

The Anniston Star

Saturday, July 28, 2007

A home-owned newspaper

50 cents

annistonstar.com

View the Sunny King Charity Classic photo gallery.

YOUR FAITH, 1D

ONE ACCORD

Area UMC churches join together to form network of mutual support.

NEWS, 6B

ADDED CLARITY
Aquafina labels soon to say water comes from municipal sources.



WORLD, 2A

NO RECONCILIATION

Suicide bomber kills 13 in Pakistan near the newly reopened Red Mosque.

TRAVEL, 1B



ROUGHING IT?

Mules carry gourmet food to campers in the John Muir Wilderness.

OBITUARIES, 6B

Virginia Kent Barnwell, Madison
Mina L. Harry, Talladega
Douglas Rainwater Sr., Anniston
Vera Andrews Watkins, Jacksonville
William Chester (W.C.) Watson Jr., Anniston
Mildred Wilson, Talladega
Jimmy Boozer "J.B." Winningham Jr., Lincoln
John Young Jr., Pell City

INDEX

Calendar 5B
Classifieds 4D
Comics 7B
Editorial 4A
Movies 4B
Stocks 7A
Television 4B

WEATHER, 5A



SUNNY KING CHARITY CLASSIC

Charity volunteers help tournament run smoothly

BY ANNE W. ANDERSON
Star Staff Writer



Kevin Qualls/The Anniston Star

Maggie Burn Owens, left, and Kris Neu volunteer at a drink stand at the Anniston Country Club. For more on the tournament, see Sports, 1C.

The first team hadn't yet hit the tees Friday at this weekend's Sunny King Charity Classic golf tournament, but action on the course had already begun.

"We were here at 6:15 this morning," said Carrie Smith, coach of the YMCA Tiger Sharks, the Y's swim team.

"It's a good thing, too," added Geneva Rochester, also with the Y swim program.

Smith and Rochester are two of the many volunteers helping to make this weekend's tournament run smoothly.

They also represent one of many organizations that will benefit from the proceeds.

The two women, along with Hannah LaRue, 13, of Anniston, a member of the Tiger Sharks, and her mom, Amy LaRue, sat in folding chairs under a white pavilion overlooking the first tee. A table in front held paperwork and a small black cooler full of ball markers.

"Help yourself to some chips to hold you over 'til lunchtime," Smith told Clark Cunningham and William Curry, both of Anniston, after they signed the required waiver. She gestured toward a side table lined with an assortment of

Please see TOURNAMENT | Page 3A

MAKING THEIR MARK

LASER SHOP BRINGS IN BUSINESS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Photos by Kevin Qualls/The Anniston Star

ABOVE: Robert Birch finishes a metal table by using a grinder at Alabama Specialty Products in Munford. BELOW: A robotic welder makes precision welds on a piece of furniture.

BY CYNTHIA DIZIKES
Star Staff Writer

MUNFORD — There's not much that Alabama Specialty Products, Inc. in Munford can't do with a piece of metal.

Using highly specialized lasers that cut, weld, and etch, plus machines that fold and grind, the company can melt, slice, bend, and burnish almost any type of metal faster than almost anyone.

"If we were God we could cut the Ten Commandments into stone," said Don Johnson, the company's founder and chief operating officer.

The company has manufactured parts to fill orders for thousands of customers in some of the top industries around the world.

Its products are as varied as the metals and alloys that make them and include motorcycle handlebars, engine gears, racecar roll bars, designer furniture, armor plating for the military, animal tissue slicers for research universities and components for the space shuttle.

"People will have a problem finding an alloy we haven't dealt with," Johnson said. "We have over

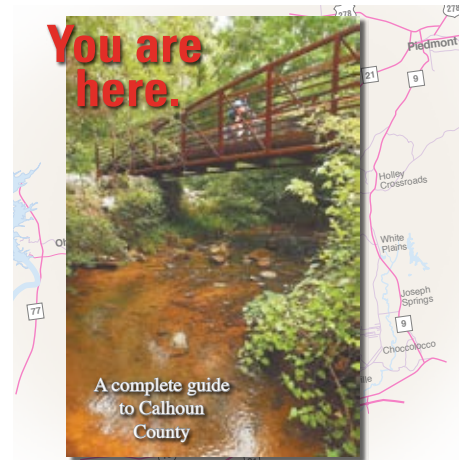
Please see LASER | Page 3A

ONLINE EXTRA

View video of the lasers at Alabama Specialty Products at www.annistonstar.com.



Inside today



Your guide to living in Calhoun County — You are Here.

ANNISTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Contract buyouts not new to system

BY STEVE IVEY
Star Staff Writer

Members of the Anniston Board of Education informally gathered around tables set up in front of their meeting dais.

They joked and made pleasant small talk about the weather, their families or their day jobs before they heard the glowing results of Superintendent Sammy Lee Felton's evaluation.

That was June 19.

The atmosphere soured 37 days later.

At a meeting Thursday night, Felton and the board again clashed over who will be assistant principal at Anniston High School. By the end of the 90-minute session, one board member's frustrations peaked, and Nathaniel Davis asked the board to begin the process of terminating Felton's contract.

Reached by The Star on Friday, Davis said he had no additional comments. Board President Vivian Thompson and member Jim Klinefelter each said they were tied up and could not immediately respond to follow-up questions about Thursday's meeting. Board member Bill Robison did not return a call to his office seeking comment.

Robison seconded Davis' motion on ending Felton's contract and then voted yes. Thompson and Klinefelter voted no.

Anniston has bought out superintendent contracts in the past. In fact, if the board were to buy out Felton, such events would appear to be shaping up as a once-per-decade occurrence in the city school system.

In 1987, the board forced J.V. Sailors to resign and paid him \$100,000 in

Please see FELTON | Page 3A

Report: NASA ignored warnings about alcohol use

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — With all the risks of space flight, it's hard to



Photos by Kevin Qualls/The Anniston Star

ABOVE: Dawn Thorne operates a laser sheet cutter at Alabama Specialty Products in Munford. BELOW: This rectangular metal tubing was cut with a laser.

Laser: Company started in Lineville in 1980

Continued from Page 1A

2000 alloys in stock, probably the largest [assortment] of different alloys in the world outside of the National Bureau of Standards."

The company, which rests in an unlikely spot amid Munford's rolling pastures and farmland, has one of the most complete laser job shops in the country and the largest in the southeast, Johnson said.

Johnson started the business — now worth about \$20 million — with \$5,000 in severance pay he received when he lost his job at Monsanto, where he had worked as a corrosion engineer.

His company's achievements appear particularly stratospheric when measured against its modest beginnings in an old Lineville laundromat back in 1980.

"Getting fired from my job was a big motivator," Johnson said.

He began with only himself and what he knew — metal corrosion testing.

The company began as Metal Samples, cutting metal strips to be used in corrosion testing.

Any industry that tries to contain potentially corrosive substances such as oil, chemicals, or even steam, needs corrosion testing, said Johnson.

Metal corrosion monitoring can prevent such disasters as oil pipeline ruptures or factory spills, which can lead to environmental devastation and human casualties.

"When I worked in the plant at Monsanto there was a chemical where if you got one drop on you, it would kill you," Johnson said.

Compared with the machines the company uses today, Johnson started Metal Samples with the technological equivalent of sticks and rocks. The hand-pumped cutting and puncturing equipment was powered by the human arm and very limited in what it could do, he said.

Alabama Specialty Products still cuts metal strips for corrosion testing through its Metal Samples division. It also performs corrosion analysis of those test strips.

Exxon Mobile, Dupont, and BP are among the company's current customers for corrosion work, helping to make it the largest corrosion-testing supply company in the world, Johnson said.

But corrosion testing turned out to be just the beginning.

As Johnson expanded the company into the pool hall next to the laundromat and then eventually to the Munford location, he started to envision bigger things, such as how a focused beam of light could cut a piece of metal better than a saw.

"A lot of our metals are extremely hard and will destroy a saw blade with one cut," said Johnson. "We ruined a lot of saw blades."

Johnson purchased his first laser cutter in 1988, soon after the technology was made commercially available.

He had planned to use the laser cutter to make



corrosion test strips, but people started calling him to do different cutting jobs. Since that time, the demand for the company's services has only grown.

The company opened its Alabama Laser Technology and Alabama Laser Systems divisions in 1993 and 1997, respectively.

Alabama Specialty Products now owns more than 20 lasers, which range in price from \$40,000 to \$1 million, and in strength from 10 to 6000 watts, or 100 times the strength of a standard light bulb.

"We could cut a man in two," said Johnson. "It would turn the body to vapor."

Alabama Laser Systems performs laser research and builds laser systems, making Alabama Specialty Products one of three or four companies in the U.S. that can build lasers, said Johnson.

"We have done laser research for Boeing and one of the largest Japanese laser companies," Johnson said.

While Alabama Specialty Products may not have the name recognition of companies like Mitsubishi, it has established its own niche building customized laser systems, said Steve Mace, the vice president of sales for Alabama Laser Technologies.

Alabama Specialty Products currently employs 250 people. Some of its employees have come to the company from other countries, including India, Columbia, and Belarus.

The company now is expanding its 600,000-square-foot facility by 50,000 square feet and delving further into the furniture business. It has recently started manufacturing contemporary furniture, including tables, chairs, and book cases, for three of the top furniture companies in the country.

Johnson said he sometimes wishes for the days when the company was smaller and all he had to do was worry about metal.

Those days, however, are long gone and probably never coming back.

Whether the company is working on a piece for an amusement park ride or an instrument to be used in testing nuclear reactors, there's rarely a slow or dull moment at Alabama Specialty Products.

"Every day is different," said Johnson. "That is the best thing about what we do."

Felton: Under contract through April 2009

Continued from Page 1A

a buyout. In June 1998, the board voted to pay Paul Goodwin \$94,740 as a lump-sum payoff after firing him in the summer of 1997 and agreeing to continue paying him on his contract until the end of 1999.

Felton is under contract with Anniston through April 2009 and would earn about \$200,000 between now and then.

It remained unclear Friday whether another buyout is an option for a school system struggling to stock its high school library with enough books to maintain accreditation and whose budget projections don't show a general fund surplus until 2009.

That kind of financial debacle, and the impact on students that it carries, also is not new for the system. In 1998, even as the board moved to pay off Goodwin, the superintendent who succeeded him, Jan Hurd, was striving to meet a \$1 million budget deficit by slashing central office staff; ending the school system's Readiness programs and the Writing to Read program; terminating computer aides, dismantling Apple Computer labs and instead distributing the computers among classrooms; and cutting the extracurricular supplements of some Anniston Middle School teachers who served as assistant coaches for some high school sports.

Current school board members are not the only ones interested in options for the system's leadership.

Forty-two parents and residents sent a letter earlier this month drafted by Rose Munford, the mother of the 2007

School board's next meeting is to be Aug. 16.

AHS valedictorian, to State Superintendent Joe Morton.

It read, in part: "(We) have come to the conclusion that we can no longer support the superintendent's decisions he renders best to serve the educational development for the students of the Anniston City School System ...

"When the head of the school system displays behavior in an unethical and nonprofessional manner, a change is needed."

Morton responded last week, writing: "I have no authority by any state policies, procedures, regulations or statutes to intervene in the matter you described. I would encourage you to work with your local school board members to resolve this matter."

Should Davis renew his call to remove Felton at the next full board meeting on Aug. 16, Bob Etnire, who was in England and did not attend Thursday's meeting, may provide the swing vote to decide the matter. Anniston's five-member board requires three votes to decide any matter.

Since the board inadvertently approved a recommendation from Felton not to renew the contract of AHS assistant principal Charles Gregory, Etnire has joined Robison and Davis in calling on Felton to recommend it reinstate Gregory. The three say they did not realize his name was included in a block of personnel recommendations that they approved with one sweeping vote.

At Felton's evaluation meeting in June, Neil Hyche, a state-approved evaluator from Tuscaloosa, told the board Felton received 49 points out of a possible 52.

It was seven points more than Felton netted in a June 2004 assessment.

Based on interviews with board members, system administrators and Felton, the superintendent received no lower than a 3.5 on a four-point scale in any of the 13 areas Hyche examined.

Felton himself has sought an exit from Anniston. Thursday, the school board in Midfield chose a candidate from Greene County by a 3-2 vote over Felton for its superintendency. It was at least the third time Felton had interviewed at another school system since he came to Anniston.

Last month, Felton said he had no other active applications with other school systems.

Contact Steve Ivey at sivey@annistonstar.com or 235-3549.

Orthodox Christian Prayers
Mon. - Wed. @ 6 am
216 E. 8th Street
Anniston



TERRA CAFE
BUCKNER CENTER

206598

Dinner • Lunch
Brunch • Catering
Events • Weddings
Receptions
256.847.3300

JULY IS NATIONAL ICE CREAM MONTH! COME BY AND CELEBRATE!



Maggie Moo's
ICE CREAM AND TREATERY

WE MAKE OUR
ICE CREAM
FRESH DAILY IN
THE STORE!

At Maggie Moo's, we hand mix fruits, candy or nuts into the ice cream on our frozen table... Udderly delicious!

• **ZOOMERS™ Fresh Smoothies** made with lowfat lactose-free ice cream. Grab one for lunch!

CUSTOM CAKES FOR EVERY OCCASION!

A delicious ice cream cake from Maggie Moo's is sure to stand out from the herd!

DID YOU KNOW? The most avid ice cream eaters in the U.S. DO NOT live in Hawaii, the South, California, or any other hot climate state. In 2003, Portland, Oregon bought more ice cream per person than any other U.S. city. Looks like everyone else has a lot of catching up to do!



ICE CREAM SO FRESH, IT MOOS!

FRANCHISEE OF SUPER PREMIUM ICE CREAM TREATERIES

maggiemooford@bellsouth.net