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Beard is Seabee Combat Warfare qualified, a designation similar to the Combat Infantryman's Badge in the U.S. Army. His medals and personal decorations are considerable, including the Bronze Star, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, and many more.

"These reunions are important, because it gives us a chance to recount stories," said Beard, reflecting on the stories and history he'd already

heard and shared that evening. "That's all that we have, our Seabee heritage, what we've done and when we started. And our individual stories are important.

"I'm sure some of you probably have relatives that served in World War II, some who served in Vietnam. You can't get them to talk about their service. They don't want to talk or they don't think it's significant, that what they did wasn't important. Or



Command Master Chief (Ret.) U.S. Navy Neal Beard shares words of wisdom on Saturday, March 5 at Seabee Ball

they don't think people will believe them when they tell their stories. But those stories are important – if they don't tell them, those stories will get lost or forgotten."

Beard discussed post-traumatic stress disorder, which is all too common among

veterans, and he spoke about the high suicide rate of veterans – upwards of 22 veterans a day, according to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"They come back, and they don't feel like they can talk about what happened," said Beard. "If you think about it, the times that you did sit down and talk to someone about your service, you felt a

whole lot better inside after you got done talking."

His message of veterans sharing their stories and experiences with others dovetailed seamlessly with the reason for the occasion – the celebration and remembrance of the creation of the Navy Seabees 74 years earlier.

For Ruback, who was one of the Seabees involved in the first amphibious landing in Vietnam in 1965, the evening was bittersweet.

"It's sad and happy both," said Ruback. "Sad memories – you lost your comrades. And happy, for all these fine, fine sailors with us tonight."

Island X-3 Chaplain Paul Brown began the evening's ceremony with an invocation, followed by the posting of the colors by the North Georgia Honor Guard. Hoibraten, who is commander of Island X-3, led those gathered in the Pledge of Allegiance, before Jerry Cannon conducted the Missing Man ceremony.

Crenshaw, secretary of Island X-3, introduced the keynote speaker, and following Beard's address Hoibraten conducted the ceremonial cutting of the Seabees' 74th Birthday Cake.

Music for the event was provided by Mountain Resort Entertainment, and the night ended with dancing after dinner and closing comments from Hoibraten.

Many special guests were present that evening, including CPO (Ret.) U.S. Navy C.E. "Bud" Johnson, Island X-1 Secretary/Treasurer LTJG (Ret.) U.S. Navy Rick Conn out of Atlanta, and Union County Sheriff Mack Mason.

According to literature made available that evening, "as the United States entered World War II, it quickly became obvious that we would need to build as well as fight our way across Europe and the Pacific to attain victory.

"With the Pacific being a Naval War, the Navy needed construction capabilities. To fill this need, Naval Construction forces were formed and organized into Construction Battalions, CBs. These Seabee forces, trained to fight and build, performed splendidly in both theaters of war.

"Since that time, Seabees have made major contributions in all of America's military conflicts. In addition, Seabees have conducted many people-to-people construction projects to build good will and cement friendships for our country. Special note should be made of their disaster recovery efforts around the world."

It should also be noted that Island X-3 of Blairsville and the North Georgia Mountains region plans to hold an even bigger Seabee Ball next year, in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Navy Seabees.

Congressman Collins pays a visit

**By Shawn Jarrard
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U.S. 9th Congressional District Rep. Doug Collins made several stops in Blairsville and Union County on Wednesday, March 9, to give constituents an in-person update on what's been going on in the District of Columbia.

His first stop was to speak with students in the new Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, marking the first occasion the congressman has had to see the state-of-the-art facility.

"I've been doing a lot of that all over the district the last couple of years, but what is really interesting is to watch the kids become more engaged in their surroundings," said Rep. Collins. "Not just what's going on in their world, but asking questions about budget, asking questions about world situations – ISIS and what could happen to them. I think they're getting to the realization that, especially if they're juniors and seniors, that this is only a year or two away from them. So it was a good morning."

One of the more pressing concerns for many of his constituents for many years now has been the underperforming Internet service provided by Windstream.

Congressman Collins has made an effort over the last several years to get answers from Windstream, most recently calling the company out for slow service and outdated infrastructure.

"I was very disappointed in their response," said Rep. Collins, speaking on Windstream's response to his inquiry earlier this year. "It's frustrating, because they just basically regurgitated their talking points, and they never got to the issue."

The congressman made sure to draw a clear distinction between local Windstream employees and the corporate entity, saying that the local workers are doing the best job they can with the current infrastructure.

Moving forward, Rep. Collins has pledged to continue to hold Windstream accountable, and one of the next steps will be a meeting between the congressman and Windstream, in which Rep. Collins, a lawyer by trade, plans to put the complaints to Windstream in a case format.

"One of the things I want to emphasize for folks up here is, this is not a last three month thing for us," said Rep. Collins. "We've been dealing with Windstream for three years. And we gave them almost two years of, let's work behind the scenes, let's see if you can work it out – and every time we would call them, they would give me half answers or they would never set a meeting."

Furthermore, the congressman has been in talks with the Federal Communications Commission and other agencies, and is trying to get the state more involved.

On news from Washington, Rep. Collins said it's time to start thinking about an appropriations bill, in which he would like to see "some lower spending numbers," including analysis of defense and discretionary spending.

Criminal justice reform will also be up for debate, and the congressman hopes to see the Apple/FBI phone unlocking issue come up for major discussion in the House of Representatives.

"It's a very scary slope that you're on, to say, well, we



Copelan Collins with his father, Rep. Doug Collins, on a daytrip to Blairsville and Union County to visit with students and constituents on Wednesday, March 9

just want to do this phone," said Rep. Collins. "Well, what happens next time, when you're forcing a private company to make a backdoor key – there are a lot of questions that need to be answered there."

The congressman visited with several businesses in the area, a radio station, as well as

the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

Traveling with Rep. Collins that Wednesday were his son, Copelan Collins, who was on Spring Break from the University of Georgia, as well as the congressman's district director, Joel Katz.