



# The ADVISOR

TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, and JUDICIAL



Vol. XLII—No. 11

SERVING OVER 350,000 MEMBERS

May 2017

## RSA Leads All Marriott, Renaissance Hotels

BY DAVE HELMS, BUSINESS ALABAMA

**S**outhern hospitality still rules: Alabama’s RSA-owned hotels ranked first, second, and third for guest satisfaction in a new ranking of 363 full-service Marriott hotels in North and South America. They also are first and third of 90 Renaissance properties in North and South America.

The rankings, tabulated by an outside firm specializing in guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry, are as of March 14 and based on Marriott and Renaissance surveys year-to-date in 2017 for guest satisfaction.

Alabama’s top Marriott finishers, in order, are: Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel & Conference Center at Grand National, Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa, and the Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa. The Milwaukee Marriott West and Louisville Marriott East rounded out the top 5.

Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa and The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa took first and third place, respectively, on the Top Renaissance Hotels listing.

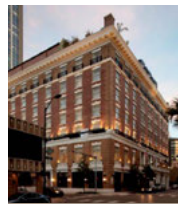
“These guest satisfaction ratings are a real tribute to the Retirement Systems of Alabama for building first-class hotels and to our team of hard working associates who take care of our guests every day,” said Tony Davis, president of PCH Hotels & Resorts, the resorts/hotels along the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. ●



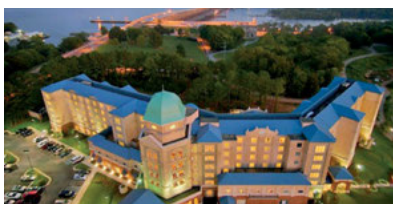
AUBURN MARRIOTT OPELIKA HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER AT GRAND NATIONAL



RENAISSANCE ROSS BRIDGE GOLF RESORT & SPA



THE BATTLE HOUSE RENAISSANCE MOBILE HOTEL & SPA



MARRIOTT SHOALS HOTEL & SPA



GRAND HOTEL MARRIOTT RESORT, GOLF CLUB & SPA

## ERS Board Needs Members’ Help

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

**L**egislation is pending that remedies a long-standing inequity on the Employees’ Retirement System (ERS) Board of Control. For too long, local employees have been woefully underrepresented on the Board.

The ERS is composed of employees of the state of Alabama and from local units – cities, counties, and boards. Over time, the number of local unit members of the ERS has grown faster than the number of state employees. Currently, there are over 850 local unit entities that participate in the ERS. None of the funding for these local units comes from the state of Alabama.

The assets that belong to the local employees constitute **55% of the total assets** of the ERS. Local unit members pay **62% of the administrative expenses** of running your pension fund. **Most importantly, over 65% of the number of members who belong to the ERS are employed by local units and only 35% are employed by the state of Alabama. The Board is currently composed of 13 members, yet only 3 board members are from local units.**

The pending legislation, SB217 and HB295, brings fairness to member representation on the ERS Board composition. Under the proposed legislation, the number of board members increases to 15. The additional two members are to be elected by local employees. Two other appointed members are to be from local units. If the legislation is passed, there will be 7 state employee representatives and 7 local unit representatives. The governor, who is on the ERS Board currently, will be the 15th member. This bill will allow ERS members to have the same status as the TRS members do on their Board.

RSA staff has long pointed out this issue to the Legislature. Passage of this legislation is good for all ERS members – both state and local. It gives employee members who own the assets of the pension system a stronger voice in oversight of the funds and brings the unique perspective of the local units to the ERS Board, both of which are crucial to making your retirement system stronger. ●

# RTJ Turns 25: Alabama's "New" RTJ Golf Trail Celebrates 25 Years of Success

BY DOUG MILNE, GOLF GEORGIA MARCH/APRIL 2017

**A** former assistant law school dean at the University of Alabama revolutionized access to great public golf 25 years ago and the rest is history.

While many scoffed at the concept, Dr. David G. Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, brought golf course architect Robert Trent Jones out of retirement in the late 1980s and the concept of America's Original Golf Trail was born. Opened in 1992, nearly 12 million rounds of golf have been played along the RTJ Golf Trail. With 26 courses on 11 sites across Alabama, this top golf destination has renovated its original courses and encourages golfers to come play the new RTJ Golf Trail.

The story began 25 years ago amid equal parts intrigue, skepticism and optimism. In short, the idea was to use the game of golf to not only increase the allure of Alabama as a vacation destination, but at the same time to dramatically boost the state's economy.

"Back 20 to 25 years ago, there was a funny feeling around Alabama," said Dr. Bronner. "The natives would say 'Well, Alabama has a great potential, but it never does anything.' So, we thought about how you change an entire state. Changing a town is one thing. You bring a new factory in and you've changed a town. But, if we created something in the state of Alabama that the rest of the United States doesn't have, that being The Trail, could we get tourism and industry to look at us and come to us that wouldn't have otherwise? Our vision was to change the whole state, similar to how President Eisenhower changed our entire country after World War II with the interstate system. He didn't impact just one state in the country, but he changed the whole country."

Today, 25 years later, The Trail boasts 26 golf courses at 11 facilities in virtually every corner of Alabama. The Trail hosts more than 1,100 events annually, including the PGA TOUR's Barbasol Championship at Grand National in Auburn/Opelika. As a result, millions of dollars are contributed each year to schools, healthcare, and community services.

To put the size and scope of The Trail into perspective, consider this; annually,

over 500,000 golfers play on The Trail's 468 holes of golf. In a typical year, folks come to The Trail from all 50 states and an average of 20 foreign countries, totaling nearly 12 million rounds to date.

## THE VISION

"Dr. Bronner had a vision that making the entire state of Alabama a world-class golf destination could not only create new tourism opportunities for the state, but could also enhance the reputation of the state of Alabama and its citizens, thus creating other economic development opportunities yet unknown," said John Cannon, President and CEO of Sunbelt Golf Corporation, which has overseen the development, construction, and management of The Trail since its 1992 inception.

Since becoming a part of The Trail in 1998, Cannon still marvels at the world's largest golf undertaking.

"I can't even imagine the early development years from 1990-1993, when our founder Bobby Vaughan, along with Mr. Jones, his associate Roger Rulewich and a construction crew of over 700 were building 18 golf courses at seven very different locations all at the same time," Cannon said.

"I want to be able to play the U.S. Open on any one of these courses we build," said Bronner. "Make every one of them a championship course. I want people to be challenged enough that they will want to come back and try again."

While the courses have not hosted the U.S. Open yet, the PGA TOUR professionals will compete in the Barbasol Championship at RTJ Grand National this July. Courses in Mobile and Prattville have hosted several LPGA tournaments. PGA TOUR Champions' tournaments were played at RTJ Ross Bridge for several years. Dr. Bronner has been honored by the golf industry for his vision to make great golf available to both professionals and the general public. The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail continues to be one of Alabama's tourist attractions with guests coming from around the world.

The Trail's artfully designed and beautifully landscaped courses, according to *The New York Times*, are "some of

the best public golf on earth." *The Wall Street Journal* said The Trail "may be the best bargain in the country." *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* called The Trail "the finest public courses in the country."

## THE NEW RTJ

In the Creek Indian language, the word Alabama means "Tribal Town." Now, this isn't to suggest that the residents and businesses in the state comprise something small. The fact is, Alabamians are leaders, innovators, and forward-thinkers. Individually and collectively, they've raised bars to unprecedented heights. This bar continues to rise as RTJ celebrates its silver anniversary.

While maintaining the key course designs created by Robert Trent Jones, renovations of the original golf sites were recently completed. RTJ courses remain consistent for quality and value while offering new experiences.

Major renovations and upgrades were made to the original seven sites; Oxmoor Valley (Birmingham), Hampton Cove (Huntsville), Grand National (Auburn/Opelika), Magnolia Grove (Mobile), Highland Oaks (Dothan), Silver Lakes (Calhoun County), and Cambrian Ridge (Greenville).

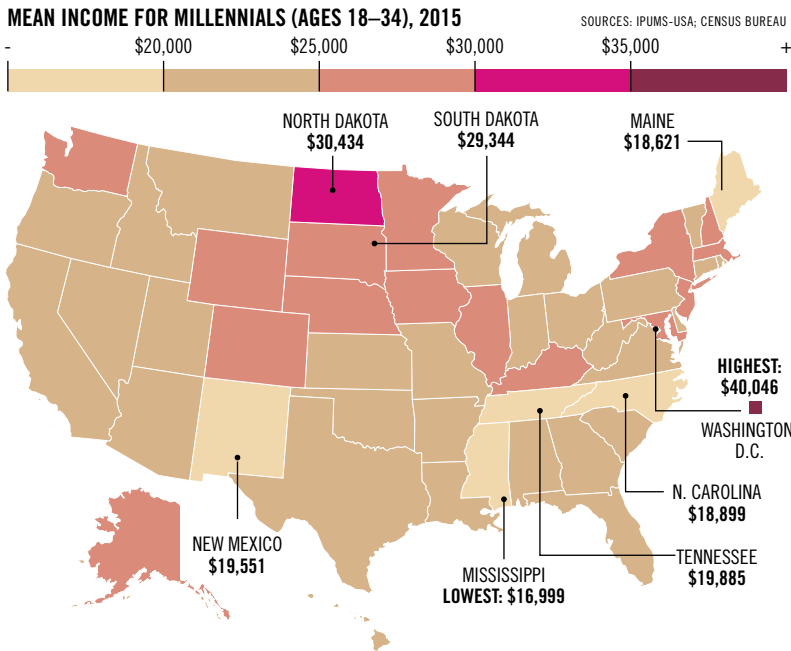
"Beginning in 2005, contours were softened to accommodate modern green speeds," Cannon said. "Every original green was regressed with the newest generation of appropriate grasses for each location (heat-resistant bentgrass in the northern part of the state and Ultradwarf Bermudas everywhere else). We also removed over 130 of the original bunkers and completely rebuilt those which remained. Additionally, we have completely redesigned 22 holes, including moving and rerouting seven different holes in Mobile, Greenville, and Huntsville."

Though the initial seven locations received the most significant upgrading, Dr. Bronner is quick to note that as of October 2016, all 11 sites had received upgrades and renovations, varying in degree.

"We started on these renovations a

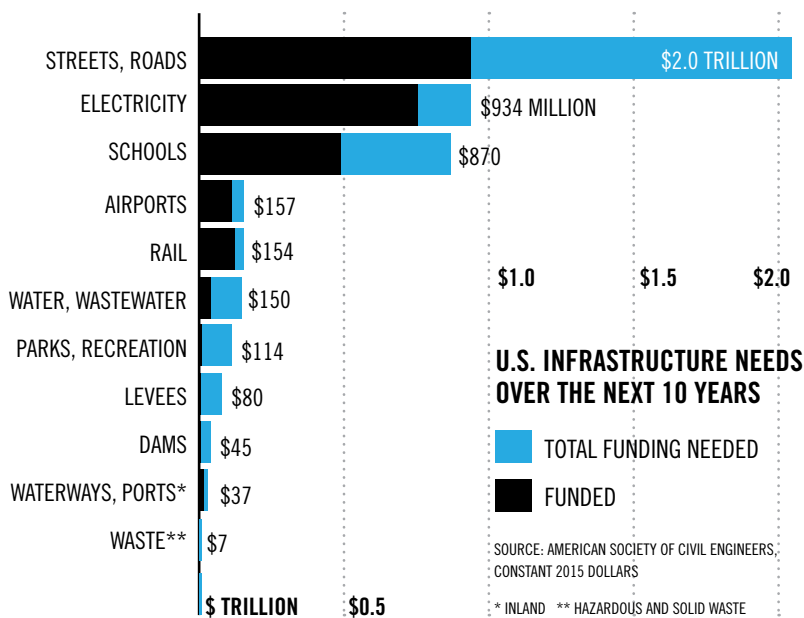
## ■ PAYCHECKS HOW MUCH YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MAKING

Millennials may act as if they're entitled to ultrahigh salaries, but in most parts of the U.S., they still don't earn them. Outside of Washington, D.C., and fracking mecca North Dakota, full-time, year-round workers under age 35 made substantially less on average than \$40,356—which was the national average for workers between 35 and 65.



## ■ BEATEN PATHS INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER DURESS

The American Society of Civil Engineers has released a grim report on the status of the country's critical infrastructure. The group found that miles of U.S. roads, in particular, badly need repair, but that governments weren't spending the money to make it happen.



number of years ago and have gone from site to site,” Dr. Bronner said. “No question, they have done a fabulous job. The entire staff at every one of the sites has done a remarkable job. I just saw the renovations at Greenville and was totally blown away. With the work they have done at each of the 11 Trail sites, it is just off the Richter Scale with how awesome these courses are now.”

In 2017 and '18, work will continue. All 36 greens at Lakewood Club in Point Clear will be re-surfaced with TifEagle Ultradwarf grass. This endeavor will accompany a new practice facility and short-game area created in 2016.

“This project will ensure Lakewood remains the premier resort/club golf experience along the Gulf Coast,” said Cannon.

And so, as it makes the turn and embarks on its next 25 years, the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail will do so not only on the solid ground set by its past, but also with the encouraging prospect of a remarkable future. In its wake, there is everything from personal-best rounds and first hole-in-ones to jobs, schools, and improved healthcare. The silver anniversary of The Trail also issues hope and promise for the retiring to embrace in comfort their golden years.

“When we started out, this program was a \$1.8 billion industry a year,” Dr. Bronner said. “Now, it’s an annual \$12.6 billion industry. What this has done is affect the north to the central to the south of the state with tourism. Those dollars flow into those communities. Most impressive is how something like that can fundamentally change a family. You not only allow them to be financially secure, but it trickles down to the next generation of kids who will now be able to go to college. Previously, everything we recruited was out of this country, and now you actually have companies within the United States looking at Alabama in a different light than they would have 20–25 years ago.”

“What our millions of guests from the past 25 years can expect from us is that we will continue to improve our properties along with their expectations,” Cannon said. “While we may be 25 years old now, every time you return, there is something new and improved for you to enjoy along Alabama’s Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.”

To start planning your trip to Alabama’s Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, visit [www.rtgolf.com](http://www.rtgolf.com) or call 1.800.949.4444. Special 25th anniversary packages are available. ●

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- July 1-3, 5-6, 23-31

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- June 1-3, 14, 17-20, 24-26 • July 14-15, 22-31

**Marriott Grand—\$109** plus a 15% resort fee

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**plus a 15% resort fee —Promotional code—R2A**

Includes: Deluxe Room, One Round of Golf for Two People.  
Call for Tee Times after booking package

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- June 4-5, 11-14, 28-29
- July 19, 26, 30

**Marriott Shoals—Florence—\$99;**

**Breakfast Package \$124**

- May 7, 11, 14, 18, 21 • June 4, 11, 18, 25
- July 6, 9, 16, 20

**Renaissance Ross Bridge—Hoover—\$109**

- May 1-2, 7-8, 14-15, 21, 29-31
- June 1, 11, 15, 18-19, 25-28
- July 5, 9-13, 16-17, 23-26, 30

**Opelika Marriott—\$99**

- May 2-4, 10, 16-18, 21-31
- June 4-8, 11-12, 15-21, 27-29
- July 2-6, 9-13, 16-17, 23-26, 30-31

**Prattville Marriott—\$89**

- May 7, 9, 11-14, 18, 20-24, 28-31
- June 1, 4-11, 15-18, 22-27, 29-30
- July 1-11, 13-17, 19-31

**Renaissance Montgomery—\$109**

- May 1, 7-9, 13, 19, 25-31
- June 12-13, 18, 21, 25-30
- July 1-3, 7-8, 23, 27, 30-31

**RSA Spa Package—\$189—Promotional code—R2A**

- May 13, 19, 25-27, 30-31
- June 13, 21, 27-30
- July 1, 7-8, 27

Specific room requests may require additional charge.  
Rates available the 1st of the month and  
are not applicable to groups.

800-228-9290 Ask for RSA rate. **Promotional  
Code: R2A** on [www.rsa-al.gov](http://www.rsa-al.gov)  
**Book Online and Save RSA \$4.**

## CHANGE IN ESTIMATES FOR 2017 U.S.-BOUND TOURISM



SOURCE: TOURISM ECONOMICS

## TRASH TALK

The USA is the No. 1  
trash-producing  
country in the world  
generating about

**1,609 pounds**  
per person each year.



SOURCE: EarthEcho International

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