

North Georgia News

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Steppe witnesses his last UCHS graduating class as superintendent

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe and the Union County High School Class of 2016 have one major thing in common – they are both leaving.

Steppe will retire at the end of June after five years at the helm of Union County Schools, and he looked on proudly as graduates displayed their Panther Pride during the Commencement Exercises in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday, May 27.

The seniors took to the field in pairs of two, dressed in the traditional garb of graduation – white caps and gowns for the young women and purple for the young men.

As they reached the staging area of the ceremony at the middle of the field, many of the senior duos celebrated in front of the crowd of family and friends by offering special salutes to graduation via pre-determined congratulatory “handshakes” between walking partners.

One thing that makes UCHS graduation ceremonies so special is that they are for the most part student-run events, and the Class of 2016 followed suit, with the high school Chamber Choir singing the national anthem just prior to senior Mackenzie DiNatale’s welcoming of gathered guests, which included special recognition of one person who could not attend.

“I want to take this moment to recognize a dear



Union County High School proudly sent 167 graduates into the world on Friday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Retiring proudly Superintendent Gary Steppe went to farewell to the students and the school system, wishing them the best life has to offer. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

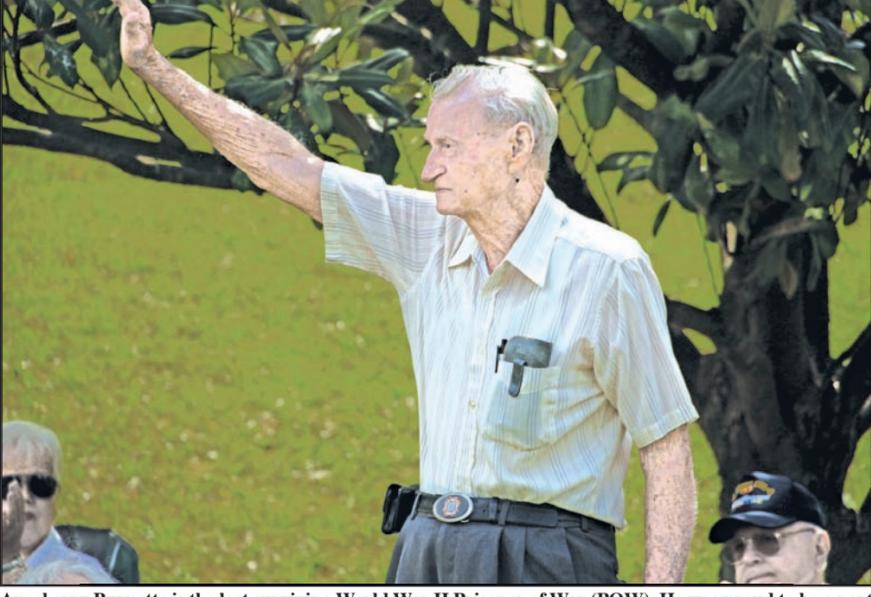
friend who would have been graduating alongside of us this evening, Kevin Williams,” said DiNatale. “We miss you, Kevin, and our memories with you will always live in our hearts.”

Senior Christopher Drost delivered the Appreciation of Class Address, in which he shared thanks with all those who helped the Class of 2016 get to and through their senior years.

Offering the Recognition of Class, senior Stephanie Busse highlighted the many accomplishments of graduating students over the course of their high school careers, and she announced that the Class of 2016 had been awarded

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Freedom isn't free; Union County remembers vets



Anthony Burnette is the last surviving World War II Prisoner of War (POW). He was proud to be a part of the annual Memorial Day Parade in Downtown Blairsville. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Memorial Day is a federal holiday set aside for the observance and remembrance of the ultimate sacrifices made by the hundreds of thousands of brave souls that perished in service to their country as members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Union County observes Memorial Day with a parade and a ceremony in honor of the nation's war dead, always the Saturday before the holiday.

The parade gives area residents the opportunity to get out and remember those who have died, and dozens of area businesses and civic groups take part in the parade each year to show their community pride.

New to the Saturday, May 28, parade route was the utilization of the recently completed Bob Head Street, which shaved some major walking and drive time off the original route for those participating in the parade.

This year's Memorial Day Parade Grand Marshal was Mike Priven, who is pres-

ident of the Blairsville Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Parade floats were awarded prizes in different categories, and Best in Parade went to the “We Are Still Here” float for its intricate design and particularly patriotic theme.

Joining the We Are Still Here crew for the Memorial Day Parade was Melba Chetoch-Eads, who is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and she hoped to spread awareness of the We Are Still Here Tri-State Initiative, which is

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Woody Gap graduates soar into real world



Saturday was an emotional moment for three Woody Gap School graduates, Zach Woody, Easton Wood, and Brooklyn Dockery accepted their high school diplomas. Photo/Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Woody Gap School said its goodbyes to the Class of 2016 on Saturday morning as Brooklyn Dockery, Easton Wood and Zach Woody each received their diplomas from the school that will hold a special place in their hearts for the remainder of their lives.

The graduation exercises opened with a prayer from Woody Gap teacher Gary Butler, the Pledge of Allegiance led by Wood, and a welcome from Woody Gap Co-Principal Carol Knight that would be followed by the Salutatory Address by Dockery, then the Valedictory Address by Woody.

“I’m glad all of you could join us on this very special day,” said Woody, who will attend North Georgia Technical College to pursue a career in automotive. “I am truly honored to stand here before you this morning.

“It seemed like yesterday I was walking through the doors on my first day of kindergarten. Time does fly. I would like to thank my mom and dad for being a wonderful inspiration and helping provide encouragement throughout my school years.

“I would also like to thank my homeroom teacher Althea Cantrell. She has done so much for me and continues to help. Some of my most precious memories are from the Local Studies class. I learned a lot in there but also had many laughs and fun times.

“One thing I will always remember about this school is how caring everyone is. We are all like family here. It's nice to come in every day and get a ‘good morning’ from the principals, or a ‘are you doing okay’ or ‘is there anything you need or want to talk about.’

“The people at this school are supportive through the good and bad times, and the students here are all good friends. I am graduating and

will not get all of this attention every day, and that will take some getting used to but I will manage. I'm going to miss seeing each and every one of you.

“One thing I will always know is if I need a friend to talk to, all I need to do is walk into Woody Gap School,” said Woody as he finished his Valedictory Address.

Prior to Woody's address, Dockery gave the Class of 2016's Salutatory Address.

“I want to say thank you for getting up so early to watch my huge class of three graduates,” said Dockery as she wished parents, family and faculty a good morning.

Then Dockery, who plans to attend Lanier Technical College and pursue a career in health care, spoke directly to the other two members of her senior class, Wood and Woody.

“We have grown up together and shared so many

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MECHS graduates 44 at Fine Arts Center

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Mountain Education Charter High School graduated its Union and Fannin sites on Thursday, May 26, at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Forty-four students – 27 from Union and 17 from Fannin – received their diplomas that Thursday, as family and friends looked on with pride and admiration.

The commencement exercises opened with “Pomp and Circumstance” and



Union County's Alana Johnston goes from student to graduate on Thursday at the Union County Fine Arts Center. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

BB gun team headed to Nationals

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Six Union County 4-H'ers are headed to Rogers, Arkansas, to compete in the 2016 Daisy National BB Gun Championship from July 1 through July 4, and the team is counting on community support to raise money for the trip.

The Union County 4-H BB Team will be holding a fund-raising event at the



The Union County 4-H BB gun team takes aim at the Nationals in Arkansas in July. They'll be raising money this weekend with a Turkey Shoot at Stover Shooting Field. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Union County walks for a cancer cure



Hundreds gathered on Saturday at the Union County Farmers Market to raise money and awareness that a cancer cure is within reach with the help of the American Cancer Society. Photo/Lily Avery

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Cancer is a word many people know all too well, but the fight against it is stronger than ever thanks to the countless volunteers, caregivers

and cancer survivors who work year after year to find a cure.

More than 100 survivors and caregivers participated in the American Cancer Society's 2016 Relay For Life held at the Union County

Farmers Market on Saturday, May 28, with hundreds more from the community coming out to show their support.

Relay has been running for 31 years, and Union County is proud to be a part of it.

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