

# Back to School...from Page 1A

to meet.”

The overarching challenge this year, which will require teamwork from every quarter of Union County Schools, will be to get 100 percent of the student population reading, writing and communicating on the level at which they need to be.

“In order to do that, we’ve asked teachers to get extra support for those kids, get them the kind of things they need,” said Stepp. “If it’s one-on-one support, we’ll try to help them with one-on-one support – whatever it takes to help us, because kids are all different.”

“I learned a long time ago that kids can all learn, but they don’t all learn at the same rate. It takes some kids longer and with more support than it does others. Our job is to add the support and get them what they need to be successful.”

This is a goal with which administrators in all of the Union County Schools feel right at home.

“We’re going to have scaffold reading from K-8,” said Woody Gap Principal Sheila Collins. “What that entails is, if you’re a student on one level and you’re progressing, since the school is so small, I can go to someone else’s room, so they can proceed all through nine levels of reading quickly.”

New to Woody Gap School this year are Co-Principal Carol Knight, who will be a math teacher at the school, and science teacher and basketball/tennis coach Robby Hill, who is working with Principal Collins on developing STEM

classes.

Also joining the teaching roster is Lisa Sweet for high school English, and she will be starting journalism and college awareness classes. Both Knight and Sweet are alumnae of Woody Gap.

Union County Primary School will be starting a literacy initiative this year called Striving Reader, according to Principal Millie Owenby.

“We have a new literacy program that we have put into place where students will be getting three 45-minute times of intensive reading instruction,” said Principal Owenby. “We want our students to leave our building reading fluently, so that would be leaving second grade and going up to elementary school with that skill.”

The primary school has been undergoing a few construction projects this summer, including a 10-classroom addition that should be completed by Jan. 1, 2016, and has also added two new pre-K classrooms to the building.

“We are also participating in the Striving Reader program, with the three 45-minute reading blocks,” said Union County Elementary School Principal Trish Cook. “Also new for the primary and elementary schools this year is we have an assistant principal (Debra Collins) who will focus on curriculum and instruction, pre-K through fifth grade, to try to maintain some continuity and keep us all on the same page, so to speak, so that our instruction flows.”

Due to Collins’ new duties this upcoming year, which

will include directing the Striving Reader program, a new assistant principal is coming on board at the elementary school – Lisa Vaughn from Gwinnett County, who has experience with the gifted program.

Union County Middle School is also adding a new assistant principal, Shane Womack, and Principal Gwen Stafford said that the school will be continuing its accelerated program.

“We have added Spanish I for eighth-graders, and we’ll be also adding agriculture full time at the middle school, as well as theater,” said Principal Stafford, reporting that students are excited about Spanish. “We actually have 30 kids signed up for it already, so it’s a full class. They’ll take it all year and be able to receive high school credit for it.”

Physical science, ninth-grade literature, world history and algebra are other subjects for which students can earn high school credit while in middle school, allowing for a greater ability to take on jobs or dual enrollment later on in high school.

STEM is also on the docket for the middle school as well as the high school this year, as the school system makes the core areas – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – a greater emphasis for students.

And aside from new and revamped band, chorus and drama programs this year at the high school, thanks to the SPLOST-funded Union County Schools Fine Arts Center that will be open the same time students return this

week, Union County High is welcoming some new staff members, including part-time Assistant Principal Tiffany Winkler, who will also be part-time assistant special education director.

“Gerald Bavero will be student services administrator, grades six through 12, and that will really help a lot of our at-risk population, our students that need a little extra help,” said High School Principal John Hill. “He’s a student advocate, and that will help us move the needle with the kids that need the most support – we’re really excited about that.”

Things are already on the right track at the high school, as Principal Hill said that more than 140 students decided to take accelerated classes this summer in order to earn credits heading into ninth grade.

Pat Donaldson, administrator for the Towns-Union Alternative Education Program for grades six through 12, a collaborative effort between Towns and Union counties housed within Union County Schools, is ready for the new school year, which as usual will see students participating in team-building exercises and working with mentors from Young Harris College.

“We try to set the students up for success while they’re with us so that we can transition them back into the normal school classroom – that’s our goal,” said Donaldson.

Open House for all Union County Schools is Thursday, Aug. 6, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., with the very next

day bringing in students by the busloads.

For the past 38 years, Transportation Supervisor Stanley Garrett has had the monumental task of making sure all bus-riding schoolchildren get to school and home safely – a task he handles with care, consideration and much experience.

“The first morning is

pretty smooth,” said Garrett of the first day of school. “By the evening, we have a little bit of hustle and bustle, making sure everybody’s on the right bus and going in the right direction. Some of the new kids in kindergarten and Pre-K, they have no clue where they’re going home to, and so we’ve got people to help out with that.”

# Stevens...from Page 1A

to get permission from the people that owned the characters of *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* to use in the song.”

Stevens moved on to another song that he wrote and recorded soon after in 1961, a song that he called a small hit – something the audience surely disagreed with by its reaction to Stevens’ performance energy – *Jeremiah Peabody’s Polyunsaturated Quick-Dissolving Fast-Acting Pleasant-Tasting Green and Purple Pills*.

“I figure we went to 35 on the national chart,” said Stevens. “And boy, I was walking in tall cotton. But in 1962, I wrote and recorded the song that became my very first big hit record. It’s sort of politically incorrect these days – I don’t know why – but I want to sing it for you.”

*Ahab the Arab* brought back memories for many in



the audience, and Stevens spoke on tales of American tanks blasting the tune during Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s.

All told, the 76-year-old Stevens hit every note that Saturday, had every fan laughing with joke af-

ter joke, and kept the high-energy performance going straight through his best known songs of yesteryears and today – *Guitarzan*, *The Streak*, *Taylor Swift Is Stalkin’ Me*, *It’s Me Again Margaret*, many more and a creative encore, featuring the

Top 5 encores of all time.

After the show, the more than 2,000 in attendance emptied out with smiles on their faces and plenty to look back on fondly from the evening.

“We had a good time,” said Mike and Cathy Smith of Ellijay. “It was fun to hear all the old things that we grew up on. We don’t have a favorite where he’s concerned, but he covered most of it.”

And Marie Fremin of Canton got to hear her favorite song – *The Mississippi Squirrel Revival* – certainly a crowd favorite, as most songs seemed, judging by how many people sang along to the words.

“You’ve been a wonderful audience,” said Stevens in closing out the show, expressing a sentiment that was surely reciprocated by his fans that night. “God bless you. Thank you.”

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