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Wednesday, May 25, 2022

UCHS Class of 2022 ready for the future

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Twelve years of hard work culminated in a single celebratory – and spiritual – night for the Class of 2022 with the Union County High School Commencement Exercises on Friday, May 20.

The class, made up of 210 seniors, also included five juniors who were pushed through graduation in order to make their way fully into the workforce after a particularly challenging high school career of trying to work around COVID-19 restrictions.

Directed by Alicia Covington, the Union County

High School Ensemble Chorus kicked off the ceremony after graduates, educators and administrative staff filed in to fill the seats around the stage on Mike Colwell Memorial Field.

The ensemble provided a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem, addressing the flag hanging above the field in full view of all present.

Easton Sosensky first offered an introductory address thanking all parties involved in helping to indicate the steps graduates needed to take to reach the proverbial final stage.

"Tonight's ceremony marks the closing of one chapter and the opening of

another for us as graduates, but certainly, none of this would be possible without the efforts of a tremendous support system that includes our family, our friends, our teachers, and our school staff," Sosensky said, citing the commitment of caring guardians from the time of primary school onward.

Emma Thompson and Emily Frizzell took to the stage next, leading their peers down a lane of memories that included getting "in trouble for wearing too many silly bands" in primary school, and, in elementary school, dropping "our terrariums during the moment of silence – you know who you are."

See UCHS Graduation, Page 8A



Graduates celebrating in the immediate aftermath of Commencement Exercises on May 20. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Woody Gap School graduates seven in close-knit ceremony



The Woody Gap Class of 2022 was ready to take on the future after Superintendent John Hill handed out diplomas in Saturday's graduation ceremony. Photo by Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – Woody Gap School bid farewell to seven seniors from the Class of 2022 during its graduation exercises at the school gymnasium on Saturday, May 21.

Ervin Altman, Caleb Brown, Ivre Cantrell, Courtney Clark, Madison King, Salutatorian Caleb Harkins and Valedictorian Logan Disser received their diplomas Saturday morning from Union County School Superintendent John Hill.

Altman opened the occasion with a prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance by Brown and a welcome address from Clark.

Scholarships were awarded by local businesses, individuals and organizations. See Woody Gap 2022, Page 7A

Memorial Day Weekend to feature patriotism, family fun

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Initially known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day, which is observed on the last Monday in May, originated in the years following the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971.

Memorial Day is one of six National Military Appreciation Month observances and events that occur throughout the month of May.

Memorial Day is meant to be a tribute to those countless soldiers who gave their lives in military service to America, and many Americans today don't know that a national moment of remembrance occurs at 3 p.m. local time every Memorial Day.

The occasion of Memorial Day is often considered just another three-day weekend to romp and play, with many forgetting to respect the fact that, but for the sacrifices of the men and women who have given their lives over the years, they well might not be afforded



A view from the 2015 Memorial Day Parade, led by Union County Sheriff Mack Mason. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

that luxury. In an effort to bely the nonchalance exhibited in recent years toward those veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, the Blairsville-Union County Parade Committee has put together a parade set for Saturday, May 28, beginning at 10:30 a.m. The annual event will culminate in a patriotic ceremony at Union County War Memorial Park at noon. See Memorial Day, Page 2A

United Community Bank throws big Senior Bash for students

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

United Community Bank thrilled the Union County High School Class of 2022 on May 19 with a Senior Bash party just for upcoming graduates, marking an occasion that all will remember fondly for years to come.

It was the first Senior Bash held in more than a decade, and the students were excited to have been invited to the party, which took place behind the bank and in the Bracket Community Room.

Immediately greeting everyone was a bowl of gummy bears and colorful leis of bright faux flowers, and seniors were treated to a smorgasbord of fun activities, including cornhole.

See Senior Bash, Page 6A



United Community Bank paid tribute to its community stakeholder status last week by celebrating the future of Union County with the return of its Senior Bash. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Commissioner Paris announces work to begin on hospital roundabout

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In his May 19 regular meeting, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris announced that the county had entered into an agreement for design and engineering services for the roundabout project at the intersection of Pat Haralson Drive and Deep South Farm Road.

The agreement between Union County and CHA Consulting, Inc. is in the amount of \$342,500, with an effective date of May 18, 2022.

Paris said the biggest challenge with the project, aimed at alleviating current and

future traffic issues at the one-way stop, will be the relocation of utilities without disrupting service, especially to the Union General Hospital complex.

“(County Manager) Larry Garrett told me every utility that’s in Union County on any road anywhere runs in front of this property,” Paris said. “It will be a real issue and a struggle for all the utility companies to get together and figure out how to relocate the utilities.”

Moving along, Paris approved a Notice of Award of Contract for paving to Colditz Trucking, Inc. in the amount of \$1,280,011.20. This service will be paid for primarily through the Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant by the Georgia Department of Transportation.

“Roads that will be paved this summer will include Cooper Gap Road, 1.18 Miles; Jones Creek Road, 1.47 miles; Kiutuestia Creek Road, 1.27 miles; Cook Henry Road, 1.25 miles; Trackrock Gap Road, 1.08 miles; and Jewell Mason Road, 0.54 miles,” Paris said. “GDOT will pay \$762,000 on this, and we are required to pay \$384,000, which is 30%.”

“We made the decision, because of the increased cost of paving, to go ahead with the additional SPLOST funds and pay the additional \$133,000 so that we can pave the same amount of miles that we paved last year and not get behind, as the cost of paving seems to keep going up.”

The commissioner approved an Intergovernmental Agreement between the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and Union County for the distribution of 90% of funds received from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax.

Paris also accepted two county Lease Amendments, the first for the Department of Juvenile Justice at the address of 76B Hunt Martin Street, containing 185 square feet of rentable office space, with an effective date of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, in the amount of \$1.

The second lease amendment was for the Department of Driver Services at the address of 149 Chase Drive, containing 1,440 square feet of rentable office space, with an effective date of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, in the amount of \$1.



Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris

“This, of course, is what makes it possible for you to get you driver’s license here in Union County and not have to go to Blue Ridge or other parts of the state,” Paris said.

He then accepted an agreement with AirMedCare for a payroll deduction only for employees of Union County Government who sign a membership agreement with AirMedCare.

“There is no cost to Union County Government for this agreement, as Union County is only agreeing to deduct membership fees from an employee’s payroll if they choose to sign a membership with AirMedCare,” Paris said.

Union County and Union General Hospital have an arrangement with Air Methods such that all residents are covered for Air Methods life flights. However, if Air Methods helicopters are otherwise engaged, then AirMedCare would step in, and residents would be liable for the cost.

County employees get the discounted senior rate under this agreement, and while residents are also eligible for memberships with AirMedCare, they only qualify for the standard rate, not through the county.

Paris held a second reading and subsequent adoption of amendments to Chapter 10, Article III, of the Union County Code of Ordinances, generally referred to as the Union County Alcohol Ordinance.

County Attorney William Mercer explained the several changes attendant to the amendments during the

meeting.

The biggest amendment to the ordinance deals with removing stipulations requiring permitting – a distinct process from licensing – for everyone involved with serving, selling or handling alcohol for licensed businesses.

For a detailed explanation of the changes, contact the Commissioner’s Office at 706-439-6000.

In his Commissioner’s Comments, Paris addressed the issue of VRBOs, that is, Vacation Rentals By Owner, in Union County, of which there has been a recent surge locally and in surrounding counties.

Paris said he doesn’t feel that the county has the right to dictate how a property owner uses his or her property. However, he said the county will insist that the owners are responsible for their renters maintaining rental properties and respecting neighbors’ privacy and peace of mind.

“We’re working on and will have a comprehensive set of ordinances,” Paris said, adding that Union and eight neighboring counties are discussing and collaborating on how to best handle the problems inherent with the surge in not only short-term rentals, but growth in general.

The commissioner urged anyone experiencing problems with neighboring short-term renters to call the Commissioner’s Office or the Union County Sheriff’s Office at 706-439-6066.

Regular commissioner meetings occur the third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse.

Memorial Day ...from Page 1A

with Iraq War Veteran Chuck Honaker serving as Master of Ceremonies, and Wade Smith as Parade Grand Marshal and featured ceremony speaker.

Area native Smith is a decorated war hero who helped transform regional education prospects for at-risk students by founding the Mountain Education Center.

The Parade Committee includes veterans from all the local Veterans Service Organizations and works with the City of Blairsville and county to initiate and coordinate the event.

This year’s parade theme will be “Honoring Our Fallen Heroes,” and the route will cover Downtown Blairsville, heading from the Old Gym past War Memorial Park to Cleveland Street, then around the Blairsville Square to Blue Ridge Street, then back toward War Memorial Park.

At press time, there were 25 entries to participate in the parade and several organizations scheduled to take part in the Memorial Day ceremony at the War Memorial immediately following the parade.

To quote Air Force Veteran Jim Yohe, who is on the Parade Committee, “Parade entries include three motorcycle clubs, The Blairsville Cruisers, several individual cars (old and new), a wide variety of floats, and the various Union

County Veterans Service Organizations.”

Of course, the Union County Fire Department will be making an appearance, as well as local government dignitaries, and, as always, the Union County Saddle Club.

The noontime War Memorial ceremony will feature the Union County High School Band and Girls Ensemble, the Appalachian St. Andrew’s Pipes & Drums, and the North Georgia Honor Guard.

And as a special treat, the song “We Never Will Forget” by Georgia native David “Eli” Grimes, which will be released on Memorial Day and can be pre-ordered now on iTunes, will be played at the end of the War Memorial ceremony.

Grimes, a master electrician who worked for an electrical contractor on U.S. bases in the Middle East 11 years ago, said he assisted in keeping generators running for right at 10,000 troops for about six months, during which time he remembers being in a bomb shelter and hearing as many as 38 rockets impact the base in a single day.

“Though I wasn’t in the service, it made me realize the price they paid. So, in a trip to Arlington National Cemetery, I was inspired to write something from the heart,” Grimes said of his upcoming single, adding that he was turned down to join

the military when he was of age because of flat feet.

In addition to the Memorial Day Parade, Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Darren Harper said there are great things happening in Downtown Blairsville throughout the Memorial Day Weekend.

“There will be a Friday night concert, May 27, at the Old Courthouse on the Square featuring the Mountain Breeze Band,” Harper said.

Then, in tandem with the parade, the annual Spring Arts, Crafts & Music Festival starts at 10 a.m. on Saturday and will run until 5 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday, May 28-29, in Downtown Blairsville.

“We’ll have a few musical acts playing both Saturday and Sunday, and Music Bingo at Granddaddy Mimm’s on Saturday night,” Harper said. “This is our first downtown festival in two years, so we’re having to get back into our groove.”

“Lots of new vendors this year, as some have retired and/or passed. But some of our longtime vendors will be there as well. This is a fundraiser for the Historical Society and the Blairsville DDA, and we share the workload to make the event happen.”

All things considered, Memorial Day Weekend 2022 in Blairsville should be one for the books.

Membership monthly meeting for Blairsville Cruisers Car Club



The meeting will be held Thursday, May 26th in the pavilion at the Union County Farmers Market at 6 PM with a pot luck dinner promptly at 6 followed by the meeting at 6:30.

All members are encouraged to attend to learn updates on the upcoming Memorial Weekend events involving the

club.

Parade plans, raffle car booth and ticket sales, mock house cruise-in following the parade and other events for a busy weekend will be discussed.

Anyone interested in the automotive hobby is invited to attend and see what the Blairsville Cruisers is all about. We love new members. You do not have to own a classic car to join. Your interest and a desire to help the community through the clubs many charitable

programs is all you need. Members reside in Union and Towns counties in Georgia and Clay and Cherokee counties in North Carolina as well as few in other north Georgia counties, Florida and South Carolina.

The Club is a 501(c)3 non profit with programs designed to help local needy Children, especially at Christmastime, and other programs such as Scholarship and Veterans assistance programs as well as helping other local charities.

Union County High School honors seniors on Scholarship Night

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Monday, May 16, the Union County High School Senior Class of 2022 had its next to last send-off with the annual Scholarship Night Awards Ceremony at the Fine Arts Center.

In getting to this point in their lives, the seniors have certainly proven that they deserve every bit of financial support they are receiving,

with scholarships totaling over \$131,000 from local organizations and businesses, and a whopping \$1.2 million in college scholarships.

Announced that evening were the Top Two grade earners for the graduating class, with Rachel Reid serving as Salutatorian and Lorelei Skinner as Valedictorian.

Reid received several thousand dollars in scholarship money through various local organizations, and also



They say it takes a village, and the Union County “village” certainly came together to the tune of more than \$131,000 in support of seniors on Scholarship Night last week.
Photo by Jeremy Foster

earned an \$11,000 scholarship for her first year at Truett McConnell University, where she will pursue a major in Global Studies, an eventual master’s degree and, one day, a Ph.D. in Theology.

“(Being salutatorian) is very reflective of my academic achievements and of my teachers and staff as well for being there and supporting me,” Reid said. “I want to thank my parents Melissa and Brian, all of my teachers, and my church House of Prayer Blairsville.

“I am not sure where life will take me after (college) or if I will return here permanently, but I am going to miss the community and the peacefulness here, and I would not mind ending up here forever.

“I have learned so much from my teachers and friends here, but I want to say the ultimate thanks and represent my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for loving people well and the way I was raised. All of the credit and the glory is due to Him in the end, and I just want to live a life of giving that back.”

Valedictorian Skinner also achieved several scholarships that evening, including

the Zell Miller Scholarship to cover all her tuition at Georgia College and State University to major in Mass Communications.

“I am just very blessed,” Skinner said. “I could not ask for a better class of students to graduate with, and I am so grateful for this opportunity to represent my class as Valedictorian, because I never thought this would have happened.

“My friends and definitely my family have helped me so much through the years to achieve these goals, and I also want to thank my church First Baptist Church of Blairsville and my youth group.

“My teachers and the administration here at Union County High School deserve the most credit, because they care about every student and their success, and they have just been such a huge blessing to me. This whole community is great and very helpful, and none of it would be that way without the Lord.”

High School Principal CT Hussion was the Master of Ceremonies for the evening, after which he shared his thoughts on once again seeing another

senior class graduate and ride off into the sunset to embrace tomorrows all their own.

“Every year, it is an amazing feeling to see the kids graduate and be able to honor them in this way,” Hussion said. “This is such a great and well-rounded group of kids. It certainly gets emotional, because you watch them grow up as children, and now they are about to begin the rest of their lives in the big world, just as if

they were your own children

“This community is outstanding when it comes to supporting these kids. They donated so much money to help with their futures, and these are tough times, so the community should be told how valued they are.”

Congratulations to all the scholars and their overlords as they endeavor toward the undoubtedly bright futures ahead of them. Go Panthers!



UCHS Class of 2022 Salutatorian Rachel Reid and Valedictorian Lorelei Skinner on Senior Scholarship Night May 16.
Photo by Jeremy Foster

Senior Bash...from Page 1A

Wipe Out, spikeball, snow cones and more – all free to the students.

“We are very involved in the school system at United Community Bank,” said Sharon Arnold, Bank Relationship Manager. “Of course, with COVID and everything else, we haven’t been able to do what we’ve wanted to do for them, so this year, we thought we would blow it out.”

And bank staff certainly

pulled out all the stops to make sure the seniors had a fun, engaging time. Just as important as providing a special affair for seniors, however, was acknowledging the importance of community and how much Blairsville cares for the future generation.

“We want to show them that their community supports them and celebrates with them,” said Bank President Adam Born, with bank employee Jimmie Sue Easter adding, “It’s our future and our community. It’s the future of growth ... and it’s just a fun thing to do for the kids.”

Parent Michelle Marcum brought her son Hayden to the bash, noting how bittersweet his graduation would be considering he was her youngest child, and she took the time to express her appreciation for the effort that went into planning such an impressive feat at the bank.

“I am ecstatic. I’m just so excited, so proud. Seeing this, hardly anyone’s phones are out. It makes me want to cry. Kids are talking, they’re interacting with each other. It’s awesome,” she said, noting her belief that it was important for the Class of 2022 to have a chance to just celebrate being kids now that restrictions have lifted as a result of fewer COVID cases.

As for Hayden, he shared the general consensus of relief after 12 long years of studious work, and he was thankful, too, for the fact that the bank put on the special bash.

“It’s nice to unite everybody for one last time before the big ceremony (on May 20), and just make sure that everybody gets to hang out one last time,” he said. “I think it would be a good tradition.”

After living in a suburban Colorado community for years, Marcum and her son view Blairsville as a breath of fresh air, and there’s nowhere they would rather be to celebrate such an important milestone in Hayden’s life.

“It brings everybody together, and that’s what a small town is all about, and to keep the small-town atmosphere going is great,” Marcum said. “Friends, family, the Lord – it’s all important.”

For his part, Born addressed the Class of 2022 with a brief but no less inspiring send-off.

“I know you guys have probably been told (this) a lot, but I know your parents are super proud,” Born said. “Your community’s very proud of you as well. We’re very excited to see what’s in store for you in the next chapter of your lives.

“So, we congratulate you, we look forward to it, we wish you the best of luck and Godspeed in whatever you do. Be safe, follow your dreams by all means, and don’t stop until you get there.”



Union County seniors had a blast at the United Community Bank Senior Bash last Thursday, pictured here with Principal CT Hussion taking on the inflatable Wipe Out activity.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Particularly popular that day was the inflatable Wipe Out station, which even High School Principal C.T. Hussion got in on after just a little bit of prodding from students.

As soon as he caught his breath post-pummeling, Hussion took a moment to praise United Community for its investment in Union County’s seniors.

“Honestly, this doesn’t exist everywhere, and it’s such a tight-knit area,” Hussion said. “Everybody wants to pitch in, and these kids are very fortunate for that. They get a lot, which is awesome for them, and I hope they appreciate it for sure. They’re good kids, so I’m sure they do.”

High School Assistant Principal Christal Chastain chimed in as well, saying, “The bank does so much for our kids, and (United Community) and all our community members are giving our kids an opportunity to go to college that they may not have (otherwise).”

“We couldn’t do it without our community sponsors,” Chastain continued. “It really takes a village to raise these kids and to do everything they need and provide a good, well-rounded education.

“People who move here from other places, they are just astounded by the support the schools have and that our students have.”

About midway through the event, some of the seniors set up a spikeball game between the taco truck and the inflatables, and on the other side of the parking lot stood the Kona Ice truck, which allowed for custom snow cones with fruity flavor nozzles on the side of the truck.

Later on, Hussion pointed out some “party crashers” – juniors had snuck into the bash to hang out with their upperclassmen friends, joining in on the show of community support.

Of course, the event was all about observing friendships and making memories, which Chastain said she could further connect with in terms of today’s students thanks to her own fond memories of graduation celebrations.

“See, they had (the Bash) when I graduated,” she said. “We had sidewalk chalk, and we would draw on that sidewalk right over there; I have pictures of murals that we drew on that sidewalk.

“I could pull out those pictures and show them to you of me at my Bank Bash, (and) I wouldn’t be embarrassed,” she added, touching on the importance of creating memories with the last few get-togethers seniors experience before going out to face “the real world.”

“These kids – yes, they’re graduating, but they’re not adults,” Chastain said. “We’re never too old to have fun, and it’s a cool thing to let them act like kids again before they head off to college and work.”

And United Community realized this, too, which is why it was such a priority for employees of the bank that was founded here in Union County to re-establish the Senior Bash in 2022.

“Putting our image out there is probably the last thing that’s on my mind when we do this type of stuff,” Branch Manager Bradley Barrett said. “We just appreciate the opportunity to get to support them. And it is a blessing; we enjoy it I think as much as the kids do.”

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



May 18, 2022
In memory of
Joni Kramer
on the 2nd Anniversary
of her death

By Joann Kramer

May 27, 2022
In honor of
Walker J. Daniel
2022 Graduation
By Judy & John Daniel

Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493

Woody Gap 2022...from Page 1A

before Principal Carol Knight took center stage for the Recognition of Parents, allowing each graduate to express their gratitude by presenting their parents with a white flower.

At just under three minutes long, Dissert – also the 2022 STAR Student – offered a “short and sweet” Valedictory Address, reflecting on the tight-knit atmosphere that she unearthed shortly after transferring to Woody Gap in middle school.

“I’ve been thinking about writing this speech for a while, what I would say and how great it would be,” she said. “But now, I’m not too sure about any of it, so this is going to be short and sweet.”

“Our school is known for being small and isolated, unheard of by most people. Woody Gap School, however, is so much more. It is a family, a community that comes together to create something truly special.

“I remember when I first started at Woody Gap in the middle of my seventh-grade year. The very first day my brothers and I stepped through the stone archway, I knew this school was different.

“Yes, the little kids in what was supposed to be my middle school were definitely different, but the spirit, attitude and the warmth of the school were clear from the beginning.

“What I didn’t know then, from that moment on, I had an entire community supporting me, and I was a part of one big family.”

Turning to her fellow graduates, Dissert added, “Because of this school, the teachers and the community, we have been successfully prepared for the future in all aspects. We are ready to face the world academically and socially.

“Spending time with younger students at Woody Gap taught us to be kind and patient in all situations. Spending time outdoors and utilizing the resources around us taught us to be grateful for all we have. And connecting to and learning from the teachers at Woody Gap taught us to be respectful, intelligent and prepared for what is next to come.

“Without this school and the community as a whole, we would not be the people we are today. To the parents, family and friends of the graduates of 2022, thank you for everything you have done in all of our lives. You have all taught us, raised us and shaped us into



Woody Gap Valedictorian Logan Dissert during her speech inside the school gymnasium May 21. Photo by Todd Forrest

who we are and have truly made our lives worth living.

“To my family and our community of friends, thank you all. Each one of you has influenced my life, and each one of you has made my life better. My heart is full knowing how loved, supported and encouraged I am as I continue through life.”

In closing, Dissert offered some final words of advice to her peers and credited her parents for the success of not only herself but her older brother Grant, who was Woody Gap’s valedictorian in 2021.

“It feels incredible to make them and everyone else in my life proud,” she said. “And as we close this chapter of our lives, I hope we remember what Woody Gap taught us. As graduates of Woody Gap School, I hope we never forget where we come from and what it means to have made it this far in life.

“I know the graduates of 2022 will face life with determination and perseverance that will make each one of us successful wherever life takes us.”

During his Salutatory Address, Harkins opened by thanking teachers, administrators, parents, family and friends for 18 years of support. To his fellow graduates, Harkins discussed the uncertainty of departing high school to tackle adult life.

“Today, as we walk out these doors, we will be leaving this place by a road that we do not know, a road that will lead to new challenges and, hopefully, continued success,” he said. “However, according to Matthew 7:14, this road will not be easy for everyone, because narrow is the gate and

difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

“Let me encourage you to remain persistent and work hard to achieve those goals. As Winston Churchill once said, ‘Never give in, never give in.’ As a class, we did not give in when the news led us to believe that the police were going to kill us, the planet would burn up in global warming or we were all going to die from COVID-19. We overcame many challenges over the last several years, and here we are, the Class of 2022. We made it, we did not give in.

“Do not forget the hard times, because they make you stronger. In addition, don’t forget where you come from; Woody Gap School and the Suches community have been a family to all of us. And even though families have disagreements, in the end, we still belong to each other.

“I wish each one of you continued success in whatever path you take; it’s been my pleasure and my privilege to be your classmate at Woody Gap School. In closing, I want to thank each person here that has encouraged and supported the Class of 2022. Words cannot express how much you mean to us.”

Following the addresses from Dissert and Harkins, the always emotional senior video provided a soundtrack to a slideshow featuring moments from the lives of each senior.

The event concluded with the Candlelight Service conducted by Coach Robert Hill. The Candlelight Service is a Woody Gap tradition symbolizing the passing of the torch from the outgoing seniors to the next crop of 12th graders.

Derrick Whittle Memorial awards six Scholarships



Jim and Sharon Whittle, in memory of their son Derrick Whittle, awarded 6 scholarships in the amount of \$2,500 each to Eli Peugh, Alyssa Sweat, Hunter White, Bethany Meanders, Emily Henderson, and Hana Gregory on May 16. Best wishes to these aspiring graduates in their future endeavors.

Ice-Cream Social for UCHS 2022 Graduating Seniors



(L-R): Frank Maloney, Michelle Maloney, Riccardo Rivas, Martha Miller, Lynda Armona, Harriet Hoke
Following the Graduation Ceremony rehearsal on May 19, the Union County Democrats hosted an ice-cream social for all graduating seniors of Union County High School. The football field was filled with seniors eating delicious ice-cream while enjoying their last days as high school students. Ice-cream and many toppings were provided by Ronnie and Janie Dyer of Nana & Papa’s. Congratulations to the Class of 2022! You should take pride in all you have accomplished. We wish all of you the very best in your chosen paths as you look forward to new beginnings.

University of N. GA confers degrees for 2022 graduates

For the spring 2022 semester, the University of North Georgia (UNG) awarded about 1,700 degrees and 25 certificates to graduates. About 1,300 graduates participated in the spring 2022 commencement ceremonies held May 6-7 at the Convocation Center on UNG’s Dahlonega Campus. Local graduates included:

Ronald Engleman of Blairsville, GA, graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in

Digital Arts; Kirsten Pickelsimer of Morganton, GA, graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with a concentration in Russian language and literature; Hayley Stowers of Young Harris, GA, graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing; Thomas Cothren of Young Harris, GA, graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice with POST Certification; Maci Ev-

erett of Blairsville, GA, graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary & Special Education; Carly Dills of Young Harris, GA, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education; Kristen Feathers of Blairsville, GA, graduated with a Master’s degree in Public Administration; and Cole Ledford of Young Harris, GA, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity.

UCHS Graduation...from Page 1A



Union County High School Class of 2022 getting ready to take the field for graduation at Mike Colwell Stadium on Friday.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

“And then came middle school,” said Thompson, briefly taking over from Frizzell’s recap to describe the ever-awkward transition from child to teen that only amplified with the new world that came with high school.

The point of the speech, featuring moments embarrassing and triumphant, was to highlight that each graduate was an individual “made of memories” who should take comfort in the fact that their years in Union County would follow them for the rest of their lives.

“We are made of her athleticism, his creativity, and their unwavering loyalty to what they love. Everything we’ve experienced from the past years, everyone who we’ve met and said goodbye to, every moment has met, combined, and come to life in these beautiful creations that we call each other.

“We will become our own reminders, our own intangible souvenirs of this moment, because I am made

of memories, and we are made of each other,” said Thompson and Frizzell jointly.

The next 2022 graduate to take the stage was Lane Kennedy, who sang and played the guitar to his own rendition of “Wherever I Go” by Miley Cyrus and Emily Osment, with accompaniment from theater teacher Chris Adams on the piano.

Fitting after such focus on the importance of memories was Grace McConnell’s reminder to keep in mind the lives of classmate Matthew Deven Taylor, who passed away in 2019, and Dr. Teena Atkins, who passed earlier this year in March.

For Taylor, a single chair decorated in purple and gold roses was left empty where he would have sat that night.

“To know Deven was to love him,” McConnell said. “Deven always had a smile on his face, no matter the situation. He kept us laughing and on our toes with what he was going to say next ... I believe Deven knew we needed a classmate

looking over us, and he has done that since the day he left us.”

And for Atkins, McConnell named off her many achievements and job titles, but put emphasis on her humble, helpful nature.

“Dr. Atkins was truly one of the most fun, supportive and spirited teachers ... Dr. Atkins was also a shoulder to cry on and a listening ear for many. It was a guarantee that if anyone went to her with a problem, she would absolutely do her best to help, and anyone who needed someone to talk to always left her room with a piece of candy, a word of advice, and a very fitting Bible verse,” McConnell said, theorizing that Atkins was asking God to paint a beautiful sunset for the graduation ceremony of ‘22.

A moment of silence followed for the two souls unable to be physically present, but there was no doubt Taylor and Atkins were there in spirit.

Picking the ceremony back up were the speeches of Valedictorian Lorelei Skinner and Salutatorian Rachel Reid.

“It’s been a long and worthwhile journey to get to this point, but we did it, and I’m so proud of our hard work and achievements,” Reid opened for her speech.

She thanked teachers for “being so committed to the wellbeing and education of each and every student,” administrators for “overseeing the function, structure and quality of our education,” and even cafeteria staff, janitors and bus drivers for “providing much-needed services.”

“No matter how much you prepared for this next stage – college, work and adulthood – it probably won’t go as planned. Life will happen as it happens, and that’s okay. I have no doubt that I am staring at future teachers, doctors, lawyers, welders, politicians, pastors, nurses, mechanics, engineers, cosmetologists, actors, and so much more, and I have no doubt that many of you will become something you never expected to be,” Reid addressed her classmates, trying to impart the wisdom of impermanence and flexibility.

For her part, Skinner began her Valedictory Address by empathizing with her fellow graduates that she knew “each of our minds are currently racing with so many thoughts, and many of us are reminded of the people who have made sacrifices to get us to this point.”

“Rather than ‘what’ do you want to be, I’d like to propose a different question. Who do you want to be? While the word ‘what’ materializes the humanity of your accomplishments, the word ‘who’ provides the opportunity to create your identity. Our worth is so much more than what we can achieve; it’s also found in the character we can build,” Skinner said, urging her peers to remember that only they are the masters of their destiny, and with that knowledge, they can go far.

Skinner also reminded her classmates that life was far more colorful than its victories alone – including the one she and her peers had just achieved.

“An all-time favorite, Forrest Gump, famously quoted, ‘Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.’ So yes, while life is abundantly full of joyful moments, at the peak of every rollercoaster, we anxiously expect the drop,” Skinner said.

Finally, the Class of 2022

was introduced individually to walk across the stage and receive their long-awaited, prized diplomas. It seemed that with every new name, the whoops and cheers grew louder, and there was a palpable sense of support and belonging alongside any apprehension of a group about to be scattered to the winds for the good of their future.

The jangling of award amulets and tassels gave way then to Principal CT Hussion explaining the role that the Class of 2022 had to play in the history of the school and the impact they made on Union County’s younger generation.

“I challenged them, and I knew I was lucky to have them as a senior class because I knew what they did before (COVID). I said, ‘You need to grab the rope, and you’re going to have to pull and you’re going to have to pull hard and work hard to establish the culture of this school and a climate that is very special to everyone. If you don’t do it right, we’ll have to start over,’” Hussion noted, saying that the Class of 2022

showed younger high schoolers what it meant to be a Panther.

As a result of their resounding success in bringing back the spirit of their school in the wake of the pandemic, 2022’s graduates handed Hussion pieces of rope as they received their diplomas.

After the turning of the tassels and the official declaration of the end of their secondary educational journey, the Class of 2022 stood for the singing of their Alma Mater and the closing speech, both performed by Niya Cobb.

And so, the night ended with a fireworks show that some parents and even staff declared was one of the best they’d ever seen. Students watched a compilation video of photos both new and old set to their graduation song, “Daylight” by Maroon 5.

With the release of proud family and friends from the bleachers, the field was in an instant covered in warm embraces, congratulatory cheers, and more than a few bleary eyes. Congratulations, Class of 2022.

Mountain Regional Library Summer Reading Programs



Summer reading programs at public libraries offer creative, fun, and free ways to build a love for reading for all ages and abilities. This year’s theme is “Oceans of Possibilities,” and most libraries will offer a variety of beloved in-person traditions such as magic shows, storytimes, and more.

Mountain Regional Library System has branches in Fannin, Towns, and Union counties. All of our events are free and open to the public, and we are offering a mixture of indoor and outdoor events this year. In addition to our performers, each county will have a kick-off event and a finale party, as well as reading challenges and bingo boards.

Our Summer reading program will run from the beginning of June through July.

“Our MRLS staff wants to invite everyone to come out an experience one or all of our fantastic Summer Reading Program events being held at any of our 4 library branches. Across MRLS, there will be jugglers, magicians, foam, etc. and of course, a reading chal-

lenge that doesn’t seem like reading at all,” said MRLS Director Heath Lee. “Programs and events are always free, fun, and fulfilling. Come out and see us!!”

Be sure to check our Events page via our website, www.MountainLibrary.com/Events. Paper calendars are also available at each branch, and all of our social media is updated regularly. If you have questions about any of the events or our services, please call any of our branches.

Don’t have a library card yet? Come into any of the branches and we can walk you through the process. It’s quick and easy! With a library card, you have access to materials from 300 libraries in Georgia as well as thousand of e-materials. All our branches have free Wi-Fi available both inside the building and from the parking lot, and we offer printing, faxing, copying, and notary services. Looking for more summer fun? A library card lets you get free or discounted admission to places like Zoo Atlanta, Georgia Parks, and multiple museums!

Learn more about summer reading at the library at www.georgialibraries.org/summer-reading.