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with those issues.” Multiple sitting superintendents – among them White County Superintendent Jeff Wilson, Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Fannin County Superintendent Mark Henson and others – all shared similar stories at the reception that Tuesday, imparting impressions of reliability and steadfast leadership found in Mr. Steppe.

His Associate Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams and the board office staff presented Steppe with a special gift just before the reception, which demonstrated the magnitude of the retiring superintendent’s impact on students throughout his career.

Writ large in calligraphy atop a regional map turned decorative scroll, the words “One Steppe can make a difference” led into the journey of Gary Steppe’s career in education.

With the illustrative assistance of Molly Marsh, who teaches art at Union County High School, determined footprints make their way across the map.

The footprints start out from Western Carolina University in 1966 through graduation in 1970, before marching onward to Graham County Schools in North Carolina, where in 19 years Steppe taught U.S. History, helped win nearly a dozen state championships while coaching football, and served as high school principal his last six years there.

Continuing on, Steppe’s footprints wind their way over to North Carolina’s Cherokee County Schools in 1989, where Steppe would work his way up to being superintendent. In 2002, Steppe became superintendent of Stephens County Schools in Georgia, running the system there and making positive educational decisions until 2009.

Steppe went to work for the Georgia Department of Education in Atlanta in 2009, filling several roles including state CTAE director. And though he nearly retired two years later, the superintendent position came open in Union County, and Steppe knew he had to apply.

In 2011, Steppe became Union County’s first non-local

superintendent, and he brought with him many fresh ideas and positive philosophies.

Thanks to his leadership over the five years he has served Union County Schools, the children of Union County have a brand new fine arts center, expanded educational opportunities such as STEM classes, INCubatorEDU and the PAES Lab, a new agriculture facility in the works, and much more.

“The rule of thumb I’ve always gone by is make all your decisions based on what’s best for the kids,” said Steppe. “I’ve always tried to do that. Sometimes I’ve fallen short and probably didn’t do as well as I could, but that’s kind of driven my decision-making process.”

“When you come down and you have to make an educational decision, is it going to be best for the kids to do this or do that? And that’s what you need to come down to. That’s what I tell school board members, I tell administrators, I tell teachers, because that’s why we’re here.”

In 46 years as an educator, Steppe has served four school systems and more than 30,000 schoolchildren. He has also built many friendships with educators from around the region, and solidified friendships that have had a lasting impact on Union County.

“Gary is a masterful education leader,” said Sandy

Addis, former head of Pioneer RESA and current director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University. “He knows how to assemble the right people, surround himself with people who know what they’re doing, empower them and motivate them. He’s a solid, consistent leader.”

Associate Superintendent Williams worked with the Pioneer RESA before coming aboard to work for Steppe four years ago, and he said Steppe has been more than a mentor to him – he has also been a friend.

“You have to have that balance of relationships and caring for people, but also being able to expect more out of people, and that’s what I think Mr. Steppe brings,” said Dr. Williams. “He brings the expectations that people can rise to the occasion whatever that occasion is, but also, it’s done in a caring way.”

Looking back over the past five years, Steppe said that he was thankful to the community for their support on the many SPLOST initiatives that have made a difference in students’ lives.

Steppe’s last day as Union County Schools superintendent will be the end of this month, on June 30. Dr. Fred Rayfield, the outgoing superintendent of Decatur County Schools, will assume the role of superintendent here in Union County on July 1.



Former Cincinnati Red and Atlanta Brave Manager Dave Bristol shares a moment with his good friend Gary Steppe. Steppe has brought Bristol in to help with the Panthers baseball team in the past

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mission, to make Reece known.”

Aside from society board members and volunteers within the society, many locals came out to share their enthusiasm about Reece and the rich literary culture he left behind, some holding long withstanding society memberships and some joining for the first time.

“I’ve always been interested in the history of an area,” said Blairsville resident and society member Al Nethery. “We moved here about nine years ago. We wanted to learn about the history of the area, so we decided to join this society as well as the Union County Historical Society.”

“It’s a unique situation where there’s an author of considerable note – yes, he died young, but he was a very talented man. Georgia should be very proud of having him as part of their heritage.”

Former Chairman John Kay and his wife, board member Patti Kay, have been involved in the society since its inception, and both hold high regards for Reece’s work and history, and how important the society is in understanding all aspects of Byron Herbert Reece’s life as well as his influence on Appalachia.

“It’s wonderful to preserve the legacy of this man who’s not only a writer and well-acclaimed poet, but he’s been instrumental to Appalachia studies,” said Patti Kay. “People are certainly excited to learn that not only was this man a farmer, and had to do that to survive, but that he was brilliant.”

After Chairman Jones began the meeting with a warm welcome, Sweet Sunny South, a local musical storytelling trio, continued the program with a beautiful rendition of Reece’s poem, “Lest the Lonesome Bird.”

The poem, sang as a ballad, was set to a moving panorama show, or “Crankie,” a traditional art form used before the days of TV and movie theaters.

Keynote Speaker Dr. Jim Clark, who is the Elizabeth H. Jordan Professor of Southern Literature, and Dean of the School of Humanities at Barton College in Wilson, North Carolina, shared his thoughts on Reece, writing, southern farm life and the grueling struggles of finding a balance within it all, and

why these things resonate with so many people, himself specifically.

Chairman Jones shared upcoming events and plans for the coming year with society members, announcing Reece’s Birth Centennial, which is to take place September of 2017.

The society hopes to find a unique way to commemorate the writer’s birth, with having coins struck or a statue erected on the farm as some of the many possibilities.

A trail from Vogel State Park to the Reece Farm is in the beginning stages, which the society hopes to have the project completed in full by the Centennial in 2017.

Thanks to the generosity of the Union County Recreation Department taking over day-to-day management and general upkeep of the farm, admission at the Reece Farm is now free. Weddings, meetings and any other events that need to be booked at the farm still come at a cost, but everyday visitations are open and free to the public.

Maters and Music, an event sponsored by the Byron

Herbert Reece Society, is set for August at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Heritage Center. Everyone is welcome and all members look forward to good food, great music and wonderful fellowship.

Members of the Board of Directors for the 2016-2017 fiscal year were nominated and voted on at the meeting.

The new members are as follows: Kenneth Akins, Truman Barrett, Ken Boyd, Barbara Bone, Bob Bone, David Cleghorn, Reid Dyer, Sanford Freeman, Bill Jernigan, Toni Jernigan, Keith Jones, Patti Kay, Carol Knight, Patrick Malone, Debra March, James Mitchell, Janice Moore, Lamar Paris, Steven Reece, Ron Roach, Rosemary Royston, Teresa Sampson, Cheryl Smith, Jerry Taylor, Burt Weerts, Terry White, Brooke Whitt and Haley Dyer.

After the meeting, members enjoyed lunch and a time of fellowship before attending the dedication ceremony of a new memorial slab at Reece’s gravesite at Old Union Baptist Cemetery in Young Harris.



Byron Herbert Reece Society members listen to keynote speaker Dr. Jim Clark perform a Reece poem in the form of a musical ballad



Attendees of the Byron Herbert Reece Society Annual Meeting were treated to a traditional form of entertainment called a “Crankie.”

## Union County School System New Student Registration for the 2016-2017 School Year

New and transferring students in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) may be registered for the upcoming school year at the Central Enrollment Office located at the Board of Education at 124 Hughes Street, Blairsville, GA 30512. Parents will need to contact the Central Enrollment Office at 706-835-4321 to schedule an enrollment appointment.

The summer Central Enrollment Office hours will be from 8 AM to 4 PM starting May 26th by appointment only. Please don’t wait until school starts to register. The first day of school is Friday, August 5th. Waiting until the end of July or beginning of August to call for a registration appointment may cause your child to delay their first day of school.

In order to expedite the registration process, please download the “Enrollment Packet” from the school system’s website at [www.ucschools.org](http://www.ucschools.org). A printed copy of the packet can also be picked up at the Board of Education office. The packet will need to be completed prior to the registration appointment and the required documents indicated below will need to be presented.

Documents you should bring when enrolling a student:

Age Verification - The school system requires evidence of the student’s date of birth and accepts as evidence a birth certificate or an alternate document from the prioritized list in the state enrollment rule.

Social Security Number - The school system complies with the provisions of O.C.G.A. §20-2-150, which requires a person enrolling a student to provide a copy of the student’s social security number or to sign a form stating that the person does not wish to provide the social security number.

Immunization Certificate - The school system requires proof of immunization as required by O.C.G.A. §20-2-771, which includes an exemption for religious grounds and provisions for a temporary waiver.

A Georgia Department of Human Resources Form 3231 marked “Complete for School” shall be considered proof of immunization.

Out of State Immunization Records will need to be transferred to a Form 3231 by the Union County Health Department prior to registration.

The Union County Health Department is located at 175 Chase Drive, Blairsville, GA, 706-745-6292.

Notarized Affidavit of Residency - Located in the Enrollment Packet available at [www.ucschools.org](http://www.ucschools.org). The form can be notarized during the registration, if the parent/guardian has not signed the form.

Withdrawal Form/Report Card from most recent former school.

Documentation for Homeless Students - Homeless students, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, shall be enrolled immediately with full participation in school activities, regardless of whether all of the above can be provided at the time of enrollment. The designated employee responsible for care of homeless students shall assist the person enrolling the homeless student or the unaccompanied youth in acquiring the necessary

## 1976 High School Class Reunion

When: August 13, 2016 at 6 p.m. Where: Experiment Station Pavilion (no alcohol allowed on site). The deadline for finalization will be July 27. Please contact one of the following for further details: Rhonda Rice Mason: 706-994-2888 [mrback4now@gmail.com](mailto:mrback4now@gmail.com); Sherry Cunningham Owenby 706-745-4846 [sherryoarts@gmail.com](mailto:sherryoarts@gmail.com); Joy Collins Kitchens 706-781-5446 [gcjkitch@bellsouth.net](mailto:gcjkitch@bellsouth.net); Debbie Collins Gailey 706-892-6069 [debbie.gailey@gmail.com](mailto:debbie.gailey@gmail.com)

documents for enrollment in accordance with the requirements of the state enrollment rule and the McKinney-Vento Act.

Please feel free to contact the Enrollment Office if you have any questions regarding student registration. N(Jun8,23)CA