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Senate to consider confirmations

Two UA trustees could receive additional six-year terms

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The Alabama Senate will take up the re-appointment of two trustees for the University of Alabama System among the confirmations it will consider this session.

Trustees Britt Sexton and Kenneth Vandervoort were re-appointed by the UA System board of trustees to additional six-year terms in September.

The system's bylaws allow trustees to begin work immediately after they are elected by the self-appointing board, but the appointments must still go to the Alabama Senate for confirmation.

The resolutions to confirm Sexton and Vandervoort have been introduced and referred to the Senate's committee on confirmations. The committee canceled its Wednesday meeting because of concerns about winter weather.

Vandervoort, who represents the 3rd District on the board, was first appointed to the board in 2012. Sexton, who represents the 5th District, was first appointed in 2009.

Trustees may serve up to three consecutive six-year terms or until they reach the age of 75.

Vandervoort is an orthopedic surgeon and a partner in Anniston Orthopedic Associates. He is past chief of the medical staff at Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center and is a director of the Surgery Center in Oxford.

Sexton is CEO of Sexton Inc., CEO of FS Financial Inc., managing member of Sexton Investments, LLC, and leads the Sexton Charitable Foundation. His companies' interests include financial services, private equity and real estate.
Protective Life to acquire Liberty Life for $1.17 billion as part of deal

By: William Thornton

Birmingham-based Protective Life Insurance Co. will acquire Liberty Life Assurance Co. of Boston for $1.17 billion, the company announced today.

Protective, a U.S. subsidiary of Dai-ichi Holdings, Inc., announced an agreement with Lincoln Financial Group, as part of Lincoln's acquisition of Liberty Life from affiliates of Liberty Group, Inc.

Protective is acquiring Liberty's individual life and annuity business in the deal.

"We are excited to announce this transaction, the largest acquisition in Protective's history," Richard J. Bielen, Protective's president and CEO said in a statement. "This block of life and annuity business is an ideal addition to our acquisition segment."

The closing is expected in the second quarter of this year, subject to regulatory approval.
Almost 21 years after workers produced the state’s first automobile in Tuscaloosa, Alabama stands poised to ascend to a new position — nationally and globally — in auto production.

Toyota and Mazda on Wednesday announced they will build a $1.6 billion vehicle production plant in Huntsville, to open in 2021. The plant is expected to employ 4,000 people and produce 300,000 vehicles a year, once up and running.

The spinoff effect of job creation is expected to be even greater. Alabama already employs more than 57,000 people in the auto industry, counting its three vehicle plants, Toyota’s Huntsville engine plant, and a web of suppliers. It was that existing web that helped the state secure its newest corporate citizens.

SEE TOYOTA-MAZDA, A6
TOYOTA-MAZDA
FROM A1

But the addition of a highly sought-after manufacturing plant, featuring the world’s largest auto company, is also part of several stories: The South’s continuing ascendancy into international auto manufacturing, current global economic politics and the future of the auto industry.

Steve Sewell, executive vice president for the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, has witnessed from the beginning as Alabama’s auto industry grew.

“It’s astounding,” he said. “Even for those of us who have watched the growth, even today, we’re still astounded that we’re at this point, to have five leading global automakers with major assembly plants operating in our state.”

Sewell said the EDPA’s first contact with the Toyota-Mazda project came about midway through last year. Contacted through a site consultant, they had no idea who was inquiring at first, which is normal for development projects. All they knew was that it could be an auto manufacturer.

Then, over time, it became clear who at least one of the players was — Toyota, a company with 15 years of manufacturing experience in Alabama. Sewell said one of the main hurdles in getting any company to decide on a site is convincing it of their advantages in choosing your area. So, in effect, Alabama had an advantage. Not only did Toyota have its own experience here, but it and Mazda could judge from the experiences of the state’s other auto players.

“What’s happened in Alabama in a generation, that requires a lot more than just attracting companies,” Sewell said. “The state has really matured into a true automotive state. It has invested in the kind of infrastructure, workforce development, training, filling the supply chains and listening to the companies’ needs.”

Alabama is currently tied for fourth among the states in terms of the size of its auto manufacturing industry. It should rise once Toyota-Mazda is up and running.

‘UNPRECEDENTED’

The Toyota-Mazda announcement caps a big year for Alabama’s auto industry. Earlier this week, Mercedes-Benz produced its 3 millionth vehicle in Tuscaloosa since the plant’s opening. Honda and Hyundai wrapped up a year where each produced more than 320,000 vehicles.

Honda began production of its redesigned Odyssey minivan — the fourth redesign the plant has undertaken in as many years. And its Ridgeline truck took home Truck of the Year honors at Detroit’s North American International Auto Show. Honda, the Toyota engine plant and Mercedes-Benz all announced expansions, including MBUSI’s plan to assemble electric vehicles in Tuscaloosa and start an electric battery plant.

Bhalat Balasubramanian is the Executive Director of the University of Alabama’s Center for Advanced Vehicle Technologies. Previously he worked for 20 years with Mercedes-Benz. He said the Deep South’s transformation, and especially Alabama’s, is unprecedented in the history of automotive manufacturing.

For example, auto companies have over the last decade worked at a competitive disadvantage in the United States, as opposed to manufacturing automobiles in Mexico, where wages are lower and free trade agreements with the European Union make production costs about 10 percent cheaper, he said.
In spite of that, international companies have over that time doubled production, increased investments, and brought more factories to the American South. Many factors can account this rise — availability of land, lack of union influence, relatively lower manufacturing costs and pro-business state governments.

“It’s astonishing what is happening here,” Balasubramanian said.

John Boyd, a New Jersey-based consultant, is among several observers who say Toyota-Mazda’s entrance into Alabama shifts the center of gravity in southern manufacturing squarely on Alabama.

“This is an endorsement of Alabama — its state economic development officials, the Huntsville labor market, the state’s AIDT program, which is the most highly regarded job training program in the country,” Boyd said. “The fact that Alabama has really invested in its vocational training programs, and their coordination with in-state universities. That’s been the difference. And it’s showing with employers like Hyundai, Airbus, Toyota.”

'RESHORING'

But the decision to build in Alabama, Boyd said, is also a result of “reshoring” — the decision of companies to bring jobs back to the U.S. that were once shipped to other countries. He sees it as a direct result of the Trump Administration’s “America First” policies.

“A decade ago, this would have been made in Mexico,” he said. “Reshoring is happening. You’ve had a tax cut from 35 to 21 percent. There’s an expectation of tweaking of NAFTA. It’s becoming more expensive to produce goods off shore. All of that is creating new momentum for reshoring, and Alabama is front and center in the narrative. This is the crown jewel in Donald Trump’s reshoring initiative.”

Toyota has announced it will build the Corolla in Huntsville, while Mazda will manufacture an as-yet-unannounced crossover. The two companies will also reportedly have a research-and-development component in their joint venture, but it’s unclear how much of that may be at the new factory.

Mazda has had joint ventures in the U.S. market previously, most recently with Ford. But the company hasn’t made vehicles here since 2012.

At least one analyst said Mazda’s move is probably intended to capitalize on its strong niche in the U.S. market, centered around design, performance and high fuel efficiency.

But a Huntsville plant will also benefit Toyota in giving the company more production flexibility, as several of its plants around the country are reportedly running beyond full capacity.

JOBS OUTLOOK

The effect on jobs will be seen almost immediately. Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield said auto supplier companies may begin announcing plans this year, as suppliers will have to be in place and running by the time production starts at Toyota-Mazda in three years.

Suppliers are usually classified as tier one or tier-two facilities — tier one being companies that supply vehicle components directly to the manufacturer. Tier two supply the suppliers, though some companies can supply multiple manufacturers.

It’s difficult to say how many supplier jobs the Toyota-Mazda project will create, since some suppliers will opt to fill needs for several plants. Balasubramanian said suppliers will, in the interest of long-term stability, probably not tie themselves to one factory, since needs can change over vehicle cycles. But they will opt for locations close to the plant. The big winner for those jobs, he said, might be Birmingham, which is situated in the middle of the four factories.

In a larger sense, the new factory also positions Alabama for the future of the automotive industry. As auto companies look to electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles and higher emissions standards, the shape of automobiles and the way they are built will change. Mercedes-Benz’s recent move toward EVs, and the coming of Toyota-Mazda, means a worldwide stage for the state at a time of great change.

“These are marquee global companies, and their important operations are in Alabama,” Sewell said. “There’s real priority in terms of what they’re doing here. These are modern plants with the latest technology. This positions Alabama very well.”

Canfield, at the end of a long Wednesday of announcements, was asked for a final comment on what it meant to him personally.

He smiled and spoke for many. “It’s pretty cool,” he laughed.
Ivey, Battle already campaigning on new Toyota-Mazda jobs

By: Lee Roop

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle both want voters to elect them governor this year, and Wednesday's Toyota-Mazda jobs announcement was the kind of big news that can make a governor.

Toyota and Mazda will invest $1.6 billion in Huntsville to build separate auto plants joined by a shared research facility. It means 4,000 jobs at an average salary of $50,000, and it's the kind of "get" political leaders love. It even drew a tweet of praise from President Trump.

Ivey and Battle shared the stage and the credit during the announcement in Montgomery, but their campaigns moved quickly to say, "Vote for us for more like this."

To show the levels of scrutiny events like this get, even the Montgomery location drew analysis. Typically, new plant announcements are made at the site, in this case Tommy Battle's Huntsville. This announcement was made in Montgomery, where Gov. Ivey reigns.

Jess Brown, a retired political science professor from Athens State University, thinks Ivey made a mistake having the event in the capital.

"I thought Gov. Ivey missed the boat by not doing that announcement in Huntsville or Limestone County and to go into that area and go in Battle's backyard with him on the stage with you," Brown said. "If you are the governor, you would control the media attention. You would've been right there in Battle's political backyard seen as making great things happening in Huntsville's backyard. I was floored."

Brown said there could be reasons Ivey might have wanted the event in Montgomery - better coverage from statewide media or another reason to be in the capital - but he still saw a missed opportunity.

"I view this as a political mistake of the governor," Brown said. "Given the magnitude of this announcement and the inevitable political benefits derived from it, it was a political mistake. This is not to say this has been an administration or a governor who routinely makes a mistake, but she should've been up there in that Athens, Decatur, Huntsville triangle."

Asked to comment on the location Wednesday, members of Team Huntsville said it was the automakers' choice. Toyota and Mazda wanted to be in the state capital with the governor, a reporter was told.

Ivey spoke first at the announcement for a little over 2 minutes, touting Alabama's workforce and saying, "This announcement would not have happened had it not been for teamwork at the state and local and county level." She also called it representative of her drive to grow business and "help the people of Alabama achieve their dreams."

Ivey praised Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield for the work "of his staff working with my staff." And she praised Battle.

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"I am also very glad to have Mayor Tommy Battle with us here today," Ivey said. "He's been an invaluable part of working at the local level in Huntsville, along with Limestone County Commission Chairman Mark Yarbrough."

When it was his turn, Battle talked about 7 minutes and thanked Ivey and Canfield up front "for another outstanding partnership."

Battle also praised Huntsville's regional partners, including Yarbrough, the Madison County Commission and Chairman Dale Strong, Morgan County Commission Chairman Ray Long, Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks and Madison Mayor Paul Finley.

Battle also praised Huntsville's City Council, TVA, Chamber of Commerce CEO Chip Cherry and, "most of all the man who put this together and kept it on track through lots of uphill travels, Shane Davis, Huntsville's urban developer. He's the one who makes it happen."

Battle spoke in detail about the process of getting the plant and about the advances like additive manufacturing that Toyota and Mazda will use there. Citing his city's history in space and defense, he said, "Huntsville will be playing a role in the evolution of this industry."

Battle repeated praise for Ivey in Huntsville Wednesday night. "This is a win for everybody," he said. "The governor called me after she had talked to Jim Lentz, the president of Toyota USA, and said, 'Congratulations, the project is coming to Huntsville,' Battle said. "I talked to the governor and we both talked about it was a team effort. I told her I was very pleased with the way (the State Department of Commerce) worked with us. We've been in negotiations and they've been right there with us.

"When good things happen for Alabama," Battle said, "we all take ownership. Success has many fathers. We'll all be father for this one."

A few hours later, both Battle and Ivey were citing the Toyota-Mazda deal as a reason to vote for them for governor.

"The new Toyota-Mazda plant is a huge deal for all of Alabama," Battle said on Facebook. "It takes a team effort to land something like this and a vision for growing jobs in our state. I have that vision and the record of leadership to bring more economic success to Alabama."

Ivey said almost the same thing on Facebook in an invitation to voters to "Join Team Ivey."

"Our hard work is paying off, and Alabama is winning," the Ivey post said. "Toyota and Mazda are investing $1.6 billion in a new auto plant and bringing 4,000 new jobs because they know Alabama now has stable, growth-minded leadership."

And Ivey went one step further. "If you want to continue Making Alabama Great Again & put even more Alabamians to work, add your name (to her team rolls)," she said.
Change sought for state education

Bills would affect school board and superintendent

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

A member of the Legislature wants to replace the Alabama State Board of Education with a select committee and make the state schools superintendent a position selected by the governor.

State Sen. Greg Albritton, R-Atmore, has pre-filed two bills in the Alabama Senate that could change the structure of decision-making for education issues across Alabama. Both bills are pending in committee.

SB24 sets a proposal to amend the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 to establish a position called “Director of Education” in lieu of having a state superintendent. The position would effectively operate as a Cabinet-level position in the governor’s office and would be selected by the governor, pending approval by the Alabama Senate.

Likewise, SB25 sets to establish a 13-member “Board of Counsel” that would be selected by the “Director of Education.” SB25 includes similar language as SB24 to create a new position in lieu of the state superintendent.

Albritton, who is the sole sponsor of both bills, said the primary factor in seeking to change the makeup of the board and its leadership was what he perceived as infighting within among board members. He mentioned controversies that arose with the selection of Michael Sentance as superintendent in 2016.

Specifically, there were questions about why the board chose Sentance, an education consultant with little classroom experience. There were also issues arising from an alleged effort linked to one

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board member, Mary Scott Hunter, to discredit Jefferson County Schools Superintendent Greg Pouncey and prevent him from getting the job despite the support of other board members.

Sentence resigned from the Alabama State Department of Education in September after months of conflict with some board members.

"Right now, if you look where we are, we have no one who can take control and no one who can accomplish what we need to accomplish," Albritton said.

In addition, Albritton said he had spoken with many educators in his district who believe the board sets standards that could not be met.

"They were verbal on how they were disgusted about jumping through hoops," he said.

In April 2016, a similar bill by state Rep. Terri Collins, R-Decatur, was withdrawn after then-Gov. Robert Bentley changed his support for the effort. The bill, HB537, set a proposal to make the state superintendent a member of the governor's Cabinet, but left the school board alone.

... Some different things developed, and I don't see the need for it at this time," Collins said then.

Different board members at the time were not in favor of Collins' bill, saying that it circumvented the power of the board by having the superintendent report to the governor as opposed to them. Likewise, Board Vice President Stephanie Bell said she was not in favor of Albritton's bills.

"It’s unfortunate that there are people in the Legislature that want to do that, but the best thing they can do is support the board with a strong education budget and let us do our job," Bell said.

Albritton said he understands board members not being in favor of the proposed bills because it threatens their jobs.

"It’s not about the individual school board members; it’s about the system that has not been able to perform," he said.

Over the years, the board has seesawed between being an appointed body
to an elected body. Currently, state school board members are elected and have been responsible for selecting the superintendent since 1969.

"With the board being elected, we want to preserve the people's voice in that regard," Bell said.

However, Albritton would like to see his proposed "Board of Counsel" be selected from different local superintendents and school board members from across the state.

Bell said that right now, the board is working on trying to find a new superintendent. Ed Richardson, who served as state superintendent from 1995 to 2004, is serving as interim superintendent.

"Right now, our focus is where it needs to be," she said.

Albritton said he will work hard to make sure more people get behind him, adding that Alabama education will get worse if nothing is done.

"Everyone thinks this will die on the vine, and it might, but if it does, it will be a hard-fought effort on my part to get something changed," he said.

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

‘A state of transformation’

Mayor talks debt-free tuition, crime in State of the Community

Erin Edgemon  eedgemon@al.com

Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin announced Monday that he plans to move forward with a proposal to provide city school graduates debt-free tuition to community colleges in Jefferson County.

The Fred Shuttlesworth Opportunity Scholarship was a promise Woodfin made during his campaign for mayor.

During his State of the Community address at Parker High School on Monday night, the mayor didn’t provide specifics on how to fund and launch the scholarship program. Woodfin said much of what he addressed during his speech would be accomplished through partnerships with other government entities, nonprofits and the private sector.

Woodfin took office Nov. 28.

“The state of our community is an open question that only you and I can answer together,” Woodfin said.

In significant ways, Birmingham is in a state of transformation,” he said. “We are making progress. At the same time, we are being held back by our lack of progress in certain respects.”

Too many Birmingham residents are living in poverty, Woodfin said. He said the city’s parks and recreation department needs to provide more services to youth, including after-school and summer programs in order to deter crime.

Woodfin also said his office is going to launch a nationwide search for a new police chief. A timeline for the search hasn’t been announced.

Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper announced Nov. 29 that he was stepping down after 10 years of service to the city. He is staying in his position during the search for a new chief.

Woodfin said he is supporting police strategies “that deter crime during peak hours in key locations.” Police officers will also be charged with engaging directly with neighborhood residents and merchants.

He said the city will do a better job moving forward in keeping the city clean. There will be streamlined process for abating weeds and demolishing abandoned homes, he said.

“An effective public works department is a critical component of real community development — of promoting long-term sustainability of our neighborhoods by expanding housing options and providing incentives to attract neighborhood-based business and commercial growth.”
Montgomery

Retirement Systems CEO opposes board’s attempt to hire attorney

Mike Cason mcason@al.com

There’s a sharp disagreement between some members of the Employees’ Retirement System Board of Control and Retirement Systems of Alabama CEO David Bronner.

At the board’s meeting in December, a proposal for the board to hire a lawyer—an independent fiduciary counsel—died on a 6-6 vote after a contentious discussion.

Bronner fought the proposal and questioned its intent.

The proposal called for the lawyer to help write a code of ethics related to companies that RSA has a stake in as a private equity owner or as a lender. RSA designates one or more corporate board members for a few of those companies in which it has so-called “private placement” investments, meaning they weren’t made through a public stock market or bond market.

Supporters of hiring the independent counsel said they wanted a code of ethics to prohibit RSA-appointed members to those corporate boards from enriching themselves through dealings with those companies. The code would also apply to RSA employees.

“We consider it of the utmost importance, as well as part of our fiduciary duty, to ensure that anyone associated with RSA assets be free of conflicts,” ERS Board Vice Chairwoman Jackie Graham said in a statement at the board meeting.

Graham, who is director of the State Personnel Department, said the board needed expert guidance on an ethics code because fiduciary issues are complex.

“These experts provide a comprehensive perspective, and most importantly, provide an independent opinion on fiduciary matters that can be particularly helpful on controversial issues,” Graham said.

Other board members who spoke out in favor of the proposal at the meeting included Finance Director Clinton Carter and Deputy Revenue Commissioner Curtis Stewart.

Bronner, who has led the RASA since 1973, said it would be unworkable for the ERS Board and the RSA to have separate legal counsels. RSA has a staff of lawyers led by General Counsel Laura Catany.

“How the hell am I supposed to sit here and run an organization and have two different lawyers telling me two different things?” Bronner said in an interview after the meeting. “How dumb would that be?”

The 13-members of the ERS Board serve as trustees of a $12 billion fund that supports pension benefits for more than 127,000 active and retired employees of state agencies, city and county governments and other public entities. The ERS funds more than $1 billion in annual payments to more than 50,000 retirees.

The ERS is part of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, which also includes the Teachers’ Retirement System and Judicial Retirement Fund and manages 23 funds with assets of more than $36 billion. The funds are supported by employer contributions (state agencies and other government entities), employee contributions and investment earnings.

Bronner said he was not opposed to a code of ethics but questioned the need. He noted that he and RSA employees are bound by the state ethics law, which prohibits using their state position for personal gain. Bronner said corporations have audit committees and disclosure requirements that scrutinize business relationships with corporate board members.

Canary, the RSA general counsel, said Alabama’s business corporation law governs the duties and conduct of all corporate board members of Alabama corporations and those that do business in the state.

“You have a fiduciary responsibility to the corporation,” Canary said. “So, if you’re going to do business with the corporation, you disclose that to the corporation and the rest of the board decides whether to do it.”

But Deputy Revenue Commissioner Stewart said he would like to have an ethics code that would not leave it up to the corporate entities to settle potential conflicts involving RSA-appointed board members.

“If it were me, whether required by state law or not, I would say that if you are representing us on one of these boards, you should not have any business dealings with that company, none at all,” Stewart said.

The dispute has simmered for several months. Some board members said they were surprised to learn that Bruce Hodges, a long-time associate of Bronner, received commission for insurance sold to New Water Street Corporation, an RSA-owned company that owns 55 Water Street, the largest office building in New York. Hodges also served on the board for New Water Street.

Hodges resigned from the New Water Street board and several others affiliated with the RSA after questions arose.

In a memo to board members in September, Bronner said Hodges resigned to avoid any appearance of a potential conflict of interest. Bronner said Hodges has been a valuable resource for RSA through his insurance expertise for decades. He said Hodges discovered that RSA was receiving $350 million in insurance for 55 Water Street while paying twice that much and was integral in collecting large claims from damages to RSA properties caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy.
INSIDE THE STATEHOUSE

Tuscaloosa wields a lot of political clout

He was a circuit judge in Tuscaloosa before his move to the state court. Tuscaloosa Circuit Judge John England previously served on the Alabama Supreme Court. He is one of the most respected men in the state. Judge England's son, Chris England, has represented Tuscaloosa in the state House of Representatives very effectively for 11 years. Chris is not only a stellar legislator; he is a practicing lawyer and an expert on Alabama football, which he grew up watching.

Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge Hardy McCol- lum has been in his office for more than 41 years. First elected in 1976, he is nearing the end of an unprecedented seventh six-year term. Over the years, he has generally been considered the most popular political figure in Tuscaloosa County.

State Sen. Gerald Allen has been representing his native Tuscaloosa County in the Legislature for 24 years. He served 16 years in the House prior to his election to the Senate in 2010. He is considered one of the most conservative members of the Senate.

Some folks believe that this time next year Tuscaloosa may regain the governor's office. The Druid City's 45-year-old mayor, Walt Maddox, will likely be the Democratic standard-bearer in the 2018 governor's race. Maddox has been the historic city's 36th mayor since 2005, which means he was first elected at the ripe old age of 32, and he is very popular in his hometown.

Although not from Tuscaloosa, some influential powerbrokers live nearby and represent the city in the halls of Congress and the state Senate. They include Congressman Robert Aderholt from Haleyville, state Sen. Greg Reed of Jasper and state Sen. Bobby Singleton of Greensboro.

Last, but certainly not least, Tuscaloosa lays claim to the most popular and consensus brightest rising star in the Alabama Legislature. Rep. Bill Poole is a crown jewel who Tuscaloosans can be very proud to call their own.

Bill earned his bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Alabama and began his law practice in Tuscaloosa in 2004. He

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fluers

From Page A6

expresses House Dis-
trict 63, which comprises
primarily the city and
suburbs of Tuscaloosa.
Bentley was the rep-
resentative from this dis-
trict prior to Poole. Tim
Parker represented
this district prior
to Bentley.

Poole came to the
House with a large group
of Republicans in 2010.
He immediately became
a leader of that group.
The entire Legislature
quickly recognized his
potential. By the end of
his first year in 2011, it
was evident that Poole
was clearly the star of
that 34-member class.

When you asked every
veteran observer of Goat
Hill about the class, the
first name on the list was
Bill Poole. He is liked and
respected by member
on both sides of the aisle.

In only his second
term, he became chair-
man of the Ways and
Means Education Budget
Committee. When Mike
Hubbard was removed as
speaker of the House, it
was a foregone conclu-
sion that Poole would
succeed him. But he
turned down the post
because he wanted to
be able to spend time
with his young family.

His utmost priority is
his wife, Niccole, and
their children, Sally,
William and Whitt-
man. The Pooles are
active members of
the First Methodist
Church of Tuscaloosa.

At 38, the sky is the
limit for Poole. How-
ever, folks in Tuscaloosa
hope he stays put. For
a city that is home to
the University of Ala-
bama, having the chair-
man of the Education
Budget Committee is
a pretty good coup.

Tuscaloosa was once
the Capitol. Some would
say essentially it is again.
In fact, preliminary
census estimates project
that Tuscaloosa
will exceed Montgomery
in population by 2030.

Steve Flowers served 16
years in the Alabama
Legislature. Read-
ers can email him at
www.steeflowers.us.
Gaining influence in the sports world
WHERE JIM CAVALE'S COMPANY GOES AFTER BIG LAUNCHPAD WIN

In the summer of 2017, Jim Cavale decided to enter a new venture that focuses heavily on the intersection of college athletics, social media and branding opportunities.

While Cavale considers himself a sports aficionado, many in the Birmingham corporate world first knew him in his previous role as president of Iron Tribe Fitness.

Using his background with Iron Tribe, he followed the social media passion by launching INFLCR (pronounced Influences). He already has seven employees and could soon complete a round of funding.

The company, which helps schools and athletes boost their brands on social media, already works with multiple Southeastern Conference deals and appears poised for more contracts in the near future.

Cavale also has an Alabama Launchpad win under his belt to look off 2018. The 88-fast down with Cavale to talk about his new company, its expansion and what will be coming in the new year.

What is the best career advice you've received? I think it's don't be all things to all people, pick a focus, and go all in on it.

What is the biggest career risk you've taken? Probably leaving Iron Tribe, which was and is still flourishing, to be able to help my wife launch her own company and to eventually launch INFLCR. I was comfortable, and we had a good thing going, but I felt that it was time, after seven years, to chase the two new passions.

How would you describe your management style? I like to lead by example, and so a lot of time that's me jumping in with my team, doing a lot of the things that I'm asking them to do, but eventually letting go because I can grow to trust them to do it better than I could.

Throughout your career who has been your mentor and what were the top lessons you learned from him or her? My father has always really been my biggest mentor. The biggest lesson I've learned from him over the years is it can take a man years, if not decades, to build up a reputation but it can take him one minute to lose it all. Just being careful about the decisions you make and the people you surround yourself with because, ultimately, those people will combine to create a lot of who you are, the decisions you make and the results of those decisions.

If you could change one career move in your life, what would it be? I had a recruiting website – my first real startup and I charged subscription revenue to my clients. I switched from a subscription to an ad revenue model, which ended up being a decision I had to come back from. That was a big learning lesson for me – never give up subscription revenue.

If you can tell your 22-year-old self anything, what would it be? Invest in Apple. You are one of the only people right now who has an Apple computer, and it is going to be a huge company. Don't just invest in Apple, invest in anything you use – not to make money but because you believe in it.

What is your favorite thing about Birmingham? There's a lot. You know, I think my favorite thing is the room for growth. You know, we have an amazing opportunity to grow because we have a good quantity and quality of people, more than a million people - and they're good people. You combine that with great cost of living, great cost of doing business, proximity to other markets that might have some things going on that we don't, like Atlanta and Nashville, I think you have a recipe for huge success, and so that gap between where we are now and where we can grow is something that motivates me and has kept me here for 15 years, being originally from New York.

Is there anything you think Birmingham can do to improve? Yeah, it actually goes back to the people again, and it goes back to their self-identity with this city. People from here – whether they are born and raised here or whether they're like me and are a transplant – need to take a lot more pride in being from there, not just from Alabama, but from Birmingham. And how they talk about it when they are in other places or even amongst their peers here is very important, and I would like to see people's internal messaging improve greatly to sell all things I said are great about this city. I think if that happens, people will believe it more and people will unite more to create the growth. Central government wouldn't hurt either.

What are some words you live by or run your company by? "You get out what you put in." "Nothing comes easy." Jim Valvano's quote in the last speech before he died was, "Every day you should laugh, you should cry and you should spend time in thought." So laugh, cry and think is something we live and work by.

Finally, for me, thinking with decisions and with everything I do with an eternal lens, because of my faith. We believe everything here is temporary, and there is a bigger picture that I'm living for through my creator and the sacrifice his son made for me.

For the immediate future, in terms of expansions, are you focusing on the Southeast or looking to go to farther? We've been blessed with multiple SEC deals really early on and those deals give us a ton of credibility, and we're thankful for that opportunity. We're about to close a deal with our first ACC team, we're about to close a deal with our first Pac-12 team, and we're excited to announce deals with all of the Power 5 conferences in the first quarter of 2019. We're also starting to talk to conferences and pro sports agencies about ways our software can serve them.

Reporter Tyler Patchen conducted this interview. You can reach him at tpatchen@birminghamjournal.com.
Coca-Cola, Golden Flake honor Tide's title

The two products have a long association with UA football

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Two product lines that teamed up in a memorable promotion for "The Bear Bryant Show" are now part of the marketing blitz celebrating the University of Alabama's 17th national championship in football.

Coca-Cola has released a limited-edition Coca-Cola can — available in six-packs — that features the custom logo commemorating Alabama's 17th national football championship, while Golden Flake has released a collectible canister that includes potato chips inscribed with the final score of UA's Jan. 8 victory over the University of Georgia.

The soft drink and snack makers have been associated with Alabama football dating back to the football highlight show hosted by Paul W. "Bear" Bryant, who coached at UA from 1958 to 1982.

Each episode of "The Bear Bryant Show" began with Bryant twisting off the cap of a Coke bottle and opening a Golden Flake bag. Billboards, refrigerator magnets and other promotional items had images of Bryant, a Coca-Cola bottle and a bag of Golden Flake chips with the slogan "Great Pair Says the Bear."

The commemorative cans of Coca-Cola will be available at Saturday's national championship celebration outside Bryant-Denny Stadium. The celebration begins at 2 p.m. with a parade from Denny Chimes to the Walk of Fame outside the stadium. Six-packs of the commemorative cans are now on sale at participating retailers in Alabama.

The Golden Flake canister will be available soon in stores, but fans can order one online at www.goldenflake.com for $17.95 plus $15 shipping and handling.

Cans of Coca-Cola and a canister from Golden Flake have been produced to honor the University of Alabama's 17th college football championship. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)
Details for UA championship parade announced

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama Athletics Department will give away 20,000 pieces of memorabilia Saturday during a celebration of the Crimson Tide’s victory in the College Football Playoff National Championship last week. The festivities will kick off at 2 p.m. when coach Nick Saban and his wife Terry will join the football team, the Million Dollar Band, Crimson Tide Cheerleaders, and fans in attendance in a short parade from Denny Chimes to the Walk of Champions and the steps of Bryant-Denny Stadium.

There, Alabama Athletics Director Greg Byrne will join CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock, Southeastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey and other dignitaries to present the team with the CFP National Championship trophy and

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PARADE

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away 10,000 championship posters and another 10,000 championship promotional items.
Anyone unable to make it to campus can listen in on the Crimson Tide Sports Radio Network or watch the celebration on the SEC Network, the Watch ESPN app, RollTide.com and on Facebook Live. Broadcasts are expected to begin at 2 and end at 3.

Fans can also arrive early to have their picture taken with the AFCA Amway Coaches Trophy, which will be on display on the Walk of Champions beginning at 11:30 Saturday morning. Alabama defeated Georgia 26-23 in overtime in the championship game on Jan. 8 in Atlanta. It’s the Crimson Tide’s 17th national title and fifth in nine years.
‘Bryant shark’ fossils found in central Alabama

Dennis Pillion dpillion@al.com

About 83 million years before Paul “Bear” Bryant coached his first football game at the University of Alabama, a shark that now shares his name was tearing into defenseless fishes in the shallow seas of central Alabama.

Paleontologists working at the McWane Science Center in Birmingham and the Alabama Museum of Natural History in Tuscaloosa have found at least 33 individual teeth from a previously unknown species of shark that they are naming Cretalamna bryanti, or the Bryant shark.

Jon Ebersole — director of collections at the McWane Center and lead author of the paper describing the new species — said the shark was named the Bryant shark in honor of the family of the former Alabama football coach to recognize their contributions to education in the state.

“Everybody is familiar with ‘Bear’ Bryant, but it’s actually for the entire Bryant family,” Ebersole said. “The members of the Bryant family have been long time supporters of not only McWane Science Center, but also the Alabama Museum of Natural History in Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama.

“This new species honors the Bryant family’s long-standing commitment to education in our state.”

The discovery of the new species was published Jan. 8 in the online peer-reviewed scientific journal PeerJ, on the same day the Crimson Tide won the college football national championship.

Ebersole said the timing was coincidental and the publication was scheduled before it was assured Alabama would be in the title game, but it gave him a little extra incentive to cheer on the Tide.

WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?

The Bryant shark is part of the otodontid, or “mega-tooth” family of sharks, which evolved more than 100 million years ago. These mega-tooth sharks eventually gave rise to the famous megalodon, a giant shark with teeth up to 7 inches long.

Based on comparisons to modern sharks, paleontologists believe that would make megalodon capable of reaching 50-60 feet in length with jaws 8 feet across.

“These are the largest sharks that ever lived, culminating in megalodon, which was by far the world’s largest shark,” Ebersole said.

The Bryant shark, Ebersole said, was nowhere near that size. The largest of the 33 fossilized teeth belonging to this new species is one inch long. Ebersole said that means the Bryant shark would look more like a large modern-day mako shark than the monstrous megalodon, but it may have been the behemoth’s direct ancestor.

“Even though they’re unrelated, the shapes of the teeth look a lot like mako sharks,” he said. “So probably, it looked like a mako shark, a great white shark, something in that ballpark.”

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SHARK
FROM AI

Speculating about ancient sharks is difficult because their teeth are usually the only things that survive the millions of years from the time oceans covered much of Alabama until now. The rest of the shark's skeleton is made of cartilage, and with the very rare exception of a preserved vertebrae, nothing else persists.

But scientists can tell how big the teeth are, where they sat in the shark's mouth (front, middle, back), and how old they are.

The Bryant shark lived in the late Cretaceous Period, about 83 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the land. Megalodon emerged about 26 million years ago and disappears from the fossil record around 2.6 million years ago.

While there were many species of otodontids in the late Cretaceous, the Bryant shark appears to have been among those to survive the extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs.

"There was an extinction event 65 million years ago where a lot of these (otodontids) died out," Ebersole said. "This seems to be one of the ones that made it through, then leading directly to megalodon."

The Bryant shark's teeth are narrower than megalodon and have smaller protrusions called cuspids on either side. Ebersole said over the ensuing 40 million years, the otodontids developed serrated edges on their teeth, lost the cuspids and grew much larger in size.

FOUND IN THE BLACK BELT

Several of the Bryant shark teeth were found at sites in the Black Belt Counties of Alabama, just south of Tuscaloosa, in Greene, Hale, Dallas and Montgomery Counties.

Ebersole said those are the areas in Alabama which — at the time of the Bryant shark — would have provided the shallow ocean habitat favored by many shark species.

"The central part of Alabama, these are our dinosaur-age marine rocks in
A shot of mako shark NOAA.gov

"Shark..."

"They still have to call it the Bryant, found everywhere else in the world, were found first here, so if they're everywhere, that's near that they..."

"These things should be..."
National trail of historic sites was launched Monday

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Foster Auditorium on the University of Alabama campus is included on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, which was launched Monday to coincide with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

The auditorium was the site of the infamous "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" on June 11, 1963, when then-Gov. George C. Wallace tried to block the enrollment of two black students at UA. After denouncing the federal effort to desegregate UA, Wallace stepped aside and the students, Vivian Malone Jones and James Hood, were allowed to enroll.

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TRAIL
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"The subject of human rights has never been more relevant," Sentell said in a news release Monday. "The landmarks in Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery already attract visitors from Britain, Europe and Australia as well as from the U.S."

In 2010, UA dedicated a plaza and clock tower outside Foster Auditorium that honors Malone, Hood and Atherine Lucy, a black student who briefly enrolled at UA in 1956.

Monday was the culmination of two years of work to create the U.S. Civil Rights Trail. Two years ago, National Park Service director Jonathan Jarvis challenged historians to create an inventory of civil rights landmarks. Researchers at Georgia State University found 60 sites, which became the foundation of the trail.

Lee Sentell, Alabama's tourism director, helped spearhead an effort by TravelSouth USA to have the 12 Southern states represent the list with other worthy sites. The result is a trail that stretches from schools in Topeka, Kansas, known for the Brown v. Board of Education desegregation court decision in 1954, to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., where King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech to thousands who rallied for equal opportunity in 1963.

Sentell said civil rights sites are already popular attractions, and the U.S. Civil Rights Trail will only increase that popularity.

"The subject of human rights has never been more relevant," Sentell said in a news release Monday. "The landmarks in Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery already attract visitors from Britain, Europe and Australia as well as from the U.S."

The trail includes almost 130 museums, churches, courthouses and other landmarks that were essential to the civil right movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Almost 30 of these sites are in Alabama.

The website www.civilrightstrail.com profiles the landmarks and offers an interactive map, interviews with foot soldiers, past and present photographs and 360-degree video as special features.

The Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Task Force has also created a trail that focuses on local points of interest in the civil rights movement. To view the Tuscaloosa trail, go to www.civilrightstuscaloosa.org.

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Alabama’s sites on the trail

- **Anniston:** Freedom Riders National Monument
- **Birmingham:** 16th Street Baptist Church, Bethel Baptist Church, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Kelly Ingram Park
- **Monroeville:** Old Courthouse Museum
- **Montgomery:** Alabama State Capitol, City of St. Jude, Civil Rights Memorial Center, Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, Dexter Parsonage Museum; First Baptist Church on Riley Street, Frank M. Johnson Jr. Federal Building and United States Courthouse, Freedom Rides Museum, Holt Street Baptist Church, Rosa Parks Museum
- **Scottsboro:** The Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center
- **Selma:** Brown Chapel AME Church, Edmund Pettus Bridge, Lowndes Interpretive Center, National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, Selma Interpretive Center, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, The Sullivan and Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson Foundation and Museum
- **Tuscaloosa:** Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama
- **Tuskegee:** Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, Tuskegee History Center, Tuskegee University
Unique club chose to support UA football nearly 50 years ago
BOOSTERS

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Johnny Nicola, who has served as president of the Bridgeport Bama Booster Club since its founding, said it was more than football that solidified his love of the University of Alabama.

"The people were just the nicest people in the world," he said. "They could tell we were from the North because you could tell a Yankee, but they were so polite and friendly.

"We couldn't get over it."

Sam Franzone, a member for the past 30 years, said Alabama football has served to bind the group together.

"Once you go to your first Alabama game, you get hooked," Franzone said.

At its peak, the club had between 40 to 50 members, but the number has dwindled to about 14 in the last few years. Some local newspapers at the time referred to the group as the "Italian Battalion" because most of the club members were of Italian descent.

One achievement by the club happened on Dec. 19, 1979, when they hosted a banquet in Bridgeport featuring Bryant as special guest speaker.

"There was a snowstorm that night, but over 500 people came out to see coach Bryant," Johnny Nicola said.

Before Bryant's death in 1983, Nicola and other members visited Bryant and the team numerous times. The club has also visited subsequent UA football coaches: Gene Stallings, Mike Shula and Nick Saban.

In its existence, club members have attended many football games and hosted parties in Birmingham for Alabama fans back when the team played at Legion Field in Birmingham. This year, three of its members went to the College Football Playoff National Championship in Atlanta, where Alabama beat Georgia 26-23 in overtime.

"It was amazing," said
Nick Chiccino, Johnny Nicola's nephew, a 10-year club member who was at the championship game.

Following a long-held tradition, the club bought out a billboard in the neighboring city of Norristown following the game to celebrate the team's championship. In bold letters, the sign reads "They Have A Name For The Winners Of The World," followed by "They Call Alabama The Crimson Tide," a line from the Steely Dan song "Deacon Blues."

However, the club has done more than just attend football games. Over the years, the club has created endowments to help send students from Pennsylvania to the University of Alabama. Johnny Nicola estimates more than 100 students have gone to the university thanks to money the club raised through its annual golf tournaments.

"I'm glad that when I see a lot of the kids, they have Bama shirts on," Johnny Nicola said.

Bob Ruggiano has been a member of the club since 1972 and has been to many Alabama games over the years. The highlight of his time in the club was getting to know Bryant.

"He was like a guy you would meet in your local store," Ruggiano said. "He was so down-to-earth."

What has bound the club together over the years has not been just a love for Alabama football, but a love for one another. Like Ruggiano, many people in the club grew up in Bridgeport together.

"I grew up with Johnny," Ruggiano said. "The camaraderie has always been great."

Franzone said that like Alabama football, the club is bound by tradition.

"Back in the day, everyone knew everyone in Bridgeport," he said. "We're a family here."

George Lombardo, a member of the club since 1988, knew Johnny Nicola as a boy and came into the club from friends and family. However, the passion Lombardo has for the team has grown over the years.

"You hear all the time about how (Philadelphia) Eagles fans are crazy, but it's really about passion," Lombardo said. "You get this passion in you that never goes away."

Members are optimistic about the future of the club, although it remains uncertain for how it can continue. Johnny Nicola is 75 years old, Jerry Nicola died in 2009 and many of the founding members have since passed away. Nicola hopes the younger generation, like Chiccino and Lombardo, taken the reins and continue the legacy.

"All they have to do is continue and support the university," he said. "All the guys want the best for the club."

Franzone said the love of the Crimson Tide will carry the club.

"We have no intention of stopping," he said.

Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
Signs will be placed near University of Central Florida

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

A Tuscaloosa man and lifelong Alabama fan is raising money to fire back a good-natured response to at University of Central Florida fans that placed a billboard in Tuscaloosa this week.

After Alabama won the College Football Playoff on Monday, 37 UCF fans collected money online to pay for a digital billboard on McFarland Boulevard, reading “Congratulations Alabama! How about a home & home series with UCF?”

Robert Moore was joking when he dashed off a Facebook post, saying he’d like to collect money to place a response billboard in Orlando. But he decided to follow through the more he thought about it and realized he’d have support.

“I’ve had a few people say they’d chip in,” he said.

Moore has spoken to a company in Orlando and has set up a GoFundMe page where people can contribute toward the $2,400 price of two billboards on a main drag between the UCF campus and downtown Orlando for four weeks. He said the billboards will include a photo of coach Nick Saban and the team on stage holding the trophy after the game, with a message congratulating UCF on their undefeated season, but warning them to be careful what they wish for.

The final AP poll had Alabama ranked No. 1 and Central Florida ranked sixth. UA earned the College Football Playoff trophy with its win over Georgia at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. Alabama running back Bo Scarbrough, who announced his intentions to go pro Thursday, told reporters he wouldn’t

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FAN

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already, so it would be a good game to see,” he said.

UA defensive back Ronnie Harrison, also leaving for the NFL Draft, said "I’d definitely have to come back and participate, I’d have to for that one."
Used racist and profane language referring to African-Americans

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama student who repeatedly used racist language while referring to African-Americans in a series of videos posted on social media is no longer enrolled at the university and has been expelled from her sorority.

In a series of videos, a young woman identified as Harley Barber, a former UA student and member of UA's Alpha Phi sorority chapter, repeatedly used racist and profane language referring to African-Americans. The videos sparked an outcry and calls for her expulsion on Tuesday and Wednesday.

“Like many of you, I find the videos highly offensive and deeply hurtful, not only to our students and our entire university community, but to everyone who viewed them. The actions of this student do not represent the larger student body or the values of our university, and she is no longer enrolled here.”

The university declined to clarify whether Barber withdrew from UA or was expelled. UA Associate Vice President for Communications Monica G. Watts said the university could only release that Barber was no longer enrolled. Barber did not respond to requests for comment but in an interview published by the New York Post on Wednesday apologized for the video and said she was in the process of moving home to New Jersey.

The videos also drew condemnation from the sorority’s

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national leadership, which issued a statement that Barber had been kicked out of the UA chapter.

"Alpha Phi is a diverse, values-based organization and condemns the language and opinions in these videos. They are offensive and hateful to both our own members and to other members of the Greek and campus community. The Beta Mu chapter leadership and supporting alumnae moved quickly to address the offense, and Ms. Barber is no longer a member of Alpha Phi," Alpha Phi International Fraternity Executive Director Linda Kahangi said.

The videos drew the attention of current and former Alabama football players, including New York Giants safety Landon Collins, who said Alabama football didn't need the support of anyone who condones racist rhetoric and behavior.

Bell also used his statement Wednesday to promote diversity resources on campus for those affected by the videos.

"Over the last year, I have had conversations with many of you who shared your UA experiences with me," Bell said. "You have voiced your pride in the progress we have made, but we still have much work to do. I want to thank all of the students, faculty and staff who met today to have conversations about this event and the steps we can take, individually and collectively, to create a more welcoming and inclusive campus."

University of Alabama students held a rally Wednesday in response to another student's use of racist language in a video that went viral this week. [PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIM REID/CBS 42]

University of Alabama students held a rally Wednesday in response to another student's use of racist language in a video that went viral this week.

UA has faced criticism for what have been seen as enduring diversity issues on campus, particularly with regard to its Greek system, which includes about a third of students on campus and is one of the largest in the country.

The outcry in 2013 over accounts reported in the student newspaper that some black women were passed over for sorority bids because of their race was part of the impetus that led to the creation of a new Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and reforms to the Greek system.

As part of a five-year strategic plan, Bell established the new office to help enhance diversity and inclusivity on campus. G. Christine Taylor, the first vice president and associate provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, arrived on campus this fall.

UA announced an action plan in 2016 to increase diversity in its sororities and fraternities and enhance its ability to prevent and respond to reports of discrimination.

As part of the diversity plan, fraternities and sororities were required to amend their constitutions, undergo annual training, develop and submit diversity plans including initiatives and education programs, and post policy information in residential facilities. If fraternities and sororities fail to comply, they run the risk of sanctions or loss of university recognition.

While the racist video posts may be included in an annual diversity report for the Greek system, Watts said they may not require action under the 2016 plan.

"It doesn't necessarily fall under the requirements of the action plan," Watts said.
Conversation continues after racist incident

By Camille Studebaker | Assistant News Editor

Around 100 people, including both students and staff, gathered for a discussion about racism at an open weekly conversation on Wednesday in the Ferguson Center, in response to malicious videos exposed on Monday.

Lane McLeiand, director of Crossroads Community Center, said this is a place for students to talk about experiences and impacts on their lives and is an inclusive, sharing space for listening to each other.

It's disparaging comments like this... that basically devalue my degree and make it hard for all of us to leave The University of Alabama... and be proud of the institution which we gained our knowledge from.

- Resha Swanson

After Taylor spoke, students, staff and a moderator broke up into seven different groups, sat in a circle and began conversation about the recent racist videos posted by a now former UA student. Groups discussed reactions.

"My personal reaction to the incident was not surprised but still outraged," said Resha Swanson, a junior majoring in social work and Spanish. "I mean, it's disparaging comments like this and incidents like this that basically devalue my degree and make it hard for all of us to leave The University of Alabama and go to an employer and be proud of the institution which we gained our knowledge from. So, for me, I'm just definitely angered as both an African-American student who pays tuition dollars here and someone who generally has to interact with people that believe these things on campus on an everyday basis."

There were many questions asked about how it is OK to say racial slurs of this magnitude. Students spoke out about the other girls who were included in the video, but not punished, who seemed to encourage the language used. Some said the other girls in the video need education on the word itself, its history and the immensity of it, and that they need to be held responsible for accepting the behavior of their peer.

Some students agreed that an incident of this extent is not just an isolated event but a recurring problem that needs to be solved.

A common recommendation among students was that students should be required to take a diversity class to help people understand everyone's different backgrounds and expose people to what they may not be otherwise exposed to.

"I think the conversation went generally well," Swanson, a group moderator, said. "It was good to kind of get everyone's opinions and views on the matter and see
what everyone else’s reactions were to the incident.”

After each group had discussions about the videos and further actions that could be taken, each moderator spoke to the entire group about what their group talked about.

Common thoughts among groups were there is a need for students to communicate better to one another about what is and what is not appropriate, a need for more collaboration amongst minority communities, students should take diversity training, students need to keep pressing administration that this is not just a single issue, students need evidence from administration that change has happened, and students need to take more personal responsibility and recognize their role in the silent majority and how it can affect others.

Other frequent recommendations for the administration were that the administration should send out emails updating students on incidents like this and transparency from the institution as a whole is important to students.

“I think conversations like this are definitely important in terms of moving forward, helping people understand what was wrong with the situation, where we can go from here, but I would definitely love to see some action come out of it and maybe some new policies,” Swanson said. “Whether that’s dealing with the fraternities or sororities or the women involved in the video or however they want to deal with it, I would definitely love to see some action come out of the conversation as well.”

If you pay tuition, this is your school. If you pay tuition, you’ve got a seat here, you’ve got a voice here, so we’ve got to collectively find out what could we do to hold each other accountable

- Christine Taylor

Crossroads Community Center, Ferguson Student Center, Intercultural Diversity Center, UA Housing and Student Care and Well-being were all represented at the event. These conversations are hosted by the Office of Student Involvement weekly on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. in the Ferguson Center to discuss campus issues.
Stadium could boost momentum for North Bham
Initiative continues to bring young professionals to the city

By: Bayne Hughes

Heather Ferrara and Josh McMurray didn’t initially consider living in Decatur after landing new jobs in north Alabama.

Both said they first looked at Madison and Huntsville, before the Best and Brightest Initiative — a program focused on attracting young professionals to Decatur — convinced the pair to move to the city.

Ferrara and McMurray are members of the Best and Brightest Initiative’s second class. With funding from private donations, the initiative provides young professionals in the science, technology, engineering and math fields with up to $3,000 a year to go toward student loans in return for a five-year commitment to live in the Decatur city limits.

Members of the second class are Ferrara, formerly of Eaton, Colorado; Ken Still and Jarrod Roberts Moore, both from Huntsville; Joshua Gaines, formerly of Moulton; and McMurray, who lived in Trinity.

Executive Director John Joseph said he is keeping each class small so the initiative can provide a high level of services. Including spouses, the initiative has attracted 20 young professionals to the city.

This year, the initiative is focusing on improving mentoring and employer networking that’s offered to participants, he said.

“We don’t have a good template of incorporating people’s lives into the community, so we’re trying to integrate them in different ways,” Joseph said.

Unlike the first class, this year there are no Decatur natives returning home. Two participants are from Lawrence County. This is the first group with married participants. One of the married participants has three children.

Ferrara said her uncle, Michael Medina, lives in the area, so she accepted a job as a metallurgist at Nucor Steel in Decatur after graduating in May from Colorado School of Mines. She moved to Decatur in August.

She said attending a school that specializes in engineering was expensive, so she was grateful Nucor human resources told her about the Best and Brightest Initiative.

“When I spoke to John, he told me they were trying to get more young professionals,” Ferrara said, “and the initiative would make it easier for us to get involved in the community.”

Ferrara, 24, and her husband, Kristopher Small, recently bought a home, and she said they are happy with their decision to live in Decatur. He is an emergency medical technician who is working to become a paramedic while he works at Supreme Beverages.

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“We’re still in transition mode, but I think Kris was meant to be born a Southerner,” Ferrara said. “I love my new job. We love the river. We definitely plan to stay awhile.”

As a native of the Trinity-Caddo area, Decatur isn’t new territory for McMurray. The University of Alabama in Huntsville graduate in physics said he initially looked in Madison and Huntsville because he wanted to be close to his new job at the Polaris plant in Greenbrier. He also considered several out-of-state opportunities.

“I wanted to live somewhere that I can be a part of the community,” McMurray said.

McMurray, 29, said he and his girlfriend are happy since moving to Decatur about six weeks ago. They recently purchased a home.

“I’m in a good spot,” McMurray said. “I’ve got a great house, and it’s an easy trip to work.”

McMurray said he’s excited about the mentoring the initiative offers.

“I’ve spoken with John about talking to someone at AIDT (Alabama Industrial Development and Training) about getting Six Sigma training, which is a big deal in manufacturing,” McMurray said.
Finney: Relax. Posting selfies to Instagram doesn't make you a narcissist.

By: Daniel P. Finney

I limped to the end of 2017. I faced personal strife and mental health struggles that challenged me to ask very difficult questions about myself.

I've made no secret to regular readers of these paragraphs that I struggle with self-esteem. The truth: I don't like myself very much and usually feel like I can't get anything right.

That's a difficult admission to make in a conversational climate in which everyone seems eager to exploit the perceived weaknesses they see in others for no other gain than a sharply worded tweet.

So, after the crisis passed and my mind settled, I resolved to embrace kindness and engage empathy in my work, seeking out stories for my columns that showed the decency of humanity.

My therapist suggested I attempt to extend a little of that empathy and kindness to myself.

I returned to the gym after the holidays. I vowed to accept compliments when they were given and at least try to accept expressions of affection and love from others.

I wanted to stop wincing when I saw my own face in the mirror, so I came up with a project: I would take a selfie every day of 2018.

It was hardly an original idea.

I wondered how I would feel about myself when I looked back at that face from Jan. 1 at the end of the year. I posted the pictures to my Instagram account, which also post automatically to my Twitter feed and personal Facebook page.

A week into the year, I was having some fun with the picture-taking and getting used to looking at my face without instant revulsion.

But then I read a story on Business Weekly's site with the tweeted headline: "7 habits of narcissists on Instagram."

Uh-oh.

I clicked and discovered I was guilty of two of the seven items listed as signs: I post more selfies, and I post photos of my progress toward health and fitness goals.

Am I a narcissist?

It's hardly a compliment to be called one. The word describes a person who has an excessive sense of self-importance, need for admiration and lack of empathy for others.

This was the opposite direction I wanted to be headed, especially in terms of empathy.
I decided to scratch at the science behind the story.

The Business Weekly article cited two studies, one published in 2016 by researchers from the University of Alabama-Huntsville. The other was a joint study between two South Korean universities and the University of Texas-Austin.

Both surveys used sample sizes of more than 200 people, which may seem small against Instagram's roster of more than 800 million users. But 200 is, in fact, a good sample size for data purposes, said Zlatan Krizan, associate professor of psychology at Iowa State University.

Krizan has studied selfies, narcissism and other social media behavior. He cautioned me that the biggest trouble with making scientific conclusions about social media behavior is the newness of the technology.

"Instagram is less than 8 years old," he said. "That is a very small period to make meaningful observations."

Dan Chibnall, a librarian at Drake University who specializes in science communication, said another way to evaluate stories in the news media is whether they quote from the summary of a survey — which is usually available for free on the scientific journal's website — or if they are looking at the entire journal article, which typically costs money.

I didn't pay to access either survey, and I don't know whether Business Weekly did either. But the article didn't appear to make any statements that weren't in the free abstracts.

"One of the biggest traps the news media falls into is applying very broad conclusions from scientific research that may have a very narrow focus," Chibnall said.

Both Chibnall and Krizan said two of the most important details about the studies were that they drew from specific, isolated populations — people who live in South Korea in one study and college students in the other.

Also, the surveys both involved self-reporting by participants.

"Self-reporting and surveys are valuable tools, but they can lead to skewed data if the person answering survey questions wants to appear a certain way," Kirzan said.

For years, I've argued that news organizations get bad data from audience surveys because people answer even the best-written questions with an eye toward wanting to seem smart and informed.

People say they want certain kinds of information from their news sources, but no one says they want more stories about ax murderers.

But if there happens to be an ax murderer running around town, I guarantee the ratings and website metrics for those stories would be robust.

So, back to the original question: Does posting a lot of selfies to Instagram make us narcissists?

See next page
In short, Krizan said, no, it does not.

"We are probably looking at more of a technological and social change than we are an increase in the number of narcissists," he said.

As for me, well, I'm going to keep at my little project.

I'm secure that I'm not a narcissist. After all, I'm not doing this for external likes; I'm just trying to appeal to my internal one.
James “Skip” Thompson Sworn In As TVA Board Member

By: Staff

James “Skip” Thompson, of Decatur, Al., on Friday officially assumed his role as a member of the Tennessee Valley Authority board of directors after taking the oath of office in a ceremony in Huntsville, Al. His term will expire on May 18, 2021.

Mr. Thompson was nominated by President Donald Trump on Sept. 21, 2017, and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Dec. 21. He was sworn in by U.S. District Senior Judge C. Lynwood Smith, Jr., of the Northern District of Alabama.

“Having grown up in Decatur in the shadow of the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant, I’ve always been impressed by the continued importance of TVA’s mission of energy, environmental stewardship and economic development,” said Mr. Thompson. “I’m honored to have the opportunity to do my part to serve the people of the Tennessee Valley as a board member.”

Director Thompson lives in Decatur, Al., and serves as the president and CEO of Corporate Billing LLC, a subsidiary of the National Bank of Commerce, Birmingham, Al. He previously served as the president and CEO of First American Bank in Decatur and as president and CEO of First Commercial Bank of Huntsville.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Alabama, Huntsville.

Mr. Thompson is one of four newly confirmed appointees to the TVA board of directors along with Jeff W. Smith of Knoxville, Kenneth Allen of White Plains, Ky., and A.D. Frazier of Mineral Bluff, Ga. They will join current TVA Chair Richard Howorth of Oxford, Ms., and Directors Virginia Lodge of Nashville, Eric Satz of Nashville, and Ronald Walter of Memphis.

One additional vacancy remains on the nine-member board, which next meets on Feb. 16, in Chattanooga.
‘Allen who?’

New Auburn athletics director Allen Greene, a Notre Dame alum, is an outsider with fresh ideas and could be the anti-Jay Jacobs.

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

It’s one of the guiding principles of intercollegiate athletics job searches. If you’re going to make a change, make a change.

If you change coaches and the last person in charge was an offensive genius light on discipline, go find a defensive mastermind known as a drill sergeant.

If you change athletics directors and the last boss was the ultimate insider, go get someone with fresh ideas with no ties to the university.

That’s exactly what Auburn’s done by tapping the University of Buffalo’s Allen Greene as its next athletics director. At first glance, he may be the anti-Jay Jacobs.

Jacobs is as Auburn as Auburn gets. He went to school on the Plains, played football for the Tigers and spent virtually his entire professional career there. He’s a spiritual son of Pat Dye in so many ways.

Greene, who will be introduced in a Friday morning news conference, knows the way to Auburn, having worked at Ole Miss, but he’s a Seattle native who played baseball at Notre Dame and in the New York Yankees farm system. He’s worked at Notre Dame, Ole Miss and Buffalo and in private business.

If Greene and Jacobs have one thing in common, it’s a critical component of an AD’s job. It’s a history as an accomplished fundraiser.

Not many people knew that as word of Greene’s selection spread Wednesday night. Reaction from Auburn supporters ranged from surprise to shock, and that goes for the fans in the streets as well as the bigwigs in the stadium suites.

There’s been a lot of “Allen who?” going around.

An industry insider with knowledge of the search said this is a perfect example of the Parker Executive Search firm fraternity at work. Auburn enlisted Parker’s services in looking for a new AD. Parker is close to UCF AD Danny White. The firm worked on the search that landed White the UCF job and helped him hire football coach Scott Frost and basketball coach Johnny Dawkins.

See SCARBINSKY, B3

If you change athletics directors and the last boss was the ultimate insider, go get someone with fresh ideas with no ties to the university.

That’s exactly what Auburn’s done by tapping the University of Buffalo’s Allen Greene ...

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SCARBINSKY
FROM BI

White is close to Greene. They're former Notre Dame athletes — White played basketball there — who worked together at Ole Miss before both moved to Buffalo with White as AD and Greene as senior associate AD. When White left Buffalo for Central Florida two years ago, Greene succeeded him as the Buffalo AD.

Auburn may have had some interest in hiring White himself as athletics director, but instead his connection to Greene helped his former colleague become the new AD on the Plains.

To the people that know him, Greene is a rising star in intercollegiate athletics, but he's entering a new world at Auburn. He's been a Group of Five AD for just two years. He's never fired or hired a football or men's basketball coach, let alone done it in the SEC. Is he ready for challenges on a much larger scale than anything he faced at a MAC school in Buffalo?

Greene inherits a football coach in Gus Malzahn who's almost untouchable thanks to his new seven-year $49-million contract; a basketball program having a great season under the unresolved cloud of an FBI investigation; and a staff that's been described by insiders as bloated and out-of-step with modern practices.

For years, Auburn insiders have howled that Jacobs overstayed his welcome as AD and the department was in desperate need of change. It's hard to imagine a more dramatic change than the transition from Jacobs to Greene.
Daboll's exit leaves another question for offense

New coordinator will be instrumental in choosing Tide's starting QB in 2018

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The whole continuity things remains evasive for Alabama's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks.

Three (almost) complete seasons with Lane Kiffin had three different passers. Then it was Steve Sarkisian for a game and Brian Daboll for a season. The NFL claimed those two, Daboll heading to the Buffalo Bills in a move announced Sunday.

It comes at a fascinating time for this Crimson Tide offense. Two qualified candidates are primed for a spring football quarterback competition unlike any Alabama's seen. You just don't find many scenarios like a two-year starter being replaced by a true freshman at halftime in a national title game-changing substitution.

The kind of offensive coordinator who replaces Daboll could say a lot about the direction Nick Saban intends for that side of the ball. Someone with a spread passing background would seem to favor Tua Tagovailoa's style.

Both can run, though Hurts is more of the straight-ahead, read-option player.

"I think Jalen, he's the kind of guy coach (Lane) Kiffin likes to quarterback," former Alabama quarterback Jake Coker said last week on WNSP-FM in Mobile. "A mobile guy who can make plays with his feet and gives you a lot of options. Coach (Brian) Daboll's approach to offensive football is different."

Tagovailoa played every snap against Georgia either tied or behind. He's the guy you want when the chips are down. Hurts is the safer option with one interception in 255 passes. Tagovailoa had two in 77 attempts.

Whoever gets the job will have some work to do with his passers. For Hurts, it's a matter of helping him find comfort in the pocket, scanning the different options without balling too soon. Tagovailoa also had his freshman moments as a passer and deciding when to get rid of the ball. The sack before the game-winner against Georgia is something that can improve with some off-season work.

This is a coordinator who'll have a young core of skill players and vets like Damien Harris at running back, Jonah Williams at left tackle and Hale Hentges at tight end.

It's worth remembering the Alabama defense is also replacing coordinator Jeremy Pruitt along with the entire starting secondary. That dynamic could make for the need to be more aggressive on offense.

And, as always when Alabama's hiring a new offensive coordinator, Saban's philosophy remains the guiding principle. Nobody is coming into this program and changing the spirit of the way Saban wants things done.

SEE OFFENSE, B3
OFFENSE
FROM B1

There are easier jobs out there. Being Saban's offensive coordinator perhaps ranks among the more challenging positions in college football. Just look at the recent turnover.

A few current and former Alabama players have voiced social media support for current Tide receivers coach Mike Locksley, a former offensive coordinator and head coach.

Saban has not promoted from within the on-field coaching staff for a coordinator job since Kirby Smart in 2008. Sarkisian was an analyst when getting the ultimately brief call up in 2016.

In Locksley Alabama would have some degree of continuity even without a returning coordinator/starting QB combo possible again.

More than a week passed before Daboll was hired last offseason, but that luxury of waiting isn't there this time. The Daboll hire followed National Signing Day. Alabama is still trying to wrap up its 2018 class. Though a majority of the class signed in December, a few important positions have vacancies in this group.

That includes a quarterback and any prospect will want to know the direction of the offense before signing next month.
Alabama had never won a championship quite like this

By: Kevin Scarbinsky

When you need all of your fingers and most of your toes to count your national championships, the latest addition to the trophy hallway could be just another digit. Thirteen, 14, 15, 16 ... Stop me if you thought you'd seen it all before.

The names would change, but that number rolled on. Alabama's long assembly line of achievement had been upgraded to something approaching a perfect football machine at the hand of Nick Saban.

Then came the 2017 season and the quest for 17, and so many things changed.

Those familiar feelings of invincibility and inevitability. The iron grip on the Iron Bowl and the SEC title. The quarterback at halftime of the National Championship Game.

In the end, at the very end, later than ever before, Alabama won the final game on the final play to return to the ultimate destination, but No. 17 was decidedly difficult and undoubtedly different. It was, quite possibly, the most satisfying of all.

It's hard to say 17 stands above the 16 that came before, but there can be no argument on one point. It stands alone. Alabama had never won a championship quite like this.

Until freshman favorite Tua Tagovailoa threw a 41-yard strike to freshman secret weapon DeVonta Smith to lift Alabama past Georgia 26-23 in overtime, Alabama had never turned losing into winning on the final play of the final game to secure a national title.

The Crimson Tide has won only one actual or so-called championship game by a closer margin. Alabama 20, Washington 19 in the 1926 Rose Bowl delivered the program's first big ring, but the Tide scored all of its points that day in the third quarter and held on.

That team trailed at halftime 12-0. This team fell behind 13-0 at the break and 20-7 late in the third quarter. No Alabama team had climbed from a larger hole in the decisive game to reach the summit.

Until rebounding with playoff victories over reigning national champion Clemson and reigning SEC champ Georgia, Alabama had never won a national title after losing to Auburn.

That 26-14 defeat on the Plains was Alabama's largest Iron Bowl loss by margin since 1969. It ended the Crimson Tide's run of three straight SEC West and SEC titles, and in the bigger picture, put the program's three-year playoff run in jeopardy.

Alabama had to wait a nervous week until Selection Sunday to learn it had been awarded the fourth and final playoff spot.
Alabama won five national titles during seasons in which it didn't play Auburn before the rivalry was renewed in 1948. In each of those seasons, the Crimson Tide still won its final regular-season game. In 1925, 1926 and 1930, that final regular-season victim was Georgia.

Until finding the fountain of youth in Tagovailoa and a handful of other rookies whose contributions were critical, Saban had never won a national title after starting a season ranked No. 1 in the major preseason polls.

His preseason No. 1 teams in 2010 and 2013 didn't reach the BCS Championship Game. His preseason No. 1 team in 2016 came up one second short in its title game loss to Clemson.

That kind of rat poison is hard to survive.

Given the injuries and imperfections along the way, it's easy to forget that Alabama was the preseason No. 1 team again. It played that way for most of September and October, but not so much in November.

So there were never galore with no shortage of doubts as this team barely made the playoff cut with not one but two potential heirs to the college football throne lying in wait.

Dabo Swinney and Clemson had beaten Saban and Alabama in the title game a year earlier, making the Tide's Sugar Bowl semifinal revenge all the sweeter. A short week later, Kirby Smart came closer than any Saban-trained consigliere to taking down the godfather, but close doesn't count with a trophy on the line.

The play that finally put Smart in his place and returned Saban to his was the perfect ending. That nuclear rainbow from Tagovailoa to Smith took the Alabama faithful from doom and gloom to shock and raw jubilation.

The Crimson Tide had to travel all the way to Hawaii to find the player who would serve as its savior, but those air miles pale next to the psychic distance traveled from Jan. 11, 2016, in Arizona to 1/8/18 in Atlanta.

The road from 16 to 17 wasn't ordinary or easy. It included losing a national championship game in between for the first time under Saban, losing starter after starter to injury, losing control of its playoff destiny after losing to its bitter rival.

No. 17 was never inevitable. For the longest time, it seemed impossible. Then it arrived with a bolt of left-handed lightning, and Alabama found it could take a different route to a familiar place.

The program that has everything had never seen anything like it.
Recruits hearing a steady Bama buzz

Cecil Hurt

The general consensus about the December early signing period for football was "wait and see."
Not many coaches liked the change, with Nick Saban being the most vociferous critic. But with another signing date coming up in about three weeks, it will be interesting to see how the Crimson Tide closes out.

On the one hand, most of December was devoted to playoff preparations, as well as the constant coaching change roulette. But so far, January has been one long, priceless advertisement for Alabama football, not merely promoting the brand that needs no...
HURT

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placing the emphasis on the dual selling points of "five championships in nine years" with a new slogan — "most dynamic offense in America for 2018."

That chatter started with the second half against Georgia and continues to build in a Tua Tagovailoa tidal wave of publicity. Much of that publicity has yet another valuable subtext — the huge contribution made by freshmen in the championship game.

You couldn't miss it during the commentary but if you did somehow, rest assured Alabama assistant coaches will be glad to replay it for you (especially if you are a five-star prospect.)

A major talking point for UA rivals — not to call them "negative" so much as "pragmatic" — is that there is so much talent stacked up in Tuscaloosa that you'll have to wait. Alabama's counterpunch — Tagovailoa, Najee Harris, Henry Ruggs, Jerry Jeudy, Dylan Moses and, by the way, the young man catching the championship-winning pass in the end zone, DeVonta Smith.

The Crimson Tide has eight scholarships, more or less, left to give. The last time he addressed recruiting, Saban mentioned wide receivers — and he was making phone calls as soon as he could after the game. UA is still involved with three of the top available wide receivers — Justyn Ross of Phenix City, Jacob Copeland of Florida and Jaylen Waddle of Texas. All must have done a double-take on Monday night.

There's still room for linemen, of course, and the secondary must be rebuilt. At his press conference after the first signing day last month, Saban indicated he would like to add a quarterback, as he does in every signing class.

That might require a special personality — someone is going to have to wait at that particular position — and yet, if there is a transfer (no one knows if there will be or not, although NCAA quarterbacks in general tend to follow playing time wherever it leads), Alabama will be precariously thin at the quarterback spot.

The burst of publicity — and the chance for the UA staff to catch its breath and recruit full-time — also means Alabama will revisit some prospects who have committed (but not signed) elsewhere. Even J.J. Peterson, the Georgia linebacker who has announced his intention to follow Jeremy Pruitt to Tennessee, hasn't had his name erased completely off the Alabama board.

Since the system is new, there is no way to calculate just how much of a championship bump Alabama will get with the pool of remaining prospects. The real effect may be in 2019. But prospects have been hearing a steady Alabama buzz all week long — and it shows no sign of stopping.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Campuses Brace for Angry Words

By AUDRA D. S. BURCH

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Kent Fuchs, the president of the University of Florida, was in the living room of his statey campus residence last fall when he saw the first televised images of a parade of terror unfolding in another college town further north.

There were protesters. Countercraft. Anxieties. The right side was lit by tiki torches in the grips of young white supremacists marching on the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. And later a car, rootlessly roaring toward the crowd, killed a counter-Demonstrator named Heather Heyer and injured others.

"Oh God, that is headed here," Mr. Fuchs recalls thinking.

Urgent texts and emails punctured the fall of a Saturday morning last fall. Richard Spencer, the star attraction of the Unite the Right rally protesting the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, was headed to the University of Florida. All of a sudden, the line from Charlottesville to Gainesville seemed frighteningly short, direct, unimpeded, with universities across the nation watching on.

Charlottesville changed how universities looked at controversial speakers. It changed how they assessed the literal and figurative cost of free speech. It changed how they secured events with a higher potential for violence.

"Should universities allow controversial speakers to have a platform on campus?" asked Catherine J. Ross, a law professor at George Washington University specializing in constitutional law and the First Amendment. "Generally yes, because the university is uniquely devoted to truth finding, to testing and challenging orthodoxy in every field. There may be some limits — if physical safety is an issue and the risk is real and attributable to the speaker."

Mr. Spencer's representatives are currently attempting to book him at at least five major universities. Campus presidents across the country are looking to Charlottesville and Gainesville for lessons. "I have had communication with all the schools facing this dilemma and I have told them, whatever you decide, you have to own that decision," Mr. Fuchs said.

In the new year, more universities are faced with that decision. Michigan State recently began mediation as part of a lawsuit over the school's rejection of a request to have Mr. Spencer speak on campus, citing safety concerns.

The University of Michigan is not to consider renting a space to Mr. Spencer. Ohio State and Penn State were also sued after denying a rental request. Both had pointed to safety reasons. The suits filed on behalf of Cameron Padgett, a Georgia State University student who organizes and books Mr. Spencer's appearances, argue that his free speech rights were violated.

And some 800 miles away from Gainesville, administrators at the University of Cincinnati, who also received a request for Mr. Spencer to speak on campus, eventually agreed to negotiate a date in mid-March during the school's spring break. Last week, a lawsuit filed in federal court accuses the university of excessive and therefore "unconstitutional" security fees for Mr. Spencer's appearance. The amount: $2,630.

The University of Florida would eventually cancel Mr. Spencer's visit, but not for long. Mr. Spencer, a leader of the far-right white nationalist movement, had the law on his side. When it became clear that his visit was certain, the administration coordinated an event that would come to include a $600,000 price tag. More than 1,000 police officers convened on the ground, in the air, on the roads — and there was plenty of soul-searching about the role of public universities as incubators of ideas, even those that are unpopular.

"Fear and dread. I just kept thinking, the same person who was in Charlottesville is now coming here," said Mr. Fuchs, who became president in 2015. "Before, this was about rhetoric, now it was about violence."

The Florida event did not go without some violence. A self-labeled white supremacist was sucker-punched while wearing a swastika T-shirt (he was later hugged and befriended by two black men) and three Texas men were arrested and charged with attempted murder after they teased a group of anti-Spencer protesters after the event. One of them fired a shot, missing the group.

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“It’s not just about the speech,” Mr. Spencer said. “It’s about the demonstration of our resolve, of the power of our ideas, of the fact that everyone now has to have an opinion on them.”

The National Policy Institute, led by Mr. Spencer, first requested a rental space on Florida’s campus on July 31. The university had already agreed to a Sept. 12 date and a campus location when Charlottesville erupted.

Mr. Fuchs said Mr. Spencer’s message was the exact opposite of the university’s inclusiveness values. But that was beside the point. There was no way, Mr. Fuchs believed, he could reasonably protect the 55,460 students against violent protesters or counter-protesters. Members of minority groups make up one-third of the student body at Florida.

During that tense period, Mr. Fuchs was on the phone with his most senior administrators and advisers, along with a First Amendment attorney to explore legal options.

On Aug. 16, Florida officially rejected the National Policy Institute’s application, citing public safety concerns. The decision, Mr. Fuchs said, was based on the specter of violence, not Mr. Spencer’s pointed ideology.

Mr. Fuchs suspected the decision would not stand. Auburn University had already lost a similar battle when a federal judge ruled Mr. Spencer should be allowed to speak on campus based on his First Amendment rights.

It foreshadowed the story in Gainesville. A local lawyer representing Mr. Spencer threatened to sue the university. Florida eventually reversed its decision. Mr. Spencer would pay $10,564 to rent the Curtis M. Phillips Center for Performing Arts. He would be speaking on Oct. 19, the first such event at a public university since Charlottesville.

Most every morning until the day Mr. Spencer walked onto the stage, a small circle of university administrators, including Mr. Fuchs and the campus police chief, Linda Stump-Kurnick, held an 8 a.m. planning call.

The day before Mr. Spencer’s speech, a group of students protested outside the administration building. “Some students believed that I was complicit in his appearance,” he said. “There was no way to come out of this, as a leader, with your reputation as high or as good as before.”

Alan Blinder contributed reporting from Atlanta.
Policy idea to aid college students is spreading from cities to states

"There's a buzz now about education that wasn't there before."
Mike Krause, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission

To churn out more workers with marketable skills, an increasing number of states are offering residents free tuition to community colleges and technical schools.

The move also is a reaction to fast-rising tuition costs — increases that stem, in part, from states reducing their financial support of public colleges and universities.

Morley Winograd, president of the Campaign for Free College Tuition, a Seattle-based nonprofit, described the movement as "the fastest-growing policy idea in the country," one with bipartisan support.

"Everybody's got cheap dirt, but do you have skilled workers?" Winograd said. "That's the question states face as they recruit new industry."

But the free tuition push hasn't produced an economic bonanza for any of the pioneering states (at least not yet) and some states have struggled to come up with the money to keep their end of the bargain.

The free tuition trend began in 2005 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which launched a privately funded effort to combat its economic decline. The movement has quickly spread: Today roughly 200 localities offer young residents free tuition to local community colleges and technical schools.

In the past two years, 12 states have enacted legislation to join them. The state rush to offer free tuition began with Tennessee in 2015, but other states quickly followed. Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Rhode Island have started programs, and Nevada plans to launch one this year. California and Montana last year enacted legislation to create programs but have yet to appropriate funds.

Delaware and Louisiana also offer something more restrictive free college scholarships with additional requirements, such as a minimum college aptitude test score or a clean record.

Free tuition plans typically promise students a free ride if they meet certain requirements, such as maintaining a certain GPA. Most plans only pay for tuition, so students must cover fees, books and other costs.

Most of the programs are "last dollar," which means a student must obtain an up-front federal aid, such as Pell Grants or other scholarships, before the program kicks in to cover the rest.

Some states, such as Arkansas and Kentucky, limit their programs to students in selected fields. Arkansas only awards grants to students focusing on science, technology, engineering, math and other subjects employers most value. This year, Work Ready Kentucky is limiting aid to students studying health care, transportation and logistics, advanced manufacturing, construction, and business services and information technology.

"Clearly we're seeing a lot of momentum right now," said Dustin Weeden, senior policy analyst with the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, an advocacy group based in Boulder, Colorado.

DRIVE TO 65
Tennessee's stated goal is to make sure that 55 percent of Tennesseans have a college degree or certificate by 2025. The state started by offering free tuition for two years of community college or technical school to every recent high school graduate in the state. The state in 2016 revised the program to allow a greater number of older adults to attend any of the 27 Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology for free, starting in this coming fall.

The state pays for the programs through an endowment started with $300 million in excess lottery revenue. The program operates on interest from the endowment.

Tuition at four-year public colleges has risen 35 percent since the 2008 school year, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a left-leaning think tank based in Washington. In Tennessee, per-student state funding at public colleges and universities declined 18 percent from 2008 to 2016, and the average annual tuition at public colleges and universities rose by more than $3,000 during that period.

Since Tennessee launched its free tuition program, applications and enrollment at the state's community colleges have soared. More than 33,000 Tennesseans have attended college free. Higher education is now a part of Tennessee's sales pitch to potential employers, said Mike Krause, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

"I can absolutely tell you it figures in our conversations," he said. Although he could not point to a specific employer won by free college, Krause said: "There's a buzz now about education that wasn't there before."

MIXED RESULTS
But in Kalamazoo, a dozen years of free tuition have yielded mixed results.

Kalamazoo Promise, which is funded by anonymous donors, covers four years of tuition at any public college or university in Michigan or at 15 private colleges in the region. Students who attend Kalamazoo schools every year from kindergarten through 12th grade receive all tuition and fees paid; those who attend grades nine through 12 receive 65 percent of their costs paid.

Tim Ready, a sociology professor and director of the Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations at Western Michigan University, said the first nine years of free tuition, which cost donors $84 million, was "inarguably beneficial but not a slam dunk" for Kalamazoo's economy.

"We had the Great Recession, which makes it hard to determine what the effect of Kalamazoo Promise on the economy has been," Ready said. Other factors, such as a new university medical school, have played a role in the slowly recovering economy, he said.

Ready believes that free tuition is "necessary but not sufficient" to create economic impact. Between 2008 and 2014, the city's public school enrollment grew by almost 25 percent (though the number of low-income kids receiving free lunches also increased). Kalamazoo now has more college graduates, and the erosion in its population has stopped.

"Kalamazoo Promise probably did help mitigate the decline in the central city area," Ready said. But he cautioned that the program "is not reaching everybody. There's a lot of income inequality here."

In Oregon, which also offers each participating student $1,000 for books and other expenses, the challenge has been finding money to keep the program going. Oregon Promise, established by the Legislature in 2015, scrambled after its first year, 2016-17, when lawmakers, while increasing funding, appropriated less than needed to continue the program in its original form.

Demand had risen more than expected. The Legislature increased funding from $10 million in the startup year to $40 million in the next two-year budget, but that was still $8 million short. To compensate, the state set stricter income eligibility limits for new students (current students were grandfathered in).

"That word "promise" is what makes the program truly galvanizing," said Ben Carson, executive director of the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

"States should be very careful about making promises they may not be able to keep," he said. "When the program has to compete every year or every other year with other worthy needs in the state budget, legislators can find other priorities more compelling."