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Larger role sought for UA

Interim chancellor says UA System can lead the state

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Finis St. John IV, the University of Alabama System's interim chancellor, wants the three-campus system to take on a greater leadership role in education, the economy and health care in the state.

"I believe that our university system has an opportunity right now to do more for the state than we have ever done before. We have the vast, untapped potential to lead that we have never called," he said during a presentation to the board of trustees Friday.

The September board meeting is the date when the system typically makes its presentation to the board, providing updates on achievements and initiatives and unveiling plans.

St. John was selected as the interim successor to Chancellor Ray Hayes in July by his fellow trustees. St. John used his comments as interim chancellor to make the case for the system's leadership in the state. The message carries echoes of past visions laid out by Hayes and former Chancellor Robert Witt who saw leadership opportunities in advocacy for education, health care and economic development.

"I believe we are uniquely positioned to lead a unified approach to education across our entire state and unified approach to developing the economy of our state," St. John said.

The UA system has more than 70,000 students, 45,000 employees and nearly 400,000 living alumni, and the health system treated 1 million patients last year, he said.

"All of these students,

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employees, alumni and patients have families and friends and all of their lives and all of the places they live are affected by what is done by the University of Alabama System. Their devotion to us is strong and it is the strong bond that has the power to many good things,” he said.

St. John sees the approach as a conversation between interests, such as educational institutions, the business community and state leaders. He juxtaposed a unified approach with a history of the different sectors of education in the state fighting amongst themselves for resources despite wanting similar outcomes for students.

“All those folks want the same thing,” he said.

Invoking UA’s 15th president, George Denny, St. John said that UA must be conscientious about its spending.

“He said many times during his years here, we must make every dollar do the work of five,” St. John said. “Now, we should spend whatever it takes to advance the education and well-being of our students and maintain our standards of excellence, but we should not spend money that is not essential to that mission.”

The board approved budgets on Friday for the upcoming fiscal year. UA’s operating budget for fiscal year 2019 is $1.05 billion. The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s operating budget will be $1.32 billion. The UAB Hospital budget would grow to $1.7 billion. The UA System office’s budget will remain at $20.4 million. The University of Alabama in Huntsville’s budget will be $235 million.

St. John praised the system’s budget and the lack of tuition increases for in-state students at Alabama as good steps as he discussed financial accountability.

“These are steps and they show progress, but there is much more we can do. I am not saying that tuition will never go up or our budget will never have greater spending in the future, but I am saying we should try to make every dollar do the work of five,” he said.

St. John also took time to re-emphasize the system’s mission as state institutions.

“Educating Alabama students has always been our highest mission and it will always be our highest mission,” he said.

Since 2012, the majority of students at UA have come from outside the state. The demographic shift has drawn criticism for the state-funded school. St. John added out-of-state students are also important to the state’s future.

“Aside from the financial benefits, if you talk to the leaders of small businesses, large businesses and cities and towns around our state, they all say our biggest economic need is having enough people to fill the jobs we attract and create,” he said. “Our population growth is flat and is projected to remain flat. So where will the people come from to fill these roles? If we want to reach our potential, we should attract students from every state and work to make sure there are opportunities here.”

St. John will continue to serve as the interim chancellor until a permanent replacement for Hayes is selected.

The system is working on a draft of qualifications for its next chancellor, Board President pro tempore Ron Gray said. The board is getting feedback from the faculty senates at the three campuses on the qualifications, Gray said, adding the system would begin advertising for the chancellorship in the next few weeks.

The search would consider both internal and external candidates and be nationwide, Gray said.

The search will be led by trustee Karen Brooks, who served as the board president before Gray. The search will not be delegated to a committee of trustees but will be worked on by the full board, Gray said.

“We are going to take our time. We don’t have anything that is pressing us,” he said, noting St. John had agreed to serve until a permanent successor was named.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
UA to upgrade stadium

Bryant-Denny Stadium to undergo $75 million renovation

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama System.board of trustees on Friday approved preliminary plans for a $75.4 million renovation of Bryant-Denny Stadium.

"Part of this, too, is making sure we have the right balance of honoring our past which we are so proud of ... then creating our vision for the future. This is what Phase One allows us the opportunity to do," Athletic Director Greg Byrne said.

Byrne presented highlights of the project to the board on Friday. It includes enhancing student and fan experiences by providing new social spaces, improved circulation, additional premium seating and upgraded spaces for athletes and recruits.

The board waived the consultant selection process and approved an architectural agreement with David Architects of Birmingham, which has previously worked on the stadium and athletic facilities, for the design of the project based on a lump fee of $3.8 million.

The project will be funded with $40.4 million in bonds and $35 million from the Crimson Tide Foundation.

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Coach Nick Saban speaks during the Crimson Standard initiative news conference, on Aug. 16. The fundraising initiative will fund extensive renovations at Bryant-Denny Stadium, along with other athletic facilities at the University of Alabama. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]

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To see more action taken at the UA board of trustees meeting Friday, see Page A5.

the fundraising arm of UA athletics.

There is no current timeline for construction to start, which would come after the board approves the renderings.

[RENDERING PROVIDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA]
STADIUM

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for the project, said Tim Leopard, U.A. associate vice president of construction.

Alabama unveiled a 10-year, $500 million initiative called the Crimson Standard in August to upgrade the stadium, Coleman Coliseum, the Mal Moore Athletic Facility and other athletic facilities.

The department has raised about $158 million so far for the project, Byrne said.

"The momentum from it has been very positive. We have been very encouraged by that," he said.

The stadium renovations would be part of the first of three phases of the 10-year plan. In August, Byrne indicated the project would likely reduce seating capacity in the stadium to less than 100,000, down from its current size of 101,821 seats.

He estimated it would impact about 5 percent of the seating in the stadium. "We want to make sure there are spots for all fans to be a part of it. It is important that we provide price points for a wide variety of our fan base," Byrne said.

The additions include a student terrace in the stadium's south end zone with a new video board over the student section, new two-cab elevators, two new video boards and a club with a field-level in the north end zone, new top-tier boxes called the Founders Suites and other premium seating options including an open-air terrace on the west side, and the relocation of the press box to the east side of the stadium.

"At the same time too, it has become a much more social event for younger fans, and older fans, too. We are trying to be proactive in our approach here," Byrne said.

The plan also includes a new locker room and recruiting lounge in the north end zone and a renovation to the tunnel that the team uses to enter the field.

The Walk of Champions would be extended into the Game Day Locker Room via a new tunnel clad with video boards. The tunnel would require the demolition of the existing stairs that lead to Gate 1.

"This is an opportunity to update that space as a focal point from a recruiting standpoint and also for our team on game days," Byrne said of the game day locker room and tunnel.

The renovation would increase space devoted for recruiting from 6,000 square feet to 12,000 square feet, he said.

The funds generated from the first phase, including the sale of luxury boxes, will help fund later phases of the department's capital plan, Byrne said.

"This is very much a focus to where we want to do Phase One to give us the revenues to be able to do Phase Two and Phase Three with trustees approval so we can give our fans across the board, whether it is a Coleman Coliseum, whether it is at Bryant-Denny Stadium, a first-class experience," he said.

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Historic Donation

UA announces $25 million gift to law school from Hugh Culverhouse Jr.

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama announced the largest gift in its history on Thursday -- a $25 million donation to the UA School of Law from Hugh Culverhouse Jr.

Culverhouse Jr., a Florida businessman and attorney, and his wife, Eliza, have donated nearly $40 million to UA during the last decade.

In recognition of the gift, UA President Stuart Bell said the university is naming the law school after Culverhouse. The university made the announcement as it praised the Culverhouses for their latest gift of $26.5 million in gifts to the law school in the last year.

"I could not be more pleased or more humbled to announce Hugh F. Culverhouse Jr. of Coral Gables, Florida, has made the monumental donation of $26.5 million to support the law school," Bell said.

The renaming got preliminary approval from the UA System's board of trustees' honorary degrees committee on Thursday. The name change is expected to get formal approval by the full board on Friday.

The previous record donation was $15 million from Marilynn A. Hewson and her husband, James, earlier this year.

"The sheer magnitude of this gift is only matched by your generosity. We are immensely proud to have the Culverhouse name attached the UA school of Law," Board President pro tempore Ron Gray said.

UA has already received more than $11.5 million of the donation, with the remaining amount to be paid over the next four years, according to the university. The Culverhouses gave a $1.5-million gift to the law school last

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GIFT

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year to establish the Hugh F. Culverhouse Jr. Endowed Chair in Constitutional Law, which serves as a foundation for a program in constitutional studies.

Law Dean Mark Brandon recalled an email correspondence with Culverhouse that bloomed into a friendship as the two discussed the Constitution and other topics.

"It is apparent to me as our conversation unfolded this was a special person," Brandon said.

The two began discussing the endowment of a chair in Constitutional law last year.

"He wanted this gift to have an impact. He wanted his gift to elevate our law school to the next level," Brandon said.

"His statement to me was that he wanted to support his law school to the next level." Culverhouse has been the top donors to the university during the past decade giving approximately $58 million, the bulk of which have been in support of scholarships, with gifts to the business college, athletics, and the school of law.

Culverhouse recalled his relationships with Bell, Brandon, and the late U.S. Circuit Court Judge Robert Vance Sr. and he traced his connections to the law school.

His gift was meant to give students the financial freedom to pursue the jobs and opportunities they are passionate about, he said.

Culverhouse recalled his own experience as an assistant U.S. Attorney learning and growing as a young attorney.

"I got experience. I lost, I won... I want every student here to have the ability to do the same. I want scholarships in case you say 'I don't want to work for a large firm. I want to work for the government.' I want you all to have the ability to do what you want. That is why I did this," Culverhouse said.

Culverhouse is the chief executive officer and owner of Palmer Ranch Holdings in Sarasota County, Florida. He is also the principal in Culverhouse Limited Partnerships and invests in real estate, securities and hedge funds.

Culverhouse, an alumnus of the University of Florida, also served as a trial attorney for the United States Securities and Exchange Commission's Division of Enforcement and an assistant U.S. attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice.

The college of business is named after his father, Hugh F. Culverhouse Sr.
UA trustees to vote on budgets for fiscal year

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama System board of trustees will consider the fiscal budget for the system's three campuses when it meets Friday.

The budgets for the system office, three campuses and UAB Hospital were approved by the Finance Committee on Thursday. The new budgets totaling more than $4.3 billion would take effect on Oct. 1.

The UA operating budget would increase from $1.03 billion at the end of fiscal year 2018 to $1.05 billion in fiscal year 2019. At UA, expenses are projected to increase by 4.4 percent while revenues are projected to grow by 3.7 percent.

The budget includes $15 million for scholarships, $10.4 million for merit increases, promotions and related costs; $4.6 million for graduate stipends, $2.1 million for state retirement and benefits and insurance increases, and $3.2 million for new staff and faculty positions and benefits.

After remaining level for two years, state appropriations increased $5.8 million.

"This increase has allowed us to keep in-state tuition at the same rate it was in (fiscal year) 2018," UA Vice President of Financial Affairs Matt Fajack said.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's operating budget will increase from $1.29 billion to $1.32 billion.

UAB will get an additional $7.7 million in state funding, Senior Vice President of Finance Allen Bolton said. Tuition revenues are expected to grow $11.7 million based on tuition increase and enrollment growth. UAB saw a record enrollment of 21,923 in the fall semester. Grant activity is projected to grow from $82.5 million to $90 million. "We will end the year with favorable financial results. Our total revenue is expected to be 3.9 percent better than budget for the year -- largely driven by student enrollment and grant awards that exceeded budget and auxiliary revenue that tracked with enrollment, especially in housing, dining and the book store and parking," Bolton said.

UAB's growth in expenses include $4.1 million for scholarships and aid, $15.4 million for a merit plan, $3.3 million in mandatory costs, $7 million for expected increases in utility costs and new buildings coming online and $4.1 million in operating increases and strategic initiatives.

The UAB Hospital budget would grow to $1.7 billion, with a 3.5 percent increase in labor costs, 10.5 percent growth in physician fees, 6.5 percent growth in supplies and 6.8 percent growth in other expenses. Patient revenue is projected to increase 5.4 percent. Other revenues are expected to grow 5.2 percent.

The UA System office's budget will remain at $20.4 million. The University of Alabama in Huntsville's budget would grow from $231 million at the end of 2018 to $235 in 2019.
How tax reform could hit the bottom line of college football in Alabama

By: Tyler Patchen

Alabama sits squarely at the intersection of college football and business.

On fall Saturdays, it’s a regular occurrence for business deals to be brokered over barbecue at a tailgate or in a skybox suite.

Thousands of fans fill stadiums across the Southeast each Saturday, and many of the seats sold to season ticket holders came with donations to a university. Donation levels for the University of Alabama’s Tide Pride program, for example, range from $60 to thousands of dollars per year per ticket in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

But, with the passage of a landmark tax reform law in late 2017, the tax deductions that have long accompanied those donations are going away.

Under the new law, donations connected to season ticket purchases will no longer be tax deductible. Donors could previously deduct 80 percent of those donations.

When coupled with nationally declining attendance and an evolving TV landscape that could affect future media rights deals, the tax code change could put additional stress on some athletic department budgets in the long term.

And experts say even athletic departments in Alabama – by many metrics the nation’s top college football hotbed – could eventually feel the heat if current trends continue in the long term.

In Alabama, that could have ramifications for a variety of industries, including hotels, retail and the wealth of cottage industries that spring up each fall in college towns and beyond.

Preparing for change

As tax reform neared the final stages of passage in late 2017, uncertainty swirled about the future of tax write-offs for donations connected to season tickets.

And many athletic departments didn’t rest on their laurels.

The University of Alabama, for example, sent a letter to Tide Pride members about the evolving situation, noting members could consult their financial or tax consultants to determine if submitting donations prior to Dec. 31, 2017, would benefit them.

When the smoke cleared, the longtime deduction did not survive in the new tax law.

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Athletic directors around the state and nation interviewed by the Birmingham Business Journal said it’s still too early to determine the full impact on donation numbers. Experts say those totals likely won’t become clear until the new year.

Mark Ingram, athletics director at UAB, said many questions still remain.

“It’s definitely a challenge that every department has had to address and really look at. I think there are a lot of questions to be answered exactly in terms of how it affects each individual,” Ingram said. “Tax laws and tax codes are complicated, and it’s certainly something everybody is concerned about and has reason to be concerned about.”

Ingram said UAB’s annual giving campaign has increased for the last three years, and the school, which revived its football program in 2017, is projecting another increase this year.

The Blazer Boosters program raised $9.5 million in the 2017 calendar year from 1,841 total donors – both school records.

“Our donors have been generous and continue to support us at the same level if not higher,” he said. “We’re still different from those bigger schools, and we’re still building a base here that has a long way to go terms of volume, depth and breadth.”

In order to get ahead of the tax code changes, Ingram said UAB allowed donors to pay in advance for three years during the past year.

“We had people take us up on that. We had a number of folks who said, ‘Yeah, I’ll go ahead and do that before the changes were made,’ he said. “In advance of that, we put that information out to people, and if they found it beneficial and if they wanted to do that, they could.”

Beyond that, Ingram said UAB has discussed a number of ideas to address any future challenges created by the tax code change, but nothing is finalized at this point.

Ingram said one factor for UAB has been the bulk of its donations – in terms of dollars – have been connected to facility improvements like the new football operations center, rather than season tickets.

Even with the tax-law change, those facility-focused donations will still be tax-deductible, Ingram said.

The University of Alabama recently unveiled its own facility-focused fundraising campaign, called The Crimson Standard. The $600 million campaign will support upgrades at Bryant-Denny Stadium, Coleman Coliseum and other facilities.

Greg Byrne, athletic director at UA, said in a statement the total effect of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is still unknown at this point.

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But, he said, Tide Pride and the Crimson Tide Foundation continue to move forward at a record pace. He also said the new Crimson Standard campaign has been well received.

Despite a national downward trend, Byrne said demand for Alabama football season tickets remains strong. He said Alabama is seeing an increased number of returns from visiting teams, which has given the program additional ticket inventory to sell through mini-plans or single-game tickets.

The school said its Tide Pride Program annually raises more than $25 million, but the school did not provide a year-over-year breakdown of fundraising totals.

One focus of the Crimson Standard – an emphasis on gameday experience – is something experts say could prove pivotal for college athletics in the years to come, particularly in light of the loss of the tax deduction.

New Auburn University Athletic Director Allen Greene also said it’s still too early for the program to determine the impact. He said Auburn’s strategies at this point are not that different than in years past.

He said Auburn is also focusing on ways to ensure a positive fan experience.

“We’re always trying to figure out how we can be better stewards of resources and how we can make it easier and more enjoyable for our fans and donors to support Auburn Athletics,” Greene said.

Beyond the giants

Steven McClung, senior associate dean and vice president of operations at Mercer Innovation Center of the Stetson School of Business and Economics at Mercer University, said the biggest effects will likely be felt at smaller colleges where the donor base is smaller and average donations are lower.

“I think the biggest effect is that it’s going to serve as a disincentive for small donors,” he said. “If I give $10,000 a year to a college program, well I can probably afford to do that. If I give $500 or $1,000, my budget is much smaller, and I’ll probably need that write-off and incentive,” he said. “It’s going to hurt a lot in incentivizing smaller donors to give because they have less money to give and they are getting less for it.”

Tax reform is also expected to reduce the number of people who itemize their deductions, so there are likely a number of individuals – particularly smaller donors – who would no longer be able to take the deduction, even without the new rule. That could be a further wrinkle in the law’s impact.

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McClung said the full impact isn’t likely to be felt until after this tax year, which is when many will realize donations for season ticket programs can no longer be deducted.

“I’m pretty sure (colleges) are already seeing some impact. The tax law is not that old yet, so we probably haven’t seen the biggest effect and (some people) don’t even know you cannot write it off,” he said. “After this year, that is when things are going to happen, so this coming year you’re going to see a drop of people giving to universities (for season tickets).”

Brian Gerrity, senior associate athletic director at Mercer, said his school has already shifted some of its strategy in connection with the rule change.

“There was a whole bunch of hype leading up to the changes. Everyone was freaking out and scrambling and coming together with a plan, and there was a lot of uncertainty,” Gerrity said. “What we did, by splitting the tickets away from anything foundation related, you won’t see a thing about tickets.”

Instead, Mercer has focused its energy on other ways to attract tax-deductible donations, such as focusing on the value of parking spaces on gamedays.

“We got away from tickets,” he said.

Gerrity believes even larger and more established programs will shift their strategies, such as having two annual funds – one related to tickets and one unrelated.

He believes schools, especially smaller programs and Football Championship Subdivision programs – will become more flexible and innovative in response to the change.

“We are able to be really creative in how we give in our benefit structure,” he said. “There’s a major difference between a great seat and a bad seat at a Power 5 school, but at Mercer, there isn’t a difference between the best and worst seats. Since ticket location is secondary, we can really focus in on those other aspects and stay out of the ticket game altogether. A lot of mid-majors will stay out of the ticket location end of things.”

Experts also say the change could further increase the need for programs to win on the field, given the deduction incentive is no longer available.

While experts say the tax deductions were heavily utilized, many experts believe Alabama football programs won’t immediately feel the brunt of the impact – particularly when it comes to the state’s marquee programs.

Will Aderholt, a member at Warren Averett’s tax division, said the season ticket deduction was popular on both the corporate and the individual level.
But Aderholt is optimistic the change won’t derail the sport in a college football hotbed like Alabama.

"My gut tells me that, at least in Alabama, at the end of the day, you have two different types of people: the really affluent people who will buy expensive seats, who will continue to (pay anything) and then your average fan with average income level and may not be able to itemize deductions anyway. And then, (with) the spirit of Alabama and Auburn fans, I don’t see little things like a tax deduction getting in the way of their desire for season tickets."
Which city is the 'Southern Silicon Valley?' Birmingham or Huntsville?

By: William Thornton

Birmingham is the Magic City. Huntsville is the Rocket City.

But which Alabama city has the better claim to be, as some publications recently put it, the "Southern Silicon Valley?"

The answer may depend greatly on Alabama's past, and could dictate the state's future.

No less an authority than the Wall Street Journal gave Huntsville the nickname, saying it was one of three cities in the U.S. that represent the future of the tech industry. Entrepreneur said it's one of seven cities competing with Silicon Valley.

Forbes and Barron's recently slapped the "Southern" moniker on Birmingham. Livability called it an-up and-coming tech spot. U.S. News said it is one of 10 cities where gig workers can flourish.

Those are only a few of the superlatives lavished in the past few years.

The two cities, at first glance, wouldn't seem to have that much in common. Birmingham's economic past was forged in steel and nurtured by its medical sector. Huntsville became America's space portal and an aerospace and research hub.

But the two are very similar, said Steve Spencer, president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama.

Birmingham has UAB and Southern Research. Huntsville has UAH and HudsonAlpha. Birmingham is a medical mecca. Huntsville has a vibrant defense sector. Both cities have thriving startup scenes.

Both cities have a lot of enthusiasm at the moment, founded on solid achievements and recent announcements of growth.

"There are a lot of reasons for these two cities to get recognition at the same time," Spencer said.

Why are publications making these comparisons? For one reason, not everyone can live in the original Silicon Valley, or afford to. A refrain in all of these think pieces is the cost of living in Alabama relative to the West Coast.

As Forbes noted, the median cost of a house in Birmingham is $218,577, according to the Alabama Center for Real Estate. In Huntsville, it's $193,500. A house in San Francisco will cost you about $1 million more.

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Another reason is the action. Birmingham is currently seeing activity in its startup community and in economic recruitment. Innovation Depot, the startup incubator, touts a study last year that says its 112 member companies have created more than 1,000 jobs and more than $1 billion in revenue over a five-year period.

Late last year, Target acquired Birmingham-based Shipt for $550 million. Earlier this year, Amazon announced plans to build an $325 million, 855,000-square-foot fulfillment center in nearby Bessemer, creating 1,500 jobs.

Meanwhile, Huntsville has seen a surge in population growth and is on track to become the state's largest city in as soon as five years. Neighboring Madison has grown at a faster rate in the last eight years. Huntsville city leaders tout the figure that more than 62 percent of the jobs in the state in the past decade have been created in Huntsville.

Those numbers are only expected to grow in the near future, as the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant in west Huntsville begins production in 2021. The plant is expected to create 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. Efforts by the city, county and chamber of commerce have been aimed not only at attracting talent to Huntsville, but keeping homegrown talent there.

Liveability called Huntsville the No. 2 Tech Hotspot in the country, and U.S. News ranked it the seventh best place to live in the U.S. In addition to the defense and aerospace industries, Huntsville's reputation as a bio-tech hub is growing. Since 2006, HudsonAlpha by itself has generated more than $1.85 billion in economic impact and more than 1,300 jobs.

DC BLOX is locating data centers in both cities, and a look at what services they are providing is a window onto each city's tech landscape. This summer, the Atlanta-based provider of network and cloud services announced a new technology and innovation center to be built on the old Trinity Steel location in Birmingham, a $785 million investment over 10 years. This month also sees the completion of the first phase of DC BLOX's $13 million Huntsville center on a five-acre site near Redstone Arsenal.

The company located in Huntsville to provide data services for companies needing classified and unclassified services. But it chose Birmingham for an ambitious project because it was the largest city in America without a purpose-built high security multi-tenant data center, CEO Jeff Uphues said.

So who has the better claim? Keivan Deravi, professor of economics at Auburn University-Montgomery, has lived in Alabama for 40 years and studied its economy.

For him, there's no contest as to which city is closer to the "Silicon Valley" comparison – it's Birmingham. But that comes with an asterisk.
There's more than a million people in the greater Birmingham metro area, he said, meaning a vital center surrounded by Hoover and suburbs in Jefferson County with growing adjoining counties. There's Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, which offers a few more direct destinations than Huntsville. The Magic City has a vital entertainment culture, Deravi said, which is growing.

"There's a healthy retail sector, healthy banking sector, very healthy pharmaceutical research, and you've got the presence of UAB, a large research university," he said. "And there's a very large presence in Birmingham of startups and venture capital. On the downside is the fragmented educational system, but that's not unique to Birmingham. There's no comparison. Birmingham is a lion in a cage, pacing back and forth, waiting to burst out."

What does Huntsville have in its favor?

Deravi said while Huntsville has a smaller population than Birmingham, it has nurtured a class of talent through its association with NASA, the defense, aviation and space industries. In addition to the presence of Redstone Arsenal are companies such as Boeing, Blue Origin and Aerojet Rocketdyne.

Facebook is building a $750 million data center in Huntsville. Not far down the road in Jackson County, Google is building a $600 million data center.

The Rocket City also has good schools, and its entertainment and hospitality industries are growing. Huntsville is currently the site of the fourth largest commercial real estate development in the U.S., the $500 million MidCity redevelopment currently under construction on the 140-acre site of the former Madison Square Mall.

"Its economic developers have also been extremely aggressive," Deravi said. "You've got a lot of high-tech, highly skilled workers there, and it's hard to attract top talent to locate in many places in Alabama. They're pushing."

What's the asterisk? When making comparisons like "the Southern Silicon Valley," it's important to remember just how big the real Silicon Valley is.

A survey earlier this year stated that, if the southern San Francisco Bay area were its own nation, it would have the 19th largest economy in the world, just ahead of Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. The area grows about 4 percent a year, twice the rate of the U.S. economy.

The San Jose Metropolitan Area has the third highest GDP per capita in the world, according to the Brookings Institution, and is home to the headquarters of 39 businesses in the Fortune 1000. About 4 million people live in the area, which makes it slightly smaller than the entire population

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of Alabama. Silicon Valley has a quarter of a million IT workers, as well as a third of all venture capital investment in the United States.

Huntsville resembles the traditional defense technology side of Silicon Valley, while Birmingham has a more organic startup community similar to the current West Coast culture.

Greg Canfield, Alabama's Secretary of Commerce, said Huntsville has benefited from the high concentration of engineering talent from the defense sector, as well as from HudsonAlpha. Birmingham's community has spinoff business from the medical sector, UAB and Southern Research, as well as an emerging startup culture.

For all the ambition in Birmingham and Huntsville, there is still the tether of reality. Both communities are in Alabama, a state near the bottom statistically in education benchmarks where almost 17 percent of the population lives in poverty. That presents obvious workforce challenges.

There's also the current economic culture. As AOL cofounder Steve Case observed earlier this year at the "Rise of the Rest" event in Birmingham, California has a significant head start on all comers. 50 percent of capital last year in the U.S. went to California. Alabama got about 1 percent, meaning California got the same amount of money every week that Alabama gets in one whole year, he said.

According to the Kaufmann Foundation, 230 out of every 100,000 adults in Alabama become entrepreneurs every month, one of the lowest percentages in the nation.

Silicon Valley wasn't built totally with private funds, either. Though many companies began there-- and the image of the startup in a garage is ingrained in many memories - part of its preeminence is due to the presence of Stanford University, the California university system and defense contracts.

"We have a long way to go," Deravi said. "We have a lot of history to overcome, a lot of poverty to correct, and there's our propensity to dislike taxes. We think of taxes as an imposition, instead of seeing it as an investment when it's dispensed smartly."

But having two cities simultaneously mentioned as possible nexus points of development isn't a bad problem to have, Spencer said.

And some of those depressing statistics show signs of changing. The Alabama Futures Fund, or AFF, last week announced it has closed a $25 million early-stage venture capital fund. The product of investors including former Auburn and NBA basketball great Charles Barkley, Protective Life Insurance Company, HOAR Construction, Raymond J. Harbert, G. Ruffner Page,
Jr., and Benny M. LaRussa, Jr., the AFF will focus on companies with high growth potential. But it will only invest in companies that are headquartered in, or willing to relocate to, Alabama.

Spencer said the AFF is a great leap forward, as it addresses venture capital.

"The one thing we've said we didn't have in the past was capital," Spencer said. "That's a big deal to companies to see that capital is available. And it has the potential to benefit the entire state."

In addition, there's a growing amount of cross-pollination between Birmingham and Huntsville, Spencer said. UAB and HudsonAlpha formed the Center for Genomic Medicine in 2014, for example. Professionals trained in Birmingham may move to new jobs in Huntsville, and vice versa.

Canfield said what's happening in Birmingham and Huntsville increasingly involves the Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Auburn and Mobile regions through the universities. That's one of the goals of the state's strategic economic development plan, Accelerate 2.0. It's a strategy that is paying dividends, Canfield said.

So whatever happens in either city has the potential to benefit the rest of the state.

"Both of them are truly world-class assets," Spencer said. "And I think you're going to see more coming together and working together."
Hospital association pushes for state Medicaid expansion

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — With one in every 10 patients walking into state hospitals without insurance, the Alabama Hospital Association on Thursday launched a campaign to push for expansion of the state's Medicaid program.

Politicians in the Deep South have often opposed expansion, but the Alabama Hospital Association is urging citizens and policy makers to think of expansion as they would any other economic development investment, arguing it would benefit communities and the entire state health care system in addition to the estimated 300,000 people who would gain health care coverage.

"Health care is part of the state's infrastructure," Danne Howard, executive vice president and chief policy officer of the Alabama Hospital Association, said.

Twelve Alabama hospitals have closed since 2011 and Howard said 75 percent of Alabama's hospitals are operating in the red. She said expanding Medicaid would be a "significant investment in the state's fragile health care infrastructure and would help maintain access to care for everyone."

"One in every 10 people who walk into a hospital doesn't have insurance. At some point those providers, those hospitals, are not going to be able to maintain operation. They are not going to be there, either closing their doors or cutting back services. At that point, it really doesn't matter what insurance card you have in your pocket. If the provider is

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MEDICAID

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not there, the care is not there," Howard said.
Alabama is one of 14 states that have taken no
action toward expanding Medicaid eligibility under
the Affordable Care Act, according to the Henry
J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Thirty-three
states and the District of Columbia have approved
raising income limits for Medicaid coverage under
the Affordable Care Act and another three will
vote this fall in ballot measures.
The Urban Institute estimated that Medicaid
expansion would add 314,000 people to Alab-
ama's Medicaid rolls. Under the Affordable
Care Act, states would put up 10 percent of the
cost of covering the additional Medicaid patients
and the federal government would pick up the
rest.
Estimates on what it would cost the state have
varied. Gov. Robert Bentley in 2015 estimated that
expansion would cost the state $710 million dollars
over six years. Other estimates have pegged the
cost higher.
Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said last week that
she is not opposed to Medicaid expansion, but
questioned how the state would pay for it.

"Medicaid expansion is desirable perhaps, but
how are you going to pay for it? That's not an
issue we can tackle at this point," the Republican
told reporters.

Democratic gubernatorial nominee Walt
Maddox has proposed striking a gambling
compact with the Poarch Creek Indians and using
the state's share of revenue to pay for the
state's cost of Medicaid expansion.

At Vaughan Regional Medical Center in Selma,
10-12 percent of patients are uninsured, and 40
percent of patients are on
Medicaid, said CEO David
McCormack.

Looming over hospi-
tals are possible cuts to
the federal Dispropor-
tionate Share Hospital
program for treating a
disproportionate share
of the indigent. Sched-
uled reductions were
delayed several times, but
McCormack said they will
have a devastating impact
if they go through in 2020
as planned.

McCormack said
expanding Medicaid
would help keep hospi-
tals open and providing
services.

"I don't want to give
you a dollar, if you give
me 10 dollars?" McCormack said.

"First of all, why would
we not want billions of
dollars coming into the
state?"
Expansion will add 70 jobs

Vance lumber company now employs 600 people

A Vance lumber company will create more than 70 new jobs after the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority's approval of a tax abatement package.

During its Thursday meeting, the authority approved the tax abatement package as part of a $28.2 million capital investment at KyKenKee Inc., according to Jo Bonner, the TCIDA's interim executive director.

"KyKenKee is a prime example of the diverse economy in Tuscaloosa County and West Alabama," Bonner said in a news release. "This new investment will allow the company an opportunity to enter new lines of business and to produce new wood products and goods, while creating 70 new, good paying jobs for our community."

KyKenKee traces its operations back to 1912. The name of the company was changed in 1980 to KyKenKee Inc. The company's former name was L.L. Burt and Sons.

KyKenKee manufactures hardwoods and Southern Yellow Pine, as well as specialty cut items and green-scape products such as wood chips and bark. The company now employs more than 600 people.

TCIDA estimates the project will contribute almost $14 million during the next 20 years in taxes.

TCIDA officials say the company will be eligible for tax abatements in the amount of $1.36 million during the first 10 years of the project. During those 10 years, officials estimate the project will contribute more than $652,000 in non-abated education tax revenue.

In other action, the authority recognized its longest-serving board member, Tuscaloosa businessman Ronny Rhodes, by naming its board room the Rhodes Conference Room.

Rhodes, the founder and owner of Craftex Protective Coatings in Moundville, has served on the TCIDA board since May 8, 1985. He has previously served TCIDA as its chairman as well as held numerous other leadership positions throughout the years.

"Ronny Rhodes has been a great member of our Board for more than 30 years," said Dean McClure, TCIDA board chairman. "His service to his community is unparalleled, and he has been a key partner as we have successfully recruited a number of companies to Tuscaloosa County throughout the years." During Rhodes' time on the board, TCIDA has announced the arrival of more than 10,000 jobs in Tuscaloosa County with more than $7.6 billion in capital investment. McClure said Rhodes played a key role in helping recruiting JVC, Hanna Steel, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International and numerous automotive suppliers.

In addition to serving TCIDA, Rhodes has also been active with the West Alabama Regional Commission, the Boys & Girls Club, Tuscaloosa County Clean Community Commission, the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama and the Jaycees. He was recognized as a Pillar of West Alabama in 2010 by the Community Foundation of West Alabama.
The Club working on $5.3 million renovation project

One of Birmingham's major event venues is undergoing a $5.3 million renovation that club leaders hope will strongly position it for the future.

The Club recently started a significant renovation of several rooms on its second floor and is on target to wrap up work on the project before the holidays.

Club General Manager Brian Green said the project, which has been in the planning stages for at least two years, will bring The Club current with the times while staying true to the iconic nature of the facility for both Birmingham residents and the 5,600 club members.

The renovation of The Club, which is one of the area's most prominent event venues, comes at a time when the local event scene is evolving – creating a number of opportunities in the market.

The general contractor is Bradford & Gorrin. The interior design firm is Johnson Studios out of Atlanta, and the architect is Hank Long with Henry Sproat Long & Associates.

Green said the club's Board of Governors had been studying what to do to make the facility more current, and a 2015 survey of the membership indicated it was time to look at infrastructure rather than build anything else on the 78-acre property.

"The Club is retro. It's cool. It's before its time," Green said. "It's a neat place, and it always has been. It's done well throughout the years, but it was time."

Phase one came in 2006 with the renovation of the State Rooms downstairs and the addition of The Grill restaurant.

The current project is considered phase two and will include a revamp of three major spaces: the Signature, the lounge and the Gold Room. They're also remodeling bathrooms, did some major work in the kitchen and will renovate the hallway area outside of the ballroom.

Green said one of the biggest changes will be more bar space for executives, young professionals and empty nesters at the private club.

A new bar will be built in the lounge area along the window overlooking the city. It will seat 20 to 30 people with soft seating, booths, tables, televisions, a fireplace and more. A second bar will be outside on the terrace. It will hold eight to 10 people with soft seating, cocktail tables and firepits. Green said it will be a vast improvement to the current small amount of bar seating.

The Signature restaurant is also undergoing an overhaul with new programming, menu, entertainment and service. Club leaders are eyeing a steakhouse concept for the space.

While those are major changes, items like the butterfly wall and the two-inch-thick glass on the Signature dance floor will remain after being refurbished, because Green said they are an iconic part of Birmingham.

"This is part of the history of Birmingham - The Club is," he said. "The great thing about this is we are renovating part of Birmingham. One of the neat things we are seeing is we are keeping with the traditions of The Club with this renovation."

When the work is complete, The Club will add 10 new employees in the kitchen and 20 new in the front of the house.

"We anticipate a big increase in revenue throughout the club and an increase in membership," Green said. "I think it will be one of the biggest changes we've had at this club in a number of years."

- Stephanie Rebman
Meet Dawn Sharff, Bradley’s new Bham office leader

Birmingham’s largest law firm has recently changed up its leadership.
Bradley Arant Boult Cummings has a new Birmingham office leader and a new chairman and managing partner of the firm.

Dawn Helms Sharff was recently named office managing partner of the firm’s Birmingham office. She briefly served as interim chair and managing partner of the overall firm following a leave of absence of the firm’s longtime chairman and managing partner Beau Greiner.

Jonathan Skeeters, a partner in the firm’s Nashville office who previously served on the firm’s board of directors, finance committee and recruiting committee, was named the new chairman and managing partner.

The firm, which earned the 25th spot on our List of Birmingham’s largest private companies with $292 million in revenue in 2017, has 235 local attorneys and 331 attorneys across its footprint.

Both Skeeters and Sharff said they plan to continue to focus on firm growth.

“Our goal is to continue to add talent in all of our markets that will help us meet the needs of our clients,” Skeeters said. “We’re really not driven by numbers in terms of headcount. We are focused on our practice groups and industries that we service and how do we continue to get more clients in those areas.

“We have nine offices across the South in terms of what we’re trying to accomplish and continue to accomplish in Birmingham, my objective is to carry that to the other offices as well,” he said.

Sharff has been at Bradley since 2005. She serves on the firm’s managing board and has held many leadership roles. Here’s what she had to say about her plans in her new role.

What are your goals for the Birmingham office in your new role? I think our goals are 1) Continued growth and pre-eminence in this market, 2) Continuing to advise the vibrant business community in Birmingham and around the state, 3) Continuing to give back and provide service to the greater Birmingham community.

How will you approach growth in the Birmingham office? I don’t think there will be a radical change to our approach. I think we’re going to continue actively looking to add lawyers to the Birmingham office – those we believe can add expertise and value for our clients. We have a two-prong approach. We’re always looking for lateral additions to the firm like Alan Deer and Buddy Cox, who recently moved their practices to Bradley. We also continue to focus heavily on young lawyers like the newest group of young lawyers that joined us last week. I think we’ll continue to try to deepen our bench in the areas where we believe we can deliver better and more economical service to our clients.

What do you think Birmingham is doing right? I think the city is experiencing an exciting revitalization with projects like Railroad Park, Regions Field, the entire Avondale area, the renovations of Children’s Hospital and UAB. Our restaurants and museums and parks are amazing, and there’s just a cool energy and pride in our city right now.

What do you think Birmingham can do better, and what are your plans for Bradley’s part in that? I think we still have portions of the city that haven’t seen the type of progress and growth in their communities that other parts of the city have experienced. We view ourselves as part of the fabric of Birmingham. We’ve made a long-term commitment to have our headquarters in downtown Birmingham, where we have, I think, over 225 lawyers today. We’re committed to the city. We’re committed to serve through leadership and community organizations - through our pro bono efforts that our individual lawyers are involved in on a regular basis so we’re helping those in our community that are less fortunate than us.

What are your plans for Bradley’s role in the business community? I think we will continue to be at the forefront of advising many businesses that are moving Birmingham forward. We’ve been in this city for almost 150 years now. We have partnered with the business community in this city for that entire time. We’ve assisted in founding and continued operations of some of the most successful businesses in the history of our city, and those businesses remain our clients today. We look forward to continuing those relationships and also cultivating new ones as the creative business community in Birmingham generates new ventures.

Are there any changes or improvements you would like to implement in the firm’s Birmingham office? Right now, we are really focusing on improving our diversity, both in the overall law firm and also in the Birmingham office, in particular. We’re in the process of working with a national consultant to help us create a new diversity strategic plan, and our goal is to make our firm look more like the communities in which we practice.

Another thing we’re also focusing on right now is just adding depth and experience in the Birmingham office with new lawyers.
Meet the Birmingham Iron:
New football team reveals name

Mark Inabinett minabinett@al.com

For 18 weeks, the team has been known by a clunky identifier — the Birmingham franchise of the Alliance of American Football.

But when the new professional football team kicks off its inaugural season in February, fans now know they can fill Legion Field with cheers of “Go, Iron.”

“We are the Birmingham Iron,” head coach Tim Lewis said in announcing the new nickname. “We picked that name because the name pays tribute to the hard-working, blue-collar steelworkers who provided the iron that fueled the Industrial Revolution. This great city of Birmingham is tough, hard-working, passionate, dependable — all attributes that our team will uphold both on and off the field.

“When they see how we play the game, I’m confident they will love our team. They will love the Iron.”

While the team’s moniker is meant to reflect Birmingham’s heritage, general manager Joe Pendry hopes the Iron’s players reflect the nickname.

“Tim and Trey (Brown, executive vice president of football operations) and I have been trying to find players that will symbolize what we are — hard-working, strong, passionate, dependable, love the game,” Pendry said. “And now that name is what we’re selling. We want our players to exemplify that — Birmingham Iron.”

The Alliance of American Football is an eight-team league that plans to begin play Feb. 9. It also has teams in Atlanta, Memphis, Orlando, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Antonio and San Diego.

The Iron’s colors will be black, dark gray, silver and light gray.
Maddox: State in mental health care crisis

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — A probate judge who described how he can sometimes not find treatment beds for people who need to be committed, gubernatorial challenger Walt Maddox said Monday the state is facing a mental health care crisis and must put more resources into treatment.

The Democratic nominee opposing Republican Gov. Kay Ivey held a news conference outside a closed psychiatric hospital in Montgomery, Maddox said a shortage of mental health services could be addressed by Medicaid expansion and his lottery and gambling proposals to put more money into treatment.

"Alabamians are hurting," Maddox said.

Maddox said the state's failure to expand Medicaid under Ivey and previous Gov. Robert Bentley "is maybe the worst" health care and economic decision the state has made.

"How we treat our fellow man is, I believe, one of the ways we will be judged. Right now, under the Bentley-Ivey administration, those vulnerable to mental illness have been forgotten about. The decisions regarding their lives are budget-driven, in the hopes Alabama will forget about them."

Ivey issued a statement through her campaign that, "I am committed to ensuring we continue to help Alabamians lead healthier, safer and happier lives."

Ivey said she appointed an experienced and dedicated new mental health commissioner, secured additional funding to create new programs and services, and ensured the Department of Mental Health had a voice on a number of commissions and tasks forces.

She also said earlier this month that she is not opposed to Medicaid expansion, but questions how the state would pay for it.

Maddox argued the economic investment in health care would pay for itself. He has also suggested striking a compact with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to pay for the state's share of expansion.

The state in 2012 announced the closure of most psychiatric hospitals in an effort to move people to community-based treatment, a step that was supported by patient advocates. However, Maddox contended the state has failed to adequately fund crisis care and other community services.

Maddox said his proposal to start a state lottery would provide $25 million for "wraparound" mental health services in public schools.

Montgomery County Probate Judge Steven Reed, who is supporting Maddox in the race, said he sometimes cannot process petitions for mental health commitment because there are no treatment beds available.

He described families trying to keep tabs on ill family members because there are no treatment options. He said some "had to lock themselves inside of a bedroom because the loved one may be going through a spell or having some hallucinations."

He said there are no adolescent treatment beds in the county.

"That is a risk to them. That is a risk to our community. It is a major problem not having enough beds in our community and throughout this state," Reed said.
Civic Hall of Fame honors Class of ’18  
By: Ken Roberts

The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama on Thursday honored five people who have had an impact on the quality of life in Tuscaloosa County.

The 2018 class of the Civic Hall of Fame was inducted during a gathering at the Tuscaloosa River Market. Each class member will have a golden plaque installed in their honor on a wall of recognition at Government Plaza in downtown Tuscaloosa. With this class, 116 people have been recognized for significant long-term contributions to the community’s development.

Here’s a look at this year’s class:

• Bert Bank: Bank survived the Bataan Death March and was held as a prisoner of war by the Japanese for 33 months during World War II. He earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star awards for his military service. After the war, Bank made his mark in broadcasting, creating WTBC radio and originating the University of Alabama football and basketball radio networks. Bank died in 2009 and is the only member of the 2018 class to be inducted posthumously.

• Jordan Plaster: Plaster has been recognized as one of the top financial advisers in the state by Barron’s magazine. He was instrumental in establishing the Tuscaloosa Rotary Flight, which takes veterans to Washington, D.C., to tour war monuments free of charge. Plaster is a past president of the Rotary Club, he served as chairman of the capital campaign for Easter Seals of West Alabama and is the 2018 campaign chairman for the United Way of West Alabama.

• Gene “Poodgie” Poole: Poole has been a fixture of the downtown Tuscaloosa retail scene as the owner of Hudson-Poole Fine Jewelers. The Army veteran helped organize CityFest, a downtown music and art festival that lasted 20 years, and has supported many local groups, including Arts ’N Autism, the Rise Center, the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra and Hospice of West Alabama. In 2000, he was named Retailer of the Year and he was selected as a Pillar of the Community in 2014.

• Malcolm Portera: Portera served for 10 years as chancellor of the University of Alabama System. He had a major impact on the local economy, serving on the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority’s board of directors and numerous committees with the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce. Other groups he has served with include the United Way, the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority, the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Board and the Tuscaloosa Commission to Improve Public School Education.
• Ken Swindle: Swindle spent 34 years with the Tuscaloosa Police Department, with 19 years as chief. In 1988, Swindle helped resolve the West End Christian School hostage situation, where more than 100 children and teachers and students were held at gunpoint for 12 hours. He retired from TPD in 2008 and has earned numerous awards, including the 2012 Pillar of West Alabama, the 2013 Dreamers Award from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and he was recognized in 1988 as one of the top law enforcement officers in the nation by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

• Harrison Taylor: Taylor was a foot soldier in Tuscaloosa’s civil rights movement. After serving in the Army, he spent 34 years with the U.S. Postal Service, earning him a nickname: “The Mailman.” He represented District 2 on the Tuscaloosa City Council for 24 years. Two sites have been named in his honor: the splash pad at Palmore Park and the city’s incident command center.

• Yvonne Wells: Wells worked full time as a physical education teacher in the Tuscaloosa City Schools system from 1965 to 2000. She maintained a record of community service with an emphasis on projects for children, veterans and residents in need. In 1979, she began another career as a quilting artist. Her quilts have earned “Best in Show” six times at the Kentuck Festival of the Arts, and her work has been included in several national touring exhibitions.
Council moves to expand short-term rental rules

Some residents have urged citywide expansion
By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The Tuscaloosa City Council on Tuesday took the first steps toward expanding short-term rentals citywide. The move comes a week after urging residents outside the two short-term rental sanctioned zones to seek a variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) that would allow them to legally rent out their properties.

That specially-called meeting of the zoning board is still set for Oct. 3, and city officials urge those who want to rent out their homes or rooms to guests but are not within the city's two Tourist Overlay Districts to file an variance application before noon on Friday.

An application fee of $50 will apply.
A variance from the ZBA will come faster than any citywide changes to amend the policy. Although the City Council voted Tuesday to begin the process of reviewing its short-term rental rules, from its current borders to requirements, in anticipation of a widespread amendment, doing so will require a lengthy process.

Because it will involve a change to the city's current zoning rules, this process requires legal advertisements and the involvement of the city's Zoning Board of Adjustment before the City Council can take action.

Still, residents are urging the council to do just that.

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"Thank you for trying to implement the change quickly," said Tanner Cline, a University of Alabama student and Windsor Drive resident who wants to participate in the practice.

Cline lives in District 5, represented by Councilman Kip Tyner, who said he was "personally in favor of" expanding the short-term rental allowances citywide.

But not all residents are in support of expanding the rules.

Rob Kemp, president of the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association, said he and his neighbors like the rules the way they are because they serve to protect most traditional neighborhoods across the city.

"There's general opposition to expanding it," Kemp said.

In a short-term rental, a property owner or tenant leases a room or an entire living space to someone for a night, a weekend, or sometimes a week or longer.

Various websites, including Airbnb.com and VRBO.com, act as a liaison between renter and property owner, and in some cases offer to facilitate the payment of state taxes. The Office of the City Attorney said efforts are underway to have these companies collect and remit city rental taxes, which could bring in an additional $80,000 in revenue each year, according to current short-term rental trends.

In July 2017, when the City Council first adopted the regulations, the city established two areas called "Tourist Overlay Districts" - one around Lake Tuscaloosa, the other in the downtown historic residential areas bordered by the Black Warrior River, McFarland Boulevard, 15th Street and 29th Avenue - where some properties would be allowed to operate "by right," meaning without the need for special permission.

These areas are near default tourist destinations, which neighborhoods like Forest Lake and Woodland Hills lack, Kemp said, noting that it makes sense that short-term rentals be permitted in these locations.

And Kemp also referred to the months of work that went into crafting the current short-term rental rules and said changing them now could serve as an insult to those who participated.

"It seems to me we're trampling on the effort of people who showed up and had input, and I think I'm not the only one who's going to feel that way."

Rob Kemp, president of the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association

Some property owners even complained that the enforcement was too "heavy handed" by the code enforcement officers, though it remained unclear whether they had been informed of the city's rules as they claimed to be residents of such locations as Huntsville and Madison.

"We've been trying to deal with this for two years," said Councilman Eddie Pugh. "I wish y'all had been here a year ago."

Mayor Walt Maddox said Tuesday that he would direct these officers to focus on enforcing the rules on a complaint-only basis, but city officials reminded the public that anyone engaging in short-term rentals without the proper licensing and inspections remains in violation of the law.

"We have a duty to enforce if we have a complaint brought," said City Attorney Glenda Webb, "and illegal activity is illegal activity."

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Group to manage DCH emergency services

Relias will oversee physician staffing and more

Staff report

A group headquartered in Tupelo, Mississippi, is now overseeing management and physician staffing at emergency departments throughout the DCH Health System.

Relias Healthcare has contracted with the system to provide emergency management services at DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, Northport Medical Center and Fayette Medical Center.

“We’re excited to be working with Relias Healthcare because they’ve demonstrated clinical and customer service excellence in Tupelo,” said Bryan Kindred, DCH president and CEO, in a news release. “Relias also shares our view that it’s important that the physicians who work in the emergency department live in the community.”

The contract, which started Sept. 1, means Relias will

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provide emergency care to around 145,000 patients annually in the DCH Health System.

“Partnering with DCH Health System has been a natural growth opportunity for Relias. We are excited to begin providing the local providers a practice environment that is rooted in the communities that DCH serves,” said Luke West, Relias CEO. “We will bring our expertise to the emergency medicine department and management to DCH and provide these local providers with the resources and support that they need to treat the patients of DCH Health System.”

The DCH Health System operates:

• DCH Regional Medical Center, a 583-bed regional trauma and referral center.
• Northport Medical Center, a 204-bed community hospital with inpatient rehabilitation and psychiatric units.
• Fayette Medical Center, a rural hospital and nursing home, which DCH operates under a long-term lease.

Relias now contracts with North Mississippi Health Services to provide management and staffing to the largest non-metropolitan hospital in the nation – a 93,000 volume emergency department in Tupelo. Relias Healthcare provides hospitals with administrative and staffing solutions in various clinical settings.

Relias’s subsidiaries include Relias Emergency Medicine Specialists, Relias Hybrid Medicine Specialists, Relias Staffing Solutions, Relias Telehealth and Relias Consulting Solutions.
What Alabama’s new VC fund means for Bham, state

A new venture capital fund could be the catalyst to significant growth of Birmingham and Alabama’s entrepreneurial scene.

At least that’s what Raymond Harbert hopes to see.

Harbert - along with other investors that include G. Huffner Page Jr., Charles Barkley, Benny M. LaRussa Jr., Protective Life Insurance Co. and Hoar Construction L.L.C. - recently teamed up to launch the Alabama Futures Fund, a $25 million seed-stage venture capital fund.

Harbert, who spearheaded the fund, said he had the idea for this project three or four years ago due to a lack of funding for startups in Birmingham and the state.

“It has to do with we have not had organized, early-stage seed capital here in Birmingham, really in the state of Alabama,” he said.

But the project fell to the wayside until fall of last year when Shipt sold to Target, which prompted Harbert to pick up the idea again - and this time, run with it.

“We’re open for business,” Harbert said.

**Startup impact**

Harbert said now is a good time to launch such a fund in the state because big things are happening in Birmingham’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, like what’s going on with Shipt and the economic development organization, Alabama Capital Network, that launched last fall. He said he hopes to work with big players like these to grow the city and state’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

“We hope this is the catalyst that accelerates what everybody else is doing,” Harbert said.

And that means operating a fund that, through partnerships with others, will create a self-seeding entrepreneurial ecosystem in the state.

Matt Hottie, managing partner at Redhawk Venture Group, which will be the fund’s investment manager, said the idea behind it is to do something similar to Chattanooga’s Renaissance Fund, which created an inflow of entrepreneurs engaging in its startup scene.

He said the Chattanooga fund provided seed money to a company that ended up selling for a large sum and went on to provide seed money for other startups.

“The idea is it’s almost like an oak tree that’s creating these saplings underneath it that then grow into an oak grove,” Hottie said.

**The fund**

The fund will target portfolio investments that demonstrate high growth potential, are led by coachable and adaptable founding teams and are focused on large total addressable markets.

“We’re looking at the market, we’re looking at the idea, and we’re looking at the founding team,” Hottie said. “Those are the three big pillars: make sure the founding team is one that can really pull this off, that the market is big enough, attractive enough, and that the idea is scalable.”

Startup teams will need to present a business model and strategy, fundraising goals and how they would apply potential invested capital.

Hottie said the fund has an investment period of five years, in which it will make all initial investments, and the fund will last beyond that for follow on investments in companies that are successful.

Hottie said the fund will make accretive investments in startup teams, giving them an initial investment and then follow-on investments as teams meet certain hurdles or thresholds. He said this approach is better for both investors and teams.

**Alabama only**

The fund is focused on Alabama-based entrepreneurs or companies that are willing to relocate to the state. Harbert said this will be a game-changer for the economy in Alabama, hopefully resulting in more jobs and a more robust economy.

“We hope it has a massive impact on Birmingham and the state of Alabama,” he said.

Hottie said he has already received multiple unsolicited calls from out-of-state entrepreneurial teams, including ones in Colorado, Tennessee and Los Angeles, and they have been willing to discuss relocation.

He said entrepreneurial teams also will be solicited through entrepreneurial and economic development programs as well as major universities and incubators.
ON THE MOVE

BRADLEY NAMES NEW CHAIRMAN, MANAGING PARTNER OF FIRM

Jonathan Skeeters, a partner in the Nashville office of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP, has been named chairman and managing partner of the Birmingham-based law firm.

Skeeters' selection does not impact Lela Hollabaugh, who will continue in her role as managing partner of the firm's Nashville office. Dawn Sharff, who had been serving as the firm's interim chairman, has been named office managing partner of the Birmingham office, according to the Nashville Business Journal.

Skeeters' work at the firm has been focused on a variety of complex business transactions, and he has advised "publicly traded and privately held companies in the health care industry in mergers, acquisitions, dispositions, securities and corporate finance matters, joint ventures, strategic alliances, syndications, and pre-merger antitrust issues," a release says.
Alabama AG Marshall helps open addiction clinic

Lawrence Specker  lspecker@al.com

Alabama's attorney general welcomed the opening of a new addiction treatment center in west Mobile on Monday, saying it will help address the state's greatest need in the fight against opioid misuse.

Steve Marshall made brief remarks at the opening of a new Pathway Healthcare office in a medical park adjacent to Providence Hospital. Pathway is a multi-state company that provides treatment for "opioid and other drug addictions, dependencies and other substance use orders."

Marshall touched on the death of his wife in June. He has said that her suicide followed a long struggle with mental illness exacerbated by opioid addiction.

"Some of you are aware of the personal story of my life," he told his audience. "Having seen what addiction can do to families, this is a personal issue for me going forward and will continue to be a personal issue for me as attorney general."

Dr. Brent Boyett, chief medical officer for the company, said that one of Pathway's focuses is on the connection between addiction and pain. Opioid addiction often begins with legitimate pain treatment, but Pathway isn't a traditional pain clinic, he said: It's an addiction treatment clinic that recognizes the role of pain.

"At the root of all addiction, there's pain," he said. "Physical pain and emotional pain, but generally a combination of the two ... No longer can we only focus on the physical component of pain. We have to think about the recovery process. We have to think about emotional pain."

Boyett said it's proper to combine medication-based treatment with "evidence-based psychotherapies." He said that addressing the nation's addiction issues requires both reduction of the supply, through laws and legal action, and reduction of the demand, through education and treatment. He praised Marshall as a prosecutor "who gets both sides of this equation."

SEE ADDICTION CLINIC, A6

"We've got to deal with those individuals right now who are suffering from these addictions."

Alabama Attorney General
Steve Marshall

See next page
Addiction clinic

FROM A1

Marshall, a Republican who faces Democratic challenger Joseph Siegelman in the November election, said that as the state drafted an action plan to combat opioid abuse, it recognized the critical need for treatment and recovery. "Badges and guns matter in this issue," Marshall said. "But for us to make tremendous strides going forward, we've got to deal with those individuals right now who are suffering from these addictions."

Pathway's goal is to provide addiction counseling and treatment in an environment that feels like, and is, a part of the medical establishment — not a last resort for those whose addiction issues have brought them to a dead end. Marshall agreed that "we need to eliminate that stigma for people who need help."

Pathway CEO Scott Olson said that the Mobile office is the 12th, and that the company plans to add about one a month for the next year. It currently has Alabama offices in Hamilton, Madison, Birmingham and Robertsdale, as well as branches in Tennessee, Mississippi and Texas.

Olson said that Pathway has a formal relationship with St. Vincent's Health System in Birmingham and is developing one with Providence. Both hospitals have been affiliated with the Ascension healthcare system since 1999, and Olson said that connection was a major factor in the decision to open in Mobile. "We came here for that very purpose," Olson said.
Carnival contract looms again

Cruise line says it’s happy in Mobile

John Sharp jsharp@aol.com

Keith Robinson vacationed on the inaugural Carnival Fantasy cruise that left the Alabama Cruise Terminal nearly two years ago. He traveled again on the same ship in January 2017, and will head out on another trip in early October.

Robinson looks forward to a “dream” adventure: A 10-day cruise to the Panama Canal. Those trips, which begin leaving from Mobile on Monday, will stop in Cozumel, Mahogany Bay and Limon.

With the Fantasy hosting 170,000 cruisers thus far in 2018, the fact that Mobile’s cruise terminal once sat empty for five years is something of a distant memory.

“Now that they are back, we’ve just forgiven and forgotten that they were gone,” said Robinson, who lives in Mobile and administers a Facebook page dedicated to cruising from the city. The Facebook page has over 6,000 followers.

“We can always support and hope for the best,” said Angela Gray, also of Mobile, who helps Robinson handle the Facebook page and who sells T-shirts for cruisers. “I honestly feel it’s been a good relationship and that Carnival is happy about the outcome.”

MOBILE POTENTIAL

Indeed, from public statements by Carnival Cruise Lines officials, the Miami-based company appears to be pleased with its return to Mobile, which occurred amid pomp and celebration inside the riverfront cruise terminal on Nov. 9, 2016.

But Carnival is operating out of the terminal on a year-by-year contract, and there’s no guarantee that the Fantasy will be sailing out of Mobile beyond 2019.

Vance Guilliksen, spokesman with Carnival Cruise Lines, said the existing contract expires on Nov. 26. He said, “We will be working with the city on an extension of the contract for an additional year very shortly.”

SEE CARNIVAL CONTRACT, A6
Carnival contract

FROM A1

Bookings for Carnival cruises out of Mobile extend into 2020, aboard the Fantasy. The 2,086-passenger vessel is among the smallest in Carnival's fleet, but it's been repurposed with new restaurants and other shiny new features.

Its arrival in 2016 was under a 13-month arrangement for 84 sailings, with a target of 170,000 passengers. The company has opted for one renewal, agreed upon 13 months ago.

Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise Lines, told AL.com on Tuesday that cruise have reached the target passenger number, and that the company is introducing longer trips, such as to the Panama Canal.

Carnival's presence in Mobile will be celebrated on Thursday, when the company's Carnival AirShip — a 128-foot-long red, white and blue blimp — arrives sometime around noon. The AirShip's stopover is part of a 30-day airborne journey across seven states after departing Memphis on Aug. 29.

The AirShip's voyage is helping Carnival showcase new offerings in three of its more popular homeports: Galveston, Texas, and Port Canaveral and Miami, Florida. "We thought it was a good way to highlight that," said Duffy.

'SO MUCH TOURISM POTENTIAL'

But while these other ports prepare for boosts, some cruisers, travel agents and analysts are wondering what's in store for Alabama.

Mobile's cruise terminal, built in 2004 to accommodate Carnival cruises, was abandoned in 2011 after the Carnival Elation's final trip. The situation saddled city taxpayers with big bills for the outstanding debt.

The cruise terminal, according to records, requires an annual $1.86 million bond payment. For five years, the city was on the hook for almost the entire amount, although it received a small revenue flow from weddings and banquets at the terminal.

The bond won't be paid off until 2030, and it's unclear whether the return of Carnival is speeding up the debt payments. According to city spokeswoman Laura Byrne, the annual revenue from the cruise terminal is around $5.8 million.

Mayor Sandy Stimpson's office did not provide additional information, and did not respond to a request for comment for this article.

Steve Cape, a longtime travel agent in Mobile, said Carnival is unlikely to sign a long-term contract with Mobile unless demand rises. He said the key for Mobile is to try and lure some sort of cruise competition.

Cape said the popular luxury cruise market — which might involve smaller in-continental cruises — could be a good catch for the terminal. He also said that "social impact" cruises might be another possibility. Those take travelers to discover new cultures and to places where they can uplift rural communities. Carnival's ship Fathom made social impact voyages from Miami to the Dominican Republic, and ventured to Cuba in 2016.

"If they operated one of these in Mobile, in the Bible Belt where Baptist missionaries could easily drive to, it could be a tremendous opportunity for Mobile," Cape said. "To me, there is a lot of potential business for the Port of Mobile. It just needs to happen sooner than later. Mobile has so much tourism potential."

But Cape and others, including industry expert Stewart Chiron, also cautioned that Carnival could leave Mobile if it sees greener pasture at another port. Chiron said that while the cruise industry overall is seeking a surge in bookings and "at higher prices," Mobile has not.

"The point is, Carnival is getting a higher yield in other ports. If the music stops and Carnival needs to move a ship, this is one place they would look."

Stewart Chiron, an industry expert

"The point is, (Carnival) is getting a higher yield in other ports. If the music stops and Carnival needs to move a ship, this is one place they would look."

Stewart Chiron, an industry expert
Commanders in Chief: The Women Building America’s Military Machine

CEOs Marilynn Hewson of Lockheed Martin, Leanne Caret of Boeing’s defense division, and Lynn Dugle of Engility discuss the challenges of leading amid hypersonic change.

By: Jen Wieczner

"THE LAST MAN STANDING." That’s what some on Wall Street have recently nicknamed Tom Kennedy, the chairman and CEO of Raytheon. After all, he’s the only leader of a top five U.S. defense business who isn’t on Fortune’s Most Powerful Women list—and for that fact, says Kennedy, “I couldn’t be prouder of our industry.”

This July, Northrop Grumman announced that CEO Wes Bush would step down at the end of the year and be replaced by the first woman to hold that office, current COO Kathy Warden. She will join an elite club of defense contractor CEOs that includes Lockheed Martin’s Marilynn Hewson, General Dynamics’ Phebe Novakovic, and Leanne Caret, who heads Boeing’s defense, space, and security division. Together, their companies generated a staggering $110 billion in defense-related revenue last year.

Warden’s promotion made waves across the corporate world, where diversity advocates marveled at the way the once male-dominated defense and aerospace industry had, in a few short years, blown up its own glass ceiling, elevating women higher and faster than most of the Fortune 500. “It isn’t a male-female thing, necessarily, but really just acknowledging that talent won,” says Lynn Dugle, CEO of military IT and cybersecurity firm Engility (EGL, +2.86%), which recently agreed to be acquired by rival contractor SAIC.

In the S&P 1500, women account for nearly 19% of the CEOs in aerospace and defense, according to the Pew Research Center, compared with just 5% across all companies. No sector works more closely with the government and military than defense, which may be one reason it’s closer to gender equality. With the armed forces making deliberate efforts to expand women’s roles and the emergence of a generation of female generals as well as Air Force and Navy secretaries beginning in the ’90s, “the defense industry has realized they need to mirror their customers,” says Patrick Gray, the aerospace, defense, and aviation practice leader at executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles. A decade ago, the companies redoubled their efforts. “It’s not an accident ... that they’ve become C-suite or a CEO,” says Lareina Yee, a senior partner at McKinsey.

No one felt the shift more viscerally than Linda Hudson, who in 2009 became CEO of BAE Systems and the industry’s first female leader. When she launched her career surrounded by male colleagues, in 1972, “I needed them to forget I was female,” she recalls. By the end of her career, she says, "being female had somewhat turned into an advantage—that you had risen against all odds.”
On the battlefield, the U.S. has the odds on its side—and these women plan to keep it that way. Even as they compete for government budget dollars, the executives say they share a duty to the United States: “To ensure that there is an unfair fight—unfair in our favor,” as Caret puts it.

Yet maintaining this country’s lead in military might and technology has never been more difficult. There is rising unease in U.S. relations with superpowers Russia and China, whose technical prowess is increasing at a breakneck pace. Add to that the nuclear capabilities of rogue states including North Korea and Iran, and continuing atrocities by acolytes of extremist factions. There are credible threats of attacks (physical and cyber) even beyond Earth’s atmosphere. And heads of state have shown a willingness to disregard international law on chemical warfare and genocide. “Every year it seems to get even more dramatic,” Hewson says of the geopolitical risk climate.

Those fears have resounded in Washington, D.C., where a Republican-led Congress granted the Pentagon a budget increase of more than 15%—to $700 billion for fiscal 2018—with vocal support from the other side of the aisle. It hasn’t hurt to have a hot-tempered Commander-in-Chief who has been direct about announcing what he wants on the national security front, whether it’s cost reductions on Lockheed’s F-35 fighter jet or “smart” missiles to fire on Syria (both expressed via tweets). All told, executives describe what may be the best industry climate of their careers. “What makes this the perfect storm is that we really do have consensus around what needs to happen in our defense space,” says Dugle.

Against that backdrop, the female CEOs have had a chance to shine. Since Hewson took over Lockheed Martin in 2013, for example, the stock has returned 338%. Overall, since President Trump’s election, aerospace and defense stocks have outperformed the market by 29 percentage points. In separate interviews, Hewson, Caret, and Dugle discussed leadership when the stakes are the highest. (Warden and Novakovic declined to participate.) What follows is in their words, edited for length and clarity.

MARILLYN HEWSON  
Chairman, CEO, and president,  
Lockheed Martin

Phebe Novakovic at General Dynamics and I started as CEOs on the same day in 2013. Phebe and I are good friends and have talked about what it’s like on day one as the first female leader of our companies. And early on, I kind of felt like, “Well, gee, I don’t want to be recognized that I achieved this just because of my gender.” I just wanted to be recognized that I achieved that through being in a company that gives us opportunities to learn and grow and be strong and demonstrate our capabilities in our performance. And through those results, ultimately we can achieve the most senior position in the company.

However, both Phebe and I discuss that we are role models. And that’s something that we should take very seriously because it inspires and motivates other women to say, “I can be in that job.”
Marilyn Hewson is #1 on Fortune's 2018 Most Powerful Women list.

I can think back at times early in my career when I wasn’t quite sure if I was ready for something. Soon after I started at Lockheed Martin (LMT, +1.64%), they put me on a special general management development plan, and that is what really got me on a path. And I think back, gosh, over 30 years ago, this company recognized that you invest in talent. It’s up to the individual to perform, to accept those opportunities. So when the board offered me the position of running Lockheed Martin, I said, “I’m ready.”

When you look at Kathy [Warden] and Leanne [Caret] and others in our industry, it’s really a matter of them getting the experiences just like a male would get. We just named a woman, Michele Evans, to lead our $21 billion aeronautics business and the largest program that we have, the F-35. But she didn’t get there by accident. She got there because she has developed a long career at Lockheed Martin and gotten a lot of different experiences. She’s had profit and loss responsibility. And all of those things I think are what you look for, whether it’s a man or a woman, to take over as CEO.
University starts partnership with TurboVote

BY JACKSON FUENTES
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Stephen Grover had a hard time keeping track of upcoming elections, so he decided to do something about that confusion.

Grover, a senior studying political science, business and social justice in the New College, helped bring the online voting support system, TurboVote, established in 2012, to the attention of student government, the Division of Student Life and Mary Lee Caldwell, the University's director of mentoring resilience and citizenship. The University has now entered a partnership with the company.

While TurboVote is a free nationwide platform for students and community members alike, the University will pay for the online voting platform to postmark and send auto-filled registration forms to each student who uses the system, Grover said. The mailing service is mainly for out-of-state students who cannot register online. TurboVote will also be able to help students registering to vote in Alabama who do not have an Alabama driver's license.

Grover said not purchasing a mailbox at the University shouldn't be a problem for students trying to receive absentee ballots either.

"Any election mail is able to be sent to your Perg address free of charge," Grover said. "The University has had that policy since 2016."

SGA President Price McGiffert, a senior majoring in civil engineering, said the SGA provided half the funding for the program, with the rest of the money coming from Vice President of Student Life David Grady and the Division of Student Life.

"My main focus was just to try and get the funds," McGiffert said. "We got Dr. Grady on board, and he covered the other half."

Through this program, we have the ability to conduct voter registration drives that really focus on marketing and promoting those drives and getting people within the process.

MARY LEE CALDWELL

Caldwell said she was excited to partner with TurboVote because they will help get voting materials from students to the proper election officials.

"TurboVote kind of handles all of that for the people that are being registered so there are no worries about making sure that things get to the proper officials because it's all handled electronically through this system," she said.

Student organizations on campus often hold voting registration drives during election season. TurboVote can track which students sign up through which student organization via tailored links that the organizations can create.

"Through this program, we have the ability to conduct voter registration drives that really focus on marketing and promoting those drives and getting people within the process," Caldwell said.

And for students who move every year, Grover said the system reminds students to update their information.

"I move every year because I'm a student who changes housing all the time," he said. "What I do is - I'm able to re-register my new location online."

TurboVote's three-part notification process will help alert and educate students via text message about upcoming elections, said Grover, a member of the Andrew Goodman Foundation, a group that "works to make young voices and votes a powerful force in democracy," according to its website.

"I've used [TurboVote] personally because it can notify you where your polling place is, which is a huge confusion for a lot of people because there are just so many in Tuscaloosa," Grover said.

"TurboVote will first remind students 30 days before an election so they may request an absentee ballot. It will then send a second notification 14 days before elections to notify those with absentee ballots that they should be submitted in the near future.

Finally, Grover said TurboVote will notify the user the day of the election where his or her polling place is, what hours the polling places are open and what form of identification is necessary to bring.

"If you want to register to vote through TurboVote, I'd say that takes a total of five minutes," he said. "We're paying for this service to make it super simple for students."

McGiffert said the program is a great way to stay up-to-date with all elections, where to vote and how to receive and send absentee ballots.

"The University encourages the partnership," Caldwell said. "The Division of Student Life, Dr. Grady and other university administrators have been very supportive of being able to have a straightforward, easy process to get engaged in this," she said.

Ultimately, Grover said the University hopes to implement this partnership for years to come by fostering civic engagement.

"As soon as we are really able to prove that students are interested in this, I think the school will be very eager to promote something that encourages civic engagement," Grover said.
Moundville hosts 30th annual Native American festival

By Erin Toland
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Look who's turning 30.
The Moundville Native American Festival will hold its 30th annual festival Oct. 3-6 at Moundville Archaeological Park. And while the festival is another year older, its objective hasn't changed: to teach its expected 13,000 visitors about Native Americans while celebrating the culture's achievements.

The park, located on the Black Warrior River 13 miles south of Tuscaloosa, preserves 326 acres where 800 years ago, 29 flat-topped mounds were constructed. The mounds served as civic and ceremonial structures as well as the homes of nobles.

Organized by the University of Alabama Museums, the festival will give attendees the opportunity to experience Native American performers, demonstrators, living history teachers and craft vendors.

At the Native American stage, guests can watch the Chikasha Hithla stomp dancers, the Grayhawk Band and hoop dancer Lyndon Alec.

See FESTIVAL, B3

Moundville Native American Festival

When: 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 3-4; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 5-6

Where: Moundville Archaeological Park, 3 miles south of Exit 71A on Interstate 20/59

Admission: $12 for adults, $10 for students and seniors. Pre-registered groups of 10 or more admitted for $8 per person. Book groups through Lisa Rasco at lirasco@ua.edu

See next page
FESTIVAL

From Page B1

Grammy Award-winner Grayhawk Perkins will be this year’s emcee and will introduce entertainment throughout the festival.

Social dancing and storytelling will also take place, and guests can learn why animals look and act the way they do as described in ancient stories.

The festival offers both traditional and contemporary performances to engage all audience members.

“The Alabama Wildlife Center will be doing its birds of prey program,” said Kayla Scott, education and outreach coordinator and festival director. “They’ll have live birds out that have been rehabilitated, and they will be discussing them with the crowd.”

Visitors can learn about traditional pottery firing, weaving and bead work as well as how Choctaws make rivercane baskets. Artists will reproduce ancient work and also create new works.

Tool makers from around the country will be in attendance, and guests can watch as craftsmen demonstrate flintknapping, the making of flaked or chipped stone tools.

Visitors can talk with a world-class Bowman as he carves a wooden longbow, can watch as experts shoot a bow and arrow and can learn how to throw a spear 50 yards with the help of an atlatl.

In the Living History Camp, re-enactors will be dressed in period clothing, and their camps will be filled with items suggesting the importance of the trade era. Native foods will be cooked on an open fire while an elder describes his journeys through the wilderness.

Some of the country’s finest artists and craftspeople are featured exhibitors this year. Authentic crafts, art prints, musical instruments, toys, clothing, books and much more will be available for sale.

For children, face painting and craft making will be offered. Kids can dress up like Southeastern Native Americans, throw a Native American football, play native games, such as stickball, and make a shell bead necklace.

The Jones Archaeological Museum features exhibits that tell stories of those who once lived at Moundville as well as artifacts, recreated scenery and a special effects theater.

Located next to the museum is the food court where Native American foods, as well as regular festival foods such as hamburgers and shaved ice, can be purchased. Additional food will be available at the riverbank near Knapper’s Corner.

“We have fantastic food with Mrs. Juanita Gardenski,” Scott said. “She runs a Choctaw Kitchen, and she has things like Indian tacos, roasted corn and turkey legs.”

Repeatedly named one of Alabama’s Top 20 Tourism Events, the Moundville Native American Festival is held Wednesday through Saturday during the first full week of October.

Admission is $12 for adults and $10 for students and seniors.

Group rates are available and can be booked through Lisa Rasco at llrasco@ua.edu. The festival will take place from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 3-4 and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 5-6.

“We hope that guests come out, they enjoy themselves and they get a chance to see a side of Native American culture that they wouldn’t see on a regular day here at the park,” Scott said.

For more information, visit www.moundville.ua.edu or call 348-7550.
Alabama football’s quiet neighbors

Rise of Crimson Tide program credited with exploding enrollment and the city’s subsequent real estate boom — for the living and the dead

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

Pounding from speakers at a tailgate just outside Bryant-Denny Stadium, the sound of "Sweet Home Alabama" trails off the deeper you walk into Evergreen Cemetery.

It’s quiet here, even on game day.

More than 100,000 piled into this coliseum of modern college football for Alabama's home opener with Arkansas State, yet its neighbors to the south rested peacefully as ever.

The juxtaposition of fall Saturday pageantry in the sport’s epicenter and 13.8 acres of serenity is striking.

Almost nobody walking by even looks to this grassy field filled with tombstones dating back to the early 1800s. Programs are hawked on the sidewalk across the street near Rama Jama’s famous restaurant.

The only business Evergreen gets this Saturday is the walk-through crowd strolling from the game-day condos separated from the stadium only by the burial grounds occupied by some of Tuscaloosa’s old money.

It’s valuable property with finite space. Despite its healthy size, it’s been around for parts of three centuries and there are certain inevitabilities in life. The success of Alabama’s football program has made it an attractive final resting place for anyone fortunate enough to land a plot in the shadow of the stadium.

But there’s a catch.

It’s sold out.

$32,500 FOR THREE

A spokesperson for the city of Tuscaloosa, owner of Evergreen, said every plot has been purchased. The last deed transfer from the city was listed in 2013 with two gravesites selling for $3,000. The only shot now at securing an eternal resting place next to Bryant-Denny Stadium is through private sale.

SEE EVERGREEN CEMETERY, A7
Evergreen Cemetery

FROM A1

And it can be pricey. A group of three plots surrounded by marble enclosure recently listed in the Tuscaloosa News classified section sold in a day for $32,500, according to the deed transfer filed with the county.

County records dating back to 1891 show plots selling for $25 apiece. That would be $673 today with inflation.

Only four obituaries published in 2018 listed Evergreen as the burial site. Jason Wyatt, who worked in the funeral home business for years in Tuscaloosa before moving to Fayette, estimates doing “hundreds” of funerals at Evergreen through the 1990s.

As space ran short, the frequency of funerals dropped. Several plots have the names of still-living, future occupants chiseled into the headstones complete with birthdates.

Count the Nelson family of Tuscaloosa among those with their spots reserved.

Dr. David Nelson will (one day) be the sixth generation of his family buried in Evergreen. His ancestor, Dr. James Somerville, is believed to be the first interred in the cemetery in 1842. Dr. Nelson served on the city’s cemetery committee for decades before it disbanded in 2017.

The rise of Alabama’s football program created a great deal of interest in plots in Evergreen over the past 50 years, he said.

Rows of graves were added over the years where walking paths once stood, but he said that ended about a decade ago.

For Dr. Nelson and his father, Dr. Paul Nelson, the sentiment behind the location of their eventual final resting place has little to do with football.

“It means I get to join antiquity,” said Dr. Paul Nelson, an 88-year-old retired dentist living in Tuscaloosa.

OVER AT THE FUNERAL HOME

Danah Jones Mingles is the general manager of Magnolia Chapel Funeral Home in Tuscaloosa. Though they recently had a funeral in Evergreen, there are fewer inquiries at the old cemetery.

There’s still a desire to be close to Alabama football for eternity.

From their mausoleum off Old Greensboro Road, there’s a clear view of Bryant-Denny Stadium a few miles in the distance.

“If you stand up on a hill, you can see the stadium at our mausoleum,” Mingles said. “People want to be buried in our mausoleum looking out at the stadium.”

Magnolia offers funerals with an Alabama fight song send-off complete with pom-pom shakers.

“It’s literally a football town,” she said, “and people who are not from here don’t understand.”

Surely, they wouldn’t have picked this real estate for a cemetery had they known what
The city is responsible for the grounds and not the graves themselves. So, as the years drag on and generations pass, these tributes go unattended — just lost to time.

“It’s kinda sad,” said Dr. David Nelson. “I guess it’s like they said, back to dust we will go.”

The city maintains a separate fund for the Evergreen Cemetery. It had more than $353,000 in assets 10 years ago but was down to $166,184 as of 2016 with expenditures of $4,739. Dr. Nelson said the city tried to stay on top of those now-illegible tombstones and budgeted money to replace them.

Complaints from locals have long been a part of Evergreen’s history. A letter to the editor in the July 20, 1918, Tuscaloosa News called it a disgrace and that it “looks like a wilderness.” A year later, cows were found grazing in the cemetery.

NOTABLE RESIDENTS

A few well-known Tuscaloosa residents have their final resting place in Evergreen. Bert Bank, who founded the Alabama football radio network, was buried there in 2009. Jeff Coleman, the former athletics director for whom Alabama’s basketball arena is named, is also in Evergreen.

Two governors — Joshua Martin and Henry Collier — and three University of Alabama presidents are there.

And two of the men who conducted Bear Bryant’s funeral were buried in Evergreen. F.G. Hocutt, who worked at a funeral home near campus, was a regular at Alabama football practices. A Sports Illustrated account from 1990 says he went to every workout from 1927 through the publication of the story.

“Actually on national television, Coach Bryant was asked if he feared any man,” said Wyatt, who worked in the Tuscaloosa funeral business for years. “He said, ‘The only man I fear is F.G. Hocutt. That’s my local undertaker.’ They were really good friends. They hunted and fished together.”

Hocutt was buried in Evergreen in 1993 when he passed away at 88.

The neighborhood has changed quite a bit since. Bryant-Denny has been expanded twice as the national title count went up by five. The Nick Saban factor has been credited with exploding enrollment, which led to the real estate boom for both the living and dead.

Again Saturday, with Texas A&M in town, the campus will fill with tailgaters. The energy will return — Lynyrd Skynyrd and all — with No. 1 Alabama on a historic pace three games into the season.

Not at Evergreen Cemetery, though.

It’ll just be another quiet day in eternity across the street from the party.
City approves $500K for business incubator

Money will provide new furnishings, equipment

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

As moving day for The Edge business incubator draws near, the Tuscaloosa City Council is spending more than $500,000 to outfit it with new furnishings and equipment.

City officials said more than $1.6 million has been set aside for furniture and technology items needed for the center's operation, and on Tuesday, the City Council approved the use of $526,975 of that funding in order to outfit the new facility.

The Edge Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation began in 2012 in a 9,000-square foot building on 22nd Avenue in downtown Tuscaloosa. Its purpose, as a partnership among the University

See FUNDS, B3
The Chamber won't be adding funding but will support The Edge through marketing, programming assistance and tenant recruitment efforts."

Requests for information from UA's Culverhouse College of Business on how much the University has budgeted for operations of The Edge went unanswered on Wednesday, but the bulk of the building's $11.6 million construction costs was funded through a 2013 grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

The city of Tuscaloosa made up the rest, which has allowed The Edge to launch with no debt. Page has described this as an advantage for the business incubator.

In addition to more room, The Edge will bring several major upgrades to aid entrepreneurs. The new facility will be more than 26,000-square feet and feature 25 offices, 100 workstations, training rooms, a conference room and a lounge.

And, so far, these efforts appear to be paying off.

Last month, an expanding Mississippi-based technology company announced that it would be the first official tenant for The Edge's new facility.

Camgian Microsystems Corp., founded in 2006 by Gary Butler, develops advanced and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies for the U.S. military, government and industrial sectors.

Headquartered in Starkville, Mississippi, the company is expanding into Tuscaloosa to take advantage of the growing number of college graduates produced in Tuscaloosa each year.

"We are excited to expand our operations and look forward to a long and productive relationship with the community of Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama," Butler said at the time of the announcement. "It is our intention to establish a leading advanced technology development center in Tuscaloosa that will drive important innovations in the field of AI and machine learning and high-tech job creation in the community."

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
Graduates start LGBTQ Alumni Association

Alabama graduates created an alumni association to advocate on behalf of current students and to establish a network of LGBTQ+ graduates and allies.

BY JESSA REID BOLLING
ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

After hearing his friends talking about their university’s LGBTQ+ alumni groups, Will Thomas wondered why his alma mater, The University of Alabama, did not have one.
So, he decided to change that.

"Most every school has an LGBTQ+ chapter, and we don’t want to appear as the racists, homophobic state that many people have in their minds."

WALT JAMES

Thomas, a UA alumnus currently living in Washington, D.C., began working with fellow UA alumnus Chase Sanders to create a group for LGBTQ+ alumni by sending out surveys to other University graduates across the country in June. They received over 200 responses.
"We’re so excited about it," Thomas said. "We’ve had a phenomenal response so far. We’re really proud of what we’re doing."
The new LGBTQ Alumni Association began its membership drive on Sept. 14 and has already gained the attention of alumni interested in becoming members.
Thomas said the University has been very helpful in the process of starting the new alumni association, and he hopes this will help make LGBTQ+ alumni feel recognized by their alma mater and provide a network where current LGBTQ+ students can voice their concerns to alumni who can advocate on their behalf.
"I think a lot of LGBTQ+ people have a complicated relationship with Alabama, the state, and also the University itself," Thomas said.
"I think the need for our community is to kind of build bridges, build networks and connections across us internally and between the LGBTQ+ community and our allies. But it’ll also push the University and our alumni to make it known that we’re here and we’re one big Alabama family."

Chris Bryant, assistant director of media relations, said in an email, alumni groups “provide a professional and educational network and offer support for

See next page
students, alumni, faculty and staff,” and that the University wants “all of our alumni to have a positive relationship with the University in ways they find beneficial.” Building a strong relationship between the University and its LGBTQ+ alumni is a vital part of what the group is seeking to accomplish, Thomas said.

“Alma mater in Latin means ‘nourishing mother,’ and I would say if you surveyed most queer people while they’re at Alabama or also in retrospect, they probably wouldn’t say that they felt nourished or encouraged about that part of their life and experience,” Thomas said. “So we really want to provide some of those resources and push UA to be more of a place that’s really welcoming to everybody.”

Walt James, chairman of the Tuscaloosa chapter of the LGBTQ Alumni Association, said seeing the group form is something he would have never thought possible during his time at the University in the late 1970s and early ‘80s.

“It was all completely hidden when I was a student,” James said. “There was nobody that I knew that was anywhere near out. It was just a different world back then.”

James said he is excited to see what the group is able to provide for students in the future and that having groups specifically for LGBTQ+ students and alumni is an important part in making their presence on campus known and having their voices heard.

“I think it will help give awareness that we are a part of the population,” James said. “Most every school has an LGBTQ+ chapter, and we don’t want to appear as the racist, homophobic state that many people have in their minds.”

Kendell Wilson, president of Spectrum, the University’s LGBTQ+ student organization, said it is necessary to have a community of alumni to advocate for current students in ways that they cannot do themselves.

“I think the need for our community is to kind of build bridges, build networks and connections across us internally and between the LGBTQ+ community and our allies.”

WILL THOMAS

“Students don’t have the ability to bargain and work with the administration,” Wilson said. “The alumni association will be able to have those conversations and convey what students need, hopefully leading to positive change on campus.”

Individual memberships cost $25 and provide membership from Sept. 1, 2018 to Aug. 31, 2019. There is also a founding member option where an additional payment of $25 will be split between UA Safe Zone, UA’s LGBTQ+ resource center and a scholarship endowment. Founding members will receive a certificate of appreciation from both the LGBTQ Alumni Association and the National Alumni Association. Membership is open to all LGBTQ+ identifying persons as well as their allies.
Alabama’s 2019 schedule released

Staff report

Alabama will make its first return trip to Columbia, South Carolina, on Sept. 14, 2019, according to the 2019 Southeastern Conference football schedule announced by the league’s office.

There will be four weekends in the 2019 schedule, which includes two open dates for each team. At least one conference contest is scheduled each week.

All of Alabama’s 2019 opponents had been previously announced but not all dates had been confirmed.

Each SEC team will play eight conference football games to include six games against division opponents and two games against non-division opponents. One of the non-division opponents will be a permanent annual opponent and the other non-division opponent will rotate each year. Alabama will meet the Gamecocks for the first time since 2010, a game that was also played in South Carolina.

The season begins the weekend of Aug. 31 with four neutral site games, including Alabama vs. Duke in Atlanta.

Alabama wide receiver Jerry Jeudy (4) breaks away from Arkansas State safety B.J. Edmonds (3) on his way to a touchdown in the Crimson Tide’s 57-7 win on Sept. 8. Alabama released its 2019 schedule Tuesday and will have seven home games. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSEBY JR.]

Alabama 2019 Schedule

Aug. 31 vs. Duke (Atlanta)
Sept. 7 New Mexico State
Sept. 14 at South Carolina
Sept. 21 Southern Miss
Sept. 28 Ole Miss
Oct. 5 Open Date
Oct. 12 at Texas A&M
Oct. 19 Tennessee
Oct. 26 Arkansas
Nov. 2 Open Date
Nov. 9 LSU
Nov. 16 at Mississippi State
Nov. 23 Western Carolina
Nov. 30 at Auburn
Hazing needs to end

By: Caroline Margle

College: the “best four years” of a young adult’s life. It is the anticipated time to finally move out of the house, become free of your parent’s rule and be officially on your own. As one begins to experience life independently and chooses the university of their dreams, they become eager to get involved and bond with their young peers.

Whether it be an intramural sports team, a poetry club or a theater group, there are plenty of ways to be an active member of campus aside from school work. One of the most popular things to get involved in outside of the classroom is Greek life. Greek life consists of Greek letter organizations, better known as fraternities and sororities. The University of Alabama is home to 67 Greek organizations with thousands of newcomers and participants each year.

Although in simple terms sororities and fraternities are organizations, they are set apart by a certain protocol that takes place before entering into them. Fraternities and sororities differ from one another in their process leading up to the final initiation. Sororities on campus devote an entire week to meeting new potential members. As the week comes to an end, bid day comes along, when sororities welcome their fresh-faced sisters to their new home away from home. As for fraternities, the process lasts weeks and has become a national area of concern.

Pledges – potential newcomers of the fraternities – go through weeks of hazing in order to become official members of their desired Greek-letter organization. Although these weeks of hazing are kept under wraps due to rules of the brotherhood, there are past events leading to evidence-based speculation that these weeks consist of heavy drinking and slight forms of torturous embarrassment. Hazing has been found not only in fraternities, but also worldwide in sports teams, military units, etc. Although hazing has been found within several social groups, fraternities receive the most attention over the issue due to fatalities in the past.

In 2017, Tim Piazza, a sophomore at Penn State University, died during a hazing ritual. After a long night of binge drinking for his final step into the brotherhood, he drunkenly fell down the stairs. As his “brothers” ignored his unconscious state, Tim was pronounced dead.

Everyone knows the majority of college students will inevitably drink alcoholic substances. It is a typical social occurrence for young adults to take part in, but being pressured to down four to five drinks every two minutes to prove oneself is when hazing is taken too far. As for Tim Piazza who was pressured to drink that amount, he will never see the light of day again simply because he was trying to prove himself to older fraternity boys.

See next page
Aside from joining a fraternity, pledges still remain full-time students who become more likely to lack in their education from the demands of hazing actions. Sleep deprivation, serving orders of active members and heavy drinking throughout the week would place a toll on anyone, but it affects full-time students in particular.

It may prove to be true that hazing activities bring the brotherhood closer together, but there are several other ways to bond. Humiliation, pranks, pressure to drink and other hazing happenings do not indicate someone’s legitimacy to be a part of a Greek organization. Rather than treating someone as a servant, fraternity brothers could easily promote academic success and genuinely get to know one another to form a strong brotherhood. Whether it be a brotherhood or a sisterhood, young adults entering into a Greek organization should do so through bonding experiences rather than potentially fatal ones.
Higher Education

Enrollment at UAB still ablaze

UAB's student body grew this fall by nearly 5 percent for a record enrollment of just under 22,000, marking the third straight year of record enrollment. "It says a lot about the attractiveness of our institution when we can continue to increase our enrollment numbers in a climate where many colleges and universities are experiencing declines," said Bradley Barnes, vice provost for enrollment management, in a statement. "To be able to continue to increase overall student enrollment — and see the caliber of ACT and GPA scores our incoming freshmen attain — really signifies that students and families recognize the world-class education and research programs we offer here at UAB. And the best news of all is that they want to be a part of it." — Erin Edgemon

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<td>39.7%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female student population</td>
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<td>International faculty, staff and visiting scholars on campus</td>
<td>442</td>
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<td>Countries represented by students, faculty and staff</td>
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ON THE MOVE

UAB CALLAHAN EYE HOSPITAL & CLINICS NAMES NEW CEO

UAB Callahan Eye Hospital & Clinics has named Rett Grover as new CEO. Grover replaces Brian Spraberry, who served as CEO for seven years, then transitioned into the role of chief administrative officer with the UAB Health System.

Prior to joining Callahan, Grover completed his administrative residency at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi, and assumed the position of director of business operations for the Department of Orthopedic Surgery and Rehabilitation in 2010. After several years in Mississippi, he joined the Callahan Eye Hospital & Clinics as the operations administrator. In 2015, Grover was named the COO of Callahan. He transferred into the role of interim CEO in November 2017.
‘A light for so many’

Blazers will honor Jackson Thomas, other Children’s Harbor patients at homecoming

Evan Dudley for AL.com

Jackson Thomas will always be 5 years old to his mother.

Thomas, affectionately known as Jack-Jack by his family, succumbed to Rhizomelic Chondrodysplasia Punctata — a terminal form of dwarfism with only about 150 known cases in the world — in 2013, but continues affecting lives through his memory and the unremitting research of similar terminal childhood diseases.

Thomas, along with former and current patients served by Children’s Harbor, will be honored again this season during UAB’s Oct. 20 homecoming game against North Texas. The Blazers, who defeated Louisiana Tech in last year’s Children’s Harbor game on a blocked field goal, will again wear their alternate gray uniforms with the name of a child replacing the name of a player on the back of the jersey.

It’s a humbling feeling for Thomas’ mother, Tracey, as the name of her son will be emblazoned on the back of the highest-profile player on the team, starting quarterback A.J. Erdely.

“When we were informed that the UAB football team wanted to honor some of the children who have been served through Children’s Hospital and Children’s Harbor, and that our Jackson would be included, our family was very humbled,” Tracey Thomas said. “We’re thankful for these players, these coaches, this athletic program, and for being a light to so many and allowing our family and so many others to be a part of their special homecoming game. It will be a bright spot in our lives long after the lights go out that night.”

Thomas’ initial diagnosis was not promising, as doctors told the family that Jackson would not make it past nine months. That timeline was shattered by more than four years, and led to his mother and Mary Ellis — whose son, Ian, was also diagnosed with RCDP, the only other case in the state — founding Rhizokids International in 2008, only a year after the children were born five weeks apart in the same hospital.

The nonprofit organization raises money for research, as there is no current treatment or cure for the disease, and holds an annual conference at the Children’s Harbor retreat lodge in Alexander City in addition to the support it provides to the Birmingham campus.

After coach Bill Clark took the reigns of the UAB program in 2014, he knew a relationship with Children’s Harbor and Children’s Hospital would give his teams the opportunity to learn and become better stewards of their community. The program embraced Children’s Harbor as one of its community charities in 2016 and frequently visits patients as a way to inspire and seed hope in those fighting an unblockable opponent.

“We talk a lot about playing for the name on the front of the jersey,” Clark said. “This is our chance to play for the name on the back. Last year our players found out about each one of these children, who they are and what
community has become a stronger and unified force in battling terminal childhood diseases. The football program experienced similar circumstances after being shut down after the 2014 season, but the resolve of the community inspired Clark and his teams to play for something bigger than themselves after the program was reinstated months later.

"Something we've said since we've come back is playing for more than ourselves," Clark said. "Our community has gotten bigger, and one of the things I love to hear when I'm out is, 'Thanks for believing in us,' and really it's the other way around. Birmingham believed in us. We're the beneficiaries, and we're very humbled to be a part of it."

Although seeing the name of a loved one after their passing could convey sorrow in its sincerest form, Tracey Thomas is grateful for the lasting remembrance of her son as well as that of the children who continue to combat long odds each day.

"I guess having a child that never could walk or talk, or run, it just means so much to know that somebody is willing to sacrifice what they've worked for and share that moment," Thomas said.

"I was thinking about it over the weekend, and it's kind of like the story of the little red hen. They're out working, putting in the practice and making all the bread, then we get to eat it and enjoy it at the game. It's such a wonderful thing, and it makes me so proud of all of these children that deserve to have a moment of joy like this."
LORI MCMAHON
DEAN AND JARMAN F. LOWDER PROFESSOR OF NEUROSCIENCE | UAB

Why did you choose the career you are in? As a child, I always loved science and decided to pursue a research career. I found the brain completely fascinating and wanted to understand how therapies could be developed to treat brain disease. This lead to my PhD in neuropharmacology.

What has been the most defining moment of your career? What I love most about my career is the ability to make discoveries in the laboratory and training the next generation of neuroscientists. I love teaching and making a difference in the lives of the students at UAB. It is an absolute joy.

How do you juggle the demands of daily life? Always work hard and always play hard. Balance is critical. I try to follow my passions at work and at home. I loved raising my sons and spending time with them and my husband, and I have loved my career at UAB.

What are your goals for the next 10 years? Continue to make discoveries in my neuroscience research laboratory and share my passion for research and education with the next generation of UAB students. As dean of the graduate school, I am focused on developing innovative graduate programs.

What lesson has a mentor taught you along the way? Always be open-minded, a clear thinker, committed, passionate, and never give up, no matter what. Put your head down, focus on the goal, and work hard.

Do you have any advice for millennials in the Magic City? Follow your dreams, and never stop, ever. Keep your eye on the ball, and jump in with both feet to follow your passion. Be the world’s expert in whatever it is you choose to do. Never forget to volunteer and always give back to your community.

How do you decide where to dedicate your extra time volunteering? My extra time is spent doing out-reach in the local community through Neuroscience Cafe at public libraries and Discoveries in the Making at a coffee shop and brewery. I am passionate about sharing the new knowledge we are generating everyday at UAB.

What makes you want to get out of bed every morning? My passion for neuroscience research and education at UAB. As Dean of the Graduate School, I am excited about developing innovative graduate programs at UAB to train the next generation of highly talented individuals.

What is your favorite restaurant in metro Birmingham? Hot & Hot Fish Club
ALANA NICHOLS
PRESIDENT | STUDENT NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AT UASOM

Why did you choose the career you are in? I grew up in a household surrounded by the medical field but did not want to be a physician. However, I learned through practicing law that my passion for advocacy and caring for underserved populations was better suited for caring for patients.

What has been the most defining moment of your career? For 15 years, the SNMA at UAB has hosted an annual event geared towards exposing underrepresented students to health care professions. This past February, we held the largest and most dynamic summit to date. Inspiring so many students was amazing.

How do you juggle the demands of daily life? Five daily phone calls to my mom, text messages to my husband, an electronic and hard-copy planner and prayer.

What are your goals for the next 10 years? I really hope I’ve finished medical school. While I don’t know which specialty, some aspect of my career will be geared towards medical education in underserved populations. I’ll also have two 12-year-old daughters, so I’m just hoping I have my sanity.

What lesson has a mentor taught you along the way? “Choose your battles. You can’t fix everything for everybody.” I’ve begrudgingly realized I can’t fix everything. I’ve learned that, “not right now,” doesn’t mean, “not ever.” You may be better equipped, at a later point, to effectuate change.

Do you have any advice for millennials in the Magic City? If you allow it, social media can be your downfall.

How do you decide where to dedicate your extra time volunteering? I chose based on the things that matter most to me. I don’t have that much free time, so what I do during that time is going to be something I am passionate about.

What makes you want to get out of bed every morning? My family

How long have you lived in Birmingham? Two and a half years

What makes you stay in Birmingham? Ask me again in 10 years.

What would you like to see happen next in Birmingham’s rejuvenation cycle? A more robust downtown area.

What is your favorite restaurant in metro Birmingham? Chez Fonfon
Rating Action: Moody's assigns Aa3 to University of Alabama in Huntsville's (AL) series 2018B revenue bonds; outlook stable

By: Moody's Investor Service

New York, September 19, 2018 -- Moody's Investors Service has assigned Aa3 ratings to the University of Alabama in Huntsville's (UAH) proposed fixed rate $5.2 million General Fee Revenue Bonds, Series 2018-B1 (maturing 2028) and $21.9 million Series 2018-B2 (maturing 2048). We maintain Aa3 and A1 ratings on the university's prior general fee and student housing bonds, respectively. The outlook is stable.

RATINGS RATIONALE

The Aa3 senior most rating reflects UAH's established niche as a STEM-focused public university, located in the economically vibrant Huntsville area, with very strong enrollment growth guided by its 2013-20 strategic plan. Research-related activity with the nearby NASA Marshall Space Flight Center and U.S. Army Redstone Arsenal support a sizeable research enterprise comprising 30% of expenses. Stabilized operating appropriations from the State of Alabama (Aa1 stable) have greater predictability, at 21% of operating revenue in fiscal 2017. Offsetting challenges include softening cash flow margins due to weak net tuition revenue growth and rising expenses associated with its strategic plan. Leverage has increased as liquidity has softened over the last three years with reserve use. Exposure to a large state pension liability further tempers the rating.

The A1 rating on the Series 2010-A Student Housing Bonds reflects the narrow net revenue pledge supporting repayment as well as the subordinate claim on the fees securing the General Fee revenue bonds.

RATING OUTLOOK

The stable outlook reflects expectations that the university will effectively manage revenue and expense growth to maintain favorable operating performance with cash flow margins above 10%. It also incorporates expectations of at least slow growth of wealth and manageable near term debt plans.

FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO AN UPGRADE

- Sustained improvement in operating performance
- Sizeable increase in spendable cash and investments
- Material increase in donor support

See next page
FACTORs THAT COULD LEAD TO A DOWNGRADE

- Inability to maintain cash flow margins above 10% to provide the gradual rebuilding of reserves

- Decline in unrestricted liquidity or spendable cash and investments

- Material increase in debt beyond what is currently planned

LEGAL SECURITY

The university's General Fee Revenue Bonds, slated to total $96 million at fiscal end 2018, are payable from a gross pledge of tuition and student fees. General Fees exclude state appropriations, housing and dining revenue. There is no required debt service reserve fund. Based on fiscal 2017 data, pledged revenues of $62.4 million provide roughly 7.6x coverage on a pro forma maximum annual debt service of $8.9 million for all general fee bonds plus student housing bonds (Series 2010A) supported by a subordinate pledge of the general fees.

The university's Series 2010A student housing revenue bonds are payable from a limited pledge of net revenue derived from the operation of specific housing facilities and a subordinate pledge of the general fee revenues.

The university also has $671,000 outstanding in the Series 1980A and 1980B bonds that are secured by consolidated housing revenues.

USE OF PROCEEDS

Proceeds of the Series 2018-B1 and 2018-B2 bonds will be used for renovations to an academic building, and to pay costs of issuance.

PROFILE

The University of Alabama in Huntsville is one of three campuses that are part of The University of Alabama System. The other two system members are the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa) and University of Alabama at Birmingham. UAH's curriculum is weighted toward science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and benefits from research ties with adjacent military and federal space program entities. In fiscal 2017, UAH recorded $221 million in operating revenue and for fall 2017 enrolled 7,363 full-time equivalent (FTE) students.
METHODOLOGY

The principal methodology used in these ratings was Higher Education published in December 2017. Please see the Rating Methodologies page on www.moodys.com for a copy of this methodology.

REGULATORY DISCLOSURES

For ratings issued on a program, series or category/class of debt, this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to each rating of a subsequently issued bond or note of the same series or category/class of debt or pursuant to a program for which the ratings are derived exclusively from existing ratings in accordance with Moody's rating practices. For ratings issued on a support provider, this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to the credit rating action on the support provider and in relation to each particular credit rating action for securities that derive their credit ratings from the support provider's credit rating. For provisional ratings, this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to the provisional rating assigned, and in relation to a definitive rating that may be assigned subsequent to the final issuance of the debt, in each case where the transaction structure and terms have not changed prior to the assignment of the definitive rating in a manner that would have affected the rating. For further information please see the ratings tab on the issuer/entity page for the respective issuer on www.moodys.com.

Regulatory disclosures contained in this press release apply to the credit rating and, if applicable, the related rating outlook or rating review.

Please see www.moodys.com for any updates on changes to the lead rating analyst and to the Moody's legal entity that has issued the rating.

Please see the ratings tab on the issuer/entity page on www.moodys.com for additional regulatory disclosures for each credit rating.
Enrollment challenges may lie ahead

College is back in full swing in Alabama, and enrollment figures for the state’s colleges and universities are starting to be released.

For Samford University, the new school year brought a 10th consecutive year of record enrollment with students in the fall semester totaling 5,509, including a freshmen class of 958, which is also the largest in school history.

The University of Alabama, the state’s largest school by enrollment, posted a slight decline in enrollment from 38,563 to 38,392. But that comes on the heels of a steady streak of growth of its own.

Over the past decade, enrollment has surged at a number of Alabama universities, including the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which topped 20,000 students in 2017. The latest enrollment figures for UAB weren’t available as of press time.

While enrollment has steadily increased for many schools, some experts say long-term trends point to future challenges in maintaining enrollment growth at universities across the nation, including Alabama.

That could affect the economy of metros like Birmingham in a number of ways, particularly given the region’s workforce development challenges and the need for population growth, as well as the impact universities have on the local economy.

For example, a recent study by Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama found Samford University had an annual economic impact of $424.8 million on the state.

Those totals suggest the stakes are high when it comes to maintaining college enrollment.

Stephen Craft, dean in the Stephens College of Business at the University of Montevallo, said higher education in America is facing a number of future headwinds.

He said one big factor is demographics, including a shrinking number of college-age students that will increase competition for enrollment.

“This is the sixth year of decline (nationally), and it’s going to continue to decline until 2023, and then there might be a slight uptick, then it takes a nosedive in 2025,” Craft said. “The expectation is in 2025, a dramatic drop is on the horizon.”

Craft said the anticipated dropoff in 2025 stems from the financial crisis, which resulted in a decline in birth rates.

Alabama’s traditionally slower population growth is another factor.

“We are one of those states that are in decline,” Craft said. “There are a few states that have avoided that (drop-off) mainly through inward migration, such as Texas. No one seems to be experiencing any growth in term of birth rates at all.”

In Alabama, where state funding is at a premium and has forced many schools to increase tuition, the demographic shift could pose a challenge.

It could force schools to further step up efforts to recruit from out of state.

Despite the looming trends, Craft said the number of people seeking bachelor’s degrees is up, according to national data.

“So, we are in the environment where flat is the new up,” Craft said. “So even in the declining market, there are areas that are stronger than others.”

He said the reason why bachelor’s degrees are popular is because they hold the highest economic value.

“You look at the recovery when we were really creating jobs after the Great Recession, and, if you look at who got the good jobs and really gave someone a foothold, it was someone who held at least a bachelor’s degree,” Craft said. “Even in economically challenging times, the bachelor’s degree and college education is the clearest, most surest path to get and sustain a foothold in the middle class, so the economic payoff is good.”

Craft said the onus will be on schools to focus on that value proposition and to increase access to jobs and future employment.

At both Montevallo and Samford, that has included a keen focus on in-demand occupations. Montevallo recently launched a technology program focused on computer informatics.

Samford has focused heavily on new programs in the College of Health Sciences and data analytics in its Brock School of Business.

“Samford’s commitment to developing new programs and evolving existing programs to meet the needs of our students and the communities we serve is undoubtedly a factor in Samford’s increasing economic impact,” said Betsy Bugg Holloway, vice president for marketing and communication at Samford University.
6 months after tornado, JSU charts its future course

By: Staff

Six months after a tornado tore through the campus of Jacksonville State University, the school aims to open a new baseball stadium and fitness and wellness center.

The upgrades are planned despite a slight decrease in undergraduate enrollment and damages caused by the March 19 tornado, Al.com reported.

Fall 2018 undergraduate enrollment decreased by 170 students compared to last fall, school officials said. However, graduate student enrollment increased by 82 students.

“There were moments over the past few months when we thought we were facing an enrollment loss of 5-10 percent. That kind of drop would have been devastating to JSU both financially and socially,” Jacksonville State President John Beehler said.

“I am very pleased with these results and want to thank all employees for their efforts in the recovery and rebuilding process and every student who stood by the university during this difficult time,” Beehler added.

Costs related to the storm damage have risen to more than $70 million compared to the $42 million estimate given soon after the tornado.

Additionally, 50 of the school’s 70 structures were damaged. Now, 40 of those damaged buildings have either been repaired or are in the process of receiving new roofs, Al.com reported.

Repairs have been completed at Logan Hall, Patterson Hall, International House, Rock House, the infirmary and student center. Repairs to Meehan Hall were to be completed by this weekend, Al.com reported.

In the next couple of weeks, repairs will be completed at Theron Montgomery Building, Crow Hall, Dixon Hall, Curtiss Hall, Fitzpatrick Hall, Daugette Hall and Hammond Hall.

Work will continue through the end of the year and into early 2019 on Ayers Hall, Bibb Graves Hall, Martin Hall, McGee Hall, Stone Center, Houston Cole Library, Pete Mathews Coliseum, Brewer Hall, Salls Hall and Self Hall, officials said.

Also, Merrill Hall is set for demolition and the Alumni House was demolished over the summer. The Honors House and Mason Hall are being renovated and upgraded.
Baker grad named Trustees Scholar

Bob Lowry  University of South Alabama Marketing and Communications

University of South Alabama freshman Cody Dunlap has been named the Board of Trustees Scholar for the 2018-19 academic year. The announcement was made at the trustees’ meeting on Aug. 31.

The Trustees Scholarship program recognizes the most academically talented student in each incoming freshman class, based on ACT/SAT score and, if needed, GPA, followed by rigor of high school coursework.

A graduate of Mobile’s Baker High School, Dunlap registered a 35 composite ACT score (the highest possible score is 36) and a 4.67 weighted grade-point average. He plans to major in mechanical engineering, at least at the beginning.

“There are some family friends within the field of mechanical engineering and other branches of engineering, but I chose engineering because I’ve always been interested in math and science,” Dunlap said. “I don’t have a specific career in mind at the moment, because I am not sure if mechanical engineering is what I want to stick with, but I do plan to stay within the engineering field.”

Dunlap is the first Board of Trustees Scholar to be a second-generation Jaguar. His father, Kevin Dunlap, graduated from USA in 1996 with a degree in occupational therapy.

“My family did not influence my decision. They were always supportive of me going wherever I chose to go. I chose South because it is a large, local university, and it has a good engineering program,” Dunlap said.

Dunlap learned that he received the Trustees Scholarship directly from university President Tony Waldrop. “When I first heard that Doctor Waldrop wanted to speak to me, I was a little nervous because I had no idea what he would want to speak to me about,” Dunlap said. “And when he told me I was chosen for the scholarship I didn’t really know how to respond. I was speechless.”

In high school, Dunlap was active in the National Honor Society and Hi-Q, an academic competition at which teams from different schools are quizzed on a variety of subjects. At USA, in addition to the Board of Trustees Scholarship, he has received a Presidential Scholarship and a USA Housing/Dining Scholarship.

The Board of Trustees Scholarship Program was created in 2014 after the trustees gave the university more than $125,000, which was matched by the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative. Each recipient is awarded a financial scholarship as a supplement to other scholarships or awards. If total scholarships exceed the cost of tuition, the Trustees Scholarship may be used for study abroad, research or other programs that enhance a student’s education.

The University of South Alabama marketing and communications team provides stories about USA students, faculty, academic programs and research initiatives, all posted online at southalabama.edu
Blazers assess what has worked, what hasn’t

Evan Dudley for AL.com

UAB has a bye this week, so it’s back to basics for the Blazers after starting the season with a 2-1 record against non-conference opponents Savannah State, Coastal Carolina and Tulane.

While a final non-conference game at Texas A&M looms later in the season, UAB begins conference play next week at home against Charlotte.

How are the Blazers performing and what areas do they need to devote their attention to before challenging conference leader North Texas for a division crown? Here are a few things to consider as UAB finishes up its bye week practices with the conference slate fast approaching:

RUN GAME LEADS OFFENSE

It should come as no surprise, but the rushing attack is the primary weapon of an offense ranked 35th in the country and third in Conference USA.

The Blazers are posting an average of 477.3 yards per game, with the running game contributing more than half of that at 380.0 ypg, which leads the conference and is good for 12th in the nation.

The beneficiary of all those rushing yards is running back Spencer Brown. The sophomore has 297 yards on 62 carries for a 4.8 yards per rush average while garnering 41 percent of the team’s rushing attempts. Michigan transfer Kingston Davis is the next closest back with a 13 percent share of the rushing load and a 4.0 ypc average.

Quarterback A.J. Erdely also commands his fair share of the work supporting 17 percent of the team’s rushing offense, and his backup, Tyler Johnston, has been utilized in short yardage situations for 101 yards on nine carries, an 11.2 ypc average.

The problem, however, arises in the passing game, which is tied for 93rd in the country and 11th in the conference. Erdely is completing 56.8 percent of his passes with three touchdowns and four interceptions, but he has kept a tight grip on the ball and only been sacked twice.

Erdely has been having trouble in the red zone despite a strong rushing game. He has completed seven of 12 passes inside the 20-yard line for 71 yards and three touchdowns, but he threw two interceptions in the end zone last week against Tulane. He exonerated himself in the final minutes of that game, leading a 13-play drive that covered 93 yards and ended with a 14-yard game-winning touchdown pass on third down to tight end Logan Scott.

Although the Blazers’ passing attack has unleashed minimal damage on opposing secondaries this season, Andre Wilson and Collin Lisa have continued their strong play from last season combining for 39 percent of Erdely’s targets. Transfer Kendall Partham has been a surprise, owning 19 percent of Erdely’s throws while making an impact in other areas of the offense.

BLAZERS’ SECONDARY A NON-FLY ZONE

UAB is tied for 46th in the nation in total defense but is third in the country in passing yards allowed, averaging 123.4 per game.

The secondary is in the top 10 in pass efficiency and has intercepted opposing quarterbacks three times with one pick six.

The defensive front seven is an important cog, racking up 21.0 tackles for loss, 10.0 sacks, nine quarterback hurries and four forced fumbles with two recoveries and one touchdown. Free safety Broderick Thomas credited a lot of the success in the secondary to the point of attack.

“The pressure coming off our D-line,” he said. “They really get off the ball more this year and get to the quarterback, so it’s really helping us in the backfield.”

Defensive coordinator Davis Reeves agreed.

“All of that goes hand-in-hand,” he said. “I’m proud of our players because they understand they all depend on each other. Our D-line and Jacks are getting there, and the guys on the backside are covering well right now. You can’t have one without the other.”

The weakness in the unit is rushing defense. UAB is 108th in the country and allowing more than 200 yards per game on the ground. A lot of that can be skewed by playing teams committed to the run early, but it’s a noticeable gap that demands attention.

PLENTY OF PENALTIES

A major factor in the Blazers’ loss to Coastal Carolina was the number of penalties and the timeliness of them.

Flags stalled offensive drives and gave the Chanticleers new life on nearly every possession in the second half.

The Blazers were able to settle down against the Green Wave following the yellow fumble outburst in Conway and has been a point of emphasis during the bye.

“Sometimes, that’s what happens when you get pressured,” Clark said following the win over Tulane. “You respond. That’s something that we have seemed to have done around here. About that Monday morning, that’s what they remember. They remember having to get up at 6:30 a.m. to watch film with their peers sitting all around them.

“I don’t cut them any slack. It all starts with me and I told them last week that it was my fault. I didn’t have them ready. It was tough to sit there and watch that.”

UAB has been flagged 27 times for 278 yards through three games with 18 coming on defense and 11 on personal fouls.

OFFENSE CONVERTING AT RAPID RATE

The Blazers are on track to set the school record in points and yards per game, and their conversion rate has been a factor in that equation.

UAB is converting 53 percent of its third downs (23 of 43) on offense, which leads the conference and is 15th in the nation. Thirteen of those conversions have come by way of the pass, and the run game has converted 10 first downs.

In all, the Blazers have 87 first downs to give them the conference lead— they are tied for eighth in the nation. The offense has also made 16 trips into opponents’ red zones and have come away with 11 touchdowns and three field goals for an 87.5 percent success rate.

By contrast, the Blazers’ defense is 32nd in the nation while holding their opponents to 31 percent on third downs. The defense has allowed 54 first downs—10 by penalty—and have let opponents score all five trips into the red zone—four touchdowns and a field goal.
UA volleyball beats Auburn to big crowd

By Cody Estremera
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

The roar of the crowd when junior Ginger Perinar killed a spike said it best, Alabama volleyball defeated Auburn in four sets.

Foster Auditorium held a season high 1,006 people and was mostly filled by the time warmups started.

"We knew the crowd was going to be here," libero Kaylee Thomas said. "We definitely could feel the environment being more of a leg up."

Thomas had her first home start at libero after getting her first start there on Wednesday against Missouri. She set a career high in digs with 19 kills, including six in the final set.

"It's very exciting," Thomas said. "I didn't really have it in my head, but I knew this is my first time wearing the libero jersey, so I figured that I would have more time on the court and be able to have more digs."

The Crimson Tide was the first team to 21 points in all four sets but struggled to put Auburn away. The Tigers outscored Alabama 15-14 after the Crimson Tide scored its 21st point.

"He (coach Ed Allen) definitely emphasized that he wanted us to be patent," Thomas said. "If there's things we can't control in the set, there will be a turn, and they will come back down to earth. We just need to be patent and consistent and wait for that to happen."

The only set Alabama lost was the second. It went up 21-20 but was outscored 5-2 in the last seven points of the match.

"I thought we were a little bit tight," Allen said. "I thought we were in a situation to go up 2-0 and really controlled most of that second set. We didn't see any overly significant runs."

Alabama's hitting percentage was significantly better after losing to Missouri. It hit just .056 at Missouri, while it hit .227 against Auburn.

The biggest two players to get back on track were Doris Carter and Hayley McSparin, as both finished with a negative hitting percentage at Missouri. Carter finished hitting .226, while McSparin led the Alabama starters with .378.

Cidavia Hall finished with eight kills, four of which came in the final set.

"CeCe is coming along," Allen said. "We would have liked to have had her production throughout the course of the match, not just in that last set. She settled down in that fourth set."

Alabama takes on South Carolina at home Friday, Sept. 28. The match starts at 7 p.m.
Several players trying to earn Tour cards

As of Saturday, former University of Alabama standout Stephanie Meadow was in the top 10 of the Symetra Tour's Guardian Championship at RTJ Golf Trail's Capitol Hill Senator Course in Prattville, with the final round to come Sunday.

Meadow came firing out of the blocks in her professional career, after a stellar four years at the Capstone, with a tie for third in the 2014 U.S. Women's Open, won by Michelle Wie.

However, she did not kick on as she would have hoped and is plying her trade on the Symetra Tour this year, which is the level below the LPGA Tour, as the Web.com Tour is to the PGA Tour.

She's been enjoying a fine season and is a lock to finish in the all-important top 10 on the money list and thus secure her playing privileges on the LPGA Tour in 2019. She is in second place with $61,308 banked, with just three events left in the season (including the Guardian Championship).

The season ends Oct. 7.

Meadow has made it into two playoffs this season, and has a 1-1 record winning the
GOLF

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10A Championship, but finishing second in the Danielle Downey Credit Union Classic, named for the former Auburn University golfer, who passed away in 2014. "Q" School to get to the LPGA Tour is ongoing with former University of Alabama golfer Mia Landgren and former multi-time State Amateur champion Elaine Wood of Spanish Fort making it through Stage I last month. On Oct. 15-18 they will join former UA golfers Lakereber Abe, Janie Jackson, Cheyenne Knight and current UA superstar Kristen Gilman, who is competing as an amateur, in Stage II in Florida. Other players in the field with local ties include Fatima Fernandez Cano (Troy University), and sisters Marta Sanz Barrio and Patricia Sanz Barrio, who both played for Auburn. Meadow is also listed in the field, but presumably would only play if she somehow fell out of the Symetra Tour’s Volvik Race for the Card top 10 season-long money list.

The successful Stage II qualifiers would then advance to the final test, which is a new Qualifying Series spread over two weeks: Oct. 24-27 and Oct. 31-Nov. 3) at Pinehurst Resort. It will constitute two 72-hole, cumulative score series, with the top 45 finishers (out of a final field of 108) earning LPGA Tour playing privileges for next year.

The field will include players, who choose to play, that finish 101-150 on this year’s LPGA Tour final money list; those who finish 11-30 in the Symetra Tour’s Volvik Race for the Card; various other exemptions and the remaining numbers coming from Stage II of “Q” School. It will be fascinating to see how this all plays out as the players battle to join, among others, former UA stellar player Emma Talley, who has enjoyed a wonderful LPGA Tour rookie campaign and who cut her teeth for one year on the Symetra Tour, and, almost certainly Meadow.

On the men’s side...

The ultimate goal for aspiring playing professionals is the PGA Tour, but that is a tough road. To get to the promised land, they must first make it to the Web.com Tour, which is no easy task. Up to four stages of “Q” School must first be successfully navigated, beginning with pre-qualifying. Get through all four levels, then you must finish in the top 25 on the money list over a season of events to earn a PGA Tour card or make it through the Web.com Tour playoffs.

Web.com Tour prequalifying concluded a few weeks ago with former UA players Jonathan Hardee and Steven Setterstrom advancing, plus other players with local ties: Patrick Twesme, Connor Slane, Wesley Hunter, Ben Schollman and Taylor Eyster. Ryan Benton and Taylor McCullum did not advance.

First Stage begins Sunday with sites in Texas and Arizona, following in the coming weeks across the country including at the RTJ Golf Trail’s Highland Oaks in Dothan. This stage ends Oct. 12. Players are only listed a few days before each venue begins so the only published fields are this week. Former UA golfer and two-time State Amateur champion Hunter Hamrick of Montgomery is in the Garland, Texas field, along with cousins Casey O’Toole of Oneonta and John Michael O’Toole of Pinson. Both have enjoyed success playing on the Asian Tours.

An interesting name also in this field is one Tony Romo, former Dallas Cowboys quarterback turned TV commentator.

Second Stage is slated for late October/early November at five countrywide sites including the RTJ Golf Trail’s Magnolia Grove in Mobile, with the big daddy, Final Stage, set for Dec. 6-9 in Arizona.

Players with local ties already guaranteed Web.com Tour status next year include former State Amateur champions Willy Wilcox and Michael Johnson, and former UA player Robby Shelton.

Michael Thompson, also a great player at UA, does too, but may well earn back his PGA Tour card back based on his play in the Web.com Tour Championship (which concluded Sunday, after the time of writing) with its impact on the Web.com Tour’s Finals money list.

Jan Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for over 25 years. His weekly "Mr. Golf" column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thompstownesoff@gmail.com
UA baseball begins fall practice

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

The turnover at Alabama baseball in recent off seasons had been from one coaching staff to the next. Now it's the roster that has new faces.

Brad Bohannon and the Alabama baseball team opened fall practice on Friday at Sewell-Thomas Stadium. Bohannon and both full-time assistants return for their second season, but it's not the same team from this spring.

"Half of our team are new guys," he said.

It's more than half the infield, which lost two seniors at first base, draft picks at third base and shortstop and another senior at second. Middle-of-the-lineup mainstay Chandler Taylor also signed a professional contract and moved on. Much of the pitching staff is intact, though. That allows for longer scrimmages and more live action.

The team had a six-inning scrimmage to close its first day of practice.

"It's just such a different team," Bohannon said. "We have a lot more guys on the mound who are healthy, so we're going to be able to play a lot more. We're older on the mound. We lost over 1,200 (career) at bats from last year's team. So a lot of new faces, especially positionally. Young players, whether they're new JC kids or high school kids,

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Practice schedule
Sept. 25-29

Tuesday: Practice - 2:15-3:45 p.m. | Scrimmage - 3:45 p.m. start
Wednesday: OFF
Thursday: Practice - 2:15-3:45 p.m. | Scrimmage - 3:45 p.m. start
Friday: Practice - 2:15-4 p.m. | Scrimmage - 4 p.m. start
Saturday: OFF
BASEBALL

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there's a learning curve." Three relievers will start throwing later in fall as a precaution. Sophomore lefty Brock Guffey and right handers Deacon Medders and Kyle Cameron all went straight from the end of the collegiate season into summer baseball. Freshman righty Landon Green is out with Tommy John surgery and is expected to miss the 2019 season. 

Otherwise, the team is healthy. Several new players stepped in right away for the first scrimmage of fall on Friday. 

"I'm just really pleased to this point with the way the new kids move," Bohannon said. "The way they're swinging the bat, the stuff in the bullpen. Now it's time to see if they can translate to a game setting."

The faces that are back from the 2018 season are looking to take a step forward from spring, when Alabama finished 27-29 overall and 8-22 in conference play. The graduations and departures from last season mean that there's still plenty of work to be done in the coming weeks.

"I know I'm more comfortable," Bohannon said. "Everything is moving a lot slower for me. I would assume it's that way for the kids. Half our team was here last year and they know exactly what to expect from the coaching staff and terminology and all that. We're logistically much further ahead now than we were 12 months ago and that's a good feeling for everybody."

Practice is expected to end in the first week of November. Scrimmages are subject to change but open to the public at no cost. Fans can enter through Gate 3 behind home plate at Sewell-Thomas Stadium.

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

Tide hoops trying to ride recruiting wave

I in the midst of football season, the Southeastern Conference's continued escalation as a men's basketball power continued quietly but powerfully. The University of Alabama basketball staff is working hard to ride that wave, a necessity as the SEC continues to climb out of the depths of a few years ago, when the league was essentially Kentucky and Florida and some other teams who weren't great on a consistent basis. Last March, the SEC placed eight teams in the NCAA Tournament field. The league's goal, which seems within reach, is to make that the norm, not the rare exception.

For the 2018-19 season, that doesn't seem like a problem. The eight teams that made the tournament all return a solid nucleus (Texas A&M could be the exception but still has talent.) At least two of the teams that did not make the tournament, LSU and Vanderbilt, recruited at a top 10 level nationally. Mississippi State was close and looks loaded. The 18-game league schedule

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will be daunting.
Even before that, because of basketball’s November/April recruiting calendar, the 2019-2020 season is starting to take shape — and looks daunting as well.
Four SEC teams are in the top 10 nationally in recruiting — Kentucky (which could wind up once more with the No. 1 Class), Tennessee, Auburn and Texas A&M — and, as top prospects commit and sign in November, that number could grow. Rick Barnes’ team in Knoxville received a huge commitment on Wednesday when Josiah James, a national top 15 point guard from Charleston, South Carolina, chose UT over Duke and Clemson. What’s difficult is placing Alabama in the proper perspective.

Going into the summer, it looked as though the Crimson Tide would have a top 10 class as well. That’s because Alabama was considered the prohibitive leader for Hazel Green point guard Kira Lewis, whose stock kept rising with every recruiting event. At the rate Lewis was going — he had risen as high as No. 30 in Rivals’ national rankings — he might have been a McDonald’s All-American with a strong senior season. He could have moved past Mountain Brook’s Trendon Watford as the state’s No. 1 prospect.

Instead, he reclassified to the class of 2018 and will begin his Alabama career in about seven weeks. As far as recruiting rankings — which are not the most important thing in basketball but which do attract a lot of attention in the build-up to November’s signing date — the Crimson Tide got no credit for Lewis, a four-star recruit at minimum, in either class. The trade-off, of course, is what Lewis can contribute to the current team.

Alabama has two commitments, Juwan Gary, a 6-5 forward, and Jaylen Forbes, a 6-5 shooting guard that Rivals.com ranks as the No. 2 player in Mississippi. The Alabama staff, including Avery Johnson and Antoine Pettway, visited that state’s No. 1 prospect, forward D.J. Jeffries, at his high school in Olive Branch, on Wednesday.

Gary has transferred from Gray Academy in Columbia, South Carolina, to West Charlotte High School in North Carolina, a decision made in part to help Gary concentrate on academics and (one would guess) in part to get him out of the shadow of Frank Martin and South Carolina, which has continued to recruit him.

The Crimson Tide is also considered the leader for another shooter — it is easy to see what Johnson is trying to build — in Jaden Shackelford of Hesperia, California, who jumped 25 spots into the National Top 100 (at No. 99) in the latest 247 rankings.

As far as big men, Alabama was in early on 6-10 forward Drew Timme from the Dallas area. His stock has soared and he’s now being called the “No. 1 priority” for schools ranging from Texas A&M to Gonzaga to Illinois.

Johnson and staff had an in-home visit last week and continue to pursue Timme. Then there is Watford. He still lists Alabama as a possibility but if he sticks with his plan of signing in April, there may be twists and turns ahead.
COMMENTARY

Which team is second-best in the West?

The Tuscaloosa News
Tuesday, September 25, 2018

T
two weeks ago, things seemed so clear in the Southeastern Conference’s West Division. Alabama appeared to be team to beat, clearly. The rest of the division seemed daunting, though, a series of games in which the Crimson Tide would be tested at every stop with the exception of Arkansas.

Two weeks later, Alabama has run through two division opponents by a combined score of 107-30, and other results among the teams in the West make it seem like the separation between the Crimson Tide and the other six teams is wide. That doesn’t mean Alabama won’t face some challenges in November, but which team will provide the toughest test remains to be answered. There is even a case to be made that last weekend’s game against Texas A&M may, in hindsight, turn out to have been the key game in the division.

Yes, LSU is undefeated and highly ranked. Transfer quarterback Joe Burrow doesn’t make your jaw drop with his arm talent — watch Tua Tagovailoa if that is your cup of tea — but he does seem to have given his team, and the yearning Tiger fan base, more confidence in the position than they have had in years.

LSU isn’t spoken about

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HURT

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In College Football Play-off terms yet, but from a scheduling standpoint, no team can do more for itself in its remaining games. Both Georgia and Alabama have to come to Baton Rouge in the coming weeks. Running the table and beating those two would give LSU a clear shot. The irony is that they would have to beat Georgia a second time in Atlanta (and, given the Saban Curse that drifts up from the bayou in the postseason, they'd probably draw Alabama again in the College Football Play-off.) Plus, for all their early success, LSU looks like a team that could stumble somewhere else. Credit to Ed Orgeron for what he has done so far, though.

Then there is Auburn. I do not profess to know what goes on behind the scenes on The Plains, but what has bubbled to the surface, from transfers to a miserable-sounding defensive coordinator Kevin Steele, puts out an odd vibe. Maybe the Tigers are simply unfinished, waiting for time to correct some problems.

That's what happened last season, although there's one big difference — the closing Georgia/Alabama run is not in Jordan-Hare Stadium. The Tigers have just two SEC home games left, and no margin for error.

Mississippi State looked like the other rising threat, especially after mauling Kansas State on the road. Then came a loss to Kentucky that has people rethinking the divisional balance of power. Ole Miss followed up its blowout loss to Alabama with a lackluster performance against Kent State.

So is it possible that, despite two losses to nation Top 3 opponents, Clemson and Alabama, Texas A&M could be the second-best in the West? "Respect" in the college football world is an ephemeral concept but it's fair to say that the Aggies are trending, and will continue to do so if they post a convincing win against Arkansas on Saturday.

Through it all, I'd still say the SEC West is the best division in college football, but that might mean Alabama on the top and a tangled knot of parity in the middle.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Coach Saban’s message to Tide hasn’t changed

By: Ben Jones

Alabama’s scrape with Texas A&M in 2017 inspired Nick Saban’s “rat poison” line that permeated the program’s lexicon. He said he wanted to avoid a repeat of that sound bite after Saturday’s game, but closed his postgame press conference with a similar message.

“We have a good team, but our team needs to do a lot of things to improve,” he said. “If what our team has accomplished to this point makes them in any way not take into account the kind of teams we have to play in the future, and they underestimate what we need to do to improve so that we can become a better team and don’t just take things for granted … that we’re going to show up because we have an Alabama uniform on and win the game … it’s not going to happen that way. It’s going to be everybody’s choice in the organization. I would appreciate it if you would, you know, sort of look at some of the things we didn’t do so well, and write about that. So maybe I can show it to some of the players and say, ‘Look here, man. Here’s something you can do better.’”

Freshman update

All eight Alabama freshmen who had appeared in the first three games of the season also participated in the game on Saturday. Those eight players have now played in four games, the limit they can play in and still receive a redshirt for the 2018 season. Playing in one more game will remove the possibility of those players redshirting.

Listed alphabetically, those players are outside linebacker Eyabi Anoma, punter Skyler DeLong, inside linebacker Ale Kaho, inside linebacker Jaylen Moody, defensive back Patrick Surtain Jr. and wide receiver Jaylen Waddle.

Running back Jerome Ford and cornerback Josh Jobe had played in the first three games of the season but did not appear on Saturday.

Special teams mixed

DeLong’s first punt Saturday pinned Texas A&M at the 1-yard line. Later he booted the ball 51 yards and had another punt go for 50. But Alabama’s sophomore punter also shanked a 13-yarder and had one that traveled just 31.

It was a mixed-bag day for the Crimson Tide on special teams. DeLong averaged 36 yards on six punts, pinning the Aggies inside their 20 three times.

Joseph Bulovas kicked a 47-yard field goal as time expired in the first half, the longest kick of his career. He was also a perfect 6 for 6 on extra points.

In the return game, Jaylen Waddle ran back two punts for 25 yards, with a long return of 15 yards, but Alabama twice had penalties called for illegal blocks on returns.

Tide bits

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Honorary captains for the game were linebackers Barry Krauss and Rich Wingo. Both were linebackers on Alabama’s 1978 team that won the SEC and a national championship. The 1978 team was recognized on the field before the game as part of its 40th anniversary. ... Game captains were outside linebacker Anfernee Jennings, tight end Hale Hentges and running back Damien Harris. ... Alabama won the toss and chose to defer. Alabama is 2-2 in coin tosses this season. ... Alabama’s 2018 men’s indoor track and field team, which won the SEC championship, was recognized at halftime. ... Paid attendance was announced as 101,821. ... Saban remained undefeated in 13 games against his former assistants. He’s also now 54-14 against ranked teams since the start of 2008. ... Saturday was Alabama’s 20th consecutive win at Bryant-Denny Stadium.
Christmas comes early in Tuscaloosa

Offense providing the entertainment for Tide's SEC party

Joseph Goodman  jgoodman@al.com

Maybe this is the best offense in the history of Alabama football.
Maybe it's the best offense in the history of the Southeastern Conference.
All of those things are possible, and attainable, at this point after Alabama 45, Texas A&M 23 on a pinch-yourself Saturday for the Crimson Tide at Bryant-Denny Stadium. We'll know everything soon enough. What we know now, after Alabama lit up another SEC defense like a bonfire, is that this team, led by this quarterback, is more fun to watch than kids opening up presents on Christmas morning.

It's like you can't look away, or you might miss another lifelong memory.
Every moment feels important when quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has the ball. Every snap can be a touchdown. Every present might be a Red Ryder BB Gun. Be careful, or Tua might put your eye out.
Football hasn't been this fun in Tuscaloosa in a long time.
Texas A&M has a good team in Jimbo Fisher's first season. The Aggies, ranked No.22 in the country, had no chance. Alabama led by 29 points entering the fourth quarter, and notoriously spoiled Bryant-Denny Stadium was packed. Everyone wanted to see what would happen next.

Tua looks like a Heisman Trophy winner, and running back Damien Harris skipped the NFL Draft to return for his senior season. That calculus doesn't even include the four receivers people are calling the best unit in school history. How do you stop this offense? How do you solve this riddle? How do you not have fun if you're a player?

Right now, it's as fun for them as it is for fans of the game watching it happen.

"Going out and scoring almost 50 points a game is really fun," Harris said. "Getting to see other guys, seeing us spread the ball around, seeing a lot of guys have success, it's a great feeling.

"Being one of the older guys on this team, it's exciting to see a lot of young guys that have stepped up into these big roles in our offense. So, we're really fortunate to have so many guys who can go out and play at such a high level. It's a lot of fun playing with those guys."

This must be what it was like to watch Bear Bryant change Alabama's offense to the wishbone in 1971. College football wasn't ready for it, and the sport doesn't seem prepared for this latest advancement: Nick Saban with a surefire future NFL quarterback.

If Saban had a quarterback this good with the Miami Dolphins, then history might be a lot different. Thirteen years after Saban made the biggest personnel mistake of his career, the future Hall of Fame coach has his Drew Brees.

And Tua is surrounded with a list of offensive options so long that Harris only had seven carries for 54 yards against Texas A&M. That would have been unthinkable a year ago.

Tua, in less than five games, has redefined Alabama football as we know it.

The Tide led 45-16 with 1:09 left in the third quarter when Tua was replaced by quarterback Jalen Hurts... and Alabama had just 81 yards rushing. Tua had more passing yards to tight ends (103).

Right now, we're witnessing football nirvana for a fanbase that has watched Alabama's run-first offense methodically churn opponents into bone meal for the past decade. Against Texas A&M, Tua finished with the fifth most yards passing in a game in school history (387), and he didn't play in
the fourth quarter. He has thrown 12 touchdowns in four games, and most of them have been like bolts of lighting.

"We feel like, as a group collectively, when we go out, we're unstoppable," said receiver Henry Ruggs III, who had three catches for 84 yards, including a 57-yard touchdown catch at the end of the third quarter to give Alabama a 45-16 lead.

Tua's first dozen completions went to eight different receivers, and pass No.12 to tight end Hale Hentges went for a 23-yard touchdown. With so many offensive weapons on the field at one time, Hentges was wide open over the middle of the field and waltzed into the end zone. It looked so easy, so unstoppable.

This must be what it's like to try and defend a jump shot by Kevin Durant, or hit a curveball off Clayton Kershaw. There are some things in sports you simply can't stop. Just gotta hope they miss.

Saban knows he has a great team. Is this the best offense he has ever coached? The question had to be asked after four games of such remarkable domination.

"I'm not ready to say that or make a comparison to any other team," Saban said. "We've had some really good offensive teams in the past. I think the diversity and the number of playmakers this team has certainly ranks it up there with one of the best.

"And we knew this was the kind of team we were going to have, but just like when you win a game today, they had 72 offensive plays and we had 61 and their time of possession was way greater than ours. So, if we were, as you put it, the best we've ever had, it wouldn't be that way."

Time of possession tends to be skewed when an offense has 10 touchdown drives in four games under a minute.

Saban doesn't want to overhype this team because he knows the only thing that can beat it is itself. Alabama's coach actually asked reporters after the game to write negatively about his team.

Not a chance. How do you downplay Christmas morning?

Every moment feels important when quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has the ball.
Every snap can be a touchdown.
Every present might be a Red Ryder BB Gun.
Be careful, or Tua might put your eye out.

Joseph Goodman is a columnist for the Alabama Media Group. He's on Twitter @Joe-GoodmanJr.
Plenty of big hits, but also lots of whiffs on Saturday

His team did beat a nationally-ranked opponent by three touchdowns but the Crimson Tide also allowed 22 first downs, committed nine penalties and kicked four punts whose combined air yardage wouldn't have stretched from one end zone to the other. So when Saban requested that the media "sort of look at some of the things that we didn't do well," he knew he was asking for something that he was going to get anyway.

No one is going to be too scathing about what was a fairly comfortable win, unless Skip Bayless proclaims this as the dynasty-toppling apocalypse that he has proclaimed about eight other times in the last three years.

But there was at least a whiff of mortality to explore.

For the first time this season, Alabama didn't seem like something more than a championship level football team.

See HURT, C8
HURT

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There's nothing wrong with being at championship level, but for three weeks now, the discussion has been about Alabama's place in history. Greatest team ever? Greatest offense ever? (Saban did get that question in the postgame media scrum.)

Against Texas A&M, though, they looked like the current New York Yankees, for instance. They could hit home runs, particularly the prodigious Tua Tagovailoa, but on Saturday they didn't look loud through the entire lineup.

The defensive line was disruptive of Aggie quarterback Kellen Mond's entire afternoon. But there were occasions where Mond slipped loose and gained big yardage. There were times when Alabama's offense sputtered. That included the final 20 minutes — Jalen Hurts didn't look great, although he also had to deal with the restricted playbook that is the lot of the backup quarterback.

There were times Alabama's offensive line was neutralized on running plays. Damien Harris had a long run and Najee Harris had a nice stretch in the fourth quarter, but there was never the same feeling that you sometimes get with the old Alabama offense, the feeling that Crimson Tide could close out an opponent by pushing ahead like an angry hippopotamus among the water lilies. Some of that, of course, is a trade-off that comes from having Tagovailoa.

His big-play-from-anywhere capability was bound to change the offense. Sooner or later in a football season, an opponent will physically challenge a team, even an Alabama team. Alabama has to be ready for that. It also has to focus at keeping penalties to a minimum and keep polishing its special teams. Small things, perhaps, but in big games, small things grow large.

That's a short list, prepared before Saban's request for a little less rat poison and a little more cage-rattling. Most of the fans at Bryant-Denny Stadium saw areas that need work. There was nothing to cause panic. Alabama has spent three weeks looking down from the mountaintop, though, and there's no problem with the fans — and Saban — wanting to stay there.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Tide special teams flourishing under Banks'

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Alabama assistant coach Jeff Banks holds a dual title: tight ends coach and special teams coordinator. Bobby Williams and Joe Pannunzio both held those titles before Banks arrived this season. But when Nick Saban went to hire him, it was his special teams work that set him apart.

"My first was philosophical, a decision that when we went to 10 coaches, I wanted to try to find a really, really good special teams coach," Saban said. "A lot of times in college you get guys that are coaches who coach special teams and maybe they don't sort of put the emphasis See BANKS, C4
BANKS

From Page C1

on it. I always had a tremendous amount of respect for the really good job that Texas A&M did on special teams when he was there. That was the No. 1 factor. The fact that he's a good recruiter and he's got a lot of connections in Texas probably was a bonus.

Banks was a two-time All-Pac 10 punter during his career at Washington State. He's been special teams coordinator at all four of his previous coaching stops. Texas A&M led the nation in punt blocks and was second in punt returns in 2017. Opponents haven't returned a punt against Alabama in the first three games of the season this fall.

His recruiting work did mean he had at least one local connection when he came to Alabama. He had previously recruited tight end Irv Smith Jr. when he was at Texas A&M. Smith committed during summer 2015 before backing off just before his signing day in 2016.

"It was tough love at first when I decommitted," Smith said. "He got here and he was very excited. We were back together and he would be coaching me. It's awesome, honestly."

It's a small sample size early in the season, but Alabama's special teams have shown some flashes. On just three total kickoff returns, Alabama has a 77-yard return for a touchdown, a 27-yard return and a 74-yard return. Freshman Jaylen Waddle is also averaging 15.0 yards per punt return.

"I think we've made some changes in that area that have been beneficial to our team," Saban said. "It's been a work in progress with our players to make those changes, but we've been pretty productive so far in our return game. Obviously we want to do the best job we can to continue to develop our specialists and develop consistency in that area. But it's been a real positive for our program."

Targeting rule reviewed

College football's targeting rules have taken greater importance since 2013, when players could first be ejected for an illegal hit.

"We really try to emphasize keeping your face up and see what you hit," Saban said. "You try to eliminate that. I think sometimes when the offensive player puts his head down and goes low when you've already committed to going low, it's very difficult."

There has been only one call against Alabama this season that could have led to an ejection. Junior cornerback Trevon Diggs was flagged for a hit in the season opener against Louisville, but was not ejected after the hit was reviewed.

"I think the key to the drill is to keep your face up, keep your head up. It's a player safety issue, No. 1. And No. 2, I think it can minimize the chances of going helmet to helmet."

Honorary captains

Former Alabama linebackers Barry Krauss and Rich Wingo will be honorary captains for Saturday's game. They'll be available to sign autographs from 10-11 a.m. at the Paul W. Bryant Museum.

Krauss was an All-American in 1978 and the sixth overall pick in the 1979 NFL Draft before a 12-year NFL career. He was best remembered for his fourth-down goaline stop of Penn State running back Mike Guman in the 1979 Sugar Bowl to secure a 14-7 win against the No. 1 Nittany Lions. Alabama won the 1978 national championship during his senior year.

Wingo was also in on the tackle and had 10 stops in the Sugar Bowl. He played at Alabama from 1976-78 and played six NFL seasons. He now serves in the Alabama House of Representatives.

Injury update

Offensive tackle Matt Womack (foot) returned to practice Wednesday for the first time since an injury sidelined him in fall. Womack was Alabama's starting right tackle during the 2017 season.

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Two Quarterbacks? Alabama, Georgia and Clemson Share a Conundrum but Don’t See a Problem

By: Marc Tracy

In Birmingham, in Muscle Shoals and most especially in Tuscaloosa, they speak in awed tones about the coaching masterstroke Alabama’s Nick Saban executed in last season’s College Football Playoff championship game.

With his Crimson Tide trailing by 13-0 at halftime, Saban swapped out his two-year starting quarterback, Jalen Hurts, for a virtually untested freshman, Tua Tagovailoa. It was a bold move in a big moment, and Tagovailoa led the Crimson Tide to 20 second-half points and an indelible overtime touchdown. The victory secured Saban’s sixth national championship, and the 17th for Alabama.

If Tagovailoa provided a classic postseason moment in January, though, this summer he produced a standard preseason narrative: the quarterback controversy.

In July, Saban insisted, somewhat dubiously, that the competition for Alabama’s starting quarterback job was unsettled. In August, when Hurts sorrowfully referred to “the elephant in the room,” he did not mean Alabama’s mascot. And in September, after Tagovailoa took the majority of the snaps in the Tide’s season opener, Saban barked at a postgame interviewer, “I still like both guys,” before adding, “So quit asking!” (He later apologized.)

They have not quit asking, though, even as Tagovailoa has established himself as the clear starter, a chancy thrower whose arm makes him a less predictable and more dangerous threat than the speedier Hurts.

As No. 1 Alabama (2-0) heads to Mississippi (2-0) on Saturday, Saban can take some solace in the fact that he is not alone. Though neither Clemson nor Georgia has a quarterback situation as contentious as Alabama’s, both teams are also juggling tricky two-quarterback platoons. In each case, both quarterbacks are capable of starting for nearly any other team, and neither coach dares alienating one player and risking that he may transfer and leave an unacceptable dearth of talent at the most important position on the depth chart.

But those situations are also not a coincidence. Quarterback controversies at Alabama, Clemson and Georgia — currently the country’s top three ranked teams, which together have contested the last three national title games — are the inevitable byproducts of the novel strategies they have deployed to make themselves college football’s best programs. They reflect several factors in a changing landscape: a more fluid transition from high school football to college football, winnertake-all recruiting trends and the unique nature of the most glamorous position in sports.

Having too many talented quarterbacks is not an awful dilemma, of course. It may count as the ultimate first-world football problem. And, increasingly, it may simply come with being an elite program.

“It’d be crazy not to ask me about it,” Clemson Coach Dabo Swinney said this week, “because it’s kind of unusual to have two guys that are playing, and really playing well.”
He added, "I think it's been really cool."

There's a saying in football at every level: When you have two quarterbacks, you don't have a quarterback. To a degree untrue of any other position, at some point a successful team will need to choose only one player to fill that role, and that eventually will leave every other quarterback on the team without the chance to gain the experience necessary to improve.

"You cannot overrecruit the running back position," the CBS analyst Gary Danielson said. "They're all perfectly happy to get a third of the carries."

"But at quarterback," he added, "it's different."

Danielson, a former college and N.F.L. quarterback, recalled how splitting snaps between a sophomore and a senior on the 1999 Michigan Wolverines birthed tensions in the locker room (not to mention a massive chip on the shoulder of the senior, Tom Brady).

"It affects the rest of the team way more than it affects the guys," Danielson said. "When things don't go well, they're just like the people calling the talk show: 'Put the other guy in!'"

So far, the Tide, the Bulldogs and the Tigers — a combined 6-0 entering this weekend — are managing. It helps that in all three cases, one of the quarterbacks is more of a so-called pro-style player — mainly handing off or passing, like most N.F.L. quarterbacks — while his rival is a dual-threat option, as likely to run with the ball as to throw it. Consequently, each player's skill set can yield what is effectively a different offense.

At Alabama, for example, Tagovailoa is more clearly pro-style than Hurts; at Georgia, the sophomore starter Jake Fromm offers a pro-style look, and the freshman Justin Fields, who spends more time on the bench, is the dual-threat option. At Clemson, it is the reverse: the starter Kelly Bryant, a senior, is the runner, while the freshman Trevor Lawrence comes from a more traditional mold.

Last week, Fields did not enter Georgia's game at South Carolina until the fourth quarter, when victory was well in hand. Swinney, on the other hand, operated something more like a platoon on Saturday at Texas A&M, using Bryant the majority of the time, including to kill clock late in the game with designed runs, while turning to Lawrence for several series. Lawrence rewarded him by throwing a 64-yard touchdown pass on his first snap.

One reason Saban, Georgia's Kirby Smart and Swinney all face this problem is that they all excel as recruiters at a moment when nationalized recruiting has increasingly clustered the best prospects at the same programs. Smart and Swinney secured the signatures of Lawrence and Fields, the top two high school recruits at all positions, according to 247Sports's consensus rankings, despite having established starters.

(Smart accomplished a similar coup the year before, luring Fromm to Georgia despite the presence of Jacob Eason, from whom Fromm took the job. Previously, Fromm had been committed to join the team on which Smart had been an assistant coach: Alabama.)
The rise of year-round high school quarterbacking, in the form of private coaches and tackle-free 7-on-7 games, and increased similarities between the high school and college versions of the sport have created more quarterback controversies than there used to be. The best true freshmen arrive early on campus — typically the January before their freshman season, giving them several months to adjust to college — and are unusually prepared to start, said Barton Simmons, 247Sports’s director of scouting.

“All those things have created an environment that has allowed some quarterbacks to show up on campus really ready,” Simmons said.

Simmons also posited that there was an element of serendipity to these teams’ current predicaments: The current freshman class just happens to have an unusual number of astoundingly good quarterbacks.

“I want to entertain the possibility that we’ve just had a really good streak,” Simmons said, pointing to Lawrence, Fields and J.T. Daniels, Southern California’s true freshman starter, as standouts from the high school class of 2018.

There may be something else at work, too: This new breed of quarterback seems to thirst for the limelight and bursts with competitiveness.

“What I think we’re actually seeing,” Simmons said, “is a generation of quarterbacks who are eager to compete, to a degree that we haven’t seen.”

In the case of Alabama, which also has a bevy of talented young receivers, Tagovailoa looks to be the solution this season. But asked about the starting situation after Alabama’s second game, a 57-7 win over Arkansas State in which both Tagovailoa and Hurts threw for multiple touchdowns, Saban merely affirmed that Tagovailoa would be the starter against Ole Miss this week.

“I think both guys did a really good job today,” Saban said.
Helen Keller is still worth students’ time

The Texas State Board of Education voted last week — it was a preliminary move; a final decision will be made in November — to streamline its social studies curriculum by ending the requirement that students study certain historical figures.

Some of those figures are political flashpoints we’re not going to name. However, the figure slated for “elimination” who caught our eye — and made us sit up and say “that’s just wrong” — is Alabama native Helen Keller, who’s been a part of Texas’ third-grade curriculum.

Donna Bahorich, the Texas board’s chairwoman, told CNN the objective of the change is to allow teachers to take “deeper dives into certain topics,” instead of simply requiring memorization of dates and the like. We have no problem with that line of thought.

She said volunteer working groups considered various historical figures and assigned them points based on “diverse perspectives, whether they were part of a watershed moment and (their) impact on or for underrepresented groups.” We have no problem with inviting public participation in that process rather than it being ordained from on high. (For the record, Keller scored 7 out of 20 possible points.)

Bahorich noted to CNN that Texas teachers have “too many learning standards, required to be taught and assessed on state assessments, for educators to cover in a year.” We understand that dilemma; not getting to the end of the book by the end of the school year isn’t a new phenomenon.

Still, if part of fully educating young people is teaching them the value of perseverance — demonstrating to them that no obstacle is truly insurmountable — there’s no better example than Keller.

Short version: She was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia (the family’s home, Ivy Green, is a tourist attraction today). She was left blind and deaf by an illness at 19 months old, but learned how to communicate through the efforts of teacher Annie Sullivan (events famously documented in the play and film “The Miracle Worker”). She went on to earn a degree from Harvard University, and became an author (12 published books), speaker and activist both for the disabled and politically.

Full disclosure on the latter: Keller was a committed socialist, which is going to set off screaming sirens in the present environment. We hope that didn’t have an impact on the Texas board’s decision.

According to the Dallas Morning News, however, Keller was included in a third-grade lesson about “the characteristics of good citizenship.” The work group that studied that particular part of the curriculum indicated “Helen Keller does not best represent the concept of citizenship. Military and first responders are best represented.”

Students absolutely need to learn to value of military and first responders. If that’s all they’re exposed to, though, the lessons on citizenship will be painfully incomplete.

What Keller accomplished in her life far transcended political philosophies or labels, and remains a powerful example after more than 130 years.

She’s someone students in Texas and elsewhere need to know about.
US students spend more time at jobs than going to class

By Riley Griffin
Bloomberg

Haunted by costly degrees and insurmountable student debt, American college students now spend more time working paid jobs than in lectures, the library or studying at home.

The vast majority of current students—85 percent—work while enrolled, according to an HSBC survey published Thursday. Students spend an average of 4.2 hours a day working paid jobs, which is more than double the time they spend in the library, nearly two hours more than they spend in class and 1.4 hours more time than they spend studying at home.

“The economics of the debt crisis have become a major distraction to students’ education,” said John Hupalo, founder and chief executive officer of Invite Education, an education financial planner. “Students’ first priority should be to get value out of their education, not squeezing out hours at a job in order to make money to sustain that education.”

The HSBC study was conducted by Ipsos MORI, which surveyed 1,507 students aged 18 to 34 currently enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs and 10,478 parents with at least one child aged 23 or younger currently

See JOBS, A7
enrolled at a university. The
survey sample was drawn
from nationally repre-
sentative online panels in 15
countries and territories
from March to April 2018.
The United States spends
more per college student
than nearly every country
in the world, according to a
September report from the
Organization for Economic
Cooperation and Devel-
opment. And the cost of
tuition is at an all-time high,
bringing with it the highest
rate of student loan debt in
history.

Student loans are now the
second-largest category of
U.S. household debt, top-
ning nearly $1.4 trillion,
according to Bloomberg
Intelligence. The burden
is even larger for younger
Americans with entry-level
wages and salaries. Student
loans currently make up 40
percent of all millennial
debt.

Students tend to rack
up personal debt as well,
spending an average of
$4,321 to pay back credit
cards, personal loans and
student debt over the
course of their degree.
That’s nearly $1,000 more
than they spend on aca-
demic books over the same
period, according to the
HSBC report.

American students are
also responsible for fund-
ing a larger portion of their
expenses than students
elsewhere in the world.
American parents fund an
average of $17,314 on tuition
fees, accommodation and
other bills, but students
spend nearly $100,000
while earning a college
degree. That leaves a
funding gap of more than
$80,000.

"The fundamental issue
is that families and stu-
dents don’t have a realistic
knowledge of the actual cost
of an education in advance,”
Hupalo said.

Nearly three in four
American parents rely on
their day-to-day income to
help fund their child’s edu-
cation, rather than resort to
savings or borrowings, the
study shows. Only quar-
ter of parents fund their
child’s savings from a spe-
cific education savings or
investment account, which
is still slightly ahead of the
global average.

But it’s not enough.
Students still report feel-
ing overwhelming anxiety
about their financial situ-
ation and, in turn, their
academic performances. Six
in 10 students said they feel
anxious about their finances
“frequently” or “all the
time,” according to a report
released Tuesday by Chegg,
an education technology
company. And female stu-
dents were 28 percent more
likely than male students
to be stressed by finan-
cial concerns—a statistic in
line with the student debt
gap between women and
men. (Women and people
of color disproportionately
bear the burden of student
loan debt).

“There’s no silver bullet,”
Hupalo said. “Despite these
statistics, many students
are actually handling these
responsibilities well. And
for some, taking on a bit
more paid work could actu-
ally reduce their financial
burden.”
U. of Tennessee Considers a Politically Connected Businessman to Run Its System

By: Lee Gardner

The University of Tennessee is reaching outside academe for an interim leader to guide a system that has been buffeted by controversy.

On Tuesday the president of the Board of Trustees recommended the appointment of Randy Boyd, a businessman and philanthropist with political ambitions, to run the system for up to two years. If approved by the board at a special meeting next week, Boyd would represent a pivot away from traditional academic leadership for the system, at least temporarily, after several years of strife and scandal, especially at the flagship campus, in Knoxville.

A Tennessee alumnus, Boyd has no background as a faculty member or in academic leadership, but he played a key role in Gov. Bill Haslam’s signature higher-education policies. Boyd, who made millions as the owner of a company that makes wireless fences for pets, helped found a scholarship program for high-school students in his native Knoxville that inspired Haslam’s Tennessee Promise, which provides free tuition at community colleges in the state.

Boyd also played key roles in Haslam’s administration, as an unpaid adviser on higher education and as state commissioner of economic development. Boyd ran for governor this year to succeed Haslam, a Republican who has served two terms and was not eligible to run again. Boyd was defeated in the Republican primary last month.

A representative of the system office said Boyd would not be available for comment until after next week’s board meeting.

A ‘UT Guy’

Boyd would take the reins of a system that has been embroiled in a string of controversies, many of them involving the ire of elected officials. The current system president, Joseph A. DiPietro, faced the displeasure of some state lawmakers over a memo, circulated on the Knoxville campus, that called for the use of gender-neutral pronouns, and over the work of its Office for Diversity and Inclusion. DiPietro this week announced his intention to retire in February.

The flagship suffered another PR black eye last year after it tried to hire, then rescinded a job offer to, Greg Schiano, a football coach, after an outcry over his ties to the Sandusky scandal at Pennsylvania State University. This year faculty members have been discomfited by changes in the system’s post-tenure review process, which many see as an attempt to weaken tenure. In May, DiPietro fired Beverly J. Davenport, the chancellor of the Knoxville campus, after she had been on the job just a year.
The board itself is still new. In April, in a controversial move, Haslam reduced its size from 27 members to 12, eliminating the student representative and the faculty representative and naming 10 new trustees, including John Compton, the chair. In a memo recommending Boyd and calling for the special board meeting, Compton wrote that the system needs “an outside-in perspective—someone who could objectively look at all options without any bias” in its interim leader. According to Compton, the system needs to “examine whether there are organizational structures that can elevate our university to even higher levels of academic success.”

Jason Zachary, a Republican state representative whose district is in the Knoxville area, said Boyd is well known throughout the state, and would be “a steadying force” at a time when much of the system’s leadership is new or in flux. Boyd also has the benefit of being “a UT guy,” Zachary said. Tennessee is a conservative, Bible Belt state, and any outsider coming in to lead the system would have to “learn the heritage, the culture, understand the people,” he said. “That will not be an issue for Randy.”

Faculty members have already expressed concern that Boyd doesn’t have any academic-leadership experience, said Misty G. Anderson, a professor of English and president of the Faculty Senate, and that he’s taking the role so soon after running for statewide office. But, she added, Compton’s framing of Boyd’s proposed appointment as a chance for the system to step back and look to improve its management structure “could be a good thing.”

Anderson said any permanent president of the university would need to come from within academe, but she is keeping an open mind about Boyd. And she said she’s encouraged by his demonstrable commitment to higher education and his deep ties to the university.

“As we say around here,” she said, “I think he bleeds orange.”

Lee Gardner writes about the management of colleges and universities, higher-education marketing, and other topics. Follow him on Twitter @lee_g, or email him at lee.gardner@chronicle.com.

Correction (9/20/2018, 10:20 a.m.): Beverly Davenport was the chancellor, not the president, of the Knoxville campus. The text has been corrected.
Behind Your Rising Health-Care Bills: Secret Hospital Deals That Squelch Competition

*Contracts with insurers allow hospitals to hide prices from consumers, add fees and discourage use of less-expensive rivals*

By: Anna Wilde Mathews

Last year, Cigna Corp. and the New York hospital system Northwell Health discussed developing an insurance plan that would offer low-cost coverage by excluding some other health-care providers, according to people with knowledge of the matter. It never happened.

The problem was a separate contract between Cigna and NewYork-Presbyterian, the powerful hospital operator that is a Northwell rival. Cigna couldn’t find a way to work around restrictive language that blocked it from selling any plans that didn’t include NewYork-Presbyterian, according to the people.

Dominant hospital systems use an array of secret contract terms to protect their turf and block efforts to curb health-care costs. As part of these deals, hospitals can demand insurers include them in every plan and discourage use of less-expensive rivals. Other terms allow hospitals to mask prices from consumers, limit audits of claims, add extra fees and block efforts to exclude health-care providers based on quality or cost.

The Wall Street Journal has identified dozens of contracts with terms that limit how insurers design plans, involving operators such as Johns Hopkins Medicine in Maryland, the 10-hospital OhioHealth system and Aurora Health Care, a major system in the Milwaukee market. National hospital operator HCA Healthcare Inc. also has restrictions in insurer contracts in certain markets.

The U.S. spends more per capita on health care than any other developed nation and will soon spend close to 20% of its GDP on health. Americans aren’t buying more health care overall than other countries. What they are buying is increasingly expensive. Among the factors driving spending is the opaque way the price of health care is set, a problem exacerbated by the hidden details in agreements between insurers and health-care providers.

“No hospital system should be able to exercise market power to demand contract agreements that prevent more competitively priced networks,” said Cigna’s chief medical officer, Alan Munev, in a written statement provided by the company. A health plan that excludes a costly system can be more than 10% less expensive for consumers and employers, according to insurance-industry officials. A plan that includes all providers but steers patients away from the costlier ones can save 3% to 7% or more, these people said.

See next page
Restrictive hospital-insurer contracts have helped prevent even big employers, including Walmart Inc. and Home Depot Inc., from moving forward with plans they were exploring to try to lower costs and improve quality for their workers.

A Northwell spokesman said “negotiations and other conversations with our insurers are confidential.” Aurora, which is now part of a larger system called Advocate Aurora Health, said in a statement from Carrie Nelson, a vice president, that it approaches “all of our contracts through the same lens that guides all of our clinical and operational decisions: what will ensure the highest quality of care at the lowest cost for our patients.” HCA said it “provides patient access to health care in a variety of settings and contracts with health-care payers for all of its services and sites of care in the communities it serves.”

NewYork-Presbyterian, Johns Hopkins and OhioHealth declined to comment on their contracts.

Hospital-industry officials said patients should be able to choose their health-care provider without financial pressure from their insurers or employers. Insurers are focused on their bottom lines, not necessarily the best care for patients, they said. “Allowing the patient to make the best decisions for them and their family and their health is the central goal,” said Matt Gove, chief consumer officer at Piedmont Healthcare, a large system in the Atlanta area.

This article is based on dozens of interviews with current and former health-insurance executives, employer executives, hospital officials, researchers and other experts.

Certain hospital systems are able to command advantageous terms because they have grown through years of deal-making, shifting the balance of power between hospitals and insurers. In 2010, the year the Affordable Care Act passed, the annual number of hospital mergers shot up 40% to 59, and the number of deals has remained above 60 every year since, according to Irving Levin Associates, a research firm that tracks health-care transactions.

About 77% of Americans living in metropolitan areas are in hospital markets considered highly concentrated, ranging from Modesto, Calif., to Trenton, N.J., according to a Wall Street Journal analysis of 2016 data from researchers at the University of California, Berkeley. The analysis excluded areas with more than three million people, which economists believe are too large to be considered single markets. “If you’re the single hospital system in an area, you essentially can set your price, because you’re a monopoly,” said Patrick Conway, the chief executive of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. “We literally have to have them in network.” Even in a region with more than one hospital system, “if they are the dominant player in part of the geography, they can charge higher rates,” Mr. Conway said.

Hospital care is the largest single component of health-care spending in the U.S. It accounts for more than $1 trillion a year—roughly three times what is spent annually on prescription drugs,
the third-largest category. The second largest is physician and clinical services, many of which are now provided by hospital systems as well.

Hospital prices grew at about three times the rate of economywide inflation between 1960 and 2016, according to data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Altarum, a nonprofit health systems research and consulting group in Ann Arbor, Mich.

“The marketplace is just not working,” said Gerard Anderson, a health-care economist at Johns Hopkins University. Insurers that must negotiate reimbursement with health-care providers for plans offered by employers pay roughly 50% more than Medicare on average, he said, and those rising costs are “the main culprit for why the U.S. spends so much on health care.”

Hospital-industry officials said that hospital-system consolidation hasn’t driven higher costs, pointing to an industry-funded analysis that said revenue per admission dropped at hospitals that were acquired, compared to non-merging hospitals, a finding that contradicted other studies. “It’s the insurers that retain the greatest leverage,” said Melinda Hatton, general counsel of the American Hospital Association. The hospital association also said that hospitals must rely on private-insurer payments to sustain themselves, because they lose money on uninsured patients and those covered by government programs. Ms. Hatton said hospitals’ mergers aim to reduce expenses and improve quality and efficiency.

The effect of contracts between hospital systems and insurers can be difficult to see directly because negotiations are secret. The contract details, including pricing, typically aren’t disclosed even to insurers’ clients—the employers and consumers who ultimately bear the cost.

Among the secret restrictions are so-called anti-steering clauses that prevent insurers from steering patients to less-expensive or higher-quality health-care providers. In some cases, they block the insurer from creating plans that cut out the system, or ones that include only some of the system’s hospitals or doctors. They also hinder plans that offer incentives such as lower copays for patients to use less-expensive or higher-quality health-care providers. The restrictive contracts sometimes require that every facility and doctor in the contracting hospital system be placed in the most favorable category, with the lowest out-of-pocket charges for patients—regardless of whether they meet the qualifications.

The restrictions in some hospitals’ contracts mean “you must always include them,” said Chet Burrell, former chief executive of CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, which offers coverage in Maryland and the D.C. area. “If their costs are 50% higher for the same service, you have to include them. That cost is directly built into premiums...in the end the buyer of the service pays that.”

Hospital systems with restrictive language in their contracts can also protect their position by limiting rivals’ ability to draw patients based on lower prices, insurance executives said.

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In some cases, contract clauses prevent patients from seeing a hospital’s prices by allowing a hospital operator to block the information from online shopping tools that insurers offer. Because of such restrictions, some health-insurance enrollees can’t find prices for hospital systems, including BJC HealthCare in St. Louis and NewYork-Presbyterian.

The gaps frustrate consumers such as Bob McKitrick, a teacher who lives near St. Louis and has insurance with a $5,400 family deductible. Mr. McKitrick checks prices carefully before getting care, he said, and he finds them for most providers. The website for his insurer, UnitedHealthcare, a unit of UnitedHealth Group Inc., doesn’t include information about hospitals owned by BJC, the parent of the well-known Barnes-Jewish Hospital and 14 others.

“How can we keep costs down if we can’t even get an estimate for care?” he said. “If you’re buying a car, they don’t say, ‘with this one, you won’t know how much it costs until you check out.’ ”

J.C. McWilliams, a vice president at BJC, said insurers’ tools sometimes offer inaccurate information and generally give a narrow picture that doesn’t reflect the total cost of care. Patients can get cost estimates from BJC directly, he said.

Hospital systems have also been snapping up other types of providers, including doctor practices, clinics and outpatient surgery centers, and raising these providers’ prices. A study published in April in the Journal of Health Economics found that doctors’ prices increased on average by 14.1% after they became part of hospital systems.

In many cases, insurer-hospital contracts allow hospitals to move these new acquisitions immediately to the hospitals’ reimbursement rates—which are typically far more generous for the same services. That leads to a fast markup in prices.

In addition, hospitals often receive extra charges, known as “facility fees,” that are supposed to cover the extra costs associated with care given in a hospital setting, including regulatory and safety standards that apply to hospitals. Hospitals can often impose these fees after they acquire an off-site clinic or office.

“It’s just paying more for the same services,” said Mark Weinstein, chief executive of the Independent Colleges and Universities Benefits Association, which provides health coverage for employees at 27 schools in Florida. Last year, the group heard complaints from employees about unexpected extra fees for visits to doctors owned by hospitals, he said. Ultimately, the group began paying the extra cost itself, to spare workers. “Our leverage is little,” he said.

American Hospital Association executive vice president Thomas Nickels said facility fees, which are also paid by Medicare, are needed to cover the extra costs that hospitals must shoulder,
including treating any patient who needs care. “We have far more regulatory requirements, legal requirements, facility and structural requirements” than other providers, he said.

The Justice Department is suing Atrium Health, a system with huge market share in the Charlotte, N.C., area, arguing that the hospital operator “uses its market power to impede insurers from negotiating lower prices with its competitors and offering lower-premium plans.” The California attorney general is suing Sutter Health, a 24-hospital operator in Northern California, citing anticompetitive practices.

Atrium Health said it “has neither violated any law nor deviated from accepted health-care industry practices for contracting and negotiation.” Sutter said “the California Attorney General’s lawsuit gets the facts wrong and mischaracterizes how Sutter Health serves patients and communities.”

Insurer Anthem Inc.’s agreement with NewYork-Presbyterian restricts its ability to exclude the hospital system, which includes the prestigious Columbia University Irving Medical Center and Weill Cornell Medical Center, from its health plans. To help win the New York area business of the Health Transformation Alliance, an employer group, Anthem partnered with a small company called Brighton Health Plan Solutions, which had its own plans that don’t include NewYork-Presbyterian. Simeon Schindelman, chief executive of Brighton, said the company is “very open to strategic alliances that help us bring lower cost, better quality health care to even more families.” Anthem declined to comment on its contracts.

Companies have been thwarted from developing new plans for workers. A few years ago, officials at Home Depot asked Anthem, which administered its coverage, to create a plan for employees around the country with a more-limited network of health-care providers. The retailer wanted to include only hospitals and doctors with the lowest costs and highest-quality care.

The insurer turned down its client’s request, and a major reason was restrictive contracts with hospital systems. A spokeswoman for Home Depot confirmed the account of the situation and declined to comment further.

Officials at Walmart a few years ago asked the insurers that administered its coverage—Aetna Inc., UnitedHealthcare and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield—if the nation’s largest private employer could remove from its health-care networks the 5% of providers with the worst quality performance. The insurers told the giant retailer their contracts with certain health-care providers didn’t allow them to filter out specific doctors or hospitals, even based solely on quality measures.

A spokesman for Walmart confirmed the company had explored such an approach. Aetna, UnitedHealthcare and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield declined to comment.

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Stuart Piltch, chief executive of Cambridge Advisory Group, a health-care consulting and data firm, approached Anthem and UnitedHealthcare a few years ago on behalf of an employer in the Milwaukee region. The employer was considering a network that would let employees pay less out of their pockets if they chose doctors and hospitals selected based on quality and cost for particular types of care.

The insurers said they couldn’t deploy such a plan “due to their contracts with the dominant player, which is Aurora,” Mr. Piltch said, so the employer wasn’t able to move forward. “The free market has been distorted in an unhealthy way,” he said.

Advocate Aurora Health’s Dr. Nelson said in the statement, “We are relentless in our pursuit of high quality and low cost in tandem, not [as] an either/or proposition.”