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WEEKLY

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BUILDING A BETTER BALDWIN

Voters will head to the polls March 31 to decide the fate of an 8-mill property tax increase, proposed as a solution to accommodate the county's growing student body.

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by Laura Rasmussen

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'No leads' in Bayou la Batre Fire Department break-in

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

On Monday, March 16, members of the Bayou la Batre Police Department responded to a reported break-in at the city's fire department, which sits adjacent from City Hall on at 13775 S. Wintzell Ave.

According to reports from both police and fire department officials, there were no signs of forced entry and computer towers and hard files seemed to be the only thing the thieves were after — overlooking petty cash, electronics and televisions within the department. Though the actual model of the computers isn't known at this time, Fire Chief John Wiggins said they weren't new.

He also said it didn't appear the thieves "were after money."

Wiggins said some of his personal files and his computer were taken along with the computer of Assistant Fire Chief James Payne.

Both Wiggins and Payne said they weren't sure what anyone would want with their computers, but did confirm the devices would have contained information pertaining to the city's Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating and documentation for several grants the department has received.

The city's fire grants were recently scrutinized after it was revealed City Clerk Jaime Abastoflor moved \$10,000 from a grant account into the city's general fund. Those funds have since been replaced via a loan obtained by Abastoflor and Mayor Brett Dungan that has come under intense scrutiny from the Bayou la Batre City Council.

"All of our fire grant information was on those computers, mine as well as Jimmy's," Wiggins said. "Every fire grant we've acquired is on these computers. If money come out of any fire grant account, that information was on these comput-

ers."

That being said, no one within the fire department or the police department has officially connected the theft of the computers to the recent interest in the city's grants. Wiggins even said he didn't think that was the case, saying he felt it was most likely a "personal attack" against him or James Payne.

Police Chief Cliff Adams said as of Tuesday morning, there had been no arrests and no leads in the case. According to Wiggins, the Fire Department doesn't have any video surveillance equipment, but building nearby do.

On Monday, he said authorities were working to review those tapes.

Pedestrian struck by Baldwin deputy arrested for public intoxication

According to officials with the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office, on Saturday, March 13, a deputy struck a pedestrian with his patrol car while attempting to stop a vehicle under suspicion of DUI.

According to a press release, a deputy was traveling east on West Beach Boulevard in Gulf Shores at approximately 9:30 p.m. when a truck traveling westbound crossed over into his lane.

The deputy then attempted to catch up to suspected drunk driver, when two men attempted to cross the road on foot.

The men were standing in the westbound lane and the deputy swerved to miss the two men, but Ryan H. Banes, of Kansas City, Kansas, was struck accidentally by the passenger side mirror of the deputy's patrol vehicle, the release says.

An ambulance was dispatched to the scene to assess Banes' injuries, and he was later transported to South Baldwin Regional Medical Center where he was treated and released for minor cuts and scrapes.

When Banes was released from SBRMC, he was placed under arrest for public intoxication and taken to the Baldwin County Sheriff's Corrections Center and has since been released on bond.

The BCSO later confirmed officer Cody Robertson was the deputy who struck Banes. According to Maj. Anthony Lowery, dashboard camera or "dashcam" footage of the incident is not available because Robertson's emergency lights were not engaged.

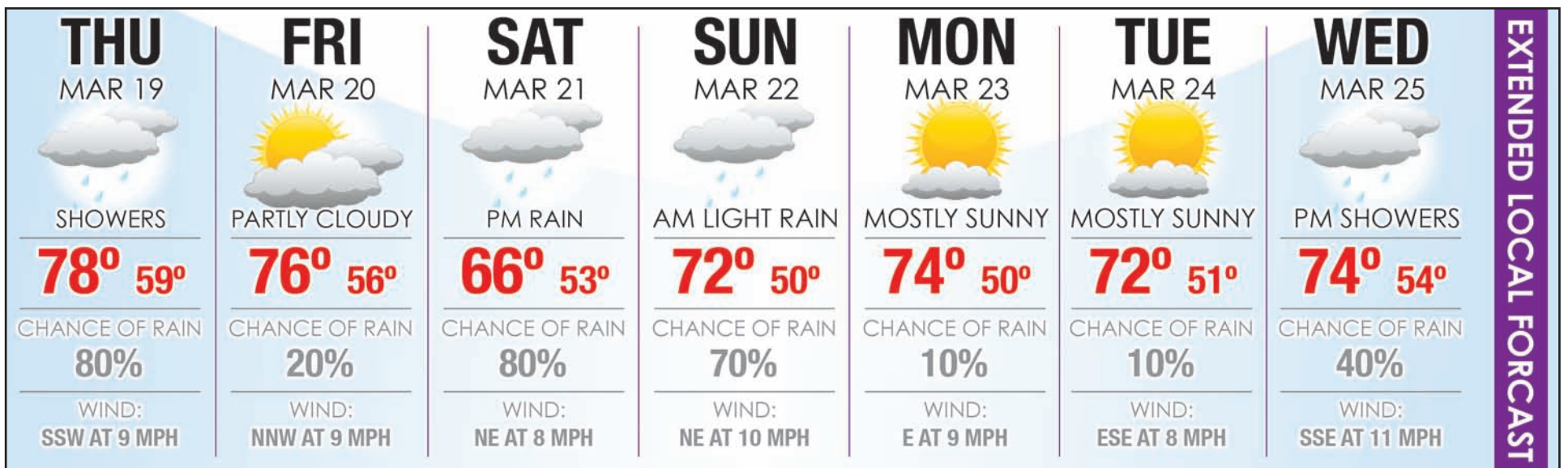
"There was no need to activate any of that stuff," Lowery said. "He wasn't going above the speed limit, and he wasn't in pursuit. He was just attempting to catch up with the suspected vehicle. It's just unfortunate it was on such a dark stretch of West Beach Boulevard."

As is common in officer-involved accidents, the Gulf Shores Police Department and the Foley Police Department responded to assist with the accident investigation as a third party. According to the press release, the accident is still under investigation



Photo courtesy BCSO

Ryan H. Banes



LOCAL FIRST

LAGNIAPPE WEEKLY

Council reappoints SWA members

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

The Mobile City Council reappointed two members of the board that oversees operations at the Chastang Landfill — the same board that was hit in late January with an \$8.1-million judgment for breach of contract.

Ray Richardson and Pete Riehm were nominated for reappointment to five-year terms by Councilmen Levon Manzie and John Williams, respectively.

In January, a U.S. District Court jury awarded \$8.1 million to Waste Management, the company that manages the Chastang Landfill, from the SWA for breach of a contract originally entered into in 1993.

During a week-long trial, attorneys for WM argued the company hadn't been allowed to raise the tipping fee it charges the city from the rate set when the contract was originally entered into in 1993. Attorneys also argued that the company, via the contract, should have been reimbursed for certain improvements made to the landfill, as well.

Attorneys for the SWA, which included former City Attorney Larry Wettermark and current Council Attorney Jim Rossler, argued the company never provided the board with adequate information to justify an increase in the tipping fee, or reimbursement for improvements. Ultimately, the seven-member jury sided with Waste Management.

Both Williams and Manzie said they considered the lawsuit award before choosing to make the reappointments.

Williams said Riehm is "very familiar" with the ongoing legal process and was the best candidate to represent the district and see it through another term. He added that he was not going to insert himself into the issue.

Manzie said he initially had some concerns over the verdict, but chose Ray Richardson because of her qualifications in the environmental engineering department with the city.

Councilman C.J. Small appointed newcomer Wesley Young to fill the unexpired term of Horace Christian, whose term is set to expire July 16. Small said he chose Young because he was a retired Public Works employee who would have the knowledge needed to serve on the board.

"I thought he'd be the best representative for District 3," Small said.

In addition, Council President Gina Gregory told councilors she would have an appointment coming up for the SWA. That appointment would be made to replace SWA member Tommy Tyrrell, who recently passed away.

Lawrence Carroll is listed as the District 1 representative to the SWA, his term expires July 16. Tim Morris is listed at the District 5 representative, his term expires July 15. Les Barnett is listed as the District 6 representative, his term expires March 22 of next year.

Hank Aaron Stadium improvements

By a 6-1 vote, the council approved a \$22,090 contract with Vision Integration Services for improvements to the Hank Aaron Stadium audio system.

During a pre-conference meeting, Councilwoman Bess Rich asked the administration if they had reached a new contract agreement with the Mobile BayBears, who use the stadium, during the Southern League season. Rich was the lone dissenting vote on the agenda item.

Mayor Sandy Stimpson's Chief of Staff Colby Cooper said the city would no longer be pursuing a new contract with the Baybears, who owe the city back rent.

The plan, Cooper said, would be to make sure the city is in compliance with their aspects of the contract to make sure they are on sound legal footing, before forcing the baseball team to pay rent. The BayBears are currently refusing to pay rent, Cooper said, and have not been current on rent since September of 2013.

"We can't enforce the contract yet," he said.

City Attorney Ricardo Woods said the city would have to make sure the field is ready for the start of the season and perform maintenance before they could come to the BayBears and ask for rent.

During the meeting, Rich said she could not support giving more money that would benefit the organization that owes the city rent money. Councilman Levon Manzie said the stadium belongs to the city and the audio system upgrades would benefit more than just the BayBears.

Rich asked the administration for an accounting of the tax revenue the city brings in from stadium concessions.

Oil storage tank permits

The council again pushed back the moratorium on any new oil storage tank applications and extended the time limit for a new ordinance governing the building of such tanks until Sept. 30.

The Planning Commission has an oil storage tank subcommittee meeting scheduled for Thursday, following its regular meeting at 2 p.m. in the Government Plaza auditorium. While the meeting is open to the public, it is not a public hearing and members of the crowd won't be asked to speak.

Manzie, who represents District 2 on the council and is a member of the Planning Commission said Tuesday he hopes only one more meeting of the subcommittee will be scheduled, following the meeting this week. He said the next step would be to present it to the entire commission and then to the council.

"I want to see it get resolved and I know residents want to see it resolved," he said.

In other business

Carriage Hills subdivision resident Lella Lowe spoke to councilors at the meeting over the neighborhood's concern about traffic congestion once a Zaxby's opens up across from the entrance to the community on Royal Carriage Drive. Lowe asked the city to look into solutions because neighbors fear business from the fast food chain could result in more accidents on Cottage Hill Road, near the intersection with Hillcrest.

Lowe even gave suggestions, including concrete dividers, a traffic signal or a reconfiguration of the community's entrance. Traffic Engineer Jennifer White said the city could redesign the entrance to the neighborhood, if traffic becomes a problem. She also suggested possibly increasing enforcement of the speed limit, along Cottage Hill.

The council voted to lay over a vote on an ordinance that would regulate the distribution of handbills and advertising circulars for three weeks. The ordinance will be discussed in a Public Service Committee meeting Tuesday, March 31 at 1:30 p.m.

The ordinance was initially held over to allow Rossler and attorneys for the Press-Register to come to a consensus on the issue.

"Let me sum it up," Rossler told councilors. "I don't see any resolution between us."

The council also appointed Pat Tyrrell to finish out her husband's unfinished term, as a member of the Mobile Area Water and Sewer System board.

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Use of force questioned in wrongful death lawsuit against MPD

BY GABRIEL TYNES/ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR | gabe@lagniappemobile.com

There is little in the 400 pages of evidence a judge released last week to indicate why 42-year-old Gregory Rachel died during an encounter with the Mobile Police Department nearly three years ago. But the material part of a wrongful death lawsuit against the city and individual defendants pending in U.S. District Court, does present an argument suggesting how it happened.

The Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences concluded Rachel succumbed on May 1, 2012 to “excited delirium,” a spontaneous, medically dubious condition increasingly cited in the deaths of subjects in police custody. While his autopsy documented dozens of contusions and abrasions received at the hands of police officers and also found tertiary evidence of “hypertensive cardiovascular disease,” Rachel’s manner of death was ruled a homicide.

The evidentiary material, excerpts from an investigation spawning thousands of pages, was released in response to a joint motion for summary judgment from the defendants, which is expected to be taken under consideration by the end of the month. Rachel’s widow Amy, who originally filed the lawsuit in November 2013, is seeking a jury trial for unspecified damages on three counts of federal Civil Rights violations and a state charge of negligence.

The MPD has spoken little about the case since issuing a press release acknowledging the death a few hours after Rachel expired. According to its initial account, the MPD responded to a domestic complaint on Estate Drive at approximately 3 that morning.

Officers located an injured victim, Amy Rachel, in a neighbor’s house. She reported to the officers that her husband was in their house across the street and had been displaying “delusional behavior” during the assault.

The account continues to explain how the officers approached the residence and located Mr. Rachel in the front yard: “After receiving several commands from the officers, Mr. Rachel began to actively resist the officers’ efforts to place him in custody for domestic violence. During the physical confrontation, Mr. Rachel was tased with little or no effect and had to be physically restrained. Soon after the physical confrontation, Mr. Rachel began to show signs of medical distress. Mobile Fire-Rescue responded and transported Mr. Rachel to Providence Hospital where he died.”

But the complaint, which was amended in last month to remove former Police Chief Micheal Williams as a defendant, claims “at no time did Gregory Rachel offer resistance to the police officers.” Instead, it suggests Rachel fell to the ground after being tased, and when he began to pull off the electrified probes, the two responding officers, Christopher McCann and John Jackson, “began to kick and stomp” Rachel, while also using their batons “to physically beat” him.

Two other officers arrived on scene and the complaint claims that after Rachel was both handcuffed and shackled — “hogtied” as Officer McCann described it in deposition — “one or two of the officers were observed sitting on his back.”

It wasn’t until several minutes later, as the four officers prepared to lift Rachel and place him in the back of a patrol car, did they notice he was nonresponsive.

‘IT GOT PRETTY BRUTAL’

The complaint appears to be corroborated in part or whole by at least three eyewitnesses, one of whom was an EMT who lived in the neighborhood and performed chest compressions on Rachel before an ambulance arrived.

“I thought the officers looked worried,” paramedic Patrick Phillips wrote to the court, explaining how he heard the commotion as he was preparing to leave his own house for a 5 a.m. shift at work. “I told the officers I thought Rachel was dead, but started compressions, which I continued until the Mobile County EMTs arrived on scene.”

While Phillips appears to have known Rachel, declaring he recognized his neighbor when he looked outside and saw him in a confrontation with police, he did not witness the entirety of the encounter. His wife Nicole however, kept on eye on the action while her husband got dressed.

In her own declaration, Nicole Phillips said she “saw Greg Rachel in the ditch in front of his house. Two Mobile Police Department officers were sitting on top of him and I thought they looked

exhausted ... I honestly believe that the police officers were really agitated from resisting and I think that they were being aggressive. The police officers looked worn out and appeared to be agitated.”

Similarly, neighbor Kristie Adams, who responded to Amy Rachel pounding on her window around 3 a.m. and made the 911 call that summoned police, also believed it was “too much force.” In a statement provided hours after the incident, Adams told investigators she “saw the whole thing from beginning to end.”

“[Police] went over there, [Gregory Rachel] came running down the driveway with his hands up screaming something crazy about Obama or something. Anyway, they hit him four times with a taser,” she said.

An investigator asked Adams if she heard the responding officers give any commands, but she indicated the physical confrontation unfolded rather swiftly.

“... Next thing, and that’s a big ol’ boy, I mean, they had a hard time. So the other two (police) came up and they had [Rachel] in the ditch and it got rough, it got real rough. They couldn’t subdue him or whatever and they took their baton ...”

The investigator stopped to ask if Rachel was fighting with the officers, and Adams’ answer appears to begin with speculation about the effects of the taser.

“... I don’t know if he took them out or what but he was just freaking out. He didn’t look like he was fighting to me, the best that I could tell,” she concluded.

Investigators asked Adams what Rachel was doing with his hands, but she responded by telling them how he was saying he didn’t want to go to jail. Then they asked whether he was on the

“... they had [Rachel] in the ditch and it got rough, it got real rough. They couldn’t subdue him or whatever and they took their baton ... - Witness Kristie Adams

ground at that point or standing up.

“He was standing up, then they [tased] him, he was on the ground and he was in that ditch ... they couldn’t get him to go down on his stomach, so they took the baton and whipped him on that and there was some kicking going on. It got pretty brutal, you know it really did, that I mean I understand he was under, not under control. They got the shackles and that neighbor came out, they thought he was passed out and they had him on concrete, just laying on his stomach and they thought he was incapacitated, you know, just passed out.”

The investigator wanted to know how long Rachel was in the ditch, at which point, Adams remembered that she had forgotten one point:

“Two officers were standing there and one of them was sitting on [Rachel’s] back ... straddling him.”

In another round of questions, Adams said the officer “stayed” on Rachel’s back “for a while.”

“I think he may have been at that time maybe incapacitated or something you know just from kicking and all that wrestling around,” she said. “‘Cause he sat on him for I don’t know, a few minutes, and then they got him and put him on his stomach and then on his back.”

The detective asked Adams to clarify “a few minutes.”

“Give or take, a good five minutes I would imagine. And [Rachel] wasn’t moving at the time,” she replied.

Detectives asked if Adams thought the officers did anything wrong.

“I think it was too much force, honestly I do,” she replied, noting that she was previously married to a cop. “I think it was a little obsessive you know? When you’re on somebody’s back and sitting for so long and they can’t breathe and I think it was a little excessive personally ... the man was actin’ up but it wasn’t like he was ... I think it was a little excessive.”

Another pair of witnesses, neighbors Robert and Tiffany Brown, each described the beating Rachel endured after the at-

tempts to subdue him with tasers had stopped.

“The hitting and the kicking were substantial,” Robert Brown wrote to the court in a sworn statement. “In my mind, it was definitely excessive, given that the man was lying face down on the ground. He was submissive. He was not struggling ...”

Tiffany Brown, who was drawn to the sound of shouting outside as she was in her home nursing an infant, moved between a bedroom window and her front door, where she said she had “a clear view of the three figures.”

“After I observed the tasing, I walked away from the door,” she wrote. “I moved back to the bassinette in my bedroom. I was there for one to two minutes, and then I returned to the front door. At that point, I heard the kneeling person (Rachel) moaning. I believe I heard him again to say ‘stop’ and was mumbling. The man’s hands were up in the air. They were held in a way that was not combative. They were held up in a way that looked submissive.”

At that time, Tiffany Brown recounted, she saw one officer hit Rachel, who fell “on all fours.” The same officer hit him again, knocking him to the ground completely.

“Now Police Officer #1 kicked the man on the ground in the head. Then both police officers were kicking the man on the ground ...”

Brown wrote that at that point, she could no longer watch.

“The beating upset me very much. I began to cry. During the whole time I watched him, I never saw the man try to get up. He never did anything that appeared to be attacking or threatening the officers ... In my opinion, the officers were hitting the man completely unnecessarily. I never saw anything during the whole time I watched which led me to believe the police officers were being threatened, endangered or even being opposed by the man on the ground.”

BEFORE THE CHAOS

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding his death, one fact about Gregory Rachel’s case is this: Before he lost consciousness under police restraint, Rachel physically assaulted his wife.

In a statement provided to MPD Internal Affairs investigators about three hours later, Officer McCann recalled responding to the Signal 39 — a domestic incident — with Officer Jackson at two locations on Plantation Court and Estate Drive.

“When we got there ... we immediately saw the victim ... had some blood and a bad, pretty bad scratch underneath her mouth right above her chin and she was crying, pretty hysterical. She told us that her husband had basically just flipped out for no apparent reason,” McCann said, noting Amy Rachel also expressed concern some of her fingers were broken.

In her own deposition, recorded more than two years after the incident, Amy Rachel detailed the events leading up to the early Tuesday morning assault. Gregory, who worked at a family-owned towing business, allegedly had no history of violence, mental disorder or drug abuse. He had been arrested on a drug charge before they met, but in the 10 years they were married, Amy said Gregory never used drugs and only drank beer occasionally.

But the Sunday before, according to proposed findings of fact authored by attorneys representing Officer Jackson, Gregory Rachel began acting out of the ordinary.

“On Sunday, April 29, he had told Plaintiff (his wife, Amy) that he would join her and her family at a local golf tournament, but never showed up. On Monday evening, Plaintiff sent Mr. Rachel a text asking about dinner, but he did not respond. [Plaintiff] also tried to call him, but he did not answer.”

Amy Rachel, who uses the name Amy Fresh today, explained in deposition how she was “concerned” and “worried” about Gregory’s behavior. Unprompted and without answering her calls, he returned home after midnight acting “confused and agitated.”

“He seemed anxious,” Fresh recalled, “he was taking deep breaths.”

Unable to communicate, Fresh said she left Rachel in the living room where he asked to be left alone. At around 3 a.m., Rachel entered the bedroom and knelt by the bed where Fresh was sleeping with their two children. Still unable to engage him, Fresh got out of bed and followed Rachel back toward the kitchen.

“He started telling me I need to protect myself. And I asked

Continued on page 7

him — you know — what do I need to protect myself from?”

Moments later, after suggesting Rachel “get his keys” and leave, he attacked.

“So at that point I started back down the hallway, and that’s when he grabbed me by the face,” Fresh said. “And we — I fell to the ground in the hall — I fell in the hallway. And he was — he had my face — he was squeezing my face. And he was just, you know, trying to grab my face and turn my head.”

Allegedly, the children awoke to the sounds of the struggle and yelled at their father to stop. Fresh attempted to talk to him.

I said ‘Please stop. I am your wife and these are your kids.’ And he got up and walked away from me. And that’s when we ran out the door and went to the neighbors.”

Neighbor Kristie Adams, who opened the door to French and the children and provided a statement to police the same day, said the woman “was terrified” and had told her that Gregory Rachel “was talking about the devil or something and trying to kill her ...”

In his own statement, McCann spoke to the severity of the assault, at one point suggesting Rachel could have been charged with attempted murder.

“According to what she said he put his palms around her neck to try to choke her to death and due to the evidence on her, on her neck with all the marks, it was obvious that’s what happened,” he said.

Later, both Fresh and her father, who arrived on scene just moments after the police, related to McCann and Jackson that Rachel was “a big dude.” In a deposition taken last year, McCann said as the lead officer on the call, then he decided to summon his superior.

“My victim ... was, you know, pretty beaten up. She had some marks on her. And she told us, you know, that he was a big guy. And she told us that he was inside the house. And she thinks there is something seriously wrong with him and, you know, that he’s not in his right mind. And it’s obvious to us, by the marks on her face. And 90, I’d say 95 percent of domestics we go on, you know, we handle without notifying our supervisor. But intuition, I guess, maybe. You know, something told me that this is more serious than the normal domestic or the average domestic that we go on, and I need to make my sergeant aware of what we’ve got and what’s going on.”

His autopsy found that Rachel was 6-foot-3, weighing 252 pounds. Officer Jackson was 5-foot-10, 185 pounds the day of the incident while Officer McCann was recorded as 6-foot-2, weighing between 245 and 250 pounds.

Sgt. Gerald Ripple, the supervisor called to the scene by Officer McCann, instructed McCann and Jackson to wait for backup before entering Rachel’s home or attempting his arrest. But then, Rachel came outside.

FOUR AGAINST ONE

McCann’s statements since the incident point to Rachel as the aggressor — an imposing figure displaying “extreme Signal 31,” meaning emotionally or mentally disturbed. Rachel emerged from his home yelling, with his arms up and a drink in one hand and his cell phone in the other.

“So at that point he started yelling at us, ‘protect me, protect me, protect me, protect me from Obama ... ’” McCann told investigators that day. “... at that point we knew we had a genuine nut on our hands ...”

McCann said he and Jackson drew their tasers and began to approach Rachel, who looked at the officers, threw his phone across the street, set his drink down and voluntarily laid down.

“And if I remember correctly, that’s when me and Officer Jackson decided to approach him. And started going across the street,” McCann said.

The available evidence does not reveal whether the officers intended to disobey Ripple’s order and attempt to arrest Rachel before backup arrived. But before they had a chance, Rachel began to stand up again.

McCann and Jackson commanded Rachel to stay on the ground, but he allegedly stood up and took an aggressive stance, then started moving toward the officers at a “strong walking pace ... with purpose,” according to McCann.

Jackson fired his taser first, delivering a jolt that dropped Rachel momentarily. As Rachel recovered from the shock and stood up again, McCann shot second. As Rachel began to tear the probes of the taser off, the officers were able to deliver at least two other rounds of electricity. But Rachel remained unfazed.

“At that point we realized we had a fight on our hands and at that point we physically engaged him and we tried to take him down on the ground and tried to hit him on his stomach and pull his hands behind his back where we can handcuff him,” McCann told investigators. “We wanted to immobilize him is what we

wanted to do.”

McCann said Rachel was “fighting” and “struggling” with the officers when he pulled out his Monadnock baton and “hit him three or four times to try to get him to comply.” Soon, McCann said he and Jackson were both on top of Rachel, who was face down, still wrestling for control of his hands. At no point, according to McCann’s statement to investigators, did either he or Jackson kick Rachel.

The struggle continued for 10 to 15 minutes, McCann said, until Sgt. Ripple arrived, followed closely by Lt. Edward Elia, the most senior officer on the scene.

Ripple joined Officer Jackson on Rachel’s back, while McCann held down his legs. Rachel continued to struggle and would not surrender his right hand, so Ripple used a “closed fist punch” three to five times on Rachel’s back as a stun technique. Ripple later testified in an affidavit that he put his knee into Rachel’s shoulder “for a few seconds” to gain leverage on his arm.

Meanwhile, according to a proposed statement of facts, Lt. Elia was employing a brachial stun technique on Rachel — using the back of his hand to strike at Rachel’s carotid artery. When he found that he didn’t have enough room for an effective wind-up, Elia decided to push on a pressure point between Rachel’s ear and jaw for 10 to 15 seconds.

Eventually, the four were able to handcuff Rachel, but according to Ripple, he continued to struggle, prompting his decision to employ four-point restraints. Ripple testified that beside his quick effort to gain control of Rachel’s arm, “at no other time, during this incident, did I sit, kneel or stand on Gregory Rachel.”

After the restraints were on, Ripple claims officers rolled Rachel onto his side. Ripple said he stood next to Rachel and “continued to watch and monitor his breathing” as his chest rose and fell, but there appeared to be “snot bubbles coming in and out of his nose.”

McCann told investigators that before officers attempted to move him, Rachel seized. Ripple allegedly told McCann, as the

“We’re not psychologists, we’re police officers. You know, emotionally disturbed people go to psychologists. They don’t come to the police. - Officer Chris McCann

two officers were standing over him, that the last word he uttered before he “passed out” was “Gestapo.”

“I don’t know what the hell that, you know that’s what he said, ‘Gestapo.’ That’s the last thing he yelled and the he, all of a sudden he just, he was out,” McCann said.

Elia left to supervise another call and Ripple asked McCann to pull his car around.

Minutes later, as the three remaining officers lifted Rachel to transport him to a patrol car, they noticed he was limp. Setting Rachel back down, Patrick Phillips, the paramedic who lived next door, approached the officers.

“Do you need any help?” he asked.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

For their part, defendants in the case are assuming a customary defense. An answer filed on behalf of Sgt. Ripple summarily denies each charge against the officers, contending the complaint itself fails to state a valid claim for relief. Ripple claims he was “acting within the line and scope of his employment as a police officer for the city of Mobile” and further argues he “acted reasonably and in good faith” and “used only such force as was reasonably necessary under the circumstances.” There are also several claims of immunity in his defense, citing his role as an agent of the state and an officer of the law.

In deposition last year McCann, a seven-year officer at the MPD and U.S. Army vet, spoke with attorneys about training and institutional policies in the department. He indicated that while there were substantial training and policies geared toward approaching people under the influence of drugs, there were few protocols for dealing with the “emotionally disturbed,” or providing medical assistance to people in custody.

“We don’t get a lot of training on how to deal with emotionally disturbed people,” he said. “Primarily because, we’re not psychologists, we’re police officers. You know, emotionally disturbed

people go to psychologists. They don’t come to the police.”

However, just one year before Rachel’s death, on March 24, 2011, Chief Micheal Williams approved MO-2011-03, a policy entitled “RECOGNIZING AND HANDLING PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS.”

The policy includes a list of do’s and don’t’s for approaching and interacting with a person with a mental illness including: do remain calm and avoid overreacting, don’t move suddenly, giving rapid orders or shouting. But buried further on page six of the seven-page policy it also states:

C: “Violent struggle extreme enough to require the officers to employ restraint techniques — subjects who have engaged in extreme violent activities may be more vulnerable to subsequent respiratory failure.”

D: “ Unresponsiveness of subject during or immediately after a struggle — Such unresponsive behavior may indicate cardio-pulmonary arrest and the need for medical attention.

The next item in the policy specifically defines and lists symptoms for recognizing “Excited Delirium,” noting that “certain persons lying on their stomach have trouble breathing, a condition which can be intensified when pressure is applied to their back.”

The policy’s guidelines for preventing in-custody deaths include: calling for back-up, calling for a paramedic, transporting the subject in a seated position or on his side, hog-tie as a last resort for officer safety and monitoring the subject closely.

McCann said he believed there was such a policy, but couldn’t name it specifically. Asked about the nature of his training beyond the police academy, he said if new policies were introduced, they were discussed at roll-call lineups 15 minutes prior to the beginning of each shift or at annual in-service training, which each officer is obligated to attend for about one week each year.

Dr. George Kirkham, a criminologist at Florida State University, was enlisted by the plaintiffs to review the officers’ actions and weigh them against policies adopted by the MPD. In a letter of conclusions dated Sept. 29, 2014, Kirkham determined that “at the time officers McCann and Jackson encountered Greg Rachel, he did not immediately pose a threat to them or to anyone else in the immediate area. Despite this fact, neither officer ever made any attempt to ‘calm the situation’ or provide a ‘reassurance’ to this obviously terrified man. In a dramatic departure from the professional stand just referenced, both officers gratuitously and recklessly escalated the situation by advancing on Greg Rachel with tasers drawn as they began issuing commands and yelling at the subject.

“McCann (and Jackson) violated the clear and mandatory policy MO-2011-03 and that those violations, based upon my experience and training, provoked the violence that inevitably led to Gregory Rachel’s death,” Kirkham concluded.

Regarding the plaintiff’s claims the MPD was negligent by failing to implement or enforce policies on the use of force, tasers and interacting with “emotionally disturbed persons,” a proposed statement of facts suggests the officers were all well trained by the department and were simply using their discretion with an individual who “posed a danger to the officers, to the victim, to the wider community, and even to himself.”

The condition “excited delirium” is not recognized by the American Medical Association or the American Psychological Association. The condition can’t be found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the definitive text in the field.

But according to an abstract published by the National Institutes of Health, excited (or agitated) delirium “is characterized by agitation, aggression, acute distress and sudden death, often in the pre-hospital care setting. It is typically associated with the use of drugs that alter dopamine processing, hyperthermia, and, most notably, sometimes with death of the affected person in the custody of law enforcement. Subjects typically die from cardiopulmonary arrest, although the cause is debated.”

In Rachel’s case, the plaintiff enlisted as an expert witness Dr. Carl Adams, a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon based in Colorado. Reviewing the medical record, Adams disagreed with the cause of death reached by the medical examiner. Rather than excited delirium, Adams believed Rachel died from “primary cardiac arrest that was induced by taser.”

The defense also disputes Adams’ findings, suggesting he offered no evidence beyond the flatline shown on an EKG.

Replies are expected in the defendants’ motion for summary judgment by March 23. If a judge upholds the merits of the case, it is scheduled for jury selection in early 2016. The Mobile Police Department did not immediately respond to a press inquiry seeking more information about the circumstances of Rachel’s death, the status of the officers’ employment, or procedural questions.

See this article on lagniappemobile.com for an archive of related documents.

Three's company: bill exempts Commissioners from open meetings provisions

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

Before taking a trip to London last year for the Farnborough International Airshow, Mobile County Commissioner Jerry Carl, who attended the event as an economic development mission with fellow Commissioner Connie Hudson, joked to a group of reporters that he hoped the county didn't have an emergency while they were gone.

With only three districts on the County Commission, a quorum of the county's legislative body would be, at least for a few days, on another continent.

While it's perfectly legal, under the state's Open Meetings Act, for a quorum of members from a public board to attend the same social function, or end up on the same plane, members of the County Commission say they are cautious when it comes to talking business.

In an interview last week, Carl called the inability to speak directly to fellow commissioners about business that has the likelihood of a future vote "crippling." He said commissioners are forced to communicate through county attorney Jay Ross and County Administrator John Pfafenbach in between bi-weekly, public pre-conference and regular commission meetings.

"We can't come up with a solution on whatever we're discussing," Carl said. "If we come up with a change, or an alternate plan we have to wait two weeks to talk about it."

Carl said the original law, passed in 2005, never considered a three-person board.

"It's very hard to do business," he said.

A new law introduced this year in the state House by State Rep. James Buskey, D-Mobile, and in the Senate by State Sen. Bill Hightower, R-Mobile, would amend the current law to allow members of three-person commissions to discuss business behind closed doors, as long as no decision is made.

HB131 had its first read on March 5 and Buskey said he's confident it'll pass the chamber before this year's legislative session ends. The bill is still in committee this week. Of the bill, Buskey said "it just makes sense."

Hightower, the sponsor of SB132, said he thinks relationships

between commissioners could be improved if the bill is passed.

"You've got to be able to build a relationship with a colleague," Hightower said. "You can become easily offended if you don't have this."

For those weary of deals taking place behind closed doors, Hightower said members would still not be allowed to vote outside of a public meeting, but would be able to discuss important issues, like economic development, beforehand.

"You need to have the deliberative process in public view, so everyone understands the rationale," he said. "That can't be taken away. I hope this strikes the right balance."

The bill is currently awaiting approval in the Senate County and Municipal Government Committee, but Hightower is also optimistic about its possibility to be passed into law.

"There's a good chance it'll pass," Hightower said. "It's a bipartisan effort."

Commission President Connie Hudson wrote in an email message Monday that she doesn't have a strong position either way on the proposed legislation.

"I will continue to support transparency and public deliberation on government matters and don't foresee that the legislation will have a significant impact on the way that I conduct my office," she wrote.

Commissioner Merceria Ludgood could not be reached for comment by press time.

March 15-21 is referred to as Sunshine Week, a nationwide celebration of access to public records and open government, according to www.sunshineweek.org. Sunshine Week participants include normally include members of the media, library staffs, civic group members, nonprofit leaders and others.

An association representing at least one of those groups opposes the legislation in HB 131 and SB 132. Alabama Press Association Executive Director Felicia Mason said the current law on the books already allows for three-member bodies to meet, as long as members aren't discussing anything that could come up

for a vote.

"If you allow anyone to do everything but vote, the public is not allowed in the deliberative process," she said.

No matter the size of the board, Mason said, no public body should be exempt.

"It should be clear they can have lunch, or be at social events, as long as they don't do business," she said.

Mobile joins Wilcox and Cullman counties as the only three in the state that have a three-member commission, Association of County Commissions of Alabama Executive Director Sonny Brasfield said.

Legal advisers are much more cautious in these counties, he said, because while it's not a violation for two members to be seen together, members avoid that situation because "you can't prove a negative."

"Clearly this (bill) would help with what is a significant perception problem," he said.

The APA supports HB195 and SB21, which are both laws that would strengthen the language in the Open Meetings Act to include the outlawing of serial meetings. Serial meetings, Brasfield said, occur when an individual, or individuals, meet with small members of a multi-member board of more than three and help come to a consensus on an issue without holding a public meeting. While these types of meetings are not stipulated against in the most recent version of the Open Meetings Act passed in 2005, Brasfield said the association has been training elected leaders against it.

"We've always advised members that is a violation of the spirit of the law," he said.

The bill would also clearly state that the provisions cover any and all public committees and subcommittees, which the ACCA has already been training for, Brasfield said.

Brasfield said his association has no problem with the tougher restrictions on serial meetings. He said they worked closely with the APA on it.



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911 board throws support behind EMA facility

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

After years of discussion, members of the Mobile County 911 Board agreed last week to purchase the Mobile County Emergency Management Agency's current facility on McGregor Avenue.

Though no money has changed hands and a closing date is still unclear, the purchase is the only option the Mobile County Communications District (MCCD) saw to assist the EMA in securing funding for the construction of a new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) near the MCCD's current campus on Zeigler Boulevard.

An EOC is a centralized location used for coordinating services during an emergency, but portions of the current facility on McGregor Avenue are more than 60 years old. Its aging condition has pushed the county's interest in a new facility, but due to fiscal constraints, those discussions have been drawn out for almost a decade.

Though the MCCD has long since planned to contribute to the project, the board's own lawyer said statutes governing the district's existence don't allow its board to directly fund anything other than emergency communications in Mobile County — including the EMA.

"I was asked to look at it from a legal standpoint, and in my opinion, the only way the board could participate would be if there is a need for the space," MCCD Attorney Larry Wettermark said during a March 12 meeting. "Secondly, if there was joint facility, the board would have to justify the amount of financial contribution to the building with the amount of space or use it would get from the building."

Charlie McNichol, deputy director of the MCCD, recently took a trip to look at similar "jointly operated" facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi. He said the layout of both operations seemed like "a great concept," but said Mobile County's situation wasn't exactly comparable.

"Those facilities had been destroyed by storms, and neither one of the agencies had a facility. So they had to build a 911 center and an EMA building," McNichol said. "The difference is, Mobile County 911 doesn't really need a new facility."

While MCCD Director Gary Tanner did agree there was no need to build an entirely new center 300 feet away from the current location, he did say the MCCD is in need of a training facility and somewhere to house its newly formed electronics department. Tanner said the McGregor facility could also serve as a backup should something prevent emergency communication workers from occupying the MCCD's current facility.

"Our recommendation is that we assist in funding the new structure next door with the value of purchasing that building (from the EMA)," Tanner said. The board followed suit, passing a resolution pledging the purchase of the building at fair market value consistent with a contemporary appraisal when EMA begins construction of a new facility.

The appraisal will determine the ultimate price tag, though at the meeting Tanner said the

current estimate is somewhere between \$1.5 and \$2 million.

For several years, the MCCD earmarked about \$1.3 million of its budget for the purchase, but hadn't officially pledged the funding until Thursday.

"How much it's going to cost? You don't know that until you take bids," said Mobile County Engineer Joe Ruffer, who until recently served on boards for the both the MCCD and the EMA. "At this time, the county is just looking for a resolution saying (the 911 board) would be willing to do this."

Though it's not binding, that resolution gives the EMA a better idea of what it will have to work with when constructing the facility is moved up from the county's backburner.

The construction costs for the facilities McNicol toured ranged anywhere from \$5 to \$15 million, but a final dollar figure isn't set for a new Mobile County facility and neither are its funding sources.

Though the property the building is slated to sit on was donated by the city of Mobile, a \$7 million pledge for additional funding has since been retracted by the City Council. Mobile County has agreed to use \$7.5 million from its current capital improvements fund, but there has also been some discussion of using an additional \$2.6 million from the 2012 CIP program. So far, only \$7.5 million is officially on the table.

The county also sought funding the EMA in one of its numerous applications for RESTORE Act funding, which will be available when a federal court rules on the civil penalties assessed to BP following 2010's Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The EMA has already received about \$2 million in federal grants for the construction of the EOC but according to Mobile County EMA Director Ronnie Adair, around \$800,000 of that has already been used to design a structural plan for the new facility.

According to that plan, the new building could cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$14 million and would be around 36,000 square feet when completed. Though it's not certain where the rest of the money will come from, Adair said he was glad the MCCD was keeping up its end of the bargain.

"Thankfully (the MCCD) approved that over there," he said. "Right now we're still kind of in limbo waiting to see if the County Commission or city of Mobile might be able to come up with enough revenue to fund the construction."

Adair made a point to thank Commissioners Connie Hudson and Merceria Ludgood, who he called two of the project's biggest supporters. In previous reports Hudson told Lagniappe the project was becoming more of a priority because the \$2 million in federal grants received by EMA also came with a deadline.

According to Hudson, the county has already been granted two extensions on that deadline, and additional extensions aren't guaranteed. If the demands of the grant aren't met, the federal government could request the money be returned.



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Legislators support five-member County Commission

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

A bill introduced in the state legislature would allow Mobile County residents to vote to increase the number of County Commission districts and representatives, from three to five.

Currently Mobile County is one of three counties in the state, along with Wilcox and Cullman counties, that have a three-member commission.

But first-term State Rep. Jack Williams, R-Mobile, wants to let residents decide whether it should stay that way. The bill is cosponsored by other members of the local delegation, including State Reps. David Sessions, Napoleon Bracy, James Buskey and Barbara Drummond.

Williams said constituents in the northern part of the county wanted him to introduce the bill because many feel they are unrepresented by having only three commissioners.

The way the current districts are arranged now, Williams said, residents of the city of Mobile have an unfair advantage when it comes to electing commissioners, because all three districts contain a portion of the city.

"Every county commissioner now is elected in Mobile," Williams said.

With five commission districts, Williams said, places like Wilmer and Citronelle could have stronger representation. He said it would likely break down into two Democratic districts and three Republican districts.

The bill, if passed, would set up the referendum for the 2016 general election and would allow the commission's five members to each be paid the same rate as members of the current three-member body, or roughly \$70,000.

"It's a big county," Williams said. "I think there's enough work to do for full-time positions."

The referendum would ask voters two questions, according to the bill. The first would ask whether they favor the current three-member board. The second would ask if voters favored a five-member commission. A simple majority of voters would decide it.

If approved, the five districts would be of equal population using the most current U.S. Census data.

Williams said the vote would take place in 2016 to keep the county from spending money on a special election.

Commissioner Jerry Carl supports the idea of a five-member commission, but said the salary should be cut in half to reflect the change as a "real part-time job." He has suggested increasing the number of members to five and paying each of them only \$35,000.

"It just makes sense with the size of the county," he said.

In addition, Carl said he'd support keeping the commissioners' current three assistants and sharing them among five members, so it would not "cost taxpayers anything."

The current three-member board, as a full-time job, attracts people with political aspirations, Carl said. That isn't bad and doesn't make

them wrong, he said, it just isn't easy for local business leaders to run because they don't have the time to commit to a full-time job.

"You would get more of a variety of candidates," Carl said. "Right now you get politicians looking to move up the ladder."

Carl said the bill probably wouldn't pass as it's currently written because of the amount of

You would get more of a variety of candidates. Right now you get politicians looking to move up the ladder.
-Mobile County Commissioner Jerry Carl

the salaries attached.

Williams said right now he thinks it's 50/50 whether it will pass or not.

"It depends on what the Senate does," he said. "I know that the public wants it and a referendum allows everyone to vote."

The bill, listed as HB86, was first read on March 3 and is currently awaiting a decision in a House committee.

Commissioners Merceria Ludgood and Connie Hudson could not be reached for comment for this story, as of press time.

Sessions said he typically likes to "streamline government," but isn't opposed to letting the people decide on it. He said it's probably a good idea for the county and would allow two commissioners to meet and discuss business.

"It's kind of silly two commissioners can't have a conversation," he said.

The obvious opposition to it, he said, would be those who oppose expanding the government and its cost to the county.

"There are pros and cons to all of it," he said. "I know some folks in the country are for it, but I know folks who are against it."

Sessions said he's used to debating the subject, as this is not the first time a bill to increase the number of Mobile County Commissioners has been introduced.

"It has come up several times," he said. "It comes up every time I'm up here."

Mobile County is quite a bit larger than the other counties in the state with three-member commissions. Mobile, as of the 2010 census, has just under 415,000 residents, making it the second largest county in the state. The population means that each commissioner represents more than 138,000 residents. Cullman is the 19th largest county, with almost 81,000 residents and Wilcox is the 62nd largest county, with slightly more than 11,000 residents.



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County engineer resigns multiple boards after ethical reflection

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

After more than three decades of service on various boards, Mobile County Engineer Joe Ruffer is stepping down from several governing bodies after seeking advisement through the Alabama Ethics Commission.

As of March 13, Ruffer tendered his resignation from boards presiding over the Mobile County Communications District, the Government Utilities Service Corporation of Mobile County, the Mobile County Emergency Management Agency and Mobile County's Solid Waste Disposal Authority — the members of which are all appointed by the County Commission and are uncompensated.

In a letter to commissioners, Ruffer said “the very appointment of a county employee to the boards created a conflict of interest on any matter that concerns both the county commission and a particular board,” citing the opinion of the Ethics Commission.

However, Ruffer said no complaint was filed, and the opinion was reached after he personally reached out to the Ethics Commission for guidance through the county's legal staff.

“I attend Associations of County Commissions of Alabama meetings regularly, and I try to take an ethics class every two or three years to make sure I'm abreast of these laws,” Ruffer told Lagniappe. “This past year, there was an opinion about an individual who was an employee of city who also served on a rural water board. Working for the county and being appointed by the county is a little bit different, but commissioners have asked me to serve on several boards, and from time to time things do come up between the two.”

Ruffer didn't quite get the answer he was hoping for when Hugh Evans, general counsel for the Ethics Commission, instructed the county's legal advisors that his appointments presented “a potential for a conflict of interest.”

“There are some situations throughout the state where legisla-

tion allows a council member or a commission member to serve on a municipal utilities board,” Evans said. “As a general rule — barring other enabling legislation — a county commission member or an employee of the county can't or at least shouldn't serve on county boards.”

Evans said though “he didn't like it,” there are several similar situations throughout the state. Though, most of those are related to city governments and not counties.

“We see it very frequently with municipalities where a statute will say, ‘the mayor will automatically serve as the superintendent of the utilities board’ or ‘two or three council members can serve on utilities board,’” Evans said. “In a general context, that presents a big opportunity for a conflict of interest. For example, if a city council member serves on the utilities board, and the council votes to give the board members a pay raise.”

Ruffer said he could see where the Commission's logic was rooted — as some organizations, like the GUS board, are entirely funded by the county. According to Ruffer, 45 percent of the EMA's funding also comes by way of the county government.

“With every decision, somebody could construe any action taken by any of those boards involved with county funds and suggest there's a conflict, and I'm sure there are such instances,” Ruffer said. “Do I consider it a conflict? I do not. In some cases, commissioners are allowed to serve as board members. If that's not a conflict, how can me being a board member be a conflict?”

Ruffer told Lagniappe he felt that his duty during his time on the boards was to represent the interest of Mobile County Commission, which he said he did.

In 1984, Ruffer was a founding board member of the MCCD, an organization he says is the “best and longest serving communications district in the state.”

MCCD Director Gary Tanner said Ruffer actually worked with

a former county administrator to compose the backing legislation that started the MCCD — the state's first emergency communications district.

“It's a tremendous loss for the county,” Tanner said. “His knowledge of communications and radio systems is significant. He's been on the ground from the beginning. It's sad that the interpretation of the current ethics law is that a person serving on two boards appointed by a sitting commission is a conflict, without personal gain.”

Tanner said the MCCD has other members serving on more than one board and has to be careful those members don't discuss or vote on something that might be pertinent to another county board.

According to Tanner, the narrow interpretation from the ethics commission presents a challenge to boards across the state when it comes to finding individuals willing to serve but also knowledgeable of the complex and changing subject matter.

“Mobile County is far-reaching, but in small county Alabama, it's going to be a stretch to find people with this type of knowledge that are not going to have some kind of a conflict of interest,” Tanner said. “I have engaged our lobbyist, Beth Lyons, to attempt to have legislations introduced that would tweak that to where it really reverts back to a conflict of interest related to personal gain.”

According to Tanner, Commissioner Mercia Ludgood is pursuing a similar solution through her position as president of ACCA. In the meantime, Ruffer says stepping down is best for everyone involved.

“I never thought there was a problem, but I felt like it was the best thing to do at least for this point in time,” Ruffer said. “Maybe once this is all ferreted out I'll have the opportunity to serve again.”

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Bayou council strips mayor's financial authority

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

In the wake of significant financial questions, the Bayou la Batre City Council took some extreme steps last Thursday to rein in expenditures — including a 30-day moratorium on all nonessential spending, while also stripping Mayor Brett Dungan of his ability sign checks, use city credit cards or obligate the city to any contract.

The chair of the city's finance committee, Councilwoman Annette Johnson, has in recent weeks brought to light a \$50,000 loan obtained by Dungan and City Clerk Jamie Abastoflor without prior consent of the council. Though Dungan claims the matter was subsequently ratified by the council during a Jan. 8 meeting, those minutes have yet to be approved by the council and are unavailable to verify those claims.

Dungan further explained the loan was obtained to help “make payroll” through the end of year, when tax revenue is typically down. However, council members have expressed concern for being kept in the dark about the city's financial concerns and Dungan's pursuit of the loan.

The discovery of the loan prompted further digging into the city's finances, which Johnson said has revealed more than \$350,000 in debt, multiple credit cards that are “maxed out,” several unauthorized financial transactions and the “unauthorized” sale of city property to an elected official in another city for \$10.

Johnson also extensively highlighted and opposed more than \$50,000 previously transferred to and from several accounts by Abastoflor without permission from the council. According to her review, Abastoflor moved \$20,000 from a BP Hospitality and Tourism fund and \$10,000 from a grant fund obtained for purchasing equipment for the Bayou la Batre Fire Department.

Abastoflor, who was brought in as part of a transitional team after Dungan's election before taking the position of city clerk, openly admitted he moved the money without authorization including an undisclosed amount of money from the city's senior citizens account.

At the meeting, Abastoflor said the monies were moved to the city's general fund and reimbursed afterwards. However, the majority of the council doesn't feel the ends justified the means.

“You took it upon yourself to make these decisions, to move this tremendous amount of money,” Johnson said to Abastoflor. “Were you aware of the significant consequences of not properly managing the BP money?”

Dungan disagreed with Johnson, explaining the funds were not earmarked for a specific purpose. Lagniappe has attempted to reach representatives of BP for clarification, but has not been successful.

Another issue that has been debated recently is Dungan's sale of piece of property deed to the city of Bayou la Batre located at 453 Norman Bridge Road in Montgomery — a parcel Dungan said he recently sold for just \$10 to Elton Dean, the chairman of the Montgomery County Commission.

Both Dungan and the council agree the property, which was donated to the city, was to be listed as “surplus” and sold to avoid demolition costs from the city of Montgomery. However, they disagree about the price. While Dungan said he had approval to sell property for \$10, at least four of five councilors say they have no recollection of providing it.

Dungan said “he recalled” discussing the matter with the council and again brought up the \$5,000 demolition charge Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange had discussed with him.

According to records obtained through the

Montgomery County Revenue Commission, the property's most recent assessed value is listed as \$10,860, while its market value is \$54,300.

George Silverman, a former Montgomery realtor who moved to Bayou La Batre, donated the property to the city. Dean, whose office is adjacent to the property, denied the opportunity to contribute to this report, but has since spoken to media outlets in Montgomery.

Financial concerns about Dungan and his staff influenced the council to implement the moratorium and eliminate the mayor's ability to expend city funds. At the meeting she said Dungan and his staff have used Regions credit card accounts as an “extension of (their) salary.”

“Multiple charges were made for fuel, when we were also submitting reimbursement for mileage for the same trips,” Johnson said. “That's why we removed credit cards from use in the city. It's a very common practice when there has been misuse.”

Aside from the “double dipping” Dungan is accused of in his travels, several council members also questioned meals and travel expenses charged on city credit cards for Dungan's wife.

City Attorney Bill Wasden said the council does have the authority to allow expenditures for Dungan's wife — as is often done with first ladies of governors and presidents — but only if it's done beforehand. He then said, “in this instance, I don't know that was done.” The council also agreed no expenses had ever been preapproved for members of Dungan's family.

Throughout the meeting, Councilwoman Ida Mae Coleman came to Dungan's defense as the only member who opposed the multiple actions the council took to limit Dungan's authority and financial access. She called the recent developments “dirty politics,” alleging they were part of plan that's been in motion for a long time.

“What you see now is going to stop Bayou la Batre dead in its tracks,” Coleman said, suggesting the moratorium and limiting the mayor's abilities would shut down the city. However, despite the moratorium and delayed payments Wasden confirmed at the March 12 meeting that all contractual agreements previously approved by the council, like electricity bills, insurance payments and employee salaries wouldn't have to be voted on by the council in order to be maintained.

In one of its last motions, the council elected to reassign Dungan's assistant Wanda Overstreet to the Bayou la Batre Welcome Center and terminate her contract with the city after 30 days. Though as of Monday, Overstreet was still returning to work as the mayor's assistant. According Johnson and other city officials, Overstreet's return to city hall on March 16 caused an incident that promoted response from the Bayou la Batre Police Department. No arrests or charges resulted from the incident.

Though Dungan hasn't denied any of the claims on the record or in public meetings, he has openly questioned the motives behind the council's sudden heightened interest in the city's finances.

“My personal integrity and the integrity and livelihoods of the hard-working city employees are being threatened for no valid reason,” Dungan said. “Our citizens deserve the truth, and I'm confident that when political motivations and power struggles are removed from the equation, the record will show that this administration has worked diligently and honestly to move the city of Bayou la Batre forward.”



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Coverage You Can Count On

On a recent journey to Goat Hill

BY ROB HOLBERT/MANAGING EDITOR | rholbert@lagniappemobile.com

You know you're on an important mission when it requires a stop at a Waffle House in Evergreen at 8 a.m. Doing the math, that means we crossed the boob of the Dolly Parton Bridge pretty early in the day.

It may not have been a mission from God, a la "The Blues Brothers," but it felt like one — and we were going to need some hash browns scattered, covered, smothered and chunked. Or as in my partner's case, covered with ketchup, which I think in WH shorthand is "bloodied." Tastes great but looks not so good.

Yes, the mission was important enough that my friend and co-publisher of this rag, Ashley, her fears quelled by Heinz-covered shredded taters and an over-easy egg, actually threw aside her great-grandmotherly driving instincts and put the pedal to the metal.

We were on our way to Montgomery to spend the day trying to talk to legislators about a bill we'd like to see passed — one that would allow free newspapers like Lagniappe to sell legal advertising (aka "public notices") just like every other newspaper around. That was going to mean a full day of walking the halls of the Alabama State House trying to bend legislators' ears.

While the issue at hand was important to us, we both were equally excited about the opportunity to see first-hand how things work in Montgomery. It may sound strange or even like a dereliction of duty, but neither of us has made it to Montgomery for a legislative session since starting Lagniappe more than a dozen years ago. Ashley last went when she was in fourth grade and was probably fueled more by Froot Loops than Waffle House. As a Mississippi boy a trip to Goat Hill would have included an extremely confused bus driver. And even as newspaper people we've never really found the time to go up there and see what's happening — even though it's been discussed many times.

Shockingly it was raining, but we managed to find a parking spot near the State House, which is where the legislators have their offices. We were told to just find a spot and accept the fact we'd get a parking ticket, but I fed the meter a couple of quarters just the same. The capitol building was just across the street but we wouldn't be darkening its doorway. Instead we entered the beehive that is the State House.

Having worked on Capitol Hill for a bit I thought I had an idea of what to expect, but this was nothing like Washington. There even on a busy day you can wander through the hallways of the Senate our House

buildings and only occasionally see an elected official — mostly staffers scurrying about doing their masters' bidding.

That's not the case in Montgomery. The halls were swarming with legislators and lobbyists all seemingly engaged in three conversations at once. The second a legislator finished a conversation someone else was sure to grab him or her "for just a second." I was impressed by the activity level. There certainly weren't a bunch of people sitting around smoking cigars, swilling scotch and guffawing about how they'd just let Alabama Power screw the public out of billions. (Just joking. Please don't raise my rates.)

The bill we're interested in seeing passed would remove the requirement newspapers must have a publications class postal permit in order to run legal ads, which deal with things like probate issues and letting citizens know which bills are being proposed. The postal permit is an outdated requirement that blocks free papers like Lagniappe — the second largest publication in the area — from even being able to offer the service, while tiny newspapers like the Citronelle Call-News and the Mobile Beacon make it a major part of their businesses.

It doesn't make any sense why the U.S. Post Office is deciding what a newspaper is in Alabama anyway, but it's a big money issue across the state and those papers that have the advertising, as well as their lobbyists with the Alabama Press Association, sure don't want any competition for it.

Since the bill that would remove this provision is being debated in the State Government Committee, our first order of business was to start trying to meet with people on that committee, as well as folks from our own local delegation. The local delegation was pretty easy to see and most were supportive of the change. One or two were worried about upsetting the other newspapers in the county or the APA, but that's probably to be expected.

What was interesting as we made the rounds was just how busy everyone seemed to be. Describing it as a beehive is appropriate. Every legislator seemed to be running from one meeting to another or had people waiting outside the office door. Very few had any sort of secretarial staff and the offices bore no resemblance to the palatial suites enjoyed by the Representatives and Senators in D.C. The term "glorified closet" came to mind when I entered several offices.

We sat in on a State Government Committee meeting, and what was interesting was the role lobbyists played in providing useful information to the committee members. That's not to say there's not plenty of spin taking place in those hallways — our bill was being roundly trashed around the building by the APA and publishers worried about competition — but the lobbyists also do seem to play a rather important role just in terms of offering objective information as well.

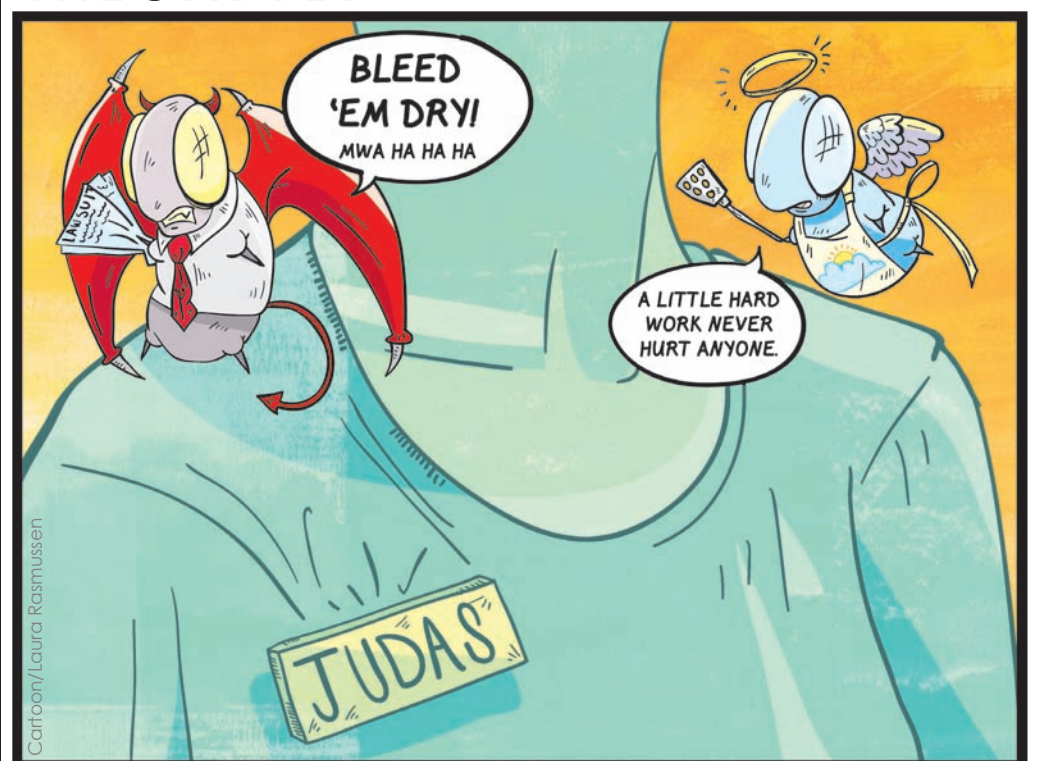
As the day wound on the biggest issue on the legislative agenda — charter schools — began to take precedence over everything else. It was a bit like the water draining out of the bathtub. All of the sudden the legislators were gone to debate that issue.

We sat down to have an unproductive meeting with the Press Association lobbyists and by 5 p.m. Ashley was stomping the pedal again to get us home.

All in all it was an eye-opening trip to the sausage factory that is Goat Hill. Certainly I can't say I'm any expert on exactly what happens there, but I did gain some respect for the amount of work being done by the people we've elected. If nothing else they were running hard.

We didn't even get a parking ticket either, so between that and enjoying a hash brown autopsy, I'll rate the visit a learning experience and at least a modest success.

THE GADFLY



If engaging in wage and benefit lawsuits against restaurants, Mobile area servers may bite the hand that feeds them.

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Some tips on suits and suitcases

BY ASHLEY TRICE/EDITOR | ashleytoland@lagniappemobile.com

The birds are chirping. The sky is blue. Oh springtime in Mobile, how I love thee! I would count the ways, but it would take too long.

But unfortunately, it's not all sunshine and azaleas in the Port City, as there have been a couple of random unrelated issues flying into my thoughts like pollen from a dioecious male oak tree. (Apparently dude trees produce the most of this yellow junk – according some random and questionably reliable site on the interweb – thanks guys!)

Restaurant remedies

Last issue, I wrote about how some of our local restaurants were under attack by a Birmingham law firm, which is representing a handful of local servers who are suing some of our favorite establishments for “invalid tip pooling” and not getting proper compensation for the pre-and-post-shift duties commonly known in the biz as “side work.” Not surprisingly, some local ambulance chasers are trying to get in on the action now too.

As I essentially said last week, I think this is complete BS. In my almost decade-long tenure in the service industry, the policies the targeted restaurants had in place — to tip kitchen staff — are quite commonplace. Most servers are happy to do so, as these people in the “back of the house” are helping them out tremendously, the amount tipped out to them is usually a very small percentage and these folks are usually still making far less than servers who — depending on the restaurant — make double to triple the minimum wage, if not more. The feedback I received was largely in agreement and came mostly from former or current servers — the very people who should be screaming these practices are unfair if

they were so egregious.

But I did have a friend state he felt like there was potential for some unethical proprietors to use servers to properly compensate kitchen staff when it should be coming out of their pockets, not the servers' tips.

I guess I can see that argument to some degree. But I have never really seen that happening myself.

But whatever the case, lawsuits are not the appropriate remedy here. I mean what business owner — restaurant or otherwise — knows all the intricacies of labor law? If a business is violating some clause of some code and someone feels they are being treated or compensated unfairly or illegally and the employer disagrees, the employee should first have to report the incident to their federal and/or state labor department. Then, an investigation should take place and if the employer is found to be in the wrong, then the business should be given time to comply or fined. Then if they don't, then yes let the civil law suits begin. But it just seems like these cases are skipping a few steps here.

I've gotcha on a couple of minor technicalities, now I'm going to sue your pants off.

I bet you could probably go into any business of any type and if you were really trying hard enough, you could find some part of the code they were unknowingly violating. If this is the road we are going down, all business owners should be very afraid, including the very lawyers who are filing these suits.

Mr. Richardson goes to Washington ... again

The Mobile City Council's most prolific traveler, Fred Richardson, was racking up the frequent flyer miles again last

week, as he and Councilman Levon Manzie were in DC for the National League of Cities conference. Richardson posted numerous pics to his Facebook page, posing with Sen. Jeff Sessions and outside of Sen. Richard Shelby's office and even a really nice and very close-up shot of President Obama as he was speaking to the conference delegates.

Next to the photo outside of Sen. Shelby's office, Richardson wrote he was going to ask him about ways to get the ditches filled in his district, something he has been making noise about his entire time on the council. That text seems to have now been removed, unless I was just hallucinating seeing it in the first place. But hallucinations or not, I wonder how many of those ditches could have been taken care of over the years with the good councilman's travel budget alone?

Look, I know it is important for our elected officials to attend some of these conferences, including this one last week, which probably was essential. And yes, I know travel comes from a different budget than capital but it's all about optics.

And, this really goes for all of them, but since Fred's travel habits have made him the poster councilman for what is perceived as by and large a high flying waste of tax payer money, you have to be more aware of how your actions look to your constituents. Especially if you are going to be the guy who has complained for your 18 years in office that you can't get ditches filled in Trinity Gardens, it's not very politically savvy to ALWAYS be the first one willing to pack your suitcase.

In fact, if I were him I would declare I am not spending another penny on travel until every ditch, “beat by beat, street by street” in District One was filled. If he doesn't he is offering up any potential competitors in the next election a very easy way to send him packing in a much different way.

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The tao of Bruce Lee, kung fu kitty

BY JENNIFER MCDONALD/COLUMNIST | betterdivorce@aol.com

We are always in a process of becoming and nothing is fixed. Have no rigid system in you, and you'll be flexible to change with the ever-changing. Open yourself and flow, my friend. Flow in the total openness of the living moment. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves. Moving, be like water. Still, be like a mirror. Respond like an echo. — Bruce Lee

The late Bruce Lee, beloved martial artist, poet, philosopher, actor and filmmaker, is almost as famous for his words of wisdom as he was for his astounding athletic prowess. Though it's been over 40 years since his sudden and tragic death at age 32, Lee remains a hero to countless students and fans of kung fu, the ancient Chinese martial art my son and I study together.

Ben and I train together frequently, as part of our larger goal of trying to become as healthy as we can, in mind and body. Kung fu has become such a big part of our lives that when we adopted a kitten back in October, Bruce Lee seemed like a perfect name.

Until then our only cat was Whisper, the outdoor cat for whom we've been providing food and medical care the past several years. Although we've tried for so long to bond with her, Whisper has never seemed especially interested in humanity. She will voluntarily enter the house occasionally, primarily seeking warmth on cold winter nights, but most of the time she prefers to nap on the back porch and explore our large back yard.

She has always rejected our attempts at showing affection, and while it made me sad she seemed to hate us, my husband shrugged it off pretty easily. Fortunately he shares my love for dogs, but he has never been a huge fan of domesticated cats, mostly viewing them as "weird, smelly, self-serving little fur-bastards."

I've always considered myself more of a "dog person" as an

adult, but I've been very fond of at least a few cats I've known in the past. It's been a long time since I've really bonded with a cat and I was actually a bit disappointed by Whisper's repeated rejection. When my husband suggested we locate and adopt a human-friendly kitten for my birthday last year, I was simultaneously surprised, apprehensive and excited.

We loved the sweet-tempered and playful new kitten from the start. We actually selected his name based on the spinning jump kicks and other feats of acrobatic wonder he performed while chasing his little red laser pointer, but true to his name, he ended up teaching us more than we ever imagined.

- The way of the open mind and heart. We find the opportunity to learn and love so much more when we let go of our prejudices and open our hearts to others. Scott always thought he disliked cats, based mostly on a handful of unpleasant experiences with cats in the past, and he was pleasantly surprised when Bruce Lee stole his heart almost overnight.

Through Bruce, he realized he never disliked cats, but merely misunderstood them and the ways they are not dogs. In fact, our great affection for Bruce Lee has helped the entire family understand Whisper in ways we never did before, and to our surprise, she has slowly begun to enjoy the indoor life with a family.

It still blows my mind sometimes to find Whisper chillin' in my husband's lap, but it's a nice reminder that people (and cats!) can change if they're willing to open their minds and challenge their old beliefs. These days Scott describes cats as "weird, smelly, self-serving little fur-bastards, and all the more delightful and hilarious because of it!"

Indeed.

- The way of just enough, but not too much. Bruce loves for us to stroke the fur on his neck and head, and sometimes even

his tummy, and he often wallows in ecstasy for several minutes. However, if you linger even a moment too long after he's given off his subtle "that's enough" signals, he's not shy about communicating his annoyance.

- The way of discipline and consistency. It doesn't matter if we're busy, tired, distracted, stranded across town or flu-ridden and nearly immobile, Bruce Lee requires his can of wet food by seven each evening. There are obviously consequences for failure to comply, such as the food bowl or perhaps a favorite vase being flung to the ground in anger, but deep down we know Bruce Lee understands discipline is its own reward.

- The way of practicing self-care through adequate rest. Bruce Lee is an active and very busy feline, but that doesn't mean he doesn't need time to recharge his batteries. For optimum mood and performance he requires 27 naps per day in addition to an extended overnight rest period involving deep sleep interrupted at midnight, 2 and 4 a.m., for half-hour sessions of wall-climbing, ceiling fan swinging, human-face-dancing and assorted hyperactivity.

- The way of living in the present. It's pointless to dwell on the past, which is already gone, and just as pointless to worry too much about the future, which hasn't even happened yet. Real life is happening in the moment, right in front of you. You can reach out and grab every beautiful second, or you can let it pass you by as you cling to regret and anxiety.

Bruce Lee doesn't care that yesterday he got in trouble for climbing the blinds, and he doesn't care that maybe I'll lock him out of my office soon if he doesn't stop knocking my plant off my desk and pushing the CAPS button every time he walks across my laptop. The only thing that matters is that right now, there is a tiny piece of string dangling from my coat hanging across the room and, obviously, it must be destroyed.

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Time for all of Alabama to get wet

BY JEFF POOR/COLUMNIST | jeffreypoor@gmail.com

Last week, Gov. Robert Bentley signed legislation to allow Alabama municipalities within dry counties to continue selling alcohol. But why did the Alabama governor take this seemingly dated action?

Earlier this month the Alabama Supreme Court overturned a 2009 law that allowed for alcohol sales in dry county cities and towns. Bentley signed the new law shortly before the expiration of the court's grace period.

According to the state's high court, the 2009 law violated the Equal Protection Clause because an exception was written in the law not to allow municipalities in Blount, Clay and Randolph counties to participate. However, the whole concept of dry counties in Alabama begs the question, why is this still a thing?

The government's involvement in the sale of alcohol has always been a peculiarity, especially in Alabama.

Alabama embraced prohibition in 1915, four years before the rest of the country did with the 18th Amendment. Then in 1933 with the 21st Amendment, prohibition ended. That led to the way alcohol is regulated within the state today, which is on a county-by-county basis.

According to an op-ed penned by historian and Jacksonville State University scholar Harvey Jackson during the 2012 election cycle for the Roanoke, Alabama's Randolph Leader, this arrangement was due to the balance of power in the Alabama legislature, where rural legislators representing areas that still favored prohibition had an edge over legislators from urban areas favoring legal alcohol sales.

Over the years, the phenomena created an uneasy alliance between prohibition proponents and bootleggers profiting off the black market created by prohibition. As the population became more mobile, roads and highways improved and more and more people got automobiles, that black market dried up, and with it half of the push keeping these regulations in place.

Currently 25 counties in Alabama remain dry, although all — with exception of Clay County — have wet municipalities within their borders.

Are dry counties really any better off?

Of these 25 counties, there is nothing to suggest they're better off economically with prohibition in place. In fact, they tend to be struggling in some cases economically with unemployment rates above the national unemployment rate of 5.5 percent according to data from the Alabama Department of Labor. That's perhaps due to these counties being rural and lacking economic opportunities of the more populated counties. But there's no clear competitive advantage.

As far keeping the roadways safer, it isn't clear a dry county is any better off than a wet county. A 2009 University of Alabama Center for Advanced Public Safety examined DUI data of 13 dry counties and 13 wet counties and determined there was no clear distinction between whether a county was wet or was dry. The study instead concluded demographic data should be considered, particularly the age of the population, where a concentration of a younger population could mean more of a likelihood of



Photo/justice.gov

A study indicates meth labs are more prevalent in dry counties.

risky behavior.

The economic and safety argument are perhaps anecdotal and may not hold true universally. However, there is one dark element that tends to be more prevalent in dry counties everywhere and that is the manufacture and use of methamphetamine.

A University of Louisville study that analyzed Kentucky's dry counties determined counties without alcohol have more meth lab seizures per capita than do the state's wet counties.

According to the authors of the study, economists Jose Fernandez, Stephan Gohmann and Joshua Pinkston, alcohol bans increase the cost of obtaining alcohol, therefore making illegal drug market more competitive.

Mobile County is bordered by three dry counties — Washington County to the north and Greene and George counties, in Mississippi, to the west. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration's meth lab registry, both Greene (10 labs) and George counties (33 labs) have had a disproportionate number meth labs decontaminated or demolished by local authorities based on their populations between 2004-2012. The DEA reported Mobile County discovered 38 meth labs in the same time period, but with a population 11 times that of Greene and George Counties combined.

The bottom line is it is difficult to regulate human behavior, especially when it comes to society's desire for their intoxicant of choice. Our country's failed attempt at prohibition last century is proof of this.

When the government attempts a ban, the law of unintended consequences often takes effect and you have an environment that is more prone for corruption, illegal drugs, etc. Or you have a cottage industry of county line liquor stores and barrooms, which would seemingly increase the possibility of drinking and driving.

While those who pushed for alcohol bans may have had honorable intentions at the time, this is a policy has outlived its usefulness. As far as Alabama is concerned, the prohibition on alcohol where it is still in effect will celebrate its 100-year anniversary.

What has it accomplished, other than ridicule from its wet neighbors?

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Greer's acquires Food Champs in midtown

BY RON SIVAK/COLUMNIST | ron@elminfo.com | Twitter @rcvak

Greer's recently acquired the 43,000-square-foot Food Champs store located at 3170 Dauphin St., giving the 99-year-old, locally owned grocery chain a total of 32 stores in the area with a 33rd under development in Quitman, Miss., under their Ace Express store label.

"This location was once a Delchamps. Our District Manager, Bill Fairchild, who is now over the store, also managed it for a time in that incarnation," Jan Greer Endfinger, director of human resources and marketing, said.

"We reopened for customers on Friday, March 13 and were pleased to be able to hire all Food Champ Associates that wanted to join our Greer's team," Endfinger said. "George Fowler, who has successfully operated two of our other locations, is our store director. His co-manager is Joe Price and the assistant manager is Keith Griffiths. Meat Market Manager Terry Crow assures us that he and his team will be available every day to take care of customers. All of these hires have numerous years of grocery chain experience."

Commercial real estate moves

The historic 10,000-square-foot **St. Francis Methodist Church** located in LoDa was recently purchased by **Clifton and Ginna Inge** of Mobile.

"The original church was built in 1842 but was damaged by an ammunition explosion that destroyed most of downtown. The congregation razed the church in 1890 and rebuilt it in 1895," Clifton Inge said, noting future plans for the property include its conversion into a wedding and music venue.

Currently, the structure is in "Phase 1" of renovations, which involves stabilization of the foundation as well as repairing the church steeple, stained glass windows, bathrooms and elevators.

"The stabilization phase will cost roughly \$300,000. Phase 2 will initiate the work for what we anticipate will be a wedding/music venue and general space for lease. This will also include a development phase for the 8,500-square-foot office space at 15 Joachim St., which could be an incubator kitchen similar to Union Market in Washington DC," Inge said.

Chicken Salad Chick recently leased a 2,600-square-foot space at the 8,800-square-foot **South Landing Shopping Center** located directly across from the University of South Alabama on Old Shell Road. The eatery, slated to open in early fall with a drive-through, will be the third launched by **franchise owner Misty McClure**, who also owns locales on U.S. Highway 98 in Daphne and Hillcrest Road.

Sam Winter recently moved his real estate office to **660 Springhill Ave.** at the intersection of Springhill Avenue and Dauphin Street. **Jeremy Milling of Milling Commercial Realty** handled the lease of the 1,300-square-foot office space which was the former home of Thomas Roofing Building.

Arkema, a worldwide producer of industrial chemicals with a plant located at **13755 U.S. Highway 43** in Axis, announced plans to spend \$60 million to build a new Alabama facility that produces Kepstan, a product used in 3D printing and carbon fiber applications.

The capital investment is projected to generate roughly 25 new jobs in the area with an average salary of \$100,000. The estimated wrap-up date for upgrades is 2018.

John Delchamps with the **Merrill P. Thomas Co. Inc.** leased an 11,000-square-foot office and warehouse space at **1909 Brookdale Drive W.** to **Alabama Electric Motor Services**.

The Mobile County Public School System broke ground last Tuesday on **Fournier-Chastang K-8 School**, a new facility in the Trinity Gardens community that will front I-65. The 93,770-square-foot facility will include 27 classrooms, science, vocational and computer labs, a gym and a 6,633-square-foot tornado shelter.

DK-Lok recently leased a 3,500-square-foot space at **161 Beltline Highway**. DK-Lok is locating its corporate offices at this location. The company sells instrumentation fittings and valves. **Robert Cook** with **Vallas Realty** handled the transaction.

Goodwill Easter Seals recently announced the grand opening of its new facility at **300 Azalea Road**. The organization renovated its 33,000-square-foot facility to house an expanded retail store, a covered drive-through

donation center and community center.

WSC's Moyer named "Safety Leader of the Year"

The Mobile section of the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Alabama named White-Spinner Construction's (WSC) safety and compliance manager, Ross Moyer, "2014 Safety Leader of the Year" at its 13th annual Construction Safety Excellence Awards luncheon on Wednesday, March 11 at the Mobile Country Club.

"I am truly honored to receive this award," Moyer said. "I can manage and implement all the new procedures I want, but it wouldn't mean anything without a shared commitment to safety from each of our employees at WSC."

The company was also presented with a Construction Safety Excellence Award in the Building Division for maintaining an excellent safety record throughout 2014. WSC finished the year with more than 127,000 hours worked without a lost-time incident or OSHA violation, bringing the company's overall total to 2.25 million consecutive safe hours worked.

Wilkins Miller's Jones earns CFF designation

Amanda Jones, CPA/CFF, a Senior Accountant with Wilkins Miller, has recently been awarded the Certified in Financial Forensics (CFF) Credential by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). Including Jones, Wilkins Miller now has five professionals who are CFFs.

In 2012, Jones graduated from the University of South Alabama with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, majoring in accounting. She was the President of the University of South Alabama chapter of Beta Alpha Psi and served as an accounting intern for Wilkins Miller in 2012. Jones' concentration at the firm is in taxation of individuals, partnerships and corporations, financial analysis and litigation services.

The CFF Credential is granted exclusively to CPAs who are members in good standing of the AICPA, which binds them to the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct.



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Nehi to a grasshopper — remembrance of soda pops gone by

BY ROB HOLBERT/MANAGING EDITOR | rhobert@lagniappemobile.com



Butler's Barber Shop was a Saturday morning hotspot in 1970s Laurel, Miss. I got my first haircut there from a man named Sheryl Clark. I remember like it was yesterday. The remnants of the day's take scattered about the floor, the combs in the blue solution, cables and tubes that hung from the ceiling suspending trimmers with vacuum hoses that tickled a bit, and hunting magazines strewn about the chairs in the waiting area. That was quite a lot for a young man to take in once every couple of months.

Men were there to talk and smoke cigarettes as much as they were there for a haircut and a shave, and I listened to many a wild hunting story. I even made some up just to fit in. Stories about a bear in my back yard soon became legendary and grew with each passing visit.

This social gathering place was welcoming to outdoorsmen who love to rattle on about whatever animal they killed depending on season. But there was an allure for the younger bucks yet to trophy their mantles, and it wasn't just the penny-apiece gum. Nestled in the far back corner just on the other side of Burl Butler was the ultimate Coke machine.

Be a good kid, don't squirm or cry and you'd receive a handful of change for the best soda pop spat out by this loud, clanging, divine contraption. I recall barely being able to pull the bottle out of the machine and the cap hurt my hand and the opener on the front. And I remember falling in love with the ceremony of it all. I was hooked.

In those days it was either Barq's Root Beer or its orange soda counterpart. But that was my first introduction to soda pop. My zeal has not waned over the years. I am crazy about the pop and felt it would make a great discussion for what are the greatest sodas.

You can't write a piece like this without mentioning Coca-Cola or simply "Coccola" for those with a hint of a drawl. Coke is still king. From mixed drinks in bars to taco stands, Coke has secured its rightful place at the head of the chain. I still grab a bag of peanuts to put in the bottle. Thankfully there has been a rise in popularity of Mexican Cokes with cane sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup.

We've heard about an RC Cola and a moon pie. Certainly that's a heavenly marriage. But the Royal Crown product I was most fond of was Nehi. Peach is the way to go. My friend Cliff and I once ordered two cases of longnecks and had them overnight delivered to our doorstep in California. It cost a fortune, but that's a craving only a Nehi lover would understand. Amazing by themselves, another way to enjoy them is gently poured over vanilla ice cream.

Stewart's came out with a peach soda that is almost as good in 1999. They'd been doing root beer since

the 1920s, but evolved into premium producer of innovative flavors. Their grape is the best version ever. My favorite, though, is the Key Lime. This soda is amazing. Do not neglect this pop should you ever see it.

Another root beer gone wild is the Virgil's brand. Outstanding root beer, but I must say as a cream soda fan this brand may be my favorite. If you have your hands on a Philly cheese steak try a bottle of their black cherry flavor.

San Pellegrino Aranciata Rossa might be the most refreshing drink on the market. I was introduced to these a few months back and was blown away. It's a blood orange-flavored sparkling beverage great for the sunnier days by the pool. Perfect with a salad, this could also hold up to smoky grilled veggies.

I couldn't pass on mentioning Abita root beer. If you find this one on tap it's unbeatable in a frosty mug. There is a good amount of vanilla taste that smoothes out the bite making it sweeter than most, but in a good way. Use a pint of this to wash down a chili cheese dog. That's pretty high cotton whoever you are.

The list goes on and on for amazing soda pop from corporate concoctions to smaller boutique sodas that eventually get purchased by big time distributors. But the soda pop I have come to call my favorite, my "desert island" soda, is a much simpler flavor than any of the above mentioned. I choose it because of its simplicity and versatility. Take all of your fancy pants this and snooty little that and drink to your heart's content because I don't need them.


The one soda pop I consider perfect for any occasion is Bubble Up. Ice cold Bubble Up in a bottle is what every soda pop tries to outdo. This is an understated masterpiece. It isn't overly sweet. The carbonation doesn't sting your nose. The finish is crisp and short-but-powerful. There is no occasion for soda pop that Bubble Up wouldn't fit right in.

I limit myself to one per week. OK, I TRY to limit myself to one per week. When I am behaving I can make a four pack last over a month, but there is only one person I know who loves Bubble Up more than I do, and his name is Lucas. Coming up on 10 years old, he is the sole soul I would deem worthy of splitting my last bottle. We celebrate straight A's and with this stuff and it can go fast. It's become a father and son bond. Don't worry, Nehi. You're our second favorite.

I wish there were more room. I'm interested in hearing your favorites. With all the new giant grocery chains and specialty shops like Virginias and Food Pak there are plenty to choose from, but I wonder if they could ever taste as good as that first one from Butler's.



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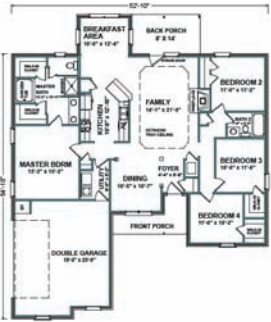
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Windmill's Seafood Savvy series brings James Beard chef

BY ANDY MACDONALD/CUISINE EDITOR | fatmansqueeze@comcast.com

It may be the random fruit trees scattered about the property. Maybe it's the eco-friendly environment and the great food. But whatever it is about Fairhope's Windmill Market that attracts you to the corner of Equality and Bancroft, you'll find there is another reason to visit at the end of this month.

Another installment of their Seafood Savvy series will be held Tuesday, March 31 at 6 p.m. For those unfamiliar, these quarterly events are set up to enlighten consumers about seafood preparation with informative lessons on where to get it and how to cook it.

"I'm always amazed by the fact that we live so close to the water here in south Alabama, and yet many of us don't know where to buy good seafood, how to handle it, where it comes from, or how it's processed," Maggie Lacey said.

Lacey is one of the Seafood Savvy organizers who hope the series will help turn consumers away from imported seafood and shed more light on what our gulf has to offer.

This quarter's session will prove to be a special occasion as James Beard award winning Chef Ryan Prewitt speaks about fish from the water to the table. Prewitt is head chef of New Orleans restaurant Peche, a James Beard Award winner for Best New Restaurant 2014, found in the warehouse district of the Crescent City. It's safe to say this man has a grasp on seafood.

Attendees will be treated to a lesson in how to shop for fresh seafood. Chef Ryan will show you how to properly clean and store seafood and how the home cook can make the most of the catch. The best part is he will demonstrate some of his favorite recipes and guests will have the opportunity to sample small portions of his creations.

For many of you this will be a first chance to have a James

Beard award winning chef cook for you. I recommend it.

The doors open at 5 p.m. There will be a cash bar for beer and wine. This event is totally free, but is limited. For tickets to this quarter's Seafood Savvy call 251-990-8883 or email Maggie Lacey at Maggie@windmillmarket.org

Dumbwaiter is ready for grand opening

According to its Facebook page, Dauphin Street's Dumbwaiter has set the grand opening date for Friday, March 20. Celebrate the first day of spring at Mobile's latest most anticipated restaurant. The pictures online look amazing and they are accepting reservations.

Call 251-445-3802 or book your reservation online through Open Table. Dumbwaiter is located at 167 Dauphin St. in the former Samurai J building on the southern perimeter of Bienville Square.

They won't let him close! Two more events at Italian Fisherman

On Valentine's Day the final meal was served at Old Shell Road's Italian Fisherman — or so we thought. It seems that over the past month there have been many requests for a final meal, and Chef John Weichman has decided to give the fans two chances to pay your respects.

The first is this Sunday, March 29. The restaurant will be open Palm Sunday from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m., but don't expect meager lunch portions. Full dinner portions and bar service will be served from a slightly smaller menu than the full Italian Fisherman book but your favorites will still be there.

Seafood gumbo, bisque and soft shell crab are a few of the appetizers. Scamp and snapper are fantastic, but thankfully he

is including my favorite trigger fish available three different ways. Chicken or veal Marsala, Osso Buco, pastas, and the prime rib that put him on the map many years ago round out the dishes you've come to know and love. Reservations are highly recommended.

The second event is the final installment of the Italian Fisherman wine dinners. This time we will be treated to wines of Vinicola de Tomelloso, La Mancha Spain. Finca Cerrada gold medal white and a red, Cabernet and a Rose' pair with grilled eggplant, seafood soup, chicken breast with Arogonese potatoes au gratin and a surprise dessert of Spanish flair to cap off a successful series. A vineyard spokesperson traveling from Spain will be on hand.

This event will be held Thursday, April 9 at 7 p.m. The price is a low \$60 per person and reservations are required. Call and reserve your spot for either of these events at 251-478-1762. Italian Fisherman is located at 2503 Old Shell Road, just east of Florida Street.

Cabo Coastal Cantina shuts down

You may remember 225 Dauphin St. as the old Hurricane Brewery location from a few moons ago. The latest tenant, Cabo Coastal Cantina finally closed its doors at the end of February citing the end of their lease as a good time to call it quits.

This begs the question of what will become of the corner of Joachim and Dauphin? It's one of my favorite buildings and has wonderful neighbors in Loda Biergarten, T.P. Crockmier's, Three Georges, Alchemy Tavern and the beautiful Saenger Theatre. My vote is high-end restaurant with live music. Someone get on that immediately.

Until then, recycle!



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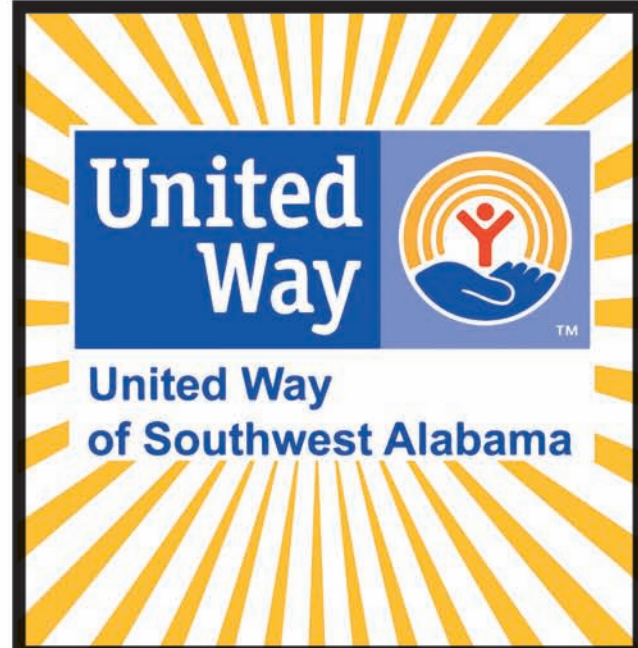
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Baldwin voters consider property tax for schools

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

Last November, a boisterous roar of cheers and applause filled the Daphne Civic Center during Baldwin County Public Schools' third annual Baldwin Education Summit, where school officials unveiled a \$350 million capital plan aimed at alleviating growing pains resulting from the school system's rapid influx of students. Today, weeks before a related March 31 county-wide tax referendum, the sound of enthusiasm isn't quite so loud.

Since January, BCPS officials have promoted their efforts by holding a number of informative education summits throughout the system's seven different feeder patterns — Bay Minette, Daphne, Fairhope, Foley, Gulf Shores, Robertsedale and Spanish Fort — but along the way, the plan has garnered criticism and opposition. In addition to the summits, members of the BCPS administrative staff and school board have also made appearances at meetings organized by groups — like the Common Sense Campaign Tea Party — openly and strongly opposed to the system's proposed 8-mill ad valorem tax increase.

School officials maintain the increase will create an additional \$28.6 million in annual revenue, which would stay in Baldwin County and be earmarked for building and maintaining facilities to accommodate its growing student body.

According to officials, BCPS has seen a 25 percent increase in students over the past decade, representing about 6,158 individuals. Spanish Fort represents the county's fastest growing feeder pattern with a 71 percent increase, or 1,465 students, in nine years. In the same time, Gulf Shores experienced a 40 percent increase, or 814 students; Foley had a 36 percent increase with 1,794 students and Robertsedale an 18 percent increase with 711 students. Further, Daphne has seen a 19 percent increase with 649 students since 2008.

Currently, the school system utilizes 100 portables to accommodate a little more than 30,000 students. In nine years, if the tax referendum does not pass, BCPS officials project a student enrollment of 36,000 and a need for 447 portable classrooms, which would cost an estimated \$17 million.

If Baldwin County residents vote "yes" on March 31, BCPS would fund construction for new elementary schools in Bay Minette, Daphne, Gulf Shores and Bay Minette, in addition to a new Gulf Shores High School. In a more long term plan, the school system said there is a potential for the creation of a new Belforest feeder pattern, including new middle and high schools, as well as a new feeder pattern in Spanish Fort's "Golden Triangle," with the potential construction of new middle and high schools.

COST TO TAXPAYERS

With the average home value in Baldwin County hovering around \$184,900, BCPS Chief School Financial Officer John Wilson has said an 8-mill increase would cost taxpayers an average increase of \$148 per year, which breaks down to \$12 per month or 41 cents per day. However, a new anti-tax website launched just last week disagrees with numbers presented by the school system and urges Baldwin County residents to vote against the referendum.

"Educate Baldwin Now" (www.educatebaldwinnow.com) was named in opposition to the school's pro-tax campaign "Build Baldwin

Now," which is supported by both the BCPS and the nonprofit Baldwin County Education Coalition. Educate Baldwin Now argues the proposed tax will apply to homes, businesses, vehicles, trailers and other taxable property and result in an average of \$400, rather than \$148, in additional taxes per year for each household in the county.

The website says that with 73,283 households in Baldwin County, according to U.S. Census data, and \$28.7 million in expected tax revenue from the proposed tax, the calculation reveals each household would actually pay \$392 in new taxes per year.

John Howard, a private school teacher who takes credit for the website along with "a small group of concerned Baldwin County citizens," believes the school board is misleading by telling county residents the proposed tax hike is only applicable to homes.

"Unfortunately, that ad valorem tax applies to luxury items like cars, boats and other items people own," he said, citing the BCPS' failure to include in their numbers the cost of the county's penny tax.

"It's somewhat disingenuous, I think, on their part," Howard added.

In November 2012, 62 percent of Baldwin County voters opted to renew the five-year, 1-cent sales tax for schools, which currently generates about \$28 million for the school system each year. Baldwin residents first voted in 2010 to levy a three-year, 1-cent sales tax to add the \$28 million to the school system's budget.

Educate Baldwin Now also claims the school system is being "mismanaged," suggesting the penny sales tax could be used for capital improvements. However, BCPS said the penny tax funds are used to offset the cost of more than 500 personnel staff and teachers.

"The school system just came and asked us for \$30 million a year in the penny sales tax and now they are asking for more! It is time for the school system to clean up its pocket book," the website reads.

Advocating for the capital improvement plan around Baldwin County, Wilson addressed whether or not the existing 1-cent sales tax could be used for education, which he says is a frequently asked question. He explained that as the temporary sales tax expires May 31, 2018, it can not be used to pay for a capital projects bond.

"We cannot pledge a five-year tax to pay for a 30-year construction bond," he said.

Wilson also noted that the penny tax was proposed as a means to counter state budget cuts, and if state funding were restored to pre-recession levels, the county would have comparable funding to allow the tax to expire.

According to Wilson, Baldwin County has seen close to a \$12 million decline in ad valorem revenue and almost \$1 billion less in state funding since 2008.

CAMPAIGN CONTROVERSY

Terry Burkle, executive director of the Baldwin County Education Coalition, compared the school board's use of taxpayer money to fund their promotional campaign to that of a publicly owned company's relationship to a shareholder, where a company would

be required to inform shareholders about how company dollars are spent.

"This, in my mind, is no different," she said.

Burkle suggested taxpaying, voting citizens of Baldwin County are like shareholders in the public school system and the BCPS has a responsibility to inform and educate those shareholders, even if it means spending their money to do so.

"I wish people would see that," she said. "They have an obligation to inform me of the fiscal condition of the school, and that's exactly what they're doing. What if it were reversed and things were going on and they worked in isolation and never communicated with us?"

"I just don't understand that argument at all," she added.

However, Howard, along with other opponents, believes the school board is using taxpayer money to push an agenda that the school system is in an immediate crisis, to essentially get the tax referendum "railroaded" through.

"I am concerned that it seems to me that there's somebody, and I don't know who it is, on the board that's really pushing this 'we're in a crisis situation' when a crisis doesn't really exist," he said. "I don't know who's behind it, but I think the citizens of Baldwin need to give due diligence as citizens and check out some of the facts."

While Howard said he thinks there are "wonderful" people on the school board and that BCPS Superintendent Robbie Owen is an "outstanding" selection for the school system, he believes an 8-mill ad valorem increase over the next 30 years is simply too much for too long.

"There is no doubt we need to build buildings," he said. "We're not opposed to capital improvements. We need those, but the capital improvements could be done at a fraction for what the school board is asking."

Meanwhile, Howard said he would not be opposed to the school board asking for a 2-mill, pay-as-you-go type program, but the 8-mill increase is "just unacceptable."

"We feel they are using this quote crisis and overcrowding, but they're using that as a catalyst for this unreasonable tax increase," he said.

Members of the Common Sense Campaign Tea Party have also questioned the possibility of a pay-as-you-go plan, but Wilson said the school system could only use a pay-as-you-go plan if it already had enough money in reserves. While \$140 million is needed to cover immediate needs and "just to get caught up," over the next three years, the board would utilize pay-as-you-go as much as possible, Wilson said at Common Sense Campaign meeting last month.

During the same meeting, Wilson addressed residents' concerns and desires for an itemized, detailed estimate of costs to each feeder pattern's proposed projects over the course of the 10-year facilities plan.

So far, school officials have presented a list of proposed construction work but have yet to provide an itemized list of costs.

"We didn't pull this out of the sky," Wilson said. "You've just got to trust us here."

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Historically, Baldwin County residents tend to be unsupportive of tax increases. The most recent “no” vote came last October when Orange Beach residents defeated a 5-mill ad valorem tax to create its own city school system by a vote of 1,842 to 928.

In May 2010, the Orange Beach City Council approved a one year, 1-mill property tax increase for general budget purposes, but later that year, the same voters rejected a proposed 2-mill property tax aimed at heading off decreased revenue from declining property values and a drop in tourism spending.

That same year, more than 87 percent of Baldwin County voters rejected what was characterized as a “rain tax,” or a fee added to property tax bills to fund watershed restoration projects.

Burkle admitted Baldwin County residents historically have been more supportive of sales tax, but she said the Baldwin County Education Coalition, with its focus on a grassroots campaign, are doing everything physically possible to inform citizens of why the public school system needs the additional revenue.

“I think it’s going to be a very tight race. The only thing that’s going to win it is the grassroots advocacy,” she said. “People can’t sit idly by — they need to work harder in getting the message out. If you support it, you need to be part of the team and part of the solution.

“We’ve all got to work together. We’re all in this together.”

THE 5-PART BALLOT

The special school tax election ballot will have five items, requiring five separate votes. Residents will vote on the renewal of an existing 1-mill tax and two 3-mill taxes in addition to the proposed 8-mill increase that is divided into separate 3-mill and 5-mill taxes. New and reinstated taxes will be applicable through 2045, at which time voters may again decide on whether to renew them or not.

Baldwin County residents have also raised questions about the ballot, as two items are only for District 2 — the renewal of a three-mill school tax and a new three-mill school tax, which is part of the system’s requested 8-mill increase.

While Burkle said there does not seem to be a “real good” explanation as to why there are two districts, she said the Baldwin County Education Coalition has asked and could not find anyone who could explain the real history behind the split. However, District 1 is comprised of approximately 100 voters, with no schools in the district, and is mostly timberland, she said.

Further, Burkle said she has contacted Baldwin County Probate Office, including Probate Judge Tim Russell, who could not give an

explanation as to why those 100 voters have been excluded.

“It just has to do with our state constitution and when these amendments were passed. And it also has to do with how the county is divided in these two districts,” Burkle said. “It really does seem to complicate it, but we’re trying to help people understand that.”

According to Baldwin County Commissioner Tucker Dorsey, Alabama law requires each county to have two tax districts, and District 2 represents the “meat” of the Baldwin County. Currently, District 1 pays the state’s required minimum amount of property tax at 10 mills while District 2 pays 12 mills, he said. Dorsey added the first 10 mills from each district goes to the state, but everything after 10 mills stays local in Baldwin County.

“The additional 8 mills do not go to Montgomery,” he said.

If the upcoming referendum passes, District 1 will pay 15 mills in property tax and District 2 will pay 20 mills. If the referendum does not pass, Dorsey said he speculates legislation will convert to seven tax districts, one for each of the school system’s seven feeder patterns, allowing residents in each individual school district to vote whether or not they want a property tax increase to fund building and maintaining schools.

Baldwin County currently receives 12 mills of ad valorem property tax for education, which falls significantly below the amount collected by other area systems like Mobile County, which receives 29.5 mills within the cities of Mobile and Prichard and 21.5 mills outside city limits. Furthermore, Mountain Brook receives 52.9 mills, Vestavia Hills 52.02 mills, Hoover 46 mills, Homewood 37.5 mills, Jefferson County 30 mills, Shelby County 30 mills and Huntsville 27.5 mills.

Despite a seemingly growing number of those in opposition to the proposed tax increase, Burkle said grassroots advocates will be going door-to-door throughout Baldwin County and participating in neighborhood canvassing in support of the referendum up until the vote on March 31.

A parade and rally is planned for Sunday, March 22 in Foley, departing from Foley Middle School and taking a similar route as previous parades held for the penny sales tax and its renewal, Burkle said.

“We just want to remind everybody it’s easy to get distracted, as all these facts and figures are being thrown out and don’t let those distractions take away from what this campaign is really about and that is for our children,” she said. “Our focus has always been our children’s future and what’s good for the whole of Baldwin.

“This is a defining moment for Baldwin County.”



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City fully enforces licensing of ArtWalk vendors

BY KEVIN LEE/ARTS EDITOR | klee@lagniappemobile.com

The city government clarified what was rumored and debated for many months: vendors at Mobile's monthly LoDa ArtWalks are required to have proper licensing from last week forward. A March 12 press release from Mayor Sandy Stimpson's office spelled out the process in no uncertain terms.

"The city has required vendors to obtain a peddler's license since the beginning of ArtWalk, but the city of Mobile Revenue Department and the Mobile Police Department will begin random checks for compliance due to increased participation," the release said.

It goes on to detail that both business licenses and peddlers' licenses are required. The second of those is good for a calendar year but prohibits selling in city rights-of-way, parks or an entrance to special events.

A peddler's license fee is \$130 and after July 1, it will be prorated to \$105. That includes a \$70 nonrefundable sales tax deposit. Additional taxes on annual sales over \$1,400 will be due through provided remittance forms.

According to previous conversations with the city of Mobile Revenue Department, a business license begins at \$178. Gross revenue charges also apply.

"This community event is experiencing the best problem you could have: overwhelming participation," Stimpson said in a statement. "Due to increased popularity, the city of Mobile and the Mobile Arts Council have decided on best practices that preserve the artistic integrity of the event while addressing issues that have risen due to increased participation."

The ArtWalk application process will go through the Mobile Arts Council (MAC) who already performs similar duties for

the Market in the Square. Applicants must present proof of their peddler's license to MAC, then pay a \$10 registration fee, \$5 for MAC members.

"We have a big map that has a bunch of numbered spaces, I think like 60 of them. You'll get a space and then a credential on a lanyard and then when you set up, if you'll just wear that, then they can see it when they decide to enforce it," MAC Associate Director Charlie Smoke said. Spaces are first-come, first-served.

According to Smoke, those on private property don't need a peddler's license or registration with MAC. However, they will need to prove to enforcement personnel they have the property owner's permission.

The deadline for registration with MAC will be the Wednesday before each ArtWalk. Those take place the second Friday of each month.

"If they sign up early enough, they will go on the ArtWalk map so it can help them as much as anything. It's like extra marketing for them," Smoke said.

This move toward regulation has stirred animosity across the Internet and social media. Many proclaimed it would "kill ArtWalk."

A foray to the March 13 ArtWalk to gauge the effect was derailed by inclement weather. It made for a poor sampling. April is normally packed so we'll see.

But the backlash continues nonetheless. In many statements, MAC is being vilified as a chief culprit.

The claims they are putting the squeeze on "the little artists" are preposterous. Every month, MAC features three exhibits, provides publicity, refreshments and space for a wide panoply of artists in this community. Many of them are students, budding

artists, or otherwise not widely known.

How much does MAC charge those artists for those opportunities and amenities? Zilch.

Galling, though, is that the city of Mobile would cut MAC's customary performance contract in half, tell them to expect nothing at all in the following budget, then turn around and ask them to be a de facto city agency and the public face of an unpopular action. To their credit, MAC put previous differences aside.

The city knows what a volatile situation this is. For example, one person posted a Facebook photo of her hand directing an obscene gesture toward her required paperwork with similar harsh invective directed to MAC.

The reality is MAC has tried to be the same force for mediation that has made them valuable to this community. They wanted to be seen as team players. They appreciate what the people at Special Events do, see how hard they work and wanted to help.

They were cagey enough to draw the line at being asked to enforce the code. That should fall to actual city employees.

No one is deciding the value of art but when a loan company attempts to set up shop in the midst of an arts-centric event, arguments about integrity evaporate. And that calls for equity across the board.

This is merely one of the concessions made by responsible adults and those who desire to live in a civilized community. Research has shown other cities to be much more regulatory and that was spelled out in this space in October 2014.

If you want Barney and Goober unfolding a card table and setting up shop wherever they please, then fine. Just don't blanch when it draws a portrait of your town as ramshackle or leads to bigger problems.

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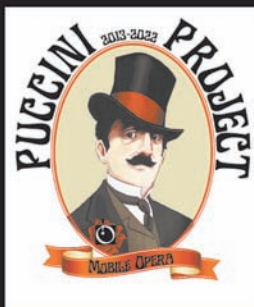
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ARTART GALLERY

Carnegie Hall regular in Mobile for March

BY KEVIN LEE/ARTS EDITOR | klee@lagniappemobile.com

Russian-born Katya Grineva has built a reputation for ethereal interpretations of classical piano. A 2006 New York Times review said she hears music “with a misty yet resonant sound and a languid, yielding sense of rubato.”

Since beginning piano at age six, she has performed as guest soloist with the Acadiana Symphony, the ARS Nova Musicians Chamber Orchestra, the Manhattan Virtuosi Orchestra, Guayaquil Symphony Orchestra and the European Philharmonic Orchestra in France.

Grineva gave a private concert for former President George H.W. Bush and Barbara Bush and Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo presented Grineva with the Gusi Peace Prize for her extensive charity and nonprofit work. Though she’s appeared at New York City’s Carnegie Hall a record-setting 14 times, Grineva will bring her talents to Mobile with a series of appearances in late March.

On Friday, March 27, Grineva will perform at Bang-

kok Thai (3821 Airport Blvd.) in a benefit for Meditation Center of Alabama. The show runs 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday and tickets are \$25 to \$30.

The next afternoon, March 28, Grineva will host a “meet and greet” at Broussard’s Piano Gallery of Mobile (1541 E. I-65 Service Road) from 4 to 5 p.m. Piano students, teachers and the interested public are invited to the free master class.

Grineva is looking at scheduling other charity events throughout the following week, possibly appearing at Providence Hospital and USA Children’s and Women’s Hospital. Details have yet to be finalized.

On Saturday, April 4, Grineva will play a concert at Laidlaw Performing Arts Center on the University of South Alabama campus. The show runs 2:30 to 3:45 p.m. with a reception hosted by Bangkok Thai and CD signing to follow. Tickets are \$35 to \$45.

For more information, call 251-408-7902, or go to www.katyagrineva.weebly.com.



Photo/katygrineva.com
Pianist Katya Grineva

Jazz group honors piano ‘god’ Tatum

Pianist Art Tatum is easily one of the most impressive and enigmatic figures in an artistic genre filled with them. His talent continues to amaze listeners with a virtuosity and technical proficiency nearly unmatched in the six decades since his death.

The Mystic Order of the Jazz Obsessed will honor Tatum with a March 23 performance from the irrepressible and gifted Bobby van Deusen. He is to be joined by saxophonist Joe Occhipinti.

A Toledo, Ohio native with music in his genes, Tatum was born blind in one eye and with limited vision in the other so it was his perfect pitch that lit his path. He was picking out church hymns at three years of age and then began to learn songs from piano rolls.

At age 19, Tatum had landed a regular gig at a local club and national touring artists began to drop by to look in on the rumored phenom. In the early 1930s, he was asked to appear on a recording session in New York City and thereafter devoured the Big Apple.

Tatum took the then-dominant Stride style of Harlem and expounded upon it. When a man with the sizable talent, girth and confidence of Thomas “Fats” Waller calls you “god” before a crowd, your talents are unimpeachable.

Entrance for the 6:30 p.m. event is \$12, \$10 for students and military, \$8 for members. A light jambalaya dinner is included and a cash bar is available.

For further info, call 251-459-2298, go to mojo-jazz.org or email mobilejazz@bellsouth.net.

Original solo comedic skits at Bernheim

Chickasawian-turned-Chicagoan-turned-Mobilian Steve Evans entertained a chilly gathering at the OK Bike Shop during the January LoDa Artwalk. In a turnabout, he’s moving his next show about performance al fresco to the indoors.

Evans will perform his original work “My Life with the Shawnee” at Bernheim Hall in the Ben May Main Branch of the Mobile Public Library on Tuesday, March 24 at 7 p.m. Entrance is free.

The comedic act was inspired by Evans’ experiences working on outdoor historic dramas across America. Travails such as working next to a skunk-infested forest or being suspected of attempting a midnight breach of a state prison provided the fodder.

After working in Mobile theatre from 1977 to 2002, Evans relocated to Chicago and acted with Strawdog Theatre, Open Eye Productions and Charles Grippio Productions. He also studied at Second City and the Mary-Arrchie Theatre where he performed in a production of Sam Shepard’s “Buried Child” which received a Joe Jefferson nomination for Best Ensemble. He also wrote and produced shows for the Abbie Hoffman Died for Our Sins Theatre Festival.

The current production is sponsored by the South of the Salt Line Theatre and the Mobile Public Library.

Annual fest calls for poster artists

The Gulf Coast Ethnic and Heritage Jazz Festival has begun its annual poster contest a little earlier on the calendar. It’s hoped the extra time will allow more entrants than in years past.

The 17th version of the annual event takes place July 27 through Aug. 2. The contest is open to all artists who are limited to one entry each.

Each entry must be:

An original, unpublished two-dimensional work by the submitting artist;

In any medium;

Include the words “Gulf Coast Ethnic & Heritage Jazz Festival” and “Mobile, Alabama,” as well as the year “2015;”

24 inches high by 18 inches wide;

Mounted on white core foam;

Received at GCEHJF offices at 56 St.

Joseph St., Suite 1311, Mobile, Ala., 36602 by May 1, 2015 with a completed entry form available at gcejazzfest.com.

Entries are to be judged and a winner notified in May. The winner’s work or portions thereof may be used as the festival poster and on other promotional materials and items.

A \$200 cash prize is awarded. The winner will also receive a booth for display and sale of artwork during the festival’s Jazz at the Temple event on Saturday, Aug. 1.

For more information, go to the website or phone 251-459-2298.

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Three must-see acts at the inaugural AeroFest

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com

On March 20-21, the Mobile Aeroplex will play host to the inaugural Mobile AeroFest, a festival with a purpose. The two-day event's mission is "to improve the lives of America's injured warriors."

The variety of events and features planned during the extravaganza will introduce the Azalea City to a new style of celebration. There will be "Hero Games," a Titan FC Championship Title Fight, a job/education fair, a mobility/adaptive technology expo and the Independence Ride, a selection of biking routes that will put attendants alongside recovering veterans.

Additionally, AeroFest will feature three outdoor stages and one indoor stage featuring some of the best in national and regional musical acts. With many to choose from, Lagniappe is giving readers their pick for this new festival. Tickets start at just \$45 for the weekend. More information is available at aerofest.org.



Photo/Facebook.com/rtrfb

Robert Randolph

Band: Robert Randolph & the Family Band
Date: Friday, March 20 at 7:15 p.m.
Stage: Stage 1

Frequent visitors over the years, Robert Randolph & the Family Band have generated many fans in the Azalea City. Randolph's Sacred Steel music has put him into a category all his own, and the jam scene has embraced every note. While the pedal steel guitar has traditionally been associated with country music, Sacred Steel takes the instrument into new worlds by adding gospel, soul and blues overtones.

For his part, Randolph and his crew mingles it with a variety of genres ranging from funk to rock. Every time he sits at the pedal steel, Randolph pulls magic from his tone bar. While other acts have not incorporated the pedal steel into their bands, many have taken note of Sacred Steel's unique style and attempted to emulate.

"It has kind of caught on in terms of its influence," Randolph said. "We've influenced Derek Trucks and Eric Clapton and John Hiatt. There's so many guys that have really been influenced by it. You can hear a lot of it in their music. A lot of the country music guys have taken on the influence of Sacred Steel."

The Family Band's last offering was 2013's "Lickety Split." Randolph said the group is planning to release its sixth major release in early July. Once again, the Family Band will mix the Sacred Steel sound with a variety of genres including rock, funk and jazz, and the AeroFest crowd will get a preview of tracks featured on the new album.

"I've recorded a bunch of songs, but I've honed in on how to mix in the traditional sacred steel sound and feel with sort of like a secular, really rock album this time around," he said. "I've been writing songs for the past year. I'm gonna pull 12 or 14 that really

work together. It's really going to be great."

In addition to the new Family Band album, Randolph also revealed that he would be starting a project alongside the North Mississippi All-Stars and John Medeski (Medeski, Martin & Wood) called The Word. While this project may seem new to many, The Word actually recorded its first album in 2001. In fact, Randolph cites this as the first album that he ever recorded.

"It was a small release, but people really loved it," he said. "It's been highly anticipated ever since. We finally got back together in the studio and rerecorded it. It's coming out on Vanguard Records, and it's going to be huge."

As far as what to expect from Randolph's live performance, he describes it as a "Mardi Gras/church service/rock concert." Some audience members might have the chance to get involved with the show. The Family Band is infamous for inviting a number of crowd members on stage to help with the show. The tradition however, has not been without mishaps.

"We did it the other day, and some girl fell all over the equipment and unplugged everything," said Randolph. "You've got guys jumping up there, and security has to throw them off. They're running across the stage and picking up guitars, and people are falling off the stage everywhere."



Photo/ facebook.com/Ryley-Walker

Ryley Walker

Band: Ryley Walker
Date: Saturday, March 21 at 2:45 p.m.
Stage: Stage 1

Ryley Walker's unique modern folk sound should appease those wanting to ease into the festival's second day. Walker crafted his eclectic brand of folk in his hometown of Chicago, which may seem odd to those familiar with the Windy City's music scene. Chicago characteristically has a rich musical legacy that tends to lean toward alt. rock or blues. However, Walker says it's changed in recent years.

"Chicago is kind of a hodge-podge of music," Walker said. "There's so much going on there. In the last five or 10 years, there has been so many diverse music styles going on there. It's a town in the middle of the country, so you get every band from every corner of the world, which has a big influence on musicians." Walker will be showcasing songs from his latest release "Primrose Green." This album brings a nostalgic edge to Walker's sound with an eclectic folk sound laced with jazz overtones. Walker also incorporated jazz philosophies in the studio. The album was recorded live in-studio with "very few overdubs." Walker called the technique a risk that relied on "spur of the moment decisions," but believes the finished product justified all the hard work.

"I'm really excited about ["Primrose Green"], and there's a really cool band on there," he said. "We've got some of the best jazz

musicians in Chicago and around the world. It came from jamming and improvising on the songs and dancing on the riffs. That was a big part of making the record and we're real proud of it."

Walker is looking forward to introducing new music to the AeroFest crowd. His set will be mixed with the new material and "a cover or two." The crowd can expect Walker and his band to take whatever song they play and build freely upon it to create a memorable concert experience.

"It's definitely a unique festival too," he suggested. "We're kinda the odd man out, as far as folk tunes, but there's a lot of big name acts there. So, we're really looking forward to being up on the big stage and doing our best."



Photo/zoogma.net

Zoogma

Band: Zoogma
Date: Saturday, March 21 at 10 p.m.
Stage: Stage 3

After the crowd samples the country sounds of Big & Rich, they should head over to Stage 3 to end the festival in the best way possible. Several years ago, jam rock and EDM melded and forced evolution upon the jam scene. In its early days, Zoogma was there mixing electronica with live instrumentation with some wonderful results. Part rock show and part dance party, Zoogma has been entertaining the denizens of Mobile since their early days. Guitarist/synth player Justin Hasting admits that the Azalea City is one of their favorite places to play.

"We love Mobile," he said. "We've been playing there for a really long time — it's one of the first places we ever played. We've always loved Soul Kitchen and The Blind Mule."

Zoogma is the epitome of a modern music industry band. While many acts are still trying to figure how to exist in today's music industry, Zoogma has a very innovative business practice, choosing to simply give away a majority of its albums.

The band makes most of their revenue from touring and merchandise. Currently, Zoogma is using their website to distribute a live album. Fans can experience live cuts from their latest tour for free.

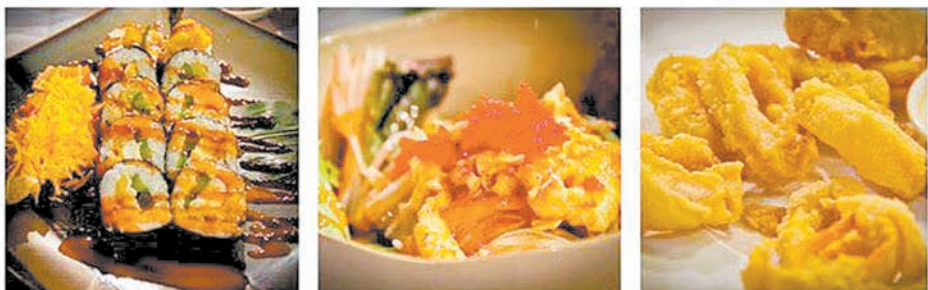
"We're releasing two a week from a tour that we did with The Werks," Hasting said. "It's live recordings, and we're releasing them from different cities."

Zoogma will treat the AeroFest audience to a late-night set of improvisational electronic jam. Break beats will be riddled with guitar licks, and the band will invite the audience to lose themselves in the sonic madness. According to guitarist/sequencer Brock Bowling, crowd energy is what drives the band throughout the set.

"The crowd in action definitely plays a part in it," he said. "We try to feed off their vibes."



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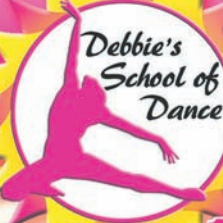
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SouthSounds Music and Arts Festival announces lineup

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com

While SXSW is in full-swing in Austin, it is only appropriate that the Southeast strikes back once again with SouthSounds Music and Arts Festival, April 10-12. Over the years, SouthSounds has grown into "the only all-Southern music and arts festival." Each year, the celebration of Southeastern sounds invades venues from the OGD to LoDa, filling each with the region's freshest bands.

For SouthSounds 2015, the festival will maintain its Cathedral Square stage but also utilize Callaghan's Irish Social Club, Alchemy Tavern, The Blind Mule and Moe's Original BBQ.

A diverse lineup of sounds from Mobile will be represented. Eric Erdman and Kyle & Karl will entertain the crowd with acoustic goodness, and Gregg Fells will deliver his homegrown songs. The Underhill Family Orchestra is a SouthSounds veteran, and members will continue to please audiences with their modern alt. rock sounds. Post Mortem Delirium will demonstrate its own style of metal-infused horror punk. Newcomers Black Titan have been turning heads with their nostalgic stoner metal.

Red Right Hand, Of Legends & Liars, Crowned Jewelz, Shifting Tracks, Satellite Graveyard and Molly Thomas & the Rare

Birds will also be performing.

As far as regional talent, SouthSounds will feature performances from Boyfriend, Madd Wikkid, Naughty Professor, The Honorable South, Steelism, GT, Wray, Dirt Lungs, Mack William, Preston Lovinggood, Willie & the Giant, Ruby the Rabbitfoot, Garret Thornton, Jesse Payne, Shaheed & DJ Supreme and many more artists to be announced. Lagniappe will continue to bring readers the latest in SouthSounds information as the festival nears. For more information, visit the festival's official website at www.southsoundsfest.com.

Music by the bay

For four years, the city of Daphne and Catt's Sunday Jazz Brunch have worked together to bring the Eastern Shore a Sunday evening of cool Big Band sounds. The tradition continues into 2015 with the Sunday Sunset Concert series at Bay Front Park. Mobile Bay at sunset will serve as the perfect backdrop for this lineup of easy listening. City Rhythm Big Band will kick off the Sunday Sunset Concerts on Sunday, March 22 at 5 p.m. On Sunday, April 19, Occhipinti Big Band will entertain the masses beginning at 5:30 p.m. Mobile Big Band will close out the series on Sunday, May 17 at 6 p.m. For more information, contact Catt Sirten at 251-583-1963.



Photo/everbnation.com/greggfells

Greg Fells is among the local acts added to the SouthSounds Music and Arts Festival lineup.

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Trombone Shorty bringin' a little brass to the Kitchen

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com

Band: 92 ZEW Presents: Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue
Date: Thursday, March 19, doors at 7 p.m.
Venue: Soul Kitchen, 219 Dauphin St., www.soulkitchenmobile.com
Tickets: \$25 in advance/\$28 day-of at Soul Kitchen, their website, Mellow Mushroom (WeMo/MiMo) or by calling 1-866-468-7630

Big Easy bone-blasters Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews is returning to the Azalea City to help ease the locals through Lent with his trademark volley of wailing brass. Considering his youthfulness, Shorty is an iconic jazz musician for the modern times. His hybrid of NOLA jazz, hip-hop, rock and funk have forced evolution in a musical genre that is steeped in tradition.

Over the years, Mobile has witnessed his rise and his local performances have transformed many into zealous fans. Today, Shorty’s reputation has grown worldwide for getting the crowd on its feet from the first note.

The demand for Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue’s versatile sound has kept the band busy. When the updated version of “The Odd Couple” premiered on CBS, many experienced Shorty’s version of the show’s classic theme song. April will be a very special month for the band. On Wednesday, April 15, Shorty’s story will be released in an autobiographical children’s book, “Trombone Shorty,” by Abrams Books. Illustrator Bryan Collier lent his colorful talents to Shorty’s own words.

On Thursday, April 30, Shorty will join a cavalcade of Crescent City talent at Shorty Fest 2015 back home in New Orleans. The philanthropic event will generate funds for the Trombone Shorty Foundation, a music education program.



Photo/ www.tromboneshorty.com

Portal opens showcase of art, film and music

Band: Psychquinox
Date: Friday, March 20, 7 p.m.
Venue: Portal Studio, 194 N. Lawrence St., 454-4923
Tickets: \$5 donation at the door

Psychquinox is Portal Studio’s “quarterly celebration of the arts,” a showcase of some of the area’s best visual artists but also a venue for musical creativity. For its most recent installment, Psychquinox will mix audio and the visual beginning with a set from the Portal SoundSpace Ensemble, a menagerie of local improvisers consisting of Ryan Jetten, Timothy Dixon, Joel Andrews and a plethora of guests. Their aural guidance will lead into one of the evening’s many highlights.

A week ago, local filmmakers were tasked with yet another challenging film scramble. For this celluloid race, participants were tasked with creating a music video. Attendees of Psychquinox will get to witness the resulting cinematic resourcefulness, ingenuity and creativity.

After the final video, enigmatic artist Lillian McKinney will add her eclectic magic to the mix, followed by 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.



Photo/[facebook.com/portalstudiomobile](https://www.facebook.com/portalstudiomobile)

Blowin' the blues

Band: Brandon Santini
Date: Friday, March 20 at 9 p.m.
Venue: The Blues Tavern, 2818 Government Blvd., www.bluestavern.com
Tickets: Free

While several blues singers have built a reputation as guitarists, many have also invested their talents into the harmonica. Legends of the blues such as Little Walter and Sonny Terry pioneered the instrument in the genre and new schoolers such as Brandon Santini still embody the original philosophy of blues harmonica while giving it a modern edge.

Santini honed his skills as a harmonica player and a vocalist in Memphis. His love of the instrument began at the age of 15 in his home state of North Carolina. Eventually, he relocated the Mississippi Delta and Hill Country to absorb some of the blues magic native to the region. Since, he has shared his experience and talent through an always full tour schedule.

Santini will be performing in support of his latest release “Live and Extended,” a live album capturing the pure blues power and glory of the young artist and his expressive harmonica.



Photo/ www.brandonsantini.com



Make it a long weekend with the Hangout Kick-off Party

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com

Anticipation continues to build for Hangout Fest 2015 (May 15-17) after organizers announced the lineup for the weekend's Kick-off Party, scheduled the Thursday before the festival. Each year, the separate ticketed event allows attendees the option of extending their weekend experience with an early night of impressive acts on the festival's smaller stages.

The party provides a perfect way for veterans to warm-up for the weekend and newcomers to acclimate to Hangout Fest footprint and mind frame. This year's pre-party will take place on Thursday, May 14 and will feature a nine-band lineup that will not want to be missed, especially the evening's headliner.

The past 10 years have given rise to a number of supergroups. The Word is the latest and greatest of these sonic amalgamations. Featuring the slide talents of Robert Randolph and the keyboard mastery of John Medeski (Medeski, Martin & Wood), the rest of the band is comprised of the North Mississippi All-Stars.

The combination of sacred steel, modern hill country, and jazz should make for an interesting set. Other bands on the lineup include Keys N Krates, Cruisr, Black Tiger Sex Machine, ASTR, Grandtheft and Break Science.

Tickets for the pre-party and the festival are on sale now at the Hangout Fest website, and VIP and travel packages are still available. While the pre-party is a separate, ticketed event for those with general admission passes, it's included with the VIP package.



Photo/www.facebook.com/rtrfb

Slide guitarist Robert Randolph, a familiar musician around Mobile, will help kickoff the 2015 Hangout Music Festival.


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MARCH 19 - MARCH 25

THUR. MARCH 19

Bill's by the Beach— Lisa Zanghi, 7p**BLUEGILL**— Brandon White, 6p**Blues Tavern**— Johnny Barbato & Friends, 8:30p**Captain's Table**— Jerry Squires, 7p**Cockeyed Charlie's**— Haley**Felix's**— Bat**Flora Bama**— Riley Green, 12p// Rusty Tabor, 2p// J. Hawkins & James Daniel, 5:30p// Mario Mena, 6p// Mark Sherrill, Chris Newbury, Mel Knapp, 6p// Bill Barrow, 5p// Adam Doleac, 10p// Wes Loper & Thomas Jenkins, 10p// Lee & Hellz Yeah, 10:30p**Hangout**— Velcro Pygmies, 7p// DJ Sremba, 11p**Legacy**— Phil and Foster, 7p**Lulu's**— CoConut Radio, 5p**McSharry's**— Kyle & Karl, 7:30p**Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach)**— Adam Holt, 6p**Traders**— The Lizards, 7p**Soul Kitchen**— Trombone Shorty & Orleans Ave, 7p**Veets**— Cary Laine, 8p

FRI. MARCH 20

American Legion Post— Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education Spring Concert Series**Beau Rivage**— Engelbert Humperdinck**Bill's by the Beach**— Barstool Surfers, 7p**BLUEGILL**— Dale Drinkard, 11a// Blind Dog Mike, 6p**Blues Tavern**— Brandon Santini, 9p**Captain's Table**— Jerry Squires, 7p**Cockeyed Charlie's**— Dave & Alice Chatel**Felix's**— Grits N Pieces**Flora Bama**— Riley Green, 12p// Wes Loper, 1p// J. Hawkins & James Daniel, 2p// Jack Robertson Show, 5:30p// Thom Shephard & Matt Hoggat, 8p// Adam Doleac, 10p// Johnny Barbato Trio, 10p// The Springs, 10:30p// Smokin' Elvis', 6p**Hangout**— U.S. Band, 7p// DJ Ellux Furor,

11p

Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Voodoo

Gumbo, 9:30p

Hard Rock (Live)— The Guess Who, 8p**IP Casino**— Loretta Lynn, 8p**Legacy**— Low Maintenance Trio, 6p// Peek, 8p**Lulu's**— Alvarado Road Show, 6p**McSharry's**— DJ Lewis, 10p**Moe's BBQ (Mobile)**— The Adam Holt Dup, 6:30p**Moe's BBQ (Daphne)**— The Dulac

Smack, 8p

O'Daly's— Gene Murrell, Tony Edwards and David White, 10p**Old 27 Grill**— Corey Rezner, 6:30p**Royal Knight**— Karaoke w/ Gary**Tacky Jacks (Gulf Shores)**— Charlie and Mel, 5p**Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach)**— Jimmy Lee Hannaford, 6p**Tropics**— Harmony Grits**Veets**— The Family Jewels, 9p**Windmill Market**— The Excelsior Band, 11a// Sam Bonfe, 11a

SAT. MARCH 21

American Legion Post— Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education Spring Concert Series**Bill's by the Beach**— Barstool Surfers, 7p// Mental Extract, 10p**Blind Mule**— Comedy Whatever, 10p**BLUEGILL**— Al & Kathy, 6p**Blues Tavern**— Rebecca Barry Band, 9p**Callaghan's**— Glass Joe**Cockeyed Charlie's**— DJ Chill**Felix's**— Blind Dog Mike**Flora Bama**— Jack Robertson Show// Riley Green, 12p// Dave & Joe Show, 1p// Ryan Conner, 1p// John Joiner & Darrel Roberts, 2p// Smokin' Elvis', 2p// Jezebel's Chill'n, 6p// The Phin Addicts, 6p// Riley green, 7p// Adam Doleac, 10p// Brain Hill, 10p// Dave Jordan Band, 10:30p**Hangout**— U.S. Band, 7p// DJ Sremba, 11p**Hard Rock (Center Bar)**— Voodoo

Gumbo, 9:30p

Legacy— Molly Thomas and the Rare Birds, 7p**Lulu's**— Alvarado Road Show, 5p**McSharry's**— DJ Lewis, 10p**Moe's BBQ (Mobile)**— Tim Kinsey, 6:30p**Old 27 Grill**— Hannah Wallace, 6:30p**Pirates Cove**— Seth Walker, 6p**Tacky Jacks (Gulf Shores)**— Adam Doleac, 5p**Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach)**— Bud Smith Duo, 6p**Top of the Bay**— Missused**Tropics**— Rock Bottom**Saenger**— Mobile Symphony Orchestra: From Tragedy to Triumph**Soul Kitchen**— The Stolen Faces, 9:30p**Veets**— The Family Jewels, 9p**The Wharf**— Florida-Georgia Line, 8p**Windmill Market**— Leland Clay, 6p

SUN. MARCH 22

Bill's by the Beach— Mental Extract, 12p**BLUEGILL**— Dale Drinkard, 11a**Blues Tavern**— Art & Lou, 5p**Callaghan's**— Cereus Bright**Felix's**— Brandon Bailey**Flora Bama**— Brittany Grimes, 12p//

Riley Green, 12p// The Beachbillys, 12p//

Brian Hill, 2p// Big Muddy, 5:30p// Hung

Jury, 6p// Perdido Brothers, 6p// Christina

Christian, 7p// Adam Doleac & Spenser

Waasdrop, 10p// Justin Jeansonne, 10p//

Heritage Band, 10:30p

Hangout— Mario Mena Band, 7p// The Perry Wall, 11p**Legacy**— Rebecca Barry Duo, 11a**Lulu's**— Greg Brown, 1p**McSharry's**— Trad Irish Session, 6:30p**Old 27 Grill**— Lisa Zanghi, 11:30a**Pinzones**— Ross Newell, 5p**Tacky Jacks (Gulf Shores)**— Barstool Surfers, 5p**Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach)**— Melissa and John Joiner, 11a**Veets**— Matt & Sherry Neese, 8p

MON. MARCH 23

Blind Mule— Moon Tooth, 10p**Callaghan's**— Maggie Koerner**Felix's**— Melissa Joiner**Flora Bama**— Riley Green, 12p// Zachary Diedrich, 5:30p// Cathy Pace, 6p// John King Band, 9:30p// Big Muddy, 10p**Hangout**— Oliver's Twist, 7p// DJ Ellux Furor, 11p**Lucky's Irish Pub**— Marcus, 8p**Lulu's**— Brent Burns, 5p

TUE. MARCH 24

BLUEGILL— Tim Kinsey, 6p**Butch Cassidy's**— Al & Cathy**Captain's Table**— Jerry Squires, 7p**Cockeyed Charlie's**— Brandon**Felix's**— Lee Yankie**Flora Bama**— Cowboy Johnson, 3p// J. Hawkins & James Daniel, 5:30p//

Perdido Brothers, 6p// John King Band, 9:30p// Albert Simpson & Jon Cook, 10p// Mario

Mena, 10p//

Hangout— Rhythm Intervention, 7p// DJ Sremba, 11p**Lulu's**— Delta Reign Duo, 5p**Moe's BBQ (Mobile)**— Denver Hawsey, 6p**Veets**— Melissa Joiner, 8p

WED. MARCH 25

BLUEGILL— Ross + I, 6p**Blues Tavern**— Rebecca Barry & Britt Meacham, 8p**Bucky's Birdcage (Grand Hotel)**— Adam Holt Piano Show, 8p**Callaghan's**— Deluxe Trio**Captain's Table**— Jerry Squires, 7p**Felix's**— Grant Dunaway**Flora Bama**— Riley Green, 12p// Neil

Dover, 3p// Justin Jeansonne, 5:30p//

Smokin' Elvis', 6p// Albert Simpsin & Jon Cook, 10p// Heritage Band, 10p// Zachery

Thomas Diedrich & Bama Bayou Boys, 10p

Legacy— Lee Yankie, 7p**Lulu's**— Webb Dalton, 5p**Veets**— Grits N' Pieces, 9p

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Intimate glimpse of Ebert's last days as fascinating as 'Life Itself'

BY ASIA FREY/FILM CRITIC | afrey@lagniappemobile.com

My only complaint about the expansive, emotional documentary “Life Itself,” about legendary film critic Roger Ebert, is that you really can’t complain about it. It’s too straightforward, too admiring of its subject, to generate a really strong reaction. But it was very interesting, and very moving.

Based on Ebert’s autobiography of the same title, and frequently narrated by voice over reading his own book, “Life Itself,” starts in his childhood, an unassuming Midwestern one, in which his doting parents believed in and nurtured his intellect. Ebert began as a kind of newspaper prodigy and by the time he was in college was already an accomplished and erudite writer and editor.

This was the meat of the film for me, especially as it captured a now bygone era of newspapers. Lots of Ebert’s Chicago Sun-Times colleagues dished about the good old days, with Roger Ebert holding court in local watering holes. Between the lines you can infer a little more than what everyone will say about him, but, as one guy puts it, “He was a nice guy, but not that nice.” A big ego clearly derived from his obvious intelligence, but hampered by his portly, nebbish appearance, was on display at nightly, alcohol fueled gabfests.

Amid anecdotes of drunken revelry, we are told that Ebert sought sobriety, and through Alcoholics Anonymous controlled his problem for the rest of his life. This is an example of a time when very little is made of what this struggle might of entailed, and what might have been a darker chapter is glossed over.

Throughout a reconstruction of his past, the filmmaker takes us to Roger Ebert’s final chapter, in which he is dying of cancer. A full participant in the film, Ebert’s condition deteriorates, adding an additional dimension that I



▲ Photo/ imdb.com

Film critic Roger Ebert died in 2013.

feel like also accounts for the worshipful tone. Missing a large portion of his face and talking through a laptop, Ebert continues to tell his own tale, and admiration is really the only proper tone to strike.

His life story takes us to the point most people are familiar with, to his enormously popular TV show with Gene Siskel, in which the two introduced the phrase “Two Thumbs Up” into the vernacular. This film is worth watching if only to see the outtakes in which they curse at each other. That grumbling love-hate chemistry they displayed was not an act.

It’s pretty fascinating to watch them together, and to hear them described by their producers, and by the late Gene Siskel’s wife. They were so competitive that a coin toss had to settle myriad aspects of their show, including the order of their names in the title, and Ebert never tired of mentioning that he won a Pulitzer Prize.

All told, “Life Itself” is a fascinating look at a fascinating man, and his passion for film and for life is worth watching. Unknown filmmakers and Martin Scorsese alike share a respect for what Roger Ebert did for them, and to see Ebert’s life through to its final act is an inescapably emotional journey.

William Wyler directs Bette Davis in two Southern stories: The Southern Literary Trail’s Trailfest 2015 continues with screenings of “Jezebel” and “The Little Foxes”

Renowned director William Wyler directed Bette Davis in two classic films set in the South: “Jezebel,” based on a play by Owen Davis, and “The Little Foxes” based on a play by Lillian Hellman, one of the authors featured on the Southern Literary Trail. This month, both will be presented in free matinees with introductions by two of Wyler’s daughters.

“Jezebel” will be shown Saturday, March 21, preceded by the hour-long documentary Directed by William Wyler, produced by Catherine Wyler. The program begins at 2 p.m. in Mobile Public Library’s Bernheim Hall, in the Ben May Main Library, 701 Government St. “The Little Foxes” will be screened Sunday, March 22, at 2 p.m. in Bernheim Hall.

A recreation of one of Orry-Kelly’s costumes for Davis as Regina Giddens in “The Little Foxes” were on display at Mobile Arts Council during last week’s ArtWalk, but are scheduled be on display at the Ben May Main Library with related Hellman artifacts through March 22.

These programs are part of The Southern Literary Trail’s Trailfest 2015, presented by Mobile Public Library, Mobile Arts Council, Historic Mobile Preservation Society, Broussard’s Piano Gallery, Davidson High School, and the University of South Alabama Department of Music.

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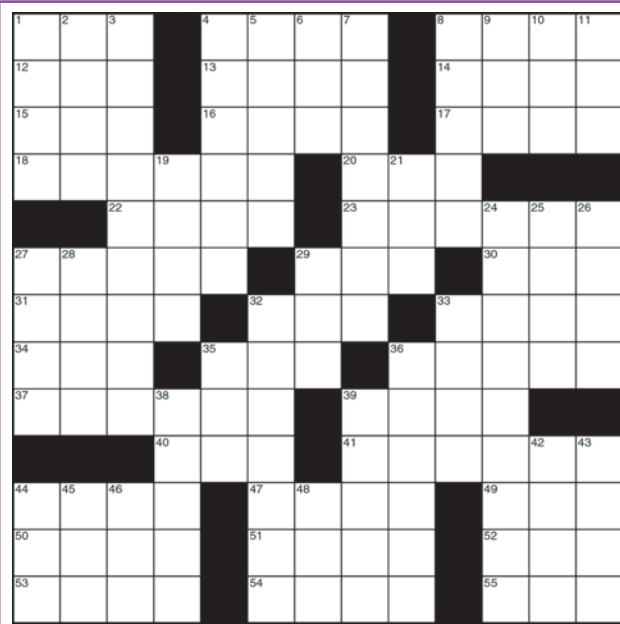
| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>“Cinderella” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Run All Night” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” Crescent Theater. All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Chappie” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Unfinished Business” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Focus” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“The Lazarus Effect” All listed multiplex</p> | <p>theaters</p> <p>“Still Alice” Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Carmike Wharf 15</p> <p>“The Duff” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Hot Tub Time Machine 2” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“McFarland, USA” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Fifty Shades of Grey” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Kingsman: The Secret Service” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Jupiter Ascending”</p> | <p>Regal Mobile Stadium 18</p> <p>“The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge out of Water” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“The Imitation Game” Carmike Wharf 15</p> <p>“American Sniper” All listed multiplex theaters.</p> <p>“Paddington” Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14</p> <p>“The Wedding Ringer” Regal Mobile Stadium 18</p> <p>“Taken 3” Regal Mobile Stadium 18</p> <p>“Selma” Regal Mobile Stadium 18</p> |
|---|--|--|

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|---|
| AREA THEATERS | <p>CARMIKE CINEMA’S Wynnsong 16 785 Schillinger Rd. S. (251) 639-7373</p> | <p>HOLLYWOOD STADIUM 18 1250 Satchel Paige Dr. (251) 473-9655</p> | <p>CARMIKE CINEMAS 23151 Wharf Ln. Orange Beach (251) 981-4444</p> | <p>EASTERN SHORE PREMIERE CINEMA 14 30500 Alabama 181 #500 Spanish Fort, Al (251) 626-0352</p> |
| | <p>CRESCENT THEATER 208 Dauphin Street (251) 438-2005</p> | <p>RAVE MOTION PICTURE JUBILEE SQUARE 12 6898 U.S. 90 Daphne, (251) 626- 6266</p> | <p>COBB THEATRES PINNACLE 14 3780 Gulf Shores Pkwy Gulf Shores (251) 968-7444</p> | <p>Information accurate at press time; please call theaters for showtimes.</p> |

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1. Not just any
4. Goes bad
8. Bodybuilder's target
12. Basket feature
13. Actor's direction
14. Old money in the banca
15. Eyeball
16. Boardwalk structure
17. Allergy symptom
18. Adjudged
20. Yodeler's perch
22. Like a certain Ranger
23. Bahamas resort
27. Designate
29. CIA counterpart
30. Mangy mutt
31. Make one
32. Links prop
33. Summoned, as the butler
34. Pack animal
35. "___ me?"
36. Talent
37. Consider again
39. Don't need, maybe
40. African antelope
41. Sends to the Hill
44. With competence
47. Revue offering
49. Certain theater, for short
50. Act of faith?
51. Lunar effect
52. Galley mover
53. Course requirement, often
54. Move
55. Smacking of irony



DOWN

1. Beat a path
2. Fill an opening
3. Decorate
4. Feel remorse for
5. Nitrous ___ (laughing gas)
6. Cause for overtime
7. Not the norm
8. Spins
9. Blazing
10. Arrow's flight
11. "Humph!"
19. Night light
21. Big dog, familiarly
24. Crop protector
25. Cousin's mom
26. Longing
27. Not shut tight
28. Squander
29. Pivotal
32. Pointed lunges
33. Amble
35. Unhealthy looking
36. Miss a step
38. Suez setting
39. Cover girl Klum
42. It may be shed
43. Active
44. Aviation stat
45. Apiary denizen
46. Hardly harsh
48. Do-it-yourselfer's purchase

ANSWERS ON PAGE 52

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Easter Brunch 2015

Soup

Vidalia Onion Soup

Salad

Fresh Greens with Assorted Condiments and Dressings
Baby Ice burg with Apple wood Smoked Bacon, Fried Shallots, Blue Cheese Dressing
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Butter Milk Ranch Potato Salad
Jumbo Shrimp with Jack Daniel Cocktail

Stations

Leg of Lamb with Mint Demi
Maple Glazed Virginia Pit Ham
Omelet and Waffles

Entrees

Braised Beef Ravioli with Sundried Tomato Sauce & Parmesan Cheese
Rosemary Bourbon Chicken
Pan Seared Salmon with Pepper Coulis
Flat Iron Steak with Green Pepper Corn Sauce
Sausage and Bacon
Cheese Blintz with Strawberry Compote

Sides

Broccoli Cauliflower and Carrots
Roasted Sea Salt Asparagus
Horseradish Mashed Potatoes
Harvest Rice Medley
Assorted Breads and Rolls

Children's Buffet

Chicken Fingers, French Fries and Macaroni and Cheese

Assorted Cake Station & Dessert

Coconut Panna Cotta with Fresh Berries
Tiramisu
Lemon Cream Cake
Oreo Cheese Cake
Banana Foster Station with Vanilla Ice Cream

Seating Times:

10:30 am - 2:00 pm

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Seniors: \$34.00

Children 6-12: \$17.00

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Lineup changes at WNSP

BY ROB HOLBERT/MANAGING EDITOR | rhobert@lagniappemobile.com

This week saw a lineup change at Mobile's all-sports radio station — WNSP FM.

According to Randy Kennedy, program director, Patrick Woo, a scouting assistant with the Reese's Senior Bowl, joins him as co-host of "Sports Drive" from 3-6 p.m. daily.

Mark Heim will also move from afternoons to mornings, joining veteran Lee Shirvanian for the revamped "Opening Kickoff" show from 6-9 a.m. daily.

"This is our first step in revitalizing WNSP and wnsp.com," Kennedy said. He was named program director earlier this month after six years as co-host of "Sports Drive" where he worked with Heim. "I'll miss having Mark to kick around every afternoon, but these moves are going to allow us to bring a fresh approach to both the morning and afternoon shows. I'm particularly excited about introducing a new personality such as Patrick to Mobile. His knowledge of college football is on par with any radio host in the country."

WNSP listeners may remember Woo as co-host of the weekly "Senior Bowl Locker Room Report" on WNSP this past season. His previous radio experience includes stints as an intern with the "Bill King Show" in Nashville and guest appearances on the "Tim Brando Show" and the "Paul Finebaum Show."

Woo graduated from Penn State, where he served as sports director of the student radio station and won a college Emmy for his TV work.

The station's weekday lineup will now be set up

as follows: "Opening Kickoff with Mark and Lee" from 6-9 a.m., the "Dan Patrick Show" from 9 a.m.-noon, "Pro Football Talk" from 12-1 p.m., "Scarbinsky" with al.com lead columnist Kevin Scarbinsky from 1-3 p.m., and "Sports Drive with Patrick and Randy" from 3-6 p.m.

Improvement at the P-R presses

According to multiple inside sources, the presses at the former Press-Register building on Water Street are undergoing an impressive upgrade.

The German-made press inhabiting the green-glassed building across from the GM&O Building is apparently getting some much-needed love, to the tune of millions of bucks, according to insiders as well as others familiar with the project. While the Newhouse Company, which owns the building, has tried to sell it off since taking the daily paper to three days a week and moving its operations downtown to Royal Street, it has also broken the printing operations into its own wing of the company.

The P-R is still printed at the facility, and it has also handled part of USA Today, as well as the Pensacola News-Journal. In October of last year it was announced the New Orleans Times-Picayune would be moving its printing operations to Water Street as well. At that time it was estimated the printing and packaging move from New Orleans to Mobile would take anywhere from 12-to-15 months.

Whether the press upgrades are directly related to the Picayune is not known.




WNSP announces changes to its line-up.

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If you have any question, please contact below.

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COLONIAL DAY

Colonial Day at the Site of Historic Fort Conde (111 S. Royal St.) is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on March 20. Bring your family to see what life was like in Colonial Mobile with demonstrations including: candle making, cooking, blacksmithing, Native American arts and crafts, and sword fighting. Children can participate in activities such as: Dressing up in colonial clothing, churning butter, playing colonial games, visiting a petting zoo, doing laundry outdoors, and more. Admission is free. For more information, please call the History Museum of Mobile's Education Department at 251-208-7510.



Photo/ www.museumofmobile.com

March 19

Vino & Values

Rose Sweet is a Catholic speaker and published author whose mission is for all Christians, be they single, married, divorced, or remarried, to find the love that never fails. Enjoy a night of wine, cheese, and fellowship with Catholic women at the Sisters of Mercy Build, at 6 p.m. (106 Providence St.). Door prizes and raffle items are up for grabs. Suggested offering of \$10. For more information visit www.facebook.com/vinoandvalues

China's Red Guard and the Cultural Revolution

The University of South Alabama's Department of History will hold its 14th annual Mahan Lecture. This year's speaker will be Dr. Rae Yang, of Dickinson College, whose autobiography, *Spider Eaters*, describes her experiences as a Red Guard in China's Cultural Revolution. Dr. Yang's talk will be entitled "Contested Memory of the Cultural Revolution." The Mahan Lecture will take place at the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center at 7 p.m. and is free and open to the public. A reception and book signing will follow.

Disney Junior Live

Grab your tiaras and doubloons and join us for Disney Junior Live On Tour Pirate & Princess Adventure presented by Stonyfield YoKids Organic Yogurt. A never-before-seen live show featuring your favorite characters from Disney Junior's hit series, Sofia the First and Jake and the Never Land Pirates. There are two show times at the Mobile Civic Center, 401 Civic Center Drive, at 4 and 7 p.m. For tickets and more information visit mobilecivicctr.com.

Culinary Event for Teens

The Daphne Library will offer a special teen and tween cooking class titled "Local Cultural Cuisine" at 4 p.m. The cooking class will be directed by Dede Trotter,

owner of Culinary Dreams, Inc. The class will explore the rich ethnic diversity of our local food culture. There will be a hands-on culinary cooking experience along with a taste testing segment. To register call 251-621-2818 ext. 211 or email lyoungblood@daphneal.com. The event is free and open to teens and tweens in grades 4-12.

Government Street Forum

Join the Government Street Presbyterian Church for lunch and a speaker every Thursday through March 26. The speaker this week will be Carl Cunningham Jr., youth advocate and Guide Right director of the Mobile Kappa League. The lunch and forum is held in the church's Fellowship Hall at the Jackson Street entrance on Government and Jackson streets. Lunch is served at noon and costs \$10, which includes tea, coffee and dessert. There is no charge to attend the forum. For information, call the church office at 251-432-1749.

Live at the Museum: Emily Stuckey & Friends

Join us for a songwriter showcase with local favorites, Emily Stuckey, Mike Jernigan, Robbie Sellers, and Gabriel Willis. \$10 suggested donation, refreshments provided. The showcase will start at 7 p.m. at the Mobile Museum of Art, 4850 Museum Drive.

March 20

AeroFest

The inaugural AeroFest celebrates our nation's heroes: injured military service members and veterans who have made enormous sacrifices. There will be live music from Robert Randolph, Dumpstaphunk and many others as well as the Independence Ride, art show, Titan FC mixed martial arts and much more. AeroFest will be held at 1891 9th St. For more information and tickets visit aerofest.org.

Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education Spring Concert Series

The second annual Music Festival and Art Auction benefitting Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education at the American Legion Post (700 S. Mobile St. in Fairhope) is a two-day music event with a raffle for a chance to win a 2015 Ford Fusion. Tickets are \$100 for the Draw-Down (this will also give you admission to both days of the event) that can be purchased through the school at 251-928-9347 or online at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/1174019. There will also be a raffle for Jimmy Buffet tickets.

Colonial Day

Colonial Day at the Site of Historic Fort Conde (111 S. Royal St.) is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bring your family to see what life was like in Colonial Mobile with demonstrations including: candle making, cooking, blacksmithing, Native American arts and crafts, and sword fighting. Children can participate in activities such as: Dressing up in colonial clothing, churning butter, playing colonial games, visiting a petting zoo, doing laundry outdoors, and more. Admission is free. For more information, please call the History Museum of Mobile's Education Department at 251-208-7510.

Ark of India

"Ark of India: An Alabama Artist Explores Southern Asia" is an exhibit about personal discovery and exploration. It is an account of late 19th and early 20th century India as seen by Alabama artist Roderick D. MacKenzie, using his paintings, drawings, sculptures and most importantly, photographs and writings. The exhibition is organized by the History Museum of Mobile at 111 S. Royal St. and is on view until Sept. 1, 2015. Admission is free.



Photo/ Dan Anderson

March 21

Cajun Cook-Off

Downtown Cajun Cook-Off to benefit the Child Advocacy Center. This fun event will feature samples of Cajun food from 20 of our area's restaurants. Live music will be played by local musicians on the Bud Light Gumbo Stage, and local art will be on display. Tickets will be available for \$10 in advance at the Child Advocacy Center (1351 Springhill Ave.), Mellow Mushroom locations (the Loop & West Mobile) and both locations of BugMaster (West Mobile & Daphne). Tickets will be available at the gate for \$15 and all proceeds benefit the CAC to help fund their many services to the community.

Downtown Open House

After you've had your fill of crawfish at the Cajun Cookoff, make sure you find your way to Bienville Square between noon and 4 p.m. to grab your map and embark on the Downtown Open House. Over 16 downtown properties will be open for viewing, and realtors will be on site to answer any questions you might have regarding the properties. Who knows? Maybe your new home is waiting for you.

SEND YOUR EVENTS TO EVENTS@LAGNIAPPEMOBILE.COM

WHEELS FOR WILMER HALL

Mob Town Riders has once again partnered with Wilmer Hall Children's Home to sponsor their 3rd annual Dice Run March 21. The run begins at Wilmer Hall, 3811 Old Shell Road. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. with coffee and donuts with the final stop at Touchdown Tavern. Come early and enter your bike in the Bike Show to be judged by the children. There will also be live music by the Perry Wall and Chico and Chris as well as a silent auction and raffles. For more information visit mobtownriders.com.



Photo/provided by Mob Town Riders

The Mob Town Riders will host their 3rd annual Dice Run benefitting Wilmer Hall March 21.

Wheels for Wilmer Hall

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Mobile SPCA Giant Rummage Sale

Gates open at 8 a.m. Friday and Saturday where the Mobile SPCA store, warehouse, carport and yard will be packed with thousands of items — collectibles, tools, art, jewelry, home decor, clothes, linens, household appliances, kitchen items, antiques, toys, furniture and more. Mobile SPCA is at 620 Zeigler Circle W. The sale closes at 2 p.m. each day.

Holi Festival

In conjunction with the Ark of India exhibit, the History Museum of Mobile is hosting a Holi festival from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. at Fort Conde, 111 S. Royal St. Traditionally celebrated on Phalgun Purnima, which comes the end of February or early March, the Holi festival has an ancient origin and celebrates the triumph of good over bad. Indian food will be available, as will vendors selling various wares, games, a water activity and music. Free admission.

Cattle Baron's Ball

A chance to snatch up some great deals for a great cause at St. Pius X Catholic School's annual Live and Silent Auction — A Night to Remember at the Cattle Baron's Ball. Guests will enjoy a night of live music by Ryan Balthrop and friends, a full Texas BBQ dinner, drinks and dancing all in a ranch setting. Tickets are \$25 in advance and on sale now at the St. Pius X church office. For more information contact Jamie at 251-756-6596.

BBQ & Blues Cook-Off

The South Baldwin Chamber Foundation will cook up a whole lot of fun while raising funds for Foley area schools during the 7th annual BBQ & Blues Cook-Off at Foley's Heritage Park. Gates will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Festival goers will enjoy award-winning barbeque, popular blues bands, craft and retail vendors, children's activities and silent auction bidding. Admission is \$10. Tickets can be purchased at the gate or in advance at the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce. For more information, visit southbaldwinchamber.com (click Major Events/BBQ & Blues).

Youth Symposium

The Kappa Zeta Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority will be hosting a Youth Symposium from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Davidson High School, 3900 Pleasant Valley Road. The event focuses on prevalent issues that negatively impact our youth such as drugs, teen violence, abuse, low self-esteem, suicide, teen pregnancy, etc. Children from the ages 12 to 18 are invited. For more information and to RSVP email kappazetasigmarhoers@gmail.com.

Let's Get It 5k

The Let's Get It 5k is held in the honor of Justin Hasty and funds raised will go to the Wounded Warrior Project. Justin severed in the U.S. Marine Corps and was an avid runner. The run will be held at Mellow Mushroom, 2032 Airport Blvd. Pre-registration will be at 9:30 a.m. and the race will begin at 11 a.m. for more information visit www.jmhletsgetit.com.

Greenleaf Writer's Group

The Greenleaf Writer's Group is currently welcoming new members. We meet every third Saturday of the month at the Semmes library from 10 a.m. until noon. If you are an aspiring writer, come join us. For more information call 251-490-5199.

March 22

Arts and Crafts Festival

The Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce hosts the 63rd annual Arts & Crafts Festival in Fairhope, March 20-22. Festival hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.



Photo/ fairhopeartsandcraftsfestival.convergelocal.com

on Friday and Saturday, and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The festival is free to the public. For more information visit fairhopeartsandcraftsfestival.convergelocal.com

March 23

Top Cats Toastmasters

Top Cats Toastmasters meets every Monday from noon to 1 p.m. at the Red Lobster located near the southeast corner of Airport Boulevard and Azalea Road in Mobile. You can practice your public speaking and listening skills and learn to think on your feet in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Dues are \$43 twice a year, and lunch must be purchased. Toastmasters International is an international organization. For more information, contact 251-344-2938.

March 24

Addiction Counseling

Narconon would like to remind families that the use of addicting drugs is on the rise, take steps to protect your family from drug use. If you know anyone who is struggling with drug addiction get them the help they need. Call for a free brochure on the signs of addiction for all drugs. Narconon also offers free screenings and referrals. Call 1-800-431-1754 or visit DrugAbuseSolution.com

Teen Tech Tutor Program

The Baldwin County Library Cooperative (BCLC) recently implemented a Teen Tech Tutor program at the Robertsedale Library, 18301 Pennsylvania St., Robertsedale. This program is designed to match high school age students with strong technological skills with adults and seniors who are unfamiliar with basic laptop computer technology. The program is available Monday through Friday from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is free of charge. An appointment is required and can be made by calling the library at 251-970-4010.

March 25

Lenten Music Series

Lenten noonday concerts are 30 minutes, followed by a luncheon in the Chapter House. An \$8 donation is suggested. This concert features performances from the principal violist of the Pensacola and Niceville Symphony Orchestras, music director of the Northwest Florida Youth Orchestra, and director of Music Ministry at St. Paul Catholic Church in Pensacola. The series are held at Christ Church Cathedral, 115 S. Conception St. For more information call 251-438-1822.

Little Discoveries at the Exploreum

Little Discoveries is a weekly programming series in the Exploreum's Wharf of Wonder for children six and under. These lessons will fuse science, technology, engineering and math, with creativity, art and reading. Each session will begin with a story reading that will serve as the launching pad for the day's hands-on activities. Wednesdays 10-11 a.m. and Thursdays 2-3 p.m. at 65 Government St., downtown Mobile. For more information call Josh Holland at 251-208-6893 or email jholland@exploreum.com.

Tour Space 301

Tours of the Main Gallery and Fabrication Hall are every Wednesday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the Centre for the Living Arts/Space 301, 301 Conti St. Tours included with the price of admission. Call 251-208-5671 or visit www.centreforthelivingarts.com for more information.

Baldwin Schools reverses course on gas station boycott

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

With an embattled property tax vote looming, emotions were running high in Baldwin County last week as a controversy erupted over a letter sent by Baldwin County Public Schools instructing bus drivers and other transportation department employees avoid two area gas stations owned by a county resident who openly opposes the tax hike.

According to the letter sent by BCPS Transportation Coordinator Michael Vivar, bus drivers and department personnel were told they “CANNOT” fuel school buses and other school-owned vehicles at either at the Malbis Shell Station at State Highway 181 and U.S. Highway 90 and the Jubilee Shell Station at U.S. 90 in Daphne, per the superintendent. The letter provided two alternate gas stations as fueling sites in the same vicinity.

Kevin Spriggs, who has owned and operated the gas stations for about 15 years, told Lagniappe a BCPS employee informed him about the letter, but noted he was not initially contacted by school officials.

“It appears to be like a command letter,” he said.

Three days later, BCPS Superintendent Robbie Owen retracted the letter’s instructions.

“Our purchases should always be based on the best economic decision for the school system, and I’ve worked hard since becoming superintendent to stress to all of our employees that we make the best business decisions based on good judgment. Fuel is no different,” Owen said in a prepared statement. “The school system uses vendors who accept our Fuelman Card and bus drivers and other employees who have the Fuelman Card should always make the best business decision in choosing where to fill up. Any and all Fuelman locations should be in consideration, including Mr. Sprigg’s locations that the previous administration did not include.”

Spriggs said he does not believe the letter had anything to do with the fuel program between his gas stations and Baldwin schools, as the school system’s discounted gas prices are based on a negotiated price with a card service in which BCPS had agreed.

“So, it doesn’t have anything to do with the price. That’s set with their negotiated price,” he said. “I can’t say for sure, but it just looks like if you disagree with this tax, then you end up on a blacklist. My question is, ‘who else is on the blacklist?’”

Friday evening, BCPS spokesperson Terry Wilhite released a statement to Lagniappe saying there had been no recent decision made about what gas stations to use in Spanish Fort, and the letter sent to employees was intended to be a “simple reminder” of a decision that was made in 2013 under the direction of former superintendent Dr. Alan Lee, though a reason for the previous administration’s decision remains unclear.

Further, Wilhite said there are hundreds of gas stations in Baldwin County and many of them are not used by BCPS, emphasizing Spriggs’ two gas stations were not being exclusively singled out.

“I regret I didn’t know more about the fuel procedures so I



Photo/GoogleMaps

Baldwin County gas station who opposes property tax hike said he was initially “blacklisted” by the school system.

could address them at the outset, and I’ve let Mr. Spriggs know that I want to be fair to everyone,” Owen’s statement read. “I regret this has become a distraction for him. I know we all want to move forward in doing what’s best.”

The school system’s proposed 8-mill ad valorem tax increase would bring in an additional \$28.6 million in annual revenue to ultimately fund a \$350 million capital plan to accommodate a growing number of students. With the March 31 vote less than three weeks away, groups like the Common Sense Campaign Tea Party and organizers behind “Educate Baldwin Now,” a new website launched this month, have openly voiced their opposition to the tax increase and the school system’s use of taxpayer money to fund their promotional campaign.

“If they’re willing to use those types of political tactics, what about teachers, employees and parents? This is a political issue,” Spriggs said. “I really think it’s wrong to use the school system to campaign for political issues. It doesn’t smell right to me.”

According to Wilhite, BCPS received reports of picketers and sign-holders shouting at the entrances of Spriggs’ Malbis Shell Station, which has “caused some worry and angst” with personnel.

“We know this will end when the referendum is over,” he said.

Spriggs admitted he does put political signs on the right of way near the road by his business and has set up a table in the

far corner inside Malbis Shell, where customers can pick up yard signs and informative literature if they choose to do so. However, he assured there is no active campaigning or protesting.

“There’s no pressure. We don’t have cashiers campaigning. There’s nothing on the gas pumps,” he said. “I won’t tolerate that from any of my employees.”

While Spriggs said some people have told him he should seek legal recourse, he said he’s not interested in pursuing any formal charges at this time.

“No, I’m not going to do that,” he said. “This is a political issue. We’ll get the information out there and let the public go out and vote.”

Lou Campomenosi, president of the Common Sense Campaign Tea Party, during Tuesday’s Baldwin County Commission meeting criticized the way BCPS officials handled the situation first with their initial decision to send out the memo without clear understanding and second by retracting the memo’s instructions just days later.

“The inability of the present superintendent’s office to deal with opposition in a way that does not tax individuals is important,” he said. “What happened with Kevin Spriggs and the memo to take away his business ... just the thought of that process ... certainly suggests there is a very clear lack of understanding and lack of management skills.”

LOCAL FIRST

LAGNIAPPE WEEKLY

Jaguars focus on rebuilding depth chart

BY TOMMY HICKS/CONTRIBUTING WRITER

South Alabama head football coach Joey Jones doesn't mince words when asked the importance of the Jaguars' spring practice, which was scheduled to begin on Monday.

"This is probably as critical a spring as any that we've had because there are so many new guys and we lost so many guys from last year," Jones said. "It's very critical. We all think they're this or that before they get here, but once they're here, that's when you find out. We may be high on a safety but when he gets here we find out he's an outside linebacker, or maybe we thought a guy was a cover corner and we find out he's better as a safety. We have to sort those things out in the spring. We have to develop depth. My goal is to be at least two-deep at every position when we finish spring. If we've got three-deep, that's great, but a minimum of two deep."

The Jaguars, who finished last season 6-7 with an invitation to the inaugural Raycom Camellia Bowl in Montgomery, lost 31 seniors. Several of those players were starters or played significant minutes for the Jags and many played key roles for the team for more than two seasons.

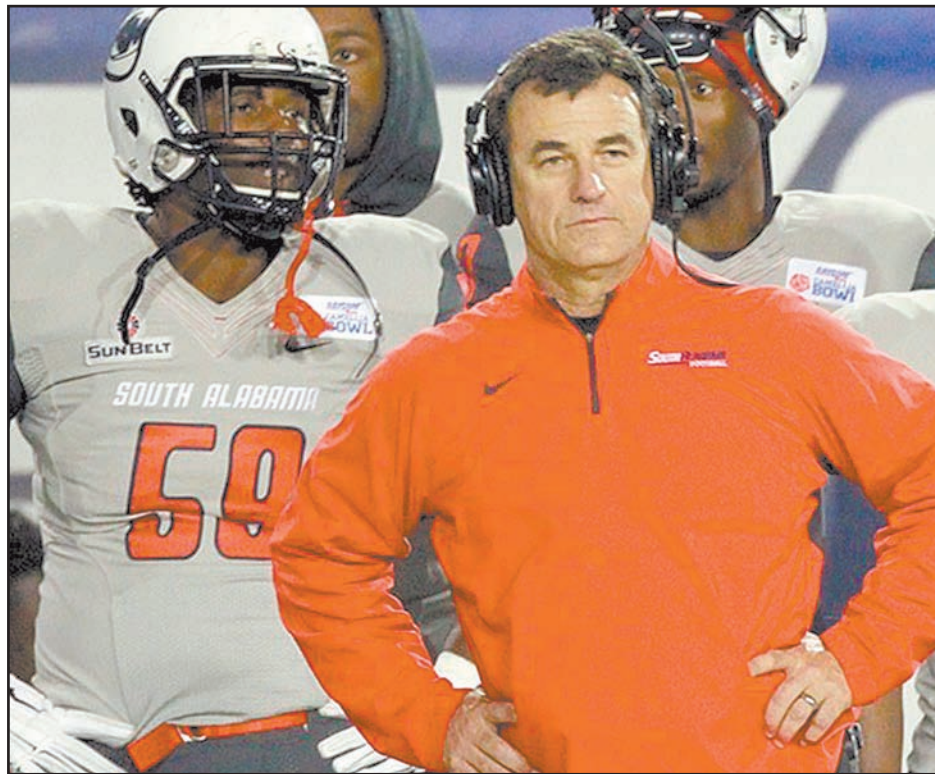
Jones and his staff countered the loss by recruiting seven players from UAB's disbanded program — with two more set to enroll for the summer semester — and signing four junior college transfers. The Jags also produced what many believe is the program's most talented recruiting class.

The Jags' 15 days of spring practice, which will continue until the team's annual Red and Blue spring game at Ladd-Peebles Stadium at noon on Saturday, April 11, will also allow a fresh coaching staff to work together on the field for the first time. Bryant Vincent, a former quarterbacks coach for the Jags, returned at the end of the regular season from UAB, where he was offensive coordinator for one season. He takes on the same role at USA, where he was able to coach the team in the bowl game.

Also joining the staff: Richard Owens (UAB), Tyler Siskey (Alabama) and Tracy Buchannon (Colquitt County High). Siskey will coach wide receivers, with Tim Bowens, who coached receivers last season, moving to a position coaching running backs. Owens will coach tight ends and Buchannon will coach inside linebackers, meaning Mike Adams, who coached the position last season, will coach outside linebackers and defensive ends this year.

The Jags lost 18 starters from last season's team, hence the urgency and importance placed on this spring practice by Jones and his staff.

"My challenge to them all winter has been, 'we've done some good things here and there's no doubt we've gotten some national recognition, being the team that has made a bowl game the quickest of a new program,'" Jones said. "All those things are great ... and there were some good things that happened (last year), but we challenged them that we want to be great. Our whole deal is that to be great, it's not about athleticism anymore. Our first year in Division I we probably didn't have enough athletes and that was a factor. Now we have enough



Photo/Courtesy of the University of South Alabama

USA head football coach Joey Jones, along with a few new staffers, are using spring scrimmages to build the team's 2015 depth chart.

athletes to where it's going to come down to the mental side of it. I think if we can develop that strength between now and next fall, we can do some great things."

Replenishing the starting lineup and building depth throughout the roster is his first priority, but Jones said they will also have to identify the team's starting quarterback and his backup, as well as finding someone to handle kickoff duties — someone who can consistently kick the ball in the end zone, limiting returns.

Some progress will be limited based on injuries and/or players rehabbing from recent surgeries. The injury list includes QB Cody Clements (UAB transfer), WR Marvin Shinn, OL Steven Foster, TE Braedon Bowman, OL Jared Maldonado, OL Clay Machen, TE Caleb Hayman, DB Devon Earl, LB Cordivdo Grice and LB Kalen Jackson.

Here's a quick look at each of the positions heading into spring:

QB: Clements started for UAB last season and figures to be to be the frontrunner, but missing spring opens the door for UAB transfer Austin Chipoletti as well as returnees Hunter Vaughn and Matt Floyd. Running back should be a deep position with the return of Terrence Timmons and Xavier Johnson and the additions of Dami Ayoola (former starter at Illinois as a freshman), D.J. Vinson (UAB) and former JUCO All-American Tyreis Thomas. At wide receiver, the position is also deep with returnees Shinn, Danny Woodson II, Cameron Broadnax and Claude Garrett, as well as the addition of JUCO transfer Tyrone Williams, Josh Magee's return (this summer) after a year at UAB.

Chris May and Chris Scelfo are back on the offensive line and UAB transfers Lee Dufour

and Cameron Blankenship add help along with Machen, Foster and Noah Armstrong. At tight end, Bowman leads the way and the addition of UAB's Gerald Everett gives the Jags a good one-two punch. Hayman and DeMarion Buford-Hughes are also added to the mix, along with JUCO transfer James Bynes.

On the defensive front, Tre Alford and DeMarion Harper return, with Dondre Chanet and Jacob Chaffin. Jones said there are three others arriving for fall practice who will be in the mix. At OLB/DE, Jimmie Gipson III is the top returning player. Linebacker finds the need for players to step forward, including Grant Powell (who loved there from QB last season), Grice, Demarius Rancifer and others. The secondary should be deep with Earl, Roman Buchanan, Margo Reed, E.J. May, Antonio Carter, Nigel Green and others making their returns, along with JUCO transfer Quinton Lane. There are also incoming freshmen, including St. Paul's Jalen Thompson, who could make an impact at the position in the fall.

The kicking game loses long snapper Austin Cole and returner T.J. Glover as well as Jereme' Jones, and finding a new set of returners will be important. Alex Hopson should step in as long snapper. Corliss Waitman, redshirted last year, will challenge for Brandon McKee's punting job as well as kickoff duties. Walk-on Alexander Theodore may figure in the kickoff competition. Aleem Sunanon is the leader and returner as the team's field goal kicker.

Practice started Monday and continued Wednesday, both drills in shorts. The team will practice in helmets and shoulder pads on Friday and in full pads Saturday. Scrimmages are set on March 28 and April 4 (at Murphy High School), with the spring game April 11.

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Mobile Sports Hall of Fame class of 2015 features coaches, athletes, war hero

BY J, MARK BRYANT/SPORTS WRITER | sports@lagniappemobile.com | Twitter @goulaguy

There are many “hall of fame” honors in the collegiate and professional ranks for those who excel in athletics, as well as on the national and international stage. However, few of these tributes quite have the impact of being a hometown hero.

That was the case when the latest class was introduced for the Mobile Sports Hall of Fame. The event took place in the lobby of the RSA Tower in downtown Mobile, which is scheduled to be the permanent site of the exhibit.

“The Class of 2015 is unique mix of incredible athletes and coaches, with some really fascinating back stories,” Peter Albrecht, MSHOF president, said in a news release. “This group includes a Vietnam War hero, the hall’s first Native American inductee, and the first-ever inductee whose mother is also in the Mobile Sports Hall of Fame.”

Karen Mayson Bahnsen — Playing golf is family tradition for this inductee. She learned the sport from her mother, fellow MSHOF member June Buckholtz Mayson, and her grandmother.

“I was introduced to the sport by my family,” Bahnsen said. “I am exceptionally honored to be part of the first mother-daughter members of this group.”

Bahnsen first gained notice by leading McGill-Toolen Catholic High School to two state titles. In 1979, she won the state individual championship and the National High School Tournament.

Bahnsen was the first recruit on LSU’s new women’s golf program. She helped the Lady Tigers earn national tournament berths from 1980 to 1982.

After her playing days were finished, she remained in Baton Rouge to coach the LSU team. In her 31 years at the helm, the Lady Tigers made numerous appearances in the NCAA championships, finishing third in 2011 and 2012. LSU won the SEC title in 1992, and in 1995 she was named the SEC Coach of the Year.

Mardye McDole — This Murphy High graduate became one of Mississippi State’s greatest wide receivers. A three-time SEC selection, he led the conference in receptions and yards per catch as a sophomore, before being named an all-American by The Sporting News as a senior. He left MSU as the Bulldogs’ all-time leader in receiving yards and catches.

He continued his career in the NFL, after being drafted by Minnesota. After three seasons with the Vikings, he also played in the CFL and USFL. As a coach, he led Shaw High School from 1996 to 2001, and has been an assistant at Baker, Blount and Murphy.

“I have waited for this so long,” said McDole, who joined the MSU Hall of Fame in 2001. “I actually thought Peter (Albrecht) was kidding when he gave me the news.

“I am so proud to be in my hometown’s hall of fame. I will represent this great institution as well as I can.”

Lloyd Skoda — This inductee was a fixture on the local baseball scene for decades. He was head coach at Daphne (1992-2001) and at Faith Academy for two terms (1975-1991, 2002-2013). He retired with a career record of 902-265.

Skoda’s Faith teams won five state baseball championships, as he coached future major league players Coco Duncan, P.R. Walters and Josh Donaldson. Skoda also directed the girl’s basketball team at Faith to three state titles. He was previously inducted into the Alabama Baseball Association Hall of Fame in 2003.

“This is really something for a high school coach to be included in this group,” Skoda said. “I never expected this.

“First, I want to thank the Lord. All of us have a calling, and mine was to work with young people.”

James Taylor — A member of the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians, Taylor played in the first high school football game he ever saw. In just eight contests for Citronelle High, he rushed



Photo/J. Mark Bryant

Mobile Sports Hall of Fame inductees for 2015 are (from left) James Taylor, Erick Walder (represented by his mother Hilda Walder), Marvin “Woody” Woodall, Lloyd Skoda, Karen Mayson Bahnsen and Mardye McDole.

for 3,200 yards and 16 touchdowns. After being invited to the Alabama High School All-Star Game, he caught the eye of Pat Dye, then an assistant coach for the Crimson Tide.

He started as a running back in Bear Bryant’s wishbone offense, helping Alabama to three straight SEC championships and a share of the 1973 national title. A team captain 12 times, he also named SEC Player of the Week during his career.

“This is an honor I will always treasure,” said Taylor, who told the audience of the impact Coach Bryant had on him. In 1973, Alabama was up 34-0 at the halftime over Virginia Tech. Bryant came into the locker room and started talking about how they might lose the game.

Weeks later against Kentucky, the Tide was down 14-0 after two quarters.

“We thought he would really get after us,” James said. “But he came in and said, ‘This is when you are going to make your mama and papa proud of you.’ This (MSHOF) honor would have made my mama and papa proud.”

Erick Walder — This Murphy High graduate is considered the greatest combination jumper in college track history. He started as the state champion in the long jump and triple jump as a junior and senior for the Panthers.

While at Arkansas, he won 10 national individual titles in the triple jump and long jump. He led the Razorbacks to four indoor and three outdoor NCAA titles, and was inducted into the school’s hall of fame in 2010. After 22 years, Walder still owns the collegiate outdoor long jump record of 8.53 meters.

He won the silver medals in the long jump at the 1994 and 1998 Good Games and 1997 World Championships, plus bronze medals at the 1995 and 1999 World Indoor Championships.

“He got all his skills from his father, who was a great sprinter,” said his mother, Hilda Walder, who represented her son at the news conference. “He has been such a joy for me. I knew he would make me proud, and he has.”

Marvin “Woody” Woodall — This inductee has had three careers that would have made anyone proud. After turning down an offer to sign with the St. Louis Cardinals out of high school, Woodall played football at Auburn. As a place kicker, he led the Tigers in scoring in 1961 and 1962.

He signed with the Dallas Cowboys, but gave up football because of a leg injury. Not deterred, Woodall took a swing at golf and played in four PGA Tour events in 1965. As the Vietnam conflict escalated, Woodall turned in his clubs for a rifle and was sent overseas. In 1969, he received a Purple Heart and the Army Commendation Medal.

In 1975, Woodall was named the director of golf at the Country Club of Mobile, where he stayed until he retired in 2008. In that time, he helped to form the Junior Golf Association of Mobile, which has sent 30 of his students into the college ranks. He was previously inducted into the Dixie Section of the PGA Hall of Fame.

“This makes me feel great,” said Woodall, who had his wife, Charlotte, stand with him during the ceremony. “I am sure none of us would be here today without the support of our families and friends.”

The MSHOF 2015 Induction Ceremony and Banquet is set for Thursday, April 23, back at the RSA Tower. Tickets are \$100 per person. For additional information, call 251-709-0310 or visit www.mobilesportshalloffame.com.

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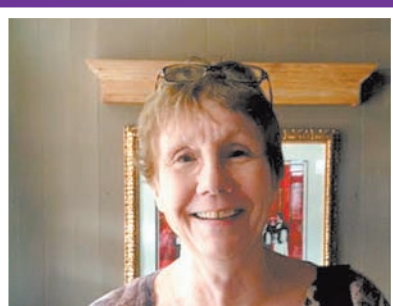
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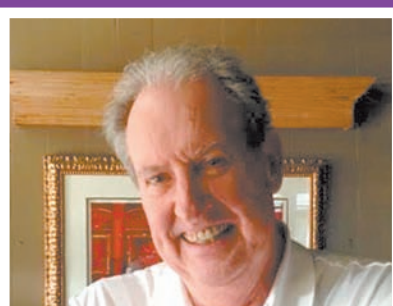
"I would spend it with my
mom."
- Justin (Mobile's most
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"I would keep doing what
I am doing."
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Aries' tech start-up socialized by 'the man'

BY DR. ZODIAC/ASTROLOGY GUY

Pisces (2/19 - 3/20) — Believing you still have the potential to be an effective, but compassionate serial killer some day, you watch “the Jinx” documentary about Robert Durst and take meticulous notes on “what not to do.” Considering the closeness you maintain with friends and family, you determined long ago to adopt more of a BTK approach to murder, minus the use of computers. But even then, of course, children will be off limits. You’re not crazy or anything.

Aries (3/21 - 4/19) — Recognizing a lucrative market, you set up a private web server to host personal email accounts for elected or appointed officials. Promising state-of-the-art security features and a custom library of patriotic emojis, you begin to enlist customers for “YourNameHere@AmericaMail.com. Unfortunately, your pursuit is tainted through pressure by lobbyists. Soon, the government will seize your operation and redistribute it to the poor.

Taurus (4/20 - 5/20) — Your near-liplock with Kiko the lifeguard will force you to change your ways. You’ll get a job as a lifeguard for the summer, but not because you want to save people, but because you like the eye candy. You’ll go to the trouble of getting all the needed training and certifications, only to forget it all the minute someone needs your help. You’ll trip in the sand and twist your ankle on the way to the rescue. Your misadventure will force Kiko to be the hero. You’ll leave the beach in shame.

Gemini (5/21 - 6/21) — Your golf cart and smoothie theft will make you a household name. You’ll even be mentioned by Sen. Ted Cruz on the campaign trail. The man who wants to be

president will argue that it’s every man’s right to drive a golf cart, as long as it’s gas powered and comes with a case of beer. He’ll be on your side until he hears you stole a green smoothie. He’ll argue that’s too liberal for America and publicly ask that the judge sentence you to 20 years in prison.

Cancer (6/21 - 7/22) — You’ll turn that producer down, but roles in Mobile are few and far between. You’ll become so desperate for work, you’ll throw all dignity out the window and begin to gush to Nicolas Cage about his excellent acting chops on one of his future visits to the Port City to film some C-list garbage film. The sucking up works, though, as you’ll be cast as a bouncer in a remake of “Roadhouse.” It will have a very limited release and will run a tight 75 minutes.

Leo (7/23 - 8/23) — Continuing on in the spirit of St. Patrick’s Day, you’ll organize a Crichton leprechaun-themed, post-party-depression shindig, resulting in the consumption of copious amounts of homemade green beer. Still recovering from your actual St. Patrick’s Day hangover, you’ll be positive more alcohol can only make things better, but someone will spike the green food coloring with LSD. You’ll hallucinate and convince yourself evil leprechauns circa 1993 are trying to uproot your house with a backhoe while screaming “Gimme da gold!” Your lucky charm this week is Pepto-Bismol.

Virgo (8/24 - 9/22) — You’ve been procrastinating for a while now, but you’ll finally move into a new apartment. The last straw was your “bro” neighbors, who kicked a hole through the wall whilst listening to Nickleback during a

raging kegger. You’ll have minor issues at your new place, like your disdain for the puke-colored walls and the mysterious fumes in your bathroom, but overall, the place will grow on you. Unfortunately, your neighbor will abuse pool privileges by inviting more than the allotted number of guests allowed, all bros BTW, to break the Guinness World Record for largest whirlpool. Stock up on towels this week.

Libra (9/23 - 10/22) — Depressed Jessica Lange won’t be returning to the upcoming season of “American Horror Story: Hotel,” you’ll binge watch something more lighthearted and innocent like “Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt” instead. Thrilled by the show’s premise, you’ll find your own apocalyptic cult to join and request to be locked in an underground bunker. By the time you emerge, “American Horror Story” will have evolved into DIY shows on HGTV network like “American Horror Story: CVS, Home Depot, Basement, Barn, etc.” You’ll be most excited for “American Horror Story: Whole Foods.”

Scorpio (10/23 - 11/21) — After suggesting Ted Cruz isn’t a natural U.S. citizen, you’ll become the target of political ire. It would seem suggesting someone isn’t from America simply because they’re kind of dark is OK, but attempting to derail a Canadian candidate warrants chastising from the conservative powers that be — those powers being your uncle at all subsequent family dinners. After a few weeks of abuse, you’ll shout over the passing of plates, “It’s the same situation, just a different ox being gored.” The use of such a Southern euphemism will calm the tension, if only for the moment.

Sagittarius (11/21 - 12/22) — Tired of waiting behind the extra traffic, you’ll use glass chalk to write “Nobody gives a damn about your Spring Break” on your car. Admittedly, the saying was illegible even to you on the rear window of a 91’ Bronco. Needing little to no provocative action, one group of shirtless guys will attempt to fight simply because they struggled so much to read your window message. They’ll beat you up, funnel a beer and answer a few questions for the Sean Hannity program. All in a day’s work.

Capricorn (12/22 - 1/19) — During an argument over police brutality, you’ll realize it’s best not to argue with a cop about the use of excessive force. Working tirelessly to summon a “mob” mentality, your friend will say things like — “You wouldn’t know until you’re in that situation,” to which you’ll reply, “I still don’t think I would have curb stomped a toddler, no matter how aggressive he appeared.” Abandoning the argument, you’ll finally say something all your “blue profile picture” friends can agree with. “Cops are right 100 percent of the time and if they kill you, you deserved to die.”

Aquarius (1/20 - 2/18) — Your annual drinking game — one sip for each fish print on display at Fairhope’s Arts and Crafts Festival — returns with great fanfare. Starting with a bloody Mary on Section Street, you’re totally wasted by the time you reach Fairhope Avenue with the watery remnants of a mint julep. The police are not amused as you make “reeling them in” gestures to passersby. But this being Fairhope, you are released on your own recognizance with a sentence of two “Our Fathers” and three “bless your hearts.”



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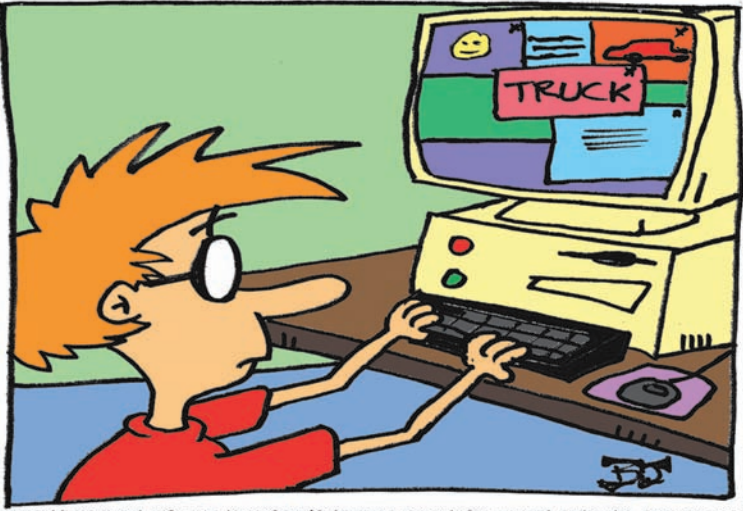
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FROM PAGE 49

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Elvis, green tights, attempted rodent murder and a ‘strange’ visit from a former alien

BY BOOZIE BEER NUES/SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

You people need to stop. Seriously. I can’t even keep up with all that is going on. I’m trying but there is cook-off after cook-off, parades, concerts, festivals, charity events, skiing rodents and oh, St. Patrick’s Day, which should now be known as St. Patrick’s Days as it gets two on the years it falls during the week, which is most of them!

Anyway, I am not really complaining. I am happy to have so much material to sort through. The spies and I have been working overtime for you, so enjoy!

Elvis has left the city

Elvis Costello’s Friday the 13th performance did not prove unlucky for those in attendance, as I am told he charmed all of his fans by playing all the hits, “Allison,” “Veronica,” “Peace, Love and Understanding” and “Watching the Detectives,” among others. He also told some entertaining tales about his career and even mentioned he was last in Mobile in 1979. My spies said they were all impressed by the backdrop on stage, which featured a cool vintage TV and footage of his father and other scenes, which went along with his storytelling.

One local lady dining at The Royal Scam before the show had some old 45 records in the sleeves she wanted Elvis to sign. She was later spotted having her wish granted by Mr. Costello.

My spies said they also heard no one yell, “Roll Tide,” which is kind of a miracle.

St. Patrick’s Day shenanigans

The spies in the OGD, said the weather cleared up just in time for Callaghan’s annual St. Patrick’s Day party on Saturday, March 14.

I am told it was packed as usual and the crowd was treated to music by DJ Pablo, Drunker Shade of Green, Naughty Professor, Cardinal Sons and Kansas Bible Company.

Before the party really got going at Callaghan’s there were several pre-parties going on at homes in OGD. Green Jell-o shots have always been a favorite breakfast of the Boozester.

I’m told the ladies in tight green tank tops really made an impression on all of the drunken men, as did the “girl in the really short shorts and green and white thigh highs.” The lady folk said the dude dressed as a green Teletubbie with a large jam box really “corned their beef,” as the Irish say.

A neighborhood spy said there were more cars left overnight than usual, so she wasn’t sure if everyone was just being safe or if folks were getting lucky in a different way.

We will have more next issue as the St. Paddy’s Day shenanigans keep coming in.

Twiggy the water-skiing squirrel narrowly escapes death

So, the Mobile Boat Show also went on last weekend, which always features an appearance by everyone’s favorite water skiing squirrel Twiggy. According to my spies, it seems poor Twiggy narrowly escaped electrocution after one of the attendees “accidentally” knocked a piece of live electronic equipment into his pool or “performance arena.”

We are told poor Twiggy was understandably terrified and jumped out of his skis and into the crowd. We hear he eventually



Photo/Courtesy of Callaghans

Thousands celebrated St. Patrick’s Day (a little early) at Callaghan’s annual street party on March 14.

came back and was unharmed. No word on if any charges will be filed against the attempted squirrel murderers.

This Bud’s for you and you and you

The Mobile Police Department “responded to Herman Drive in reference to a recovered stolen Budweiser semi-truck Monday. The recovered 18-wheeler was taken from the Budweiser warehouse at 1050 E-I-65 Service Road Monday night. Approximately 580 cases of assorted beer were removed from the truck before it was abandoned on Herman Drive. The vehicle was unoccupied at the time it was recovered.

It didn’t take long, though, before some suspects were arrested. A Lagniappe reporter rather quickly calculated that would be 13, 920 beers that disappeared, so the suspects may have been a bit bloated, or perhaps easily caught in an area men’s room. And my guess is while the latest Bud Light ads like to say they are “up for whatever,” the folks over at our local distributor were probably not too “up” for this.

Strange appearance from “3rd Rock” star

So according to multiple spies and at least one other media outlet, the attendees of the ultra swank Drug Education Council luncheon last week were treated to a rather bizarre appearance from “3rd Rock from the Sun” actress Kristen Johnson, who was the special guest speaker and who has reportedly been sober for

eight years, after battling alcohol and narcotics addiction.

Many people in attendance, stopping short of speculating further, said she was “at the very least acting very strangely.” Instead of actually giving a speech, she reportedly just began reading one of the chapters of her book, a chapter that had nothing to do with her struggle with addiction. She almost immediately broke the microphone, which she made a joke about and also dropped the F-bomb several times, even though there were children in attendance, according to spies. After the reading of the chapter in the book went on and on and people needed to get back to work, organizers actually cut her “speech” short and had FOX 10’s Bob Grip, who was the emcee, help get her off stage. WPMI reported she was seen crying after the event.

That’s sad. Hopefully she is OK.

The spies said other than her strange behavior the event was a great success and her speech definitely made the event “interesting.” But the spy added they hoped her actions didn’t take anything away from the great work the Drug Education Council does for this community. The Boozester totally agrees!

Another quipped, “This will probably be a chapter in her next book.”

Well kids, that’s all I got. Just remember, whether it’s rain or shine, dramatic or scandalous, or some plain ol’ Twiggy lovin’, I will be there. Ciao!

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