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of the entire facility. Attendees will then be treated to a musical program to be conducted within the center's auditorium beginning at 6:30 p.m., which will include the band, chorus and drama programs of Union County High School, as well as the Steel Drum Ensemble of Woody Gap High School and a community brass ensemble.

On Thursday, Aug. 20, middle and high school students who will be utilizing the new facility met for a group picture at the fine arts center, and used the time to familiarize themselves with the building.

"The fortunate thing of this is that the students now have an outlet for creativity," said newly hired Fine Arts Center Manager Regina Hawkins, who managed the Blue Ridge Community Theater for the past five years. "They have a space to perform. They have a space to house people who want to see their performances besides parents and grandparents.

"People in the community who like classical music, who support high school arts, now have a place to come. As well as the community at large has a place to hopefully be able to rent, like dance recitals, or if someone has a benefit that they want to have a concert come in and play to

take money and such as that, we are open to renting the facility."

Students are just as excited about the facility as school administrators, and now that classes have started back for the year, those in band, chorus and the new drama program have had the opportunity to begin classroom instruction inside the state-of-the-art building.

UCHS senior Brooks Patterson, 17, studies all fine arts programs – band, chorus and drama – and spends three out of four blocks at the new arts center.

"I definitely appreciate our school and our town spending the time and money actually building this for us, because we've wanted this for so long, and now that we finally have it, we're so grateful and we're so happy that it's here," said Patterson.

Raphaella Aleman, also a senior at UCHS who takes part in all three fine arts programs available at the high school, echoed Patterson's sentiments.

"I love this building, it's so nice. It's really great to have a place to actually do performances and work in a more professional setting without having to have concerts in the cafeteria and in the gym," said Aleman, who has community theater experience. "For audience purposes and that kind



of thing, I think it sets a tone for better audience etiquette and participation, because the general etiquette of being in a gym is really different from being in an auditorium."

UCHS Band Director Will Stafford, now in his third year, said that he's excited for the opportunities the new building will bring to his 85 students this year.

"It just takes our program to a whole other level," said Stafford. "We're doing many more concerts – I think we're doing two, maybe three more concerts than we did last year, just because of the convenience. It's right here. And we get to practice on stage before the concert, which is a big deal, because it sounds different on stage than it does in class, and they never got to experience that before."

Choral Director Ali-

cia Covington has been with UCHS for 15 years, and she has carefully constructed her program into the powerhouse that it is today.

"I started with 20 kids in my program, and now I have 133," said Covington. "We used to perform at First Baptist Church. I'm very grateful for the church and what they allowed us to do, but I'm going to love this facility. It's awesome."

In addition to the new fine arts center, Chris Adams, who is also new to Union County Schools this year, will be heading up the new drama program. Adams, himself a graduate of Union County High School, recently made the move from Towns County High School, where he taught drama and chorus for 10 years.

"It's an incredible op-

portunity for the students and the community to have something like this, to have a facility that will be able to fill a lot of needs, but also give the kids great access to be creative and perform in front of their peers and their parents," said Adams, who has 85 students to start the program.

Like Adams, Union County Schools Superinten-

dent Gary Steppe is ready to take on the challenges of operating a facility that has so much to offer the community that voted to fund it.

"We'd like to invite the community out to see what we've got, and hope that they take as much pride in it as we do," said Superintendent Steppe.

Cagle...from Page 1A

Hall County with his wife Nita, and had a great family with all boys.

"He's a great leader, and I've had the pleasure of working with him for the last five years, and I can tell you he's a strong conservative, he's a strong Christian, he's a businessman, and he's looking after our citizens and our 10 million Georgians. And I'm going to predict here today that he'll be the next Georgia governor, so y'all welcome Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle," Gooch said.

Lt. Gov. Cagle began his message with what he called a 30,000 foot perspective of where Georgia is today as a state "filled with great promise," citing past areas of growth in Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and the Port of Savannah.

"We not only celebrate the largest airport in the world, but we also celebrate the fastest growing port today – over \$60 billion dollars of revenue," said Lt. Gov. Cagle. "You see, these are the kind of visionary actions that we need today in our state, and we need today even in our country."

According to Lt. Gov. Cagle, Georgia is stronger than ever before, even after the eco-

nomie downturn and subsequent recession that set back many in the state and country.

"We bit the bullet, we did the hard things, we cut the state's spending by \$4 billion," said Lt. Gov. Cagle. "We strategically aligned the state to make sure that our portfolio as an industry was far more diverse. As a result, we have come out of this recession stronger than we ever could have imagined, and I believe our greatest days are still ahead of us."

The economy today is vastly different than when Lt. Gov. Cagle started his first business, a bricks-and-mortar retail store. This is thanks in large part to technology, which Lt. Gov. Cagle used as an example to explain how local Georgia businesses have been able to step outside of physical, regional boundaries to compete with big-box stores.

"All of us run around with our little smartphones, and you can walk into that Home Depot, and you can download an app, hit a button, and it will tell you not only who has got the lowest price within a five-mile radius, but who has the lowest price in the world," said Lt. Gov. Cagle. "And what it's done is it's transformed our



economy.

"The little guy over in Athens, Georgia, that has a bricks-and-mortar gas grill accessory company, no longer is bound by the commute that someone needs to come to his store. And he did a deal with Amazon – before that, he was doing about \$200,000 in annual revenue. Today, because of his connectivity, because of technology and innovation, today he does \$5 million in annual revenue."

Because of this marriage of technology and the economy, Georgians have been able to find greater prosperity in the global market, a fact that the lieutenant governor says must be taken into account moving forward.

"I believe that if we're going to continue in prosperity, and we're going to continue to

build a state that is going to be poised to attract the companies that we want, to create an environment to where industry that exists today can expand, we have to focus on education," said Lt. Gov. Cagle.

"There is no question that today, when a manufacturing facility is hiring, it's not the same skillset that it was 20 years ago. If you walk into the Kia automobile manufacturer in Lagrange, you will find robotics, you will find lasers, you will find an entirely different place than when I was a kid and I toured GM and Ford."

Lt. Gov. Cagle pointed out that 70 percent of all jobs created in the future will require technical training, and that technical pathways in education must be embraced in order to continue prosperous trends in the state.

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