

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

## UCHS honors students with drive-in graduation, fireworks

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Although the Union County High School Class of 2020 did not get a traditional graduation ceremony, the 191 graduates still received recognition for their accomplishments and the chance to take part in a unique celebration with a drive-in graduation.

On Friday, May 22, students met at First Baptist Church to decorate their vehicles and drive through Downtown Blairsville, symbolically recreating the Graduation Processional.

Led by the School Police Department, the procession wound up at the UCHS parking lot, where students and parents sat in their cars to view a pre-recorded ceremony that was filmed over several days the previous week, featuring

students individually accepting their diplomas at the Fine Arts Center.

Graduation speeches were also filmed last week, including that of Class of 2020 Valedictorian Josie Bradley, who started things off by focusing on the bittersweet nature of her class' parting.

"Seven hundred and twenty days - 180 days times four years," Bradley said. "This was the number I despised our first day of freshman year as I was already beginning my countdown to graduation."

"Never did I dream that I would be begging for just one more day... God put UCHS in my path, where I truly did find my place. I will forever cherish all the incredible friendships and memories. Thank you all for accepting me into this family."

Bradley went on to discuss the impact and

importance of the phrase "build onward, upward" from the UCHS Alma Mater, saying that "this is the challenge that we are faced with tonight, fellow 2020 graduates."

"Up until this point in our lives, the people around us - teachers, family, friends - have worked tirelessly to lay a strong and solid foundation preparing us to build our lives, our futures," she said. "They have poured into us, showing us skills, teaching us lessons and providing us with guidance."

Continued Bradley, "Our teachers, family and friends have done their part. They have dug deeply and laid the solid foundation which will withstand even the most difficult floods and storms. But now, it is up to us to build."

Bradley plans on attending the University of North Georgia to pursue a See UCHS Graduation, Page 6A



Union County High held a unique drive-in graduation for seniors May 22, which included a procession through town. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## Army National Guard observes Memorial Day; Kemp talks virus



A formation of Georgia Army National Guard helicopters from 2017. Photo by Spc. Isaiah Matthews

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Editor at nganews.com

Memorial Day is a sacred holiday in the U.S., bringing millions of Americans together in honoring the brave military men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in serving their country.

Every year, hundreds and more Union County residents observe Memorial Day with a traditional parade and ceremony in Downtown Blairsville. As with so many things right now, these observances were canceled in 2020 due to concerns over COVID-19 and public gatherings.

Last week, the Georgia

National Guard recognized the unique factors keeping Georgians apart by sharing its plans to honor America's war dead on Monday, May 25, thereby enabling a collective observance from afar.

"This year, our nation will observe Memorial Day under completely unprecedented circumstances," the National Guard said. "Social distancing and travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 preclude many of us from gathering, but they do not prevent us joining together in spirit for the common purpose of honoring our fallen."

"On Memorial Day, helicopters of the Georgia Army National Guard will fly

over north and south Georgia in honor of our fallen and to remind us all of the debt we owe for the high price that has been paid for our liberty."

In his weekly COVID-19 briefing on May 21, Gov. Brian Kemp noted the necessity to "find inspiration from our fallen soldiers," before going on to give an update on the state of the state during the pandemic.

"While the battle against COVID-19 is far from over, I remain encouraged by the data and feedback from public health officials," Kemp said. "As you know, testing remains a top priority as we take measured steps forward."

See National Guard, Page 3A

## Woody Gap High joins Suches community in celebrating graduates

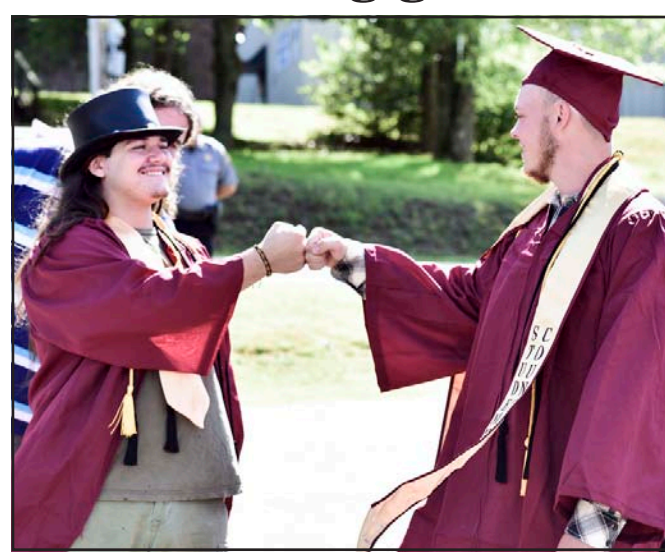
By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

SUCHES - Woody Gap High School bid farewell to the Class of 2020 on Saturday, May 23, during a short-but-sweet graduation ceremony held outdoors in the gymnasium parking lot.

Valedictorian Ernest Waldroup, Salutatorian Duncan Lee, Levi Etheridge, Eric LeCroy, Kirstin Ledford and Matthew Woody accepted their diplomas during an unconventional ceremony that saw graduates and parents remaining in their vehicles as other spectators watched from the Community Center across the street.

The day began as a typical late-spring morning in Suches, as LeCroy stepped to the podium at 10 a.m. to offer the opening prayer amid a backdrop of birds chirping and the occasional motorcycle rumbling past on Georgia 60.

Once LeCroy returned to his vehicle, Etheridge came front and center to lead the Pledge of Allegiance, allowing his fellow graduates and their



Woody Gap graduates Ernest Waldroup and Levi Etheridge shared this moment of friendship following their May 23 graduation ceremony in Suches. Photo by Todd Forrest

families to briefly exit their vehicles to stand.

Principal Carol Knight followed by welcoming everyone to Woody Gap's 79th commencement exercises, which she called "arguably the most unusual in the history of the school."

Taking extra precautions due to COVID-19, each graduate

waited in their car until Knight called his or her name, at which point they exited their vehicles, one at a time, to pick up a diploma that had been placed on a table located outside the gymnasium.

Superintendent John Hill stood by to verbally congratulate each of them while maintaining

See Woody Gap, Page 6A

## Dyer takes aim at Emmanuel College with archery scholarship



L-R: 4-H Archery Coach Gerald Potts, Preston Dyer, David Dyer and 4-H Coordinator Timothy Jennings. Photo/Submitted

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Outgoing Union County High School Senior Preston Dyer will continue his education at Emmanuel College in fall after his exemplary archery

skills earned him a scholarship to the private Christian school in Franklin Springs.

Dyer took an interest in archery at a young age, shooting a bow in the back yard with his dad and brother. After crossing paths with Coach Gerald Potts

and the Union County 4-H Archery Program, he was soon on the fast track to bigger and better things.

"Although I was able to help Preston improve in a few areas, he was already a top-

See Dyer, Page 2A

## Union County seniors awarded \$5.86 million in scholarships, aid

**BLAIRSVILLE/UNION COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SCHOLARSHIP**

<b>Zion Ross</b> \$500	<b>Makenna Starling</b> \$500	<b>Grace Weldon</b> \$500

The annual UCHS Senior Scholarship Night was conducted entirely online this year, featuring more than 100 slides like this one highlighting student achievement.

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

With COVID-19, the Class of 2020 has faced unique challenges no prior graduating class has had to face, including having to transition a majority of college preparations and end-of-year business online.

One of these year-end items is the annual Senior Scholarship Night, which went digital on Tuesday, May 19, when Union County High uploaded an awards video to take the place of the normal ceremony that is usually held on campus.

"For the last few months,

one of the main topics has been what the Class of 2020 has lost," Principal C.T. Hussion said during the program. "Tonight, however, you get to see a glimpse into what a wonderful and bright future these young adults have in store for them."

"As you hear about all the scholarships that these students have been awarded, I think it will be nice to stop focusing on the confusing times that we have been living through and look towards a bright future with hope for our graduating seniors."

"I would like to take a few moments to thank our counseling department, Colleen Collins, Dr. Jill Olson and Dr.

Melissa Bridges, for working so hard to put this program together. I would also like to thank members of the UCHS Scholarship Foundation and the Selection Committee.

"Last but not least, and on behalf of our students, I would like to say thank you to our community. Even during these tough times, they continued to step up like they always do and support our seniors."

Students in the Class of 2020 have worked hard in pursuit of their dreams and career paths of choice, with many of the 191 seniors earning scholarships, like Evelyn McBride, who

See Scholarships, Page 2A

Vol. 111 No. 22  
4 Sections 24 Pages  
Weather  
Thurs: T-Storm Hi 76 Lo 63  
Fri: T-Storm Hi 79 Lo 62  
Sat: T-Storm Hi 77 Lo 61

**Inside**  
Arrests 4C  
Churches 3B  
Classified 3D  
Opinion 4A  
Legals 4D  
Obits 5B

**June 9**  
**Ballot**  
**Samples**

See page 5C

**EARLY VOTING CONTINUES**  
Every VOTE COUNTS!

See page 3A

**Meet Me at the Market**

See page 4C

**Ga Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In**

See page 1D