

# Veterans..from Page 1A

with prayer, thanking veterans for their devotion and courage in preserving the freedoms and heritage of Americans everywhere.

"May the dedication and honor of each of these men and women be remembered as a blessing from generation to generation," said Danek in closing her invocation.

The Civil Air Patrol Blairsville Squadron GA 152 – composed of Lt. Kevin Potts, 17, SSgt. Nic Klopschinski, 17, Airman Alex Bailey, 15, and Airman 1st Class Nicholas Sherman, 15 – held the Posting of the Colors, after which the unified band and chorus programs performed the national anthem and "God Bless America."

"We are humbled in honoring and recognizing our community's veterans and their families – thank you for your service," said senior Dylan Byers, 18, in his opening remarks.

Byers served as the master of ceremonies for the day's event, and he next introduced seniors Cody Short, 18, and Brooks Patterson, 17, who performed "8th of November," a Country Music ballad chronicling the time of Niles Harris, a soldier in the U.S. Army, during an operation in South Vietnam on Nov. 8, 1965.

"Veterans – as a representative of the students of Union County Schools, I want to thank you for your service to our country," said Danek following the moving performance from Short and Patterson. "If it wasn't for men and women of your caliber and those who stood before you, we would not be able to enjoy the freedom that we have today."

The band and chorus programs then played and sang the "Armed Forces Medley," a composition of the various service hymns of each of the five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. As each branch's hymn began, the veterans from that branch stood and were recognized.

New to this year's ceremony was the presentation

of Quilts of Valor, quilted by volunteers of the Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild, to three local veterans.

"Laurie Reid served with the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf during both Desert Shield and Desert Storm as a plane captain for the F-14 Tomcat fighter aircraft aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, assigned to Fighter Squadron 124," said Danek, introducing Reid as a QoV recipient. "Medals and awards include the Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Star, the National Defense Service Medal, the Good Conduct Medal and a Letter of Commendation."

Senior Justin Eigel handed quilts to fellow seniors Kat Capstick and Nathan South, who wrapped each recipient in unique quilts to call their own.

After Capstick and South enfolded Reid in her quilt, Danek moved on to recognize Shane Womack, who is the assistant principal at Union County Middle School.

"Shane Womack graduated from the U.S. Naval School of Health Sciences and Field Medical Service School as a Navy Fleet Marine Force Corpsman," said Danek. "He served with the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines as a Senior Corpsman during the Persian Gulf War. After his tour in the Persian Gulf, he saw duty at several stateside duty stations. His medals and awards include the Combat Action Ribbon, the Meritorious Unit Commendation and the Southeast Asia Service Ribbon with two Service Stars."

Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Art McCann of the U.S. Army, who is an assistant administrator at the high school, has coordinated the Veterans Day Ceremony since it began three years ago.

Instead of leading the ceremony this year, he stepped aside to allow students to take up those responsibilities, and this year he was honored in the ceremony with a Quilt of Valor.

"Arthur McCann served in the U.S. Army for over 27 years," said Danek. "He served

in combat with the 1st Ranger Battalion during Operation Just Cause in Panama, and during the Gulf War in Kuwait. He served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade during Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

"His medals and awards include the Legion of Merit, two Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, the Soldier's Medal for Valor and six Meritorious Service Medals. He was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge twice, and earned the Combat Master Parachutist Badge with Gold Star during a night combat parachute assault."

Short returned to perform "Thank You Soldier" with senior Tori Walker, who played piano while Short sang.

Senior Matthew Peney, 17, took to the podium as the guest speaker for the event, offering words of gratitude for veterans.

"Today, we have come together as a community to honor, commemorate and thank all of our U.S. Armed Forces veterans," said Peney. "Those men and women who have served our nation in a variety of ways over a span of time

that is longer than many here today have been alive, and within or outside the borders of our nation, all with the purpose of ensuring our safety here at home – to those veterans here today, and also to those who have passed before us, I first want to personally express my gratitude. Your actions serve as testimony to your courage, strength and valor."

Peney pointed out the living history represented in each and every veteran in attendance that Tuesday, and the importance of learning from and paying attention to what history has to teach the younger generations of today.

"We have to remember that history serves as a great lesson in and of itself," said Peney. "That lesson is that we should never take our past and those who fought to make our nation a land of opportunity for granted. Instead, we must always learn from our past and honor those who have dedicated their lives to preserving our nation's freedoms and opportunities."

Byers returned to the podium to speak words in recognition of the fallen men and women who could not be with those gathered for the ceremony that day, and the North Georgia Honor Guard fired a volley in honor of those

who did not return home. Following the playing of "Taps" by a student of the band, the Civil Air Patrol retired the colors and both band and chorus programs performed "Stars and Stripes Forever" together.

Prior to the ceremony,

Union County High School Principal John Hill, Director of School Nutrition Courtney Waller and staff treated veterans to a breakfast in the high school cafeteria, and donations for the food came from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.



Students showed their appreciation for sacrifices made by Veterans

## Byron Herbert Reece Center Christmas Open House



**BYRON HERBERT REECE FARM AND HERITAGE CENTER**

The fourth annual Christmas Open House will be held at the Reece Farm and Heritage Center on Sat-

urday, November 28th from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday, November 29th from 1 to 5 p.m.

Please note the following features: Free admission to the Appalachian farm and Reece literary

exhibits on these days; light refreshments, including hot beverages and homemade biscuits with ham; Christmas

music in the pavilion, provided by Jackie Elsner, singer of ballads, Jerry Taylor, organist, and Joel Kay, music therapist; photo opportunities for children and families in Santa's sleigh; seasonal decorations, including a Christmas tree adorned with ornaments that belonged to the Reece family; signings by local and regional authors; drawings for door prizes provided by our Gift Shop consignors; and early shopping opportunities for choice Christmas gifts in our well-stocked Gift Shop col-

lection.

This two-day event represents the final open days of the Reece Farm and Heritage Center for this year. We extend a cordial welcome to our friends who live nearby or who come from distant places. Call the Center at 706-745-2034 for further information.

The Reece Center is located 9 miles south of Blairsville and one mile north of Vogel State Park on Highway 129.

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