

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Schakat and Wright will serve their country at West Point

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Most schools would celebrate one student gaining acceptance into a service academy – Union County High School is sending two. Seniors Emmi Schakat and Cole Wright are headed to the United States Military Academy at West Point after graduation, and earlier this month, the high school recognized both at a National Signing Day ceremony in the gymnasium.

"This is not only a real honor for these young people, but for the people who have helped Cole and Emmi get into West Point," said U.S. Army Col. Dan Wickersham, who attended Signing Day. "It's a task. They're going to the No. 1 leadership institution in the world, and I really look forward to seeing them up

there." While both of their journeys will culminate in the small Hudson River Valley town of West Point, New York, Schakat and Wright took separate paths to get there.

Wright drew interest from the Black Knight football program between his junior and senior years, and last summer, he visited the campus and immediately committed.

On Feb. 7, National Signing Day, he made it official.

"Coach Brent Davis (Army offensive coordinator) and I kept in contact almost weekly, and he has recently visited me at my house again," Wright said. "He has been awesome throughout my entire process and never once pressured me to commit. I can't wait to get up to New York and get to work."

As for Schakat, she

happened upon West Point during her junior year, and like her fellow classmate, she immediately envisioned herself as a U.S. Army cadet.

"I was doing some research when I found West Point, and it was like a light bulb moment for me – that's what I need to do," she said. "I feel like there is a huge need for superior leadership, I wanted an adventure, and I wanted to make a positive difference. For me, West Point is the place to be for all of that."

Also on hand for the signing ceremonies was Bill Kokaly, representing U.S. Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia's 9th Congressional District.

Kokaly is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, and he took a moment to educate those in attendance on the value of a West Point education.

"Union County is very



Photo by Todd Forrest
Army Col. Dan Wickersham, UCHS seniors Cole Wright and Emmi Schakat, and Bill Kokaly of U.S. Rep. Doug Collins' Office.

Veteran Bud Johnson recalls Battle of Iwo Jima

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

HIAWASSEE – On Feb. 16, 1945, a young Bud Johnson arrived offshore of Iwo Jima, Japan, aboard the USS Silverstein (DE-534).

Johnson had earned the rank of Chief Petty Officer Third Class several months prior on the Silverstein, and as Chief Quartermaster of the ship, he held the wheel for three straight days as the entire crew of the destroyer escort went to battle stations.

He and his fellow sailors in a fleet of more than 400 ships bombarded the island ahead of the Feb. 19 amphibious landing of the Fourth and Fifth Marine Divisions.



Photo by Shawn Jarrard
Bud Johnson, retired U.S. Navy.

The Marines took Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945, four days after the ground assault began, and

Johnson witnessed both U.S. flag raisings from his ship at Iwo Jima.

Nearly 7,000 Americans died during the Battle of Iwo Jima, which resulted in victory on March 26, 1945.

Seventy-three years later, on Feb. 16, 2018, Johnson demonstrated that he still had the ability to command the attention of those around him.

"I thank God and I thank my Jesus Christ that He gave me the years that He's given me," said Johnson, who will turn 96 on March 7. "I've been in this community for 45 years. I've been all over the world, and I would never live anywhere but in America, in

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Former Union County students survive school shooting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Two former students of Union County Schools survived the horrific Valentine's Day shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

A lone gunman murdered 17 people in the shooting.

The former Union County students, who are sisters, appeared on several news outlets to tell their story, including WPTV NewsChannel 5 out of West Palm Beach, Florida.

"I heard his scream, 'Help me,'" said the 17-year-old student, identified by friends on Facebook as Mady. "I thought it was fake at first,



A screenshot from WPTV NewsChannel 5 interview with two former Union County students.

I thought they were just trying to test us, but when I came around the corner, I saw a man on the floor." Mady told WPTV

reporters that she hid in a cabinet, where she hung from a shelf for more than 30 minutes to keep her feet from appearing

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Rotary honors Union County Teachers of the Year



Photo by Shawn Jarrard
L-R: Front – Lisa Vaughn, Millie Owenby, Brittany Jordan, Anna Roxbury, Stephanie Sweet and Carol Lichten; Back – Rick Maddox, John Hill, Camie George and C.T. Hussion.

By Mark Novak
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Members of the Rotary Club of Union County invited five local teachers to break bread with them in their weekly lunch meeting at North Georgia Technical College on Thursday, Feb. 15.

In the meeting, Rotarians expressed their heartfelt gratitude for the hard work and dedication of the teachers to the children of the community.

These teachers recently received recognition by the Union County School System as 2017-2018 Teachers of the Year, and they are:

Stephanie Stubblefield of Union County Primary;

Brittany Jordan of Union County Elementary; Anna Roxbury of Union County Middle; Camie George of Union County High; and Lisa Sweet of Woody Gap School.

"We appreciate what you do, and we appreciate your investment of time and your own money to teach the children of our county," said Rotary President Rick Maddox.

"We've got your back," added Maddox, before presenting a check to each teacher meant to offset minor out-of-pocket costs she might have incurred instructing students.

The club surprised the teachers with questions to answer in front of the group,

and their responses showed exactly why each had been chosen as Teacher of the Year.

Jordan, who was also selected 2017-2018 System Teacher of the Year, was asked by Rotarians why she was a teacher.

"I had a little girl say to me, 'I wish you were my mom,'" said Jordan, highlighting the special connection between a teacher and student.

For her part, George said it was important for people to always remain teachable, which served as a reminder to those present that it was never too late to learn something new.

"I'm one of the luckiest

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City and county commemorate Arbor Day with tree planting

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The City of Blairsville teamed up with Union County Government, the Blairsville Garden Club and the Georgia Forestry Commission to celebrate Arbor Day on Friday, Feb. 16.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Garden Club members and GFC Rangers Roy Fortenberry and Justin Davenport weathered the rain together at the Old Blairsville Cemetery to proclaim Feb. 16 Arbor Day.

Fortenberry presented the mayor, commissioner and garden club with a Tree City USA flag to recognize their continued support for maintaining and replenishing the greenery throughout the county.

"We're so very excited

to celebrate our 24th year as a Tree City," said Lou Ann Bleakley, Blairsville Garden Club President. "It is an honor that we hope to continue." To achieve the status of Tree City USA, the city must meet the Tree City USA program's four requirements of having a tree board or department, a tree care ordinance, an annual community forestry budget of at least \$2 per capita, and hold an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.

Mayor Conley read an Arbor Day proclamation on behalf of both the city and Commissioner Paris that Friday.

The proclamation read: "Trees and native plants are among our most valuable resources; trees provide a more livable environment for mankind, providing clean air and removing pollutants from the air.

"Trees provide a cooling effect and prevent global warming; trees are a source of food for man and animals; trees constitute hope for our future and carry out our heritage as they provide for a stable environment.

"Arbor Day is designated for tree planting, and the Garden Clubs of Georgia encourage the participation in tree planting. The Blairsville Garden Club recognizes that the third Friday in February is designated as Arbor Day in Georgia.

"A tree will be planted on Feb. 16, 2018, to commemorate the 146th anniversary of Arbor Day and the 24th year in Union County, in cooperation with the Georgia Forestry Commission, City of Blairsville, Blairsville Garden Club and the Union County Commissioner's Office."

Arbor Day was
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Photo by Lily Avery
Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris with members of the Blairsville Garden Club.

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Feb 24 vs. Rabun Gap 2:30 PM

BASEBALL

Feb 20 vs. Gilmer 4 PM
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Union County Primary School Kindergarten Registration

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Pre-K and Headstart Registration Begins March 1st

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10th Annual Trackrock STRA Trials March 3rd and 4th

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