

Graduates...from Page 1A

go home to cry tonight by ourselves, not to damage our make-up or pride. I hope that you remember how unique and truly phenomenal each of you are as not only classmates but also as best friends, sons, daughters and siblings.

"Individually, you all have the potential to change the world and the sooner you are able to realize that, the better. Once in the world, have confidence in your faith, your intellect and your potential."

Joshua Goeltz, who took the highest academic honor as Valedictorian for the Class of 2017, congratulated his fellow classmates for their successes and for accomplishing such a milestone in their lives, thanking God, TCHS Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs, the faculty of TCHS, family and friends for helping them through the last four years leading toward graduation.

Goeltz, while pointing out that the future had something special in store for each one of them, urged his classmates to recognize that grief and loss are a part of life, to not hide from it or let it define the future, but to learn from it and move forward.

"As many of you know at this point, life is hard, very hard," said Goeltz. "In the past four years, we've lost one of our own classmates. We've lost a teacher. We have each suffered through our own private losses and dramas that maybe no one else understood or even knew about.

"And that's my point tonight, yes, our futures are bright. Good things are going to happen. Some of us will go on to do great things and all of us will go on to do the little things that make life worth living.

"It's going to seem like most of our suffering is pointless, like it's just suffering, but it's never just suffering. It's what determines the kind of person we become.

"So take heart, your suffering is not in vain. In the end, something great can come out of suffering."

Salutatorian and STAR Student Marshall Ledford delivered a light-hearted but moving speech addressed to his fellow classmates, sharing one of the truths he learned throughout his high school career.

"I am a millennial, so the obvious solution to all of my problems is Google," said Ledford. "So, I went online and frantically tried to find out what a Salutatorian is supposed to say. After scouring countless pages of Reddit, Yahoo! Answers and various random websites, I came to the conclusion that I'm supposed to bestow wisdom among the graduating class.

"Instantly I thought of a quote from a man known around the world for his wisdom - Dr. Phil. He said that the only difference between you and the people you envy is that you settled for less."

Ledford went on to explain that oftentimes fear is what stands in the way of a person achieving greatness, whether they realize it or not. In an effort to encourage the Class of 2017 to not let fear control future decisions, Ledford challenged his classmates to take risks, even if that meant failure.

"Rewards and risks are so fundamentally entangled that one is never present without the other," said Ledford. "So, Class of 2017, I encourage you to not succumb to fear, to always view life's obstacles as an opportunity for improvement, to constantly push yourself to not only improve your life, but the lives of those that surround you.

"Take whatever risks that may be necessary because the only thing that you should truly fear is regret. Right now, decide that you are worth the risk."

Ledford also gave a special thank you to his parents, family and friends and to the faculty and staff of TCHS for supporting and encouraging the graduates throughout the years, for always offering guidance and for taking the time to

celebrate with the graduates on their special day.

Willem DeVries, who achieved the honor of third highest GPA as Historian for the Class of 2017, strayed from the traditional Historian speech of reminiscing on old times and instead focused on the one thing that sets this graduating class apart from the rest - perseverance through change.

"Throughout all the change, here we are," said DeVries. "We made it through and that change was, in my opinion, for the better. We learned to adapt and got to meet so many new people.

"We come from so many different walks of life with different skill sets. We come from different places, some having lived here their whole lives and some moving here from places like Louisiana, Wisconsin or Florida.

"We have different interests and we have plans to go off and do many different things with our lives. While these differences do separate us out into groups, I believe that in the end they actually helped bring us together."

Before the graduates from the Class of 2017 walked across the stage one last time together as a group, ending their high school careers and taking a step toward the rest of their lives, Dr. Hobbs shared parting words with a class that she would never forget.

"Class of 2017, you have made your mark," said Dr. Hobbs. "Towns County High School will not be the same without you. I will not be the same without you.

"Not only did you make your mark on my classroom wall, you made your mark on my heart and all those around you.

"Class of 2017, continue to make your mark on this world in a positive way. You've made your mark on my wall, you've made your mark on the Indian rock, now go and make your mark on this world."

Hiwassee PD...from Page 1A

you can see what appears to be a Dodge truck backing up to the trailer," said Smith. "Someone cuts the lock off (the trailer), then they pull out of there.

"That one, we have security video from it, but you can't see the tag at all, you can't see the faces."

As far as the burgled county building, Smith said that the storage area on the backside of the Old Rock Jail had been broken into recently through a window, and someone had taken several weed eaters and a leaf blower.

"That one, it's a different Dodge truck, and it's a pretty recognizable truck, as it has rails on top of the bed and a chrome toolbox," said Smith. "That one, I don't think it's related to the other one necessarily. They're different trucks, they just both happen to be Dodges."

Several trailers have also gone missing abroad in the county, and the Hiwassee Police Department is in contact with the Towns County Sheriff's Office to pool information in hopes of finding the culprit or culprits.

So far, the Hiwassee PD Facebook post concerning these recent thefts has been shared more than 200 times. Unfortunately, those shares were yet to generate any leads as of press time Monday.

Hiwassee investigators first turned to social media after several leads in the cases dried up, and they're looking



Hiwassee Police are also looking for this truck, a Dodge with noticeable bed rails and chrome toolbox.

for any information that could potentially prevent further crime in the city.

Those involved in the recent thefts are looking at multiple felony charges, including for burglary and theft by taking.

"If someone breaks into a building to commit a theft, even if they don't actually get away with anything, it's a felony," said Smith.

HPD is searching for at least four suspects at this point, two involved in each crime.

"At the Downtown A to Z, one person got the locks off while the other person backed the truck up," said Smith. "The lawn equipment, on that one, if you look at the pictures, the

truck pulling a small trailer pulled up first.

"The one person broke in and loaded some stuff in the truck, and a few hours later, a small car pulled up, and that person went in and took another item and left. We don't know if they're the same person or if it was a total of three different people."

Any assistance the public can provide would be greatly appreciated, said Smith, adding that people can reach out with tips on Facebook with a message, or they can call (706) 896-2888, ext. 1, and leave a voicemail message if necessary.



A special music performance of "Never Alone," by TCHS seniors Amaira Barrett, Makenzie Carroll, Cadence Nichols, Tyler Grimsley, Andrew Rogers and Jessie Tittle. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Flight...from Page 1A

National Honor Flight began with two men's desires to honor as many WWII veterans by taking them to the National World War II memorial in D.C. after it was built in 2004.

After years of carrying deserving veterans and grateful volunteers from all across the country to see the great veteran and war memorials of this nation, more than 100,000 WWII veterans have been given the opportunity to visit D.C.

And now, Kimsey, Warth and Sonnenfeld are among the many who have been honored.

"Of course, they took us first to the World War II memorial," said Warth. "I had seen it before but it's always a moving experience to see it. It's a beautiful thing.

"While we were there, a retired brigadier general gave us all a victory medal."

From the WWII Memorial, the veterans were taken to see the Vietnam Wall, the Marine Corps War Memorial, the Women In Military Service for America Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and the changing

of the guard at Arlington Cemetery.

While Sonnenfeld was in awe of all the countless memorials they were shown during the trip, the sheer joy of being selected and honored by the flight held the greatest impact for her and is not something that she will soon forget.

"It was fantastic," said Sonnenfeld. "It was very emotional because you went to see every one of those memorials. Everything was done very well.

"Everything was so different but so beautifully done. I'm very thankful that I was able to go."

Although Sonnenfeld and Warth had visited D.C. before - they each lived there during their time of service - it was Kimsey's first time in the nation's capital.

Kimsey, an Iwo Jima veteran, said that while the memorials and monuments were moving, the thing that he will carry with him always is a moment he shared with a little girl in the airport.

Both to and from the flight to D.C., both the

Asheville airport and the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, were lined with dozens of men, women and children there to salute these veterans, give thanks for their service and wish them happiness for their trip.

"There were lines coming from the airport," said Kimsey. "I think I shook every hand in the county. But I noticed in one of the lines a cute little girl that was about 5 or 6 years old. She was talking to her momma.

"She looked at me down the line so I waved her over and she looked at her momma and her momma said yes, she could come see me. She came down and she handed me this, and I'll keep it for a long time.

"It's a card that reads, 'A veteran is someone who at one point in their life made a check payable to the United States of America for an amount of up to and including my life. Thank you for your service.'"

These veterans, though the wars they fought may have long since passed, will never be forgotten and the sacrifice they made will forever be cherished.

Todd Kimsey, Martha Warth and Shirley Sonnenfeld - thank you for your service.

Commissioner...from Page 1A

time of the year and for any substance.

"This drug policy is good for the county," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "We don't need county road workers or any department that's out there, not doing right, driving our vehicles.

"It's for their safety. It's for the safety of the county and it will help lower our worker's comp insurance as well, once we start enforcing it."

In other county news, Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Candace Lee made an appearance at last week's meeting to discuss the biggest event of the year, this summer's solar eclipse.

Before Lee gave her presentation, Commissioner Bradshaw shared various facts on this once in a lifetime event that will take place on Aug. 21.

According to Commissioner Bradshaw, this is the first eclipse to cover from the west coast to the east coast since 1918.

"The next eclipse like this will be in 2591," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "You can only see it, if you stay in Georgia, in Northeast Georgia. If you're staying in Atlanta, then you probably won't be



Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Candace Lee

able to see it. So, we're going to have a lot of people visiting here."

When the eclipse occurs in August, there will be a totality of darkness for two minutes and 30 seconds during the middle part of the day, at approximately 2:35 p.m.

Although Towns County is one of the only places in Georgia that will experience the total eclipse, several

surrounding areas will be subjected to a partial eclipse from the eclipse's 70-mile wide shadow.

To celebrate this truly unique experience, the Towns County Chamber of Commerce will be hosting an eclipse tailgate party that Monday at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for residents and visitors to gather and enjoy the event.

"Towns County Chamber of Commerce and Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge have put together a community event," said Lee. "We're going to have an eclipse tailgating party so you can come in with your family for \$5 a carload. You can set up a tent, have a picnic and have a party at your car while we all watch the eclipse together."

Due to Towns County being in an optimal path for the eclipse, Lee warned residents that traffic will more than likely be extremely dense and everyone should be prepared for several days of such impacts.

"People that aren't expecting this may stop dead in the road," said Lee. "Hopefully that won't happen but it can."

Lee will release more information on the eclipse tailgate party and eclipse preparations closer to August.

Gardens...from Page 1A

books as guests mingled under the newly renovated Paris Pavilion and reminisced over the accomplishments of the blooming season.

"Thank you all so much for coming to be with us tonight," said Grace Howard, President of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge Inc. "We want to welcome you with lots of love and attention and warmth. We're so pleased to see you be a part of this activity here.

"We've had an extraordinary year. It's not been without its pitfalls, but we have had a wonderful year."

In 1981, Hamilton Gardens was gifted to Towns County from Fred and Hazel Hamilton with the purpose of providing citizens with a public botanical garden. Throughout the years, the gardens upkeep had fallen to the wayside and weeds and shrubbery had overtaken the beautiful blooms.

However, in February 2016, a group of dedicated individuals joined together to form Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge, Inc. as a way to restore the gardens to its former glory.

Over the last year, volunteers working at Hamilton Gardens have gone the extra mile to revamp the gardens and make this year the best one in recent memory.

Since last year, the Hamilton Gardens volunteers have worked to repaint the on site Paris Pavilion, refurbish the bridge in the gardens, acquire a new storage barn, clean out the overgrowth throughout the 33 acres of gardens and so much more.

"A couple of different things have happened this year," said Howard. "Our mission is to restore, preserve



Grace Howard of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge Board of Directors. Photo/Lily Avery

and enhance. The restoration campaign got underway in the fall of last year with the restoration of the two bathrooms. We started with that.

"It continued on into the infrastructure of the property and the bridge. We have a new, safe bridge now. We've had fun. We're going to continue to have more fun.

"We're moving forward hopefully this next year with an irrigation system. Things are rocking on for us and we're excited for everything that's to come.

"We're going to have a beautiful place here, more so than it is now."

Since the Towns County Homeowners Association sponsored the event, President Noel Turner shared information on the association with guests, inviting all in attendance to join if they were not currently a member. According to Turner, the association has 200 members at this time.

Although the event was a cooperative effort of Hamilton Gardens volunteers and the Towns County Homeowners Association as way to end the gardens' blooming season, it also served as a dedication to a very special couple - the Millers.

"This event is in honor of Jack and Mary Miller," said Turner. "Jack is a founding member of the Towns County Homeowners Association. This event was Jack's idea. He was the former president of the homeowners association and we're just so thankful for him.

"The both of them have done so much for this community and we want to honor them."

Guests spent the rest of the evening talking and visiting with one another, enjoying good food and the peaceful view of the gardens, all set to the backdrop of the beautiful North Georgia Mountains.