



MEMORIAL DAY

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North Georgia News

4 Sections 28 Pages

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UCHS packs stadium for Class of '23 graduation

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

From "Pomp and Circumstance" to a thunderous fireworks finale and plenty more fanfare besides, Union County High School sent its latest crop of best-and-brightest to get their start in the world on Friday, May 19.

The Commencement Exercises were well attended inside Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, with more than 2,500 people showing up to support the 172 graduates of the Class of 2023. Additionally, over 500 people watched the graduation live on YouTube.

After the procession of Board of Education

members, administrators, School Governance Team representatives, counselors, senior class advisors and walking graduates took their seats on the field, the UCHS Advanced Ensemble performed a pitch-perfect rendition of the National Anthem.

Graduates Mattie Brookshire and Jaycee Seabolt welcomed everyone to the ceremony, making sure to thank family members, teachers, coaches, administrators, school staff, resource officers, and even the community for preparing them for the journeys on which they are embarking.

The duo also gave special recognition to the following graduates who are joining

the U.S. Army: Colton Lotts, Dillon Tessitore, Nathaniel Johnson, Damon Wallace and Andrew Young.

"Our deepest gratitude to you for your commitment and service to your country," Brookshire said.

Courtney Foster and Caroline Karnes took to the podium next to present a "Moment of Reflection," taking their classmates on a stroll down memory lane that was both humorous and heartfelt in its encapsulation of their many years together.

From first anxious moments in Primary School to "pre-teen body odor" in Middle School and eventual first-place success as High School

seniors in the annual inter-grade "Ulympics" competition, Foster and Karnes covered the gamut of Class of 2023 experiences.

It wasn't all fun and games along the way – their freshman year, for instance, was cut short in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, causing sophomore year "to be knocked for a loop" – but the class adapted with grit and determination to earn their seats in the stadium that night.

Salutatorian Eloise Whisenhunt delivered a speech of gratitude for the people who made their special day possible, "most of all ... those who loved us." And she



UCHS Class of 2023 Valedictorian Abeni Hogsed delivering her big speech at graduation on Friday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Woody Gap School sends graduates out into world

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – Union County and the Suches community celebrated the outstanding accomplishments of the three Class of 2023 Woody Gap School graduates, Gretchen Mossinger, Brooklyn Payne and Dylan Salas, during Commencement Exercises at the school gymnasium on Saturday, May 20.

The graduation opened with a prayer from Payne and a few welcoming words by Salas. Up next, Principal Wendy Reynolds stepped to the podium for the recognition of parents, allowing each senior



Woody Gap Class of 2023 graduates Dylan Salas and Brooklyn Payne in their ceremony on Saturday, May 20. Photo by Todd Forrest

Memorial Day Service to be held Saturday, May 27

Local veterans saluting Old Glory during the 2018 Memorial Day Service. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County will honor the nation's fallen service members in the annual Memorial Day observances this Saturday, May 27, to include the parade and official ceremony.

Both aspects of this year's Memorial Day service were handled by volunteers from each of Blairsville's veteran organizations, including the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, Event Coordinator Jim Yohe

Together, the commanders of these organizations make up the Veterans Commanders Group, an exclusive coalition that meets monthly to organize just such events, as it has for the



Blairsville's own Hinsli Dease ropes up scholarship to CMU

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Hinsli Dease's roping and riding talents have earned the 17-year-old Blairsville native the opportunity to continue her education at Central Methodist University of Fayette, Missouri.

Alongside family, friends and CMU rodeo coach Amanda Harper-Phipps, Dease put pen to paper during a scholarship



signing ceremony at the Union County Horse Arena on Monday, May 15.

Harper-Phipps, who grew up in Hiwassee and graduated from Towns County in 2002, proved instrumental in getting Dease to the Show-Me State.

"She used to ride horses with my grandad and babysit me," Dease said of her new coach. "I've been wanting to go to this school because we've

known Amanda for a while. She's incredible."

Growing up within the Blairsville Saddle Club, rodeo has been a constant in Dease's plans since she was 11 years old. Shortly thereafter, she realized she could chase her dreams at the college level, made possible at CMU when Harper-Phipps started collegiate rodeo there in 2019.

"It was about middle

Union County Relay For Life raises over \$35K to fight cancer

See Relay For Life story on Page 7A

Team Deklin was thrilled to participate in the annual Relay For Life on Saturday to help raise money to cure cancer. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Team Deklin members, including a young child in a wheelchair, holding a "WELCOME SURVIVORS" sign.



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Turner, Jones join forces for Memorial Day tribute

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

When local Vietnam Veteran Sid Turner learned of the Wall of Faces virtual tribute to the 58,281 service members who lost their lives due to the Vietnam War, he became so moved that he decided to build a monument to the men of his U.S. Army unit who died in the war.

The monument he built consists of a metal plaque showcasing the names, ranks, dates of death and photos of the 38 men killed in combat – most during the bloody Tet Offensive of 1968 – while attached to the 716th Military Police Battalion between 1966 and 1972 in Vietnam.

Accompanying the metal plaque is a custom-engraved wood plaque, which will be presented and placed alongside its metal counterpart at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., this Memorial Day, the American holiday set aside to remember and honor those who gave all.

Delivering the local tribute to Washington will be Gold Star Son Wayne A.

Jones, who serves with the U.S. National Park Service as a VIP – that is, a Volunteer in the Park – at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

As a VIP, Jones travels to the national memorial on major holidays “to provide directory services and educate visitors to The Wall about its design and meaning,” Jones said. He also assists visitors with name rubbings taken from The Wall’s black granite surface.

Turner and Jones struck up a friendship in recent years after Jones moved to Blairsville in 2017. Once here, Jones began visiting veteran organizations like the local chapter Vietnam Veterans of America to discuss The Wall and its founding nonprofit Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc.

Jones is not a veteran himself, but like Turner, his involvement in honoring Vietnam Veterans is deeply personal: “My goal in doing this is to honor my dad by helping others understand the loss,” he said.

On Aug. 17, 1967, when Jones was just a boy, he lost his father, Chief Warrant Officer Wayne E. Jones, in Vietnam.

“He was an Army fixed-wing pilot flying the De Havilland of Canada Otter aircraft used by the U.S. Army as a light transport with short take-off and landing capabilities,” Jones said of his dad. “His company flew direct support missions for the Special Forces, often landing on dirt runways.”

Just 33 years old when he died, CWO Jones was a lifelong patriot. He quit high school after 10th grade and joined the U.S. Marine Corps at 17. He married young and became a father at 19, going on to serve in the 1st Marine Aviation Group over the duration of the Korean War.

After his stint in the Marines, the elder Jones relocated his family to Alaska, where he took the initiative to become a private pilot while serving with the Alaska State Police.

When the Army put out a call for additional pilots, Jones capitalized on the opportunity to both expand his flying career and serve his country again by enlisting once more, this time for Warrant Officer Flight Training in 1964 at age 30.



Gold Star Son Wayne Jones and Vietnam Veteran Sid Turner have made possible a special Memorial Day presentation at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

He completed his training in 1965, after which the Jones Family moved to Karlsruhe, Germany, for a “guaranteed three-year tour.” CWO Jones got orders to go to Vietnam 14 months later, and he reported there in January 1967 to serve with the 18th Aviation Company.

On Aug. 17, 1967, on a return flight aboard aircraft Otter 58-1702, the plane crashed in poor weather conditions and all four passengers perished, including CWO Jones.

“I am not ready to die but I am prepared,” the father of five wrote his brother from Vietnam. “So many of these over here are totally unprepared because they do not know the one who can save them for eternity. So if it be God’s will, let me bring one to the saving power of Jesus Christ.”

In recognition of his valiant service, CWO Jones received the Air Medal 16 times, the Bronze Star posthumously, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and the Korean Service Medal along with various other service medals.

“I turned 12 years old that year and searched for meaning in his death, as the war in Vietnam was not well regarded at that time,” the younger Jones said. “We did not talk about him much as a family, and my classmates knew that I had no father but not how or why.”

Jones never gave up his search for meaning in the loss of his father, and about 20 years later, his search led him to visit the Moving Wall over Memorial Day Weekend while he was living in Houston, Texas.

A half-scale replica of

the memorial in Washington, the Moving Wall containing his father’s name and thousands of others moved him so much that he soon began volunteering whenever it traveled to his region.

Shortly thereafter, in 1990, he started training other volunteers to assist with the roaming tribute as part of a local group effort, at which point he got involved with the nascent nonprofit Sons and Daughters in Touch that consists of “America’s Gold Star Children from the Vietnam War.”

About nine years ago, Jones became a VIP with the National Park Service at the official Vietnam Veterans Memorial. There, he shares the tremendous meaning he has found by informing people about the memorial and its affiliated programs to honor the fallen.

One of these programs is the Wall of Faces, sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and found at <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>.

According to the website, “The virtual Wall of Faces features a page dedicated to honoring and remembering every person whose name is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.”

“In an effort to further preserve the legacy of those who sacrificed all in Vietnam, VVMF is committed to finding a photo to go with each of the more than 58,000 names on The Wall. The Wall of Faces allows family and friends to share memories, post pictures and connect with each other.”

Jones was happy to report recently that the Wall

of Faces had been completed after a years-long undertaking to find a photo for every single person named on The Wall. He even submitted a photo he found right here in the Military Room of the Blairsville Restaurant.

And it was Jones’ information about the Wall of Faces that inspired Turner to complete his 716th MP Battalion memorial this year, which Jones will take for presentation at The Wall on Monday, May 29, in his duties as a VIP for the National Park Service.

The plaques will be stored in a warehouse specifically designed to keep safe the many tributes left at The Wall each year, and Turner said he hopes “the people that worked hard on the Wall of Faces will see what they made possible.”

Turner has scribed a special note on the back of the metal plaque: “Inspired by and made possible by FACES OF THE WALL. Concept & general layout Sid Turner, Co. B 716th MP Batt. 1968. Tweaked and digitized by Allison Caldwell, West Printing Company, Blairsville, GA.”

This August, Turner will carry poster versions of his FACES OF THE WALL memorial, 15 of his engraved wood plaques and 20 custom-painted helmet liners to give away during his upcoming 716th MP Battalion Reunion that meets every other year.

This may be the last reunion the unit holds due to the advancing age of its members, and Turner looks forward to the occasion and to sharing the tribute he made to his fallen brothers in arms.

Rodeo Scholarship...from Page 1A

school when I found out I could do this at college, and Amanda has been wanting me to (go to CMU) for a long time,” Dease said. “We looked at a few other schools, but since we knew Amanda, we knew that was the way to go.”

Dease noted that her connection to Harper-Phipps wasn’t the only contributing factor in her decision; her campus visit helped sell her on CMU as well.

“I really liked the school,” she said. “It’s not too big and not too small, and the people there really helped make my decision much easier.”

As for adjusting to college-level competition, Dease doesn’t see a significant disparity in what she’s already done her entire life in the North Georgia Mountains, with the biggest difference being that “you’re on a team.”

Dease plans on majoring in health sciences and hopes to become an ultrasound technician when her college career wraps up. In the meantime, she’ll be focusing on the 2023-24 school year.



CMU Rodeo Coach Amanda Harper-Phipps was happy to support Hinsli Dease during the Blairsville native’s scholarship signing last week.

Photo by Todd Forrest

“I’m just going to take it one year at a time,” she said. “For now, I just want to get out there and give it my best and see how it goes.”

In closing, Dease credited her family for aiding her along the way.

“I want to thank them for helping me get to where I am and doing whatever it takes

to do whatever I want to do,” she said.

Dease was also grateful to receive a scholarship from the Union County Saddle Club that day.

She is a homeschooled graduate with a 3.7 GPA. Hinsli is the daughter of Robert and Tali (Patterson) Hollis, and Scott Dease.

Humane Society’s Mountain Shelter receives donation



The Humane Society’s Mountain Shelter graciously accepts a generous donation of \$2,000 from the Northeast Georgia Board of Realtors, Inc. Over the years, this Board has continuously supported our many orphaned animals residing at our animal shelter. We want to thank each of their 1100 members for their kindness in helping make the stay a much more pleasant experience for our fur babies while they await their forever home! Thank you again for your community support!

Memorial Day...from Page 1A

past four and a half years.

"It's kind of two-fold, to help everybody understand what each veterans' service organization is doing, and then how we can support each other, trying to get synergies from that organization," VCG Cmdr. Jim Reed said.

The Memorial Day theme this year will be "Honoring Our Women Heroes," encompassing

all the different ways that women have supported their country.

"Women have only been able to serve in the military for a short time of American history, but they have always served the military," Yohe said. "And we reference back to even the American Revolution, where women of course would always help as far as caring for the wounded.

"We want (people to) understand that it's not 'a woman,' but it's all of their efforts, including wives who sacrifice quite a bit in being married to someone in the military."

The 2023 parade will be unique in specifically honoring the often unrecognized, yet massive role women have played in the support of the United States.

Rather than the usual singular grand marshal, the 10:30 a.m. parade through Downtown Blairsville will be led by multiple women on one

float courtesy of the Union County Recreation Department.

Affectionately dubbed "the people-mover," the vehicle can carry over 20 individuals, and although there's already been some interest, Yohe is still looking for riders.

"We're asking for folks to volunteer to be on the float that are active duty, veterans, auxiliaries," Yohe said. "And not just from the aspect of the military auxiliaries, but any veteran organization auxiliary, medical, and wives to volunteer to be on that to represent just how important they are to us."

The Memorial Day Ceremony will be held after the parade at noon in the Union County War Memorial Park, with the featured speaker being retired Air Force Col. Kathy Merritt. That said, there are other speakers lined up to talk at the event.

In the event of rain, the ceremony will be held in the Haralson Memorial Civic Center.

"They are heroes," Yohe said about women in the service. "Even though they may not have been able to serve because we wouldn't allow them to, doesn't mean that they did not support our country and our military."

Memorial Day is a special occasion set aside to remember those who gave all, and Reed believes the holiday encompasses both men and women, making it the duty of the living to remember and honor the dead.

"What's important is that we remember the veterans that are no longer with us, and hence, the Memorial Day," Reed said. "As a veterans' organization and as veterans, we really appreciate the support we get from Union County for veterans. It's phenomenal."

For more information or to volunteer to ride the opening float for the Memorial Day Parade, contact Jim Yohe at iraweaver121@gmail.com or 940-867-4392.

Mars Hill Porch Pickers in Concert at the Old Courthouse on the Square Friday, May 26th

On Friday, May 26, at 7 p.m. The Mars Hill Porch Pickers will take to the stage in The Old Courthouse on the Square in Blairsville.

"The Mars Hill Porch Pickers" Bluegrass Band was started by Painter Dickson Lester in the Fall of 1992 as an outreach to youth in the community of the Mars Hill Presbyterian Church, Acworth.

After the Youth went off to college Dickson continued to use the group to play for retirement homes and other special events in the community around Cobb County including Acworth, Kennesaw, Dallas, Cartersville and many other locations.

They have since put on or played at concerts in Powders Springs, Blue Ridge, The Blue Ridge Rail Road, Raccoon Creek, Acworth Opry, Everett's Music Barn, Heritage at Brookstone and many



Mars Hill Porch Pickers

others. They were filmed for a TV show "The Best Of America By Horse Back - in Lyons, GA that was aired on RFD TV. The Porch Pickers have also played for our Troops at Fort Riley in Kansas, and that show was aired on the same RDF television broadcast.

There is never an admission charge to the concerts presented by The Union County Historical Society. The musicians donate their time and talents. Voluntary donations to the maintenance fund are always welcomed and appreciated.

Reece Heritage Farm presents The Wilderness Pickers

Reece Heritage Farm presents The Wilderness Pickers! Two hours of original & cover songs with a nine-member acoustic group that plays songs from the 50's, 60's, and 70's! The Beatles, Jimmy Buffett, Willie Nelson and many others! We invite you to come enjoy the exhibits at the farm before the concert.

They will be performing Saturday May 27, 2023 from 1 until 3 p.m. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy music! Free admission! Donations raised will benefit Reece Farm, thank you Wilderness Pickers!

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, and his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books, and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park. We now have trout stocked in Wolf creek (please follow all



The Wilderness Pickers

Georgia Fishing rules).

Exhibits are open Wednesday through Saturday 10 until 4, Free admission. Please keep us in mind for your affordable wedding & events!

FB: Reece Heritage Farm; Keep informed: www.reecefarm.org; bhfarm@uniongov.com; 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville, GA; 706-745-2034.

Comedian Rodney Carrington to perform at Anderson Music Hall, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds

Rodney Carrington has announced additional dates for his 2023 comedy tour, including at Anderson Music Hall inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee on Saturday, Sept. 23.

Carrington is known for the witty and sarcastic humor that he is able to blend into various mediums of stand-up, music, and short films. He integrates his country roots seamlessly into the essence of his demeanor and writing style.

Tickets are on sale now at <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/id/444>. The password for ticket purchases is Beer or Rodney.

Rodney Carrington is a multi-talented comedian, actor, singer and writer playing sold-out shows around the world as one of the top 10 highest-grossing touring comedians for the past two decades.

A platinum-recording artist, Rodney's recorded eight major record label comedy albums, followed by three albums on his own record label, Laughter's Good Records. His last album "Here Comes the Truth" (released 2017) climbed to #3 on the comedy



Rodney Carrington

charts, accruing tens of millions of streams on Spotify and even spawned a Netflix special.

Rodney broke through with his major label comedy CD debut "Hangin' With Rodney" in 1998. The next few years saw nine more Top 10 comedy albums: Live, Morning Wood, Nutsack, Greatest Hits, King of the Mountains, El Nino Loco, C'mon Laugh You Bastards, Laughter's Good and The Hits, all of which continue to receive radio airplay and regularly place on the national comedy charts. "Hangin' With Rodney" and "Morning Wood" earned

RIAA gold record certification, and his Greatest Hits (a double CD) album reached platinum status. Rodney also released "Make it Christmas" which features his original song "Camouflage and Christmas Lights," a tribute to our military.

Rodney also added "author" to his list of accomplishments with the release of his book "Rodney Carrington, Coming Clean" published by Hachette Books.

Over the years, he's starred in his own TV sitcom, "Rodney", which ran for two seasons on ABC, co-wrote and co-starred with Toby Keith in the feature film, "Beer for My Horses," which won the Tex Ritter Award from the ACM, and starred in his own Netflix special "Here Comes the Truth." Rodney's also appeared on countless other TV shows, including the ACA (American Country Awards), hosting the American Country New Year's Eve Live show on FOX, and won "Supporting Character of the Year" from the CMT Music Video Awards for his appearance on the Trace Adkins' music video "I Got My Game On."

Relay For Life raises over \$35,000 to fight cancer

Continued from Front Page



The talented students of Blairsville Dance Project put on quite a show for Relay attendees on May 20.

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The 28th Annual Union County Relay For Life was a major success on Saturday, May 20, despite the downpour that began just before the Survivors' Walk.

Sponsored by the American Cancer Society with organizational help from dedicated local volunteers, the "Knock Cancer Off the Board" effort began with a 4:30 p.m. picnic, to which area cancer survivors, patients and families were invited at the Union County Farmers Market.

At 6 p.m., Relay participants improvised after the sky opened up; the survivors' lap was re-routed around the outer perimeter of Building No. 1, just past the support beams but still under the overhang.

Twelve teams took part in the walk, including the firefighter-centric Cancer Ash Kickers, the Coosa Methodist Church team, and, among others, Team Deklin, named for a local boy who is thankfully recovering from cancer.

In fact, Deklin Jones was the guest of honor this year. Like many other third-graders, he's a huge fan of Pokémon, but unlike other kids his age, he has undergone a trial that even many adults fear.

"It would be very nice

to meet with y'all," said Jones, addressing the folks who have shared his story and helped or supported him on his journey, which really began nine years ago when he was born two months early. Despite his small size, his mighty determination saw him through.

Then, on Dec. 16, 2022, after experiencing severe leg pain, Jones was diagnosed with cancer. Life changed significantly; where once Jones was able to run and play, he had to learn to walk using crutches.

Since the disease was localized to his left shin, doctors made the choice to amputate part of Jones' leg. On March 21, he underwent the surgery, and after the tumor was removed, biopsies showed that "in every single slice, the cancer was dead."

Now, Jones is officially in remission, and according to his mother TaSheena, his final chemotherapy appointment is scheduled for Aug. 16.

Nine-year-old Jones remained in good spirits to enjoy his time at the Relay. With help from his mother and brothers pushing his wheelchair, he participated in the Survivors' Walk and even had fun with musical chairs and dancing.

"Never give up, and just believe in yourself," Jones said, offering advice to those who are

still fighting the battle.

Outside of gout in his left foot, Bobby Jackson said he was doing well and cancer-free after battling bladder and kidney cancer. He and his daughter, Lisa Mashburn, were named as the Honorary Survivor/Caregiver Family Ambassadors, and they headed the triumphant parade.

Mashburn is known by many for her years as a special education teacher at Union County Schools. At the time of her diagnosis, several of her colleagues were facing the same battle. She can remember a day when she and another teacher dropped something, and both lost their wigs.

"It was 20 years ago at Christmas – my very first mammogram at 40," Mashburn recalled of her diagnosis. "So, I came home that day knowing I had breast cancer when I had my very first mammogram."

She fondly credits "all those Relay ladies" with helping her keep her spirits up with the Look Good, Feel Good program and in countless other ways.

"I didn't want to lose my hair, I didn't want to wear those turbans, but you do anyway," admitted Mashburn. "But those girls helped. They're good help; they called, they sent things, they mailed cards, they brought things."

Another important

person for Mashburn was her cousin Tommy Jones, pastor of Fairview Baptist Church. Jones was often there at the school gym to pick his granddaughter up when Mashburn was "trying to beat those buses to get gone," and he had spiritual advice and humor to share.

"He'd be standing there because I was right at that gym door anyway," Mashburn said with some mirth. "He greeted me at least 15 or 20 of my 37 visits. I didn't ever forget that. It made me feel good, sure it did."

At around 8:30 p.m. after a fun-filled evening of entertainment by the Blairsville Dance Project, games and socializing, everyone gathered in Building No. 2 for the Luminary Ceremony.

Relay organizers Allyson McGraw, Sue Upchurch and Mia Crowe prepared for the event by handing out glowsticks and lighting decorated bags honoring lost loved ones or supporting current patients.

Piper Bill Lombardo led the solemn procession through a path lined on either side with the beautifully lit candles in

the bags. Winding back around to the front of the building, Lombardo paused at the edge of a circle made by himself and survivors, patients, family and friends.

As the haunting melody of "Amazing Grace" filled the air, several voices rose in song before McGraw closed out the evening.

"I just want to remind folks how much we appreciate the support that this community gives to our cancer patients, our cancer families, our cancer survivors," McGraw said.

She offered the hopeful message that cancer treatment has seen many advancements through the nearly three decades Blairsville has hosted the Relay For Life.

"When our legs are tired of walking, we'll walk with our hearts," she said.

The 2023 Relay For Life raised over \$35,000. To help the organization continue the fight to cure cancer, contact local event leadership chair Mia Crowe at 706-897-4519 or Allyson McGraw at 706-835-8384.

University of North Georgia (UNG) President Bonita C. Jacobs recognized students who achieved a 4.0 GPA during the spring 2023 semester. Students enrolled in 12 or more credit hours in bachelor's degree programs who achieved a 4.0 grade point average were named to the President's Honor Roll.

Students enrolled in associate degree or dual enrollment programs who met the

same level of achievement were named to the President's List.

Local honorees included: Sierra Deyton; Jessica Lara; Paxton Meyer; Laura-leigh Miller; Courtney Moose; Skylar Tipton; Maci Walls; Sarah Walker all of Blairsville, GA; and Anthony Covey; Destiny King; Jenna Young; and Evan Osterc all of Morganton, GA; and Kaitlyn Helton; Luz Pereira both of Suches, GA.

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Union County High School Seniors answer "The Call"



(L-R) Colson Lotts, Dillion Tessitore, Wayne Roshaven (NGHG), Nathaniel Johnson, Damon Wallace, and Andrew Young

The North Georgia Honor Guard (NGHG), Eastern Division held a recognition ceremony on May 17 for five UCHS Seniors who have made the decision to join the United States Army after graduation.

"These young men represent the 1% of those eligible, that stand up to protect the other 99%," NGHG Cmdr. Wayne Roshaven said during the ceremony. "We chose to recognize them so that they know they do not stand alone. Their community and the Veterans of North Georgia stand with them."

The young men recognized were Colson Lotts, enlisting as a 91F - Small Arms/Artillery Repairer; Dillion Tessitore, enlisting as a 31B - Military Policeman; Nathaniel Johnson, enlisting as an 11B - Infantryman; Damon Wallace, ROTC Scholarship to University of North Georgia majoring in Criminal Justice; and Andrew Young, also an ROTC Scholarship to UNG majoring in Engineering.

Roshaven presented each with a certificate of recognition and informed them

that, as a show of gratitude for their willingness to serve, the NGHG had arranged, with the support of local businesses, for them to have a congratulatory meal with their families before they depart.

The following businesses generously contributed a meal for a family of four to each of the young men: Mr. Stephen Holland, Co-Owner of Mike's Seafood Market and Grill, donated two family meals at his establishment. Mr. Jason Seabolt, Owner of Summit Lawn and Landscape, Inc., donated one family meal by providing a \$50 gift card to a local restaurant. The management of Rib Country BBQ provided one family meal by donating a \$50 gift card to their establishment. And Monte Alban Mexican Restaurant gave one family meal at their establishment.

"We want to thank these businesses for their generosity and show of support for these young men and their families," said NGHG Event Coordinator Mark Harbison, adding that this is the first of what the NGHG plans to make an annual event not only for Union County, but also for Towns County starting next year.

Roshaven closed the event by again thanking the young men and leaving them with a quote by President John F. Kennedy: "Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard."

2023 Courthouse Friday Night Concerts

- Mars Hill Porch Pickers ... May 26
- Colin Grant Adams ... June 9
- John Cochran ... June 16
- Billy Kelly ... June 23
- Collins Family Band ... June 30
- Jim Wood ... July 7
- Lighthouse ... July 14
- Greg Smith Band ... July 21
- Tunnel Rats Band ... July 28
- Wilderness Pickers ... August 4
- Mountain Breeze Band ... August 11
- Saved By Grace (Ralph Piano) ... August 18
- Mike Lane ... August 25
- Tunnel Rats ... September 1
- Heritage Festival ... September 2 & 3
- Sammy & Samuel Ensley ... September 8
- Gavyn Thorsell ... September 15
- Jack Miller ... September 22
- Mars Hill Porch Pickers ... September 29
- Jim Wood/Tommy Townsend ... October 6
- Wilderness Pickers ... October 18
- Nelson Thomas ... October 20

UCHS Graduation...from Page 1A

“saluted” her classmates “for the community you created,” imparting her belief that “you can go anywhere from here.”

Graduate Abeni Hogsted offered the Valedictory Address, in which she expressed gratitude as well, “above all (to) the Lord for being with me every step of the way – I am thankful for His blessings over the past 17 years.”

Turning to her class, she congratulated them while urging the graduates to “color outside the lines and break out of our boundaries” moving forward.

“As we all part ways, I encourage you to embrace this new chapter of our lives,” Hogsted said. “Enjoy not knowing how each day will play out. Lean on the Lord and let your faith help encourage you on the good days and the bad.”

“Each and every one of us has a talent. I encourage you to utilize it in whatever you decide to do. I pray that your talents aren’t wasted but instead are used to magnify the Lord. I pray that, as we walk through life, we shine the light.”

“I didn’t get here on my own; I prayed for guidance and strength. Without the Lord,

I wouldn’t have made it this far. I encourage each of you to avoid going forward on your own – you won’t get very far. Lean on the Lord and let Him lead you and strengthen you.”

To cheers from the stands, Primary School Assistant Principal Wesley Garrett called forth each graduating senior to receive his or her hard-earned diploma from UCHS Principal C.T. Hussion.

In turn, Hussion handled with grace another UCHS tradition, the symbolic exchange of a fanciful item, this year a complete LEGO set delivered one piece at a time, from student to principal.

The last graduate to receive a diploma on Friday was Hussion’s son Brady, and the two shared a hug before the principal stepped up to the microphone to give his own recognition for the Class of 2023.

Hussion began his address by showcasing the tremendous level of talent that has graduated from UCHS since he first became an administrator there 10 years ago, detailing how last year alone saw 65 nominations for the school’s “Pacesetter Alumni Award.” He then demonstrated the

brilliance of the Class of 2023 itself by asking graduates to stand if they were going into any of the following fields: health care, engineering, construction, computer science/coding, automotive, education, the Armed Forces, criminal justice and entrepreneurship.

Most of the graduates had stood by the end, allowing a proud Principal Hussion to visually drive home a powerful point about the future success of these graduates as the community’s next “movers and shakers.”

UCHS Assistant Principal Carol Knight carried out the “Turning of the Tassels” portion of the ceremony, marking their “transition from students to graduates,” after which Superintendent John Hill enthusiastically proclaimed the graduation milestone before all in attendance.

Gracie Copeland, Valarie Nichols and Hailey Watkins led their fellow graduates in a beautiful performance of the school’s Alma Mater, and they were followed by closing remarks from Hunter Fleming and Brady Hussion.

“Many of us, myself included, have been waiting for this moment for a long time,

and now we’re finally here,” Hussion said. “This is it; this is the big one. And now that this day has finally come, I think a lot of us are looking back and realizing what we’re leaving behind.”

Hussion advised his classmates, no matter where they end up in life, to “think back on this town once in a while; think back on all the things our class did; think back on the good times and the bad; and think back on being a Panther.”

Likewise, Fleming called attention to the bittersweet nature of the occasion, noting that, though they had grown accustomed to returning to each other for a new school year following summer break, “this time, there is no coming back, and some of us will not be seeing one another again.”

“Now, it’s time for us to depart toward new journeys and live out dreams and lives,” Fleming said. “Through it all, don’t forget who you are and the people you grew up with ... This is the end of one journey and the beginning of another. I wish everyone the best as you start this new one.”

From there, the newly minted graduates stood, walked together one last time to the inflatable screen at the end of



Several graduates flexed to kick off their celebratory gathering in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium May 19, and rightfully so – they earned it. Congrats! Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the field, and watched many of the memories they had made distilled in the class video, which played to the tune of the class song, “I Lived” by OneRepublic.

At the conclusion of the video, the school launched the traditional end-of-ceremony fireworks display, and the graduates’ families joined them on the field to continue celebrating the momentous event before everyone departs for college, trade schools, the workforce or military.



The UCHS Advanced Ensemble sang “The Star-Spangled Banner” in Friday’s ceremony, under the direction of Chorus Director Alicia Covington. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Woody Gap Grads...from Page 1A

the chance to present a rose to their respective families.

During his Valedictory Address, Salas reflected on his classmates’ journey and acknowledged those who helped make their big day a reality.

“When we first entered the halls of Woody Gap, we were a group of individuals with talents, dreams and aspirations,” he said. “We were young and uncertain, eager to explore the world before us.”

“But over time, our school became more than just a building; it became a community that fostered growth, friendship, and unforgettable memories.”

Celebrating the faculty and staff, Salas thanked the educators responsible for pushing the Class of 2023 to achieve their goals, noting that hardships along the way have only strengthened him and his classmates as they advance to the next chapters of their stories.

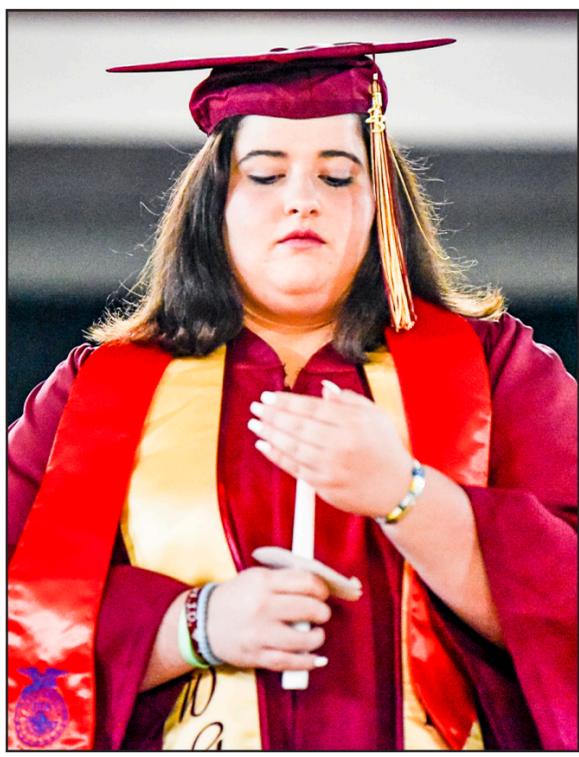
“They believed in us when we doubted ourselves,” he said of teachers and administrators.

“They challenged us to push onward and instilled in us the passion for learning that will carry us far beyond these walls.”

“However, the path we traveled was not without obstacles. We faced challenges during our high school career, going through a global pandemic that killed our routines, limited our experiences and tested our resilience.”

“Despite these trials, we remained productive, adapting to virtual learning while maintaining our academic excellence. Overcoming these difficulties is a testament to our character and the spirit that defines Woody Gap.”

The senior video followed, featuring a montage of special moments from the lives of each graduating student. Music during the tribute included Corey Smith’s



Brooklyn Payne during the solemn candlelight tradition of passing the torch to the Class of 2024. Photo by Todd Forrest

“I’m Not Gonna Cry,” before the video took on a lighthearted tone via “Sweet Child O’ Mine” by Guns N’ Roses and Elton John’s “I’m Still Standing.”

With members of the Union County Board of Education in attendance, Principal Reynolds turned over the class to Superintendent John Hill for the presentation of diplomas.

After having their tassels turned by Hill, Woody Gap teacher Robert Hill led the annual candlelight service – a symbolic passing of the torch to the Class of 2024.

Scholarships were awarded to the Class of 2023 by local businesses and individuals, including the Appalachian Shrine Club, Band of Steel, Bill Owens Memorial, Blue Ridge

Mountain EMC, Daughters of the American Revolution, Disabled American Veterans, the Gaddistown Homemakers, Head Memorial, Joanne Williams Memorial, MedLink, Run Above the Clouds, Suches Fire Department, Union County Schools Foundation, United Community Bank, Woody Gap School Foundation and Woody Gap Sports Club.

Woody Gap’s 2023 Salutatorian, Gretchen Mossinger, could not attend Saturday’s graduation. Mossinger was the Student Council President and Co-President of Students Against Destructive Decisions alongside Payne.

Congratulations to the Woody Gap School Class of 2023.

YHC Spring 2023 Dean’s List and President’s List

Young Harris College President Dr. Drew L. Van Horn is pleased to announce that the following students have been named to the College’s Dean’s List for the Spring 2023 semester. Students who achieve a 3.5 grade point average or better are eligible to be named to the Dean’s List.

Local students include: Jordan Andrews; Samara Aponte of Suches, GA; Gabriel Bowman; Kayla Bowman; Marena Brown; Ella Casey; Megan Cothren; Inisfree Dixon; Stephen Espinosa; Logan Foley; Nicholas Forthman;

William Harkins; Wright Hogsted; Charles Kelley; Spencer Mathis; Thomas Mellendorf; Leigha Whittle; Cole Williams; and Isabella Zamora all of Blairsville, GA; Logan Anderson and Samara Aponte of Suches, GA; Danielle Aurin; Alyssa Bantum; Madison Hickey; Tyler Kasten; Kolby Moss; Kelly Ryals; Merritt Turner and Alec Youngblood all of Young Harris, GA; Jason Babb; Katelynn Rash; and Eli Smith-Foot all of Morganton, GA.

Young Harris College President Dr. Drew L. Van

Horn is pleased to announce that the following students have been named to the College’s President’s List for the Spring 2023 semester. Students who achieve a 4.0 grade point average or better are eligible to be named to the President’s List.

Local students include: Emily Birnbaum; Andelin Hill; Rebekah Kelley; Chancellor Sienkowski; and Abigail Studebaker all of Blairsville; Makenzie Glass; Liam King; Alison Markham; Kimberly Petty; and Madalynn Thomas all of Young Harris.