

Tide gymnasts win
Northeast Regional,
qualify for nationals

PARA
calendar
of events

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The Tuscaloosa News

THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

Alabama baseball
hosts LSU
this weekend



STAFF FILE PHOTO | ROBERT SUTTON

The Bryce building stands on the Bryce Hospital campus.

City wants in on fate of Bryce

By Dana Beyerle
Montgomery Bureau Chief

MONTGOMERY | Tuscaloosa officials are concerned about Bryce Hospital's clients being adequately supported in the community if the hospital property is sold or its services privatized.

In letters to John Houston, commissioner of the state Department of Mental Health, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox and Rep. Alan Harper, D-Aliceville, said local governments want input into how the department will serve Bryce's clients if the hospital land is sold to the University of Alabama and clients are released.

Legislators also expressed concern about privatizing mental health services in Tuscaloosa and the impact on state jobs at Bryce.

The department said April 1 that no one would be "dumped" into the community and clients would receive adequate support in community settings.

The state mental health department is in discussions with UA, which wants to buy the Bryce property to expand the university campus. Mental health spokesman John Ziegler declined to say what the status of the department's discussions with the university was, saying that it was too early to tell.

Mental health officials have not indicated whether the 300 clients

SEE BRYCE | 3A

Tobacco tax could reduce smoking

Health officials tout benefits of measure

By Wayne Grayson
Staff Writer

State and local health officials agree the recent 62-cent increase in federal cigarette taxing will mean fewer smokers in Alabama — and some health changes.

State Health Officer Don Williamson said the tax would result in a measurable decline in smoking prevalence for the state.

"The most effective way to reduce tobacco consumption is with tobacco tax increase," he said. "I don't think there's any doubt that in doubling the tax in addition to all the other economic hardships facing people today that a large number will have to quit."

The tax went into effect April 1. Added to Alabama's state tobacco tax, it means each pack of cigarettes will be

taxed a total of \$1.44. Williamson said the tax not only means more money to fund children's health care, but it also saves state money in other ways.

"It will have long-term effects of reducing health care expenditures because it will cause someone who has been smoking tobacco to quit," he said.

The decrease in the number of smokers is much needed, Williamson said. Alabama has higher smoking rates as well as a historically lower tobacco tax compared with other states.

In fact, according to a survey done by the National Conference of State Legislatures, Alabama ranks as the ninth-lowest in state cigarette excise taxes.

Alan Blum, director of the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Tobacco in Society, said a decrease



TOTAL TAXES

Each pack of cigarettes will be taxed a total of \$1.44 in Alabama in state and federal taxes.

and use, Blum said.

"But I don't think we would still be talking about raising prices if consumption wasn't at some point leveling off," he said.

Through the years, tobacco companies have become used to adapting to the dynamics of their market, Blum said.

will be seen, but only in the short term.

"[The tax] is not a bad thing, it's just that it's an incomplete approach," Blum said.

In the past, as cigarette prices have been raised, there has always been a temporary drop in tobacco sales

"[The tax] will have long-term effects of reducing health care expenditures because it will cause someone who has been smoking tobacco to quit."

State Health Officer
Don Williamson

"You'll start to see all sorts of price discounting. You'll see two-for-one sales or three-for-one sales. There will be coupons available on the Internet," he said. "The companies are all very adept at maintaining their users."

Blum pointed out that Phillip Morris, the largest tobacco manufacturer in the U.S., raised prices on cigarettes just ahead of the increase. He said he believes tobacco companies piggyback

SEE TAX | 3A



Stephen Glasgow of Riverview Animal Clinic releases an alligator snapping turtle into the Black Warrior River on April 1. Below is a close-up of the 70-pound turtle.

\$10 wins turtle's freedom

By Wayne Grayson
Staff Writer

He had already lost \$10 — he wasn't about to lose his finger, too.

But as William Wilder reached down to retrieve most of his left index finger from the clutches of a 70-pound alligator snapping turtle, the turtle struck again.

"I reached down there with the other hand to get my finger back and he got my thumb," Wilder said.

The turtle was a bit out of sorts, and likely terrified as Wilder hosed him down on the front porch of his home in Brookwood. But it was a far better situation than what could have been had Wilder not come to the turtle's rescue earlier in the day.

Wilder had just gotten off work and decided

to head down to a nearby bar to meet a few friends. Walking in, he noticed the turtle confined in the bed of a pickup truck. A cable had been attached to the truck bed and run through a small hole drilled into the turtle's shell.

He asked around the bar to see who the truck belonged to and what they planned on doing with the turtle. The

man who owned the truck told him he caught the turtle while fishing.

"He said the turtle had gotten stuck in his trotline and they were gonna take him home and eat him," Wilder said.

And while Wilder will be the first to admit he's no animal expert, he knew by the turtle's sheer size that it had to be rare.

"I said 'No you ain't. How about I give you \$10 and take it off your hands,'" Wilder said. "I wasn't about to let anybody kill something like that."

And later on the front porch, as the turtle tightened its grip on Wilder's hand, and those looking on urged him to kill the behemoth reptile, Wilder stayed true to his misunderstood friend.

"I said I just got done paying \$10 for this thing," Wilder said. "Nobody's going to kill it. Especially not me."

It took four EMTs to pull the turtle from Wilder's hand. He spent two days in the hospital and while he still has his right thumb, doctors weren't able to reattach the finger.

When he returned home, the turtle greeted him, still sitting on the front porch. He soon called the Alabama Wildlife Center to, once and for all, take the turtle off his hands.

The turtle was treated at Riverview Animal Clinic in Birming-



ham for head and tail injuries and Wednesday afternoon, the animal was released back into the wild.

Lee McDonald of the AWC said alligator snapping turtles aren't endangered, but they are a threatened species and are protected by state law from being captured or killed. McDonald said the turtles eat anything they can catch and are thought to deplete fish populations.

She said it is common for the turtle to become tangled in trotlines and then killed by fishermen once they are dragged to shore.

"It's important that we're getting him back where he needs to be," McDonald said.

Wilder has no hard feelings toward his attacker and was glad to hear the turtle had finally made it home.

"That's just the way I feel about animals. I just want to make sure nothing happens to them," he said. "I wasn't expecting that to happen, but it happened."

STAFF PHOTOS | MICHAEL E. PALMER

BFGoodrich to lay off 50 workers in Tuscaloosa

By Patrick Rupinski
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | BFGoodrich planned to lay off 50 hourly workers at its Tuscaloosa plant effective April 6.

The company informed its workers of the indefinite layoff on April 1, said James Crowder, recording secretary for Local 351 of the United Steelworkers union, which represents the tire maker's unionized employees.

Plant officials and spokesmen at the U.S. headquarters of Michelin, which owns BFGoodrich, could not be reached for comment. It is unknown if any

SEE LAYOFFS | 3A

ABOUT THE LAYOFFS

James Crowder, a recording secretary for Local 351 of the United Steelworkers union, said that the layoffs will be based on seniority. The Tuscaloosa BFGoodrich plant employs about 1,300 workers.

County BOE cuts 5 central office jobs

By Jamon Smith
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | The Tuscaloosa County Board of Education approved five layoffs on March 30, finally bringing the budget for the 2008-09 school year into balance.

The positions eliminated were director of purchasing, a literacy specialist, director of facility operations, a graphic arts technician and a secretary.

All five layoffs were made at the Tuscaloosa County Schools Central Office and were done through the Reduction in Force policy, which allows employees to be rehired if financial conditions improve.

The employees' contracts end June 30. The move saves the school system a total of \$394,013.40 from that date until the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.

"With the Reduction in Force of the five positions, we will be able to balance the budget in September with all the additional cuts that have been made," said Frank Costanzo, superintendent of the Tuscaloosa County School System.

"It's a very good thing for the system certainly as we've tried to deal with the most devastating financial issues in

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