

# Chamber ...from Page 1A

Rowe then invited Paris up to the podium.

"What's been amazing for me through all these years is to watch how our school system has grown and improved continuously, how our students have excelled, our sports programs have excelled, our band - anything to do with our school system is amazing," said Paris. "Of course, tonight's the night to honor those that have excelled, but it's not all about those that excelled to the max."

"It's about all the kids. It takes a great staff, a great administrative staff, a great group of teachers and educators and board of education to lead the school to the point to where we don't leave those others behind. Thank you to everybody involved in our school system."

Chamber Board of Directors Chairwoman Renee Deibert introduced Chamber Board Member and Union County Schools Assistant Superintendent David Murphy as the master of ceremonies for the student and teacher recognitions.

"It is indeed an honor to stand before you this evening to recognize just a few of the amazing youth that we have in Union County," said Murphy. "There are three high schools that serve these students."

"The Mountain Education Charter High School, Woody Gap School, and Union County High School. They all call upon their students to reach for excellence in all that they do from academics to athletics, from purpose to passion."

First to be recognized was Ben Taylor, who has been a part of the Union County High School student body for nearly five years. He was awarded the Reaching for the Stars Award. Taylor did not make a speech, but he did sing the national anthem to a standing ovation.

"Ben, you truly bring a smile to those you meet every day, and you are the deserving recipient of the Reaching for the Stars Award," said Murphy, to a round of applause for Taylor.

Sahory Salazar, a truly shining star with her many accomplishments at UCHS, was this year's recipient of the Shining Star Award.

A UCHS student council member, brilliant Mock Trial Team member, participant in several school clubs and activities, always a willing helper to her fellow students, and her undeniably moving speech at the UCHS 2018 Veterans Day Memorial event has made her a model student.

Salazar has also qualified as a QuestBridge finalist and has gained acceptance to Columbia University, earning a full four-year scholarship for her academic excellence. The scholarship is valued at over \$200,000.

Her graduation from UCHS in 2019 will be bitter-sweet, as her family, friends and teachers will be happy for her moving forward, yet sad to see her go.

"I never thought I'd receive anything like this. Yes, 5-year-old me should be like, 'What? She doesn't even know English,'" said Salazar, tearfully, to chuckles from around the room.

"I wouldn't be able to do anything that I've done with Union County without my parents and others' support - without the support of my teachers and my peers - starting kindergarten without knowing anything and then being thrown into a culture that's so unfamiliar."

"I would never have achieved what I have now without the community's support and everyone's support. So, thank you."

Madison Yost, a senior at UCHS, was the recipient of the All-Star Panther Award. Yost played soccer all four years of her high school career as well as serving as a student representative on the School Governance Team.

Yost also serves on the Principal's Council and is part of the STEM Academy and the Technology Student Association. A fierce competitor, "she most definitely models Panther Pride," said Murphy.

Earnest Waldroup, a junior at Woody Gap School, was the recipient of the Rising Star Award.

"This young man ... has scored in the 'Distinguished' category on every Milestones End-of-Course exam he has taken in high school," said Murphy. "He scored in the top 9 percent of all students in the United States on the PSAT."

"Next month, he will represent Woody Gap School in Atlanta at the SkillsUSA competition in Crime Scene Investigation."

With an academic comet tail like that, Waldroup is set to accomplish star status in his senior year.

The Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE) Student Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) program honors Georgia's highest achieving high school seniors and the teachers who have been most instrumental in their academic



**2019 STAR Student for UCHS Matthew Patrick with his dad, Solomon Patrick.**  
Photo by Mark Smith

achievement.

The STAR program was created in 1958 by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and has since honored nearly 27,000 students and their chosen STAR teachers. All accredited high schools in Georgia are eligible to participate.

Audrey Michaela Justice, the recipient of the 2019 PAGE STAR award for Mountain Education Charter High School, was introduced by Blairsville Site Director Roy Perren. Justice won the award out of 16 sites in 15 counties system-wide totaling about 2,500 students.

Justice introduced her chosen STAR Teacher, Mrs. Kim Perren.

"She has always been there for me, has always helped me, outside of school and also in (school), and I owe it all to her," said Justice. "She's kept me going in the right direction, and I'm so thankful. I'm also thankful to be a part of the Union County community as well."

Matthew Patrick, the recipient of the 2019 PAGE STAR award for UCHS, was introduced by UCHS Principle C.T. Hussion, who observed that the 2019 Senior Class is one of the most competitive he's seen.

In order to qualify, "the senior must have the highest SAT score in the senior class in one single sitting and be in the Top 10 percent of the class," said Hussion, adding that this was right off the (PAGE) website.

"I'm very honored to be named the Union County STAR Student for 2019 and to be recognized here tonight," said Patrick. "I want to begin by thanking God for all the many blessings that he's bestowed upon me, from a wonderful family to supportive friends to amazing teachers and a great school



**Ben Taylor was awarded the Reaching for the Stars Award and Mandilyn Moore received the Stellar Staff Award on Feb. 21.**  
Photo by Mark Smith

beyond on a regular basis to make the high school all that it is. Moore works with UCHS special needs students.

Ashley Palmateer was the recipient of the Community Service Star Award.

"Her passion to make others feel welcomed and included is clearly evident by those fortunate enough to know Ashley," said Rowe.

Matthew Efird was the recipient of the Alumni Pacesetter Star Award.

"Tonight's Pacesetter Star

recipient has been setting the pace since he graduated from UGA's Terry College of Business in 2014," said Rowe. Efird also continues his involvement with the Baptist Collegiate Ministry.

Table sponsors for the event were M-Design, Chick-fil-A, Butternut Creek Golf Course, Cabin Coffee, Blairsville Downtown Development Authority, United Community Bank, North Georgia Technical College, Mortgage Financial Group, Inc. and Union General Hospital.

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