

North Georgia News

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Mountain Education grads celebrate milestone

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Mountain Education Union Campus Class of 2025 had its time to shine on Tuesday, May 27, when graduates gathered at the Union County Fine Arts Center for scholarships and awards, but most importantly, to walk across the stage to receive their diplomas and turn their tassels.

With 19 total graduates attending from Union and Towns counties, four students earned Honor Graduate status and one earned Campus High Honor Graduate, namely Cayleigh Kenner, who led the class processional carrying

the traditional cromach staff of Mountain Education commencement exercises.

"Symbolically, the cromach represents the power of preserving good through fidelity and truth," explained Campus Principal Brandon Bradburn.

Led by Co-Principal Jennifer Ludlum, scholarships were awarded from local organizations like the Allegheny Masonic Lodge, Blairsville Kiwanis, the Union County Lions and other entities, including Unity Church, Mike's Seafood and Woodmen of the World.

Several graduates received financial assistance

via scholarships in honor of the departed, such as the North Georgia Technical College Dr. Ivester Memorial, Jacob Lynch Memorial, Martha Elliot Memorial and the Teena Atkins Memorial.

"I want to express how grateful I am for this moment and everyone here who could attend this special day," said Honor Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby. "No matter what we face, no matter what labels society may place on us, each and every single one of us are scholars ... with the determination and perseverance to achieve success in what we want to be and to do in our life."

Destiny Eskew delivered

the Graduate Speech, bravely sharing the story of how she found herself attending Mountain Education and what the public high school did to change her life.

"Exposed to things I should have been sheltered from at a young age," Eskew described her upbringing as a difficult one.

Although she admitted she made some wrong turns, the path to her future was ultimately changed when she decided to fight for herself and take a chance that would result in the betterment of not just her life, but that of her daughter.

"I started focusing

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Mountain Education High School Class of 2025 Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby receiving her diploma from Union Campus Principal Jennifer Ludlum. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Propane accident sends contractor to burn center

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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A propane tank upgrade at Union County High School went horribly wrong last week when an out-of-town contractor was engulfed in a fireball that resulted in serious injuries and a life-flight to the Grady Burn Center in Atlanta.

Over the weekend, the newspaper learned that the man was doing well and was expected to make a full recovery.

The school system's propane tanks are primarily utilized for heating campus buildings and are also used to heat water and for cooking.

Recently, the Central Office had all propane tanks evaluated for needed upgrades and scheduled maintenance for the largest tank – 30,000 gallons – to coincide with summer break to ensure no children and minimal staff were on campus

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To upgrade the large propane tank at UCHS, a company first had to pump the tank and then burn off excess vapor on May 27. Photo/Facebook

Collins Cabin dedicated as F.C. turns 90 years old



The Collins Family and others gathered to dedicate the donation of the Collins Cabin for ongoing preservation by the Union County Historical Society. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Sports Editor

The Union County Historical Society celebrated a piece of local history on

Saturday, May 24, hosting a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the near-200-year-old Collins Cabin that was recently moved and restored on the Mountain Life Museum property in

Downtown Blairsville. Furthermore, the event served as a birthday celebration for F.C. Collins, a Union County resident born in that

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Farmers Market to open 2025 season on Saturday



The Union County Farmers Market is a popular destination for fresh produce, pictured here in July 2021. Photo/North Georgia News

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the 2025 season, the Union County Farmers Market returns with a few new features meant to make the shopping experience even better – and a makeover of one big attraction.

Opening day is this Saturday, June 7, and like years past, guests can enjoy Beef Cattle Field Day. The Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation & Development Council will be present, and visitors can grab a free hamburger beside the Cannery as they browse

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The Scots are coming this weekend, June 7-8!

By Kimberly Miller
Guest Contributor

HIAWASSEE – For years now the Scots have gathered in the North Georgia Mountains, bringing Highland dancers, Highland Games athletes, family clans, bagpipers, drummers, and traditional musicians who come to celebrate their heritage.

This year brings an exciting chapter to the Festival with a name change, to encompass all of the North Georgia region and a much larger facility with lots more parking. The Festival's history is filled with wonderful

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The Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games will feature an expanded variety of athletic competitions and so much more when it kicks off this weekend.

Habitat, Union County Schools celebrate second Panther Home

News Special

Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties, in partnership with Union County Schools, is proud to announce the completion of the Panther 2 home – the second house built through a collaborative effort between Habitat and Union County High School's Construction Academy.

Originally constructed on campus by juniors and seniors enrolled in the school's construction trade program, the home was moved to its permanent site in September 2024 after being dried in.

Measuring 52 feet by 26 feet, the Panther 2 home represents more than just another build – it's a symbol of hands-on education, community collaboration, and the ongoing commitment to addressing local housing needs.

This initiative marks the second completed home in what is now an annual tradition: a new home constructed each school year by students and completed by Habitat and its network of contractors and volunteers.

The goal is twofold: to provide affordable housing for

a deserving local family and to equip students with practical skills they can carry into the workforce after graduation.

Charlotte Randall, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties, emphasized the importance of the partnership.

"This program is truly a community effort – from the students and teachers to our incredible volunteers, contractors and donors," Randall said. "We're not only helping families build a foundation for their future

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Farmers Market...from Page 1A

produce and crafts.

This season’s beginning crops are the typical choices. Although non-local options will be available like watermelon, cantaloupe and tomatoes, farmers from the area will have squash, zucchini, lettuce, spinach and possibly cabbage.

The Hunter-England Cabin has received a rehaul and will enjoy a ribbon-cutting on June 7 at 11 a.m. The blacksmith shop now has a guide detailing all the antique tools on display, and the garden out front will feature at least two different types of corn.

Additionally, six apple trees, four peach trees and two pear trees were planted to start an orchard, and dahlias as well as wildflowers have been added to support native flora.

“We want to have a sorghum operation going by this fall so you can show people (how it’s processed) from the field to the mill,” said Sole Commissioner Harold Collins, who has worked extensively with Market Manager Dustin “The Rog” Rogers to set up

the area.

Questions have been trickling in about the sorghum, and one thing the county, market staff and volunteers want to make clear is that the Sorghum in the Mountains Festival will not be moving to the Farmers Market but will take place at the usual festival grounds inside Meeks Park.

The goal is to get the cane growth and processing demonstrations up and running at the Farmers Market sometime around the last week of September; Rogers likens it to an “introduction” to the festival for market visitors.

“You can explore ... how it was in the old days,” said Rogers of the overall cabin experience.

Another disclaimer worth mentioning is that some of the crops showcased at the cabin may not be ready by opening day, and there are plans to add more variety as the summer progresses.

That said, there’s still plenty to see, as the trail leading up to the cabin will be lined this

year with more vendors selling their wares out of tents.

Some new quality-of-life features have been added to the regular shopping area. Customers can now utilize an ATM for their purchases if they don’t have cash on-hand, and, courtesy of an anonymous donor, 31 shopping carts will be available for folks who have a lot of groceries to pick up.

Special events are in the works, set to take place throughout the season and advertised about two weeks in advance on either the Farmers Market Facebook page or on the website. For example, Rogers hinted at “theme days,” like decorating in red, white and blue for Saturday, July 5.

Hours of operation have changed, too. Both Saturdays and Tuesdays, the Farmers Market will be open from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., but the old schedule of running from June through October still stands.

So far, about 100 vendors have signed up, so come on out, enjoy opening day and beyond, and support local shopping.

Propane Accident...from Page 1A

due to the inherent risks of work involving propane.

The upgrade consisted of replacing outdated valves, both internal and external, as well as other parts, which meant that the tank, situated in a parking lot near the high school gym, had to be emptied to the extent possible to complete the work.

So, on Tuesday, May 27, UCHS notified the public via social media that a licensed propane company would be upgrading the tank, and that motorists should not be alarmed if a large, continuous flame was visible from the Glenn Gooch Bypass prior to the scheduled maintenance.

“As part of the process, the tank will be emptied, and the remaining gas vapors will be safely burned off by a licensed propane company,” the school posted. “While it may be quite the sight as you drive by, please know this is a standard and controlled procedure.

“There is no cause for concern. We appreciate your understanding as we complete this important upkeep.”

However, around 2:25 p.m. on Wednesday, May 28, while multiple propane contractors were conducting the upgrade, some remaining

propane vapor leaked out of the tank, according to Union County Fire Capt. Brent Long.

“They had pumped all the liquid propane out of the tank, but of course, there is some residual vapor inside the tank,” Capt. Long said. “They had burnt the residual vapor out of the tank as well.

“Once the pressure in the tank dropped sufficiently enough, apparently, they cut it off and were able to work on it. As they were working on it, they noticed that they could smell a little bit of propane.

“They were replacing some internal valves on the tank itself, and as one person was using a torch, the wind shifted and ignited the vapor – kind of just a flash fire – and that’s what caused the injuries to the individual.”

The man received extensive burns, at least second-degree and possibly third-degree, and was the only person transported for treatment, Long said. No property damage was reported.

Responding to the scene were Union General EMS, Union County Schools Police, UCFD Station 1 firefighters and an investigator with the State Fire Marshal’s Office.

Maintenance resumed

on the tank sometime after the incident last week but was delayed due to the accident and rainy weather, and the newspaper was uncertain if the upgrade had been completed by press time. A thorough inspection process will occur before the tank is used again.

School Superintendent John Hill said Saturday he is grateful the injured man appears to be on the mend, adding that he will remain in everyone’s thoughts and prayers.

As for the tank maintenance, Hill said the system obtained multiple quotes for the work, and that the contracted company, Mobile Propane Services out of Hogansville, came highly recommended.

Union County Schools has three bulk propane tanks: the one at UCHS, an 18,000-gallon tank at the Central Office, and a recently installed, fully inspected 30,000-gallon tank at the new Elementary School.

Similar maintenance is coming up on the large tank at the Central Office, with quotes to be sought soon, though Hill said it was too early to say who would be doing that upgrade, to potentially begin in July.

Scottish Festival...from Page 1A

memories, and many thanks to those who have been a part of it over the years.

The Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games will be held at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee, beginning with a free Ceilidh or party with food trucks opening at 5 p.m. and the party starting at 6 p.m. on June 6 at the beautiful Hamilton Gardens inside the fairgrounds.

The Festival itself runs 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, June 7th and 8th. A truly amazing sight to see is the Opening Ceremony at 12 noon on Saturday, with the massed highland bands and parade of tartans and athletes.

Admission is \$20 on Saturday and \$10 on Sunday, or \$25 for both days. Children 7-12 are \$5, and children 6 and under get in free. Everything other than food and souvenirs is included in the admission price. Parking continues to be free. This is a bargain compared to other Scottish Festivals of comparable size!

Even if you don’t know your family’s lineage or have little or no Scottish ties, you’re invited to come experience Scotland without the need of a passport or international flight across the ocean. Forty-four clans (family units) will be waiting for you to bring your family names to find your lineage and tie you to the land of the Scots.

A first for the Festival: two pubs, Rusty Kilt and St. Andrews, will have a variety of offerings, and Hightower Vineyard will be supplying Mead inside the fairgrounds for purchase.

For the first time in 20 years, Athletics will have the space to bring a full competition, with nine events at the Highland Games, including the caber toss (telephone pole), heavy and light hammer throw, open stone and Braemer stone throw. Seventy-five athletes who train year-round will be tossing the caber and putting the stones beginning at 9 a.m. both Saturday and Sunday. Men and women athletes come to earn points to rise to the top!

From the Scottish athletes to two different types of Scottish dancing, four Celtic bands to a pipe-band contest at 2 p.m. on Saturday, there is sure to be something to excite everyone in the family!

The Highland ponies will be coming to the Festival for the first time. Returning are traditional sheep-herding with the Border Collies, Highland coos (cows) and birds of prey used for hunting along with the black faced sheep. The 11 demonstrators also include a fierce bowyer who makes longbows, to two sturdy blacksmiths in the forge. Historical re-enactors Clann Nan Con will be camped on the lake while the Spinners & Weavers will be in the Pioneer Village.

Wee lads and lassies are encouraged to attend as well! Special activities for the children include the “Passport to the Clans” activity, where children visit clan tents and learn about each different family’s history. Once their Passport is full, they can return to the Children’s Area to select a prize!

There is also face-painting, mini-golf, a coloring station, and a bouncy-castle (all activities included in admission). Adventurous kids can even try out some of the Highland Games, scaled down to child-size.

The “real” Scottish princess Merida from the Pixar film “Brave,” provided by Enchanted Events, will be greeting children from 1-3 p.m. on both days of the festival.

As you’re planning your family trip, please remember that children in the Children’s Area are required to be supervised by a family member at all times. Unaccompanied children will be given a caffeine rich Irn-Bru soda and a caber to toss!

For our most wee of wee bairns (and for the comfort of their mothers), also available in the Children’s Area is a “Quiet Tent” with a changing table. This comfortable spot is ideal for parents with infants if any privacy is needed for nursing, napping or diapering.

What is a Festival without shopping? Many favorite vendors with traditional Scottish wares, clothing and food are returning, plus new merchants who are making their first trek to the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games. There will be jewelry, sporrans, kilts, T-shirts, musical instruments, home decor and many more Scottish items available for purchase.

The Scottish Festival’s new home allows 15 different food vendors to offer delicious Scottish food including scotch eggs, Shepherd’s pie, fish & chips, whiskey brisket, traditional and vegetarian haggis, and the traditional meat pies and bakery items. For those with less adventurous taste buds, we have American food such as barbecue, hamburgers, chicken tenders, funnel cakes, etc.

Kicking off the weekend, we are having a free traditional Scottish Ceilidh or party on Friday, with the food trucks opening at 5 p.m. and the party starting at 6 p.m. While it is hard to spell, it’s easy to say – kay-lee – and it will offer Celtic entertainment, pipes and drums, a sing-along, an athletic presentation, poetry reading, and traditional Celtic storytelling, all free at Hamilton Gardens in Hiawassee on June 6.

Transportation for those less mobile will be available inside the park, and the trolley will be running in the car park (parking lot).

Come join in the fun at the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games! There are still volunteer positions available for Sunday in three-hour shifts. Volunteers receive free admission to the Festival!

Heed the call of the pipes and the drums, grab your kilt, come to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on June 6th, 7th and 8th, and try being Scottish for a weekend!

Find out more at <https://gamtnscottishfestival.org>. Follow the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games on Facebook and on Instagram @gamountainscottishfestival.

Mountain Ed...from Page 1A

on finding me ... but I still regretted not finishing school,” Eskew said. “In August of 2023, I enrolled in (Mountain Education) in Blairsville.”

And so, she stood before her fellow graduates after successfully completing a customized education plan that involved taking courses at home and testing on campus so she could continue to work in support of her family.

Triumphant in her endeavors and enjoying a new lease on life, she praised Mountain Education for offering her – and countless others over the years – a second chance.

“In May of 2024, I watched my daughter graduate from kindergarten,” Eskew

said. “While this graduation may seem small to some people ... this really opened my eyes to me graduating.

“I wanted to finish for myself, but I also wanted to show her that I could do it despite being a teen mom. I wanted to prove all of those who doubted me wrong, and I wanted to show the kid in me that we did it. And guess what? I did it.”

Among the crowd and staff alike, tears were shed at Eskew’s emotional testimony. She vouched for her classmates and the importance of Mountain Education as an alternative to traditional education, describing how those beset by trauma like herself can find a way to overcome life’s challenges.

Following the ceremony, everyone was invited to the Union County High School cafeteria for refreshments and socializing, proving that while the journey may look different for some graduates, there’s still a victory worth celebrating at its end.

The Mountain Education Union Campus Class of 2025 is Sebastian Astorga, Honor Graduate Rayven Chastain,



The Mountain Education Class of 2025 has plenty to look forward to after graduating on May 27. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Colton Czarnecke, Aubree Davis, Honor Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby, Destiny Eskew, Garrett Glisson, Brianna Grave, Arie Hayston, Indigo Hull Hatchett, Jolie Johnson, Campus High Honor Graduate Cayleigh Kenner, Honor Graduate Braden Kinderknecht, Honor Graduate Chevale Kinderknecht, Marissa Lund, Jordyn Mason, Chloe Phillips, Ethan Pickelsimer, Naliana Ray, Jason Savage and Zachary Wenrich.

Panther Home...from Page 1A



Habitat for Humanity of Towns/Union Counties is used to making the dream of affordable housing come true, and Union County Schools has gotten in on the action with a tremendous partnership that benefits all.

but also preparing our next generation with real-world trade skills.

“The support we’ve received has been overwhelming, and we are deeply thankful for everyone who continues to invest in this mission.”

Special recognition goes to Charley Cattanach, former Construction Academy teacher and now the Director

of the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education program at Union County Schools, whose leadership has been instrumental in making this project possible.

Looking ahead, the Panther 3 home has already been constructed on campus and is scheduled to be moved to its lot in September 2025. With each build, the partnership grows stronger – bringing

new hope to families and new opportunities to students.

Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties invites the community to support this impactful program through donations, sponsorships or volunteer efforts. To learn more or get involved, please visit townsunionhabitat.org, call 706-745-7101, or stop by the office at 225 Wellborn St., Blairsville, GA 30512.

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Collins Cabin...from Page 1A

very cabin 90 years ago this May.

“This is definitely a special day for a special person at a special event,” said Blairsville-Union County Chamber Board Chair Tony Dyer. “This is a beautiful place, and I’m thankful for all the work they’ve done on the structure.”

It is believed that the Mountain Life Museum at the Butt-Mock House is the cabin’s fourth location, with Collins’ own birthplace marking the

second site.

Todd Collins, the nephew of F.C., reports that the second resting spot stood on the property of his childhood home off Pine Ridge Road in the Trackrock community.

It was then relocated by F.C.’s son Troy Collins and family friend Jerry Dyer to the Fain Branch area in the early 1980s, where it was used as a storage shed at Troy’s home before ultimately arriving at its current location decades later.

About a year ago, then-

Historical Society President Mickey Cummings received a phone call from Troy and Jerry inquiring if the society had any interest in the cabin.

“I told them yes without even getting it approved by the (Historical Society) board, which is against parliamentary procedure,” Cummings said. “I convinced the board, and that didn’t take much; all I had to do was bring up the idea, and they jumped at the opportunity.”

Cummings, along with others, helped restore the cabin every Saturday after its arrival at the museum. He believes the structure dates to the 1830s based on a unique opening found on the side of the home.

“We don’t think it was a window, we think it was a gun portal, and a gun portal would have been put in sometime around the Indian Removal, which would have been around 1832,” Cummings said.

As noted above, the 16-by-19-foot cabin marks the home where F.C. Collins was born in May 1935 and lived for 14 years alongside his parents Francis Walter Collins and Pauline Thomas Collins, and siblings.

According to F.C., the original home began as a one-



F.C. Collins, third from left, was not only attending the dedication of the cabin he was born in but also celebrating his 90th birthday at the May 24 public gathering. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

room building with a fireplace, after which a kitchen, dining room and bedroom were added.

“The cabin has been moved three times, and my daddy moved it the first time to Pine Ridge Road,” F.C. said. “On the day I was born, May 13, 1935, Doc Kimsey drove a horse and buggy up there to deliver me. We had a good life there.”

Following the ribbon-cutting, birthday cake and punch were provided, while the Collins Family Band performed music to the delight of all in attendance. Old Liberty Baptist Church Pastor Chad Underwood led the opening prayer.

Historical Society President Mike Cook would like to extend a special “thank you”

to the following individuals for their contributions to the cabin: Robert Aumak, Bill Pyszka, Bill Thiebus, Curtis Cook, Troy Collins, Mike Gable, Jared Oberman, Rudy Dover, Carl Radford, Jerry Collins, Jerry Dyer, Loy Cook, Glen Henderson, Barney Cook, Darren Reeves, Randy Stiver, Dave Gott, Eddie Partin and Mickey Cummings.



The Collins Family Band was a big hit at the Collins Cabin dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 24.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson