

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Record number of students turn tassels at UCHS Class of 2019 graduation

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

A record 210 Union County High School seniors received their high school diplomas in 2019 – five graduated early, and 205 walked the walk during the student-led Commencement Exercises on Friday, May 24, in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and more filled the stadium on that warm Friday evening, and they proudly stood with hands over hearts as the High School Ensemble Choir sang "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Together, seniors

Madison Yost and Sahory Salazar delivered the welcome speech.

"We've gathered here to celebrate, and to specifically celebrate the successes of the Class of 2019," said Yost. "Over the course of this evening, we will recall and celebrate our academic and personal victories, all the while recognizing the challenges we have overcome and risen above."

Added Salazar, "No matter which route we have chosen for ourselves, hardships are inevitable."

"We have arrived at this day in large part because of our families, most of our petty and ungrateful days. So, to our

families and loved ones, I say thank you.

This ceremony marks the beginning of a new independence. May our passions and resilience guide this freedom, commemorating our past and fulfilling our futures. Enjoy these moments and this celebration."

A Moment of Reflection was shared by Jack Dalton and Claire McPherson as they skillfully took the Class of 2019 back through their years together, from primary school to the present, to the raucous laughter of everyone present.

McPherson reminded the Class of 2019 that they were UCHS Class of the Year their sophomore, junior and senior

years; the first class in UCHS history to do it three times.

Leilani Schroeder and Madelyn Sutton recited the class accomplishments.

"Thirteen years ago, this thing and this ceremony seemed like a lifetime away," said Schroeder. "Even nine months ago, at the beginning of our senior year, it still seemed like we had all the time in the world. But now, looking back, it feels as though it passed in the blink of an eye."

Schroeder recited the class accomplishments, from CTAE to all the colleges the Class of 2019 would be dispersing to, and Sutton called the names of all 18 graduates See UCHS Class of 2019, Page 8A



Valedictorian Carson Chambers speaking to her fellow graduates during the May 24 UCHS Commencement Exercises. Photo by Mark Smith

Woody Gap School sends 2019 graduates out into the world

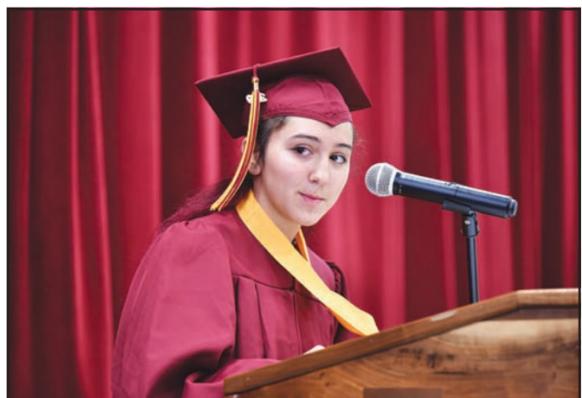
By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Woody Gap Schools bid farewell to four seniors on Saturday, May 25, during the Class of 2019 Commencement Exercises.

Chayil Aponte, Joseph Corbin, Luke Mott, Kelli Tritt and family reflected on their accomplishments, trials and tribulations, both respectively and collectively, from their previous 13 years as friends and classmates.

Valedictorian Aponte and Salutatorian Mott presented their customary addresses following the opening prayer by Coach Chad Shook, the Pledge of Allegiance led by Corbin and Tritt, and a welcome from Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight.

"One prefers one's home to all other places," said Aponte. "Home is where the heart is most emotionally attached, or better yet, 'Home is where the



Woody Gap Class of 2019 Valedictorian Chayil Aponte delivering her big speech in the May 25 graduation ceremony. Photo by Todd Forrest

heart is."

"Home is a wonderful place. It's your own little world, safe from the dangers of outside, where you are free to be you."

Aponte explained that her definition of "home" had evolved over the years, and that

it took on more importance as she became older.

"As we moved from house to house and church to church, it made me restless because I had just begun to get a feel for home and God," she said.

See Woody Gap, Page 8A

Memorial Day Parade and Arts, Crafts & Music Festival draw big crowd

By Chad Stack
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Each year, the brave men and women who have died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces are honored on Memorial Day.

The actual observance of the patriotic holiday was Monday, May 27, though many celebrated the occasion over the weekend.

On Saturday, May 25, thousands of Union County residents traveled to Downtown Blairsville to watch all the decorated floats and classic cars in the annual Memorial Day Parade make their way around the square.

This year's Memorial Day Parade Grand Marshal was World War II Veteran Ronald Taylor, who is a resident of Blairsville.



World War II Veteran and 2019 Memorial Day Parade Grand Marshal Ronald Taylor, with Veteran Bud Akins. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Taylor was in the medical department of the U.S. Army in 1943. He served for three years and was stationed in France and Belgium. In 1946, after his See Parade, Page 3A

MECHS hosts inaugural joint graduation ceremony for all 16 sites

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

DAHLONEGA – Mountain Education Charter High School hosted its first ever joint graduation ceremony at the University of North Georgia Convocation Center on Saturday, May 25.

The school features 16 sites in 15 counties across North Georgia, including the Union Site, which consists of students from Union and Towns counties.

"We have students, family members and friends who have traveled many miles joining us today," said Dr. Joe Cash, Director of School Performance. "These diplomas not only reflect the hard work and determination of these students, but also the support



Kimberly Bowen walking at the Mountain Education Charter High School graduation ceremony on May 25. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

of their families, community organizations, local businesses, MECHS staff, and the MECHS governing board."

Valedictorian Kayla

Gray from the Lumpkin Site delivered the 2019 Valedictory Address, telling her classmates to live life without caring what

See MECHS Ceremony, Page 8A

Union-Towns Special Olympics event celebrates friendship, fun competition



Members of the Union County Special Olympics team leading the opening lap at the May 20 event. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Blairsville.

This event, which was rescheduled this year from April 26 due to rain, serves locals with special needs by putting them in active competitions such as 100-meter dashes and

softball throws. The 2019 Special Olympics kicked off that morning with all the participants excited and ready to be active.

See Olympics, Page 7A

Patriotic residents gather to commemorate real reason for Memorial Day

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Saturday, May 25, many patriotic residents gathered at the Union County War Memorial Park to honor all American sons and daughters who have given their lives to the cause of individual freedom.

Memorial Day is a very special day in the United States, when American citizens take to the great outdoors to grill, celebrate and enjoy time together in the freest nation on the planet.

But more importantly, Memorial Day is a time to honor members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have paid the ultimate price in defense of the freedoms enumerated in the U.S. Constitution and Bill



Retired U.S. Navy Lt. Ray Williams served as the keynote speaker for the 2019 Blairsville-Union County Memorial Day Ceremony on May 25. Photo by Mark Smith

of Rights.

Veteran Chuck Honaker helped to organize the May 25

ceremony with Bob Spaulding and Eddie Fontaine, and he also See Memorial Day, Page 2A

Entrepreneurial students win \$5,000 at final INCubator competition



Union County High INCubator EDU entrepreneurial teams with community coaches and judges. Photo by Mark Smith

to pitch their inventions for a chance to win seed money on Friday, May 10, at the Fine Arts Center.

Sophomore Aaron Helton and junior Isabella Rosales, who founded Rei-Ki

Tool Company (pronounced ray-key) as their project, won the competition and a check for \$5,000 to get their company off the ground. For real.

Helton and Rosales See INCubator, Page 7A

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