

# North Georgia News

5 Sections 40 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Baccalaureate offers spiritual guidance to seniors

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Fellowship of Christian Athletes led the event, offering prayers and imparting wisdom via personally selected bible verses.

On behalf of the FCA and her graduating class, senior Ashley Bradburn welcomed everyone to the service, making sure to thank all the parents and educators, "for without your continuous support, we would not be in this position today."

Senior Mattie Brookshire gave the invocation, thanking the Lord "for each and every individual student that is here and the ones that could not make it," and likewise for the circumstances and people God put in their lives "to make them who they are today."

"I pray that each one of them knows that they are known and loved by you, God," Brookshire said of her peers. "Over the next week, I pray that

See *Baccalaureate*, Page 6A



More than 70 of the 173-member Union County High School Class of 2023 attended their Baccalaureate Service on Sunday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

The Union County High School Class of 2023 will participate in traditional commencement exercises this Friday, May 19, at 8 p.m. inside Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

In preparation for the momentous occasion, dozens of faith-minded seniors attended another tradition this past Sunday, May 14, to ensure that the next steps of their journeys in life get started on the right spiritual footing.

The 2023 Baccalaureate Service at First Baptist Church of Blairsville was a beautiful affair featuring time-tested messages delivered largely by students wearing purple graduation gowns in anticipation of their big day.

Members of the school's

## Cancer survivors, caregivers to celebrate Relay For Life

News Special  
North Georgia News

Everyone in the community is invited to help the annual Relay For Life effort "Knock Cancer Off The Board" this Saturday, May 20, at the Union County Farmers Market.

"As the 28th annual celebration of life with our Tri-Statewide American Cancer Society Relay For Life event gets close, volunteer leadership is working hard to spread the word to the many cancer survivors that they each have a special invitation to join the fight to end all cancers on Saturday, May 20, here in Union County at our local Farmers Market," stated Sue Upchurch of Blairsville and the Coosa United Methodist Church Relay For Life team "Critters."

Their Relay For Life Team has recently revived one of their most meaningful fundraisers. Last Sunday after services, church members, guests and Relay For Life volunteers served a delicious luncheon and held a very successful auction of desserts and cakes along with some



UCES third-grader Deklin Jones and his family will be honored at the 28th Annual Union County Relay For Life on Saturday. Photo/Submitted

beautiful handmade pottery and plant arrangements.

As Mrs. Upchurch pointed out, those non-food auction items were donated for those bidders who were not tempted by the sweets!

The Union County American Cancer Society

volunteers are pleased to announce the selection of 2023 Honorary Survivor/Caregiver Family Ambassadors. The traditional survivor/caregiver opening lap around the perimeter of the Farmers Market buildings will be led

See *Relay For Life*, Page 3A

## Band of Steel enthralled with annual 'Pan Rocks' concert

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Woody Gap, Georgia's smallest public school, knows how to rock - Pan Rock, that is.

On Saturday, May 13, the Union County Fine Arts Center came alive with an impressive display of strobe lights, misting and, of course, enthusiastic students giving

their all to perform on steel pan setups alongside drums, electric guitars and even an energetically played cowbell.

The Woody Gap Band of Steel collaborated not for the first time with international steelpan expert Tracy Thornton for the "ultimate steel drum rock show" known as Pan Rocks.

Thornton's 20 years of

musical experience blended well with the talent of Woody Gap's Middle and High School pannists that evening, wowing the crowd with multiple genres of music.

Although most of the setlist consisted of classic rock giants like AC/DC and Guns N' Roses, the band also featured metal from artists such as

See *Band of Steel*, Page 2A



The Woody Gap Band of Steel had a rocking good time with world-renowned steelpannist Tracy Thornton at the Pan Rocks! concert May 13. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Students choosing workforce after graduation Friday



These graduating seniors have chosen to go directly into the workforce, where they will form part of the next generation building up Union County. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Some students find their futures lie not in pursuing academia, but in joining the workforce immediately after graduation. And these students find ample opportunities in the Union County School System, which offers a heavy focus on employability.

In recognition of these

opportunities, on May 2, several Union County High School seniors were honored at the Career Ready Recognition Program for their decisions to pursue careers straight out of high school.

Eight students, their parents and workplace representatives traveled to the Board of Education Office to appear alongside teachers and school administrators that

morning, with a celebration that began with an address from CTAE Director Josh Davis.

"We understand the importance of real-world training and training the workforce, and our vision of ensuring that our students are employable when they graduate from here," Davis said. "We also understand that each of our students is unique and has

See *Choosing Workforce*, Page 2A

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Crowds of Union County Middle School students gathered at the Union County Agriscience Center earlier this month to take a tour of the individual learning stations available there during the Annual Farm to Table Day.

Between the Union County Nutrition Program, Agriculture Teacher Katie

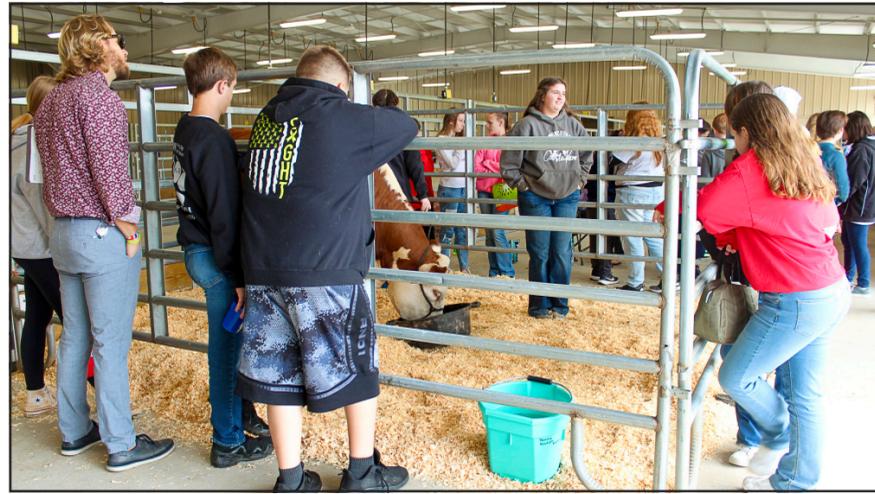
Hutson, the Georgia Forestry Commission, other organizations on a local and national level, and even Union County High School students, there was a lot to see around the barn on May 5.

"We take every single middle school student and bring them over to the Ag Center where they are introduced to all sorts of industries and agriculture," Hutson said. "We

have forestry, we have hay equipment, we have cattle, swine, rabbits - we even have hobby farm animals here.

"It allows our students to build some leadership opportunities while also learning from each other, too, and industry professionals as well."

Farm machinery lined the far edge of the parking lot. See *Farm to Table Day*, Page 3A



A Union County Middle School class visiting with Amber Watkins and her Hereford heifer named Remi for Farm to Table Day this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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# Choosing the Workforce...from Page 1A

individual goals, and there are many different paths for them to reach those goals.

"But we definitely understand that 'Success for ALL' means if we do our job as educators, it's going to benefit this entire community."

Next, Superintendent John Hill shared that "days like today are what makes you realize the future's really bright." After thanking the parents for raising their children with strength and integrity, he thanked teachers for opening those students' eyes through patience and education.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe, who chairs the Union County College and Career Academy Governing Board, voiced his own pride in the students and all they've accomplished thus far.

"It's important for our workers here to go straight to the workforce," he said. "Our businesses here need those workers, and we've got good-paying jobs. Several years ago, we couldn't say that - you had to leave in order to get these jobs, but these jobs are here (now)."

UCHS Principal C.T. Hussion took a moment to address the students, emotionally expressing his pride by saying, "There's kids

that are going to different phases of their life like every graduation group, but I feel like this group's the most ready to go into the workforce and actually be what our employers are telling us that they need immediately."

One by one, the students were called to the front of the room, most with at least one parent along with their business representative joining them, with the exception of one student who owns her own business. Each received a certificate and paused for a photo before returning to their seat.

Shelby Agacinski, daughter of Ken and Cathy Agacinski, started things off strong without a representative for her business - save for herself. Shelby's Odd Jobs LLC covers everything from pet sitting to mowing lawns.

Kendon Hemphill is ready to follow in his family's footsteps and one day plans on inheriting Hemphill Vinyl Siding and Metal Roofing, which was represented by Hemphill's father, Kenneth "Spud" Hemphill.

Jacob McCann, son of John McCann and Blairsville City Clerk Kaye McCann, is going to work at Advanced Digital Cable, represented by Joseph Goble. John Kluth, son

of Pia Kluth, will be joining him there.

Goble said that among the "20 or 30" students the business has hired on in the past, McCann and Kluth have "phenomenal" work ethics.

Kord Gibby, son of Waylon and Tanya Gibby, is set to work dayshifts at Walmart, as represented by Gail Smith.

Jace Vinez will be joining his parents, Eugene and Angela Vinez, working for Panel Built, as represented by Human

Resources Director Michelle Murray. Vinez said he "can't think of a better place to work," appreciating the support he's already gotten.

Dylan Carroll, son of Wesley and Amanda Carroll, will be joining the Union County Road Department, and according to representative Joe Edwards, he'll be part of the grounds maintenance crew full-time after graduation on Friday.

Finally, Kyle Poling, son of Russell and Amy Poling,

will be joining Jenny Chandler at Corrugated Replacements. Poling already works there setting up and running CNC equipment, "which speaks volumes about how intelligent he is." Company President Chandler said.

Congratulations to these hardworking students who will be helping to grow the local job base for future students to follow in their footsteps, which will enable more families to stay in Union County.

## Band of Steel...from Page 1A

Metallica and Rob Zombie.

Hip-hop was represented with the Gorillaz hit "Feel Good Inc." And with folk tune "Misirlou" of surfer pop fame, the group covered a little bit of everything.

Original compositions from Thornton made it into the show as well accompanied by powerful performances from students doubling up on the drum set, bongos, cowbell and guitar, making for an overall multifaceted, impressively bold sound.

One of the night's highlights occurred with the performance of calypso favorite "Jump In the Line" of "Beetlejuice" fame. Popularized by Harry Belafonte, Saturday night's performance was made poignant with the passing of the beloved musician last month on April 25.

And despite the bittersweet nature of the performance being dedicated to Belafonte, the atmosphere was no less cheerful, as it wasn't too long before a conga line weaved its way down the aisles of the auditorium, steadily adding more and more people before a roaring applause at the end of the song ushered the dancers back to their seats.

Woody Gap Band Director Doug Roberts took time to introduce each member of the band, also highlighting Thornton himself and the latter's own accompaniment. Roberts additionally announced trivia between songs with information ranging from the Band of Steel's history with a particular ditty or the origin story of a popular melody.

"After the success of our rock concert ... last year, I sat down and was like, 'How in the world can I possibly top what these kids just did in this last one?'" Roberts said. "And so, one thing that came to mind right away was this song by The Scorpions ('Rock You Like a Hurricane')."

"I didn't even know at the time that my budding young guitar player would turn into a monster rock hero over here, Mr. Ryan Marsh," Roberts added as the overhead camera panned toward Marsh, who quickly became such a favorite among the crowd that one rocker requested the volume on his guitar be turned up.

Dylan Salas, introduced as "the drum guru," is a senior at Woody Gap, and could also be seen walking around the stage lifting the cowbell

percussion toward the camera.

Another notable addition was alumni Will Potts, also on guitar. Before Roberts taught at Woody Gap, he was at Union County High School, and Potts was part of his band at the time.

Some students switched out instruments and positions throughout the night, but no matter who was standing beside Thornton, they couldn't help but smile at his infectious energy and passion for his craft. Thornton, too, was often moved to grin at the talent - and antics - of the students.

Cafetti burst from the stage during the final song's performance, leading some audience members to grab what they could from the front row and don the colorful slips of paper, and those who didn't initially pick up a T-shirt to support the band made a purchase on the way out.

Overall, the performance was filled with "good vibes," and judging by the cheers, whistles, and wild applause of the crowd, it was incredibly well-appreciated.

Keep an out on the Woody Gap Band of Steel's Facebook page for any news on upcoming concerts. To learn more about Tracy Thornton, visit [www.ttpan.com](http://www.ttpan.com).

## Veterans of Foreign Wars Patriotic Audio and Written Essay Competition 2023-2024



### Voice of Democracy Scholarship competition

Commander Chuck Honaker of the Veterans Of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the U.S Post Brown-Davis-Elliott-Woody/7394 announced the kick-off of this year's VFW's Voice of Democracy Scholarship competition. Local high school students have the opportunity to compete for thousands of dollars in scholarships and a trip to Washington, D.C.

Students must write and record a three-to-five-minute essay on the selected theme using an audio CD or flash drive and present their recording, typed essay and completed entry form to their local VFW Post by October 31. The 2023-2024 theme selected is "What are the greatest attributes of our Democracy." Students begin by competing at the local Post level, then Post winners compete at the District level with the winner advancing to the state competition.

All state first-place win-

ners receive a four-day trip to Washington, D.C., and the chance to compete for their share of more than \$150,000 in scholarships. The first-place winner receives a \$30,000. College scholarship.

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) started the Voice of Democracy Scholarship program in 1947. The VFW became a national sponsor in the late 1950s and assumed sole responsibility for the program in 1961. The competition was created to provide students grades 9-12 the opportunity to express themselves in regard to democratic ideas and principles. Around 40,000. Students participate in the competition each year and VFW awards more than \$2.1 million in educational scholarships every year.

Interested students and teachers should contact the VFW Post 7394 by email: [vfw7394@outlook.com](mailto:vfw7394@outlook.com) for more information. For details visit: [www.vfw.org/VOD](http://www.vfw.org/VOD).

### Patriot's Pen Youth Essay Competition

Commander Chuck Honaker of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. Post Brown-Davis-Elliott-Woody/7394, announced the kick-off of the VFW's an-

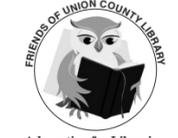
nual Patriot's Pen youth essay competition. Middle school students in grades 6-8 in this area have the opportunity to compete and win thousands of dollars in national awards.

The VFW enacted the Patriot's Pen competition in 1995 to encourage young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society by composing a 300 to 400 word patriotic-themed essay. The theme for the 2023-2024 competition is "How are you inspired by America?"

Students begin by competing at the local Post level. Post winners advance to District competition with District winners advancing to the state competition. State first-place winners compete for their share of thousands of dollars in awards, and the national first-place winner is awarded \$5,000. And all expense paid trip to Washington, D.C.

Each year, more than 125,000 students participate nationwide. Deadline for students is October 31, and interested students and teachers should contact their local VFW Post 7394 by email: [vfw7394@outlook.com](mailto:vfw7394@outlook.com) for more information. For details visit: <https://www.vfw.org/PatriotsPen>.

## Union County Public Library receives donation from FOUCL; Friends say goodbye to retiring Branch Librarian Susie Brendle



Susie Brendle received a quarterly check from Friends of Union County Library (FOUCL) in April of this year. At the time, we did not know this would be the last check she would be receiving from us in her capacity as branch librarian. Susie has been the Branch Librarian at Union County Public Library (UCPL) since 2004 and has worked at the library since she began volunteering there in 1995. She was hired as a library assistant in 1997 and went back to school to get her MLIS (Master Library & Information Science) from the University of South Carolina in 2000. The library has only had two branch librarians in its 32-year history at its current location. The first was Wilma Ash.

UCPL opened in its current building in Blairsville on February 6, 1989, after renovations had been completed. At that time the building was changed from a bank to a library. A second expansion/renovation began in 2006 when Mountain Regional Library System Director at the time, Donna Howell, Union County Public Library Branch Librarian Susie Brendle, and Union County



FOUCL President Jackie Volk, Branch Librarian Susie Brendle, and FOUCL Treasurer Debora Quigley

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris met. UCPL was put on 2008 SPLOST, Winter Construction won the bid to complete the expansion/renovation project, and Friends of Union County Library created LEAF (Library Enrichment and Furniture) to raise funds. FOUCL raised over \$20,000 and wrote hundreds of letters to our representatives requesting that the library be added to the 2008 State Construction Grant. Through this major project and many smaller ones, FOUCL has been fortunate to work under the guidance of Branch Librarian Susie Brendle.

Because Susie is retiring, FOUCL is spearheading an effort to show our appreciation for all she has done over her twenty-eight years at our library. If you would like to congratulate her on a job well done, send a card

or letter expressing your appreciation or drop one off at the library circulation desk before May 26. If you want to give a gift, donations in her honor can be given to the organizations she holds dear: Friends of Union County Library, FirstReaders, Union County Historical Society, or Union County Retired Educators.

Susie's last day of work has not yet been officially announced, and she wants no fanfare as she departs, so there will be no parties; but we can say thank you. This request is not a secret. Spread the word. Cards, messages, and well wishes can be sent to Branch Librarian Susie Brendle; c/o Union County Public Library; 303 Hunt Martin Street; Blairsville, GA 30512. Thank you, Susie, it has been a pleasure working with you!

# Farm to Table Day...from Page 1A

including a hay baler and a combine decorated in balloons along with multiple John Deere tractors.

Several Forestry rangers talked about trees and their significance to agriculture, whether that be in the form of domesticated orchards with fruits or wild forests and their importance to the environment.

According to Hutson, the educational event started in 2018 as an experiment, only to grow exponentially in 2019.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it wasn't until 2022 that the Farm to Table Day made a humble return on a much smaller scale. With the test run meeting with positive feedback, organizers decided to return to the Ag Center to expand the experience once again in 2023.

"This year, we said we were going to bring it back full-

force, and so far, everything's been great, and the kids are enjoying it (and) the teachers and staff are enjoying it," remarked Hutson.

Cindy Jones, Director of Nutrition for Union County Schools, said that everything for lunch that day was Georgia grown, including fresh-picked strawberries and homemade salsa made with local tomatoes.

Even the beef used for the tacos came from Future Farmers of America student Amber Watkins' show steer, Ziggy, who was purchased by the school. Watkins couldn't bring herself to eat the meat but was willing to admit that it was a great way to serve the community.

"I started showing a pig. I liked it but wanted something that kept me busy all year-round," Watkins said, finding that she preferred to keep a

bigger animal. As for Ziggy, "He was a really good show steer. He won Reserve Grand Champion Angus Steer at the National Fair, but sadly, his time did need to come."

Now, Watkins is in it for the long haul with a year-and-a-half-old Hereford heifer named Remi. One day, Watkins will begin a breeding line with Remi and her future calves in the hopes of starting up her own business. For now, the pair have enjoyed a busy show season.

"This is incredible," said Commissioner Lamar Paris when he arrived on the scene, taking photos of Buster and Molly, Tate Harkins' massive rabbits. The pair are both crossbreeds from lop and Champagne d'Argent – a common choice for folks looking to start a colony of meat rabbits.

Meanwhile, George Hernandez's father used to be a supervisor at Heinz Nursery, so he has some secondhand knowledge of horticulture. Between keeping an eye on his students, Hernandez enjoyed his own experience walking from station to station.

"I love it. (The kids) are able to go out into the public and experience the real world," Hernandez said regarding his take on the event. "Any chances that they get for that – they're good."

Overall, 2023's Farm to Table Day made a great comeback, if the scores of excited children leaning in to get a better look at how greenhouses work and mooing along with restless Remi were any indication.

"This kind of stuff is what gets me going and gets me excited about work every day – just getting kids out of the classroom, letting them see ag firsthand, because I am not a stay-in-the-classroom and teach-behind-a-book kind of person," admitted Hutson between calling out for students to switch stations. "I love watching them experience this hands-on."



The Georgia Forestry Commission attended Farm to Table Day to educate local youngsters about what it is they do in the agriculture space. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

# Relay For Life...from Page 1A

by Bobby Jackson and daughter Lisa Mashburn escorted by their family members.

"By naming the Bobby Jackson Family as our 2023 Honorary Cancer Ambassadors," stated Mrs. Upchurch, "our community honors a local businessman, a community citizen, as well as our longtime supporters of the fight to end all cancers."

Lisa Mashburn is a breast cancer survivor, having undergone her treatments and surgery back in the day when she was a special education teacher here in Union County. Her dad Bobby has been battling cancer most recently with a very successful outcome. He and his wife Beverly have been together through his battle and have been able to continue their enjoyment of travel with friends and family. They are active members of First Baptist Church of Blairsville.

Also being honored for 2023 will be Union County student Deklin Jones. He and his family will also lead off the opening cancer survivors lap that is set to begin at 6 p.m. following the opening ceremony and recognition of sponsors. Readers of the North Georgia News should remember the front-page story about Deklin and the community send-off as he prepared for surgery and treatments that began earlier this year.

For many years this community has honored children in the area who have fought childhood cancers. "At one time we called the childhood cancer lap the "Take It To The Track Lap... that was in the early years of our local event when it was held at the UCHS track/football field," added volunteer Sue Upchurch.

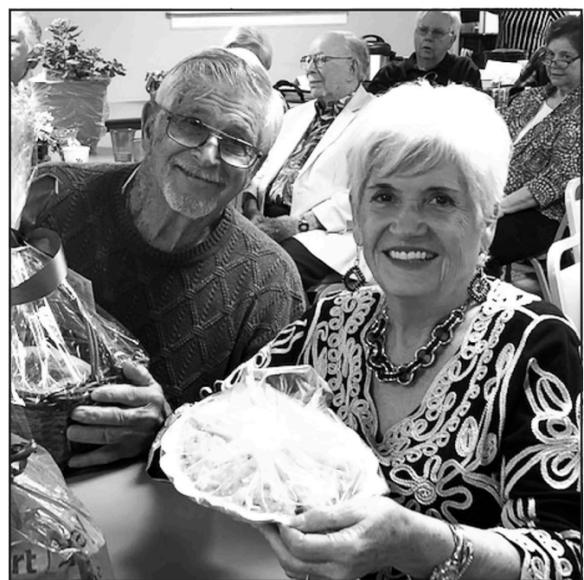
Cancer survivors are encouraged to attend the Pre-Event Picnic beginning at 4:30 in Building No. 1 of the Union County Farmers Market. Chick-fil-A of Blairsville will provide the picnic.

While survivors visit and eat, there will be entertainment provided by local musicians as well as a talented DJ.

The official opening



2023 Honorary Ambassadors for Union County Relay For Life are Lisa Mashburn and her father, Bobby Jackson, of Blairsville.



Coosa Methodist Church team, made up mostly of cancer survivors, held a fundraising luncheon following the Sunday service.

of the 2023 Knock Cancer Off The Board event will begin at 6 p.m. as Honorary Ambassadors lead off the opening lap. There will be plenty of music, entertainment, fun and games up until 8:45 p.m. when everyone is asked

to assemble in Building No. 2 for the quiet and meaningful Luminaria/Candle Lighting Service that will close out the celebration, remembrance and fight-back aspects of this American Cancer Society signature event.

The Candle Lighting/Luminary Ceremony will begin at 9 p.m. Luminary bags may be decorated and set out on-site beginning as early as 4:30 and ending around 8:45 as teams and participants prepare for the ceremony at 9 p.m. For a \$5 donation people can support this mission to lessen the burdens of cancer. Folks will be able to decorate their bag in honor of and in memory of someone special!

Twelve Relay For Life teams along with local survivors and caregivers will Knock Cancer Off The Board, so please join the community in fighting cancer on Saturday, May 20.

To pre-register for the survivor picnic or to sign up to participate, people may check out information at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) or contact local event leadership chair Mia Crowe at 706-897-4519 or Allyson McGraw at 706-835-8384.

# Sylvia Dyer Turnage to deliver Historical Society lecture May 20

Sylvia is a native of Union County, where she happily resides once again following retirement from a career in Atlanta as a Certified Public Accountant specializing in taxes.

Her deep love of the history of this area is reflected in most of the articles and books she has authored: The Choestoe Story, Choestoe Songs, Mountain Gold, Financially Savvy, Adventures in the Woods, The Legend of Clark Dyer's Flying Machine, Georgia's Pioneer Aviator—Micajah Clark Dyer, and Flying off Rattlesnake Mountain. Sylvia is the great, great granddaughter of Micajah Clark Dyer, who invented and flew an aircraft in Choestoe Community in the mid-1800s. Sylvia will be speak-



Sylvia Dyer Turnage

ing at the old courthouse on the square on Saturday, May 20th beginning at 11 AM. Her books will be available for sale on that day. Doors will open at 10 AM.

# DECA members shine under state, national spotlight

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Distributive Education Clubs of America – otherwise known as DECA – maintains a mission of preparing “emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management.”

This includes youth in high school and college, and as a program operating in nearly all 50 of the United States along with Canada, Puerto Rico and Germany, Union County High School has its own chapter of the organization.

UCHS Entrepreneurship Pathway Instructor Howard McCombs has led DECA here for three years, teaching the nine students who make up the group: Ava Arthur, Leah Cox, Matthew McClure, Eliyah Ochoa, Bella Moss, Hailey Hand, Sarah Rodriguez, Mikala Souther and Turner West.

As part of the club, the kids are challenged to come up with solutions to real problems in their community, usually those that impact local businesses or organizations, with three teams choosing three businesses to partner with, visit and observe.

“They go into a company and try to look for solutions for things that the company or business can do better,” explained McCombs, adding that this year’s businesses were Abide Coffee, Alexander’s Store and Ruby Kate’s Boutique.

After learning the ins and outs of their respective business partners, it’s up to the

kids to make a presentation out of their problem-solving skills. The businesses have the chance to sit down and listen to DECA members when it comes to these potential solutions.

And the club is very well prepared when that happens. The students’ analyses are year-long projects started in early fall, culminating in 20-page “manuals” that get graded and can be used again during competition.

These presentations are eventually brought before regional-level judges, and with outstanding results, the young problem-solvers can take their work to state competition. McCombs can’t recall a smaller school than Union making it to the state level, which UCHS did this year.

With their triumph at state, the Union DECA Club’s next step was to move up to the national level, which took place in 2023 at DECA’s International Career Development Conference in Orlando, Florida, from April 22-25.

More than 20,000 high school students competed against each other for the right to be named an International DECA Champion.

And while Union’s DECA Club didn’t make the cut to participate in the finals, there’s something to be said about the students rising to the national spotlight, especially considering that the group has underclassmen in it, one of whom is just a freshman and already making waves.

“They were really disappointed they didn’t get to the finals,” McCombs said, but



2023 UCHS DECA Club at the International Career Development Conference in Orlando last month. Photo/Facebook

added, “I was crazy proud of them. They deserve the credit. I just try to guide them and give them a chance to succeed, and they do the work and they do great.”

So, the trip wasn’t a loss at all. In fact, McCombs is glad they had the opportunity, and he wanted to especially thank the outside help that rallied to make sure the students got a shot at their big goal.

“We would like to thank the community members who donated,” McCombs said. “This was a pretty big, expensive trip, and we had probably 20-something people in our community, businesses who donated to this that really made it happen to allow all these kids to go.”

“They really did. We’ve got a great community that

supports them. We really appreciate that we were able to go because of their support.”

The hands-on experience is overall great for students to get a taste of, as McCombs calls it, “the real world,” as being a part of local businesses, albeit in an indirect way, gives the kids a way to interact with their

community.

It’s also great for helping them decide what they want to do post-graduation. McCombs knows that some students have already developed an interest in marketing, and at least one is considering becoming an attorney.

For now, though, they’re

content to work on a smaller level, doing “something that’s relevant in their community now.”

To learn more about the DECA Club as an organization, visit [www.deca.org](http://www.deca.org). For information on the local team, email Howard McCombs at [hmccombs@ucschools.org](mailto:hmccombs@ucschools.org).

## Baccalaureate...from Page 1A



UCHS senior Jaycee Seabolt lighting the top flame in the traditional Candlelight Service at First Baptist Blairsville May 14. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

they cherish the memories that they have made and make new ones. Amen.”

She also took charge of the Old Testament reading, delivering the message of Joshua 1:1-9 in advising her fellow soon-to-be graduates not to get discouraged as they make their way into the world, “for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go.”

Senior Eli Underwood spoke from the New Testament, Matthew 28:16-20, to counsel his classmates to teach others “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” and to also take heart in Jesus’ words that “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Performing for those gathered was a talented group of 9th-12th graders from the UCHS Ensemble under the direction of Chorus Director Alicia Covington for a moving rendition of “Homeward Bound,” the lyrics of which

promise a return home one day after parting.

Senior Jaycee Seabolt delivered a prayer for her class and, to “relinquish responsibility, tradition and knowledge to the next class,” lit the first flame in a Candlelight Service that featured also juniors Natalie Payne and Ellie Adams, and sophomore Katie Payne.

It was a “passing of the torch,” so to speak, in which the younger students lit two more candles to signify acceptance of their roles in a new class of torchbearers, and they conducted themselves admirably while looking ahead to their own future graduations.

Joining senior Bailey Adams on stage for a special musical performance of “It Is Well With My Soul” were her father, UCHS Theater Director Chris Adams, and sister, freshman Mady Adams.

Then came the time for

Rev. Jerry Helton, who works with FCA students during the school year, to offer the Baccalaureate Address, noting first that “we are blessed to be in an area of the country where you can (hold Baccalaureate Services).”

Referencing also the story of Joshua after Moses’ death as well as Jesus’ resurrection, Helton encouraged graduates to not be afraid as they go into the world because unchanging God and Jesus love them, and to share the Gospel with people everywhere they go.

Underwood returned to the podium to say a final prayer over his class, expressing gratitude to the Lord for blessings bestowed upon his classmates.

“I thank you for each and every member of this class that I’ve grown up with, whether they moved in or have been here the whole time,” Underwood said, asking that, no matter what happens next, God “stay with us and that we look to You in times of need.”

Senior Taylor Carroll closed things out with a proper sendoff for the festivities, including a thoughtful “Happy Mother’s Day” for all the moms in attendance. He also offered hope for all by reciting his favorite bible verse, John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, Jesus, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,” he read, adding, “We are thanking everyone – parents, grandparents, guardians, teachers, administration, the superintendent and our church community.”

The seniors then filed outside to take a group photo on the steps leading from the street down to the church before splitting off to join with family members who were very proud of their participation that day.



UCHS senior Taylor Carroll received a big round of applause following his closing remarks at Sunday’s Baccalaureate Service. Photo by Shawn Jarrard