By Gary Hardin

A morning devotional time in summer 2012 opened Zach Richards’ eyes to a ministry need—the equipping of those called to ministry. God took his burden and gave him a vision for a New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) extension center in his area.

Thanks to his pursuit of that vision, Richards, pastor of Union Grove Baptist Church, Crossville, saw a certificate extension center begin offering classes in his community in January. And soon he may see the expansion of that center to include undergraduate and graduate degree programs. A group of 60 area pastors, ministry staff and directors of missions gathered July 18 at First Baptist Church, Rainsville, to talk about the possibility.

Currently the northeast Alabama extension center offers two fully accredited certificate programs. The first is an undergrad certificate, ideal for those who might not have attended college but who want to study the Bible in a deeper way, said Richards, who serves as director of the extension center. This certificate program also is for those who would like to begin work on a bachelor’s degree. Up to 18 credit hours of classes taken in the graduate certificate program transfer directly into a master’s degree.

If sufficient interest is expressed, NOBTS will add two more programs to the center—an undergraduate degree program through Leavell College and a graduate degree program through NOBTS.

“Many pastors can’t pack up and move to New Orleans to attend seminary, but they can come to Rainsville, study and then go home to their families,” Richards said.

For the Fall semester, three new classes will be offered at the extension center. For more information about the classes offered at the northeast Alabama extension center, email nealnobts@gmail.com.
MEET BIRMINGHAM GRADUATE STUDENT: JORDAN NORRIS

In this inaugural edition of the new Alabama Centers Gatekeeper, we would like to introduce you to Birmingham Graduate student, Jordan Norris. Jordan has a heart for his Lord Jesus Christ. His desire is to see Christ glorified in all that he does.

Where did you grow up?
I grew up in Huntsville, really west of Huntsville in the Harvest/Toney area. Currently I live in Adger, AL.

Briefly share your testimony
I grew up in church as a kid and prayed when I was young, but I didn’t know God. After years of spiritual confusion thinking that I was safe, God led me to a church and to his love. So I let him have all of me.

Briefly tell me about your call to ministry.
God in his sovereignty put together the right people, the right place, and the right time to make it clear that he wanted me to give my life to his ministry. It happened in a little retirement trailer park in Cherokee, NC through a simple devotion and some very special words spoken by a friend.

Are you married? Kids?
Nope and nope, but hopefully one day!

What is your favorite hobby?
I like to write rap songs. Woot Woot!!

What is your favorite sport to watch and/or play?
Football is pretty much it, unless I’m at a game live. Everything else might as well be golf!

What is your favorite class?
Call me strange, but I’m kind of fond of Greek! Shout out to Dr. Aernie!

Besides the Bible what was the last book you read?
I am currently reading Who Do You Think You Are? By Mark Driscoll for our Bible Study at church. In the book he walks through the book of Ephesians and reminds us who we are in Christ.

What is one piece of advice you would give students about their years in seminary?
Study and pray!