



Land of Lakes, Mountains, Scenic Beauty and Friendly People

# North Georgia News

75¢

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## Service prepares seniors to journey in faith

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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The Union County High School Class of 2025 will participate in traditional commencement exercises this Friday, May 23, at 8 p.m. inside Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

In preparation for the momentous occasion, dozens of faith-minded seniors attended another tradition this past Sunday, May 18, to ensure that the next steps of their journeys in life get started down the right spiritual path.

The 2025 Baccalaureate Service at First Baptist Blairsville was a beautiful affair featuring time-tested messages delivered largely by students wearing purple graduation gowns in anticipation of their big day.

Members of the school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes sponsored the event, offering prayers and imparting wisdom via personally selected

Bible verses.

From the pews, hundreds of loved ones looked on with pride and adoration as the seniors filed in to the "Triumphal March" from Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Aida."

Senior Ethan Lester welcomed everyone on behalf of Union County FCA and the graduating class. Lester thanked Superintendent John Hill, school administrators, teachers, First Baptist Church and parents "for your unwavering support throughout the years."

Fellow senior Gunnar Ingram joined Lester on stage to offer the invocation for the event, thanking God for giving the Class of 2025 strength, peace and grace, and asking for His blessings.

"We're standing on the edge of our future, and I ask that you walk with and guide each one of us," Ingram said. "Help us not to forget where we come from. Help us to

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The UCHS Ensemble is a talented group of students, several of whom led a beautiful performance at Sunday's Baccalaureate Service. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## United Community Bank turns 75 in Blairsville



United Community employees enjoyed a private party in their honor last week to celebrate 75 years since the bank began in Blairsville. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
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United Community celebrated its 75th year in operation with a private banquet on Wednesday, May 14, inside the Union County Community Center.

The company hosted its annual Customer Appreciation Day earlier in May, but on this night, the guests of honor were the employees themselves – the 300-plus dedicated workers of the Blairsville bank offices, plus leadership from neighboring branches in North Georgia.

Also attending were the United Community Board of Directors and corporate officers, including Chairman, President and CEO Lynn Harton, as well as retired CEO Jimmy Tallent, who received credit for establishing the "golden rule" of customer

service at United Community Bank.

Together, they celebrated shared memories and the culture of excellence they have created over the years, as exemplified in the company's growth from a modest local bank with \$40 million in assets 40 years ago to a multi-state holding company with nearly \$30 billion in assets today.

Known as "The Bank that SERVICE Built," United Community got its start in 1950, right here in Blairsville as Union County Bank, making the local commemoration all the more fitting.

What began as a humble hometown bank has expanded into a truly well-rounded financial institution that serves the needs of customers across 200 offices in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

From the standpoint of services and technology, United has come a long way in 75 years thanks to its commitment to offering products people and communities care about, from personal banking to business banking, mobile banking mortgages, wealth management and beyond.

What hasn't changed in all that time is the mission of United: "to serve people with trust, care and personal connection."

And that core mission has guided the company not only in customer service but also community giving, for example, the establishment of the United Community Bank Foundation to support youth development, housing and economic empowerment in communities.

So, employees toasted all

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## Local Memorial Day events will honor fallen on May 24



The annual Memorial Day Parade will return to Downtown Blairsville this year after getting rained out in 2024. Pictured here: the 2023 Grand Marshal float featuring "Our Women Heroes." Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Starting at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 24, Union County will celebrate Memorial Day with the annual parade through Downtown Blairsville and the usual ceremony that follows inside War Memorial Park.

But for all the enthusiasm that goes into driving a fun and engaging community event, the focus once again lies on reminding the public of the true significance of the day, which is officially observed the last Monday of each May.

"We're trying to bring the focus back to what it's all about," said North Georgia Honor Guard Eastern Division

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## Fire Station 4 Open House boasts major public support

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County Fire Station No. 4 kicked off open house season on Saturday, May 17, enjoying gorgeous weather and an outstanding turnout estimated at about 300 people at the 93 Moccasin Road facility of the Ivy Log area.

Everyone from first responders and their families to neighboring residents and local government officials attended the cookout and educational event, including Sole Commissioner Harold Collins and County Manager Tony Hughes.

This year saw some special differences, meaning that word of an evolving – and

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Children and families had an unbelievable time at the UCFD Station 4 Open House over the weekend, receiving tours and even hands-on experience with some of the firefighting equipment. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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# Development Authority returns; life flight agreement renewed

## Publix comes up in county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Three months after its dissolution, the Union County Development Authority is back with an expanded board, new establishing documents, the inclusion of ex-officio members and more.

Union County Sole Commissioner Harold Collins re-formed the Development Authority via resolution in his regular monthly meeting in the courthouse on Thursday, May 15.

As previously reported, Collins dissolved the longstanding Development Authority in February, primarily citing costs and the lack of diverse community representation on the board, and he said in March he hoped to have a re-formed authority up and running with a new board by April.

The process took longer than anticipated but was completed in time for last week's meeting.

When Collins decided to dissolve the authority after first coming into office, he originally wanted to take his time in determining the need to re-form such an entity.

But former authority board member Mike Kiernen of Panel Built informed Collins that, without the authority, he would not have access to the industrial revenue bonds he was planning to acquire to expand his business, which would create 75 new jobs in the county.

So, Collins got to work creating the new authority with aims of increasing transparency and expanding the volunteer board from seven to nine members for greater community representation. That work culminated in the May 15 announcement.

The nine new Development Authority Board members appointed by resolution were Doug Anderson, Rick Davenport, Rhonda Mahan, Ivan Walker, Jason Henson, Courtney Waller, Shawna Harkins, David Dyer and Kevin Green, with Davenport and Waller returning.

Collins also created four ex-officio board positions, appointing the following individuals to non-voting advisory roles: Brett Owenby, Erik Brinke, Gavin King and Scotty Jarrard.

"The previous board did not allow for any ex-officio members," Collins said. "My reasoning for these ex-officio seats is to allow input from members of the community that don't necessarily need to be voting members of the authority board."

Added Collins, "Myself or a representative of my office has talked to each of these who are willing to donate their time to serve on the Union County Development Authority Board of Directors."

"They all are excited and looking forward to

making a positive impact on our community. I am looking forward to working with this group of individuals and see what progress we can make in the direction of focused economic development and working together with the other entities in Union County."

As of last week, the Development Authority Board had yet to receive a meeting schedule, and bylaws were pending finalization by the county. Collins said there was "no rush or plan to hire an executive director," though the new board may opt to do so in time.

The purpose of the Development Authority is to support economic development in Union County, and Collins has shown a particular interest in fostering more manufacturing. Toward that end, Panel Built's bond issuance will be the first project the board tackles, Collins said.

Also that night, to streamline accounting procedures, promote transparency and accrue more interest on county funds, Collins authorized the closing of multiple county checking accounts containing "unrestricted funds," which he then transferred to a "pooled cash account."

Closed accounts include monies associated with the Jail Fund, Juvenile Court Case Fees, Drug Fund, Judicial ARPA monies, the Employee Fund and others.

He also closed the Accountability Court Account, but because it contained "restricted funds," he opened a new checking account dedicated to these funds to accept their transfer.

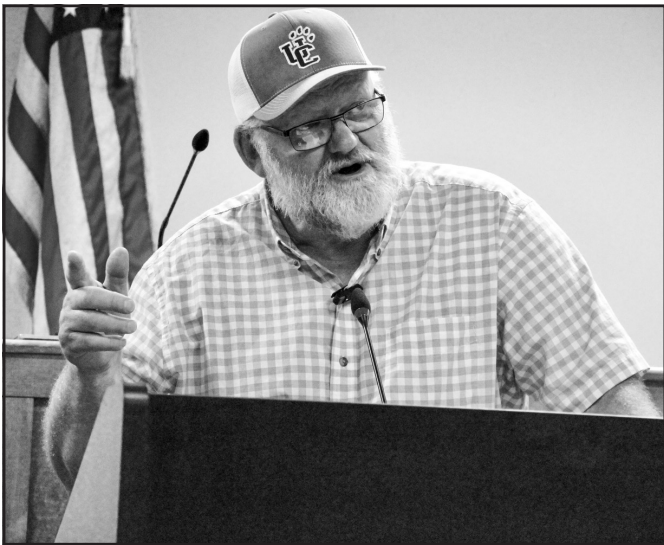
After announcing the Notice of Award last month to build the new E-911 Center off Shoe Factory Road, Collins officially accepted the contract between the county and Winkler & Winkler to erect the new facility for \$3,868,241, with groundbreaking scheduled for this week.

The commissioner awarded the annual county road paving contract to Colditz Trucking in the amount of \$1.6 million, to be paid for with state grant funds. Colditz came in as the lowest among four bidders.

Additionally, Collins accepted an \$18,800 agreement with Carter Engineering Consultants for civil engineering services to design a replacement bridge at Canada Creek Road in Suches.

He renewed the Air Methods agreement to provide emergency air ambulance services at no out-of-pocket costs to county residents anywhere Air Methods operates in the U.S. – even those who are uninsured or are on Medicare/Medicaid.

Effective June 1, the agreement tops out at \$71,480 for the next year, to be split 50/50 with Union General Hospital, putting the county's maximum contribution at \$35,740.



Sole Commissioner Harold Collins

Photo by Shawn Jarrard



**Marcus Lindsey is the Regional Business Development Manager at Air Methods – AirLife Georgia. He spoke about the renewal of the air ambulance service agreement in last week's county meeting.**

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

However, the partnership operates on a "pay-as-you-go" model, and current annual costs are again coming in well under budget for the life flight company, which has a helicopter conveniently stationed at the Blairsville-based hospital.

Marcus Lindsey of Air Methods gave some facts about the partnership, including that the local agreement has been in place since 2016; the maximum out-of-pocket cost charged to the county is \$800 per patient; and 155 patients have been transported under the current annual agreement.

Lindsey and Air Methods received thanks and a round of applause from meeting attendees for the life-saving care they provide to Union Countians.

Collins announced another agreement, this one between the county and Alexander Cattle LLC for hay cutting on two empty lots in front of the Farmers Market, with "no cost to either party."

He also rescheduled his next regular meeting from Thursday, June 19, to Tuesday, June 17, to accommodate the federal and state holiday of Juneteenth.

Following adjournment, several of the roughly three dozen attendees from the public either made statements or asked questions of the commissioner, with the recent financial struggles of the Union County Senior Center being the most discussed topic during the Q&A.

Generally, commenters

sought clarification on funding options and asked the county to offer more support to the Senior Center – and by extension to local seniors on fixed incomes – to keep meal programs fully funded amid budgetary shortfalls in federal and state funding this year.

Collins and other county representatives said that completely taking over funding the Senior Center would require raising property taxes and encouraged residents to help by volunteering or sponsoring senior meals through donations while the county continues to examine options.

A resident suggested using funds raised by the new Sorghum in the Mountains Festival to offset Senior Center costs, and Collins said the nonprofit's board – a separate entity from the county – would be responsible for deciding how festival proceeds will be used for community giving.

An interesting discussion about Publix took place, with Collins divulging to a questioner that, during his first month in office, he had declined to sell the roughly 20 acres of county-owned land across from the Farmers Market as a site for the grocery store, shops and apartments.

Collins added that developers linked to Publix are welcome to build on private property, but he does not want another big development so close to the Farmers Market, as the county land in question is prone to flooding, so building there would likely divert floodwater to the market.

# Memorial Day...from Page 1A

Senior Vice Cmdr. Mark Harbison. "It's a wonderful day to have for families ... but when you get right down to it, it's about those who didn't make it back."

This year's Grand Marshal is Jack McCorkle, a US Marine Corps veteran and local legend. At just 15, he was a deckhand aboard a supply boat in Singapore with no idea that, by the age of 19, he would be facing a conflict regarded as "one of the most brutal in modern military history."

The Battle of Chosin Reservoir in North Korea occurred in 1950 when 30,000 United Nations soldiers faced Chinese forces numbering 120,000.

A savage clash unfolded over the course of 17 days in sub-freezing temperatures, and both sides suffered considerable losses not just to the horrors of war but to an environment so cold medics had to defrost morphine syrettes in their mouths while blood bags froze and batteries for vital equipment ruined.

McCorkle, 93, was one of the "Chosin Few" survivors, and his presence in this year's parade represents an effort to highlight veterans from the Korean War, said coordinator and Air Force Veteran Jim Yohe.

This particular era of veterans is quickly passing into memory, so, like last year, one of the parade's goals is to "showcase as many as we can."

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #7394 Cmdr. Chuck Honaker will return in his role as Parade Master of Ceremonies. Bringing up the rear of a tangible display of patriotism will be the Honor Guard float, led by fifth-grade students Kevin Marrett and Jackson Payne; the boys will be carrying a sign displaying some information on the holiday.

To be pulled by the organization's van, the float measures 20 feet and sits atop a trailer supplied by Jason Seabolt of Summit Lawn and Landscape. Resting at the front is the Soldier's Cross, often used as a memorial marker for the military fallen in the form of a soldier's rifle topped with a helmet and footed by boots. The dog tags of the dead may or may not be included.

As is the duty of the Honor Guard, four Sentinels will stand at each corner of the float, protecting a coffin draped in the American flag. A bugler will also ride with the group and play Taps at two points – once at the Blairsville Square, and again at the First Baptist Church of Blairsville.

"Our intent is to bring it at the end of the (parade)," Harbison explained, hoping that the sincere, sobering nature of the float might educate young children by creating a "conversation starter" for parents and families to introduce the concept of sacrifice.

As is tradition, a

ceremony will immediately follow the parade at the downtown-adjacent Union County War Memorial Park located at 226 School Street.

With American Legion Cmdr. Mike Merritt serving as the Master of Ceremonies, retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur "Art" J. McCann III will be this year's keynote speaker. While active in supporting the cause of local veterans, McCann is also known for his service in Union County Schools.

"I'll be speaking about how (the Korean War) started," said McCann, adding that there would also be a focus on Memorial Day itself.

McCann's military career spanned 28 years and included combat, and he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 2019, nine years after his Army retirement.

Drawing parallels between the Korean War as "The Forgotten War" and the War in Afghanistan, McCann said the latter is often overshadowed in its own right because of its length; other current events and a vastly different public perception of military service have influenced the way many citizens treat the veterans of a more modern conflict.

"War is war, wherever you are," McCann noted. "It's the same, whether you're in the jungles or you're in the mountains of Afghanistan. When you're up there chasing bullets, it's still the same."



# United Turns 75...from Page 1A



**Former United Community CEO Jimmy Tallent retired as chief executive in 2018 after nearly 35 years of guiding the company to maximize customer service.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

this and more last Wednesday, and the bank's executive leadership – past and present – made sure to assign credit where it was due.

In 1984, Union County Bank incorporated as United Community under Tallent, who had a specific vision of what a bank could be and do for its customers. And CEO Harton lauded Tallent and the entire Blairsville workforce for their cultivation of such a successful company culture.

"We've had an image that we particularly used in those early years to describe the bank as this great tree with these really strong roots and the leaves," Harton said. "And we said the leaves are the new growth that we have going on in different parts of the franchise.

"But the tree doesn't grow unless the roots are strong. And this place – this is the root of our company, this is the root of our culture, and you all are the strength that enables those green spots to grow."

For his part, Tallent highlighted the tremendous honor it was for him to be there with so many of his former employees in Blairsville, likening the "heartwarming" 75th anniversary celebration to a homecoming.

Tallent expressed his pride in what the company has accomplished and harkened back to several of the "pioneers" from the mid-1980s who sparked the legacy United enjoys after 75 years and counting.

From Gene Sprayberry to Billy Decker, Ann Patterson, Mary Frances "Cricket" Ramsey, Burl Conley, Joe Fair and W.C. Nelson, just to name a few, Tallent's list of pioneers "goes on and on."

"I refer back to that core group that believed in a dream that we came together with: a commitment to service and to our communities and competitiveness, and all of those great things," Tallent said. "That really is where this culture started – that's the bottom line."

What Tallent is most proud of today is United's reputation, which is not something given, rather, "that's something earned over a long, long period of time."

"To treat employees and treat the customers the way that you would want to be treated, as simple as that statement is, that has always been the North Star of United Community Bank," Tallent said. "I believe if you look at the reason of the success that United has enjoyed and the success it will continue to enjoy, it's because of that. It's because of every one of you that believe in it."

The retired CEO went on to thank Harton and his executive team out of company headquarters in Greenville, South Carolina, for deciding to host the 75th recognition in Blairsville.

"That is so meaningful to all of us, and especially me, knowing where that root system that you talked about began," Tallent said.

In closing, he remarked to the primarily Blairsville-based crowd that the banking industry is at heart a people



**United Community CEO Lynn Harton was thrilled to be able to celebrate the company's 75th anniversary with employees where it all started.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

business – a fact that the employees of United take to heart: "I'm telling you, you exemplify the best of the best."

"A lot of banks talk about 'we're the best in service'; well, talk is cheap," Tallent said. "You've got to demonstrate it day after day and year after year, and you've been doing that for decades. I congratulate you. It's so great to see you, and I hope you all have a wonderful time."

The celebration featured a true party atmosphere, with guests swapping stories, sharing laughs, enjoying drinks and partaking of a delicious buffet by The View Grill. Melissa's Custom Cakes even prepared three different "Birthday Cakes" to mark the special occasion.

Mingling among the hundreds of guests was Carol Chastain, who works in compliance and has been a Blairsville branch employee for 39 years. Chastain was actually the 40th employee of United, which now provides jobs to more than 3,000 people across its six-state footprint.

She has seen tremendous change in her time with everything from company growth to technological advances and regulatory expansion in the broader financial industry. But she attested that the "North Star" of the company has remained consistent.

"The thing that hasn't changed is the genuine way we care about each other and our customers, and it all started with Jimmy Tallent," Chastain said. "That was something he absolutely instilled in us, that the customer matters, and without them we're nothing."

"Through the years of living his vision, and then seeing it being carried on through Lynn, who has the same vision that without the customer there's no reason for us to be around – it's what makes the difference."

Chastain said she appreciates that United cares about more than just the bottom line: "We've made an extreme effort to ensure that the customers are treated well, and both Jimmy and Lynn have made efforts to make sure the employees are treated well."

"One of the things I'm the most grateful for is, I grew up right here in these mountains, and I expected to have to leave

to find a career," Chastain said. "And with this company, I have a career staying right here in the mountains that I love, and it's been a wonderful career."

Blairsville Bank President Adam Born also had a terrific time celebrating the company and its many employees, and he used the occasion to thank the community for its support over the years, which made that evening's festivities possible.

"This is a party in recognition of what started here and what's continuing here, and without our employees, our community and our customers, we wouldn't be here," Born said.

Guests had fun chatting with one another, flipping through photo albums placed on tables showcasing years of memories made in Blairsville, and watching a picture slideshow of employee moments on the big screen, but there were also a couple of recognitions.

United Community Director David C. Shaver received a special award and gift for his commitment to and positive influence on the company; Shaver, who is coming off the board after 10 years of service, attended his last meeting as a director the very next day.

Jimmy Tallent and Lynn Harton both received appreciation awards presented by Jack Keener, who serves as North Georgia President for United Community, and Keener thanked Born and Executive Assistant Joann Wilcoxon for organizing the local gathering.

And just before dinner was served, United Senior Risk Officer Shep Calhoun, also of Union County, offered a gracious prayer for the occasion, thanking Jesus "that our focus is the same as yours – people."

United is an 11-time winner of J.D. Power's award for highest customer satisfaction among consumer banks in the Southeast and was named the most trusted bank in the region in 2025, as detailed at <https://www.ucbi.com/>.

Looking ahead to the next 75 years, United Community is focused on becoming more than just a great bank: "We want to be a bank that employees believe in, customers love and communities truly value."



**Everyone had a great time at the Union County Community Center, where the exterior doors to the upstairs ballroom were thrown wide to a beautiful May evening – the perfect atmosphere for a company party.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard



# Baccalaureate...from Page 1A

stay grounded, stay humble, and stay hungry to be the best versions of ourselves.”

Reading from the Old Testament, senior Hensley Adams delivered the message of Jeremiah 17:7-8, imploring her classmates to trust in the Lord to provide them protection and nourishment as a tree planted by a river.

Turning to the New Testament, senior Alanah Rosa read a similar message found in Philippians 4:6-7, asking her fellow seniors to trust that, through prayer, supplication and thanksgiving, Jesus will surely guard their hearts and minds as they enter the world upon graduation.

The UCHS Ensemble beautifully sang the poignant hymn “Homeward Bound,” making a promise to return home one day after parting – a message both reassuring to loved ones and symbolic of enduring faith.

Senior Braden Plott then led the Prayer of the Class of 2025, beseeching God to provide them all with guidance and thanking Him “for the journey that has brought us to this milestone; for the lessons learned; the friendships made; and the growth we’ve experienced.”

“Grant us courage to pursue our dreams, wisdom to make good choices and compassion to serve others with humility and grace,” Plott said, looking ahead.

Seniors Katie Payne and Lily Helton performed

juniors Campbell Burnette and Alayna Stringer.

Accompanied by readings of 2 Timothy 4:6-7, Psalm 78:2-4 and Isaiah 40:30-31, the service symbolized a passing of the torch to the next class of torchbearers, whose turn it is now to carry “responsibility, tradition and knowledge” at UCHS – tasks made easy through trust in the Lord.

Taking up acoustic guitars, senior musicians Carson Collins and Cole Stanley performed “In the Time That You Gave Me” by Bradley Walker. The selection was inspired by the realization that “this is our final time in high school ... but this is just the beginning of the time of our lives.”

Senior Lily Helton returned once more to the front to introduce the keynote speaker – her father, Mount Olivet Baptist Church Pastor Jason Helton.

In addition to being “the best dad,” Lily remarked that her father was “a Union County High School legend,” prompting Rev. Helton to jokingly apologize to the assembly that his daughter had “lied in church.”

He said Lily graduating brought to mind another big milestone from her life, recalling her actual first steps as a baby, and by analogy, the first steps of Lily and her classmates after they finish high school.

As with all first steps,

stumble, which is why it is so important to have a solid foundation – in the case of his baby daughter, stiff and flat-bottomed shoes; and in the case of the graduates, their time at Union County High and, more importantly, faith in God.

Helton cherishes his own time at UCHS as experiences that can never be replaced, but he said the “one thing that tops all that is knowing who God is.”

He continued his analogy of establishing a solid foundation with a reading of Matthew 7:24, in which Jesus tells his disciples that anyone who follows him is likened “to a wise man which built his house upon a rock,” able to weather any storm through belief in Christ.

Helton relayed the harrowing tale of former slave trader John Newton, who was inspired to turn his life back over to God while traversing a deadly storm at sea.

Newton not only survived that storm but went on to become a preacher, abolitionist and author of the famous hymn “Amazing Grace,” all thanks to his return to the scriptural foundations of his youth.

Again, Helton gave gratitude for his foundational time at UCHS – the lessons learned, lifelong friends made and memories fondly gathered – but he said only one thing will assuredly carry the soon-to-be graduates safely through the many pitfalls and rough seas of life.

“There’s one foundation that always helped me get up and take my first step again,”

Helton said of God. “Children,



Seniors Carson Collins and Cole Stanley performed their last performance as UCHS students on Sunday, to the delight of everyone in attendance for the Baccalaureate at First Baptist Church.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

you; I hope this week is great. I hope that you go to school and do whatever you want to do.

“And if it’s not school, it’s work. It’s maybe in the military, it may be a lot of things, but I hope it’s very prosperous to you. I hope it’s great, I hope it’s grand. I hope God shines his blessings down on each one of you.”

Carson Collins stepped

up again to deliver a closing prayer, noting first that the Class of 2025 had much to be grateful for – from parents to teachers and coaches, from pastors to church life and God’s plan.

He read Isaiah 43:1-2 to reassure his classmates that God will take care of them as they take their next steps in life, and he thanked God for the gift

of salvation through Christ, advising his fellow seniors to “give somebody Jesus” along their journeys ahead.

The seniors then filed outside to take a group photo on the steps leading from the street to the church before splitting off to join with family members who were very proud of their participation that day.



UCHS Juniors Campbell Burnette and Alayna Stringer symbolically picked up the torch handed them by Seniors Katie Payne and Lily Helton May 18.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard



# UCFD Open House...from Page 1A



In all the years the Fire Department has hosted open houses, the May 17 event at Fire Station 4 was one of the best attended. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

caring – effort got out. A Life Force helicopter was available for inspection by the public, parked in the field just beside the station. Though the crew didn’t offer flights for guests, folks got a good idea of how patients are cared for and kept stable when flown out for emergency medical treatment.

The fire trucks were on display for all ages, too, and children were especially fascinated by the vehicles and their capabilities.

Volunteer Firefighter Shawna Harkins captivated some curious kiddos by showing off the hose pressure on one of the trucks; one little guy in particular, as expressive as he was impressed, threw an arm wide as if to make sure everyone else was watching as the water arced overhead.

Augmenting the theme of educating the public on safety measures, Georgia 811 had a presence courtesy of Brian Gilliam. In addition to trinkets and logo-laden merchandise, excavation manuals with valuable safety tips were also up for grabs at the 811 table.

“Whenever you’re digging in Georgia – or really anywhere – you can call 811, and we put in the necessary information so we can have our members come out and locate utilities,” Gilliam said. “That (way), you’re not digging into waterlines, gas lines or any types of utilities.”

Perhaps the most exciting change, however, was the advent of Firefighter Bingo. Station 4 Lt. David Ueltzen credits the game’s adoption to his wife, saying the idea came about from a desire to make raffles more interesting.

“Evelyn was looking for something different, and we just came up with that,” Ueltzen admitted. “Just passing out the tickets gets kind of boring, but this gives everyone a chance (at fun) – it’s a game.”

Most of the prizes were

gift cards from local businesses, though some, like the hanging basket from Gracie’s Nursery, were more tangible. And the cards were nothing to scoff at; one View Grill card, for example, was worth \$50, and several memberships for the Union General Wellness Center ranged into nearly \$400.

“I’ve lived here 31 years, so this has always been our fire department,” said Ashley Cordell, thankful for the opportunity to get an inside look at the kind of world firefighters navigate every day.

“A lot of these people, you know, they’re our neighbors,” Jacob Bailey said. “To see our community come together like this, it’s nice to know your neighbors are looking over you.”

“I think it’s nice to know that a couple people in our neighborhood are firefighters,” Cordell agreed, praising Station 4 for its love of the community highlighted not just during an open house, but year-round; she especially appreciates the food pantry out front.

Bailey’s son Eli, for what it was worth, thought the helicopter was the best part – along with the hamburgers and hot dogs grilled up for a big community lunch.


The Bailies – unrelated to Jacob and Eli Bailey – were in agreement with their neighbors. Though the couple moved to Blairsville four years ago from Virginia, they are no strangers to the concept of open house days at fire stations.

“We always came out and supported them and liked to interact with the people,” said Elizabeth Bailie of her old fire station, believing that events like open houses offer a great way to connect with the community as well as the firefighters and volunteers that man them.

“Would much rather see them here today than at my house when I need them. I don’t

ever want to have the need, but if I have the need, I’d be delighted to have them come,” she added with a smile.

*Happy 40th Anniversary  
Douglas and Elizabeth Harper*



*Love, Danita, Triston, Landon,  
April and Todd McDonald,  
and Doug and Jelena Harper*

**Military Time**  
US Merchant  
Marine History  
By: Whitey White



## Merchant Marines

During the Persian Gulf conflict in early 1991, and for many months prior to the war, both Academy graduates and midshipmen played key roles in the massive sealift of military supplies to the Middle East.

Midshipmen training at sea also participated in the humanitarian sealift to Somalia in Operation Restore Hope.

While the Academy’s curriculum has changed dramatically since 1943 to reflect the technological advances of America’s merchant marine, the institution has maintained

its unwavering commitment to quality education and excellence among its midshipmen.