

# North Georgia News

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## Francis: 'the future has come'; Hooper: 'thanks to all'

By Colleen Collins  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

A packed house at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium witnessed the final salute to the Class of 2014 on Friday night.

Threatening clouds turned to rainbows as the seniors of Union County High School took their seats near the 50-yard-line.

Dressed in caps and gowns made of traditional school colors, the 125 seniors took their final bows as family, friends and educators looked on.

Approximately 91 percent of the Class of 2014 will attend college; more than \$435,976 in scholarship dollars was earned by these students for college education; 87 completed a CTAE pathway.

For two years in a row, the class held the highest Grade Point Average; Football, Track, Cross Country, Softball, Basketball, Baseball, Soccer, Mock Trial, Girl's



Alice Francis

Golf, and Skills USA Teams advanced to state tournaments, and Band and Chorus received superior ratings at various festivals.

The Class of 2014 won the U-lympics, a variety of academic and athletic events, two years in a row.

Eight seniors were recognized for joining a branch of the U.S. Military Service.

U.S. Navy: Amber Carlton, Sam Guffey and Austin Norton; U.S. Marine Corps: Scott Garrett, Josh Rakestraw,

and Caleb Ussery; U.S. Army/National Guard (after attending the University of North Georgia) Ryan Rogers. Sam Whitmer will join the United States Air Force after attending Valdosta State. An appreciative crowd applauded after each name was read.

Four seniors signed to play sports at the collegiate level, Lane Everett, (baseball), Georgia Highland College; Erin Innis, (soccer), Agnes Scott University; Luther Jones, (football), Kennesaw State University; and Lauren Zollinger, (basketball), Piedmont College.

UCHS Principal John Hill then introduced the Salutatorian for the Class of 2014, Alice Francis, who plans to attend Georgia Tech in the fall.

"I would like to recognize how much support has been congregated in this stadium tonight. On behalf of the Class of 2014, I want to thank you all for the investment you have contributed over the past 18 years.

"Over the years, some-



Reagan Hooper

thing has repeatedly brought me back to this concept, 'a ship is always safest in the harbor, but that is not what ships are built for.'

"We no longer belong in a tranquil harbor, waiting for our time to shine. Now it's time to explore the new world that awaits us - whether it's part of the workforce, vocational, military service, or another few years in school.

"Now, that future has come - and with more force than any of us could have

imagined. Now, it's up to us to make the most of what waits ahead."

Valedictorian, Reagan Hooper then approached the podium. The daughter of Gwen and Tim Hooper, Reagan Hooper plans to attend Southern Polytechnic State University in the fall.

"I would like to let everyone know I'm going to continue my legacy of being a total nerd and chronic our lives through the halls of UCHS with the cell cycle as my illustration. But first, there is much thanking to be done.

"Thank you to all the teachers and staff who tried to teach us even on the days we didn't want to learn. Thank you to my church for giving me encouragement and for guiding me in realizing from whom my help comes.

"Thank you to my family for always standing behind me; without my mom I don't know how I would have made it to this moment."

Much to the amusement of her class and the crowd,

Reagan Hooper then proceeded to compare four years of high school to the cell cycle.

"We've shown that great things can be accomplished even without large numbers.

"We've shown that we can persevere through the loss of a beloved teacher.

"After you're done celebrating the achievement of transforming from the mindless freshman to the primed senior, find something new and meaningful you want to achieve.

"Remember, contentment is the enemy of productivity."

After the diplomas were handed out, one-by-one, Principal Hill gave a special thanks of his own.

"My first year as High School Principal has been the most challenging and rewarding year in my life," he said. "Together we have faced many challenges and together we overcame these obstacles.

See Grads, 6A

## Wood: 'teachers are an anchor in my life'

By Colleen Collins  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Suches - Four words describe The Woody Gap School Class of 2014 - affectionate, caring, skilled, and sensible.

These students take care of each other, said Shelia Tritt Collins, co-principal at The Woody Gap School.

"I would often observe them asking each other about homework, projects, or inquiring about a sick relative," Collins said. "A better description of these graduates is 'family' rather than classmates. One important difference in our graduation ceremony was that no one stated, 'This is the last time we will be together.' Woody Gap students know they will continue to be together and be an integral part

See The Gap, 6A



Logan Wood delivers the Valedictorian Speech in Suches. Photo/Joe Collins

## It didn't train on this parade

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Memorial Day is a somber and poignant occasion.

Iraq War Veteran Chuck Honaker told a crowd at Union County Veterans Park that everyone gathered at the memorial was there to honor those who have given their lives so that we may live in a free country.

"It is a day that we put on hold, our own schedules and hectic lifestyles, to pause and remember their sacrifice for each of us," Honaker said. "Many of us here today personally knew someone who has made such a sacrifice. Our lives will never be the same because of that sacrifice.

"While Memorial Day is only one day, we can con-

See Memorial, 2A



Vietnam Veteran Evan Legg is the 2014 Parade Grand Marshal. Legg served in the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division. He earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for Valor. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## MECHS graduates 44 Thursday

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Forty-four students from Union and Fannin counties will walk the aisle and graduate from Mountain Education Charter High School on Thursday at 5 p.m. at the Fannin County Performing Arts Center.

More than 300 will graduate from the 11 counties that make up the school, and that is a normal sized class according to Union County Site Administrator Roy Perren.

"These kids are here for different reasons," Perren said. "Some are here because this is where they want to go to school. Some are here be-



Roy Perren

cause they have struggled in school or dropped out and this is like a second chance. We're really doing a lot of great things for kids at Moun-

tain Ed."

During Thursday's graduation exercises, Raymond Lee Mitchely III will give the Mountain Education's reflection and Holly Davis will present the Union County Senior High Honor Address.

Fannin County Site Administrator Lori Chastain will give the Recognition of the 2014 Class.

Dana Lance will present the President's Award for Educational Excellence and the President's Award for Educational Achievement.

Scholarships will be presented by the Union County Rotary Club, the Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge, MEC Faculty Scholarship, Blairs-

See MECHS, 2A

## Strawberry Fest leaves a sweet taste behind

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On Saturday morning, the Union County Farmers Market played host to the Third Annual Strawberry Jubilee and according to some vendors, this event has the potential to be one of Blairsville's most popular.

Local produce farmers and Western North Carolina's farmers teamed up for an abundance of berries at this year's festival.

And with the Farmers Market set to open, the Strawberry Jubilee is a fine way to kick-start the market's summer season.

And it wasn't just berries featured at the festival, more than 85 vendors, including local craftsmen, and artists were on hand as well.

"This event just keeps getting better every year,

See Strawberries, 2A



Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Relay For Life on Saturday

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Saturday marks the 20th time Union County has come together to beat back the killer that has claimed so many of its loved ones.

Relay For Life at Union County Farmers Market is an event to behold as countless families come together with one common cause - find a cure for cancer.

The event is scheduled from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. on Saturday, May 31.

The event with a carnival atmosphere, features lives entertainment, lots of

See Relay, 3A



## Arts and Crafts on the Square Saturday and Sunday

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

This weekend marks the return of Downtown Blairsville's Spring Arts and Crafts Festival on and around the Historic Courthouse Square.

The event will feature skilled artists and craftsmen from around the Tri-State region and with the construction on the square concluding, the festival is on the move from the Historic Mock House to downtown.

If for some strange

reason you are unable to find something that suits your tastes in the arts and crafts department, talented local musicians will be offering up a taste of Appalachia for the ears of tourists and locals alike.

You can relax and listen to the fiddles, banjos and guitars while trying the assortment of foods and snacks that is sure to please anyone who pays downtown a visit this weekend.

There is sure to be plenty of free samples for anyone who's looking for a taste test

before diving into the local cuisine.

Many of the artists on hand will be happy to personalize or craft an item for you.

The two-day festival will take place this Saturday or Sunday, rain or shine from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Two days of art exhibits, crafts, jewelry, herbal health, hats, clothing, good food, have highlighted the annual event, which that is beginning to become quite a hit, and word of our local secret is

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