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State panel studies gasoline tax increase

By: Jason Morton

The Alabama Legislature's Permanent Joint Transportation Committee on Thursday discussed whether to raise the state gasoline tax to fund infrastructure services.

The meeting, held in Northport, was the first of five such sessions to be hosted around the state by the 14-member committee. The objective of the meetings is to listen to residents and find out whether there's support for a gas tax increase, with proceeds used to improve roads and bridges.

State Rep. Mac McCutcheon, R-Capshaw, the committee chairman, introduced a bill in the most recent special session that would have raised the gas tax by 5 cents per gallon and then adjust the tax up or down another 2 cents each year, depending on consumer prices and other factors. But the bill never advanced to the floor of the Legislature for a vote.

McCutcheon has said he is still working on the proposal for the session that begins Feb. 2, but the lawmaker said more than once on Thursday that no legislation to increase the tax was complete.

However, none of the elected officials who showed up at Northport City Hall for the meeting said they were opposed to supporting one.

“Our current funding model is not sustainable,” said Jim Page, president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama and a member of the Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure, a grassroots organization that formed in 2015 to address ways to improve the state's bridges and roads.

He cited the American Society of Civil Engineers, which graded about 50 percent of Alabama highways as being in fair, poor or very poor condition, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which ranked Alabama fifth in the nation for drivers being more likely to be involved in a fatal traffic accident.

These problems can be corrected, Page said, but not with the current gas tax allotment of 12 cents per gallon, and not as the money is being used today.

“As cars continue to become more and more fuel-efficient, that's less money (the Alabama Department of Transportation) has to use on roads and bridges -- roads and bridges we drive on every day,” Page said.

Page said that, since the last state gas tax hike in 1992, the average motorist driving a Honda Accord for 12,000 miles each year paid about $185 toward the state gas tax fund.

In 2014, that total had dipped to $142.

During that same span, construction costs -- asphalt, steel and the like -- had at least doubled.

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“We can't ignore the fact that expenses are increasing and revenue is decreasing across the state,” Page said.

Jason Hoff, who took over as president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in 2003, also implored the committee to take action.

The plant outside Vance began production in 1997 and, in that year, cranked out about 68,000 SUVs, Hoff said.

Last year, that total had increased to more than 300,000 vehicles, with about 1,250 automobiles being manufactured at the plant every day.

And by the time Mercedes completes its latest expansion next year, the company will have invested about $6 billion into Alabama, Hoff said.

But in recent years, the plant has faced manufacturing delays at an increasing rate because of local infrastructure.

Wrecks and congestion either keep employees from getting to work or prevent supplies and parts from arriving on time, Hoff said.

Tuscaloosa Police Chief Steve Anderson said infrastructure issues cause undue stress and damage to patrol vehicles while slowing emergency responders.

Rob Roberson, director of the Tuscaloosa County Emergency Management Agency, was delayed in arriving to the meeting because of an infrastructure-related issue in Vance. He, along with Rod Coleman, director of Tuscaloosa 911, echoed Anderson's sentiments, and Coleman said it sometimes takes him 45 minutes to an hour to make the 15-mile drive from his home to the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse because of road-related issues.

Not everyone, however, supported increasing the gas tax.

Bart Fletcher, president of the Petroleum & Convenience Marketers of Alabama, said his group could not support a gas tax increase without addressing how local municipalities can now increase gas taxes within their jurisdictions.

Fletcher said that adding more state tax on top of the city taxes isn't fair.

And John Downing, a retiree from Duncanville, said he was opposed to any kind of gas tax increase for any reason.
New road network

Construction of a new road network on the University of Alabama campus linking with Jack Warner Parkway remains on schedule.

North Campus Way is part of the $24 million road project on the historic Bryce Hospital campus at UA that will connect Fifth Avenue, Hackberry Lane and Jack Warner Parkway. The new road will connect to Jack Warner east of Clara Verner Apartments and Peter Bryce Boulevard, another road currently under construction, north of the historic main hospital building. Peter Bryce Boulevard will connect Hackberry Lane with Fifth Avenue.

The first phase, including the links with Hackberry and Jack Warner, is still scheduled to be completed by April, according to Tim Leopard, associate vice president of construction. The second phase includes the leg connecting to Fifth Avenue and is expected to be completed by July.
Students get new Camaro to work on

Goal is save energy, cut emissions

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

For a team of students at the University of Alabama, a brand new 2016 Chevrolet Camaro topped with a red bow delivered just before Christmas marks the beginning of the next phase of an engineering challenge to retain the iconic sports car's performance while making it more energy efficient.

On Tuesday, UA's EcoCAR3 team officially unveiled the Camaro that they will spend the next two years re-engineering as part of a nationwide contest sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and General Motors.

"It is a really exciting program," faculty adviser Paul Puzinauskas said.

The UA students are among 16 teams of university students tasked with designing, developing, and integrating powertrains into a Camaro that will allow it to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions while maintaining the performance and safety of the production gasoline vehicle. Student must also consider cost and innovation as part of the process.

The contest requires student-led teams to consider a variety of aspects including mechanical, electrical, computer and software engineering, as well as communications, marketing, fundraising and project management. The team offers students a mix of managerial, design and support roles and draws from disciplines across campus.

"It is very interdisciplinary," project manager Kaylie Crosby said.

There are 150 students participating on the UA team subdivided into three main groups for engineering, management and communication with 19 sub-teams for specific aspect of the project. The team has five faculty advisers.

The progress of the teams is evaluated annually in end-of-the year competitions. The re-engineering must be 50 percent complete by the end of the second year, and the team must have a show-room ready car by the end of the fourth year.

The UA team plans to make its Camaro more energy efficient by converting it into a blended plug-in hybrid by replacing its stock combustion engine with a smaller combustion engine supplemented by two electric motors.

It will spend the next four months installing the new hybrid powertrain, said A.J. Hamley, a senior mechanical engineering major who leads the innovation sub-team.

Under the team's plan, the 3.6-liter, six-cylinder stock engine will be replaced with a 2.4-liter, four-cylinder GM engine, a Parker electric motor, a Denso electric motor, and a 12.6-kWh battery pack in the trunk.

The goal is to increase its fuel efficiency from the stock 28 miles per gallon

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CAMARO
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to the equivalent of roughly 50 mpg, Hamley said.

The re-engineered Camaro is designed to be able to select among its electric and combustion power sources depending on performance needs.

The challenge for the team as it crafted a design for the new powertrain during the 18 months since it was selected to participate was to figure out how to fit the new components into a vehicle that was engineered without the parts in mind, Hamley said.

"The biggest challenge during the design phase has been space," Hamley said. "The Camaro is a two-door sports car."

Weight was also a concern, he said.

The team's goal for the redesign, according to Hamley, is to retain the character of the Camaro as a sports car capable of seating four with some trunk space, which was reduced with the addition of the battery pack.

The team's design still allows for storage of two "overnight" suitcases in the trunk, Hamley said.

The contest is modeled on the GM design process, Hamley said. The teams have the option of using existing GM parts or integrating new parts. UA's team is doing a bit of both. Hamley said the team was retaining the Camaro's GM transmission and adding an existing GM 4-cylinder engine and two electric motors from other manufacturers.

In May at the end-of-the-year competition, the team's car and its new powertrain will undergo a function and safety test.

"It doesn't have to work as a system but the individual parts need to work," Hamley said.

The remaining two years will be the refinement of the design.

At the end of their participation, students will have practical experience working in an automotive design process.

"They are coming out of this with experience as a GM engineer," Crosby said.

Crosby, a 22-year-old MBA student with an undergraduate degree from UA in mechanical engineering, and Hamley both have job offers from GM.

It's an exciting opportunity for the students on the team because the students have access to millions (of dollars) of state-of-the-art equipment and tools through the sponsors, Puzinauskas said.

The contest is the latest in a series of Advanced Vehicle Technology Competitions (AVTC) by the U.S. Department of Energy aimed at developing the next generation of automotive engineers.

"We are talking about tools and things like that that even our faculty have not been exposed to yet," said Puzinauskas, an associate engineering professor in UA's Center for Advanced Vehicle Technologies. 
Breaking down Alabama's specialty tags

The University of Alabama has the most, but Medal of Honor tag the most rare

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Have you ever wondered which specialty car tags are the most popular in Alabama? Or, maybe, which ones are the most rare? Alabama has more than 120 different types of specialty plates, ranging from its Agriculture to Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. While some tags sell tens of thousands, others barely top 100 or, in some special cases, don't even eclipse 10.

10 most-common specialty tags
1. University of Alabama 103,321
2. Helping Schools 83,120
3. Auburn University 68,067
5. Alabama Wildlife Federation 19,643
6. Fight Breast Cancer 17,244
7. Vietnam Veteran 12,054
8. Barber Motorsports Museum 11,186
10. U.S. Army 9,734

Source: Alabama Department of Revenue

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Note: The rankings don’t include disability-related license plates or the God Bless America plate, which is classified as a specialty plate but does not come with an additional charge. It also omits others, such as National Guard or Firefighter tags, where there are exemptions for most costs unless the tag is personalized. It does include widely issued military tags that require proof of service before purchase.

Other side of the spectrum

It generally takes a commitment from 1,000 people before a specialty car tag is printed, though the bar is sometimes as low as 250. There are exceptions, usually related to specially issued military service tags.

While most tags are offered to the public, others require verification before they can be purchased. The list below doesn’t include some government-related tags, such as those given to consular officials, or tags that are no longer in print, such as the “Take a Kid Fishing” tag, that remain on a handful of vehicles.

10 least-common specialty tags:


1. Medal of Honor 8
2. Pearl Harbor Survivor 25
3. Prisoner of War 38
4. Selma University 57
5. Civitan International 60
6. Merchant Marine 65
7. Atomic Nuked Veteran 67
8. Battle of the Bulge 71
9. Rotary International 120
10. WWII American Campaign Veteran 130

Source: Alabama Department of Revenue

Notes: The Medal of Honor, Pearl Harbor Survivor, Prisoner of War, Merchant Marine, Battle of the Bulge and World War II veteran plates all require documentation from the Department of Defense before purchase.

The “Atomic Nuked” tag also requires documentation from the Pentagon. That tag, which has been called “the single most bizarre plate on the road today” is for those who were “were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation due to atomic bomb and weapons tested from 1946 to 1962.”
Limits placed on hoverboards

University officials cite safety concerns

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama, citing safety concerns, has placed temporary restrictions on storing and recharging hoverboards on campus, including banning them from residential buildings.

The restrictions, announced a week ahead of the scheduled return of students for the spring semester, go into effect immediately and will remain in place until safety concerns are resolved. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is currently investigating why certain hoverboard models caught fire while being recharged and others while being used.

The decision was made based on the totality of the safety concerns, according to Associate Vice President for Student Affairs Steven Hood.

There have been no fires related to the boards on campus, but Hood said the university wanted to be proactive with the potential safety risk. The approach to enforcing the restrictions will not be punitive, he said.

Students found with the two-wheeled devices in residence halls will be asked to remove them, Hood said.

“We work with them to give them time to likely ground ship it home,” Hood said.

In addition to hoverboards being banned in residential facilities including sorority and fraternity houses, the devices cannot be recharged in any UA-owned or UA-leased facilities or buildings.

The advisory does not restrict hoverboards from being ridden on campus, but users are required to follow all traffic and pedestrian laws, according to the advisory.

Students are set to return to campus for classes on Jan. 13.
Retailer rolls dice, orders 3,000 Alabama Championship shirts

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A family-owned Alabama footwear chain feels pretty confident the Crimson Tide will win the college football national championship game Monday against Clemson.

Shoe Station is so confident that it pre-ordered more than 3,000 T-shirts celebrating the hopeful victory. If the Crimson Tide falls short, the Mobile company said the shirts will be worth nothing.

“We love sports and appreciate the hard work of all teams, but we stock our merchandise based on consumer demand,” said Shoe Station Executive Vice President Brent Barkin. “Since we are an Alabama-based company, much of that demand is for merchandise for UA. This year, if Bama wins, 12 of our 19 stores will extend their hours to sell these limited-edition T-shirts.”

Barkin said Shoe Station managers and employees will rush to open select stores the moment Alabama wins to give fans an opportunity to buy a shirt before they sell out. Text messages and emails will be sent to more than 100,000 Shoe Station customers.

“We will also be posting on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram,” Barkin said. “It will be a party-like atmosphere.”

Barkin said they will send the shirts back to the vendor if Alabama loses, resulting in lost labor time for Shoe Station and material and printing costs for the vendor.
Blazer Boosters donations exceed $5M in 2015

UAB athletics received donations in 2015 exceeding $5 million, a record achievement for Blazer Boosters.

Donations from nearly 1,500 Blazer Boosters in 2015, combined with a membership increase of 36.4 percent over 2014 and 105 percent over the past five years, have contributed to annual scholarship programs, capital projects, sport gift accounts and the football, bowling and rifle support fund.

"We are so grateful to our loyal fans and community for their tremendous support," said UAB Director of Athletics Mark Ingram. "I'd like to thank our donors, the Blazer Boosters staff and the UAB Development Office for all of their hard work. Great things are happening at UAB."

Annual scholarship contributions surpassed $1.3 million, while more than $18 million was pledged toward the enhanced support of the football, bowling and rifle programs, including more than $13 million in philanthropy.

The Finish the Drive Campaign for UAB athletics was launched in August 2015. In addition, Hatton Smith, CEO Emeritus of Royal Cup Coffee and Tea, has partnered with Blazer Boosters to assemble the UAB Athletics Campaign Committee, which includes Birmingham-area business and community leaders. Smith was appointed committee chair to work with UAB athletics to raise additional funds with an emphasis on facility development and enhancement.

"I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish together, but I am even more excited for the victories ahead of us," Smith said. "What is good for UAB is good for Birmingham, and successful athletic programs will provide a platform to tell the world the story of both UAB and Birmingham."

The recently formed UAB Athletics Foundation, led by campus, community and University of Alabama System leaders, was developed with a charge to build loyalty and the philanthropic support necessary to develop elite Blazer Athletics programs.

Blazer Boosters is the fundraising arm of UAB athletics. Donations to Blazer Boosters generate funding for student-athlete scholarships, capital projects, facility improvements and the enhancement of sport operating budgets. For more information about Blazer Boosters and its initiatives, visit BlazerBoosters.com or call 205-996-9969.
Alaska scientist, one of nation's few black female physicists, breaks ground in cancer research

By: Anna Claire Vollers

When Dr. Hadiah-Nicole Green receives invitations to be a guest speaker for professional groups, schools and nonprofit organizations, she almost never turns them down.

"Usually if there is an invitation to speak at a forum like that, I accept it because I feel like it's a responsibility," she said. "There are so few of us (black women in STEM fields) I don't feel like I have the luxury to say I'm too busy."

By many measures, Green has been extremely busy. One of fewer than 100 black female physicists in the country, she recently won a $1.1 million grant to further develop her patent-pending technology for using laser-activated nanoparticles to treat cancer.

A tomboy as a child, Green was crowned Homecoming Queen at Alabama A&M University (by a landslide vote), earned her master's and Ph.D degrees at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and is now an assistant professor in the physics department at Tuskegee University.

It's tempting to see Green for all the ways that she is unusual — not the least for winning a large grant at a relatively young age, and for being black and female in a field dominated by white men — but it's not something she said she thinks about in her day-to-day life.

"It looks like I'm special, but I'm not. I'm no different from anybody else," she said. "When opportunity found me, I was prepared."

Close to home

Green's personal history with cancer fuels her drive to find a way to treat it. She grew up in St. Louis and — after the death of her mother and father — was raised by her aunt and uncle, General Lee Smith and his wife, Ora Lee.

When Ora Lee was diagnosed with cancer, "She refused the treatment because she didn't want to experience the side effects," said Green. "It was heartbreaking, but I could appreciate she wanted to die on her own terms.

"Three months later, my uncle was diagnosed with cancer."

Green took time off from school to help him through chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "I saw first-hand how devastating it was, and I could understand why my aunt didn't want to go through that."
She earned a bachelor's degree in physics with a concentration in fiber optics, and then a full scholarship to UAB. She got the idea to use lasers to treat cancer without the side effects of chemo and radiation.

**A physicist's cancer treatment**

A few months ago, Green was awarded a $1.1 million grant to work on a technology that targets, images and treats cancer.

"I was completely overwhelmed with joy, with thanksgiving, humbled at the opportunity that a group of my peers thought that my work was worthy for such a grant," she said. "This is a huge door opening. It outlines a path to take this treatment to clinical trial."

Green had spent seven years during her master's and doctoral programs at UAB, developing a way to target cancer cells – not the healthy cells around them.

"I'm really hoping this can change the way we treat cancer in America," said Green. "There are so many people who only get a three-month or six-month survival benefit from the drugs they take. Then three or six months later, they're sent home with no hope, nothing else we can do. Those are the patients I want to try to save, the ones where regular medicine isn't effective for them."

The way the technology works is that an FDA-approved drug containing nanoparticles is injected into a cancer patient and causes the patient's tumor to fluoresce (glow) under imaging equipment. The goal is for a laser to activate the nanoparticles by heating them.

"They are not toxic, so without the laser they won't kill anything, and the laser by itself is harmless, so without the particles it won't hurt anything," said Green. "Because of their need to work together and their inability to work apart, I can insure that the treatment is only happening to the cancer cells we target and identify."

While Green is not the first to think of using lasers and nanoparticles to treat cancer, she's been able to work the bugs out of parts of the technology that have been problematic, like nanoparticle delivery and seeing success in living animals – mice, in Green's case.

"As a physicist I've created a physical treatment that is not specific to the biology of the cancer," she said. "It's a platform technology. It's not cancer type-specific, though it can treat the cancer specifically. That's a concept my friends who are biologists struggle with."

**Capable of more**

As she moves forward with her research and with teaching at Tuskegee, Green makes time to speak at schools, Boys & Girls Clubs and other youth events.
"People told me to make good grades and stay in school," she said, "and I always take good advice to heart."

Green said she feels a responsibility to be a positive example and change stereotypes of black women portrayed in media.

"There are black female scientists who don't get media exposure," she said. "Because of that, young black girls don't see those role models as often as they see Beyonce or Nicki Minaj. It's important to know that our brains are capable of more than fashion and entertainment and music, even though arts are important."

Green has mentored several young women, many of whom have gone on to receive degrees and jobs in science-related fields.

"It takes a village to raise a child," she said. "I repeat that because a village of people helped raise me and instill values in me, and encouraged me to get to this point. I did not get here by myself. Because of that clarity, I know my responsibility to encourage and mentor the next generation."
Parcak, modern-day Indiana Jones, appearing on Colbert’s show

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Sarah Parcak has brought global attention to UAB, most recently by winning a 2016 TED Prize and a $1 million grant.

Now the space archaeologist will appear on tonight’s “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert,” along with actor Matthew Broderick and singer Kacey Musgraves.

The show airs at 10:35 p.m. CT weekdays on CBS.

Parcak, sometimes known as a modern-day Indiana Jones, is the founder of UAB’s Laboratory for Global Observation.

She uses satellites to prevent looting at historical locations and discover new sites. She has helped locate 17 potential pyramids in Egypt and identified more than 4,000 forgotten settlements and lost tombs.

She has not yet announced what she plans to do with the grant money, but will reveal her project at the annual TED conference in Vancouver in February.

In 2011, her work was spotlighted in a BBC documentary, “Egypt’s Lost Cities.” In 2012, she was named a National Geographic Emerging Explorer and a TED fellow.

IN HER WORDS

Sarah Parcak in 2014 explained to TED ideas how space archaeology works and why it is so important:

Archaeologists have used aerial photographs to map archaeological sites since the 1920s, while the use of infrared photography started in the 1960s, and satellite imagery was first used in the 1970s.

“Today, space archaeology is fairly standard practice. Conventional excavation and survey are crucial to confirm any satellite imagery findings, but analyzing the images saves time and money and allows projects to focus on specific locations at archaeological sites. ...”

“I don’t think there is one single thing I’ve found that I consider spectacular. But what I do think is amazing is that the imagery analysis has shown us that we only know about a tiny fraction of sites and features in ancient Egypt.

“Think about all of the huge questions we have not been able to ask due to a dearth of data: about the rise and collapse of ancient Egypt or how and why the Nile River changed over time. Our entire picture of ancient Egypt will be totally different in 25 years.”
Top health care issues in Birmingham in 2016

Birmingham's medical market experienced some significant changes in 2015. The relocation of a major hospital to U.S. 280 and the creation of a new health system were some of the top stories, and a few national trends made their effects felt here in Birmingham as well.

That sets the stage for an interesting upcoming year for health care in the Magic City, industry experts say.

Here are three of the top things to watch heading into 2016:

All eyes on Medicaid

Alabama is one of 20 states that has yet to expand Medicaid under the federal program, thereby forfeiting billions in funding towards improving access to care for hundreds of thousands of Alabama residents.

But that might not be the case for long. Toward the end of 2015 Gov. Robert Bentley hinted he's considering an expansion, and the task force he created suggested the state should take that step.

Local providers feel the same way.

"It's the No. 1 issue on every provider's mind," said Keith Parrott, CEO of the joint venture that united Brookwood Medical Center and Baptist Health System. "I think expansion is important to the state, not just for the recipients who will get access to care, but economically as well. It's really going to help the providers be much better off financially and provide better services."

A study conducted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham shows that 290,000 Alabamians would receive coverage and health care providers would bring in $1.7 billion in new income if the program was expanded.

Alabama reformed its state Medicaid program in 2013 and has since unveiled the six regional care organizations assigned to manage them. The launch of the RCOs could lead to growth for Birmingham companies like Viva Health. But the effectiveness of the RCO system could play a huge role in the state's potential Medicaid expansion.

"I'm also concerned how successful the RCOs will be without expansion. The way they are structured I think it will be very difficult for them to succeed without expansion," Parrott said.

Rate changes for hospitals

Parrott said another thing to keep an eye on in the new year is how providers respond to rate changes made by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, the state's dominant insurer.

He said Blue Cross will change how they

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pay hospitals and primary care physicians by moving away from a historically flat daily rate for any type of medical service toward a tiered system.

That system will pay hospitals differently based on the service provided.

“A lower-intensity inpatient visit will get a lower daily rate, and a more intense visit like for a heart surgery patient will get a higher daily rate,” Parrott said. “I think that’s a good change. We need the revenue and pay from Blue Cross to be more aligned with the costs of the care we provide.”

He noted that’s a step towards more value-based care from an insurance perspective, and that all providers will be keeping a close watch on how it will impact their organizations.

A vastly different market

The opening of Grandview Medical Center on U.S. 280 and the merger of Baptist Health System and Brookwood Medical Center will dramatically change the local health care market in the years ahead.

And the ramifications from those big events will start to be felt in 2016.

“The move of Trinity to Grandview and our merger have caused a lot of disruption in the market,” Parrott said. “A lot of hospital administrators are going to be very focused on physician relationships. Physicians are still very important customers for us and that’s going to be job number one for us.”

He said the need for providers to lock down physician groups will drive competition locally, noting that it could become “a musical chairs” of physicians moving around to different hospitals.

Grandview CEO Keith Granger said it will be interesting to see how physicians dictate who they align themselves with.

“I think we will see more and more physician alignment with the hospitals,” he said. “(Physicians) are looking for both the security and resources that occur with those alignments.”
24Hour Generator hopes to inspire Huntsville-area youth to become entrepreneurs

By: Lucy Berry

The clock is ticking for local high school students to participate in a team-building competition designed to inspire young people to become entrepreneurs.

Rocket Hatch, a startup accelerator serving north Alabama since 2014, is producing 24Hour Generator with Village of Promise, a nonprofit in Huntsville. Participants will leave the March contest with relationships, insights and tools needed to make their ideas a reality.

"To create a sustainable entrepreneurial culture, we need to start early introducing students to the principles of business, and giving them the opportunity to interact with successful entrepreneurs and leaders in the community," said Rocket Hatch founder Antonio Montoya.

Madison County students can apply at generatorhsv.org/application by Jan. 15 to be considered for 24Hour Generator, a division of Rocket Hatch's CO.STARTERS program. A team building exercise will take place March 4, followed by a two-day competition March 11-12 in the Business Administration Building at UAH.

Cash prizes will be available. Individuals or companies who wish to sponsor or volunteer with 24Hour Generator should visit generatorhsv.org/get-involved.

"This will be an awesome opportunity for local students to interact with business leaders in a short, intense entrepreneurship experience," said Bobby Bradley, founder of Village of Promise.
UAH accepting 2016 Tech Trek nominations

By: Travis Leder

UAH is continuing its growing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) camp for middle school girls in 2016, and the university is looking for nominations.

64 seventh grade Alabama girls will be selected for the week-long camp in June, but parents don't send the applications. Students are chosen through a nominating process through their math or science teachers. Nominated students then turn in an application and essay. Once essays and applications are submitted, the Tech Trek selection committee conducts interviews before selecting its attendees.

"In our first year of Tech Trek, we served 48 girls from 20 schools in 6 counties. In the second year we served 64 girls from 41 schools and 14 counties," says associate professor of electrical and computer engineering Rhonda Gaede, who serves as camp director, "We are looking to teachers across Alabama to help us reach those girls who would benefit most from such a profound and immersive STEM experience."

Tech Trek is a partnership with the Huntsville branch of the American Association of University Women and UAH. The program is an effort to help close the gender gap in the STEM workforce.
Alabama joins interstate college agreement

By Jim Cook
Dothan Eagle

DOTHAN — Alabama colleges and universities will soon have an easier way to offer online courses to students in other states, and out-of-state institutions will have the same opportunity to offer online course in Alabama, thanks to an interstate agreement.

Currently, to offer distance education courses in Alabama, colleges and universities must gain approval from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Now that Alabama is a member of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, schools in participating states that have been approved by their state’s equivalent to ACHE will be able to offer online courses in Alabama.

 Colleges and universities in Alabama approved by ACHE will be able to offer classes in participating states without having to go through those states’ approval processes.

Greg Fitch, ACHE executive director, said Alabama joining the pact will help cut down on costs to colleges and universities associated with offering degrees in other states. Many schools have had to pay exorbitant fees to offer classes in other states. Here in Alabama, schools will pay just $6,000 to SARA and $6,000 to ACHE per year to offer classes online.

“We had some schools that were charged up to $25,000 per degree program,” Fitch said.

For students, the interstate agreement is beneficial because it ensures that the institutions they are taking courses from meet accepted standards of instruction. In recent years, many students have taken online courses from diploma mills, fly-by-night institutions offering degrees that often aren’t worth the paper they’re printed on. When students take online courses from an approved school, they can be sure that they’re getting a legitimate degree.

One thing students will still need to do is make sure that agencies that certify or license the professions they’re seeking a degree to join recognize their institution’s degree program, Fitch said. For example, students majoring in education at an out-of-state school will need to ensure that their school’s education degree program meets the requirements for teacher certification in Alabama.

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement was established in 2014, and 36 states and 588 colleges and universities are participating. Alabama colleges and universities can apply to join on Feb. 1.

Fitch said several major Alabama universities, including the University of Alabama, Auburn University, the University of South Alabama and Troy University, have expressed interest in joining the agreement.
Ireland's Paul Dunne to make PGA Tour debut

By: ESPN Staff

Paul Dunne will make his PGA Tour debut at the Farmers Insurance Open on Jan. 28.

Dunne, who earned his European Tour card having turned professional last year and is currently competing at the South Africa Open, will tee off at Torrey Pines later this month.

The 23-year-old first came to prominence at The Open last July, where he held a share of the lead after 54 holes at St. Andrews. However, he missed out on becoming the first amateur lift the Claret Jug since 1930 and eventually finished tied for 30th in Scotland.

Born in Dublin, Dunne won the 2010 Irish Youths Amateur title before he went on to play college golf at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in the United States -- the same college that Graeme McDowell attended -- where he graduated with a degree in business finance.

He qualified for The Open in 2014 after winning the final qualifier at Woburn, but went on to miss the cut after the opening two rounds at Hoylake.

The following year, Dunne won at Woburn for the second successive year to qualify for St. Andrews, where he went on to set a tournament record for the lowest 54-hole score set by an amateur. His first tournament as a professional was the Alfred Dunhill Championship in Scotland last October, where he finished tied for 19th at 12 under par.
Leave for NFL? Saban's already got best job any coach could have

It wasn't the Colts so it must be the Giants. If not the Giants, how about the Browns? Titans? Eagles? A team to be named later?

Surely some NFL team out there still thinks it's going to be the one to take Nick Saban away from the best job he's ever had or could have.

Enough already.

How many ways can Saban throw water on the idea of him leaving Alabama for the NFL? How many times does he have to say it? No, not in a "I'm not going to be the Alabama coach" kind of way. That was nine long years ago, and he's not the same man he was then.

How many times does he have to show it? Go watch the video of Saban dancing the T-Rex during the Cotton Bowl celebration. Has he ever looked like he was enjoying the moment more?

Contrast that smile with his scowl after getting bonked by the Gatorade bucket when Alabama beat Texas for his first national title with the Crimson Tide. You can read too much into a word, a gesture or an expression, but everyone who knows the man knows he's changed in the intervening years.

He's not ready for a rocking chair, but he's no longer the same coach for hire intrigued by the next challenge. He's older and more settled, at least as much as an unsettled Type AAA personality can be. He's put down deeper roots in Tuscaloosa than at any other stop on his resume.

Why would he leave at age 64 to start over in the NFL? He can't out-work and out-recruit people there, and excuse me for laughing at any analyst who suggests Eli Manning would give him the franchise quarterback he lacked at Miami.

Everyone remembers the two Super Bowl wins, but the Giants have missed the playoffs four straight years and six times in the last seven years. As good as Manning has been, he hasn't been a perennial playoff quarterback, and he turned 35 years old Sunday. Indianapolis made a lot more sense because of Andrew Luck's bright future at the most important position in the NFL. It's not hard to believe the Colts surprised a lot of people by keeping Chuck Pagano, at least in part, because they inquired about Saban and were told no thanks.

At some point, Saban is going to leave Alabama. It could be next week — anyone who says they know for sure almost certainly doesn't — but it seems less likely than ever his next destination will be to coach another team, in college football or the NFL. He's so close to leaving behind a legacy as the best coach in college football history, and two more national titles to tie Bear Bryant would make that case.

He's one win over Clemson away from title No. 5, and there are no visible signs of slippage in the program that would keep the Crimson Tide from competing for more titles in the coming years. Would it really be wise at this stage of his life to leave the best job a coach could ever want?
Clemson vs. Alabama: Why the Party Crashers May Turn the Tide

By: Matthew Futterman

In the 18th year of college football’s efforts to crown a national champion, and the second year of trying out a playoff tournament, the sport finally has a matchup which will test the recent seismic shifts in the game.

When perennial power Alabama takes on upstart Clemson for the title Monday evening, the sport’s leading blue blood will face its top party-crasher.

The showdown comes as new media contracts from TV networks have provided every major school with a windfall that is creating dividends on the field. At the same time, teams are featuring offensive schemes that rely more on speed and athleticism than brute strength. Combined with a training system that now begins to transform kids into star athletes around the time they get braces, college football is democratized as never before.

This once-in-a-generation change explains the possibility of Clemson hoisting the national championship trophy. The Tigers would be the biggest outsider to finish the season atop college football since Tennessee won after the 1998 season. Since then, every champion has either been a longtime member of college football’s royalty (USC, Texas, Alabama, etc.) or from Florida.

“There are a couple of teams that are good every year, but parity is just rampant now,” said Joel Klatt, the Fox Sports analyst and quarterback at the University of Colorado from 2003-2005. “When I played the cream of the crop was so much better than the middle of the road team. With the early exits of top players to the NFL, the television money that is so influential and the emphasis these college presidents are putting on the football programs, it’s all helped level the playing field.”

Last year Clemson reported spending a little more than $24 million a year on its football program, according to federal filings. That is still less than half of Alabama’s $51 million annual football outlay, but it is 34% more than the $18.1 million Clemson reported spending on football in 2010. Others, such as Texas Christian and Baylor, appear primed to join the elite in the coming years.

Clemson has been able to spend more on football in part because of the Atlantic Coast Conference’s $3.6 billion, 15-year media-rights deal with ESPN that extends to 2027. Last year, the ACC reported its revenues for 2013-14 had grown to $302 million, nearly double the $158 million it collected in 2009-10.

Just how level the field will be for the College Football Playoff in Glendale, Ariz., remains to be seen. Oddsmakers have installed Alabama, winner of three of the last six national championships, as a seven-point favorite. The Crimson Tide looked frightening in its 38-0 obliteration of Michigan State in the semifinal at the Cotton Bowl on New Year’s Eve.

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However, head coach Nick Saban’s Alabama teams have proven vulnerable in recent years against high-octane offenses led by quarterbacks who can win games with their legs as well as their arms: in other words, exactly the kind of attack that Clemson’s star quarterback Deshaun Watson runs.

Chad Morris remembers the January day in 2011 when an assistant handed him a computer file with footage of the 15-year-old Watson from Gainesville, Ga., about a 70-minute drive from the Clemson campus. Head Coach Dabo Swinney had just hired Morris to become his offensive coordinator and modernize an attack that had finished 88th in total offense the previous season.

Morris had spent 2010 running Tulsa’s no-huddle, no-mercy attack that averaged 8 yards every time it put the ball in the air and finished 83 spots ahead of Clemson in the offensive rankings. Dozens of programs have switched to a speed-based attack in recent years, in part because coaches can run it successfully with the type of players prevalent today. They are big, though not huge, and fast and have specialized in football since childhood. They have technical skills far beyond what players had a decade ago, coaches and analysts say.

Morris said he watched three snaps on the Watson tape: a throw that effortlessly left Watson’s hand, a running play when Watson blazed through a helpless defense and a perfectly executed fake pass and handoff. He called Swinney and told him that Watson could be better than Vince Young, the dual-threat high school star who went on to win a national championship at Texas.

That week they told Watson’s high school coach Clemson was prepared to offer the freshman a scholarship, the first of more than a dozen offers he would receive from top Division 1 programs.

“From that moment on, every time the NCAA allowed us an opportunity to be at his school, we were there,” said Morris, now the head coach at Southern Methodist University. Morris even drove to Gainesville over and over to watch Watson’s high school basketball games. “Had we not gotten to him when we did, we wouldn’t have landed him.”

Watson was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy this season as a sophomore, passing for 3,699 yards and rushing for an additional 1,032. The fact that he accomplished this for Clemson, whose success at recruiting top high school players is rarely ranked among the top 10 in the country, shouldn’t come as a surprise: Clemson has prospered by focusing on players from the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida, where the vast majority of young talent outside of Texas and California resides. Just 12 of 116 players on Clemson’s roster come from outside those four states.

“Clemson has been out-recruiting Georgia in Georgia,” said Tom Lemming, who publishes the definitive report on high school prospects. Clemson may not often land the milk-truck sized 18-year-old guards and tackles that sit atop lists of top graduating prospects, but it finds the long, lean linemen who can play its revved-up style. That means athletes who can pull out of a three-point stance, beat a linebacker to the outside and block for Watson on a rollout. The 6-foot-5 inch guard Eric MacLain was a 245-pound tight end as a senior in high school. The 6-foot-6 inch tackle Joe Gore was a 260-pound defensive end.

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Ryan Bartow, a recruiting analyst who covered Clemson for eight years for the website Rivals.com, said that because the coaches can’t sell the history of USC or Notre Dame, they hook recruits on the football-first atmosphere of this small South Carolina town. The on-campus stadium seats more than 80,000; the university president, James Clements, knows many of the players personally and often meets with prospective recruits when they visit campus.

“The saying is, there are seven fun days a year in town, and those are the home games,” Bartow said.

Clemson got to the championship after blasting Oklahoma 37-17 in the Orange Bowl last week despite being a 3.5 point underdog.

“It was just a matter of when,” said Swinney, who became head coach in October 2008. “This is year seven, and we were able to kind of knock the roof off of it.”

At Alabama, where any season that doesn’t end with a title is considered a failure, the journey to the championship game has relied on everything Clemson’s hasn’t. While the Tigers have focused on playing faster, the Crimson Tide slowed down this season. While Clemson scours its region for recruits, Alabama cherry-picks the country’s top talent.

Saban has flirted with adjusting his retro approach to a changing world of no-huddle, pass-happy offenses that have helped turn college football into something that looks a lot closer to basketball with shoulder pads. But Saban clings to the mantra of Alabama football going back to the days of the legendary Bear Bryant: Football games are won with an impenetrable defense and a stolid running game.

“The philosophy is to beat the other team into submission,” said Paul Finebaum, the Alabama-based radio broadcaster whose voice dominates Southern football.

After losing his final two games of the 2013 campaign, including a 45-31 thumping by Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl, Saban sensed Alabama’s attack needed updating. He brought in Lane Kiffin, then 38, to modernize the Crimson Tide offense. Kiffin had flamed out as a head coach with the Oakland Raiders, at the University of Tennessee and USC. But he had a reputation as an aggressive offensive whiz. In 2013, the Crimson Tide offense ran one play every 30.2 seconds. In 2014, Kiffin’s first season, Alabama ran one play every 26.2 seconds.

In last year’s semifinal, Alabama was upset by Ohio State, which went on to win the championship. Despite a loss that some in Alabama referred to as the worst day in the state since Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Saban stuck with the Kiffin approach in 2015. Against Mississippi in September, the Tide held the ball for 35 minutes, ran a play every 21 seconds, attempted 59 passes and ran it just 42 times, despite having eventual Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry in the backfield. Alabama lost 43-37.

Saban had seen enough of 21st century football. Two weeks later, with his season on the line against then-eighth-ranked Georgia in Athens, Alabama became Alabama again. The Crimson
Tide ran one play every 38.5 seconds, throwing the ball just 16 times compared with 47 rush attempts. Alabama won 38-10.

Since then, the Crimson Tide has been an old-new hybrid, and unbeatable. Henry, a junior who weighs 242 pounds, has barreled for 2,061 yards, but the nail in the Michigan State coffin in the semifinal was a 50-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Jake Cokerto freshman wide receiver Calvin Ridley on the first play of a drive with a little over two minutes left in the third quarter.

Alabama’s players say there’s a simple reason for their offensive slowdown. Last season, the Crimson Tide had Amari Cooper, who was the best wide receiver in the country. This season, the offense has Henry, who is the best running back in the country. So they run the ball more. Like most offensive linemen Cam Robinson prefers the latter. “I’m biased,” he said. “I think every lineman would.”

Alabama’s offense has the luxury of playing slowly because it can rely on the nation’s top-ranked scoring defense, which has allowed just 187 points in 14 games. Opponents averaged just 4 yards per play and 257 total yards a game against the Crimson Tide, the second lowest in both categories.

Three of the starting 11 are projected as first round NFL draft picks—320-pound tackle A’Shawn Robinson, defensive end Jarran Reed, who goes 313-pounds, and linebacker Reggie Ragland. “This squad here, everybody is just so mean,” Ragland said.

That suits the Alabama faithful just fine, Finebaum said. “The average Alabama fan is a believer in the same football that has been played there for 50 or 60 years,” he said. “Strong special teams, a great defense—and pound the ball down someone’s throat.”
Swinney vs. UA a complex narrative

CECIL HURT

The College Football Playoff, just two years old, is still the shiny new toy of the sport, one that isn't entirely over its shake-down cruise if the New Year's Eve controversy (bad timing equaling bad ratings) is any indication.

New format or not, a college football season is still part of a narrative that stretches back in time, tying one piece of history to another — which is why, in a convoluted way, it makes sense for someone to ask Dabo Swinney a question about Bear Bryant.

Bryant passed away while Swinney was still in middle school. The Clemson coach never met his boyhood idol. But when it comes to asking for remembrances of things past, Swinney puts Marcel Proust to shame. He's a voluminous speaker, rarely content to answer a question without adding an anecdote or four. When he's actually coaching against his alma mater, Alabama, for a national championship, the stories come as thick as a Conecuh County drawl.

There is nothing wrong with that. That's Swinney's personality. On the flip side of the same coin, there's nothing wrong with Nick Saban's approach to nostalgia either. For the past couple of games, he's coached against two former assistants, Jim McElwain and Mark Dantonio and he has seen a couple of other protégés, Kirby Smart and Will Muschamp, move on (or prepare to move on, in Smart's case) to head coaching jobs elsewhere in the SEC. That leads to questions about when he met those coaches, how did he come to hire them and so forth. Saban always has an answer, and speaks glowingly of each branch on his coaching tree, but you can tell he has minimal time to spend of such reflections while there are games to be played or recruits to be contacted.

SEE HURT, C3
The Alabama that he loves to talk about is the same Alabama, but it's also not the same. The tradition hasn't been scrapped, nor should it be. No college football town embraces its past with the suffocating grip (you have to try hard not to call it a "bear hug") of Tuscaloosa.

**HURT**

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More than once, when promoted to travel down Memory Lane, he's prefaced his reply with "that was 10 years ago and I have a hard time remembering last week." Saban appreciates his past, his West Virginia roots and his vast number of former players, coaches and administrators but rarely linger, somewhat in the same way that a great white shark doesn't spend time treading water.

Things are different for Swinney. Brief aside for a confession -- I've known him for 25 years and it's almost impossible for me to call him anything other than "Dabo," even in print. For one thing, his entire college football life consists of working for two schools -- Alabama and Clemson. That's what prompted him to say at his Tuesday press conference that "God must have a sense of humor" because of the championship game pairing. For another, he loves to talk about Alabama (or anything, but especially Alabama).

There's an irony, though. The Alabama that he loves to talk about is the same Alabama, but it's also not the same. The tradition hasn't been scrapped, nor should it be. No college football town embraces its past with the suffocating grip (you have to try hard not to call it a "bear hug") of Tuscaloosa.

But Saban is not merely an inheritor. He is a builder, or a rebuild, and the massive modern success at Alabama has been forged in his image, not executed from memory.

Swinney describes boyhood days, viewing Bryant with awe and reverence like many little boys in this state. He shares tales of his playing and coaching days with Gene Stallings. Those are part of a storied tradition, but only a part. Swinney gets far fewer questions about his good fortune in surviving the titanic wreck of the 2000 staff, but those were his last days at Alabama. His days were good old days, surely, but times have changed — a lot.

That doesn't lessen the importance of memory, of old tales and long friendships. Nothing should do that. But the simple narrative of Coach vs. Old School that you will hear all week is a lot more complex than it might appear at first glance.

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