

Stars...from Page 1A

in attendance. Todd reflected on the past four years of high school, crediting her family and teachers for providing her with “the courage to set lofty goals, and the grit and work ethic needed to achieve those goals, like becoming STAR Student, receiving an Attorney Award in Mock Trial, and eventually becoming a real lawyer.”

She has faced many challenges in recent years, especially during the pandemic, but Todd has persevered thanks in large part to fantastic teachers like Krieger, who in turn praised “Todd’s qualities as a student and a person, saying she was fully confident Todd would go far in life.”

Krieger impressed upon those gathered that, while it is important for kids to remember their roots, “we also want them to spread their wings, because that’s what life is all about.” As for Todd, she will be spreading her wings at the University of Georgia this fall.

Principal C.T. Hussion presented the STAR Student and Teacher recognitions at the banquet, announcing afterward that Todd, as the sole STAR Student in the system, automatically qualified to advance to region level competition for a chance at state.

Also that evening, Hussion commended everyone on a successful school year so far, an accomplishment that was certainly in doubt due to ever-present concerns over COVID-19. But Union County Schools prevailed, and Hussion thanked those present for their support.

Earning the “Alumni Pacesetter Star Award” was past student Bonnie Ann Sarrell, who graduated UCHS Class of 2007, and the past valedictorian attended via teleconference to accept her award.

Sarrell is a highly trained medical doctor who will soon be joining Vanderbilt University Medical Center as a Transplant Nephrology Attending, and she will spend the rest of her career taking care of kidney transplant recipients.

A special pair of



High School Principal C.T. Hussion was honored to present Hannah Todd with an award recognizing her as the 2021 STAR Student on April 15.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard
 educators also received awards, starting with retired U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Art McCann, who serves as an administrative assistant at the high school.

McCann received the “Stellar Staff Award,” given to him for going “above and beyond on a regular basis to make the high school everything that it is.”

“Throughout the pandemic, he helped in the areas of food delivery, building level safety, COVID mitigation protocols, contact tracing, student support and attendance,” Murphy said.

High School Assistant Principal Pat Donaldson received the “North Star Award” that night in recognition for her leadership at the school, which has been particularly inspiring over the last year.

“The North Star Award winner this year always kept her compass pointed towards the physical and mental health of the students and staff,” Murphy said. “This amazing lady did more than most know to make the graduation of the Class of 2020 a beautiful and special event.”

“As the only full-time certified counselor in our building this year, she pulled double duty by helping

countless kids through the tough times while never missing a beat with her assistant principal duties.”

Among the VIPs in attendance were District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter, who congratulated the hard-working award recipients on their stellar achievements.

New Blue Ridge Mountain EMC General Manager Allan Glidewell presented a \$4,500 check to Principal Hussion for the Union County School Foundation, the proceeds of which came from the Shooting for the Stars Golf Tournament.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was the presenting sponsor for the banquet, with additional sponsors as introduced by Chamber President Steve Rowe: Union General Health System, United Community Bank, Realtor Sharon Davis, Cozy Cove Realty & Rental Cabins, Visit Downtown Blairsville, Homestead Hospice, The Barn at Young Harris, Enotah Valley Wedding & Events Center.

Event partners were LongHorn Steakhouse, the chamber itself and Corrugated Replacements Inc., with table sponsors being Alysia Hargus Photography, South State Bank and A Balloon A’Fair.

Blood Drive...from Page 1A

in the road and struck a tree while he was on his way to an emergency call involving a gun.

Ever since, Jim and Sharon have organized the blood drive in order to give back to the community Derrick loved serving as well as to keep his memory going.

“Derrick loved this community,” Sharon said. “He was always giving to this community. He coached little league, and he volunteered with different organizations. He died serving the community.”

“This is just a way for the community to give back like he did. This is just a way to help people, which is what he lived to do.”

Dedication to the community is part of the reason the Whittles have chosen to partner with Blood Assurance, since all the organization’s donations are distributed locally and around the Southeast.

Over the years, the drive has garnered support from many people and groups in Union County, such as Allegheny Masonic Lodge No. 114, Lodge Worshipful Master Murl Tackett and other members came out to the drive to donate a new banner for the event, and a few even gave blood.

“We support all of our veterans, fire department, and police departments,” Tackett said. “It is just something that we do, and we think it is important.”

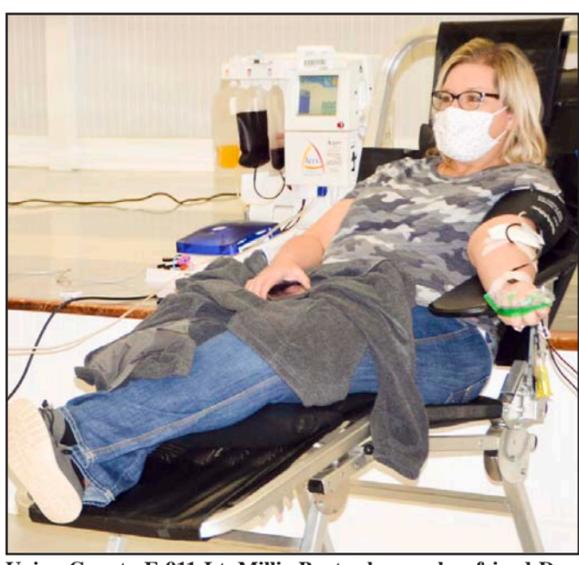
Jim and Sharon are thankful for the ongoing community participation and number of blood donors they are able to recruit each time the event is held. And for many donors, keeping Derrick’s memory alive is near and dear to their heart.

Lt. Millie Baxter of Union County E-911 was working at the Dispatch Center the day of Derrick’s accident, and she has given blood each year that the event has been held.

“This is just a part of me giving back to him,” Baxter said. “He was an amazing friend, an amazing person, and I would encourage everybody to come out and give in his memory.”

Those who gave blood that Sunday received a bandage with a black and blue ribbon in honor of Derrick’s service as a deputy. Donors were also encouraged to celebrate the birthday by enjoying free hotdogs and snacks alongside birthday cake.

While the drive is usually



Union County E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter honors her friend Derrick Whittle by donating blood annually at his memorial blood drive.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener
 scheduled for Derrick’s birthday of April 11, last year’s drive was moved due to the pandemic and took place instead on the ninth anniversary of his accident, September 18.

Despite this change, the 2020 blood drive attracted more than 60 people, bringing the total number of units the drive has raised over the years to around 400. Due to this success, Jim and Sharon will be hosting the blood drive biannually moving forward, starting in 2021.

“We had such a good turnout in September that we thought it would be good to do

it twice,” Sharon said. “It used to only be in April, but when we moved it to September, we had a lot of donations.”

For those who missed the drive, blood given at any Blood Assurance Drive can be donated in Derrick’s name by requesting it while filling out the paperwork.

Jim and Sharon also run a scholarship fund in memory of Derrick driven by local support and donations, which they will be giving out to at least four graduating seniors in May. For more information on donating to the scholarship fund, contact the Whittles at 706-781-7581.

‘Bless Blairsville’...from Page 1A



Citing Mark 9:35, the volunteers of Bless Blairsville hope to continue the message of the organization, which “exists to meet community needs while inspiring students to a lifetime of service.”

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

picking up roadside trash.

Two projects capitalized on the talents of students involved with CTAE programs in Union County Schools, allowing them to build “Tiny Pantries” to accept food donations at each end of the county, and a public COVID-19 Healthcare Worker Memorial.

“Instead of going to a professional woodworker, we got the high school students involved,” Landon said of the Tiny Pantries. “We asked CTAE classes if they would build it for us, and we are thankful for them for doing it.”

Landon hopes to make Bless Blairsville a regular feature of the community, taking on more projects in the fall and growing the program to include even more student volunteers, as well as community organizations that might need help with some of their own projects.

The idea for Bless Blairsville came out of a trip Landon and his mother Amy made last May to participate in the massive Love Atlanta service project, a church-led initiative meant to inspire and mobilize people toward service lifestyles.

As part of the project, Landon and Amy volunteered

at an Atlanta men’s homeless shelter, cleaning out pantries, organizing closets, cooking meals and more, and the entire experience gave the young man “a sense of purpose to be able to serve others.”

“I saw such a need in Atlanta, and on the way back, I felt so inspired,” Landon said. “During that time, all the riots were happening, and it showed me God’s Love takes over and prevails over fear and anger. That really just inspired me.”

“I saw a need in our community, and I wanted the people here to experience what I did in Atlanta and to show them that there are things they can do here to volunteer. We hope that these projects will stick with them and be something they keep in their lives.”

In helping him to accomplish his goal, Landon reached out to already existing community groups and asked for advice on how to recruit volunteers to participate.

“We got our ideas for projects from the organizations,” Amy Kight said. “(Landon) went to the Kiwanis meetings, and they told him what they were thinking about doing, and he went up to the chamber to get some leads on where to go.”

For her part, Amy was happy with the turnout of volunteers for Bless Blairsville and how well the students took charge in giving back to the community.

“I think what makes Bless Blairsville unique is that it is student-led,” Amy said. “As his mom and for his dad, we are obviously supporting Landon, but it is mostly the kids that are doing all of this stuff – that is what is most unique.”

“We feel like it is best to lead through serving or by helping in other ways. For Landon to show that servant leadership is the way to go, and for us to perpetuate that is great.”

Support for Bless Blairsville has come from a variety of businesses and organizations, including The Sawmill Place, Nelson Tractor, First Baptist Church, Vertical Church, Panel Built, the Chamber of Commerce, the Commissioner’s Office, UCHS Construction & Metals Classes, Beacon Ministry Team, Kiwanis, UCHS Boys Basketball, Family Connection, Keller Williams – The Mountain Life Team, Beta Club, and Chick-fil-A.

Bless Blairsville is sponsored out of First Baptist Church of Blairsville. People who wish to support the projects and make a tax-deductible donation may drop off or mail a check to First Baptist Church Blairsville at 296 Blue Ridge Street.

Checks should be made payable to FBC Blairsville, with “Mountain Ministries – Bless Blairsville” written on the for/memo line. For more information and to find out how to volunteer, visit bitly.com/blessblairsville.