to FBI investigation

By: Cecil Hurt

The resignation of Kobie Baker from his position as associate athletics director at the University of Alabama came after an internal investigation indicated that Baker may have been involved in a scheme to accept money in return for directing a UA player to sign with an Atlanta financial advisor after declaring for the NBA draft, The Tuscaloosa News has learned.

Alabama announced Baker’s resignation on Wednesday.

Although Baker was not charged with a crime in the recent FBI roundup of figures allegedly connected with corruption in college basketball, UA acted in the belief that he was involved in a meeting with Atlanta-based advisor Rashan Michel who was arrested on Tuesday as part of an FBI sting operation.

According to the charges released yesterday by the United States Attorney Office in the Southern District of New York, Michel met with an unidentified “school administrator” who accepted a $5,000 payment and arranged an August meeting with the “father of a highly regarded incoming freshman” from the Atlanta area, along with Michel and a cooperating federal witness listed as CW-1.

An additional $10,000 was allegedly given to Michel at that meeting, and was to be given to the staff member for his “influence” in steering the player.

The Tuscaloosa News learned Wednesday that UA believed Baker to be the “staff member” identified. The player’s father was not identified. Alabama recruited highly-rated freshman Collin Sexton from the Atlanta area last season. The meeting was recorded on audio and video by the cooperating witness referred to in the FBI sting.

UA announced Baker’s resignation in an official release on Wednesday evening. Officials declined further comment on Wednesday night.

“Following yesterday’s reports from New York regarding a Federal investigation of intercollegiate athletics, The University of Alabama Department of Athletics immediately initiated an internal review of our men’s basketball operations,” UA director of athletics Greg Byrne said in the release. “As a result, we have accepted the resignation effective today of Kobie Baker, a men’s basketball administrator. Our review has not identified any NCAA or SEC rules violations nor the involvement of any other coach or staff member. We have notified both of the governing bodies of the actions we have taken. As always, we will continue to be proactive in our compliance efforts.”

Prior to joining Avery Johnson’s staff in 2015, Baker was the assistant director of enforcement for basketball development at the NCAA. He was also the associate director of amateurism certification at the NCAA.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
UA receives $5 million donation

Gift will fund business research, cyber security lab

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

A $5 million donation will help build a high-tech cyber security lab and fund research in business-data intelligence at the University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration.

The donation, made by Marilynn A. Hewson, a UA alumna and chairwoman, president and CEO of Lockheed Martin, was announced Monday at Biddgood Hall, where the lab will be located.

"My education and experiences at Culverhouse have been an important part of my professional successes and my approach to business leadership," said Hewson, who earned a bachelor of science degree in business administration and a master of arts degree in economics at UA. "I am grateful."

UA President Stuart R. Bell, left, Kay Palan, center, dean of Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration, and Marilynn A. Hewson stand outside a data analytics lab following the announcement of a $5 million gift from Hewson in support of the college's education and research in business-data intelligence and cyber security. [PHOTO PROVIDED BY UA]

Hewson's donation will also help fund two named faculty endowments, an

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endowed undergraduate scholarship and a graduate assistantship.

"With the rapidly evolving fields of big-data analytics and cybersecurity, there will be strong demand for talent for many years to come," Hewson said. "With this gift, it is my hope that this institution will have the resources it needs to advance its innovative research and attract further support for its core mission of preparing students for the jobs of the future."

The lab, which will be named after Hewson, will be managed by Jason M. Parton.

"Through our academic programs, and now the Marillyn A. Hewson Data Analytics Lab, I feel we are at the forefront of preparing our students at the University of Alabama with the proficiencies needed to apply wisdom to knowledge that will aid them throughout their career," Parton said.

"Specifically, this lab makes available unique opportunities of partnerships between academia and industry where students are involved with project-based learning that offers solutions for real world problems and therefore provides them with an experience difficult to achieve inside a classroom alone," he said.

Hewson has worked for more than 30 years with Lockheed Martin, holding a series of executive positions, including president and chief operating officer and executive vice president of its Electronic Systems business area. She is also a member of the College of Commerce and Business Administration's board of visitors and the UA President's Cabinet.
Festival aims to celebrate, educate

29th annual event in Moundville focuses on Native American culture

By Aaron Bonner
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Organizers of next month's Moundville Native American Festival say the goals of the event remain the same: to celebrate culture and educate guests.

This marks the 29th consecutive year the festival has been held at Moundville Archaeological Park, which is 10 miles south of Tuscaloosa on Alabama Highway 69. Each year, the festival adds new vendors, performances and opportunities for visitors to learn about the culture of Southeastern Native Americans.

The 320-acre park has more than 20 mounds built by a community of Native Americans of the Mississippian culture. The site is believed to have been America's largest city north of Mexico 800 years ago.

Kayla Scott, festival coordinator and educational outreach coordinator, said that she has high hopes for this year's event.

"It's challenging, but I think it's going to be very rewarding," said Scott, who is in her first year with the festival. "I've had a chance to meet a lot of wonderful people so far in organizing and I've had a lot of wonderful conversations with tribal members. I think it's going to be great to actually meet the ones I haven't met yet and start building those relationships with the park."

More than 10,000 people attend the festival each year.

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FESTIVAL
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including school groups that travel from across the state. However, Lisa Rasco, education assistant for the park, said that the festival offers an opportunity for people of all ages to learn about the history of the park.

“The community learning, just climbing Mound B (the park’s tallest mound), and the visitors that come — it’s still just as exciting as the first time I climbed it,” Rasco said. “I don’t know if anybody else gets that excited, but to think of what happened here so many years ago and now I’m on these grounds experiencing this. Each time it’s a new thing because the visitors give us new questions each time we’re out with them on an educational program.”

In the festival’s arts and crafts areas, attendees are given the opportunity to speak with Native American craftspeople and work alongside them to create works of art, from carved wooden longbows to pottery. The target range teaches all ages about handcrafted weapons, such as spears and arrows, made by Native Americans.

Storytellers and performers entertain guests at the Native American Stage with historical tales and traditional music, featuring flutes and rattles. Guided tours bring guests along to learn about the history of the park and into the Jones Archaeological Museum to view artifacts and exhibits that showcase ceremonial decorations.

“Once you go into the museum and you have in your mindset, because this is what we try to get people to see, you’re entering like a temple almost,” Rasco said. “Really pay attention to the mural on the wall and the bridal parties on each side and up in the ceiling where the rafters are because those are important aspects of what the natives believed in.”

Vistors from University of Alabama Museums, the city of Tuscaloosa and UA students have helped the festival run smoothly throughout the years, Rasco said. More information on volunteer work or the Native American Festival can be found on the park’s Facebook page and website or by emailing Scott directly at kscott1@ua.edu.

The festival will be from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 4, 5 and 6 and 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Oct. 7 at the Moundville Archaeological Park. Tickets are $12 for adults, $10 for students and seniors and group rates are available.

“We’re really excited about it and we hope that as many people as possible come out and enjoy it, too,” Scott said.
UAB's jersey salute honors inspiring kids

Joseph Goodman
jgoodman@al.com

Born with spina bifida, 8-year-old Landon Sysamiek never learned how to walk while living at an orphanage in Beijing. Instead, he pulled and pushed himself around with his hands.

Landon loves football, chess and playing outside. Recently, his leg was amputated to prepare him for a life with a prosthetic. On Saturday, a UAB football player will represent Landon on the field by wearing his name on the back of his jersey.

Landon's adopted sister, Lainey, is from southern China near the Vietnam border. She's a rambunctious 5-year-old who has absolutely no time for anything except being fabulous. Lainey needs a blood transfusion every three weeks for the rest of her life.

SEE GOODMAN, A5
GOODMAN

FROM AL

Part of a new homecoming tradition for UAB. another football player on the team will honor Lainey's courage by wearing her name on the back of his jersey.

Lainey's 3-year-old adopted brother, David, is also from southern China, and also requires blood transfusions to live. Not that would know it if he were watching him stomp around in his Buzz Lightyear boots. Like his siblings, David's name also will be on a jersey during UAB's homecoming game against Louisiana Tech at 3 p.m. Saturday at Legion Field.

Lainey, Lainey and David Samsak of Trussville are all special needs children who have received extensive treatment at Benjamin Russell Hospital for Children. While there receiving care, the three adopted siblings and their family have spent countless hours at the Children's Harbor Family Center, which provides patients and their families a destination in the hospital that doesn't actually feel like a hospital. Children's Harbor features games, crafts and activities for families, as well as counseling and educational resources.

For homecoming, the UAB football team is raising awareness for Children's Harbor with 100 specialized jerseys that feature the names of patients.

"Children's Harbor has absolutely become a part of the Blazer family," UAB coach Bill Clark said. "I intend for this relationship to grow with our program. As we build, there will be even more we can do to provide encouragement and a positive distraction to support the terrific work Children's Harbor does."

It's another impressive initiative for UAB football in its first season back since 2014, and something that has the potential to be one of college football's great homecoming traditions.

They're finally getting it right in this new era of UAB football.

"THIS IS OUR PASSION"

Patients serviced by Children's Harbor and their families will sit in section 13 at Saturday's game. A ceremony beforehand will honor their courage, and afterward players will give their jerseys to the children and families they're representing.

That means there will be a sizable crowd around the Samsak family, which has dedicated their lives to saving sick children. Parents Nikki and Michael Samsak have nine children, the five youngest adopted from China. All five have special needs and they've all been treated at Children's of Alabama.

Here's the running count of Samsak children, which could increase by next year:


After having four biological children, the Samsaks felt like they had more to give. Michael, 43, is an executive for O'Neal Industries, and Nikki, 41, is a superstar. The children are homeschooled, and every day, says Nikki, is an adventure.

This is our passion that we just believe the Lord has given to us," said Nikki, who is 41. "Scripture says to take care of the widows and the orphans. It is just clearly stated in Scripture, and it has always been on our heart. I traveled to Korea when I was 14 and got to see a bunch of orphans there that were not being adopted, and so that was super hard.

"And then my husband was just always very convicted that we needed to do something beyond just live a comfortable lifestyle in the suburbs. He has a great job and they take very good care of him, and so we just wanted to extend that blessing out and share the love of Christ."

Trips to Sam's Club happen three times a week, and the family goes through at least a gallon of milk a day.

Nikki and Michael attended Florida State together and lived in Jacksonville for 10 years before moving to Alabama. They have lived in Birmingham for 11 years. Nikk said already having a large family before adopting their first child encouraged them to find children with special needs.

I think a child with special needs doesn't scare bigger families because they've already had a chance to have a couple kids, and they realize they're still going to get sick, and there's always going to be an issue and nobody is perfect," Nikki said. "I would encourage families just not to seek a perfect child when they're adopting, because you're not going to find a perfect child. Adoption comes out of brokenness and loss, so every child who is adopted has had to deal with some type of trauma — even if they are perfectly healthy."

"THE REAL ROLE MODELS"

A no-cost resource provided by the Children's of Alabama health system, Children's Harbor has been there throughout the Samsak's amazing journey. Little Lainey has attended the Cinderella Ball organized by Children's Harbor, and Landon and his brother, CJ, who also has spina bifida, have participated in summer camp at the Children's Harbor Lake Martin Campus.

"They were able to do adaptive water skiing, and inner tubing and they felt normal because all the other kids had spina bifida, too," Nikki said. "And the families go to Lake Martin, also, because it affects the whole families. It doesn't just affect the child.

Nikki said, Landon, the 8-year-old who recently had his leg amputated, is excited about Saturday's game because he's always wanted to play football, and he has an incredible arm.

Landon's favorite player is Deandre Francois, a quarterback at Florida State. But UAB receiver Collin Lisa might be a close second after the homecoming game. Lisa is wearing Landon's name on his jersey.

"When you meet these kids and learn some of their stories, and what they've been through, those are the real role models," Lisa said. "Playing at UAB is a lot more than just playing football."

Joseph Goodman is a columnist for Alabama Media Group. He can be reached at JoeGoodmanjr.T
UAB breaks ground on new building

The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM — The University of Alabama at Birmingham has broken ground on a new $39.5 million arts and sciences building.

The 160,000-square-foot building is expected to open in the fall of 2019.

Al.com reports the new building will replace the UAB Humanities Building, which has served students for more than 45 years. It will be home to the anthropology, computer and information sciences, English, foreign languages and literatures, mathematics, philosophy and social work departments.

"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, Ph.D., 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 building will also include a 300-seat auditorium, performance space, administrative support offices and a storm shelter.

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

Montgomery, Alabama-based firm Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, Inc., will serve as architect. M.J. Harris Construction Services, based in Birmingham, has been awarded the facility's construction contract.

The UAB College of Arts and Sciences serves more than 50 percent of UAB students through one of its 29 majors and 19 departments.
A fragile network

Climate change is no longer a concept down on the Alabama bayou

Regina M. Benjamin and James B. McClintock for AL.com

Alabama's 230-year-old shrimping village of Bayou La Batre — of Forrest Gump fame — lies within a fragile network of bays and salt marshes and is vulnerable to sea level rise. Its shores sit just 5 feet above sea level on Alabama coastal soil that is slowly, but surely, being covered by water.

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina brought a 16-foot storm surge that left a trail of gutted homes and seafood processing plants, along with shrimp boats capsized and stranded in the pine trees. Despite recent efforts to build a mile-and-a-half long protective breakwater on a small island south of Bayou La Batre, large areas of coastal marsh continue to erode.

The waters of the Gulf of Mexico are warming more rapidly than similar sized bodies of water, and for the first time on record, this past winter the waters did not cool. As we just experienced this past month with Houston's Hurricane Harvey, future hurricanes will use this additional heat to intensify, become stronger and produce storm surges that go further inland, causing more damage. Just as water heated in a pot to a boil expands and bubbles over, Gulf waters are expanding as they warm, contributing to sea level rise. Melting waters from the distant ice caps of Greenland and Antarctica also add to this rise in sea level.

The economy of Bayou La Batre's seafood industry, including our once-plentiful oyster harvest, depend on a balanced ecosystem. Torrential rains can flood the marshes with too much fresh water and kill the oysters. On the other hand, too little rain can raise the salt content of bays and estuaries, which will attract snails that drill into the oysters and eat their flesh. Also with warmer waters and higher salt levels, oysters are more likely to carry Vibrio vulnificus, a bacteria that can cause serious skin, and gastrointestinal infections, making the oysters unsafe to eat.

There are health effects as well. A combination of greater humidity and higher temperature can increase the potential for heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and even heat-induced death.

As we experience warmer Gulf Coast winters, mosquitoes and other insects are at greater risk of carrying diseases such as Zika, West Nile, and Dengue. Locals have recently noticed more swarms of termites; one swarm was so thick it delayed a little league softball game.

Whether you believe in global warming or not, and regardless of your politics, something is happening to our Bayou and other coastal communities. Last month, the governor of Louisiana declared the disappearance of their coast a national emergency. Changes to the environment are no longer far from home, or someone else's problem. It is happening in our own backyard, along our coasts, and in our Bayou, affecting our lives and our livelihoods.

As we pursue a more humane and just society, each of us has the responsibility to protect our planet for future generations. Pope Francis said it succinctly in his 2015 speech to the United Nations:

"The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species. Any harm done to the environment, therefore is harm done to humanity."

Benjamin, MD, MBA, and the 18th U.S. Surgeon General, is founder and CEO, BayouClinic Inc. in Bayou La Batre. McClintock, Ph.D., is the endowed University Professor of Polar and Marine Biology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and author of "Lost Antarctica" and "A Naturalist Goes Fishing."

"The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species, ... Any harm done to the environment, therefore is harm done to humanity."
SCI Teams With University of Alabama Huntsville To Provide Education and Networking For Civilian Army Logistics Professionals

By: Angela Hardin

HUNTSVILLE, Ala., Sep. 26, 2017 (Canada NewsWire via COMTEX) -- New UAH program serves senior-level logisticians from major Army commands.

SCI Technology, a Sanmina company SANM strengthened its ties to the U.S. Army Logistics community on Friday when it hosted 30 students from the Civilian Logistics Career Management Office's (CLCMO) Senior Logician Advanced Course (SLAC) at the University of Alabama-Huntsville (UAH).

Civilian logisticians play a vital role in the Army's global supply chain, supporting Sustainable Army Readiness by creating and implementing logistics policies, programs and plans. This event provided SLAC students with a chance to leverage Sanmina's expertise in supply chain operations, as well as SCI's extensive experience with Department of Defense (DoD) manufacturing.

CLCMO provides life-cycle career management services to Department of the Army (DA) civilians seeking strategic professional development and growth, and partnered with Professional Development Solutions at UAH to conduct this program. SLAC is UAH's new two-week learning event aimed at closing competency gaps and providing education and networking opportunities to senior DA civilian logisticians (GS-14/GS-15 level) from major commands throughout the Army.

"Hosting these students helps SCI build stronger relationships with the men and women responsible for supporting the Army's supply chain," SCI President Mike Underwood said. "Civilians perform crucial duties in support of our Armed Forces, and SCI is proud to assist them in the development of their careers."

SLAC's visit included facility tours and a roundtable session with SCI's leadership team. This roundtable involved topics highly relevant to a logisticians work including supply chain, manufacturing, contracts, program management, depot and test services, and quality control.

About SCI Technology, Inc., For more than 55 years, SCI has designed and provided some of the most advanced systems for military and commercial aviation, ground tactical and other defense applications, as well as industrial and space-flight programs. SCI also provides services including network communications solutions and post-delivery sustainment. Headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama, SCI delivers unsurpassed quality and support to the defense and aerospace sector. More information regarding the company is available at http://www.sci.com.

About Sanmina Corporation Sanmina Corporation is a leading integrated manufacturing solutions provider serving the fastest-growing segments of the global Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS) market. Recognized as a technology leader, Sanmina provides end-to-end manufacturing solutions, delivering superior quality and support to Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) primarily in the communications networks, defense and aerospace, industrial and semiconductor

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systems, medical, multimedia, computing and storage, automotive and clean technology sectors. Sanmina has facilities strategically located in key regions throughout the world. More information regarding the company is available at http://www.sanmina.com.

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US university diversity scheme to learn from UK experience

By: Rebecca Trager

Initiative to be launched next month will support women in science and be broadened to race and beyond

A UK programme that recognises the progress of universities in advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (Stemm) is being piloted in the US. The UK initiative, known as Athena Scientific Women’s Academic Network (Swan), has been linked to government funding, and the same could happen with its US counterpart.

The US programme, dubbed Stem Equity Achievement Change (Sea Change), is expected to be rolled out in October, and it will go beyond gender to focus on underrepresented groups like racial minorities and people with disabilities. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the host organisation for Sea Change, and eight or nine US institutions are expected to participate in the upcoming pilot.

Like its decade-old UK predecessor, Sea Change will have a panel that determines which institutions are given bronze, silver or gold awards to recognise excellence in practices that advance and promote these underrepresented groups in science and technology. These decisions are based on data collected and analysed by staff at the applicant institutions to identify gender and diversity issues within their organisation and then plan how to tackle them.

‘Mark of distinction’

Shirley Malcom, who directs the AAAS’s education and human resources programmes, says Sea Change will serve as ‘a mark of distinction’. It will recognise US institutions that have worked to foster an environment ‘supportive of all kinds of people coming from all kinds of backgrounds who are trying to be successful in these scientific fields’, she adds.

The AAAS wants to work with various professional societies to help Sea Change put in place structures to examine diversity within the science departments of US universities. ‘We would be looking, for example, at professional groups in physics and chemistry and geoscience to look at their own departments,’ Malcom tells Chemistry World. ‘There has not been a reach out yet to the chemistry community, but there will be.’ Thus far, AAAS is only working with the American Geophysical Union on the project.

Malcom says it’s important that Sea Change be backed up with the sorts of monetary incentives that exist in the UK version. However, she points out that such decisions are up to funding agencies, foundations and other donors, not the AAAS.

The UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) requires that medical schools applying for biomedical research funding hold a silver Athena Swan award. Although Research Councils UK does not directly link Athena Swan to funding, it explicitly states that grant recipients must ‘provide evidence of ways in which equality and diversity issues are managed at both an institutional and department level’, and recommends participation in Athena Swan.

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Carrot needed

Nilanjana Dasgupta, director of faculty equity and inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Amherst’s college of natural sciences, says that Sea Change will not be truly effective unless its ties federal agency research funding to the inclusivity of a university’s science and technology departments.

‘Institutions can report where they currently stand, but they need a carrot, or carrots, to move the needle from where they are at to a better place,’ Dasgupta tells Chemistry World. ‘If the recognition is linked to some national standard and also linked to access to resources that are otherwise not available, then those two things will make this more likely to be a mechanism that will bring about institutional change.’

The president of the US National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, Emanuel Waddell, agrees. ‘The lack of diversity is a threat to long-term growth that has been well-established,’ he states. Waddell, who is the associate dean at the University of Alabama in Huntsville’s college of science, calls any effort to make research dollars dependent on an institution’s diversity metrics ‘a step in the right direction’. He adds: ‘I don’t see any problem with that approach, in terms of limiting access, because you have to apply some leverage somehow.’
UWA’s enrollment grows 3 percent

At least 1,819 students are on campus this fall

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of West Alabama saw its enrollment on campus grow by 3 percent this year, with a 22-percent increase in the size of its freshman class.

On-campus enrollment increased to from 1,772 to 1,819 students this fall. UWA’s freshman class grew from 370 to 453, its highest since 1995, according to figures released by the university. Overall enrollment, which includes online students, increased by 18 percent to 4,148.

The university attributes the gains to initiatives started during the past couple of years to reverse a trend

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UWA

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of declining enrollment, including partnerships with outside companies to increase online and on-campus enrollment.

“Our university has made an intentional effort to improve our communication plans,” said Blake Bedsole, director of admissions and enrollment management, in a statement released by UWA. “We’ve expanded our multi-channel marketing efforts, and our traveling counselors and in-house admissions staff have worked extremely hard to produce this kind of result.”

The average ACT score among the incoming freshman was 21 with an average high school GPA of 3.35, according to the university. “This year’s admissions and enrollment numbers are very encouraging for UWA, especially considering that enrollment is flat or declining in many institutions across the U.S.,” said UWA President Ken Tucker in comments released by the university. “Our university is committed to building on these efforts and continuing to recruit outstanding students, growing our academic and student offerings, and providing a high-quality, safe, and enjoyable educational experience that will prove an excellent return on investment for students for years to come.”

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosa- news.com or 205-722-0209.
Ross leaves Senate to head ASU

Mike Cason  mcason@al.com

State Sen. Quinton Ross, D-Montgomery, has agreed to a contract to become the next president at Alabama State University.

Making the announcement Monday at the Alabama State House, the 48-year-old resigned from the Senate effective immediately. State lawmakers cannot have a second state job.

"This community, which I love, wrapped its arms around me for those 15 years," said Ross, the leader of the Democratic minority in the Senate who has represented District 26 since 2003. "Running four times for elections, and three of them unopposed, I truly have been blessed for the opportunity to serve such a wonderful community. And I'm hopeful in some small way that my service has made a difference to the citizens of my district and the citizens throughout the state of Alabama."

Gov. Kay Ivey will call a special election to fill the seat. Press Secretary Daniel Sparks said.

State Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, said he would run for Ross' Senate seat. Knight has served in the House of Representatives since 1993. He is chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus and was chairman of the House General Fund committee until Democrats lost control of the chamber in 2010. He said his experience would be valuable in the Senate.

"I think my record speaks for itself," said Knight, who said he would be making a formal announcement later.

Ross, however, said he would not endorse anyone to become his successor.

"Once I walk away from this position, my focus is on my alma mater, Alabama State University," Ross said. However, he said the relationships he has built in the State House should help him in his advocacy for ASU.

"I think with what my colleagues know about me, I think what you see is what you get," Ross said. "I think they know where my heart is in terms of education and wanting to provide the very best. And so I'm hoping that those type of relationships and understanding and understanding will be useful in terms of coming to this Legislature to advocate on behalf of the students and faculty and staff of Alabama State University."

The ASU board of trustees voted on Sept. 8 to hire Ross over three other finalists to become the university's 11th president. On Friday, the trustees voted to approve a contract offer to Ross. He will be paid $300,000 a year under the three-year contract, officials said.

The ASU board of trustees fired President Gwendolyn Boyd in December, saying she had lost the confidence of the board. Interim President Leon Wilson has filled the position since.

Ross, who holds bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from ASU, said there are great challenges at his alma mater.

"There's no doubt there will be a lot of work to do. We have to look into the budgets and find out where we are by basically doing an overall assessment of the academic enterprise. And so, we'll do that."

"We'll plot a course together as a university on how we rectify the financial situation as well as the enrollment."

In the early stages of his job, he said he'll listen to faculty, staff and student body as he shapes his priorities. He was asked about a perceived lack of connection between ASU and the Montgomery community.

"The one thing that we have to realize is that we cannot function in a silo," Ross said. "In order for us, in my opinion, for us to be successful, we have to open ourselves up. So that will be to engage the community, some of our great stakeholders, and making sure that the dialogue and communication is open and finding ways that we can partner in the community, which provides a benefit to the university, its students, faculty and staff."

The resignation of Ross leaves seven Democrats in the 35-member chamber. There are 26 Republicans and one independent.

The legislative session will begin Jan. 9.
BLAZER BUZZ UAB (2-2, 0-1) VS. LOUISIANA TECH (2-2, 0-1)

When: Saturday, 3 p.m.
Where: Legion Field; Birmingham
Line: Louisiana Tech by 12

This game will determine

How well does UAB perform after its open date following a loss to North Texas. The Blazers proved they can compete in Conference USA — after a two-year layover — overcoming a 16-point deficit against the Mean Green. UAB had a week off to reflect and refocus with Louisiana Tech coming to town for homecoming.

Three things to look for

1. Spencer Brown and the running game:
Brown has established himself as the lead back for the Blazers with strong performances through the first four games and leads the team with 294 rushing yards. He ranks ninth in single-season yards by a UAB freshman and is a reliable option out of the backfield. Look for Brown to continue his impressive season against a Louisiana Tech defense that is giving up 168 yards on the ground.

2. Balanced Blazers: UAB was hard-pressed to find any running room against North Texas but found success in the second half with the passing game. Quarterback A.J. Erdely threw

A.J. Erdely is averaging 185.8 yards passing per game. Mark Almond, file

for more than 300 yards in the Blazers' rally with juniors Collin Lisa and Andre Wilson as the primary beneficiaries. UAB is sixth in the conference in total offense and has shown it can improve upon that with a more balanced attack.

3. UAB's uniforms honoring its partnership with Children's Harbor: The names of patients will be displayed on the back of the Blazers' jerseys in Saturday's homecoming game against Louisiana Tech. The school is sectioning off a seating block for patients and their families to attend the game.

Key matchup

UAB's secondary vs Louisiana Tech's pass game: J'Mar Smith is the second-leading passer in C-USA, with 1,320 yards and seven touchdowns through five games. However, he is only completing 57.4 percent of his passes and has thrown three interceptions. The Blazers are ranked second in the conference in passing defense and have four turnovers off interceptions.

By the numbers

35,000: UAB's average attendance in two home games this season. After drawing more than 45,000 for their opener against Alabama A&M, another strong crowd filed into Legion Field for the Blazers' game against Coastal Carolina. With storms in the forecast, will fans shrug off potentially inclement weather to continue supporting the Blazers in large numbers for homecoming?

— Evan Dudley
Rested and ready

Bye week ‘could not have come at a better time’ for Blazers

Evan Dudley  For AL.com

It’s a time of study, of reflection. A time for healing. A single peaceful Saturday amidst a 12-week struggle, without hard licks, mouth guards and game plans.

For UAB, it was bye week. But with a sense of familiarity, as the Blazers spent two years in a perpetual open date.

No games. Just practicing the fundamentals over and over again.

And again. And again.

And that’s what a bye week is for. Instead of preparing for the specific traits of the next opponent, practices focus on basics: blocking, tackling, ball security.

And UAB entered its open date last week after coming off a 46-43 loss to North Texas that saw the Blazers erase a 16-point deficit in the second half, only to have a chance at overtime snatched away in the final seconds.

“I think our open day could not have come at a better time,” head coach Bill Clark said.

“We had the extended camp and then those four games which were all tough contests. We were really beat up and banged up. We really needed that off time and we think we really came out in good shape, getting everybody back for this big week. It gave our guys a chance to heal up and for us to watch some other programs play on Saturday and see how we compare and stack up.”

UAB vs. Louisiana Tech

When: Saturday, 3 p.m.

Where: Legion Field; Birmingham

Line: Louisiana Tech by 11½

And that same sentiment could be heard throughout the halls of the UAB football operations facility and on the practice fields of Legacy Pavilion.

After a two-year hiatus and playing four straight games, the Blazers were ready for a week off.

“You get to take a step back after you play your first conference game in two years,” said linebacker Tevin Crews, one of a handful of seniors that has endured the entire process. “I think the bye came at a perfect time. We got to break the film all the way down and not rush past it. What can we do at this point, and what can we do better?”

But bye weeks are different for different teams. Different programs. Different coaches.

And the Blazers are no different.

Clark has been in the coaching ranks for almost 30 years (with 11 seasons as the head man) and has done what all good coaches do — take the best of what they’ve seen and mold it in their image.

“I think there are some different concepts on what you do during the bye week and really going back to 2013 we had an open date similar at Jacksonville State, we made the decision to practice early in the week when normally it would be Tuesday through Thursday,” he said.

“We went Monday through Wednesday giving us an extra off day. I think that made a difference for us as the season went on. That’s what you do, you self-evaluate.”

And now the Blazers are battle ready. They have survived the early season grind. They have healed. They have refocused attention to detail and they are still a work-in-progress. But Clark likes where this Blazers team is at and where they have the potential to go.

“The thing I’ve been proudest of with this group is they have come in ready to go to work with a really good attitude,” Clark said. “I think there was some self-discovery from that North Texas game about what does it look like.”

“They should have been proud of how they fought but we’ve got to continue to get better on the fundamentals and to me the mark of a team is, do they get better every single week. I like what I’ve seen out of this group if we continue to grow and up to this point that’s what I’ve seen.”
UA women boast experience for new season

**By Drew Hill**
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

**Editor's Note:** For the full story, go to www.tidesports.com.

The Alabama women's basketball team resumed practice at Foster Auditorium on Monday in preparation for its Nov. 1 exhibition against Antelope Valley to begin the 2017-18 season. Six seniors and two highly-sought transfers headline an experienced group in coach Kristy Curry's fifth year at Alabama. Here's what Curry had to say about the upcoming season:

**Q:** What has the start of practice been like with every player returning from last year?

**A:** I think anytime you return a lot of experience it allows your pace at the beginning of practice to accelerate because everyone understands the system. Even though everyone returns, we still have a freshman and three transfers that are getting acclimated. Having a lot of experience return is certainly a great example to follow, and it makes the newcomers fit in even quicker because you have great leadership.

**Q:** Given the success the team had last season making it to the quarterfinals of the WNIT, does that change any expectations heading into this season?

**A:** I don't think it changes our expectations because from the moment I stepped foot in Tuscaloosa our goal has been to compete for an SEC championship and get to the NCAA Tournament. It's been 1,200 plus days, and that's the only thing on my mind. What can I do daily to get this program in a position to continuously improve and have the best day we can each day? We're really excited. Anytime you return a lot of experience and add new faces like we have, that are as talented as they are, it makes you really, really excited.

See TIDE, C3

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**TIDE**

*Continued from C1*

**Q:** Does the combination of the experience coming back and the success last year put any additional pressure on you as a coach to get this team to the NCAA Tournament?

**A:** I don't feel any pressure from anybody but myself. I've never been one to worry what others think or how they feel. No one is any more driven every day to be successful than I am. Again, it's from within, not on the outside that affects me. It comes from myself. Nobody can put more pressure on me to do that than I do.

**Q:** You have six seniors who all played significant minutes on the roster. How do you plan on the leadership to be broken up when you have that many players with experience?

**A:** Something that I've told them is that leadership has to come by committee. Your leaders will emerge, but your best players also have to be your hardest workers. We certainly have a great group of leaders, not just one or two. Anytime you have a chance to get leadership by committee it puts you in a position to be more successful.

**Q:** There are two more non-conference road games this season than last year. Was that by design to give you a chance to build a better resume as a road team?

**A:** Absolutely. That's why the schedule was designed the way that it was with the experience. Anytime you design your schedule you have to consider who you have coming back and how many new faces you have coming in. We feel like with this year's team we should put ourselves in a position — we have really worked hard at scheduling to increase our RPI and get us road-tested come SEC time. So, the schedule we have in place is really going to benefit this team. We began a better road team a year ago, and now we have to build on that and become more consistent on the road — and at home — and we think the schedule will help us do that.
Exceeding expectations

Former Bama star Justin Thomas had high hopes for the season, but even he didn’t foresee winning Player of the Year

Doug Ferguson  Associated Press

Justin Thomas wrote down a dozen goals at the start of the season, some higher than others — none about winning PGA Tour Player of the Year.

He achieved so much that Thomas was the obvious choice. Thomas had a tour-best five victories, won his first major at the PGA Championship, set the tour’s 72-hole scoring record and captured the FedEx Cup.

After all that, it was no surprise when the tour said Wednesday that Thomas had been voted the PGA Tour player of the year.

The tour does not disclose vote totals. Thomas was on the ballot with British Open champion Jordan Spieth, Dustin Johnson and Hideki Matsuyama.

Thomas said the tour was easy when he closed with a 66 at East Lake to finish one shot behind in the Tour Championship, which allowed him to win the FedEx Cup and its $10 million bonus.

And then he headed to Liberty National for his first Presidents Cup, where he went 3-1-4.

"It was weird with Presidents Cup last week. It never really was a thought," Thomas said. "And then I finally got that call, and it just kind of sunk in. I was with my parents when I got the call, so I was able to kind of share the moment with them, too.

"Thomas previously won the PGA of America award as player of the year, which is based on points.

He was announced for the PGA Tour award a few days before heading to Malaysia for the CIMB Classic, where it all started.

Thomas shot 64 in the final round for a three-shot victory over Matsuyama. He swept the Hawaii swing, with a playoff win at the Sony Open. He opened with a 69 and then set the tour’s 36-hole scoring record (123) and the 72-hole record (253) in a seven-shot victory.

He made his mark at the PGA Championship, winning at Quail Hollow for his first major.

His fifth victory was at the TPc Boston, where he outlasted Spieth on the back nine for a three-shot victory. Spieth was his main challenger as PGA Tour player of the year.

Thomas writes down his goals, and he keeps them private until the season is over. He revealed them after he had won the FedEx Cup. He nailed just about each one except for finishing in the top 10 at half of his PGA Tour events. He missed that by one.

The next list of goals will be tougher, and it can wait.

Thomas is playing the next two weeks in Asia (CIMB Classic and CJ Cup in South Korea), followed by the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas the week after Thanksgiving. At some point, he said, he will talk to Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods and perhaps even Spieth on how to raise the bar.

"Those are the only people I know that have had such success in one season multiple times, and they’ve had to deal with resetting their goals and re-evaluating," he said.

Thomas said he learned long ago to break up two to four goals into three categories — ones he should be able to achieve, one that are difficult but still reasonable, and a few others that are "somewhat achievable if you have a great year like I did this year."

Among this goals this year were to make the Tour Championship and Presidents Cup teams. He also listed a half-dozen statistical goals involving putting, scrambling, scoring average and his consistency from tee-to-green.

He listed the hard ones this year as winning a major and finishing in the top 10 at half his tournaments.

Such was the year that Thomas had a hard time pinpointing a single shot or moment. For sheer achievement, he said the 7-iron he hit over the water to a front pin on the 71st hole of the PGA Championship. "Probably the best shot I’ve ever hit in my life under those circumstances," he said.

For scoring, he thought about the 3-wood he hit from 310 yards to the elevated 18th green at Erin Hills to 8 feet for an eagle and a 63. He became only the fourth player to shoot 63 in the U.S. Open, and the first to reach that score on a par 72.

And to think that at this time a year ago, Thomas had only one victory. He was tempted to get impatient with the results, especially with Spieth doing so much so quickly.

"But my dad does a great job of reminding me I’ve done a lot of great things," Thomas said, "and I will continue to do a lot of great things if I continue to work hard and continue to do the right things."
Well represented

Golf trio that includes Tuscaloosa's West, Gray and UA commitment takes fourth at USGA Team Championships

By Rucky Hopf
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Between the two, they've played thousands of rounds of golf. But few have been more fun than the three rounds they each played last week.

Northport's Cammie Gray and Tuscaloosa's Susan West made up two of the three golfers who represented the state of Alabama in the United States Golf Association Women's State Team Championships at Club at Las Campanas in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Sept. 20-22.

The third Team member was Huntsville teenager Michaela Morard.

The fun was in the playing, the representing and in the teaming together. All three have University of Alabama ties. West played tennis for Alabama. Gray played on Alabama's successful women's golf team, and Morard has already made a verbal commitment to join the Crimson Tide women's golf team in 2010.

"Cammie and Cammie are just so talented. It was an honor to be their teammate," said West, 53, a two-time Alabama Woman's Senior and member of the state's team at nationals in 2005.

Together the three combined to finish 39 of 48 teams. Each state is invited to bring three players to complete the team, which began in 1995, and alternates with the men's team event every other year. College players are not allowed to compete. This year's tournament marked the final time it will be held as the USGA makes room to add another event to its calendar.

"Our finish was the second-best by an Alabama women's team. In 1997, Virginia Darby Grimes, Kathy Hartwig and Beth Williams won the tournament's national championship. This year's winners came from Tennessee, a group whose three ages combined, totaled 51. They won the tournament at 1-under 431."

"I didn't know who all was going to be playing for the other teams, but I knew that we had a really solid team. I knew Susan and Michelle's game and I knew my game," said Gray, 24, a state amateur champion and three-time state stroke play champion. "They tend not to have rain there, but they ended up having rain, and all three of us are pretty good players in weather like that. So that was a key. We were also playing in altitude too, which allows you to hit further. Michelle and I are both pretty long. It's set up as a long course, so that didn't bother us. I feel like the big thing that helped us was the mindset of going one shot at a time and focusing that way and not looking at the leader board. That was our key, just play our game and do the best that we could."

Morard, who played on Alabama's 2005 state team, is the 2007 state junior champion and made the cut of 64 for the U.S. Girls' Junior and the U.S. Women's Amateur championships. She is the state's 2007 Junior Female Player of the Year. Morard had the trio's best finish, placing fourth overall among individuals at 2-under par, shooting round scores of 75-69-70 to total 214. Gray finished in a tie for 12th at 5-over par 221, shooting 75-71-75. West finished tied at 47th in 39 over 235 with round scores of 78-79-78.

"You want to do well for yourself, but you also want to do well for your team. You step on that first tee and you hear, 'Representing the state of Alabama,' and it's kind of cool, just a wonderful honor," said West. "I just feel blessed to have been a part of such an elite tournament and really historic event since it's the last one.

"I can't say enough of how impressed I was with Cammie and Michelle, especially on day two. Rain. Wind. Play stoppage. And the way they came back - their golf was unstoppable," said West.

"I've played so many national tournaments that I know how good the players are out there," said West who has played in seven USGA Women's Mid-Amateurs and heads for an eighth appearance in November. "As we traveled out there, I was hoping we could make the cut and finish in the Top 10. That would be a home run. As I practiced, I thought, 'These two are really great golfers. We've got a shot at this thing.' Then after day two, when we were really in it, I thought we had a chance to win it. Going into it, I anticipated finishing 10 to 20." All three knew each other. Gray and West both play out of Tuscaloosa's NorthRiver Yacht Club and have played in tournaments where Morard was also among the field.

That two of the three golfers on the state team were from Tuscaloosa didn't really surprise Gray. The area has produced top amateur college golfers and even PGA Tour players.

"It's amazing how good the talent is here. There are a lot of good golfers who could but chose not to play in college because they want to focus on academics. But it is amazing that two of us not only came from the same hometown but also the same golf course," said Gray.

And there was that Crimson Tide connection.

"We thought it was pretty cool," said Gray who graduated from Alabama then stayed a fifth year to earn her master's degree in marketing in 2007. "All week we were saying 'Roll Tide.' It was cool for everybody to have some Crimson roots. It was a lot of fun. A very cool experience."

From left, Susan West, Michaela Morard and Cammie Gray represented the state of Alabama at the USGA Women's State Team Championships at The Club at Las Campanas in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Alabama trio finished fourth of 48 teams. Gray, a former UA golfer, is from Northport, West, a former UA tennis player, lives in Tuscaloosa, and Morard is a high school student in Huntsville who has already committed to play golf for Alabama in 2010.

Thursday, October 5, 2017

The Tuscaloosa News
Tide's Turner eager for softball practice to start

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Let's make this perfectly clear: Demi Turner has been cleared to practice with the Alabama softball team this fall.

The senior infielder from Huntsville, Texas, missed 15 games last season after being hit in the face with a ball in late May. She returned for the end of UA's season, which came at the Gainesville (Fla.) Regional when the Crimson Tide dropped two out of three to Florida.

The previous year, the career .400 hitter missed almost half the season when she hyperextended her elbow on an attempted steal.

She's happy to be healthy again.

"Finally 100 percent clear," she said Tuesday before UA's first fall practice.

Her bat was missed during the stretch run of a 46-18 campaign last spring, with Alabama falling just short of a fourth straight appearance in the Women's College World Series.

"I think we have a chip on our shoulder this year for sure, especially after last year,"

See SOFTBALL, C4
STAFFBALL

Continued from Cl

Turner said, «The freshmen have really bought into that. They don’t want to see that happen again with this program, because it shouldn’t.

“Everyone is trying to get after it right now and do anything they can to do that.”

That includes head coach Patrick Murphy. He went out in search of answers to help fix UA’s hitting problems.

“I visited a couple of places this summer and talked to a bunch of people just to kind of refresh, I guess,” he said. “I came home with a lot of cool stuff, some new drills and just some good philosophy stuff. We’re going to try it.

“It’s not going to be an all-or-nothing thing. I still think good hitting is contagious and bad hitting is contagious, and unfortunately in about a seven- to eight-week stretch last year bad hitting was contagious. I’m hoping that doesn’t happen again, because it was miserable.”

What Murphy most wants to get out of the fall is a hitter with some pop who can fill the third spot in the batting order.

“I don’t care if it’s a freshman or a senior,” he said. “We haven’t had one of those for a couple of years where when she got up to bat, everybody was like, ‘Uh oh, what’s she going to do this time?’ I think we have some possibilities.”

That won’t be Turner’s role. She bats first or second, to best utilize her speed. In addition to a deft hand with the bat, she has stolen 47 career bases despite all the missed time.

She’s ready to get back on the practice field.

“I’m not even looking at it like my last fall,” she said. “I’m taking it one day at a time and coming in as excited as if it’s my first day and I just got on campus. I’m just excited to get started.”

UA will host four doubleheaders in October at Rhoads Stadium on Friday, Oct. 13 vs. Mobile College at 5 p.m.; Sunday, Oct. 15, vs. Wallace-Hanceville at 1:30; Friday, Oct. 20, vs. Shelton State at 5 p.m.; and Sunday, Oct. 22, vs. Auburn-Montgomery at 1:30 p.m.

Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.
UA women's golf wins Schooner Fall Classic

Staff report

NORMAN, Okla. — Sophomore Kristen Gillman fired a personal-best 7-under par 64 final round on Monday to claim individual medalist honors and lead the Alabama women's golf team to the team championship at the Schooner Fall Classic at the par-71, 6,046-yard Belmar Golf Club.

Alabama (281-281-269/831) finished at 21-under par as a team after a 15-under round on Monday to outdistance runner-up Clemson (285-286-277/848), which finished 17 shots back at 4-under par. Florida (284-286-279/849) finished third at 3-under par, followed by Texas (290-287-274/851) at 1-under par and Florida State (291-285-277/853) at 1-over par.

Gillman's individual victory, coupled with junior Lauren Stephenson's win at the Mason Rudolph Championship a week ago, marks the first time since the 2008-09 season that two different Tide golfers have claimed medalist honors in consecutive tournaments.

The Tide's final score is the second-lowest in relation to par in the history of the tournament and ranks as the third-lowest 54-hole total and fourth-lowest score in relation to par in school history. Alabama's final-round 15-under par 269 is the second-lowest single-round score and ties for the third-lowest single round score in relation to par in UA annals.

Gillman (68-68-64/200) finished at a career-low 13-under par for the tournament to capture individual medalist honors for the second time in her career. The Austin, Texas, native equaled the week-old school record for low 54-hole total set by Stephenson at the Mason Rudolph Championship. Gillman's 13-under par score also equals the third-lowest score vs. par at UA.

Stephenson (69-68-66/203) shot 5-under par on Monday to finish second to Gillman at 10-under par and is now 26-under par through two tournaments this season. Junior Cheyenne Knight (71-73-69/213) shot a 2-under par 69 in the third round to tie for 21st at even par. Senior Lakareber Abe (73-72-70/215) finished at 1-under par on the day and tied for 33rd at 2-over par for the tournament. Freshman Angelica Moresco (75-76-72/223) finished with a final round 1-over par and tied for 55th at 10-over par.

Alabama will return to action Oct. 13-15 at the University of North Carolina's Ruth's Chris Tar Heel Invitational at Finley Golf Club in Chapel Hill, N.C.
Auburn offering full refunds for basketball season tickets

By: James Crepea

Auburn is offering full refunds for men's basketball season tickets if fans no longer want them in light of the federal charges against assistant coach Chuck Person.

An Auburn ticket office representative said "full refunds" are available to season ticket holders if they request.

A spokeswoman said Auburn "had a few people request refunds and those were granted," as of Wednesday morning but that increased to an "estimated 30" as of 2:30 p.m.

On Monday, Auburn announced it sold out of its season ticket allotment for the fourth straight year and single-game tickets are going on sale Thursday.

On Tuesday, Person was among 10 people arrested on federal charges as a result of a joint investigation by the FBI and U.S. Attorney's office into corruption college basketball. Person, who is Auburn suspended without pay, faces six charges for bribery, fraud and conspiracy.

The federal complaint against Person, who was released from custody after a hearing in federal court in Birmingham on Tuesday and ordered to appear in federal court in New York on Oct. 10, states he received approximately $91,500 in bribes over 10 months and gave a total of $18,500 to the mothers of two of Auburn's basketball players.

Auburn has not confirmed the identities of those players or clarified their eligibility for the upcoming season.

Auburn opens the 2017-18 season against Norfolk State on Nov. 10.

The Auburn ticket office can be reached at AUBTIX.com or by calling (855) 282-2010.
Auburn assistant arrested in FBI probe

Chuck Person charged with bribery involving recruits, business managers

Tom Green tgreen@al.com

Auburn assistant coach Chuck Person has been charged with corruption in a sworn complaint from the FBI and arrested on federal charges.

Person, who has been on Bruce Pearl's staff at Auburn since 2014, is facing six charges — including bribery conspiracy, solicitation of bribes and gratuities, conspiracy to commit honest services fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to commit wire fraud and travel act conspiracy — according to court documents.

Promoted to associate head coach in 2015, Person was suspended indefinitely and without pay, Auburn University announced Tuesday afternoon.

"This morning's news is shocking," Auburn President Steven Leath said in the statement, which he posted to Twitter. "We are saddened, angry and disappointed. ... We are committed to playing by the rules, and that's what we expect from our coaches. In the meantime, Auburn is working closely with law enforcement, and we will help them in their investigation in any way we can."

The charges stem from an ongoing FBI investigation into "the criminal influence of money on coaches and student-athletes" in the NCAA that dates back to 2015. Bill Sweeney, assistant director of the FBI's New York field office, said the investigation was covert until Tuesday morning and that the NCAA was not aware of the investigation.

According to the complaint, Person is facing charges stemming from events "from at least in or about" September 2016 and September 2017.

SEE PERSON, A5
PERSON
FROM A1

In all, 10 people — including four college coaches, three people associated with professional managers and advisers, and three associated with an athletics apparel company — were charged and arrested in the investigation.

"The picture painted by the charges brought today is not a pretty one," said Joan Kim, the acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

"Coaches at some of the nation's top programs soliciting and accepting cash bribes, making deals involving blue-chip prospects like coyotes, and employees of one of the world's largest sporting goods companies secretly funneling cash to families of high school recruits."

FBI: PERSON TOOK 90K

Person is named in the complaint along with Kastan Michel, a Birmingham native whose custom clothing business attracted "hundreds" of clients from the NBA and NFL, according to this 2004 profile. The FBI investigation has also resulted in sworn complaints against Oklahoma State assistant Lamont Evans, Southern California assistant Tony Bland, Arizona assistant Emmanuel Richardson and Adidas director of marketing James Gatto.

"The nature of the charges brought to light by the federal government are deeply disturbing," NCAA President Mark Emmert said in a statement released Tuesday afternoon. "We have no tolerance whatsoever for this alleged behavior. Coaches hold a unique position as role models for student-athletes and their families and these bribery allegations, if true, suggest an extraordinary and despicable breach of that trust. We learned of these charges this morning and of course FBI will support the ongoing criminal federal investigation."

According to the complaint, Person received approximately $91,000 from a cooperating FBI witness over a 10-month period in exchange for Person's agreement to "use his official influence over student-athletes" at Auburn that Person believed would enter the NBA to retain the cooperating witness' "financial advisory and business management services" and to obtain suits from Michel.

The allegations against Person involve two unidentified student-athletes at Auburn. In discussing the allegations Tuesday, Kim said Person, in describing his influence over one of Auburn's players said, "he listens to one person, that is me." According to Kim, Person also told the cooperating witness that Auburn's players trusted and looked up to him because "as he reminded them, he coached Kobe Bryant and worked for Phil Jackson.

Person also allegedly lied to players and their families about the financial adviser he pushed them toward, claiming that adviser — who was the FBI's cooperating witness — handled Person's personal finances and also those of former Auburn great and NBA Hall of Famer Charles Barkley. Neither of those statements were true, and the adviser, who was identified by ESPN citing U.S. Department of Justice documents as Martin Blazer, had never even met Barkley.

Person is also alleged to have told one player's mother that he never received any money from the adviser for promoting him to her.

That exchange occurred five days after Person allegedly accepted an envelope with $15,000 in cash bribes from the adviser during a prearranged meeting at a Manhattan hotel on or about Dec. 12, 2016 — which was during the team's trip to New York to take on Boston College in the Under Armour Reunion at Madison Square Garden on that same day.

"While pursuing these professionals, the bribed coaches showed little regard for the players' wellbeing," Kim said. "They ignored red flags, seeing only the green of the cash bribes flowing their way."

Auburn assistant coach Chuck Person, who has been charged with corruption in a far-ranging FBI investigation into the criminal influence of money in sports, celebrates Auburn head coach Bruce Pearl's 500th career win after the victory over LSU on Jan. 28, 2017, during an NCAA basketball game. Julie Bennett, jsbennett@al.com

Person, a native of Brantley, Alabama, is a basketball icon at Auburn, having played for the Tigers from 1982 to 1986 alongside Barkley, helping the team to its first three NCAA Tournament appearances in school history. He is Auburn's all-time scoring leader and was the fourth overall pick of the Indiana Pacers in the 1986 NBA draft. Nicknamed "The Rifleman," Person's No. 45 jersey was retired at Auburn in 2006.

The charges were formally announced by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York Monday.

Kim said the investigation was able to get into the "dark underworld of college basketball" through the cooperating witness and two undercover agents posing as corrupt advisers and financial backers. The FBI also obtained several court-authorized wiretaps and made "hundreds" of confidential recordings of conversations in which the defendants described the criminal schemes in their own words.

"The madness of college basketball went well beyond the big dance in March," Kim said. "Month after month, the defendants exploited the hoop dreams of athletes around the country. Fraud, abuse and corruption of the type alleged in the charges brought today contaminates all that's good around it and all that is good in college sports."

"The defendants' alleged conduct not only sullied the spirit of amateur athletics, but it showed contempt for the thousands of players and coaches who follow the rules and play the game the right way."

According to Kim, the involved coaches never questioned the qualifications or track record of the financial adviser who served as the FBI's cooperating witness.

A simple Google search of the adviser's name, Kim said, would have shown that the Securities and Exchange Commission brought securities fraud charges against the adviser just last year.

Blazer, a former Pittsburgh financial adviser, was accused by the SEC of siphoning $2.35 million from clients and misappropriating the funds into movie investments.

Blazer, who founded Blazer Capital Management, was involved in a Ponzi-type scheme involving five of his clients, including two professional athletes, between 2000 and 2012.

Sweeney said the investigation is ongoing and additional interviews are being conducted.

He added that the FBI has "a lot more" work to be done and that he encouraged others with relevant information to contact the agency through its tip line.

"All of those charged today contributed to a pay-to-play culture that has no place in college basketball," Sweeney said.

"Today's arrests should serve as a warning to others choosing to conduct business this way in the world of college athletics. We have your playbook."

WIDER NET OF CORRUPTION?

Gatto, the Adidas marketing director, is one of the five defendants charged with "making and concealing bribe payments" to high-school players and/or their families.

Adidas denied any knowledge of Gatto's actions.

The FBI's indictment hints at the possibility of a wider net of corruption than those arrested.

Gatto and other defendants are accused of sending $800,000 in four installments to a family of a high-school player to make sure he signed with a "public research university" in Kentucky.

In August, Louisville announced its athletic department had rescinded its apparel, footwear and equipment deal with Adidas for $160 million over 10 years. The agreement made Louisville the highest-paying school in Adidas' college portfolio.

In June, Louisville landed five-star recruit Brian Bowen from Indiana, a surprise to recruiting analysts who expected him to attend Michigan State.

The other defendants in the FBI's case include Jonathan Brad Augustine, the president of the nonprofit The League Initiative; Jerod Codo, the head of Nike's Elite Youth Basketball League as of 2015; and Christian Dawkins, a former sports agent who was fired in May after being found to have charged $42,000 in Uber rides on an NBA player's credit card.

The FBI says the defendants used payments to the nonprofits to conceal money funneled to players and their families.

AL.com's Mark Inabinett contributed to this report.
When will Alabama, Auburn get first SEC test?

Kevin Scarbinsky
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It has to happen, right? At some point, Alabama and Auburn have to play a football game that doesn’t prove Yogi Berra wrong, that isn’t over long before it’s over, that doesn’t turn into a JV scrimmage for the final 15, 20 or 30 minutes.

Sure, Alabama and Auburn have steam-rolled their first two SEC opponents, to the tune of 125-3 in Alabama’s case and 100-24 for Auburn, but common sense, history and the law of averages are working against the Tide and Tigers.

It’s highly unlikely both teams will continue on their destructive paths all the way to the Iron Bowl.

None of Nick Saban’s four national championship teams at Alabama has gone through a season without getting defeated or tested in victory at least once by a conference opponent.

The 2009 team didn’t lose, but won two games — Tennessee and Auburn — by five points or less. The 2011 team lost the Game of the Century to LSU before making amends and then some in the BCS Championship Game.
The 2012 team lost to Texas A&M and beat both LSU in the regular season and Georgia in the SEC Championship by four points. The 2015 team lost to Ole Miss and came from behind to beat Tennessee by five.

Gene Chizik’s undefeated national title team at Auburn in 2010 won five SEC games by eight points or less. Gus Malzahn’s 2013 team, which won the SEC title but lost the BCS Championship, dropped one regular-season league game and also beat five SEC opponents by no more than eight points.

Ever the best Auburn and Alabama teams in recent years were unable to make it through an entire season without doing some heavy lifting within the conference. So it stands to reason they’ll be challenged at least once between here and the Iron Bowl.

For Auburn, the largest roadblock between here and there looks like Georgia, but there are potential speed bumps before the Dawgs get to the Plains for that Nov. 11 showdown. A three-game road swing to LSU, Arkansas and Texas A&M figures to test the Tigers. Note: The Arkansas trip will be Auburn’s eighth game in eight weeks before the Tigers get their bye week.

Alabama’s most imposing challenge until Auburn may come Saturday at Texas A&M. The Aggies have better athletes and more of them than Vanderbilt and Ole Miss combined. It’s a good bet that, unlike the Commodores, A&M will cross midfield, and unlike the Rebels, A&M will find the end zone at least once.

Given the state of the SEC, it’s possible Alabama is simply that much better than everyone in college football but Clemson and that Auburn is superior to everyone in the league outside of Tuscaloosa and Athens.

So far, the Tide and Tigers have made a mockery of the outdated notion of SEC parity. They keep doing things they haven’t done in a long time, if ever, against conference patsies. At some point, history says, that dominance has to end before they meet.

Or does it?
Tide QB Hurts could have been an Aggie

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts has history not just with Texas, but with Texas A&M and Aggie coach Kevin Sumlin. Hurts grew up in Channelview, Texas, about two hours from College Station, and will be playing his first collegiate game in his home state since his debut as a true freshman.

"It's my first time being back home since high school, so it'll be fun," he said. "But at the end of the day, it's another game, a tough road environment that we have to play in and we have to be ready."

Hurts was also heavily recruited by Sumlin and Texas A&M. He grew up as more of a fan of Texas and quarterback Vince Young, but said A&M was among his finalists in the recruiting process.

"I'd say they were top 3, with them and Mississippi State," he said.

The Aggies didn't have a high school quarterback in the class of 2016 but did add Oklahoma transfer Trevor Knight before that season. He ended up winning the starting job last season as a senior before graduating.

Sumlin knew Hurts and his family even before he was a high school recruit. When Sumlin was head coach at the University of Houston from 2008-11, he often recruited at Channelview High School just outside of Houston. Hurts' father is the head coach at Channelview, and Sumlin's relationship with his family started then.

"I wasn't surprised by

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Jalen’s success,” Sumlin said. “His demeanor lends itself to him being successful. He’s never too high, never too low. Being a powerhouse, he’s a lot stronger than people knew that didn’t know his background. His leadership qualities and his success come as no surprise to us.”

Impressed by big wins

Alabama’s first two SEC wins have turned some heads around the league. Many coaches don’t watch games other than to prepare for their opponents, but the Crimson Tide’s whipping of Vanderbilt 59-0 and and domination of Ole Miss 66-3 made an impression.

“I was just very impressed with them overall,” Ole Miss coach Matt Luke said. “I didn’t see any weaknesses.”

It’s the first time Alabama scored 59 or more points in a two-game stretch since 1945, when the Crimson Tide beat Kentucky 60-19 and Vanderbilt 71-0. But the 122-point margin in the last two games surpasses even that.

“It doesn’t really surprise me, anything at Alabama,” Arkansas coach Bret Bielema said. “Alabama is a really good football team. Other than seeing the scores I hadn’t really seen any of the games.”

Alabama set a school record with 582 total points scored last season. UA had 220 total points after five games last season; it’s ahead of that pace now with 231.

“I thought they were the same Alabama team,” said Luke, who has been at Ole Miss since 2012. “I thought they were better offensively, more efficient. They did some things in the pass game, they had tailbacks coming out of the backfield. They were very efficient on offense. On defense, it was the same. They don’t change.”

The massive margin in the first two games hasn’t been about the competition level or the state of the SEC, Texas A&M coach Kevin Sumlin said.

“I think it says a lot about where Alabama is,” Sumlin said. “They’ve stepped up outside our league and have won also.”

Injury update

Alabama coach Nick Saban updated the status of two players Wednesday night during his final press conference before heading to Texas A&M. Nothing too new, though.

Defensive lineman Da’Shawn Hand sustained a MCL injury against Ole Miss last weekend, and defensive back Trevon Diggs hurt his foot. Both will not play Saturday against the Aggies, as previously expected.

“Da’Shawn Hand is still out, Diggs is probably for sure out,” Saban said. “Can’t really practice yet. So those guys probably won’t be playing in the game.”

Terrin Waack contributed to this report

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
Facing Tide not helpful for hot-seat coaches

Cecil Hurt

Although it will firmly establish that I was born somewhere in the Grover Cleveland Administration, there is an image of Nick Saban that I can’t shake. The picture is of Saban, a proud West Virginian, walking along behind every coach in the Southeastern Conference carrying a hod — a sort of a bucket specifically for carrying coal — and shoveling some white-hot lumps into every single pair of britches along the way.

Depending on how things go, Saban’s Alabama football team might be in a stretch where it could have a detrimental effect on the future of five — that’s five — consecutive coaches on seats that range from uncomfortably warm to blazing-inferno-of-burning-habanero-peppers hot.

That is in no way

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HURT
Continued from C1

Saban's concern, of course. Once a coach starts worrying about the other guy's job, he's no longer doing his own. Saban has been notoriously tough on his own former assistants in matchups over the years. To take an example from another sport, Billy Donovan loved Anthony Grant like a brother but that never stopped his Florida basketball teams from beating Alabama every time.

To be fair, Ole Miss isn't likely to hang on to interim coach Matt Luke after this season, regardless of last Saturday's outcome (short of a Rebel win or, less likely, an asteroid strike.) This week may actually be a no-lose situation for Kevin Sumlin, barring another one of those 66-3 scores. Once the members of your own Board of Trustees have already declared war on you (and purchased a tank), you can probably only help your situation as a 28-point home underdog.

Then comes Arkansas, where Bret Bielema's SEC win percentage is in imminent danger of dipping below the Mendoza line. The word is the Arkansas administration remains patient, but if dominos start tumbling all around, who knows?

Then comes Butch Jones. Then comes Ed Orgeron, probably safe because of the short-timer rule. But if LSU doesn't look competitive, what then?

That potential wave of unemployment isn't noted in order to proclaim how awesome Alabama is. The Crimson Tide gets plenty of public love and adulation and if there is the occasional commentator or opposing fan that doesn't kowtow, that's not a problem.

What is a problem, for the SEC at large, is the number of programs that are poised on the brink of panic, in some cases for the second or third time since Nick Saban came to Tuscaloosa.

There are level heads out there to be sure, but at some places, they are running headlong into the old adage about doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Most fans are true to their school, but every fan base has its anarchists, a desperate few willing to endure a loss of historic proportions — even actively wishing for such a loss if they believe the aftershock would bring about a sweeping change and the coming of Jon Gruden or Chip Kelly or some other incarnation of the Shining Knight of Unending Touchdowns.

That's not just to say "some fan bases are crazy," either; Alabama had its share of fans who pulled against a 2006 win over Auburn because they thought it would extend Mike Shula's tenure.

Alabama's only mission this week is to play as well as it can play. The ramifications for Texas A&M, or a future opponent like Tennessee, shouldn't be on the radar. All Nick Saban needs as an accessory is his trusty, if occasional abused, headset. The hod full of sizzling embers has to be someone else's problem.

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Maturation of Hurts as passer continues

Sophomore quarterback completed 9 straight passes in win over Rebels

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The evolution of Jalen Hurts continued Saturday night, using his right arm and well-designed plays to boost Alabama's passing game.

Working just over half of the 66-3 humiliation of Ole Miss, Hurts started shaky before finding a groove that powered the Crimson Tide offense to the insurmountable lead.

A streak of nine straight completions spanning the first and second quarters did the trick. He's had similar runs before, but they were padded by screens or jet sweeps. This time Hurts challenged the middle of the field, throwing through defenders without endangering the turnover streak.

Those nine completions gained 188 yards and included two touchdowns. By our count, the nine passes were thrown a combined 126 yards downfield — an average of 14 yards per attempt. None were bombs like the ball Hurts threw 45 yards in the air incomplete to Robert Foster on the game's second play.

Five of the nine went at least 20 yards in the air.

And five different players caught passes in that span with receivers, running backs and tight ends getting involved.

Hurts' final numbers included 197 passing yards, completing 12 of 19 throws with two touchdowns and no interceptions. His mistake-free streak now includes 169 passes dating back to the Auburn game last season. That's the third-longest run behind Brodie Croyle (190 in 2005) and AJ McCarron (291 from 2011-12).

SEE HURTS, B5
The night didn’t start as sharp for Alabama’s sophomore quarterback. Nick Saban said he was a little “out of sorts” in the early going. A three-and-out included two unsuccessful down-field throws. The second went 27 yards in the air, missing a wide-open Calvin Ridley for an easy first down.

Then on the second drive, the interception streak nearly ended if not for a drop by an Ole Miss defender in the end zone. That would be the last incomplete until a third-quarter screen pass bounced instead of hitting Bo Scarbrough.

Perhaps his nicest throw in the nine straight completions was the 60-yarder to Calvin Sims.

Stepping up in the pocket, Hurts found the senior coming across the middle with defenders in the neighborhood. Sims broke a few tackles after catching the 27-yard pass to nearly score a touchdown. That score came moments later when Hurts froze the linebacker to dump a touch pass over the top for Hale Hentges’ second career touchdown.

Later, he hit freshman Jerry Jeudy on a perfect corner route to convert a third down. That ball went 27 yards down the field, dropped into the right window.

Hurts’ second touchdown went to running back Josh Jacobs, who leaked out of the backfield for a wide-open pass that traveled another 27 yards. Even a few of the incomplete passes thrown later were well-thrown balls down the field.

One hit freshman Henry Ruggs III in the hands for what would have been a touchdown in the second quarter. And Hurts’ last throw went 28 yards downfield to Robert Foster, but the airborne receiver was pushed out of bounds before he could get a foot down.

It was a different looking plan from games earlier in the season. Two weeks prior, nine of Hurts 17 throws against Colorado State were screen passes or balls thrown behind the line of scrimmage.

The result this Saturday comes as young receivers mature and new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll evolves as a play caller in Alabama’s system.

“That comes with him being more comfortable now, and he’s going to get comfortable throughout the season,” Hurts said. “Everybody gets comfortable throughout the season with the reps and the opportunities to do what you do. We just have to continue to take positive strides as an offense.”

Up next, Hurts travels back home to face a Texas A&M team not far from where he grew up.

In College Station he’ll find an Aggie pass defense ranked 119th in the country, allowing 291.5 yards a game through the air.
Jack Nicklaus to speak at Jerry Pate National Intercollegiate dinner

By Ian Thompson
Special to the News

One of the greatest players to ever play the game, 18-time major champion Jack Nicklaus, will be at Old Overton Club in Vestavia Hills on Oct. 8 at a dinner to speak to the players and coaches at the 53rd Jerry Pate National Intercollegiate.

Pate, who does much, much more than just put his name on this premier men’s college golf event, is integral to the long-running success of one of the very top college golf events across the country.

Host team Alabama will welcome teams from Auburn, UAB, Samford, South Alabama, Baylor, BYU, Mississippi State, Arkansas, Michigan, UNLV and UNC-Chapel Hill to the 54-hole event set for Oct. 9-10 at long-time host facility Old Overton Club.

Pate always invites a speaker of note for the dinner held the night before the tournament begins, but he has taken it upon himself to take it up a notch this year with the addition of Jack Nicklaus.

Nicklaus

"After I won the 1976 U.S. Open I started playing with Jack regularly. We traveled over the years to many countries to hunt and fish, plus play in events. We became good friends," Pate said.

"We also played in the grand opening, along with Hubert Green, of Shoal Creek in 1977. "When I got hurt when I was 28 and dropped off the Tour, there were a lot of years I wasn’t around the tour and didn’t see Jack much." Jack noted that Nicklaus "loved Birmingham, particularly Shoal Creek. I think his recent renovation of Shoal Creek is one of the very best renovations I’ve seen in a very long time. I called Ron Whitten, course architecture editor at Golf Digest, to tell him that."

Earlier this summer, Pate was playing in a Legends event in Minnesota and was on the same team as Nicklaus. He asked Nicklaus than if he would come and speak, to which he agreed.

"It will be a Q&A format. I’ll introduce Jack, who really needs no introduction, and it will just flow from there.

"Here’s one fact I plan to point out. In his first 16 years on Tour, Jack finished fourth on the money list once, third on it twice and the other 13 years he was either first or second."

The tournament itself is open to the public, free of charge to watch.

A who’s who of golfers have participated over the 32 years and counting, including Tiger Woods, Jordan Spieth, U.A’s own Justin Thomas, Michael Thompson and Bud Cauley, as well as Matt Kuchar, Adam Scott, Bubba Watson, Graeme McDowell, Paul Casey, David Toms, David Duval, Jason Dufner, Bill Haas, Charles Howell III.

While Pate said it would be hard to top Nicklaus as guest speaker, he did mention he had former Alabama football coach Gene Stallings speak the year he led the Crimson Tide to the national championship (1992), plus former PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem spoke another year.

Pate talked with great pride about the JPN, as well as the 42nd consecutive Boy Scouts golf event he hosts in his hometown of Pensacola, Fla. every year.

"I love to give back to the kids and think it is very important to do so."
For Saban, lopsided numbers are not his big concern

After Alabama's dominant performance in Nashville last week, you might have felt you were seeing a synchronized offense/defense/special teams effort of the kind that even great football teams produce only once a decade or so.

Instead, it's become once a week.

If anything, Alabama beat Ole Miss even worse on Saturday night than it had beaten Vanderbilt the week before, because the Rebels had at least the ingredients for an offense. This was a team, after all, that had beaten Alabama twice within the living memory of a preschooler.

But the Rebels were just oozing with Nick Saban's newly discovered concept of "quiet disrespect," one assumes. The Alabama coach certainly sold his team on the idea that Ole Miss "had Alabama's number." He didn't mention that the number this time around was 66.

So we are left to sort out questions: Is Alabama really that good? Or has the SEC, beyond the Top 3 (Alabama, Auburn and

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HURT

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Georgia), lost the ability and the will to compete? Can you judge solely by Vanderbilt, which played pretty well against Florida, and Ole Miss? Will Texas A&M at Kyle Field at night be more of a challenge?

Then there is Saban's greatest nemesis: the pursuit of a standard. "Nothing's perfect," Saban said, before listing a variety of missed opportunities, penalties and other flaws, including, for good measure, the media's deficient micro-phone-holding technique.

That's why, as embarrassing as Alabama's proliferation of record-setting numbers — biggest win since 1979 (also a 66-3 win, that one at Vanderbilt), huge total offense and so forth — for opponents, it seems equally irritating to Saban. Obviously, he likes to win by big margins and gain lots of yards and so forth. But there comes a point where the deluge of stunning numbers obscures the actual performance.

What Saban would tell you, I'm guessing, is statistics are something that lie outside his control, to an extent, numbers that depend in part on how the other team plays. Statistics can dress up a performance that might, against a different opponent, not be quite enough. Clemson excepted, it's hard to imagine who that college opponent might be — but there's still a standard involved. Saban might like to play cleaner, even in a game where Alabama scored less.

On the other hand, the fact is Alabama has an embarrassment of offensive riches, options on top of options, all getting some share of the spotlight without any being overworked. There were times on Saturday night when the Ole Miss defense didn't just look outmatched, but seemed to be outnumbered.

The defense is loaded, too, although Da'Shawn Hand's injury is worrisome given the defensive line depth. Texas A&M will be a challenge offensively, as will Auburn. The rest of the SEC West, and Tennessee, are having problems, which doesn't bode well.

But guessing scores isn't Saban's concern. Neither are records. He made the point emphatically on Saturday night. The numbers are unprecedented — but they are not the entire picture. A Van Gogh can't be judged numerically, even at auction. There's a point where Saban is more artist than accountant.

"I don't really care about how many points we've scored in the last four games or five games," he said as he closed his press conference on the precarious cusp of a patented rant. "I care about how many we score in the next game. That's the focus. That's what we need to dominate next."

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COMMENTARY

Saban focuses on respect on anthem issue

That's why Nick Saban was asked — full disclosure here, asked by me — about the current conversation regarding protests by athletes, particularly those centered around the pregame national anthem.

Saban is the premier coach in college football, and has the experience to have reached statesman status. His views matter. He was on campus at the Kent State protests, a watershed of American history. He deals with 100 or more student-athletes, black and white, rich and poor, every single day. His perspective matters.

His answer was calm and carefully considered. He took no political side, although he did stress his support for his players and their right to express themselves.

In other words, he answered like a leader.

"I'm just a football coach," Saban said. "I don't keep up with all that stuff as much"

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HURT

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as maybe everybody else does, especially during the season, especially when we're playing games.

"To me, some of the things that we do in our country when I grew up, they were unifying events, and it's a little painful to see that those things are not so right now," Saban continued. "I also respect everyone's rights not to be censored in terms of the way they express their beliefs. I'm just a coach. I don't have the answers to all the questions.

"I know that most good things come out of love and respect and compassion and unifying people. Most bad things come out of hate and dislike and deceit. Hopefully we can focus on the above and not the below."

Other reporters asked the Alabama players — who, like most college players, are in the locker room during the pregame ceremony that includes the national anthem — about their opinions. Defensive back Anthony Averett and running back Damien Harris said mid-season wasn't the time to get into the discussion. There was no angry rhetoric, no attempt to stir controversy.

Linebacker Anfernee Jennings did offer an opinion.

"I support what they're doing because I understand and everything," Jennings said. "I support everything they're doing and what they're standing for. At the end of the day, you have one goal. It doesn't matter what color, what background, it doesn't matter where you come from. We're trying to accomplish one goal. That's where brotherhood comes in."

Saban also stressed the "respect and trust" that keeps a team unified in controversial times.

"People respect and trust the principles and values of the organization, but they also respect and trust each other, and I think that because everybody has bought into the same thing, you have the same goal," Saban said. "You have the same spirit in terms of what you're trying to accomplish and what you're trying to do. I think it's a very unifying factor when everybody respects — and because you respect the people, you respect the individual differences as well."

There is no answer that pleases every side in any political debate. There can be answers that deserve respect, agree or disagree. Those are the kind of answers that came from the Mal Moore complex on Monday.

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Credit where it's due

Harris, Pierschbacher named players of the week

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Two Alabama players earned honors from the Southeastern Conference during this weekend's 59-0 win over Vanderbilt.

Running back Damien Harris was named SEC Offensive Player of the Week, the league announced Monday. Harris ran 12 times for a career-high 151 yards and a career-best three touchdowns against the Commodores. He averaged 12.6 yards per carry. Of Harris' 12 rushes, seven went for first downs or touchdowns.

Defensive lineman Ross Pierschbacher helped Harris earn his award and got an award of his own. He was named Offensive Lineman of the Week. He graded out at 90 percent and did not commit a penalty. He also did not allow a sack or a quarterback hurry. Alabama's offensive line blocked for a unit that piled up 677 yards, including 466 rushing yards. It was the most rushing yards in the Nick Saban era.

The Alabama coaches rewarded the entire team with its own players of the week awards. They named the entire offensive and defensive travel squads as the offensive and defensive players of the week.

"Everybody that played in the game was the player of the game because everybody bought in and did exactly what we wanted to do," Saban said.

Hockey Jones, Dylan Moses and Daniel Wright were named special teams players of the week by the coaches.

Jennings makes return

Saban did not give an injury report on Monday. Alabama's injured players were back in action on Saturday. Linebackers Dylan Moses, Rashan Evans and Anfernee Jennings all played.

Evans and Jennings missed the last two games. They were among the four linebackers who were lost to injury during the season opener against Florida State.

"It felt good," Jennings said. "I was probably anxious more than I've ever been. After the first half I got, I was coming back down to earth and I knew I had to do my job and calm down."

Evans came back from a groin injury, Jennings had ankle surgery earlier this month. He began participating in practice last week before Alabama's game against Colorado State, and was back on the field less than three weeks after his surgery.

"It feels good," Jennings said. "It feels great. I had Jeremy (Gesell) and Jeff (Allen) and all those guys in the training room. They helped me get back to 100 percent in a short amount of time. I feel good."

Evans had one tackle in his first game back. Jennings finished with two tackles and forced a fumble in the first quarter that was recovered by Da'Shawn Hand. Alabama's defense had limited opportunities for stats, as Vanderbilt ran only 38 plays, and the backups were in for much of the game.

"I can't take all the credit," Jennings said. "Our trainers and all them guys down there. They kept me up here. I rehabbed a lot. And I have to thank Dr. (Norman) Waldrop too. He did a good job."

Alabama-Texas A&M kick off set

Alabama's game at Texas A&M on Oct. 7 will be a 6:15 p.m. kickoff on ESPN. It will be the fourth night game for Alabama so far this season.

Other notes

Ole Miss head coach Matt Luke said starting center Sean Rawlings (ankle) and wide receiver A.J. Brown (leg bruise) will both be game-time decisions against Alabama, according to multiple reports. Brown is the Rebels' leading receiver despite playing in two games, posting 16 catches for 389 yards and four touchdowns.

The Crimson Tide did not go through a full practice on Monday. Saban and the team did a walk-through rather than a standard Monday practice as the team enters its fifth game week of the season.
So here's the next debate. We still haven't decided whether Nick Saban is a better coach than Bear Bryant. Now we can argue over who had the bigger heart.

Bryant once hung 66 on Vanderbilt and beat the Commodores by 63. It could've been worse were he so inclined.

Saban could've traveled Route 66 himself in Vanderbilt Stadium and won by that same margin Saturday, but with his team a few strides shy of its ninth touchdown on the day, he ordered his backup quarterback to take a knee.

Times three.

Just to be clear, that wasn't a victory formation. It was a mercy killing of the clock.

Alabama 59, Vanderbilt 0 demonstrated in so many ways that, until further notice, the Grand Canyon between the reigning three-time conference champions and the rest of the league hasn't been reduced by a single pebble.

It didn't matter that Vandy was feeling good about itself after starting 3-0 thanks to its first win over a ranked non-conference opponent since 1946. The Commodores looked as overmatched as ever against the Crimson Tide, which matched its largest victory margin under Saban.

It didn't matter that Alabama was playing its first conference game of the season on the road. By conservative estimates, about 75 percent of the crowd wore crimson. The visiting fans were as dominant as their players.

While No. 2 Clemson took a long time to pull away from ACC bottom-dweller Boston College and No. 5 USC needed four quarters to put away Pac-12 patsy Cal, No. 1 Alabama established its dominance early and often and turned the second half into a JV game.

Even though it's not his job, Saban tried to hold the score down. He inserted backup quarterback Tua Tagovailoa into the game for good with 26 minutes left, and the freshman threw for more yards than starter Jalen Hurts.

Saban played six different tailbacks, and they piled up most of the team's 496 rushing yards. Nine players in all carried the ball and 10 caught passes. Alabama set a program high in outgaining Vanderbilt by — this is not a typo — 599 yards.

The visitors rolled up 677 total yards, the most under Saban and the second-highest total in school history, which included a school-record 38 first downs. The home team had 78 yards of offense and never reached midfield, let alone crossed it.

Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason tried to look on the bright side.

"I'm not going to fall into the abyss on one game," he said.

There's only one problem with his optimism. You have to crawl out of an abyss before you can fall into it. Thirteen SEC programs find themselves huddling in a deep hole looking up at the Crimson Tide in varying states of frustration, anger or awe.

Vanderbilt still hasn't beaten Alabama since 1984. No one in the league has taken down the Tide since Ole Miss in the 2015 SEC opener.

Since then, Saban and company have won 18 straight SEC games. In only three of those games has the opponent scored as many as 20 points in defeat. The Crimson Tide has scored 30 or more points in 13 of those 18 victories, and they've reached that number in nine of their 10 league wins with Hurts as the starter.

Let it all sink in while Mason tries to pick up the pieces of Vanderbilt's shattered anchor. Only one SEC coach has beaten Alabama in the Tide's last 28 conference games, and he's no longer an SEC coach.

Hugh Freeze did make news Saturday — by issuing an apology for the personal behavior that got him forced out at Ole Miss despite his two wins over Saban. With Freeze out of the way, no one in this league looks capable of bringing Alabama to its knees.

Unless the Tide decides to go there in victory with mercy.
View from the summit looks good for Tide

NASHVILLE —
You can spend a lifetime climbing mountains, spending most of your waking hours struggling up sheer rock faces or fighting blizzards or just testing your stamina.
But at some point, as you journey from Denali to the Matterhorn or Mount Cheaha, you're at the summit, the sun shining, the air clear. You get to actually take a deep breath or two before moving on.

Alabama stood atop one of those peaks on Saturday. Except for

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HURT

Continued from C1

a penalty or two, a missed assignment along the way, there wasn't a single detail that even a perfectionist like Alabama's Nick Saban would alter. The Crimson Tide was dominant in every phase, putting away a Vanderbilt team that defeated a nationally-ranked Power Five team the week before the third quarter was halfway done.

The offensive performance would have been more than adequate on an average defensive day. The shutout by the defense would have stood up even if offense had sputtered. Taken as a whole, they made Alabama look like the best college football team in America for whatever that is worth in late September.

"They're the No. 1 team for a reason," said Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason, whose upcoming task, as he described it, consists of not having his team "fall into the abyss" for the rest of the year. If they do, it will look very familiar.

Circumstances couldn't have been worse for Vanderbilt, which has committed itself to building a better program the old-fashioned way. That has worked, in a way. But when the other team is bigger, stronger and faster, you have to hang on and shorten the game. Once you are down 21-0 in the first quarter, you need some sort of offensive ability to come from behind. Vanderbilt doesn't have that, the "efficient" Commodore passing game being built more as a complement to a running attack than a vertical assault weapon on its own. Lacking that, you have to at least be able to run the ball well enough to shorten the game and abridge the full dictionary of agony into a thousand or so pages. Vanderbilt got the unabridged edition.

Aside from Alabama loyalists, there were few people that watched the last 20 minutes of play. For those that did, the ability level of the freshman that Saban sprinkled into the lineup did not portend well for the future — if you are an Alabama opponent. No, there is not a quarterback controversy although the subterranean rumbling about "the backup" will never, ever end in Alabama until the planet itself stops spinning. But Tua Tagovailoa, in relief of Jalen Hurts, whipped the ball around nicely. Every running back saw action and they all looked good, although the first taste of playing time had to be especially sweet for Tuscaloosa's Brian Robinson Jr., coming with the added bonus of a touchdown along the way.

There are more mountains to climb, of course. The journey has hardly started for Alabama, no matter how encouraging the result. Remember the last time Alabama had a 59-0 SEC win, blowing Texas A&M out of Bryant-Denny Stadium in 2014? That game came after a 14-13 win over Arkansas (and an epic Saban rant, an attention-graver he didn't need to employ with Vanderbilt doing the motivational dirty work for him this week.) An overtime win over LSU and a shootout with Auburn lay ahead in the regular season. This year will be no different. But for one Saturday, the top of the mountain was a comfortable place to be.

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Get the Keg Out of the Frat House

John Hechinger

Fraternity initiation season has just begun and already an 18-year-old freshman is dead. An investigation into the death of the student, who had been drinking at Louisiana State University’s Phi Delta Theta house, will most likely point to a familiar culprit: the toxic brew of alcohol and hazing.

The Louisiana case is only the latest example in a horrifying but persistent trend. At Penn State, 14 Beta Theta Pi members will soon face a criminal trial because a pledge, or new member, died of traumatic brain injuries in February. They are accused of ordering him to drink until he could barely stand.

Alcohol is the wellspring of most fraternity vice, and evidence shows that reducing drinking at chapters makes them safer — and not just for fraternity brothers. According to the National Institute of Justice, women who frequent frat parties are more likely to become victims of “incapacitated sexual assault.” Many fraternity brothers and alumni maintain that fraternities shouldn’t be blamed for excessive drinking — that it is just a part of college life — but the numbers tell a different story.

Study after study has shown that fraternity men are the heaviest drinkers on campus. According to Harvard public-health research, considered the most definitive, 86 percent of men living in chapter houses binge on alcohol twice the level of those who live elsewhere. A University of Maine survey found that three-quarters of fraternity members report they’ve been hazed, including being forced to drink into unconsciousness.

In the 1990s and 2000, Phi Delta Theta — the same fraternity as in the LSU case — lost three members to alcohol. One died in an initiation ritual, another while driving drunk on a motorcycle. A third died during a house fire; he was so drunk that he didn’t flee. The fraternity banned alcohol at its chapter houses, and since 2000, injuries and sexual assaults have become much less common. Insurance claims plunged 90 percent.

Phi Delta Theta has mostly stayed out of the headlines until now, but as the death at LSU shows, efforts to cut down drinking require constant vigilance. The success of public health campaigns provides an apt comparison: They haven’t eliminated smoking or drunken driving, but they have saved millions of lives.

Banning pledging, the dangerous, monthlong initiation period, also helps. For about a decade, Sigma Alpha Epsilon had more hazings and alcohol-related deaths than any other fraternity; it banned pledging altogether in 2014, and since then insurance claims have dropped from an average of 13 a year to two, and no one has died from hazing or drinking.

Fraternities are growing in popularity, and are in desperate need of reform.

They don’t participate in hazings — can become defendants in hazing claims. Plaintiffs will go after their families and seek to collect on their homeowners’ policies.

Even with all their bad behavior, fraternities are more popular than ever. Undergraduate membership in the North-American Interfraternity Conference, which represents most of the oldest and largest fraternities, has soared by 50 percent over the last decade. As many as one in six men who attends a four-year college full time belongs to a fraternity. This year, more than 100,000 young men will pledge. Compared with their peers, members of Greek organizations report greater well-being, a stronger sense of community and better preparation for postcollege life. Fraternities’ vast alumni networks help catapult them into successful careers.

Reforming, not abating, these powerful organizations represents the best hope for confronting their dangerous legacy of drinking, hazing and sexual assault. Fraternities celebrate their values of friendship, honor and leadership; alumni must force young members to live up to those principles. Colleges can also do more to hold fraternities accountable, starting with collecting and making public any information about alcohol-related hospitalizations associated with local chapters.

From the outset, fraternities have struggled with a kind of split personality. In 1776, the first Greek-letter group, the Phi Beta Kappa Society, was born in a tavern. It has since transformed itself into the pre-eminent organization for college scholars. Fraternities have a choice: They can do nothing about their original sins, or they can honor the nobler side of their traditions and work toward reform. With privilege comes responsibility.

John Hechinger, a senior editor at Bloomberg News, is the author of “True Gentlemen: The Broken Pledge of America’s Fraternities.”