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IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT CAN UNITE BHAM, IT'S WORKFORCE

When you read the Building (It) Together report, which takes a deep dive into Birmingham’s workforce, you can come away with a number of impressions.

You can call it a looming crisis. You can call it an opportunity. You can say it’s a challenge metros across the nation are facing. You can call it Birmingham’s next big opportunity to shed its slow growth reputation.

But one thing is for certain: it should be a call to action.

The data in the report speaks for itself, from the tepid growth comparisons to our Southeastern peers to misalignment stats between education and employers.

Workforce development is simply an issue we need to address and soon, if we hope to grow as a region.

And, even if you fall into the camp that doesn’t want Birmingham to grow – and we do hear from those people from time to time – the report is pretty clear that it will be difficult to maintain our status quo without taking action.

Building (It) Together laid out a number of recommendations for how the metro area can address the misalignment between education, workforce training and employer needs.

We need more cooperation and communication between educators and employers – and a framework that eases that process.

Businesses must embrace the opportunities created by Building (It) Together and look for innovative ways to work with educators and trainers to develop their talent pipelines.

As a community, we need to capitalize on this unique opportunity to address inequity in metro Birmingham and extend economic opportunities to those who haven’t traditionally benefited from the growth we’ve had.

Birmingham needs to leverage its strengths to find more growth in traded industries to boost local wealth creation.

We must find a way to foster and encourage entrepreneurship to rid Birmingham of the risk aversion that is limiting our startup culture.

Of course, one of the most important overarching themes is the word “together.”

From the largest businesses and the most influential executives to powerful elected officials, no one person will be able to solve these challenges alone.

It will take a level of cooperation we frankly haven’t seen often enough in metro Birmingham.

It will mean breaking down traditional silos and, yes, some people might have to yield their traditional lanes to others.

That hasn’t always been our strong suit in metro Birmingham.

But if there’s one thing we should all be able to get behind, it’s this movement toward better workforce development.

It’s the pathway to creating the best Birmingham we can be.

It’s how we can create a metro area where our children and grandchildren have sufficient opportunities to stay or come back.

It’s what we must do to create an economy where businesses of all types can grow, thrive and create wealth. It’s how we can make sure Birmingham doesn’t fall further behind its regional peers. It’s how we can make sure – several generations down the road – Birmingham isn’t eclipsed by fast-rising Huntsville.

And we can do it. But only together.
Former police chief lands job at Pentagon

Carol Robinson  crobinson@al.com

Former Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper is heading to the Pentagon as the deputy chief of the U.S. Army Reserve.

General Mark Milley, the U.S. Army's chief of staff, announced Roper's appointment Friday morning. He will begin his duties on July 1.

Roper, who for three decades has continued to rise in the Reserve ranks, most recently has served as the commanding general for the 76th U.S. Army Reserve Operational Response Command in Salt Lake City, which is the Army Reserve's all hazard response command.

Roper has more than 30 years of military service. He was deployed during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm and again during Operation Enduring Freedom, where he served as the military spokesman for all U.S. Army forces in Afghanistan.

Named Birmingham's police chief in 2007, the 54-year-old Roper announced in November 2017 he would be stepping down following the election of Mayor Randall Woodfin, who asked all department heads to reapply for their positions. He left the job officially in April.

Roper on Friday told AL.com he has the initial Pentagon assignment for one year. He and his wife, Edith, will maintain their Birmingham area home but have a condominium near the Pentagon where he can walk to work every day. "It will surely be a different lifestyle for us, but my family is excited and my wife is ready to decorate and make it our northern home," Roper said.

Roper said the U.S. Army Reserve has transitioned from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve and that's placed a greater demand on soldiers, their families and employers.

"After serving as a field commander totally focused on the readiness of my command, in this position, my role is two-fold. As the Deputy Chief, Army Reserve, my focus is strategy and policy development, planning, programming, and resourcing at the national, departmental, and service levels," he said. "I also have a secondary responsibility for the coordination, integration, and synchronization of our staff within the Headquarters Department of the Army Staff. The key is accomplishing the chief's vision by integrating Army Reserve force capabilities in support of the nation and ensuring we set the conditions for long term success.

"As a product of the Birmingham School System, I fondly remember my four years in JROTC at Phillips High School where I received a certain satisfaction and fulfillment in wearing my uniform and learning the lessons of leadership," he said. "I still remember my three instructors and their impact on my life. I then received my Army commission in 1983 at UAB but I had no idea the journey would take me all over the world, including several deployments."

Roper said it has been an honor serving the community for 33 years as a police officer, but also serving his country for 35 years as a soldier.

"The Birmingham Police Department benefited from my Army Reserve training and experiences. For example, I led the Army Reserve command that specializes in responding to homeland disasters so when the tornadoes struck our area, I fully understood the coordination required to synchronize the additional support that flowed into our area," he said. "I also understood what questions to ask and could mentor my team on the process, so the lessons are enduring."

Since leaving the Birmingham Police Department, Roper said he's been teaching leadership, ethics and decision making to law enforcement professionals all over the country. "These are challenging times in policing, so we have to lead our way through the chaos, mistrust and dialogue on policing and race relations in America and there is no better example than Birmingham," he said.

"I have truly been blessed to serve with amazing men and women in the blue uniform here in Birmingham and the green uniform all over the nation so this new Army assignment is another chapter in my life's destiny," he said. "I've always believed that God has a plan for our lives so when one door closed another door opened."
Fairhope feuding just gets nastier

A pretty city torn by politics

John Sharp jsharp@ai.com

From outward appearances, Fairhope might be the envy of Alabama cities. Quaint shops, galleries and homegrown eateries burst with activity. Popular festivals attract tens of thousands of people. Flowers dot the landscape. The city’s population is the state’s fastest-growing since 2010.

But for the past 18 months, Fairhope’s politics have been anything but lovely. Power plays at city hall often pit Mayor Karin Wilson and her supporters against the five-member City Council and Wilson’s critics.

In the past two weeks, those battle lines hardened further as the two sides debated the fate of Fairhope’s police chief. The divide was illustrated by two council meetings that the warring factions attended separately. The mayor’s detractors filled the council chambers during a special-called meeting on June 4, followed by a stronger showing of Wilson proponents on Monday.

The friction brought calls for the mayor to resign, counter-calls for the council president to step aside and accusations from both sides about a lack of trust.

The mayor’s husband even stood up and spoke out on Monday, accusing the council of orchestrating the June 4 outrage against the mayor, while defending his wife’s character.

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FAIRHOPE

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Meanwhile, resident Ron Allen said, “I’ve been coming to these meetings the last 10 to 11 years and I don’t know what to say, but this has just got to stop. It’s nasty. It’s not being adults. It’s not people who are mature. It’s got to stop.”

‘NEGATIVE STATEMENTS’

The latest discord first began its boil on June 1, when a city press release announced the retirement of Police Chief Joe Petties. Petties is a notable law-enforcement figure in the coastal region, being an African-American chief in a city that’s more than 85 percent white.

The press release caused shock, and Petties himself claimed he would be willing to reconsider retirement as long as the police department oversight was handled by the City Council, rather than the mayor’s administration.

Council members said they were unaware of the chief’s pending retirement, but Wilson said the announcement was based on paperwork Petties had filed with the Retirement Systems of Alabama in Montgomery.

A special meeting was hastily arranged so that council members could discuss an interim replacement. The meeting drew a large crowd, all of whom appeared to be Petties supporters and many of whom were Wilson detectors. The meeting evolved into a town hall-style forum, where attendee after attendee praised Petties.

“He’s been a great chief who caters to everybody,” said resident Johnny Chaney. “He doesn’t choose any sides.”

Petties spoke, too, flanked at the podium by numerous former city employees who had either been fired or had retired since Wilson took over as mayor in 2016.

Petties accused the mayor of attacking his integrity and orchestrating a “ploy for me to surrender my position.” He said he received a poor evaluation late last month from the mayor, which he claimed was the first “deplorable” review he’s gotten in his 35-year law enforcement career.

“This evaluation was filled with negative statements and lies,” the chief said.

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Petties said that the mayor accused him of intimidating or harassing city employees. He said he was asked to assign lieutenants to handle those interactions.

"Mayor Wilson called one of my lieutenants and stated that I needed to retire while I still had my integrity intact and that the police department was like the Titanic, a sinking ship, under my leadership," said Petties. "This just confirmed my thought that Mayor Wilson was bound and determined to force me out."

At one point, Petties had to stop speaking and was overcome with emotion. His wife had to finish his thoughts. "My retirement should be a joyful one ... I feel I should be able to finish the rest of my term freed from harassment and bullying," Petties' statement concluded.

'IT IS MY JOB'

Wilson declined to talk specifics about her review of the chief, calling it a confidential matter.

"As mayor, it is my job to do evaluations," she said. "I do that for all department heads. If he wants to share it, he can. I support anything he wants to do — stay or retire — and I didn't ask him to retire."

Wilson said that Petties told her that he had intended to retire at the end of former Mayor Tim Kant's term in late 2016. Petties was appointed as chief in 2013, while Kant was in office.

Wilson said that Petties decided to stay on the job to help with the transition.

Petties said he and his wife traveled to Montgomery to speak with representatives at the Retirement Systems of Alabama to discuss a July 1 retirement. He said that retirement is the only way to leave "on my own terms."

Council members, following Petties' statement, said they were unaware of what had transpired. They said the public commentary at the June 4 meeting was not "rehearsed" and they all asked Petties to reconsider his retirement. Some of the council members even tore up a resignation letter that Petties had written.

The council voted unanimously to explore possible options that would allow it to take control of the police department from the mayor, and Petties said he'd remain with the city until the council's analysis was complete. A report is expected within the next couple of weeks.

Wilson, meanwhile, said: "It's unfortunate that this is turned into something about me," a comment which elicited audience boos. "There is nothing I can say to this group. I don't talk about personnel matters. You won't hear it from me. The reality is this has been a very political town in the past one and a half years and there has been a lot of opportunities for people to point the finger and that should not happen when it comes to personnel."

Councilman Kevin Boone, a Wilson nemesis on the council, responded: "It is about the mayor. You are in charge of the employees. This is a hostile environment. We've had six other employees up there speaking about how bad of a situation it was which forced them to resign. It's about the mayor."

" Said Wilson: "It's political."

'ALL ORCHESTRATED'

A week later — on Monday — it was Wilson's side that came to speak out at the council meeting. The view of the crowd was that the council had ginned up the outrage against the mayor.

"What you guys put on last week, I was told not to watch and I haven't watched it," said the mayor's husband, Kiefer Wilson, referring to the council meetings which are taped and broadcast on the city's website. "What you guys displayed was horrible. I think it was all orchestrated. I think you call your special friends and disgruntled employees. It was made to make her look bad. The more you do that, the tougher we get."

He added, "When you question my wife's character, you question me."

Dean Mosher and Jay Harlan, both Wilson proponents, also accused the council of staging the June 4 meeting.

They focused particular ire on Jack Burrell, the council president.

Harlan said, "You planned the whole thing. You packed the crowd."

Bobby Green, a Fairhope resident, liked the audience at the June 4 meeting to a "mob."

Mosher questioned why other council members, instead of Burrell, had not offered to serve as the council president. Burrell has served in that role for six years.

Harlan said he believes that Burrell is trying to oust the mayor so that he can take over.

" Said Burrell: "I didn't orchestrate anything. This is more character assassination that I've endured for the past year and a half."

He added, "I don't have any sights on being mayor. There is no conspiracy. I have a great paying job. I'm a full-time engineer. I don't have dreams of being the mayor right now."

Wilson also had an ally in A.J. Cooper, the mayor of Prichard from 1972-1980, who is a Fairhope business owner. He said that Wilson, as mayor, has the authority to act as the city's top executive.

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"This is not about race, it's not about political parties," said Cooper. "It's about how do we manage the cities."

But there were Wilson detractors at Monday's meeting, such as Jesse Patterson, who directly asked the mayor whether she would resign. Said Wilson, "That's a resounding No."

"I've never seen such a blatant misuse of power as I've seen with the current mayor," said Melanie Beiser, a former city employee. "Over 25 employees have left since this mayor was elected, and that is over 400 years of experience."

'GROUND ZERO'

The meeting on Monday also underscored the dire relationship between Wilson and the five-member, all-male council.

Wilson said none of the council members have reached out to her to request a meeting to try to improve relations and resolve disagreements.

Councilman Jay Robinson, who along with Jimmy Conyers and Robert Brown was first elected in 2016, said he has never rejected a meeting with Wilson. He accused Wilson of making generalized statements that the council "refuses to meet with me."

Brown said that trust between the two sides needs to be rebuilt. He said the relationship is at "Ground Zero."

Boone and Wilson then began arguing, with Boone emphatically saying he would not reach out to Wilson for anything. He said, "Mayor, you have misled me so many times. We cannot trust you. The last time I met with you, you asked me to leave. Why would I reach out to you if you asked me to leave and yelled?"

Said Wilson: "The only one who yells is you. The reality is that I'm the only one who reaches out. It has to go both ways."

Countered Boone: "Unfortunately, we can't trust you."

Kiefer Wilson, in the audience, then responded: "What you did, we can't trust you."

Said Boone: "You had your time to talk. We cannot trust her."

Said Kiefer Wilson: "I'm sure she feels the same way."
And the industrial kitchen equipment store Hotel & Restaurant Supply, located next to Monkey Joe’s, also is closing, though a definitive date was not available.

The closures are related to an overall $22.61 million road project that’s expected to improve and realign Second Avenue between Paul W. Bryant Drive and 15th Street. Earlier this month, a $6.025 million grant was awarded to the University of Alabama for the construction of a vehicle and pedestrian bridge over the railroad crossing of Second Avenue as part of the project.

Work to build the bridge and improve the roadway could begin by the end of the year, said Monica G. Watts, an associate vice president for communications in UA’s Division of Strategic Communications.

Construction is expected to last about 10 months.

“We previously completed some components of the project, including raising the power transmission lines that run parallel to the railroads,” she said. “The next phase, tentatively scheduled to start by the end of the year, depending on the grant contract, will be the bridge and road construction.”

The building housing Monkey Joe’s and Hotel & Restaurant Supply is slated to come down at the end of the year before the road work begins.

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construction, Watts said. It’s the only building within the shopping center that will be affected, she said.

The Tuscaloosa location of Monkey Joe’s opened in 2015. Shane Spiller, president of Spiller Furniture Co. and a franchisee of the local Monkey Joe’s, which is headquartered in Atlanta, said there are no plans for the business to reopen after its closure.

“We will work with Monkey Joe’s corporate office to facilitate anyone who wanted to go into that business,” Spiller said. “It’s been a great business.”

Also, Monkey Joe’s will honor all gift cards and frequent jumper cards that have already been purchased by customers through the last day of business, and deposit refunds will be granted to those who have reserved parties for after the July 1 closing date.

Marcus Lyon, general manager of the Meridian, Mississippi-based Hotel & Restaurant Supply, said the company expects to open a new location in Tuscaloosa by the end of the year.

“It’s unfortunate for Monkey Joe’s and Hotel & Restaurant Supply because I feel like we have great locations,” Lyon said, “but for the city of Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama, this is a great project and it’s going to enhance our community.”

Both Spiller and Lyon said that UA was reasonable and courteous during this process that began about two years ago when the university’s 1831 Foundation purchased the tract where the two businesses now operate.

The Second Avenue road project is meant to correct what has become a transportation barrier in Tuscaloosa by building a bridge over the existing rail line, a move that is expected to decrease traffic delays and improve safety for residents in Tuscaloosa and surrounding areas.

Additionally, it will provide an alternative route for around 80,000 vehicles per day, reducing conflicts with the train and other vehicle-pedestrian traffic for those traveling on and off-campus.

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, announced June 6 that UA had received the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America grant.

This grant program was established by the federal Department of Transportation in June 2017 to advance the Trump administration’s goals of rebuilding the nation’s infrastructure while increasing the total investment by state, local and private partners.

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BHAM ATTORNEY NAMED DISTRICT JUDGE FOR NORTH ALABAMA

A Birmingham attorney has been selected by the United States Senate to hold a seat in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama.

Annemarie Carney

Axon, an attorney at Wallace Jordan Ratliff & Brandt LLC, will serve as district judge.

Axon's litigation practice at the firm includes a concentration in fiduciary and probate litigation, where she represents a broad range of clients, including individual and corporate fiduciaries and financial institutions in both state and federal court.

Her experience includes claims arising under a fiduciary's duty to its beneficiaries, matters relating to conservatorship and guardianship, will contests, trust modifications and terminations, and the resignation and/or removal of fiduciaries. In addition to fiduciary litigation, her experience includes litigation involving state and federal environmental laws, federal securities law, state immunity under 42 U.S.C. 1983, and general contract and tort law.

Axon is a member of the Alabama and Rhode Island state bar associations, as well as the Birmingham Bar Association and the Estate Planning Council.

She is president of the YWCA junior board and the Girls on the Run board of directors and a member of the Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation board and the American Cancer Society.

She earned her bachelor's degree in history and political science and her law degree at the University of Alabama.
Maintenance worker accused of break-in

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa police have arrested a maintenance worker accused of breaking into a University of Alabama student's apartment.

The victim reported to police Friday that she had security footage showing the worker enter her room at Campus Evolution Village off Greensboro Avenue.

Officers located suspect Theodore Williams, 60, at the complex and arrested him Friday, said Tuscaloosa Police spokeswoman Lt. Teena Richardson. Some of the victim's property has been recovered, she said. He was charged with third-degree burglary and later released from the Tuscaloosa County Jail on $15,000 bond.

According to court records, Williams had a master key that gave him access to each unit in the complex. The student had no maintenance scheduled for that day. She reported that a watch worth around $2,000 was missing from her belongings.

One of the student's friends posted the video to Facebook Friday. It shows a man wearing a lanyard enter the room and leave about 30 seconds after looking on her desk before moving to an area that was off-camera.
Meet UAB's new innovation and entrepreneurship chair

UAB has tapped Patrick Murphy as the inaugural Goodrich Endowed Chair in Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Collat School of Business.

The new chair position was established in 2017 by Mike and Gillian Goodrich to support education and research in innovation and entrepreneurship at the Collat School of Business.

It’s one part of the school’s effort to boost entrepreneurship and innovation-based economic development, something local leaders have said is critical to the future of metro Birmingham’s economy.

Murphy comes from DePaul University in Chicago and brings a wealth of experience in entrepreneurship. Murphy will start his position in August. The BBJ spoke to Murphy to gain some insight into what he has done in the past and how that will apply to Birmingham.

What is your take on the state of innovation and entrepreneurship in Birmingham right now? I have been researching the scene for two months, and I do have some observations. Clearly it is a revitalizing town. By revitalizing I mean growing just more and more. Eight years ago, Chicago had a type of (economic) resurgence. Whenever that happens, it’s important for an entrepreneurial economy to not lose touch with its culture. By culture, I’m talking about the history — including the civil rights history and traditions, including the banking and steel traditions.

All of these things matter and they are reflected in subtle ways in how people address the culture. So I’m trying to assess the culture, and I see a town that has a lot going for it, and everybody that I’ve talked to is excited about the future. But what I would like to do is help the city tell its story more clearly and show the rest of the nation what’s going on there. I think there is a great story to tell, and I think that starts in the younger generation and the universities.

What do you think this endowed chair will bring to UAB and to the Collat school?

The endowed chair is an indication to me that the university takes entrepreneurship seriously. It’s unique (also) because it’s housed in the business school, because we’re talking about turning projects into businesses, but anyone can be a part of it. In this area of entrepreneurship, I’m going to have the resources to spread entrepreneurship across campus, and I have the experience here in the Chicago ecosystem. The best way is to design entrepreneurial needs for it to be embedded into the structure of the university, and it’s really great that the university has events and annual campaigns related to entrepreneurship.

When we get it embedded and the way professors teach their courses. After that (the plan is to) develop a masters in entrepreneurship, there’s already a certificate program, but it can be built upon.

What areas need improvement in entrepreneurship at both UAB and in Birmingham? I think the formal curriculum in the programs now can be made a little bit more current with regards to social enterprise. That’s one specific thing that I would like to do. A really strong social enterprise course that taps into the desires and dreams of first generation college students living around the city that have a dream of doing more than their family ever has. They do entrepreneurship by reviving the communities they come from and assembling (businesses) in correlation with those values, and they often turn it into social enterprise or community entrepreneurship. The community can be adapted to that element in Birmingham. In Chicago, it’s a big city, but we have large communities with very pressing needs. We have here a great deal of issues and from what I’ve gathered, there are some similar communities that want to use entrepreneurship to raise the community up but in a way that doesn’t erase the core culture and that is social enterprise. I think that’s where the trend is going, and that’s the kind of coursework I would like to create.

With your experience in international entrepreneurship education, how will you take that and apply that to UAB? Well, I think universities in general are interested in internationalizing. (The U.S.) has a really strong higher education system and, with UAB, it’s a young institution. It’s going to start attracting students from around the world. From when I was a foreign student in China in college and taught in the Middle East and (went) to New Zealand and multiple places in Europe, I have a sense for how the international community views entrepreneurship. And, if you’re inclusive and open about this, you will attract people from outside the state and country. We’re going to attract more attention from institutions from around the world, and I think that my experience will be relevant.
Military awards Alabama’s GeneCapture $1 million contract to develop portable disease detector

By: Michael Tomberlin

The Department of Defense has awarded Huntsville’s GeneCapture a $1 million, two-year contract to develop a portable device that war fighters can use to identify disease-causing germs.

The Small Business Technology Transfer Research (STTR) contract is from the DOD’s Joint Science and Technology Office for Chemical and Biological Defense.

GeneCapture, a resident associate company at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, has developed a “gene signature matching platform” that screens for hundreds of pathogens in less than one hour. The multi-pathogen test is conducted using a small, inexpensive disposable cartridge and can be used to test samples from humans and animals. The technique is being evaluated as a possible solution for a portable infection diagnostic device for use in forward deployed military operations.

GeneCapture is collaborating on this contract with Birmingham’s Southern Research, which will provide its expertise in infectious diseases, purifying genetic material for testing and designing clinical trials for the Food and Drug Administration.

“It has been a dream of mine to bring this technology to market so that critical diagnostic decisions can be made quickly, which will save lives,” said Krishnan Chittur, chemical engineering professor emeritus at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and co-founder of GeneCapture. The original discovery was patented by UAH and exclusively licensed to GeneCapture.

Krishnan Chittur, Ph.D., CTO of GeneCapture, and Art Tipton, Ph.D., President and CEO of Southern Research. The Huntsville company and Birmingham-based research institute will work together on a device to quickly identify diseases for the U.S. military. (contributed)

Chittur said the technology uses genetic probes to capture the “signature” of germs. An optical scan identifies which germ is present and produces a result in about 45 minutes.

“It’s a completely new technique that would have been impossible without the advances in genetics and genomics discoveries of the last decade,” he said. “That is one of the reasons we are located at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology – the research that’s happening here is cutting-edge.”

Paula Koelle, chief scientist at GeneCapture and principal investigator for the STTR Phase II contract, will lead the effort to produce the disposable cartridges and desktop analyzer for a set of pathogens selected by the DOD that present potential biological threats to the war fighter.

The resulting technology could have uses beyond the battlefield.

The portable platform could enable civilian applications, such as rapid infection diagnosis in schools, urgent care clinics, doctors’ offices, nursing homes, veterinary clinics, cruise ships and airports.

Southern Research’s proven track record supporting new platforms for detecting and preventing newly emerged and highly dangerous and infectious disease pathogens made the nonprofit the perfect partner on the project.

“The opportunity to work closely with GeneCapture is a perfect match for Southern Research,” said Art Tipton, Southern Research president and CEO. “We have a history of reaching out to the life sciences
community, which benefits both our state economy and the global healthcare industry. Our infectious disease scientists will produce reference tests and accelerate the clinical testing of GeneCapture’s new platform.”

Working for the DOD drives home the sense of urgency when it comes to disease-causing germs around the world.

“GeneCapture is focused on reducing the risk we all have of being infected from emerging pathogens and global pandemics – the clock is ticking,” said GeneCapture CEO and co-founder Peggy Sammon. “The GeneCapture team is working diligently to bring an affordable, portable solution to this critical problem by connecting with disease experts around the world to incorporate their needs into this product.”
Protecting Your Family: Social media use and isolation could lead to depression

By: Staff

In recent weeks, several high profile suicides have put a focus on mental health.

Now, one UAH professor has a study showing a link between increased social media use, and isolation, which can lead to depression.

When Dr. Pavica Sheldon asks students in her social media classes at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) about close friendships the answer is always the same: "I have 500 Facebook friends, but I do not think I could call any of them if I needed something."

"Most of those friends are acquaintances," said Sheldon. "We meet somebody once or twice and we add them as LinkedIn or Facebook friends. Most of the time we know very little about them, especially if we are not spending quality face-to-face time with them," she added.

Sheldon, a communications and social media expert is Chairperson and Associate Professor of the UAH Department of Communication Arts.

Is social media the sole blame for nearly half the country feeling lonely?

"A recent study says social media is not the blame," said Sheldon. "Rather, it is the overall culture we live in: spending less time with family and friends and more time with our technological devices. People who do not have friends that they can talk to face-to-face not only feel lonely, but they lack social support. Lack of social support can cause early death," she said.

As an example, Sheldon said more passive forms of use (e.g., browsing others' profiles without posting one's own material) contribute to a depressed mood. And, passively looking at others' photos of vacations or social events to which one was not invited triggers resentment, envy and loneliness.

She also noted that having more strangers as friends on social media contributes to greater depressive symptoms. "That is because we compare ourselves to strangers. While we know how our friends and acquaintances actually live, we are more likely to exhibit attribution error toward those we do not know."

She offers tips to the young and young at heart about building lasting relationships and genuine friendships. "For the Young: school, college, extracurricular activities;

Middle-age adults: work, children, exercise workouts and other adult social activities; Mature adults: professional and continuing education classes, meet up groups and people with similar interests."

Sheldon also recommends counseling for people should they have more immediate needs.

"Most employers offer some kind of counseling services – at UAH we have the Counseling Center. Other sources for affordable or free counseling include non-profits and religious organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul, American Red Cross, and the Downtown Rescue Mission."
Getting ready for the world’s next weapons threat, Hypersonics

By: Steve Johnson

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. -- "Speed kills" is a phrase commonly used when talking about safe driving. These days it's connected with the next wave of weapons that has defense planners in the United States concerned. Hypersonic weapons will travel at least five times the speed of sound, referred to as Mach 5. That's far faster than a speeding bullet, and be the kind of speed to cover the distance between Decatur and Huntsville in 26 seconds or less.

Russia's Vladimir Putin was bragging about his country's hypersonic missiles earlier this year, calling them invincible. What Putin doesn't talk about is the fact that hypersonic systems are still several years away. Right now it's all about research, and that is a very good thing. Steven Messervy is the Director of the Research Institute at UAH, and has done research on hypersonics. I asked him if we would be in trouble if America's enemies had hypersonics now. "We would be in trouble, right," said Messervy.

The good news says Messervy is the fact that multiple commands, agencies, and companies in Huntsville are heavily involved in research into hypersonic systems, both offensive and defensive. The problem is that past budgets have not contained enough money for hypersonic research, though Messervy says that will change in the next few years. He also says that Mike Griffin, the new Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering has told Congress that hypersonics are his priority.

"We are behind Russia and China in our technology development. I guess I agree with some of our senior leaders when they say we're behind, but we haven't lost the fight yet," said Messervy.

In Messervy's mind catching up isn't really the goal. The goal is the pass our adversaries, and work on that is going on in north Alabama right now. The thing to remember, our adversaries are also working.
UAH setting new benchmark for tech in music education

By: Lindsey Connell

The Department of Music at the University of Alabama in Huntsville has new cutting edge technology that's changing the way its students learn piano.

It's also setting a new benchmark for music education in the U. S.

The school celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and used the milestone occasion to acquire a Yamaha Disklavier CFX concert grand piano (DCFX), the most technologically advanced instrument of its kind.

"It's one of 13 pianos in the United States and we are fortunate to be one of the institutions among just very few prestigious places to have this capability, to have a piano that can connect with the world," said Dr. Melody Ng, UAH Assistant Professor of Piano.

They are handcrafted and take a year to build, she explained. A teacher can conduct a live piano lesson thousands of miles away from a student.

Faculty members now incorporate the piano into the school's curriculum, to significantly enhance "remote" master class and distance learning opportunities for students.

UAH is now making routine use of Yamaha "Remote Lesson," advanced distance learning technology that enables highly nuanced performance data—the actual key strokes and subtle pedal movements made by a performing artist—to be transmitted back and forth between similarly equipped instruments over the internet, with perfectly synchronized video streaming between the two locations.

As an artist performs on a Disklavier in one location, the remotely connected Disklavier recreates the performance in real time—the instrument's keys and pedals moving up and down.

Casey Rickles is a recent UAH graduate who has played the piano. This week, she demonstrated how it works during a lesson with teacher in Denver.

"The keys on the piano in Denver were being played, as well as the petals. So everything was just live action, what I played was exactly what she heard, the dynamics, how loud or how soft I played was the exact same for her as well. As soon as I pressed my key, it immediately pressed her key," Rickles explained.

It makes it possible for UAH to conduct transcontinental piano lessons, master classes and performances between two Internet-connected Disklavier pianos.

The technology allows students to build connections and do collaborations all over the world without having to travel. Officials say it meshes perfectly with the DNA at UAH and Huntsville, both on the forefront of scientific innovation.
"Each key is fiber optics equipped. UAH is a pioneer in technological and scientific advances and this pushes advances in artistry through musical technology. This is a true product that represents UAH that embraces both arts and technology and engineering in this Rocket City town," Dr. Ng stated.

"The lessons have been awesome. One time I played a duet with someone. That was really interesting. I was on one side of the piano and it looked like a ghost was playing the keys next to me. So there's not many limits that you have with this piano," Rickles added.

One of UAH's short-term goals is to recruit students residing in China, having them record and transmit their audition performances over the Internet through the use of a Yamaha Disklavier. These virtual auditions will then be recreated on the remote Disklavier piano at UAH for evaluation.

UAH is one of only a few schools in the country to offer an accredited piano ensemble course, and members of the UAH Piano Ensemble have previously offered concerts using two pianos. The Disklavier allows student pianists to incorporate multiple pianos, remotely, into their performances.

"This isn't just the future of music at UAH, but the future of music period," said Dr. C. David Ragsdale, Chair of the UAH Department of Music. "UAH music students are grounded in a traditional music education with a technological thrust to fully equip them for 21st century careers."
Facebook to hire Alabamians for new data center

By: Kody Fisher

Facebook plans on hiring as many people as possible from Alabama to fill the 100 positions at the new $750 million data center. Teens in town for a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics camp are excited at the possibility of being able to work there once it's up and running in 2020.

Jana Houser is one of 64 four teenage girls in Huntsville for the STEM camp partnering with the University of Alabama Huntsville.

"I'm learning so much stuff. I'm getting so much new experience it's crazy. My mind is just psch (mind blown gesture)," said Houser.

Camp organizers said the camp is a stepping stone for the young women to get the knowledge they need to get the jobs at Facebook.

Governor Kay Ivey touted Alabama's work force as a reason why Facebook will love calling north Alabama home.

"I know you will not be disappointed in the employees that you hire here at Facebook. Our people are well trained, they're eager to work, they're ready to work, and when Alabamians are given the opportunity to work they do so with vigor," said Governor Ivey.

On top of the infrastructure established in the area, Facebook said the workers in Alabama are a major reason they chose us.

"Obviously the great talent pool that you heard the mayor and the governor speak about," said Facebook Spokesman Matt VanderZanden.

The company will start posting all sorts of long term positions in the coming weeks and months.

"It's a very sophisticated facility with a lot of electronic and mechanical gear, so we're looking for people to maintain and update that gear, so electrical engineers, technicians, mechanical HVAC specialists, and then we also have down to security and culinary, so all variety of jobs on the campus," said VanderZanden.

Houser said many of the girls in town for the camp are excited by the possibility of working for Facebook in the future.

"I would say over half of them would be very good for that job," said Houser.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle told WAAY 31 there is an 8:1 job multiplier attached to the 100 jobs at the data center.

Meaning an additional 800 jobs could be brought to the area simply because of the data center being here.
Lawsuit filed over UWA charter school

Use of former Livingston High building is at issue

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The Sumter County Board of Education has filed suit to prevent the University of West Alabama from allowing its affiliated charter school to use space in the former Livingston High School building when it opens this fall, arguing the plans violate the terms of a 2011 sales agreement.

The school board, which filed the lawsuit in May in Sumter County, seeks a permanent injunction preventing the charter school from using the former high school building that was renamed Lyon Hall and is home to the UWA's College of Education.

The board has asked for an immediate restraining order blocking use by the charter school pending a hearing on the injunction request. A hearing scheduled for 10 a.m. June 29 will focus on the motion for a preliminary injunction.

The defendants include UWA and its current board of trustees, the members of the board and university leadership at the time of the building's sale, the charter school and members of the charter school board.

The leadership of the University Charter School and UWA said they could not comment on the lawsuit, citing the pending litigation.

UWA attorney Mike Kendrick also declined to comment on the specific allegations of the lawsuit.

"I can say that I am very comfortable with all of the actions taken by the university to this point in time," Kendrick said.

Officials with the Sumter County Board of Education and the attorneys who filed the lawsuit on its behalf could not be reached for comment.

The charter school, created under a 2015 law passed by See LAWSUIT, B2
LAW SUIT

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the Alabama Legislature, plans to open in the fall in Lyon Hall on the UWA campus with pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. The charter school plans to expand, adding a grade level per year, until it reaches pre-K through 12th grade by 2022. While the charter school plans to start at Lyon Hall, the long-term plan is for a standalone building, which will likely be built on the northwestern side of the UWA campus.

The board alleges the charter’s use of the former high school building will adversely affect enrollment and funding for the public system.

The complaint is based on a covenant in a 2011 sales agreement for the high school that prohibited the building’s use for a school that was not under the control of supervision for of the county school board. The agreement also included a covenant that prohibited UWA from moving its campus school to the property. The university bought the old building on the west side of campus for $4 million in 2011.

The lawsuit alleges UWA is in breach of the 2011 agreement by allowing the university-affiliated charter school to use the building when it opens. The board also alleges the university and its leadership fraudulently misrepresented their intentions during the sale and is seeking compensatory and punitive damages.

The school board alleges UWA failed to honor the agreement despite multiple meetings between the university and public system in November 2017 and the spring.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Auburn, UA trustees raise tuition

By: Staff, wire report

Auburn University has raised its tuition after increases at other colleges in Alabama.

Media outlets quoted a statement from Auburn’s president’s office in a Thursday report as saying the school’s board of trustees decided to hold the tuition increase for fall 2019 at 2 percent. Auburn’s tuition has gone up by 3 percent each year since 2016.

The board approved the increase for the 2019-20 school year last week. The statement says the annual rise in tuition was less this year because of an increase in state funds. An average undergraduate student will now pay nearly $5,500 for one semester.

The University of Alabama System board of trustees also approved an increase last week. In-state tuition will rise by 2.9 percent at its Birmingham campus and 4 percent at its Huntsville one.

In-state students at the University of Alabama will not see a tuition increase for the upcoming academic year. The university announced that tuition for in-state undergraduate and graduate students will remain the same as last year.

In a news release, UA President Stuart Bell said being able to keep tuition level for in-state students was possible, in part, because of additional funding from the state.

“We appreciate everything our Legislature has done to work with us on funding this year,” Bell said. “We want students within the state of Alabama to know that we, as the flagship university, remain committed to meeting their educational needs, and there is no reason to go anywhere else to get an exceptional education.”

While in-state students will not see an increase, out-of-state students enrolled at UA will see an increase of $565 per semester this fall. Tuition for in-state law students will increase by about $100 per semester, while out-of-state law students will see a tuition increase of about $755 per semester.
Auburn's new major is going to be wild

Mike Bolton
AL.com

You've probably heard some high school students claim that colleges don't offer anything that really interests them. Auburn University's Board of Trustees last week approved a new degree program that likely will capture the imagination of many of those.

Beginning in the fall of 2019, Auburn will offer a program that will provide the education and skills needed for students to find careers in a wide variety of hunting- and fishing-related fields.

Auburn will be one of only two colleges offering such a program. Kansas State is the other.

The program is being called wildlife enterprise management. Among the things students will learn is wildlife and fishery management, hotel and restaurant management, accounting and marketing. The program will prepare students to manage hunting and shooting facilities, fishing and hunting resorts and fishing and hunting guide services. The major also will instruct students in the promotion of such outdoors enterprises.

Students will graduate with a well-rounded education. They will take classes in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, the College of Human Sciences and the Harbert College of Business. In addition to a degree in those fields, students also will earn a minor in business.

Stephen Ditchkoff, a professor in Auburn's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, says that in five years Auburn expects to have about 120 students enrolled in the program.

Outdoors, of course, is big business not only in Alabama, but across the country as well. The Outdoor Industry Association's 2017 report says outdoor recreation contributes $887 billion annually to the U.S. economy, employs 7.6 million people and generates $125 billion in tax revenue.

Auburn University officials spent many months developing the program by interviewing those in the hunting and fishing industry. They were looking for input on what skills are needed to be valuable to employers.

Among those interviewed were officials with John Burrell's High Adventure Company, a big player in outdoor recreation business with facilities as far away as Africa and Argentina. Company officials there said they just can't find enough employees with the skills and education needed to operate their global business.

Many of the companies interviewed by Auburn officials offer internships. Ditchkoff said he expects 75 to 100 students in the program to receive internships each year.

What would such a degree allow graduates to do? Single-owner hunting or fishing operations in the Southeast, corporate retreats that feature outdoor endeavors and even African safari outfitters are all looking for employees to fill various roles, one Auburn official said.

Even though the program will not launch until the fall of 2019, Auburn currently is offering some classes that would count as course credit toward the degree.

Mike Bolton is editor of Alabama Outdoor News Magazine. He may be reached at aloutdoors@aol.com.
Former Alabama player expected to be top-10 pick in today's NBA draft

By Terrin Waack
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Collin Sexton isn't asking for much.
All the point guard wants out of Thursday's NBA draft at Barclays Center is to be picked by a good team. Then, he wants a long and injury-free career. Play-off and championship runs would be an obvious — and desired — bonus.

"And to just be happy," Sexton said Wednesday. "Because that's the main thing. Be happy with what you're doing because now it's a job. It's something that's going to feed your family. You have to take it seriously."

This is a 19-year-old speaking.
Opting for the fast lane, Sexton declared for the draft after his freshman season at Alabama, a program that hasn't had a player drafted in the last decade. He's only the second Crimson Tide freshman to do so, the first since the one-and-done rule was installed in 2006.

That year was enough.
"It was amazing," Sexton said. "I learned a whole lot — good, bad, everything. I feel like just being there and

See Sexton, C2

Alabama head coach Avery Johnson talks to Collin Sexton in the first half against Arkansas at Coleman Coliseum in February.
[STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]

NBA Draft

When: Thursday, 6 p.m.
Where: Barclays Center, New York
TV: ESPN

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being around the group of guys I was with, I connected pretty well and had a good season.”

Sexton helped the Crimson Tide reach the NCAA Tournament for the first time in six years. He then scored 25 points in a victory over Virginia Tech to send Alabama to the second round, a feat it had not accomplished in 12 years.

The Southeastern Conference named Sexton SEC Co-Freshman of the Year — with Kentucky’s Kevin Knox, who is also in the draft — and the Associated Press awarded him Newcomer of the Year. Sexton finished second in the conference with 19.2 points per game, adding 3.8 rebounds and 3.6 assists per contest. He had 29 double-digit scoring games — 16 were 20 or more points, three were 30-plus points.

“A guy who plays extremely hard, he’s an overall great competitor,” said Oklahoma’s Trae Young, the draft’s other top point guard prospect. “Whenever you’re a competitor like me, you like playing against people like that.”

The Young Bull — a nickname Sexton plans to keep in the NBA — grew up fast.

“Well, you have to,” he said. “Because you have to leave.”

But he hasn’t had to say goodbye. Not yet.

Alabama coach Avery Johnson has been keeping up with Sexton and will be at draft. Johnson, a former NBA champion and coach, taught Sexton everything he could as a player and as an adult. He keeps reminding the young star to embrace this opportunity, soak it all in because it only happens once.

“Also, off the court, he just told me to always respect people,” Sexton said. “You never know what they can do for you, and you never know who’s watching.”

Good advice, considering all the eyes on him this week.

Sexton’s eyes are wide, too. The excitement he feels is obvious. A smile sneaks on his face every time he talks about Thursday’s festivities. It’s a relief knowing all his hard work has paid off, and there’s an eagerness to get back out there.

Since Alabama’s season ended, Sexton has been working on his individual game. He’s already fast but thinks he can be faster. He went back and watched film to figure out where he can improve — and has done so.

Next time he’s on the court?

“It’ll be a big surprise,” Sexton said.

There’s that excitement.

A year ago, Sexton was fresh out of high school — his days at Pebblebrook High School in Mableton, Georgia, he said ‘feel like forever ago’ — and had just moved into his dorm at Alabama, where he watched the 2017 draft. Pick after pick, he enjoyed players’ reactions. They were so genuine; that has always been his favorite part.

“I just envisioned myself doing it one day,” Sexton said.

That day is here. It’s his turn to experience that life-changing moment and, as he said, just be happy.

It’ll be both a dream come true and a job for the future.

“You grow up wanting to do this,” Sexton said. “Everybody knows what’s going to come with it.”
UA hoping to build off top-five national showing

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

In another decade or so, the University of Alabama track and field team will be the answer to an odd trivia question. In a year in which UA athletics won one national championship (in football) and played in the NCAA championship match in two more (men’s and women’s golf), name the school’s only 2017-18 Southeastern Conference champion.

That would be the men’s track team, which won the SEC Indoor Track title in February, the first time UA has claimed that championship since 1972. And while it’s a tough trivia question, there was nothing trivial at all about the 2018 season for UA. The Crimson Tide men were in the title mix at the NCAA championships in Eugene, Oregon, until the final event and wound up with a fifth-place finish, the first

See TRACK, C2

top 5 national finish for the program since 1986.

“It came down to centimeters and thousandths of a second for a trophy,” Alabama coach Dan Walters said Monday.

“We felt like we had enough opportunities. We also know that we have some holes that we are working to fill. So the biggest thing about this year was gaining the experience of being in contention. That will carry over for us.”

Six Alabama men earned first-team All-America honors in Eugene and five of those athletes return for the 2019 season:

junior high jumper Shelby McEwen, junior discus/hammer thrower Kord Ferguson, distance runners Gilbert Kigen and Vincent Kiprop, and freshman triple jumper Christian Edwards. Senior Ruebin Walters, who ran sixth in the 110-meter hurdles, also earned All-America honors.

“Shelby jumped 7-3 in the pouring rain,” Walters said of McEwen’s performance. “He was in the first group, when the rain was much worse, but I never had a doubt that he would be competitive. He just has that intensity. He loves to compete on the big stage.”

Kigen and Kiprop both finished in the top 10 in the 10,000-meters (Kiprop finished second) in Eugene, although they struggled in the 5,000 meters.

“In the 10,000 (meters), Kiprop had the lead with about 180 meters to go but the little guy from Michigan (Ben Flanagan) just had perfect mechanics down the stretch,” Walters said.

“In the 5,000, I thought Vincent and Gilbert were both a little tired,” Walters said. “They run the (5,000), the (10,000) double in the SECs, the NCAA regionals and then at nationals, so I think fatigue affected them.”

That core could be supplemented by a solid recruiting season.

“If recruiting goes as well as we think it has, we should be adding more points next year,” Walters said.

The Alabama women’s team, with several top performers either sitting out a redshirt season or healing from injuries, scored just three points at nationals, but Walters called the move to hold out those athletes “a tactical decision.”

First-team All-America honorees for the Tide women were freshmen Tamara Clark, Daija Lampkin and Demi Washington, as well as sophomore Symone Darius in the 4x100-meter relay.

“They performed well for such a young group and we’ve recruited even more sprinters, so we are excited about next year,” Walters said.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Glenn Putyræe, nine-time West Coast Conference Coach of the Year, was chosen as the new head coach of the Alabama rowing team, athletic director Greg Byrne announced on Friday. Putyræe comes to Tuscaloosa with 19 years of head coaching experience having spent 15 of those over two stints at Gonzaga (1999-2007, 2011-18) and the other four at Georgetown (2007-11).

"Four areas really stood out for us as we progressed through the interview process with Glenn," Byrne said. "Those were his passion, his work ethic and his vision and belief for the future of this program. He’s had great success leading both Gonzaga and Georgetown, and we are confident he will do the same for the Crimson Tide."

Since the start of his second stint at Gonzaga in 2011, Putyræe won five WCC championships over a seven-year span (2013, 2015-18). The team’s 2013 league title earned the Zags their first bid in program history into the NCAA championships.

"My goal is to build on the foundation that Coach Davis laid here and ultimately compete for championships, which I know we can do with all of the phenomenal resources available to us," Putyræe said. "My wife, Mollie, and I felt so welcomed from the time we stepped foot in Alabama, and we are so excited to now call Tuscaloosa home. I’m eager to get started, and I look forward to meeting and working with the student-athletes."
Susan West and her impressive path in her golfing career

By: Ian Thompson

In March I wrote a column about Tuscaloosa’s Susan West being the first player to apply to play in the inaugural U.S. Senior Women’s Open Championship, which will be held at historic Chicago Golf Club, in Wheaton, Ill., July 12-15. Her entry was officially received just minutes after entries began to be accepted.

Last week she achieved her goal of qualifying for the championship. She traveled to Bent Creek Golf Club in Eden Prairie, Minn., for a sectional qualifier. She shot 75 and found herself in a playoff with professional Karen Davies for the second and final spot. Three steady pars was enough for West to move on.

“Three years ago, the USGA announced this championship was finally coming to fruition and I wrote down my ultimate goal of qualifying for it. It’s been on my compass to work so hard for the last few years,” she said.

She went to Minnesota for the qualifier as those closer to home were all held the week before, when she was busy being tournament chairman, and playing in, the Women’s Southern Amateur at her home course of NorthRiver Yacht Club in Tuscaloosa.

Not only did she play in the Mid-Amateur Championship, she won it. After one round of qualifying, she had to survive five matches spread over four days and prevailed in the final over fellow Alabamian Linda Jeffrey.

Fifteen-year-old Calyne Rosholt of Austin, Texas, won the regular division. She opened with an outstanding 66 in stroke play qualifying and never looked back, winning the final match against Sophie Burks of Montgomery, who will be a sophomore on the golf team at Middle Tennessee State.

“I took the confidence from the Women’s Southern right into the (Women’s Open) qualifier and it all came together,” West said.

She also expressed her joy that NorthRiver hosted the WSGA.

“NorthRiver as a community and a club really stepped up to the plate and got behind the championship. We had a lot of volunteers and the course has never looked better. It was a spectacular week.”

West will travel to Chicago on July 8 and her husband, Tom, will be at her side as he always is as her caddie.

“Tom is with me every step of the way, and I couldn’t do it without him,” she said.

The list of exempt players who have entered reads like a Who’s Who of women’s golf from yesteryear: Kristi Albers, Amy Alcott, Helen Alfredsson, Danielle Ammaccapane, Janet Anderson, Donna Andrews, Tina Barrett, Jean Bartholomew, Laura Baugh, Jane Blalock, Nanci Bowen, Pat Bradley, Jerilyn Britz, Macarena Campomanes, Kay Cockerill, Jane Crafter, Laura

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Davies, Alicia Dibos, Judy Dickinson, Cindy Figg-Currier, Joanne Foreman, Jane Geddes, Tammie Green-Parker, Lisa Grimes, JoAnne Gunderson Carner, Mary Jane Hiestand, Carolyn Hill, Juli Inkster, Becky Iverson, Christa Johnson, Patricia Johnson, Cathy Johnston-Forbes, Rosie Jones, Lorie Kane, Betsy King, Hiromi Kobayashi, Judith Kyrinis, Jenny Lidback, Murle Lindstrom Breer, Sally Little, Marilyn Lovander, Lauri Merten, Alice Miller, Barbara Moxness, Barb Mucha, Martha Nause, Liselotte Neumann, Alison Nicholas, Sandra Palmer, Ellen Port, Cindy Rarick, Michele Redman, Laurie Rinker, Terrill Samuel, Nancy Scranton, Patty Sheehan, Val Skinner, Hollis Stacy, Jan Stephenson, Kris Tschetter and Sue Wooster.

Rinker is the sister of Lee Rinker, who played golf for the University of Alabama.

Susan West has won the Alabama Women’s State Senior three years in a row and has had many top finishes and wins across the state and country. And her golf seems to just keep getting better.

She is the retired president of the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission, and was previously assistant dean and director of the MBA program at the University of Alabama. She was a member of the Crimson Tide’s tennis program as an undergraduate, not taking golf up until her 40s. A nationally ranked tennis player, West won the 1993 USTA National Clay Court Doubles Championship.
Tide's slip doesn't seem to be trend

Michael Casagrande
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Frankly, Alabama's recruiting situation had more than a few baffled this time last year.

Riding a streak of seven consecutive No. 1 classes, the Crimson Tide had just four commitments by mid-June 2017. It didn't crack the top 50 of the rankings until the fifth pledge arrived in late June to push Nick Saban's bunch to No. 47.

A year later, it's safe to say the anomaly didn't become a trend.

Alabama stands atop all three major recruiting rankings released by 247Sports, Rivals and ESPN.

Instead of the four commits from a year ago, the Tide is sitting on 16 after four-star defensive end Justin Eboigbe went public Monday.

Though early in the process, Alabama holds healthy leads in the ranking for recruits.

The 247Sports composite awards Alabama 271.76 points — well ahead of No. 2 Texas A&M at 246.39 and No. 3 Oklahoma at 230.02. The Tide has 14 players with four-star ratings, and the Aggies have six. Jimbo Fisher has 10 commits with three-star ratings and two five stars. Pierce Quick of Hewitt-Trussville remains Alabama's only five-star as the offensive tackle ranks 30th overall.

Over at Rivals, top-ranked Alabama has 2,043 points compared to Texas A&M's 1,863 and Oklahoma's 1,684.

Last year's recruiting champ, Georgia, is No. 6 on 247Sports and No. 5 at Rivals.

Alabama picked up some momentum after the slow summer of 2017 but never threatened to extend its streak of No. 1 classes to eight. It finished No. 6 in the 247Sports composite and No. 7 at Rivals.

The two five-star cornerstones — Eyabi Anoma and Patrick Surtain Jr. — committed and signed on the two national signing days.

There's still a long way to go until the Dec. 19 early signing day. All of the 2019 rankings are based solely on commitments that are written in pencil rather than ink. It's still more comfortable sitting atop the mid-June rankings as opposed to No. 47.

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @ByCasagrande or on Facebook.

Where they stand

A look at the 2019 recruiting rankings as of Tuesday:

247SPORTS
1. Alabama 271.76
2. Texas A&M 246.39
3. Oklahoma 230.02
4. Notre Dame 221.73
5. Clemson 219.12

RIVALS
1. Alabama 2,043
2. Texas A&M 1,863
3. Oklahoma 1,684
4. Clemson 1,515
5. Georgia 1,494
Alabama radio announcer overwhelmed by support from UA fans following stroke

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The clock was ticking on Chris Stewart. No one was sure how much time had gone by or how much was left, but the situation was dire as he was wheeled into surgery two months ago.

The radio play-by-play voice for Alabama basketball and baseball had suffered a stroke sometime in the early-morning hours on April 16. It had taken doctors some time to diagnose Stewart, then 47, as a stroke victim. Hours had already passed when the neurologist prepared to operate.

"Ordinarily the surgeon and physician would go talk to the family after they've done an initial diagnosis," Stewart said. "... But he sends his chief nurse, and says 'Tell her that if she insists on me coming and laying out what the situation is (before surgery), then I'll do it. But the truth is her husband doesn't have that time. We can't afford that time.'"

Stewart is now recovering at his home in Hoover a little more than two months after the stroke. He still requires rest and his memory can be spotty at times. Those effects should wear off with time. His left eye droops slightly, though that can be fixed through therapy. He suffered no paralysis, loss of mobility or long-term memory loss.

"I'm using the doctor's term: It's a miracle that I survived it first and foremost, but also that I'm in the condition that I'm in," Stewart said.

Doctors often hope that treating a stroke victim in the first two or three hours can prevent any long-term brain damage. Stewart went at least seven hours before surgery began.

His wife, Christy, had noticed at about 4:30 a.m. that he was nestled in the fetal position in bed. He was grunting slightly. When he was still unresponsive at about 6:30 a.m., paramedics arrived to take Stewart to St. Vincent's hospital.

But even then, doctors were unsure what had happened. His blood pressure was elevated but not extreme. His medical history didn't point to a stroke.

"I don't fit the stereotypical age and profile of stroke victim," Stewart said.

Tests and checks ruled out other possibilities. It took a second CT scan to reveal a blockage in an artery to his brain. Stewart was transferred from St. Vincent's to Brookwood Baptist Medical Center for surgery. It was almost noon when Dr. Jitendra Sharma began operating.

"He said there was no procedure, no next step," Stewart said. "He said, 'This was either going to work, or you weren't going to make it.'"

Hindsight revealed some subtle symptoms that could have foreshadowed the stroke. He had some slight pain when turning his head from one side to another, and there were vision problems from time to time.

That didn't set off alarm bells for someone who was otherwise healthy, though. Things had been fine just hours before Stewart was unresponsive in bed. He had gone to a birthday party the day before and spent time with family. It was a normal night until it wasn't.

"There were no warning signs whatsoever that night," said his wife, Christy. "Not one. It's just crazy to me that you can go to sleep feeling perfectly normal and then, just a few hours later, your whole life changes. It's unreal."

The margin between life and death was fractional. If it had happened a couple of days earlier, Stewart could have been alone in a hotel room during Alabama baseball's road trip to Texas A&M. It would be all but certain that no one would have found him before he passed away.

If the stroke had happened earlier in the night, Stewart's wife also might not have found him until it was too late. As neurologists say, 'time is brain' during a stroke.

"If you're outside of that window, you're either going to die or you're just going to be a vegetable," Christy said. "... That definitely has crossed my mind."

"She saved me," he said. "She really did."

Coaches, administrators and co-workers reached out to Stewart by the dozen. Avery Johnson has been in contact often. Nick and Terry Saban checked in. Former basketball coach Anthony Grant also connected, as did former baseball coach Mitch Gaspard and his wife, Kim. UA director of athletics Greg Byrne was in touch, as were several other Alabama athletics employees. His basketball radio partner, Bryan Passink, received regular updates and kept others in the loop. Bill Battle visited while Stewart was in the hospital.

Stewart was watching an Alabama baseball game less than a week after the stroke when coach Brad Bohannon did an in-game interview. One of the questions was about Stewart.

"(Bohannon) basically
says at one point, ‘Chris, if you’re watching, we’re thinking about you, we’re praying for you and we love you,’” Stewart said.

Friends kept the Stewarts stocked with meals for weeks afterward. He was receiving “Get Well Soon” cards even into June. Stewart still finds messages on his phone from people who had reached out while he was in the hospital. Lee Tracey, his baseball broadcast partner, was often stopped on his way to the Sewell-Thomas Stadium press box. Coaches, players, staffers and fans all asked for updates.

“At a time like this, you realize that a place even as big as Alabama how much of a family it truly becomes,” Stewart said, “because of the people that reached out and the way they showed genuine care and concern for me and my family.”

Tracey soldiered through the final month of the season. Eli Gold filled in for a few games in the play-by-play chair when he was available, but Tracey was by himself on the air most of the time.

Stewart did make a brief return to work before the end of the season. He hadn’t suffered any speech problems, just one more miracle in the aftermath of it all. He was at Sewell-Thomas Stadium for Alabama’s game against Ole Miss on May 18 and stepped into the booth for the sixth inning.

Tracey drove the broadcast for the top of the inning with Stewart chipping in occasionally. Then he turned things over after the commercial break to Stewart, who made the call as Alabama scored the go-ahead run in a 3-0 win. It gave him a boost to see that he could still do his job.

“His recovery has been amazing,” Tracey said. “The fact that he had a stroke and, number one, appears to have no speech problem whatsoever, that is just a godsend right there. Really, he has very little lasting problems.”

Stewart plans on being ready to work again this fall as the sideline reporter for the Crimson Tide Sports Network during football games. He also hosts the weekly TV shows for Saban and Johnson. There’s still plenty of time to continue his recovery and resume those duties as well.

Basketball season might be a bigger challenge, with its continuous action and hectic pace. But there’s still months left for his vision to recover for that.

“Being where I am, and from what I’ve been told by the doctor, I’m extremely encouraged that everything will be back to normal in time,” Stewart said. “The thing I’ve got to be mindful of, I have to be patient. Because it won’t be tomorrow. I’m not going to say it won’t be next week, but the likelihood of it being next week is very slim.”

Survival was one miracle for Stewart. The expectation of a full recovery is a second miracle that may have been even more unlikely.

“Because of my faith, I’m comfortable and I understand there are things that can’t be explained other than ‘God took care of that,’” he said. “I’m very much of the belief that that’s what it was.”

The last two months at home have given him a chance to spend time with his children while he rests and recovers. He went to an awards program for his daughter. He’s been at baseball games; but they’ve been for little league all-stars instead of Alabama. There will be time for the Crimson Tide later.

He’s in good spirits and improving health. There’s been enough excitement this spring.

“I’m not shocked I had a stroke,” Stewart said with a laugh. “I’m shocked it didn’t happen after Collin (Sexton) made that runner against Texas A&M (in the SEC Tournament).”

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New leadership for Senior Bowl

Nagy says all-star game could change venues, but will stay in Mobile

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

MONTGOMERY – The Senior Bowl won’t be leaving Mobile under its new leadership, but it might be moving across town at some point.

The all-star game, which annually features some of the top football players in the country, has been played at Ladd-Peebles Stadium since 1951. New executive director Jim Nagy expects it to stay in the Port City.

“The game’s never going to leave Mobile,” he said last weekend at the Alabama Sports Writers Association summer conference.

Ladd-Peebles, which also hosts high school games and the Dollar General Bowl, holds 40,636 but drew fewer than 30,000 people for last January’s Senior Bowl. The city has no plans to upgrade the stadium, and the University of South Alabama is moving forward with plans to build a 25,000-seat on-campus stadium.

“Where we play the game in Mobile might change down the line,” Nagy said, “but I don’t think it’s ever going to leave Mobile.”

South Alabama expects to start playing in its new stadium in 2020 or 2021. The school is also building a covered practice facility, offices for its football staff, and two practice fields.

It seems reasonable the Senior Bowl will want to explore playing in the newer facility, or at least holding practices there. National Football League coaches, general managers and scouts attend practices to look at draft prospects. Teams are coached by NFL staffs.

“I’m really excited for South, but it’s an exciting opportunity for us as well,” Nagy said. “It’s going to be a great facility, and hopefully down the line we are a part of it.”

Nagy said he has plans to meet with Joel Erdmann, South Alabama’s athletics director, to explore the possibilities.

The Senior Bowl has three years remaining on its contract with the NFL Network, Nagy said.

Former Alabama player and assistant coach Sylvester Croom, a Tuscaloosa native who was a longtime NFL assistant and also served as head coach at Mississippi State, has been hired as senior vice president of operations for the Senior Bowl. Nagy said Croom is having knee surgery this summer and will probably not be in the office on a full-time basis until August.

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In Name of Free Speech, a Crackdown on Campus Protests

By JEREMY W. PETERS

When the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin wanted to address the issue of free speech on campus last fall, it adopted a three-strikes policy that is the strictest of its kind: Any student found to have disrupted the free expression of others is expelled after a third infraction.

The goal was to foster an atmosphere of “civility, respect and safety,” and avoid the kind of violent, unruly disruptions that prevented conservatives from speaking at schools like the University of California, Berkeley, and Middlebury College. Those protests had focused national attention on the question of whether college campuses were shutting out politically unpopular points of view.

Wisconsin is not alone. Republican-led state legislatures in Arizona, Georgia and North Carolina have imposed similar policies on public colleges and universities, and bills to establish campus speech guidelines are under consideration in at least seven other legislatures. These efforts, funded in part by big-money Republican donors, are part of a growing and well-organized campaign that has put academia squarely in the cross hairs of the American right.

The spate of new policies shows how conservatives are advancing one of their longstanding goals: to turn the tables in the debate over the First Amendment by casting the left as an enemy of open and free political expression on campuses. It was at schools like Berkeley, after all, that the free speech movement bloomed in the 1960s.

The new efforts raise a question that has only grown more intractable since President Trump took office: When one person’s beliefs sound like hate speech to another, how do you ensure a more civil political debate?

What conservatives see as a necessary corrective to decades of political imbalance in higher education, liberals and some college administrators see as an overly paternalistic approach to a problem that is being used as ammunition in the culture wars.

“It has this strong motivating factor when it appeals to the politics of resentment,” said Donald Moynihan, director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who opposed the regents’ policy.

Mr. Moynihan added that conservatives are pushing these policies because of “the sense that there are these elite institutions where your voice is not being heard, and where your beliefs are somehow being devalued.”

The campaign to address speech issues at colleges and universities is unfolding not just in state legislatures but in the courts and in Congress, where Republicans have convened hearings to explore how colleges and universities are addressing free speech concerns.

The Trump administration has also picked up the baton. In March when the White House convened a discussion called “Crisis on College Campus,” it identified two co-equal culprits: opioid abuse and suppression of free speech. This week the Justice Department formally filed a statement in support of a lawsuit challenging the University of Michigan for establishing “bias response teams,” which assist students who claim to have been victims of offensive conduct. The filing called the university’s policies “chilling” on free speech.

The issue is a natural fit for President Trump, who has made fighting political correctness and pushing boundaries central to his identity:

“Increasingly, when conservatives
make their points, they are told, whether directly or in a roundabout way, 'Shut up, you're a bad person,'" said Stanley Kurtz, co-author of model campus speech legislation being promoted by the Goldwater Institute, named for Barry Goldwater, the archconservative former senator.

Several states have taken up the Goldwater model or adopted it in part. The Wisconsin regents, almost all of whom are appointed by the Republican governor, Scott Walker; borrowed from it. Lawmakers in North Carolina and Georgia did as well.

Mr. Kurtz said that shoutdowns of conservatives at colleges are a far more serious problem than the left admits, calling them "an open embodiment of a problem that runs more subtly through far too much of our political discourse."

The Goldwater Institute has been funded by some of the biggest benefactors in Republican politics. They include the Mercer family of New York, whose foundation has given more than $1.1 million since 2012, tax filings show. Rebekah Mercer, who oversees much of her family's giving, has served on the institute's board. Another leading conservative policy group, the Alliance Defending Freedom, has sued schools in Georgia, Michigan and other states for restricting demonstrations to designated areas on campus, sometimes referred to as "free speech zones." The group, which just successfully defended before the Supreme Court a Colorado baker who refused to make a cake for a gay wedding, has been able to force some colleges to revise their policies.

The cause also has its own news service, a website called Campus Reform, which mocks liberalism taken to the extreme. One of its recurring segments, for example, shows interviews with students on questions like whether St. Patrick's Day celebrations amount to cultural appropriation. The site is a project of the Leadership Institute, another big player in the conservative movement.

Many liberals agree that universities should be extremely judicious in how they regulate political expression. They also say that Republican lawmakers are stifling free speech in the name of protecting it by forcing codes of conduct on universities.

"The big irony is that their solution is right-wing social engineering," said Michael Behrent, an associate professor of history at Appalachian State University in North Carolina and a co-author of a new report, for the American Association of University Professors, on speech legislation.

"They're supposedly against the idea of speech codes and authorities regulating what can and cannot be said," Mr. Behrent added. "But they really are in fact advocating that."

The Goldwater model makes several recommendations for colleges and universities: to create disciplinary sanc-

ations, including expulsion, for students who have been found to have twice interfered with someone's free expression; to prevent administrators from disinviting speakers, no matter how controversial; and to remain neutral on the controversies of the day.

The model is not without disagreement on the right. Its mandatory punishment provisions drew a rebuke from the Charles Koch Institute, one of whose directors said conservatives were "giving in to the same fragility of which they so freely accuse their liberal counterparts." Mr. Koch's foundation has been a contributor to the institute in the past.

More broadly, some powerful Republicans are questioning whether affirmative action should be extended beyond race to students with less commonly held political views.

"You did it for underrepresented students, do it for underrepresented points of view," said Senator Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee and the chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. In his comments, which he made at a New York Times conference on higher education last month, Mr. Alexander said that if colleges did not prioritize political diversity, they risked graduating a generation of overly squeamish adults.

Lt. Gov. Dan Forest of North Carolina, who led the effort to pass the state's Goldwater-modeled law, said, "If you want to shut down the discussion, that's called communism."

Conservatives say that one of their biggest concerns is a growing misunderstanding about what "free speech" means and how the principle is selectively enforced. They point to the slogan used by many liberals today, "Hate Speech is Not Protected Speech," as an example of how distorted the debate has become. (The First Amendment protects speech regardless of how offensive it is.)

"Whatever the standard is for right-wing hate speech must be the standard for left-wing hate speech," said Alan Dershowitz, a professor emeritus at Harvard Law School, who also spoke at The Times's higher education conference.

The role that lawmakers have in setting those standards is what remains so divisive.

"We've had students protesting forever and speech survives," Mr. Moomian, the professor of public affairs, said. He pointed to the 2016 appearance at Wisconsin-Madison campus by Ben Shapiro, the conservative writer whose addresses have sparked outbursts on campuses across the country. Student protesters interrupted him and at one point tried to obstruct the stage. But they eventually left on their own, and Mr. Shapiro continued with his remarks.

That was a year before the regents adopted the new code of conduct. Since its implementation, few controversial conservative headliners have come to campus. And according to the university, no student has been expelled.