

North Georgia News

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STAR students, teachers recognized at Chamber event

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The county's STAR students, Alice Francis and Logan Wood are super heroes in disguise.

Francis, a Union County High School senior, and the county's systemwide STAR Student, is a mild mannered student, who, once in a Mock Trial courtroom, uses the gift of gab and legal knowledge to gain the upper hand on her opponent.

Wood, a Woody Gap School senior, and the school's STAR Student, has a wit faster than a speeding bullet. He's an unassuming student who wears Clark Kent glasses to fool his unassuming teachers in the classroom.

Both Francis and Wood were honored last week at the Union County Community Center during the Annual Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce meeting and PAGE STAR Student

Banquet.

"He has a wit faster than a speeding bullet," said Althea Cantrell, Wood's STAR Teacher, who calls Wood her "Clark Kent."

"He's well-grounded, athletic, and he's the first student ever at Woody Gap to take AP Calculus," Cantrell said. "When I think of Logan, intelligent, witty, responsible and compassionate come to mind. He tries to make everyone laugh."

Wood, who will attend the University of North Georgia and major in pre-med, offered high praise for Cantrell, a teacher who he said spends as much time with her students as she does her own family.

"I think that's because she considers her students a huge part of her family," Wood said. "She has made a huge difference in my life."

Meanwhile, Francis didn't begin her student career in the typical classroom.

She was born in Ecuador, and later moved to



Alice Francis
Indonesia. Soon afterward, she moved with her family to the United States, and later, moved to Australia.

After that, she found her home in Blairsville.

Her STAR Teacher Amy Payne calls her the "female Jason Bourne."

Initially, Francis, who



Logan Wood
received early admission and acceptance to Georgia Tech, was home-schooled.

Later, Union County Schools were blessed with her talent and pleasant demeanor, Payne said.

"I've never had to push her," said Payne, referring to Francis' initiative in Mock

Trial. "Her first year in Mock Trial, she wanted to try out for being a witness. She succeeded in that. Mock Trial is fake, but when Alice takes the stand, she makes it all real to the point that when she took the stand, she was crying real tears."

Francis later asked Payne if she could give it a try as an attorney. With trepidation, Payne decided "why not."

"Sure, Alice you can try," Payne told Francis. "And, Alice was right, she was amazing. She is feared in the Mock Trial courtroom."

Payne said Francis is a leader in Mock Trial. She makes people feel like people in real life, and she's equally pleasant in and out of the classroom, Payne said.

"She doesn't have a selfish bone in her body. We will miss her very much," Payne said.

A humble Francis said she wouldn't be where she is today without the investments

that others have put in her.

"Everything that comes from me, comes from everything I've gotten from my parents, my family and from Ms. Payne," Francis said. "Everything you've learned from Kindergarten through 12th grade comes out through SAT."

"I really want to thank my parents for everything they gave me when I was little," she said. "My mom home schooled me when I started first grade. She got me addicted to learning. She set the stage."

"I want to thank my Dad also," she said. "Especially for breakfast."

"He gets up every morning and makes me breakfast," Francis said. "He's given me a lot of foundation to go to college and become successful."

"I also want to thank my baby brother," she said. "If not for his temper tantrums, I probably wouldn't have

See STAR, 3A

Sen. Gooch: 'teacher furloughs to end'



District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch meets with constituents on Saturday at the Union County Community Center. Photo/Charles Duncan

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

State Sen. Steve Gooch, R-Dahlonega, brought back

should bring an end to teacher furlough days, and importantly, funding back into Georgia's classrooms, Sen. Gooch said.

"A while back, we had a money crisis, and we had to cut the state budget from \$22 billion to \$15 billion," Sen. Gooch said. "You have to cut where the money goes, and 60 percent of the state budget goes to education."

"Revenues are going back up, and now, we can put that money back into education," he said. "I don't know if teachers will get a pay raise, that's a local decision. Our main goal was to eliminate the teacher furlough days."

The legislative session at the State Capitol is closing in on Day 30, which is Cross-Over Day, or the last day a bill can leave committee and still make it through both chambers.

"If a bill doesn't make it

See Gooch, 2A

Iwo Jima vets remember the pain of victory

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Hiawassee - Bud Johnson, Phil Gamache and Todd Kimsey are a dying breed - literally.

The three are survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima, a battle that began Feb. 19, 1945 and ended 35 days later, on March 26, 1945.

Johnson, Gamache and Kimsey were honored last week at Bear Meadows Grill during observance of the 69th anniversary of the battle.

Gamache, a U.S. Marine corporal, is one of the rare few Marines from that battle still alive.

Iwo Jima was of strategic importance to the Allied Forces. The island was located midway between Japan and American bomber bases in the Marianas.

Since the summer of 1944, the Japanese home is-



Iwo Jima Vet Bud Johnson gives the background for the Battle of Iwo Jima at last week's observance luncheon in Hiawassee. Photo/Charles Duncan

lands had been reeling from strikes by the new, long range U.S. B-29 bombers.

The U.S., however, had no protective fighters with

See Iwo 2A

Kingston seeks U.S. Senate seat

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Congressman Jack Kingston, 1st District U.S. Representative, (R-GA), came to town last week and met with a crowd of supporters at Grinds & Glazes in Blairsville.

Kingston, a candidate for the soon to be vacant U.S. Senate seat held by retiring U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss, (R-GA), told the crowd the tax system is broken and Obama-care will break the country.

"The reality is that government is getting so big, and so out of control it's really ridiculous," Kingston said.

Kingston is a native of Athens. He grew up the son of a World War II veteran, knowing the value of a dollar, and working hard to make those hard-earned dollars count.

Kingston said his moth-



U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston visited Blairsville last week. Photo/Charles Duncan

er taught her children values.

He carries those core values - frugality, hard work, idealism, and solid work ethic

See Kingston, 3A

Fine Arts ESPLOST project moving forward



Union County Schools Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams and Superintendent Gary Steppe look over plans for the system's new Fine Arts Center. Photo/Charles Duncan

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Board of Education is ready to move forward with the

Fine Arts Center ESPLOST project.

Toccoa-based Bowen & Watson is the construction manager and a legal advertisement has been placed in-

side this edition of the North Georgia News seeking local contractors for the construction project.

See Project, 2A

Mock Trial wins District Championship

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Cartersville - The Union County Mock Trial team continues to excel in the courtroom and picked up the District Championship last Saturday and will advance to the State Competition on March 15 at the Gwinnett Justice Center in Lawrenceville.

Under the tutelage of Coach Amy Payne, Union County picked up its fifth straight Region Championship earlier this month and

hosted an inner-squad scrimmage at the Union County Courthouse.

Senior Enotah Circuit Superior Court Judge Murphy Miller, Beth Miller, Daniel Davenport, and Andrea Conarro have done an outstanding job whipping their young men and women into shape and during the scrimmage.

You could close your eyes and it would be impossible to tell that these were 16 and 17 year olds and not an experienced defense team and prosecutors working a bona fide capital murder case.

In fact, some even commented that the television show Law and Order isn't as talented or as realistic as the Union County Mock Trial squad.

Many of the spectators in attendance during the scrimmage were witnessing the Mock Trial team in action for the first time, and most were in awe after the first few minutes of action.

Not only does the team have to know the law, they must be able to act out the

See Mock Trial, 3A

Schools get thumbs up for security

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Schools received two thumbs up for security from the Georgia Department of Education, following a walk through last week.

The Union County Board of Education hosted a school safety visitation at each of the five schools in which DOE, Georgia Emergency Management Agency, Union County Sheriff's Of-

fice and the Union County Fire Department were given a tour of the school's new safety measures and upgrades since the ESPLOST was passed in March 2013.

"We haven't had a chance to bring the School Board through since the ESPLOST," Union County School Superintendent Gary Steppe said. "We also invited a team from the Department of Education. They came up last year and did an extensive walk through while we were

planning this and they gave us some recommendations. After the shooting at Sandy Hook, we thought we could do better and be safer than we were.

"David Murphy, Bill Driskell, Chris Crow and others did a great job in the planning and implementation of the new security measures and I feel we are better prepared," Steppe said. "We hope we never have to test the new system, but at least we have some defenses in place that

See Security, 3A

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**REVISED
2013-2014
SCHOOL
CALENDAR**

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Thurs. Feb 27th
Old Chamber Building

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**WOODY GAP
STUDENT
COUNCIL
YARD SALE**
Mar. 14th & 15th

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**UNION COUNTY
HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS**

BASEBALL:

TUES. FEB 25 VS. NORTH MURRAY 5 PM
SAT. MARCH 1 @ GILMER 11 AM