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Davenport with fellow board member Patrick White and Union County Schools Transportation Director Stanley Garrett.



that go through a person's mind when they think about a change in their career, relocating their family, and establishing a permanent position for later in life," said Dr. Rayfield. "And I can tell you that the professionalism, the demeanor, and the way

in which Mr. Davenport communicated with me through the process is certainly one of the main stabilizing reasons why I said, yes sir, I'm willing to come to work in Union County."

Continued Dr. Rayfield: "I want you to know, on behalf

of me and my family, we appreciate that. He was very helpful to us in our process to come here, and I know he's done some of the same things for some of the rest of the folks in the room."

Twenty years is a long time, and Davenport has much to show for it, as he and other school board members over the years have helped to lay the foundation for a school system that's currently one of the top in the state.

Since he was first elected in 1996, Davenport has been an integral voice in decisions that have provided new high and middle schools, a baseball and softball complex, the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, and the Union County Schools Agriscience Center.

Over the years, Davenport has contributed a strong sense of fiscal responsibility to the school board, which has helped the system to build the very best environment for student learning and achievement.

"If you've got a good fund balance, your test scores are good, and you've got a good school system with great facilities, you've got a place people want to come to, and I think we have that," said Davenport. "We've got great teachers, everybody in transportation, lunchroom, our principals - we've just got a lot of great people in our system."

And though the board will be missing the many years of wisdom and experience that Davenport brought to the table, he feels confident that the school system is in a great place and his fellow board members are ready to continue that tradition of excellence.

"I really appreciate being able to serve Union County citizens, Union County students, and it's been an honor to serve in the capacity as a board member for 20 years and as chairman for eight years," said Davenport. "It's been an



honor to me, and I'd just like to thank all the people who have supported me through the years."

A few of Davenport's biggest supporters and mentors have been Carlton Colwell, Ricky Davenport, Clint Patterson, Glen Hamby, among others.

Hamby, a fellow Democrat and local baseball legend, coached Gary Davenport in baseball when he was 14 years old. Since then, Hamby has watched that young man grow into a leader within the community, and all the while their friendship has strengthened.

"What I like about Gary is that you know how he stands," said Hamby, pointing out Davenport's consistency in leadership over the years. "He's always admired me, and ever since he's grown up, I've always admired him."

Another of Davenport's big supporters has been Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who also considers Davenport a personal friend.

"Just like in the county, there's always a lot of people

involved to make good things happen, but I think Gary has provided a solid leadership on the board," said Commissioner Paris.

"And because of that, it's helped not only our school system to keep our property taxes lower than most in the state, but also to provide a great education and school system and facilities throughout the county."

"I just couldn't be more appreciative, because on top of doing that for 20 years, he's had a very big and busy business (Davenport Transportation) to look after as well. Doing all that at the same time really shows his love and care for Union County and the Union County School System."

Gov. Nathan Deal is yet another individual who has placed value in Davenport and his ability to lead on several fronts. The governor named Davenport to serve on his Education Advisory Board in 2015, which Davenport said was a definite highlight in his career as a board member.

Another milestone for Davenport was when

his daughter, Janna Akins, won her election to take his seat on the Union County Board of Education, in a way symbolizing a passing of the torch.

"I want to be able to continue what we have going here for my kids and the generations that follow," said Akins, who is about the same age her father was when he first won election to the board. "I do feel like I have big shoes to fill, but I'm looking forward to the challenge."

In his last regular board meeting, Davenport led his fellow board members through discussions and approval of a construction bid for a multi-million dollar SPLOST project for school additions that will be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis, as was promised to taxpayers when the last SPLOST was first approved.

He also heard about the system's excellent RESA-topping CCRPI scores for 2016, a testament to the hard work contributed by everyone in the school system, including by himself and the Union County Board of Education.

# Grandparent...from Page 1A



Ford, Edghill and Wallace are three members of the group's Joy Team, the members of which work with Mary Kay products.



Roberta Ford with her cart full of gifts for nursing home residents.

Lazy-R Personal Care Center as beneficiaries of their program, and they got help from friends and clients Erika Star and Brigitte Edghill, as well as Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

Paris couldn't make it this year because he was out of town, but he was with the team in spirit as they made their way up and down the corridors of Union County Nursing Home.

Ford, Wallace and Hill delivered gifts to each resident, and they did so dressed in festive attire and ringing jingle bells as they moved from room to room.

This year, instead of a winter hat, the team decided to gift Bible verse pocket calendars with the much-appreciated scent free hand cream and a Christmas ornament.

In order to make the gift packages a reality for residents year after year, Ford and company look to find a larger presenting sponsor, which this year was Total Recovery Paint & Body Shop.

Sponsorships go toward covering the cost of gifts, and all told the gifts cost \$15 per package. The Joy Team invites anyone and everyone to become sponsors for next year's cycle of Adopt-a-Grandparent.

Those interested in donating, businesses or individuals, can check out the website at [www.adoptagrandparentnoga.com](http://www.adoptagrandparentnoga.com).

One of the reasons that Ford and Wallace decided to start the initiative back in 2013 was that they couldn't stand the idea that there were elderly residents of the county who may not receive a single visitor or special present on Christmas Day.

Last year, the ladies were able to deliver 276 total gifts to residents of Union County Nursing, Lazy-R and Chatuge Regional Nursing Home. They expanded that to 280 total gifts this year, and hope to add Stonehenge Assisted Living for gifts to be delivered before the end of the year.

"The smiles on all of their faces are amazing," said Ford. "Coming down the hallway, even the nurses are smiling. Each year we learn, and I think the one thing that we might incorporate next year is a little recorder with some

Christmas music."

A third member of Ford and Wallace's Mary Kay team helped in Hiawassee on Saturday, Alicia Rogers, and everyone was excited to see the women as they spread Christmas joy from room to room during their gift deliveries.

Back at Union County Nursing Home, Treatment Nurse Shawna Harkins said that she truly appreciated the idea behind Adopt-a-Grandparent.

"Our residents enjoy having people come visit them any time," said Harkins. "We have some residents who don't have family to come see them, and it makes them feel like they're still part of the community."

"And especially for those who don't have family to come and see them, it makes them feel like part of a family."