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**10 BEST HOTELS AND RESORTS IN THE US FOR HISTORIC STAYS**

10. Congress Hall – Cape May, NJ
9. The Omni Homestead Resort – Hot Springs, VA
8. Willard InterContinental Washington D.C. – Washington, D. C.
7. The Royal Hawaiian – Honolulu, HI
6. The Pfister Hotel – Milwaukee, WI
5. The Historic Davenport, Autograph Collection – Spokane, WA
4. Grand Hotel, Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection – Point Clear, AL
3. The Peabody Memphis – Memphis, TN
2. The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa – Riverside, CA
1. Historic Hotel Bethlehem – Bethlehem, PA

**ESCAPE TO COASTAL BLISS: DISCOVER THE BEST WATERFRONT HOTELS IN THE US**

10. The Inn Above Tide – Sausalito, CA
9. Hotel Del Coronado – Coronado, CA
8. Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea – Wailea, HI
7. Edgewood Tahoe Resort – Stateline, NV
6. The Lodge at Bodega Bay – Bodega Bay, CA
5. Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa – Manalapan, FL
4. Wentworth by the Sea – New Castle, NH
3. Grand Hotel, Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection – Point Clear, AL
2. Aqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach – Sunny Isles Beach, FL
1. Chatham Bars Inn – Chatham, MA ●

## The Old “Good News & Bad News”

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

As previously stated, PEEHIP’s costs are significantly increasing due to federal changes impacting PEEHIP’s Medicare-eligible retirees. With the “Good News,” the PEEHIP Board met to decide how to address these increasing costs. The Board voted to request a funding increase of \$130 million from the Alabama Legislature for fiscal year 2026. The Board **ALSO** authorized the withdrawal of up to \$118.9 million from the Alabama Retired Education Employees’ Healthcare Trust in fiscal year 2026 to be used for retiree healthcare costs. The Board did not increase member premiums or copays for 2025.

If the Legislature is unable to fully fund the requested increase, the PEEHIP Board will meet again to determine what plan changes must be made to address the shortfall. Even if the Legislature fully funds the increase, PEEHIP will continue to face funding challenges into 2027 and beyond unless changes are made at the federal level. In any circumstance, PEEHIP will continue working to ensure that it can provide the best benefits to its members at the lowest cost to the members and the state.

Now for the “Bad News,” read page two and find a solution. There is no rational excuse for not correcting the problem shown on page two! No State Senators, Representatives, Mayor, or County Commissioner has a legitimate reason for not correcting the problem on page two. Demand your local elected officers do their job and solve this problem for the people of your county. ●

## RTJ Record Earnings in 2024

BY MIKE CASON, AL.COM

Retirement Systems of Alabama CEO David Bronner said Tuesday the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is having its best year since it opened more than three decades ago and is on track to make \$15 million or more in profit...business on the RTJ Golf Trail has continued to rise since

the COVID pandemic began to subside three years ago. The RSA’s most recent annual report says golfers played 688,477 rounds at the RTJ’s 11 sites in 2023, a 12% increase over a record set in 2022.

The Boards heard a presentation from the company that manages the RSA’s

eight resort hotels in Alabama. Executives with PCH Hotel & Resorts said the hotels maintained a rise in revenue that started after the pandemic and will exceed last year’s record revenue of \$235 million.

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# RTJ Record Earnings in 2024

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The numbers are important because the golf courses and hotels are components in the assets the Retirement Systems of Alabama maintains to support pension funds for about 400,000 active and retired members.

The TRS fund, with about 250,000 state and local education employees and retirees, has assets valued at about \$31 billion. The ERS fund, with about 145,000 state and local government employees and retirees, has assets with a market value of about \$16 billion. Stocks make up more than 60% of both funds.

Bronner gave the board a brief recap of the genesis of the RTJ, which opened in 1992. He said some of his critics were probably right in believing the idea made no sense. But he said he believes the goals – to attract tourists, help recruit industry, and improve how those outside Alabama viewed the state – are being achieved.

“I wanted to do something for Alabama to try to change it from head to toe,” Bronner said. “Basically, the people that didn’t like me 25 and 30 years ago were correct. It was a crazy idea. Why would you ever do something like that? It was really to change the image of the state if

I could, a little bit anyway, on the positive side.”

...Bronner said golf as a stand-alone activity is not generally a money-maker. He said profits were even less likely at some of the trail sites in smaller towns, like in Greenville and at Silver Lakes. But he said the trail concept would not have worked if it was limited to the state’s largest cities. “You can’t have a trail by saying, ‘Hey, we have a trail, the first stop is Huntsville, the second stop is Birmingham, and, oh, by the way, the third stop is Mobile,’” Bronner said. “That’s not much of a trail. So we had to develop things in-between.”

The idea, Bronner said, was to attract tourists with money to spend at hotels and restaurants. The Trail sites have helped recruit industry, including automakers Honda and Hyundai, he said.

Bronner said the RSA’s ownership of newspapers, a billboard company, and especially television stations have helped with the advertising essential to letting the world know about the RTJ. “I was smart enough at least to know that there ain’t a snowball’s chance in hell that this idea is going to work if I don’t get advertising behind it,” Bronner said.

The Trail had been open for almost two decades before it made any money in golf revenue, Bronner said. “We basically jumped up and down with excitement in 2019, 2020, because it took all those years to basically break even in the Trail,” Bronner said. Bronner also said the RTJ made about \$1.5 million in 2021, then made more than \$10 million in 2022. All 11 sites made money in 2023.

The RSA’s eight resort hotels range from the Marriott Shoals on the Tennessee River to the Grand Hotel in Point Clear on Mobile Bay...The hotels have a total of 2,130 rooms, 36 restaurants, and 323,000 square feet of meeting space, according to PCH. Occupancy has ranged from 65% to 68% the last few years, several percentage points ahead of the industry average, PCH said.

“You need to understand there’s a huge connection between golf and the hotels,” Bronner told the Boards. “I don’t think either one of them would have survived financially, much less been as successful as both of them have been, without each other.” (Editor’s Note: State tourism revenue grew from \$1.8 billion in the 1990s to the current estimate of \$24 billion.) ●

## Alabama’s State of Decay (in search of a pen)

BY TOMMY JOHNSON, DMD, STATE DENTAL DIRECTOR, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**O**n my first day at Public Health, I was met with a sobering concept from my deputy director: More good can be done by the stroke of a pen than in all my years of private practice. That both scared and invigorated me. I knew I had a purpose. I still do.

As a dentist, I was accustomed to addressing patients in pain. What I wasn’t prepared for was the visceral reaction that screening children with rampant decay and no access to dental care would evoke in me. Children – the most vulnerable of our population – experiencing sleepless nights, inability to concentrate, absenteeism from school, and devastated self-esteem were sitting helpless in front of me. Although tooth decay is almost 100 percent preventable, it still plagues not only children but adults as well,

disproportionately affecting Alabama Blacks and Hispanics.

Since 1945, Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) has been touted as an ideal socioeconomic and equitable method of tooth decay prevention. In fact, it is considered one of the Ten Greatest Public Health Achievements of the 20th Century. By adjusting the level of fluoride in drinking water to the optimal level of 0.7 ppm, decay can be reduced by 18-40 percent for both children and adults. **Every \$1 spent on water fluoridation saves \$20 in dental visits.** According to 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, approximately 77.7 percent of Alabama benefits from optimally adjusted fluoride, with some areas demonstrating naturally occurring fluoride in levels that need not be adjusted. But today, the

increasing consumption of bottled water negates the benefits of CWF, as bottled waters typically do not contain fluoride. They also have a wide range of pH levels, raising new concerns. Increasing numbers of water systems are also being met with strong opposition to CWF.

But for many, prevention is no longer an option and dental professional intervention is needed to address their concerns. **Ranking 51st in the dentist-to-population ratio, Alabama has many challenges to overcome in access to care.** Demographic distribution of dental offices poses a transportation obstacle for many, **citing zero or one dentist in seven of our counties.** The aging/retiring dentist population continues to diminish,

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## Alabama Success Story Tharptown Rocketry Team

**T**harptown High School in Russellville, Alabama, is home to an award-winning rocketry program. Since the program began in 2018, it has sent a team to the national finals six times, been in the top 10 four times, and won 2nd place in 2023. This year, the team is the National Champion and won 2nd place in the international competition!

This year's team members are team captain Kylee Bears, Angie Chavez, Shyla Martinez, Angel Franco, Frank Guitierrez, Jessie Mitchell, Adrionna Ashley, and Isabella Hall.



As the 22nd Annual American Rocketry Challenge National Finals winners, the Tharptown Rocketry Team beat a record-breaking 922 teams from across the

country. At the National Finals, the top 100 teams designed, built, and launched model rockets carrying a large egg to an altitude of 850 feet. The rockets had to remain airborne between 43-46 seconds before landing safely for 60% of their score. The teams also had to give presentations to industry experts on their rocket designs and lessons learned. The Tharptown Rocketry Team won for having greater precision than any other team in the nation. The team won \$20,000 for their engineering skill and another \$1,000 for the school in recognition of the team's accomplishments. The win also sent them to the international competition to represent the United States. The International Rocketry Challenge was held in late July at Farnborough International Airshow in London.

The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville hosted a special day of recognition and learning for the team and their sponsors before they departed for the international competition. The team toured several area facilities where work was being done on rocket parts. They also had the opportunity to speak with engineers. The Tharptown Rocketry Team practiced their presentation in front of the audience to prepare for the next stage of their journey.

According to the team's coach and sponsor, Areanna Orozco, the team practiced in June and July getting ready for the event, explaining they met around 5:15-5:30 a.m. to practice in temperatures similar to what was expected at the international competition in London. Orozco said that only allowed about an hour and a half to two hours for practicing at the correct temperatures and humidity, factors she said matter because they affect what must be done in order to manage the desired type of rocket launch.

Tharptown Rocketry Team placed second in the International Rocketry Challenge, with only ten points separating them from the first-place team from the United Kingdom. This was the closest scoring in the competition. They also competed against teams from Japan and France.

Congratulations, Tharptown Rocketry Team, and keep up the great work!

*This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at [communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov](mailto:communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov).* ●

## Alabama's State of Decay (in search of a pen)

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and the number of practitioners is decreasing. Decreased third-party providers reduce the availability of patient visits. While an increased class size of the state's only dental school is poised to provide more dentists, retention of graduates in the state is of concern, with only 38 of the 84 most recent graduates taking the Alabama Boards.

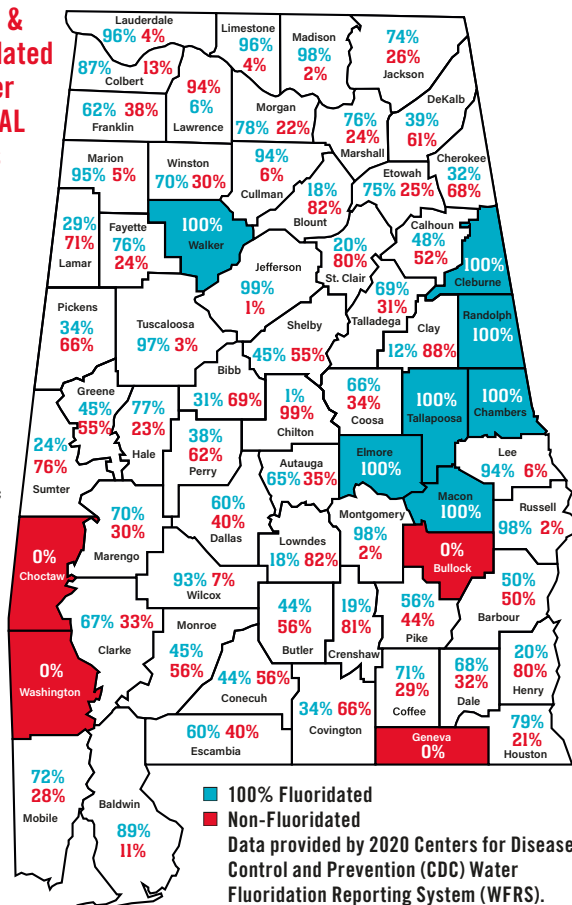
We continue to make strides in our efforts for better oral health in Alabama. Increased awareness of the role oral health plays in overall health demands the schism between medicine and dentistry be narrowed through medical-dental integration so the mouth is no longer considered a separate entity from the body. Incentives are available for dental graduates to practice in rural areas, such as loan forgiveness via the Board of Dental Scholarships and Loan Awards. The Rural Dental Scholars Program targets applicants from rural areas in Alabama who intend to practice dentistry in a rural community. Hygienists certified as Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHCs) improve access to care burdens. And there's the hope of legislative changes that will allow teledentistry within the state, enabling CDHCs to operate at their maximum potential.

On a final note, perhaps my favorite quote seems apropos: "Sometimes it's the people no one imagines anything of that do the things no one can imagine." In a state with so much promise, we can certainly assemble the right people to accomplish our oral and overall health goals for Alabama's children and adults alike. I'll be happy to supply the pen... ●

### Fluoridated & Non-Fluoridated Public Water Systems in AL by Counties



Populations on public water systems may exceed the county census population. Many water systems span multiple counties. WFRS collects population data for primary and secondary counties for each water system. However, due to difficulty in assigning population values to multiple counties, the primary county information can be over-estimated. September 2023





# Start Planning Your Fall Getaways at RSA's Outstanding Hotels, Spas, and RTJ Golf



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Discounts Webpage

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## ENJOY YOUR FALL A Special Deal FOR RSA MEMBERS

### The Battle House,

#### A Renaissance Hotel \$129

- October 5-17, 20-24, 30-31 • November 3-17, 24-26
- December 1-4, 13-21, 26-28

### The Battle House RSA Spa Package \$244

- October 7-9, 14-16, 21-23, 30
- November 4-6, 11-13, 25-26 • December 2-4, 16-17

### Riverview Plaza \$119

- October 8-10, 13-17, 20-22, 30-31
- November 3-5, 8-10, 25-30
- December 1-4, 16-21, 26-28

### Grand Hotel \$137 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- October 1-2, 6-7, 20-21 • November 3-4, 10-11, 17-18
- December 1-2, 11-12, 15-16

### Grand Hotel RSA Golf Package \$209 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- October 1-2, 6-7, 20-21 • November 3-4, 10-11, 17-18
- December 1-2, 11-12, 15-16

### Grand Hotel RSA Spa Package \$285 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- October 1-2, 6-7, 20-21 • November 3-4, 10-11, 17-18
- December 1-2, 11-12, 15-16

### Marriott Shoals \$119

- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31
- November 3-4, 20-21, 24-28
- December 1-2, 8-9, 22-30

### Marriott Shoals RSA Spa Package \$229

- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31
- November 3, 20-21, 24-25, 27
- December 1-2, 8-9, 22-23

### Renaissance Ross Bridge \$129

- October 6-7, 13, 16-17, 27-28
- November 3, 10-11, 17-19, 24-26
- December 15-19, 22-31

### Renaissance Ross Bridge RSA Spa Package \$260

- October 6, 13, 27-28
- November 3, 10-11, 17-19, 24-25
- December 15-17

### Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort \$119 (plus a 10% resort fee) Web reservation will show \$144, including \$25 resort fee. Guest will only be charged RSA rate at checkout.

- October 1-2, 6-9, 13-15, 30
- November 4-5, 11-12, 17-20, 24-30
- December 1-2, 8-9, 15-16, 22-26

### Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort RSA Spa Package \$234 (plus a 10% resort fee)

- October 2, 6-7, 9, 13-14, 30
- November 4, 11, 17-18, 20, 24-25
- December 1-2, 8-9, 15-16

### Prattville Marriott \$109

- October 6, 20-21, 27-29 • November 10, 17-19, 24-26
- December 15-31

### Renaissance Montgomery \$129

- October 11-14, 25-26, 31 • November 3-4, 26-29
- December 15-18, 24-26

### Renaissance Montgomery RSA Spa Package \$244

- October 11-12, 25-26, 31 • November 26-29
- December 17-18, 24-26

Specific room requests may require additional charge.

Rates available the 1st of the month and are not applicable to groups.

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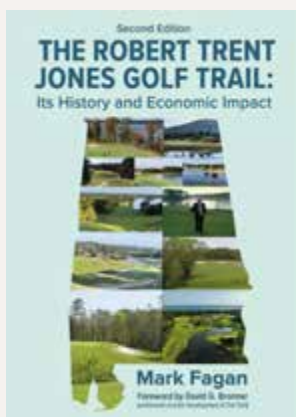
## TRS Board of Control Members Sworn In

TRS Board of Control Chair Ricky Whaley administers the Oath of Office to Kelli Shomaker, Amy Knight Fowler, Mary Beth Tate, and Thomas Jones on September 4, 2024. ●



This new book of 395 pages is the comprehensive account on how this one-of-a-kind, state-wide investment was structured and has evolved.

It preserves the history of this massive development for historians, economic developers, politicians, journalists, golfers, and the public. To purchase this book, visit <https://store.bookbaby.com/book/the-robert-trent-jones-golf-trail>.



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