

Towns County Herald

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U.S. Rep. Clyde delivers local Memorial Day message

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia's Ninth Congressional District spoke on the meaning of Memorial Day in a ceremony held at Towns County Veterans Memorial Park on Monday, May 31.

Fortunately, the timing of the event worked for Clyde's schedule, so he accepted the invitation made earlier this year by Mel Halfon, the Sr. Vice Commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett-Owenby Post No. 7807 in Hiawassee.

A freshman congressman arrived in Jan. 3, Clyde is also a Navy veteran who spent 28

years in the military before retiring and ultimately starting his own firearms business called Clyde Armory.

Having three combat deployments to Kuwait and Iraq under his belt and numerous medals reflecting his time in the Armed Forces, Clyde knows a thing or two about service, as well as what it means to make sacrifices for one's country.

During his remarks, Clyde spoke about the personal significance of the poem "In Flanders Fields," written during World War I by Canadian soldier John McCrae, and which he was made to memorize as an elementary school student.

Clyde, whose mother

is Canadian and father is a U.S. Navy veteran, grew up in Canada, where Memorial Day is known as Remembrance Day.

In observance of Remembrance Day, his family would always wear red poppies "to remind everyone of the sacrifices that were made for freedom."

"The symbol of the poppy for remembrance, however, did not come from Canada," Clyde explained. "It came from right here in Georgia, from a professor at the University of Georgia named Moira Michael."

A wartime volunteer, Michael drew inspiration from McCrae's poem memorializing the dead by adopting the

red poppy as a symbol of the commitment Americans to the noble task of taking up the "torch" of freedom from those who came before and paid its price.

That's why Clyde wore a red poppy, while delivering his remarks, and he recognized those in attendance who wore one also, as well as the more than 300 people who decided to attend the ceremony to honor America's protectors, past and present.

"Today is not about enjoying a three-day weekend, or just another opportunity to uncover the grill," Clyde said. See *Memorial Day*, Page 8A



The local VFW Post 7807 was honored to welcome U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde to speak at the annual Memorial Day ceremony Monday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Twenty walk the stage for graduation at MECHS



Union Site Administrator Casey Jones led graduates in the traditional "turning of the tassels" to close out the May 27 ceremony. Photo by Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE—Twenty graduates accepted diplomas from Mountain Education Charter High School during the Union County Site Graduation on Thursday, May 27.

The Union County Schools Fine Arts Center hosted the event that featured graduates from Union and Towns counties, closing out MECHS' 29th year with the return of a traditional ceremony.

Due to COVID-19, last spring's exercises were

limited to one student on stage at a time, with family briefly allowed to witness the graduate receiving their diploma before having to exit so the procedure could begin again for another graduate.

"This class has overcome See *MECHS Graduation*, Page 8A

Rodeo ropes in thousands despite rainy first night

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Second Annual Hiawassee Pro Rodeo rode into the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Friday, May 28, and Saturday, May 29, bringing with it around 6,000 spectators despite the rain delay Friday evening.

Sponsored by the Southern Pro Rodeo Company, the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo is an International Professional Rodeo Association and Southeastern Professional Rodeo Association sanctioned competition.

"I want to welcome everyone to beautiful Towns County and thank you so much for coming out and spending time with us," Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said in opening. "This is the second event, and I want to thank y'all also for making it such a success last



Barrel racing was just one of the many action-packed events available at the Pro Rodeo May 28-29 at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

year. "We are going to keep it growing. Look at tonight – it is completely full. We are adding more events for the children in the back and more food vendors. We are just going to keep growing it, because we are Americans and we love rodeos. See *Rodeo*, Page 8A

Vince Dooley makes guest appearance at Hamilton Gardens



It was an honor for the Hamilton Gardens to host a recent book signing by the renowned football coach and Master Gardener Vince Dooley. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

University of Georgia Football fans were in for a treat when legendary former Bulldogs Coach Vince Dooley paid a visit to Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge for a book signing event May 15.

Dooley coached the Bulldogs from 1964 through 1988, earning a 201-77-10 record, six Southeastern Conference titles, and a national championship in the 1980 season.

And while Dooley is best known for his contributions to college football, he also has a passion for horticulture and gardening, which led to the Hamilton Gardens inviting him for a tour.

Gardens Director Grace Howard was thrilled to see Dooley pay a visit and see the progress made there over the last 10 years.

"He is a Master Gardener, and his second career has been in horticulture," Howard said. "He has a keen interest in it, and he has a spectacular garden in Athens. He just decided to take a journey to learn more about plants and horticulture."

"He has written a book that I have and want him to sign, but they are not selling it today. He just has a passion for horticulture. We were going to do this last year, but COVID pushed it back. He is here because he is a supporter of the Gardens."

Having Dooley visit the Gardens provides wider publicity to the area and attracts local interest, too, which is something that Howard and the Hamilton Gardens Board have strived for since revitalizing the trails and scenery.

"He is a recognized name and a student of horticulture," Howard said. "To have him come in support of our venture

up here is important and great, so we are glad he is here."

For his part, Dooley enjoyed his time at the Gardens and complimented the team for its dedication to keeping the venue alive and open all these years.

"I think it is just magnificent," Dooley said. "It is a great job that these people have done in taking it. I was here 10 or 12 years ago, and I was a little concerned about it. They have done a magnificent job."

As for the book signing, the line of people continued from the moment the event opened to the moment it closed, making for a successful evening and one of the first events Dooley has done since the onset of the pandemic.

"It was beyond my greatest expectations," Dooley said. "During COVID, I didn't do a lot of signing, and this See *Dooley*, Page 7A

County, cities set to receive American Rescue COVID funds

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On March 11, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, committing \$1.9 trillion in federal spending to aid in U.S. economic recovery amid COVID-19.

Alongside one-time direct payments to more than 100 million citizens, expanded federal unemployment benefits for many workers, and more, the American Rescue Plan also featured \$65 billion in direct funding to county and city governments across the nation.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held a called meeting on Thursday, May 27, to open a money market account with South State Bank to receive the first installment of the county's portion of American Recovery funds.

The county received a



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw has opened a bank account to receive American Rescue funds, which will go toward helping the county with COVID-19 recovery efforts. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

first installment of \$1,169,023 deposited directly into the General Fund about the third week of May. However, Bradshaw's office was advised by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia that he should create a separate account for the money. Opening a money market account to house the deposit See *Rescue Funds*, Page 3A

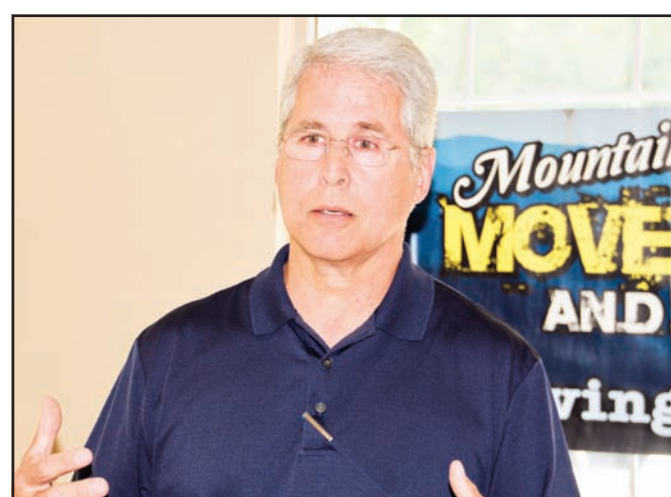
Rep. Gunter talks freshman year with Movers and Shakers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter joined the Mountain Movers and Shakers May 28 for their second meeting back after more than a year away for COVID-19. In the breakfast meeting, he spoke on his time as a freshman legislator.

Gunter is a Blairsville resident who retired as Superior Court Chief Judge of the Enotah Judicial Circuit in September 2019. He decided last year to run for the District 8 seat to continue his public service, swearing in earlier this year after winning election in November 2020.

Of course, Gunter is no stranger to the State Capitol, having gotten his first job as an attorney working for Gov. Joe Frank Harris from 1987-1991, and later visiting annually,



Stan Gunter
State Representative

responsibilities in the Georgia General Assembly, which ran from Jan. 11 to April 2.

"As a freshman, you come in there, and the first time adjusting to his new See *Gunter*, Page 3A

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Rescue Funds...from Page 1A

allows for separation of the earmarked funds and enables the county to earn a small amount of interest on the money as Bradshaw's office awaits additional guidance for how the funds are to be spent.

According to ACCG, the primary purposes of the funds are to "make counties whole for COVID-related expenses incurred after March 3, 2021," and to "provide support to the community in areas impacted by COVID-19."

All monies received must be strictly accounted for, so Bradshaw is awaiting additional guidance from ACCG in consultation with the county attorney before moving forward with utilizing the funds.

"We're going to wait until we're 100% sure on how we can spend the money," Bradshaw said, noting he should have a plan ready for public presentation soon. "Overall, it should save money in the General Fund, but how much, I don't know. It just depends on how we can spend it."

Added Bradshaw, "As soon as a plan is in place, we'll

explain what we can and can't do and how we're doing it in an upcoming county meeting."

While specifics are outstanding, counties will have flexibility in spending the money, ACCG said, "so long as they can demonstrate that these activities support the public health response or that recipients of the recovery funds have experienced economic harm from the pandemic."

Broadly speaking, there are five areas governing the funds: support of public health responses; to address negative economic impacts; replacement of public sector revenue loss; provision of premium pay for essential workers; and investment in water, sewer and broadband, per ACCG.

A second and final installment of \$1,169,023 is expected to be deposited "one year later" to bring total funding to \$2,338,046. The county will have through Dec. 24, 2024, to allocate the funds, which must be used by Dec. 31, 2026, according to ACCG.

"We're not going to touch the money until we have 100%

clear clarification how it is to be spent," Bradshaw said. "This is taxpayer money, it's not our money, and we are very frugal with the money and very careful with it."

The cities of Hiawassee and Young Harris are also set to receive American Rescue Plan funds. Hiawassee will be receiving \$280,000 over two years, and the total for Young Harris was not available by press time, though estimates put the figure at \$523,000.

Hiawassee has already set up a bank account and is ready to receive funds, with city officials there also awaiting spending details before committing the money. The City of Young Harris will be discussing its options in the June 1 council meeting that occurred after press time.

Also in Bradshaw's May 27 called meeting, he signed a letter of engagement with Alexander, Almand & Bangs Certified Public Accountants to conduct the 2020 Fiscal Audit. The contract is for \$47,000. The CPA firm has conducted audits for the county in past years.

Ochoa named to Berry Dean's List

Ellexia Ochoa of Hiawassee GA, was named to the Spring 2021 Dean's List at Berry College.

The Dean's List honors students who posted an academic average of 3.5 or better on a 4.0 scale while carrying a class load of at least 12 hours during the semester.

Gunter ...from Page 1A

week in a two-year cycle is mostly ceremonial," Gunter said. "You get sworn in and that kind of stuff. But as a freshman, you don't have an office to go to, you don't have an administrative assistant.

"You don't have any committee assignments or place to go, so you kind of wander around a little bit lost (for the first couple weeks)."

Despite the freshman delay, Gunter hit the ground running. He has an office and administrative assistant to help address constituents, three committee assignments, put through five bills, including a law outlining virtual meetings for corporations and nonprofits, and he became a vote-counting whip.

His committee assignments include Economic Development and Tourism, Vice Chairman of Judiciary, and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Safety. Only two other representatives have ever had the privilege of joining Appropriations as freshmen.

It's also unusual for many representatives to help pass five sponsored pieces of legislation in a session, and almost unheard of for a freshman to accomplish the same, so it's clear that Gunter is making friends down in Atlanta.

The freshman legislator

touched on Senate Bill 202, aka the Election Integrity Act of 2021, of which he said there were several active lawsuits trying to stop the bill.

"I think it's a strategy of the Democrats to keep it bottled up," Gunter said. "I haven't seen a motion to keep it from coming into effect, but I think that's coming, I think there will be a motion made to do that, and their strategy is to keep the law the same as it is for the next election."

Going into more detail, Gunter said a lot of the negative things people were hearing about SB 202 was nonsense, adding that he thought it was "a really good bill."

"The biggest problem we had in our elections was the absentee ballots," Gunter said. "The provisions that we have in Senate Bill 202 handle a lot of that (including drop boxes) ... drop boxes were never in our elections until COVID came around. That was a new thing."

"So, we needed this election cycle to see how that worked, and it didn't work all that well sometimes when you had a box just sitting out somewhere, where anybody could come up and they could dump whatever into it."

"We've got more built-in controls now over those boxes so we can watch what goes in,

clean it out every night, and that kind of stuff ... it's a good bill - I don't think the courts are going to have a problem with it."

"The provisions that we have in there allow for voters to come in and vote on days like Saturday. And if a local jurisdiction chooses to vote on Sundays, they can do that."

Of the 300-400 emails he receives every day, Gunter said most constituents writing in seem to be concerned about auditing the Georgia election, calling an Article V Convention, and the occasional request for help with a state service or other matter.

Gunter detailed an upcoming Legislative Special Session to occur around the first of November dealing with returned census data and undertaking the redistricting process.

In addition to speaking generally, Gunter fielded several questions Friday morning and thanked those who attended the meeting.

Join the Mountain Movers and Shakers for the regular meetings every Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee. This Friday's special guests are none other than Frank Riley and Michael Courey of Firewise.

Riley and Courey to speak to Movers and Shakers

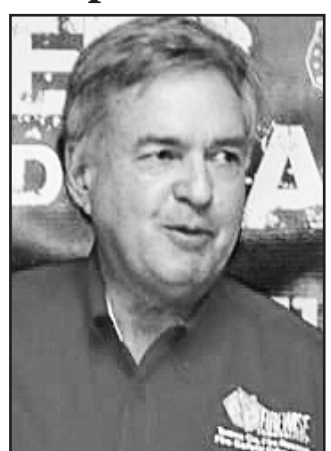


NEWS FLASH: We live in a Forest. We are surrounded by trees. And we don't want those trees to burn. So, we all better get FIREWISE.

And so we welcome longtime friend Mr. Frank Riley, Exec Director of the CCRCD, which Frank may explain to us, and Mr. Michael Courey, Towns County Firewise Coalition Director. Do you live in a Firewise Community? If not, get to the Sundance early this Friday, June 4, to get a good seat, because these men may literally save your life, your property, your family.

Get Wise, Get Firewise!

Everyone is invited to join the Mountain Movers & Shakers, a grass-roots, non-partisan civic organization,

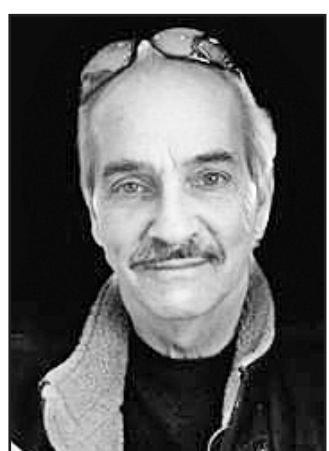


Frank Riley

dedicated to serving the North Georgia/Western Carolina Mountain Region.

In respect for our MMS family, you are encouraged to wear a face mask. Each person should consider if you are comfortable with the close seating arrangement.

Come join us for in-



Michael Courey

formation, conversation, and breakfast every Friday at 8 a.m. at the Sundance Grill, as we welcome civic leaders, elected officials, safety and forest officials all coming to share information of vital importance to all.

Like us on Facebook: Mountain Movers & Shakers.

Enotah Garden Club installs officers for 2021-2022

The Enotah Garden Club held its end-of-year luncheon on May 20 at Brothers Restaurant, where officers for the 2021-2022 year were installed. New officers are: Helen Adams Harvey, President; Sandra Collins, Vice-President; and Dot Lashley, Treasurer. In spite of many limitations due to COVID, the club was able to accomplish numerous projects, even though some traditional events had to be cancelled.

Some of the group's projects this past year have included: planting and maintaining a beautiful garden at the Young Harris Post Office; maintenance and clean-up of the property surrounding the Young Harris Mayor's office; new plantings at Cupid Falls; and participation in the Mile-Long Yard Sale at the GA Mountain Fairgrounds.

In addition, the members were busy filling TWO large garden carts with garden tools, outdoor decor, and miscellaneous yard equipment. Raffle tickets have been sold the past several months to friends and the public, including many who purchased chances at Hamilton Gardens and the Mile-Long Yard Sale. Drawing for the carts was held at the



Officers for the 2021-2022 Enotah Garden Club were recently installed. (L-R): Sandra Collins, Vice-President; Dot Lashley, Treasurer; Helen Adams Harvey, President

luncheon on May 20, and the two lucky winners are Karin Butler and Joy Lockman!

Proceeds from this raffle, as well as other yearly endeavors, allow the club to donate to beautification projects in the area and support of environmental groups, such as Hiawassee Rivershed Coalition, Hamilton Gardens, State Botanical Garden in Athens, State Scholarship Fund, Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center, and the Old Union Cemetery Foundation. In past years (before the

COVID restrictions) the club sponsored the Christmas Tree Lighting Celebration at Young Harris Mayor's Park including a visit from Santa.

Membership in the Enotah Garden Club is open to anyone in the area; and you do not have to be a plant expert nor garden scholar. For more information, please submit your name and contact information to: Enotah Garden Club, P.O. Box 422, Young Harris, GA, 30582. Someone will contact you to answer any questions and with meeting times and dates.

Dooley...from Page 1A

is really my first time out. I don't think I have ever had a signing where it was so good, the weather was so great, and the scenery was like nothing I have ever seen before."

Attendees of the signing, such as Jack Biz, were excited to see a known figure come to the area.

"I have been a fan of football since I was a little kid," Biz said. "My parents and I would watch it every weekend it was on, and we were huge Bulldog fans. Mr. Dooley was a bit before my time, but I have heard plenty about the great things he did while coaching. "Having him come here

and have a book signing like this is something that I never thought I would see in my lifetime. When you think of Hiawassee, you don't really expect famous people to come around and do things like this. It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing for me, and I won't forget it."

Hiawassee Park celebrates expansion with ribbon cutting



Sheriff Ken Henderson, David Rogers (Probate Judge), Cliff Bradshaw (Town's County Commissioner), Shannon Watson (President BRCGA), Sharalene Roper (Vice President BRCGA), Liz Ordiales (Mayor of Hiawassee), Paul Smith (City of Hiawassee Police Chief), Tamela Cooper (Town's County Coroner)

Baptist Retirement Communities of Georgia celebrates the completion of Phase III cottages and Grand Opening of Community Clubhouse at the 2021 Ribbon Cutting at Hiawassee Park Senior Living. For over 50 years, BRCGA has been committed to the mission of enriching the lives of senior adults by empowering each individual to flourish while aging in place within a Christian environment.

Over a span of two years, BRCGA has worked tirelessly at building 48 additional cottages that take advantage of the breathtaking views of Lake Chatuge. Hiawassee Park Senior Living caters to the active senior adult that desires the freedom from the responsibilities of home ownership while being surrounded by neighbors who seek to find new adventures, a sense of community, and a dynamic program filled with a myriad of events and services. Additionally, the large event space creates opportunities for tenants to engage, enjoy the majestic views, celebrate, and appreciate time together. There are future plans to add a chapel, activities room, and

guest apartment on the terrace level of the clubhouse.

Shannon Watson, President/CEO of Baptist Retirement Communities of Georgia shared with ceremony attendees that, "Today is significant for so many reasons. We have built these incredible facilities that honor God and will inspire those who we serve and those to come in the future. God has truly blessed us to see this project come to fruition. The buildings are beautiful, but it is not just the buildings but a place to call home."

Attendees present to help BRCGA celebrate this milestone were local officials, BRCGA Board of Trustees, building partners, and staff. Several key-note speakers were present to mark the special event, as well as a current tenant who shared a heartwarming tribute to Hiawassee Park depicting his experience during his move and the impact the community has made in his own life. Alicia Rogers, Hiawassee Park Senior Living Executive Director stated, "What an exciting time it is for our Hiawassee Park Family. We are thrilled to announce that our phase three cottages

are move in ready and our beautiful new clubhouse is complete! We have prayed, planned, worked, and waited. It is incredible that the day is finally here!"

News about this incredible community is beginning to spread fast. Out of the 48 newly built cottages, 15 units are now rented. Daily tours and interest continue to build as the project has finally come to completion.

Sharalene Roper, Vice President, shared, "Today, marks a momentous occasion that celebrates the culmination of God-inspired vision, servant leadership, and commitment in the creation of this beautiful community. This celebration represents the transition of vision into reality. Baptist Retirement Communities of Georgia strives to represent a new beginning, an extended family, and a hope in Christ that will be shared with all that choose to make Hiawassee Park home today and for generations to come."

For more information about Hiawassee Park Senior Living, please contact (762) 500-2021 or visit www.brcga.org/hiawassee-park. TJun2,F3JSH

Enter the Spot On! contest at Celebration of Pets

The beloved Dalmatian made famous by the Disney movie "101 Dalmatians" is a unique breed of dogs. Born pure white the Dalmatian soon develop their spots all over their bodies. Those eye-catching spots make the Dalmatian unique. Bred to guard horses and coaches this breed remains loyal to their masters and are a powerful guard dog. With their beloved owners they are loyal and protective, aloof to strangers. The origin of the Dalmatian is believed to have taken place in Croatia of Dalmatia where they crossed a spotted pointer with a Great Dane. The breeders found that this unique dog had a calming effect on horses; therefore, they became carriage dogs and trotted along side of their masters and horses. Some Dalmatians became firehouse dogs and would run along the horse drawn fire trucks to the fires.

The Dalmatian is a great dog to have if you like to go hiking or running. They are a powerful, active athlete, with strong hindquarters. They have great stamina and are built to go the distance. The Dalmatian is gentle in the house with the family that they love.

Spotted in the picture is "Charlie" an 11-year-old Dalmatian rescued by Vickie Bowers an Elder Law Attorney from Jacksonville, FL. Charlie was in Tampa Dalmatian Rescue when Vicki found him. Charlie had been in two different homes by the time he was 14 months old, he had kidney and bladder stones.



Charlie and his owner, Vickie Bowers, challenge you to guess how many spots are on Charlie at the Celebration of Pets, Hayesville Square on September 18th.

They were painful for Charlie and after surgeries to remove them and a proper diet, Charlie became a delightful member of her family.

Vicki Bowers has pur-

chased a home here in Clay County and happily for us, Vicki and Charlie are going to help the "Celebration of Pets Foundation" by having a contest to help raise monies for our local rescues. The contest will be called "Spot On." This summer you will have an opportunity to enter your guess on how many spots are on Charlie.

The contest finale will be on September 18th at the Celebration of Pets on the Hayesville Square. You may get a glimpse of Charlie at the concert by "Gnarly Fingers" August 27th. This concert will be dedicated to our dog and cat rescues and it will be "dog friendly."

Gurley graduates LaGrange College

Jordyn Gurley of Young Harris, GA, graduated from LaGrange College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Exercise Science.

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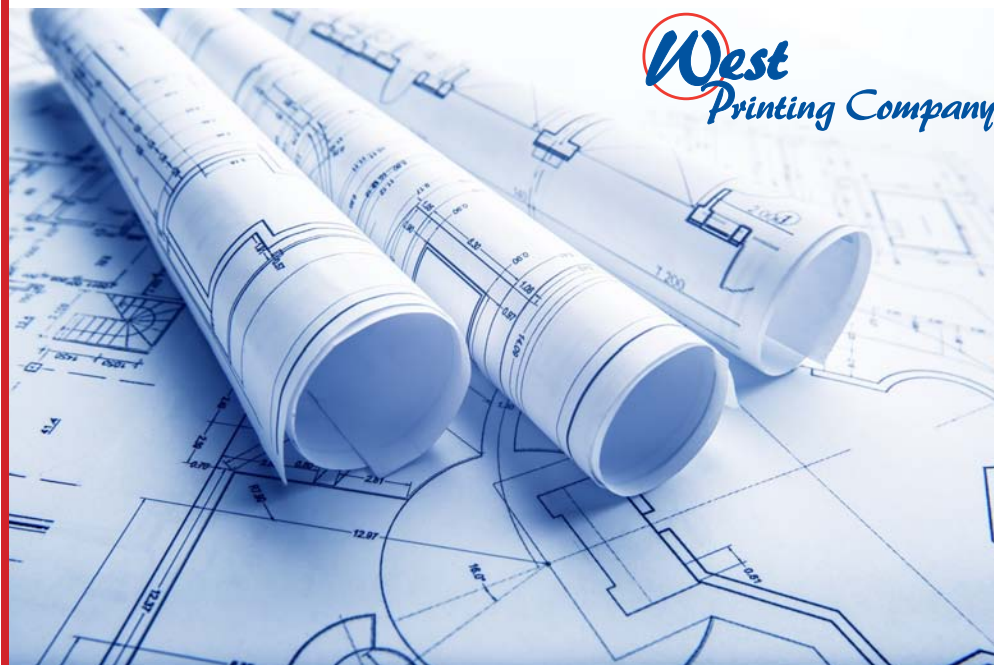
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Memorial Day...from Page 1A

"It is about honoring those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for us to live in the greatest nation on the face of the Earth."

Clyde challenged himself and everyone present to consider, every day, "in what way have you carried the burden of protecting our precious freedom?"

"Because I can tell you, that same freedom that men and women willingly died to preserve is slipping away from us right in front of our very eyes," he said. "We must allow their sacrifice to fuel our vigilance."

Touching on his view that the administration of President Joe Biden is "working daily to grow the size and scope of government," he framed the national conversation as "a battle of our republic versus socialism and Marxism."

"As the son of a World War

II veteran who was part of the Greatest Generation who fought and won against the greatest evil our nation has ever seen, I for one refuse to allow this to be the generation who, through apathy or discouragement, gives away American liberty," Clyde said.

"Every day that I represent you, I pledge to fight the socialist agenda being pushed by the liberal left, and proudly stand up for our Ninth District values. But in order to win this fight, I need your help. America needs your help. And the America that they died for needs your help."

On the line, Clyde said, is "our freedom, our economic prosperity, personal responsibility, our religious liberty, the right to life, election integrity, a secure border, and our Second Amendment, and the future of our Free Country

is truly on the ballot."

Leading the ceremony was VFW Post 7807 Cmdr. John Harkins. VFW Chaplain Dwight Moss held an invocation, with VFW Auxiliary Chaplain Katie Harkins offering a closing prayer.

Everyone in attendance joined in singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" that warm spring day, as well as the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. The North Georgia Honor Guard posted and retired the colors, offered a "Rifle Salute to the Fallen," and performed Taps.

The laying of the memorial wreaths was conducted by VFW Post 7807 and Auxiliary; American Legion Post 23, Auxiliary, Riders and Sons of the American Legion Squadron; and the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783.

Sharp Memorial United



The local veterans' service organizations teamed up to remember the sacrifices of America's war dead on May 31 Memorial Day.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Methodist Church attended to perform the patriotic hymn "Blades of Grass and Pure White Stones."

Also present were numerous local elected and public safety officials, the Fire Department with a ladder truck waving an American flag over US 76, the Sheriff's Office directing traffic, and Clyde's wife Jennifer joined him in

Hiawassee.

Veterans from the following eras were in attendance: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, Iraq and Afghanistan. Following the program, everyone was invited back to the VFW Building on Sunnyside Road for a cookout luncheon.

Clyde has made headlines

recently for criticizing the prolonged presence of fencing and National Guard troops in Washington, D.C. following the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, for opposing the use of metal detectors at the U.S. House floor entrance, and for comments made about certain aspects of the Jan. 6 riot, during which he was present inside the House Chamber.

MECHS Graduation...from Page 1A

so much adversity over the last year, and I couldn't be more proud of them," Union Site Administrator Casey Jones said after the ceremony.

It wasn't entirely business as usual, however, as this year's graduation exercises were divided among each of MECHS' 18 locations.

Traditionally, MECHS holds shared commencement exercises for multiple sites, like Union, Fannin and Towns hosting a combined ceremony, but to prevent large crowds, each site hosted its own farewell in 2021.

With no individual restrictions on graduates or attendees, graduation went off without a hitch for the 20 seniors and their families.

Zachary Adams, Lindsey Canterbury, Austin Phillips and Miranda White each picked up Honor Graduate recognition, while Kyla Locklear received High Honors for recording the class' highest grade-point average.

"Being a part of MECHS has been a truly awesome experience, and I'm also excited to be recognized as the Union Site's 2021 High Honors graduate," Locklear said. "As someone who started at traditional day school, I soon began to doubt my abilities as a student."

"I also wanted to seek an atmosphere where I felt supported. Up to that point, I had heard nothing but great comments about MECHS, and I immediately began to think, this option is possible for me."

"MECHS allowed me to work at my own pace while making time for work and my schedule, and I found that supportive environment that I was seeking as well."

"Even during the pandemic, when we worked online, I felt there was a caring group of teachers and staff that wanted to help me succeed in a difficult time."

Before Locklear took center stage to deliver her High Honors address, fellow Class of 2021 graduates Ethan Nolte led the Pledge of Allegiance and Bailey Denton stepped to the podium to offer the welcome



Having earned the highest GPA of her Union Site classmates, MECHS Class of 2021 Graduate Kyla Locklear delivered a High Honors address in the May 27 commencement exercises.

Photo by Todd Forrest

address.

"We all know that achieving a high school education is challenging, but learning during a pandemic placed both students and staff in uncharted territory," Denton said. "Our overwhelming dedication, perseverance and desire to succeed has brought us to where we are today."

"I would take this opportunity to say 'thank you' to all the families, friends and supporters who have helped us in achieving our goals. I would also like to take time to thank the teachers and staff of MECHS."

"All the staff have been there to support us with everything since we walked through the doors. I would like to give a huge thank you to Ms. (Angie) Burns and Ms. (Gina) Young for pushing not only me, but every graduate sitting on this stage today to ensure that we made it here."

Following the awards presentation by Site Administrator Dr. Teena Atkins, class recognition by Young and scholarship presentation by Lesia Johnson, diplomas were granted to the 20 graduates by Akins, Burns and Jones. The ceremony closed with Jones leading the turning of

the tassels.

Afterward, the North Georgia News caught up with Locklear, who was surrounded by friends and family, to discuss her High Honors acceptance. Her plans are to attend Gwinnett Technical College to study stenography.

"I didn't find out until a (week before graduation that I had the highest G.P.A.), so I was a bit surprised, but then I realized that I was going to have to write a speech," Locklear said, resulting in a laugh from those gathered. "It's an honor, and I have to thank my family, friends and (close friend Ivy Garret) for all their support."

Union County graduates are Zachary Nathan Adams, Garrett Austin Becker, Lindsey Lee Canterbury, Jayden Rose Harkins-Durfee, Katelyn Ruth Ensley, Luke James Fitzpatrick, Emily Beth Gibbs, Brianna Lashea Hawkins, Kyla Nicole Locklear, Talon Michael McAtee, Luther Ethan Nolte, Tara Alicea Nolte, Wilson Antonio Pineda, Teresa Haisan Warren and Miranda Marie White.

Graduates from Towns County are Chloe McKenna Bateman, Kambrie Bailey Denton, Allison Lynn Kitchens and Austin Daniel Phillips.

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no doubt about it."

There was a brief Memorial Day recognition for those who have given their lives for the country and in honor of the veterans attending the show.

Towns County High School Class of 2021 Graduate Summer Rahn performed the National Anthem both nights in front of thousands of people, all of whom cheered each time she finished.

And because last year was such a success, the Fairgrounds put in more seating for the outdoor rodeo, though hundreds of people still had to stand and sit on the hill overlooking the arena. Still, guests had a great time and enjoyed the rodeo.

Attendees such as Jameson Osborn of Tennessee were happy to get back into the rodeo scene and see the competition of talented cowboys and cowgirls.

"I had a blast," Osborn said. "We heard of the rain from (Friday night) and were a little worried about coming out tonight, but it turned into a great show, and we actually got good seats. I know ... there were a lot of people standing, but it was still good fun."

"I have always liked the roping contests and seeing them get that rope around that steer. It is just so neat how precise they are when they do it, and it blows my mind every time. Working with someone to rope a steer is not easy, and a lot of teams don't succeed. It is just a blast to watch."



Bull riding was all the rage at the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo over the weekend, with people sitting and standing anywhere they could to get a view of the action.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Clyde Dale of Newnan was grateful to be celebrating a tried-and-true tradition with fellow Americans after the pandemic without the worry of social distancing.

"Rodeos are essential to the American Spirit," Dale said. "Everyone grew up watching cowboys on the TV or reading about them in school. The cowboy is the American hero, and everyone loves it - well, almost everyone. You can tell by the thousands of people here tonight that the tradition isn't going anywhere."

"Things like the bull riding and the contests between visitors keep it entertaining. That clown was probably the funniest act I have seen in a

long time. I'm going to keep bringing my family back to this rodeo. It is one of the best ones we have seen, and we do this a lot."

Competing Saturday night was Towns County's own Andrew Turpin in the calf roping event. At just 26 years old, the Hiwassee native has made a name for himself on the Southeastern Professional Rodeo Association circuit, claiming the association's 2020 Rookie of the Year title.

For more information on upcoming events at the Fairgrounds, including the Georgia Mountain Arts & Crafts Festival June 4-6, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.