

Parade ...continued from Page 1A

piners, earned a Purple Heart. Their sister, Stella Mae Harkins enlisted in the Air Force in 1956. The Harkins siblings have been featured in regional newspapers, honored with plaques, and acknowledged with surprise ceremonies.

Clyde, a Navy man, and I.T., an Army man for 31 years, have lots of military stories to share.

From patrolling the U.S. coast from Florida to Maine, to Okinawa, Japan, from being stationed at the Panama Canal to riding cattle car trains in Casablanca, Clyde and I.T. Harkins make history

come alive.

"You could see the Panama Canal from the mess hall," I.T. Harkins said. "It was like watching a ship move through the air as they lifted it up to the next level."

"In 1945, I visited I.T. in Panama," Clyde Harkins said. "It took all day to find him, but I finally tracked him down once I found someone that could speak English. I didn't know a word of Spanish."

Meanwhile, the parade route will wind around the old courthouse and end at the Union County War Memorial

Park.

Folks are invited to also join the ceremonies at Veterans Park for a Memorial Day observance that will begin shortly after the parade's conclusion, said Union County Veterans Affairs Representative Bob Spaulding.

"Memorial Day commemorates U.S. men and women who died while in the military service," said Spaulding. "Our country is engaged in a war with terrorism; one that we cannot afford to lose. Put aside for the day any foreign policy issues and honor our fallen heroes. We expect

a large turnout with a sincere display of patriotism.

"Your church, business, or organization's involvement in this parade is one of the ways to demonstrate the theme of 'For God and Country, Support Our Troops,'" Spaulding said.

"We hope you are able to enter a vehicle or float. In this downturned economy, your participation with any kind of entry is most important thing. Our community has a large veteran population and remembering those that gave the ultimate sacrifice is proper."

Drowning ...continued from Page 1A

Sheriff Mason said. "His car keys were laying on the ground beside the vehicle, the vehicle was locked up.

"He looked closer at the embankment and it looked like someone had slid into the water," Sheriff Mason said. "Shawn called Detective Pat Williams and she contacted Towns County for Mutual Aid and requested their Dive Team."

Williams said she was amazed at how quickly the Towns Dive Team organized and arrived at the scene.

"It was incredible, they were there with two teams ready to alternate dive missions," Detective Williams said. "When they hit the wa-

ter, they found Mr. Manning in about 8 feet of water within five minutes.

"His body was between the boat dock and the embankment," she said. "They made recovery at 8:45 a.m."

Sheriff Mason said that high praise was in order for Union County 911 for its work with OnStar to discover Manning's Chevy Cruze.

"We'd still be looking for the vehicle if it wasn't for what 911 did with OnStar," Sheriff Mason said. "Also, high praise goes out to Towns County Fire & Rescue's dive team. They got there, found the body and were out of the water almost as quick as they went in to begin with."

Williams said the drowning, the first in Union County in 2013, was nothing short of tragic.

"It was horrible," she said. "Tragic, tragic, tragic."

"We really feel for the family and there's not a whole lot that anyone can say to make them feel better."

Williams said the theory of how Manning ended up in the water is circumstantial, but the only explanation available.

"It was dark, there was a guide wire running along the top of the ground," she said. "Mr. Manning had health issues, he didn't have good balance on level ground."

"It appears he tripped

over the guide wire, tossed his burning flashlight in the air, it landed on the embankment and Mr. Manning landed in the water," Williams said. "His hat was floating in the water, and the dive team found him right below his hat."

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Manning family," Detective Williams said. "This was an unfortunate tragedy; it's so sad."

The Manning family thanked Sheriff Mason and his deputies, Union County 911, Towns County Fire & Rescue Dive Team and Union County Fire & Rescue, Union County Ambulance Service and Georgia DNR for their efforts during the recovery.

Gap Grads ...continued from Page 1A

ditorium in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Valedictorian Amber Gooch welcomed and thanked the guests, family, friends, teachers, school administration, and everyone who was joining the Class on their special day.

Jinjer Taylor, putgoing principal, called Salutatorian Aponte and Valedictorian Gooch back to center stage, and both returned to the podium for the Salutatory Address.

Amber Gooch, who is entering the U.S. Navy, remained front-and-center as she gave the Valedictory Address.

She opened with some words of encouragement, that



The Falcons' Class of 2013 in Suches. Photos/Todd Forrest

she says summed her path to the top of her class.

"I am deeply honored to stand before you today as the Woody Gap Class of 2013 Valedictorian," Amber Gooch said. "How do we get such a title as 'Valedictorian?'"

The simple answer is perseverance – the ability to keep trying, even when things seem difficult," she said. "The title of Valedictorian will get you nothing in life, but what will is, the perseverance that I learned from it."

As Amber Gooch continued with her words of encouragement, she began to get emotional as she realized she would no longer be a student at her beloved school.

She quoted the fictional film legend Rocky Balboa, as she inspired her Senior Class to never stop chasing their dreams, no matter what obstacle is put in their path.

"The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows," Amber Gooch said, quoting Rocky. "It's a very mean and nasty place and it will beat you to your knees and keep you there if you let it. But life ain't about how hard you hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward."

"How much you can

take and keep moving forward," she said. "Now if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you worth, and stop pointing fingers and saying you're not where you want to be because of this person or that person. That's what quitters do and that ain't you."

After Amber Gooch poured her heart and soul into her Valedictory Address, District 51 Georgia State Sen. Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) spoke to the class.

At first, he joked of how this was the largest graduating class he's spoken to – to date. It's also, the first graduating class he has addressed.

Sen. Gooch encouraged the class to never quit chasing their dreams and urged them to be active in the community and to never compromise their principles.

Taylor and Steppe then presented the class with their diplomas and a senior video was shown entitled, *Because They are Girls*.

The comedic performance centered around Roberts, the only boy in the graduating class, and the difficulties of being the lone male in a class dominated by girls.

Before the candlelight

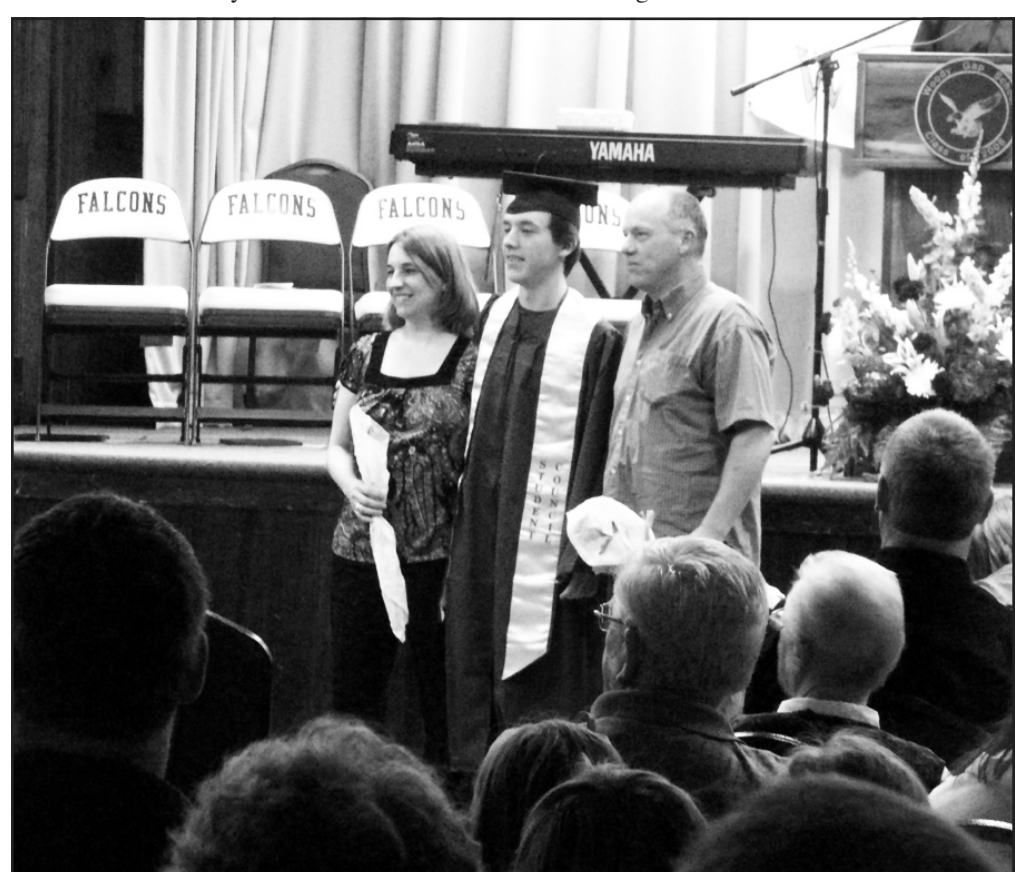
service, the four seniors honored their parents and gave a special thank you to their families who had their backs for the past 18 years, acknowledging the necessity for great parents, and another one of the ways the Class of 2013 has been blessed throughout their lives.

During the candlelight service Amy Rogers and Jerry Bavero led the ceremony as the torch was passed to the Class of 2014.

The upcoming seniors at Woody Gap have some giant shoes to fill, but they have been mentored by three fine classes ahead of them and a faculty and staff who's only mission is to see that Woody Gap Schools continually raise the bar in excellence in the classroom and athletic competition, while proving that nice guys, and gals, don't always finish last.

The Senior Class of 2013 finished their days at Woody Gap with grace, dignity, and pride.

Congratulations Woody Gap, Class of 2013 and the *North Georgia News* wishes you nothing but success in each of your future endeavors.



WGHS Senior Alex Roberts, center, may be the luckiest guy in the world. He's the only male in the 2013 graduating class. Photo/Todd Forrest