

# Woody Gap Grads...from Page 1A

mates and I begin the next chapter of our lives," Harkins said. "This graduation ceremony signifies the achievement of a goal that we've been working towards for the past 14 years, a day that we have long anticipated, but now many of us likely feel that it has come too soon. As we continue to move onward with our lives, we will always cherish the memories that we've made while at Woody Gap."

Superintendent Steppe followed Harkins with the presentation of a diploma to Samuel Arbour.

"At this point," Steppe said, "the graduating class of 2015 would like to pause its commencement ceremony for the community to recognize Samuel Arbour."

Arbour began attending Woody Gap during his 6th Grade school year and remained until leaving as a sophomore, however Arbour and his family continue to reside in the Suches community.

"Sam was a graduate of the Georgia Cyber Academy, a full-time, tuition-free, on-



line public school for grades K-through-12, working under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Charter Schools Association," Steppe told the audience. "Sam was unable to attend a graduation ceremony since it's an on-line school and he was a member of this school for a long time and his classmates wanted to include him in the ceremony here today."

"So by the authority vested in me by the State of Georgia, I present you with your diploma," Steppe told Arbour before handing him his diploma.

Before the presentation

of diplomas to the graduating class by Principal Murphy and Superintendent Steppe, Principal Collins recognized the parents of each of the 11 graduates by having them stand when their names were called while receiving a round of applause from the audience.

As the ceremony drew to a close, the lights were dimmed for the Senior Video and the Candlelight Service.

The video was a musical tribute to each of the graduating seniors, showing pictures that covered 18 years of their life, along with their years at Woody Gap.



During the Candlelight Service, all 11 members of the senior class lit a candle before lighting the candles and passing the proverbial torch to members of the Class of 2016.

As Principal Collins closed the commencement exercises, the Woody Gap Class of 2015 had one last thing to say before tossing their hats into the air.

"Hell yeah," the class shouted out in unison as the hats went flying, drawing a good laugh from everyone at the conclusion of the ceremony.

# Service...from Page 1A

bers their own special veteran who is not here today.

"Some say it's a solemn day of remembrance, and there are others who believe we should celebrate. Well, I believe they're both right, because we want to remember, and sometimes the best way to remember someone who has fallen is to celebrate their life as we remember it, and to believe that they have given their lives in order for us to stand here today," McCann said.

The War in Afghanistan began in 2001 as a direct result of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that killed 3,000 Americans. Those attacks caused the U.S. to aim her bombs at Taliban forces in Afghanistan that were harboring Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda forces.

"Last year marked the end of combat actions in Afghanistan, which claimed over 2,000 lives and just over 17,000 wounded," said McCann. "The War in Afghanistan lasted 13 years. It was the longest war in our history. At the height of the war in 2010, there were 140,000 combat troops in country."

American troops faced harsh conditions at all hours of the day and night, fighting in mountainous terrain in upwards of 6,000 feet above sea level, all while wearing combat equipment weighing 50 to 60 pounds.

"We fought against an enemy that attacked our



homeland, and we were determined to win," said McCann. "No matter what war or conflict throughout the history of our country, we have learned to always stand by our countrymen who fought. We will remember and celebrate their lives because there is no greater sacrifice than for one person to give their life so that others can live free."

"Today, we proudly unveil the Afghan War Memorial. In Union County, we have those that have served, and we are blessed to say that we did not lose a man. It is important, though, that we place a stone for all Afghan veterans to stand by and remember

the sacrifice of our comrades, who we will never forget."

Various civic leaders from around the community attended the event, including Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, as well as District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch.

"It's a sobering ceremony to think about all the bloodshed that's been poured out to defend our country and our constitution," said Sen. Gooch. "It makes me go back and want to work even harder at my job as senator, because I know that those people basically laid their life on the line



for us." Many in attendance were themselves veterans and recognized during the ceremony, including Roy Hamby and Leon Davenport.

Alfonso Miguel Martinez of Blairsville returned from Afghanistan in December of 2014. He began his service in the United States Marine Corps in 2011.

For Martinez, it was important to be there for the unveiling of the memorial, which signifies the end of combat operations in Afghanistan.

"I don't really think that people can move on until they embrace it," said Martinez.

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