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the county's best interests at heart.

"People sometimes complain about paying taxes but I felt like we did more with our county tax dollars than anyone else," Payne said. "This county has seen a lot of good results from the taxpayers' dollars. I know sometimes it's hard for people to come up with the money, but we worked with them. We'd call them on the telephone and just talk to them and do our best to solve the problem. I've only had two or three tax sales since I've been in office."

Now that Payne is leaving office he will have more time for hobbies that include hunting, fishing and playing golf.

"I'm going to enjoy my retirement," Payne said with a smile.

Payne or as some call him, 'Dub' will be missed. If you need proof, just ask the young ladies who work for him.

"He's the best boss ever," Tawana Aaron said. "He's the greatest. We will miss him very much"

"He's been a true asset to the community," Teresa Stephens added.

Perhaps the highlight of his retirement, now that he's also out of the farming in-



Retiring Union County Tax Commissioner J.W. Payne poses with his team of workers from the Tax Commissioner's Office. Payne served Union County taxpayers for 44 years. Photo/Todd Forrest

dustry, will be spending more time with his wife Bobbi, who wrote a poem that was framed and presented to an emotional Payne later in the evening.

"The milking parlor is empty, the pasture is rented out," it read. "No more calls at midnight, 'Mr. Payne your cows are out.' No more trips to Ace Hardware to get the

week's supply of feed or trips up to Cleveland to get the supplies you need. The corn planting, the silage cutting, corn picking, haybaling, sick cows, and equipment breaking down. That's all behind you now. Aren't you glad?"

"For 44 years you've collected taxes, that's 11 elections you've won, and a lot

of weeks in Savannah and Athens, to learn how the new things are done. A lot of people complaining their taxes are too high, a lot of days explaining, 'I'm not the reason why.' So now it's time to go fishing and the singings you love so much, just remember that we love you and want you to keep in touch."

C.H.A.M.P.S. graduation...continued from Page 1A

or at school. Those problems include alcohol, bullying, drugs, nicotine and peer pressure.

C.H.A.M.P.S. also examines safety issues and how to follow the hunting regulations to ensure proper hunting technique and how to avoid bad situations when out in public.

"This is a great program these kids are going through. They have to deal with things in life most parents never had to deal with, and we feel a little education can go a long way in helping them face those situations," Sheriff Stephens said.

The fifth graders are actually tested on the first day of the course to judge just how well informed they are.

"We test them at the start of the class and again at the end and it is amazing how much they learn," praised Deputy Sally Tanner who taught the class. "We used to be under the D.A.R.E. program but the Georgia Sheriff's Association realized that our kids are facing things out there other than drugs that are just as dangerous to their health and well being. This program is more involved with all the things they face in life and not just the drug problem."

There were nine fifth grade classes involved in the program and that amounts to just under 200 students that will benefit from their experience.

Each class was asked to write an essay at the end of the



C.H.A.M.P.S. graduates await their diplomas last week at Union County Elementary School. They completed a 10-week course that will help them on their journey into adulthood. Photo/Joe Collins

10 weeks that included three main points they had learned during the course.

An award was given in each class for the best essay and one award was given for the best essay overall.

Carter Rowe took that honor with his essay on tobacco, marijuana and hunter safety.

He had obviously learned a great deal because his essay was really well written.

"He came to his dad and asked him to help him with it but Todd (Rowe) told him no. He made him do it all on his own so that makes it even more special to us. This class was really great for Carter," said a proud mother, Jamie Rowe.

Today's youth is living in a day and age when circum-

stances can sometimes be unbelievable. Unfortunately local youth are on the front lines in many situations.

"We realize what the kids of today have to deal with and when we got the opportunity to teach this class through the Georgia Sheriff's Association, we knew it would be a very good thing for the children," explained Tanner as she described the thought process that brought the program to Union County Elementary School.

It's interesting to note that every student who participated received a certificate of Graduation; none of them failed. There's proof in the pudding that they know what's going on and are interested in someone helping them down the road of life.

The Sheriff's Office is

doing just that by bringing the C.H.A.M.P.S. program to Union County Elementary School.

Union unemployment rate drops to 6.6

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Union County's unemployment rate dropped to 6.6 percent in October from 7.8 in September, according to Georgia's Labor Commissioner Mark Butler.

Overall, state labor officials reported Thursday that 36,000 new jobs in October pushed Georgia's unemployment rate down from 9 percent to 8.7 percent.

Commissioner Butler said the drop was not caused because fewer Georgians are looking for work.

"A lot of times, you can see an unemployment rate go down in a state because people have dropped out. They've given



Mitch Griggs talks employment numbers with UCDA last week at the Union County Community Center. Photo/Charles Duncan

up on job search. That's not been the case Georgia," Butler said.

"Our labor force has continued to get stronger and stronger."

Union County Economic Director Mitch Griggs used guarded optimism when fielding the news.

"We have to look a lot closer at the numbers," Griggs told the Union County Development Authority last week at the Union County Community Center. "A lot of times in those counts, the unemployment numbers go down because people just aren't staying in the workforce."

Butler says the state's more than 3.9 million jobs last month are the most since December 2008. Most of the job growth occurred in retail, education and healthcare, and professional and business services.

The Labor Department also reported higher initial claims for jobless benefits, but fewer claims overall.

Georgia's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped to 8.7 percent in October, down from 9 percent in September, Butler said.