



On the hunt

States short on fish, game wardens

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Bizarre

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# Missing out on graduation

## Graduation Rates

Local school systems 2005-2006 school year

Dothan City Schools	80%
Houston County Schools	85%
Geneva City Schools	72%
Geneva County Schools	79%
Henry County Schools	66%
Dale County Schools	84%
Daleville City Schools	88%
Ozark City Schools	77%
Elba City Schools	72%
Enterprise City Schools	84%
Coffee County Schools	78%

Source: Alabama State Department of Education

## Learn more, make more

Median 2005 earnings based on educational level.

Less than high school	\$25,309
High school graduate	\$31,539
Some college	\$37,135
Associate's degree	\$40,588
Bachelor's degree	\$50,944
Master's degree	\$61,273
Doctorate	\$79,401
Professional degree	\$100,000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Eagle Graphic

Alabama's low high school graduation rates can have dire consequences for the state's people, schools and communities

Jim Cook

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Caleb Eubank left school after his eighth grade year. Shawn Wells dropped out at the end of his junior year.

Caleb dropped out for financial reasons — his dad needed help with the bills and Caleb got a job doing remodeling work. Shawn left school because he had fallen so far behind in his math classes that he wouldn't be able to graduate on time with his classmates.

Caleb and Shawn are examples of a major problem with in Alabama's public schools — the high school graduation rate.

According to the Alabama Department of Education, the state's graduation rate is 82 percent. Some studies by education advocacy groups have pegged the rate as low as 65 percent. Either way, the numbers are too low.

"We've got to help more kids graduate," said Alan Richard, a spokesman for the Southern Regional Education Board. "It's a local issue. It's a statewide issue. It's a national issue. We're hoping more leaders and the public will become more interested."

See GRADUATION, 3A

## Different numbers

Why do state and federal numbers differ for Alabama's graduation rate? It's because state and federal number crunchers define them in different ways. The state of Alabama offers six diploma types for graduation, the federal government only recognizes four of them when it's counting high school graduation rates. Other factors, such as when students graduate, may also factor into the calculations.



Photo by Jay Hare / jhare@dothaneagle.com

# Profiles of the 131st

There's no such thing as too old, too young or too lucky in Iraq

Mike Marshall

Press-Register

ANACONDA AIRBASE, Iraq — Capt. Brad Howard's favorite ride rolled off the assembly line in 1978.

The paint job is chalkboard dull, the upholstery as worn and stained as the back seat of an old taxi and the roar from its tailpipes rattles fine china a mile away.

Soldiers in Company B, 1-131st call it by its serial number: "Double O Seven."

It was the seventh Blackhawk ever built.

According to Howard, Double O Seven flies as well or better than any of the 10 other Blackhawks that Company B brought from Mobile to Anaconda Airbase.

The oldest helicopter is also the hardest-working, having logged more flight hours in Iraq than any other of the 30 Blackhawks in the 1-131st Aviation Regiment.

Howard said military equipment typically is "cascaded" down from the regular Army to the Army National Guard as the Pentagon buys new equipment. The youngest Blackhawk on the 131st's flight line was built in 1989.

Double O Seven first came to reside in Mobile in 2001. That's when the Alabama National Guard's Aviation Support Facility was converted from a

Medevac unit operating Hueys to the homebase for an air-assault company of Blackhawks.

Howard credits the wizardry of the maintenance crew from Mobile for keeping Company B's aircraft aloft and hauling general officers and foot soldiers all over Iraq.

"The older helicopters require a little more work, a little more 'love,' as the maintenance guys put it, but they fly just as well as the ones they make today."

Howard, 36, lives in west Mobile with his wife, Tina, and their daughters Rachel, 18; Rebekah, 14; and Grace, 7.

## Manning them all

The only female member of Company B also has the most flying time as a Blackhawk gunner over Iraq.

"At first, they thought I wouldn't make it as a gunner," said 21-year-old Spc. Jessica Brooks. "But I proved myself."

Now she is referred to as "kid sister" by the rest of Company B.

Before joining the Alabama National Guard, her experience with marksmanship involved "paintballing with my brother. I was good at that."

She said she had a tough time when she first asked to be trained as a gunner.

"The other soldiers said, 'She's a female, so she'll get away with stuff.' Really, they held me to a higher standard."

Before her Guard unit was activated, Brooks lived with her mother, Lori Brooks of Dothan, and



Mike Marshall / Press Register

Spc. Jessica Brooks is a member of Company B.

was studying nursing at Troy University.

When she is not in a Blackhawk, she spends a lot of time doing what she can to help out around the company's command post.

See IRAQ, 3A

# Teen in auto crash dies from injuries

Lance Griffin

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Alabama State Troopers reported Saturday afternoon that 16-year-old David Michael Johnston of Dothan, who suffered injuries in an automobile accident Thursday on Highway 231 South at Madrid, passed away at Southeast Alabama Medical Center.

Johnston was a passenger in a car that collided with a 2003 Hyundai SUV at Highway 231 South and Sonny Mixon Road Thursday around 4:45 p.m.

Johnston had completed the eighth grade at Rehobeth Middle School and was active in the youth group at Memphis Baptist Church. His parents are David and Angie Windham Johnston.

Also injured in the accident were the driver of the car, 17-year-old Terry Emerson of Cottonwood, and another passenger, 16-year-old Cory Rayborn of Dothan.

The driver of the SUV, 18-year-old Coral J. Hepler of Plantation, Fla., was also injured.

The accident caused the SUV to flip across the highway and land in the median separating turn lanes on Sonny Mixon Road. The red Ford car ran off the road and down an embankment.

The accident is still under investigation by Alabama State Troopers.

Funeral arrangements are still being made and will be handled by Holman-Headland Mortuary.

# King papers paying off for Atlanta

Errin Haines

Associated Press

ATLANTA — It's been a year since Atlanta did what many thought was impossible: The city bought the Martin Luther King Jr. Collection in an eleventh-hour deal, avoiding an auction and returning more than 10,000 of the civil rights icon's personal papers and books to his hometown.

But the papers could have just as easily ended up another city's treasure. Andrew Young, King's friend and lieutenant in the civil

rights movement, said he almost panicked when he heard days before the auction that officials in Washington and New York were looking to buy the collection.

"This was our birthright," he said. "And we needed to claim it."

Young went to Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, his friend and former protege, and argued that the papers were too valuable to Atlanta's history and that they shouldn't leave the South.

See KING, 3A



One of the King books in the Martin Luther King Jr. Collection is measured during a cataloging process at Atlanta University Center in Atlanta, June 13.

Gene Blythe / Associated Press

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