SPECIAL SECTION:

NELLE HARPER LEE

1926-2016
Stand up, Harper Lee's passing

Harper Lee applauds as the winner of the To Kill A Mockingbird High School Essay Contest is announced in 2004. Lee died Friday at 89, according to publisher HarperCollins and officials in Monroeville. ROBERT SUTTON/STAFF

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Monroeville native, celebrated author dies at 89

By Kendal Weaver
The Associated Press

Harper Lee was an ordinary woman as stunned as anybody by the extraordinary success of "To Kill a Mockingbird."

"It was like being hit over the head and knocked cold," Lee — who died Friday at age 89, according to publisher HarperCollins — said during a 1964 interview, at a time when she still talked to the media.

"I didn't expect the book to sell in the first place. I was hoping for a quick and merciful death at the hands of reviewers but at the same time I sort of hoped that maybe someone would like it enough to give me encouragement."

"To Kill a Mockingbird" may not be the Great American Novel. But it's likely the most universally known work of fiction by an American author over the past 70 years, that rare volume to find a home both in classrooms and among voluntary readers, throughout the country and beyond.

Lee was cited for her subtle, graceful style and gift for explaining the world through a child's eye, but the secret to the novel's ongoing appeal was also in how many books this single book contained.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" was a coming-of-age story, a courtroom thriller, a Southern novel, a period piece, a drama about class, and — of course — a drama of race.

"All I want to be is the Jane

Inside

Hometown of Monroeville became private haven for Lee, A5

Others reflect on the life of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, A8

Austen of South Alabama," she once observed.

The story of Lee is essentially the story of her book, and how she responded to it. She wasn't a bragger, like Norman Mailer, or a misanthrope like J.D. Salinger or an eccentric or tormented genius. She was a celebrity who didn't live or behave like a celebrity. By the accounts

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frequently to the press, wrote about herself and gave speeches, once to a class of cadets at West Point.

But she began declining interviews in the mid-1960s and, until late in her life, firmly avoided making any public comment about her novel or her career. Claudia Durst Johnson, author of a book-length critical analysis of Lee's novel, described her as preferring to guard her privacy "like others in an older generation, who didn't go out and talk about themselves on Oprah or the Letterman show at the drop of a hat." According to Johnson, Lee also complained that the news media invariably misquoted her.

Other than a few magazine pieces for Vogue and McCall's in the 1960s and a review of a 1975 centennial Alabama history book in 1983, she published no other work until stunning the world in 2015 by permitting the novel "Go Set a Watchman" to be released.

"Watchman" was written before "Mockingbird" but was set 20 years later, using the same location and many of the same characters. The tone was far more immediate and starker than for "Mockingbird" and readers and reviewers were disheartened to find an Atticus nothing like the hero of the earlier book. The man who defied the status quo in "Mockingbird" was now part of the mob in "Watchman," denouncing the Supreme Court's ruling that school segregation was unconstitutional and denouncing blacks as unfit to enjoy full equality.

But despite unenthusiastic reviews and questions whether Lee was well enough to approve the publication, "Watchman" jumped to the top of best-seller lists within a day of its announcement and remained there for months. Critics, meanwhile, debated whether "Watchman" would damage Lee's reputation, and the legacy of Atticus as an American saint.

Lee was in the news at other times, not always in ways she preferred. She was involved in numerous legal disputes over the rights to her book and denied she had cooperated with the biography "The Mockingbird Next Door: Life With Harper Lee," by Marja Mills.

Some occasions were happier. She wrote a letter of thanks in 2001 when the Chicago Public Library chose "Mockingbird" for its first One Book, One Chicago program. In 2007, she agreed to attend a White House ceremony at which she received a Presidential Medal of Freedom. Around the same time, she wrote a rare published item — for O, The Oprah Magazine — about how she became a reader as a child in a rural, Depression-era Alabama town, and remained one.

"Now, 75 years later in an abundant society where people have laptops, cellphones, iPods, and minds like empty rooms, I still plod along with books," she wrote.

By 2014, she had given in to the digital age and allowed her novel to come out as an e-book, calling it "Mockingbird" for a new generation.

Born in Monroeville, Nelle Harper Lee was known to family and friends as Nelle (pronounced Nell) — the name of a relative, Ellen, spelled backward. Like Atticus Finch, her father was a lawyer and state legislator. One of her childhood friends was Truman Capote, who lived with relatives next door to the Lees for several years.
Capote became the model for Scout’s creative, impish and loving friend Dill. In the novel, Dill is described as “a pocket Merlin, whose head teemed with eccentric plans, strange longings, and quaint fancies.”

Lee’s friendship with Capote was evident later when she traveled frequently with him to Kansas, beginning in 1959, to help him do research for what became his own bestseller, the “nonfiction” novel “In Cold Blood.” He dedicated the book to her and his longtime companion, Jack Dunphy, but never acknowledged how vital a role she played in its creation.

Charles J. Shields, in the first book-length attempt at a biography of Lee, “Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee,” showed how Lee helped Capote gain entrance to key figures in the murder investigation and provided keen observations and myriad notes that Capote wove into his book. (He also debunked a long-standing rumor that Capote had actually written much of “Mockingbird.”)

In the 2005 film “Capote,” Philip Seymour Hoffman won the best actor Academy Award for his portrayal of Capote struggling with his demons as he works on the book. Catherine Keener was nominated for an Oscar for her portrayal of Lee. The next year, Sandra Bullock took the role of Lee in “Infamous,” with Toby Jones as Capote.

Lee said in the 1960s that she was working on a second novel, but over time it dropped from view and never reached a publisher.

Lee researched another book, a non-fiction account of a bizarre voodoo murder case in rural east Alabama, but abandoned the project in the 1980s.

Lee, who attended Huntingdon College in Montgomery as a freshman, transferred to the University of Alabama as a sophomore, where she wrote and became editor of the campus literary magazine. After studying to be a lawyer like her father and older sister, Lee left the university before graduating, heading to New York to become a writer, as Capote already had done.

Lee worked as an airline reservation clerk in New York City during the early 1950s, writing on the side. Finally, with a Christmas loan from friends, she quit to write full time, and the first draft of “To Kill a Mockingbird” reached its publisher, J.B. Lippincott, in 1957.

The manuscript, according to the publishing house, arrived under the title “Atticus.” The title later became “To Kill a Mockingbird,” referring to an old saying that it was all right to kill a blue jay but a sin to kill a mockingbird, which gives the world its music.

Lee worked with the editor Tay Hohoff in bringing the book to its final form, a period when Lee was scrimping financially and dealing with the difficulties of rewriting.

“Though Miss Lee then had never published even an essay or a short story, this was clearly not the work of an amateur or tyro,” the editor wrote in an account published by Lippincott in 1967. “...She had learned the essential part of her craft, with no so-called professional help, simply by working at it and working at it, endlessly.”

Capote, in a letter to an aunt in July 1959, said that a year earlier Lee “showed me as much of the book as she’d written, and I liked it very much. She has real talent.”

Her novel, while hugely popular, was not ranked by many scholars in the same category as the work of other Southern authors such as Eudora Welty or Flannery O’Connor. Decades after its publication, little was written about it in scholarly journals. Some critics have called the book naïve and sentimental, whether dismissing the Ku Klux Klan as a minor nuisance in Maycomb or advocating change through personal persuasion rather than collective action.

O’Connor, in an October 1960 letter, said, “I think I see what it really is—a child’s book... I think for a child’s book, it does all right.” Decades later, Toni Morrison would call it a “white savior” narrative, “one of those,” she told The Associated Press, expressing a common objection that so many books by white people reduced blacks to passive, secondary roles.

Parallels were drawn between Lee and Margaret Mitchell, another Southern woman whose only novel, “Gone With the Wind,” became a phenomenon made into a beloved movie. But Mitchell’s book romanticized the black-white divide; Lee’s work confronted it, although more gently than novels before and since.
Hometown was refuge of privacy for Lee

By Jay Reeves and Phillip Lucas
The Associated Press

MONROEVILLE — This south Alabama town with a domed courthouse and tree-lined streets served as both a literary inspiration and a place of refuge for “To Kill a Mockingbird” author Harper Lee.

Lee tweaked names and locations in her hometown of Monroeville to come up with the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. The same town appears in her novel “Go Set a Watchman,” released last year.

Residents easily point out locations depicted in both books, including the historic Monroe County Courthouse.

But above all Monroeville was simply home to Lee, who died Friday at age 89. She had lived in an assisted living facility there for years as her health worsened. Two black blows hung on the doors of the old courthouse, which now is a museum, following her death.

Here, before a stroke and failing hearing and eyesight limited her mobility, Lee wasn’t the hermit often depicted by news outlets. Instead, she was the woman in the pew at the First United Methodist Church, the shopper on the bread aisle at the grocery store, the golfer who enjoyed playing a round with sister Alice Finch Lee, who died in 2014 at age 103.

Connie Baggett, who met Lee while working as a newspaper reporter in the region for years, said the author typically was friendly and chatty as long as she knew the conversation wasn’t for an interview.

“She was in no way reclusive. She went golfing, she went to church, she went to parties with friends. She, when she was able, went to the casino in Atmore quite often,” Baggett said Friday. “But she did not like publicity; she didn’t like reporters. She was an intensely private person.”

Neighbors knew all about Lee’s dislike for the media and for surprise visitors, so they would rarely direct outsiders to the red-brick home where she lived with her sister for years when not in New York. People who knew Lee best typically wouldn’t discuss her life out of respect for her wishes and fear of being shut out of a tight loop of friends.

But Lee’s relationship with Monroeville also could be tense. She was known to speak up if she thought someone was trying to appropriate her book or its characters,

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“She was in no way reclusive. She went golfing, she went to church, she went to parties with friends. She, when she was able, went to the casino in Atmore quite often.”
— Connie Baggett

and she had a court fight with the town's museum over its use of “Mockingbird.”

Wayne Flynt, a Lee friend and historian, said those mixed feelings were evident when he visited Lee last week.

“She was coming up on 90 in a couple of months and we talked about her birthday, and I said my wife was going to bring a cake and we were going to put 90 candles on it and burn down the entire town of Monroeville as she tried to blow out the candles,” Flynt said. “She laughed. She chortled. She giggled. Given her love-hate relationship with Monroeville, you can certainly appreciate the possibility of burning down the entire town of Monroeville on her 90th birthday.”

Yet Lee was perfectly at ease and happy during a luncheon held last summer in the days before the release of “Watchman,” said Alabama tourism director Lee Sentell, who attended the event and drove Lee home afterward to The Meadows, the senior center where she lived.

“The thing I remember most is that she was asked whether she expected 'Watchman' to be published and she said, 'Well of course I did, don't be silly,'” Sentell said. “She was in very good form, animated and happy to be around people she knew and liked.”

Monroeville, a city of about 6,300 located 90 miles north of Mobile, is where Lee and childhood friend Truman Capote spent summer days together, much as Lee's character Scout Finch and her friend Dill did. It's also where her father, A.C. Lee, worked as an attorney and became her model for fictional lawyer Atticus Finch.

The town has called itself Alabama's literary capital for years in large part because of their fame, but the entire state claims a share of Lee.

“'To Kill A Mockingbird' has impacted people around the world,” Gov. Robert Bentley said in a statement. “It is because of Harper Lee that the world knows about her special hometown of Monroeville.”
'Mockingbird' impact lives on

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

Shakespeare lamented on the death of a famed man: "The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones."

Yet the pride of Monroeville, Harper Lee, dispelled those fears with her first, and for five decades only, novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird." Lee died in her hometown Friday at age 89.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" flew as a rare masterpiece: a phenomenally popular work encompassing contemptible spirits and saintly virtues, transcending the boundaries of fictional

Online
To see more photos of Harper Lee and the impact of her life, go online to tuscaloosa-sanews.com.

Loosely based on her childhood with lawyer-father Amasa Coleman "A.C." Lee, "Mockingbird" gave us in lawyer Atticus Finch, and his noble, doomed crusade the means and desire to reach toward higher natures.

"Atticus was the face of what could have been," said Rick Bragg, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and writer of creative non-fiction books about his own Alabama soil, including "All Over But the Shoutin,'" "Ava's Man" and "The Prince of Frogtown," and 2009 winner of the Harper Lee Award for the state's Distinguished Writer of the Year.

The plethora of attorneys claiming Atticus as inspiration number beyond counting, including federal judges, law professors, and notables such as Morris Dees, chief trial counsel for the Southern Poverty Law Center.

A 1999 article in the Michigan Law Review read, in part, "No real-life lawyer has done more for the self-image or public perception of the legal

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profession" than Atticus Finch. Law professors have claimed "Mockingbird" a textbook; for many Atticus feels real, transcending fiction.

"Don't get me wrong, there is incredible sadness over the thought that this living history has passed, and that we won't get to look on her face again. But Ms. Lee passed into spirit, passed into legend, long ago," said Bragg, now a professor of writing at the University of Alabama.

"Her book became the best of us; it became the very best of us. It became part of our conscience," he said.

Like Bragg, Tuscaloosa actor and restaurateur Jeff Wilson met the famously private -- not reclusive -- writer just once. While cooking at his old The Globe Restaurant in Northport, he got word someone at table four wanted to speak with the chef. As always with his hands full, Wilson reluctantly walked into the dining area to meet a woman introduced to him as "Ms. Lee."

This was 2004, shortly after Wilson had played Atticus for a second time for Theatre Tuscaloosa; he played the role a third time in the group's fall performance. In June Wilson read from "the book" for the inaugural Alabama Writers Hall of Fame ceremony; Lee was one of the first 12 honorees. She was too ill to attend last year, but in 2004, Lee had quietly slipped into town, as she sometimes did in Tuscaloosa, where she'd attended UA in the 1940s.

Lee had come to see the 2004 production, unknown to him at the time. "She saw it, but nobody knew she saw it. She was just like that. She said I liked the way you portrayed Atticus," which just..." Wilson trailed off into happy laughter. Lee left him a signed copy of "Mockingbird."

"It became bigger than her, is the feeling I always got about it. Everybody made it a part of them," Wilson said. At last fall's production, "...grown men were coming up to me, crying and shaking. The beauty of it is, everyone just makes it their own story."

Bragg's one encounter happened later, at the retirement home in Monroeville where she spent her final years. It came through friendship with Wayne Flynt, the historian and writer, who brought along his wife. When the couple left Lee's room, Bragg said, "She kind of motioned me over: 'There go the only two people from Auburn I've ever liked.'"

Flynt was one of those whose heart was changed by the book, and later, by friendship with Lee. In 1963, when the bomb planted by Ku Klux Klansmen killed four young girls at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, he was in grad school at Florida State University. His fury was incandescent. "I remember leaving our church that Sunday, and I told my wife I didn't know where we would wind up teaching, but I had ruled out one state: I was not going back to Alabama. That was a vow," Flynt said.

In a 2010 story with The Tuscaloosa News about the 50th anniversary of "Mockingbird." Somehow he'd not read the novel to that point; when he did, hope returned. Flynt moved his family back to the state.

"I was just sort of blown away by the book, for someone from Monroeville, down in the Black Belt, a white being sensitive to the black community, preaching tolerance, wrestling with the tensions of the people who lived there, and who understood them, flawed though they were," Flynt said.

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Simple poetry

Beyond its emotional impact, "Mockingbird" reached an ineffable spot with Southerners who recognized the cadences, the quirky characters, the flavors and hues sketched in simple prose, Bragg said. Many favorite passages are sketched in plain but evocative phrasing:

"Atticus put his face in my hair and rubbed it. When he got up and walked across the porch into the shadows, his youthful step had returned. Before he went inside the house, he stopped in front of Boo Radley. "Thank you for my children, Arthur," he said."

or

"I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the blue-jays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

"That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.

"Your father's right," she said. 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

or just

"Hey, Boo."

When Atticus, defeated in court, shuffles out under the balcony where the black people of the community sit, this sweet, famous line happens:

"All around us and in the balcony on the opposite wall, the Negroes were getting to their feet. Reverend Sykes's voice was as distant as Judge Taylor's: 'Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'."

"That sends chills up and down your spine," Bragg said. "That courtroom scene's probably my favorite, although my favorite writing is her simple descriptions of Maycomb....So much of the little things are just achingly Southern."

Here's an example of a passage Bragg loves: "Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostedness of sweat and sweet talcum."

Bragg added: "What I preach in class is color, imagery and detail. Those make the story go down, like peppermint in a homemade cough remedy. You would not call it fancy writing, just a gold standard to shoot for."
“Watchman” controversy

Flynt was among the friends insisting Lee remained mentally keen even as her physical health declined, when controversy arose over the publication of “Go Set a Watchman.” As an earlier draft of “Mockingbird,” the manuscript had been shelved, virtually buried, for decades. Some feared unscrupulous vultures had pushed a much-awaited second book out, without Lee’s consent.

But those who actually knew her said differently. Cathy Randall, chairman of the board of Tuscaloosa-based Pettus Randall Holdings LLC and former chairman of the board of Randall Publishing Company, befriended Lee when the two were honored in the class of UA’s top 31 women graduates of the 20th century.

“... She was absolutely delighted with the publication of ‘Watchman,’” Randall said.

The idea that Lee was slipping mentally is ridiculous, she said, noting that the author attended a production of “King Lear” a few months back, at Montgomery’s Alabama Shakespeare Festival, “... and recited it along with the cast.

“Sharp? Absolutely. What she’d want us to do was look at her work, her remarkable work, as a testimony to her life,” Randall said.

Andy Crank, UA assistant professor of American literature, has spoken about the second, though first-written, Lee novel to international media including the BBC, and published an article about it the Los Angeles Review of Books, titled “Unkillable Mockingbird.” What struck him was how “unapologetically individual” Lee was, right down to her decision to release “Watchman.”

“She did a lot of things that were so brave, for a woman in her position,” Crank said. From what he hears of Lee’s college years at UA and other youthful days, she “never stuck with the Southern belle stereotype. She would cuss like a sailor, drink; wouldn’t wear what everyone else is wearing. And it was so brave of her to publish this book that no one asked for, that upset a lot of people.”

As opposed to mental deterioration, Crank sees “Watchman” as a sign Lee remained iconoclastic, intellectually rigorous to the end.

“I think she wanted us to go back, figure out what our investment was in the figure of Atticus Finch, who that person was, and why that was so powerful,” he said. “I think this was Harper Lee saying, ‘Go back and read this novel again.’”

Equally unlikely, and unusual, was that the 1962 film of “To Kill a Mockingbird”, with screenplay by Horton Foote. It became almost as beloved as the book. Like many, Crank first came to Maycomb through the movie, but thinks, while it’s a sterling adaptation, the movie glosses over some of the novel’s complexities.

“I call it the Gregory Peckification of Atticus,” he said, laughing. “He looks so much like Clark Kent in that movie, I can’t help thinking he’s going to pull off his shirt and fly. He’s a moral paragon beyond compare...but we’ve got to remember this story is being told through the eyes of Scout.”

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Never again

The phenomenon of the novel’s sales, the well-done movie, its impact on the legal profession, and the hearts of readers, is unlikely to ever happen again, said Don Noble, host of literary series “Bookmark” on Alabama Public Television, and a scholar specializing in American and Southern literature.

“It had the right degree of intensity on racial matters, at the right moment,” he said. “In the ‘60s, it was all people could stand, but it was enough. If it had been more shrill, more insistent, it would not have been as successful. It hit at the moment when people were sensitive to racial issues, but weren’t yet ready to hear from Malcolm X or the Black Panthers.”

The diversification, fragmentation and formatting of arts and entertainment in recent decades precludes chances of such another watercooler hit happening, he said.

“There was a day when, if everybody in America watched Ed Sullivan on Sunday night, everybody talked about Ed Sullivan on Monday. If Elvis or The Platters had a hit, everybody knew that music,” he said. “Now there are 15 kinds of music, and people listen to (one) kind of music.

“One of the things ‘Mockingbird’ had was the universality: Everybody read the book, everybody saw the movie, everybody talked about it.”

Although the book, on release, did not strike then 20-year-old Noble as a personal revelation, he’s heard that statement often enough to believe it.

“...That book touched and changed thousands of people,” he said. “It’s a phenomenon; it cannot be denied in any way. You could find fault in small ways, but its effect cannot be denied.”

Bragg felt that magic.

“It’s not just a great morality play. It’s a great book. It’s a great read,” he said. “I really just can’t think of a better book that combines story and sermon in the best way, in the very best way. I’m honored that we come from more or less the same dirt.

“If our books mean something to somebody, then we win. And who won more than her?”
LAID TO REST

Author Harper Lee buried in Monroeville

Friends and family of author Harper Lee leave the First United Methodist Church after a private funeral Saturday in Monroeville. Lee, the elusive author of best-seller "To Kill a Mockingbird," died Friday, according to her publisher Harper Collins. She was 89. AP PHOTO/KIM CHANDLER

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONROEVILLE — The author of the America classic "To Kill a Mockingbird" was laid to rest Saturday, in a private ceremony attended by only the closest of friends and family, a reflection of how she had lived.

Harper Lee, who died Friday at age 89, was eulogized at a church in the small Alabama town of Monroeville, which the author used as a model for the imaginary town of Maycomb, the setting of Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

A few dozen people who comprised Lee's intimate circle gathered at the First United Methodist Church to hear a eulogy Saturday by her longtime friend and history professor, Wayne Flynt. Afterward, her casket was taken by silver hearse to an adjacent cemetery where her father, A.C. Lee and sister, Alice Lee, are buried.

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Flynt, a longtime friend of Lee, said he delivered a eulogy that Lee specifically requested years ago. Entitled, "Atticus inside ourselves," the eulogy was written by Flynt for a speech that he gave in 2005 as a tribute to Lee when she won the Birmingham Pledge Foundation Award for racial justice.

Flynt said Lee liked the speech so much that she wanted him to give it as her eulogy.

"I want you to say exactly that," Flynt quoted Lee as saying at the time. "Not one thing more, and not one thing less."

"If I decended one degree, I would hear this great booming voice from heaven, and it wouldn't be God," Flynt said in an earlier interview.

Details of the service were fiercely guarded. Lee had wanted a quick and quiet funeral without pomp or panache, family members said.

"We obeyed her wishes," said Jackie Stovall, Lee's second cousin.

The town was appropriately somber a day after their native daughter's death.

Ann Mote, owner of the Ol' Curiosities & Book Shoppe in Monroeville, said she thinks the town will always be linked to Lee.

Jared Anton, of Hollywood, Florida, sat outside the old courthouse in Monroeville during part of planned vacation through the South that coincided with Lee's death.

Anton said reading the book — in which attorney Atticus Finch defends a wrongly accused African-American man — was one reason he decided to become a lawyer.

"It had an impact on me when I was younger. I wanted to do the right thing, to stand up to people, to defend the innocent if you will," Anton said. "It is the greatest American novel. Name one that really has had more of an impact on Americans than that book."

Mockingbirds chirped and frolicked among blooming camellia bushes outside the courthouse on a warm Alabama morning that teased the early arrival of spring.

The courthouse was where Lee as a child, like her creation Scout Finch, would peer down from the balcony as her father tried his cases in the courtroom.

The southern town was home to childhood friends Truman Capote and Lee, giving rise to its self-given nickname of the literary capital of the South.

"She's a part of it and always will be," Mote said.

Tributes to Lee's novel dot the town. The courthouse is a museum that pays homage to her creation.

There's the Mockingbird Inn on the edge of town and a statute of children reading, "Mockingbird" in the courthouse square.

Tickets for the city's annual "Mockingbird" play go on sale in a week for the city's annual "To Kill a Mockingbird" play, Mote said. A black mourning bow and the top of the sign at the bookstore, where a stack of hardcopy "Mockingbird" books sat the counter along with a DVD of the movie.

The town this summer had a celebration for the release of "Go Set a Watchman" — Lee's initial draft of the story that would become "Mockingbird" — even though many residents had ambivalent feelings about its release.

Lee was largely unseen in her hometown in recent years, as she first sought privacy and then was secluded at an assisted living home. Security guards would shoo away the inevitable mix of reporters, curious onlookers and old acquaintances who were not on her list of approved visitors.

"You would see her around, but still we would honor her wishes of being a very private person. The impact from now forward, I think for the next few weeks we'll have an influx of people here just looking around and at some point — like when anybody passes away — at some point it just returns back to normal," said Tim McKenzie, chairman of the museum's board of directors who also acts in the play.

McKenzie said the best way fans can honor the author's memory is by applying the values in Mockingbird to the way they treat others.
Harper Lee, the elusive author whose "To Kill a Mockingbird" became an enduring best seller and classic film with its child's-eye view of racial injustice in a small Southern town, died Friday morning. She was 89. AP file

OUR VIEW

Harper Lee showed the world the true Alabama

The world lost a literary icon last week. • Nelle Harper Lee died at the age of 89 in Monroe County, Alabama, the place she immortalized as the fictional Maycomb County in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird." • Lee will be remembered as a national treasure, a master of Southern style, a literary enigma and the defining voice of Alabama.
In her fictional world, Lee brought to life a cast of characters that perfectly captured the idiosyncrasies of the South. From Mrs. Hancock to Tom Robinson, Dill Harris to Robert Ewell, Lee avoided the rote caricatures that comprised the world's impression of Alabama, offering instead a community filled with laughter, frustration, lust, hopes, fears, gossip and honor. She gave us the Finch family. She gave us Atticus.

While George Wallace's cries for permanent segregation captured national media attention, Atticus Finch offered us an alternative: a voice of moral courage, of civility, of hope and salvation.

Lee presented a complex South.

It's an important counterweight, one Alabama may not have earned, but one that offers a much richer discussion to the world. Students of history will learn about Alabama's legacy as the first capital of the Confederacy and as the bloody birthplace of the civil rights movement. But students of literature will learn about Alabama: a place rooted in traditions that could alternately promote civility and hostility, danger and grace.

It's a place Lee may have once longed to escape — she lived much of her life in New York City — but it's a place she felt called to return to in her writing and, later, in her life.

We are indebted to Harper Lee for her role in shaping Alabama's literary legacy. We are also indebted to her for challenging us to consistently revisit and reflect on a period of our past that would be easy to turn away from in shame. It's in that reflection that we grow and move forward.

Just last year, Lee's long-forgotten, original manuscript, "Go Set a Watchman," was published. Its publication was controversial, but it offered readers the chance to revisit familiar characters and study them through more mature eyes. It's been described as a messy draft; but then, the truth is often messy.

It is a testament to the strength of Lee's writing and her deep Southern roots that a book authored 50 years ago could feel so relevant to 21st-century readers. It would be easy — and for some, comforting — to hold her in our collective memory as the creator of the virtuous, iconic Atticus Finch; but by fleshing out her icon, she imparted another important lesson: that flawed people can aspire to moral greatness, and that our heroes can carry flaws of their own.

In a culture increasingly quick to categorize celebrities, politicians and each other in easily defined boxes of "good" and "bad," Atticus Finch reminds us of the complexity and frailty of our heroes. That lesson paves the path to examine other heroes — and even villains like Wallace — of American history and politics through a similar lens.

Above all else, Harper Lee reminded us that "there's only one kind of folks ... folks."
Monroeville inspired, sheltered Pulitzer-winning author

Editor's note: The interviews for this story were conducted several years ago by Connie Baggett, then a longtime Mobile Press-Register reporter, with the understanding that the recollections about Harper Lee would be published after her death.

Connie Baggett AL.com

MONROEVILLE — Through the years, the town that most agree inspired the setting of "To Kill a Mockingbird" both revered and revered Nelle Harper Lee. But whatever their opinions, people here rallied around her, protecting her privacy with unwavering resolve.

Many grew weary of reporters arriving in their midst seeking information about her.

For decades after the novel became a best-seller, Lee herself declined interviews, often with by means of "holl no" scrawled in capital letters on the written requests from far and wide.

In the modern era, businesses with Mockingbird-inspired themes abound in Monroeville, as do public murals depicting its scenes and characters. If the book caused embarrassment early on, it was long ago embraced as an economic boon.

Two of those who knew her well — and kindly shared their recollections and insights for this story — are two men who were among her pastors at Monroeville First United Methodist, Tommy Lane Butts and Lance Moore.

Butts said that he and Lee became good friends back about 1988. They'd had lunch while he was visiting Alice Lee, the author's older sister and celebrated lawyer, while she was at a hospital recovering from illness.

Butts would spend a month each summer in New York as a guest speaker at Christ Church UMC. Lee, meanwhile, also enjoyed summers in the big city, living in a rent-controlled apartment that cost her $400 a month.

They'd meet up, said Butts, for excursions to museums, restaurants, ball games and cemeteries, even to Atlantic City. Lee enjoyed finding the graves of famous people, he said. At one such grave, he said, they picnicked.

Once, he said, "She asked me, 'Why do you think I've never written anything else? I said, 'I guess you didn't want to compete with yourself.' She said, 'Bull.' I said, Well, OK ... tell me then.' She said, 'I would not for any amount of money go through what I did with all the publicity that followed Mockingbird.'"

Butts said that Lee turned down an offer to allow a remake of the movie, explaining to him that she didn't need the money.

Money, in fact, was something that she faithfully gave away, he said, tithe to the church and quietly helping those in need. She did it, he said, "without anybody knowing it."

They never argued theology, Butts said, although she once chastised him for labeling her "conservative." She made it clear that she was "an independent," he said.

She favored the King James Version of the Bible for the beauty of the language, he said.

After her recovery from a 2007 stroke, Butts said, he regularly drove her to Atmore to play the bingo machines at Wind Creek casino.

But she never liked "people praying over her or for me to bring communion," he said.

Lee's public appearances through the years were relatively few in number. She accepted literary tributes and honorary degrees, but also turned out for children's plays.

Said Moore, "She knew not too much fame came of fame, and she showed wisdom in the way she lived her life. I think the national media was somewhat frustrated by her. She softened some in her old age, but she had strong personal convictions that never wavered."

Moore, an author himself, said that Lee did talk about other writing that she was undertaking.

He said that visitors would come to Monroeville First UMC on occasion trying to spot Lee in the congregation. Mary Badham, the actress who years before played Scout in the movie adaptation, was one of them.

"The best I could tell," Moore said, "people left her alone ... Townspeople respected her privacy and there were not many recent photographs, so she could come and go pretty much anonymously."

Moore recalled one evening when Lee attended a small Bible study. The teacher that night was an English teacher at school, and acknowledged Lee's attendance, saying that she enjoyed guiding students into "To Kill a Mockingbird."

The compliment pleased Lee, Moore said.

As a guest at his home for dinner, however, Lee was more interested in discussing "children, gardening and cats with my wife than any intellectual discourse with me," he said.

Still, "when it came to literature, it was clear she was one of the best-read, most knowledgeable people I ever met," he said.

Lee lived in Monroeville for good once her sister Alice became ill and needed help. She'd eat breakfast each morning at the same fast-food place. By noon, she could be seen picking up Alice from the law firm founded by their father.

As some acknowledge, Lee could be prickly. When the local museum director published a collection of recipes under the title "Calpurnia's Cookbook," Lee took offense and ordered the books off shelves. She was likewise incensed when some of the $18 "To Kill a Mockingbird" copies that she autographed for sale in local shops wound up at auction online for hundreds of dollars each.

Lee was quick to blast reporters for invading her privacy, and some were intrusive enough to knock on her door during her afternoon nap time. Given her desire to be left to her own life, friends said, she was well-justified.

Having battled back from several health issues, Lee eventually made her home at an assisted living center. There was no special security or guard to keep people away, but there was no need.

In Monroeville, people who knew which center it was wouldn't say, at least not to strangers.
Harper Lee died on Feb. 19 at the age of 89. Though she never earned a degree from The University of Alabama, she has always held a presence on our campus. When she attended in 1946, she served as an editor for the Rammer-Jammer – a humor magazine – and wrote a column appropriately titled “Caustic Comments” for The Crimson White.

Lee’s voice was heard then, and it is heard now. Her novel “To Kill a Mockingbird” has established itself as a staple of American literature that nearly every school aged child reads today. Through her writing, she stood out as a voice not only for the state of Alabama, but for our university as well, heard loud and clear amid the racial turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. The CW Editorial Board certainly feels the impact of our alumna and mourns her death.

In the wake of this momentous loss, a petition emerged to rename Morgan Hall for Nelle Harper Lee. The Crimson White Editorial Board is proud to support this position.

John Tyler Morgan is possibly one of the most despicable people whose name is displayed on a university building, and he has some stiff competition for that title. He was a strong proponent for Alabama’s secession from the union, a decision that obliterated the economy, the natural resources and the lives of tens of thousands of Alabamians. He succeeded in curtailing the voting rights of black Americans, served as a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, and argued for the forced deportation of black Southerners.

His name is a disgrace to the English department housed inside Morgan Hall. His name is a disgrace to the students, faculty and staff of all colors who have to pass through its doors. His name is a disgrace to a campus striving to re-define itself as an inclusive, national academic power.

On the contrary, Nelle Harper Lee is an inspiration to millions across the state, the South, the country and the world. She moved the needle of public opinion in this state and nationwide towards more progressive positions on race, class, criminal justice and rural life. Most importantly to the residents of Morgan Hall, she is by any measure of commercial or critical success one of the greatest writers in the English language, and one of the most remarkable alumni of this university. She is a writer whose name could remind students who enter that building that they too can write the next great American novel.

John Tyler Morgan’s name only reminds students of terrorism.

The choice is easy, and it’s long past time for change.

*Our View is the consensus of The Crimson White Editorial Board*
OUR VIEW

Nelle Harper Lee, a gift to the world

Maybe Harper Lee's death Friday doesn't fit the literal definition of a tragedy. Lee lived 89 days short of 90 years — a full, rich and completed life. We know of nothing she left undone.

Yet millions of people have heavy hearts, many have shed a tear, since learning of Lee's passing.

She was born and died in Monroeville, so Alabamians feel a special loss. However, she was a friend, heroine and role model to close to three generations — not just in the United States, but around the planet — even if they never stood in the same postal code or breathed the same air.

Such is the power — both raw and staying — of Lee's gift to the world in 1960: "To Kill a Mockingbird."

The novel, her first, was commercially successful. It has sold more than 40 million copies worldwide, been translated into 40 languages and was adapted into a 1962 film that garnered an Academy Award for Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch, the book's hero.

It was artistically successful. Lee won the Pulitzer Prize for literature, and "Mockingbird" is a regular on "best books of all time" and "you need to read this before you die" lists.

It has garnered enough respect from educators to be a regular part of school English curricula.

However, none of that truly defines the impact of "Mockingbird."

We're not going to detail the plot for the uninitiated, other than to say it deals with a young girl coming of age in rural Alabama during the Great Depression, who's confronted with the brutality of racial inequality during the Jim Crow days.

The first part has been an eternal topic for authors; few handled it better than Lee, probably because her story was so autobiographical. "Mockingbird" was released just at the right time — the early days of the civil rights movement — to deal with the second part. We imagine it's a major reason the book caused such a stir and was greeted so receptively. The fact that those issues remain unresolved after 60 years has kept it fresh.

Lee's mystique also helped keep "Mockingbird" alive. A private person, she never granted an interview after 1964, although she circulated in Monroeville (she split time between there and New York) and attended public events and awards ceremonies. She's a member of the Alabama Academy of Honor and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and National Medal of Arts.

It appeared "Mockingbird" would be her only published novel, until the release of "Go Set a Watchman," an apparent first draft of "Mockingbird" found in a safe deposit box. Promoted as a sequel, it attracted much attention.

"Watchman" is just a footnote in Lee's life, though. "Mockingbird" has carried her into history and will keep her name alive through the centuries.

Her gift is eternal and enduring. Godspeed to her.

— A version of this editorial first appeared in The Gadsden Times.
Petition seeks to honor ‘Mockingbird’ author

Some UA students want Morgan Hall renamed

Staff report

On Friday, within hours of the news that Pulitzer Prize-winning author Harper Lee had died, a petition was started to rename the building housing the English department at the University of Alabama in her honor.

The petition started on the site Change.org by a UA student calls for Morgan Hall to be renamed Lee Hall after the UA alumna and author of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” who died Friday at 89. As of Monday afternoon, the petition had more than 2,000 supporters. The petition argues the move is a chance to show university support for racial equality while honoring Lee’s legacy.

“Lee was doubtless the university’s greatest contribution to literature, and it would be more than fitting for our English building to bear her name, which reflects so much more accurately the values of the University of Alabama, than that of white supremacist John Tyler Morgan,” the petition reads.

Morgan, an outspoken white supremacist, was a Confederate officer and later a U.S. senator.

The university said it was aware of the petition on Monday.

“We share in the respect and admiration for Ms. Lee. She was one of our own, and she will continue to serve as an inspiration for many generations. In the past, buildings on our campus have been named for men and women whose contributions to the university and society were viewed through the context of the times they lived. Their history does not define us. Rather, it informs us and moves us forward,” the university said in a statement released Monday.

The university indicated the topic would be heard as part of the strategic planning process. However, the decision on renaming campus buildings ultimately resides with the UA System board of trustees.

UA replaced Morgan’s portrait in the building with an exhibit from a collection of African-American art in December. Changing building names or at least acknowledging their namesake’s racist history has been part of ongoing discussions about inclusion and diversity on campus in recent years.
Renaming building for Lee a good idea

Within hours of Harper Lee's death on Friday, a University of Alabama student launched a petition to re-name Morgan Hall for her. We like the idea.

Lee, famous and revered for her seminal novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," was a University of Alabama graduate.

Morgan Hall, which houses the university's English department, is named for John Tyler Morgan, who rose from a private in the Confederate Army to the rank of general, practiced law in Selma when the war ended, served six terms as a U.S. senator and played a leading role in U.S. foreign policy — he was the driving force behind the Panama Canal. Morgan left a lasting imprint on our world.

Unfortunately, he was also grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama — a lifelong segregationist who took pride in fueling racial strife for political gain. He was relentless in his efforts to deny minorities voting rights and was among the Southern leaders most responsible for establishing the "Jim Crow" era.

The petition declares that Lee is the university's greatest contribution to literature and that the English building should bear the name of a person who better reflects the values of the university than a white supremacist.

By Tuesday afternoon, the petition had nearly 2,500 supporters.

The matter will likely be subject to the university's strategic planning process, but ultimately it will be up to the UA System board of trustees to decide whether the building should be renamed.

"We share in the respect and admiration for Ms. Lee. She was one of our own, and she will continue to serve as an inspiration for many generations. In the past, buildings on our campus have been named for men and women whose contributions to the university and society were viewed through the context of the times they lived. Their history does not define us. Rather, it informs us and moves us forward," the university said in a statement released Monday.

In December, Robert Olin, dean of the UA College of Arts and Sciences, decided to remove Morgan's portrait from Morgan Hall at the request of the Department of English. The decision was welcomed by those who have called for renaming any classroom buildings named for someone with a racist past, or at minimum installing markers acknowledging that racism.

UA should tread carefully here — establishing a commission to consider name changes and other options on a case-by-case basis would be one possibility.

But renaming Morgan Hall after Lee seems like an easy decision. Few, if any, Alabama alumnae have had such a positive and lasting social impact as Lee. Her example is worth honoring and should be held up to students as a contribution worth emulating.

The discussion about whether buildings should be named for known racists from long ago has gone on for a while. Renaming Morgan Hall would not be a knee-jerk reaction. The trustees should move to replace Morgan's name with Lee's. The action would go a long way in demonstrating the university's commitment to moving forward.
FEBRUARY 26, 2016

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
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State college officials defend naming buildings after Shelby

Howard Koplowitz  hkoplowitz@al.com

Throughout the campaign, most of the four Republican challengers to U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., have launched a common criticism against the man they want to replace: that it was inappropriate for him to secure hundreds of millions of federal dollars for Alabama universities for campus buildings that were then named after the senator.

To the University of Alabama System, Auburn University and the University of South Alabama — the beneficiaries of the federal money — not only is that criticism unfair, but the engineering, science and technology facilities they were able to build with the federal funds helped them attract higher quality students and faculty. Such investments in infrastructure are a boon to Alabama's economy, they said.

"It has been about more than constructing, research and classroom buildings on campuses. From my perspective, those funds that Sen. Shelby brought to the state of Alabama were, in effect, over the last decade building a foundation for the economic future of our state," said Dr. Robert Witt, chancellor of the University of Alabama System and a former president of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. "We want to be universities that attract the best and brightest. If you want to compete with outstanding students, you need excellent academic programs, outstanding faculty and outstanding facilities. He's helped us put in place the outstanding facilities."

Witt said a good analogy for what the new building does for the school academically to its investment in a state-of-the-art practice facility for UA's football team, which head coach Nick Saban said was needed to help Alabama compete for national championships.

Dr. David Johnson, provost and senior vice president of academic affairs for USA, said its $40 million Shelby Hall, which includes the Senator Richard C. and Dr. Annette N. Shelby College of Engineering and School of Computer and Information Sciences, helps attract students and faculty to the campus.  File
Dr. David Johnson, provost and senior vice president of academic affairs for USA, said its $50 million Shelby Hall, which includes the Senator Richard C. and Dr. Annette N. Shelby College of Engineering and School of Computer and Information Sciences, is a recruiting pitch — except in this case attracting students and faculty instead of blue-chip football prospects.

"We now attract, and retain, faculty members that previously would have been off limits for us," Johnson said in an email. "We certainly show off Shelby Hall to new recruits and many indicate that the quality of the facilities factored into their decisions to come to USA. We recently hosted a delegation from another university's college of engineering who specifically came to see our building to get good ideas for their own building design."

Shelby's campaign and the university officials said the senator did not request that his name be put on the buildings or make dedications to him a condition of funding. In some cases, that decision was reached by the board of trustees or another university body with no input from the senator.

Auburn University President Jay Gogue said the senator told him "it's not about the buildings, it's what comes out of the buildings." By that measure, Gogue said, the $30 million the senator secured for the Senator Richard C. and Dr. Annette N. Shelby Center for Engineering Technology has been a success.

SIGNOS OF PROGRESS
Before the building was erected, Auburn had 4,000 engineering students. Today, there are about 6,000, and the average ACT score of incoming freshman as a whole have increased from 24 to 27.8 over the last nine years.

The University of Alabama, UAH abd UAB have made similar progress since Shelby secured funding.

Before the first component of the Shelby Hall Research Center went up in the fall of 2012, UA had about 1,200 undergraduate students in the College of Engineering. This fall, it had about 5,300. And the number of national merit scholars from the college have more than doubled from the 22 in the fall of 2012.

Since the Shelby Center for Science and Technology was erected at UAH in 2007, undergraduate engineering enrollment at the school increased 50 percent.

And since the $70 million Richard C. and Annette N. Shelby Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Building was established at UAB in 2006, the school's $50 million in National Institutes of Health research funding ranks in the top 10 nationally among public schools.

"I can understand people maybe fussing about someone's name or whatever on a building. I have worked in higher education for a long time... Sen. Shelby invests the time, he spends time with us on campus," Gogue said. "He comes and interacts with students, interacts with faculty. It is not part common for a U.S. senator to come to your campus on a recurring basis and to really interact with students and faculty."

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

What is common, Gogue said, is dedicating buildings to major supporters of a university.

But there is a difference between naming buildings after someone who contributed their personal wealth to a university and a senator who secured taxpayer money for that purpose.

Scott Swenson, spokesman for the Washington-based Common Cause, argued that the universities should have been more cautious to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

"Naming buildings after a public servant who is still in office and in a position to influence appropriations may not be illegal, but it doesn't feel right to voters. True leaders should prevent even these unseemly appearances of influence peddling," Swenson said. "The naming of a building raises a perfectly reasonable question as to whether the university, or other contributor, is attempting to curry favor with a Senator that sits on a powerful appropriating committee. Voters should be making decisions based on each candidate's record in office. While not a scandal, this does nothing restore people's faith in congress, either."

Witt disputed that characterization, pointing out that public universities have limited options for capital construction: gifts, donations and taxpayer money.

He added that the state government in Montgomery has only provided funds for capital construction in one of the last 13 budget proposals, meaning public universities throughout the state have to rely on federal money.

"Naming the building after Shelby was doing what is done normally. There was nothing unique or special about it," said Witt, a former president at the University of Texas at Arlington who noted that the Lyndon Johnson Center for Public Affairs at UT was named while the ex-president, who directed federal resources to the school as a senator, was still alive. "This is something that's happened literally over the country."

Johnson, the USA provost, said any criticism is unwarranted.

"In my view, the building would not have been built without Sen. Shelby's commitment to support the state of Alabama and the University of South Alabama in particular, and given his support I think it appropriate that the university honor him in this way," he said.

"His commitment to helping the state and the university become competitive in engineering and science education is commendable. In my opinion, it was fitting that the University of South Alabama named Shelby Hall after him."
McMurray named Member of the Year

Kimberly McMurray of Ward Scott Architecture was named the 2015 Charles H. Land Member of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

The chamber recognized her and other volunteers at its 115th annual celebration Thursday evening at the Bryant Conference Center.

McMurray of Ward Scott Architecture received the chamber’s highest honor individual honor and was cited for her involvement with the organization that started as a Chamber ambassador and later a range of leadership roles. She now serves on the chamber’s board of directors and its Education Policy Council. She also is immediate past chair of the organization’s Women’s Division.

McMurray is a 2013 graduate of Leadership Tuscaloosa and now chairs the program. She is also active within the Leadership Tuscaloosa Alumni Association. She also has served as project manager for the design of the new Edge facility, which is nearing construction.

“Kimberly sets the standard for active engagement in the Chamber,” said a statement from Jim Page, the chamber’s president and CEO. “We are extremely fortunate that she gives so much of her time and attention to the important work of this organization.”

In other chamber awards:
- The Robert Tanner Corporate Service Award was presented to WVUA-TV. The award is the chamber’s highest corporate honor and recognizes exceptional community service.

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MCMURRAY
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charitable, volunteer and philanthropic service by a corporate entity in the Tuscaloosa County/West Alabama region.

WVUA was honored for its service to the local community as a go-to source for local news and information, as well as a resource for local programming such as their Featured Teacher segment and Law Call. The station gives back to non-profit organizations through consistent promotion, and also serves as a training ground for aspiring journalists through the University of Alabama, the chamber said in its presentation.

The Chairman’s Leadership Award was presented to Robert E. Witt, chancellor of the University of Alabama System. He was cited for his previous tenure as president of the University of Alabama and his effort there to make the Tuscaloosa University one of the fastest growing public research universities in the country.

The award is given to an individual who has provided extraordinary leadership and service to the community, the chamber said and it noted Witt’s impact on Tuscaloosa County and the state has reached beyond his leadership roles in higher education.

He is past chairman of the chamber board and chaired its Working As I 1 capital campaign in 2012.

The Minority Business Council Trailblazer Awards were presented to Fitzgerald Washington, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Labor and a past chairman of the chamber, and Verta Barr-Meherg, the first woman to chair the chamber and the Alabama Automobile Dealers Association.

Annette Smallwood of Chick-fil-A of Northport was named the chamber’s Ambassador of the Year. She was cited for her service to and on behalf of the chamber’s membership. The Ambassadors are the Chamber’s official hosts for all functions.

Three Distinguished Service Awards were presented to Judy Graham of the Alabama Department of Commerce; Bruce Henderson of Phelps, Jenkins, Gibson & Fowler; and Cal Holt of Knight Sign Industries.

The annual celebration also marked the transition to the chamber’s leadership as Dan Blakley of Regions Bank assumed the 2016 chairman’s position from 2015 chairman Norman Crow of D.T. & Freight Co.
LEGISLATURE

Senate OKs budget with cuts to Medicaid

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — The Alabama Senate on Thursday approved a lean general fund budget that would mean cuts in Medicaid services — and halt a long-planned reform to managed care — if it wins final approval.

Senators approved the $1.8 billion appropriations bill on a 24-10 vote, sending it to the Alabama House to start what is expected to be a lengthy negotiation.

The Senate-passed budget provides level-funding to most agencies, including Medicaid. It does not provide the additional $100 million that Medicaid Commissioner Stephanie Azar said was needed to maintain services and continue a transition to a managed care system.

Sen. Trip Pittman, chairman of the Finance and Taxation General Fund Committee, said he thought it was important to “frame the debate” around Medicaid.

“Medicaid is an important part of our health care system and we’re going to have to decide how we are going to find additional funding for Medicaid or suffer the catastrophic consequences of cutting $100 million and also taking off the table the waiver,” Pittman said during the debate.

Pittman said it was impossible to provide the additional money to Medicaid without deep cuts that would “cannibalize” other state agencies for the sake of Medicaid.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid this year approved Alabama’s waiver request to alter its Medicaid program from the traditional fee-for-service health care delivery model to managed care. That would involve 11 regional care organizations providing care and case management services for patients. Alabama

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promised in the agreement to maintain adequate funding for Medicaid.

Sen. Rodger Smitherman, a Democrat from Birmingham, said he feared the Medicaid reductions could become reality, a view shared by advocacy groups for the poor.

"Medicaid insures many of the most vulnerable Alabamians: children, seniors, and people with disabilities. As the budget debate goes forward, we hope lawmakers will be careful not to send patients a message that their basic health care could be at risk," Arise Citizens' Policy Project executive director Kimble Forrister said in a statement.

Legislators have so far rejected a proposal by Gov. Robert Bentley to shift some education dollars to the more cash-strapped general fund.

Senators also rejected a proposal to restore a 2 percent pay raise for state employees that Bentley had sought. Senators tabled the proposal on an 18-14 vote after senators raised concerns about affording the raise in a budget struggling to fund agencies.
Mercedes led state in auto exports in 2015

Total topped $7 billion last year

Staff report

China was the top export market for Alabama vehicles, growing nearly 9 percent to $2 billion. Canada fell to second place, according to trade data from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Germany, Mexico and the United Kingdom rounded the top five for buyers of Alabama vehicles, with also include Hondas made in Lincoln and Hyundais made in Montgomery.

Rapid growth in overseas shipments has propelled Alabama to a No. 3 spot ranking auto-exporting states, trailing only Michigan and South Carolina, according to government data. During the past 15 years, Alabama’s vehicle exports have increased tenfold.

“Alabama’s auto industry has become an exporting powerhouse, with vehicles produced in the state finding markets around the world,” said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce. “This creates jobs in our state and solidifies the position of the Alabama auto assembly plants in a global business.”
Bill would keep State Park revenues in parks

Dennis Pillion dpillion@al.com

State Sen. Clay Scofield plans to introduce a bill in the Alabama Legislature that would prevent the entrance fees and other revenues from Alabama's state parks from being redirected to the General Fund.

"Alabamians spoke loud and clear about their support for Alabama's State Parks," Scofield, R-Arab, said in a Wednesday news conference. "Alabamians let the Legislature know 'Our parks are important to us.'"

"They're important to our economy, they're important to tourism and they're important to people who enjoy the outdoors." Scofield, who represents a portion of southern Madison County, said his bill would call for a constitutional amendment to prohibit the Legislature from transferring money out of the state parks funds, and allowing the parks to make long-term plans, upgrades and maintenance expenditures. Voters would have to approve a constitutional amendment.

Over the past five years the Legislature has transferred $80 million from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which includes the state parks, and into the general fund. The money came from sources like park entrance fees and hunting and fishing licenses that were meant to stay within the department.

"(Parks are) important to our economy, they're important to tourism, and they're important to people who enjoy the outdoors."

State Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Arab

The money transfers and the uncertainty about how much would be taken by the Legislature in a given year led to state park closures, threats of more closures, postponed maintenance and upgrades and a great deal of uncertainty for the park system.

The amount and timing of the transfers were wholly left up to the Legislature, leaving State Parks Director Greg Lein to wonder from year-to-year how much would be taken, when the money was due and whether the parks could pay their bills with what was left.

"It's huge, it's everything," Lein said of the impact Scofield's bill would have on the park system. "From a planning standpoint, we've left planning from one year to another because we don't know what the transfer will be next year. You can't plan for renovations or capital improvements."

OUT THE BACK DOOR

Lein said 2015 was a record year for the parks in terms of attendance, but the parks weren't able to use the money they generated.

"While it was depressing to know that we had a record year and the money went out the back door, this legislation slams the back door shut," Lein said. "It slams the back door shut, locks it and puts a barricade in front of it."

Rep. Kerry Rich, R-Albertville, who is sponsoring a bill in the House, said he has 56 co-sponsors and Scofield said he had "around a dozen" co-sponsors in the Senate. They both said they believed the bill would have enough support to advance.

Alabama's state parks system is largely self-funded, with most of the parks' operating expenses covered by the revenue they generate.

"We've essentially decided as a state, unlike other states, that we are not going to provide very much general fund money to the parks," Scofield said.

Scofield said he had tried to fight the funds transfers from the park each year since 2011. Last year he introduced a bill that would redirect funding from the Forevery Wild land conservation program to the state parks. That bill passed the Senate, but was later withdrawn as many of the state park system's biggest supporters also supported Forever Wild.

"As many of you know, the parks have always been an important thing to me," Scofield said. "Sometimes we've agreed on ways to help our parks and sometimes we haven't, but I think at the end of the day, we're all on the same page about making sure that Alabamians have these God-given natural resources that we can all enjoy."

Rickwood Caverns State Park in Blount County, 7 miles north of Warrior, offers a mile of underground caverns featuring 260 million-year-old limestone formations. Park officials shared this post Thursday on the Rickwood Facebook page: "Great News for us! Thanks Sen. Scofield for your Bill for a Constitutional Amendment to protect Alabama state parks."
ALABAMA MEDICAID

Hospitals put at lead of managed health care

By Phil Galewitz
Kaiser Health News (TNS)

Despite having one of the strictest eligibility requirements in the country, Alabama has struggled to control the rising costs of Medicaid, which provides health coverage to more than 1 million residents.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley is offering an unusual cure.

The state last week won federal approval to shift most of its Medicaid recipients into managed care organizations, which are paid a fixed monthly fee from the state for each person in the plan. It's a strategy employed by about three dozen states, many for decades, to provide more predictable spending.

Yet, Alabama's shift to Medicaid managed care has features not typically seen elsewhere. Most notably, the state isn't relying on big for-profit insurance companies like UnitedHealthcare and Aetna to manage the program. Instead, it's turning control over to new nonprofit organizations mostly run by the state's hospitals and other local providers. Oregon has also pulled in health care providers to help run its Medicaid program, but that approach, begun in 2012, also included private insurance plans.

Hospital leaders applaud the move, saying they know their communities' needs and are best positioned to care for the patients. And they hope it's a step that leads the governor and legislature to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

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HOSPITALS

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Act, which would make an additional 300,000 people eligible. Bentley has said he would not consider expanding Medicaid until his proposed reforms of the program go into effect.

Alabama is one of 19 states, mostly in the South, that have refused to accept the health law’s provision to extend Medicaid to everyone earning less than 138 percent of the federal poverty level, or $16,400 for an individual. The federal government pays the full cost of the expansion through this year and then gradually reduces its share to 90 percent in 2020. Alabama’s Medicaid program is mostly used by children and disabled residents. Parents are only eligible if their income is under 18 percent of the poverty level, or about $4,000 a year for a family of four.

The state and the federal government split the costs of the program, with the federal share nearly 70 percent in Alabama.

The Obama administration’s decision to approve Alabama’s managed care system will bring the state an additional $328 million in federal funding over three years — money that will help set up the new entities the state calls regional care organizations. Most of the funding will be used to build information technology and computer systems to help the hospitals work as insurers. Under the waiver, Alabama could also qualify for an additional $420 million in federal money over a five-year period to further support the transformation.

Without the waiver, Alabama hospitals feared the state would have cut Medicaid benefits and reimbursements to the hospitals. Alabama’s total Medicaid spending has increased from $5.2 billion to $5.8 billion in the past four years as enrollment rose more than 15 percent.

Hospitals say the money they will receive through managing the regional care collaborations will give them incentives to keep people healthy. That’s quite different from the traditional fee-for-service Medicaid system in which hospitals get paid more money by

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providing the most expensive health services.

The effort will allow hospitals to change their mission from treating disease to improving the health of the population and share in the savings, said Frederick Isasi, director of the health division of the National Governors Association, which worked with the state on the waiver. "Alabama is creating a more efficient system," he said.

The regional care organizations, or RCOs, will be rewarded for keeping spending on budget and they will have their care rated by a doctor-controlled state board that will look at dozens of quality and customer service measures. The RCOs will work to help people with chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma so they can avoid costly hospital stays.

Hospitals say they are happy they won’t have for-profit managed care companies dictating their

Medicaid reimbursement and can have more control

over how the program’s dollars are spent.

"Anyone who realizes where health care is going in the country knows you want to be high up on the hierarchy where the premium dollars are being paid," said Burr Ingram, spokesman for Huntsville Hospital Health System, which is tentatively planning to run two of the RCOs in the northern and western parts of the state.

Some health insurers will still provide a supporting role for the program, such as providing back office support or helping hospitals meet their financial requirements.

Insurers say the state is wasting money having hospitals and other providers learn how to operate as managed care companies when insurers have been doing that elsewhere for years.

"The state bought half a loaf," said Jeff Myers, CEO of the Medicaid Health Plans of America, a trade group of large insurers. He applauds Alabama for moving to managed care, but he said it could have saved money using experienced insurers that know how to build provider networks, pay claims and manage risk.

The state has tentatively contracted with at least two regional care organizations in each of five regions of the state. Each RCO will set up its own provider networks, which Medicaid recipients must use to get the cost of their care covered. The program expects to enroll 650,000 Medicaid patients. Nursing home patients are excluded.

"We see this as a huge milestone," Dante Howard, executive vice president for the Alabama Hospital Association, said of the federal waiver approval. "We hope this will pave the way for more serious discussion of expansion."
ADAPTED ATHLETICS

Couple makes $3 million donation to UA program

Justin Obermeyer signs a poster for 9-year-old Jacob Dumas during the Night of Champions event honoring the University of Alabama Adaptive Sports at the Bryant Conference Center on Thursday. STAFF PHOTOS/ERIN NELSON

See next page
UA celebrates program’s success with Night of Champions

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A Mountain Brook couple has donated $3 million to help fund construction of a planned adaptive athletics facility at the University of Alabama.

The university on Thursday announced the gift from alumni Michael and Kathy Mouron—which will cover about a third of the cost of the facility—before the Night of Champions celebration of the successes of the Adaptive Athletics program, which was founded in 2003.

“The university and I thank the Mourons for

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DONATION
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their generous gift toward this project, which will provide state-of-the-art facilities and support for our adapted student-athletes and coaches,” UA President Stuart Bell said.

Earlier this month, trustees approved preliminary planning for a 27,036-square-foot facility that includes a gym and basketball court, lobby and concourse, office suite, locker rooms and weight and workout rooms.

The facility to be built on the south side of the

UA Student Rec Center will provide competition space for the men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball teams while also providing locker, training, storage and office space for all program’s coaches and students.

The cost of the $10 million project is being split evenly between university funds and gifts and fundraising.

While the teams currently compete and practice in Foster Auditorium and the recreation center, there is no dedicated space for locker rooms, equipment storage, laundry or adaptive training equipment, according to Brent Hardin, director of the Adapted Wheelchair Athletics program. Hardin predicts the new facility would be a standard bearer for programs nationwide.

“This isn’t just a local program—it’s one with worldwide influence. I hope the level of commitment at the University of Alabama will inspire others, both here and across the country, to support adapted athletics,” Kathy Mouron said.

Activities will continue on Friday as UA System Chancellor Robert Witt will be inducted into
Alabama's Revenue Again Proves Nick Saban's Worth Every Penny, If Not Underpaid

By: Christopher Walsh

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Considering all the times the University of Alabama football program has been part of a victory celebration lately, it’s hard not to make the comparison.

The only thing that has rained down more on the reigning national champions than confetti is money, and a lot of it. Granted, it’s spent a lot as well and has invested heavily into its future, but these days Alabama hardly looks like the program that Nick Saban took over in 2007.

On Tuesday, Aaron Suttles of the Tuscaloosa News reported that the football program alone profited nearly $46.5 million in 2015, according to a financial report filed by the university to the NCAA.

It generated $95,132,301 in revenue, the most ever by any single team in the history of college sports.

Actually, the profit part of it was down nearly $7 million from 2014 due to a significant bump in expenses, but those playoff trips to Texas and Arizona weren’t exactly cheap. Saban’s also not known for cutting corners, especially when it comes to the coaching staff and extensive list of advisers and support workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>$152 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Notre Dame</td>
<td>$127 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>$102 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ohio State</td>
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See next page
8  Alabama  $99 million
9  Oklahoma  $96 million
10  Auburn  $89 million

2015 Forbes' College Football Team Values

Forbes

Nevertheless, it’s still close to what Chris Smith of Forbes reported in December, which is that Alabama football had a value of $99 million but had spent $51 million on football operations—$11 million more than any other program in 2015, which helps explain why it’s only 10th on the list of most profitable programs.

Texas topped the magazine’s rankings with a total value of $152 million and $92 million in profit; Notre Dame, Tennessee and LSU distantly trailed at $127 million, $121 million and $111 million, respectively—although Texas won only five games, and Louisiana’s governor says the state budget crisis threatens next season (in all college sports).

Alabama also spent $12 million in coaching expenses before this year’s bonuses kicked in, approximately $7 million to Saban alone (he made nearly another million by winning his fifth national title), which had him at the top of USA Today’s annual list of coaching salaries.

That’s the cost of a dynasty these days.

The Crimson Tide just won their fourth national championship in seven years, their sixth straight recruiting title according to 247Sports and appear poised to have another corresponding showing in the upcoming NFL draft.

Here’s a taste of Alabama’s success with Saban:


A record of 100-18 (.847)

Since 2008, Alabama was ranked No. 1 at some point of every season


Twenty-five consensus All-Americans

After Alabama had no players selected in the 2008 NFL draft, it had 48 selections, including 17 in the first round, from 2009-15

See next page
It’s also won enough hardware, including two Heisman Trophies, to open another museum, but all that only begins to show how Saban’s contract in particular is more than paying off.

When Saban’s agent, Jimmy Sexton, initially negotiated an eight-year, $32 million contract with Alabama it was the highest salary ever paid to a collegiate coach in any sport and widely panned for being too big.

While some claimed that it was helping ruin college athletics and Alabama had become the poster child of excess, others claimed that it was obvious he’d only stick around a couple of years, especially since there was no out clause, and Saban could leave at any time without a financial penalty.

Chances of Alabama athletic director Bill Battle getting a call from Nick Saban’s agent this spring? Pretty good.

Have you heard a Saban rumor to the NFL rumor lately? Well, it’s only taken nine years for some people to believe that the coach really does prefer the college ranks and is enjoying building what might end up being the strongest legacy in the sport’s history.

What the rumor-mongers never considered was that his contract would a) help keep him at Alabama; b) be necessary to lure him away from the Miami Dolphins; and c) re-enforce the school’s level of commitment because a lot more was necessary to return the Crimson Tide to the top of the college football world.

When Saban got a contract extension to pay him $5.32 million in 2012 and $45 million through the 2019 season, in addition to a $5 million life insurance policy, no one argued. He had already won two national championships with the Crimson Tide.

“The acceptance of this extension expresses our commitment, my commitment, Terry and I’s commitment, our family’s commitment to the University of Alabama, for the rest of our career,” he said at the time. “We made that decision after the season when other people were interested.”

<table>
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<td>36,155</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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University of Alabama enrollment

When asked who was interested, Saban said: “It doesn’t really matter. We wanted to stay at Alabama. We’re staying at Alabama and weren’t interested in going anywhere else.

“We’re really pleased and happy to be here.”

Alabama reworked the contract again at the end of the 2013 season, making Saban one of highest-paid coaches in American sports ($7 million a season). According to Forbes, of the nine pro coaches who were making more than $6 million a year at the time, eight were in the NFL and the other was in the NBA.

Now look at the flip side of it.

When Saban arrived Alabama’s enrollment was on an increase from approximately 20,000 in 2004 to 23,878 in January 2007. It topped 37,000 in fall 2015. The dramatic rise also occurred despite Tuscaloosa experiencing a major natural disaster, the 2011 tornado.

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As one of the few Alabama sports that pays for itself, football helps subsidize the entire Crimson Tide athletics department budget, which is separate from the school’s budget. In 2006, the athletic department brought in $67.7 million in revenue and spent $60.6 million.

Five years later, revenue was $124.5 million and expenditures were $105.1 million, for a profit of $19.4 million.

Last year, Michael Casagrande of AL.com reported that it was up to $33 million for fiscal year 2013-14 ($153 million in revenue, $120 million in expenses), of which $9.1 million went to the school—up from $5 million the previous year.

That the profit margin has only continued to grow is indicative of his success.

"Nick Saban's the best financial investment this university has ever made," chancellor of the University of Alabama system Robert Witt, Ph.D., who was the president when Saban was hired, told the television show 60 Minutes in 2013. "We have made an investment that's been returned many fold."

With another national championship in tow it pretty much means just one thing for Saban: It’s time for another raise. He’s more than earned it.
UA program has blossomed into a model for others

By: Tommy Deas

Brent Hardin arrived at the University of Alabama more than a dozen years ago with an idea, but no budget.

He wanted to start a wheelchair basketball team, but he didn't have so much as a single wheelchair.

"We didn't have anything but a great idea," he said.

He applied for grants to get money for equipment and started a women's team, which made it to nationals in the first season. Alabama won its first national championship in 2009, and has won three more since. As the program grew, men's basketball and tennis teams were added, and each won a national title in 2013.

Now the UA adapted athletics program has a $600,000 annual budget that funds scholarships and allows full-time coaches in all three sports, as well as paying for bus trips and uniforms. Earlier this month, the UA board of trustees approved funding for a $10 million facility that will be built adjacent to the Student Recreation Center.

The program's growth will be on display tonight at the Bryant Conference Center for a Night of Champions event that is free and open to the public. On Friday, the UA men's and women's teams will play Texas-Arlington in a doubleheader at Foster Auditorium starting at 6 p.m.

Full circle

UA wheelchair basketball comes full circle every year when it plays its doubleheader at Foster Auditorium. That's where the first teams played, in an historic but run-down building before it was refurbished in 2011 to house the UA varsity women's basketball and volleyball team.

"We were happy to have it," said Hardin, who serves as UA director of adapted athletics.
"Nobody wanted to be there. It was hot. There was no air conditioning. But it was our place."

The wheelchair athletics programs moved to the rec center in 2005, but the athletic department agreed, after the refurbishment, to allow the teams to play one date at Foster per year. It's a highlight on the schedule.

At last year's game, UA women's player Maude Jacques, a graduate student in social work from Montreal, Canada, wheeled onto the court and immediately spotted a sign in the crowd cheering her on.

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"It was someone I barely knew," she said. "I was sitting next to her in the hairdresser and she asked about the game."

The doubleheader drew more than 2,000 fans two years ago, and around 1,800 last year. Playing in the big arena uplifts the players, and their sport.

"The (pep) band comes and I think that helps make it feel so official, like any other sport," Jacques said.

**To be the best**

Michael Auprince, a freshman center for the UA men's team from Sydney, Australia, is an imposing force. Ask him about his prosthetic left leg and he'll look you straight in the eye and tell you, in his thick accent: "Shark attack."

Then he'll laugh and confess that it's really due to a congenital birth defect. The leg was amputated at the knee when he was 10.

Unlike many wheelchair basketball players, Auprince is able to walk. Because of his mobility, he accounts for four points on a scale that allows up to 14 points spread among the five player on the court at any time.

He's the first to tell you wheelchair basketball is a contact sport.

"They're armored tanks," he said of the chairs. "You get hit and you're going to feel it."

Auprince won gold and bronze medals in swimming at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. He was lured to UA by some previous Aussies who had thrived in the adapted athletics program.

"I've always wanted to represent something bigger than myself," he said. "There's something in the air here I can't describe, a school spirit. I'm here to make Paralympic teams. I want to be the best wheelchair basketball player in the world, and I think this is the best place to play wheelchair basketball."

**More than just basketball**

Hardin come to Alabama from Florida State in 2003 as an assistant professor, coinciding with Robert Witt being named president at UA. The timing couldn't have been better for Hardin's dream: Witt came from Texas-Arlington, where he had been a strong supporter of wheelchair athletics.

Witt found some money for Hardin's program by the end of its first year, and the funding continued to grow.

"We still don't have the biggest budget," Hardin said, "but we do more with what we have."
To that end, the program still aggressively pursues outside grants. Just a week ago, the United States Tennis Association awarded $10,000 to UA for wheelchair tennis.

In addition to the wheelchair basketball and tennis teams that compete collegiately on a national level, UA's program has also delved into rowing, track and field and swimming on a more intramural level.

Alabama's program has a worldwide reach, with more than 20 current and former athletes and coaches expected to participate in the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in September.

A model for others

With the funding for the $10 million facility that was approved earlier this month, Alabama's program become the epicenter for collegiate adapted athletics.

The facility will have competition and practice courts, accessible locker rooms, offices, a study hall, a room for team meetings and film study, a players lounge, an athletic training area and space devoted to research. The atrium will showcase the program's accomplishments and history.

With the announcement of the approval of the new facility came acclaim from around the wheelchair athletics community.

"We got a lot of phone calls and congratulatory emails," Hardin said.

UA men's coach Ford Burtrtram played at Alabama from 2006 through '09 and was a team captain. He then became an assistant for five years before being promoted to head coach.

The Pensacola, Fla., native remembers the early days.

"We were scratching and clawing for everything we got when I was playing," he said. "We've grown leaps and bounds, but we're in the infancy of our sport."

The optimistic projection is that the program will be able to move into its new facility by August 2017. Those who are a part of UA adapted athletics know it will create greater expectations and bigger opportunities.

It will also serve as a beacon to spur other universities to do the same.

"I'm very proud to be a part of the leading program for adapted athletics in the country," Burtrtram said. "This sets a mark for programs across the nation. What I'm really the happiest for with our university is the recognition from the higher-ups. It's almost like getting their approval."
University of Alabama student starts petition seeking repeal of SEC's gameday alcohol prohibition

By: Erin Edgemon

A candidate for University of Alabama's student government association president is seeking to have the SEC's gameday prohibition of alcohol sales repealed.

Patrick Fitzgerald, a junior marketing major, said his Change.org petition and promotional video isn't about winning votes. It's primarily about student safety.

"Too many times in my college career, I've walked past the tents on the quad on the way to the stadium and seen students passed out in their chairs," Fitzgerald wrote. "Alcohol is a part of many students' gameday experience, but because alcohol is not sold in Bryant-Denny and other athletic facilities, students feel the need to binge drink before games."

Making alcohol sales legal, would put students in less dangerous situations, he said.

"It is an issue that a lot of people are passionate about on campus," Fitzgerald said. He is also trying to garner support from SGA presidents of other SEC universities.

If the SEC changed its policy, Fitzgerald said it would mean less gameday arrests as well.

He said West Virginia University saw its gameday arrest rate decrease 35 percent after repealing its ban on alcohol.

Permitting alcohol sales at Bryant-Denny Stadium would be "a huge revenue booster," Fitzgerald said. It could also drive attendance to other sporting events on campus.

Alabama's stadium is similar in size to the University of Texas at Austin stadium where alcohol sales garnered $1.8 million in revenues last year, he said.

Many student services are in need of these revenues, Fitzgerald said.

He also pointed out that alcohol is already allowed in Bryant-Denny's luxury boxes so why not make it available for purchase.
Doubleheader game is Friday

Paralympic medalist, coach will be at Thursday celebration

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The University of Alabama wheelchair basketball program is gearing up for a big week.

On Thursday, UA’s adapted athletics program will host its Night of Champions at the Bryant Conference Center. Alabama will host a wheelchair basketball doubleheader on Friday at Foster Auditorium.

The Night of Champions begins at 5 p.m. The event is free to the public and includes free food, door prizes and autograph sessions with UA athletes from the men’s and women’s adapted basketball, tennis and other programs. Guest speakers will include Paralympic medalists Mackenzie Saldan and Jannik Blair as well as Margaret Stran, who has coached UA national championship wheelchair teams and coached the U.S. in Paralympic competition.

Also, UA System Chancellor Robert Witt will be inducted into the National Wheelchair Basketball Hall of Fame for his support of adapted athletics at Alabama and, previously, at the University of Texas-Arlington. Attendees can pick up a pair of tickets to Friday’s doubleheader at Foster Auditorium, where the UA men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball teams will host Texas-Arlington. Up to 500 tickets will be given away.

Friday’s doubleheader will begin with the women’s game at 5 p.m.

After the game, the defending national champion Alabama women’s team will receive championship rings in a ceremony on the court. The men’s game will follow at 7 p.m.

Admission is $5, with UA students admitted free.

More than 2,000 fans attended a Foster Auditorium doubleheader two years ago.

“When people say they want to come see us play, we always tell them come to (the doubleheader at) Foster,” said Maude Jaques, a senior UA women’s player from Montreal, Canada.

“It’s pretty awesome.”
MANAGING EDITOR’S TAKE

Students change tune on Bham

For the past six years, I’ve made trips to both the University of Alabama and Auburn University to interview candidates for summer internships.

It’s always a great experience to get out and meet talented young students at our institutions of higher learning.

While many decry journalism as a “dying industry” in this increasingly digital world, you wouldn’t know it based on the passion for the trade among the many students I talk to each year.

Ultimately, one goal of our internship program is to help train the next generation of journalists. Another goal is building a pipeline of talent that, hopefully, will eventually land at the Birmingham Business Journal.

We’ve had some good luck with that. Two of our three reporters are former interns at the BBJ.

But because one of our long-term goals is using the internship program to find future job candidates for us, my yearly interviews with potential interns give me a good indication of how college students really feel about Birmingham.

It’s a sentiment that has significantly changed for the better over the past six years.

When I first starting interviewing students for our 2011 summer internship, I found myself having to sell many candidates on the merits of Birmingham.

When I would ask students where they ultimately wanted to end up, many would say Atlanta, Nashville or even New York.

Few mentioned Birmingham as their preferred long-term destination, even if they were initially from here.

Over the past couple years, I’ve noticed a clear change in that tune.

Students started asking about Birmingham’s beer and food scenes, based on articles they’ve read.

They started talking about Regions Field or how cool it would be to live downtown for a summer.

By my trip to Auburn last week, students were voluntarily revealing that “Birmingham is where I want to end up after college” without my prompting.

It’s one of the most encouraging signs I’ve seen to date of how Birmingham’s image is changing for the better.

And, as Birmingham looks for ways to attract more young professionals in a highly competitive environment, that bodes well for the future of our economy.
Against all odds, cancer survivor celebrates 22 years with donated lung

Amy Yurkanin
ayurkanin@al.com

Janice Gravette was in her early 30s when she developed a persistent cough that doctors initially diagnosed as pneumonia.

That diagnosis turned out to be wrong. Gravette actually had a type of lung cancer that often affects women and nonsmokers, and it had spread throughout her left lung. Gravette had that lung removed, but when she was 34, the cancer returned in her right lung.

"Once you've had one lung removed, you can't really do much more of that," Gravette said.

Doctors had nothing to offer but a medical long shot — enrollment in a small study of lung transplants as cancer treatment. Gravette joined eight other cancer patients who all received lung transplants.

Dr. David McGiffin, director of cardiothoracic surgery and transplantation at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia, performed the surgery when he was working at UAB.

"It made sense," McGiffin said. "The idea was a little out there, but it made sense. So we went ahead with a series of nine patients."

Unfortunately, the cancer returned in the transplanted lungs of the eight other patients. Some of them died pretty quickly, while others enjoyed years of health before the cancer came back.

Gravette was the only patient to make a full recovery — and then some. About half of all lung transplant recipients survive for five years, according to the National Institutes of Health, and a third make it to 10 years. Patients who receive only one lung usually fare worse than double-lung transplant patients.

But Gravette has beaten the odds. On Feb. 22, she celebrated the 22nd anniversary of her transplant. Her cancer has not returned, and she has been able to work and live normally for more than two decades since her surgery. McGiffin was passing through town and met up with her patient at UAB on the anniversary of her transplant.

Eight patients enrolled in the original study had a recurrence of cancer, and transplantation as a treatment is still controversial, McGiffin said. He said he would recommend it to a patient who had run out of options, but that others might not.

"There are many more people who need lungs than there are lungs available, so you've got to be responsible for a very rare resource," McGiffin said.

In recent years, there has been an increased pressure to produce good outcomes, which could keep doctors from taking a chance with a difficult case.

"It's still controversial," said Dr. James Hoopes, who runs the heart and lung transplant program at UAB. "Some people might think it was irresponsible."

McGiffin and Hoopes said they don't know why Gravette has done so well. Her doctors want to run extra tests to see if they can pinpoint the cause of her excellent health.

"We would all love to know that," McGiffin said. "From a biological perspective, what was it about Janice?"

A group of about five of the original transplant patients grew close, including Gravette. She said many of the patients enjoyed several extra years with their family after surgery.

"In conversation, we all knew we would do it again," she said. "Of course, you go into it hoping you have more time, but none of us knows how much time we have."

When Gravette had her surgery at 34, the average life expectancy for a woman was 74 years, so she set a goal to live at least 40 more years. She has already passed the halfway point.

"I don't think of myself as a sick person," she said. "I don't think of myself as a sick person. But I can tell you there is not a day that goes by that I don't at some point think about my donor and know why I'm here."
Aspiring entrepreneurs will come together for Huntsville business competition

By: Lucy Berry

As one of the area's most promising young entrepreneurs, Noah Huber-Feely struggles with finding peers who share similar interests.

The 17-year-old Tennessee home school student and Hop Around Huntsville app developer travels each week to downtown Huntsville to attend Coworking Night with coders, designers, photographers, writers, entrepreneurs and other like-minded members of the tech community.

He will be one of dozens of students to participate next month in 24Hr Generator, a new business competition for youth in Huntsville hosted by nonprofit organizations Rocket Hatch and Village of Promise.

"24Hr Generator is the perfect opportunity to find these similarly driven people, and engage with them by solving complex and productive problems real establishments are facing," said Huber-Feely.

The team-building competition will take place March 11-12. 24Hr Generator Chair and Phocaz Group Founding Partner Mary Ramsey said close to 50 students have applied for the inaugural event and they are expecting even more applicants next year.

Global Ties will also have a group of 27 students from South America who will join the competition, adding even more diversity to the teams.

"We are planning to select eight teams to participate with a broad representation of our private, public and home schooled students," said Antonio Montoya, founder of Rocket Hatch.

The event will conclude with cash prizes at an awards ceremony in the Chan Auditorium in the UAH Business Administration Building on 301 Sparkman Drive.

Rocket Hatch and Village of Promise are still seeking individuals or companies who wish to sponsor or volunteer with 24Hr Generator. Bryan Powell, CEO of Metabahn, is an example of a local business that is sponsoring the competition.

Powell said 24Hr Generator "aligns perfectly" with the company's vision, which is to make software development and the business behind it more accessible.

"We're excited to sponsor an event that's intent on bringing students together and exposing them to the idea of entrepreneurship," he said. "Exposing students to the unstructured nature of entrepreneurial problems is vitally important, and the 24Hr Generator will do just that."

For information on the event, visit generatorhsv.org.
We need more engineering students in Alabama

By: Guest Voices

By Dr. Taylor W. Lawrence, a Raytheon Company vice president and president of its Missile Systems business, with significant engineering and manufacturing operations in Huntsville, Alabama. With 2015 sales of $23 billion and 61,000 employees worldwide, Raytheon is a technology and innovation leader specializing in defense, civil government and cybersecurity solutions, and is headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts.

When I look back to my school years growing up in Montevallo, Alabama, it was my teachers who helped spark my interest in math as a young student. I also received tremendous encouragement and support from my family during my academic journey. After all, who knew what the future held for me?

Inspiration can come in many forms but the key is to stimulate and sustain genuine curiosity in our students from an early age. America's future innovators need to be building competencies in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects today.

Unfortunately, too many students are not actively pursuing and sticking with STEM, a fact that puts America at risk as it continues to lag behind other nations in career-ready technical talent. Inadequate emphasis on STEM education challenges our nation to develop its engineers of the future at a time when demand and competition for skilled technical talent continues to increase throughout the world.

Strengthening the pipeline of qualified, innovative and diverse students and employees is critical to our nation’s future. As we observe National Engineers Week Feb. 21-27, it is critical for businesses and all stakeholders in education to renew their commitments to investing in the education of our youth.

In Huntsville, more than 80 percent of our 750 Raytheon employees are engineers. We depend on these highly skilled professionals to carry our business into the future, and we take our responsibility to invest in developing the next generation of problem solvers very seriously.

To aid in the development of our local students, Raytheon Huntsville holds a MathMovesU event each year for 200 fifth graders in partnership with the University of Alabama Huntsville. Through hands-on, interactive and fun activities, the Raytheon program builds excitement in math and science education.

At Morris Elementary School, Raytheon volunteers work one-on-one with students on math skills. The goal is to boost student competency in the basics before they proceed to more complicated math principles required in engineering fields.

Notably, women are significantly under-represented in America's technical workforces. According to the National Science Foundation, women account for less than 15 percent of American engineers and about one-quarter of computer and mathematical sciences professionals.

See next page
Clearly we need to find more ways for more girls to select and stay on pathways to STEM-related careers for these numbers to improve.

Last year, Raytheon announced a partnership with Boys and Girls Clubs of America to build STEM Centers of Innovation at five locations around the United States. The Williams Club in Huntsville was one of the first locations selected for this new program. The STEM Center at Williams is set to open on Tuesday, Feb. 23 to coincide with National Engineers Week.

Huntsville-area students using the Center of Innovation will work with dedicated Boys & Girls Club STEM staff and Raytheon employee mentors to develop their skills and critical thinking using real-world STEM applications.

These types of programs are aimed at stimulating interest in STEM subjects and, ultimately, in increasing the number of women engineers – and all engineers – who are career-ready and available to companies like ours.

It is my hope that, during a National Engineer's Week sometime in the future, we can proudly proclaim our nation has closed its gap in STEM education and is seeing record numbers of world class engineers entering the workforce.

Until that time, I would argue that American businesses, in partnership with school systems, teachers, policy makers and families, need to take more action, so that today's students will be capable of solving the problems of tomorrow.
UAH technology business incubator receives millions in grant funds, Commerce Department support

By: Brian Lawson

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (WHNT) -- The University of Alabama in Huntsville has earned $3.5 million in grant funds toward construction and staffing of its planned technology business incubator, the Innovation to Invention Center.

Jay Williams, U.S. Department of Commerce assistant secretary for economic development, visited the UAH campus Monday. Williams said UAH won the grant funds in a highly competitive process.

“It is exceptionally competitive,” he said. “We have a very limited amount of grant funding, $10 million of grant funding. We get applications from across the country, that exceed five times that, five-six times that, or even more. So for this university to be awarded, speaks volumes to the level of commitment, the talent, the level of collaboration that exists here.”

The $9 million incubator project is slated to be 45,000 square feet and will provide support, lab and office space for up to 40 companies.

The incubator is currently in the approval phase, with design work to follow.

Construction is expected to begin in about a year, with the building’s completion two years after that, UAH said.

Williams said UAH’s track record helps mark the project for future success.

“One of the markers is the level of collaboration that has already existed here,” he said. “One of the markers is the fact that there have already been significant private investment here, this university, this community has continued to grow.”

Ray Vaughn, UAH vice president of research, said the incubator’s mission will be to take good ideas and provide the support and facilities necessary to help develop successful companies.

“What we want to do is foster the high-tech science, high-tech engineering that’s coming out of the Arsenal and coming out of UAH, and coming out of this community and foster that into companies that are successful and can grow in Huntsville,” he said.

Williams said President Obama believes government policy and investment can help facilitate job creation.
U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce to visit UAH

By: Savannah Williamson

The Honorable Jay Williams, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, will visit Huntsville on February 22, to tour the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

UAH has recently won two grants from the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Authority.

The first grant is to build a technology-based incubator on UAH's campus called "Innovation to Invention Center" (I2C).

The second grant is to begin setting up operations for the Regional Innovation Strategy i6 Challenge. The grant will allow UAH to set up a hiring program, put policies in place and plan for procedures and operations.
Cyber Analyst: FBI backdoor could change future iPhones

By: Travis Leder

One of UAH's top cyber analysts says if the FBI wins a legal battle over accessing locked iPhones, it could change the way Apple designs its popular devices.

UAH Center for Cybersecurity Research and Education director Tommy Morris says the FBI is looking for a "backdoor" which would allow investigators to access an iPhone 5c used by one of the shooters in the San Bernardino massacre. 14 people died in the terrorist attack. Although the FBI is arguing there is a national security interest, Apple CEO Tim Cook says this would force the company to build a new operating system in order to crack the code.

Here's the issue. There is a security setting on the iPhone where data could be wiped clean if investigators try to enter a passcode ten times. This is the minimum number, and it could be more on this particular phone.

Why can't Apple get into the phone? The company designed the phone in a way where even its own employees cannot access the code. This security measure is in place because the company is concerned a backdoor could allow hackers to get that information and use it to unlock vulnerable iPhones.

Morris says if the FBI wins this legal battle, it will not just force Apple to unlock this single phone. It could set a precedent for future mobile devices.

"The issue is if you let the camel's nose under the tent, the government may require backdoors be designed into future generations of the iPhone," Morris explains.

The longtime cybersecurity professional also says this could create a domino effect where foreign countries could also seek backdoors and access information on an iPhone within its borders.
Tornado researchers are coming to town

UAH's SWIRLL building to host kickoff on Feb. 29

Leigh Morgan

A huge tornado research project targeting the Southeast is set to begin in the next few weeks.

Vortex-Southeast is coordinated by NOAA's National Severe Storms Laboratory but will involve meteorologists and researchers from the Southeast, including Alabama.

In fact, Huntsville will be the site of one of the first public events for the program. A media day is scheduled for Feb. 29 at 10 a.m. at the Severe Weather Institute and Radar & Lightning Laboratories (SWIRLL) building on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, according to information from NSSL. Some of the project's participating scientists will be on hand as well as the research vehicles and equipment that will be used to track and study tornadoes later this spring.

The goal of Vortex-SE is to understand more about Southern-style tornadoes — and how to prevent them from becoming killers. Vortex stands for Verification of the Origins of Rotation in Tornadoes Experiment.

The project, which has been in the planning stages for more than a year, will include 40 physical and social science researchers from 20 institutions, a fleet of cutting-edge equipment and a $5.45 million budget.

It's the latest in a series of Vortex projects that began with Vortex I in 1994. Vortex2 followed in 2009. Both projects were focused on the Great Plains, and sent teams of researchers and fleets of chase vehicles and equipment across thousands of miles to study tornadoes from beginning to end.

In this Vortex project, scientists will study nocturnal tornadoes, how terrain affects them and also the social science aspect of the warning process — specifically, how the public receives warnings and reacts to them.

The project is timed to coincide with Alabama's prime severe weather season, which typically peaks in April.

The project will run through April 30, according to the NSSL.
Team Measures Lightning-Produced Ozone with Lidar

By: UAH

Scientists at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) have used UAH's Rocket-city Ozone (O3) Quality Evaluation in the Troposphere (RO3 QET) Lidar to measure ozone that was chemically produced by summertime lightning over the United States, research that could be important to air quality prediction and assessment once it is developed further.

"This is the first time in the United States that we have used high-resolution Lidar data to determine lightning's impact on tropospheric ozone," says Dr. Lihua "Lucy" Wang, a UAH Earth Systems Science Center (ESSC) research associate who was the lead author of a research paper on the team's findings.

The ESSC team used data from a Lidar facility on the top floor of The National Space Science Technology Center (NSSTC) in Cramer Research Hall, one of just five such atmospheric Lidar facilities in the U.S. and about 15 worldwide.

Lidar uses a laser beam to collect data, so it is effective only during clear conditions. Vaisala's U.S. National Lightning Detection Network (NLDN) monitors total lightning activity across the continental United States, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The UAH team estimated lightning nitric oxide (NO) emissions based on NLDN observations, measured the resulting ozone created by the lightning downwind of the storms, where clear conditions allowed Lidar to function and quantified the ozone enhancements due to lightning.

The troposphere is the lowest layer of atmosphere on Earth and produces the planet's weather. Above it is the stratosphere, a layer of thinner atmosphere. The denser troposphere is separated from the stratosphere by a large temperature inversion called the tropopause.

Tropospheric ozone - a greenhouse gas and the kind that affects the air we breathe - can increase in concentration because of atmospheric conditions, or can result from human activities. In the winter, intermixing of stratospheric ozone with the troposphere in a process called Stratospheric Tropospheric Exchange (STE) is the chief means of ozone transport into our air, but Dr. Wang says in summertime that process subsides and lightning bolts create significant ozone enhancements in the middle to upper troposphere, particularly in the Southeastern U.S.

"During the summertime, the lightning produced very important ozone enhancements in the upper troposphere. When lightning introduces ozone into the upper troposphere, there is some downward transport mechanism that will affect lower tropospheric ozone" Dr. Wang says.

"In the troposphere, ozone is considered a bad gas," says Dr. Wang. "It can worsen bronchitis, emphysema and asthma." If ground-level ozone exceeds 70 parts per billion, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issues an air quality advisory.

"We are investigating the processes that influence the ozone production," Dr. Wang says. The first Lidar measurements of lightning-generated ozone have opened a door to further research. "There are still many uncertainties in this research that we are trying to improve upon."
Alabama women earn first win against Tennessee since 1984

By: Terrin Waack

For their last basketball game in Foster Auditorium, Alabama seniors Nikki Hegstetter and Khadijah Carter helped make history.

The Crimson Tide defeated Tennessee, 54-46, Thursday night, putting an end to the Lady Volunteers' 42-game winning streak. The last time the Crimson Tide knocked off the Lady Vols was on March 3, 1984. Alabama coach Kristy Curry said she didn’t know it had been that long, but she’s proud of her team.

“It’s a special night for the seniors, and that’s how a team is supposed to play on senior night,” she said.

If the last three quarters were anything like the first, the ending would have been a coin toss. There were a lot of back-and-forth scoring and lead changes, and with a last-second shot from Hegstetter, Alabama closed out the quarter with a 15-14 lead.

Once Alabama pulled ahead, however, the Crimson Tide never relinquished the lead.

Sophomore Karyla Middlebrook hit her stride during the second quarter, breaking double digits with more than two minutes left until halftime, which Alabama went into leading 28-17.

Before halftime, Alabama hit 13 of 34 shots from the field while Tennessee made 6 of 30. By the end of the game, both teams made 18 shots from the field, of which Alabama had four 3-pointers to Tennessee's zero.

Middlebrook scored 12 points in the first half, finishing the game with 13 points. Sophomore Hannah Cook finished the night with a double-double, scoring 10 points and snagging 10 rebounds.

Tennessee's leading scorer, sophomore Diamond DeShields who averages 13.6 points per game this season, was shutout. The Volunteers cut Alabama's lead to five points and prevented the Crimson Tide from taking any shots until midway through the third quarter, but Cook sunk a 3-pointer, and Alabama was off again.

It didn’t go into the final stretch with a double-digit lead, but that didn’t seem to bother Curry as she turned to the bench and the crowd, gesturing for them to get out of their seats and cheer.

During the fourth quarters, the Volunteers tried to catch up but never got closer than three points.
When the final buzzer sounded, Alabama players were hugging, dancing and celebrating. Hegstetter shed happy tears as she hugged her teammates, ending her final game in Foster Auditorium.

“I think this is one of the best moments of my life,” Hegstetter said. “I’ve had a few great one, but this tops it all.”
Blazers fend off Herd to widen C-USA lead

Drew Champlin  dchamplin@al.com

Conference USA's two heavyweights battled it out on Thursday at Bartow Arena, and again it was UAB coming out on top.

A month after the Blazers won by three at Marshall, UAB made the clutch plays down the stretch and held on for a 95-91 win.

"It was a heck of a win for us," UAB coach Jerod Haase said. "We tried everything three or four times and we ended up sticking with a lot of zone in the second half. It wasn't great, but it was good enough."

It was UAB's 24th straight home win and it put the Blazers two games ahead of Marshall in the race for the Conference USA title with three games left. UAB is now 23-5, 13-2, while Marshall dropped to 15-13, 11-4.

With UAB up 86-85 with a minute left, Dirk Williams hit a fallaway three. Every time Marshall answered with two points, UAB responded with two free throws, hitting all six it attempted in the final minute.


"We do have guys that make big plays and Dirk was certainly a catalyst for us," Haase said. "Our bench, we have a great deal of confidence in them. We've come to expect our bench to produce at a high level. Very few teams in the country can bring in guys offensively and defensively who can produce like we do."

Stevie Browning led Marshall with 23 points. Ryan Taylor and Jon Elmore scored 19 each and James Kelly and C.J. Burks added 12 points each.

The teams were tied 49-all at halftime.

UAB hosts Western Kentucky in its home finale on Saturday at 11 a.m.

"The biggest thing in my mind is that I want to make sure Robert Brown goes out the right way (Saturday)," Haase said. "He's meant so much to this program the last two years. It's his senior day.

"We're going to try to get the biggest crowd we possibly can and honor him the best way we possibly can. The best way to honor him is to play great."
Offensive coordinator Les Koenning was a 'huge get' for UAB, Bill Clark says

By: Drew Champlin

As UAB rebuilds its program with players from different backgrounds and with different skill sets, new offensive coordinator Les Koenning’s practice energy has been a constant.

And that's just how head coach Bill Clark wants it.

"I tell our coaches all the time that we project the energy," Clark said. "We can't expect a bunch of players to be the energy guys, even though they're going to get to that point where they're carrying the torch because they play on the field.

"Practice is run by the coaches. Having the head of your offense that way, that's going to trickle down. That's what I expect."

Clark and Koenning's relationship started when the two were at South Alabama in 2008. At the time, South Alabama was a start-up program without offices or places to store equipment. UAB is in the midst of its football rebirth and will eventually move into a new football operations building, but has the basic necessities to get by.

But Clark and Koenning are back at the forefront of a new football project. Their coaching reunion has been a long time coming. Clark stayed at South Alabama until leaving to become Jacksonville State's head coach for the 2013 season and then coming to UAB. After 2008, Koenning spent time at Mississippi State and Texas.

"We talked every week from South till now," Clark said. "We've wanted to coach together. It was a good fit and the timing was right."

Clark said that Koenning is a perfect fit to run UAB's fast tempo offense. The Blazers aren't deep at receiver this spring, but quarterback A.J. Erdely and running back Greg Bryant - both midyear signees - are early candidates to become focal points of the offense.

"We're going to take the chains off," Clark said. "He was one of the first one-back guys in the country and obviously has a great history.

"We're always going to play good defense but we're going to turn him loose offensively. This was a huge get for us, with all of his recruiting background in Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. He's recruited all over the country."

Koenning was at Texas in 2014 but wasn't retained. Rumors of him coming to UAB surfaced last summer, but the move wasn't official until the start of this year. Koenning was still being paid by Texas and did some consulting for UAB.

He traveled the country, studying various offenses. He went from California through Texas and up around the east coast.

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"It was like a sabbatical," Koenning said. "I went out and took notes at every place, talking with Coach Clark the whole time telling him that I think there was some really good stuff out here."

When he was able to officially recruit for UAB, he played a big role in landing players like receiver Raylon Richardson out of Lithonia, Ga.

Koenning said he's been proud to represent Clark and UAB while he's been on the road recruiting.

"I've had opportunities (to go elsewhere)," the 57-year-old Koenning said. "But having the opportunity to get back with Coach Clark is really exciting. He's a good person, good coach and good family man. He's somebody you'd want your son to play for."

UAB returns to the practice field on Friday and Saturday. The Blazers will host an open spring practice to the public on March 5.
Another chance for UAB fans to put up and shut up their critics

Kevin Scarbinsky kscarbinsky@al.com

One thing we know about UAB fans: They’re passionate. How passionate? Passionate enough to bring their football program back from the dead. If not for the inspired work of students such as Courtney Campbell and Timothy Alexander and so many other undergrads, grads and assorted supporters, it’s unlikely the Blazers would be in the midst of spring practice.

They led a grass-roots movement that moved the campus, the city and even the board of trustees.

Do you believe in miracles? UAB fans didn’t just believe. They made one happen.

That said, there’s one thing we don’t know about UAB fans. How many are there? Are there enough to fill Bartow Arena for the biggest home game of the season Thursday night? Enough to sell out and fill up the house for the very first time during this very special season?

It would be nice. Anything less would be a shame.

It would be nice to see this fan base throw its weight behind a basketball team putting together one of the best seasons in school history. The Blazers just put down one challenger to their season-long run in first place in Conference USA with Sunday’s emphatic 77-67 win at Middle Tennessee.
Now comes Marshall, one game behind UAB in second place. Thin the Herd, and the Blazers (22-5, 12-2) will have a two-game lead with three games to play.

Winning the C-USA regular-season title would allow this team to check off another accomplishment on a shrinking bucket list. These Blazers already have set school records with 14 straight overall wins and 23 straight home wins, and the home streak is still going strong. They’ve also gotten to 20 wins in a season faster than any previous UAB team.

Despite those highlights, the largest home crowd this season has been the announced 6,835 for North Texas on Saturday Jan. 23. The average home attendance for 14 games — all of them part of that school-record 23-game home win streak — is 4,602. Bartow Arena’s listed capacity is 8,500, but we know it can hold more if the fire marshal looks the other way.

Let’s be honest. Those numbers are a little sad.

There appear to be no excuses on the horizon Thursday for anything less than a full house. It’s a 7 p.m. tip, not too early or too late. The game’s not on television, and it’s not even supposed to rain. Plus, it’s a Blackout Bartow night, and what fan doesn’t love to lend a voice to a monochromatic choir in matching T-shirts?

UABsports.com says the first 1,000 students get those T-shirts free. Everyone else can buy one for $10. We know UAB fans have dug deep, financially and spiritually, to bring back football. Can they go to the well in a different way for roundball Thursday night?

Jerod Haase and his team have earned the support. Haase has put together a deep and talented roster that’s in the middle of what should be at least a three-year run of big wins and memorable moments.

There’s a good chance he’ll be a hot commodity once the coaching carousel swings into action in a month or so. Now would be a good time for UAB fans to show him why he should keep making magic in the Magic City.
Brown’s career winding down

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Robert Brown was sold a vision by UAB coaches of cutting down nets, going to NCAA Tournaments and winning championships.

Now that he’s been a part of it — with more potentially to come — he’ll try to keep his emotions in check on Saturday when he’s honored as UAB’s lone senior.

But that will have to wait. First, the first-place Blazers (22-8, 12-2 Conference USA) host second-place Marshall (15-12, 11-3) on Thursday night at 7 p.m.

Brown left Virginia Tech after two inconsistent years under two head coaches. That first year, he developed a bond with Hokies staffers Rob Ehsan and Jeff Wulbrun, who later joined Jerod Haase on his first staff at UAB.

After the 2013 season, when Ehsan found out Brown had been released to transfer, the recruiting process began. Brown wanted to get closer to his home of Clermont, Fla., and chose UAB over East Tennessee State and Florida Gulf Coast. He sat out the 2013-14 season.

The 6-foot-5, 195-pound guard is scoring 13.2 points per game for UAB and is one of the best all-around players in Conference USA. He’s also found the “sweet spot of leadership,” Haase said, and isn’t too combative or too quiet with other players.

When other teams are making runs at UAB, it’s Brown who hits the key shot to thwart that or — in the case at Charlotte — the game-winning shot right before the buzzer.

“He’s turned himself into a great leader,” Ehsan said. “Just his composure and the maturity of him as a person has affected him as a basketball player.”

Brown said he found the right family environment at UAB, but the Blazers were coming off a 16-17 season before he arrived. UAB finished strong in conference play, making the NCAA Tournament by winning the Conference USA Tournament and cutting down the nets at Legacy Arena.

With two wins this week UAB would clinch a share of the Conference USA title and the No. 1 seed for the tournament, which will again be in Birmingham.

Brown was the Conference USA Tournament MVP and hit a big 3-pointer in the final minute of UAB’s 60-59 win over third-seed Iowa State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

“I think that’s probably the biggest (shot of his life),” Brown said. “I know that gave me the most chills down my spine.”

UAB lost to UCLA in the round of 32, but Haase and Ehsan’s vision to Brown proved correct. It’s why the senior soon-to-be graduate with a communications degree has a high level of trust in the coaching staff.

“I was at home for spring break and I heard from Coach Ehsan tootin’ his own horn,” Brown said. “All I needed to do was trust them and it would all work out.”

That it did. But he’s now come to realize that he has just two more games left at Bartow Arena and his three years in Birmingham will soon come to an end.

His family, which has been able to see him play much more in person with UAB than previously, will be in attendance.

“I know it’s going to be emotional, but I’m going to try my best not to cry and try to keep it together in front of everybody,” Brown said.
Former Tide OL Brandon Hill finds his home with Blazers

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It’s not just Brandon Hill’s size that makes him hard to miss, but the new UAB offensive lineman has been a steady force of encouragement for a program on its way back.

Hill, who started his career at Alabama and played a season at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College before coming to UAB in January, emerged as a leader for the Blazers as they began spring practice last week.

“He’s a leader,” UAB coach Bill Clark said. “He’s always encouraging his teammates. He’s intelligent. He’s got high football IQ. The sky is the limit for him.”

Hill, who has been working as an offensive guard, was listed at 6-foot-6 and 375 pounds when he signed. He’s likely heavier than that now, but is working to get back in the 375 range.

Clark said that he’s been able to make it through every practice. He did extra work on weekends before UAB started spring practice.

“I’m working on it,” Hill said. “You always can get better. I can get better. And with the way we practice and our tempo, you always get in shape.”

Hill’s athleticism has stood out, and defensive players certainly meet their match when taking him on. Clark said the biggest challenge going forward will be working on Hill’s lateral movement and getting adjusted to the fast tempo that UAB wants to run offensively.

“Trust and play your technique and stay away from him,” UAB linebacker Tevin Crews said. “That’s what I try to do. That’s a big guy and he can move. He’s a pretty athletic guy.”

Hill said that UAB’s family atmosphere enticed him when he committed last fall. He also noted that he could possibly “get my master’s degree before I even probably play a down.”

“A lot of people don’t get an opportunity to be a part of something great,” Hill said, in reference to UAB’s return to the football field after the program was shut down in December 2014 and then restored last June.

“With (offensive line) Coach (Mike) Bennefield, Coach Clark and all the strength and conditioning coaches, it just felt like home again.”
UA SOFTBALL

Dare can play anywhere for Tide

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Chandler Dare is playing at home today for the first time this season.
Exactly where she’ll line up for the fourth-ranked University of Alabama softball team is less certain.
At a tournament in Atlanta last weekend, she started in center field in place of All-American Haylie McCleney, who was out after sustaining a concussion. She also played second base. She has seen time at both corner outfield positions as well.
“T almost had her at short,” UA head coach Patrick Murphy said, “but the way the situation turned out we didn’t need her. But she could easily play second, third or short and all three spots in the outfield, so she’s very valuable.”
The 5-foot-2 junior from Moundville, who graduated from American Christian Academy, has a position on the official roster: utility.
“My position? Whatever Murph puts me right now,” she said.
“I’ll play any position. I like the outfield, I like the infield, so wherever he puts me as long as I get to play, that’s awesome.
“I’d just say I think it’s good to be versatile. I grew up, my dad was always telling you need to be able to play every position, you need to be able to play the outfield and the infield.”

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Dare has also been flexible at the plate. The left-handed hitter has hit second in the batting order five times (all last weekend when filling in for McCleny in center), and also batted seventh, eighth and ninth this year. She carries a .393 average, third-best on the team, with two doubles, a home run and 10 RBIs through 11 games. She’s 3-for-3 on steal attempts.

Murphy likes to use the early part of the season to experiment, and Dare is an obliging subject.

“I think that’s really good that there’s not really a consistent lineup yet so you can get used to hitting in the two hole, you can get used to hitting in the nine hole, so it’s really interesting,” she said. “You get to kind of get a feel for this spot, you get a feel for right field, left field, center field.”

After 11 games on the road to open the season, she mostly wants to play on her home field.

“We finally got out of that stage of we finally get to play somebody else, now we’re like, yes, we get to play at home in front of the best fans in the country: our crowd, our fans.”

Murphy, likewise, is ready for a home game.

“There’s so many things going on: We’ve got the new scoreboard, the six new kids that have never played on our field, we’re looking forward to a bunch of fans being out here,” he said. “We’ve had enough of the road for sure.”

McCleny is expected to return to the lineup, so that leaves Murphy to ponder where to put Dare in the lineup. Her power hitting is improving, she says. And she’s never had the chance to bat cleanup.

“Working on it, I guess you could say,” she said.

— Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.
ALABAMA SOFTBALL

Murphy earns his 900th win at Bama

Crimson Tide takes down Maryland, 10-5

Staff report

The Crimson Tide softball team finished up the weekend undefeated at the Panther Invitational, winning 10-5 over Maryland on Sunday. With this win, coach Patrick Murphy earns his 900th win at Alabama.

Currently in his 18th season, Murphy has a 900-242 record with the Tide.

Maryland may of out-hit Alabama, but the Terrapins couldn't bring home any runners. Alabama capitalized on Maryland's lacking offense, garnering 10 runs on nine hits, including five for extra bases.

Reagan Dykes and Peyton Grantham each had multi-hit games. Grantham had four RBIs while Dykes had one. Dykes was 2-for-3.

Madi Moore earned the win for Alabama. Moore is now 5-0 on the season. Alexis Osorio pitch 3.0 relief innings for her second save.

Maryland got the first run of the game quickly in the top of the first. With the bases loaded, Moore walked Maryland's Hannah Dewey, which gave the Terrapins the advantage. Dykes got the run for Alabama to tie up the game. Leona Lafaiele scored the second run of the day.

In the bottom of the second, with two outs, Chandler Dare hit a double to bring home Demi Turner and Andrea Hawkins to extend the lead to 4-1. Then, Dykes stepped up to the plate, hit a single to bring home Dare.

Trailing by four runs at the top of the third, the Terrapins scored one run and then two more in the fourth inning.

Caroline Hardy hit her first career hit in the bottom of the fourth, a two-run single to extend the lead to 7-4.

Hardy's hit helped give the Tide enough cushion to secure the victory.

Alabama will open its home season on Wednesday against the Troy Trojans.
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

FROM SHOTS
... TO SOCKS

Hannah Cook brings it all to the Crimson Tide

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Three-year-old Hannah Cook was playing with a basketball when her older brother, Easton, stole it from her. She immediately puckered up and started crying until her parents made Easton give it back. As soon as the basketball was back in Hannah's hands, the crying stopped and the playing continued. Hannah was happy again.

"I'm bouncing it, but then I bounced it against the door and it just hits me in the head, and I fall down," she said. "I didn't cry though. I picked it back up."

Nothing could stop

No. 3 South Carolina at Alabama

Where: Foster Auditorium
When: 6 p.m. CT
Records: Alabama 14-12, 3-10 SEC; South Carolina 25-1, 13-0 SEC
TV: SEC Network
Radio: 99.1 FM

Hannah from loving the feel of a basketball in her hands, even at such a young age. Now, that 3-year-old is a sophomore at the University of Alabama, a starting guard for the women's basketball team and a young lady with many unique quirks.

SEE COOK, C3
Hannah's quirks started when she first played organized basketball at age 4. She was the only female, but instead of being intimidated she let it fuel her to become better than her male teammates.

"Balling on the guys was always fun," Hannah said. "They got mad sometimes because I was a girl and they're like, 'That's embarrassing.' I was like, 'So what if I'm a girl? Girls can play basketball too.'"

Once she proved herself, Hannah earned the boys' respect. It got to the point where she never had to worry about if or when she was going to be picked for a team during recess - she was picked first.

Hannah's parents were proud.

"It reminded me of myself when I was younger," her mother, Darla, said. "I was always a tomboy. I was kind of one of the guys, so to speak."

Hannah's tomboy side is still present. Although she likes to get all dolled up every now and then, she refuses to wear nail polish. It throws off her shot - a shot that has enabled Hannah to consistently lead Alabama in scoring this season with an average of 12.8 points per game.

Although she takes 50 warm-up shots before practice, up to 200 after practice and at least 300 on an off day, Hannah isn't solely concerned about her shooting. It's the opposite, really.

Growing up, Hannah made basketball as much of a year-round sport as she could, but when the weather was bad and she wasn't able to shoot on the family's outdoor hoop, she'd move inside.

"She would just dribble in our basement," said David, her father. "If I was down there just doing something, she'd be down there with a basketball just dribbling and just wouldn't stop. It was amazing."

It's the same way today, only not in her family's basement. Hannah has confidence in her shot, so she focuses on other aspects of her game. That's what really makes her parents and Alabama coach Kristy Curry proud. It's not that she's the leading scorer, it's that she's doing all that she can to be the best all-around basketball player out there.

Over the past year, Hannah's rebounding average has nearly doubled, jumping from 3.3 to 5.6 per game. Curry, who joined Alabama in 2013, said Hannah has always been a hard worker.

The coach knew she was something special from the moment he walked into an Ozark High School girl's basketball game.

"I saw her play for about three minutes, and without question, I knew she could be a difference-maker as we built the program," Curry said.

What comes with that talent is Hannah's personality. She's a variety of quirks. She always wears her socks inside out, not for luck but simply because it's more comfortable. Her parents say she has a stage where she'd overlap the toe area before putting her basketball shoes on.

At least in those cases, she had both socks on.

"When she was little, she would wear one sock on and one sock off all the time in the house," Darla said. "She would run around the house like Mowgli from 'The Jungle Book,' on her hands and feet all the time. Anywhere she went in the house, that's how she got around."

Hannah likes to have fun. Her father calls her animated, her mother calls her loving and her coach calls her bubbly. She doesn't censor herself.

"I just enjoy life," Hannah said. "Like if something is funny, I'm going to laugh. I'm not going to hide anything."
ALABAMA GYMNASTICS

Duckworth's coaching style has its influences

By Sean Landry
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

University of Alabama gymnastics coach Dana Duckworth's office is littered with books. Two bookshelves dominate the walls of her second-floor department in Coleman Coliseum, from leadership manuals from her time as an MBA student at the University to coaching books inspired by coach Paul W. "Bear" Bryant. Two recent additions to that collection have become the cornerstone of her team's philosophy this season.

"(Alabama softball coach Patrick Murphy) had gone to a leadership conference," Duckworth said. "So he told me I told this guy about you because the style of his presentation made me think of you. The next thing I know, I have copies of two books that have been personalized to Coach Duckworth. So I attribute it all to Murph."

'This guy' was Joshua Medcalf, author of the books 'Burn Your Goals' and 'Chop Wood, Carry Water,' and the philosophy is 'True Mental Toughness,' a concept of process-oriented thinking that Medcalf began developing as a soccer player at Duke University.

"I saw it impact my life at Duke, going from being the last player picked for pick-up games to being the ACC player of the week, the Duke student-athlete on the week, finishing second on the team in points with 15 future pros, with Mike Grella, arguably the best player in the country," Medcalf said. "I knew right away that if I could share this stuff, it would be helpful for other people. I had what was a transformational experience that wasn't something that I read in a book. It was something that I had profoundly impact my life from a playing perspective."

Medcalf's work focuses on separating an athlete's personal identity from on-field success, which he calls a "zero-sum game." By asking athletes to focus on the best process, positive attitudes to themselves and others that endure despite wins or losses, or off-field circumstance.

Medcalf left Duke University shortly thereafter, honing the philosophy to include concepts prevalent in UCLA basketball coach John Wooden's programs, and particularly emphasizing 'unconditional gratitude,' taken from then-Butler basketball coach Brad Stevens.

Now, Medcalf works as a sports psychology consultant, on staff for the UCLA women's basketball team and traveling the country as a motivational speaker and consultant for sports and business.

"I just started sharing it with as many people as I could with anyone who would listen whenever I got the opportunity," Medcalf said. "I wasn't so much concerned with getting a degree and having someone say 'Oh, you're qualified to do this.' I knew that there were probably few people who were more qualified, because all I wanted to do was really share my story about what had happened, and I knew that that story would inspire a lot of people, because I had done it. It was my testimony about what had happened after using what I had been taught."

Medcalf remains in contact with Duckworth and the Alabama programs, and Duckworth said commitment to his program to where they are: the fourth-ranked team in the country, despite a 4-4 record.

"I think it's really infused in all that we're doing," Duckworth said. "They know that I don't accept a bad attitude."

Today's meet
No. 4 Alabama at No. 28 Penn State, No. 13 Denver, No. 54 Cornell
When: 3 p.m. CT
Where: Rec Hall in University Park, Pennsylvania
Records: Alabama 4-4-0, Penn State 2-3-0, Denver 8-1-0, Cornell 7-4-0
Radio: 90.7 FM
Baseball diamond is a gem

But that means another, perhaps less enjoyable amenity is on the way: expectations. I don't mean expectations for this year's team, which is young and lightly regarded and competing in a league without forgiveness. The promise of a new stadium is one thing for recruits, while the actual brick-and-mortar facility is yet another. For years, "facilities" represented an albatross that Alabama faced in recruiting. One could understand how a prospect who'd visited Arkansas or LSU or South Carolina might wonder just how much of priority baseball was at Alabama. That albatross isn't hanging around any more.

In every sport, facilities matter. SEC schools, awash in football money, are constantly upgrading, trying to match Alabama's football

See HURT, C7

See next page
facilities or the new basketball practice facilities springing up. Ole Miss and Auburn have new basketball arenas, and are hoping for success to go along with them. South Carolina is starting to have that success and is filling the basketball arena that was built a few years ago for the first time. New indoor football facilities are springing up at Georgia and Florida, and Texas A&M just tore one football stadium down and built another in its place. It’s fair to say that you can’t automatically spend your way to success. Other factors are involved. But you can sit on your wallet until you are far behind, a fate that Alabama has avoided for the most part, now that baseball is up to speed.

So far, the experiment in “if you build it, they will come” has been a success. Friday night’s crowd showed (if anyone wondered) that there is support for baseball in Tuscaloosa. The fan base has stayed fairly loyal through a long wait for a return to Omaha. The student turnout was outstanding and promising. A playground in the outfield and cold beer in the skyboxes are welcome diversions for either end of the age spectrum. But it’s only a matter of time — again, that doesn’t necessarily mean this year, but eventually — that the novelty will wear off the new stadium and that greatest of all diversions, winning, will have to take place. Otherwise, the new park will be far prettier, but just as quiet, as the old one had become.

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UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Opening game at new ballpark

Party atmosphere accompanies opening pitch

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Let the record reflect that the first pitch inside the new Sewell-Thomas Stadium was a fast-ball strike right down the middle. It was the start of a 1-2-3 inning, an appropriate beginning to the new beginning of the University of Alabama’s $42.5 million baseball stadium.

There was a light show just before first pitch, the lights on top of the stadium shut off before displaying blinking LED lights that created a raucous atmosphere, especially in the student section in right field, that showed just what the new stadium is capable of — namely entertaining a sold-out crowd.

Entertainment was the highlight of the evening and that didn’t even include a close game on the field. From the playground in left field for children, to the student-only section in right field that provided a top-notch competitive atmosphere, to the splashy .525 and Home Plate clubs, the new Sewell-Thomas Stadium offered amenities that should keep fans entertained.

SEE BALLPARK, A4
BALL PARK

From Page A1

in UA’s newest marvel in facilities.

In the .525 Club, two bartenders tended a fully stocked bar complete with four beers on tap, including one from Tuscaloosa’s own Druid City Brewing Co.

An observant staff also made sure the buffet was fresh and appetizing, serving teriyaki beef stir fry, shrimp fried rice and vegetable spring rolls.

Paul Bryant Jr., who Director of Athletics Bill Battle credited along with the late Mal Moore for their behind-the-scenes work in making the stadium a reality, watched the game in the enclosed club with a crimson hat with a script ‘A.’

In the club seats just outside, former UA player Scott McClanahan (1998-2002) doted on his family, holding one daughter in his left arm and lap while another daughter danced in and out his right arm. His wife, seated a few rows up, watched after the couple’s other children.

McClanahan sat next to his baseball steering committee member, Roger Myers, who sat with his wife Sherry, as he kept his own scoreboard.

All were instrumental in making Friday night such a success, their love of baseball such that they spent many personal hours helping to raise funds and work with UA athletic officials to make sure the new stadium had everything it needed to be competitive in the ultra-competitive SEC.

In the Home Plate Club, behind, you guessed it, home plate, hamburgers, hot dogs and corn dogs were served along with an assortment of snacks. It also had a fully-stocked bar and beers on draft with three attentive bartenders serving fans.

Mike Gray has been an Alabama baseball fan for years, visiting the old Joe frequently. He said the Home Plate Club was comparable to the Zone at Bryant-Denny Stadium.

“I’m impressed,” Gray said. “I like the food better. I don’t see how baseball can go anywhere but up from here. How could a (recruit) who is coming to look at schools not be impressed?”

The game against the University of Maryland sold out more than two hours before first pitch, and the line to get into the student section began forming before 1:30 p.m. when Brian Talbot, Anthony Picarazzi and Zack Perry brought their folding chairs and claimed the first spots in line.

Two hours later the line stretched more than 100 yards and curved around the adjacent center-field wall.

The team gave all crimson-loving fans something to cheer for early when freshman Chander Taylor deposited a first-inning offering over the right field wall, setting off a beer shower celebration by the students. It was Taylor’s first career at-bat.

Battle perhaps summed up the night best when he addressed the crowd before the game, asking “Is this a great night or what?”

He’d know more than most. He arrived on the job in 2013 and one of his first major tasks was bringing the baseball facilities up to par. Three years later he helped cut the ribbon opening the new stadium.

“It’s just so special, everything came together tonight like a dream – the weather, good baseball teams, a sellout crowd,” Battle said. “This stadium is something special.

“We were at the bottom of the conference. Our baseball tradition is important to us. This was a major step in the right direction toward helping us to get better baseball players to come to Alabama, and I think it’s already happened in this class. We look forward to what happens in the future.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
By Ben Jones  
Sports writer  

It didn’t take long for many of the historic firsts at the rebuilt Sewell-Thomas Stadium to happen. The first hit? The first run? The first home run?  
They were all in the record books by the end of the first inning. All three were accomplished on a solo home run by freshman right fielder Chandler Taylor.  
“I still can’t explain it, to be honest,” Taylor said of his home run. “It was breathtaking for sure.”  
Taylor did everything he could to give the University of Alabama (1-0) its first win at the stadium on opening night. He drove in two runs in a 3-1 win over Maryland (0-1).  
“As you started seeing it come together, you kind of had to pinch yourself through the process of it,” head coach Mitch Gaspard said. “Honestly, I think tonight, I put as much pressure on myself as any other night because I wanted it to be a good night.”  
Taylor’s home run in the bottom of the first, with two outs, kept the pregame party going. After a ribbon cutting ceremony and introductory video that included the stadium lights flashing on and off, the sellout crowd of 5,867 was ready to celebrate. Students seated in the grass outside right field erupted as the home run ball landed among them, spraying suds in the air.  
Taylor wasn’t done with his debut yet, though. He came back in the sixth inning with the score tied 1-1 to give Alabama the lead for good on a single up the middle. Sophomore shortstop Chandler Avant led the inning off with a double to left, and Taylor’s second hit of the night drove him in. Taylor finished the night 2-2 with two RBI and a walk while also reaching base in the seventh inning after being hit by a pitch.  
His effort was supported by a strong start from junior righty Geoffrey Bramlett. He went 5.1 innings and gave up only one run on three hits and four walks while striking out six.  
“I thought Geoffrey really gutted it out tonight. He got in a couple of rough spots but made good pitches,” Gaspard said.  
Bramlett out-dueled Maryland’s Mike Shawaryn, a potential first round pick in this summer’s MLB draft. Shawaryn’s night ended after Taylor’s second
BASEBALL
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RBI, with no outs in the bottom of the sixth inning. He gave up three hits and two walks against eight strikeouts. Other than Taylor, Shawaryn only surrendered one hit and one walk to the Crimson Tide.

The UA bullpen finished things out for Bramlett. Senior Jon Keller pitched 1.2 innings. Matt Foster and Thomas Burrows each pitched a perfect inning to close out the game.

Taylor was one of three Alabama freshmen to start the game. Left fielder Gene Wood started and led off for the Crimson Tide, while second baseman Cobie Vance batted fifth.

But Taylor’s showing made the night memorable. His start gave Alabama the finish it wanted as it opened the new “Joe.”

“I think it was everything we thought of when this thing started coming to fruition,” Gaspard said. For me it was about raising the energy level of Alabama baseball. A new stadium was a big part of that ... When you look up in the third, fourth, fifth inning and you see the place packed out and you see the students in the right field and you feel the energy, that’s what it’s all about.”

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ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Crimson Tide nets $46 million in 2015

By Aaron Sutlles
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama football program profited nearly $46.5 million in 2015, according to a financial report filed by the university to the NCAA and obtained by The Tuscaloosa News.

To no surprise, the football program kept the entire athletic department in the black with total revenues of nearly $100 million: specifically $95,132,301, with incurred expenditures that totaled $48,640,971. That profit of $46,491,330 was down nearly $7 million from 2014.

Media rights fees brought in by the football program, including broadcasting fees from television, radio, internet and digital, were more than $20 million. Those rights also included the revenues from the SEC Network.

A total of $37 million was profited from ticket sales, and almost $20 million in private contributions.

Staff salaries, head coach Nick Saban’s salary, nine assistant coaches and all support staff and administration, totaled $18,055,483, which also incorporates bonuses. That total rose from $15,490,459 a year before.

The university paid Saban $7,969,113, including bonuses. Recruiting expenses rose to $1,315,030 in 2015.

Overall, the athletic department profited approximately $16.6 million, with total operating revenues of $148.9 million and total expenses of $132.3 million. In 2014, total revenues were $153.2 million with expenses of $129.3 million.

— Reach Aaron Sutlles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
TEXAS GUNS IN SCHOOL

Private colleges saying no to guns on campus

By Jim Vertuno
The Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — When Texas' conservative Legislature passed a law requiring public universities to allow concealed guns on campus, it also gave the state's private institutions of higher learning the chance to follow suit. None has so far.

More than 20 private schools have said they won't lift their gun bans when the law takes effect this August, including the state's largest private universities that have religious affiliations and often align with the type of conservative values espoused by the politicians behind the law.

The opposition has not surprised top Texas Republicans who championed the law as a matter of constitutional rights and self-defense. But it reflects a widespread belief even among conservative university leaders that guns have no place in the classroom.

Baylor, Texas Christian and Southern Methodist universities have all declined to allow guns on their campuses.

"My own view is that it is a very unwise public policy," Baylor President Ken Starr, a former prosecutor and judge best known for his work on the Whitewater investigation involving President Bill Clinton, said late last year. The Baptist school announced this month that guns would not be allowed on campus.

Previous law generally banned concealed handguns from Texas' public and private universities. That changed last year, when lawmakers passed the so-called "campus carry" law that requires public universities to allow concealed handgun license holders to bring their weapons into campus buildings and classrooms.

Texas will be one of at least 20 states that allow some form of campus carry. But only a few make it a defined right in state law like Texas does.

The law faced strong objections from public higher education officials, law enforcement, students and faculty across the state. Opponents included University of Texas System Chancellor William McRaven, the former head of U.S. Special Operations Command who directed the raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

A notable exception was Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp, who said guns on campus didn't trouble him.

When public schools asked for the same choice private schools have, state lawmakers said no.

The author of the law, Sen. Brian Birdwell, whose district includes Baylor, said he had to protect the public's "God-given" right of self-defense on public property, but also private property rights. He notes private businesses can ban guns.

Private universities are "no different than Starbucks selling coffee. What they are selling is different," Birdwell said.

"Now it's up to the marketplace of free enterprise, to make a market decision," about guns on campus, Birdwell said. "My duty was to preserve their ability to make that choice."

Lawmakers likely also would have faced legal action from private schools over any attempt to force them to accept guns. Many of the state's private schools are religiously-based and likely would have resisted having such a major policy decision thrust on them.

"I did expect a number of schools to try to circumvent the law," Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick told WFAA-TV of Dallas. "I don't know why colleges are floundering with this. I think it makes campuses safer."

The campus carry advocacy group Students for Concealed Carry supported private university choice and expected most to initially ban guns.

(Our) hope is that once the administrators of private colleges see campus carry safely and successfully implemented on public college campuses, they'll reconsider," the group said.

The public school gun mandate frustrates University of Texas President Greg Fenves. On Wednesday, Fenves begrudgingly approved rules allowing guns in his classrooms, saying the law gave him no alternative.
What you need to do to get money for college by March 1st

By: Raven Knowlton

When I was in the fourth grade, I had two big dreams for my future. I told my mom that I aspired to be the valedictorian of my high school, and then I wanted to go on to be a lawyer. By my senior year, I had achieved my goal of being valedictorian, so my next step was to pursue a higher education path toward becoming a lawyer. As a first generation college student, I did not know what questions to ask or how to start the college application process. Prior to applying to specific colleges, I took the time to learn about my options and identify the factors that mattered to me.

I grew up in a small town in Morgan County, and I wanted to attend a college in a large city. Thankfully, that dream seemed possible when I toured the Birmingham-Southern College (BSC) campus as a 10th grade student. BSC is located in a big city, but still has a close-knit atmosphere — something that is very important to me. Although I was very interested in the school, I needed to learn more.

After spending time at BSC and later visiting other local colleges, I was connected with several people who provided me with information about the application and financial aid process which helped immensely during my college search.

BSC offered me a variety of scholarships and grants. While the financial aid options that were offered to me were quite generous, I still needed more aid to make it affordable for me and my family. At that point, I thought that Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) was the most realistic choice.

I was lucky that my my mom was my biggest supporter during my search for the right college. While I was considering various schools, she was gathering information about financial aid. That’s when we learned about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). By completing the FAFSA, I could access thousands of dollars in grants, loans and scholarships to help finance my education.

As my mother and I learned, you have to complete the FAFSA to be considered for a Pell Grant. Students can receive up to $5,815 in Pell Grant funding. Eligibility is based on financial need, and since it is gift aid, it does not have to be paid back.

In addition to the Pell Grant, the FAFSA helps determine the Estimated Family Contribution (EFC), as well as loan eligibility for students and their parents or legal guardians. By filling out the FAFSA, students can also access federal work-study opportunities that allow them to work on-campus in exchange for funds for college and related expenses.

After I completed the FAFSA during the spring of my senior year of high school, BSC contacted me about additional scholarships and grants that I qualified for based on my FAFSA. They also
told me about scholarships based on my high school activities. Together, we came up with a financial aid package that made it possible for me to attend my dream school: BSC.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 9 out of 10 students who complete the FAFSA attend college the following fall. However, a recent study conducted by NerdWallet, found that only 45 percent of Alabama students completed the FAFSA in 2014. As a result, they left more than $58 million of financial aid unclaimed. Although the FAFSA is complex and requires time to complete, it can be a difference maker for students who are on the fence about attending college because of financial barriers.

March 1 is the priority deadline. While the application will remain open past March 1, historical data shows that students who apply prior to March 1 receive more funding.

As students and their families go through the financial aid process, I would like to offer one piece of advice: ask for help.

Your high school guidance counselor, local colleges and college access organizations can help students complete their financial aid form. If you need additional assistance, then explore Cash for College at alabamapossible.org/cashforcollege. It's a great starting point as you begin to search for answers to your FAFSA questions.

For me, a first generation college student with dreams of becoming an attorney, the FAFSA created opportunities for me to pursue my higher education dreams by removing financial barriers for my family.