

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

May 31, 2017

Residents gather to remember fallen soldiers

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Following the conclusion of another successful Memorial Day Parade, more than 100 residents attended the annual Union County Memorial Day Service on Saturday, May 27. The service took place at the Union County War Memorial Park, and was emceed by Combat Veteran Chuck Honaker, who set the stage for the seriousness of the occasion.

"Memorial Day is important to me, and it's obviously important to you, as evidenced by your attendance here today," said Honaker to those gathered. "To many, though, Memorial Day is just the kickoff of summer and a reason to fire up the grill or

catch at a store.

"I have nothing against those things – matter of fact, I like to eat – but it is imperative that the true purpose not be overlooked.

"We are here to remember our fallen heroes, those men and women who believed in a cause greater than themselves. They believed that this cause was worth more than their own lives, and worthy of fighting for. That cause was freedom, liberty and the American way of life."

In his introduction of the event's keynote speaker, retired Maj. Gen. Maria Britt of the Army National Guard, Honaker read off a commanding list of Britt's accomplishments in her 28 years of military service and beyond.

Most recently, Britt, a West Point graduate, served as commanding general of Georgia's 11,000 Army National Guard soldiers from 2007 to 2011, and was awarded the fourth highest military award, the Distinguished Service Medal, in 2014.

The granddaughter of Italian immigrants who came to America through Ellis Island in the early 1900s, Britt said that, though she could have been born anywhere in the world, she was thankful to have been born in America.

"Being a soldier is personal to me, because I want my three daughters and two grandsons ... to grow up in a world that's safe and at peace," said Britt. "Just last week, terrorists shattered this peace in Manchester, England, targeting



Retired Maj. Gen. Maria Britt of the Army National Guard. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

on an asymmetric battlefield. "It was just horrific and heartbreaking. Our military

and intelligence communities must remain strong to deter these bullies and tyrants."

Freedom is not free, argued Britt, putting forth that it is an idea that must be protected and even fought for.

"Without the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces, this great nation, the United States of America, would have perished from the earth many number of times," said Britt. "So today, we remember, we pay respect to those who have gone before us, those who have died in the service of this, our country."

"We also pay tribute to the veterans of the past and those that continue to serve. We all swore an oath

See Soldiers, Page 8A

Woody Gap School wishes 2017 graduates the best

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Woody Gap School's 76th year came to a close Saturday, May 27, when it parted ways with seven graduates as family, friends, and members of the close-knit Suches community gathered in the gymnasium to say farewell to the departing seniors.

Upon receiving their diplomas from Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield, Christopher Ryan Chancey, Payton Elizabeth Gooch, Delaney Nicole Grizzle, Haley Rebecca Grizzle, Zebulon Haynes Harkins, Ivy Shelby Katherine LeCroy and Kianna Vetter Martin will carry the torch for their Alma Mater as they say hello to college and

the workforce in the coming months.

Leading up to the issuance of diplomas, the commencement exercises featured a Presentation of the Graduation Class of 2017 by Woody Gap Co-Principal Carol Knight, words of encouragement by Woody Gap teacher Gary Butler, and a recognition of parents by Woody Gap Co-Principal Sheila Tritt Collins.

Addressed by Valedictorian Kianna Martin and Salutatorian Payton Gooch earlier in the program came on the heels of an opening prayer by Ms. Mary Kidd, the Pledge of Allegiance led by Haley Grizzle, and a brief welcome by Knight.

"Nine years ago, I moved to Woody Gap, and



Woody Gap Class of 2017 Valedictorian Kianna Martin. Photo/Todd Forrest

'scared' just isn't the word to describe how I felt about moving to this tiny school,"

said Martin, the valedictorian who plans on attending Kennesaw State University.

"Previously I attended Long Branch Elementary in Lumpkin County, so the transition was quite drastic, but once I got settled in, it was awesome."

"During my sophomore year, some of my best friends were upperclassmen and I will never forget our lunch table and our conversations, that was my favorite part of the day and it kind of made me who I am today."

"I started playing basketball in sixth grade and we've gone through a few coaches since then, but I want to thank each and every one of them. (They) all taught me that losing isn't so bad and how you handle the loss is most important."

"My experience here at Woody Gap has been filled with laughs and a few tears, but

this is my family. We argue like siblings, but we love each other just as much, but I wouldn't be standing here at this podium today if it wasn't for the love and support of my friends, family, and teachers."

During the Salutatory address, Gooch, who plans on attending Augusta State, also thanked her family, classmates, and teachers for their guidance and friendship while navigating their childhood and teenage years at Woody Gap.

"On behalf of the Class of 2017, we are all honored that you are here today, supporting us as we make it through this milestone in our lives," Gooch said. "Without the support you have given throughout our school years, we would not have made it to this point. And

See Woody Gap, Page 8A

All the world's a stage for UCHS Class of 2017

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The future wore white and purple in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, Friday, May 26, as the Panther Class of 2017 met one last time as high school seniors under the lights.

It was a proud night all around, for the graduating Union County High School seniors, their family and friends gathered for the occasion, and for the teachers, administrators and board of education members who have watched the students grow from children to young adults.

Leading up to graduation, the school announced that its first-rate students had managed to rake in nearly \$2.1 million in scholarships

from colleges and universities, local businesses, churches and civic organizations, and state-awarded monies.

During Reagan Davis' words of welcome, she thanked those who helped the Class of 2017 on its road to graduation, adding that her cohorts had already saved thousands of dollars leading up to their post-secondary educations with joint-enrollment classes through the high school.

Madison Horinek, in her Valedictory Address, spoke on the wisdom of having strong personal convictions.

"No matter the case, no matter the circumstances in your life, you must have a platform and you must be able to think for yourself," said Horinek to her fellow graduates. "In other words, be authentic and be independent



UCHS Class of 2017 Valedictorian Madison "Maddie" Horinek. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

thinkers. "To accomplish this, it helps if you have a process. A process is defined as a series

of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end. Mr. (Mark) Donahue lays this idea out in much simpler

terms, though, and it goes like this.

"To go about a process, you ask yourself three simple questions. Ask yourself what you have, what you know, and what you are looking for. Once you can answer these questions, the rest is just a matter of getting out of the way of the process."

Horinek relayed her own path of acquiring a process that worked for her, starting with her first days in high school, Valedictorian, and as an athlete on the school golf team.

In her speech, Horinek made sure to thank those who helped her along the way, including her grandparents, parents and sister, and she left her class with a solid plan to take full advantage of the future.

"High school may just be the tip of the iceberg, but our time at UCHS has prepared us to go out and do something great with our lives, to go out and find the opportunities that we have been preparing for," said Horinek. "Some plans don't involve college, and it isn't for everyone, but don't just sit back and do nothing."

"We should take advantage of opportunities the moment we walk out of the stadium tonight, and then never look back in doubt. We should take advantage of the process, figure out what we have, what we can do with the skills that we've learned, and then get out of the way to see what happens, because there's truly so much to do, so much to see."

See UCHS, Page 2A

MECHS graduates walk the stage in Fannin County

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

BLUE RIDGE – Mountain Education Center Charter High School hosted its commencement exercises Thursday, May 25, at the Fannin County High School Performing Arts Center to bid farewell to 42 graduates from the Fannin and Union County sites.

Family and friends of the MECHS Class of 2017 packed the auditorium for the hour-long festivities that included a Valedictory Address from Fannin County's Haley Campbell along with a Union site High Honors address from Justin Anderson.

"It's a great honor to be the Union Site High Honor graduate from the MECHS Class of 2017," Anderson said during his address. "I

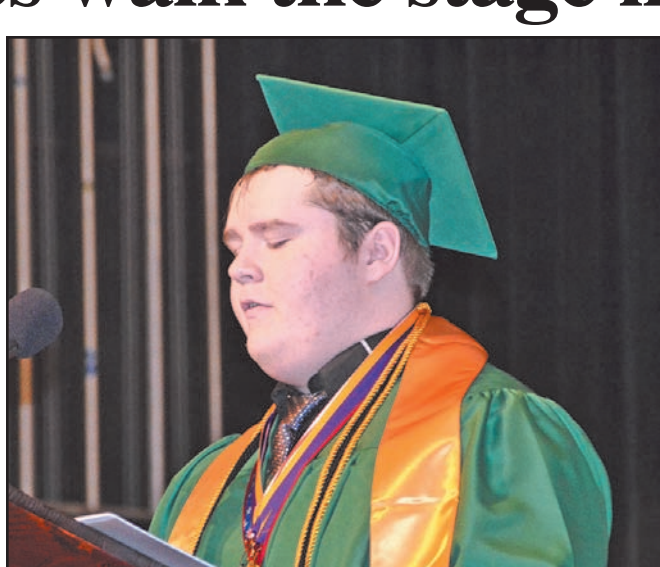
would like to recognize my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout the years. I would also like to express a special thanks and appreciation to all of our teachers that helped us achieve our goals.

"Mountain Education Charter High School has provided a unique learning environment for all of us. Its flexible schedule has allowed many students to go to school while working. MECHS' Mentor program, as well as the staff have taken an active role in helping many of us graduate."

Anderson wrapped up his address with a quote from Leo Tolstoy's novel "War and Peace."

"The strongest of all warriors are these two – Time and Patience."

The exercises opened with the Pledge of Allegiance,



Justin Anderson, Union County Site High Honors, Mountain Education Charter High School. Photo/Todd Forrest

performed by Abigail Shepard, a Anthem by Mary Kate Dickey, a welcome from Fannin site

administrator Betsy Hyde and a greeting from Darion Kinderknecht.

Following the

valedictory address, Union County site administrator Roy Perren recognized the 2017 class and its honor graduates then provided a glimpse of the growth that the school has witnessed in its 24 years while paying homage to the founding father of MECHS, former Union County High School Principal Wade Smith.

"In 1993 Mountain Education Charter High School opened in Union County and we graduated 3 students," he said. "Since then we've grown steadily year-after-year and this year, we expect to graduate over 300 students. Mountain Education Charter High School started out as 'Mountain Education Center' in 1993 as the vision of a man who really had a passion for children, and I dare say we wouldn't be standing here today without that vision, and I'd like to recognize him as he

is here with us today, Mr. Wade Smith."

Following Perren's address, Fannin site administrator Dr. Scott Ramsey awarded honor graduate Kelly Dye for becoming the first Fannin site student to complete the Pathway program.

"Kelly completed her Pathway in healthcare and earned her CNA certification," Ramsey said. "This was made possible not only through Kelly's hard work, and the work of the faculty that worked with her, but also, through the strong collaboration with the Fannin County School system."

"Kelly was able to participate in clinical hours at the high school, and she was also able to test at the high school to prevent her from having to go off elsewhere to take the test. This underscores

See MECHS, Page 3A

Vol. 108 No. 21

4 Sections 32 Pages

Weather

Thurs: Cloudy Hi 81 Lo 60

Fri: T-Storms Hi 79 Lo 63

Sat: T-Storms Hi 79 Lo 63

Arrests 6A

Church 5C

Classifieds 4A

Opinion 4D

Legals 6D

Obits 7C

Sports 2C

Byron Herbert Reece

Society Annual Meeting

Saturday, June 3

11 a.m.

Union County

Community Center

FARMERS MARKET

Home Grown & Handmade

The Farmers Market

Opens Saturday, June 3rd

See page 7A

Union County

Food Pantry

New Hours

See page 2A

Lady Panthers place

second in state golf

tournament

See page 2C