

Woody Gap...from Page 1A

"Today, we celebrate the beginning of a journey we can't take together – we will soon begin our paths through life," said Woody in her Salutatory Address. "Whether we are furthering our educations or going immediately into the workplace, we will always have each other to turn to. We will never forget the bonds we have made as a class."

"Life is going to throw us in all different directions, but we will always have Suches as a getaway and a home to turn to. I encourage all of the 2018 graduates to always reach for the stars and never settle for anything less. We are all going out into the real world, and this journey will have its ups and downs, but I know each of you can handle all of life's challenges."

In her Valedictory Address, Graham reflected on her time at Woody Gap School along with its inevitable influence on her future.

"About six years ago, we were talking about graduation and just commenting on how we'd made it through six years but still have six years to go, and how it felt like it would be forever," said Graham. "Now that we're here, any one of us can confirm that it didn't feel like forever."

"It seems unreal. Reaching this milestone was the longest endeavor we've ever accomplished, and it's hard to imagine what comes next. We've all learned important things here."

"For me, Woody Gap helped me get over being shy. Whether it was Mr. (Robert) Hill or Mr. (Glenn) Kough making me present projects, or Mrs. (Carol) Knight teaching me how to be more professional and friendly."

Continued Graham: "I will always remember the laughs, the fun and the chaotic



Photo by Todd Forrest

The Woody Gap School Class of 2018 – Kirsten Woody, Eliza Wilkins, Destiney Holloway, Lakota Graham, Austin Clark and Montana Barnes.

good times, but that's all behind us now. We're going to take what we learned here, not just the math and science, but the lessons, the memories, and make a life of them."

At the conclusion of Graham's speech, Principal Carol Knight led the "Recognition of Parents" segment of the ceremony, where the parents of each graduate stood as their son or daughter presented them with a rose.

When it was time to present the diplomas, Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill handed the students more than a piece of paper – he offered some advice to the six departing seniors.

"Last week, I heard Pastor Bill Schakat address the Union County High School Class of 2018, and he told them, 'You're going to have more challenges in life than you're going to have good times.' Embrace those challenges, work hard, get up every day with a smile on your face."

"Your attitude you're totally in control of. Your work ethic you're totally in control of. If every day you embrace



Photo by Todd Forrest

Kirsten Woody during the Candlelight Service at her May 26 graduation in Suches.

life with a positive mindset and you're willing to get up early and stay late on the job, work on that college assignment a little bit longer, you're going to be successful."

Eliza and Bella Wilkins followed up the diploma presentation with a song, a cover of the 2008 Trace Adkins hit "You're Gonna Miss This."

As graduation neared an end, the lights dimmed for the

Senior Video and Candlelight Service before Knight closed the 2018 graduation exercises.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the Woody Gap Class of 2018," Knight announced, which was answered by a standing ovation from the audience.

Afterward, the Woody Gap faculty hosted a reception to honor the seniors.

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Skiles from the Gilmer County site was salutatorian.

Walden and Skiles had the highest GPAs of all students at all 16 MECHS sites.

In her Valedictory Address, Walden thanked her parents, teachers and school staff for their help in getting her to graduation. To her fellow graduates, she said the world is out there to mold, so take hold of it and don't let it pass by.

Walden will be attending the University of North Georgia on full scholarship and is planning on a career in the nursing field.

Skiles, in her Salutatory Address, spoke about her difficult childhood, her struggle to stay focused, and her appreciation for the people



Photo by Mark Smith

A number of seniors receiving scholarships in the MECHS Graduation Ceremony on Thursday, May 24, in Fannin County.

who helped her get through challenging times.

"I would really like to thank each and every one of you who helped me get through my high school career," said Skiles. "I wouldn't really be standing here if it wasn't for your help."

Continued Skiles: "I didn't have the best childhood growing up. My dad was gone because he was a truck driver, and my mom was a drug addict. It was really hard growing up like that, but it taught me so much about life and how I wanted to live my life."

Skiles said she took care of her family when her father was gone, which taught her valuable lessons in responsibility.

"I took all this on because

I loved my mom and I just really wanted to help her out," said Skiles.

Sadly, in July of 2012, God called Skiles' mom home.

"I so wanted my mom to be here and to see me walk across this stage and to get my diploma," she said. "To all the upcoming new graduates, just remember that you can do it. It's not going to be easy, but as long as you tell yourself that you can do it, you will."

Skiles will be attending Dalton State University on a Zell Miller scholarship. She plans to pursue a career in nursing.

Gilmer Site Administrator Michael Putnam summed up plans for the 2018 seniors from all three sites, saying

there are 29 planning to attend college, 16 planning to enter the workforce, and nine planning to enter the U.S. Armed Forces. Four, he said, are undecided.

Three from Union County are already engaged in their next walks in life, two in military service and one working out of state.

Duncan Mauney from Union County was the high honor graduate for the Union site. De'Anna Underwood and Chrischen Knotts are both Union site graduates from Towns County.

Knotts is also engaged with the military.

In addition to HOPE Scholarships, 25 local businesses awarded an undisclosed amount in scholarships to the MECHS Class of 2018.

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from the community and other entities that were able to provide these kids with these financial resources," said Hill. "It's wonderful to see that come together, that partnership with the community, the churches, the donors that have agreed to help our kids out."

One of the highlights of the night was when U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dan Wickersham of West Point's admissions department awarded scholarships to Emmi Schakat and Cole Wright.

"Each of these people have received an academic scholarship valued at nearly \$400,000," said Wickersham. "Each year, some 15,000 young men and women apply for admission to West Point. This year, about 1,200 were accepted."

Continued Wickersham: "In addition to leadership, West Point is also among the nation's top academic institutions. It offers over 40 majors in the sciences and humanities. It ranks with the top universities, with those students becoming Rhodes Scholars and those receiving the Hertz Fellowship."

Other highlights included Gabrielle Santilli being awarded a \$26,000 per year scholarship to Agnes Scott College; and Devin Sanders receiving two scholarships



Photo by Mark Smith

Congratulations to all the scholarship recipients in the Union County High School Class of 2018!

totaling \$31,914 per year to attend Berry College.

Claudia Ledezma was awarded two scholarships totaling \$19,750 per year to attend Colorado Christian University; and Austin Pattee, who will attend Jacksonville University, was awarded a scholarship for \$22,500 a year.

Grace Wischmeyer will attend Maryville College, and she was awarded a \$21,000 per year scholarship; Kristen Odom received a scholarship for \$14,000 a year to attend

Piedmont College; and Brenda Innis received an \$18,000 a year scholarship to go to Brevard College.

And the list went on, as 76 more scholarships were announced that night as having been awarded to 2018 graduates of Union County High.

The entirety of the evening served as proof positive that the parents of Union County make it a priority to raise their young to be productive and place a high value on personal achievement.