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Ohio University rescinds H. Brandt Ayers' journalism award after spanking allegations

By: The Associated Press

Ohio University's journalism school is rescinding an award given to a former Alabama newspaper executive who recently resigned following allegations that he assaulted female newsroom employees in the 1970s by spanking them.

Because of those accusations, faculty at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism voted in January to rescind H. Brandt Ayers' 2011 Carr Van Anda Award, the school's highest honor.

Ayers had stepped down as chairman of the board of Consolidated Publishing Co. earlier in January. He has said he regrets things he did when he was younger.

At least three women have said Ayers assaulted them in the mid-1970s when he was an executive at The Anniston Star. Ayers became a nationally known voice of Southern liberalism during his tenure as editor and publisher at the newspaper.
Student, adults protest government class

The Associated Press

BAY MINETTE — An Alabama high school student is protesting a government class where the summer reading list included books such as "Liberalism Is a Mental Disorder" by conservative author and radio host Michael Savage.

The reading list was pulled last year, but complaints about the advanced placement government class are continuing.

High school senior Julia Coccaro confronted Baldwin County school board members at a Thursday meeting, telling them taxpayers are not paying for students "to be indoctrinated," Al.com reported.

"They are paying to be educated and we are not being educated in that classroom," she said.

"They are paying to be educated and we are not being educated in that classroom,"

High school senior Julia Coccaro

Thursday’s meeting mentioned the teacher by name, the news site reported.

"We are teaching hate in our school systems," retired high school educator Sandra Page said at the meeting.

Baldwin County Schools Superintendent Eddie Tyler said the school system will take some of the public’s suggestions under consideration.

“We have to learn to cope and address these issues in a mature and meaningful way and not coming from an angle of ‘everyone says you’re guilty because we say you are,’” Tyler told Al.com after the meeting.

The school system, one of the state’s largest, is on Alabama’s Gulf coast.
Inside the Toyota-Mazda deal

How the automakers were lured to Alabama

Lee Roop lroop@al.com

Bidding on the new Toyota-Mazda "plant" was by invitation only, and Alabama didn't know it was vying for an automobile company until deep in the game. And then it found out there were two, and those two wanted to build something "never done before on American soil."

That's Shane Davis' recollection. He's head of urban development for Huntsville, which eventually did win the twin plants coming to the city's extreme west side near Interstate 565.

Davis and his counterpart at the state level, Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield, are the two field coaches whose teams handled the rapid fire of questions and answers about Huntsville's site that started in late August and ran through the holidays.

Davis said his team was contacted in August by the professional services and commercial real estate company JLL. The city was one of a small number being asked to open discussions about a "large O.E.M. (Original Equipment Manufacturer)"

As Huntsville stayed in the hunt, Davis learned it was an automobile plant, but not exactly.

"You're talking two auto plants on the same campus, with their own independent lines making two separate vehicles, but also having a joint venture in some shared space," Davis said.

The partnership is to research and develop cars of the future, likely electric. "It's independent auto assembly lines plus a joint venture," Davis said. "That's like three entities on one campus."

It was unprecedented, so Alabama's teams were working with, as Davis put it, "companies trying to lay out what that looks like. It's a very fluid process that changed almost daily at times."

"You've got to stay on top of everything," Steve Sewell, executive vice president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, said of the state's role. "You have to be thinking of what's next. Everything you can put in front of them has to demonstrate your state's effectiveness."

Day-to-day, that could mean "22 people on a conference call going over a development agreement," Davis said. It could mean three or four questions in the late afternoon that need answers by the next morning, "so you're giving them the information to continue to make decisions on their end."

"And in the middle of it, we needed more land ...." Davis laughed. "You get a call that says, 'I think we're going to need more acres to make our plan fit.' It's Wednesday afternoon. A decision is going to be made on Friday.

"That gives me 24 hours to get in the car
and go talk to landowners and say, 'Hey, can't tell you what we're doing, but it's an economic development project and we need to get an option on this little piece of property.'"

Where was Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle?

"In the meetings and on the conference calls," Davis said. "He's not the type who wants to be briefed on where we stand."

Battle put in those hours, Davis said, "so, when it comes down to those final high-level decisions, he's been through it from the ditch to the top, he knows every minute detail and can make a call on the fly."

It wasn't Canfield's first time around the track, either. He's been commerce secretary since 2011. Just this past year, Alabama's auto companies have announced $3.2 billion in projects within the state, including major expansions at Honda and Mercedes-Benz.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Toyota is now saying the site and its location were the key decision drivers, but Alabama's recruiters think it was more than that.

Canfield thinks Alabama's existing relationship with Toyota sealed the deal. The company broke ground in 2001 on an engine plant in Huntsville, and it has expanded that plant four times and invested almost $1 billion there. It now employs more than 1,400 people.

"In business, particularly when you're working with Japanese companies, relationships mean an awful lot," Canfield said. "In this case, if you're going to invest $1.6 billion, you're putting a lot of capital at risk. If you have a relationship with a state and local government that you trust, you can go into that relationship knowing you've mitigated your risk."

Davis agreed relationships were key.

"I don't think it was our site as much as it was our community," Davis said of the Huntsville area. "Like I told our team, it was invitation-only, 16-20 sites, and they're all winning sites. They've all got the right land size, they've probably got the utilities."

"I think our community having a site that close to a major metro center appealed a lot," he said. "A lot of these plants are in rural areas. They're tagged Some City, USA, but when you go visit it's off the beaten path 20 or 30 miles from the city core. Being 10 minutes from an urban core had its advantages."

Davis cited Huntsville's workforce development plan and investments in education by all three systems in the county and in Limestone County.

"Whether the career readiness is going to college or learn that skill like 3D printing, that's what the schools are doing," he said. "We've got the workforce and the system in place that replenishes that workforce. And it's bigger than Huntsville. It makes my job and our team's job a little easier if you have something to showcase. You just show it exactly like it is. You don't have to sugarcoat it."

Now, the deal has been signed and the second part of the project begins: building the infrastructure needed for the plant. That work starts this summer. And Davis and his team turn to the other 50 projects on their economic recruitment board.

Steve Sewell, executive vice president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama

"You have to be thinking of what's next. Everything you can put in front of them has to demonstrate your state's effectiveness."

AL.com reporter William Thornton contributed to this report.
A path to the past

State Sen. Arthur Orr holds up the PastPort book that shows visitors the locations of historic locations in all 67 Alabama counties. The Alabama Bicentennial Commission launched the PastPort, a visitors guide to Alabama during the state's bicentennial celebration, during an event at the Mercedes-Benz Visitors Center Friday, Jan. 26, 2018. [GARY COSBY JR./STAFF PHOTO]

New guide highlights historic sites in Alabama

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

The Alabama Bicentennial Commission on Friday unveiled a new educational program that encourages exploring the Yellowhammer State at the Mercedes-Benz Visitor Center in Vance.

The project is called PastPort, and at its center is a 174-page guidebook that points residents and visitors alike to 300 sites of significance in Alabama. Stylized as

“A Time-Traveler's Companion to Our Counties,” the book highlights museums, mansions and more across the state.

State Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, the chairman of the bicentennial commission, introduced PastPort in Vance on Friday.

“The PastPort will guide visitors to historic sites in each of our 67 counties, where they can see our beautiful state and learn more about it and the

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Online
See more photos from the Alabama Bicentennial Commission's launch of the PastPort at www.tuscaloosanews.com.
PASTPORT

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people who made it,” Orr said.

As executive director of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission, Jay Lamar is overseeing a three-year celebration that began last March, two centuries after Alabama became a territory, and will end on Dec. 14, 2019, the 200th anniversary of Alabama’s admittance as the 22nd state of the union.

Lamar said visitors to the places listed in the PastPort can get their book stamped there, memorializing their trips in the same way international travelers do.

“At the end of the bicentennial, this can be a record of where you have traveled and the places you’ve been,” Lamar said. “It becomes a keepsake and a memento, a testimony to what we’ve done over this bicentennial commemoration.”

The first publicly distributed copies of the guide were given to each member of the fourth grade class at Vance Elementary School, who sang Alabama’s state song to kick off the event Friday morning.

The PastPort also features a free, interactive mobile app set to be released in February. Lamar said the companion app will feature information from the Encyclopedia of Alabama and be packed with educational resources, including classroom tools meant for students in the fourth grade, when state history is typically taught.

The PastPort highlights more than 30 sites in West Alabama, including the Paul W. Bryant Museum in Tuscaloosa to the Golden Eagle Syrup Factory in Fayette, the Alabama Military Hall of Honor in Marion and many more.

Anyone wanting to use the guide to explore the state can preorder a copy at www.shop-alabama200.com for $10 each. The PastPorts are expected to ship by March 1.

Reach Stephen Dethrage at stephen.dethrage@tuscaloosanews.com or 722-0227.
How one rural Alabama district is closing the gap, raising scores for all children

By: Trisha Powell Crain

This is the final piece in AL.com's Tackling the Gap series. In this article, AL.com used test score data to find schools where black children and white children are showing success, looking for examples where the stubborn gap in proficiency levels between black and white students was narrowing or even erased.

Honestly, those places are hard to find in Alabama.

But Pike County is one of those places. Initially, it looked like an anomaly. How could a small Alabama rural school district be successful in educating all of its students, black and white, when the wealthiest districts struggle to do so?

In that analysis of test scores, Pike County stood out, both for the high level of poverty—three out of four students qualify for free or reduced-price meals—and the high levels of proficiency for both groups of students.

Something was going on in Pike County, and when I emailed Superintendent Mark Bazzell to ask him if I could visit his district to help me understand what they were doing, he put together an ambitious agenda to not only tell me what they were doing, but also to show me.

What I found was a surprise in many ways, but not so much if you understand what Bazzell says really makes education work: the people.

Mark Bazzell has been superintendent of Pike County Schools in southeastern Alabama for 15 years. And he has demonstrated he knows how to raise the bar in this rural district.

During the 1990s, Bazzell said, two of Pike County's five schools "were on just about every list you didn't want to be on."

When Bazzell was appointed superintendent of the district in 2003, he knew something had to change.

"We had students that don't believe in themselves," he said. "To some extent, the parents don't understand the possibilities that exist for their kids. We had faculty members that we weren't sure completely believed in the kids."

Rural Alabama

Farm land and abandoned homes line Pike County's winding roads. And though it was late November when I visited, cotton was still visible along the roadside.

Pike County is part of Alabama's Black Belt, named for the fertile soil that enriched the area before the Civil War, and now known for its continued decline and dwindling population.
On paper, it's not much different from many rural areas in Alabama. The median household income within the Pike County school district is $36,700, about $8,000 below Alabama's median income. One in four residents live in poverty here, compared with 17 percent statewide.

Student enrollment in Pike County has been about the same for the past twenty years. The six school campuses there have right at 2,100 students enrolled this year, and the student population is diverse: just under 50 percent African-American, and 43 percent white. Four percent of students are Hispanic, and 3 percent are of two or more races.

So how did Bazzell get started turning Pike County's schools around more than a decade ago?

"We just started from scratch," he said, "and have been plugging away for ten, twelve years."

**Homegrown leaders**

Bazzell and his leadership team, which includes Dr. Donnella Carter, Dr. Mark Head, and Jeff McClure, spoke about the many efforts they've undertaken to change the culture of the schools.

Carter and Head are both graduates of Pike County's system, and each served as principals there before advancing to the central office. Carter is head of instructional services and Head oversees prevention and support services, including special education.

Bazzell is a product of Pike County schools, too.

McClure is the director of alternative learning, which includes distance learning, which is fast becoming a way to help students find what makes them successful in the future, "whatever that looks like," McClure said.

The leadership team is largely homegrown, which certainly influences their investment in the success of the children in their community. Getting started

"We started out from the very get-go raising the bar," said Bazzell. "One of the things we say is that we're not going to accept excuses."

Bazzell said he used to get frustrated with leadership in his school system when report cards would come out and blame for low test scores was placed on kids and their families.

Bazzell asks: When school leaders blame kids, how can teachers be expected to believe anything different?

In those early days, he said, building-level administrators weren't always great instructional leaders. Instead, they were mostly facility managers, he said. He knew he needed the focus to be on instruction.

"It took a little while to get the right people, I'll say that."

As an example of what it took to get those right people, Bazzell said 18 faculty members at Pike County Elementary were "turned over" within the first 18 months after he was appointed.
Pike County Elementary has historically had a larger black student population than Goshen Elementary and was one of the schools that earned a spot on those lists no one wants to be on.

"What we've tried to do is change the entire culture. Not just within the school, but in some places within the community," he said. "You've got to have parents who are proud of their school, believe in their school, believe in their kids. You've got to have faculty buy into it. You've got to have leadership that will push the initiatives forward, and it's a lot of work and it takes time to do those things."

Throughout my day in Pike County's schools, principals, teachers and faculty used various words to say the same thing these administrators were saying: believe in students.

My idea for the story about how Pike County is narrowing the achievement gap began to look less like a laser focus on raising black students' achievement and more like a story about opportunities for all students.

Asked where he got the idea that all kids can achieve if given opportunities, Bazzell said he didn't know.

"We understand the challenges that come with having a student population that is at-risk," he said. "We know that and accept that and understand we've got to address those barriers when they show up.

"We're not going to allow [barriers] to be used as an excuse. We just can't. That's the very first thing that we've tried to communicate from day one," Bazzell said.

**Taking care of teachers**

The good stuff happens in the classroom, between the teachers and the students, Bazzell said.

"We protected instructional time. We started trying to align our instruction to the standards."

Not all teachers made the transition, he said, and "some people chose to go other places where they could be more comfortable."

Carter said one early example was Eleanor Rodriguez's book, "What Is It About Me You Can't Teach" which addressed a lack of cultural understanding about poverty.

"We do a lot on the front end, and we lay out what the expectations are for teachers in the system."

"And that's even if a teacher may come to us with 15 years' experience," Head said. "[Because] it's different [here]."

The word is getting out that Pike County takes care of its teachers.

Pike County Elementary Principal Tracy Arnold said Troy University provides preservice teachers, what used to be called "student teaching." Arnold said she has noticed recently that
more preservice teachers are asking to be placed at her school, an indicator that new teachers like what they see.

Pike County High School's Vice Principal Shondra Whitaker said teachers now call the school looking for job openings. That, too, is an indicator that Pike County is doing something right. And having a good reputation among teachers is important in a rural area, where schools face some of the greatest teacher shortages.

**Taking care of data**

Another important ingredient for improvement is monitoring data.

Bazzell said it isn't enough to break down test scores by subgroups, the typical way the public looks at results.

"I think what has made a difference for us is disaggregating the data all the way down to the student level," Head said. "Our data meetings need to be about kids, not subgroups. What do we need to do to move this student? Where is this particular student deficient? What does this student not know?"

Bazzell pointed out the district's 84 percent 2016 high school graduation rate as an example of one of the numbers they worry about. Bazzell said, "If you have 100 kids and you save three [from dropping out], you've just increased your graduation rate by 3 percent."

"Our goal is to move one student at a time," he said.

Understanding what the data tells you is something that has to be learned, too, Head said. Teachers aren't learning how to interpret data in their teacher preparation programs, he said. So Pike County took that on.

Getting down to that granular level, looking at data for each individual student, is something I would see up close and personal in Pike County's schools later in the day.

**The data that made Pike County stick out**

Test results, particularly the narrowing black-white achievement gap, are what called my attention to Pike County.

Not only is the gap in proficiency levels smaller than it is statewide, it continues to narrow.

In recent years, Pike County's ACT Aspire results have shown not only high proficiency, but improvement in most grades and subjects. And that's with more than 77 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, a measure of poverty.

Bazzell was a fan of the ACT Aspire, the annual test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and also grade 10 to measure student outcomes. So when the state board of education voted in June to drop the test, Bazzell used local money to pay for his students to take the Aspire in the spring of 2018.

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Keeping up with growth measured by the Aspire, and using that data to drive instruction, was worth the $25,000 investment.

Here's a look at Pike County's ACT Aspire results in recent years, compared with statewide results.

Though proficiency levels for black students are not as high as in suburban school districts like Vestavia Hills, Homewood City, and Madison City, a higher percentage of Pike County's black students reach proficiency than in other high-poverty districts.

Suburban school districts raise substantial amounts of local tax dollars to add to state and federal education dollars.

Those local dollars matter, experts say, because they help lower class sizes, purchase additional curricular materials above and beyond what the state provides, and provide additional learning and professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their skills.

Pike County spent $10,527 per student in the 2015-2016 school year, the 19th highest amount spent in Alabama. Of that amount, nearly $2,400 per student was collected locally, mostly from sales taxes allocated for the schools.

Bazzell said securing an extra penny in sales tax a short time after he became superintendent was a turning point for Pike County schools. "It put us on a level playing field with [Troy] city schools," he said.

Taking care of students

Carter said students don't always have opportunities to experience new settings, "So we're real big on field trips."

Vocabulary lessons are built in to lessons throughout schools, Carter said, because exposure to new words is a must to improve learning.

Teachers use district-wide lesson plan templates to ensure adherence to principles of teaching, Carter said. "We know that strategic teaching works. We know that explicit instruction works. Those things are just not optional in our approach," Carter said.

Taking care of students requires knowing what's going on their lives, McClure said. "From the top down, these folks know these kids," he said. "They know their families. They have connections with them. They see their struggles."

Beginning in the tenth grade, students can enroll in two-year colleges through one of nine of Pike County's academies ranging from arts to flight to business to agriscience, a combination of agriculture and science helping those who want to follow their families in farming.

Because the coursework is difficult, Bazzel said, admission requirements are, too. Students must have a 3.0 GPA and have scored a 20 on the ACT college entrance exam or reach a benchmark score on the COMPASS, also a college entrance exam.
Those can be barriers for students, Bazzel said, but he is committed to helping students get in, and stay in, the district's academies.

A day in Pike County's schools

The STEM initiative

Early in the day, we visited the district's central technology center where fifth- and sixth-grade students worked together in what officials called the STEM initiative. STEM is short for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Inside, teacher Amy Garrett was leading a group of "makers" learning to code inputs to make outputs.

From snowmen whose faces light up, to a sign crawl reading "Welcome to STEM Academy" to Rudolph's lighted nose, to a police car that had working lights on top, one by one the students explained how they made their projects work.

Some used pressure sensors---"it's like an iPhone button, push it!"---and others used on and off buttons. One pair of students coded the musical notes in "The Star-Spangled Banner," which started at the push of a button.

This type of work is important, Garrett said, because students learn how to solve problems when projects don't work as planned.

"Sometimes it's a little hard," one fifth-grader said, "but then you get the hang of it."

The distance learning center

Down the hall, in another building on the same campus, in what McClure referred to as a "swing space," was an open area housing the district's non-traditional online high school programs. Around 30 students were sitting in three groups: dual enrollment courses, credit recovery, and accelerated high school classes not offered in the district's classrooms.

Teacher Jodie Jefcoat's job is monitoring students' progress in those online courses and helping them stay on task.

"With teenagers, the biggest problem they have is learning to manage their time," she said. "Procrastination becomes their biggest problem."

One of three sophomores enrolled in the Health and Information Academy and taking online courses from Enterprise State Community College said, "At first [taking college-level coursework] was overwhelming, but as time passes by, I've kind of caught on to the vibe of this."

She and her classmates are learning medical terminology. Jefcoat said if they stick to and pass the sequence of courses, they are on track to graduate with both a two-year associate's degree and a high school diploma, the goal of all the districts' academies.

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That two-year college degree comes at no cost to parents or students. Bazzell uses a combination of workforce development funds, scholarships, and local tax dollars to pay for tuition, books and other curricular materials the students need.

Tierra and Janyriah are juniors working in the same academy. When asked why they're willing to work so hard, Tierra said, "It gets us ahead of the game." Both young women are interested in the managerial aspect of a medical practice and plan to use their associate's degree as a stepping stone to a four-year business administration degree.

They said participating in dual enrollment makes them want to come to school. "It's fun," Janyriah said.

On the way out, I met Lane, a high school senior who earned his pilot's license through the district's First in Flight and Leadership Academy. Lane plans to be a pilot in the Air Force after he graduates high school with his associate's degree and high school diploma.

Lane said he recently flew a 180-mile, 2-hour solo flight around Georgia. He knows how lucky he is to find this program in Pike County schools. "It is a very unique opportunity," he said. "I know that most people in most places don't have the opportunity to do this sort of thing."

The opportunity to earn a college degree at no cost to their families was not lost on Pike County's students. It was a phrase I heard over and over again.

The agriscience academy at Goshen High School

The five seniors graduating from the agriscience academy were, at first, short on words that morning. Turns out my visit interrupted a test they were taking.

But when asked why they want to work extra hard taking college courses, senior Laken said, "I want to say I did it. I want to graduate," pointing out this group will be the first group to graduate with associate's degrees and high school diplomas in this field.

Joseph, a junior, said one of the benefits of an academy is it gives you "a two-year head start in your college after high school" toward a four-year degree. And if all else fails, he said, the associate's degree can serve as a backup plan.

An energetic junior named Genelynn offered to show me around the school's three greenhouses. One was full of ferns, grown from cuttings to be sold in the spring as a fundraiser for the academy, she said.

It's a hands-on activity that all students in the program participate in and one that she enjoys, she said.

"That's what I like about the program," she said. "We're not cooped up inside all day long."

Genelynn said she became interested in the academy as a ninth grader when Dr. Bazzell spoke with students about the academies. She said she grew up on a farm and plans to attend Auburn.
University to become a large-animal veterinarian, but is open to the idea of a career in agriculture.

Earning college credit at no cost will help her family, she said, "and that's why I'm taking the opportunity to do it." Neither of her parents attended college, and the fact that she's already enrolled in college is great, she said.

Genelynn said she's talked with students in nearby school districts who don't have academies like Pike County's and realizes how special her district is.

**Pike County High School**

As we entered Pike County High School, five young women, all seniors in the business and finance academy, greeted us.

Their interests range from ROTC to cheerleading. All participate in community service, competitions related to their studies, and are leaders in their school, according to their teacher, Jon Sonmor. They, like those in the agriscience academy at Goshen High School, appreciate the no-cost head start on college provided in Pike County.

Pike County High School's leadership team of Principal Willie Wright and Vice Principal Shondra Whittaker met with us over lunch.

Whittaker said three years ago, after digging into a drop in seventh- and eighth-grade test scores ("these are the same kids, why did they drop so far," Whitaker asked), they decided to move those two grades into their own wing in the building. "That totally changed the culture," Wright said.

Wright said that big change was an example of the team's willingness to make substantial changes to meet students' needs.

"We came to the point where we said we really need our best teachers teaching the middle grades," Whitaker said. One teacher took the invitation to teach middle schoolers, she said, and has become a leader in changing the atmosphere among teachers about how they can best use their teaching skills.

Head said when individual students fall behind, administrators and faculty confront the problem, not in an adversarial way, but in a way that forces teachers to take ownership.

"Ownership's the big thing," Head said. "This is my kid. This is a direct reflection on what I'm doing [in the classroom]."

**Data diving at Pike County Elementary School**

Pike County Elementary's test scores were what pulled me down to Pike County in the first place. And it was the last school we visited.
I asked second-year principal Tracy Arnold why her elementary school appeared to be closing the achievement gap.

"I call it the buy-in," she said.

"Teachers are vested in the school. And they want what's best for the kids here and not just here, but also in the community."

"And the kids? The kids are just going to reach for whatever you set the limits to if they know you believe in them," she said.

Arnold took us to the data room, what she called "the situation level two room."

In that room, Arnold and Assistant Principal Rodney Drish tracked how well students were learning standards. Every standard. For every tested grade: third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

Standards were printed on giant sheets of paper, laminated, and carefully pieced together lining up columns and rows. The charts stretched around the entire classroom.

Students take periodic tests measuring mastery, and score a 1, 2, or 3. Those scores are then posted on those giant charts.

Teachers aren't teaching the test, they're teaching the standards, Arnold said, adding that teachers have embraced this method, recognizing knowing where each child stands allows them to adjust teaching methods to reach each child.

And student outcomes, measured by tests, continue to improve in Pike County schools.

Here's a look at the progression of both test results and the gap between proficiency levels of black students and white students since the ACT Aspire has been taken.

What's in the future

As Bazzell looks toward the future, he shared plans for the Advanced Academics and Accelerated Learning Center. Officials broke ground in August.

It is a multipurpose facility that will house the county's virtual high school and credit recovery programs, the dual enrollment programs aligned with the nine academy offerings, and the elementary and middle school STEM initiatives. Bazzell said he hopes 35 to 40 percent of the districts' 175 to 200 graduates will graduate with associate's degrees. The remainder will be work-ready, he said, through a program that will start next semester.

The achievement gap doesn't have to always be there

I came to Pike County to find out what educators were doing to improve test scores for their African-American students.
What I found instead was equity in action. It wasn't a focus on one group or another that was improving learning. It was a unique focus on all students at the individual level, to help them find their way toward their own futures.

Culture, leadership, taking care of students, teachers, and data are a few of the pieces Bazzell said matter.

And, he said, a strong belief that all students can learn at high levels when given the right supports.

"I don't think that what we're doing is magical," Bazzell said. "It's not about any of us".

"It's about what happens between that teacher and those 20 kids every day. Day in and day out," Bazzell said.

Those efforts are paying off. Though not every number shows improvement, Pike County no longer has schools on those dreaded lists, and Bazzell is confident they're headed in the right direction.
SAFE center seeks executive director

New center will offer services to sexual assault victims

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The board of directors of a new center that will treat sexual assault victims in Tuscaloosa and West Alabama has launched the search for its first executive director.

The Tuscaloosa SAFE Center board began advertising the position this week.

"I want to thank board member Dena Prince and community volunteer Dr. Kathleen Cramer for leading the search," said Amanda Fowler, president of the Tuscaloosa SAFE Center board of directors. "The position description was developed after consultation with our community partners and in keeping with best practices we continue to learn from throughout the United States.

Cramer, a longtime community volunteer and retired University of Alabama administrator, was tapped to lead efforts to establish the center.

The SAFE program will provide comprehensive care for sexual assault victims in West Alabama. The board is in the process of selecting a site for the center, which is expected to be located near DCH Regional Medical Center and the UA campus. Services will include medical care, follow-up counseling, specialized therapy and information about reporting options.

The executive director will be tasked with staffing the center, maintaining the center's protocols and policies including acquiring and transferring forensic evidence, and developing fundraising efforts that will financially sustain the viability of the center.

The qualifications include a bachelor's degree and administrative experience, with previous experience with a nonprofit and as a fundraiser preferred. The executive director is also expected to be able to develop and enhance

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SAFE

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community partnerships, lead collaboratively and maintain confidentiality. No pay range is listed in the job announcement, which says salary will be commensurate with experience.

While the director will oversee the center, there will also be clinical leadership hired to run the program.

“The launch of the Tuscaloosa SAFE Center will involve extensive fundraising from both public and private entities in addition to management and logistical responsibilities,” Fowler said. “After the executive director is recruited, our top priorities will be to hire our medical director and our SANE-trained program coordinator.”

DCH announced in the fall about 17 emergency department nurses were undergoing specialized training, including classroom and additional clinical work, to care for patients and collect forensic evidence, such as rape kits.

The center, which is a partnership among the DCH Health System, the DCH Foundation, UA, the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney’s Office, local law enforcement and city and county leaders, was announced in late August 2017. Preliminary planning began in the fall of 2016. It will be operated by a 501(c)(3) non-profit overseen by a volunteer board of directors.

“On behalf of the board, I want to thank our colleagues at DCH, the University of Alabama and everyone in West Alabama who is working so hard to make this important community resource a reality,” Fowler said.
Sports artist to commemorate UA title

Daniel Moore releases pencil sketch of painting

Staff report

Sports artist Daniel Moore has released a preliminary pencil sketch of a full-color painting that will commemorate the University of Alabama's 17th national championship in football.

Information about how to pre-order the painting, with prices beginning at $189, is available at www.newlifeart.com.

The website says the painting will include:

- Quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and wide receiver DeVonta Smith's winning touchdown pass and catch
- A defensive stop that includes UA players Isaiah Buggs, Da'Ron Payne, Anthony Averett, Terrell Lewis, Minkah Fitzpatrick, Ronnie Harrison, Raekwon Davis, Tony Brown, Mack Wilson and Deionte Thompson
- Coach Nick Saban celebrating the win.

The painting will also have the final score and other hidden symbolic imagery, according to the website.

UA beat Georgia, 26-23 in overtime, Jan. 8 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta to win the College Football Playoff.

Moore, a 1976 UA graduate, began painting iconic Alabama football moments in 1979 with "The Goal Line Stand," which captured UA's goal-line stand to defeat Penn State during the Sugar Bowl.

The print sold well, and Moore eventually incorporated New Life Art in 1979 to handle his art business.
Program provides free job skill development classes

Staff report

The Culverhouse Learning Initiative and Financial Training program is seeking student volunteers and community participants for its spring series of job and professional skill development programs.

More information and registration guides are available online at www.culverhouse.ua.edu/lift.

Created in 2014, Culverhouse LIFT was created as a joint initiative between the University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Commerce’s dean’s office and the School of Accountancy. It aims to improve job skills in the adult, teen and veteran populations in West Alabama through the use of UA resources and student and faculty talent.

Culverhouse LIFT provides community members with free one-on-one job skill and financial literacy training with one of the more than 350 Culverhouse student volunteers. Included in those trainings are GED classes, professional development classes and beginner and intermediate Microsoft Excel and Word classes.

The value proposition of Culverhouse LIFT is clear, said Lisa McKinney, a faculty member in the Culverhouse School of Accountancy and director of Culverhouse LIFT.

“It’s a one-on-one tutoring relationship between the student and the participant, and because it’s so intimate, the speed of learning is astronomically high as opposed to a class because every minute is for you,” she said.

Both the students and communities have found success through the Culverhouse LIFT program.

“So many students participate because they want to participate. And, they enjoy it,” McKinney said. “I hear all the time (from students), ‘I love this.’”

“Everybody wants to be of value,” she said. “It sounds corny, but everybody wants to make the world a tiny bit better rather than making it worse.”

Each class is 75 minutes in length. The classes run for nine weeks, meeting once a week. Most classes start at the end of January or the beginning of February.

Classes are held in downtown Tuscaloosa at The Edge Small Business Development Center, 800 22nd Ave., at the intersection of Eighth Street and 22nd Avenue in between Queen City Ave and Greensboro Avenue, behind the federal courthouse and a short walk from the main hub of the bus station.

To get involved, contact McKinney at lmckinne@culverhouse.ua.edu.

All donations to LIFT are used to directly benefit community participants, funding resources that include student support, laptops and computer program licenses. The program is also seeking speakers who can share business insights. For information on program support, contact Rich Houston at rhouston@cba.ua.edu.
'It helps people to know he cares'

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Mac Jones came to the East Tuscaloosa Community Soup Bowl because he had to; he stayed because he wanted to.

The University of Alabama’s third-string quarterback from Jacksonville, Florida, who did not play as a freshman in the 2017 season, volunteered to fulfill his community service after he was charged last November with driving under the influence and improper ID for a minor. After failing a field sobriety test, he was arrested at 2:14 a.m. on the Friday before the LSU game, and suspended for that game.

After his 40 hours of community service were up, he kept coming to the soup bowl twice a week.

The soup bowl operates out of a large metal building behind Hargrove Memorial United Methodist Church.

It serves hot lunches every Wednesday and Friday, and distributes bagged lunches on Sundays at Alberta Baptist.

When Jones arrived, he met

See JONES, A4

Online
See video of Alabama player Mac Jones volunteering at the local soup kitchen at www.tuscaloosanews.com.

See next page
JONES

From Page A1

the man who runs the operation: Charlie Simmons, a 58-year-old lay servant who grew up in Brookwood.

"One of the first things I talked about to Mac was I'm not a big football fan," Simmons said.

Jones answered: "That's not what I'm here for."

The young player was looking for more than just a chance to check off some hours to put his legal problems behind him. After the arrest, he apologized to the entire team.

"That wasn't me," he told them. "I'm sorry for embarrassing you guys and the program, and I'm going to do whatever I can to prove to you guys what kind of person I am."

The soup bowl has been his proving ground.

"Twice a week, a dozen or so volunteers from any of the 30 to 35 church groups or civic organizations that sponsor the nonprofit Christian program show up to set up 126 chairs around 21 tables — six to a table, with salt and pepper shakers for each table. They cook the food and serve 150 to 170 clients on an average day, more than 200 during the summer months.

It's free, and anyone is welcome.

"We just serve people and love them," said Simmons, who sometimes fills in for area pastors when they're away.

Jones quickly found his place.

"Mac just kind of clicked," Simmons said. "He's helped cook. He's served. He helped put up the Christmas tree. He'll sweep, mop, whatever."

He also socializes. Having an Alabama football player who cares is uplifting for many of the clients.

"He's a big celebrity around here," Simmons said. "It means a lot to a lot of people." Betty Davis, 74, wears an

Alabama football shirt every single day. She says she has more than 500 of them. She met Jones at the soup kitchen. One day she asked him to sign her shirt. He obliged.

"He's the best there is for out here," Davis said. "He doesn't have to do it."

Kathy Lee, 58, volunteers twice a week. If the soup kitchen is open, she's there. She has watched Jones interact with clients, and watched them light up.

"He would hug people, sit down and listen to their problems," she said. "He shakes everybody's hand. Everybody has a story to tell him about a game."

Lee watched one day as a man engaged Jones for 20 minutes, sharing his favorite Alabama football memory. She thought she might have to pull the young player away, but Jones didn't want to be rescued.

"He had a smile the whole time," she said. "His expression never changed."

Jones says he benefits as much as do the people at the soup bowl.

"It's definitely something that makes you feel good inside when you're helping other people and making it not about yourself," he said. "Going in there and putting a smile on someone's face or signing a shirt is something that makes you feel good regardless of what's going on in the world."

Jones also found a mentor in Simmons, the man he calls Mr. Charlie.

"One of the nicest guys I've ever met," Jones said. "He means a lot to me and just taking me under his wing both religiously and in general."

When his mother and sister visited for Thanksgiving, Jones took them to the soup bowl to introduce them to his new friends. As a Christmas present to Simmons, he made a donation to the operation. Simmons got Jones a couple of shirts. They exchanged texts on the holiday.

Jones has taken a break from the soup kitchen since Alabama's national championship season ended earlier this month. He had to get settled back into school and into his training routine for football, but he's told Simmons that he will be back. He's still driven by that mistake that led to him arriving at the soup bowl in the first place, but he's learned to look at it differently.

"It's tough because people have that idea about me, about what happened, and I'm really not that type person," he said. "But anybody can say that. I'm trying to show it.

"Really, I think that was probably one of the best things that's happened to me. It's one of those things that happened for me. It didn't happen to me. You've got to look at it like that."

The clients at the soup bowl look at Jones as their guy on the Alabama team. He hasn't played a down, but they know who he is.

"We've seen him on TV and I said, 'That's our No. 10 right there,' " Davis said.

In that metal building off Hargrove road in the eastern part of town, Jones has his own team.

"I think it helps people to know that he cares," said Denise Harris, a 55-year-old client. "He's a team player. He's a role model."

Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tuscaloosanews.com or at 205-722-0224.

The Tuscaloosa News
Sunday, January 28, 2018
BIRMINGHAM

Woodfin pushing for $90M stake in stadium

Erin Edgemon  edgemon@al.com

Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin asked the City Council on Wednesday to support allocating $90 million for the construction of a new stadium on BJCC-owned property.

During a Wednesday afternoon meeting, the mayor proposed the city contribute $3 million a year for 30 years to the expansion and renovation of the BJCC, which includes a stadium and renovations to Legacy Arena.

The city’s contribution would come each year from excess lodging tax and funds that have previously been going to city debt service, the mayor said.

The City Council will vote on the allocation at its next regular meeting Tuesday.

SEE STADIUM, A7
The expansion of the BJCC is projected to generate $9.9 million in additional tax revenue for the city, according to the BJCC.

"I think it is time we actually move beyond just talk," said Woodfin, who showed councilors a 1965 article from the Birmingham News in which a downtown stadium was being proposed.

Woodfin said the city doesn’t have the money to fund its priorities such as crime and neighborhood revitalization, but the city can’t afford not to invest in its infrastructure. He said a new stadium and renovated Legacy Arena will increase tourism to the city.

The mayor said this commitment doesn’t mean Legion Field and the Smithfield community will be forgotten.

"We can do both," he said.

"We can net new revenue (from renovating BJCC and building a new stadium) to create funds that will go 100 percent to neighborhood revitalization."

The BJCC’s 20-year, $300 million master plan includes the construction of a $174 million open-air stadium, a Legacy Arena makeover and an outside piazza renovation. The stadium would have up to 55,000 seats and additional meeting and exhibition space.

The BJCC Authority is committing $10.7 million to the annual debt service on the project. Jefferson County has committed $1 million a year for 30 years.

BJCC Executive Director Tad Snider said UAB and corporate partners have committed to a combined $4 million a year for 10 years through a lease agreement, sponsorship and naming rights.

State legislation that would levy an additional 3 percent automobile rental tax in Jefferson County for the support of the BJCC has been advertised for the 2018 legislative session.

This rental sales tax is expected to generate $3.5 million a year for 30 years.

According to the bill, the stadium must be suitable for NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision football games.
Initiative brings young professionals to Decatur

By: Bayne Hughes

DECATUR, Ala. (AP) — 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.
"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.
Upcoming conference to address veterans' behavioral health

By: Staff

An upcoming seminar in Huntsville will address the effectiveness of veterans treatment courts and the overall behavioral health of veterans.

"Veterans Treatment Courts: No Veteran Left Behind" is a daylong conference set for Friday, Feb. 9, in the Charger Union Theater on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The event is being sponsored by the U.S. Attorney's Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, University of Alabama School of Social Work and UAH's Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs.

The goal of veterans treatment courts is to provide veterans the tools needed to ensure success. Veterans can have problems readjusting to civilian life after long deployments. It may also take longer for them to recover from physical or emotional injuries, like post-traumatic stress syndrome.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 7–8 percent of the U.S. population will have PTSD at some point in their lives. The number for veterans is much higher, however. For example:

- Between 11–20 percent of veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom have PTSD in a given year;
- About 12 percent of Gulf War veterans have PTSD in a given year; and
- About 15 percent of Vietnam veterans were currently diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the most recent study in the late 1980s, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS). It is estimated that about 30 percent of Vietnam veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

According to the group Justice for Vets, one in six veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffer from a substance use issue. Research continues to draw a link between substance use and combat-related mental illnesses like PTSD.

What are veterans treatment courts?

Judge Robert Russell of Buffalo, New York, who is credited with starting the first veterans treatment court in the nation, will provide the morning keynote address.

"The VTC is something every judicial circuit should have," United States Attorney Jay E. Town said. "It gives our veterans not just a holistic system to get their honor back but vests them with the truth that they never lost it in the first place."

According to Justice for Vets, the veterans treatment court model requires regular court appearances, as well as mandatory attendance at treatment sessions and frequent and random testing for drug and alcohol use. The group says veterans respond favorably to the structured
environment, but a few will struggle. Those are the veterans who need a veterans treatment court program the most, the group says.

"Without this structure, these veterans will reoffend and remain in the criminal justice system," according to Justice for Vets. "The veterans treatment court is able to ensure they meet their obligations to themselves, the court and their community."

Expert opinions

Dr. Eric Seemann, a counseling psychologist, U.S. Navy veteran and a member of the Alabama Army National Guard, will present the afternoon keynote address. Seemann's areas of specialization as a licensed psychologist include forensic psychology, assessment, military psychology, crisis intervention, risk assessment, pain psychology and dangerous populations.

Retired Lt. Gen. Jim Pillsbury will also be a guest speaker during the afternoon. Pillsbury, who has 38 years of military experience and retired as commander of Redstone Arsenal and the Aviation and Missile Command, has previously spoken at veterans events in Athens.

The conference is free and open to the public, but seating is limited. To register, click here or email Phillip.howard@usdoj.gov. Six APOST hours have been approved for law enforcement officers. Continuing Education Units of 5.8 hours of have been approved for attorneys. CEUs for social workers are pending.
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.
Relax. Posting selfies to Instagram doesn't make you a narcissist.

By: Daniel 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.

See next page
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," Krizan 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?
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.
Annual gymnastics meet raises breast cancer awareness

Staff report

Friday will mark the University of Alabama gymnastics team's 14th annual Power of Pink meet, which is designed to help raise awareness in the fight against breast cancer.

The meet features UA against the University of Arkansas, beginning at 7:30 p.m. in Coleman Coliseum.

The team will compete in pink leotards, and before the meet, breast cancer survivors will be honored. Coleman Coliseum, along with other University of Alabama and Tuscaloosa area landmarks, has been lit in pink to celebrate the Power of Pink.

The initiative was started by former Alabama gymnastics head coach Sarah Patterson in 2004. The DCH Foundation supports the Power of Pink initiative through a fund that provides early detection and treatment of breast cancer for patients who meet the eligibility requirements.


Tickets are still available for Friday's meet $10 for adults and $5 for youth. For more information, go to www.rolltide.com.
NBA draft observers impressed with Tide players in game against Oklahoma

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

There were approximately 50 NBA scouts in attendance at Saturday's Alabama-Oklahoma men's basketball game - the University of Alabama media relations office issued 50 credentials, but a handful of the scouts didn't make it to Tuscaloosa. Those who did certainly got what they came for, a full look at Alabama's Collin Sexton and Oklahoma's Trae Young in a basketball environment, playing at a brisk if not breakneck tempo.

Here is a sampling of opinion from some noted NBA draft observers.

"(Sexton) made his money as a prep star by hurtling toward the basket, getting to the foul line and playing fearlessly," wrote Jeremy Woo of The Crossover, a college-to-NBA feature of Sports illustrated. "He was composed and didn't force too many shots Saturday, and his physicality showed.

"Sexton generates easy baskets ... simply by being able to outrun defenders with a full head of steam. He'll advance the ball and push it himself if he has to, rather than look to advance with the pass. He's able to use both hands around the rim capably, and being able to keep up in the open court is more valuable than ever."

Woo rates Young as a slightly better prospect than Sexton. ESPN draft analyst Mike Schmitz had similar observations, comparing Sexton to former Kentucky Wildcat (and Birmingham native) Eric Bledsoe of the Milwaukee Bucks.

"Sexton thrives on explosive downhill dashes to the rim" while profiling as a "physical, explosive athlete in terms of burst and leaping ability. Blur in the open court. Can finish above the rim," Schmitz wrote. "He has an NBA physical profile," Schmitz added on his Twitter account. "(He) plays both ends, (is a) hoops junkie who is going to continually get better, should live in the paint with NBA spacing. Not much downside."

See NBA, B4
Schmitz was also impressed with another Alabama freshman. “Herb Jones impresses me more and more every time I see him,” he said via Twitter. “Monster defender with elite tools. Super competitive. Continuing to improve offensively. Showing some budding playmaking ability in the half court. Still a ways to go skill wise but a bright future no doubt about it.”

Alabama will host Missouri on Wednesday at 8 p.m.

UA gymnasts ranked 10th

Despite defeating Missouri last Friday in Coleman Coliseum by more than a point, Alabama gymnastics dropped in the latest rankings. UA posted a 195.85 to get the win, but that was its second-lowest score. UA is four meets into the season. Alabama is now the No. 10 team in the nation, holding an average score of 196.194 with a high score of 196.725.

Oklahoma remains at the top with a 197.733 average. LSU and Utah follow in order with averages of 197.306 and 197.244, respectively. UCLA (197.094) and Florida (196.875) round out the top five.

The Crimson Tide was No. 9 after both of the first two weeks of competition but then jumped to No. 7 after the third. This is its lowest ranking so far. Also last week, Alabama was in the top 10 on three events. Not anymore. Now, it has just one event in that range. Alabama is sixth nationally on the uneven bars, averaging a 49.206. It is 13th on the balance beam (tied, 49.013), 15th on the floor exercise (49.069) and 20th on the vault (tied, 48.906).

Individually, UA freshman Lexi Graber is tied for ninth on bars with a 9.9 average and high. Senior Kiana Winston is tied for 10th on beam with a 9.894 average and 9.9 high.

Up next, Alabama hosts No. 8 Arkansas on Friday in Coleman Coliseum. Arkansas averages a 196.3 overall and has two events ranked in the top 10 (vault and beam).

Timeout for women’s basketball

It’s a good week for Alabama women’s basketball to have some time off.

The Crimson Tide struggled mightily last week, dropping back-to-back road games against Auburn and Kentucky, two teams at the bottom of the SEC standings.

Now, Alabama and coach Kristy Curry will have until Sunday to regroup and figure out what they can fix before hosting Arkansas. The stat sheet would be a good place to start.

UA turned the ball over 41 times over its last two games, while shooting just 39 and 38 percent in those matchups. The Crimson Tide has relied on its defense for much of the season to combat some offensive woes, but that becomes a much taller task when giving opponents extra possessions. In fact, it was so much of a struggle last week that Alabama lost both games despite out-rebounding its opponent. In its first seven conference games, UA had never lost when winning the battle on the glass.

In Sunday’s contest against Auburn, five different Tide players turned the ball over at least three times, and Alabama’s bench scored only five points. That should change against Arkansas, which does not rank among the SEC’s elite on defense like Auburn.

The Crimson Tide already defeated the Razorbacks on the road earlier this month and reached the 80-point mark in that game for the fourth time this season. Ashley Williams, Jordan Lewis and Shaquera Wade all had dominant games against Arkansas the first time around, combining for 50 of Alabama’s 83 points.

– Drew Hill
Facility opens doors to adapted athletics

By Ehsan Kassim | Staff Reporter

Caitlin McDermott felt the opening of the Stran-Hardin Arena was a bittersweet moment.

McDermott played on the Alabama national championship women’s wheelchair basketball team in 2015, but is a little jealous of the players that get to play in the new $10 million multi-purpose facility for the University’s Adapted Athletics program.

“I am glad this is finally happening, but I kind of wish it happened a few years sooner, so that I could have played,” she said.

McDermott did have an opportunity to play on the court, as she was apart of the alumni team that played in a tournament on Saturday, Jan. 20 to commemorate the opening of the facility.

The arena is named after Margaret Stran and Brent Hardin, the Pioneers of the University’s Adapted Athletics program. Brent Hardin is the director of Alabama Adapted Athletics and Margaret Stran is the associate director.

Upon seeing the facility for the first time, the small details that the building staff included stuck out most to McDermott.

“I thought it was amazing,” McDermott said. “I hadn’t had any walkthroughs before, so I had only seen pictures of what the inside would look like. It was better than I even thought it would be. Just the incredible detail that our staff had considered and the contractors and the architects had considered to make it adaptable to wheelchair athletics was amazing.”

The two-story facility includes a NCAA regulation game venue for wheelchair basketball, an athletic training room, a strength and conditioning room, team meeting rooms, locker rooms and study halls.

The Adapted Athletics basketball teams previously held practices in the University Recreation Center and found it hard to schedule practices at ideal times. The team now has an easier time and can practice when it wants.

Senior Sean Burns, who was on the 2013 men’s national basketball team, is proud of the new facility and all its amenities.

“Just seeing where the program was when I first started and where it is now is just amazing,” said Ryan Hynes, assistant coach to the men’s wheelchair basketball team.

Hynes got to view the arena before his players and he felt overwhelmed with how beautiful the finished product looked.

The men’s wheelchair basketball team is out to a 15-3 start on the season and has high expectations for the rest of the season.

“It’s my last year here, so I’d love to finish out winning,” Burns said. “It would be cool to hang another banner on that wall.”

Adding another banner would help cement the Alabama Adapted Athletics program success, something McDermott feels was solidified with the opening of the brand-new arena.

“I think the perseverance and determination of players, in the past and present, having an incredible staff, have really pushed for this, not taking ‘no’ for an answer,” McDermott said.

“To be able to have this arena that is a visual representation of how incredible, competitive and great this program is.”
Alabama holds off Young, Sooners for big non-conference win

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

A funny thing happened on the way to college basketball’s biggest game of one-on-one for 2018. The rest of Alabama’s team showed up.

With every one of the nine Alabama players who saw action making some sort of contribution, the Crimson Tide knocked off No. 12 Oklahoma 80-73, thrilling a raucous sellout crowd with Alabama’s first home win over a top 15 non-conference opponent since a 1989 win over North Carolina.

Collin Sexton, whose matchup with Oklahoma star freshman Trae Young attracted much of the pre-game attention, delivered a solid, disciplined performance, leading the Crimson Tide with 18 points. But the rest of the box score was dotted with key contributions, ranging from Donta Hall’s seven points, nine rebounds and eight blocked shots to Herbert Jones’ career-high 14 points.

Jones was also a key component to Alabama’s continually shifting defenses against Young.

Five different Alabama players guarded Young at one point, and while he had 17 points and eight assists, both numbers were below his season averages.

See WIN, C4

SCORING SUMMARY

ALABAMA 80, NO. 12 OKLAHOMA 73

Oklahoma (15-5)
Lattin 8-11 2-2 18, Manek 5-13 1-1 12, James 3-9 0-0 8, Young 6-17 1-2 17, Odomes 6-12 3-4 15, Freeman 0-1 0-0, Doolittle 0-1 0-0, McNeace 0-0 0-0, Pulu 0-1 0-0, Shepherd 0-2 0-0, Lazenby 0-0 0-0, McGusty 1-4 0-0 3. Totals 29-71 7-9 73.

Alabama (14-7)
Key 3-9 3-4 11, Hall 4-6 1-4 9, Petty 3-4 0-0 9, Ingram 2-4 3-4 8, Sexton 8-14 1-2 18, Reese 1-3 0-0 3, Giddens 2-2 0-1 4, Johnson 1-2 2-2 4, Jones 6-10 2-5 14, Totals 30-54 12-22 80.

Half-times: Alabama 41-25, 3-Point Goals: Oklahoma 8-27 (Young 4-9, James 2-7, McGusty 1-3, Manek 1-7, Shepherd 0-1), Alabama 8-19 (Petty 3-4, Key 2-5, Ingram 1-1, Reese 1-3, Sexton 1-4, Johnson 0-1, Jones 0-1). Fouled Out: None.

The Crimson Tide also held Young scoreless over the final 11 minutes as it erased a five-point Sooner lead and pulled away for the win.

The key stretch was fueled by another UA player, Braxton Key, who hit back-to-back 3-pointers that extended the Alabama lead from a precarious 62-60 to a more comfortable 68-60 with 5:51 to play.

"I thought we probably played a little more tough-minded today than we have recently," Alabama coach Avery Johnson said. "There was no magic formula to what we did. Defensively, we mixed up seven different things and six of them worked. Collin was a stud, and we got important contributions from the rest of our roster. You look at Donta and Daniel Giddens (who had four points and nine rebounds off the bench), then what Herb contributed.

"When (Jones) gets going downfield he's tough to cover and when he raises up around the basket it looks like he's 7-foot-4. He's getting point guard reps because the trust in him is higher."

The first half was fast-paced and entertaining, with Alabama's effort marred only by 11 turnovers, many of the unforced variety. The Crimson Tide led by as many as 13 points (32-19) in the opening period, although an Oklahoma run whittled that edge down to two late in the half.

Alabama (14-7) led 41-35 at intermission. Oklahoma outscored Alabama 19-10 over the first nine minutes of the second half, but UA responded with a 13-0 run capped by the two Key 3-pointers.

"I told Braxton at halftime to keep shooting, that we had confidence in him," Sexton said. "We know he can make those shots."

Young indicated he didn't feel "held in check" by Alabama's defense, but did compliment UA.

"They're a great team," he said. "They did a lot of different stuff on defense, some straight man and a lot of doubles. And we knew it would be a great atmosphere."

Khadeem Lattin led Oklahoma (15-5) with 18 points.

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

"I thought we probably played a little more tough-minded today than we have recently."
ALABAMA BASKETBALL

This is what Tide fans were waiting on

Kevin Scarbinsky
kscarbinsky@al.com

We'd seen it in flashes, from the open practice in August to last week's streak-busting victory against Auburn, but this was different. This was special.

From Collin Sexton breaking ankles and speed limits to John Petty painting rainbows. From Donta Hall rejecting everyone in his path to Dazon Ingram dropping long-distance dimes. From Braxton Key rejoining the party to Herbert Jones reducing the nation's best player to a spectator at the end.

This wasn't the whole show, but this was the special Alabama basketball team we'd been expecting to see.

That it came against No. 12 Oklahoma and the leader for national player of the year in Trae Young made it look like a scary premonition of what's to come down the road. That it happened in front of as loud a sellout crowd as Coleman Coliseum had heard in ages made it feel like a blast from the past.

Alabama 80, Oklahoma 73 was a statement in bold, capital letters. The Crimson Tide isn't just an NCAA Tournament team waiting to happen. If it keeps working, it has an NCAA Tournament run in the offing.

Avery Johnson estimated his team played well for 32 minutes. If it gets to 40, everybody beware. You could see that potential in Saturday's group effort, and it went well beyond the nine players who played and contributed in so many ways. Johnson complimented virtually everyone in a white jersey and a white T-shirt.

"The crowd I witnessed today in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, for an Alabama basketball game, was magical," Johnson said. "I'm honored to be the head coach. I'm honored to be a part of it."

Who wasn't a part of this cornerstone moment for the revitalized conference in the Big 12/SEC Challenge?

The featured cage match between peerless freshman point guards went Alabama's way. Sexton, who's still not 100 percent after last week's abdomen injury, didn't just outscore Young 18-17. He was part of the tag team that slowed down OU's Steph Curry clone like almost no one else.

While a mob of NBA scouts showed up to break down Sexton vs. Young, another Alabama freshman stole some of their show. Herbert Jones was the primary blanket holding Young to 6-for-17 from the field and 4-for-9 from the arc.

Young had scored 20 or more points in the past 18 of Oklahoma's 19 games. His 17 points on this day was his lowest total since scoring 15 in his college debut. Oh, and he didn't scratch in the final 11 minutes.

In the ultimate victory for Jones, Sexton and the Crimson Tide, Oklahoma coach Lon Kruger gave Young a seat with 1:46 left and the game out of reach.

But the Alabama defense didn't stop with the Young shutdown. Hall, still recovering from wrist surgery, blocked eight shots with his usual furious joy. The offense didn't begin and end with Sexton flying to the goal. Key, still feeling his way back, swished back-to-back treys inside the 8-minute mark of the second half to stretch the lead to eight. The Sooners never really threatened from there.

And as if bothering Young wasn't enough, Jones added 14 points of his own as he continues to demonstrate the depth of Alabama's fantastic freshman class. If you don't love his game, you don't like basketball.

Johnson, already trying to turn the page, said Jones has work to do come Monday.

"We're not throwing him a parade," Johnson said. "We're not giving him a cake."

There will be no trophy, either, for a home victory on the last Saturday in January, but facts are facts. Oklahoma started the day at No. 9 in the NCAA RPI with Alabama at No. 35. This wasn't just another win.

This was an emphatic shutdown of one of the country's best players and one of its best teams. This was Alabama basketball like the old-timers remember. This was a snapshot of what's possible for this team down the road.

So far, by far, this was the highlight of that special Alabama basketball season we were expecting. It hasn't gone exactly as planned, but imagine how much sweeter it'll be when it gets where it has every chance to go.
Tide baseball putting pieces together

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

There's much to learn for Alabama baseball this spring. First-year head coach Brad Bohannon still has to find his best lineup and pitching rotation. The Crimson Tide roster has to become familiar with Bohannon and assistant coaches Jerry Zulli, Jason Jackson and Brock Bennett. That education started on Friday with the first full team practice of spring.

"Energy was outstanding," Bohannon said. "A lot of hard contact, a lot of strikes. It's the healthiest we've been since I've been here, since I got the job. It was a good first day. I'm really pleased with where we are right now."

The team scrimmaged for five innings Friday at the end of its first practice. Alabama's season begins with a three-game homestand against Valparaiso from Feb. 16-18.

There's plenty to be done before then. Bohannon and the coaching staff still haven't seen all of their pitchers because of a handful of injuries that limited some players during fall practice.

Redshirt sophomore Brock Love and redshirt freshman Garret Rukes, who both underwent Tommy John surgery during the 2017 season, completed their throwing programs in December and are expected to be available for opening day.

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TIDE

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Junior Dylan Duarte, who had an elbow injury late last season, pitched in Friday’s scrimmage. Jake Walters and Sonny Potter, who had minor injuries that limited them in fall, are both available now.

“We’ve got some guys that we expect to be in our top eight to 10 (pitchers) that this is really the first time we’re seeing them pitch live to hitters,” Bohannon said. “You evaluate pitchers in the bullpen and you see their pitches, but there’s nothing like the feedback from the hitter that they give you.”

A handful of position players moved around to new positions in Friday’s practice as well. Cobie Vance, who started the last two seasons at second base, played third. Senior Chandler Avant, who had started at shortstop, played second base. There could be more shuffling as the coaching staff finds its lineup.

“We have a lot of experience,” Bohannon said. “We have 40 of 46 home runs back from last year. No matter who we end up playing opening day, there are going to be a lot of juniors and seniors out there.”

Bohannon is the third head coach for the baseball program in three years. Mitch Gaspard resigned in 2016 after seven years as head coach. Greg Goff was fired after the 2017 season. More than a dozen players on Alabama’s roster are playing for their third college head coach. A handful of players who had transferred earlier in their careers, like seniors Connor Short and Hunter Alexander, have played for four coaches.

“I went from (Florida coach Kevin O’Sullivan) to Ross Jones at junior college to the coaching staff last year to Bo,” Alexander said. “It’s been a lot but I’ve got a lot of useful information from four different really good coaches.”

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
Clemson, S.C. - The Alabama men's and women's track and field teams wrapped up two days of competition at the Bob Pollock Invitational in Clemson, S.C., Saturday with victories in the women's 600 meters, women's triple jump and the men's high jump.

Tamara Moncrieffe won the triple jump with a leap of 42-0. Jaimie Robinson finished third at 41-3 1/4. Kaitlin Walker finished as the top collegian in the women's 600 meters in a school record time of 1:31.50.

Other highlights for the women included freshmen Tamara Clark (23.40) and Daija Lampkin (23.46) posting two of the fastest times in school history as they finished second and fourth, respectively, in their collegiate debuts at 200 meters. Clark's time ranks second at Alabama behind Pauline Davis' 30-year-old school-record of 22.76. Lampkin's time equals the fourth-fastest ever run at Alabama.

For the Crimson Tide men, Shelby McEwen won the high jump with a clearance of 7-3. The mark equals the No. 2 all-time clearance at Alabama, second only to Jeff Woodward's 37-year-old school record of 7-7 3/4. On the track, Vincent Kiprop (8:07.10) and Gilbert Kigen (8:12.55) finished second and third in the 3,000 meters. Alfred Chelanga finished seventh in 8:16.24.
SEC distributes close to $41 million to schools

By Matt Murschel
Orlando Sentinel (TNS)

ORLANDO, Fla. — The SEC distributed approximately $596.9 million in total revenue for the 2016-17 fiscal year with an average payout of $40.9 million for each of its 14 member institutions.

That's up slightly from the previous fiscal year (2015-16) when the league handed out $584.2 million and an average school distribution of $40.4 million.

The average payout per school doesn't include revenue from bowl participation.

"This distribution from the SEC is instrumental to our universities' athletics programs ability to provide the highest possible level of support for the thousands of student-athletes who participate annually in nearly two dozen conference sports," SEC commissioner Greg Sankey said in a statement Thursday. "This commitment to excellence encompasses superior support in coaching, equipment, training, academic counseling, medical care and life-skills development for our student-athletes."

According to the league, the SEC distributed $573.8 million from the conference offices as well as $23.1 million retained by institutions that participated in bowl games in order to offset travel and other expenses.

The total amount of revenue distributed comes from a variety of sources including television contracts, bowl games, the College Football Playoff, the SEC Championship, SEC Men's basketball tournament and the NCAA Tournament.

The SEC continues to lead the way among the Power 5 conference when it comes to average distribution among its member schools.

The Big Ten was second last season with an average of $34.8 million per school followed by the Big 12 ($34.5M), Pac-12 ($24.7M) and ACC ($23.8M).
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Some coaches find NFL path goes through Tuscaloosa

Ex-OC Brian Daboll latest assistant to parlay success at Bama into NFL job

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To get back to a position where he could call plays in the pros, Brian Daboll took the road less traveled.

He packed up his bags, left the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots and moved to Alabama.

In a span of 11 months, he apprenticed under one of the best coaches of his generation, helped the Crimson Tide win a national championship and gained exposure to the college game that is influencing the NFL more than ever.

Now, he's the offensive coordinator for the Buffalo Bills — a team he rooted for as a child.

"He obviously ended up a lot better off for having come to our place," Nick Saban proclaimed last week not far from where Daboll sat in the stands at Ladd-Peebles Stadium in Mobile, site of the Senior Bowl.

Along the way toward building a program that rules its level of the sport, Saban has made Alabama an attractive destination for NFL types who are interested in advancing their careers and diversifying their work experience.

Phil Savage, the Crimson Tide's radio analyst and a former general manager of the Cleveland Browns, called Alabama "the ultimate bridge between college and pro."

Look no further than Saban's 2017 staff, which was chock full of men who have held jobs in the NFL. Offensive analyst Chris Weinke did a tour as the Los Angeles Rams' quarterbacks coach prior to his arrival in Tuscaloosa. Former associate athletics director for football Ed Marynowitz was once the Philadelphia Eagles' vice president for player personnel. Defensive line coach Karl Dunbar oversaw the same position group for four NFL teams during 11 seasons.

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And both analyst Shea Tierney as well as special assistant Bobby Williams, who has since moved on to Oregon, also had stints in the league.

"As a college program, it's proving out to be the best," former Tampa Bay Buccaneers general manager Mark Dominik said of Alabama. "So if you want to go work somewhere, go work for the best for a little bit and see what they're doing right. It's always good to spend a year with Coach Saban. It just depends on if you can handle it."

There is a sacrifice, of course. Tuscaloosa is off the beaten path — far from the bright lights that can be found in most NFL cities. Upon settling in, Saban's newest underlings quickly learn the hours are long and the labor is intensive. But they often find the payoff is enormous. Careers generally don't dead end at Alabama. They're jumpstarted or revitalized and in some cases refashioned.

Before leaving for the Oakland Raiders last month, former defensive backs coach Derrick Ansley had never worked in the NFL. Now, he's going to supervise the secondary for Jon Gruden. Ansley landed the job, in part, because he was mentored by Saban — the master of a complex pass-cover- age scheme that is more sophisticated than many of the systems employed by pro teams.

"You're getting exposure to maybe the greatest coach of all time and how he puts things together and how the staff works behind the scenes," Savage said.

As Houston Texans defensive coordinator Romeo Crennel said, "The Alabama program is a great program and Nick does a great job down there."

Saban's bonafides are what attracted Daboll, a 41-year-old ex-NFL offensive coordinator who had become pigeonholed as a position coach with the Patriots in the three seasons that preceded his arrival in Alabama.

Daboll wanted to prove he could call plays again, and Alabama — the college program that most closely resembled the franchise he was leaving — offered him the chance to do that.

"He wasn't getting any chance to move really in the New England organization because they have such a good coordinator in Josh McDaniels," Dominik said. "I think he saw a way that I've got to set myself apart. I don't think he went to Alabama thinking, 'Boy if I do really great, I am just going to leave.' There are still only 32 coordinator jobs in the NFL. So, I think it was an opportunity to show that, hey, I am a good play-caller. And if I do this for five years, that's great. And if something opens up. I'll consider it."

Six days after he dialed up "Seattle" — the play that produced the 41-yard touchdown catch by DeVonta Smith that won Alabama the College Football Playoff national championship over Georgia — Daboll was out the door and headed back north.

He had been called back to the NFL by the Bills.

But Daboll's departure wasn't a loss for Alabama.

The Crimson Tide won again because Daboll's return to the pros only reinforced the perception that Tuscaloosa is a destination for assistants and personnel staff members looking to climb the football ladder.

"If a coach comes there and does really good and he leaves," Dominik said, "it's still another feather in the cap for Alabama."
Now may be the right time for Jalen Hurts to switch positions

Joseph Goodman  jgoodman@al.com

When Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts watches Super Bowl 52 on Sunday, there is one player who should draw most of his attention.

It's not Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Nick Foles, and it's not New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady.

No, while everyone else is watching the passers, Hurts would be wise to focus on Eagles tight end Trey Burton, who played quarterback for the Florida Gators. Burton went undrafted out of college, but now he's being called a possible Super Bowl X-factor for the underdog Eagles.

Hurts is an X-factor for Alabama when he's lined up behind center, but if he wants to give himself the best chance at a long NFL-career, a position change might be in his best interest. Why wait until after college like Burton?

After Tua Tagovailoa's emergence for the Crimson Tide during the national championship game, Hurts might have the luxury of changing positions now, this offseason, and setting himself up for a future NFL Draft.

Is it in Alabama's best interest for Hurts to change positions? Probably not. Whether it's Hurts who starts next season, or Tagovailoa, Alabama is probably the best it can be with one of them being the backup. But is it in Hurts' best interest to remain at quarterback? I'm not so sure. ESPN Draft analyst Mel Kiper was asked about Hurts' draft projection recently, and Kiper said Hurts, in his opinion, wouldn't be drafted as a quarterback.

Now, Kiper isn't an NFL general manager, and, as all agents preach to their new clients this time of year, it only takes one GM to draft you, but quarterbacks are the most scrutinized of all positions, and there is now a long list of spread quarterbacks who haven't worked out in the NFL.
GOODMAN
FROM BI

This age of spread offenses in the college game has produced some fantastic quarterbacks — and Hurts is one of them — but it’s a tough transition to the pro game. For every DeShåun Watson and Cam Newton, there’s a Johnny Manziel and Tim Tebow — big-name college quarterbacks who are busts in the NFL.

There’s also another ever-growing list, though, and Hurts should start studying it beginning with Sunday’s Super Bowl. Burton is one of the latest former college quarterbacks finding some success in the NFL, but he’s not an outlier.

The Patriots have their own converted quarterback, but receiver/return specialist Julian Edelman has been injured this season. Edelman played quarterback at Kent State and was drafted in the seventh round by New England.

Ohio State has two quarterbacks-turned-receivers in the NFL. Their stories should interest Hurts.

Terrelle Pryor was drafted as a quarterback in 2011 by the Oakland Raiders, and he spent the majority of the first four seasons of his pro career struggling at that position. He had some initial success — he earned the starting job to begin the 2013 season, and broke the Raiders’ rushing record by a quarterback in the season opener — but the Raiders traded him to the Seattle Seahawks in 2014 for a seventh-round pick.

Then the Seahawks cut him.

Then the Kansas City Chiefs cut him.

Finally, the Cincinnati Bengals cut him in the summer of 2015.

When the Bengals cut you as a quarterback, that’s when you know it’s time for a change.

And that’s when something pretty extraordinary happened. Pryor got rich. He found initial success with the Cleveland Browns in 2016, and then signed a one-year, $8 mil-
Pryor's story doesn't resonate with Hurts, then Braxton Miller's path to the NFL certainly will. Miller had incredible success as a quarterback for Ohio State early in his career. His sophomore season, he passed for 2,039 yards and 15 touchdowns, and ran for 1,271 yards and 13 touchdowns. Last season, Hurts passed for 2,081 yards and 17 touchdowns, and rushed for 855 yards and eight touchdowns.

Hurts was named SEC Offensive Player of the Year as a freshman. Miller was named Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year as a junior. His senior season, though, Miller couldn't beat out Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett. Miller switched to receiver his senior year and was drafted in the third round. He signed an initial four-year, $3.1 million deal with the Houston Texans, and he's still in the league.

From the SEC footprint, Randall Cobb (Kentucky) made the successful transition from college quarterback to NFL receiver. Cobb has been a star for Green Bay since being drafted in 2011.

Like Cobb in college, Hurts is the most athletic player when he's on a football field. Is he a better quarterback than Tua? Probably not. Is Hurts a better all-around football player? Most certainly.

Burton was the same type of player at Florida just not as athletically gifted. After going undrafted, Burton packed on about 10 pounds of muscle and the Eagles gave him a shot at tight end. Burton was a third-string tight end for the Eagles this season, but he's set up for a big payday after the Super Bowl.

Maybe Hurts can make it as a quarterback in the NFL. Who really knows? A career as a backup quarterback is the best job in sports. Just ask former UAB quarterback Joe Webb. More than likely, though, at some point, Hurts is going to have to consider switching positions.

There are others who have made the transition. Former Indiana University quarterback Antwaan Randle El is probably the gold standard. He was the first player in Division I-A history to pass for 40 touchdowns and rush for 40 touchdowns. He played receiver for nine seasons in the NFL.

Brad Smith (Missouri) was the first NCAA Division-I quarterback to pass for 8,000 yards and rush for 4,000 yards in his career. He was Tim Tebow before Tim Tebow.

In 2006, after a successful career in the Big 12, Smith was drafted by the New York Jets in the fourth round as a wide receiver/running back/quarterback. This was during the heyday of the NFL's "wildcat quarterback" fad, so Smith spent most of his time playing that niche position and later signed a four-year, $15 million deal with the Buffalo Bills.

Unfortunately for Hurts, the "wildcat" days are mostly gone. He does have the skill set, though, to succeed at another position. The question is, does he want to do it now, or wait until later?
Should city help pay for new stadium?

By: Erin Edgemon

The Birmingham City Council on Wednesday will officially begin the conversation on whether to help fund the construction of a new stadium on Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex-owned property downtown.

Mayor Randall Woodfin is expected to discuss stadium funding in a special-called Committee of the Whole meeting set for 3:30 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall.

Woodfin previously said he supported the city paying for a portion of the stadium. He said he also expected Jefferson County, University of Alabama at Birmingham and corporate participation.

The proposed $174 million open-air stadium was included in the BJCC's 20-year master plan released in 2016. The stadium would have up to 55,000 seats and additional meeting and exhibition space.

"The stadium project in terms of funding is structured as a collaborative effort involving the city of Birmingham, Jefferson County Commission, Jefferson County Legislative Delegation, UAB and private sector support as well as the Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center Authority," BJCC Executive Director Tad Snider said in an email to AL.com.

"All the parties are important to being able to move forward with the project," he added. "The city of Birmingham's support is needed along with other key stakeholders and is very important to the project being able to move forward. The city, just as all parties, is being very responsible in their due diligence and seeking appropriate information in considering their support of the project. The Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center Authority has been appropriately working with the city in their due diligence process.

Ahead of Wednesday's meeting, some city councilors appeared to be on the fence about the project as the city is being asked to contribute the largest sum.

Birmingham is said to have been asked to contribute as much as $3 million a year for 30 years on the project.

Councilors have also expressed concern over the University of Alabama at Birmingham not pitching in, even though, they will be a major user of the facility.

UAB has agreed to a long-term lease of the stadium for its home football games. UAB is also considering sponsorship opportunities, the university said in a statement.

In an attempt to move the project forward, the Jefferson County Commission earlier this month approved allocating $30 million to the construction of the stadium. The county will allocate $1 million a year from the county's economic development fund for 30 years to the debt service on the multi-purpose facility.

The county's funding is contingent on construction starting before the end of the year.

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"We are on a very limited time frame," Commission President Jimmie Stephens said. "The ground must be broken if we want it to be there for the (2021) World Games."

Officials also want to have the stadium available to be used by Birmingham's new professional soccer team which will debut in spring 2019.

State legislation that would levy an additional 3 percent automobile rental tax in Jefferson County for the support of the BJCC has been advertised for the 2018 legislative session.

According to the bill, the stadium must be suitable for NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision football games.
Video of dancing Nick Saban goes viral

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Not only does Nick Saban own six national championship titles, the Alabama football coach apparently also owns a nice pair of boogie shoes.

Video of the 66-year-old Saban dancing surfaced Sunday, after a high school recruit’s father posted the video to Facebook.

Saban has been recruiting cornerback prospect Eddie Smith of Slidell, Louisiana, and the video shows the crimson-jacketed coach doing the Cupid Shuffle and the Wobble during an off-campus visit.

The video has been shared multiple times on Facebook, retweeted on Twitter and been the subject of news articles published by a variety of websites, from online gossip site TMZ.com to yahoosports.com.

Most of the articles praise Saban’s Cupid Shuffle skills, but add that his Wobble needs a little work.

Some of the headlines read “You just wish you had Nick Saban’s dance moves” and “Nick Saban shows why he’s a recruiting god with some slick dance moves.”

No word yet on whether “Dancing With the Stars” has expressed an interest in UA’s coach.
German automaker expects heavy spending on new tech

FRANKFURT, Germany —

German automaker Daimler made lots of money last year. That's a good thing, because the company says it will need to spend heavily this year to keep up with the technological change expected to disrupt the car industry.

The maker of Mercedes-Benz luxury cars said Thursday that its earnings this year faced the burden of "very high" expenditure on new models and technologies such as battery-powered cars. Like the rest of the industry, the company is positioning itself for an anticipated shift to autonomous driving and self-driving technologies.

See MERCEDES, A7

CEO of Daimler AG Dieter Zetsche speaks during the annual balance news conference in Stuttgart, Germany, Thursday. Daimler AG says its net profit rose 24 percent to a record $13.5 billion last year, helped by strong sales of its Mercedes-Benz SUVs and new E-Class luxury sedan. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS)
to transportation services such as car-sharing and ride-hailing through smartphone apps.

Based on that, the company issued a measured outlook for this year despite a record profit of 10.9 billion euros ($13.5 billion) last year, saying that operating earnings would only be of "the magnitude of the previous year" instead of increasing.

Daimler AG said spending on research and development would increase slightly in 2018 after spending 8.7 billion euros in 2017, a rise of 15 percent.

The company's shares dipped on the earnings news and outlook, trading down 1.2 percent at 72.84 euros in midday trading in Europe.

CEO Dieter Zetsche's position is that the company's core business — selling gasoline- and diesel-powered luxury cars with fat profit margins, plus trucks and buses — is "very healthy and highly profitable" and can provide the investment cash needed to remain a leader as the industry changes rapidly. Daimler says it will spend 10 billion euros on new electric vehicles in the next few years. It has shown off pre-production versions of a new electric-driven EQ sub-brand within Mercedes, saying the first EQ sport-utility vehicle will be launched by the end of this decade.

Tighter government restrictions on auto emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases are part of the reason behind the industry-wide push into electric vehicles, even though they have limited appeal to consumers due to higher prices, limited range and the amount of time it takes to charge them. Sales could pick up if battery-powered vehicles become cheaper and more convenient than internal combustion ones — a tipping point that some experts say could be reached by the early to mid-2020s.

For all of last year, Daimler net profit rose 24 percent, helped by strong sales of its Mercedes-Benz SUVs and the new version of its E-Class luxury sedan. Revenue rose 7 percent to 164.3 billion euros and management proposed its highest dividend to date, of 3.65 euros per share.

Earnings were driven by the Mercedes-Benz luxury car division, which increased sales by 8 percent to a record 2.37 million vehicles worldwide. The unit's revenue rose 6 percent to 94.7 billion euros, resulting in earnings before interest and taxes of 9.2 billion euros, up from 8.1 billion euros in 2016.

The company said it would pay profit-sharing of 5,700 euros per worker for eligible employees, up from 5,400 euros.

The company's annual news conference in Stuttgart began with Zetsche condemning an experiment commissioned by an industry-backed entity in which monkeys were exposed to diluted diesel exhaust from a Volkswagen vehicle. The entity, known by its German abbreviation EUGT, had representatives from Daimler, Volkswagen, and BMW on its management board.

Zetsche said "such experiments are contrary to our values at Daimler" and said the company's role would be "thoroughly investigated." The company has said that its representative on the EUGT board has been suspended.
For-profit loan forgiveness program could see major cut

By Maria Danilova
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Education Department’s plan to provide only partial loan forgiveness to some students defrauded by for-profit colleges could reduce overall payments by about 60 percent, according to a preliminary analysis obtained by The Associated Press.

The agency announced in December that it was discontinuing the Obama administration’s practice of fully wiping out the loans of students deceived by the now-defunct Corinthian Colleges under the borrower defense rule. The department said some students will now be getting only partial loan forgiveness to make the process fair and protect taxpayers from excessive costs. The agency will look at average income for specific programs to determine if the loans should be forgiven fully or partially.

A department document drafted in the fall and viewed by the AP shows that such an approach could cut the overall amount of relief granted to students by around 60 percent. To arrive at the initial estimate, officials looked at student loans that had been forgiven in their entirety to determine the impact had partial relief been granted.

Education Department press secretary Liz Hill said in a statement Tuesday, “This is not an official calculation from the Department of Education. It is an impossible calculation to make at this stage in the process as we continue to adjudicate claims.”

Critics said the idea of partial relief was unfair since thousands of Corinthian students had already had their loans canceled in full under President Barack Obama. The agency said in December that it had tens of thousands of claims from Corinthian students pending.

The action comes as Education Secretary Betsy DeVos rewrites regulations governing student protections with regard to for-profit schools. Last year she froze two Obama-era rules that were meant to put additional checks on for-profits. Critics point to the Trump administration’s ties with the for-profit sector and accuse the department of protecting industry interests, but DeVos says the Obama-era rules were too broad and could be misused at taxpayers’ expense.

Eileen Connor, a litigator at Harvard University’s Project on Predatory Student Lending, which has represented hundreds of defrauded Corinthian students, criticized the projections.

“I think that is terrible. It’s another example of the Department of Education picking the side of fraudulent schools and not doing right by those who have been hurt by them,” Connor said. “And we have every intention of channeling the department’s action in this regard.”

Rick Hess, director of education policy at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, praised the program as defending the interests of taxpayers.

“If I borrow money and I go to a college in which I don’t get a good education or receive a diploma, should any of that responsibility lie with me?” Hess said. “What I see here is the department trying to responsibly determine when individuals are defrauded and when they should be responsible for the funds they borrowed.”

When announcing the partial relief program, DeVos said, “No fraud is acceptable, and students deserve relief if the school they attended acted dishonestly.” But she added that the process also “protects taxpayers from being forced to shoulder massive costs that may be unjustified.”