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with an invocation by retired U.S. Army Master Sergeant Charles Honaker, and the Pledge of Allegiance led by American Legion Auxiliary Vice President Rhonda Mason.

The Missing Man Table, an empty table at the front of the room, was reserved to honor the missing men of the military.

Set for six, the empty chairs represent Americans who were or are missing from each of the services – Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard, along with civilians, who are all with us in spirit.

Honaker explained the meaning of the table before a moment of silent prayer. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a glass was raised in a toast to honor America's POWs/MIAs, to the success of our efforts to account for them, and to the safety of all now serving our nation.

"The table is round to show our everlasting concern," said Honaker. "The cloth is white, symbolizing the purity of their motives when answering the call to serve. The single red rose reminds us of the lives of these Americans and their loved ones and friends who keep the faith, while seeking answers.

"The yellow ribbon symbolizes our continued uncertainty, hope for their return and determination to account for them. A slice of lemon reminds us of their bitter fate, captured and missing in a foreign land.

"A pinch of salt symbolizes the tears of our missing and their families, who long for answers after decades of uncertainty. The lighted candle reflects our hope for their return, alive or dead.

"The Bible represents the strength gained through faith to sustain us and those lost from our country, founded as one nation under God. The glass is inverted to symbolize their inability to share a toast. The chairs are empty – they are missing."

Following the Missing Man Table ceremony, members of the UCHS Chorus performed "Angel Flight." At the conclusion of the moving performance, members from each of the five service branches were recognized.

As the name of each branch was called out by Honaker, the veterans that served in their respective branch stood for a round of applause.

"Union County is blessed to have a large population of veterans and service organizations, and I'd like to acknowledge them today," Honaker said. "This recognition luncheon is for all veterans that are in our community. It is also a way for us to thank you for all that you have done, going above and beyond the call of duty. For many of us, we feel like this is a way that we can continue to serve, even after our military service is over.

"Some are in the Honor Guard, some visit veterans in the nursing home or visit sick veterans in their homes, while others provide festivities throughout the year. But they all have one thing in common – they know the camaraderie they felt years ago is alive when they gather together today for a common cause."

Mike Priven, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Blairsville Chapter 1101, received the 2016 Commanders Award.

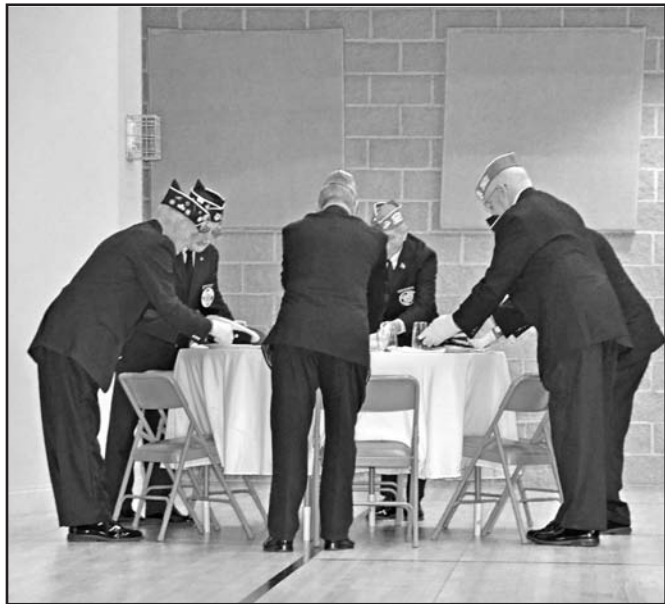
"Every year, a veteran



Mike Priven, president of the Blairsville Chapter Vietnam Veterans of America, received the Commanders Award at the annual Veterans Day Service put on by many of the veterans' organizations in the county. Here, Priven is joined onstage by his family.



Chuck Honaker emceed the Veterans Day event. Honaker is pictured here with Don Sullivan of the American Legion and North Georgia Honor Guard.



The North Georgia Honor Guard solemnly conducted the Missing Man Ceremony.

who is a member of one of the service organizations is picked as the recipient of the Commanders Award," Honaker said. "This award is the highest honor that can be given to any member. The selection of the recipient is a serious task. They must have served their community well, represent what a veteran should be, and this year the commanders picked a member of the Navy.

"He spent three tours of duty (in Vietnam) on the U.S.S. Seminole attack cargo ship. He was part of a group in direct support of combat operations and was honorably discharged in 1972.

"He has been key in forming the Vietnam Veterans of America in Union County. He was instrumental in bringing the Vietnam Moving Wall to the area, and in organizing the display of flags in front of the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Center. Additionally he helped

in the planning of a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge on the Murphy Highway."

During his recipient speech, Priven accepted the award with pride and acknowledged everyone that has worked especially hard alongside of him.

"There are so many people giving their time and effort," Priven said. "I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. One person told me that I have a big heart, and I told him that's very easy in a community that has a giant heart."

Later in the program, the UCHS Chorus returned to the stage to perform "Proud to Be an American" and "God Bless America." Caroline Ingersoll read a "Letter from a Soldier's Mother" prior to guest speaker Barbara Honaker, who spoke about the role of family and veterans organizations in the life of a veteran returning to civilian life.

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Jim Clark.

"Today, we have the honor to present one of our own veterans, James Clark, with a Quilt of Valor," said Davis. "Mr. Clark graduated high school in 1964 at a high school in Galena Park, Texas. While he was in high school, he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

"He entered the Marine Corps on June 9, 1964, and began Boot Camp and intensive combat training for over 16 weeks at San Diego, California. Upon completion, he was assigned communication duty at Oceanside, California.

"He was then assigned to overseas training in Okinawa, Japan, in preparation for assignment in Vietnam. He served in Vietnam from 1965 through 1966. While in Vietnam, he was promoted to corporal and received the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat V for combat duty in Vietnam."

Clark returned home in 1966, completed his service in 1967, and soon after pursued his education at Young Harris College and the University of Georgia to receive degrees in mathematics and administration.

A math teacher for 19 years and a principal for 21 years, Clark retired as an educator in 2003, though he continues to work as a substitute teacher in Union County Schools.

"I am most humbled and most honored by this presentation," said Clark following the ceremony, adding a special thanks to Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Art McCann of the U.S. Army, who facilitated the planning of the ceremony as an administrator at the high school.

Maj. Leilani Schroeder, a high school sophomore attached to the Civil Air Patrol's North Georgia Composite Squadron, was the keynote speaker for the event, and she highlighted in her speech how important it is to uphold the tradition of honoring veterans, and not just on Nov. 11.

"We do not need a special day of the year to dedicate to honoring our veterans," said Maj. Schroeder. "Each and every day of our lives, we should be thanking and honoring veterans for the sacrifices they made to protect our country."

Added Maj. Schroeder: "As Americans, we have been fortunate not to be subject to the warfront in our country. The devastation in countries suffering from wars on their soil is catastrophic. In events like 9/11 and Pearl Harbor, that devastation is brought home to America.

"It is because of our service men and women who defend our country today that there are not more attacks on our soil. Our military might keeps our country strong."

The full text of Maj. Schroeder's speech can be found at [ga152.org](http://ga152.org).

For the second year in a row, the high school served breakfast to veterans and their spouses immediately preceding the Nov. 10 ceremony.

Also integral to Thursday's ceremony were: the North Georgia Honor Guard, which

fired a volley to retire the colors; the band and chorus led by Will Stafford and Alicia Covington, who were joined by Chris Adams for a special trio performance of "Amazing Grace"; seniors Brady Robbins, Luke Winkler, Nick Rodriguez and Nick Klopschinski; and NGCS Cadets Airman Alex Baily, Sgt. Nicholas Sherman and Lt. Kevin Potts.

Kelly Helton's Middle School Sign Language class accompanied all songs with signed lyrics



Every year, at 10 a.m. on the day before Veterans Day, Union County Schools honors veterans countywide



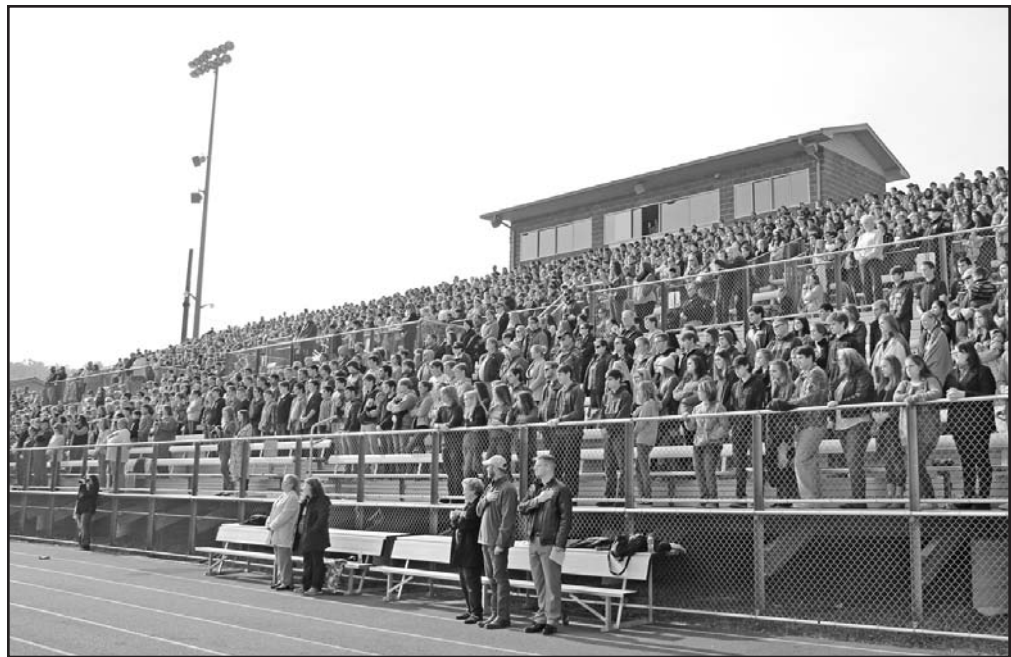
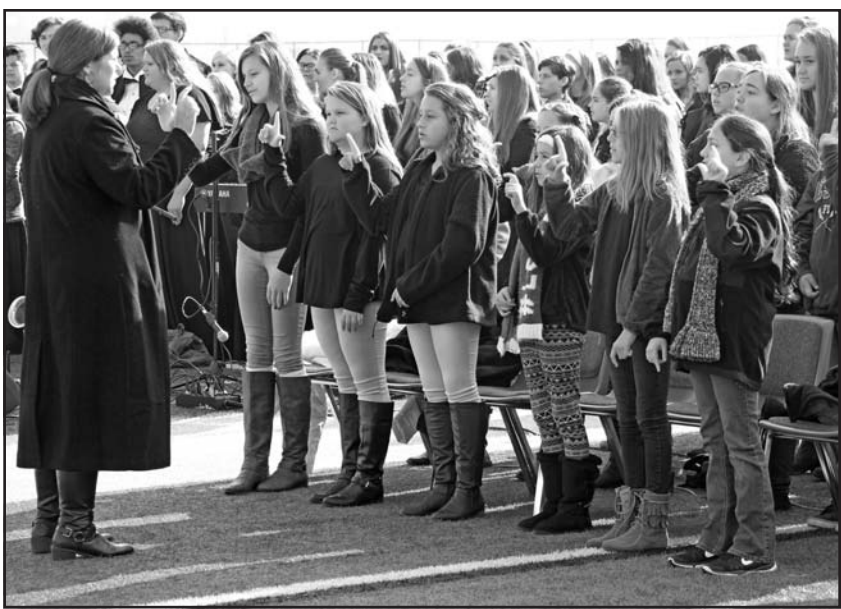
Jim Clark, an educator for Union County Schools, received a Quilt of Valor presented by students during this year's student-run Veterans Day Service.



The North Georgia Honor Guard always plays a big role in the schools' Veterans Program.



Dozens of veterans and their spouses sat in special reserved field-level seating for the event.



Students not only helped to set up and organize the ceremony, they also attended it in droves at Mike Colwell Stadium.