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FORECAST

TODAY SAT SUN

81°/64° 77°/61° 76°/60°

Complete forecast, A2

SPORTS



Austin and Decatur fight for rivalry win

The Austin Black Bears and Decatur Red Raiders, both with excellent records this season, hit the dirt Thursday evening for a baseball version of the River City rivalry. C1

RIVERFRONT

Trial set for woman who allegedly hired hit man

The trial for a woman accused of hiring a hit man via Facebook to kill the Hartselle father of her young daughter after a custody dispute in 2020 is scheduled to go forward in April following a hearing Wednesday in Morgan County Circuit Court. B1

Charge: Snapchat user exploited Limestone girl

A Maryland man has been charged in federal court with child exploitation offenses after authorities said he communicated with a 14-year-old girl in Limestone County through Snapchat and convinced her to send sexually explicit images and videos of herself. B1

NATION



Homeland Security funding falters again

Republicans invoked the war in Iran and the prospect of retaliatory terrorist attacks as they made another unsuccessful effort Thursday to pass a bill funding the Department of Homeland Security. B4

WORLD

Trump wants role in picking Iran's leader

U.S. President Donald Trump said Thursday he should be involved in choosing Iran's next supreme leader as the U.S. and Israel hammered the country for a sixth day. A5

AREA DEATHS

Rebecca Garrison, Decatur
 Lucy McCaig, Falkville
 Ruby Means, Decatur
 Hazel Norton, Mouton
 James Payne, Florida
 Jerry Suggs, Decatur
 Death notices, obits, A3

AbbyB3 HoroscopeB3
 BusinessD4 Obituaries.....A3
 ClassifiedC4 Religion.....D1
 Comics.....B2 RiverfrontC1
 Crossword.....B3 Sports.....B1
 Editorials.....A4 Weather.....A2

Decatur, Alabama
 115th year, No. 8
 20 pages, 4 sections



CHILD SAFETY

Conference highlights online threats

By Wes Tomlinson
Staff Writer



Jones

Online crimes involving sexual extortion, grooming of minors and human trafficking occur nationwide — including in small communities across north Alabama — and they are often facilitated online.

“I think that the vulnerability is always there and with our more rural communities, I feel

like it’s important to emphasize that there’s no shame or embarrassment in having any of these conversations with our kids,” said Casey Jones, an outreach specialist for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. “Even in some communities where technology isn’t readily accessible,

we’re still seeing this on school computers. No matter what community we’re in, it happens everywhere.”

Jones said the nonprofit organization is federally funded and its mission is to help find missing children and combat sexual exploitation by operating the CyberTipline, a national reporting system that reviews tips and forwards them to appropriate law enforcement agencies worldwide.

Jones was one of several speakers discussing these crimes and how to prevent them during the 24th Annual Child Safety Conference on Tuesday at Decatur Baptist Church, hosted by the Mental Health Association of Morgan County.

According to the Department of Justice, sextortion is a form of blackmail used by offenders to

SEE CONFERENCE, A5

DECATUR POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officers demonstrate use-of-force simulator



WAFF-48 reporter Kalee Kniess finds herself in a tense and confusing scenario as she participates in a firearm use simulation at Decatur Police Department's shooting range. More photos at decaturdaily.com. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

By Wes Tomlinson
Staff Writer

In less than a second, a calm encounter can turn hostile, forcing police officers to make life-or-death decisions to protect themselves and the public — a reality Decatur Police Chief Torry Mack said his officers face every day.

“Look at it through our lens — the decisions that we have to make and the time we have

to make those decisions,” Mack told reporters. “We have to have law enforcement. If not, we would look like a third-world country. There would be no law and order anywhere.”

Mack invited several local reporters, including one from The Decatur Daily, to participate in the department’s firearm simulation training at its firing range in Trinity last month. The program includes

hundreds of scenarios based on real dispatch calls, ranging from traffic stops and suspicious persons calls to home invasions and hostage situations.

Each reporter was given a holster and a department-issued handgun outfitted with a laser training device powered by a CO2 cartridge. The training took place inside the

SEE OFFICERS, A5

HOMELAND SECURITY

Trump fires Kristi Noem amid criticism

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday fired his embattled Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, after mounting criticism over her leadership of the department, including the handling of the administration’s immigration crackdown and disaster response.

Trump, who said he would nominate Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin in her place, made the announcement on social media after Noem faced a two-day grilling on Capitol Hill this week from GOP members as well as Democrats.



Noem

Noem’s departure marks a stunning turnaround for a close ally to the president who was tasked with steering his centerpiece policy of mass deportations. But she appeared to increasingly become a liability for Trump, with questions arising over her spending at her department and over her conduct in the aftermath of the shooting deaths of two protesters in Minneapolis earlier this year.

Trump said Noem “has served us well, and has had numerous and spectacular results (especially on the Border!).” He said he was making her a “Special Envoy for The Shield of the Americas,” a



Mullin

SEE TRUMP, A5

BIRMINGHAM-SOUTHERN

Coast Guard to buy campus for training center

By Alex Angle
Alabama Daily News

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Coast Guard will acquire the now-closed Birmingham-Southern College campus to house its new training facilities, Alabama federal lawmakers announced Wednesday.

The Coast Guard will use the 192-acre campus to help train recruits and support up to 15,000 personnel. Birmingham-Southern was chosen for meeting multiple requirements, such as housing for 1,200 recruits, a medical facility and classrooms. The Coast Guard launched its search for a location for the center last year. The college ceased operations in 2024.

“Last year’s recruitment exceeded 110% of active-duty enlisted goals, and the Coast

Guard is on track to add 15,000 new members by 2028,” Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in a statement issued before her termination. “This next generation of heroes deserves training centers and support facilities worthy of their mission, and that is exactly what they are going to have in Alabama.”

U.S. Sen. Katie Britt, R-Ala., chair of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, said she advocated directly to Noem for the Birmingham site to be chosen for the new hub.

“Alabama stands as a proud leader in military excellence, and we’re honored to host this new training center that will help



Lunday

mold the next generation of Coast Guard members,” Britt said.

After the purchase is complete, the Coast Guard will begin refitting the campus to serve its new purpose.

“Although we will always grieve the closing of our beloved college in 2024, we believe the sale of our campus to the Coast Guard for this purpose — supporting the training, education, and ongoing development of the people who serve in our nation’s premier maritime protection force — is a terrific outcome for our city, our state, and the neighborhood we called home for more than 100 years,” the Rev. Keith D. Thompson, chair of the BSC Board of Trustees, said in a statement.

The 168-year-old Methodist-affiliated school closed in 2024 after years of financial difficulties.

Legislative efforts to save the school through state loans failed. Legislation to secure a taxpayer-backed loan for the college had stalled in the Alabama Statehouse.

U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., said the selection of Birmingham-Southern “will save the American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.”

The sale price of the campus was not immediately available Wednesday.

As a Birmingham-Southern alumnus, U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville, expressed his support for the college campus continuing to be a place for “those seeking to learn and improve their lives.”

The new training facility is part of the Coast Guard’s 2028 plan to

SEE COAST, A5



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