

---

BURT JONES  
RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

Fall Travel Experience

*Northwest Alabama*  
*Franklin, Lawrence, and Winston Counties*  
*October 27-30, 2021*



---

BURT JONES  
**RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE**

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA\*** | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Contents

<b>Trip Itinerary/Map</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Community Profiles</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Session I – Cabinet Making and Manufacturing</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Session II – Saving of a Rural Hospital</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Session III – Rural Legislative Delegation</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Session IV – Museum Tours</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Session V – Farm to Fabric Textiles</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Session VI – Rural K-12 Education</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Session VII – Industrial Development</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Session VIII – Legacy of Richard Alexander Hubbard</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Session IX – Good Shepherd Catholic Church</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Session X – Downtown Redevelopment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Session XI – Steel Fabrication</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Session XII – Corporate Engagement</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Session XIII – Rural Higher Education Panel</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Session XIV – Free State of Winston</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Session XV – Environmental Stewardship</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Student Expectations</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Dress Classifications &amp; Suggested Packing List</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Post-Trip Self-Assessment</b>	<b>123</b>



---

BURT JONES  
**RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE**

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Meeting Itinerary

## Wednesday, October 27

- 12:00pm Meet at Blackburn Suite
- 12:15pm Depart Tuscaloosa for Haleyville**
- 2:00pm Session I – Cabinet Making and Manufacturing at Kith Kitchens with Espy House (Human Resources Manager)
- 3:30pm Session II – Saving of a Rural Hospital at Haleyville City Hall with Dr. Judy Bittinger (Chairperson, Healthcare Authority of Haleyville and Winston County), Bappa Mukherji (CEO of Java), Ashley Pool (CEO, Lakeland Hospital), and Mayor Ken Sunseri
- 5:00pm Session III – Regional Legislative Forum with Rep. Tracy Estes (R-Winfield, District 17) and Rep. Proncey Robertson (R-Mt. Hope, District 7)
- 6:30pm Dinner at Russell's Rising Smoke
- 8:00pm Depart for Hotel
- 9:00pm Check-in at Courtyard by Marriott Decatur
- 9:30pm Reflections and Overview of Thursday

## Thursday, October 28

- 7:15am Breakfast at Hotel
- 8:15am Depart for Oakville**
- 8:45am Session IV – Museum Tours at Oakville Indian Mounds Education with Anna Mullican (Cultural Resource Specialist) and Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum with Nancy Pinion (Director)
- 10:15am Depart for Moulton**
- 10:30am Session V – Farm to Fabric Textiles at Red Land Cotton with Anna Yeager Brakefield (Co-founder, Red Land Cotton)
- 12:00pm Lunch at TBD

## Thursday, October 28 (Continued)

- 1:30pm Session VI – Rural K-12 Education with Dr. Jon Bret Smith (Superintendent, Lawrence County Schools)
- 3:00pm Depart for Courtland**
- 3:30pm Session VII – Industrial Development in North Lawrence County with Mayor Riely Evans (North Courtland), Tabitha Paste (Lawrence County Industrial Development Board), and Mayor Linda Peebles (Courtland)
- 5:00pm Session VIII – Legacy of Richard Alexander Hubbard at R. A. Hubbard High School with Dr. May Bolden (Educator), Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Robinson (United States Army, Retired), and Rev. J. E. Turnbore (President, Lawrence County NAACP)
- 7:00pm Dinner at R. A. Hubbard High School
- 8:30pm Reflections and Overview of Friday
- 10:00pm Depart for Hotel
- 9:30pm Check-In at Best Western Plus Tuscumbia

## Friday, October 29

- 7:15am Breakfast at Hotel
- 8:15am Depart for Russellville**
- 8:45am Session IX – Good Shepherd Catholic Church with the Rev. Vincent Bresowar (Pastor)
- 10:15am Session X – Downtown Redevelopment with Mayor David Grissom (City of Russellville), Susie Malone (President, Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council), and Chase Sparks (Owner, Russellville Florist and Gifts)
- 12:00pm Lunch at Russellville City Hall
- 1:30pm Session XI – Steel Fabrication at G&G Steel with Michael Shane Bendall (Senior Project Manager) and Aaron Harbin (Operations Manager for Franklin Manufacturing)
- 3:00pm Session XII – Corporate Engagement with Jamie Young (Complex Manager, Pilgrim's Pride)
- 4:30pm Session XIII – Rural Higher Education Panel at Northwest-Shoals Community College moderated by Brittney Humphres (Executive Director, Phil Campbell Campus), Kenneth Brackins (Retired Instructor), and Dr. Timmy James (Associate Dean, Academic Programs)
- 6:00pm Dinner at Northwest Shoals Community College
- 7:30pm Depart for Hotel
- 8:15pm Check-In at Holiday Inn Guin
- 8:45pm *Group Departs for Blue Moon Drive-In Theater*
- 9:00pm Reflections and Overview of Saturday
- 11:15pm *Group Departs for Hotel*

## Saturday, October 30

7:30am Breakfast at Hotel

**8:30am Depart for Double Springs**

9:00am Session XIV – Free State of Winston at Winston County Courthouse with Diane Miller (President, Winston County Genealogical Society), Peggy Norris (Past President, Arley Women’s Club), and J. D. Snoddy (Circuit Clerk)

10:30am Session XV – Environmental Stewardship at Camp McDowell with Whitney Moore-Shea (Interim Executive Director) and Andrew Shea (Land and Resource Manager)

12:00pm Lunch at Camp McDowell

1:30pm Hiking & Canoeing at Camp McDowell

4:00pm Reflections and Post-Trip Assessment

6:00pm Dinner at Five Loaves

**8:00pm Depart for Tuscaloosa**

10:00pm End of Travel Experience

# Haleyville



Haleyville, Alabama is a town located on the border between Winston and Marion Counties. Beginning in the 1830's, European settlers moved into the area and forcibly displaced many of the native Cherokee residents. After going by many different names such as Wards Grist Mill, Crossroads, and The Ark, the town was eventually named Haleyville in honor of the Haley family who created a large mercantile business in the area. Haleyville was officially incorporated by the state legislature on February 28, 1889, and by that time was already home to several industries, a school house, a bank, and nearby coal mines.

Today, industry has continued to act as a large economic boon to the town, with both mobile home and textile manufacturing plants being located in Haleyville. Public education in Haleyville is administered by Haleyville City Schools, which administrates one elementary school, one middle school, one high school, and one technology center that collectively serve approximately 1,725 students and 130 faculty members. Notable citizens of Haleyville include Congressman Robert Aderholt and Judge E.M. Johnson. Aderholt has served in the House of Representatives for over 23 years and has remained a popular public official in his district since he was first elected in 1997. Judge Frank Menis Johnson served as a federal judge beginning in 1979, after being nominated to the bench by President Jimmy Carter. Johnson is noted as ruling in favor of Rosa Parks, civil rights activists organizing the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965, and putting a stop to the harassment of the Freedom Riders attempting to integrate public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama.

## Fast Facts About Haleyville

**Population:** 4,173

**Demographic Composition:** 98.0% White, 8.8% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 1.1% two or more races, 0.4% African American, 0.3% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Asian.

**Median Household Income:** \$25,949

**Largest Industries:** Manufacturing - 23.5%, educational and healthcare services - 21.9%, retail trade - 11.2%, finance, insurance, and real estate - 8.8%.

**Fun Fact:** In 1968, Haleyville became the first municipality in the United States to utilize the phone number 9-1-1 for emergency services and hosts a festival for first responders each June.

## Haleyville on a Map





---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA** | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session I

Below is the biography for the speaker for Session I, discussing cabinet manufacturing at Kith Kitchens.

---

### **Espy House**

Espy House is Human Resources Manager for Kith Kitchens. Kith Kitchens is a family-owned business that designs custom cabinetry. It is Headquartered in Haleyville, Alabama and it started as a components company in 1998. Kith Kitchens quickly established themselves as a strong service-based organization supplying quality kitchen components.



Kith Kitchens, an Alabama-based maker of high-quality cabinets, plans to invest \$11 million to open a new manufacturing facility in Florence that will create 131 full-time jobs.

Kith Kitchens will purchase a 150,000-square-foot speculative building pad and 11.5 acres in the Florence-Lauderdale Industrial Park. The company plans to start construction soon with a goal of beginning operations next summer.

“We are excited to work with the Shoals Economic Development Authority, the State of Alabama and the Tennessee Valley Authority to build this facility and hire a new team in Florence, which, working in conjunction with our team in Haleyville, will help us continue the growth and success of Kith Kitchens,” CEO Mark Smith said.

## GROWTH PLANS

According to the Shoals EDA, demand for Kith Kitchens’ cabinets has outgrown the capacity at the company’s current facility in Haleyville. The organization says the company chose the Shoals because of the availability of a first-class workforce and shovel ready industrial property.

“A couple of years ago the Shoals EDA developed an aggressive product development plan that included the construction of a new road and speculative building pad in the Florence-Lauderdale Industrial Park,” said Adam Himber, vice president of the Shoals EDA.

“The speculative building pad will allow Kith Kitchens to become operational quicker to meet the ever-growing demand in their industry,” he said.

The Shoals EDA said the success of the project can be attributed to a collaborative effort with the Alabama Department of Commerce, AIDT, and TVA.

The Shoals EDA began building this 150,000-square-foot speculative building pad earlier this year in preparation for future development.

Kith is a family-owned business, founded in 1998.

<https://www.madeinalabama.com/2020/10/kith-kitchens-to-open-cabinet-factory-in-florence-creating-131-jobs/>

CHICAGO – Pfingsten has announced that its portfolio company, Kith Kitchens, LLC, has acquired Mouser Custom Cabinetry LLC, a manufacturer of semi-custom and custom kitchen and bath cabinetry in Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

Mouser manufactures framed and frameless cabinets in a wide variety of wood species, finishes and door styles.

Mark Smith, CEO of Kith, said that Mouser's reputation and product portfolio of premium kitchen and bath cabinets will be highly complementary to Kith.

Both Mouser and Kith are FDMC 300 companies. Mouser was ranked 167 in 2019.

Kith Kitchens is based in Haleyville, Alabama. Kith was ranked 90th.

Pfingsten is a private equity firm and became majority shareholder of Kith in June 2016. Kith offers a portfolio of semi-custom kitchen and bath cabinetry for both the remodeling and new construction markets under the Kith and Eudora brand names. See <http://kithkitchens.com> and <http://mousercabinetry.com>

<https://www.woodworkingnetwork.com/management/fdmc-300/kith-kitchens-acquires-mouser-custom-cabinetry>

# KITH KITCHENS, LLC

## From Our CEO >>

Welcome to summer at Kith!  
With temperatures rising, I am hopeful that we will have our new break room finished soon for your enjoyment. At the moment, we're waiting on our A/C units to be installed. We have vending machines, tables & chairs, etc. on the way, and Brad is donating a ping pong table to the cause. I will be ready to take on all challenges. 😊  
A few updates for you:



Sales at both Kith and Mouser continue to accelerate, as the new home construction and home remodeling markets remain strong across the U.S.

As a result of the strong demand in our markets, we are experiencing unprecedented increases in the costs of our materials and services (wood, hardware, freight, insurance, etc.) across the board, so it is more important than ever to maximize efficiency and minimize waste (in both time and materials). Please take care with your work, strive to do things right the first time, and do your best to minimize damage to components as you move them through the plant.

I am happy to report that we have seen significant improvement in hiring and attendance over the past six weeks or so, and we will continue hiring for the foreseeable future. Great work by our HR team and plant managers in this effort. Please refer your friends and family, and welcome new team members as they join us to serve our customers every day!

Construction and equipment installation in Florence continue at a rapid pace, and we are on track to be up and running there in August/September. Thanks to Brad, Jason, Trae and the team in Florence for their work in managing this important project to completion.

Have a great summer!

Mark



"Be yourself, everyone else is taken."

## Graduation 2021



## Graduation 2021



## Graduation 2021

### >> TEAM SPOTLIGHT <<

#### Kith Kitchens Maintenance Team

Our Maintenance Manager, Michael Rollins, sat down with us to discuss his team. "Our maintenance team tasks include servicing, repairing, and replacing the machinery and building infrastructure, when needed. We make sure the equipment is running correctly and a great quality product is produced. We take pride in getting everything running in a timely manner and maintaining it. Our main goal at the end of each day is to have everything working in the best condition so our employees stay safe."

Our maintenance team is composed of 14 dedicated employees.



Jacinda Evans  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter  
Hourly Office



Debra Cornelius  
2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter  
Hourly Office



Jose Blanco  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter  
Supervisor



Benny Martello  
2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter  
Supervisor

"Be yourself, everyone else is taken."



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session II

Below are the biographies for presenters for Session II, who tell the story of a rural hospital slated to close and the community's quick action to take over ownership within the span of a few months.

---

### **Dr. Judy Bittinger**

Dr. Judy Bittinger has served as the Chairperson for the Healthcare Authority of Haleyville and Winston County and the Lakeland Community Hospital Governing Board since April 2018. Previously she served as a volunteer consultant to the Mayor and City of Haleyville beginning in November 2017. She began her career as a staff nurse in 1978 with Burdick West Memorial Hospital in Haleyville and later became Chief Nursing Officer for Columbia Northwest Medical Center in Winfield. Dr. Bittinger returned to Haleyville as Director of Health Planning for Carraway Burdick West Medical Center in 1997 and became Regional Director of Health Planning for Russellville Hospital and Lakeland Community Hospital in 2002. She added the title of Chief Clinical Officer at Lakeland in 2006, and under LifePoint Hospitals® in Haleyville she transitioned to Regional Director for Home Health and Hospice Services from 2009 until her retirement in 2011. Additionally, she served as ANCC Board Certification as Advanced Practice Registered Nurse from 1986 to 2016.



Dr. Bittinger holds an Associate Degree in Nursing from Northwest Alabama State Junior College; Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing (Family Nurse Practitioner) from University of Alabama in Huntsville; Doctor of Science in Nursing in Adult Health/Consultation from University of Alabama at Birmingham; and a Doctor of Philosophy in Health Administration from Kennedy-Western University in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

## **Bappa Mukherji**

Ashoke “Bappa” Mukherji has over 15 years of healthcare industry experience focused exclusively on the acquisition and operation of rural hospitals and clinics. He serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Java Medical Group which he founded in 2017 for the purpose of partnering with rural hospitals to reorient their business models to become financially viable. Bappa earned a B.S. in Economics from the California Institute of Technology, a J.D. from Vanderbilt University School of Law, and an MBA from Vanderbilt University School of Business. Prior to getting involved in rural healthcare, he practiced law at Neal & Harwell PLC in Nashville, Tennessee in the areas of mergers & acquisitions and finance. He co-founded Guy Brown Products in 1997 where he served as CEO until 2010, at which time the company had over \$200 million in annual revenue. Bappa has been involved in numerous other ventures in the healthcare industry including founding The Rapha Centre in 2014 to treat patients addicted to opioids.



---

## **Ashley Pool**

Ashley Pool is the Chief Executive Officer at Lakeland Community Hospital. Ms. Pool is a Healthcare Executive with over 23 years of experience as a clinician, entrepreneur, leader, and administrator. Ms. Pool has a master's degree in Nursing from The University of Alabama in Huntsville and a master's degree in Management of Health Care from Vanderbilt University. She has extensive experience in direct patient care as a CCU nurse as well as a nurse practitioner in a successful self-employed rural clinic. Now Ms. Pool focuses on a turnaround project rural hospital that offers acute care, geropsychiatry, and medical detoxification.



---

## **Mayor Ken Sunseri**

Ken Sunseri, current Mayor of Haleyville, was elected in November 2008. He served as an Infantry Platoon Leader with the First Infantry Division in Vietnam and retired from combined military service as a colonel. He was the 2004 Haleyville Civitan's Citizen of the Year recipient. He served as the local coordinator for Haleyville through the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program, where he was named 2005 Outstanding (ACE) Volunteer. He was awarded the 2011 Haleyville High School Alumni Association Service and Dedication Award. He has held numerous board positions and received many awards including, the 2015 Outstanding ACE Mayor award. In 2017, he was named the Alabama Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) Member of the Year.



WINSTON COUNTY, AL (WBRC) - Good news for Winston County, their only hospital, which was scheduled to close at the end of the month, will now stay open.

Some called it the impossible but thanks to several people coming together, the city with the help of so many others, were able to save Lakeland Community Hospital.

Will Walker and Donald Bray who live in Haleyville describe the changing fate of the hospital closing as a roller coaster ride.

"Not knowing and then the depths of possible closure, and to the point where it could be saved," said Will Walker who lives in Haleyville.

"I had a stroke. Without this hospital and this facility, you know I might have not made it through," said Donald Bray who lives in Haleyville.

It was a matter of life or death for many. Haleyville's mayor said getting two extensions gave them the time they needed to explore all avenues.

"At first it was really devastating, you know it really takes a lot of hard work. Realizing the importance of the hospital I knew we had to take action and take it immediately," said Mayor Ken Sunseri. The mayor said the Haleyville and Winston County Hospital Authority will own Lakeland Community Hospital and Java Medical Group will operate it.

"There is team work involved, that it does take persistence and a lot of hard work," said Walker.

The one-cent sales tax recently approved to help with hospital debt is an example of the community doing their part, but some think more needs to be done to keep the hospital afloat.

"Make sure that they send the ones who are sick, that need to go to the hospital, that they choose local first if at all possible," said Walker.

On March 31st, Mayor Sunseri said ownership and management for the hospital will officially change.

<https://www.wbrc.com/story/37664123/winston-county-hospital-facing-closure-will-remain-open/>

As the lone hospital in Alabama's rural northwest Winston County, Lakeland Community Hospital had for decades been critical to health care in the region.

Then officials stunned the community when they announced just before Thanksgiving in 2017 that the hospital, in the small city of Haleyville (pop. 4,000), would close by year's end, leaving the nearest emergency room nearly an hour away.

That spurred extraordinary measures by staff, community, city and county government that not only brought the hospital back to life – but underscored what it might take to keep struggling rural hospitals in places like Michigan and across much of the nation open for business.

“Our community had to have medical care. It could mean life or death,” Haleyville Mayor Ken Sunseri told *Bridge Magazine*.

Dozens of local residents packed a city council meeting a month after the closing announcement. It wasn't just the loss of hospital care that was on their mind; the city said Lakeland's closing would put 10 percent of Haleyville out of work.

With local backing, the council passed a 1-cent sales tax hike to finance purchase of the hospital from its owner, Curae Health, a Tennessee-based nonprofit rural healthcare firm which has since filed for bankruptcy.

That led to formation in 2018 of the Health Care Authority of Haleyville and Winston County and its purchase of the hospital for \$1.25 million. County commissioners also voted to approve a 2-mill property tax hike in deeply red Alabama to support the hospital.

“Raising sales tax is generally not a popular item,” Sunseri said. “But when we passed the sales tax, I did not have one person make a negative comment. I did not get one negative phone call.”

The authority turned over operation of the 59-bed hospital to Nashville-based Java Medical Group, which took on a share of the hospital's debt. Java CEO Bappa Mukherji said he had toured the hospital in December and noticed a bulletin board with a note: “To Santa: All we want for Christmas is to save Lakeland. Love, Third Floor Nurses.”

MEDHOST, a Nashville health information technology business, took over Lakeland's business functions and laid out a process for fiscal recovery that included repayment of outstanding bills.



In the meantime, some hospital employees fled to take other jobs.

But by the end of January 2018, Lakeland was seeking to fill more than a dozen positions, including nurses, radiology technologists and respiratory therapists.

Haleyville Mayor Sunseri said it was critical for the hospital's survival that most employees stayed when its future remained in doubt. Some pulled extra shifts to make up for those who left.

"They did anything and everything to save the hospital," he said.

One rural health care analyst said Lakeland Community Hospital likely won't be the last whose fate rests on a willingness of the local community to shell out more in taxes for health care.

"It's a national issue," said Brock Slabach, senior vice president for the Kansas-based National Rural Health Association, a nonprofit advocacy group.

"Communities all over the country are struggling with the problem. These are resources that shouldn't be taken for granted."

<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/alabama-one-rural-town-reached-its-wallet-keep-its-hospital-open>



# Lakeland Community Hospital

**HIGH QUALITY HEALTHCARE - CLOSE TO HOME**

Lakeland Community Hospital is a locally managed hospital serving the citizens of Haleyville, Alabama and surrounding communities. One of Only Five 5-Star Rated Hospitals in Alabama. LCH is equipped with some of the most advanced medical technology available today. These tools help doctors diagnose and treat a wide variety of medical conditions - faster - and with greater precision than ever before.

LCH is committed to providing high-quality medical care in a friendly hospital environment. Our medical staff includes skilled physicians representing a wide range of medical specialties. You'll find the desire to help others in the hearts and minds of our caring and experienced nurses, medical technicians and support staff.



**42024 AL-195,  
Haleyville, AL 35565  
205-486-5213**

**To learn how Haleyville united to save our hospital please visit our website:  
[CityofHaleyville.com](http://CityofHaleyville.com)**

---

---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session III

Below are the biography of the panelists for Session III, members of the Alabama Legislature from Northwest Alabama who represent portions of Franklin, Lawrence, and Winston Counties.

---

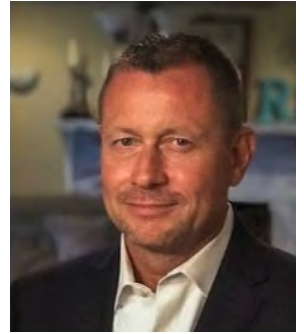
### **Rep. Tracy Estes**

Representative Tracy Estes is a member of the Alabama House of Representatives from Winfield. He represents District 17, which includes portions of Lamar, Marion, and Winston Counties. Rep. Estes is a member of the House Committees on Education Policy, Public Safety and Homeland Security, and Children and Senior Advocacy.



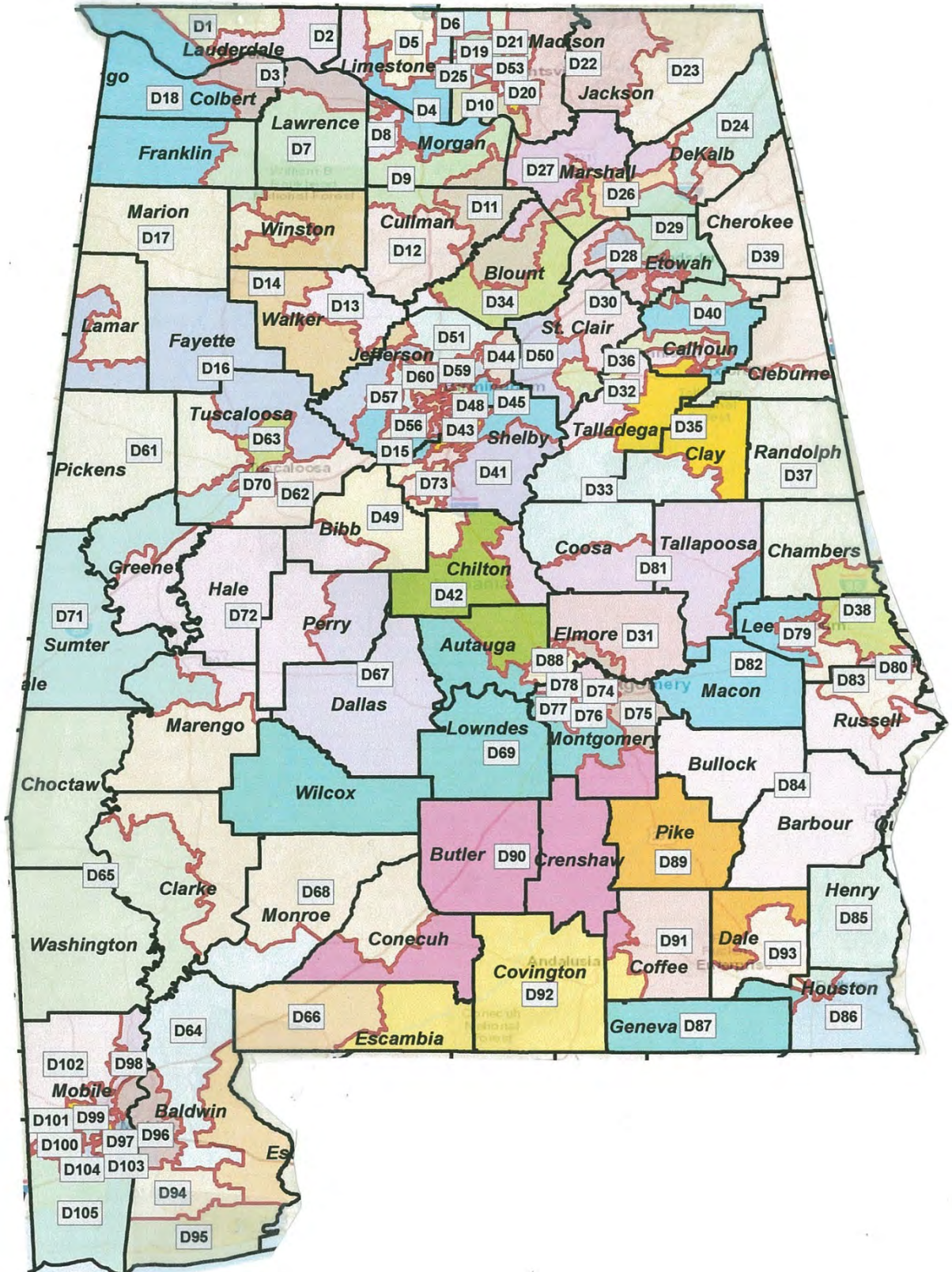
## **Rep. Proncey Robertson**

Rep. Proncey Robertson is a US Air Force veteran of the Persian Gulf War and received an Honorable Discharge in 1990. After his time in the armed service, Rep. Robertson worked as a youth minister and in local law enforcement in Russellville, Arkansas. In 1994, he moved back to his home state of Alabama where he served at the Decatur Police Department for more than 24 years. While working at Decatur PD he supervised the Decatur Police Department's Robbery & Homicide Unit, Crime Scene Investigations (CSI), the Street Crimes Unit (ACU) and the Honor Guard Unit. He was also a member and team commander of the Decatur Police Department's Special Response Unit (SWAT) for more than 22 years. He also served on the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force for 7 years working Counter Terrorism. Rep. Robertson has spent the last decade of his law enforcement career working directly with local school systems to develop their emergency response plans and School Resource Officer Programs. Robertson was one of the most decorated officers within the Decatur Police Department, with sixteen department medals, including the department's highest award the Medal of Valor. He was named the 2003 American Legion Law Enforcement Officer of the Year for the State of Alabama. Promoted to lieutenant in 2011, Robertson's primary roles were Homeland Security Coordinator, School Safety Coordinator, and Public Information Officer. Robertson retired from Decatur Police Department in May of 2018. Outside of law enforcement, Rep. Robertson has served as the Lawrence County Republican Party Executive Committee Chairman for 4 years. He has also served as a legislative appointee on the Lawrence County Community Development Commission, which reviews and awards local grant requests for TVA in-lieu of Tax Monies within Lawrence County. He is known throughout the state for his work as the state director of the non-profit organization, The Alabama Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics. With grass roots fundraising this organization has raised millions of dollars and brought public awareness to citizens with development disabilities across Alabama. After his retirement from law enforcement last year, and having spent more than 30 years in public service on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Proncey Robertson was elected to the State House of Representatives District 7 and will continue to serve us in his new role at the State Legislature.





# 2017 REMEDIAL HOUSE PLAN





# Moulton



Moulton is the largest city and seat of Lawrence County. At the time of its incorporation in 1819, the only structure in the community was an inn. Nestled just north of the Bankhead National Forest, Moulton beat out rival Courtland for the county seat due to its central location. The community was the site of the former Baptist Female Institute in the 19th century. The town is named for Lieutenant Michael Moulton, a soldier killed while fighting under Andrew Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814.

Moulton is principal city of the Decatur Metropolitan Statistical Area and considered a suburb for the Huntsville-Decatur Combined Statistical Area. The community is served by the Lawrence County School System with Moulton Elementary School, Moulton Middle School, and Lawrence County High School all located in the city limits. The town lies at the crossroads of three major state highways: AL-24 linking Decatur and Russellville, AL-33 between Courtland and Double Springs, and AL-157 connecting Cullman and Florence.

## Quick Facts

**Population:** 3,215

**Racial Composition:** 82.0% White, 13.6% Black or African American, 1.3% Native American, 0.2% Asian, and 2.9% from two or more races.

**Median Age:** 50

**County:** Lawrence

**Random Trivia:** Moulton hosted the Alabama Chicken and Egg Festival from 2004-2013 that drew 20,000 to the area promoting agriculture.

## Alabama



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session IV

Below are the biographies for the curators in Session IV, where students choose to tour one of two local museums: Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center or the Jesse Owens Museum in the Oakville area.

---

### **Anna Mullican**

Anna Mullican earned her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts from the University of Alabama focusing in archaeology, anthropology, history, and the Blount Undergraduate Initiative (now known as the Scholars) program. She has worked for the Lawrence County School System and Oakville Indian Mounds for 9 years. She also occasionally teaches classes at the University of North Alabama as an adjunct history instructor.



## Nancy Pinion

Nancy Todd Pinion grew up in Russellville and graduated from Russellville High School. Attending Auburn University, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Athens State University, and The University of North Alabama, she earned a Bachelors and Masters in Elementary Education, as well as an Administration Certification. Nancy taught for 25 years at Hatton Elementary School, located in rural Lawrence County, until retirement in 2003. For 17 of those years, she was fortunate to teach fourth grade Alabama History. Nancy's passion for history developed through experiences at an early age through years of family involvement in public service and state government. Nancy sought to pass on her love of history and importance of government and community service through teaching and her leadership in Alabama State Social Studies Fair programs. She mentored, encouraged, and guided students in the development, research and preparation of Social Studies Fair exhibits. Annually, those students took top honors at local, regional and state level competitions.



After retirement as a public-school educator, Nancy has served the past eighteen years as Director of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum located at Jesse's birthplace in Lawrence County, Alabama. Her years of educational experience and passion for history are assets which guide her in the park's mission to educate, perpetuate, and honor the legendary Olympic great, Jesse Owens. Her position includes overseeing everyday operations, promotion, fundraising, grant writing, event management, and development of educational programs. Her guiding principle is honoring Jesse's athletic and humanitarian accomplishments while ensuring that all guests leave with a greater appreciation for his athletic and humanitarian achievements. Highlights of her association with the park and museum have been receipt of a museum donation from a sitting President of the United States, collaboration with directors, producers and promoters of the major Hollywood film "Race" to host a film premier in Alabama, and assisting with planning and hosting the US Olympic Torch Run Committee on its route to the 1996 Atlanta Games.



During 1991, Oakville Indian Mounds Park came about with the initial purchase of 26.7 acres of land by the Lawrence County Commission and the Indian Youth Leadership Project in Lawrence County that was sponsored by the Alabama Indian Affairs Commission through a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Congressman Tom Bevill was instrumental in the securing of funds.

The Lawrence County Commission, with help from the Lawrence County Schools Indian Education Program, sponsored and provided guidance to the project during 1991 and 1992. Children enrolled in the Lawrence County Schools' Indian Education Program participated in the initial phases of Park development.

During 1991, improvements initiated at the Park included clean-up, road construction, fencing, disking, and seeding. A Park entrance sign, a picnic pavilion, fishing pier, steps to the ceremonial mound, and cleanup of the burial mound and cemetery were completed. The Park was dedicated on August 24, 1991, with approximately 3,000 people attending the dedication ceremony.

During the initial preparation of the land for the Park from 1990 – 1992, archaeologists from Mound State Monument, with the University of Alabama, conducted an intensive study in the immediate vicinity of the Oakville Indian Mounds Park and they identified some 100 archaeological sites at Oakville and surrounding areas.

During 1992, the park's five-year development plan was completed, construction of the Indian village began. An archeological survey was conducted, and the museum building plans and specifications were completed and accepted by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs that funded \$126,400.00 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the shell-in of the museum and office building. The Lawrence County Board of Education provided all additional funds for completion of the Museum and office building. The museum project was finished in 1995.

During 2000, an Alabama Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant was awarded to the Lawrence County Board of Education to purchase 14 historical markers that were erected throughout the Park and 18 markers that were placed at historic landmarks throughout the county. The Lawrence County Historical Commission provided matching funds for this grant to be secured.

### **PARK LAND ACQUISITION TIMELINE**

- From 1991 – 2002, the Oakville Indian Mounds Park has steadily grown into an 83-acre complex through a series of land purchases. The following list is a chronology of the Park's expansion history.

- 1991 - The Lawrence County Commission purchased 26.7 acres of land with an Appalachian Regional Commission Grant.
- 1994 - The Lawrence County Commission leased for 99 years the 26.7 acres of land to the Lawrence County Board of Education.
- 1996- 37.82 acres of land was purchased with an Alabama Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant. Matching funds for the grant were raised from donations and gift shop sales.
- 2000 - 7.37 acres of land was purchased for the Park with donations and gift shop funds.
- 2002 - 12.5 acres of land was purchased for the Park with donations and gift shop funds.

<https://oakvilleindianmounds.com/history-of-park>

---

## Indian Education Programs

### *Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center*

Since the Park's opening in 1991, the major emphasis has been the Indian Education Program with the focus on children from pre-school through high school. The target population has been school children and teachers in the seven surrounding counties.

Lawrence County is home to the second-largest Indian population in the state. The Indian Education Program and Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum are tributes to the Indian citizens and their heritage. The Museum located within the Park serves as a teaching venue for the Lawrence County Schools' Indian Education Program.

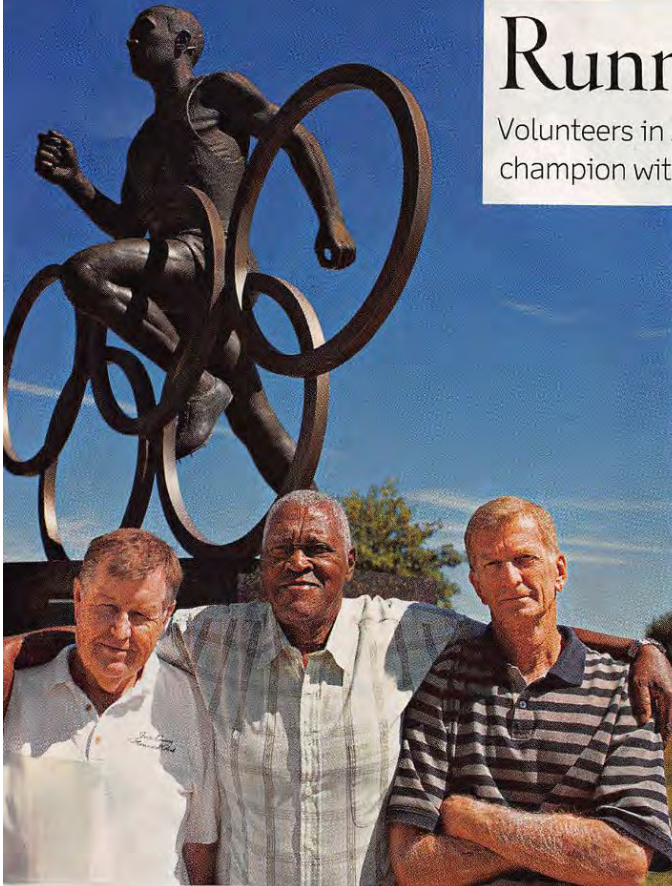
The Indian Education Program began in Lawrence County in 1986 with the primary purpose being to teach the local Indian history and culture to Indian students attending the Lawrence County Schools and to make students aware of their tribal roots. The program serves 1700 students with eligibility based on tribal enrollment of their grandparents, parents, or the students themselves. Most of the students are members of the Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama and are of Cherokee, Chickasaw, or Creek Indian mixed-blood heritage.

<https://oakvilleindianmounds.com/indian-education-program>



# Running Tribute

Volunteers in Jesse Owens's hometown honor the Olympic champion with a community park and museum. By **Wade Kwon**



**FAR LEFT:** Park volunteers Curtis Cole, Therman White and James Pinion stand before a sculpture of the Oakville native bursting through the Olympic rings. **LEFT:** Museum visitors learn about Jesse's life on and off the track at the memorial park and museum.

**T**he Olympian from Oakville lives on, thanks to hometown residents who have gone the distance for him. Jesse Owens dazzled the world by winning four gold medals and ruining Adolf Hitler's dreams of an Aryan-dominated games during the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

For years afterward, few knew about the track star's humble beginnings in Alabama. Even fewer have heard about the park and museum that bear his name or of local residents such as Therman White and James Pinion who created the heartfelt tribute. Together, the hardworking volunteers turned 30 acres of cow pasture south of Moulton into the Jesse Owens Memorial Park & Museum and brought the world to the Olympic champion's hometown.

**A Homegrown Tribute** Composed of a small museum building and an even smaller replica of the three-room house where Jesse lived as a child, the attraction chronicles his life. Born in 1913, he left with his sharecropper family nine years later for Columbus, Ohio, looking for a brighter future. After becoming a track star at The Ohio State University, he went on to win a record four track-and-field events at the 1936 Olympics—a feat

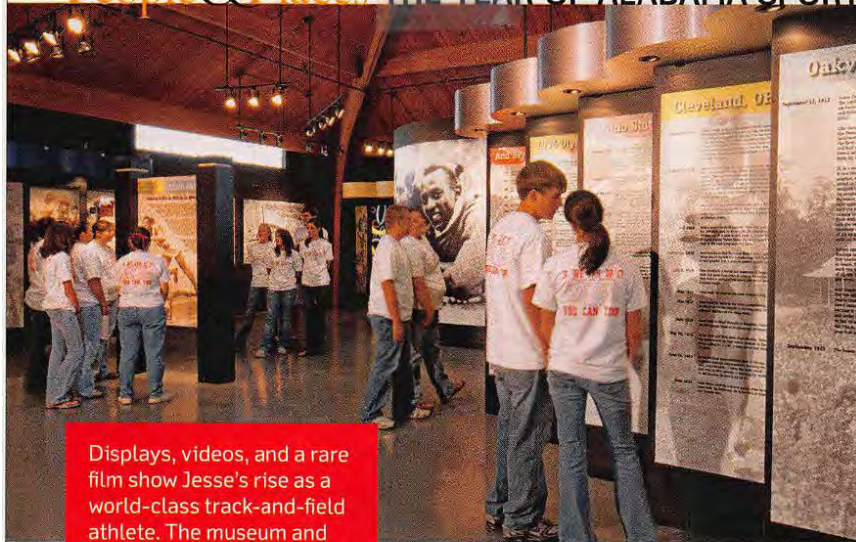
unmatched until Carl Lewis, another Alabama-born Olympian, did it in 1984.

"The Jesse Owens Park near Oakville is a source of great pride for the Owens family," says Marlene Owens Rankin, Jesse's daughter and board member of the Jesse Owens Foundation in Chicago. "We are grateful to Mr. Pinion and Mr. White for their vision, dedication, and ongoing hard work to make the park a place for recreation and learning."

The stone museum building sits at the top of a winding road from the park welcome center. Exhibits include film footage and mementos from Jesse's defining competitions, including track shoes, uniforms, and programs. Just outside, a 14-foot-tall statue by Birmingham sculptor Branko Medenica shows the runner bursting through the five Olympic rings. A replica of the Owens family house, built not far from the site of the original homestead, stands nearby. Inside, visitors see the floor that doubled as a bed for all 10 children, including older brother Sylvester who narrates a recorded greeting.

**Discovering Jesse** Therman learned about his hometown hero after traveling halfway around the world. Like Jesse, the Alabama native left the state as a young





Displays, videos, and a rare film show Jesse's rise as a world-class track-and-field athlete. The museum and park attract thousands of visitors each year to Danville just off State 157.

man in search of a better life. He enlisted in the Navy and spent 20 years touring Europe and the Pacific.

At a Tokyo museum, the Naval veteran made a surprising discovery: Jesse Owens had spent his childhood on the same stretch of land where Therman played as a child. "I'd been all around the world and thought I'd seen it all," he says. "So I started thinking that Danville would be a good spot for people to learn about this famous person."

**Building a Dream** With \$15,000 in state grants and \$2,500 in retirement savings, Therman purchased farmland near Oakville, hoping to build a lasting legacy to the sports legend. "I believe in doing nice things for the community," he explains.

In 1991, Therman and Marvin Fitzgerald (Jesse's cousin) started making plans for the park. They were soon joined by James Pinion, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System coordinator for Lawrence County.

Together the men and other community members eventually raised more than \$2 million. Much of the money came after James asked organizers of Atlanta's 1996 Olympic torch relay to travel through Jesse's birthplace when heading south from Huntsville to Birmingham.

The relay focused national attention

on the project, and two years later the park opened its museum. Then James and Therman started meeting with local, state, and federal officials to raise money for a twofold mission: attracting tourists to the park while also providing an outdoor facility where residents could play, exercise, and relax.

A decade after the museum opened its doors, the original volunteers are keeping it alive. Like Jesse Owens, Therman and James are both spending their later years giving back to communities and promoting children's sports programs. ●

**The Jesse Owens Memorial Park & Museum:** 7019 County Road 203, Danville, AL 35619; [www.jesseowensmuseum.org](http://www.jesseowensmuseum.org) or (256) 974-3636.

## Tracking the Future

In addition to the museum and Owens's home, the park also features two baseball fields for Little League games and areas where visitors can stroll, try the long jump, picnic, and play a pickup game of basketball. James wants to expand the outdoor offerings by building a regulation eight-lane running track for high school and junior college meets, and he's presently raising \$250,000 for its construction. To make a tax-deductible contribution, contact him at (256) 974-0551 or [jesseowens@charter.net](mailto:jesseowens@charter.net).

---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session V

Below is a biography for the speaker in Session V, discussing the intersection of agriculture and e-commerce with Red Land Cotton, a local family-owned manufacturer of textiles.

---

### **Anna Brakefield**

Anna Yeager Brakefield grew up quite literally in the middle of a cotton field. Gifted in the arts, Anna graduated from Auburn University in 2012 with a degree in Graphic Design. From there, Anna moved to New York City to work for KBS+P, a prestigious advertising firm. At KBS+P, Anna had the opportunity to work with high-powered clients such as BMW, Jay Z, and American Express. In 2014, Anna moved to Nashville, Tennessee where she has worked for local clients such as Singer Sewing Machine and Nashville Ballet. Over the last 4 years, Anna has received multiple awards and acknowledgments from the advertising industry. In Nashville, her work received the Nashville Mosaic Award (2015) as well as winning GOLD in the Nashville ADDY awards and receiving the Judges' Choice for Diversity (2015). Her work on the campaign launch for Jay Z Gold took GOLD again in the Digital Signage Expo (DSE) Apex content award: Retail Category (2015). In 2014 the work was awarded GOLD for Digital Out of Home Awards: Location-Based Retail Category and was on the shortlist in the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Mixx Awards. Perhaps her greatest honor so far was to be nominated by KBS+P for the prestigious BUSINESS INSIDERS TOP 30 UNDER 30 award (2014). Anna is bringing her "New York know-how" back to the farm and is eager to bring part of the family farm into homes all across America



## **GROWN IN ALABAMA**

Situated at the foot of Bankhead National Forest, our farm has been home to the Yeager family for three generations. From the very beginning, it has been where we each, in turn, have learned the value of hard work and the importance of family. And it's certainly hard work farming our renowned red soil. It indelibly tints everything it touches and turns to thick clay after a good rain. Growing here means being resilient and hearty. It's true of our crops, and it's true of our children.

Owned And Operated By Mark Yeager Since 1983, It Was His Vision And Ambition That Shaped It Into A Premier Source Of North Alabama Cotton.

In 1994, Mark Yeager built his own cotton gin, a huge undertaking that gave our family strict control over the quality of our cotton fibers. He has since spent years implementing sustainable farming practices across our thousands of acres of land until our farm was able to produce an unrivaled crop with minimal impact to the surrounding environment.

## **MADE IN THE USA**

With its roots in the rich, red soil of North Alabama, our bed sheets, bath towels, and other home linens are made with the finest homegrown cotton our farm can produce. We realized long ago that the soil was our greatest asset, so careful thought goes into our farming practices. Our cotton is rain fed, never irrigated, and produced under the most up-to-date and sustainable farming techniques.

We then custom gin our cotton which allows us to ensure that only the finest fibers our farm has to offer become a part of Red Land Cotton linens. Through every step in the process, our linens receive an unsurpassed level of quality control.

From the spinning yarn to the final cut and sew, our linens are artfully made and manufactured here in the Southern United States as part of a rich textile tradition that spans decades and generations. We work closely with each of our vendors to achieve the best result. As we've traveled in this journey, our hearts have hurt over the empty manufacturing businesses that once employed so many American workers. We are dedicated to doing our part in bringing manufacturing back to the United States.

## **INSPIRED DESIGN**

From a bed sheet passed down from the 1920s, we reverse engineered the original weave construction and yarn size to bring you linens that are truly heirloom-inspired.

Our bed sheets are unlike anything that is currently on the market. Not only are they exclusively a farm-to-home offering, but these linens are heirloom pieces, entitled to the same reverence that bed linens of yesteryear were due. Our bed linens are recreations of the bed linens of our ancestors from almost a century ago.

Our Leighton Bath Collection is made for us in Griffin, GA by one of the only towel manufacturers left in the USA. Our towels are finished with a dobby design created specifically for Red Land Cotton that features classic chevrons and decorative roping.

Our Classic Quilts are filled with 100% cotton batting, just like the heirloom quilts of yesteryear. The cotton batting is grown on our family farm in Alabama and manufactured for us in Waco, Texas. These quilts are lightweight yet warm and substantial — just like they used to be.

<https://www.redlandcotton.com/pages/about-us>



Northwestern Alabama cotton farmer Mark Yeager knows all about making lemonade out of lemons. Or rather, making a thriving cotton business out of a challenging cotton market.

He and his family have done just that for three generations on the Yeager farm, which he took over in 1983.

Despite being blessed with the farm's rich red clay soil, renowned for producing premier cotton at the foot of Bankhead National Forest, he, like other cotton producers, has faced declining prices and escalating operating expenses.

Many of Yeager's peers have exited the market for greener pastures such as soybeans and corn. According to USDA Census of Agriculture data, the number of cotton farms in Alabama dropped from 1,820 in 1987 to 925 in 2012. Cotton ranks fifth in the value of agricultural products sold in Alabama, behind poultry, other grains and crops, and cattle operations.

### **Building His Own Gin**

What Yeager needed in order to continue pursuing his passion for cotton farming was innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit. And that spirit was evident in 1994, when he took the bold step to build his own cotton gin so he could control the fiber quality of his crops.

"I wanted control of my own cotton and to mill my own cotton seed," says Yeager. "We have one key employee who works on the farm in the off-season and is very capable of running the gin in the fall, average ginning 5,000 to 6,000 bales a year in about a five-week period."

While the gin ensured quality control and provided an income stream, the family continued to look for business strategies to maximize their farm income. Last year, a simple post on Instagram pointed them to their most recent venture, which launched this fall — Red Land Cotton heirloom sheets crafted from their own crop.

"Last year, Dad posted a video to Instagram while they were ginning their cotton, and his sister, who lives in Dallas, commented that she would love some sheets from that North Alabama cotton," says Yeager's daughter Anna Brakefield. "Ever since then, Dad kept thinking on it, and asked me if I'd like to get involved."

The timing and opportunity couldn't have been better for the young marketing professional. Brakefield recently had moved back near the family farm after two years with a New York City advertising agency.



## **Defining the Brand**

With the idea of developing their own line of cotton bedding, she and her dad set about doing market research, talking with friends and neighbors to refine their concept. The late Madeline Gray, the great-grandmother of a friend, provided the light-bulb moment.

“We wanted to do something different, and had been asking around, getting ideas from people. A friend came up to me in Sunday school and mentioned that she had found some 1920s linens in a chest that had been passed down to her from her great-grandmother, Madeline Gray,” says Yeager. “I slept on them and they reminded me of sleeping on grandma’s sheets as a kid.”

The idea of vertically integrating appealed to Yeager. Father and daughter considered producing a sheet to compete in the exclusive Pima sheet market, but the romance and nostalgia of days gone by resonated with them.

“We could have made a high-thread-count, high-sheen sheet with the high-quality cotton we are growing, but I don’t think that would have correlated with who we are here on the farm,” says Brakefield, who researched pricing and messaging to differentiate Red Land Cotton sheets from other high-end sheets. “We wanted to make something that was different.”

## **Recreating Grandma’s Sheets**

What was missing, they determined, was a superior-quality sheet made to the specifications of heirloom textiles. With that concept in mind, they sent Madeline Gray’s sheet to Cotton Incorporated’s textile engineers to be analyzed, and replicated it as closely as possible. In fact, Gray is the namesake for one of two lines that entered production this fall. They mimic Gray’s originals down to the double-hemstitching, lace edging, and bleached and natural color options.

“We are using the best cotton we have, and the construction will feel very much like a 1920s sheet. It breathes much better than a tightly woven 600-count sheet,” Brakefield says, describing Red Land’s sets of heirloom sheets, which retail online starting at \$250.

Yeager set aside 50 bales from the 2015 harvest — approximately 1 percent of his total production — to test the market.

“To find a mill willing to make yarn out of our 50 bales of cotton was an interesting process,” says Yeager, who ultimately secured Parkdale Mills in North Carolina to spin the yarn. “It is really amazing to me, given the total number of bales they will do, that they accepted our proposal.”

The yarn is shipped to Hamrick Mill in Gaffney, S.C., for weaving — one of only two mills in the United States that can weave cloth the width of a bed sheet.

“I have a much greater appreciation now for what is required to take a bale of cotton all the way to a finished textile,” he says.

## **Marketing Through Social Media**

To generate advance sales, Brakefield placed drawings of the sheet designs online and promoted them on social media.

“Online marketing offers so many options and capabilities for a person in rural Alabama to reach the masses,” says Brakefield, who has relied heavily on social platforms and low-cost videos posted on the Red Land Cotton website to evoke a nostalgic tone.

“It doesn’t cost anything to go out into the field and take a video and share what you are doing,” she says. “A lot of people don’t know what goes into producing a cotton crop, and we want to be able to share that.”

She adds, “There’s always been something very warm and romantic in the old way. I think that, even though you may not necessarily want to live like the old days, that old way is reminiscent of a sweeter time. It is a different kind of romantic.”

The initial marketing alone generated sales of roughly 100 sets, which began shipping in mid-October. Red Land Cotton expects to produce approximately 3,500 sheet sets in its initial production run, and is planning a seven-fold expansion for next year.

“My goal is that every ounce of cotton that leaves the farm goes into our own textile,” Yeager says.

If the past is any predictor, those who know Yeager won’t be surprised when he achieves that goal.

“Mark has been a Farm Credit customer for more than 30 years and is a top-notch row-crop farmer and excellent businessman,” says the Yeagers’ loan officer, Heath Davis, vice president and branch manager with Alabama Farm Credit in Tuscumbia. “While other cotton farmers are diversifying into other crops, Mark is taking his cotton and further producing it. What he is doing is completely unique from anything I have seen.”

<https://www.findfarmcredit.com/landscapes-articles/from-boll-to-bedding>

My meeting with Mark and Joe Yeager was supposed to be about their Fall plans for Red Land Farms. You know, questions like, what are you working on now? When will you begin picking cotton?

But, I quickly found myself asking these two brothers more. I realized these guys answered my farm questions effortlessly because they knew from experience...from years of working alongside their father, Mark Yeager, Sr., the co-founder of Red Land Cotton. Their answers didn't come from textbooks; they came from life.

So, y'all, this post is about the Fall happenings at the farm while highlighting two hard-working Americans who help make this whole bedding-and-towel thing happen for Red Land Cotton.

We are so thankful for them!

## **CORN COMES FIRST**

Am I the only one surprised to learn that their first order of business in September was to pick corn?! I was anxious to talk about cotton, but Mark was quick to remind me that corn comes first.

See, many farmers diversify crops for the same reason we diversify stocks. (Ya know...don't put all your eggs in one basket.) By planting corn and then harvesting it, Red Land Farms has another revenue stream, a necessity in the farming business where most of your success depends on the weather and the economic strength of specific crops. Y'aaaaallll, these are two things definitely out of our control! So, diversifying it is!

And FYI, Red Land Farms has over 400 beef cattle. Prior to harvesting corn, Joe and Mark had worked hard baling hay for winter feeding.

So, to answer a question, Mark and Joe are often asked, "Do you guys just plant cotton?" They respond with a firm, "No." :)

## **4400 ACRES OF COTTON**

They admit that Red Land Farms is best known for its COTTON, primarily because Mark Yeager, Sr. has always had his mind on the next innovation.

That's why he started his own gin company in the 1990s. And that's why when a family member commented 3 years ago on Instagram that she would love sheets made from that beautiful crop, he and his daughter Anna founded Red Land Cotton.

Our cotton is more prominent than our cows and corn, and we're good with that. But they know that all of it comes together to make Red Land Farms, the backbone of Red Land Cotton's heirloom-inspired linens and two-ply woven towels.

## **THE MODERN TECHNOLOGY OF PICKING COTTON**

Starting in mid-September, you'll find Joe and Mark out in the 4400 acres of cotton that have been planted this year. They'll be driving huge roll pickers that harvest and bundle the cotton into round "modules."

The modern-day cotton pickers make this time-consuming work much, much easier. They come, though, with a hefty price tag and lots of necessary maintenance. Because of their many sensors and moving parts and the obligatory cotton fluff, they can be finicky.

In fact, Red Land Farms often designates one person through the picking season as the maintenance and supply guy. His sole purpose is not to pick cotton but to fix any broke-down roll picker so it can get back moving ASAP.

## **IN THE FIELD TODAY**

One of Mark Jr's earliest memories at Red Land Farms was looking out over a cotton field being picked. He remembers the machinery traveling up and down the rows but mostly all the people following behind the module builder. These people were paid to scoop up any cotton left behind by the picker or tossed out of the module builder.

See, 20 years ago when Mark Jr. was young, the module builder was separate from the picker. To form cotton into bundles, the picker shot cotton into the module builder where people worked presses to stamp down the cotton, and others walked alongside the picker gathering loose cotton. Picture stuffing as much cotton as possible into a cardboard box.

Today, though, roll pickers are much more efficient than picking machines 20 years ago. They leave less cotton behind, and round modules are built within the roll picker itself (no need for a separate machine) and dropped out when finished.

In most fields now, there are only seven or eight people working. Usually, two or three people are driving roll pickers, and one is driving a tractor loading the round cotton modules onto large truck beds. There is one maintenance guy and two diesel truck drivers who will transport cotton to the gin.

## **GOALS FOR THE FALL**

By the time this article is published, Mark and Joe will be finished harvesting corn and will be working in the cotton fields...or, at least, readying those pesky, yet marvelous roll pickers.

It will take these guys and their crew about 2 months to finish picking all 4400 acres. On a good day – weather and machines cooperating – they can expect to harvest around 90 acres per roll picker. Of course, good days don't happen every day. :)

Their biggest goal each year is to have most of the cotton harvested before the first frost because it can affect the quality of the crop. This mission is what drives long days and even nights - sometimes all-nighters - during picking season.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

While Joe used to skip school to drive the combine - and, of course, we don't condone this practice :) we do love that someone this dedicated to farming is driving the tractors of Red Land Farms and making decisions for future plantings.

It's people like Joe, Mark, and Mark, Sr. that keep farming alive in America. They're proud to put in 13-hour days (and often more), 7 days a week during the cotton season. It's a rush for them to see a field finished and to know their product is needed and enjoyed by others.

And, it's our joy to share their hard work through our bedding and towels at Red Land Cotton.

<https://www.redlandcotton.com/blogs/news/behind-the-seams-a-chat-with-mark-and-joe-yeager-about-fall-plans-for-the-farm>

Red Land Cotton, despite the pressures of COVID-19, had a busy 2020, and looks to be even more so this year.

The Lawrence County-based heirloom linen manufacturer last December finished work on a 25,000-square-foot warehouse, distribution center and storefront in Moulton. And the company is now rolling at a 37,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Tylerwood, Miss. Red Land's moves represent about \$1.5 million worth of investments.

This is after the company saw a sales volume surge of 215% from March through August of last year, and sales up 67% over a year ago.

"I believe that we have been smarter about our marketing on social media and search engines, and we have grown our product offerings allowing for several different points of entry to our brand," Anna Yeager Brakefield, the company's co-founder said.

Red Land Cotton started about five years ago, with Brakefield and her father using cotton from the family farm in Moulton to make luxury sheets, blankets, towels and more. The products have been featured in publications such as Southern Living, Garden & Gun and Country Living. Last year, when the pandemic hit, Red Land also pivoted to manufacture masks.

Brakefield said the company plans to double its workforce over this year. In 2020 Red Land added four jobs to its fulfillment and distribution team. The company also created 18 jobs in Mississippi producing sheets, loungewear and bathrobes.

And this year, the company looks to double its production in woven fabric and towels.

<https://www.al.com/business/2021/03/red-land-cotton-has-big-plans-for-2021.html>

---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session VI

Below are the biographies for panelists in Session VI, exploring local leadership for rural school districts.

---

### **Dr. Jon Bret Smith**

Dr. Jon Bret Smith is the current Superintendent for Lawrence County Schools. Dr. Smith is originally from Moulton, Alabama. He earned an Ed.S. in Administration from the University of North Alabama and then moved on to the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at The University of Alabama. Dr. Smith began his career by becoming the Principle at Hatton Elementary School and Principle at East Lawrence Middle School. He then was promoted to the Superintendent at Lawrence County Schools where he has worked since 2017.



Many local schools continue to struggle with a large number of student COVID infections, according to data released last week, and health experts are concerned about the long-term effects of the disease on children and the extent to which even undiagnosed students are spreading the virus.

While COVID cases and exposures continue to increase in neighboring Morgan County Schools, Lawrence County Schools on Friday reported a sharp drop in confirmed cases compared to the previous week. Superintendent Jon Bret Smith said 19 students and staff had confirmed cases of COVID, down from 132 a week earlier.

He said Moulton Middle had two cases as of Friday, down from 25 the previous week. Lawrence County High had four confirmed cases, down from 18 the previous week, and East Lawrence Middle had three confirmed cases, down from six the previous week.

Both Moulton Middle and Lawrence County High resumed in-person classes last Monday after being virtual the previous week. Hatton High School, Hatton Elementary and East Lawrence Elementary resumed in-person on Tuesday after going virtual on Aug. 25 due to a spike in COVID cases at the three campuses.

Since the six schools' transitions, the Lawrence system began requiring masks indoors at all campuses through Sept. 17. Smith said the school board will revisit the mask mandate at that time to determine whether the requirement will be lifted or renewed.

In the Morgan County School System, 398 students and staff reported as testing positive in a weekly report released Friday and another 337 were in quarantine due to close contact with an infected person.

Decatur City Schools reported 128 active COVID cases among students Friday, down from 131 a week earlier. There were 73 symptomatic students who were awaiting test results, down from 86 the previous week. The number of staff with confirmed cases of COVID had increased to 17, up from 13 the previous week.

Some school systems have begun reporting the number of confirmed COVID cases to the Alabama Department of Public Health for use in its online dashboard. Limestone County last week reported 222 confirmed cases to ADPH. The previous week, according to school officials, 209 students and staff tested positive and 124 were symptomatic and awaiting test results.

Athens City Schools on Friday reported 70 confirmed cases of COVID among students and staff. Hartselle City Superintendent Dee Dee Jones said 58 students and staff tested positive for the coronavirus last week.



Assistant State Health Officer Dr. Karen Landers, a pediatrician, on Thursday said the delta variant is having a more prolonged impact on some infected school-age children than earlier versions of the virus.

Landers said that cases in children are different this year because of the presence of “long COVID.” Children with long COVID have complications such as brain fog, inability to concentrate, sleeping issues and fatigue.

“Last year, kids did well with COVID-19 and didn’t have to be hospitalized,” Landers said at a news conference last Thursday. “This year 6-to-10% of kids may have long COVID.”

According to Landers, 24.8% of COVID cases in the last four weeks have been pediatric cases.

“I am concerned about the significant numbers of children there are with positive cases in the state of Alabama,” she said.

Landers encouraged parents to have their children ages 12 and up vaccinated. She added that children who test positive need to isolate for a full 10 days.

Suzanne Judd, a professor and epidemiologist in the UAB School of Public Health, said she suspects far more children have the virus than have been tested for it, and she worries they are spreading it to others.

“Those (young) folks are less likely to be in the hospital,” Judd said. “So we have tons and tons of cases, a much higher level of cases than we would guess, but they’re in really young people.

“We don’t know what that means in terms of what’s going to happen in the future. Is this just the first wave? Will they then give COVID to their parents who might be susceptible, to grandparents? How does young people having COVID in September influence what happens to us in October?”

According to State Superintendent Eric Mackey, there were over 9,000 COVID cases in Alabama public schools in the week ending Aug. 27.

He said that anytime a student tests positive, the parents should report it to the school nurse.

“We’ve been getting reports that there are parents in Alabama that are taking their kids to get tested, which comes back positive, then they take the kids back to school without notifying us,” Mackey said.

[https://www.moultonadvertiser.com/news/article\\_40835202-10e4-11ec-8016-27536381c4d7.html](https://www.moultonadvertiser.com/news/article_40835202-10e4-11ec-8016-27536381c4d7.html)

# Courtland



Originally known as Ebenezer, the area was settled by wealthy plantation owners in the early 1800s. The site was chosen due to its proximity to the Tennessee River and includes a town square. Courtland was founded in 1818 by the Courtland Land Company who purchased the land and subdivided lots. The town preserved incorporated the following year and preserved a central square shortly in an effort to become the seat of Lawrence County seat. However, that designation was ultimately awarded to Moulton which was more centrally located in the county.

The growth of Courtland was spurred along in the 1830s by the development of one of the Alabama's earliest railways, the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad. As a result, Courtland became a prosperous town in the late nineteenth century. The U.S. Army established an Army Air Force Flying School near Courtland in 1942, and in 1971 Champion Paper opened a processing plant near the town. The Courtland Historic District is located in the center of the town and features more than 100 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Quick Facts

**Population:** 586

**Racial Composition:** 50.7% White, 48.7% Black or African American, and 0.8% American Indian or Alaskan Native. 0.8% Hispanic or Latino of any race.

**Median Age:** 43

**County:** Lawrence

**Random Trivia:** Haunted House of Horror, located in the old Courtland High School, is among the largest haunted houses in Alabama.

## Alabama



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA** | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session VII

Below are the biographies for panelists in Session VII, discussing industry in North Lawrence County, including the closing of the paper mill's closing, intercommunity cooperation, and new opportunities.

---

### **Mayor Riely Evans Sr**

Riely Evans Sr. has been a resident of North Courtland for most of his life. He is the fourth of six siblings. He is a graduated from Courtland High where he is fondly remembered for his outstanding athletic abilities. He set many records in track and field and was equally capable on the football field. He later attended the University of North Alabama on a football scholarship. He also played a short stint with a semi-pro football team. In 1998 he married Rhonda, they have 3 children a grandson and a granddaughter on the way. In 2015 after returning to live in North Courtland he felt like he could make a difference in the town. After taking office he was faced with many challenges, financial, lack of staff and yes even lack of knowledge. He decided to accept the challenges, face them head on trusting God to give him the wisdom to overcome those obstacles. Now into the first year of his second term he can look back at those challenges as learning opportunities. He, along with a great support staff, has made major visible and even non-visible changes to the town. There have been many newly paved roads, a walking trail added, clearing of dilapidated buildings, new police vehicles and much more added. Recently, the construction of the storm shelter has begun and daily there's workers present to keep the town clean. Currently he is working on other projects to continue to add growth to the town and will provide further updates as they occur.



## **Tabitha Pace**

Tabitha Pace has worked for the Lawrence County Industrial Development Board for 23 years and was promoted to President/CEO in 2018. Her primary duties include overseeing the daily operations, assisting existing industries, workforce development and recruiting new businesses and industries to Lawrence County. Mrs. Pace received a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management of Technology from Athens State University in 1998. She also received an Associate of Applied Science degree in Health Information Technology from Wallace State College. Mrs. Pace is an active member of the Economic Development Association of Alabama, a graduate of Auburn University's Intensive Economic Development Training Course and the University of Alabama's Applied Economic Development Honors Class. Tabitha is also a recent graduate of TVA's Valley Workforce Institute and Rural Leadership Institute. She was instrumental in the location of The Jack Daniel Cooperage and Progressive Pipe Fabricators, as well as the expansions of Lockheed Martin and Nucor Tubular Products. She is a lifelong resident of Lawrence County, Alabama where she resides with her husband and two children.



---

## **Mayor Linda Peebles**

Linda Peebles is the Mayor of Courtland. She is a 1979 graduate of Hatton High School and has been employed by Champion/International Paper Company in Courtland for the past 25 years. Peebles worked as a Nuclear Security Supervisor at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant in Athens, Alabama for five years. She was also employed by Clark Gas Company in Decatur, overseeing, and managing day-to-day operations. In addition to serving as mayor of Courtland, Peebles is on the Board of Directors for Lawrence County History and Preservation Society, and Friends of the General Joe Wheeler Foundation. She is also a member of the Courtland Community Revitalization Committee and a board member of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce.





Most people who frequent the tiny town of Courtland are familiar with the stench of the International Paper mill, but for Moulton native Nick McDaniel, the facility that put him through college and paid for his first two cars as a teenager smells like money.

McDaniel, a Decatur real estate broker who was blindsided when he learned on the anniversary of 9/11 that IP will shutter its Courtland plant, is still devastated by the impending demise of Lawrence County's largest employer in March.

"I have aunts, uncles, cousins, parents and friends who have worked at this place over the years," he said. "My parents met there. This place is made up of the blood, sweat and tears of a lot of people, including my family."

In limbo about the fate of Courtland and the surrounding region, leaders have a bumpy road ahead as they attempt to survive the closing, which will leave 1,096 mill workers jobless and impact about 5,400 foresters and loggers in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, according to the Alabama Forestry Commission.

For northwest Alabama residents, the anxiety over the IP closure was heightened recently when Tennessee Valley Authority announced it will soon cut 150 workers when it closes all five units at its coal-powered Tuscumbia plant and two additional units at the Widow Creek plant near Stevenson.

The first wave of IP layoffs, which will affect less than 10 percent of the workforce, or just under 100 employees, is set to take place this week. IP spokeswoman Laura Gipson said the plant's first two paper machines were shut down in November.

Once all the machines are shut down, Gipson said a Courtland Mill closure team will remain on site for an extended time to maintain the facility.

IP's decision to close was driven primarily by dwindling demand for the mill's uncoated freesheet paper product, which has been in decline since 1999 as more consumers have switched to electronic alternatives, such as computerized filing and online publications.

The Courtland plant, which originally opened as Champion International in 1971 but was later bought out by IP, makes paper for envelopes, labels, copiers, forms, printers and magazines.

Lawrence County, a poor, blue collar county with an estimated population of 33,838 and median household income of \$40,009, will not only suffer the loss of jobs next year, but will also take a heavy financial hit when budgets in the town of Courtland, the county and the school system lose a combined \$2.3 million.

"(IP) has been a major source of jobs for the people of Lawrence County for many years," said Tony Stockton, executive director of the Lawrence County Industrial Development Board. "In relation to that, it's been a major tax producer and a major source of income for the city of Courtland. The loss is not something you're going to recover from in a short time, if you ever totally recover."

### **Bracing for impact**

It's the same story day in, day out at Friend's Café, a quaint locally owned diner in the heart of Courtland near Dollar General and the town's only grocery store, Food Valu.

Recently, an out-of-town logger visited the burger joint and expressed concern about the future of his timber company, which has a three-year contract with the Courtland mill and is facing uncertainty as the plant winds down operations.

Taking a break after feeding a hungry lunch crowd, Friend's Café workers Linda Nguyen and Nell Smith said they're praying an industry will purchase the 42-year-old plant before all the workers are laid off next spring.

"It's going to be hard on these families around here," Smith said. "Do I think it's going to affect Courtland? I think it's going to close Courtland down. I think they're going to be a ghost town."

Although IT-TRI announced plans in October to invest up to \$68 million to build a new steel tubing and pipe manufacturing plant in Trinity, Food Valu meat manager John Ratcliff worries that the promise of 100 new jobs in Lawrence County by 2016 won't be enough to keep Courtland afloat.

"My biggest concern right now is, how is this town going to survive and provide the necessary services without all of that money," the Decatur resident said. "Since I've been at Food Valu, we have doubled our meat business, so the store does OK. But we wouldn't be able to survive a 30 percent drop in business. We wouldn't be able to pay the bills."

On the real estate side, the closing of the Courtland mill has already had an impact, according to McDaniel, who works for Century 21 Prestige Properties in Decatur.

"Just within our company, we have had several deals to fall apart because of the closure," he said. "I have also heard from many of my colleagues who were experiencing the same scenarios. Some have changed their purchase plans, such as price range or time frame, while others were turned down for financing due to their employment situation."

Tim Karrh, owner of Awards & Engraving Plus in Trinity, said about 4 percent of his annual revenue is tied up in IP, which has purchased engraved equipment tags and nameplates for office doors from the family business.



Optimistic that Courtland and the surrounding areas will endure, Karrh said he is looking forward to the opening of the Jack Daniel's Cooperage barrel-making plant in Trinity next year and is hopeful that Huntsville can land Boeing's next-generation 777X jetliner manufacturing facility.

Carpenter Technology in Limestone County is also on track to open a \$518 million plant next spring. The company announced in October it plans to continue expanding by building a new superalloy powder facility across the street from its nearly-completed ultra-premium product manufacturing plant near Calhoun Community College's Decatur campus.

"I feel like north Alabama as a whole will bounce back, but it's just the transition period before the other companies are up and running," he said.

Lawrence County schools Superintendent Heath Grimes and County Commissioner Bobby Burch are two members on the task force organized to examine the effects of the closure on Lawrence County and Courtland, which receives about \$771,000 in yearly revenue from the mill.

Last week, Burch said the IP situation appears much worse than leaders originally anticipated.

"It's going to be a trickle-down effect on everybody," he said. "Since Sept. 11, you can see everybody tightening up a little bit."

Realizing the closure will have a much larger direct effect on the Lawrence County school system, Grimes said he has been forced to put more than \$10 million in capital school projects on hold.

### **Recruiting new industry**

Gov. Robert Bentley, who worked with state Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield to keep the Courtland plant open following IP's sudden announcement, told AL.com during a phone interview that efforts are continuing at the state and local levels to "secure the right industry" for Lawrence County.

Comparing the IP situation to "a disaster of any type," Bentley said leaders are working to recruit an industry that is more sustainable and long-term for north Alabama.

"One that would fit the supply chain that's there, and one that would fit with our timber industry," he added. "But of course, we will try to recruit any good company to that area. ... To find the right fit is going to be a long-term issue, not a short-term issue."

Bentley has said displaced IP workers will be eligible for career retraining dollars, and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs will connect those employees with available assistance. ADECA's Workforce Development Division has also sent a Rapid Response Team to Lawrence County to meet with workers and discuss options as the plant nears closure.

"It's difficult on everyone when we lose this many jobs," Bentley said. "Unfortunately, manufacturing is like people. It ages out, and this is a situation where the demand was no longer there for the supply. No incentives would have changed that."

### **Hope for north Alabama?**

Lawrence County, which has 318 salaried and hourly IP workers, is among several other counties, including Morgan (255 workers), Lauderdale (262 workers) and Colbert (140 workers), that will be most impacted by the closure.

An external job fair was held in Courtland in early November and attended by 660 IP employees. Gipson, who reported more than 300 workers have interviewed for alternative placements within the company, said a number of interviews are underway as a result of the job fair.

Gipson said about 41 percent of the mill's workforce is eligible for some sort of retirement. Questions about severance packages for salaried and hourly employees were deferred by IP to a local representative of the United Steelworkers, who declined to discuss the matter "out of respect" for mill workers.

State Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, said he doesn't anticipate the closing of IP will shut down Lawrence County or any other north Alabama community with a large number of mill employees.

"We have to have the spirit of resilience," he said. "It will affect us. It will create some hardship. It was our largest employer, and it will create some funding shortages. But we're just going to have to keep going forward."

Arthur E. Jones, mayor of Bastrop, La., knows the struggle Lawrence County is facing all too well. Since the early 1970s, International Paper has shuttered multiple operations in his city, which has a population of 11,300.

Jones said a single-service box plant also closed, leaving 400 workers out of a job.

The closings "changed our tax base totally," Jones said, adding that Bastrop has lost \$2 million in sales and property taxes and the number of city employees has dipped from 200 to 140 since the 2008 closing.

Despite the setback, Jones said Bastrop continues to recover from the loss.

"Right now, we're beginning to see a resurgence," he said. "People were down for a little while, but I think their spirits are coming back as they realize they can live without the mill."

[https://www.al.com/business/2013/12/some\\_fear\\_closing\\_of\\_internati.html](https://www.al.com/business/2013/12/some_fear_closing_of_internati.html)

Former International Paper employee Valerie Young remembers hearing the news that the paper manufacturer in Courtland planned to cease operations.

The date was Sept. 11, 2013. "When it first came out on the floor, we thought they were joking, but when I saw the look on our manager's face I knew it wasn't a joke," said the 64-year-old retiree. She's one of nearly 1,100 workers who lost high-paying jobs when Lawrence County's largest employer ended operations five years ago this month.

The ramifications of the closure affected not just the displaced workers and their families, but was a brutal blow to the school system and the county and municipal governments who relied on IP for much of their revenue. Five years later, the financial effects of the plant's shutdown — which have thus far cost the school system and the county more than \$1 million each — remain dire. And no wonder. The IP plant's annual payroll before it closed was \$86 million.

While the schools, the county and several municipalities have managed to maintain most services on much leaner budgets, some local governments are struggling to cover basic expenses. Both the county government and the schools have fewer employees than they did five years ago and offer fewer programs and services. "The general public doesn't understand," said District 3 Commissioner Kyle Pankey. "People say the money is there. There's not much more we can cut. This county doesn't have the money to pave roads and do things it needs to do."

IP spokesman Tom Ryan said in an email last week the decision to permanently close the facility was driven by "demand decline for uncoated freesheet paper products in the United States." Plant records showed 318 of its 1,100 workers were Lawrence County residents at the time of the mill's closure.

Young said she was more fortunate than most IP workers. IP transferred her to its Selma plant, where she was able to get the final year she needed to be eligible for 25-year retirement. "A lot of people who worked there couldn't move or IP didn't have jobs for them," she said. "Some people got jobs at plants in Decatur. Some took jobs paying a lot less doing whatever they could. I knew quite a few people who went from making more than \$30 an hour to \$12 an hour. I don't know how they are able to make it."

IP helped most distressed workers find employment, Ryan said. "About 70 percent of the 1,100 workers found alternate employment or elected to retire," he said. He said 390 workers were interested in a transfer. "Nearly all received an offer," he said. "And 150 job offers came as a direct result of job fairs we held."

Young said she now draws Social Security, IP retirement and works part-time as a substitute teacher in the Lawrence County school system. "If the plant didn't close I'd still be out there working, but when it

closed I knew another plant wasn't going to hire me at my age," she said. "I am blessed. My home is paid off, my children are grown. "My mom taught me to save up for a rainy day. It's been a stormy day."

For county officials, post-IP governance has been a constant challenge. The Lawrence County Commission's revenue from property tax collections and Tennessee Valley Authority in-lieu-of-tax payments collectively have fallen by more than \$1.1 million annually, tax records show. A decline in TVA payments is partially a result of lower industrial power use in the county since IP closed. Property tax collections fell as the closed plant's value decreased and its equipment was removed.

The commission dealt with some of the revenue losses with cuts in personnel and services. In 2012, the county employed 176 workers. In 2018, the county had 158 workers on its payroll and 19 of those were in the solid waste department that wasn't part of the county system in 2012. Effectively, the county has trimmed 21 percent of its workforce.

The cutbacks didn't end there. County employees haven't had pay hikes since 2012, and are taking home less pay because health insurance premiums and the retirement match have increased. The department overseeing the county transportation system was eliminated, and senior centers in the Aging Department must now engage in fundraising activities to make up for limited county funding.

District 2 Commissioner Norman Pool said not all of the commission's efforts to cut expenses were successful. "The commission had to create ways to save money," he said. "Closing the courthouse Thursdays and Fridays didn't work. That move probably cost the county money. The general fund was cut 45 percent in fiscal '15. ... Having good (administrators) Donna Llewellyn and Heather Dyar both working together is how we survived. Also, the commission learned to say no."

Former Sheriff Gene Mitchell said the 45 percent budget cut cost his department three arresting officers and a drug task force agent. "We went from five to four drug task agents and nine to six deputies," Mitchell recalled. "Sometimes, we pulled an investigator off his duties to help patrol during the high traffic hours. I told the administrators we were not going to cut back on answering calls. The budget cut definitely slowed down the investigating process, and some duties got shifted throughout the department." Efforts to raise taxes to maintain county services since IP closed have been rejected, with county residents voting down proposed hikes in sales tax and property tax.

### **'Uncharted waters'**

District 4 Commissioner Bobby Burch said the commission was near finalizing the fiscal 2014 budget when IP announced it was closing. "We scrambled trying to find an area and/or county which had a similar experience, but we quickly realized that we were on uncharted waters," he said. "It simply wasn't possible to project what our future monthly loss of revenues would be, but we knew that cuts were inevitable and that's where we started." He said the commission began to stabilize its finances by holding monthly budget meetings with each department head.

Dyar, now the county administrator, said one example of cost-cutting occurred in 2014, when the transportation system was costing the general fund about \$500,000 annually. "The commission voted to cut salaries and employees in that department," she said, and the North-central Alabama Regional Council of Governments agency took over the county bus service.

Robby Cantrell, NARCOG director of transportation, said Lawrence County now pays about \$50,000 annually in local matching funds for its service. He said the riders' fares pay about 10 percent of his department's budget with the remaining money coming from federal transit funding. "That has been a significant savings for the Lawrence County Commission's general fund," Cantrell said.

Dyar said county employees' hours were temporarily slashed from 40 to 32 hours. "As of right now, we are living paycheck to paycheck. This county has got to have new revenue. ... We have to live within our means to survive," she said.

Pankey, elected to the commission last year, felt the impact of IP's closure firsthand. He worked in shipping at the massive plant for 34 years. His last day at work was June 1, 2014, after his department helped finish getting the plant ready to sit idle. The following month, Pankey's wife died. "With my (IP) retirement and Social Security, it took me a month to make what I was making in a week there," he said. He now works as an ambulance driver and commissioner to help pay the bills.

Pankey has proposed to fellow commissioners that the county sell off some more property and help the Industrial Development Board attract industry to the county. The IDB announced two weeks ago 35 labor jobs paying about \$50,000 a year could be coming to a company planning to expand in the Mallard Fox West Industrial Park along Alabama 20.

## **Schools**

Superintendent Jon Bret Smith said Lawrence County Schools continues to watch every penny and is encouraged the economy is picking up. The school system's sales tax revenue initially fell about \$800,000 following IP's closure and was still down more than \$525,000 in fiscal 2018. According to school records, in fiscal 2013, the system received \$5.07 million vs. \$4.27 million in fiscal 2015 from sales tax. The 2018 total was up to \$4.55 million.

Ad valorem taxes for the system fell from \$2.98 million in fiscal 2014 to \$2.51 million in fiscal 2017. The school system's allocation from TVA in-lieu-of-tax money dropped from \$619,608 in 2013 to \$285,657 in 2018.

Smith said because IP closed, locally funded teacher units are down from 25 to eight, and capital improvement projects — such as an expansion of Hatton Elementary and replacement of aging Moulton Elementary — have been put on hold. "It's millions of dollars when you talk about the totality of it," Smith said of the unrealized funds. "Local teaching units, repairing instead of patching, more programs for our kids. It would be nice to have those things."

## Towns

Courtland and North Courtland, which financially benefited from their proximity to the plant, are now in dire financial straits. Courtland Councilman Farrell Hutto said the town presently employs about six people. According to an audit, Courtland employed 12 full-time and three part-time workers in 1998 and received \$804,000 in lieu of taxes from the paper mill. Mayor Clarence Logston cut his salary and all but one council member agreed to give up the \$150-a-meeting pay they were receiving.

Former North Courtland Mayor Ronald Jones, who left office in 2016, remembers seeing a drastic decrease in sales tax revenue from Sivley Food and Fuel store, better known as RKM, at Alabama 20 and Lawrence County 150. "Everyone in town was directly affected, either through losing a job or a financial spiral the town was in after IP closed," Jones said. "We were already struggling and have been since we incorporated in the 1980s. RKM was our largest revenue generator."

"We lost maybe 70 to 80 percent of our income when IP closed," Jones said. "Some of our employees didn't get paid for two or three months. We had to wait on the TVA check to come in or ad valorem tax to be paid." In 2016, Jones said he was forced to take police vehicles out of service because there was no money for insurance. "I couldn't allow officers to drive the cars," he said. "If something happened, we would have been sued and in a much bigger mess."

Current Mayor Riely Evans Sr., who worked at IP for five years and lost his job when it shut down, said the town still struggles, but the residents are adjusting. "We're surviving," he said. "We don't owe any money, and everybody is getting paid on time." Evans said IP offered him a position at its Prattville plant but he wanted to stay in north Alabama.

After IP closed, Sivley Food and Fuel eliminated its third shift and about six workers, said District Manager Scott Maxwell. He said they went from being open 24 hours a day to 18 hours. "The closure hurt diesel fuel sales about 50 percent, and the deli sales are down about 30 to 40 percent," Maxwell said.

Assistant store manager Yolanda Young said about 400 trucks stopped in daily during the plant's heyday. "Everybody who comes in here is like family," she said. "The family just got a little smaller. We'll survive by the grace of God."

Five years after IP's closure, Pankey said the county is still working to get back on its feet. " (IP) did what they had to do," he said. "Lawrence County was living before IP closed, and Lawrence County is still living."

[https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/lawrence\\_county/lawrence-county-still-struggles-years-after-international-paper-s-closure/article\\_edb71113-3265-5cf3-8e07-72f93c8e7019.html](https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/lawrence_county/lawrence-county-still-struggles-years-after-international-paper-s-closure/article_edb71113-3265-5cf3-8e07-72f93c8e7019.html)



## Lockheed Martin Breaks Ground on New Weapons Facility in Courtland

Casey Albritton | WAAY TV

September 16, 2019

Lockheed Martin is bringing dozens of jobs to Courtland. Lockheed Martin's new facility is the Hypersonics Manufacturing Facility, and leaders say they will be hiring for 72 more jobs. By February of 2020, a large area in Lawrence County will hold the brand new facility.

Lockheed Martin said this new building will bring more people to Courtland. "Courtland's just a small, bedroom-like community. We have a lot of older people who live here," said a resident, Peggy Hazle.

Peggy Hazle has lived in Courtland her whole life and she describes the area as a ghost town. "I would like to see it grow somewhat, get some improved schools in our area and bring in some more folks," said Hazle. She says the majority of people who live there are retired, and she is excited to hear the new Lockheed Martin Hypersonics Facility is being built in her hometown. "Hopefully, it would bring in some more young people and rejuvenate our community," said Hazle.

Employees at the facility will build and test hypersonic missiles and equipment. Monday's groundbreaking ceremony brought in high-level dignitaries, including Governor Kay Ivey, Senator Richard Shelby and the U.S. Army's Chief of Staff. "It will enable our nation to compete with, deter, and if necessary, defeat any adversary who wishes our nation harm," said U.S. Army Chief of Staff, Gen. James McConville.

"This is a win for the United States of America because our community here in the Tennessee Valley, we're going to be building a weapons system that is unmatched in human history," said Alabama Representative Mo Brooks.

Both Lockheed Martin and residents say this facility could help Courtland grow. "The individual that we hire, their children will want to come work for Lockheed Martin as well and hopefully grow a community," said Vice President of Hypersonic Strike Programs, Eric Sherff.

"Hopefully, it will bring in some people who might be interested in opening up some small businesses and attract more people to our historical town," said Hazle.

Lockheed Martin officials tell WAAY 31 in February of 2020, the first building of the facility will be built, and then, a year after that, the second building will be finished.

Lockheed Martin said the manufacturing facility in Courtland will be working directly with the engineering facility in Huntsville to improve the nation's missile defense system.

<https://www.waaytv.com/content/news/Lockheed-Martin-breaks-ground-on-new-weapons-facility-in-Courtland-560484131.html>

# Community History/Profile

Courtland in Lawrence County is part of the Decatur Metropolitan Area. The town is concentrated along Big Nance Creek, a tributary of the Tennessee River west of Decatur and southeast of Muscle Shoals, and operates with a mayor-council form of government.

Believed to be located on the site of a Native American village, Courtland's location was chosen by planters from Virginia and the Carolinas who saw economic potential of its fertile cotton-growing land that could be taken to market to New Orleans by way of the Tennessee River.



The town began as a small settlement called Ebenezer in the early 1800s. In 1818, the Courtland Land Company bought the land on which the town is now situated and subdivided it. These land speculators reserved a plot for a town square in case the town became the county seat. Courtland was incorporated in 1819 and reincorporated in 1829.

Like many Alabama towns, the railroad played an integral role in its early development. Courtland became a stopping point on one of the earliest railroads in the state when in 1832 its citizens built the Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur railroad to avoid the treacherous shoals on the Tennessee River when shipping cotton and other exports to market.

The 50-mile-long rail line initially operated using horses to draw the train. A steam engine was added in 1834. The line was bought by the Memphis & Charleston Railroad in 1850, was destroyed during the Civil War, was rebuilt and became part of the Great Southern Railroad.

Courtland was a prosperous town by the late 19th century, with businesses that included several saloons, a grist mill, three cotton gins, three blacksmith shops and an ice house.

During World War II Courtland was home to the Courtland Army Airfield. The airfield was dismantled after the war and given to the city of Courtland, which now operates it as Courtland Airport. The U.S. Army established an Army Air Force Flying School near Courtland in 1942, and in 1971 Champion Paper opened a processing plant near the town, now owned by International Paper. The Norfolk-Southern Railway still runs through Courtland.

By the early 1990s, more than 100 buildings in Courtland Historic District – most dating from the 1830s-1930s—were on the National Register of Historic Places. Several architectural styles are represented in these early buildings that span nearly 175 years. The Federal period of Courtland's first 60 years reflects the town's early ties to Virginia and the upper South. Victorian Colonial Revival style is prevalent in Courtland's buildings constructed in the late-1800s and early-1900s.



# Design Proposals/Challenges



Courtland has a historic civic square with a central green bounded on three sides by 1-2, or 3 story masonry buildings and is bounding on the south side by a railroad track that features a historic depot. Before COVID, the city of Courtland was hosting regular events such as markets, tree lightings and car shows that enjoyed large turn outs. The square however, has not had regular sustained pedestrian traffic daily and has a lot of vacancy. Mayor Peebles would like to focus on how she can leverage this great asset into a place where people come daily to frequent thriving local businesses. She mentioned the town of Bell Buckle, TN as a great example of the type of economic and pedestrian activity she would like to see in Courtland.



# North Courtland



North Courtland is a town that was originally a part of the neighboring Courtland and shares much of its history. During the area of legal racial segregation, African American citizens were primarily located in an area called “The Hill.” No fire or police services were extended to the area by the town of Courtland, which forced the community to solely rely on the resources provided by Lawrence County. As a result, the citizens of “The Hill” decided to separate from the town of Courtland in 1981 and form a separate town, known as North Courtland.

North Courtland’s lone school, R.A. Hubbard is located at the old site of Central High School, an all-black school that was closed in 1970 after integration. Named for the Central’s former Principal, what was initially R. A. Hubbard Elementary merged with Courtland High School and became R. A. Hubbard High School serving grades 7-12 following district realignment. In 2019, the school was designated as a failing school by the Alabama Accountability Act and has also experienced declining enrollment, causing increased concern about the school’s possible closure.

## Quick Facts

**Population:** 622

**Racial Composition:** 98.3% Black or African American and 1.7% White. 0.8% were Hispanic or Latino of any race.

**Median Age:** 44

**County:** Lawrence

**Random Trivia:** North Courtland holds a Founders Day celebration every summer to commemorate the town’s incorporation.

## Alabama



---

## BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Session VIII

Below are biographies for presenters and panelists in Session VII, exploring the legacy of R. A. Hubbard, founder of Central High School, the first public school for African Americans in Lawrence County.

---

### **Dr. May Bolden (Presenter)**

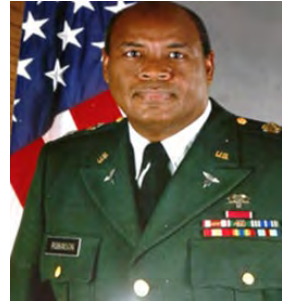
Dr. May Bolden received her B.S. and M.A. degrees from Alabama State University. She received her Class A, AA Certification, and Education Specialist Degree from the University of North Alabama. She earned a doctorate from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where she published a dropout intervention plan for at-risk students and a dissertation entitled “Second Chance.” Her dropout program has been duplicated throughout the state. Dr. Bolden has worked extensively with students in grades K-12 and has served as a teacher, Director of Student Services, Community Education Director, administrator, and Attendance Supervisor in Florence City Schools. She has also worked as a teacher and coach in the Lawrence County School System. Dr. Bolden has over 40 years of experience in education. She has worked with the State Department of Education Truancy Task Force in the revision of the State of Alabama Attendance Manual. She has presented at many conferences on subjects such as graduation tracking, attendance strategies, at-risk programs that work, operation rescue, second chance, and how to keep children in school. Bolden was featured in the Shoals Woman of the Year magazine as well as the Times Daily for her work as a humanitarian in the city of Florence. The love of her life is working with at-risk students and finding ways to help them succeed. She has served on many boards which include Chairman of the board for Florence Federal Credit Union, Board of directors for Shoals Scholar Dollar, DHR Quality Assessment Team, Lauderdale County Children’s Policy Council, Boys’ and Girls’ Club, Northwest Alabama Food Bank, Family Success Center, Aids Coalition and CLAS where she served as president for Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools. She has also been named Outstanding Teacher of the Year, Outstanding woman of the year, and teacher of the year during her tenure. Dr. Bolden was instrumental in the development of the SPAN program in the city of Florence which serves at-risk students. She was also instrumental in the development of the Truancy Intervention Program and helped to develop the Family Success Center. She attends the First Missionary Baptist Church of Courtland.





### **Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Robert C. Robinson (Presenter)**

LTC (Ret.) Robert C. Robinson is a 1970 graduate of Central High School in Courtland and holds the distinction of being its last class president and Valedictorian. His civilian education includes a B. S. Degree in Biology from Florence State University (UNA) and a master's degree in Systems Management from the University of Southern California and course work at Arundel Community College, University of Maryland, and Webster University. LTC Robinson is also a graduate of Graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College, Academy of Health Sciences Basic and Advanced Course, Army Personnel Program, and Combat Casualty Care Course. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1974 and retired from the Army in 1999 as a Lieutenant Colonel. During his tenure, he served as the Commander of C Company of the 15th Medical Battalion, Adjutant of Kimbrough Army Hospital, Chief of Plans and Operations of Martin Army Hospital, Executive Officer and Chief of Plans and Operation at Brooke Army Medical Center, three tours in the Office of the Surgeon General, and one tour as the aide to Major General Floyd Baker. Upon retirement from the Army, LTC Robinson worked as the Director of Health Services at Champion/International Paper at the Courtland mill. In 2002, I began work as the Senior Instructor of the Junior ROTC Program at Courtland/R.A. Hubbard High School and retired in 2012.



---

### **Rev. J.E. Turnbore (Presenter)**

Rev. J.E. Turnbore has been married to Dana Turnbore for 32 years and have three children and one grandson. He has been in the gospel ministry for 23 years and serve has an associate minister at First Missionary Baptist Church, Courtland, Alabama. He attended Huntsville Bible College in Huntsville, Alabama, from 2008 to 2014 and received a Biblical Studies Degree, Associates in Pastoral Studies, and a bachelor's degree Divinity and a Biblical Counseling Certificate. He is a former member of the Council of Aging with the North Alabama Regional Council of Governments. He is presently the President of the Lawrence County Branch of the NAACP and Chair of the Alabama State Legacy Committee. He has had the opportunity to work with many youth groups such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Serving God as a faithful leader in his community, church, or whatever area the Lord allows is how he finds peace.



### **Commissioner Jesse Byrd (Panelist)**

Jesse Byrd, a proud husband, father, and grandfather grew up on the farm in Hillsboro, Alabama, where sharing and making things better or trying to improve it has always been a part of life. After graduating from Courtland High in 1977 and acquiring an Associate of Science degree from Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, Alabama, Jesse joined the workforce and retired from International Paper, formerly known as Champion Paper, after 32 years of service. In 2018 Jesse was elected to serve as Commissioner for District 1 in Lawrence County. Jesse has always been very active in the community through serving as a treasurer and the deacon board of his church, being a local farmer, and a referee for local school sports. Jesse is the Chairman for the board of directors at North Central Alabama Regional Council of Government (NARCOG) that provides services to Lawrence, Morgan, and Cullman County in writing grants, assisting the elderly, furnishing senior meals, loans for local businesses, and more. Jesse is also the Lawrence County representative on the legislative committee for the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA). As Commissioner in a county where funds are limited and have very little tax-based revenue, Jesse wants to find ways to produce more revenue and utilize what resources they do have in a more effective manner.



---

### **Thomas Davis (Panelist)**

Mr. Thomas Edward Davis was born in 1929 to Edward and Carrie Davis in a small shack owned by Annie Wheeler, a plantation owner. At the age of seven he started working in the fields with his father until the age of eighteen. He was born into a Christian family and went to church every Sunday. At the age of 13 he accepted Christ and joined the First Missionary Baptist Church of Courtland, Alabama, where he remains today and serves faithfully on the deacon board of this church for about 50 years with many of these years alongside R.A. Hubbard. He was encouraged by his parents and Mr. R. A. Hubbard, the principal at that time, to go to college at Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama, to pursue a degree in Math and Science. After graduating college, Mr. Davis landed his first job in Demopolis, Alabama. After only 4 months on the job, he was drafted into the US Marine Corps and trained as a Marine Gunner. He served 2 years in the Marines, with one of those years on the front line. He was wounded and shipped to a Japanese Hospital. While in the hospital, he received the Purple Heart of Honor for his actions. Upon leaving the hospital he was sent back to the front line to finish his 1 year of combat. Thru it all, the Lord heard his prayers and he's still with us today. Thank you, Lord. He was finally discharged and began working with Mr. R.A. Hubbard as a teacher, assistant principal, and guidance counselor for 2 years. At church, he was the Superintendent of Sunday School for 22 years, church janitor, church bus driver, and manicured the lawn.



## **Bobby Diggs (Panelist)**

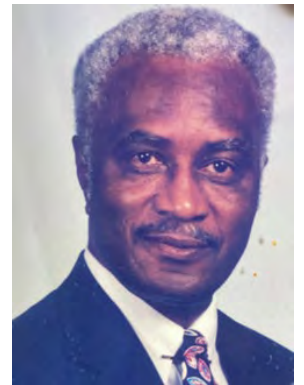
Bobby Diggs began his humble beginning in Courtland. He is married and has two children. After high school he attended Alabama State University in Montgomery and obtained a BS degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Sociology. He is a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity. He was an employee of Champion/International Paper for 32 years, finally retiring in August 2020. In July of 2020, he received a Master of Ministry in Pastoral Study from Huntsville Bible College. Bobby is a member of Grace Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, where he has held positions as Vice-Chairman of the church's Daycare, served on Trustee Board, Board of Directors, and Pastoral Advisory Committee. He was called into Ministry in 2017, and is an Ordained Elder. Bobby has been involved in the following community and civic organizations: President of PTA, President of youth leagues, Coach of youth leagues (basketball/softball/baseball/football), Community outreach program, President of NAACP (presently 1st Vice), and served as Chairman and member of the Lawrence County School Board. While being an advocate of his community, it has given him the ability to cross-over into different boundaries as well as work with various ethnic groups and communities. Most recently as Chairman of Legal Redress, his time and effort has been toward working with the NAACP and the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) attorneys on keeping the local high school, Richard Alexander Hubbard (RAH), open.



---

## **Eliga Diggs Jr. (Panelist)**

Eliga Diggs Jr. was born in 1935 and raised on a farm in Courtland, Alabama. After high school he joined the United States Army where he served 2 years. He came back to Courtland, married and started a family, he's the father of four children, thirteen grandchildren, and sixteen great grandchildren. He worked for Champion/International Paper for 28 years. Eliga was a member of Jackson Chapel CME Church, where he served as Sunday School Superintendent, Trustee, and Deacon. While there he was placed over the construction of a new church. In 1980 he joined Mary's Temple Church of God in Christ. The Pastor appointed him over the building project of constructing a new church. After completion of the new church, the name was changed to Grace Tabernacle Church of God in Christ where he presently serves as a Deacon. Eliga has been part of several community and civic groups. He has served as Trustee of the Lawrence County School System, member of the Lawrence County NAACP (presently a member), managed sports organizations, and owned several businesses. Currently Eliga is involved with the town of North Courtland. He is a co-founder of the town, where he worked tirelessly to form a committee to address the concerns of starting a municipality. In 1984 the town of North Courtland received its charter, and to this day it is a thriving town. North Courtland is the home of R.A. Hubbard High School. The North Courtland Community Park (Papa Diggs Park) is named in his honor.



### **Mayor Riely Evans Sr. (Panelist)**

Riely Evans Sr., Mayor of North Courtland, has been a resident of North Courtland for most of his life. He is the fourth of six siblings. He is a graduate of Courtland High where he is fondly remembered for his outstanding athletic abilities. He set many records in track and field and was equally capable on the football field. He later attended the University of North Alabama on a football scholarship. He also played a short stint with a semi-pro football team. In 1998 he married Rhonda Billings and they have 3 children, a grandson, and a granddaughter on the way. In 2015 after returning to live in North Courtland he felt like he could make a difference in the town. After taking office he was faced with many challenges such as financial, lack of staff, and yes even lack of knowledge. He decided to accept the challenges and face them head on while trusting God to give him the wisdom to overcome those obstacles. Now into the first year of his second term he can look back at those challenges as learning opportunities. He, along with a great support staff, has made major visible and even non-visible changes to the town. Daily there are workers present to keep the town clean, many newly paved roads, walking trail added, clearing of dilapidated buildings, new police vehicles, and much more added. Recently, the construction of the storm shelter has begun. Currently he is working on other projects to continue to add growth to the town.



---

### **Christine Garner (Panelist)**

Christine Garner is a lifelong resident of Town Creek, Alabama, although she lived in Louisiana for 10 years. She is divorced and the mother of three grown children and three grandchildren. She also has seven brothers and two sisters. She graduated from Hazelwood High School then attended the University of North Alabama where she majored in Accounting. She later graduated from the same school with a Masters in Business Administration. Currently, she is the General Manager of the Lodge and Cottages at Joe Wheeler State Park where she has worked for the past 23 years. As mentioned about her stay in Louisiana, even though she majored in Accounting in school she was lucky enough to secure a position with a business college where she taught Accounting and a variety of other business courses. This is where her respect for education and educators really began. She began to understand how important education is to all people but especially to people of color. She feels that this is our avenue to success. That is the reason why she ran for the position of District One Board of Education Representative in 2010. She is currently in the fifth year of her second term serving on the Board. Regardless of whether she serves as a representative on the Board of Education or as a member of any organization in the community, she will continue to advocate for education.





## Dr. Jewel Crutch Satchel (Panelist)

Dr. Jewel Crutch Satchel is a graduate of Town Creek Elementary School and Central High School/R.A. Hubbard High. She received her B.S., M.Ed. degrees and AA certification from Alabama A&M University. Dr. Satchel received the Educational Specialist degree (Ed.S.) from The University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa and Ph.D. from UAB with emphasis on a phenomenal study of why students become early leavers (dropouts). Dr. Satchel realized the authentic of the results of her study after viewing the findings of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation study, published the same year her research was published. Dr. Satchel was employed as a teacher with the New Orleans Parrish School Board for one year. She worked as a teacher, curriculum specialist, and principal with the Lawrence County School system for 43 years. The schools she was assigned to (Tennessee Valley Elementary, East Lawrence Elementary, and R.A. Hubbard High School) were always recognized by the state test results as some of the highest performing schools in Lawrence County during her tenure. One of her greatest educational honors as an educational leader was the recognition of East Lawrence Elementary as one of the first sixteen schools in the state of Alabama to lead out as a Reading Initiative School, setting the example for other elementary schools in the state. Dr. Satchel has served in several leadership capacities on the state and local levels. She served as state secretary for The Elementary Association of Principal and Supervisors, The Alcoholic Anonymous Council, The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Co-chairman of the Elementary Education State Conference, The Marva Collins Recruitment Committee, and others. Dr. Satchel is a member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority.





### **Brief Snapshot of Early Education (Information provided by panelists)**

Informal education for blacks in Courtland and the surrounding communities was initially faith based. Many communities in the surrounding area used their church as a public grade school. Students could only advance as far as the second grade.

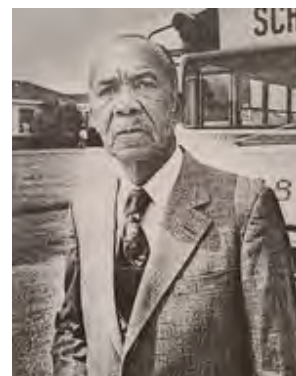
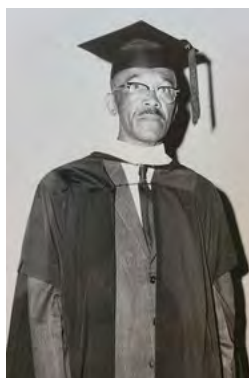
A two-story Academy building was built on the Muscle Shoals Colored Missionary Baptist Association site which accommodated a church school for ministers and a dormitory for boys. Later Courtland's black school children attended grades 1-12 at the dormitory.

After the Academy burned in 1928, students (both boys and girls) in grades 1-3 attended school in the "Charity Bell House" which was a home that had been donated for use as a school. Grades 4-6 attended school at the Masonic Hall owned by the Order of Masons in Courtland. The junior and senior high school students attended school in a house owned by local resident Frank Davis. This house, still standing today, was added to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage on March 18, 2021. The home is currently occupied by a fourth generation Frank Davis family member.



**Last Building to Serve as an Early Education Facility on the Academy Property**

### **Legacy of Richard Alexander Hubbard**



Mr. Richard Alexander (R.A.) Hubbard as a young student was the janitor at the Academy. His jobs were keeping the place clean, milking the cow, and picking up mail for the Academy. It was during this time that Hubbard envisioned and declared to others that one day he would start a school.

After earning his degree, he returned to a teaching position. Later the county allowed the community to rent the Academy. Mr. Hubbard was appointed as the first black principal of a school in Lawrence County.

Recognizing the struggle that blacks continued to endure in the segregated and often unjust South, Principal Hubbard was convinced that education was the way forward. A man of conviction and great foresight, he used all the resources that were at his disposal to ensure that this small community of black people were given the opportunity to live successful and productive lives. After several years of trying to educate young black boys and girls in these decentralized teaching facilities, he signed a mortgage contract to buy five acres of land at the enormous (for that period) price of \$750 to establish a centralized educational institution for black students living in Courtland and nearby surrounding areas.

The current school still sits on the original five acres that were purchased. Being a poor man, Principal Hubbard organized the teachers, parents, and others in the community in efforts to help to pay for the land. He sold hotdogs and “pig ear” sandwiches to students during the school day to raise money towards the debt. On weekends, school socials (dances) were held where he sold fish dinners. He also planted cotton and vegetables on the land, crops that were harvested by the high school students to help pay for the land. He also engaged local churches in the effort. The churches dedicated every fifth Sunday to raising money for the school.

In the mid-1940's, after the end of World War II, Principal Hubbard approached the military leadership at the recently deactivated Courtland Army & Air Force Base about the possibility of acquiring unused barracks for use as school buildings on the newly purchased land. Although exempted from service in the military during the war, Principal Hubbard served as an associate member of the Local Draft Board. President Franklin D. Roosevelt later cited him for his meritorious service. Using money from community fundraisers, Principal Hubbard purchased one barrack building and turned it into four classrooms. By the late 1940's two additional barracks had been purchased – one that served as the principal's office, a lunchroom, and a library.



**The Three Barracks**

It was not until 1952 that the County started funding Courtland Colored High School and ground was broken to construct a permanent structure consisting of eight classrooms in a north/south orientation parallel to Jesse Jackson Parkway. This work was initiated during the tenure of Mr. Moody who served as Superintendent of Lawrence County Schools from 1948 until 1953. A prerequisite for the construction was that the acreage on which the barracks complex resided had to be deeded to Lawrence County. During the tenure of Woodrow Burks as Superintendent, 1957-1961, the county added additional classrooms, the gymnasium, and restrooms. The gymnasium also served as the band room. This construction began the east/west oriented portion of the high school. The next addition was the vocational (agriculture and home economics) and athletic facilities. The elementary hallway and the field house were completed in 1966.

Prior to 1970, temporary mobile classrooms, to include art and reading rooms, were located in the front of the school. The last stand-alone addition completed prior to 1970 was the science lab and library which is located between the gym and main high school hallway. The library is now located in the main building.

Starting with a teaching staff of four and a student body of slightly over 100, by the late 1960's the school had grown from three barracks to one with a science department that was envied by Lawrence County, with instruction being provided by 36 teachers to more than 1,000 students.



**Central High School - 1965**

Largely, this was due to the vigilance of Principal Hubbard who with his wife, attended seminars in Montgomery and Huntsville for educators to learn about what their schools were entitled to have.

The personal and professional hardships that Principal Hubbard endured in the effort to provide access to education were numerous. He faced opposition to some of his efforts both from within and outside of the community. However, nothing would deter him from his fearless dedication to the welfare of children. He engaged teachers in the fields of music and art, purchasing a baby grand piano for use by the music teacher.

### **Name Changes**

White students residing in the Courtland area were initially bussed to Hazelwood School in Town Creek to attend high school. The county built a school to accommodate the white students and named it Courtland High School and required Mr. Hubbard to rename Courtland High School to Courtland Colored High School. This similarity in names at the black and white schools caused issues with school mail. Courtland Colored High School's name was changed to Central High School. Mr. Hubbard's rationale for selecting a school name beginning with "C" was that his school athletic gear was already emboldened with a "C".

When desegregation was ordered in the fall of 1970 Central High School followed the same demise as other black high schools, becoming an elementary school or closure. Central High School became Courtland Elementary. Courtland High School remained the high school. Although Mr. Hubbard was best credentialed, he was told he had to be principal of the elementary school resulting in the majority of students refusing to integrate the first semester. Efforts were made by parents, students, and community leaders and as a result Mr. Hubbard started as principal of Courtland High School in the second semester in 1971. Mr. Hubbard decided to retire in 1972.

How historic!! Mr. Hubbard, a black principal, would invariably hold the distinction of being Central High Schools only principal from 1936 through the first semester of 1970/1971. In addition, Mr. Hubbard gained tenure at Courtland High School from the second semester of the term until his retirement in 1972.

The name Courtland Elementary was subsequently changed to R.A. Hubbard Elementary in 1982.



On August 5, 2004, the Superintendent of schools signed a memorandum affecting the merger of Courtland High and R.A. Hubbard Elementary. This merger placed the high school and elementary school in the same location (Central High School) and in the basic physical structure it occupied in 1970 when ordered desegregation was implemented. The name given to the K-12 school is R.A. Hubbard High School.

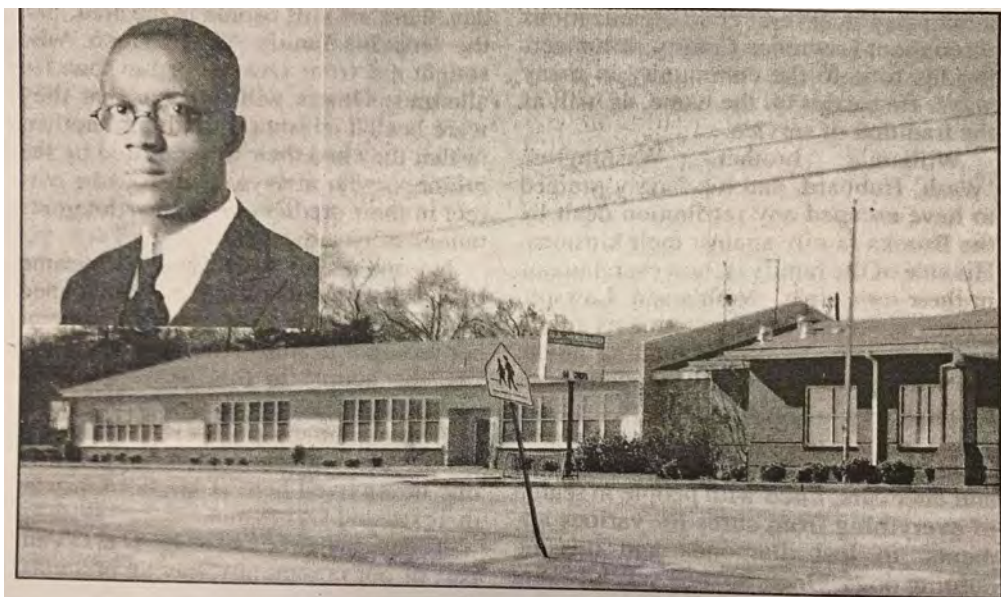


On May 9, 2009, Judge Procter gave approval to a plan which will consolidate R.A. Hubbard High School and Hazelwood High School beginning school year 2009-2010. R.A. Hubbard will be a K-12 facility whereas Hazelwood would retain its elementary school and grades 7 and 8.

Due to district realignment in 2013, Hazelwood's grades 7 and 8 moved to R.A. Hubbard and R.A. Hubbard's K-6 grades moved to Hazelwood.



**R.A. Hubbard School – 2021**



Rather Brown / Special to The Advertiser

William Hubbard's grandson, R.A. Hubbard, founded what is now R.A. Hubbard High School in Courtland in 1936. The U.S. News and World Report named R.A. Hubbard a bronze medal school in its 2015 list of the Best High Schools in Alabama. Criteria requirements included that at least one-third of the school's students to perform above the state average.



After finding its name on the state's failing list this past November, and meeting the deadline for school choice returns from parents, the fate of R.A. Hubbard remains uncertain, according to Lawrence County Schools Superintendent Jon Bret Smith.

When the school was placed on the failing school list, the Lawrence County School System had to give students the option to transfer to a non-failing school in compliance with the Alabama Accountability Act.

School choice letters were sent out beginning Jan. 1, and in a board meeting Monday night, Smith said the deadline to respond to those letters had passed on March 1.

President of the Lawrence County Chapter of the NAACP Jan Turnbore pressed Smith for direct answers concerning the high school's fate and for answers concerning renovations and maintenance at Hazelwood Elementary, which lies in the same school district.

"You're at a point where there's lots of improvements to be done at Hazelwood Elementary," Turnbore said. "Will we hear in this meeting tonight, the process going forward for both R.A. Hubbard and Hazelwood Elementary?"

With the school's fate riding on response rates from parents, Smith said 60 percent of the school choice forms had been returned, and 40 percent were left without a response.

In a November community meeting at R.A. Hubbard High School, Smith had said parents not returning their letters would be counted as having opted for their child to stay at R.A. Hubbard.

"We have formed a committee to count the votes... We're checking about timelines and things like that, but for exact numbers, we're not there yet," said Smith. "Of that 60 percent that did return, 50 percent wanted to stay, and about 10 percent wanted to leave R.A. Hubbard."

With a student body of about 140, Smith said the school could not afford to lose 10 students.

"R.A. Hubbard cannot stand to lose any students. That comes close to losing another teacher unit for the school," he said.

Turnbore said he doubted the school would lose 10 students, and Lawrence County NAACP Vice President Bobby Diggs argued that Smith was not being transparent.

"He's not giving us specific numbers," said Diggs. "If 90 percent of the students are staying at the school, that school should not close."

“There is proof of the work being done at every school in the county, but you see little work being done at R.A. Hubbard. He didn’t give us a direct answer on anything,” added Turnbore.

During Monday night’s meeting, school board members approved a contract with Quality Paving for asphalt paving at R.A. Hubbard for \$16,105.

R.A. Hubbard teacher Leslie Gillespie said she couldn’t know whether school EFT funds received from the state this school year were being distributed among all schools evenly. In the past school year, she said one awning had been installed at R.A. Hubbard, and to her knowledge, no other work had been done.

LaKesha McCoy, a parent of one student at R.A. Hubbard and one child who attends a Head Start Pre-K program at Hazelwood Elementary, said she’s concerned Smith isn’t doing all he can to support the two schools.

“I feel that he can do more. These other schools—I call them schools on the top of the mountain—they get more privileges than we do down in the valley. It’s not right, and they work as hard as the other schools do,” she said.

McCoy, who also volunteers with her son’s Head Start program, said she noticed the bathrooms at Hazelwood falling into disrepair. She said she’s also concerned about the school’s gym, which has seen recent damage from flooding.

“I see a lot of stuff that needs to be done around the school. From my understanding, they’ve put orders in, but I haven’t seen anything happen yet,” she added.

Smith said he was unaware of any flooding issues at Hazelwood Elementary, but said the board would look into those complaints.

Smith, who said he’s been instructed by the Alabama State Department of Education to stay neutral during this decision process, explained that funding for each school that includes set costs like utilities and teachers’ salaries is divided by the number of students at the school. This means schools with lower enrollment have higher costs per student.

He said R.A. Hubbard’s declining enrollment, which has steadily decreased since the 2009-2010 school year following a school consolidation that closed Hazelwood High, has cost the school system \$15,881 per student while other school’s in the system cost about \$6,000 per student.

“We strive to treat all our schools equally,” Smith said. “Each one has its separate needs, so equal doesn’t always seem fair. We try to meet each school’s needs, but we do fund those two campuses at a higher rate than we do most of the other schools.”

[https://www.moultonadvertiser.com/news/local/article\\_f13d0c8a-63c7-11ea-80a3-e77d5f80aa6f.html](https://www.moultonadvertiser.com/news/local/article_f13d0c8a-63c7-11ea-80a3-e77d5f80aa6f.html)

# Russellville



Russellville is the largest city and seat of Franklin County. The community was developed after the War of 1812 along Jackson's Military Road, a route from Nashville to New Orleans. The city was incorporated in 1819 and is named for an early settler Major William Russell who helped in the road's construction and served with Andrew Jackson in the Creek War of 1813-14. The Cedar Creek Furnace was the first iron ore furnace in Alabama and in the Reconstruction era, Russellville was a center of the iron and steel industry.

The construction of a poultry plant in 1989 has led to an influx of immigrants, primarily Mexican and Guatemalans to the area. As a result, Franklin County has the highest percentage Hispanic residents in the state. The Russellville City School System serves local students with two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Russellville High School ranks in the Top 20 in football all-time wins across the state with more than 600 victories.

## Quick Facts

**Population:** 10,855

**Racial Composition:** 67.0% White, 9.4% Black or African American, 3.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.1% Asian, 0.0% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 0.6% from two or more races. 37.2% were Hispanic or Latino of any race.

**Median Age:** 32

**County:** Franklin

**Random Trivia:** An annual Watermelon Festival is held each August in downtown, and includes music and entertainment, car and tractor shows, and arts and crafts.

## Alabama



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session IX

Below is the biography for the speaker in Session IX, a exploring the work of Good Shepherd Catholic Church, a growing bilingual faith community, and their service and outreach to the local community.

---

### **Rev. Vincent Bresowar**

The Rev. Vincent Bresowar has served as pastor of Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Russellville since 2015. A native of Baton Rouge, he was raised in Birmingham, graduated from Homewood High School in 1998, and attended Auburn University for three years. Rev. Bresowar joined the Air Force for three years and worked at UAB as a medical technician before applying to become a seminarian. He finished his bachelor's degree at Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans and received his master's degree in theology in from Notre Dame Seminary in 2011. Later that year, Rev. Bresowar was ordained as a priest at Saint Paul's Catholic Church in Birmingham. Afterwards, he was named chaplain for St. John Paul II Catholic High School and associate pastor at Holy Spirit Catholic Church both in Huntsville, where he served both the Anglo and Hispanic communities.



Sister Marynell Morris said after converting to Catholicism, one day the Lord told her to journey to Russellville to speak to the church about her mission to bring nuns to a local parish. The journey to Russellville paid off, now that Morris lives in the original Good Shepherd Catholic Church rectory with two nuns.

Sister Teresa Perol and Sister Cecilia Corpus moved to Russellville from Venezuela after being in contact with Morris.

“We actually met through Facebook,” Morris said. “I was saying something about how I was looking for nuns, and (Perol) sent me a friend request. She said she and Sister Cecilia both felt like God was pulling them in a different direction.”

Perol, Corpus and Morris are a part of the Reparatrix Sisters of the Sacred Heart, an organization founded in Italy.

“The word reparatrix, it means to repair, us first and then all mankind,” Perol said.

Church pastor Vincent Bresowar said the nuns are already hard at work establishing their own ministry. He said they will be involved in all aspects of parish ministry, will be present in the community and will work to educate the community.

“We are just very blessed and honored to have them here with us living on our property,” Bresowar said.

Morris said Perol and Corpus left Venezuela Aug. 6 and arrived in Russellville Aug. 8 after being stuck in the airport in Orlando for two days because of problems with Venezuela customs.

Morris, Perol and Corpus moved into the old rectory on the Good Shepherd Catholic Church property Aug. 10.

“We are just very thankful to Sister Marynell and Father Vincent for everything, for doing something so risky,” Corpus said.

Bresowar said there were plenty of unknowns in getting nuns to Franklin County, but the entire process has been possible through faith.

Perol and Corpus both served in Venezuela for 21 years. They are originally from the Philippines and speak four languages: English, Spanish, Italian and Filipino. Corpus is about to begin her 25th year as a nun.

<http://franklincountytimes.com/2019/09/04/good-shepherd-welcomes-nuns-to-russellville/>



Attending Sunday Mass at Good Shepherd Catholic Church during the pandemic means driving up and tuning in. Father Vincent Bresowar says the church began offering “drive-up” Mass in mid-May to allow parishioners to continue worshipping safely.

“People stay in their cars and we have a transmitter by FM radio, and they can hear the Mass inside their car, and in this way, it’s safer,” Bresowar said.

Around 100 cars come out every Sunday in Russellville to participate in Mass, according to Bresowar. “We built a platform next to the roof of our temple, and in a large field, people can park their cars and we raise the platform so people can see the Holy Mass,” Bresowar said.

Masses are bilingual in English and Spanish, as a majority of the parishioners are native Spanish speakers. Bresowar says many of these individuals have been greatly impacted by coronavirus.

“Most of our community, especially here in the church, are from Guatemala, Mexico, they are immigrants. They are very affected, there are many Hispanics in our community who have contracted the virus in their own families, their own homes,” Bresowar said.

Bresowar says that coronavirus has been especially challenging for many in these communities because their work does not allow them to stay home.

“People don’t get much opportunity to rest because they don’t have a lot of money, of course the parents still need to work. The majority, probably 95% of people can’t work inside their home because they have jobs where they can only work at the company or the factory,” Bresowar said.

The church is also working to meet more than just the spiritual needs of the community. “We also provide food for the poor who need food, who need clothes, we have clothes. We also help with bills, the cost of their bills or the bills because a lot of people are struggling with their bills,” Bresowar said.

Bresowar says the church is open every day and can provide assistance with food or clothing. On Mondays, there is a food bank from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and a team that comes to help those seeking assistance with bills specifically.

Mass is also offered online and through Facebook Live, which can be found by going to the Good Shepherd Catholic Church website and Facebook page.

<https://www.waaytv.com/content/coronavirus-content/Russellville-church-offers-drive-in-Mass-provides-assistance-with-food-and-bills--572208671.html>

Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Russellville has announced plans for a \$3 million building project, with a new worship center that will seat 400 to 500 people. “It has needed to happen for years,” said the pastor, the Rev. Vincent Bresowar, a 1998 graduate of Homewood High School who attended Auburn University, spent three years in the Air Force and worked at UAB as a medical technician before attending seminary.

The predominantly Hispanic congregation has been growing in spite of an unusual pandemic arrangement that has focused on holding an outdoor Spanish-language Mass every Sunday. The church transmits the Mass over an FM radio transmitter as Bresowar leads the service outdoors. “We built an outdoor altar, with a podium,” Bresowar said. “We’ve been offering Mass outside the whole year, which is a challenge in the winter and the summer, in the heat,” he said. “Everybody’s staying in their cars. We sanitize and bring communion to each individual car.”

The current church only holds 175 people, and much fewer than that with social distancing rules in place. “It was extremely crowded before COVID,” said Bresowar, who has been the pastor at Russellville for six years. A small indoor Mass is held on Saturday nights in Spanish, and another small gathering is indoors in English on Sunday mornings. The largest attendance is for the outdoor, drive-in Spanish-language Mass at noon on Sundays. Construction is expected to begin on May 1.

“As more people get vaccinated, once Covid is a thing of the past, we’ll continue to grow,” Bresowar said. The congregation includes about 600 Spanish-speaking families and 20 English-speaking families. “There are a lot of immigrants who are Catholic,” Bresowar said. It’s an international congregation, with members from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and other Central American nations, as well as some from South America. “People are coming,” he said. “There’s a growing number of children in the Sunday school program.”

Bresowar has organized COVID testing at the church and hopes to use it as a site for vaccinations. “I’ve been vaccinated,” Bresowar said. “We’re actively promoting the vaccine.” Meanwhile, people keep coming. “It is a good problem to have,” he said. “Your parish is growing. People are coming back to the faith. We have told people to feel free to come back when you feel safe. We’re letting people know the church is still there for them.”

The church is very working-class and has been having food sales and other events to raise money. They welcome donations if anyone wants to help build the church, Bresowar said. Donations may be sent to Good Shepherd, 1700 North Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL, 35653.

<https://www.al.com/life/2021/03/growing-russellville-catholic-church-expands-with-building-project.html>

---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session X

Below are the biographies for panelists in Session X, exploring recent redevelopment efforts of Russellville's downtown area affectionately known as "The Strip."

---

### **Mayor David Grissom**

David Reed Grissom was born August 20, 1972, to Judy Keeton Grissom and the late Robert Reed (Bob) Grissom. He is a lifelong Russellville resident. He attended the Russellville City Schools and graduated from Russellville High School in 1990. He attended Northwest Shoals Community College, Phil Campbell, from 1990-1991, and then transferred to the University of North Alabama, Florence, where he received a B.S. degree in Marketing and graduated magna cum laude in 1994. He is married to Melissa Fuller Grissom who is an art teacher at Russellville High School. Melissa also graduated from the University of North Alabama in 1994. They have one daughter, Kate Reed Grissom, who is 16 years old and in the eleventh grade at Russellville High School. David is President of Alabama Gun & Pawn, Inc. in Russellville (since 1997); Alabama Title & Pawn of Haleyville, Inc. (since 1998); Alabama Title Pawn, Inc. in Moulton (since 1999); Alabama Title Pawn of Red Bay, Inc. (since 1999); Alabama Super Pawn, Inc. in Sheffield (since 2000); Cash Spot in Russellville (since March 2007). He was Vice-President of Diamond House, Inc., in Russellville from 1990-2000 and was Manager of Grissom Car Wash in Russellville from 1988-1990. David currently serves as Mayor of the City of Russellville since November 2012. He served as a member of the Russellville City Council, District #5 -2008-2012; is a member of the Community Spirit Bank Board of Directors (since July 2007), Community Spirit Bank Advisory Board (since February 2000), and the Audit Committee of Community Spirit Bank; member of Board of Directors, Title Pawn Council of Alabama, Birmingham; member of Board of Directors of Council for Fair Lending, Birmingham; lifetime member of Russellville Lodge # 371, member of Scottish Rite 32nd Degree Valley of Birmingham, member of Cahaba Shrine, Huntsville, and member of the Franklin County Shrine Club, Russellville. David and his family are members of South Side Baptist Church.



## **Susie Malone**

Ms. Malone has been active in the community for years. She taught at Russellville High School for 34 years. She has served as president of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, Inc. for over thirty years. Malone spearheaded the renovation of the Historic Roxy Theatre. With the support of the council members, community, civic organizations, businesses, Senator Roger Bedford, and Johnny Mack Morrow over \$300,000 was raised through fundraisers, donations, and grants. Susie has written numerous grants for the Roxy which included funding for theater seats, new heating and air conditioning unit, cosmetic repairs, various productions, and concerts. She has also served on numerous local and state civic and professional organizations. Ms. Malone's accomplishments include the Alabama Outstanding Clubwoman; Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Woman of the Year-Athena Award; Who's Who Among America's Outstanding Teachers; Who's Who Among America's Outstanding Women; RHS Honorary Annual Staff Member; and RHS Teacher of the Year. Malone currently serves on the GFWC Alabama Federation of Women's Club Board of Directors and president of the Cultura Garden Club. She is a member of the GFWC Book Lovers Study Club; Delta Kappa Gamma (Teachers' Honor Society) Alpha Upsilon Chapter past president; judge for the Miss Alabama preliminary pageants; Russellville First Baptist Church Homecoming Committee Chairman, Board of Trustees; and choir member. During her tenure at RHS she sponsored the Annual Staff; Tiger Track Yearbook, Tiger Pause Newspaper, Miss RHS Pageant, Homecoming Court, and Future Business Leaders of America for 34 years. Susie also served as Varsity Cheerleader Coach for 10 years; Junior Varsity Cheerleaders Coach for 6 years; and Students Against Destructive Decisions. She has carried her students to district, state, and national competitions; and where they won many awards. Ms. has served on numerous committees for the RHS school system; State Superintendent Dr. Wayne Teague's Plan of Excellence Committee; Alabama Vocational Teachers Public Affairs Committee; Tennessee Valley Business Teachers Association; and RHS Band Parents Historian. Ms. Malone stated, "I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to attend and to teach at RHS. As a teacher, the rewards are watching your students become successful adults and having them come back to thank you for the positive impact you had on their life."

---



## **Chase Sparks**

Mr. Sparks is the owner of Russellville Florist and Gifts. Mr. Sparks studied professional Accounting at the University of North Alabama. Before owning his own business in 2018, he was an Accountant at G&G Steel, Inc. His current entrepreneurship has been a community staple in Russellville from beautiful door hangers to balloon arches at family events.



## History of the Roxy Theatre

*Franklin County Arts & Humanities Council, Inc. – Historic Roxy Theatre*

The Roxy Theatre was built in 1949 and was the center of entertainment and a landmark for Russellville and Franklin County for several years. It is the only one of its kind in Alabama and only two others in Tennessee. Like many movie theatres around the country, it became victim to television and other forms of home entertainment. The theatre closed in 1976 and remained unoccupied until it was donated to the Franklin County Arts & Humanities Council by a local businessman December 31, 1987. Over the years with no maintenance, the theatre had become an eye sore. The walls and floors had been vandalized with unsightly scenes. A huge hole in the roof gave way to an “unwanted” skylight. It seemed a shame to let this historic landmark fall prey to rot and destruction. After it was donated to the Arts Council, the members began securing funds from the community for its restoration.

Restoring the Roxy has been a continuing project for the Franklin County Arts & Humanities Council. Many local civic and volunteer organizations as well as local industries, businesses, professional organizations, and individuals have assisted in raising funds for its renovation. Senator Roger Bedford and Representative Johnny Mack Morrow were instrumental in securing grants for its restoration. Without everyone’s continued support of this project, the Roxy renovation would not have become a reality for our community.

### **The Importance of the Roxy Renovation**

The Roxy, as part of the heritage of Franklin County, provides entertainment and relaxation to area residents. This theatre has been transformed into a wonderful and unique facility to which the region can point with pride. It can offer dozens of community groups, schools, churches, civic clubs, and businesses a 575-seat facility for theatre, children’s events, meetings, fashion shows, recitals, large meetings, ceremonies, musical productions, and concerts. The Council feels the community benefits from the Roxy. Its restoration has a long-term impact on the growth of our city and county. The Roxy plays an important role in revitalization of the downtown area, the economy, and preserving a historical landmark for our rural community.

The theatre provides a place for locals to perform as well as provide entertainment which attracts tourists to our area. Tourism is a vital part of the economy. The Arts Council has sponsored several events at the Roxy over the past few years which have attracted many people from other states and the surrounding areas. Some of these events include the annual Watermelon festival which brings in crowds exceeding 25,000 each August; the W. C. Handy Festival which is extended from the Shoals area to the Roxy Theatre for “The Great Pretenders” in Russellville; The Roxy’s Christmas Spectacular; the KGB and Guests show presented the second Saturday of each month; and the Ronnie McDowell concerts which attracts fans and tourists from other states.

It is the desire of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council to present quality, wholesome programs that the entire family can enjoy in our community. It is also the mission of the Arts Council to protect and preserve historical sites such as the Historical Roxy Theatre.



From a distance—the perspective from which immigration is too often discussed—this small town seems like an apt illustration of why Alabama should crack down on immigrants. Up close, it's clear immigration is actually saving Russellville.

Russellville is a small town in northwest Alabama, the kind of place that most people who grew up an hour's drive away don't even know exists. Even by Alabama standards, folks in Russellville take their football seriously. Though the town only has about 10,000 residents, a few years ago its high school became the first in the state to purchase a Jumbotron video screen, at a cost of more than a quarter million dollars.

As with many small towns, when change comes to Russellville it usually comes slow: schools here didn't integrate until the late 1960s, and until a few months ago the sale of alcohol was prohibited. But in 1989, the construction of a poultry plant unwittingly set Russellville on a course of rapid transformation. Within a few years the area became a magnet for immigrants looking to settle down and raise a family after years of laboring in the tomato fields of Florida.

Today, Franklin County—of which Russellville is the county seat—has the highest percentage of Latinos in the state, primarily a mix of Mexicans and Guatemalans. According to the Census Bureau, Latinos make up 14.9 percent of the county's population, though the real number is undoubtedly much higher, as undocumented communities are regularly undercounted.

Along with Russellville, the entire state of Alabama has seen a tremendous increase in Latino residents, whose numbers have doubled in the last decade. This growth has in turn generated a backlash from politicians seeking to build their careers upon the backs of undocumented immigrants. In June, Republican Gov. Robert Bentley made history by signing into law what the harshest anti-immigrant bill in the nation. Inspired by Arizona's SB1070, the bill permits law enforcement to detain people they suspect to be undocumented, allows the state to revoke the business licenses of companies found to be employing unauthorized workers, and makes it a crime to transport someone known to be undocumented. Finally, and most controversially, it forces schools to determine the citizenship status of its students.

The Justice Department has called the law unconstitutional—because it preempts federal authority to regulate immigration, among other reasons—and filed suit against the state earlier this month. A federal judge heard initial arguments in the case on Wednesday. The court will have to move quickly in deciding whether to allow the law to move forward; it takes effect on Sept. 1.

At the bill's signing ceremony, Bentley was triumphant. "I campaigned for the toughest immigration laws, and I'm proud of the legislature for working tirelessly to create the strongest immigration bill in the country," he said. Other Alabama lawmakers were similarly enthusiastic—and some were downright unhinged. Rep. Mo Brooks, who represents an area near Russellville, has now twice called for doing

“anything short of shooting” undocumented immigrants. That’s scary talk anywhere, but particularly in a state with Alabama’s history of racial violence (incidentally, one of Brooks’ district offices is located on George Wallace Boulevard).

From a distance—the perspective from which immigration is too often discussed—Russellville can seem like an apt illustration of why Alabama should crack down on immigrants. The area is poor and suffers from chronic rates of high unemployment. The county’s largest employer is the poultry plant; while many American citizens are without work, hundreds of immigrants, some certainly undocumented, are employed at the plant. This fact is to many an outrage, and it is the sort of thing Rep. Brooks cited to justify his “by any means necessary” strategy of eliminating the brown menace.

As Alabama’s new law attests, politicians around the country are also beginning to zero in on schools. They are convinced that immigrants are overwhelming local educational institutions. In Russellville, it’s certainly impossible to miss the dramatic change in student demographics. Twenty years ago there were three Latino students in the entire district. Now, more than one-third of the student body is Latino. At lower grades the rate is even higher, with 44 percent of kindergartners speaking Spanish or a Mayan dialect as their first language. Most of these children enter school unable to speak English.

So here one has all the ingredients for a story that seems to fit every nightmarish scenario dreamed up by the Pat Buchanans of the world. An impoverished town is overwhelmed with immigrants, who take many of the local jobs and whose kids show up at school in large numbers unable to speak a word of English. It’s the perfect assignment for lazy journalism, the kind of article that can write itself by plugging into predictable narratives. Slap the word **INVASION** across the screen and you’ve got a special report the likes of which Lou Dobbs—if he hadn’t been booted from CNN—wouldn’t have been able to resist.

### **Except they’d have the story entirely wrong.**

Consider the concern about jobs. The massive poultry plant can kill and process nearly 1.5 million birds a week. Day and night, hundreds of immigrant workers can be found slicing up chickens with knives and packing them into boxes to be shipped worldwide. According to proponents of Alabama’s new bill, the plant is the scene of grand larceny, with each undocumented immigrant stealing a job out of the hands of a deserving citizen.

Yet like many abstract arguments against immigration, this quickly falls apart upon examination in the real world. When I relocated to Russellville in 2008, I found that, as a citizen, it was exceedingly easy to “steal” a job back: I was hired within a week after arriving. There was only one test to pass: I took a Breathalyzer in front of a company nurse to prove I hadn’t come to the interview drunk. (And yes, people do fail.)

As I soon learned, the hard part wasn’t getting the job; the hard part was keeping the job. During a single shift I could be asked to tear apart more than 7,000 chicken breasts by hand or carry and dump 30 tons of meat onto an assembly line. The work was painful and unpleasant, with my hands and wrists aching

and bits of chicken fat often stuck to my face. To deal with the pain, management had installed machines dispensing various brands of painkillers along one wall of the break room, and during our orientation we were advised to take such pills every four hours.

Within two weeks, most of the people who had gone through the English-language orientation with me had left. This was typical. I learned from a previous employee that during one week the plant had hired 150 new people; that same week, 175 workers quit. During the six weeks I was employed at the plant, new faces appeared every day.

There is a problem here, certainly. The workers are treated as disposable and wages top out at about \$10 an hour. Folks work hard for low wages, frequently suffering lifelong injuries in the process. But this isn't an immigration problem: two-thirds of the workers are American born.

Nor is this a new problem: work has been brutal ever since the plant opened, originally staffed by an entirely local workforce. At the time, Gov. Gay Hunt heralded the plant's opening as a watershed moment for economic development in the state. Presumably with a straight face, he argued that the poultry plant ensured "our children won't have to leave the state to find jobs." Indeed, hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars were spent to attract Gold Kist, the company that built the plant (Gold Kist was bought by Pilgrim's Pride in 2006.) To justify the public subsidy, a Gold Kist representative called poultry plant work "the finest-type industry" before adding that many workers would earn just \$4.35 an hour.

Today, immigrants have filled open slots—and disproportionately endure the most grueling jobs within the plant, like the de-boning line—but the central story of jobs in Russellville isn't about immigrants. It's about dangerous working conditions, poverty wages, and politicians bending over backwards for corporations while getting very little in return for their constituents. Now that's a crisis Alabama politicians ought to tackle.

### **More Revival Than 'Invasion'**

So if immigrants aren't stealing jobs, what about schools? With so many kids entering school and not speaking English, surely the system has come crashing down, right?

Actually, quite the opposite. By fifth grade, Latino students are equal to their peers in math, reading, and writing. (By the fifth grade, they're also speaking with a flawless Southern accent). Russellville boasts one of the highest graduation rates in the state, at 94 percent. And while Latino students are quickly catching up, immigrant parents are proving to be dedicated partners in improving the school system.

"Hispanic parents serve on our advisory committees and take a lot of pride in our school and system," says George Harper, who is in charge of special education and English learning programs for the district. "They want their kids to find the American dream and think education is essential. We're getting more support from them than from other parents."

A recent valedictorian at Russellville High was Latino, and Harper believes he's planning on becoming a doctor.

"It hasn't been the nightmare everyone thought it was going to be," Harper tells me, though it hasn't been without challenges. Harper and his group of teachers have struggled to work with students with limited English-speaking skills. "We have to work a little harder to get to the same place," is how he puts it. But the main problem—as is often the case when it comes to education—is funding. "I don't think we've gotten the help that we need from federal and state funding. We're a whole lot on our own."

Harper says he's still in the dark about how the new law might affect the district. "We're in the business of schooling folks, and we're gonna' try to keep doing that," he promises. He's especially concerned because immigrants have always considered school—like church—to be a safe place, where the question of immigration status isn't broached. Still, he's hopeful that things will sort themselves out. "Our school starts in mid August and the law goes into effect in September. Maybe by next year cooler heads will prevail."

Just as immigrant parents have brought new energy to the school district, the immigrant community as a whole has thrown a lifeline to the struggling town. Without the influx of new people, Russellville and Franklin County would be shrinking. From 2000 to 2010 the population of the county remained unchanged, but that's only because the number of Latinos doubled.

Deborah Barnett is the town's librarian, and her building is located in an area of downtown called "Little Mexico." Across from the library is a string of immigrant-owned shops, selling groceries, furniture and clothing. "Latinos are responsible for most of the revitalization going on," she says. "Before, many of the downtown shops had been boarded up. We didn't even like to have evening activities here, because the area was so deserted that it didn't feel safe."

Not far from the library is El Quetzal, a large grocery store named after Guatemala's national bird. The building had previously been an auto parts store, but had been vacant for years when Pascual Mateo purchased it in 2001. "The front windows were broken and trees had started branching into the store," laughs Mateo. "The first thing we did was clear out the trash. We used a van and carted away 70 loads." Most of the other businesses on the block are also run by immigrant entrepreneurs. Take immigrants out of Russellville and the town suddenly has thousands of square feet of vacant space to fill and plenty of missing tax revenue.

Here, then, is what one will find when examining the "crisis" that led Alabama to pass the nation's most inhumane immigration legislation. In Russellville—perhaps the single place most affected by immigrants in the entire state—new arrivals have filled open jobs, devoted themselves to education, opened new businesses and replaced a dwindling population. They might have labored for years in Florida, but Russellville is where these immigrants are choosing to lay down their roots. They appreciate the slow pace of life, the religiosity, the affordable housing, the educational opportunities for their children. For them, Russellville has a lot to offer; they have proven that they also have plenty to offer Russellville.



This is not to say that Alabama isn't without its fair share of problems, many of which find their reflection in Russellville. Alabama is a poor state, with too many people stuck in dead-end jobs, while massive tax breaks are given to the very creators of those jobs. Too often, the only way up is out. It remains to be seen what the children of immigrants will do after graduating high school and college—whether they'll leave it behind like many have before them or return to help bring more opportunities to the area.

But one thing is clear: Alabama's problems won't be solved by cracking down on immigrants. Take immigrants out of a town like Russellville and such problems don't go away, they get worse. Without immigrants, Russellville would turn into an aging ghost town. Storefronts in the business district would shutter. Companies would go out of business. Schools would lose children eager to learn and parents eager to assist. Russellville would become a shell of itself: less dynamic, less bustling, less entrepreneurial, less diverse. The same could be said, of course, of the country as a whole.

[https://www.alternet.org/2011/08/2/big\\_lies\\_about\\_immigration\\_disproved\\_in\\_one\\_alabama\\_town/](https://www.alternet.org/2011/08/2/big_lies_about_immigration_disproved_in_one_alabama_town/)

---

## BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Session XI

Below are the biographies for presenters in Session XI, leaders in the fabrication industry at G&G Steel.

---

### **Michael “Shane” Bendall**

Shane is currently a Senior Project Manager for G&G Steel, Inc. where he has worked for over 22 years. His entire career of over 29 years includes experience with plant management, production management, design engineering, project management, sales, and customer service. In addition, he also has design and manufacturing experience with heavy structural steel fabrication and machining. His manufacturing experience in the fabrication and assembly of aerospace flight hardware includes the assembly of major end items and complex 5-axis machining of large aluminum rings and skins. Additionally, he is experienced in designs and applications of CNC controls, PLC's, electrical and hydraulic servo systems, hydraulic power units and pneumatic systems; and designs and project engineering in the petro-chemical industry. He has worked in different work environments including production, engineering research & development, and job shop environment. Shane graduated from Auburn University with a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering.



---

### **Aaron Harbin**

Aaron Harbin works as the Operations Manager for Franklin Manufacturing, Inc. Aaron began work with G&G Steel, Inc., a sister company to Franklin, as a mechanical engineer in 2009. He currently manages projects designing, developing, and manufacturing custom fabrication equipment which sell worldwide. His experience includes custom CNC machinery, moveable bridges, inland waterway structures and complex fabrications. Aaron earned his Mechanical Engineering degree from Auburn University. Aaron actively works with local high schools and colleges to develop their knowledge of engineering and manufacturing. Aaron serves as a Franklin County Chamber of Commerce board member and is involved in several civic organizations. Aaron is also a graduate of the Alabama Leadership Initiative with class 2018-2019.



## About G&G Steel

### *G&G Steel*

Since the incorporation of G&G Steel, Inc. in 1975, we are committed to producing superior fabrications and providing prompt delivery at competitive prices. Delivering on this commitment has caused us to experience phenomenal growth while also helping us to become one of the larger, AISC certified, steel fabricators in the U.S.A. G&G Steel handles steel fabrications for numerous industries.

Hydraulic steel structures for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and heavy moveable bridge structures/machinery are just two of the primary industries for G&G. We also specialize in the fabrication of industrial furnaces for the aluminum and steel industries, grinding mills and kilns for the cement, gold mine and lime industries. G&G Steel has also fabricated various structures and tooling used in the aerospace industry and mining industry.

The home office is situated on 27 acres in the Russellville, AL industrial park. G&G has also extended its operations to Cordova, AL (Warrior River Steel) and to Iuka, MS (G&G Steel Mississippi Works). The locations in Cordova and Iuka provide access for shipping by rail or inland waterway.

In Russellville, our modern spacious fabrication plant, with its state-of-the-art facilities, encompasses 320,000 square feet among its five bays. In addition to the fabrication bays, our operations include a 90,400 square feet machine shop equipped with the most modern of machining facilities to provide for machining large components on variety of large boring mills and lathes. Another unique feature at our Russellville location is a 26, 880 square foot clean assembly bay for mechanical, electrical and hydraulic components that require assembly and test in a cleaner environment. This combination of fabrication, machining, blasting, painting, assembly and testing gives us the ability to completely handle all your fabrication needs.

For the larger fabrication needs, G&G has the capability at its Iuka and Cordova facilities to do final fitting, welding, machining, painting, assembly and testing at these facilities when shipping access by rail or water is needed for the large structures and assemblies. The Warrior River Steel facility boasts 358,000 square feet of fabrication area including a 1,000-ton crane bay while also providing 32,000 square feet of large capacity machining area. The G&G Steel Mississippi Works facility provides 72,000 square feet of fabrication area under a 400-ton crane bay. These two locations extended from our home office provide our customers with several options for assembly, testing and shipping of large components.

G&G Steel is a customer-oriented fabricator, staffed by professionals, which also offers problem solving services including design assistance and computer aided drafting. The engineering department utilizes AutoDesk Inventor for their 3D modeling and detailing services. Our staff has years of experience in fabricating components and meeting challenging requirements to ensure our customer's success. We invite you to become acquainted with G&G Steel's commitment to quality and to call on us to be your total FABRICATOR.

<https://www.ggsteel.com/about>

## Corps Completes 34-Day Closure At Holt Lock And Dam

Frank McCormack | *The Waterways Journal*

August 10, 2018

As it weaves through the wooded hills of Tuscaloosa County, Ala., the Black Warrior River tumbles from an elevation of near 240 feet to below 100 feet in a span of less than 30 miles. In centuries past, that precipitous drop produced rocky, shallow rapids as the river plowed through what is now downtown Tuscaloosa. Today, that drop in elevation is eased by a trio of structures: John Hollis Bankhead Lock and Dam at Black Warrior River Mile 365.5, Holt Lock and Dam at Mile 347 and Oliver Lock and Dam at Mile 337.7.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns and operates a total of six locks and dams on the Black Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway that all measure 110 feet by 600 feet. Bankhead and Holt offer by far the highest lifts on the system at 68 feet and 64 feet, respectively, with Oliver adding another 28-foot lift.

The Corps team that manages the Black Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway along with lock maintenance contractor R&D Maintenance Services Inc. and Barnhart Crane & Rigging, is wrapping up a major repair project at Holt Lock, which first opened to navigation in 1966.

The primary task during the 34-day closure at Holt, which began July 10, was replacing the lock's lower miter gate. G&G Steel of Russellville, Ala., fabricated the new gate leafs and transported them to the lock by barge from their facility in Iuka, Miss., via the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, then up the Black Warrior River. The new gate leafs arrived on site ahead of schedule on July 2.

Just as they did two years ago at Selden Lock and Dam farther downriver, the maintenance team at Holt used a gantry crane spanning the lock chamber to lift and lower the old gate leafs onto a deck barge and to install the new leafs.

"It's a pretty unique way of doing it," said Danny Hensley, Corps operations project manager for the Black Warrior-Tombigbee and Alabama River waterways. "Other Corps of Engineers districts don't use a gantry to remove and set gate leafs, but it works well for us."

The sprawling Barnhart gantry crane used in the operation was made up of two 150-foot-long, 8-foot-tall girders spanning the lock chamber. Each weighed 230,000 pounds. Atop the girders was a hoist with a lifting capacity of 500 tons.

Removing the old gate leafs and setting the new leafs in the gate recesses on temporary stands was a methodical process that spanned four days.

"It takes approximately 3-1/2 to 4 hours to move the hoist from one side of the lock chamber to the other," said Brooks Ferguson, project manager with R&D Maintenance, which oversees lock and dam maintenance and recreation facility maintenance for the Corps on the waterway. "We took one gate leaf down then stood up the new gate. We made a lift a day."

The first new leaf was set on a brand-new nickel pintle ball July 30, with the other leaf set August 1.

“Most people don’t realize nickel is a valuable metal used in alloys to make things other than nickels,” Hensley joked.

Ferguson said the new leafs each weigh about 375 tons—35 tons more than the old leafs. The new leafs each feature three positive and three negative “gate diagonals,” which are adjustable, angled tension rods. G&G pre-stressed the gate in its fabrication facility, and the Corps team had the ability to adjust the diagonals after the gates were set using hydraulic jacks. The redesign of the gate diagonals was a lesson learned from Selden in 2016, Hensley said.

“At Selden, we opened three days late,” Hensley said. “Those three days are attributed to having to stress the gates with heat and turnbuckles. We realized that was an area we needed to save time in.”

Hensley said pre-stressing the gates at the fabrication shop with the hydraulic jacks worked so well that no additional adjustments were required at the lock.

The new gate leafs also feature low-voltage anodes for reducing corrosion and synthetic timbers, among other modernizations. At the top connection of the new leafs, the Corps also repaired the mule head anchors, which is where the leaf ties into the chamber lock wall.

“Over the years, they’d line-bored those several times,” said Anthony Perkins, navigation manager for the waterway. “The hole was originally 6 inches, now it’s almost 7. We’re having to come back with a special radial welding machine to weld those up, then line bore them back to the original size.”

## **Other Work**

And while the new lower miter gate was the most pressing task at Holt, the team was busy elsewhere at the lock throughout the month-long closure.

The Corps replaced much of the hydraulic piping located in galleries at the lock, which is critical to operating the valves that flood the chamber. Those pipes were heavily corroded from decades of use in a damp environment. The new carbon steel piping features a ceramic coating to fight corrosion.

“The rust incorporates into the ceramic coating,” Hensley said. “The new coating is supposed to be something that can handle the damp conditions.”

In all, about 1,200 feet of piping was replaced at Holt.

“That’s almost a quarter mile of pipe,” said Wynne Fuller, operations division chief for the Mobile Engineer District. While the upper reach of the waterway was closed, the Corps also replaced 200 feet of



piping at Bankhead Lock, Hensley said. West Alabama Mechanical Inc. of Moundville, Ala., was the subcontractor in charge of replacing the pipe.

Crews were also busy making repairs to the smaller upper miter gate at Holt Lock during the closure.

As part of the contract to fabricate the new miter gate, G&G is also building new valves for Holt Lock. Hensley said those will be delivered in 2019.

“These valves have been problematic over the years with vibrating issues, and have required many repairs,” he said. “We’ve had more trouble with valves here than at any other lock. They’ve been redesigned, rebuilt, and they’ll be put in one at a time without having to close the lock to traffic.”

### **Dewatered Chamber**

One surprising sight at the bottom of the dewatered lock chamber: bedrock.

“They left this rock instead of taking it out and pouring concrete,” Hensley said. “They just left it, and it forms the floor of the chamber. I guess it saved on concrete and rock removal. They wouldn’t do that now, but we haven’t had any issues with it. They just left the natural rock and poured around it.”

Besides the usual tools, tires and rims, walnuts, bolts and driftwood found on the floor of the dewatered chamber, maintenance crews and visitors also spotted an occasional hunk of coal among the debris. That’s no surprise, since coal is such a vital cargo on the Black Warrior River, with several large coal mines on the upper reaches of the waterway.

“Our biggest commodity is coal,” lock supervisor Ashley Ward said.

The vast majority of tonnage passing through Holt Lock is metallurgical coal bound for export from the Port of Mobile.

And now with the new miter gate at Holt, the entire Black Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway is up-to-date on lock maintenance and in good working order. That reliability throughout the system is a great driver of commerce, said Larry Merrihew, president of the Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway Association.

“Because we have such an efficient river system, thanks to what the Corps is doing to keep these locks running, we’re seeing more and more economic development opportunities,” Merrihew said.

<https://www.waterwaysjournal.net/2018/08/10/corps-completes-34-day-closure-at-holt-lock-and-dam/>

With the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Olmsted Locks and Dam underway the day this story went to press—August 30—G&G Steel made sure to be present for the momentous occasion. The fabrication company has unique ties to Olmsted, a project that has been in the works for more than three decades. It built five of the lock and dam's tainter gates, the largest gates the company has ever built.

Eric Daniel, plant superintendent for G&G Steel Mississippi Works, a subsidiary of G&G Steel, said the Olmsted tainter gates were a larger-than-usual challenge for the company due to their sheer size. Each tainter gate measures 41 feet high by 110 feet deep and weighs approximately 350 tons.

“With our plant in Russellville (Ala.) not having barge shipping capabilities, we had to fabricate the gates at either our Cordova (Ala.) or Iuka (Miss.) facilities,” said Daniel.

Ultimately, G&G Steel decided to use its Iuka facility at Mile 446 of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, a stretch of the river that is also known as Yellow Creek. “This facility basically has unlimited barge-shipping access going south on the Tenn-Tom or north on the Tennessee River,” Daniel added. “We started the early phases of subassembly fabrication of the gates at our Russellville location, and completed the fabrications at our main fabrication bay in Iuka to ensure that we exceeded the schedule required. This allowed G&G Steel to make provisions to ship gates 4 and 5 both one year ahead of schedule.”

Daniel said the company was able to overcome the challenge of constructing these large gates ahead of schedule due to the company's dedicated staff and work ethic. “Loading those massive structures was very challenging,” he said. “G&G Steel modified a barge that doubled as an installation barge to ship the gates one at a time and install them at Olmsted.”

Daniel said that once the barge arrived at Olmsted with one of the tainter gates on board, it would be floated into the gate chambers and lifted with strand jacks for installation into the operating machinery. “G&G Steel looks forward to more challenging projects from the Corps of Engineers, a long-time customer of ours, and we are very proud to have contributed to rebuilding America's infrastructure,” he said.

### **New Gate For Montgomery Lock**

While the work at Olmsted might be coming to an end for the time being, G&G Steel has remained busy working on other Corps projects, including the fabrication of lift gates for Montgomery Lock and Dam near Pittsburgh, Pa., on the Ohio River.

The company shipped a lift gate via barge for the Pittsburgh Engineer District August 29. It is being towed by the mv. Bill Hill, owned by American Commercial Barge Line.

This is the third lift gate of this design that G&G has built for the Pittsburgh District. It is the third gate out of four total. The fourth gate has been completed, but is receiving its protective coating application, according to G&G Steel. The company submitted a bid earlier this year to build two more lift gates for the Pittsburgh District, which was accepted August 30.

The gates are about 105 feet, 10 inches long from operating sprocket to operating sprocket, 16 feet high and weigh approximately 260,000 pounds when fully assembled. The body of the gates are protected by a metalized coating of 85 percent zinc and 15 percent aluminum, along with a full paint system on top of the metalizing.

### **About G&G Steel**

Since 1975, G&G Steel has produced steel fabrications for a variety of industries. The company has created hydraulic steel structures for the Corps and heavy moveable bridge structures and machinery. The company also specializes in the fabrication of industrial furnaces for the aluminum and steel industries and grinding mills and kilns for the cement, gold mine and lime industries. G&G Steel has even fabricated various structures for the aerospace industry.

Headquartered in Russellville on 27 acres, its subsidiary firms—Warrior River Steel in Cordova and G&G Steel Mississippi Works in Iuka—each have access for shipping via rail and barge. In Russellville, the company has a fabrication plant, five bays, a machine shop and a large assembly bay for mechanical, electrical and hydraulic components to be tested in a cleaner environment.

Its Warrior River Steel facility boasts 358,000 square feet of fabrication area including a 1,000-ton crane bay while also providing 32,000 square feet of large capacity machining area. The G&G Steel Mississippi Works facility provides 72,000 square feet of fabrication area under a 400-ton crane bay. These two locations, extended from the company's home office, provide its customers with several options for assembly, testing and shipping of large components, according to the company.

<https://www.waterwaysjournal.net/2018/08/31/gg-steel-built-its-largest-tainter-gates-for-olmsted/>



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

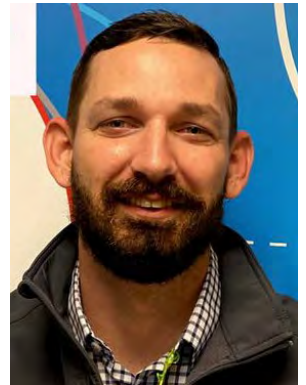
## Session XII

Below are the biographies for the speaker in Session XII, a conversation with leaders of Pilgrims Pride, the largest employer in Franklin County, regarding local civic investment and corporate responsibility

---

### **Jamie Young**

Jamie Young serves as the complex manager for Pilgrim's Pride. He came to Russellville in May 2021 from Gainesville, GA where he was the complex manager in training. Jamie also worked for Tyson Food for 7 years and is an 8-year Army veteran. He currently serves as the Board of Directors for the Alabama Poultry & Egg Association. Jamie has been married to his wife Diamond for 13 years. They have an 11-year-old son Trent.





Employees at Pilgrim's Pride in Russellville are frustrated with how the plant has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. An employee who wishes to remain anonymous told WHNT News 19 that on the night of Monday, April 20, employees arrived to work and were told a day shift employee had tested positive for the virus. They added that management told them they were not exposed; however, they argue that day and night shifts walk past each other closely during shift changes. Two employees said in the past week they began showing symptoms and went to a Florence Med Plus to be tested. They said some employees are afraid to go to work but can't afford not to.

The company released a statement that reads, "Team member health and safety is our top priority. We have implemented a wide of range of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our workforce. No one is forced to come to work and no one is punished for being absent for health reasons. If someone is sick or lives with someone who is sick, we send them home. The U.S. government has identified the food supply as a critical infrastructure industry and has stated we have a special responsibility to maintain normal work schedules on behalf of the nation. We take this responsibility seriously and are doing our best to safely provide food to the country during a challenging time." The employees said there are preventative measures in place now—but added that the company should have been more proactive in implementing them.

**Those measures include:**

- Temperature testing all team members prior to entering facilities;
- Providing extra personal protective equipment (PPE), including protective masks, which are required to be worn at all times;
- Promoting physical distancing by staggering starts and breaks, and increasing spacing in cafeterias, break and locker rooms, including plexiglass dividers in key areas;
- Increasing sanitation and disinfection efforts, including whole facility deep-cleaning every day;
- Hiring dedicated staff whose only job is to continuously clean facilities, including common areas beyond the production floor;
- Removing vulnerable populations from facilities, offering full pay and benefits;
- Requiring sick team members to stay home from work;
- Waiving short-term disability waiting periods;
- Providing free 100% preventative care to all team members enrolled in the company's health plan;
- Offering free LiveHealth Online services for team members enrolled in the company's health plan that allow for virtual doctor visits at no cost;
- Educating and encouraging team members to practice social distancing at home and in the community outside of work; and
- Restricting access to facilities and not allowing visitors.

<https://whnt.com/news/shoals/employees-express-health-and-safety-concerns-at-pilgrims-pride-in-russellville/>

The Russellville splash pad is in sight as the city council approved the location and order at Monday night's city council meeting in hopes of having the splash pad finished in time to open at this year's Jam on Sloss Lake July 4.

The splash pad will be located between John Blackwell Sports Complex and Sloss Lake on Highway 24, with the project costing \$444,729.50. "It will blow your mind once it's done and you see it," said Great Southern Recreation salesman Jonas Bailey, who represents the general contractor and designer. "There won't be anything else like it in the Southeast." Of the \$444,729.50 to complete the project, \$309,000 will come from a donation from Pilgrim's Pride, and the remaining funds will come from an amount the city had previously set aside for a splash pad in the 2019 Capital Improvement Fund.

The splash pad will be 6,000 square feet and run on a flow-through system, where the splash pad will run on fresh water. Several areas of the splash pad will boast different features, including an elevated area with slides and spray features. The goal is to have the splash pad open by this year's Jam on Sloss Lake, so excavating will begin immediately. "For a while it will look like nothing is being done because it will take about eight to 10 weeks to get the stuff in, but then things will really go quick," Bailey said.

Mayor David Grissom said the splash pad has been discussed since 2008, with excitement for it being increased each year. Grissom said he contacted Bailey in 2018 to discuss plans for a splash pad, which would have been comparable to most splash pads. After the donation from Pilgrim's Pride, however, the plans for a typical splash pad grew to fulfill larger dreams. "This is something we are really excited to get started on because we have been talking about it for a while," Grissom said.

City Councilman David Palmer raised a concern about parking, about which he said several people had approached him. Because the splash pad will be located beside John Blackwell Sports Complex, the plan is to use the existing sports complex parking for the splash pad. Palmer said his concern is about times when Russellville is hosting a tournament at the sports complex while the splash pad is busy. "I'd hate to lose people because we didn't have enough parking," Palmer said.

Palmer suggested the city look into parking options to accommodate the potential need for additional parking in the area in the future. City Councilman Jamie Harris said grassy areas nearby, which are already used for parking sometimes because of tournaments, could be utilized. Grissom said he did not foresee an issue because the season when the splash pad will run, Memorial Day to Labor Day, should not interfere with typical tournaments at the sports complex.

The council unanimously approved moving forward with the project at the proposed location, with the order being sent out Tuesday.

<https://m.franklincountytimes.com/2021/03/16/russellville-approves-location-pricing-for-splash-pad/>

# Phil Campbell



The town is named after a railroad construction superintendent who agreed to extend the railway in the area in exchange for naming the community in his honor. Founded in 1896, the town was officially incorporated in 1911. The community was severely impacted by the tornado outbreak on April 27, 2011. An EF-5 tornado killed 28 people in the vicinity of Phil Campbell and destroyed nearly a third of residents' homes. Property damage was estimated at \$119 million. After the tornado, the badly damaged high school was torn down and rebuilt in 2014.

Dismals Canyon, a National Natural Landmark, is located six miles west of the town. The privately owned canyon is a haven for North America's largest-known population of *Orfelia fultoni*—a species of fungus gnat whose larvae emit a bioluminescent glow. Dismals Canyon also purportedly provided a hiding place for outlaws, including prominent fugitives Aaron Burr and Jesse James.

## Quick Facts

**Population:** 1,067

**Racial Composition:** 89.9% White, 5.7% other races, 1.6% Black or African American, 1.0% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 5.7 % other race, and 1.9% from two or more races. 6.4% were Hispanic or Latino of any race.

**Median Age:** 41

**County:** Franklin

**Random Trivia:** Brooklyn writer Phil Campbell organized a Phil Campbell Convention in the town for people who share the town's name.

## Alabama



---

## BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA** | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Session XIII

Below are the biographies for panelists in Session XIII, examining the importance of post-secondary higher education in rural communities on the campus of Alabama's first community college.

---

### **Brittney Humphres (Moderator)**

Mrs. Brittney Humphres serves as the Executive Director of the Phil Campbell Campus and Nursing Education at Northwest-Shoals Community College. Mrs. Humphres is a 2001 graduate of Northeast Mississippi Community College and earned both her bachelor and master of science degrees in nursing from the University of North Alabama in Florence. She began her college service in the nursing department at NW-SCC as a nursing instructor before becoming the Director of Nursing and later the Executive Director of the Phil Campbell Campus and Nursing Education.



---

### **Kenneth A. Brackins**

Kenneth A. Brackins is a recently retired Psychology Instructor at Northwest-Shoals Community College. He has over 34 years of service in the community college system along with civic and community involvement. He believes that education, academic and technical, economic development, and recreational opportunities are critical for healthy individuals and vibrant society. He is a graduate of Northwest Alabama State Junior College, the University of North Alabama, and Alabama A&M University. He is Chairman of the Lawrence County Industrial Development Board, Chairman of the North-Central Alabama 310 Board, Chairman of the Jesse Owens Park and Museum Board, and Vice-Chair of the City of Moulton Housing Authority. He is a graduate of the Alabama Community College Leadership Academy and Leadership Alabama, Class XVIII.



## **Dr. Timmy James**

Dr. Timmy James serves as Associate Dean of Academic Programs at Northwest-Shoals. Dr. James is a 1983 graduate of Northwest Junior College and earned both his bachelor's degree in Management Information Systems and M.B.A. from the University of North Alabama in Florence. He received his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Alabama. He began his college service in the IT department at NW-SCC and taught Computer Science and Business Administration courses for over 15 years before making the transition to the College's administration.





## NW-SCC History

### *Northwest-Shoals Community College*

Northwest-Shoals Community College is a comprehensive two-year public institution of higher learning providing technical, academic and lifelong educational opportunities for the northwest Alabama Region. The College is part of the Alabama Community College System, a statewide system of postsecondary colleges, governed by the Alabama Community College System Board of Trustees. Northwest-Shoals derives its original charter from the Alabama legislature through the Alabama Trade School and Junior College Authority Act of 1963.

The Northwest-Shoals service area is comprised of the counties of Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence and the western portion of Winston. The College operates two campuses - the Shoals Campus in Muscle Shoals and the Phil Campbell Campus in Phil Campbell.

The Phil Campbell Campus was founded in 1963 as Northwest Alabama State Junior College to provide access to postsecondary education for citizens of the rural counties of northwest Alabama. It was the first public junior college in what was to become the Alabama Community College System and was accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges in 1967. The Shoals Campus, founded in 1966 as Joe Wheeler State Trade School, provided occupational and technical training.



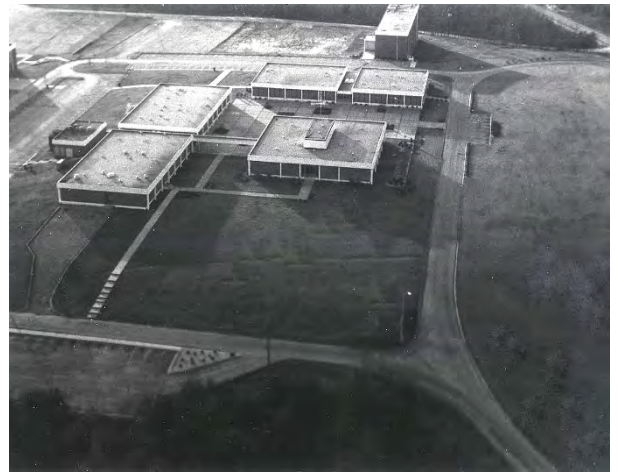
Both institutions recognized that the narrowness of their focus did not meet their constituents' educational needs. In 1973, Muscle Shoals State Technical Institute enhanced its curriculum and obtained accreditation from the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions. In 1977, with the approval of the Alabama State Board of Education, Northwest Alabama State Junior College established a branch campus in Tuscumbia primarily to offer first and second-year college courses.

In 1989, the Alabama State Board of Education created Northwest Alabama Community College through the consolidation of Northwest Alabama State Junior College in Phil Campbell and Northwest Alabama State Technical College in Hamilton. Shoals Community College was created through consolidating Muscle Shoals State Technical College and the Tuscumbia Campus of Northwest Alabama State Junior College. The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools granted accreditation to Northwest Alabama Community College in 1990. Shoals Community College received its accreditation in 1991.

Northwest-Shoals Community College was formed in 1993 by the Alabama State Board of Education through the merger of Northwest Alabama Community College's Phil Campbell Campus and Shoals Community College. The merger was enacted in order to provide more effective and efficient educational services to residents of rural northwest Alabama and the Shoals area.

Additionally, the merger provided business and industry with a single focal point for addressing educational and training needs and provided a single workforce development center to assist communities with economic development activities. The merger was reviewed and approved by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Reaffirmation of accreditation was granted by SACS in 1999 and again in 2009. Northwest-Shoals Community College, composed of two campuses, has adequate physical facilities to support an environment in which academic, social, physical, and emotional development may be fostered.

The two campuses are located in Muscle Shoals and Phil Campbell. The campus in Muscle Shoals is designated as the Shoals Campus. The Shoals is a two-county region comprised of Colbert and Lauderdale counties.



<https://www.nwscc.edu/about-nw-scc/at-a-glance/nw-scc-campuses>

---

### Phil Campbell Campus

*Northwest-Shoals Community College*

The Phil Campbell Campus is located approximately 30 miles south of the Shoals campus. It is easily accessible from either U.S. Highway 43 or Alabama Highway 5/AL Hwy 13. Located on a scenic 100-acre site one mile southwest of the town of Phil Campbell, the campus provides academic and applied technology programs and a full complement of student and community services. The Bevill Fine Arts Center is among the premier cultural centers in northwest Alabama and the home of numerous concerts, musicals and special events for both the College and local communities.



<https://www.nwscc.edu/about-nw-scc/at-a-glance/nw-scc-campuses/phil-campbell-campus>

After the April 27 tornado smashed through Franklin County in 2011, Northwest-Shoals Community College closed the Cecil Clapp Nature Trail and outdoor classroom on the Phil Campbell campus.

Now that trail is reopening.

The trail formerly featured an observatory an outdoor classroom used for kindergarten through 12th-grade instruction and community events, but the trail was damaged by the 2011 F-5 tornado that came through Phil Campbell.

With funding from the Northwest Alabama RC&D Council and Alabama Power Foundation, the trail has been revitalized, and the college is holding its grand reopening April 26 at 2 p.m.

The reopening will be held at the revitalized outdoor classroom, which will be named in honor of former NW-SCC science instructor Joe Mark Alls.

The event will include a ribbon cutting with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and a performance from the NW-SCC Jazz Band.

NW-SCC President Glenda Colagross will be on hand to make remarks, along with Rep. Jamie Kiel, Rep. Proncey Robertson, Northwest Alabama RC&D Council office manager Vanessa King and Alabama Power community relations manager Melinda Weaver.

<https://franklincountytimes.com/2021/04/22/nw-scc-to-reopen-nature-trail/>

Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System Jimmy H. Baker last week announced the appointment of Dr. Chris Cox as Interim President of Northwest-Shoals Community College. Cox replaced Glenda Cologross and he began his tenure on August 19.

Cox has more than 24 years of higher education administration experience and currently serves as Special Assistant to the Chancellor at the ACCS. Prior to his role at ACCS, Cox served as Interim President at both Beville State Community College in Jasper and Lurleen B. Wallace Community College in Andalusia.

“Northwest-Shoals is a special place and I’m eager to join the Patriot family as we serve our students and the Muscle Shoals and Phil Campbell communities,” Cox said. “I look forward to working alongside the faculty, staff, and administration at Northwest-Shoals as we help our students explore their potential and obtain a better future for themselves and their families.”

Among Cox’s goals are refurbishing the college’s two campuses, furthering workforce development, and bringing athletics back, and improvements with maintenance-related issues around campus.

“Time and time again, Dr. Cox has proven to be a capable leader and I’m confident Northwest-Shoals will be well-served by his time as Interim President,” Baker said. “Chris’s innovative and enthusiastic approach is a benefit to students, faculty, and staff alike.”

Cox’s career includes stints as a high school teacher and coach, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent for the Oxford City Board of Education. Cox earned a Bachelor of Science in Social Science from Troy State University and a Master of Science in Educational Administration from Alabama State University. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration from Auburn University.

While last week’s news that President Glenda Colagross was out and Cox was in took campus personnel by surprise, it didn’t slow his plan to hit the ground running first thing Thursday morning. He had separate meetings with the president’s cabinet, faculty, and other personnel before the week was out.

Cox said he told the cabinet that his goal for everyone within the college is to improve daily and help people reach their goals and dreams.

“Northwest-Shoals Community College doesn’t need fixing,” he said. “There are lots of good things happening here, and it’s a great community so it’s all forward from here.”

[https://www.courierjournal.net/news/article\\_43c925e2-0228-11ec-b295-b783bc4a81be.html](https://www.courierjournal.net/news/article_43c925e2-0228-11ec-b295-b783bc4a81be.html)



## Message from the President

I am pleased to present the 2020 State of the College for Northwest-Shoals Community College. This report provides information about the productivity of the College over the 2019 calendar year.

This report provides a snapshot of the work of the College, but it cannot capture the breadth and qualities of our programs that make our College unique. I hope that it provides you with a sense of where Northwest-Shoals has been. Even more, I hope that it gives you a glimpse into the future and our commitment to forging stronger links to our community, to growing and enhancing our academic and technical programs, and to continuing service to business and industry.

NW-SCC faculty and staff are dedicated to helping students determine their career aspirations by identifying and strengthening their knowledge, skills, talents, and abilities. We take great pride in cultivating an environment of academic and technical excellence while embracing the commitment of lifelong learning.

We know our successes are shared by all the communities in our service area, and they would not be possible without your ongoing involvement and support. Northwest-Shoals remains committed to providing accessible, affordable, quality education for everyone in our community.

Thanks again for your ongoing support,

*Glenda Colagrosso*

Dr. Glenda Colagrosso  
President



### ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

#### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Governor Kay Ivey President District 1 Chairman

Al Thompson District 1 Chairman

John Mitchell District 2

Susan Foy District 3

Matthew Woods District 4

Crystal Brown District 5

Milton A. Davis District 6 Vice Chairman

Chuck Smith District 7

Blake McAnally Member-at-Large

Jeffrey Newman Ex-Officio Member State Board of Education



CHANCELLOR  
Jimmy H. Baker

## NW-SCC Student Successes

### NW-SCC helps Fabien get transfer scholarship to UA

Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) alumnus, Fabien Valles, of Rogersville, Alabama, received the College's most prestigious honor, the President's Award, at the Spring 2019 Honor's night ceremony.

Valles graduated from NW-SCC and was awarded more than \$30,000 in transfer scholarships to attend the University of Alabama. He is currently majoring in Mechanical Engineering.

As a student at NW-SCC, Valles served as the president of the campus chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international two-year college honor society. As president, he presented Phi Theta Kappa projects to the Alabama Education Policy Committee in Montgomery. He has also served on a student committee with Alabama Possible in Washington, D.C., to discuss how Congress can improve post-secondary access and completion.

"I don't have a lot of family in Alabama, just my parents and siblings, and my Northwest-Shoals family has been just that to me — my family," Valles said. "I'm grateful to be fulfilling my dream of becoming an engineer."



### NW-SCC helps Makayla's dreams come true

During her last semester at NW-SCC, alumna Makayla Franks of Thaplow, Alabama, found out her dreams were one step closer to becoming a reality when she received her acceptance letter into the McWhorter School of Pharmacy at Samford University.

NW-SCC offered several opportunities that were important to Franks when she was selecting a college. "Northwest-Shoals always seemed to be at the top of my list," stated Franks. "I was instantly attracted to NW-SCC due to many factors including the smaller class size, the accessibility of classes at two campuses, and the many scholarship opportunities."

"When I say NW-SCC is my second home, I mean it," said Franks.

After graduating from pharmacy school, Franks would like to return to Franklin County and give back to the community. She would like to eventually own her own pharmacy.





## Exciting New Programs

### FAME Program partners with 13 area companies

The Alabama FAME (Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education) Program at Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) combines an Associate of Applied Science Degree (AAS) in Industrial Systems Technology and two years of paid industry experience. The program includes cutting-edge curriculum in Electricity, Robotics, Fluid Power, Mechanics, Welding, Machining, and Industrial Troubleshooting. The FAME Program began in August of 2019.

NW-SCC currently has 13 companies committed to the program and sponsoring 18 students. Once accepted into the Alabama FAME AMT program at NW-SCC, students attend classes two full days per week (16-20 hours per week) while working three full days a week (24+ contact hours) with a sponsoring business from the local area.

For more information on the program, visit [nwsccl.edu/fame](http://nwsccl.edu/fame).



### Machinist apprenticeship at NW-SCC grows workforce

The Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) department of Workforce Solutions partnered with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) District 711, Local 65 to sign 10 machinist apprentices into the second class of the Machinist Apprenticeship Program last November on the Shoals campus.

The IAMAW Machinist Apprenticeship Program at NW-SCC is a non-credit pathway to a challenging and well-paying career as a machinist for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and its partner contractors. Program apprentices will begin a four-year training program that includes 1,200 hours of classroom training and 8,400 hours of on-the-job training. This is the second class of students to start this apprenticeship.

### NW-SCC launches medical imaging programs

Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) started two new Health Studies programs, Diagnostic/Medical Sonography and Diagnostic Imaging - Radiography, during the 2019 fall semester.

The Diagnostic Imaging - Radiography program prepares students to create images through the use of x-rays that can be used by physicians to diagnose a variety of conditions. The Diagnostic Medical Sonography program prepares students to use medical ultrasound equipment to capture images. Sonography is commonly associated with obstetrics and the use of ultrasound imaging during pregnancy but is also used in the diagnosis and treatment of other medical conditions.



### 5:2 Finish Program aims to help NW-SCC students complete

The 5:2 Finish Program is designed for students who are seeking to attain an Associate in Science Degree in five semesters and prefer not to start with online course offerings.

Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) expanded the program in fall of 2019. Students can now begin the program and take day or night classes on the Shoals or Phil Campbell campus. Each 5:2 Finish student has direct contact with a student success coach to help them with any questions or issues. As a result, the program has a student retention rate of over 90 percent.

After successfully completing the first year of the program with a 3.5 GPA or higher, participants will receive a half tuition scholarship for 30 credit hours to be used during the second year of the program. All participants receive personalized advising, career, financial literacy, and success coaching.



### NW-SCC starts Community Partners Scholarship Program

In 2019, Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) was proud to partner with the Franklin County, Haleyville, Lawrence County, Rogersville, and Shoals Chambers of Commerce to offer scholarships to employees of their business members. In the fall semester, NW-SCC awarded approximately 40 Community Partners scholarships.

The partnership provides 10 percent tuition scholarships to all full-time (30 hours+) employees of member businesses/companies of the Chambers of Commerce within the NW-SCC service area. Scholarships are applicable to all degree and certificate programs, at both campuses, including online offerings. Benefits of the Community Partners Scholarship are customized career plans for their employees and on-site academic or career technical course instruction.

### NW-SCC restructures Music Department to include Show Choir

For over 40 years, the Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) Music Department has been a staple for the Phil Campbell campus and community.

Traditionally, the Music Department has featured two primary groups: the NW-SCC Chorale and the NW-SCC Jazz Band. The department now features an exciting mix of choral and dance choreography in the form of the NW-SCC Show Choir.

The College's musical groups perform primarily in the Lou B. Bevell Center on the Phil Campbell Campus. However, the group will begin to perform throughout the College's service area.



## Building Projects

### NW-SCC Career Center and Career Closet now open

Northwest-Shoals Community College's (NW-SCC) opened the new Career Center on the Shoals campus (Building 100) in October of 2019.

The NW-SCC Career Center is committed to assisting students in achieving career readiness by developing soft skills instruction, coordinating work-based learning opportunities, providing employment guidance, and supporting students through career exploration.

The Career Center also provides NW-SCC students access to the Career Closet. This service offers students who do not own work and interview appropriate clothing professional clothing options. NW-SCC has partnered with the Department of Human Resources, Cato's, and many faculty/staff members to provide FREE professional clothing to students.



### NW-SCC renovates new building for Radiography and Sonography programs

#### Sonography programs

In spring of 2019, Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) purchased a medical imaging building adjacent to the Shoals campus to house the new Diagnostic Imaging - Radiography and Medical Sonography programs.

The NW-SCC Center for Medical Imaging is nearing completion of all renovations and is expected to open in spring of 2020.

Currently, the Radiography program has 12 students in its first class, and the Medical Sonography program has 8 students. The enrollment is expected to double in both programs in the fall of 2020.



#### Facility projects planned for 2020

Northwest-Shoals Community College (NW-SCC) will begin and/or complete the following projects in 2020:

- Finance Office Suite - Shoals Campus (Building 100)
- Campus Buildings and Grounds Restoration Project - Phil Campbell and Shoals Campuses
- Renovation Project - Phil Campbell Campus (Administration Building, 301)

## NW-SCC by the Numbers

### Enrollment, Retention & Graduation



2019 Fall Enrollment  
**3,598**

2019 Spring Student Retention Rate  
**81%**

Graduation Awards  
**1,007**

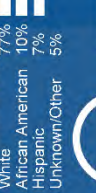
#### Enrollment by County



#### Enrollment by Gender



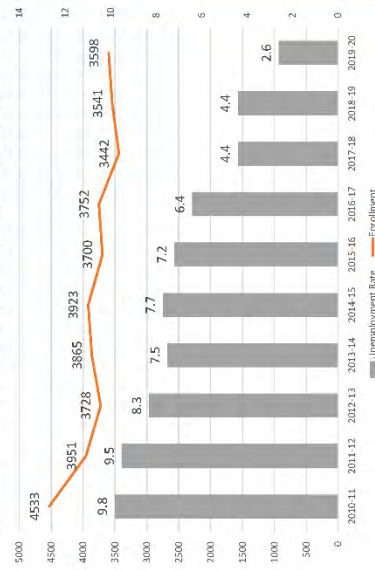
#### Enrollment by Race



Average Student Age  
**22**

### NW-SCC enrollment vs. area unemployment rate

Fall Semester Enrollment Comparison from 2010 - 2011 to 2019 - 2020





# Double Springs



Double Springs serves as the seat of Winston County and is located centrally within it. The town was named Double Springs after two springs that flow side by side near the town. The county seat was originally located in the town of Houston, but in 1883, residents voted to move the seat to Double Springs. Soon, construction began in Double Springs, and a courthouse, several stores, and a hotel were built in the fledgling town.

Although agriculture was a large source of early income for the town, Double Springs eventually began to incorporate industry into its economy. Today, there are a diverse range of products manufactured in the town, with windows, mattresses, and furniture all being produced in Double Springs. Education in the town is overseen by the Winston County School System, and consists of one public elementary school, one middle school, and one high school serving approximately 863 students in grades PreK-12. Double Springs is notable for the wide range of outdoor activities available in close proximity to the town. William B. Bankhead National Forest is located near Double Springs and offers recreational boating, hiking, and fishing to visitors. Additionally, the Sipsey Wilderness also covers area near Double Springs in both Winston and Lawrence Counties. The Sipsey Wilderness is the largest and most-visited wilderness area in the state of Alabama and is known as the "Land of 1000 Waterfalls" due to the natural-forming limestone and sandstone that form the many falls.

## Fast Facts About Double Springs

**Population:** 1,083

**Demographic Composition:** 87.5% White, 6.5% African American, 3.6% two or more races, 1.8% Native American, 0.5% Asian.

**Median Household Income:** \$23,000

**Largest Industries:** Manufacturing - 30.4%, educational and healthcare services - 18.7%, transportation and warehousing - 9.6%, construction - 8.8%.

**Fun Fact:** Each June, Double Springs hosts Frontier Days, which celebrates the town's early history. Activities include a horseshoe throwing contest, a Moon Pie eating contest, and a rodeo parade.

## Double Springs on a Map



---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

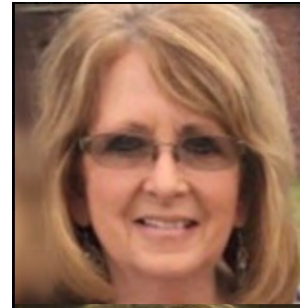
## Session XIV

Below are the biographies for speakers in Session XIV, exploring the history and legend of the Free State of Winston, including themes of public memory, community pride, and political neutrality.

---

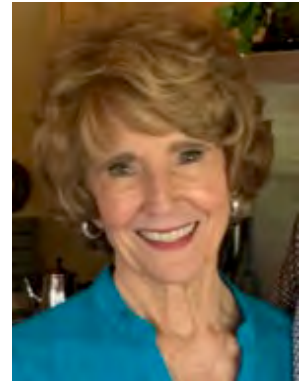
### **Diane Miller**

Dianne Tidwell Miller is a life-long resident of Winston County, Alabama. She was born and raised in the city of Haleyville, a 1974 graduate of Haleyville High School and graduated from Northwest Community College with an Associate Degree in Education and a minor in history. She has two children and four grandchildren. Dianne's love of history and genealogy began at an early age and began actively researching her family history 35 years ago. Dianne is an archivist at the Winston County Archives and is President of the Winston County Genealogical Society.



## **Peggy Norris**

Peggy is a Haleyville High School graduate, holds a BS degree in education from The University of Alabama, a master's degree, and AA from Auburn University at Montgomery. Peggy is a retired teacher and principal from The Montgomery Public School System and now resides in Arley on Rock Creek. She is a member of the Arley First Baptist Church where she sings in the choir. She is a member of Alpha Delta Kappa, an education sorority. She was married to Tim Norris for almost 55 years before he passed away in 2008. She is a proud mother of 4 children, (one deceased), 12 grandchildren, and 20 great grandchildren. She continues to be very active in Arley Women's Club and is a former president of this group that now has over 170 members. The Club's biggest project has been building and helping maintain the two-story public library in Arley. Its other main project is to restore and improve Hamner Park. It was named for Peggy's grandfather, David Hamner, who was, incidentally, the first University of Alabama graduate in Winston County. Other projects of Arley Women's Club include providing local scholarships, and sponsoring scouting, school projects and other civic efforts. Peggy presents programs to various church, school, and civic groups on a range of topics that include devotionals, health issues that relate particularly cardiac problems, local history, folk music, etc. Some of her folk music was placed in the library of Congress several years ago. Her folk songs tell about her life in Winston County and its history. Some songs are humorous while others are about love, faith, and hope.



---

## **J. D. Snoddy**

J. D. Snoddy has been Winston County's Circuit Court Clerk for 20 years. He serves as Chairman of Main Street Ministries food bank, the Winston County Arts Council, and JOBS Advisory Board. He is also on the boards of Addie's Place and Northwest Alabama Mental Health. He is Winston County's representative to the Mountain Lakes Tourism Association. He has been appointed to the Judicial Rules Committee of the Alabama Supreme Court and the Legislative Committee of the Circuit Clerks' Association.





The Free State of Winston is a popular name given to Civil War-era Winston County, as a reflection of the county's generally pro-Union stance and resistance to Confederate rule during the war. During the secession crisis, Unionists in Winston County declared their right to secede from Alabama; much as the state seceded from the Union. Although the county pulled back from the bold step of secession and hoped to remain neutral in the conflict, it remained under state control and was the scene of violent acts of retribution during and after the war.

Located in the rugged hill country of northwest Alabama, south of the Tennessee River, Winston County was originally formed from part of Walker County in 1850 and was named Hancock County, before it became Winston in 1858. Its rugged terrain, characterized by hills and steep-walled gorges, together with its poor soil and unpredictable climate, made subsistence farming, rather than large-scale cotton planting, the mainstay of Winston's economy. Very few enslaved people lived in the county in 1860.

In the 1860 election, the majority of Winston County's voters supported Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge for president, perhaps because they saw Breckinridge as the political heir of Andrew Jackson, a hero to many of the county's residents. From the beginning of the war, though, Winston County's inhabitants were strongly Unionist. Christopher Sheats, a 22-year old Winston County schoolteacher and ardent Unionist, was elected by an overwhelming majority to represent the county at Alabama's secession convention. There, he refused to sign the secession ordinance. His Unionism later led to his expulsion from the state legislature and his imprisonment for some time under charges of treason. In the first months after secession, many Winston Unionists formed home guard companies to defend themselves against Confederates. In addition, Unionists elected as officers in many of the county's militia units refused to take the oath of office, preventing them from drilling and entering Confederate service.

Winston earned its reputation as a Unionist "free state" during a large informal gathering of Unionists from Winston and surrounding counties. One early local historian gives the date as July 4, 1861, at Looney's Tavern, north of present-day Addison, whereas other sources suggest a later date, perhaps as late as early 1862, also at Looney's Tavern. According to the earlier account, the Unionists passed three resolutions. The first commended Sheats for his staunch opposition to secession. The second denied Alabama's right to secede but declared that if Alabama had that right, Winston County also had the right to secede from Alabama. The third resolution declared that those present desired to fight neither the Union nor the Confederacy and requested to be left alone by both sides to "work out our own political and financial destiny." Although the second resolution affirmed the right of the county to secede from Alabama, it did not actually declare Winston's secession. Nevertheless, one of those present reportedly said, "Oho! Winston secedes! The Free State of Winston!" Though the accounts may well contain some inaccuracies, a Unionist meeting did take place in the county and called for neutrality in the Civil War.

There were supporters of the Confederacy in Winston County as well, many of whom volunteered for Confederate service at the beginning of the war. The county's Confederates held a meeting of their own

on November 30, 1861. They petitioned Gov. John Gill Shorter to suppress the Unionist spirit pervading the county, to require all of the county's residents to take the Confederate loyalty oath, and to order the county to provide 250 Confederate soldiers. Shorter responded by issuing writs of arrest for those in the county who were actively disloyal to the Confederacy and also demanding the resignations of militia commanders who would not take the oath of office.

Although Winston County's Unionists wanted to be left alone, the governments of the Confederacy and of Alabama did not oblige. The hill-country Unionists soon faced Confederate conscription beginning in 1862 and many fled their homes, seeking refuge from conscription agents in the county's rugged forests and canyons. The natural bridge in western Winston County was said to have been a major gathering point for Unionists avoiding the draft or who had deserted from the Confederate Army. From Winston County, many of these Unionists eventually made their way north to the Tennessee River valley and joined the Union Army, most commonly enlisting in the First Alabama Cavalry, USA. A few of the county's residents, including Bill Looney, served the Union Army by helping Unionists escape to the safety of Union lines. In July 1862, Col. Abel D. Streight led a detachment of Union troops into the hills to gather more recruits for the Union Army. The Unionist farmers who fled into the woods and to the Union Army to avoid the Confederate draft could not work on their farms. Hence, the county's residents had difficulty growing enough food. Confederate impressment agents worsened matters by taking food and livestock from the county to feed the Confederate army.

The war produced a number of atrocities in Winston County, as both Unionists and Confederates committed acts of robbery, vandalism, and even murder against their former neighbors. One notable instance was the murder of probate judge Tom Pink Curtis by a band of Confederate horsemen who were looking for salt left in Curtis's charge by the Alabama state government for distribution to the poor. In the later years of the war, both Union and Confederate raiders swept through the county. Confederate captain Nelson Fennel led an unsuccessful raid into Winston in June 1863 to seize deserters and draft-dodgers. Lt. Col. W. L. Maxwell led a Confederate expedition in April 1864 into the county for a similar purpose, but the rugged terrain hampered his efforts. Union colonel William J. Palmer led a raid through Winston County in December 1864 and January 1865. While in the county, his force won a skirmish with a body of Confederates and liberated a large number of Unionist conscripts. Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson led a major Union raid through the county in March and April of 1865.

After the war, considerable tensions remained between Winston County's Unionists and Confederates, leading to occasional violence. The county's Unionism led to Republican Party dominance of local politics. Today, a statue of a Civil War soldier, half Union and half Confederate, stands in front of the Winston County courthouse in Double Springs, commemorating the county's divided loyalties during the war. The Incident at Looney's Tavern, a musical drama performed many times in Winston County, tells the story of Christopher Sheats and the Unionist meeting at Looney's Tavern. It is the official state outdoor musical drama of Alabama.

<http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1850>

DOUBLE SPRINGS — As racial tensions burn across the United States and protesters in the South pressure officials to remove Confederate symbols, all is quiet on this northwestern Alabama front.

No one is trying to tear down what may be the most unusual courthouse monument in the state, a statue called Dual Destiny that features both Confederate and U.S. flags.

Perhaps the design of the monument makes it more palatable to current values. But the lack of conflict also may lie in the fact that only 124 of the county's estimated 23,968 residents are black.

Roger Hayes, himself serving in a dual role as County Commission chairman and Haleyville barber, said residents are proud of their monument and their heritage of supporting the Union during the Civil War. Although he has not received direct complaints about the monument, he did hear barbershop rumors that a group planned to attack it. So the county increased security.

"We heard that a group in Jasper was headed toward Double Springs," he said. "It was apparently false. We don't go bothering anybody, and we don't want them bothering us. We just want to be left alone."

Although he represents a county that remained loyal to the United States 159 years ago and he said he "tries to treat people right, no matter their race," Hayes doesn't support efforts to remove Confederate monuments. He said everyone has a right to celebrate their history.

"We got a good country, and we don't need anybody tearing it down," he said. Other residents interviewed in the county's largest town, Haleyville, echoed similar feelings.

### **Dual Destiny Monument**

The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified 1,747 Confederate monuments across the nation, but the statue designed for the city of Double Springs and erected at the Winston County Courthouse may be unique, or at least unusual, for its dual destiny theme. Another difference from the majority of statues is that the Winston monument was erected in 1987, not during the period immediately after Reconstruction, during Jim Crow suppression or the segregation era of the 1950s.

The sculptor, German-born Branko Medenica, is the same person who in 2013 created the Charles Linn statue in Birmingham, which protesters pulled down May 31. Linn was a sea captain who aided the Confederate Navy and founded what became AmSouth Bank.

Medenica's soldier in the Winston County monument bears both U.S. and Rebel flags, and he holds a broken sword.

“This Civil War soldier, one-half Union and one-half Confederate, symbolizes the war within a war and honors the Winstonians in both armies,” wrote Donald D. Dodd, professor emeritus of history at Auburn University, in the monument’s inscription. “Their shiny new swords of 1861 were by 1865 as broken as the spirits of the men who bore them, and their uniforms of blue and gray once fresh and clean were now as worn and patched as the bodies and souls they contained. Johnny Reb and Billy Yank, disillusioned by the realities of war, shared dual destinies as pragmatic Americans in a reunited nation.”

U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville, said some people have suggested the courthouse monument should have been limited to a Union soldier because most people from Winston County sided with the United States. He said he once talked to Dodd about this suggestion.

“(He) told me that if the Dual Destiny monument in Winston County had been solely of a Union Army soldier, then it would have been one of the few — perhaps the only — monuments to the Civil War of a Union soldier in the Deep South.”

Confederate monuments that appeared during racially oppressive periods in history were erected to teach certain values to people, University of North Carolina at Greensboro history professor Mark Elliott told history.com. Those values include “glorification of the cause of the Civil War,” he said.

Today, the monuments have come under fire as more people consider what the symbols represent and watch as white supremacy groups embrace the Confederate flag.

In a recent Facebook live conference, U.S. Sen. Doug Jones, a Democrat, said there is a “moral awakening of so many people in this country to the fact that there are so many of our brothers and sisters who are still being denied equal opportunities, equal rights and equal dignities.”

Aderholt said he would never claim to know how blacks feel, but he understands why Confederate monuments might offend them.

“People see these monuments from many different perspectives and lenses,” he said. “My hope is that we learn that our system of government allows for change that that one man or race is not superior to another. There is always room for us to strive to do better.”

Aderholt said he generally believes historical monuments should be left in place. When the House of Representatives voted in 2019 to ban Confederate flags at national cemeteries, Aderholt voted against the measure.

“As with the monument in Winston County, they are not all the same,” he said. “The Civil War is a dark period in our nation’s history, but it was, nonetheless, a part of our history, and we must not forget our history. Removing all of the monuments will not change that history, but it might cause people to forget it and perhaps even repeat it.”

Living among a tiny black population far from urban centers, several Winston County residents expressed strong sentiments about monuments and racial issues. This includes limited empathy for George Floyd, the black man recently killed by a Minneapolis police officer. They also show little support for the protests, riots, criticism of police and removal of Confederate monuments that followed Floyd's death.

"I'm tired of it," said Robert Steelman, who moved to Winston County from the Birmingham area. "Where is our country going? It's insane."

He said Confederate monuments are important for teaching history to schoolchildren. Removing those monuments is like eliminating history, he said.

Outside a business in Haleyville, Jessica Shank agreed that Confederate monuments are part of history that should be preserved. She said Floyd's death is the responsibility of one police officer, and it shouldn't turn into a widespread racial issue.

"I'm not racist," she said, adding that her first child is bi-racial.

Aderholt said the nation needs to listen to the concerns of African Americans and other minorities.

"What happened to George Floyd is unacceptable. Period," he said. "I believe that the vast majority of the men and women in law enforcement are dedicated to doing their jobs professionally and with courtesy, and find what happened appalling. However, we need to make new efforts to root out that small percentage of law enforcement officers who are not in the profession for the right reasons."

### **Free State of Winston**

In reality, the Free State of Winston was never a state, nor was it free from the Confederacy. It was filled with Unionists, and was dogged and persecuted during the war, according to Ronald Jackson, the go-to volunteer for expertise on local history at the Winston County Archives. Some of the hard feelings lingered after the war.

In the 1860 Census, Winston County listed 14 slaveholders and 122 slaves, which helps explain both its lack of zeal for Confederate ideology and today's small black population. The county is 94% white, according to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau estimate, compared to 65% statewide.

From its earliest days, the county possessed a deep loyalty with the United States and fondness for Andrew Jackson, which carried over as states in the South seceded from the Union.

"Most people here were children of Revolutionary soldiers and the war of 1812," Ronald Jackson said. "They clung to the Union."



Voters from 1860 in Winston County did not choose President Lincoln — he wasn't on the ballot in Alabama — but they helped Winston become one of the strongest Republican counties in the state.

With talk of secession swirling throughout Alabama after Lincoln's election, Winston County residents chose Charles Christopher Sheats to represent them as a delegate to the state capital in Montgomery. Sheats ran on a platform to "vote against secession first, last and all the time," according to an article at [freestateofwinston.org](http://freestateofwinston.org).

Sheats was among 24 delegates who did not sign the secession resolution. Jackson said Sheats and others were eventually thrown into prison so they could not oppose the secession resolution.

"They got a 100% vote by eliminating the ones who wouldn't vote for it," Jackson said.

During a regional meeting with Sheats at Looney's Tavern at Double Springs, the Union loyalists agreed to several resolutions that declared their wishes to remain neutral. Jackson said one resolution stated that if a state could secede from the Union, then a county could secede from the state. This resolution didn't pass, but someone shouted "The Free State of Winston!" The name stuck, and today it adorns a few barns in the county.

Winston County residents quickly gained a reputation for being traitors to the Confederacy, which resulted in raids and attempts to conscript men into military service against their will.

After their 1862 victory at Shiloh, Tennessee, Union troops moved into nearby north Mississippi and established camps. Jackson said many men sneaked out of Winston County and joined the First Alabama Cavalry USA in Glendale, Mississippi, eventually becoming guards for Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

According to the plaque on the courthouse monument, Winston County provided 239 soldiers for the Union. They were part of the estimated 300,000 Southerners who fought for the Union Army, mostly from the Appalachian region from West Virginia to Winston County.

But those Union soldiers are not widely honored or celebrated in the South.

While Jackson said local residents are proud of their reputation as the Free State of Winston, he said the local chapter of Sons of Confederate Veterans is active in honoring the Confederacy. On private land just off U.S. 278, a few miles west of the courthouse monument, the group erected a massive Rebel flag at a roadside park along with two statues and a recruitment sign.

Winston County provided 112 soldiers to the Confederates, according to the Dual Destiny Monument.]

## Political Twists and Turns

Trying to follow the twists and turns of political ideology in Winston County is like driving one of the many mountain roads here that plunges into dark hollows only to climb onto sunny ridge tops.

Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom Jr. was present in 1987 when officials dedicated the Union/Confederate monument. He was among the state's Democrats seeing their power evaporate with the election of Republican Gov. Guy Hunt.

But the ground where Folsom stood in Winston County was a Republican stronghold long before being Republican was considered cool in Alabama.

"When Alabama seceded from the Union, Winston County tried to secede from Alabama, and is still known as the Free State of Winston, even today," Aderholt said. "This is actually the reason Winston County has been a Republican county for a century and a half when the rest of the state was solidly Democrat."

The Republican party of Lincoln led to the end of slavery — with the help of Winston County — and for a short period, an escalation of political empowerment for blacks. Democrats fought to preserve slavery and to oppress blacks for decades after the Civil War.

Perceptions have flipped in modern history, however, with Democrats receiving the majority of black votes and aligning themselves with minority interests. Republican President Trump is taking criticism for being deaf to black concerns, clamping down on protests and dismissing claims of police brutality.

Winston County has stood by the GOP through the decades of sharp political change. In 2016, the county had the highest percentage of the Trump/Pence vote in the nation, according to the Alabama Republican Party.

Aderholt stands by his party and president, too.

"We were all shocked by the video of George Floyd, but then we became shocked by videos of rioters killing and hurting people," Aderholt said. "I think the president has responded to this frustration out there that we cannot have anarchy."

Winston County resident Maria Epperson said she agrees with peaceful protests against police brutality, but she doesn't support taking down Civil War monuments.

"A monument never hurt anybody," she said.

<https://birminghamwatch.org/free-state-winston-honors-dual-destiny-confederate-monuments-fall/>



# CAMP MCDOWELL



105 DeLong Road • Nauvoo, AL 35578 / 205-387-1806 • [campmcdowell.com](http://campmcdowell.com)

---

# BURT JONES RURAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>®</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

## Session XV

Below are the biographies for presenters in Session XV, an overview of Camp McDowell Camp and Conference Center, a ministry of the Episcopal Churches in the Diocese of Alabama.

---

### **Whitney Moore-Shea**

Whitney Moore-Shea is Acting Executive Director of Camp McDowell. She is originally from Fayette, Alabama and now lives in Nauvoo, Alabama. Ms. Moore-Shea has been able to provide Camp McDowell direction and stability while they are in this period of transition. After a tragic fire that the camp suffered in 2019, Ms. Moore-Shea led a fundraiser which raised over \$22,000 and helped recover much of the lost infrastructure.



---

### **Andrew Shea**

Andrew Shea works with Land and Resource Management for Camp McDowell. Mr. Shea is the farm school director at Camp McDowell and in this position, he has been able to work on several initiatives. In 2020 Mr. Shea partnered with the Rural Assembly for The Rethinking Rural Alabama Symposium. Mr. Shea has also worked as the Food Ambassador for the heads-up camp's production farms where he has practiced good farming techniques and helped to host farm school workshops.





# Wonderful Wonderful CAMP McDOWELL

At Camp McDowell, we show the way the world could be through worship, learning, rest and play in the beauty of God's Backyard.



The mission of the Alabama Folk School is to provide an opportunity to be inspired and renewed in a supportive community while learning from and experiencing master artists, artisans and musicians.

The mission of the McDowell Environmental Center is to connect people to their environment, teach respect for the Earth and its beings, and to promote a commitment to lifelong learning.



Situated on 1,140 acres of fields and forests with miles of trails winding through beautiful sandstone canyons, Camp McDowell is the perfect place to relax and build community with your church family, small group, organization, or business. We can accommodate individuals or groups from 1 - 800. All people and traditions are welcomed with love and joy.



The mission of the Magnolia Nature School is to provide a kindergarten readiness program allowing children to explore the natural world thereby creating good stewards of God's earth.



**Magnolia**  
NATURE SCHOOL  
At Camp McDowell  
creating good stewards of God's earth



The mission of Summer Camp & Retreats at Camp McDowell is to spread the gospel by lifting up intentional camp community, the care of creation, the gift of inclusion, and the joy of creativity and play.

The mission of the McDowell Farm School is to inspire curiosity, teach problem solving, and empower community connections through sustainable agriculture.



Camp McDowell is a ministry of the Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Alabama and is the largest Episcopal Camp & Conference in the U.S. regarding capacity.

The Episcopal Church welcomes you.  
We believe that God loves you - no exceptions.



McDowell Camp & Conference Center | 105 Delong Road | Nauvoo, AL 35578 | 205.387.1806 | [wonderful@campmcdowell.com](mailto:wonderful@campmcdowell.com) | [www.campmcdowell.com](http://www.campmcdowell.com)









---

BURT JONES  
RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Student Expectations

Each and every interaction with a Blackburn Student, Fellow, Advisory Board member, or friend of the institute provides you with a unique opportunity to build your personal brand through positive networking experiences. Be mindful that poor behavior reflects poorly not only on yourself, but your family, your region, your state, the Blackburn Institute, and The University of Alabama.

---

## **Broadening Horizons:**

A primary mission of the Blackburn Institute is developing ethical, broad-thinking leaders. In order to become a leader of this caliber, individuals must be willing to entertain new ideas and expose themselves to new people and experiences.

- Have the courage to not only embrace, but to seek out, new experiences.
  - Show empathy and understanding for others in all that you do.
  - Tolerate and learn from differing viewpoints.
  - Develop a positive attitude towards interacting with people unfamiliar to you.
- 

## **Professionalism:**

As a leadership development organization, the Blackburn Institute places a heavy emphasis on professionalism. Ethical leaders should exemplify professional ideals and enact them in his or her daily life, but especially during Blackburn-sponsored events.

- Engage in meaningful dialogue aimed at increasing mutual understanding; never adversarial debate aimed at conquest or victory.
- Respect every individual regardless of class, rank, title, or responsibilities.
- Ask insightful questions in search of knowledge and understanding; never use questioning as a mechanism to trap or discredit someone.

## General Decorum:

Ensure that you always use proper manners at Blackburn-sponsored events and please keep in mind the useful tips we learned from the Blackburn Essential Skills Workshops.

- Utilize appropriate dining etiquette.
  - Maximize networking opportunities.
  - Engage in civil discourse and dialogue.
  - Ask thoughtful and respectful questions.
  - Show respect and courtesy to members of the Blackburn Institute, speakers, invited guests, and all others.
- 

## Conduct:

As a member of the Blackburn Institute, you represent the Institute and The University of Alabama at all Blackburn events.

- Remember, you will be held accountable for all policies contained in the [Code of Student Conduct](#) when off campus representing The University and the Blackburn Institute.
- From [The University of Alabama Alcohol and Other Drug Policy](#):  
“The University of Alabama is an institution of higher education which seeks to create a community that promotes respect, responsibility for actions, civility, upholds state and federal laws, and fosters an environment conducive to learning for members of the academic community. The misuse of AOD can hinder the University’s mission and its role in preparing students for responsible citizenship through appropriately focused educational, environmental and enforcement activities related to student health, safety, and wellbeing.”
- Consuming and/or being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are strictly prohibited for all students in all Blackburn student programs. A limited exception for alcohol is made for students age 21 and over during institute-designated events with Fellows and Advisory Board members. Expectations of appropriate conduct, decorum, and professionalism remain in place at all times.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print), as a student member of the Blackburn Institute have read, fully understand, and agree to the Student Expectations.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

BURT JONES  
**RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE**

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**<sup>\*</sup> | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Dress Classifications

The Blackburn Institute utilizes a standard dress classification system to help its community identify appropriate attire for a variety of events. Attire will be noted in all invitations for Blackburn Institute events. This system provides flexibility for personal style, while ensuring a consistent appearance and level of professionalism.

## Business Formal

- Business-style dress
- Dress with a jacket
- Stockings (optional in summer)
- Heels, low or high
- Business suit
- Matching vest (optional)
- Dress shirt
- Conservative tie
- Dress shoes and dress socks

## Business Casual

- Skirt, khakis, or pants
- Open-collar shirt, knit shirt, or sweater (no spaghetti straps or décolleté)
- Dress
- Flats or heels
- Seasonal sport coat or blazer with slacks or khakis
- Dress shirt, casual button-down shirt, open-collar or polo shirt
- Optional tie
- Loafers or loafer-style shoes with socks

## Casual

- Anything in which you are comfortable!

If you want specific guidelines for this category, here are some suggestions:

- Sundress
- Long or short skirt
- Khakis or jeans (clean, no holes)
- Shorts (depending on occasion and climate)
- Plain t-shirt (no slogans), polo shirt, or turtleneck
- Casual button-down blouse or shirt and/or sweater
- Loafers, sneakers, or sandals



# Suggested Packing List

## Clothing

- General Attire Guidelines (see previous page for descriptions)
  - Wednesday - Business casual for full day  
*Note: Comfortable footwear, no open-toed shoes for mill tour at Kith Kitchens.*
  - Thursday - Business casual for full day  
*Note: Comfortable footwear for outdoor agricultural tour at Red Land Cotton.*
  - Friday - Business casual for full day  
*Note: Comfortable footwear for short walk outdoors (less than .5 miles) in the Russellville Central Business District, and another short walk down hill (less than .5 miles) to an outdoor classroom at Northwest Shoals Community College.*
  - Saturday - Casual for full day  
*Note: Bring extra clothes for hiking and canoeing at Camp McDowell.*
- Socks and appropriate footwear
- Belt

## Miscellaneous

- Mask - **required**
- Nametag - **required**
- Portfolio - **required**
- Personal hand sanitizer or other PPE - **optional**

**Not Recommended** - Students are strongly discouraged from bringing the following items.

- Laptops
- Large amounts of study materials
- Excessive cash
- Expensive jewelry

---

BURT JONES  
RURAL COMMUNITY  
EXPERIENCE

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA** | Division of  
Student Life  
Blackburn Institute

# Post-Trip Self-Assessment

1. Name:

2. How would you rate your general level of knowledge of the following issues impacting Northwest Alabama on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least knowledgeable and 10 being the most knowledgeable?

Arts and Culture

Business/Industry

Education

Geography/Environment

History and Social Issues

Local Government/Politics

3. How would you rate your personal level of empathy and appreciation for other people's perspectives on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least empathetic and 10 being the most empathetic?

4. How would you rate your ability to engage in meaningful discussions among the following groups on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being unable to have meaningful discussions and 10 being fully able to have meaningful discussions?

Your Blackburn Class

Your Class Small Group

All Blackburn Students

Blackburn Fellows

Blackburn Advisory Board

Blackburn Staff

Those Outside of Blackburn

5. What do you think are the biggest issues impacting this region of the state?

---

---

---

---

6. What do you think are the state's greatest resources/advantages for this region of the state?

---

---

---

---

7. What did you learn from this travel experience?

---

---

---

---

8. What content did you enjoy most about this travel experience?

---

---

---

---

9. What content did you enjoy least about this travel experience?

---

---

---

---

10. What area of the state would you like to explore in future rural travel experiences?

---

---

---

---

11. Did you have any concerns about the content or format of the travel experience?

---

---

---

---